

## **"A place where you cannot walk without a bra" - Women in the kibbutz space**

During the 1980s, a decision was made in most of the kibbutzim in Israel regarding the sleeping arrangements of the children, to move them to sleep at families' homes ("Lina Mishpahtit") instead of the children's home where they slept together ("Lina-Meshutefet"). This process, which was clearly the result of a long struggle of the kibbutz women, changed the social and spatial equilibrium of the kibbutz, shifting the center of gravity from the public to the private sphere, and from the center to the periphery. In the proposed presentation I will focus on the central role that the spatial structure of the kibbutz had in creating gender inequality, which eventually led women to this struggle.

The spatial structure of the kibbutz was designed to match the values of an allegedly gender-equal society. The institutions comprising the traditional family were dismantled and redistributed in the kibbutz space; the "household chores" were carried out collectively in institutions such as the kitchen, the laundry, and the children's homes. Yet, the kibbutz was never actually gender-equal. The traditional division of labor was preserved, creating a hierarchical spatial division. Space organization of the entire kibbutz eventually became similar to the common perception of the private home: The areas defined as 'feminine' were concentrated at the heart of the kibbutz space, supervised, and protected, while the 'masculine' areas spread along the boundaries, enabling contact with the outside world.

This spatial division not only reflected gender inequality, but may have deepened and reproduced it. While the men reported experiences of unrestricted freedom in the entire area of the kibbutz, women experienced space as restrictive and limiting. Their different experience illuminates the women's struggle to have the children sleep in their parents' homes, not as a struggle to return to their 'natural' place, as some scholars have noted, but as an effort to gain control over resources and power by re-appropriating their attachment to the private home and family. Strengthening the family increased the power of women in the kibbutz, but also strengthened the traditional division of labor and the ideologies that supported this division in the first place.

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