

## Modernism and Gender in Ads from Hebrew Magazines of Mandatory Palestine

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### Abstract

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This article examines representations of the home-maker and mother in advertisements from dailies, women magazines, and manuals of pre-state Israel. It is based on about 150 ads which were divided into topic-oriented groups and then analyzed using content analysis and semiotic models. The ads were investigated as cultural texts reflecting ideologies, concepts, and norms of its creators as well as of the audience they were aimed at. The findings show four main ideologies embodied in the ads: the ideology of nationalism, the ideology of domesticity, that of Modernism and the ideology of science. In this article, the last two ideologies are presented, followed by analyzed examples of home-makers and mothers' representations in relation to domestic chores and to family members in the house. Throughout all ideologies, an ambivalent image of the woman is portrayed: a woman exclusively in charge of the household jobs, albeit lacking authority and power. We notice a repetitive representation of a mother responsible for the health of her children, who is asked to rely on an expert's advice, but not on her own intuition and experience.

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**Keywords:** advertisements, home-maker, representation, pre-state Israel, gender, semiotic analysis.

### Introduction

Zionism, as a national movement, strove to the modernization of the Jewish people in Eretz Israel by creating a new modern Jewish identity.<sup>2</sup> The process of modernization of Jewish women, within the new society, became an internal part of Zionist revolution.<sup>3</sup> This article will focus on aspects of Modernism as they were reflected in advertisements for domestic products. It is based on a comprehensive research of about one hundred and fifty ads, which appeared in dailies, in women's magazines and in manuals published over the three decades prior to the establishment of the state of Israel, in 1948.<sup>4</sup>

Advertisements featuring representations of home-maker and mother first appeared in the Hebrew press of the 1920s, and continued to develop widely along the decades. The ads will be analyzed with the assumption that extracting meanings and messages inherent in them is the key to understanding the world views prevalent in the Hebrew society in Eretz Israel (known as the *Yishuv*) both with their creators and with the target audience they were aimed to.<sup>5</sup> This premise is based on perceiving the ad as a text aiming for an effective communication with its audience, so as to maximize selling the product by referring to the ideologies then accepted as normative.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Bengio, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2004: 1.

<sup>4</sup> Manuals and articles featuring in this research study, prior to 1920s are scarce. 1948 serves as a chronological boundary of this research as it is considered by Hebrew culture researchers as ending the pre-state phase.

<sup>5</sup> Bartal, 2013: 137-147.

<sup>6</sup> Agam-Dali, 2010: 41.

Decoding these ideologies will be done through analyzing the ad text according to the theory of structuralism claiming that cultural meaning is to be found in cultural structures and the human consciousness conceiving these structures.<sup>7</sup> The period of the New Hebrew settlement in pre-state Israel, beginning with the first immigration to the establishment of Israel, is perceived in modern Jewish history as a time of local Hebrew culture crystallization.<sup>8</sup> The appearance of ads in the press and in popular literature reflected a process of cultural flowering, which was characterized by increasing population and rapid economic growth.<sup>9</sup> Immigration waves from central Europe in the 1930s had a crucial contribution to the development of economy, society, and culture.<sup>10</sup> The field of advertising marched along with industry and manufacturing, as suppliers of bourgeois consumerism culture, centering in Tel-Aviv.<sup>11</sup> At the end of the 1930s, there were twenty five advertising agents in Tel-Aviv with one focusing of film. In the 1940s, following World War II, many industrial plants were set up and thus the product and advertising market expended too.<sup>12</sup>

Until the 1920's Hebrew press ads lacked illustrations almost entirely and contained verbal text specifying the product's virtues.<sup>13</sup> Later in the 1920's the first illustrated ads emerged many of which featuring women's representations. Like the products, the ads too were imported and placed in the Hebrew press with their text translated into Hebrew. The decision to include these in this research corpus was based on the notion that they were verbally adapted for a Hebrew speaking readers albeit visually highly similar, and sometimes identical to the original ads. In addition, this decision was also based on the marketing principle by which ads embody the essence of accepted values of the society where they appear, so as to generate situations with which the target audience can easily identify.<sup>14</sup> It seems that the local advertising companies adopted the foreign ads since they considered them suitable for the Hebrew consumers.

In spite of the fact that this research focuses on representations, it is worthwhile to briefly dwell on the Hebrew Woman's condition in Eretz Israel, so as to shed light on the link between reality and its images as shaped in the ads.<sup>15</sup> During the Mandate period, the rate of immigrating women was similar to that of men.<sup>16</sup> Most of them settled in towns,<sup>17</sup> lived within traditional families, and were mainly homemakers.<sup>18</sup> Despite many women's aspirations to change life patterns and establish an equalitarian society, the work division within the Hebrew family remained the same and men's expectations were that women would carry on engaging in traditional "feminine" jobs.<sup>19</sup> Their disappointment led them to strive for a better involvement in the Yishuv's life both in the socialistic sector as agricultural workers<sup>20</sup> or as doing welfare educational medical and legal jobs in the civil society.

Women of the whole political range got together in order to improve their living conditions including fighting for a right to vote for the political institutions of the Yishuv which they fully won in 1926. Of all the women's organizations, I will only mention two major ones starting in 1920, whose influence was crucial:

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<sup>7</sup> Beeri, 2004: 57.

<sup>8</sup> Even-Zohar, 1980: 165-189; Ben-Porat, 1999:49.

<sup>9</sup> Between 1920 and 1948 the Yishuv increased tenfold and counted 650,000 people just before the establishment of the state of Israel. The two major immigration waves during the British Mandate were the fourth Aliya (1924-1926) and the fifth Aliya (1933-1936). The latter years significantly changed the image of the Hebrew Yishuv: The domestic product grew 2.5 times, the city of Tel-Aviv grew threefold hosting about 40% of all Jewish immigrants during that period. Helman, 2007: 11.

<sup>10</sup> Gelbar, 1990:385.

<sup>11</sup> Similar development occurred in advertising in Arab press within the country and also in neighboring Arab countries such as Egypt.

<sup>12</sup> Helman, 2007:23.

<sup>13</sup> Marnin-Distelfeld, 2012:306.

<sup>14</sup> Vestergaard and Schroder, 2004:398.

<sup>15</sup>As this article addresses representations namely the field of prescriptive images rather than the descriptive one, I will not expand on the life reality of women in the Hebrew Yishuv. This will only be discussed briefly.

<sup>16</sup> Alroey, 2010: 91.

<sup>17</sup> Ben-Porat, 1999:77.

<sup>18</sup> Bernstein, 1993: 92.

<sup>19</sup> Bernstein, 2001:116, 121; Shilo, 1992:120-123.

<sup>20</sup> Neumann, 2009: 16-18. For further reading on the battle for the right to vote see: Safran, 2006.

The council of Women Workers whose aim was to take care of women Histadrut members<sup>21</sup> and Hebrew Women's Organization which promoted women's status in Eretz Israel and engaged in philanthropic activity.<sup>22</sup> The latter together with Hadassah organization issued the women's magazine *Ha'Isha* during 1926 to 1929 through which feminine ideas were promoted, while the former issued *Dvar Hapoelet*, starting 1934, which served to express the opinions and experiences of Hebrew women workers thus deepening the connection between them and Hebrew culture as well as their general education and their feminist awareness.<sup>23</sup>

Another major issue regarding Yishuv women was the housewife's professional training and her status. In 1920, Hanna Maisel Shochat started a women's training project aiming to turn household and yard tasks into a profession.<sup>24</sup> Parallel to expanding women's options to acquire training and be incorporated as household workers both in villages and in towns, a new organization – Working Mothers in their Household Organization was founded in 1929, in the hope of equating housewives' status to that of women working outside their homes.<sup>25</sup> Hebrew housewives had to cope with distress and scarcity – small crowded apartments and poor household means. In which way did the advertisement for home products reflect the “real” condition of women in the Hebrew Yishuv? This question along with the major research one, concerning the ideologies underlying the advertisements will be responded in this article.

### Methodology

The ads researched have been collected from the three major Hebrew dailies of Mandate Palestine- *Davar*, *Haaretz* and *Hatzofe*, and from women's magazines and manuals published in Hebrew between 1920 and 1948. Choosing these three dailies stemmed from the wish to create an ideologically wide corpus: Each daily belonged to a different political stream: *Davar* – The socialistic sector, *Haaretz* – The liberal sector, and the *Hatzofe* – The religious Zionist sector. The dailies were systematically sampled - three months each year, so that a month reviewed in one year was not scanned the following year so as to create a reliable sample reflecting the seasons, holidays, political events, etc. As to women's magazines – all published during that period were fully reviewed so as to get a wide picture of addressing women from various sectors. Manuals included consisted both of major Yishuv institutions' publications and books published by private authors or commercial publishers. All manuals relevant to the household and woman's topic found in archives of those years were also reviewed. These include a written text and a visual image where the representation of the homemaker and/or mother is central or equivalent in significance to those of others - husband, child, friend or some object. The ads were classified into four major groups fitting the main issues dealt with: representations of the homemaker and the household; of the mother as a caretaker; of the woman as healthy and well-groomed and finally - representations of intimate body parts– sexuality, marriage, couplehood and fertility.

After categorizing the ads, a methodology was chosen combining content analysis focusing on semiotic theories and models following Roland Barthes's definition of the ad as a mini-narrative, a kind of a meaningful sign sequence.<sup>26</sup>

As such, the ad has three key points of the plot: <sup>27</sup> breaking of the balance thus creating instability, the protagonist fighting the forces of evil and resuming the balance by resolving the conflict.<sup>28</sup> The narrative ideology exists within the conflict of imbalance and its resolution, and through identifying the values involved in it.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Margalit-Stern, 2001:294-295.

<sup>22</sup> Diskin, 2011:65.

<sup>23</sup> Schechter, 2011:333-334.

<sup>24</sup> Carmel-Hakim, 2007:72.

<sup>25</sup> For further reading see: Margalit-Stern, 2006: 324-344.

<sup>26</sup> Barthes divides text analysis into syntagm which is a sign system and paradigm which is a system underlying the text which includes a corpus of our beliefs and conceptions as cultured creatures. Barthes, 2006: 71-72.

<sup>27</sup> Vladimir Propp created a model for narrative analysis. While analyzing one hundred Russian folk stories he found in them a repeated narrated structure containing 32 functions which he summarized into six: preparation, conflict, change, battle, returning and release. John Fiske argued this model could be executed for every cultural narrative. Fiske, 1990: 136-137.

<sup>28</sup> Fiske, 1990: 139.

<sup>29</sup> Todorov, 1977: 10-11.

The point of imbalance, the state of the "minus", will be fixed by a subject whose job is to reinstall order and reach a state of "plus". Based on these principles, Algirdas Julien Greimas developed his *Actant Model* which contains six agents: the sender, the object, the subject /hero, the antagonist/enemy, the assistant/friend and the recipient.<sup>30</sup> The actants are the elements functioning within the plot and can even be abstract concepts. The narrative plot is motivated by a sender, who appoints a hero who, in turn, through obtaining the object, is supposed to resume order. On his/her way, he/she will meet both helpers and opponents whom he/she will overcome until finally achieving the desired object. There are three axes at the basis of each narrative: the axis of desire – where the hero acts to achieve the object, the axis of power – where the helper and opponent act and finally the axis of knowledge – the one lying between the sender and the recipient.

At the paradigmatic level, two models will be used: The Greimas model and that of Claude Levi Strauss.<sup>31</sup> The latter suggested that there is a universal way of grasping the world by mapping existing values as a system of binary contrasts used as anxiety reducers.<sup>32</sup> Contrasting values will be juxtaposed along the narrative sequence where it is the reader/viewer's job to decode them in order to reveal the ideology underlying the text. Levi- Strauss defined the binary contrast – nature versus culture – as the basic contrast underlying every text.<sup>33</sup> Following him, John Fiske expanded the binary model to include metaphoric values conveying contrasting forces – order vs chaos, man vs woman, and good vs evil.<sup>34</sup>

The content analysis is based on a series of questions and indices formulated and inspired by Ervin Goffman, while studying ads from a gender-oriented point of view:<sup>35</sup>

1. The image of woman as a central figure (the heroin): Is this representation narrative-like or concise? Is the heroin active or passive? The woman's position: standing or seated? Where she is situated – near a table, on a chair, on the floor, in a bed.
2. Job division of man and woman: being displayed next to one another in the same scene, jobs done by the woman or by the man. The relationships among family members: how close is the woman to her children, to her husband? How is the relationship between husband and wife depicted regarding look, touch, etc.
3. Does the body appear whole or partial? Does the woman touch feminine objects or parts of her own body?
4. Interaction between spectator and woman: Does the woman look straight at the spectator or does not look at him/her all? Is she close/far from the spectator?
5. Visual image and written text:<sup>36</sup> in what way does the former illustrate the latter?<sup>37</sup>
6. The written text's format:<sup>38</sup> repetitive terms, the language of address, the manner of address (imperative or second person), the tone of the text (e.g. warning, threatening, etc).

## Discussion and Findings

This research is based on 150 representations centered on homemakers and mothers.<sup>39</sup> The foreign representations and the local ones share a similar image of the housewife as a well-groomed matron. The former show a more elaborately dressed woman in a dress and apron, high-hill shoes, sometimes with her face made-up. Compared to these, the local representations feature a simple image, drawn with little details only. Evidence of household realities, such as fatigue, dirt, or frustration, is shown in few examples alone.

<sup>30</sup> Vestergaard and Schroder, 2004: 414-415; Liebes and Talmon, 2004: 331; Hebert, 2006: 1-3; Mishkis-Haber, 2009: 29-30.

<sup>31</sup> Fiske, 1990: 138.

<sup>32</sup> Levi Strauss leaned on de-Saussure's theories as well as on Freud's dream theory while developing the theory of the binary contrasts. Mishkis-Haber, 2009: 28.

<sup>33</sup> Fiske, 1990: 116-117.

<sup>34</sup> Liebes and Talmon, 2004:333.

<sup>35</sup> For studies based on Goffman's parameters, see: First, 2001; Bell and Milic, 2002; Vestergaard and Schroder, 2004. I would like to stress that not all of Goffman's parameters were relevant to each ad.

<sup>36</sup> Martinec and Salway, 2005: 337-340.

<sup>37</sup> Barthes argues that visual images are an un-stable chain of signifiers, enables the viewer to choose some and ignore others. The aim of the written text is to establish the visual image within a category of meaning, and to lead the viewer to a "preferred reading" of the ad. Fiske, 1990: 110-111.

<sup>38</sup> Zeevi, 2010: 223-224.

<sup>39</sup> Marnin-Distelfeld, 2012: 51-52.

The gap between the ads and reality appears in the products themselves: electrical ovens and refrigerators, laundry powders and certain food products which were very rarely in use during the Mandate years. Most families could not afford them. The correlation between women's representations in the ads and women's condition in the Yishuv society is present in the complex and ambivalent attitude towards them within both worlds. Conflicting messages as to women's status and power conveyed by the ads echoed the way women were treated by the society of the Yishuv. The representations reveal four main Ideologies:<sup>40</sup> Nationalism (20%), Domesticity (20%), Modernism (30%) and the Ideology of science (30%). In this article, two of the four will be presented: The Ideology of Modernism and the Ideology of science.

### **The Modern Homemaker**

The pre-state Hebrew Yishuv saw the advent of new technology into the market of home appliances and products, which increased advertisements. Various values have been idealized: housework efficiency, improving its output compared to the past and liberating women from doing cumbersome house chores. Written and visual texts of the early 1930's stressed the use of stoves, ovens, and refrigerators and also engaged in instructing home-makers about their use.<sup>41</sup> In an ad for `Ultragas` (pic. 1) a stove is depicted connected to a gas container with steaming pots and kettles over it. A home-maker is peeping behind a door at the cooking taking place as if done by itself. The inscription reads, "She is content as `Ultragas` does the cooking for her", which is undoubtedly a rhetoric implying freeing the woman from the burden of cooking and assure her that the advanced technology will do the job for her. Conveying utopian values in ads is a common strategy.<sup>42</sup> By analyzing the ad according to the actantial model, the home-maker, the heroine, will obtain the desirable object, namely tasty dishes for her family prepared with the helper's aid which is `Ultragas` stove.

Reinstalling the order by the use of `Ultragas` indicates the imbalance, which prevailed when the woman cooked herself. Pre-technology home-making is portrayed then as a state of lack of happiness, uncleanliness and time wasting as implied by the side inscriptions. Like the home-maker, the viewer is also a little remote from the cookery scene and like her; she is peeking from another place at the kitchen. This remote viewing position helps illustrate the fact that the cooking is, indeed, carried out without the woman being present. Placing the gas tank where we would expect to find the home-maker adds to the desired illusion. However, the woman is both the subject in the narrative and the heroine, and thus her presence in the kitchen is rather firm though she is only peeking into it. Eventually it is obvious that not only is she freed from the whole job but also that it is up to her to decide whether and how she will let technology into her kitchen. It is to be noted that not only cooked dishes are in question but also a sign system signifying more abstract values; the large firm logo whose letters define the kitchen space which recurs on the gas tank enhances the brand's value.

The woman lets into her home a "best known product" which has already proven the best. The product is also "the cleanest" and finally "the fastest"; the fastness is implied through the opening of the door the peeking of the woman which contributes a sense of motion to the visual depiction; the well-groomed home-maker is already on her way elsewhere but the door serving as a symbol of movement and rapidity, also marks the middle zone. The door and woman are at the same position, in the middle; the homemaker may not be standing near the stove cooking but nor is she absent. As a peeping figure she is still in charge of the cooking territory and responsible for gaining a personal happiness as a guarantee for the domestic balance at her command.

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<sup>40</sup> The rough division is due to the fact that some representations match more than one ideology.

<sup>41</sup> Very few families could afford to buy electrical appliances and most advertisers were aware of this. Thus the high purchase and usage costs of these, led them to focus on the housewife's physical work's efficiency regardless of the appliances: "Facilitating household chores is not just a question of modern appliances. Some simple habits are no less important than many expensive instruments". See: *Proper Household Work*, 1937: 3-4; *To The Home-Maker*, 1937: 40-41.

<sup>42</sup> First, 2001: 26.



Pic. 1: ad for `Ultragas` from: *For the Homemaker* (1937), Tel-Aviv: Yair, 5.

The emphasis on relieving the physical aspect of housework appeared as a dominant element in laundry powder and soap ads. Doing the washing was considered one of the hardest and most hated chores and women who could afford it hired a laundry woman.<sup>43</sup> In a period when most home-makers used laundry soap, the ads tried to introduce laundry powders. In `Kessem` laundry powder ad (pic. 2) we again read a rhetoric advocating technology, effectiveness and ease; “`Kessem` powder is wonderful! Without any toil it does the washing by itself”. The ad features a young woman, elegantly dressed, wearing high-heel shoes sitting in an armchair reading. Next to her, there is the container where the washing takes place by itself. In a 1933 ad, the term “Women’s Liberation” appears as part of the logo where a young woman is wearing a dress, a scarf and a hat dancing on the beach. Here the advertiser took one-step forward, detaching the woman not only from the washing tank but also from the domestic space itself. This way, in addition to practical values (“your underwear will be as white as snow”), lose and win values (“saving time, toil and money”) and utopian values (“liberating women from the bother of doing the laundry”), new ludic values implying hedonism were added as well.<sup>44</sup> In addition to the name “Kessem”, Hebrew for “magic” which is very detached from the cumbersome washing, pleasure seeking is manifested through the thin and curved image of the woman eluding feminine figures of popular visual Western culture in the 1920s and 1930s especially the flapper. This figure embodied the new liberated woman in the post-World-War I period.<sup>45</sup> The flapper was an image of a thin young woman being in constant movement and unrelated to a home of family. She might have inspired the `Kessem` advertisers who emphasized the idea of women’s liberation and their pleasure finding potential as the way she is dressed and the beach where she is located amply a leisure activity, totally different from doing the washing.



Pic. 2: ad for `Kessem` laundry powder. Right: from *Haaretz* (30.4.1934), p. 5. Left: from *Haaretz*, (30.5.1933), p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> “Which house chore tires us the most? I think, that mostly – laundry”. *Proper Household Work*, 1937: 5.

<sup>44</sup> Similar to this ad, Floch also analyses furniture catalogues where he locates various types of values (pragmatic, economic, utopian and ludic) which he poses on the Greimas’s semiotic square. See: Floch, 2000: 121. For a comprehensive explanation for the semiotic square see: Greimas and Courtes, 1989: 570-571.

<sup>45</sup> Kitch, 2001: 129-131.

The `Kessem` ad is built as a continuing narrative, which was supposed to illustrate realistic daily episodes of a home-maker, thus enhancing the viewer's identification with the product. The viewer is led through a signification process where the advertised product turns into a manifestation of life style and values.<sup>46</sup> It seems that the final destination of this process is labeling the product with the proper identity so that the need of that identity will be replaced by the need of purchasing it. The laundry powder symbolizes effectiveness of modernity and of the household as a means for achieving personal bliss for the home-maker.

An additional element of modernity was the homemaker's young age in ads, where a middle-aged home-maker has often been excluded. The strong link between modernism, youth and physical vivaciousness, which characterized Zionism in general,<sup>47</sup> was consistently shown through the image of the Hebrew woman in ads. Domestic Taylorism, which also influenced the Eretz Israeli discourse, embodied contrasts related to the home-maker's figure, especially her body; she was required to work as a well-greased machine, efficiently and economically but at the same time had to hide her exhausted body behind a well-cared-for feminine look.<sup>48</sup> This dual rhetoric serves the author of the book *How to relieve the burden of household* instructing her women readers how they should function: "...the mechanism of a well-designed household has to operate in perfect quite just like a well-greased engine. It will be totally perfected only when your husband coming home in the evening will innocently ask you: `Tell me please, what indeed do you do in the course of a whole day?'"<sup>49</sup> The home-maker welcoming her husband after a workday should look as if she has never worked.

It is worth noting that whenever a home-maker is depicted in the domestic space, she is wearing an apron over her dress (or pants in fewer cases). Fiske claims that the apron in ads acts like a gender-related signal denoting femininity as dirt in the Western culture refers to what man produce and women clean up.<sup>50</sup> Cleaning the dirt should not soil the woman for according to femininity and masculinity perceptions, man can soil, as their looks do not guarantee their social status while with women any flaw in their looks bears a social meaning of harming their very femininity.<sup>51</sup>

The desirable Hebrew home-maker featuring in ads is a young one as only she is capable of adopting modern life style and homemaking as a progressing profession.<sup>52</sup> Only two examples with an older figure were found: In an `Ama` ad (pic. 3) we see the representations of an old laundry woman and a young woman; in the ad on the right an overweight lethargic older laundry. Compared to her the desirable laundry woman is young, thin, neatly dressed conceiving herself as a modern woman. She represents the Hebrew home-maker whose body embodies eternal youth and progress. Besides her physical description as an antithesis of the desirable laundry woman, the figure of the older one is humiliated by the large masculine hand touching her shoulder representing male authority (A `Shemen` chemist) and also metonymically the `sender` and finally, society itself. Doing the laundry is shown in a 1948 ad as "hard labor" and according to the actant model; this chore is the `protagonist` in establishing the plot. Another `opponent` here the conservative approach of the home-maker rubbing the clothes thus exhausting her body. The link between this hard effort and her old age and fatigue is clear. The `helpers` in advancing the narrative are `Kessem` and `Ama` which with a joined effort will lead the `heroine` to the `desired object`, namely clean laundry without physical effort. In directly, the desired values are the home-maker's fresh body and an effective washing. Numerous texts warn the home-maker not to become a slave in her own home. She is advised to avoid feeling victimized and draw satisfaction and happiness from doing the housework.

<sup>46</sup> Vestergaard and Schroder, 2004: 398.

<sup>47</sup> Heilbroner, 2010 : 46.

<sup>48</sup> Jewish writers whose origin was European and American, like Erna Meyer and Esther Rozov-Uzieli admitted they were influenced by the American Taylorism and brought its principles into their writing to Hebrew women. See: Marnin-Distelfeld, 2012: 98-99.

<sup>49</sup> Holdheim, 1943: 9.

<sup>50</sup> Fiske, 1990: 180.

<sup>51</sup> Fiske, 1990: 179.

<sup>52</sup> These findings resemble those of Scanlon in her research of the popular American Magazine *The Ladies Home Journal*: Her study shows that this women magazine, too, naturally equated the home-maker with a young woman. See Scanlon, 1995: 57-58.

A 1947 `Ama` ad (pic. 3 in the middle) reveals that this job can be both efficient, easy and economical compared to the depiction of the washing done by the older tired woman. The home-maker who has not yet tried the new detergent is described as one who does not "follow modernity". The text uses a pattern called by Vestergaard and Schroder "a gossip ad" in a negative way. The author's question implies that the woman has been blamed by other women, for not "being modern". She herself forwards the question to the viewer and her reply connects to the ad text to enhance the effect, appearing as an explanation at the bottom reproaching the woman for not having used `Ama`. This ad is in line with the actant model: the woman is the `heroine` for which purchasing will obtain the `desired object` containing several values: modernity ("zeitgeist"), efficiency, frugality and product longevity. These are the values which the `sender` (the advertiser, the company) intends to convey to the `recipient` (the potential buyer). The `helper` or the friend are embodied in Ama itself through which the dirty laundry – the `opponents` are naturalized.

And who among the women does the actual washing? In a 1948 ad the older woman does. In a 1947 ad the asking woman's figure is merged with another feminine representation, that of Ama herself, her `helper`, who has been personified in so many `Shemen` ads. The term `Ama` in the Bible, stands for a Hebrew female slave, who, unlike her foreign counterpart, had some basic rights. We can only assume that the advertisers picking that name for their product were aware of this denotation. `Ama`s` figure representation, ridiculously exaggerated, totally contradicts that of the old overweight older woman. Ama's figure, which was a local graphic creation of `Shemen` is worth noting; it was central and dominant in `Shemen` ads in the Hebrew press of the 1940s and lasted for about three decades. In the actant model this figure can be position as both `a heroin` and a `helper`. In an ad taken from the Witzo book we read "you will cook tasty dishes, `Ama` will clean the dishes" to illustrate the relationship the home-maker and her helper. The dirty dishes are the `opponent`, the advertiser is the `sender` and the viewer is the `recipient`. The `object` to be achieved is clean dishes, a clean home or clean laundry and indirectly also a household using advanced, efficient and economical cleaning detergents.



Pic. 3: ad for `Ama`. Right: from *Davar* (18.2.1948), p. 3. Middle: from *Davar* (15.8.1947), p. 7. Left: from: *Wizo* (1948). *Cook Book*, Tel Aviv: Massadah, 121.

The `Ama` figure design represents not only the modern home-maker using a modern product but also the gap between the desirable image and the available one; it seems that the advertiser was aware of the fact that the long the western rhetoric of a liberating technology and a modern household reality was very different. Most home-makers were still busy doing the cumbersome housework. The `Ama` image borrowed its outer features from those of western home-makers in ads of that time (pic. 3, left): made up face, well-kept hair-do, a dress, an apron, high-heeled shoes. These characteristics were exaggerated and made the `Ama` figure look like a caricature: a large head, smeared make up and a too large ribbon reminding that of Disney's Mini-mouse, and a very short dress showing the legs. `Ama` makes the young home-maker looks ridicules as `being young` is linked with `being childish` and fantasy. Goffman claims that very often feminine representations were `childlike`.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Goffman, 1979: 48.



This childlike characteristic was manifested through shy facial expressions, playful positions and distorted physical behavior, bordering with buffoonery.<sup>54</sup> All these exist in the `Ama` figure, thus contributing to the inferior status of the Hebrew home-maker. `Ama` is the young modern home-maker trying very hard to look like the well-groomed lady of the house, but the dirty chores which she does render her efforts in a mocking tone. In this way, using the `Ama` caricature to ridicule home-makers in general and lessen her value in the eyes of those watching her. Her figure exposes an internal paradox: she is both an elegant lady and a cleaning one, and she is both young but also exhausted.

### The Scientific Homemaker and Mother

Preserving the family health was the main task of the Hebrew Home-maker and mother. Alongside stressing the link between Hebrew nationality and a properly managed household, an ideology of science capable of achieving personal health – both physical and mental, strength and vigor, a peaceful sleep and relaxed nerves, was also stressed. What was called “the theory of nutrition” was preached throughout homemaking sections as well as the pages of manuals.<sup>55</sup> Stoller-liss notes the internal contradiction seen in texts dealing with nutrition issues during this period: “physicians and experts reprimanded vitamin-freak mothers and at the same time bombarded them with complex and detail demands for supplying these vitamins themselves”.<sup>56</sup>

Mothers were called on to get an education and knowledge in the field of nutrition but were also accused of over feeding their children.<sup>57</sup> Proper nutrition lay on the assumption that “scientific food” is the proper one and this ideology played a leading role in ads while stressing that current and future historical change is progressive and scientific development is the ultimate way of understanding and controlling nature.<sup>58</sup> The ads glorified science, which was automatically linked to the male world and women’s inferiority for lacking scientific knowledge to lean on. Women were required to learn “the latest scientific conclusions” from an external authority and to avoid relying on their own feelings or on “her neighbor’s advice”. The scientific ideology was embodied by description accentuated division of sphere – the private and the public one, just like the `Blueband` ad (pic. 4) taken from a manual published in German.<sup>59</sup>

While the woman wearing a dress and apron is depicted in a mundane moment of making food (stirring something, not looking at the viewer with an oblique unrepresentative composition) the male scientist is seriously engaged in writing the formula for margarine (wearing glasses and a white robe with his instruments next to him facing the viewer frontally). The text accompanied the illustration emphasizes the different occupations belonging to two distinct spheres: the uses of margarine (“Cooking, Baking and frying”) appear next to the homemaker image while its scientific nutritious values (“rich in vitamins”) appear next to the chemist. This ad strongly expresses the scientific ideology, which put the male mental world at the top far above the practical feminine world.



Pic. 4: ad for `Blueband`, from: Meyer, E. (1934). *Kuchenzettel in Krisenzeiten*, Tel-Aviv, 34-35.

<sup>54</sup> Goffman, 1979: 50.

<sup>55</sup> Malka Sapir defines what appropriate feeding is according to nutritional science principles. The first – the high value of food, the second – easy digestion, the third – food that looks and tastes good, the fourth – diversity of food, and the last one – good food for a reasonable price. Sapir, 1931: 4.

<sup>56</sup> Stoller-Liss, 1998: 55.

<sup>57</sup> Mol, 1934: 93-94.

<sup>58</sup> Fiske, 1990: 170.

<sup>59</sup> In the Yishuv period various books were published in German for the German immigrants. Ofek, 2012: 19. The decision to relate to this ad in the research corpus derives from its identical representation in Hebrew sources as well, translated into Hebrew. Such representations as depicted in this ad resemble others in other ads, thus serve as a representative example. Similar images see in: a Blueband ad (*Hazofe*, 4.6.1944), p. 3.

Feminine consumerism was displayed negatively in ads, which created weak and humiliated representations.<sup>60</sup> Ervin Goffman defines a few criteria by which he establishes a gender-oriented reading of ads. One of them is defined as "Permitted withdrawal".<sup>61</sup> This means women depicted in situations of fear, panic or embarrassment, which demand putting an end to these unpleasant situations. In an Australian butter ad, marketed in the Hebrew Yishuv as 'Manna' (pic. 5) we witness a home-maker about to jump off a cliff into the sea, blind-folded with her hands probing towards the unknown. Surprisingly the written text addresses a man with a rhetoric question, "Would you do the same? Would you buy butter blind-folded?" The advertiser, the sender, poses here the man as a hero with a woman as an opponent.

The woman is described here as expropriated from the concrete context of shopping and is likened to a person about to commit suicide. Here the advertiser did not allow her to reinstall order by doing the "right kind of shopping". He appropriated the course of "right shopping" to a man thus annihilating the woman's ability to do so. Buying the butter is shown as a matter of safety ("butter wrapped for safety") and safety is a masculine issue. The word "wrapped" which appears twice in this text, as well as in other ads, implies the phenomenon of selling products in fabricated packages in markets and shops, to which the advertisers were strongly opposed.

The strategy of addressing the man as the buyer of the butter, while using an extreme visual depiction of a suicidal woman, sharply contrasts the binary poles underlying the ad: woman versus man, irrationality versus rationality, disastrous behavior versus responsibility.<sup>62</sup> These contrasts were based on a classical distinction, which perceived mind and emotion as two separate systems representing contradicting values.



Pic. 5: ad for 'Mana' butter, *Haaretz* (13.1.1935) and *Davar* (13.1.1935).

In a 'Glaxo' ad the physician's authoritative figure is facing an audience of young mothers holding their babies (pic. 6). Goffman notes that in the patriarchal Western world we are used to identifying men as professionals, a source of authority and as guide to women and therefore most ads use this relationship to convey this message effectively.<sup>63</sup> According to the actant model in this ad the mothers are the heroes while the physician is the 'helper'.

The 'Glaxo' drink is another 'helper' and the 'object to be achieved' are healthy babies. The 'opponents' are the diseased inducing microbes, the sick babies and the fear for their lives. Despite the fact that the mothers are many and the physician is single, he is depicted as knowledgeable compared to them as a preacher standing on a podium.

<sup>60</sup> McHugh's research on American manuals of the period between the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries reveals an ambivalent attitude toward housewives. She shows how the field of house-engineering elevated home-making to an academic profession on the one hand but made it dependent on experts' external professional knowledge on the other. This dependency created an under estimation and erosion of the traditional domesticity cult and of the domestic housewife intensively controlling her tasks without relying on any external knowledge. McHugh, 1999: 64.

<sup>61</sup> First, 2001: 28.

<sup>62</sup> Lemish, 2003: 16.

<sup>63</sup> Goffman, 1979: 15.

The atmosphere of threat is enhanced by the text referring to the mothers with an exclamation mark noting that this beverage has saved many babies. The word “saved” causes fear, which is, reflected in the silent mothers’ faces. The physician figure reminds us of ancient art philosophers – reverently large, elderly bearded, wearing a black coat. Decoding the `Glaxo` ad narrative reveals the ideological access on which the figures operate: the axis of medicalization (scientific knowledge).

This trend, prevalent in medical contexts of the caretaking mothers and her own health, expressed social power relationship in pre-state Israel according to which women were structured as dependent on the established medical authorities. Dafna Hirsch in her study on the medicalization of motherhood shows how the pre-state institutions structured the “adequate mother” on the basis on Western modern concepts and beliefs while stressing primitiveness of oriental mothers.<sup>64</sup> Hirsch discusses the issue of the cultural structuring of the `Hygienic project` which included oriental Jews and Arabs as marginal groups representing the opposite of the desired ideal. These groups did not get to be represented in Hebrew sources ads at all. This fact is culturally significant as reading visual texts as cultural sign systems reveal that these populations in the context of the Hebrew woman on the domestic space were not signified at all. Liebes and Talmon note that the ad must “take the safe side” in convincing the viewer to purchase a specific product by using central values of a society which are in a large consensus.<sup>65</sup>

The discourse used various strategies, which acted in determining a hierarchy between the medical institution and the ignorant mother. Intimidation was one of them and it was manifested by undermining the woman of her abilities and by attempting to convince her to always trust science. Medicalization acted as a knowledge-power agent<sup>66</sup> (conscious or un-conscious) in order to subject women to the male authority, in this case the medical one. Fiske claims, following Barthes, that scientific ideology was initially linked with patriarchal society and capitalism and was intended to serve the latter’s needs.<sup>67</sup>



**Pic. 6:** ad for `Glaxo` from *Haaretz*, (20.6.1927), p. 4.

<sup>64</sup> On the medicalization of mothers in the Yishuv, see: Hirsch, 2011: 106-139.

<sup>65</sup> Liebes and Talmon, 2004: 318.

<sup>66</sup> I am using Michel Foucault’s term while analyzing discourse on sexuality in Western society. He claims that the structure of knowledge-power mediated sexuality for the society as a dictated system. Foucault, 1996: 12-28.

<sup>67</sup> Fiske, 1990: 172.

## Conclusion

Gender meanings of women's representations in domestic products ads of that time, were based on four ideologies which were very often intertwined: the national, domestic, modern and scientific ones. Analyzing the combined content by semiotic tools helped decode these meanings which were embodied in the visual text itself and in the combination between this text and the verbal one in advertisements. In this article only the two latter were discussed. The ideology of modernity joined forces with the national and the domestic ones thus creating an image of a technology oriented homemaker trusting it to improve her life quality and liberate her from the hard work. As part of this modern rhetoric all homemakers were depicted as young ladies marching along the spirit of time with their femininity emphasized through mad-up faces, slim figures, dresses and high-heeled shoes. `Ama's caricature figure took this modern rhetoric to the extreme with the advertisers wishing it to assimilate with the working homemaker's image. The scientific ideology also lay at the ground of structuring the homemaker and mother's representation stressing the gap between the two distinct spheres, women's ignorance compared the male scientific authority. A chemist or physician was confronted by feminine representations requiring them to learn and to rely on scientific knowledge while cooking, cleaning, and caring for children.

The ideal Hebrew home-maker image was always described as ambivalent; on the one hand, advertisers assigned women with the responsibility for managing the domestic space properly, and portrayed them as dominant in the domestic space.

- [1] While on the other hand, they were denied both the authority and the capability to appropriately carry out their tasks. The woman's figure remained fragile and indecisive and at times even scorned and humiliated compared to male images – husband, cook, shopkeeper, chemist or physician. This ambivalence reflected a similar attitude towards women within society: Hebrew women in the Yishuv have not gained equality and were forced to struggle for their status. The ads adopted and followed a conservative approach, which reinforced gender boundaries. This paper therefore, aims at a systematic study of contemporary rhetoric and understanding the way in which women's representations were trendily used for expressing and spreading those ideologies held by the social cultural economic leadership in pre-state Israel.

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