

GENDER AND GEOGRAPHY: THE TERRAIN OF EASTERN EUROPE IN LEAH GOLDBERG'S VE-HU HA-OR

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Leah Goldberg's novel *Ve-hu ha-or* has met with collective critical bewilderment. As Tamara Hess has shown in her essay on the novel's reception history, early critics of Goldberg's work dismissed the writing on gendered grounds as, for example, "women's gossip" or simple autobiography, or on the ideological grounds that the subjective voice of the narrator was divorced from the national and collective concerns of Hebrew literature of the period. The gendered reception of Goldberg's novel is even more complex than the chauvinism of Goldberg's contemporaries. In this paper, I argue that Goldberg's novel has been misunderstood in part because of its engagement with diaspora Jewish life at the moment when Hebrew fiction was being territorialized and transformed into Israeli writing. I examine how Goldberg turns to eastern European ground precisely because of its critical significance for the formation of a modern Jewish national subject. In her writing, she theorizes the cultural inheritance of the imagined national space of Jewish eastern Europe for Israeli literature and reveals the ways that gender was inscribed in the formation of modern Jewish culture. Goldberg's heroine, Nora, is a university student home from her studies in Berlin. She is a female counterpart to the literary figure of the *talush*, circulating between her university studies in western Europe and her family's home in the former Pale of Settlement. However, the protagonist of Goldberg's novel, Nora, negotiates the tensions between the traditional Jewish world of the shtetl and the cosmopolitan space of western Europe on radically different terms than earlier Hebrew and Yiddish writers. Goldberg resists the gendered bifurcation of tradition and modernity, of diaspora and return. The result is a new conception of the modern Jewish subject in Hebrew literature, one that allows for both a woman novelist and a female Jewish subject.

My paper will also reflect on the influence of Chana Kronfeld's work *On the Margins of Modernism*.