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No Longer Complacent?: Why Israeli Women Did Not Rebel

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Center on Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law
Stanford Institute on International Studies

CDDRL
STANFORD
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Number 33
January 26, 2005

This working paper was produced as part of CDDRL's ongoing programming on economic and political development in transitional states. Additional working papers appear on CDDRL's website: http://cddrl.stanford.edu.

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NO LONGER COMPLACENT?: WHY ISRAELI WOMEN DID NOT REBEL

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Paper presented at workshop on Women Transition and Development at the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law (CDDRL) at the Stanford Institute for International Studies. I wish to thank Charls Smith, Judy Stacey, Baruch Kimmerling, Eva Meyersson Milgrom, and Guillermina Jasso for their helpful contributions to an earlier version of this paper. Direct all communication to Dahlia Moore, College of Management-Academic Studies, 7, Y. Rabin Avenue, Rishon LeZion 75190, Israel, 61480. Fax: 972-3-963 4173. E-Mail: dmoore@colman.ac.il

NO LONGER COMPLACENT?: WHY ISRAELI WOMEN DID NOT REBEL

Abstract

Why did Israeli women not fight for social equality until the late 1980s? And what changed their individual and collective willingness to act? The paper maintains that social action to improve women's positions in society did exist before the late 1980s but it was mostly not rebellious in the sense that it was not directed against men or the existing social order. The main factor behind the inaction is the lack of feminist ideologies that affect and support gender identities. This kind of feminist gender identity was inhibited in Israel by the inter-relations among three factors: (1) the lack of ideological pluralism, (2) the influence of traditional and religious beliefs, and (3) the effect of national, total, and masculine institutions (like the Israeli army). The same factors—or some combinations of these factors—may inhibit women's activism in other societies as well.

NO LONGER COMPLACENT?: WHY ISRAELI WOMEN DID NOT REBEL

For several millennia, and in virtually every society females have been subject to substantial social-structural strain - that is, tensions, conflicts, discriminations and deprivations within a social structure characterized by inequality. Therefore, "there has long been ample reason for women's movement almost everywhere. Yet, such movements did not occur before the mid-nineteenth century, and then not everywhere." (Chafetz, Dworkin, and Swanson 1990, p.304).

Despite the myths regarding "Zionist pioneer women" and the image of "female soldiers" both of which depict Israeli women as liberated and equal to men, gender inequality is (and has always been) highly noticeable in Israel in all life domains. This paper analyzes why Israeli women did not create social protest movements or resort to rebellious social action to reduce gender inequality in Israeli society until the late 1980s, and what has brought the change in women's attitudes and behaviors. It focuses on the major preconditions for such action, and their role in empowering women to rebel or hindering their rebellion. Rebellion does not mean that women turn against men in all areas, but that they are willing to fight—against the existing social systems and against men—for equality and women's rights.

Analysis of the social forces that inhibit women's ability to fight against patriarchal structuration processes is crucial to the understanding of women's oppression in Israel as in other patriarchal societies.[i] The forces that curb women's desire and ability to rebel are many, and they often interact, so that they strengthen each other. Although some of the suppressing forces are culture-specific and vary from one society to another, the influence of certain factors is more universal.

The paper depicts women's collective activism as the result of salient and prevalent non-traditional gender identities. It maintains that the most important precondition creating such gender identities is the prevalence of supporting ideologies. The spreading of such ideologies was hindered in Israel by (1) the lack of ideological pluralism, (2) the prevalence of formal religion and traditional value orientations, and (3) the impact of total (and masculine) national institutions (like national army and police force).

The case of Israel is particularly relevant to these issues for several reasons. First, the rather short history of the Israel as an independent state (50 years) enables the analysis of its entire development through time. Second, all three factors that inhibit the spreading of

feminist ideologies and feminist gender identities were, until recently, salient in its society. Third, as some of the inhibiting factors have changed in Israeli society (e.g., ideological hegemony no longer exists, and policy changes were made regarding female recruits in the Israeli Army), it is possible to examine their impact before and after the change.

Although the specific manifestations (or forms) of these factors may vary from one society to another, their impact on the formation of feminist gender identities and women's 'rebellious' actions may be similar across societies.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Social Action

One of the most ambitious and promising attempts to re-theorize the role of the individual in social processes, is Anthony Giddens' structuration theory. At the core of this theory are individuals, known as agents (apparently, agents of the social system), who do not create systems or cultures per se but reproduce or transform them in the continuity of praxis (Giddens 1984, 1994). Agents are autonomous, knowledgeable and skillful, although never fully aware of their actions. Agents' actions are always bound by historical-situational contexts, compounded by given power structures, which are not of the agents' choosing. However, agents are never fully culturally pre-programmed and have a wide range of knowledge about their world and are capable of offering rational explanations of the motives of their action (Swingewood 1991; Thompson 1989).

Stated briefly, the theory posits that every action involving agents combines three major dimensions that appear within circular loops: (a) Unacknowledged conditions of action, which are anchored in sets of rules and resources; (b) The action itself—including verbal behavior—during which agents and their counterparts in social interaction monitor and rationalize their actions and motivations; (c) The unintended consequences of the action, which can or cannot reproduce or change, on the micro or macro level, the initial conditions (Giddens 1976, p. 56; 1979, p. 17). The continuous feedback, generated by the circular movement, is the process of structuration (in the Giddensian neologism). To the degree that these flows exhibit regular and uniform patterns (institutionalization, in non-Giddensian terminology), the praxis is reproduced, or alternatively shaped into new practices. Thus, structure is both a medium and outcome of the reproduction of practices (Giddens 1979, p. 4). Giddens does not give deterministic or trans-historical priority to any particular form of production of new practices or reproduction of old conducts; and correspondingly, no

universalistic needs are implicitly or explicitly assumed, either for collectivities or for actors (Cohen 1987).

When the process of structuration significantly transforms the system, it indicates dissatisfaction with existing cultural processes and/or social institutions and may therefore be termed rebellious, especially when the praxis is directed against the perceived power structures.

Giddens' structuration theory can be used to analyze the conditions that empower (or impede) women's movements and social protest.[ii] Although Giddens treats all individuals as social agents who reproduce social systems, feminist scholars claim that female agents are less autonomous than male agents, bound by value systems that limit their ability to transform the social institutions in which they function (Blumberg 1979; Hughes and Galinsky 1994; Spade and Reese 1991; Stacey 1990). Moreover, although the actions of all agents are bound by historical and situational contexts which are not of the agents' choosing, the contexts in most societies are patriarchal and serve men's basic interests but not women's (Baxter and Kane 1995). The same contexts, therefore, have different meanings for men and women.

Changes in the historical conditions and situational contexts (like the growth of bureaucratic state apparatuses, the growth of industrialized economy, and urbanization) have had a multi-faceted impact on how women agents are bound by the situational context. The changes have resulted in stronger and more centralized male-dominated power structures but at the same time, they have led to more job opportunities for women. The latter increased both women's autonomy and the conflict between their domestic and work roles. The urbanization and the growth of the service sector increased the crowding of women in female-typed jobs (like teachers, nurses, and secretaries). Thus, women met other women with similar role conflicts and this has increased their awareness of sex-based inequity (Chafetz and Dworkin, 1986; Chafetz et all. 1990; Smelser 1963; Tilly 1986). In addition, the increase in size of the middle-class, and the leisure time of members of this class, led middle-class women to join organizations in the public sphere. Among the consequences of these trends are the spreading of feminist ideologies and the formation of feminist gender identities which are the precondtions for women's activism. When a group of people (or agents) who share some of the same defining characteristics (like sex) follow similar processes of structuration, intending the same transformations in the existing power structure, their actions become collective (though each agent has operated individually)(Hearn and Collinson 1994).

Thus, the flow of the structuration process shaped new practices initiated by women, and led to redefining "political" activities (Tilly and Gurin 1990; West and Blumberg 1990; Whittier 1995). It also reflects women's dissatisfaction with existing sociocultural institutions and the awareness that women's collective action can influence the process. In the context of the present analysis, whether women work as individuals to transform the power structure that defines their inferiority or as part of a group, they criticize the sociocultural institutions and attempt to change them. This, however, can only be done if women are—at least partially—aware of their actions and their motivating forces, an awareness which embodies salient and well-defined gender identities.

Gender Identity

Social identities are based on people's tendency to classify themselves and others into diverse social categories (like class, race, ethnic origin, religion, gender and age groups). This creates the distinction between us and them or in-group and out-group (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1986; Turner 1985; Wagner et al. 1986). Each person belongs to several groups at the same time and may identify with more than one group. The identities are organized into hierarchies on the basis of their centrality and salience (McCall and Simmons 1978; Rosenberg 1979; Stryker 1991). Thus, the hierarchies incorporate the multiple identities' components into a singular, consequential whole (Burke 1991; Stryker and Serpe 1994).

In pluralistic and/or highly politicized societies the salience of social differentiations tends to be higher, so that people's awareness of them is heightened (Devine 1992; Marshal et al. 1988; Sidanius and Duffy 1988). This awareness is reflected in the hierarchical order of social identities so that the identities which are related to clearly differentiated social categories tend to become more central to individuals in that society (Auron 1993; Steeh and Schuman 1992), especially if a person belongs to a group that the social differentiation regards as subordinate. Thus, being African American is more salient for people in this social category than being Caucasian is for people in this category (Wellman 1971). However, a person may have a salient (or central) social identity that is <u>not</u> related to a divisive issue (e.g., being a family person) (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Oakes and Turner 1986; van Deth and Guertz 1989).

Unlike most other social identities (like nationality or ethnicity), a salient gender identity may have two opposing meanings for both the subordinate and dominant groups. On the one

hand, a salient gender identity may reflect adherence to the traditional division of labor according to which women's family role is their primary and most important roles, and men's role as breadwinners is the most important role. On the other hand, a salient gender identity may reflect the espousing of feminist and/or egalitarian ideas and the rejection of the traditional gender roles (Hunt 1980).

For tradition-oriented and orthodox, or religious women (especially those of traditional, more conservative denominations of Judaism, Islam and Christianity), a salient gender identity may indicate acceptance of the traditional, gendered division of labor, preservation of the social order, and resistance of change (Bernstein 1983; El-Or 1995; Sered 1987). These religious ideologies are patriarchal, bestowing upon men higher spiritual status and privileges, and often legitimating the subordination of women. They have established different rituals and rules for men and women, and teach that men rule because of divine right, and have therefore the right to tell others (who are women) how to be, what is right for them and what is wrong (Daly 1978). Thus, Jewish, Muslim or Christian, orthodox women tend to support libertarian, egalitarian ideologies less than secular, nontraditional women.[iii] Some researchers (e.g., Kaufman 1994) claim that traditional religion and some feminist ideologies similarly celebrate the female, her life-cycle experiences and feminine attributes. However, even these researchers claim that orthodox women eschew feminist politics by choosing to enhance the status of women within the boundaries of patriarchal religion (Kaufman 1991 1992).

For secular, nontraditional women, a salient gender identity seems to be based on egalitarian and/or feminist notions (Moore and Kimmerling 1995). According to egalitarian and some of the feminist ideologies, men and women are basically equal and therefore have a right to expect equal status and opportunities. Other feminist ideologies emphasize the uniqueness of each gender and the distinct perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of men and women.(In order to avoid a lengthy discussion of differences that is not entirely relevant in this context, the concept feminism is used for a variety of political perspective and ideologies). Thus, social identities are supported by relevant ideologies that justify their existence.

It seems logical to expect, therefore, that the collective actions of women who espouse feminist ideologies are aimed to change or reshape the existing patriarchal institutions more than the actions of women who espouse religious or traditional value orientations. For the latter, women's social activism tends to be non-conflictual so that it reproduces the

patriarchal social order and confirms its legitimacy. The study examines these notions in the Israeli context.

THE ISRAELI CASE

As in all patriarchies, the subordination of women in Israel is apparent ever since Israel has become an independent state in 1948. Even today, women's inferiority is evident in all life's domain: in the economy, culture, polity, military, science, and even in the family sphere.[iv] (Effroni 1980; Hertzog 1994; Izraeli 1993; Moore 1992a,b 1995a). As a result, the autonomy of female agents' actions was reduced within most of the social institutions.

The continued inferiority does not mean that women were complacent throughout the years. However, most social actions taken by women until the late 1980s were either within male-dominated organizations (like the existing political parties) or in women's organizations that supported the male-dominated institutions (like Naamat, the women's labor union, and Wizo, the Zionist Women's organization). Their actions in those years were directed mainly to improve women's lives in the traditionally female domestic sphere but did not place these organizations in a position of competition with the state and its institutions. For example, these organizations focused their efforts on creating more—and better—subsidized day-care centers that enhance the ability of women to seek full time employment.

Almost none of these actions were in conflict with the existing social order and its defined priorities. At best, when a possible conflict of interests seemed to develop (for example, when women's employment seemed to increase men's unemployment), women's attempts to improve their positions were portrayed as legitimately deriving from egalitarian ideas that were part of all the dominant ideologies.

These non-conflictual courses of action seem to have somewhat changed in the late 1980s both at the individual and the collective levels. At the individual level, several highly publicized sexual harassment and gender discrimination cases were brought to the legal system. Also, one woman's fight for an equal-to-men's retirement age (i.e., 65 years instead of 60) was won and set a precedent according to which women are given a choice regarding retirement age. Women's demands for equality became louder and clearer and accompanied by collective social action: Naamat's department of legal aid for women attained greater publicity, and it is more involved with fighting against the masculine establishments than ever before; several shelters for battered wives (and their children) were formed by women's

organizations; female elected members of the Israeli parliament (the Kenesset) became more involved with legislation to ensure equal opportunities for women, regardless of party membership[v]; and the women's lobby in the Israeli parliament has gained more power and status and aids parliament members in women's rights activism.

The study now examines how the three inter-related forces - lack of ideological pluralism, prevalence of religion, and dominance of total and masculine institutions - limited women's actions to transform social institutions in Israel by preventing the spreading of feminist ideologies which are necessary for the development of feminist gender identities.

The Lack of Ideological pluralism

Ideological pluralism means that no ideological hegemony exists in a given society so that a dominant ideology does not preclude the emergence of alternative views. In socially differentiated and ideologically pluralistic societies different ideologies will be adopted by opposing sides (i.e., the "us" and "them"), thus ideology provides both direction and motivating force for the existence of social identities (Dickens 1992).

In the case of women's gender identities, general libertarian and egalitarian ideologies in Western societies cannot be considered relevant. Most of these approaches repudiate gender differences rather than acknowledge them (Rossi 1973). Feminist ideologies (whether liberal, radical (including Marxist and socialist), cultural or postmodernist) seem better suited to provide justification and rationalization for gender identities.

These diverse ideologies can take the form of either competing or derivative ideologies. Competing ideologies promote alternative views of social order and social justice; derivative ideologies presuppose the existence of a dominant ideology and a distinct but contingent one (for example, radical feminism competes with other ideologies in most Western societies while liberal feminism is related to (or derives from) general notions of freedom, equality and self-fulfillment). (Andersen 1993; Epstein 1988; England 1993; Renzetti and Curran 1995).

Analysis of ideological pluralism in Israel shows that the socialist ideology that ruled Israel between 1948-1977 acted as a hegemonic and dominant ideology. Ideological pluralism was depicted as a threat or a weakening force during that period. Israel was construed as needing a unifying ideology to rally its people both in order to survive the hostility of its neighbors and to contend with mass immigration from Post-War Europe and the Arab countries. Moreover, depicting Israel as a melting pot in which a new, Israeli

identity is forged, the dominant ideology attempted to suppress almost all dimensions of ideological, social and cultural pluralism (only the distinction between religious and secular was accredited legitimacy by the Zionist coalition formed after the first elections).[vi] The hegemonic ideology also claimed to address the needs of all members of the collective, nullifying any attempt to form interest groups for the attainment of other goals (Hertzog, 1994; Kimmerling 1989).[vii] Women, as other minority groups, attempted to advance women's issues through the hegemonic institutions they were ineffective and had no significant influence.

Any attempt to present an alternative ideology was presented as counterproductive, and as encumbering the process of nation building and protection. As a result, feminist ideologies have spread rather slowly.[viii] Though feminist conceptions were apparent among some of the pre-state Zionist women, their small numbers and the lack of social and political support for gender issues rendered ineffective their attempts to gain equality (Bernstein 1983).

In addition, this dominant socialist ideology blurred gender differences (as well as ethnic and cultural ones. See Smooha and Kraus 1985) and impeded the formation of significant gender group identity and feminist ideologies. It co-opted almost all other ideologies, parties and interest groups, and expected all members of society to contribute to the attainment of the collective goals as much as they could, with whatever resources they had (Lotan 1993). In this respect, women were portrayed—at least ideally—as men's equals. They were expected to contribute to social propagation and regeneration, as much as to the work sphere. However, the reproductive role carries less power in society than the economic one and women found themselves in an inferior social position despite egalitarian ideology (Izraeli 1993).

On top of that, finding jobs for men was presented as of paramount importance (especially for the many men who came to Israel from Asian and African countries and had more traditional—patriarchal—beliefs and ideologies). Encouraging women to work was seen as much less important (if not improper competition with men for limited resources) by the socialist government that ruled at that time (especially in the 1950s); collectivistic needs were viewed as preceding the need for equality at the individual level (Rosenfeld and Carmi 1976).

This led to the disillusionment of the Zionist women who found themselves placed in the very traditional homemaker role. Furthermore, these women were unable to obtain massive social support for their desire for equality, not even from women. As a result, no group

consciousness and hardly any group action have developed. Attempts to redefine the major social goals or to fight for a better placement in the social hierarchy were weak and ineffective (Bernstein 1983).

The right-wing capitalist coalition gained political dominance in 1977 in Israel by enlisting the support of the disenfranchised Asian-African ethnic group(Peres and Yuchtman-Yaar 1992; Roumani 1988). The fact that women lacked both political and economic powers seems to have made it easy for the new regime to ignore gender issues and postpone addressing the topic of women's rights, assigning precedence to social problems which those in power defined as more urgent like ethnic equality.

Still, feminist interest and/or pressure groups became more active (e.g., The Women's Lobby, The Academic Women Association). This activity may be attributed in part to the inadvertent legitimation of ideological pluralism that the shift in government entailed (Klatch 1990; Schlozman 1990; Yishai 1982). According to neo-Weberian analysis of capitalistic systems, each group attempts to guard its existing advantages while it encroaches upon the privileges of higher-placed groups (Calhoun 1988). Thus, under the rule of the right wing capitalist government (1977-1992), feminism attained a more significant foothold in Israel. Though right wing ideology tends to be more conservative than left wing socialism, its basic premises legitimize the existence of interest groups and competing ideologies (Dickens, 1992).

In addition, the spreading of feminist ideas imported from the United States and the accumulating knowledge of feminists' achievements in other countries, together with the less centralist nature of capitalism has contributed to the creating of several feminist organizations in Israel in the mid-1980s, and to the turning of complacent women’s organizations (like Naamat) into more feminist organizations fighting for women’s rights. These organizations fought at first for women's place in society as an exercising of their rights, not as conflicting with the welfare of society or its goals. In the 1990s, these organizations have become more willing to act against the existing social order and their influence is more noticeable.

The shift in power in 1992 returned the socialist labor party and it's Left-wing coalition to government for four years. With their new awareness, the changed conditions in the country and the spreading of post-industrial egalitarian ideas (Moore 1995a), women in the 90s seem to be more willing to fight for a change in their social and economic placement. Some initiatives in this direction were taken by female parliament members elected at the end of

1992 so that political and institutional support for these efforts has been gained (Commission for the Advancement of Women's Status 1995). When it comes to gender issues, female parliament members from diverse parties join forces to attain feminist goals.[ix] They work in concert to pass laws such as equal pay for work of equal value, affirmative action in the public sector and in selection of directors for government-owned companies. Also, much pressure was placed on Israel's supreme court to implement laws against the violation of women (in rape or incest cases), and increase the punishment of the oppressors. In addition, women's fights for higher occupational status—especially in female-typed occupations—are increasing. In part, the justification for these fights derives from liberal quest for lessening social inequality; but it also reflects post-industrial (or post-structural) feminism and emphasizes the unique merit of women's contributions.[x]

During this period (1992-1996), the optimistic feelings accompanying the peace process in which Israel and its neighbors were involved reflected the belief that the state of war that had existed between them for almost 50 years was ending. This may have—directly or indirectly—contributed to the acceleration of the process of change in women's status by creating a sociocultural legitimacy for women's rights movements: No longer in existential danger, Israelis were able to address matters of social inequality (see also Moore 1996).

Although slowly, the legitimacy accorded by ideological pluralism to feminist ideas, has begun to filter to grassroots levels, and women's awareness of them has increased. This process provides a wider basis of support for feminist action groups. An attitude survey, performed by The Strategy Institute for Haaretz's Newspaper (Special Supplement, March 4 1994) shows that 34 percent of the women in Israel define themselves as feminists when everyday practices (rather than ideologies) were examined. (The definition of feminism was deliberately left open to individual interpretations to maximize responses.).

The recent elections (June, 1996) decreased the number of women at the Kennesset to only 8 (out of 120) elected members and brought the right-wing coalition back to power. With its "natural allies" (a term used by prime minister Nethanyahu in reference to the orthodox parties who were first to join the coalition). The peace process has ground to a halt in the few months since this coalition gained power because of its different political orientation, and feelings of insecurity, uncertainty, and fear have strengthened (recent "national mood" surveys indicate that people are less optimistic today than they were before the elections). Although it is too early to evaluate the impact of these trends on women's

ability to fight for equality, women's issues and women's movements have already become less visible in the mass media.

In conclusion, ideological pluralism allows diverse views to coexist so that socially differentiated categories may espouse different ideologies. It seems logical to expect the dominant social group espouses the hegemonic ideology; the oppressed (or subordinate) group espouses a different, seditious ideology. Ideological pluralism also indicates legitimacy of alternative views, and this is a necessary condition for the spreading of alternative ideologies to grassroots level. Only when alternative ideologies are widely supported, they become a motivating force for social action for the groups that espouse them (Tal 1993).

The Role of Religion

Like all traditional, orthodox religions, Judaism is one of the forces hindering the spreading of feminist ideologies because of the codes of behavior it imposes and its conservative value orientations (Wuthrow and Lehrman 1990). Research dealing with the influence of religion on gender and feminism usually focuses on two dimensions: the degree of religiosity in a given society (i.e., the intensity of commitment to a religious belief system), and the strength of its religious institutions (Woodruff 1985). There is, however, a third dimension of influence when dealing with countries like Israel where state and religion are not separated: The political power of religious parties (Kimmerling 1983).

Degree of Religiosity. More than half of the Jewish population in Israel see themselves as observing the major religious decrees, tradition oriented, religious, or orthodox, while the other half, the secular one, still see religious tradition as an important part of its heritage despite noncompliance with its decrees (Levy, Levinson and Katz 1993; Peres 1992).

The ancient codes of law (the bible, Talmud and Halacha) upon which orthodox Judaism is based, define a distinct position for women within their families. Orthodox men and women have different obligations (Webber 1983). Orthodox men are required to preserve and carry on the Jewish tradition through communal worship (there must be at least 10 men for that and even a non-Jewish male is better than a Jewish woman), daily prayers, and religious study. Women are exempt from these religious duties because fulfilling them may interfere with their more important duties: taking care of their men, families and homes (the average number of children in orthodox families is about 6). Women come to pray in the synagogues, but they are segregated, sitting where the men cannot see them, they are not allowed to raise their voices in song or prayer because their voices profane the house of

worship (Kaufman 1991). The religious duties of women are mostly performed at home, and are related to rules of modesty. (For example- a woman must go to the Mikve, the public bathhouse, where she must cleanse herself a week after her period stops. During the two weeks until she washes there she is considered unclean, and she is not allowed to touch her husband or be touched by him). When outside their homes, women must cover their bodies and their hair. A woman dressed otherwise will be treated with contempt (El-Or 1995; Hyman 1979). Thus, orthodoxy provides a well defined, day to day, and season to season set of rules, regulating all aspects of women's behaviors (Kaufman 1994).

Moreover, unlike in the Diaspora, in which Reform and Conservative Judaism are acceptable, Orthodox Judaism is the only legitimate and prevalent form of worship in Israel. Both the reform and the conservative Judaism are strongly influenced by liberal, humanitarian and feminist movements around them. Reform and Conservative Judaism are more liberal and egalitarian. Men and women pray together, women can be ordained and pray in public, and it emphasizes equal and integrated roles for both genders.

The influence of Religious Institutions. The orthodox religious establishment and its all-male office holders hinder the spreading of liberal and feminist ideas by diverse means, but mainly by its hierarchical structure from which all women are barred. Thus, women are barred from the power structure within religious institutions, they cannot set an example to others, they are not allowed to address the congregation in any formal capacity related to religious services, and they cannot induce any adjustments that will contemporize religion (Snyder 1986).

Formal gender discrimination is legitimized and justified by orthodox Judaism (as it is by the more conservative Catholic and Islamic denominations who steadfastly resist change (Rhodes 1983; Williams 1987). Women still cannot become rabbis although they can sometimes fill the roles of informal heads of congregations (Lehman 1982). Thus, women do much of the informal work, but always in a gender-typical context (like visiting the sick, preparing food for the poor and so forth) so that religious institutions reflect and reproduce the gender division of labor (McGuire 1981). In contrast, changes are occurring today within Reform Judaism in the United States, with a growing degree of openness and willingness to reevaluate sexuality (Nason-Clark 1987; Snyder 1986).

The unseparated State and religion. Judaic principles are an integral aspect of the ideological justification for the existence of Israel. However, Israel is constantly torn between two inherently contradictory ideological value systems: the universalistic, democratic and

secular values on the one hand, and the particularistic, elitist and religious values on the other hand. One of the consequences of this duality is that two separate and completely independent judicial systems were created in Israel. The secular, democratic system deals with all but the family-laws which are the domain of the Rabbinical, religious courts of law (Eisenstadt 1985).

The premises upon which the two judicial systems are based are contradictory. According to the secular law all persons are equal; according to the religious law - inequality is a basic concept. The most frequently encountered inequality is the basic inferiority of women according to religious laws and in religious courts of law: men divorce women, but not vice versa; a man can marry another woman if his wife refuses a divorce, but a woman cannot marry another man if her husband refuses to divorce her, and there is no legal way to force a husband to divorce his wife (Hyman 1979; Neuberger 1983; Webber 1983).

There are also different laws regarding the extramarital relations for the two genders: A woman who has a sexual relationship with another man while still married is labeled a whore, she may be divorced by her husband without her consent, without alimony or part of the mutual property, and loose custody over her children. Moreover, she is then forbidden to marry the other man with whom she had a relationship. No such laws apply to men who have extramarital affairs (Kaufman 1991; Neuberger 1983).

Through tacit agreement, religious law was accorded supremacy until the 1990s, so that whenever a clash between secular and religious laws exist- religious law was upheld. This is in total contradiction with Israel's aspiration to secular and universalism according to which all are equal regardless of gender, race and religion (in 1994 the secular Supreme Court forced a rabbinical court of law to accept the ruling of a secular court of law for the first time). Feminist and other interest groups and political parties fighting for separation of state and religion failed to elicit massive support. Separation between state and religion in Israel was never attained nor seriously attempted because most of the Jewish population accepts, at least to some degree, the supremacy of religious institutions in molding the Jewish character of the Israeli state (Kimmerling 1983; Peres 1992).

The political power of religious parties may be traced to the multi-party political structure of Israel. Ever since it became an independent state, governments in Israel were based on coalitions that included several political parties. As often happens, the only way to gain majority (i.e., more than 60 representatives out of the 120) in the Israeli parliament, (the Kenesset) is by assuring the cooperation of some strange bedfellows and a religious party

with 2-3 elected members may often demand - and get - power far beyond their elective power. Thus, religious parties were the cornerstones in many of those coalitions.[xi]

The influence of the religious parties and values has tremendously increased in the first period of the right-wing Likud rule (1977-1992), and it has strengthened even more in the recent (1996) elections where they have almost tripled their power. As a result, the status quo has also shifted. Religious laws and decrees are more strictly implemented than under left-wing coalitions (For example: stricter control over abortions was implemented disallowing abortions in any case except where an imminent hazard to the mother's health can be proven; no advertisement posters depicting women are to be displayed in the streets of cities were orthodox Jews are the majority) (Lotan 1993; Tal 1987). Thus, the democratic principle is twisted and subverted, and a minority of the orthodox of a certain religious stream determines the way of life in the country for other religious streams, for the secular, and for other religions.

The permeation of religious and traditional values and beliefs into everyday life hinders the spreading of feminist ideas both at the structural-institutional level and at the individual one. At the structural level, religious parties fight to maintain the status quo or change it into greater orthodoxy which means greater conservatism; at the individual level, the wide support for traditionally Jewish values —even among the non-religious— limits the acceptance of feminist ideas.

The Impact of National Totalitarian Masculine institutions: The Israeli Army.

The Israeli army is a national institution that recruits almost all men and women aged 18 for 3 years (for men) or 2 years (for women), and calls them back (mostly men) for reserve service for as much as 60 days each year until they are 50 years old (Married women are usually not called for reserve military service). Several groups are exempt from military service. The main groups are Arabs, handicapped, the ultra-orthodox, and any woman who declares that she is ‘religious’. Thus, service in the army is almost a universal experience of Israeli youth (Schild 1980). Moreover, Israel is the first state in which women are recruited to serve in the army on the basis of a national recruitment law. This is not only in times of national emergency or war, but as a permanent feature of army recruitment policy since the establishment of the state in 1948 (Yuval-Davis 1981). The illusion of equality in the Israeli army derives from the pre-state period and even then it was a myth. However, the sexual division of labor was less crystallized then because (1) there were no separate female units at

that time, and (2) women were not restricted to the 'rear' while most men were at the 'front' because the war was not restricted to the 'front' only. Once the differentiation occurred, women's roles were clearly defined as 'rear' only, legally banned from the 'front' war zones (Yuval-Davis 1981). Today, women are allowed 'front' activities, but not in combat roles (e.g., they may train soldiers as tank instructors, but are not allowed to drive the tanks themselves during combat or training activity).

The army is a total institution because there are rigid barriers between the army and the outside world and it controls the people who enter it by ruling all aspects of life of its recruits: it determines what a person is capable of doing and uses this knowledge to allocate people to different jobs, it decides where a person will be stationed and for how long, it defines what a person will eat and when, where he/she will sleep and when, etc. (see Goffman 1968). Although some ability to contend these decisions exist, most recruits serve their time when and where told. In sum, the military experience is intended to break the civilian in order to make the soldier (Schild 1980, p.430).

The masculinity of any organization is determined by three factors: the proportion of men employed in it; the type of tasks required in the majority of its jobs; and the characteristics required to perform the work. The army is a masculine organization according to all three criteria: men constitute most of all its workers (though army authorities never release data regarding sizes of cohorts or their specific proportions); the tasks defined by its charter include high risk, high responsibility, protection of civilians, and field (combat) work. The characteristics necessary to perform this work are also considered masculine (e.g., authority, use of physical force, taking initiative in stressful situations, dominance).

As officially defined, the aim of the female soldiers' service in the Israeli army is strengthening the fighting force by fulfilling administrative, professional and auxiliary roles in order to release male soldiers for combat roles. The female soldiers also help in the educational activity of the army.... in the areas of crystallizing the morale of the units and taking care of the soldiers of the units (Office of the Prime Minister 1977, p. 120).

All the women in the army belong to the women's corps which gives them separate basic training. However, most women soldiers work under the authority of male commanders in the various corps. '<u>Man</u>power' considerations relating to women are dealt with by the General Headquarters and the heads of various command units who are all men. Senior female officers are given only consultant powers, and the head of the women's corps is one rank lower than that of other heads of command units (Yuval-Davis 1997).

The Israeli army strengthens the existing gendered stereotypes and the gendered division of labor in several ways because of its practices and values. First, because women are exempt from service more often than men the message is that they are not as necessary as men in the overall scheme of military roles. Second, because women serve less time than men, the army considers investment in them less productive. As a result, women are sent to lengthy courses that provide high ranks and technical/instrumental knowledge less often than men.

Moreover, female recruits serve mostly in traditionally 'female jobs' (like secretaries, clerks, instructors or teachers) from which their advancement is limited (Chapkis and Wings 1981; Megens and Wings 1981; Yuval-Davis 1981). Only in recent years were female recruits allowed into the more lucrative courses (like fighter pilots), and have a chance to improve their options because of skilled manpower shortage and the rise of the women's movement which empowered women to encourage their fight for equality (Enloe 1988 1993). Even to female jobs, the selection criteria include sexist criteria: women are placed not only according to skills and abilities, but also by their looks so that the most beautiful among them are placed at the best units (like the air force (Weiler 1991).

According to Weiler (1991), at the cultural level, messages are also implicitly and explicitly sexist. Examining texts of songs created by or for the military entertainment groups, he shows that while some of the texts depict the naive, pure, passive asexual woman-child, other texts measure women by their beauty, and present them as sex objects.

The immense impact of this institution is thus threefold. It supplies men with better qualifications then women, it blocks women's access to positions of authority and powerful social networks that enhance men's competitive ability once they leave the army, and it strengthens women's lower image of themselves (see also Marsden 1986; Ojile 1986).

CONCLUSIONS

The structuration processes in Israel seem to have changed in recent years. No longer complacent and satisfied with their allotted roles and place in the social order, Israeli women engage today in social actions to increase social equality and are more willing to fight the social system and its institutions. Thus, the dissatisfaction with social systems directs the structuration processes away from reproducing the existing sociocultural systems and toward social change.The basic assumption in this study is that collective social action on gender issues to increase gender equality appears when defined gender identities are prevalent in a specific society, legitimized and directed by relevant—mostly feminist— ideologies.

Three factors are proposed as hindering the social processes that crystallize gender identities and the spreading of feminist ideologies: the lack of ideological pluralism, the prevalence of religious value systems, and the dominance of national and totalitarian masculine institutions. Ideological pluralism is essential for two reasons: to define the controversial ideological issues and to justify the social conflict that the cleavage creates. By definition, ideological pluralism implies that the opposing sides espouse diverse ideologies. The ideologies thus contribute to the definition of "us" and "them", and provide the framework for the social conflict that women's activism may create. Although the diversity can take the form of either competing or derivative ideologies, radical (i.e., competitive) feminist ideologies are, even today, less prevalent in Israel than liberal (i.e., derivative) feminist ideologies. This may have a significant impact on the gender identities of Israeli women, but these issues are beyond the scope of this paper.

Even when the socialist ideological hegemony was broken in Israel, the spreading of feminism was slow, as it had to overcome traditional and unequal value systems that both the Jewish religion and the Israeli total and masculine institutions (like the army) sanctioned and reproduced.

Analysis of this specific political context shows that gender issues are often not related to other political issues and are not part of the political-ideological discourse. Defined by Israeli politicians—most of whom are men—the discourse focused on building a state, surviving wars, and economic growth, issues that were always presented as having higher priority than gender equality. Thus, feminist organizations and interest groups failed to elicit the support of other political parties and groups, and female agents actions were bound and limited by the sociopolitical context which was not of their choosing.

It seems that between 1992-1996, when the peace process, pushed forward by the left-wing coalition, was well on its way (i.e., signing of the peace treaty with Jordan, the Oslo agreements in which Israel and the Palestinians negotiated Palestinian independent State, and the peace talks between Israel and Syria), Israelis felt more secure and able to address gender issues. The discourse shifted to include human rights and equality for Palestinians, Arab citizens of Israel, and women.

However, the shift of power in the 1996 elections to a right-wing coalition slowed to a halt the peace process, violence escalated and the threat of iminent war was reintroduced, lessening Israelis' interest in equal rights and feminist issues. Moreover, this coalition in which about 50 percent of the members are tradition-oriented or religious or ultra-orthodox

wants to set back these egalitarian trends. Representatives of some of the ultra-orthodox parties in the coalition have already declared that they will attempt to restore the status quo to its pre-1992 level, eradicating women's recent gains by legislative actions to change some of the supreme courts latest rulings in favor of women (and against the Rabbinical courts of law) and to curtail the power of the supreme court so that no new rulings of this sort will be possible.

The shift in power also indicates that materialistic values like physical and economic security (Inglehart, 1987) are still highly salient in Israeli society. As the analysis shows, feminism is unable to flourish in an otherwise materialistic and traditional society in which national security, economic growth, and conservative values are perceived by most social agents to be of highest importance.

Research has shown that in contrast to the highly advanced Western world, postmaterialist values like egalitarianism, environmentalism, and freedom of speech were not common in Israel until the 1990s (Moore 1996). Instead, Israelis tended to emphasize materialist values like national and physical security, economic stability and growth. Only in the early 1990s (and only among younger generations) were more liberal ideas detected in Israel, but this, too, may have changed in the second half of the decade: "Return to traditional values" was one of the more noticeable slogans used by the parties who won the 1996 elections and its effectiveness seems undeniable: the majority of the Jewish Israeli voters preferred them to liberal and egalitarian values represented by left-wing parties. Moreover, the religious parties declared a war on Meretz who epitomizes for them the forces that draw Jews away from traditional Judaic values and lead to the espousing of universalistic, secular and democratic values.

As ideological pluralism exists in Israel today, and the army has begun to include women in hitherto exclusively male jobs (like fighter pilots), the major hindrance for feminist ideas today is the hold of religion. It seems that the intense nationalism depicted by religious Jews in the past decade has increased the distance between secular and religious Jews, forcing a reevaluation of the relationships between them. It remains to be seen how they will use their increased power in the coming years. It seems to me that only separation of state and religion will empower women's struggle for social, economic, political and cultural equality.

In summation, the analysis is based on the assumption that women need not accept their inferior social position as an immutable fact and that in all societies, free-thinking, irreligious, liberal women <u>can</u> induce changes in social processes and reproduce social

structures in which their abilities and contributions are more highly valued. These changes are difficult to attain. Women must first become aware that they are discriminated against and deprived of equal status as a group and identify with the group despite the possible differences between them. Second, women must realize that their inferior position in patriarchal societies is the result of a structuration process dominated by men and that the process can be influenced by collective action (i.e., joint women activities for the attainment of common interests, and the establishment of organized women's movements or pressure groups.

Also, analysis of the Israeli socio-historical processes seem to indicate that attempts to advance women's issues through activity in male-dominated social movements is futile (as Chafetz et al., 1990 claimed). Joining such movements in which women are forced to depend on the good will of mostly-male policy- and decision-makers did not increase equality for Israeli women in a significant manner. Although some laws were passed in their favor, the sociocultural changes they brought were minimal.

It may be that women's organizations that espoused derivative ideologies (rather than competing ideologies) like Naamat and Wizo in their earlier days had but limited freedom of action, and provided superficial and marginal changes in women's life conditions. They may have also bound women's actions, and confined them to activities that did not jeopardize the social systems created and maintained by male-dominated ideologies. Only when competing (mostly feminist) ideologies appeared in Israel and were espoused by both existing and new women's organizations were women able to denounce the structuration processes and fight for change in the patriarchal social structure.

The same forces may be maintaining inequality and limiting feminist actions in other patriarchal societies. Their influence will be noticeable even in societies were some of these forces prevail, not all of them. We may assume that wherever hegemony dominates the structuration process, feminist ideologies do not spread to grass roots levels. Even in societies like Argentina, where women *did* get organized against the hegemonic militarist regime, their actions are women's activity more than feminist action for the attainment of women's goals and issues (i.e., they remain a class *in* itself, not a class *for* itself). Moreover, in these societies women are either totally excluded from national masculine institutions that predominate society (like religion and the military), or they play a minor role in them (see also Grossi and Rial, 1997).

The role of religion as a force that limits women's feminist activism can also be seen in other societies. As all traditional religions reproduce conservative value orientations, religion serves as an impeding force in catholic societies (like southern Italy) and Muslim ones (like Syria, Egypt, Iraq), as much as orthodox Judaism hinders women's activism in Israel. In societies in which religion is strengthening and it is politically-oriented (e.g., Iran, Turkey), women seem to be cooperating with the patriarchal regime, and traditional gender identities are reinforced (see also Bader-Aaraf, 1995; El-Hadge, 1988; Geraisi, 1991). Though some individual nontraditional exceptions exist in such societies (like women presidents), and the exceptions may create a myth of equality, this is no indication of egalitarian attitudes: Israel had a female prime minister when its patriarchal sociopolitical system reached its peak; Turkey had a female president prior to the increase in power of the extremist Muslim party.

Although the interaction of the three forces - lack of ideological pluralism, prevalence of religion, and dominance of total and masculine institutions - limits the spreading of feminist ideologies and feminist gender identities more strongly than any single factor, each of these forces may limit women's feminist activity. As one or more of these factors exists in many societies today, this may explain why women's activism is limited in diverse societies.

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[i] Following Eisenstein (1979) and Whittier (1995), I define patriarchy as a hierarchical system of social relations among men and women that creates and maintains the domination of women.

[ii] Women's movement is "a social movement mounted primarily by females, whose members explicitly and consciously focus on actions intended to alleviate strains experienced by women on the basis of sex (regardless of any other social attribute such as religion, class, race, nationality). That is, the first priority of women's movement is to bring about change in some aspect of the status or roles of women in society in order to rectify disadvantages faced by women as women." (Chafetz, et al. 1990, p. 303).

[iii] In contrast, some Christian denominations as well as Reform and Conservative Judaism are more liberal, and more egalitarian. However, these denominations are not common in Israel and only orthodox Judaism is currently formally recognized so that only orthodox rabbies determine who is Jewish, perform marriage ceremonies etc. The more egalitarian

denominations are strongly influenced by liberal, humanitarian and feminist movements around them. Among Muslims, the trend seems to be reversed so that all religious Muslims are devout, but the Fundamentalists see themselves as more devote than others (and, according to Haddad (1985), fundamentalism is the rule rather than the exception in most Islamic countries).

[iv] Israeli society is simultaneously an industrialized, urbanized society and a traditional one (in terms of the structure of family life. See Izraeli, 1993). Although it is considered "developed" by many researchers, it is not as highly developed as the societies in which feminist theories are more wide-spread.

[v] Laws that increase equality and improve women's work conditions were made even before the 1980s (like the cancellation of the law according to which women needed official permission to work at night). They were often initiated by men, not by women. Some of these laws may have hindered women's work opportunities more than enhanced them (like the law according to which a mother of small children is required to work seven hours per-day instead of eight hours for full pay).

[vi] This means that although other ideologies and political parties (like the right-wing Herut) did exist in Israel at the time, they were marginalized and often de-legitimized by the ruling party and ideology.

[vii] The socialist government had pased several laws in order to reduce the growing gender gap (most of them were <u>not</u> initiated by women) but the changes that these laws have brought were minimal and superficial (Commission for the Advancement of Women's Status 1995).

[viii] Therefore, feminism cannot be considered a derivative of this ideology. In this respect, Israel is different than other socialist countries like Scandinavia in which Socialism does not act as a hegemonic ideology.

[ix] For example, the Commision for the Advancement of Women's Status is chaired by Neomi Blumental (from the right-wing Likud), and includes Yael Dayan (Labor) and Neomi Hazan (from the left-wing Meretz). Heading it's subcommittees are: Anat Maor (Meretz), Tamar Gozanski (Hadash, the Jewish-Arab Party) and others.

[x] The more radical approaches seem to have skipped Israel and this may be due to several concurrent social processes. First, compulsory military service may have hindered women's willingness and ability to espouse ideologies that undermine and/or contradict patriarchal ideologies (Izraeli 1993). Second, the earlier disappointment with socialist ideology made radical (especially the Marxist and socialist) feminism less attractive in Israel. Third, some of the radical feminist approaches suggest common interests for gender, class, and ethnicity. However, the lower-income Asian-African Jews have turned away from socialist ideology and are the majority among the right wing supporters. Thus, gender, class and ethnicity-based social categorizations share no ideological concerns.

[xi] There are three religious parties in Israel today, controlled by religious leaders none of which are democratically elected. The cooperation of these parties is granted to the party most willing to pass new religious laws and to enforce the existing ones more forcefully (the reader should remember that Israel has no constitution).