Bargaining with Spiritual Patriarchy: The Women in the Shas Movement in Israel

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Consciences and Transcendence Incarnate

New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion

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Pamela Sue Anderson

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New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Contesting Concepts, Practices and Transcendence
edited by Pamela Sue Anderson

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Bargaining with Spiritual Patriarchy: The Women in Shas Movement in Israel

Henriette Dahan Kalev

I shall explore in this article the strategies of gender bargaining with the spiritual and political patriarchy\(^1\) in Shas, a Jewish ultra orthodox Sephardic patriarchal community [and movement] in Israel.

Shas is a community whose life, beliefs and culture are rooted in the Jewish religion. Patriarchal codes of behavior whose legitimacy rests on the religious legacy and the Bible, the Halakha and the writings of the Sages. It is practiced according to the Mitzvoth (The Jewish religious commands) as they are interpreted by the Sages and the contemporary spiritual leadership, the Great Sages of Torah, The Rabbis, of the Shas community headed by Rabbi Ovadya Yosseph. The codes of behavior and the legacy in which they are grounded are the source for authorization of gender relations' formation. The rules and the gender relations are translated into codes of behavior that are implemented by forces of patriarchy which work through social network that function similar to other disciplining power network, although they are more condensed then in non religious societies, in small and wide webs\(^2\). 'Gate keepers' are in charge of the conservation of the order and they are often the older conservative women, Rabbis or the "public opinion" as indoctrinated through pamphlets distributed in synagogues, educational systems\(^3\) and informally through gossip and rumor. Every minor attempt to generate a change alerts te gatekeepers who move into action swiftly.

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1. Deniz Kandyoti in a breaking through article developed the notion patriarchal bargain. In this article I presume that the feminist reader is familiar with the text. Kandyoti's definition of patriarchal bargain focus on the what: "...is intended to indicate the existence of set of rules and scripts regulating gender relations, to which both genders accommodate and acquiesce, yet which may nonetheless be contested, redefined, and renegotiated. Some suggested alternatives were the terms contract, deal, or scenario; however, none of these fully captured the fluidity and tension implied by bargain." (Deniz Kandyoti, Gender and Society, Vol. 2 number 3; September 1988 pp.274-290 p. 274p.286, fn.1)

2. Michel Foucault, "Disciplinary Power and Subjection", in Power ed. S. Lucks, 1984 pp. 229-242

3. For example "Maayan Hashavua" [The Weekly Wail] pamphlet distributed weekly by Shas movement in the synagogues and the schools by El Hmaayan [To The Wail]. The Educational Fund For Sephardic Jewry Legacy.
As the control over the observation of religious life with regard to the gender relations is very rigid the women who start to make a move of bargaining also in very small steps and they proceed carefully in order to loosen the restricting forces. They tend to take their action when the attention of the gatekeepers is other wise occupied like during moments of crisis. What is more during such times they use all possible means, their body, language, personal and cultural talents, charm, reason, social ties, emotional manipulation. Bargaining with patriarchy occurs across all domains of life. The methods of bargaining are very subtle, fine tuned and practiced in the private sphere with the husband, the father, or the sons, and in the public sphere with the institutional agents of Shas, politicians or school teachers. The women bargain in the intimate realms of control over sexual pregnancy and motherhood issues, over relations between parents and teachers, couples and families, at the workplace and the synagogue, or on the street in the neighborhood. The bargaining tends to take the form of improvisation, although it is sometimes planned ahead of time [in general lines] as one of the illustrations below demonstrates. In short women's bargaining is practiced like the art of embroidery. It is often an individual woman, a poor and uneducated women who live in the margins of the community takes the initiative, but it can also be the beloved daughter of a reverend Rabbi, who trys to bargaining directly with the Chief Rabbi and the other spiritual leaders.

Because the methods of bargaining are individual and they are worked out like a piece of art, it is difficult to imitate or to draw generalizations from them. As such it is also difficult to study them and elaborate theoretical generalizations as I shall explain in the following section.

Methodological comments:

Because of its uniqueness and subtlety the study of bargaining with patriarchy in Shas is limited to a close analysis of the cases I shall illustrate below two cases in details. The women who, as subjective agents, chose to remain in the community and look for bargaining method are the majority of the women in Shas4, although in the Israeli

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4 Like women in every other community whether it is very oppressive, moderate or tolerant. Bargaining with patriarchy is perhaps a plausible answer to the more general feminist frustration regarding women's refraining from universally uniting under liberating goals.
society it is relatively easier then, say, in Afghanistan to "burn the club and leave their lives behind" in order to begin new life in one of the non-religious groups that exist in Israel. In what follows I shall focus on the contexts in which bargaining elements are practiced and on the method developed by the women as they proceed when bargaining with the patriarchy of Shas.

Monitoring of bargaining nuances that might make a difference in the lives of women requires the inspection of things that might appear as unimportant details. However, the study showed that it is there the seeming unimportant "neglected daily details" that change is generated. The illustrations I shall bring touch upon many parts of women's lives, but for reasons of analysis, I shall elaborate them, somewhat artificially, in order to demonstrate how exactly the women generate change. Three main themes mount from the illustration, bargaining over the women's and girls' body discipline, bargaining for education and work and vocation opportunities.

A. Social and Political Context of the Gender relations

The Israeli society, in which our case study is located, is a heterogenic society. It is made up of diverse groups that can be divided to five social categories

5 For further discussion of the topic in a multicultural context see .Dahan Kalev, Henriette, 2004, “Female Genital Mutilation and Human Rights” for Sex Roles. Vol.51, 5/6

6 Parts of this study has already been presented in two different conferences: one in Israel, on "Feminism law and Social Change" April 3-5, 2005 Tel Aviv University and the other in University of Liverpool, "Women and the Divine", June 17-19, 2005 The information assembled here is based on many interviews. Sometime the "woman" in case is a prototype which I have "constructed" from interviews and fragments of the data that repeated itself.

Data and interviews are based on three of student's field work My wonderful students in seminars I taught on "Ethnic Politics in Israel" in the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, in the years 1994-1999 and in Ben Gurion University in 1998 onwards have contributed to the development of this study. Especially, my student Ricki Tesler who continued her study in the field and in 2003, published the book In the name of God; Shas and the Religious Revolution Keter Jerusalem (Hebrew). Daniel Assulyn who interviewed the leaders of Shas and collected data on the indoctrination system of Shas in 1998 and Ela Kaner in Ben Gurion University in 2004 who did part of the interviews with the women. Finally, I want to thank Ahikam Farber Tzurel who has helped me with the biblical text and the writings of the sages

As the bargaining with the spiritual leadership involves references to the holy scripts, sometimes from the Bible, when it was possible I preferred to translate from Hebrew but also to quote the sources in Hebrew in the attached appendix.
according to religion, ethnicity, and nationality, economic and political issues. These categories range from Religious to non-religious groups, Jews of European origin (often referred at as Ashkenazim) to Jews of Arab and Moslem countries of origin (often referred at as Sephardic or Mizrahim) tainted with Oriental's relationship, Palestinian Israelis to Israeli Jews, rich and poor made up of new comers immigrants and older residents, and center and periphery groups who reside away from the big cities. These divisions nourishes political conflicts and social rifts. This division is even more complex as the groups are divided into subgroups due to ideological and political disagreements. Within the religious groups for example one might find religious, ultra orthodox religious, Ashkenazi religious, traditional Sephardic religious etc. As the groups and the subgroups keep a certain degree of interaction, mostly for pragmatic political reasons, their boundaries are not hermetically closed and their members can sometimes transfer from one category to the other. Some of the groups are intolerant and demand full loyalty to the group members while others are liberal. Thus the boundaries are relatively open even in more intolerant groups. The implication of this is that different degrees of mutual influence cannot be prevented even when gatekeepers severely sanction the disobedient members. Thus, when feminist breeze blow onto the Israeli patriarchal order, the non-religious women are those who import and generate the ideas of liberating women but some ultra orthodox women also feel the breeze. This is where bargaining with the patriarchy begins.

The women of Shas belong to a Jewish ultra orthodox community that was founded and living in Israel. The majority of its members consist of Jews who migrated to Israel, or were born to immigrants who came from Arab or Moslem countries in the late 1940s. The community spiritual and political leadership founded a movement of this name and has first represented it in the municipality of Jerusalem after getting organized as a political party in 1981. It became a significant political

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7 See for further discussion of Orientalism Edward Said, 1979, Orientalism Vintage Books
9 Shas is written in Hebrew PANEL ש"ח PANEL and it is the initials of [ספורים שמיים רוחא] Sephardic Jews Torah Observant. It is also a play with the word PANEL PANEL PANEL PANEL PANEL PANEL PANEL PANEL PANEL PANEL PANEL Panel the six series of Mishmash.
10 Ricky Tesler, 2003, In the name of God; Shas and the Religious Revolution Keter Jerusalem (Hebrew)
party and movement after the elections of 1984 and since then the movement as well as the community plays a visible and influential role in Israeli politics. Long years of ethnical discrimination against the community of the Mizrahim led to the unavoidable emergence of Shas. Shas community suffered from ultra orthodox establishment "Agudat Israel" [a community and political movement of Ashkenazi origin] from economic, social and political deprivation and has been racialized\(^{11}\). In the early 1980s, when they realized that they form a firm group within the larger Ashkenazi ultra orthodox group they have separated themselves and founded their own movement. Soon after appearing on the political map it was clear that Shas is a movement with cohesive forces that attracts members who where discriminated against, not necessarily very religious people, who have sentiments of loyalty and are ready to follow the ultra orthodox leaders. The movement's representatives have displayed political competence when playing governmental roles. The community leadership is divided into two heads, one spiritual and one political. The spiritual, superior to the political, is headed by a group of 12 Great Sages chaired by Rabbi Ovadia Yosseph, a leader who proved his greatness in Torah and who is respected by the Ashkenazi spiritual leadership as much as by the Sephardic. He was the Chief Rabbi of the state during the 1972-1983. The other head of leadership is political; its first leader Arie Dery, a brilliant Yeshiva student who became the political leader represented the community from 1984-1998. When he was 27, in 1986, he was already the General Director of the Minister of Interior, the youngest ever in the in this position in Israel. In 1988, again, the youngest ever minister in the Israeli governments, he was nominated to be the Minister of Interior, after two years of he laying out a condensed welfare network in the poor neighborhoods where Shas community followers lived\(^{12}\). He showed unusual talents in reading the political parties' map of Israel; he was also a brilliant parliamentarian\(^{13}\). In 1989 he was

\(^{11}\) Amnon Levi, 1988, Haharedin [The Ultra Orthodox], Keter, Jerusalem (Hebrew), see also Freedman Menahem, 1989, "The Ultra Orthodox Society in Israel at the Aftermath of the 12\(^{th}\) Election Campaign, Trends and Processes" Monthly Survey 36 (5) pp. 22-36 (Hebrew)

\(^{12}\) During its first years in government community welfare and educational network was laid out to ease the poverty after the long years of deprivation. Thousands of Heiders (Torah classes taught at the age as early as three onwards), kindergartens, synagogues, Koilels (an ultra orthodox school where the young people learn Torah); Yeshivas – (Jewish religious higher education institutions and religious colleges), Mikvoth (purifying public baths) welfare community supporting system, for large families, philanthropy homes for the needy were opened and budgeted. The institutionalization was made up to fit the specific ultra orthodox way of life.

\(^{13}\) Yoel Nir, Arie Dery, 1999 The Rise The crisis, The Pain, Yediot Aharonot Publications
accused of corruption and after ten years of trial he was sent to prison in 2000 for three years. Eli Yishay, yet another young bright Yeshiva student and a virtuous politician succeeded Dery. Yishay remained in power as the political leader of Shas in the parliament and has been a cabinet minister in all governments ever since whenever Shas was a member in the government coalition. He is now the Minister of Industry Commence and Labor. This leadership is exclusively masculine and women are not given access to high rank positions in Shas institutions. Like the Ashkenazi ultra orthodox community from which they have separated, the Shas leadership has also invested efforts in keeping the community under control in order to minimize the possible invasion of non-religious influence from outside the community. But Shas allows people who are also not religious to become members of the movement. This means that the boundaries between the non-religious and the religious population are not very rigidly observant within the movement.

The structure of Shas institutions are designed so it fits the special gender division of labor that largely divide the gender roles. The division runs along lines in which women are more or less responsible for the "profane" tasks in the private and the public spheres, and the men are in charge of the religious Jewish tasks. The women's tasks include breadwinning, paying the bills, taking care of the domestic roles and the negotiation with the welfare services and the state's administration and the men are expected to learn Torah, to fill the Jewish obligations as Rabbis as Avrechim [Yeshiva and Koilels' fellow] and be kosher practitioners in public and commercial institutions in veterinarian services based on Jewish law, or work with the politicians who represent the community in the public administration.

Gender division of labor of this type is central to the community network. The institutions, including the family, the education, and the political and welfare institutions are all formed to fit the way of life of the community so to enable its male members to observe their Jewish religious life according to the ultra orthodox rules.

Although it is difficult to draw a clear profile of the typical member of Shas, either man or woman, it is possible to discuss this group in terms of social category that practices Jewish religious life modified by patterns acquired in the Jewish Yeshivas – open to men only - which were dominated by the Ashkenazi spiritual leadership. Nevertheless, they differ in many respects from their Ashkenazi compeers.
The tradition and the religious practices have been influenced significantly by the Jewish legacy as was shaped along the years in the Arab and Moslem countries of origin. For example, during the colonial era they welcomed modernization and reacted moderately to the secularization and to the Oxidant, Christianity and the western world, unlike the Ashkenazim who tended to respond to changes by reinforcing separatist rules. Watching TV and listening to the radio, living in mixed neighborhoods with non religious residents are a few examples of relative moderation. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the issue in depth but as I intend to focus on gender aspects and the ways it influences women's lives within the community, I also hope a rough picture of the relationship with the rest of the Israeli society shall also emerge.

The gender division of labor poses tremendous difficulties, both for the gatekeepers as well as for the women themselves as they are in charge of the family maintenance as they are expected to keep strict modesty of the body, speech and social relations. For example, they are not allowed to talk to men. Men are not allowed to shake hands with women. At certain locations they are not allowed to sit next to men on the public transportation. These basic restrictions confront not only the women with difficulties but also the patriarchal leadership. The women are exposed to the risk of developing undesired networks in non-religious circles. Therefore, women are severely inspected and as a result they are not allowed to go further than

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14 Rabbi Shalom Mashash, from Meknes in Morocco is an example of a spiritual leader who addressed questions of Christianity and of modernity with openness and provided the community he headed with moderate solutions to tensions between tradition and modernity. See for example his writings Q&A Semmesh, Volume # 4 (last vol.) published in 2007 in Torat Emet Institute, Jerusalem see also Mizrah Shemmesh – Restrictions and Permits Judgments. Published in 1933 in Mekness, Morocco. See appendix #1.

15 These threats sometimes adhere to old myths of Lilith's forces of woman as sources of dark forces that must be controlled. It results in fears of promiscuity and generates aggressive methods of discipline in form of educating the public with blunt and populist commands aiming at the enhancement of control over the women's body, sever restriction over the possibilities girls to walk in public, the domestic discipline over the couples relations at home and the like. For example the chief Rabbi Ovadya Yosseph decreed that women should not wear wigs to replace the simple cover of the heads with handkerchiefs because wigs are both made of hair of non-Jews and therefore not kosher and "even worth" they are made of animals. Also, wigs are a beauty item that can be used for sexual temptation. Second, Rabbi Yosseph has commanded that men should not walk between two women because women are like non kosher animals, like he walked between two female donkeys. Third example men should not forget that when talking to women they risk sexual temptation therefore they should refrain from speaking with women.
what they are instructed to do for the family and community. For example, they are not allowed to register for vocational courses and develop professional skills. This results in women's ability to offer very limited range of skills and professional options and therefore able to work only in low income jobs. They work in domestic jobs, in kindergartens, groceries. Those who hold high school or teaching certificates, small numbers of them, are offered office works in the local municipality where the male delegates of Shas are located as school principals. Often they practice teaching only before they marry, at the age of 18-20. This situation and the fact that men refrain from working for wages are of the major reasons why poverty of the entire community is perpetuated. Shas community is the second poorest population (after the Israeli Palestinians) in Israel

On this ground, having no choice and a strong desire to improve their family's economic situation, some of the daring women in Shas, occasionally, played with the rules and practiced methods of bargaining with the patriarchy. Although the restrictions are rigid the women develop outstanding methods, cross the lines of limits and re-cross them when they are set up time and again. They stretch the boundaries, sometimes obscuring them thickening them and enable mobilization and change as the following illustrations demonstrate.

B. Development of Bargaining Strategies
The site in which Shas women are functioning is located at the border zones of the patriarchy whether it is within the Rabbi’s family or the margins of a poor neighborhood. When they challenge the patriarchy it is never performed in direct confrontation. Opportunism, obscuration of boundaries and negotiation with the authorities are the strategies they employ when coping with them.

Obscuring the Boundaries Strategy
Case study 1: The kindergarten

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16 Adva… It is also one of the sources for their unpopularity amongst the rest of the society. They are accused of investing their time in milking the state's budget to support the people instead of going to work (Tesler, ibid).
Shas's most successful welfare projects begins with concentration on budgets for large poor families, subsidies for early Jewish education and kindergarten network that provides the population with services which the welfare state fails to provide for the entire society. Thanks to its sophisticated politics Shas has control over priorities setting in the Ministry of Welfare and Industry. Hence it is capable of getting decisions in favor to all parts of lower class society including ultra orthodox, mildly religious and non religious basic welfare services. Shas uses this arrangement to extend its influence over larger circles in the society, not only the ultra orthodox Sephardic Jews. The curricula in the kindergartens however are supervised by the spiritual leadership and their ideological aim is to employ the system as a powerful instrument to begin the indoctrination of children for Mitzvoth practice as early as the age of 3. Unlike in the Ashkenazi Ultra orthodox system, Shas allow mixture of boys and girls at this age till the schooling age of 6. In the evenings the kindergarten's spaces function as a community network where the people gather and exchange information about the community life activity. The activity can range from job and education information for the adults to special events like organization of traveling to the prison where Arie Dery was jailed. The division of labor in the system is very much class, gender and ethnic oriented. Men usually hold the higher rank positions of management in the kindergarten administration, well off women who graduated teaching seminars of the Ashkenazi religious educational network "Beit Yaakov" hold prestigious positions like supervisors and training the kindergarten principals. The kindergarten principals who like their assistants and the kindergarten cleaning ladies are often unskilled; they are selected by the supervisors and trained by them for the job. The principals after a few years of experience as assistants and sometimes even cleaning ladies in the kindergartens are often personally trained by the supervisors during their inspection visits in the kindergarten, and the most skillful are promoted to the role of principals. This promotion is possible sometimes on the basis of close personal relations and good networking or family ties and friends that help paving the path to the jobs. In our case, all of the actors are of Moroccan origin. The kindergarten principal is autonomous, she can hire or fire the kindergarten assistants and with collaboration with the parents she can modify the curriculum by scheduling cultural enrichment programs for the children.
The most important detail on which all of the actors insist, that the supervisor, the parents and the manager, is that the principal should be in charge of maintaining religious practices which include the implementation of the formal curricula and should personally behave according to the religious practices sometimes by the Shas leadership. In other words, the principal is in charge of enforcing the religious modesty rules of dressing, hair and body language, prayer regulations, genders interaction and speech restrictions. Her knowledge should get to details such as being updated with the most recent rules that the Rabbi ordered, like for example the restriction of usage of cell phones. In this respect, when women need to be at the workplace and simultaneously take care of the domestic affair, women's lives become unbearable and the use of cell phone becomes a seductive possibility.

The kindergarten principle, in our case, an ambitious woman, is expected to be a saleswoman of the educational system and to encourage non-religious parents who bring their children to the subsidized kindergarten, to register and stay. In other words, the kindergarten principal is expected to do missionary work for Shas movement. At this point bargaining with patriarchy enters into action.

The principal invited the parents for an evening gathering to discuss enrichment courses for the children. The meeting opens with a confessional statement that she owns a cell phone "just for the security of the children", she says. The parents, the non-religious, are somewhat puzzled why this is an issue for a discussion: "so…" One of them asked. On the other hand, the religious parents, embarrassed, they are sensing that indeed it is a non-issue about which to make a commotion. They say nothing. The principal gives a few examples to explain how important it is in emergency cases and the issue is closed with the agreement that cell phone is used only in cases of emergency. But everybody understands that by this decision a fence was broken through. The general rule that forbade the women to use cell phones no longer existed for the principal. Will she indeed use it only for emergency matters? How long would it take until the word shall be passed on to the other principals?

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17 Cell phone in 1999 was strictly forbidden for use by women. Talking on the street or in the bus on the cell phone was considered violation of modesty codes and promiscuity of girls and women, not of men.
In Shas today no one remembers that in 1999 cell phone was forbidden for use for women. It is not clear if this was the occasion on which women began to use cell phones, but as it happened the Rabbis’ command did not resist and finally was given up by those who restricted it at the first place, the Rabbis.

Second issue discussed on that evening: Jamboree – early education for body awareness.

The women's body discipline in Shas begins at a very early age when the girl is sent to the kindergarten. Susan Star Sered (1986) inspected a kindergarten and found that disciplining the body includes covering sexual parts before the age of three, moving and walking humbly, choosing "quite colors" and adopting gentle gestures. The methods are accompanied with esthetic manners. Colors classification is taught as well as the tissue classification. Red, for example, is forbidden for girls and boys alike, muslin is good for girls only etc.¹⁸

In the meeting, the principal explains to the parents that she is interested in bringing a course of Jamboree as she knows this recent activity is popular in kindergarten in Israel. The activity is aimed at the development of children, beginning with toddler's sensual and body motor systems. It has significant influence on the brains development and on social communication. The children are playing and using music, colorful cloths, balls and other instruments in order to develop their creative minds, imagination, and body consciousness. Shahar Levi¹⁹ the Israeli woman who runs these classes, claimed in her research that young girls who uninterruptedly experienced spontaneous movement of the body enjoy a rich physical and cognitive repertoire. She supports her explanation with the idea of the psychoanalyst Margaret Mahler whose idea of "the psychological birth" as to how to move the body is aimed to constructs the memory on the selfhood and the inwards representation²⁰.

¹⁸ These codes of dressing are kept more strictly in the Ashkenazi kindergarten of Agudat Israel. There for example they forbid the girls to wear trousers whereas in Shas kindergartens it is not banned.

¹⁹ Yona Shahar Levi, 2004, From the Open Body to The Hidden Mental Story Personal publication. "מאונך חנויות למספים נשפים המיפה"[2]

²⁰ Margaret Mahler, 1975, The psychological birth of the human infant: symbiosis and individuation,
The description the principal has given seems to satisfy the parents and they approve it with the commitment to give extra payment for this enrichment course.

The project of Jamboree is run exclusively by nonreligious teachers; it uses very loud western pop music which is considered too radical for the ultra orthodox to listen to. During the classes the principal is 'humming' the melody. The teacher comes dressed with dancer tights that emphasize her body's contours. During the class, children, boys and girls alike, are asked to lie on their backs, legs up, open and close them, role on each other, together; something that is strictly against the disciplinary codes of body maintaining and sexes separation, even at this age. The Jamboree teacher moves across the hall, turns on the music and all of a sudden, the kindergarten is filled with noisy sounds of laughter of happy children, busy choosing daring colors like red and purple and orange cloths, rolling on each other freely. Shyness faded away as if it never existed. A norm is violated, the disciplinization of the body and strict education for modesty are broken.

To the interviewer question how come this restriction is violated, the principal replies: "No, no, it is allowed only during this one class…"

This particular kindergarten principal who brought Jamboree class to children at the age of 3 knew very well that she was engaged in an action of subversion [as I will further discuss it below] that had a very long range significant impact on the entire lives of the children. When the teacher lies on the floor with tights that show her body lines and stretch her legs up asking the small children to do the same, point on the different parts of the body, including the intimate parts, she makes a dramatic impact on educating the children to relate to their bodies, to hold it, to feel right or wrong about it. If the famous methods of Margaret Mahler are effective then these first steps are far more significant then what might be coming later on when they will be taught about the code of body conduct according to the religious laws.

To what extent was the principal conscious of subverting the patriarchal authorities while bringing Jamboree classes? This question needs to further contextualize the principles social and self awareness.

My contention is that the principal is a woman who is aware of her being located at the margins of the society, where the watching eyes of the "gatekeepers" hardly see her. She is interacting with non-religious people in the neighborhood and expected to
persuade them to keep their children in the kindergarten. From these margins and obscure lines between religion and non-religion people she could play with the rules and erode the restriction a little bit. Perhaps she was not aware of the significant implications on the children lives and body maintaining. Close to the lines that divides the religious and non religious parents, most of the parents from poor families, the boundaries of right and wrong patterns were loosened, so what she was doing is just thickening the border zone, bending the rules a little more creating new forms, hybrid forms of behavior.

When interviewed the kindergarten principle was asked to describe her degree of religiosity and she defined herself as an observant, "traditional but not fanatic, after all we must learn how to live with each other" she said and added "You see, we are all Jews. My brother is not observing the Mitzvoth but on the Sabbath he goes to the synagogue and puts on a yarmulke, he doesn't smoke in front of our father, he respects him." This state of religion observation is typical to approximately two thirds of Shas community members; hence the question we asked the principal surprised her. She thought the Jamboree classes being she said: "are not big deal, they cannot do any harm to the children and the curriculum is anyway not radically transformed…besides, what, do you expect me to, just baby-sit the children? I do for the children what is good for them."

From this training of the body of the children there is no way back. This example, and that of legitimizing the use of cell phone, show how bargaining with the patriarchy is possible from the margins at the border zone where women can bend the rules and thickens the boundaries' lines to the satisfaction of a mixed group of parents, without being sanctioned.

Whereas bargaining from the margins is practiced away from the "gatekeepers" eyes, frontal methods of bargaining are also practiced. The methods however, differ as the next illustration demonstrates.

Bargaining with the spiritual Leadership

Case study 2 – Vocational and higher education for girls
Shas relations with the non religious society are complex. On the one hand some of the (non-religious) political parties cannot construct a coalition without Shas. The political members of Shas hold a pivotal position and therefore are indispensable for the support of a coalition in the parliament, but on the other
hand non-religious tax payers perceive Shas as parasites that milk the states resources (Tesler, ibid). In the midst of this tension there were many attempts to legislate a law that enable the state enforce people to go to work and recruit the religious college's students to the mandatory military service ("Tal Law"). This had no impact on the gender division of labor, the men are still often either unemployed or registered in one of the religious colleges, for which they receive a small living allowance and so the women are still the main breadwinners and the housekeepers. Nevertheless, women hardly get the opportunity to purchase education or skill training. This situation is rooted in the Torah commands that determine that teaching Torah to girls resembles to teaching her nonsense (ibid). As winds of modernity and feminism blow over the entire society some of it inspired the women in Shas whose desire for education and career grew stronger as the time go by. The right to register to higher education whenever it is allowed it means that it was authorized first by the patriarchs, that is the Chief Rabbis and the community leader, and finally by the fathers or the husbands at home. As this authorization was never formally discussed, when women attempt to make their living in the public sphere they are exposed to a variety of possible courses in academic and semi-academic institutions and slowly develop ways to purchase education. Some of them sneak out for a short course here and a short course there. Gradually, in the early 1990, they even began to register to more systematic studies, but tend to keep it in secrete in order not to be expelled from home or even from the community. One of them, Leora, a young woman of 25 years old, married with children, said she registered to a course for kindergarten teacher. In order to be allowed to do that she has explained to her husband how difficult it was for her to maintain the family with very low wage. Of course, it is not that he did not know it, but still the bargaining made it possible for her to get his blessing. She added: "besides, I told him [the husband] I wanted to have something in my hands, some certificate, just in case I am fired and need to look for another job.

21 It is ordered by Maimonides, the sages that "A women who learns should be paid lower then a man, as she was not commanded to learn…Nevertheless, the sages ordered that: He who teaches his daughter Torah it is a s if he taught her nonsense." Quoted and translated from: http://www.daat.ac.il/DAAT/kitveyet/hamasyan/rambam-2.htm see app.#2

See also Parush Iris; 2001, Reading Women: The Advantage of Marginality In East Europe in the 19th Century Ofakin Library, Am Oved, Tel Aviv [Hebrew] see also Tamar El-Or, 1994 Educated and Ignorant: Ultra orthodox Jewish Women and Their World Lynne Rienner Publishers Boulder, CO
But my family, my parents don't know about it, neither do my neighbors”. Iris, another woman, registered to the Open University hiding the fact from the entire community. "How could you hide such a thing for so long time?" The interviewer asked. She could do it as: "In the Open University you don't have to show up on campus every day. I correspond a lot, and my husband is the only one who knew it, but no one else knew." "Why it is so important for you", she is asked. "Well, I have always wanted to learn mathematics, it has always been very interesting to me but I got married, had a child every eighteen or so months, and now I have seven children I am 38 and I have a degree in math." The women sounded happy and proud of herself when talking.

These examples show that the phenomenon of women sneaking out for education hiding from the patriarchs is a widespread phenomenon. It does not mean that the patriarchal leadership is not aware of the problem, though. This is why the idea to establish a women's college did not come as a surprise to the Chief Rabbi when he was approached for his blessing to found a college for girls. The question was how to justify it without breaking the religious code.

The idea of higher education for women was germinating for long years until in the beginning of the 2000 a college for women was founded in Jerusalem. The germination nested in the head of the Chief Rabbi's daughter Adina Bar Shalom.22 "The question was how to address the spiritual leadership", Bar Shalom recalls when talking to me. Though it was her father so it was not impossible for her as a woman, to set an appointment with him, she worked long before on how to persuade him. Bar Shalom, who grew up where male were well educated in the best Jewish colleges, but the girls graduated high schools only, or at most became teachers in Teaching Seminars before they married, is a married women who wanted her daughters and granddaughters to get qualitative education. She studied fashion in a non-religious school and said that she did it with her father's blessing, but still admitted that she was an exceptional case. Bar Shalom was conscious of political games as she was exposed at home to politics from childhood:

"Although, I could take my daughters to Bar Ilan University, a university that lays an emphasis on accentuate Jewish studies, and its entire authority consists of

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22 This account is based on my interview with Mrs. Bar Shalom, my visit in the college and discussion with the students in June 2003.
religious men, it would still have required the need to sneak around in order not to harm the family reputation in the community…as you know Bar Ilan is not approved by the Rabbi, you see…In order not to embarrass the family, I decided to put the demand straight on the table, as I always do, and ask for my father's blessing."

Bar Shalom used two arguments. First when discussing the matter with him she brought up the community needs to compete with the nonreligious public over the prestigious and well paid jobs. She brought sages quotations that address the urgent times and the need to allow girls education by referring to it as a temporary command that comes at times of anxiety and emergency. The other argument Bar Shalom used when asking her father's blessing was pragmatic "…the process is already happening and the number of girls that sneak out to Bar Ilan University grows steadily and significantly, so: …why not founding a college for girls that will train them in professions that are on demand and are very practical, like computers, office work, accounting and social work, health systems management, business administration and all shall still be under the patriarch's watch?" Bar Shalom admitted that she had to warp the idea with smoothing and calming adjectives and indicated the benefits that it could yield for the future of the entire

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a. Mamrim orders ch.2 …. 8 and if they thought that an affirmative Mitzvah should be cancelled for a while, or violate a forbidding Mitzvah, in order to bring back many people to religion, or to rescue many people of Israel from failing to do other things-they should do what the time requires…see app.#3

b. Judgements of the basiscs of the Torah, ch.9: 1 It is clear and evident in the Torah, that it is a Mitzva that stands for ever and ever: it cannot be changed reduced or extended, as they say ” All this word which I command you, that shall ye observe to do; thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.” Deuteronomy 13:1(The secret things belong unto the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.) Deuteronomy 29:28 You have learnt that all Torah things you are commanded to obey for ever; he says also "It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations” Leviticus 3:17; (and 7 other sites) It is not in heaven, Deuteronomy 30:12 This is what you have learned, that no prophet is allowed to renew anything from now on."See app.3 (translation of the biblical sections are taken from http://www.mechon-mamre.org
community. Above all she argued that this opportunity provides for young women good reasons to choose to stay within the community and not remote from it "…to even further non religious fields, god forbid…"

Before talking to her father she knew that even when he gave his blessing the road to the opening of a college was still very long. If the certificate is to provide a valuable degree in the competing market an academic license for the college needs to be granted by the Higher Education Council at the Ministry of Education. She also knew that funds for the project need to be raised. Two things that are very challenging for anyone who wants to establish a college let alone entrepreneur who had no previous credentials in the filed like she was.

When she has first discussed it with her father she was already very busy working on three tracks, knowing that she is determined to succeed. One, using her family kinship being the chief Rabbi’s daughter, she set up meetings with the Bar Ilan University authorities, she suggested to them to assemble an academic committee which will collaborate with Rabbis from Shas. Once the college is established "this group of Rabbis shall be nominated as part of the academic committee and be in charge of setting the academic standards of the college for girls." She has also spoken with those Rabbis in the community which she knew they were more liberal and discussed the idea with them, so they were there for her as candidates for the academic-Rabbis committee when she began to do her moves.

Another track was fund raising. Jews in the Diaspora especially Jews of Sephardic origin who live in communities, mainly in France and in Canada, has always maintained close contacts with the Chief Rabbi as he is considered an authority in spiritual debates and questions of Halakha Judgments. The Diaspora communities donated to the welfare of the community in Israel. Bar Shalom growing in the Rabbi's home, witnessed donation processes and grasped some talent in lobbying and fund raising. She began to correspond and travel to meet with the community leaders abroad preparing them for the initiative and the need for funds. They were excited. She found the wives if the donators most cooperative in helping her to persuade their husbands.

The third track was the professional womanpower. Bar Sahlom wanted women as teachers at the college rather then men. But the Rabbis' restrictions and the ethnic and
economic deprivation in the first years when they were in the Ashkenazi institutions did not produce Sephardic skilful women power. It was clear that it is very rare to find Sephardic women in Shas with higher education and academic degree. Bar Shalom had no choice but to offer jobs of Ph.D. and MA qualifications for graduating women at Bar Ilan. These women were mostly of Ashkenazi origin. At this point the ethnic situation turned up side down. Mizrahi women offered prestigious jobs to Ashkenazi women. Whereas everywhere Askenazi women hired and fired Sephardic women from low paid jobs, Bar Shalom was now hiring, [not yet firing.] Ashkenazi women for the best well paid jobs. Most of the academic women came from a religious subgroup defined as 'modern ultra orthodox'. Bar Shalom had an outstanding achievement, the bargain was successful, but not quite, as she faced unexpected obstacles from within the family, the Rabbi's own sons and his close advisors. They were concerned with the initiative as they pointed out to the Rabbi the emancipating power of education is a source of conspicuousness and obtrusion. Her explanation to my question, "why would they do such a thing, was there a hidden motive?" She answered: "…yes, that's right, the problem was not the promiscuity but the anticipated implication that such a project might cause a cut in the funds that they have usually enjoyed from the Jews in the Diaspora. But there was yet another, more difficult obstacle. According to the Halakha Judgments "the new which is forbidden by the Torah"\(^{24}\) is a law that could threat the religion if women are educated. This time the

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\(^{24}\) a. Leviticus 23:10-14
10 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them: When ye are come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring the sheaf of the first-fruits of your harvest unto the priest. 11 And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you; on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. 12 And in the day when ye wave the sheaf, ye shall offer a he-lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt-offering unto the LORD 13 And the meal-offering thereof shall be two tenth parts of an ephah of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto the LORD for a sweet savour; and the drink-offering thereof shall be of wine, the fourth part of a hin. 14 And ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor fresh ears, until this selfsame day, until ye have brought the offering of your God; it is a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. \[s\] See app.#4

b. Questions and Answers Chatam Sofer section 2 (10) mark 19
"...and he answered because it is very difficult to break Israel custom even if to make it easy and he saw how much it was a burden to set easy custom in doin prozbol …on the eventh year [shemita] …and how they have endeavored to set custom to permit before the omer …they should not renew the restriction because it is the custom of Israel it is Torah and the generalization is that the new from the Torah is forbidden anywere and the old of the oldest is even far more better then the new…” app.#4.

See also
Rabbis committee with whom Bar Shalom has spoken before, came to her support and provided a "counter" Halakha Judgment, one which allows girls' education because it was an "emergency need". This step opened a debate among those who were in favor and those who objected the initiative. It was at this point that Bar Shalom took the opportunity to ask the Rabbis with whom she has spoken before, to become the trustees of the college and her father to become the chair of the trustees of the college.

It worked, they agreed. She has also promised to accept women from the community only, "and they will be very serious girls. Their age will be above 18 and if possible, even married women, who are already committed and tied to their families. This way…" she said, "the students will not be exposed to external influence and will be well watched." During the debates she had with her brothers and sisters in law, "every time the negative impact of education on girls was raised I made sure to reduce its implied risks by promising that the college will be transparent to the Great Rabbis' Committee that lead the community…they can come inspect the college any time they want, without scheduling the visit, that was the agreement."

This type of bargaining with patriarchy is exactly the opposite of the previous one. It gets to the heart of patriarchy and negotiates over one of the hardest taboos that restrict women. The mode of persuasion that enabled Bar Shalom to succeed was her knowing the ins and outs, not only of her limits but also of the possibilities in the community. Knowing from within how the system works, how the interrelations are woven and how substantially religious and cultural life is ran.

Concluding remarks
In conclusion, whether they are at home, in the neighborhood or in an unusual event, in the center or in the margins, women in Shas are embroidering their lives with colorful and rich strings; even if they are forced to "wear a modesty belt". These case studies demonstrate how the women in Shas manage to construct islands of autonomy. As Shas is a movement and a community that is living within a larger and

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c. Questions and Answers Chatam Sofer section a mark 148
...secondly...and even if I don't allow because I am afraid to command and I hate the new…the new is forbidden from the Torah everywhere, but in sites where they use to allow..see app.4

25 See above fn. #14. The Ashkenazi Rabbis however are still hesitating to approve education in the universities either for girls or for boys. The fact is that those who want to study snick out and register.
more liberal society this becomes possible. It begins by external feminist influence that generates dissonance whilst creating desires of women for education, career and control over their bodies. They find new ways and create new patterns to overcome severe restrictions.

Perhaps the traditional Sephardic way of life in Shas is an advantage for the women, as it is considered more tolerant to technological changes. Minor and major changes are generated in bargaining methods, through which the uses of a cell phone as well as higher education for girls were finally authorized.

Nevertheless, bargaining by nature cannot bring revolutionary or radical changes. It inscribes gradual and limited goals. Its power is in the dissolution of the boundaries that render them absorbent without disappearing, in thickening the border zone in creating hybrid patterns of behavior. Moments of crisis are the best opportunities for the women to practice their bargaining with patriarchy talents "without pouring the baby with the bath water".

It is difficult to relate to Shas members as a prototype. In the Israeli discourse they are often referred at as they have a clear identity niche called "Shas women" or "Shas followers". One of the main reasons why it is difficult and stereotypical too, to do so, is that Shas followers form a social category that was formed by disappointed members of groups where they belonged before, either for reasons of ethnic, class or religion discrimination. Shas members in many senses range from completely non observant Jews through moderate religious to ultra orthodox. But precisely these strategies of bargaining with the patriarchal authorities, which is carried out by the ultra orthodox hegemony, men and women alike, often of older generation, mostly of Sephardic origin, produce large border zones where hybrid identities are possible to be created, dynamic and fluid movement of members keep the community life viable. As the patriarchal authorities are in favor of extending the believers population, they open the gates wide and facilitate nonreligious women to meet with ultra orthodox women and with traditional women. The interaction between different discourses, languages, practices, which the women bring with them create new forms of construction of selves and identities. These new forms reflect in mutual influence on how they interpret the rules of discipline of the body, the domestic life, family affairs and raise the children. Here the question what exactly is the new identity or identities
they create or should be created are secondary to their acting within the restrictions as subjective agents who eventually dissolve some of the rigidity of boundaries. The impact of the hybrid identity or identities on the social structure of Shas is subversive in more than one sense as the margins from where the women take action is sometimes duplicated and even triplicate. The women of Shas are part of a resisting group of Sephardic ultra orthodox who separated in the first instance from the Ashkenazi group. This does not make them the ultimate allies of the men in Shas, neither are they the allies of the Ashkenazi ultra orthodox women (or men). On the contrary, they are located at the Margins of the Ashkenazi ultra orthodox and on the margins of the male community in Shas. Their resistance and practices of subversion may be aimed at differing themselves from the prototype of the woman that Shas patriarchs inscribe to them but what they create from that margin is in fact a hybrid entity that subvert the Ashkenazi ultra orthodox woman too. In this respect they are acting in the service of the entire community subversion roles against the Ashkenazi ultra orthodox hegemony. But then again, the closer it gets to the fluid margins the more Shas patriarchs face a complexity that forces them to take at once as many contradicting consideration and to provide answers for the codes of behavior according to the Halakha rules. This is why one of the women who took the liberty to wear a wig and nylon socks in the public said triumphantly and very intuitively: "The Rabbis cannot bit us". Perhaps this is the paradigm expression of the feminism of Shas women.
Appendix

App.#1 to ft.16

App.#2 ft.23

App.#3 ft.25 a.

App.#3 ft.25 b.

App.#4 ft.26 a.

b.

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