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Motherhood and nation: The voice of women artists in Israel's bereavement and memorial discourse

Yael Guilat*

This article offers an interpretive reading of current works of art by women that indicate the paradoxical place of the woman artist as a mother in the cycle of militarism and attitudes toward the discourse of bereavement and commemoration. My hypothesis is that the arts herald or anticipate the trauma by seeking to express something that may be called "pre- and counter-commemoration." This interpretation of these artists' stance expands on insights arising from the notion of "counter-memory" to discuss a paradoxical form of commemoration that refuses to acquiesce in the cycle of militarism and memorialization. The article offers an integrated examination of theory and practices in the historical context of motherhood and nationalism and, specifically, of women artists in Israel in recent decades in the "discourse of bereavement" as opposed to the "discourse of the bereaved."

Keywords: motherhood; nationalism; militarism; women artists; counter-memory; bereavement; commemoration; collective memory

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Introduction

Sarah Metzer's article, "The Silent Voice of the Combat Soldiers' Mothers," begins by stating: "To be a combat soldier's mother is to be in a paradox."[1] This sentence accompanies my article, which explores the works of women artists who seek to contend with potential bereavement and anxiety while expressing their resistance to being passively and automatically drawn into the cycle of militarism. This ambivalence recurs in most discussions about motherhood in the nationalist discourse and about motherhood as a stance in the public discourse.[2]

These women artists' endeavors were prompted by a complex linkage among different aspects of their identity. Some produced their works in response to their sons' military induction; others were driven by feminist and anti-militarist political attitudes. The former refused to play the role of mothers who silently acquiesce in the occupation sustained by their soldier-sons, as in Shoshan Brosh-Weitz's work (Figure 1); their conduct was subversive relative to what is expected of them. In the case of Yehudit Matzkel, who produced several series of works on the topic (Figure 2), the articulation between feminist positions and "motherhood in conflict" is generating a corpus of work that oscillates between the two and offers a plethora of attitudes and positions from empathy to overt protest, focusing on the body as woman-mother and culminating with her gaze over the landscape of grief at the cemeteries. The women artists whom I discuss below did not experience bereavement under military circumstances. I chose them to expand the discussion of what may be called the separate voice of women and women artists in the "discourse of bereavement" as opposed to the "discourse of the bereaved." In Israel, this voice was first heard in the 1990s and found expression in

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Figure 1. Shoshan Brosh-Weitz, *The Silence of the Washerwomen* (2006), mixed technique on plaque (www.e-mago.co.il/Editor/feminism-1129.htm).

literature, philosophy, and the plastic arts.[3] Thus, this article offers an integrated examination of theory and practices in the historical context of motherhood and, specifically, of women artists in Israel in recent decades.

During these years and particularly after the Yom Kippur War (1973), the Israeli memorial discourse became a battlefield among diverse voices and attested to a profound change in relations between the individual and the collective.[4] The debate was not confined to the nature of memorial sites and their ability to accommodate individual narratives; in the past two decades, it has spread to the designing of tombstones in military cemeteries as a place for personal grief in instead of public commemoration.[5]

This article focuses on women artists who chose to express the maternal aspect of their identity either directly, through the artistic themes, motives, and devices of their works, or indirectly, via the strategies and cultural contexts that they selected. Their works abound with references to maternal roles, address the way these roles are structured, and respond to the appropriation of the roles by nationalism and militarism. These artists neither acted as a group nor were treated as such in exhibitions or any other event. They represent a phenomenon that I will use to illuminate the issue of motherhood and nationalism from an angle that has not been investigated thus far. Unlike other studies that focus on the place and function of monuments in Israeli society, the presence of women in these monuments, or the image of the mother in Israeli art, my aim in this article is to offer an interpretive reading of current works of art by women that indicate the paradoxical place of the woman artist as a mother in the cycle of militarism and attitudes toward the discourse of bereavement and commemoration.[6] My hypothesis is that the arts herald or anticipate the trauma by seeking to express something that may be called "pre- and counter-commemoration." This interpretation of these artists' stance expands on insights arising from the notion of "counter-memory" to discuss a paradoxical form of commemoration that refuses to acquiesce in the cycle of militarism and memorialization.

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Figure 2. Yehudit Matzkel, photograph (1998), in *"Hatza'it ba-derekh!" Shalosh shanim im Givati: Yehudit Matzkel, tzilumim* ("Skirt on the way!" Three years with the Givati Brigade: Yehudit Matzkel, photographs) (Tel Aviv: Eretz Israel Museum, 2000), 98.

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The counter-memory concept evolved from a confrontation with the collective memory, which essentially banishes or represses memory that is personal or that fails to conform with hegemonic group memory. Counter-memory undermines the legitimacy of the historical memory that the collective memory created and strives for symbolic representation in history.[7]

James Young, discussing the same issue in the context of Holocaust commemoration, deconstructs the concept of commemoration and discusses the structural failure that takes place when an absence is marked by a monumental "presence." Basing myself on the constantly expanding discussion of counter-memory, I wish to construe these women artists' anti-monumental works as a proposal for a "counter-memorial."[8] The "counter" in these works is resistance that anticipates loss – the active resistance of an artistic endeavor that uses memorial strategies to dispense with the need to memorialize, a sort of fetishist practice of protectiveness on the one hand and protest on the other. I precede this interpretive reading with historical background about the place of women and mothers in monuments for the fallen and with feminist theories on motherhood and its position in the public discourse.

In a certain sense, the interpretation that follows reverberates in David Grossman's novel *To the End of the Land*. The heroine, Ora, denies being "one of those mothers who sends [her sons] into battle. [She is] not from those dynasties, not from Um Jauni and not from Beit Alfa, not from Beit Hashita and not from Kfar Giladi; nevertheless, she discovers to her bewilderment that this is exactly what she is."[9] In this sentence, Grossman brings together all the cultural "monuments" embodying the statement that the works of contemporary women artists seek to resist.

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From crisis in the national consensus to women's activism: History and theory

In the past thirty years Israel has undergone a process of the disintegration of identity. The political "turnaround" in 1977 (the demise of the Labor-left political hegemony) marked the onset of a drastic change in the national consensus, which had been undermined by the Yom Kippur War. The crisis escalated in the 1980s as a result of the First Lebanese War, the First Intifada, and the disappearance of the welfare state through the forces of privatization and economic liberalization that the Likud-Labor governments set in motion. Refusal to perform military service in the territories also emerged as a threat to the existing order emanating from the mainstream itself. The formative myths – central among them the "Sabra" as a basically unifying and native male identity with a victorious present and future but no past and no traumas of the past – began to collapse.[10]

The shock and disillusionment following the Yom Kippur War shook the national order and exposed its failure to assure the citizens' lives and well-being. As Eliezer Witztum described it, "the collective narratives that society needs to examine its identity, its stability, and its ability to achieve" were modified, and hitherto repressed elements began to flood the national consciousness, even as the veteran establishment lost the legitimacy that it needed to silence them.[11] "The crisis recurred in relations between personal mourning and public mourning," Witztum notes, adding that, for the first time, the restraints that bereaved parents and the public had accepted were overtly ruptured. In demonstrations and protest movements, they shouted, "[Defense Minister Moshe] Dayan's a murderer," rejecting the army establishment's credibility.[12]

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The crisis of confidence in the military system and the Israeli soldier that it had created was widely reflected in art, cinema, and literature.[13] In cinema, for example, militarism as an element in the normative Israeli culture came under challenge from the late 1970s onward. In the plastic arts, the same process had begun in 1967, as in Yigal Tumarkin's sculpture *He Walked through the Fields*. The process gathered momentum in the 1980s in the works of David Wakstein, David Riv, Avishai Eyal, and others.[14] From then on, as researchers such as Nurit Gertz and Ella Shohat maintain, the films were populated not by normative soldiers but by deviant ones, those "unsuited" to the military system.[15] Several examples are Shimon Dotan's *Repeat Dive* (1982), Danny Wolman's *Soldier of the Night* (1984), and Judd Ne'eman's *The Silver Platter* (1982). Eli Cohen's film *Two Fingers from Sidon* (1986), one of the political films that reflected the liberal-humanist outlook of the 1980s and that became an icon of its time, was produced by the filmmaking unit of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Its symbolic final scene – a military vehicle with spinning wheels stuck in the Lebanese mud on its way out of Lebanon – mirrors the despair and the question marks that remained even after Israeli forces left that country. One of the new voices that began to articulate its claims was the maternal voice of mothers who contended with the feminist discourse at home and the national discourse in the public domain.[16]

The feminist critique initially attacked motherhood and viewed it as a source of weakness that shackles women and sustains exploitation and oppression by touting what Simone de Beauvoir called the maternal essence.[17] The separation of sex from gender placed maternity in the shadow of resistance to the social repression of women on biological grounds. Many feminist women refused to do their duty as "sites of reproduction" both at the family level and as the nation's womb. By the late 1980s, feminist discourse, a term that became used in Israel only in the 1970s, began to develop new modi operandi; despite differences among its constituent groups, all feminist actions placed women themselves and their personal rights, including their rights as mothers, at the center of the struggle.[18]

The question of motherhood in feminist thinking has defied consensus all along – in early feminism, third-wave feminism (1990s), and postmodern, including post-feminist, outlooks. In 1990 Judith Butler published her book *Gender Trouble*, which related mainly to continental thinking. Butler argued against the essentialism of the early feminist outlook, which promoted the feminine subject as universal and confused female identity politics with its representation. Butler maintained that feminism made a grave mistake by attempting to define women as one group. By doing this, it perpetuated binarism (such as female/male) and obstructed the possibility of a critical perception of gender.[19] Butler also opposed the demand of women thinkers such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous for "women's writing" on the grounds that this would reinforce the essentialist view of sex and gender as naturally connected.[20] Butler also criticized Julia Kristeva's view of the role of the maternal body as a primary agent in the libido economy, and symbolic production (language) as a reaction to essentialism.[21] She rejected Kristeva's claim that the maternal body is a cultural site a priori, a source of semiotic inferences of language such as intuition, onomatopoeia, and its kin, cadence. Kristeva discusses language, voice, texture of voice, and gestures of voice in their physical context. The body as the "grain of the voice"[22] recurred as a motif in metaphorical form (such as an abdomen, a receptacle, an empty hive) among women artists such as Yehudit Matzkel (Figure 3), Drora Dominey (Figure 4), and Ariane

Figure 3. Yehudit Matzkel, photographs from the series *A Soldier's Mother* (1995–98), in Yehudit Matzkel, *A Soldier's Mother* (Ein Hod: Janco-Dada Museum, 1998).

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Littman-Cohen (Figure 5). According to Kristeva, the maternal body drives poetic expression among women artists as a subliminal source of creativity associated with processes of the infant's separation from the mother, akin to the working through of grief over the loss of the maternal body and the transposition of the grief to the creative domain.[23] While Kristeva, the psychoanalyst, discusses the mother and her body in connection with body, psyche, and culture, and pursuant to this with motherhood, Butler, the philosopher, rejects approaches that may generate hierarchic links between biology and culture and sees gender as a kind of performance, of practical positioning. "The body has no ontological status apart from the various actions that guide its essentiality," she insists.[24] If so, not only is maternal thinking/a maternal voice impossible, but both should be seen as fictive. With Butler, however, maternity was not removed from the feminist agenda any more than from that of psychoanalysis. The conceptualization of mother as subject is the product of current psychoanalytic thinking; Freud, in contrast, perceived the mother as an object, as one who satisfies her child's needs.[25]

Coinciding with Butler and Kristeva but differing from them at the level that links theory and praxis, other theoretical models evolved among American feminists that challenged feminist thinking in an additional way and yielded new theoretical concepts: maternal work, maternal parenting, and maternal thinking.[26] As maternal work was detached from the essentialist discourse, questions slowly began to arise about the mother as subject, motherhood as social conditioning, and motherhood as an experience. Acknowledging the complexity of the intersubjective experience

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Figure 4. Drora Dominey, *Blue Washtub* (1990), wood, glass, aluminum, concrete, 90 × 40 × 40 cm.

associated with maternal work made it possible to observe the innate ambivalence, the internal trinity – mother-child-space – that enables mothers to accommodate the other: to accommodate attraction and rejection, intimacy and separateness.[27]

In the aftermath of these developments, all concepts of "motherhood" and "motherliness" have been reexamined. According to Emilia Perroni's distinction, while "motherhood" denotes a woman's being a mother and the relationship between her and her offspring in biological, emotional, and physiological terms, "motherliness" is an emotional position vis-à-vis the other, with no essential connection between the two.[28]

Figure 5. Ariane Littman-Cohen, *Virgin of Israel and Her Daughters* (1994), part of an installation at the Jerusalem Artists' Center, 1995: beehives, infrared lighting, and power lines, 30 × 41 × 56 cm each (http://www.ariane-littman.com/docs/mother_land/02_intro_motherland.html).

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In this context, Sara Ruddick lists four characteristics of maternal thinking: concern for the children's physical existence (preservation), growth of the personality, and social acceptability, and attentive love.[29] Carol Gilligan, too, regards feminine maternal judgment as categorically separate from its masculine counterpart. To her mind, women's moral judgment is based on the perception of being responsible for mitigating distress at large, concern for the other, concern for his/her needs, and personal contact – an ethical approach toward personal life that eschews the invasion, repression, and control of the other.[30] In the 1990s, a view emerged in the West that saw a connection between maternal work and peace: maternal work leads to ideals of anti-violence combined with anti-establishment feminist awareness. If so, protest against repressive maternity intersects with anti-militarist action.[31] In Israel, too, new theoretical and literary writing in this spirit developed in the 1990s; it concerned questions of gender and nationalism and gender and the military. Prominent among the literary works are Yehudit Hendel's *The Mountain of Losses*, Orly Kastel Bloom's *Dolly City*, and Batya Gur's *Stone for Stone*.[32]

Both then and today, the glass ceiling has persisted in Israel as it has in other Western societies. Despite legislative changes relating to women's rights, the primary definition of women as "the nation's womb," as stated in the documentary film *Israeli Sex*,[33] remains part of the public discourse. It was the challenge to this definition, starting in the 1990s, that allowed the female and maternal voice to be heard for the first time. The activities of organizations such as Machsom Watch, Women in Black, The Four Mothers, Women's Coalition for Peace, Mothers against Silence, Shuvi, Zochrot, and others wished to express (beyond their political positions) various feminine-maternal

stances on military and security issues.[34] As part of these processes in the feminist, politico-cultural, and artistic discourse, new representations of maternity in various fields of culture, in the context of the discourse of bereavement and the national order at large, also proliferated.

"Woman's place" in monuments to fallen soldiers

Mothers, and women generally, are represented in Israeli art in national contexts – both in monuments to the fallen (art in the public space) and in personal works (those produced whether publicly commissioned or not) – on the basis of biblical myths and images imported from European nationalism. They have also, although to a lesser extent, been presented in the context of discrete historical events.

In the 1990s, historical research and research on culture and the arts in Israel addressed the question of constitutive myths, revealing mechanisms of accommodation and exclusion of the various identities in the national narrative, including gender identities.[35] Monuments to the fallen were perceived as representing the discourse of bereavement and remembrance in the Zionist national visual culture and, *ipso facto*, the hegemonic discourse.[36] The scanty presence of women in the monuments, either as images or as creators, was explained against the background of women's place in the national order, and the egalitarian rhetoric of the pioneer-progenitors of Zionism was one of the myths that was reexamined.[37] True enough, women seldom fought on the battlefield except in the 1948 war; most performed auxiliary duties. The image of the woman-warrior was represented sparsely and, after 1955, not at all.[38]

As noted above, conventional representations in the European national discourse made a perceptible impact on women's status in the Israeli remembrance discourse. They identified woman foremost as the mother of the nation, appropriating the nationally symbolic femininity of the maternal-motherly type. The European tradition offered allegorical images of the woman, prime among them those of the nation and victory. As part of the allegorical matrix or separate from it, a "grieving mother" – the wailing mother – also appeared as representing the price of victory.[39] The allegory of the nation as a mother who protects her offspring was usually recounted in the form of a large, heroic, and erect woman.[40]

Monuments, which were regarded as the main form of sculpture in Israel until the 1980s, were homologous territory in the sense of male hegemony in both the artistic and the national domains.[41] Ever since the construction of monuments to Israel's fallen began, the visual representation of women at commemorative places has corresponded largely to the homeland concept and long-lived traditional motifs in European art along with the widespread use of the various forms of the biblical image of the nation, combined with the set of common visual symbols in European nationalism.[42]

The sculpture *The Matriarch Rachel* (1949) by David Polus (1893–1975) presents an example of a mother-savior (Figure 6). The matriarch clutches a large torch in one hand and scans the horizon as if waiting for her children; at her feet, the inscription "And the sons shall return to their border" (Jer. 31:16) appears. Her other hand draws a boy and a girl into her gown. Another statue by Polus, the memorial pillar at Kiryat Tivon (1952), contrasts with this depiction. Atop two concrete reliefs on either side of the pillar, the nation as the "Great Mother" is symbolized by a map of the country that accommodates its living and dead children. In a memorial designed by Aharon Priver

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Figure 6. David Polus, *The Matriarch Rachel* (memorial to fallen soldiers in the 1948 war) (1959), Ramat Rachel (photo by author).

(1902–71) at Tel Yosef (1952), the relief wall shows a group of figures. Two of them are women; the one on the right-hand side "calls out and summons," as the sculptor put it (Figure 7).[43] In fact, she symbolizes the nation, urging its offspring to mobilize. Her forearm is shaped in the form of a wing that spreads over the soldiers, recalling the winged figure in the European tradition. The second female in the relief is holding and attending to an injured soldier. Her posture recalls the Pietà, the motif of Christian mercy; she symbolizes aid, compassion, anguish, and kindness. Priver appears to have combined two ostensibly contrasting elements in one monument. On one side, the nation demands participation if not sacrifice; this is the mother who "speaks" the language of the father and the patriarchal order;[44] on the other side stands the mother-nation, the nation as "mother and sister" and as the embodiment of the civic "good virtues" that flow from the feminine "essence" that the nation has appropriated for its needs.[45] The two images may be complementary: the mother who gives life and the mother who gives death. Both of them, like the goddesses of antiquity, evoke Mother Earth, the great goddess, as an archetype of fecundity and death in its Zionist version. At the Tel Yosef monument, "Priver's women" induct men, send them into battle, and ultimately grieve for those who fall. Similarly, women populate additional monuments and memorials as grieving mourners; by their means, the nation is represented as a bereaved mother, the mother of children.[46]

To gauge the watershed that the women artists propose to cross – what I call the counter-memorial – one must not only examine the representation of the feminine and

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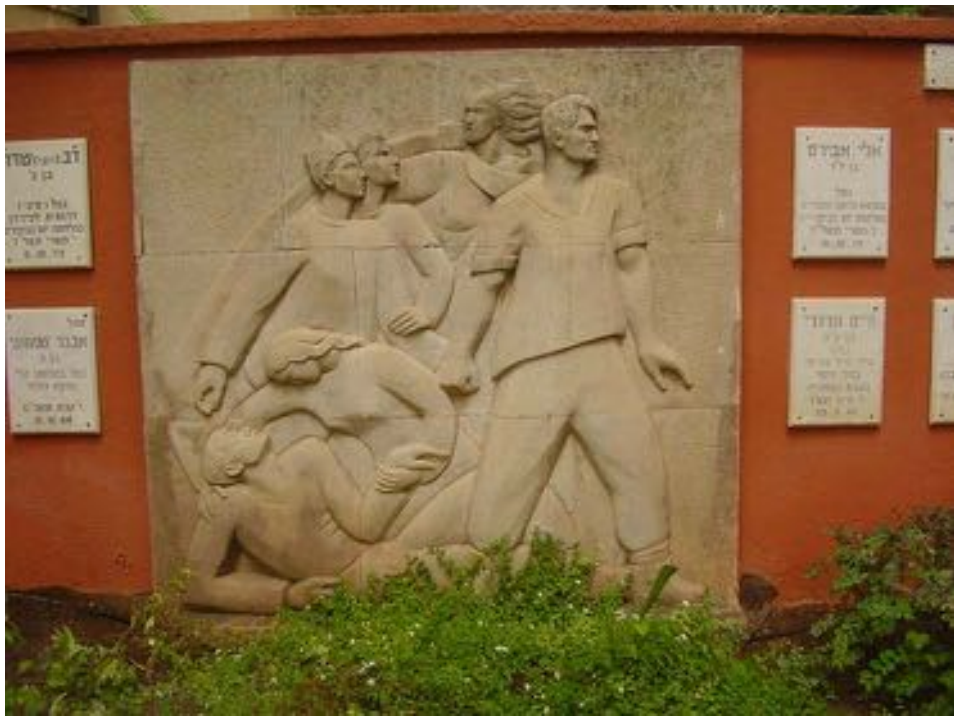

Figure 7. Aaron Priver, *Monument to the Fallen* (1955), stone relief, Kibbutz Tel Yosef (photo by author).

the maternal in the landscape of memorialization and nationalism but also assess where women stand as creative artists. That is, we need to investigate not only their presence but also their artistic and gender stance and the role of the mother that appears in their works. Esther Levinger noted that only some 30 of the approximately 1,000 monuments erected in Israel by the end of the twentieth century were designed by women. In most cases (much as in other fields), they speak in public language, i.e., the hegemonic language of commemoration that was molded by models of male heroism.

The concept of counter-memory may be understood in two ways, as an opposite memory and as a resistant memory. Thus, the concept of counter-memorial may be construed as a "resistance memorial," a form of memorialization predicated on resistance.[47] Did the women artists in the first half of the twentieth century and Israel's first years express a kind of resistance to the hegemonic memorialization? Was their stance related to the expression of maternal views in the public arena? Hannah Orloff, Batya Lishansky, Dina Nir, and Dalia Meiri are among the few who took part in the memorial enterprise.

Batya Lishansky (1900–90), a pioneer among women sculptors, was a prolific artist who stood out strikingly against the background of men's total control of the field of sculpture. One may even consider her the backbone of the commemorative discourse in the Yishuv period and also in the first years after the establishment of the State. From this standpoint, she is the exception that proves the rule. Lishansky, like other sculptors, memorialized woman figures in her monuments. These women embodied the young

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nation as friends of the fighters and the builders; the monument at Kfar Yehoshua (1953) is a case in point.[48] In 1979, pursuant to the Yom Kippur War, Lishansky designed another memorial plaque at Kfar Yehoshua. This time, the woman figure represents a mother parting from her son forever. In the thirty years between the earlier monument and the plaque, Israeli society revised its ways of relating to loss and bereavement – a process that, as noted above, would gather strength in the decades to come.[49] Notably, childless mothers appear in many of Lishansky's monuments. The nation as mother and sister is not the national womb that produces national children; instead, it is an exalted and abstract idea. Here, perhaps, is a manifestation of the separation of the public and private spheres in a way that allows the symbolic to blur social power relations. Dalia Meiri (b. 1951) is one of the few women artists who offered a significantly different design perspective. In the memorial site at Moshav Moledet (1977), she created an accommodative and circular environment of remembrance that offers a panoramic view of the landscape of the Beit Shean Valley (Figure 8).

In their adherence to forms and motifs that reinforced the official ritual, women refrained from the use of scrap metal and vestiges of weapons. They preferred stone and eschewed imagery of towers and memorial columns. However, monuments designed by women rarely exhibit a tension that would indicate a basic contradiction between mothers' role vis-à-vis their children as individuals and as children of the nation, i.e., between a motherhood managed by the national order and that reflecting motherly emotion, a primordial maternal motherhood and, in particular, motherliness.[50] In other

Figure 8. Dalia Meiri, *Memorial Site* (1977), Moshav Moledet (photo by author).

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words, with the sole exception of the memorial site at Moledet, there is little perceptible iconographic difference between men and women as the creators of monuments, whether they be abstract or realist, that is, there is no different, contrasting, or opposing maternal or female position. Women and men responded to the hegemonic discourse and replicated it.

Art and motherhood: A different view of the bereavement discourse as a counter-memorial

The "prototype mother": Bianca Eshel Gershuni

Bianca Eshel Gershuni (b. 1958) holds a unique position in the discourse of bereavement and memorialization from the early 1980s onward. The daring material richness of her works and her preoccupation with "love and loss, war, home, and motherhood"[51] have long positioned her alongside those in the mainstream of Israeli art who followed the path of abstraction and conceptualization. Whether Eshel Gershuni created jewelry, reliefs, statues, or paintings, many of her works are connected to burial ceremonies, ritual "altars," and even monuments that mock establishment commemoration and subvert it with an inconsolable cry of agony. In her *In Continuation of the Roaring Lion* (1994), she replaced the "Roaring Lion" (1934), a Zionist cultural icon created by Avraham Melnikov (1892–1960) at Kfar Giladi, commemorating the fallen at Tel Hai, with a roaring winged turtle, its mouth agape, revealing a threatening row of teeth. The void behind the teeth resembles a cave in which prostrate dolls are interred. In this work, like many others that she produced over the years, the turtle became a key metaphor in the artist's personal iconography. A turtle that carries its house on its back and thereby protects it must bear this burden all its life. The turtle is like a house, like a mother, like the carrier of memory.

Eshel Gershuni became an army widow as a young woman and the anguish of her loss accompanied her in her life and art. The circumstances of her life compounded the sense of loss. However, in contrast to the representations of heroic and stoic sacrifice that typified monuments to the fallen, including those created by women, her works exude sensuality and sexuality. She created a female language of grief far from the image of Rachel bewailing her offspring or Sarah the sacrificing mother, or from Jewish mourning styles. Her works manifest pagan and Christian aesthetics.[52] For example, her *I'm Dying for You* (1987) is built on a church-like structure, behind which are graves and tiny burial plots and inside which a prone figure appears alone or with a spouse. Other works feature toy soldiers, dolls with amputated limbs, artificial flowers, broken wings, snails, mouths, and other elements. The color red recurs like a stain, a wound, like clay alongside the gold or gold-plating that heralds something sacred. Her work *This House Is Full of Love* (1981) includes a hand-grenade box. The house, a symbol of security, warmth, and love, is crammed with photos of family members, soldiers, dolls, mouths, and flowers, but the national home, like the private one, is a ticking bomb (Figure 9). Although Eshel Gershuni's works lack an explicit and coherent ideological dimension, they do, however, present unending mourning work, as their names or inscriptions attest: "The dead may merely be isolating themselves like people who want to think about life," "Death is never the last word."

Paradoxically, Eshel Gershuni's works, which speak in a language locally perceived as "foreign," deal with the nexus of women, sex, and death that recurs in various myths

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Figure 9. Bianca Eshel Gershuni, *This House Is Full of Love* (1981), photographs, figures of plastic, fur, tar, artificial flowers, boxes, feathers, 15 × 10 × 30 cm.

and in the language of the Jewish sages that denotes the womb as a tomb.[53] Rachel Elior notes that the primordial subconscious fear in face of the nexus of sex and death underlies the desire to control fertility and woman. The link between menstruation (as the death of an opportunity for pregnancy, manifested in bleeding that signifies the fetuses that will not be born) and death amplifies the nexus of impurity and *nidah* (the period of women's state of ritual impurity during and after menstruation). Thus, even as the halakhah exalted motherhood, ambivalence toward woman took root.[54]

Plurality of voices or privatization of the national mother?

Until the mid-1990s, Eshel Gershuni's works reflected rituals of death, bereavement, and mourning that were uncommonly sensual in the visual culture in general and in art in particular. Her oeuvre was not read in a cultural context that transcended the discourse of motherhood and bereavement even though it integrated motifs from both.

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The demonstration of womanly, sexual motherliness, obsessive in its courting of life and death, was outside the canon.[55] In a wide-ranging survey of the mother-figure in Israeli art, Gideon Ofrat writes, "Before there was a biological mother, there was a national mother."[56] What is more, the national mother that he describes was evidently different from Eshel Gershuni's and from those that began to appear in the past two decades and were displayed in the exhibition "Oh Mama! – Representation of the Mother in Current Israeli Art," held at the Ramat Gan Museum of Israeli Art in 1994 (curators: Hadara Shaflan-Katzav and Yehudit Matzkel). This exhibition marked a turning point in the curatorial discussion of motherhood in the Israeli artistic scene. It broadened the discussion of the feminine as presented at the exhibitions "The Female Presence," curated by Ellen Ginton (1990), and "Meta-Sex," curated by Tammy Katz Freiman (1994), and illuminated the other face of the feminine.[57] The proliferation of faces of, and points of view about, motherhood was perceived as the demise, if not the "privatization," of the national archetype of the mother-image.[58]

The "privatization" of the national mother partly overlaps with questions that relate to the loss of the collective nature of national bereavement and the transformation of the bereaved family into bereaved families. Both questions are symbolically and allegorically related to the tragic case of Shula Melet, a bereaved mother who waged a lengthy legal battle to determine the circumstances of the death of her son, Amir, in 1997. After losing the court case and, accordingly, her bid to invoke the law against those responsible for her son's death, she committed suicide on his grave, the stone of which she had been denied permission to design.[59] Melet's struggle for the commemoration and memorialization of her "own" soldier might have been perceived cynically as a ghastly, aberrant, insane incident befitting women who are said to be unequal to national tasks that come before personal anguish.[60] It was an extreme step indeed, but above all it was a social, not only private, symptom that illuminated the tip of an iceberg of dramatic change in the attitude toward militarism, bereavement, memorialization, and remembrance in the consciousness of many women as mothers in Israel, including women artists. What began as individual requests by parents for slight amendments to the wording of the inscription evolved into a series of overt pitched battles with the defense and judicial establishments. The private sphere sought to establish its presence in the public space and, in so doing, demanded a reckoning with those responsible for their loved ones' demise. Wherever the consensus was breached, other voices in Israel and elsewhere burst through the fissures.[61] In the power centers, these non-hegemonic stances are perceived as "privatization"; however, they also reflect resistance to the policy of militaristic occupation. In this sense, one cannot but view the works of women artists such as Dominey, France Lebee-Nadav, Matzkel, Littman-Cohen, and others as complex political acts that blend different fields of discourse such as the intra-artistic, the feminist, and the socio-national.[62]

A maternal feminine point of view is not an asset that one buys while accompanying one's "own" soldier to the IDF induction base. As a position in the public discourse generally and the artistic discourse specifically, it appears in contexts that subvert the canonic representation, as shown above. In this sense, *à la* Butler,[63] a maternal position is merely one more position in the array of forces in a given field. Indeed, the approach of the sculptor Drora Dominey and the photographer France Lebee-Nadav, who collaborated on the project *Everywhere: An Israeli Landscape with a Monument* (exhibition 1997, catalogue 2002), strives to find alternatives of plurality and difference

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(Figure 10). The two artists met at their daughters' kindergarten. This acquaintance and their common interest in cultural signs in the public domain resulted in a two-year journey during which more than 180 monuments were photographed and in which they developed an alternative way of contemplating the machoistic military ethos. They proposed not the creation of "other" monuments but the deconstruction of the gaze that powers the memorial sites from within the male hegemonic context (Figure 11). The maternal perspective as one of several additional perspectives developed only after the fact, amid the construction of a non-heroic way of viewing things that was umbilically connected to the giving of life and concern for the newborn and not to the myth of heroism. The theme of monuments was present in Dominey's works in 1990–2000.[64] Deviating from the heroic outlook in towering Israeli monumental sculpture, Dominey proposed sculptures in the form of blue washtubs set on a floor (Figure 4). This forces the observer to crouch, like a mother bathing her child, in order to discover the water-tower statuettes that mirror the veteran icon of commemoration for the Zionist settlement enterprise. The tension between masculine and feminine in the Israeli sculpture discourse, the tension between aggressive and extrovert sculpture and the sculpting of domestic objects, was augmented by the maternal aspect, which accommodated "miniaturized monuments" such as "innocuous" bathtub toys.

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Figure 10. Drora Dominey and France Lebee-Nadav, "Book Binding," in idem, *Everywhere: An Israeli Landscape with a Monument* (2002).

Figure 11. Drora Dominey and France Lebee-Nadav, "Netanya," photograph (2002), in idem, *Everywhere: An Israeli Landscape with a Monument* (2002), 102. A relief by Moshe Ziffer (1960) at the memorial for the fallen in the 1948 war in Netanya appears in the photograph.

Dominey and Lebee-Nadav's photographs seek an unofficial gaze that would enable the personal to exist in the nationalized landscape.[65] The landscapes of memory are experienced from the road, from the shoulders, from the sides, and from behind. The gaze, antagonistic to clichés, uncouples the monument from the ritual and writes a new and additional text for it. One may say that both women artists contend with, and respond to, the official texts offered to their children. Their contention and response, however, may also be viewed from a broader perspective: as quiet resistance offered in the place where art is viewed, a setting that reveals its political potential as a counter-memorial – not as an act that realizes remembrance in matter but as one that invokes artistic ways of reading and seeing that deconstruct the monolithic nature of remembrance embedded in the memorial and commemorative structures. The result is the creation of a profusion of possible narratives whether they overlap the official ones or not, in contrast to the memorial albums issued by the Ministry of Defense and the Soldiers Commemoration Department.

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"Soldier's mother/soldier-father

In the Israeli context, the motherhood-motherliness discourse is interwoven almost inexorably into the discussion of a motherhood that has been appropriated by state rituals – military rituals above all – and into the discourse of militarism. An ontological paradox accompanies the lives of many mothers whose sons will be soldiers in Israel and exacerbates the conflict that underlies the maternal experience and maternal thinking as such, which create a confrontation in motherhood between the desire to protect and the need to encourage autonomy and social capacity (even in countries that have neither compulsory induction nor an unresolved military conflict). All these elements are part of a feminist consciousness that strives for critical examination of the political discourse and its militarist element. The militarization of the son and, even more so, his death in action create the trap involved in the dual custody: that of the mother and that of the state, primarily the army. Woman's role as mother manifests itself in nurturing the newborn, watching over it, and concerning herself with its physical and psychological well-being. Her role as an agent of the national order, in contrast, is to forgo all these functions and hand them over to the state and its apparatuses.[66] At the concrete and the symbolic levels, Hanni Mann-Shalvi's study on parents' attitudes from their children's prenatal phase until their induction ("from ultrasound to the draft") argues that the knowledge of the newborn's future induction has a determining influence on differences in the parenting patterns of father and mother, culminating in the creation of behaviors that anticipate trauma and loss. Mann-Shalvi points to a sense of motherhood on loan: the imagining of bereavement along with difficulties in encouraging separation processes.[67]

The different parenting patterns in regard to militarism replicate gender roles that parents experience as young women and men.[68] These roles are reflected in the choices made by those who address questions of parenting and militarism, bereavement, and memorialization. An intergenerational view of Israeli art gives us a glimpse of this phenomenon. The young artists, as we will see below in the case of Erez Yisraeli (b. 1974), deal with themselves, their parents, and, in particular, the role they are forced to play as soldiers and their acceptance or rejection of it. An exceptional work among members of this generation in terms of its depiction of anxious fatherhood that anticipates potential trauma is *Abba* (2002, 14 min), an art video by Doron Solomons (b. 1970). The film concerns Jewish and Palestinian fathers, their existential fears, and the physical and psychological dangers that menace their children's lives in a state of war, violent attacks, terrorism, and occupation. The parental impotence in the face of this reality is manifested in the persona of the father as an absurdly incompetent magician. No trick can save the children. The paternal role of protection and concern is replaced by "making manipulations."

In works by Israeli artists who fought in the Six Day War, the Yom Kippur War, and even the First Lebanon War, there is a salient focus on the persona of the Israeli soldier from the perspective of personal experience, personal memory, and personal trauma. Before they were soldiers' fathers, they were soldiers who became fathers. This may be seen in the works of David Wakstein (b. 1954), Avishai Eyal (b. 1945), and Oded Yedaya (b. 1949), and even the films of Ari Folman (b. 1963) and others. The same perspective is even more prominent among artists of the generation that took part in creating the Zionist ethos. Iconographic aspects of this ethos appear at the memorial sites that these artists created and in their personal works, whether they deal with the soldier-persona or represent bereavement and loss. There are, however, several examples of a paternal

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presence in bereavement, including the symbolic work of Naftali Bezem (b. 1924).[69] In most cases, the personal or national bereavement is presented via the Pietà or the Binding of Isaac motif.[70] The series of Binding of Isaac works by Menashe Kadishman (b. 1932), both in massive paintings and in sculptural installations in the public domain, such as *Birth and Other Sculptures* (1990) at the Tel Aviv Museum plaza, deal with representations of motherhood as the mythical embodiment of life and death forces and as an allegory for the existential situation in Israel. Even though these works are not monuments to the fallen, they express the anguish of loss and bereavement in very powerful ways, as befits the public commemoration discourse. In the aforementioned installation, the monstrous steel sculptures of the father's and mother's heads contemplate the head of their son, prostrate in front of the ram. The setting of the work – as a work of art rather than establishment memorialization – may be interpreted as an act of rejection of the monument and of the Binding of Isaac ethos. The nature, the materials, and the heroic magnitude of the work, however, return us to the domain of parenting that corresponds to the national and gender order.

The foregoing discussion once again raises the question whether monuments, or works of art generally, have the ability to memorialize and counter-memorialize simultaneously. Young examined the term "counter-memory" in the commemoration discourse in general and the commemoration of German-Jewish victims of the Holocaust in particular, expanding it to the domain of the counter-memorial in its reference to the dualism that exists when the destruction inherent to the loss is concretized by means of construction (of a monument). Leaving a void allows memory to fill it, Young writes, using the expression "memorial undoing."[71] According to Young, postmodernism added new critical and ironic dimensions to the dualism of the European avant-garde's attitude toward works of public commemoration.[72] The memorials that he terms "counter-memorials" reflect a tendency to reject their traditional role in the national order or the commemorative discourse. Although they were created on the basis of public bidding for memorial projects, these memorials are close in spirit to independent works of art. Instead of being focal points of collective reconciliation with the loss, they represent conflict and contradiction, refusal and resistance. These were reflected in a series of strategies and stylistic characteristics: the absence of heroism and the adherence to living, personal, vital memory; emphasis on emptiness; focus on the private, the personal, and their insertion into the public domain; understatement and prosaic language; and the terror and the destructive potential embodied in the familiar and the trivial. These elements are present in the works of women artists who chose to express themselves with regard to motherhood and motherliness in the discourse of militarism, bereavement, and memorialization. They created their art because they wished obsessively to cling to what might be lost before it is lost and because they adhered to motherhood as a stance of resistance to the appropriative national discourse. They used repetitive actions that preserve memory and relate to the threat, the void, and the all-remembering womb. They acted by not refraining from acting, which is not the same as willing participation. They deconstructed the arenas of the conflict between motherhood and the national order as individuals as opposed to an ideologically homogenous group.

"A dialogue of cruel dualism underlies the relationship between parents and the army in general, and between the violent male military system and women-mothers in particular," Tamar El-Or writes in reference to Yehudit Matzkel's photography project, *"Skirt on the Way!"* (2000).[73] A year after co-curating "Oh Mama!" Matzkel launched a

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sequence of three museum exhibitions: *A Soldier's Mother* (Janco-Dada Museum, 1998), *Stillborn* (Ramat Gan Museum of Israeli Art, 1999), and *"Skirt on the Way!"* (Eretz Israel Museum, 2000).

When her eldest son was inducted in early 1996, Matzkel began to document his military service. The results were exhibited four years later. In her application to the military authorities for permission to carry out the project, she wrote, "As a photographer, I wish to document my son's military service from the day of his induction to that of his discharge. As a mother who remembers every change in her son's growth and maturation, every struggle and every success, I wish to take part in the new process as well."[74] Matzkel refused to play the role that was expected of her: doing the laundry and the cooking while "shutting up about things she doesn't understand."[75] Her rejection of the expected role was subversive of the state, the army, the soldiers, and her family. In one of the photographs in the series, a sign appears: "Every mother should know that she has placed her son's fate in the hands of commanders who are worthy of it" (Figure 12).[76] The inclusion of this photo in the exhibit makes an ironic statement about the entire process. It reflects puzzlement about the boundaries between "depositing" one's son in the army's care and obeying orders and about the way mothers are summoned to do the latter.

During the years of the project, as Matzkel violated the border (with permission) in order to symbolically watch over her son and her motherhood, she put on two additional exhibitions that made a thematic transition to remembrance and bereavement. In the photographic series *A Soldier's Mother* (Janco-Dada Museum, Ein Hod, 1998), she uses her abdomen, a soft abdomen, an empty abdomen that expresses metaphorically a womb that is steadily losing its strength. The "womb as tomb" imagery is mirrored in the design of the catalogue as a memorial pamphlet. The exhibition treats the mother's

Figure 12. Yehudit Matzkel, photograph (1999), in *"Hatza'it ba-derekh!" Shalosh shanim im Givati: Yehudit Matzkel, tzilumim* ("Skirt on the way!" Three years with the Givati Brigade: Yehudit Matzkel, photographs) (Tel Aviv: Eretz Israel Museum, 2000), 109.

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body and the womb as a personal and intimate place that has, however, been nationalized by belonging to a soldier's mother. The feelings of the abdomen, the speech that emanates from the maternal feminine abdomen, find public expression that is both intimate and oppositionist (Figure 3). The body activates the memory. The body, which remembers pregnancies and births, routine childraising and separations, and the caressing hands, expresses the angst and frustration at the disruption of the "maternal work," at the nationalization of the womb. Memory is connected to "pre-memorialization," an anxious anti-memorialization. The photographic image captures all these contents and amplifies them by expanding the abdomen into a monument of remembrance.

A year later, Matzkel exhibited a series of works in which she photographed fragments of existing inscriptions on military tombstones and, in particular, a pillow that had been placed atop one of the stones – transforming the grave into a figurative eternal bed for the deceased.[77] Matzkel isolates the words that are etched into the stone and cuts them out with the lens of her camera. This places the words in new contexts and reinterprets the contents of the linguistic landscape, transforming them into encrypted messages of personal bereavement, personal anguish, and, above all, a terrible void, that the eye can barely tolerate. The repetitiveness accumulates into a pool of texts in which the words are almost constant and prepared in advance. The truncation performed by the camera reveals the internal grammar of bereavement and what the standard formulas conceal. It thus isolates combinations of words that have intensified the dimension of the angst that transforms morbidity into one of the strategies that may be used to work through a trauma that has not yet occurred: *An Anonymous Stillborn*; *The Void Is Full of You*; *State, Massacre*; *A Beautiful Son Born in Combat*; and *Live Life Lot*s (Figures 13–14).[78]

In *Olive Green* (2010), Sima Levin, who emigrated to Israel from Moldova in the 1990s, created an oeuvre that deals with her being the mother of a combat soldier: oil paintings in which khaki colors blend with the olive-gray landscapes of the new "there" – the "there" where her son is serving, where she goes to visit, and whence he comes home. A broad and ostensibly pastoral landscape photo turns out to be a scene of terror and fear, positioned between portraits of the soldier-son and his mother. In two cases, the mother is painted in the form of a "part-object";[79] the son, in contrast, is given full-bodied representation and grins at his mother amid the routine rituals of coming home and saying goodbye. Sima paints herself as an ironing hand that is clouded and weakened by the vapors. Laundering and ironing serve here as recurrent metaphors of the work that a mother is expected to do within permissible limits. Only when Sima goes one step farther is a connection established between all the works: in a self-portrait, she covers her eyes with the flannel cloth that Israeli soldiers use to clean their weapons (Figure 15), thus becoming a detainee, a suspect, a potential victim. She transposes herself from the position of mother-as-sacrificer to that of mother-as-victim who offers up her motherhood on the national altar. Sima the painter "runs away" from this message by blocking her vision, obstructing the view. This image of maternal blindness as the possibility of an absurd existence seeks to tear the blindfold away, to take the public step that will avert the disaster.

For the artists Miriam Cohen Bruck and Dikla Gavish, the maternal protection motif is embodied in clothing as something that covers the body, an agent of the protective and caring maternal hand. The army uniform undergoes a transformation. Concern for the

Figures 13–14. Yehudit Matzkel, photographs from the series *Stillborn*, Museum of Israeli Art, Ramat Gan (1999).

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Figure 15. Sima Levin, untitled (from the series *Olive Green*, 2010), oil on canvas, 45 × 55 cm.

son's welfare and health is replaced with concern for the uniform, socks, and undershirts that serve as conductors between the mother's hands and the son's body. Again the theme of trauma and anticipation of trauma emanates from these works, attesting to a motherhood ensnared between national and maternal discourses. From this sense of entrapment, however, art erupts in an expression of "feminism in hard times."[80] In the course of her son's army service, Cohen Bruck stitched, with Sisyphean toil, all remnants of the son's torn army socks into one enormous sock, *Army Sock* (1996) (Figure 16), which becomes an instrument of protection. By making it, she banishes her dread for his safety to the field of symbolism. The sock, two meters high, was later suspended in the form of a sculpture installation. Dikla Gavish constructs her works from worn-out clothing and creates a new symbolic system for them by cutting them, sewing them, folding them, spreading them out, and piling them up. *Baby's Blanket* (2005) (Figure 17),

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Figure 16. Miriam Cohen Bruck, *Army Sock* (1996), army socks stitched together, 1.8 × 2.8 m.

made of army socks, fits the "soldier's mother" motif as a motherhood pattern that lasts from nursing to adulthood – "from ultrasound to the draft" – an innate awareness that lurks inside every Jewish mother in Israel from the moment her son's sex is known.[81] The patchwork blanket is spread over a stage (maybe a bed) that is lower than the level of an infant's crib, suggesting the motif of a covered coffin. Therefore, the work invokes a play on the Hebrew word *mitah*, which denotes "bed" when spelled one way and "death" when spelled differently. Here too we see the dualism that recurs in various works, attesting to participation in the national order on the one hand and insubordination on the other, and, in particular, to the angst and the protest that accompany this impossible situation.

Shoshan Brosh-Weitz presented *The Silence of the Washerwomen* (Figure 1) at a conference titled "Clothing, Gender, and Feminism" (Tel Aviv, 2006). The work, produced from dryer lint that the artist had painstakingly gathered, was born in the aftermath of an event that captures the conflict occasioned by the positioning of motherhood in the public domain as a stance on military and security matters. Brosh-Weitz writes:

> In August 2002, I demonstrated at the Rantis checkpoint for a month or so. . . . Every day I hung out the protest signs [against the fecklessness of the political echelons] and the support signs [for the soldiers] on poles and cords next to the army checkpoint. One morning I reached the checkpoint and saw that the poles had been ripped out and the cords taken away. The settlers had left me a written message: "Go hang up laundry instead of signs, you hag!"[82]

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Figure 17. Dikla Gavish, *Baby's Blanket* (2005). Materials: army socks. Technique: cutting and sewing by hand, 78 × 105 cm.

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She did go home, but for the purpose of hanging the "dirty laundry" outside or, to be more precise, putting it on public display. She gathered up the dryer lint, the dirt that remained of what had been cleaned, dyed it in cheerful colors, and wrote the inscription that announces a weekly act of collaboration that abounds with ambivalence: she washes and hangs the laundry, washes and protests. The title of the installation, *Shtikat ha-kovsot*, evokes the title of the film, *Silence of the Lambs* (in Hebrew, *Shtikat ha-kvasim*) (as well as the expression "like lambs to the slaughter") that generates a net of associations expressing a maternal routine of service to the nation imbued with multidimensional violence.

These artist-mothers "gave birth" to a gaze that lacks all heroism, a gaze produced from a primordial maternal position that predates the national order. Unlike the conventional demand in feminist discourse for numerical equality between the sexes (in this case, between male and female monument-builders and memorializers), these women artists proclaim it their duty to offer opposition by way of counter-art. Their aim is not to privatize the national mother by sending her "back to the kitchen" but to change the collective discourse in the public realm by investing it with a personal, unappropriated voice. They challenge the national discourse on boy-soldiers by transferring the work of motherhood (caring and sharing) to the artistic realm and allowing possible strategies of working through the grief to inundate their works. Freud describes mourning work as the obsessive attachment of the libido to a lost object.[83] The response to the loss of a loved one includes an anguished state of mind that manifests itself in dedication to grieving accompanied by a sense that the world is

empty apart from the pain that fills it. Relations between empty and full are key concepts both in mourning work and in the counter-memorial discourse according to Young. In the case of the works presented, however, the fantasy of mourning and the anticipation of trauma relate first and foremost to mourning for a motherhood that has been appropriated and nationalized by the state and the army – a motherhood that is being emptied of its content and is therefore transformed from fullness to an ominous emptiness.

"A country that devours its offspring . . .": Motherland Motherhood

The feminist political and post-Zionist positioning of maternity recurs as an organizing element in the works of Ariane Littman-Cohen. In the past two decades, this artist has been developing a feminist response to Israeliness by constructing a unique system of language and imagery that deals with relations between nationalism and cartography, nationalism and motherhood, and nationalism and innate blindness. In her sculptural installation *Motherland Motherhood* (1994), she integrates two elements: homeland and motherhood.[84] The installation has two parts, mothers and daughters and the land of the olive, and metaphors of nutrition such as powdered milk, honey, and oil appear in both. Mothers and daughters became *Virgin of Israel and Her Daughters*. The nation and homeland embodied in the expression "virgin of Israel" (Jer. 31:20–21) produced the simile of the beehive that the queen (the homeland) rules. The empty beehives bask in a red light that evokes an emptied and bleeding womb. The work exudes a sense of life and death, the ambivalence between life-giving forces and death-dealing forces that lie at the foundations of the myth of the great mother and the womb as a tomb, as a monument. Littman adopts this dualism and sets motherhood and homeland in confrontation. The hot womb that signifies the cravings of the body is an open grave, so to speak. Additional objects such as barrels and containers in dazzling red heighten the sense of penetration of the mother's body, the body of the homeland, and the public exposure of her nakedness. Another part of the installation includes an "innocuous" box of kosher powdered milk and, in contrast, kindergarten sandboxes that have become a burial plot. The title of the work, *The Nurturing Vessel, Israel Milk*, again connects nutrition and death with maternal roles and their appropriation by the homeland. The biblical land flowing with milk and honey has become the biblical land that devours its offspring.

Rachel Guiladi's works introduce a feminine maternal voice that employs more than a drop of irony in its anticipation of trauma. Guiladi turns things upside down. In one of her works, four Israeli flags appear in pink, corresponding to the Four Mothers organization, which campaigned for an end to Israel's occupation in Lebanon and was likened to Jeremiah's "afflictor of Israel." Another work shows milk bottles covered with industrial paint. Coated in this manner, they resemble weapons that violate the promise of life that nutrition bestows – instruments of nutrition transformed into weapons. Motherhood and bereavement can provide a possible interpretation of another work of Guiladi's that packs tears into plastic bags, arranges them in a box, and furnishes what is needed to sustain the perilous nexus of motherhood and nationalism. The tears complement the motif of anguished motherhood. As Kristeva notes in her essay *Stabat Mater* on the hymn relating to the Virgin Mary's anguish over her dead son, the Mater Dolorosa channels the maternal libido to her dead son by means of tears that crave for the body, resembling the milk that moves from the mother's breast to the

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suckling's mouth.[85] In the exchange of fluids – from milk to tears – the cravings of life are displaced to the cravings of death, so to speak. In the case of Guiladi's milk bottles, their black color evokes the black milk that serves as a central motif in Paul Celan's "Death Fugue" (1944).[86]

A mothers-and-sons affair

The anticipatory strategy is evident today among young artists who co-opt/stage-direct their biological mothers in their works. The mother's consent to "act" on behalf of her artist son, who himself plays a "void," must be seen in the context of the changes that have taken place in the concepts of motherhood, nationalism, and the connection between them. Two video works by Erez Yisraeli relate to the Christian Pietà scene, the myth of Icarus, and, of course, the Binding of Isaac; however, they invest each with local meanings that relate to soldiers' death and the ethos of sacrifice. In the first work (untitled, 2006, video, 4:20 min.), the artist's mother is seen obsessively and agonizingly plucking feathers that have been glued to her son's body with wax.[87] The monotonous act of plucking represents mourning work: the mother is gradually making peace with her son's death – so it seems – but refuses to part with him. To remain close to him, she wishes to reabsorb his body into her own, into her womb. In the second work produced "in conjunction" with his mother, "El male rahamim" (2004, video, loop), the mother makes endless attempts to grasp her son's body, which repeatedly slips away. The "El male rahamim" memorial prayer is audible in the background of the work, but the sound is distorted and becomes a protracted groan.[88]

Epilogue

Instead of a journey among monuments, we have described a journey that expresses the motherhood vs. nationalism trap in a country that has lived by its sword for more than sixty years amid a bloody conflict. The conflict places motherhood in an ontological paradox, ensnared between a discourse of militarism and patriotic sacrifice and a civil normalcy that includes compulsory military service. The mothers' voices are drowned out, as it were, by the roaring gales of militarism even when they breach the "silence of the washerwomen" in public cultural representations. Seemingly, then, the ambivalence that typifies most of these works may insinuate itself into the national discourse, be trapped within it, and even contribute to it. The reverse of this coin, the maternal stance in the public domain, is liable to be deemed a retreat to essentialism – an oppressive stance in terms of feminist discourse. However, the women artists' attempt, as mothers, to operate from a maternal position and express themselves by issuing warnings, offering resistance, anticipating catastrophe, and proposing a preventive course of action testifies to the changes that Israeli society has been undergoing in the past twenty years and of women's place and role in them. Cracks in the discourse of bereavement and acceptance of fate as something inevitable for which silence is befitting reflect a refusal to comply with models that perpetuate the status of women in Zionist nationalism: as national mothers, national wombs, and mothers who have babies, bury them, and lament them.

Recently, another voice has become audible. The works of Erez Yisraeli together with his mother are yielding a new genre in the field of maternal counter-memorial.

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Borrowing from psychoanalysis, one may term it the "third" genre, a new domain in which one hears not only the mother's voice but also the son's and the difference between the two. This is a further development of the trend that began in the early 1990s in the works of women artists who confronted the didactic content of the bereavement and memorialization discourse as embodied in official monuments to the fallen. In contrast with the conventional representations, which lacked specific content and abounded in abstract universalisms and allegories, the women artists' works presented here offer an intimate language, a language of body, face, and touch, an intimacy that Kristeva defined as the sensual grain of the semiotic. Sometimes it is a highly ironic language that seeks to tear off the masks produced by the official language of grief and decrypt what the official language has encrypted. The forms of expression that reflect the maternal stance seek reciprocity and represent a place for individuals and their memories. Instead of forfeiting their identity in the public domain, individuals establish their presence in the public text and its interpretive artistic reading. The resulting identity, as Butler puts it, is activated and socially positioned by its multiplicity.

The intention of the women artists whose works have been discussed here is not to privatize motherhood within the home but to expose the nationalization and the disappearance of their voice as mothers. In so doing, they offer the possibility of establishing a different relationship between motherhood and nationalism that will not require the maternal and feminine voice to be constructed as the relinquishing of the work of maternity. It marks more than an awareness of the need for multiple voices in the public domain; it also reflects the understanding that the counter-memorial in current art allows the adoption of a civil perspective on the discourse of bereavement and memorialization.

Translated from Hebrew by Naftali Greenwood

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Notes

1. Metzer, "Kolan ha-shotek," 257.
2. See Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*; Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*.
3. Naveh, *Be-shevi ha-evel*.
4. Shalom Seri, head of the Soldiers Commemoration Division at the Israel Ministry of Defense at the relevant time, describes in detail how the change also affected parents who had lost offspring in previous wars. He defined the state's relations with bereaved families as having crossed a "watershed" in terms of commemoration. Shalom Seri, interview, Ramat Aviv, 7 August 2010.
5. Katz, *Lev ve-even*; Guilat and Waksman, "Ha-matzevah ha-tzva'it," 12.
6. See Almog, "Andartot ve-halalei milhamah"; Levinger, "Women and War Memorials in Israel"; Baumel-Schwartz, "Hantzahat nashim"; Ofrat, "Dmut ha-em," 152.
7. Michel Foucault emphasizes the subversive elements of counter-memory in the matrix of power relations between the hegemonic historical narrative and that of dis-empowered groups. See Foucault, *Language, Counter Memory and Practice*, 209. In our context, the position of motherhood in the Israeli militaristic public arena is perceived as

weak or marginal. For discussion of counter-memory, see also Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, 9–10.
8. Young, "Memory and Counter Memory."
9. Grossman, *Ishah borahat mi-besorah*, 115.
10. Almog, *Ha-pridah me-Srulik*.
11. Eliezer Witztum, "Shkhol ve-hantzahah: Ha-panim ha-kfulot shel ha-mitos ha-le'umi" (Bereavement and commemoration: Two faces of the national myth), in idem, *Nefesh, evel ve-shkhol*, 115.
12. Ibid., 120–21.
13. Cohen, "Militarizm o antimilitarizm?"
14. See Tenenbaum, ed., *Check-Post*.
15. Gertz, *Sipur meha-sratim*; Shohat, *Israeli Cinema*.
16. Yael Zerubavel, for example, describes the diachronic progression of cultural representations in various fields on the theme of patriotic sacrifice, one that projects onto the ways in which bereavement, memory, and memorialization are addressed. She dwells, among other things, on changes in recent decades in authors' perception of the motive of sacrifice and the advent of women's activism in the bereavement discourse. Zerubavel, "Krav, hakravah, korban."
17. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.
18. Safran, "Ha-kesher ha-amerikani."
19. Butler argues that gender should be understood as a relation among socially constituted subjects in specifiable contexts. In other words, rather than being a fixed attribute in a person, gender should be seen as a fluid variable that shifts and changes in different contexts and at different times. She states that "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender . . . identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 25, 33. See also Ziv, "Tzarot shel migdar."
20. On women's writing and the art discourse, see Guilat, "Eifoh hayiten?"
21. Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 135.
22. See Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*.
23. By insisting that the maternal body acts in the space that lies between nature and culture, Kristeva tries to counteract stereotypes that reduce maternity to nature. Even if the mother is neither the subject nor an agent of her pregnancy and giving birth, she never ceases to be primarily a speaking subject. In fact, Kristeva uses the maternal body with its two-in-one, or other within, as a model for all subjective relations. Like the maternal body, each of us is what she calls a subject in process. As such, we are always negotiating with the other within, i.e., the return of the repressed. Like the maternal body, we are never completely the subjects of our own experience. Some feminists have found Kristeva's notion of a subject in process a useful alternative to traditional notions of an autonomous unified (masculine) subject. Kristeva also discusses the theme of the dynamic encounter between writing and melancholia in her seminal book *Black Sun*. The explicit relation between the two – Kristeva opposes the "artistic" or "writing" cure for melancholia – serves as a basis for my assumption about the psychological function of the women artist's mechanism of "anticipation" of the potential trauma through its visual symbolical representation.
24. Ziv, "Tzarot shel migdar," 639.
25. Anat Palgi-Hecker, *Me-i-mahut le-imahut*; and Emilia Perroni, "Introduction," in idem, ed., *Imahut*, 9–17.
26. Friedman, "Imahut bi-re'i ha-te'oriyah."
27. Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*.
28. Ibid., 9.
29. Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*.
30. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*; Rich, *Of Woman Born*; and Reardon, *Women and Peace*.
31. See Gur and Mazali, "Gever ve-ishah," 17, available at http://www.itu.org.il/Index.asp?ArticleID=1217&CategoryID=503&Page=1 (accessed 21 June 2012).
32. Since the 1990s, the gender–nation relationship has been dealt with in various books and articles, two of which contribute to our discussion: Azmon and Izraeli, eds., *Women in Israel*; and Atzmon, ed., *Ha-tishma koli*.
33. *Seks yisre'eli* (Israeli sex), dir. Orna Ben-Dror (2006).

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34. Gelblum, "Mesarvot lihiyot oyevot feministiyot."
35. See Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, 85–120; Naveh, "Al ha-ovdan"; Azaryahu, *Pulhanei medinah*.
36. Shamir, ed., *Gal-ed*; Levinger, *Andarta'ot la-noflim*.
37. Levinger, "Women and War Memorials in Israel"; Melman, "Historiyah shel nashim"; Baumel, "'Hayinu sham itam'"; Brutin, "Al mizbeah ha-moledet."
38. Baumel-Schwartz, "Hantzahat nashim," 69; Efron, "Ahayot, lohamot ve-imahot."
39. For millennia, Western culture has had traditions of allegorical winged figures for victory: starting with Nike, the Greek goddess of victory, and her manifestation in Roman art (Victoria), and up to the early twentieth century. In the arch of Septimus Severus, for example (203–204 CE), two Victorias clutching wreathes and palm fronds appear. The combination of the fronds, representing victory, and the wreaths, representing remembrance, was adopted in monuments to soldiers who fell in World War I, and the winged-victory allegory was common at memorial sites in Europe and United States. See Borg, *War Memorials from Antiquity to the Present*.
40. The nation-as-mother allegory in its metamorphosis of motifs is common in the classic arts, e.g., in war goddesses and cities' patron saints. The European national movements of Romantic cultural origins embraced these models and their attributes, merged them with local national mythology, and thereby produced personifications of modern nations in woman-emblems such as Marianne in France and similar ones in Germany, Britain, and elsewhere. Gideon Ofrat notes: "This tradition of the nation-image in the neoclassical mythologization of the 'mother-country,' the 'homeland,' or 'Zion' did not weaken its grip in the early Zionist design." See Ofrat, "Heyi li em ve-ahot," 112. *The Motherland Calls*, the Soviet sculptor Yevgeny Vuchetich's colossal (85 m.) statue, erected in 1960 as a monument to those who fell in World War II at Volgograd, is another archetype of the Great Mother in classical garb. See Neumann, *The Great Mother*.
41. Baruch, "Tzirufim," 7.
42. An example of an exception is the young mother-figure in the design of Hannah Orloff (1888–1968) at a monument built at Kibbutz Ein Gev (1952) to a woman combat soldier, a mother who fell there. As for the metamorphoses of the biblical nation-image, see Ofrat, *Ganim tluyim*, 64–70.
43. See Levinger, *Andarta'ot la-noflim*, 30.
44. "The Name-of-the-Father" (in French *Nom du père*) is a concept that Jacques Lacan developed in his seminal psychoanalytic oeuvre. In terms of Lacan's three orders, the "language of the father" refers not to the real father, nor to the imaginary father (the paternal imago), but to the symbolic father. See Friedman, "Imahut bi-re'i ha-te'oriyah."
45. See Perroni, "Introduction," 15.
46. Baumel-Schwartz argues that the characteristics of women in the memorials for the fallen correspond to the role of women in the war but stand in categorical contrast to the mythical image of the era of gender equality. See Baumel-Schwartz, "Hantzahat nashim," 68; and Levinger, *Andarta'ot la-noflim*, 76.
47. The concept of "resistance" is crucial in the philosophy of Boris Groys, who asks rhetorically, "Does art hold any power of its own, or is it only able to decorate external powers – whether these are powers of oppression or liberation?" He answers his question in the affirmative: "Art does have an autonomous power of resistance" (*Art Power*, 13). The struggle for inclusion is possible only as a resistance to the exclusion of aesthetical censorship values from the inside of the field.
48. Levinger, "Women and War Memorials," 41. The monument is depicted at http://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D7%9B%D7%A4%D7%A8_%D7%99%D7%94%D7%95%D7%A9%D7%A2 (accessed 21 June 2012).
49. See Malkinson, Rubin, and Witztum, eds., *Ovdan ve-shkhol*.
50. On the distinction between motherhood and motherliness, see below and Perroni, "Introduction," 9, 15.
51. Shaflan-Katzav, "Sridim shel mashehu kadosh," 24.
52. See Canaan, "Bamot le-mahazot tragiyim,"
53. Mishna, Tractate Ohalot 7:4.

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54. See Elior, "'Nokhahot nifkadot.'"
55. In recent years, the art establishment has developed an appreciation for her work. In 2010, Eshel Gershuni won the Ministry of Culture's prize for lifetime achievement.
56. Ofrat, "Dmut ha-em," 52.
57. For more about these exhibitions, see Guilat, "Eifoh hayiten?"
58. Ofrat, "Dmut ha-em," 163.
59. Only in 1995, after petitions by bereaved families, did the High Court of Justice authorize inscriptions that conveyed personal messages on graves in military cemeteries. From the second half of the 1990s onward, legislative processes addressed the issue of personal inscriptions and were followed by a legislative amendment prohibiting political expressions, symbols, pictures, etc. The authorized "personal" plaque places the inscription at the bottom of the stone; the personal inscription consists of a sentence no more than two rows long. See Katz, *Lev ve-even*, 241. Batya Gur's novel, *Even tahat even*, is based on the tragic case of Shula Melet.
60. Psychological and psychiatric scholarship depicts the mourning process as a sequence composed of several steps. After the initial exposure to the loss, the process moves to the gradual restructuring of a life-world without the dead. Obviously, this model leaves much room for personal variability. As studies in Israel show, the mourning process of bereaved parents never really ends; instead, it becomes a basic given in their lives (Witztum, *Nefesh, evel ve-shkhol*, 68). As an indication of an important aspect of Israel's civil religion, the commemorative cult of dead soldiers is expected to assuage personal bereavement by investing the loss with existential significance at the socio-national level. For many of the bereaved, however, becoming "living memorials" means a painful dissociation between public self-presentation, typified by endurance and self-restraint, and the anguish felt in the private realms of the self. In many cases, the split between the prescribed heroic role and the private suffering exacerbates the sense of loss. See Bilu and Witztum, "War-Related Loss and Suffering."
61. See Pershing and Bellinger, "From Sorrow to Activism"; Grider, '"Faces of the Fallen.'"
62. Other groups in Israeli public life, including Women in Green, act from a position of motherhood but assent to their role in the national discourse as soldiers' mothers and the "nation's womb." Although they do not accept government policy, they do not direct their protest at canonical national outlooks including memorialization, i.e., they do not oppose memorialization per se in the sense of counter-memorial. For example, their memorialization takes on obvious political features when they name illegal outposts in the West Bank for fallen soldiers. In a report posted on the Religious-Zionist Channel 7 website headlined "To Return to Joseph's Tomb in Broad Daylight," the Women in Green expressed support for everything that Garin Shechem (the Nablus core settlement group) had done – actions that had led to the death of one of the worshipers who had entered the tomb's compound without authorization – and accepted the price in blood as part of the struggle. See www.inn.co.il/News/News.aspx/218896 (accessed 25 June 2012). For the Women in Green, see www.womeningreen.org.il
63. See n. 19 above.
64. Wigoder, *Lehabit be-hizakhrut*, 11–17.
65. On the nationalization of the landscape and its role, see, in regard to the construction of the Israeli art and visual culture, Dalia Manor, "A View from Afar: Landscapes of the Homeland," in idem, *Art in Zion*, 113–33. See also Guilat, "'Mapot-nofiyot'."
66. Naveh, "Al ha-ovdan," 106.
67. Mann-Shalvi, "Hashpa'at ha-yedi'ah." Her underlying hypothesis is that for expectant young couples the knowledge that their fetus is male arouses substantial anxiety due to the expected future draft. The research, focusing on the intergenerational transmission of trauma, aims to explore the effects of this anxiety (conscious and unconscious) on the emotional attitude and object relations of parents toward their sons and the dynamics of their marital relationship at various stages of the sons' development. Mann-Shalvi points out that mothers hold fathers responsible and blame them in advance for the son's (potential) death during his military service. Fathers accept this responsibility but (occasionally) weakly protest the mothers' overprotective patterns of motherhood. These assumptions are reflected in the common

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themes of some women's works of art described here, as well as in the Binding of Isaac motif depicted in many art works by men.
68. Ibid. See also Sasson-Levy, *Zehuyot be-madim*.
69. Ofrat, "Dmut ha-em," 157.
70. A sizable part of the Petah Tikva Yad Lebanim Museum collection consists of works that deal with this motif. See also Ofrat, *Akedat Yitzhak*; Sperber, "Hofa'at Sarah."
71. Young, "Memory and Counter Memory," 1.
72. Young cites several works that demonstrate the principles of counter-memorial: Horst Hoheisel's fountain in the City Hall Square in Kassel; Christian Boltanski's *The Missing House* on Grosse Hamburger Strasse in Berlin; and Micha Ullman's *Burned Library* installation on the Bebelplatz in Berlin. All these memorial works, related to the Holocaust, deal with images of destruction and the terrible void that this destruction left behind rather than with the theme of glorifying the victims. Ibid., 5–9. Young concludes (10), "The monument has increasingly become the site of contested and competing meanings, more likely the site of cultural conflict than of shared national values and ideals."
73. El-Or, "Sarbanit giyus," 12.
74. Cited in Abram Eilat, "Tzalemet ve-imah shel hayal" (A photographer and a soldier's mother), in Matzkel, *Hatza'it ba-derekh*, 5–7.
75. El-Or, "Sarbanit giyus," 12.
76. The sentence is a well-known quotation from a speech by David Ben Gurion on 2 July 1963.
77. Pundak, "Nolad-met," 7–8.
78. See Zeruvabel, "Krav, hakravah, korban," 71–72. Contrary to Zeruvabel's description of the cynical way in which militarism is contested in Hanoch Levin's plays, Matzkel argues that her work is totally devoid of cynicism. Conversation with the author, Kfar Aharon, April 2009.
79. "Part-object" is a psychological concept coined by Melanie Klein, according to which an infant's underdeveloped capacity for perception, together with the fact that it concerns itself only with its immediate gratification, means that the subject begins by relating only to part of a person rather than the whole. The primordial part-object, according to Klein, is the mother's breast. As the child's visual apparatus develops, so also does his/her capacity to perceive people as whole objects rather than collections of separate parts. One may construe the mother's "ironing hand" as a part-object for the son's needs.
80. Brosh-Weitz, "Shtikat ha-kovsot."
81. For possible changes in the Israeli habitus in recent years as a result of women's discharging combat duties, see Sasson-Levy, *Zehuyot be-madim*, 188–91. On the different and gender-based path of the separation process (the development step), see Friedman, *Mehubarot*, 15.
82. Brosh-Weitz, "Shtikat ha-kovsot."
83. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia."
84. Images at http://www.ariane-littman.com/docs/holy_land/02_introduction.html (accessed 21 June 2012).
85. Kristeva, "Stabat Mater."
86. See Rachel Guiladi's works at lib.cet.ac.il/pages/item.asp?item=15460&kwd=7559 (accessed 21 June 2012).
87. See these works at http://www.hma.org.il/Museum/Templates/showpage.asp?DBID=1&LNGID=2&TMID=84&FID=616&PID=1145 (accessed 21 June 2012).
88. See the work at http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-401940800.html (accessed 21 June 2012).

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