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GOLDA MEIR – A RETROSPECTIVE



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“A Great Episode in the History of Jewish Womanhood”: Golda Meir, the Women Workers’ Council, Pioneer Women, and the Struggle for Gender Equality

ABSTRACT

The establishment of the American Pioneer Women Organization revealed two patterns typical of the Labor Movement in the Yishuv: women’s struggle to break the patriarchal chains that kept them subordinated to men and the centrality of American funding for the socialist project of Zionist nation building. In Palestine, the Women Worker’s Council (Council) (Moetzet Hapoalot), while founded at the same time as the Histadrut (Federation of Labor), encountered considerable obstacles in its quest to implement gender equality. The founding mothers of the Council were convinced that consciousness raising, as well as meeting the special needs of the woman worker, necessitated a special gender-based organization. The founding fathers of socialist Zionism were not responsive. They believed that formal equality would resolve the gender problem. Thus, funds required by the Council to pursue the various projects aimed at training women workers and building their self-confidence as they joined the labor market, were largely denied by the patriarchal leadership. Council members had no choice but to turn to fundraising in the US and the Pioneer Women Organization was born. Golda Meir (then Myerson) was not a passionate supporter of a separate organization for women. She was indeed a member of the Council’s secretariat in the late 1920s but it appears that by and large she shared the world view of the Histadrut male leadership. The article begins by contrasting Golda Meir with Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi, a Council founder, and then tracks Golda’s transformation, following her mission to



the US as an emissary of Pioneer Women. Through an analysis of Golda's article published in the newspaper *Davar* it analyzes the process by which she came to recognize the just claims of the women's movement and the wisdom inherent in its policy. However, while converting, Golda did not become a feminist activist. The article reviews the reasons why Golda chose to remain loyal to the patriarchy, a choice that facilitated her rise to power in the Yishuv and then in Israeli politics. The article is based on a chapter of a forthcoming biography of Golda Meir, *Through the Gender Lens*.

INTRODUCTION

RACHEL KATZNELSON-SHAZAR, FOUNDING MOTHER OF ISRAELI feminism and editor-in-chief of *D'var Hapoelet* ("The Woman Worker's Voice") called the Pioneer Women Organization "a great episode in the history of Jewish womanhood".¹ Pioneer Women, intensely Zionist, feminist, feisty, and energetic, managed to collect enough funds for the Women Workers' Council in Palestine that it soon attracted the attention of the leaders of the Histadrut, as a viable source of revenue. This article reviews the origins of Pioneer Women through the work of Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi, the first Council emissary to the US, and Golda Meir, its second. It introduces the reader to the spirit of sisterhood between American and Palestinian-Zionist organizations in the second quarter of the twentieth century and adds a feminist layer to the contribution of American Jewry to nation-building in what soon became the State of Israel.

NEW YORK CITY, 1924, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PIONEER WOMEN

Jewish tradition assigns great meaning to the connection between women and wells of water. The book of Exodus tells us that Miriam, Moshe's sister, who shared leadership with him during the long wandering in the parched desert, was accompanied by a well wherever she went. A well of water also marks the beginning of the history of Pioneer Women. In Jerusalem, Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi, one of the founding mothers of socialist Zionism, established an agricultural training farm for young women and girls, which also functioned as a tree nursery. The project had two distinct Zionist

objectives: to participate in the grand mission of Jewish revival and to empower women to develop self-sufficiency through gainful employment outside the home.² The girls and their teachers were enthusiastic, particularly about the project of afforestation of the land, but the seedlings needed water and water was scarce. Rachel Yanait was thirsty for funds to keep her dream alive.³ She dispatched a letter to Sophy Udin, fellow socialist-Zionist and member of Poale Zion [Workers of Zion] in New York: could she help? Udin, American founding mother of Pioneer Women, along with six other remarkable women activists⁴ raised the \$500 dollars, \$6,836 in today's terms. Pioneer women, known in Palestine as “Histadrut Ha-Nashim Ha-Chalutsot” or “Ha-Liga”, was born.

The original seven women were thrilled by their newfound agency. They were familiar with male resistance to gender equality. Their experience with the Jewish-American socialist party of Poale Zion was as frustrating as their sisters' experience in Palestine. They identified with its ideology – that mix of socialism and pride in Jewish history and culture, a commitment to Zionism and loyalty to Yiddish as the language of the Jewish masses – but they felt stymied by the party's sexism. The men of Poale Zion, USA, just like their brethren in Palestine, could not view women as their equal. For them, the noble mission of Zionism – liberating the Jewish people, did not include change in the traditional division of labor. Thus, men were expected to make policy in the public sphere and women to perform the traditional roles of mothers and homemakers – queens of the private sphere.⁵

The name Pioneer Women designated the activists' affinity with the Socialist-Zionist ideal of pioneering – blazing the trail (Halutzit); it contained a call to working class Jewish women to follow and partake in the utopian project of reclaiming and rebuilding the ancient homeland. What distinguished them was their belief that gender equality was an integral part of this project. They sought to heighten the awareness of gender-based discrimination as well as to cultivate the recognition that women had special needs, largely ignored by the existing male-dominated Zionist organizations.⁶ The story is told that in 1920, when the 22-year-old Goldie Myerson arrived at the Party's office in New York City, eager to volunteer, the man at the desk “gave her a broom and asked her to clean up the floor”. She did.⁷

Pioneer Women was a big leap forward towards women's empowerment and women's assertion of their own self-worth. A centerpiece of their ideology was that women needed to organize separately, in order to heighten consciousness, overcome inhibitions related to action in the public sphere, and plan measures to pursue equality. Devoted socialists, they adopted the egalitarian culture of their male brethren, referring to

the members as “chaverot” – comrades. The goal was to obliterate status differences and establish solidarity.

The year was 1924, four years after the long suffragist struggle to win the right to vote ended with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the US constitution. American women, Jewish women included, felt they wanted to be more than mothers and homemakers.⁸ For those Jewish women with a socialist ideology, organizing as Pioneer Women felt like the ideal outlet.

Pioneer Women, or as they originally called themselves in Yiddish *Pioneeran Freue Organizaia*, proved to be energetic and skilled.⁹ With the money they collected they bought twelve acres of land in Jerusalem to establish a permanent women’s workers farm. They later made substantial contributions towards the establishment of several such farms across the land. They also helped identify and develop special occupations that would better fit the woman’s physique. Raising chickens was one such path and sophisticated equipment, such as advanced incubators for the chicken coops were purchased in the US and sent to Palestine. Without the support of Pioneer Women much of the work to empower women workers in Palestine could not have been done. Between 1926 and 1931 it covered 78% of the budget of the Women Workers Council in Palestine, enabling the Council to develop important projects designed to empower the woman worker and facilitate her independence.¹⁰

Pioneer Women activity went beyond fund raising. For them, cultural transformation was essential. They established their own national magazine, *Pioneer Women*, which appeared monthly with its own editor-in-chief and reporters.¹¹ The magazine, published first in Yiddish and then in both Yiddish and English, contained information about their Palestinian endeavors and the inspiring vision of Zionism. It also included high quality analysis of current events in the US and consciousness-raising articles about women and their special needs as they struggled to balance the public and private spheres.¹²

Pioneer Women imposed annual dues (in the beginning \$2 per woman) and a goal for their fund raising which they called a “quota”. They organized into “clubs”, similar to the auxiliary “ladies clubs” elsewhere in American society.¹³ Mostly Russian immigrants and devoid of disposable income, they also had a well-developed class consciousness and considered themselves “downtown” people as distinguished from uptown middle class Jews.¹⁴ They worked tirelessly to expand their reach and established clubs across the US and Canada. As their success grew and money began to flow, the leadership of the Histadrut (Federation of Labor) in Palestine, eager to

solidify its hegemony over Palestine’s economy and therefore impatient to acquire more funds, began to covet that source of revenue. Established in 1920, the Histadrut had many viable nation-building projects in need of funding. Its leaders, all men, did not see the fact that mostly men were both deciding and benefiting from these projects as an impediment to sharing in the “bounty” raised by Pioneer Women.¹⁵ The Women’s Workers Council (hereafter Council) in Palestine disagreed.

The very establishment of Pioneer Women was rooted in the fact that the major and male-dominated Jewish organizations dedicated to the Zionist project were ignoring the Council and denying it a fair share in the funding.¹⁶ The injustice they felt was akin to the injustice decried in the biblical parable of the poor [wo]man lamb.¹⁷ Controversy soon erupted. What was the role of the Council in this controversy? Bat-Sheva Margalit-Stern, in her aptly titled volume *Redemption in Bondage* offered a pertinent analysis of the discord.¹⁸ The Council insisted on full integration of the principle of gender equality into all the projects developed by the Histadrut – thus they insisted that the great Zionist vision of redemption include the praxis of gender equality.

The men had little problem with the principle, but could not internalize the practice. They failed to recognize the chains that prevented women from full participation. The rift began as soon as the Histadrut was established.¹⁹ The male leadership designed a centralizing policy that would subordinate all members and all interests to the greater goal of nation building as defined by the Histadrut. The Council was apprehensive and demanded equal treatment. Golda Meir’s involvement with Pioneer Women must be understood against this controversy.

GOLDA MYERSON-MEIR AND GOLDA
LISHANSKY, AKA RACHEL YANAIT BEN-ZVI:
A STORY OF TWO GOLDAS

The year 1920 inaugurated women’s right to vote into the US Constitution and that same year, Jewish women began to vote for Knesset Israel, the Yishuv’s representative assembly under the British Mandate.²⁰ Three years earlier the Balfour Declaration recognized the right of the Jewish People to a national home in Palestine.²¹ Each event, in its turn, injected energy into the women’s rights movement and Zionism.²² Four years later, Golda Myerson, a young American immigrant in Palestine, left her beloved Kibbutz Merhavia and moved to Jerusalem.²³ She arrived in Palestine full

of enthusiasm for Kibbutz life and very soon not only established herself in the Kibbutz but also began to gain recognition as a rising talent deserving of attention among the leadership of the nascent labor movement.

Golda's husband, Morris Myerson, was less exhilarated by Kibbutz life and prevailed upon her to leave. The leverage he had over his young wife was the prospect of raising a family. Golda wanted children and Morris would not have them in the Kibbutz. Evidently, Golda wanted children more than she wanted Kibbutz life; within two years she gave birth to two children, Menachem and Sarah. She began to realize that the bargain did not bring her the hoped for marital bliss. From the joy and camaraderie of life in Merhavia she was now plunged into utter misery, compounded by abject poverty.²⁴ Family life, motherhood, and quite likely marriage to Morris, were becoming woefully oppressive.²⁵ Her friend and mentor, David Remez, probably already her lover at the time, offered a life preserver: relocate to Tel-Aviv and join the secretariat of the Women Workers Council. It was an offer she could not refuse. She had to have a life of her own. In Tel-Aviv, struggling with the sadness and guilt of separation, the growing realization that political life fit her maturing personhood like hand in glove, Golda increasingly faced the reality that the agenda of the Council and her own political consciousness as well as personal constraints were at odds. The women at the Council were confirmed feminists who were committed not only to the principle of gender equality but also to policies (such as equal pay, special training for urban workers, flexible working terms for the working mother) designed to implement the principle.²⁶ As indicated earlier, the male leadership was ambivalent. Zionist leaders like David Ben-Gurion and David Remez (first and second holders of the powerful position of general secretary of the Histadrut) never failed to trumpet the rhetoric of gender equality (just as their male American comrades at Poale Zion did), but they felt that the time was not ripe for action. Nation building, by men and therefore for men, had priority.

The goal of the Council was precisely to thwart the labor leadership's effort to ignore the women's needs. Staunch feminists among them, Ada Fishman Maimon, Rachel Katznelson, Rachel Yanait, Leah Miron, were angry about what they perceived as an unfair and misguided dismissal of their claims. They understood the position of the leadership as an effort to keep the traditional division of labor between the sexes and preserve the built-in advantage of the patriarchy.²⁷ Golda's job at the Council was, among other things, to see to it that the Council's activists would not rock the boat and to help her women companions develop a more sympathetic attitude towards cooperation with the Histadrut.

At that time, Golda Lishansky, already widely known as Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi, was in the US. She was sent by the Council with the specific mission of raising funds that would help promote the goal of empowering women, so dear to her heart. Both Goldas were born in Ukraine, then a part of the Russian empire, at the end of the nineteenth century. Both tied their political fortunes with Poale Zion. Golda Lishansky, a founder of Poale Zion in Russia, was known for supporting the slogan that the “Liberation of the Jewish people will either come through the Jewish workers movement or will fail to come”.²⁸ She was also active in the fight to get women the right to vote in Palestine.²⁹ The name Rachel Yanait also reflects Zionist ideology. It was forged in the crucible of a passionate commitment to transform the Jewish people into “new Hebrew persons”. Golda Lishansky became Rachel and chose the surname Yanait to affiliate herself with the royal Yanaic Hasmonaic dynasty of the late period of the Second Temple. Name change in the hope of bringing about a change in identity was common among the early Zionists.

Golda Myerson (nee Mabovitch) was not so revolutionary. As a child she saw her older sister Sheyna’s activism in a revolutionary underground cell and their mother’s maddening anxiety that this “reckless” behavior could end in painful ruin.³⁰ That was enough to distance Golda from violent solutions. Arriving in the US at the age of seven, she was shaped by American progressivism. She preferred reform, not revolution.

We thus have two Goldas. One, Rachel Yanait, who dropped her original name as an unwanted relic of the past. Another, Golda Mabovitz, stubbornly rejecting any suggestion that she Hebraize her name into Zehava (Hebrew for Golda) or change it in any other way.³¹ Another difference between the two was that Yanait was married to one of the leaders of the labor movement, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi. Ben-Zvi later served as the second president of Israel, making Rachel Yanait Israel’s first lady. By all accounts, they had a solid marriage that lasted until the end of their lives. Yanait was not subjected to the turbulence of family life experienced by Golda Myerson and therefore may have been more secure about pursuing her values and political path.

Many of the founders of the Council were married to high powered Zionist politicians.³² Golda married Morris Myerson, a self-educated gentle young man whose passion was music and the arts, not politics. Morris was a reluctant Zionist and came to Palestine only because Golda gave him an ultimatum: Palestine or separation. These differences between her and other women leaders such as Yanait may have increased her sense of vulnerability and insecurity.

Another attribute of Yanait, already mentioned above, that would explain her affinity with Pioneer Women and distinguish her from Golda Myerson, was conscious feminism. Yanait believed that one of the imperative goals of Zionism was to liberate the Jewish woman and make her equal to man. Hence – the agricultural farm for girls that needed a well. She was dedicated to the idea that women should acquire useful skills and develop agency to function as independent persons.

Yanait's bonding with Pioneer Women was based, to a large degree, on shared feminist values. In 1932 Pioneer Women helped their comrades in Palestine to publish a book of essays titled *The Plough Woman*.³³ It was designed to record, analyze, and publicize the condition of women pioneers in Palestine. In an article she contributed to the volume, Yanait discussed the problems faced by working women. The agricultural market in Palestine preferred men to women and ignored their need for equal pay:

However difficult it is for men to find jobs, insecure as these jobs are – yet they have made a place for themselves in every branch of agriculture, in the plantations and fields. But the woman still has to fight out her right to work . . . in the orchard and vineyard; and not merely at the picking of oranges. And how few women get a man's pay for doing a man's work.³⁴

Golda Myerson also published in the same volume a piece that described the torment of the working mother, torn between her ambition to pursue a political career and the needs of her children.³⁵ In theoretical terms the piece documented what scholar Hanna Herzog termed “the ideology of role conflict”, the myth that a working woman would always suffer psychological hardships if she chose to pursue a career.³⁶ Yet Golda was not a theorist. She wrote a heart-wrenching description of the existential struggle of a woman drawn to public service but also yearning to perform the role of a devoted mother. By that time, she had already separated from her husband, thereby abandoning the role of wife, but she would not give up the role of mother.

Because of her success with financing the well, her good contacts with the founders of Pioneer Women, and her leadership position in the Council, the Council sent Yanait to the US to raise more funds and deepen the ties between the two women's organizations. The year was 1927. Yanait crisscrossed the US, traveled by train and bus from one corner of that vast land to another, gave speeches, attended bake sales and used-clothing sales, endless receptions, and various concerts and parties. In her letters to her husband she complained, as Golda would do later, that these events

continued until dawn and invariably ended with those in attendance dancing the Hora, a tiring if endearing practice. She also used her trip to visit the University of California at Berkeley to consult about her horticultural projects. She raised good money and felt exhausted. The organizers at Pioneer Woman took their mission seriously and squeezed every drop of her energy. She also missed her two sons and complained bitterly to her husband for his failure to write, for giving her scant information about the children, and for not spending enough time with them.³⁷

Yanait also got into fights with other Histadrut emissaries then visiting the US from Palestine and with one of the emerging leaders of Pioneer Women, Leah Biskin.³⁸ The fights were about politics and about money: is Pioneer Women an independent organization with its own agenda or should it defer to the judgment of the leadership of Poale Zion, USA? Poale Zion, USA, in turn, coordinated their steps with the Histadrut. And then, who will benefit from the collected funds?³⁹ The key to persuading Pioneer Women to share the revenue with general Histadrut projects lay in instilling in them appreciation for Histadrut projects as projects that would benefit all.

It is at this moment that Golda Myerson came to prominence. Up until her trip to the US she was frustrated with the Council's leadership. They did not see her as “one of them” and feared that she was a Trojan horse, sent to tame, not enhance, their mission. Indeed, at this time Golda did not identify with a robust feminist agenda. Probably following her comrades in the Histadrut, she called that agenda “radical” and advocated a more moderate approach that would recognize and even defer to men's interests. The very term “radical” works to stigmatize the marked group as problematic and deviant. That was probably what the Histadrut leadership sought to accomplish. However, it is also important to realize that Golda did take it upon herself to promote the Council's projects, and given her persuasive skills and fluent English, did make some strides. For example, “Rachel Yanait and Golda met with [representatives of the British Mandate government] to discuss the financial difficulties of the women's agricultural farms. They demanded that the government purchase plants from the nursery in Jerusalem for its forestation project . . . in 1928–1930 the Mandatory government purchased young trees from the women's farms for several hundred Israeli pounds.”⁴⁰

In 1930 Golda resigned her position at the Council. She said: “I feel that I am not succeeding and I do not have the confidence that I am doing what is necessary . . . I do not see any possibility of continuing my work with the Council's secretariat.”⁴¹ Still, she agreed to replace Yanait as the

new emissary to Pioneer Women. She performed the role to everyone's satisfaction. The membership was charmed, fund raising was fruitful, and the base was expanding. Her children, then four and three, were left in Tel-Aviv, to be taken care of by her mother, her sister, hired help, or occasionally by Morris, who remained in Jerusalem.⁴²

At the end of eight months in the US, Golda returned to Palestine, only to turn around and embark on another boat heading to New York. It was 1931. Golda accepted the position of national secretary of Pioneer Women and spent three years in the US, as head of the organization and for a short time as the editor-in-chief of its magazine. Not surprisingly, she developed a very good relationship with Biskin, Yanait's nemesis and even brought her children to a Passover Seder at Biskin's parent's home in Detroit. She also supported Biskin's appointment to the position of editor-in-chief of *Pioneer Women Magazine*. Putting pen to paper was not one of Golda's favorite ways to communicate, and she must have been very busy, attending meetings and speaking at numerous events. Probably at Golda's directions, Biskin gradually changed the content of the magazine to include more stories about men and their blessed contribution to the Zionist project in Palestine. When Golda returned to Palestine, Biskin followed her and for several years rented a room in Golda's apartment, serving as a housekeeper and nanny to Golda's children, while Golda increasingly undertook more demanding political and administrative jobs at the Histadrut.⁴³

WHAT PROMPTED GOLDA'S RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES IN 1931?

There were two personal reasons and one political. The more pressing personal reason was her daughter. Sarah suffered from a kidney disease that was so severe, many thought she was dying. From Tel-Aviv Morris cabled his estranged wife in the US "Sarele Desperately Ill. Come Home at Once."⁴⁴ Golda took a boat (planes were very rare), arrived in Tel-Aviv, arranged a position for herself as national secretary of Pioneer Women and took the two children back to New York. The doctors in Tel-Aviv advised against the trip, but it stands to reason that Golda made her own inquiries in the US and learnt that Sarah might have been misdiagnosed. Golda arrived in New York, Sarah was hospitalized, received the correct treatment and soon was improving. Whereupon, Golda left the children with friends, and resumed her hectic schedule, working for Pioneer Women as well as for the Histadrut and her party, Mapai.

There was another, personal, reason to come to America. Another lover. Golda and Zalman Shazar (then Zalman Rubashov) were in love. He was a charismatic and spirited man, nine years older than Golda, a man of letters and a ladies' man.⁴⁵ Remez, Golda's lover and mentor, one of Shazar's best friends, roared in pain, but ultimately remained close to Golda. Shazar, it turned out, was planning to enroll at Columbia University, to pursue a PhD. Golda wished to spend time with him, away from the suffocating circle of critical family and friends.⁴⁶ In America, Shazar and Golda saw a great deal of each other, gave speeches on behalf of the labor camp, and also participated in Pioneer Women events. Certainly, Golda was a woman of abundant energy.

When Golda secured the position of emissary to the US on behalf of Pioneer Women, she was not alone. This time the Council decided to send two chaverot, adding no other than Rachel Katznelson Shazar, an intellectual activist and one of the founding mothers of the Council and Israeli feminism. Rachel was also Zalman's wife and mother of his daughter. Golda opposed Rachel's arrival vehemently, to no avail.⁴⁷ Evidently, she did not always get what she wanted. Was Rachel aware of the romance between her husband and Golda and did she come to America, among other reasons, to chill the romance? Save her marriage? While Rachel kept a diary, she did not mention the affair.⁴⁸ Shazar, became the third president of Israel.⁴⁹ By then Golda was Israel's fourth prime minister.

Sarah's health and love for Rubashov were Golda's two personal reasons to spend time in the US. The third reason was political. Golda was determined to prove herself as a valuable asset to the Labor leadership. First, she attempted to rein in Pioneer Women, so that they would drop their opposition to channeling a portion of their funds to Histadrut and labor projects and modify thereby their emphasis on women's issues. Many of the members were fiercely committed to gender equality and believed that channeling the funds to organizations such as the Histadrut, dominated by men, would be a mistake.⁵⁰ They also thought that the women-only organization performed an important role in empowering women and opposed the idea that the time had come to dismantle the separate framework. They feared that men would dominate the deliberations and tilt the discourse in their favor while the female members would fall into silence. They also suspected that contribution to general projects would perpetuate the traditional division of labor in society, thereby compromising women's potential for growth and independence.⁵¹

Golda labeled these feminists “radical”, emphasized that man was not woman's enemy, and that a moderate approach would benefit all. This

technique of otherizing the opposition by labeling it “radical” is familiar (as mentioned above) helped to sway many (but not all) of the American Chaverot. By the time she returned to Palestine, it appeared that Golda’s charisma, rhetorical powers, and deft leadership worked to steer the Pioneer Women towards a more reconciliatory and cooperative approach towards men.⁵²

Golda also saw it as her mission to strengthen Labor’s ties with Jewish and non-Jewish elements of American public opinion. Not all American Jews supported Labor Zionism. The right-wing revisionist camp led by Vladimir Zeev Zabotinsky was strongly anti-union and violently disparaging of labor policies in Palestine. Golda’s appearances in the US were often obstructed by right-wing Jewish demonstrators.⁵³ In addition, mainstream American Jews, benefitting from the free market economy in the US were critical of the socialist orientation represented by Golda’s politics.⁵⁴ To build the nation on Labor Zionist principles, Golda and her friends needed not only money but also political backing from Unions, from the Democratic Party, from prominent shapers of public opinion. With her fluent English, charisma, and increasing political savvy Golda was turning into an indispensable asset. Within a decade, as the struggle to secure US recognition of a Jewish state intensified, Golda’s ploughing of the political field began paying high dividends.

THE EDUCATION OF GOLDA MEIR: CONSCIOUSNESS RAISED, RECONCILIATION SOUGHT

On 25 May 1932, midway through her mission with Pioneer Women in the US, Golda published an article in Mapai’s daily, *Davar*, reflecting on her travels, titled “Travel Impressions”. The article was devoted to Pioneer Women’s conflict with the Histadrut.⁵⁵ Golda called for reconciliation, opining that each side needed to recognize the kernel of truth in the other’s message. Both had to practice the value of equality and treat males and females as equal in rights and obligations.⁵⁶ The implication was that the Histadrut and its male leadership was also under duty to raise its consciousness about women’s role in society and that without such effort, the goal of cooperation could not be accomplished.

The road that took her to this conclusion was tortured and not always clear, yet she powerfully delivered the feminist message, and emphasized the intrinsic value of women-only organizations. She also criticized the prevailing gender stereotypes. The opening of the article

contained an unqualified recognition of the difficulty enveloping the woman question:

Many women harbor a prejudice toward single-sex organizations regardless of the objectives of these organizations. Women do not always liberate themselves from their personal and social subordination, they do not always use their powers to reach the perfect liberation. To the contrary, their very opposition to the women-only organization reflects their own backwardness as well as their desire to deny their backwardness from themselves.

The statement could not be more explicit. Prejudice against women was rampant and resulted in personal and social subordination. Gender-based stereotypes have shaped the consciousness not only of men but also of women. Women, just like men, nurture false consciousness about the second sex being second: “[They] turn a blind eye to their backwardness” and this is the reason why they develop a resistance to feminist ideas and feminist organization.⁵⁷

Golda was declaring herself a feminist. One would expect the next paragraph to elaborate further, perhaps to insist on the need to spread the feminist agenda, at least to praise Pioneer Women and the Council for carrying the torch. Instead, came the rhetorical move known as “on the other hand”: “On the other hand, it is hard to view positively the feminist trend [where] gender based segregation is portrayed as a great achievement. The hostility against men among feminists may sometimes take very obnoxious forms: they don’t let men participate in their deliberations and they always stand guard against this nemesis.” Thus, on one page, the bold feminist statement was joined with a condemnation of those “extreme” feminists who view men as their enemy. Golda was referring to the few incidents in both Palestine and America, where women, weary of male domination, refused to allow male participants to attend their meetings.⁵⁸ Those incidents were real albeit infrequent, but Golda’s article was using them to distance herself (the writer) from feminism. Yet, barely had the ink dried on this disclaimer, when Golda re-asserted the quintessential feminist grievance: “Truth to tell, I should note that maybe there indeed were many male members who could not fathom how women could manage and organize serious issues by themselves.” Sexism was a problem, she seemed to be saying, and feminism was based on empirical evidence of male chauvinist attitudes (“there indeed were many male members . . .”).

Golda must have been torn. She recognized the powerful patriarchal domination in Mapai and in the Histadrut. And yet she felt uncomfortable

with what she called “extreme” (in fact quite balanced) feminism that would point the finger at male chauvinism. She was interested in building bridges with the male establishment. In her article, she paid tribute to Pioneer Women who were “extremely devoted and work incessantly. Complete one fund raising and plan a second.”⁵⁹ She then quickly leaped forward, assuring her readership that progress towards gender equality had already been made. Women who acquired gender consciousness found it easier to cooperate with men at the Histadrut and many men, “have discarded the stereotype that the woman is less intelligent and less talented than the man etc.” She seemed to be stating that a bridge was built, and that cooperation was now possible on egalitarian grounds. She ended with her signature rhetorical style: “Can anyone deny that the liberation of the woman does, finally, liberate the man as well?”

This rhetoric could be pacifying. Liberation of both males and females of oppressive gender stereotypes frees both sexes to pursue the great and pressing task of nation building. But she knew that to declare such an “agreement” would not by itself bring about the desired equality. Hence, the deeper radical principle lying underneath the pacifying rhetoric: men too, would be much better off, once they acknowledged their male chauvinist prejudices, perhaps stopped blaming women’s insecurity for the evils of the social structure and earnestly worked to dismantle the powerful gender stereotypes.⁶⁰ She concluded: “massive reform and improvements are needed”. There is hope for change, she wrote, but it will not be accomplished through “superficial ploughing”, easier, indeed, but likely to yield “low quality gains. What is needed is fundamental work, deep ploughing.”⁶¹

Earlier, in mid-article she exclaimed: “and now what?”. These were the words of a political activist, a woman in search not of theory but of practical solutions. Apparently, only two solutions were on the table: declaring that a reconciliation has already been achieved or was on its way (the superficial gain) and moving on. Or launching a project of deep ploughing. She knew well that the second was the better policy, but she was not prepared to actively embrace it.

Golda’s entire article, therefore, was marked by ambivalence, an unwillingness to walk a straight path. Why was that? A simple answer is that the article amounted to a stream of consciousness, ideas wrestling in her mind. Here, one may argue, her lack of formal education stood as an obstacle. She had not been trained in the art of essay writing and failed to watch herself zigzagging. But deeper questions knock on the door. First, did Golda in fact undergo a transformation? Second, who or what could be responsible for that fundamental change in perspective? Third, once she came to terms with her transformation, what did she decide to do?⁶²

First, the article does explicitly mention a transformation. While its language was that of a disinterested observer, merely reporting the impressions of travel, it is clear that Golda was reflecting on her personal experiences. The clue was provided in the article’s second paragraph, the one following the bold feminist statement:

There were many women who, because they have joined a Party were doubting or even opposing . . . women’s organizations. They thought that the Party offered them full satisfaction. And then, after working for a few years with Pioneer Women, they found that they became more active members of the party.⁶³

One woman in particular fit this description – Golda herself. When she joined Poale Zion, first in the US and then in Palestine (later Achdut Haavoda and Mapai), she was not keen to identify “women’s problems”. The power of patriarchal stereotypes was overwhelming and she internalized their message. She did not take the job at the Council because of feminist conviction.⁶⁴ The interaction with admiring and empathic American women accelerated a transformation that was already in the making following her separation and move to Tel-Aviv. In her own words, in the second paragraph of her article: “The gender exclusive organization *served as a school, where they learned to act independently, take responsibility and gain self-confidence.*” (Emphasis added.) The paragraph says “they”, meaning the members of Pioneer Women, but it can easily be replaced with “We” or “I”. Golda was recounting the trajectory of her own emotional and intellectual development. She was paying tribute to the members of Pioneer Women who influenced the way she now came to understand gender roles.

Second, who or what could be responsible for that fundamental change in perspective? Golda attributed the transformation to her work with the women’s organization: probably Pioneer Women but also the Council, that feminist organization in Tel-Aviv that sent her to the mission in America. Surely her troubled recent experience of poverty and loneliness in Jerusalem, financial dependence, and tormented realization that motherhood was not compatible with a brilliant career, made her comprehend more clearly what the leaders of the Council were talking about.⁶⁵ It is also possible that two men played a part in the messages articulated in her article. David Remez, the influential power engine behind the economic growth of the Histadrut, who found her the job at the Council, was not a feminist. He must have been displeased with what he probably called “extreme feminism” – gender-based separatism, the analysis of men as

women's nemesis and the exclusion of men from women's meetings.⁶⁶ To appease him, who was so central to her emotional and political life, Golda had to emphasize, twice, that "extreme feminism" was unacceptable. Her lover in New York at the same time as she was undergoing the "schooling" at Pioneer Women, was Zalman Shazar. Golda's analysis of the impact of traditional gender stereotypes on both men and women, the phenomenon of "social and personal" subordination, and the insight that only "deep ploughing" could lead to meaningful reform may have received further confirmation from him.⁶⁷

In the history of the Labor party Shazar was a leading intellectual but he could not be classified as a feminist, or as a theorist of the complexity of the "woman question". Shazar was a married man and his wife, Rachel Katznelson-Shazar, was one of the most prominent and active feminist leaders in Palestine, highly educated, analytically astute, and articulate. Most of her practical and theoretical work revolved around the woman question.⁶⁸ Zalman and Rachel must have had many discussions about these issues. At Pioneer Women Golda was struggling with women's issues and their impact on politics, and it is not fanciful to imagine conversations between the lovers, on precisely these issues.⁶⁹ Thus, Shazar, in all probability, was the conduit through which Rachel Katznelson's ideas reached Golda.

Shazar could have offered the legitimacy to the feminist theories now percolating in her mind. If correct, one may then imagine that, ironically, he lent the required male authority to the views of the women comrades at Pioneer Women. Admiring and sympathetic, they enveloped Golda with love and approval while at the same time focusing on feminist theory and the special needs of women. These were women like herself, speaking Yiddish rather than Hebrew and rooted in similar background. Her heart opened in ways it could do not under the blazing sun of critical disapproval and didactic lecturing in Tel-Aviv. Pioneer Women was the kind of women organization able to convert her, and convert she did

Why then the ambivalence? The resistance to join the feminist wagon? Here Golda was independently making her own decisions. She absorbed ideas from others like a sponge; but she was also thinking for herself. Golda was an ambitious young politician, eager to succeed. Working with women and for women was difficult and might well lead nowhere. She witnessed the tightfisted policy towards women's needs by both the World Zionist Organization and the Histadrut. Clouds were hiding the feminist agenda. The atmosphere at the Council was another impediment. She witnessed the ambivalence of women towards feminism.⁷⁰ The women at the Council were known for bitter internal fights, for bickering and wrangling. She

must have been reminded of her original home: the unhappy arguments between grandmother, mother, and sisters. It was precisely what she needed to leave behind.⁷¹

Harmony usually came in the company of men – her father, her lovers, her co-workers. Financial considerations should not be underestimated. Golda was estranged from her husband, with two young children to support. Her salary upon arrival at the Council was thirteen pounds – a substantial sum compared to anything she made before and even higher than many contemporary white-collar workers.⁷² If she attached her lot to the Histadrut, she could not only engage in the work she found so exciting and for which she got rewarding recognition; she could also support herself more comfortably and enjoy the perks associated with status such as travel abroad (modest, in those days, but paid for) at the expense of the public treasury. Perhaps the experience of poverty and helplessness as an adult, made her less inclined to take unnecessary risks.

And there was ambition. At the time, the Histadrut was already making a mark and rapidly consolidating its hegemony. The temptation to get on the band wagon, the desire to take a meaningful part in nation-building (albeit a nation based on patriarchal principles) was too seductive to throw-away. Golda probably concluded that for all of these reasons it would be best to discontinue her activities with Pioneer Women and return home, literally and figuratively.⁷³

Upon her return Golda was elected as a member of the prestigious and powerful Executive Committee of the Histadrut.⁷⁴ Her talents as an excellent organizer and fund raiser were already widely recognized. By 1935, Remez, now general secretary of the Histadrut, came up with another tempting idea of expanding the economic portfolio of the Histadrut: the development of a shipping company to be called Nachshon. This, he reasoned, would bring about “the conquest of the sea”. He offered Golda the job of locating American investors for the new project. She was thrilled by the vision of ships flying a Jewish flag and operated by Jewish sailors. What could be better than that?⁷⁵

From the emphasis on agriculture, wells, tree nurseries, and ploughshares, operated by and for women, Golda moved to shipping and sailing, a field dominated by men and associated with masculinity. She did not remain with this project for long. Soon enough she moved on, earning a position of trust and responsibility in the inner circle of the political leadership that within fourteen years led the Yishuv to statehood.

She was always very fond of Pioneer Women and welcomed its members warmly when they visited in Palestine and then Israel. One assumes

that she always knew that their organization was the first to provide her not only with affection but also with leadership opportunities and with a ladder to fulfill her ambitions.

CONCLUSION

Was the story of Pioneer Women “a great episode in the history of Jewish Womanhood?” Indeed, it was and it must not be overlooked. Poor immigrant Jewish women in the US and Canada got together, established active clubs all over the land, educated themselves about the socialist Zionist project, and raised funds to enhance the status of the Jewish working woman in Palestine. Without their support and enthusiastic sisterhood, the Women Workers’ Council would not have been able to print its mark on the foundations of Israeli nationhood.

Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi may have been schooled in feminist theories in revolutionary Russia and therefore enjoyed intimate affinity with Pioneer Women. Golda Meir, schooled in Zionist theory by the American chapter of Poale Zion, had a harder time seeing through the empty declarations of loyalty to gender equality made by the patriarchy, in the US and in Palestine. During her stay in the US as emissary to Pioneer Women, she came to understand, on a theoretical rather than anecdotal level, the problems facing a woman seeking equality. Had she chosen to actively insist on feminist principles in the 1930s, would she have been crushed by the patriarchy, as were the other formidable feminists from the Council or was it possible that that “great episode of Jewish Womanhood” would be even greater?

NOTES

I thank Brian Hayes for expert research on Pioneer Women, and Deborah Bernstein, Leora Bilsky, Hanna Herzog, and Laura Kalman for reading the manuscript and giving me helpful comments. All errors are mine alone. A different version of the first part of this article appeared in *Naamat Woman*, Winter 2017: 16.

1. Rachel Katznelson-Rubashov, *Introduction to The Plough Woman, Records of the Pioneer Women of Palestine, Critical Edition*, edited and annotated by Mark Raider and Miriam B. Raider-Roth (Waltham, MA, 2002), xxix: “This book is, in form and content, the mirror of a great episode in the history of Jewish womanhood. It is not a literary enterprise. It is a simple collection of human documents, a

cooperative effort to record, in direct personal reports, the spirit and achievements of a generation of women.”

2. In keeping with the Zionist theory of A.D. Gordon that agricultural labor and a connection to the land would restore healthy Jewish existence. Zionism was also dedicated to the idea of gender equality, but mostly on the level of theory. Yanait and her friends endeavored to make gender equality a part of the Zionist practice.

3. Close to that time the World Zionist Organization cut the funds for the Women’s Agricultural Farms and to other projects the Women Workers’ Council developed to help women acquire professional and occupational skills. Other sources of funding had to be located. See Yitzhak Greenberg, *Golda, Growth of a Leader* (Tel-Aviv, 1994), 50 [Hebrew].

4. Nina Zuckerman, PW first national secretary, Leah Brown, Rachel Sigel, Chaya Ehrenreich, Luba Hurwitz, and Eva Berg. For the history of Pioneer Women see Nick Mandelkern, “The Story of Pioneer Women,” Parts 1–4, *Pioneer Women* (September 1980): 20–9 (November 1980): 6–8, (January-February 1981): 13–16, (March-April 1981): 6–9; Mark A. Raider, *Pioneer Women in the United States*, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/pioneer-women-in-united-states>

5. Rachel Rozanski, *Conflicting Identities, Poalei Zion in America, 1905–1931* (Sede Boker, 2004), 388–92 [Hebrew]; Rojanski, “At the Center or on the Fringes of the Public Arena, Esther Mintz-Aberson and the Status of Women in American Poalei Zion, 1905–35,” in *Gender and Israeli Society, Women’s Time*, ed. Hannah Naveh (London, 2003), 27.

6. For the history of the Socialist Women Movement in Palestine see Bat-Sheva Margalit-Stern, *Redemption in Bondage, The Women Workers Movement in Eretz Israel 1920–1939* (Jerusalem, 2006) [Hebrew]; Deborah Bernstein, “The Status and Organization of women workers in the Urban Yishuv during the 1920s and 1930s,” *Cathedra* 34 (1985): 115–44 [Hebrew]; *The Struggle For Equality, Urban Women Workers in Prestate Israeli Society* (London, 1987); Ada Maimon (Fishman), *Fifty Years of the Women Workers’ Movement* (Tel-Aviv, 1955) [Hebrew]. Maimon was the political and ideological leader of the women workers’ movement. Dafna N. Izraeli, “The Zionist Women’s Movement in Palestine, 1911–1927: A Sociological Analysis,” *Signs* 7 (1981): 87–114. For a sociological and historical analysis of the status of women in Israel see Hanna Herzog, *Gendering Politics: Women in Israel* Ann Arbor, 1999; for a short history of Israel’s women’s movement see Hannah Safra, *Don’t Wanna Be Nice Girls* (Haifa, 2006) [Hebrew]. On Golda’s feminism and femininity see Anita Shapira, “Golda: Femininity and Feminism,” in *American Jewish Women and the Zionist Enterprise*, ed. Shulamit Reinharz and Mark A. Raider (Waltham, MA, 2004), 303; Zvi Triger, “Golda Meir’s Reluctant Feminism: The Prestate Years,” *Israel Studies* 19 (2014): 108–33.

7. Ralph G. Martin, *Golda Meir: The Romantic Years* (New York, 1988), 90.

8. Mellissa R. Klapper, *Ballots, Babies, and Banners: American Jewish Women Activism 1890–1940* (New York, 2013).

9. Yiddish was the dominant language among Pioneer Women's early organization phase. Their logo appeared in Yiddish (rather than Hebrew, the preferred language by Zionists, or English, the local tongue). However, in the late 1920s it became evident that Americanization among the Jewish immigrants was spreading and that without English young members would not enroll. Golda took a leading part in encouraging the Pioneer Women's leadership to welcome English speakers.

10. Greenberg, *Golda*, 50 citing financial report of the women's workers council. See also Margalit Stern, "The central committee of the Histadrut practically absolved itself from the obligation to support the Council," *Redemption in Bondage*, 176. Another important source of funds was the Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO). The World Jewish Organization and the male-dominated labor organization in Palestine, the Histadrut, made negligible contributions to promote gender equality.

11. The magazine is still published today, under the name *Na'amat Woman*.

12. See, e.g., Fannia M. Cohn, "Woman's Eternal Struggle: What Workers' Education Will Do for Women," December (1931); Sara Feder, "Convention Problems," June (1930); "Working Women in the Depression: Glancing Backward," *Pioneer Woman* February (1934). The organization was also committed to the principle of unionized labor and their logo included the "union bug", designating their commitment to employ only unionized labor.

13. Within a few years they expanded their reach to include the next generation – young women 18-years-of-age.

14. Upon return to Palestine Gold noted that the women comrades "feel that a substantial amount of money should be raised through their own labor. They look for work, do laundry, child care and more – in order to fulfil the 'quota' of the current fund raising." Meir Avizohar, ed., *Golda Meir, Growth of a Leader, 1921–1956* (Tel-Aviv, 1972), 123 [Hebrew].

15. Margalit Stern, *Redemption in Bondage*, 182–8.

16. Another major complicating factor was partisanship. Two main socialist parties dominated the Histadrut – Hapoel Hatzair and Achdut Haavoda. The Council, too, reflected this division and its leaders vied for influence on behalf of their party. For example, Ada Fishman Maimon, the Council's leader, was a member of Hapoel Hatzair. Rachel Katznelson (see below) and Golda were members of Achdut Haavoda.

17. The poor man's lamb parable, 2 Samuel 12:1–4. Letter from Pioneer Women to the Council: "Why is it felt that in Palestine the Histadrut and the Party do not guarantee the election of women members to the committees and institutions? Are you not sufficiently valued? Are the male members better than you?" Margalit Stern, *Redemption in Bondage*, 182.

18. *Ibid.*

19. It did not help that Maimon was a member of one socialist Zionist party, Hapoel Hatzair, whereas others were members of Achdut Haavoda.

20. Margalit Shilo, *Girls of Liberty: The Struggle for Suffrage in Mandatory Palestine* (Waltham, MA, 2016).

21. <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-balfour-declaration-table-of-contents>. In that foundational event in Zionist history, the British Empire, on the verge of taking control of Palestine at the end of WW I, declared that it will “view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.”

22. However, at the same time, the Mandate government legislated the power of the rabbinical courts on matters of marriage and divorce. See Hanna Herzog, “The Chief Rabbinate: From a Mechanism of Colonial Control to Institutionalization of National, Ethnic and Gender Boundaries,” in *Zionism & Empires*, ed. Yehouda Shenhav (Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv, 2009), 237–65 [Hebrew].

23. The exact date is not clear. Golda and Morris left Kibbutz Merhavia to Tel-Aviv in mid-1923 and arrived in Jerusalem in 1924. See Meron Medzini, *Golda, A Political Biography* (Tel-Aviv, 2008), 52–75 [Hebrew]. Medzini’s is the most comprehensive and authoritative biography of Golda Meir.

24. Golda Meir, *My Life* (New York, 1975), 97.

25. As she stated in her memoirs, “I was a sort of a prisoner.”

26. See Margalit-Stern, Bernstein, Izraeli, note 6.

27. Margalit Stern, *Redemption in Bondage*.

28. Margalit Shilo, Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi, in Zeev Tsachor, *The Second Aliya* (Jerusalem, 1994) [Hebrew].

29. Shilo, *Girls of Liberty*.

30. Sheyna Korngold, *Memoires* (Tel-Aviv, 1967), 61–2.

31. The most she accepted was to be called Goldie, mainly by her American friends. Her memoranda and letters, even as prime minister of Israel, always bore the single signature – Golda. Today, the name Golda is iconic, immediately bringing to mind Golda Meir. Note that it was not Golda who chose the name Meir. When Golda, aged 18, married Morris Myerson she took his name and dropped her maiden name. She was traditional and did not seek to defend her personhood. As Israel achieved statehood, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs required all officials to Hebraize their names. In 1956, when Golda was appointed minister of foreign affairs, she still resisted the pressure. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion (himself, decades earlier, Hebraizing his name from David Green) prevailed upon her to change her name and suggested the name Meir.

32. Rachel Katznelson was married to Zalman Shazar Rubashov, Leah Miron was married to Berl Katznelson, Rachel Yanait was married to Yitzhak Ben-Zvi. Most of these women came from the same background in Russia and belonged to the same network. See Margalit-Stern, *Redemption in Bondage*, 87.

33. See Mark Raider’s introductory essay on the *Plough Woman*, xxxix.

34. *Izraeli*, “The Zionist Women’s Movement in Palestine,” 114–5. Similar ideas are found in Yanait’s talking points in preparation for the trip, Yanait-Ben Zvi papers in the Israel State Archives (ISA). Itzhak Ben-Zvi was born Itzhak Shimshilevitz, and later Hebraized his name to Ben-Zvi. Rachel hyphenated her last name and was known as Rachel Yanait-Ben-Zvi. Ben-Zvi was one of the leaders of labor Zionism, a close friend and collaborator of Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister. The

sixteen-year-old Golda was mesmerized by their powerful personalities when she first met them in Milwaukee. Golda Meir, *My Life*, 24, 40–1.

35. Miriam B. Raider-Roth, *The Plough Woman, Identities in the Making* (Albany, 2002), lix.

36. *Ibid.*, note 63.

37. ISA, P 2065/27, See letter of 2 January 1928, “I am waiting for news, Yitzhak. What is happening at home – how are the sweet ones, you write so little about them and about yourself.”

38. There was no love lost between Biskin and Rachel Yanait. Biskin was the secretary general of Pioneer Women and Yanait felt that she methodically sided with the male leadership of Poalei Zion against the female membership of Pioneer women. Yanait described Biskin as “narrow and limited”. ISA, P-2065/27, Yanait to her husband Yitzhak, 3, 9, February 1928.

39. ISA, P-2065/29, Marminsky, member of the central committee of the Histadrut, then its emissary to the US, clashed with Yanait Ben-Zvi, 22 April 1928. She complained that Marminsky falsely stated that she was not authorized to represent the Labor institutions in Palestine and that she was “merely invited by the American members of Pioneer Women”. Thereby, she wrote, he dismissed the value of the Women’s Council “as if it were the dust of the earth ... Both the men and female members surrounded me during the internal meeting – stunned – is this a reflection of the relationship between the men and women members in Eretz Yisrael?”

40. Greenberg, *Golda*, 51. Greenberg refers to this event as having occurred in 1929. It could be that Golda was back in Palestine then, or that his date is mistaken.

41. Margalit Stern, *Redemption in Bondage*, 135.

42. Golda Myerson, “Borrowed Mothers,” *The Plough Woman*, 164.

43. Menachem Meir, *My Mother, Golda Meir* (Westminster, MA, 1983), 168.

44. Martin, *Golda Meir*, 173.

45. Tamar Schechter, *The Life Story of Rachel Katznelson Shazar* (Jerusalem, 2011), 139 [Hebrew].

46. Martin, *Golda Meir*, 173.

47. Golda to Bebbba Idelson, Council Secretariat: “You, Bebbba, should remember well the discussion I had with you and Rachel when I was in Palestine. Both of you thought that because I was [appointed secretary of Pioneer Women] it would be necessary to send an additional emissary. I told you explicitly, that in my opinion the [economic] situation in America cannot permit [two emissaries] this year.” *Golda Meir, The Fourth Prime Minister, Selected Documents*, ed. Haggai Zoref (Jerusalem, 2015), 22 [Hebrew].

48. Schechter, *The Life Story of Rachel Katznelson Shazar*, 121. Prominent politicians in Palestine frequently mixed the personal with the political, and travels abroad often served as a cover for extramarital relationships. It is hard to believe that Rachel was not aware of this arrangement or of Golda’s opposition to her arrival.

49. Margalit Stern, *Redemption in Bondage*, 172. See Marie Syrkin, *Golda Meir, Israel’s Leader* (New York, 1969), 97: “At more than one meeting [Golda] was

asked “Why do you talk about the Histadrut in general instead of the work of the women?”

50. In her memoirs Golda recalled similar criticism. A woman asked her “Why does she speak like a man?”, meaning she supports the male hegemony rather than the women’s agenda (*My Life*, 133–4).

51. Mark A. Raider, “The Romance and Realpolitik of Zionist Pioneering: The Case of the Pioneer Women’s Organization,” in *American Jewish Women and the Zionist Enterprise*, ed. Shulamit Reinharz and Mark A. Raider (Waltham, MA, 2005), 112.

52. During Golda’s tenure as general secretary, the magazine displayed several stories about prominent Labor intellectuals, all men. Golda also benefitted from the sophisticated techniques of public relations employed by Pioneer Women. Upon her return to Tel-Aviv she persuaded the Histadrut Executive Committee to open “A Touring and Sightseeing bureau” to welcome visitors from abroad and took upon herself to establish the bureau. Greenberg, *Golda*, 69.

53. Greenberg, *Golda*, 69.

54. Golda Meir, “Impressions on Travel in America,” *Davar*, 25 May 1932, reprinted in *Labor and Laboring Classes*, 224 [Hebrew]: “Once they joined [the movement] the women got a new heart and a new spirit. Fear of the word ‘socialism’ disappeared ... Eretz Israel turned them into socialists. It is regrettable that the opportunities to unravel the socialist activity of our members are so very small in America.” In the aftermath of the Russian Revolution American public opinion turned against socialism and communism.

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*, 224.

57. The familiar contemporary feminist terminology was not available to Golda but her description fits the building blocks of feminist theory.

58. Meir, *Labor and Laboring Classes*, 222.

59. *Ibid.*, 223

60. It is interesting to contrast Golda’s analysis with the rendition of her views, fifty years later (after she expressed reservations about the women’s movement). For example, Itshak Greenberg, summarizing her views about feminism, said that “Golda criticized the passivity of women and demanded that they show more involvement and activity, and strengthen their public status by proving their talents and not through [affirmative action].” Evidently Greenberg failed to understand Golda’s subtle analysis (Greenberg, *Golda*, 53).

61. Note the metaphor, based on agriculture (a cardinal theme in Zionist revival) and its connection to the title of the volume published by the Women Worker’s Council with the help of Pioneer Women “The Plough Women”.

62. The question “and now what” appeared in the middle of the article.

63. Meir, *Labor and Laboring Classes*, 222.

64. However, Golda was a member of the Council since 1924.

65. Medzini, *Golda*, 75.

66. Remez favored centralization and did not eye kindly a separate workers' organization. In addition, he envisioned the Histadrut as based on the traditional family, with the man at the helm as primary breadwinner. Yosef Gorny, *Achdut HaAvoda 1919–1930* (Tel-Aviv, 1973), 99–107 [Hebrew]. Gorny's canonical book does not mention the issue of gender equality, nor does his index mention the Women Workers Council or any of the leading feminists and members of Achdut Haavoda or Hapoel Hatzair at this time. Absent are Ada Fishman Maimon, Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi, Rachel Katznelson, and Chayuta Busel.

67. Shazar had not yet Hebraized his name and was known as Rubashov.

68. Tamar Schechter, *To Conquer the Heart: The Story of Rachel Katznelson-Shazar* (Jerusalem, 2011) [Hebrew]. The quote is integrated into the title of this article.

69. Surely, discussions with the members of Pioneer Women contributed handsomely as did discussions with Shazar.

70. Many women workers were tempted to get married and stay home. As she observed, women were dominated by false consciousness and what scholar Hanna Herzog calls “the ideology of role conflicts”, “The Chief Rabbinate,” 73.

71. She did maintain certain aspects of the private/public distinction. Some of her best friends were women, first and foremost Regina Hamburger Medzini to whom she was attached throughout her life. See also her letter to Bebbi Idelson in 1933 alluding to “such treatment from the [comrades] back home.” *Golda Meir, The Fourth Prime Minister*, 47, 23.

72. Yossi Goldstein, *Golda, A Biography* (Beer-Sheva, 2012), 62 [Hebrew]. The Histadrut payroll department was asked to give Golda a stipend for childcare, but their internal regulations did not permit that and therefore it was decided to name the stipend “care for a sick child”. Margalit-Stern states that at the same time Ada Fishman Maimon, the senior leader of the Council, received the sum of 7.5 pounds as also did husband Morris Myerson when he was employed. Margalit-Stern, *Redemption in Bondage*, 134.

73. She rejected the Pioneer Women's offer to stay on as general secretary. Greenberg, *Golda*, 71.

74. The all-powerful board had 61 members. David Ben-Gurion served as chairman, to be followed in 1935 by David Remez. See Avi Bareli, *Mapai in Israel's early Independence, 1948–1953* (Jerusalem, 2007), chapter one [Hebrew]. Golda's position was equivalent to that of a cabinet minister.

75. Greenberg, *Golda*, 73.

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“Zivotofsky v. Kerry: The Supreme Court of the United States, the Politics of American Jewry and the Biblical Balaam,” *Israel Studies* 21.1 (2016); “The Suez Crisis of 1956 and Its Aftermath: A Comparative Study of Constitutions, Use of Force, Diplomacy and International Relations,” *Boston University Law Review* 1297 (2015); “American Influence on Israeli Law: Freedom of Expression,” in *Israel and the United States: Six Decades of US-Israeli Relations*, ed. Robert Freedman (New York, 2012).