

Home and the Female Scholar: Re-visiting the Salamans' Archives

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ABSTRACT

It took me just one month in the Salaman archives of Cambridge University Library to accumulate hundreds of digital images relating to the life of a female Hebrew scholar born at the *fin de siecle*, Nina Salaman, a Sephardic Jew of rare beauty who died young. It has taken several years to revisit and analyse the resonance I experienced at that time. In reading the Salamans' lives I felt like I had fallen among interesting friends and I wanted to enter the rich diversity of their artistic and scholarly lives. The sheer volume of material in the archives attracts several historians, and that led me to question why I was working beyond my own scope and practice. The Salamans had deep roots in England. Their intellectual networks dipped into a dozen disciplines, touching many lives, questioning greater minds, gathering grass roots support for causes that were feminist, Zionist, and often far to the left. They shared my ancestors' ethnicity and even attended the same synagogue in London, but the similarity ends there. One branch of my family has no recorded legacy, as though all our creativity sprang up spontaneously. The Salamans' writing is often evocative auto ethnography, transparent and poignant, particularly the letters and unpublished memoir of patriarch Dr. Redcliffe N. Salaman and the books and memoirs of his daughter-in-law, Esther Polianowski. Nina Salaman's heart beat is in her translations of medieval poetry from the tragedy of the Arabic-Spanish period (S. Litman, 1957). What interested me was the way Nina's Jewish spirituality mapped out family life, education and expectations. At a time when my own family had lost one another through the death of my grandmother aged just 33, the Salamans were consolidating around the thing we denied: Jewishness. Yet both Redcliffe Salaman and Esther Polianowski were agnostic as were so many others in the family, and their passion for Zion was a cultural and political yearning. In returning to explore the personal lives of the Salamans I constructed a Foucault's genealogy of family and home itself, to explore its hegemonic power and the cost and beauty of its perpetuation. In this work I regard myself as a Foucauldian Detective discovering the family values of my own lost tribe.

A Methodology to Explore the Tribal Home As a Site for Women's Work

In this essay I apply a Foucauldian genealogical method to demonstrate the shifting discourses around both gender and Jewish identity that enabled some women to do creative work in Cambridge, England, before the Second World War. It is an auto ethnographic essay: ethnographic in the sense that I immersed myself in my subjects' world both geographically and through their narratives, and auto ethnographic in that I identify on tribal, academic and gender grounds with my subjects and draw meaning for my own contemporary concerns (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010; Van Maanen, 2011).

Foucauldian genealogy has been described as both radical historicism and history "of a sort" (Gutting, 1994). Michel Foucault revealed the discourses beneath power claims by reconstructing in harrowing detail the hegemony of prisons and asylums, and their imprint on the human body. Using this method Foucault transcended the limitations of theoretical

analysis of power from an objective distance. In an erudite translation and interpretation Paul Rabinow, whose understanding came from interviews with Foucault, asserted that genealogy deals with elements set aside by history: sentiments, love, conscience, and instinct (1984). In Foucauldian philosophy discourse emerges from human emotion but derives power from history and institution in order to make truth claims (Foucault, 2001).

Foucault did not define the parameters of his genealogical method although he left book length examples that deal with minutiae of human subjugation that goes beyond tracing the linear historical development of ideas and institutions (Foucault, 1976). Anti-Semitism is a classic example of a discourse that in essence is rooted in emotions that has been institutionalised and inscribed on human flesh. Anti-Semitism can be exposed as it is deconstructed through genealogy. Because of the sheer indigestible magnitude of Anti-Semitism its history can be made opaque through biography and auto ethnography. Similarly, women's lives have been limited by the truth claims of religious discourses in different times and cultures. An ethnographic approach shows how the female body is subject to hegemonic power in a specific moment and place. Foucault's own writing was covertly auto ethnographic, and he believed all academic writers worked out personal issues in their texts and problems (Macey, 1993). Auto ethnography brings the author to the foreground.

Auto ethnography coalesces with Foucault's fluid methodology (Kaufmann, 2005) because it is research that begins with the personal and immediate (Ellis et al., 2010). Ethnography is a contested and burgeoning field, dynamic in its diversity. It is post-modern and eclectic in some places, while coterie of scholars and journals attempt to rein it in and harness ethnography alongside its old ally, anthropology. (Richardson, 1997). Leon Anderson (2006) has helpfully created a framework for analytic auto ethnography that defines its distinct place apart from evocative forms of auto ethnography that have proven a creative and sustainable field for those with literary skills (Richardson, 1997). However, my Foucauldian genealogical auto ethnographic method attempts to be both evocative and analytic. It analyses the discourses of individuals from my own tribes that I have been able to identify through traditional genealogical work, and tries to recover their emotive voice.

Childbearing, Cancer and the Hunger for Home

The most poignant image I captured in the Salamans' archives at Cambridge University Library (CUL) was a single word logged by Nina Salaman on April 26, 1920, at the end of a long hospitalisation. It was the word HOME, writ large by her own pondering pen in a tiny black leather bound Cambridge University term diary. In a family memoir Nina was portrayed as a remote and absent mother (Miller, 2003), probably the perception of daughters whose childhood was soured by her slow dying. In 1920 Nina endured a miscarriage - followed by two surgeries and months of hospital, nursing home, night nurses, recurring fevers and pain, symptoms of the undefeated cancer that would take her life within five years. Her sparse diary notes the visits of her children, and particularly the birthdays of her two young daughters, Esther, six, and Ruth, 11. There are painful milestones recorded: the day when Nina could sit up in a chair, her first outing in a car, resuming her endless visits to the dentist, and no real strength until October when she is able to visit her children at their progressive school, Bedales. Nina's childbearing was inescapable in that era, but her mothering was relieved by wealth, which provided servants and boarding schools and time to work.

Exploring the importance of home to a scholar such as Nina Salaman might seem to minimise her life's work, the translation of Hebrew poetry for which she was celebrated (Koren, 2012). Yet for many women, home, unless it is an uninhabited dormitory, is never benign. Poet, preacher and social activist, Nina Salaman was a feminist who worked alongside the leading Hebrew scholars of her day, all male, and she made the female voice heard in the synagogue almost by stealth. Todd M. Endelman (2014 p65) suggests she found inspiration in the Jewish poets of Medieval Spain because they offered a "robust Jewishness" capable of embracing two cultures, unlike the narrow retreat of Eastern European Judaism of that time. As a Sephardi, Spain was her spiritual home and its ancient tragedy found an echo in the tragedy of the Ashkenazi pouring into England from the Russias. In her home so aptly named *Homestall*, she was passionately Jewish and entirely English. She found no conflict between Zionism and her social concerns for poor immigrant Jews of London. The Balfour Declaration of 1917, which signalled British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, was marked by the Salamans with the planting of a new orchard at Homestall. Zion was a symbol of hope and not an imminent destination.

Homestall was the site for scholarly and religious life, it was where she personally educated her six children, giving priority to the Hebrew biblical texts, hosting birthday parties, supervising their musical education; it was the centre for her intellectual networks and philanthropy. She had enough financial security and moral support in her marriage to Dr. Redcliffe Salaman to be a productive writer and a leading voice among Jewish feminists. Although Cambridge was a progressive place, both of them abandoned traditional gender roles gently (Endelman, 2014). The physical burden of childbearing was evident in her diary notes: a dark circle appeared at regular intervals probably representing menstruation, and one stillborn child was recorded alongside the same circle: *March 1908 First Sunday in Lent, Baby born dead*. Less than a year later the second youngest daughter, Ruth, was born. Home was the site for Nina's declining health before she died at 48 in 1925, but Homestall remained the centre of Salaman life for another 30 years after her death, and it became a place that fully expressed her spiritual values.

In an obituary paying tribute to Nina Salaman's achievements Semitic languages lecturer Herbert Loewe (1925) also emphasised Homestall and its influence on both the Jewish and the academic community in Cambridge. Generations of students as well as male scholars felt privileged to visit Nina, and innumerable charities benefited from fetes and entertainments in the grounds. Rachel Litman, a Jewish journalist who also preached in the USA, who had corresponded with Nina for 25 years, referred to the charm of Homestall, in an obituary. She suggested the serenity Nina's environment was reflected in the meditative nature of her work (R. Litman, 1925).

Homestall was originally just a refuge from a shattered youth. In 1905 tuberculosis and pleurisy had ended Redcliffe's career as a pathologist at the London Hospital. They left three small children in England and went for six months convalescence in Spain and Switzerland where he slowly regained some weight. Advised to give up work, they faced their options:

We were very fond of our house at Hampstead... [but] it seemed most sensible to take a house in the country. In October we discovered this house and fell in love at first sight....We have been here a month now and are very pleased with the house and garden and the country round. We are only 14 miles from Cambridge....I think the life and air will suit Redcliffe splendidly (N. Salaman cited in S. Litman, 1957 p129)

At first Redcliffe floundered in his scientific work, making forays into eugenics (R. N. Salaman, 1911). Despite her husband's disinterest in Jewish observance and his religious agnosticism, Nina kept a kosher table and returned to London to observe Jewish festivals (Endelman, 2011, 2014) and the problems of Jewish identity was the conversational theme in their marriage. As her health declined, Redcliffe's commitment to his Jewish roots intensified. He found a consuming scientific interest in potato virus research, which, alongside a taxing portfolio of community work, gave expression to his social concerns (Reader, 2009). In the 1949 introduction to a tome that took more than a decade to produce, *The history and social influence of the potato*, he wrote a transparent reflection on the unfolding of his career at Homestall that reveals his sensitive nature:

I retired to what promised to be a life of ease and leisure in the beautiful village of Barley in north Herts... Thirty-two years of age, happily married, free from financial cares, and devoted to hunting, one was unconsciously graduating for the part of a Jane Austen character. But I discovered, as I believe her men also would have done, had not their careers invariably terminated with their capture and mental sterilisation at the altar, that "respectability," even with a corresponding income, is not enough.

The Salaman men did not sterilise their wives' intellectual work, either, although it meant women like Nina often worked with other men. Redcliffe struggled with the idea that his wife worked with male scholars (Endelman, 2014) although it was increasingly regarded as respectable among university colleagues. His sister Brenda Seligman was an ethnographer who published papers and worked closely with her husband, Dr. Charles Seligman, as well as their male colleagues, notably Bronislaw Malinowski. Nina spent whole days with colleagues in a Cambridge library, and she was apologetic for the measure of independence she gained during Redcliffe's long absence with his regiment in Palestine in 1918-1919 (Endelman, 1999, 2014).

Despite Nina's breathtaking beauty and her attractive personality (R. Litman, 1925; S. Litman, 1957) only one colleague, the somewhat unconventional author Israel Zangwill, tended to a flirtatiousness. Redcliffe regarded it as silly and embarrassing (Rochelson, 2010). Zangwill met Nina through her father Arthur Davis, when she was living at her parents' Oxford Road, Kilburn home in the late 1890s. Both men were among the Solomon Schechter's Kilburn Wanderers, an Anglo-Jewish intellectual coterie. Davis had given his daughters the kind of Jewish education usually reserved for sons (R. Litman, 1925) and as her

skill with Hebrew language developed many of her father's friends took an interest and helped her find publication for her work. Zangwill, fifteen years her senior, sent her books for opinions and translations, and throughout both their lives they were frank and respectful critics of one another's work, engaged in a 25 year long correspondence (Rochelson, 2010).

It is through the Zangwill-Salaman correspondence that the shifting discourses of Zionism and feminism among educated people become clear. Zangwill tended to have warm correspondence with a number of women, all intellectuals, but perhaps most notably with his wife's stepmother, the Jewish physicist and militant feminist Hertha Marks Ayrton. Edith Ayrton was a gentile despite her great sympathy for Jewish causes, and Zangwill's marriage to Edith eroded his standing in the Jewish community for a time (R. Litman, 1925; S. Litman, 1957). Redcliffe Salaman was aware that Zangwill's passions were complex and beyond religious observance. Suffrage was a shared cause. Edith Ayrton and her stepmother helped form the Jewish League for Women's Suffrage, to which Nina belonged, but Edith Ayrton soon moved on to more militant groups. Ayrton's own mother, a doctor, had also been a suffragist. Nina and Edith Ayrton were close friends who shared babies' clothing, bicycles and blankets through the war years when goods were in short supply. Zangwill died in 1926 less than a year after Nina and from that time Ayrton and Redcliffe collaborated in editing the years of correspondence their spouses had maintained.

After Nina's death Redcliffe knew he wanted another wife who had meaningful work of her own, and he was deeply convinced of the rights of women. He willingly championed women who wanted to study medicine or science and he expressed support for women's ambitions that were far ahead of his time (Collection, 1874-1955; E. P. Salaman, 1982).

The Second Wife

Eighteen months after Nina's death her eldest son Myer (b. 1902), a pathologist, married Esther Polianowski ¹, a Ukrainian Jew, fair haired, shapely and magnetic. She had been Albert Einstein's pupil, vacillating over the start of her doctoral dissertation while anti-Semitism was intensifying in Berlin. For her own safety, Einstein encouraged her to go to the

¹ Redcliffe and Nina Salaman had a daughter whose name was also Esther. She became a distinguished mezzo-soprano, musical educator and author. The name Polianowski is spelled in various ways.

Cavendish Laboratories in Cambridge to work in physics with Sir Ernest Rutherford. Myer's marriage to Esther was a personal triumph over two rivals: his own father, Redcliffe, had proposed to "Polly" Polianowski on the second occasion he met her, assuring her she could continue to work (E. P. Salaman, 1979, 1982). His precipitous proposal was an echo of his 10-day courtship of Nina. Esther Polianowski was the same age as his own children, and he had failed to notice that his son Myer had a spark of romance in his eye.

The young female physicist also had to extricate herself from a complex ten-year relationship in which she had criss-crossed the globe through war, pogroms and famine with another remarkable man, Schlomo Bardinstein². It is hard for those living in the permissive 21st Century to imagine the outrage Esther's behaviour caused among Russian Jews, or the dramatic machinations of the couple's families in Palestine to preserve their respectability and keep Esther in the fold, with family members feigning fatal illness and threatening suicide to manipulate her emotions (E. P. Salaman, 1982). Remarkably Redcliffe Salaman put aside his own broken heart to broker a solution for his son and Polly. Redcliffe's desire to remarry quickly was not a denial of his love for Nina so much as an expression of happiness in the married state. In a letter to the young couple shortly after they tried some matchmaking to assuage his disappointment, he wrote:

Oh Esther. You don't know your new Dad if you could have imagined I could have been happy with her [Frau Z]– a good woman and intelligent, but sentimental and flabby to the point of nausea – less independent than Mother and much younger...

I never felt the presence of Mother so imminent as I did in Synagogue – the simple majesty of her bearing as she stood in the gallery eclipsing everyone else – it has all come back, usually I only get memories and dreams of the days of the illness but this was in the great past days when we had joy in life – And you my dears enjoy life and each other while you may – Fate please God may be kinder to you than it has been to me, but if I had not loved my Nina and she me with all that was in us I would never have been able to hold old – I am not done yet (E. P. Salaman, 1982 p213)

Redcliffe soon took as his second wife Gertrude Lowy, a radical suffragette who had endured a hunger strike in prison. Thankfully the two youngest Salaman girls, Esther and Ruth, were happy with their stepmother (Miller, 2003) and the older siblings remained wisely silent.

² Later known as Bardin, founder of the Brandeis-Bardin Institute. He developed a strong Jewish identity among American youth through his camps and training programs. The Institute was a significant land holder and enabled the establishment of Brandeis University. Redcliffe Salaman recognised Bardinstein's potential as a young man when he was negotiating with him to withdraw from Esther Polianowski's life after a ten-year relationship, which had been regarded as a marriage.

Despite the conflicted love triangle, the marriage of Myer Salaman and Esther Polianowski thrived for 68 years, and Redcliffe supported Polly, placing her books in libraries and using her life experiences to illustrate his speeches.

Myer Salaman's progressive upbringing was evident in his marriage from the start. Although she was his first love, he was not daunted by Polly's colourful past (E. P. Salaman, 1982). She had already published journalistic accounts of the pogroms she had lived through. Although she was only in her early twenties she had survived murderous tides of anti-Semitism, fought in the Ukrainian national resistance and rescued two families across the Polish border and led them to freedom in Palestine (Lazarsfeld-Jensen, 2015). Her mother tongue was Russian, she knew German and Hebrew, but English was the weakest of her languages in the 1920s when she needed to begin writing for an English audience. There was another obstacle to her writing, and that was the presence of traumatic memories that seemed to dominate her thinking. Not surprisingly, as Foucault might have predicted, her scientific and literary interests converged around the subject of memory. She worked so closely with her husband that after 45 years of marriage she wrote:

...my husband's help was indispensable....as a scientist he could and did treat my hypotheses as he would those in his own subject. But it was the attitude to my work that was decisive: commenting, suggesting, tolerating my obsessive absorption in the work, seeing it scrapped again... (E. P. Salaman, 1971)

Esther Polianowski had developed a personal relationship with Einstein while she was his pupil in Berlin (Lazarsfeld-Jensen, 2015) but this was not an excessively impressive fact in a family whose acquaintances included dozens of great names including Paul Dirac, Karl Popper, Charles Darwin and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Einstein had recognised and encouraged Esther's writing from the time her freelance journalism appeared in *Frankfurter Zeitung*, while she was a student, and he had discouraged her ambitions in physics believing it would crush her creativity (E. P. Salaman, 1979). While working at the Cavendish she only published one scientific paper before abandoning physics and turning to fiction, encouraged by Wittgenstein, who said she was too young to write autobiography.

In her fiction Esther Polianowski developed the insistent theme of home (E. P. Salaman, 1932, 1956, 1973). Hunger for a lost home resonated in her account of her childhood in the Ukraine as it was being carved apart before the First World War (E. P. Salaman, 1932). Her

family moved house often within the oppressive Pale of Settlement, but she created literary vignettes of her mother baking and her grandfather muttering his Hebrew prayers late into the night. In all of her writing there is a staccato style, a lack of continuity, because she only wrote from retrieved memories, a pattern that was observed by her brother-in-law German literary scholar Roy Pascal (E. P. Salaman, 1971) and which was obvious in her published memories of Einstein (E. P. Salaman, 1979) drawn from contemporaneous note-taking. The tragedy of her final auto ethnographic writing is that she was descending into dementia: “She wanted to write about England, Cambridge, the Cavendish, her marriage ...it was left in a muddle: repetitions, contradictions, gaps,” (Mrs Polak's introductory commetary in: E. P. Salaman, 1982). Esther’s traumatic memories tended to eclipse all sense of continuity in her writing, so that her subject crippled the thing she most desired to do, writing the memories.

In her mature writing, Polianowski analysed the retrieval of her memories and studied the reconstruction of childhood memories in the fiction of other writers such as Dostoyevsky and Proust (E. P. Salaman, 1971). She described the flow of writing that followed a rush of memory complete with sensory information and the unresolved pain of a fractured life is evident. Finding a place of her own in Cambridge took time.

A Place of Their Own in a Norfolk Windmill

Throughout the Second World War, Myer and Esther Salaman lived in a large chaotic household with their close friends, the Cornfords. Francis Cornford was a classical scholar at Cambridge who had fought for the admission of women. His wife was the controversial poet Frances Cornford. Esther and Frances managed to write a translation of a book of verse from the Russian (Cornford & Salaman, 1943) during that time, despite the lack of household help, too many children and rationing. Frances produced her second book of poetry celebrating home in those years (Cornford, 1948). Frances was a granddaughter of Charles Darwin, a fact side-stepped by the family because, as her cousin and childhood companion Gwen Reverat observed, it was like talking about God (Reverat, 1952). Deeply embedded in Cambridge intellectual and social circles for generations, Frances had named her first son after her university friend, wartime poet Rupert Brooke, and she also penned a poem celebrating Brooke’s charismatic beauty. Like Brooke she had lived on the fringes of the Bloomsbury set,

never engaging in its promiscuity. Frances' poetry reflected her love of place, family and continuity, particularly in Cambridge

This Cambridge country plain beneath the sky
Where I was born, and grew, and hope to die (Cornford, 1948).

The Cornfords' four children were in early adulthood in the war years, and they also had a child fathered by their eldest son who had been killed in 1926 in the Spanish Civil War. The Salaman's five children were much younger when in 1944 Brenda Seligman wrote to her brother Redcliffe that Esther had been very tired on a recent stop over: "The Salaman-Cornford household is too full. She ought to have her teeth attended to." (Collection, 1874-1955).

Norfolk was a place of retreat for the two families and Frances Cornford's love of Norfolk was haunting in her poetry. In the coastal town of Ringstead the two women's love of place converged. At some point Esther fell in love with the six storey 1850 Hunstanton Mill³, a Darwin family property that had been let out from 1936 as a debating retreat for a group of radical molecular biologists, many of whom had far left political leanings. Karl Popper did not share their politics but enjoyed the mental pursuits (Niemann, 2015). Myer Salaman must have been a part of the group although his presence is not discussed by Niemann (2015). In his memoirs of his years in cancer research, written at 92, Myer revisits the Popper dialogue, written from the traditional impersonal stance of someone who is thoroughly English (M. H. Salaman, 1995).

When her husband died in 1956, Frances sold the Mill to Myer and Esther. It may have been Redcliffe's death the previous year, and his final act of stewardship in leaving a surprising amount of his inherited capital intact, that enabled the purchase. Hunstanton Mill, like Homestall in a past generation, is still a place where family values are perpetuated by grandchildren who visit there and blog their memories (Wordsworth, 2009).

³ It is actually called Ringstead Tower Mill, but Popper referred to it constantly in his writing and those who followed him as the Hunstanton Mill. The Mill had its sails removed in the 1950's.

My Analysis of Truth and Power in Tribal Lives

The voices of my eldest granddaughters echoed through everything I did while I was in Cambridge. In Australia I had sold the place that felt like home to them. No one wanted to move from *Mansefield*. I had built the orchard and rose gardens, retrieved the distant corners from encroaching weed trees. I loved its distant misty mountain views and the deep green in the wet season when a river ran sixty metres wide across the paddocks. However, I am shaped by the economic, political and institutional climate in which I live: women cannot retire before 68, academics teach burgeoning cohorts of poorly prepared students whose focus is vocational, and universities cannot afford the luxury of ivory tower writers. I am also shaped by the personal. My career has been interrupted by care demands, and at this late moment I still have much to achieve to satisfy myself. In practical terms moving 88km closer to my university town made sense. It is also a university town, in Australia's oldest inland city: a mere 200 years since it was settled. But I had expected to die on that small acreage and instead my life was in cardboard boxes, and there were alpacas, dogs, chickens, two generations of children and a sick husband to be moved. Finding home and a place to write was my problem in Cambridge. The disruption of continuity and memory was my theme.

When I rejected the conventional gendered discourse for a female academic's interrupted career I recognised that my attachment to home was institutionally awkward, not a feminist issue. Teaching in a modern university impinges on every part of my life, and in a Foucauldian sense affects my body. The physicality of commuting can be resolved by moving house, but the emotional problems emanate from the early losses of emigration, when as a child I was not consulted and barely forewarned. At age ten in Australia's baking summer in a remote Eastern seaboard town I was homesick for London, not a council house in Walthamstow, but the culture, history and dynamic of a city. Leaving London intensified our isolation from the little extended family we knew. Working in Cambridge almost 50 years later I ached for the chill Australian dawn where Western grey kangaroos nibble the roses growing on the wrong side of the rabbit proof fence, on that last spine of the Blue Mountains before the land rolls down forever flat, west. It is where I am surrounded by the new tribe I have built. Nina Salaman's words of longing for Zion that are still evocative today, had other meanings for me:

My Heart Is in the East, and I Am in the Uttermost West⁴

To be an emigrant is less painful than refugee, but it still creates chasms of disorientation. I had no sense of place until I married because I had been a “Ten Pound Pom”⁵, a foreigner, a stranger, an interloper, like the previous four generations of my family that moved across Eastern Europe seeking safety and the right to education and prosperity. In creating a new tribe through marriage I would established my own spiritual place afresh, orchestrated its events, processes and people, presided over it, controlled its gates, and I would continue to be the matriarch in any new house where I could easily do the work expected of me.

The women whose genealogy of home I have constructed had subtle triumphs in life, making homes in the midst of their own difficulties, freeing themselves to work. Although they lived within oppressive structures, suffered illness, anti-Semitism and misogyny, their focus on their work was a more hopeful response than the post-feminism that draws on a cult of victimology (Hughes, 1993). Their brief ascendance releases me from Max Weber’s iron cage and Foucault’s hegemonies (Foucault, 2001; Schluchter, 1985) into a rich field of intimate relationships where people make deeper meaning of the life they have been given. Cataloguing intimate relationships is essentially a feminist project that privileges the domestic sphere when it represents the primary source of strength and courage. The domestic is both oppressor and liberator and its primacy meaning cannot ethically be denied.

In cutting myself loose from the traditional feminist approaches to women’s unfulfilled promise, I waded into a morass of social theorising that of itself is oppressive. Was I now projecting my life and its meanings onto my subjects? In his critique of the social constructionism of Charles Wright Mills, Norman K. Denzin (1990) noted the absence of the subject’s voice in Mills’ work, and revisited the question of whether our texts can capture “biography, lived history, and lived experience.” My interests went beyond historicism to the tribal resonance that had galvanised me to think about my life and my work, my identity, and place as a scholar within an institution, and home as the *room of one’s own* that enables me to work. I thought I knew how women’s academic work was suffocated by misogyny, gendered

⁴ Yahuda Halevi (1141), Translated from the Hebrew by Nina Salaman, 1924.

⁵ Common Australian expression for subsidised emigrants from the UK in the post war years when the cost to the family was £10.

roles and glass ceilings, but until now I had not explored without prejudice the role of home in my life and the domain of feminine power.

I found in the smaller stories of my subjects both liberation and resilience within or beyond structures, institutions and gender. A Foucauldian approach allowed me to look into the micro narratives, such as home, within the broad scope of great intellectual networks struggling with power and truth, by recognising these as both constraining and empowering structures, or as the kind of conflict and stress that motivate. Foucauldian genealogy ‘demonstrates how particular discourses are historically constituted, and how these are changed and reconstituted into qualitatively different practices,’ (Meadmore, Hatcher, & McWilliam, 2000 p2). However, as Scott Lash (1984) observed there is a pessimistic absence of agency in so much of Foucault’s work, “a bodily passivity.” This became clear when I read Esther Polianowski’s fictional account of her anger with the passivity of her elders, her stubborn resistance to anti-Semitism as a young girl, even at the real risk of death (E. P. Salaman, 1932). Auto ethnography was unknown to her, but in her fiction she could unleash emotions that were inappropriate, touching the controversial accusations of passivity that have troubled Jewish history.

Above all else my Foucauldian genealogical turn is auto ethnographic Detective Work that gathers autobiographical fragments into a whole through archival research. It is Foucauldian minutiae of oppression in the lives of obscure and uncelebrated individuals and in exploring their relationships within power structures in order to expose human resilience, personal priorities and the life work of people whose contribution may not have endured without its moment of resonance with another writer. In this way their lives nourish and inform my own, giving hope.

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