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ABSTRACT

Within many traditional Jewish texts, women's bodies are portrayed as fertile vessels through which they can birth children and fulfill their nation-building roles. When Zionism arose as a prominent Jewish movement in the mid-1800s, Theodore Herzl envisioned this nationalist movement as an alternative to religious Judaism. Nevertheless, he accessed the Jewish narratives of female fertility as a means of enabling Jewish survival and of contrasting the newly masculinized Jews. Women's natural, passive fertility became a fundamental part of the nation-building endeavor and a necessity to Jewish survival. Women's reproduction became not only a physical necessity but also a social role and a means of her political enfranchisement. Although the pronatalism in the early era of Israel's statehood maintained loose tethers between the reproductive policies and religious narratives, the recent and nearly unilateral support for modern fertility treatments tightened those connections and galvanized the religious subtexts within Israeli society. These treatments, particularly in vitro fertilization, facilitate women's national duty to bear children, appealing to a complex narrative of nationalism which affirms the reproductive role of the female body.

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Conceiving Motherhood

The Jewish Female Body in Israeli Reproductive Practices

By Elana Bloomfield
Haverford Colleg

Introduction

> The doctor said to me, "Look, everyone's being killed in this country. People are being killed so you should probably want more babies." I must say, at that moment, she had made a point.
>
> Pninah[1]

Pninah had already birthed two children with the assistance of fertility treatments when she approached her gynecologist with a request for contraception. She was emotionally and physically exhausted and she sought assurance that her body could recover from the stress of the procedures. In the midst of the Second Intifada, however, her doctor was acutely aware of the implications that Pninah's choice held for the collective Jewish population and she urged Pninah to consider her decision in connection to its political ramifications. Pninah found her body written into the collective narrative of national survival, recognizing her responsibility to support the nation through her reproductive role. Her fertility had become both a private experience and a public resource. Pninah, like generations of women before her, acknowledged the legitimacy of her doctor's message and chose not to use contraception, aligning her physical experience with the collective, national needs.

Pninah's experience reflects the contemporary incarnation of a cultural narrative that originated in the biblical stories of the Jewish matriarchs. Within many traditional Jewish texts, women's bodies are portrayed as fertile vessels through which they can birth children and fulfill their nation-building roles. When Zionism arose as a prominent Jewish movement in the mid-1800s, Theodore Herzl envisioned this nationalist movement as an alternative to religious

[1] The subjects interviewed are profiled in the appendix.

Judaism.[2] Nevertheless, he accessed the Jewish narratives of female fertility as a means of enabling Jewish survival and of contrasting the newly masculinized Jews. Women's natural, passive fertility became a fundamental part of the nation-building endeavor and a necessity to Jewish survival. Reproduction became not only a physical need but also a social role and a means of her political enfranchisement. Although the pronatalism in the early era of Israel's statehood maintained loose tethers between the reproductive policies and religious narratives, the recent and nearly unilateral support for modern fertility treatments tightened those connections and galvanized the religious subtexts within Israeli society. These treatments are perhaps the most unnatural means for achieving natural pregnancy, but they appeal to a complex narrative of nationalism which affirms the reproductive role of the female body and they facilitate women's national duty to bear children.

This paper exists in a contained and finished form but the narratives held within this work are inevitably organic and evolving. Through ethnographic material, primary histories, and secondary analyses, I have sought to understand the contemporary reproductive experiences of Israeli women as a narrative of religious evolution, but I am certain that many women under-stand their experiences differently. The interviews are the means by which I can contextualize the scholarly discourse; I realize that any step away from women's voices presents risks of inadvertently compromising the integrity of the religious and cultural messages that Israeli women find truly meaningful. No less importantly, the women's presence within the paper serves as a testimony to the reverberant subtexts inherent to Israeli society. In the end, I hope I have constructed a work which is both analytically critical and ideologically sensitive to the complex and emotionally charged experiences of Israeli motherhood and reproduction.

I first examine the religious narratives of Jewish female identity which underlie the politicized reproductive policies within Israel. Using biblical passages and midrashic interpretation,[3] I explore how important streams of rabbinic Judaism sought to make sense of the creation stories within Genesis and subsequently came to develop a discourse surrounding gender identity. This religious view of the body evolved further in the late 1800s when aspects of Zionist ideology incorporated this fertile yet passive female role into its nationalist endeavor. Although Zionist leaders Theodore Herzl, Max Nordau, and Aaron Gordon sought to create a different Jewish experience,[4] they accessed the Jewish

[2] Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist idea: a historical analysis and reader* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 204-05.

[3] A Midrash is a commentary on the Hebrew Bible that initially existed in oral form. Midrashim (the plural for Midrash) have since been written down in textual form.

[4] Hertzberg, 200-203; 232-234; 368-370.

paradigm of nation-building which centered on female fertility. Moreover, because much of early Zionism was a reaction to European anti-Semitism which targeted the "emasculated"[5] Jewish male, Herzl, Nordau, and Gordon found a means of enhancing men's masculinity by opposing the religiously-imagined fertile female.

I then consider how the Jewish narratives of women's fertility entered into the modern State of Israel without the overt connections to religion. Israel instituted profoundly pronatalist policies which created social roles for mothers; legislation such as maternal awards, labor laws, and reproductive policies defined what a good woman should be and what a good woman should not be. Subsequently, I will turn to governmental policy, health publications, and women's narratives to consider the methods by which the social role of motherhood expanded this cultural lexicon beyond a level of bodily fertility. These sources demonstrate how the public sphere placed women within a framework of maternity which, in turn, privileged her womb as the means by which she could fulfill her duty to the nation. The newly politicized motherhood subsumed the religious narratives and built them into resonant pillars of Israeli society.

Finally, I address the nationally subsidized fertility treatments, particularly in-vitro fertilization (IVF), which have developed as a part of the political legislation of motherhood. These treatments exemplify the pronatalism that Israel has consistently practiced and they add a new dimension to the reproductive policies by permitting a concrete link between social and communal Israeli interests and women's bodies. Discourse surrounding these treatments poses an opportunity to dissect the ways in which the government and women become dynamic actors in the internalization of fertility narratives. The treatments are the result of a linear development of politicized motherhood, but they are also directly linked to religious narratives of female reproductive identities through the language and imagery of women's chambered, passive bodies. IVF affirms the physical images of women's embodied wombs and enters into Israeli society as an end result of those internalized female narratives and as a galvanizing link back to religious narratives.

[5] Otto Weininger, *Sex and character* (New York: Howard Fertig Press, 2003).

Imagining Women: The Natural Body and the Nature of Reproduction

> Women are created, by the nature of our creation, we were created to nurture and to have families. Today, it's a little distorted because women feel like, what if I choose not to? Well, you do have a choice not to. But you can't take away from what we were created to do as people.
>
> Bat-El

> Is motherhood a choice? Of course it's a choice. But we're going back to our culture, so what do we really choose in life?
>
> Michal

Much of the discourse that exists within Israeli reproductive legislation today has lost its overtly religious tones, replaced instead by a call for a Jewish demographic presence and a concern for women who desire motherhood. These issues have become a part of Israeli culture but they have roots which extend back into the earliest narratives of human creation. The construction of women in Israeli society, which began as a religious endeavor, flowed into the national culture and has come to influence the choices women make for their own bodies. Much of the continuity stems from the ongoing importance of Jewish nation-building and survival. The modern concerns are remarkably parallel to the verses in Genesis when God commands Adam to "fill the earth and master it," (Gen. 1:28)[6] and tells Abraham that, "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you" (Gen. 17:6). National survival necessitated specific gender roles in the past and present, for Jewish continuity depended on reproduction. Within Jewish biblical stories and later exegesis, reproduction became an essentially female role and women's creation became explicitly tied to their procreative bodies. The shape of a woman's body prepared her for bearing children and entered into modern Israeli society through pronatalist reproductive policies.

"The Mother of All Living": Eve and the Maternal Woman

The language of reproduction and fertility in modern Israel originates in the creation of Eve. The Hebrew Bible offers a powerful account of her origin which has evolved within rabbinic discourse. Although there is no unilateral interpretation of female creation and her subsequent role in society, there are certain streams which have profoundly informed the lasting narratives of women.

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[6] Harold W. Attridge, Wayne A. Meeks, and Jouette M. Bassler, *The HarperCollins study Bible: new revised standard version, including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books (*San Francisco, Calif: Harper San Francisco, 2006). All future biblical passages will be taken from this translation and the chapters and verses will be noted in the text.

Among the various discourses is one which has conceptualized women's social identities in direct connection to their reproductive bodies. The discourse continually affirms women's roles and duties as they are manifested in their all-important wombs. Women's ability to bear children has become their externalized signifier, and the place that they have come to occupy within society is derived from their wombs. These accounts have offered rich and lasting capital for social identities as they are created through social institutions and political forums.

Although women's societal identities have developed out of their reproductive roles, general consensus among rabbis suggests that women are not commanded to procreate as men are. Among several explanations, there is a common view that only men are responsible for the biblical injunction "to be fruitful and multiply" due to the correlate commandment to "fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). Certain felt that the inherent aggressiveness was contrary to women's dispositions and thus presumed that only men were held accountable for procreation.[7] Although women do not carry the same responsibility as men to procreate, the pressure for women to bear children is just as forceful. Some rabbis have even suggested that women were not commanded to procreate because such a commandment would be redundant given woman's natural desires to bear children.[8] Hodaya, an Orthodox Jewish woman with whom I met, shared this opinion, telling me: "It is so natural for a woman to want to reproduce that it does not need to be commanded." The religious discourse imagines women as incomplete with-out a male partner and so marriage becomes a tacit requirement. Hodaya explained that upon marriage, women "are obligated to help their husband fulfill his commandment." Several Midrashim firmly encourage women to marry so that women's fertility, though unofficial, is implicitly commanded.

Tracing the discourse surrounding woman's creation from the biblical stories into the present reveals the powerful imagery that has inscribed her reproductive body. There are two creation stories within Genesis which later Midrashic texts have sought to reconcile. The first creation story describes God's creation of man and woman as a single event: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). In the second, Eve is formed from Adam's rib: "And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man"

[7] Rochelle L. Millen, *Women, birth, and death in Jewish law and practice*, Brandeis series on Jewish women (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 20-21.
[8] Millen, 20-21.

(Gen. 2:22). In order to reconcile the two stories, certain interpretations of human creation suggest that the original person formed by God was actually androgynous, encompassing male and female in one body. Eve became a separate person from Adam when God realized Adam needed a partner. Subsequently, each retained certain pieces of the original body. The way in which Eve and Adam received their individual identities stemmed largely from the reproductive roles they assumed; woman gained the womb while men retained the penis. As Leslie Hazelton explores within her work, there exists a powerful linguistic relationship between the Hebrew word for each reproductive organ and the qualities that they imply; the word for womb (*rechem*) also means mercy and compassion while the word for penis (*zayin*) also means weapon.[9] Men and women's personal identities correlated with their internal organs.

At the very outset of creation, Eve's name secures her identity: "The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20). The linguistic connection between her creation and her reproductive role has been lost in English but it remains tightly connected in the Hebrew, in which the name Eve (*Chavah*) comes from the Hebrew word for life (*chai*).[10] Through this connection, Eve's name has become a perpetual symbol of her biological role and this role has secured her social identity. God creates Eve's body so that she is the mother of all living beings and Adam receives the authority to assign her a name. In both contexts, Eve is a passive figure whose body is formed and named by masculine figures. Eve's womb becomes de-fining of her internal creation and later extends outward as its connotations shape her communal role. Rabbi Hisda wrote about women's physical creation in *Genesis Rabbah* 18.3: "He [God] built more chambers in her than in a man, fashioning her broad below and narrow at the top, so that she could receive child."[11] Women's bodies retain a distinct emptiness for the purpose of carrying a child. A woman's body is ready to "receive child" but not to create a child; she has no agency in forming a child creatively and instead exists in the correct conformation for holding the child. Woman entered into the world as a chamber and only through the man can she find fulfillment.

Man's fulfillment of a woman comes not merely in filling her chambers, which he does, but also in correctly forming the chambers. The male partner introduces

[9] Lesley Hazleton, *Israeli women: the reality behind the myths* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), 95-96.

[10] Millen, 26.

[11] Ruth Baskin, *Midrashic women: formations of the feminine in Rabbinic literature,* Brandeis series on Jewish women (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2002), 21.

a number of necessary and tangible factors in permitting women's reproductive roles. Chief among these is a conformational change within women's bodies to permit conception. Samuel b. Unya wrote about the transformation women undergo upon partnership with men in B. Sanhedrin: "Before marriage a woman is a shapeless lump. It is her husband who transforms her into a useful vessel."[12] Marriage permits women to take the shape that their creation presupposed; prior to marriage, when she has no reproductive function, she is useless. This form returns to the imagery that Rabbi Hisda used in his comment about women's many chambers. A woman's fertility centralizes her identity, but it also requires some correct conformation via a secondary actor. The concept of shape proves important in modern-day fertility treatments, in which invasive medical procedures seek to overcome the "deformed" shape of women's reproductive chambers.

During much of the time when the relevant Midrash were written, popular conceptions of reproduction conjectured that men's semen was the primary life material; women accepted men's "seed" and nurtured it in their wombs.[13] As a result, within the context of reproduction, women occupied a dialectical tension in which they existed for the purpose of bearing children but they were the passive partner in this act of creation. This passivity stemmed largely from the sentiment within B. Niddah 31b that women entered the world completely dependent upon man for survival:

> When a male comes into the world his provisions come with him, [the Hebrew for] "male" (zakhar) [being composed of the consonants for the words for], "this is provision (zeh khar)," for it is written, "And be prepared a great provision (kherah) for them" (2 Kings 6:23). [Conversely] a female has nothing with her, [the Hebrew for] "female" (n'qevah) implying "she comes with nothing" (n'qiyyah ba'ah).[14]

This partnership brings women into a relationship which necessitates fertility and demonstrates women's non-substantive contribution to procreation. Women's wombs receive but do not create; they can produce only out of the building blocks that man provides to them. Women may not be commanded to procreate but their creation presupposed a pairing that would make up for their incompletion.

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[12] Ibid., 99.
[13] Michel Gold, *Does God belong in the bedroom?* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992), 107.
[14] Baskin, 14.

The view that women's bodies are built through marriage and procreation remains strong within female society today. I visited Rebbetzin Steiner at a religious girls' school where she teaches Jewish family law. She used the same imagery of construction to describe the way in which reproduction creates a structural transformation within the individual:

> The word for son is *ben* which is related to the word *banyan* which is building. The word for daughter is *bat* which is related to the word *bayit* which is home. So the idea is that children provide parents with a means of building themselves a home. A person without a child—a man or a woman—is very much un-built.

Rebbetzin Steiner accesses the same type of physical imagery that rabbinical figures such as Rabbi Hisda used in speaking of women's many chambers. Here, she takes the physicality of reproduction and brings it into the social realm; that is, a woman is built internally through reproduction but ultimately, the resulting home stands as a physical construction that exists on the communal level. Similarly to Jewish tradition, the womb is an internal structure but the results of its correct use are outwardly manifested. Within Jewish narrative, women's social inclusion rests on the fulfillment of their creative purpose of reproduction, a purpose which can only be fulfilled through secondary activation.

The primacy of fertility, perhaps ironically, is epitomized by the biblical stories of infertility. These instances exemplify the pivotal role that fertility played both in the self-fulfillment of the women and in the fulfillment of their positions in society. Perhaps the most resonant example of the travails of biblical infertility occurred with Leah and Rachel.[15] For each woman, her ability to bear Jacob children became a reflection of her value. As a Midrash in *Genesis Rabbah* 71.2 explains, Leah bears Jacob many children and this redeems her within the eyes of her family:

> "The Lord supports all who stumble" (Ps. 145.14): this refers to childless women who fall [i.e.] are disgraced] in their own homes; "And makes all who are bent stand straight" (Ps. 145.14): As soon as God visits them with children, they are raised up. The proof is that Leah was unloved in her house, yet when the Holy One, blessed be He, visited her, she was able to stand straight.[16]

[15] There are several relevant biblical passages that address God's intervention in the matriarchs' infertility; regarding Leah: "When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb" (Gen. 29:31); regarding Rachel: "Then God remembered Rachel, and God heeded her and opened her womb" (Gen. 30:22).

[16] Baskin, 131.

Leah gains favor in her house because she fulfills her purpose. Moreover, Leah's physical transformation upon giving birth reflects the earlier Midrash that reproduction introduces a conformational change. God grants Leah children, enabling her to achieve her designed purpose, and this action returns Leah to her natural, physical form.

Rachel's infertility offers another example of the profound partnership between woman and God in conceiving a child. After failing to conceive a child, she painfully chastises Jacob: "Give me children or else I shall die" (Gen. 30.1). Jacob responds indignantly, "Can I take the place of God, who has denied you fruit of the womb?" (Gen. 30. 2). Rachel finds no value in her life if she fails to bear children and yet she finds herself powerless to change her situation. Within these accounts of infertility, God becomes the crucial partner in reproduction, for he enables conception. Rachel's ability to bear children depends upon God's attention to her need. As many religious Jews believe today, reproduction depends on three partners: man, woman, and God. Many women continue to understand their fertility as a blessing from God and they view fertility treatments as God's active engagement with them, just as God intervened with Leah and Rachel. In this way, having a child, even with the help of reproductive technology, is not merely a human choice but a divine blessing.

The urgency with which Rachel and Leah appealed for children demonstrates the direct social and ideological implications that their reproduction held for the Jewish people. When they bore a child, they were fulfilled because they contributed to the building of the Jewish nation. Biblical women set a precedent for modern women that the righteous, good woman will be "like a fruitful vine within the sides of your house."[17] She should produce prolifically and endlessly, until that "house" of Jews is filled with her children. This fertility connects to nationalism and the religious traditions of today. A formal model of childbirth exists even within the marriage ceremonies in which many brides are blessed with the same words that blessed the matriarch Rebecca: "May you be a mother of thousands of myriads."[18] As with the early narratives of female bodies, the bride's body will undergo its activation in partnership with the male and, with her body in its correct form, she can then help to fill the earth.

The relationship between women's fertility and national survival exists throughout religious texts, for the two are intimately connected in Jewish

[17] Baskin, 112. Ps. 128.3, from Midrash collection *Tanhuma*, (*Vayishlah* 36, f. 55).

[18] Susan Sered, *What makes women sick?: maternity, modesty, and militarism in Israeli society*, Brandeis series on Jewish women (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2000), 47.

tradition. I spoke with Rachel during my trip and she explained the she finds this association exceedingly clear throughout Jewish history. She suggests that Jewish women are genetically hardwired to bear children for the interest of the Jewish nation. Rachel finds support for this in the stories of biblical women who understood that their communal roles depended on their childbearing responsibilities:

> I think there's something called cultural genetics. I really believe that just like the matriarchs — whatever happened in the Chumash — the stories of the matriarchs you see their intense desire to build the Jewish nation. That's what it's all about, those stories. And you also have the story of the women in Egypt. At the same time when there was a decree that the children were being killed and the husbands said, "It's better that we divorce because we can't continue to conceive children, what's the point?" And the women said, "No. We'll have the girls. Somehow things will be good." And they continued to bear children. It's like spiritual genetics. This drive to build families. You can't snuff it out…It's genetics. We're warriors like that.

Armed with their fertile wombs, women's reproduction constitutes their battle for national survival. Women can offer their bodies to the Jewish mission and this becomes their primary source of identity. In this way, women's identities develop social and political elements from the physical dimensions of their wombs; the biological functions of reproduction inform their existence and they secure Jewish survival by serving as reproductive vessels for the collective interest.

Jewish discourse, while affirming the great importance of women in nation building, predicates her contribution on her reproductive body. Eve's role in the stories of creation emphasizes the centrality of the womb to female identity. Her physical form reflects her duty to procreate and she is empty in expectation of partnership with a man who can enable this purpose. She is the vessel that must be filled, the being who can produce the nation if she is given something with which to work. Her duty to the Jewish people depends on her chambered body and its physical, fertile structure. This emphasis on woman's shape in conception carries through to modern fertility treatments, as does the sense that a woman is the secondary actor within reproduction. Before entering into modern Israeli society, however, the religious narratives underwent an important evolution. These narratives were incorporated into the nationalism espoused by many

leaders of Zionism and their religious origins blended into the ideological constructions of gender and nation-building.

Manly Men and Fertile Females: Secularizing Religious Constructions of Women

The centrality of Jewish survival to Judaism gained a new meaning as Zionism arose in Jewish-European consciousness. Although Zionism developed through a variety of people and held different and often conflicting meanings, it was, at the most general level, a movement that sought to procure a Jewish homeland in then-Palestine.[19] Theodore Herzl, who many consider to be the "father of the Jewish State," envisioned Zionism as an alternative to Judaism.[20] Early Zionist thinkers such as Theodore Herzl and Aaron Gordon brought into their ideological configuration of Zionism many vestiges of Jewish narratives. Despite many of the leaders' protestations against Jewish religiosity, their Zionism retained an intimate link to the religious foundations. This link arose, in part, out of the inevitable reality that Jewish religion served as a cultural link among Jews of the decentralized Diaspora. But more than finding them convenient for religious imagery, many Zionists found religious narratives of women's fertility to be particularly important in constructing the rhetoric and imagery of their modern nationalism.

Zionism arose in an environment of anti-Semitism that accused Jewish men of being feminine, weak, and emasculated figures. This context propelled Herzl, among many later Zionists, to return to the religious narratives of Jewish survival which centered around the passively reproductive female. These narratives provided not only a practical means for a newly galvanized Jewish nationalism but also a means of strengthening the masculinity of men by enhancing the fertility and passivity of women. Although the gender discussion within this section will begin by focusing on male constructions of masculinity, women's gender identities were deeply inscribed in connection to the narratives of masculinity. Women's fertility, which came to parallel the fertility of the land, offered men a means of achieving a masculine, Jewish revival.

The centrality of women's identity to the Zionist movement arose largely out of the historical context surrounding its ideological development. In large part, the Enlightenment movement within Europe served as the direct precursor to

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[19] Shlomo Avineri, *The making of modern Zionism: intellectual origins of the Jewish state* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 3.

[20] Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic conduct: the rise of heterosexuality and the invention of the Jewish man,* Contraversions, 8 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 278.

Zionism. The Enlightenment began in the late 1700s with the purpose of bringing a new intellectualism to Europe.[21] Although the Enlightenment invoked lofty goals of equality and justice, the movement did not fulfill its promises in connection to the Jews. While the Enlightenment philosophers no longer called on theological doctrine as the source of anti-Semitism, they placed anti-Semitism within the context of pseudo-intellectualism. Within this new intellectual framework, the justification for the persistent persecution of the Jews assumed supposedly rational explanations. German and Austrian scholars, in particular, began to use new theories within psychology and philosophy to justify the inherent differences and inferiority of Jews relative to gentile Europeans.[22] Thus, by the time Zionism arose as a significant movement within Jewish-European populations, anti-Semitism existed pervasively throughout European society, among gentiles and Jews.

Chief among this new wave of post-Enlightenment scholars was Otto Weininger, an Austrian Jew.[23] Weininger wrote a work entitled *Sex and character*, in which he suggested that the Jewish male had become a thoroughly emasculated figure, equivalent to what he deemed to be the weak female. The idea of the Jewish male as a feminine being was not unique to Weininger, though his work epitomized this pervasive trend. Weininger based his observations on supposedly empirical truths about gender identities in combination with his conception of human psychology. On the subject of gender within Jewish identity, Weininger wrote, "Judaism is saturated with femininity, with precisely those qualities the essence of which I have shown to be in the strongest opposition to the male nature."[24] In further sections of the article, he describes that women's primary qualities center on their complete disinterest in property, their weakness, and general inferiority.[25] Weininger presupposes a universal male nature that fully opposes femininity. In declaring Judaism and the Jewish community as feminine, Weininger denotes Jews' aversion to citizenship, physicality, and landownership: "Zionism is the negation of Judaism"[26] He views Zionism as antithetical to Judaism because it appeals to citizenship and nationhood, qualities which Weininger considers to be uniquely European and non-Jewish.

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[21] Amos Elon, *The pity of it all: a portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch, 1743-1933* (New York, N.Y.: Picador, Metropolitan Books, 2002), 61-62.

[22] Ibid. For specific examples, see also Karl Marx (1843), "On 'The Jewish Question'"; Richard Wagner (1850), "Judaism in Music."

[23] Ibid., 236.

[24] Weininger, 306

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 307.

Herzl envisioned Zionism as a means of becoming a part of the gentile people. He desired recognition by the surrounding culture but he found himself excluded: "I am a German-speaking Jew from Hungary and can never be anything but a German. At present I am not recognized as a German. But that will come once we are over there."[27] He crafted his writing and nationalist efforts as a means of addressing the emasculating anti-Semitism which Weininger epitomized. Rather than react against these narratives, however, Herzl formed his ideology as a means of responding in the affirmative to Weininger: "Through Zionism Jews will again be able to love this Germany to which, despite everything, our hearts have clung."[28] Zionism gave Jews the skills and abilities to participate within non-Jewish society. As such, Herzl envisioned changes within Jews that would transform them into a people who would appeal to the respected, masculine characteristics so valued by Europeans.

The criticisms of feminized Judaism became a fundamental challenge for Herzl, who sought to recreate Jewish society to reflect the qualities prized by European culture. Herzl constructed much of his Zionist ideology around a desire to redefine Jewish identity. Arthur Hertzberg notes how Jews sought to transform their identities in order to align themselves with European society: "Since the Emancipation, Jewish thought has been attempting to rebuild a definition of Jewish identity, even with some—or many—bricks borrowed from the old building, but for a different need and from a different perspective: in order to make Jewish existence analogous to the categories by which western man has been defining himself."[29] Herzl's attempts at achieving this new Jewish existence rested on a reconfiguration of the masculine figure. As part of this project, he established connections to masculine characters in Jewish history such as Samson, the Maccabees, and Bar Kokhba, and devalued the intellectual, rabbinical institution that characterized modern Judaism.[30] Herzl imagined a transformation of the weak Jew into an empowered and virile Jew.

In his journal, Herzl wrote of his fellow European Jews, "They are Ghetto creatures, quiet, decent, timorous. Most of our people are like that. Will they understand the call to freedom and manliness?"[31] Herzl feared that the vast numbers of these "Ghetto creatures" had become too deeply effeminized and so

[27] Boyarin, 278.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Hetzberg, 21.
[30] Boyarin, 274.
[31] Tamar Mayer, "From Zero to Hero: Masculinity in Jewish Nationalism," *Israeli women's studies: a reader*, ed. Esther Fuchs (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 99.

distanced from "manliness" that they would fail to understand what he was saying. The freedom that he envisioned through a return to the Holy Land might have little resonance for those Jews whose femininity had left them devoid of any sense of citizenship and without any interest in physical property, just as Weininger had written earlier. Herzl framed Zionism and the possibility of return to Israel as an exercise of masculinity that pandered to the emasculating narrative intrinsic to the European portrayal of Jewry.[32]

Herzl offered another aspect of gendered narrative to his developing Zionism. As in the previous quote, Herzl feared that the men had become too emasculated to recognize and seek freedom. Freedom came with manliness—the attainment of freedom depended on a gendered, masculine identity. Herzl summoned the gender dichotomy so apparent in the earlier Jewish narratives and brought that version of masculinity into the present. Just as he had sought to connect the Jewish history to Samson and Judah Maccabee, Herzl began to align Jewish nationalism with the earlier history of Jews, before they had become "Ghetto creatures." Before even reaching Palestine, Herzelian Zionism[33] internalized a fundamental gender paradigm based on European discourse. The emasculating, anti-Semitic ideas established a problematic framework in which the Jews leaving Europe felt the anti-Semitism not merely as a comment on their religious identities but on their gender identities, as well. They were not criticized merely for being Jewish but for the fact that Judaism had molded the men into feminine figures. Moving to Palestine, therefore, held meaning that transcended the historical legacy of the Holy Land; the move permitted the immigrant Jews an opportunity to counteract the gender stereotypes that dogged them in Europe. Much of the Zionist imagery that soon arose from this movement focused on the relationship between the Zionist pioneers, strong and muscular, and the female land, whose fertility held endless abundance.

The physical connection to the land became a fundamental point of self-transformation that Zionist writers Aaron Gordon and Max Nordau emphasized. As Nordau wrote, "Solid stomachs and hard muscles will allow Jews to overcome their stereotype…to compete in the world…and to recapture [their dignity]."[34] Nordau acknowledged the power of physical shape in metaphysical meaning; like earlier Jewish narratives which emphasized women's specific reproductive conformation, Nordau enlisted men to change their bodies and thus gain

[32] Boyarin, 277-304.

[33] Boyarin uses this term to specify Zionism as imagined by Herzl (295). I use this terminology in my paper to denote the same qualification.

[34] Mayer, 101.

fulfillment. Nordau's emphasis on the body changes the traditional Jewish physical experience centered on scholarly pursuits and also demonstrates the degree to which Zionist discourse operated in opposition to notions of emasculated Judaism. Nordau, like Herzl, wrote into Zionism the implicit qualification that the realization of a Jewish state must rest on conceiving the individual body differently.[35] While Nordau believed the male role must change to embody athleticism and muscularity, the opposing female role must return to her natural state, to embody the feminine that permits the man to stand separately.

Perhaps more central than Nordau in locating the space of Jewish transformation was Aaron Gordon, who saw nature as a means of initiating societal change.[36] Underlying Gordon's presumption was the idea that Jewish culture had drifted away from its natural state. In a similar way to Herzl, who had sought to reestablish connections to the heroic tradition within Jewish history, Gordon suggested that the Jews had lost their natural roles because they had been removed from the physical land throughout the modern era.[37] He invoked nature as a means of returning Jews to their original states and believed that an emphasis on physical labor would solidify the return of the Jew to his natural identity. In his essay, "Logic for the Future" (1910), Gordon explains:

> And when, O Man, you will return to Nature—on that day your eyes will open, you will gaze straight into the eyes of Nature, and in its mirror you will see your own image. You will know that you have returned to yourself, that when you hid from Nature, you hid from yourself. When you return you will see that from you, from your hands and from your feet, from your body and from your soul, heavy, hard, oppressive fragments will fall and you will begin to stand erect.[38]

Gordon's statement is essential not only for understanding the strong ideological relationship between man and the physical land, but also for its suggestion that there is a natural, fundamental Jewish identity to which the modern Jews can—and must—return. This conjures up images of a new creation, for just as Adam came from the land, so too must the Jews return to that early state of physicality

[35] Hertzberg, 232-242.
[36] Ibid., 368-87.
[37] Ibid., 371
[38] Hertzberg, 371.

and masculinity.[39] For women, this return to creation invokes her central womb and reproductive identity.

As with Weininger who placed the Jews outside of normative masculinity, Gordon engaged an image of nature that would revert Jews back to the state of natural existence that they had lost. This nature has lost its overtly religious connection but it implies the same imagery and gender identities. His vision entailed a sort of peeling away of the external layers of artificiality to reveal one's "own image." Much of the focus in self-transformation relates to men and a return to the physical masculinity. For men, this is the command to "fill the earth and master it," an imperative to masculinity that fits into the Jewish return and settlement of then-Palestine. This trans-formation in men, however, occurred largely in opposition to women and it invoked a space of transformation that held great significance for women. When men returned to nature through physical work, their forms returned to them and, they "will begin to stand erect." For women, muscled labor did not initiate a return to their original form; rather, for them, the implicit natural being was embodied in their reproductive nature. As Gordon suggested in his image of a Jewish return to the original creation, women must return to their procreative purposes. Man will stand straight through physical labor, whereas women, as with Leah, stand straight upon bearing children.[40]

As Jews moved to Palestine, Zionism became not only a political movement but also a prominently social one. The communities that the social Zionists created, specifically the *moshavim* and *kibbutzim*,[41] embodied the nationalist ideals that people had spoken of in their earlier rhetoric; they prized physical labor and productivity and set about making the land fertile and productive. It was within this relationship to the land that women entered most strongly into the actual Zionist rhetoric. This relationship was called upon by Martin Buber, a Socialist Zionist, philosopher, and theologian, who found meaning in the Hebrew words for man and land. In Hebrew, *adam* is both the name of the first man, Adam, and the Hebrew word for "man." *Adama*, however, does not mean woman, but rather "land." Thus, when Buber described Zionism as "the great marriage between *adam* and *adama*," he drew a parallel between man and land which was

[39] Sheila H. Katz, *Women and gender in early Jewish and Palestinian nationalism* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003), 93.

[40] Baskin, 131.

[41] *Moshavim* and *kibbutzim* were agricultural communities in which everything was shared—labor, food, and material goods. They were very important in creating the early settlements in pre-State Israel. See Hertzberg for further discussion of social Zionism and their communities.

both pragmatic and profoundly sexual.[42] The parallel also brought women into the fold of masculinized Zionism. As Katz observes of the man-land imagery, "Like God's creation of Adam from the dust of the earth in Genesis, Zionists created men from adama, the soil of Palestine."[43] Men plowed the land and enabled its production but the land then created men, both in the physical labor of cultivation that transformed weak Jews into virile men and in the actual sense of bearing human fruit.

The language used by many proponents of physical labor as a means of self-transformation engaged a gendered imagery which deeply inscribed female roles. Sheila Katz observes how the land, which initially stood as a removed figure of the distant mother transformed into a lover for the male figures. The land became a possible source of access for the men in which they could activate her reproduction and till her soils in both the literal, agricultural way and, later, in the actively procreative way: "The motherland image turned the native land into a womb that brought forth new-born sons. But when Jews created a new reality of life and work in Palestine, the symbol shifted from mother to lover, as the emerging male hero reclaimed his lost bride, the land."[44] Meir Yaari was a student of Gordon and actively promoted the agricultural basis of Zionist society within Palestine. He invoked the male-female opposition in his vision of his role as "the bridegroom who abandons himself in his bride's bosom…thus we abandon ourselves to the motherly womb of the sanctifying earth."[45] According to Yaari, the man rids himself of inhibitions and seeks connection to this feminized land. He becomes masculine by envisioning a bride; through the man's pursuit, he engages with the motherly womb and presumably accesses her natural, creative powers. Like the vessel imagery common to many rabbinic sources, Yaari asserts that the land wants to produce if she can be filled. She is ready to assume her natural, motherly role, but she can only do that passively, if the men access her.

The parallel of the Jewish male pioneers' marriage to the female land, as imagined by Buber and Yaari, inscribed the roles that Jewish women assumed within the new communities. Just as man's tilling of the soil would ultimately yield fruit, so too would the man's tilling of women yield human fruit; this Zionist rhetoric created a connection to the religious narratives of women's bodies, for men could access women within the Jewish paradigm of women as

[42] Katz, 87-88.
[43] Ibid., 93.
[44] Katz, 86.
[45] Hazelton, 93.

fertile vessels. This relationship perpetuated the imagery of women as natural, land-oriented figures and developed their physical reproductive roles into nurturing, social ones. When men accessed women to yield their bodily fruit, women produced and, in turn, nurtured men. This Zionist imagery characterized women's fertility as nurturing and loving, just as cultivated land offered sustenance to the pioneers. The same image of men's active plowing of female bodies exists very strongly in modern practices of reproductive technology, in which the physician and medical establishment tills the initially barren womb to create fruitful produce.

Women's identity as fertile soil maintained the fundamental role of childbearing and nurturing but within a newly non-religious paradigm. Many women left religious communities in Europe for the Zionist pioneer excitement that Jewish settlements in Palestine promised, only to find that their roles remained relatively consistent with that which they had left. Within these Zionist communities, both men and women were expected to contribute to the ideological and supremely practical nationalist endeavor through productive labor, considered to be work that benefited the community rather than the family-unit. As David Ben-Gurion proudly wrote of the communities, "All members of the *moshava* [colony] work. The men plow and plant their land. The women work in their garden and milk the cows. The children herd the geese on the farm and ride horses towards their fathers in the field."[46] Equal work did not mean equal opportunities, for women found themselves concentrated in jobs such as cooking, childcare, and gardening which maintained the traditional gender roles. The men plow "their" land — they become the masters of its productivity — while women work in nurturing capacities. Despite rhetoric of equality in Zionist writings, women were often denied work in the agricultural fields, work that was seen as the most productive and highly valued.

When women did work in agriculture, the assignments were often in vegetable gardens or other less "masculine" areas. As a result, the most tangible outlet for productivity was through reproduction, a contribution to society which not only reinforced women's natural, Jewish identities but which also reinforced the masculine identity as the active figure. Mayer explains that women's "fulfillment of their family roles was publicly valued not only as women's calling and obligation, but also as their contribution to the collective goal of nation-

[46] Mayer, 104.

building."[47] While men contributed to the nation-building by plowing the physical soil, women contributed by serving as embodied wombs through which they could offer themselves to the community. Although the women could not plow the land as men could, they could be like the land and offer their fertility to the collective good.

Within the kibbutz society, women spoke of their dual roles as workers and mothers as two imperative dimensions of their societal contributions. Rachel Katznelson, a leading figure in the Women's Workers Movement of the 1920s, spoke to fellow female workers about the challenging experience of needing to produce for the collective in tangible ways and to produce in maternal ways:

> What is it to be a mother, a worker's wife, and a mother? We must answer that a family must have more than one child. And if we remember that the worker's wife should educate the children, care for the house and its upkeep, be in touch with doctors and educators, we may say once again: enough, there is strength for no more…This is the problem which faces the WWM, which faces every woman worker…We often forget that work and motherhood are the sources of life.[48]

She acknowledges the challenge in fulfilling both roles and yet she firmly endorses women's needs to be both mothers and workers. These two roles are the "sources of life," the sustenance that constructs women's beings. They must work *with* their bodies and *through* their bodies in order to fulfill their duty to the collective. Moreover, the two dimensions of work that they must contribute to the community are the very things which form their lives, the "sources of life." In this way, women's production and procreation fuel their identities.

During the pre-State period, secular Jewish society formed into non-religious communities, yet these communities still existed within the framework of religious narratives. The physical transformation of men, which became central to much of Zionism, brought with it the religiously imagined female. Herzelian Zionism, and later pioneers who envisioned a natural physicality, internalized the earlier religious narratives of female fertility and brought Zionism in sync with religious, female narratives. Both argued for the physical bearing of children as

[47] Deborah S. Bernstein, "Daughters of the Nation: Between the Public and Private Spheres in Pre-State Israel," *Israeli women's studies: a reader*, ed. Esther Fuchs (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 83.

[48] Ibid., 84.

the primary female role. The image of the vessel as an embodiment of the female role of endless fertility seeped into Zionist interpretations of the land. Just as a vessel cannot be used up, neither can the land; a woman's inner womb reflects her universal role. When Israel gained statehood, much of the policy that addressed women founded it on the biological narratives of female bodies. As these threads were pulled into the public, however, they created an expansive social role of motherhood that the narratives fueled.

Politicizing Women: Motherhood as a Social Identity

> You walk in the street on a windy day and your baby's not wearing a hat and a stranger will stop you and say, "mah pitom," put the baby's hat on! On the bus, you'll see when a lady has a stroller and she has to open the baggage, a stranger will go up and take the baby. They just hand the baby to you and get their things…They know what you're trying to do so they'll lend a hand and support you.
>
> Rachel

> It's very hard to defend your position if you're going to say, "Hey, I don't have to have kids. I'm a woman and I have a career, I went to school, I have a house, I might have a husband, or I'm an artist. I travel or I write." But, you're going to be looked at, like that in Israel. It's not common in here. Society won't let you feel like you're a full woman if you don't have kids.
>
> Shira

Jewish religious narratives created a scaffolding for Israeli society that informed the national consciousness of both religious and non-religious Israelis. An important stream of Zionism appropriated the religious narratives of gender and transformed them into secular ones. Underneath this superficial change, the same narratives of female identity and creation, along with women's overtly reproductive roles, remained intact. This flowed into the gender imagery which informed the nation of Israel. These streams of thought brought the female narratives into its national legislation. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, and in response to the perpetual conflicts with Israel's non-Jewish, Arab neighbors, Israel appropriated these narratives of fertility with a newly galvanized interest in nation-building.[49] Jewish survival, now national survival, depended upon women's reproduction and fertility. As Rachel and Shira describe in their experiences, Israeli society paints childbearing as the essential female role.

[49] Jacqueline Portugese, *Fertility policy in Israel: the politics of religion, gender, and nation* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 73, 82; See also Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, *Birthing the nation: strategies of Palestinian women in Israel*, California series in public anthropology (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 2002), 45.

Families are the units of commonality among people on the streets and everyone "know[s] what you're trying to do." But this national endeavor requires a specific construction of women, to which Shira refers, and this centralizes her reproduction as her pathway into modern society.

Israel's official declaration of independence in 1948 precipitated a war between the fledgling nation and its Arab neighbors.[50] The war served as a defining event, for not only did it set a precedent for future diplomatic challenges, but it framed the period during which social legislation first began. In all corners of society, people began to speak of the situation within the paradigm of Jewish national survival, a focus of Jewish consciousness since the earliest forefathers and foremothers.[51] This translated into rhetoric and policies which carried the earlier religious and Zionist narratives of female fertility into the present. Israel literally became "the Promised Land," and not just in language rife with lofty symbolism. Diaspora Jews, who immigrated to Israel as well as Jews who had already settled in the land during the pre-State period began the project of constructing the new nation with an outlook toward overcoming their historical vulnerability.

For all the emphasis on national survival that entered into the Israeli mentality, the implications of demographically building Israel fell to women. The governmental policies subsumed the Jewish and Zionist narratives of women's fertility into their legislation and created a national role that necessitated reproductive women. Legislation implicitly defined the proper female role as one in which motherhood was the central characteristic. Nitza Berkovitch has studied the way in which women entered into the public realm: "The Jewish-Israeli female subject is constructed first and foremost, not as an individual or a citizen, but as a mother and a wife. The state, using rhetoric of equality, incorporates the Jewish-Israeli woman via these traditional roles and not through the universal characteristic of citizenship."[52] Women gained citizenship through their bodies and entered into the public through the private roles of reproduction. Although the state became a political entity, it internalized the earlier narratives that predated its establishment and created a continuous link between the past and the present.

[50] Howard M. Sachar, *A history of Israel: from the rise of Zionism to our time* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 315.
[51] Portugese, 35-38.
[52] Sered, 25.

"A Woman's Duty": Motherhood as National Service

In the midst of the 1948 war, much of the national rhetoric focused on the responsibility that women had to the nation through their ability to bear children. The men's fight was on the battlefields but the women's fight was different; it was a fight for the demographic welfare of the Jewish State.[53] Dr. Aharanova addressed this female fight in several governmentally-distributed parenting manuals that he wrote during the war:

> Every family should include at least three children: two, [equal to] the number of parents, and another one to build the family and the race…For our safety in the future we need to have a large population. These periods of war have taken valuable people from us. Our human reservoir in the Diaspora has de-clined, and if childbearing is always a crucial national necessity, it is now even more crucial…A woman's duty is different from a man's in this war.[54]

Underlying Dr. Aharanova's comment were several preexisting assumptions about female identity and national needs. Just as in biblical times, when women's reproduction fulfilled God's commandment of Abraham to be a great nation of multitudes, women returned to this role within the nationalist context of Israel. Dr. Aharanova acknowledges that as in previous centuries of Jewish history, "childbearing is always a crucial national necessity," but that the present reflects an even higher pinnacle which Jewish women must strive to achieve. Women must reconnect to their fertility in order to assure national survival.

Beginning soon after Israel's founding, the government launched social campaigns to increase the Jewish birth rate. This occurred in part because of the demographic concerns for Jewish population levels, but it also occurred as policymakers came to realize that Israel must serve as the locus of Jewish life.[55] In the 1920s and 1930s, when Jewish Palestine served as a symbolic satellite of Jewish global life, several massive waves of Jewish immigration boosted the population. This immigration declined during the period of time surrounding Israel's establishment so that the Israeli population could no longer rely on foreign influxes; facilitating a native-born Israeli population became a pressing

[53] Kanaaneh, 65-68.

[54] Sachlav Stoler-Liss, "'Mothers Birth the Nation': The Social Construction of Zionist Motherhood in Wartime in Israeli Parents' Manuals," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 6, no. 1 (2003): 114.

[55] Nira Yuval-Davis, "Woman/Nation/State: The Demographic Race and National Reproduction in Israel," *Radical American* 38 (1987): 37-59.

national issue, and one that factored prominently into policy decisions.[56] The need for a renewed Jewish population following the demographic catastrophes of the Holocaust and the risk of the Arab-Israeli tension paralleled the biblical motif of Jewish perseverance. As such, the government encouraged reproduction by appealing to the natural role of the female body; the policies connected to the physical construction of her body and to the role that she played in Jewish continuity.

Perhaps the strongest public proponent of motherhood in the early years of Israel was Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion.[57] He created a precedent in which the political sphere absorbed the social role of motherhood. Ben-Gurion had been a prominent Zionist leader prior to Israel's founding, and his leadership of the national agenda created a conducive environment for pulling ideological gender constructions into the national context. Much of his language centralized the symbolic role that women had to the nation and he later institutionalized these images within specific legislative policies. Fitting with his general view towards motherhood was a comment Ben-Gurion made of his own mother during a Knesset discussion: "I will talk about my mother, but refer to all mothers. Mother is the most precious person to everyone…my mother died when I was ten…but I still know that she was the symbol of purity, love, devotion, and nobility."[58] Women become symbols, not agents. In the same way that women had become static vessels in earlier narratives, women enter into political discussions as constant symbols of nurturance. Ben-Gurion's mother is every mother; she has reproduced, thus filling her role, and she joins the ranks of all other women who completed their maternal duties.

The tenor of discussion became increasingly focused towards institutionalizing women's roles to bear children. Just as Dr. Aharanova had called upon women to serve the nation by birthing children, Ben-Gurion began to use similar rhetoric within the Israeli government. Ben-Gurion defined women's national responsibilities within their reproductive potential, creating an overt definition of a good woman: "A Jewish woman who does not bring at least four children into the world…is defrauding the Jewish mission."[59] Women's reproduction defines her existence. The Jewish mission rests on her body and on her complicity with its needs. Ben-Gurion lays out the role a woman must assume and implicitly paints those women who do not bear the proper number of children as traitors who actively neglect and harm their people. Women gain a sort of enfranchisement within Israeli society through their fertility and yet that

[56] Ibid.
[57] Portugese, 49-50.
[58] Sered, 23.
[59] Hazleton, 72.

inclusion rests on their ability to fit themselves into the reproductive paradigm internalized within society.

Language transformed into policy as Ben-Gurion began to establish numerous pronatalist programs during his time in office. He brought motherhood into the public sphere of political life. In 1949, he introduced his "Heroine Mothers" initiative.[60] A woman received this award upon giving birth to her tenth child. The program gained considerable publicity and gave rise to the popular saying:

> In honor of the motherland
> Ten boys to be born
> With grandeur we receive
> Ben-Gurion's prize.[61]

Women were not only mothers but they were protectors of the "motherland" through the boys that they bore—no doubt future soldiers. The verse becomes a play on words, for the women bear these children in honor of their motherland (Israel) and, at the same time, they are honored *as* the motherland. Israel is at once the women's motherland just as the women are themselves the motherland to their children and to the future Israeli society.

Women's inclusion within the political realm rests on the same requirements that entail her social inclusion. Israeli politics have absorbed and promoted the same fertility narratives that have saturated the national consciousness. They have given womanhood and motherhood a unilateral meaning and in so doing, have conflated these two pieces into a single role. Although Ben-Gurion's language and complementary initiatives serve as the earliest examples of the widespread governmental endorsement of motherhood, the beliefs have lasted. Geula Cohen, a female Knesset Member during the 1970s and 1980s, expressed her own views of women's roles as mothers within the national context:

> The Israeli woman is an organic part of the family of the Jewish people and the female constitutes a practical symbol of that. But she is a wife and a mother in Israel, and therefore it is of her nature to be a soldier, a wife of a soldier, a sister of a soldier, a grandmother of a soldier. This is her reserve service. She is continually in military service.[62]

[60] Portugese, 93.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Yuval-Davis, 55.

Although Cohen speaks many decades after Ben-Gurion, she retains the same imagery and concept that he so forcefully utilized. Women are symbols and their symbolism rests on their reproductive contribution to the nation. Just as in Gordon's vision of the natural roles that people will return to upon successful transformations, Cohen speaks to a constancy of identity for both genders that endorses that same sort of fundamentality. Men are physical (soldiers). Women are bearers (family members). Cohen points out the dividing line between genders and reaffirms the nature-based discourse that existed so prominently within religious and Zionist narratives.

The presumption that women satisfy their national duty through motherhood continues to inform the reproductive decisions that many women make. Aviva shared with me the general consensus among women that most feel obligated to have three children. She told me that this was consistent among women on the kibbutz and in the city, because it was a strategic number:

> Not many people would tell you that but the general accepted feeling in Israel is that you must have three children because you might lose one to the army. To the army, to the terrorist actions. Never have one because you might lose it, two is not enough…Most mothers and parents would go the extra mile to have a third child although it's heavier on the budget. Just in case.

Women bear children for a political purpose that goes beyond their own personal fulfillment. As Aviva explains, she may have to sacrifice personal comforts for the ultimate goal of satisfying the national need. Her body is inextricably tied to the collective, even if she exerts official control over her fertility. The political messages are embedded in society in such a way so that the "general accepted feeling" exists in dialogue with the political expectations of motherhood.

The politicization of motherhood has gained additional dimensions even outside of the purview of social legislation. The Knesset passed an expansive legislation in 1954 which brought labor laws in line with the existing societal beliefs. The Women's Work Law openly limited women's employment based on concerns for her reproductive health:

> [The law] prohibits a woman from working during the period of her maternity leave in order to safeguard her health, grants her the right to absent herself from work for reasons connected with

> pregnancy, miscarriage or breastfeeding, etc., and to a period of leave for adopting a child. It also forbids the employment of women in certain jobs…that may be injurious to her health. The law also limits the possibility of dismissing a pregnant woman and prohibits entirely the dismissal of a woman during maternity leave.[63]

As a part of this law, women were forbidden to work in "plants manufacturing acids, various other chemical products, or poisonous paints, or to work in contact with lead, lest these be injurious to their health or impair their ability to have children."[64] A woman's ability to contribute publically depended upon her vulnerable womb;[65] her most important public role was to bear children and in no way could she risk her fertility on account of labor. The labor law affirmed the precedent of gender relations and expanded the realm in which women's motherhood defined their participation in Israeli society. Men gained affirmation that they were the true laborers and the ones who could define women's work. The law made no mention that the same workplaces that could harm women's fertility could also harm men's fertility. Instead, women's fertility was fragile and vulnerable. Her fertility could be compromised, just as the imagined vessel could be deformed, and it was the responsibility of society to ensure that it's shape — and wellbeing —remained intact.

Although many of the maternal and labor-related laws were enacted in the early decades of Israel's establishment, the ideas continue to resonate within female society today. For Michal, the persistent disparities between men's and women's salary levels and public leadership merely reflect the inherent differences between genders:

> You know there is this theory that says that the men are the hunters and the women are the gatherers. We are not equal because they can only hunt and we can only gather. And, if we're getting paid less for that, I don't care. We do what we like to do and they do what they like to do and it's fine because we're completing one another.

Men and women are engaged in a partnership that divides at the level of their creation. Women are meant to be mothers and this fact permits the differences

[63] Portugese, 93.
[64] Hazelton, 89.
[65] Sered, 22-25, 61-62.

in material life, what Michal sees as peripheral parts of women's lives. Women can only gather — they are mothers, nurturers — and this role originates from their private bodies and extends into their public participation. Women's acceptance of their central, reproductive roles requires that they also accept the complementary social identities.

Abortion and the Unhealthy Woman: Framing Good Mothers by Naming the Other

At the same time that Israel promoted motherhood through policies which inscribed a maternal, social role, attention also began to shift toward inscribing the good Israeli woman through legislation of the opposite. The most weighty of these issues was abortion and it serves as a primary locus of internalized motherhood narratives. When abortion came under government analysis in the 1960s and 1970s, Israel approached it from a perspective which maintained the primacy of motherhood as the social and political female identity. Prior to 1977, when the government officially legalized the practice, women had easy, though illegal, access to safe abortions; the government turned a blind eye to the practice unless there was malpractice.[66] However, in a move to appease political and religious interests concerned about unregulated abortion, the secular-dominated government passed the new abortion law and brought the practice under the official domain of the government. Abortion became a problematic subject, for it presented a possible "contestation of the notion of committed motherhood."[67] Therefore, much of the legislation surrounding abortion laws and the way many women view abortion now reaffirms women's reproductive role. Structures around its regulation privilege the women who do not have abortions and alienate those women who do undergo the procedure.

Unlike the United States where the debate over abortion has centered around women's rights over their bodies, the debate within Israel has focused on the impact that legalizing abortion would have on women's health and later fertility.[68] A study conducted by Amir and Benjamin explored the reasons why women sought abortions and found that women most often do so out of financial pressures or out of emotional pressures of having so many children.[69] Many women cited inadequate money to raise a child, health concerns, or social concerns if they were not married or, alternatively, if the child was conceived

[66] Portugese, 138.

[67] Delila Amir and Orly Benjamin. "Defining Encounters: Who Are the Women Entitled to Join the Israeli Collective?" *Women's Studies International Forum* 20, no. 5/6 (1997): 648.

[68] Portugese, 136-151.

[69] Amir and Benjamin, 639-650.

within the context of an affair.[70] The fight to legalize abortion, therefore, was not a fight to challenge the centrality of motherhood but a fight to promote healthy mothers.

Many prominent figures entered into the abortion debate on the grounds of protecting maternal health. Supporters of legalized abortion, along with opponents, rationalized their arguments by basing their decision on what would most positively promote fertility. Menahem Yedid, a Likud member of the Knesset, voted in favor of legalizing abortion on the basis that "only a healthy mother can function and run a household and educate her children as is fitting and suitable for a mother in Israel."[71] Yedid acknowledges that women should have the ability to choose an abortion but a woman's choice should revolve around her ability to be a good mother. Bearing children has social implications, as well, so that a woman must accept both her physical reproduction and the social and political dimensions that motherhood requires. Yedid contextualizes abortion so that a woman's choice to have an abortion affirms her present state as unhealthy but her persistent desire to be a "healthy mother."

On the other side of the debate, opponents to legalized abortion invoked language that was remarkably parallel to that used by Yedid. Efrat is a prominent right-to-life organization that identifies as religious-Zionist and it has become a major voice in the abortion debate.[72] The organization's leader, Dr. Eli Schussheim, justified his view against legalizing abortion on the grounds that bearing many children makes women healthy:

> The happiness that comes from having children strengthens the emotional health of the person and has a positive influence on physical health. The absence of these elements, because of failure to fulfill the natural function of the family, can result in absence of satisfaction, in stress and tension that harm the emotional health of the person and so have a bad influence on the physical health as well. There are those who are concerned that bearing many children causes damage to the woman. But reality proves that the opposite is true. The facts prove that mothers of many children, who run their lives according to the biological nature of bearing children, are emotionally healthy and physically strong.[73]

[70] Ibid.
[71] Sered, 31.
[72] Portugese, 143
[73] Sered, 38.

For Dr. Schussheim, children bring happiness upon women because it is a woman's "biological nature" to bear children; only through the utility of her nature, will she become "emotionally healthy and physically strong." Moreover, in a similar parallel to Yedid, Schussheim portrays women who do not wish to bear children as unhealthy and unnatural. He centralizes the function that reproduction plays in women's holistic wellbeing and implicitly calls upon the government to take a role in ensuring that women make decisions that protect their health.

Israeli legislators eventually chose to establish a committee structure to monitor abortion procedures within individual hospital settings. During the early deliberations on what these committees should do, Haim Sadan, the adviser to the Minister of Health, proposed that they should "force every woman considering abortion to watch a slide show which would include… pictures of dead children in Nazi concentration camps."[74] Though never instituted, Sadan's proposal demonstrated the government's attempts to create an abortion policy that would alienate women who did not fulfill their national obligation to the Jewish people. The suggestion that a woman should be forced to see such grotesque pictures from the genocidal campaign against the Jewish people places the individual woman outside of the innocent Jewish community; the woman would become a sort of accomplice to the genocide.

When abortion did finally become legal in 1977,[75] it came under the supervision of institutionalized abortion committees. The committees include a gynecologist and two social workers and have the authority to permit or prohibit a woman's abortion.[76] More than actually regulate abortions, the committees become cultural-political entities. Amir and Benjamin recorded the deliberations within these structures and they found that committees approved more than 95 percent of women's requests.[77] Although the committees permit most requests, they offer the medical and political establishment entry into the reproductive lives of women, and in women they seek a reaffirmed commitment to the role of motherhood that they occupy within society. As a result, the government generally allows abortions within a formal structure of disapproval. The

[74] Kanaaneh, 46.

[75] Portugese, 138.

[76] There are four reasons that a woman can qualify to receive an abortion: 1. the pregnant woman is under 17 or over 40 years old; 2. the pregnancy is a result of incest, rape, or an out-of-wedlock relationship; 3. the woman's physical or mental health is jeopardized by the pregnancy; 4. the fetus has developmental abnormalities. See Amir and Benjamin (642).

[77] Amir and Benjamin, 644.

legislation of abortion reaffirms motherhood and permits the government some control in enforcing women's national identities.

Ironically, abortion does not become a contestation of motherhood within Israel for many of the women who undergo the procedure.[78] Although women assert some amount of choice in seeking an abortion, most are not choosing against the idea of being a mother. Abortion enters into their reproductive pictures when they feel that they cannot function in the way that a "healthy woman" should. During my interview with Pninah, she brought up a story about her neighbor who underwent three abortions during the course of her fertile years: "My neighbor had three abortions and until today she feels very guilty. She's an orthodox woman, and she has twelve children and they were very poor. But she feels very guilty. So you have to see how conflicting these issues are." Pninah's neighbor found herself caught between her social circumstances and her ideological commitment to motherhood. Women's guilt and shame over the procedure is affirmed and compounded by much of the literature surrounding abortion. Efrat distributes a pamphlet called "The Price for an Instant" which contains stories from women who cannot conceive children as a result of an earlier abortion:

> When I finally told my secret to the doctor, I heard from him that there is a direct connection between the abortion I had and my condition. I finally understood that because I had not stood up for myself and been strong enough, I endangered my future as a mother forever…I saw the suffering of women who had undergone an abortion and now are willing to undergo seven hells in order to hear the great news that they are pregnant. They are desperate to hug a child in their arms, but there isn't one.[79]

Having an abortion means a woman is weak; strong women, healthy women understand that abortions risk their fertility in the present and future.

A significant thrust within the abortion committee structures has emphasized educating women of the risk abortions present to their future fertility. Through all of these measures, it is clear that the dominant concern which contributes to the legislation of abortion is a concern for fertility and not for the surrounding circumstances. Although a woman is permitted access to a legal abortion, her choice to undergo the procedure carries with it profound implications for her

[78] Ibid., 639-50.
[79] Sered, 38.

positive contribution to Israeli society and for her personal identity as a healthy woman.

As the government began to legislate policies which ascribed specific meanings to women's reproductive decisions, the Israeli government situated rabbinic Jewish and Zionist narratives of female motherhood within the body of Israeli women. These narratives entered into the culture through practical legislation that brought women's private lives into the public; their fertility and reproduction became a national resource. Policies subsumed the religious narratives into the political and social cultures. Motherhood held a cache for social inclusion and its qualifications centered on physically bearing children. A mother was supposed to birth children and then function in society as a reflection of her biological role. For those women who experienced infertility, however, this social prerequisite posed profound challenges. Since the 1980s, the government has entered into fertility directly with its national subsidization of in-vitro fertility treatments. These treatments have come to occupy a crucial space in considering the religious and Zionist narratives of fertility, for the government becomes an actor in fertility. Although the treatment comes out of political interests, it ultimately reveals the foundational religious narratives because it enforces the ideology that a woman's natural role is to bear children and that her bodily shape must be properly formed for conception. IVF becomes a link between political pronatalism and religious conceptions of the female body; the legislated policy comes into direct contact with the physical construction of women's bodies and enforces the presence of religious narratives by institutionalizing specific images of the body.

Enabling Women: "Fixing" Infertility through Reproductive Technology

> It is important for people to get a message from the government that they value life and that they care about the people.
>
> Chani

> If you speak to Dr. Laufer, who is the chief of OB/GYN at Hadassah [Hospital], [subsidizing fertility treatments] is a clear and conscious decision on behalf of the people of Israel and the Israeli state to sponsor fertility treatments because we need more babies, because we need more people.
>
> Pninah

Over the course of Israel's political history, narratives of female fertility entered into the legislated, public sphere. By the time fertility treatments entered into mainstream society, imperative motherhood resonated in nearly

every dimension of life so that women came to exist in a society in which religious traditions, political traditions, and cultural traditions all pointed toward her reproductive responsibility. This emphasis on motherhood became part of a social and political narrative and, in so doing, lost its overt religious connections. Governmental and social institutions inscribed motherhood upon women by incorporating the religious narratives into their foundations. They were able to encourage motherhood by rewarding good women, as with Ben-Gurion's "Heroine Mother" prizes, and by defining what a good woman should not do, as with abortion. Beginning in the 1980s, however, fertility treatments became available within Israel and they have offered a revolutionary means to actively enable pregnancy. The treatments have since been fully subsidized by national health care for all women[80] and they become expressions of the earliest religious narratives of female reproduction within the paradigm of politicized motherhood. They permit women and governmental structures to become active partners in fulfilling women's physical and national purpose and reveal the strong religious narratives that exist directly below the surface of Israeli society.

The government incorporated fertility treatments as a part of its historically pronatalist health policies. In June of 1986, the Minister of Health gathered leading gynecologists to discuss ways that the country could "improve fertility."[81] The collective recommendation focused on expanding access to fertility treatments, which legislators saw as a means of addressing the country's interests and in appealing to what had become the needs of Israeli society. Fertility treatments entered into the national consciousness as a part of political interests and gained a profoundly social meaning as they fulfilled women's desires for children. The governmental support for these treatments came, in large part, from the great promise the technology posed for enabling increased fertility rates among women who would then contribute to the birth rate. Throughout this discussion, I will directly address in-vitro fertilization (IVF), though the cultural implications of IVF are consistent with other types of therapies in which female reproduction exists within a medical space.

Underneath the political ends of IVF lay the reasons why the treatment became so popular, reasons which appealed to a common narrative of motherhood. IVF treatments are not trivial procedures; they require profound physical and emotional commitments from the women who undergo the therapy and a costly

[80] For a full discussion of IVF legislation, see Susan Martha Kahn, *Reproducing Jews: a cultural account of assisted conception in Israel*, Body, commodity, text (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

[81] Daphna Birenbaum-Carmeli, "'Cheaper than a newcomer': on the social production of IVF policy in Israel," *Sociology of Health and Illness* 26, no. 7 (2004): 905.

investment of resources on the part of the financial and medical providers. IVF is only successful, therefore, because it has come to fulfill the political interests of the nation while appealing to the bodily narratives of female reproduction. Within Israel, IVF's presence is intimately linked to its relationship with the religious narratives that informed the female body. IVF arose from the government which had, in turn, derived its policies from the fertility narratives that preceded their establishment.

It is worth turning to some statistics to appreciate the scope of IVF's influence. In 2004, there were twenty-six infertility centers in Israel, giving it the world record ratio of one center to every 230,000 women. In 1990, there were 1,800 IVF cycles per million Israeli women in comparison to 416 in the United Kingdom and 240 in the United States. Further, in 1996, 2.1 percent of the 2,562 births in Israel were born through the use of IVF.[82] The numbers are no doubt significantly higher today as technology has improved and additional legislation has passed to support women going through these procedures. The prevalence of this technology is astounding, for it demonstrates the very real influence it has on the lives of thousands of Israeli women and children. That fertility treatments contribute to so many women's experiences brings it into the normalized realm of Jewish reproduction.

IVF's legislation within Israel has been relatively easy, for it has gained the support of both non-religious and religious institutions. The non-religious community voiced few objections to IVF, while the religious institutions have gone to great lengths — successfully — to reconcile IVF with the possible halakhic problems that it presents.[83] With the introduction of several specific provisions, nearly every rabbi in Israel approved the practice and IVF has become a halakhically valid way to conceive a child.[84] Within the secular legal realm, the procedure also gained rapid approval when the High Committee of Medical Experiments in Human Subjects approved the technology in the early 1980s, even before any long-term studies confirmed its safety among female subjects. In 1984, the Ministry of Health expanded IVF's use to include single women, as well, and since then the government has also expanded its use to include lesbian women.[85] As Daphna Birenbaum-Carmeli notes, "IVF was broadly accepted in

[82] Ibid., 904.

[83] The concern focused on the possibility that a child born through IVF and donor sperm might later marry a half-sibling, resulting in a *mamzer*, a child who could not marry another Jew for ten generations. See Kahn, *Reproducing Jews.*

[84] Birenbaum-Carmeli, "'Cheaper than a newcomer'", 905.

[85] Ibid., 904.

Israel as morally and socially legitimate and has not been called into question in any significant way."[86] IVF fit into preexisting narratives of reproduction which influenced both women's and Israeli society's images of fertility.

Thus, beginning in the late 1980s, Israel pushed to expand IVF and it entered into popular culture as a source of Israeli pride. Newspaper articles regularly reported on the technological developments: "World's first: national delivery following IVF" and "World record: woman aged 60 gave birth to a girl."[87] IVF offered a resounding call to the progress that Israel was making on the problems of infertility and it cultivated the perception that, beyond any other country, Israel could fix women's bodies. Infertility entered into the public forum as a frontier that could—and must—be conquered. The discourse became two-sided, for just as the government emphasized the scientific developments that they achieved through this technology, women expressed their incredible gratitude for the treatment.

Throughout the process of instituting IVF treatments in governmental legislation, proposals to restrict the treatment to certain numbers of rounds or to more limited age groups occasionally arose for discussion. In the early 1990s, the Minister of Health attempted to limit the number of subsidized IVF cycles for each woman. Cries against these proposals rang out and fertility treatments began to assume an aspect of enabling women's individual fulfillment; already IVF held a seemingly permanent status within society and attempts at limiting it were termed attacks on a woman's right to motherhood. A woman quoted in *Yedioth Aharanoth*, the most widely read newspaper in Israel, [88] passionately called against the proposed limitations: "No one in the world, including the Minister of Health, has the right to decide how many times I shall try. No one will take away from me the hope to become a mother, even if it takes twenty IVF treatments or more."[89] Motherhood is this woman's right and it is the duty of the government to enable her fertility. In spite of any economic and physical hardships, this woman wishes to sacrifice everything to bear a child. The woman calls on her right to receive unlimited treatment and defines IVF as a means by which the government must assist her in fulfilling her fundamental role.

The perception that motherhood is a right resonates in much of the legislation surrounding IVF. In 1994, the Aloni Commission released a report requested by

[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., 906.
[88] Ibid., 908.
[89] Ibid.

the government that disclosed its investigation into the social, religious, political, and cultural dimensions of modern reproductive technologies. More than merely reporting on the status of reproductive health policy, it sought to create a foundation for future Israeli health legislation that reflected the many intertwining factors of Israeli national life. The governmental beliefs espoused by the Commission's report did not reflect new perspectives on reproductive practices; rather, the Aloni Commission confirmed preexisting Israeli policies and influenced subsequent ones. Among the recommendations is one passage which stands as a symbolic endorsement of the long-standing emphasis on motherhood: "The Commission agreed that, as a matter of principles, there should be no interference with the right of access [to reproductive technologies]. In other words, the right to receive fertility treatment should be granted to every person."[90] This suggestion that fertility treatments are a *right* speaks not only to the entitlement of a woman to receive such treatments, but to the complex cultural narratives that underlay the government's presumption that every woman should be able to bear a child.

The Knesset Committee for the Advancement of Women's Status held a discussion in 1998 entitled, "Fertilization, pregnancy and pregnancy-related social rights in the National Health Insurance Law." The attendees came from the government, medical professions, women's organizations, and health funds.[91] The purpose of the gathering was to consider the practice of IVF within the context of increasing accessibility and to understand how the structure of treatments could change to better appeal to the public needs. A senior gynecologist called upon the treatments as a sign of governmental benevolence to its citizens:

> Our public is thirsty for children. In this country, gentlemen, a childless couple is a beaten couple, socially as well as personally. Each partner in this couple feels himself utterly disabled, unable to concentrate on his work. People do not realize their ability to contribute to society because they are so preoccupied with this difficulty and with their bodily defect. I have worked in the US and know American society. There, a couple may undergo one cycle or two but they will not destroy their normal lives. At the most, they will adopt a child, because treatment is very expensive. We are an enlightened state and allow unlimited treatment according to

[90] Kahn, 77.
[91] Birenbaum-Carmeli, "'Cheaper than a newcomer'", 909-910.

> medical indications, but in the US, a couple has to spend $10-15,000, so how many cycles can they afford?[92]

The doctor equates the experience of infertility to a social deficit that IVF can ameliorate. When an infertile couple is "beaten," IVF helps them to overcome the stigma and bring them back into the mainstream of Israeli culture. The "thirst" for children, the childless couple as "disabled," the "bodily defect"—these all inscribe the fundamental desperation for children that is normative in the national culture, as well as reify reproduction as imperative. Given these associated meanings of infertility, many Israelis see IVF as a treatment which offers the public a means for remedying societal alienation.

When IVF works, it can help women and couples fit into the child-focused Israeli society in a way that might have been impossible otherwise. At the same time, in its existence as a treatment in which people must actively seek the service, IVF allows fertility to be dictated by the narratives of the wider social environment. As I sat for several hours with an infertility-specialist in a public fertility clinic, the doctor explained to me that he is seeing a dramatic increase in "non-traditional" patients. More and more single women and lesbian couples were seeking sperm donation, male-female friend couples wanted to have a child without sexual intercourse, and gay men with surrogate mothers wanted to have a child. All of these couples, the doctor suggested, sought fertility treatments out of a desire for children and, at the same time, for the ability to be a part of society via their familial status. He believed that the patients' intentions were not to challenge the traditional nuclear family but rather to find an entry into a society that implicitly mandates bearing children.

Fertility treatments in Israel have made an impact on the reproductive choices of heterosexual couples, as well. Because it provides a seemingly endless possibility for more children, the decision of how many children to bear and of when to stop treatments reveals many of the implicit societal pressures for having children. The government funds treatments until a woman has two children, but the treatments are not so prohibitively expensive as to prevent upper-class women from seeking additional services. As Pninah explained, she encountered an indirect sense of pressure to continue the treatment: "I used to sort of go through the infertility [treatments] and say, when should I stop? And they said, 'Well, it's up to you—as much as you want.'" The treatment becomes a panacea with endless hope for a child. Because the treatment is fully funded by the

[92] Ibid.

government, the woman's choice of when to pursue treatment and when to stop rests entirely on her personal choice, a choice which is heavily influenced by the family-centric Israeli society. When a woman chooses to stop, it often becomes a surrender of sorts, as though she is neglecting her natural role to become a mother. As a result, although some women do choose to end treatments early in the process, many women go through IVF for extensive numbers of cycles out their intense desire for a coveted child—until they have a baby or until they can no longer handle the side-effects.[93]

Nevertheless, the popularity of IVF exists not only from the procreative end result; if a child were the only important piece of the narrative, adoption would be an equally privileged option for enabling motherhood. During my interviews, women emphasized the advantages of IVF over adoption. I asked several women why IVF is more valued than adoption and received responses that brought the discussion back to the earliest narratives of motherhood. The physicality of pregnancy, the continuity of genetic material, and the sense of bodily purpose all remain in IVF-aided pregnancy. Rebbetzin Steiner, whose comment focused specifically on the relationship of adoption to halakhic procreation, mirrored the responses by secular women. She explained that although adoption is "considered spiritually equivalent" to natural pregnancy, "it's not the same thing because it's not the biological parent." The parents can love their adopted child equally to natural children but it does not fulfill the same biological need for the couple nor the physical pregnancy for the woman who carries the child. IVF's popularity stems from its appeal to the founding narrative of female identity. It enters into a society that values motherhood as a physical experience of the female body. Her womb, central to her societal enfranchisement, serves its "natural" purpose via fertility treatments.

The preference of fertility treatments above adoption exists not only informally within casual society but within the political realm, as well. According to Pninah, the government urges women on a list for a national adoption to continue receiving fertility treatments. She understood this to be a clear indication of the government's preference that a woman bear her own child, in part because few children are available for adoption and in part because they acknowledge that a genetic baby is better than the alternative. Shira shared the opinion that the government should push IVF over adoption: "The advantage of IVF is that you get pregnancy, too…Every decent woman who is young and

[93] Daphna Birenbaum-Carmeli, (Forthcoming), "Policy on In Vitro Fertilisation in Israel and the Views of Women Having IVF Treatment: The More the Better?" in *Reproductive Health Matters*.

healthy, even if she has a problem and it's not her egg, in my opinion, should prefer to experience the pregnancy, the breastfeeding…The best babies are the mother's egg and the father's sperm." Shira acknowledged the importance of adoption and she felt that adoption should become more accessible than it is at present; nevertheless, she is fully supportive of IVF as a means of enabling a woman to experience the physical dimension of motherhood. The power of IVF is that it satisfies the construction of motherhood that is an explicit part of national and individual narratives.

IVF entered into the public realm as a scientific miracle, even as one article called it, a means of "Correcting God's mistakes."[94] The early discussion surrounding fertility treatments emphasized the primary role that the government and medical establishment had in fixing the problems. In the Jewish paradigm of woman as a reproductive vessel, the medical establishment and the looming government has become the redeemer of that failed body. The doctor-patient interactions thus came to embody the Jewish narrative of the transforming male to the deformed woman. The interpersonal dynamic within fertility treatments has often empowered the doctor and medical establishment in controlling the course of procedures. When women receive sperm donations, for example, the doctors and nurses have control over who the donor will be. The woman has the choice only of whether the man has a light or dark complexion, corresponding to his Ashkenazic or Sephardic descent.[95] Moreover, scholars have noted the way in which doctors have insufficiently discussed the side-effects and risks of fertility treatments so that women become passive consumers of a meaning-laden treatment.[96] Many women are unaware of the actual statistical probability that they will conceive a child on any given round, illustrating the passivity with which many of them approach the interaction.[97] In these cases, the women accessing IVF envision the doctors as the active partner in enabling conception, just as men are presumed to initiate physical changes in the woman's chambered body upon marriage. As Daphna Birenbaum-Carmeli explains, "In Israeli terms, this 'loyal,' 'considerate' collusion paradoxically confirmed the physician's status as the real reproductive partner."[98] The doctors, almost always male, actively draw out women's fertility. They administer medication, perform procedures,

[94] Birenbaum-Carmeli, "'Cheaper than a newcomer'", 906.

[95] Kahn, 32-39.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Birenbaum-Carmeli, "Policy on In Vitro Fertilisation in Israel", 5.

[98] Daphna Birenbaum-Carmeli, "Reproductive Partners: Doctor-Woman Relations in Israeli and Canadian IVF Contexts," in *Small wars: the cultural politics of childhood*, ed. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Carolyn F. Sargent (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

and "experience" the treatment with the woman in such a way as to take the instrumental role in the process.

The male-female gender dynamic within the process of treatment reflects an additional aspect of fertility treatments which involves the responsibility for infertility. Larissa Remennick conducted an ethnographic study of Israeli women undergoing IVF treatment. She found that although 20 percent of the female participants were fertile (and that it was their partner who was infertile), many of these women explained the persistent childlessness as a result of their own infertility.[99] Among several women whom Remennick quotes, Maya explains that she accepts responsibility for her persistent childlessness even though it is her husband who is infertile:

> My husband never asked me to withhold this information, but I chose myself to defend his self-esteem and male pride. Even to family members I am always telling that my tubes are blocked after infected appendicitis many years ago. For most men I know, it's too hard to admit this problem and try to deal with it in the open. Women take it easier for some reason.[100]

By inventing her own physiological infertility, Maya appeals to the image of the vulnerable womb that so deeply founded Israeli society. Rather than risk emasculating her partner, Maya reinforces the perception that a woman's vessel can be misshapen and that it is the woman's responsibility to be the space in which a child can grow. Fertility treatments reenact the paradigm of religiously-imagined fertility in which men have the substance and women provide the shape. Even more profoundly, Maya calls upon the Zionist legacy as imagined by Herzl and Gordon in which men's masculinity must be enhanced and offset by a passive and weak female. That a man could be infertile inverts this construction and conflicts with the fundamental beliefs.

IVF traces the reproductive narratives back to the earliest religious origins of female bodily constructions, for the practice has distinct religious connotations. All of the women with whom I spoke understood IVF as an obvious method to overcome infertility and they readily shared anecdotes of couples they knew who had met great success after undergoing treatment. Within the Orthodox Jewish community, however, the implications of IVF have stepped outside of the physical childbearing and the act of bearing children for the political-national

[99] Larissa Remennick, "Childless in the Land of Imperative Motherhood: Stigma and Coping Among Infertile Israeli Women." *Sex Roles* 43, no. 11 (2000): 821-841.

[100] Remenick, 832.

collective. Rather, IVF is saturated with a sense of religious purpose that interprets the treatments as a divine intervention.

For many religious women, IVF is the tool through which God can intervene in women's fertility within the contemporary era. In essence, IVF becomes the modern manifestation of what God did for Rachel and Leah in opening their wombs. Susan Kahn has conducted numerous studies on Jewish Israeli women and couples who undergo IVF treatment. Among her work is a particularly enlightening interchange between two women who seek to contextualize the practice within their religious beliefs. The first woman posted on an online discussion board about the dilemma she felt over the effort required by IVF treatments:

> The key to children is one of the three keys that only Hashem [God—literally, "the name"] has; i.e. they come directly from Him. I understand this to mean, that not like parnasah [livelihood] where it is clear that we have to make hishtadlus [effort], children should not require extra unnatural and invasive hishtadlus. If so, where do all these treatments, procedures come in to the picture?

Among numerous responses was the following explanation by another woman undergoing treatment:

> For some, the ribono shel olam [God—literally, "master of the world"] gives the nisayon [experience] of being unable to do piryeh v'rivyeh [procreate] the natural way. He wants them to make more efforts I guess….I am fine with all these procedures. This is what Hashem wants from me. Otherwise, He wouldn't challenge me with infertility. And otherwise IVF would not be available to me.[101]

Just as infertility challenged the matriarchs, modern women can understand their infertility within the same framework of maternal desire and divine intervention. The first woman is concerned that IVF is an unnatural means for conceiving a child and that it conflicts with the religious view that conception should not require extra effort. Because many women believe that conception should come out of the action of a man, a woman, and God, reproductive technologies raise the question of whether they are conflicting with the natural body.

Nevertheless, the second woman responds to the first woman's concern by placing IVF within the purview of God's divine tools. For her, IVF is not

[101] Kahn, 473.

something that conflicts with a woman's natural motherhood but which provides her an alternate—if more "challeng[ing]"—means of achieving that role. God is "ribono shel olam" ("master of the world"), emphasizing God's instrumentality; she creates an implicit framework in which humans do not have the ultimate authority in the happenings of the world. IVF exists because God wants it to exist; and God wants it to exist because piryeh v'rivyeh (procreation) is "the natural way." In doing this, the second woman folds IVF into the framework of natural motherhood. This exchange affirms not only the sense that women should use fertility technology but that IVF fits into the overarching pronatalist image of the naturally maternal female, even when that female needs seemingly unnatural assistance.

The second explanation for IVF's role within the religious reproductive context came from Chani. She understands IVF not only as a means of bearing children, which in itself is a blessing in her view, but also as an active endeavor on God's part to enable larger plans. As she shared with me, she believes that God is using IVF as a means of speeding up the arrival of the messiah:

> And they said it's because it's a sign that the moshiach [messiah] is coming. That as we get closer to the moshiach coming, every soul that has to come back, has to come back in a body…So, they say that as we get closer to the moshiach—they knew that when we lost the Temple that there would be this long gap—then things would start to speed up. And that's what's happening here, that we have to speed up the babies being born. This is God's message, this is God's way of saying, "we're bring you closer." That we have this treatment, there is a religious aspect to this.

God uses women's bodies for a purpose that exists outside of the women themselves; through reproduction, women become instruments for a project that resonates for all living things. IVF returns to the earliest of narratives in which God becomes the active partner in reproduction; God now enlists women's physical reproduction as a means of precipitating the messiah's arrival.

The legislation of reproductive technologies occupies a complicated role within Israeli society. Although the presence of reproductive technologies stems in large part from their contribution to Jewish demographic concerns, it also arises from the continuous narratives of female fertility. The reproductive technology within the modern context reflects a nexus of Israel's demographic concerns and ideological foundations and from this, we can identify the ever-present religious narratives within pronatalist policies. Whereas earlier policies obscured the religious link between their outcomes and their foundations, IVF reaffirms the

connection by creating a direct relationship between Jewish-based social interests and women's physical identities. The collective affirmation of reproductive technologies reflects the deeply internalized religious narratives of women's bodies as they have come to exist within a nation-building framework.

Conclusion

As we trace the path of religious narratives surrounding the female body into present reproductive technologies, we can see how women have assumed a place in Israeli society that defines their roles within a maternal space. Religiously, their reproduction is a blessing; politically, they should reproduce for the demographic needs; socially, they should reproduce for their inclusion in Israel's family-oriented society. Israel's legislative policies incorporated the Jewish constructions of the female, maternal body. The narratives diffused throughout Israeli society and placed women within a space of imperative motherhood. Fertility treatments were originally legislated as a result of political and demographic interests but they also appeal to the maternal needs of Israeli women.

While the trajectory of religious narratives appears, on the one hand, to ascribe to women a powerless role in their own fertility, the women whom I met spoke of motherhood with a great sense of agency. They felt in control of their bodies and they passionately called upon the government to support their motherhood with fertility treatments and family-centric policies. While many critics of Israel's reproductive policies have understood the policies as making women "victims in a system of domination over which they have little or no control,"[102] Michal understood those same policies as a "beautiful thing that we provide the technology and the ability for people to have children if they can't." There exists a profound dichotomy between the language used by scholars and the language used by women in understanding the significance that Israel's pronatalism poses for women. Israeli policies perpetuate a reproductive imperative but they also enable women's fulfillment of a role that they have come to expect of themselves.

While there is no definitive answer for the conflict between agency and passivity in understanding Israel's reproductive policies, it is worth questioning why such a dichotomy exists. Religious narratives of female identity have constructed a role for women which exists in a static form, one that has been carried through history on the path of Jewish nation-building. At the same time, although this paradigm has infused Israeli society with a specific role for women, the religious

[102] Portugese, 13.

foundations of the overarching narrative have offered an incredible depth to the maternal role which women occupy. These narratives may inscribe a woman into a reproductive role, but she exists inside of that narrative and it is her choice to participate in what is an essential action for collective survival. Women act within a symbolic space that they may not have constructed but which they actively fill.

At the most critical level, we find reproductive legislation which enforces the government's interest in Jewish birth rates and which risks sacrificing women's bodily agency for a collective interest. But if we contextualize these policies and permit a new image of agency, we problematize the assumption that the present policies and technologies necessarily disenfranchise women in their public and private roles. Perhaps women do lose agency in acting within the socially imperative role of motherhood, but perhaps this also gives them a public power that their private bodies would otherwise not receive; the women's language certainly suggests that the answer is not so clear. As Shira noted of the pressure to bear children, "it's what people expect of you and it's what you expect of yourself." Women are affected by these narratives and they themselves perpetuate them. Nation-building depends on women and provides them with a specific role and yet every time she bears a child, she actively participates in that communal endeavor.

Elana Bloomfield graduated in 2008 from Haverford College, where she majored in religion. During her postgraduate year, she worked as a research assistant in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Michigan Medical School. Elana has continued to research the intersection of religion and medicine, particularly as it applies to women's experiences of domestic violence and sexual assault. She is planning to attend medical school and pursuing her interests in a clinical setting.

Appendix: About the Subjects of this Study

Michal is a third-generation kibbutznikit and works as an art teacher in the kibbutz school. She lives with her partner and their two children. She considers herself completely non-religious but culturally Jewish.

Shira grew up in an Israeli town but moved to the kibbutz when she married a member. She now works in a technology factory at a neighboring kibbutz. Although she is divorced from her husband, she continues to live on the kibbutz with her two children. She identifies as completely secular.

Aviva grew up on the kibbutz, as did her mother. She has two children of her own and two step-children. Aviva works as an English teacher in the kibbutz school. She considers herself non-religious but culturally Jewish.

Mayan is an anthropologist whose research focuses on reproductive issues within Israeli society. She has two children, one of whom was conceived through in vitro fertility treatments. She is religiously secular but has conducted much of her research among ultra-Orthodox women.

Pninah lives in Jerusalem and is a rabbi in a liberal Jewish movement. She has two children which she conceived through fertility treatments.

Rebbetzin Steiner lives in Jerusalem but comes originally from the United States. She has twelve children and teaches at a religious girls' school. She is ultra-Orthodox.

Bat-El lives in Jerusalem but comes from South Africa. She teaches classes about halakha and family life for women who are about to get married. She has eight children and is ultra-Orthodox.

Rachel lives in Beit Shemesh, a community just outside of Jerusalem, and has eight children. She comes from the United States but has spent much of her adult life in Israel. She is ultra-Orthodox.

Hodaya lives in Jerusalem and has seven children. She is from the United States and became religious during college. She now writes books about orthodox Judaism and goes on book tours throughout Israel and the United States.

Chani lives in Beit Shemesh with her four daughters. She is from the United States but has lived in Israel since she married an Israeli man. She works in a public relations firm and teaches history at a girl's school.