

# The Early Settlement to Palestine and the Zionist Women's Labor Movement

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## ABSTRACT

In 1911, the Jewish Feminist Movement began. Following multiple Aliyahs, Jewish female workers discovered that the prevailing social structure did not provide them with equality of opportunity. Women remained "muted" in political activities at the same time. Palestinian female employees were adamant about defending individual rights and insisting on breaking the male-female binary. They remained zealous in agricultural productivity, entered male-dominated fields, and gave historically women-dominated fields a higher social status. In view of this, this research will utilize literature summarization and exemplification to assess the emergence of Jewish feminism, with a special emphasis on Galilee conference and Council of Women Workers. The study will explore Jewish women workers' transitions from silent employees to radical motivators, ending in an investigation into the development of the women workers' movement. To shed light on the historical significance and influence of Israel's first women's labor movement.

**Keywords:** *Jewish immigrant wave, Jewish women, Zionist Labor Movement, Zionist Women's Labor Movement.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, Chinese people know little about Israel and Jewish culture. Many people assume that Israel's and China's development paths are vastly different. Nevertheless, as the two countries' economic, scientific, and technical interactions have deepened, a common ground has progressively formed. Feminism is thriving in today's China, women's voices are rising louder, and their demands are pouring out in a never-ending stream. This is a critical time for us to learn from the experiences of other countries in order to avoid making costly mistakes. The modern feminism movement is currently underrepresented in academic studies on Israeli feminism in China. The majority of research focus on Jewish women as part of a religious notion. This page should hopefully be useful for the following projects.

This paper will examine the pre-state development of feminism, assess the creation of the first female worker movement in Jewish society, summarize experience and lessons learned, and present diverse perspectives on the development of feminism in China.

After a succession of relentless attempts, the first Women's Movement came to an end in 1927. The failure can be attributed to a number of factors, one of which is feminists' blunder to hand over leadership to Histadrut (General Federation of Labors in Hebrew). Another reason is that when internal disputes arose, feminists did not stick to their initial agenda, members fluctuated between violent revolutions and moderate reforms. Furthermore, the Council lacked a coherent philosophy to justify its existence. In the end, their vacillation provided an opportunity for Histadrut to take over the Council. When Ada Maimon resigned in 1927, feminists' efforts fell short. David Remez, Histadrut chairman at the time, appointed Golda Meir and make it a subordinate group under Histadrut.

Along with its "Jewish" characteristics, the study of Jewish feminists in the pre-state era may cause readers to misinterpret it as a religious group study. Furthermore, the discrepancy between "feminist movement" and "female workers' movement" may perplex readers, who may question what the distinction is. Narrations will be necessary for this study and through the process to hidden misunderstandings.

The scope of this paper will be limited to female workers. The Women Workers' Movement (WWM) is unassailable a feminist movement because it was female workers that aggressively pushed for women's rights. While it is sometimes framed in terms of "waves," another theoretical perspective emphasizes the continuity of feminism ideology as a result of a series population influxes. This article will regard it as the Women's Worker Movement (WWM) to differentiate it from the later liberal movement in 1960s, which included more women. Further, due to the exclusivity of the concept of women's labor movement, the essay will focus on women workers rather than women who stay at home. The essay will not go over Jewish housewives' ideological shifts. Furthermore, despite rabbis' strong opposition to women's participation in public affairs, women bound by Judaism were unable to access secular education on an equal basis from the start. As a result, the restriction on working women imposed by the rabbis was not instantly obvious. In sum, this article does not create a clear distinction between Jewish and secular women.

## **2.FEMINIST MOVEMENT: THE EARLY ENLIGHTENMENT (FROM 1882 TO 1918)**

### ***2.1 The first and second Aliyah ;***

Early Jewish immigrants adhered to patriarchal lines and disciplines during the first Aliyah, which followed a patriarchal structure. Women were restricted to the domestic sphere in traditional Jewish society, and education was out of reach for women. When men monopolized power as leaders of local communities or households, women were responsible for domestic chores. Semiliterate Jewish women, mainly those who lived in an isolated Jewish community, were barred from reading and writing, and only a handful were fluent in Yiddish and Hebrew. The Jewish Enlightenment Haskalah emerged around the close of the nineteenth century. Jewish women began to leave their homes and attend secular schools and gymnasiums as more traditional Jewish families assimilated into secular culture. These Jewish people embarked on a modernization journey.

During the same period, the first Aliyah started (1882-1903). Immigrants, mainly from Russia, set up Moshavots, known as private farms. Female immigrants, primarily housewives, participated in labor activities in Moshavots. Women of the first Aliyah who immigrated to Eretz-Israel with their husbands and helped establish the colonies maintained a traditional conception of their role as housewives and rarely became farmers. They contributed to the family construction without commensurate public recognition. Ironically, during the first Aliyah, female immigrants earned social status through their transcendent contribution to education and

the teaching of Hebrew. Though, they failed to obtain the right of representation and vote.

The second wave, from 1904 to 1918, mainly consisted of young and single proletarian immigrants. "Female immigrants accounted for 17-18% of the population" [1]. New immigrants underwent an evident transition, where they went to colleges and actively participated in constructing the "New Yishuv." Their joint effort formed the steady foundation for the first Female Worker's Movement, as well as the new Israeli society.

### ***2.2 The Galilee Conference;***

The inflow of people aided economic development in Palestine, and women immigrants quickly established themselves in fields such as education and childcare. No one questioned women's participation in the Teacher's Association when it was founded in 1903. Their educational superiority, however, did not provide them with any agricultural advantages or a fast track to equity. Women workers were either less competitive than cheaper Arab labor or were excluded owing to discrimination based on their gender.

The basic structure of Jewish civilization was established during the second Aliyah, with the cooperation from both women and men. Women's levels of education and social participation, as well as their desire for self-actualization and economic independence through labor, changed dramatically. Women were actively engaged in various jobs. Women began to appear in professional positions as more women gained higher education. Amidst this, the number of women working in professional positions remained low. Available occupations for women were primarily occupations that women had long-held—namely kindergarten teachers, medical assistants, midwives, masseuses, and cooks. In addition, "it is harder for a woman to get by than for a man. Women receive inferior preparation for life's struggles." [2] Not every woman at the time confessed or recognized the prejudice that women were subjected to, particularly metropolitan Jewish women with the necessary education to work in professional fields or in traditionally female occupations. Despite the fact that they were granted high social standing and public acknowledgment without difficulty, "the majority of them grew concerned for the status of women in society and intuitively knew that women's material independence could increase their status." [3]

Still, women were difficult to find a job on farms, "there is not even one woman employed in agricultural work in Judea. In Samaria, there are two, and there are a few women laborers in the Galilee, whose total number does not exceed eight." [4]

When Hannah Maisel immigrated to Palestine in 1909, she did not find any farms or agriculture programs for women. To resolve this problem, in 1910, Hannah Meisel established a woman training farm in Kineret after she obtained funds from the Women Zionist Group in Germany. After a year, Maisel successfully established her first agricultural training framework, *Havat ha-Alamot* (young women's farm in Hebrew). Nonetheless, discrimination remained a major problem for female professionals. Female immigrants were generally young secularists and socialists who sought to introduce socialism to their new home but were met with fierce opposition from the peasants. Hannah Meisel convened a meeting in Kinneret in 1911 where female workers protested unfair market circumstances and discriminatory legislation. "Even though only 17 women attended, the conference publicly laid the foundation for the emergence of the Women Workers' Movement within the Labor Zionist Camp in Palestine." [5] After the conference, women workers reached a consensus to insist on developing the new agricultural branches. Two main tactics were adopted. First, the exclusive farm at Kineret was to serve as a training center where women could learn technical skills and begin personal transformation within a supportive environment, unhampered by the presence of men. Second, in the future women would join only those *kvutzot* willing to accept at least ten of them, so that rotation between household and agriculture would be feasible. [6]

At the time, women workers did not blame men for their misfortune; instead, they declared their right to transform themselves, thereby reforming society from within. Males were incapable of acknowledging women's efforts and were resistant to change, so women realized they could not rely on men to address injustice.

### ***2.3 Council of Women Workers***

The male-dominated governmental system "muted" Jewish female workers in the early stages of the Zionist movement. Female workers were barred from participating in politics, and their contributions to domestic labor were assumed. "When the Galilee Agricultural Union failed to invite a woman representative to its sixth congress in 1914, female employees stormed the conference and voiced their displeasure." [7] Female employees felt compelled to form their own organization to express their worries about "female" issues. Female farm workers had their own agricultural conference three months after the incident. "209 women workers were represented by 30 delegates." [8] Women's Movement Organizations sprang up.

The movement aimed to change women's participation in society through changing cultural and

social norms. Despite this, the movement was unable to establish itself as a politically powerful force and remained limited to the agricultural sector. In Galilee, women completed agricultural training courses with the goal of equipping female laborers with competitive working abilities. "In 1919 a drop in the price of grain and a drought accelerated the process toward diversification and self-reliance." [9] "Women joined grain-growing collectives and established several independent vegetable-growing collectives which successfully sold their produce in the markets." [10]

### ***2.4 A review of the Early Feminist Enlightenment;***

From the first meeting in Galilee in 1911 through successive gatherings, the condition of women in the workplace became a focal point, and their public image shifted. "In addition to the 17 women present, the conference invited members from many political parties and trade unions to the start of the fifth session in Tel Aviv." [11] Women's determination to continue building the current movement was boosted by these advances.

Despite its importance in improving women's working circumstances, the Women Workers' Movement had no impact on the political and social structures. Women were notably absent from power centers associated to the World Zionist Organization (the Zionist movement's primary source of funding) and other social organizations. In addition, the majority of women chose manual labor to political activism. This philosophy arose largely as a result of the Zionism immigration waves, in which Jewish immigrants took pride in their execution, prompting women workers to believe that they, as well, could achieve their objectives via action.

As previously stated, the pursuit of practical efficiency by women employees was a prominent aspect of the second immigration wave: they preferred to walk rather than talk the talk. Pre-state feminists were only seen at women's labor congresses and women's labor committees from 1914 to 1918. They also raised money to go towards vocational and agricultural training programs. Their hesitant interest in politics and feminism led to their fervent advocacy for the construction of a "New Yishuv." They were insistent that all parts of life and citizens' contributions were vital to the country. As a result, there was no need to deliberately highlight "Masculine" or "Femininity intentionally." Instead, they suggested that people should be aware of the physical distinction, allowing them to participate in social creation more effectively. Furthermore, most women immigrants believed that by working, they would be able to obtain a greater social status.

### **3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE FEMALE WORKERS' MOVEMENT (1918-1927)**

#### ***3.1 The third and fourth immigration waves;***

The third wave of immigration took place between 1919 and 1923, just after World War I ended. During the mandate time, socialism was prevalent amongst Jewish working class and new immigrants, impacting their perceptions of Jewish society. This was especially true for feminists who were passionate about freeing women from oppression.

“Women accounted for 36% of immigrants during this period.” [12] “In the third Aliyah, the proportion of women among immigrants rose to 36.8% in the third immigration wave, and women accounted for 17% of single immigrants in 1920 but 30% in 1922. Amongst socialist activists, women accounted for about 17-18%, compared with about 10% in the second immigration wave.” [13]

Between 1924 and 1931, the fourth immigration wave mostly comprised of petty-bourgeois families from Poland who moved to Palestine with tiny quantities of private cash. With a bigger share of families and “women making up a larger proportion of single, labor-oriented immigrants,” [14] the fourth wave’s gender mix was more balanced than ever before. Employers viewed women from petit bourgeois immigrant households as incapable of doing hard labor at a time when the urban economy needed construction workers the most. As a result, female workers had a tough time finding work. The capital market contracted in 1927 as a result of the decline in Polish immigration and the resulting capital inflows. The Jewish community experienced an economic downturn because of the transition. Many female employees were laid off.

#### ***3.2 Development of women’s movement***

It’s worth emphasizing that these immigrants were deeply influenced by Socialism. Although it is impossible to say whether the feminists who zealously participated in the Feminist Movement were socialist feminists or not, their chants unmistakably demonstrated a great socialist leaning.

Following World War I, In the convention of Histadrut, or the General Organization of Workers, convened in Palestine in 1920, women accounted for only four seats out of 87 delegates sent by Ahdut Ha'avoda, an extension of the Zion Workers' Party. Thirty women were invited to the meeting as guests, including feminists Ada Fishman and Yael Gordon (head of the Young Workers' Party). None of the 30 women who spoke, and the four women delegates were elected to represent the women workers by their peers. During the meeting, Women were vociferous in their

opposition to uneven representation for men and women. Ada Maimon, leader of the movement, proposed the formation of an autonomous women's section within the union in the closing hours of the conference. The majority of party leaders backed Maimon’s plan. Her petition was later accepted by the convention. They eventually resolved to set aside two seats for women workers to be elected directly.

“In 1921, Convention of Working Women meets to elect the Executive Committee of the Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot. Lays the foundation for the Working Woman’s Movement. Conference had 43 delegates representing 485 workers. Committed to providing work for women and tries to broaden the range of occupations available to women and to provide training.” [15]

The successful attempt of the Feminist Movement in joining Histadrut triggered a Feminism Wave.

The General Council of Women Workers was founded in 1922, and by 1930, they had constructed six training farms. A second conference was conducted, with 37 delegates representing 600 female members in attendance. The Women's International Zionist Organization founded the Women's Training Farm in Nahalal in 1926, four years after Hannah Meisel created the first farm in Kineret.

#### ***3.3 The Adjustment of the Feminist Movement (1921-1927)***

Female delegates were split into two groups. Radical feminists argued that “male-led worker’s organizations failed to provide meaningful safety for women.” [16] The moderates claimed that men and women should not be divided and that a single workers' party can effectively represent all workers. Furthermore, moderates argued that Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot should focus on education and encourage more women to work in the social sector. In terms of trade unions, Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot should limit itself to providing advice and not be accountable for resource distribution. Additionally, they were strongly opposed to the separation of men and women. “The kind of feminism that gives rise to bra burning, hatred of males, or a crusade against motherhood,” stated Golda Meir, one of many female demonstrators who were vehemently opposed to Feminism. [17]

In truth, the argument amongst female employees was not just confined to the organization. The final reactions of male leaders to Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot mirrored their broader policy stance toward distinct interest groups. The demand for political independence by women workers ran against to Histadrut's interests, with the latter believing that the emergence of specific interest groups would waste social resources and weaken Histadrut's activities. At the same time, the leadership was not sympathetic to the women

organizations' specific concerns and aspirations. The decision to admit Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot to the union was a sort of co-opting, which Selznick first described as "the process of incorporating new elements into the decision-making structure's leadership. Organization as a means of avoiding threats to its stability or existence". [18] As previously stated, Histadrut's influence over the working class was under jeopardy in 1920. Histadrut leaders were concerned that as additional immigrants arrived, they might form a party that would dilute Histadrut. Not to mention the fact that women workers made only a minor part of the workforce. Accepting Maimon's demands was a temporary solution for the Histadrut leaders at the 1920 convention.

In the current situation, a separate feminist group might have further weakened Histadrut. The lack of women's suffrage in the newly created National Assembly (the Yishuv's Jewish Parliament) reintroduced feminism as a hot topic. For feminists, the right to vote became a factual basis for advocating for self-government. From Histadrut's standpoint, the Feminist Movement and its demands may have jeopardized Histadrut's "protection of all workers" stability, because the Women Workers' Movement questioned the Histadrut's claim to represent all workers. Women's committee should form a subbranch of Histadrut to cover the probable cost of such allegations. The committee should be open to wives of Histadrut members as well as women workers. This opinion first appeared in the Ahdut Ha 'avoda leader Ben Gurion's report to the second congress of the Histadrut in 1923, in which he explained that " Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot 's efforts to protect the interests of women workers are a denial of our achievements". [19] Ben-Gurion's explanation of the role of women workers' councils understated the significance of Feminist Movement in country's nascent ideology. Instead of being portrayed as the creator of a new cultural image for women, Feminist Movement received an infamy for protecting the interests of "minorities". Public's misunderstanding "stigmatized" Feminist Movement and deprived its supporters of deserved pride and a sense of accomplishment. According to Ben-Gurion, the implementation of the goals of the Feminist Movement, such as job hunting, should come under the obligations of Histadrut.

Later on, Union leadership purposefully pushed certain female leaders to higher positions while weakening the status of others by appointing key decision-makers. Despite the fact that the official Executive Committee Women's Council had the authority to recommend representatives, it was subject to the approval of the Central Committee, which used its powers to appoint and remove committee members for political reasons. In 1925, for example, Ada Maimon, was expelled from the Immigration Committee because she insisted on "50% representation

ratio for women immigrants. Furthermore, male leaders felt irritated by her demands for female independence." [20]

The issue resulted in a disagreement over the women's Commission's electoral procedure. Radical feminists in Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot, led by Ada Maimon, and other members advocated for direct elections by women's unions at the local level, free of political intervention and without regard for the women's party allegiance. Other moderates who supported the appointment of female representatives by party officials and unions on local Labor boards argued that such low trust in local labor parties would escalate direct gender conflict and that women committee members would lose their original function. In the end, Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot made recommendations to ensure that "the appointment of these members by local officials was in the interests of women and that these members were more accountable to women by way of Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot 's intervention." [21] These two ideas came to be known as the "elected committee" and the "appointed committee".

The issue was sharply debated at the June 1926 Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot meeting, where Histadrut argued that a separate women's election branch "would set a dangerous precedent for other groups, for the Orthodox and Yemeni communities, thus weakening central control on the periphery". [22] Despite pressure from Histadrut, "the Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot 's executive committee received 8 votes out of 12 that was in favor of the elected committee at its meeting in November 1926". [23] Since then, the spilt within the Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot became increasingly apparent. As the struggle for control among political factions within the party intensified, intra-party competition gradually infiltrated into the Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot circle. By the end of the 1920s, moderates were gaining the upper hand in the battle. While extending their control over the Feminist Movement by sponsoring selective leaders, Histadrut made concessions to Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot. Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot obtained additional funding from Histadrut. Before 1926, "Histadrut did not allocate a budget to the WWC or offer wages to its main Histadrut representatives." [24] Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot developed six agricultural training farms and vocational training courses for women; Initially, Zionist women's organizations abroad upheld these activities.

1927 marked the eclipse of radical feminism in the Feminist Movement. Two incidents reflected the shift that took place, which also implied a change of Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot's purpose. The organization initially was funded in 1920 as a non-partisan body against the backdrop of a schism-afflicted Zionist movement. This will circumvent women members from falling into the political conflict amongst parties. More notably, in contrast to Histadrut, Mo'ezet Ha-Po'a frequently

prioritizes women. Feminists were unable to prioritize concerns related to women's liberation as a result of the transition. The male-dominated committee would always have "more pressing" topics to deal on from that day forward, and "pressing issues" were usually unsolvable difficulties, especially, and as a result, many activists remained mute. The second event was Golda Meir's appointment as the new Secretary General of Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot, replacing Ada Maimon. Given their extremely divergent views of Mo'ezet Ha-duty, Po'alot's the move constituted the culmination of a power struggle between the old and the new. Despite Maimon's return to the Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot committee 27 years later, the committee had lost its popular base and control had passed to moderates.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The Zionist Feminist Movement avoided labeling itself as an organizer or participant in the struggle against gender discrimination and patriarchy. Nonetheless, the Feminist Movement's methods of self-transformation and equal involvement in the development of a new society unified its warring members from 1911 to 1927. The movement requested more equality in the sharing of social resources such as job chances as a cohesive organization for female employees.

The Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot was a distinct branch of Histadrut that was never autonomous. Since the late 1920s, the women's movement had shifted its focus away from the battle for gender equality. Several factors contributed to the detour: First, Histadrut political parties, particularly Ahdut Ha'avoda, urged that women speak for the collective good. Second, during the Aliyah, WWC failed to fully commit to the emancipation of female workers through the creation of new economic, political, and social institutions. The Women's Worker's Movement became the greatest voluntary social service agency and later expanded into settlement and welfare groups in response to female workers' demand for equality in new fields of employment and nation-building. Furthermore, the movement institutionalized and thereby entrenched gender discrimination; the Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot became a springboard for women's political careers. Women in other parties "anticipated" to climb first in the Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot, and that the Mo'ezet Ha- leadership Po'alot's became the gatekeeper between the female-dominated and male-dominated institutions, with only a few women picked for seats in the Knesset and other major bodies. The illusion of gender equality was created by the Mo'ezet Ha-Po'alot. From then on, Mo'ezet Ha-Po'a shifted from being a movement for working women and women's labors to one in which housewives played a central role; from a suffrage and independence movement to an institutional collaboration arm with a

sphere of operation rooted in the heritage of women's volunteer work.

Due to space constraints, this story will come to a close with the WWM. The revolution lasted more than ten years, and the agitation of thought and the speed with which it was carried out are difficult to describe. So far in Israel, there have been two feminist movements. Women workers were at the forefront of the first feminist movement. The mobilization of the movement was limited to female workers and politicians. As the second feminist movement gained steam, women began to seek equal participation in the military, judicial, and legislative sectors. In the second wave of liberal feminism, the appointment of a consultant on women's issues was a watershed moment. In retrospect, current research on Israeli feminism in China is still mostly focused on Judaism, with little concern for secular culture, and the utilization of Hebrew texts is insufficient. To plan for the development of Chinese feminism, we must confront the above issues, actively learn from Israel's important experience in the feminist movement, observe Israel's control of the "binary opposition," and other challenging issues.

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