

## The usefulness of the concept of class for gender theory

By Judith Buber Agassi

What do we mean by class? All the people who "stand in the same relationship to the means of production"? (Marx)

Or people who stand in the same relationship to the market? (Weber)

Or people who have a similar income, standard of living, and usually also a similar lifestyle? (American social stratification theorists)

Are classes supposed to have distinct boundaries, common interests; to acquire, at least potentially, a class-consciousness; and to be permanently engaged in class-struggle or war, resulting in social revolution?

Or do social classes in modern societies have rather fluid boundaries, with a high degree of social mobility, both upwards and downwards, both intra-generational and inter-generational?

Are there two major classes in modern "capitalist" societies, (and no classes in "socialist" society), or is there a continuum of socio-economic strata, whose interests and lifestyle may well be shaped not only by income and property, but also by occupational group, level and kind of education, and by membership in ethnic, racial and religious groups?

The first class concept appears to me as unrealistic and misleading. The classical "Marxist" theories concerning the connection between "class society" and the inferior status of women - those of Frederick Engels - used this first concept, and make sense only if this is accepted.

1) Private property, the family and the state all appear together with class society. Gender inequality appeared only with class society.

2) The end of class society will bring about the end of this inequality.

3) the problem of gender inequality cannot be solved without the abolition of class society.

3)

Most Marxist and Neomarxist feminists refrain from criticizing these theories. Most of them, however admit that the traditional, strict use of Marxist class theory negates basic assumptions of feminism.