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The purpose of the Centre is to provide a framework for investigations and research on problems concerning rural cooperative communities and publication of the results, to coordinate the exchange of information on current research projects and published works, and to encourage the organization of symposia on the problems of cooperative rural communities, as well as the exchange of experts between different countries.

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Research on Women in Rural Israel: The Gender Gap*

by

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Abstract

Agricultural production has been in decline in Israel, especially in the wake of financial and ideological crisis in the kibbutzim and moshavim in the mid-1980s. As part of a general process of transformation of the position of agricultural production in the economy and in national ideology, women's roles and positions in cooperative settlements have also shifted. This essay offers a critical review of research that has documented the place of women in the rural sector in Israel. It explores the existing data on women in three sub-segments of the rural sector: women in the Jewish cooperative and non-cooperative settlements and women in non-Jewish rural settings. Based on a more general analysis of the sociology of knowledge production about women in Israel, the essay proposes that there are serious gaps in our knowledge on women in the Israeli rural sector. The analysis offered in this essay suggests that more gender-focused research must be carried out in rural Israel if the impact of the recent dramatic transformation in both the cooperative and non-cooperative settlement is to be understood.

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to provide a critical review of research that has documented the place of women in the rural sector in Israel. The analysis progresses from the more general, national level to the more specific rural sector, and finally to micro-level studies carried out in rural communities. The essay distinguishes between the Jewish rural sector and the Arab rural sector in Israel. The Jewish rural

*This essay is based on research I carried out when I worked as a "gender specialist" within a team of researchers from Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority. I would like to thank Dr. Zienab El-Toubshy, Dr. Abdul-Hamid Musa, and Dr. Laith Rousan for their continuous collegiality in very difficult circumstances. The "Regional Agricultural Programme in the Middle East" was partly financed and administered by DANIDA, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I would also like to thank Mr. Martin Kohn for his support and Ms. Miriam Bar-Lev, his Israeli counterpart from the Israel Ministry of Agriculture. Finally, I would like to thank my research assistant, Ms. Sigal Nagar Ron, for her help in locating and organizing the material on which this essay is based. The responsibility for the content of this essay and the mistakes it might have is all mine.

sector is mainly composed of kibbutz and moshav settlements, known as cooperative communities. But the rapidly decreasing weight of agriculture and the increase in wage labor has dramatically changed the cooperative nature of these rural settings. What is the position of women within these diverse rural settings and how has it been recorded in official and academic research?

An overview of research on women in Israel

National census records and data collected by various government ministries in Israel provide a breakdown of the more general data by gender categories in many (but definitely not in all) cases. It is the role of social scientists to interpret this data and to explore its social and political significance. Social research makes use of national statistics, but it also works to explore issues of social concern at the more limited regional or micro levels.

Only quite recently have Israeli social scientists begun to direct their attention in a serious way to the issue of the place of women in society. This has happened during the last two decades. Although there have been studies that investigated the issue of women in Israeli society, the penetration of feminist perspectives into Israeli academic work has refocused attention and opened new, unexplored questions about gender relations, in general, and the position of women in society, in particular. Most recent research on gender has been carried out by women academicians who, themselves, constitute a small and marginalized group within the Israeli academy. Research on women in Israel has further been limited in scope when we consider that these researchers were largely concerned with Jewish women like themselves. Moreover, within the Jewish women category, they have focused their research mainly on middle-class, Jewish Ashkenazi women (of European origin) and hardly at all on Jewish Oriental women from Arab countries.¹

The main topics of such research have, accordingly, centered on issues such as the struggle of Jewish middle class women for equality in the job market, on the "glass ceiling" encountered by women managers and women entrepreneurs, and on the place of these women in decision-making processes. Examples include Efroni's work on the unequal structure of the Israeli job market (Efroni, 1997), Zamir's work on the "glass ceiling" of the kibbutz (1999), and Izraeli's extensive work on women managers (Izraeli, 1996, 1997a and 1997b). Herzog (1994) has written about the place of women in the Israeli local political arena, and the contributors to Ma'or's edited volume (1997) wrote about the rising power of women in business and politics. Little of this work on gender appears in the main Israeli social science research journals. Much of the post-1990s research on women in Israel appear in collections edited by a small number of women academics (Swirski and Safir, 1993; Bernstein,

¹Oriental Jews are known in Hebrew as "Mizrahiim".

1992; Azmon and Izraeli, 1993).

Within this limited range of academic research on women in Israel, research on “Other” women in Israel – Jewish-Oriental women, Ethiopian women, lower-class Russian immigrant women, and non-Jewish women – has been limited both in number and in scope. Elsewhere (Motzafi-Haller, 1999) I reviewed the nature of the few studies that have looked more fully at Oriental women in Israel since the 1950s. It will suffice to note at this point that Oriental women in Israel are often constituted as a “problem” and that the research about them is often directed at proposing policy solutions for the “social problem” such women pose. A similar perspective frames the research on women immigrants from the former Soviet Union (*e.g.* Fisman, 1997; Appelbaum and Zinger, 1995).

Placement of women and their worlds at the center of research has been largely the concern of women anthropologists. Two recent anthropological studies are worthy of special note here: El-Or’s work on women in the ultra-orthodox community and the religious Zionist movement (1992, 1998) and Sered’s work on the world of religious Oriental women in Jerusalem (1995). The following observations are offered to sum up this brief general review of research on gender in the Israeli academy:

1. Social research on women and gender relations has been a relatively recent development in Israel. On the whole, it has been pushed to the margins of mainstream academic research work. Most social research in Israel still ignores gender as a central category for analysis;
2. The nature of the limited body of research that has begun to explore the place of women in society has been further narrowed down due to the strong influence of liberal feminist concerns. Most scholarly work on women in Israel reflect liberal feminist concerns that are relevant in the lives of urban, middle-class and Jewish Ashkenazi women;
3. Very few works have explored the lives of “ethnic” non-Ashkenazi women and even less attention has been focused on non-Jewish women and their worlds;
4. The three observations presented above also suggest that very little sustained work has been carried out on *rural* women in Israel. The rest of this essay sets out to outline the nature of this limited work.

Women in Israel: The national level

Women in the Israeli labor market

On the whole, the rate of participation in the labor market by Israeli women is lower than that of Israeli men and lower than that of women in western “developed” countries. In the 25-54 age group, 73 percent of the Jewish women and 18 percent of Arab Israeli women participate in the labor force. This is compared to 86 percent

of the Jewish men and 87 percent of Arab men. In Sweden, for example, the rate of women's participation in the labor force in the same age group is 86 percent, in France 79 percent, and in the U.S. 76 percent (The Adva Center, 1998). Nevertheless, as the most recent national data show, the participation of Israeli women in the labor market has been on the increase in the past two decades. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics calculations, in 1996 women constituted some 46 percent of the national labor force in Israel. Twenty years earlier, their rate of participation was calculated as 32 percent. However, these general figures conceal significant variations among Israeli women. While 51 percent of the Jewish women were reported as part of the national labor force (more than the national average), only 33 percent of the Christian women, 29 percent of the Druze women, and 13 percent of the Muslim women entered the labor force.

There are also great variations in the kind of work performed by women in these varied ethnic and religious categories. At the top of the labor market, holding academic and professional positions, one finds Ashkenazi Jewish women. Oriental women cluster around secretarial and clerical positions. Arab women, although represented in the labor market in small numbers, fall at both ends: either in academic and teaching positions or in low paying jobs on assembly lines (Central Bureau of Statistics, 1996).

Numerous studies and aggregate statistics document the inequality in the earning power of men and women in Israel. These show that the average monthly salary earned by women is about 60 percent that of Israeli men, and the hourly wages are 80 percent that of men. A more limited report which compares income levels of men and women in the civil service concludes that women earn 75 percent of the income of men with the same qualifications and work experience. A 1998 report by the Women's Lobby in Israel shows that about a third of Israeli working women earn minimum wage or less. This compares with 14 percent of men at that income level. Only 20 percent of women earn what is defined as the average income as compared to 40 percent of men. In 1999, the minimum monthly wage was set at NIS 2,625, (about \$650) and the average income was NIS 5,952 per month. Finally, since 1993, more than 50 percent of the unemployed have been women (Adva Center, 1998).

Women's education in Israel

There is a general rise in the achievement of women in formal education, in particular in the rate of high school and university enrollment. In 1995-1996, 53 percent of the seventeen-year old Jewish girls had passed their matriculation exams at the end of high school, in comparison to 41 percent of the Jewish males of that age group. In the Arab education system, 23 percent of the females, as compared to 16 percent of the males, passed these critical exams that are necessary for entry into higher education. Within their respective ethnic categories, women composed 59 percent of the Oriental university students, 52 percent of the total Ashkenazi

students, 54 percent of the Christian students, 40 percent of the Muslim students, and 33 percent of the Druze students in the country. In general, 55 percent of the university graduates (at B.A. level), 50 percent of M.A. graduates, and 39 percent of Ph.D. graduates were women (Adva Center, 1998).

What subjects do women study when they reach university? Their presence has increased in most subjects, including those known as “male” subjects: business administration (43 percent), law (48 percent) medicine (48 percent), and physics (35 percent). Their presence in engineering and architecture has increased, but remains relatively minor (21 percent). The number of women in subjects known as “feminine” – which lead to low-paying positions – is the greatest: Humanities (60 percent), social sciences (63 percent), languages (82 percent), and education and teaching (86 percent). Where do these academic degrees place women? More than one-third of the college-level educated women are employed in education, health and the social services, the very areas that have been cut in recent years by government central planning (Swirski, 1999).

Women in the agricultural sector

It is critical to begin our review of the place of women in agriculture in contemporary Israel with the following two facts:

1. Only 2.4 percent of the Israeli population is engaged in agricultural production;
2. Women who are employed in the agricultural sector constitute only 1 percent of the total number of women of the Israeli labor power (Central Bureau of Statistics, 1996).

Over the years, agricultural production has shrunk as part of a decline in the rural sector in Israel. Schwartz (1998) reports that the share of agriculture in the country's net domestic product dropped from 12 percent in 1952 to 2.3 percent in 1995. Interestingly, the sharpest decline occurred after the 1986 financial crisis that hit Israel's collective settlements. A review of this crisis and the far-reaching changes it brought to the rural segment of Israeli agriculture is detailed by Schwartz (1995). For our purposes here, it will suffice to state that following the mid-1980s crisis, agriculture lost much of its importance in the national economy. It is also instructive to note that the excellent review of this recent crisis in agricultural production pays very little attention to the impact such a process has had on women and their well-being.

The 1997 Central Bureau of Statistics data compare males and females according to the economic branch of their employment. It is important to note here that these and other national statistics document only those women who are defined as “employed”. The particular nature of women's involvement in agricultural production, as the following discussion will make clear, has often meant that women's work is not defined as “employment”. Women contribute many hours of their labor

within small family farms, but are seldom reported as “employees” of these farm units (Nevo, 1986). Only 0.6 percent of women employees are considered “skilled agricultural workers”.

Keeping in mind this built-in bias in the aggregate statistical records (the tendency to ignore/not record women’s labor in agriculture), we must read the following data skeptically. National statistics indicate that women employed in agriculture work less hours per week than men. Specifically, men work on the average 43 hours; women work an average of 34.9 hours. This gender gap in work performance in agriculture cuts across both Jewish and non-Jewish gender divisions, as Table 1 shows.

Table 1. Average work hours per week by economic branch, population group and sex

Economic branch	Arab men	Total Arab*	Jewish women	Jewish men	Total Jews	Total men	Total women	Total
Agriculture	45.9	45.1	34.4	42.5	40.8	43.0	34.9	41.5
Banking, insurance and other financial institutions	43.9	42.0	35.0	41.4	37.6	41.6	35.0	37.8
Education	25.1	24.1	25.0	33.6	27.0	32.3	24.9	26.7
Health, welfare and social work services	43.3	39.7	30.7	39.5	32.8	40.0	31.1	33.4

*Official data for Arab females are not available. Note that the average total work hours is lower than the average for males only, evidently due to the lower average of Arab women working hours.

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, 1996:189, abstracted from Table 41.

The distinction between men and women within the Jewish population on the one hand, and internal gender differences within the Arab population of Israel on the other, leads us to the meso-level. Here one is struck by the paucity of research that concerns non-Ashkenazi Jewish women. Due to particular historical and political circumstances, this ethnic and religious division – between Jewish and non-Jewish women and between Ashkenazi women (of European origin) and Oriental (of Middle-Eastern and North African origin) – corresponds with types of settlement. A small fraction of the non-Jewish population has clustered in a few urban settings, while the majority continues to reside in rural villages, known in the statistical records as “minority villages” (*kafré miu’tim* in Hebrew).

The bulk of the Jewish rural population is divided among the cooperative settlements of the “moshav ovdim” type (here there is an internal division between veteran, established moshavim and moshavim established by immigrants from Arab lands, originally known as “moshvé olim”, the moshav shitufi and the collective settlement form of the “kibbutz”). These three settlement types, the moshav (plural moshavim), the moshav shitufi (literally collective moshav) and the kibbutz (plural, kibbutzim) are the main forms of planned settlements among the Jewish population in Israel.

The Moshav and the Moshav shitufi are cooperative rural settlements distinguished from the collective kibbutz. The distinction among these three settlement forms has been eroding over the years as the kibbutzim have gradually given up many aspects of collective life.

Women in cooperative and non-cooperative settings in Israel

Table 2 shows the changing rural population in Israel over the years, distinguishing between Jewish and non-Jewish rural populations. The data show that the total rural population in Israel has dramatically decreased over the past five decades, from a total of 27.8 percent of the population in 1948 to less than 9 percent in 1996. This decline in rural population is much more dramatic among the non-Jewish population than among the Jews. Thus in 1948, the Jewish rural sector was 17 percent of the population, and this rate has declined in 1996 to about 9 percent. Among the non-Jewish population, more than 76 percent lived in rural settlements in 1948, and this rate declined to a low of 7 percent in 1996.

Table 2. Rural population in Israel: Jewish and non-Jewish segments

Year	Total		% of total	Jewish		% of total	Non-Jewish		% of total
	thousands			thousands			thousands		
	Total	Rural		Total	Rural		Total	Rural	
1948	873	243	27.8	717	123	17.2	156	119	76.3
1951	1,578	439	27.8	1,404	311	22.1	173	128	73.8
1955	1,789	516	28.8	1,591	371	23.3	199	145	72.8
1960	2,150	501	23.3	1,911	322	16.9	239	179	74.8
1965	2,598	472	18.2	2,299	267	11.6	299	204	68.3
1970	3,001	524	17.4	2,561	272	10.6	440	252	57.2
1975	3,493	491	14.1	2,959	274	9.2	534	218	40.8
1980	3,922	520	13.3	3,283	315	9.6	639	205	32.1
1985	4,266	451	10.6	3,517	356	10.1	749	95	12.7
1990	4,822	458	9.5	3,947	377	9.6	875	81	9.3
1996	5,759	513	8.9	4,637	433	9.3	1,122	79	7.0

Source: Israel Ministry of Agriculture, *An economic account on agriculture and the rural sector 1997* (1998:11).

Table 3 shows more detailed data, distinguishing among four types of rural settlements in Israel – “moshavim”, “moshavim shitufiyim”, “kibbutzim”, and “kafré miu’tim”. The fourth category lumps together all non-Jewish rural settlements. It indicates changes in the numbers of each settlement type over more than three decades, between 1961 and 1996. Table 3 also records a residual category of “Other”, which includes rural settings that have no cooperative status.

Table 3. The number of rural settlements in Israel by type of settlement

	Year	Total no.	Moshav	Moshav shitufi	Kibbutzim	Minorities	Other
Number of settlements	1961	765	346	20	228	75	96
	1972	780	353	33	233	58	103
	1983	941	405	43	267	61	165
	1990	988	409	45	270	44	220
	1996	757	411	44	268	34	233
Percents	1961	100	45.2	2.6	29.8	9.8	12.5
	1972	100	45.3	4.2	29.9	7.4	13.2
	1983	100	43.0	4.6	28.4	6.5	17.5
	1990	100	41.4	4.6	27.3	4.5	22.3
	1996	100	54.3	5.8	35.4	4.5	30.8

Source: Israel Ministry of Agriculture, *An economic account on agriculture and the rural sector* 1997 (1998:11).

To sum up:

1. Agricultural production has declined dramatically in Israel and constitutes, according to the most recent official data, only about 2 percent of the country's net domestic product;
2. Most agricultural production is carried out in three main types of rural settlements: kibbutzim, moshavim, and minority villages;
3. Due to historical, political, and social factors, the population of these three main sites of agricultural production in Israel is diverse and the place of women within this universe of agricultural production varies greatly.

Thus, when we turn to a review of the micro-level, we must devote a separate discussion to each of these varied settlement types. We begin with the most studied, the kibbutzim.

Research on women in the kibbutz

There is a relatively high number of studies that have explored the position of women in kibbutz society.² A most prolific researcher on this topic is sociologist Talmon-Garber (1956, 1970, 1980). Talmon-Garber's work exposed the gender inequality in the kibbutz society and thus dispelled one of the most common myths about gender equality in the kibbutz. More recent works on gender inequality in the kibbutz include that of Adar *et al.* (1986, 1988, 1993), Adar (1996), Bar-Yosef (1986,

²There is no space in this brief section, nor do I intend to review all work published on women in the kibbutz. Instead, the selection I have cited intends to support the argument I am developing about the shifting nature of academic scholarship on women in the kibbutz due to the growing impact of feminist theories and perspectives.

1992), Neuman (1991), and Palgi (1996). Together, these studies document the fact that despite the myth of the equal kibbutz society, women in the kibbutz tended to hold service roles, mostly associated with the caring for children and cooking, while agricultural roles were reserved for men. For example, Neuman's study (1991) records that only 3 percent of the women in the kibbutz were involved in agricultural production. While 85 percent of managerial positions are held by men, women fulfill 85 percent of the service positions.³ This data suggest that role segregation in Israel along gender lines is higher in the kibbutz than in urban settings. Feminism in the kibbutz, according to Adar (1996:24) "exposed the nakedness of the double message that was prominent in kibbutz society. On the one hand it was argued that every woman can work in any branch of kibbutz economy she may wish to work. ... On the other hand, there were clear signals that the primary duty of each woman is to care for her family, especially her children" (my translation). Adar reviews a range of research work documenting women inequality in kibbutz society of the late 1980s and 1990s and provides several tables based on data culled from the kibbutz research center files. Against the 3 percent of women who participated in agriculture in the late 1980s, she notes 22 percent of men in that field (*i.e.*, more than seven times more men than women participated in agricultural production). By the early 1990s, the relative numbers of men and women engaged in agricultural production shifted to 23 and 5 percent, respectively (Adar, 1996:27, Table 3).

Research carried out after 1985 – the year that marked the economic crisis of the cooperative movement in general, and the kibbutzim, in particular – reveal that gender inequality in the kibbutzim had, in fact, expanded.⁴ This more recent research also tends to use different research methodology and theoretical frames when it explores this post-crisis era in the kibbutz society. Such recent research tends to use qualitative methods and asks more open-ended questions such as: have the recent transformations in the kibbutz society and structure created a better environment for gender equality in the kibbutz? For example, Blank (1995) used an interpretive analysis of open interviews conducted with women who had been members of various kibbutzim for at least ten years. Unlike the kind of research that prevailed up to the 1970s, Blank did not focus on the statistical gaps between men's and women's status in the kibbutz, but chose instead to explore the ways in which these women have *experienced* the recent dramatic shifts in the socio-economic fabric of kibbutz life. Zamir (1999) selected a more focused research sample, concentrating on life stories

³ Adar (1996:27) supports this data when she argues that "there are more men than women in jobs of managerial nature". She adds another interesting twist to this statistics when she adds that despite the fact that women have gained higher education in larger numbers than men, they have less opportunities to make use of their educational skills in their work (*op. cit.*). For a detailed discussion about the meaning of the categories "service" and "managerial", see Palgi 1996:14 ff.

⁴ The list of such research is long. I decided instead to direct interested readers to the excellent review and many references cited in Palgi, 1996; Adar, 1996; and Neuman, 1991.

of those 5 percent of kibbutz women who had reached management and decision-making positions in their respective kibbutzim. Liblich, who wrote the forward to Zamir's book, makes explicit the shift in focus of both research methodology and questions that this study signals. "The goals of this research," she noted (1999:9), "have been to characterize the lives of those women who had succeeded in reaching the economic elite of the kibbutz and to examine, from their perspective, why they make up such a tiny minority among women. The research is thus structured so as to learn about the 'failure' from the understanding of the 'success' cases." This work finally dispelled the stubborn myth of equality of women in the kibbutz setting, documented the ways in which the more recent crisis in the kibbutz movement has exacerbated that tendency, and highlighted the particular experiences of women in the process of change in their cooperative communities.

Research on women in the moshav

One of the most striking facts about the position of women in Israeli moshavim is that until very recently, women did not have the legal right to vote or be elected to the central committee that runs the moshav – the "Agudat Hamoshav". The right to vote was limited to male owners of the family farm units of the moshav. In 1999, the law was changed after a legal battle initiated by a woman from Moshav Zavdiel. Further to the Amendment to the Law promulgated by the Israeli Knesset in 1988,⁵ women could become members of the moshav council (and thus obtain the right to vote), if they were married to the male owner of the family farm or to his son, but only after had completed a set of bureaucratic procedures of registration (Mualem, 1999; Tal, 1999) and met a number of requirements. "We are used that women do not interfere with business matters. Until now it was fine and created no problems. So why should we change the regulations?" asked the chairperson of Moshav Mahasiya committee (Frielich, 2000). Most women do not bother to come forward and apply for their membership, enabled by the new Amendment (men are automatically members, the application is necessary for women only) and do not partake in any of the decision-making regarding the distribution of resources made in these committees. This glaring gender inequality ensconced in the legal code was made public and began to be the subject of journalistic essays only after the legal battle was won a few years ago. Curiously, academic research on women in the moshav has not dealt with the phenomenon.

Research on women in cooperative moshav settlements can be divided into three main types: 1) economic research; 2) social anthropology research; and 3) surveys of attitudes held by moshav residents.

⁵Par. 6a1 of the Amendment.

Economic research

Two sub-categories of economic research can be identified.

Research that considers the family in the rural areas as the key economic unit. Such research begins with the assumption that the family and the family-centered household units are the basic analytical unit. This has since been questioned. The early work by Sadan *et al.* (1976) is a good example. The researchers examined the correlation between the socio-economic background of members of this family unit and the success of its economic management. They compared families of Jewish Oriental and Ashkenazi background and found a direct correlation between the level of formal education of the women, the size of the family, and the level of efficient economic management of the farm. In a recent work Kimhi (1996) also looks at the family unit as an explanatory factor for his financial analysis. He links the nature of the division of labor within the family farm with the decision to seek paid employment outside it. Semyonov and Lewin-Epstein (1991) also look at the gender-related gaps within the labor market. They propose that because most women tend to work next to their homes, women in rural settings tend to be paid less.

Research that focuses on employment of women in peripheral regions. The key researcher in this category is Fleischer who, together with colleagues, have edited several collections of research work published by the Development Study Center of Rehovot (see Fleischer *et al.*, 1990; Fleischer and Appelbaum, 1992; Fleischer *et al.*, 1993). This research, based mainly on data culled from questionnaires, examines the characteristics of women's employment in small peripheral towns and moshavim in the south and north of Israel. Among the key research findings are the following:

- Women in peripheral settlements in both the north and the south of the country (note the grouping together of moshavim with semi-urban peripheral settlements) have a higher rate of unemployment than the national average;
- These women are mostly of Oriental (non-European) origin. They are less educated, have less marketable skills and when employed, are often found in low-paid, low status positions;
- The socio-economic profile of this population composed of women is the key factor that defines a woman's ability to secure employment.

The 1993 research published in collaboration with Rotem and Banin examines the new avenue of income generation in rural settings – internal rural tourism. The study proposes that women's skills, such as cooking and housekeeping, could be used to build a profitable small business. Several more recent publications by women's advocacy groups (Women's Lobby in Israel, 1998), the Ministry of Housing (1994, 1996) and the Association for Small Businesses (1996) have also advocated the engagement of women in this growing non-agricultural income-generating activity. Yet, a 1996 study on rural tourism (Quixchan-Kedar, 1996) reveals that although

there is a tremendous growth in rural tourism (from five businesses in the early 1970s to over 200 in the mid-1990s), and despite the fact that about half of these small businesses are owned by women, women of low-income and modest socio-economic background do not take advantage of this economic potential. The person most likely to initiate a rural tourism business (rented rooms are known as “tzimer” after the German word for “room”) is middle-aged, relatively more educated and with professional background and experience (1996:7). Despite the importance of this research, little else was studied about the potential of engaging moshav women in non-agricultural economic activity. In fact, most published work on “non-agricultural businesses” in moshavim have a larger research agenda and mentions women in passing. They do not explore gender distribution in this emerging economic activity (see for example, Ilberg, 1984 and Sherman *et al.*, 1993).

Social anthropology/qualitative research

Anthropological research is characterized by its holistic and qualitative nature. It explores the wider fabric of social life in the moshav and it employs mostly qualitative and interpretive analytical methods to explain its results. This body of research is also divided into two sub-categories: research that places moshav families and their transformation at the center of the study, and research that is focused on the world of moshav women.

Research on families and household units in the moshav settings. Women do not constitute the focus of this research, but are considered as part of a larger family/household unit. Shoked's pioneering work (1980) on the changing division of labor in an immigrant moshav in the Negev is a good example. Solomonica (1981) has also recorded changes in family structure in the moshav and explored the implications of such changes on women's status. Solomonica concludes that there have been significant differences in the way economic changes in the moshav structure during the late 1970s to the early 1980s have affected women in veteran moshavim and in the effects these changes have on women in moshavim inhabited mostly by immigrants (“moshavé olim”). He finds that women's roles have changed more dramatically in moshavim in which most of the residents are Jews of Oriental origin than in moshavim inhabited by Jews of European origin. Jewish women of Oriental origin became the main bread winners in their families. Many of them sought cash employment outside the moshav settlement.

An important anthropological work that looks directly at the position of women within Israeli moshavim up to the early 1980s was carried out by Nevo (1986, 1991). Nevo documents the extent to which agricultural work in the family farm is carried out by women. Such work is not recorded, nor paid. Exploring shifts in the ideology of cooperative work in moshavim since 1921, Nevo finds that despite the emphasis on equality between genders in this ideology, the structure of the family within the moshav has remained unchanged over the years. This structure has reproduced

inequality between the genders and kept women at a disadvantage.

Very little work has been carried out on moshav women in the 1990s. In her 1991 article, Nevo examines five moshavim which adopted new technologies for growing greenhouse flowers. She reports that women have found a new focus in managing these greenhouses. However, despite this relative success, Nevo argues that this new economic opportunity for women did not change their lower status in the moshav. The engagement of women in public and decision-making positions in the moshav remains minimal, and their marginality in local political life has become more pronounced.

Anthropological work that places the experience of women in the moshav society at the center of research. Included in this category are the works of Wasserfall (1995) on women of Moroccan origin who live in a moshav in the Negev; of Katzir (1983) on Yemenite women in a moshav near Jerusalem; and of Schelly-Newman (1993) on women's narratives among Tunisian moshav women. These micro studies are rich in insights not only regarding gender inequality in the moshav setting, but more critically in the particular ways these women have dealt with the changing conditions of their lives.

Sociological research on women's attitudes to their positions in society. This kind of sociological research uses questionnaires that record views women hold about their place in society, and how they rate their satisfaction with their membership in the cooperative, public activity and family life, etc. Among the results of one early research (Padan-Eisenshtarck and Meir-Heker, 1975) are the following:

- Women tend to report a low level of satisfaction with their limited and non-professional engagement in economic activity in the moshav;
- Women have low level of professional aspiration and thus limit their involvement in the economic life of the moshav;
- Most women in the sample see their role as housewives and mothers as their central social role and draw most of their self-value from these gender-specific roles;
- Although they articulate limited professional aspirations for themselves, most women hope for a professional career for their own daughters.

Research on women in non-Jewish rural sectors

In a process that parallels the decline of agricultural production in the Jewish population of Israel, agriculture has been declining in importance in Arab villages, although due to more specific historical and political conditions (Rabinowitz, 1998). In the late 1960s, only 17 percent of the residents in Arab villages made their living by cultivating their land (*op. cit.*: 146). This rate decreased in the 1970s, when more Arab laborers sought jobs in towns, especially in construction (Abu-Rakba,

1993:187). There is very little recent concrete data that documents the scope and extent of the Israeli Arab women engagement in agricultural production. There is some data on the overall rate of labor participation by Arab women in Israel. On the whole, the rate of the Arab women's labor participation is lower than that of Jewish Israeli women. In 1985, the participation of Arab women in the work force stood at 11 percent. In comparison, the rate of Jewish women's participation in the labor force in the same year was 39 percent. Based on an analysis of data provided by the population census of 1983, Lewin-Epstein and Semyonov (1992) found that Arab women's rate of employment was directly influenced by local, community-based economic and social factors. The rate of Arab women's participation in the labor force rose in communities where agricultural production was dominant; it declined in communities with little agricultural work, few job opportunities, and high birth rates.

The labor force of Arab women tends to be sharply divided into low service and industry work and white-collar jobs (Abu-Rakba, 1993:189). Arab women who work in service jobs, such as cleaning, earn the lowest wages. Many young, unmarried Arab women find employment in textile plants, often located within their home villages or in a neighboring town (Drori, 1996). The low wages earned by these young women are often translated into a social and economic advantage that empower these women (Goldberg, 1993).

Education among Arab women has also increased over the past two decades. Women constitute about 21 percent of all Arabs who earned a first degree (Abu-Rakba, 1993). Almost half of the Israeli Arab women in the work force are engaged in white-collar, public service jobs. Shaloufeh Khazen (1993) argues that the improved economic status of Arab women in recent years has resulted in shifts in the patterns of mate selection among Palestinian women in Israel. Women tend to use "modern" criteria (such as emotional compatibility) for selecting their mate, rather than comply with "traditional" criteria (economic or social compatibility). Mar'i and Mar'i (1993) claim that these changes in the position of Arab women have made them important change agents in the Arab society.

Most recent research has focused on Arab communities within the "Green Line". Semyonov's 1994 study is unique in exploring changing patterns of gender-linked participation in the labor market in the areas occupied by Israel since the 1967 war. Analysis of official national statistics relevant to the population of the West Bank and Gaza since the 1970s led Semyonov to conclude that contrary to expectations in other societies for a rise in the rate of women's participation in the labor force, and despite the rapid rise of the male labor force in the occupied territories since the early 1970s, the percentage of women's engagement in the labor force has decreased.

Yet, as important as these limited data on rate of women's participation in the labor force are, they tell us little about the larger social structures that shape these

gender-specific patterns. More sociological analyses of the place of women in Arab society in Israel were carried out in the 1960s and 1970s. These include the works by Rosenfeld (1958, 1968), Cohen (1965), Ginat (1982, 1986), and Marx (1974). While Ginat has devoted a separate book to the status of women in Muslim rural society (1982), the concern with women and their status did not stand at the center of the other researchers' investigations and is only discussed in passing. Another critical shortcoming of this body of early ethnographic work on rural Arab village society is that it adopts the male-centered perspective in explaining the place of women. Yet, despite these obvious limitations, this early work presents us with a social analysis that positions gender relations within the larger socio-political and historical settings. More recent work on Arab women in Israel (Ibrahim, 1997; Jareissi, 1991) provides a more limited analysis of the larger structures that shape these women's lives.

Conclusions

Social research in Israel began to explore the place of women in society only since the late 1970s, mainly due to the entrance of feminist perspectives into the Israeli academy. Until then, and in many cases to this day, research considered women and their concerns as part of research on the family and the household unit. Feminist perspectives have changed this assumption and directed attention to women and to gender relations as a category of research in its own right. However, the first wave of feminist research has been criticized for its limited focus on a liberal feminist agenda that was mainly concerned with equality between the sexes, and for its exclusive focus on urban, Jewish-Ashkenazi women as the subject of research. Research on the position of women in the rural sector in Israel, the kibbutz notwithstanding, and on non-Ashkenazi and non-Jewish women, has been extremely limited.

This sociology of knowledge production has resulted in serious gaps in our knowledge on women in the Israeli rural sector. We know very little about non-Jewish women and the shape of their lives in changing circumstances. What, for example, have recent shifts in the demands for labor by the expanding Israeli economy meant for women in Arab villages within Israel? And what does the trend to import foreign workers from the Far East mean for Jewish moshav women? We know little about Bedouin women and girls who do the major part of goat and sheep herding and not much more about poor Oriental women in failed family farms in the Negev moshavim. Despite the relatively large number of research projects conducted in Israeli kibbutzim, we know very little about women's engagement in the diminished agricultural production still carried out in several kibbutzim.

Agricultural production has been in decline in Israel, especially in the wake of the mid-1980s financial and ideological crisis in the kibbutzim and moshavim. As part of a general process of transformation of the position of agricultural production in the economy and national ideology, the role of women has also shifted. For

example, when Jewish men left their farms to work outside their homes, women became managers of foreign workers from the Gaza Strip and from Thailand. No serious research has been done on the meaning of such a new situation for the Jewish women who manage these workers, or for the Palestinian women left to cultivate their own fields.

In Israel, the "rural sector" has a specific history and politics that distinguish the moshav from the kibbutz and the Palestinian village from the recently-settled Bedouin villages. Within each of these "rural" settings, patterns of production as well as work and gender relations vary greatly. Not only do we find variations in gender relations according to distinct ethnic, class, and religious communities, but these relations have dramatically shifted in time. The analysis offered in this essay suggests that more gender-focused research must be carried out in rural Israel if the impact of the recent dramatic transformation in cooperative and non-cooperative settlements is to be understood.

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