

A Karaite taste: Femininity, food and religion

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines immigrant women's reflections on their daily tasks as a tool for integrating into Israeli society. Based on theories of foodways and gendered views of cooking, it shows how structurally weak Karaite-Jewish immigrant women define a social place for themselves and their community. In Israel, the Karaite women face a complex situation in which their Rabbinical (the Karaite name for non-Karaite Jews) neighbors criticize them as not Jewish enough and question their belonging to the Israeli nation, while at the same time coexisting beside them. The Karaite women express their reactions to the Rabbanites, their wish to preserve their customs and religion, and their desire for acceptance via a discussion of their cooking and feeding. This discourse reveals use of cooking to comment on religious and social positioning. The Karaite women present a connection between their foods, Karaism and Judaism, portraying their domestic skills and Jewishness as superior to those of Rabbinical women. This discourse is a means of expressing social claims, coping with exclusion and presenting their individual, family and communal identity.

The Karaites

The Karaite belief rejects the oral testament and observes only the written one (Astren, 2004). Karaites differ from Rabbanites (the Karaite name for non-Karaite Jews) in a few practices, including dietary laws (kashrut), substituting the personal responsibility of the believer for the authority of the Rabbis, and the calendar (Colligan, 2003). The majority of Israeli Karaites immigrated from Egypt during and after the 1950s (Newman, 1996). While the state's decision to regard the Karaites as Jews obligates the Israeli Chief Rabbinate to recognize them as such, their Rabbinical surroundings continue the historical denunciation of Karaism (Ichilov and Stern, 1978). In Egypt, this was done by seclusion or negation of Karaites, by refusing to meet, marry or share celebrations, and by eating (Beinin, 1998). In Israel, this entails excluding the Karaites and challenging their Judaism, which has led to their representation as people whose ascription to the religion, and therefore the nationality, is in doubt (Laskier, 2001). Excluding viewpoints have been expressed

even more vehemently toward those Karaites who chose to settle in the Karaite moshav (cooperative Israeli agricultural settlement) discussed in the present paper. The geographic distance of this moshav from Karaite centers intensifies the members' daily relations with members of neighboring Rabbinical settlements, who cast doubt on the Karaites' Judaism (Cicurel, 2005).

The Karaites present themselves as the authentic Jews, which simultaneously expresses their uniqueness and their belonging to Judaism, and therefore also to Israeli society (Colligan, 2003). Members of the moshav have exploited their homogeneity to shut its gates on Karaite holidays, and foods they do not regard as kosher (e.g., dairy products during Passover) are excluded from the moshav's grocery store, creating tight social control of members (Cicurel, 2005).

As for belonging to the Israeli state, is an important notion for moshav residence in the area (Schely-Newman, 2002), the men of the moshav emphasize their Israeliness by exploiting the Israeli connection between Zionism, agriculture, settlement of the Negev and service in the military or police force (Cicurel, 2005). However, the moshav's women have fewer means at their disposal for presenting Israeliness. As women immigrants, whose agricultural work is presented as "help only" to the husband, most of their resources for presenting their identity are from their domestic work. Generations of effort to be assimilated into Israeli society have changed their feminine discourse about food from the discussion of cooking to a declaration of identity.

The women of the moshav, like the rest of its inhabitants, can be divided into three generations: the immigrant generation that established the moshav; their sons and daughters, who were born into it and remained there (or daughters-in-law, mostly Karaites, who grew up elsewhere in Israel and came to the moshav when they married); and the grandchildren, who are today mostly children or young adults. The women of the moshav's founding generation worked throughout their lifetime with their husbands on the farm, parallelly managing their households, trying to adjust to Israeli culture and yet preserve their Karaite culture. Their daughters and daughters-in-law, on the other hand, hardly did any physical work on the farms and had more time to invest energy in the household or in developing a career (Cicurel, 2005).

Cooking as a means for constructing an ethnic feminine identity

The idea of using cooking for public statements of identity was raised by Counihan (2008) in her discussion on food voice—the way in which people, mainly women, use food to transmit messages about their lives. Counihan claimed that, until recently, discussion of food was not only a possible means, but also almost the sole means of making the feminine voice heard in public. Discussion of cooking has therefore turned into an expression of feminine practice and activism. This is partly due to the feminine exclusivity, especially among uneducated women, in making

decisions regarding the feeding of the family (De Vault, 1991). They are given this role due to its connection to daily service work (Ferree, 1998; Rosin, 2005), which is forced upon them. The connection between femininity and housework also stems from the inferior status of domestic work, which is perishable, does not entail the accumulation of assets or resources, involves satisfying others and thus demonstrates women's relegation to men (Counihan, 2004).

On the other hand, food holds the potential for personal feminine power embedded in the role of the "feeder." Lewin (1943) demonstrated how feminine control over the choice of foods that enter their homes and their cooking emphasize their crucial role. Counihan (2004) claimed that, within the family framework, cooking may afford women advantages such as love and power that derive from being necessary. Other researchers referred to this feminine position as stemming from their culinary influence on husbands and children (Hupkens, Knibbe and Drop, 1997; Kemmer, Anderson and Marshall, 1998; Voski Avakian and Haber, 2005). Still others spoke of food's connection to religion, presenting women as experts in the religious context (Ochs, 2000; Sered, 1996). Such culinary practices open possibilities for women to make economic decisions and become foci of information and authority, and afford them social esteem and respect in the community without challenging their traditional roles (Gvion, 2006).

This viewpoint positions women, by virtue of being supervisors of domestic food consumption, as boundary managers, defining and preserving cultural and ethnic borders (El-Or, 2006). Audrey Richards (1932), one of the first to research the anthropology of food, claimed that food comprises a mediating cultural factor, which unites or divides cultures. Shared cooking and eating may be viewed as an issue that indicates social cohesion. Conversely, intercultural conflicts are often based on struggles over food sources, and one of their long-term implications is the avoidance of shared eating.

Many of the cultural boundaries that are based on the perception of food are set by feminine cooking (Gvion, 2006; Sutton, 2001). Cooking unique foods arouses personal or cultural memory, thus helping define those eating these foods as belonging to a family or community, as opposed to people not invited to these meals (Douglas, 1999:Ch. 18). This cooking also defines the foods that are to be avoided (for instance, non-kosher foods); therefore, one must not eat in homes where such food is cooked (Bahloul, 1995).

Cultural identity definition via food is enhanced in the discussion of ethnic culture. Preservation of the culinary and thus the culture among immigrants is active, rational, ongoing work (Ahmad, 1998), since the absorbing culture exerts constant pressure on all members of the family, especially the younger generation, to consume its own traditions and foods. This pressure leads immigrants to a renewed definition of the foods they consume (Wright-St. Clair et al., 2005). For example, in order to preserve shared unifying and unique eating, female immigrants include foods from their culture of origin as well as from the absorbing culture, and thus

develop foods that contain motifs from both cooking cultures, such as a serving of the new culture with gravy from the culture of origin (Gvion, 2006).

Despite the inclusion of new foods, cooking of the ethnic food continues to comprise feminine structuring and demonstration of traditionalism (Ahmad, 1998; Allen and Sachs, 2007; Avieli, 2005), especially via the cooking of foods that require extensive preparation. Such food, which is not cooked frequently, is awarded symbolic cultural significance (Wright-St. Claire et al., 2005), and its consumption comprises a declaration of identity (Ahmad, 1998; Mintz and Du Bois, 2002). As the sole experts on cooking these foods, and thus on one aspect of tradition in the culture of origin, the women gain the status and power of “expert” on a cultural issue.

This article analyzes the Karaite women’s discourse of taste, food and power as a means to mold an ethno-gendered identity. My claim is that this process progressed over generations and contributes to the creation of a change in the self-perception of the Karaites and in others’ perceptions of them.

Methodology

This research is based on an ethnography performed in the Karaite moshav in Israel between 1998 and 2001. The fieldwork included approximately 60 interviews of representatives from all the moshav families, numerous individual and group conversations, and living on the moshav. The women described and presented their cooking during conversations dealing with being authentic Jews and the uniqueness of Karaite belief. Cooking comprised an integral part of the women’s self-definition as Karaites, especially as such who live in Rabbinical surroundings.

Karaite cooking

“As I hear, the Karaites do it nicer, have better-tasting foods, on a higher level, truly on a higher level,” says Sarah (40), a housewife born on the moshav, when describing celebration of the Jewish holidays by couples where one spouse is a Karaite and the other a Rabbanite. Sarah’s statement reveals the essence of the Karaite women’s narrative concerning food and identity. In a society where the Karaites national belonging is challenged by their Rabbinical neighbors, the weak moshav women use cooking, feeding and discussions of food as a means to simultaneously integrate (we cook for the same holidays and may marry Rabbanites) and dismantle rejection (our cooking is better). Although the message is continuous, women of the different generations use discussions of cooking and feeding differently in order to convey this message.

First generation

The first generation of Karaite moshav women views Rabbinical criticism as a threat to Karaism. These women use their cooking as a means to preserve Karaism in their community, especially among their children, and in order to convey messages about Karaism as the authentic Judaism. They disseminate this message via discussion of their traditional foods, especially holiday and Sabbath dishes, as evidence of Karaite Jewishness. Their message is seen in cooking these foods according to kashrut and avoiding cooking during the impurity of menstruation. Moreover, due to Karaite abstention from lighting or transferring fire on the Sabbath, Sabbath foods are served cold and are therefore based on congealed meat foods (mainly poultry with vegetables and nuts).² Cooking of these foods requires investment of time, knowledge and energy.

Aliza, a woman in her fifties, came to the Karaite moshav upon marriage and raised her three children there. She uses holiday cooking that is shared by both Rabbanites and Karaites—Haman's ears on Purim—to present Karaite cooking and thus Karaite identity as more Jewish than the Rabbinical equivalent. She claims that the shape and making of the Karaite's Haman's ears better resemble the biblical intention:

We would make Haman's ears, but not Haman's ears with poppy seeds [like the Rabbanites]—it was a dough with eggs and flour, and this was fried—because an ear, a real ear was decorated. And on Passover, we would sort the rice one by one.

Other Karaite moshav women use their cooking of ethnic foods to indicate the traditional identity of the cook, her faith and her motherly investment. As "ritual experts" (Sered, 1996), they speak of feeding their children Karaite dishes as a means of preserving the Karaite belief. For instance, after a long interview with Esther, who is in her sixties and one of the veterans on the moshav, I asked her for additional remarks about Karaism in the moshav. She replied: "You forgot to ask about our food." She went on to describe the Karaite foods she cooks nowadays in comparison to those that were eaten in Egypt. She presented the cooking of those near-abandoned traditional dishes as a means of conserving Karaism by teaching her children and grandchildren about Karaite tradition: "Sometimes I do this [cook traditional foods] only so that the children will know [the tradition]. Sometimes they take a little; some like it, but most do not." There is also a personal message conveyed through her discourse: since most Karaites in the Israeli moshav do not eat these ethnic dishes nowadays, she, like other women who know how to cook it, is presented as a keeper of the authentic Karaite tradition. The women of the older generation view their ability to continue making these dishes also as motherly investment and as imparting tradition or its memory. Judith, also in her sixties, portrays her personal passing on of Karaite tradition by cooking these dishes: "When

the children come, they like my food. I prepare things that are difficult for them [to cook], prepare sausages from the meat, take some chickens from the chicken coop and prepare them.”

While the women of the first generation try to feed their offspring Karaism and Karaite food, they feel that, like other second-generation immigrants, the children prefer the taste of the absorbing culture. The older women see them replacing the traditional cold and slow-cooked food, prepared by the women of the family in advance for the Sabbath, with warm, fast, ready-made food, where men are also included in its preparation and which contains a statement about their Israeliness. Hannah, a woman in her sixties and one of the veterans of the moshav, compares traditional Karaite cooking to the food preferred by her children and grandchildren: “The children prefer steak and the nonsense there is today. *Al ha'esh* [barbecue], they only want barbecue.” Barbecue is presented in the Israeli media as one of the core Israeli meals (Gvion, 2006). It is cooked over a fire on Saturday—the day off—as part of a family ritual. This cooking is against Jewish Sabbath laws and therefore is characteristic of secular Rabbinical Jews. For the younger Karaite generations, declaring their “Israeli taste” connected to this meal denounces the Karaite law that prohibits any use of fire on the Sabbath. Thus, Hannah, like others of her generation, is noting and complaining about the younger generation’s choice of “Israeli” secular versus “Karaite” religious food.

While their children’s choice of food is not suitable for declaring Karaite Jewishness or for religious preservation, the women of the older generation use their children’s food to declaring the Karaites’ superiority over the Rabbanites in terms of their cooking skills. Sarah, also a veteran of the moshav, claims that even this Israeli barbecuing is done better by the Karaites than by the Rabbinical Jews: “When the Karaites barbecue, the seasoning is tastier. For example, when we go to the park and see the Rabbinical Jews feeding the flames [*menafnefim*], [their food is] tasteless and I feel that [this type of cooking] comes from the home.”

In saying this, Sarah implies that, even though they do not believe in Rabbinical cooking, the Karaites are more Israeli than the Rabbanites by excelling even in this cooking. It should be noted that the qualities of Karaite cooking are perceived as stemming from the feminine contribution in the kitchen. The barbecued meat is better not because of the manly feeding of the fire, but because of the addition of (traditional?) tastier seasoning.

Second and third generations

While the women of the first generation resent their children’s choice of non-Karaite food, the second generation of Israeli-born Karaites portray acceptance of food as a response to their rejection by the Rabbanites. Such rejection is presented in many of the second-generation women’s stories when describing Rabbanites who refused to eat in their homes. The Rabbanites claim that this refusal is based on the difference

between the Karaite and Rabbinical interpretation of the verse that discusses the Jewish laws of kashrut: "Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk" (Exodus 23:19; Exodus 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:21). Whereas the Rabbanites interpret this verse as a comprehensive prohibition on combining meat and dairy, the Karaite interpretation adheres literally to the biblical version and requires avoidance of cooking a young goat in its mother's milk. The Rabbanites therefore avoid eating Karaite foods or eating together with the Karaites. Tsoffar (2006) claimed that the comparison between Rabbinical and Karaite forms of kashrut becomes a metaphor for cultural exclusion.

Because the women are the main cooks, refusing to eat in their homes is perceived as an insult to the woman (March, 1998). The women perceive the negation of Karaite kashrut as criticism of their own Judaism and that of their household. For instance, Gila, a thirty-year-old mother of four who lives on the moshav, speaks of rejection of her food:

Girlfriends who would come to visit me, or just a technician, would not eat anything but water, apparently because they thought the food was not kosher, not even juice. My friends are not religious, I don't know how this got to them, but besides water or a drink that obviously comes from a bottle of cola or something like that, they would not drink or eat, even cookies that I baked or our foods. This is insulting. A cake—you serve a drink, so I serve cake, cookies, they would only drink the drink and not eat the cake.

Meirav, a woman in her thirties, told a similar story about her colleagues at work:

I once brought food to work and my girlfriend ate. Another woman said to her—what, you're eating [Karaite food]? She answered "yes." But after that, the one who didn't want to eat, I saw her drinking with Arabs—so that's better?

While aware of the differences in kashrut laws, Meirav implies that it is not Jewish religious law that underlies rejection of Karaite food, but rather the desire to socially exclude the Karaites. She claims that not everyone who rejects Karaite food does so because of strict adherence to Rabbinical laws of kashrut. Many of these people are not strict about Rabbinical kashrut in their own homes (for example, the woman who denounced her food, but drank with non-Jews), and the rejection of Karaite food comprises a means for the social rejection of the women who cook it.

Rachel, who married into the moshav, described her negative feelings about rejection of her food:

When my son was young, you bake a birthday cake and the kindergarten teacher won't eat it, if it is a cake that I baked—from the Karaites—then no.... I saw this happen every birthday. At first it really hurt me, it's as if she's stabbing you with a knife, but then we got used to it and [I] did not offer any at all, because I knew she would refuse, so why get bashed by the "no?"

The Karaite women's reactions to Rabbinical exclusions range from trying to convince Rabbanites to eat Karaite food, to ignoring the rejection, to presenting themselves as eating the same foods Rabbanites do. Some women proudly express their ability to feed Karaite foods to Rabbanites. As all moshav children go to the same regional kindergarten, it is reasonable to assume that, if the cakes of some of the women were rejected based on their religion, then the cakes of all the women of the moshav would be rejected. However, some women tell of cases in which Karaite food was accepted by Rabbanites. Orit, a woman in her thirties, explained:

In the kindergarten of the neighboring moshav, the teacher is not a Karaite and the helper is not a Karaite and they ask us to make doughnuts, make all kinds of things, so I don't think there's a reason. If she was afraid, she would not ask. They don't say buy a cake or something, but bake a cake.

While Orit claims not to have noticed the rejection of Karaite food, Dikla, a third-generation adolescent in the moshav, defined her acceptance by her Rabbinical girlfriend as a function of eating the food served in her home: "She understands me, she really doesn't care about this thing of ethnic community [*eda*]. She comes and eats at my home, even though they are strict about meat and dairy dishes and we are not. But she eats here." Unlike Orit, Dikla is aware of the Rabbinical avoidance of intimacy with Karaites. She therefore presents her Rabbinical friend who is not afraid of such relations.

The story of Malka, a woman in her thirties who came to the moshav upon marriage, bridges the presentations of the Rabbanites as rejecting or accepting Karaite food, as Malka focuses on a personal struggle to achieve acceptance of *her* food:

For the Hanukkah party, my son's kindergarten teacher asked who was willing to bake doughnuts. I told her I was. She said, "You must buy doughnuts because your kitchen is not kosher." So I told her, "No, I will bake, whoever does not want it shouldn't eat it," and I baked and they were the first to be eaten.

Malka's words present her personality and cooking as an important factor. In her short story, she refers to herself seven times, indicating that it was indeed her proud

stance and her demand to accept her and her cooking, and therefore her religion, as is, that led to insight and acceptance by the Rabbanites.

This acceptance, contrary to the common opinion that Rabbanites do not eat Karaite food, can also be inferred from the words of other women. Aliza, an assertive, smiling woman of about 50, presented a personal attitude regarding food and social acceptance. She did not refer to the Rabbinical exclusion of all Karaites, but rather to their acceptance of her personally (including her cooking and her religion):

Look, I'll tell you something, and you'll be surprised. Many religious traditional people come to my house. On the first day they do not touch anything, but later they eat everything I serve. They feel the atmosphere of the house; they see that it's normal, just like their home.

Aliza's conversation suggests that the Rabbinical rejection of the Karaites is familiar, and perhaps even understandable. However, she declares that intimate familiarity with Karaites, showing the Rabbanites the similarity between the two communities ("just like their home"), will lead to their acceptance of Karaite food and Karaism. She emphasizes the idea of cultural integration via food when she describes the acceptance of her foods by the Rabbanites, since it is "normal" or, in other words, compatible with Jewish food and the atmosphere in Rabbinical homes.

Other women present Karaite food as not only edible, but as preferred by Rabbanites. This superiority is expressed through quotes of Rabbanites liking Karaite food. Esther, one of the founders of the moshav, tells of her granddaughter who married a Rabbanite (the rest of her grandchildren married Karaites). Esther and the rest of the family were concerned about the religious path this couple might take. She portrays the couple's choice:

My granddaughter's husband is crazy about my food. They came to me to eat on the Sabbath. We Egyptians [Karaites] cook broad beans, so they all came [and the Rabbinical son-in-law said] ah, grandmother, what broad beans, prepare them every Sabbath and we will come here.

For Esther, this groom's declaration of his liking of Karaite food serves as proof that the couple will stay in touch with Karaite life, as can be seen from his promise to visit every Saturday. This is all due to her exceptional traditional cooking. Such a notion of Karaite superiority via its foods is also presented by Sarah, who was quoted at the beginning of this ethnography: "The Karaites do it [cook for holiday celebrations] nicer, have better-tasting foods, on a higher level."

In contrast with the presented Rabbinical acceptance of Karaite food, there are Karaites who deal with the Rabbinical rejection of their food by focusing on its similarity to Rabbinical food. In order to facilitate their inclusion in Jewish life in

Israel, these Karaites present themselves as observing kashrut laws the same way as the Rabbanites, i.e., separating meat and dairy. Such a choice requires a rationale. No one in the moshav explained the choice of the laws of kashrut by a desire to be accepted by Rabbanites or by a belief in the justness of their religious ways. Instead, some of the moshav members described the separation of meat and dairy foods as part of their culture or for health reasons.

Rina, a woman of about 50, defined herself as strict in the Karaite religion. When asked about combining meat and dairy, she said: "I am strict, health-wise, not eating meat with dairy, this is healthy, and [mixing them] is also not healthy for the stomach." Nofar, an adolescent who lives on the moshav, explained the separation of meat and dairy based on taste: "I do not eat meat and dairy together, it sounds disgusting to me, even McDonald's, I once ate it and it didn't taste good." Nofar does not pretend to be strict about Rabbinical kashrut, and talks about trying a combination of dairy and meat at McDonald's. Her disliking this combination grants her the ability to cling to the tastes of kashrut while simultaneously adhering to the Karaite faith.³

Ahmad (1998) stated that personal preferences of food indicate cultural choices, especially for second-generation immigrants, and that women are willing to accept the tastes of others in food as long as unity is preserved, as expressed in eating together. This claim may explain the use many Karaites made of ideas of taste (tasty/not tasty) as a means for stating personal and family choices regarding Israeli-Jewish identity, a choice expressed in the reshaping of their food (separation of meat and dairy foods).

Additional explanations for strictness about Rabbinical kashrut included reports of memories of separation between meat and dairy in their parents' home. Ethnographic and theoretical descriptions of Karaite life in Egypt indicate that Karaites did not separate meat and dairy there. Nonetheless, Miri, a woman in her forties who immigrated to Israel at the age of one, presented a (structured?) memory of such separation: "In Egypt they were really strict, they had a sink for dairy and a sink for meat.... I only remember my grandmother's stories; in our house [her parents' home] we ate freely."

Conclusion

The discourse of the Karaite women reveals a complex situation in which Rabbinical neighbors denounce their community and cast doubt on their religious ascription and thus also their nationality (in the Jewish state), and yet live together with them: they learn together in school, marry each other and have neighborly relations. The response of the moshav's Karaite women to this situation ranges—with overlaps, contradicting setbacks and victories—from striving to be accepted by Rabbanites to simultaneously believing in the superiority of their religion and wishing to preserve

it. While the responses of the first- and second-generation women differ, all are based on discussions of food, cooking, eating and feeding.

All the moshav women agree that the uniqueness and perhaps the preference of Karaism are expressed in its unique foods. The recipes, just like the Karaite religion, are presented as more complex. Being strict about the quality of the cooking indicates the tenacity, and therefore superiority, of Karaite customs. Thus, the Karaites convert their cooking, used by the Rabbanites to exclude them, into a means of resisting this exclusion and into a demonstration of adherence to Karaite laws.

The women who founded the moshav use the discussion of cooking to emphasize the common Jewish foods (Haman's ears, meat meal on the Sabbath) that unify all Jews. They also make statements on Karaite tradition as being embodied in the work of cooking and as demonstrating Karaite authenticity and religious tenacity (see also Bahloul, 1995; Sered, 2001). In addition, they emphasize their feminine ability to feed Karaites with traditional foods as indicating that they are the preservers of culture.

The women of the following generations, who were born in Israel, focus more on trying to feed the Rabbanites. Such attempts have taught the women the ability (or lack thereof) of Rabbanites to accept Karaism. These women present their food not only as nutritious for the bodies of the Karaites, but also as sustaining a belief in their religious ways, especially relative to that of the Rabbanites. They discuss close relations with Rabbanites, relations that could be embodied in eating together. The realization of this relationship is through a combination of the Rabbinates' acceptance of Karaite food, avoidance of the issue, and Karaite acceptance of Rabbinical kashrut laws.

For these women, acceptance of their food is equivalent to acceptance of themselves, and is also expressed in their willingness to accept Rabbinical food and kashrut. This discussion can be viewed as stemming from the concepts of the feminine gift of food. This gift has been described as indicating a willingness to give, a woman's investment affording unique social status. The gift of food usually leads to social reward (Counihan, 2004), and therefore also to the pain described by the Karaite women in response to its rejection by some of the Rabbanites.

A personal message also arises from the feminine discussion. Just as people differ from each other in their learnedness or their religious tenacity, so do women differ by the quality of their cooking. This quality is expressed in the ability to make traditional foods, which indicates being a real Karaite, as well as in the ability to feed Rabbinical Jews, i.e., to be awarded the definition of Israeli. A woman who succeeds in these tasks demonstrates personal acceptance in the face of the general Karaite exclusion.

Not every statement of the moshav women regarding housework contained a conscious message about exclusion or the superiority of Karaism. Nonetheless, the discussion of their exclusion by the Rabbanites was central in their lives and especially in the conversations they held on Karaism. Furthermore, occupation with

housework was frequent and related to the feminine Karaite tradition, and these two fields were thus intertwined. Basing the discussion on domestic everyday activities, and such that were not perceived as challenging the surroundings, defined the Karaites as non-threatening to the excluding culture. Their non-threatening self-presentation enabled the Karaite women to express scathing statements on culture, religion and identity.

Was their protest beneficial? It did not lead to absolute acceptance of Karaism and certainly not to its aggrandizement. However, according to the women's descriptions, there were people who changed their minds about Karaism after tasting their foods. Furthermore, one of the main goals of the feminine statements was construction of Karaism for themselves and for members of their community, and in this they succeeded.

NOTES

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² The origin for the congealment is apparently a combination of a desire for meat foods that do not require heating and the desire for economic frugality (as congealment results from use of the bones).

³ Explanations for choosing Rabbinical kashrut based on taste or personal preference were not unique to the women; the young Karaite men expressed similar attitudes. For example, after trying to evade the question of kashrut and being asked about drinking instant coffee (with milk) after a meat meal, Uriel said: "Instant coffee and meat don't go together, they don't taste good together. If anything, then beer with meat."

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