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Amir Goldstein & Tamar Hager

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ARTICLE



Identification and alienation: Aliza Levenberg's educational work in Kiryat Shmona in the early 1960s

Amir Goldstein^{a,b} and Tamar Hager^b

^aHerzl Institute for the Study of Zionism, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel; ^bTel-Hai College, Qiryat Shmona, Israel

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on Aliza Levenberg, an educator who taught at a Kiryat Shmona high school at the beginning of the 1960s. For three years Levenberg, a middle class Western European, travelled every week from her home in Tel Aviv to the poor town in the northern periphery of Israel, the inhabitants of which were mainly immigrants from Islamic countries. Levenberg was a productive writer. Her most famous book, *Kiryat Shmona Chapters*, tells of her complex encounter with a culture and way of life so different from her own. Analysing this text, our article addresses the cultural clash she experienced, illuminating its impact on her educational, social, and political perspectives. As we show, Levenberg, who at first was a “dedicated soldier” of the melting pot vision, aiming to bring enlightenment to the poor, eventually refused to take part in this forced conversion. She focused instead on listening to her students, and creating a space that would enable them to form their opinions, and express their fears and hopes. As a result, she developed a more flexible and sensitive educational vision. Reading her book as literary autoethnography enable us to expose the hidden layers of the emotional, social, and political process she underwent during this period. We argue that this process exposes the dualistic attitudes of educators who have worked on the deprived social margins. On the one hand, feelings of compassion and empathy impelled many of them to activism, yet on the other, cultural and social differences often elicited paternalistic and orientalist sentiments, which obstructed their educational efforts.

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Introduction

Every Sunday Aliza Levenberg, an English teacher, journalist, and public activist, would leave her home on Hayarkon Street in Tel Aviv. She would board a bus, get an occasional ride, and from time to time, catch a flight. But more often than not, she would make the long journey along the potholed roads from Tel Aviv to Kiryat Shmona. In that far-away and poverty-stricken development town,¹ with a mostly immigrant population largely from Islamic countries, and a minority of residents from Eastern Europe, she would, after a short visit to her apartment, stride towards the town's high school, which had just opened and was one of

CONTACT Amir Goldstein  amirgold@telhai.ac.il ;Tamar Hager hagart@telhai.ac.il  Amir Goldstein and Tamar Hager, Tel-Hai College, Upper Galilee, Israel 1220800

*The authors contributed equally to the writing of this paper.

¹Developing towns are peripheral settlements established to contain the great immigration to Israel in the 1950s.

the first high schools in the existing development towns. There, she taught the young people of Kiryat Shmona poetry by English and American poets, like John Donne, William Blake, Francis Bacon, Dylan Thomas, and Robert Frost, and introduced them to writings by Jacqueline Kahanoff, and Nissim Rejwan Mizrahi Israelis (Jews who immigrated from North Africa and the Middle East). She used these texts to converse with her students about their lives as young people, about life in Kiryat Shmona and Israel, about the role of education, about appropriate values, about their original culture, and about the European culture, which they and she highly evaluated, about despair, and about hopes and dreams. She had personal meetings with them and heard their heart-breaking and inspiring stories about coping with difficult economic and social living conditions. And then, towards the end of the week, she would take the afternoon bus, or car-ride, or flight when available, and usually spend long hours on the potholed roads travelling home to Tel Aviv.

For three years, between the fall of 1960 and the summer of 1963, Levenberg travelled back and forth between Kiryat Shmona and Tel Aviv, between the forgotten margins of Israel and its undisputed centre. During these years, she gradually wrote down her impressions as a teacher in the periphery in a diary and in articles, documenting the significant differences between life in Kiryat Shmona and the realities of Tel Aviv, so sure of itself. In 1964, a year after she had left Kiryat Shmona, she edited what she had written into a book entitled *Kiryat Shmona Chapters*, published by Schocken, one of the important Israeli publishers at the time; the book earned no small number of reactions and both supportive and negative newspaper reviews.²

Our article addresses the account by Aliza Levenberg, of what she found during her work as a teacher in Kiryat Shmona and how she perceived the transformation of her educational and social awareness during her stay. We argue that for Levenberg education and social activism were inseparable. Hers is a unique example in the new Israeli state of a female educator who like other women worldwide worked “for social justice both inside and outside of their classrooms”.³ By telling her story our article contributes to a less discussed topic – the association between women’s work in education and their activist efforts to transform society. Women like Levenberg were active simultaneously in the formal education system where they taught children, and in various social and political frameworks, with a similar aim in mind to make a better society. Consequently, it is difficult and in Levenberg’s case even impossible, to discern between teaching and activism.⁴

In this paper we examine how did Levenberg’s journey that was meant to bring enlightenment to the adolescents of the periphery, become a quest aiming to record the realities of the town in order to present the disturbing information to the national leadership? And how did her book become a valuable educational document which provided sincere attempts to create meaningful teaching, by undermining at times the existing social power relations with her students, who were mostly poor and belonged to ethnic minorities. But it also demonstrates that in her opinion it was wrong to push ethnic groups to the social and cultural margins, because of the injustice and the grave social and national consequences it would engender.

²Examples of criticism: *Herut*, 27 November 1964; *Kol Haam*, 10 December 1965; *Bama’aracha*; *Hatzofe*.

³Bree Picower, “Teacher Activism: Enacting a Vision for Social Justice,” *Equity & Excellence in Education* 45, no. 4 (2012): 562.

⁴See also Margaret Crocco and Petra Munro Hendry, *Pedagogies of Resistance: Women Educator Activists, 1880–1960* (New York and London: Teachers College Columbia University, 1999).

Methodology, philanthropy, teaching, and documentation

Investigating Levenberg's writing reveals a uniquely critical social perspective stemming from her location in Israeli social and geographical space. Levenberg arrived in Mandatory Palestine as an immigrant from Western Europe; she felt alienated from the Eastern European leadership of Israel and this enabled her to partially understand and feel empathy for and closeness to the immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East that she met in Kiryat Shmona, people who had been pushed to the far edge of the country and had become poor migrants.

In her educational journey to the poverty-stricken town and her decision to document her stay, Levenberg was echoing a tradition among women that had begun in Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century.⁵ In her book *Slum Travellers*, Ellen Ross presents a relatively large group of women, some were devoted educators, who left their middle class geographical spaces for the slums, in this case, in London, and documented their meetings with the poor in order to present the harsh life to their readers and to transmit a moral-political message intended to change this reality.⁶

This tradition is, to a great extent, a result of the division of gender roles since the Industrial Revolution, during which women remained at home and were charged with the social responsibility of safeguarding it. Their main role was to supply positive living conditions and nutrition to those in the home, and especially to raise children and to mould their characters. The public sphere, however, where men controlled all of the economic, social, and political centres of power, was closed to them.⁷ Research shows that middle class women in Europe and in the United States succeeded in gaining permission to work outside the home among the poor and immigrants if they fulfilled roles similar to those which engaged them at home, and which were regarded suitable for voluntary and philanthropic work.⁸

Ruth Livesey argues that women's participation in caring for the poor and the needy "was naturalized as a mere extension of the duties of motherhood to a wider family of the suffering".⁹ Orit Rozin asserts that these philanthropic acts became sites where women gained a sense of at least partial worth and autonomy in that social reality.¹⁰

In this way, they also created their own version of the colonialist occupation of "barbarian" lands far across the sea, that were accessible only to their male family members.¹¹ In the foreign spaces of the slums, women felt the exciting anthropological experience of meeting with the other, the stranger, the poor, and the migrant, which was reminiscent of male experience in the colonies.

⁵Ellen Ross, "Introduction: Adventures among the Poor," in *Slum Travellers: Ladies and London Poverty, 1860–1920*, ed. Ellen Ross (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 1–39; Jill Bergman and Debra Bernardi, eds., *Our Sisters' Keepers: Nineteenth Century Benevolence Literature by American Women* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005).

⁶Ellen Ross, ed. *Slum Travellers: Ladies and London Poverty, 1860–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

⁷Aminata Forna, *Mother of all Myths: How Society Moulds and Constrains Mothers* (London: Harper Collins, 1999), 25–45; Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago Press, 1986), 46–52.

⁸Mineke Van Essen, "Strategies of Women Teachers 1860–1920: Feminization in Dutch Elementary and Secondary Schools from a Comparative Perspective," *History of Education* 28, no. 4 (1999): 413–33.

⁹Ruth Livesey, "Reading for Character: Women Social Reformers and Narratives of the Urban Poor in Late Victorian and Edwardian London," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 9, no. 1 (2004): 48.

¹⁰Orit Rozin, "Women Meeting Women: The Role of Veteran Israeli Women in the Absorption of New Immigrants in 1950s Israel: History and Theory," *Iyunim Betkumat Israel* (2005): 645–70.

¹¹Ross, "Introduction," 26.

However, the social glorification of their feminine nature enabled them eventually to turn their voluntary work into a profession. Historians of education demonstrate that it was believed that women's nursing and caring capacities prepared them to educate small children and older children of the poor. In the Netherlands, for example, in vocational secondary schools, female teachers were hired to teach lower-class older girls housekeeping skills.¹² It was widely assumed that women teachers' presence contributed valuable motherly qualities to education. Therefore, the first half of the twentieth century they were regarded as essential element through which the State achieved the expansion of public education, and often became social change agents mainly in underprivileged places.¹³

This tradition reached Israel, as well. According to Rozin, hundreds of middle-class women belonging to the local elite participated in educating poor immigrants living in transit camps during the early 1950s. Many more women, especially from the moshavim and the kibbutz movements, answered Prime Minister David Ben Gurion's call during the 1950s, and adopted new immigrant moshavim¹⁴ that had been established all over the country, but usually far from its centre.¹⁵ However, at the time that Levenberg began to work in the northern town, the number of women still working in the immigrant neighbourhoods and teaching and caring for the children had decreased significantly with the end of the wave of immigration.

About 100 years separate Levenberg and the English women described by Ross, who made an anthropological voluntary journey from their middle-class milieu for the slums of London. In the 1950s and 1960s the number of female teachers was expanded, and they became an integral part of the education system in many countries. Yet despite the different circumstances, it seems that Levenberg's decision to teach in the underfunded periphery still echoed the limited professional opportunities for women and the obstacles they had to tackle when aspiring to influence the public sphere. Thus, Levenberg's journey was perhaps an attempt as a female to overcome a relative sense of alienation and exclusion she felt in her political party, Mapai. This major labour party ruled by the Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, had formed the young state hegemony and was controlled by Eastern European men. Leaving home in order to teach in the northern periphery town, she adopted hence an established nineteenth-century female strategy that was still relevant in the 1960s, in order to achieve a position of social influence and to make her voice heard. Thus, her journey became a process of feminist liberation echoing preceding female journeys.

But who was Levenberg and what is the importance of her voice and actions in the realities of Israel in the 1960s?

Teacher, journalist, activist

Aliza Levenberg was born in Posen at the end of 1914 to a well-to-do and liberal Jewish family, the Moteks, who relocated to Berlin a short time after her birth.¹⁶ A few months after Hitler's rise to power, she immigrated to Israel. She married, gave birth to a

¹²Essen, "Strategies of Women Teachers 1860–1920."

¹³Regina Cortina and Sonsoles San Roman, "Introduction: Women and Teaching: Global Perspectives on Feminization of a Profession," in *Women and Teaching: Global Perspectives on the Feminisation of a Profession*, ed. Regina Cortina and Sonsoles San Román (London: Springer, 2006), 1–20.

¹⁴Ayal Kimhi, "Institutional Environment, Ideological Commitment, and Farmers' Time Allocation: The Case of Israeli Moshavim," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 47, no. 1 (1998): 27–44.

¹⁵Rozin, "Women Meeting Women," 645–70.

¹⁶Lisa Löwenberg, *Von Kampf um den jüdischen Traum* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1990).

daughter, and divorced. After her divorce, she turned to teaching students who were defined as having “educational difficulties”, inter alia, in the Yemenite neighbourhood, Kerem Ha’taimanim in Tel-Aviv. Alongside her educational work, she wrote newspaper reports and opinion articles, primarily about subjects connected to the great wave of immigration from North Africa and about education in Israel. She also became a member of Mapai, and participated in youth groups and in the Working Women’s Council.¹⁷

The Wadi Salib riots that were sparked in 1959 in Haifa following the shooting of a Moroccan Jewish immigrant by policemen, served for her as a wake-up call. These riots raised Israeli awareness of the tensions that had accumulated during the integration of the great wave of immigration, and aroused Levenberg to initiate her social mission.¹⁸ This motivation in addition perhaps to her feeling that in Tel Aviv her chances of gaining political influence were blocked, led her at the end of August, 1960, in her mid-40s, to join the group of teachers staffing the first academic high school in Kiryat Shmona.

Kiryat Shmona, the northernmost development town in Israel, was established in 1949 at the centre of a dense area of kibbutzim in the Hula Valley, on the ruins of the Arab village of Halsá, whose inhabitants had been expelled a year earlier. In 1960, the town, located close to the border with Lebanon, had 14,000 inhabitants, almost all of them new immigrants, mostly from Islamic countries, with a minority of people from Eastern Europe. Kiryat Shmona was dealing with characteristic problems of the new development towns, which had been established with no economic infrastructure in the framework of government planning to disperse the immigrants and to settle outlying areas.¹⁹ The establishment of a high school was a sign of town maturity.

As an initiative of the Ministry of Education, it was part of the plan to expand the secondary school system established in the pre-state years on Western European institutional models.²⁰ Funded by public and private money, these schools were sorting students to vocational or academic streams and were closed to those whose families could not afford the tuition.²¹ Levenberg took it upon herself to become the head teacher of the first academic class of the school.

Levenberg was an unusual figure among those who had been working with the Mizrahi immigrants. Most were men, with Eastern European backgrounds, usually high school graduates.²² Levenberg came from Western Europe and had an academic background in sociology and English literature, an affinity for progressive European

¹⁷*Davar*, 21 November 1958; *Kol Ha’am*, 13 January 1960. [in Hebrew].

¹⁸Yifat Weiss, *Wadi Salib and Haifa’s Lost Heritage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

¹⁹For information about Kiryat Shmona in its early years, see Amir Goldstein, “The Kibbutz and the Transit Camp (ma’abara): The Case of Kiryat Shmona,” *Journal of Israeli History*, 35 (March 2016): 17–37; and Amir Goldstein, “The Kibbutz and the Development Town: The Economic Dimension of their Reciprocal Relations – The Case of the Hula Valley,” *Israeli Studies* 22 (Summer 2017): 96–120.

²⁰Avner Molcho, “The Formation of Secondary Education in Israel, 1948–1964,” *The Journal of Israeli History* 29, no. 1 (2010): 25–45.

²¹Due to the wave of immigrants to Israel during the 1950s, the education system was growing fast. A compulsory education law dictated that until the age of 14 schooling was free. The secondary school system, however, was selective, and the tuition was considerably higher. During the 1960s only small numbers of students learnt a four-year high school programme which enabled them to pass the “Bagrut” (A level) exams. When the Education Ministry extended the high school system to the periphery, Kiryat Shmona’s school was one of the first to open up.

²²Amir Goldstein, “Two-Directional Mission: Aliza Levenberg and the Echoes of Her Activity in Kiryat Shmona,” *Zion* 83, no. 3 (2018): 351–82. [in Hebrew]. For further information about education and Mizrahi immigrant integration see Yuval Dror, “The Workers Movement Coping with the Great Wave of Immigration During the First Years of the State, A Systematic Educational-Social Approach Adding to Present Research,” *Iyunim B’tkumat Yisrael* 4 (1994): 325–3. [in Hebrew].

culture, and an awareness of liberal and humanist discourse, But what set her apart in particular was her choice not to settle in Kiryat Shmona, but rather to travel back and forth between the town and Tel Aviv. This decision contributed to her dual vision of events. “The world of Kiryat Shmona”, she wrote,

is more comprehensible to me when I am in Tel Aviv than when I am in the Galilee. There, my impressions control me and I am too busy to understand the significance of what is going on. Among friends who are interested in these questions only abstractly, I begin to view them in proportion. (90)

Her meeting with this new place was complex and demanded adaptation. Her personal diary where she described her impressions was a refuge for her.²³ Although she tried to remain empathetic and unprejudiced, quite often she expressed arrogant or generalised attitudes. She wrote, for example, “The town is prominent for its ugliness, its filthiness, its noise and its lack of esthetic taste” (18).

Levenberg reached Kiryat Shmona with the aim of bringing the modern experience of veteran Israelis to the outlying development town. When she started on her journey, she believed that Western educational knowledge would enable Kiryat Shmona’s residents to be integrated into Eurocentric Israeli society. At the basis of this worldview was the modernisation paradigm, the assumption that the immigrants needed education and cultivation which would enable them to succeed in Israeli society. But as her acquaintance with her students, the developing school, and the reality of life in Kiryat Shmona deepened, these common assumptions were undermined and she began to acknowledge the limitations of educational activity in such alienated and inegalitarian geographical and social space. She recognised that the rejection of Mizrahi culture would harm town inhabitants’ integration into Israeli society and that the deprived economic and social conditions lowered the chances of her students to attain an education. “One cannot take advantage of existing intellectual ability by force”, she wrote.²⁴ She thought that the establishment should recognise Mizrahi culture and should preserve it, investing significant resources in the development towns and failing settlements; otherwise, their inhabitants would develop hostility which could become dangerous. She also called upon her party to return to its social democratic roots – to support socio-economic policies which would eliminate the differences between people.²⁵ If Mapai did not become aware of what was going on in the absorption process, she wrote, the leaders of the right-wing could become the “defenders of the unskilled laborers in the development town” at the expense of the Labour movement Parties.²⁶

Following these insights, she took on an additional Sisyphean mission, to use her skills as an educator and a journalist in order to change the worldview held by Israeli society and its leaders, and to reshape the policies and practices of absorbing immigrants from Islamic countries. She began to publish reportage based on her diary in various high-circulation and important magazines and journals, calling, inter alia, for pluralistic

²³For the importance of refuge for teachers in the Israeli peripheries see Yair Seltenreich, “The Solitude of Rural Teachers: Hebrew Teachers in Galilee Moshavot at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century,” *Paedagogica Historica* 51, no. 5 (2015): 579–94.

²⁴Aliza Levenberg to Yisrael Guri, 13 July 1962, *Labour Party Archives*, 291a-1951-932-2. [in Hebrew].

²⁵Aliza Levenberg, “Not by the Law Alone Will There Be Civil Equality,” *Min Hayisod* (12 December 1964): 16–17. [in Hebrew].

²⁶Aliza Levenberg to Reuven Bareket, undated, *Labour Party Archives*, 291a-1951-932-2. [in Hebrew].

treatment for immigrants and economic investment in the periphery, because only these could prevent the injustice and its results. Her writings, which aroused curiosity as well as defensive, sometimes angry reactions, gained wide recognition and consequently new channels were opened to her for personal and journalistic writing.

Kiryat Shmona Chapters: autoethnography and literature

The book *Kiryat Shmona Chapters*, on which we focus in this article, is a unique and fascinating testimony of a social and educational journey into the Israeli deprived periphery. While Levenberg's letters and articles, which we read with much curiosity, helped us to understand her activities in Kiryat Shmona, it was her book which uncover for us her fascinating observations and reflections on education and the social and political reality in the marginal town.

The recognition that personal accounts do not only shed light on private lives but rather contain political and social insights drove historians of education to explore teachers' diaries, letters, and other writings.²⁷ Providing new knowledge about everyday experience, these accounts became a significant source for exploring the origins and development of educational ideas and often the demonstrations of their social and political impact. Reading *Kiryat Shmona Chapters* as an intersection of the personal and the collective, a testimony of private educational insights with social and political implications, we consider it as autoethnography, a genre whose source is in anthropology, and which deals in complex relationships between the self and society as a function of political, social, and economic power.²⁸ Autoethnography clearly exposes the fact that there is no objective, neutral, and universal reality and the identity of the writer is fluid, hybrid, and can be understood only in the framework of complex and changing political and social connections. In this type of writing, the author reflectively observes collective identity and attains a dual identity, if not more, and thus, is always in a state of feeling displacement, exile, "not at home" in relation to the fixed definition of identity in the context of the established social power relations.²⁹ *Kiryat Shmona Chapters* is an autoethnography also because Levenberg is explicitly observing her place as a writer in a political and social power network and presents her complex insights and feelings in relation to the reality surrounding her and her own actions, failures, and successes.

Although she presents *Kiryat Shmona Chapters* as a journalistic account and according to the journalist, writer, and editor Shlomo Grodzensky, who wrote the introduction, "she was faithful only to what she could see with her own eyes", one cannot ignore the literary characteristics of the text.³⁰ Ross insists that many texts dealing with social observation simultaneously function as historical and literary documents and since they are "semi-factual accounts" it is difficult to distinguish between fact (history) and fiction (literature).³¹ According to Ross the use of fiction in constructing descriptions of

²⁷Jane Martin, "Thinking Education Histories Differently: Biographical Approaches to Class Politics and Women's Movements in London, 1900s to 1960s," *History of Education* 36, no. 4–5 (2007): 515–33.

²⁸Debora Reed-Danahay, "Introduction," in *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*, ed. D. E. Reed Donahay (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 1–10; and Carolyn Ellis, *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2004).

²⁹Reed Danahay, "Introduction," 4.

³⁰Shlomo Grodzensky, "Introduction," in *Kiryat Shmona Chapters*, ed. Aliza Levenberg (Tel-Aviv & Jerusalem: Schocken, 1965), 8.

³¹Ross, "Introduction," 10.

reality may be an effective tool in convincing readers. Such texts are therefore biased and to a great extent, testify to the positions of the author and his/her goals. Ruth Livesey maintains that, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in Britain, texts by social reformers became pedagogical tools in training social workers and as an important means for local governments and philanthropic organisations to make ethical judgments in relation to the behaviour of the poor and immigrants, and to create practical solutions.³² In Israel, parts of *Kiryat Shmona Chapters* appeared in teachers' journals and became a training tool for student teachers.³³

Without a doubt, Levenberg had political pedagogical objectives when she published *Kiryat Shmona Chapters*, and like her predecessors, she too used literary means in order to sharpen her ethical, educational, and political position. Her writings reverberate not only the writing style that developed in the slums of London but also the writing tradition that developed in Germany after World War I. Newspaper reportage, written in the first person, and using literary artistic elements, was then perceived by the public as providing a more accurate picture of social realities than articles that presented themselves as objective.³⁴ Later, during the 1960s in the United States, a similar writing style, termed "New Journalism" (primarily identified with Tom Wolfe), was presented as a protest against the myth of journalistic objectivity. This genre mixed journalistic reporting with fiction while deliberately blurring the difference between journalism and literature to achieve "journalism that would read like a novel".³⁵

In our opinion, Levenberg's text reflects these writing traditions. However, it is exceptional in that it has been written by a woman. Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner, and Carole Fleming, in their book *Women and Journalism*, state that few women wrote such texts. They maintain that "women either are not allowed, or do not allow themselves, to enjoy the freedom and sense of literary experimentation that is permitted to, or claimed by men".³⁶ One of the reasons, in our view, is the difficulty for women, especially in the patriarchal reality, to challenge the expectation of objectivity and to present themselves as having personal knowledge with public value.

The literary aspects of *Kiryat Shmona Chapters* invite an investigation of the artistic devices alongside the explicit educational and social descriptions and ideas. We argue that a reading of the text as journalistic literary autoethnography, in the spirit of New Journalism, may contribute to our understanding of the complex development and transformation of an activist teacher in Israel periphery, as well as contributing an additional in-depth view of the social-educational beliefs of Levenberg.

³²Ruth Livesey, "Reading for Character: Women Social Reformers and Narratives of the Urban Poor in Late Victorian and Edwardian London," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 9, no. 1 (2004): 43–67.

³³See e.g. Avraham Shattel, Tamar Agmon, and Matitya Mar-Haim, *The Teachers' Attitude Towards Disadvantaged Students, The Ministry of Education and Culture, School for Senior Education Workers* (Ganei Yehuda-Jerusalem: July 1975), 1–2. [in Hebrew].

³⁴John C. Hartsock, "Literary Reportage: The 'Other Literary Journalism,'" *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture* 42: 1–2 (2009): 113–34.

³⁵Tom Wolfe, "New Journalism," in *The New Journalism*, ed. Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson (New York: Harper, 1973): 21–2; and Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner, and Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism* (Routledge: 2004), 40.

³⁶Chambers, Steiner and Fleming, *Women and Journalism*, 40–1.

“To take picture of reality”

According to the book, her first meeting with Kiryat Shmona was for Levenberg experiencing a strange world, difficult to decipher. Her difficulty is expressed primarily in the presentation of a generalised and alienated vision of what was happening around her. In her journey through the city, she meets figures who are “hopeless, neglected and lonely.”³⁷ Some of them are wearing strange sackcloth clothes or robes and they appear as “characters from *One Thousand and One Nights*” (16). She hears a medley of foreign languages and voices that “seemingly tear the air in their monotony, shrieking and unpleasant” (15). Everything is dusty, dirty, and neglected: the apartment she has received, the streets, with wild weeds and thorns at their margins, the rag with which the coffee shop table is wiped, the rabbi who supervises kashrut in the butcher shop. The workers waiting for the bus whom she meets on her morning walk are “indifferent . . . almost apathetic . . . a heavy and slightly sharp odour emanates from them, even now, in the early morning hours, the smell of poverty rising up from bodies who have slept in crowded rooms with other people (22). She sees Kiryat Shmona as “a completely different world: its laws are different, its demands are different, its people are different” (11).

The sense of alienation does not disappear even when school opens – “which is rough and unfinished”, squeezed in among industrial buildings with no play space – but nevertheless hope is aroused. The children, in contrast to the unskilled labourers, are not apathetic but “ready and full of anticipation, excited and curious” (24). And although, for the residents of Kiryat Shmona, she always remained “on the other side of the barricade” (68) and she herself was in no hurry to breach the cultural barriers, her estrangement gradually turned into a kind of familiarity and proximity, evident from the disintegration of her overgeneralised view of the town and its residents. If previously her descriptions relate to the poor as anonymous, faceless, physically repulsive, as material and psychological deprivation had robbed them of their individuality, now she presents concrete stories gleaned from personal meetings with the students (and sometimes with their parents), usually in her apartment. These close-ups enable her readers – veteran Israelis – to feel empathy with her students, the future generation.

Readers, for example, meet with the costs of poverty in the story of Nissim, whose father has left the home, his sickly mother earns little, his grandmother is old, and he is the one who cares for the housecleaning from four in the morning, yet continues to study in the evening hours. “I’m pretty busy”, he says (27). She describes Sarah, who also immigrated from Persia and who has been forced to leave the educational system because of the disapproval of her family. “They don’t understand! Look, they don’t understand!” (152), she says painfully. She relates that she prefers to stay at work in the factory rather than in her overcrowded home since “there are beds everywhere . . . only beds” (152). And now she is refusing the family’s demand that she marries an old uncle.

Yet since Levenberg’s outlook is white, Eurocentric, and middle class, even her concrete descriptions of Mizrahi poverty are liable to be anthropologically distanced, and they relatively easily fall into generalisations. Relating to Sarah, she writes:

³⁷ Aliza Levenberg, *Kiryat Shmona Chapters* (Tel-Aviv & Jerusalem: Schocken, 1965), 12.

When I didn't distinguish her facial features or her dress, she became an impersonal figure, one of the many that I have met in this place, whose fate had been sealed before they had even had a chance. (151)

Without meaning to perhaps she was clarifying to her readers that she was one of them, a resident of Tel Aviv, who was viewing the development town from afar.

Towards the end of the book, just before Levenberg leaves Kiryat Shmona, it becomes clear that a concrete viewpoint is not enough to feel an even partial sense of belonging and empathy. The figures that she chooses to present in detail in the final chapters become, for the most part, a source of estrangement. The wretchedness of these people and the anger that they express towards life in Israel are too difficult to bear. It appears that their presentation again reconstructs the barriers that Levenberg tried to remove. Ending the book with detailed descriptions of hostile meetings with poverty and with a strong sense of powerlessness, she poetically justifies her decision to leave the school and Kiryat Shmona, choosing a different type of activism.

Miriam's story is presented as proof of Levenberg's helplessness and that of the entire system, as "it wasn't enough to create social frames in order to solve problems" (178). Although the story became known to her during her first days in the town, she chooses to tell it only at the end of the book, as a testimony to her sense of failure, when her social and educational efforts don't lead to the desired change. This is the story of a 13-year-old girl who is second-generation illiterate, and who is a victim of a violent and habitual criminal father, and an uncaring mother, both of whom neglect her and force her to do hard physical labour, and despite her repeated efforts, deliberately prevent her from going to school. It is also a story about the authorities, who, fearing the girl's father, avoid acting. "In any case, it won't help – everyone said – and aside from that, if the children go to school the way they are now, in their neglected state, they will endanger the health of the other children" (182). Poverty in this case is depicted as pathological (Miriam's father suffers from syphilis, a disease that attacks the brain) and criminological (he sells drugs, is corrupt and violent). This justifies avoidance of any action by the Welfare authorities or the educational system and explains Levenberg's own helplessness. She watches Miriam from afar, lifting heavy crates, close to collapse, and when the girl asks for her help in activating the police to force her father to let her go to school, Levenberg writes down her name and address "even though I knew that I wouldn't be able to do anything" (180).

The story of Yoav as well proves the powerlessness of education. Levenberg asserts: "No formal education destroys barriers. Only economic security can overcome the sense of alienation . . ." (195). Yoav, whose father is an unskilled worker and whose mother is ill, arrived one winter evening to Levenberg's apartment to borrow a book, and responded to her question of how he was with "There's no choice; there isn't any other way; we will destroy everything" (192). Yoav's extreme declaration and his pessimism, described in the book as part of a particular scene, is echoed in some of Levenberg's social and educational analyses, and in her letters to the leadership she returned to her experiences as a young woman in Germany and repeated her warning that a short-sighted policy would ultimately lead to fascism, as occurred "in the country where I was born". The message, that present developments could bring fascism to Israel, was also expressed in her correspondence with Ben-Gurion.³⁸

³⁸ Aliza Levenberg to Ben Gurion, 11 November 1962, Ben Gurion Archives, Correspondence. [in Hebrew].

The actual confrontation with Yoav, who clarifies to her that the hostility and anger are not directed towards her personally, enables her not only to criticise the leadership, but also those who have chosen violence. “But when people begin breaking things, Yoav, they don’t distinguish ‘exceptions to the rule’, right?” (192), she asserts, clarifying to him that if there is violence, everyone will leave, the kibbutzniks and those who come from the big cities. “When you decide to break things, to throw stones, there’s no point in being here . . . We have failed and it’s best for us to go home” (193).

With the understanding that violence is not a solution and it will only make the economic situation worse, Yoav wonders, “What can we do? I’m sure that the people outside simply don’t know about the situation here . . .” (193). Levenberg responds to Yoav’s insight, by transforming her public role, explaining to the driver who takes her home to Tel Aviv: “I see that my role is to take a picture of reality. For as long as it goes on, we must know it” (198).

“My role is to listen”

Taking pictures of reality in *Kiryat Shmona Chapters*, which is accompanied by many cultural, sociological, economic, and political insights, is, in fact, Levenberg’s way of inviting policymakers and veteran Israelis to learn about the acute problems created by integrating the immigrants from Islamic countries. It is a lesson about the neglect of the Israeli periphery in general and Kiryat Shmona in particular. In her attempt to change attitudes among the Israeli leadership, she does not spare examples, explanations, and generalisations, but to her students in Kiryat Shmona she presents another educational way, inclusive, dialogic, and giving space to their voices.

She opens for them her apartment in town and a significant number of the conversations with them in the book take place there. The students come to borrow books and to talk. They come alone or in groups. Their parents also reach out to her to ask for advice. The borders between her apartment and the school become blurred.

Levenberg raises significant questions about her educational role. She wonders to what extent there is justification for her original educational mission: “Did I actually come here to educate the children of these Jews who maintained their Jewish traditions for hundreds of years, to be ‘typical Israelis’ in the framework of propaganda literature?” (24). As early as the third chapter, she declares that she will not participate in this educational experiment but rather she will give them the space for self-expression. In her view, this move was essential, since, in their attempt to adapt themselves to the Israeli consensus, they were expected to abandon their parents’ religious tradition, and thus their voices were taken away from them. Identifying the gap between the “fast-pulsed” modern world of veteran Israelis and the traditional world of the immigrants she wonders, “Will we succeed in bridging the abyss between the two worlds?” Considering this, she views her role as “to listen more than to lead,” while “they express their inner feelings and think aloud” (38).

That insight contradicts the expectation that educators in those years of immigrant absorption, would be agents of socialisation. Levenberg was supposed to have fulfilled the “melting pot” policies in her educational practice. She was expected to take the painful educational steps intending to cut off the immigrants from their unique culture and traditions, compelling them to adopt the new uniform Israeli culture which has been

predominantly European.³⁹ “Melting pot” policies were grasped as effective and quick tool for immigrant children’s assimilation into the dominant culture and as such they were implemented by many nation states when perceiving migration as threatening to the national hegemony.⁴⁰

In actuality, however, Levenberg and other teachers were not completely convinced by the effectiveness of such policies and thus found themselves acting as “intermediaries”, facilitating between the hegemonic discourse and the immigrants, for whom they felt empathy.⁴¹ As an “intermediary”, Levenberg who identified with her students and their point of view distanced herself from the establishment’s official and implied expectations critically investigating what was perceived as the “right” education. “It seems to me”, she wrote, “that the ‘melting pot’ sometimes melts valuable things, which should not be melted”.⁴²

From a desire to give space and time to valuable voices that were excluded from hegemonic discourse, she invited to Kiryat Shmona two Mizrahi literary and intellectual figures who were also her friends, the Iraqi-born author and journalist, Nissim Rejwan,⁴³ and the Egyptian-born (with Tunisian and Iraqi ancestry) author, Jacqueline Kahanoff.⁴⁴ In her book, she devotes a chapter to the visit, describing the students’ encounter with pride in Mizrahi-Arabic culture, a meeting intended to broaden their horizons and identification with their own original culture (71–79). It is doubtful whether Kahanoff and Rejwan, who, in their activities, merged Eastern and Western cultures, were invited to any other school in Israel during those years.

Levenberg’s sensitivity to the exclusion of the students’ culture and her sense of solidarity with them and with their families stemmed from the fact that she had not forgotten her experience as a “yekke” (a Jewish German immigrant), when settlement veterans from Eastern Europe had tried to diminish the significance of her culture and to make her abandon it.⁴⁵ Marking the Mizrahi traditional culture as inferior, she explained, empties the students of valuable resources, and harms their learning skills (24). She believed that the task of education was to bridge between the world of the student and social realities, and to combine them, without creating a contradiction “that would tear the soul of the child”.⁴⁶ Giving space to the students’ self-expression and listening to what they had to say was therefore an essential strategy.

In the complex social political reality, the extent to which these young people needed space for talking can be understood by readers of *Kiryat Shmona Chapters* from Sarah,

³⁹For more on the Israeli context, see Zvi Zameret, *Melting Pot in Israel: The Commission of Inquiry Concerning the Education of Immigrant Children During the Early Years of the State* (New York: SUNY Press, 2012).

⁴⁰Myers identified this issue as lacking in the historiography of education: Kevin Myers, “Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities in the History of Education,” *Paedagogica Historica* 45, no. 6 (2009): 801–16.

⁴¹Tali Tadmor-Shimoni. “Immigrant and Veteran Teachers of the 1948 Generation: As Socialization Agents of the New State,” *Israel Studies* 16, no. 3 (2011): 97–122; and Tali Tadmor-Shimoni and Nurit Reichel, “Social Education of Immigrants as a National Socialization Agent in the New State of Israel,” *International Journal of Jewish Education Research*, no. 3 (2011): 65–89.

⁴²Aliza Levenberg, *Kiryat Shmona Diary* (2), Keshet, Year four, Booklet 3, Autumn 1961, 88. [in Hebrew].

⁴³See Nissim Rejwan, *The Last Jews in Baghdad: Remembering a Lost Homeland* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).

⁴⁴Deborah A. Starr and Sasson Somekh, *Mongrels or Marvels: The Levantine Writing of Jacqueline Kahanoff* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁴⁵Aliza Levenberg, “Pseudo-Westernization disguised as Jewish Consciousness”, *Ot*, September 1966, pp. 84–7. [in Hebrew].

⁴⁶Aliza Levenberg, “Comments on Education for Good Citizenship,” *Amot*, Year 1, Booklet 5 (April-May 1963), pp. 110. [in Hebrew].

who was invited by Levenberg to be interviewed on Kol Yisrael (the official radio station). When Levenberg wondered why Sarah thanked her at the end of the programme, since it was Sarah who shared her knowledge with them, the young woman answered, “Don’t you understand? No one has ever listened to me for such a long time . . . No one wanted to know” (154).

The descriptions of the unique voices echo throughout the book. For example, Levenberg opens a space for self-expression by using works of literature in order to raise painful social issues. Reading poetry becomes a current social discussion among the students. It appears that Levenberg is avoiding standard literary analyses in order not to silence voices under the weight of accepted interpretations. One of the lessons, for example, focuses on the acclaimed American poet Robert Frost’s poem “The Gift Outright”,⁴⁷ when one of the students notes that he read about Frost’s death in the newspaper (29 January 1963). The poem is about the difficulty of the first immigrants from Britain to America to give up their British identity in exchange for their American, while, in their refusal to submit to a new identity, they give up on themselves. The discussion that develops centres around immigration and acclimatisation in Israel, which does not necessarily open its gates to them as Mizrahis. Levenberg does not share Frost’s and the students’ argument that relinquishment and surrender of the older identity is essential, since “they must reject much that is positive and beautiful in their heritage and destroy things with no recourse that they will never be able to recreate . . .” (68). This insight, which remains only between Levenberg and her readers, and which is not, at least according to the description, presented to the students, reflects her educational outlook – which determines that she must primarily listen and let the students develop their attitudes about these issues, and to avoid (perhaps excessively) guiding them.

This attitude is reflected again at the meeting with Jaqueline Kahanoff, where there was a discussion of the poem “Prayer of a Little Negro Child”. The poem was written by the Guadeloupian poet Guy Tirolien, who took part in the Negritude (black) literary movement established during the 1940s.⁴⁸ The protagonist of Tirolien’s poem wishes to stop the symbolic violence in school, expressed by the demand that he adapt himself to the culture of the white masters: “Lord, I don’t want to go to their school anymore” (78). Levenberg who discovers that her students don’t identify with the black boy, declares that they “have subconsciously recoiled from this identification lest they discover what should best be covered up” (78). Here too, she does not share with her students her concerns regarding their approval of cultural colonialism.

Such a decision has its drawbacks, yet it provided the students with a space for expression, creating a sense of confidence which was intensified by the central place given to their own knowledge. In a number of episodes, Levenberg becomes a student of her students and the power relations are reversed. This occurs, for example, when, attempting to prevent the effacement of Mizrahi culture by the educational system, she avoids teaching them about the accepted Ashkenazi holidays, and wedding and circumcision customs, requesting instead, that they introduce their own family customs and teach one another and her, as well.

⁴⁷Robert Frost, “The Gift Outright (1942) The land was ours before we were the land’s. She was our land more than a hundred years Before We Were Her People. She was ours In Massachusetts, in Virginia,” *The Explicator* 38, no. 1 (1979): 22–3.

⁴⁸Guy Tirolien, “Prayer of a Little Negro Child,” *Golden Balls and Other Poems* (Paris: African Presence, 1961).

The dialogue with her students demonstrates to her that it is not enough to connect them with their parents' culture, but they should also have direct contact with other high school peers from veteran Israel. "They lack so much, and first and foremost – contact with the outside world, the feeling that we are part of Israel as a whole and not just residents of a city which was forgotten when it was established", she writes. She arranges meetings for her students with teens from two schools, which, for her, represents the national elite: Tichon Hadash High School in Tel Aviv, directed by Dr Toni Halle (an immigrant from Germany like Levenberg), whose political climate was regarded as very leftist, and the school of Kfar Giladi, one of the first schools of the kibbutz movement, which shaped the progressive educational pedagogy characterised those schools in later years.⁴⁹ It becomes clear that it is easier to meet with the distant Tel Aviv students than with the young people of Kfar Giladi. It seems that the kibbutz people attempt to sabotage the encounter by refusing to provide their own young students with transportation to reach Kiryat Shmona. Thus, they must walk for an hour in cold winter weather. At the meetings, cultural, social, and economic differences become clear. Mira, who has participated in the meeting with Tichon Hadash, talks with wonder about the visit to a movie theatre and the bar of chocolate that she found beside her bed.

Actually, I didn't enjoy having a room to myself ... I have never slept alone in a room ... We're always talking about the crowdedness at home, that's true. But to think about sitting in a room alone is terrible, much less sleeping alone in a room ... (40)

"Even the minimum, I don't do as I should"

But even in Kiryat Shmona, the school is a secular modern place and it is not always easy to align what students learn – consensual Israeli culture – with the norms of traditional Mizrahi culture. Facing the difficulties of the students and their families with the "progressive" Israeli reality, Levenberg quite often feels helpless as she demonstrates for example in the eighth chapter.

At an evening meeting at her apartment, the girls of the academic stream report that the education they are receiving in school is completely disconnected from the expectations of their families. They would rather have homes like their mothers, but also to develop careers for themselves. They also want school to teach them homemaking and sewing. One of the young girls says that she would like to be a structural engineer, as well as a mother of seven children who manages her home the way her mother does. "We should receive special training so that we will be able to manage at home and also adapt ourselves to what is customary in Israel", she says (83). Considering these young girls, Levenberg feels helpless. Although she has created a space for self-expression, she has no idea how to solve these conflicts and where to gain the knowledge. "And again, I know that I am doing only half the work and even the minimum, I don't do as I should" (85).

Her helplessness increases in her meeting with Yosef, whose mother married his father at the age of 14 and since their immigration from Morocco to Kiryat Shmona, has had another baby every year, and one day set herself on fire. Since then, Yosef has been called

⁴⁹ Aliza Levenberg, "Youth from Immigrant Towns and the Children of Veteran Israelis," *Davar*, 12 July 1961. [in Hebrew]; Yuval Dror, "National Education" *Through Mutually Supportive Devices: A Case Study of Zionist Education* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2007), 185–90.

“the crazy woman’s son” (87). Conversing with the young boy, she explains to him that mental illness is an illness like any other, and so he should not be ashamed of his mother. This speech, which was meant to make Yosef feel better only succeeds in making her feel better. “I always knew that this was the trap set for every educator; and even so, I got caught in it” (87). Yosef

lifted his head and looked at me with eyes that reflected the wisdom of generations and radiated acceptance of his sentence of suffering . . . and in a quiet voice, soft almost as though he didn’t want to hurt me, and perhaps even pitied me, he said, “I understand. I believe you . . . But you know? After you explained that to me so well, there are two people in Kiryat Shmona that know it – you and me . . . We know. But the neighbours don’t know. The children don’t know. They will continue to call me “the crazy woman’s son” (87)

When he leaves, she understands that he has endowed her with new knowledge; “how little we can help another and how great the power of society is that creates its own patterns and uses them to control people” (87).

Sometimes not knowing how to help becomes a feeling of guilt. This happens to her facing David’s father. He is an immigrant from Eastern Europe who arrives to ask for her help after he has been fired. Without earning money, he cannot pay David’s tuition, nor does he have money for notebooks and textbooks.

“I came to Israel because I wanted to give my son a Jewish education. That’s why I left,” he says. “I want to give my son an education.” He lifted his head and our eyes met for a moment. I lowered my eyes. I was the embarrassed one. I was the accused. This is the society of which I am a part. It has done this. There is no refuge from that recognition. I am to blame . . . (89)

It is clear to her that if David’s father does not find a source of income, David will leave school and have to work as an unskilled labourer. “The chain will never end. Generation after generation, without education, without economic and social security” (89).

With these three meetings at her home, form an illuminating analogy. In each of the described cases, the teacher, a representative of the educational system must deal with complex social issues which should be the responsibility of other institutions (the government, the welfare system, and woman’s organisations). But these institutions have themselves rejected these complex tasks and she remains alone in the struggle. Levenberg’s repeated feelings of helplessness invite the reader to take a deep look into the common fate of those who live in poverty, on the margins and excluded, forgotten, and abandoned by hegemonic powers that are in no hurry to help. Each of these parallel scenes reveals Levenberg’s powerlessness and confusion; despite her membership in the educated Ashkenazi middle class hegemony she lacks the knowledge that could enable her to deal with this complicated reality. It appears that, despite the inabilities of her visitors to cope with the establishment, they understand the situation better than she does, and they know how to define it more accurately and clearly. The power relations between the Western white woman and the people on the margins change for a moment as they are the ones who own the relevant knowledge. “We who represent the world of the knowledgeable”, she writes, “learn from time to time how little we know about those whom we seemingly lead and educate” (134).

“Education is not a wonder drug”

The understanding that education can only provide a partial response to the difficulties shared by the students and their parents leads Levenberg to investigate her own educational beliefs. In Kiryat Shmona, she has learnt that what primarily causes education to fail is “the feelings of superiority among many teachers” who “automatically project the confidence that in any case, ‘nothing will come of these children’” (90). She understands that this is a structured failure and so “I stopped trying to blame one single factor . . . I began to understand that there are neither victims nor sacrificers but rather that we are all causing the injustice and we are all its victims” (91).

But what really disturbs her is her cooperation with the meritocracy and the pursuit of excellence, while pushing aside education for values like equality and human dignity, among others. She learns about the damages of meritocracy, ambitiousness, and the desire for excellence when visiting the Carmit Boarding School in Jerusalem,⁵⁰ where gifted children from development towns are sent. The children she meets there, who have met all the conditions for achieving professional success, are not interested in learning anything that does not lead to high marks. They make every effort to advance in the spirit of Western capitalism and they are ready to leave behind and eliminate anything that might block their advancement, like their past in the development town or their deep-throated accent. Levenberg sees this education as producing “a fake elite, known by its polished and sparkling mediocrity” (160–1). Their unbounded ambition creates social blindness.

In contrast, Yigal, who wants to be a scientist (and who actually became a professor of civil engineering at the Technion) is regarded as one of the school’s educational successes.

We didn’t give Yigal very much at school . . . but at least we worked together and neither we nor he ever considered success or failure at one’s studies as the only measure of a person’s value. It was clear to us that there were other things, although we hesitated to use the banal word “values” . . . It is of course better to succeed because a diploma is equipment for life. But we didn’t exaggerate its importance and we didn’t make it a question of life or death. (188)

Working together is also at the basis of Levenberg’s education worldview, as exemplified by many interactions with pupils described in the book. This type of work assumes that the young people also have important cultural knowledge (even though she does not always understand it or find it meaningful), that should be related to and appreciated. But when, in an interview with the Kol Yisrael radio station, Yigal declares that when he is a scientist, he will remember that there are other things in the world, she is doubtful of his ability to keep his promise to adhere to his values in an achievement-permeated environment. She fears that at present, in a reality of the melting pot and education for Western meritocracy, the children of the immigrants will become “robots . . . who will smash everything: themselves and our common world” (188).

It seems that three years in Kiryat Shmona taught her that the work of education is partial. Even when it gives a child a chance to escape a life of poverty, it cannot ensure an environment that will enable him/her to remain humane. “What worries me . . . is the

⁵⁰One of five boarding schools that were founded by the “Society for Advancement of Education” during the early 1960s.

thought that education is not a wonder drug, as we have been accustomed to view it, and that it cannot heal all of our social illnesses” (191).

Levenberg’s disillusion about the power of education in a reality of economic, cultural, and social deprivation, and her fear that “the feeling of failure will increase [in the students . . .] precisely after they have achieved an education – if this is not accompanied by the right integration” (191) are strengthened and accentuated in the analogy she creates with Yonah, the public health nurse’s disillusionment with the belief that soap and water can function “as a solution to every evil in the world” (134). Up to the moment of her own disillusionment, Levenberg relates to Yonah as someone who is “calm and happy; only people who are sure that they have a mission in life look like that” (134). What undermines Yonah’s beliefs is a meeting with two women whose many deliveries and the prohibition against abortion by the medical system have left them hostile and despondent. “You! You with all of your rules, with all of your advice,” says one of the women, “All that you know how to do is to keep children alive. Before I came to Israel at least a few of them died. Here they are constantly underfoot, and I don’t know what to do with them” (136). These women reveal that good hygiene saves lives but if poverty makes life unbearable what kind of value do these lives have? In the face of their anger, Yonah loses her confidence. “Nothing will help”, she says to Levenberg. “Everything is lost”.

In contrast to Yonah, for Levenberg the understanding that education is not the solution to all evil, is not the end of the world. As someone who found that “taking a picture of reality” is a solution for an activist journalist, she declares, “If Y. H. Brenner⁵¹ could allow himself to admit unhesitatingly that he knew that there was good and bad but he preferred to write only about the bad – it seems to me that I can do that too” (198). But does Levenberg really photograph only the bad in this book? We do not think so. What is interesting about her picture is the social, cultural, and educational complexity about the bad and good.

Conclusion

Kiryat Shmona Chapters is, to a great extent, an educational, anthropological political journey to the social and geographical margins of Israel. As such, it also addresses the freedom and restrictions of moving in space. Levenberg comes from Tel Aviv; she stays in Kiryat Shmona for a few days every week; the young people she describes, and their parents, only rarely leave the town. Movement limitations act as a kind of barrier for most inhabitants of the social, cultural, and geographic margins, but primarily for the women. Miriam and Sarah cannot go to school because they are not permitted to, or because the situations in which they live require that they work. For Levenberg as well, the physical journey is not easy. At the beginning of the book she enters a dusty and dirty space in which she feels uncomfortable, and she quickly hurries to buy cleaning utensils. However, the dust is clinging to her and can only be removed when the journey ends. Reaching Tel Aviv after three years of working in the development town, she hears the breaking waves of the Mediterranean “and my top priority was focused on one idea: a hot bath” (199).

⁵¹A Russian-born Hebrew-language author and thinker and one of the pioneers of modern Hebrew literature.

As a teacher-activist the difficult physical journey is also for her an emotional, intellectual, and political-social process. She began her journey as an instructor who wanted to bring Western knowledge to the children of immigrants from Islamic countries in order to eliminate the culture from which they came and integrate them into Israeli society. But eventually she refused to cooperate with this forced conversion. Her educational belief that the students should be allowed to express themselves and to tell their stories, while she should listen, enabled her to become acquainted with the town from the inside and to develop a worldview according to which communication with students should be at eye-level and the educational vision must be flexible and context-sensitive.

In addition, this journey has also been a feminist liberating process. The transition from school teaching to autoethnographic journalistic writing was actually a shift from an accepted realm of feminine activism – expansion of caring practices from the home to the public sphere – to journalism and literature, domains that draw their power from a presence in public sphere and are usually controlled by men. In other words, Levenberg's process of political and social transformation, included emerging from the comfortable gender zone.

Still faithful to her change in consciousness, after returning from Kiryat Shmona, Levenberg continued in her efforts to arouse public discussion about educational, social, and economic challenges in the periphery and to warn about the long-term ramifications of the way Israel was integrating and absorbing the great immigration of the 1950s.⁵² She was among the initiators of a committee aiming to prevent ethnic discrimination in Israel.⁵³ She protested against discriminatory educational reforms led by the Ministry of Education, and continued to travel to distant settlements and to publicise the voices of periphery residents to an indifferent Israeli society.⁵⁴

Despite her feelings of helplessness when facing her students and the residents of the town, for those she had educated, she remained an impressive and dedicated educator. They saw her as a figure involved in what was happening in Israel and in the world, and they related that in her English and education lessons, she opened a window into the heart of Israeli society for them.⁵⁵ On her side, she was proud of her students and saw them as the future local elite who would mould its new directions.

She marked students' return to Kiryat Shmona as the pathway to achievement and the main pioneering activity for her students (53).

The students internalised these messages, as can be understood from a radio discussion that she conducted with them in which they used the concept of "local fulfillment" and emphasised that they wished to remain in Kiryat Shmona and contribute to its development.⁵⁶ One of her students, returning from a youth movement conference in Tel Aviv, expressed anger about the non-recognition of living in the town as a pioneering act: "Isn't someone who lives here also doing something?" He announced that when the first high school graduates had completed their higher education, they "would make something of this town . . . it's ours, isn't it?"⁵⁷ The high expectations Levenberg had of them,

⁵²See e.g. *The Israeli State Archives*, Gal – 11887/23. [in Hebrew].

⁵³*Al Hamishmar*, 4 December 1964. [in Hebrew].

⁵⁴*Herut*, 20 January 1965. [in Hebrew].

⁵⁵Interviews with Levenberg's students by the authors, 2014–2015, Kiryat Shmona.

⁵⁶*Al Hamishmar*, 20 July 1962. [in Hebrew].

⁵⁷Aliza Levenberg, *Kiryat Shmona Diary* (4), *Keshet*, Year four, Booklet 3, Spring 1962, p. 46. [in Hebrew].

as “the first generation being educated in Israel” and the first graduates of the local high school in a development town, accompanied many of her students for many years.

Levenberg continued a long tradition of women who were active in poverty-stricken areas in Israel and she became the prototype of many educators in deprived peripheral zones. Her personal story and the way she told it, reveal the many complexities educators who have chosen to work in these areas must confront. Many of them, like Levenberg, were imbued with faith in the power of education and in their own power to bridge between the hegemonic centre and the social and geographical margins. Like her, some of them found it difficult to undermine the economic-social processes and developed dual attitudes towards educational activity. On the one hand, they criticised the inequality and the political attitudes that deepened it, and on the other, the daily educational encounter with their students and their families aroused internal paternalistic and orientalist attitudes, making their work more difficult.

It is interesting to examine the connection between the strong rebukes levelled by Levenberg at the country leadership and the public regarding the integration of Mizrahi immigrants, and her own cringing reactions as expressed in her book. We might have expected that the conflict between the desire to remove cultural barriers and her reservations about the immigrants’ culture would soften her criticism towards the leadership. But it was her dual attitudes that demonstrated for her the intensity of the challenge to Israeli society. If she herself, who had chosen to live in Kiryat Shmona and who wholeheartedly believed in the importance of listening to the immigrants and recognising their culture, felt conflicting emotions, the need to shout out to indifferent and estranged Israel society was many times greater.

Doubtless, the sincere revelation of this complex relationship to the social and geographical periphery is an important starting point to create a more egalitarian and just social and cultural reality. Thus, *Kiryat Shmona Chapters* is still an important document, and relevant more than ever to all of us, and especially to educators and social reformers.

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Notes on contributors

Amir Goldstein is Associate Professor of Israel and Jewish History at Tel-Hai College and Research Fellow at the Herzl Institute for the Study of Zionism at the University of Haifa. His books and articles focus on the Ideology and activities of Zeev Jabotinsky and Menahem Begin and the breakthrough of the Zionist right, moving from the margins of Israeli politics to the centre. His research includes Galilee social history in the twentieth century. His last book (co-editor with Yael Zerubavel): *Tel Hai, 1920–2020: Between History and Memory* [Hebrew].

Tamar Hager is an Associate Professor in the Department of Education and Gender Studies at Tel-Hai College, Israel. Motherhood, critical feminist methodology, art sociology, and fictional and academic writing are core issues of her academic research, writing, teaching and social activism. She published a book of short stories *A Perfectly Ordinary Life* (in

Hebrew) in 2000 and in 2012, *Malice Aforethought* (in Hebrew), microhistories of two English depraved mothers who killed their babies in 1870s. She is the co-editor of *Bad Mothers: Regulations, Representations and Resistance* published in 2017 and the co-writer of *Compliance and Resistance Within the Neoliberal Academia: Biographical Stories, Collective Voices* to be soon published by Palgrave. Currently she is reconstructing the lives of two female sitters of the Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron.