

The Length of the Slits and the Spread of Luxury: Reconstructing the Subordination of Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Women Through the Patriarchy of Men Scholars

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Whenever ultra-Orthodox women gather, someone takes over the task of preaching to them. Be it a charity dinner, a Torah lesson, a holiday meal, or a few hours with the children in the playground—preaching is always part of what transpires, and women's dress will always be touched on. Every spare moment, especially those times when women are most vulnerable, like after a death or a tragic event in the community, the public discourse of, to, and about women is saturated with the meanings of modesty. This work, based on two years of research among ultra-Orthodox women in Tel Aviv, Israel, describes the nature and content of this discourse and places it within the context of fundamentalism in the Middle East, and of political and economic conditions. It shows how the discourse reconstructs the women's subordination through a new patriarchy of men scholars.

Were one to scan ethnographies on Middle Eastern women for key words or concepts, "veil" would head the list of the most frequent terms. Tens of books and articles have veil or veiling in their titles, and the veil is seen as a marker for tracing various developments. Explanations of the significance of the veil, which by now are so popular as to be trivial, touch on its exotic appeal to European eyes, the curiosity it provokes to "see through," its appearance as a fashion accessory, and its role as a blatant symbol of fundamentalism. The veil, together with modesty, shame, honor, and patriarchy, form the conceptual framework for analyzing women in the Middle East (Hale, 1989).

One possible explanation for this “veil obsession” and the growing interest in modesty might be the anxiety of feminist scholars about a reactionary return to traditional patterns (Mohanty, 1988). Women are seen by some authors, both indigenous and foreign, as victims of men’s decision to return to a religious fundamentalist and sexist culture, or they are viewed as consenting, satisfied subordinates. The multicultural approach in feminism, which is a relative approach, examines these cultural trends for the active part women play in reconstructing their “subordination” (Baxter, 1992; MacLeod, 1992; El-Guindi, 1981). These studies present women’s decision to veil themselves as a complex act that is both a reaction to and sustained by their cultural, economic, and political status. Some women, mainly lower middle class and urban women, choose to tighten or renew their hold on tradition, and to negate their changing society—the exposure to modernity, the collapse of the old patriarchy, Western influences, and the wage labor market (Kandiyoti, 1988). A ride to work on a crowded Cairo bus, a stroll in the streets of Amman, a departure from the patriarchal family to pursue higher education—all are much easier in the dress of a religious woman and with the moral support of the Islamic community. This is a constrained/free decision of modern/traditional women. It is not a choice between veiling vs. revealing; wearing traditional dress (the *hijab*) is, rather, an attempt to resolve the “funny” look created when elements of East and West are worn together (Abu-Oden, 1993). Thus, the veil obsession appears to be a metaphor of the theoretical debates in feminist theory, as much as it is a response to changing social realities. For some anthropologists, it is a symbol of regression from liberation; for others it is an act of rebellion against the cultural regression that “liberation” has brought.

Notwithstanding these differences among contemporary feminist anthropologists, most of them are interested in evaluating women’s cultural power, and they do so by trying to tease apart the emancipating factors from the subordinating ones. Moreover, these postmodern anthropologists strive to decipher the local meanings of women’s existence within their own culture, using the well-known technique of separating the “emic” (the women’s perceptions) from the “etic” (the researcher’s perceptions).

This work is about ultra-Orthodox Jewish women, members of a Hasidic sect of *Gur*, a subculture that evolved in Eastern Europe far from Islam and the heat of the Mediterranean sun. The ethnography was carried out in Israel, in a political and cultural context that bears some similarities to those mentioned above. The women are part of an ultra-Orthodox community sociologically defined as fundamentalist (Heilman & Friedman, 1991), living in a democratic, mostly nonreligious, Jewish State. Academic studies on ultra-Orthodox women in Israel are meager (Berger-Sofer, 1979; Jayanti, 1982), and more has been done in the United States (Harris, 1985;

Davidman, 1991; Kaufman, 1991). The issues of modesty, of covering the body out of shame and honor, of the pure and the profane are prominent in all the studies about ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups.

Jewish women in Europe, America, or Israel are treated as “others,” with a puzzling sexuality hidden beneath wigs and full skirts. The issues of sexuality were avoided in this ethnography and emphasis was placed, instead, on the intellectual life of the women (El-Or, 1993a). Nevertheless, modesty as part of a new political culture, as means to bargain for power and negate modernity, cannot be overlooked. This work attempts to explain the origin and dynamics of the obsession for modesty—*tzniot* in Hebrew—in the ultra-Orthodox *Gur* community. It does not deal with the religious or mystical meanings of *tzniot*, in order not to move from the sociocultural to the theological level. Thus, modesty is defined not by terms like purity and profanity, but rather as an ideology in the Marxist sense. It is treated here as a postmodern phenomenon that mixes the fear of tradition with social realities, that turns modesty into a full-scale effort to reconstruct women’s subordination through a new form of patriarchy.

THE COMMUNITY

The women I have been studying were all in their third decade. They were recently married with no or a few children, married as long as 10 years with 4–6 children. They all belonged to the Hassidic sect of *Gur* and resided in a suburb of Tel Aviv.

The sect was established in the middle of the 19th century in Gura Kalvaria near Warsaw, Poland, by Rabbi Yetzchuk Meir Alter. A positive attitude toward Zionism brought some of them to Palestine before the Holocaust, where they founded communities in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Bnei-Brak. These were reinforced by refugees from the Second World War, and today the *Gur* sect in Israel numbers around 7000 families and forms the strongest Hassidic group in the main ultra-Orthodox political party.

Originally successful merchants, during the last 15 years the *Gur*, like the rest of the ultra-Orthodox community in Israel, began extending the period of study for men. This was done as a defense against the open cultural market which offers several alternative ways to exercise Judaism (Heilman & Freedman, 1991). Living amongst Jews who exercised their national and historical identity without religious orthodoxy threatened the cultural choice of the ultra-Orthodox, and their major response was to emphasize their “otherness” (Friedman, 1986). Remaining in the *yeshiva* (a secondary school for boys and men, often residential) for as long as possible became the most important tactic of that strategy. All men are expected to be schol-

ars—enclosed in the world of Torah (Jewish literature and oral tradition containing the laws, teachings, and divine knowledge of the religion), far from everyday concerns, problems of livelihood and the profane streets.

The creation of this “society of scholars” imposes major financial burdens on the community. Most men stay in the *yeshiva* until their mid-20s, and then begin dropping out because of economic pressures and lack of academic zeal. A scholar’s salary, paid by the *yeshiva*, is between \$250 and \$400 a month; with an additional sum provided by the State according to the number of children in the family, a scholar’s family has a monthly income, without the wife’s income, of about \$600–\$700.

Most women graduate from *Gur* high schools and teacher’s seminars, but the educational system offers few permanent jobs. Some women help in family businesses and shops, other work at home as wig dressers, seamstresses, accountants, typists, baby-sitters, and the like. Most women want to work in order to support the family and occupy themselves with something other than the home. But the ideal ultra-Orthodox woman is one who stays at home, takes care of her ever-growing family, goes to evening classes for women in the community, and has time for social activities and charity.

The lengthened study period for men, coupled with the image of the ideal woman who does not contribute to the family income, creates a financial problem that leads to an existential paradox. The ultra-Orthodox community was able to create the society of scholars by being part of a democratic capitalistic state—a state that supports the sect’s schools and scholars, exempts orthodox students from military service, and provides national insurance payments to their large families. This democratic and pluralistic society that enables their very existence, and the economic system that generates some limited surpluses to be spent on them, has turned, ideologically, into their main enemy. In their overt discourse they oppose pluralism, condemn liberalism, and detest prosperity. The very context of their being is portrayed in their texts as a demon. If they accept and exercise the possibilities offered by the open society, their existence as “others” is threatened. If they renounce these possibilities they will not be able to sustain their communities. To survive in this existential paradox, the ultra-Orthodox have developed a whole array of social mechanisms.

THE OBSESSION FOR MODESTY

One of the main vehicles reinforcing the cultural choice of orthodoxy in a non-Orthodox Jewish environment, and reproducing the centrality of the society of men scholars is *tzniot*, the Hebrew and Yiddish term for

modesty. Literally, *tzniot* means constraint, demureness, and submissiveness (youth to adult, woman to man, student to teacher, follower to Rabbi). While this attribute is valued in both men and women, the social requisite for *tzniot* and its impact on everyday life are far more significant for women, for whom it is transformed from a general attribute to the ability to reject prosperity.

The public discourse describes women as both soldiers and liabilities in the battle against luxury. While this may give them some social and economic power, it actually turns women into perpetual defendants. If the battle is won, the glory goes to the men and the social system (mainly the girls' schools and seminars) that managed to "constrain" the women. The men remain in school and the families face relative poverty. If the battle is lost, the men go to work, and the financial state of the family improves. But the woman is portrayed as greedy and spoiled and the destroyer of the community's cultural choice. (There is no doubt that the men are also subjected to a powerful mechanism of subordination. The expectation that they will stay in the yeshiva for as long as possible postpones their entrance into adulthood and an independent life. This compliance with the system cannot be ignored, nor can the fact that their studying is presented as the most prestigious occupation, one which the entire community must support.) Modesty, the highly valued attribute of an individual, is used to refute the reputation of a woman and of the women of the community (*Marvea Latzame*, 1986–1988). Pressure for modesty is directed particularly at women in their 20s and 30s, who are at the height of their attractiveness, fertility, and sexual appeal.

Most of the literature written in the different ultra-Orthodox communities for and about women deals with modesty (*tzniot*). These books prepare the women for their mature years as teenagers, wives, mothers, and housekeepers. History and philosophy texts, written by Orthodox men for women, refer extensively to the value of modesty. The presence of *tzniot* in this discourse is not new.

The academic research on ultra-Orthodox women is very sparse, and only four researchers have conducted field work on the subject in Israel (Berger-Sofer, 1979; Jayanti, 1982; Ginsberg, 1988; El-Or, 1993a, 1993b). Both Jayanti and Berger-Sofer, working in an ultra-Orthodox ghetto in Jerusalem, saw *tzniot* as a means of social control exerted by women as they negotiated their social surroundings, and as a sexual–personal constraint within the community. The overwhelming emphasis in *tzniot* in the ultra-Orthodox discourse, its relationship to the choices of the male scholars, and the way women experience, decode, and live up to its demands remain to be explained.

IT'S ALL UP TO YOU GIRLS

On a cold night in February of 1986, I received a phone call from Sheina-Brucha, the daughter of my patron in the Hassidic community:

Mama says you should come to the school next to our house tonight at 9 o'clock. There's going to be a lecture there for the women.

When I arrived, 40 ultra-Orthodox *Gur* Hassidic women in their 20s were already sitting, chatting, in a cold dilapidated classroom where they sometimes held their public gatherings. (The local children do not attend this public school on the edge of their neighborhood; they are bussed to Hassidic schools in Bnei-Brak, a town adjacent to Tel Aviv where most residents are Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox.) At 9:05 PM Hanna walked in, went directly to the front of the class, and waited for the women to come to order. The stern look on her face eventually silenced them.

I want to apologize for Bluma's being late. She didn't want to take a taxi for reasons of modesty,¹ and called to say she'll be on the 8:45 bus. She should be here any minute now.

The women, dressed in colorful sweaters and wearing their casual wigs (Ultra-Orthodox women wear wigs, while the more moderately Orthodox women wear scarves. The style of the wigs and their cost range from simple and cheap to elegant and expensive.), seemed delighted with the little break before the lecture and went back to talking. All of them recognized Bluma when she came in and rose to welcome their former teacher from the Bnei-Brak Girls' Seminar. (Most of the girls attend the sect's girls' high school and teacher training seminary. The large number of highly talented students results in a select group of women appointed as teachers. Permanent teachers in the seminaries are therefore pious, intelligent women who form the elite cadre of women in the community.) She wasted no time on greetings and launched directly into her talk. This woman, at 35 older than the others, wearing a pale knit dress and shabby wig, was about to startle them, tell them things they expected to hear, praise them, and castigate them—like any good preacher at a public gathering. But the texture of her speech and its context were part of a new social phenomenon.

Knowing that the women in the classroom believe in the ethos of the society of men scholars, that most of them struggle daily with its ramifications, and that each one of them has the potential to seriously threaten that cultural choice, Bluma gave the following speech:

¹Modesty can be understood here as the use of cheap public transportation instead of more costly taxis, and avoiding being alone in a car with a man. Such a statement about the lecturer must be seen in light of the preference of most ultra-Orthodox people to take taxis over public transportation.

There once was an oboe in the Temple, a smooth and simple cane oboe. It had the most pleasant and gracious sound. The king, who loved the oboe very much, ordered his jewelers to cover it with pure gold. The oboe turned into an exquisite object, but lost its pleasant sound. It took a while to remove the gold cover, but once the job was done, the oboe regained its former quality.

And so it is with us—the daughters of Israel. Our beauty lies in our simplicity. I was asked by some of the local girls to come and talk to you about modesty [some women giggle bashfully and bow their heads]. Yes, yes, if you were waiting for some other topic, now is the time to leave. The fact that you all live together in a *Gur* community gives you a lot of power, unlike those of us who are spread out amongst others. You have the ability to help and support each other. How come I have to hear from some of you that you need a talk about *tzniot*? It's true that the great test of our generation is luxury—actually, consumption, luxury and *tzniot*. And we all need a lot of improvement and correction in those areas. Our Rebbe once said that luxury is very deceptive, mainly because we don't take it as seriously as we take the other temptations of the irreligious Zionist street.

But, hearing that some of you girls wear skirts slit up the back is too much. Even if the skirt is long enough and the slit reaches a proper height, you know what it says. You stand in the store and nothing moves—that's fine, but have you ever walked behind a woman with a slit in her skirt? It's very provocative. Where does one get the nerve to do it? to be the first one in the community to do it? The next one will have a much easier job, she'll only be following.

A woman who leaves her home looking tip-top with everything in place is putting a sign on her forehead that says, "This is what I take notice of." Looking well doesn't come naturally, you have to invest time and money in it, so what you are actually saying out loud is, "My outer looks are my main interest." If you do that, allow me to be merciful and condemn you for stupidity and not for bad intentions.

Everyone wants to be original, exclusive, unique. I looked through some ads in our newspaper, ours not theirs, and sure enough, everything is exclusive: furniture, bridal wear, wigs, the whole lot. So the disease has pretty much spread. Instead of seeking unanimity and anonymity, people are looking for exclusivity. Don't be comforted by the fact that most people do it: you as a young community are expected to behave much better. It's all up to you girls, whether your men will stay in the *yeshiva*, whether you will be the wives of scholars, and whether your children will be the sons and daughters of Torah men.

Bluma continued her sermon, citing various Jewish sources, weaving her discourse out of traditional tales blended with stories from everyday life. Her language moved from low to high Hebrew, from loud authoritative tones to jokes and friendly comments. These varied references and styles of speech were offered as equally valid, and created a melange of truths. The women sat quietly, their heads bowed. There was no discussion, no questions at the end. After 50 minutes Bluma ended her lecture as abruptly as she had begun. Some of the women, mainly her former students and fellow teachers, went up front to thank her. The rest filed slowly out of the room into the cold night.

The group of women I was with stopped outside. Three of us sat down on a low stone wall, hands thrust deep in our pockets, and talked. Sarah my patron, asked what I thought of the lecture. At that point in our relationship I felt sufficiently free to express my true feelings, and said,

It's strange to me, an adult, to expose myself to preaching. I felt like a little girl, I got angrier and angrier as she lectured. I felt almost beaten.

Sarah smiled, the blush on her cheek disclosing embarrassment (at being about to criticize me?):

It was a very encouraging talk, but perhaps not for you. You prefer smart lectures, huh? The ones about Jewish philosophy and such, but when I go to town with a tiny bit of money in my purse, Maimonides doesn't help me, her talk does.

Deborah, the woman who had invited Bluma, sat with us. She is a wig dresser. Her husband had just left the *yeshiva* and taken a job as a manager of a hotel in Bnei-Brak. His father owns a small hotel in Switzerland where he learned the business. They were about to leave the suburban community and move to the city. As a working woman in the field of fashion, Deborah was always well dressed. She held a large tape recorder she had used to record the lecture:

Well, this was my last job as lecture organizer, and much as I liked it I must say I'm pretty happy to be finished with it.

A woman came out of the lecture and called to her:

Hey Deborah, what about my dressy wig, the one with the blond streaks I gave you yesterday. I need it for a wedding this week. Don't let me down, okay? I really have to look good.

"Not now okay? Call me tomorrow," replied Deborah and hurried back into the building, leaving Sarah and me smiling.

Sarah thought the lecture was encouraging, Deborah, the wife of a businessman and herself a well-dressed working woman, invited Bluma to talk against men working and against fashion. And with Bluma's words lingering in the air, one of the women publicly expressed concern about her looks. These actions and reactions are part of a paradox that both creates and explains the apparently contradictory behavior. Those contradictions and their existential value are further understood through the timing and social context in which they are invoked.

WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME TO RAISE THE SUBJECT?

The women are ready for a lesson in modesty on all occasions—a family gathering, a charity meeting, a Torah lesson, even during a casual afternoon at the neighborhood playground. But the expected time is in the midst of a delicate social situation like mourning for a loved one or a child, following a disaster like a terrorist attack or a train wreck, during the spread of a dreaded disease, or in the middle of a war. The use of moments of vulnerability for reinforcing social order has been studied extensively in an-

thropology. Traditional anthropology explained witchcraft, rituals, healing, and other social ceremonies as attempts to reinforce social order (Gluckman, 1944). But the social power gained at vulnerable moments is more dynamic than it seems through the functional analysis. The effort to re-create women's subordination under new circumstances might actually be a new form of patriarchy. This can be clarified by a brief digression to describe a lecture given in an ultra-Orthodox girls' high school in Jerusalem on January 30, 1991, two weeks after the Gulf War began:

What are we asked to do during this war, girls? We are asked to cover our windows and doors with plastic. To close ourselves off, to seal ourselves in. If we take this at face value we are stupid, because everybody knows such measures won't help. That sort of defense is good against chemicals, but that's not the weapon we're dealing with here. If we really want to hide during this war we should go down to the shelters—not hide in a sealed room.² But, closing ourselves at home, as recommended by the army, is a message, a sign. That's what it is. If we take it in this sense then maybe this war will teach us something. Closing ourselves off from the outside, from what's going on in the streets, means hiding from modernity. For us women the message is even stronger. All of us should withdraw inside. We, the daughters of Israel, should take the far, hard to reach rooms. In order to do so, let me go over with you the rules of modest appearance. Let's refresh our memories, although I can see all of you are well dressed.

This speaker turned quickly from the metaphor to its practical significance—*tzniot*—from the general order regarding safety to how women can carry out the dictum. She read them the well-known (printed and distributed) rules governing appearance and dress: the length of the dress, the depth of the neckline, the sheerness of the nylons, and the style of hair for unmarried girls and wigs for married ones. The relative safety in Jerusalem, which although not attacked during the war was nonetheless vulnerable because of the general uncertainty of the situation, was a perfect place for the moral lesson. And even when fundamental questions of ex-

²At the beginning of the Gulf War Israeli citizens were advised to take shelter in sealed rooms. Shortly after the first SCUD attacks people realized that an ordinary bomb shelter offered better protection. The army did not change its policy, however, and the public, who believe deeply in the Israel Defense Forces, were bewildered. The Orthodox speaker expressed commonly held feelings; she interpreted the army's advice as a kind of nationalistic blindness that freed her to advocate otherwise (and in practical terms, correctly).

The Gulf War offers an opportunity to examine the ongoing dialogue between the religious and nonreligious ideologies in Israel. The Zionist-nationalist ethos, in which the Israel Defense Forces plays an important role, was at stake. In all previous wars the ultra-Orthodox community felt extremely uncomfortable; they excluded themselves from military service and its symbols, and their cultural choice was ridiculed while the choice to serve and fight was valued by the society as a whole. In the Gulf War the ultra-Orthodox views about the lack of real power of the Jewish State were confirmed. The Israeli army sat back helplessly while the people hid in their homes and the Jews once again sought the protection of the great powers. The entire was symbolic for the ultra-Orthodox: it was confirmation of the Jewish destiny to live stateless until the coming of the Messiah, and a rejection of political efforts to alter this fate.

istence were at stake, the practical lesson for women was once again the depth of the neckline and the length of the skirt. Combining states of vulnerability and preaching for *tzniot* is very grave; when the frequency of *tzniot* preaching, its all-pervasiveness, and the consistency of the message are added, one has what appears to be a new ideology.

LIVING UP TO IT: CONDEMNATION FOR PARTICIPATION AND THE NEW PATRIARCHY

The orthodox Marxist explanation for women's subordination came from a view of class oppression. Gender was constituted by class. The emphasis on production relations and the exclusion of reproduction (child rearing, care and housework) from the production cycle eliminated feminist critique in Marxism (Nicholson, 1987). The meeting between neo-Marxism and feminism was facilitated by rendering gender and reproduction constituting attributes. Engels was reread, and his historical-evolutionary explanation for the origin of family and private property (Engels, 1891) was reexamined in the context of postcapitalist societies (Gough, 1975; Benhabib & Cornell, 1987). Feminist Marxism shifts back from class to gender, from family to kinship, and from production to reproduction, through the ideology of patriarchy (Sokoloff, 1980). Patriarchy, as a basic mode of thought within Western culture (which both women and men believe in), connects the cultural and economic spheres. It constructs and is constructed by both, and although an entirely socially created phenomenon, patriarchy is understood to be the natural order of things (West & Zimmerman, 1991).

Condemning luxury—the ideology of *tzniot*—helps maintain the society of men scholars—the new patriarchy. The scholars' families are socially rewarded for their poverty, and women are given a prominent role in furthering the community's goals and ideals. Rejecting the idea of prosperity and presenting the surrounding world as a vanity fair helps denounce the values of that world, which is depicted as having no borders, becoming increasingly permissive, frightening, destructive, and hollow. Newspapers and magazines read throughout the ultra-Orthodox community (*Marvea Latzame*, 1986–1988) portray non-Orthodox Jews as potential divorcées, drug addicts, and ignoramuses. At best they search for the meaning of life in Indian shrines or in the Amazon jungle. [Many Israeli youngsters (non-religious and nationalistic orthodox) take a trip abroad after completing their army service. They travel to South America, Asia and the Far East, sometimes for a year or two, before settling down to work or study.]

However, when the ultra-Orthodox look up from their newspapers and walk through the city, catch a glimpse of a secular magazine, or talk

to nonreligious people, this well-knit discourse is in jeopardy. They see families, single people, youngsters, and old people to whom they feel close as Jews, conducting apparently "normal" lives. These people live in the "holy land," are knowledgeable about the holy scriptures, study Jewish history and philosophy, and speak better Hebrew than they do. At the same time they learn other subjects, celebrate the Jewish holidays in their own modern ways, and actually maintain—albeit with great difficulty and serious faults—a Jewish democratic state. Moreover, they have created a modern culture with flourishing Hebrew literature, Hebrew rock and roll, academic research, advanced technology, medicine, and art.

Ignoring all this is extremely difficult. The drive for financial support and recognition of "the society of men scholars" has drawn the ultra-Orthodox communities into local politics. Participating in the democratic process and being dependent on its outcome have made them part of a culture they would like to ignore but cannot. Being part of the political establishment has forced them to take a stand on foreign affairs. Thus, they have become part of the Zionist State whose ideology they reject. This paradox has generated the social phenomenon I refer to as "condemnation for participation."

Accepting *a priori* the ultra-Orthodox scheme, their women have developed an existential mechanism by which to live up to that scheme. They have learned to decode the accusations directed at them into a source of strength and faith. They have created a dual world in which they can exist as modern and segregated at the same time. This duality is not based on fallacy, hypocrisy, or pretense, although that is how non-Orthodox people might view it. Both parts are equally authentic and meaningful for them.

Deborah the wig dresser, elegant and well dressed, the wife of a businessman, can invite Bluma to talk about *tzniot* and its direct impact on keeping men in school. A woman emerging from that session feels quite comfortable asking Deborah to share her interest in "looking good." Sarah feels encouraged after being collectively criticized for spending money, even though she has not spent any money. The Jerusalem schoolgirls passively absorb the real lesson of the Gulf War, which has more to do with their looks than with their security.

This dual existence is practical. It helps an ever-growing family survive on \$600–\$700 a month. It puts the important communal issues, global Jewish topics, and local problems into the hands of the simple housewife, giving a well-educated woman self-esteem and pride otherwise lost in her domestic role. What appears to be a patronizing, bizarre linkage between the ultra-Orthodox cultural choice and women's *tzniot* is interpreted by them as recognition of their potential power. It gives them the ability to participate within limits in the experience of modern life. They go to school and

learn music, English, and the basics of computers. They continue studying as adults (El-Or, 1993b), and feel that their strivings for knowledge alongside their modern looks are inevitable.

Instead of feeling haunted by *tzniot* the women are able to see it as their protection. They cannot extricate themselves from their social situation: they accept it and fulfill their drive for modernity within it. By maneuvering and shifting from one level of behavior to another, they are able to see themselves from without—to deviate from the norm in order to go along with it, to remain ultra-Orthodox women with increasing communication with less and less religious surroundings.

The case of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish women offers a unique opportunity to examine this theoretical approach. They live in a postcapitalist state and operate within its economic system, which they culturally condemn. At the same time, their community is exposed to postmodern culture, within which their preferences are evaluated and reevaluated. This leads to the following interpretation of reconstructing women's subordination: The subordination of women to men can no longer depend upon an economic bond or women's ignorance. The new patriarchy is not about who brings home the bread, but about the meaning and symbolism of the shared loaf. The dyad or familial bond cannot rely solely on financial factors, and must offer more. The traditional Jewish family, while in the diaspora, was the key element in women's subordination (Zobrowski & Herzon, 1952). Men were the "knowers," and only they studied the corpus of power and prestige (Torah), participated in public life, and collaborated with the women in supporting the family. Today, women study (although not as men) and they also "know." Women work, and sometimes they are the main supporters. The new patriarchal ideology recreates the gender bond differently. It diminishes the economic benefit of marriage, since marrying a scholar might worsen a woman's condition and offer meager opportunity for betterment. Thus, among the ultra-Orthodox, marriage is presented as the women's sole chance for prominence.

Marriage takes them beyond individual gains and into the collective effort to maintain the society of men scholars. After all, the community's choice (men's choice) to extend the men's period of study is financed by the State, women's labor, and the families' subsistence lifestyle, which in many cases borders on virtual poverty. This economic constraint is introduced through the public discourse as a critical trial, a concrete test of the ability to go beyond materialism. Thus, marriage is not presented as a deal, but as an important relationship that offers these modern women relevant and authentic meaning for their situation. This restructuring also enables them to integrate their perception of the family with the non-Orthodox discourse of marriage involving love and sharing by equal partners.

Essential to this process of integration is the strong emphasis on the value of modesty in the ultra-Orthodox discourse for and about women. It diminishes the merits of prosperity while at the same time gives meaning to their poverty. Being the modest wife of a scholar becomes a highly desired state among contemporary ultra-Orthodox woman, reconstructing her private and collective subordination through a new patriarchy of men scholars.

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