Women in the Changing World of the Kibbutz

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Introduction

This article will discuss the changes which have occurred in the kibbutz settlements and the influence of such changes on gender equality. The kibbutz organization attract attention among those dealing with the question of gender equality, because the kibbutz society has tried to implement equality between its male and female members. However, the kibbutz ideology is not specifically directed to gender issues, but rather to human rights in general. This may be one of the reasons that the "problems of female kibbutz members" (meaning their lower status) has been an ever-present issue throughout the entire history of the kibbutz movement (Tiger and Shepher, 1975; Spiro, 1979; Palgi et al., 1983).

Recently in the kibbutz settlements there have been several decisions which may bring about far-reaching ideological, social and economic changes. This article will examine the status of kibbutz women in the work sphere, in management, and with respect to their social security within the changing environment of the kibbutz.

Before we describe the current and proposed changes within the kibbutz society, we shall briefly examine the status of women in the areas of higher education, the work sphere, public service, the family, as well as social security arrangements.

Female Kibbutz Members and Higher Education

In the last 25 years, both sexes obtained the right to higher education. Though in the early 70's the right to post-secondary education belonged mainly to persons who were supposed to use this education in the direct service of the kibbutz, today every kibbutz member is entitled to further his or her studies in any field and in any academic institution. Statistics show that 61% of all men and 69% of all women aged 65 and under obtained at least 13 years of education (Palgi, 1997 - Table 1, Appendix). Among those aged 31-40, the percentage of men with 13 years of education or more
increases to 69% and the percentage of women to 74% (Leviatan, 1995). The gap between women and men decreases within the younger age group, and more men are now obtaining academic education. There are differences in the areas of study: the majority of the women are turning to the social sciences, philosophy and the arts, while the men study economics, pure sciences and technical professions.

**Female Kibbutz Members in the Work Sphere**

Each female member is considered part of the kibbutz workforce. The majority of the women - roughly 75% - work in various types of educational capacities and in consumer (domestic) services (Adar & Lewis, 1988). They work as service suppliers, and generally do not contribute directly to kibbutz revenue. In contrast, 75% of all male members work in production, and the by-products are sold outside the kibbutz, meaning they are "wage-earners". Though there is no personal income within the kibbutz framework, everyone knows who "earns" and who does not. Female kibbutz members work primarily in small teams and supply personal services; thus, their working hours are rigid. Such characteristics create much tension in the work sphere (Palgi, 1979; Hertz & Baker, 1983; Lieblitch, 1984). Women work less hours than men (an arrangement that could be considered a unique privilege for women, since the female members are partially relieved from household duties, as a result of the fact that the kibbutz provides most of the domestic services). Studies among kibbutz members have reported that in the opinion of both sexes, opportunities for self-actualization are similar, both with respect to job interest, and with respect to the opportunity to learn new things on the job and to utilize their own ideas and initiatives (Palgi et al., 1983). Female kibbutz members report a high level of personal satisfaction in their work, though the younger ones (under the age of 30) are less satisfied (Palgi & Sharir, 1991). At the same time, female kibbutz members are aware that their occupations have lower prestige than those of the men (Adar & Lewis, 1988). Additionally, it is also found that for a greater percentage of the women's occupations less training is required (Table 3, Appendix)

According to Table 2 (Appendix) some change has occurred in the occupational systems of the kibbutz: there is a decrease in the percentage of agricultural and education workers, while the percentage of clerical workers is on the rise. The increase in the percentage of women in industry stems from the inclusion of "female trades" (such as sewing and tourism) in this category. The decrease in the number of women in education stems from the abandonment of this field by female members, and the introduction of outside child-care workers.

**Managerial/Political Activities**

The status of women in the kibbutz is more marginal than that of men. When asked about the centrality of their position in the kibbutz when compared to that of their spouses, the female kibbutz members position themselves on the margins and their spouses at the center. A similar pattern of response was received when they were asked concerning their parents. The men gave similar answers to the two questions (Mednick, 1975). Few women occupy central offices, and even fewer an economic function (Mednick, 1975; Rayman, 1981; Adar & Lewis, 1988). The participation of women in the kibbutz assembly, the central institution for decision-making, is lower
than that of the men; the women are also less likely to voice their opinions in these assemblies.

Previous studies demonstrated that the rate of participation of female kibbutz members in the lower levels of communal tasks was equal to or even greater than that of men. However, as the level of the task increased, the number of females decreased (Adar, 1992). The most recent findings show that in the last five years the number of men already exceeded that of women at the level of committee heads (19% of all men, in comparison to 9% of all women). The percentage of all women in senior (and central) positions is 2%, and of all men 9% (4 times that of women - Palgi, 1997).

The research findings reveal a trend toward increased polarization in the social-political spheres: education and health committees (the traditional occupation of women) are run by women, while economic and financial areas are closed to them. With respect to the most prestigious committee, the kibbutz secretariat, there is at most one woman for every three men (Adar, 1993). Adar and Lewis (1988) found that in a period of 10 years there were 10 women who worked in central management among all the kibbutzim, 59 who were treasurers, and 29 who were factory managers. Zamir (1992) identified the female members who undertook social-political and economic tasks in 172 kibbutzim in the years 1986-1992. She located 22 central managers, double the number found in 1984; however, her list includes the names of women who were located by Adar and Lewis ten years earlier. Zamir found a similar number of treasurers. It is not possible to compare the number of factory managers, given the lack of earlier data; the newsletter "Kibbutz" revealed 9 female factory managers, who constitute approximately 4% of the total number of managers.

In the course of the last 20 years, many female members rose to the senior ranks of the kibbutz secretariat, as a consequence of a procedural expansion in which two kibbutz secretaries, male and female, were elected together. As a result, this central function has a "female" image, giving the impression that most kibbutz secretaries are women, though the data do not confirm this: according to the most recent data available (Getz, 1994), only 38% of all secretaries are women.

As compared to men, women enter the political domain at a later stage of their lives. Therefore, the average age of women in the upper ranks of responsibility is higher than that of men. It is worth noting that a woman's marital status made no difference as to whether she was politically active or not (Adar, 1993a).

Female Kibbutz Members and their Families

The distribution of work within the family is more equal than that in the work sphere (Selier, 1980; Orchan, 1990), but the responsibility for housework and child-care still remains the woman's responsibility. Women are more occupied than men in housecleaning and cooking. The female members get an hour off their work daily in order to do housework (Proposed Decisions, Kibbutz Artzi, 1966). The latest changes in the kibbutz family structure transferred tasks from the communal sphere to the family - the children sleep in the parents' house, and not, as previously, in the children's house; families are now responsible for feeding their own children, washing them, and taking care of their clothes, instead of the child-care workers as previously. With respect to work distribution in the kibbutz, women work close to the home, in
education and consumption; their workday begins with bringing the children to the children's house. The men work most of the day farther from the kibbutz center, in agriculture and industry; there the workday begins very early. As a result, the women are the ones who must wake up those children spending the night at the parents' home, and look after their clothes and health. The workday of the father starts too early and he works too far from home to share equally in these tasks (Ben-Rafael & Weitman, 1986). Therefore the main burden falls on the mother.

The Social Security of Female Kibbutz Members

All female members of the kibbutz belong to the workforce of the kibbutz. Their personal economic situation is equal to that of men, from the point of view of the individual budgetary allowances they receive, pension plan entitlement, general insurance, and occupational safety. Their clothing and shoe allowance even exceeds that of the male members. The socio-economic situation of a single female parent is similar to that of a single male parent; neither faces any danger of poverty or inability to support their dependants. The heads of single parent families receive allowances that are even greater than those received by other female or male members, as the financial expenses of the household and the family fall on the budget of one adult and not two. These facts hold true for most kibbutzim; slightly different conditions prevail in a minority of kibbutzim which have implemented a bonus system in members' budget allowances according to their work and/or duties.

National Organization of Female Kibbutz Members

In the years 1980-82, the two largest kibbutz movements, the United Kibbutz Movement (Takam) and the Kibbutz Artzi Movement, decided to establish departments devoted to the promotion of gender equality. The decision was consolidated and put into practice in Takam as a result of the social activism of female kibbutz members at the grass-roots level, and after prolonged debates in Artzi, debates in which the chief participants were the administrators of the organization. The women who were at the heads of these sections presented a clear feminist approach, backed up by a united support group of 40 female kibbutz members. As a result of cooperative action between the two sections, they formed a shared program and strategy for the two organizations.

The radical strategy of the 'equality departments' was set in motion at transitional three levels: at the level of the individual, at the level of the kibbutz, and at the level of the kibbutz movements. Workshops were set up for consciousness-raising and assertiveness. For the kibbutzim monthly lectures and symposia on gender equality were proposed, written material was prepared and videos produced. In addition, the equality sections put out a newsletter called HaMeshavah ("The Equalizer"). In order to initiate a change from the top downward, efforts were made to supply information to various departments at the kibbutz movements concerning manifestations of gender inequality in kibbutz life, and proposals were put forth to correct the distortions. The central female activists led a fierce struggle to increase the percentage of women among those who worked in senior positions and central duties in the kibbutzim and in the kibbutz movements.
The 'equality departments' expressed vigorous opposition to the "double messages", and personally supported women who wanted to pursue non-traditional occupations. A scholarship fund was established for women studying management. The political mission was to introduce women qualified for community and political positions, even those not inclined to adopt feminist views.

The popular perception in the kibbutz movement in its earlier years, as well as in the world feminist movement in the first half of this century, defined gender equality as the inclusion of women in all-male occupations and tasks. In contrast, the new wave presented the transfer of both women and men from occupations defined traditionally as appropriate to one sex into occupations of the other sex. On this ideological basis the departments recommended the inclusion of men in the education of young children. In the Kibbutz Artzi Movement there was in fact a decision handed down that the staff of the children's houses must consist of at least 5% male workers. Thanks to this approach, the barrier preventing the entry of males into caregiver tasks was shattered, though not at acceptable rates, and not so as to provide a profession or steady work.

Together with this, the 'equality departments' did not succeed in changing the negative attitude toward feminist organization. The use of the term "feminism" continues to arouse negative verbal reactions. Feminist action has not succeeded in convincing kibbutz members - women and men alike - of the sources of inequality. On only one point has understanding been obtained: all agree that certainly the potential of women in the work sphere is much more greatly restricted than that of men.

The economic crisis, and the breaches of trust among the leadership of the kibbutz movements, which continued into the 90's, brought about cutbacks and structural changes in the kibbutz movements; among the first departments affected by the cutbacks were those devoted to gender equality.

Proposed Changes in the Kibbutz

In 1985 an economic crisis broke out in Israel, including the kibbutzim. The economic growth curve plunged dramatically downward, demand and profits fell, and the situation threatened the very economic existence of the kibbutzim (for the most detailed chronological description of the crisis see Rosner, 1993). Prior to the crisis, there were no apparent negative influences, such as unemployment or a drop in the level of work skill required, resulting from the incorporation of advanced technologies (Shaiken, 1984; Noble, 1984; Kelley, 1986; Rosner, 1989; Palgi, 1989). However, there were signs of hidden unemployment with respect to both sexes. It remained hidden because the comfort of kibbutz members was the ruling trend during the period of prosperity in kibbutz industry, and not economic efficiency. Kibbutz members were allowed to choose their own workplaces according to their wishes, and in not a few cases would choose places that were already at full complement of staff. The work managers did not interfere, in order to avoid conflicts, unless they had no choice. In 1985 matters were turned upside down, and the economic crisis exposed a situation in which their very existence became the chief worry of most kibbutzim. All production departments in the kibbutz had to account for their staffing; in a few cases redundancies were found and the hidden unemployment was exposed. All those
whose work could be forfeited in the production sector suddenly found themselves having to find replacement work.

The economic crisis hit the kibbutz community when it was occupied with the processes of change - social, ideological and cultural. These did not cease, and some were even accelerated. The economic crisis forced the kibbutzim to seek organizational and social changes, which would enable them to avoid being hit by the crisis. The issue of equality between the sexes was not the chief worry of the kibbutzim, even in those cases in which the proposed changes directly affected women's work or their participation in communal issues.

The changes ultimately proposed in the kibbutz community were directed for the most part at matters related to the work area, on the assumption and expectation that through organizational means the kibbutzim could deal more efficiently with the economic crisis. The central office-holders proposed most of the changes in their kibbutzim; other changes were proposed by outside management experts. However, the female kibbutz members were not usually among those proposing the changes, although most of these changes had a direct affect on them.

1. The Shift in Domestic Assignments: The first change we shall assess is the shift of several tasks which were formerly communal responsibilities to the jurisdiction of the family. The process had begun prior to the economic crisis, perhaps as a result of ideological changes in the kibbutz, but accelerated during the crisis. Examples of this shift include: a transition from children sleeping in the communal children's houses to sleeping in their parents' houses; a proposal to transfer breakfast and/or supper from the communal dining room to the family house (already implemented in 37% of kibbutzim - Getz, 1996); a proposal that the work of laundering and ironing items of clothing should be done in the family house rather than by a communal laundry service. It was claimed that in this way various female kibbutz members would be freed from their work and could adopt income-earning tasks.

The privatization process in the kibbutzim 'normalized' the kibbutz family, turning it into a 'regular' household providing most of its own consumption functions and services, including having the children sleep in the parents' house. Findings indicate that from the woman's point of view the implication was a greater investment of work hours in the private sector, in the family house and a curtailment of hours in the communal sector (Palgi, 1994). The abolition of extensive branches of communal services such as the dining room, laundry, etc. might place new stumbling blocks in place of the old in the path of a woman aspiring to a career of her choice.

Changes in sleeping and eating arrangements were accompanied by the allocation of consumption to the private budget rather than the communal family budget. Privatization became the new by-word. The rate of privatization differed in each kibbutz, but in 1992 particularization in most of the kibbutzim stood at over 40% of all consumption expense, with respect to the kibbutz movement norm.

2a. Cutbacks in Staff and Streamlining of Services: the second proposed change was directed to cutbacks of the workforce in education and consumption services. Recommendations toward this end are to raise the number of children in the care of each education worker, to pay for various services, to open education centers and paid
service to people outside the kibbutz (88% of kibbutzim have already adopted this proposal), and to employ people who are not kibbutz members in the education area (approved by 55% of all kibbutzim - Getz, 1994). Until recently, the employment of paid workers in early education was not permitted. The intention was that as a result of these steps the women's workplaces would be changed to profit centers, and the kibbutz women would be free to choose careers or would move to the 'income-generating sector.'

2b. Surrender of the Principle of Self-Employment: A more strict examination indicates changes in general structure, such as a reduction in the agricultural workforce or the centralization of the kibbutz elementary classes in regional schools, as well as changes in the basic values of the kibbutz system. The principle of 'self-employment', which until recently was used, among other principles, to restrict the incorporation of paid workers in child-care and communal services, took on a new guise. In the past, the meaning of self-employment was that kibbutz members would be obligated to do jobs within the boundary of the kibbutz system if and when a need arose for them, whether or not they were suited for them or the jobs met their desires. Maintaining the principle of self-employment contributed in some measure to a restriction in the number of salaried employees in the kibbutz, and in large measure prevented the replacement of female kibbutz members working in child-care with salaried outside workers. This fundamental obstacle was recently removed, and it was widely recognized that it was the right of every man and woman to occupational fields of their own choice, even when it was necessary to hire an employee for a position not filled through staffing (Leviatan, 1995). As a result, more salaried workers are employed today in production and services, including the education system; in a parallel trend, more kibbutz members are turning to outside employment. In 49% of kibbutzim hired workers may be substituted for kibbutz members, and in 60% of kibbutzim there as been a decision to encourage members to work outside the kibbutz (Getz, 1996). This trend has not yet changed the apportionment of work between the sexes in the kibbutz employment system, although there is some expansion of opportunities for both sexes for employment in non-traditional positions.

3. Payment in Exchange for Public Activities: The third proposed change is intended to increase the readiness of kibbutz members to accept 'disagreeable' tasks in the kibbutz, through material recompense. This change was put into effect in 5% of all kibbutzim (Getz, 1996). In this case it was proposed to rethink the connection between effort, skill and the type of task, and the giving of material recompense to people according to these criteria - a connection that most kibbutzim found objectionable in the past, and for which they still show reluctance, given their existence as socialist communities.

4. Differential Recompense for Work: The profit term "consideration for value" is understood as the granting of a non-equal monetary reward for communal jobs and tasks within the employment structure of the kibbutz. Until now all kibbutz members received identical allowances without regard to the amount, type or quality of their work. Various proposals for change in this area have been put into effect, thus implementing certain proposals that vitiate equality among members' allowances, and create differences in their standard of living. One proposal concerns the creation of a connection between the number of days of work a member puts in and the allowance received (implemented in 11% of kibbutzim according to Getz, 1996). A second
proposal calls for giving a special recompense to those who undertake disagreeable tasks (item 3 above). Another proposal concerns the giving of a differential wage to members according to their work, or at least the introduction of a differential component in the allowance according to the contribution to the kibbutz; this proposal has been implemented in 6% of kibbutzim (Getz, 1996).

5. Elimination of Rotation in Management Positions: The fifth proposed change is the elimination of arbitrary rotation among successful kibbutz work managers. 29% of all kibbutzim have decided to adopt this proposal (Getz, 1996). Until recently, each manager was elected for a term not exceeding 5 years. The rotation mechanism prevented the creation of a powerful economic elite. When the economic crisis began, there were those who believed that the cause of the crisis was buried in the constant random rotation of the managers.

6. Transfer of Decision-Making to Experts: the sixth proposal is based on the argument that it is appropriate that decision-making be transferred into the hands of a smaller group of experts (59% of kibbutzim have boards of directors in industry; 21% of kibbutzim have boards of directors in agriculture; in 58% of kibbutzim there is an economic directorate instead of a central committee), and that there should be an elected directorate instead of the kibbutz general assembly (26% of all kibbutzim decided on this change: Getz, 1996). In fact, committees of experts had operated even in the past, but the innovation is in the fact that it is now proposed to grant these experts authority for decision-making, instead of the advisory capacity they enjoyed previously. The background to these proposals originated in the widespread belief that the average kibbutz member is no longer capable of keeping up with the complexities of modern technology and economics. In addition, a position was maintained in various debates that the failure of the kibbutz originated in non-expert participation in decision-making. The proposal to cancel the general assembly was founded on these apprehensions, and on the realization that the number of participants in these meetings has decreased.

7. "Separation between the Economy and the Community": this proposal entailed the creation of two separate entities in the kibbutz: the economic/production function and the consumption/communal function. The economic/production function has autonomy to operate within the boundaries set by the consumption/communal (23% of kibbutzim decided on this change). The implications of this separation are two-fold: control of the production branches is increasingly slipping away from kibbutz members, and these branches are also becoming separated from the service branches and central committees. The separation at once restricts the amount of qualitative information flowing to the kibbutz community, lessens the latter's ability to influence, and weakens the overall social control. The severing of the connection between the production sector and general community (the opportunity to participate in information and decision-making) is likely to cause an increase in the alienation of the members from their work, and a reticence to invest in their jobs. Due to the particular lack of qualifications in the economic area among women in the kibbutz, their vulnerability is greater, and hence the feeling of frustration and helplessness. And in all this there is a cost to the community.

Conclusion
It appears that several of the proposed changes indicate a movement from relationships that are shared, mutual and non-mediated to relationships that are hierarchical, formal and more indirect (see items 5, 6 and 7 above). With other proposed changes there is an apparent movement from shared, direct and diffuse relationships to market relationships that are characteristically more specific, profit-oriented and non-personal (see items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7).

The last five changes appear on the surface to be gender-neutral, but in fact they are not. The third and fourth changes afford preferential opportunities for men for financial gain, because of the assumption that paid overtime will concern only production, in which the participation of women is very low. Moreover, women will find it hard to accommodate to a set number of absence days from work, including sick days, since according to the existing division of work in the kibbutz they must also care for the health of their children, and therefore their absence days are greater. The fifth, sixth and seventh suggestions will prevent women from participating in the managerial ranks and decision-making bodies, as only a few female members were allowed in the past to participate in managerial positions (and the cessation of rotation will prevent the entrance of new female members), and few women in the kibbutzim specialize in economics and management.

The new work order has not yet led to an increase in significant women's initiatives or in the number of women entering unconventional occupations. On the other hand, the development of consumption and education services for the non-kibbutz sector may tie female members to service work, despite the fact that they desire alternatives. Until recently, it was relatively convenient for female and male members to change their work places. Now, with the worsening of the economic situation in the kibbutz, and given that women can bring income in from outside instead of working in the kibbutz, achieving alternative employment will prove more difficult. It is possible that the reason women are less opposed to hiring outside workers to perform unwanted jobs (Palgi & Sharir, 1997) stems from the fact that they refuse to be tied to their traditional occupations. In the past, salaried workers were employed only in men's jobs and almost never in women's jobs; now, however, the employment of hired workers in all jobs has been legitimated. The data show that though women do not present active opposition to changes or express reservations about them, a lower percentage of women than men finds life in the kibbutz appealing. The reaction of most women to the kibbutz procedures is expressed in a quiet disconnection from kibbutz life. Most women, given the choice, would not have chosen urban life, but nor would they have chosen kibbutz life; they would have preferred a different version of village life.

One of the aims of the changes was to re-organize the work places of women. The old system forced women to work in kibbutz jobs that "didn't bring money home," but which allowed for convenient work conditions (short hours, a surplus of female workers). In the many debates that went on in the kibbutz movements and inside the kibbutzim concerning the changes, an assumption was made that one of the factors leading to the failure of the kibbutz was hidden in the defective functioning of the consumer sector (child-care, food and clothing services), and the surplus staff invested in them. It was hinted that this sector was managed by women and that they did not manage it properly. It was claimed, for instance, that there was a need to decrease staff in services, on the assumption that there existed hidden unemployment.
It is worth noting that a similar proposal was not suggested with respect to most of the "male" work places.

It was decided that women must earn "real money" instead of simply working in community service. This demand accorded well with the feelings of many women; their "way out" was not to change jobs but to both continue to supply services to the kibbutz and offer paid services to the public outside the kibbutz. The "change" thus left the division of work as it was, the women continuing to work mainly in child-care and consumption services and bringing in little income.

Another trend is beginning to take shape in the employment arrangements in the kibbutz: an increase in the percentage of outside workers, a trend with conflicting effects. On the one hand, the opening up of the Israeli job market to female kibbutz members offers them a wider variety of occupations than the traditional variety of kibbutz occupations. If women were also to vary their areas of occupational training, the chances of improving their status as workers and earners would also increase. However, an opposing process may also develop from the current situation; it is possible that in the future female kibbutz members will prefer to take up public offices inside the kibbutz, while the male members will prefer to work in outside jobs, because the opportunities for men in the Israeli job market are better, and because women are employed primarily in the lower salary ranges.

Another changing trend was aimed at the managerial team. The rotation in managerial functions that were mostly in the hands of men will occur less often, if indeed the current trend continues (Palgi & Sharir, 1991). As a result, women will find it more difficult to infiltrate these functions. The slowing of the rotation will limit women's opportunities for mobility inside management ranks, and their ability to acquire power in decision-making. In addition, women may be formally barred from participating in decision-making, as they lack skills in the economic area. If only experts are allowed to be involved in economic committees, women will find themselves more than ever pushed to marginal positions.

It is possible to say that the contract between the sexes has been broken and replaced. In the past, men were the income-earners and women the child-care and service workers, while both participated in decision-making. According to the new social contract, men, as in the old arrangement, will continue to make most of the economic decisions; but the distancing of women from decision-making will no longer be voluntary but a legally enforced alienation. Women and men as one must earn money, but women are expected to work in jobs that have less earning potential, such as child-care and services.

Even if the changes were not aimed directly at women, one may not deny their greater effect on women's lives than on those of men. The kibbutz society is becoming increasingly dependent on hierarchical supervision and on the control of its members by market forces. Female kibbutz members find themselves on the losing side. In the "old" kibbutz society they were responsible for maintaining a pleasant atmosphere and the spirit of the kibbutz. Men, in whose hands were concentrated most external contacts and economic positions, were already frequently exposed to hierarchical relations and market forces. Today, women must organize the workplace differently in order to accommodate themselves to the demands of the market; men's work has
been directed to these conditions for a long time. The adaptation required of women is far from simple, and what is expected of them in their workplace is ambivalent. On the one hand they are expected to manage their work efficiently and according to the regulations of the market; on the other hand they are expected to keep up the informal "domestic" cooperative atmosphere in their workplace, since the kibbutz kitchen, dining hall and laundry are part of the "regular" familial functions.

What will be the ultimate result of these changes with respect to women's status in the kibbutz? The changes will have conflicting effects. The positive results - the opening up of the outside job market to the kibbutz - will expand the variety of women's occupations and will allow them to penetrate into new occupations and achieve more in the professional and economic fields; these achievements will improve their social status. However, it is to be remembered that this trend also exposes women to the social discrimination that exists in Israeli society. It is almost self-evident to say that when the kibbutz loses its unique characteristics, women will lose the advantages the old kibbutz bestowed upon them: economic equality, equivalent social security and legal equality. The status of women in the kibbutz will approximate the status of women in Israeli society - with both its advantages and disadvantages.

We may draw several possible scenarios:
1) The opening up of the regional job market may open doors to women for more varied professional employment.
2) An increase in the number of men taking on outside jobs will create an opportunity for female kibbutz members to take on political and central offices inside the kibbutz, which will affect their ability to acquire control over the management of their lives and the lifestyle of the entire community.
3) The advantages enjoyed by men in the Israeli job market may also increase the gap between the world of women, who care for their homes, and the world of men, as earners. Men will continue to be the main earners and women will be merely sub-earners and responsible for housework.
4) It is possible to predict that two groups of women will be distinguished: those who aspire to the development of a professional career, and others who will immerse themselves in family and housework. Based on the situation as it stands today, neither group will have its needs met particularly well within the future arrangement of the kibbutz.

In conclusion, the failure to include gender equality among the factors related to kibbutz survival, and the concentration only on economic factors, have intensified gender inequality in kibbutz society. With respect to feminist theory, it is possible to learn from the kibbutz experience that technological and economic changes do not improve gender equality in society; this can be accomplished only if such mechanisms are consciously targeted to this task. Such attempts will not take place in a period of economic crisis - the time in which most extreme organizational and social changes are decided - as long as gender equality is not seen as an existential matter but merely as an external "decoration".

Appendices

Table 1. Education Levels of Male and Female Kibbutz Members Age 65 and Younger (in Percentages)*
Men Women
didn't finish high school 13  6
finished high school  26  25
post-secondary education 61  69
Total Percentages 100  100
Total Numbers 358  393

* Source: Palgi, 1997

Table 2. Work Places of Male and Female Kibbutz Members Age 65 and Younger (in Percentages)*

Men Women
agriculture  23  4
industry, crafts and tourism  30  17
communal services  10  25
child-care  6  28
administration & secretarial  18  17
other  13  9
Total Percentages 100  100
Total Numbers 358  393

* Source: Palgi, 1997

Table 3. Training Levels Required in the Jobs of Male and Female Kibbutz Members Age 65 and Younger (in Percentages)*

Men Women
non-skilled  13  21
4-5 months' training  13  16
6-12 months  13  11
1-2 years' training 23  13
more than 2 years, up to 3 years 15  16
over 3 years  23  23
Total Percentages 100  100
Total Numbers 358  393

* Source: Palgi, 1997

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[Top]