

Kibbutz Mothering in Transition

Bringing the Children Home

My generation of mothers on Kibbutz Hazorea is in the unique situation of having mothered in two contexts: the “normal” way and the kibbutz way, which involved communal sleeping arrangements for children. This system lasted until the 1991 Gulf War when the children moved home, leading to the de-facto end of collective education for kibbutz children. I investigate how the role of “mother” evolved in this transition from communal childrearing to full-parental responsibility as well as how the mothers felt about the transition. I also address what effect, if any, their own upbringing had on their experiences. I interviewed kibbutz mothers raised in communal education; kibbutz mothers who joined the kibbutz as adults; and a subgroup of women who worked as childcare givers (metaplot). Investigating the experience of mothering on kibbutz in its transition from collective childrearing to the traditional framework of the nuclear family can illuminate alternative perspectives of this unique kibbutz experience, focusing on whether and/or how the kibbutz prescription of mothering defined “mother” for the women who lived it.

More than three decades ago, I became a member of a secular kibbutz whose founders supported kibbutz ideology, which comprised childrearing theories of collective or communal education, including sleeping arrangements; thus, two of my four children were raised from infancy in the kibbutz “children’s house” rather than at our home. This means that they *lived* in the children’s house and *visited* our home.

My philosophy was that of a “modern woman” coming of age in the 1970s, taking the necessity for gender equality to be a given. At the time, the kibbutz seemed to be a living utopian example of the expression of true gender equality. Indeed, the kibbutz is regarded as one of the few “utopian experiments that

successfully established a radically different way of living and raising children for a period of 80-90 years” (Aviezer et al., “Balancing the Family” 436; Agassi 161). Children were raised by professional childcare workers (called *metaplot* in Hebrew; singular *metapelet*), which would mean the best of both worlds for mothers and children alike. There would be no conflict about being a working mother—a conflict in mothering identity that the kibbutz founders recognized in the 1930s and continues to flourish¹ (Mayer 212; Thurer; Walkerdine and Lucey); mothers were expected to work in the kibbutz lifestyle. Although the idea of gender equality on the kibbutz was included in its founding creed—a collective society whose members lived in complete equality—from its early days that equality precluded feminine tasks from inclusion in the collective productive work, and it was understood that women needed to take on the traditional kitchen and childrearing duties. Only women who worked in agriculture (the mainstay of kibbutz work in its early days) were appreciated, and although theoretically women were allowed to work in whatever spheres men did, very few women did so, and even fewer men worked in areas more suited to women, and when they did, it was considered temporary (Gershon 33-34). I was too ignorant of both language and culture at the time to understand that the very name of the childcare workers hinted that the “equality of the sexes” was more equal for men than for women; Hebrew is a gendered language and *metapelet* is a feminine word.

I embraced the unusual, unique, and extreme practice of collective childrearing for a number of reasons, despite misgivings expressed by my mother and sister, who was already a mother herself. Before I became a mother, I was attracted to the freedom the kibbutz promised me, unaware of what could—and would—change in my priorities after I gave birth. I didn’t understand that the kibbutz educational philosophy and lifestyle essentially co-opted my parental rights. The children’s houses functioned as the children’s home: children spent most of their time there. It was where they slept and played, and were bathed, fed, toilet trained, and basically raised in compliance with the kibbutz philosophy that all children were the kibbutz’s children. The parents’ role was freed from the domestic labour of cleaning, cooking and other accepted childrearing chores related to their care, allowing them to spend pure quality time with their children, which seemed desirable. Although I worked in children’s houses for some time, I did not reflect deeply on the implications—which, in fact, conveyed a basic distrust of the ability of parents to parent and viewed the family unit as competition with the kibbutz as a social entity. I had agreed to become a member of the kibbutz, a ceremonial and legal process—members share in all the kibbutz resources and the kibbutz is a unique legal entity in Israel—that inhaled I agreed to live according to the kibbutz rules. And perhaps most significantly, I was not yet a mother.

In order to gain insights through narrating these experiences, for myself and others, I wanted to better understand the historical and theoretical foundations for the kibbutz communal education system and share personal mothering narratives within that system—from the perspectives of those who were raised on the kibbutz pre-1991 and those, like myself, not born into this unique sociological, historical, educational, and cultural environment.

The overall objective of this study is to explore the lived experiences of mothers who raised their children in both the communal education system once prevalent in kibbutzim, in which children slept in children's houses rather than their parents' homes, and after the 1991 Gulf War² when their children moved to live in the parents' home. My aim is to understand whether and how the location of their children's sleeping affected these women's sense of their identities as mothers, including how they felt about their mothering experiences "before" and "after." Furthermore, I assumed that if a mother was herself raised in the environment of collective sleeping arrangements, she would find the same circumstances more amenable to her view of what it meant to be a mother. And of course I was interested in discovering whether my own recollections and feelings of mothering in the kibbutz communal framework were shared, which resurfaced as I became a grandmother. An additional goal of this study is the expansion of understanding of the long-term implications of this unique childrearing arrangement for mothers and their relationships with their children.

Investigating the experience of mothering on kibbutz in its transition from collective childrearing to the traditional framework of the nuclear family can illuminate alternative perspectives of this unique kibbutz experience, and can focus on whether and/or how the kibbutz prescription of mothering defined "mother" for the women who lived it.

Description of the Research Methodology

Research in mothering experiences lends itself to a multidisciplinary approach as motherhood can be viewed from a variety of perspectives—including sociological, psychological, and historical—and, as such, is especially suited to narrative inquiry. Furthermore, the inherently personal and unique character of mothering, despite its universality, begs a theoretical approach that can accommodate its complexity, which phenomenological and narrative inquiry can provide. Thus, I employed qualitative phenomenological and narrative inquiry methods as I investigated how women identified themselves as mothers within the shifting landscape of their lives before and after 1991. In my attempt to discover if and in what way the transition from collective to home sleeping shaped mothers' views of their mother identity—and /or the kibbutz

childrearing framework—I prepared a questionnaire covering the following questions for inquiry:

- How did the role of “mother” evolve in this transition from communal childrearing to full parental responsibility?
- How did mothers feel about the transition?
- How was the role of the caregiver perceived by both mothers and the caregivers themselves in the collective educational system?
- Did the transition from communal childrearing to full parental responsibility affect the caregiver’s role, and if so, how?
- What effect, if any, did the mothers’ own upbringing have on their experiences?
- How might these experiences be used to improve the present kibbutz daycare childrearing framework?

I approached a number of female kibbutz members—who, like me, had raised young children in both kibbutz educational frameworks in the years before and after the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1991—about their willingness to share their mothering experiences with me. They comprised the following:

Five kibbutz women raised in communal education.

Five kibbutz women who joined the kibbutz as adults.

A subgroup of five women among the above who worked as a metaplot; only one was not raised on kibbutz.³

In-depth interviews of mothering experiences “before” and “after” 1991 were conducted in the frame of an informal chat in the location the mother preferred: usually her home or mine.

First, background questions were asked to solicit data about the women’s families as well as about how they perceived motherhood before and after giving birth. Then, personal narratives prompted by open-ended questions were asked of all participants. For those women who were also caregivers professionally, I asked them to consider their role before and after the children moved home, and if their work in childcare affected their own mother identity.

All the interviews were recorded with the participants’ consent and then transcribed verbatim. The interviews that were conducted in Hebrew were also professionally translated into English. The transcribed interviews were categorized first according to the mother’s upbringing (raised collectively on kibbutz or in their parents’ home) and then by identifying the subgroup of mothers who worked as caregivers at the time of the transition in children’s sleeping arrangements with all its attending changes in childcare routines.

The transcriptions were then reviewed to identify recurring themes that arose in the interviews, and these were identified in order to summarize core themes, motifs, and patterns that appeared. In order to contextualize the mother stories some background is useful here.

Historical Background

Kibbutzim in general were founded by idealistic young people who believed in “the justice of economic collectivism and social equality” (Van Ijendoorn 5) and were rebelling against the dominant culture in the ways of their parents, mainly Eastern European Jews. The guiding principle for this new society was Marxian: “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.”

My kibbutz was founded by members of a German Jewish youth movement, young socialist-oriented liberals who originally sought to find a new alternative to their life in Germany. However, with the rise of the Nazis to power in the winter of 1933, the movement began to prepare to establish a kibbutz in Israel; for many, this meant leaving academic or professional studies to take up agricultural training for their new and very different life as pioneers. In early 1934, the first members arrived and they lived in harsh, primitive conditions in tents while they built their settlement, which was in swampy terrain empty of vegetation. The original group of about eighty suffered from the harsh climate, typhoid, malaria and violence; in this context, the decision to raise children collectively included concern for their health, safety, and protection as well as the belief that this system would protect children from the traumas that accompanied life with tyrannical fathers and hysterical mothers, and other parental shortcomings in general (“Kibbutz Hazorea”). Indeed, one of the founding female members referred disparagingly to the family environment as “pampering.” But the guiding principle was an awareness of the role of childrearing in furthering the goals of the collective by discouraging individualism, abolishing inequalities between the sexes, and bringing up a person who was better socialized to communal life (Gerson 7). The kibbutz would be the child’s “extended family,” children would not be dependent emotionally or economically on their parents as “the socialization and control of the children [is not] a prerogative of the family” (Rabin 8). This was a manifestation of the founding philosophy that sought liberation for women and children alike.

My husband was born and raised in this environment, which was child-centered in every sense of the word, but not to the exclusion of parental needs and rights, but it certainly marginalized them. From the day they were born, children lived in peer groups in houses suited to their needs both physically and psychologically—infant, toddler, kindergarten, grade school, and high

school. By the time our daughter was born in 1981, some of the childrearing restrictions had been relaxed or abandoned altogether, but our children did not call our apartment “home.” It was the “parents’ home.” There was no need for the children to have a bedroom in our home; they came to visit us from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. They moved into the “baby house” after three months, and mothers continued to get their children up in the mornings until they were eighteen months old. In the mid-1980s, the baby’s living time at home was extended to six months, and that was the standard until 1991, when the Gulf War broke out and suddenly, and at once, the children all moved home.² Those arrangements are part of the dramatic changes in the communal system that I and the mothers interviewed for this study lived through.

Pre-1991 Communal Education Norms

When I joined the kibbutz in 1979, babies were allowed to be at home with their mothers for the first six weeks—the length of national maternity leave, and a decision that had been taken by the kibbutz assembly in 1976. Prior to 1976, babies lived in the infant houses from the day they came home from the hospital and mothers were restricted in their visiting times. They freely came to feed the babies, change them, play with them, and bathe them during the first six weeks, but they were not allowed to take them anywhere without special permission. Mothers tell stories of parents and older siblings spending all afternoon in the infant house because the weather was too inclement to take the baby out. A strict feeding schedule was gradually introduced after those first six weeks, and mothers, who had gone back to work part time, were no longer allowed to come in whenever they wished. My sister-in-law remembers standing outside the baby house and listening to her first-born son cry from hunger, but she was unable to go in until feeding time arrived. She cried along with him. These stories shocked me, and I could not (I still cannot) imagine what that must have felt like for a young mother and how anyone could have thought that was good for the baby. Then my mother told me she regulated herself with my older brother’s feedings; this was the prevailing belief in the 1950s, when Dr. Spock made mothers feel they could spoil their babies by feeding them on demand. These stories speak directly to a deeply rooted modern concern about being a good mother. New mothers feel inadequate, overwhelmed, uncertain, and worried about how their behaviour may damage their children. As one psychologist put it, in the modern world, “parental anxiety reigns” (Thurer 331). Influenced by these stories, when I became a mother, I was relieved and even delighted to know I would have mature, experienced support from my baby’s metapelet as a new mother. My own mother was halfway around the world from me.

Selected Findings

During the interviews with the mothers, I discovered that the descriptions and perceptions of their mother experiences in the two dichotomous experiences of mothering (collective and familial) were coloured by the level of their initial acceptance of the communal sleeping for children. Unsurprisingly, for mothers who believed in the system before and after giving birth, the positive aspects took prominence over the negative. Furthermore, and in contradiction to my assumptions, women who joined the kibbutz as adults were more accepting of the system than mothers raised on the kibbutz. Just as I had, those women appreciated professional support from experienced caregivers in the absence of their own mothers. In addition, they had made the conscious decision to accept the status quo when they applied to join the kibbutz. Women who were raised in the kibbutz did not necessarily make any conscious decisions in that regard.

Of the ten mothers interviewed, five had eagerly looked forward to becoming mothers, three of whom grew up in children's houses. The others had not been particularly excited or simply had not thought about it. Four women held explicitly positive perceptions of the collective sleeping arrangements before giving birth, but only one had been raised that way; none changed their mind after their babies were born. When asked about her feelings regarding the collective sleeping arrangements before and after giving birth, B, who joined the kibbutz as an adult, responded in a way representative of other mothers of her background who were supportive of the system: "I especially enjoyed the professionalism of the care-givers ... because after all I didn't have my mother near me." The kibbutz-born mother cited kibbutz ideology, specifically: "children grow up knowing that they are responsible to help other children." The pleasure of being a parent without the need to be an enforcer of rules and having true quality time with the children was one point a majority of the mothers cited as a benefit of the system. Another was the caregivers, whom the mothers trusted. This trust came from the ways in which the metaplot characterized their work: "I was half a mother"; "I was motherly." The following comment by M is characteristic of the professional metaplot I interviewed: "I felt those children were mine. I loved them dearly. I was really attached to them, and there are those to whom I'm attached even today."

The Caregiver

The role of the metapelet in the children's lives was an auxiliary yet core component of the collective system. Children spent more time with their metapelet than their parents, whose time with children was designated to the hours

from after school and work until bedtime. Regarding whether these “mother substitutes” viewed their roles differently after children moved home to sleep, and whether that perception was compatible with that of the mothers of the children in their care, I quote A, who is also certified kindergarten teacher: “I realized that I had to be more of an educator and less of a mother.”

These recollections reflect the complexity and potential conflict inherent in the system. The mothers never doubted their mother identity, yet they did not do the work of mothering (I will address this discord shortly); that work was done by the metaplot, who consistently used a variant of “mother” to describe their relationships with their charges as mentioned earlier. Yet they were always aware that they were not, in fact, those children’s mother.

Not all the women who had joined the kibbutz as adults were happy with the status quo, but mothers raised on the kibbutz tended to be less forgiving and as a result seemed to suffer more. M described her feelings thus: “It was extremely hard for me to bring my children to the children’s house [to sleep] and I wasn’t ‘okay’ with that for a single moment,” despite her spontaneous comment during our conversation that “I had a lot of fun in the collective education format in which I grew up, and we had a wonderful social life, and lots of activities.”

I know that I trusted the metaplot—who were recognized by all as the authority on the babies in their care and certainly had more experience than I did in taking care of babies—as well as the women who did night guarding. Night guarding was an annual duty all the kibbutz women shared, comprising a week spent awake from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m., in a central office, doing hourly rounds to check on all the children. The children’s houses were equipped with intercoms, so if a baby cried or a child called out, the guards could hear them.

I knew how responsible I was when I was guarding, and I trusted everyone else was as committed. After all, their children, too, were watched over by others during the night.

From the perspective of mothering theory, because the metaplot did the work of mothering—feeding, bathing, dressing, toilet training infants, and getting the children up in the morning and putting them to bed at night—this afforded them a de-facto “mother” identity, which they acknowledged in their choice of terminology when describing their role in the lives of the children in their care. Mothers instinctively recognized this dissonance. B, who was not a caregiver, indicated that she became more assertive as a mother after the children moved home to sleep because “the child was legitimately recognized as the parent’s child, and not partly the metapelet’s child.” But J, who

was happy with the communal sleeping arrangements, declared emphatically: “There are no children who are similar in any way to their care workers. They resemble their parents.”

Coping with Cognitive Dissonance

Many mothers, however, felt a need to find ways to assert their identity as their child’s mother and to subvert in subtle ways the kibbutz proprietorship over their children. This was inclined to occur in unfortunately negative contexts and culminated in the transition to home sleeping as a direct result of the Gulf War, which created paradoxical feelings about the context of the children moving home. B’s comment was repeated by others in some form or another when discussing how they felt when the children moved home: “It was only because [of the war] which for me was a blessing in disguise ... and you know, I had to feel bad about the people who suffered and the people who died, yet for me it was bliss.”

In fact, before the transition, some mothers found themselves taking guilty pleasure in their children’s injuries and illnesses, as A recalled in the following statement:

My oldest daughter was at home for three months after she broke her leg at fourteen months, because they felt the night guard would not be able to handle a baby in a cast. And I was only happy; I wasn’t happy that she had broken her leg, but I was very happy that I had a reason to keep her at home. I was delighted, and I kept thinking, you know, if she hadn’t broken her leg then she wouldn’t have been at home. I knew that.

Others were reduced to exaggerating their child’s health issues. G recalled that “for any excuse whatsoever, I took them home. Even when they weren’t really ill I took them home.” Another mother lied to her toddler after she began keeping her older son at home. The family all went together to the children’s house at bedtime, and the toddler was led to believe that the parents were then taking his brother to the kindergarten, when, in fact, they took him home to sleep. And the five-year-old knew he was not allowed to talk about where he slept. This mother declared, “We had to hide the truth”—for the sake of the child she felt needed to sleep at home.

These seem to be coping acts on the part of mothers who found the demands of the system untenable, but felt they had no legitimate recourse. The official message was “If you want your children at home, you can leave the kibbutz.” Often these mothers had acquiesced to their husband’s preferences and unambiguous belief that the system was best for the children. Some said

directly “I blame him.” Repeatedly, mothers were unable to explain their compliance to a system that caused them such distress during the interview. As for me, thinking about this time in my life, I am often overcome by feelings of guilt and sadness. How could I have left my babies to sleep somewhere other than with me? How did I agree to raise my children in an environment that severely curtailed my contact with them? Simply put, everyone raised their children that way; it was the custom, the way of our world. At that time and in that environment, being a good mother meant mothering according to the kibbutz expectations.

My husband and I were lucky in that our children were good sleepers, and we were seldom contacted in the middle of the night (by walkie-talkie before 1984, then by telephone installed in members’ homes) because our child had woken but could not be comforted. When I came in the morning, I rarely read in the guard log that they had awakened. I have a story to console myself: I always told the guard to call me if any of our children woke up, no matter when or why. This comforts me when I read research about children raised communally that concludes in the following way:

The quality of night care in the infant house has been poor because it has most often been provided by strangers who can offer only a precarious sense of security to the infants. On the other hand, maternal compensation is not very likely, because even sensitive parents may not feel an urgency to compensate for their absence during the night in a situation in which routinely implemented separations are the norm for all of the children in the community. (Aviezer, “Children of the Dream” 99)

Instinctively I had created an environment in which to be a “good mother” to my children as I defined it to myself without having to lie or take pleasure in their ill health.

Caregivers who opposed the communal sleeping system had an additional level of conflict with which to cope. All the caregivers mentioned the tension created by the need to “cast aside” their own children at bedtime in the children’s house, as they rushed away to fulfill their bedtime responsibilities in the group where they worked.

Insights Gleaned

In whatever way the mothers valued (or devalued) the communal sleeping on kibbutz, none of the women I interviewed believes today that her relationships with her children suffered.⁴ They expressed that faith in various ways, in response

to the question that asked them to consider their mother identity before and after the children moved home to sleep. This comment by J is indicative of all the responses: “I just think as a mother, I love my three kids and I love them all equally, and I love them in different ways because they are very different kids, and I don’t feel in any way that I’m a different mother or that I have a different connection with them because my daughter slept in the children’s house for three years and the boys didn’t. Not at all. Not at all.”

And S commented, “I think to a large extent I even have more than if I had brought them up alone, it was a richer background.... I think I was a smart mother that I stayed and didn’t leave.”

Some women found it difficult to address the questions I asked, particularly in how they viewed themselves as mothers. V confessed: “I try not to think about it too much.... I feel that everybody has lost out here, but I don’t think about it.” There may seem to be a subtle level of denial in a response that several mothers gave, that “nothing was different” for them as how they mothered between the time they raised their children in the collective system and the time they raised them at home. Such comments, however, affirm a strong core mother identity, despite circumstances that, in effect, required women to abdicate their maternal rights, and certainly were different.

Of the ten women interviewed, four held explicitly positive perceptions of the collective sleeping arrangements before giving birth. The others were unhappy with the system but either accepted this was expected of them, or had not thought seriously about it before giving birth. Growing up in the communal system did not predispose mothers to accept it, although I had expected it would. Rather, the mothers interviewed who were raised on kibbutz expressed their ignorance about “another way to raise children” rather than supporting the system; this insight generally came after the children moved home. Indeed of the four women interviewed who were supportive of the system, only one had been born on the kibbutz. None of the interviewees changed their opinions about the kibbutz system after giving birth or with the birth of subsequent children.

Mothers generally did not change their largely positive views on caregivers after 1991. As it had been in the communal system, the metapelet’s role was still crucial in the child’s life, but if before 1991 the women clearly demarcated mother and metapelet—“she was not my child’s mother”—once the children moved home, there was no longer a need to clarify this.

Caregivers tended to be more critical of mothers after 1991, and this seems reasonable, as they lost their authority but not their responsibility. The initial transition was sudden, without any clarifying guidelines, and the new roles and rules were implemented as a process in response to the altered circumstances.

I was surprised to discover, when reviewing the interview transcripts, that the word “trauma” was used in some form by four of the ten mothers, although it

was not part of the questionnaire, nor did I mention it in our conversations. This speaks to the lingering sense of pain and regret that these mothers acknowledged feeling when revisiting that time. These regrets appeared in remembrance, as L remarked, “It’s not like I have spent the last thirty years feeling bad about communal education!” On the other hand, Donald Polkinghorne has written that it is often only in retrospect that we can understand and give meaning to events because memory is selective and complex. I provided these mothers a catalyst for such retrospection.

Many mothers used the word “guilt”—again not a term I presented—but most used it in order to deny it. These negative feelings, however, do not colour these women’s relationships with their children or their lives today. As noted earlier, one of the mothers told me she really had not thought about it until I started asking her questions; another said that she simply chose not think about it. This confirms what many narrative researchers posit: “Clear accounts of an experience ... are structures in a story form, constituting a meaningful story, [that are] sometimes not known to the storyteller until it is told” (Kramp108).

None of the mothers interviewed, regardless of their feelings toward the collective childrearing system, felt their mother-child bonding was harmed by the collective sleeping, despite research that indicates otherwise (Aviezer et al., “Balancing the Family”). This may reflect the coping mechanisms mothers used when prevented from fulfilling the expected role of mothering their children, or simply a nonprofessional understanding of “attachment” as defined by John Bowlby after WWII, which cannot be validated as it is beyond the scope of the framework of this research.

All of the mothers who had negative perceptions of the system realized (before 1991) that as long as they remained on the kibbutz they needed to accept the status quo and make the best of the circumstances. For the others, this was not an issue.

Conclusion

All the mothers interviewed affirmed their unambiguous sense of identity as their children’s mother, regardless of their attitude toward communal sleeping. They did not feel their mother identity changed before and after home sleeping. They trusted the caregivers to treat their children as if they were their own, and the metaplot conveyed, in their role perception, an approach compatible with the mothers’ expectations. This core aspect of kibbutz educational ideology would seem to be a plausible explanation for the perceived prestige of kibbutz daycare institutions in Israel today. However, although mothers’ and caretakers’ discourses on what makes a good mother in the context of communal

education converged to some extent, there were important differences. For the metaplot, a “good mother” followed the rules, but mothers constructed their “good mother” identities when they privileged their children’s needs. This speaks to the weakening of a core kibbutz ideology: putting the good of the community before the individual.

Finally the mothers did not feel their relationships with their children today suffered because of the way the children were raised. However, it may be that mothers who do feel this way chose not to be interviewed.

And what of the gender equality that seemed so appealing when I first came to the kibbutz? With all the ideological intent to liberate women from the bonds of child and house care, why does research consistently point to a reality that is a contradiction of that ideal? This may be an interesting topic for another study, but the fact is, in both the workplace and the level and area of social involvement in kibbutz life, there are clearly gendered spheres that reflect a stereotypical, patriarchal approach to gender equality from the kibbutz’s earliest days (Gerson 50). It is apparent most clearly in education; there were very few men working with children, and none with infants thirty years ago. That continues to be the case today.

As I consider my mothering experience, I understand that I am not to blame for mothering as I was expected to by the kibbutz in which I lived. Shari Thurer reminds us “Motherhood—the way we perform mothering—is culturally derived” (334). I know I was not a bad mother, and the kibbutz does not label mothers in that way. Yet today there is an undercurrent of discontent, disbelief, and disappointment in the mother narratives prior to 1991. My female friends, who were mothers with me, tell me their grown children sometimes express disbelief about the sleeping arrangements, or ask “Didn’t you ever feel like there was something wrong with the sleeping arrangements?” Whether or not we are actually called “bad mothers” by others, it is clear that we often feel we were.

Today, this conflict is not one experienced by kibbutz mothers. The metaplot do not position themselves as the experts on the children in their care. The role of the metapelet today holds much less authority and is even less regarded than it once was. Kibbutz mothers today “resist patriarchal motherhood” (O’Reilly 799)—that is, motherhood as defined by the kibbutz—by rejecting the profession of childcare giver for themselves, just as we resisted by refusing to return our children to the children’s houses after the Gulf War. Occasionally mothers of my daughter’s generation express a desire for the system of their childhood that they perceive to have been supportive, but to quote my daughter, who is an exemplary mother of three: “I had a wonderful childhood—but I would never raise my children that way.” And in abandoning collective childrearing practices, albeit resisting all the way, it is clear the kibbutz agrees with her.

What remains central to this investigation is that regardless of how they might have felt about the communal system at the time, all the mothers I spoke to affirm an unambiguous sense of identity as their children's mother, which shows how "women's own experiences of mothering can ... be a source of power" (O'Reilly 794). As M told me at the end of our interview, "I was a mother before, a mother after, and I am still a mother." As am I.

Appendix A

Questions and Prompts during Interviews with Mothers

Pre-1991

1. How were you raised on the kibbutz, collectively, or in a nuclear family setting?
2. How many children do you have? How many did you raise in the collective education format—that is, your children slept in children's houses? How many did you raise at home?
3. What did you think becoming a mother would be like? How did you feel about it?
4. How did you feel about having your baby/child sleep in the children's house before you had the baby?
5. What do you remember feeling after you gave birth? Did your feelings change? Please explain.
6. How old was your baby when it went to sleep in the baby house? Do you feel that your bonding with your baby was affected by this? How?
7. What, if anything, do you remember about the first night your baby was not sleeping at home?
8. What was the most positive aspect of the collective childrearing arrangements for you? Did your opinion change over time? How?
9. What was the most difficult aspect of the collective childrearing arrangements for you? Did your opinion change over time? How?
10. If you raised more than one child in the collective education format, was there a difference in your experience with subsequent children? Please explain.
11. There was a time when parents were requested to take turns sleeping in the kindergartens to assuage the developmental night fears of children aged three to six. How did you feel about this?
12. Did your child ever express a desire to sleep at home and/or have difficulties saying good night and letting you leave him or her? If so, how did you respond to this? How did you feel about it?

For metaplot:

13. How did you view your role in the raising of the children in your care? How did you view the child's mother?

14. Did anything about this perception change after 1991, once children began sleeping at their parents' home? Please explain.

For mothers:

15. How did you view the role of your child's metaplet in the raising of your children? How did you view yourself?

16. Did anything about this perception change after 1991, once children began sleeping at their parents' home? Please explain.

Post-1991

1. When your children moved home in 1991, how did you feel about the new arrangements?

2. What was the most positive aspect of the home-sleeping arrangements for you? Did your opinion change over time? If so, how?

3. What was the most difficult aspect of the home-sleeping arrangements for you? Did your opinion change over time? If so, how?

4. Did having your children move home influence the way you feel/felt about the collective childrearing system? Please explain.

5. Have you discussed the collective child-rearing system with your adult children? If so, why did you do so? If not, why not?

6. If you have discussed this subject with your children, what were their responses? How did you feel about those responses?

7. If you have daughters, are any of them mothers? If so, did this influence how they responded? Please explain.

8. When you think of yourself as a mother, does the fact of that you raised some of your children in the communal kibbutz system influence your view of what kind of mother you were/are? Please explain.

9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Endnotes

¹In 2012 Katharine Mayer analyzed mothering identities in popular discourse, and she specifically identifies "two dominant mothering categories, the stay at home mother ... and the working mother. ... roles that exist in a dichotomy" (11). The kibbutz theoretically eradicated that dichotomy in the structure of communal education, but since women were the mainstay of childcare, this issue was merely hiding in plain sight.

²When President Bush attacked Baghdad in 1991 for its invasion of Kuwait, Iraq retaliated by firing SCUD missiles at Israel. Israel declared a state of war; gas masks were distributed to all citizens from infants to the elderly, who were expected to stay in shelters during attacks. Kibbutzim with communal sleeping

arrangements sent all the children home to sleep during this time. “The Gulf War” lasted from mid-January till the end of February 1991.

³On the kibbutz under discussion mothers were required to work for a year in education, usually in the children’s houses, after giving birth. I refer here to women who worked professionally as caregivers.

⁴I will note here that not all the women I approached agreed to talk to me. Later, in informal conversation, it came up that they considered themselves bad mothers, or their children had expressed anger toward them directly related to communal sleeping. One confessed that her adult daughter said she was not “there for her.” Another explained she would not have been “a good subject” for me because she was not a successful mother.

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