

CHAPTER FOUR

HOW I BECAME WHO I AM: LIFE STORIES

PRELUDE

PERSONAL BIOGRAPHIES AND SOCIAL INSIGHTS

This chapter, which deals with biographies in various ways, has three parts. The first presents the life stories of some of the women I came to know in Pardes Katz. The second part tells another life story, of the birth and development of a school for Mizrahi girls, where many of these same women were educated into a Haredi way of life. The third part turns its gaze to me, the researcher, and examines the ethnic aspect of my own biography. This chapter seeks answers to the question of how each of us became what she is: a cashier, a Haredi woman, an Ashkenazi woman, a single mother, a person with respect for religion, an office cleaner, a social activist. Unfurling a biography is like pulling on a thread that unravels the social fabric into which we have each been woven at what seems to be a preordained location.

If we each had a parallel self, we could learn some important things about our placement in the social fabric. A friend of mine suggested to me the idea of a person with parameters more or less identical to one's own, who chooses, at life's major intersections, the road you did not take. The simple model of this "sister self" assumes that each intersection presents a choice between only two roads. At any given moment of time, this double can show us "what might have happened if." What would have happened had I decided to keep dancing seriously, what would have happened if I hadn't married at such

a young age, and what would have happened had I gone to law school, as I originally intended. The idea of the double is more than a curiosity. It can be a tool for sociological analysis.

The sister self marks out, in broad lines, the degrees of freedom available to a girl/teenager/woman with a given set of parameters. Beyond her individual traits, her place of residence, family, ethnicity, class, and her other cultural affiliations create a social map. This map, which has both visible and blind areas, is first-class intelligence material. It can help us trace the process by which such maps are made and their roads marked. These maps display bumps and barriers, and they identify the people who control the traffic lights and those who level and pave the roads. They also show us the navigation instruments used by those who move through the territory it depicts.

I don't actually have such a parallel self, but I can examine the lives of my friends from my own neighborhood, where I grew up and still live. What happened to Dalia, Havva, Hanale, Yael, Michal, and Rivka? What is Raya doing, and where do Leah and Dvori live? What kind of job does Irit have, and what has become of Shlomit? These are girls who grew up with me in my neighborhood on the edge of Tel Aviv. They attended my non-religious public elementary school, and we went to the same youth movement. We attended different high schools in the city, because there was no high school in our neighborhood. When I inquired after their current lives, I did not find anything astonishing. All in all, the social differences between us are not great. We are all married, although some of us divorced and remarried. We all have children, we all have post-secondary educations, and almost all of us work. We all live in Israel, and only one lives over the Green Line, in the Golan Heights. One is a judge, one a lawyer who founded a

school, one a doctor. Many are high school teachers, and others have jobs in the commercial and business sector. It's a normal distribution of talents and ambitions. The keys of socialization worked as they were supposed to, opening some doors and failing to open others. Here and there we fiddled with the locks and banged on locked doors, but we did not go anywhere we were not supposed to go.

A collection of life stories is based on a principle similar to that of the "sister self." Such a collection might offer biographies of Jews who have shed their religious beliefs, of Holocaust survivors, of North African immigrants, or of businesswomen. The definition of the group under study determines whether the lives included share a common origin or a common present station. For example, if one wants to study women in senior positions in the business community, one begins with their current position and reads back into their biographies. In contrast, one can choose a biographical datum, for example having lived in Europe during World War II, and then read forward to see where such people have gone. The assumption at the basis of this methodology is that gathering together a number of different life progresses on the basis of a common axis will enable the researcher to plot a social map that shows the forces that operated on the subjects, and the counter-forces that they applied. The methodology of collecting and analyzing life stories¹ takes as given that the personal story of a specific person has double value: it precisely portrays a unique life, but also can, when taken alongside other stories, be placed within its public, social, and historical context. This enhances the importance of the private biography as a source of social insight, and at the same time unravels social insights into a myriad of individual stories.

The collection of life stories of the women I studied with in the senior secretaries' course at the Pardes Katz community center is, then, like any other effort to weave together the private and the public. But it is also different, and unique.

I should open by stating that the stories of many women who grew up in the neighborhood and then left it, or of women with whom I did not speak, might well offer a rich and varied tapestry that is unknown to me. Most of the women I met were born and raised in the neighborhood, and remained there during the third decade of their lives. Their field of maneuver was colored by the environmental conditions in this area, their family origins, and the educational systems they were exposed to. The educational options were a function of the neighborhood's Mizrahi-ethnic character and its homogeneous class structure, and ranged from public schools (with their religious-public school variation) to Haredi schools. One option was meant to offer a royal road to Israeli identity and culture, while the other sought to direct them to an alternate route.

Placing these stories one beside the other offers something much like a "sister self." Their proximity offers a glimpse of what might have happened if, for example, Eveline's father had won his argument with her mother and sent her to the public school that he favored instead of the Haredi boarding school that her mother chose. Or what might have happened to Bracha if her mother had insisted on keeping her close to home in the neighborhood state-religious school, rather than allowing her to transfer to the Or Hayyim boarding school in Bnei Brak. What might have happened to Eti-Aya if she had remained in the neighborhood, at her public school, instead of transferring to a kibbutz boarding school in eighth grade? What would have happened to Sarit if she had continued

her professional studies in the Haredi post-secondary program rather than getting married at a young age?

These women walked down different paths, but paths that could have intersected and exchanged one for the other. That, and the fact that they found themselves in the same classroom in the community center in the 1998-1999 school year, indicates that the social map available to them and their families was similar, even if they are located at different points. Their ethnic origin, place of residence, and economic class interlock into a single social parameter of lower middle class peripheral Mizrahiyut. This parameter paints in new colors the categories of religious and non-religious, and thus also the definition of Israeli identity.

I. THE SOCIAL MAP OF LIFE PATHS

The reconstruction of the road map available to my protagonists and their families will be accomplished in two stages. In the first stage, I will offer the profiles of eight interview subjects, grouped in four pairs. Each pair places a woman alongside her “sister.” This act of coupling is itself an act of interpretation. The first three pairs are women who attended the secretarial course with me. They place the biography of a woman who identifies herself as Haredi alongside that of a woman who views herself as not religious. The fourth pair, the life stories of women who led the neighborhood’s Haredi women’s club, invites an examination of the variation within this single social category. The second stage of reconstructing the social map will offer a theory-based interpretation of the life stories. This is an interpretation that grows out of each individual biography, and also out of the juxtaposition of each biography with its sister biography.

The interviews took place after the course ended. I first tried to set up appointments to talk to the women, but only three agreed; the others were evasive or refused. During the course of the year I received a small grant and decided to use it to pay for the interviews. I proposed to Rachel Katabi, with whom I remained in contact after the course ended, that she serve as my research assistant. Rachel received about \$12 for each interview she arranged, and another \$25 if she participated in the interview and wrote up her impressions. Each interviewee was offered \$25 in cash for a conversation that could take place at a time of her choosing. I conducted three of the interviews in the community center, but all the others took place in the women's homes, generally in the morning. The first three pairs of interviews were conducted in the winter of 2000. The interviews with Esti and Leah, who led the women's club, were conducted in the summer of 2003.

After offering a brief explanation of my project as a whole, I asked each of the subjects to tell her "literacy biography,"² that is, the course of her life as a learner. I did not always use that precise term, and if I did so, I immediately expanded on it and explained what I meant. In practical terms, I invited the speaker to describe their lives along the axis of institutional schooling. During the interviews I asked additional questions, requested clarifications, and invited them, beyond that, to share their thoughts and feelings. In presenting their profiles, I have minimized my voice to make the reading easier. The interviews have been condensed to approximately a third of their original length.

1. Bracha and Aya: Boarding-School Girls

Bracha's and Aya's homes are a five-minute walk from each other. Bracha lives in an apartment of her own, with her husband and son. Aya lives, for the present, in her mother's house with her brother and sisters. Both are in their mid-twenties. Aya was born in the neighborhood but moved out at the age of 13 to attend a kibbutz boarding school in southern Israel. Bracha was born in Jerusalem and moved to a Haredi boarding school in Bnei Brak, also at the age of 13. Now both live in Pardes Katz, and both have (among other things) a graduate certificate from Ort Career's senior secretary course. Neither was working at the time of the interview, neither as a secretary nor in any other capacity. Bracha was expecting a baby, while Aya was recovering from an automobile accident and taking courses from the Open University. Both were born in homes that defined themselves as non-religious. Aya's home remains that way, while Bracha's family became Haredi. Each made non-standard choices during her life, choosing a clear direction that required work against and with their families. Both offered reflexive interviews, retrospectively weighing the paths of their decisions, and both portrayed their mothers as a central figure in their lives.

Bracha

I parked my car half on the asphalt and half on the sidewalk, next to the large jerrybuilt roadside fruit-and-vegetable stand. This time, instead of rummaging through the produce, I strode into the yard between the apartment blocks. Each housing project building has four entrances, each with three floors of apartments. Most of the apartments have been stretched in whatever direction the renovator's imagination took him. The rain of recent days had dampened the bare ground between the buildings. There is no garden.

The wind piled up the trash against the buildings—plastic bags, shreds of wet newspapers, and citrus peels.

The entrances are not labeled, so I have to wager on which is the right one. I hear children's voices behind the doors—a teachers' strike has kept them at home. Bracha opens the door for me. She is dressed in a long cotton dress, dark socks, and slippers, and her head is covered with a knitted mesh kerchief in black and gold. She has a big smile on her face. The house was renovated over the summer. Sunlight floods through wide glass windows, illuminating the living room; there is a new kitchen and a new 3-2-1 living room set—couch, loveseat, and armchair. In the bedroom, alongside a large bed covered with a shiny pink spread, stands the crib belonging to Ariel, who was born almost a year ago. "I thought he would fall asleep at about this time, that's why I invited you for 11:30. But look, that's not on his agenda." Throughout our conversation, Ariel sits next to us in his swing, playing on his own, speaking to himself and to us, studying my face, wondering about my presence, but not interfering. He is a handsome boy. He will have a baby sister this coming Purim. Bracha became pregnant while she was still nursing, didn't think it would happen to her, but accepts it with pleasure. She radiates intensity, smiles frequently, expresses herself fluently, and seems to enjoy the conversation.

"When Rachel called me, I didn't even think it was you. She told me, you know, the buzz-cut one who came to our class, don't you remember? Only then I remembered that you called me over the summer and I said that I can't, that we're renovating. Don't ask what a state we were in, no floor tiles, dust everywhere, in the clothes and in the

drawers. You were probably insulted that I told that I couldn't, but there was really no way you could come."

"I understand completely," I replied. "Renovations, with a baby, I really couldn't."

Bracha Tells Her Story

The truth is, I don't really remember kindergarten and all that. I began school in the neighborhood. I went to Beit Ya'akov [the local branch of a national network of Haredi schools for girls by that name]. My parents weren't religious, but I was always attracted to religion, so I went to a religious school.

"In first grade you already knew that you wanted a religious school even though your parents weren't religious?"

My parents didn't oppose my going to a religious school. It was like, okay, go ahead, go to a religious school. What could possibly happen, you understand? I was the oldest, with two boys after me, and after a break my mother had two more girls.

In fourth grade I really began, you know, to become observant. It was like, I felt you really have to be religious and all that, and why doesn't my mother cover her hair or light Sabbath candles. So I'd tell her that if you want to come to parents' night you have to cover your hair because I'm ashamed in front of my friends that you come that way. My other always says, you're the

one who made me religious. I would tell her to light candles on the Sabbath, it's a mitzvah, and the teacher told us this and that. My mother's sister is married to a Torah scholar. So she began asking his advice, and she'd call him, and told him that she wants to begin to learn a little about religion, and he guided her.

When I was about in fifth grade, the whole family spent Pesach at a seminar run by the Arachim organization. I remember that it was seven days, and I enjoyed it very much. We were children, so with us there wasn't really the thing about *hazara be-teshuva*, because what our parents did we did too. They put us with a sitter or in a camp, something like that, with all sorts of stories about righteous people, and I already knew everything, because I went to a religious school. My parents had more in the way of lectures, with Rabbi Uri Zohar, and Rabbi Nissim Yagan, and they were very, very impressed. They brought them up on the stage, put a kerchief on my mother's head, my father made the *sheheheyanu* blessing [a blessing made thanking God for bringing one to this time or opportunity], put on *tzitzit*, it was very moving.

Afterwards, on the seventh day, they went to the sea, read Moses's Song at the Sea at sunrise, at dawn. They really enjoyed it and they began to get religious.

The truth is that my father didn't... At first he was pretty enthusiastic, but he got off it a little bit, didn't really get into it. But my mother took to it very strongly, registered the boys for religious schools, and I continued in my school. My mother is a real friendly type, a doer. Now she doesn't work there

anymore, but then she worked for Israel Military Industries. Most of the workers were men, maybe there were two women. She was, like, at the top of things—hey, how are you? Hands, here and there, coffee and all that, everything together, so they saw her, tried to have fun with her, Sarah's gone religious, they didn't believe it. How they tried to talk her out of it, and she said, I'm religious and deal with it, take it however you want, and that's it. I, for example, am not at all like her, she's really different from me. If for example I was in society like hers, I think I would really be influenced negatively. But she wasn't, she didn't care what anyone thought, she put on her Walkman, her cassettes of [religious] lectures, read psalms, didn't care what anyone said. And if someone takes a cookie or something from her, she tells him, first put a *kipah* on your head and make a blessing—you understand? Otherwise you can't have it. That way here and there she put religion into their heads a little.

She worked there for eighteen years, the entire period of my childhood, many years. But they closed the factory, so they said, listen Sarah, you're like three men with us. You're such an expert at the work, so if you want will transfer you to Hod HaSharon [northeast of Tel Aviv]. But that wasn't a real option, because when she worked in Jerusalem, in Ma'aleh Adumim, she'd leave home at 6:30, and my poor father had to dress us and get us out of bed and make our lunches and all that, and it just wasn't possible. Because everything had gone topsy-turvy, you understand? The woman was the man and the man was the woman. My mother would come home at four, my father worked

from nine until two, would give us lunch at home and say: how was school? Everything was upside down. Because the truth was that my mother earned a good salary and my father less, so he looked for a job with shorter hours, so he could be with the children more. But then they said that if you want to work in Hod HaSharon you'll have to leave for work at five in the morning, and you'll get home only at five. So my mother said, listen, that's just not possible, I have children, I have to educate them. She took her severance pay and at first she stayed at home, afterwards she opened a *mishpahton* [a small home-based preschool], and now, *Baruch Ha-Shem*, she's a preschool teacher.

I stayed at Beit Ya'akov. It was mixed Ashkenazi-Sephardi, and then there weren't those things that if you have a television at home you can't attend, or anything like that. Now they are very strict about that. They don't let in girls that have televisions at home, and there are Ashkenazi schools that don't let Sephardi girls in. Since I didn't have any guidelines from home, I prayed in the Ashkenazi version, like everyone else. For example, now my sisters, in the same school, pray the Sephardi version. The teacher says in advance, and each girl gets a prayer book with her version.

Up until seventh grade I wasn't really into school. I wasn't diligent but not lazy, either. I didn't really care about my studies. I was a very quiet girl. I wasn't loud with my friends. I hung out more with the Sephardi girls. There was a bit of division along those lines.

I liked Bible, I really loved the stories about King David, about Saul, Joshua, I really loved that. I could never stand arithmetic or English. So, what can I say? I actually really liked my main teacher, the same one for three years. That's actually what I remember.

When I got to seventh grade, my two friends from the neighborhood went to Or Hayyim, and they actually dragged me with them. They said, you should, and you know, there's a boarding school, and it's a lot of fun in the dorms, you don't have to wash the dishes at home and you don't have to clean, and you don't have to fight with your brothers, and they really convinced me, and I began to grow up a little and I stopped hanging out with girlfriends from the neighborhood, because I was religious, and wore a skirt and they went with boys and I was embarrassed to play with boys because I was religious. No one prevented me from doing it, but I didn't like to play with boys, they were like wilder and I was more the delicate type. That's it, so I told my mother, listen, I'm at home all the time, I was the only girl, I liked cleaning the house more than my studies. I would come home from school, the beds weren't made because my mother of course had been at work since 6:30, I was very independent, I'd immediately make the beds, I liked to surprise Mom. I even did laundry, washed the floors, everything.

I told my mother, it's really boring here, I don't have after-school activities, I don't have friends, school isn't close to home, I had to take a bus, I want to go to a boarding school. At first my mother said, what will happen? And how will we get along? You're the only girl, and it'll be hard for me, you're the

only one at home to help me and all that. I really wanted to. And my friends really convinced me, and said how fun it is, see. My father was also sorry for me that I was alone, and my Haredi uncle said, of course, she'll grow up soon, start opening her eyes, better for you to put her in a boarding school. And that's what happened. At first it was very hard for me in the boarding school, I didn't adjust, I was really spoiled, the food, the room, I didn't like anything, but my friends said, that's nonsense, look, it's only the beginning. From this point I remember a lot more.

I began making more progress in my studies, I liked schoolwork better, because I didn't have to clean the house any more and there wasn't anyone on my shoulders. I really liked my main teacher, the counselor, I became more social. It was just fun. There are friends, and you sleep together, and each one tells about herself, everyone buys snacks and you have parties—there's nothing like that at home. There were girls from all over the country, even from Eilat, Beersheva, anywhere you can think of. From Nahariyya, from Kiryat Shmonah. My mother also signed me up for after school activities, I was in the computer club, I loved it and I became more religious. The discipline and chores didn't bother me, I was a good girl, I wasn't disrespectful. Maybe afterwards, when I matured a little, I began, I saw my friends and began to learn from them. When I got older I became a counselor, I saw the difference between the generations. Where I was and where they were, they were insolent, they'd run off when we had days out, what didn't

they do? We were very quiet in our time. The previous generation was a lot better than now. Now things have really gone bad there, it's really a shame.

I excelled in all subjects. Even what I never liked, I couldn't just sit in class, I always participated. My mother saw that my report cards were really good, she'd go to parents' meetings and they'd tell her, your daughter Bracha is really something, it really raised her spirits and just because of that she left me there. She really had a sense of satisfaction.

In ninth grade we divided into academic and vocational tracks. Academic was preschool and school teaching and vocational was sewing. I said I'd go to sewing, because I wasn't really interested in being a teacher. I know that there are a lot who don't have work. It doesn't matter that I don't have work in sewing, either, but that's what I thought then, and there was a trend, all my friends went to vocational. I was popular, so I said, why should I go to academic, they're nerds, I want to be in vocational with all my friends. The truth is that I really managed well in vocational. For example I had friends who didn't even know how to hold a needle, it was very hard for them, they'd get fives. I actually did well at sewing and fashion drawing, I liked the subject. I didn't like materials science, that's boring, about fibers, about how they make them from the silk worm. How I hated that!

It's not that it was my dream, I didn't sew a lot. There were those who were always sewing for their sisters and their aunts and their grandparents and whoever. I, the truth is, I didn't really sew much for the family. If I did

anything, I sewed for myself. You understand? My mother never pressured me, sew for your sisters, save us money. I had friends, for example from large families, whose parents, for example, on holidays had a hard time buying clothes for the whole family, so they asked the girls to sew for them. Look, they were smart on the one hand, because that's what really motivated them. The more you move forward and sew more the better you become.

Now they don't really do a *bagrut* there, they do external exams. I liked the studies—pedagogy, psychology, all that. I stopped taking English in tenth grade. You understand? There was a final exam, thank God I'm done with it, we got rid of it. We had math until twelfth grade. In general I liked all the subjects, there was no subject I hated or anything like that. Maybe Hebrew grammar a bit. But...I always studied in everything.

“And then you decided to stay in the seminar [a post-high school program standard in Haredi girls schools that provides professional training, generally for teaching jobs, and further religious studies]?”

Now we finished twelfth grade. During that period, the truth is, I was a little influenced by my friends. You know, it's the teenage years, you begin doing stupid things and all that. I had friends from non-religious homes, even though it was a Haredi school. The girls don't always accept all the spirituality in school, because there's influence from home, and I understand them when you get down to it. It's not a simple thing to live with a non-religious family that doesn't observe anything, and to be a saint. You

understand. So I was a little influenced here and there, and in twelfth grade I said, I'm not doing the seminar, maybe I'll do national service, even though only a very small number [from the school] go. Maybe I'll go work a little, make some money. Afterwards, really, at the end of twelfth grade, the teachers already know that it's hard for us to decide, and it's also an age where you are indecisive, so they give you more lectures, start talking with us about making a home about spirituality, about your future, and there are even lectures for parents. They don't talk about marriage yet, that's more in the seminar. Until twelfth grade they don't recommend it at all. First they want you to be clear-headed, learn what you need to, know what you're getting into, mature a bit, that's very natural and good.

I got married at the age of 21, I don't think that's too late. True, I thought about getting married already when I was 18, but now I thank God that I got married at 21. I grew up, I got acquainted with life, saw what it is, I learned to get to know boys and know what the character of each one was, until I chose my partner. Really, it's not a simple matter to get married early. I, I have friends who got married early, and they're really miserable. The men, you have to bring them up like children. So that's it, the lectures began, they brought us great rabbis, trying to open us up that way to all sorts of things. Despite all that, I was sure that I didn't want to do the seminar, I don't want to, don't want to, I'm sick of it, I don't have the strength for it. I'm also sick of living in a dorm so many years, hey, after six years I felt it was like a

prison. I'm already grown up, I want to develop a little, to get to know the world.

But they had a parents assembly, and even though I didn't want my mother to come because she, she has influence over me, she came. At first we were all together, afterwards they had a really nice lunch, and then they had a lecture just for the parents. Apparently they talked to them about how the girls, how they really have to make them go to the seminar, it's an age when they are a little unsteady, so that they don't deteriorate, they worked hard on them.

Apparently they also told them how to talk to us, that's what I understood afterwards. I was already on my way to accompany my mother home, and my mother says. Now, the truth is, on the whole, my mother didn't pressure me, apparently that's what they told them to do, to tell me yes, okay, so that I'd calm down. So my mother said to me: so, what's going to be with you, and all that? I told her, forget it, the seminar's not for me, I'm sick of being in Or Hayyim, I want to work a little, we'll see, maybe I'll go to national service, we'll see. Then my mother began, you know, to say a word here, a word there, you know how today people go bad, she began to say a bit here, a bit there, I realized that she was starting up, but I kept quiet, I always said "okay, okay," so that she wouldn't go on.

But somehow, believe me, it's really divine intervention, heaven's providence, *Baruch Ha-Shem*, I don't even know how it happened, I signed up for the seminar. Believe me, to this day I don't know. But I decided, I said, really, what will I do? Where will I find work? And who knows what's

happening today, and really, how will I get married and what will be with me? Because, after all, in Or Hayyim they look after us, you know, they arrange matches. In Jerusalem, who knows me? My parents weren't all that popular, the whole world didn't know them. And, really, God opened my eyes, and in the end I said, okay, let's do it, I'll register for the seminar. The truth is that a good friend of mine wanted to be in the seminar and I didn't really want to leave her alone, we were really close friends. So that's it, maybe thanks to that. *Baruch Ha-Shem*, I went on to the seminar. I stayed in the dormitory, but the conditions changed. You're already older, they're a lot more open with you, and it's an entirely different way of living. Seminar, I recommend it to everyone.

At first I was in crisis again, but afterwards I began to get to know my counselor, to connect with her more. You know, a counselor always looks for someone, sort of from the side. When I was a counselor I also always liked to have someone. She'd compliment me, and actually, I really became very tight with her. That's what actually drew me more into spiritual return, to Judaism, *le-hithazek*. Because then, even when I was in the seminar, I wasn't so strong. Do you get the picture? I was deteriorating a little because I was being influenced by my friends. So she began reinforcing me, she'd talk to me all the time about a Torah scholar, that I'd marry a man who studies all day. We were really close friends. Thanks to her, *Baruch Ha-Shem*, I live with a Torah scholar and everything's in the spirit of Judaism. What my mother didn't

succeed in doing she really did. She was also in touch with my mother, my mother really loved her, and she'd call her and they'd have soul talks.

In my classes I was okay, I really loved the studies. The seminar is for two years. Afterwards a new law came out, a third year for professional qualifications, to qualify as a senior teacher. See what they've done? But on the other hand it's good, the third year is just once a week, and you get senior teacher grade. Our teachers, not senior ones, teach us how to be senior teachers, poor girls, they'd plead with the school inspector, they said, we're teaching them to be senior teachers, why can't you certify us as senior teachers? It's logical, isn't it? But poor things, they had to go to the teachers' union and do 200 course hours to get senior qualification. And we did it mellow, once a week, it's not so bad. Along with the studies I began to go out to meet men that Or Hayyim set me up with. Through my teacher. *Baruch Ha-Shem*, I had a really wonderful teacher. I really liked her, she was such a good teacher, and sort of motherly, and also....

“Was the teaching staff at Or Hayyim Ashkenazi or mixed?”

The teachers? Most of them were Ashkenazi women, yes. There weren't any Sephardi teachers. Now there are more, there are Yemenites, maybe a few Moroccans. In the seminar we actually had Sephardi teachers, for example in sewing and that stuff, but for psychology, pedagogy, all those things they always brought us Ashkenazim.

Then the teacher would always offer me matches. I began to go out a little, to a certain extent, but I saw that that's not what I wanted, because I wanted to study, I liked my classes, and I said, if I've gone ahead and signed up for the seminar, I don't want to get married and then keep studying. So I stopped going out, it was more important for me to study, to concentrate on my classes. I'd sit on projects all morning, you know what a sewing project is? You have to make a portfolio and then there's an exhibition and the national inspectors come. I liked working hard, I loved all the ornaments and all the special decorations and the gold trim, gluing and sewing and what didn't I do? I didn't give up on anything.

I started going out in my last year in seminar. I began going out, and there was only one thing in my head: a Torah scholar who studies all day. In the seminar, you have the subjects of pedagogy, psychology, they talk to you more about Jewish education, about the Jewish home, how to educate children and establish a family, and the main teacher, she also gave a class once a week, an education lesson, what's a Torah scholar, what are the philosophies of Judaism and all that. So that's what really gets it in to you, little by little, whether you want it or not, it really gets in to you a spiritual view, and only wanting a Torah scholar. One who studies all day. *And that's in fact what they wanted us to understand in the seminar.* Because until twelfth grade they don't talk to you about marriage, and you, your head is more with your friends and those things and nonsense, and you just look forward to going home for the weekend, and to go downtown on Saturday

night to wander around, and ice cream and pizza, and there you begin to make friends with boys and all that. It's hard. But in the seminar you mature a lot more, and in your head you're already...if you think about getting married, you don't think, a boyfriend and love and all that stuff. You think about building a home, a serious home, with God's help, without nonsense. Love's not for a moment, love at first sight and that's that. When it comes down to it you have to live with a person fifty, sixty, seventy years, and it's not so simple. And you need to know, to be with principles about those things, to know what you want and to work on your personal values. It's not so simple. For example, a lazy woman, or a disorganized woman, or a short-tempered one or all sorts of things like that, it's hard for her to manage in the home. You understand? So you have to work on all those things. For example, with me, I was in a dorm so many years, and when I got married it was very difficult. What, start doing laundry now? Ironing? And cleaning? What a thing to do! Oof, I don't want to! I was sick of it, what kind of thing is this? I lived so many years in a dorm and they did everything for me, and at home I was always like a guest, my mother would say, don't do anything, you've come from school, sit down and rest.

So I went out a bit, I was picky. We're Bukharians, and generally Bukharians very much want to marry within the community, but it didn't matter to me or to my parents, you understand? My parents are more Israeli and modern—whatever comes is welcome, the most important thing is that he's right for you, and you're right, and you love each other. But in the end I married a

Bukharian. In the end my destiny was Bukharian. I didn't want a Bukharian, I went out with all communities, but believe me, there's nothing like marrying someone from your own ethnic group. I really see it with my friends and all, each one with his different customs, and when for example a new bride comes into the house, they begin talking a different language and she thinks they're gossiping about her. I'm Bukharian and I married a Bukharian, I know what they're talking about. They were a traditional family, but my husband got away from that, was swept away, took off his *kipah*, music, discothèques. When I met him he was a *hozer be-teshuva*. When we went out he had only become religious three years previously. Get it? I went out with newly religious men and I didn't like it...like they, they're not fanatics, but I've been religious so many years, live it, do things as a matter of course, God be merciful, so what can I tell you, but it's part of our reality, we don't get excited about every little thing. They, *hozrim be-teshuva*, I don't know how to explain it, they take to it a lot more strongly. So I started going out with guys like that and I saw that it wasn't right for me and I stopped. But my fate was a *hozer be-teshuva*. When I met him he was 24 and I was 20. He didn't do the army. Even though he wasn't religious, he managed to get out of it. He wanted to be a *kashrut* inspector, put a cheap *kipah* on his head and wanted to be a *kashrut* inspector... so here and there, I don't know, he managed to evade the army, they gave him an exemption.

I went from not wanting to go to the seminar to remaining there for a third year as a counselor. I was a counselor for the junior high, seventh grade, and

that strengthened me a lot and educated me a lot in terms of values and everything. I received a salary of NIS 1,600 [~\$360] a month. We'd sleep there, eat there, the counselors too, and that gave me a lot. First, to work on your own values, you can't be an egoist and like only yourself, you have to look after everyone. Like they're my daughters, really. These are my children, I had twenty girls in my class, I was like a mother for them. Because they all in all came from miserable homes, broken families, for example the parents ill, God protect us, not on us, or...drug addicts... it's changed a lot at Or Hayyim, not like when I went there.

We came from religious homes, or from non-religious but good homes, but they come from difficult homes. They specifically want to bring these girls, not from religious homes. For religious families there's no shortage of religious schools, they can manage. The principal deliberately wanted the girls from the broken homes, homes with illness, divorce, mental illness, in order to save those souls. He wants to bring those girls closer, to strengthen them. I learned from that work what kinds of things happen in life. I have more love, I have more patience for the children. When you are involved in education, you yourself learn. You have a better approach to things, a better approach to your husband, because you've already gone through all those crises living with the girls, all their difficult periods, so you are, you know, a lot more experienced in life, like they say.

We went out for four months and then we got married. He studied and he continues to study here in the Or David Yeshiva. Our decision is that he, with

God's help, will study in the meantime. We have one boy, we manage. We decided to live here, close to the yeshiva, it's cheaper here, and it's not always good to live close to your mother or mother-in-law. You begin to say that he did this to me and he did that. But when you live far away from both of them, you simply manage with what you have, that's it, that's what you've got. Bang your head against the four walls. So he comes from the *kolel*, you have to make him a meal, and now who are you going to talk to? With the walls? So, okay, you make up and you talk, you understand? That's really what builds you up for family life. It wasn't easy to buy, we're in a lot of debt—a mortgage and a supplementary mortgage and who knows what mortgage, and believe me, it's God's intervention in our personal lives, we don't know what we live off of. The most important thing is that my husband continues studying, and we'll see. Each of us here according to his achievements. There are those who study and nothing else, and they “speak the Torah day and night.” And there are those who maybe aspire to be a rabbi or *mohel* [ritual circumciser], a ritual slaughterer, a writer, a scribe. But the principle with us in life is that the husband sits and studies Torah. It gives us a great deal. A great deal.

What can I say? It's just different. My husband himself says that if he wasn't religious now and got married, he wouldn't achieve a quarter of what he achieves now. I mean, in terms of respecting his wife, how to treat his wife, he says, what? If I weren't religious? I'd do the opposite of what she wanted, she's this way, she thinks that, puts her foot down—I'd do exactly the

opposite, and let her stew. What, do I care what she thinks? But a Haredi man knows what a woman is, what family life is, they get a lot of guidance from rabbis. They have a lot of classes, they talk about the wife, she's emotional and she's like that. And sometimes, for example in pregnancies. There's a period when she's depressed or short-tempered, or sensitive, she can suddenly start crying over nonsense, they give them guidance on everything. When the non-religious are miserable, I tell you, I really pity them. Why is there so much divorce today? Because there's no one really to give them guidance, there's no one to tell them about life with a woman, they work, eat, sleep, and all over again, the same life all the time, you understand. With Torah scholars, in the Talmud, in the Torah, it's all written for them. They tell about all kinds of righteous men, rabbis, how they lived in earlier generations, and how they respected their wives, and how to work on values, on being righteous, on humility. So all those things put the Torah scholar in his place. For example, my husband, his sister says that then, when he was non-religious, he was so lazy, and he didn't like to work. For example, they would go to the *shuk*, she was younger than him, and she'd lug all the bags and he would sit in the car like a prince, feet crossed, listening to music. She tells me, "Wow, believe me, *Baruch Ha-Shem*, I really see, don't tempt the evil eye, don't tempt the evil eye, but he helps you with the boy, he watches him, he feeds him, he's not the same person he was. After all they say that proper behavior comes before the Torah, it's not just study the Torah and that's all. It's work on your values, try to compromise, to be patient, don't get angry,

and if your wife did something to you, don't try to get back at her. Try to live a good life with peace in the home, there are cassette tapes, and who knows what else.

“Do you go to Rabbi Zer's lectures and listen to cassettes?”

Sometimes I go. I'm at home a lot now, so I listen a lot to the religious radio stations, which is really what strengthens me and what guides me. What keeps me in it, really. I don't listen to Radio Kol Chai, it's too Zionist-religious. I used to listen to Station 2000. I was very attached to that. When I came here, before the renovations, I could still pick it up, now that I built I can't pick it up, the directions changed. Then I listened to Kol HaHesed, but now I don't pick that up either, so I listen to Radio 10. I really recommend Radio 10 for you, it will help you with your work, for example Rabbi Uri Zohar's program between four and six. I'd also be interested in going to convocations and that kind of thing, but I'm new in the area and I don't know many women and I have a problem with the child.

“And going back to work?”

After the wedding I did work. I was a cashier and I saw that that wasn't right for me. I need a profession in order to get ahead, because my husband studies in any case, and we need to make a living, and buy a home. I said, at least I'll learn something normal, because I didn't manage with sewing, I didn't find work. The only work was teaching, two hours a day. What's two hours a day? You get 600 shekels at the end of the month, you understand? It's not simple

at all. I don't have the patience to sew for clients, each one says, do me this, here, do me that. I don't have the patience for that, I only sew for Ariel. Work in industry? What do you mean? Break my back for fifteen shekels an hour? It's not worth it. Why did I go to school so many years? I'll start playing with overlock stitches, sew turtle-necks or long underwear and get fifteen shekels an hour? I'm a senior teacher and I'll end up working in the trash heap?

They told me that a senior secretary gets a great salary. Of course that turns out not to be true, but that's what they told me, so I began. My husband asked the rabbi because I was already pregnant. The rabbi said, so she's pregnant, next year she'll also be pregnant, and two years from now she'll be pregnant, so what, she won't learn anything her whole life? So what if she's pregnant? She should go study. I did what the rabbi said, I was in my fifth month, I began the course.

Aya

Aya lives in her mother's apartment, a few minutes' walk from Bracha's home. She returned home to live after high school, during her military service. She would rather rent an apartment somewhere, but she remains with her family. The apartment's balcony faces the *shuk*, the neighborhood's large open-air market, which is located on a broad avenue that crosses the neighborhood from north to south. We speak in the morning, when Aya is alone.

Aya Tells Her Story

Okay, my name is Aya, not what's written on this form, I changed my name.³

I was born in Ashkelon and we moved here when I was five because my parents separated. In other words, I began kindergarten here. Like always, all the kids want to go to first grade together, so I went to first grade at a religious school, if that's relevant to your research.

“Because your parents chose it?”

No, I chose. It was a municipal kindergarten, so it's not surprising that there were children whose parents are religious. Then I didn't have a problem with it, I mean also today I don't have such a problem with it. Then I certainly didn't have a problem with it, because I wanted to go to the same school as everyone else. I went to the school that was next door to the kindergarten, which was a religious school. State-religious. Okay? I went to first, second, third grade at a religious school. In third grade it already didn't fit with what went on in my house, because the school is religious you have to go to prayers in the morning, it really didn't fit with how we lived at home from a mental point of view, and I asked to switch schools. By the way, it was always my initiative, me choosing, they always respected my choices, you want to study, you don't want to study, there's nothing mandatory here. The most important thing is that you be a good person. In fourth grade I switched to a non-religious school. It's a lot closer to the way I live, there's no such thing as not having homework on Friday, there's no religious law and no

other subjects like that, I went to a non-religious school, and everything was a hundred percent. I'm the oldest and I have three siblings, and they followed in my footsteps.

I liked my studies, I always like to learn. What I like least is language and math, it doesn't fit my inborn logic. In general, I don't like big laws, I need to manipulate it and ask why is it that way, and how, and it can't be that it's always that way. With me, one and one can also be three, if you give me a convincing explanation. So language and math are not my fields. My report cards were always very good, positive evaluations. I was very active, they let me be a substitute teacher for the younger kids, I was on the school decoration committee, you don't need much to know that I'm very dominant, I make a lot of noise.

It was always very important for my mother (my parents are divorced) that ... since she had to go out to work, because there was no alternative because my father didn't live at home, so for my mother it was very important that we not be out on the street. Even if you don't come out really really smart, don't be on the street. So that she be at ease at work that we're in an okay place. If you are at school I'm calm. For my brother at home, school's the farthest thing from his mind. If you want to kill him, give him notebooks and schoolbooks. My mother absolutely insisted that he stay in school. In tenth grade he told her, that's it, up to here it's mandatory. I don't have to do any more. She told him, over my dead body. As long as you live at home with me, and I see what you're doing, you won't wander around on the street. He told her no, I'll go

work, I'll help you. She told him no way. I don't need help. Go to school, do what you have to do. After that you can do what you want to do. And he's a boy made for work, he really really likes to work. He's worked since the age of twelve. The proverb, "if I'm not for myself who will be for me" is him, bull's-eye. He looks after himself, he doesn't ask for anything from anybody. If he wants Levis, he doesn't have to feel awkward about it, because for my Mom Levis cost a lot of money, for the price of Levis she can buy three pairs of pants.

We're all of us very independent children, we always worked. From a very, very young age. Because we knew that the situation was rotten and we needed to cope with it. Our home always pushed us to work hard, but the method wasn't if you don't get a 100 you'll be punished. My mother wasn't interested in grades. Her thinking was that you can get a lot more out of school than grades. Really, when I look back on it today, what's elementary school? I was scared, I was frightened to death that one of my notebooks might be crumpled or that I might forget a notebook, or I don't know what, I had a very very high study ethic, I was really scared. If I had to show up at school with a tattered notebook I'd tremble. Once children stood somehow in awe of the teacher. There was some sort of respect for the teacher. I look at children today, what's a teacher for them? The ultimate zero. Like homeboys, hey dude. I didn't behave that way with teachers. In my time, school just wasn't like that.

I mostly remember two teachers who reminded me of my mother's method of education. They didn't force you to do anything, they spoke to the students' common sense. As far as they were concerned, don't get 100s, be a human being, in the end you'll learn somehow or other. They didn't raise their voices, they didn't use punishments, for whoever it was right to fit into that framework, that was great. If not, then the group rejected you in a very very clear way. They were like maps, those teachers. They showed you the way, if you chose to go that way, that's was great. If you didn't make that choice, if you slipped once, slipped twice, slipped three times, in the end you'd understand that when they said something they really meant what they said, and it was worth your while to listen to them. That, incidentally, is my mother's teaching method, she's a guide. You want, choose, do what you want. As the years go by, what she says definitely proves itself. You actually choose to give weight to her opinion or to what she is.

At a certain point I decided I didn't want to live at home anymore. I went to the school counselor, completely confidentially, and told her, listen, I read in the newspaper that there's a group getting sent to a kibbutz and they meet with other kids from all over the world. And remember, I'm in seventh grade, and she says to me: your mother will never agree. And I told her, listen, I want to take the test. Let me go through the process, and after that I'll take care of my mother. Now, don't forget, I'm the oldest, a girl, my mother works long hours, I take care of my little brothers, and I suddenly say that I want to go to a kibbutz, suddenly I turned into a Zionist. I passed the tests and I got a

letter at home saying I was accepted. So I said, okay, now I have to tell her about it. It worked out that she opened the envelope before me, and she knew, and she went through the roof and let me have it. And then she said, listen, you want to go, no problem. Of course she got all heated up. But I'm telling you—you'll be back home in a week. I'm very very much a homebody. With all my independence and my ... the racket I make and the sirens and alarms, I make I'm very much a stay-at-home girl. Even today I'm at home all the time. What's outside doesn't interest me, what interests me is home. And she was so calm, convinced that I'd hold out for a week and that I'd be home in a flash. She helped me go buy things, teeshirts and underwear and get organized, I'm leaving home for a five-year program. In eighth grade, two days before the school year begins, I report to the kibbutz, which by the way I chose, I don't know on what basis I chose it.

We report there, another twenty guys and girls arrive, and up to this point it seems just fine. My mother has to go and she reminds me of course that the house is always open for me. By the way, I'll never forget that my whole life. Just because she said that the house was open for me I didn't go back. The truth is that I broke after a week. I really broke down. But because she told me that, it gave me strength and I stayed. To this day I thank God that I was there. From eighth grade through twelfth grade I stayed at the kibbutz. I attended the regional school, and I assimilated into kibbutz society, it wasn't at all a simple matter, but I survived.

After a year the Youth Society was dismantled. The Youth Aliya⁴ office decided not to fund it. We made a ruckus. During the first year we weren't integrated into the kibbutz school. Then, kibbutz society was very unreceptive, in fact it still is today, there's a horrible problem between city people and kibbutzniks. Especially when the city people are Mizrahim. And when it comes through the Youth Aliya office, it has the connotation of pathetic children whose parents are drug addicts. If you look at it through the kibbutznik's eyes, so I'm a *frenk* [a somewhat derogatory term for Mizrahi], and obviously my parents are drug addicts, I've got a father in jail and my mother's a whore. And all the more so if I choose to leave my incubator, which is my home, and you know for them the home is sacred and how can you leave home, so it must have been awful for me there. Now, that wasn't the case with us. There were kids whose parents were rich, I'm telling you, it all began with a newspaper advertisement, they promised we'd meet kids from all over the world and we'll explain Judaism to them and we'll go with them on delegations and so on. My mother also had that impression. When she heard that it was a boarding school she said, what kind of thing is that? Am I a bad mother? What, do you live in a deprived home? But the kibbutz framework is not a boarding school framework in any way. I don't think that the kibbutz would accept kids from a welfare boarding school. Youth Aliya and the welfare office are two very very different things. Not that Youth Aliya doesn't take care of boarding school kids, but the background is different.

So the Youth Society was dismantled, the Youth Aliya office decided not to fund it any more, and the kibbutz didn't want to fund it either, so that was it, I left with everyone. I went back home, with all the farewells, all the parties, and on the first of September my adopted family came to my house and took me away from here. They announced, two families, me and another boy who was in the Youth Society, they threatened that they'd leave the kibbutz if they didn't get their kids back.

The relationship I created with the family I became part of, and by the way they chose me, they decided after I was there two months that they wanted only me. It was a young family, and I know all four of their children, except for the oldest, from the day they were born. We established a very very special bond. Absolutely, really my home. Today we laugh about it, they decided to use me to learn how to educate their children when they became teenagers. They also found themselves someone that required their full attention. I wasn't a problem girl, but I'm a very independent person. You can't say, tsk tsk to me, or don't do that, or do this, because my mother didn't use those methods. And I was never a delinquent, I never used drugs, I'm not an alcoholic, I didn't turn into a loose girl. But my mother's way of educating me proved itself, what can I tell you. It sounds as if she didn't do anything, but she did everything her own way, not with screaming, without losing her temper, without eating her heart out by raising children. They tried to experiment with me about how they'd raise their children, how they'd cope with their kids, and they got a lot of grief from me, because I, what can I say?

The screaming matches and, don't get me wrong, we're still in touch, my screaming and the mother's screaming could be heard all over the kibbutz, they knew that we had fights. No one was going to impose his parenting on me. I have one pair of parents and that's enough.

Now, it wasn't easy to go back there. I'd already come home, the whole summer vacation I had mental cramps. Now, to hell with it, I chose to be there. Why was it so hard to return? Because, look, it's another home, it's a different mentality. When it comes down to it, you come from one place and you turn around and change and become something else, but in an extreme way. I don't have any way to describe it. I'm not racist, but it's Ashkenazi versus Sephardi, it's city versus kibbutz, its life in which the mentality, the aspirations, here it's one thing and there it's something else. In fact everything about life is different. The lenses you look at life through are entirely different. And I had to cope with both.

Summer vacation begins, and I'm at home with my brothers, my friends, my cousins, and all that. On the first of September they come to my house. I stayed until the end of twelfth grade, and I could have stayed afterwards, too. I want you to know that. I simply said, that's it, enough. Do you get it? I didn't even stay for the graduation party. I loved the kibbutz, it was a fantastic period in my life. I had to taste it. I have no doubts about it, and I'm grateful to them. Honestly, I'm just grateful to the kibbutz for what it made of me. Without even meaning to. I became something different. I'm also very different from my brothers. Five years, but five critical years in shaping my

personality. Five years in which I learned who I am, what I am, what my identity is, what my sexual identity is, what I want, what I don't want, and suddenly I'm, like, a foreign implant in my family. What do you expect?

The army is the best example. For me, I was instilled with the sense that it's important to do the army, how can you not serve your country. As if, what kind of thing is this? The importance of the homeland, as if what kind of thing is it not to make absolutely the greatest contribution in the army? No such thing. My brother wants to be a flag boy in the army. I want to tear my hair out. He says to me, hey, are you normal? Three years? I don't want to, I'm afraid to die. He gets hold of the sentence that works best on my mother. But really, he doesn't want to work hard without getting money in return, he doesn't have a problem with work. He sees the army as three wasted years, and I say, to hell with it, you're going to the army, what will you say, that you swept out offices in the General Staff offices in Tel Aviv and came home after two hours? You're a man, go to Lebanon, like, you should be ashamed of yourself.

Another thing was the importance of school. I'm the oldest, I have a very very big influence over my brothers. If they are good students today I think it's thanks to me. I went to the regional school, a really huge school. Kids come there from kibbutzim, from farming villages, from the regional town. I really liked school, I liked the friends, I liked the activities. Not at all a regular school. It took up my entire day, until the evening. It's after school clubs, it's activities. I don't see that here, but there, if someone begins

something in third grade, then no way, he continues with it. Ballet, then ballet. Basketball, then basketball. You keep doing it seriously. They really invest in the kids. I really loved all the organizational and administrative stuff, the committees. My adopted mother was the cultural coordinator at the kibbutz all the years I lived there. She brought all the performers and I agreed to make them coffee only if they'd allow me to say a few words in the auditorium before the show.

The Holocaust is very important for them. You work two months in advance on Holocaust Day. Anyone you ask, his father is a Holocaust survivor, his grandmother is a Holocaust survivor, or his aunt is. In my house, for example, Holocaust Day doesn't have that meaning. What's Holocaust Day? A ceremony at school. I came to kibbutz, and Holocaust Day is really extreme, it's a day that really puts you in depression. Here I didn't feel Holocaust Day, okay six million died. But what am I supposed to do about it? I'm far away, all I am is a schoolgirl, like what? There's a morning ceremony, okay. It doesn't get the same significance. Today, when the siren goes off on Holocaust Day, it means something to me. It means something to me not because I grew up on a kibbutz. Because I understood the real meaning of Holocaust Day. It really touches me. Here, for example, on Memorial Day for the soldiers, they don't stand at attention. The Haredim don't, did you know that Haredim don't stand at attention on Memorial Day? They don't, no, it's their country. It's very, very, very different.

“Pardes Katz wasn't very religious when you were young, was it?”

It was religious. It was always religious. Don't think otherwise. Pardes Katz is a neighborhood in Bnei Brak, and Bnei Brak is a religious city. However you look at it, in the clubs and courses here there's something very irritating. My sister inquired about some course and they asked her if she's religious. And I argued that that's racism. Because what does it matter to thirty *dosiot* [a somewhat derogatory term for religious women] who dress up in skirts for me, and I have no problem with religious, all my aunts and uncles are religious. What does it matter to thirty *dosiot* with skirts, if one woman in pants sits with them? What, does it mean that they're less respectable? It's not clear, it's not clear to me. It's racism to me, and they're the most racist of all. She didn't go study there because she's not religious. Men don't study there in any case, so what's the story? It's women sitting there. Go away, I don't like that stuff. In my opinion it's real racism. What does it matter to me? I sat in a class with *dosiot* in the secretarial course, and I really enjoyed it. What's the problem?

I know what it is to be different, after all I arrived at the kibbutz with a label on me and it's not easy. It's not pleasant when you are tagged, it's not pleasant when people look at you, it's not pleasant when they're always taking stock of you, it's not pleasant when they talk about you, it's not pleasant when they make things up about you, when they start guessing what you were before, it's no fun at all. But, again, if I hadn't succeeded that first year, I wouldn't have stayed on. But I also guarded myself. I remember that I received a cassette deck as a present from my uncle, and hell I'm going to

listen to Mizrahi music. You can hear all the Pink Floyd and “The Wall” that you want, blow your ears out, I’m going to listen to Margalit Tsanani. I was in ninth or tenth grade, there was that song, I waited all night. They put on full volume and I put on full volume and at some point they began singing my music. Now, it’s like a joke, because they don’t listen to Mizrahi. What, are we blacks? But at some point they began listening, really, like, to play it, they stand there talking with us and suddenly they begin to play it. You say, wow, I did it. I clean the house the way I cleaned our house, put on music, dress in rags like in my house, I was precisely me. I didn’t agree to change so that they’d love me. Whoever wants to can accept me, whoever doesn’t want, won’t accept me. Precisely.

The boy, the other one who stayed with me at the kibbutz, gave up his own home. He still lives at the kibbutz. He gave up his mother, gave up his father, gave up his brothers and sisters, gave up his neighborhood, gave up his friends, gave up his mentality. He disguised himself as someone else. He lived there when he was in the army. Have you ever seen a boy like that? Who doesn’t want to go back, even a little bit, to Mom and Dad? He never even went home to visit his friends. He worked hard, and I didn’t do anything. There’s this thing that when you get accepted into the youth housing you have to go through this hazing. You know, all sorts of mistreatment. They throw eggs at you, you work in the cow pen and...and I said No! I’ll get hazed? Not on your life! I’m not going through any hazing for you, why, what happened? I’m here, that’s a fact, take it or leave it.

Kibbutz kids go through hazing, and I said no. I'm not doing it. Why should I? Why should I get humiliated that way? To be accepted? Hey guys, I'm here, that's a fact, I have a room, I have a bed, I have a dresser. For that I need eggs, cows, all that stuff? I didn't get hazed and he went through that degradation. It seems completely superfluous to me. Really.

“Where did you work?”

Everywhere. In field crops, in the children's houses, in the dining room, it's a matter of seasons. When volunteers came, I liked to work in the dining room. In the summer I liked to work in the children's houses. It was fun. You go to the pool with them, you're not stuck inside all the time. I also worked in classrooms. I worked in the garlic and carrot sheds and in the factory. I had a hand in everything. Of course, I didn't neglect my studies. I did a *bagrut* without math. What's funny is that after I came back home I took a math course and got a 100 in the *bagrut* math exam. It was a joke.

Now, the army was a complicated story. It wasn't bad for me at the kibbutz, it was very very good. But I knew that my roots were somewhere else and I wanted a little more of my own home. Everyone signed up for Nachal [an army unit where friends enlist and serve together, and spend part of their time working on a kibbutz] and they tried to convince me, but I said, I'm going home. I want to be in the general staff base in Tel Aviv. Now, go ask the army for permission to serve close to home. It goes against all my thinking. Okay, so at first I kept it secret, then I said, to hell with you, I'm leaving. I

didn't stay for the graduation party. You know, how I had to run away. Because if I had stayed, I'd never have gotten out of there. I had this feeling that if I stayed even another little bit then I'd stay and that would be it. If I stayed there for the army, then after that I'd be committed to two years of work in the kibbutz and then you already see yourself a college student living there, I didn't want to.

This week I met someone from high school who was in my year, not even in classes with me, and he called out to me and it was kind of funny and I exclaimed "Ma'oz!" I mean, what kind of name is Ma'oz, you won't find a Ma'oz anywhere in Pardes Katz. He had this thing, he'd close my eyes and pull my nose. So I knew it was him, when I saw him it brought me back there like a movie. You know, there aren't any kibbutzniks here, they're far away. He says, hey, sister, you didn't even stay for the graduation party? I told him, what's your problem, I got out while I could.

I could go back to the kibbutz, but I'd never do that. Why? Because today kibbutz isn't what it once was when I lived on a kibbutz. When you get down to it, teenagers there have a very very clear path set out for them. They do the army, after that they travel for a year, and then they go back to the kibbutz and work another year and then they get their college studies paid for. It's not for me. Too many years of commitment.

So that's it, I served in the general staff headquarters in Tel Aviv, in the officer training division. I didn't want to become an officer, it was a stage in

my life when I didn't want to commit myself to any framework. I felt that I wanted to leave all my options open, didn't want to serve as an officer. Why do I need to be in uniform my whole life now? I don't intend to have a military career, I have other plans. On the other hand, what will I do now? You left the kibbutz. Do you have any plans? I don't have plans. I only knew that I wanted to be close to home and that's it.

“Did you sometimes make changes at home based on things you saw at the kibbutz?”

No, I don't change anyone, I'm me. I have a method of my own. I claim that when you change, people change in your wake. That's my method in life. For me, if someone argues with me, I just change positions. That's it. When you change, people change after you. But I'm me. I mean, I don't play games, I didn't come here and suddenly become some sort of kibbutznik. I was like that. So, what can I do. Like, what you see is what you get. I didn't try to change anything. I like lots of things in my house, and there are things that with them I would trade places, I would literally trade places with kibbutzniks. But I have a friend from the kibbutz who until the age of nineteen, until she was in the army, never went on a bus by herself. In my opinion, that's denigrating. Hell, how much of an incubator can you take? How much can you live packed in cotton balls? What's so scary about going on a bus? I started taking buses on my own at the age of eleven. I had to ride them home from the kibbutz. What's so awful about that? Think of it, until

she was nineteen. She had to go to Tzrifin [an army base] and she didn't go by bus. They're really overprotective there. I don't like that.

In the army I had a really big idea about what to study afterwards, but first I needed to improve my *bagrut* grades and do the psychometric [Israel's equivalent of the SAT]. I worked very hard. I don't have older brothers and sisters to tell me how to do it, I had to do everything myself. To get all kinds of workbooks, to start reading, check what, who, when. I got the help from Project Renewal, they gave me grants. I can't complain, they helped me a lot. When it comes to that, they're great. I worked at the same time. I was a saleslady and marketing secretary in a computer company. I worked very very hard, really. Day and night. My motto was to save money. I went to an evaluation through the Project, they have this workshop, it's really amazing. It's meetings, dynamics, and graphology.

I thought of going in the direction of teaching, and I also had all the reasons why I wanted to study teaching. I want to be a housewife and it fits in with bringing up children. I was looking for something convenient. I did the diagnosis and then they told me: Listen, everything's just fine, you're wonderful with kids and you don't have any problems, but over the years you'll feel that you're wasting yourself. They told me marketing and sales and I said no, that wears you down, I'm not willing. I want to have children, it's not acceptable, I don't want it. So then they told me, okay, any humanistic field that involves people, and the field of management. They don't focus it all that much. They didn't tell me anything I didn't know already.

So I ordered workbooks again and I decided to study at the Open University [a distance-learning institution]. It was because of the teaching method. What I say is this, with a bachelor's degree you don't come out anything anyway. You need a masters. So I said, I really want to study. I'll take a general B.A., whatever I want, for fun. I don't need statistics, don't need all the horrible stuff that I don't connect to anyway. So now I'm studying in the general B.A. program, taking courses in education, psychology, sociology, whatever I want, and I'm enjoying every minute. At first I thought that I'd need those reinforcement classes. But it turns out that with this method you can really learn at home alone. It works, just like they say. The material is written for idiots. Any kid could understand it. I really have no problem with it. You need to hand in assignments during the semester, and at the end you're tested. If you pass, you pass, if you don't pass, you don't pass. I also don't go to the reinforcement classes because I was hurt in an automobile accident, and I've still got a lot of running around and things to take care of. I progress at my own pace, it depends how much time English will hold me back. If everything works out, in another year and a half I can finish the degree requirements.

If I look ahead, and this is a thought that came to me just this last week, I'd like to do a masters in psychology. When I have goals, I don't have any problem getting there. Like, it's nothing for me. If I want organizational consultant or pedagogical consultant, that's nothing, it's a matter of two years at Beit Berl [an education college] twice a week, easy. If in the end I want to

be a teacher, I'll make up courses and major in teaching. Just not grunt work. I put that in italics. I have a problem with grunt work. I can't do grunt work. I'm not a grunt. I don't think I'm a grunt. I have a problem working as a telephone solicitor, even while I'm a student. And that's a problem, because my mother can't pay for me, and even the Open University is 17,000 [shekels, about \$3,850] a year. So maybe I'll stop studying at the Open University and I'll take a vocational course so that I can work somewhere. But maybe I'll also find work and I'll reduce the course load. One of the two has to happen, I mean, it's inevitable. It's impossible to live without money. No way, I can't let myself do that.

“Now a final question. You lived here, you went to kibbutz, you came back, how is your social life?”

I don't have much of a social life here. I left elementary school, I didn't finish with them, I didn't go on to high school with them. I wasn't in high school here, I wasn't with them in the army, I didn't do anything, nothing, nothing, nothing with them. I don't have any connection with them either. It's true that we run into each other on the street. Hi, what's up, how are you doing. Many of them did go on to college. We don't broadcast on the same frequency. I actually see the crowd from the kibbutz sometimes, because they aren't at the kibbutz any more, they're in the city. They began living now. They thought that it was really simple, and suddenly they begin wailing a bit. How do you do this, how do you sign a rental contract? Sometimes I go visit my family at

the kibbutz, but my friends study in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, got stuck somewhere in the world, work, they've scattered.

Getting a Membership Card

The aware Mizrahi of today is a Mizrahi among Ashkenazi, he is the Mizrahi who struggles with Ashkenazim from within their language. The next stage will be for Mizrahim to speak only with themselves and among themselves. From a place where they have no need for Ashkenazi venues (Nizri 2002, p. 48).

In the closing chapter of the collection *Mizrahim in Israel*,⁵ the editors express their hope that their post-colonial scholarly approach will invite “Speech in variegated, heterogeneous voices, and fluid rather than frozen identities, possibilities that extend beyond traditional lines of separation” (p. 305). These possibilities should be accepted, they argue, in part because the post-colonial discourse “allows the creation of connections between the object of the discussion, the arena in which it is conducted, and the speakers who act with in it” (p. 24). The object of the discussion in the case before us is the courses of the lives of young women, charted in the face of their ethnic origin, class, gender, and education, with special attention to the religious component. The arena is a specific neighborhood in central Israel, and the speakers are the women themselves, mediated by the researcher. The study of Mizrahiyut in such a discourse, so the writers hope, seeks to break through the Zionist Israeli national space and create a new space. The empirical findings (observations and interviews) themselves are insufficient to this

task. The endeavor to fill these expectations is always the task of the interpretive process, from within a policed dialogue with the findings.

At this point, at which the text moves from its empiric section to its interpretive section, I seek to make use of several of these writers' goals. The central one is to decipher Mizrahiyut autonomously, rather than as opposed to the "Ashkenazi other." Such a move should create a space free of the "big other,"⁶ in which a new conversation is possible. I have chosen Bracha and Aya as my first pair of biographies in order to address the boundaries of this autonomy. Their stories suggest two ideal models of charting a life course. These ideal types do not touch on the internal division within the neighborhood, ethnicity or class (which will be addressed below). They mark the ultimate "outside" of the community and its uttermost "inside" as well. The first ideal type recognizes the Israel hegemony in its traditional form, and conducts a dialogue with the "Ashkenazi/non-religious/education" complex. The second type looks to the Sephardi religious hegemony and conducts a dialogue with intra-Haredi values. The Israeli outside of the first type is not within its field of vision; it is an "other" of little relevance that is generally not troubling.

In their lives, Aya and Bracha do not embody the full achievement of this binary ideal. But they have certainly chosen one of these two extremes, and each seeks for themselves a specific place within it. Their lives are examples of how people diligently seek to improve their position within the social system with which they choose to affiliate. They embody a desire to buy a share in a cooperative that will ensure their future and the future of their families. Their stories also indicate the ability to create an autonomous space, free of a hegemonic regime.

Aya, who was called Eti as a child, was sent to a state-religious kindergarten because it was adjacent to her apartment building. Her parents saw no reason to insist on a non-religious public kindergarten, even though they did not identify themselves as religious. Bracha attended the a Haredi Beit Ya'akov school even though her parents were not religious. The ease with which Mizrahi parents allow their children to attend religious educational frameworks is not self-evident. Such flexibility would have been nearly unthinkable in the largely Ashkenazi neighborhood where I grew up, not far from Pardes Katz.

The national division of public education into religious and secular sectors did not manifest itself in the same way in all places. Mizrahi parents who lived in marginal neighborhoods where there was a choice of several schools did not always insist that their children go to the one that matched their level of religious practice and belief. All the women I interviewed who identified themselves as non-religious attended a religious school for at least one grade. Religious education (in particular of the state-religious type) was not perceived as an aberration or a risk, and was not considered foreign or threatening.⁷ It's close to home? She'll go there. She doesn't like it? She'll transfer to a different kind of school. Even though they began their lives in quite similar ways, their biographies diverged significantly. In both stories, dominant protagonists act opposite and together with their mothers. Their encounter at the course for senior secretaries was mediated by quite different narratives.

Aya: Her Teachers and Mother Were Her Guides, But She Set Her Own Course

The narrative that motivates Aya's life story assigns a central role to the individual and her choices. The girl, teenager, and young woman looks at herself, at her mother, and at her environment, and decides, on her own, what course she will take. She portrays her mother as a guide, as one who does not impose herself but instead offers advice. The teachers that Aya remembers had a pedagogical approach much like her mother's. They advised, illuminated, directed, but did not coerce or punish. The major educational message she remembers and reconstructs is humanist: be a good person. Apparently, to carry out this general counsel, Aya needs an unmarked space that lies between: between home and school, between the neighborhood and the kibbutz. She needs a place in which she can invent herself, where she can transform from Eti to Aya, to be a Mizrahi kibbutznik who has left her home for the kibbutz. She needs to miss her friends from the kibbutz, who have nothing to offer, to walk the streets of her neighborhood and not find anyone to talk to.

In seventh grade she reads a newspaper advertisement and makes a secret compact with her school counselor. Aya, who speaks so warmly of her home and family, of her mother, brothers, aunts and uncles, chooses to leave them. "At a certain point I decided I didn't want to live at home anymore," she says. Leaving home, presented as a test for Aya as an individual (will she last a week there, or will she run back to Mom?) is a turning point. But, for her, leaving home is not abandonment or betrayal. Aya drags her home and neighborhood to the kibbutz, and brings the kibbutz into her home. It's all on her back, alone. At the kibbutz she mops the floors and enjoys it, dressed in "rags," just as she did at home, with the tape playing Margalit Tzinani at full volume. What does she

care that the kibbutz children would rather hear Pink Floyd's "The Wall" over and over and over again? She will not allow her adoptive parents at the kibbutz impose anything on her. They have shouting matches that the whole kibbutz hears. The traditional hazing that marks the move into adult society is unacceptable to her and she refuses to participate. Everyone enlists in the Nachal corps? Not she.

The individual motive that colors Aya's story does not obscure her social insights. She is critical of the kibbutz's racism and of some of its traditions, and of some of the educational methods its members use. At the same time, she recalls positively and with affection the social life, the regional school, the places she worked, and the constructive attitude of parents towards their children. When she says, "To this day I thank God that I was there," the statement is not smooth and resolved. Immediately thereafter she says, "it wasn't at all a simple matter, but I survived." Aya survived the repression, the stereotypes, alienation from the kibbutz and from the neighborhood. as in any significant struggle for identity, she assimilated and rejected, profited and paid.

She absorbed and internalized Zionist education. The technical Holocaust Day of Pardes Katz became a meaningful Holocaust Day in a kibbutz of refugees from Europe. A brother who does not understand why he ought to waste three years in the army without getting anything out of it, and risk his life as well, makes Aya want to tear out her hair: "How can you not serve your country?... You're a man, go to Lebanon, like, you should be ashamed of yourself." Aya accepted uncritically the two ultimate normative stations—Holocaust and Jewish national self-determination. At these stations she shed all opposition and was exposed to mechanisms that seared the national code into her. Nevertheless, she makes a point of reading her life in parallel with a twin story, that of a

Mizrahi boy, the other kid from the Youth Society who remained at the kibbutz. Aya portrayed him as a person who was swallowed up and assimilated completely. He erased his personal Mizrahi identity and exchanged his family for a kibbutz family. He went to Nachal with everyone else and returned to the kibbutz and its standard path for young people. This boy chose to leave the hybrid space and attach himself to the collective. He bought a share at a price that Aya sees as high or impossible. Now he is an individual in a marked context, a member of the cooperative, and she is outside, alone.

Aya's attempt to tell herself from within herself swings between social regimes. She is not unaware that they seek to impose control, but she does not dismiss them. Hers is not a Mizrahi story free of the "big other," and it raises the question of whether such a story can indeed be told. The price of the critical personal process leaves Aya only half fulfilled. She returned home without having gone through all the stations of a normative young life path. She served in the army, but close to home, she didn't go on the traditional post-army overseas backpacking trek, she does not hang out on the quad at college, does not live in a rented apartment in the city. She is cut off from most of her kibbutz friends, and speechless in the face of her friends in Pardes Katz. But Aya lives with a feeling of being true to herself. She thinks about a family, children, and a career, plans to continue her study, and moves forward. The price she paid and the insights she gained came from within a semi-autonomous space that she created for herself. Is that space Mizrahi? Is it Ashkenazified? Is it worthwhile? Empowering? At present, she collapses into the identity she has constructed, folded up within her name, with all its potential: Aya Edri.

Bracha: At the Wheel

Bracha didn't let life steer her. She also realized, at a very early stage of her childhood, that she had the power to choose. Like Aya, her most significant choice was to leave home. Aya's mother worked long hours outside the house. As the family's principal wage earner, Bracha's mother was also absent from home. Both of these eldest daughters admire their mothers, but they did not want to continue to serve as their mothers' deputies—taking care of their younger brothers and sisters, cleaning the house, and being the homemaker. Bracha chose to deepen and improve the path she had already started on, rather than to deviate from it or choose an alternative path, as Aya did. If she was going to be religious, then she'd be Haredi; if she was Mizrahi, then she'd go to a mixed Ashkenazi-Sephardi Haredi school, or even better, to a leading Sephardi-Haredi institution. If she lived in a Mizrahi neighborhood at the outskirts of Jerusalem, the better she should live in the Haredi bastion of Bnei Brak. The direction is inward and upward. Like Aya, Bracha, has not taken her life course to its end.. She has not become a senior teacher, or a rabbi's wife, just as Aya has not completed a prestigious academic program, and is still not a psychologist, as she wanted to be. But Bracha and her husband are certainly making every effort to belong, in the full sense of the word, to the community they have chosen. He abandoned the frivolities of his youth—music, jeans, and discothèques—for a yeshiva. She completed her studies at the seminar and worked there as a counselor. Both of them continually seek to improve their position within the Sephardi-Haredi area, and they have no intention of creating critical areas of their own.

The narrative that guides Bracha's life story displays an systematic and ongoing effort to weed out hybrid tendencies. It is an effort that aims at producing a standard and

familiar Sephardi-Haredi identity. So, in her recollections of her childhood, Bracha's social units undergo standardization and purification. Her home, which was not religious, becomes religious. Her mother takes it seriously, her father less so. The mother's dominance enables the Haredi lifestyle to take root. Bracha's younger siblings attend Haredi schools. Their neighborhood in north Jerusalem, where girls play with boys on the street, is exchanged for a boarding school. Within this total institution, Bracha carries on with her coherent project. She separates herself from friends who were bad influences, partly at her own volition and partly with the aid of her teachers, who apparently identify the potential and devotion in her. At every station along her educational path, Bracha pauses and almost gives in. "I was a little influenced by my friends," she recalls. "You know, it's the teenage years, you begin doing stupid things and all that. I had friends from non-religious homes, even though it was a Haredi school.... I said, I'm not doing the seminar.... I'm sick of living in a dorm so many years, hey, after six years I felt it was like a prison. I'm already grown up, I want to develop a little, to get to know the world.... Maybe I'll do national service."

It is hard for Bracha far from home, and she has trouble with the policing and oversight. The girls around her drop out and go their own ways, but she gets through it. "I don't know how," she says, "Believe me, real divine intervention, with heaven's help, *Baruch Ha-Shem*, believe me, *Baruch Ha-Shem*." Bracha enlists all the standard expressions of gratitude to God to explain to herself how she remained on the path. But, in parallel, she also explains why, in fact, beyond the Creator's guidance, she enrolled in the seminar. "Because, after all, in Or Hayyim they look after us, you know, they arrange matches.... I'll stay. That way I'm still in Bnei Brak, I'm in touch with my teacher, she'll

suggest boys.... My parents weren't all that popular, the whole world didn't know them. ... They won't find me boys, they don't know me there, I grew up the whole time in Bnei Brak.”

In the dangerous gap that transitions produce, in the in-between place, Bracha wonders and examines alternatives, even if only as mental games. Maybe do National Service, even though few of the girls at Or Hayyim do so. Maybe be independent and work? Maybe leave Bnei Brak and go home to Jerusalem? A large number of her high school friends did not continue along the track and enroll in the seminar, and even fewer remained in the seminar as counselors. The shelter provided by the Or Hayyim institutions, and their place in the lives of Mizrahi girls, will be discussed below. In any case it is clear that as long as the young woman is inside the institution, she retains normative status, and this improves the quality of the matches she will be offered. The teachers and counselors are part of the network linking the girls' school to the parallel boys' institutions, and they have many matches to offer. Bracha understands that she must not return to the Jerusalem periphery, and she must not get stuck with the hazy status of a single woman who is not in school. She knows that it is not worthwhile for her to cut her ties to the matchmaking enterprise, and she stays. Reading backwards, she feels she made the correct move. Even though she did not want to go out with newly-religious boys, she found her man among this group, and together they carry on the personal project that each of them began before they met.

The fact that Bracha spent six years, from the age of 15, hunched over a sewing machine instead of choosing the academic program, and that today she finds no work in the craft she learned, was mentioned in the literacy discussion in Chapter 3. Bracha is

aware of the waste and uselessness of what she did. Nevertheless, her strong reading of her educational path depends on the socio-religious status she achieved thereby, rather than the professional status it left her with. It was her social status that brought her an economic insurance policy. It allowed her to buy a share in Sephardi Haredi society. As a member, even if she is not part of its elite, she believes that her livelihood is secure:

“Believe me, it’s God’s intervention in our personal lives, we don’t know what we live off of.... Our decision is that he, with God’s help, will study in the meantime. We have one boy, we manage.” The economic side of thing somehow works out, with a combination of charity, the unemployment allowance that Bracha was receiving when I spoke to her, support from the yeshiva, and help from their parents.

Alongside the economics is the culture. Bracha thinks that she and her husband made correct choices that allow them a life of cooperation and mutual respect. “My husband himself says that if he wasn’t religious now and got married, he wouldn’t achieve a quarter of what he achieves now,” she recounts. “I mean, in terms of respecting his wife, how to treat his wife, he says, what? If I weren’t religious? I’d do the opposite of what she wanted, she’s this way, she thinks that, puts her foot down—I’d do exactly the opposite, and let her stew. What, do I care what she thinks? But a Haredi man knows what a woman is, what family life is, they get a lot of guidance from rabbis.” There is great profit in belonging to Sephardi Haredi society. Its comes from within, and is not diverted by anything outside.

Bracha’s story is devoid of reference to Ashkenazim. She would not have referred to them at all had I not asked her about the composition of her neighborhood Beit Ya’akov class in Jerusalem, and what version of the prayer book they used. The statutory

ranking is internal: non-religious Sephardim, *hozrim be-teshuva*, and Torah scholars. Bracha's life followed this ranking and she climbed its ladder—from a non-religious home, to her very early personal attachment to religious observance, followed by her parents, to the dream of a Torah scholar, which was rounded off and exchanged for marriage with a *mit'hazek*, but leading to the building of a family with a Torah scholar.

At the end of the interview, Bracha described herself as alone in the neighborhood. What seemed to me to be an area full of religious people seemed to Bracha like a desert. The more religious women, she says, “live over there in Kiryat Herzog.”⁸ There is always something to aspire to.

Position and Status

Aya went out into a bustling space, where she had a head-on encounter with a diversity of sights that changed her point of view. Her kibbutz education placed her in a new position, even if her status did not change. She confronted the “other” in its stereotypical form—a kibbutz populated by Holocaust survivors. She encountered Ashkenazi Zionist pioneers who sought to make the desert bloom and who presented her with all the values inherent in the classical Zionist project. This encounter smoothed her rough edges, sharpened her gaze, granted her parameters external to her previous life and to those of her previous experience. It made her reflexive and critical. Her intimate acquaintance with the “other,” and her insistence on not being swallowed up by it, left her outside any framework, aware of her lack of interest in becoming part of any one of them and her inability to be what she once was, to be like her brother.

Bracha has a new status and a fixed position. Her perspective on the social system has not changed since elementary school. There were difficulties along the way and there

were moments when she thought of exchanging her position for another. But in the end she rejected those options. By remaining with the same point of view throughout her life, she was able to improve her position in the field. Her external gaze is limited, and critical speech is absent. Her sharp mind and keen eye are directed inward, into her field, her society, her neighborhood, and her family.

2. Eveline and Sigalit: The Home and the Street

My sisters, I address you as a brother to his sisters. What have they done with us? They've undressed *you*, *you're* naked. How can you allow the government and the cinema and the media to undress you, thirty years ago, if a woman had gone around the way women go today, the non-religious would have shouted "shame!" at her! But today, what degeneration, we degenerate and get used to it and degenerate more and get used to it. Where are the modest daughters of Israel, all the gentiles knew that our girls were modest. But today? A man goes to work, he doesn't know what his wife is doing at home. I heard, not on us, today a man came to my office, I don't want to go into details, that there are all sorts of overseas trips for women to do things, we shouldn't know about them. Daughters of Israel, my sisters, I cry out to you, come back. One comes back in repentance, what joy that causes in the heavens. I see Haredi girls in Bnei Brak who grew up in sanctity, what girls, what innocence, everyone wants daughters like that, everyone would want a wife like that (Rabbi Daniel Zer, Lecture, 15 Av, Aug. 16, 2000).

The hermeneutic process of the two previous biographies derived largely from their ethnic component. The next hermeneutic process will be motivated by the gender component inherent in social contexts such as class, ethnic origin, and extent of religious observance. My juxtaposition of Eveline's and Sigalit's biographies is based on looser parallels than those between Aya and Bracha. Eveline is ten years older than Sigalit, is married, and is the mother of five children. She was born in Morocco and with her family immigrated to Israel. She lived in Pardes Katz as a teenager, and now lives in Bnei Brak proper. Her social affiliation is Haredi. Sigalit belongs to the group of non-religious women, even though she also attended religious schools and her family became religious. She is a divorced mother of two, grew up in Pardes Katz, and continues to live there.

I have juxtaposed these two women's lives on the axis of the powerful metaphor that organizes the lives of lower-class Mizrahim, and especially those of Mizrahi women. It is the dichotomy of the home and the street. Another dichotomous metaphor classifies the women as either saints or sluts. These attributions, present in many social classifications,⁹ Israeli and other, Haredi and non-Haredi, here collapse into paper dolls, one dressed as a Haredi woman with her hair covered and the other dressed in jeans and a tank top. Placing Eveline's and Sigalit's actual lives alongside the paper dolls is a way of learning about the social arena in which the binary metaphors of saint and slut are created.¹⁰ By placing their biographies alongside each other, I will seek to be precise about the value-moral meanings attached to each pole—but also to blur them.

Sigalit

The house I wanted to be Sigalit's had one story, a well-manicured lawn, a freshly-mopped porch with plastic chairs, and was situated on a quiet Pardes Katz side

street. This area is not included in Project Renewal, and the community workers identify it as a strong neighborhood. But, in fact, the house that Sigalit lives in with her son and daughter is the other side of that two-family house. When no one answered the door on the pretty, well-tended side, I went to the other door, and there I found her. We talked for about two hours.

The rent leaves her little money for other expenses. Her telephone receives calls but is blocked for outgoing calls. The arrangement of the furnishings bespeaks a desperate attempt to create a homey atmosphere based on the unusual taste that Sigalit sees as her central personality characteristic. She places the glass of tea she has made for me on the living room table and continues to sip from the coffee mug she had in hand prior to my arrival. Next to my glass were two books in transparent plastic covers—apparently out on loan from the public library. One was on childrearing for divorced couples, by Professor Sarah Smilansky, and the other was on children's emotional world.

Sigalit is tall and has an athletic build. Her hair is long and very dark, and she has a pretty face. She wore black cotton pants and a colored sweatshirt. Although it was winter, she wore clogs and no socks. On the table, next to the books, lay an ashtray and a box of Time 100 cigarettes. Sigalit smoked continually throughout the interview. The transcriber of my tapes marked "Sigalit's Story" as the "most touching," and I wonder whether a written text can possibly convey the force of the emotion displayed in the conversation. I have no doubt that her story is more complex, harsher, and more charged than the life stories of her classmates in the secretarial course. But, at the same time, the stereotypical nature of her difficult story unravels as it progresses. A year after our talk I met her in the Project Renewal office. She had come to make the final arrangements for

receiving the apartment she had fought for—even enlisting a member of the Knesset, Yael Dayan, in her struggle. Sigalit and her children moved a month later into their own rent-controlled apartment in Pardes Katz.

Walking back from her house to my car, I stopped to buy a falafel sandwich. The local falafel stand is run by an old man whom everyone, it seems, knows. Three young men, all of whom looked like drug addicts and each of whom had a *kipah* on his head, sat on a fence, talking. They spoke about legal issues, the police, “users,” and the like. Perhaps they were former addicts, or maybe they thought they were.

Two children stood talking by the fence of the school across the street from the falafel stand. I eavesdropped. They sounded Russian. They spoke, in slightly accented Hebrew, about science fiction books they had read.

I walked towards my car. Pasted up on the walls of the factory I had parked next to were posters announcing “A Day of Joy and Rest for the Religious Woman” at the Sun Hotel in Bat Yam. Rabbi Kadouri would be there, as would the city rabbis of Bat Yam, Holon, and Petach Tikva. They also promised that Eli Yishai, the political leader of the Shas party, would be there, as well as the head of Shas’s El Ha-Ma‘ayan school system. The event would include a skit on the role of the Sabbath candles and a lecture on the status of the Jewish mother. Each participant would receive an amulet necklace with magic stones.

This area is not included in Project Renewal and is labeled a good, non-religious neighborhood. It is home to the non-religious Remez elementary school, close to Jabotinsky Street, which leads into Tel Aviv. Its two and one-story houses are quiet and pretty, but between and among them, as in Sigalit’s life, God and drugs, the state, prison,

and the community center, the Zionist women's organization WIZO and Rabbi Kadouri, come and go.

Sigalit Tells Her Story

A lot of it, let's put it this way, I don't remember a lot. I am in the stage of sublimating¹¹ the past. Only when we sit down together, me and my two sisters, then little by little they try to bring up memories.

Okay, I was born in Israel, in Beilinson Hospital [in Petach Tikva]. When I was about four, my parents were divorced. I don't remember the period of the divorce, I don't remember ... that is, I don't remember bitterness at home or ... or maybe I remember and I'm sublimating it and I don't let it surface. We lived in Pardes Katz, and my Mom worked my whole life. She is not a woman who got welfare or anything like that, she was simply a divorced woman who ran a home and brought up her three girls on her own.

I'm the youngest, I have a sister who is 31 today, married with two kids and a third on the way. I have sister who's 28 and a half and single. She's the pride of the family, that is she's intelligent, the brains of the family, she studied social sciences, finished her undergraduate degree and now wants to go to grad school.

Mom worked in an electronics factory. Until six each day. We'd come home, that is, it's not really coming home. It's to go to Grandma, we called her

Nana, to eat lunch. We went to the non-religious Komemuyot elementary school, where my daughter goes today. I went to first and second grade there.

At some point we became religious or I don't know how to call it, that is, I told you, it's hard for me to bring up things from the past, maybe because I don't want to remember them. That is, it makes me feel awful, I think I need therapy to bring it to the surface, to learn from my previous biography.

At some point my mother put us in an institution. I went to a place called Ma'on HaYalda. I don't remember myself being an exemplary student, one that goes to every class and listens to the teacher and ... the social part was more important for me. That is, I was more into friends, more ... that I go to friends' houses, that they come over my house. That is, the way I remember it, exactly like today. I just don't like to study. I just can't sit still. I'm aware that today the key to life is a profession, a career. I'll show you my report cards from first, second grade, it didn't bother me that I got a B or a C, it really didn't bother me. Today, when I look at that, I think that maybe it's because we didn't have the warmth of a mother at home. I mean, we didn't have talks about how important it is to study and look, here all I am is a manual laborer and I want ... that is, there was never warmth in the family, especially when I always felt like the spare child. That is, Sigalit was not a priority with Mom.

The institution was in Ramat Gan and it was religious. From there they sent us out to schools. My sister went to HaRama and that was really on a high

level, and I went to Shalom, which is like from the middle down, just so that you be somewhere. I liked to be in school, to sit, to be like all the pupils, to talk in class, interfere, I was always the head of the group.

Two years later Mom's family insisted that she take us out of there. We came back home and went to Lapidot, a religious school, where I did fourth and fifth grade. All that transition to religion suddenly, as a girl it seemed natural. I don't know. Like ... it came all by itself. That is, there was a period when the whole family would go to the beach and picnics on Saturdays and ... apparently at some point the family itself began falling apart. I mean, my aunt went into the thing of religion, and suddenly my Mom also ... I don't know how it came to her, maybe the influence of our more distant family, that is, the son of her uncle, or all sorts of people like that, and then we like saw ourselves as religious in every way. That means to dress in skirts, and to get up on Saturday and not turn on the light and not turn on the television, it came normally, like something routine. And at some point we went back to the institution, that is, I don't know how it happened, but I wanted to, or they decided to put me there, so then I went to Talpiot in Hadera. If there was a place like that you could stay your whole life I'd be willing to stay there.

It was a good institution, pure and simple. Maybe because of the warmth I was looking for. There were house mothers and cooks, and you don't call them by their name, you call them Aunt Mazal, for example. This closeness was so wonderful, like I could say to Aunt Mazal, "Oh, no, I don't have a dress for Shabbat" and she'd run to the laundry and try to find me something.

It was awesome. There were weekends I wasn't even willing to go home, it was fun to stay in the institution. The framework, the friends. At school I also had some progress, because I wasn't with the whole thing of the family, I didn't struggle too much with emotions. So maybe that way I was steady and able to listen to the teacher a little bit, and we had a wonderful teacher named Shlomit Ben-Aharon, we called her the Queen of Sheba, Shlomit Ben-Aharon.

The school was in the institution, it was sort of like a commune with a family feeling. And she was a teacher, that is, I felt as if she came down to our level, she learned it all over again with us. She wasn't an authoritative teacher, like, I have to teach them this and this. And it was a lot of fun. The material was easier. I liked to sit in class and I liked to show that here, I can do it. With tests, I was never one to sit in her room and hit the books. I didn't care what I got on the test, but I wanted the counselor to say "Great, you tried!" Like ... it wasn't as if anyone expected me, please get a 90, a 100, no. It was, like—first take the test. I'm one of those that ... when they give the date of the test I begin to get mixed up and I already start planning in my head that on the day of the test I'll just show up for attendance and then skip class. I'll go to my room, I'll sit there, that's it.

But there I already had a boyfriend (it's religious but co-ed) and I saw that he studied. And you know, you sit in class together, and then I felt like, there's, there's something fascinating in learning. I mean, knowledge, learning, acquiring knowledge about all sorts of things. What's true, though, is that I

never liked English. That was always the hardest language and the most annoying material. So I always found a way to skip class—I've got to go to the nurse, I'm dizzy, whatever it was, I always skipped English class. I liked the classes outside, agriculture. History interested me a little, what happened in the past. I don't believe in God so much, but I liked Torah. Mostly I looked for proofs there. Because, hey, guys, I never saw the sea split in two. Who can come and tell me, I was there and I saw it? Like, it was always, pricking my mind, prove it to me. If there was God, why are there all those wars, why is there so much evil? And then you hear that a two-year old kid died, or they murdered him. I thought, maybe at the end of the tunnel I'll find some thread that will help me begin to believe. But it's still wobbly with me. Children get raped, it's frightening. So where's my God? Yesterday they showed that the parents of a two-year old girl are abusing her. So where's God? After all, God guides us to the right, to the left, he reads hearts, reads thoughts, so hey dude, put some positive thoughts into that mother's head.

At the end of eighth grade the institution ended and I went back home. In a roundabout way I understood that my sister was in a closed institution, I simply opened a letter that they didn't give me. She wrote me that she was in a closed institution and that it was very hard for her and that they give her the keys to the gate and want to check to see if she'll run away, and this is where my hatred for my mother comes from. That is, I can say right out loud that I hate my mother for a lot of things in my life. But in some way I'm, like, hypocritical, because when we're with people somewhere I make a show that

everything is wonderful and nice and in some place I don't want to show that I hurt her, maybe not, I don't mean to hurt her, really. In the end my sister got out of there and everything went like it was normal, and her husband doesn't even know she was there. I went to an institution in Petach Tikva. I went to ninth and tenth grade there.

I was even more angry at my mother because she simply didn't come to visit. I would pick up the telephone and tell her, I miss you, and then she would say to me, I work until six, it's very hard for me, by the time I get home, and then the distancing began ... that is, the automatic disconnection from my mother. Then I started going to friends for the weekend, and their parents would come visit them and would give Sigalit something, I felt shitty. Like—why should I study, why should I make an effort, like for what? To come at the end of the trimester and show her—here's my report card? I think that at some point in my life, today when I run the film backwards, it wasn't that I really didn't want to learn, they simply didn't teach me to appreciate myself. I mean, they didn't do it the way of “study, it will be good for you in the future,” like “your children will be proud of you.” It all crumpled under the family thing, under emotion more than logic. That is, I won't work at school, maybe that way I'll get attention, maybe that's what will get my mother to parents' night to talk to my teachers. And then, you know, I'll have time to be with her. But that wasn't the thing, because I just started rebelling and I said that I don't want to be in the institution. That is, I want to be in my house with her and with my sisters. I don't want to be in institutions any more. And she fought

back and said it's worth it for you, and I told her, if you don't take me out at the end of this year, I'm coming home and I won't go to school, and that's what happened. That is, at the end of tenth grade she came to register me for the next year, and I told her, don't sign me up, because I'm running away and I won't come back. I mean, I don't want school. I don't see why I have to learn.

The money situation at home was hard, but she worked to make it all look okay. The notebooks and schoolbooks always looked good, with that she functioned very well. Like ... everything should look okay from the outside. At the end of every year, even before summer vacation began, all our books were organized, each one of us had a compartment, and all the books for next year were ready and with covers and organized on the shelves. Yes, every morning she got up and ironed our clothes, our uniforms, everything was ready on the chair, as if everything had to be perfect, but like perfect on the outside. On the inside she didn't care at all, like, study, don't study, get good grades or bad grades. I don't remember that she ever opened my report card and said, wow, I'm proud of you. I don't remember anything like that.

What's true, I always remember that as much as my sister was messy and her handwriting was atrocious, she would sit there with the tv and the radio and all her books, every folder scattered about and she lay there and did homework, that is, she was always the best girl at home, the wonderful one, always got the greatest grades, wrote wonderful poems. But my Mom never said, come on, I'll sit down with you, I'll help you with your homework. I

don't remember anything like that. It wasn't that she sat with my sister, she didn't need to sit with her. She'd get to class ten minutes early, as soon as the teacher would say to her, Yael, read us the answer, even if she hadn't prepared it she'd on the spur of the moment produce a wonderful answer, because it just got into her brain, the material. She always liked the thing about gaining knowledge and learning and knowing more and all that. Maybe she didn't have the emotional thing that I and my big sister had. I mean, the problems we had with my mother.

So after tenth grade I dropped out and came home. I didn't go to school any more. That is, I waited for the great enlistment day that every girl waits for. I went, I did the tests, everything, and then they sent me an exemption. I went to them and I said that I want to enlist, and they told me that if I want to enlist I have to study. I don't remember if it was the social worker or someone else who told me to go to this program for girls to complete high school in order to qualify for the army. It was in Jaffa, facing the sea. Which is what Sigalit loves. I began the year, and we studied, and I had a friend who's from here, and we did the course together. I told you, the social part was really important for me. We began to study, and really about three-quarters of a year went by when I really worked hard and I was typing 40 words a minute, the teacher was so pleased with me, she told me you're doing so well and all that. And then at some point it was like Sigalit went into a nosedive. That means coming to school with a towel and bathing suit under the books, showing up,

signing in for the first class, and second period we're already on the beach. But somehow I got by, like I made up the material.

The second stage was that they kicked out my friend and I'm, you know, social, I have to be in the crowd. So I went to the teacher and told her, if you kick out Michal I'm leaving with her. And I remember that day. The teacher pleaded with me, she told me, Sigalit, you can succeed, you're doing 40 words a minute and all that ... it's awesome, like, it's very hard to get to that stage at the rate you learned. And then I told her, no. I remember that day that she sat with me, maybe for an hour in the office, she pleaded with me. You've got just a little more to finish, don't always ruin your future because of friendship. But I go where my friends go, I don't care. And that's it, that was the end of school for me. I didn't want to go on, I was already at the age of buying myself clothes and all that, things I didn't get at home, so I began working, and of course I couldn't go to the army. I worked in gold, placing stones, and things happened, and I got married.

“Where did you meet your husband?”

At his house. I mean, I had a friend who was going out with his brother, and I was seeing someone else then, we were really in love and everything. But she said to me, come over to my friend, he just got out of jail. Okay, I was an innocent girl, like naïve, like ... I went with strangers again. I think to myself today, they said jail and all that—it didn't give me a knock on the head? Maybe not, because my mother was never the type who gave me guidance,

even though she could be an enchanting person socially. But when I look at her today, as a mother myself, in my opinion she was a total failure. I don't know how it is with my sisters, I believe that my sisters feel that way, too. But maybe they somehow learned how to forgive her.

I got married. They didn't want me to get married. She actually fought for me not to marry this guy. But maybe I was looking for a warm and loving family nest. I was twenty and a half, and he was thirty-two. I made the greatest mistake of my life. He'd been released maybe two months before we met. But I didn't know. That is, I came to their house and I don't know, something just clicked and that was it. From that day I stayed there. I didn't know what to do with my emotions and I couldn't go to my mother and be open with her, tell her, I'm having this experience and that experience, give me advice, tell me what to do. There wasn't any of that. All she had in her head was work, no warmth towards us. I moved in with his parents. He didn't have a job, actually he was just an addict.

“And you didn't know that?”

No. On the day I went to the *mikveh* [the ritual bath, for immersion prior to the wedding ceremony] he sat with his brothers and smoked. Like, I didn't know. I knew it only half a year later, and even then it was because his mother blurted it out. I was naïve, I didn't know what hashish was, I didn't know what drugs were, I didn't know anything. It wasn't that I didn't go out, I went out and had fun, the Soweto Club was my second home. People could

call me at midnight, we're going to Eilat, no problem, I'd sling my shoes over my shoulder, be here in half an hour to pick me up. When my mother suddenly remembered to ask, where are you going? I'd tell her, don't worry, I'll show up at some point. I'd go and crash on the beach with the crowd, for me that was the ultimate. But drugs—never.

And here I went out with him for two months and I didn't see anything. Nothing. It could be that again, like, I was looking for the warm and loving family nest, and maybe I thought that this would be my family nest. I got pregnant right away with my first one, in a big way, and we lived in a rented place, the rent for which we haven't paid to this day, because he took all the money for drugs. There was always this movement to my mother and back to him, to Mom and back to him. She'd take me to him even though I didn't want to. My mother-in-law became my mother. She was always protecting me. At some point I called her "Mom." I don't have any problem calling someone Mom, for me it's not some great wonderful word just for my mother.

Afterwards we lived with my sister-in-law and he kept going in and out of jail. Until we got a public housing apartment, and I was stabbed. That is, he stabbed me in the leg. The lucky thing was that I was stabbed and not my daughter, because I just managed to throw her to one side. Of course that was a scary thing, but you don't press charges, you say at the hospital that it's from a fence, and the doctor doesn't really believe you but ... you insist. Now, there's always hope. And I tried to arrange work for him, he really has

golden hands, whether its in auto repair or electricity, whatever he wanted he could have succeeded. And his mother also got him job interviews, made phone calls.

And then suddenly this book *Women Who Love Too Much* fell into my hands, it's a book that opened my eyes and my head in a big way. I understood that when it comes down to it women who love too much are really women who didn't receive love and they look for someone who will be dependent on them. In other words, what I didn't receive I give to another. And it really was that way. Like, he was always dependent on me, he was always dependent on the money I'd give him to buy another dose. We got welfare, which was a certain amount, and I worked in housecleaning. I had the baby girl on my back and I was cleaning houses. I'd beg people to let me work, even though I had a baby. And then a stage came when I, like, was already too much into the thing about the book. The first time you read it it's very hard to understand it. You need to read it over and over again to know what really makes life go round. Okay, so I didn't get love in the past, but now why should I be taking care of someone? Why shouldn't I look for my own life?

One day I came home from work and found an empty house. He simply emptied the house out. He sold the whole house. It wasn't the first time, but this time I was mad at him, I was furious, I cried and said enough. Like stop! I've reached my limit! Because there were moments like ... it's a little hard for me to talk today. That is, I'd sit with my friends and put off going home

until seven in the evening because, if I was with them, like ... and the girl cried and then I'd tell her, do me a favor, put a little milk in a bottle — because there wasn't any left at home. I mean, there was some point when I was just a stick. A stick. Because I always made sure that there would be food for the baby and ... that is, there were times when I'd even go [she weeps] to the garbage cans in the *shuk*, maybe I'd find something I could make for her, maybe potatoes [she weeps]. That's the way it was for about a year, and I didn't go to the welfare office, anything but there. I tried, like my mother, to manage on my own. In the end I put her in a day care center and I began working and I filed charges that he stabbed me. And he got four years. I worked in cleaning, I stayed in touch with his family, I went to visit. During one of his furloughs I got pregnant.

Now listen. I knew I'd get divorced from him at some stage, and I said to myself, if I get divorced then God knows when I'll get married again, and God knows when I'll have more children, and I don't know when I'll be able to have more children. I don't want my daughter to grow up alone, if the divorce goes through. I knew that me and two kids is a family. I thought of the future. I love my girl and I'll give her everything. I invest a lot in my eldest, and if you see my girl, it's not talking with a seven-year old, it's talking with a fifteen-year old girl. And I knew that, like, I don't want this girl to grow up alone, because in some place it will hurt her. That is, to live without a father, and also with a mother who at some stage will have to pay

the price and go out and work, and I like decided that I would have another one, no matter what, it doesn't make any difference.

During the pregnancy he was in jail. I lived with my mother and I planned how to get divorce. My sister had just then met someone. On the day I went to the hospital with my little boy, she got married. With us, the Iraqis, we don't put a woman who's just given birth with a bride. In Iraqi Arabic they call it *manhous*, like if the woman who gave birth is with the bride, she'll turn her womb around and she won't be able to get pregnant. So I wasn't at my sister's wedding, you understand? I wept blood. On the day of the wedding she called from the beauty salon and asked me to bring her the bouquet. And I, like in tears, go to the beauty parlor. I told her, if God, that is, if his name is God and he's listening, and he didn't let me take part in your celebration, which is the biggest happiness for me, then there'll be nine months between your child and mine. Three weeks later she went to my mother's house, and everyone said leave, leave, like she's forbidden to see Sigalit for sixty days. She said, "I don't care, I want to give her a hug." My grandmother was in shock, she's an elderly woman, and she told her, "it's forbidden, it's forbidden." So my sister answered her, I'm pregnant, now it's permitted. So between her boy and mine there really are nine months.

So we lived that way with a little bit of tranquility until my husband got out of jail. I had to go back to him. There was a thing of maybe two weeks, I don't want to remember it, there were humiliations, spitting, everything. I told my aunt (the religious one) and she told my mother, and they got

together and decided—cut. My sisters called and told me, you're coming home this minute. That is, take the kids, take what you can and get over here. It was the first time I ever felt like my mother wanted me, wanted to help me, she called me to her, even though I had two kids. I had a portable crib, first I put in the kids' clothes, whatever I could take, and a few other things. I put the girl on the things in the crib, the baby in the backpack, he was tiny, maybe three months old, and we moved in with my mother. That was the first time my mother was so decisive, she told me: if you plan to get divorced, you can stay here. If you intend ever to go back to him, you can go now. And then, like, my sisters got into the picture and told me, listen, it's no way to live. That's how I got the push to begin to go in the direction of divorce.

He was really against it. That is, he told that to my dying day I wouldn't get a divorce from him and I'd simply ... that is, it was two years of an Entebbe operation to get a divorce.¹² And then I got Yael Dayan, from the Knesset, involved, and she like sent a letter to the director of the rabbinical court Eli Dahan. She simply pushed him to the wall until, like ... because always when I asked the rabbis like to issue a summons, so that if he didn't show up he had to forfeit his note, but I never saw that any guy had to pay his note.

One day my sister read my palm, my sister knows how to read palms. And she said to me, just when you're not expecting the divorce it will come to you as a gift. That is, like ... it'll be a routine procedure, and you'll get the divorce just when you wouldn't dream of it. And then, really, on Wednesday, four days before the hearing, my mother and I went to Bnei Brak. My sister

worked in the post office then, we stopped in, told her good morning, what's new and all that. Then she asked me where we were going, and I said we're going to the labor federation office and to the welfare office to ask about something. We got to the welfare office, I told my mother, you know what, I'll call the police, I'll ask if they even received the order to bring him to the hearing. I call, and they tell me that they have no such order. So I ask the policeman, and if I bring you the order by hand, will you send out a car for him? And he said, if you bring the order, I'll send out four cars to put your husband in jail, divorced. I hung up and told my mother. Wait a minute, what do I do now. She tells me, call the rabbinate, tell them to fax the order to your welfare worker. I call the rabbinate. While I'm still on the phone, he tells me, Jerasi Sigalit? He puts down the receiver and I hear them shouting, rabbi, rabbi, Jerasi is on the phone. The president of the court gets on the phone and says to me: Jerasi, where are you? I tell him in Bnei Brak, why? He says, we nabbed your husband, come over right now, before twelve you're at the rabbinate, hit the iron while it's hot, he's prepared to give you a divorce. And I for a minute didn't take it in, I hung up the telephone. My mother said, okay, but what about the order? I told her—he's there, come. They caught him near Haifa.

We took a cab at twenty to twelve, at three minutes to twelve we were at the rabbinate. It was like a military operation, and then like I didn't believe it, the whole way I said to my mother, they're fooling us, maybe to, maybe ... I didn't know what to think. And then that same day the whole rabbinate knew

I'd gotten divorced. That is, I went out and shouted, "I got it, I'm divorced, it's great!" I felt liberated, like I wasn't dependent on anyone.

I stayed with my mother, until four months ago. It was very difficult. My refuge was, and still is, the single mothers' club that the welfare department runs in the WIZO hall. The person who started it is simply a genius. The women who come are widowed, divorced, separated, at least once a week they have an activity. It means to come, to sit with a cup of coffee, to be together in a kind of family atmosphere, to go out on trips at subsidized prices. There's a facilitator who's like a mother. For example, half an hour ago she called up and we're going for a five-day retreat, without children. Its guidance by psychologists, and all sorts of professional people. How to cope, how to cope with the kids, with their schools, with work, with your own studies. In other words, how to bridge between all those things without losing proportion about being a family. It's subsidized and costs 170 shekels. But I can't go now. I haven't been working recently and I don't have a cent, I'm down to the bone. That is, today, for example, I didn't even have food to give the children. The National Insurance allowance is just 2,800 shekels [about \$650], just enough for you to open your eyes and take a breath. After-school activities are out of the question. Last year, by the skin of my teeth, I put the oldest into a computer class. To go to something cultural, there's nothing. Once I took them to the Susan Dalal auditorium for a play, because my little sister was in it, an amateur troupe. Now, if I begin to work, they start lowering the National Insurance. I have to find work that will let me be at

home when the youngest comes, because I think that connection is very important. So I don't manage. I worked in the supermarket, and they're okay, but I had to work shifts and I didn't want to leave the kids. No way, it's me who's going to read them their bedtime story.

Now that secretarial course. I heard about it from the Project, but it wasn't something for me. Again, I went to show my mother and my sister. I love my children and I want the best for them, and I have no regrets having them or anything like that. But if I could begin over again, I wouldn't have them. I wouldn't get married at all. Because I, I don't see any point to my life. [She is on the verge of tears.] That is, I won't get up and study suddenly because, because I don't like it, because I don't see any point in it. When I went to the course, I didn't have the thing of "Here, I'm going to work towards my future." I'm not the type who goes to bed at night and says, wow tomorrow I'm going to work on my future, I'm going to study and maybe I'll have a career and ... I have, I have a thing that I live in illusions and bubbles, and like I don't have any intention of popping them.

You ask me where I imagine myself ten years from now? I can't tell you. I know what I'd like. Yes, I want to be a career woman, I love interior design, it really interests me. That is ... you can see my home today this way, and come a week from now and see that I arranged everything differently. I like moving and changing things, home is very important for me. If I had money, then my windows wouldn't be just transparent ones. I'd take colors and I'd make circles and shapes and colors, and the apartment would be more alive. I

would put all sorts of Charlie Chaplin statues and dogs and stuff like that, and everything would be very tidy. I mean, if the living room is blue, then around everything you'll see, like a background thing of blue with white. If there are shelves on the wall, then they'd be blue in some style.

I can imagine myself living with my children, and they're grown up, and I'm married to someone. He works the hours I want of course, that means from eight to six, no later than six he's at home. I'm a career woman, that means I run a very large and famous interior design firm, I have a partner and she ... that is, she's my friend, very close, my life is the way I want it to look. The daily schedule more or less? To get up in the morning with my husband with my children, to sit down, to drink coffee in the stunning breakfast nook I'll have, to go to work, to sit there half a day, like until twelve noon, to go drink coffee with my friend in some restaurant, to go home, be with the kids. Twice a year to go overseas with the family. That is, again, it's a kind of great big illusion. I know that practically, like, it's possible to get it, but like I don't do anything for it. Like ... again, it's a plan I have to study for. That is, I like interior design, okay, I need to study it. I hate to study, I can't sit still to study now, and I know it, and ...

That is, my whole life really revolves around the children. I'm not prepared to pay the price, say, that if I go to work from eight to four someone else will pick up my son from his preschool. I'm not talking about exceptional cases when I have things I have to do and my mother picks him up.

On a particularly hot August day in 2002, I emerged from our small neighborhood supermarket. I put my bags in the car and turned around to return the shopping cart and get my five-shekel coin back from its lock. A young woman in a white cashier's smock was sitting on the sidewalk in the sun, smoking a cigarette next to the shopping cart rack. She stared at me and said:

“Excuse me for asking, but where did you buy those pants?”

I was wearing jeans attached to a miniskirt of the same fabric. I took another look at her and asked: “Aren't you Sigalit?”

“Yes,” she said hesitantly. “I was sure I knew you from somewhere, but you've cut your hair and everything.”

“You don't remember me from the interview? From the secretarial course? We also ran into each other last year in the Project Renewal office, just when you had received the letter confirming that you'd receive an apartment.”

“Wow, you're right, Tamar, what a gas, you looked familiar, but your hair's grown and I didn't expect to see you here.”

Sigalit related that she'd been working in the supermarket for seven months (which shows that I am not a regular customer), that she was very pleased, and that she'd advanced from being a cashier to the next higher job, of arranging merchandise and working with suppliers. The apartment was just right for her and her children and things had really improved. The next day I brought her a postcard printed by the designer of my jeans, announcing a special sale in the southern part of Tel Aviv. There was a map on the back of the postcard and Sigalit looked at it.

“Thanks, I’ll give this to my boyfriend, we’ll go there Friday night, he’s got a car, and I’m sure he’ll know how to get there.”

The Street and the Home, the Daughter, the Mother, and the Sisters: Sigalit’s Version

The boundary is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences, but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially. (Simmel. 1997.143)

Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects etc. the trajectories it “speaks.” (De Certeau 1984, p. 99).

My conversation with Sigalit was so charged and moving that it requires a special measure of restraint to channel her life story into districts far from her tears. My path to her and back offers me a tour of an area considered to be Pardes Katz’s “good” neighborhood—single-story, two-family homes, well-tended gardens, and suburban calm. The environment is very different from that of the area around the open-air market, of the northern Mizrahi Haredi neighborhood, or of the Haredi Kiryat Herzog complex. On the way, I am enchanted by the pastoral atmosphere, so unlike the stereotype of Pardes Katz. On the way back, by the falafel stand, I overhear two schoolboys chatting about science fiction, and some drug-users in *kipot* chatting while perched on a fence. At her house, Sigalit speaks to me in language that owes a lot to therapeutic jargon. She probably learned the vocabulary in her single mothers’ club, in the workshops that the women in the club attend, and in self-help books—two of which I see on her coffee table. She uses and misuses “sublimation,” “surfacing,” “recall,” and “coping.” She talks about her ability to verbalize hatred of her mother, and about her ability to forgive her.

After the interview, she shows me her children's room. She points out the many games they have, the effort she puts into their education. She speaks of nurture and love, which contrast with what she has told me about her own mother. She talks about how she tends the apartment, which she can't afford and which she'll have to leave very soon. There are blue-and-white checked curtains, a wall-to-wall carpet in the children's room, and pictures hanging in her own bedroom.

The *home* is at the center of her dream. Sigalit wants to be an interior designer. In her imagination, she sees a "stunning breakfast nook," where she'll drink her morning coffee with her husband. She knows that it's a "bubble," a warm mantle dream of being a career woman with a quiet family and annual trips overseas. Outside the bubble, in the complex reality of her life, she struggles to obtain a real apartment. She needs a place she can raise her children in security, protect them from the street,¹³ and not go back to her mother. She fought for two years, with the help of the Project Renewal staff and a member of the Knesset, to get such a place to live—a single mother's rent-controlled apartment in Pardes Katz.

Her life story tells of her mother's efforts to earn a living and make a home for her daughters. When she proved unable to do this, the children were taken, or were sent away, from home—whether at the mother's volition or at the intervention of outsiders. The establishment, which marked the children as being at risk, liable to "wander the streets," institutionalized Sigalit and her sisters. Her mother's family did not take this well. They had the children returned home. But they were taken away again. One girl was put in an institution that was hard to get out of, while Sigalit was sent to a place she

remembers with great warmth. She portrays the institution as a family. The caretakers were like aunts, dressing, feeding, and looking after her. She also liked school there.

Her conversation with me marks an unending search for recognition. Recognition and love from the mother who was not there for her, who brought her into the world when her own life was already falling apart, who, Sigalit says, preferred her successful sister. The line of her story's logic follows her emotions. Sigalit explains her circumstances and the progress of events in the terms of the popular psychology she has learned. I didn't do well at school because they didn't give me support and encouragement. I didn't have the benefit of true motherly love, I almost never felt wanted. I married a drug addict because my mother never explained anything to me and never really talked to me.

Sigalit exchanges one house for another, one mother for another, and in retrospect knows that she made the greatest mistake of her life. During her marriage she was poor, beaten, lonely, and humiliated. She rummaged through garbage cans for food, overstayed her visits to her friends until her baby girl cried and they gave her milk, came home to an empty house because her husband had sold the furniture to buy a dose. A decision by her mother, aunt, and sisters to call her home put her back on track. "My sisters called and told me, you're coming home this minute. That is, take the kids, take what you can and get over here. It was the first time I ever felt like my mother wanted me, wanted to help me, she called me to her."

This circle of women—the aunt who had become religious, the mother, and the sisters—tells Sigalit to come home—to the home that was never a home. To the home that did not become a home, until Sigalit made for herself a place of her own.

In describing all these transitions—from the home to the institution, to the neighborhood school, to the remedial high school course in Jaffa, to her marriage home and back—Sigalit does not refer to the street. She makes no mention of the Pardes Katz environment, neither as a place that buzzes with activity like Rabbi Zer's sermons, nor as an engulfing, threatening space of bad company, bad influences, and incitement. Sigalit talks about her tendency to do what her friends do, about the stupid mistake she made in leaving her pre-army course because of a friend who dropped out, about always being available when a friend called and suggested a midnight trip, about going with another friend to visit a home where a recently-released prisoner lived. Nowhere in all this does she speak about a "bad neighborhood," or the temptations of the street. It's always Mom. She organizes herself a story of individuals, people who are like that, other women. In her narrative, there is no reason to fear the neighborhood or the street, or even drug addicts. Within this story she was able to think in an original and challenging way about having a second child. Normative logic would rule out such a birth because of her unstable relations with her husband and her intention of leaving him. But Sigalit explains that even though she knew she would divorce her husband, and perhaps precisely for that reason, she wanted to complete her family. She wanted a brother for her daughter, to complete a circle of three that would become a tight nucleus in the face of anything the future might bring. Her project was to build a normal family because, as she understood it, there and only there could she live a normative life.

Sigalit's story, based on therapeutic discourse, neuters the social context. Its lens focuses on relationships—the relationship between a mother and her daughters, between

a girl and her sisters, a woman and her mother-in-law, a young mother and her two children. Social conventions are examined through the lens of psychology. God does not meet the test of mercifulness when faced with children who are raped. In contrast, the counselor in her club for single mothers is portrayed as a redeeming mother. Sigalit's focus on relationships also enables her to cope, and win, at the institutional level. She leaves her husband, settles into an apartment, finds work, and organizes her life. All these demand no little work with social agents—the welfare office, Project Renewal, the rabbinate, a member of the Knesset.

On the summer streets of Pardes Katz, Sigalit is one of the women whom Rabbi Zer simultaneously addresses and warns his audience against. Her clothes, her gait, the way she conducts her body, are the bulletin board from which the rabbi reads her interior. But under her jeans and tank top, the divorcee of a drug addict, the slut, does not wait to be redeemed. She's done her own job, and her God is a different God. In the face of the “dangers of the street” she has built a home whose holiness is in no way inferior to the holiness of Bnei Brak's homes, even if it lies north of Jabotinsky street, in the depths of Pardes Katz.

Sigalit's life story is extreme, but it contains no few of the characteristics that typically get obscured by the dichotomy of the saint and the slut. Most of the “bad women” that Rabbi Zer warns against are in fact seeking to make homes and run proper families. They want to work, care for, see to their children's educations, send them to after school activities, cope with and enjoy the fruits that a normative family produces. The huge effort they make in the face of the social conditions available to them is largely

unappreciated. The outsiders who occasionally direct their gaze in that direction (the media, opinion polls, popular culture) take quick snapshots that replicate the image.

Michal, the director of the Pardes Katz community center, once told me: “Why should you study the Haredi women? Come see the majority, although it’s shrinking. Come see the mothers who after a day at work bring their children to activities and fight to keep them here. Sit with them here in the lobby, talk to them, listen to what they want for their children.” It may well be that other people working in the neighborhood know what Michal knows; perhaps Rabbi Zer knows it as well. But the potent metaphor of the street and the home, of the saint and the slut, organizes the discourse that hovers over the efforts of these women, and imposes parameters that affect the way they understand their lives. These divide Haredi and non-Haredi, and focus on gender in its class and ethnic contexts. The discourse produces a moral, apolitical and asocial yardstick that can be used to judge whether the women measure up—and flog them at the same time.

Eveline

On a sunny winter day I picked up Rachel, my research assistant, from her home in the Haredi part of Bnei Brak. We drove to the northeast corner of the city, where the population is mixed. Eveline’s street is strewn with four-family, two-story residential buildings, arranged in a twisting row. Alongside each is a parcel of land large enough for a garden, future enlargement, renovation of the apartments, or just neglect. A drive down the road shows that all these options have been tried. Some of the homes are renovated, and some have fenced-in gardens. Other blocks are bare. Some of the buildings have added a third floor, topped by red-shingled slanted roofs. The roofs of other buildings are flat and open, some adorned in each of their four corners by large round projector lights.

You enter Eveline's block through an open staircase at the corner of the building, allowing a separate entrance to the second floor without going through the original stairwell. A third floor has been built on top of the second one, accessible from inside the apartment itself. As we ascended the staircase, we heard high-pitched shouts. Two of the voices were adult and female, while one was young. Rachel hesitated, listened, and suggested: "Maybe we shouldn't go in, it looks as if we came at a bad time, maybe she forgot that we're coming?"

"Maybe," I said. "But let's wait a bit. These things calm down in the end." A few minutes later the voices faded, and we, with awkward smiles, completed the ascent and knocked.

Eveline opened the door with a smile. "Don't ask what's been going on here this morning, It's good you came now. My daughter is giving us a run for the money, she doesn't want to go to school, my mother's screaming at her, my sister is going to have to come over to persuade her, a real carnival. And the little one, no one remembers that I have the little one."

At the time of our visit, Eveline's baby was three months old. She had been pregnant during the final part of the course. We sat in a pink living room, open to the kitchen, on the lower floor. The baby girl was next to us, in a carriage, during the interview, after passing from hand to hand and getting complimented on how beautiful she was. The older, sixteen-year old daughter and grandmother were on the upper floor, in the girl's room, and their ongoing argument rose and fell throughout our conversation. When the shouts got especially loud, I suggested to Eveline that perhaps we should go and come back some other time, but she dismissed the offer and led the conversation, as

will be seen below, into the intricacies of the altercation. At times, Rachel and I found ourselves in awkward and uncomfortable situations, especially when Eveline's sister arrived and gave us her take on the story. After leaving, we talked about this feeling of being in a place that we shouldn't have been. We each had different interpretations of why she did not want to call off the interview.¹⁴

After we finally at down, I asked Eveline, as I asked the others, to talk about herself as a learner.

Eveline Tells Her Story

I was born in Morocco. I don't remember much from the early years. Most of our family had already left and we immigrated to Israel only in 1974.

My father was a tailor by trade, but there he worked as a money changer. Now, there it was illegal. He would travel a lot. It was his business. True, he also worked as a tailor, he was an excellent suit maker, even today he does tailoring, but that's on the side. He would go to Spain, he would travel to lots of places, change money, foreign currency for Moroccan currency. He did a lot of business with Arab merchants. Then, in 1974 ... what caused us to immigrate? The ring of money changers was arrested, and we heard about the torture they were being put through, they would make them sit on broken bottles, there is horrible torture in prison in Morocco. My father, I don't know who told him ... in some way they tipped him off that he was on the list, the first on the list. He picked himself up and went to France.

We were left alone, my mother was nine months pregnant, and she had to liquidate the entire house. He had money in all sorts of places that she had to collect, and his father was also a very wealthy man, and there was gold, too. She, with her huge belly, had to do it all, sell the apartments, take care of the two grandmothers, and organize everything. My grandmother's brother still lived there, he organized all the money. She sold the store, he sold the house, in the middle of the night, I remember that he took us, after all to get out of there at that time wasn't like today. You had to go in the dark of the night, by train, without money, it was dangerous to take it out, by law you had to leave everything there. So my mother, who was pregnant, I'll never forget it, together with my grandmother, they put all the money, all the gold, in the baby's clothes bag. A week after we reached France my mother gave birth to a boy, her seventh and last child. We stayed there for a short time, maybe a month. It was a place for new immigrants to Israel, temporary, until we went to Israel.

I don't really remember school in Morocco. There were boys and girls, a Jewish school where you also learned Arabic and French and a little bit of Hebrew. All of us, all the brothers and sisters, went to the same school. I don't remember a lot, but I do remember that they would whip you. There was one teacher who had something like a thin metal ruler and she would smear something on it and whip us with it. There are things I actually remember, but school less. At home we spoke Moroccan Arabic and a little bit of French.

My parents still know French, they write, read and of course speak, but at home and among the siblings we mostly spoke Moroccan.

When we came here as new immigrants we lived near Bar-Ilan University, in Ramat Ilan. Through the Jewish Agency we received one large public housing apartment. We lived together with my grandmothers. My mother went with the home more in the religious direction, while my father was more free, more liberal. He didn't favor keeping children on a short leash, while she did. My mother actually didn't go to any school, I mean, she learned to sew. She was an only daughter and was a very beautiful woman, my mother. Look at her picture here, it's from a few years ago. Her mother, my grandmother, was very protective of her as an only child, and was afraid to let her, like, go out. So she got married at a young age and in practice, in principle, she learned sewing from someone. There were women there who did get ahead and go to school, but she ... that's what she learned. Now she wanted us to go to Haredi schools.

My father wasn't really interested in that. He was more interested in our housing. She wanted to go to Bnei Brak, and he said, "No, let's live in Netanya, let's get to some more open place." But in practice she navigated the house and he earned the livelihood. In Israel he continued as a tailor. Almost at the beginning he went to the Hagor tent factory, in the Bnei Brak industrial park, and worked there fifteen years. Afterwards the factory closed, and he became a kashrut inspector. His hobby is cooking. He knows how to make salads and good things, so he worked at a hotel. He worked for a while,

and afterwards, just in recent years, he's gone back to tailoring, making alterations, he brings things home, makes a go of it. My mother was always a housewife. When it came to schools, there were some battles, but she navigated, she was responsible for everything. She sent the boys to yeshivot, and the girls to Haredi boarding schools.

When we got here I was in fourth grade, and I went to the Beit Ya'akov boarding school in Pardes Katz. As new immigrants, she didn't understand much, they told her it was a good place. She heard Haredim, sent us. I was there through eighth grade. I don't remember a lot from there, it's hazy for me. It seemed to me natural to be there, my older sister was also there, and my brothers were at a yeshiva. It seemed to me as if there were no other possibilities. Afterwards I went on to the seminar and lived at home. But until that age it seemed to me as if everyone was in boarding schools.

The girls in the boarding school were of all types, new immigrants and from all sorts of towns where the situation apparently wasn't so good at home, and also from here in Bnei Brak. The schoolwork was hard for me. It was very hard for me to adjust to school. Because that was many years ago, not like today. Back then they didn't ... make an effort. They didn't really have the mentality. In any case, what I see today, that they are more ... even with us, in Haredi circles, they at least try to understand each individual. But then, it was be Haredi and stay at home, because there wasn't really awareness then.

I see the difference with my daughters now. They want to study and get ahead, and also with marriage, not get married young. You understand? My daughters, they see me like ... like I see myself today, I don't know whether to call it as a failure, because I also married very young. You understand. And that's it, we raised children. You understand? I didn't have, you know, any thought of going to study. I worked as a dental assistant, in other words whatever I found. Afterwards there was a period when I did day care at home. And that's it. Afterwards we had a gift basket business. But practically, to go out and work seriously, that I didn't do. I missed something. You understand?

My daughters say to me: what are you doing? You didn't do anything with your life. They see me as a failure. It's hard to hear that, it's hard. Look, when you feel you've been slapped in the face, like ... in the final analysis I say, look, I raised children.

“That's no little accomplishment.”

Yes, I raised, them, and for them it's not enough. They claim that, no, I have to go out to work, that my way of life isn't worth anything.

Maybe because it was hard I didn't really take my studies seriously. Hebrew was difficult. At some point I got into the groove, but no one thought about what the possibilities were, we didn't think about *bagrut* or no *bagrut*. Today, for example, my daughter, she didn't want to go to a super-Haredi school.

True, she goes to a Haredi school today, but it's one that has a *bagrut* program, in Ra'anana. A high-level school. Once, mothers had hard heads,

even though they didn't understand what was going on here. You couldn't rebel like you can today, when children stand up for themselves. I couldn't tell her, Mother, look, I want to go to that school, I don't want this school, I don't like this one, the social life, too. No, you'll go here! That conservatism, how can you think of going outside the city, you might go bad, you might ... you understand? So you like went to school under duress. You simply went to a school ... that wasn't really right for me.

So, that's it, from the boarding school for younger girls I switched for seventh, eighth, and ninth grades to the Or Hayyim boarding school, and from there I went on to the Rabbi Wolf seminar, which is a seminar where you learn to be a teacher either for school or preschool. I didn't have a lot of options like there are today, when they've put in computers and other things.

“And did they accept Sephardi girls there?”

Then they did, even though it's an Ashkenazi school. Today it's very difficult, because they opened a lot of Sephardi seminars. Then, that's what there was, there was the Wolf seminar and Sharansky in Tel Aviv and Or Hayyim, which was Sephardi. We didn't have a lot of choices.

Look, the Ashkenazi girls were definitely the majority. Because let's say that the Sephardi girls, all of them went more to Or Hayyim. I wasn't enthusiastic about the studies there and not about the social life either. The girls weren't—I was, like, more on the modern side. They were more Haredi, like Hasidic. Really Hasidic style, with braids and all that. I didn't find anyone to talk to

there. So picture it, they put you in a place that's not the most appropriate one for you. Then the studies are like a joke, everything's a joke. We didn't say a word, you understand, we never rebelled. My mother wanted me to be there—so I was there. I didn't care. I sat there, we did the work, we got through it, I didn't take the studies there seriously. We were a group of Sephardi girls and we were more giggly, we understood each other more. I see my daughter in eighth grade today standing her ground. "No way, you won't put me here, I know what I want for myself, I know what school I want to go to, you won't take me to where you went." And what ... once, I don't know, maybe we were too good, we did more what our parents wanted. We never talked back, we never used our hands, like today.

You should know that that happens with us, too. It's also in our circle, true we're a minority, but the insolence, don't ask. Today they give them things. I think that's what makes them disrespectful. My daughter wanted a computer, and we have an old computer, we went and signed on to make payments, we bought her a better computer, I thought I'd use it also what with the course. But they don't appreciate it. They feel like they can do what they want, like the problem I have with my oldest.

Maybe I was difficult sometimes, but my mother says I always helped at home. Maybe because she kept us on such a short leash.

"Maybe she was scared about what might happen to you?"

Yes, she was scared. She was really scared. Back then, after Ramat Ilan, my father bought two small apartments in Pardes Katz from a public housing company. My parents live there to this day. At that time, when I was still in school, it really was scary to go walk around there. Today, look, over the last few years this wave of going back to religion has become very popular, in general, everywhere, not just there. But at that time it really was scary to walk through there. If you're religious, let's say a girl who wears stockings, you'd feel that your embarrassed to walk there in modest clothing. It was scary, there were criminals. Today it's the opposite, the place has changed, maybe you'd be ashamed today not to be dressed modestly on Abuhatzzeira Street, which was once called Ben-Gurion Street.

If we, my sister and I, were a little late—and I was pretty—my mother would be scared that someone there, some lowlife, might grab me. I'd come back at ten at night and my mother would scream at me—where were you, and she would send my brother downstairs to go up the street and look for us. At that time, with girls, they wanted to keep them inside. I think that's why I got married young.

Today, for example, I'm already wiser, I think about it, that you don't have to marry them off early. Even though even today there are even non-religious girls who get married early. It's not related, but I think that it's the wrong thing to do. I met my husband when I was seventeen and a half, I got married when I was eighteen and a half, and I had my oldest daughter right away. I

think that they also pushed me to get married, because I was a problem for my older sister.

Once the mother of my sister's fiancé came over and suddenly she says to my mother: "Maybe give us the younger one." Like Rachel and Leah. That's the irony of my fate. They'd hide me, tell me not to walk in when they were talking about my sister. My cousin knew my husband, we're family, and he's also from Makhnes, so she said, go on, marry her off. With us there's no army, no national service, what's the solution? Marriage. We met, we went out for a short time, and that was it. My husband was studying at a yeshiva then, even though I had a more modern attitude, and watched television. My husband had work in a yeshiva. He was like an inspector, and we lived there in Bnei Brak. Afterwards I got pregnant again, and it ended in a miscarriage. And that's it, afterwards ... it didn't come one after the other. Another girl was born two years later. After that, every three years. We rested a bit. Just in the last few years, when the girls began to grow up, I decided to take myself in hand.

"When you were bringing up the children you didn't work?"

I worked in the evenings, and it was hard. I had the two girls, my mother would take care of them, and with my husband, too. I worked with men, and husbands get jealous, you see it today in non-religious circles, too. Once, the doctor I worked for brought me home, that was actually a good job, but it was perceived as improper. Afterwards my husband didn't feel well, didn't work

for a while, was at home a few years. He'd always call and tell me to come right away. After I left the job in the clinic, I was at home for a little while and then I did day care at home under the supervision of the municipality. I used to live in Kiryat Herzog. Afterwards, for the last five years, we bought this apartment, which was just two rooms, and my husband built on the roof. So that's it, afterwards we had a business for two years, we tried to be self-employed in the gift business. My husband's brother has a business like that in the north. We tried to do it here but it was hard, it didn't work, the business didn't work, the house was a mess. It breaks you. A woman who has to work needs a lot of help from home. To get up, to get organized.

Today I look at myself, and while I'm young, it means starting over, getting the family used to a different way of doing things. In the end, what I get in return from them is not worth it. Look, what I get in return from my oldest? That she tells me I'm a nothing? And what does she expect? I tell her, I raised children, she answers, "A cat has babies, too." Just yesterday she said that to me. For her, I'm just a woman. A housewife who didn't make it. And, yes, she claims that she'll succeed. All power to her! But a lot of people who thought they were very smart failed in the end. After all, no one promises us anything. You understand?

At some point I heard about the course from the Project, so I decided to go study. The truth is, my husband spurred me, he actually always prodded me to go back to school. If he can, he helps and gives support. His cousin has an employment agency and he told my husband that if I finished the course, he'd

find me work. Now the pregnancy and the baby have been quite a crisis for me. If we weren't Haredim, you understand, maybe I'd have had an abortion. But with us you have to go on with it and that's it. So at least I kind of enjoyed the course. I tried my best, kept at it, maybe if she goes to day care, we'll see.

The Street and the Home, the Daughter, the Mother and the Sisters: Eveline's Version

The street has the paradoxical character of having more importance than the places it connects, more living reality than the things it reflects. The street renders public. "The street tears from obscurity what is hidden and publishes what happened elsewhere, in secret, it deforms it, but inserts it into the social text." (Blanchot 1993, p. 242, quoting Lefebvre).

I didn't have to imagine Sigalit's mother and sisters. These partners in the drama of Eveline's life were present in the house at the time of the interview. They'd been called over to lend support to the postpartum mother in her battle with her prodigal daughter, who was refusing to go to school. The grandmother came over, and afterwards the aunt as well. It was a matriarchal matrix seeking to channel the girl, just as it had channeled the mother. Pretty women are an agony in traditional society. Pretty women who think and speak are no less than a catastrophe.

Eveline's life story provides what I sought. She told me about the schools she attended, about her difficulties acquiring literacy, her discomfort in the Ashkenazi Wolf seminar, her anger at her parents for not having checked whether the school they sent their daughter to offers a *bagrut* diploma. But the force that pushes the story along is

something else, and it may well have been influenced by the context in which it was told. The story's energy is concentrated around the fate of young women in a conservative society. It's about the fate of a mother who learned to sew and who was brought to the wedding canopy at a very young age because she was beautiful. It was her fate to be pushed into marriage younger than she wished and without any useful education, because she was pretty. And it's about the fate of her beautiful daughter, who refuses to carry on the tradition.

The story's reflexive force, in Eveline's recounting, is based on an intergenerational gap: what was then and what happens today. How did my mother act with me and how do I act with my children. What were my dreams and what are my daughter's dreams. The fact that Eveline is the pivot, a member of the middle generation, turns her into a victim of the generations on either side. Her mother decided her future for her and Eveline acceded. As a result, her daughter holds her in contempt, and sees her as a cat who has given birth to kittens. Eveline stands helplessly in the middle, trying to give meaning to her life, her efforts, her achievements, feeling that she has "missed" something.

The night Sigalit put everything she had in her baby son's portable crib, in flight from her drug addict husband, is in some ways reminiscent of Eveline's mother's flight, on the verge of labor, hiding her money among the clothes she's prepared for the coming baby. In Israel, this uneducated mother becomes her daughter's social conductor. Her husband wants to live in Netanya and be freer about religion, but she, looking around at the environment that she finds herself in, decides on another strategy. She decides to protect her children from the street with the help of a Haredi framework. Pardes Katz of

her childhood days, Eveline says, was different. The street swarmed with criminals, it was embarrassing to walk there dressed as a Haredi girl. But those clothes were meant to save her.¹⁵

The Haredi education her mother chose led Eveline, her brothers, and her sisters into boarding schools. Far from the street and the home, among other girls, Eveline was meant to assimilate her protective values. It is evident from her story that she did not. Today, facing her defiant daughter, she capitulates to the change in generations. She also wanted a *bagrut* diploma, she also wanted to watch television, and she didn't intend to marry so young. But then you did what your parents told you to do: "Once, mothers had hard heads, even though they didn't understand what was going on here. You couldn't rebel like you can today, when children stand up for themselves. I couldn't tell her, Mother, look, I want to go to that school, I don't want this school, I don't like this one, the social life, too. No, you'll go here! That conservatism, how can you think of going outside the city, you might go bad, you might ... you understand? So you like went to school under duress. You simply went to a school ... that wasn't really right for me."

Reading her life retrospectively, confronted with the coercion of her parents' home and her oldest daughter's criticism, turns out to be a bitter exercise. She successfully survived with a large family, with unsteady income from occasional jobs. She made an unsuccessful attempt to run a gift business, she worked in child care and as a dental assistant, but looking back on it all makes her feel she missed something. Eveline sits at home with a certificate from a training course for senior secretaries that she never completed, caring for an unplanned baby who lives because "If we weren't Haredim, you understand, maybe I'd have had an abortion. But with us you have to go on with it and

that's it." She has an unstable husband and lots of expenses, and a matriarchy that continues to intervene in her life whether she wants it or not. She transferred her daughter to a more open Haredi school that was supposed to offer what Eveline herself never received. She bought her a computer on sale and allows her to express her opinions. Yet, in crisis, she needs her mother and sister to restrain the girl. Apparently, her standing before her daughter has collapsed. After I turned off the tape recorder, she told me that she and her daughter once went to a social worker for counseling, that they also sought help outside the family, but that it didn't help.

The street of Eveline's childhood, portrayed as a non-religious, criminal, threatening place, has become a different street. Now it is religious. It is easier for a girl in Haredi dress to walk outside. In fact, there may well be areas where it is unpleasant for a girl not in Haredi dress to walk. But the sounds of the Haredi street have changed. You can now be a rebellious Haredi girl, a disobedient one, a Haredi girl who speaks rudely to her mother, a Haredi girl who, in Rachel's eyes—even if she did not say so explicitly—is a Haredi slut. New internal categories are developing within Sephardi-Haredi as it grows. Some of the parameters those categories use are ethnic affiliation, level of religious knowledge, and obedience. Eveline and her family do not rank high on this scale. Her husband works (rather than studies), but is unsuccessful at business. She does not act like a saint—she doesn't go to religious classes or lectures, and does not speak like a pious woman. She criticizes the Haredi life path that constituted her as a person, is attentive to the voices of the younger generation, and dresses more freely than the Haredi norm.¹⁶ The discipline she accepted protected her from the street of her childhood, but she feels that

the street has penetrated her home in a new guise. This time it is the Haredi street that is ruining her daughter's education.

Perhaps it is not surprising that Eveline's daughter has chosen to describe her as a cat, an animal that in colloquial Hebrew is generically female—mysterious, sexual, unpredictable, unfaithful, sharp-clawed. A cat always falls on her feet and knows how to live on the street. Its compounds are suggestive: sex kitten, alley cat. In her daughter's cruel characterization, her mother's role in life is limited to surviving and producing the next generation of cats.

Satisfied parents will often say, when describing a good place to live, that “the children are always outside, they have so many friends that, since we moved in, we hardly ever see them.” The public space used to be apartment building parking lots, the cobblestone limited access roads of Israel's new suburbs, and the asphalt streets of the old neighborhoods that, years ago, were not filled with cars as they are today. These were places of learning, of identity, and of struggle. The school of life.

When I was a child, my parents never knew where I was. The only instruction that my siblings and I received was to be home by dark, and we didn't always observe that stricture. The assumption was that on the street we met other children like ourselves, and in the absence of the worries that fill the agenda of Israel's public space today, the street was our playground. We could mark out soccer goals, hopscotch squares, and stickball bases. Only two or three times in an afternoon would we have to step aside to allow a car to go by. We'd go from neighborhood to neighborhood to look for fresh activity, or we might stay close to home and wait for visitors. Sometimes the call would come out that

“the kids from the transit camp are coming,” and our bodies would go taut in expectation. We’d spot a gang of boys at the end of the street, on foot or with some in homemade wagons. Sometimes they came to use the steep hill next to my house, to check out the steering of their wagons, the resilience of their go-carts, and the courage of their drivers. One of us would stand at the intersection at the foot of the hill to warn the guests of approaching cars. Generally the visit would go by with just a bit of antagonism, some minor threats, with the tough kids toying with us at a tolerable level. Sometimes there were fights, or street lights smashed by slingshots, or they’d send a ball of ours flying to who knows where, or filch it. We never told our parents, not about what they did to us, nor about what we did to others. The street was our space, and our parents assumed that it was part of growing up to be exposed to it.

There are still places where parents feel that the street is like home, and that children who go outside will meet other children like themselves, with whom they can together grow up to be young members of the normative community. In such cases the street takes on warm colors. It is part of, and broadens, private space. It is a comforting territory, which alleviates the crampedness at home and makes the family’s job easier.

In colloquial language, the word “street” still has the negative connotation of an ungoverned land, a place where people wander purposelessly and waste time. But it is not considered a threat. In places where the experience of social affiliation is not tranquil, where parents feel that they do not want to raise children like the children of their neighbors,¹⁷ the street becomes a monster. The street’s flexibility in value terms, between being expansion and externalization of the home and being a place of catastrophe, is possible precisely because of its moral haziness. Blanchot, quoted above, elaborates and

says that the street is a place “without responsibility and without authority, without direction and without decision. The man in the street is fundamentally irresponsible: while having always seen everything, he is witness to nothing” (Blanchot 243). The street that Blanchot sees is the big city street, that which preoccupied the sociologists of the early twentieth century. Something of that street remains in the great metropolis, and in our context that may be the street of Bnei Brak, to which we will return. In other places it has disappeared—it has become a public park, a parking lot, a pedestrian street and, especially, a shopping mall.

The Pardes Katz street is a street in a neighborhood that does not believe in itself. Everyone who looks out of her window there sees something she does not want in her home. The “street,” which is an enlargement, exteriorization, and abstraction of the “social situation,” becomes “their” place, the place of those who are not I. Its monstrosity relies on the knowledge that inattention is liable to allow it a foot in the door, like mud that is not scraped off on the doorstep, or like a powerful wave that can sweep me off the beach. The street, then, is a place from which parents want to protect their children. Such a street marks all those in the surrounding as “inappropriate.” They are neighbors whom I cannot see as part of my community, unless they relate to our common space similar to the way I do. Such a street reinforces doorsteps, adds locks on doors, shuts the windows, and seeks a way to lead me via the street without walking through it.

Haredim who live as a minority in an Israeli city have this experience of the street in a palpable and extreme way. The street is “the situation.” It is secular, permissive, Zionist, capitalist Israel. One who values his soul will spend as little time there as possible. He will stay at home, in the yeshiva, at work, among those like him. The

situation becomes more complex when the surroundings do not classify themselves as a manifest “other.” In such cases, the street can become an area like that described by Zimmel, or even that portrayed by Walter Benjamin. As such, the street can, as Blanchot writes, be more important and stronger than the places it links. On its threatening side it is anonymous and untamed; on its attractive side it is a place for *flâneurism*.¹⁸

In Pardes Katz, the “others” are much like those who close themselves in against them. In a certain sense, the neighborhood’s residents shut themselves off from themselves, or from whom they fear to be. They have little confidence in the public space, and there is no sense of solidarity. Solidarity is, in fact, ruled out by their placement within the social context. Instead, that context has constructed a sense of powerlessness, which includes fear, alienation, and defamiliarization from what they cannot control. The home remains the only site of ownership. Sigalit’s mother worked long hours outside the home. Her daughters were sent to institutions so that they wouldn’t be out on the street. Eveline’s mother feared the street and each evening sent her eldest son to wait for his sisters, so that he could chaperone them home. They (and he) were also sent to school away from home. One of the goals of Project Renewal and community workers in Pardes Katz is to take control of the street—a goal Rabbi Daniel Zer shares. The former adhere to a social repair enterprise with universalist assumptions; the latter’s campaign is based on religious seclusion.

Sigalit’s biography shows that her encounter with the “street” led her to places of distress and violence that, in the end, she had the presence of mind to leave. Eveline’s story shows that Haredi clothing and religious schools are no guarantee against the street’s infiltration of the home. In any case, the concept of the “street” is falling apart.

On the one hand, it is once more becoming a hazy metaphor, while on the other hand it receives sharp social parameters that cross over the religious/non-religious division and locate themselves in regions of class and ethnicity, and of the individuals who belong to these categories. On its hazy side, the street is a site of a variety of social installations, while on its sharp side it is a site that sustains human beings.

Sigalit fought to obtain a “home of her own” for herself and her children, a fixed and secure interior space that will enable her to realize some part of her dream “bubble.” Eveline and her husband built a spacious home and furnished it beautifully, but the “street” does not spare them. Sigalit has internalized the liberal discourse and views education, parenting, and a well-ordered emotional world as keys to normative life. Eveline understands the Haredi social context that demands obedience, but she nevertheless must stand in judgment before the generation above her and the younger generation nipping at her heels.

3. Sarit and Lydia: In and Out of Fashion

The first pair of biographies highlighted young, diligent women of similar life circumstances who have chosen and unflinchingly pursued two very different life courses on offer to the young Mizrahi woman in Israel: the Sephardi-Haredi and the non-religious path. Bracha and Aya had to cope with many difficulties along their ways, but did not turn aside. The second pair of biographies, of Sigalit and Eveline, invited me to mark sites of obstruction. These two women encountered, one on the Haredi and the other on the non-religious path of life, obstacles they were unable to overcome. Confronting and overcoming the obstacles positioned them on the margins of the societies with which they affiliated. The street, the sociological context in which the home functions, took Sigalit to

harsh places that she seems to have, in the end, escaped. The same street also threatens Eveline's home and sabotages her attempts to build the ideal model family that Haredi society offers as a refuge and an anchor. The two women's biographies move from the edges inwards, into the well-traveled areas in which most young Mizrahi women's lives flow, be they Haredi or not. These are jagged areas that touch on the Haredi and the non-religious, attempts to complete life paths that are not completed.

The motivating force in the lives of Sarit and Lydia is experimentation—essaying experiments that may or may not succeed. These lives display flexibility, maneuverability, a willingness to make concessions, and an ability to both stand on principle and ignore it. It might seem that the type represented by this pair should be more common and less dramatic. I will nevertheless use these two lives to grapple, if only momentarily, with a central issue that occupies the study of excluded populations. My own name for this subject is “coasting,” slipping down or off the side of a downhill course. Women who coast can't get to the next stage, move forward, reach resolutions. The research literature uses terms like “dropping out,” “lack of motivation,” and “alienation” to label this phenomenon; each term illuminates an aspect of the phenomenon. The limited sort of ethnographic work that I do cannot get to the roots of coasting and explain it, but it can describe something of its rhythm and logic. Ethnography can also examine the chronicle of social reproduction that leaves these young women close to their parents' social location, unlike Aya and Bracha on the one hand and Sigalit and Eveline on the other.¹⁹ It is important to note that these are not extreme cases of “failure,” but rather standard cases of “no breakthrough.” They care

cases that reveal the limitations of the modern discourse of progress, social evolution, and exploitation of the “unbounded” possibilities that democratic society offers.

Sarit

Sarit lives in a rented apartment in a new building, very close to Pardes Katz’s major artery, Jabotinsky Street. It is a clean and well-tended ground-floor flat, although it contains little furniture. We sat in a small nook next to the kitchen on a cold winter evening. Sarit’s husband brought us an electric space heater and promised to see to the baby. Rachel and I sat on a small sofa, facing Sarit.

Sarit Tells Her Story

Not that I remember much from elementary school. Maybe because I didn’t like it, because of the teachers. It was a Beit Ya’akov school in Kiryat Herzog in Pardes Katz, called Sha’arei Aharon. There was a big to-do before they accepted me there, because it was Sephardim/Ashkenazim. We didn’t live in Kiryat Herzog, we were in Pardes Katz, so they didn’t want to accept me. My father went and made a scene and they let me in. I’m the oldest daughter, and it was important to him that my sister and I go there. At the beginning our house was sort of Zionist-religious, okay. We were observant and all that. But how do they say? All beginnings are hard.

I went to a state-religious kindergarten and in first grade in a state-religious school, afterwards I transferred to the center, in Bnei Brak. Just then we heard that a Beit Ya’akov school had opened in Kiryat Herzog, so my father

transferred me there. As I said, they didn't want to accept us, but my father is a little ... how can I put it? He raised his voice, and used all sorts of undesirable methods, until they let us in, and not only let us in but let in all the other girls in the Pardes Katz area. My brothers were already born into a more Haredi family. At first they went to Rabbi Daniel Zer's schools, but my father wasn't pleased with the level there, so he transferred them to Rabbi Pinto in Petach Tikva.

My little sister, who went to Beit Ya'akov with me, is a bit, how should I put it, she didn't make it. That is, not in elementary school but in high school. She already had a boyfriend at the age of sixteen. He was nineteen and everyone was worried about it, because they understood there were intimate relations. The family found a rabbi who was willing to marry them even though they didn't register in the rabbinate. Now she already has a six-month old baby girl and she'll only turn seventeen soon. After she passed sixteen they went and registered in the rabbinate, everything was, like they say, legal.

So let's go back here to school, the one my father got us in, it gave an opening to all the Sephardi girls. But there was lots of discrimination, there were lots of arguments. There was favoritism. For example, when they gave out parts in school plays, or on tests. In the class itself, the teacher would ask the Ashkenazi girls more questions than the Sephardi girls, and, you know, a lot of people complained about that. So it created a lot of arguments, real commotion in the class. Ironically, now the school is entirely Sephardi. The Ashkenazim who still live in Kiryat Herzog go to school in Bnei Brak. But

then they were the majority, let's say there were 35 girls in my class, and only five were Sephardi. Most of the teachers were also Ashkenazi. It was very hard to prepare for tests, for example, because the Ashkenazi girls didn't want to study with us, and there wasn't any solidarity in the class that made it possible to study and get through the year okay. Sometimes there were girls who got close to Ashkenazi girls, but it was just for a short time and afterwards they split.

Every Saturday we went to Batya, a youth movement for girls. That was actually very nice, there was a strong message, it did more to unify the girls, as much as was possible, as much as was good and effective. There were lots of activities, as opposed to school itself, where there weren't. They'd promise us field trips but never did them. After that I went to the Or Hayyim high school.

“Were there other possibilities, or only Or Hayyim?”

I could have chosen whatever I wanted. In principle, there was Or Hayyim and there was Rabbi Mazuz's Sephardi seminar in Bnei Brak. There's also Lustig and Wolf, and there was Beit Ya'akov in Petach Tikva, and Rothschild, or Ma'ayanot, there were all sorts of places. To get into Wolf, for example, you need connections. Your elementary school teachers pressure them, and then they accept you at Wolf. There are very few like that who go there. But I wanted to go to Or Hayyim.

What can I say, I liked it there, the teachers, the staff, the friends. I lived in the dormitory even though we lived close by. If I'd continued my studies, I'd still be there today [in the second post-high school year]. The whole message at that institution, everything they offer you, it gives you a lot. The friends, the dorm, the staff, the studies, really on a good level. If you had trouble with the schoolwork, they'd help. Before tests they gave tutoring, go over material, get it down. The teacher would give the lesson in a way everyone understood. If girls asked questions, the teacher would immediately repeat the lesson a few times.

The problem was the tough discipline. The counselor there was strict about all sorts of things, about all sorts of things in the dress code. She wanted, for example, there to be a uniform that everyone wore so that there wouldn't be any distinctions. Attentiveness, discipline, they kept us in line. The dress code, insisted that the girls wear a men's collar. That is, it didn't matter if it was closed and high, but there had to be a men's collar. Stockings, for example, black was forbidden, and the skirt had to be a certain length, they couldn't be too long or too short. Tight was forbidden. They'd check our closets to see what we had there. Hairstyle—only ponytails.

“But in general you felt good, right? You felt that you were with nice girls and that the staff took an interest in you?”

Every girl was a different style there. But little by little we got to know all the girls. The dorm was what had the biggest effect. Everyone was together. We

really sat together all the time, studied for tests together, along with the counselor, and if we had questions she would help out. We'd go out together, girlfriends, really. The friendships make a big contribution. For example, on weekends there was also a very good atmosphere.

There would be a Shabbat at home and a Shabbat we had to stay in the dorm. They'd only let us go home if there was something really important. To get a pass to leave you had to run yourself ragged, but in the end they'd give it. I, for example, made a lot of trouble until they let me go home. Because even so, with everything I've been saying about how good it was to be in the dorm, I didn't like the life there. I liked home better, being at home. You had all sorts of constraints in the dorm. You can't stay out past a certain hour, you have to get up early in the morning to attend group meetings in the evening, I didn't like that. I wouldn't do my chores, I was exempted from them, I had connections. I didn't stay for the pre-Pesach cleaning. I didn't even do dishwashing duty. I mean it. I was there four years and I didn't wash dishes a single time. At home I did, all the time, but not there. There was one Saturday night a month that the girls would clean the dining hall, the dishes, everything, and I didn't do it. I didn't give in up to the very end. I didn't like being shut in and told what to do, so my father would get me out of it.

In terms of the studies, there was vocational and academic, if you go to vocational and then want to transfer to academic, it's easier than if you go to academic and afterwards want to transfer to vocational. Why? Because in the vocational program they demand sewing from the beginning. In ninth grade

you already begin sewing. In my time there was only sewing, now there's bookkeeping and computer graphics. Academic is preschool and teaching first and second grade.

At first I wanted vocational. I felt that it was right for me. I mean, I liked to sew and do crafts. Even now I sew a lot. I've even bought a machine and play around with it. At school they would advise us what fabrics, what kinds, they'd go and buy with us, they wouldn't force it on us. We'd sit together and sew, chat, it was a fun class. And that was five or six hours a day. They take it seriously. You do work, with a portfolio, with research and fashion design. If you want to sew a garment, you have to say what style it's going to be in. What pattern you took, where the idea came from, from a car, say? From an electric appliance? We really liked those classes.

“What about academic *bagrut* exams, did you do those?”

Yes, everything. Bible, math, English, and fashion drawing. We earned 21 credits [enough for a diploma]. We also had computers, but those computers, to tell the truth, didn't give us anything. On the other hand, what we learned in computer graphics did. The level was generally okay. The math was very high. We finished English in tenth grade. The teachers would switch off because each one would go off on maternity leave, so there were lots of foul-ups. In the academic program they probably learned more English, I saw that with my friends.

Rachel, who was present at the interview, added:

In my time there were very substantial differences between the academic and vocational tracks. Today it's become blurred. When I was a student, they were really separated. I remember that we had almost no contact with the vocational program. It was like there were two separate schools. Today it's changed. I knew hardly anyone who was in vocational in my year, I really didn't know them. Today they've combined it, the staff is the same, there are teachers who teach in both.

Sarit continues:

As much as I loved sewing, I spoke with Bracha, the one from our course, and she told me that even though she did the whole program and has certificates, but she hasn't found work. I told myself, I'll finish twelfth grade, do a little of thirteenth and leave. I don't want to go on. I'll go to learn to be a secretary.

I hope that I can work. I need to see what will be with the baby. My mother doesn't work, she never worked outside home, and my father doesn't work any more either, he had an accident. I heard about the senior secretary course at Project Renewal. We're connected with them because we're eight children, so every year they give us a scholarship. They give a certain sum for schoolbooks and supplies. One day I went to bring them a form and I saw the flyer about the course. I took it, read it, and I liked it. I asked my parents what they thought. My father didn't have an opinion one way or another, he said, go ahead, do whatever you want, and that was it. I began.

At that time I was already about to get married. I'd known my husband all my life, we were neighbors, there's four years between us. As close as we were, we never thought about it, but in the end that's what happened. When we began going out, he asked me what I planned to do. I told him that I was taking a night course to be a secretary, and in the mornings I went to the seminar. I told him that I was staying in school until the wedding to keep my good name, and afterwards I'd leave and only continue with the course. And that's what in fact happened.

In general, the course gave me a lot. There were lots of subjects I didn't know and had no acquaintance with. My husband helped me with some of it, because he learned to be a computer technician at an Ort high school. He finished all the exams there. He was supposed to go to Bar-Ilan University, or Tel Aviv University, I think, but he decided not to because it meant getting up early in the morning to fit it in with work. Now he works and is also studying to be a scribe. Sometimes he has work in computers. If people want him for something, they call. He also worked in a computer workshop in Tel Aviv but they closed it and it's hard to find a job now. He sent resumes, with his schooling, army service, no one replied. My husband worked once as a computer teacher in a Shas school, but they never paid him. For two months he didn't get a salary. How about that? I voted for Shas and what did I get? Nothing. They tell you, if you're Sephardi, vote Shas, that's what the rabbis say. But still, like ... if a person votes what he feels inside, what his heart tells him, according to his inner feelings ... if there were elections today, I

wouldn't vote for them. I was so hurt by them. What kind of thing is that?

Working for free? They should have told him from the start that that school didn't have a license, but they didn't tell him. If they'd told him, he wouldn't have gone to teach there. But it's like talking to a wall.

For my part, until the baby came I worked for the Ramat Gan municipality. It was handling the phones, taking messages, passing on messages. There wasn't a lot of work with computers, it was more filing: outgoing mail, incoming mail, all sorts of letters that have to be sent on to the boss, to sort, urgent, not urgent, what to give him, what not to give him. To take calls from schools, there are problems, there aren't problems, there's a teachers' meeting, there's a shortage of supplies, they need a repair done or a plumber or an electrician, windows, air conditioners, all sorts of things. I enjoyed working there, they're holding the job for me, but I don't know if I'll be able to go back because of the baby.

The conversation with Sarit lasted for an hour and a half. After I turned off the tape recorder, Sarit managed to get the baby to sleep in the other room. She went to the kitchen, made us tea, brought out home-baked cookies, and we began to talk more freely. It turned into a mothers' chat about breastfeeding, nourishment during nursing, and babies' sleeping habits. Sarit said that she didn't sleep much, because the baby woke her every few hours and made day and night the same. She recently stopped putting the baby to sleep in her crib and started letting her sleep with her. Rachel gave her a list of reasons not to do that, and suggested various ways of enriching her own diet, including medicines

and natural food supplements that she used. As always, the atmosphere was more uninhibited when the tape recorder was not running. We stayed for another half an hour.

Lydia

Lydia, one of the non-religious women who took the course, was the first of the women I interviewed. She usually sat next to her good friend Karen in class; both of them took the course seriously. During breaks she was one of the “smokers” who gathered outside the classroom. We conducted the interview in her parents’ home in northeast Pardes Katz, a neighborhood that in recent years has become Sephardi Haredi.

Lydia Tells Her Story

I wasn’t born in this apartment. I was born closer to the community center. My parents rented a one-room apartment there, they talk about it to this day. One room. My brother was born exactly a year and a day after me, and we all lived in one room. It’s actually an interesting subject. At the beginning I went to the state-religious school, which is pretty close to here. My mother simply didn’t want to send me to a school far away. I really didn’t enjoy it.

I went there from first through fourth grade. You know, one teacher taught everything. That teacher hit us. Imagine something like that today. She really beat us. She would also stand in a way that stays in my head to this day. I’ll never forget her all my life. Not her and not her name. She stood with this kind of backward-leaning pose, and she’d slam sticks onto our hands and pull our ears. Maybe that’s what kept people from learning.

After fourth grade I had a choice. I said, that's enough, I don't want to go there any more. I went to a regular, non-religious school called Yesodot. I stayed there through eighth grade, and one of the teachers I had there brought me into the field that I worked in until not long ago—fashion. With her it was still drawing. Not long ago I went to see her and showed her my drawings and told her that I almost finished thirteenth grade and a *bagrut* certificate in the field, she was astounded, didn't believe me. There are actually good teachers there. I visited there a lot afterwards. It was simply the most fun school I ever went to. I would stay there after school, hang around until five. There was a kind of activity workshop, all sorts of things.

What subject did I like most? My favorite subject was math, and the one I hated most was English. Most people are like that, if they like math then they don't like English. Usually it's the opposite. Of course I hated gym. You see why. What other subjects? The other subjects didn't really interest me, but I did them because there wasn't a choice. Fundamentally, I was actually a girl who didn't skip classes. In high school a little more. I'd also lie to my parents some. My grades weren't so great. If it was English (and I'm telling you a dark secret), I'd forge my father's signature, to this day I'm the only one who knows how to forge his signature. My brothers can't.

Afterwards I went to high school, where I had a lot of fun. I went to Ort in Ramat Gan. It's a huge school, but everyone knows everyone else. We'd sit there and what can I say, most of the time was spent having a good time, outside class. I studied fashion there, and I put a lot of time into it because I

liked it. You could choose fashion or business. But I always said that I'd never sit in an office. It really turns me off, I just can't sit for eight hours on a chair and serve someone.

Academic high school wasn't in the cards at all, and I didn't have such great grades. I'll tell you the truth. The fact that I got into Ort is something in itself, my parents wanted to send me to Pitman. I made a stand and said I'm not going to that school, it's substandard, I can't do it. So my mother said to me, so if you don't get into Ort Ramat Gan, you won't get in to anything. I told her, you know what? I'll turn the world upside down to get into that school. I studied all summer vacation for the entrance exams in English, math, and literature. I studied and worked hard and I passed with pretty good scores except in English, and my mother didn't believe it. They just didn't believe that I'd get into that school. I went there alone and brought all the documents I needed, and I said I don't care what you say, even if I didn't have such great grades. I got in, and I even finished high school with grades good enough to continue into thirteenth grade [the extra year needed for vocational diploma].

I put most of my energy into fashion, that was my goal. That's what I wanted. Also, in academic subjects the teachers weren't as good. For example, I had a teacher for Bible, and others like that who seemed to be from outer space.

The Bible teacher teaches the same book every year, almost the same chapter. If someone was chewing gum, she could waste the entire lesson on the gum, how it makes her nauseous, how it's like a camel, she hurled insults at us that I'll never forget. But the coordinator of the fashion program really loved me,

she knew that I smoked. My father didn't know, my mother didn't know, but she knew. We'd go outside to smoke a cigarette together. I always hung out with girls a year older than me who were of course also in the fashion major. We'd sit outside school, at the entrance to an apartment block, and smoke, do homework, and draw. One day we look up and see the principal and some of the teachers looking at us. They took us to the principal's office. The people from the apartment block where we used to smoke claimed that we'd used the building as a latrine. Of course they called in my father, just like they called in everyone, and they came down harder on me because I was in eleventh grade and the others were in twelfth grade and about to graduate. My father sat down and, now, is the coordinator going to tell him that I smoke? I made faces at her, held my finger to my lips ... so that she not say something by accident, so that she wouldn't blurt it out. And she really didn't say it, she saved me, she winked something at me, I don't know where she got it from, but she saved me. That was one experience I'll never forget. I actually saw her not long ago. She's a really nice woman. I got excellent grades in fashion.

I graduated with a professional certificate in fashion and also did *bagrut* exams. I'm missing math and English and I think one other exam, but I passed the rest. I passed Bible, I passed literature, and another subject. The coordinator of the fashion program wanted me to continue to thirteenth grade but I couldn't because I didn't have the English *bagrut*. But the coordinator pulled some strings and got me in. I didn't feel completely okay with that, because I said I'm sitting here in an English course and I don't know English.

My father paid something like ten thousand shekels and I entered thirteenth grade. Again a girls' school, this time at Amit, if you know where it is, next to WIZO France in Tel Baruch. It's a religious professional school, and they lied a lot to us. Before we started they told us, you won't have any problems, you can come in pants, you won't bother the other girls [in the lower grades], they're not connected to you. We started the course and then the problems began. You have to come in skirts, you have to respect the school. But we did what we felt like.

The studies weren't very practical. The direction was more academic. Now, in fashion, the academic side isn't very interesting. Like, okay, but not really interesting. So I didn't finish the course, I was there maybe five out of the eight months. Like, I just had a little more to do. But then my boyfriend went to jail and I had too much hanging over me because school began at eight and ended at four. You get home at five-thirty and it's already dark and you don't have the energy to do anything. So one day I got up and said—that's it. No more. It was pretty funny. I'd go to school and everyone would jump on me and say study, continue the course, you've got three more months. I tell them but I won't finish it, so what difference does it make. Without grades, why should I go on. And suddenly fourteenth grade also appears before us. They told us that to get into Shenkar [a degree-granting fashion and design college] you have to have fourteenth grade, and then another four years. Lots of money without any, I don't know, anything, it's not concrete.

When I entered thirteenth grade I requested a deferment from the army. I said I'll finish another year of studies and then I'll enlist. In the meantime my boyfriend was put in a military prison, and I got disgusted with the army. I heard so many bad things about the army. I decided that I didn't want to enlist. I went in and made an official declaration that I couldn't serve because I'm religious. I brought them witnesses but they didn't exactly believe me. I began to cry, I began to make a scene, and in the end the rabbi said, I'm prepared to exempt you on one condition. Because I see that it's so hard for you because your parents aren't religious and you want to be religious and they turn on the television, you know, so you have to lie. So I'll give you my phone number and I'll help you. He signed the form and I didn't call him, of course I didn't want to hear from him. But I was so afraid of walking around here. Really, because I wore pants. I said to myself, who knows, maybe I'll see that rabbi in Bnei Brak?

I received the exemption certificate and I said now I'll work, but I didn't find work that was right for me, even though it was always in the fashion field. My first job was in Bnei Brak, with religious women. Four religious women and I was the only non-religious one. It was a private hat business. They make all the hats for religious women. They sell wholesale. I was one of the seamstresses there. At some point, you sit with four women, who are older than you by a good forty years. You don't talk to them, you don't find any subject for conversation with them, nothing other than their children or their homes or their cleaning. After that I worked at Dimona Textile, a factory

outlet. I worked there a month as a salesperson and cashier. It was during the period that they began going bankrupt. I worked there a month and a half, I was supposed to get a salary of 400 shekels, I received it. They sued, all the workers, so I joined the suit and they paid me 2,500 shekels in compensation. For one month that I worked there. So I said, that's nice. After that I worked at Shekem [a department store]. The same kind of thing, I worked with handbags and jewelry and apparel, all that stuff. In between there were periods when I wasn't at school, wasn't working, and didn't do anything with myself. Looking for work, working on myself—and I'm already twenty-three.

For a while I was a supervisor in charge of cleaning workers. You know, sometimes it works out that your luck and the right time and everything comes together just like you want. At first I worked in a cleaning company as a regular laborer. I'd clean from eight to four. Two weeks later they fired the supervisor. The boss wanted me instead and I started working as supervisor. I was in charge of maybe five men and two women. I'd get up like a big girl, at five-thirty I was there, and I was the last one who closed up everything and took care of all the problems. I made an excellent salary for a twenty-something girl. Almost 4,500 shekels a month. But I put a lot of effort in to it. I really liked my boss, and the minute you like your boss you're prepared to do everything for him, because he's also willing to give to you. I worked for a year and a half until I fell out with the man from the building's house committee. He'd spent his whole life in the army and I hadn't served. He wanted things to be straight, and that meant straight and not even slightly

slanted. There are people like that in the army. They won't accept anything else. Then I started standing on principle. Because if I think that straight line of yours isn't good, and that my slightly crooked like is better, so I'll do what I think is right. I started to get into arguments with him and I told my boss that I didn't want to work at that place any more. So he brought in a new supervisor, I taught her what she needed to know, and I left. After that I kept working for him as an office cleaner. For 2,000 shekels, in the evening, I didn't care. That way the whole day was free, until I found my current job. Now I'm pleased.

I began as a cashier at the supermarket, after a month and a half, like the story with the boss at the cleaning company, here the boss also took a liking to me. He and his secretary began arguing over what my next position would be. Either I'd be chief cashier, or I'd work as a stock person. That means to make orders, to receive merchandise. It's the Co-op chain, but I came there from a temp agency. My boss saw that I was a success, made the orders they way you're supposed to, that I didn't take sick days all the time, came on time each day, made an effort. He tried to get me on the Co-op payroll. A week ago, after seven months, I became a Co-op employee. From now on I'll get a salary from them, and they have to deduct all my benefit payments. My boss doesn't want me to stay a stock person. He wants me to take courses at their expense, and that's worth it. He wants me to be a hall manager. That sounds good to me. I don't know exactly what it is, but it sounds good. So, that's it, he wants me to take courses, and I said that I'm willing. Now he's waiting for

me to do an English course, so that I'll have better English. After that he'll start sending me to courses. At their expense. I won't have to pay anything. And then maybe I'll do something with the senior secretary [qualification] I have.

“How did you decide to go to the course?”

I had a period when I wasn't working and I wasn't doing anything. A friend of mine was in the middle of the course then, in the [administration] part taught by Batya. She'd come home with her notebooks and a smile on her face every Monday and Wednesday, and that's what gave me a yen to go back to my school days. It made me feel good just to see her. It took some convincing on her part, because I didn't have money, I wasn't working, my father said he'd pay, so I went.

“How important is work you? Where do you place it in your future, along with family life?”

Work is very important to me, certainly. Now, when you say family, family comes first, but it's inseparable, it's inseparable from work. I won't work from eight to six in the evening. But I'll work from eight to three. I'll have time for my family, and that's important. Because to sit at home all day, I see my mother who stays at home, she doesn't have anything to do, she starts going bonkers.

She used to work outside the house. My mother has worked since she was thirteen. She didn't get any support from her parents, not like today. She worked and she always had her own money. She made her own wedding, did everything herself. My parents really did everything on their own. She worked until six years ago, cleaning, childcare, caring for the elderly in an old age home. Now she's older, she doesn't have the energy any more. But today, when I call her from work and ask her what's up, she doesn't have anything to do. She's bored. I don't want to get to that point of sitting at home. Even when we were kids I remember the children she sat for, she'd bring them here and at the same time she'd cook, clean, watch the children, earn money, too. I don't want to reach that point. I need to work. It also clears your head of the house. That's why I put an effort into the course, even though I wasn't really thinking of being a secretary.

“In a minute we'll talk about the course itself, but before that, how was it socially?”

In general it was fun, we got along. For me it was like high school. You enter the room, survey it, check it out, I saw right away who the young women were, who I could talk to. I was astounded that there were older women. But we got along, we got along with the religious ones as well, except the silly episodes there were with the refreshments, the *kashrut* certification and all that. But there are differences, you saw that they're always talking about getting married, what month this one's in, and when that one is going to have her baby. Did you see the graduation ceremony? Almost everyone was

pregnant. Really, I ask myself, how do you want to have a career if you have a baby each year? How? When do you want to get out? You'll work during your maternity leave? I don't understand that business. Fine, but if they want a career they should have a career.

In the last computer lesson Karen and I sat with that Sarah, who makes out she's religious, and two other religious women, and Haya who's not religious. We saw that the computers were hooked up to the internet, so Asaf, the teacher, started going into sites. We said, put on some sex. He asked if we want girls. We told him, what do you mean girls, we want men. You can look at girls at home if you want, we want men. That Sarah sat next to Asaf. She didn't move, she got into it. Haya was furious the minute she saw the boy's ass, she got up and said that we were abnormal and left. We sat there until maybe a quarter after ten, it was fun. We also went into television sites and other stuff, not just sex.

But they're all nice girls. Really. I didn't have any problem with them. If it was a moral issue that I wasn't willing to compromise on, I would have argued. There's stuff that's weird for me. Some of them, if you noticed, wear wigs, and some don't. But it's the same Bible, the same things, and each of them tells you something different. For example, we asked about one of them who's divorced, why does she keep wearing a wig, and each one says something different. Only Shlomit is serious, she knows. Here in Pardes Katz, you know, we're mixed, there's all kinds. You all live in the same neighborhood. But recently there are a lot of *hozrim be-teshuva* and they're

different. They've taken over. Once, when I was a little girl, until not long ago, the roads were open here. Now on Friday afternoons, if you come by here, they start closing off the roads. They make trouble. They come out of synagogue with their children and don't let cars go by.

I don't live with my parents now, I live in Bnei Brak, right on the border of where they close the streets [on the Sabbath]. There are all kinds in my building. I don't bother them, so they shouldn't bother me. That's just the way it is, that's my way of doing things. I don't turn on the radio on Shabbat, I won't put on the tv at high volume. My mother taught me that here. She'd tell me: don't put on the radio, don't bother people. But they don't respect us. They sit here from eight in the morning, you know what Saturday is. You want to sleep? Eight in the morning they start chattering under your window. The children come play on the swings here. So you don't respect me but I respect you? What kind of behavior is that?

If they really start pressuring us, like closing off streets, that's the most important, if they start really doing that, in practice, so that no one can get out on Saturdays, then the non-religious people will start waking up. There are quite a lot of non-religious people, not just a few. Sometimes they look at us as if we've got horns. I, in contrast, watch how they talk with their children, how they watch them. I don't know, okay, it's hard with so many children, but no one pays any attention where the children are, they run into the street. I drive at ten miles an hour in Bnei Brak, because I'm scared, really. I don't drive like I do in Ramat Gan. It's like a bus driver told me this week, when

you enter Bnei Brak it's like going into another country. You have to change all your behavioral patterns, your driving, you simply need to change everything. And that's really true. Because they jump into the street and the mothers aren't interested, do you know how many accidents there have been on this street? You can't imagine. Why? Because of the parents. Pure and simple. I can't, I can't connect with people like that. If you want to be religious, if you don't want to affect me, I have no problem with that. But if you start having an effect, stay away. So young couples leave. To bring up a child in Pardes Katz, I'm not prepared to raise my child in Pardes Katz. Even though my brothers and I came out okay. But it's because I had strong parents.

My father grew up next to the market, it's a place where criminals hang out, and my father came out an entirely different kind of person. It also depends on a person's character. But I can't, I'm not prepared to bring up my child in a place like this. I'm really not willing to bring him up in Pardes Katz. For example, we now received the certificate and it says there that I did the course in Pardes Katz. I'm not willing to have that name appear on it. I want it to say Bnei Brak. If I go to an office and they see Pardes Katz it immediately brings all sorts of things to mind. There's nothing you can do, that's the way it is. When a person says I live in Pardes Katz, they immediately think that he belongs to the Pardes Katz gang. There's a stigma that everyone here is a criminal.

Lydia's mother, who listened to the last part of the conversation, interjected:

Our media shares the blame. When they interview people, they don't take the good children. They only take children who say bad things. One day I saw them interviewing children next to the community center. There were children who spoke straight to the point, but what did they show in the evening? Only the wild ones. It's simply amazing. That way good people leave, and it's easier for the religious ones. The city government doesn't care either. For example, there was a synagogue next to us until five years ago. The municipality didn't care, neglected it. They closed the synagogue and made it a Shas preschool. They made a huge enlargement, took over the entire lot next to it. The city's not interested, as long as it's for the religious they don't care. But if I were to build an addition to the house here, forget it. You know what they'd do to me?

On the other hand, they [Shas] get things done. The city was always run by the Ashkenazim, and they didn't want them [the Mizrahim]. They didn't want them in their schools. That's why Shas got started in the first place. So Shas—I vote for them. I have to say that. With all that they don't give me anything and don't do anything for me, but at least they'll set up a school, the fact that a strong and large movement came into being is only because they didn't treat them properly, and the truth is, and that's more for the non-religious, because of the amulets they pass out and the sermons they offer.

Sarit and Lydia's Versions*I Got Up and Left: Lydia's Version*

Both Sarit and Lydia were born in Pardes Katz. Both began in state-religious schools, one because “our house was sort of Zionist-religious,” and the second because “my mother simply didn’t want to send me to a school far away.” Even though their educational paths diverged early on, both found themselves trained, but without graduation certificates, to be—seamstresses. Of all the literacy options available, beyond the wide range of differences between non-religious general education and Haredi-Sephardi education, both women’s paths led to sewing machines. Lydia struggled to get there. She loved to draw in elementary school. She fought for a place in Ort Ramat Gan, and later for her right to stay there and not drop out. She sees her continuation into the first and part of the second year of a post-secondary program as a literacy victory that made her elementary school teacher happy. She managed all these transitions—from the state-religious school where the teacher hit her students, to the state school that she remembers warmly,²⁰ from there to high school and from high school to the postsecondary program—on her own, with the support of parents who sometimes believed she would succeed and sometimes had their doubts. In her literacy biography, she is the hero, with supporting actors—teachers, her father, a rabbi—who serve as her confidantes and offer support, who lie for her or to whom she lies.

Lydia knows what she wants and what she doesn’t want (to sit in an office, for example), and is aware of her own value. The profession she strove for is perceived in its ideal form as “fashion design,” a prestigious creative endeavor whose peak is study at Shenkar College of Engineering and Design. But the path to the top is a long one, and

especially long for Lydia. A graduate of an academic high school program with reasonable *bagrut* scores might get accepted to Shenkar even if she hadn't studied fashion design. Lydia, who studied fashion in a vocational school, might get in if she were to take an additional two-year postsecondary program at a vocational college of middling reputation.²¹ That option requires a great deal of perseverance and sense of purpose. A woman like Lydia must cope with her inability to make a living while following this path, and with uncertainty about whether she can complete her education and find a job in the field. As she followed this path, she had to live at home and remain dependent upon her parents, who work at low-status and low-paying jobs. The fact that she succeeded in staying on course until the age of nineteen and a half is a huge victory for her.

What the establishment reads as a dropout, or what I call a coaster—a person who has almost succeeded, almost completed *bagrut*, almost completed postsecondary studies, almost enlisted in the army—Lydia reads as a success, a source of pride and joy. Lydia overcame the violent teacher in her state-religious elementary school, and her parents' lack of confidence in her ability to be accepted at Ort Ramat Gan high school. She overcame the insults of a high school teacher, was helped by another teacher who supported her, and made it to the next stage. The fact that all these efforts led, at the end of the road, to a tiny room in Bnei Brak where elderly women sit and sew hats, or to a cash register in the Dimona Textile factory outlet, instead of to a designer's desk at a high-class fashion company, is linked to her tendency "to get up and leave." She leaves the postsecondary program before finishing it, declares that she's religious to get out of

army service when she is not religious at all, and she exchanges her profession for cleaning work.

Instead of a linear biography centered on setting and achieving a goal, Lydia's story is a zigzag between persistence and concession, between complete success and small achievements. The American anthropologist Elliot Liebow, who studied a black neighborhood in Washington D.C. during the 1960s, sought to comprehend and explain such zigzag stories, whose logic seemed elusive to white observers. Liebow wanted to show that all human behavior is rational within a given person's socio-cultural context. When a car drove through the neighborhood and offered the street loafers day labor with a reasonable wage, few took up the offer. Liebow asks, for his readers, why unemployed people who seem to be available don't jump at the chance that presented itself on their doorstep. Instead of immediately branding the men who demurred as lazy, he sought to understand each of those present on the scene. From their stories, he understood that each individual had a good reason to turn down the offer, in the internal context in which he found himself—even though the decision seemed illogical outside that context.²² But the two contexts are not detached from each other. They define and construct one another and exist as a result of their mutual interaction.²³

The "Shenkar" ideal is tailored, with a hidden seam, to the measurements of candidates who are different from Lydia. On the face of it, she can get there (the stories of women like her who have gotten there and succeeded adorn newspaper fashion supplements from time to time). The educational system was not apathetic towards her, and even tried to help. But the sewing kit it gave her produced a staple stitch that easily unraveled. Unlike Sarit, Lydia liked her craft and pursued it wholeheartedly and by

choice. But the burden was unbearable. Dichotomously, Lydia faces two possible social readings of her life. One points to the system's failure and demands pointed critique of the connection between her place of residence, her class and ethnic origin, and her educational path. The other proposes that she read herself as a failure. She makes another choice: to get up and leave. To leave, to get out, to close the door, not to show up—small freedoms, momentary acts of power. They distance her from developing a critical stance towards the system, but save her from self-disparagement. She remains the agent, the decider, the pathfinder. Her talents and charisma display themselves when she works as a cleaner, and she is promoted to be a supervisor.

At her most recent station, she has succeeded in exchanging the status of temporary worker for a position on the staff of the Co-op supermarket chain, with a promise of schooling and advancement. Lydia views work as an important part of her adult life as a woman. The bourgeois dream of family, children, and a worthwhile job is implanted within her. She wants to be like her mother, who worked and brought up children, but also does not want to be like her mother. Her mother cared for other people's children in her home. Lydia wants to go out to work, and to have her children cared for by others during her work hours. She wants to live outside the house as well, but not until eight at night.

Lydia directs her social critique at her Haredi neighbors in her apartment building, and at the senior secretarial course. This critique detaches her from the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi discourse and its educational and class contexts, and links her to the general discussion in the Israeli sociopolitical discourse over relations between religious and non-religious people. Here, and only here, does her social and gender critique emerge. Facing

growing Haredi power, she voices a liberal tone of live and let live, of mutual respect increasingly infringed, by her account, in Pardes Katz. Things are changing for the worse, and life as she wants to live it is threatened by the rising Sephardi Haredi tide. She doesn't understand the women she sees: "How do you want to have a career if you have a baby each year?" During the course she had no common language with them. They spoke about morning sickness and pregnancy and she wanted to talk with her friend about what she did last night with her boyfriend. Their morals seem hypocritical to her. During the lessons on the internet, some couldn't take their eyes off the screen when it showed nude men. When asked halachic questions, they didn't always know how to validate their behavior (for example, why does a divorced woman have to keep her hair covered, if that precept applies to married women?). She does not present the story of how she was exempted from army service as a trick. Instead, in her view, she rationally exploited the religion's fraudulent ethics and its representative, the rabbi.

The Haredim don't know how to keep an eye on their children, who run into the streets. They are lawbreakers who take over public land and allow themselves to do things forbidden to other citizens. In the same breath, she describes her relations with the Haredi women in the course: "They're all nice girls. Really. I didn't have any problem with them." Lydia's mother joins the conversation at the end and adds her own view. She is very critical of her newly-religious neighbors, but they (the Ashkenazim who run the municipality) didn't do much for them (that is, for us, the Sephardim), so she, too, it turns out, voted for Shas, the party of the Sephardi Haredim.

Lydia rents an apartment in Bnei Brak, and supports herself. She took the secretarial course and looks forward to further studies through her job. At present, it

seems, she has no interest in using her “get up and leave” strategy. She stays where she is, with possibilities for slow advancement before her.

I Got Up and Left: Sarit's Version

Sarit is more realistic than Lydia. She doesn't sit down, so she has no need to get up and leave. She is always, it seems, ready to jump ship. It's as if she accepts as a given that there's nothing worth making an effort for, and that the best place to get on her feet is always somewhere else. Sarit's literacy biography centers on ethnic battles in which her father plays the main role. He saw to it that Sephardi girls got accepted to the Ashkenazi Beit Ya'akov school in Kiryat Herzog, where, according to Sarit, they were discriminated against and silenced. The teachers did not call on them, and the Ashkenazi girls did not want to study for tests with them. There was favoritism. Today, she says, the Ashkenazi girls don't go to the school in Kiryat Herzog. Instead, they go to school in Bnei Brak, and the neighborhood is slowly filling up with Sephardi families. She didn't make much of an effort in at school. She didn't work in subjects she didn't like, and she didn't listen to teachers who didn't teach well.

In high school, Sarit was not one of the Sephardi girls who were recommended by the Ashkenazi teachers and accepted to the Wolf seminar. She chose, from among the available options, to go to Or Hayyim—as many other girls like her did. Her memories of that school are again linked to discipline and concessions. In general, she liked the place, but she didn't like the strict discipline and refused to accept it. Her father came to the aid and supported her evasions: “I didn't even do dishwashing duty. I mean it. I was there four years and I didn't wash dishes a single time.” Her father made sure she came home on weekends when she was supposed to stay in the dorm, and her father also got her out

of the annual Pesach cleaning, a huge operation that other graduates of Or Hayyim recall as traumatic. She took the vocational track at the seminar and she describes it as being more difficult than the academic track, since you can transfer from the vocational to the academic track but not the reverse. Perhaps this is what the teachers told the students, because this claim appears in several of the women's stories. Or perhaps it's the answer that parents of those girls the school thought unfit for academic studies received when they asked about the price to be paid for entering the vocational track. The academic program trains its students to be teachers, who are considered the community's spiritual and moral elite.

Sarit describes the sewing lessons as fun, they did interesting things, but she does not take the craft seriously. It becomes clear to her at an early stage that she should stay in the seminar only until she finds a husband, so as "to keep her good name," and in thirteenth grade she begins the secretarial course and sloughs off the seminar studies: "I came and went, I'd leave, I didn't study a lot." She finishes her four years of high school with only a partial *bagrut* diploma—no standard Haredi school today (very few Beit Ya'akov or Sephardi-Haredi schools) offer a full *bagrut* program. But she did not even complete the partial *bagrut* program that Or Hayyim offers. Yet this does not keep her from saying at first that, of course, one can do *bagrut* exams in the seminar. It could be that these fine points, which preoccupy non-religious high school students, are not central to the lives of Haredi girls. At this stage, academic post-secondary studies for Haredi women are still only in their very first stages. Or Hayyim seminar gave Sarit what she needed: a familiar, respectable home in which she could get through adolescence, an

attractive line on the resume of a Haredi girl seeking a good match. Sarit wasn't looking for a Torah scholar and had no need to prove her own devotion and learning.

When her friendship with her future husband reaches the stage of talking about a wedding, she leaves. She gets a low-ranking clerical job in the Ramat Gan municipality—filing and fielding phone calls. Her fiancé attended non-Haredi schools. He graduated from ORT, where he majored in computers, and served in the army. Sarit says that he wanted to go to Bar-Ilan or Tel Aviv University, but in the end decided not to because “you have to get up early in the morning.” That’s a sentence that rings dissonant in “white” ears. What do you mean early in the morning? What does that have to do with it? A person who wants to go to college, goes to college. Did he meet the minimum requirements for acceptance? Or perhaps he is Lydia’s literacy brother, a boy who studied computers in a vocational program on a technical level, and who thus needs additional studies to get into university? Why does Sarit relate this at all? To impress me? To inform me that college studies were on the agenda but didn’t work out? What was the logic behind his not pursuing his literacy path?

Her husband worked in a computer repair shop and even taught in a Shas school. Now he is trying to change paths and learn to be a religious scribe. He is one of thousands who fill the courses for this profession that Shas offers as a gesture to its supporters. At a time when the high-tech sector is in crisis, it seems more realistic to join the religion industry. Sarit is not impressed by this career, either. She casts her pragmatic gaze further, towards Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef. Her husband worked for Shas for two months, and they didn’t tell him they had no school license. In the end, they didn’t pay him. So Sarit feels she voted Shas for nothing.

Sarit's practical approach does not present her as the victim of an ideology that manipulates her into impossible situations. She knows what she wants, and it has not been difficult for her to achieve it. Her world distinguishes critically between Ashkenazim and Sephardim within Haredi society. Her father apparently took care to mark out for his children the discrimination that prevails in ethnic relationships. He made sure to place his children in what he considered appropriate schools, and transferred them from one to another until he was satisfied. He continued to keep an eye on Sarit and to extricate her from uncomfortable situations at the Or Hayyim boarding school. Her family, which moved from typical Mizrahi religious observance to Haredi observance, sought to protect its children. One sister got pregnant at a very young age and, with rabbinical sanction, was married at a younger age than secular law allows. She lives in northern Israel, far from her family, and does not maintain a Haredi lifestyle. Sarit's little brothers attend Shas schools and Sephardi yeshivot. Her husband, who used to wear the knitted kipah of the modern religious community, now wears a Haredi black kipah and is seeking his future in the world of Shas.

Sarit's life path is as clearly marked as Lydia's is. Sarit knows that she belongs to the Sephardi-Haredi world, while Lydia knows that she is not Haredi and that the limits of her toleration for Haredim is when they try to close for the Sabbath the street she lives on. Neither has sought to walk the center of their path and they have not reached the destination at its end. Sarit wanted to marry a good boy, and did. Lydia lives with her boyfriend in a rented apartment and is not interested in conversation about pregnancy and

children. The flexible tracks the two of them follow are probably characteristic of most of the neighborhood's women. The direction is clear, the adherence to it temperate.

Freedom of movement on the path—the ability “to get up and leave”—is a central focal point of power and protest in the lives of women who lack social power. The move is bifaceted—on the one hand, it makes choice possible, and on the other it retards linear processes that could (at a huge price) produce real power. Lydia did not get to Shenkar, but refused to toil at a sewing machine in a hat factory. Sarit did not become a seminar teacher, but refused to take her vocational sewing track to its conclusion. Lydia works in a supermarket, while Sarit cares for her baby daughter.

4. Leah and Esti: The One Facing Forward and the One Facing Back

I conclude this section by paralleling the life stories of Leah and Esti, two women whom I did not meet in the secretarial course. They appear in this book's opening chapter as the central and most active members of the Haredi women's club. This pair of biographies thus does not place a Haredi woman alongside a non-Haredi one, but rather presents two similar, but nevertheless different, life possibilities for Sephardi Haredi women.

The two speakers grew up along different paths. One was born in a Haredi home and received all her education in Haredi frameworks. The other grew up in a traditional but not fully observant home and attended both non-religious and Haredi schools. Their biographies cast light on the heterogeneous past of the Sephardi Haredi community, on the unifying project that brings the two women together, and on ways of living within that project that nevertheless allow a certain amount of difference.

Leah: Once Everything Had a Taste That Stayed With You All Your Life

Esti is busy and we can't manage to set a time for an interview. So she refers me to her partner in running the club: "I want you to get all kinds of opinions, you understand, I want you to hear other girls, Leah, for example, is more sort of extreme, she's got more spunk, and maybe you should also talk to Aliza afterwards, then you'll have a range of opinions. As for me, with God's help, after the Ninth of Av, after I get the trips out, I'll have more time."

On this hot August day I dress long but not overboard, put on a hat,²⁴ and drive to Pardes Katz. The map directs me two streets past the *shuk*, and from there to a narrow alley that makes its way between housing projects, a school, and a park. The yellow afternoon light has no pity—it illuminates the wretchedness of the surroundings.

This is the center of the country, in the inner circle of the Tel Aviv metropolitan area. The basketball courts and soccer pitches are in awful condition, the park is full of weeds, peeling signs admonish their readers to maintain the beauty of their public spaces, and declare that "this park is intended for the welfare of the residents." The inhabitants have indeed done everything in their power to improve their living conditions. They've added rooms, closed off balconies, run cables from the roofs into their apartments, paved small patios outside their homes, installed clothes lines, erected shade roofs over open balconies. The resulting landscape is slapdash. Yet Leah's building stands out. It is uniform and disciplined. In front stretches a green lawn, surrounded by flowerbeds and low shrubs. On the lawn are small paved spots with plastic tables and chairs so that the residents can receive guests in the garden. The three entrances to the building are well-

tended, newly-painted, and tastefully tiled. The mailboxes are uniform and the names of the residents are printed clearly. A new garden lamp bears the number of each entrance. I ascend a single flight of stairs to the home of the Arusi family.

The door displays a “He [Der’i] is Innocent” sticker and others associated with Shas. My light tap on the door produces the sound of footsteps. A girl of about fifteen opens the door and looks at me curiously. “Mom is here, come in.” Leah is in the kitchen, flanked by a girl of maybe ten and a toddler who is perhaps three, while feeding a baby in a highchair. The apartment was renovated when the entire building was enlarged. It has been painted and is clean and pleasant. The kitchen opens to a small dining nook and the living room. Leah asks me to wait for her there. I sit on the couch, next to a large window, wait for a breeze, and take in the glass-enclosed bookcase full of sacred texts. Beside it, on the wall, hang portraits of rabbis. I identify the senior Rabbi Abu-Hatzeira and others, some of them Ashkenazi. Flower paintings hang in the dining nook. The remaining walls are without ornament. There are no house plants. It’s the Haredi esthetic and is no different from Ashkenazi Haredi homes I have visited. As I wait I gaze out at the path leading to the building. Every so often someone passes by, mostly children and teenagers enjoying their summer vacation, as well as women—most of them dressed in non-religious summer fashion.

Leah joins me. She brings a bottle of RC Cola and two disposable plastic cups and places them on the coffee table. She sits facing me on a large armchair, the kind that in other homes would be placed facing the television set. Of course there is no television in Leah’s home, but I can hear loud tv sounds coming from one of the neighbors’

apartments. Every so often I find myself trying to identify the soundtrack of what seems to be an Israeli movie the neighbors are watching.

I turn on the tape recorder. “First, I want to say how grateful I am that you agreed to this conversation. I know that you were a little apprehensive of me and it’s not clear to you what I want. Your name won’t appear in my work, and I still don’t know whether I will mention Pardes Katz explicitly. What I’m asking is that you tell me a pretty simple story. Describe for me where you grew up, what kind of home you came from, what schools you went to, that kind of thing. From there we’ll go into how your own children are being educated, and in the end we’ll talk about your women’s club here in the neighborhood. I’m recording the conversation so that I will be able to transcribe it accurately.”

Leah attaches the microphone to the lapel of her cotton shirt. It’s green, with long sleeves, with a round neck. She’s also wearing a black skirt, black stockings, and on her feet she has fashionable black, broad-toed clogs with silver buckles. Her hair is covered with a simple black kerchief, “something I wear at home,” which sometimes slips back and forces her to adjust it on her head. The hair that gets revealed in front shows that she, like other Sephardi Haredi women, does not cut it short. She begins to talk.

Leah Tells Her Story

I was born in the north, in Haifa, I grew up in Haifa, in a Haredi home. My parents were born abroad, in Algeria, they came here before the establishment of the state with the illegal immigrants. What kind of Haredi home you ask? It’s not like the Zionist religious home of today, it’s stronger than that. We

grew up without a television, we observed all the commandments, I went to a Beit Ya'akov school. In our time, Beit Ya'akov had boys' classes and girls' classes, like in old Zionist-religious schools. It was a Sephardi Beit Ya'akov school. There was an Ashkenazi Beit Ya'akov school but our circle didn't get accepted there, then there was already that segregation. The boys and girls didn't mix, even during recess we didn't play with them.

My father worked during the day at the Tenuva dairy, he'd do deliveries, and he studied in the evening. My mother was a housewife. All the girls, *Baruch Ha-Shem*, went to Beit Ya'akov, and they're all married today, some of them to Torah scholars, some of the husbands work and study. One of my brothers still studies full time today, to his joy, I hope my husband will be able to do that. Some of the other brothers work and study in the evenings, *Baruch Ha-Shem*. That's where I went until sixth grade, and then we thought about where to go from there. In Haifa the Ashkenazi Haredi schools wouldn't accept us and we had to go into exile.

Actually, there was an Ashkenazi family that got to know my father from his work and liked him very much. They saw my father as a simple Haredi Jew, God-fearing, who was very concerned that his children be brought to be observant. They asked him where the girls go to school and he said, here. And afterwards? Wherever they tell us. Then the woman said that there's a boarding school in Jerusalem and another one in Bnei Brak. My big sister really loved Jerusalem so she went there. But the rest of us sisters and myself came to Bnei Brak, to Or Hayyim.

We lived in the dorms and came home for weekends. We did that for eight years. I liked the life there. Each to her own. My sisters think differently, but I really liked it there, I'm a social person. Friends come first for me, I always liked to have friends, today as well. When we were little, most of the kids near home were non-religious, but old-style non-religious, once non-religious people used to go to Beit Ya'akov, too, and afterwards, in seventh grade, they'd go to a Zionist-religious or even a non-religious school. But the non-religious people today are not like the non-religious back then, you can't compare them. In the previous generation education was entirely different. But even Haredi girls could have older siblings at home who weren't Haredi. So there was a television at home. In our family, *Baruch Ha-Shem*, my brothers went to good yeshivot. To the credit of that woman and her husband, may God remember them, that they pointed the way for us and my parents had the benefit of good education for their older children and that's how we younger ones also continued.

At Or Hayyim I took the sewing track, even though I had other ambitions, but I never spoke up out of respect for my parents. I was afraid my father would say no, so I didn't say anything. Right at the same time they opened a nursing program in Netanya and I really loved that field. But I took sewing, and I worked at it because that was what I took for me, for myself, because that's what I had to do, that's the program and that's it. I didn't want to be a sewing teacher. I don't like teaching. I really liked Or Hayyim, to this day I like it, because I like being with friends. At first I kept going to the Yom Kippur

services for the older girls, for a year or two after I graduated, but afterwards it wasn't for me anymore, I go to the neighborhood synagogue, where my husband goes.

“And what about work?”

After the seminar I worked. I lived with my sister in Bnei Brak. I didn't have anything to return to in Haifa, the area where my parents lived was already non-religious and my parents would come here a lot. They tried to move here but it didn't work out. My father wanted to come here to be close to his children, to be like all the older men in the *kolel*, to realize his dream like they say, at least towards the end of his life. But God didn't give him that. He passed away just when the public housing company approved their exchange of their apartment in Haifa for one in Pardes Katz. So my mother made the move and was rewarded with another ten years until she also, may her memory be blessed, passed away.

I worked for two years and got married. I always wanted a home of Torah, a husband who would sit and study. I wasn't given the reward of my husband being able to study all day. But, *Baruch Ha-Shem*, he works in the mornings as a *kashrut* inspector and studies in the evening. At first, for ten years, he worked in a supermarket, making the orders. I worked here and there until our girl was born. After a year at home I spent ten years working in the Ponivetz yeshiva's supermarket, ordering merchandise, taking out merchandise, as a cashier. After that I stopped because we built on here.

While construction was going on, toward the end, I took a secretarial and computer course at the Haredi Center for Vocational Training, in cooperation with the municipality and Project Renewal. I worked for a year for an insurance agent, but three years ago, when I had our youngest girl, I left and I haven't gone back. I gained experience in secretarial work, I have certificates, I more or less know how to run an office, of course every office is run differently, but I managed. The truth is that I don't like to be alone in an office all day, I like to be with people. It's out of the question to sit in an office with a man or with men coming in, and you're alone all day with the telephone and the computer.

The job I like best is being a cashier. I like to be with people. A cashier talks with people, you chat, you enjoy yourself, you're always seeing different people, you make connections with people, to this day I meet very old people, women, children who've already gotten married, I really loved that position. You hear a lot, you get advice from people, you give advice. You get satisfaction from having told someone to buy some item and afterwards they come and thank you and tell you that they really enjoyed it, or you see a person that's not well off and you recommend an item that's similar but cheaper. That's the best work, it's work with the public. You see someone who's sad, you learn about people, about their wisdom, even from a child you learn a lot, you have satisfaction, not like in an office, you see the people, they're not behind a telephone. My husband doesn't really want me to but I really want to go back to that, I like people.

My sisters are in the city, in Bnei Brak, but it's far. One of my sisters used to live the next street over, it was fun. I had only one girl, she had three, may they be healthy. It was fun. I'd finish work, run home, finish my housework, go visit her, help her feed the children, bathe them, put them to bed, I'd fill up the day, I'd come home, but *Baruch Ha-Shem* everything in its time.

Now there's a period of flight, people are leaving, there are all sorts of offers and housing projects and grants, why not? May they be healthy, I'd also prefer to live in a new house in a Haredi neighborhood. People move to Elad, to Kiryat Sefer, to Brachfeld. There are advantages here and there are disadvantages.

“How does it affect your children?”

The children don't go down to play on school days, never, so their heads are free, there aren't friends waiting for them downstairs, there's time to study and prepare for tests. But I know from my own experience that you miss something that way, the same with my daughter. She, the oldest, goes to Beit Masouda, Or Hayyim's non-boarding school, and the younger one goes to Beit Ya'akov Merkaz, which is mixed Ashkenazi-Sephardi. I had heaven's help that they accepted her. God helped me. We moved to a rented apartment in Ramat Aharon [a Haredi neighborhood in Bnei Brak] so that they could go to school there. One of the teachers who knew me from work, spoke up for me and persuaded them, so even now, when we live here on this side of Bnei

Brak, they'll accept my younger girl. Because there's no way she'll go to school in this neighborhood.

There are also girls from non-Haredi homes [at the Haredi school in the neighborhood], there are girls with televisions at home, and there are Russians there. I see girls who go to the beach on Shabbat and show up at school on Sunday with suntans. At first I sent my girl there for three years. She'd come home with songs that you hear from the neighbors. I told the preschool teacher: I don't put on non-religious radio stations and I don't have a television, and my daughter brings these things home from Beit Ya'akov? I won't accept that. Then we moved to Ramat Aharon in Bnei Brak, where we rented. How long could I keep them cooped up at home? But afterwards it was hard, we were worried about our own apartment, that the tenants might do damage, we asked a rabbi, and he said go back to your own apartment and God will help you. I told my husband that I'm going back to my home for the sake of heaven and then God will help us. So we went back and despite that they accepted her at Beit Ya'akov Merkaz. The principal asked me: "How did I let you in?" I told her, "I had heaven's help."

For junior high she transferred to Beit Masouda. In theory, she could have gone to Beit Ya'akov Wolf, but it's just a token what they take. They take just a few [Sephardi] girls and you also have to go through all the degradation they hand out. I don't feel comfortable with what they do. If there isn't enough room and you take the best students, take without discrimination, without hostility and without prying. But they take Ashkenazi girls who

aren't the most diligent students, they take Ashkenazi girls from outside the city for money, so it's not fair. I live in this city, it's my right. Today everything is connections, not just in the Haredi world. We personally did not run after them, and may God help us so that we don't need favors from them. My daughter, who saw how hard they made it, said to me: I don't want to sign up for them at all, I don't want to even try.

I spoke to my sister and with a few others whose girls were in Beit Masouda, which is a branch of Or Hayyim for the daughters of *avrechim*. They told me, why take insults? You're welcome here. I only recommended to her that she not take sewing, I told her, go on the academic track. She didn't want to be a teacher and today there are lots of options. Today you don't need to decide from the start. She can choose in the seminar, sewing, or special education, or regular education, there are lots of programs. The level there is very high, very demanding, really top. They only take girls who have at least a B average, nothing less than that. If a girl can't handle the level they recommend that she go to Or Hayyim itself, which is a little lower, even Wolf's level is lower than Beit Masouda's. Beit Masouda is a separate building and they only go to the Or Hayyim campus for the library. They have computers in their building.

It would be great if all the Sephardim were to decide that they're not going to run after the Ashkenazim, and then they'd come running after us. Why go through all that pain? What they open up for Sephardi girls in their schools is the lower tracks, the sewing classes. You sit in the Wolf seminar and they'll

remind you your whole life that they accepted you. They give the classes numbers from one to eight, eight is for important and well off people and teachers, and one and two is where they put all the Sephardi girls. If we didn't run after them, they'd come to us, because the Sephardi girls give the school all its character, all his quality. I have nieces who study at Kahane and they have teachers who teach at both schools and tell them that at Beit Masouda the level is higher. It's a big mistake to run after them. Just like there are excellent Sephardi yeshivot that produce important rabbinical judges and rabbis, they see that our seminars produce excellent teachers and wives of rabbis and women. You don't need to beg. After all, it's state-supported, they have to accept me. It belongs to the city, just like they have to provide me with an elementary school they have to give me a seminar as well. Why do we need that discrimination, why do we need that hatred? It could be solved nicely, with good manners, let's do everything in Wolf, we'll all have the same administration and have separate classes, and not have the degradation. But until then, I'm not going to go after them, not their honey and not their sting, like they say. My daughter is happy at Beit Masouda, satisfied, she's not sorry for a minute. She's a girl who sits and studies, she studies for hours.

If you ask me about my attitude to work and study for men, then a man who can really study, with complete devotion, should study. But if he can't, it can ejoe@eppmar.comven lead to transgression. So they can work and study in the evening. Why not? They even study better when they study in the evening. The rabbis don't insist that you study. Idleness leads to sin. You

can't do it? Go out, work, help your children study, and set yourself fixed times to study Torah. A man who can sit for the whole day—that's his bliss. Your livelihood comes from God, from the smallest to the largest things. Livelihood doesn't come from anyone, not from the government and not from anyone else, God is the one who feeds and supports everyone. God brings a livelihood to the home of anyone who studies. God wants to teach us today with the [government's cuts in] pensions that we shouldn't depend on the government. We were very dependent on the government, so today God wants to teach us, to shake us before the Messiah comes. After all, this is the generation of the Messiah, he will shake us up really well [to tell us], listen, it's not the government, I feed and support everyone.

When Israel was founded it was also bad. We've forgotten. They took from here and gave to there. If you lived on a kibbutz you benefited, if you didn't, you suffered. Our parents, who came from other countries, worked, Ashkenazi, Sephardim, it doesn't matter, they worked hard and who got helped? The people close to the people in charge. Now we're going sixty years back. The wheel has reversed itself. But there was more faith. Today everything is loose, so he's shaking us up. The ones who work don't get shafted? Who profits? The upper tenth percentile. We earn the minimum wage that the government requires, and they still take from us. You have to work, true, even the greatest rabbis worked and studied, there's no contradiction between one and the other. But they shouldn't shaft us, they shouldn't steal from the poor.

You asked me about Vicky Kanfo.²⁵ I'm not all that familiar with it, I don't turn on the radio much, what, is she a single mother? Believe me, if all the Haredim went out on a march, the government wouldn't lift a finger. They don't have hearts of flesh and blood. Because if they had a heart, they wouldn't oppress the poor. So I think it won't help. That single mother's march to Jerusalem might have made waves, but it won't stop those who want to crush the weak. I don't even want to mention his [Netanyahu's] name. He lives well and he doesn't care. He thinks that if he treads on human flesh he'll go higher. But doesn't he think about falling? God, when he wants to knock someone down, he first raises him way up, so that when he falls his crash will be so strong that he'll never get up again. The sound of his downfall will reverberate more than he reverberates today. It's great that she got up and did something, but it won't help. If the Haredim were to go out, the media wouldn't broadcast it, so that it wouldn't make waves around the world, because it won't look good around the world. After all, the government encourages single mothers, everything's permitted here, this is the land of unbounded possibilities. They encourage them against the Torah. Whatever's against the Torah they encourage here. Helping single mothers doesn't help increase the birthrate, even though it's better than abortion, which is murder.

But what bothers me most is the way people talk today. Here, around me, there's a lot of bad language. You hear a lot of insolence from our Israelis, may God help and bring them back to observance, and from the immigrants, too. There's insolence between man and fellow-man, between children and

parents. My children hear it, but they don't understand. Sometimes they come to me and ask me what certain words mean. What can I tell them? I won't tell them anything except that it's forbidden to say them. In the summer, the way people dress, it's hard, and that way of dressing has come into Bnei Brak. But more than anything else it's the way people talk that bothers me, the insolence. Even in our own community there's insolence. What can I tell you, it didn't used to be that way. Not with the non-religious and not with the Haredim. People were simpler, everything was more meaningful. Today, even when I go to a parents' night, the teachers are really okay, but it's not like it was in my time, it's not the same level. There was a different style, there was modesty. They weren't in a hurry, not everything went at full speed, not everything was competitive. Even with us at school today it's not education, it's college. They want more and do less with meaning, less that has any savor to it. Then you could savor everything, there was a taste you felt in your mouth that stayed with you for the rest of your life.

What Was: Leah's Version

I try to comprehend what Esti meant when she said that Leah is more extreme and has more spunk. Leah left me with a whiff of nostalgia, almost a longing for the old, forgotten Israel. Esti may well have been referring to Leah's critique of Ashkenazi discrimination against Sephardim. But Leah offered substantiation for her claims and presented a complex stance of conditional willingness for cooperation between the two ethnic groups. The particular nature of our conversation—an interview, recorded, in

exchange for payment—seems to have presented with me with a Leah of this sort, perceptive and nuanced.

When I checked my impression against the text, I found that the word “once” appears frequently. This word will guide me in deciphering Leah’s life story, as I juxtapose education and ethnic origin.

The Old Mizrahi, The Old Non-Religious People, And The Way People Act Today

Leah’s “once” is located in the north, in Haifa of the 1960s. She is the daughter of North African parents who kept a religious home. But once, everyone was different. From her Haredi home in the center of Israel, she describes her childhood home as Haredi. But she knows that that is not an accurate description. She has to modify her picture by calling her parents home “religious Zionist” but “stronger than religious Zionist.” They kept all the commandments, did not allow a television set at home,²⁶ and sent their daughters to a Sephardi Beit Ya’akov school. While both boys and girls attended the school, they studied in separate classes and did not mix even during recess. Nevertheless, some of the students in Leah’s class would be called non-religious today, or had siblings who were not religious—and some even had televisions at home. Leah tries to set her home apart from other homes, while at the same time describing a time when even people who were not observant at home sought to give their children a Torah education, at least until they reached high school age.

That’s the way it was once. Once it was difficult to be Haredi, because the environment was secular. Once it was hard to maintain a Haredi lifestyle, because after elementary school, a large number of her peers chose religious Zionist or non-religious highs schools. Once you needed luck or an external guiding hand to keep the children in a

religious framework. Leah's father was a Jew who trusted the establishment. He was prepared to send his children wherever he was told. Providence came in the form of "actually an Ashkenazi family," who knew her father as a "simple Haredi Jew" and pointed him in the right direction. This is the model of the "double rescue" presented in a broader way in the next part of the story. Ashkenazi Haredim "rescue" Sephardim from secularization, while at the same time rescuing their own declining culture. Leah was sent away from home. She had to be sent away—literally, to go into exile—because Haredi schools in Haifa didn't accept Sephardi girls. Her older sister went to Jerusalem, while Leah and the other sisters enrolled in Or Hayyim in Bnei Brak, and never returned to Haifa. Leah's brothers also benefited from the direction of the same Ashkenazi couple, and were placed in good yeshivot.

Her family's history is not standard. All the children attended Haredi schools and continued to maintain that way of life when they grew up. The home that Leah and her husband established is thus a second-generation Sephardi Haredi home, and ostensibly should benefit from its "clean past." That is, it should have no problem being accepted by the Haredi and Sephardi-Haredi world. But that's not the way things are, at least not in practical terms. The exile is not over; and the quest to be accepted into the central avenue of the Haredi world is still underway.

But despite the difficulty of being Sephardi Haredim in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Leah misses those times. They had a "taste," she says. Everyone was different then. This may well be analogous to the sense of loss felt by many Israelis who have lived through the dissolution of the national collective.²⁷ They long for that bygone feeling of an interlinked, dedicated, cohesive public. If this is indeed one of the sources of

her wistfulness, it is sorrow over the loss of the very hegemonic Zionist society that made it so difficult for her family to live as Haredim. This is an inbuilt paradox that combines a longing for the (labor movement? kibbutz?) values that exemplified the newborn state of Israel with a critique of the very same hegemonic society's exclusion of those who did not live according to its very particular standards.

But it may well be that the longing for "once" has another source, something to do with the pace of life, its style, its depth: "People were simpler, everything was more meaningful.... There was modesty. They weren't in a hurry, not everything went at full speed, not everything was competitive." Here, too, she places non-religious Israelis and Haredim together and states that both sectors have lost something. Nowadays, they all want a lot, quickly, and without depth. The level has declined. Her daughters' teachers are not like the teachers she herself had, every school thinks it's a university. The dress code has lost its force even in Bnei Brak, although the way the non-religious dress outside is worse. Bad language has made its way into Haredi homes, but among the non-religious the language is worse. She doesn't like what she sees from the window in her living room, on the well-tended path between her building and the lawn. It's some recompense for the fact that her girls have no friends in the neighborhood and have no reason to go downstairs.

It Would Be Great If All The Sephardim Were To Decide That They're Not Going To

Run After The Ashkenazim

Education, and its ethnic context, plays a central role in Leah's life story. At the beginning of her monologue she states that she attended a Sephardi Beit Ya'akov school, because her type of people were not accepted by the Ashkenazi Beit Ya'akov school. Her

simple Haredi father was representative of those kind of people who went where they were told. Their meekness produced an ethnic and religious path that led many of those who walked it to religious Zionist and non-religious schools. The Ashkenazi couple who diverted her family away from the Zionist default and rerouted them back onto the Haredi road did not annul their ethnicity. She, her sisters, and her brothers all attended institutions designated for Sephardim. Their new schools detached children from their homes and uprooted them from their environments, a process Leah describes as “exile.”²⁸ The sites of Haredi exile were Bnei Brak and Jerusalem. Haredi boarding schools for Sephardi girls for the most part offered vocational programs (although they also had academic tracks).

Leah, unlike her sisters, liked being in a boarding school. She reiterates, a number of times, the importance she attaches to her social life, which she enjoyed at Or Hayyim. So, even though she was channeled into a program—inappropriate for her, she believes—that taught her to sew and how to teach others to sew—she remembers her school days fondly. Her apprehension that her father would veto academic studies led her to remain silent about her own desires. Knowing that it would not be her career, she interpreted her sewing studies as a way of obtaining knowledge for herself.²⁹ She worked for ten years as a cashier in a supermarket, which she thoroughly enjoyed. Sitting behind a cash register, a job without prestige that, in today’s Israel, has become stereotypically associated with immigrant women from the former Soviet Union, was a fascinating occupation for her. She had ongoing contact with customers, spoke with them, offered advice, and learned a lot.

In contrast, she describes her office job, the kind of position that many other women seek, as boring and dangerous. To obtain such a job Leah took a secretarial and computer course for Haredi women. She worked for an insurance agent, but was uncomfortable alone by the telephone and behind a computer, in close quarters with a man. She missed contact with people, while her new job left her in a sterile or male space that is “out of the question.” Even though she completed the course, received a certificate, and gained experience, Leah misses the cashier’s chair.

Just as she once submitted to her father’s will and did not study nursing, today she accepts her husband’s wish that she stay at home rather than return to her supermarket job. She puts her hopes in her daughters’ futures. The social reality they confront is different, but similar, to the one she faced. Even though they come from a Haredi family and live in a city with a Haredi majority, the place they live in is marked as the “unclean” side of Haredi society. Here, in a “bad” neighborhood, they had to attend the preschool and school that they were directed to. These schools were open to girls from non-Haredi families, who have televisions at home, and to girls from Russian families who go to the beach on the Sabbath and show up at school on Sundays with suntans. But Leah did not require an Ashkenazi family to save her own children. She refused to allow them to continue in the designated school and exiled her family to the clean side of the city. There, her daughters were allowed to attend an untainted Haredi school, of the type that accepts Ashkenazi girls and Sephardi girls who have been marked as “worthy.” But her apprehensions about what would happen to her apartment, which she had rented out, and the rabbi’s promise that God would help them, impelled her to take her family home.

As in many other cases, success in getting one child into a school eased the way for younger siblings. Leah's young daughters continued to study at Beit Ya'akov Merkaz even after the family returned to its original school district. But the problems did not end there. When the time came to register for a junior high school, the cycle of acceptances and rejections began again. In principle, Leah claims, her daughter could attend the venerable Wolf high school and seminar, but to send her there would involve degradation, hatred, and prejudice. Wolf takes just a few token Sephardi girls, Leah maintains, and they prefer less talented Ashkenazi girls from outside the city who pay more. Leah is weary of ingratiating herself and her eldest daughter also had reservations. They decided to go to a place where they are wanted, and they are not sorry. Leah's only advice to her daughter was "don't do sewing."

They chose the relatively new Beit Masouda, a school for the daughters of full-time Sephardi Haredi Torah scholars. While it is part of the Or Hayyim system, its pupils are segregated from those of the main Or Hayyim girls' school—the one that Leah herself attended. The school (as described by Leah) has high academic demands, and offers a rich and flexible curriculum, in order to compete with the parallel Ashkenazi institutions. Leah's political decision is conditional: for the moment, her strategy is to give up both the benefits that would derive from acceptance by the Ashkenazi Haredi mainstream and the pain that gaining such acceptance would inflict. She sees Sephardi institutions producing *avrechim*, religious judges, and rabbis of high quality, as well as worthy teachers and wives, so she has no intention of groveling before the Ashkenazim, since "the Sephardi girls give the school all its character, all his quality." Nevertheless, she regrets the animosity created by prejudice and hopes that eventually two equal learning

communities will function under a single roof and administration, within the Wolf seminar. Then, and only then, will Leah be prepared to accept ethnic integration.

Leah's social consciousness, and her sensitivity to injustice and discrimination, seems to be guided by the division between Haredim and non-religious Jews. In the final analysis, she is not willing to cross that binary distinction in order to form coalitions with other, non-Haredi groups with positions close to hers. Her sense of the injustice inflicted on her and her daughters by the Ashkenazi Haredi establishment is self-policed and turns into a moderated critique of "until": until they accept me as I deserve to be accepted, I don't want to be with them, but when it comes down to it my place is with them.

Similarly, Viki Kanfo's campaign, which reached its climax at the time of the interview (the summer of 2003), elicits some sympathy from Leah and once again reveals her sensitivity to the treatment of the disadvantaged. But she has a hard time supporting a woman who presents herself as a single mother, and she cannot connect with the struggle of women who place their alternative families at the forefront of their struggle. She accuses the government of creating a land of unbounded possibilities, in which women can receive financial support for actions that violate the spirit of the Torah and the family.

³⁰ In the same breath, she fires a volley of arrows of criticism at her own community, which has become too dependent on the government. The man whom she does not want to name, Minister of Finance Binyamin Netanyahu, appears as the principal symbol of this move. The same man whom the Haredim learned to trust and depend on, to support, and to believe that he would continue to feed them, appears in Leah's words as a cheat who lives a good life and enjoys crushing the poor. Leah's interpretive framework, which places everything in the field of faith and prophesizes that Netanyahu will crash,

positions him as another sign calling on Haredim to wake up. Such an awakening, for Leah, includes expecting the community's member to work. She sees no contradiction between Torah study and earning a living. The government's unjust policies towards workers constructs and deepens deprivation and poverty. Social injustice distinguishes between fashionable non-religious Israelis (like the single mothers that are the darlings of the media) and the large families of the Haredim, which the media generally ignores. It is thus unlikely that Leah will enlist her critical sensibility in a campaign that cuts across her Haredi-community boundaries.

Esti: My Line of Thought is to Make Progress

My interview with Esti took place after we had made a very preliminary acquaintance. In her mind, I was "Tamar the seminar student"—a student at a teachers college. She took no interest in my work beyond what I told her and did not ask about my private life. The fact that I reached her through Hagit from the municipality, and that I took an interest in the women's club, was enough for her. For me, Esti was first and foremost a key character—a woman who could show me part of what I sought. I came to her in the hopes of meeting a leader, and she did not disappoint me.

After a number of postponements and cancellations, we meet on an early summer afternoon in August 2003, in the room where the club meets. Esti's chose not to invite me into her home, which hosts many meetings of the club's women and their daughters. She said once that the new apartment that she and her family recently moved into "enlarges in accordance with the number of people," but I never saw it. All my encounters with Esti took place in the public spaces she acts in. Her mobility is a function of her tiny Subarit pickup truck, which enables her to travel, to give rides, to move things around, to rescue

people, to bring guests, to make a quick trip to her daughters, to keep up the beat. We sit in the club room, with her mobile phone in front of her. She fields incoming calls, and answers some of them. She put on the air conditioner, and then I turned on my tape recorder.

Esti Tells Her Story

We're a large family, eight children. I'm the third-oldest. We come from a religious Zionist family that slowly became Haredi. I began in a non-religious school in our neighborhood in southern Tel Aviv, and went to Herzliya High School for junior high. After that I transferred to Shilo in Bat Yam. From there I went to a high school and seminar in Jerusalem. I made the transition from non-religious to religious because what happened was that Herzlyiya was on a very high level and we came from a family of average means, and the payments were very high. My parents simply couldn't afford it because we were three sisters. I had sisters who were making great progress and there was no way of stopping the payments for them. So I decided to take a new direction. I already had a Haredi sister then, so I went on, forward, and transferred to Shilo. There it was a bit cheaper, that was in tenth grade. I studied there for two years and then I transferred to Jerusalem, which was already a more Haredi school. I'd already become more Haredi. The home became more Haredi, and so I continued to ascend. Everything went step by step. It was very hard for me, because it was living in a dormitory. My parents were not at all in favor of it. My parents got weak knees. With regard

to the Haredi education, they took it hard, because at home we have all the extremes. That's the way it is to this day, some of us are non-religious, some are religious, and some are Haredi. I have a sister in Brooklyn who is a Satmar Hasid. We also have a totally non-religious sister, but she's a non-religious woman who keeps Shabbat and kashrut because she lives with our parents.

The seminar in Jerusalem was like an incubator, I went to a high school on a very high level, and I came out a school and preschool teacher. It's not just a seminar for the newly religious, not at all. It's a Haredi seminar, largely for *mit'hazkim*, but the majority are Haredi girls. Because I already came from a Haredi family, we were in the category of religious-Zionist-Haredim, I didn't have a problem. I had a sister who went to a Beit Ya'akov seminar and I didn't have any problems. It's an Ashkenazi-Sephardi seminar, very mixed. In its education, it's Ashkenazi-Lithuanian. A majority of the girls are Sephardi. I went there until twelfth grade and then I got married. There was also thirteenth and fourteenth grade there, but I didn't continue because I got married. I didn't have the option of continuing, it was far away. During my school years I knew what my direction was, I knew exactly where I was going. I knew that I wasn't looking for Ashkenazi-Ashkenazi or the Sephardi-Sephardi, I was looking for something mixed and that place really supplied that and lived up to my expectations in general.

But, as I told you, I got married. I was matched up with my husband. My sister's sister-in-law introduced us in a very surprising way. I came home for

a Shabbat, and they told me, listen, there's a boy on offer, and I said, listen, I'm here with no clothes, no nothing, you know, you come home from the dorm, you come with one suit. They said, what do you care, wear what you have. And that was it. He was on a track similar to mine. He was religious Zionist, then he was in Daniel Zer's yeshiva, was one of the founders of the yeshiva, *Baruch Ha-Shem*. I always aspired to have a husband who worked and studied, I never thought about a husband who only studied, because I'm a spender, so I need that. From the start I always preferred someone who works and studies, even though at the seminar they were kind of in shock because I was one of the best students there, but that's reality. Right now he's a taxi driver. He was in the diamond business, worked in diamonds and studied in the Or David yeshiva, and he continues to study at Or David every day. He has set times for Torah, attends regular lessons, he studies, prays there, everything. That's what I wanted, like they say, "a wife builds and a wife destroys," that's what I wanted and that's what I built, because if I only wanted money, then....

"Did you consider working?"

I always thought of moving forward, I always have ambitions to make progress, and my way of thinking is of advancing. I always liked the challenge of working with people, whether in Jerusalem when I studied there or anywhere else. In high school and elementary school I always had the thing of leading, of advancing, which is a very important thing. When I arrived in Bnei Brak and lived in the previous apartment, I was involved in

lots of activities, until I came to the matter of the Project. I have an organization of new mothers and I have an organization to distribute [to the poor] bread and fruit and vegetables and all sorts of canned goods. I always looked for ways to help people, especially on the holidays. As hard as things were, I always scoured the earth, like they say, to make us a little incubator, even in Pardes Katz. I always put all my energies into work for society. I have a car, a tiny car that flies to all sorts of places and can get anywhere. I work on the matter of charity.

When we were first married I worked in a number of preschools on a regular basis and I devoted part of the day to charity. It was a very special period. Afterwards, when children began to arrive, *Baruch Ha-Shem*, the matter of work fell to the side a bit and the charity remained.

My daily routine is a matter of telephone calls. I live on the telephone. My telephone rings 24 hours a day. Call me at midnight, you'll find a receptive ear. Anyone who's stuck, who doesn't have any way of getting where they need to go, anyone who's giving birth, the smallest things. People get stuck in parks, at the beach, I go out and get them. I don't have fixed hours, I can be at home for an hour now and then five hours outside. Recently, I've spent most of my time in the city offices, work with the women's club. Let's put it this way, from the point of view of the home and life, at night and in the late afternoon I'm at home, I can divide the time up for you, I'm maybe three hours at home and five outside, let's say. There's a group around here that helps me, I really do have help, without that it would be impossible. I see it

now after I got into all this activity. Once I was also at home, even though I did a lot of charity, but I was principally at home.

“What kind of education did you want for the children?”

I’ll tell you. I arrived in Pardes Katz fifteen years ago with my two daughters. Today I’m a mother of six girls, may they be healthy. There was a preschool and school here called Otzar Le-Hayyim. I didn’t know that there are city preschools run by organizations, by Shas, I was a young mother. How was I supposed to know all those things? Generally, you put your children in the place closest to home. I put the girl in Otzar Le-Hayyim. At first it was wonderful, there were lots of girls, they made a big effort, there was everything. The teachers were exceptional. When we reached elementary school, at some point things began declining. When my eldest daughter was still in first grade it was okay, but then the decline began. I had two girls there, when the second finished kindergarten, before she went to first grade, I said—that’s it.

I was that school’s factotum. I brought my husband to work there as janitor part time. I’d help the teachers and assistants, bring things for them, run errands for them, so that the preschool and school be on a high level, really on the rise. Over the years the rabbi began making it, like the expression says, into a Yemenite club, which meant preschool and schoolteachers, whatever jobs were open, he filled with Yemenites. His children started teaching there and the teachers were beginners. They didn’t give lessons the way you

should. I decided, after extensive conversations with the rabbi, that I was throwing up my hands, leaving. Other parents told me, If you leave, we're coming with you. I organized a flyer about a demonstration and passed it out to the children, I asked parents who really cared about their children to come. We had gotten to the point that there wasn't even toilet paper in the school, the girls had to clean the schoolyard, and the rabbi said: "It's educational." I ask you, what kind of thing is that? It's educational for my daughter to pick up drug addicts' hypodermic needles? That's unacceptable. Bring the school a janitor. Every normal school has a janitor, a nurse, there are minimal things, here there isn't anything, not even a sign. The bathrooms were broken and in ruins. He got support from the city for cleaning, teachers' salaries he got through the Shas organization, Ma'ayan HaTorah, and he was the third, private part. What happened was that he sat on the Bnei Brak city council, he had lots of organizations around him, *talmudei Torah*, yeshivot, we know that every girl who enters his school gets a certain budget, if it's from the Ministry of Education, from the city, we always asked why the girls were always neglected, and the boys, to his credit, their *talmudei Torah* were magnificent. Air conditioners, gardens, playgrounds, they had everything. I sat with him, spoke with him. I told him, what do you want? For our girls to be on the street while the boys sit in *talmudei Torah* and yeshivot? In practice, without the girls you can't do anything with the boys. Anyone who doesn't like it, he says to me, can leave. We threw up our hands. Ten other families, the parents

of thirty girls, came with me. They said, if Esti goes, the school will collapse. We left and began to look around.

We kept the girls at home for half a year. Now think about it, my daughter has to go into first grade. We wanted to transfer to Sha'arei Aharon in Kiryat Herzog, but he [the rabbi who ran Otzar Le-Hayyim] closed the door to us because his daughters study there. It's a completely Sephardi school, once it was mixed, now the Ashkenazi girls from Kiryat Herzog have buses that take them to Masoret Yisrael in Bnei Brak. We went to everyone in the municipality and they closed their doors in our faces. They told us, you're in Otzar HaHayyim, stay there. We told them, there's no education there, no studies, nothing. There was no one to talk to. We talked with the city truant officer, with Rabbi Safra, all the families demonstrated in front of Rabbi Safra's and Rabbi Luria's houses in Bnei Brak, and literally nothing helped. We wrote to the Ministry of Education, Yossi Sarid was minister of education then. I spoke with him, sent him letters, to Zelda Shapira [the school inspector from the Ministry of Education], no results. As if your hands are tied and there's nothing to do. Every district we went to was closed to us because Rabbi Safra sits in the administration. In the municipality, wherever we went was closed. He said, you'll go to the religious Zionists. We told him, we don't have a problem with that, we'll go to the religious Zionists, it will all fall on your head at some point. Make your accounting with God, we're Haredi homes.

The girls stayed home for half a year, they interviewed us for television, and the radio, they tried to help us, but nothing happened. Half a year later we went to Lev Le-Ahim. We said, the girl is sitting at home with her school satchel, crying, she hasn't begun the school year. They said, don't worry, we'll help. In the meantime letters began coming from the city, if you don't put your girls into a school they'll be taken from you, the welfare department will intervene. Lev Le-Ahim told me, Esti, you're the leader of group, the place we have is in Ramat Gan, a school called Netivot Moshe, it's a branch of Horev, on a high level, it's worthwhile, go take a look and try it. I told them, it's far away, we don't have anyone to fund all that. The city had in the meantime suggested putting us in a Shas school in Petach Tikva (Edwin Amar). I told them, if we're not willing to go to Ramat Gan, do you think we'll go to Petach Tikva? Why can't I, as a resident of Pardes Katz, can't have a school close to home? Why do I have to send my girls out at seven in the morning? The problem was that you can't force those institutions to do anything, because Otzar Le-Hayyim is Shas and half private and Sha'arei Aharon is in the Independent system. I told the group, guys, there's no other choice, we'll go to Ramat Gan, we'll have normal lives again.

I went, put my daughters in Ramat Gan with the entire group that remained after some dropped out. Some of the parents had boys who studied with Rabbi Zecharia [from Otzar Le-Hayyim] and he threatened that he would kick out the boys if the girls didn't come back. There were also threats, really disgusting. In the end the girls entered the branch of Horev with a promise

that they would go on to high school and seminar at Lustig. Now they're studying there and enjoying it, *Baruch Ha-Shem*. There are Haredi girls there, *mit'hazkot*, and even non-religious girls who are into religion.

After I was burned in a school called Haredi I say, Haredim need to be God-fearers [the literal meaning of *haredim*], to look to the desecration of God's name that they do with children, to children who have not sinned. My daughters taste the good taste of Haredim and religious girls and non-religious girls who study together, so they should know how to cope, know that in Israel there are all opinions and sectors. There are Ashkenazi and Sephardi girls there. It's Beit Ya'akov, a Haredi branch. The teachers are Ashkenazi-Haredi with a high level, different in a thousand ways from Otzar Le-Hayyim, there it's the pupils but at Horev, the teachers are mature, mothers of children, they have a sense of great responsibility. I warmly recommend the school today. My oldest is in eighth grade today, and then she goes to apply to seminars. There will be entrance exams during Pesach vacation. I want her to go on to Lustig, I don't want her to do the teacher-training program, which is a very low-wage profession today. My ambition is that she have a profession. I want her to have a good background, I want them to have a full *bagrut*. I did a full *bagrut* and I want them to have *bagrut* and a normal profession.

Regarding friends, I don't have a problem. I told you, I have car I do charity work with, I drive them wherever they have to go, wherever their friends are. That's not a problem. I know, I'm in touch with them by phone. I equip each

one with a cell phone, I want them to know that there are all kinds. They have a friend here and a friend there.

In the neighborhood everyone has their own mentality. My mentality is to be open to all sectors. There are those who seek out only Haredim, just to be among themselves. Their way of life is a little different. When their boys reach the age of thirteen and have to enter yeshivot, they try to get them into the most prestigious ones. The yeshiva, the glory and the splendor. I'm exactly the opposite. I also want them to get into all those places, to do everything but also to be a bit open. There are people of all types. I try to sniff it out and get that into them, to show them that even in being religious there are minuses. You think that you do everything, but there are things that your isolation isn't good for. There are people outside that you can help, but you're shutting yourselves off and that's not good. The interior needs to open up a little in order to advance the rest.

I can see women who were closed up in themselves who today, because of the club, accept the women in pants and bare heads who come, and they bring them in and give to them. Let's sit together, come on, come to a Torah class at Or David, listen, we've got a group that recites psalms together, take a step forward, we'll all be together. And there were actually six women who were very closed off and four have already opened up to the population here, which makes a great contribution and also gives them great satisfaction. There are those who are prepared to come here and listen, but when it comes to the children—no way, leave the children out of it. They don't let them open up.

I'm okay, I'm a happy mother of girls. I don't have to worry that they won't be accepted into yeshivot. There are women whose men study, so at the yeshiva they tell them, "How's your wife, and what does she do, she's this and that." I'm not concerned, I don't do anything bad to anyone, all I want to do is do good for everyone, and the fact is that those husbands who study go out with us on trips and tell me, "Good for you for giving us a little relaxation, enjoyment." What did Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav say? "It is a great precept to be happy." I see that on trips, when the men and the boys and the girls, *Baruch Ha-Shem*, are all happy and dancing and they all want these things. There are women who have apprehensions, but all in all even if I had a son who had to get into a yeshiva, everything's written in heaven, even if you're a mother at the height of your energies, open and everything, that shouldn't hurt your son, on the contrary, even in the yeshiva that can help and make a contribution.

Recently I was elected to be a Pardes Katz activist, I'm a member of the neighborhood council. We'll try, little by little, to rehabilitate Pardes Katz. I almost got active in Shas, but the truth is, after I saw the disgusting things that happened with my daughters, I said: if a party like that managed to hurt my children, how can you work together with people who gave you a sour face, to go help a party like that? In the election when Shas received seventeen seats in the Knesset, I was active and worked at the polls and brought people to vote, everything for Shas. But I see that none of Shas's Knesset members went to Shas schools, or send their kids to them, they all

went to Lithuanian [Ashkenazi] yeshivot, so why are you pushing us into Shas [schools]? Push us into the Independent school system. I want to see you help me. I had a problem, I was in distress, and I didn't find anyone willing to listen to me. They want our votes and that's it.

When it came to that, we threw up our hands. We're with Shas, with our teacher and rabbi, Rabbi Ovadiah. That's when it comes to halacha, Torah, kashrut certification, but when it comes to the party, we've left it, we've been very disappointed. If Aryeh Der'i had continued we wouldn't have had a problem, because he was the one who helped us and gave us feedback, go on, keep at it and don't give in. But beyond that I didn't hear anyone say, come, I'll help you. Even their people in the city council slammed their doors in our faces. To this day they say to me, come help us in the elections in Bnei Brak. But as far as I'm concerned it's one big X. I told them, just like you slammed the door in my face and went to the Ashkenazim, today I'm going to slam the door in your faces and let's see how you manage.

My parents always voted Likud and they still vote Likud. In the election of the seventeen seats, my father went with Shas. Today he's gone back to the Likud, he's disappointed. My father immigrated from Turkey in '48, and my mother from Lebanon. My father knew Ladino, my mother didn't, she learned some. I didn't get into that, I was more into being a native. We've gone twice to Turkey. My father took us, showed us, but there isn't a lot to see there, it doesn't interest me. My husband is Iraqi. My father likes Turkey, my father-in-law and mother-in-law, just give them Iraq. They have very warm

sentiments in that direction, but as for us, it doesn't interest us. We need to get acquainted with the land of Israel. I travel here. Especially now with the project, we try to make the entire population here familiar with all of Israel. People here don't know the country, they know the Sheraton [religious] beach, the Ganei Yehoshua Park, and that's it. Now we want them to get out more, we've gotten as far as Tiberias, who could have managed that before? Today they can. Until now they didn't have anyone to turn to, today they come and say to me, we want to go to Rosh HaNikra, so I organized a trip to Rosh HaNikra, to Acre, who ever used to go to those places? To the cable car, to Haifa, maybe they went on a school trip once. Now I send out trips three times a year, during Pesach and Sukkot and in the summer, and it also encourages people to get out on their own, to break out of their routine, to get out of the house. They need someone to lead them. The Haredi sector is a homebody sector. The Haredi person is not someone who aspires to progress, his aspiration is his home, his children. Today, with the club giving and helping them out, that's changing. On the margin of the sign-up paper I write, "friends bring friends." If you bring a friend, she'll get out of her depression and she'll get away from her troubles, everyone has troubles. The motivation here is to wake people up and get them out and show them that there are other things.

What Will Be: Esti's Version

Esti is the force in her life story . She is the agent of its progress and its path, she is the selector, the actor, the critic, and the decision maker. She presents her force as a

personal character trait that has developed over the years. She displays no modesty or underestimation of herself. In her story, external forces that have affected her life are not things she must adjust to, but rather things to stand against. Her family, the different schools she and her daughters have attended, the yeshiva world, the Haredi community (both Ashkenazi and Sephardi), the city government, Shas, the neighborhood and its inhabitants, all appear as sites that she can work in and against. They are open to critique, to conversion, or to change from within. The home she grew up in was not Haredi, but it became more religious under her and her sisters' influence. Nevertheless, Esti is proud of her family's heterogeneity, even today. The non-religious schools she attended were exchanged for Haredi institutions despite her parents' apprehension, because she, in her words, knew what direction she wanted to go in. Even on the Haredi track, Esti does not experience herself as being led, nor does she see the religious world as a place where all is good and right. It was clear to her that she would marry a man who both works and studies, it was clear to her that she wanted to do something, and it was clear to her that she would not give in to the system when it came to the future of her daughters.

After a few years of working for a salary, she expanded her volunteer work. She set up charitable "organizations" that cared for women after childbirth and distributed food to the needy. She sought out avenues for social activism with a potential for improving the lives of those around her. Her freedom is symbolized by the mobile phone and her tiny car, two devices that provide mobility and communication, and which connect her with those interested in her energy. She also equips her daughters with cell phones, to allow them freedom of movement in and outside the neighborhood—so that

they can get together with classmates who live in the next suburb over, so that they'll learn that there "are all kinds."

It's no wonder that the others sought her out to organize the Haredi women's club. It's no wonder that, in a short time, she became a prominent figure in the women's club, and that this activity led her on to the inner sanctums of city hall. Today, as Esti testifies of herself, she spends a great deal of her days in municipal offices on activity concerning the club and the families of its members. "Three hours at home and five outside" is how she divides her time. She depends on her older daughters to take care of their younger sisters so that their mother can keep going indefatigably. Esti's talents as a local leader were recognized, apparently, when she organized the strike over her daughter's school placement. This local rebellion, which crossed the neighborhood's borders and reverberated in the media, pierces the story of her life.

Why Are The Girls Always Neglected?

In the mid-1990s, Esti's daughters were just starting along their paths in school, and she was taking the first steps as the mother of schoolchildren. She sent them where she was told. Her activist nature motivated her to try to improve their school. She enlisted her parents and husband for this work of repair, and quickly became the school's factotum. But internal politics involving the school's principal, the Shas school system, and the municipality left her no room for maneuver. The principal employed only Yemenites, the level of teaching declined, and the school's physical condition deteriorated. Esti tried to speak with the rabbi/principal, but quickly understood that he acted within a tangled web of interests far larger than the school. So she organized a demonstration.

In the Haredi community, organizing a demonstration that is not directed at external forces is not a matter of little consequence. The history of the Haredi sector is laded with demonstrations against government forces perceived as antagonistic or apathetic to Haredi life. A demonstration directed at central figures within the Haredi community, and a struggle that involves cooperation with non-Haredi elements, is hardly common. Esti and the group of parents who stuck with her until the final stages of the fight refused to send their daughters to the local Sephardi Haredi school. She wanted her daughters to attend a school with decent physical conditions and a high academic standards, not too far from home, where there would not be discrimination between Ashkenazi and Sephardi girls. Such conditions are, in her opinion, part of her elementary rights as a citizen, and are obtainable because the government's per-student funding goes with her daughters to whatever school they enroll in. It is obvious to her that interests that don't give priority to the welfare of her daughters are preventing her from receiving these fundamental rights, and she has no intention of giving in. The focal point of the problem is that she has "just daughters," but at the same time this is the source of the power needed to solve it. "Happy is the mother of daughters," Esti says. A mother who has only daughters has more degrees of freedom. Parents with sons have to worry about whether their good name will be sullied by their criticism of or actions against the local establishment. If your name is not clean, your sons will have a hard time getting into prestigious or even good yeshivot. Parents who have only daughters are free of this constraint. Esti, nevertheless, does not intend for her daughters to get less than what boys receive. With all the respect that she has for the rabbi and for the education he provides for boys (she is careful to declare her respect, noting that this is to his "credit"), it is

worthless if he does not do the same for girls. “Without the girls you can’t do anything with the boys,” she says, looking ahead. She knows that if the establishment does not prepare women dedicated to Haredi life, the graduates of the boys’ schools and yeshivot will have no one to marry and with whom to establish a Haredi family.

For half a year Esti kept her girls at home—a third grader and her little sister with her new school bag, waiting to enter first grade. The rabbi-principal of the school they had left kept them out of the neighborhood’s best school, which had a Sephardi minority, because his own daughters studied there.³¹ All other options were also blocked, and rebellious parents felt they were being choked. They demonstrated in front of the homes of the decision makers, asked for the help of public figures who were supposed to help them, and finally even asked for the help of the minister of education, Yossi Sarid, leader of the left-wing, secular Meretz party. Their unusual battle attracted the attention of the secular media—Esti was interviewed on a number of radio stations, by newspapers, and on television, but the pressure from within her community crushed her and the other families and they were forced to accept a compromise. The exceptional and bitter fight that Esti led in the end brought the girls to a distant school whose students are the daughters of Sephardi *mit’hazkim*, a school run by an Ashkenazi organization, with an Ashkenazi teaching staff. The experience of this campaign, along with her family history, reinforced her conviction that Haredim should be open to the outside world, as well as her critical attitude to her own Sephardi Haredi sector and its politics.

Her daughters’ current school, Esti says, has excellent academic standards and opens the girls to the world around them. There they have become acquainted with girls

from all walks of life, and the curriculum will provide them with a full *bagrut* diploma³² and a better profession than teaching.

Academic accreditation is a big issue today in that part of Haredi society that is seeking to blaze a new path that includes professional studies of a richer kind than has traditionally characterized the sector's schools.³³ Girls' schooling has always been easier experimental ground. Esti is happy about that, and seeks to expand that flexibility to boys' education as well. "There are things," she tells her community, "that your isolation isn't good for." A boy who studies in a prestigious yeshiva can also benefit from an open and energetic mother like her, she says, although she also knows that the fact that she did not have to fight for a place for a son in such a yeshiva allowed her more freedom.

Esti looks at her friends in the neighborhood and regrets their seclusion. She believes that her way of doing things doesn't "do anything bad to anyone," so she is not concerned. Little by little, even the husbands (in other words, the more conservative of the men) acknowledge the quality of the activities she organizes, and thank her for the window she's opened for them. Esti seeks to apply the same open approach to her political activity. At one point she "almost got active in Shas," but the way the party's representatives dealt with her daughters' school battle disgusted her. She deciphers their interests as being very narrow, and points to her own and her family's disappointment. Shas leaders enroll their own children in Ashkenazi institutions, while pushing others into the party's own ethnic schools. Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef's stature is unquestioned, but she wants nothing to do with his political representatives (with the exception of Aryeh Der'i). Her parents reverted to the secular, right-wing Likud party that they had supported all their lives, and she herself has put "one big X" on Shas's local activists. She understands

her parents' and her husbands' parents' wistfulness regarding their countries of origin, and she even traveled to Turkey with her parents and visited the city where her father was born. But she would rather see the families in her neighborhood enjoy the cable car at Rosh HaNikra or a visit to Acre. "We need to get acquainted with the Land of Israel," she says. "The motivation here is to wake people up and get them out and show them that there are other things."

Conservatism and Critique

Man wishes to be confirmed in his being by man, and wishes to have a presence in the being of the other. The human person needs confirmation because man as man needs it (Buber 1965, p. 71)

The life stories of two of the most prominent members of the women's club place one woman alongside the other, and one strategy alongside another. In the same club, around the same table, Leah and Esti might look very similar. But this similarity, and the basis of the cooperation between them, exists together with great differences that have roots in their pasts, fundamental differences growing out of their current experience, and different views of the future they have in mind for themselves and their families. Placing their lives side by side offers a dense portrait containing all components of the saga of religious, social, ethnic, and gender relations of Israeli society.

Leah comes from a family that sought to conduct a religious life after moving from North Africa to Haifa. Israel offered very narrow boundaries within which these choice could be exercised. The family's insistence on preserving its religious, non-Zionist lifestyle enabled it to step into the next generation with the help of an Ashkenazi Haredi

“rescue mission.” An Ashkenazi man helped Leah’s father cross the boundaries of his place of residence and the schools available there, and paved a road for the families daughters and sons into boarding schools for Sephardi youth established by Ashkenazi Haredim.

The progress of Leah’s life has thus been entirely Haredi. She is the second daughter of a Haredi family, now raising the family’s third generation in Israel. The agents of her upbringing were her Mizrahi immigrant parents and her Ashkenazi teachers. The agents of her daughters’ upbringing are Ashkenazi and Sephardi teachers and parents who grew up as Mizrahi Haredim in Israel. This blend creates a sense of belonging in Israel, as a place and as a society, alongside a critical reading of the country from her Haredi and Sephardi point of view. Her Haredi side accepts the cultural hierarchy in which Ashkenazi Haredim are more prestigious, and which labels the Israeli state as bad for Haredim. Her Sephardi side critiques the Ashkenazi-Haredi hegemony and misses the old Israel. An attempt to pinpoint the areas of Leah’s longings reveals that she would like to live in a Haredi world devoid of ethnicity. She dreams of one big Beit Ya’akov school whose students are Israeli. This fantasy of the future also has roots in her longings, in this case her childhood memories of a mixed, tolerant neighborhood whose residents treated each other politely and with mutual respect. But now, faced with what she seems from the window of her renovated apartment, in the face of the Haredi world’s internal politics, which exiled her from her home, she prefers to shut herself off. She wants to shut herself up within her ethnic camp and send her daughter to study at a Sephardi school. She forbids her children to go downstairs to play with children from the neighborhood, and dreams of a place where she could drop in on her neighbor on a Friday evening. She is

suspicious of all Israeli governments, as well as of the citizens who fight them (like Viki Kanfo). Leah moves between her living room and her kitchen, between the nearby Haredi women's club and Bnei Brak, between old Haifa and the yet unfounded Beit Ya'akov school where there is no ethnic discrimination. She is not entirely at home anywhere, and her sense of power and of civil change is thus limited.

Esti, in contrast, symbolizes the other side of the saga. She belongs to one of the four new forces that joined the Haredi camp at the end of the last century: Haredi immigrants from English-speaking countries, women, and Sephardi and Ashkenazi *hozerim be-teshuva*. All four of these forces have been engines of change in the community. Each has brought the Haredi world new energies and directions, and all have contributed to the creation of a more heterogeneous Haredi community.

Esti grew up in a Tel Aviv neighborhood. Her parents acceded to the general, normative Israeli culture of the city's margins and their children followed that culture's educational path: they attended the neighborhood elementary school and an integrated junior high school that required them to travel to the northern part of the city. This path scattered her siblings all over the religious map, and some of them became traditional but non-religious Mizrahi Israelis who observe the Sabbath, while another became a member of the Ashkenazi Satmar Hasidic community in Brooklyn. Esti's memory does not register this heterogeneity as the chance result of the family being buffeted by a range of influences; she rather sees it as a process of choice. She depicts her movement from a neighborhood school to one in upper-middle class north Tel Aviv, from a Sephardi-Haredi seminary in Bat Yam to a seminar in Jerusalem, between the options of marriage to a full-time Torah scholar or to a man who both works and studies, as choices she made

independently and consciously. The fundamental experience of her life is a sense of belonging to the place she lives and knowledge that such belonging gives her rights—whether it is belonging to a community, her city, her country. These rights motivate her to act—both to contribute, and to ensure that she receives the things to which she is entitled. Esti seeks to live as an Israeli citizen, without being required to pass value-laden entrance exams—neither those of the non-religious hegemony and those of Haredi hegemony. Neither government ministries, the corridors of city hall, or media news rooms are off limits for her, and she is prepared to form ad hoc coalitions with all of them, as needed. Rosh HaNikra, the Ashdod beach, Acre, and Mini-Israel are all on her map, and she wants to put them on the maps of Haredi families who have heretofore been restricted to narrow territories. Her charismatic personality and her active nature have made her into a local leader, and that is how she experiences herself. The sociopolitical context in which she has to function is lucid for her and she has no apprehensions about working within it. Her passage among different sectors has equipped her with a critical view of all of them, but also appreciation. She wishes to grant these assets to all camps, out of sense of belonging to all of them.

Martin Buber writes, in the article from which the epigraph to this section is taken, that the primal human experience is the desire to be confirmed by the other. The desire to be present in the being of another person exists on the socio-cultural level as well. In Leah's view, she and those close to her have but a limited ability to be present, and she fights to be present. Leah represents a strategy of relative introversion that confirms her social I within; Esti chooses a strategy of contact and dialogue in order to disseminate that I through contact with "others."

These two individual cases were molded within the local context and the possibilities offered by the intersection of Mizrahiyut, religion, and gender. Leah chooses to live according to the classic Ashkenazi-Haredi model, based on sectarianism. Esti chooses the new Israeli Haredi model, which draws its force from the concept of citizenship.

5. To Go to the Limit, To Get Up And Leave, To Fall And Get Up Again, And Maybe Finally Settle Down: Parallel Biographies And The Insights They Produce

A linear life process, which proceeds from one stage to another in growth and development, ensures a life story that is normative, intelligible, and valued. The application of this paradigm to characterize modern, educated, Western, white narratives is incomplete and insufficient. The sayings “to go from one success to another” and “each journey begins with a first step” were not born in modern Europe. The image of life as a road is one that crosses cultures and eras. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that life path pedagogy belongs to the normative and makes the normative. It is appropriate for the disciplined and it disciplines them.

Aya and Bracha decided to go to the limit. They subordinated themselves to the paths that secular and religious societies marked out for them as main roads. In terms of profit and loss, an accounting that is impossible yet unavoidable, it would seem that Bracha’s road has served her better. Her road is better fitted to the context of her life. She encountered obstacles along the way, but she is already beyond them. She does not belong to the Sephardi Haredi elite; she is not a teacher in a seminar, nor does she have some other prestigious profession. But her husband still studies in a *kolel*, and her

curriculum vitae includes her years as a counselor at the Or Hayyim seminar. Bracha construes her life within the community to which she belongs, and her community views her as a welcome member.

Aya sought to reach the end of a road with far more potholes. Her journey from her single-mother home in Pardes Katz to a kibbutz in the south, significant army service, and college studies demanded much more discipline and adjustment, and made it more difficult for her to finish successfully. Yet she is still fighting and it looks as if she will complete her undergraduate studies one way or another. She has paid high tolls. They encompass her constitution as a female-ethnic subject, her alienation from the neighborhood, her social isolation, and the intra-family barriers she must erect and dismantle. The critical stance she has taken towards her home, kibbutz society, and the hegemonic culture, as well as her appreciation of them, have fashioned complex and educated woman who has almost gotten past the roadblock.

“Almost” is the heart of the matter. It indicates the huge force of the social order and its implications for the individual. The social order leaves Aya on the margins. She remains a young, single Mizrahi woman, of limited economic means, whose academic education does not currently allow her to gain a valued profession. On the personal level she is alone, in constant struggle. She judges herself severely, according to criteria that have not been adjusted to the context of her life. Would she want to exchange her biography for Bracha’s? The question is hypothetical but not irrelevant. We may presume that, after all her efforts not to be Bracha, Aya’s answer would be no, or that she would even negate the question. From the point of view of the social regime and its study, juxtaposing a life lived within the bounds of the Mizrahi community with one that seeks

to break down ethnic and class barriers, the question is valid and persistent. The answers to this question depend on political-cultural strategies.

The life stories of Eveline and Sigalit emphasize the pitfalls along the road. Their biographies tell of young women who did not challenge the path offered them, and who did not stray far from it. Eveline and Sigalit were flung from one side to another to different extents along the way, but they continue to stride along the road. They fall and get up again. They do not scale great heights, but they make their way past not insignificant barriers.

Eveline chose to remain within the family that was the source of some of her difficulties, but which also defends her from other hardships. She criticizes her mother's pedagogy, but allows her to continue to instill it in her daughters. She gripes about the discipline in her girlhood home, but misses the days when children respected their parents. From the view of social change and critique, Eveline submits to the conservative matriarchy above her and is crushed by her daughters' generation below her. Her surrender to these guideposts have left her on the road with very little strength and very little self-esteem.

Sigalit chose to distance herself from her original family and created a new family for herself, a small family consisting of her and her two children, which would try to do things differently. Despite stumbling off the reasonable path, including only a most partial education, marriage at a young age to a drug addict, poverty and a difficult divorce, she does not give up. Sigalit searched for new tools and new pedagogies to decode her life and to bring up her children and herself. She did not look for easy

solutions, did not flee into religion, nor did she give up having her own family. Like her own mother in her time, she heads her family, and it may well be that a view from the outside would place her family at the same location as her mother's. Yet Sigalit's critical reflexivity seems to mark something that does not long for the values of her mother's home and does not submit to the patriarchy (her mother, aunt, and sisters), even though she craves its love. She seems to have decided to try to create another source of love, one that will nourish her and her children.

I placed Sarit and Lydia in the ambiguous category of "to get up and leave." These two women do not accept the bounds of the normative road. Instead, they live on their own zigzag path that meets up and then departs from the normative road. The educators and educating institutions in their lives (parents, teachers, school, the army) both helped and hindered them along their meandering way. They did not see the destination on offer at the end of the road as "worth the effort." They reached interim stations along the path, achievements that kept them on course: Lydia remained in the non-religious Mizrahi world, in the lower-middle class, in a rented apartment in Bnei Brak; Sarit remained in the Sephardi-Haredi community, in a rented apartment with a husband whose status within the community is not the highest, but whose abilities enable them to maneuver within and outside the community. Both women refused to pay the full toll demanded of those who walk the main road. Their profit-loss statement shows that, with regard to the social order, the partial payments they have made shut them into the road, within social strictures that are little different from what their parents faced. On the individual level, they do not judge themselves severely. They express neither a sweeping

sense of victory, nor a sense of defeat. Their social critique is moderate and aimed at a short range—Lydia aims it at her Mizrahi-Haredi neighbors, Sarit critiques her won Haredi community, against both Ashkenazi favoritism and the corruption of the Shas educational system.

If each of us had a parallel self, a kind of test case of our own, we could learn some fundamental things about our position on the social map.

The idea of the “sister biography” that has structured these life stories sought to be a method that would reveal the map of the social order with which the protagonists of these life stories worked. Beyond the insights that emerged in each of the interim summaries, one clear generalization can be made from all of them: most of the women’s parents did not make any distinction between secular, state-religious, or even Haredi education. Their economic status as immigrants, their lack of familiarity with the dominant discourse, and their dependence on intermediaries in dealing with the larger society around them made the character of the education they chose for their children a marginal matter. Their primary concern was that their children be enrolled in an educational framework of some sort. Having a framework that would stand between the young girl and the street was their central concern, while the nature of the education that that framework offered was not part of the computation. As long as it was a Jewish school in the state of Israel, the parents assumed, it must be okay. The parents, in no few cases the mothers in particular, were locked in a battle for economic survival. They wanted their children to be cared for during their work hours. It was relatively easy to sign them up and transfer them between a secular state school, a religious Zionist state-

religious school, and a Haredi school. The only exceptions are the families that were firmly Haredi to begin with. The life stories of the protagonists of this chapter show how easy it was to coast from one system to another. Yet, despite the ostensibly fundamental differences between these frameworks, these girls were routed in similar directions—most of them into sewing, a few into graphics at a basic level. A small number (only one of the ten women interviewed) enrolled in an academic track leading to teacher training. The fact that they met in the secretarial course at the local community center, each so different from the other, unraveled through the train of their lives. This unraveling enables a better understanding of the social, cultural, and political context that made it possible for these different life courses to link one to another.

Looking ahead, it is clear that none of these women will be complacent about their own children's educational paths. Even if they have not acquired great social power and have not broken through the neighborhood's borders, all are aware that the choice of a pedagogical path for their children is critical, and each woman, it seems, will seek to exercise her influence, in accordance with her power and her location.

II. BOARDING SCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE LIVES OF MIZRAHI GIRLS

Having presented the life stories of four pairs of Pardes Katz women, I now offer a sociological biography of an educational institution that figures in many of the women's lives. Here is the life story of the Or Hayyim boarding school for girls.

The novels I read as a teenager placed their protagonists in an environment free of home and of parents. The characters were kibbutz children, children in agricultural

boarding schools, or young members of the Palmach, the elite military force of pre-state Israel. Likewise, the heroes of translated novels from other countries belonged to youthful bands that met secretly and set out on long journeys.

On the holiday of Shavu'ot I often joined my father, who as a driver and tour guide would accompany visitors to Hadasim, a prestigious WIZO boarding school in the Sharon Plain, north of Tel Aviv. Standing flush with his long legs and attentive to his explanations, I looked jealously at the children who roared on platforms pulled by tractors, dressed in white, their heads crowned with wreaths of flowers and their feet swinging freely off the edge of the wagon. These were children whose parents were divorced, or whose parents lived outside Israel. There were a few new immigrants, and other children from homes where something wasn't working out.

As a child, I received the message that a worthy childhood, in which one received commendable values, was one spent far from family and home. The message came from a number of directions. In real life, I tasted this kind of living on scout trips and work camps at kibbutzim, and heard first-hand accounts from some friends who spent part of their summers in boarding schools. During the few days we were involved in such activities, we could pretend that we were children from books, living in a world divided into smaller and older children, instead of families. We were children who controlled the space around them and their time, who built themselves alternative homes on trees or in caves (or, in our case, tents), and turned night into day.

At Tel Aviv University's school of education, my teachers Yitzhak Kashti and Mordecai Arieli taught me that Israeli boarding schools are part of the modern Zionist project. These two scholars placed the phenomenon in the context of Communist and

English education, and threw water on the fantasy world of my childhood boarding school books. The remainder of my sympathy for this separate children's world was dissolved by my husband, a kibbutz native who had not one positive thing to say about having grown up in a children's house, separate from his parents.

The history of boarding school education in Israel is interwoven with a variety of projects, but all of them have their roots in immigration. Most of the students at these schools were immigrants children without parents or other adult relatives, and the goal was to reeducate them. While the proportion of children educated in boarding schools in the former Soviet Union was approximately two percent at the beginning of the 1990s, in Israel at this same time, between 15 and 20 percent of school-age children were enrolled in boarding schools, as there had been in previous years. From its inception, the Israeli public sphere had power, as well as the urgent need to absorb and naturalize masses of immigrants into the ethos of the Jewish state. This need took precedence over the family and the home, which were depicted as old-fashioned and inadequate to the task at hand—a task best accomplished by the boarding school and kibbutz children's house. The need to become local, alongside the very real difficulties faced by immigrants, made the boarding school an efficient mode of education. Enrolled in these institutions, side by side, were children whose parents chose this form of education, children whose parents had a difficult time resisting it, and children who had no parents. These three categories apply to the Mizrahi population as well—some chose to send their children to boarding schools, and others were compelled or urged to do so. Some parents presumed that their children could receive a good education and learn proper behavior in a total educational framework that detached them from the future that awaited them if they were to remain in

the environment around their homes. The boarding school offered a new place, naturalization in the new country, escape from a disadvantaged neighborhood or small town on the country's periphery, and an ostensibly sure road to the country's geographical and sociological center. Boarding schools also offered children a way out of their crowded apartments and into open spaces and "nature."³⁴

Within the range of Israeli boarding school education, boarding schools for Mizrahim have their own special character. As the number of Mizrahi children attending boarding schools grew, so did their dissimilarity from the non-Mizrahim in the schools. In the socialist-kibbutz educational enterprise, Youth Societies were designed for non-kibbutz-born Mizrahi youth, like Aya. In the secular public system, they were disproportionately represented in special education classes, or sent to boarding schools run by Youth Aliya or institutions for children with special needs and youth at risk. Loyal to the enlightenment model, the secular system also established a couple of boarding schools for gifted Mizrahi children, detaching them from their families and culture.

Religious Zionist and Haredi boarding schools sought to save Mizrahi children from the secularism of Ashkenazi-dominated public education. The administrators of this re-education project were largely Ashkenazi, and the ideal model they worked within was fashioned far from the life experience of the Sephardi children they educated. The result was a situation in which a specific population was recognized as being different, separate, "with its own unique needs," at the same time that general educational system (beyond certain specific adjustments) limited and disciplined this otherness.

A Lithuanian *rabbanit* who worked for 40 years as a key figure in the administration of the Or Hayyim boarding school in Bnei Brak described this duality:

“We were an avant-garde, this institution saved Sephardi Jewry, trained a cadre of God-fearing women who established Sephardi Haredi homes. We held them above water until they reached a safe shore. We knew how to respect their tradition and halacha, but on the institutional level everything was conducted and to this day is conducted in the Lithuanian fashion.”

1. Or Hayyim—A Unique As Well As Representative Example

The Or Hayyim institutions are a characteristic—but also exceptional—example of boarding school education for Mizrahi children.³⁵ Bracha, Sarit, Rachel, and other women I interviewed attended Or Hayyim schools. Or Hayyim’s history from the early 1950s to this day is unique, but it is also representative of the education of Mizrahi children, and in particular of Haredi boarding school education for Sephardi girls.

The Or Hayyim story has one central hero: Rabbi Moshe Pardo, a textile merchant of Turkish extraction who owned a store in southern Tel Aviv.³⁶ He held afternoon and evening prayer services each day in his store, and between the two services Rabbi Rafael Hillel offered a Torah lesson. Once the worshippers did not have the required ten men for a prayer quorum and called in a passing young Haredi man. The young man had just visited the nearby draft office to renew his exemption, as a full-time Torah scholar, from military service. Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Pardo debated the visitor’s ethnicity. Rabbi Hillel thought he was Sephardi:

I saw how, before the prayers, you looked behind you and made a gesture of invitation, in keeping with what the Ben Ish Hai [a leading Sephardi halachic authority] wrote on the Beshalach portion of the Torah, to show that we all

accept the yoke of heaven with love and amity and sanction each other to offer our devotions to our Creator in good spirit. And during the prayers you stand with your head bowed, your left hand on your heart and your right hand on your left, the thumbs folded onto the palms, as the Ben Ish Hai wrote on the Yitro portion—and I knew that you were Sephardi (Wallach 2002, p. 10).

Rabbi Pardo thought he was Ashkenazi because he wore a beard. They asked him where he studied and he said at the Ponivetz Yeshiva—the most prestigious Lithuanian Ashkenazi yeshiva, located in Bnei Brak. Rabbi Pardo was about to celebrate victory, but then Rabbi Hillel asked him what his origins were and the young man, whose name was Ben-David, said that his parents had come from Iran. Rabbi Pardo asked him: “Then why aren’t you studying at the Porat Yosef Yeshiva, which was founded by the Ben Ish Hai?” The young man replied: “It is the same Torah.” This chance encounter, which Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Pardo described as a “summons,” brought the three men’s lives together and was the moment at which Or Hayyim was born.

The young Sephardi man returned to Rabbi Pardo’s store some time later to announce his wedding. But he qualified his joyful announcement with the sorrow he felt with regard to his Sephardi Haredi friends:

They have difficulty finding young women prepared to build a home of Torah in sacrifice and devotion, and willingness to bear the burden of allowing their husband to ascend in Torah. He spoke about Mizrahi girls who graduate from a Beit Ya’akov elementary school in outlying cities and have no place to continue their studies as their heart directs. With no other choice available to them, they go on to high school in compromising [religious Zionist] high

schools, and all the education they received dissolves in mixed-sex, substandard society.

The young Torah scholar informed Rabbi Pardo that, at the instructions of the Hazon Ish, (Rabbi Abraham Isaiah Karelitz, the leading Ashkenazi Haredi halachic authority of the time), he had taken upon himself to look after four girls who had come from Tiberias to Bnei Brak to study at the Wolf seminar. Word that four Sephardi girls were studying in Bnei Brak had drawn other girls, and now he was looking after sixteen girls. He had to rent apartments for them, pay their tuition, and provide them with board and clothing. Rabbi Pardo decided to help the young man.

It was a turning point in Rabbi Pardo's life. Step by step, he embarked on an enterprise of huge proportions. When he died, on the eleventh of the Jewish month of Adar in 1996, the textile merchant left behind kingdoms of education and study. The Or Hayyim boarding school for girls, which he founded to educate girls to be fitting wives for Torah scholars, produced more graduates than there were men who wanted them. So the rabbi founded Or Ha-Torah, a yeshiva that would produce husbands for the girls of Or Hayyim. This led to the need for a *kolel*, a yeshiva for married men, and a Talmud Torah, called Torah Temima, to provide a Haredi elementary school education for the sons of these families. When the boys grew up they needed a school to bridge between the Talmud Torah and the higher yeshiva, so Rabbi Pardo closed the circle by founding the Tiferet Moshe lower (high school) yeshiva. All these institutions included student dormitories, libraries, synagogues, a medical and dental clinic, as well as the construction of housing projects, the establishment of a yeshiva for *hozrim be-teshuva*, and other institutions. Rabbi Pardo traveled the world, especially to Sephardi communities in South

America, in order to raise money for his projects. He drew in enthusiastic and distinguished donors who bought up property in Bnei Brak for the establishment of school compounds and housing. After his death, the street in the Or Hayyim neighborhood in Bnei Brak on which most of his institutions were located was named after him.

Even though he was involved in the establishment of so many institutions, the girls' boarding school remained the one closest to his heart, the place identified with him and with which he identified in particular. Two apartments he rented in 1952, with the help of a founding donation of a single Israeli lira by the Hazon Ish himself, had been the foundation of the school that hundreds of girls now attend each year. Rabbi Pardo at first called the school Orah Hayyim, the name of the first section of the great collection of Jewish law, the *Shulchan Aruch*. But when he spoke to Rabbi Rafael Abu about his project, the latter heard "Or Hayyim," the pen name of Rabbi Hayyim Ben-Atar,³⁷ and the name stuck. Since, in any case, everyone pronounces the school's name with an Ashkenazi accent, the difference between the two names is barely noticeable and both names remain in use.

Rabbi Pardo's biography places in the center the man and the objects of his proudest achievement—Mizrahi girls. Between them, many men appear—donors, developers, builders, Rabbi Pardo's assistants, and important rabbis who granted their spiritual endorsement. There are virtually no references to women, even though it is women who took the project from theory into practice. Teachers, counselors, principals, and graduates who came back to work at the institution do not get mentioned, with two exceptions: Mrs. Masouda Cohen, who was the first principal of the girls' school and

who also founded the non-boarding girls' school, and Mrs. Miriam Ben-Shimon, who worked as a counselor and a teacher and is the high school's current principal. Both of them are Mizrahi women. The purpose of the non-boarding school is to separate girls who come from Haredi homes from the girls in the boarding school, most of whom grew up in other kinds of homes—non-Haredi religious, traditional, or even non-religious. Also absent from this central educational enterprise—not only their names, but their involvement—are Sephardi spiritual shepherds. All the rabbis mentioned in the biography as guides and endorsers of the project are Ashkenazi, and most are Lithuanian.

2. To Leave Home In Order To Establish A Home

I raised the issue of the place Ashkenazim play in the reorganization of the Sephardi Haredi community, as well as questions regarding Or Hayyim itself, with the school's former principal, who agreed to meet with me at her home but insisted that her name not be mentioned. We met after a number of postponements, and her condition was that I first read Moshe Pardo's biography.

She lives in the center of Bnei Brak, on a narrow side street branching off the main road, lined on either side with housing projects built in the 1950s by donors to Ponivetz Yeshiva. In the midst of the buildings lies a small garden that could be a wonderful spot were it not neglected. The apartment itself is spare and modest. The *rabbanit*, who came to Israel in 1946, presents herself as an autodidact. She has a fine command of Hebrew, which she speaks with a native Israeli accent, acquired at the high school she attended in Lithuania. She began working at Or Hayyim in 1960 and quickly advanced to a senior position. Today, retired, she still teaches a few classes at the seminar. We sit in her living room, at the large dining room table that stands at the center

of Haredi living rooms. Behind my back is a bookcase full of sacred works, and facing me is the “secular” bookcase, which holds a few volumes of an encyclopedia, several volumes of Simon Dubnov’s *History of the Jewish People*, student papers, and miscellaneous binders.

With regard to the connection between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, it wasn’t all that significant. True, this enterprise saved Sephardi Jewry, but back then we didn’t educate just Sephardi girls. In previous years, about a third of the girls in each class were Ashkenazi. They came here from farming villages in the Negev associated with Poalei Agudat Yisrael [a Haredi labor party], from Safed, from Tiberias, from Mt. Meron, and they didn’t want to go to the Wolf seminar. Everyone knew that the Or Hayyim boarding school was nicer, unpretentious, like a family. We even had the daughters of Hasidic rabbis who studied and lived with us. Yes, yes, those were days when girls [with Ashkenazi names like] Razeleh and Faygeleh frequented Or Hayyim.

The *rabbanit* found a graduating class picture from 1968, and we counted: Friedman, Greenbaum, another Friedman, Goldberg—all Ashkenazi names. Indeed, about a third of the graduates were Ashkenazi. She continues:

Today there aren’t any more Ashkenazi girls. The young teachers that get hired are for the most part Sephardi, and ten-fifteen years from now not a single Ashkenazi teacher will remain at Or Hayyim. Once they were a large majority. Just a few Sephardi women taught in the vocational track for sewing and fashion. Many were social counselors, the big sisters of students,

themselves graduates of the school. As you read in the book, there was a Sephardi principal, and today as well the high school is headed by Rabbi Atias. But it's undeniable that the tone and the philosophy is Lithuanian. Lithuanian Jewry is devoted to Sephardi Jewry. Rabbi Liba, who taught Jewish law and who to this day remains an authority on this subject, was an expert in the halacha of Sephardi Jewry. Everyone worked hard to ensure that the tradition would continue. But in everything connected to the running of the institution itself, rulings were made in accordance with the Hazon Ish. The institution's generator, which provided electricity on the Sabbath and holidays³⁸ was ready in the bomb shelter before there was money to build a dining hall. A newspaper was posted daily on the walls of the school. It wasn't *Mi-Yom LeYom* [the Shas newspaper] and not *Ha-Modi'a* [the newspaper of the Hasidim of the Agudat Yisrael party]. It was *Yated Ne'eman* [the newspaper of the Lithuanian Degel Ha-Torah party]. The girls are asked not to bring Shas into the school and not to be involved in politics. Sometimes something gets stuck on their school bags or shirts, a "He [Der'i] is innocent" or something else, but we don't allow them to go around like that. Of course, before elections, or when he went to jail, there has been more turmoil, but as far as the institution is concerned it has no place. I personally listen to cassette tapes by Amnon Yitzhak and all the other "stars," after all I have to know where they're coming from, what they listen to.

It's not the old generation. Today we accept into the boarding school girls from very difficult homes. We have a battery of social workers. Once the

teacher was the social worker. Today we have very difficult cases. It's impossible to control what goes on outside and it gets inside. Once the mailman would bring a sack of letters to the boarding school and leave with a sack of letters. Today his sack is empty. Every girl has a cell phone. We don't allow them to bring them into the school, but in the dormitory you can't control it. Do I know who they talk to? What they hear? A lot of times they go home and it's hard for them to come back. Many of them have televisions at home, there are members of the family who are not observant, it's very hard for them. But if they hold out until eleventh grade, which is the transition stage, if they get through that, they shape up and get stronger, and there's no end to success stories. We don't expel any girl without a rabbinical ruling, after all, it's a matter of saving souls. Not us. We don't just kick a girl out.

The *rabbanit* is pleased with my report of what I heard in my interviews. She is interested in how the story is told from their side, although she thinks they exaggerated somewhat in their descriptions of the dress code.

A men's collar? No, I don't remember that they were so strict. It's true, the girls in the Haredi seminars in Bnei Brak, the Ashkenazi seminars, only wear men's collars to school. That's not the case with us, today they can wear teeshirts. If a girl wears a teeshirt that's too tight, we ask her to go up to her room and change, because this isn't the beach. With regard to what they told you about skirt lengths, that they should not be too short and not too long, today they wear long skirts that literally sweep the floor, pretty soon we'll

have to fire the cleaning staff. No one says anything to them about it. Here we threw up our hands, it's not the same generation, not the same Hebrew, not the same level. What I hear, what I read, well, it's better not to talk about it.

They tell you that they sometimes felt like they were in jail. Yes, that's right, we need to wield a strong hand, otherwise it's impossible, there's no other way. Every third Shabbat they go home, but they are required to stay for Yom Kippur, the first candle of Hannukah they're in the dormitory, for the reading of the book of Esther on Purim, they're in the dormitory. On that we don't compromise. You know what? There are women who to this day come to hear *Ne'ilah* [the final prayer service] of Yom Kippur in the school. There's a story about a very special counselor we had; when summer vacation came, her pupils refused to go home. Rabbi Pardo used to come by to make sure everything was locked and he found them in their commons room, which was called the "tree room." They begged to stay, and in fact they took mattresses down to that room and stayed together for three more days. So there are also cases in which the girls could go and didn't. Many girls have been saved by that distance from the home, and many loved dormitory life. Today people don't want to send their children to boarding schools. No boarding school can give what they have in today's homes. That's why we set up the non-boarding program. It's outside the compound, it's for girls whose homes are already Haredi, and there's one within the compound, for girls who come from the entire Tel Aviv area and don't want to sleep here. Alongside that, we also have girls from Bnei Brak who come to the boarding school, and they are

Haredi girls. Why? Because their mothers told them how much fun the dormitory was and they also want it. In principle, we work with difficult communities. True, it was that way before, too, in the fifties and sixties the home situations were even worse, but there was innocence, there was delicacy, there wasn't insolence and the influence of television. So the girls were of a different kind. Do you know what? Everyone was different then, weren't they?

When I ask the *rabbanit* about the justification for having separate academic and vocational tracks in the school, and the quality of the programs, I learn that the vocational track still trains pupils in sewing and to become “handicrafts” teachers. This despite the fact that she knows that there is no demand for these professions: “Who orders clothes today? Who has the patience to go to a seamstress; another measurement and another measurement, a seam like this, a different seam. You go into a store and buy ready-made. It's fast and it's cheap.” The girls directed into the vocational track are girls whose academic achievements are relatively low—which means that what Sarit told me about selection for the two tracks is not true. The academic track offers only teacher training and there are no plans at the moment to offer other programs. Women from all over the country enroll in the seminar (grades thirteen and fourteen). Some of them attended Beit Ya'akov schools (in Ashdod, Ra'anana, and Betar Elit, for example) that prepare students for *bagrut* exams. More conservative institutions, which are also labeled as elitist and Ashkenazi, do not offer a *bagrut* program, so as not to encourage graduates to go to college. What my interviewees called “*bagrut*” were official examinations prepared by the Ministry of Education. The *rabbanit* says of these: “They are very difficult exams

written in the Ministry of Education in the Independent Education Division. Besides that, graduates of Haredi seminars can receive a B.A. through in-service training programs for teachers, while they are working as teachers.”

I ask to see the booklet that lists the requirements teachers must meet to receive their undergraduate degree. It turns out that the program offers a large number of classes in science, mathematics, English, and behavioral sciences. Teachers can take courses that qualify them for higher wage levels, equivalent to those enjoyed by teachers who have a B.A. (the term used is “B.A. equivalent”). Hardly any of the teachers of these courses have PhDs, but, for example, one of the continuing education centers is associated with the Hebrew University. She shows me seminar paper submitted by one Or Hayyim teacher who is taking a course on the Holocaust. The evaluation of the work was written on Hebrew University letterhead, and the *rabbanit* was certain that the teacher had received a B.A. from that institution. Like my interviewees, she is not fastidious when it comes to academic accreditation and has no qualms about the position that girls should not do a full *bagrut* program so that they will not go to university. She declares proudly that Haredi teachers can receive a college degree.

The meeting between us, put off so many times, goes on longer than planned. The *rabbanit* prepares me a glass of chamomile tea and tells me a little about her experiences as a refugee girl during World War II. I sense that she would gladly have me stay longer. She writes down the names of my books, in the hope that she will manage to find copies. When we parted, she said she would like to read the finished product of my research and asked that her name not be mentioned.

At home I reread sections from the last part of Rabbi Pardo's biography— testimonies from students, teachers, rabbis, assistants, and donors that supplement the life story of Or Hayyim's founder. The florid Haredi style does not surprise me. I have learned to read it and through it. One can enlist all the critical faculties required for a survey of any literary material and add to it the prism of patron-client relations between the teachers and pupils. Shas's El Ha-Ma'ayan school system, a fundamental component of that party's great revolution, aims at the same fragile point at which these patron-client relationships were molded. Because at Shas institutions, Mizrahim seek to educate themselves, by themselves.

Nevertheless, before embarking on my critique, I wish to address the primacy and centrality of this Lithuanian enterprise in the current history of Sephardi Haredi Jewry. I will point to the ethnic background to the power relations between Haredi groups on the development of ambiguous relations between the strong and the weak, and the conditions required for a change in those relations.³⁹ I will do all this in the context of the specific case of boarding school education that Or Hayyim offers to girls and women.

The aggregate memories of my interviewees brought together state, state-religious, and Haredi boarding schools, as well as other kinds of schools. The state-religious schools were neighborhood schools, and most of the women I spoke to abandoned them. Some recalled beatings and insults and others a low academic level. For some, like Lydia and Aya, the experience led them to non-religious state schools, while others, like Sarit and Bracha, went on to Haredi schools. None of them completed their education in the state-religious system.

In contrast, all the women who attended secular state schools in Pardes Katz remember them favorably. They recall them as intimate places where they received support and help in their studies. At that time, Haredi schools accepted both Ashkenazim and Sephardim, but my interviewees remember favoritism and bias in favor of Ashkenazi girls. Teachers called on them more in class and gave them the roles in school plays. The Sephardi girls felt social alienation. Some of them hint at a behavioral-cultural gap. The talk is not the same talk, the laugh not the same laugh, interests and subjects of conversation differ. Moving into the Or Hayyim boarding school, despite the difficulties the transition brought with it, marked, in a sense, a homecoming. The girls left their real homes for another socio-cultural home. This home had a Sephardi father, and his first wife, Zelda, is described as a kind of great mother. The way this father is portrayed in the testimonies that appear in Rabbi Pardo's biography matches the standard expectations of a patriarch: support, protection, strictness, and reward—he enforced cleanliness, modest behavior, offered financial support to those in need, helped pay for his girls' weddings and find them apartments, saw the big picture and remembered the details. He rewarded those who excelled, and his door was always open to any girl who wanted to confide in him or ask for help. He called all his pupils "my daughters" and they called him Father Pardo.

When the first pupils began to get married, Rabbi Moshe bought a thick ledger and inscribed the name of each pupil who was rewarded with being able to build a home. He was extremely fond of this ledger and he would amuse himself with it and find there comfort in difficult times.... When he met with donors, he would open it, leaf through it, tarry over one name and

another. This one is from a poor village, this one is an orphan, this one is the daughter of invalid parents, this one is from a non-religious family. And today: what wonderful girls, what families they have established! Here I attended a circumcision, here they brought a son for his first haircut, and I tested this son in his knowledge of the Torah. And his face would shine: “Believe me,” he exclaimed warmly, “how can you compare the tribulations of raising children to the joy of grandchildren?” (Wallach 2002, p. 318).

3. The Sephardi Haredi Home In Its National Context

The postcolonial school supplies us with a theoretical and intellectual pivot with which the discussion of Mizrahiyut can be extricated from its stasis, principally because it maintains that “ethnicity” and “subordination” cannot be understood without understanding the context in which they were created: colonialism and nationalism (Hever, Shenhav, and Motzafi-Haller 2002, p. 17).

The Or Hayyim boarding school was and remains an educational enterprise whose goal is to create Mizrahi Haredi women. To understand the ways in which it produces “ethnicity” and addresses “subordination,” it must be deciphered within the context of two other educational projects: the modernist Zionist educational enterprise, and the Haredi educational project in all its variations. Both these pursue a multifaceted policy of exclusion that directs their students away from one set of options and towards another. The Zionist educational project rejects traditional Judaism (which it associates with the Diaspora), and affirms a cultural alternative, secularism and enlightenment—which the

Haredi project rejects in favor of traditional Judaism. The Zionist project rejects Mizrahiyut in favor of Western universalism, which is in turn rejected by the Haredim, who affirm ethnic distinctions. The Zionist rejects Haredi-traditional and other gender distinctions, which the Haredi project affirms. Each of these exclusions is itself bifaceted: the hegemony excludes the population under study, and the population excludes itself, or seeks to differentiate itself from the excluding culture. Each such act of exclusion and self-exclusion is immersed in characteristics described in postcolonial theories as identity and alienation—a longing to be like others and to assimilate into them, alongside repugnance of the excluders and their values. This process turned a young Holocaust survivor named Moishe Tehillimzeiger into flamboyant, irreverent Dahn Ben-Amotz, the writer who more than anyone else symbolized the Sabra generation, the first generation of native-born Israelis. Paradoxically, the boy from the European Diaspora became the ultimate Sabra. Similarly, the religious Zionists, despised by the kibbutz-founding Sabras because of their insistence on maintaining religious belief and observance, became the pioneers of Israeli settlement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Similarly, some Haredim became acolytes of the extremist nationalism of Rabbi Meir Kahane, or “soldiers” in the Haredi ambulance and rescue squads that have in recent years become omnipresent after terrorist attacks and other disasters. Yet, at the same time, Dahn Ben-Amotz brought the Holocaust into Sabra discourse, the settlers in the territories brought Orthodox religion into the Zionist pioneer ethos, and the Haredim fractured the links between democracy, secularism, and nationalism. Gender comes on top of every such process of approach and challenge. Processes of exclusion and distinction, which involve approach, imitation, and assimilation, have simultaneously sharpened and dulled the ideological gaps between

Zionist factions. These processes did not blur the socioeconomic divisions nor the habitus of each class.

Or Hayyim was established as an alternative home. It sought to create an educational space that stood opposed to the real homes from which the pupils came. In this way it was like boarding schools in the secular Zionist, religious Zionist, and Haredi sectors. At the end of this study, I would like to focus precisely on this particular case and its context. Established for Sephardi girls by a textile merchant of Turkish extraction and an *avrech* from Iran, it operated, both educationally and religiously, in a Lithuanian-Ashkenazi spirit. In this, Or Hayyim was part of a large-scale movement that Ya'akov Lupo (1997) calls the "double rescue." The double rescue was a confluence of the yeshiva world of Europe, first emptied by the Enlightenment and the secularization of European Jewry, and later physically destroyed in the Holocaust, with the lives of traditional-religious Jews from North Africa who feared the threat of secularization.

The "rescue" of North African Jewry was begun by Rabbi Ze'ev Halperin, an Ashkenazi educator from Poland who arrived in Morocco in 1912. Local rabbis were at the time first confronting the influences of French colonialism, which brought with it the possibility of secular education and integration into non-Jewish culture, and of the Alliance Française, a French-Jewish educational organization that had become active in Morocco at the end of the 19th century. Halperin established ties with Moroccan religious leaders and with them founded an organization called Mahzikei Ha-Dat. He urged local rabbis in Moroccan cities to establish "Haredi associations." Although Halperin enjoyed considerable success during his ten-year stay in Morocco, his initiative lost steam in the

1930s. But the project of rescuing Jews from secularization enjoyed a renaissance after World War II.

Halperin planted Lithuanian seeds from the beginning, transforming the manner and content of religious instruction. In Morocco, sacred study had traditionally revolved around ritual and the calendar, with the texts studied being ones associated with specific observances or holidays. Instead, he introduced the curriculum of European Lithuanian yeshivot—the study of entire Talmudic tractates. He organized a network of donors to provide financial support for *avrechim*, and brought aggressive and uncompromising language into the anti-modernist discourse. Yet he also understood that mathematics and French language had to remain in the curriculum, in order to encourage members of the upper classes to send their sons to his new yeshivot. During the post-war renaissance of his educational project, the rescue became a double one. The Ashkenazi yeshivot in Europe had been decimated, and north African Jews emigrated to France, North America, and Israel. The seeds of the first movement served as a stable foundation for the absorption of these North African students into European yeshivot that were regenerating themselves after the war, under the direction of European refugees. Lupo says of the Israeli version of this international process: “‘Rescuing’ the children of Sephardi/Mizrahi immigrants was perceived as a heroic act by Ashkenazi Haredi society, with yeshiva students standing at the front. The Lithuanian yeshivot opened their gates to Sephardi/Mizrahi Torah scholars and some were also absorbed into the boarding schools associated with the yeshivot. In some cases the yeshiva served as a replacement for a dissolving family that had grown distant from religious observance in its unsuccessful efforts to integrate into secular/Zionist life” (Lupo 2004, p. 14).

This historical process is thus a story that runs parallel to the Zionist story. This Ashkenazi Haredi version of the rescue of Jews is, according to Lupo, a fundamental constitutive element in the construction of the Sephardi Haredi community, as well as of the Lithuanian community.

“The Lithuanian community’s ‘rescue concept’ is the central factor that shaped the Sephardi-Mizrahi Torah world during the twentieth century,” and it qualified the Lithuanian leadership, in its own and its students’ eyes, “to lead the public as a whole and the Sephardi-Mizrahi public within it. The display of condescension that came along with this process for many years, and the (partial) rejection of it are the historical background to the establishment of Shas” (Lupo 2006, p. 4).⁴⁰ The historical case that Lupo studied shows that, faced with Zionist hegemony, the Haredim sought to constitute their own “rescue story.” The huge difficulties of deciphering the Holocaust—when the Zionists called on Jews to come to Palestine and Haredi rabbis instructed them to remain in Europe, leading to the deaths of millions of Jews—produced a Haredi need to come up with their own rescue narrative. This need produced the estranging/imitating counter-Zionist project of which Or Hayyim is one product.

This is a classic description of colonialist relations, in which the ruler and the ruled grow side by side and become part of a single fabric, in which the identity of each side is constituted via the relations between them. Within the Haredi arena, and on the basis of ethnic relations, Sephardi Torah-committed Jews experienced themselves as survivors rescued by the Ashkenazi Haredi community. They were grateful, appreciative, and admiring of their saviors. The saviors, for their part, believed themselves worthy of submission and gratitude, and translated this into a right to continue to lead the survivors.

Or Hayyim was born out of a shortage of women fit to marry Sephardi *avrechim*. The living conditions in Israel were not conducive to raising such women. If it was hard to grow up as a Mizrahi Haredi, it was even harder to grow up as the female version of this. Ben-David encountered Rabbi Pardo on his way back from “there,” from the Zionist enlistment office, where he had renewed his military exemption. Among the Sephardi textile merchants, who observed Jewish traditions but were certainly not anti-Zionists, he found a willing and sympathetic ear. But in order to embark on his alternative project and found a Haredi, non-Zionist school for girls, Ben-David turned to his saviors, the Lithuanian rabbis. He asked them to help him create himself in the guise of a woman. The Ashkenazi Haredi stood at the halfway point between the Sephardi *avrech* and hegemonic Zionism. He was religious, but he was also European. And the opposite: he was Ashkenazi, but at least he was religious.

Juxtaposition of the Zionist and Haredi stories here encounters an obstacle. The classic Zionist story offered the Mizrahi a place within it, if the Mizrahi changed. In theory, the Mizrahi was required to do something that was, at least ostensibly, possible—give up his ethnicity. The Haredi case does not allow the elimination of ethnic identity, because that identity is a type of tradition and heritage. Young Sephardi men can study in the Ponivetz yeshiva and speak Yiddish, singsong their Talmud studies in “*loymshen koydesh*,” according to Lithuanian study practices, but their ethnic identity is recognized as a racial element that cannot be erased, neither in principle nor in practice. The Haredi community’s racism, if it is to be called that, is not disguised. The positive side of this racism is its visibility, and the place it gives to the difference of the other. A Lithuanian

yeshiva can accept a Sephardi *avrech* as a student, but it cannot promise to turn it into one of its own sons. Around the Mount of Ponivetz there is a place for satellite types of Haredim—Hasidic Haredim, or Mizrahi Haredim. The Lithuanians look down at both with some measure of condescension.

The assimilation of the savior's image into the new Sephardi-Haredi identity did not eliminate feelings of discrimination and alienation. These took on a cultural-political hue around the organization and operation of Shas. The growth in the number of Sephardi Haredim (and the sense of support they felt from the traditional Mizrahi population), in the face of the relative reduction in the Ashkenazi Haredi population, is an important factor in the tipping of the scales. But if the Haredi story were entirely separate from the Zionist story, or if it were not closely tied to it, these patron-client relations might well have endured longer. The experience of Mizrahiyut within the general national context accelerated processes of segregation and rejection, while constituting alternative sources of authority. *It was Zionist enlightenment education that led the Sephardim to Lithuania and away from it.* Paradoxically, the discourse of democratic citizenship helped formulate the experience of Haredi oppression and accelerated the process through which Sephardi Haredim shook off their dependence on the Ashkenazi Haredi community. It was the Haredi version of this ethnic rejection of the patron-client relationship between Ashkenazim and Sephardim that turned out to be a political success. Two versions of oppression, existing side by side (in Israeli society as a whole, and within Israeli Haredi society), and the mobility between these two communities within Sephardi families, created Shas. Lessons learned and experienced in general society were translated into the Haredi community. Among the Haredim, the Sephardim were a legitimate separate

cultural entity, whereas in general Zionist society they were expected to become part of the national fabric. So it was within the Haredi community that they could organize as citizens.

But the cycle does not end there, and the traces of the colonial fabric do not fade. In the Prelude to this book, I present the voice of the principal of a Shas school for girls. Yona grew up in a Yemenite Haredi home. As the daughter of a local rabbi, she was privileged to study in elitist Ashkenazi Haredi schools. When she finished seminar, she did not find work in the institutions she had attended, and was forced to make do with teaching in less prestigious ones. As one of the founders of Shas's El Ha-Ma'ayan school system, she emphatically maintains the need for an ethnic educational system separate from and competitive with the Ashkenazi Haredi system. Nevertheless, she told me that her greatest happiness was her son's acceptance into the Ponivetz yeshiva. The struggle with the oppressive other, and recognition of that adversary's superiority, are diluted in the Sephardi Haredi experience, just as they are in Sephardi-Ashkenazi relations in non-religious Israeli society.

Sephardi Haredi boarding schools, as in Youth Aliya boarding schools and kibbutzim, have sought to reeducate their pupils, to harness the demographic potential of the Sephardi population to the renewal of the Jewish people. Some young Israelis had to learn how to walk around in shorts and sandals and read the poetry of Hayyim Nachman Bialik, while others had to learn how to wear black suits and homburgs and learn by heart stories from the lives of the great rabbis of Europe. The boarding school has been a central tool for the reeducation of the human material that immigrated to Israel from both the East and the West. For a small number, it was the place they were formed into the

agricultural pioneer elite of the new society. But the lion's share of students at these schools were refugees, orphans, and children from Mizrahi families.

The girls who enrolled in Or Hayyim were taken away from home in order to build homes. They sheltered under the wings of Father Pardo in order to provide him with Sephardi grandchildren. His granddaughters, the daughters of graduates of his school, are today directed into a separate high school, without a dormitory, which makes every effort to imitate Lithuanian schools for girls. Girls whose family backgrounds are still not pure enough are directed into the boarding school. They wear skirts that sweep the floor, not like the good girls at Beit Ya'akov schools, and sometimes they paste a "He is innocent" sticker on their school bags. The newspaper posted on the walls of their school is still the Lithuanian *Yated Ne'eman*, and the institution founded by the textile merchant is administered by Lithuanian rabbis. But, looking ahead, the *rabbanit*, who spent half a century in the school, assumes that the number of Ashkenazi teachers will shrink to zero and that control of this avant-garde project will pass entirely from the rescuers to the rescued, who will continue the rescue operation. This operation seeks to go down in national history as a Sephardi Haredi rescue story, and so complete the missing narrative. Now, all the large Jewish sectors in Israel have a story of rescuing themselves and rescuing others.⁴¹ The ultimate redemption has come.

The "biography" of Or Hayyim constitutes a kind of break in my series of life stories, an attempt to become acquainted with an institution that influenced the lives of some of the protagonists of my study. This institution turned them into Mizrahi Haredi women of a specific type, whose character depends on a broad, complex system of

relations. The ethnicity that the institution created, and the political and value subservience it involves, were deciphered in an integrated and intimate system that characterizes colonial relationships. This system of interpretation will continue into the final part of this chapter, in which I will examine my own origins. From the range of problems involved in conducting a qualitative study among “others,” my focus in this part will be ethnicity. Economic class, secularism, and education will appear as secondary components that accompany the question “How did I become an Ashkenazi woman, and what kind of Ashkenazi woman am I?”

III. ONE ISN'T BORN AN ASHKENAZI WOMAN—ONE BECOMES AN ASHEKNAZI WOMAN

“One is not born a woman, one becomes a woman” (de Beauvoir 1952, p. 249)

My two previous books were about those who are like me in that they are Israeli Jewish women, but nevertheless different from me in that they are Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) or religious. In this current project, I have also studied Israeli Jewish women, but this time the partition between me and them is an ethnic one. I and my research subjects are on either side of binary division: I am a scholar who is an Ashkenazi woman and they are research subjects who are Mizrahi women. We belong to different sides of the greatest ethnic divide in the Jewish people, Ashkenazim and Sephardim, representing two religious and cultural traditions. My family came to Israel from Europe, theirs from the Islamic world. As an Ashkenazi, I belong to the same ethnic group as the huge majority of Israel’s founders and leaders. Ashkenazim are, as a group, wealthier, better

educated, and better-connected in the Israeli economic, political, and military elite—even today, after a once yawning ethnic gap has narrowed in many spheres of society.

Mizrahim still make up a greater part of Israel’s underclass and poor, and remain culturally “other” in the light of the dominant Ashkenazi culture. They also generally have darker skin than Ashkenazim, so in Israel they are often called, and call themselves, “blacks.”

During my work with women from the Gur Hasidic community, my Ashkenazi ethnicity was something I shared with them, connecting my family history with those of the women I studied. I am not religious, but I am an Ashkenazi woman whose family tree includes some Hasidim. When I worked with Zionist religious women, my ethnicity was on the face of it unimportant because, in that group, Zionism trumps ethnicity. My subjects and I were Israelis tied to a narrative of settlement and nationalism that sought to render ethnic differences among Jews inconsequential. Unlike them, I was not religious, nor was I right-wing in my politics, but I was a Zionist.

In contrast, this study leaves me with very few assets. Economics, culture, family history, and politics place innumerable barriers between me and my subjects. Any sociological parameter I might choose will place me and them on opposite sides and define the interaction between us as principally a relationship of power.

The arena of power relations sorts its participants into oppressors and oppressed. It necessarily leads to the conclusion reached by Sarah Chinski in her analysis of the motivation behind an exhibit at the Israel Museum devoted to representation of the Orient in Israeli art:⁴² “Representation of the oppression of the Mizrahim from the hegemonic point of view is itself an actualization of the right of patronage reserved solely for the

privileged group. Whatever the discourse of the Orient, the coupon will in the end be redeemed at the distribution point of the reinforcement of Western identity” (Chinski 2002: 60). In other words, any representation of the oppression of Oriental Jews by the hegemony (in Chinski’s case, the Israel Museum and its curators) reproduces the existing power relationship and the superiority of Western identity within it. Neither, in her opinion, can those involved in the discourse of Mizrahiyut (the state of being Mizrahi) escape the reproduction of the power relationship, even if they do not take the establishment position or are not Ashkenazim. “In this sense, the critical socio-historic discussion conducted in Israel in recent years, despite its huge contribution to publicizing forbidden objects of criticism, connects along structural lines of interface to the institutional discourse of confirming ‘Western identity.’”

The search for a way out of this power relationship leads many of those who address the “Mizrahi discourse” to speak of “extrication from the jam.” This effort to break free of the straitjacket in which the Mizrahi discourse finds itself is a salient feature of Israeli academic research, literature, politics, and culture at the turn of the millennium. It is the central goal stated by the writers of the book *Mizrahim in Israel*; and also appeared in a discussion that took place on the pages of the *Israel Studies Forum* journal’s spring 2002 issue, titled *Perspectives on Mizrahiyut*. In this latter volume, the participants seek, in different ways, “to get past it.” Their aspiration, as revealed by the articles in the journal, is in one way or another much like the “third space” described by Homi Bhabha. In other words, it is a place in which the transparency of white hegemony is dimmed, a space that has been extricated from the constraints of the nation and which deconstructs the West-East binary system, locally and globally. It thus creates an area

that, Baba writes, “is never simply white and never simply black” (Baba 2002, 288). This area contains the potential for turning the results of colonialism into a plasma of life, into a hybrid tissue of new communities that cannot be sorted according to the usual labels. Such an area is the utopia of the forum that wrote *Mizrahim in Israel*. They describe it as a place in which the experience of being Mizrahi will be the most Arab way of being a Zionist Jew and the most local way of being part of the global, Middle Eastern, or Mediterranean space. Mizrahiyut is, then, a passport that leads beyond nationalism, to outside the local. This movement leaves behind the map that lays out the contours of the post-colonial space. The nature of the journey, or the character of the road into the third space, changes from one writer to another. But all of them share a view that the road is not just a way of reaching that goal. They define the road, too, as a place, as an experience, as a type of hard work.

Among the wealth of possibilities of understanding Mizrahiyut as a road into the third space, two in particular have attracted my attention. The first was proposed by Ela Shohat (Shohat 2002) and the second by Aziza Khazzoom (Khazzoom 2002). In a discussion of whether a field of Mizrahi studies is possible, Shohat proposes steering clear of all existing definitions. The understanding of Mizrahiyut must, in her opinion, rid itself of all familiar interpretation, because all the terms used to describe the “phenomenon” are locked within the Zionist discourse. “Mizrahi ethnics” (*‘edot ha-mizrah*), “the second Israel,” “Asian and African-born,” or simply “Moroccans” have all been ways of presenting Mizrahim as Jews whose Arab culture is a limb to be amputated or a wound to be bandaged. The downtrodden side of their past has been shaped, Shohat

writes, as a “negative past” that lies behind all the evils they suffer: poverty, violence, low educational achievement, dysfunctional families.

In order to comprehend another Mizrahiyut—in order to break free of the rigidity of existing concepts—it is necessary to cast off the local context, to go beyond the national, the Zionist, the Israeli, to cross every possible boundary in order to find broad, deep, and remote contexts that can illuminate the subject in new and different ways. A good metaphor for Shohat’s proposal is a fountain—water shooting up forcefully from its source in all directions.

Aziza Khazzoom offers a different and perhaps even contrary, but detailed and practical, proposal. As an itinerant actor in this industry, I found in her article tools that are both accessible and challenging. Like many others, Khazzoom argues that it is impossible to understand what it is to be Israeli without understanding Mizrahiyut. In other words, Mizrahiyut is not an additional facet of the Israeli experience that must be clarified, but rather a fundamental texture that embraces/stifles all of Israeli society. Khazzoom also seeks to differentiate between Mizrahim and Mizrahiyut. It is important that Mizrahim study Mizrahiyut, but it is no less important that Ashkenazim not be absent in this scholarship. The Ashkenazim, like the Mizrahim, are a source of information for understanding Mizrahiyut. The identity of Ashkenazi women in Israel is interwoven and wrapped around the concept of Mizrahiyut no less, if differently, than is the identity of a Mizrahi women. Ashkenazi women are also citizens of a stifled society, Khazzoom argues, and they, too, have a duty to search for a way out.

Going down the river on the Israeli raft has never been a particularly easy journey, but the Ashkenazim have navigated and controlled the craft. To remain at the

tiller and steer, the Ashkenazim also had to give up their heritage. And “if there is a tradition that has been abandoned to oblivion and entirely destroyed, it is the Ashkenazi diaspora tradition” (Chinski 2002: 61). Chinski focuses on the price to be paid in Israeli art for this process of forgetting, but the process has a wide context, which Khazzoom addresses.

In her dissertation, Khazzoom describes how the Jews of central and western Europe created an east-west dichotomy in their construction of the relationship between themselves and the Jewish immigrants to these areas from eastern Europe, the *Ostjuden*.⁴³ This division was experienced particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries in Europe and imported into the modernist Zionist project in Palestine/Israel. Here the east-west dichotomy was a tool for shaping the Zionist recasting of Jewish identity. It resolved the tension between the preservation of Oriental “authenticity” and westernization. Through it, the new society created, largely from the Ashkenazi population, modern, progressive Israelis. It also created “authentic Israelis” and “authentic Jews”—Mizrahim and Ashkenazi Haredim (ultra-Orthodox). The binary segmentation was anchored, stabilized, and made rigid by structural components such as housing, education, and area of residence. Oriental Jews and Haredim were assigned the role of preserving “warmth” and “family life,” the “extended family” and “tradition,” evacuating the arena of universalism in favor of the Ashkenazim. However, the process of shaping a renewed identity involves contacts and encounters between the mutually dependent binary endpoints. One cannot be a modern “Western” Israeli without containing the “Oriental,” and vice-versa. All Jews, whatever their or their parents’ country of origin, were subject to oppression, stigmatization, and obliteration of part of their culture on their way to becoming Israeli.⁴⁴

Therefore, to understand the Mizrahi women of my study, I must comprehend the systems of relations that made me an Ashkenazi woman. Such relationships are much more significant influences on my ethnic identity than that overly simplistic definition, “country of father’s birth,” that demographers use to categorize Israelis. To answer the question “How did I become an Ashkenazi woman?”, I must describe my Ashkenazi biography with reference to Mizrahiyut’s fixed presence within it. I will accomplish this by using my own professional tool—ethnography. In this case, it is auto-ethnography—an ethnic autobiography.

1. Black Poles: All Families Are Racist Except Ours

“To what extent are Jews in Israel still concerned about not being Western enough?” (Khazzoom 2002: 98).

My family’s ethnic ambiguity is exemplified by my memory of what my mother used to say about her cousin Zvi:

He would stand in his mother’s little grocery store on Tzefaniah Street in Jerusalem and serve the customers. She was a widow and worked from morning to evening, rising before the sun to tidy up the house and put pots on the stove so that there would be food for the children, and she wanted to open the store at six. He was a good boy, helped her. Of course you know Tzvi, how dark he is. There are dark Poles, your father is a little like that, too. The customers knew him, but sometimes women would come to the store who didn’t know he was the son of Miriam. He’d occasionally hear one say to the

other, *ret Yiddish, de shvartze iz du* (speak in Yiddish, the black [boy] is here).

My mother would tell me that as a joke, a kind of ethnic joke. In her story, the extended family could be both Ashkenazi and black. The message was that we children had inherited a combination of Ashkenazi and black genes from both parents. Tzvi, the black boy, and also my father to a certain extent, enabled us to place ourselves in two roles. We could be the racist and suspicious customers who gossiped about the freshness of the produce and did not want the black boy to understand. That role was important to my mother because she made a concerted attempt to educate us not to be racist. But within that project of hers we stood on firm ground. We could allow the neighborhood women to say what they did not want us to understand (about the merchandise? about the *frenkim*—the Mizrahi Jews?), then wait a bit and peel off the black skin and answer them in Yiddish. That's what Tzvi did once. The customers' red faces showed that the insult to the produce was nothing compared to the potential insult to the suspected shopkeeper.

The fact that Tzvi was not insulted, and that the story was handed down in the family as a joke, reinforced the extended family's white status. Tzvi's swarthy skin was a sign that we contained something Levantine, that there were people like that among us, that the black boy was of our flesh, so we could not be racist. The family story was also a kind of fable, at least for my mother, of the danger of thinking that skin color indicated something about a person's real, essential nature. In other words, even though Tzvi (and my father) were black, they weren't really, and it could be that we would meet white people who were actually black. The non-racist side of the fable taught that one could draw no conclusions from the color of a person's skin, while the fable's other side

reconstructed our community and theirs. My mother would not permit the word *frenk*—a slang, somewhat derogatory word for Mizrahim—to be used in our house. If Grandma let the word slip, my mother would reprimand her, even if—and perhaps precisely because—we children were present.

My mother's best friend was Tzvia, whose family lived across the street. The two friends conducted lives that interwove the biographies of their two families. Relatives and friends would sometimes ask mother "How is your Yemenite neighbor?" Mom would stiffen and say "She has a name." The relations between the two families, over the course of four decades, encompassed many combinations of their members, but the two women, who later in life became inseparable, were always at the center. My mother, a widow, and Tzvia, married but separated, together crossed continents and seas, got through illnesses and had good times, celebrated and worried.

When I was a little girl, it was clear that Tzvia was Mommy's friend. But it was no less clear to me that their relationship was organized around a fixed and permanent axis. Tzvia thought that my mother knew more than she did, while my mother constantly sought to convince Tzvia that she knew, or could know, just as much. It was a kind of pedagogic game of charades in which each woman projected on the other an image that her friend refused to accept. My mother would not accept the role of the wise Ashkenazi woman and Tzvia refused to take the role of the wise Yemenite woman. Over the course of the game they learned quite a bit from each other, but the class gap remained. It was difficult to dismantle it within the pair and even harder to get support for dismantling it from those around them. Committed to a progressive mode of thinking and weary of the

battle, they looked to us—the next generation, the children. We went to the same school, had the same friends, and were friends with each other.

“You understand,” my mother would often tell me, “it’s all a matter of time. Look at Zohar, Ofer, and Shlomi, look at them. Each is more successful than the next, they’re all top students, they’re all surrounded by friends.” Mom didn’t miss a thing. Tzvia’s three boys were indeed successful, each in his own way. Until we reached school age, I spent most of my hours of play out roaming with Ofer. When we were a bit older we trudged together through heat or rain to the afternoon session of elementary school (Tel Aviv schools then ran in double shifts). I couldn’t understand why Nili and Rela, who were older than we were, laughed at us. Apparently we were an odd couple, a “regular” second-grade girl with a skinny, sooty-skinned first-grade boy.

As a teenager I became closer to Zohar, who was three years older than me. His first great love took him away forever and taught me my most important lesson in racism. He was 18, an age when young people start leaving the neighborhood to explore the world. His circle of friends linked up with one from north Tel Aviv and Zohar fell in love with one of the girls there. Zohar was a leader among his friends. He was smart, funny, tall, and skinny and sported an Afro. Everyone liked him, hung out at his house, ate Tzvia’s *malawah* and called him Yaman, for Yemenite. It was in fun, out of love, easy, Yaman. Why not? Wasn’t he? It was the early 1970s, black was beautiful, and Jimmy Hendrix was king. He and the girl from north Tel Aviv began to go out together. Zohar told me enthusiastically about Mina, and I made a point of dropping by his house when I knew she was coming for her first visit. It’s hard for me to remember her face now, and not because it was so long ago. There simply wasn’t anything to remember except how

pale it was. A white girl, one who had “Ashkenazi” written all over her. Not just a regular girl, certainly not one from our family, with its black Polish genes. A purebred.

Mina’s mother cut short that young love. She told Mina that she was not allowed to go out with Zohar. Perhaps she didn’t say it in so many words, perhaps she didn’t like his hippy look, maybe she gave Mina more solid reasons, like the distance or some such thing. Whatever the case, the relationship was cut off. For my part, I put her on my black list. It was a list I inherited from my mother and added to on my own.

It was an anti-racist list drawn up by “good Ashkenazim,” an inventory of the bad people among us. Mina appeared on the list alongside mother’s religious aunt and uncle who would not agree to their son’s marriage with a Yemenite girl. They were “scoundrels with the Torah’s sanction,” in Mom’s words. She often told me that “they didn’t go to their own son’s wedding, and what a wonderful girl she is, graduate of a teacher’s college, they should be thankful that she married their son.” Alongside that aunt and uncle (who in the end made peace with their son) resided Aunt Hela from Givatayyim. She shunned her son who married a non-Jewish woman from England. When he made his first visit to Israel he contacted my mother. She was the only one out of our entire large family who agreed to meet him, his *shiksa*, and their five children. Lunchtime, the twenty minutes of the day when the house rules required me to sit, stiff and defenseless, with my mother in the dining room, she would repeat the familiar stories and add new ones, about the laudable and about the despicable.

In October 1973, after the Yom Kippur War, Mina called to ask if Zohar was all right. As it happened, I was sitting with Tzvia in the kitchen. After that I never heard from her again, but I frequently pondered her and Zohar’s story as a sort of parable. I

interpreted it and imbued it with various meanings that I did not refer back to Zohar. In the summer of 1997, in the corridor of Internal Medicine Ward D of Ichelov Hospital in Tel Aviv, we sat next to one another outside the room in which Tzvia spent her final days. Zohar's wife and children did not accompany him this time. They remained far off, in Malibu, California. Late at night, an intimate time; we were no longer children and no subject was off-limits.

“Do you know that I sometimes think about that bitch Mina and how she affected your life? I can't keep from thinking about how you ran away from here because of her, I mean, not actually because of her, she wasn't such a great prize or anything. But because things like that can happen here. And that you decided to marry Dana (and you know I really love her), that wasn't just chance. The whitest girl in the world, the blondest, the most un-Jewish. Do you think about that sometimes?”

Zohar paused a moment before replying—maybe my question caught him off guard. But my analysis didn't surprise him.

“Not long ago I actually said to Dana that the story with Mina needs closure, that I didn't close it. It's something that's stayed with me all these years and I never really worked on it. I understand what you mean, I need to do something with it.”

I didn't know whether Zohar agreed with me about the basic story, which is like many others—an unfulfilled youthful love that an older person seeks to work out. I don't know if he accepted my racial interpretation of the story and of its effect on his life. His mother's death made his visits here less frequent, and we don't write about subjects like that in the e-mails that go back and forth between us.

For me it was a foundation story. Mina was me, or one side of me, or someone who lived with me through Mom's blacklist. She grew up with us in the kitchen with the bad aunt and uncle who didn't attend their son's wedding, and with Aunt Hela. I knew her intimately from childhood. Mom marked her for me, placing her beside Uncle Tzvi who could work as a black boy, alongside the women who bought their groceries at the corner store in Jerusalem, alongside those friends of hers who always asked "How is your Yemenite neighbor?" When I went with Zohar and his family to visit their relatives who lived in Elyashiv, a farming village in the Heffer Valley, I'd often pass as a Yemenite and was proud of it. But I knew that my identity games and the social principles that Mom helped me develop stood on firm ground. After all, in the final analysis, we were both Ashkenazim.

I'm always happy when someone asks me—it's a frequent question in Israel—"what ethnic group are you from?" I like the fact that its not immediately evident, that I don't act or sound like a Russian, German, Moroccan, Persian, or any other specific kind of Israeli. Sometimes people would even ask my father. True, he had blue eyes, nearly unheard of among Sephardim, but he had those black Ashkenazi genes and he spoke Arabic (and several other languages). Dad worked as a driver for WIZO, the women's Zionist organization. He was the bosses' driver, and the bosses were women. His job was to ferry members of the organization's international board along Israel's transportation arteries, from home to office and from office to the institutions that the organization sponsored throughout the country. Sometimes donors from overseas came along, and Dad would add to his driving his talents as a tour guide and as a linguist.

Twice a week in the early 1960s, Dad drove volunteers from WIZO's agricultural department to instruct new immigrants in the Negev in how to tend their kitchen gardens. He liked the volunteers, but his heart went out to the children they taught. In the evenings he would tell us exotic tales from the southern periphery—about the beauty and the poverty, about the bare feet and the hospitality, about how he never ate the food Mom prepared for him when the children were around. The central protagonist of his stories was Moshiko, whom I came to envy a bit. Dad waxed eloquent about his beauty and intelligence. Little Moshiko knew when Dad was coming and waited for him at the edge of the village so that he could hitch a short ride to his parents' house in Dad's car. Moshiko told Dad things that made him laugh and excited him, and I wanted to meet him. Dad, an amateur photographer, took pictures of Moshiko and the other children.

The children who gazed out at me from Dad's black-and-white snapshots, which he developed himself, looked pathetic. Some gave Dad a big smile, others were shy and looked at the ground. Some stood alone to be photographed and others came together for group or family portraits. When I looked for the charm that Dad saw in them, he provided a voice-over: "See? Look what a handsome boy he is, take a look at his big sister, what a girl, she's a bit shy. Do you see that she's holding their baby? That's his mother, she's the best student of Helena, the instructor. She has a vegetable garden and now she also has a garden of blooming roses, and she works in the back yard, and she has six children." I looked but couldn't find her. I don't remember if Dad said anything about what ethnic group they belonged to. Even so, it was clear to me that they were "ethnic."

One summer day I asked my father if I could come along with him to the south. I wanted to meet the "Moshikos" myself. So I went to work with him, as I occasionally

did. Mom added another sandwich to his lunchbox and, as always, the day seemed endless. He drove forever in the summer heat and today it is hard for me to reconstruct his route. When we reached Moshiko's village, he wasn't waiting for us at the gate, but we met him by his house, part of a gang of big kids in a wagon hitched up to a donkey. They galloped boisterously along the sandy paths that ran circled the houses, and drew to a halt when they saw the WIZO car. A few kids jumped off the wagon and ran towards Dad, hugged him and asked for a ride. I stood next to my father, wearing blue shorts with an elastic waistband and elastic cuffs, a cotton sleeveless shirt, and sandals. I didn't realize that this was not how they dressed. Their clothes were unfamiliar and didn't seem to obey any rule of order. I thought that I identified Moshiko from the pictures but I was wrong. I had a hard time differentiating one dirty boy from the next.

On the way home, I didn't want to say anything not nice about Dad's kids. I listened to him and to Helena talking in the front seat. She spoke of "them." She explained to them how to do things but they didn't do them. They didn't care, they forgot to water the gardens, and with the exception of a handful of good families, the situation really wasn't improving. In my mind, I couldn't make any connection between these people and my neighbors across the street. There was no rubric that could put them into the same category. I couldn't discern anything that Moshiko had in common with Ofer, Shlomi, or Zohar, even though all four of them liked Dad and wanted rides in his car.

The division between the weak and the strong became clearer as the years went by. By the time I was in high school at Tichon Hadash I had learned to tell apart the "good kids"—that was us—from the elect kids from the wealthy suburbs of Tzahala,

Kfar Shmaryahu, and Herzliyya Pituah. At the end of the school day, a line of Valiants, the sedans that army families received as a perk, waited for the Tzahala kids at the gate. Their fathers' drivers waited to take them home. The kids from Kfar Shmaryahu spent their Passover vacations in London and sometimes ate out with their parents. My first boyfriend from outside the neighborhood was from north Tel Aviv, like Mina, and his parents (and he himself) thought that I was not an appropriate choice. But in class, as in love, we knew that we left them far behind. If we got good grades and were rebellious and funny we would be the class leaders. We made our working class status a moral and political launching point, a source of motivation. We knew that we belonged and that we had no reason to run away.

Tichon Hadash was officially associated with the ruling Mapai party, forerunner of today's Labor party. My socialist high school teachers didn't talk about ethnicity, but they sometimes talked about justice. It was the Zionist socialist version of justice; at home, Dad taught me that it was actually Mapai's version of justice. Dad belonged to the right wing opposition party, Herut. Mom told me that she registered my brother and me at Tichon Hadash because it had refused to accept her. Her father had a snack stand in the village of Ramatayyim and was considered a petit-bourgeois merchant, so she wasn't from the right social class. I developed revulsion and suspicion of my teachers. Oded from Tzahala took me to a meeting of the radical Marxist Matzpen party—his uncle was a member. It was on the other side of the spectrum from Herut, but it preserved my father's opposition stance to Mapai's hegemony. But these lines of identity and opposition did not come together into a position. When I was in the army and heard that our personnel officer was looking for someone to go to a course for NCOs who oversee

service conditions for soldiers, I begged him to let me go. I spent a year and a half as a sensitive Ashkenazi sergeant addressing the problems of problematic soldiers. Little by little, on that strong, sure ground, I added story to story, memory to memory, home visit to home visit, and the picture slowly became clear.

My mother's pedagogical enterprise and my father's behavior received added meaning in light of class categories. They were the ultimate source of my career path. I chose a social studies major in high school even though my teachers pressed me to do biology. I sought out social work in the army, and pursued the social sciences in college. Injustice began to receive a language, but racism remained dumb. Feminist thought later got woven into my academic world and enabled me to broaden my understanding of injustice and experience it in new ways. I will thus try to put my ethnic background, my Ashkenazi origin, with the parameters of gender and class, and search for the social category where the three come together.

2. The Ashkenazi I Became Also Has a Yemenite Mother: The Relational Field of Ethnicity

A relational analysis has to begin from the premise that classes, genders, races and nations do not exist as hermetically sealed entities, especially in a century that bears the scars of partitions and cross-border movements of populations and of images and sounds. (Shohat 2002: 93)

When Tzvia's father immigrated to Palestine from Yemen with his two older sons and young daughter, the children's mother was no longer alive. She had died in her final labor, along with her baby girl, the last of eight children of whom only three survived.

Tzvia was her father's favorite. He taught her to read and to write, drilled her in chapters of the Torah and midrash, and also passed on to her his knowledge of folk medicine. In Israel they lived with the eldest brother and his wife, who gave them a room in their shack at the edge of the farming town of Rishon LeTzion. That same year, 1933, my mother and her family came to Palestine from Poland. They knew that my grandmother's large family, which had arrived in Palestine in 1924, waited for them in the Sharon plain, north of Tel Aviv. The family gave the immigrants a room in their home in the farming village of Magdiel, which served as temporary living quarters until the newcomers found a home for themselves in the adjacent village of Ramatayyim.

It was indeed a century of partitions and cross-border movements, of departures and losses. People's course of growth and maturation were cut short. They exchanged one language for another, one climate for another. Old opportunities were lost and new ones were born. My mother began her studies in the city of Kalish in western Poland, continued at school in Magdiel, and finished high school in Tel Aviv. Tzvia began school in Palestine. When, at age 12, her father died, she went to work as a maid for a preschool teacher, who then made Tzvia her classroom assistant. When she turned 18 she insisted on enlisting in the army, against her family's wishes. There she met her husband, who signed on for additional military service in the standing army. When they married, they lived in Kerem HaTeimanim, a Yemenite neighborhood in Tel Aviv, where Zohar, their oldest son, was born. Then they moved to Jaffa and from there to a young neighborhood on the other side of the Yarkon River, on the northern edge of Tel Aviv. My mother left home after high school and wanted to learn pharmacology. She applied to the American University of Beirut and waited for a reply. In the meantime she worked in Tel Aviv as

an assistant to a pharmacist and lived in a rented room. She met my father in Tel Aviv and they were married after the War of Independence. At first they lived with her parents, where my older brother Muli was born. When they were able, they moved to a young neighborhood north of the Yarkon. In 1957 the Katbi and Freiman families found themselves on either side of HaGolan Street, almost exactly facing each other. Here the relations between them took shape.

The analysis of relationships, of being in relationship, Ella Shohat says, is the key to understanding social categories. Studying relationships enables us to understand how they came into being; they do not exist as isolated entities. A social category always exists in relation to another social category, or to other categories.

The constitution of identity is a developmental process that occurs within a system of relationships. From the point of view of the Zionist project, the meeting of the Katbi and Freiman families was a success. Twenty-two years after they immigrated from two different parts of the world, the two couples found themselves as neighbors. They lived in homes of similar sizes, and were parents of the same number of children. The two women lacked professions and worked as homemakers; the two men were wage earners. The dream that Jews from different lands would mix and mingle came to fruition as both the young country and the young couples established themselves. The Zionist ideology that guided the national agenda was not alien to the two families, both of which arrived in Palestine in the 1930s out of Zionist ideals. Now they had to work, to create relationships, to love, to become Israeli families, bring up native-born Israeli children, to be reborn on HaGolan Street. The story related above places two adult women, Tzvia and

Yona, at the center of this enterprise. They signify the generation of immigrants. The signifiers of the next generation are Zohar and I. The ethnic component comes on top of these gender and generational axes, which are not to be taken for granted.

Gender, Ethnic Group, and Class: The Mothers' Side

The feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people.... Depending on its social setting, women's sense of relation and connection and their embeddedness in social life provide them a kind of security that men lack (Chodorow 1974, pp. 44, 62).

As a child raised in what was essentially the South, Baltimore in the segregated 1930s, I had from birth not only a white , but a Black mother (Rich 1986, p. 253).⁴⁵

Tzvia grew up without a mother and she had no sisters. Her close relationship with her father, and their attempts to create a family unit of their own under the brother's/son's roof made her an unusual girl. Chodorow's pathbreaking work taught me that girls grow up within extended mother-daughter relationships that encompass possibilities of identification and empathy. The need for separation in order to constitute sexual identity applies more to boys than to girls. The need to disengage and deny the pre-Oedipal relationship, which is characteristic of boys, is not a necessary developmental stage among girls. They can constitute a sexual identity based on connectedness and continuity. This basic experience grants them a different way of looking at the world of objects, both external and internal (Chodorow 1974, 1978).

Tzvia was her father's daughter-son. He gave her confidence in her ability to learn and he discovered within himself the motherly abilities he needed to raise her. She grew up as a daughter and housekeeper, and she discovered that things could be done other than in the accepted ways. Her process of development was not based on any continuity that could be taken for granted, because she had no models who could subordinate or embrace her. Each of the adults around her was something different from what she wanted or could be. She understood that she must invent herself, and that her new country offered her some space to do that in—for example, by enlisting. Her biography displays an organized detachment from the neighborhood at the outskirts of Rishon LeTzion, where her family remained, detachment from religious observance (but not from Jewish tradition and heritage), and an attempt to take up all the Zionist agenda had to offer. In later years she became her family's ambassador to the outside world and the agent of change for her nieces and nephews. They would make pilgrimages to her home to ask her advice, to enlist her against the prevailing winds in their homes, and to use her home as an interim stop between Rishon LeTzion—by then a suburb and not a farm town—and Tel Aviv. She, for her part, visited them frequently, brought them clothes, advice, and much love. She also rested there, with her brothers, when she was weary of urban life. I assume that Tzvia shared with them stories of her life on HaGolan Street. She always told us a lot about them.

Her personal biography freed her by not supplying her with a mother model, and opened before her a field in which she became a student and a teacher. Throughout her life she educated herself, informally and formally, and tried to teach her nuclear and extended family.

My mother, Yona, had a mother. That mother had been an educated, beautiful, and pampered graduate of a Hebrew high school in Warsaw. In Palestine she had to stand on her feet for long hours to serve customers in a restaurant on the highway that ran through the Sharon region. My mother learned many important things from her mother. But when she spoke of education or her sources of inspiration, she spoke always of her father, whom I never knew. He was a yeshiva student who abandoned his religion. When he saw his sister's braids sheared off on the eve of her wedding, he cast aside Orthodoxy, but he did not banish traditional Jewish wisdom from his heart. My mother's parents accomplished for her the transition to the world of secular education and life, and all she had left to do was to become Israeli, almost a native-born one. When she left home to live on her own in Tel Aviv, the people around her viewed her as almost a pervert. When she received a drivers license in 1947, without even a bicycle to her name, her family branded her rebellious. My mother's separation from her mother derived largely from the relations between them as two women, mother and daughter, rather than lack of education or religious practice. Yona sought space in which she could be independent, earn money, not be spoiled, escape the dictates of gender, to be different. That behavior did not have a name then, for feminism had not yet come to Ramatayyim.

Tzvia and Yona, so influenced by their fathers, met when they were wives and mothers. Many of their dreams had by then taken second place to their families, but their fighting spirit and their refusal to submit to accepted practice characterized their lives, and shaped their relationship. These two women chose each other out of the large selection of women who lived in their neighborhood. Israeli neighborhoods of the 1950s

and 1960s were inhabited by families of displaced people, and many of the mothers had no accessible mothers, aunts, or sisters to consult. Neighbors thus became the matriarchal support group. These two women's choice of each other was nourished by the lines of similarity between them and by the sense of difference and superiority that they felt towards the other women in the neighborhood.⁴⁶ At the same time, they recreated structural differences. The "couple" they formed as women bore some signs of division of labor along gender and class lines. Both women were responsible for all traditional homemaking tasks, but my mother had a maid.

Looking back, I find it hard to believe that my father earned more than Tzvia's husband. But Tzvia apparently could not conceive of taking on someone to help her.⁴⁷ My mother taught Tzvia how to cook a number of dishes, and in particular how to bake cakes, unknown in Yemenite cuisine. For her part, Tzvia enriched our diet with *tehinna* (sesame paste), *hawayej* (a peppery Yemenite spice), beans in tomato sauce, Oriental soups, and the Sabbath practice of snacking on sunflower and pumpkin seeds, which she baked in the hot oven after her cakes came out. My mother did not attempt other Yemenite dishes, like *jahnun*, *malawah*, and *kubana* (varieties of cooked or fried dough), so we ate these only at Tzvia's house. Tzvia was adept at the use of her Singer sewing machine. My mother was weak in this area; Tzvia, for her part, had no daughters to pass her skills on to. So I was the recipient of her embroidery and sewing skills. Both women liked to knit. But when it came to "foreign affairs"—the conduct of relations outside the house—Tzvia always consulted with my mother. She solicited her best friend's advice about when to go to the doctor, what to say to Ofer's teacher, what encyclopedia to buy, and other such questions.

When I was five years old, my mother decided to learn a skill that would enable her to work at home. She enrolled in a course in cosmetics and persuaded Tzvia to take one in pedicure. The two then established a salon that spanned the two sides of the street. They exchanged clients and earned spending money. Ten years later my mother decided that the time had come for her to work outside the house, in a regular and challenging job. When she found such a place, she looked for one for Tzvia as well. During these transitions, my mother took on the role of Tzvia's "father," encouraging her to believe in herself and serving as an example. She never took credit for Tzvia's successes, but she was always gratified by them.

Gender, Ethnicity, and Status: The Daughters' Side

Few women growing up in patriarchal society can feel mothered enough; the power of our mothers, whatever their love for us and their struggles on our behalf, is too restricted (Rich 1986, p. 243).

Even though she agrees in principle with Chodorow's claims, Rich chooses to emphasize the destructive ambivalence that prevails in relations between daughters and mothers. It results from the tension between what the daughter wants to be and what the mother wants her to be (and who the mother herself turned out to be). The unresolved rejection of the mother figure is often transferred into women's relations with other women. In this light, women can have equitable relationships with other women if they have divested themselves of the rejection they feel towards their mothers. The ability to break free of the suffocation built into daughter-mother relations is linked to the weakening of the patriarchy.

As a young country, Israel offered moments of slack patriarchy from which women could benefit. Generally, they exchanged one patriarchy for another (for example, by enlisting in the army). Despite this, they were empowered. The fact that Tzvia and Yona (like other feminists in their time) were fostered by their fathers served as a way of getting around the existing or absent figure of the mother. Both took advantage of the period when Israeli society was organizing itself in order to evade accepted, traditional compartments.

I received two women whose love, support, and force of empowerment for me were great, even if limited to a certain extent to a system of values in which patriarchy was still dominant. The fact that I grew up alongside my mother, alongside her firm friendship with Tzvia, and alongside Tzvia presented me with two different but also similar mother figures, and with a supportive and stable friendship between women. They were, each in her own way, significant models for the way one could be a woman. Together they showed me that, despite the bad name attached to women's friendships, it was possible to create a focal point of gender strength between, within, and outside the family frameworks. I spent hours sitting in the kitchen alongside them, or alongside one of them. I watched them work, I listened to their conversations, and I felt that I was being gathered in to the space that they created. I went out from their kitchens into the street, into the neighborhood, where there were only boys. I managed not badly with them on trees, on the playing field, in penknife games, and with marbles. But when I tried, without success, to urinate standing up, I ran home to seek comfort with these women. I did not see them as two alternative options for womanhood because they did similar things. But I could sense, as a girl, the quiet tones of variation.

Tzvia did not like being served (neither had she ever conceived that she ought to be pampered). As soon as she finished the cup of coffee my mother made for her, Tzvia would take the mug to the sink and wash it—and also do any other dishes that happened to be there. My mother's reproofs (and little nudges), whether spiced with humor or with disapproval, made no difference. On Saturday mornings, after her husband went to synagogue, she'd often walk across the street to our house and bring her own cup of coffee and slice of bread.

When I married, I inherited the sink battles. My home was very close to theirs and they followed my life from close up, offering much help. I replaced my mother's insistent comments and sighs with a stubborn defense of the sink and the abduction of Tzvia's emptied coffee mugs. But after a while I gave up. I stopped lecturing her about the dishwasher, about the importance of knowing also how to accept favors, and about my desire to extend my hospitality to her. When Dana told me about the sink wars in Malibu during Tzvia's visits there, I assured her that this simply meant that Tzvia was treating her as a daughter and that it certainly wasn't anything personal against her or any lack of confidence in her ability to wash dishes or of the capabilities of American dishwashers. Even my mother capitulated in the end.

When they traveled overseas together, Mom tried to teach Tzvia that it was not necessary to make the bed in their hotel room each morning, that it was permissible to throw wet towels on the floor in the corner of the bathroom. I understood the difference between my mother's growing willingness to accept that Tzvia's ongoing refusal was connected to their different self-images. I did sociology with that difference. Tzvia's expressions of gratitude for the fact that someone was serving her pained me personally,

and also because of what it said about gender, ethnicity, and class. I knew how to turn that picture around and see her stubbornness as adherence to a source of power, but I did not like that strategy. I expunged it from my repertoire of behaviors as a woman and a mother—but not entirely. I learned from my mother that to serve the others in one's home is one way of showing love—but also, mostly, a way of achieving peace and quiet.

Tzvia's stubbornness guides me during my rare visits to my son's rented apartment. I sit on the couch and enjoy listening to him fuss in the kitchen.

Before I sum up what made the relations established by the Freiman and Katbi children what they were, I would like to cross the gender boundary and return to my father. To a certain extent the relations between him and me will serve as chart for reading ethnic messages that cross the lines of “the kitchen and the home” and go out into the public, institutionalized space.

Gender, Ethnicity, and Class: The Father's Side

Nimrod, the son of a good friend, served in the Golani infantry brigade. He is a blonde kid from the well-off town of Herzliyya, a bookworm and obsessive film freak. In combat units, Ashkenazi men of this type are called “yellows.” Nimrod matched the label in every possible way. But during his service, as his comrades got to know him with the intimacy that military service offers, they discovered unexpected facets to his personality. He is proud of their judgment of him: “Nimrod is a yellow with the heart of a black.”

My father, who graduated from a college preparatory high school in Galicia and studied law for a year at university before moving to Palestine, could have tried to place himself among the yellows. He had all the necessary traits to fight for a place in the elite

of the Jewish community in Palestine—not in the center of the elite but not on its margins, either. But Dad chose to be a black. He had only disdain for his friends from Europe who, upon arriving in Palestine, switched their membership card in the anti-socialist Revisionist Zionist youth group Beitar, which stood in opposition to Mapai, for a membership card in the Histadrut labor federation. “I was never prepared to say that I was Mapai just to get a job,” he used to tell me, “except once.”

After World War II, he saw a newspaper advertisement soliciting men and women to go to Greece to help Jewish refugees there. Dad applied, stating that he read Greek (which he did, but classical Greek) and spoke many other languages. The job seemed to be his, but then he was called in for another talk. He’d been seen reading *HaBoker*, the daily newspaper of the Revisionist movement. “That was the only time I lied. I told them that it was the newspaper that the owner of the café subscribed to, and that I had no choice but to read it instead of *Davar*, the workers’ newspaper.” He went to Salonika and stayed there for about a year and a half. In the strongbox he left when he died I found letters he received from his mother and siblings in Poland up until the war began, and a clip from *Ha’aretz* of a long article he wrote describing the Salonikan Jews who had returned from the concentration camps. Salonika’s Jews were Sephardim, not Ashkenazim. The vast majority of Jews who suffered and died at the hands of the Nazis were Ashkenazim. That my father’s experience of the Holocaust was linked to the small Sephardi minority among its Jewish victims may have been happenstance, but for me it is symbolic.

In Salonika, he told me, he fell in love with Rembetiko music, seafood, and with a woman from the surviving Jewish community. But her family disapproved of her

relationship with an Ashkenazi. Like Zohar, he had a story of a romance cut short by ethnicity. Tel Aviv, where he lived, was a city of young people. His friends married, looked for work, and sought the resources to raise their children in their cramped apartments. He insisted on his freedom, moving from one temporary job to another, sleeping late in the morning and sitting long evening hours in Pinati or Kasit, his favorite Tel Aviv cafes. He read books, saw films, but stayed away from the theater. When he finally married, at the age of 36, he understood that he had to become more self-disciplined, but he refused to become part of the system. The job he found at WIZO was just right for him. He roamed the country's roads, changed landscapes and languages. He was at odds with his superiors and close to the recipients of their ministrations—the immigrants, the indigent, the children. Every so often one of the women who oversaw his work would try to press him: "David, you, with all your knowledge, and your talents, you don't have to stay at this work, maybe do an accounting course and work in the main office?" Mom tried to lend her weight to these suggestions but he rejected them time and again. Life in an office, behind a table groaning under paper and numbers, was for him a death sentence. He liked to take one of his women bosses to a meeting in the Jewish Agency building in Jerusalem, wait in the parking lot and shoot the bull with the other drivers. As he aged, more and more of the drivers were Mizrahim. They would tell him about overtime, grossing up, and perks, until he grew weary, opened the door of WIZO's American-made car and lay his long body down on the back seat. Then he'd do what he really loved doing—sleep and dream. A half-hour's nap could produce a two-hour long story staring the crazies of Stryi, the European town where he grew up, his high school Latin teacher, or his terrifying "Grandpa Vas."

Israeli society institutionalized, while my father was too lazy, or refused, to be domesticated. His high school friends grew up to be managers of one sort or another. Sometimes they would all make a pilgrimage to the large house of one man from their town who had become a wealthy car dealer. They'd gossip about him behind his back that "he never finished school and doesn't speak any language," but that didn't stop them from asking him for loans. Dad's friends from the British police, in which he had served for seven years, reached the top ranks of the new Israeli police force, but he had only contempt for men in uniform.

When people got together for the evening, my father was the star—witty, funny, sincere, and direct. He often paid for his honest talk at work and among his friends. Mom would often urge him to learn "to count to three" before he opened his mouth. He was a bad pupil, leaving her the sensible role in the family. Instead, he joined us children. He romped with us, updated himself on the latest slang, and refused to take any part in our formal education. He didn't go to school meetings, wasn't always sure what grade we were in, but could always recommend a good book he'd read. He'd join us at the movies or get, especially with me, into knock-down political debates.

I learned from my father that you can be a black Ashkenazi. You can belong, but not really. You can be capable but not always want to. You can want to but not always be capable. He was a black Ashkenazi without trying. For him, it was neither a cultural project nor an educational enterprise. He didn't do it so that his children could observe him and learn about nonconformism. He was just like that. He didn't feel comfortable among the light-skinned and he didn't like to be on the side of those in charge.

On the day Herut's leader, Menachem Begin, was elected prime minister, my father lost interest in him. "Just another politician. Did you see him run to the hospital to ask Moshe Dayan to join his cabinet?" He felt at ease on the street—it was great fun to walk around Tel Aviv with him. I learned from him that human beings are the most interesting things around us, and that there is no greater joy than to sit in a public place and watch people, to walk around, happen on conversations, to listen. He was my introductory course in the social sciences: theory, methodology, and field work.

When he retired, they took his car from him and sat him down at home. Too lazy to reinvent himself, he died within the year.

3. Black Poles and White Yemenites

If it is true that identity, with all its components, is learned from relationships, then my ethnic identity was constructed out of the relationships I have described: my mother's memories and stories about her family; my father's dreams and wanderlust. They were an organic part of my life on HaGolan Street, as it was shaped within my home, between the two homes that were almost opposite each other, and within the larger context that surrounded them. At the time I grew up to be an Ashkenazi woman, Zohar grew up to be a Yemenite man. We breathed the same air and ate from the same plates, we listed to the same teachers and saw the same movies at the Ram cinema. Yona, Tzvia, and Zohar made me an Ashkenazi woman, and Tzvia and Yona and I made Zohar a Yemenite man.

Since I also had a Yemenite mother and a father with the heart of a black man gave me more room for maneuver than did the fact that Zohar also had an Ashkenazi mother and a father in the standing army. That was because of the contextual advantage

of being Ashkenazi and because of my gender. It is easier for a girl and a young woman to be within relationships and to extract identity, connectedness, and empathy from them. The place that Tzvia received inside me is organic. She resides within me in very physical ways, in the memory of the touch of her skin, of hands that rubbed brandy onto my belly, of my eyes following her as she washed enamel pots in the sink in the yard. I can rehearse her movements as she shook out the laundry in the tub and hung the clothes up on the line to dry. I can hear her instructing that a just-whitewashed room be swept. She came back to me when I said *samallah* to my children when they sneezed or coughed, and I miss the endearment *ya binti* that she kept just for me. Zohar could not receive these kinds of things from my mother because he was a boy. When he was very young, my mother was his counselor and confidant, and they both grew with that arrangement. He would tell her things and she would listen. He would ask and she would try to answer.

When the American family of Dana, Zohar's wife, came to visit, they stayed with my mother. Our house served as liaison between the U.S. and the Middle East. It was an Ashkenazi station where the people could speak English and knew how to respect privacy. Dana's mother immediately discovered things in common with my mother and they became friends. Zohar claimed that his two white mothers were very much alike.

In the U.S., Zohar completed college and a masters degree and became a certified public accountant, auditor, and business manager. Ofer, who emigrated to the U.S. with the help of his big brother, became a producer who specialized in "world music." The youngest brother, Shlomi, took a more traveled route. His parents were unable to convince him to go to a vocational school (even a well-regarded one that provided a full

academic program and diploma). Instead he attended Tikhon Hadash, the high school I and my brothers went to, and afterwards he studied computers and business administration. Shlomi married an Ashkenazi woman and lives in Israel.

Our mothers believed in themselves and in the Zionist project. In retrospect, it seems to me that they accomplished a considerable portion of what they believed in within and outside their intimate association. Zohar (as well as Ofer and Shlomi) received the message that they were equal, that they were just like everyone else. Some of those messages were manifested in their lives. But finer probes revealed, to Zohar in particular,⁴⁸ deeper currents. Passing the flag on to the next generation was a more complex matter. What worked between the two mothers of the generation of Israel's independence became more complicated as society became set in its ways. The institutionalized social distance between Tzvia and my mother was smaller than that which gaped between me and Tzvia's nieces, who still live in the predominately Mizrahi neighborhood of Ramat Eliahu, and between Tzvia's children and their cousins. The cousins went to school in Ramat Eliahu, married within the neighborhood and raised their children there. They continue to speak with the Yemenite accent that Zohar, Ofer, and Shlomi lost, and most of them maintain a religious lifestyle.

Preservation of Yemenite ethnicity (Mizrahiyut) in body, voice, and faith is fulfillment of the role that Khazzoom writes of. Zohar's family preserves its Oriental Jewish "authenticity," and thus makes room for him and me to be "universalists." The distance between the inventory of roles grows wider, and the connection between the Katbi boys and their cousins in Yemenite farming villages or urban neighborhoods is dissolving. The farther away they went, the greater room for maneuver they gained. As

their room for maneuver grew, the cousins strengthened their hold on “authenticity,” faithful to Chinski’s statement that the preservation of “Jewish/Mizrahi identity among the weaker parts of the population is a source of critique and power.” It is an ex post facto source. The space that Tzvia created when she chose to distance herself from the Yemenite pole gave her children no little leeway, but the space was nevertheless always enclosed by fences, some of them visible but most of them transparent.

Zohar had (and, via Dana, he also has now) a Yemenite family and an Ashkenazi family. But he was less able to pass as an Ashkenazi than I was able to pass as a Yemenite. I have more room for maneuver. Ashkenazim who decide to be Mizrahim are accepted one way or another. Mizrahim who ignore their ethnic origin, as part of the cultural project they constitute for themselves, often receive slaps in the face from any number of directions, and from themselves as well. Beyond the gender advantage that allowed me to imbibe more from my Yemenite mother than Zohar could from his Ashkenazi mother, I enjoyed a structural advantage that made my Ashkenazi status preferable to his Mizrahi status. The sure ground on which I stood shook under Zohar’s feet, so he left. He moved on to other ground. Standing in the yard of his beautiful home in Malibu, barbequing juicy steaks for his family, he smiled at me. “Once black, always black—they brought me into their family so I could barbeque meat for them.” I didn’t think it was funny, but I thought to myself that maybe when you barbeque for others far from your home, it hurts less.

Three long days after I sent Zohar the text that tells his story, he called. It was morning for me, late at night for him. “Hello Ashkenazi woman,” he said when I picked

up the phone. "Hello," I replied, and felt a sense of relief. He had read me, and called me, correctly.

NOTES

¹ For more on the different forms this methodology can take, see, for example, Barzilai 2001, and the anthology Josselson & Lieblich 1995.

² On the concept of the literacy biography, see El-Or 2002, 173-179.

³ Aya was born Esther, and used the nickname Eti as a child. Her given name was a traditional Jewish one, while Aya is a modern Israeli name.

⁴ An organization that funds schooling and educational programs for immigrant and disadvantaged youth, often in kibbutzim or regional rural boarding schools.

⁵ Hever, Shenhav, and Motzafi-Haller (eds.) 2002.

⁶ See the discussion of Zizek in the wake of Lacan (2002), on the ability to ignore the “big other.”

⁷ In an interview in *Ha'aretz's* Friday magazine (Lee 2002), the artist Yigal Nizri reformulated a common statement about the Mizrahi's relaxed connection to religion: “There is no Mizrahi who doesn't come from a religious home, or whose parents didn't come from a religious home, except in the case of Communists, secular Iraqis in this instance. Mizrahim live at peace with Judaism and have no need to struggle with it, as the Ashkenazim do.”

⁸ Kiryat Herzog is a development in northern Pardes Katz built for young Ashkenazi Haredi families who could not afford homes in Bnei Brak proper. Its Ashkenazi population is declining, and Sephardi Haredim seek their way in to this exclusively Haredi area.

⁹ Binary labels of this type are familiar in other contexts as well: the slut and the good girl, the northern Tel Aviv nerd and the southern Tel Aviv punk. The divisions are made according to class, gender, and race, but not just by these parameters. Sometimes the parameters overlap, creating mixed categories such as the Ashkenazi slut and the intellectual punk, labels that may or may not be intended as subversive.

¹⁰ On the images of the saint and slut, see the chapter devoted to Rabbi Zer's lectures.

¹¹ Sigalit has read enough popular psychology to be familiar with its terms, but on occasion she misuses them. She presumably means “repressing” here.

¹² In Israel, marriage and divorce are under the purview of rabbinical courts. According to Jewish religious law, a woman cannot divorce her husband without his consent.

¹³ The sociology of the city and the street comprises a rich literature that cannot be addressed here. The key works of Simmel (Frisby and Featherstone 1997) and De Certeau (1984) have served as an inspiration for thought more than as analytic tools. The anthropology of the city and street is much poorer. Most studies are embedded in the urban context in which they were conducted and their theoretical contribution is limited. Some of the products of this anthropological research can be found in Low 1999 and Holston 1999.

¹⁴ Rachel thought that Eveline simply felt it would be impolite to cancel the meeting after we had already arrived, especially given the fact that it had taken us a long time to set the date. She was astounded that Eveline was willing to open up to strangers in embarrassing circumstances and attributed this to “the family’s culture.” Rachel said: “A lot of people think that Haredim are all alike. They don’t know that there are lots of problems in families, that there are differences between ethnic communities, that there are economic difficulties that tear families apart. Even here, where the house looks beautiful and well-ordered, there are problems with educational values. I really don’t understand how her daughter can talk to her like that, it’s not something I could pass over.” I told Rachel that perhaps the payment we had offered Eveline in return for the interview was what kept her from asking us to leave. She felt uncomfortable taking the money and not giving us the interview, so she proceeded with it even though she would rather not have had us there. I agreed with Rachel, however, that Eveline had a different way of distinguishing between the private or family sphere and the sphere of other people. Just as she brought her mother and sister into the argument with her daughter, she also brought us in as sister-women who might well understand her and make her feel better in the difficult situation she found herself in.

¹⁵ Arab feminist literature describes a similar situation in large cities such as Cairo and Amman. The movement of rural families into the city, and life in a densely-populated area full of unfamiliar people, has encouraged many women to choose traditional dress, and traditional head covering in

particular, as a shield against the street. The use of public transportation has become essential for moving through the urban space, and is more secure when the body declares: “I am a saint, do not touch” (Hale 1989).

¹⁶ Eveline covered her hair with a net kerchief that left a bit of hair above her forehead exposed. She dressed well for the classes at the community center, with heavy makeup around her green eyes. It was clear that she was not at the strict end of Haredi society as, for example, Rachel is. In class, she generally sat next to Leah, an Ashkenazi Haredi women who was separated from her husband and in the process of losing her religion. The other Haredi women in the class labeled both these women as “lax” and “freer” than they themselves were.

¹⁷ Such a feeling can, of course, be multifaceted. That is, each neighbor feels that the others are not exemplars and each sees himself different from the others, in the sense that “I am the home and they are the street.”

¹⁸ On “The New Haredi Flâneur,” see El-Or and Neria 2003.

¹⁹ Aya and Bracha improved their social placement relative to their families, while Sigalit and Eveline are perceived by their mothers (at least at some stages of their lives) as threatening their families’ good names.

²⁰ Many of the interviewees who attended non-religious state schools in Pardes Katz remember them warmly, praise the teachers and counselors, and recall an atmosphere of support and encouragement.

²¹ Swirsky, in his book *Education in Israel: The District of Separate Tracks* (1990), points to the consequences of channeling Mizrahi students into vocational schools. This tendency creates a class of laborers and technicians, above whom is a class of professionals, most of whom are Ashkenazi, graduates of academic programs. On this issue, see also Yonah and Saporta 2002. After addressing the socio-political issue of national lands, the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow movement turned to the issue of vocational education in high school. The movement seeks to end tracking and offer all students full academic studies.

²² Leibow 1967.

²³ In a different chapter, Liebow describes the conjugal and family relationships in the neighborhood. He argues that, at the beginning of their adult lives, its inhabitants accept the validity of the ideal American family model of a married couple heading a nuclear family, and seek to adopt it. But in the conditions of their lives, alternative structures and families turn out to accomplish the task of life better. These structures are seen, both by the establishment and by the inhabitants themselves, as dysfunctional, and as a default choice. Thus, two logical systems function in parallel, and in mutual dependence. They reflect each other's successes and failures, and what is normative and not normative.

²⁴ In general I did not cover my hair while doing my field work for this book. During my observations in the community center and at Rabbi Zer's talks I could dress in a secular fashion (within reason—completely bare arms and legs would have alienated some people I wanted to speak to) and with my hair exposed. But my first encounter with the Haredi women's club took place in a synagogue, and there I wore a hat that left some hair in view. I therefore dressed in a similar fashion in my subsequent meetings with the women in the club.

²⁵ Vicky Kanfo was a single mother dependent on Israel's supplementary income allowance and other benefits. In the summer of 2003, when Minister of Finance Binyamin Netanyahu cut these payments, she draped herself in an Israeli flag and set out on foot from her home in Mitzpeh Ramon, in Israel's far south, to Jerusalem. Her march attracted many supporters and garnered much media attention.

²⁶ The presence or absence of a television set is an important diagnostic parameter. Children accepted into Sephardi Haredi schools are placed in specific institutions and classes by a number of criteria, such as the father's occupation (scholar or worker), Sabbath observance, whether or not the mother covers her hair. The television is an important threshold criterion, especially for families of *mit'hazkim*, or *hozrim be-teshuva*.

²⁷ On the sociology of the dissolution of the collective, see Kimmerling 2004.

²⁸ The claim that the best way to educate children was to remove them from home into boarding schools characterized Israeli education until the 1970s. The significance of boarding school education in Israel is addressed more broadly below, in the section devoted to Or Hayyim.

²⁹ Many Haredi women internalize the message that their education to be preschool, elementary school, or sewing teachers is in fact education for motherhood. They know that there are few openings for teachers. In the absence of other job possibilities (other options for employment have opened up only recently), they accept this literacy restriction as a way of gaining proficiencies useful in maintaining a large family (El-Or 1994).

³⁰ Although she immediately qualifies her statement and says that its better to increase the birthrate than to have abortions.

³¹ For a time this prestigious school had classes with an Ashkenazi majority and a small number of Sephardi girls “from strong homes,” alongside entirely Sephardi classes. Today, Esti testifies, the Ashkenazi girls are bused to another Ashkenazi school and the local school has become entirely Sephardi.

³² Most Haredi girls’ schools do not enable their students to complete all the requirements for a *bagrut* diploma. The *bagrut* exams conducted by the Ministry of Education’s Independent School System serve as “equivalents” to *bagrut* exams but do not meet the criteria for college study. Today a small number of Haredi girls’ schools serving English-speaking families, as well as a small number of Sephardi schools, prepare their pupils for the standard *bagrut* examinations. The situation is similar to some kibbutzim, which in the past, for ideological reasons, deliberately did not prepare their teenage children for the *bagrut* examinations. Like Haredim today, these kibbutzim viewed acceptance of the Ministry of Education’s academic agenda as a surrender of pedagogical control over their children. The kibbutzim eventually accepted the national curriculum and standards, and today there is a similar, if still quite tentative, change underway in the Haredi sector.

³³ See Lupo 2006.

³⁴ The library at Tel Aviv University's school of education is remarkably well-endowed with studies of boarding school education in Israel. The fact that, at the beginning of the 1990s, the proportion of school children in boarding schools was still about 20 percent, is an excellent explanation for this wealth of material. This research was carried out at the Hebrew University's school of education and department of sociology (see Hakimi and Kahana 1990) and the school of education at Tel Aviv University (Kashti, Shlasky, Arieli 2000). Each of these research homes differed notably in ideology. The work done in Jerusalem at the Hebrew University came first and evinces a more establishment tone. Kahane and Hakimi concluded their introduction to the book they edited with regrets that boarding schools were losing their prestige: "We cannot conclude this introduction without noting that attempt in recent years to downsize boarding schools and turn them into therapeutic or custodial institutions is a fundamental error" (p. xii). The Tel Aviv studies come later chronologically and display a more critical approach. In their introduction to the Tel Aviv collection, the editors state that boarding school education has proven successes in providing better education, social mobility, and naturalization, when compared to standard education. Of parallel populations. Nevertheless, the Tel Aviv writers' point of view is not that of "the good of the country" or "progress." Their historical survey of the nature of boarding schools from the 1930s onward explains the changes this form of education underwent and offers a wide range of points of views, including those of students, teachers, and counselors—and offers more complex insights. For other studies of boarding school education, see Kashti et al. 1991.

³⁵ The only social study I found on the Or Hayyim institutions is Bernstein 2000 not in bibliography she is inside Kashti. This work, first published at the beginning of the 1980s, is reprinted in Kashti, Shlaski and Arieli 2000. She bases her findings on an analysis of the school newspaper and interviews with teachers and counselors. She stresses in particular the double process of support and supervision. These mechanisms operate in the long term and accompany the pupils from the day they enter the school and into their adult lives.

³⁶ On Moshe Pardo and his life work, see Walach 2002.

³⁷ Rabbi Hayyim Ben-Atar moved from his native Morocco to the Holy Land, where he established a yeshiva in Safed. He died in 1741 and was buried on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

³⁸ According to Lithuanian jurisprudence, it is forbidden to use electricity produced by Israel's electric company on the Sabbath because the maintenance of the system requires Jewish workers to violate the laws of the Sabbath.

³⁹ On the Lithuanian role in the constitution of the Sephardi Haredi community, see Lupo 1997, 2006.

⁴⁰ If we replace the yeshiva, which is also a boarding school in the quote with the word "kibbutz," and the establishment of Lithuanian hegemony with the historical hegemony of Mapai, the large labor Zionist party that ruled Israel during its first three decades, we can see just how strong are the parallels between the secular and Haredi stories of rescuing the Mizrahim. The same goes for the story of rejection, in the Haredi case leading to the formation of Shas, and in the Zionist case leading to the accession to power of the Likud party.

⁴¹ An interesting corollary of this thesis is the struggle over care and responsibility for the recent Falashmora immigrants from Ethiopia between Shas and the political parties that represent the immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

⁴² *To the East: Orientalism in the Arts in Israel* (the Hebrew name was "*Qadima*," which means "forward" as well) was the Israel Museum's flagship exhibition on the occasion of the country's 50th anniversary. It spread over large portions of the museum's main building and was accompanied by an opulent catalogue. This choice of a charged and critical subject was the curators' way of "celebrating" the occasion.

⁴³ Khazzoom 1998.

⁴⁴ It is clear to Chinski, as it is to Shohat and Khazzoom, that processes of "the obliteration of pasts" have various implications. To create an appearance of Westernness, the Ashkenazim had to expunge the remnants of the Diaspora. This obliteration worked in their favor and helped mark them as worthy of hegemony. The obliteration of the subordinates' past worked against them,

because it severed them from their last sources of power. In other words, it was worthwhile for the Ashkenazim to give up their tradition, but for the Sephardim it reinforced their subordinate status. Chinski notes that the equation can be reversed—the revival of an “authentic Oriental” culture can be an evasive strategy by the subordinates. The demand to make transparent the ethnic component in white identity is another facet of the same strategy, because such exposure demonstrates how much work is invested in ethnic identities that pretend not to be ethnic identities.

⁴⁵ In the introduction to the new edition of her book *Of Woman Born*, Rich discusses this quote and its continuation. She relates that her children had a black nanny. In critical retrospect, she minimizes the egalitarian essence implied in the passage and recalls that her and her children’s black “mother” was a salaried worker, scion of a slave family in the American south. There is a fundamental difference between the American and Israeli contexts—that of slavery and institutionalized racism—but there are also similarities. In this case I found it appropriate to refer to Rich’s quote, which emphasized that a girl can have more than one mother, and that their mothers may be very different from one another.

⁴⁶ Tzvia and Yona hated gossip and exclusive friendship. They spent many hours together, but also carefully preserved their time outside each other’s company. They did not have other close friends among the neighbors, and they were critical of those women who spent all day “going from one friend to another.” When my father complained that my mother was a “snob,” her retort was that all the other women ended up quarrelling and came to her to carp about the women who until yesterday had been their best friends. The female connection between Tzvia and Yona coexisted together with a certain contempt for stereotypical femininity—gossipy, spineless, pampered.

⁴⁷ Paradoxically, as the years went by, my mother reduced her maid’s hours. During the years that she worked outside the house and earned a good salary, she called housecleaning “my exercise.” My father did not get anywhere near cleaning and never entered the kitchen. Tzvia’s husband, however, helped care for his children, especially when they were small. He bathed and fed them, took them on walks, and took them, one by one, each in turn, on his bicycle to the beach. My

mother often held him up as an exemplar when she wanted to criticize my father.

⁴⁸ Two elements distinguish Zohar from his two brothers. The first is that he was the eldest, successful son; the second is his very “Yemenite” appearance. The first gave him everything he needed to blaze his path with confidence, with his family that had left the Yemenite neighborhood, and with an environment that believed in him. On the other hand, his body bore the colors identifying him as Oriental. Shlomi, the youngest brother, knew how to evade obstacles that Zohar encountered, and also had a “whiter” appearance, with relatively fair skin and straight hair.