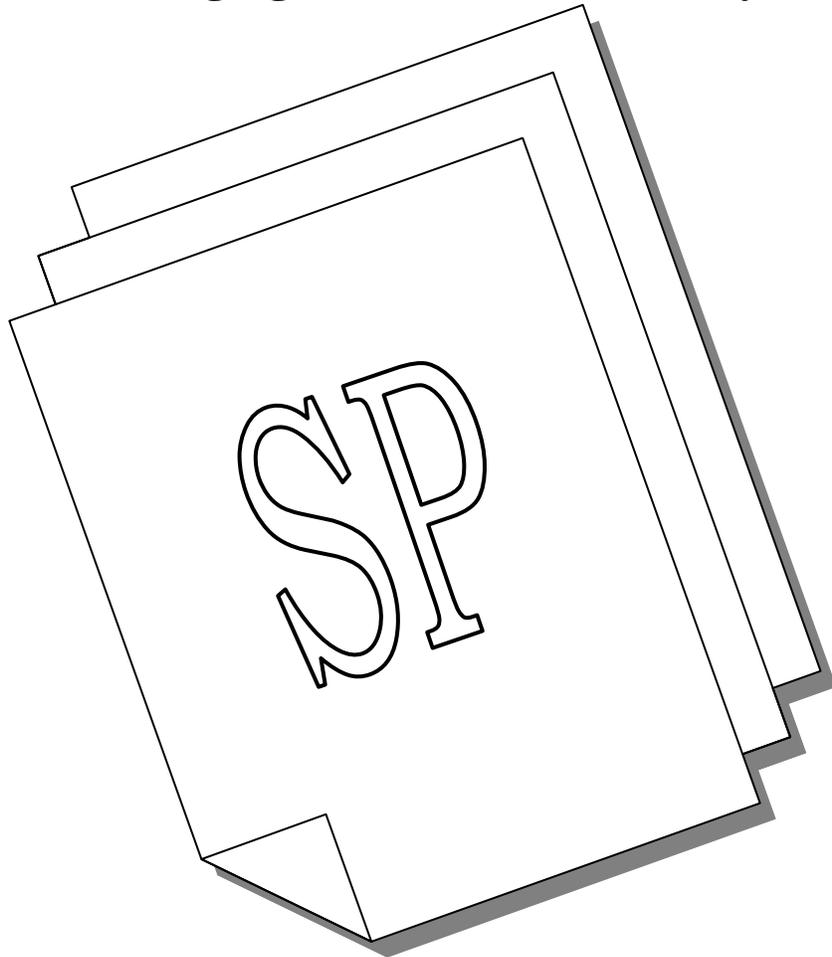


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Women as Leaders of Religious Change in a Karaite Community¹

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Abstract

Taking the example of Karaite Jews in Israel, this paper looks at the ways in which women alter religious practices to aid their social adjustment as immigrants. Current literature deals with two alternative practices by immigrant women: magnifying their role in institutionalized religion or secularization that facilitates their social inclusion in the mainstream. The first practice aims to offset social isolation by in-group support while striving to maintain the group's unity by emphasizing its uniqueness. Enhancing women's religious roles seemed appropriate for the Karaite women; yet, their marginality in the Israeli society led them to prefer religious change, or secularization. Had they done so publicly, they might have achieved a greater social impact, but would have encountered men's resistance. Instead, the immigrant women chose to pursue change through private domestic acts, justifying them to the men on the grounds of convenience. Thus they managed an adaptive religious change without facing internal objection within their community.

Women, immigration, and religion

Social science literature discusses possibilities for change or re-shaping family gender roles following immigration (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Khazzoom, 2006). Exposure to new social situations puts resources for redefining gender roles at the immigrants' disposal (Kibria, 1999). The academic discussion on the aftermath of immigration indicates it may allow changes in gender roles and statuses. One such change is the mitigation of community domination over women (Hirsch, 1999). In parallel, immigration weakens endocentric religious establishments, though not necessarily religious beliefs (Foner, 1997).

Immigrant women have been reported to take advantage of changes in religion, to bolster their social status. Scholars point to two opposite feminine uses of religion: one is turning to it and enhancing their place within it, while the other is reshaping religion to match their new lives in the new country, a process that is sometimes referred to as secularization. Immigration from a culture where religion is part of the social surroundings, into a secular one, or into the culture of another religion, was presented as enhancing religious belief and practices (Ebaugh and Chafetz, 2000). This is partly because new immigrants feel marginalized in the new society, which leads many to assert

¹ I would like to thank Moshe Schwartz for his valuable comments.

a unique communal identity, through religion (Chambers, 2006). This is especially true for women who tend to lean towards religion to begin with.

The religious establishment, weakened in the immigrant setting, contributes to this trend since it has a need for worshipers and thus accepts the women. The women, in turn especially those from patriarchal religions, who traditionally practiced at home, either alone or with other women, find themselves isolated in the new country, with small homes, nuclear families and few acquaintances (Aune, 2008). They exhibit a tendency to turn to houses of worship for faith, support and company (Wang, 2006; Chong, 2006; Ramji, 2007; Nyhagen, 2008). The social weakness of the women's community, and the need of the religious establishment for worshipers, leads to an enhancement of the women's communal and spiritual, status, resulting in a new, more egalitarian civil identity (Wang, 2006; Nyhagen, 2008).

Another way for immigrant women to enhance their social status via religion was to reshape their community's religion, a process that has been presented as secularization. Weber (1930) was the first to coin the term, as part of his discussion of religion and religious change. In the 1970's researchers used the term mostly in reference to the changes made in immigrant's lives (Swatos and Christiano, 1999). Later writers modified and added to this concept, making it fit to describe a variety of changes in religious life. Asad (2003) disused the ambiguity in the term secularization, Chaves (1994) defined secularization not as deterioration in religious belief but as a decline in deference to religious authorities.

Martin (2005) noted the diverse approaches and patterns of secularization in different cultural and historical settings. Thus, secularization is not a fixed concept, but rather an idea that changes according to the circumstances. This idea stems from literatures discussion on the decline of secularization theory. Secularization theory is not a unified theory of religious decline. It is a family of theories of religious change, some of which posit religious decline, while others do not. Only few of them actually posit the disappearance of religion (Gorski, 2000). Most of these theories claim that there is no dichotomy between religion (that is considered communal and traditional) and secularization (associated with modernity and enlightenment), but rather these two ideas are based on a continuum upon which different people can be placed (Stark, 1999).

In accordance with this view, the Israeli anthropology objected the idea of secularization since the 60's (Goodman and Fisher, 2004). An alternative to the secularization model was offered by Israeli anthropologists (for example: Shokeid and Deshen, 1999) who claimed that immigrants make adjustments to their religion to make it more suitable to the Israeli reality.

One major aspect of religious change is its usage by women. Although the gendered aspects of religion have been ignored by most, some writers in the last decade dedicated their work to exploring them (Aune, 2008; Marler, 2008; Woodhead, 2008). Those theories claim that one of the explanations for women's higher religiousness than that of men (Brown, 2001) is the fact that man turned to secularization earlier. This male secularization is portrayed as a reaction to various social factors, some of which were related to the industrial revolution. During this era, ideologies changed from religious ideas of giving to capitalist ideas of taking, and the state took upon itself many former functions of religion (Marler, 2008). These new beliefs led men to forsake religion.

While men moved into the public sphere and embraced the new ideology, women, still connected with domesticity and with ideologies of giving, stayed religious (Brown, 2001; Aune, 2008; Marler, 2008). The gender revolution of the 1960's helped change women's relation to religion, and ushered in secularization (Brown, 2001; Woodhead, 2008). Marler (2008) claimed that the latter is partly due to the expectation that women do double shift, entering the capitalist world, while giving freely and lovingly in the domestic sphere (see also Aune, 2008). She concluded that since religious thought is not compatible with this confusing situation, women may turn to other forms of spirituality (see also Aune, Sharma et al., 2008). Thus, while male secularization is based on abandoning religion, feminine forms of secularization are more subtle and include forsaking, or changing some religious traditions, usually those that affect women's need for being both homely and giving, and a part of the capitalist workforce.

Woodhead (2008:147) states that *"we cannot simply assume that male experience is the "leading edge" of the secularization process, with women falling into line once they come under the sway of the same process ..."* She describes the need for other explanations of feminine secularization. She suggests looking into the effect of integration into the workforce on women's religiosity (Chong, 2006).

In this paper I examine another factor that may affect gendered change of religion and its enhancement among immigrant women: the utilisation of their place in a community. Sered (1997) compared feminine religious acts to conclude that communal ones generate a louder echo in society than individualistic ones. She made her case by showing how Jewish men accepted women's personal rebellions, while resisting communal ones. Feminine oriented religious changes defer from masculine ones not only in its causes but also in its expressions. They are more subtle than those among men, tend to stem from a personal decision, and are based on small changes in its practice rather than totally forsaking religion.

The above-said authors discuss women's need for communal support as one of the main reasons for their turning to religion. Women who feel secluded in the new country turn to the culturally and socially legitimate house of worship as a source of social support (Wang, 2006; Nyhagen, 2008). Established religions, in turn, having been neglected by the immigrant man, make changes in its norms in order to accept the female worshippers. According to the same logic, those religions may accept more easily feminine alterations of religious practices that may stop them from leaving it altogether. These changes can be referred to as secularization; they stem from personal choice and are more likely to be accepted by religious hegemony, receiving a weaker social resonance than communal ones.

This paper looks into the strategies employed by the immigrant religious women who collectively, or as individuals working in concert, created religious change. It will focus on a Moshav (smallholders village) in the Israeli hinterland, populated by Karaites – a small and marginalized Jewish group (Cicurel, 2005).

The Karaites

The general belief is that the Karaites take root in Babylon between the 7th and the 10th centuries (Newman, 1996; Astren, 2004). Besides this general agreement, most writings on and by Karaites are polemic (Astren, 2004; Tsoffar, 2006) expressing tendentious, unclear, or contradictory information. Karaism itself contributed to this confusion by

failing to establish a body of oral or written tradition, relying instead solely on the ancient biblical texts (Astren, 2004).

In practice, the Karaite and Rabbanite (or *Rabbaniim*, the Hebrew- Karaite name for non-Karaite Jews) differ in their interpretation of dietary laws (Kashrut), modes of prayer and calendar use (Colligan, 2003). For centuries, the two communities lived side by side, their relationships moving back and forth between cooperation and verbal or even physical conflict (Beinin, 2003). The Rabbanites, usually being the bigger and stronger community, were often antagonistic to the Karaites, refraining from marrying, celebrating holidays, or even sharing meals with them.

Over the 13 centuries since Karaism was established, the group was scattered over the globe, with many Karaites eventually settling in the Middle East, mainly in Babylon and Egypt. In the 1950's and 60's all but a few Egyptian Jews, Karaites as well as Rabbanites, left the country. Some were expelled; others felt compelled to leave (Beinin, 2003). The Karaites who settled in Israel encountered a new situation, where the Rabbanites were significantly stronger numerically and socially, and where the Karaites were perceived as having a closer resemblance to Muslims. This resemblance was seen in the Karaite prayer customs, where rather than being seated, people instead stand, kneel, and bow to the Tora, and in the Karaite calendar that follows the Lunar cycle. The Karaites claim that it was they who had preserved the ancient Jewish customs, later copied by the Muslims, while the Rabbanites, being influenced by Christianity, have changed it.

With Israel being at war with Muslim countries for much of its existence, this religious resemblance with some Muslim customs, led the Rabbanites to treat the Karaite identity as problematic. Moreover, being defined as a Jewish state, national identity in Israel is shared by all Jews. The state of Israel accepts the Karaites as Jews, and thus the formal Rabbanite institute, the "Rabbanut" entrusted with a legal monopoly over the provision of some religious Jewish services in Israel, must do the same. However, the Rabbanite neighbors of the Israeli Karaites challenge their Judaism and thus their belonging to the Israeli nation.

The Karaites in Israel were scattered in cities and few villages. The Moshav on which this paper focuses is unique, as it almost wholly Karaite, and thus able to maintain a Karaite culture. The drawback of belonging to this Moshav is that due to its definition as Karaite, spiteful "Rabbanite" neighbors can challenge the Jewishness of its residents and keep them at a distance, leading Rabbanite children to mock Karaite children on a religious basis. In reaction to the imposed negative image, the Karaites tried to underscore their unique Judaism and thus Israeli identity, to their children and to their Rabbanite neighbors (Cicurel, 2005).

The Moshav's women, as immigrants of a marginalized religion, felt socially even weaker than the men. These women and especially their daughters belonging to the second generation wished to be accepted by the surrounding society (Cicurel, 2005). This paper analyzes how their unique distress led them beyond talk about their religion's virtues, into actual religious action.

Methodology

The paper is based upon an ethnography conducted in a Karaite Moshav between the years 1998-2001, as part of a doctoral dissertation about identity construction among the Karaite community in Israel. This fieldwork (conducted while living in the Moshav) included about sixty interviews with representatives of all the families in this community during personal and communal meetings. Most of the group talks evolved from everyday

meetings of Moshav members (for instance elderly population, mothers). The interviews were conducted in Hebrew, a language they all speak. Most of the interviews were conducted in the interviewee's homes with people entering them and joining in the conversation. The research also included participant observation in many religious and secular events.

The Moshav's population includes four generations. The first generation, who immigrated to Israel and established the Moshav in the 1950's, were in their 70's at the time of the interviews. Other interviews were conducted with people from a wide range of ages and generations, with the youngest being teenagers. Most of those belonging to the first and second generations did not receive academic education. This is due both to the period when they grew up and to their main occupation in the Moshav – as farmers. Still, they strive to give higher education to their children and grandchildren, as the means to bettering their lives. Therefore, many of those in their twenties are in the process of getting academic education, and they do not intend to continue their parent's agricultural work.

The women from the older generation both worked in the farms with their husbands and managed the household, striving to adapt themselves and their family to the new culture while preserving Karaite traditions. The next generation, including their daughters and daughters-in-law, did not participate in agricultural work and were free to develop a career or invest in the households (Cicurel, 2005).

Most interviewees had families of 5-7 persons. Many had no academic education, yet they expressed their wish for such education for their children, so that they could more easily integrate, socially and economically, into Israeli society. Since the Moshav is unique in terms of religious practices, they formed a major focus of the conversations. The women expressed their attitudes toward religious traditions and of their personal and communal tendencies to preserve or change it, especially in the light of the Rabbanite pressures to give up their religious uniqueness and observe Judaism in a more universal manner. All the names in this paper have been changed to preserve the privacy of the interviewees.

In order to help explain the women's relations to, and uses of, religion I shall now describe and analyze their statements on this matter.

Karaism and gender relations

Having evolved around the 8th century, Karaite Judaism includes some influences of the era, such as a relation towards women that is more egalitarian than the biblical one. A Karaite woman, like man, blesses her spouse at their wedding, signs the ketubah (Jewish marriage contract), and may initiate divorce. The Rabbanite prayer: "Blessed You Hashem, our God, King of the world, for not making me a woman," was not incorporated into Karaism; women may bear witness in court and, in the absence of men, are even allowed to practice ritual slaughter (Schur, 1992).

The nida

The above customs can be construed as evidence of the Karaites' somewhat egalitarian view of women. Yet, traditional Karaism views menstruating women who are said to be in 'nida', as impure. At the time of her menstruation, a Karaite woman is physically and socially secluded; she sits alone on a designated chair and refrains from any contact with family members or household objects. Her food is served on special plates and she sleeps in a designated bed, or at least, on designated sheets (Tsoffar, 2004). At the end of the

bleeding the women thoroughly bathe and resume daily contact with other people. Unlike their Rabbinite equivalents, there is no Mikvah in the Karaite belief and Karaite women reject the Mikvah as impure since it is used by many. In Egypt, this custom contributed to the patriarchal family structure. Rose, born in Egypt, immigrated in her twenties among the first ones in the Moshav and is now in her sixties. She recalls: "*The man was in charge there in Egypt, all was the man, his word is honor.*"

The women who emigrated from Egypt adhered strictly to this law. They saw Karaism as superior to Rabbanite Judaism and chose to stress their Karaite customs. In later years, most women gave up the custom of Nida. This personal choice reflects a feminine version of secularization. It is based on personal choices, yet reverberates communally, and it involves a change of "only" a practice yet affects the whole religious atmosphere.

This choice was made by each woman on her own, yet involved obtaining the cooperation of the man in her family. The women did so by stressing the difficulties for a man at the time of his wife's menstruation, such as having to cook and perform additional household duties, while his wife is in her seclusion, and the inconvenience involved in having to present this custom to Rabbanite friends. Thus, 18-year-old Sivan explained: "*We don't do that [Nida] anymore. When I'm menstruating, I can still go in the kitchen and grab a glass of water, I sit with everyone at the table for meals.*" Alice, who has lately past her menstruating years, stated: "*We don't observe this custom, today it is all over.*"

Making changes in the nida custom can be seen as an obvious example of achieving more egalitarian gender relations and assertion of the power allowing immigrant women to make changes in their religion (Khazzoom, 2006). The views expressed by the women on the matter of Karaite gender customs present an even more interesting secularization issue. Karaite women of the second generation and later, prefer acceptance in Israeli society by conforming with their Rabbinical peers rather than strictly observing traditional customs, even when the latter favor them more.

The ketubah

As noted, Karaite women sign their marriage certificate (the ketubah), bless their husbands at the wedding, and may also initiate divorce proceedings. Yet, when asked about Karaism's relation to gender, the Moshav's second generation women born in the Moshav and larger Israeli society, denounce or minimize its disadvantages, or even dismiss any discussion of them. Ruth, now in her forties, recalled her marriage ceremony more than twenty years ago: "*I did sign the ketubah but I did not think about it, nor did I think about divorce [the other egalitarian possibility for Karaite women].*" Susan, her friend and neighbor, added: "*I had no idea what I was signing.*" When asked about the Karaite wedding ceremony and the reciprocal blessings Ruth replies: "*The man blesses the woman, I don't know if she says anything [to Susan]: Did you say anything? I don't remember. The husband breaks the glass and repeats the Rabbi's words.*"

Our talk continued and revolved around the relatively egalitarian Karaite ceremony, a ceremony that is still practiced and surely was practiced at the time of their weddings. Ruth concludes this talk by saying: "*I was not aware of all this, If you had not said so, I would not have known.*"

When I mentioned the Karaite wedding ceremony in comparison with the Rabbinite one, Mazal, a married housewife in her forties, replied: *"Better? More boring, it is like the Christian one, when he makes promises, you will buy her, you shall indulge her, all this is promised to the wife. She signs as well; this is a good thing about our religion, [yet] I did not want to live that way"* [does not like the Karaite marriage ceremony, despite her adhering to it]. Nira, a Karaite woman in her fifties, which married into the Moshav, talked hypothetically of Karaite divorce: *"I don't like the fact that if the husband refuses [to grant a divorce] a woman can't get divorced, I think this is awful."*

The women above, and many like them, seem to portray the Karaite gender laws as similar to the Rabbanite ones. Ruth remembered the man repeating the Rabbi's words, but not the woman's oath – which is a unique Karaite addition to the Jewish ceremony. Like other women, she downplayed all feminine roles in the marriage ceremony. Mazal even went so far as to compare the Karaite ceremony to a non –Jewish one, and declare it *boring*. While acknowledging its general benefits, she implied that she would rather forsake the unique Karaite way. Nira complained about men's sole control over divorce, ignoring that Karaite woman may initiate divorce, and thus, unlike Rabbanite women, are not completely dependent on men in this matter.

Motzafi-Haler (2004) proposed looking into what is not mentioned, and I might add, what is not 'remembered', as part of a person or group's agency and resistance to the dominant discourse. This idea is compatible with Wisweswaran (1994), who differentiates "what goes without saying" and "what cannot be said". Not willing to elaborate on a subject is an active decision conveying the women's subversive act, which stems from their perception of the whole of Karaite law, and the gender laws in particular, as marking them as different from their Rabbanite peers and thus impeding their ambition to blend into the society (Colligan, 2003).

The Karaite women's reactions to the gender laws, whether benefiting or disadvantaging them, may be seen as a desire for change. This change has to do with accepting Israeli norms, or perceived gender relations, not about adhering to Rabbanite norms, yet the outcome is forsaking Karaite laws, or, in other word - secularization.

This is evident in these women's view of Israeli gender relations as inspired by modern feminism and aspiring to be egalitarian. Presenting Karaism as matching these gender relations will thus benefit the social ambition of the Karaite women for social inclusion. This is probably why Karaite women in the Moshav declared Karaite religion and society as representing relative gender equality.

Merry, a Karaite woman in her forties, who was married into the Moshav and preserved only few Karaite traditions, claimed: *"I think that a Karaite woman is in a better position than a Rabbanite one. She is more independent; she is not pushed aside, or kept in a secluded group. The Karaites don't shove their women aside, they are equal."* Nelly, also married into the Moshav, is now in her fifties and trying to develop a new career, said of the Karaite Moshav women:

I know that the women here are very leading, very dominant, I noticed that in the families I see, the husband is disciplined, he respects his wife's wishes, that is, ah, what I see in the Moshav, I don't know about the rest of the Karaites. In my home it is mutual, very mutual.

Nelly's husband, who lived in the Moshav since his immigration to Israel as a teenager, is one of the few educated adults in the place and works as a teacher. He explained how he views Karaite gender relations as not only equal but even privileging women over men in matters of religion:

I think the wife has more influence on religious life, the way she manages the household. If the wife keeps the dietary laws, the home will be more traditional, if she doesn't keep these laws and does not pass the message, for it is the wife and not the father... in a patriarchal family, the father determines what traditions are kept, yet it is the woman who gives the direct message. When my parents were married, my father came from a secular family, and my mum from a religious one. At first the home was not religious, but slowly my mother came back to her old customs and managed to influence my father... so in the end, a wife has as much influence over the religious life at home as the husband, sometimes even more.

This idea of women working quietly, domestically, to bring about changes in public religion is also illustrated in the case of the unique Karaite calendar.

The calendar

One of the main sources of tension between Rabbanites and Karaites is the different calendars that serve the two groups. Whereas the Rabbanite calendar was modified in the middle Ages to enable calculation in advance, the Karaite calendar is still set according to the monthly rise of the new moon. The debate between Karaites and Rabbanites revolves around questions of counting days to determine when holidays actually occur. Tsoffar (2006) defines the debate between Karaites and Rabbanites over the yearly calendar as one of the most contested issues. When Karaite and Rabbanite holidays do not coincide, it leads to suggestions that one method of counting is erroneous, and likewise the theology and philosophy associated with it.

Well aware that the calendar had the potential either to unify or divide Jewish culture, Kashani concluded his monograph *The Karaites: History, Tradition and Customs* with an appeal to demolish the partitions and unify the tribes of Israel by highlighting commonalities rather than differences: "As a first step, it seems to me, that if our brothers, the Karaites, would agree to follow the Hebrew calendar, we would, undoubtedly, progress towards bridging the extremes. ... We have no interest in the existence of two religious nations on this earth. Only by celebrating the holidays on the same dates will the torn fabric be mended, the generational animosity dissolve, and the miracle of the fusion of the Karaites and Rabbanites will materialize" (Kashani, 1978).

Similar pressures from the Rabbanites to adopt their calendar, together with practical considerations relating to the difficulty of maintaining a separate calendar from the rest of their surroundings (discussed below) forced the Karaites to make a choice in the matter. As many Egyptian Karaite community leaders did not immigrate to Israel, their leadership in Israel was unable to make an authoritative decision on the matter of the calendar. Thus, each family or congregation had to decide for itself (Colligan, 2003).

For the Moshav's Karaites, accepting the Rabbanites' call for a united (Rabbanite) calendar has some benefits. In Israel, the Rabbanite is the official calendar. The Karaite holiday is thus adjusted to but not matching the formal holiday vacations. For the Moshav

members as farmers, the proximity of the two holidays sometimes leads to four or five days of leisure when one cannot work and earn income (i.e. bring goods to the market on a national holiday). For a farmer this may be devastating. Shimon, one of the Moshav's farmers explains: *"I'm growing flowers; I cannot work for the two days of the Karaite holiday, and two more because of the Rabbanite one. I will be unable to pick the flowers on time."*

The difference in the holidays is felt not only in the vacation time but also in the national festive atmosphere pervading them. Many Karaites mentioned the difficulty of celebrating the same holidays on different yet adjacent dates. Rachel, a woman in her late thirties, and a mother of four who married into the Moshav, relates: *"When the Karaite holiday does not match the state's vacations, one day this holiday and the next the other holiday, you do not feel the holiday. Without the rest of the country, it does not feel like a holiday. Everyone is driving; it does not feel like a holiday."*

The above difficulties surrounding the different calendars led to a sense of the Karaites being "different". This was especially painful for the children. Almost all of the Moshav members remember returning to school after the Karaite holiday. The Rabbanite children had gone back to school earlier. Miri, born in the Moshav and now a mother in her thirties, describes the situation: *"When we came back to school two days after the other [Rabbanite] students.... they would stand on the balcony and shout horrible names at us: Arabs and such ... Names that are not nice to hear, and we were very hurt."*

Tzili, a woman in her forties, was born and raised in the Moshav, married a man from the Moshav, and now lives there with her family, describes the changes in the Karaite children's reaction to the calendar, reaction that may derive from their experience at school: *"When I was a child, during the Karaite holiday we would close the gates to the Moshav and feel special, it was fun. Now our kids want to celebrate with everyone, we are in Israel, we are like them. We used to love being Karaites; our children want to be like everyone else."*

As can be seen from the above quotes, the Moshav members speak of abandoning the unique and characterizing Karaite one and adopting the calendar established by the state. The decision to keep or abandon the Karaite calendar was a matter of choice for every family. There were a few single women and elderly couples adhering to the Karaite calendar. These families were unaffected by the circumstances pushing other families away from the Karaite calendar: they were either not working or described the workplace as very understanding, and they had no children of school age who would have felt social pressure to conform. The rest of the Moshav members held these observant women in high regard and admiration, as more religious than others.

For all their admiration of the adhering women and families, during the 1980's there was a growing number of newlyweds and young families in the Moshav who chose to abandon the Karaite calendar. Rosa, born, raised and married into the Moshav, expresses her feelings at the time of the change: *"We were feeling as if the people is calling out to us to celebrate the holidays with everyone, as we are in Israel."*

During the next two decades the majority of the Moshav followed suit. Many of the couples recall that the decision to switch calendar was made by the wife, with the husband going along with more or less enthusiasm. When asked about changing the calendar as a feminine decision, Tzili replies: *"I believe it is a woman's decision because if the wife will not make preparations or cook, the husband will go with the flow, celebrate today, celebrate tomorrow, what does he care? You see? So it's only the women."*

During the 1990's, the majority of the Moshav's women, one by one, turned their families away from the Karaite calendar. Many did so due to the changes in the surrounding society. Margalit's parents were not used to celebrating according to the Karaite calendar; she was introduced to this calendar by her husband, whose parents were observant Karaites. She explains that in later years: *"I saw I couldn't do it anymore, celebrate with my mother and here [with her mother in law] so we convinced my mother in law to come with us. Even the Karaite synagogue was now opening for holiday service according to the dates of the state, so I told her that this way you feel the holidays more powerfully, there is more unity among people."*

Margalit's narrative stresses the feminine role in the calendar. Although she refers to three families: hers, her parents, and her in-laws, she speaks only of the women: herself, her mother and her mother in law. Her discourse and similar ones stress that while women feel strong enough to initiate such a process in their own families, they are highly sensitive to the views of other women. These concerns led both to "bad feeling" for those who embarked first on the process of secularization, and to a sense of being left behind by those who joined the process a decade later.

Discussion

The Karaite community's immigration to Israel presented its women with the known pros and cons of immigration, mainly the ability for social empowerment, on the one hand, and the sense of marginalization on the other. This paper dealt with the relation of Karaite immigrant women to religious life and their use of religion as means for empowerment. At first glance, it would seem reasonable that the women would choose to expand the place of religion in their lives, and their presence in institutionalized religion. The leaning of immigrant women upon religion has been well documented (Martin, 2005). The question was: to which religious end would the women direct their efforts, would they enhance religion or turn towards changing it or secularization?

Indeed, many factors that the literature associates with enhanced religion exist in the Karaite women's situation: they are marginalized immigrants (Chambers, 2006), socially weak, insecure and have undergone serious lifestyle changes (Hervieu-Léger, 2006). Moreover, the older women are mostly housewives, a status which may further incline them towards religion (Nyhagen, 2008). Still, as Martin (2005) and Ramji (2007) claimed, enhancing religion helps singling out one's group from the surrounding society.

The Karaite women of the Moshav were conscious of their marginality in "Rabbanite" Israeli society. Rather than asserting their religious uniqueness, they preferred to emphasize their resemblance to the rest of Israeli society by downplaying the part of Karaite religion in their and their families' lives. In other words, they led the community towards religious change with a focus on changing Karaite practices and not beliefs. Moreover, only those Karaite practices that stress their difference from the non-Karaite Jews of Israel were changed. This way, changes were made in the formal calendar and holiday dates but not in the content of the holiday prayer or celebration. In a similar manner, changes were made to the Karaite wedding ceremony, yet not to the unique role of the bride that is transmitted in the Karaite ceremony.

By choosing to make adjustments in their religion, rather than deeper immersion in it, the Karaite women managed to utilize the benefits of the two kinds of feminine religious activities. They both improved their social acceptance by the Israeli society (led by Rabbinic ideas), and at the same time, enhanced their position in their own community due to their ability to negotiate and navigate religiosity, for the benefit of the whole community.

Aune, Sharma et al. (2008) claimed that feminine secularization will be a byproduct of a change in social surroundings. They talked about women's entering the modern capitalist workforce as a motive for western feminine secularization. Their theory partly predicted the religious change fostered by the Karaite women. In this case, the religious change can be seen as a reflection of the women's social marginalization.

Another question that arises around the women-led religious change to Karaism in the Moshav is the question of public against private process. Although a public feminine movement may have been more prominent, the Karaite women conducted the process privately and discretely, seemingly unaware of its cumulative effect, which eventually led to a clear outcome.

The Karaite women did hold communal religious activities, but those consisted mostly of cooking for religious events, such as times of mourning, holidays, and synagogue events, thus, publicly supporting religion. It seems that their meaningful religious activities took place within the domestic sphere, where they relegated protests or wishes for change within their domestic roles. Changing the *nida* custom, the calendar and their view of the wedding ceremony were all attributed to practical considerations revolving around women's household duties. The women brought about religious change through discussion of menus and meal times, without referring to theological issues. One may view this feminine choice in light of Sered's (1997) contention that when women make public demands on religious life, they tend to encounter opposition.

To sum up, the Karaite immigrant women viewed religion not only as a source of communal ties and support, a perception that could have led to heightened religiosity, but also as the source of their marginalization in the surrounding society. That is a major reason for the women's religious and even secularized choices. Had the move been public, it might have achieved social impact, but at the price of arousing the men's objections. Instead, the immigrant women pursued change through private domestic acts, justifying them to the men on the grounds of convenience. Thus they managed religious change while avoiding communal conflicts.

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