



# Girls of Liberty

THE STRUGGLE FOR SUFFRAGE  
IN MANDATORY PALESTINE

Margalit Shilo



# Girls of Liberty



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Margalit Shilo

*Translated by Haim Watzman*

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## Foreword



In spring 2015, a new political party emerged in Israel. Ubezchutan (In her merit) was an all-female party of ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) women. Their leader, Ruth Colian, argued that the interests of these women, whose situation was “akin to slavery,” were not represented by any existing political party. The ultra-Orthodox parties that purported to represent their communities in the Knesset were led by men, and excluded women from their electoral lists. Mainstream parties were ignorant of their needs or failed to make them a priority. While Ubezchutan failed to garner any seats in the twentieth Knesset, some commentators noted that there had been attempts to run all-female party slates several times since the creation of the State of Israel. Unmentioned in this modern retelling was the legacy of Israel’s *first* all-female political party, the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights, whose diligent efforts obtained the right to vote for women, first in the representative assembly of the Yishuv under the British Mandate and then for seats in the first Knesset.

Margalit Shilo’s masterful account of the work of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights fills this unfortunate gap in popular and scholarly accounts of women’s history in Israel. Translated from the original Hebrew with the support of a Helen Hammer Translation Prize, this work epitomizes the sort of careful scholarship on the history of Jewish women and their struggle for gender equality that the Brandeis Series on Gender, Culture, Religion and Law and HBI Series on Jewish Women are committed to publishing.

Between 1917 and 1936, the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights succeeded in securing women’s suffrage, the establishment of commitment to women’s equality, and passage of Mandate legislation that banned child marriage. Weaving together memoir, analysis of public documents, and press reports, Shilo provides a gripping account of the personalities and political forces that achieved these milestones and shaped the identity of the New Yishuv.

Debate over the role of women in this new dispensation was the crucible in which this new identity was forged. Understanding the struggle between mainstream and ultra-Orthodox groups during this formative period provides important insight into continuing struggles in Israel over the inclusion of women in all aspects of public life. Both arguments and political stratagems continue to reappear. During the debate over suffrage, some Haredi groups insisted that the franchise could not be extended to women because they were too frivolous to participate in political discussion. Most, however, made the less provocative argument that involvement in political debate was immodest, inconsistent with women's empathic nature and a potential threat to the family because it would distract women from their primary duties to children and home. All these claims purported to be supported by halakhah. They reemerged in 2015, when Haredi political and religious leaders rejected the idea of women serving on Haredi party lists or running on their own all-female list.

The deployment of segregation as a solution to problems of immodest mingling of the sexes in public institutions is also not a novel approach. Israelis in the twenty-first century grapple with sex segregation on public buses, on which women are pressured, harassed, and sometimes assaulted, in order to persuade them to sit in the back of the bus, away from view of and contact with men. Haredi politicians in the 1920s who worried that it was immodest for men and women to sit together in the assembly proposed ingenious solutions, such as a separate women's section. Thanks to lobbying by the Union of Hebrew Women, this proposal was not adopted.

Many Israelis today resent the stranglehold of rabbinical courts in Israel over matters relating to marriage and divorce and call for the creation of civil marriage. Shilo shows how the women of the Union of Hebrew Women resisted rabbinical attempts to assume exclusive jurisdiction over inheritance law and argued for the creation of Hebrew law courts, which would institute civil law in accordance with modern Jewish norms.

Shilo's account demonstrates that discrimination against women in public life has been a component of Israeli identity from the start. It was the one thing that all sectors of the old Yishuv could agree on, that bound them into a unified political force. The need to keep ultra-orthodox parties on board with the project of the creation of the Jewish state has presented a temptation to mainstream Israeli governments to compromise on their commit-

*Foreword*

ment to women's rights—and continues to do so. Shilo describes the vigilance with which the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights fought this tendency in the 1920s. That history provides a lesson for those who might let down their guard in the defense of women's rights today.

*Lisa Fishbayn Joffe*



## Acknowledgments



The status of women in Israeli society is a very complicated issue. On the one hand, Israel is known for having a mandatory women's military service requirement, thus declaring women's equality. On the other hand, there are several political parties in Israel that even today do not allow women belonging to them to serve in the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. This contradictory situation has roots in the early history of prestate Israel. The first Zionist feminist struggle, which will be described thoroughly in the following chapters, sheds new light on this issue and depicts *inter alia* the most outstanding women who led this nearly forgotten battle.

For lack of space, I cannot possibly list here all my research assistants and colleagues who have helped me through this venture, including many of my students. My sincere thanks to all of them. I am particularly indebted to Professor Deborah Bernstein, a close friend and colleague; Professor Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui, who was the first researcher who studied this unknown suffrage struggle; Professor Billie Melman, who is always ready to give her insightful advice; and Dr. Lilach Rosenberg-Friedman, a former student and a close friend and colleague. During my research I was financially assisted by the Kushitsky Fund at the Martin (Szusz) Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archeology at Bar-Ilan University.

This book was written originally in Hebrew and was published in a more detailed version by Yad Yizhak Ben-Zvi, in Jerusalem, and the Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in 2013. The English version was translated by Haim Watzman, who helped me clarify and sharpen the text in a most intelligent and elegant way. The Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, headed by Professor Shulamit Reinharz and Professor Sylvia Barack Fishman, awarded the book the HBI translation prize in 2014. Phyllis D. Deutsch, the always helpful editor of the English version, assisted me greatly in many ways.

Special thanks are due to my husband, Shmuel Shilo, whose help and support are immeasurable. This book is dedicated with love to my entire family.





# Girls of Liberty





## Feminism and Its Zionist and Hebrew Roots

I have drawn strength from their strength and courage from their courage.

—Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700–1950*

Largely forgotten among the dozens of suffragist movements of the twentieth century, the battle fought by the Jewish women of Palestine during the first decade of British rule, from 1917 to 1926, threatened to rupture the community to which they belonged. The right of women to participate in public life served as a litmus test for this small new society. Would the Yishuv—the Jewish community in the Land of Israel—be founded on patriarchy and religious law, as about half of its members desired, or would it transform itself into a modern and egalitarian national society, as the other half envisioned? In practice, the issue of women’s suffrage was intimately connected to the establishment of the Yishuv’s Assembly of Representatives. This body, the predecessor to the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, established the democratic forms and precedents that were later adopted by the Jewish state that succeeded the Yishuv.

The Yishuv’s suffragists pursued a new and innovative strategy: they founded a women’s party and participated in local elections and in the preparations for national elections even before they officially gained the vote. Furthermore, paradoxically, they participated in the elections for the first Assembly of Representatives, and women were elected to this body even before they had officially received the rights to vote and hold elective office. During its first decade, this women’s party gained power and visibility and achieved remarkable successes, thanks to a group of resourceful and forceful leaders. Viewing legislation and the courts as the foremost means of advancing the status of women, its slogan echoed an injunction from the Torah, “You shall have a single law and justice for man and woman.”

Karen Offen, the historian of feminism quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, says of her work on suffragists: “I have drawn strength from their

strength and courage from their courage, and have tried to learn from their weaknesses. I can be critical of them when the occasion demands, and from the perspective of the late twentieth century [and the twenty-first] I can acknowledge that they were not always perfect.”<sup>1</sup> It is my hope that my story of the Yishuv’s women’s campaign for the right to vote will do the same for my readers.

### Feminism and Nationalism

Nationalism, the ideology that every nation has a right to self-determination, was an incubator of the suffragist movement.<sup>2</sup> Nationalism provided women with a platform from which to demand that their rights be equal to men’s. The vast majority of the Yishuv’s women were immigrants who had absorbed suffragist ideas in the countries of their birth and education, such as Russia, Germany, the United States, and England. They were thus not inspired by a single source. Indeed, nationalism and feminism expressed themselves differently in different places, and thus the women’s movements in each country need to be examined in the context of that country’s experience of nationalism and colonialism. The Yishuv’s women, like women in Europe and the rest of the world, were enthralled by nationalism. Its vision of liberation shaped their lives and, when moved from the national sphere to that of gender, set their movement in motion.<sup>3</sup> Both the nationalist and suffragist campaigns raised the banner of ending subjection, both the subjection of one people to another and the subjection of women to men.<sup>4</sup>

National movements exhibit ambiguous attitudes toward women. On the one hand, they cast women in subservient roles, assigning them the role of producing, fostering, and educating the nation’s children. On the other hand, nationalism empowers them, enabling them to fight for their rights, including the vote.<sup>5</sup> The suffragist movement in its various forms also catalyzed the assimilation of “feminine” traits—such as compassion, morality, and pacifism—into the public sphere and enhanced the power of women within their families.<sup>6</sup>

Since its origins in the nineteenth century, feminism has viewed suffrage for women as the key to equal rights. The first countries to grant women the vote were New Zealand, in 1893 (women won the right to vote but not to be elected to office), and Australia, in 1903. Finland, then an autonomous region under Russian rule, was the first European country to do so, in 1906.

The United States granted women the right to vote in federal elections only in 1920.<sup>7</sup> The principle of women's right to vote began at the margins, with weak countries leading the way, and moved to the center. The trailblazers lay way off in the Pacific Ocean and were followed by Finland, on Europe's northern frontier.<sup>8</sup> In the Americas, the pioneers were the new Western state of Wyoming in the United States, and Ecuador in South America. During the interwar period covered by this book, many countries in Europe and elsewhere granted women the vote.

In her memoirs, the American suffragist leader Carrie Chapman Catt writes that the fight to win the vote for women was the longest and most intensive electoral struggle ever fought on the federal level.<sup>9</sup> It advanced incrementally throughout the world. For example, the vote was first given to women who owned property, or in England to women age thirty and older; only later did women achieve full rights to vote in elections for and serve in municipal and national bodies. The conditions for granting women the right to vote were in most cases a liberal political culture (as in New Zealand and Australia), an active national movement (Finland), or the growth of working-class parties (Russia).<sup>10</sup> In both Finland and Norway, women were granted the vote as part of the process of establishing new elected national bodies.<sup>11</sup>

In the decade before World War I thousands of women joined suffragist movements, seeking to gain civil equality in their countries and to change the social attitudes of their male-dominated societies. They became forces to contend with in their communities, both because their demands were seen as moral ones and because of their determination to gain public recognition and leadership positions.<sup>12</sup> Men believed that when the national struggle achieved its goals, women would return to their homes. But with the emergence of new nation-states following World War I, the suffragists redoubled their efforts. In each country, the women's movement reflected prevailing local conditions. During the interwar period, the women's struggle gained support from liberal, national, and socialist movements.<sup>13</sup> Suffragists viewed their campaign as a means of not only enhancing women's status but also improving society as a whole. New Zealand and Australia served as examples—these countries, the first to grant women the vote, stood out as being the world's healthiest societies, with the world's longest life expectancies and lowest infant mortality rates.<sup>14</sup>

The women's movement was not just a campaign for civil rights but also

a profound cultural clash over gender and sexual roles.<sup>15</sup> Giving women the vote had profound psychological, ideological, and cultural implications.<sup>16</sup> The suffragists brought to the surface society's implicit and explicit assumptions about women, ones that lay deep in the hearts and minds of both men and women. When women gained the right to vote and be elected, it brought about a sea change in society's perceptions of the two genders and in the way men and women viewed each other.<sup>17</sup>

Millicent Garrett Fawcett, a British suffragist who visited Palestine in the early 1920s and met with her counterparts in the Yishuv, called the suffragist movement "one of the biggest things that has ever taken place in the history of the world."<sup>18</sup> She stressed that it was the only social movement that sought to advance not a single sector of society but rather human society as a whole. She was right—the feminist movement brought about sweeping changes, and its messages had ubiquitous influence, both above and below the surface, in the home and the family.<sup>19</sup> The same is true of the Hebrew suffragist struggle, with its unique place in the national narrative and local culture. To understand its story, we need first to take a look at the Yishuv's women in the decades prior to the beginning of the campaign.

### The Emergence of the New Hebrew Woman

Piety was the salient characteristic of the pre-Zionist Jewish community in Palestine. The country was then a neglected and sparsely populated hinterland in the Ottoman Empire, and its Jewish population at the beginning of the nineteenth century was approximately 8,000, growing to 26,000 by 1882. The Jews were a small minority living among a large Arab majority of about half a million.<sup>20</sup> However, as the population figures indicate, Jews immigrated at an increasing rate during the nineteenth century. Historians classify the immigrants according to their motives.

Most of the arrivals prior to World War I were spurred by religious faith and settled, for the most part, in the four cities that were deemed sacred by the Jews—Jerusalem, Hebron, Tiberias, and Safed. Living in the Holy Land as an act of service to God and largely living off charity in the form of donations sent to them by Jews around the world, they were collectively referred to as the Old Yishuv, or Haredim.<sup>21</sup> It was a patriarchal and very conservative society, in which the task of women was to enable men to fulfill their religious vocation. In their personal behavior, these women were ex-

pected to exemplify the sanctity of the land. The Old Yishuv did all it could to prevent the winds of liberalism from blowing in.<sup>22</sup>

#### THE FIRST IMMIGRATION WAVES

In 1881–82 a series of anti-Jewish pogroms swept Russia, setting off a wave of emigration. Most of these Jews headed for the United States, but some went to Palestine, forming what has come to be called the First Aliyah of 1882–1903. Acting on the deep religious and historical connection that they felt to the Holy Land, they were also influenced by the ideals of modern nationalism. Their mission, as they saw it, was to rebuild the ruins of their forefathers' land by establishing a new Jewish society there.<sup>23</sup> While largely seeking to preserve Jewish tradition, these families mostly avoided the holy cities, and about half of them instead founded twenty-five new agricultural settlements called *moshavot* (*moshavah* in the singular). The rest settled mainly in Jaffa and Haifa and earned their living at urban occupations. All these newcomers created communities that boasted modern schools, which enrolled both boys and girls. Many of them also believed that the spoken language of this new Jewish society should be Hebrew, the ancestral Jewish tongue, and they took it on themselves to revive the language by speaking it in their daily lives. Collectively, they were called the New Yishuv, which by 1900 numbered about 14,000 within a total Jewish population of about 55,000.<sup>24</sup> The women of the New Yishuv for the most part accepted traditional gender roles: they were housewives, and only a few of them engaged in farming, the occupation that was the most visible feature of New Yishuv life.

The First Aliyah had two stories—one of pioneering success and one of suffering and sacrifice. The *moshavot* were an achievement, with their fields of crops and their vineyards, but life was nevertheless risky and hard. Conditions in the country were primitive—premodern farming techniques, bad sanitation, poor housing, and the lack of security all meant that life was risky and hard. Women suffered in particular, from disease and the deaths of children. Nevertheless, some promising changes in gender roles emerged. Girls from First Aliyah families attended the new Hebrew-language schools and preschools, where some of their mothers taught. These schools, where boys and girls learned side by side under teachers of both sexes, operated in accordance with nineteenth-century European liberal principles and the values of the Jewish Enlightenment, the Haskalah. First Aliyah society also took it as a given that its women were responsible for the education of the

new Hebrew generation.<sup>25</sup> The New Yishuv's women and men both sensed that they were living at a critical turning point in history and many fully identified with the ideology of revitalizing the Jewish nation.<sup>26</sup>

The experience of life in the Land of Israel provided the foundation for a new feminine identity. The teacher and author Yehudit Harari expressed this when she portrayed herself as "a girl of liberty, as natural and simple as the wildflowers among which [I] grew."<sup>27</sup> When Jews arrived in other countries, they largely adopted the identity of the absorbing society. In contrast, the First Aliyah immigrants' identities were shaped mostly by their national ideology. However, for all their identification with the enterprise of building the land and the prominent role they played in education, First Aliyah women were not permitted to participate in the governing councils and administrative bodies of the moshavot or in community boards in the cities.

In contrast, the Zionist Organization that Theodor Herzl inaugurated in 1897 with the goal of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine resolved in its second year that all women who joined the movement would have the right to vote, as well as representation in all the movement's institutions.<sup>28</sup> In practice, only a handful of women participated in the early Zionist Congresses, and even those who did seldom spoke out or assumed roles in the bodies established by the Congresses. But Herzl envisioned the Jewish state as a modern society based on progressive principles. Equality for women was, in his mind, the most important way of signaling the Zionist commitment to modernity.<sup>29</sup>

Another wave of immigration arrived in Palestine during the decade preceding World War I, swelling the Yishuv's population to 85,000 by 1914. Notable in this Second Aliyah were Jews committed to socialist principles. While the members of this group constituted only about a tenth of Second Aliyah immigrants, they had a huge influence on the history of the Yishuv and the state of Israel, and also on how Zionist history was written. These young people had absorbed socialist ideas in Russia and believed that their ideology also provided a solution to the question of women's position in society.<sup>30</sup> Only a small minority of this group were women, however. Ada Fishman (later Maimon), who immigrated at this time and who we will meet again below, wrote in her memoirs that the women of the Second Aliyah were the first women in the Yishuv to strive for independence and equality.<sup>31</sup> They intended to be workers in their own right, not farmers' wives, and they harbored a heady desire to shatter conventions and shape a new female



identity. Nearly every one of these women was a special figure in her own right, full of fight and strong of will. Only women like these could blaze a new trail for the Yishuv's women.

But the great majority of the Jews who arrived during this decade, while joining the New Yishuv, were not socialists seeking to do manual labor. They came from the merchant and middle classes and settled in the cities and moshavot.<sup>32</sup> Their crowning achievement was the founding of the first Hebrew city, Tel Aviv, in 1909. The women of this group were first and foremost housewives, but many also broke new ground by working outside the home as school and preschool teachers, seamstresses, nurses, midwives, masseuses, physicians, dentists, and cooks, as well as in other fields.<sup>33</sup>

One of the leading figures in advancing the status of women in the years preceding World War I was Sarah Thon (pronounced "Tone"; 1881–1920),<sup>34</sup> who was born in Poland and came to Palestine from Germany, with her husband and children, at the end of 1907. Thon served in Palestine as the representative of the Women's Organization for Cultural Work, which was established in Germany before her arrival. The first Zionist women's association, it trained young women to pursue arts and crafts in Palestine.<sup>35</sup> Maintaining that women's labor was of "exceptional importance" for the Yishuv,<sup>36</sup> she used funds provided by the German organization to found workshops throughout the Jewish communities in the cities of Palestine, as well as an agricultural training farm for girls.<sup>37</sup> Her message was that the new Yishuv woman should be economically independent and Hebrew in culture.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, women did not, during the decade of the Second Aliyah, gain equality with men or the right to serve on local councils.

A rare expression of these women's awareness of the women's question and of their inferior status can be found in the autobiography of Rachel Yana'it (1886–1979), one of the leaders of the Yishuv's labor Zionist camp and of HaShomer, its first self-defense organization. (In 1918 she married another of the movement's leaders, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, who would later serve as Israel's second president.) She recounts an exchange with David Ben-Gurion in Jerusalem a few years before World War I:

On the women's question, David argued against me, accusing me, and I insisted on responding—why do women lag so far behind, why are their talents not evident, not only not in science, but even in those fields they most love, in music and art. I felt as if the guilt of

generations was being placed on my head. I tried to defend myself by saying that it was men's fault that women had been thrust into the narrow and limited world of housework—it should hardly be surprising that, being cut off from the problems of society and the public for long generations, they remain backward.<sup>39</sup>

Looking back on that time, she acknowledged that “I have, in fact, never stopped feeling the pain of that problem.”<sup>40</sup>

#### WORLD WAR I EMPOWERS THE YISHUV'S WOMEN

World War I has been portrayed by historians both as an event that advanced women and served as a springboard for their campaign to gain the vote, and as a setback, because at the war's end they were directed back into their homes.<sup>41</sup> The Israeli historian Billie Melman estimates that the so-called Great War did not produce any permanent change in the status of women. On the contrary, it reinforced the patriarchy.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, the dramatic changes in women's roles that took place during the war, including the large-scale entry of women into the labor force, certainly did much to recast the consciousness of women throughout the world, the Yishuv included.<sup>43</sup>

The four years of the war (1914–18) were harsh ones in Palestine. The Yishuv suffered extensively. The momentum of Jewish settlement suddenly ceased, to be replaced by hunger, deportations, epidemics, and death. During the war years the population of the Yishuv shrank from 86,000 to 56,000.<sup>44</sup> Jerusalem's Jews, a divided and poverty-stricken community, had the worst of it, their numbers shrinking to half the community's former size.<sup>45</sup>

The war years offered resourceful women a unique opportunity to gain positions of influence and power. One exceptional example of such power is found in the story of Sarah Terese Dreyfuss, who founded three new huge soup kitchens that fed thousands of people, mostly children, the first enterprise of its scope to be founded and managed by a woman. Furthermore, she did so in Jerusalem, the stronghold of the patriarchal Old Yishuv. Dreyfuss, a twenty-four-year-old single and educated Haredi woman from Switzerland, obtained funds for her project by traveling to Europe and North America to raise money. She impressed the us consul in Jerusalem, Otis M. Glazebrook, who lent his hand to this charitable enterprise.<sup>46</sup> Dreyfuss demonstrated that, even in a society dominated by men, women with education,

initiative, and talent could gain positions of influence and make their presence felt in a time of crisis.

The Jewish women of Tel Aviv and Jaffa, led by Sarah Thon, also organized impressive philanthropic projects. They founded a women's organization and offered assistance to the needy, mainly women and especially people who needed food and shelter following the Turkish expulsions of the Jews of Jaffa and Tel Aviv, first in the winter of 1914 and then again in the spring of 1917.<sup>47</sup> Thon, who earned the nickname "the good mother of all the deportees,"<sup>48</sup> became a new sort of public activist, "harmoniously combining the gentleness of a woman with the clear logic of an experienced public official."<sup>49</sup>

In December 1917, after the British army entered Jerusalem, the city's women displayed their ability to suppress a plague of prostitution of a dimension not previously known in the city. Hundreds of Jewish girls and women were impelled by hunger and the loss of their parents into the arms of British soldiers and brothels established in Jewish neighborhoods in accordance with the ordinances established by the British military regime.<sup>50</sup> The Jerusalem Jewish Committee, the community's governing body, proved helpless when faced with the plight of these young victims, so the city's women took action.<sup>51</sup> They founded workshops and a farm to train young women to support themselves in an acceptable way and offered night courses as well. The British authorities attributed the eradication of prostitution in the Jewish community to the work of these women's organizations.<sup>52</sup> For the first time, Jewish women of the Yishuv exerted their influence on legislation and shaped a new concept of citizenship, one based on the principle that every person, man or woman, had a right to a life of honor and freedom.<sup>53</sup>

Another unprecedented step for women during the war years came when young women from the Yishuv volunteered to serve in the British army. While the British turned them down, the very fact that women took such an initiative was revolutionary. Other armies had already accepted women.<sup>54</sup> Led by Rachel Yana'it, the volunteers demanded that women be permitted to participate "in our country's war of liberation."<sup>55</sup> Another woman, Sarah Aaronson, led Nili, a small underground intelligence cell founded during the war by inhabitants of the moshavah Zikhron Ya'akov. The story of her heroic death helped fashion the myth of equality of the sexes in the Yishuv, and she served as an exemplar of female valor.<sup>56</sup> The initiative

displayed by women during the war provided the foundation for women's entry into Yishuv politics in the postwar years.

### The Contending Forces and the Goals of This Study

During the same week that the British defeated the Ottoman army and captured the southern part of Palestine, leaders of the New Yishuv took the first steps toward establishing what eventually would be named the Assembly of Representatives, which would represent the entire Jewish community in Palestine. The question of whether women would be participants was immediately raised, and it ranged two forces against each other—the New Yishuv, which sought to establish an elected assembly that would represent all the country's Jews, and the Haredim of the Old Yishuv, who were called on to join in the initiative but stridently opposed the involvement of women. It quickly became evident that not all the Yishuv's advocates of women's rights were cut from the same cloth. Some advised concessions, at least interim ones, in the name of Jewish unity, while others placed equality above all other values. The leaders of the New Yishuv believed it was essential to include the Old Yishuv, which, after all, accounted at that time for half of Palestine's Jewish population, in the new institution. Otherwise the British administration would not recognize the assembly as the official representative of the entire Jewish community in Palestine.

In the summer of 1919 a small women's party—the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights—entered the fray. These women, wholly committed to the construction of the national assembly, raised the banner of equality and fought with all their might to win for women the rights to vote and to be represented in the new body. They saw no contradiction between their commitment to their nation and their duty as feminists. A new Hebrew society in which women could not vote was inconceivable, in their view. Their eight-year battle to achieve this was a drama that highlighted the tension between the needs of the nation (unity) and the needs of women (the vote).

The Union of Hebrew Women has virtually been absent from Israeli society's collective memory despite the fact that one of its leaders, Sarah Azaryahu, penned a memoir focusing on the Yishuv's women's fight for suffrage.<sup>57</sup> While the contemporary press regularly reported on the women's party, mentions of it were brief. This was not unique to the Yishuv. American newspapers also printed news about the suffragist movement but gave it rel-

atively modest coverage. Apparently the press still adhered to the Victorian view that proper women did not engage in public affairs.<sup>58</sup>

The absence of women in historiography is not unique to the Zionist story. The fact that the women's movement has been disregarded in historical writing in many countries reflects not only the place of women in historiography but also their desire not to be seen as obstacles to the advancement of broader national and social progress. It has also contributed to the myth that Jewish women enjoyed equality in the New Yishuv.<sup>59</sup>

In the 1970s historians began taking a certain amount of interest in the story of the Hebrew feminist movement, with the emergence of second-wave feminism in Israel and the new field of women's and gender history. Yet the movement has not yet been the subject of a comprehensive overall study.<sup>60</sup> To reconstruct the full scope of the struggle to every extent that I can, I delved into more than twenty archives in Israel and elsewhere.

I seek here to present the mutual dependence of Hebrew feminism and the realization of the Zionist vision in the Land of Israel—that is, the creation of a democratic and modern Jewish society. To do so, I will present the stories of the Yishuv's suffragist heroines, with special attention to their female identities. It is my belief that their personal and family lives served as arenas for these women in which to express their feminist ideals. Their personal lives thus help explain their complexities. In feminist historiography, identity is no less important than ideology and social influences.<sup>61</sup> The campaign to get the vote was certainly the most important battle fought by the Yishuv's women prior to 1948. It is my hope that this multifaceted story will find its way into the central stream of political and social history of the Yishuv and the worldwide history of feminism.<sup>62</sup>

## 2



# The Women's Struggle Begins

## *Local Organization*

We can live no longer without fully equal rights.

—Nehamah Puhachevsky, in minutes of the  
General Assembly, Rishon LeTzion, December 2, 1917

As calamitous as the war years were for the Yishuv, hopes ran high when the Turks fled Palestine. The country's Jews enthusiastically welcomed the British military conquest, both because of the British Empire's image as an enlightened power and because the British had committed themselves to the Zionist project. On November 2, 1917, two days after the British army captured Beersheba, the government in London issued the Balfour Declaration, committing itself to the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. The Yishuv was euphoric at the news. Mordechai Ben-Hillel HaCohen, who chronicled the events of World War I in Palestine, recounted the public mood in his diary. He used language reserved in the Jewish tradition for speaking of the end of days: "People were ecstatic . . . we feel the footsteps of the English. It is the beginning of the redemption."<sup>1</sup> Rachel Yana'it, a committed socialist, did the same, describing the surging emotions in Petah Tikvah: "Cheering and rejoicing in the streets—the English are coming, the liberating English! . . . Everyone has gone out, flooding the streets . . . cheering and rejoicing in the moshavah."<sup>2</sup>

The combination of the pain and suffering caused by the war and the fervor brought on by the British victory and Balfour Declaration together impelled the Jewish community to reorganize. It was a crisis, but a constructive one.<sup>3</sup> The Yishuv as a whole lacked a representative body, an obstacle to concerted and unified action.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, local community committees had been paralyzed during the war and had not conducted elections. The members of these bodies were chosen by only part of the public. Among

others, men without property and women (whose property, if they had any, was registered in the name of their husband or some other man) were excluded from political participation. The feeling that a new era was dawning awakened a profound yearning for change throughout the Yishuv. It was time for the democratic election, by both men and women, of a new leadership.

This yearning was put into words by a woman from Haifa who viewed the rebirth of the Jewish nation and its women as one and the same: "We see our national revival as a very real 'raising of the dead,' and among the dead the Hebrew woman is also revived: she stands before us like her nation . . . proud, brave, and spirited; she too is the wonder of the world."<sup>5</sup> The British conquest injected new blood into some of the Yishuv's women. Women's charitable and cultural associations founded during the war entered the political fray. Throughout the world, women's struggles generally began on the local level and only thereafter appeared on the more significant national stage.<sup>6</sup> In Palestine, however, the potent desire of Jewish women to take part in the renewed effort to build the land led to simultaneous action on both levels, as the Yishuv prepared for local elections and for the establishment of a nationwide Assembly of Representatives.

I will first examine the local struggles for women's right to vote. This will serve as a prologue to my presentation of the national struggle and will offer an opportunity to take a close look at the population that constituted the New Yishuv. These Jews lived under difficult, even primitive, conditions, but most of them were educated and aware of events in the rest of the world. Following the suffragist campaigns in these individual communities can show how the discourse of international feminism penetrated different subpopulations in the Yishuv. Such examples of struggles on local levels will also cast light on the dawn of Hebrew feminism.

#### Rishon LeTzion: Women First Speak Up

The first place women demanded the right to participate in their community's leadership was Rishon LeTzion. In the twenty-first century, Rishon—as it is called for short—is Israel's fourth-largest city, but in 1917 it was a moshavah with about 1,300 inhabitants. It had been founded in 1882 by seventeen families, and its name, which means "the first in Zion," was literally true—it was the first settlement founded by the wave of settlers that

came to constitute the New Yishuv. As the first such settlement, it was home to several other firsts—the first Hebrew-language school in Palestine was established there, in 1885, as was the first Hebrew orchestra, in 1895, and the first Hebrew kindergarten, in 1898; and now its women’s organization was the first in Palestine to demand equal political rights for women.<sup>7</sup> What prompted the moshavah’s women to fight for the vote? It seems that the impressive civic-mindedness of the village’s founders was shared by its women. In addition, Rishon LeTzion was home to the foremost Hebrew woman writer of the First Aliyah, Nehamah Puhachevsky, whose political consciousness and leadership abilities played a decisive role.<sup>8</sup>

Born Nehamah Feinstein in 1869 in Lithuania (she died in Rishon LeTzion in 1934),<sup>9</sup> Puhachevsky had been a star student. She made a name for herself in her girlhood in Brisk (Brest), both in the Russian Gymnasium she attended and in her Hebrew studies at home. Prior to her move to Palestine she corresponded in Hebrew with the famous Hebrew poet Judah Leib Gordon,<sup>10</sup> some of whose works protested the low status of Jewish women. She also published, in the Hebrew newspaper *Hamelitz*, a bold article stating that the progress of the Jewish nation depended in part on education for women.<sup>11</sup> In his memoirs, her husband Yehiel Mikhal Puhachevsky told the amazing story of how they conducted their courtship by means of letters in Hebrew he sent from Rishon LeTzion to the city where she lived, Tsaritsyn. The young woman happily accepted his marriage proposal: “And I am grateful with all my heart and soul for the opportunity that I have had in such a wonderful way to be one of the builders [of Zion] in tears and sweat.”<sup>12</sup> It was a historic wedding.<sup>13</sup>

Nehamah arrived in Rishon LeTzion at the end of the summer of 1889 as a twenty-year-old newlywed.<sup>14</sup> Her stories, which she began to publish during the years of the Second Aliyah, portray the hardships that the New Yishuv’s first women faced.<sup>15</sup> Scholars have read her melancholy voice as a plaint against the harsh life Palestine then offered, a life that was especially difficult for women.<sup>16</sup> Her disillusionment with the fate of the Yishuv’s women propelled her into public activity. She founded a volunteer legal clinic in the moshavah that provided assistance to women in need, especially Yemenite women.<sup>17</sup> Puhachevsky’s feminist stance was especially forceful in her fight to win women the vote on both the local and national level. The rise of a national liberation movement aroused among the moshavah’s women,



as it did among women of other nations, a desire for personal liberation as well. These women claimed throughout their campaign that the Jewish people's right to national self-determination was inextricably wound up with women's right to full citizenship.

The debate over the women's question in Rishon LeTzion began at a general assembly of the village's inhabitants, held on November 24, 1917, just nine days after the British took control of the moshavah.<sup>18</sup> Democratization was on the agenda—specifically, the issue of whether the community's charter could be revised to grant the vote to residents who were not landowners.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the moshavah's women petitioned for the vote. It is worth noting that the two groups did not submit a joint demand but instead preferred to conduct their campaigns independently.

The women reiterated their demand at a second assembly held a week later, on December 2. Puhachevsky gave an impassioned speech: "We can live no longer without fully equal rights. We, who built the settlement together with the men, deserve the right to vote for the [local] Committee, although during the first year we do not want to be elected as members. Give us what is ours—as in England and Germany, we demand full rights."<sup>20</sup> Puhachevsky took a classically feminist position—without full civil rights, a woman's life was worthless. She explained that women should be given the vote not only as a natural human right, but also by virtue of their labors to build the Yishuv. She also stressed that in the rest of the world, such as England and Germany, women had already been considered worthy of the vote.<sup>21</sup> Her liberal feminist stance was evident when she declared: "Let us be like you [men]."<sup>22</sup> Puhachevsky was sharp-witted enough to recognize that the men would have difficulty acceding to her demands. Therefore, in face of opposition, she softened her position by promising that if women were given the right to vote, implementation of the change could be delayed for a full year.

The decision was to grant all males the right to vote, even if they did not own property. Regarding women, a note was made in the record: "The question of the right of women in our moshavah has been postponed until a general nationwide resolution is reached."<sup>23</sup> In other words, the men preferred that the decision be made outside the community. And in fact the question had already been taken up by the preparatory committee that had convened in Jaffa to plan for elections to an Assembly of Representatives for

the entire Yishuv. At this point, the moshavah that took pride in its innovations declined to be the first in Zion to grant women the vote and left the matter to a higher authority.

Although the decision had been made, the assembly continued to debate the issue. Hannah Drubin, a long-time resident, asked that the men explain their opposition to women's suffrage, but no one was willing to reply. The men's silence seems to indicate that they had no serious arguments to make and that their opposition derived from traditional patriarchal views and a fear of the unfamiliar and unknown. In the end, the chairman of the local committee endorsed Puhachevsky's cleverly low-key proposal that the right be recognized but take effect only in the following year's elections. The proposal was brought up for a vote once again, and to the surprise of everyone present, it passed.<sup>24</sup> Despite the doubts of its men, Rishon LeTzion once again showed itself to be a pioneer, becoming the first local council to grant—formally, at least—women the right to vote.<sup>25</sup>

The same pattern emerged in other communities. Clearly, at this juncture, the end of 1917, reactions to the demand for women's suffrage were mixed. Many members of the New Yishuv supported equal rights in principle, while preferring to put off implementation until general agreement could be reached. Emotions were high on both sides. Clearly, partisans on both sides were very conscious of the larger implications on the local and national level.

#### The Women of Rishon LeTzion Organize: The First Road to Victory

It was at Puhachevsky's home that a group of women gathered to found "the moshavah's first women's association with the sole purpose of attaining equal rights for women in this place."<sup>26</sup> Puhachevsky went from house to house to urge her neighbors to join and take part in the struggle.<sup>27</sup> This was, as far as is known, the first time that Yishuv women organized for a political rather than a benevolent purpose. Furthermore, the women of Rishon LeTzion were determined to expand their campaign to include the rest of the Yishuv's women.<sup>28</sup>

With discussions in progress about whether women should be allowed to vote for the Assembly of Representatives, sixty-seven women from Rishon LeTzion, constituting about 15 percent of the moshavah's adult women, sent a petition to the Preparatory Committee of the forthcoming elections

to the Assembly of Representatives. They protested the fact that the question was even under discussion. As citizens whose equality had just been recognized by their local community, they objected to any attempt to restrict the right of the Yishuv's women to take part in the new Yishuvwide organizational effort. Their petition stressed that the Zionist movement had allowed women to vote for members of its institutions from the start and asked: "Why should our rights be constrained here in our own land?"<sup>29</sup>

A petition was a democratic tool amenable to the nature of the suffragist campaign. It proved itself popular worldwide and was the most important instrument for spreading the feminist gospel.<sup>30</sup> The same tactic was used in Norway to great effect, when in 1905 an especially popular suffragist petition was signed by 200,000 women.<sup>31</sup>

Since the next election was rescheduled for a year later, women actually voted for the first time in Rishon LeTzion two years after the decision to give them the vote had been made in principle.<sup>32</sup> The agenda of a general assembly of the moshavah's inhabitants held on December 6, 1919, included a single item—electing the local committee. According to the minutes of the meeting, 228 men and women were in attendance. To everyone's surprise, the women won an exceptional victory. It turned out that all previous hesitations and objections had dissolved. Puhachevsky and her colleague Adina Kahansky won an absolute majority of the votes.<sup>33</sup> The surviving documentation does not indicate whether she turned down the chairmanship out of modesty or because she feared it the duties were too heavy, or whether it was even offered to her.<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that it was not just the case that men refrained from putting women in key positions. In general, in Palestine and elsewhere, women, too, were reluctant to take on too much responsibility. A woman would serve as mayor of a city only after the establishment of the Israeli state, when Hannah Levin was elected mayor of Rishon LeTzion. The moshavah then achieved another first.

The complicated events in Rishon LeTzion offer a number of insights. The groundbreaking culture of the moshavah from its inception made it possible for women to take part in a public debate. This provided a foundation for instilling in women the belief that they had a right to take part in local elections. Notably, Rishon LeTzion's women were accustomed to speak in public, so entering the political arena seemed to them to be the obvious next step. For the same reason, men found it easier to accept the women's demands.

The campaign in Rishon LeTzion blazed the trail for women elsewhere in the Yishuv. It inspired similar battles in other moshavot, each case reflecting the unique nature of the community and the capacities of the women who lived there. It is instructive to compare the energy and alacrity so evident in the women of Rishon LeTzion with the women of, for example, the neighboring moshavah of Rehovot. Though Rehovot had a similar liberal character, its Women's Association was less effective. As a result, women there received the vote only in the spring of 1921. Such a comparison indicates that the personality and presence of a female leader in Rishon LeTzion seems to have been a key factor.

#### Theory and Practice: The Women's Struggle in Jaffa and Tel Aviv

In 1909 a modern garden city, Tel Aviv, was founded on the northern outskirts of Palestine's premier port city, Jaffa. The first sixty Jews to build houses there, mostly Zionists who had just immigrated, hoped that their initiative was the first step toward the building of "the first Hebrew city, a city inhabited 100 percent by Hebrews, in which they would speak Hebrew . . . and it would eventually become the Land of Israel's New York."<sup>35</sup> The dream began to take on flesh and blood, and by 1914 Tel Aviv had 2,000 inhabitants.<sup>36</sup> Jaffa also grew impressively in these years. On the eve of World War I it had 45,000 inhabitants, most of them Arab and about a third (10,000–15,000) traditional Jews. Toward the end of the war, in the spring of 1917, the Turks expelled all the Jews of Jaffa and Tel Aviv from their homes, which were left abandoned.<sup>37</sup>

The Jews began to return to Tel Aviv as soon as the Turks retreated from the city, on November 15, 1917. The homecoming was an emotional one: "It is so amazing: our days are being restored as of old, once again we are in Tel Aviv, and again the public work of the Palestine Office [of the World Zionist Organization]<sup>38</sup> has returned to work . . . and schools have reopened . . . and our Hebrew rings through the streets of Jaffa again! Hooray!"<sup>39</sup> When its members returned, the Tel Aviv community council met frequently, almost every day, to see that the roads and parks were cleaned, to reinstall Hebrew signs, to help the needy, and to put neighborhood institutions and returning residents back on track.<sup>40</sup> The Tel Aviv public was filled with the spirit of action, and the city's women voiced their desire "to appear on the platform of public life."<sup>41</sup>

The bylaws of Tel Aviv excluded from the neighborhood council those who did not own property, both men and women.<sup>42</sup> These bylaws instituted before the war, allowed women to vote and to be elected to the neighborhood council. However, most property was registered in the name of the men in each family. As a result, the bylaws discriminated against women in practice, and until 1919 no women had held public office. In Jaffa's Jewish community, in contrast, only men had the right to vote for the community board. As soon as the war ended, the members of both communities called for new elections to their governing councils.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, some Tel Aviv residents called for an end to discrimination and the institution of fully democratic elections.<sup>44</sup> This set off a raging controversy in the city.

The force behind the women's campaign in Tel Aviv was Ada Fishman, born in 1893 in Bessarabia. After immigrating at the beginning of 1913 with her brother, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Fishman (both sister and brother later Hebraized their name to Maimon), a very prominent leader of the Mizrahi religious Zionist movement,<sup>45</sup> she became a leading figure in the Yishuv's labor movement.<sup>46</sup> Fishman belonged to HaPo'el HaTza'ir, a moderate socialist party, but unlike most other members of this group, she remained an observant Jew. She never married. A committed feminist, she frequently came to the aid of women, workers and others as well, who suffered from discrimination. She fought her first battle in the spring of 1914, on Lag B'Omer, a holiday marked by a pilgrimage and festival to the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yohai on Mt. Meron in the Galilee. Despite a rabbinic ban against women taking part in the celebration, Fishman and a friend insisted on attending.<sup>47</sup> Looking back on the incident years later, Fishman maintained that it had been the first step taken by the women of the Yishuv in their effort to gain the vote.<sup>48</sup> Thanks to her proficiency in the halakhic literature, she was able to mount an argument against the rabbis based on their own tradition. "Who knows better than you do," she said to them, "that our Torah is a Torah of life, a Torah of human and social freedom, that places no boundaries or differences between one person and another."<sup>49</sup>

By her own account, she took up the equality of women as her personal cause while still a girl: "I vowed in my heart, I really vowed, that when the time came I would know to fight forcefully against this injustice to women no matter what."<sup>50</sup> She continued to fight for women's rights as a member of the Israeli Knesset and afterward, until her death in 1973. She was critical of the way women were treated both in Jewish religious tradition and in the

labor movement. From 1921 onward she headed the Council of Women Workers of the Histadrut labor union and fought boldly to ensure the rights of its members. “I want a revolution,” she told her friends in the summer of 1918.<sup>51</sup>

The first step Fishman took to win Tel Aviv’s women the right to vote is documented in a pamphlet she authored, titled “To the Hebrew Woman!,” published by the Women’s Association of Tel Aviv and Jaffa in December 1918. It seems to have been the first Hebrew publication by a woman about women’s right to vote issued in the Yishuv, and it was praised by the daily newspaper *Ha’arets*.<sup>52</sup> Fishman’s pamphlet was not the only one to appear on the subject. Others, both for and against giving women the vote, were published at that time. Fishman promoted political organization by women<sup>53</sup> and censured feminine passivity: “For once [woman] needs to be an actor and not acted upon.”<sup>54</sup>

Tel Aviv’s women quickly organized. On March 13, 1918, 125 of them signed a petition<sup>55</sup> protesting the city committee’s intention not to amend the bylaws that excluded most of the garden suburb’s inhabitants—both women and men who did not own property—from voting.<sup>56</sup> The petition was notable not only for the long list of signatories, headed by Fishman, but also because it was a joint initiative by working-class and middle-class women.<sup>57</sup>

The petitioners first stressed that the Yishuv, at this important juncture, was a society in which men and women participated jointly in building the country.<sup>58</sup> They noted that women had been given the right to vote in the Zionist movement, beginning with the Second Zionist Congress of 1898, and stressed that women’s equality was an integral part of the Zionist vision. Some two weeks after the petition was sent to the local committee, the residents of Tel Aviv were summoned to a public assembly that would decide the matter.<sup>59</sup> The women won, and every adult man and woman was given the right to vote and to be elected to office.<sup>60</sup> The Zionist public of Tel Aviv, like that of Rishon LeTzion, was open to progress.

At this point there was not yet a national umbrella organization of women’s associations. The Women’s Association of Tel Aviv and Jaffa disseminated its political positions, organized public meetings, and helped women in Rehovot, Petah Tikvah, and Jerusalem found associations of their own. A correspondent for *Do’ar Hayom* wrote that “the mania for equal rights is attacking

all the moshavot. The ladies are envious of their friends and demand [to be elected] . . . and their demands are coming to be accepted."<sup>61</sup>

The women of Tel Aviv were granted the vote, but the debate continued and even intensified in Jaffa, where the Jewish population included Haredim, Sephardim, and Mizrahim (Jews with roots in the Islamic world), all of whom had trouble accepting nationalism and universalism. They categorically and openly opposed allowing women to play a role in running the community on the ground that investing a woman with power in the community was opposed to Jewish religious law, the halakhah, as they interpreted it.<sup>62</sup> Disappointingly for the advocates of women's rights, some Zionist men preferred "to set aside the demand and to give women their right to vote at some quieter and more placid time."<sup>63</sup> In fact, many of the founders of the Assembly of Representatives capitulated to the Haredim, justifying that action on the ground that unifying all members under a single political framework was their top priority. Conflicts between what was good for the nation and what was good for women were generally decided in favor of the former.

The women's campaign in Tel Aviv offers fascinating insights into the Hebrew suffragist crusade. Here, as in Rishon LeTzion and other moshavot, the debate over whether to grant women the vote was part of a larger process of democratization of the elections to local governing councils. Yet the expansion of the franchise to all males regardless of their ownership of property aroused little controversy, whereas granting the vote to women—many of whom belonged to propertied families, even if the property was not registered in their names—raised a storm. The controversy resurfaced in 1926, when the British Mandate authorities, who had opposed granting the vote to women as part of the pro-Islam tilt in their policy,<sup>64</sup> issued a law to govern elections for city councils in cities with mixed Jewish-Arab populations. It granted the vote only to men on the grounds that only men were registered as property owners and taxpayers. Members of the Tel Aviv Women's Association thus launched a new campaign for their right to vote.<sup>65</sup> The wrinkles were soon ironed out—the chief secretary of the Mandate administration announced that tax-paying women would also be able to vote.<sup>66</sup> The Women's Association had once again demonstrated its power.

## Haifa: The Municipal Battle as an Ethnic Battle

Haifa had been viewed, since the end of the Ottoman era, as Palestine's city of the future. The Technion, the country's first institution of higher education, opened its doors there in 1925, and in 1933 a new and modern port facility went into operation. However, the British took control of the city only in the autumn of 1918, when their forces moved into northern Palestine.<sup>67</sup> In 1914 the city's population had been 22,000; the great majority were Arabs, and only 3,000 were Jews.<sup>68</sup> A large portion of these Jews were of Sephardi and North African origin, members of communities with strong patriarchal traditions, while others were Ashkenazim. When the city's Jewish community reorganized after the British conquest, its members debated the extension of the franchise. The controversy brought to the fore another female leader, a teacher named Sarah Azaryahu, who had immigrated to Palestine with her family in 1906. She organized a small group of courageous women into a women's association that led the local suffragist campaign. In her memoirs, Azaryahu relates that Ashkenazi Zionists supported giving women the vote, while the traditional Eastern communities, which had absorbed Muslim culture, opposed it.<sup>69</sup>

A public assembly of the Jewish community held early in 1919 took up the question of elections for the community leadership. Eighty women were present. Azaryahu made an impressive speech at the gathering, laying out her credo. Like Puhachevsky and Fishman, Azaryahu argued that feminism was an inseparable part of the Jewish national movement, and that the national project could not succeed if women were not granted equal rights. She explained that Hebrew suffragists had adopted the idea of women's liberation from their gentile peers prior to their arrival in Palestine: "We absorbed it into our blood. [Progressive ideas] became an inseparable part of our spiritual and moral lives; we cannot and *will not* give them up."<sup>70</sup> Suffragism was as integral to the characters of the leaders of the women's associations as their commitment to Hebrew education and their professional training. A few weeks later, on March 11, another assembly granted Haifa's women the vote.

The Sephardim who opposed equality for women assumed that they commanded a majority and that the women would fail in the forthcoming elections. But they were proved wrong. On the polling days, March 19–20, a woman was elected to the community council.<sup>71</sup> That was not the end of



the matter, however—the opponents of granting the vote to women did not give up and kept on fighting. Yet in the next elections, in the fall of 1920, two women, both from the Women's Association slate, won seats.<sup>72</sup> The campaign for women's suffrage in Haifa suggests that opposition among the traditional Sephardi population was not as intense as that among the traditional Ashkenazi population.

In a rare emotional passage in her autobiography, Azaryahu acknowledged that her suffragist campaign in Haifa “opened a new, full, and profoundly interesting chapter in my life. This chapter enriched the second half of my life . . . with experiences that remain in a person's soul until the last day of his life and as a precious gift of fate.”<sup>73</sup> But Azaryahu remained active in Haifa for only a short time. At the end of the summer of 1919 she moved to Jerusalem, where she carried on her campaign with redoubled intensity.<sup>74</sup>

#### Orthodoxy Elicits Female Resolve: Petah Tikvah

The local struggles chronicled thus far show that the success of suffragist campaigns depended on the nature of the community in which they were waged. It was this that determined the vigor of the campaign and its duration. Petah Tikvah, a moshavah founded in 1878 by families from Jerusalem's Old Yishuv, was abandoned by its original settlers two years later. With European immigrants belonging to the proto-Zionist Hovevei Zion movement, its founders reestablished it at the end of 1882; together, the two groups constituted a very conservative community. During World War I Petah Tikvah had a population of about 3,000.

Here, too, the changes brought about by the British conquest prompted the moshavah's women to seek to participate in public life. Hannah Zlatopovskiy (later Hebraized to Zahavi), who emerged as a moshavah activist, explained, “Now that we are about to receive self-government . . . we also demand the right to speak our minds.”<sup>75</sup> The Hebrew suffragists of Petah Tikvah, like their colleagues in other settlements, directly linked the right to vote to the Jewish national enterprise.

The moshavah assembly was held just two days after the last of the exiles returned from the north of the country, on October 13, 1918.<sup>76</sup> It was an especially tempestuous meeting.<sup>77</sup> Petah Tikvah's workers, who owned no property and had thus been excluded from the political arena, now spoke up and demanded to be allowed to vote and be elected to the local govern-

ing committee. At the same time, a group of women living in the village demanded their rights. As far as is known, however, the two disenfranchised groups made no attempt to cooperate. Did the workers of Petah Tikvah, as elsewhere, fear that a joint campaign would ruin their chances to get the vote? Whatever the case, their demand was quickly met, but the women's demand was rejected.

That was not the end of it. The moshavah's women continued to push for the vote, stressing not only their contribution to the settlement's establishment and success but also, in particular, the anguish that they had endured: "Did we not suffer as much as you from every affliction?" they asked.<sup>78</sup> They were also aware that their campaign was part of a larger international effort, because it was "an issue all over the world."<sup>79</sup> Voting was a fundamental human right, they claimed.<sup>80</sup> Baruch Raab, a founder of the moshavah who backed the women, declared: "We need to move forward, not backward."<sup>81</sup> Advancing the status of women was perceived as a way to improve society as a whole.

The suffragists in Petah Tikvah did not despair. Although elections were held without their participation, they carried on their campaign. In the midst of the election (December 24–26, 1918), seven of them appeared in the auditorium where voting took place and took the ballot box hostage. They announced that if they were not given the right to vote they would not allow the poll to proceed. In Petah Tikvah, as elsewhere in the world, when men took a determined stand against them, women were radicalized to the point of taking the law into their own hands.<sup>82</sup> The women of Petah Tikvah presented a petition to the local council bearing the signatures of a large number of the village's women.<sup>83</sup> But none of these actions led to the desired result. They did, however, lead to the establishment of the first local women's association with a political agenda.<sup>84</sup>

The opposition to women's suffrage of most of Petah Tikvah's inhabitants, men and women alike, was especially intractable. The controversy continued for another two decades. During this period the Yishuvwide Assembly of Representatives and most local councils allowed women to participate. In Petah Tikvah women were not given the vote until 1940, more than sixty years after the moshavah was founded. By that time the founding Haredi generation had passed on and new inhabitants had arrived, changing the character of the moshavah to a certain extent.

The Jerusalem Women's Association:  
From Local Struggle to National Organization

Jerusalem, the largest city in Palestine and home to the country's largest Jewish community, suffered even worse during the war than did other places. When the British entered the city in December 1917 it was, as one writer has put it, like "a sick person who has begun to recover from a lengthy and fatal disease."<sup>85</sup> Some 46,000 Jews lived in the city in 1914 and constituted the majority of its total population of 70,000. By the time the war ended, the Jewish community had shrunk to only 26,000. That included a large Haredi Ashkenazi population of Torah scholars who did not sympathize with Zionism and its goals. The Sephardi community was more diverse, consisting of Ottoman subjects, North Africans, Persians, and others. Many of the Sephardim worked for their living, but many others depended on charity. There was also a third group: *maskilim*—Jews with secular educations and progressive ideas—of different levels of religious observance and commitment to Zionism. The size of this third group is difficult to estimate. With the arrival of the new regime, the members of the Holy City's Jews sought to rehabilitate their communities and remedy the damage the war had wrought.

The mania for organization that overcame the Yishuv as a whole did not pass over Jerusalem's women. One of the city's leading suffragists, a preschool teacher named Hasyah Feinsud-Sukenik, later remembered: "I recall how the late Sarah Thon came to us, a group of women in Jerusalem, with the appeal: 'Will we Hebrew women sit with our hands in our pockets at a time when our forces are weak and small, will we sit idly?'"<sup>86</sup> Thon, who moved with her family to Jerusalem in the spring of 1917 after their expulsion from Tel Aviv, worked on charitable projects.<sup>87</sup> Simultaneously, some Jerusalem women formed an association that restricted itself to charitable activities. Efforts had to be focused on easing the hardships of the war. But the Jerusalem Women's Association's avoidance of politics also derived from the Haredi nature of the city. As Ada Fishman wrote, "each city and its own war, each moshavah and its discontents. The women of Jerusalem have not to this day *dared bring up this issue* about the participation of women in the Jerusalem City Committee."<sup>88</sup>

At this time the city's men began to reorganize Jerusalem's Jewish community. In 1918, two governing committees were established—the Jeru-

saalem Jewish Committee (*Va'ad HaKehilah*) and the Ashkenazi City Committee (*HaVa'ad HaAshkenazi*). The latter did not accept the authority of the former and was led by extreme Haredim.<sup>89</sup> The Zionist leaders who lived in the city sought to unify the two committees and, by democratizing and unifying community institutions, to buttress the standing of Jerusalem's Jewish community. To do so, it was necessary to hold elections, and this raised the question of whether women could participate. In May 1918 representatives of the two committees decided that only men would be permitted to vote. Furthermore, the elections would be "free, secret, direct, general, and equal for all Jerusalem's *male* Jews."<sup>90</sup> The decree angered many Jews, especially those from the labor movement, and led to an evasive action—a postponement of the elections.<sup>91</sup>

Even women who opposed women's suffrage in principle took part in the debate, as recounted by a reporter for *Ha'aretz*: "Many of the educated women also say that in their opinion women have a more important role in life than to attend to the political intrigues and crafty alliances that are part of political life. The usefulness of women to society is greater than entry into the parliamentary game."<sup>92</sup> The question of what women's roles were and whether women could take part in both home life and politics greatly troubled Western society during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Both men and women feared that, if women crossed the boundary from the private to the public realm, the home and family would suffer. Moreover, some believed that the very nature of political activity, with its deceptions and machinations, was contrary and even injurious to feminine nature.

The reluctance of the Jerusalem Women's Association's members to engage in political activity apparently irked the suffragists of Tel Aviv. On January 30, 1919, three delegates came to Jerusalem and held a public meeting.<sup>93</sup> These three—Sarah Thon (who had temporarily moved back to Tel Aviv), Esther Yeivin, and Ada Fishman convened about fifty of Jerusalem's women in the local assembly hall and called on Jerusalem's women to take part in political activity.

The Tel Aviv initiative brought results only a short time later. A group of Jerusalem women founded a local political women's association. On February 1, 1919, they reported that they had begun preparations for the next elections and that they had elected a steering committee for their new association.<sup>94</sup> Jerusalem's women seem to have entered the political fray at a relatively late date in part because they lacked a charismatic and determined

leader. Although Sarah Thon had moved to the city and lent her hand to charitable projects, she was ambivalent when it came to political aspirations. Her husband, Ya'akov Thon, was deeply involved at the time in the effort to found a unified committee representing Jerusalem's Jews, and he maintained that this goal required the postponement, for a time, of the grant of suffrage to women.<sup>95</sup> This stratagem of postponement enabled him and others like him to declare their commitment in principle to the idea of equality while at the same time refraining from taking any action to promote it.

Did Ya'akov Thon's position influence his wife? Sarah Thon found herself torn between conflicting duties—between motherhood and public affairs, between suffragism and family loyalty, between the interests of women and the interests of the public as a whole. Her letters clearly show that she supported women's right to vote without reservation. But, like Nehamah Puhachevsky, she thought patience preferable to passion. Thon's life story—which Rafi Thon, her son, wrote (and whose title can be translated into English as "A Struggle for Equal Rights for Women")<sup>96</sup>—is an example of the way many supporters of equal rights for women found themselves torn between what they saw at that moment as the good of the Jewish nation and their feminist principles.

The right of Jerusalem's Jewish women to vote for the Jerusalem Jewish Committee was postponed again and again. But their spirits remained high, and they continued to promote their ideas and to volunteer to provide women in need with legal services.<sup>97</sup> The women's campaign for the vote continued in full force until 1932.<sup>98</sup> By that time, in Jerusalem, as elsewhere, the demographic growth of the New Yishuv population had made an impact. Women finally won the right to vote in local elections, and two were elected to seats on the Jerusalem Jewish Committee.<sup>99</sup> However, the separate Ashkenazi City Committee, which represented only the city's extreme Haredim, refused to give rights to women and remained an independent and separate body.

Presumably it was this ongoing deep struggle that impelled Jerusalem's suffragists to found, in the summer of 1919, an umbrella organization that united all the Yishuv's local women's associations—the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights. Its founders stated explicitly that it was the opposition of the Haredim and their supporters that convinced them that this national body was necessary. Feinsud-Sukenik, who headed the Jerusalem organization (in addition to being chairwoman of the Council of Preschool

Teachers),<sup>100</sup> wrote in her autobiography that it was one of the most challenging jobs she had ever undertaken. The slogan that she and her associates kept in mind, she said, was the saying attributed to Hillel the Elder: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?"<sup>101</sup>

#### Between Principle and Implementation

The local struggles recounted here clearly show that when women battled for their rights in communities belonging to the New Yishuv, the battle was generally a brief one, even in comparison to those that took place in other Western countries. In Zionist circles it was generally accepted that the national enterprise required equality for women. The innovative atmosphere and character of the New Yishuv was evident in many other areas as well, such as the adoption of modern styles in architecture, painting, and sculpture and the assimilation of current medical and psychological practices. The New Yishuv was quick to internalize not only the national idea but also an entire range of other modern universal concepts that prevailed in the West at the beginning of the twentieth century, among them the need to improve the status of women. Yet at the same time, the extreme part of the Old Ashkenazi Yishuv remained obdurate, rejecting new ideas. It organized itself separately so as to have no part in the program of equality.

These local struggles also show that the nature and character of a given society are the most fundamental factors in whether the society granted or denied women the vote. Furthermore, they demonstrate categorically that women gained rights only where they spearheaded the campaign. In fact, it is much easier for women to make their way into local politics than onto the national stage. Local politics is, after all, an arena of community action, and it is thus seen as appropriate for women.<sup>102</sup> As the battle intensified, the determination and power of Hebrew suffragists grew. In a pamphlet published on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights, one member wrote that when the men asked the women to set aside their goals, "they achieved the opposite. It provided ammunition for our crusade. Women who had hitherto hesitated about whether to lend a hand to the fight for equal rights now saw that the battle was their battle."<sup>103</sup>

### 3



## The National Campaign Commences

There is no unity in among the Jewish people. The same accusing Satan . . . has suddenly appeared and begun to do his work openly. This time he has the “women’s question” in hand.

—Parnas-Hodesh [pseud.], “Ma meHodesh”

The way in which the debate began over women’s right to vote and be elected to the Assembly of Representatives was exceptional by any standard. The committee that first discussed the issue and all the committees that followed it had as their primary mission the establishment of an all-Yishuv representative body.

Furthermore, they all included at least one woman among their members, a fact that was accepted without preliminary discussion or objection. While the inclusion of women in local councils was initiated by women themselves, on the national level, men invited women to participate in the preparations for the forthcoming elections.

#### Act I: Full Rights, Partial Rights—The Three Constituent Assemblies

The first meeting in this process took place in Petah Tikvah on a wintry Saturday night, November 17, 1917, while World War I was still raging and northern Palestine remained under Turkish rule. Notably, this preceded by a week the initial postwar assembly in Rishon LeTzion where, as related in the previous chapter, women for the first time demanded the right to vote and be elected to a local governing body.<sup>1</sup> Even at this distance of time, the alacrity with which the Yishuv acted is astounding. At the time, some asked: “Are we not being too hasty?”<sup>2</sup>

One of the people attending the Petah Tikvah meeting was Rachel Yana’it, who was about thirty years old at the time. A leading figure in the socialist HaShomer self-defense organization, she had taught at Jerusalem’s

Hebrew Gymnasium and studied agricultural engineering in Nancy, France. The Yishuv leaders hardly saw her presence as exceptional, and her inclusion sent a clear message that the leadership was committed to the principle of gender equality. But not everyone in the Yishuv thought this way.

As the account of the suffragist campaign in local councils showed, the Yishuv as a whole was at this time in the throes of democratization. Elections to the Assembly of Representatives were meant to establish an autonomous self-governing community administration for the Yishuv, one that could represent all the country's Jews to the new regime.<sup>3</sup> The Assembly of Representatives would address only internal Yishuv issues; political issues with international implications would remain the province of the Zionist Organization.<sup>4</sup>

The participants in the first meeting in Petah Tikvah resolved to establish a Preparatory Committee that would in turn convene a Constituent Assembly, which would make the arrangements for elections to the Assembly of Representatives. The Preparatory Committee had ten members, including one woman—Yana'it. It looked as if there would be no need to fight about the inclusion of women in the political system. But that turned out to be mistaken.

#### THE FIRST CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY: THE BEGINNING OF THE BACKWARD STRUGGLE

The Constituent Assembly, consisting of forty-two respected delegates from among the leadership of the New Yishuv, convened on January 2–3, 1918. The members included Yana'it, and the chairman was Ya'akov Thon,<sup>5</sup> Sarah Thon's husband, who served as the Zionist movement's official representative in Palestine. Conspicuously absent were people from the north of Palestine, who were still under Turkish rule, and representatives of the Jewish community of Jerusalem. The latter apparently were unable to get to Tel Aviv because of travel restrictions imposed by the British army and their community's preoccupation with repairing the damage incurred during the war.<sup>6</sup>

Emotions ran high at the meeting, as a contemporary reported: "All those gathered sensed the greatness and importance of this historical moment."<sup>7</sup> The Constituent Assembly was charged with determining election procedures for the Assembly of Representatives. It proposed that "the elections . . . should be direct, equal, secret, and general, without regard for sex and class [meaning property]."<sup>8</sup> The proposal granting the vote to



men who did not own property was approved, but another proposal to conduct egalitarian elections “without regard to sex” did not achieve the required two-thirds majority.

As I have noted above, the Yishuv was unlike any other community in the world in this regard. The debate over whether women could vote in elections took place despite the fact that a woman was already serving as a member of the body charged with organizing those very elections and, later, despite the fact that women had already voted for and participated in the Assembly of Representatives. I have not located any report of how Yana’it reacted to this decision and to the position of those who opposed granting the vote to women. While the minutes of the meeting survive, no mention of her speaking appears there. She addressed her reluctance to speak in public in her autobiography. Despite her talent as a speaker, she said, among men she fell mute.<sup>9</sup> But, she insisted, her participation in the Constituent Assembly was more important than whatever she might have said there.<sup>10</sup> It should be kept in mind that, at this time, Yishuv women were not represented on any local committees, either in the moshavot or in urban Jewish communities. Women also lacked voting rights in most of Europe and the United States. In the end, the Constituent Assembly made an ambiguous decision: it recognized women’s right to vote in principle but rejected the implementation of that right.

Since no resolution was reached, the members of the Constituent Assembly referred the issue to the Provisional Committee of the Jewish Community in Palestine, which they had just established. This was an executive body charged with implementing the Constituent Assembly’s decisions.<sup>11</sup> Ya’akov Thon was appointed to head this body as well, and Rachel Yana’it was one of its seven members.<sup>12</sup> The Provisional Committee met on a weekly basis.<sup>13</sup> Thon, who was working tirelessly to unite the entire Yishuv, believed that women’s rights had to be secondary to that goal.<sup>14</sup> He seems to have believed that women would gradually, if slowly, gain places on public bodies, and that there was no need to press the matter. The Provisional Committee thus preferred to roll the hot potato over to the Second Constituent Assembly.<sup>15</sup>

THE SECOND CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY:  
THE FIGHT FOR THE VOTE INTENSIFIES

The Second Constituent Assembly convened in the heat of the summer, on June 17–19, 1918, at the Hebrew Girls' School in Jaffa.<sup>16</sup> It was an impressive gathering of one hundred men and three women from all of Palestine then under British control. Delegates came from Jerusalem this time, but the north was still under Turkish rule, so Zionist settlements there were not represented. The contours of the debate over women's rights were largely the same as they would be in the forums in the next years. Most notably, giving women the vote was seen as a symbol of all that distinguished the New Yishuv from the Old, and as part of the struggle between those two communities for leadership of the Yishuv as a whole. A new aspect of the debate was that, for the first time, halakhic objections were raised to granting women the vote. The injection of Jewish religious law made the debate even fiercer, with advocates of women's rights accusing opponents of bowing to rabbinic dictates.<sup>17</sup> The first delegate to raise the objection that the halakhah forbids women to vote was Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uzi'el, the Sephardi chief rabbi of Jaffa. He contended that this was a matter of Torah law and said that "we cannot change the law . . . and will oppose [you] resolutely if you seek to touch our Holy Torah of Israel."<sup>18</sup>

The effort to form a unified leadership for the entire Yishuv ended up underlining differences and pushing both sides to radicalize their positions. Moshe Smilansky, a writer and farmer from Rehovot, explained that two types of Jews had come to the Land of Israel: "the first type with an old *Shulkhan Arukh* [halakhic code] in his hands, and the second type with a new *Shulkhan Arukh* in his heart." Smilansky claimed that the New Yishuv respected the halakhic practices of the Haredim at the same time that they refused to respect the values of the Zionist sector.<sup>19</sup> Yoseph Sprinzak of HaPo'el HaTza'ir, one of the two socialist parties, castigated the Haredim, saying that while he and most members of the New Yishuv sought a compromise, "unfortunately we have encountered utter obstinacy on the other side and felt that there is a desire to make us responsible for the consequences."<sup>20</sup>

But it was not only the debate that grew fiercer. So did the women. They had three representatives in the Second Constituent Assembly: Ada Fishman, Esther Yeivin, and Rachel Yana'it. The first two were leading figures in the Tel Aviv Women's Association, whereas Yana'it served as a delegate for the

Po'alei Tzion party, which argued that socialism would solve the plight of women. At the same time a second woman was appointed to the Provisional Committee—Sarah Thon, wife of the committee chairman and, as we have seen, a public figure in her own right. A photograph taken in 1918 shows Yana'it and Thon at a joint meeting of the Provisional Committee and representatives of the Zionist Commission, the two women standing at either side of a large group of men.<sup>21</sup>

Yeivin's entry onto the national stage offers an opportunity to take a look at how her feminist awareness developed. Born Esther Yunis in Bessarabia in 1877,<sup>22</sup> she was given a thorough Hebrew education. In her youth she was friendly with Yoseph Klausner, a well-known historian who would later support the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights. Klausner relates in his memoirs that when he was sixteen, he and the twelve-year-old Esther read together two famous poems by Judah Leib Gordon, "My Sister Ruhama" and "Who Knows the Life of a Hebrew Woman," both of which address the plight of Jewish women.<sup>23</sup> Esther—who continued her studies even after her marriage, in 1894, to Nisan Yeivin—worked as a Hebrew teacher in Odessa. She moved to Palestine with her three children following the pogroms of 1905; her husband joined them three years later. For several years she and her family had a farm in Gedera, after which they moved to Tel Aviv so their children could attend that community's high school, the Herzliya Gymnasium. In Tel Aviv she devoted herself to a broad range of public work. She declared that a liberated woman "should aspire to be a free person, working and living and supporting herself."<sup>24</sup> In all her activities she relied on her expansive knowledge—which included familiarity with foundational texts on the women's question and proficiency in the Hebrew language—and her courage.<sup>25</sup>

The three women who served in the Second Constituent Assembly did not speak up often in the debates regarding the question most central to them. Perhaps they felt that their very presence in the Assembly was the most demonstrative response they could make to a discussion that was often hurtful to them. Or was it simply that they had heard the counterarguments so often that they despaired of being able to change the speakers' minds? At another opportunity, Ada Fishman offered an intriguing response to the question "Why do the women remain silent?" In her words, "we kept silent because we were always waiting for an opinion that could serve as a foundation for opposition to granting women the right to vote, and—we never

heard one."<sup>26</sup> In other words, Fishman said, she and her colleagues could not raise their voices in defense of their positions because no cogent reason had been offered that justified not giving women the vote.<sup>27</sup>

Three possible ways to resolve the issue arose during the meeting of the Second Constituent Assembly. The first was a proposal to separate the right to vote from the right to be elected to office. The model seems to have been New Zealand, which granted women the right to vote in 1893 but had not yet granted them the right to be elected to office (that would happen only in 1919). The second arose when members of Mizrahi, the religious Zionist movement, threatened to walk out of the Assembly and split the Yishuv. The third was to again avoid making a decision and to send the issue to a higher authority—this time, to the Assembly of Representatives, which had yet to be elected.<sup>28</sup>

Note that the Haredi Old Yishuv had no qualms about splitting the Yishuv, just as the rise of the Reform movement prompted Germany's Orthodox Jews to split away from the larger Jewish community to form their own institutions. The Haredim viewed traditional Jewish observance, according to their interpretation, as taking precedence over the value of Jews' responsibility for each other. In contrast, at that stage, the New Yishuv wanted unity above all. Mizrahi, with its combined commitment to religion and Zionism, took a position between these two camps. Doing so gained it political power because of its position to tip the balance one way or the other. It was at the Second Constituent Assembly that Mizrahi's weight first became evident. Its members made their mark on that body and stood behind its conciliatory actions.<sup>29</sup> The women raised their voice only against the proposal to put off the decision to a later date.<sup>30</sup>

The compromise, which was approved by a majority of the delegates, recognized women's right to vote in the elections to the Assembly of Representatives as a one-time measure. The decision about whether they would be allowed to vote in future elections and whether they could be elected to office was referred to the future Assembly of Representatives. *Ha'aretz Veha'avodah*, a periodical published by Po'alei Tzion, protested that the bargain discriminated against half the Jewish population in the Land of Israel, and that, in accepting it, the Yishuv's workers had given up their demand for equality "for the sake of peace."<sup>31</sup> Neither side was pleased with the resolution, and the fundamental issue of women's right to vote continued to be debated furiously. At this point, however, the imperative of ensuring that all

parts of the Yishuv took part in the creation of the Assembly of Representatives took precedence over immediate recognition of women's rights in the public sphere. The hot potato continued to be passed from hand to hand.

THE THIRD CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY:  
THE RIGHT TO VOTE AND BE ELECTED

When the Third Constituent Assembly convened in December 1918, times had changed. The British had taken control of Palestine's north, and World War I had ended a month before. In the streets and synagogues, the Yishuv celebrated the first anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, while the Arabs submitted their first petition protesting British policy in Palestine.<sup>32</sup> The opening of the Third Constituent Assembly caused great excitement. In the words of its chairman, Ya'akov Thon, "there has not hitherto been a time of such great understanding of, or such great desire for, organization."<sup>33</sup> Optimism pervaded the Yishuv,<sup>34</sup> yet the question of whether women should vote continued to raise a storm.

The Third Constituent Assembly, which met in Jaffa for five days, December 18–22, was made up of 114 delegates from throughout the country.<sup>35</sup> Six of them, 5 percent of the total, were women. In other words, women had doubled their representation, and the principle that women should be participants in any such body had been clearly established. The veteran women activists Rachel Yana'it, Sarah Thon, and Ada Fishman were now joined by Sarah Malchin and Leah Meron, both of whom represented the Union of Women Farm Workers, and Dr. Bat-Sheva Yunis-Guttman, a physician and sister of Esther Yeivin, representing the Hebrew Medical Association.<sup>36</sup> Despite their increased representation, the women's voices remained subdued. Even Sarah Thon, the wife of the chairman, seldom spoke at the sessions. Was she afraid that it would be impolite to do so in the presence of her husband, or was the cause her rapidly declining health? In a pessimistic letter she had sent to a friend almost a year later, in September 1919, she confessed: "I have a disgusting malaria that I can't get rid of."<sup>37</sup> The silence of the women seems to testify to the difficulty they had in blazing a political path for themselves.

A large and animated crowd filled the hall where the Third Constituent Assembly met.<sup>38</sup> Official guests and the press were also in attendance.<sup>39</sup> The Assembly took up a wide variety of issues but turned first of all the women's question—specifically, whether women should be allowed to vote and be

elected to office.<sup>40</sup> Delegates representing agricultural workers presented the right to vote as a fundamental social principle that could not be abridged in any way: “Do not think that women’s right [to vote] is just one more progressive issue for us. No! It is for us a *vital question* . . . in the New Yishuv there is no distinction between man and woman. It is made up of human beings.”<sup>41</sup> They argued that the right to vote had to be a fundamental principle of the new Hebrew society that was being formed. “A national home is not imaginable without the national Hebrew woman,” one delegate declared.<sup>42</sup> The record of the debate shows that the delegates from the New Yishuv viewed gender equality as a central characteristic of the new Hebrew society.<sup>43</sup>

The Third Constituent Assembly was the first body in which the Haredim were properly represented. They categorically rejected the demand of the New Yishuv’s delegates that their progressive principles should be respected, even though those principles had no divine approval. According to the Haredim, values established by human fiat had no standing and thus could be subject to compromise, whereas principles established by God could not be abandoned. But the Haredi claim that the halakhic basis of their objection came directly from heaven<sup>44</sup> was rejected by Ada Fishman. Noting her religious pedigree—her father and brother were respected rabbis—she maintained, on the basis of her own familiarity with the halakhic literature, that Jewish law did not in any way forbid women from voting. The very fact that Haredim were sitting side by side with women at this Assembly, she noted, was clear proof that there was nothing wrong with women serving on a community body. Yet she was unable, during her speech, to recall which Talmudic source she was basing her claim on, and apologized for “forgetting my page number.”<sup>45</sup>

Unlike Fishman, Sarah Thon supported her husband Ya’akov’s compromise proposal that women be allowed to vote for the Assembly of the Representatives only in the local communities that agreed to this.<sup>46</sup> The Thons’ assumption was that if no formal decision was made giving all women the right to vote and be elected, the status quo in which women voted in localities that approved this and served as representatives in Yishuv assemblies would slowly pave the way for general women’s suffrage.<sup>47</sup> But they were in the minority. Most of the delegates to the Third Constituent Assembly demanded an “explicit and unequivocal” recognition of women’s rights.<sup>48</sup>

With the advocates of women’s suffrage now taking an uncompromising

stand, the opponents dug in as well. The representatives of the Old Yishuv, who in the Second Constituent Assembly had been willing to accept a compromise allowing women to vote but not be elected, now backtracked and declared that the current Assembly, which was not an elected body, did not have the authority to make a decision about the issue. They argued that opponents of women's suffrage were not fully represented and said that they would thus boycott any vote on the women's question.<sup>49</sup> That was the first, perhaps unintentional, step toward fracture. But in abstaining the Haredim paved the way for a suffragist victory. The Assembly voted to give women the vote and the right to hold office—but only provisionally, in the case of the coming elections. The ultimate decision about women's political rights would be made by the Assembly of Representatives.

The decision looked like a clear victory for the New Yishuv. According to the minutes of the Constituent Assembly, it was greeted with “stormy and lengthy applause,” although the Haredim and some others sat silently.<sup>50</sup> Fishman and others spoke optimistically about the Haredim coming around to acceptance of the new situation. She was wrong. The victory simply caused the battle to continue on a new and fiercer level.<sup>51</sup>

Did women's involvement in these new bodies have an impact on the outcome of the debate? The relative silence of the women delegates shows that they were probably ambivalent about their presence. As already noted, they found it difficult to express themselves freely in public meetings dominated by men. Presumably, participation in the constituent assemblies was for them a sort of political rite of passage.

In fact, most of the six women delegates had made their way into the Yishuv leadership via family connections that put them in contact with and gave them an opportunity to converse with male leaders. In Sarah Thon's case, these family connections also came at a cost, as she herself openly acknowledged: “Despite my own opinion, I tried to persuade the Jerusalem Women's Association to make a temporary concession for the sake of peace; but they all opposed me and considered me a traitor. And no one should really hope for concessions on our side.”<sup>52</sup> A close look at the role women played in the Third Constituent Assembly shows that their participation in that body and its committees, even if in small numbers and largely in silence, made a clear statement of equality.

## Act II: The Haredi Community Confronts the New Age

The Third Constituent Assembly resolved that women would be able to vote and run for office in Yishuv elections, and that the poll should be held no later than May 1919. The Yishuv roiled with controversy. The date of the elections was postponed again and again, until they were finally scheduled for April 20, 1920. In retrospect, it is clear that the equanimity with which the Haredi delegates accepted the Third Constituent Assembly's decision to allow women to vote was merely the calm that preceded the storm. In fact, the Haredim believed that the decision crossed a red line. The New Yishuv, they felt, was trying to banish them from the new institutions. As one Haredi rabbi said, "Jerusalem has encountered a locked door . . . we have too much schism and contradiction among us."<sup>53</sup>

The end of World War I propelled Old Yishuv Haredi society into a new age. The Haredim were also swept away by enthusiasm for the new horizons that the British conquest opened up. Jerusalem's Old Yishuv perceived itself as an elite holy community looked up to by the entire Jewish people. Its calling was to live a life of Torah and religious observance. But the Old Yishuv was not homogeneous—it consisted of a large number of small communities with their own traditions and origins. Furthermore, there was a wide variety of theologies and political and religious philosophies—there were extremists, moderates, Hasidim, and Prushim (also called *Mitnagdim*, a community of followers of the Gaon of Vilna, a vehement eighteenth-century opponent of Hasidism). One thing they all had in common, however, was that their women took no part in public life. While many of the community's girls received a basic education in girls' schools that were established in the city beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, nearly all of them married and began families at a young age and had no inclination to engage in public activity. Their outward appearance and manner were expressions, in their community's view, of the life of sanctity they lived in the Holy City. Their purpose was to enable their husbands and sons to fulfill their religious obligations. The fact that no Haredi women spoke up during the debate over the right to vote should be taken as their endorsement of the position taken by their men—silence, in this instance, was a form of assent.

Jerusalem's Jews, who had suffered more than any other community in Palestine during World War I,<sup>54</sup> were slowly recovering. They had begun to find their way under the new British regime, which one of the city's Haredi



rabbis called “the dawn of the redemption.”<sup>55</sup> At that historical moment, the rabbinic establishment and most of the political leaders of the Ashkenazi Old Yishuv sought, for a brief instant, to achieve cooperation with Zionism.<sup>56</sup> Letters written by rabbis at the end of 1918 display this sense of brotherhood clearly. “All Jews are brothers!” one proclaims.<sup>57</sup>

A sincere desire for unity prevailed among the Haredim. They aspired to have the New Yishuv adopt their lifestyle, respect them, and view the Jewish religion and its precepts as the social and legal foundation of the entire Yishuv.<sup>58</sup> But from the beginning of the second half of 1918, after the Second Constituent Assembly recognized in principle women’s right to vote (but not to be elected to office), the Haredim began to take a different tack. A spirit of social and political self-segregation and a desire to sever ties with the Zionists came to the fore and grew steadily stronger.<sup>59</sup> The women’s question became a shibboleth that marked out the boundaries between political camps.<sup>60</sup>

The ensuing story raises a series of questions: Were the Haredi elation at the new era and the desire for unity with the newly arrived Zionists sustainable, or would they have dissipated in any case? Does the sequence of events lead to the conclusion that, even without the dispute over women’s right to vote, a rift between the New and Old Yishuvs was inevitable? Above all, was the women’s question the real cause of the break between the two camps, or did a larger conflict simply home in on women’s right to vote?

#### HOW THE HAREDIM VIEWED THEMSELVES AND THE NEW YISHUV

The Haredim, both extreme and moderate, viewed themselves not only as the Yishuv’s pinnacle but also as its largest sector, “the majority and major part of the Jews of the Land of Israel.”<sup>61</sup> They did not realize that most Jews in the Diaspora and in the New Yishuv were receiving some sort of non-religious education and adopting, to one extent or another, modern lifestyles. This misapprehension was explicit in pronouncements made by Haredi representatives to the Third Constituent Assembly: “Among the rest of the Hebrew people throughout the world, about 99 percent are Haredi,” Rabbi Menahem Mordechai Te’omim-Frankel declared.<sup>62</sup> This figure was hugely inflated, but even more moderate estimates that 80–90 percent of Jerusalem’s Jews and 50–70 percent of all the Jews in Palestine were Haredim were greatly exaggerated.<sup>63</sup>

The true figures were important because demographics were a key fac-

tor in the dispute over women's right to vote. Between 1800 and 1914, Palestine's Jewish population grew by an order of magnitude, with the sharpest increase occurring in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>64</sup> The relative weights of the Old and New Yishuv had far-reaching implications. If most of the Jewish population in Palestine was indeed Haredi, the claim that a Zionist minority was seeking to impose itself on the majority was correct. In that case, the New Yishuv could not insist that democracy required equal rights for the sexes at the same time that they ignored the will of a majority that opposed that principle.<sup>65</sup> This was the logic behind Ya'akov Thon's initiative at the Third Constituent Assembly that the decision about whether to allow women to vote for the Assembly of Representatives should be left to the local council of each community or settlement.<sup>66</sup> But his proposal was rejected. There was also a geographical aspect to the controversy, with a rivalry between Jerusalem, the stronghold of the Old Yishuv, and Jaffa, which was often called "the capital of the New Yishuv." This rivalry prompted a question of procedure, as voiced by Rabbi Yehi'el Mikhal Tokachinski: "Why is this assembly convening in Jaffa and not in Jerusalem?"<sup>67</sup> Jaffa was home court for the New Yishuv and hostile territory for the Haredim.

The Haredim viewed themselves as adhering to Judaism in its original form, conveying tradition and practice from the ancients to future generations. The New Yishuv, as they saw it, was their exact opposite.<sup>68</sup> The spirit of the New Yishuv, they claimed, stood in opposition to true Judaism because it sprang from foreign sources. As Rabbi Te'omim-Frankel charged, "you want to found a new people according to the laws of other nations." The Haredim were the ones who threatened a rupture, but they blamed the New Yishuv: "The Jewish people should know, our generation should know and so should future generations, who forcibly brought a bad spirit among us, who divided brothers."<sup>69</sup> They accused the New Yishuv of bringing about spiritual destruction and feared that the national enterprise would not survive. "All that is not based on faith—dies out," another Haredi rabbi told the Third Constituent Assembly.<sup>70</sup> Combat between the two subcommunities grew so intense that, as Rabbi Tokachinski put it, it became "a matter of life or death."<sup>71</sup> The women's question threatened to bring down the entire Yishuv and its institutions.

FORBIDDEN!

Following the adjournment of the Third Constituent Assembly and the Haredi delegates' return to Jerusalem, the news of the decision to grant women the vote began to spread through the city. The community was incensed and horrified, and people raised their voices against the decision in public gatherings.<sup>72</sup> Rabbi Yoseph Gershon Horovitz of Jerusalem explained candidly at a Mizrahi gathering that he had not thought that granting women the vote was "clearly prohibited," but that when he saw hundreds of people massed outside his house, he changed his mind. "Would I really permit participation with women?" he asked. "And I saw that the community's feelings were against it."<sup>73</sup> The impression that his account gives is that Jerusalem's Haredi rabbis issued their ban on women's participation in elections in response to the public mood rather than out of purely legal considerations. Some two months after the Third Constituent Assembly, Rabbi Te'omim-Frankel issued a ruling: "The law prohibits all Haredi Jews who believe in the Torah and who walk in the way of the Torah from participating in the Assembly of Representatives for as long as this provision [granting the vote to women] still stands."<sup>74</sup> Broadsides publicizing this ruling and listing the names of the rabbis who signed it were pasted on billboards throughout Jerusalem, and rabbis proclaimed it to their congregations on each Sabbath.<sup>75</sup>

The Old Yishuv believed that the Third Constituent Assembly had overstepped its authority when it passed this provision, and that the decision was thus illegal. "How can a small minority at an arbitrary assembly make a law that a majority of the public cannot live with?" Rabbi Te'omim-Frankel wrote to the Provisional Committee. "How can a building constructed on such a shaky foundation stand?"<sup>76</sup> Looking back, it seems clear that the Haredi decision to abstain from the crucial vote in the Third Constituent Assembly was not a sign of moderation but the opposite—it was a jumping-off point for intensifying their campaign. Both the Haredim and the New Yishuv viewed the battle as affecting not only women but also the very nature of the Yishuv.

MIZRAHI—FOR AND AGAINST

The Mizrahi movement, founded in Vilna in 1902, sought to combine political Zionism with a commitment to halakhah. It was an integral part of the Zionist movement. The party's branch in the Yishuv carried on the ed-

ucational and cultural work that its members had begun in Palestine before World War I.<sup>77</sup> Following the British conquest, the movement became active politically in the Yishuv as well, with the intention of ensuring its place in the political party system that was then taking form. The Palestinian branch of Mizrahi was headed by Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uzi'el, a Sephardi scholar and Jerusalem native, and Rabbi Moshe Ostrovski (later Hebraized as Hameiri) of the moshavah Mazkeret Batya. They were joined by Rabbi Yehuda Leib Fishman, Ada Fishman's brother, who had been deported from the country by the Turks during the war but had returned in August 1919.<sup>78</sup> Mizrahi, which sought to cooperate with both the Old and the New Yishuv, found itself in a dilemma. How could it continue to work with both when they were at each other's throats?

When it was founded, Mizrahi accepted, without hesitation or debate, the Zionist Congress's granting of the vote to women. But the issue began to come up at meetings of followers of the movement around the world in the wake of the controversy after World War I.<sup>79</sup> At the second convention of the Mizrahi movement in Poland, in the spring of 1919, a majority of delegates favored granting women the right to vote.<sup>80</sup> The movement's branches in Germany, Switzerland, and the United States also supported women's suffrage, and this was affirmed by the world Mizrahi convention in London in 1920. All these Mizrahi branches also agreed that the movement should participate in the Yishuv's institutions.<sup>81</sup> HaPo'el HaMizrahi, a labor-religious faction founded by young members of Mizrahi in 1922, took an unambiguous stand in favor of women's suffrage.<sup>82</sup> One Mizrahi activist in Vilna, Ester Rubinstein, supported women's rights without reservation. She argued that in biblical times women enjoyed a higher status than they did in her own time, and she longed for a change.<sup>83</sup> Yet hers seems to have been a lonely voice. Most of the movement's women in the Yishuv passively accepted their exclusion from public life.

In other words, the Mizrahi leaders in the Yishuv differed from their Diaspora cousins on the women's issue. A meeting of the Yishuv chapter in the summer of 1918 resolved that women should not be given the vote "because it is not in the spirit of the religion."<sup>84</sup> Note that the resolution did not say that women's suffrage was prohibited by the halakhah. Indeed, Rabbi Ostrovski termed the issue one of mores rather than of religion.<sup>85</sup> When the British branch of the Women's International Zionist Organization protested the stance of the Mizrahi chapter in Palestine on the suffrage issue,

the latter offered a frank response: Mizrahi's Palestine branch opposed votes for women not for religious reasons but rather in defense of the Haredim, who felt hurt by the new norm.<sup>86</sup> At the world Mizrahi convention held in Amsterdam in the winter of 1920, the Yishuv delegates were evasive on the women's issue. Rabbi Uzi'el argued that it would not be advisable for Mizrahi to come out against the Haredi position, while Rabbi Fishman sought to squash the debate. It was not a halakhic issue, he said, and the Haredim should be able to participate in the Yishuv's organizing effort.<sup>87</sup> The convention reached no decision on the issue.<sup>88</sup>

Mizrahi's equivocation had a lot to do with its members' opinions of with the Haredim, which ranged from admiration to criticism. The members of Mizrahi tended to view the Haredim as bearing the banner of the Torah and as the first to immigrate to the Holy Land in order to bring about the messianic redemption.<sup>89</sup> Mizrahi accepted the Haredim claim to be the largest sector in the Yishuv. Thus, it would not be fair to impose the minority's position on them.<sup>90</sup> But as the debate went on, Mizrahi came to realize that the New Yishuv was growing rapidly, and that women's suffrage would gain legitimacy in the future. "I am certain, for example, that a few years from now women in Jerusalem will have the right to vote," said Yehoshua Radler Feldman, the secretary of Mizrahi's Palestinian branch who wrote under the pen name Rabbi Binyamin. "But everything needs to be done unhurriedly. It will come little by little and on its own, not in an instant and artificially."<sup>91</sup>

Mizrahi had another serious reason to support the Haredim. Its members feared that their own political position would be weakened if the Haredim did not participate in the Assembly of Representatives.<sup>92</sup> In such a case, the elections would hand the religious sector a stunning defeat.<sup>93</sup> Mizrahi's members were also influenced by their place of residence. Most of the members in Jerusalem opposed giving women the vote, while most of those who lived in places belonging to the New Yishuv favored it. Both groups felt, however, that the Provisional Committee was unfriendly to religion. "We cannot consent to our religion being destroyed in this Land," a Mizrahi member told that Committee. "We want the new life [under the British regime] to allow us to live as well."<sup>94</sup>

All this made Mizrahi seem to be sitting on the fence. It refused to cut its ties to the secular New Yishuv, but it also sought to please the Haredim. Mizrahi's women fell in line behind its men. It was, they felt, immodest for

women to vote, and giving them the vote was copying the laws of gentile society.<sup>95</sup> They focused primarily on charitable and social work, leaving politics to their men.<sup>96</sup>

THE WOMEN'S QUESTION: PRINCIPLE OR POLITICAL PRETEXT?

The Old Yishuv dismissed the New Yishuv, felt alienated from it, and even feared and hated it. The feelings were mutual. The New Yishuv's leaders were profoundly suspicious any time the Haredim said anything positive about the Zionists. Haredi expressions of sympathy for Zionism were taken as insincere. Since the Old Yishuv's positive attitude toward the New appeared only in the wake of the Balfour Declaration, it was seen as opportunistic. In the New Yishuv these newfound supporters of the Jewish national movement were sometimes called "Balfour Zionists."<sup>97</sup>

Similarly, the New Yishuv was skeptical about the Haredi opposition to women's suffrage. It was seen as an excuse, a cover for their opposition to the New Yishuv's initiative to establish a political framework for the Jewish community in Palestine. Ya'akov Thon claimed that the issue was just a pretext used by the Haredim because of "their general opposition to Zionism and the New Yishuv."<sup>98</sup> He had no confidence, he said, in Haredi statements about their interest in taking part in a Yishuvwide administration—yet the New Yishuv should make every effort to include them. In fact, each side believed that the other's intransigence on the women's question was a deliberate provocation.

The labor movement's attitude toward women's suffrage was particularly complex. Zionist workers unreservedly supported the principle that women should be allowed to vote. It was part and parcel of their socialist creed. Yet the issue was not at the top of their agenda. More important were the establishment and maintenance of agricultural settlements and the creation of jobs for Jewish laborers. Only a small number of women were elected on labor party slates to committees and boards of organizations and, later, to the Assembly of Representatives. Clearly there was a disparity between the movement's declarations about equality of the sexes and what happened in practice. For all their assertions of principle, labor movement leaders were notably reluctant to fight for women's rights, not only for political representation but sometimes also for equality of employment.<sup>99</sup> The need to create a body that would represent the entire Jewish population led them to subordinate feminist principles to national ones.

But voices were raised against such conciliation. The labor leader Berl Katznelson was committed to the principle of equality. “We cannot sell off this right,” he declared, “because our entire lives are tied up with the importance of the woman’s place in all our affairs.”<sup>100</sup> The principle of equality, he said, should take precedence over the immediate establishment of the Assembly of Representatives. The latter, he argued, could be postponed.<sup>101</sup> David Ben-Gurion, then a young and energetic labor Zionist leader, opposed making any concession to the Haredim and lashed out at them. “If the sick part of the Yishuv,” he proclaimed, referring to the Haredim, “does not allow the Yishuv to organize itself, and if it is impossible to place the New Yishuv over the Old, at least the New should rule the New.”<sup>102</sup> Members of the Provisional Committee spoke up in favor of adhering to the Third Constituent Assembly’s decision that women should be allowed to vote and be elected to office. “What was decided by the [Constituent Assembly] has been decided. Threats will make no difference,” one member said.<sup>103</sup> “No concessions are possible,” another agreed.<sup>104</sup> As noted above, the impetus for including the Haredim was not just the recognition of their importance in the Yishuv, but also the realization that the British would not recognize the Assembly as the representative of Palestine’s entire Jewish population if it was not elected by the entire Yishuv. This dilemma brought tensions to a climax.

#### GENDER AS A SHAPER OF POLITICAL CONDUCT

On March 17, 1919, the day after the Purim holiday, Mizrahi’s secretary announced that Jerusalem’s rabbis had forbidden their community to participate in the elections as long as women were allowed to be elected to office.<sup>105</sup> About a month later, Haredi Rabbi Te’omim-Frankel submitted his resignation to the Provisional Committee, declaring unequivocally: “I cannot take part in further meetings of the Provisional Committee—and I will not change this pronouncement, God help me.”<sup>106</sup> In spite of this, he reiterated his request to revoke women’s right to vote and be elected, so that the Haredim could participate in the organization of the Yishuv. In other words, with one hand he divorced himself from the Provisional Committee, while with the other hand he offered peace.

In the spring of 1919, the members of the Provisional Committee still hoped that they would be able to iron out the wrinkles and achieve a compromise “to bring the two sides together.”<sup>107</sup> These discussions impelled the Women’s Association in Jaffa to send a letter to the committee declaring:

“The Women’s Association continues to fight for women’s right to vote with greater urgency and openness, and the protests of its opponents only strengthen our aspiration for liberation.”<sup>108</sup> Once again, opposition to rights for women boosted their fighting spirit.

The members of the Provisional Committee believed that Mizrahi could serve as a bridge to the Haredim. But these contacts led to the opposite of the expected result.<sup>109</sup> In June 1919 it became apparent that Mizrahi firmly opposed women’s participation in the elections and that it did not intend to take part in them. The Yishuv institutions entered a period of stagnation, with one delay after another. Even the members of the Farmers Association, who still hoped that they could manage to unify the Yishuv,<sup>110</sup> proposed putting off the elections because of the harvest.<sup>111</sup> A disappointed Ya’akov Thon said that the Provisional Committee that he chaired was like “a prisoner who cannot free himself from jail.”<sup>112</sup> The repeated delays, he said, were a crisis.

The gender question seemed to be a threat to the entire social order. Everything else seemed to be related to it. No other issue was as turbulent as women’s suffrage,<sup>113</sup> because the women’s question stirs the deepest parts of the soul. It became the fault line in the attempt to unify the Jewish population of Palestine under a single autonomous community organization. In most other places, the battle for votes for women proceeded independently of the ongoing conduct of the state, but in the Yishuv it prevented the establishment of representative institutions and utterly paralyzed community politics.

How did the Hebrew suffragists explain to themselves and to Yishuv society as a whole that the price of allowing women to participate in the elections—a rift in the community—was worth it? The story of the immigration of these educated and bold women demonstrates their persistence and courage. These were women who gave up the opportunities that European society offered them on the eve of World War I and chose instead to settle in Ottoman Palestine, with all its drawbacks. To generalize, theirs are stories of doing the impossible and the unconventional. As the delays and debates continued and as one after another compromise was proposed, the women’s associations ratcheted up their activity. The members of the Jerusalem Women’s Association, who had organized to ensure their place in the elections to the Jerusalem Jewish Committee, organized a national body, the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights. It was an innovation on an international scale, as we will see in the next chapter.



## 4



### From Associations to Political Party *The Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights*

This tough and long fight for women's equality in the Yishuv proved to us that the moving and instigating force in this war of liberation has been and will in the future also be woman alone.

—[Sarah Azryahu?], “Madua’ Holekhet haHitahdut . . . el haBehirot le’ Asefat haNivharim biReshimat Nashim?”

The special conditions prevailing in the Yishuv produced an innovative and original idea—the establishment of a national women's political organization that would field a slate of candidates in the elections for the Assembly of Representatives. The women who would thus win seats in the Assembly would then lead the campaign to ratify their right to serve in the body to which they had been elected. A decade and a half earlier, the world's other suffragist movements had founded an international organization, the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA), granting the movement worldwide visibility.<sup>1</sup> But none of the other movements—in England, Europe, or the United States—operated as a political party.

What prompted a group of women in Jerusalem to decide to establish a national party? Sarah Azryahu, who would become a leading force in the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights, made that clear: “The unremitting efforts of Haredi circles to shut women out of the country's civil and political life caused a huge revolution in the mood of [each] woman, and prompted her to take her fate in her own hands, to organize and commence a planned struggle for women's equality and freedom in all areas of life.”<sup>2</sup>

The women of the New Yishuv, especially those in Jerusalem, entered into a flurry of organizational activity in the years 1919–21. They founded several new organizations, among them Mizrahi Women, which provided assistance to religious immigrant women;<sup>3</sup> the Hebrew Women's Organization (HWO), headed by Henrietta Szold, which focused on mother and child care

and was the Yishuv's largest charitable women's society;<sup>4</sup> and the Council of Women Workers, which was established as part of the new Yishuv labor organization, the Histadrut.<sup>5</sup> Notably, not only Jewish women became aware of the need to act to improve their situation. The Palestinian Women's Council was founded in 1920 as well; it engaged in both charitable and political work in the Arab community.<sup>6</sup>

The steps leading up to the foundation of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights are not clear. In February 1919, when news of the Petliura pogroms in Ukraine reached the Yishuv, women's organizations organized to provide assistance to Ukrainian Jews.<sup>7</sup> They held protest rallies and fundraising events, sent petitions to international women's organizations and to the postwar peace conference in Paris, and collected money and clothing for the victims.<sup>8</sup> These activities brought women together and gave them power that could be brought to bear in the national political arena. It seems likely that these international charitable projects produced an atmosphere in which women gained the courage to assert their rights.

#### The First Manifesto

The Jerusalem Women's Association was headed at the time by Hasyah Feinsud-Sukenik. Apparently it was her cooperation with the members of the Tel Aviv Women's Association that led to the formation of the Union. The repeated postponements of the elections to the Assembly of Representatives led to growing frustration among these women and seem to have been the trigger that set the Jerusalem group off in a new direction. On June 24, 1919, its members sent an open letter to the Provisional Committee Executive,<sup>9</sup> and ten days later they published it in full (with only minor revisions) on the front page of the newspaper *Ha'aretz*, under the headline "Manifesto."<sup>10</sup>

This, the Union's first declaration of principles, pointed its finger at Mizrahi. The religious Zionist movement, the women declared, was a disgrace to every Jew in the Yishuv and was the cause of the postponement of the elections. The manifesto cited the important leadership roles played by women in Jewish history and stressed that the involvement of women in public life was an ancient Jewish custom. It also noted that the traditional Jewish longing for the Land of Israel, the emotion that had led the nation to return to its homeland, was common to men and women. The Zionist

movement, the manifesto noted, had granted women equality from its inception,<sup>11</sup> and discrimination against women in the Yishuv had its source in non-Zionist circles that opposed women's full integration into society. Women had made an essential contribution to the building of the land. They had experienced the anguish of the settlement project, and many of them had been among its victims. Since women had been full partners in the Zionist and settlement project, they deserved equal rights.

The authors of the manifesto underlined their commitment to Zionism and the difference between them and the international suffragist movement: "The Hebrew woman in this land knows how to defend her rights, not out of boredom and to copy the modern suffragist movements that have spread through the world in our time; rather it emerges from a desire to take an equal part in building the land and under no circumstances can that right be denied." At the time the Union was founded, its members had not yet comprehended that the vision of a Jewish homeland included universalist feminist principles. They viewed suffragists elsewhere as bored and egocentric, women who sought to enhance their status merely out of self-interest.<sup>12</sup> Azaryahu wrote in her account of the movement's history that, when it was founded, the Union had no connection to women's organizations in other countries.<sup>13</sup> This isolationist feeling soon dissolved, to be replaced by a sense of universal sisterhood. The first manifesto can be seen as the Union's earliest formulation of Zionist Hebrew feminism.<sup>14</sup>

But when we read the manifesto carefully, we see that a tone of insecurity pervades it. "We, the Zionist women of the Land of Israel, *submit* to the discipline of the Zionist Organization," it states (my emphasis). Tellingly, the authors staked their claim to equality on the ground of their contribution to the country, rather than asserting it as a natural right. In this they were not exceptional—women in other countries also argued that they deserved equality because of their role in building the nation.<sup>15</sup> They also claimed that Zionist feminism derived from two sources: the heritage of Jewish culture over the ages and the universal value of human equality. This, too, is a common element in suffragist movements in many countries.<sup>16</sup>

The Yishuv's women organized politically in a Middle Eastern colonialist context, but it was not colonialism that created their movement. Unlike suffragist activity elsewhere in the region, where feminism was perceived as a movement brought in from outside and imposed by Western imperialism,<sup>17</sup> Zionist feminism was an integral part of the Jewish national movement. In

fact, at many stages it worked at cross-purposes with British policy, which often tilted far in the direction of respecting Muslim patriarchal traditions. The Union's members believed they were acting not only for the women of the Yishuv but also for Jewish women who would in the future immigrate to the country from around the world.<sup>18</sup> Even more, they believed that their efforts would benefit the Jewish community in Palestine as a whole. This, too, was an outlook they shared with Jewish and non-Jewish feminists throughout the world who also believed that their own efforts would benefit their nations.<sup>19</sup>

It is commonly accepted in gender studies that nationalist movements privilege men and masculinity,<sup>20</sup> but a closer look shows that, in the case of the Yishuv, nationalism also raised the consciousness of women and turned them toward feminism. It led them to recognize that equality for women was a fundamental building block of the new society. Under these circumstances, their feminist and national identities were of equal value, two complementary elements of their characters.<sup>21</sup>

The members of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights believed that gender equality could be achieved through political channels. Unlike male supporters and opponents of women's suffrage, these Hebrew suffragists did not see the right to vote as merely a symbol of progress. For them, it was a practical goal that, when achieved, would change their lives and society as a whole. Furthermore, they maintained that the way in which their objective was achieved was of prime importance and would reshape women's behavior and society as a whole. The recognition that women could be liberated only if they themselves took action was the engine that brought forth the women's party.

Nearly two months after the Union's first manifesto, on August 20, a notice appeared in *Do'ar Hayom*: "Several of the most important women in Jerusalem convened a meeting today to decide on the founding of a special association that will take on itself the battle for women's rights. The association will have chapters throughout the country and its charter will be published in the days to come."<sup>22</sup> We may assume that it was on this day that the organizational foundation of the Union was laid, and that at this meeting the Jerusalem Women's Association transformed itself into a national body. At the time the manifesto was issued, the two best-known leaders of the Union, Dr. Rosa Welt Straus and Azaryahu, were not members of the association—they joined a short time later. Welt Straus published a letter in the monthly

journal published by the IWSA relating that the Union had been formed before she joined it, and that she had found an organization ready and waiting for her: "Political associations existed throughout the country and it was very easy to unite them."<sup>23</sup>

### The Class Picture

The Union of Hebrew Women raised two banners, in support both of women's right to vote and be elected to office and of egalitarian legislation applying equally to women and men.<sup>24</sup> In this it differed from most suffragist organizations throughout the world, which fought only for the right to vote. The Union was a small, elitist women's movement. A member of the HaPo'el HaTza'ir worker's party reported: "The demand for rights is not in our case the product of a mass women's organization, like that in European countries."<sup>25</sup> He was right. At its peak, the Union received only two thousand votes.<sup>26</sup>

Only a small minority of the Union's supporters worked energetically to promote the movement's political and legal agenda. They served on its executive committee, wrote pamphlets, and ran for the Assembly of Representatives. Feinsud-Sukenik had this to say about the leaders of the Jerusalem chapter, who headed the organization: "Luck has brought [Azaryahu] to live in our neighborhood . . . and we could . . . devote our leisure hours to public work. . . . The [members of the] Jerusalem women's group could be counted on ten fingers."<sup>27</sup> This frank assessment shows that the women's party was led by a very small group. Most urban middle-class women interested in public activity were not attracted to politics—they preferred charitable causes, in particular aid to women and children.

I now offer portraits of three of these women, and assessments of their feminist view. They wrote extensively about their beliefs (in chapter 6 I portray their family lives). Two of them were elected to the Assembly of Representatives, while the third, the Union's president, declined to be a candidate because of her insufficient knowledge of Hebrew. The biographical vignettes offered in the previous chapters and those offered here are presented as examples showing that feminism in the Yishuv was not just an ideology that produced a social movement, but also a way of life. Such life stories are history at its best.<sup>28</sup>

Sarah Glicklich Slouschz:

Woman's Double Subjugation and a Feminism of Difference

A modest twenty-page pamphlet titled "To Women" was self-published in January 1919 by a thirty-one-year-old schoolteacher, Sarah Glicklich-Slouschz (Nikolaev, Ukraine 1888–Jerusalem 1963). Glicklich, who immigrated to Palestine in the winter of 1906, did not voice her ideas only in writing—she also addressed public meetings in Jerusalem.<sup>29</sup> After receiving her professional training in Jaffa, at the first Hebrew teachers' college in the Yishuv, she attended the Sorbonne in Paris. When she returned to Jerusalem, she worked as a schoolteacher and principal. Famed for her devotion to her pupils and her administrative skills, she viewed the education of youth as the most important social role a woman could play. "To educate a generation healthy in body and mind—that is, to create society, to aid the wretched," she demanded, "can there be any more important task?"<sup>30</sup>

Like other Yishuv educators who arrived in Palestine during the decade of the Second Aliyah, Glicklich identified with the labor movement and was a member of the labor party *Ahdut HaAvodah*, on the slate of which she was elected to the Assembly of Representatives. Even though she was not a member of the Union, she was considered "one of the most courageous fighters for the equal rights of the Hebrew woman."<sup>31</sup>

In her pamphlet "To Women," she argued that the women's question could be resolved only by establishing a separate women's party.<sup>32</sup> The question would not be addressed if women did not do it themselves. She proposed that women from all parts of the Yishuv, all political parties, and all sectors cooperate in promoting the issues of importance to them. Furthermore, she maintained that women's action was needed first and foremost to prepare the younger generation for building the country. "It is the role of education and the Hebrew woman educator to take on the task of turning children of the Exile into free people," she declared.<sup>33</sup> In her view, women's goals and the Jewish people's goals were one and the same.

Glicklich stressed that women's capacities differed from men's, but were of equal value: "Whatever doubt there might be as to whether men's and women's mental abilities are equal, there is no doubt that in the matter of sentiment women are superior to men. And who can say the last word on whether mind is more important than sentiment rather than sentiment more important than mind?"<sup>34</sup> (At the time, the claim that women's intellectual

abilities were inferior to men's was still respectable.) The common view in the labor movement was that women could liberate themselves by adopting male traits. Glicklich, in contrast, believed that "in desiring to be like a man, [a woman] enslaves herself in a different way."<sup>35</sup> She proposed shaping a new female persona—no longer the submissive traditional woman, but also not a woman who sought to be the same as a man. Rather, she suggested, women should seek to fulfill their role as women and train themselves in any field they chose, whether in the arts or sciences, but "not out of a desire to imitate men."<sup>36</sup> Glicklich advocated what is now termed difference feminism—equality based on equal moral status for both genders but different physical, mental, and emotional capacities.<sup>37</sup>

#### Sarah Azaryahu: Zionism and Suffragism in One Package

In an autobiography she published in her later years, Sarah Azaryahu (Dvinsk, Latvia, 1873–Afikim, Israel, 1962) wrote that her parents' and grandparents' homes in Russia were pervaded by respect for her mother, who "exuded energy and common sense" and was careful not to show any preference for her sons over her daughters.<sup>38</sup> Azaryahu offered an answer to the question raised by the historian Joan Wallach Scott: how can feminist awareness best be fostered among women? "From my earliest childhood," Azaryahu wrote, "I began to devote most of my thinking to two problems: 1. the bitter fate of my wandering and persecuted people; 2. the inferior position of the woman in the family."<sup>39</sup> Her concern for her people's fate led her to Zionism, while her concern for women grew out of her observation "of the life of broad strata of our people" and from books she read.<sup>40</sup> She became a suffragist not as a result of her personal plight but rather as the daughter of a comfortably well-off family who was brought up on the basis of equality.

In her book, Azaryahu devoted much space to the difficulties faced by women. Noting the great importance of education, she chronicled the barriers women faced in their attempts to enter academic institutions. She and her husband, Yosef Azaryahu, she related, chose to move to "democratic Switzerland [which] had already opened wide the doors of its universities to every educated person without respect for nationality, sex, or religion."<sup>41</sup> She noted the restrictions on the mobility of married women that prevailed at the beginning of the twentieth century and their dependence on their husbands, something she experienced herself: "Fifty years ago, Russia,

like many other countries in Europe, had a humiliating law regarding the married woman, which stated that she was not . . . permitted to leave the country . . . without the formal consent of her husband.<sup>42</sup> She maintained that every woman required economic independence “to raise her status and greatly improve her situation in the family.”<sup>43</sup> Women’s standing in their families determined their status on the public stage, she claimed. The members of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights focused their energies on precisely this area, seeking in particular to improve women’s legal status in their families.<sup>44</sup>

Azaryahu’s identity as a feminist grew even stronger when the debate broke out over women’s right to vote in the Yishuv: “The rebellious feelings against the denial of rights to women that had filled my heart since my girlhood . . . again welled up in my soul in the face of the threat to discriminate against women in our country.”<sup>45</sup> Azaryahu’s feminism grew out of her aspiration to better the world. She viewed equality as a humanistic principle that enabled women to act like men in the public arena. She explained that this was proved by the women of the New Yishuv who had taken part in the defense of Jewish settlements against Arab raiders.<sup>46</sup> In her personal life she displayed independence, both personal and economic. When, because of work or study, her husband had to move to another city or even another country, she remained at home with her children and carried on her work.

After arriving in Palestine, Azaryahu worked as a teacher and school principal in all three of the country’s large cities—Jaffa, Haifa, and Jerusalem.<sup>47</sup> At the same time she was raising three children—Ya’akov, Tehiya, and Arnan.<sup>48</sup> Her memoir offers no clues about how she balanced her responsibilities as an educator with her public work and both of them with rearing children. But such disregard for that subject was then standard among feminists, both in Palestine and the rest of the world—private affairs were kept private. Azaryahu was the local public face of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights. She told the story of her fight for women’s right to vote not just in her autobiography, published in 1957 when she was eighty-four, but also in a book she had devoted to the subject eight years earlier.<sup>49</sup> But her autobiography ends in 1926, when the suffragist battle was won and Azaryahu was only fifty-three years old. She saw that as the acme of her achievements.<sup>50</sup> While she was the dominant figure in the Union for decades, the title of president belonged to Welt Straus. Azaryahu’s youngest son, Arnan, told me in an interview that the two women were close friends,



and that this friendship influenced relations among the rest of the organization's members.<sup>51</sup>

#### Dr. Rosa Welt Straus: A Suffragist's Road to Zion

Tzipora Klausner, an active member of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights and a delegate to the Assembly of Representatives, offered this account of her first encounter with Rosa Welt Straus: "The impression made by Doktor Rosa Straus was wonderful—a woman at the pinnacle of education of her time, wise and full of energy, with a single great goal before her: equal rights for half of the human race—women."<sup>52</sup> Klausner was not the only person impressed by Welt Straus, who enthralled other members of the newly formed Union when they met her in the summer of 1919. They elected her chairman of the meeting and then president of the organization. What was the secret behind the charisma that placed her at the top of the new movement just two months after her arrival in Palestine?

Welt Straus (Czernowitz, Bukovina, 1856–Geneva 1938) was an exceptional figure among the Union's members. She and her three trendsetting sisters had all been encouraged by their father, Sinai Welt, to attend college.<sup>53</sup> Welt Straus was the first woman in the Austro-Hungarian Empire to complete high school and was among the first Jewish women to attend university.<sup>54</sup> She studied medicine in Vienna and Bern, becoming Europe's first woman ophthalmologist.<sup>55</sup> After completing her studies she went to New York and married a wealthy businessman, Leo Straus, a gregarious music lover. Rosa, a captivating woman of great personal charm, worked as an eye surgeon and spoke fluent German, English, and French. Azaryahu related in her history of the Union that Welt Straus had been active in non-Jewish suffragist organizations.<sup>56</sup> According to Azaryahu, Welt Straus had also been one of the founders of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in 1904.<sup>57</sup>

Welt Straus's daughter, Nellie (1892–1933), was the sole child of the four Welt sisters. Nellie was a sickly girl with a weak heart who did not attend school. Neither did she receive a Jewish education. The home was an assimilated one, in which "it was against principles to talk of Judaism."<sup>58</sup> Leo Straus committed suicide when his business ventures failed. Nellie, then a teenager, went to Geneva to live with one of her mother's sisters.<sup>59</sup> Her first encounter with her Jewish identity and with young Zionists occurred at the local university. One of the Zionists was Bernard Mochenson, a young

teacher at the Herzliya Gymnasium in Tel Aviv who was staying temporarily in Geneva to extend his studies. Nellie fell in love with him and with Zionism and, undergoing a profound transformation, began to study Yiddish and Hebrew.

When World War I broke out, Nellie returned to the United States. In New York she associated with Zionists, most notably Henrietta Szold. Nellie introduced her mother to this circle and devoted herself to Zionist activity.<sup>60</sup> This was how Rosa Welt Straus herself encountered her Jewish identity. Like her daughter, she was quickly taken with it. *Our Palestine*, a book published in Nellie's memory, with some of her writings, states that Nellie came to Palestine because she was offered a job. But her letters show that her intention to make the move had been formed earlier.<sup>61</sup> Welt Straus seems to have made the move with her because of a strong desire to be close to her only daughter.<sup>62</sup> But neither came out of solely personal motives. They were inspired by the challenge of the Yishuv.<sup>63</sup>

On their way to Palestine, Nellie and Rosa stopped in Geneva and Alexandria. They arrived in Jaffa on June 1, 1919.<sup>64</sup> When her boat approached Jaffa, Nellie wrote to her friend Szold that she felt as if she were dreaming.<sup>65</sup> Rosa Walt Straus was then sixty-three, a vigorous woman with much achievement still before her. Nellie, age twenty-six, was not well, but she was spirited and optimistic. Many newcomers described their immigration experience as a rebirth, a change of worlds.<sup>66</sup> In December 1919, Nellie wrote to a friend in the United States, "I have become a Palestinian for better or worse—and am hopefully awaiting the better."<sup>67</sup>

Mother and daughter were united by a great love for the Land of Israel. In an emotional letter to a friend in the United States, Nellie, who was in Paris at the time, wrote: "It is a curious thing that I cannot bear to be away from Palestine, though in no way have I (nor Palestine) benefited by my sojourns there. . . . There is nothing I love so much as the ascent to Jerusalem."<sup>68</sup> Her love for the land, which she called a "love affair," received expression in her professional work as well. Hadassah, the world's largest Jewish women's organization, hired Nellie to write public relations pieces about Palestine, and she later worked as an editor on the English edition of the Histadrut newspaper *Davar*.<sup>69</sup>

Azaryahu, who stood by Welt Straus's side for nearly two decades, said of her: "Dr. Straus came to us from afar. . . . Upon her immigration, when she encountered the rebirth of the Jewish people in its ancient land face to

face, when she saw close up the pioneering spirit beating among the fulfillers of this vision . . . she enthusiastically and with great devotion joined their work.”<sup>70</sup> Further testimony to Welt Straus’s enthusiasm for life in Palestine comes from a letter she wrote to an American friend in 1932, in which she marveled at the beauty of Jerusalem and at the rapid way in which the country had been built.<sup>71</sup>

Since the bylaws of the Union explicitly required the use of Hebrew in its meetings and correspondence, Welt Straus made great efforts to learn Hebrew, but without much success. She was able to carry out a simple friendly conversation, but she never gained the fluency needed for public speaking.<sup>72</sup> This explains her position in the Union—she served as its “foreign minister” in contacts with other organizations and institutions, inside and outside Palestine. Her acquaintances testified that she made a huge impression with her attractive appearance and her quick mind.<sup>73</sup>

In the spring of 1920, the IWSA journal printed a letter from Welt Straus in which she related that, prior to her move to Palestine, she told Carrie Chapman Catt, the president of the North American Woman Suffrage Association and of the IWSA, of her plans. In her letter Welt Straus mentioned that Catt had presented her with a challenge: to organize the women of Palestine and bring their organization into the international one.<sup>74</sup> This would seem to explain Welt Straus’s exceptional involvement in the Union. She did not come to Palestine seeking a cause—her mission was already clear.

As shown above, the fight for women’s right to vote was, in the Yishuv, part of a larger issue—the halakhic and legal status of women. In a letter written in the spring of 1920, Welt Straus stressed that suffrage was only one part of the Union’s aims,<sup>75</sup> as expressed in the Union’s slogan: “You shall have a single law and justice for man and woman.” The Hebrew suffragists recognized that the critical arena in which the inferior status of women could be remedied was that of the legal system.

Welt Straus first encountered the larger Yishuv public via a letter she wrote in September 1919 to the editors of *Ha’aretz*, in which she presented the Union members’ desire to participate in the Jewish national revival in Palestine.<sup>76</sup> The newspaper printed it prominently on the front page. Welt Straus spoke of the Land of Our Fathers and proudly noted that the Zionist movement had early on granted women the right to vote, even before they had this right in the United States. Welt Straus’s voice was clear and her point was explicit: equality for women was an unassailable universal right.

The right to equality was an ultimate human one: "It is not proper for one sex to be subjugated to the other."<sup>77</sup>

Welt Straus identified totally with the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights, which was sometimes called "Dr. Straus's favorite child."<sup>78</sup> She devoted every moment she had to the organization and acknowledged that it was "uphill work."<sup>79</sup> Eulogizing her, her colleagues said: "She spared no labor or her health when she saw a need to work for the cause."<sup>80</sup> After losing her daughter and reaching the age of eighty, Welt Straus left Palestine and joined her sisters in Geneva. But she continued her involvement in Yishuv affairs from there, especially in the wake of the harsh events of the late 1930s. Among other activities, she met with the Swedish member of the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission and told her "about the nature of the Yishuv, its aspirations, activities, and victims."<sup>81</sup>

#### The Women's Party in Action

Members of the women's associations throughout the Yishuv that had joined the Union met in Jerusalem on February 9, 1920. As already noted, even prior to this, members of the local associations had displayed sisterly feelings for each other. Dozens of women had been invited to the Jerusalem meeting.<sup>82</sup> Within a year an executive committee was appointed to handle the Union's daily affairs, with Welt Straus serving as chairman and Azaryahu as secretary (a title that then designated the top administrator of an organization). The committee also included Dr. Miryam Nofech, a physician; Fanyah Matman-Cohen, a schoolteacher; and Feinsud-Sukenik, a kindergarten teacher.<sup>83</sup> Nofech was the first ophthalmologist to practice in Palestine,<sup>84</sup> while Matman-Cohen and her husband had founded the Herzlyiya Gymnasium in Jaffa. Feinsud-Sukenik was the esteemed superintendent of the Yishuv's preschools. With the exception of Welt Straus, all the members of the executive committee had lived in Palestine for a decade or so by this time. They all worked hard to promote the Union's goals, along with performing their jobs and carrying out their family duties.

Socially, the Union largely resembled Jewish and other suffragist organizations in Europe and the United States. That is, most of the members were middle class.<sup>85</sup> Most of them were immigrants who had arrived from Eastern Europe in the years preceding World War I. There were also a very small number of Sephardi women. Less well-off women were apparently too pre-

occupied with mere survival to take much interest in voting rights.<sup>86</sup> Most of the activists had university educations and were well versed in Western culture.<sup>87</sup> Louise Ryan has suggested that the leading role played by educated women in the Irish suffragist movement can be attributed to the fact that, because of gender discrimination, they were unable to find work in their fields. In response, they devoted their energies to fighting for their rights.<sup>88</sup> But this hypothesis does not seem to fit the case of the Yishuv. Most of the Union's members worked outside their homes, were women of means, and enjoyed solid social status. Their wide-ranging professional and political activities went along with their home and family responsibilities. They also established ties with key figures in the Yishuv, often via family connections.

Welt Straus updated her friend Catt on the work of the Union and its eight chapters, in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, Tiberias, Safed, Rishon LeTzion, Petah Tikvah, and Rehovot.<sup>89</sup> According to its bylaws, "every Hebrew woman of eighteen years of age and above who live[d] in Palestine" and agreed with the Union's goals was eligible to join.<sup>90</sup> Alongside their political work, some of the chapters engaged in a variety of other activities, including providing assistance to orphanages, job placement for new immigrants, and night classes.<sup>91</sup> But in her letters Welt Straus clearly took the most pride in the final ratification of women's right to vote. Once that goal was achieved, the Union redoubled its efforts to instill the principle of gender equality in the legal system as a whole, both in rabbinic and civil courts. In 1923, the president estimated that the Union's membership had reached 1,000.<sup>92</sup> The relatively small number of members should not be surprising; sociologists have found that women tend to avoid politics, seeing it as an arena meant for men and dominated by them.<sup>93</sup>

Another aspect of the Union's work was to convey messages from the IWSA to Union members and sympathizers via frequent classes and seminars. The classes taught Yishuv women about the history of the worldwide women's movement and informed them about the legal status of women in other countries.<sup>94</sup> Unlike the militant Women's Social and Political Union in England, the Yishuv's suffragists never engaged in illegal actions or violence. They adhered to Catt's principle of pursuing only lawful channels.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, while they won the support of men, no men's auxiliary organization appeared in the Yishuv of the type founded in other countries. Neither did a secular anti-suffragist movement appear in the Yishuv, as happened in Britain and elsewhere.<sup>96</sup>

## A Women's Political Party: Pro and Con

“Following considerable hesitation,” Azaryahu wrote in her autobiography, “the Union settled on a unique strategy that, at that time, had no precedent in women’s movements around the world. It decided to run, in the elections to the Assembly of Representatives, a slate of its own, independent of other parties and factions.”<sup>97</sup> Such independent partisan activity on the part of women was extremely rare.<sup>98</sup>

The IWSA debated whether women should establish their own parties or work in the ranks of existing ones. The general consensus was that partisan activity was essential. However, given women’s meager experience in party politics, most thought it best that women not involve themselves directly in political parties but rather seek to influence them from outside. This position was subject to withering criticism, however, from the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, who had gained fame with his feminist play *A Doll’s House*. He charged that women who supported existing parties would find themselves electing men who were concerned only about what was good for their party, to the exclusion of feminist principles.<sup>99</sup>

The debate raised another question: Are women fit for politics? This was a question that preoccupied many feminists around the world and was addressed in the monthly newsletter of the IWSA. One writer there explained that women had not yet acquired the necessary aptitude for political work. In the future, however, this writer was certain, they would imbue politics with the most salient female qualities—motherliness, care for others, and empathy. She proposed an original political goal for women—changing the nature of political parties, replacing power with cooperation as their basis for operation.<sup>100</sup>

The Union’s members understood the complexity of the dilemma they faced. According to a journalist writing in *Ha’aretz*, Avraham Ludvipol, the women’s strategy of founding an independent party was tantamount to shooting themselves in the foot. It was unrealistic to think that all the country’s women would agree on a common political agenda.<sup>101</sup> He argued that women should join existing parties and change them from within. But the Tel Aviv Women’s Association rejected the idea categorically. “Women lack complete confidence even in their so-called friends, so why should they place such faith [in men]?” it demanded.<sup>102</sup> The Union recognized that the issue was a complex one and thus viewed favorably the possibility that its

members also run on the slates of other parties. Azaryahu explained, however, that a women's party would have two purposes: it would provide an incentive for unaffiliated women to act in the public political arena, and it would boost the female presence in politics and "indirectly influence parties to grant women candidates safe slots on their slates."<sup>103</sup> This in fact occurred. There was a fundamental paradox inherent in a women's party. On the one hand, there was nothing as effective as a women's organization taking responsibility for the campaign to raise the status of women. On the other hand, some feminists might claim that a separate framework, just for women, was antifeminist by nature.<sup>104</sup>

But such piecemeal entry into politics through other parties seems to have been seen as a stopgap, if we put credence in later accounts by the Union's leaders. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Union, Esther Yeivin wrote that the battle for the vote taught the Yishuv's women "an important lesson . . . not to depend on the support of others."<sup>105</sup> In 1945 she claimed that running a separate slate ensured the election of the greatest number of Union members to the Assembly, in a proportion unparalleled in other countries.<sup>106</sup> Azaryahu explained that women who were elected as candidates of mainstream parties to other parliaments represented a multitude of interests, whereas Yishuv women elected on the women's party slate "were not dependent on any other political body and not subject to party discipline."<sup>107</sup> On the basis of her experience, she asserted that she was "perhaps the happiest member of the Assembly of Representatives, and the one most true to herself."<sup>108</sup>

The Union's strategy received an important endorsement decades later. A study conducted at the end of the twentieth century confirmed the hypothesis that women's political bargaining power is reduced when they do not adopt strategies and political preferences that are uniquely their own.<sup>109</sup> The United Nations Development Programme and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs unambiguously endorsed the importance of women's political parties in 2012. There was no replacement for such frameworks, the organizations stated, as in mixed-sex political organizations women find it difficult to achieve leadership positions.<sup>110</sup>

## The Union and the Labor Movement

The issue of the labor movement's involvement in the campaign to win the vote for women has not yet been properly studied.<sup>111</sup> The Council of Women Workers, founded in March 1921, focused on the immediate needs of female workers, in particular jobs and housing. Most of its members believed that the women's question had been solved in the labor movement. This position was voiced by Devorah Dayan, a farmer from Nahalal and the mother of Moshe Dayan, in the summer of 1923: "It seems to me . . . that the entire campaign for the right of women to work is needless. After all, it all depends on us . . . to the extent that we take upon ourselves as much liberation as we are able."<sup>112</sup> Rachel Yana'it and two of her labor movement colleagues, Sarah Malkhin and Sarah Glicklich, participated in the Union's founding meeting.<sup>113</sup> But with the exception of Ada Fishman, who played a very active role in the struggle in Tel Aviv, most of the members of the Council of Women Workers were largely absent from the suffragist campaign despite their advocacy of equality. Fishman related that Yosef Aharonowitz, the husband of the Hebrew author Devorah Baron and a leader of HaPo'el HaTza'ir, once castigated her: "How long will you keep up with those ladies?" And she responded: "As long as the doors of the Assembly of Representatives are open to you and closed to me, I will go with the dispossessed."<sup>114</sup>

The Council of Women Workers, like most women's labor organizations around the world, preferred to cooperate with socialist movements.<sup>115</sup> Parties of the Left viewed capitalism and the bourgeoisie as the source of evil, and the class struggle was seen by them as contradicting feminist goals.<sup>116</sup> According to socialist women around the world, the women's question would be solved when the proletariat took power, and any separate effort on the part of women was deleterious to the struggle of socialism.<sup>117</sup> In their view, women had most need of the right to work, not the right to legal equality.<sup>118</sup> In contrast, many Jewish female wage laborers in New York supported suffragist organizations and viewed their campaign for the right to vote as one that would improve their living conditions.<sup>119</sup>

A critical article on the Council of Women Workers in *Ha'ishah*, the Yishuv's first women's magazine, charged that it was egotistical for the women of the labor movement to set themselves apart.<sup>120</sup> Another article by the same author rejected the labor movement's tenet that women workers should aspire to be like their male counterparts. "Will this delusion benefit



the nation's health and harmony?" the author asked. She also disparaged the socialist family: "Can this annulment [of the family at kibbutzim, where children slept in children's houses rather than with their parents] really be useful for our nation? . . . They have taken the freedom of women to the ultimate extreme."<sup>121</sup> Unlike the socialists, the women of the Union believed femininity and motherhood to be of equal value to masculinity and essential for the Jewish national revival.

Later, Fishman offered an explanation for the Council of Women Workers' attitude toward the Union. "The country's labor movement devoted itself to the conquest of labor in the countryside and in the city and did not evince much interest in the conquest of basic rights, such as [women's] right to participate in elections to moshavot and city councils," she said.<sup>122</sup> In the labor movement, a woman's standing was measured solely by her success in "conquering labor"—that is, devoting herself to an agricultural or industrial job—; gaining rights via legislation was not a proper goal.<sup>123</sup> Paradoxically, however, in the ostensibly egalitarian labor movement, the public arena was left largely to men.

The members of the Union thought it important to involve other women's organizations in their campaign. They obtained a certain amount of cooperation from the HWO, which focused on charitable work and was supported by Hadassah. Szold, the HWO's famous president and founder of Hadassah, openly supported the Union's aims. A few women were active in both organizations, among them Nellie Straus-Mochenson, Welt Straus's daughter, who served as the HWO's secretary. The HWO engaged in both traditional and innovative women's projects. Its founders felt that "Jerusalem lacks a solid and comprehensive women's organization that is well acquainted with the needs of women and children requiring assistance . . . especially the questions produced by the large [wave of] immigration."<sup>124</sup> A writer for *Ha'ishah* argued that women's organizations were too factionalized, pointing in particular to the women's labor movement, which was perceived as taking its own course in the most extreme way.<sup>125</sup> This go-it-alone attitude was seen to be the product, to a great extent, of a sense of superiority.

## The Union of Jewish Suffragists

The manifestly nationalist character of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights was evident from its bylaws, which declared that the organization's goal was "to achieve equal political and civil rights *for the Hebrew women of the Land of Israel*" (my emphasis).<sup>126</sup> Its slogan—"You shall have a single law and justice for man and woman"—implied equal rights for every human being, but only Jews could be members. The Jewish national collective in Palestine, which then made up only about a tenth of the country's population, largely pursued a policy of isolation from the majority society and raised its feminist banner only within the Yishuv.

But the Palestinian Arab women's movement was largely the same. It arose in tandem with Arab resistance to British colonialism but virtually lacked a feminist agenda.<sup>127</sup> When Catt visited Palestine in 1911, she met with Arab Christian feminists,<sup>128</sup> but they organized politically only a decade later, in response to the Balfour Declaration and the arrival of the British Mandate. Welt Straus believed that they had been prompted by the initiative of the Hebrew suffragists in Jerusalem to found their new organization.<sup>129</sup> In 1919 the Young Arab Women's Revival movement, which sought to spread education among women, was founded,<sup>130</sup> and in 1920 another organization was created that engaged in charitable and political work in the Arab community.<sup>131</sup> Arab women played a role in the disturbances of May 1921, when they engaged in political activity against both the British and the Jewish national movement. They seem not to have had an agenda on gender issues,<sup>132</sup> being elitist organizations that were not joined by people from the poor class—the women of tenant farming families (the *fellahin*), who made up most of the population. The members of this group were largely illiterate and active only in the home and the family.<sup>133</sup> Women in neighboring countries, most notably Egypt, also began organizing after World War I, but their efforts to achieve the right to vote moved slowly. Turkey granted women the vote in 1934, and Egypt did so only in 1956.<sup>134</sup> The women involved were largely members of the middle and upper classes. Most of the prominent figures were women belonging to the families of male leaders of Arab nationalist movements, who gave the women's campaign a largely national character. One Syrian woman declared: "The economic and political situation of my country is so desperate that it is extremely difficult for us women to give our wholehearted energies to the cause of feminism alone."<sup>135</sup> The

tension between nationalism and feminism, evident in the Hebrew women's movement, was even more prominent on the Arab side.

The Union, like the labor organizations, did not accept non-Jews as members, nor did it work together with Arab women's organizations. Again, the Hebrew suffragist movement was not exceptional in this regard. In Australia, for example, where women received the vote in 1903, suffragists of European origin did not fight for the rights of women of other races, including the Aborigines. The latter received full civil rights only in 1993.<sup>136</sup> In Finland, women belonging to the country's Swedish ethnic minority organized and acted separately from those of the Finnish majority.<sup>137</sup> When, in 1905, the union of Sweden and Norway was dissolved, the women's movements of the two countries ceased to cooperate, each putting their national before their gender identities.<sup>138</sup> The same thing happened in the United States, where the suffragist movement sought equality for white women and did not fight for the rights of women of color.<sup>139</sup> This testifies not only to the nature of suffragist movements but also to the conception of citizenship that prevailed in Western societies during the first half of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, European women who visited Palestine were often surprised by the Union's lack of cooperation with Arab women. Millicent Fawcett, leader of Britain's nonmilitant National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, gave a lecture that made a "great impression" at the National Library in Jerusalem about the history of the English women's movement.<sup>140</sup> She spoke at length about the lack of connection between women of the two communities in Palestine. She acknowledged that because the women of the Jewish sector had higher educational achievements and better organizational skills than did Arab women, they had great public influence despite their small numbers. Nevertheless, she saw no reason for estrangement between Jewish and Muslim women, and she went so far as to invite Arab women and translators to her meeting with the Union's members.<sup>141</sup> Like most members of the IWSA, Fawcett displayed an Orientalist attitude about the inferiority of the Muslim population but hoped that Westerners could help lift up the Arabs.

In her memoirs, Fawcett related that such segregation disturbed her. She repeated what she told her hostesses: "You, Jews, have in some countries endured centuries of cruel oppression and persecution. You have endured all with unflinching courage and fortitude: now I hope I may, without incurring your censure, appeal to you to show yourselves as great in prosperity as

you have been in adversity. Enlarge your aims for gaining equality of opportunity for women so that they shall include those not of your race."<sup>142</sup> She said frankly that she believed that Palestine would not be tranquil until the people of the three faiths represented there lived in peace. In an interview she gave after her return to England, Fawcett put the onus for peace on Palestine's women: "We should also strive in Palestine to end the antagonism which exists between the different sections of its population. . . . It [Palestine] will not have truly fulfilled its great destiny in the world until Jew, Mohammedan and Christian are strong enough to set aside their strife and antagonism and unite."<sup>143</sup> Sisterhood had created the IWSA, she noted, and it could also empower the women's movement in Palestine and bring about the liberation of women that all strove for. This belief that women could cast aside their nationalist allegiances and adopt pacifism had become common currency before World War I, but it was largely shattered by events.<sup>144</sup>

Did the Union members not sense that national separatism called into question their organization's egalitarian principles? According to Fawcett, Azaryahu told her that she and her colleagues were interested in working together with Muslim women, but that the latter refused. Fawcett expressed her hope that once enlightenment and education gained a foothold in Arab society, its women would be prepared to cooperate with their Jewish counterparts.<sup>145</sup> In a letter she sent in the spring of 1920 to Catt, Welt Straus stated unequivocally that since Muslim women were treated by their men as slaves, they were underdeveloped and thus not ready to take part in the feminist endeavor.<sup>146</sup>

This segregation was also evident in the refusal by members of the Union to participate in a local interfaith organization. At the end of December 1920, Lady Miriam Samuel—wife of Herbert Samuel, the British High Commissioner in Palestine—founded an umbrella group of all the women's organizations in Palestine, Jewish and non-Jewish, to be called the Palestine Women's Council. Its universalist character was most notable in that it officially permitted the use of all three official languages of the Mandate regime—English, Arabic, and Hebrew—at its meetings.<sup>147</sup> But the Union's members did not join the new body. Azaryahu said the reason was that its agenda was incompatible with the Union's legal and national goals. "Since the goal of our organization is solely political, as its name indicates," she wrote, "there is no reason of any kind for us to participate in the new women's committee that is about to come into being."<sup>148</sup>

The liberal principle of equality for all before the law,<sup>149</sup> the profound feminist consciousness of the Union's women, and their sense of global sisterhood were not enough to induce them to cooperate with local Arab women. At the time women said explicitly what modern scholars have also asserted—that the national cause engendered and shaped the suffragist cause.

### Creating Feminist Consciousness

The right to vote was the primary means of obtaining legal equality for women. But to demand the vote women had to undergo a psychological transformation, to liberate themselves from the “relics of the distant past that make distinctions between men and women.”<sup>150</sup> At the same time, the campaign for legal equality was a means of achieving internal psychological liberation. Accordingly, most struggles for women's rights were pursued through persuasion and not violence. Political scientists have thus found it difficult to classify these feminist campaigns according to their usual criteria because of the lack of aggression displayed by women.<sup>151</sup>

The fight for the vote and the public activity it required were a political rite of passage for the Union's members and supporters.<sup>152</sup> Suffragists all over the world were aware of the need to expand the consciousness of women. Margery Corbett Ashby, the IWSA's second president, said that women who were raised to be obedient, delicate, and sacrificing had to learn to use their rich and diverse abilities.<sup>153</sup> Or, in the words of a Norwegian suffragist, Gina Krog: “It is something far more than a paradox that nothing brings more freedom and independence than just the fight for freedom and independence.”<sup>154</sup> The Jewish League for Woman Suffrage, founded in England in 1912, which also aimed at creating a new Jewish woman, pointed to the need to reshape the perception of women in Judaism and to purge it of Oriental patriarchy.<sup>155</sup>

The Union was aware of the difficulty women had in internalizing the suffragist principle of women being equal to men, but different. Its members thus disseminated knowledge on the subject, in the belief that knowledge was power. Union chapters broadened the education of the Yishuv's women, especially with regard to the legal status of women in the world. They organized lectures and seminars in which members explained the legal status of women according to Jewish law and other legal systems.<sup>156</sup> Chap-

ters also offered lectures for the public at large on legal, historical, and political issues.<sup>157</sup> The speakers included well-known figures such as Yitzhak Nofech, whose wife Miraim, a physician, was a member of the Union; Norman Bentwich, a Jewish British lawyer who worked in the Mandate administration; the Zionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky; the historian Yoseph Klausner; and the writer and journalist Hemda Ben-Yehuda.<sup>158</sup> They also included figures from overseas, such as Mary Fels of Philadelphia, a purchaser of land in the Sharon area, who was invited to speak about her economic operations and as an example for other women.<sup>159</sup>

The Union's ongoing activity was impressive. A pamphlet it put out shows the huge amount of cultural and leisure activity it sponsored. These included Bible classes and rigorous analysis of biblical characters. There were also Hebrew-language classes and talks on the meaning of Jewish holidays.<sup>160</sup> District conventions were occasionally held in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv,<sup>161</sup> at which members could hear updates on Welt Straus's participation in IWSA congresses and on the progress toward gaining rights for women throughout the world.<sup>162</sup> The Union also consented to take part in an initiative to unite all the Yishuv's women's organizations and their supporters in the Diaspora. The preparations for the establishment of a Council of Jewish Women's Organizations began in the spring of 1924 and reached fruition in 1927. Nellie Straus-Mochenson, secretary of the HWO, was the force behind it.<sup>163</sup> The unification was meant to institutionalize communication and cooperation among member organizations and to establish a body that could represent the Yishuv's women before Jewish women's organizations around the world.<sup>164</sup> The independence of each member organization was guaranteed. The goal was "creating harmony in all that the Hebrew woman does and creates in the Land for the good of the Land."<sup>165</sup> The umbrella group's surviving documents show that the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights made a crucial contribution to the new body.<sup>166</sup> Another means of increasing contact among the Yishuv's women was *Ha'ishah*, which was founded by HWO and Hadassah. A trial issue came out in the summer of 1925, including contributions written by Union members.<sup>167</sup> The Union viewed the Council and *Ha'ishah* as important communications channels through which it could bring its message to the public at large.

During its first seven years, the Union's energies were principally directed toward the struggle for the right to vote. Waging a political campaign was a new experience for its members, and their lack of experience

was sometimes evident. But the Hebrew suffragists were not fighting alone. They enjoyed the support, at least in principle, of most of the New Yishuv's leaders, even if those leaders did not see equal rights for women as a sacred principle that could not be deviated from. The next chapter will present the battle's climax, the first elections in which women participated, and the establishment of an Assembly of Representatives in which women sat.



## One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

It will be to our credit that, in proceeding to lay the foundations for our national home, we did not make any distinction between man and woman and in this way recognized the worthy position that Hebrew women deserve.

—Minutes, Assembly of Representatives, 1920

### Prelude: Woman in the Eyes of the Jewish Sages

This chapter will portray the full force of the fight for votes for women up to the spring of 1920, when elections to the first Assembly of Representatives were held. The New Yishuv sought to shape an egalitarian national society “in the most modern spirit,”<sup>1</sup> whereas the Old Yishuv categorically opposed innovation and viewed the Jewish woman in her traditional role as an emblem of an unchanging Haredi society. The New Yishuv very much wanted the Jewish community as a whole to be represented before the British Mandate administration by a democratic and progressive body. Yet its members feared that if women participated in elections to the Assembly, and if women were elected as representatives, the Haredim would boycott it. And if the Assembly could not claim to represent all the Jews of Palestine, its standing would be weak from the outset. Neither the British nor the Jewish Diaspora would view the body as the sole representative of the Yishuv as a whole. Furthermore, the New Yishuv would be seen as rejecting Jewish religion and tradition, and along with them the basis of the Zionist claim to Palestine.<sup>2</sup> This dilemma shaped the eight-year debate over the women’s suffrage issue.

Yoseph Klausner, a firm supporter of the Union of Hebrew Women, acknowledged that “the question of women’s rights . . . is simply the same old and shameful question: are women human beings or not?”<sup>3</sup> The New Yishuv accepted democratic values and viewed women as people possessing equal rights with men. Yet it did not fully assimilate this principle or view its implementation as a top priority. Since those who supported suffrage viewed



women's rights as a given, they wrote little about it. In contrast, Haredim wrote about it at length.

To understand the thinking of these opponents of women's suffrage, it is necessary to present their view of women's roles in the family and society and the debate over whether Jewish religious law permitted or forbade women from voting. Patriarchal in structure, Haredi society placed women in an inferior position. Their role was primarily to serve men. This attitude toward women derived from a traditional view of the female sex's nature and rights and of the halakhic sources relating to women. An understanding of the Haredi position and its context thus requires an examination of Jewish religious attitudes toward women and the halakhic literature on this issue. It is important to keep in mind that Jewish legal authorities over the ages were familiar with non-Jewish literature on the nature of women, and in particular the line of thought that claimed that women were, in the Aristotelian sense, merely formless matter, whereas men were matter with form.

The fundamental question for those who opposed votes for women was whether men and women had the same or different natures. The extreme Haredi position was that women were fundamentally different from men. Some Haredim explained that the essential difference of women was imprinted on their bodies, which showed that they were incomplete creations until they were engaged in sexual relations. Women were thus lesser beings and had no right to vote.<sup>4</sup>

There was, however, a more moderate Haredi view, according to which men and women were of the same essential nature, but on different levels and with different functions. Woman was not "a being in and of herself . . . but rather one of his [man's] ribs." Furthermore, "man and woman are equal partners" but have entirely different roles. Men are responsible for public activity, whereas women are responsible for the home and are not fit for public work. Some of those who took this view believed that "there is indeed wisdom and knowledge and discernment among women. And there were and are today among them a small number of exemplary individuals."<sup>5</sup> But they added that even the achievements of such exceptional women could not aspire to the level of men's achievements.

A third approach was taken by more moderate Haredim. They argued that men and women were of the same nature,<sup>6</sup> both being "creatures created at [God's] bidding and in his image."<sup>7</sup> They maintained that "God has also im-

bued [women] with judgment, discernment, and intelligence.<sup>98</sup> In this view, the reason for women's inferior social status throughout history was due to the fact that they had been denied education, not because of any inborn limitation.<sup>9</sup> This was a view not limited to religious Jews—in fact, it was shared by feminists, who also needed to explain why women had, throughout history, been for the most part mothers and housekeepers rather than political leaders and intellectuals. For example, Rachel Yana'it suggested that women's lower social standing was due to motherhood, which placed unique burdens on them.<sup>10</sup> Women thus faced substantial obstacles to making contributions to intellectual and cultural life, obstacles that men did not need to overcome.<sup>11</sup> Yana'it herself did not see herself as a mother but rather as a Zionist pioneer. When she wrote this, Yana'it was still single and about thirty years old. Eventually she would marry her close friend Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, who had recently been deported from Palestine and forbidden to ever return.<sup>12</sup> But she firmly believed that women could achieve true redemption by living a socialist life of labor in Palestine.

Those who viewed women as having a different or lesser nature generally agreed that women had negative inborn traits. Licentiousness was often cited as a characteristic female trait, and any encounter between men and women was perceived as opening the door to sexual immorality. However, rabbis who were aware of women's intellectual capacities opposed this characterization, asking whether it was conceivable that Jews could be so wanton. How could one “suspect that every Jewish person is devoid of wisdom and that sexual urges lie in wait for them, and that their prayer is full of evil thoughts and that an encounter with a woman is like a fire in the chaff?”<sup>13</sup> Others pointed out that if this were true, how could women walk on the same street or patronize the same store as men?<sup>14</sup> Other traits that many people attributed to women were frivolousness, oversensitivity, and self-righteousness. But even those who maligned women admitted that they were devoted to their homes and families. Such stereotypical views seem to have been well rooted in male consciousness.

In opposition to these views, some of the rabbis who granted that women had higher natures grounded their claims on the fact that a number of women had played leadership roles in Jewish history—Miriam, the sister of Moses; the prophetess Deborah; and the Hasmonean Queen Salome Alexandra, to name a few. True, halakhic authorities often lowered these women's standing by stressing their flaws, but the advocates of

women retorted: “It is false to say that ‘there is no wisdom for leadership in women.’ . . . Women have a superior and enormous power to do great things as political leaders, both internally and externally.”<sup>15</sup>

### The Halakhic Debate

Halakhic authorities and Jewish thinkers first addressed the topic of women’s voting only around the end of the nineteenth century, when the issue came to the fore in Western society. Jewish jurisprudence is based on the explication of traditional texts—the Bible, Talmud, the works of Talmudic commentators, and the rulings of halakhic authorities over the generations.<sup>16</sup> But in fact, the halakhic debate over women’s right to vote was not based only on such exegesis. Rabbis in the Yishuv and the Diaspora also considered issues that stood partly or entirely outside the bounds of Jewish religious law. The positions they took have been preserved in the records of meetings, newspaper articles, broadsides announcing rabbinic rulings and signed by numerous authorities, and booklets disseminated among the public at large. Most of the halakhic debates took place during the first two years of the controversy—that is, up until the first elections in 1920.

In fact, the rabbis who rejected women’s right to vote generally spoke in a clear and unambiguous voice. They based their rulings largely on a ruling of Maimonides, perhaps the greatest of the medieval Jewish authorities. In his Jewish legal compendium *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides ruled that “a woman is not to be placed among the kings . . . and the same of all leadership positions in Israel.”<sup>17</sup> But this ruling did not really address the debate in the Yishuv, which had to do with democratic elections to an Assembly of Representatives, not the crowning of a sovereign queen.<sup>18</sup> Elections as a means of choosing a people’s leaders are, after all, a social innovation of the nineteenth century and did not exist in Maimonides’s time. As a result, the question was not addressed in the classical halakhic literature, or in the Mishnah or Talmud. Notably, the Haredim who opposed granting women these rights and thus avoided the complication of men and women being together, nevertheless participated in assemblies and discussions in which women took part, demonstrating by their actions that there was no obvious halakhic prohibition on men and women participating together in politics.<sup>19</sup> This served as evidence that women’s suffrage was not a purely halakhic question and was also a classic example of halakhic pluralism.<sup>20</sup>

As noted, the rabbis were explicit in stating that their opposition to granting women the vote was based in part on meta-halakhic and extra-halakhic considerations. In their contacts with the New Yishuv, Haredi rabbis argued that “a right to vote for women is opposed to the Hebrew nation’s religiosity and mores,”<sup>21</sup> or that it was detrimental to the qualities of Jewish women and thus constituted “a great and profound spiritual-psychological impediment.”<sup>22</sup> Another recurring claim was that the denial of the vote to women derived from a fear that participation in elections would compromise their modesty. The modesty of Jewish women was seen as an extremely important value: “A single hidden grace glows in beauty and splendor in the Jewish store of values, the virtue of modesty.”<sup>23</sup> But their opponents rejected out of hand the idea that any woman’s modesty would be compromised by voting. The most prominent voice in this regard was that of Rabbi Chaim Hirschensohn, a Yishuv native who was educated and brought up in Jerusalem and then emigrated to New Jersey before World War I. “And we have not found anywhere a prohibition against men and women coming into contact in public, at a time when there is no issue of being alone together involved,” he wrote.<sup>24</sup> He also argued that there was no halakhic basis for prohibiting a man from conversing with a woman.<sup>25</sup> He spoke openly of his close relations and learned conversations with his educated wife, Chava, also a native of Jerusalem.

Another point raised against giving women the vote was that doing so would breach the worldwide social order. Given the reports of the violence involved in the campaign for women’s suffrage in Britain, some Haredim feared that giving women the vote in the Yishuv would undermine public order. They suggested that the gentile nations were beginning to regret having granted the vote to women. “We can see how this has upset public order and caused an uproar and elements of disorder into family life,” a Haredi delegate to the Third Constituent Assembly declared.<sup>26</sup> Around the world, both men and women voiced fears that women’s involvement in the public sphere would infringe on their duties to their families. In Massachusetts, at the end of the nineteenth century, Catholic leaders claimed that voting would be detrimental to women’s purity, honor, and moral sway over their families. Furthermore, it was a violation of natural law, which mandated distinct gender roles.<sup>27</sup> In Australia, the second country in the world to grant women the vote, opponents argued that women should devote their lives solely to their most important missions, caring for their homes and children.<sup>28</sup> In Ireland,

the Catholic clergy accused suffragists of neglecting their children.<sup>29</sup> The anti-suffragist movements that arose on both sides of the Atlantic argued principally that feminine nature and the existing social order needed protection.<sup>30</sup> In the United States, opponents argued that each sex should stick to its specific tasks.<sup>31</sup> Similar arguments were made in the Jewish British community, where it was charged that the women's movement was causing harm not only to the home and family but also to feminine character and morality.<sup>32</sup> Notably, Catholic countries like France, Italy, and Belgium were generally the slowest to grant women the vote, with Ireland being the exception.<sup>33</sup> Throughout the world religious communities generally opposed any change in the status of women.<sup>34</sup>

The voices of the naysayers were strident and unequivocal. In contrast, rabbis and religious leaders who supported women's suffrage, most of them affiliated with Mizrahi, often spoke hesitantly, or so softly that they were barely heard. Ultimately, they wanted to maintain a unified front with the Haredim. The most common argument they made was that no rigorous halakhic case could be made for prohibiting women from voting. Rabbi Yehuda Leib Fishman, Mizrahi's leader in the Yishuv, acknowledged that his movement's initial opposition to women's suffrage had been politically rather than halakhically motivated.<sup>35</sup> Rabbi Hirschensohn, who corresponded voluminously with the rabbis of Jerusalem, wrote from New Jersey: "The proscribers who proscribe what is permitted on the grounds that it is forbidden are [as bad as] those who permit the forbidden."<sup>36</sup> A speaker at the World Mizrahi Convention held in 1919 in Poland, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Zlotnik, declared explicitly that the right to determine the fate of the nation could not be withheld from half its members: "We have no moral basis for withholding from women the right to voice their opinions on the issues before the community and public."<sup>37</sup> In other words, denying the vote to women was a moral failing.<sup>38</sup>

In 1940, some fifteen years after this debate, Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uzi'el, then the Sephardi chief rabbi of Palestine, issued a rigorous *responsum* in which he permitted women to vote. Recall that he had originally, at the Second Constituent Assembly in the summer of 1918, declared the participation of women in elections to be forbidden by Torah law.<sup>39</sup> In fact, he had begun to regret his prohibition not long after making it.<sup>40</sup> He originally drafted his ruling permitting the vote for women in the 1920s, but he delayed making it public.<sup>41</sup> His ruling remains to this day the most-cited one

on the issue.<sup>42</sup> According to Rabbi Uzi`el, in a democratic regime, citizens—both men and women—are required to obey the law on the basis of their status as participants in government. This being the case, women cannot be expected to obey the law if they are not allowed to participate in government. He asked: “And how can you have it both ways, imposing on them the duty to obey the people’s chosen representatives while depriving them of the right to choose [those representatives]?”<sup>43</sup> Simply put, in a democratic regime, the vote cannot be denied to women.

Klausner suggested that giving the vote to women was one way of atoning for Judaism’s past sins against women, in particular the refusal to allow them to engage in religious studies. This conservative position had, he said, “taken cruel vengeance on Judaism.” Furthermore, one great merit of the national movement was that it had begun to make up for this injustice. “In the entire Zionist Organization,” he wrote, “women have been placed on equal standing with men in every respect.”<sup>44</sup> Integrating women into the political system was seen by many as not only a political matter but also as a way of repairing Jewish culture.

#### Rabbi Kook: Forbidden on Halakhic, National, and Family Grounds

Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook moved to Palestine in 1904 and served for ten years as the rabbi of the Jewish community of Jaffa and the moshavot. A bold and respected thinker, kabbalist, and sharp-minded halakhic authority, he gained the respect and admiration of a wide range of Jews. Caught in Europe when World War I broke out, he was able to return to Palestine only in the summer of 1919. At that time he was named chief Ashkenazi rabbi of Jerusalem, but his reception in that city was stormy. The zealots of the Old Yishuv, led by Rabbis Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld and Yehoshua Leib Diskin, refused to accept his authority. According to Avinoam Rosenak’s biography of Kook, “in the Haredi view, his open sympathy for those eaters of forbidden foods, the pioneers of the Second Aliyah, and his dreams of the Jewish people’s redemption through the heretical Zionist movement were sufficient cause to oppose him.”<sup>45</sup> In 1921 Kook was appointed chief rabbi of the entire Ashkenazi community in Palestine and became a spiritual inspiration for the religious Zionists of his generation and, even more so, of the generations that followed. He became, as Rosenak writes, “a religious Zionist culture hero.”<sup>46</sup>

When Kook returned to Palestine he became a new and particularly significant voice in the debate over women's suffrage, addressing the issue in a responsum he wrote to a question submitted to him by the Mizrahi movement in September 1919.<sup>47</sup> The religious Zionists viewed Kook as a halakhic authority attuned to the new winds blowing in the religious public sphere and hoped that a ruling from him would end the ongoing debate over the issue in their camp.<sup>48</sup> To the disappointment of the movement's moderates, however, he did not provide them with a halakhic sanction for women's participation in politics. On the contrary, he ruled categorically that women should not be allowed to vote and stated unambiguously that "it is against the law."<sup>49</sup> According to him, women were forbidden to vote by both the written and oral Torah.

Kook's ruling undoubtedly emerged from his view of women, who he believed were essentially different from men. "The difference between men and women is profound and categorical," he wrote.<sup>50</sup> The "difference between man and woman is a metaphysical-essential one," he wrote elsewhere.<sup>51</sup> Man is "the actor, the inscriber, the conqueror, the subduer," while woman is the "imprinted on, the acted upon, the inscribed upon, the vanquished, and the subdued."<sup>52</sup> He maintained that women were intellectually inferior to men, but emphasized often that women were superior emotionally.<sup>53</sup> He wondered at woman's emotional capabilities, claiming that "she can comprehend well with emotion that which man comprehends with mind."<sup>54</sup>

Kook did not cite only halakhic justifications for his ruling. He also advanced social, cultural, and political arguments. Women, he argued, were important as educators of the nation, and for their families. "And who knows the splendor of family life better than the woman of valor, of good mind, who is the foundation of the home?" he asked.<sup>55</sup> Prohibiting women from voting was also for the good of the nation. The special moral character of the Jewish people could be maintained only if Jewish women focused on raising their families and imparting Jewish traditions to their children, in keeping with the fundamental nature of motherhood and family life.<sup>56</sup> Women were charged with preserving the Jewish nation and ensuring its uniqueness among the nations of the world. Kook waxed eloquent on the importance of the Jewish family.<sup>57</sup> Unlike women in non-Jewish societies, he claimed, Jewish women were accorded great respect in their homes, and their social standing was immeasurably higher than that of gentile women. Thus, they had no need of the vote.

But prohibiting women from voting was also politically advantageous. The Balfour Declaration was evidence that the nations of the world recognized the Jewish people's claim to the Land of Israel on the basis of its biblical heritage. Yet that very heritage forbade women to vote. Women's participation in elections, Kook maintained, would thus weaken the Jewish people's claim to their ancestral land.<sup>58</sup> He spoke not just to observant Jews but to the entire Zionist public, "those for whom the good of the nation is decisive," as well as to those Jews "whose gaze is primarily directed at moral ideals."<sup>59</sup> He termed granting the vote to women a "betrayal."<sup>60</sup>

Kook's thinking on the issue can be found in his letters and the writings he published in a variety of forums. His rulings on women's suffrage were pasted up on billboards in the streets of Jerusalem.<sup>61</sup> They were highly influential,<sup>62</sup> catalyzing debates and discussions sponsored by Mizrahi throughout the country. On the basis of his position, Mizrahi announced that it would not participate in the elections to the Assembly of Representatives if women were given the vote.<sup>63</sup>

#### Postponements, Threats, and Compromise Proposals

Elections to the Assembly of Representatives were announced in the fall of 1919 by newspaper advertisements.<sup>64</sup> It was like a breath of fresh air. The repeated postponements of the elections seem to have reached an end. Ya'akov and Sarah Thon went together to see whether the Zion Cinema in downtown Jerusalem could serve as a venue for the Assembly's sessions. But then the Haredim and Mizrahi announced that they would boycott the poll, and they were put off once again.<sup>65</sup> Zionist leaders Chaim Weizmann and Menachem Ussishkin, who were visiting Palestine at the time, also supported a further delay. Ussishkin was frank: "The founding assembly requires juridical validity or moral force; it seems possible that the assembly you want to organize will have neither. It is thus better that it not convene at all. We insist on waiting until the situation clarifies."<sup>66</sup> Weizmann, who in 1921 became the president of the Zionist Organization, agreed.<sup>67</sup>

The repeated deferments increased the uncertainty that pervaded the Yishuv as it faced the harsh conduct of the British military government. Contrary to expectations, the authorities halted settlement activity, forbade the entry of Jewish immigrants, and muddied the political situation. The Yishuv grew dejected, apathetic, and frustrated.<sup>68</sup> David Ben-Gurion



viewed the postponements as a symptom of anarchy and demoralization.<sup>69</sup> Ze'ev Jabotinsky, who had founded the Zion Mule Corps in which men of the Yishuv had served in the British army during the war, sent a letter to the Provisional Committee stressing the urgency of establishing a formal Yishuv organization, not only because the Yishuv required it, but also because such an institution would be a vital symbol for the Jews of the Diaspora.<sup>70</sup>

The dispute over women's right to vote had by this time become tiresome. With no solution in the offing, the Haredim cited procedural reasons why the provisions providing for women's suffrage, passed by the Third Constituent Assembly and the Provisional Committee, lacked legal force. These institutions, they argued, were not elected bodies and thus did not have the authority to decide how the elections would be conducted. Since their demands had not been met, they announced, they would split the Yishuv and found an assembly of their own, one that would operate "in the spirit of our holy Torah."<sup>71</sup> Kook's ruling strengthened their position.

One idea offered for breaking the impasse was holding a referendum on women's right to vote. The same proposal had been floated by opponents of women's suffrage in a number of places around the world, and when such polls were held they generally rejected votes for women.<sup>72</sup> Mizrahi was the first to suggest adopting the idea in the hope that such a referendum would resolve the issue once and for all—most likely by denying women the vote.<sup>73</sup> The Haredim supported the suggestion, believing that a majority of the Yishuv public opposed women's suffrage, but they refused to allow women to vote in the referendum, and the suggestion was voted down.<sup>74</sup> Avraham Lev, a member of Mizrahi, asserted that if it turned out that a majority of the public supported giving women the vote, "even the extreme rabbis will take that into account."<sup>75</sup> But the labor parties condemned the proposal and asked pointedly how a halakhic issue could be resolved by majority vote.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, they did not reject it out of hand, even though it threatened to disenfranchise women.

The public received the further delay with a yawn, while one newspaper reported in October 1919 that "only women are taking any interest in the Assembly of Representatives."<sup>77</sup> The repeated rescheduling of election day dissipated the original enthusiasm that the Yishuv had displayed at the idea of having its own parliament. Even the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights, which had been founded in Jerusalem just two months before, offered no real response. Each successive delay enhanced the power of the

Haredim and seriously weakened the position of the helpless organizers of the elections.<sup>78</sup> At this point the elections were put off for a longer time than they had been previously, from the fall of 1919 to the spring of 1920. During the intervening months Ussishkin had been appointed to head the Zionist Commission, a body that served in a consultative role, liaising between the Zionist organization, the Yishuv, and the British administration. He established Jerusalem as the Yishuv's administrative center, transferring the offices of the Provisional Committee to that city from Jaffa. The move was meant in part to unify the Old and New Yishuv into a single polity.<sup>79</sup>

#### From Dejection to Reawakening: The Elections Approach

The dejection with which the postponement of the elections was initially greeted quickly turned to despair. "Without an organization, we are lost," one New Yishuv leader declared.<sup>80</sup> The Provisional Committee, responsible for conducting the elections, was perceived as a failure.<sup>81</sup> Ya'akov Thon, its dedicated chairman, admitted that the Yishuv was facing a profound internal crisis, a post-traumatic consequence of the war.<sup>82</sup> Moshe Smilansky claimed that the Yishuv was suffering from a paralysis brought on by the sheer size of the task it faced.<sup>83</sup> The public mood grew even worse following a round of Jewish-Arab violence in the Upper Galilee at the end of the winter of 1920.<sup>84</sup> On March 1 of that year, six men and two women were killed by Bedouin irregulars while defending Tel Hai, a Jewish settlement in the Upper Galilee. The killings electrified the Yishuv and prompted the Provisional Committee to gird its loins and vigorously promote the elections.<sup>85</sup> Ussishkin and Weizmann acceded and announced that they supported re-scheduling the poll.<sup>86</sup>

The new date set for the elections, April 19, 1920, was termed final, with the Assembly scheduled to convene on May 6.<sup>87</sup> The timing was not coordinated with the Haredim, but the Mizrahi representative on the Provisional Committee endorsed the decision and declared that he and his movement would put all their efforts into establishing an elected Yishuv leadership.<sup>88</sup> Soon thereafter, on April 4, when the Jews' Pesach holiday coincided with the Muslim Nebi Musa celebration in Jerusalem, an Arab mob attacked Jews in Jerusalem. This bloody incident once again shocked the Yishuv out of its lethargy.<sup>89</sup> A broadside issued by the Provisional Committee called on the

public to stand “like an iron wall to defend our positions in the Land. . . . To be united and strong within and without.”<sup>90</sup> Ussishkin and Weizmann called on the Jewish public to vote in the elections.<sup>91</sup> *Do’ar Hayom* made a similar appeal: “Take part in the elections! Spread through the people the recognition of the importance of the elections! Arrange and organize them! Away with apathy! Away with negligence!”<sup>92</sup>

The Haredim refused to cooperate.<sup>93</sup> The extremist camp, led by Rabbi Sonnenfeld and Diskin, handed out leaflets announcing their unyielding opposition to the elections.<sup>94</sup> The United Rabbinic Committee of Jerusalem voiced its displeasure with the new decision. Rabbi Kook again issued a responsum reiterating his halakhic, social, and moral arguments against allowing women to vote and appealed to the leaders of the New Yishuv to give up their demand so as “to remove the reason preventing the greater majority of the Jewish public in the Land of Israel from participating in the Assembly.”<sup>95</sup> Kook remained adamant that the majority of the country’s Jews opposed women’s suffrage. He was backed by a rabbinic assembly that convened in Jerusalem on April 14, 1920, which declared its categorical opposition to the planned Assembly of Representatives.<sup>96</sup>

Mizrachi continued to zigzag. It appealed to the Jewish public, both men and women, to vote for its slate, promising to work in the new Assembly to revoke women’s right to vote. It was the only way to decide the issue once and for all, the party maintained. Mizrahi viewed its participation in the elections as a “sacred duty,” declaring that “it is forbidden for anyone to remain at home, Torah scholars should lay down their books and craftsmen their work, and the same with women.”<sup>97</sup> Paradoxically, Zionist religious leaders who opposed women’s right to vote instructed women in their camp to violate the halakhic stricture against voting so as to elect delegates to the Assembly who would work to revoke women’s right to vote. Other Mizrahi leaders offered another justification for participating in the elections—their concern that the Yishuv needed to establish governing institutions.<sup>98</sup>

The members of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights were pleased with the decision to go ahead with the elections. In a statement published in *Ha’arets*, they declared that women’s participation in this poll was the first step toward achieving their goal of “fully equal rights.”<sup>99</sup> The Union’s Jaffa and Tel Aviv chapter issued its own call to the women of the Yishuv: “Take part in the elections! . . . Know that every vote given to can-

didates of our own brings closer the realization of our goals.”<sup>100</sup> The Union hoped that the election of women delegates would ensure the Assembly’s codification of women’s right to vote.

### The Elections

Three weeks prior to the elections, on March 27, Sarah Thon died at the age of only thirty-nine. The only woman to serve as a voting member of the Provisional Committee, Thon had been on her deathbed throughout the winter. She left her distraught husband, Ya’akov, and three small children.<sup>101</sup> Her son Rafi, who was four years old at the time, published a biography of his mother seventy-six years later with the title *The Struggle for Equal Rights for Women*. In his book, he posed some pointed questions about her: “Who was Sarah Thon? Have I succeeded in constructing for myself the mother whom I missed my entire life . . . ? Have I composed the figure of this woman, Sarah Thon, with her character, her virtues and her deficiencies?”<sup>102</sup> He answered his own questions: “Sarah Thon devoted her entire life to public work, even though she sensed that in doing so she was neglecting her children and not providing them with the care, education, and love that they deserved.”<sup>103</sup> We can get a sense of her character from her letters, which are preserved in the Central Zionist Archives. In January 1916, already ill and in pain and fearing that death was not far off, she sent her husband Ya’akov a passionate love letter in which she confessed her shortcomings as a mother. “I want the children not to forget me entirely,” she declared. “I have certainly been too hard on them all too often, and not gentle enough. How much can I indict myself?”<sup>104</sup> Mordechai Ben-Hillel HaCohen, a devoted family friend, eulogized her. “The delicacy of a woman and the clear logic of an experienced functionary mixed harmoniously in the soul of Mrs. Sarah Thon,” he declared, “and this is what gave a special sparkle to her public work.”<sup>105</sup> Did Thon create the mold for women political leaders in the Yishuv and state of Israel? For her contemporaries, the most important traits a female politician needed were masculine ones.

Rafi Thon notes that the memoir published by his mother’s contemporary, Sarah Azaryahu, entirely ignores his mother’s personality and work. “There can be no doubt that [Azaryahu] knew [my mother],” he writes. “I have no way of knowing whether this failure to mention her is due to disagreements between them or forgetfulness.”<sup>106</sup> Perhaps it was Thon’s

acceptance of the proposal that women's suffrage be put off temporarily that angered Azarayahu and led her to write Thon out of her chronicle. But there could be another explanation, one found in a eulogy written by one of Thon's friends: "She was not always easy to work with, because for her the main thing was to achieve her goals over all opposition. She did not cooperate with others; she worked alone."<sup>107</sup> We may presume that there was no little tension among the Union's members, as is often the case in political organizations. Sisterhood may be an idea, but ideological differences, personal rivalries, loathing, and jealousy can make work difficult.<sup>108</sup>

Nevertheless, Thon was not forgotten by the rest of her colleagues in the Union. A year after her death they held a memorial evening in which they commended her public labors.<sup>109</sup> Her friends, led by Ada Fishman, published a memorial booklet marking her hard work for the Yishuv's women.<sup>110</sup> Fishman felt particularly strong feelings of friendship with Thon. "I loved her as a daughter loves her mother, I respected her like a little sister respects her older sister. . . . At her death I personally lost a person who was very, very close to me," she said.<sup>111</sup> The mourning notices put out following Thon's death indubitably testify not only to the high position held by her husband, Ya'akov, but also to the great esteem in which she was held for her charitable and political work. Memorial statements were issued by the Provisional Committee, the Zionist Commission, the Hebrew Magistrates Court, the Teachers' Committee, Women's Associations, and many others. The Zionist Commission referred to Thon as "the Hebrew woman who devoted her entire life to the rebirth of our people in our Land."<sup>112</sup> Thon lived long enough to see her primary goal, the elections, virtually achieved, even if she did not live long enough to vote in them.<sup>113</sup> When the Assembly of Representatives first convened half a year after Thon's death, she was officially commemorated along with the martyrs who had died in the Galilee and Jerusalem.<sup>114</sup>

Alongside the mourning notices, newspapers called on their readers to vote in the elections.<sup>115</sup> An editorial in the daily *Ha'arets* cried: "Jews! To the polling stations! . . . Neither man nor woman living in our land may lock himself up at home on election day. Let nothing stop you . . . to the polling stations, to the elections!"<sup>116</sup> But shortly before the elections, there were also calls for thwarting the participation of women. A writer in *Do'ar Hayom* called on his readers not to vote for women: "You have a duty to make this attempt this time and to give up the right of a woman to be elected."<sup>117</sup>

The Nebi Musa riots of early April further exacerbated tensions in the

Yishuv. Six Jews were killed, some two hundred were injured, women were raped, and synagogues were put to the torch.<sup>118</sup> The entire city was in shock. On election day, April 19, the British military regime sentenced Jabotinsky to fifteen years at hard labor and expulsion from the country, punishment for his organization of a Jewish self-defense group to help beleaguered Jews. The polling day in Jerusalem was postponed but, despite the riots, the elections were held on the set date in the rest of the country.

On April 20 a protest strike was declared by the Jews of Jerusalem. Schools, religious seminaries, stores, and public institutions closed.<sup>119</sup> A week later, on April 26, the community observed a day of fasting and mourning, set jointly by the Provisional Committee and the city's rabbis. But the solemn atmosphere of that morning dissolved, as if by magic, when the news arrived that the San Remo conference had resolved to grant a League of Nations mandate for Palestine to the British, and that the charter of the mandate would incorporate the Balfour Declaration's commitment to establishing a Jewish national home.<sup>120</sup> A sense of elation ran through the Yishuv and seems to have prompted a decision to hold elections in Jerusalem for the Assembly of Representatives on May 3, 1920. Furthermore, the elections would be conducted according to a special arrangement. Haredi men would be allowed to vote at men-only polling stations, and each man would be given two votes, one for himself and one for his wife. The surviving documentation does not record whether or how the Union of Hebrew Women reacted to this provision, and we therefore do not know what position they took in response to it.

This solution, unique in Palestine and in the world, garnered surprising support. Kook added his signature to a proclamation calling on all Jews to vote at the Haredi polling stations.<sup>121</sup> Smilansky celebrated the decision to permit Haredim to vote separately.<sup>122</sup> But the more extreme segments of the Haredi public refused to accept the compromise. Rabbis Diskin and Sonnenfeld once again announced their opposition.<sup>123</sup> Ostensibly, at least, the compromise seemed to signal that the less radical part of the Haredi public was prepared to cooperate with the leaders of the New Yishuv. However, the separate men's polling places demonstrated the Haredi intention of remaining a separate entity. Rabbi Fishman indicated that the Haredi representatives who were so elected would be willing to take up their seats in the new body only after it had annulled the decision permitting women to be elected as delegates.<sup>124</sup> The upshot of the compromise was that these first elections

were not fully democratic, and that the Haredim defined themselves as a community to which the principle of gender equality did not apply.

On election day the Haredi polling stations were a huge attraction for both supporters and opponents of women's suffrage. Crowds gathered to watch the Haredim participating in Yishuvwide elections. Pandemonium reigned in Me'ah She'arim, the neighborhood at the heart of the Haredi community. "Anyone who did not see what they did in Me'ah She'arim has never really seen a disgusting scene," Yehoshua Radler Feldman, the Mizrahi secretary, wrote. "To vote there was to take your life into your hands."<sup>125</sup> Partisans on both sides of the debate harangued voters, some calling on them to go to vote at an unsegregated polling station and others telling them not to vote at all. Opponents of the vote accused voters of being sacrilegious and told them that they had "no part in the Torah of Moses and Israel."<sup>126</sup> Shouts in Yiddish of "*Es iz asur!*" (It is forbidden) rang through the neighborhood's streets.<sup>127</sup>

Some 22,200 people voted, constituting 77 percent of the Yishuv's eligible voters.<sup>128</sup> The high turnout demonstrated that a large majority of the Yishuv wanted to take part in creating the Yishuv's autonomous self-governing body. As in Israel today, the elections were conducted on a proportional basis, with voters choosing a party slate rather than individual candidates. The two labor parties, both of which supported women's right to vote, together won more than a third (111 out of 314) of the seats in the Assembly of Representatives, making them the largest bloc. The liberal-bourgeois bloc of nine parties, one of which was the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights, gained 63 seats, nearly 20 percent of the total.<sup>129</sup> Six ethnic parties together won a quarter of the seats, 78 in number. The religious bloc, made up of three parties, had 62 delegates, nearly a fifth.<sup>130</sup> In these first-ever Yishuvwide democratic elections, Zionist parties that supported women's integration into Jewish national institutions won a clear majority of 55 percent of the vote. But the large number of parties that won seats demonstrated that the Yishuv was highly fragmented into small sectors that found it difficult to cooperate with each other.<sup>131</sup>

Only fourteen women, a mere 4.5 percent of the total number of delegates, won seats in the Assembly. Half of those were members of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights—five who were elected on the Union slate, which received about 600 votes, and two who were elected on other slates. The other seven women, elected on labor party slates, were

not Union members.<sup>132</sup> The existence of a Union faction of seven delegates, committed to pursuing equal rights as a top priority, ensured that women's issues would receive attention in the new body. Most importantly, they disproved the ominous prophecies about what would happen if women ran on their own. It was the first important step toward establishing the political rights of the Hebrew woman.

The members of the Union were proud of their achievement.<sup>133</sup> But contemporary press reports barely mentioned it, or the number of women elected to the new body. Azaryahu, who won a seat on the Liberals list, claimed that the Union had doubled the number of women elected. Furthermore, she noted that the Union's decision to run its own slate had induced other parties to include women on their slates. Furthermore, the fact that the Union was not affiliated with any of the other parties meant that it could focus all its efforts on women's rights.<sup>134</sup> But the elections in and of themselves did not decide the issue of women's suffrage. The issue would have to be taken up by the Assembly of Representatives.

#### The Assembly of Representatives, First Session

The election results did not give any pause to the opponents of women's suffrage. Two days after the polls in Jerusalem closed, Rabbi Kook declared: "We will not yield on the central principles of our lives."<sup>135</sup> In this he spoke for the Haredim and for those of Mizrahi who refused to accept their loss and the poll's results as proof that their views were those of a small minority of the Yishuv. On top of this, the British military regime issued an order forbidding the Assembly to convene and halting all the preparations for it. As a result, the Provisional Committee, which had hoped to disband with the election of the Assembly, had to continue to conduct the Yishuv's affairs. It sent a protest to London, demanding that the elected body be permitted to meet, but to no avail. The ban was finally revoked at the beginning of July, when the military handed over authority to High Commissioner Sir Herbert Samuel. Samuel, a Jewish British politician and diplomat, had served as a member of Parliament and cabinet minister. Known for his Zionist sympathies, he decreed that the Assembly could convene.<sup>136</sup> The Yishuv viewed Samuel's assumption of his post in messianic terms. The country's Jews were elated when the high commissioner pardoned Jabotinsky and others who had been involved in the Yishuv's self-defense activities. They were even



more ecstatic at the surge in Jewish immigration. There was an intoxicating sense that a new and hopeful era had arrived.<sup>137</sup>

Half a year after the elections, on October 7, 1920, the Assembly of Representatives convened in the auditorium of the Alliance Israel school in Jerusalem, despite threats of boycott from several quarters, with nearly all the delegates in attendance.<sup>138</sup> Demonstratively, Mizrahi's delegates took their seats only at the end of the first day, and the Haredim not until the third day.<sup>139</sup> The absences hardly affected the celebratory atmosphere. The press waxed eloquent, with one newspaper declaring it was "a glorious and wonderful event in our history."<sup>140</sup> Ya'akov Thon gave the keynote speech. "This is the first step," he proclaimed, "toward the establishment of the national home."<sup>141</sup> The Yishuv as a whole seems to have felt that the Assembly of Representatives was the foundation on which the Jewish people's national and cultural independence would be built.<sup>142</sup>

*Ha'aretz* offered a detailed portrait of the plenum. The walls of the auditorium, adorned with floral ornaments, were hung with portraits of the great men of the Zionist movement—Herzl, Weizmann, Nahum Sokolow, and Ussishkin (who was in attendance), as well as those of the heroes of Jewish self-defense, including Jabotinsky and the fallen hero of Tel Hai, Joseph Trumpeldor. Mounted alongside these were the banners of the twelve tribes of ancient Israel, the Union Jack, and the Jewish national flag. The 300 delegates proudly filled the room. The newspaper described at length their chairs, the podium, and the platform on which the Assembly presidium sat. It looked, the newspaper said, like a European parliament. The hall was adorned with a quotation from the prophetic book of Zechariah (8:16): "Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates."<sup>143</sup> Honored guests were also a notable presence, among them Jerusalem's mayor, Raghib Nashashibi, who warmly welcomed the Assembly. One journalist wrote regretfully, however, that some absences were also notable, in particular those of High Commissioner Samuel and Zionist leaders Weizmann and Sokolow, although all had sent greetings.<sup>144</sup> Samuel declared, in a statement he issued following the Assembly session that, in accordance with the Mandate's law, the British government would recognize the Assembly of Representatives as long as it represented most of the country's Jewish population and as long as it dealt only with internal community matters.<sup>145</sup>

Since the women's presence in the Assembly was sparse, it was easy for their presence not to stand out. A writer for *Ha'aretz* remarked: "The

women, the reason of reasons for the war that the Haredim started over the Assembly of Representatives, are very few in number and are in no way evident.”<sup>146</sup> Between the lines, he seemed to be saying that the great ado over women’s rights had been about almost nothing. Yet the big question that hung in the air was whether the Assembly would resolve the women’s issue.

In his keynote speech, Thon congratulated the women on their achievement. “It is to our honor that, in proceeding to lay the foundations of our national home, we made no distinction between man and woman and have recognized in this way the place worthy of the Hebrew women, whose role in the building of the land is no smaller than that of the men and whose importance in many cases has been decisive,” he declared.<sup>147</sup> He presented the principle of equality as fair recompense to women for their contribution to society, and as an attainment that was to the credit of the Hebrew community.<sup>148</sup> It ensured the Yishuv’s place among “the most enlightened peoples,” he maintained. He also stressed that the debates about the issue, over the previous three years, had made it clear that the Jewish religion did not deny women the right to vote. The Sephardi Rabbi Ya’akov Meir, who was elected honorary president of the Assembly, seconded this assertion. Women, he stressed, had the right to participate in the body, because they were “working for the good of the Jewish people.” Nevertheless, he proposed, as a gesture to the Haredim, “that the women be seated in a separate section, like the women’s courtyard in the time of the Temple.”<sup>149</sup> The Union delegate Esther Yeivin later said that she had no problem with separate seating—so long as the women could sit in the plenum. If the Haredi delegates were uncomfortable sitting with women, they could be placed behind a curtain, she suggested.<sup>150</sup> Perhaps the women were beginning to make their voices heard?

The delegates applauded when their Mizrahi colleagues entered the hall toward the end of the first day.<sup>151</sup> The fact that they had taken their seats did not, however, change their policies. They again demanded that the decision granting women the vote be overturned. Even though women participated in the conventions of their own movement, World Mizrahi, they tried to play both sides—they praised the virtues of women but sought to strip them of their civil rights. One Mizrahi leader put it bluntly: “We were elected on condition that this provision be revoked.” In the meantime, he said, “this Assembly of Representatives has no right to pass laws, as it is not the agent of all of Palestine’s Jews.”<sup>152</sup>

The absence of the Haredim, who had won about a tenth of the seats,

for the first two days caused a lot of resentment among the other delegates. In his speech, Thon lamented: "How sorry we are at the absence [of the Haredim]. We wanted and hoped that the Assembly of Representatives would be a faithful image of the Yishuv and that no person be missing here." He declared that the dispute over women's suffrage was merely a fig leaf the Haredim were using to hide their opposition to the creation of Yishuv-wide institutions and their lack of interest in "common organization and word with the entire nation."<sup>153</sup> Once their absence had attracted a good deal of attention, however, they deigned to join the body for its third meeting, on Saturday night, October 9, 1920. Their arrival produced "natural excitement among those present . . . because we had all waited for them to join us in building the Jewish people's home."<sup>154</sup> *Ha'aretz* reported that, after their entry, the feeling was that "joy prevailed throughout the auditorium."<sup>155</sup> It created a sense of unity, which received further expression when all the delegates paid a joint visit to the Western Wall, the most sacred Jewish prayer site, where a memorial service was held for the dead of the recent pogroms in Europe and the attacks in the Upper Galilee and Jerusalem.<sup>156</sup>

But the feeling of unity did not last long. When the Haredim arrived, they gave notice that their recognition of the Assembly was conditional on the revocation of women's suffrage and that they would participate in the body for only six months, in the hope that their demand be met.<sup>157</sup> But they did not have to wait that long—they were disabused of their hopes on the spot. Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, who represented the labor movement on the National Council (the Assembly's executive body), told them that their condition was unacceptable. They immediately walked out of the Assembly and refused to return. However, they did not officially resign, in the hope "that the election laws will change in the spirit of religion, that is, that the doors be locked to women."<sup>158</sup> Clearly the prediction that the wearying fight over women's suffrage would end with the convening of the Assembly of Representatives was proved wrong. The debate was simply transferred to a new venue.

How did the woman delegates feel about this? The records of the meetings do not reveal their inner feelings, nor do they show the women speaking up about the demands of Mizrahi and the Haredim. Was their silence a product of bashfulness? That was a factor for a well-known Jewish suffragist from Holland, Dr. Aletta Jacobs, who in her memoir spoke of how difficult it was for her to overcome her nervousness in making public appearances.<sup>159</sup> The silence of the women delegates when the Mizrahi and Haredi delegates de-

manded their removal from the body to which they had been legally elected may indicate that they had not yet overcome what is sometimes called submissive woman syndrome. As they declared in a statement they issued in 1919: "We, the women of the Zionist Land of Israel, submit to the discipline of the Zionist Organization."<sup>160</sup>

It seems not to have been a matter of fleeting female weakness. In her autobiography, Azaryahu made no secret of the cleft that opened within her when she was faced with the prospect of a rift that would put the Assembly's claim to legitimacy at risk because of opposition to the very fact that she and her female colleagues had been seated as members of the Assembly: "Perhaps, I would wonder, the rupture in the Yishuv was due to the women's question, and women would thus bear responsibility for its grave repercussions."<sup>161</sup> This thought, which seems to represent her state of mind at the time and also nearly forty years later, when she wrote her memoir, shows how torn she was. On the one hand she was committed to the unity of the Jewish people and the Yishuv, but on the other hand she was steadfast in her belief in equality. The feminism of the members of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights drew its power and potency from the Zionist movement within which it had grown. But loyalty to Zionism sometimes dealt a direct blow to feminist commitments. As the members of the women's party saw it, Zionism and feminism were complementary, but in practice they sometimes clashed. Nevertheless, and despite their reserved behavior as delegates, they believed that their participation in the Assembly of Representatives was a victory for which they could take credit.<sup>162</sup> Their achievement in these first elections was a first step for this trailblazing women's organization.

# 6



## The Union Comes of Age

Ladies! I have neither father and nor mother. No brother or relative! But if you wish you will be able to rescue a soul from death!

—Sasonah Cohen to the committee of the Union, August 8, 1923

The Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights established itself as a part of Yishuv society not only because of its battle for the right to vote, but also as a result of its systematic legal and community work and its international connections. This chapter will sketch the organization's legal achievements during its first seven years, ending at the beginning of 1926, when the campaign for women's suffrage reached completion. The subject here is not that campaign, but rather the Union's concepts of women's aims, roles, and position in society.

### The Union's Threefold Identity:

#### National Suffragism, Universalism, and Motherhood

The Union particularly wanted to remedy the legal inferiority of mothers, so as to reinforce the family as the nation's foundational institution. In direct contrast to its opponents, who charged that women's involvement in the public sphere would come at the expense of their role in the private realm, the Union maintained that enabling women to take an active role in national affairs would empower the family.

Zionist feminism maintained that the welfare of women and of the Jewish nation as a whole depended, more than anything else, on the strength of the family—the institution that maintained and transmitted Jewish culture from one generation to the next, the keystone of the nation. In contrast with the claim that making women into full citizens would turn them simply into inferior men,<sup>1</sup> the Union maintained that citizenship would bolster both families and the public arena.<sup>2</sup> In traditional societies, the family was per-

ceived as the institution charged with caring for the physical, spiritual, and moral welfare of children. In the New Yishuv, however, as in other modern national societies, the mother was seen also as a mother of the nation, raising children for her people.<sup>3</sup> The same idea would become part of the ethos of the state of Israel. In 1951, when the Knesset passed the Equal Rights for Women Law, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion declared that women deserved equal rights by virtue of their vital role as mothers. Recognition of women's equality seems to have emerged first from their biological roles as producers of children rather than as a fundamental right deriving from their status as human beings.<sup>4</sup>

The claim that when women are not valued in the public arena they can nevertheless be esteemed domestically as queens of the home has been shown to be incorrect. In fact, when women's status in the public sphere is inferior, women have low status at home as well.<sup>5</sup> The members of the Union believed that granting wives equal standing with husbands would improve women's legal position in the family and that this would ensure an increase in the birthrate and family stability.<sup>6</sup> Members of the Union declared, as did many others in the Yishuv, that stable and large families were a primary national goal.<sup>7</sup>

Statistical information shows that most of the Jewish population of child-bearing age during the Mandate period lived in nuclear families. But this is somewhat deceptive. While Yishuv society was indeed familist,<sup>8</sup> it was also an immigrant society with all the woes brought on by immigration—with family destabilization first and foremost.<sup>9</sup> The members of the Union could see not only the plight of women themselves, but also the infirmities of the family unit and their debilitating effect on children in particular. According to Azaryahu, “the disintegration of the family is not a private matter affecting only the residents of a particular home. It is a social-national issue of paramount importance.”<sup>10</sup> In contrast with the postmodern focus on the individual, the Hebrew suffragists raised the banner of the family. Their outlook accorded with maternalist feminism, which views motherhood as the legitimate foundation of women's civil rights.<sup>11</sup>

#### International Jewish Connections

The Union's goal was to blaze a new trail not only for the Yishuv's women, but also for “the myriad Jewish women of the entire Diaspora who intend

to cast their lots in with the building of our land and who are searching for a way to settle in it.”<sup>12</sup> Such a sense of Jewish partnership and international sisterhood was common in the Diaspora as well, especially among women who sought to establish new lives in Palestine. The feeling was based on traditional Jewish solidarity and provided the spiritual basis for the Union’s ties with Jewish women’s organizations around the world.

The complex link between Judaism and feminism, and the involvement of Jewish women in the world suffragist movement, has already attracted scholarly attention.<sup>13</sup> Jewish women’s commitment to the concept of equal political rights has often been explained as deriving from the Bible’s emphasis on justice and charity, their traditional involvement in charitable organizations, Jewish respect for education, and the assimilation of liberalism by Jewish society.<sup>14</sup> There is no question but that the number of Jewish women involved in suffragist organizations is astounding relative to the percentage of Jews in each country’s population—just like the exceptional percentage of Jewish women who entered higher education at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.<sup>15</sup> At about the time the Union was founded, Jewish women stood at the head of suffragist movements in Holland, Hungary, and France. However, prior to the rise of the Nazis, these suffragist leaders ignored their Jewish identities.<sup>16</sup> They viewed themselves rather as citizens of the world. These women also had little cooperation with Jewish suffragists in Palestine.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, Azaryahu viewed their achievements as exemplary for the women of the Yishuv.<sup>18</sup>

In June 1919, before the Union was founded, the periodical published by the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) called on Jewish women to bring the gospel of feminism to the Middle East and to lead the advancement of women there. The appeal, in the best colonialist spirit and in keeping with the views of the IWSA’s president, Carrie Chapman Catt, was written by Romana Goodman.<sup>19</sup> Goodman was one of the founders of the London chapter of the Women’s International Zionist Organization (WIZO) and a member of the Jewish League for Woman Suffrage.<sup>20</sup> In her article, Goodman, whose husband was also an active Zionist, declared that the Jews’ return to the Land of Israel under the protection of the British occupation would become an inspiration for the entire world. She lauded Jewish women and evoked a gallery of Jewish women leaders—heroines from the Bible; medieval martyrs for their faith; Dona Gracia, the highly respected and very wealthy sixteenth-century Spanish businesswoman who sought to renew the

Jewish community in Tiberias; and, in the modern age, the German Jewish salon hostesses, suffragists, scientists, and socialists, among others. Goodman argued that the most important current achievement of Jewish women was the equality granted them in the Zionist congresses, which served as a ticket into the world of politics. She regretfully acknowledged, however, that only a few women had actually gone into politics. Goodman's article struck a chord with the Yishuv's suffragists.

A few months after Goodman's article appeared, WIZO women in England sent a letter to the Mizrahi movement in Palestine castigating it for its refusal to support the Yishuv's women's right to vote. In the autumn of 1919 the letter was published in the *Jewish Chronicle*, British Jewry's popular weekly newspaper, over the signatures of Goodman and three other WIZO leaders in London. A Hebrew translation appeared in *Do'ar Hayom*.<sup>21</sup> The letter noted that Mizrahi's position violated the bylaws of the Zionist Organization and the precedent set by the congresses, where rabbis and Hasidim had sat in the same assembly as women. "The Mizrahi can claim no justification for such action on the ground of Jewish Law," the letter stated, while noting the great importance of women's involvement in the enterprise of building the Jewish homeland. Women deserved equality in the Yishuv in accord with the improving civil status of women all over the world. Finally, the letter concluded, "we call on you, in the interests of the Jewish future, to do all in your power to avoid a conflict."<sup>22</sup>

This letter was the first indication of the network of international connections that the Union established with women's organizations around the world. The support that Zionist women in Britain lent to the women's suffrage campaign in the Yishuv was not a solitary example. Over time, Jewish women's organizations throughout the Diaspora voiced their sympathy for their sisters in Palestine.<sup>23</sup> Diaspora Jewish women were also concerned about the inferior status of women under the halakhah, and they encouraged the Union to fight that as well. In a lecture she gave in New York in the spring of 1923, the Hadassah leader Henrietta Szold spoke of the need to upgrade women's status in Jewish religious law: "The Jewish women of Palestine are petitioning the rabbis to begin at once with the task which must eventually be undertaken of modifying the ancient Jewish Law in such ways that the Jewish woman may not stand behind her Mohammedan and her Christian sisters. . . . It was one of our aspirations, that a large Jewish community in Palestine would bring about a development of the old Jewish Law in accor-



dance with the demands of modern life.”<sup>24</sup> A similar demand was made by the Council for the Amelioration of the Legal Position of the Jewess. This organization of observant Jewish women in London worked, during the interwar period, to find a solution to the problem of *agunot*, women whose husbands left them or disappeared and who thus could not remarry.<sup>25</sup> The Union’s connections with Jewish women’s organizations strengthened it, but its association with the IWSA was of special importance in shaping its policy.

### The International Woman Suffrage Alliance

Even before World War I, the Yishuv’s Hebrew-language newspapers frequently offered news of international women’s meetings and the political achievements of the women’s movement.<sup>26</sup> They also reported on women’s affairs in far-flung countries<sup>27</sup> and informed their readers about the founding of new suffragist organizations, such as the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, a pacifist group established during World War I.<sup>28</sup>

The establishment of an international suffragist organization was first proposed in 1902 by American feminists at a meeting in Washington, D.C., and the IWSA was founded in Berlin in 1904. Catt, who had achieved much as president of the largest American suffragist organization, the National American Woman Suffrage Association,<sup>29</sup> was elected president of the new body. The members of the new movement were united in their respect for Catt, whom they saw as the “mother of the movement” and “queen of the [IWSA] congress.”<sup>30</sup> She held this post for nearly two decades, until 1923, when she was succeeded by Margery Corbett Ashby of England. In 1926 the IWSA adopted another goal besides women’s suffrage—that of world peace. It thus changed its name to the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship.<sup>31</sup> The Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights also adopted world peace as a goal, declaring that disarmament and an end to war “should be the slogan of every mother and sister, and we make the essence of our being the preservation and nurturing of life.”<sup>32</sup> They noted that the idea of peace was deeply ensconced in the Jewish Bible and that Jews greeted each other with the word *shalom* (peace).

Catt boldly led the American women’s movement to victory; dozens of books were written about her. She was the only woman in her college graduating class, and she supported herself after being widowed at a young age. A popular lecturer, she never had children. After being widowed a sec-

ond time, she devoted herself to the women's suffrage campaign, first in the United States and then internationally. Failure was not an option, she maintained, and thus she worked tirelessly to achieve her goal.<sup>33</sup> Catt displayed strong organizational skills and was a centralizer who demanded obedience to the organizational leadership, but she also fostered close relations with its members. She made them feel at ease, and they loved her, calling her "Mother Catt."<sup>34</sup> One of her biographers, Mary Gray Peck, notes the large number of campaigns that Catt led in the United States—56 referendums, 480 legislative battles, 47 national conventions, and 277 conventions. She swept up thousands of American women, who put their best efforts into the battle for equality.<sup>35</sup>

The IWSA's manifesto states that "men and women are born equally free and independent members of the human race, equally endowed with intelligence and ability, and equally entitled to the free exercise of their individual rights and liberty."<sup>36</sup> Catt proclaimed that women were entitled to human rights and stressed women's contribution to society as a whole. The overarching goals of the international organization were gaining women the right to vote and promoting social reforms through local women's organizations around the world.<sup>37</sup>

Following World War I, Catt grew increasingly convinced that full equality for women was vital. Women needed to be able to earn their own livelihoods and to earn on a par with men.<sup>38</sup> The IWSA preached universal brotherhood and the "motherhood of the world."<sup>39</sup> In a variety of ways Catt encouraged the establishment of branches of the suffragist movement throughout the world, as she did with the Union in Palestine.<sup>40</sup> The IWSA offered vital assistance and information to suffragists everywhere, fostered sisterly relations among supporters of equality, and maintained neutrality on matters of state.<sup>41</sup> The leaders of national organizations quickly came to understand the usefulness of working together with the international body.<sup>42</sup>

IWSA congresses, which were held every three years in different European capitals to spread the suffragist idea, provided a venue for productive encounters between activists from different countries and served as a platform for displaying their achievements. At the organization's seventh congress, held in Budapest in 1913, it was reported that only four countries had granted women the vote.<sup>43</sup> When the next congress was held in 1920, the number of countries that had granted women the vote had risen to twenty-one. Twenty-six countries were represented at that gathering.<sup>44</sup> Three years

later, when the next congress was held in Rome, forty-two countries were represented.<sup>45</sup> Catt proudly declared that women from two-thirds of the world's sixty countries were in attendance.<sup>46</sup>

That congress took up the question of whether the IWSA should be disbanded, given that so many countries had accepted the principle of women's suffrage. The delegates insisted that the organization still served a purpose and decided to broaden its agenda to include a wide range of issues of discrimination against women. In 1920 the organization had already established four committees to address such issues: equal pay, equal moral standards, equality in choosing citizenship, and the rights of women and mothers in the family.<sup>47</sup> The congresses also promoted a sense of universalism. The delegates from each country proudly displayed their national flags and costumes and offered folklore performances. In doing so, they sought to shape suffragist identity in each country.<sup>48</sup>

The sense of sisterhood that prevailed at the congresses was itself one of the important accomplishments of the international body. Suffragists profoundly needed each other's support.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, by working together, women acquired a universal component to their individual identities, testimony to the fact that human consciousness can change. Many of IWSA leaders testified that the friendships they formed in the organization gave them deep satisfaction, sometimes more than their family relations did.<sup>50</sup> The friendship and mutual admiration of the members was a catalyst for activity that strengthened them and the IWSA.<sup>51</sup>

#### The Union's Ties with the IWSA and the League of Nations

In the spring of 1920, the IWSA's monthly journal, *Jus Suffragii*, announced that the organization would be holding its eighth congress on June 12–16 in Geneva. It called on its member organizations in each country, as well as individual suffragists, to participate.<sup>52</sup> Dr. Rosa Welt Straus, whose immediate family lived in Geneva, informed the IWSA that a Yishuv delegation would attend. The leaders of the Union, their spirits boosted by the Union's success in the recent elections to the Assembly of Representatives, also asked their president to represent them at any other gatherings she might find reason to attend in Europe. Welt Straus attended the congress and, like a delegation representing a women's organization from India, the Union was accepted as a provisional member of the IWSA. Three years later, at the ninth congress in

Rome, the Union was accepted as a full member organization of the IWSA.<sup>53</sup> Beginning in 1920, *Jus Suffragii* reported the progress of the women's suffrage campaign in the Yishuv.<sup>54</sup>

Welt Straus's move to affiliate the Union with the IWSA, despite her colleagues' previous inclination to view their campaign as different and separate from those of suffragists elsewhere in the world, turned out to be a brilliant move. Her activity on the international stage made her the spokeswoman for the Union and the shaper of its vision. She was a successful and talented advocate for the Hebrew suffragists. "Thanks to her being well-informed, her advanced views, her clear logic, and her talent as a speaker, she has won a place of honor in the congress," her colleagues declared.<sup>55</sup> She was appointed to several IWSA committees and met with heads of state. During her stay in Paris she took part in an audience with the mayor and the president of the French republic.<sup>56</sup> She and Catt enjoyed warm relations, and some of Catt's letters to Welt Straus were printed in Hebrew newspapers. When Welt Straus died, Catt recalled her fondly: "It was in Rome during the Alliance Congress there in 1923 that we first met and then and there I fell in love with her vivid active and humorous personality. . . . For she was a rebel, a fighter and a woman of a warm heart and noble nature."<sup>57</sup>

Catt's particular interest in the Holy Land was already evident when she visited Palestine in 1911 with her Jewish Dutch suffragist colleague, Aletta Jacobs. The latter wrote in her memoirs: "How glad we were later that we had decided to go to Jerusalem!"<sup>58</sup> Catt's journal of the trip shows that she intimately identified with the stories of the Bible.<sup>59</sup> During a visit to the Temple Mount she thought of the binding of Isaac, and in a cave she imagined Samson making love with Delilah. She was a keen observer of the landscape and, seeing Arab women balancing water jugs on their heads, discerned just how primitive living conditions were in Palestine.<sup>60</sup> The local population looked to her like living fossils from biblical times.<sup>61</sup> She was both empathetic and patronizing. She was certain that the awakening of women, even in this remote corner of the world, would be led by Western women, both Christians and Jews.<sup>62</sup> Her sympathy for Jews would become even more apparent later, beginning in 1933, when a wave of antisemitism swept the world. She labored to help her Jewish friends in Europe escape to the United States, winning the American Hebrew Award for her efforts.<sup>63</sup>

The IWSA's congresses gave the Union a unique opportunity to clarify and consider its goals. The rhetoric at these meetings dealt with the princi-

ples of human freedom, individual liberty, and democracy.<sup>64</sup> The IWSA promoted an international politics based on universal human values, according to the belief that “the personal is not only political but also international.”<sup>65</sup> Welt Straus and her colleagues in the Yishuv adopted these principles and sought to instill them in their organization’s members and in the Yishuv as a whole.<sup>66</sup> The Union’s women were considerably influenced by feminist theories and strategies current in both Jewish and non-Jewish suffragist organizations in the rest of the world. Despite these universal values, the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights was manifestly a nationalist organization, as were women’s organizations in many countries.<sup>67</sup> It had virtually no contact with non-Jewish women’s organizations in Palestine. This was problematic because the memberships of delegations to the IWSA were composed on the basis of country, not nationality. The fact that the delegation from Palestine included only Jewish women from the Union and no Arab women was sometimes a source of misunderstanding with European suffragists, who tried to bridge the gap between Jewish and Arab organizations.<sup>68</sup>

The Union’s participation in the IWSA created an opportunity to advertise Zionist accomplishments to the many Jewish delegates from different countries. The Yishuv delegates put their national pride on display. According to Azaryahu, “a nation that demands equality and freedom for itself in the family of the world’s nations” is duty bound to grant equality at home as well.<sup>69</sup> At the IWSA congress in Paris in 1926, the Yishuv delegation used a car emblazoned with Zionist flags.<sup>70</sup> IWSA congresses also served as a platform from which the Yishuv could convey its message to the world.<sup>71</sup> In her plenary address to the congress in the summer of 1926, Welt Straus spoke at length about the Assembly of Representatives’ decision to grant equality to women. Her speech was included in the congress’s reports.<sup>72</sup> Disseminating information about the women’s campaign in the Yishuv and hosting visits by suffragist leaders from around the world empowered the members of the Union. Welt Straus acknowledged this when Millicent Fawcett visited Jerusalem in January 1921. “She will be a tower of strength to the Jewish women in their fight against reaction,” Welt Straus declared about her guest.<sup>73</sup>

Participation in the IWSA made Yishuv women aware of how women in other countries lived, serving as a kind of mirror that simultaneously offered a larger perspective. The comparison was flattering to the Union. Welt Straus enumerated the achievements of the Yishuv’s women: they could vote for and be elected to the Assembly of Representatives and city councils; and

they enjoyed freedom of employment in the fields of medicine and education, including school administration. She proudly added that the Hebrew University in Jerusalem was open to both men and women. But she also regretfully noted the inferior status of women when they appeared before rabbinic courts: “Before our courts, for their entire lives [women are considered] immature. . . . This legal treatment impinges on our entire family life. . . . It is easy to comprehend what influence this legal treatment has on our entire political lives.”<sup>74</sup>

The close ties between the Union and the IWSA bolstered not only the former’s standing in the Yishuv but also its dealings with the Mandate administration.<sup>75</sup> For example, in June 1921, Union leaders offered the high commissioner their thoughts on a Mandate proposal to regulate prostitution in Palestine.<sup>76</sup> The IWSA also supported the Union in its fight against child marriage and occupational discrimination.<sup>77</sup> A letter that Catt sent to *Ha’ishah* ended with important words of encouragement. “Do not fear what others say of you,” she exhorted the women of the Yishuv. “You are fighting for the truth. And while you will have to make many sacrifices, and suffer many humiliations, do not forget that many women have already suffered everything that is liable to be your lot. . . . Do not let your spirits flag; take up the burden and bear it courageously!”<sup>78</sup>

The Union’s affiliation with the IWSA also gained it ties with the League of Nations, the international organization founded by US President Woodrow Wilson in January 1920. The League’s goal was to provide a mechanism for the peaceful resolution of conflicts between states. Its ideals were based on the belief that world peace could never come about through war but rather through diplomacy and improving the lot of peoples everywhere. The League of Nations advocated the legislation and enforcement of national laws protecting human rights, full democratization, and opening the political arena to women. In keeping with its own principles, the organization employed women in a large range of capacities. Its feminist policies were seen as one of the great accomplishments of the international women’s movement. One example is Anna Bugge Wicksell, a Swedish feminist born and raised in Norway. Wicksell, who had in her youth headed the most important Norwegian suffragist organization and was later one of the founders of the IWSA, was appointed to the League of Nations’ Permanent Mandates Commission and used her position to put the advancement of women on the

body's agenda.<sup>79</sup> Her personal ties with Welt Straus were of great assistance in the Union's contacts with the British.<sup>80</sup>

Women first gained a foothold in the field of international relations at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. The conference resolved to establish an international council for women's and children's affairs.<sup>81</sup> This was enshrined in Article 23 of the League of Nations Covenant, which declared that the League would "endeavour to secure and maintain fair and humane conditions of labour for men, women, and children, both in their own countries and in all countries to which their commercial and industrial relations extend, and for that purpose will establish and maintain the necessary international organisations."<sup>82</sup> The League was also granted powers to oversee international agreements regarding prostitution, age at marriage, and infant mortality.<sup>83</sup> In addition, it served as a stage for important discussions of social reforms and women's rights.<sup>84</sup> The result was that these issues were placed on the agendas of its member states, and from this time onward the issues routinely came up in contacts between nations.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, because the low status of women in any one country affected their status in the rest of the world, it was proposed that the League of Nations accept as members only states that granted women the right to vote.<sup>86</sup> The fact that these issues were taken up by the League not only upgraded the status of women but also marked a turn for the better in the substance of international relations and the standing of women's organizations. The League became a most important source of support for the IWSA, and the Union sought League backing in its dealings with the Mandate authorities. Notably, some of the Union's correspondence with the League was conducted in Hebrew.<sup>87</sup> The Union's leaders viewed the Yishuv campaign for votes for women as part of its national enterprise, which was itself an inseparable component of a universal struggle.

#### Facing the Mandate Administration

The new Mandate regime opened an era of reorganization and modernization of the country's administration and in the life of its inhabitants. Herbert Samuel's position on women's rights had been shaped by mores in Britain, where women—but only those age thirty and above (in contrast, the voting age was eighteen for men)—had been granted the right to vote for mem-

bers of Parliament in 1918. Another decade passed before the franchise was extended to all women.<sup>88</sup> The Mandate administration's policies were based, first and foremost, on its desire to portray itself as a modernizing regime and thus promote its international standing, rather than to advance the local population. Samuel sought to avoid conflict with the Muslims of Palestine, and he thus declined to intervene in women's issues out of consideration for Muslim public opinion.<sup>89</sup> The Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights gained formal recognition from the Mandate,<sup>90</sup> but this did not mean that the administration saw eye to eye with the Union on policy regarding women. At first Samuel thought that it would be possible to permit women to work as attorneys in Palestine and to employ them in government offices,<sup>91</sup> but he soon changed his position. "I am very doubtful," he wrote the Foreign Office, "as to the effect of such an innovation on Moslem opinion in Palestine. In particular, I am inclined to think that Moslems would, generally speaking, resent intensely being subjected to cross-examination in public by a woman. . . . I consider that the introduction of a measure, constituting so startling an advance on existing practice in Palestine and in other eastern countries at a similar stage of development, should be postponed."<sup>92</sup>

The Mandate government took the same tack regarding its initiative to establish a Palestine Legislative Assembly that would represent all the country's inhabitants. The Parliament in London debated whether women should be permitted to vote in elections for the new body. Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill declared that impossible. Women would gain the vote in Palestine, he declared, only through a gradual process. News of the decision was published in the IWSA newsletter with the acerbic comment: "Poor Mr. Churchill! His answer combines that sententiousness and timidity so characteristic of Government replies concerning Woman's Suffrage."<sup>93</sup> At the IWSA congress in Rome, the delegates from the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights told their colleagues that Jewish women in Palestine found themselves in an ambiguous position—according to the Palestine constitution promulgated in September 1922, they were forbidden to vote for the Palestinewide Legislative Assembly, but they were allowed to participate in elections for the Yishuv's Assembly of Representatives.<sup>94</sup> The reason, the Union said, was that "here in Palestine, generations of tradition have placed women on a lower level than men."<sup>95</sup> The Union protested to the high commissioner, but to no avail.

In contrast, the Mandate authorities upgraded the status of the Union



by soliciting its input regarding needed changes in the legal system. This enabled the Union to be involved in drafting legislation, thus acting on its motto: “You shall have a single law and justice for man and woman.” As part of its reorganization of the judicial system, in September 1920 the Mandate administration established a legal committee that considered expanding the purview of all religious courts, including rabbinical courts. Under Ottoman rule, all personal law—in particular, marriage, divorce, and legal questions arising out of them, such as inheritance—fell under the jurisdiction of religious rather than secular courts. However, the Ottoman regime permitted non-Muslim citizens to apply to Muslim courts, and their rulings took precedence. The new Mandate administration proposed to change the law so that petitioners could apply only to the religious court of the community to which the petitioner belonged. The upshot was to worsen the legal situation of Jewish women, who had sometimes taken their suits over inheritance to Muslim courts. The latter, in contrast to rabbinic courts, gave wider recognition to women’s inheritance rights.<sup>96</sup>

To evaluate the proposal, the Mandate’s legal committee asked the Union, which it viewed as the representative of the Yishuv’s women, for its opinion.<sup>97</sup> The Union took up the challenge, setting a precedent that cemented its involvement in the Mandate administration’s legislative process. The committee’s request was “a historical opportunity” that produced “excellent . . . intensive work.”<sup>98</sup> In other words, the Union’s women were involved in legislative activity even before they were given the official right to vote.

#### The Fight over Rabbinic Court Powers: The Inheritance Law

The Union categorically rejected the government’s proposal to expand the authority of the rabbinic courts to include inheritances and wills.<sup>99</sup> The Union submitted its memorandum on the rabbinic courts’ denial of inheritance rights to the Mandate’s legal committee and to the office of the Jerusalem Rabbinate.<sup>100</sup> The Rabbinate also rendered its opinion. Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook, recently appointed the first chief rabbi of the Ashkenazi community in Mandatory Palestine, demanded that, in inheritance matters, the Mandate government revoke the Ottoman regime’s subordination of Jewish to Muslim courts, and that all authority regarding the personal status of Jews be invested solely in the Jewish rabbinic courts.

But the Union did not simply submit its opinion and leave it at that. Its members organized a protest rally under the banner of “rectification of family law and women’s rights,” held in the Beit Ha’am auditorium in Jerusalem at the end of the winter of 1921.<sup>101</sup> The speakers emphatically opposed granting the rabbis exclusive authority over personal law.<sup>102</sup> The philosopher Samuel Hugo Bergmann spoke first, followed by Yitzhak Ben-Zvi and Azaryahu. A reporter for *Ha’aretz* quoted Azaryahu at length. Jewish religious law on personal matters was fine, she said, “in its time, when the Hebrew woman was confined to her home and did not participate in society. That is not the case now. Women are now laborers, office workers, and teachers. Since they now have obligations like men, or even more than men, they should also receive equal rights in all things.”<sup>103</sup> She presented the principle of equality as a fundamental part of Jewish life in Palestine.

The rally ended with a very important and pioneering declaration. It utterly rejected granting rabbinic courts exclusive authority over personal and inheritance matters, but it also opposed granting judicial authority to the law of a foreign state—meaning the Mandate administration. “Our family sentiment will not allow our sisters to hand their family matters over to people who are not of their nation,” Azaryahu later wrote.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, the declaration made an innovative demand: that the Yishuv establish a secular Hebrew court, recognized by the Mandate administration, in accordance with “the principle of the equal rights of women and men.”<sup>105</sup> A detailed memorandum containing the resolutions passed by the protest rally was submitted to the Mandate’s legal committee in June 1921, along with a petition supporting the resolutions signed by hundreds of Jewish women from the three large cities and the moshavot.<sup>106</sup>

The proposal for a secular Hebrew court was a call for a cultural revolution. The Yishuv suffragists seem to have understood from the start that they could never beat the rabbinate head on. They thus proposed a separate judicial system. A paradox lay at the heart of the Union’s attitude toward Hebrew law—that is, the Jewish legal tradition.<sup>107</sup> On the one hand, Union members condemned the halakhah’s discriminatory treatment of women and fought the prospect of being forced to have their cases adjudicated under its authority. On the other hand, they viewed the Jewish legal heritage as an inseparable part of their national culture. They openly acknowledged that the halakhic system was incompatible with their own times, but at the same time they esteemed and respected it. Welt Straus expressed both sides of this

attitude in a speech to an IWSA congress in which she explained that Jewish laws had been intended in their time to protect women but later subjugated them.<sup>108</sup> This paradox remained a feature of the Union's approach over a long period of time. Twenty-five years later, when the Union conducted exhausting negotiations over family law with the Chief Rabbinate from which they emerged with only minuscule concessions, one of the Union's members acknowledged: "We cannot disregard Hebrew law, and despite everything we will have to build our future Hebrew state on the foundations of Hebrew tradition, because that tradition is the very essence of our historical right to the Land of Israel."<sup>109</sup>

The idea of a secular Hebrew family court did not go anywhere. Instead, the Mandate government's own judicial system offered a solution. In 1923 the high commissioner promulgated a new inheritance law. It empowered both women and men to pursue family inheritance claims in the Mandate court system.<sup>110</sup> In her history of the Union, Azaryahu proudly cited a clause that was added to the law in response to the Union's concerns, to the effect that either party to an inheritance suit could petition a civil court if he or she did not wish to adjudicate inheritance matters in a religious court.<sup>111</sup> In February 1923, she termed it "salvation for many of the Yishuv's women."<sup>112</sup> She emphasized proudly that it was one of the Union's greatest achievements of the previous two years.<sup>113</sup> The campaign over the inheritance law won the Union a reputation as a respected and effective public organization able to cooperate with influential figures in the Yishuv and Mandate administration. Thanks to its work, women ceased to be passive victims of their legal status.

### Child Marriage

Child marriage, especially of girls, was an accepted practice in Palestine, as it was throughout the Middle East. It was especially common in the Sephardi, Yemenite, and Persian Jewish communities, but it also occurred at times among the Ashkenazim of the Old Yishuv.<sup>114</sup> Doctors warned against the consequences of child marriage,<sup>115</sup> and educators opposed the practice. Annie Landau, headmistress of the Evelina de Rothschild school for girls at the beginning of the twentieth century, offered a cash prize to girls who completed their studies instead of dropping out to marry.<sup>116</sup>

Child marriage was of great concern to the Union of Hebrew Women

for Equal Rights.<sup>117</sup> Writing in the IWSA newsletter, Welt Straus, the Union's president, described girls of twelve and even younger who had been married to men double or triple their ages. "These little victims, cheated of their childhood and very often of their lives, have so far been undefended," she remonstrated.<sup>118</sup> Noting that the problem was especially acute among Eastern Jews, she explained that the practice was rooted in "Oriental ignorance," which subjugated women, destroyed their lives "physically and morally," and impaired their maternal capacities.<sup>119</sup> In response to the claim that Oriental girls reached sexual maturity at an earlier age than Western ones, she conducted a research project together with Dr. Helena Kagan, the first pediatrician in Ottoman Palestine. They found that the claim was false.<sup>120</sup> Their statistical study showed that infant mortality was four times higher in Palestine than in advanced countries such as England,<sup>121</sup> and that the welfare of both mother and infant required the postponement of marriage. They submitted their findings to the Rabbinate, the Mandate administration, and the League of Nations,<sup>122</sup> along with a demand for the establishment of sixteen as the minimum age for marriage.<sup>123</sup> Mandate officials denied that the phenomenon of child marriage was a common one and argued that the government should not interfere with private matters.<sup>124</sup>

The Union did not only make its position known to local and external authorities. It also acted in the field. For example, Yishayahu Press, principal of the Girls School in Jerusalem's Old City, asked for the Union's assistance in preventing the marriage of one of his eleven-year-old students. Azaryahu alerted the Rabbinate to the case and asked that it take "the necessary measures to prevent the marriage of this girl, which is liable to destroy her life physically and morally . . . [and thus] disgrace the entire Yishuv."<sup>125</sup> While the Union and Kook, now the chief rabbi of the Ashkenazi community in Palestine, had fundamental differences about women's right to vote, they cooperated on this issue. In this particular case, the marriage seems to have been averted. Azaryahu's papers preserve the response of the Chief Rabbinate, informing her that the girl's father had been summoned and had signed a commitment not to marry off his daughter before she reached the age of seventeen.<sup>126</sup> But the Union did not take this at face value. They asked Press whether the girl's marriage had indeed been called off and whether she had returned to school. Press responded that she had not.<sup>127</sup>

This specific case shows how determined the Union was to fight the phenomenon and how much weight it put on maintaining a respectful working

relationship with the Rabbinate. At the same time, it also shows how difficult it was to enforce the new regulations without appropriate legislation.<sup>128</sup> A Union report on the issue from the end of 1926 listed a range of actions taken: “lectures, collection of statistical material, and negotiations with the Rabbinate office.”<sup>129</sup> The Union’s cooperation with the Rabbinate continued and increased in the 1930s, under Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Herzog.<sup>130</sup>

The Union was not put off by the obstacles it encountered. On the contrary, it redoubled its efforts.<sup>131</sup> At its ninth congress, held in Rome in 1923, the IWSA resolved to ask governments to set minimum marriage ages and to give girls the power to refuse to marry. Reinforced by this decision, the Union, via the international organization,<sup>132</sup> petitioned the League of Nations Assembly in Geneva, asking for help in its campaign.<sup>133</sup> In consultation with the League, the Union presented the Mandate administration with a demand that child marriage be outlawed in Palestine as a whole, not just in the Jewish community.<sup>134</sup> In fact, on this issue, the Union cooperated with Arab feminists in the early 1930s.<sup>135</sup> The Union’s campaign proved effective. In 1936 the Mandate administration promulgated a law forbidding the marriage of girls under the age of fifteen. As this fell short of what the Union sought, the Union continued to work to raise the marriage age.<sup>136</sup> Its work on the inheritance and marriage age issues won it publicity throughout the Yishuv, but it made an even greater impact with its Legal Service Bureaus.

### The Legal Service Bureaus

Through its Legal Service Bureaus the Union provided confidential assistance to needy women. The bureaus were set up in response to appeals that the Union received from distraught women, such as Sasonah Cohen of Jaffa, from whose letter the epigraph to this chapter is taken. Cohen had been beaten by her husband and wrote: “Ladies! I have neither father nor mother. No brother or relative! But if you wish you will be able to rescue a soul from death! Because I have despaired of my life, which hangs before me. I sincerely hope that you will examine my case and respond quickly!”<sup>137</sup> Cohen, who was one of her Yemenite husband’s four wives, desperately wanted a divorce and placed her last hopes in the Union.

The idea of providing legal advice to underprivileged women involved in family conflicts had first been proposed prior to World War I in the home of Nehamah Puhachevsky, the feminist writer of Rishon LeTzion. Puhachevsky

offered lay legal advice to the women of her moshavah.<sup>138</sup> Documents in the Union archives indicate that the Union opened its Legal Service Bureaus about a year after the organization was founded.<sup>139</sup> The bureaus offered family, legal, economic, and emotional counseling to women who could not afford to pay professionals.

The Union's counselors, called legal advocates, worked as volunteers, and displayed great empathy with their clients. "More than any lawyer who does his job solely as a professional, a member of the Bureau, as a woman, can understand the feelings of a suffering woman. The miserable woman finds it much easier to uncover the inner recesses of her heart to a member of the Bureau," Azaryahu wrote.<sup>140</sup> Each volunteer, she explained, "in many cases plays the role of mother and sister and adviser to a despondent woman and imbues her with courage so as to raise her spirits and keep her from abandoning her duties as a mother for her children."<sup>141</sup> At times the advocates were able to serve as arbitrators and resolve problems without a formal legal process. At other times they represented clients in lieu of lawyers.<sup>142</sup> The Union's members were extremely proud of the unique and important work of the bureaus.<sup>143</sup>

When the Union opened its bureau in Tel Aviv, Azaryahu composed an advertisement that presented the complex roles of the advocates: providing legal advice, assistance in dealing with the Rabbinate, and contacts with women's organizations around the world.<sup>144</sup> One client noted in particular the importance of the Union's impact on shaping public opinion and urged it to work for new legislation, in particular in the areas of religious court procedures and the issue of the agunot.<sup>145</sup> The Union indeed sought changes not only to personal status laws but also to the procedural rules used in rabbinic courts so as to ensure that hearings were held punctually, that records of hearings included the arguments of all parties, and that these were open for examination.<sup>146</sup>

According to a report published by the Union in the 1930s, the Legal Service Bureaus received hundreds of applications from all over the country and from every sector of the Yishuv, including both Yemenite women and socialist women living in agricultural settlements.<sup>147</sup> The bureaus thus collected a large amount of information about women's standing in their families and their legal situations. Azaryahu explained that "the great amount of factual material that accumulated in these Bureaus over the years of their existence gave the Union the ability to present to the authorities the sorry

legal state of women and, on the basis of these facts, to demand necessary improvements in personal law.<sup>148</sup> Letters written by the Rabbinate indicate that rabbinic judges also made use of information provided to them by the Union's legal advocates.<sup>149</sup> The advocates suggested, on the basis of the harsh conditions women operated under as revealed to them in their work, that the school system create a family life curriculum.<sup>150</sup>

The Legal Service Bureaus produced another benefit as well. In 1930 the Union produced a popular guidebook under the editorship of Bernard Dov Yoseph, an attorney and later an Israeli cabinet minister, titled *Women's Rights according to the Laws of Palestine*. A number of jurists contributed to the book, covering topics such as marriage and divorce law, property law, women's and children's rights, wills, and inheritance.<sup>151</sup> Yoseph stressed that many women did not receive all the benefits and rights the law provided because they were ignorant of their rights. He thus wanted to teach them to stand up for their rights and to protect them against discrimination. The need to raise women's consciousness of their legal and family standing was a common theme of all the Union's activities.

#### The Union as an Anchor for the Yishuv's Women

Comparing the status of the Yishuv's women to that of women in other countries, Welt Straus told the IWSA, with some exaggeration, that there was no occupational discrimination in the Yishuv labor market. "With the exception of the law, there is complete equality for men and women," she declared.<sup>152</sup> That exception led to a famous and especially arduous struggle led by Rosa Ginzberg (Hebraized as Ginossar), who had completed her legal studies in Paris and sought to be licensed by the Mandate authorities to practice her profession. The daughter of the writer and public figure Mordehai Ben-Hillel HaCohen and the daughter-in-law of the Zionist thinker Ahad Ha'am, she conducted a nearly decade-long battle to be certified.<sup>153</sup> The Union took up her cause, supporting her before the Mandate authorities, the Rabbinate, and the IWSA.<sup>154</sup> In 1930, after obtaining the right for women to work as attorneys under the Mandate, Ginzberg acknowledged the encouragement and support she had received from the Union. It was one of the Union's most important achievements.<sup>155</sup>

The Union's unflagging work for equality, among other things in its efforts to achieve equal pay and to make it possible for real estate to be regis-

tered in women's names, made its office the natural address for any Yishuv woman in distress. One example is a heartbreaking letter sent by the women of Yavna'el, a Galilean moshavah to the Union's office in Jerusalem. The letter testifies both to the unbearable lives of its authors and to the Union's special standing: "The life of a farmwoman in the Galilee is the hardest of all working women in Palestine—she must, by herself, keep order, do laundry, cook, bake bread, mend, care for her children, care for the chickens, process the milk, and work in the garden, all under the most primitive and worst of conditions."<sup>156</sup> The women reported that they were "sickly and anxious," and that, to save themselves, they had established a women's association. They wanted to found dairies, bakeries, and a rest house for women. Unfortunately, all their efforts had been for naught and they sought the Union's help, as a last resort.<sup>157</sup>

The Union made far-reaching gains in changing women's view of themselves as members of a political community. The legal status of women was no longer seen as a trivial matter—it was now part and parcel of the legal system. The Hebrew suffragists had placed the issue of women's rights squarely in the center of public discourse. The equal civil rights of women had turned from a question into an unambiguous statement. According to one author, "the principal contribution of the Union . . . was the creation of a discourse of [women's] rights that continued long after the establishment of the state of Israel."<sup>158</sup> The Union did not dispute the traditional view that the primary responsibility for the family lay on the shoulders of women, but its concern for women's standing in their families made the family a public issue. Women were thus perceived as important subjects, responsible for ensuring familial and communal continuity.

The feminist ideology of the Union's members was a liberal one, and they lived their lives accordingly. The majority of them viewed motherhood as the most important aspect of a woman's life. At that time, this was the view also of many of the suffragists of the IWSA. Lady Astor, for example, the first woman to serve in Britain's House of Commons, was the mother of six children. "Women do not wish to be like men," she declared, according to the report of a Union member who heard her speak at an IWSA congress, "but rather to work together with them for the good of the country and nation."<sup>159</sup> The great value that the Union ascribed to the family, and to motherhood in particular, was diminished somewhat prior to World War II by statistical information from around the world that showed a clear correlation



between the rise of liberalism and feminism and the decline of the family.<sup>160</sup> While that issue lies beyond the scope of this book, it is something to keep in mind in the following survey of three important Yishuv suffragists.

Theory and Practice: The Family Lives of Yishuv Suffragists

To what extent did feminism shape the daily lives of the Union's leaders? Was it reflected in their relations with their husbands and children? To comprehend the profound feminist consciousness of the standard-bearers of the Yishuv's women's suffrage campaign, it is necessary to go beyond their speeches, public declarations, and writings and examine the way they lived their lives. I offer here a portrait of three of these women, for whom we have evidence in the form of letters, memoirs, and other forms of documentation. Did their endeavor to achieve civil equality enable them to create homes free of gender hierarchy?

The first such story is that of Azaryahu, the Union's keystone and the only one of its members to leave us her own story. The autobiography she published at the age of eighty-four principally addresses her public work but also offers a limited view of her private life. She does not tell how she first met her husband, nor does she recount her wedding or the births of her children. In fact her husband, Yosef, whom she terms her "best friend," and her children are mentioned only in passing. Was she seeking to protect her family's privacy, or was she adopting the male practice of viewing private and family life as irrelevant to one's life story? Her youngest son, Arnan Azaryahu, writes in his own memoir—published in his later years, a short time before his death—that "Mother did not like to speak of her past. She had a need to disengage from it—perhaps so that we not suspect her of wanting to return to it."<sup>161</sup>

In her autobiography, Azaryahu writes that she "hitched her destiny" to that of her husband, a teacher and later a school inspector and director of the Yishuv's education department. She immigrated to Palestine in 1906, a year after he did.<sup>162</sup> She explains that she delayed her arrival so that she could meet some obligations. "Devoted to my work at the school and not wanting to stop it in the middle of the year," she wrote, "I [resolved to] stay in Russia to the end of the school year in the summer and put off my move to Palestine until I was free of my job."<sup>163</sup> This indicates that, in the Azaryahus' case, the wife's desires and needs were placed on the same level as those of the hus-

band. She terms the return of the Jews to Palestine a “revolution,”<sup>164</sup> one that included a gender revolution, a pursuit of the same equality in public life that she enjoyed within her family.

Another peephole into her private life is the will drafted by her husband in 1928, at the age of fifty-six “My wife,” he wrote, “has been a good friend . . . together we labored, together we worked, and all we have acquired belongs to her no less—and perhaps more—than to me.”<sup>165</sup> Arnan also stressed that an atmosphere of respect and equality pervaded their family, both between his parents and between them and the children: “The ideas that [my mother] advocated were almost always humane and universal. . . . [My parents] made a point of not imposing any form of physical punishment and never raised a hand against me.”<sup>166</sup> His parents sent him to a progressive school where boys and girls were treated equally and where the teaching method was learning by doing. Clearly, his mother’s suffragist ideology was not just something to be spoken of publicly but also part of her private life. Her own home was an arena for practicing her ideal of equality between men and women.

Further insight comes from the life story of Sarah Glicklich Slouschz, a socialist and supporter of the Union, although she never joined it. We know something of her personal life from childhood memories written by her daughter, Aviva Gali, which includes information on her parents’ difficult marriage. I also interviewed Gali.<sup>167</sup> Glicklich, a mother of three, led an unconventional life. According to her daughter, she expunged her legal husband, the father of her children, from her life and theirs. Gali offered an unembellished story of her parents’ tragic divorce. Her maternal grandmother told her, she said, that Glicklich insisted on separating from her husband, an educated man who worked as a teacher at Jerusalem’s Hebrew Gymnasium, and refused to allow him any contact with their children. According to Gali’s memoir, her father taught her and her siblings, but they were ordered by their mother not to speak to him. Despite her financial difficulties, she forbade her ex-husband to provide financial support for their children. “She told her friends that she would not take anything from him,” Gali wrote, “that the children were hers and her responsibility. She disparaged his paternal rights. ‘I will be both mother and father, they have no need of him.’”<sup>168</sup> She was prepared to assume both roles, no matter what the emotional cost to her children. While it is difficult to draw conclusions from as emotional

a situation as a divorce, Glicklich's story is an example of a gender revolution in her own family, one that ran counter to all traditional conceptions of parenting. In her writings, she warns that women's attempts to imitate men were simply a new form of enslavement. Yet she herself appropriated the role of father, as well as performing the role of mother, to her children. In her later years her courage was defeated by her loneliness. She spoke of her suffering in tragic letters she wrote to the Zionist leader Menachem Ussishkin.<sup>169</sup> Her complex personality illustrates the difficulty of molding new gender roles, a difficulty that apparently discouraged many people from lending their support to the new ideology of equality of the sexes.

Welt Straus lived an even more unusual life, as we know from the candid letters written by her daughter, Nellie Straus-Mochenson, and from press reports. Relations between mother and daughter were tense. Nellie admitted in a letter to a Zionist friend, Hadassah President Alice Seligsberg, that her mother intensely disliked her son-in-law, Nellie's husband.<sup>170</sup> The extent of this hostility could be seen in the summer of 1924, when Nellie and Bernard Mochenson, a teacher at the Herzilya Gymnasium, adopted a beautiful six-month-old baby girl. Aliza, as the girl was called, reunited the family.<sup>171</sup> Nellie proclaimed that motherhood had made her into a new person. But Nellie, an invalid, died in the summer of 1933. Heartbroken at the loss of her only child, Welt Straus began a legal campaign to gain guardianship of her granddaughter. Her efforts attracted public attention.<sup>172</sup> According to press reports, the court decided in favor of Welt Straus, citing her international reputation and her declaration that she would make the girl her legal heir.<sup>173</sup> The English-language *Palestine Post* reported that "this news has caused great astonishment among the friends of the late Mrs. Mochenson. What are the facts? A child who only a few months ago lost a loving tender mother is, through the judgment of the court, deprived now of her father. . . . From the human aspect it is inconceivable that a child should be torn from its father."<sup>174</sup>

The court's ruling seems to indicate that Welt Straus and the judge in the case thought that the financial support that the grandmother could provide took precedence over the girl's relation with her adopted father. Did they not recognize the important role played by fathers in family life? Did Welt Straus's ideas about gender roles make her less appreciative of fathering? This regretful affair, along with Welt Straus's ultimate emigration from

Palestine, may well be the reason why the first president of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal rights has disappeared from Israelis' collective memory.<sup>175</sup>

The lives of these three women represent a range of feminist positions. Azaryahu incorporated her egalitarian principles into her marriage and her relations with her children. In contrast, Glicklich and Welt Straus lived lives of independence and freedom without relying on any man in the role of husband and father. Their conduct might be seen as the first glimmerings of the postmodern view common today that eschews the privileged status of the traditional nuclear family and proposes new forms of family life. As early as the 1920s feminists throughout the world were proposing innovative family models.<sup>176</sup> Glicklich went far, fashioning a single-parent matriarchal family, while Welt Straus stripped her son-in-law of his role as guardian of his adopted daughter. In these cases an ostensibly egalitarian view showed itself to be in fact a privileging of a woman's role as parent over that of a man. Both reproduced the gender equality they fought for on the public stage in their private lives, and in so doing dismantled the family unit. These examples, exceptional for their time, point to the possibility that the empowerment of women can establish a new order in the private realm as well. The stories of Azaryahu, Glicklich, and Welt Straus show how public values may construct private lives.



## Five Years of Struggle and a Victory

The question of women's rights must therefore receive a final solution in this session, so that it [will] no longer be a nemesis for the National Council.

—Y. A. Navon, “BeSivkhey haVa‘ad haLe’umi”

Contrary to expectations, the elections to the first Assembly of Representatives did not mark the end of the struggle for equality. The fight continued for another five years before finally ending in victory in January 1926. The suffragists ratcheted up their campaign and raised their voices even louder. During this period, the League of Nations officially granted Great Britain a Mandate over Palestine and the territory's borders were established. In 1921, Arabs rioted in Jaffa, killing Jews and shaking Jewish-Arab coexistence. When peace was restored, it was a tense one. Sir Herbert Samuel's tenure as high commissioner, a time of both achievements and failures, ended in the summer of 1925, when he was replaced by Lord Palmer.

Demographically, the Jewish population of Palestine more than doubled during this period, thanks to two waves of immigration, the Third Aliyah and Fourth Aliyah.<sup>1</sup> The immigrant influx expanded Tel Aviv, which was transformed from a garden suburb of Jaffa into a city in its own right. It also swelled the populations of the country's other cities and the *moshavot*. Some of these immigrants founded new communal agricultural settlements—*kibbutzim* and *moshavim*.

On the political level, labor organizations and parties became the dominant force in the Yishuv. At the same time, the Old Yishuv's share of the Jewish population diminished. Yet while the Yishuv grew and developed, its national institutions—the Assembly of Representatives and the National Council—remained weak and lacked effective organization.

The Assembly of Representatives met first in October 1920 and only a handful of times afterward. The Haredim continued to refuse to participate, fearing that they would become dependent on this secular organization—

one that would control their most vital services, such as education, the distribution of charitable funds, and kosher slaughter. The lack of cooperation between the Yishuv's two sectors led the Mandate administration to refrain from granting the power of taxation to the newly established Yishuv institutions, thus impeding their ability to function.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the Zionist Executive, protecting its own turf, held back in granting the Yishuv institutions' request for cooperation.<sup>3</sup> In the midst of all this, the women's question, "the question that made public life miserable," remained on the public agenda.<sup>4</sup>

The National Council, chosen from among the members of the Assembly of Representatives, served as its executive body. To satisfy the Haredim, all thirty-six members of the Council were men. However, seventeen alternate members were also chosen, and among these were two women, Rachel Yana'it and Dr. Hannah Maisel Shochat, both members of the labor movement. Yana'it had recently married Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, who chaired the Council. Maisel, the founder of the country's first women's farm, was the wife of Eli'ezer Shochat, also a delegate to the Assembly, and the sister-in-law of Yisra'el Shochat, who served on the Council. It is not clear whether the two were chosen mostly for their family connections or because of their considerable personal achievements.<sup>5</sup>

This slight to women angered and frustrated the members of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights. Its president, Rosa Welt Straus, declared in a letter to the *IWSA* journal that she was profoundly disappointed by the exclusion of women from full membership in the National Council.<sup>6</sup>

The Council showed itself to be a conciliatory and subdued body, reflecting the nature of its three chairmen. Ya'akov Thon, who had chaired the Provisional Committee, had been a compromiser, but his initiatives were usually rejected by its other members.<sup>7</sup> Ben-Zvi was a leader of *Ahdut HaAvodah*, which was one of the two main parties in the labor movement at that time that advocated equality for women, but he was also known as a seeker of consensus. David Yellin, an educator born into the Old Yishuv who sought to unite it with the New Yishuv,<sup>8</sup> maintained that there was no halakhic prohibition against women's participation in elections. He thus believed that the Haredim would slowly come around to accepting the new rules. The leaders of the National Council recognized women's right to vote in principle but viewed putting it into action as a matter of secondary importance. Their paramount objective was to obtain British recognition of the Yishuv's governing institutions, and to do that they needed the Haredim to cooper-

ate. This “politics of expediency” was pursued by progressive forces in many countries that supported women’s rights but held off implementing them in for economic or practical political reasons.<sup>9</sup>

The women’s question was thus a central cause of the paralysis of the Yishuv’s elected institutions.<sup>10</sup> Their inaction disappointed the Yishuv, as Ben-Zvi noted in the autumn of 1921. “There is a sense of total apathy in all our work and no project is accomplished properly,” he complained.<sup>11</sup> The only way out seemed to lie in the second session of the Assembly of Representatives, scheduled for February 1922. Resolving the women’s issue was on the agenda.<sup>12</sup> But the Haredim issued an ultimatum to the National Council: as long as women’s right to vote and be elected to office was not rescinded, they would not take part in the Assembly.<sup>13</sup> The Haredim’s poor showing in the elections, rather than prompting them to compromise, caused them to make increasingly extreme demands.

The flames of hostility between the Old and New Yishuvs grew higher.<sup>14</sup> The New Yishuv was appalled when, in February 1922, Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld and his right-hand man Jacob Israël De-Haan met with the British press baron Lord Northcliffe, a strident anti-Zionist. The Haredim asked Northcliffe to recommend to the British authorities that they recognize the Haredim as a separate Jewish community, legally distinct from the New Yishuv.<sup>15</sup> It was the first practical step the Haredi leadership had made toward seceding from the organized Yishuv, and its implications were clear to all. The New Yishuv viewed the meeting with Lord Northcliffe as tantamount to treason.<sup>16</sup> The antagonism it caused would lead, two years later, to the Yishuv’s first political assassination. The Union organized a public meeting in Jerusalem on February 19–20, 1922, to protest Haredi intransigence.<sup>17</sup> At the protest meeting and rally the Union’s members boldly raised their voices.

The Mizrahi movement nevertheless persisted in its support for the Haredim. Rabbi Moshe Ostrovski—whose wife, Hinda, was one of the founders of the Mizrahi Women organization in the Yishuv—put it this way: “We don’t say whether women are permitted or forbidden to participate in elections, but one thing is clear to us, that it is that in complete opposition to the opinions and views of most parts of the Hebrew public in Palestine.”<sup>18</sup> Mizrahi also vehemently opposed recognizing the results of the first elections and adhered to its decision not to participate in the Assembly of Representatives as long as the Haredim were not present.<sup>19</sup>

But the two religious groups were not the only ones to boycott the Assembly. The parties representing the farmers of the moshavot and the Sephardim saw an opportunity to flex their muscles.<sup>20</sup> But after meeting with them, the leaders of the National Council were able to mollify these factions.<sup>21</sup> The leaders' many meetings with the Haredim,<sup>22</sup> however, were futile and showed just how weak the elected bodies were. Yoseph Klausner described the situation in harsh terms: "You had to see the most respected figures in Palestinian Jewry running . . . harried and frantic . . . inveigling and appeasing—and all this just so that the most rotten part of the Yishuv endorse the nation's renewal."<sup>23</sup>

### The Second Session of the Assembly of Representatives

Whatever power the Assembly of Representatives had, it possessed by virtue of its very existence. It convened for its second session on March 6–9, 1922, in the Zion Theater in downtown Jerusalem, a venue perfectly suited to the body's significance. With seating for 900, the hall was equipped with electric lighting at a time when Jerusalem homes lacked this amenity.<sup>24</sup> Zionist flags, the banners of the twelve tribes of Israel, and photographs of Zionist leaders adorned the walls. On the day it convened, the Haredim sent the Assembly an open letter calling on the factions of the Left to decide against women's suffrage, "and then all Haredi Judaism will come to join with you in the organizational work."<sup>25</sup> The demand was rejected categorically. The secretary who recorded the proceedings noted that the seats assigned to the Haredim and Mizrahi remained empty, and Assembly Speaker Yellin regretted this in his opening remarks: "These [empty] seats call and shout out to that part that has not yet come—come and join us!"<sup>26</sup>

A smaller number of delegates attended this time—in fact, to keep costs down, only about 200 of the 314 delegates elected were invited to participate.<sup>27</sup> This time, the Assembly operated with greater efficiency, thanks in part to the absence of the Haredim. The Communities Ordinance, which required every Jew in Palestine to belong to the Yishuv's official bodies, was approved, and the national institutions were authorized to levy mandatory taxes on the country's Jews.<sup>28</sup> But these decisions required the Mandate government's ratification, which was not forthcoming. The British claimed that the rights granted to the Jews needed to be appropriate for the Arab pop-



ulation as well.<sup>29</sup> The National Council thus remained paralyzed and lost prestige.<sup>30</sup>

In the end, the women's issue did not come up at this session. It was put off for the next one, which was slated to convene during the following year.<sup>31</sup> It seems likely that the leaders of the Assembly thought that this postponement would make it possible for the Haredim to participate in the next session. In the meantime, the women's issue was put into the deep freeze, and the elation that had prevailed at the first session had turned into skepticism by this point.<sup>32</sup> Ada Fishman wrote sarcastically in *Do'ar Hayom*: "The most important thing in the second session is whether the [labor] left will stick to its capitulationist-compromising tactics in the future as well."<sup>33</sup> Once again, at the end of the second session, no women were appointed full members of the National Council, only as alternates. But this tactic did have some partial success—Mizrahi consented to accept seats on the National Council.<sup>34</sup> The proceedings of the National Council between the second and third Assembly sessions show that the two women serving as alternate members, Yana'it and Glicklich, both representing Ahdut HaAvodah, participated in National Council meetings.

Nevertheless, the dispute with the Haredim led to a new round of pleas to the women who sat in the Assembly of Representatives. They were asked to give up their seats, but they remained steadfast in their beliefs that women should not give up even one iota of their rights and that it was their responsibility to ensure the liberal character of the Jewish national society in the making.<sup>35</sup>

#### Toward a Split: Initial Feelers

It gradually became clear that the Haredim intended to secede from the rest of the Yishuv and that the fight over women's political rights was merely a proxy for a more general war against the New Yishuv's intention of dominating the Jewish community in Palestine. Rabbi Yisra'el Porat asserted that Haredi intransigence was aimed at frustrating "the desire of the left-wing minority to rule and impose its ideals and opinions on the Haredi majority."<sup>36</sup> The Haredim announced that they were "against cooperation with secular Jews . . . and against . . . paying taxes to a Council of Sabbath violators and consumers of forbidden foods."<sup>37</sup> They justified this separatist stance by

referring to traditional Jewish sources and historical experience. They explained their position at length in letters they sent in English to the Colonial Office in London, in which they declared that they were forbidden to live under the authority of the secular National Council.<sup>38</sup>

In the debate over women's suffrage the Haredim emphatically rejected modern standards, but that did not keep them from shrewdly invoking democratic values in their dialogue with the British. They reiterated their claim that they were the majority among Palestine's Jews,<sup>39</sup> and that they should thus not be compelled to become part of the organized Yishuv. Such coercion would be in violation of British law as well as the Mandate charter, both of which recognized individual and religious freedom.<sup>40</sup> They also argued that they were being forced to be part of a community that granted women the right to vote, even though this was not the practice—or so they claimed—in any other Jewish community. They met with High Commissioner Samuel and asked him to recognize them as a separate community.<sup>41</sup> In letters to the League of Nations in Geneva, they tried to block ratification of the British Mandate.<sup>42</sup> The British—who, following Ottoman practice, categorized the Yishuv as a religious community—took the Haredi claims very seriously and for that reason held off ratifying the charter of the Yishuv's national institutions.<sup>43</sup>

Articles condemning cooperation with the Assembly of Representatives appeared frequently in the Haredi press.<sup>44</sup> In the Haredi view, establishing themselves as a separate community was the right and proper thing to do: “[we have come to] realize clearly that Torah-observant Jews are not permitted and are not able to be organized into a single common community with public desecrators of the Sabbath and heretics.”<sup>45</sup> As the time for ratifying the Communities Ordinance approached, separatist efforts increased. On June 22, 1924, a public prayer service was held at the Western Wall to protest the imposition of the ordinance. Rabbi Sonnenfeld wrote: “It is a time of tribulation for the Jewish community, a danger of destruction, may it not be, hovers over the Torah, religion and the entire Haredi Yishuv.”<sup>46</sup> Three thousand Haredim signed a petition to the colonial secretary asking for recognition as a separate community.<sup>47</sup> Preparations were made for sending a delegation to London to make this request in person.

The tension between the Haredim and the New Yishuv reached its climax on June 30, 1924. De-Haan was shot dead outside the Sha'arei Tzedek hospital on Jaffa Road. He had been meant to travel to London as part of a

Haredi delegation to meet with Colonial Office officials as part of Haredi efforts to gain recognition as a separate community. His death is considered to be the modern Yishuv's first political assassination. The furor aroused by the murder further fanned the flames between the warring factions.<sup>48</sup> British officials voiced their concern that the killing would make it harder for them to recognize the Assembly of Representatives.<sup>49</sup> Women's suffrage was temporarily pushed into the background of a pitched battle waged by the Haredim against their subordination to the Yishuv's autonomous governing institutions.

### Referendum: The Union in Opposition

In search for a solution to the deadlock over women's suffrage, Mizrahi—aware that in other countries popular majorities had usually voted against granting the vote to women—had since the spring of 1919 waged an inconsistent campaign for a referendum on women's suffrage in the Yishuv. Referendums can be double-edged swords. On the one hand, they are perceived to be the ultimate in democracy, but on the other hand, they can exacerbate societal rifts and cause a severe crisis of legitimacy for the regime that sponsors them. In some of the United States<sup>50</sup> as well as European countries (Switzerland, in particular), referendums came to be accepted as the best way of making decisions about voting rights.<sup>51</sup> The Mizrahi movement became so fervent about the subject that, as Rabbi Yehuda Leib Fishman acknowledged, “We’ve made ourselves a laughing stock among the Haredim.”<sup>52</sup>

Referendums on women's suffrage in other places had been held in different formats. In some, both men and women voted; in others, only men or only women participated. Taken as a whole, these referendums showed that broad-based support for women's suffrage among women could not be taken for granted, and in many cases more women opposed it than supported it.<sup>53</sup> For example, in the public debate leading up to a referendum in Massachusetts in 1895, members of a women's party opposing suffrage argued that even voting no in a referendum would be a violation of their absolute opposition to women's involvement in politics. They thus boycotted the poll.<sup>54</sup> American anti-suffragists argued that referendums on the subject should be restricted to women, on the ground that democracy required that women decide the issue for themselves.<sup>55</sup>

The National Council leaders agreed in principle in 1923 with the referendum proposal, thus implicitly declaring that women's voting rights were a matter of choice rather than of principle. Advocates of a referendum thought that it could bring the controversy to an end, whereas opponents on both sides of the issue rejected it, claiming that they would not accept the results.<sup>56</sup> Leaders of the labor movement supported the idea of a referendum halfheartedly, hoping that it might pave the way toward British recognition of the Yishuv's autonomous institutions.<sup>57</sup>

The National Council's position is difficult to understand. Did its members think that the Haredim would accept the referendum results? Perhaps they thought that if a referendum denied women the right to vote, the labor camp would accept the people's judgment, and that if it granted the right, the Haredim would break away but Mizrahi and the other conservative factions—the Sephardim and farmers—would accept the results and participate in the Assembly.<sup>58</sup> Members of the Union and some women in the labor movement argued that consenting to a referendum was tantamount to giving up a right they had already exercised.<sup>59</sup> The controversy over a referendum proved so fierce that the idea was tabled for the time being.

In the spring of 1924, with the approach of the Assembly of Representatives' third session, Mizrahi broached an idea that had been bandied about several times over the previous five years—holding a referendum on women's suffrage. The women of the Union felt that they needed to ratchet up their campaign and produce “a single enormous voice of protest,” so they declared a nationwide Women's Rights Campaign Day for April 2, 1924.<sup>60</sup> They planned it in detail: there would be rallies in settlements and cities, posters, and leaflets explaining the roles played by women in building the Yishuv and on feminist activism. Calling on Yishuv women “for whom the idea of women's liberation is close and dear to their hearts,” Union members asked for help organizing the rallies and urged women to participate in protests against the referendum.<sup>61</sup> Azaryahu wrote a pointed article for *Ha'aretz*, arguing that any concession on women's suffrage would open the door to demands for still further concessions.

She was not alone in this assessment. Leading figures on the National Council were also coming to the conclusion that yielding to the Haredim was simply providing an incentive for them to issue more demands.<sup>62</sup> Azaryahu pledged that she and her colleagues would not compromise “on our natural rights to participate in the building of our land. . . . For a quar-

ter of a century we have been brought up as Zionist women in the spirit of absolute equality and we will never forfeit this right.”<sup>63</sup> She spoke from a position of strength and with a fierce belief in women’s ability to stand their ground. The two dailies, *Ha’aretz* and *Do’ar Hayom*, that assiduously reported the Union’s efforts also loyally supported its campaign.

The response was enthusiastic. Large crowds showed up for the rallies, at which both women and men spoke. The rally in Jerusalem was held at one of the city’s largest venues, outside Beit Ha‘Am. The yard was packed. Most of those present were associated with the labor movement, and the mood was exultant.<sup>64</sup> The most notable speaker was Henrietta Szold, the founder of Hadassah and the head of the Hebrew Women’s Organization. She stressed that it was vital for the national enterprise to be founded on the principles of equality and justice, including full participation for women.<sup>65</sup> Turning a term of Haredi vituperation against them, she said that they, not the supporters of women’s suffrage, were “fence breakers”—that is, they breached a social norm.<sup>66</sup> Azaryahu and Hasyah Feinsud-Sukenik of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights also spoke, as did Rachel Yana’it of Ahdut HaAvodah, the well-known pediatrician Dr. Helena Kagan, and Yoseph Klausner.<sup>67</sup>

Klausner pointed to the great advances in women’s suffrage in Europe and North America and condemned the Yishuv’s stagnation on the issue.<sup>68</sup> He extolled the traditional Jewish prohibition against causing harm to another person and argued that considering women as inferior to men conflicted with enlightened Judaism and Zionism. A referendum on women’s right to vote was, he said, tantamount to asking voters to decide whether or not women were human beings. “This is our unchanging, adamant position and we will not move from it. We will not budge!” he concluded.<sup>69</sup> The crowd applauded and cheered the speakers’ categorical rejection of a referendum.<sup>70</sup>

### The Third Session Approaches: The Union Intensifies Its Campaign

The Yishuv grew considerably between the Assembly of Representatives’ first and third sessions, and most of the newcomers were affiliated with the New Yishuv. As a result, the Assembly elected in 1920 no longer represented the population, causing unease among Yishuv leaders. The National Council Executive issued a statement saying that “the time has come for the New He-

brew Yishuv in Palestine, which has almost doubled its numbers during this period, to make its wishes heard."<sup>71</sup> The time that had passed and the changing demographic characteristics of the Yishuv raised hopes that the women's question had become anachronistic. Yana'it's reaction was: "I had hoped not to hear the same old argument in the National Council today."<sup>72</sup>

But new elections meant crafting the rules by which they would be held, and that meant a decision regarding women's right to vote had to be made. The Union thus redoubled its campaign. It sent letters chronicling previous parts of the campaign, signed by Welt Straus and the seven members of its executive committee, to Zionist offices around the globe.<sup>73</sup> No halakhic prohibition was involved, they maintained, stressing women's contributions to building the land. They would not compromise on their legal rights, they declared, and they asked the Yishuv's women's "sisters, wherever they are . . . to stand at our side in this war and to help [us], with all the power of influence they wield, achieve total victory."<sup>74</sup> They sent a special letter to Szold, asking her to convene Hadassah's governing council and send the National Council a telegram in support of the struggle. Such a message was "of extreme importance," they wrote.<sup>75</sup>

These appeals to Zionist organizations brought the results the women had hoped. On the eve of the third session of the Assembly, the Yishuv press was full of stories of cables that Zionist women's organizations from various countries had sent to the National Council and the Union. The messages adamantly opposed the suggestion that Yishuv women might be deprived of their right to vote.<sup>76</sup> They demanded that the election regulations conform to the rules of justice and equality.<sup>77</sup> Szold once again stood by the Union, calling in a telegram to Welt Straus for the Assembly of Representatives to ratify women's right to vote. Anything else, she asserted, would be unbefitting the new Jewish society that had been established in the people's national home.<sup>78</sup> In a single move, the Union's campaign had the effect of making women's rights, once and for all, an inseparable part of Zionist ideology and of creating an international sisterhood of Jewish women.<sup>79</sup>

But that was not all. The women of the Union made their voices heard throughout the Yishuv. They organized women's rallies supporting women's suffrage in Haifa and Jerusalem,<sup>80</sup> in Jaffa and Tel Aviv,<sup>81</sup> and in the moshavot.<sup>82</sup> They once again packed Jerusalem's Beit Ha'Am auditorium, and *Do'ar Hayom* reported that there were more men in attendance than women.<sup>83</sup> The speakers included members of the Union; representatives of the labor

movement; and Klausner, the Union's veteran supporter. They stressed that the question facing the Assembly of Representatives at this juncture was not that of whether to grant women the right to vote but that of whether to revoke a right that women had already exercised in the first Yishuvwide elections.<sup>84</sup> These rallies ended by adopting resolutions adamantly calling on the Assembly to "not take away the right!" As Welt Straus put it, "we are not now discussing here the question of whether to grant women the right to vote but rather whether to rescind it, the first and only such spectacle in the history of the women's liberation movement, which can bring no honor to our revitalizing land."<sup>85</sup>

### The Assembly Decides and Splits

The Assembly of Representatives convened for its third session on June 15–17, 1925, at the Zion Theater. The regulations that would govern the next election were on its agenda.<sup>86</sup> The Haredim, who declared that they refused to give in to the dictates of the New Yishuv, did not attend. In their absence, the presence of women in the Assembly and audience was all the more evident, and the general feeling was that the time had come to make a decision. Ya'akov Thon, who still hoped that he could bring the body to accede to the Haredi demand for a referendum and thus entice them to take part in the proceedings, made a secret deal with them with the help of Yellin.<sup>87</sup> It contained two provisions: that the Assembly would approve a referendum by secret ballot, and that the Haredim would accept the results of the referendum—but only if the proposal to grant women the vote was defeated. This patently undemocratic compact was aimed at getting the Haredim to participate in the session so that the Assembly could claim to represent all of Palestine's Jews.<sup>88</sup> When the agreement was brought before the delegates for a vote, they were shocked. Azaryahu stressed in the debate about the scheme that women had been sitting alongside rabbis at Zion Congresses for an entire generation, and no one had ever objected to their presence or suggested that the halakhah forbade women to vote. She spoke of the prevailing winds in Western society, where women were now accepted as equal members of the world's parliaments. "They now come with a demand that the decision be given over to the minority, something unheard of everywhere," she concluded.<sup>89</sup> Years later she wrote that her speech was met "with a huge thunder of cheers and lengthy applause."<sup>90</sup>

The unexpected pact was put to a vote. The result was unequivocal—53 for and 130 against. In response, the delegates of the Mizrahi, Sephardi, and Yemenite factions immediately walked out of the hall, to boos from their fellow delegates. Yet the walkout was a clear sign that the Assembly of Representatives had come to an end. The remaining delegates were anxious. Had the Assembly, Azaryahu wondered, “fallen, God forbid, never to rise again?”<sup>91</sup> The next morning, after expressing regret at the exit of the Haredim and their supporters,<sup>92</sup> the Assembly passed the bylaws that would govern the elections to a new Assembly. The rules included the following section: “Every Jew, without regard to sex or class, has a right to vote and to be elected.”<sup>93</sup> It was also decided that the elections would be held within three weeks.<sup>94</sup> Both these decisions were of great importance. According to the newspaper *HaPo‘el HaTza‘ir*, “the third session adjourned in elation and confidence that the Yishuv will be able to overcome the obstacles that various irresponsible parties have placed in the way of our organization.”<sup>95</sup>

But the opponents of women’s suffrage did not sit on their hands. Fifty of the delegates who had walked out assembled the next day and declared that they were the legal Assembly. “The people are with us . . . we are the Assembly of Representatives,” they announced.<sup>96</sup> They chose a provisional, mostly Haredi, National Council<sup>97</sup> and an Election Commission and planned to demand that the Zionist Executive support their organization.<sup>98</sup> It looked as if the split in the Yishuv was final.

#### Referendum Redux

The Assembly’s decision to hold new elections inspired the women of the Union. They began to organize rallies and home meetings “in all sectors of the people to persuade them to go to the polls and vote for those who defend their rights.”<sup>99</sup> They also took part in joint rallies with other parties.<sup>100</sup> But it seemed as if the subject, and the Union’s reiteration of its message, now bored the public. *Davar* reported that a rally in Petah Tikvah where Azaryahu had spoken had been sparsely attended.<sup>101</sup> Yet the blow that knocked the wind out of the sails of the Union came from an unexpected direction: the elections were postponed once again.

The immediate cause was Mizrahi. The members of the religious Zionist movement asked for time to rethink their strategy. Admitting that they had been too hasty in walking out, they maintained, “The women’s question is



not even an issue for us.”<sup>102</sup> They once again raised the worn banner of a referendum, promising that they and the Haredim would accept the results unconditionally. They sent their proposal to the press.<sup>103</sup> Some of the Sephardi and Yemenite delegates who had walked out with Mizrahi expressed similar regrets.<sup>104</sup> At first, the National Council categorically rejected any delay, and the referendum idea as well, on the ground that “the women’s question has become a sticking point. Because of it the National Council cannot progress with any work.”<sup>105</sup> It sounds as if its members had accepted the split in the Yishuv and that the subject of a referendum had been exhausted. The Haredim also opposed the Mizrahi proposal, announcing in their newspaper *Kol Yisra’el* that “none of Haredi Jewry will take part in the referendum.”<sup>106</sup> Despite all this, after debating the issue for two days, the National Council decided to delay the elections by three months.<sup>107</sup>

This postponement, like previous ones, demonstrates the New Yishuv leadership’s profound desire to bring all of Palestine’s Jews under one roof. It also once again put the Union in the position of being seen as an impediment to Jewish unity. However, the members of the National Council did not want to be seen as infringing women’s rights or as setting aside the decisions of the Assembly of Representatives. They thus reasserted that the decision made in the third session regarding women’s participation in the elections was not open to appeal.<sup>108</sup> Their desire to please all sides was evident at a meeting of the Provisional Committee Executive held in September 1925, which set the election day for November 8, 1925. But, it resolved, on the same ballot there would also be a referendum on women’s suffrage.<sup>109</sup> According to one writer, this referendum, which he termed “the final concession,” was the last hope for saving Yishuv unity.<sup>110</sup>

The decision angered the women of the Union, who refused to agree to a referendum.<sup>111</sup> Although Welt Straus was not a member of the National Council, she had been present at the meeting where the referendum was decided on. She wrote in *Ha’aretz* that the decision violated the decisions of the Assembly of Representatives, as well as the Zionist movement’s democratic principles. “Who does not understand that by such means we shake the very foundations of our Yishuv?” she asked.<sup>112</sup> Szold stood by the Union and sent a letter to the National Council demanding that women be given full rights to vote and to be elected to office.<sup>113</sup>

Ada Fishman castigated the labor parties for agreeing to compromise. “Would they have consented to a referendum if the subject were men?” she

asked.<sup>114</sup> A writer in the brand-new labor newspaper, *Davar*, supported her: “It is unheard of in a place where women have already participated in elections and have already been elected to the national legislature that this natural and inherent right be stolen from them and they [be] ejected from their people’s and their land’s legislature. In doing this, are we not making ourselves a laughingstock before the entire world?”<sup>115</sup>

The Union’s members were unanimous in rejecting the referendum but divided on tactics. Should they participate in it and lend their support to those who supported women’s rights, or boycott it and thus strengthen their opponents? Most of them chose the first course. They worked to rouse public opinion in the cities and moshavot and to persuade women to vote against those who would rob them of their rights.<sup>116</sup> But the members of the Tel Aviv chapter took the opposite tack, voting at two rallies to boycott the referendum. “We are washing our hands of it and will remain passive,” they declared.<sup>117</sup> Esther Yeivin, the chapter’s chairwoman, argued that the National Council’s decision on the referendum was illegal and constituted a stinging affront to the Yishuv’s women. “We must, once and for all, decide and dare to protest and not give in,” she asserted.<sup>118</sup> The Tel Aviv chapter sent a statement to the press calling on the “radical Hebrew” public to join in their protest and not vote in the referendum.<sup>119</sup>

The disagreement between the Union’s national leadership in Jerusalem and the Tel Aviv branch was one of tactics, not principle. The women in Jerusalem believed that they needed to take part in the referendum and vote in favor of women’s suffrage, so that the initiative would be passed. The members in Tel Aviv, in contrast, maintained that participation in the referendum legitimized it. And elsewhere? In the estimation of *Do’ar Hayom*, “the demand for equal rights for women not only does not come from all the women in Palestine, but a large portion of them is willing to do without it or even utterly opposes it.”<sup>120</sup> The religious newspaper *Hed Ha’am* agreed, arguing that “the larger part of the women in Palestine does not demand this right [to vote] and is not even concerned with it.”<sup>121</sup> The eloquent reticence of the Yishuv’s women seems to support the newspapers’ claims. The same phenomenon of a paucity of interest by women in suffrage could be seen also in the United States, where most women abstained from the struggle and did not vote in referendums on the issue.<sup>122</sup>

The hope that the Haredim would consent to accept the results of a referendum even if it went against them turned out to be a vain one. Two weeks

before the scheduled vote, an assembly of rabbis from all over the country declared its inalterable opposition to a referendum in which women could vote.<sup>123</sup> The Chief Rabbinate also issued a prohibition against participating in the referendum.<sup>124</sup> *KolYisra'el* published a stern warning against voting, signed by rabbis from the Yishuv, Europe, and the United States.<sup>125</sup> Mizrahi realized that its strategy had been a mistake. It issued a statement calling for the referendum to be abandoned because “it is totally unnecessary and there is no need to take part in it.”<sup>126</sup> The National Council agreed and immediately canceled the referendum.<sup>127</sup> Yellin acknowledged that, over the years, “we conceded [to the Haredim] everything we could just so that they would take part,” but it had all been for nothing.<sup>128</sup>

Yeivin proudly declared: “A disgrace for the Hebrew nation in Palestine has been averted.”<sup>129</sup> At a meeting organized by the Union in Tel Aviv and attended by representatives of chapters around the country and many guests, the organization’s leaders maintained that they had paved the way for this achievement and that the Yishuv should “congratulate the Union of [Hebrew] Women for Equal Rights for its uncompromising battle for justice and equality.”<sup>130</sup>

### Victory for Women: The Second Elections

A new date was set for elections, December 6.<sup>131</sup> The fractiousness that had been evident in the initial elections to the Assembly of Representatives increased. In 1920 about twenty parties had participated, while this time twenty-nine submitted slates. At the same time, the number of seats in the Assembly was reduced by a third.<sup>132</sup> Thanks to a surge in immigration, however, the voting public had increased to approximately 58,000.<sup>133</sup> Bulletin boards were plastered with posters announcing polling places and calling on people to vote.<sup>134</sup> Rallies were held to urge people to perform their civic duty.<sup>135</sup>

The Union worked hard to prepare for the elections. It submitted its slate of candidates to the Election Commission and launched its campaign.<sup>136</sup> Welt Straus urged its members to do their part by donating to the election fund, making posters, and encouraging women to vote for lists that included female candidates.<sup>137</sup> She concluded a letter to the Union’s members: “We must mobilize all our scattered strength and in the end victory will be ours.”<sup>138</sup>

But opponents of the elections did not remain impassive. Haredi groups planned actions to interfere with the voting. *KolYisra'el* launched attacks on Mizrahi.<sup>139</sup> The offices of the Jerusalem branch of the Haredi organization Agudat Yisra'el filled with energetic volunteers. *KolYisra'el* reported that “broadsides and prohibitions against the elections are published daily and plastered on walls and handed out to people.”<sup>140</sup> Pious Jews all over the country were called on to sign a petition to the Mandate authorities declaring that the Haredi public was united in its opposition to the Assembly of Representatives. Particularly venomous attacks were made on Yana'it and Glicklich, alternative National Council members.<sup>141</sup> At the Meah She'arim Yeshiva every weapon was fired: “boycotts, invective, and shofar blasts.”<sup>142</sup> *KolYisra'el* published a “warning” that the elections would bring “a horrible disaster on the Holy Land and destruction and devastation on Judaism and the entire Jewish people.”<sup>143</sup> But the rest of the public remained largely apathetic, “paralyzed,” as the Election Commission put it.<sup>144</sup> Ben-Zvi lamented in *Davar* that “apathy has become natural for us in all relating to the organization of the Yishuv and the National Council.”<sup>145</sup>

The lack of public enthusiasm for the campaign was evident in a sharp reduction in turnout. In 1920 a full 77 percent of those eligible voted, whereas in 1925 only 56.7 percent did so.<sup>146</sup> Yehoshua Radler Feldman of Mizrahi recalled that five years previously some Jews had recited the festive *sheheheyanu* blessing on casting their vote, “their eyes sparkling with tears of joy.”<sup>147</sup> He remembered that Oriental Jews had decorated the polling places with greenery and that voters had arrived singing, accompanied by drums and cymbals. But that kind of euphoria was nowhere to be seen in the second round.

The newspapers devoted much space to opposition to the elections and covered the event extensively. “Almost all the inhabitants of Jerusalem took the day off . . . heads of yeshivot recognized that it was essential to cancel studies on this day so as to give the young people a chance to fight the holy war,” the Haredi newspaper *Kol Yisra'el* reported.<sup>148</sup> The obligation to engage in Torah study was set aside so as to enable yeshiva students to frighten the public and deter potential voters.<sup>149</sup> The Election Commission reported that members of Agudat Yisra'el armed with sticks threatened citizens arriving to vote.<sup>150</sup> But *KolYisra'el* painted a different picture: “Pioneers [members of the New Yishuv] brutally pummeled exhausted Jews and Torah scholars with

their fists.”<sup>151</sup> Recall that, in 1920, Haredi polling places were considered dangerous.<sup>152</sup>

The Election Commission reported that, despite the difficulties, “the elections proceeded in an orderly fashion throughout the country. Supervision . . . was excellent.”<sup>153</sup> And the results clearly reflected the new political map and the changes that had taken place since the first poll. The women’s party made respectable gains, receiving 2,000 votes, which made it the fifth-largest faction, with 13 delegates.<sup>154</sup> Another 12 women were elected on the slates of other parties. The number of women who were elected nearly doubled, in spite of the fact that the size of the Assembly had been reduced. They now constituted 11.4 percent of the delegates, as opposed to 4.5 percent in the previous Assembly.<sup>155</sup> The labor parties won 92 of the 221 seats, together receiving 42.6 percent of the vote, up from 35.4 percent in the elections of 1920. Their victory constituted a victory for women’s right to vote.

The center or middle-class bloc, to which the Union belonged, included a number of other parties that also had women in their slates. Together the bloc won 73 seats, a third of the total (as opposed to a fifth in the first Assembly of Representatives). The bloc included the Revisionist Party, recently founded by Ze’ev Jabotinsky, who called himself a “male suffragist.”<sup>156</sup> A third of the bloc was made up of ethnic slates, who with 40 seats constituted 16.3 percent of the total membership of the Assembly—down from 20 percent in 1920. The religious bloc suffered a heavy blow. Partly because of the Haredi boycott and partly because of the Yishuv’s changing demographics, it was the smallest group in the new Assembly, and Mizrahi, which had fought tirelessly to get the Haredim to participate, lost badly. The religious bloc was fractured into five different parties, and together these received only 16 seats, just 4.5 percent of the total (as opposed to 19.7 percent in 1920).

The Union’s leaders sensed their power.<sup>157</sup> Their writings stress that they had fought and won the battle for women’s suffrage. Proudly, they reported in the IWSA’s journal that they had not been surprised by the Union’s triumph, even though other parties had been.<sup>158</sup>

## The End of the Struggle

Five weeks after the elections, on January 11, 1926, the Yishuv's elected representatives again filled the Zion Theater in Jerusalem. The first session of the Second Assembly of Representatives was termed a "peace meeting," but it in fact highlighted the fracture in the Yishuv.<sup>159</sup> Yellin and the other members of the presidium gave welcoming speeches. *Davar* expressed the feelings of the public: "We come here from all parts of the Yishuv. Men and women without the infringement of rights and without a war for rights."<sup>160</sup> Years later Azaryahu recalled her excitement: "I remember very well the elation that filled every part of me . . . with a light heart I took my place among the delegates as an equal among equals."<sup>161</sup>

Really? The way the hall looked reflected the convoluted and obstacle-ridden road women had traveled to obtain equality. *Davar* reported acerbically that the twenty-five female delegates sat "crowded and close to each other, almost separate, almost as if in a separate women's section."<sup>162</sup> It is not clear whether they did so out of habit or solidarity, or as a way of needling the Haredim. A reporter for *Ha'aretz* also mocked the "kosher" way the women delegates sat.<sup>163</sup> In addition, the silence that the women observed throughout the meeting showed that they still had a long way to go before they were equal partners in the political system.

But the fruits of the struggle were nevertheless apparent. An overwhelming number of the delegates voted, at this first session, in favor of women's rights. The resolution read: "The Second Assembly of Representatives of the Jews of the Land of Israel hereby declares the equal rights [of women] in all areas of the Hebrew Yishuv's civil, political, and economic life, and demands that the [Mandate] government ensure equal rights in all the country's laws."<sup>164</sup> At the IWSA congress held in Paris in the summer of 1926, Welt Straus declared that the resolution had been proposed by the Union.<sup>165</sup> On December 31, 1927, the Mandate administration formally ratified the resolution.<sup>166</sup> The struggle for women's suffrage produced a new civil order that promised equality for women in all areas.

The equality resolution was not just lip service—it was immediately put into force. Four women were appointed to the National Council: Azaryahu and Yeivin from the Union and Yana'it and Fishman of the labor caucus. Two more women served as alternate members: Feinsod-Sukenik of the Union and Rachel Katznelson of the labor movement, who would later, as wife

of Israel's third president, Zalman Shazar, serve as Israel's first lady.<sup>167</sup> The participation of women in the executive body, the National Council, guaranteed their standing and enabled them to play an active role in decision making.<sup>168</sup> It is worth noting that, at this point, women had a larger representation in the Yishuv leadership than in the Zionist Executive, even though the Zionist movement had granted women the vote from the start. A writer for *Ha'ishah* marveled at this: "How could this have happened . . . that during all those years not a single woman had entered the Executive of the Zionist Organization?"<sup>169</sup>

In every publication of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights throughout its history (1919–51), its leaders cited the granting of the vote to women in local and national elections as its most dramatic and important achievement. Azaryahu maintained that the Union had blazed the trail that led women onto the national stage.<sup>170</sup> The fact that this successful campaign had been waged over the relatively brief period of eight years was, in her words, "a huge leap."<sup>171</sup> The unique strategy chosen by the Union—its constitution as a political party—was viewed by its members as the key factor in its electoral success, one that went far beyond that of suffragists in other countries at that time.<sup>172</sup>

The suffrage campaign was not only one of women for women. It changed Yishuv society. "How great was the revolution in its world-view and in the Yishuv's way of thinking about women," said Sarah Azaryahu. She saw it as part of a profound process of inner liberation of the souls of the Yishuv's women, much like the sense of liberation that swept up nations in their struggles for independence. As she wrote, "both these movements suckle from a single source—the aspiration for freedom and self-determination of the nation and the individual, of man and of woman."<sup>173</sup> The Union's women saw their victory in 1925–1926 as a jumping-off point for further efforts, such as rectification of the legal status of women in the family.<sup>174</sup>

## Epilogue

The campaign had seemingly come to an end, but in fact it was not over. From time to time women's suffrage reemerged as an issue during debates in local councils or in the Assembly of Representatives, or with regard to legislation by the Mandate administration.<sup>175</sup> Two years after the question of women's suffrage had been decided, Ostrovski, the Mizrahi leader, tabled

in front of the National Council new proposals for reconciliation with the Haredim to induce them to return to the Assembly. He proposed that women voters be permitted to fill out their ballots at home and give them to their husbands to place in the ballot boxes at polling stations. Alternatively, he suggested that separate polling places be instituted for men and women. His suggestions were rejected.<sup>176</sup>

Another attempt to roll back women's suffrage came in 1932, when the Mandate administration, faced with Muslim objections to women's participation in local elections and seeking to maintain a uniform legal system for all of Palestine's inhabitants, proposed a provision that would grant the high commissioner the power to cancel women's right to vote in local council elections. The Union protested vociferously. Welt Straus brought the proposal before an IWSA congress in Marseilles, which denounced the initiative. This condemnation, along with petitions by the Union to the high commissioner and the British Ministry of Justice, forced the withdrawal of the proposal.<sup>177</sup>

The women serving in the National Council responded vigorously each time Mandate or Jewish authorities attempted what Azaryahu called "acts of public violence"—that is, a rollback of women's rights. Jewish women, she declared, would "never agree to be a second-class citizens in their land and among their nation."<sup>178</sup> Given the attempts of some religious authorities in today's Israel to enforce increasing public segregation of the sexes, Feinsud-Sukenik proved prophetic when she said that sex-segregated polling places would lead the Yishuv down a dangerous road. "We don't have separate streets and cars for women," she said, "so why should we make our elections into a farce when there is no reason to do so?"<sup>179</sup>

These and similar attempts made it clear to Azaryahu and her colleagues that the equality they had achieved remained shaky. In the spring of 1936 she acknowledged that "women remain the weak side of society that can, at any opportunity, be cast aside."<sup>180</sup> This sense did not fade with time. A short time after Israel was founded, the Union's women sent a letter to Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion expressing their concern about discrimination against women. They wrote: "A nation that demands a position of equality and freedom for itself among the family of nations is required first to establish its own life on these principles. It cannot discriminate between the two parts of the nation, men and women."<sup>181</sup>





## Victory and Defeat

The question of women's rights is a question of Zionism's right to exist.

—Yoseph Klausner, “Zekhuyot Ha’Ishah”

The battle for women's right to vote ended with the passage by the Second Assembly of Representatives of a declaration of equal rights for women. Once the issue was decided, everyone involved began to argue about who should get credit for the victory. The members of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights insisted that the triumph was theirs, as it had been their relentless and uncompromising campaign that had brought success. As Sarah Azaryahu later wrote, “Women fought boldly and energetically against this attack on their rights, and they won.”<sup>1</sup> To the women's party, victory seemed complete. Azaryahu rejoiced that “a turbulent and suspenseful era of the Hebrew women's movement in our country has come to an end—the era of women's fight for the right to vote for the Yishuv's highest institution.”<sup>2</sup> She and her colleagues seem to have believed that their political battle had reached its conclusion with the Assembly's declaration of equal rights for women.

It was certainly true that the Union, despite its limited electoral power, had played a very important watchdog role, sounding the alarm each time men tried to fashion new compromises that infringed on women's rights. It had also proved categorically that politics was not solely a male preserve.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, political activity by women is unambiguous proof of their entitlement.<sup>4</sup> Azaryahu said as much: “At such decisive moments, the Yishuv's women, of all leanings, unite[d] around the Union and, at public meetings it held all over the country, they vigorously voiced their bold concept of being equal and free citizens.”<sup>5</sup> The Union's members maintained that their participation in the first elections to the Assembly of Representatives in 1920 enabled them to fight for their cause and wield influence.<sup>6</sup>

Offering a glimpse into her own experience, Azaryahu admitted that she had wavered. “At times it seemed that, under pressure from Haredi circles, women would need to abandon their political positions; at times it seemed as if the ground was being pulled out from under them and that they were about to lose all the gains they had obtained,” she wrote. After women’s suffrage had gained the force of law, she admitted, “there were many difficult and shocking moments of inner warfare . . . [but we] could not, from a moral point of view, give in . . . [we] would not commit moral suicide.” Members of the Union had maintained from the start that they could trust no one but themselves. Nevertheless, Azaryahu acknowledged that she had often received the help and encouragement of men in the Assembly, who were “allies committed to the idea of equality and freedom for women.”<sup>7</sup>

The elation of the Union’s women was not shared by the leaders of the New Yishuv. They, too, saw the decision on women’s rights as a victory in principle—but it was also a calamity in practice. For most of them, women’s suffrage had been a long-range goal. Their more immediate aim had been to unite the entire Yishuv under their leadership. Unlike the Haredim, who had declared that votes for women was a red line they would not cross, most members of the New Yishuv favored the cause in principle, but they did not think it worth the price of a rupture.<sup>8</sup> Over the course of the Union’s campaign for suffrage, these leaders sought to fashion a broad consensus among the Yishuv’s myriad components for two reasons: first so that the Yishuv’s self-governing bodies would be recognized as legitimate by the British, and second with the purpose of fashioning a common sense of unity within the Yishuv and between it and the Jewish people as a whole.<sup>9</sup> On this count, they failed. In retrospect, it seems clear that, despite the New Yishuv’s declarations of support for the principle of women’s equality, it did not in fact internalize the principle. In this regard the Hebrew suffragists found themselves facing a situation similar to that faced by their sisters elsewhere in the world.<sup>10</sup>

The Haredi community’s crushing failure to convince the Yishuv to reject women’s suffrage resulted more than anything else from the huge demographic transformation that the Jewish community in Palestine underwent during these years, which greatly enlarged the New Yishuv. In the years 1920–26, Jewish immigration surged. By the end of 1925 the Old Yishuv had lost its primacy. Most of the immigrants who arrived following the British conquest supported the Zionist movement and thus associated

themselves with the New Yishuv. The Haredim were faced with the fact that their confidence that most of the Jewish public would side with them on the women's issue had been misplaced. Furthermore, they realized that they would be able to maintain their unique lifestyle only within an independent community separate from the organized New Yishuv. They had broached the possibility of a split at the beginning of the women's suffrage campaign, and their repeated declarations that they could not compromise on the women's issue were evidence of their inclination to maintain themselves as a separate community independent of the secular Zionist leadership.<sup>11</sup> In the summer of 1925, the Haredi newspaper *KolYisra'el* stated explicitly that by splitting away from the rest of the Yishuv "divine providence had kept us from being swept away by the [Zionists]."<sup>12</sup> The Old Yishuv had lost the demographic contest, but that only made it more zealous in upholding its principles and refusing to surrender to the New Yishuv. Mizrahi, for its part, lost face when it failed to bridge the gap between the Haredim and the New Yishuv. With the Haredim gone, Mizrahi found itself a marginal, isolated, and weak faction in the Assembly of Representatives, unable to further its mission of promoting traditional Judaism within the framework of the new institutions.

The considerable international research on voting rights addresses the question of the contribution made by women's organizations to gaining suffrage.<sup>13</sup> It is an issue that preoccupied suffragist leaders in any number of countries, as can be seen at the end of a book coauthored by Carrie Chapman Catt: "On the outside of politics women fought one of the strongest, bravest battles recorded in history, but to these men inside politics, some Republicans, some Democrats, and some members of minority parties, the women of the United States owe their enfranchisement."<sup>14</sup> The same was true in the Yishuv. While the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights was represented in the First Assembly of Representatives, their numbers were few and their votes alone were not enough to achieve their goals. As was the case with suffragists elsewhere in the world, they succeeded only thanks to massive support from men and growing public awareness that democracy required equality for women.

Historians have reached widely different conclusions about how important the Union was in gaining Yishuv women the right to vote. Some say the Union's campaign was decisive,<sup>15</sup> while others claim its effect was modest.<sup>16</sup> In reality, the facts as we know them support both positions, as there is no measure that can precisely determine how much influence the Union had.<sup>17</sup>

Whatever the case, the Union's work was celebrated worldwide thanks to its membership in the International Woman Suffrage Alliance.

It should also be kept in mind that the Union's eight-year struggle enabled New Yishuv society to become accustomed to, and internalize the principle of equality for women. The suffrage campaign was an educational process both for the women involved and for the Yishuv as a whole. In such a complex and tortuous campaign, victory cannot be attributed to a single cause or participant. Rather, it belonged, as Azaryahu wrote, "to the dreamers of the New Yishuv, who remained faithful to fundamental principles, on which they labored to construct a nation."<sup>18</sup> By melding Jewish nationalism with feminism, the Union was able to present the suffragist cause as not just an exclusively women's issue but rather as something in the interest of the entire Jewish community.<sup>19</sup>

#### The Uniqueness of the Struggle

The Yishuv was not the only polity in which women's emancipation, nation building, and democratization were closely linked.<sup>20</sup> In many emerging nations, women demanded the vote as part of the struggle for national self-determination.<sup>21</sup> One example is Ireland, another country connected, if in a different way, to England.<sup>22</sup> The feminist organizations in both countries were not particularly large, and in both cases these movements opposed violence of any kind. Both in Ireland and in the Yishuv, many women refrained from taking part in the campaign for suffrage because they believed that independence (or socialism) would automatically grant them equality.<sup>23</sup> Irish suffragists, like their Hebrew sisters, did not restrict themselves to voting rights. They supported other policies and legislation to promote women's interests, in particular giving them more legal power and correcting injustices that affected women especially, such as rape and prostitution. In both countries the women's campaign had in a way an antireligious character. The liberation of women in both cases symbolized, in part, the national society's separation from traditional religious society. In Palestine, Haredi Jews were the most vociferous opponents of women's suffrage; in Ireland, that part was played by the Catholic hierarchy. Finally, in both cases, victory was followed by oblivion. Histories of the national movements ignored the role played by women's rights activists, and the public too soon forgot the role women played.<sup>24</sup>

But the Hebrew suffragist movement nevertheless displays several unique features that reflect the special nature of the Yishuv. First, the movement's members viewed women's suffrage as a central principle without which the Zionist project could not be achieved. This contrasted with Irish feminists, who were unsure whether they should make national independence or votes for women their first priority.<sup>25</sup> Second, the Hebrew suffragists proclaimed that equality was the foremost means of protecting the traditional nuclear family. It was the family that builds the nation, they claimed; without families the nation could not stand. Indeed, from the Mandate period to the present day, the Yishuv and state of Israel have encouraged Jews to raise large families.

And third, the principle of equality for women impelled the Union to look beyond the local arena and to see their struggle as part of a universal, international movement. The members of the Union understood that the restoration of the Jewish people to the stage of history and politics meant acting internationally. The fight for the vote changed the nature of Yishuv society, transforming it from a tiny entity drawing its strength from its historical past into one seeing itself as an integral part of the family of nations. The debate over women's rights, which inflamed Yishuv society for only about eight years, demonstrates that gender is not just a seasoning kneaded into the dough of society, but rather the yeast that makes it rise and gives it its character.

Additional unique features of the Hebrew suffragist movement were noted by Azaryahu in her book on the movement:<sup>26</sup>

1. *The local and national campaigns were pursued simultaneously.* This contrasts with the situation in the West, where women gradually made their way into the governing councils and committees of local institutions, such as school boards and town councils. Only after that did they take their campaign to the national level.<sup>27</sup>

2. *The campaign for women's suffrage was conducted in the process of establishing national institutions.* In fact, women were involved in the work of fashioning the Assembly of Representatives even before they had been officially granted the right to participate in it. This was quite different from what happened in the United States and Western Europe, where women sought to join existing legislative bodies.<sup>28</sup>

3. *The women of the Yishuv exercised the right to vote and to be elected in 1920 and 1925, before their right was ratified.* As Rosa Welt Straus, the Union's presi-

dent, put it, the Yishuv's women fought not to gain a right but to prevent one from being revoked.

4. *The Yishuv's feminists founded a political party.* The Union's strategy of running a "women's slate independent of parties and factions" was, according to Azaryahu, "a unique tactic that up to this time [1949] has had no equal in women's movements in other countries."<sup>29</sup> The Yishuv's women did not subordinate their interests as women to national interests. Rather, they raised two banners, that of their nation and that of women's equality in the family. The Union proclaimed, in Yoseph Klausner's words, that "the question of women's rights is a question of Zionism's right to exist."<sup>30</sup> The common scholarly presumption that national and feminist goals were incompatible with each other does not apply to the case of the Yishuv.<sup>31</sup>

#### Why Has the Yishuv's Women's Suffrage Campaign Been Suppressed and Forgotten?

Looking back, the campaign for women's suffrage is perceived, in Israel and in many other countries, as a story that needs no telling. In Mandatory Palestine, after women gained the right to vote, that right came to be taken for granted, and the story of how it happened seems unremarkable, even today. In this it resembles the battle to establish Hebrew as the Yishuv's primary language. The Hebrew language's revival is also taken for granted, to the point where the story of the campaign waged to bring that about has almost vanished from Israeli collective memory. It is well known that prior to the institution of an innovation its absence is unfelt, while after the innovation has been accepted, it is hard to imagine the world without it. But that fact does not mean that we should not seek a better understanding of why the fight for women's suffrage receives barely any mention in mainstream histories of the Yishuv. The explanation may further illuminate the unique nature of the campaign.<sup>32</sup>

Histories of the Yishuv focus largely on immigration and settlement, as well as on relations between the Jews, Arabs, and British. The women's story makes no appearance. Collective memory is molded by agents who foster and promote it. The natural agents of the memory of the women's unit would have been the members of the Union, a tiny organization carrying a heavy burden. Oblivion claimed not only the Union's suffrage campaign but

also its other activities, just as the doings of women are generally forgotten in all areas.<sup>33</sup>

This consignment to oblivion seems to be attributable to the fact that the suffragist campaign was led by women from the political right and center, whereas the labor left was the leading political force in the Yishuv throughout the Mandate and for the first three decades of Israeli history. Note also that the role of the National Council, the primary theater of the battle for women's suffrage, has also been minimized in Zionist historiography. Most writers of Yishuv and Israeli history were aligned with the labor movement. Presumably the relatively moderate line taken by the Union, with its allegiance to feminism, the Jewish nation, and family life, did not fire up souls the way the socialist labor movement did, with its promise of a new world order. In the labor movement, the Council of Women Workers was seen as the flag bearer of women's equality, and only a few of the women active in this organization were supporters of the Union. Much of the Yishuv was captivated by the message of revolutionary socialism. The measured, if consistent and persistent, stance taken by the Union did not rouse fervor and thus was not remembered. The involvement of some women in the Yishuv's defense forces (mainly in combat support roles) gave birth to a myth of female equality that did not jibe with the suffragist narrative. This, too, caused the battle for women's rights to be forgotten.

Writers who have chronicled the first successful suffragist campaign, in New Zealand, have pointed out that men were the heroes in the earliest version of the narrative. Only seventy years later did a historian, Patricia Grimshaw, show that women played an important role.<sup>34</sup> This is one more example that historiography does not always reliably report the truth—instead, it portrays a society's view of the facts. The marginal position of women in Yishuv society left an imprint, and the Hebrew suffragist story was nearly forgotten.

Society has always considered modesty a female virtue. Male historians are not the only ones to have kept women in the background—women have done the same. With the exception of Azarayhu, who composed a history of the women's movement in the Yishuv, none of the members of the Union wrote about their work. Not only was the women's suffrage campaign excluded from Israeli history, but so were its heroines—most importantly Welt Straus, who left Palestine at the age of eighty, after her daughter's death.<sup>35</sup>

Abandoning the country and the Zionist enterprise is a grave transgression in the Zionist value system. When Welt Straus committed this “sin” to join her remaining family in Europe, she most likely doomed herself to be forgotten. Arnan Azaryahu, Sarah Azaryahu’s youngest son, confirmed to me that Welt Straus’s emigration was seen by her colleagues as tantamount to disloyalty; few of them would speak of her thereafter.<sup>36</sup>

Another explanation may well be that the minuscule number of women elected to the Assemblies of Representatives, and thereafter to the Knesset, demonstrated just how far Yishuv and Israeli society was from full equality. The Second Assembly of Representatives’ declaration in 1926 that women were equal “in all branches of life” has not been fully implemented to this day.<sup>37</sup> As I write, in 2015, the number of women in the Knesset is far smaller than their proportion in the population.<sup>38</sup> The story of the battle for women’s rights is not only a success story. In large measure, it is also a tale of disappointment and failure. And failure, as we know, does not sell books. To rescue this story from the depths of oblivion is also to write an indictment of how slowly the train to equality runs.

#### Just a Beginning

The Yishuv’s feminists traveled a long road before achieving the right to vote, but that battle was only the first one in the equality revolution. Farther down the road the members of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights had disappointments and came to realize that full parity with men would be long in coming.<sup>39</sup> In other countries as well it soon became clear that gaining the vote did not bring about the full equality that the advocates of women’s suffrage had hoped for.<sup>40</sup> In her book on Jewish women’s organizations in England and the United States, Linda Kuzmack writes that “securing the vote did not empower immigrant women to the degree they expected. They did not win equal pay or equal working conditions.”<sup>41</sup> In an article Azaryahu wrote at the time of the Second Assembly of Representatives, she stressed that in gaining the vote the Union had not completed its task. Rather, it faced a new era of labors.<sup>42</sup>

A memorandum that was almost certainly written in 1929, apparently by Azaryahu, celebrated the Union’s achievements but at the same time stressed that much work remained to be done: “In most of our national institutions women have no place and no influence; there are still community



and moshavah councils from which women are barred; the Hebrew magistrate's court—that progressive bench—feels no obligation to invite women to serve as judges (the exceptions—the magistrate's courts of Tel Aviv and Rishon LeTzion). At Zionist Congresses you encounter almost no women delegates from the Yishuv."<sup>43</sup> True, formal barriers before women had been removed, but a glass ceiling still prevented women from reaching positions of influence in the prestigious institutions of the New Yishuv and the Zionist movement.

In the summer of 1944, almost two decades after the official granting of the vote to women and the declaration of equal rights, Azaryahu indicated that she had begun to comprehend that there were obstacles to true equality that she had not been aware of previously. Women face, she said, "very tough barriers . . . [and] have begun to search for new ways of ensuring that the women of the Yishuv will take part in its central institutions . . . so that the precious asset of the vote [will] not remain as a dead letter on paper, a symbol alone."<sup>44</sup> In the beginning, the members of the Union believed that its legal achievements would pave the way to equality. They later realized that laws recognizing their rights were not sufficient—they had to fight to have the laws put into practice and seek new ways to advance their cause.<sup>45</sup>

The women of the Union realized that once again they had to set out on a two-pronged campaign, aimed both outward, at changing the institutional framework of the Yishuv, and inward, at educating women. In 1950, in the early stages of the State of Israel—after the appointment of Israel's first female cabinet minister and the submission to the Knesset, by the minister of justice, of a law granting equal rights for women (which was passed in 1951)—the Union issued its final newsletter. An anonymous writer remained cautious: "These are the heralds of *full* equality for women in the world and in our country as well; mostly likely, for now, in theory only."<sup>46</sup>

While they were pleased with what they had achieved, the Union's leaders were well aware of the huge disparity between the equality proclaimed by law and the actual state of women in Israeli society. Furthermore, the reasons that the government used to explain its position on gender equality were themselves patently nonegalitarian. The grant of equality to women was portrayed not as a fundamental right but as a token of gratitude for women's contribution to society. That is how Minister of Justice Pinhas Rosen justified the equal rights law when he presented it to the Knesset. "From the beginning of the new return to Zion . . . the role of the Jewish

women has not been absent from all the Yishuv's work," he declared. "The first elected government has thus seen fit to bring before the Knesset the fundamentals of its program and state: full equality for women will be instituted."<sup>47</sup> In some parts of Israeli society, the debate over the social and public status of women continues to be controversial, and some still seek to deny them full equality.<sup>48</sup> The battle begun by the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights is not yet over.

## Notes



### 1. Feminism and Its Zionist and Hebrew Roots

Epigraph: Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700–1950: A Political History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

1. Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700–1950*, 15.
2. Gaber and Selisnik, “Slovene Women’s Suffrage Movement in a Comparative Perspective,” 219; Evans, *The Feminists*.
3. Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, 73–108.
4. Ryan, “Traditions and Double Moral Standards”; Blom, “Gender and Nation in International Comparison,” 3.
5. Werbner and Yuval-Davis, “Women and the New Discourse of Citizenship,” 1.
6. Ryan, “A Question of Loyalty,” 22–23.
7. The Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States reads: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”
8. Markoff, “Margins, Center and Democracy.”
9. Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 361.
10. Grimshaw, “Colonialism, Power and Women’s Political Citizenship in Australia, 1894–1908,” 36.
11. Sulkunen, “Suffrage, Nation and Citizenship,” 85.
12. Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 250 and 264.
13. Offen, *European Feminisms*; Turliuc and Turliuc, “The Struggle for Women’s Political Rights in Modern Romania.”
14. Berkovitch, *From Motherhood to Citizenship*, 27.
15. Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860–1914*, 184–219.
16. Alberti, “‘A Symbol and a Key.’”
17. Woloch, *Women and the American Experience*, 364.
18. Quoted in Offen, *European Feminisms*, 2.
19. Delap, Ryan, and Zackodnik, “Self-Determination, Race, and Empire,” 242.
20. Eliav, *Eretz Yisra’el ve Yishuvah baMe’ah ha-19*, 498.
21. Bartal, “‘Yishuv Yashan ve Yishuv Hadash.’”
22. Shilo, *Princess or Prisoner?*
23. Eliav, ed., *Sefer Ha’Aliyah HaRishonah*, vol. 1.
24. Eliav, *Eretz Yisra’el ve Yishuvah baMe’ah ha-19*, 498.

25. Walk, "Tsmihat haHinukh haLe'umi baMoshavot," 1:410.
26. Bagel-Tal, "Ha'Ishah beMazkeret Batyah veTrumatah le'Itsv haHevrah ha-Moshavtit be'Eretz Yisra'el."
27. Harari, *Bein haKramim*, 1:21.
28. *Die Welt*, April 29, 1898.
29. Elboim-Dror, "Ha'Ishah haTsiyonit ha'Ide'alit."
30. Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*.
31. Fishman-Maimon, *Hamishim Shnot Tenu'at haPo'alot, 1904–1954*.
32. Alro'ey, *Imigrantim, haHaqirah haYehudit le'Eretz Yisra'el beReshit haMeah ha'Esrin*.
33. Sarah Thon, "Frauenarbeit in Palästina," *Die Welt*, October 17, 1920.
34. Tidhar, *Entsiklopedyah leHalutsey haYishuv uBonav, Dmuyot uTmunot*, 1:243.
35. Shilo, *Etgar haMigdar*, 148–49.
36. Quoted in *ibid.*, 197.
37. Rafi Thon, *HaMa'avak leShivyon Zekhuyot ha'Ishah*, 28–36.
38. Golan, "Avodah Sotsialit baYishuv (1931–1936)," 9.
39. Yana'it Ben-Zvi, *Anu 'Olim*, 208–9.
40. *Ibid.*, 209.
41. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, 4; Walby, *Patriarchy at Work*, 156; Shilo, "The First World War."
42. Melman, introduction.
43. Klapper, *Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace*, 54.
44. Shmelz, "Hitma'atut Ukhlusyat Eretz Yisra'el beMilhemet ha'Olam haRishonah."
45. Shilo, "The First World War."
46. Auerbach, *MeHalberstadt ad Petah Tikvah*, 47, 52, 57.
47. Efrati, *MiMashber leTikvah*.
48. Mordechai Ben-Hilel HaCohen, "Shana leZikhra shel Sarah Thon," *Ha'aretz*, April 19, 1921.
49. M. K., "Sarah Thon," *Ha'aretz*, March 29, 1920.
50. Shilo, "Women as Victims of War."
51. S. Z. Rivlin, "HaYetomim biYerushalayim," *Ha'aretz*, February 20, 1919.
52. Herbert Samuel to Mográs, May 1, 1925, Herbert Samuel Archives, 649/12/p, Israel State Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter ISA).
53. Helen Bentwich, "Memories of Helen Bentwich,": 22, A255/470, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter CZA).
54. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*.
55. Women's Volunteer Committee to General Edmond Allenby, July 17, 1918, Rachel Yana'it Archive 2061/35, ISA.
56. Melman, "The Legend of Sarah."

57. Azaryahu, *The Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights in Eretz Yisra'el and Pirkey Hayim*. See also Azaryahu, *Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el*.
58. DuBois, "Working Women, Class Relations and Suffrage Militance," 188–89.
59. Hazleton, *The Equality Bluff*.
60. Fogiel-Bijaoui, "On the Way to Equality?"; R. Abrams, "Jewish Women in the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, 1899–1926"; Herzog, "The Fringes of the Margins"; Safran, *Lo Rotsot liHiyot Nehmadot*.
61. Melman, "LeShanot et haHistoryah, Historyah shel Nashim veHistoryah shel Migdar."
62. Offen, *European Feminisms*, 1.

## 2. The Women's Struggle Begins

Epigraph: Nehamah Puhachevsky, in minutes of the General Assembly, Rishon LeTzion, December 2, 1917, 1/16–17, Rishon LeTzion Archive, Rishon LeTzion.

1. HaCohen, *Milhemet he 'Amim (Yoman)*, 2:744–45. See also 2:749.
2. Yana'it Ben-Zvi, *Anu 'Olim*, 501–2.
3. Fogiel-Bijaoui, "On the Way to Equality?," 263.
4. See chapter 1.
5. Miryam Likhtenstein, "Assefat Nashim," *Ha'arets*, November 10, 1919.
6. Azaryahu, *Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el*, 12.
7. Yudilovich, ed., *Rishon LeTzion 1882–1941*.
8. Berlovitz, "Ha'Ishah beSifrut haNashim shel ha'Aliyah haRishonah."
9. Govrin, *Devash miSela*.
10. Cohen and Feiner, *Kol Almah 'Ivriyah*, 137–40.
11. Nehamah Feinstein, "'Od al Dvar Hinukh haBanot," *Hamelitz*, February 8, 1889.
12. Mikhal Puhachevsky, "Me'ora' Hashuv beHayeynu," no date, A192/633, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter CZA).
13. Mikhal Puhachevsky, "Korot Nehamah Puhachevsky," no date, A192/663, CZA.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Nehamah Puhachevsky, *BiYehudah haHadashah*.
16. Berlovitz, "Kol haMelankolyah keKol haMeha'ah."
17. Berlovitz, "Beit Mishpat shel Ishah Ahat: Siporah shel Nehamah Puhachevsky keHistoryah Mekomit shel Nashim (Rishon LeTzion 1893–1933)."
18. Minutes of the General Assembly, Rishon LeTzion, November 24, 1917, 1/17–18, Rishon LeTzion Archive, Rishon LeTzion (hereafter RLA).
19. The status quo was not exceptional—restricting the vote, both for local and

- national bodies, to the propertied class was accepted practice throughout the world at the time.
20. Quoted in minutes of the General Assembly, Rishon LeTzion," December 2, 1917, 1/16-17, RLA.
  21. The facts do not support Puhachevsky's claim. German women did not gain the vote until November 1918, and that same year English women were given the vote—but only those who had reached the age of thirty.
  22. Quoted in minutes of the General Assembly, Rishon LeTzion, December 2, 1917, 1/16-17, RLA.
  23. Minutes of the General Assembly, Rishon LeTzion," December 22, 1917, 1/16-17, RLA.
  24. Ibid.
  25. In Tel Aviv women were barred from voting because they were not land-owners.
  26. Adinah Kahanski, "Yesodey Histadrut Nashim beRishon LeTzion," no date, A192/663, CZA.
  27. Batya Halevi, "Zikhronot mehaYamim haHem: Rishon LeTzion," in *Hitahdut Nashim*, no. 1, 27.
  28. Kahanski, "Yesodey Histadrut Nashim beRishon LeTzion."
  29. Rishon LeTzion Women to the Preparatory Committee, February 13, 1918, in *Zikhronot Va'ad Ha'irYaffo*, 17-18.
  30. Macdonald, "Suffrage, Gender and Sovereignty in New Zealand."
  31. Hagemann, "To Become a Political Subject."
  32. For a number of reasons, the elections originally scheduled for 1918 were postponed until December 1919.
  33. Minutes of the General Assembly, Rishon LeTzion, December 6, 1919, 211-13, 1/1/16-17, RLA.
  34. Yaniv Azmon (Puhachevsky) to the Rishon LeTzion Archive, 20/c, RLA.
  35. Weis, *Reshitah shel Tel Aviv*.
  36. Shavit and Biger, *HaHistoryah shel Tel Aviv*, 157-62.
  37. Giladi, "HaYishuv beMilhemet HaOlam haRishonah," 2:470.
  38. The Palestine Office represented the Zionist Organization in Ottoman Palestine, 1908-17.
  39. HaCohen, *Milhemet he'Amim*, 2:754.
  40. Shehori, *Halom sheHafakh leKraKh*, 117-38.
  41. Fishman, *El ha'Ishah ha'Ivriyah*, 5.
  42. Tel Aviv bylaws, in *Zikhronot Va'ad Ha'irYaffo*, 10.
  43. HaCohen, *Milhemet he'Amim*, 2:754.
  44. *Ha'aretz Veha'avodah*, March 14, 1918, 107.

45. Bat-Yehuda, *HaRav Maimon beDorotav*.
46. Shilo, "Ada Fishman-Maimon," 289–90.
47. Fishman, "Morah beVeit haSefer ha'Ivri haRishon beTsefat"
48. Fishman-Maimon, *Hamishim Shnot Tenu'at haPo'alot, 1904–1954*, 207–8.
49. Fishman, *El ha'Ishah ha'Ivriyah*, 18–22.
50. Quoted in Ronen, "Ada Fishman-Maimon: She'elat ha'Ishah, Hinukh, uMet-siut," unpublished manuscript, 16.
51. Quoted in Katzenelson-Shazar, *Adam kmo sheHu*, 159.
52. Y. Saba, "Yaffo," *Ha'aretz*, January 16, 1919.
53. Margalit-Stern, "Ada Fishman-Maimon."
54. Ada Fishman to Hitahdut Nashim, October 30, 1925, 01–165, Tel Aviv Historical Archives, Tel Aviv (hereafter TAHA).
55. HaCohen, *Milhemet he'Amim*, 2:859.
56. Agudat Nashim, "Petition," March 13, 1918, 01–165, TAHA.
57. *Ha'aretz*, August 9, 1918; HaCohen, *Milhemet he'Amim*, 2:859.
58. Nashim, "Petition."
59. Fishman-Maimon, *Hamishim Shnot Tenu'at haPo'alot*, 196.
60. Fishman, *El ha'Ishah ha'Ivriyah*, 6.
61. S. Viloni-Hovav, "MeHayei haMoshavot," *Do'ar Hayom*, June 1, 1921.
62. "Me'Inyan Le'Inyan," *Mahzikey Hadat*, May, 20, 1920.
63. HaCohen, *Milhemet he'Amim* 2:890.
64. Likhovski, "Shfahot, Kalot vePo'alot."
65. "El Neshey Tel Aviv," no date, Sarah Azaryahu Collection, 1, 3, Hakibbutz Hame'uhad Archives, Yad Tabenkin (hereafter AHH).
66. Poster B, "Hitahdut Nashim leShivuy Zekhuyot," September 9, 1926, J75/3, CZA.
67. Haifa was captured by the British army on September 23, 1918.
68. At the end of World War I, Haifa's population was estimated at 15,000–22,000.
69. Azaryahu, *Pirkey Hayim*, 154–61.
70. *Ibid.*, 159.
71. Kidron, "Va'ad haKehilah haIvrit beHaifa," 66–68.
72. "Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot, Snif Haifa," *Do'ar Hayom*, January 13, 1921.
73. Azaryahu, *Pirkey Hayim*, 161.
74. Azaryahu, *Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el*, 10–12.
75. Mrs. Zlatopovsky [Hannah Zlatopovsky], "Asefah Klalit," January 25, 1919, 2.3/6, Petach Tikvah City Archives, Petach-Tikvah (hereafter PTA).
76. *Ha'aretz*, December 13, 1918.
77. *HaPo'el HaTza'ir*, February 7, 1919.

78. "Assefat haMoshvah," January 22, 1919, 2.3/6, PTA.
79. Ibid. The speaker quoted is Elisheva Gissin.
80. Ibid. The speaker quoted is Hannah Zlatopovsky.
81. Ibid. The speaker quoted is Baruch Raab.
82. Rachel Golomb, "LeToldot Tnu'at haNashim be'Em haMoshavot," *Ha'Ishah* 2 (1927): 28.
83. "Asefat HaMoshavah," January 26, 1919, 2.3/6, PTA.
84. *Ha'aretz*, January 12, 1919.
85. Yisra'el Sabah, "MeHayey Yerushalayim," *Ha'aretz*, May 24, 1918.
86. Feinsud-Sukenik, "LeZikhrah," 9.
87. *Ha'aretz*, April 4, 1918.
88. Fishman, "HaTse'adim haRishonim," 85.
89. Cohen-Hatav, "Hashpa'at Va'ad HaKehilah al Hitpathut Ha'Ir beTkufat HaShilton HaBriti (1917–1948)."
90. "HaHahlatot shel Va'ad ha'Ir leYehudey Yerushalayim," May 11–13, 1918, L3/58IV, CZA.
91. "Va'ad ha'Ir," Jerusalem, January 22, 1919, J2/4014, Historical Archives of the City of Jerusalem, Jerusalem (hereafter HACJ).
92. *Ha'aretz*, February 20, 1919.
93. *Ha'aretz*, February 18, 1919.
94. "Agudat HaNashim," February 9, 1919, J2/4397, HACJ.
95. Ya'akov Thon in "Va'ad ha'Ir Proceedings," March 18, 1918, L3/58IV, CZA.
96. Rafi Thon, *HaMa'avak leShivyon Zekhuyot ha'Ishah*.
97. "Yerushalayim," *Ha'aretz*, March 3, 1919.
98. Azaryahu, *Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el*, 43. The elections in Jerusalem took place on February 2, 1932.
99. The first two delegates in Jerusalem were Hasyah Feinsud-Sukenik and Dr. Git-tel Dorfman.
100. Siton, "Gan haYeladim ha'Ivri," 14.
101. Quoted in Feinsud-Sukenik, *Pirkey Gan*, 165.
102. Herzog, "Politikah shel Nashim o Politikah al-yedey Nashim;," 106.
103. Batya Halevi, "Zikhronot MeHayamim haHem: Rishon LeTzion," in *Hitahdut Nashim*, no.1, 27.

### 3. The National Campaign Commences

- Epigraph: Parnas-Hodesh [pseud.], "Ma meHodesh," *HaShilo'ah*, September–March 1924, 188.
1. Kressel, *Em haMoshavot Petah Tikvah, 1878–1953*, 315.



2. HaCohen, *Milhemet he'Amim (Yoman)* 2:750–52.
3. Chaim Weizmann and Menachem Ussishkin, “El haKahal ha'Ivri,” March 26, 1920, L4/647, in Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter CZA).
4. Unsigned and undated circular, A46/18/16, CZA.
5. HaCohen, *Milhemet he'Amim*, 2:813–15.
6. S. Rubinstein, *Hitargenutah meHadash shel “HaMizrahi” be'Eretz Yisra'el biTkufat ha-Ma'avar mehaShilton haTurki laBriti*, 7.
7. HaCohen, *Milhemet he'Amim*, 2:815.
8. Minutes of the First Constituent Assembly, J16313, CZA.
9. Yana'it Ben-Zvi, *Anu 'Olim*, 269.
10. Yana'it in minutes of the First Constituent Assembly, J1/6313, CZA.
11. Minutes of the Provisional Committee of the Jewish Community in Palestine, 1, J1/8820, CZA.
12. *Zikhronot Va'ad ha'IrYaffo*, 21.
13. Minutes of the Executive of the Provisional Committee, March 7, 1918, 15, J1/8766, CZA.
14. Ya'akov Thon in *ibid.*, 16.
15. Ya'akov Thon in minutes of the Second Constituent Assembly, June 17, 1918, 14, J1/6313, CZA.
16. Minutes of the Second Constituent Assembly, 40–41.
17. M. Friedman, *Hevrah veDat*, 152–53.
18. Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uzi'el in minutes of the Second Constituent Assembly, J1/8763, CZA.
19. Moshe Smilansky, in minutes of the Second Constituent Assembly, 93, *ibid.*
20. Yoseph Sprinzak, in minutes of the Second Constituent Assembly, *ibid.*
21. Rafi Thon, *HaMa'avak leShivyon Zekhuyot ha'Ishah*, 264–65.
22. Tidhar, *Entsiklopedyah leHalutsey haYishuv uBonav*, 10:3635.
23. Yoseph Klausner, “Autobiographyah” 1924, 4\*1085, National Library Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter NLI).
24. Esther Yeivin, “LiMlot 'Esrime veHamesh Shanah leHitahdut leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el,” in *Hitahdut Nashim*, no. 1, 8–9.
25. Ambur, *Sefer Shushelet Mishpachat Yunis*.
26. Ada Fishman, in minutes of the Third Constituent Assembly, J1/8766, CZA.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Minutes of the Second Constituent Assembly, 106, J1/8763, CZA.
29. “Al haPerek,” *Hatsir*, January 1, 1919.
30. Minutes of the Second Constituent Assembly, J1/J1/8763, CZA.
31. *Ha'aretz Veba'avodah* 2 (August–September 1918): 24.
32. Rosenthal, *Khronologyah leToldot haYishuv haYehudi be'Eretz Yisra'el, 1918–1935*, 21.

33. Minutes of the Third Constituent Assembly, first session, 2–3, J1/8763, CZA.
34. *Ha'aretz*, December 13, 1918.
35. For a list of all the participants, see J1/8766, CZA.
36. Shehory-Rubin, “Dr. Bat Sheva Yunis-Guttman.”
37. Quoted in Thon, *HaMa'avak leShivyon Zekhuyot ha'Ishah*, 280.
38. Eitan Ha'Ezrahi, “Mo'ezah beHesah haDa'at,” *Ha'Ezrah*, 1919.
39. *Ha'aretz*, January 9, 1919.
40. Ya'akov Thon in minutes of the Third Constituent Assembly, 63, J1/8766, CZA.
41. Shlomo Shiler in minutes of the Third Constituent Assembly, *ibid*.
42. David Remez in *ibid*.
43. David Blumenfeld in minutes of the Provisional Council Executive and the Zionist Commission, April, 17, 1919, J1/8801, CZA.
44. Rabbi Yehi'el Mikhal Tokachinski, in minutes of the Third Constituent Assembly, 26, J1/8766, CZA.
45. Ada Fishman, in *ibid.*, 58.
46. Minutes of the Provisional Committee, July 2–3, 1919, J1/8779, CZA.
47. Minutes of the Third Constituent Assembly, 15, J1/8766, CZA.
48. *Ibid.*, 20.
49. “Giluy Da'at,” *Hatsir*, January 1919.
50. Minutes of the Third Constituent Assembly, 81, J1/8766, CZA.
51. Bo'az, “HaStatus Quo,” 32.
52. Sarah Thon in minutes of the Meeting of the Zionist Commission and the Provisional Council Executive, April 17, 1919, 36, J1/8801, CZA.
53. Rabbi Menahem Mordechai Te'omim-Frankel to the Provisional Council, November 29, 1918, J1/8806, CZA.
54. Shmelz, “Hitma'atut Ukhlusyat Eretz Yisra'el beMilhemet ha'Olam haRishonah.”
55. Zalman HaCohen Rubin to Ya'akov Thon, J1/8865, CZA.
56. M. Friedman, *Hevrah veDat*, 131.
57. Rabbi Yoseph Gershon Horovitz and Rabbi Menahem Mordechai Te'omim-Frankel to the Provisional Committee, November 29, 1918, J1/8806, CZA.
58. “Ha'Asefah HaMekhononet,” *Ha'aretz*, July 26, 1918.
59. M. Friedman, *Hevrah veDat*, 72.
60. Bo'az, “HaStatus Quo,” 126.
61. Rabbi Yoseph Gershon Horovitz and Rabbi Menahem Mordechai Te'omim-Frankel to the Provisional Committee, November 29, 1918, J1/8806, CZA.

62. Rabbi Menahem Mordechai Te'omim-Frankel, in minutes of the Third Constituent Assembly, 26, J1/8766, CZA.
63. Rabbi Menahem Mordechai Te'omim-Frankel, in minutes of the Executive of the Provisional Committee, December 12, 1918, 37, J1/8789, CZA; Avraham Lev in minutes of the Executive of the Provisional Committee, April 10, 1919, 1, L4/433, CZA.
64. Most of the Haredi population lived in Jerusalem; the rest resided mainly in Tiberias, Safed, and Hebron.
65. Minutes of the Executive of the Provisional Committee, April 17, 1919, J1/8801, CZA.
66. Dov Ariel Leibovitz agreed with Ya'akov Thon's proposal to let each local committee decide whether women could vote. See minutes of the Third Constituent Assembly, 102, J1/8766, CZA.
67. Rabbi Yehi'el Mikhal Tokachinski, in minutes of the Third Constituent Assembly, 26, J1/8766, CZA.
68. Committee of the Jerusalem Rabbis to the Zionist Commission, June 16, 1918, J1/8806, CZA.
69. Rabbi Menahem Mordechai Te'omim-Frankel to the Provisional Committee, April 23, 1919, in minutes of the Provisional Committee, April 24, 1919, J1/87761, CZA.
70. Rabbi Yoseph Gershon Horovitz, in minutes of the Third Constituent Assembly, 34, J1/8766, CZA.
71. Rabbi Yehi'el Mikhal Tokachinski, in minutes of the Third Constituent Assembly, 26.
72. Minutes of the Mizrahi Annual Conference, September 16–18, 1919, Annual Conferences file, Archives of Religious Zionism, Mossad Harav Kook, Jerusalem (hereafter GZD).
73. Quoted in M. Friedman, *Hevrah veDat*, 147.
74. Rabbi Menahem Mordechai Te'omim-Frankel, in minutes of the Provisional Committee, March 3, 1919, J1/8773, CZA.
75. "Hatenu'ah beYerushalayim likrat haBehirot," no date, elections file, J1/8824, CZA.
76. Rabbi Menahem Mordechai Te'omim-Frankel to the Provisional Committee, March 23, 1919, L4/647, CZA.
77. The first meeting of the Mizrahi after the war took place in Jerusalem in March 1918. See S. Rubinstein, *Hitargenutah meHadash shel "HaMizrahi" be'Eretz Yisra'el biTkufat haMa'avar mehaShilton haTurki laBriti*, 6.
78. Ostrovski, *Toldot haMizrahi be'Eretz Yisra'el*, 35–36.

79. A. Rubinstein, *Tenu'ah beldan shel Temurah*, 109–119; Bozich-Hertzig, “HaPulmus al Zekhut haBehirah leNashim leMosdot haYishuv beReshit Tekufat haMandat,” 17–22; Bat-Yehuda, *HaRav Maimon beDorotav*, 234–35.
80. A. Rubinstein, *Tenu'ah beldan shel Temurah*, 147–149; Yizhak Nisinboim, “Aharey haVe'idah haMizrahit”: in *ibid.*, 344–48.
81. “HaMizrahi be'Eretz Yisra'el,” *Do'ar Hayom*, January 20, 1924.
82. Rabbi Binyamin [Yehoshua Radler Feldman], “Mi Doresh Referandum?” *Ha'aretz*, February 1, 1924.
83. Ester Rubinstein, “Ha'Ivriyah, Hinukhah veZekhuyoteha,” *Hamizrahi*, October 22, 1919.
84. Ostrovski, *Toldot haMizrahi be'Eretz Yisra'el*, 16.
85. Rabbi Moshe Ostrovski, Third Session of the First Assembly of Representatives, June 15, 1925, J1/7205 CZA.
86. *Jewish Chronicle*, January 16, 1920.
87. “HaMizrahi veShe'elat haNashim,” *Hamizrahi*, January 15, 1920.
88. “Have'idah HaOlamit shel HaMizrahi,” *Ha'ivri*, February 13, 1920.
89. Avraham Lev in minutes of the Meeting of the Zionist Commission and the Executive of the Provisional Committee, April 17, 1919, 36, J1/8801, CZA.
90. Y. Maimon, *Igrot haRav Yehuda Leib Maimon*, 241.
91. Rabbi Binyamin [Yehoshua Radler Feldman], in minutes of the Provisional Committee, July 2–3, 1919, 16, J1/8779, CZA.
92. Yehoshua Radler Feldman, secretary of the Mizrahi's Palestinian branch, to the Va'ad HaTza'ir Ha'Eretz Yisra'eli, March 20, 1919, Archive of Religious Zionism, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan.
93. Dov Natan Brinker to the Va'ad HaTza'ir Ha'Eretz Yisra'eli, March 18, 1918, GZD.
94. Avraham Lev in minutes of the Executive of the Provisional Committee, April 10, 1919, L4/433, CZA.
95. Lea Seliger, “LeShe'elat Zekhut haBehirah leNashim be'Eretz Yisra'el,” *Hayarden*, December 1920–January 1921.
96. Rosenberg-Friedman, *Mahaphaniyot be'al Korkhan*, 56–57.
97. Minutes of the meeting of the Zionist Commission and the Executive of the Provisional Committee, April 17, 1919, 35, J1/8801, CZA.
98. Ya'akov Thon in *ibid.*, 33.
99. The same attitude was adopted during Rosa Ginzberg's struggle to practice law in Mandatory Palestine. See Katvan and Halperin-Kaddari, “The Feminist Proposal Is Really Ridiculous,” 241.
100. Berl Katznelson, in minutes of the Provisional Committee Executive, April 10, 1919, L4/433, CZA.

101. Berl Katznelson in minutes of the meeting of the Zionist Commission and the Provisional Committee Executive, April 17, 1919, J1/8801, CZA.
102. David Ben-Gurion in minutes of the Executive of the Provisional Committee, June 26, 1919, J1/8791, CZA.
103. Minutes of the Provisional Committee, March 18, 1919, 39, J1/8773, CZA.
104. Shaul Gordon in minutes of the meeting of the Zionist Commission and the Executive of the Provisional Committee, April 17, 1919, 34, J1/8801, CZA.
105. Yehoshua Radler Feldman, secretary of the Mizrahi's Palestinian branch, to Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uzi'el, March 18, 1919, 08–700, Tel Aviv Historical Archives, Tel Aviv.
106. Rabbi Menahem Mordechai Te'omim-Frankel to the Provisional Committee, April 23, 1919, L4/647, CZA.
107. Minutes of the Meeting of the Zionist Commission and the Executive of the Provisional Committee, April 17, 1919, 34, J1/8801, CZA.
108. Women's Association of Jaffa to the Provisional Committee, April 23, 1919, in minutes of the Executive Provisional Committee, April 23, 1919, J1/8776I, CZA.
109. "HaTnu'ah biYerushalayim lekhat haBehirot la'Asefah haMeyasedet," no date, J1/8824, CZA.
110. Menashe Me'irovitz in minutes of the Executive of the Provisional Committee, June 26, 1919, J1/8791 CZA.
111. Minutes of the Executive of the Provisional Committee, June 6, 1919, J1/8791, CZA.
112. Ya'akov Thon in minutes of the Provisional Committee, July 2–3, 1919, J1/8779, CZA.
113. M. Friedman, *Hevrah veDat*, 74–77.

#### 4. From Associations to Political Party

Epigraph: [Sarah Azryahu?], "Madua' Holekhet haHitahdut leShivyon Zekhuyot el haBehirot le'Asefat haNivharim biReshimat Nashim?," August 1944, J75/25, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem

1. Gaber and Selisnik, "Slovene Women's Suffrage Movement in a Comparative Perspective," 220.
2. Azaryahu, *Pirkey Hayim*, 165.
3. Rosenberg-Friedman, *Mahaphaniyot be'al Korkhanyes*, 56–60.
4. Zemora, *Nashim Ivriyot Tsiyoniyot*; Herzog, "The Fringes of the Margins."
5. Margalit-Stern, *Ge'ulah biKhalim*, 66–72.
6. Fleischmann, *Jerusalem Women's Organizations during the British Mandate*.

7. Rosenberg-Friedman, *Mahaphaniyot be'al Korkhan*, 87.
8. "HaNeshef beGan ha'Ir," *Do'ar Hayom*, August 17, 1919.
9. Hitahdut Nashim to the Executive Committee of the Provisional Council, June 26, 1919, J1/8791, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter CZA).
10. *Ha'aretz*, July 4, 1919. The following quotes from the manifesto are from this source.
11. See chapter 1.
12. Alberti, "A Symbol and a Key," 275.
13. Azaryahu, *Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el*, 2.
14. Ryan, "A Question of Loyalty."
15. "Carrie Chapman Catt, An Appeal to Liberty!" 1915, Carrie Chapman Catt's files, Library of Congress Archives, Washington, D.C.
16. Sinha, "Suffragism and Internationalism."
17. Weber, "Making Common Cause?"
18. Esther Yeivin, "LiMlot 'Esrin veHamesh Shanah laHitahdut leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el," *Hitahdut Nashim*, no.1, 10.
19. Kuzmack, *Women's Cause*, 139.
20. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*.
21. Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer*.
22. *Do'ar Hayom*, August 20, 1919. For the charter, see a six-page undated booklet from an unknown publisher titled "Takanot shel Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuyon Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisrael," J75/24, CZA.
23. Rosa Welt Straus to Carrie Chapman Catt, April 26, 1920, in *IWSN* 14 (July 1920): 163.
24. *Hitahdut Nashim*, no. 1, 2.
25. Nahum Twersky, "Me'Inyanei Hayom," *Ha'aretz Veha'avodah* 5 (January 1919): 16.
26. For details, see chapter 7.
27. Hasyah Feinsud-Sukenik, "LiDmutah shel Sarah Azaryahu z'l" 1, *Shloshim lePetiratah*, 5121/26, Archive for Jewish Education in Israel and the Diaspora, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv (hereafter AJEI).
28. Joyce Antler, *The Journey Home*, 41.
29. Shehory-Rubin, "Sarah Glicklich."
30. Glicklikh-Slouschz, *El-ha'Ishah*, 12.
31. Sarah Ben-Hanan, "Sarah Glicklikh," *Devar haPo'etet*, October 1963.
32. Glicklikh-Slouschz, *El-ha'Ishah*, 20.
33. *Ibid.*, 14–15.
34. *Ibid.*, 10–11.
35. *Ibid.*, 9.

36. Ibid., 13.
37. P. Cohen, "Nationalism and Suffrage," 713; Hoff, *Law, Gender, and Injustice*, 12.
38. Azaryahu, *Pirkey Hayim*, 12.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., 42.
42. Ibid., 56.
43. Ibid., 12.
44. See chapter 6.
45. Azaryahu, *Pirkey Hayim*, 155–56.
46. Ibid., 69.
47. Tidhar, *Entsiklopedyah leHalutsey haYishuv uBonav*, 3:1190–91.
48. Ibid., 3:1191.
49. Azaryahu, *Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el*.
50. Azaryahu, *Pirkey Hayim*, 230.
51. Phone interview with Arnan Azaryahu, July 7, 2004.
52. Tzipora Klausner, "MehaYamim haRishonim," *Hitahdut Nashim*, no. 1, 28.
53. Friedenreich, *Female, Jewish, Educated*, 8.
54. K. B., "Obituary," *IWSN*, February 1939, 35.
55. Krogmann, "The First Austrian-Born Female Eye Doctor."
56. Azaryahu, *Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el*, 16.
57. Azaryahu, *Pirkey Hayim*, 170.
58. Straus-Mochenson, *Our Palestine*, 17.
59. The sister was Gurfein Welt, a medical doctor and an active member of the Women's International Zionist Organization.
60. Straus-Mochenson, *Our Palestine*, 22; Alice L. Seligsberg, "Nellie Straus-Mochenson," *Hadassah Newsletter* 18, no. 6 (1938): 109, 118.
61. Nellie Straus-Mochenson to Alice Seligsberg, February 22, 1922, A375/238, CZA.
62. Azaryahu, *Pirkey Hayim*, 169.
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#### 5. One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

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## 6. The Union Comes of Age

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9. Razi, *Yaldey haHefker*, 68–94.
10. [Sarah Azaryahu], "HaLeshakhot haMishpatiyot," 1947, 3, 3, Hakibbutz Hame'uhad Archives, Yad Tabenkin (hereafter AHH).
11. Fogiel-Bijaoui, *Demokratyah veFeminism, Migdar veZekhuyot Adam*, 65.
12. "Skirah Al Pe'ulot Hitahdut Nashim 'Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el," 3, 3, AHH.
13. R. Abrams, "Jewish Women in the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, 1899–1926," 1–8.
14. Kuzmack, *Women's Cause*, 140–41.
15. Friedenreich, *Female, Jewish, Educated*, 148–52.
16. Kuzmack, *Women's Cause*, 155.
17. Friedenreich, "Alletta Jacobs in Historical Perspective," 192–93.
18. Sarah Azaryahu, "Likrat haMoshav haShlishi," *Ha'arets*, March 26, 1924.
19. Romana Goodman, "The Jewish Woman in History," *IWSN* 13 (June 1919): 130–31.
20. R. Abrams, "Jewish Women in the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, 1899–1926," 240.
21. Romana Goodman, Helena Weisberg, Henrietta Irwell, and Rosa Ginsberg, *Do'ar Hayom*, December 2, 1919.
22. Romana Goodman, Helena Weisberg, Henrietta Irwell, and Rosa Ginsberg, "To the Mizrahi," *Jewish Chronicle*, November 21, 1919.
23. Kuzmack, *Women's Cause*, 139.
24. Henrietta Szold, "Jewish Palestine in the Making," *Hadassah Newsletter*, June 1923, 3.
25. Shilo, "Femenism veDatiyut."
26. Shilo, *Etgar haMigdar*, 36–64.
27. Shlomit Flaum, "Neshey Hodu," *Ha'arets*, December 25, 1925.
28. "HaLigah haBeinle'umit shel Nashim leShalom veHofesh," *Ha'arets*, April 24, 1927.
29. R. Abrams, "Jewish Women in the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, 1899–1926," 43.

30. Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 189–90, 199.
31. R. Abrams, “Jewish Women in the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, 1899–1926,” 43–51.
32. “Hartsa’at Welt Straus baKongress ha’Asiri shel haBrit, Paris,” Second Circular, September 8, 1926, J75/3, CZA.
33. Fowler, *Carrie Catt*, 122.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Peck, *Carrie Chapman Catt*.
36. International Alliance of Women, “Principles.”
37. Deutsch, *The International Woman Suffrage Alliance*, 17.
38. Carrie Chapman Catt, “Greeting to the International Woman Suffrage Alliance,” *IWSN*, February 1919, 57.
39. Burton, “The Feminist Quest for Identity,” 62.
40. Carrie Chapman Catt to Rosika Schwimmer, September 29, 1905, 6, 8–9, Catt Archives, Library of Congress Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter LCAW).
41. Miller, “Lobbying the League,” 47.
42. *Ibid.*, 1–2.
43. Weber, “Making Common Cause?,” 35.
44. Miller, “Lobbying the League,” 2.
45. “Hozer 2: Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot,” September 8, 1926, J75/3, CZA.
46. Fay, “International Feminism and the Women’s Movement in Egypt, 1904–1923.”
47. Deutsch, *The International Woman Suffrage Alliance*, 25–26.
48. Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 108–10.
49. *Ibid.*, 194–98.
50. *Ibid.*, 99–101.
51. *Ibid.*, 120–22.
52. *IWSN* 14 (March 1920): 81.
53. “HaVa’ad haMerkazi shel Hitahdut Nashim ‘Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot,” in “Hozer 2: Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot,” September 8, 1926, J75/3, CZA.
54. A. L. Hawkins, “The Women’s Question in Palestine,” *IWSN* 14 (January 1920): 61.
55. Hannah Berakhyahu, “HaKesharim Shelanu ‘im Brit Nashim Beynleumit,” in *Hitahdut Nashim*, no. 1, 12.
56. “Hozer 2: Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot,” September 8, 1926, J75/3, CZA.
57. Quoted in K. B., “Obituary,” *IWSN*, February 1939, 35.

58. Jacobs, *Memories*, 156.
59. Shilo, *Princess or Prisoner?*, 38.
60. Carrie Chapman Catt's private diaries, 1, 1, LCAW.
61. Jacobs, *Memories*, p. 156.
62. Weber, *Making Common Cause?*, pp. 27–34.
63. *New York Times*, November 24, 1933.
64. Hannah Berakhyahu, "HaKesharim Shelanu 'im Brit Nashim Beynleumit," in *Hitahdut Nashim*, no. 1, 12.
65. Miller, "Lobbying the League," 12–13.
66. Rosa Welt Straus, "HaVe'idah haBeinle'umit leNashim," *Ha'arets*, January 10, 1921.
67. Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 113.
68. Weber, "Making Common Cause?," 170.
69. Sarah Azaryahu, "Darkah shel Hitahdut Nashim 'Ivriyot be'Eretz Yisra'el," in *Hitahdut Nashim*, no. 1, 1.
70. Hannah Berakhyahu, "HaKesharim Shelanu 'im Brit Nashim Beynleumit," in *Hitahdut Nashim*, no. 1, 12.
71. R. Abrams, "Pioneering Representatives of the Hebrew People," 132.
72. International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, *Report of the Tenth Congress*, Paris, May 30, June 6, 1926, Palestine 2/1aw/1/c/5, Women's Library Archives, London (hereafter WLA).
73. Quoted in Rosa Welt Straus, "Palestine," *IWSN* 15 (April 1921): 97.
74. Rosa Welt Straus at the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, *Report of the Tenth Congress*, Paris, 260–63, Palestine, WLA.
75. Unsigned memorandum, [1926?], J75/2, CZA.
76. Memorandum no. 194, from the Mandatory Government to the Foreign Office, June 30, 1921, C0733/4, the National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom (hereafter TNA).
77. Report on the Union's Activities, 1923–26, J75/4, CZA.
78. Carrie Chapman Catt, "Igeret laNashim ha'Ivriyot Shel Eretz Yisra'el," *Ha'ishah* 2, no. 1 (1927): 41.
79. Miller, "Lobbying the League," 152.
80. Hasyah Feinsud-Sukenik, "Asefat Evel," J75/3, CZA. The item is what Feinsud-Sukenik said at the memorial gathering for Rosa Welt Straus.
81. *IWSN* 13 (March 1919): 72.
82. League of Nations, "Covenant of the League of Nations."
83. Miller, "Lobbying the League," 124.
84. Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 222.
85. Berkovitch, *From Motherhood to Citizenship*, 20 and 60.

86. *IWSN* 13 (May 1919): 105.
87. Letter from the Union to the League of Nations, July 25, 1925, 1, AHH.
88. On the British Empire's attitude to the suffrage struggle in colonial India, see Sinha, "Refashioning Mother India."
89. Likhovski, "Shfahot Kalot vePo'alot," 388.
90. "MePe'ulot Hitahdut Nashim 'Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el uMatroteha," no date, J75/9, CZA.
91. Herbert Samuel to the Foreign Office, December 6, 1920, Co7333/68, TNA.
92. Herbert Samuel to the Foreign Office, January 5, 1921, Co7333/68, TNA.
93. "Palestine," *IWSN* 16 (March 1922) 106–7.
94. "Hitahdut Nashim 'Ivriyot leShivyon Zekhuyot," a memorandum to the IWSA Rome Congress, 1923, J75/3, CZA.
95. Union to Herbert Samuel, July 25, 1921, 1, 1, AHH.
96. Morgenstern, *HaRabanut haRashit le'Eretz Yisra'el*, 60–62.
97. Rosa Welt Straus, "Palestine," *IWSN* 15 (April 1921): 110.
98. Fishman, "HaTse'adim haRishonim," 89–90.
99. Dukhan, "Diney haYerushah vahaTsava'ah be'Eretz Yisra'el."
100. Sarah Azaryahu, *Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el*, 60–63.
101. "Asefat Am beVet ha'Am, Sidur Mishpat haMishpahah veZkhut ha'Ishah," *Do'ar Hayom*, February 21, 1921.
102. "Asefat leSidur Mishpat haMishpahah veZkhut ha'Ishah," *Ha'arets*, February 25, 1921.
103. Quoted in *ibid.*
104. Azaryahu, *Pirkey Hayim*, 201–2.
105. Quoted in "Asefat Am beVet ha'Am, Sidur Mishpat haMishpahah veZkhut ha'Ishah," *Do'ar Hayom*, February 21, 1921.
106. "Hitahdut Nashim 'Ivriyot leShivyon Zekhuyot," a memorandum to the IWSA Rome Congress, 1923, J75/3, CZA.
107. The clash between the Union's wish to adhere to the Jewish tradition on the one hand and the principal of gender equality on the other hand, was debated again at the Second Assembly of Representatives. See "Asefat haNivharim," *Davar*, January 14, 1926.
108. "Hartsa'at Welt Straus baKongress ha'Asiri shel haBrit, Paris," Second Circular, September 8, 1926, J75/3, CZA.
109. Tehila Matmon, "Tafkideha shel Hitahdut Nashim leShivuy Zekhuyot liKrat he'Atid," in *Hitahdut Nashim*, no. 2, 19.
110. "Hitahdut Nashim leShivuy Zekhuyot," memorandum, [1929?], J75/14, CZA.
111. Azaryahu, *Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el*, 63.

112. Quoted in “Hitahdut Nashim leShivuy Zekhuyot, Memorandum,” [1929?], J75/14, CZA.
113. Sarah Azaryahu, “Yerushalayim Yom Yom be’Hitahdut Nashim ‘Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be’Eretz Yisra’el,” *Do’ar Hayom*, February 19, 1923.
114. Shilo, *Princess or Prisoner?*, 62–65.
115. Tobler, *Terumah laTopographyah haRefu’it shelYerushalayim*.
116. Shilo, *Princess or Prisoner?*, 162.
117. Azaryahu, *Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be’Eretz Yisra’el*, 63–65.
118. Rosa Welt Straus, “Palestine,” *IWSN* 15 (April 1921): 110–11.
119. Hitahdut to the Chief Rabbinate, June 18, 1922, 2, 1, 15, AHH.
120. Rosa Welt Straus memorandum to the IWSA Paris Congress, 1926, Palestine, WLA.
121. *Ibid.*
122. Miller, “Lobbying the League,” 178.
123. Hasyah Feinsud-Sukenik to the Chief Rabbinate, January 1, 1923, 1, 2, AHH.
124. Likhovski, “Shfahot Kalot vePo’alot,” 94.
125. Sarah Azaryahu in the name of the Union to the Chief Rabbinate, June 6, 1923, 1, 2, AHH.
126. Chief Rabbinate to the Union, June 17, 1923, 1, 2, AHH.
127. Yishayahu Press to the Union, June 21, 1923, 1, 1, AHH.
128. “Hitahdut Nashim ‘Ivriyot leShivyon Zekhuyot,” a memorandum to the IWSA Rome Congress, 1923, J75/3, CZA.
129. Report on the Union’s activities, 1923–1926, J75/4, CZA.
130. Radzyner, “Milhamot haYehudim.”
131. Report on the Union’s activities, 1923–1926, J75/4, CZA.
132. Welt Straus to Herbert Samuel, November 12, 1924, 1, 3, AHH.
133. Minutes of the Union’s meeting, February 10, 1925, J75/4, CZA.
134. “Hozer 2: Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot,” September 8, 1926, J75/3, CZA.
135. Likhovski, “Shfahot Kalot vePo’alot,” 389–90.
136. *Ibid.*, 392.
137. Sasonah Cohen to the committee of the Union, August 8, 1923, 1, 1, AHH.
138. Berlovitz, “Beit Mishpat shel Ishah Ahat.”
139. Hitahdut Nashim leShivuy Zekhuyot,” memorandum [1929?], J75/14, CZA.
140. Azaryahu, *Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be’Eretz Yisra’el*, 58.
141. Azryahu, “Haleshakhot haMishpatiyot,” 1947, 3, 3, AHH.
142. Ajenstadt, “Hitahdut Nashim ‘Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be’Eretz Yisra’el uMa’avakan leKhinun Tafkid ‘Em haMishpahah.”
143. Yehudit Katinka, “Haleshakhot haMishpatiyot,” in *Hitahdut Nashim*, no. 1, 5.

144. Azaryahu, "BaLishkah haMishpatit shel Hitahdut Nashim leShivuy Zekhuyot," no date, 1, 6, AHH.
145. "Ezra Mishpatit leNashim 'Ivriyot," *Ha'arezt*, July 6, 1923.
146. Azaryahu, *Pirkey Hayim*, 198.
147. "Hitahdut Nashim 'Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el," no date, J75/9, CZA.
148. Sarah Azaryahu, "HaLeshakhhot haMishpatiyot," 1947, 3,3, AHH.
149. Rabbi Yosef Panigel, the Rabbinat secretary, to Yosef Meyuhas, the head of the Jerusalem Jewish Committee, July 16, 1923, 3,2, AHH.
150. Yehudit Katinka, "Haleshakhhot haMishpatiyot," in *Hitahdut Nashim*, no. 1, 6.
151. Yoseph, introduction.
152. Quoted in "Hitahdut Nashim 'Ivriyot leShivuyon Zekhuyot," a memorandum to the IWSA Rome Congress, 1923, J75/3, CZA.
153. Katvan, and Halperin-Kaddari, "The Feminist Proposal is Really Ridiculous."
154. Rosa Ginzberg, "Mikhtav," in *Hitahdut Nashim*, no.1, 14.
155. "Skirah," in *Hitahdut Nashim*, no.1, 7.
156. Sarah Nisinboym in the name of Agudat Nashim beYavne'el to the Union, January 9, 1924, J75/95, CZA.
157. Ibid.
158. Ajenstadt, "Hitahdut Nashim 'Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el uMa'avakan leKhinun Tafkid 'Em haMishpahah," 85.
159. Quoted in Ada Geller, "Kongress haNashim haBeinle'umi leShivuy Zekhuyot," *Devar haPo'ezet*, July 18, 1934.
160. O'Neill, "Divorce in the Progressive Era."
161. Quoted in Armoni, *Haver ve'Ish Sod*, 22.
162. Azaryahu, *Pirkey Hayim*, 59.
163. Ibid., 56.
164. Ibid.
165. Yosef Azaryahu's will, February 6, 1928, Kibbutz Afikim Archive, Afikim.
166. Quoted in Armoni, *Haver ve'Ish Sod*, 24 and 31.
167. Gali, *Ha'ir she'Einena 'Od*. Phone interview, September 2009.
168. Ibid., 48.
169. Sarah Glicklich to Menachem Ussishkin, August 7, 1924, A24/189, CZA.
170. Nellie Straus-Mochenson to Alice Seligsberg, November 10, 1922, A375/238, CZA.
171. Straus-Mochenson, *Our Palestine*, 33 and 48.
172. "Writer's Adopted Child," *Palestine Post*, January 9, 1934.
173. "Custody of Writer's Adopted Daughter," *Palestine Post*, January 17, 1934.
174. Gerda Luft, "Legal Separation," *Palestine Post*, January 20, 1934.

175. For more details, see various documents at A375/303, CZA; *Palestine Post*, January 17, 1934.
176. O'Neill, "Divorce in the Progressive Era."

### 7. Five Years of Struggle and a Victory

Epigraph: Y. A. Navon, "BeSivkhey haVa'ad haLe'umi," *Ha'aretz*, May 27, 1925.

1. In 1918, 56,000 Jews lived in Palestine; in 1926, the number was nearly 140,000.
2. Attias, *Knesset Yisra'el be'Eretz Yisra'el*, 66–69; M. Friedman, *Hevrah veDat*, 185–213.
3. E. Rubinstein, "MiYishuv leMedinah," 164–68.
4. "Al haMitspeh," *Hator*, October 12, 1923.
5. Minutes of the Meeting of the Provisional Committee Executive and the representatives of the Haredi Community, April 8, 1922, J1/137, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter CZA).
6. Rosa Welt Straus, "Palestine," *IWSN* 15 (April 1921): 110.
7. For example, David Yellin proposed holding a referendum. See minutes of the meeting of the Presidium of the National Council, December 12, 1921, J1/137, CZA.
8. Meitilis, "David Yellin, Biographiyah," 242.
9. Hannam, Auchterlonie, and Holden, *International Encyclopedia of Women's Suffrage*, 16–17.
10. Ya'akov Thon, in minutes of the National Council Executive, October 20, 1921, J1/137, CZA.
11. Yitzhak Ben-Zvi in minutes of the National Council Executive, October 20, 1921, J1/137, CZA.
12. "Hatsa'at Hukey haBehirah le'Asefat haNivharim shel Yehudey Eretz Yisra'el," *Ha'aretz*, January 30, 1922.
13. Haredim representatives to the National Council, February 13, 1922, J1/321, CZA. .
14. "Hahlatat Tse'irey haHaredim le'Asefat haNivharim," *Do'ar Hayom*, January 8, 1922.
15. Sykes, *Cross Roads to Israel*, 92.
16. *Jewish Chronicle*, March 3, 1922.
17. "Meha'at Hitahduyot haNashim ha'Ivriyot," *Ha'aretz*, February 23, 1922.
18. Quoted in "Asefat haVa'ad haMerkazi shel Histadrut haMizrahi be'Eretz Yisrael," *Hator*, February 13, 1922.
19. "Asefat Tsirey haHaredim leAsefat haNivharim," *Do'ar Hayom*, February 19, 1922.

20. "HaSefaradim vemaMoshav haSheni shel Asefat haNivharim," *Do'ar Hayom*, February 22, 1922.
21. "Asefat Va'ad ha'ir leYehudey Yaffo beShe'elat haMisim," *Ha'aretz*, March 5, 1922.
22. "Protokol shel Yeshivat haHaredim 'im Havrey haNesiut shel haVa'ad haLe'umi biYerushalayim," *Ha'aretz*, March 5, 1922.
23. Yoseph Klausner, "Asefat haNivharim, haMoshav haSheni," *Hashilo'ah* 40 (1922): 66.
24. Contract between the Zion Theater and the National Council, February 27, 1922, J1/321, CZA.
25. Quoted in Bozich-Hertzog, "HaPulmus al Zekhut haBehirah leNashim leMosdot haYishuv beReshit Tekufat haMandat," p. 177.
26. David Yellin in minutes of the Second Session of the Assembly of Representatives, March 9, 1922, J1/7204, CZA.
27. Rosenthal, *Khronologyah leToldot haYishuv haYehudi be'Eretz Yisra'el, 1918–1935*, 68.
28. E. Rubinstein, "MiYishuv leMedinah," 162.
29. Attias, *Knesset Yisra'el be'Eretz Yisra'el*, 77–82.
30. The Communities Ordinance was not ratified until 1927–28.
31. David Yellin in minutes of the National Council Executive, October 29, 1923, J1/99II, CZA.
32. "Hamoshav haShlishi shel Asefat haNivharim," *Do'ar Hayom*, March 17, 1924.
33. Adifah [Ada Fishman], "Asefat haNivharim," *Do'ar Hayom*, February 13, 1922.
34. National Council to Rabbi Yehuda Leib Fishman, March 29, 1922, J1/224, CZA.
35. David Yellin to the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights, June 22, 1922, A153/151, CZA; Azaryahu, *Pirkey Hayim*, 187.
36. Committee of the Haredi delegates to the secretary of the National Council, May 9, 1922, J1/137, CZA.
37. Quoted in "El Aheinu ha'Askenazim haHaredim," *KolYisra'el*, April 4, 1924.
38. Ashkenazi Committee of Jerusalem to the Colonial Office, July 1, 1924, CO/733/71, the National Archives, Kew, UK (hereafter TNA).
39. Ashkenazi Committee of Jerusalem to the Colonial Secretary, July 10, 1924, CO/733/71, TNA.
40. Circular of the Ashkenazi Committee of Jerusalem concerning the opposition to the Communities Ordinance, 1924, CO 733/74, TNA.
41. World Organization of Mahzikey haDat of Palestine to the Colonial Office, August 13, 1923, CO 793/3, TNA.
42. Sir Herbert Samuel, untitled item in the *Jewish Chronicle*, March 9, 1922; Ash-



- kenazi City Council to the Colonial Office, December 9, 1924, 549–5m, the Central Archives of the Jewish People, Jerusalem.
43. Meitilis, “David Yellin, Biographiyah,” 252.
  44. See, for example, “Sakanat haVa’ad haLe’umi,” *KolYisra’el*, June 20, 1924.
  45. Yerushalmi, “Va’ad ha’Ir leYehudei Yerushalayim,” *KolYisra’el*, May 11, 1923.
  46. Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, a circular for a general fast day, A153/152a, CZA.
  47. Minutes of the National Council Executive, June 11, 1924, A153/152a, CZA.
  48. Nakdimon and Mayzlich, *De-Hann*; *KolYisra’el*, July 11, 1924.
  49. Foreign Office to the Secretary of State, July 2, 1924, CO 737/70, TNA.
  50. Fifty-six referendums on women’s suffrage were held in various states. See Peck, *Carrie Chapman Catt*, 5–6.
  51. Kenneally, “Woman Suffrage and the Massachusetts ‘Referendum’ of 1895.”
  52. Rabbi Yehuda Leib Fishman in minutes of the National Council Executive, October 29, 1923, J1/99II, CZA. See also P. Cohen, “Nationalism and Suffrage,” 721.
  53. Grant, “The 1912 Suffrage Referendum.”
  54. Kenneally, “Woman Suffrage and the Massachusetts ‘Referendum,’” 624.
  55. Benjamin, *A History of the Anti-Suffrage Movement in the United States from 1895 to 1920*, 211.
  56. Minutes of the National Committee Executive, October 29, 1923, J1/99II, CZA.
  57. Minutes of the National Council Executive, March 3, 1924, J1/99II, CZA.
  58. M. Friedman, *Hevrah veDat*, 178.
  59. “HaMoshav haShlishi shel Asefat haNivharim,” *Ha’aretz*, March 18, 1924; Ada Fishman, “HaReferendum,” *Ha’aretz*, November 27, 1923.
  60. Circular to all members of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights, March 23, 1924, 1, 2, Azaryahu Archives, Hakibbutz Hame’uhad Archives, Yad Tabenkin (hereafter AHH).
  61. “BeHitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot,” *Do’ar Hayom*, March 30, 1924.
  62. Yizhak Ben-Zvi in minutes of the National Council Executive, June 11, 1924, A153/152a, CZA.
  63. Sarah Azaryahu, “Likrat haMoshav haShlishi,” *Ha’aretz*, March 26, 1924.
  64. “Asefat Shivuy Zekhuyot Nashim,” *Do’ar Hayom*, April 3, 1924.
  65. Azaryahu, *Pirkey Hayim*, 26–28; a poster calling for the women’s rally, V1986/12, National Library Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter NLI).
  66. “Asefat Shivuy Zeckhuyot Nashim,” *Do’ar Hayom*, April 3, 1924.

67. Yoseph Klausner, "Ne'um be'Asefat haMeha'ah shel Hitahdut Nashim leShivuy Zekhuyot," *Ha'aretz*, April 8, 1924.
68. Women's rally program, J75/2, CZA; *Do'ar Hayom*, April 2, 1924.
69. Yoseph Klausner, "Ne'um be'Asefat haMeha'ah shel Hitahdut Nashim leShivuy Zekhuyot," *Ha'aretz*, April 8, 1924.
70. Women's Assembly resolutions, J75/2, CZA. The assembly was a part of the rally.
71. National Council Executive to the Assembly of Representatives, May 24, 1925, J1/317, CZA.
72. Rachel Yana'it in minutes of the National Council, May 13, 1925, J1/7228, CZA.
73. The seven members of the Union's executive committee were Sarah Azaryahu, Hasyah Feinsud-Sukenik, Nellie Straus-Mochenson, Tzipora Klausner, Margalit Meyuhas, Elka Zeldah Godel, and Hannah Frumkin.
74. Circular from the committee of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights, Jerusalem, May 22, 1925, J75/4, CZA.
75. Rosa Welt Straus and Sarah Azaryahu to Henrietta Szold, May 20, 1925, RG4/B50/F2, Hadassah Archives, New York (hereafter HANY).
76. Cables from Poland, Germany, Austria, *Davar*, June 12, 1925, J1/317, CZA.
77. For more cables from various countries, see J1/317, CZA.
78. Henrietta Szold to Rosa Welt Straus, June 15, 1925, RG4/B50/F2, HANY.
79. Delap, Ryan, and Zackodnik, "Self-Determination, Race, and Empire."
80. *Davar*, June 10, 1925.
81. *Ha'aretz*, June 12, 1925.
82. *Ha'aretz*, June 14, 1925.
83. "Asefah Pumbit leShivuy Zekhuyot haNashim," *Do'ar Hayom*, June 11, 1925.
84. "BeHitahdut Nashim 'Ivriyot," *Do'ar Hayom*, June 16, 1925.
85. Rosa Welt Straus, "Leshe'elat haReferendum," *Ha'aretz*, June 25, 1925.
86. Minutes of the Third Session of the First Assembly of Representatives, June 15–16, 1925, J1/7205, CZA.
87. Meitilis, "David Yellin, Biographiyah," 250.
88. Palestine Zionist Executive to the chief secretary of the Mandatory Government, June 14, 1925, 154–5m, Israel State Archives, Jerusalem.
89. Sarah Azaryahu in minutes of the Third Session of the First Assembly of Representatives, June 16, 1925, J1/7205, CZA.
90. Azaryahu, *Pirkey Hayim*, 218.
91. *Ibid.*, 220.
92. Minutes of the Third Session of the First Assembly of Representatives, June 16, 1925, J1/7205, CZA.

93. Bylaws of the National Assembly, June 15, 1925, J1/318, CZA.
94. "HaHakhanot leAsefat haNivharim haShniyah," *Ha'aretz*, June 21, 1925.
95. "HaMoshav haShlishi shel Asefat haNivharim," *HaPo'el HaTza'ir*, June 17, 1925.
96. "Asefat Tse'irey haKalfi haHaredit," *Do'ar Hayom*, June 19, 1925.
97. "Hahlatot Tse'irey haHaredim leAsefat haNivharim," *Do'ar Hayom*, June 17, 1925.
98. "HaHanhalah haTsiyonit Dahatah et Bakashatam," *Ha'aretz*, May 19, 1925.
99. Anonymous handwritten memorandum, June 24, 1925, J75/4, CZA.
100. See, for example, a poster promoting a joint gathering with Sarah Azaryahu, the labor parties, and the Sephardi parties, J1/1627, CZA.
101. "Petah Tikvah," *Davar*, July 6, 1925.
102. Minutes of a joint meeting of the Mizrahi World Center and the Mizrahi branches in Palestine, June 26, 1925165a, Archive of Religious Zionism, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan.
103. "Hoda'ah Gluyah me'et haMizrahi," *Do'ar Hayom*, July 1, 1925.
104. "Giluy Da'at shel haTeymanim," *Ha'aretz*, June 26, 1925.
105. Minutes of the National Council Executive, September 30, 1925, J1/133, CZA.
106. Haver [pseud.], "Mish'al Ha'Am," *KolYisra'el*, July 17, 1925.
107. "Asefat haNivharim Nidhetah leShloshah Hodashim," *Do'ar Hayom*, July 14, 1925.
108. "LiDhiyat haBehirot le'Asefat haNivharim," *Ha'aretz*, July 19, 1925.
109. Minutes of the National Council Executive, September 30, 1925, J1/133, CZA.
110. M. B. [Moshe Beilinson], "HaVitur ha'Aharon," *Davar*, October 19, 1925.
111. "El ha'Ishah ha'Ivriyah ba'Aretz," October 21, 1925, V1986/12, NLI.
112. Rosa Welt Straus, "LeShe'elat haReferendum," *Ha'aretz*, October 25, 1925.
113. Feinsud-Sukenik, *Pirkey Gan*, 282.
114. Maimon, *Le'Orekh haDerekh*, 27.
115. L.V., "Devar HaYom: Teshuvat ha'Am," *Davar*, July 7, 1925.
116. Azaryahu, *Pirkey Hayim*, 223.
117. Quoted in Ada Fishman to the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights, Jerusalem, October 30, 1925, J75/25, CZA.
118. Quoted in Tel Aviv branch of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights to Sarah Azaryahu, "Agudat Nashim," November 1, 1925, J75/4, CZA.
119. Tel Aviv branch of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights, "KeNeced haHishtatfut beMish'al 'Am," *Davar*, November 2, 1925.
120. Yosef M. Cohen, "Aharey haMoshav haShlishi (leShe'elat ha'Ishah)," *Do'ar Hayom*, June 26, 1925.

121. Y. Y. Yellin, "HaMish'al 'im Tani [?]," *Hed Ha'am*, October 21, 1925.
122. Kenneally, "Woman Suffrage and the Massachusetts 'Referendum,'" 626.
123. "Asefat Rabbanim neged Mish'al Am," *Do'ar Hayom*, October 26, 1925.
124. Chief Rabbinate, *Do'ar Hayom*, October 23, 1925; *Kol Yisra'el*, October 23, 1925.
125. "Azharah Hamurah," *Kol Yisra'el*, November 11, 1925.
126. Manifesto of the Mizrahi Eretz Yisra'el Branch, J1/8811, CZA.
127. "The National Council Statement," November 9, 1925, J1/8811, CZA.
128. David Yellin in minutes of the Second Assembly of Representatives, January 1926, A153/151, CZA.
129. Quoted in "Mo'etsset haNashim leShivuy Zekhuyot beTel Aviv," *Do'ar Hayom*, November 15, 1925.
130. Quoted in "Mo'etsset haNashim leShivuy Zekhuyot beTel Aviv," *Ha'arets*, November 17, 1925.
131. R. Binyamin [pseud.], "Tse'u veHitkonenu laBehirot," *Ha'arets*, November 24, 1925.
132. E. Rubinstein, "MiYishuv leMedinah," 157 and 170.
133. Gurevich, *Sefer Statisti le'Eretz Yisra'el*, 33.
134. Posters in honor of the Second Assembly of Representatives, J1/1627, CZA.
135. K. Y. Silman, "Beshabat haBehirot," *Ha'arets*, December 11, 1925.
136. The Union's branch in Tel Aviv had spilt. A small faction of its members headed by Le'a Kook, a sister-in-law of the Ashkenazi chief rabbi, founded a party called Nashim Amamiyot and led its slate in the elections. Le'a Kook was the only member of her tiny party who won a seat in the Second Assembly of Representatives. See J1/63/1, CZA.
137. The Union's candidates in the second elections were Sarah Azaryahu, Hasyah Feinsud-Sukenik, Dr. Helena Kagan, Tzipora Klausner, Margalit Meyuhas, Jessie Sampter, and Dr. Hannah Borokhov (Hebraized as Berakhyahu). See elections file, J1/1633, CZA.
138. Rosa Welt Straus to members of the Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights, November 16, 1925, J35/14, CZA.
139. "Al Devar Isur Behirat Nashim," *Kol Yisra'el*, December 11, 1925; *Hator*, November 27, 1925.
140. "HaShavua' be'Eretz Yisra'el," *Kol Yisra'el*, December 4, 1925.
141. Ish Yerushalayim, "Renanat ha'Agudah," *Ha'arets*, December 8, 1925.
142. Sarah Azaryahu, "Ha'Ishah veAsefat haNivharim," *Ha'ishah* 1 (April 1926): 28.
143. "Azharah Hamurah," *Kol Yisra'el*, December 4, 1925.

144. Unsigned and undated report of the Election Commission, A24/175, CZA.
145. Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, "Mish'al ha'Am," *Davar*, October 30, 1925.
146. E. Rubinstein, "MiYishuv leMedinah," 156 and 168.
147. R. Binyamin [pseud.], "Tse'u veHitkonenu laBehirot," *Ha'aretz*, November 24, 1925.
148. "HaBehirot," *KolYisra'el*, December 11, 1925.
149. A. Shaharay, "Aharey haBehirot," *Ha'aretz*, December 17, 1925.
150. Report of the Election Commission, January 8, 1926, J1/318, CZA.
151. A. Shaharay, "Aharey haBehirot," *Ha'aretz*, December 17, 1925.
152. Yehoshua Radler Feldman, "Be'Eretz Yisra'el," *Ha'ivri*, June 18, 1920.
153. Report of the Election Commission, January 8, 1926, J1/318, CZA.
154. E. Rubinstein, "MiYishuv leMedinah," 170; Ben-Arieh, *Havrot haKnesset*, 20–38.
155. Sarah Azaryahu, "Ha'Ishah veAsefat haNivharim," *Ha'ishah* 1 (April 1926): 28.
156. Nedava, *Demut ha'Ishah be'Eyney Jabotinsky*, 199–200.
157. "Doh Hitahdut Nashim, 1923–1926," J75/4, CZA.
158. "Palestine Jewish Women," *IWSN* 20 (April 1926): 106; International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, "Report of the Tenth Congress," Paris, May 30–June 6, 1926, 2/1aw/1/c/5, Women's Library Archives, London (hereafter WLA).
159. "Asefat haNivharim haShniyah," *Ha'aretz*, January 3, 1926.
160. "Asefat haNivharim haShniyah," *Davar*, January 12, 1926.
161. Azaryahu, *Pirkey Hayim*, 224–25.
162. K. Y. Silman, "MiSaviv umiSaviv," *Davar*, January 14, 1926.
163. Pahaz [pseud.], "Nashim," *Ha'aretz*, January 15, 1926.
164. Attias, *Knesset Yisra'el be'Eretz Yisra'el*, 201.
165. International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, "Report of the Tenth Congress," Paris, May 30–June 6, 1926, 2/1aw/1/c/5, WLA.
166. Azaryahu, *Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el*, 38.
167. Second Assembly of Representatives, Session 1, January 15, 1926, J1/7206, CZA.
168. Helman, "Ezrahut uMigdar," 529.
169. Hannah Thon, "Hirhurim al Tenu'at haNashim," *Ha'ishah* 1 (July–August 1926): 12–13.
170. Sarah Azaryahu, "Ha'Ishah veAsefat haNivharim," *Ha'ishah* 1 (April 1926): 30.
171. Quoted in *Hitahdut Nashim*, no. 1, 4.

172. "A Brief History of the Jewish Women's Movement in Palestine, 1945," J75/32, CZA.
173. Sarah Azaryahu, "Ha'Ishah veAsefat haNivharim," *Ha'ishah* 1 (April 1926): 29.
174. Azaryahu, *Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el*, 37.
175. Minutes of the National Council's Executive, August 14, 1927, L1/132, CZA.
176. Minutes of the Third Meeting of the National Council, March 11, 1928, J1/7231, CZA.
177. Azaryahu, *Pirkey Hayim*, 52–54.
178. Sarah Azaryahu, "Ad Eimatay?," February 14, 1928, 1, 6, AHH.
179. Quoted in *ibid*.
180. Sarah Azaryahu, "Tafkidey ha'Ishah be'Asefat haNivharim," March 16, 1936, 3, 6, AHH.
181. Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights to Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, no date, J75/35, CZA.

#### 8. Victory and Defeat

Epigraph: Yoseph Klausner, "Zekhuyot Ha'Ishah," *Ha'aretz*, April 8, 1924.

1. Sarah Azaryahu, "Ha'Ishah veAsefat haNivharim," *Ha'ishah* 1 (April 1926): 26–30.
2. Azaryahu, *Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el*, 36.
3. Herzog, "Politikah shel Nashim o Politika al-yedey Nashim," 112.
4. Hagemann, "To Become a Political Subject," 141; Purvis, "Christabel Pankhurst and the Struggle for Suffrage Reform in Edwardian Britain," 279–81.
5. Sarah Azaryahu, untitled and undated item, J75/14, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter CZA).
6. *Ibid*.
7. Sarah Azaryahu, "Ha'Ishah veAsefat haNivharim," *Ha'ishah* 1 (April 1926): 30.
8. Bozich-Hertzog, "HaPulmus al Zekhut haBehirah leNashim leMosdot haYishuv beReshit Tekufat haMandat," 99.
9. Bo'az, "HaStatus Quo," 30–40, 123.
10. Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, 99.
11. M. Friedman, *Hevrah veDat*, 129–45 and 185–213.
12. *Kol Yisra'el*, July 10, 1925.
13. Macdonald, "Suffrage, Gender and Sovereignty in New Zealand," 18.
14. Catt and Shuler, *Woman Suffrage and Politics*, 493.
15. Safran, "International Struggle, Local Victory"; Herzog, "The Fringes of the Margins."

16. Bozich-Hertzog, "HaPulmus al Zekhut haBehirah leNashim leMosdot haYishuv beReshit Tekufat haMandat," 69–70.
17. Grant, "The 1912 Suffrage Referendum," 118.
18. Azaryahu, *Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el*, 38.
19. Fogiel-Bijaoui, "HaMa'avak al haMuvan me'Elav."
20. Turliuc and Turliuc, "The Struggle for Women's Political Rights in Modern Romania."
21. Macdonald, "Suffrage, Gender and Sovereignty in New Zealand," 24 and 28.
22. Beaumont, Hill, Lane, and Ryan, "Becoming Citizens in Ireland."
23. See chapter 4.
24. Ryan, "A Question of Loyalty," 21–22; Delap, Ryan, and Zackodnik, "Self-Determination, Race, and Empire," 252.
25. Booth, "Women in the Irish Nationalist Movement 1900–1916."
26. Azaryahu, *Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el*, 12–13.
27. *Hitahdut Nashim*, no. 1, 3.
28. Sarah Azaryahu, "Ha'Ishah veAsefat haNivharim," *Ha'ishah* 1 (April 1926): 26–30.
29. Azaryahu, *Hitahdut Nashim Ivriyot leShivuy Zekhuyot be'Eretz Yisra'el*, 18.
30. Yoseph Klausner, "Zekhuyot Ha'Ishah," *Ha'arets*, April 8, 1924.
31. Katz, *Women and Gender in Early Jewish and Palestinian Nationalism*, 164.
32. Sarah Azaryahu, "Ha'Ishah veAsefat haNivharim," *Ha'ishah* 1 (April 1926): 26–30.
33. Hoff, *Law, Gender, and Injustice*, 15.
34. Macdonald, "Suffrage, Gender and Sovereignty in New Zealand."
35. Welt Straus passed away in Geneva on December 16, 1938.
36. Phone interview with Arnan Azaryahu, September 7, 2004.
37. Attias, *Knesset Yisra'el be'Eretz Yisra'el*, p. 201.
38. There are 120 seats in the Israeli Knesset. In December 2014, 27 of them were held by women.
39. Fogiel-Bijaoui, *Demokratyah veFeminism, Migdar veZekhuyot Adam*, 63.
40. Gaber and Selisnik, "Slovene Women's Suffrage Movement in a Comparative Perspective," 236; Beaumont, Hill, Lane, and Ryan, "Becoming Citizens in Ireland."
41. Kuzmack, *Women's Cause*, 154.
42. Sarah Azaryahu, "Ha'Ishah veAsefat haNivharim," *Ha'ishah* 1 (April 1926): 26.
43. [Sarah Azaryahu?], Union of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights, memorandum, [1929?], J75/14, CZA.
44. Sarah Azaryahu, "Madua' Holekhet haHitahdut leShivyon Zekhuyot el haBehirot le'Asefat haNivharim beReshimat Nashim?," August 1944, J75/25, CZA.

*Notes to Chapter 8*

45. Tehilah Matmon, "Tafkideyha shel Hitahdut Nashim leShivyon Zekhuyot lekrat he'Atid?" in *Hitahdut Nashim*, no. 2, 19.
46. *Hitahdut Nashim*, no. 2, 2.
47. Quoted in Berkovitch, *From Motherhood to Citizenship*, 229–30.
48. Weiss and Yishay, "Yitsug ha'Ishah ba'Ilit ha'Politit beYisra'el."



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AJEI Archive for Jewish Education in Israel and the Diaspora, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv  
AKA Kibbutz Afikim Archive, Afikim  
AZD Archive of Religious Zionism, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan  
CHAJP The Central Archives of the Jewish People, Jerusalem  
CZA Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem  
GZD Archives of Religious Zionism, Mossad Harav Kook, Jerusalem  
HACJ Historical Archives of the City of Jerusalem, Jerusalem  
HANY Hadassah Archives, New York  
ISA Israel State Archives, Jerusalem  
LCAW Library of Congress Archives, Washington, D.C.  
NLI National Library Archives, Jerusalem  
PLANY Public Library Archives and Manuscripts, New York  
PLILMR The Pinhas Lavon Institute for Labour Movement Research, Tel Aviv  
PTA Petach Tikvah City Archives, Petach-Tikvah  
RLA Rishon LeTzion Archive, Rishon leTzion  
TAHA Tel Aviv Historical Archives, Tel Aviv  
TNA The National Archives, Kew, UK  
WLA Women's Library Archives, London

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