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THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN KIBBUTZ-SOCIETY

by Judith Buber Agassi

1. The interest of the symposium in this problem

This symposium rests on the assumption, that the kibbutz may serve as a model for industrial society, e.g., that kibbutz-society or the social experiment of the integrated cooperative may have found solutions for major problems of the industrial society. The topic "social sex roles and the status of women" appears in several contributions and was also chosen as the topic for one of the workshops. It is therefore to be assumed, that the conveners see in it an important problem of industrial society and also consider it probable that kibbutz-society has found or will soon find a solution for this problem.

The spokesmen of kibbutz-society itself do not consider the status of women to constitute a major problem, although a growing minority of female members ((1)) as well as the kibbutz educator Gerson (1978) ((2)) consider it a pressing problem indeed. The topic was discussed frequently especially during the last decade, most often due to the appearance of practical problems, especially in education of girls and staffing of the service branches. Yet the start of a more systematic discussion, using empirical research-data, was apparently triggered from the outside. On the one side, several sociologists, who hold the values and goals of the modern women's movement and also are acquainted with kibbutz-society and sympathize with it, have examined the current status of women in the kibbutz, found it wanting by their criteria and have looked for the causes. ((3)) On the other side the socio-biologists Tiger and Shepher (1975) - the latter a long-time

kibbutz-member - have documented extensively and statistically the considerable differences in the economic and political roles of sexes in two kibbutz-federations; they claimed that the development of kibbutz-society towards sharper polarization of social sex-roles constitutes a proof for their thesis: the differentiation between social sex-roles can never be eliminated, even under conditions of revolutionary egalitarian ideology and socialization - simply because this would be going against nature. Spiro (1979) has recently joined this school.

2. A disappointing discussion I

Discussions about our topic have proved frustrating and fruitless. The reason for this seems to me to be lack of previous clarification of four if essential points.

1. What is the problem of women in modern industrial society?
2. What are the causes of this problematic situation?
3. What is the desired state for society in general?
4. What are the ways and means to achieve this goal?

It appears to me, that without a previous discussion of these four questions it is absolutely impossible to even understand, why kibbutz-society could at all be considered as a probable model for the solution of the problem of women's status in modern industrial society. Likewise, it is impossible without such a clarification to evaluate, whether kibbutz-society is in reality entitled to serve as such a model, I.e. If It has solved or will solve the problem better than societies outside the kibbutz.

3. The problem of women in industrial society

In all societies, any situation is considered to be a social problem, if it conflicts with current moral values. In modern society, the existing status of women used to conflict with the following current values: 1. equality before

the law, and 2. equal political rights for all citizens. This conflict was deemed problematic in the period of the classical women's movement and was resolved by legal reforms and by admitting women to the vote. Yet, the modern value of equality of opportunity still stands in clear contrast to the inferior economic and political status of women.

The same development is to be seen in the cases of racial and ethnic inequality. As soon as the ideal of equality of opportunity was accepted, the recognition followed that the social segregation of the previously underprivileged group constitutes covert discrimination. A well-known example was the case of the American negroes, the public rejection of the old maxim of separate-but-equal and the acknowledgment, that inevitably segregation causes inequality. In the case of racial and ethnic minorities, the focus of debate were the schools. In the case of women, the focus of debate is the segregated labor-market, the sex-typing of jobs. The next step in this development of values, then, is the refusal to recognize any stereotyping, which prescribes for the underprivileged group a group ideal, diverging from the general human ideal and assigning to them limited stereotypical social role. In western industrial societies nowadays, the problem of women is understood by many to imply removal of the remnants of overt and covert discrimination. The modern women's movement has taken an additional theoretical step and considers problem to constitute sexism as such, i.e., the view that being male or female is a decisive characteristic of a human being.

In general, as has also become obvious in the course of the symposium the ideologues of the kibbutz-movement view the problem of women modern society as much less weighty than the liberal progressive thinkers of western industrialized countries. The sociologists of the kibbutz-movement view the focus of the women's problem in the kibbutz merely as

that of the greater dissatisfaction women show than men with their social and particularly their occupational roles.

4. The causes of this problematic situation

Traditional socialist explanations for the inferior status of women are class society and the bourgeois family. The first explanation claims, that as long as the exploitation of man by man persists, women will remain doubly exploited. The second explanation views the financial dependence of women in bourgeois societies as the cause of their inferiority. A variant of this is the view, that as long as a large number of women are not active in production, they will lack both economic and political power. A more modern explanation is that of the double role or the double burden: modern women, who are employed in addition to their household duties, have lower aspirations or less energy and therefore also lower occupational achievements, because they suffer from the demands of their double roles or from the weight of their double burden.

The modern explanation for the diffusion and persistence of the problem of unequal status of women is the claim, that during the entire history of mankind sexism was the prevailing position; only due to the recent development of production technology, which has devalued male superior muscle-power, and due to the recent development of medical control of human fertility, which has permitted women to control their life-plans, has the abolition of sexism at all become feasible.

5. What is the desired state for society in general?

The participants of the symposium have not clearly expressed their own ideal solution of the problem of women. It seems to me, that a large part of kibbutz social scientists view the present situation in the kibbutz as an ideal state, because there is no financial dependence of women on men, and

because women's status is not determined by that of their husbands. In addition, women are obliged just as much as men to work full-time outside the private family household. Despite the fact that many kibbutz social scientists consider the situation to be quite satisfactory, some of them seem to find minor imperfections and thus space for changes and improvements.

Many participants, who are not kibbutz-members, seem to think that property relations in modern society are to blame for a large portion of the social problems within it; therefore, one may assume that they expect, a radical change in property relations would also result in a radical solution to the women's problem. No one has openly expressed the view, that the women's problem is solved in socialist society, neither in its Moscow nor in its Peking model. Moreover, the majority would view the problem as solved only in a society, that truly offers women equal opportunity, i.e. truly equal access to rewards, satisfaction and power. That would be the Scandinavian ideal, let's say, which, admittedly, has not yet been realized in any modern western industrial society.

The women's movement identifies with this ideal, yet it views even more explicitly as the ideal state that of the androgynous society, i.e. the society in which sexism has been removed not only by far reaching legal, economic, and social reforms, but also through a far-reaching psychological-educational revolution.

6. What are the ways and means towards that goal?

Corresponding to the mentioned views and opinions concerning the causes of the problem of women, we also find various opinions concerning the necessary ways and means to its solution. Thus, for instance, those who hail from various socialist traditions propose the following solutions: abolition of private property; liberation of women from household work; abolition of the

family; formation of cooperative or collective social units; obligation for all women to participate in productive labor. Concerning the problem of dual role and double burden, kibbutz-ideologues do not demand the abolition of the family; indeed, contrary to assumptions among American sociologists, they never did so even in legendary revolutionary pioneering days ((4)). They believe they have succeeded in their attempt to solve the problem by abolition of private familial consumption and child-care. Outside socialist tradition, there are those, who follow the American legalist tradition and see the means in organizing women in order to achieve both equality of formal rights and implementation. Both the progressive camp, which demands equal opportunity, and the more radical feminist camp consider the removal of the additional burden for women as possible only through a radically equal sharing of domestic service activities and child-care, inclusive of baby-care, among both parents and/or adults of both sexes.

On the basis of the experiences of the last decade, both groups have come to the conclusion, that the struggle against occupational segregation is central to the struggle against covert discrimination. Linked to this is the wider fight against sex-typing and stereotyping as well as against the ossified images of masculinity and femininity held by both males and females.

7. Current status of women in kibbutz-society

The evaluation of the current status of women in kibbutz-society became a focus of discussion in the symposium and appeared to the listeners as especially frustrating and confusing. It is my hope, that after recognizing the participants' differences of opinion concerning the above four points it will be easier to uncover the roots of this confusion.

The empirical evidence for such an evaluation of the status of women in the kibbutz is the following: first, we have data about occupation

according to sex in two of the four kibbutz-federations; second, there are demographic data of these federations, which permit the calculation of the rate of leaving the kibbutz by men and women, born or raised in the kibbutz; third, we have rather comprehensive attitude studies especially about men and women of the second generation by kibbutz social scientists. Before discussing the interpretation of these data, I want to mention shortly the components of the situation of women, which is specific to the kibbutz, about which - so it seems to me - all are agreed.

1. Private domestic and child-care work of women is lighter than the average burden of married women and mothers outside, yet heavier than that of married men and fathers inside the kibbutz. Baby-care during the first months of life is considered almost exclusively the task of the mother, who receives assistance from the nurse (metapelet).
2. Women are not dependent financially on the income of their men. Yet, the kibbutz-family fulfills nowadays considerable functions as a consumption unit.
3. Women are more affected by the occupational prestige and non-financial rewards of their husbands, than men are by those of their wife's.
4. Higher education and vocational training of women, although improving constantly, in quality still lag considerably behind that of men.
5. The achievements of girls in high school decline considerably compared to those of boys and to their own earlier ones.

8. Interpretations of the data

Most sociologists and educators in and outside the kibbutz agree on these five points, yet concerning the proper interpretation and significance of statistical data and attitude studies there exist considerable differences.

The fact, which appears to me as a key factor for understanding the problems of women in the kibbutz, is the sharp polarization of occupational activities of the sexes, with which I will deal in the next paragraph. To me lesser political activity of women and far larger rate of second generation women, who have left the kibbutz, appear directly correlated with their occupational situation, while a majority of kibbutz-sociologists deny such a correlation. Concerning lower achievements of girls in kibbutz high schools, kibbutz-educators like Dar (1974) and Alon (1975) noticed the connection with the limited and unattractive occupational perspective of women in the kibbutz. Palgi (1976) interprets the attitude-studies as evidence for her claim, that general satisfaction of women with life in the kibbutz as with their work were as high as that of men. Therefore, she claims, the problem of women in the kibbutz either does not exist at all or is minimal. Obviously, I differ from her both in my interpretation of the studies and in my conclusion.

The data in Rosner's well-known study (1969)' about attitudes of the second generation include replies to a question about the desire to change one's present work-place; double the percentage of women as of men in the age-group 20-30 years wanted to change. Yet, only a small percentage of these women could point at an alternative desirable work-place in the kibbutz. Also, 57 percent of the young men in this age group answered, they had found relevance and achievement in their work, as against only 45 percent of the young women. Yet, Palgi does not evaluate this as evidence for a more pronounced dissatisfaction of women with their occupational role. She dismisses this evidence on the ground, that these two questions

were included in a more complex set of questions concerning attitude to work, which set, she claims, has enough internal consistency to justify the comparison of men and women only regarding the overall replies to the whole set, not to individual questions.

As to the idea of the internal consistency of sets of questions about satisfaction with work, it seems to me extremely dubious; I will deal with it in the next section.

9. Interpretation of data concerning work satisfaction

Sociologists and psychologists of work are well aware, that the conventional direct question about satisfaction with work, or, more accurately, with the current job, tends to obtain very inaccurate and therefore hardly informative results. This is due to the absence of differentiation, but also to the prevalent tendency among interviewees to view any question concerning satisfaction with any of their main life-spheres as ego-involving and, thus, near-automatically to respond in the affirmative. It is, the advisable to add to the direct question other questions meant to elicit from the interviewee expressions of satisfaction or its absence with different aspects of the job, as well as different kinds of satisfaction or its absence For example, Bruggemann (1974, 1975) observes, that satisfaction and dissatisfaction can have both active and passive expressions.

In my comparative study (1979) concerning attitudes of women to their jobs, I have suggested an additional classification of satisfaction into superficial and consistent. Superficial satisfaction with work appears to me an important attitude to work, in that it tends to accompany the instrumental attitude to work. I see superficial satisfaction as the combination of the affirmative answer to the direct question regarding satisfaction with one's job, with the negative answer to the question, whether one would

recommend one's job to a good friend or offspring of the same sex. There are important attitudes to work expressed in apparently inconsistent answers. Not only is the inconsistency apparent; regular patterns in them are easily discernible.

Therefore, I reject the method deployed by Palgi (1976), which claims that wherever a majority of interviewees answer consistently any set of questions, only the sum of all their answers is valid for comparing the attitudes of two subgroups of interviewees, and that the noticeable difference in the answers of these two subgroups - men and women in our case - to two very specific questions is to be considered a priori irrelevant. I find this rule both superficial and misleading, at the very least in the present case. For me the data signify, that the interviewed young kibbutz-women are less satisfied with their occupational activities than young kibbutz-men. This assumption is based not only on the answers to the two questions mentioned above, but also on the generally known fact, that in the service-branches, where most women and hardly any men work, the turnover of workers is much higher, than in other kibbutz-branches. Thus, it frequently becomes extremely difficult to staff those "female" jobs. As mentioned, these were the facts, which, though not recorded statistically, constituted the background to numerous discussions about the work situation of women. Had the problem of de-facto-dissatisfaction of women with their jobs not existed at all, the outdrawn discussion about the service-branches and their "image", which predated any discussion about polarization in labour-division between the sexes, would not have come about at all.

10. Occupational polarization and its significance

Tiger and Shepher (1976) claim that the pronounced occupational polarization of sexes, which they were the first to document statistically for

two of the four kibbutz-federations, constitutes the proof for their thesis, that women in the kibbutz - just as women everywhere else - due to their natural tendency to domestic and child-care activities (as the learning of these skills is easier for women than others) will always end up performing these activities, whatever the ideology and socialization of their society. Kibbutz society, thus, serves as evidence for their thesis, that occupational polarization and segregation among the sexes is permanent and unavoidable; therefore, the goal of modern feminism, to overcome the differentiation of social roles of the sexes, has no chance of being realized.

I do not know any other social scientist from the kibbutzim, who agrees fully with this extreme anti-feminist interpretation of the situation. Yet, I also do not know any kibbutz-sociologist or educator, who shares my analysis of occupational segregation as the mainspring of de facto inferiority of opportunities of women in the kibbutz, and who also considers a far-reaching change of this situation necessary and feasible. However, a growing number of members and of sociologists, who are well acquainted with kibbutz-society, without being members, approach this evaluation.

Within the kibbutz-movement, discussion hardly ever concerned the abolition of the present polarized division of labour or a radical improvement of content, task characteristics, work-roles in the service-branches, but only an improvement of their bad image. The usual arguments are: (a) For kibbutz-society, satisfaction of the consumption needs, and especially the care and education of children, were as important as economic production. (b) Therefore, the customary labelling of service-branches as not productive or not profitable was taken from a system of values alien to the kibbutz. (c) Moreover, everybody would realize, that efficient management

of the services was economically of utmost importance for the kibbutz - as soon as in these branches a careful bookkeeping would be introduced.

This last mentioned reform has since been carried out extensively.

Similarly, it was recognized that - due to the erroneous concept of non-profitability of the services - the technical development of these branches had been neglected, and that, thus, for instance, work in kitchen and dining-hall had remained unnecessarily heavy and time-consuming. As a result, during the last decade the service-branches underwent considerable technical modernization. Yet, no socio-technical reorganization, aimed at fitting these work-places to the psychological and intellectual needs of the women working there, was attempted. It was tacitly assumed, that the motive of women's dissatisfaction was lack of prestige: whereas more and more men are supposed to need extensive vocational training or even higher technical or academic education for their work, most women's work remained unskilled or semi-skilled and a minority's lower semi-professional.

Therefore, it was decided to upgrade the prestige of women's jobs by upgrading their training in the following ways: vocational training for workers in child-care, food and clothing services was extended and specialized; women were sent to courses for beauticians, hairdressers and physiotherapists; a two-year-course for social workers was instituted; the graduates of the kibbutz-seminars for kindergarten and grade schoolteachers were granted the B. A. Earlier Gerson had advocated one-year-seminar training, and recently even two-year academic training for all Kibbutz Artzi infant-care workers (metaplot). Thus, it is claimed, two inequalities are abolished: the educational level of women as well as the prestige of women's jobs are being equalized to that of men.

I contend, that neither is true. Whereas the total time spent by kibbutz-women on any kind of further education or training may now be equal to that of men, the quality of this training and its usefulness to the trainee are on the average considerably lower for women than for men. Sending women to "courses" has indeed become a kind of compensatory reward for working for long years in jobs they dislike. A large number of these trainees do not expect to have a chance to use the newly acquired knowledge and skills in daily work in the kibbutz, or at least not in the near future. Very few women receive training which would be marketable outside the kibbutz, be that training technical, semi-professional or professional. In particular, until recently at least, such training was offered within the kibbutz-movement and led to no generally recognized diploma or degree.

No amount of training will raise the prestige of a job in the long run, if its intrinsic quality is not improved. I want to state, that - up to now - jobs that are considered in the kibbutz as unsuitable for normal healthy men, yet suitable for normal healthy women, i.e. nearly all consumer service jobs, child-care and education (excluding high-school teaching), and routine industrial and clerical jobs, have a level of task characteristics lower than those that are considered typical men's jobs. Moreover, in kibbutz-work, that is sex-typed as women's work, a genuinely progressive occupational career is much rarer than in that occupied by men. To refute the claim, that the occupational polarization de-facto discriminates against women, it is customary in kibbutz-circles to contend, that this is a voluntary segregation: women are free to work in any branch, it is said. Yet, they prefer the convenient physical conditions of the service-branches to agricultural work in the open air - "because they don't want to ruin their complexion".

In reality, many kibbutz-women have cried to become skilled or technical workers in agriculture or industry. Nowadays, nobody can "force" any member to work in a specific job. Yet, several widespread norms and organizational arrangements exercise enormous social pressure on women, either not to choose "masculine" occupations or to give up such careers in their early stages.

Here the most important double norm is to consider women - as a group - solely responsible for smooth functioning of all services and to consider all service jobs and especially child-care as unsuitable as regular employment for men. As a result, not only men - as a group - exercise social pressure on women, who do not want to work in the service-branches, but women - as a group - unconsciously do the same. Kibbutz- ideologues pride themselves of their society being a "conscious" society, planned according to the needs of its members. Without a radical and conscious fight against this double norm, there exists no chance to overcome occupational segregation and with it de-facto discrimination of women.

Up to now, kibbutz-sociologists, educators and ideologues have refused to do this. Either they claim, that the norm did not need fighting, as it wasn't that strong at all. (Here everybody mentions 2-3 men, who sometime, someplace, worked in child-care.) Or they contend, that such a fight would necessitate organizational devices as the quota system, which is considered alien to the kibbutz.

Rosner (1965) has shown that among kibbutz-men prejudice is widespread against placing women in skilled manual, technical engineering and managerial occupations. Apparently, even this finding is not taken seriously. Recently, cases of open discrimination against women in kibbutz-industry have also been documented ((6)): young women who - in spite of

prevailing prejudice - had chosen technical occupations and trained for them, were excluded from promotion into any higher qualified or managerial positions, these positions being exclusively occupied by young men with less training and experience.

Summing up - this occupational segregation and polarization is not considered a serious problem by any kibbutz-sociologist. Palgi (1976) even claims explicitly, that here we have a situation of "difference, yet equality". Spiro (1979) speaks of equivalence having replaced equality as an ideal.

11. *The "familism" debate*

"Familism" or the symptoms of its apparent growth are frequently mentioned in discussions about the status of women in the kibbutz, usually as endangering this status. What are supposed to be the symptoms? Social scientists of the Kibbutz-Artzi federation consider the demand of parents to let children sleep in their family's apartment instead of in the children's house, as the central and most dangerous symptom of familism. Whereas the Kibbutz Artzi is opposed on principle to such a change, it has been introduced in recent years by majority vote in a growing number of kibbutzim of the other federations. Recent studies claim to have found a clear correlation between familial sleeping arrangements for children and a general rise in the activities of the family as a consumption-unit, the latter trend, however, being common to the entire movement.

It is claimed, that the rise of familism weakens the impact and advantages of collective education of the peer-group, and, perhaps in the long run, lowers the readiness of the kibbutz population to engage in wider public issues, as e.g. Gerson (1978) contends. I cannot here enter the discussion. But, I want to challenge the claim, that this kind of familism is the main and inevitable danger to women's status in the kibbutz. Having the

children sleep at home or eating more meals at home only affects the situation of women negatively, if the burden of looking after the children at night, getting them up in the morning, fetching food from the store or kitchen, falls on the shoulders of mothers more than of fathers.

Unfortunately, this is very likely, but certainly not inevitable. And without any further familist changes, it is already a well-established pattern, that women are expected to carry the larger share of private child-care and household chores.

Yet another innovation was introduced widely in the Kibbutz Artzi, the "hour of love", i.e. freeing mothers to spend one hour during the work-day with their infants ((7)). This innovation has limited the chances of women to advance in work outside the immediate confines of the kibbutz. Indeed, mothers who were negatively affected by this innovation have complained about it. Nevertheless, kibbutz social scientists disregard its effect on the occupational status of women. Naturally, Shepher sees in it just another expression of women's natural tendency to revert to their traditional activities.

Outside kibbutz-circles, the concept of familism is used differently: what is usually meant here are values and norms, that prescribe early marriage for all adults and several children for all married couples. This is a view of the family, including also the extended family, as the centre of all positive human relations. This kind of familism and natalism has existed in kibbutz-society for decades and is there even stronger than in contemporary Israeli Jewish non-orthodox society in general, where familism is currently much stronger than in Western societies. Familism/natalism tends to emphasize the differences between the sexes, especially the specific reproductive functions of women, and to favor sex-specific traditional social

roles. These prevalent values seriously inhibit the process of psychological and intellectual emancipation of kibbutz-women. Gerson (1968) seems to have some qualms about the upsurge of familism, chiefly because of its encroachment on the concerns and functions of the collective, but also because of its anti-feminist connotations. Yet, even he is still (1978) so much occupied with rebutting the antiquated and erroneous claims about the supposed instability and marginality of the family in the kibbutz, that he, just like the great number of kibbutz social scientists and ideologues, hardly notices the elements of sexism, anti-feminism and illiberality encouraged by this well-established kibbutz-familism.

Why should this be so? Apparently, what is at work here, is a combination of those interests that buttress familism and sexism in the wider society as well, especially the protection of the short-range interests of male privilege and convenience and the "national interest" in a high birth rate, with the specific interest of producing enough offspring to maintain a stable kibbutz-population. It is high time, kibbutz-people realize, that those shortsighted interests conflict with their declared goal of full equality of opportunity for women.

12. Conclusion

I have tried to explain my view, that the kibbutz in its present form cannot serve as a model for the solution of the problem of women, neither for those aiming at full equality nor certainly for those aiming farther - at the abolition of sexism.

It is in the long-term interest of the kibbutz to widen the horizons and the chances for development and self-realization of its women and daughters; to attract young women - and men, for whom full equality of rights and chances and full equality of evaluation of the sexes constitutes a

basic value. In order to achieve these goals, it is essential, that kibbutz-society decides against the conventional occupational polarization and against traditional familism. Both tasks appear to me feasible as well as essential for the further existence of the kibbutz as an attractive and exemplary way of life.

Notes

1. An extended discussion of the Hebrew literature can be found in my review (1976) of Tiger and Shepher.
2. See my review in *Contemporary Sociology*, forthcoming. 1980, for a discussion of Gerson's analysis.
3. Padn-Eistn Stark and Hacker (1975), sociologists with feminist orientation developed the thesis for the Moshav Shitufi, that the frustration of women with their collective service jobs caused an apparent familism, it- a demand to enlarge their private domestic sphere. They also used the thesis of superficial satisfaction as an inconsistent attitude of women to their work. See also Mednick (1976), 75-91; Buber Agassi (1976, 1979); Blumberg (1976a, 1979b); Kanter (1976).
4. Talmon (1972) proves the process of gradual growth of emphasis on marriage and family in kibbutz-society from the thirties to the fifties. There are two parallel processes, that are obviously interconnected. First, the kibbutz-movement was an active part of an anti-clericalist, anti-traditionalist, secularist, experimentalist sector of the Zionist movement. This movement and the kibbutz-movement have drastically changed since the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948. Second, in the early days, though partnership and joint responsibility for children

were always taken for granted, this was under-emphasized for fear, that commitment to the nuclear family might compete with commitment to the collective. It was soon realized, however, that families form the basis for stability of the kibbutz, and so commitment to the nuclear family became overemphasized and familism became official ideology.

5. The papers by Rosner and Palgi (1976) and in the present volume contain interpretations of this material, from which I differ.
6. See Shapira (forthcoming).
7. Cf. Report on the 1974 conference in Giv'at Haviva of kibbutz secretaries and activists, concerning women kibbutz-members Hebrew, mimeo, Giv'at Haviva, 1974.