

“We did not come here to rest”: Multiple-work among women in a national-religious community village¹

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ABSTRACT

The paper will present a group of national-religious women who, along with their spouses, have been developing a community village. The paper will attempt to show that establishing a community village challenges, at least temporarily, traditional social patterns and norms. These include gender patterns, work related norms and the distinction between sacred and secular. Under these boundary-challenging circumstances it is difficult to create hierarchies, and the women feel committed to performing both traditional and non-traditional female tasks.

This blurring of boundaries is particularly prominent against the backdrop of religious nationalism, which itself is based on the coupling of different spheres along with its messages to adolescent girls. These young girls, who study in Ulpanas, are educated to excel, simultaneously, in all areas of life – housework, career and religious work. This education stresses the need to combine religion and nationalism through intense activity and contribution at home, in the community and on a national level, as well as the importance of acting in all three spheres. Consequently, the women in this new and developing community village find themselves both creating and locked into the unending pressure to work and to excel in the various work contexts.

It is 10 at night and I am at Ruthie’s house. When I called to schedule the interview, she said: “I am at work (she holds a senior position in an organisation located in a nearby city) in the morning and with the children (three children ages 8 months, 2 years and 4 years) in the afternoon, but after I put them to sleep at 9 I will be glad to meet.” She told me that her evening hours are mostly dedicated to activity in one of the village committees on which she serves. This activity demands the investment of about 6 hours a week spent in committee meetings, on correspondence and addressing future plans. When I inquired about her choice to combine work, children and public

activity, Ruthie told me that this was not even an issue – “It is my village and I must be active for its success.”

As we sit down for the interview, I am impressed by the tidiness and style of Ruthie’s small home and by her hospitality, including her homemade cookies. I ask her to tell me about life in the young and evolving village only established three years ago. Ruthie uses the word “work” repeatedly in numerous and varied contexts. She describes the work involved in establishing the village and her activity on village committees, her career work as well as parenthood – which she also refers to as work – with an emphasis on having a large family, along with nurturing her marriage and working on shaping her personal religious identity and that of the entire village. The picture that emerges from conversations with Ruthie and her female friends who established the village is one of women strongly committed to all work spheres and constantly involved with all these spheres. Their perception of work presents a renewed definition of gender boundaries, and of the tasks required of women.

This paper will examine and attempt to explain the commitment to endless work among a group² of national-religious women who, together with their spouses, established a communal village inside the Green Line over the last few years. The women, in their 20s and 30s, are married with young children, and almost all are graduates of the national religious education system both within and beyond the Green Line. They can be seen as a unique case of the manner in which work is experienced by Israeli women. Their uniqueness is found in their commitment to combining traditional home and family roles with the significant contribution to establishing and shaping the village, career development and even social construction of religious belief. Their work will be presented as the product of the examination and renewed definition of traditional work and gender patterns. This examination stems from the social-educational-political-gender-national-religious complexity of their life, which in turn stems from three key factors: the challenge of accepted social patterns during a pioneering period; communality; and the gender messages that the national religious education system instills in its female pupils.

Pioneering, female identity and work

Social change provides fertile ground for challenging social norms (Razi, 2009). Neumann (2009) demonstrated this claim in his discussion of pioneer work as redefining perceptions and social patterns about masculinity, sexuality and the body. Additional studies showed how pioneering and the establishment of new settlements³ undermined social norms in general and gender norms in particular, which in turn led to the construction of a new female identity (Rosenberg-Friedman, 2013; Sharaby, 2002) that aspired to equality with men (Keshet, 2011). The ability to reshape norms

during a period of social change may derive from its perception as temporary in the eyes of its proponents. The creation of a new settlement is perceived as a unique event, limited in time and space, and its female participants as trailblazers with unique personality traits (Sharaby, 2002; Rosenberg-Friedman, 2011). Similarly, Sered (2011) described the perception of circumstances as being unusual, unique and one-time as a precursor to the success of gender-based struggles, for example, women permitted to serve as members of a religious council or of the entity that elects religious leaders.

The establishment of a new settlement also challenges distinctions between types of work, including gender specific, paid-unpaid or main-secondary. Female and male work differs in character, income and quantity (Hartsock, 1983/2006). Higher pay for work performed by men leads to the social conception of men's work as paid and performed outside the home, while women's work is viewed as unpaid and conducted inside the home. These work distinctions and boundaries become blurred during the settlement creation period. Women may become primary instead of secondary earners (Aharon, 2006) and challenge the distinction between work inside and outside the home as well as the hierarchy of paid, unpaid and volunteer work (Stadler, 2002). An example of social change that altered agreed social patterns regarding work can be found in the second wave of feminism, during which women challenged gendered work patterns and entered the public work sphere alongside their work at home. This led to the ensuing discussion about the "second shift" that underscored the fact that women must work long hours to achieve advancement and self-actualisation (Hochschild & Machung, 1989).

The challenge by women of work boundaries during periods of social change is not intended to replace men's work in the public sphere, but rather to expand these boundaries to include work outside the home, in addition to their home and family duties. (Sharaby, 2002; Rosenberg-Friedman, 2011). Their decision to do so, whether of their own volition or as the result of social pressure, undermines the norms that define women's work and as such is portrayed as unique and crossing gender boundaries.

Religious work may also be challenged in times of change, particularly the distinction between sacred and secular work (El-Or & Neriya, 2003; Fischer, 2009). The term "sacred work" derives from religious work conducted in the Temple to exalt God and performed for ritual purposes. Its reward is spiritual, in contrast to secular work that is for the most part remunerated materially. Durkheim addressed the binary dichotomy between sacred and secular spheres common to all religions (Stadler, 1999). He maintained that the believer faces a paradox, striving to merge with the sacred and to pursue private redemption even whilst aspiring to realise worldly needs (Stadler, 1999).

El Or and Neriya (2003) placed the dichotomous distinction between secular and sacred work in a temporal context. They pointed to two distinct time cycles in the Jewish orthodox world –the sacred and the secular. Secular time is dedicated to work,

creating and earning a living in line with the value placed on economic activity. In contrast, the ideal time cycle is that of the sacred, which is dedicated to Torah study (El-Or & Neriya, 2003). Fischer (2009) and Stadler (1999), following Durkheim, discussed the integration of ideas defined as “secular” and “sacred” in national-religious and orthodox theologies respectively. This integration creates a continuum between sacred and secular, and enables the challenging of the binary distinction. The latter may stem from desired social change, mainly among identities inherently based on a discourse of contrasts such as religious nationalism (Inbari, 2008).

Religious nationalism

Religious nationalism is a multi-school spiritual and intellectual stance that seeks to combine Jewish religious belief with modern nationalism (Gross, 2012; Leon, 2009; Cohen, 2012). The merging of these two distinct concepts leads to an emphasis on elements directly related to them, as well as to ideas resulting from their convergence. These include religious belief; educational focus on a desired career (Geiger, 2002); sharing in the national defence burden (Schwartz, 2009); volunteer and value-based activity (Geiger, 2002); and political thinking and establishing settlements throughout the country as a means of personal actualisation and of hastening redemption (Gross, 2012; Schwartz & Baumel-Schwartz, 2012)⁴. Many of these ideas are presented as part of the notion of continuous pioneering, which defines the act of building the country as a religious and worldly process that has not yet been completed.

Female identity and its formation pose a significant challenge for those attempting to combine religion and nationalism (Kahane Uli & Court, 2013; Kaniel, 2002). Religious emphasis on the woman’s traditional place in the home, along with feminist attention on integration in the public sphere fostered by the national religious education system, produced new gender relations in the national-religious community (Zarfati & Liran-Alper, 2010; Schwartz & Baumel-Schwartz, 2012; Rosenberg-Friedman, 2013). These new relations are cultivated by the national-religious education system for adolescent girls⁵ (Shakdiel, 1999), that portrays the religious woman as representing multi-dimensional giving. This includes giving at home – as a wife and a mother of many children that maintains a Jewish household according to Jewish law; giving to the community – as a volunteering and contributing community member (Rapoport, 1999; Rapoport, Garb & Penso, 1995; Rapoport & Garb, 1998); and finally giving in the labour market through personal-academic excellence (Kehat, 2008). Additional messages were added to this portrayal with the transition to boarding school education (Ulpana) for girls in recent years⁶. These messages include intensive activity, leadership qualities and female empowerment (Shakdiel, 1999; Rapoport, Garb & Penso, 1995), with an emphasis on settlement of the land as a value and as a means of

political and self-actualisation – building the personal and national home (Rapoport, Garb & Penso, 1995).

Educating adolescent girls to combine religion and nationalism was achieved by cultivating a model of women that successfully combined various spheres - developing a career that brings in a livelihood, and volunteering to participate in the building new settlements, whilst simultaneously preserving a religious role at home as wives and mothers. These women⁷ are depicted as particularly religious and as fulfilling the ideal of 'Eshet Chayil' - a woman of valour (Rappaport, 1999). Another example of the manner in which the education system cultivates the coupling of values emerges from its message that the values of motherhood and a religious home can be used to promote issues in the national public sphere while blurring the boundaries between them. El-Or and Aran (2010) used this idea to show how motherhood was used to justify the building of the settlement Rachelim⁸.

Educating towards conformity, including communal conformity, is also used by the national-religious school system to cultivate combined values of nationalism and religious belief and practice among adolescent girls (Gross, 2012; Kaniel, 2002; Rapoport, Garb & Penso, 1995). Sharaby (2002) described the way communal conformity increases during times of change and creates *communitas* (to follow Turner's phrase). During this communal phase, collective boundary crossing (for instance, the definition of gender roles or work divisions) may take place. At the end of this temporary period, according to Sharaby, there is a transition from *communitas* to community – a defined and controlled state that preserves the boundaries created during the founding period. This underscores the temporary nature of the flexibility that exists during the pioneering period.

As the product of the national-religious education system for girls – one that urged them to combine religious belief with enhanced feminine identity through social involvement – national-religious women demanded to be educated in the religious texts which, in contrast to men, are not a mandatory part of women's education (El-Or, 2006). The national-religious rabbinical establishment justified acceptance of their demand through their capacity as future mothers who will now be better equipped to educate their children in Judaism (Schwartz & Baumel-Schwartz, 2012). From the women's perspective, this change came about in response to their protest against women's exclusion from the religious world (Ross, 2007). The change signified realisation of the message cultivated by the national-religious school system, which viewed religious studies as a means of self-actualisation. (Ross, 2007:146; Shakdiel, 2004). The feminist-religious discourse created change in all areas of religious life, including theological conceptions, the interpretation of traditional texts, religious practices and the inclusion of the female equality discourse on the religious agenda (Kahat, 2008; Ross, 2007; Teitelbaum, 2011)⁹. Women began to fulfil "time-bound

positive commandments”¹⁰, and blazed the way for others by stretching gender boundaries in religious society (Koren, 2011). Family structure was also affected by the changes described. The traditional structure, through which men engage in community religious practices performed in the synagogue and women are exempt from these practices and take care of the children, was challenged by women who demanded a more egalitarian gender division with respect to religious practice (ibid).

In summary, situations of social transition – and the establishment of a community village is one such situation – are a temporary point in time during which it is possible to challenge accepted social patterns. This tendency is pronounced in a community predicated upon the merging of social categories such as religion and nationalism. National-religious education for adolescent girls, with its emphasis on the establishment of new settlements, positioned its graduates at the intersection of tradition and change. This enabled – and even required – the women to take part in shaping the community of whose establishment they played a principal role, including the construction of a female identity. The literature concerning the national-religious education of adolescent girls described above pertains for the most part to the system and its messages from more than a decade ago (for example: Rapoport, 1999; Rapoport, Garb & Penso, 1995; Rapoport and Garb, 1998; Gross, 2003). The current paper will examine a group of women realising the values upon which they were educated about ten years after graduation, and will attempt to show that their commitment to multiple and constant work in all spheres of life is grounded in their education.

Methodology

The paper is based on ethnography conducted during the years 2011-2012 in a national-religious community village established in 2008. Fieldwork included in-depth interviews with 18 women, as well as conversations and observations conducted during community events. Permanent homes had not yet been built and the families – all with between one and four children at the time – lived in caravans or small apartments of up to 75 square metres. The village was comprised of a homogeneous population – young national-religious families, adults aged between 25-35 and the majority of children between 0-8 years old. Most of the women interviewed were educated in national-religious ulpanas. As adults, many of them chose to continue their Jewish studies within the framework of a midrasha¹¹. They also went on to university or college, and worked in white-collar professions such as social work, education, psychology, engineering and medicine.¹²

Most of the spouses also hold academic degrees however; mirroring Israeli society, more women than men have academic degrees¹³ and many of the women are higher educated than their spouses¹⁴.

The village defines itself as egalitarian and is managed democratically. The village coordinator is a salaried employee who manages the village alongside the general assembly and twelve social committees (culture, Torah/religious, etc.). Committees are comprised of five members and membership is voluntary. At the time the paper was written, five of the twelve committee chairpersons were women. Some committees are almost always chaired by a man (the security and agriculture committees for example); other committees are considered as dealing with ‘feminine’ issues and as such attract more women (e.g. the education committee), and many committees such as absorption and planning are chaired by either a man or a woman depending on the candidates and the individual elected. Many village members, male and female, who are not formal members on any committee are nonetheless active on committees or as volunteers in other frameworks (operation of the children’s play centre, involvement with adult extra-curricular classes, teaching religion classes, etc.).

Most residents do not view themselves as living in the periphery, although the village would be considered as such based on its geographic location. Originally from central Israel, a part of the middle class in terms of education, occupation and perceived ability to better themselves (Leon, 2009), and geographically distant from the centre with the attendant Zionist connotations, the village members belong to the periphery geographically but to the Israeli centre socially. Thus the significance and difficulty of living in the periphery has more to do with their physical distance from employment centres (the closest city is about a 40-minute drive) and from their families of origin (for most about a two-hour drive). This also means that within the community there are no adults older than them that can serve as support or authority figures.

“We did not come here to rest”: The female founders of the village

The blurring of boundaries between various work categories (for example home vs. public, volunteer vs. paid and female vs. male) leads women into combine their existing ‘women’s work load’ with work that they had previously either avoided or had been excluded or distanced. In this community village women engaged in what can be defined as ‘multiple-work’. This comprised of tasks and responsibilities from different cultural categories, which they performed concurrently as pioneering women involved in the creation of a new community. The perceived need to carry this multiple-work load was particularly dominant among the women that initiated and established the village. It is very likely that many of these active and highly aware women would have been equally involved had they lived in existing villages; however, a new community offers women the opportunity to add new kinds of activities and presents a communal need for their (multiple) work”.

The assertiveness and initiative to establish the new village characterises, and is unique to the group of women founders – namely those who joined the community when it was still in its temporary location two years before the move to the permanent village – as well as the women who joined the village in its first year. Sarit¹⁵, one of the founders, stated: “Those who joined during the first year came because of a pioneering spirit”. Ofra described the beginning: “I don’t know how it is in other villages, but here, it is really work”. The founding women view the contribution to establishing and consolidating the village as a necessity. Ofra remembered the initial period: “there were feelings of being called to the flag, and the committees are very demanding”. The women mentioned the many hours they invested, similar to the men, serving on committees. These efforts stemmed from a sense of commitment to the village and the belief that they, the women, are particularly suited for this endeavour. Orna added: “there was a feeling that you must work for the village, we did not come here to rest, a person that will not contribute will not remain here. You must serve on a committee”.

Involvement in shaping the village in its initial stages was gender-equal. Orna noted: “a fundamental decision was made that every committee would be half and half [in terms of gender], in reality... there are not many men that want to be members of the culture committee...”. While gender literature views men’s increased activity as normative, intensive activity by women is perceived as unusual. Some of the founding women used their gender characteristics as well as conformity to the national-religious value placed on large families to their advantage, by investing the time made available through their frequent maternity leaves into the village and its needs. Orna noted:

“in the first year I was on maternity leave... and I dealt with village issues. A year later, Rachel was on maternity leave and worked on the committee... For us maternity leave means contributing to the village... I was a committee member, all meetings were held at my house because I had a baby and I returned to the committee after I gave birth, there was no question about that”.

The discourse surrounding the development of the village is reminiscent of the activity of the mothers (and fathers) of many of the women, who themselves were involved in establishing new settlements in Judea and Samaria in the 1970s and 1980s. Liat described thus: “My parents and my husband’s parents all shared in the establishment of community villages when they were young”. Nofar added:

“I always wanted to establish a new community village, my parents established a settlement and I was one of its first children. At my Bat Mitzvah my father said – you have to unselfishly dedicate your life to the People of Israel. So it was obvious that I would establish something new”.

However, while for their mothers the woman's role in founding a new community village centred on maintaining the home and raising a family in the new location – leaving management and shaping of the new community to the men (Feige, 2002) – these women chose to play an active role in building and shaping the new village.

The women who had grown up in settlements in Judea and Samaria described the experience of their family of origin, who had witnessed the character of the village they had built undergo complete and unfavourable changes. Ruth described how the permeation of conservative values changed the nature of the settlement established by her grandfather:

"My grandfather was among the founders of one of the settlements, but [because at some stage he stopped being active] it did not turn out like he wanted... he was of Eastern origin, not religiously strict, and the settlement turned into something very conservative".

From her grandfather's story, Ruth concluded that she must continue to be active despite the hardships, in order to preserve the desired character of the village. The interviewees indicated that this was one of underlying motives for their extensive community activity. Ofra indicated:

"What attracted us was that you could make things happen, you could influence... I want to ensure the things that are important to me, it really connects you to the village... the desire to give my take on this whole story, to add my colour to situations that can be advanced".

By comparison, women who joined the village after the founding period expressed a slightly different attitude towards their work.

Between founders and joiners

Ronit, one of the initiators of the village, describes the difference between the founders (i.e. those who initiated, and lived in the community during the first three years) and those that joined after this period: "The founders undoubtedly have to be a bit different... compared to people that join now, that come because of the quality of life". Bruria, who was not one of the founders, stressed that social factors rather than values guided her decision to join the village:

"I grew up with the desire to build a village – my parents established a village, [but] it is not that I came because I was looking for a village to establish, it is nice as an aside to feel that you are significant and contributing, it really is... but it is not what brought us here. We wanted to leave the place where we

lived; several couples are our friends here”.

Other women who joined the village in later waves addressed the flexibility they had to determine their level of involvement. Sarit said: “Currently I do not want to volunteer on a committee. They really want me to be on a committee but I do not want to at this time”. Hedva explained: “You can choose how much to take part, I still do not feel comfortable being on a committee and that is ok, you know your limits”. The founding women shaped the village so as to allow for gender equality and feminine activity. Women who joined in later years could choose whether or not to be active on village committees. The choice by some to play an active role in community life stemmed from the village outlook, promoting active women, as well as from a personal desire grounded in the education they received that encouraged involvement and influence. At the same time – and contrary to the actions of the founding women – these women do not feel a community imperative to serve on committees.

Despite differing commitments to various types of work between the founders and those that joined after the founding period, all the women face the same work issues – the difficulty to combine home and career and the place of prayer (working God) in their life.

Home-career conflict within the village context

The female founders of the village invest similarly in shaping the village, developing their career, parenting and additional work in the home and public spheres. This contrasts with the message conveyed to Israeli women, to give priority to family over career (Aharon, 2006). Many of the women attribute their commitment to work across all spheres to the education the national-religious school system gives its daughters. Eti said: “We want to excel in everything in life; national religious women must be successful at work, earn a living and look good.” Liat described the educational message that excelling and combining work spheres leads to self-realisation (Rapoport, 1999):

“This is national-religious education – to manage to do everything, to be good at everything. Something in the values and something very personal. To do what is expected and to do everything, to have an academic degree, it is very personal. However there is something in the national-religious education about being good at everything, army, studies, to delve into things, to ask questions, to be inquisitive, not to give up”.

The women think and speak about reducing the amount of work they invest in their various tasks, but in fact do not relinquish any of them. Galit described:

"To reduce the volume of work, of course I never [considered it]. I want to work part-time but I can't, also from a professional standpoint... it means losing part of what you have ... when I see and envy women who are teachers that have vacations, which is something I don't have at all, in terms of work hours and flexibility, I am really envious of this. I wish it was possible... but it isn't".

Renana said:

"I work full time now, even more than full time, it is crazy... my dream is to work until 1:00 in the afternoon and then come home and prepare lunch for my kids, not that I like to prepare lunch but it seems to me to be the right thing".

Renana is referring to the various messages conveyed to her as a national-religious woman. On the one hand, glorification of the religious woman's role in the home leads to a guilty conscience on her part and the part of Galit and many of their female friends, in light of the long hours they spend working outside the home. This anxiety prompts them to declare their desire to fill their traditional gender role. Renana and the others admit that this is not their dream, and that their aspirations lean towards the other message conveyed to women by Israeli society in general and by national religious society in particular, one that calls for ambitious integration of women into the workforce. Accordingly – and despite the great difficulty they express – these women and many of their female friends do not plan to give up their work or reduce the time they invest in it outside the home. Orna depicted the village women as unique:

"Women [here] must work, it is important to them, and not stay at home. In comparison to other villages for example, where women stay at home out of choice and ideology. The difficulty is between family and career, it is hard to combine, you cannot cut off your career and it is difficult to stop the number of children [you have]".

Women's work also involves cultivating the home. Orna continued:

"Food must be tasty and aesthetic, you must always have cookies at home, and bring food [to the neighbors] all the time... we also entertain a lot, every Friday night we gladly invite friends and people for dinner, but the minute it went beyond the... to show how much you bring... the perfect mother, who has time for this and this and this".

The women described village solutions devised to address the difficulty of combining motherhood, home and career. Neta, who holds a senior position and has a long drive to work, claimed that:

“A great deal of consideration is given here to working parents. For example, Ministry of Education kindergartens open at 7:30 in the morning, and there was discussion here about opening at 7:00 to enable parents to get to work”.

Rona described an idea she wishes to promote:

“To think outside the box and see how to help working families. Because there are no babysitters or grandmothers here... because there are times when I really feel, mainly in winter, I shouldn’t feel like this, but because of my strong commitment to work, I feel that I am doing something wrong when I take three sick-child days. It is a lot, it is half a work week. It is a lot... I think we need a think group, a steering committee with additional villages, to find solutions, as far as I am concerned even at the legislative level, for working families. That women and men living in the periphery... will have more sick-child days... I was thinking at the caretaker level, like a place for sick-children. I am not sure that this is good for the children, I am not sure I would send my children”.

Although Rona thinks of community solutions, she presents them as unfeasible.

Another solution for easing the hardship is family-based, in that most if not all the women share the load and responsibility of housework and parenting with their spouses. This would be to view husbands as equal partners, especially since most husbands do not work longer hours than their wives.

Sarit compares herself to her sisters:

“My sisters – they are always alone with the children and the entire burden falls on their shoulders, it is theirs. Maybe he helps her, but here it is really... it [parenting] is for the most part a family matter. A man that does not take part – his wife is considered to be miserable, how it must be difficult for her”.

Sarit stresses the man’s role in educating his children:

“if there is a family where the man is not involved enough in childcare... people say – of course it is because the father is not invested, what can you expect when the father is not around?”

The men’s commitment to sharing the care of their children – intended, among other things to enable their spouse to work outside the home – is also demonstrated with respect to collective prayer. This comes into play against the backdrop of the notion, challenged by many women in the village as elsewhere, that since women are exempt from synagogue prayer they should be the ones caring for the children while the men participate in synagogue services. The women in this community village demanded to realise their spiritual right to pray in synagogue, with the resulting problem being who would care for the children while their parents are involved in prayer. The community

mobilised to find solutions, among them a greater tolerance of the presence of children in the synagogue and along with the disturbance they create. Sharon described: "We just bought many books about religion for the synagogue... it is working, we spent money, we bought a whole library for the children, it quietens them for a while and gives time to pray".

Another solution is rotation between the spouses, such that one parent prays while the other watches over the children. Tali described: "On Yom Kippur... I wanted to pray and if the children [interfered] a bit, then Yaniv took them outside". Sarit recounted how her mother was impressed by the legitimacy given to women's prayer in synagogue while the men looked after the children: "My mother says – the number of men here that go outside during synagogue prayer is amazing. [It is amazing] that it is trivial here".

Women's synagogue prayer prompted some of them to aspire¹⁶ to participate in additional public ritual practices, until then the exclusive domain of men. These practices include dancing with the Torah in the women's area in synagogue, reciting a segment from the Torah on Simchat Torah and reading the Book of Esther on Purim. Referring to these religious choices in the village, Sharon said: "[When we established the village] it was very clear to us that we are equal among equals, we also taught classes, it was really half and half... the default is not only men".

The desire for female prayer does not characterise all women in the village. Nurit expressed her dilemma about the inclusion of female religious practices:

"There is no agreement about this and I am very naïve, I go along with the Rabbis [those that decide]. First because I feel comfortable with the Halacha, it is a tradition observed for years, it worked very well for years, I say – honour what those wiser than you decided. On the other hand, there is innovation in the Halacha, it is updated".

From the conversation with Nurit, we learn that the centrality of the female religious discourse in the village requires every woman (and man) – whether she is involved in the matter or not – to consider the issue and take a stand. This reflects both the message of their education, which calls for conscious thought and practice in religious matters, and the ways in which the village views and addresses the feminist interpretation of their education.

The women's outlook, as influenced by their religious schooling, is also evident in matters with both sacred and secular elements. Thus, for example, discussions about the synagogue architecture and design also addressed the possibility of female prayer, and construction of the Mikveh generated a discussion about female commandments. Nurit noted that female prayer can, at the same time, be given a spiritual and/or feminist interpretation: "I understood that for Sharah it [prayer] is... a female act

of religiosity and also in fact a desire to achieve sacredness. For me it does not give [sacredness], for me it is a feminine act”.

Women’s choice to study and develop careers in professions considered to be spiritual and altruistic can also be seen within the context of the blurred boundaries between the sacred and secular. These professions are in keeping with the national-religious values and education that emphasise volunteering and community activity, such as social work, psychology and the medical professions. Ruth noted:

“I gave a class about the exodus from Egypt and public responsibility. And I thought [to myself] that it was embarrassing and awkward that here I was speaking about this when the women in the audience are social workers, teachers, they are all saving the world”.

Ruth’s reference to secular careers in religious terms of sacredness challenges the distinction between ‘secular’ work – expected to be limited to meeting the family’s economic needs – and sacred committed work that must be cultivated and in which an individual must invest and excel.

Most of the village women speak of the blurred boundaries between work categories in terms of overload, hardship and pressure to keep in line with the activity level of their female neighbours. Aya recounted her first year in the village:

“I felt pressure. I was at home with my daughter. I did not take part in any significant committee, just helped a bit in social involvement and always felt it was not enough. I could not understand how the women had the energy to have a baby and also work and also volunteer on committees. To me it seemed too much, and I felt bad that I could not do all these things all at once. There was also this atmosphere that everybody has to invest and contribute and be active all the time, there was this pressure.”

Ofra stressed the effect of women’s unending activity on the community:

“There is a lot of envy towards those women that remain perfect, that succeed in doing everything. Some really succeed in doing everything. There are those perfect women, with their clean house, with this clean polished image. Then, there are those that really want to be close to these perfect women so they can partake of the glory, there are also those that recoil from them precisely because of this... there are women for whom it is very difficult, yes this race is difficult, but it is only discussed behind closed doors with best friends”.

Many women (and men) in the village sought to be involved in as many activities as possible, whether volunteering on a committee or attending courses and lectures offered in the community. However, since it was not possible to be active or to attend

all activities due to multiple-work expectations and commitments, they were described as temptations that cannot all be satisfied.

Noa stressed the desire to end these temptations and demands:

"We are all cramped together, close to each other, and everybody is also very busy, there are private activities, work and livelihood, and there are public activities. Yoav is on a committee, so every evening there is a meeting and I am with the children. On the evenings when he is at home I volunteer a bit. So every evening one of us is not at home, it doesn't make sense. And you also want to acquire some training so there is homework and workshops and you want to go, and there was a class and thousands of other things you want to attend and don't make it and you say – that's it, enough".

As a community, the women devised ways to help each other contend with the difficulties they experienced. For example, they **avoided placing direct pressure** on one another to work, and respected each other's personal choices. Orly noted:

"No woman will say 'come [to a class]' or 'why aren't you coming?' There isn't any pressure, you don't have to attend. You can hear about a class and people will tell you that it was interesting, they will not say – why didn't you come".

This can be seen as a reaction to messages of the national-religious education that urge women to engage in ceaseless work. Alternatively, it may suggest acceptance of these messages, in which case there is no need for pressure since the message has been internalised (Shakdiel, 1999). Furthermore, while some women claimed that work for the community is not an obligatory part of life in the village, others felt that those who withstand the pressure and choose not to be involved in village work will not be considered for committees or leadership roles.

The women also describe situations of **mutual help and support**. Adi, in an advanced stage of pregnancy, recounted something that happened when she came home after a draining day at work:

"yesterday, my neighbour... saw me [returning from work], she said – you must be exhausted, she took my daughter and put her in the bath with her daughters and then dinner, I was with them, but [the neighbour said] hey, go get some rest, I'll prepare it."

Adi's explanation of the help she received from her neighbour centres on the fact that she returned from a very tiring day at work. Considering that most women in the village are very busy, such overtures of support are offered for the most part only to those who are seen as in need and deserving – such as a pregnant hard-working mother.

Women spoke of temporarily ameliorating the difficulty involved in combining different types of work, for example by extending their maternity leave¹⁷, trying (usually unsuccessfully) to refrain from serving on committees for a specific period of time, or somewhat postponing their next pregnancy. Sarit described:

“Women who find it difficult ultimately cut out some things, there is no choice. I also want a full time job and to study and a family but it is impossible, most women in the world experience this, all women ages 25-40 with children do less. You have to give up something...I am sure that when there will be permanent houses then people will have cleaners”.

Eti, one of the village founders, summarises the discussion about women's work by presenting the social pressure to keep up: “I can't afford to be weak...I know I am like this and I think I have girlfriends like this”.

Summary discussion

The paper presented multiple-work characterising women in a developing national-religious community village. Their commitment to multiple-work, as well as the contribution and social acceptance of this work, were presented as the combined product of national-religious education, intensive village communality and the challenge to accepted social patterns at a time of village development.

Literature concerning national-religious education documents the numerous messages conveyed to female pupils about, among other things, religious belief, work, contribution and founding new settlements - all of which demand intensive activity and the reshaping of boundaries. This paper presented products of this education process about a decade after the above-mentioned studies were conducted - a committed and ambitious young generation that shifted its focus as Israeli trailblazers from the national to the community sphere. In common with the unfolding of religious feminism, the settlement helped women develop, deepen and add to the messages cultivated by their national-religious education in the village-building context. They translated this into roles and responsibilities, which they took upon themselves as part of their involvement in shaping the character of the village. Previous generations of national-religious women were involved in settling the country viewed their role in the settlement endeavour primarily as homemakers (Feige, 2002). In contrast, the founders of the village which is the focus of this paper saw their role in shaping the community village as similar to that described in the literature about pre-State female pioneers – women that added boundary-challenging activities in the public sphere, similar to the accepted activities of men, to their traditional house-based tasks (Rosenberg-Friedman, 2013). For these women, founding a new settlement involves

not only tending to the home but also contributing and taking personal responsibility for the physical, social, economic and spiritual shaping of the community – until then considered to be the domain of men – through activity on committees and efforts to influence the character of the community.

Their education, along with the pioneering ethos, geographic distance from their communities of origin and life in a small village, created a sense of community described by the women as supportive but at the same time conscious of those that do not conform to its values – including values pertaining to women's multiple-work. The female founders formulated a community message, which the majority accepts as binding, that champions intensive activity of women in all spheres of life.

This community conformity is compatible with Sharaby's (2002) claim regarding *communitas*, that characterises new communities in the establishment stage and facilitates the cultivation of ideas, in this case encouraging women's extensive activity and visibility. The perception of the village as promoting – or at least enabling – female activity will remain even if women choose to be less active than their spouses on village committees, in the income they bring home from their work or in their religious practices. Thus, they will always be able to return to intensive activity should they choose to do so.

According to Rosenberg-Friedman (2011, 2013), the pioneering period is viewed as a singular time, and as the village becomes more established women report less investment in village-related activities. The temporary nature of this period enables the creation of a transitory and mixed sphere within which it is difficult to maintain separate work and religious hierarchies. In this space, the male is female and the female is male; the home sphere is public, the sacred is secular and the secular is sacred. In this temporary situation, the sacred and secular are also intermingled (Inbari, 2008; Stadler, 1999). Thus for the women in the community village discussed in this paper, work traditionally considered to be 'secular' (such as career) is defined as sacred (a world saving mission), housework and the daily education of children (secular work) is perceived as the women's religious role (sacred). Founding the village constitutes the realisation of religious values 'the path to redemption' (Fischer, 2009) yet also requires involvement in secular matters such as planning and village events. Finally, the women's feminist choice to participate in religious practices previously unobserved or out of bounds is perceived as sacred work, while defying the religious authority figures opposed to this inclusion may hint at a debate that belongs to the "secular" world. By attributing sacredness to a certain type of work, it becomes vital and sustaining both materially and spiritually. The greater the number of tasks viewed as sacred, the harder – if not impossible – it becomes to create a hierarchy of work categories or to forgo a responsibility. Under these conditions, the women feel committed to make an effort to fill all tasks. At the same time, by

infusing a certain type of work with sacredness and placing it in a religious context, the national-religious women of this village alleviate or at least explain and justify the difficulty they experience in the face of endless and multiple-work because of its religious necessity and significance.

As noted, the underlying idea of viewing women's multiple-work as sacred is based on the ideal of 'Eshet Chayil' (Rapoport, 1999). 'Eshet Chayil' is also a Jewish blessing with which a husband blesses his wife on Sabbath eve (Friday evening) for her many deeds (Zifroni, 2008). The blessing defines the Jewish women by virtue of her endless work in all dimensions and spheres of life, and her expansion of these spheres through negotiation. Zifroni (2008) maintains that the blessing describes a strong active woman that uses both her physical and spiritual strength to perform her multiple and varied tasks.

The blurring and crossing of agreed social hierarchies and patterns of work, even if temporarily during the 'pioneering' founding period, placed a heavy demand on the women of the village and led them to challenge social, gender and religious norms. This challenge cultivated a community message encouraging examination of cultural codes which may have paved the way for examination and questioning of additional norms in the future, among them family size, ideology and religious belief. From this perspective, these women's intensive and ceaseless activity forged the way for them and for other women to influence the future character of their community village.

NOTE

- 1 I would like to thank Ashkelon Academic College for its generous contribution to the publication of this article.

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- 2 18 female interviewees from an expanding community village comprised, as of now, of about 70 families.
- 3 Refers to settlements in the general meaning of the word, in the world and in Israel. In this paper, it refers to new settlements, both religious and secular, established from the Yishuv (pre-State) period up to the present time.
- 4 Since its inception, religious nationalism has been criticized both from within

and without for aspiring to combine religious belief with Zionist secular activity (Geiger, 2002). One way to contend with this criticism is to prove the feasibility of combining the two by showcasing individuals that succeed in joining religious and secular beliefs. In doing so it conveys the message that religious nationalism is a whole larger than its parts.

- 5 As noted, mainly in studies from the mid-1990s up to the mid-2000s.
- 6 National-religious education for girls of high-school age developed following the emerging trend of sending outstanding male pupils in this education system to receive elitist education in Yeshivot Tichoniyot (educational institutions for high school boys focusing on the study of traditional religious texts). Ulpanas for women - the parallel of Yeshivot Tichoniyot, were established for outstanding adolescent girls during the first half of the 20th century, and grew in number and influence during the 1970's (Gross, 2003).
- 7 The message conveyed by the national-religious education system to adolescent girls regarding female identity differs from its education of boys regarding their gender identity. According to Amar-Halevi (2013), the system avoids the issue of masculine identity, or presents masculinity mainly in contrast to femininity.
- 8 The notion that women and children are perceived as less threatening to the authorities led to their presence at critical junctures in settlement efforts and to initiatives by women to establish settlements in Judea and Samaria. Beit Hadassah in Hebron for example was settled by a group of women headed by Rebbetzin Miriam Levinger in 1979 (Feige, 2002).
- 9 The women's deviation from the rabbinical position that upholds limited study of religious texts by women generated criticism directed towards them. They were accused of using the secular feminist discourse and argument as the only justification for their activity and protest in the matter (Kahat, 2008). The women on the other hand struggled to gain permission to study the texts within the school framework as a means of spiritual development (Koren, 2011).
- 10 A group of commandments known as positive time-bound commandments that men are obligated to fulfil and from which women are generally exempt, among them: listening to the Shofar, sitting in the Sukkah, waving the lulav (closed frond of the date palm tree), reading Megilat Esther (the Book of Esther) on Purim and reciting the mourner's Kadish for their loved ones who passed away (Ross, 2007; Israel-Cohen, 2012).
- 11 A midrasha is a Jewish studies institute for female high school graduates. In most cases women attend a midrasha after completing their military or national service.

- 12 In the most recent census conducted on 2008, 70.7% of the men and 74.4% of the women held an academic degree, and 100% of the men and 96% of the women participated in the civilian work force.
- 13 According to the 2012 Israel Bureau of Statistics, 53% of academic degree holders in Israel are women.
- 14 Seven of the 18 women interviewees have more years of academic study or more advanced academic degrees than their spouse and as a result are employed in positions considered to be more senior than that of their husband. Three of the husbands studied more academic years than their spouse, and with respect to the remaining couples, both partners have similar levels of education.
- 15 All of the names in the paper are pseudonym.
- 16 A similar process is ongoing in many national religious communities in Israel.
- 17 A decision to reduce the workload may be difficult for women whose income is needed. However, the relatively cheap cost of living due to the standard of living in the village may enable a family to live on a lower income, at least temporarily.

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