CHICAGO JOURNALS

The Zionist Women's Movement in Palestine, 1911-1927: A Sociological Analysis
Author(s): Dafna N. Izraeli
Source: *Signs*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn, 1981), pp. 87-114
Published by: The University of Chicago Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173511
Accessed: 12/06/2014 14:24

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Signs.*

http://www.jstor.org

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

The Zionist Women's Movement in Palestine, 1911-1927: A Sociological Analysis

Dafna N. Izraeli

The Zionist women's movement in Palestine developed within the socialist Zionist movement as a reaction to the disappointment of a small group of women with the limited role they were assigned in the emerging society. From its beginnings in 1911, the movement aimed to expand the boundaries of the Jewish woman's role in Palestine and to secure her full and equal participation in the process of Jewish national reconstruction. Members of the movement were nationalists and idealists who had come as pioneers from eastern Europe during the years 1904–14, and they were joined by women who arrived in Palestine after World War I, from 1919 through 1923. These periods, known in the history of Zionism as the second and third waves of immigration *(aliya)*, are considered the formative periods of Israeli society. During the second wave the dominant values of the society were formulated and the rudiments of

---

EDITORS' NOTE: *"The transformation of dissatisfied people into a social movement requires their awareness that they share a situation which in some important ways is unjust," writes Dafna Izraeli. Her story is of the women of Israel's failure to achieve political effectiveness because, divided in their experience among the different waves of immigration, they could come to no common definition of the injustices they suffered and thus to no common decision on how to achieve a political voice that would allow redress. Although the conclusion of her analysis is much more pessimistic than that of Marianne Schmink, both essays have a positive result in that both increase our consciousness of possible sources of disunity among women, a necessary step toward awareness of a unity that can transcend differences.*

[*Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1981, vol. 7, no. 1]
© 1981 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved. 0097-9740/82/0701-0009$01.00

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

new organizational forms appeared. During the third wave goals were implemented and major institutional structures took shape.[1]

Because they were marked by social creativity, readiness for experimentation, and remodeling of institutional forms, these periods were also crucial for the status of women in the new society. Many of the obstacles to a restructuring of sex roles were reduced, and conditions were favorable for redefining traditional role relations between men and women. That equality of the sexes was achieved during the second wave and that women played a role of importance are two of the founding myths of Israeli society. Although the career of Golda Meir and the conscription of women into the army are often invoked to lend credence to these ideas, and to link the idealized past with the present, the "facts" of the case have never been subject to systematic investigation.

While this account is a study of a specific place, time, and circumstance, it highlights dilemmas that commonly confront women in socialist movements generally, especially during periods of economic and political upheaval. At such time the commitment of a movement's participants tends to be heavily taxed, and the demand for undivided loyalties is great. Identification with a larger movement creates a set of constraints on the development of feminist ideology and on the creation of a separate feminist organization, particularly when feminist dissatisfaction is directed toward the position of women within the movement itself.[2] These constraints, and their consequences for the career of the feminist movement in Palestine, are the major themes of this paper.

Background

Modern political Zionism developed in Europe and America in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The World Zionist Movement and its organizational arm, the World Zionist Organization, established in 1897, served as umbrella structures incorporating a variety of social and political ideologies for which the rebuilding of Zion was the binding element. The Palestinian women's movement developed within Labor Zionism, which was inspired by radical socialist ideas then gaining momentum in Russia. The Labor Zionist groups, based in the cities and towns of what was formerly the Russian empire, professed an egalitarian ideology. Women did not organize in separate groups nor were they assigned specialized roles, although they tended to be more active in cultural

1. S. N. Eisenstadt, *Israeli Society* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967); A. Bein, *The History of Jewish Agricultural Settlement in Palestine,* 3d ed. (Tel Aviv: Massada Press, 1954); Y. Shapiro, *Achdut Haavoda Party: The Power of Political Organization* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Ltd., 1976) (in Hebrew).

2. J. M. Slaughter, "Women and Socialism: The Case of Angelica Balanbanoff," *Social Science Journal* 14, no. 2 (1977): 57–65.

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

activities than in politics.[3] In contrast, women in the nonsocialist sector of the Zionist movement both in Europe and North America formed separate chapters that engaged in fund raising, education, and philanthropy.

Although Labor Zionism was ideologically committed to social equality it did not concern itself with the issues of women's emancipation. One explanation may lie in socialist theory: if the elimination of exploitive relationships automatically results in women's emancipation, then within the new society in Palestine women's emancipation must be assured. A more persuasive explanation, however, is that the Zionist movement defined the problem of Jewish existence as the fundamental and overriding social issue to which all efforts had to be directed. As Eisenstadt suggests: "The Zionist ideology assumed that the Jews would not be able to participate fully in the new modern societies and would become, despite their assimilation, an alien element. . . ."[4] Jewish feminists were told that the Jewish woman "must bear in mind that even those [non-Jewish] women fighting for [feminist] emancipation view her first not as a woman, but as a Jewess."[5] But, for whatever reason, within the Labor Zionist movement sexual equality was taken for granted, and the value of equality between men and women in early political Zionist ideology was institutionalized in the socialist movement through the integration of the sexes in the various groups and activities prior to immigration to Palestine. Since the subordination of women in society was not defined as a condition requiring special action, no legitimation existed for specialized institutional arrangements for its change. Women's experience in Labor Zionist groups prior to immigration created a set of expectations that later conditioned their reaction to what they encountered in Palestine.

The pioneers of the second wave emigrated from Russia following the pogroms that took place in 1903 and after the October revolution in 1905. Many pioneers were infused with radical and socialist ideas prevalent in Russia at the time, but they had been disappointed by the social reform movement there and by its failure to solve the problems of the Jewish people.[6] The immigrants consisted primarily of middle-class young, single people or young couples without children or parents. In a new country the usual restraints and obligations that bind women to domestic roles and traditional definitions of their domain were reduced, which allowed women freedom to experiment with alternative roles.

3. Katzir, *Source Readings for the Zionist Movement in Russia* (Tel Aviv: Massada Press, 1964) (in Hebrew).

4. Eisenstadt, p. 3.

5. From a manifesto prepared in 1897 by the Committee of Women Zionists in Stanislaw, Galicia (Poland), quoted in N. Gelber, *The History of the Zionist Movement in Galicia 1875–1918* (Jerusalem: Histadrut Hazionit, 1958), 2:806.

6. Shapiro.

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

Furthermore, there are indications that these women composed a self-selected group that had "liberated" itself from the effects of traditional socialization. The move to Palestine required determination and idealism from all the immigrants, but even more so from the women. They had to combat the traditionally stronger social control exerted by parents over daughters, the stigma attached to a single woman leaving home (especially in the company of a group of men), as well as the physical hardship of the passage itself. It is not surprising that women constituted only about 30 percent of the total immigrants to Palestine, many of whom joined the religious communities in the holy cities. Among the minority who came to live productive lives as laborers—those whose initiative, energy, and ideological fervor were the dominant force for change in the structure of the Jewish community—the proportion of women was even smaller.[7]

Women came to Palestine ready to participate more fully in social life than they had been permitted to do in Jewish bourgeois circles in Russia. In the words of Sara Malchin, a founder of the women's movement: "These young women Zionists dreamed of engaging in battle and sacrifice for the ideal of redemption, even while still in the diaspora."[8] They did not expect to struggle for women's place; they thought equality would be an accompanying feature of their move to the new homeland.

Years of Incubation, 1904–11

Ideas and ideology played an important role in shaping the character of the pioneering society, even though specific activities undertaken in the name of the ideology were redefined to suit the constraints of practical experience. A basic tenet of the ideology was the value attributed to the collective. The individual was expected to sacrifice personal interests to the welfare of the new Jewish society whose members in-

7. Y. Gorni, "Changes in the Social and Political Structure of the Second Aliya between 1904–1940," in *Zionism: Studies in the History of the Zionist Movement and the Jewish Community in Palestine,* ed. D. Carpi (Tel Aviv: Massada Press, 1975). Throughout this paper we are dealing with small numbers of people. According to Gorni some 35,000–40,000 persons came on the second *aliya,* but most left the country or were deported by 1914. Only a fraction of those who remained formed the socialist pioneering element that gave the tone to the developments in the *Yishuv* (the Jewish community in Palestine) and influenced the course of its history. Eisenstadt, in describing the second *aliya,* points out that "although workers were in the minority . . . it is nonetheless considered as a labor immigration, since the workers' initiative and energy changed the whole structure of the Jewish community" (p. 11).

8. S. Malchin, "The Woman Worker in Kineret," *Hapoel Hatzair,* vol. 11, no. 13 (1912) (in Hebrew). For an expression of similar aspirations, see the memoirs of women pioneers in B. Chabas, ed., *The Second Aliya* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Ltd., 1947) (in Hebrew); R. Katzenelson Shazar, ed., *The Plough Woman* (New York: Herzl Press, 1975); Y. Harari, *Woman and Mother in Israel* (Tel Aviv: Massada Press, 1959) (in Hebrew).

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

cluded not only those who had already immigrated but also the multitudes of Jews who would "return home" in the future.

Among the two most important cultural creations of the second wave were the image of the ideal pioneer—the *halutz*—and the ideal form of social organization—the *kvutza* (forerunner of the kibbutz).[9] *Halutz* literally means a member of the vanguard, one who goes before the camp and fulfills its highest purposes. These include a readiness for personal sacrifice made necessary by the persistent dangers of working in the malaria-infested swamplands and of defending the young collectives from attack by Arab marauders, belief in a return to the biblical state of farming the land, and dedication to manual work. During the second wave physical work was idealized and elevated to a religious value.[10] These key elements of the *halutz* ideal had an essentially masculine character, which heightened the relevance of biological differences between the sexes.

The most urgent problem facing the new immigrants upon their arrival in Palestine was employment. In vain they knocked at the doors of the established farmers of the first wave (1881–91), who were unwilling to substitute Jewish labor for the cheaper, more experienced, and amenable Arab labor. Women faced greater obstacles than men. The first-wave farmers considered their insistence on having "men's jobs" "unnatural." They stigmatized and ostracized the women and forbade their own daughters any contact with them.[11] Those who were less antagonistic feared for the women's safety. Any girl doing man's work in the vineyards might be considered easy prey by the Arab laborers, unaccustomed to such license from "respectable" women. Faced with unemployment and filled with a desire to establish a new type of Jewish society, the second wave rejected as unsuited to their purpose the existing socioeconomic structures developed by their forerunners. They moved north to the barren lands of the lower Galilee, drained the swamps, and established a new type of communal life—the *kvutza*—a small collective settlement in which everyone labored.

Two of the guiding principles of the new settlement were "conquering the land," that is, making it arable for Jewish farmers, and economic self-sufficiency.[12] The *kvutza* was a pragmatic solution for the pioneers who faced the problem of "how to organize some form of settlement for young people with strong socialist and nationalist aspira-

9. Eisenstadt (n. 1 above), p. 17.

10. Bein, p. 31; W. Preuss, *The Labour Movement in Israel* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1965), p. 19; A. D. Gordon, "People and Labor," in *The Zionist Idea,* ed. A. Hertberg (New York: Meridan Books, 1959), p. 373. Bein observes that the typical photograph of the second wave shows pioneers with their work tools.

11. Z. Even Shoshan, *The History of the Workers' Movement in Eretz Israel* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Ltd., 1963), 1:208–9 (in Hebrew).

12. Bein, p. 53.

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

tions, without capital and with little experience and know-how. . . ."[13] This form of living very quickly became a normative ideal.

In the *kvutza* the women were automatically assigned to the kitchen and the laundry.[14] It seems that among the men and many of the women the conscious rebellion against the traditional occupational structure of Jewish society did not extend to women's work. It remained part of the "world taken for granted" that domestic work was the woman's responsibility.[15] The attitude of the men is described by one of the women pioneers in an article that appeared in the socialist party newspaper at the time: "Many [of the workers] believed that the role of the young female idealist coming to Palestine was to serve them. The young women, who were still inexperienced, submitted to this view and believed that in cooking and serving they were solving most of our questions [concerning our role] in Palestine. The young woman who dared to doubt this assumption was considered strange."[16] It is ironic that the women should have been expected to perform domestic tasks, which in their former homes usually had been the responsibility of domestics. They were poorly equipped for the jobs they were expected to fill so "naturally" and doubly frustrated because the roles for which they had hoped were denied them. Although the men had been neither farmers nor watchmen prior to immigration, it was assumed natural for them to undertake these "manly" roles. Plowing and loading crops were considered too strenuous and even harmful for women, a situation reflected in the following statement: "My first six weeks in Palestine I worked in Degania [a *kvutza* established in 1909]. I listened with such admiration as the men spoke of their work tools and sounded the names of corn yields. My soul yearned to be in contact with the soil, to work the land, but that was not granted me, nor to any other women."[17]

Since the training men received from professional agronomists in Palestine was usually not extended to women, the "ability gap" between the sexes widened. Economic considerations also encouraged the perpetuation of a traditional division of labor between the sexes. The newly formed communes were dependent on the World Zionist Organization, which had yet to be convinced that agricultural collectivism was preferable to the previous system of farms under the direction of a professional agronomist in which the pioneers were paid a wage, women

13. Eisenstadt, p. 20.

14. Chabas. B. Katznelson, *Writings* (Tel Aviv: Mapai Publication, 1948), 4:179 (in Hebrew).

15. Even Shoshan, pp. 196–97.

16. T. Liberson, "On the Question of the Women Workers," *Hapoel Hatzair*, vol. 27 (1913) (in Hebrew).

17. A. Shidlovsky, "Kineret in Its Jubilee," in *With the Steps of the Generation*, ed. R. Katznelson Shazar (Israel: Histadrut HaKlalit—Moetzet Hapoalot, 1964) (in Hebrew).

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

paid less than men.[18] The *halutzim* (plural form of *halutz*) had to prove that the *kvutza* was economically viable. Viewing women as less productive, they feared that their participation in agriculture would result in a deficit, and so women were confined to more "suitable" jobs. The same men who had demanded that the farmers of the first wave overlook economic considerations on ideological grounds and prefer them to Arab laborers accepted only one to three women into a *kvutza* with between ten and thirty male members on the grounds that women were economically less productive. The fact that women were so few bound them even more strictly to domestic chores because it was impossible for them to rotate between kitchen and field work. In 1909 there were 165 Jewish workers organized in *kvutzot* or workers' collectives in the Galilee, only eleven of whom were women. In 1912 there were 522 Jewish workers in *kvutzot* in Judea, thirty of whom were women. During the war years, the number of workers rose to 1,500 while the proportion of women increased to over 13 percent (200 women).[19]

Domestic chores, although physical work, had low status among the pioneers who established a hierarchy of values according to both the conditions under which work was performed and the type of work engaged in. A member of a collective had higher status than someone who was an employee; "productive work," work that produced marketable goods, was deemed more valuable than "nonproductive work," such as services provided for the members of the collective. Thus, cooking, laundering, and mending were not considered productive work, and they ranked low among pioneering values. Cooking for a collective held greater prestige than cooking in a private household, but it was less "worthy" than tilling the soil. Within productive work, agriculture, specifically field crops (*falcha*), became the embodiment of the *halutz* endeavor, symbolizing economic self-sufficiency as well as rejection of the pattern set by the farmers of the first wave with their dependence on Arab labor and foreign markets.

One of the unintended consequences of this pioneering ideology as well as of the new forms of social organization was that they relegated women to secondary roles in the new society. The *halutza* (female form of *halutz*) had virtually no opportunity to become a bearer of the effective symbols of the *halutz* ideology. Thus, the women's dissatisfaction and growing sense of deprivation came to focus on three issues: formal status, participation, and attitudes in the *kvutza*.

18. M. Schochat, "The Collective," in Katznelson Shazar, ed., *The Plough Women;* Bein (n. 1 above), p. 73.

19. Even Shoshan, pp. 213–14; Y. Shapira, *Work and Land—Fifty Years of the Histadrut of Agricultural Workers* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Ltd., 1961), 1:226 (in Hebrew); A. Maimon (Fishman), *Women Workers' Movement in Eretz Israel* (Tel Aviv: Hapoel Hatzair, 1929), p. 37 (in Hebrew).

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

In these early years, women were not accorded full membership; it was taken for granted that the *kvutza* was made up of male members and the few women were helpers doing domestic work. They were not included as members in the annual contracts with the Zionist Organization even though "they had shared the burden and dangers equally with the men."[20] As Maimon explains, "it was argued that in point of fact the women were working for them [members of the *kvutza*], not for the Palestine Office [of the Zionist Organization] which was concerned with the farm, not with the kitchen."[21]

In addition, the women felt deprived of the opportunity to "conquer new fields of work" through agriculture and to guard the *kvutza* as the men were doing, and they resented the restrictions placed on their participation in group decision making about the affairs of the *kvutza*. In an article, "On the Question of the Women Workers," which appeared in the workers' newspaper in 1913, Tchiya Liberson bemoaned the fact that "the men could not get used to thinking of them [the women] as real members. They did not want to come to terms with the fact that the women express their ideas freely about how matters should be handled and that they stand firm in their opinions."[22] The problem of women's participation in group meetings was exacerbated by the fact that relatively few knew Hebrew, the language of religious instruction in the diaspora and of the pioneers in Palestine. A study of second-wave pioneers still living in Palestine in 1940 found that 60 percent of men, but only 30 percent of the women, knew Hebrew upon arrival.[23]

But the issue that most aroused the women's indignation is expressed in the Hebrew term *yachas,* which literally means attitude or relation. In the context of the second wave it referred to what women deemed degrading treatment. It combined, women argued, expressions of disregard and even derision for their yearning to work equally in the building of the country. In the words of another female pioneer: "We young women did not encounter hardship in our work but rather in the humiliating treatment and apathetic attitude toward our aspirations. Even in the eyes of the [pioneer] laborers we were ludicrous; not only those of us who wished to destroy the natural barriers and take hold of the difficult occupations of agricultural work but even those who undertook work in which a woman is able to compete with men—even there we were ludicrous [in their eyes]."[24] The issue of *yachas* came up

20. E. Becker, "From the Life of a Watchman's Family," in Chabas (n. 8 above), p. 517; Bein.

21. Maimon, p. 91.

22. Liberson, p. 27; R. Yanait Ben Zvi, *We Ascend: Memoirs* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Ltd., 1959), p. 394 (in Hebrew).

23. Gorni (n. 7 above). Gorni found that the women tended to have somewhat more formal education than the men but less Jewish instruction.

24. Malchin (n. 8 above); p. 11.

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

most frequently in the kitchens of the communes as well as of other workers' groups. Unaccustomed to cooking, particularly with primitive utensils and unfamiliar ingredients which were, in addition, in very meager supply, the women very often produced unappetizing food. At times, when the workers preferred to be hungry rather than consume burned food, they would arrange their bowls like wagons in a train and push them along the table toward the kitchen chanting "train, train"—an act of protest on the part of the hungry pioneers but also a "degradation ceremony" for the cook.[25]

In spite of their disappointments, however, the women pioneers in the communes of the Galilee found new hope in occasional incidents. For example, in 1908 at Sejera, a small group of farm laborers decided to form an independent agricultural collective. Among the members was Manya Schochat, a radical labor leader and known activist prior to her immigration as well as the first to promote the idea of collective settlement in Palestine. She succeeded in persuading the agronomist who managed the farm to train women to plow with a pair of oxen. Though a successful experiment, this did not seem a workable solution to the women. An alternative was found in vegetable gardening. In 1909, under the initiative and guidance of one of the members, Hanna Meizel, a trained agronomist, the women secretly planted the first garden, hidden behind a distant hill.[26] The experience at Sejera, in which women proved themselves capable of plowing, provided a sense of efficacy and justified the claim for participation in physical work, while the gardening experiment supplied a suitable model. Women could become farmers by creating new agricultural branches compatible with their physical abilities.

A women's training farm at Kineret (on the Sea of Galilee) was founded in 1910 after Hanna Meizel had obtained funds from a women's Zionist group in Germany. The timing was propitious because a group of men at the Kineret farm had established an independent *falcha* collective. Five women under the leadership of Hanna Meizel were apportioned a courtyard, a plot of land, and minimum facilities for establishing their own collective. One of them describes the excitement: "And for us too the young women, this was the beginning of a new period. Our male comrades would be only our neighbours. Their life and ours would flow along separate paths. We are receiving a separate plot of land which will be solely for our use, worked according to our own wishes and abilities. A period of splendor, what emancipation!"[27]

25. Z. Liberson, "The Workers' Kitchen in Hadera," in Chabas (n. 8 above), pp. 272–73.

26. R. Yanait Ben Zvi, *Manya Schochat* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 1976) (in Hebrew); S. Krigser, "Our First Agricultural Training," in Chabas, p. 506; Mamashi, "On the Question of the Women Workers," *Hapoel Hatzair,* vol. 27 (1913).

27. S. Blumstein, "Life in the Kineret Commune," in *Memoirs of Eretz Yisrael,* ed. A. Ya'ari (Jerusalem: Zionist Organization Youth Department, 1937), 2:814–22 (in Hebrew).

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

For the time being, at least, these women gave up the idea that their equality could be achieved in the mixed group.

Beginnings of the Movement

The transformation of dissatisfied people into a social movement requires their awareness that they share a situation which is in some important respects unjust.[28] This process of change first manifested itself in 1911 in Kineret at a meeting initiated by Hanna Meizel for the purpose of explaining her plans for the women's training farm. Although only seventeen women attended, this meeting—providing as it did the first opportunity for the *halutzot* (female plural of *halutz*) to exchange experiences, share their individual grievances, and give each other moral support—laid the foundation for the emergence of a women's movement within the Labor Zionist camp in Palestine.[29] First, "the problem of the woman worker" emerged as a social reality and legitimized the establishment of a segregated organization. Once socially identified and labeled, the issue could become the basis for social action. Second, the meeting defined the goals of the movement's future, outlined the strategy for change, and identified a group of leaders among the second wave of pioneers. The ideological orientation first formulated at Kineret, and reiterated at every subsequent conference of women workers, emphasized the need for self-transformation. To achieve their goals, namely, equal participation, women had to change themselves. As they proclaimed: "We, the women laborers, like the men, aspire first and foremost to rehabilitate our spirit and bodies through work . . . in the field and in nature, and in this way we can rid ourselves of the habits, the way of life and even the way of thinking that we brought with us from the diaspora."[30]

Turner and Killian list three conditions as essential for a movement to follow the route of self-transformation rather than that of institutional change: a belief that widespread improvement is possible, a belief that "the state of the social order will reflect the integrity and character of individual man," and an acceptance by the people of responsibility "for their present unsatisfactory conditions."[31] Belief in the possibility for transforming the Jewish *Luftmensch* of the diaspora into a manual worker and tiller of the soil, as we have seen, was fundamental to Labor Zionism.

28. N. J. Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963).

29. Even Shoshan (n. 11 above), 1:215.

30. Group of Women Workers, "In Answer to Mrs. Tahon," *Hapoel Hatzair*, vol. 26 (1913) (in Hebrew).

31. R. H. Turner and L. M. Killian, *Collective Behavior*, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1972), p. 275.

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

In defining self-alteration as their major goal, the *halutzot* adopted a stance that fit well with the dominant ideology and was, therefore, attractive. The women believed that they had the same potential as men, though for historical reasons it had remained dormant. Through training as manual workers they would overcome their passive, dependent character. Once the *halutza* proved her skill, not only would she be accepted as a full member in the *kvutza,* but men would seek her out. "At the dawn of the movement we thought that we had only to overcome the barrier of occupational training, and as for equality, it would all follow automatically," wrote Ada Maimon, one of the leading figures in the struggle for women's equal participation.[32]

Men were not to be blamed for women's unhappy predicament since they, too, were conditioned by habitual ways of thinking and behaving. However, since they seemed unable to understand the problem of women workers, they could not be relied upon to bring about the necessary changes. Women would have to transform themselves.[33] An ideology oriented toward self-transformation rather than toward changing men and social institutions helped to legitimate the creation of a separate women's movement within Labor Zionism in that it avoided direct conflict with the male-dominated ideology and with the male pioneers. The network of social ties that linked the feminists of the second wave with the male leadership of the labor movement discouraged the development of a "we-they" dichotomy. A number of highly influential male comrades had encouraged the *halutzot,* and some of the women's leaders were members of the same political party and the same *kvutza,* or they shared backgrounds, friends, and relatives. These relationships put pressure on the women who feared that their desire for separate institutional arrangements would lead to accusations of lack of trust and even of the betrayal of their male comrades. The ideology of self-transformation mitigated this danger by emphasizing the common goals of male and female pioneers: women must be helped to change so that they could contribute more effectively toward the realization of shared values.

The Kineret meeting defined the operational goals of the women's movement. The strategy was to push for the development of new agricultural branches, such as vegetable gardening, poultry, and dairy farming, that were considered "suitable for women." The women also demanded a monopoly over these areas of work, since, they argued, men had many other jobs to do. Two main tactics were adopted. First, the farm at Kineret was to serve as a training center where women could learn technical skills and begin personal transformation within a supportive environment, unhampered by the presence of men. Second, in

32. A. Maimon, *Along the Way* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Ltd., 1972), p. 121 (in Hebrew).

33. "The First Women Workers' Conference," *Hapoel Hatzair,* vol. 37 (1914) (in Hebrew).

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

the future women would join only those *kvutzot* willing to accept at least ten of them, so that rotation between household and agriculture would be feasible.[34] The former tactic aimed at achieving the goal of self-transformation, the latter that of participation.

The women's desire for a separate organization resulted from their growing awareness that their goals could not be realized through the existing structures of Palestine's Labor Zionist movement. These consisted of two competing political parties, which were the most important organizations of the labor movement prior to World War I, the agriculturally oriented, leftist Hapoel Hatzair and the radical socialist Poalei Zion, as well as two unions of agricultural workers, one in the Galilee and one in Judea. The parties sent representatives to the unions, which negotiated with the Palestine Office of the World Zionist Organization on behalf of the agricultural communes and mobilized resources for new settlements. Because very few women were influential or active in the labor parties, they hesitated to raise their particular problems. In addition, there were always "more important" problems of survival that took priority. Nevertheless, the disregard for women's problems struck even a male observer, who found it necessary to comment on the point in a labor newspaper: "I have been in the country five years and have taken part in many workers' meetings where every conceivable subject was discussed. To my complete surprise there was one subject that was never discussed, not even in passing; the situation of our women workers."[35] The failure to permit women to participate in the various decision-making forums of the labor movement organizations had a cumulative effect. When the agricultural union of the Galilee neglected to invite a woman representative to its fifth conference in 1914, the *halutzot* barged into their meeting and vociferously protested,[36] but a more important result was the women's decision to convene their own conference of women agricultural workers only three months later. Thirty delegates met representing 209 women workers.[37] Thus the organizational arm of the women's movement was established. In the war years the women's movement created two organizational structures: an annual conference, five of which were held between 1914 and 1918, and the women workers' committee to organize and coordinate the activities of the movement between the conferences. The leaders were not anonymous women but women linked to the inner circles of Palestine's emerging elites. Some had political experience, and according to the evidence none received monetary remuneration for her work in the women's movement.

The issues on the agenda of the various conferences were similar to those which had been raised at Kineret in 1911, though there were

34. Maimon, *Women Workers' Movement,* p. 23.
35. Mamashi.
36. Maimon, *Women Workers' Movement,* p. 52; Shapira (n. 19 above), p. 140.
37. "First Women Workers' Conference."

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

additions. When the *halutzot* gave birth to their first children, the problem of how to combine child care with public activities became urgent. If each woman had to care for her own children, she would have to give up many work tasks outside the home, and the gains made would be lost. Since women accepted child raising as their primary responsibility, the demand that men share in the responsibilities, while occasionally voiced, was never seriously considered. The arrival of children threatened the women's status. Miriam Baratz, the first mother in the *kvutza,* describes her struggle against social pressure: "The general opinion was that I should devote all my time to my child. I objected to this with all my might. I knew that that way I would no longer be a part of the community and of everything that was happening in the group."[38] The solution adopted was collective child care with women in the collective rotating the responsibility.[39] Women's participation in the labor movement was another issue at consecutive conferences, as women came increasingly to realize that doing agricultural work did not automatically lead to participation in the decision-making bodies either of the labor movement as a whole or even of the commune.[40]

The most pressing general issue for all the pioneers of the time related to employment. During the war years, the movement achieved some important successes in providing work. Women were trained on the Kineret farm and then integrated into the *kvutzot.* The shift in economic policy within the agricultural communes between 1914 and 1918 from total reliance on grain crops toward greater diversification opened new branches and thus new opportunities for women. In 1919 a drop in the price of grain and a drought accelerated the process toward diversification and self-reliance.[41] Women joined grain-growing collectives and established a number of independent vegetable-growing collectives which successfully sold their produce in the markets.[42] The vegetable gardens were usually situated next to the workers' public kitchens, where the women were employed as cooks. Most of the projects received modest financial assistance from the agricultural union and, through the intervention of the women workers' committee, from Zionist women's groups abroad.

The change in women's self-image and in their status within the labor movement is reflected in the differences noticeable between the first meeting at Kineret in 1911 and later conferences. At Kineret the doors were closed to men. Those who showed up were accused of having

38. M. Baratz, "How I Conquered Work?" in Katznelson Shazar, ed., *With the Steps of the Generation.*

39. R. Porat, *Education in the Collectives and Kibbutzim* (Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz Hameuchad, 1977) (in Hebrew).

40. Harari (n. 8 above), p. 492.

41. Bein (n. 1 above), pp. 55, 164.

42. Y. Etinger, "Cooperative Groups in the Year 1919," *Kontres* 12 (1919): 5–6.

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

come to ridicule or out of curiosity, and they were thought to be indifferent to the problems of the *halutzot.* At the opening session of the fifth conference held in Tel Aviv, apart from the seventy women delegates, there were a large number of invited guests, including several official male representatives of the parties and the agricultural union.[43] This change of policy manifests the increased self-confidence of the movement and its recognition by the pioneering community.

Although the women's movement brought about important cultural change in the norms regarding woman's role, it did not institutionalize a social structure to serve as a power center in relation to other organizations in the *Yishuv* or the World Zionist Organization (the major source of funds for the pioneers in Palestine). The women gave relatively little attention to organizational activity, partly because they were so few and partly because they accepted as their major structural referrent the agricultural unions, where they had gained official recognition. An important additional factor was that the women preferred "doing" to "organizing others." A characteristic of the second wave as a whole was that it was oriented more toward the implementation of ideals through direct participation in grass-roots activities associated with Zionist fulfillment than toward political activity.[44] No organizational bodies were developed between the years 1914 and 1918 apart from the conferences and the elected committee. Whatever funds were obtained, whether from the agricultural union or from women's organizations abroad, were earmarked for specific employment and agricultural training projects. But these financial contributions were not institutionalized in a structural commitment of continuous support.

The Career of the Women's Movement, 1918–27

The end of World War I ushered in a period of developments in the *Yishuv,* where new dilemmas for the women's movement emerged. Comparing the *Yishuv* before and after the First World War, Eisenstadt observes that "if the period of the second wave was the period of ideological emphasis, the [British] Mandate ushered in a period of stress on the formulation and practical implementation of the major goals of the *Yishuv*. . . ."[45] The ability of the women workers' movement to im-

43. Maimon, *Women Workers' Movement*; Harari, p. 492.

44. Gorni (n. 7 above) found that prior to immigration 51 percent of the immigrants belonged to a political party; after immigration that figure declined to 33 percent. Among the 47 percent of the immigrants who had been *active* in parties abroad, only 14.7 percent continued in Palestine. Shapiro (n. 1 above, p. 19) suggests that the preference of the second wave for activities directly related to self-actualization explains these findings. This preference was probably stronger among women than among men.

45. Eisenstadt (n.1 above), p. 24.

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

plement its goals was affected by two major developments: first, the arrival of the third wave of immigrants (1919–23); second, the establishment of the Histadrut—the Jewish Federation of Labor.

The third wave, arriving after World War I, was encouraged by the Balfour Declaration, which affirmed the British government's support for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. In many of its social and ideological characteristics the third wave was a continuation of the second: A sizable proportion of the immigrants were young socialist pioneers from eastern Europe; and they too had been influenced by ideas prevalent at the time of the Russian Revolution. From the perspective of the women's movement, however, the third wave differed from the second in three respects. First, the proportion of women among all immigrants during the third wave was larger, 36.8 percent. Among the single immigrants the proportion was 17 percent in 1920, increasing to 30 percent in 1922. Among the more strongly nationalistic pioneers, women comprised some 17–18 percent, compared with approximately 10 percent during the second wave.[46] Second, the pioneers arrived as members of different pioneering groups and social movements, most notably Gdud Avoda (Work Battalion) and Hashomer Hatzair (The Young Watchman). These were created in the diaspora and organized in communes committed to the principle of equality in production and consumption. Third, larger numbers of pioneers gravitated to the towns, where they formed part of the new urban proletariat. There, unemployment was particularly acute for women.

The period began ominously for the women's movement. The women's vegetable-growing collectives collapsed due to competition from British imports. The farm at Kineret was closed for lack of financial means. The settlement department of the Zionist Organization discontinued its support of women's farming collectives, believing that women would find their place in *kibbutzim*.[47] The women's committee had failed to gain the recognition granted to other institutions of the labor movement, particularly the political parties, by the World Zionist Organization. In other words, in 1918 on the eve of the arrival of the third wave, the women workers' movement lacked its own mechanisms for coping with the new problems of unemployment and for pursuing its goals.

The new sources of employment that developed after the establish-

46. Even Shoshan (n. 11 above), 1:400; Y. Erez, *The Third Aliya* (Jerusalem: Zionist Organization Youth Department, 1948), p. 43.

47. Bein, pp. 157–58; *Histadrut Hahalait—the Union of Agricultural Workers in Its Thirtieth Year* (Tel Aviv: Vaad Hapoel, 1951), p. 549 (in Hebrew). *Kibbutzim* developed during the third wave. They differed from the *kvutzot,* which were restricted to twenty to thirty members and where social relations were modeled on the intimacy characteristic of family ties, primarily in that they were larger social units with 100 and more members and consequently less selective and more open to individuals ready to share their way of life.

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

ment of the mandate, namely, rail and road construction and then building in the towns, did not welcome women. Nevertheless, women pressed for entry, and in 1922 they composed 16 percent of the total membership in construction collectives, although half of them supplied the domestic services such as cooking. The Construction Workers' Union in 1924 resolved to increase the number of women accepted into the work groups; train women in building crafts; establish work groups in the crafts suitable for women such as floor tiling, plastering, and painting; and put women in line for suitable jobs.[48] These resolutions, however, were never translated into a program of action.

Working in construction became the epic expression of the *halutz* ideal and a challenge to the women's movement seeking to conquer new fields, as agriculture had been for the *halutzot* of the second wave. Again, however, women faced strong opposition. Jobs were scarce. They were mainly allocated through the labor bureau of the political parties and, after 1920, through the Histadrut (General Federation of Labor). Since work contracts were assigned to groups, getting a job depended on being accepted to a work group, which was problematic for women. As Tchiya Liberson, a member of the Construction Workers' Union reported: "The men had quite a number of reasons for keeping us out. Some said the work was too strenuous for women. Others argued that if women were admitted to the building trade communes, which contracted for work as a group, the output would decrease and the pay with it."[49]

Faced with resistance to their acceptance by male groups, and indignant at being accused of causing financial deficits, women formed their own work communes and even competed with men for job contracts.[50] In the mid-1920s there were two women's construction groups, several floor-tiling communes, as well as tobacco and laundry collectives. The women's organization established a half-dozen training farms modeled on the Kineret experiment. Women also formed *havurot*–small collectives based on a combination of vegetable gardening and outside employment.[51] Organizing, encouraging, and financing these projects were the major activities of the executive committee of the Women Workers' Council, the organizational arm of the Women Workers' Movement within the newly established Histadrut (Jewish Federation of Labor).

After World War I there had been a trend toward unification among the labor groups in the *Yishuv* which in 1920 led to the establishment of an umbrella organization, the Histadrut. The trade unions, the

48. "Second Conference of the Construction Workers' Union," *Pinkas Hahistadrut*, special ed. (1924), p. 27.

49. T. Liberson, "Women Build Houses," in Katznelson Shazar, ed. (n. 8 above), p. 176.

50. Erez (n. 46 above).

51. "The Third Conference of the Women Workers' Council," *Pinkas Hahistadrut* (1926).

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

sick fund, the consumers' union, labor exchanges, immigration office, public works and building office, schools, and workers' public kitchens, which had been created by the political parties, were transferred to the Histadrut. The consolidation of these structures within a single organization, which controlled virtually all the resource-generating institutions of the labor movement, meant that the women's movement became dependent on the Histadrut.

Election of delegates to the founding convention of the Histadrut, held in December 1920, was by proportional representation of political parties. As the women's movement did not consider itself a political faction but viewed its goals as cutting across the ideological differences that segmented the labor movement, it did not submit a separate list of candidates and was not officially represented. Among eighty-seven delegates to the founding convention of the Histadrut, only four were women, all sent by the Achdut Haavoda party (an extension of the Poalei Zion party). The more committed feminists, such as Ada Fishman-Maimon and Yael Gordon, leading members of the Hapoel Hatzair party, were among the thirty or so women who had been invited to attend the proceedings as guests. Restricted to passive participation, these guests objected strongly to the poor representation of women by the political factions and to the failure of the convention to deal with the special problems of the woman worker. In the last hours of the closing session, Ada Maimon, leader in the struggle for women's electoral rights in all institutions of Jewish self-government, declared that the female delegates, having been chosen by the parties and not by the women workers, did not and could not represent them. She announced that the women planned to form their own association within the Histadrut, and if refused representation on the Histadrut Council they "would feel forced to submit a separate electoral list to compete for representation on the Histadrut Council in the next election."[52] Maimon's proposal won the support of leading figures in the major parties and was accepted by the convention. Two places were reserved for representatives to be elected directly by the women workers.

The admission of the women's movement into the Histadrut stimulated a new wave of organizational activity among the women. The leadership set out to mobilize support among the new immigrants, particularly those pioneers who had arrived as part of organized ideological movements. They were potentially most co-optable. First, they were physically concentrated and thus more accessible than the mass of indi-

52. "Protocol of the First Convention of the Histadrut, December, 1920," *Asufot* 1 (14) (December 1970): 5–80. Maimon reports that it was Rachel Yanait, one of the official delegates of Achdut Haavoda at the conference, who had asked her to speak on behalf of the *poalot.* Yanait was a party leader and "it seems she felt it not appropriate nor in good taste for her to do the task; to demand elected representatives of the *poalot* [women workers], and therefore, she turned to me" (n. 32 above, p. 105).

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

vidual women employed primarily as seamstresses and domestics in private homes. Second, more than other women, their immigration had been motivated by aspirations similar to those of the feminists of the second *aliya*—namely, realization of the pioneering goals of Socialist Zionism. Third, they were the most predisposed to egalitarian ideals.

The meeting between the second- and third-wave pioneers may be analyzed in terms of an encounter between "sociological generations." The *halutzot* of the second wave had been excluded from full participation in the *kvutzot,* and their aspirations had been ridiculed. After a decade of struggle, they found that women were still discriminated against in all areas of public life. The *halutzot* of the third wave belonged to sexually mixed and strongly ideological socialist groups which provided work for their women members. They did not feel as deprived as did their forerunners. Although dissatisfaction with the sex division of labor and status existed even within such aggressively egalitarian groups as the Gdud Avoda, it was expressed, if at all, within the organization through its internal media[53] and did not spark collective action across factional boundaries. Loyalty to the group and its goals took priority over the issues that had united the women a decade earlier. Nonetheless, out of reverence for the women of the second wave, they attended the founding conference of the Women Workers' Council (WWC) held in 1921.[54] The 1921 conference, with forty-three delegates representing 485 workers, officially established WWC as the organizational arm of the women workers' movement within the Histadrut. The council elected an executive committee and representatives to each of the major departments within the Histadrut.[55]

By the time of the second conference in 1922, at which thirty-seven delegates represented 600 women members, the underlying tensions within the women's movement had surfaced. Two major opposing factions emerged. I refer to them as the "radicals" and the "loyalists." The difference between them may be analyzed in terms of degrees of commitment to feminism and of trust put in the male leadership. The old leaders, joined by the disenchanted among the third *aliya,* were the more radical. They put little trust in a male-dominated Histadrut to look after women's interests and advocated a strong, separate organization—free of party control and in contact with grass-roots members—that would initiate and monitor women's training and employment opportunities.

53. Erez, *Me'Chayinu* [From our life], newspaper of the Gdud Aavoda, no. 25 (1922), p. 252 (in Hebrew).

54. Ch. Drori, "From Soviet Russia to the Conference in Haifa," in Katznelson Shazar, ed. (n. 8 above), pp. 14–17. Drori recounts the report of the delegate to the 1922 WWC conference from Ein Harod—a kibbutz belonging to Gdud Avoda—that she represented those who supported the WWC while the second delegate represented those who opposed a separate Women's Movement. See also Even Shoshan, 2:199.

55. "The First Conference of the Women Workers' Council," *Pinkas Hahistadrut* (1921) (in Hebrew).

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

The newly arrived third-wave pioneers held the loyalist position which recognized that women had special problems but believed there was no need for a separate women's organization to solve them. They argued that the newly constituted Histadrut should look after all workers alike. The WWC should concentrate on reeducating and activating women for participation in public life. In relation to the Histadrut it should limit itself to an advisory role and certainly not duplicate the services of the labor exchange and other bodies that generated and allocated resources. Organizational segregation was objectionable also because it implied lack of faith in the men which, the loyalists felt, was not deserved.[56]

The dispute over the WWC's role was not merely an internal matter. The positions defended and the relative influence of the respective protagonists were determined by the interests of the male leaders of the Histadrut, whose response to the WWC was a reflection of its general policy toward particular interest groups. Analysis of the events in the 1920s therefore requires some understanding of the wider sociopolitical context.

At that time the leadership of the Histadrut faced two major organizational problems. The first was how to safeguard the stability of the new, unifying institution, which had been forged from a variety of divergent ideological streams within Labor Zionism and incorporated a number of conflicting power groups. The second problem concerned the relationship of the political parties to the Histadrut. Although elements within Achdut Haavoda argued that after the establishment of the Histadrut political parties were no longer necessary and should be dissolved, those in their favor prevailed. The latter faction, furthermore, opposed a pluralistic structure and pressed for centralization of the party organization and for party control over the Histadrut.[57] Clearly, a women's organization independent of party control conflicted with the interests of Achdut Haavoda, which argued that separatist tendencies among particular interest groups would waste resources and weaken the Histadrut. At the same time the leadership was generally sympathetic toward the special problems and goals of the women pioneers. The decision to include the WWC in the Histadrut may be viewed as a form of co-optation, a mechanism of social control first defined by Selznick as "the process of absorbing new elements into the leadership of the policy determining structure of an organization as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence."[58]

As noted, in 1920 the Histadrut's control over the worker community was still precarious. The leaders of the Achdut Haavoda party

56. Maimon (n. 19 above); Minutes of the Second Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Women Workers' Council, June 1926, unpublished (Labor Archives, Tel Aviv, in Hebrew); hereafter cited as Minutes.

57. Shapiro (n. 1 above).

58. P. Selznick, *TVA and the Grassroots* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949).

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

feared the separate organization of various factions among both the second and third waves. For Histadrut leaders at the 1920 convention, Maimon's threat that the women workers would submit an independent electoral list made it expedient to absorb the leadership into the council, especially since events outside the labor movement gave the threat greater credibility. The conflict over women's voting rights in the newly forming National Assembly, the Jewish parliament of the *Yishuv*, had made feminism a salient issue and a legitimate basis for organizational differentiation. By 1920, the Association of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights in Eretz Yisrael (Palestine) had been established and was mobilizing support outside the labor sector. The association was an umbrella organization for women's groups which formed after World War I in the urban centers and larger agricultural villages *(moshavot)*. The members were mainly from the educated middle class and secular elements of the Jewish community.[59]

Not affiliated with any existing political party, the association's activities were directed to overcoming the religious sector's militant opposition to equal civil and political liberties for women and particularly to their right to active and passive representation on the local and national bodies of Jewish self-government which developed during the first and second decades under the British Mandate.[60] (The WWC apparently viewed its commitment to the labor movement as precluding an alliance with this "bourgeois" women's rights party.) In the elections to the National Assembly, some eight months before the founding convention of the Histadrut, the association submitted a separate women's list that won seven mandates—the same number as there were women elected by the two labor parties to the assembly. These developments influenced the response to the demand of the women workers for representatives and their incorporation in the Histadrut Council.

The Transformation of the Feminist Movement, 1921–27

From the perspective of the Histadrut and particularly that of the Achdut Haavoda party, which was struggling for dominance within the newly established superstructure, the women's movement posed a problem of social control. Its accusations of discrimination undermined the legitimacy of the Histadrut's claim to represent all workers. To offset the potential costs of such allegations, the WWC was defined as an embarrassment to the labor movement. This perspective emerges in the

59. Dr. Rose Walt Stroim, founder and leader of the association, immigrated from the United States where she had been an activist in the women's suffrage movement and a founding member of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance.

60. S. Azaryahu, *The Association of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights in Eretz Yisrael*, 2d ed. (Haifa: Foundation for Women's Aid, 1977) (in Hebrew).

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

report presented by Ben Gurion, then leader of Achdut Haavoda to the second convention of the Histadrut in 1923 in which he explained that the "very existence and need for the existence of a special institution in the form of the WWC to protect the interests of the women workers does not add to our honor."[61] This stance most affected those women in the WWC who were closely identified with the male leaders of Achdut Haavoda and committed to them; one such woman was Golda Meir, who at the same convention declared: ". . . It is a sad and shameful fact that we are forced to create a special organization to deal with matters of the woman worker."[62]

The tactical aspect of this admission about the WWC is twofold. First, when viewed as a concession to an unfortunate and embarrassing reality, the organization became a vestige of some unresolved past rather than a positive creative force projected into the future and devoted to the creation of a better society. Second, presented as a kind of "bastard" child of the labor movement (unwanted and unplanned for by the father), the women's movement was discredited for exposing the labor movement's failure to live up to its own ideals. Another tactic employed to confine the amount of resources the Histadrut would be required to divert to satisfy the demands of the WWC was to understate the magnitude of the change aspired to. The women's goals were translated into specific objectives and defined in negative rather than positive terms. For example, describing women's aspirations for equality as the need to eliminate discrimination at work made fewer demands on the system than a definition that called for affirmative action in all walks of life. In the same address in 1923, Ben Gurion went on to explain that "there is no special Histadrut for women workers nor is there a need for such a Histadrut, but we cannot ignore the bitter truth that the matter of equality for women, which we accept as a first principle, is only formal . . . there is *still* a need for a special institution for the women workers which will stand guard and concern itself with the social and economic position of the female worker so that she not be discriminated against within the community of workers."[63]

Ben Gurion's interpretation of the role of the WWC discounts the importance of the movement in the ideology and activity of national rebirth. Instead of being depicted as a creator of a new cultural image for women in the emerging socialist society, it was ascribed the role of watchdog guarding the interests of a "minority" group. Its members are thus denied the right to pride in a mission whose importance for the labor movement is discounted. According to Ben Gurion, implementation of the women's movement goals, such as creating employment opportunities, was to be left to the Histadrut. His statement that no special

61. "The Second Histadrut Convention," *Pinkas Hahistadrut* (1923), p. 22.
62. Ibid., p. 49.
63. Ibid., p. 22.

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

union for women existed as it did, for example, for agricultural workers, was not merely a description of the facts. It was intended as a warning that separation would not be tolerated and that women would have to solve their problems through the existing structures of the Histadrut.

The need for women workers to prove that they were indeed not "creating a separate platform" for women (the phrase used to accuse the WWC of separatism) put the movement on the defensive. On all public occasions, such as the Histadrut and WWC conventions, WWC leaders repeatedly declared their loyalty to the Histadrut and denied that, in demanding greater opportunities, women were seeking a "separate platform" for themselves.[64]

The election system, based on proportional representation, gave the political parties and particularly the dominant Achdut Haavoda considerable control over the Histadrut in general and over the WWC in particular. Each political faction constructed its lists of candidates so that the voter elected a party rather than an individual. Representation was indirect, since the party members elected delegates to the national convention, the convention to the council, and the council to the central committee of the Histadrut. The party bosses constructed the lists of candidates to the convention, which meant that they virtually controlled the access to all important and paid positions within the Histadrut and secured control of the top leadership over the organization. Women candidates usually made up no more than 20 percent of the list.

What weakened women's bargaining position was first, that so few were politically active and second, that many, particularly the "loyalists," experienced ambivalence regarding the definition of women as a special interest group. Sex as a basis for interest aggregation was unacceptable to those who wished to participate as individuals and not as members of a category which, by implication, was in some way inferior. Willingly or not, however, women on a party list were almost inevitably perceived as representing women.

In the Histadrut, the political "logic" of party list construction was aimed at selecting people who could claim to represent the respective interest groups but whose loyalty to the party was not in question. Selective sponsorship of leaders by the dominant coalition, according to Gamson, is a strategy of social control similar to co-optation.[65] Because only the loyal are sponsored, the strategy reduces the need for direct intervention and continuous monitoring by the establishment. The sponsorship strategy is evident in the Histadrut's intervention through the selection of the leadership of the WWC and in its control over the organization's election system.

64. See, e.g., ibid., pp. 17 and 99; R. Katznelson, "The Participation of the Female Workers," *Kontres* 14 (1927): 15–20 (in Hebrew).

65. W. A. Gamson, *Power and Discontent* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1968), pp. 135 ff.

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

The Histadrut leadership strengthened the position of some women and weakened that of others through its appointments to policymaking and resource-allocating committees of its various agencies. Although formally the executive committee of the WWC had the right to recommend representatives to these bodies, they required the approval of the Central Committee, which used its prerogative to appoint and depose committee members in accord with its political interests. For example, in 1925 Maimon, member of Hapoel Hatzair, was removed from the important immigration committee because she fought for 50 percent representation for women among those allocated immigration permits to Palestine. While the male leadership opposed her on this issue, they objected even more strongly to her independent behavior.[66] She was replaced by a male member of Achdut Haavoda.

There is also evidence that the Histadrut intervened and affected leadership recruitment *within* the WWC. Golda Meir records that in 1927 David Remez, influential member of the Achdut Haavoda faction in the Central Committee of the Histadrut, invited her to become secretary (equivalent to chairperson) of the WWC.[67] In 1921 Golda Meir had immigrated from the United States, where she had been an active member of the Poalei Zion party, forerunner of the Achdut Haavoda party. The following year she was elected to the executive committee of the WWC, and in 1923 she and Maimon were elected to the Histadrut council.[68] Meir's qualifications for the post are not at issue, but it should be recognized that her election was initiated and engineered by the male leadership.

The process of centralization within the Histadrut was combined with the creation of a network of labor councils to implement Histadrut policy at the local level. Under the initiative of the WWC, committees of women workers were established within the councils in the cities and agricultural villages. The WWC defined their role as "activating" women workers and representing them in the various departments of the local labor council, such as the Offices of Public Works and Immigration, as well as in trade unions. Antagonism developed between the party functionaries of the local labor councils who controlled employment opportunities and other resources and the members of the women's committees whose direct election by the local female constituency weakened the former's control over them. Work was scarce, and the functionaries rejected the women's claim to special consideration, refusing to grant them "privileges."[69]

66. Maimon (n. 32 above), p. 252.

67. G. Meir, *My Life* (London: Futura Publications, 1975), p. 85.

68. "The Second Conference of the Women Workers' Council," *Pinkas Hahistadrut* (1922) (in Hebrew); "The Second Histadrut Convention."

69. Report of the Second Conference of the Women Workers' Council, *Hapoel Hatzair* 37 (1922): 12 (in Hebrew).

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

The issue came to a head in a debate concerning the system to be employed for electing members of the women's committee. There were two camps in the WWC: the radical feminists who favored direct elections by a general meeting of women workers at the local level without regard to women's party affiliation and free from party intervention, and the loyalists who advocated that candidates be appointed by the party functionaries of the local council in cooperation with the WWC. The two views came to be known as "elected committees" and "appointed committees." The radical feminists, headed by Ada Maimon, Tova Yaffe, and other members of Hapoel Hatzair, argued that direct elections were essential to arouse women to active involvement in public life. The major concern of the radicals was that with appointed committees there would be no meaningful ties between the delegates and the women workers. Members would be selected on the basis of criteria such as compliance and party allegiance, and not on the basis of their ability and readiness to represent women's issues. Direct election of candidates, therefore, was essential to promote women's confidence in their representatives and to assure that the latter would be loyal first and foremost to the female constituency.

The loyalists argued that such low trust of the local labor council functionaries would result in conflicts, which would make the women's committee ineffective. It was, therefore, in the women's interest that the committees be appointed, with the advice of the WWC, by the local functionaries who would consequently feel more responsible for them.[70]

The issue was hotly debated during the meeting of the WWC in June 1926, at which Ben Gurion, representing the central committee of the Histadrut, commented: "There is no need to create a negative attitude toward the women's committees among the local labor councils from the start. A committee elected from among the community of women workers will create a negative attitude on the part of the local labor councils."[71] The implication that withdrawal of Histadrut support would be the price the WWC would have to pay for its independence and that by raising such demands they were intensifying interparty conflict within the Histadrut was intended to intimidate those who opposed appointed committees. These statements, however, do not reveal what appears to have been the deeper concern of the male leadership.

Achdut Haavoda feared that separate elections for women would set a dangerous precedent for other interest groups, such as the Orthodox and Yemenite communities, which could result in a weakening of the control of the center over the periphery.[72] Despite pressure from the

70. Minutes; B. S. Cheikin, "Protocol of the Third Histadrut Convention," *Pinkas Hahistadrut* (1927), p. 337 (in Hebrew).

71. Minutes.

72. M. Sharet, "Protocol of the Third Histadrut Convention," *Pinkas Hahistadrut* (1927), p. 328 (in Hebrew).

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

male leadership, however, the executive council of the WWC decided twelve to eight in favor of elected committees at its November 1926 meeting. Women members of Hapoel Hatzair and other parties voted for them and those of Achdut Haavoda against them, and it is apparent that the division between the radicals and the loyalists more and more paralleled that between the two labor parties.[73] Because the struggle among political factions for control within the Histadrut had intensified the demand for party loyalty, party rivalries were penetrating the WWC. The Histadrut leadership, which by the mid-twenties was mainly in the hands of the centralist Achdut Haavoda, encouraged the loyalists. The leaders of the ideologically pluralist Hapoel Hatzair party, fearful of the growing control of its rival party, favored independently elected committees. At the third Histadrut convention in 1927, the majority of whose delegates came from the Achdut Haavoda party, the vote was ninety-seven to seventy-nine in favor of appointed women's committees. In 1926, election by proportional representation of political factions was introduced into the conference of the WWC as well. At the following conference held in 1932 all candidates were sponsored by the respective political factions, and proportional representation was officially implemented.[74] Thus, by the end of the 1920s, the struggle between the "radicals" and the "loyalists" had been determined in favor of the latter.

The Histadrut, while extending its control over the women's movement through selective sponsorship of leaders, was also under pressure to make concessions to the WWC. But, in terms of its original goals, the WWC was able to exact a small price from the Histadrut for its active support. It developed six agricultural training farms as well as a number of vocational training courses for women; however, these were financed almost entirely by Zionist women's organizations abroad. By 1926 the Histadrut had not yet assigned a budget to the WWC or determined salaries for its representatives on the major Histadrut committees.[75] The WWC conference of that year reports a list of abortive attempts to gain concessions from the local labor councils in the field of employment.[76] The economic crisis that hit Palestine, and especially the cities, in the years 1926–29 resulted in large-scale unemployment for both women and men and intensified the competition between the sexes for scarce jobs. By 1930 the proportion of women in nontraditional jobs had dropped considerably. Only 0.4 percent of the urban female labor force was then employed in construction and public works, while 46.1 percent were employed in private homes.[77] In addition, the Histadrut made only insignificant concessions to the WWC's demands for power. A few token

73. "The Women Workers' Council," *Hapoel Hatzair* 20, no. 9 (1926): 13 (in Hebrew).
74. Even Shoshan (n. 11 above), 3:165 ff.
75. Minutes.
76. Sharet.
77. Even Shoshan, 3:165.

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

women were assigned to various Histadrut committees in the early twenties, but their numbers dwindled as the decade progressed. Apart from Maimon, who was a member of the economic council of Hevrat Haovdim (economic enterprises of the Histadrut), women were not found in any of the policymaking bodies of the economic organizations created by the Histadrut in the 1920s. No woman was represented on the fifteen-member committee which in 1925 negotiated the first collective agreement between the Histadrut and employers in the *Yishuv*. In this agreement, unskilled women workers employed in factories were officially discriminated against in wages—a situation that continued until the 1970s. A review of the minutes of the Histadrut Executive Council meetings held between 1921 and 1927 reveals that the problem of women was raised only four times, invariably by a woman and without response from other members.

The problem of the woman worker, which was an item on the agenda of the second Histadrut conference in 1923, was dropped from that of the third in 1927. It was argued that with the creation of the WWC the problem had been solved. Although the subject was returned to the agenda in later conferences and even became a permanent item, it was an issue to which only women gave their attention. The position of women within the new worker community was and remained the responsibility and concern of the WWC. Once the organization ceased to make unacceptable demands and its energies were harnessed to advance the interests of the Histadrut establishment, the sex division of labor and a large women's organization proved highly convenient. Looking after women's issues functioned as an outlet for the political energies of women while it freed the men for dealing with the "more important" issues of the day. Every woman who joined the Histadrut was automatically registered as a member of the WWC—a bureaucratic procedure that enabled the WWC in later years to boast of being the largest women's organization in the country.

The year 1927 marks the eclipse of radical feminism within the women workers' movement. Two events that year reflect the transformation that took place in the WWC and that led to the displacement of its original goals. The first was the decision in favor of appointed committees, which has already been discussed in some detail. The grass-roots organization was co-opted by the local councils. This discouraged sustained feminist pressure to give priority to women's emancipation since there were always "more pressing" problems that required attention. "Pressing problems" were usually those for which pressure could not be eliminated, and the silencing of the radical elements was as much a consequence of the WWC's weakness as a cause of it.

The second event was the replacement of Ada Maimon as secretary of the WWC by Golda Meir. In view of their very different conceptions of the role of the WWC, this change represents the culmination of the

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

struggle for power between the old guard and the new generation.[78] Although Maimon was reelected to the WWC executive committee, after 1927, she and the old guard had lost ground. Power had shifted to the loyalist faction.

Meir's entrance into office symbolizes the succession of generations. The generation that had put women's self-transformation above party politics gave way to a cadre whose priorities were determined by the interests of the overall party organization. Meir, who was selected by the male leadership of Achdut Haavoda, was, according to her own report, attracted to the WWC not so much because it was concerned with the issue of women as such, but because she was "very interested in the work it was doing, particularly in the agricultural training farms they set up for immigrant girls."[79] For her, the WWC was a brief interlude in a long career within the male establishment of the labor party. The WWC was transformed into a social service organization meeting the needs of women in their traditional roles of wives and mothers, albeit working mothers. It sponsored child day-care centers to free women to enter the labor market. Its occupational training prepared girls primarily for traditionally feminine roles as hairdressers, dressmakers, nursemaids, and the like. It turned its attention more and more to looking after welfare needs of mothers and children in the urban centers, leaving the political decisions, the trade union activities, and economic policy in the hands of the male establishment. In addition it served ancillary political functions, the most important of which was mobilizing female support for the party at elections.

Conclusion

From its inception, the Zionist women workers' movement avoided defining itself as engaged in a struggle against male oppression. Nonetheless, between the period between 1911 and 1927 the commitment of the women's movement to self-transformation and equal participation in the building of the new society united its members across the competing political factions within the labor movement. As a united front it pressed for greater equality in the allocation of scarce resources such as immigration certificates, job opportunities, and participation in

78. In 1926, three months prior to the third WWC conference, a crisis arose within the executive committee of the WWC when Maimon was sharply criticized for ruling the organization with her "favorites" and neglecting others. Maimon resigned, the council disbanded, and the executive committee of the Histadrut appointed an interim committee to prepare for the third Histadrut convention. See "The Third Conference of the Women Workers' Council."

79. Meir, p. 88.

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

decision-making bodies of the various organizations of the labor movement.

The structural integration of the WWC within the Histadrut as a separate, but not autonomous part of the socialist movement, brought it under the control of the emerging power centers. From the late 1920s two forces diverted the women's movement from a sustained struggle for sexual equality: first, the demands of the political parties within the Histadrut and particularly of the dominant Achdut Haavoda for the women's undivided commitment to the wider interests of the labor movement as these were defined by the party; and second, the party's failure to develop a real commitment to women's emancipation in the construction of the new economic, political, and social institutions of the *Yishuv*. These forces also shaped the course of the WWC for decades to come. The feminist movement, which had emerged in response to the wish of women pioneers to be equal partners in conquering new fields of work and building the nation, became the largest voluntary social service and, later, welfare organization in the *Yishuv*. In addition, the movement institutionalized and thus reenforced the categorical treatment of women at the same time it monitored their public careers. Women in the labor party (which dominated the country until 1977) were "expected" to rise through the ranks of the WWC, while its leadership acted as gatekeepers between the female enclave and the male establishment, allowing only a selected few, sponsored by them, to pass. Those who succeeded were rewarded with a seat in the Knesset (Israeli parliament) and other central bodies, and they provided the few tokens that bolstered public belief in the notion that "capable" women *do* "make it." The lack of institutionalized rotation in the leadership, however, set stringent limits on the number who ever did.

Despite the WWC's shift in activities, the organization remained officially committed to the full participation of women in public life. Consequently, the existence of this powerful women's organization, which claimed to be the vanguard of women's interests, helped to perpetuate the myth of equality and to discourage the emergence of alternative definitions around which women could organize.

Department of Labor Studies
Tel-Aviv University

This content downloaded from 185.44.78.76 on Thu, 12 Jun 2014 14:24:24 PM
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions