

# Righteous Transgressions

A photograph of an Israeli soldier in a green uniform and beret walking past a group of women. The soldier is carrying a rifle and has a backpack. The women are standing in a public space, some with their arms crossed. The background shows a wall with graffiti and posters.

WOMEN'S ACTIVISM  
ON THE ISRAELI  
AND PALESTINIAN  
RELIGIOUS RIGHT

**Lihi Ben Shitrit**

Righteous Transgressions

**PRINCETON STUDIES IN MUSLIM  
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*Lihī Ben Shitrit*

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

PRINCETON AND OXFORD

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[press.princeton.edu](http://press.princeton.edu)

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ben Shitrit, Lihi, 1981–

Righteous transgressions : women's activism on the Israeli and Palestinian religious right / Lihi Ben Shitrit.

pages cm. — (Princeton studies in muslim politics)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-691-16456-4 (hardcover : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-691-16457-1 (pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Women—Political activity—Israel. 2. Women—Political activity—West Bank. 3. Women—Political activity—Gaza Strip. 4. Religious right—Israel. 5. Religious right—West Bank. 6. Religious right—Gaza strip. 7. Judaism and politics—Israel. 8. Islam and politics—Israel. 9. Islam and politics—West Bank. 10. Islam and politics—Gaza Strip. I. Title.

HQ1236.5.I75B46 2016

320.08205694—dc23 2015019622

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

Publication of this book has been made possible in part by a grant of the Israel Institute, Washington, DC.

“Women, Freedom, and Agency in Religious Political Movements,” originally published in *The Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Volume no. 9:3, pp. 81–107. Copyright, 2013, Association for Middle East Women's Studies.

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Printed on acid-free paper. ∞

Printed in the United States of America

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# Contents

*Acknowledgments* vii

*Note on Language* xi

1. Introduction: Frames of Exception and Righteous Transgressions 1
  2. Contextualizing the Movements 32
  3. Complementarian Activism: Domestic and Social Work, Da‘wa, and Teshuva 80
  4. Women’s Protest: Exceptional Times and Exceptional Measures 128
  5. Women’s Formal Representation: Overlapping Frames 181
  6. Conclusion 225
- Notes* 241
- References* 259
- Index* 275

## Acknowledgments

Many people and institutions supported this project over the years since I began working on it in earnest in 2007. I should first mention the financial support without which the fieldwork, and deskwork, for this book would not have been possible. I received generous grants from Yale's MacMillan Center (2008) and the Social Science Research Council's International Dissertation Research Fellowship (2009–2010). A year spent as a Colorado Scholar at Harvard's Women's Studies in Religion Program (WSRP) was instrumental for completing my writing, and the Israel Institute in Washington, DC, offered a much needed subvention grant to help make this manuscript into a book. A part of [chapter 6](#) was previously published in the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* (2013) in an article titled "Women, Freedom, and Agency in Religious-Political Movements: Reflections from Women Activists in Shas and the Islamic Movement in Israel." I thank JMEWS and Duke University Press for allowing me to reproduce some of this work here. A section of the Palestinian women's quota study in [chapter 5](#) was previously published in *Politics & Gender* (2015) in my article "Authenticating Representation: Women's Quotas and Islamist Parties."

My dissertation adviser, Ellen Lust, accompanied the project from the start and provided invaluable guidance, advice, and confidence; I am enormously grateful to her. I also want to thank Elisabeth Jean Wood for reading earlier versions of this manuscript, for offering insightful suggestions, and for pointing me in the right directions. In addition, Adria Lawrence and Tariq Thachil gave important comments on an earlier version of this work, which I have incorporated in the book. Regina Bateson, Madhavi Devasher, Calvert Jones, Jonah Schulhofer-Wohl, Matthew Longo, and Corinna Jentsch commented on parts of this work at Yale and also made my graduate school experience much more pleasant than I had expected it would be. At Harvard Divinity School

(HDS), Ann Braude was instrumental in kickstarting the work of adaptation from dissertation to book, and Tracy Wall provided much needed help and the relief of conversations about things other than work. My WSRP colleagues Sarah Bracke, Jacquelyn Williamson, Amanda Izzo, Hsiao-wen Cheng, Zilka Spahić Šiljak, and Judith Casselberry provided a year of intellectual excitement and nurturing. I would also like to thank Leila Ahmed and Sara Roy at Harvard, whose work has been inspirational. The students in the graduate seminar I taught at HDS in the fall of 2013 also helped me think through several of the themes addressed in this book.

Parts of this manuscript have been presented in numerous forums, and I thank participants for their engaged feedback. In particular, I want to mention the Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) and Marc Lynch, who organized the Junior Scholar Book Development Workshop in October 2014. I received incredibly useful comments from participants, and especially from Jillian Schewdler, Lisa Wedeen, and Sultan Tepe. Mahmoud Jaraba at the Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg has also been a wonderful colleague and co-author, and provided the most insightful conversations on Palestinian politics. Many others provided intellectual engagement, research facilitation, or warm hospitality: Maryam Abu-Raqeeq and her family, Mona al-Habnen and her family, Shaykh Ibrahim Sarsour, Shaykh Safwat Fredge, Shaheen Sarsour, Shoshi Greenfeld, Emily Amrusy, Etiya Zar, Rab-banit Yafa Yom Tov, Anwar Ben-Badis, and Marilyn Friedes. I am indebted to the many women activists and leaders in the movements that I study who opened their homes, workplaces, activities, and stories to me and made this research possible. I hope that they will find this work interesting and useful. I also hope that this book will help highlight their incredible contribution to their movements' organizational, political, and religious work and vision.

My colleagues at the School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Georgia, and particularly Cas

Mudde and Maryann Gallagher, as well as my undergraduate and graduate students here, created a wonderful environment in which to make the final revisions for this manuscript. Colleagues at my previous work place, the Public Diplomacy department at the US Embassy in Tel Aviv, were also very supportive when I was researching, writing, and trying to do my job there at the same time. At Princeton University Press, I would like to thank my editor Fred Appel for expert handling of the work and for making the process much less painful than it could otherwise have been. Juliana Fidler, Jennifer Harris, and Leslie Grundfest were also tremendously helpful in guiding me through this process. I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers of the manuscript, whose suggestions greatly improved the final version of the book.

Finally, I want to thank my family—Deganit, Haim, Eshchar, Yahav, and Ruth Ben Shitrit; Albert Ben Shitrit; Yaeli Avraham and Hillel Baneth; Adina and Israel Flascher; Inbal Franco; and Orit Valency—for their continued love and support and for giving me a home to escape to from the emotional challenges of fieldwork. I also want to thank my parents-in-law, Gulshan and Sharat Sikri, for their love and support. Most of all, I am grateful to my husband, Rohan Sikri, who always knows when it's time for me to stop reading and start writing. His generosity with his brilliance, talent, and love is the reason I was able to write this book.



## Note on Language

I have used a highly simplified transliteration format for Arabic and Hebrew, given that this work contains a mixture of Hebrew, colloquial Arabic of various Palestinian dialects, and Modern Standard Arabic. The transliteration does not include distinctions between long and short vowels, or hard and soft letters.

## Righteous Transgressions

# 1

## Introduction: Frames of Exception and Righteous Transgressions

I met Shlomit, a prominent settler activist in her early fifties, in the summer of 2008 while conducting preliminary fieldwork in several Jewish settlements in the West Bank. After a full day spent together, we moved to her office at the settlement's municipal council to continue our conversation. Shlomit had a familiar air about her, a gentle zeal that felt motherly and pious in equal parts. With her extended hand, she offered a warm and measured embrace as we stepped together into her office.

"I want to show you something on YouTube," Shlomit said when our conversation again picked up. She pressed "play" with hurried anticipation, and we watched a video recording of a violent confrontation at an illegal settlement outpost. A collage of abuse and vitriol flashed across the screen, men with ostensible markers of their allegiance provoking other men. There were settlers, their large yarmulkes and *tsitsiyot* swaying in an angry rhythm as they flung their bodies at their adversaries. These adversaries, Palestinians and Israeli peace activists, appeared tired at first. But they too started a shoving match once a few too many punches had been thrown.

These were not, however, just unruly men. Of all the parties to the violence, a lone woman's rage burned the brightest. There she was, Shlomit, diminutive and yet commanding all of the energies of the Israeli border police and soldiers on the scene. She screamed expletives in the face of the Palestinians and the peace activists, these "bastard leftist traitors" spreading ruin across her beloved land. She argued incessantly with the border police officer, proclaiming her religious reason and resorting to an effusive display of injured sentiment when argument failed. And she did not shy away from the physical confrontation. As the video convulsed into an all-out scuffle, Shlomit was there in the thick of it, her arms flailing alongside tightened fists and ruffled beards. At some point, the officer resorted to his final option in stemming the disruption she was causing. Three soldiers grabbed Shlomit, lifted her up in the air

—two holding her from her shoulders, one at her ankles—and carried her out of the frame.

When I asked Shlomit about her conduct in the video, she did not attempt to offer a reconciliatory explanation. This was not, she said, proper behavior for an Orthodox woman concerned with female modesty. This was behavior instead that caused her and her family to suffer embarrassment. And yet she stood by each of her gestures, both physical and verbal, in those moments we had just watched on the screen. She spoke to me of an exceptional situation that warranted her to act in the way she did. She spoke of her land, the Land of Israel, and the future of her children, and of religious Redemption (*ge'ula*), and, perhaps of more significance, the role she had to play in securing all three. Her unrestrained limbs and her fierce tongue, lacking all measure, were a necessity in order to meet these exceptional demands. The exigencies of family, of social and religious protocol, fell to the wayside in this passionate performance.

Like Shlomit, many of my Orthodox settler interlocutors used the nationalist ideology of their movement to construct “frames of exception” that temporarily suspended, rather than challenged, some of the limiting aspects of their movement’s gender ideology in favor of its broader goals. The women activists interpreted reality with a vocabulary of exceptional, urgent, and unusual temporality brought about by the nationalist struggle. They framed current events in terms of an exceptional threat that is posed to the national body and that requires exceptional, and even transgressive, responses by women. The unusual times, the context of a religious-nationalist struggle over the Land of Israel, they argued, justified, and made highly commendable women’s behaviors that might not in normal, calmer times, be acceptable. Exceptional times called for exceptional measures and transformed women’s transgressions from improper to righteous.

\* \* \*

Like some Orthodox strands in the Jewish settler movement, many other contemporary religious-political movements in the Middle East and around the world advocate conservative gender politics.<sup>1</sup> On the level of religious doctrine and praxis, many movements commonly promote patriarchal religious interpretations and patriarchal structures of religious practice in which women hold subordinate positions. In the public sphere, some of them advocate men and women’s role-complementarity, stipulating a sexual

division of labor where women's essential, primary roles are motherhood and caregiving to the community while the political public sphere is largely the domain of men.<sup>2</sup> In formal politics and formal institutions, such movements at times circumscribe women's representation, again basing this on a commitment to role-complementarity. Some of these movements also support laws and legal systems that discriminate against women, especially in areas of reproductive rights and family law.<sup>3</sup>

The adoption of a private/public dichotomy and the association of the private sphere with women and the public sphere with men, which is a primary feature of the Enlightenment project, is a testament to these movements' modernity.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, as Joan Wallach Scott and others have argued, the privatization and domestication of women has also historically been a distinguishing feature of the genealogy of secularism.<sup>5</sup> Paradoxically, then, the conceptualization of sexual difference as upheld by many contemporary conservative religious-political movements, while articulated in religious language, is derived not so much from religious tradition as from modern secular discourses.<sup>6</sup> However, more often than not, these movements assert that their religious commitment to role-complementarity comes to counteract what they see as the current corrupting effects of a secularism that undermines and muddles correct and God-given gender roles.

Yet women are important to such movements not only as targets of restrictive politics, but also as participating activists. In almost all of them, the theme of righteous women proliferates. "By the merit of righteous women [*nashim tsadkaniyot*], our forefathers were saved from Egypt," was a refrain that was often repeated in the Jewish movements I worked with to describe the importance of steadfast pious women's activism. Righteous women (*nisa' salihat*) from Islamic sacred history were touted as role models of piety and activism for women in the contemporary Muslim movements I studied. Similarly, in many other conservative religious movements around the world, righteous pious women are considered the backbone of a moral society.

But given these movements' constraining worldview regarding women's roles, we would expect patterns of women's activism within them to reflect the movements' gender doctrines. We would expect women to play what their movements construct as traditionally feminine roles such as embodying religious virtue

through dress and modest behavior, opting for motherhood and childrearing, and carrying out piety work, charity, education, and other social services for the religious community as an extension of their caregiving roles. However, women attain different levels of visibility, voice, and leadership and perform different tasks within different movements. In some movements, they work strictly on piety promotion and social services provision and operate mainly within segregated women's spheres; their activism seamlessly adheres to the articulated gender norms of their movements. In others, women are involved in mixed-sex, explicitly political public action such as unruly protest, physical confrontations, and even militant action. Like Shlomit, they take part in activities that seem to contradict and transgress their professed commitment to role-complementarity, sex-segregation, and notions of female modesty. And in yet other movements, women serve in the highest leadership bodies and even run for elected office. What explains this variation, given that these movements' gender ideology is often fairly similar?

This is the central puzzle that this book addresses: *How do activists in patriarchal religious-political movements, with clear notions about male and female different private and public roles, manage to expand spaces for political activism in ways that seem to transgress their movements' gender ideology? And why does this happen in some movements but not in others?* This book examines these questions through a comparative study of four groups: the Jewish settler movement in the West Bank, the ultra-Orthodox Shas, the Islamic Movement in Israel, and the Palestinian Hamas. Using these cases, it offers a theoretical framework for understanding women's activism in conservative Middle Eastern religious-political movements more broadly. The framework is built by two interconnected means. First, I disaggregate and conceptualize the various forms of women's activities to offer a descriptive typology of their activism. In this way, I also demonstrate that women's activism includes both "compliant" and "transgressive" patterns and that whether it takes place in the private sphere, in sex-segregated publics, or in the public sphere, their work is inherently political. Second, I explain when and how women engage in types of activism that seem to transgress or overstep their movements' restrictive positions on gender roles, and outline the mechanisms that govern and make possible these "righteous transgressions."

## **Asking the Right Questions: Feminism and Conservative Religious Politics in the Middle East**

For a long time, much of the traditional academic and popular analysis of the politics of socially conservative religious-political movements in the Middle East has paid only very little attention to women's activism within them. Several assumptions underlie this scant attention to women. The first is that women in general are not an important constituency for these movements. Why would they support and be active in frameworks that seem to limit their freedoms and opportunities? The second assumption is that women's work is less important because they usually do not play formal leadership roles in conservative religious-political movements. The argument here is that women's labor is mainly confined to the private sphere or to a separate women's sphere and therefore does not merit consideration when studying movement politics. However, women in the contemporary Middle East have been supporting conservative religious movements in great numbers, in many places more than they have been supporting feminist agendas or movements. Moreover, women's political activism in such movements has in fact been instrumental to the rise in popularity and influence of many of them.

For feminist scholars including myself, the fact of women's support for conservative religious politics has presented a challenge and generated scholarship that strives to uncover why women might be drawn to such agendas.<sup>7</sup> While this line of inquiry has produced illuminating explanations that point to historical, social, economic, political, cultural, psychological, and spiritual factors, it has suffered from one major flaw. The posing of the question of why women would support religious politics that seem to go against their own interests takes for granted that there is something strange or puzzling about this support—that it is an anomaly or a peculiarity that requires explanation. This exposes an assumption about what in fact constitutes women's interests, and which political choices require explanation and which do not. Feminist scholars are far less surprised when women turn to feminist or progressive politics. This latter choice is taken as commonsensical or natural. But in many places, and particularly in the Middle East, it is the women who choose feminism who may be the anomaly, while those who adhere to conservative religious politics are arguably the contemporary norm.

In order to sidestep this feminist bias, I follow the lead of scholars such as Saba Mahmood, Lara Deeb, Sarah Bracke, and others in contending that rather than asking *why* women support conservative religious politics, we need to shift our inquiry to the question of *how* women support such agendas<sup>8</sup>—what are the politics and mechanisms of women’s efforts to advance socially conservative religious objectives? This will lead us to ask such questions as: What are the forms of women’s engagement in conservative religious-political movements? How do women determine and shape the contours of their activism? And what are the consequences of their activism for their movements, for the activists themselves, and for women in general? Making such questions the heart of the research provides richer accounts of women’s political experiences and overcomes the desire to question women’s commitments that do not fit the expectations of universalized feminism, liberalism, and secularism. This refocusing also shifts our inquiry away from women as *targets* of the supposedly oppressive politics of contemporary conservative religious movements and toward a conception of women as effective political *agents* in these movements.

In the scholarship on women and conservative religion in the Middle East, there has been only limited investigation of women who are formal activists in explicitly political religious movements. For instance, groundbreaking works such as Mahmood’s, Hafez’s, and Deeb’s about conservative piety in Egypt and Lebanon, respectively; El-Or’s examinations of religious Zionist women and ultra-Orthodox Mizrahi women in Israel; and Ahmed’s study of women’s veiling<sup>9</sup> focus on women who live and act in the general sphere of influence of certain religious-political movements (such as the Egyptian Muslim Brothers, Hezbollah, the settler movement, Shas, and so on) but that are not formally affiliated with them. Like these important works, most other studies that focus on the Middle East examine cultural trends that provide the sociological base for religious-political movements rather than engage with women who are formal political activists in them.<sup>10</sup> The focus of this scholarship on women’s personal engagement with patriarchal piety practices—like donning the veil, or cultivating a pious subjectivity that accepts women’s subordination—may circumvent some of the challenges that formal politics pose.

For scholars in the Western academe who seek to render legible women’s adherence to religious patriarchy in a nuanced and

noncondemning manner, it may be useful to choose as subject the private woman who accepts and values, for example, a gender-inequitable religious system of marriage and divorce. It would be a different matter to take as the subject of inquiry the religious-political activist who strives to pass discriminatory legislation that would make it harder for women, but easier for men, to seek a divorce. This book differs from previous studies by looking at women who actively advocate formal political agendas grounded in patriarchal religious interpretations and who do not restrict their efforts only to personal, social, or cultural turns to piety.<sup>11</sup> Relocating our attention to women's formal and explicitly political activism in conservative religious-political movements poses a tremendous challenge. But it also exposes a surprising and diverse reality that counters assumptions about women's religious-political engagement.

Understanding how variation becomes possible is important for several reasons pertaining to the implications of the ascendance of religious-political movements to women's equality. First, as mentioned, many of these movements promote teachings that profess complementarity between men and women rather than full equality and thus limit women's opportunities for equal religious, social, and political participation.<sup>12</sup> However, the divergence of some movements in practice from their professed doctrines lessens the problems they pose to women. The actual public roles women members perform and their political leadership might signify practical flexibility (even if not ideological adaptability) on the part of religious-political movements. In addition, the visibility of women in the public sphere and in formal politics can have a symbolic effect on the movements' constituents and the general public. Descriptive representation of women symbolically demonstrates that women are fit and able to be public and political leaders. It can also bring new agendas to the table, as women leaders may introduce different perspectives on women's concerns and draw more attention to these concerns.<sup>13</sup> Of course, these implications are potential rather than guaranteed. Descriptive representation does not ensure that the policies pursued and the discourses generated would promote greater equality for women. This depends to some extent on the attitudes and actions of the women activists and leaders who ascend in the ranks of the movements or gain public visibility.

For this reason, there are two interlinked inquiries in this book. On the macro level, with the movement as our unit of analysis, the puzzle this book tackles is the existence of variation in forms of



women's activism in socially conservative religious-political movements. While the movements all share similar socially conservative commitments, which tend to limit certain actions by women in the public sphere, in some movements women's activism diverges drastically from these professed principles, while in others women's activism adheres more seamlessly to the movements' dogma. What explains this variation? Second, on the micro level, with the activist herself as the unit of analysis, this work investigates the attitudes and practices of women activists. This investigation involves an interpretive inquiry into activists' lives as they understand them and their attitudes toward women's rights and roles in society and in their movements.

### **The Cases: The Spectrum of the Israeli and Palestinian Religious Right**

Israel and Palestine provide a useful arena in which to examine this diversity and variation in women's activism in conservative religious-political movements. Both Israeli and Palestinian societies experienced a surge of religious organizing that started in the 1970s and early 1980s and has become particularly salient from the 1990s to the present. Within the same geographical and political context, Israel and Palestine have a number of politically influential religious movements that share a conservative gender ideology but that belong to different faith traditions (Muslim and Jewish).<sup>14</sup> Examining movements belonging to different faiths serves two purposes. It demonstrates that the mechanisms that shape women's activism are not restricted to a particular religion, and it also counters essentialist tendencies that single out Islam as particularly given to highly conservative gender politics. The fact that the movements share a political context while being differently positioned in relation to it is also important for the purpose of comparative work. This allows us to keep constant the ecological environment in which the movements operate, making it easier to parse out the factors impacting the variation we try to explain.

Most importantly, although these movements share similar gendered commitments, they are very different from each other on other ideological dimensions. While the "gender ideology" of socially conservative religious-political movements is important, I argue that this is not the main determinant of the forms of activism women perform in them. Rather, other dimensions of a movement's ideology that are unrelated to the subject of women are as, and at

times more, influential in shaping the roles women can undertake.<sup>15</sup> A movement's ideological repertoire can determine the resources available for women to frame in legitimate terms actions that go beyond and even transgress their movement's gender ideology. As we shall see, in the case of the Israeli and Palestinian religious right, the presence or absence of a religious-*nationalist* ideology is one of the most significant determinants of forms of women's participation in Jewish and Muslim conservative religious-political movements.

Nikki Keddie divides contemporary religious-political movements into two categories. The first she calls "religious-nationalism," or "communalism," which refers to religious movements that are outwardly focused on a struggle against a foreign rival. The second strand is "proselytizing" movements that are inwardly oriented and seek primarily to spread religiosity in their communities.<sup>16</sup> In the Muslim and Jewish contexts in which I work, proselytizing does not entail conversion from one religion to another, but rather refers to the work of *da'wa* and *hazara beteshuva* (henceforth *teshuva*) respectively—the labor to spread religiosity among coreligionists. I argue that this typology has significant explanatory power in accounting for the variation in forms of women's political participation on the Israeli and Palestinian religious right.

Chapter 2 includes the detailed historical backgrounds of the movements. It also provides an analysis of their gender ideology in order to make the case that there are stark family resemblances in this aspect between them. Here I only briefly introduce the cases and their categorization. The first case is the Jewish settlers in the West Bank, which I categorize as primarily nationalist. The settler movement became a central player in Israeli politics in the 1970s. Its Orthodox strand advances a messianic interpretation of the history of the state of Israel and understands the establishment of the state in 1948, and even more so the 1967 Six-Day War and Israeli occupation of territory in that war as a miracle that signals the unfolding of the process of religious redemption. Therefore, it aims to entrench Jewish control over the occupied Palestinian territories by settling all parts of it. There are, of course, religious and nonreligious settlers, but in my work I focus only on activists who are Orthodox-nationalist (*datiyyim leumiyyim*) or ultra-Orthodox nationalist (*hardalim*) and who are religiously motivated; who hope to make Israeli society and the state more religious and believe that settling in the territories will help realize their vision of religious

redemption or divine promise. The second Jewish case is the ultra-Orthodox Shas movement. Established in 1983, Shas is a proselytizing-focused religious-political movement that seeks mainly to make Jewish Israelis and the state of Israel more religious. While it has marked itself as a movement representing a marginalized Jewish ethnic group—Jews of Middle Eastern origin (Mizrahim)—it in fact advances an integrative religious identity that it hopes can replace secular Zionism as the unifying ethos of the state of Israel.

The third case is the Islamic Movement in Israel, which is modeled after the Egyptian Muslim Brothers and operates among Palestinians who are citizens of Israel. I categorize this movement as hybrid, since it contains both nationalist and proselytizing tendencies, each prioritizing one ideological aspect over the other. The Movement was established in the 1970s and split in two in 1996. In that year, what later became known as the southern branch of the Movement decided to form a political party and participate in national election for the Knesset—the Israeli Parliament. Its focus has since been on increasing piety among the Muslim population of Israel. The northern branch rejected what it called an accommodation of Zionism and the Jewish majority and refused to participate in national elections. It has worked since to stress a nationalist Palestinian Muslim identity that is threatened by a Jewish state and a Jewish majority and must resist integration. Finally, Hamas, or the Islamic Resistance Movement in Palestine, began as the proselytizing successor of the Muslim Brothers branch in the occupied Palestinian territories but underwent a reorientation toward nationalist resistance against the Israeli occupation with the onset of the first Palestinian intifada (uprising) in 1987.

Naturally, the neat categorization along the proselytizing-nationalist spectrum serves an analytic purpose that does not fully capture the diversity and complexity of each movement. To begin with, *all four movements are proselytizing* in the sense that they aim to promote piety and offer a religious solution to the various social, economic, and political problems their societies face. In the ones that I term nationalist, however, the nationalist agenda tends to take precedence over religious reform in the movements' discourse and actions. As the hybrid category in the case of the Islamic Movement in Israel shows, a movement can also maintain an internal tension between a proselytizing and a nationalist tendency without one orientation fully winning precedence over the other. Finally, in the

case of Shas, which serves here as an ideal type proselytizing movement, there have been periods in which some political figures within it espoused quite an acrimonious nationalist discourse.<sup>17</sup>

### *Disaggregating Types of Women's Activism*

To formalize women's activism in the four movements, I divide the types of activities they participate in into the following categories:

*Complementarian activism:* This form of activism complies with the movements' hegemonic role-complementarity model. It includes tasks that are understood as "feminine" and that take place largely in private, in sex-segregated publics, or in arenas that are considered an extension of women's caregiving roles. They entail women's engagement in homemaking and childrearing, piety promotion among other women, and charity and social services provision for the community. These activities are in fact highly political in that they facilitate, embody, and make visible the impact of the movements on society. However, they do not pose a challenge to the dominant gender ideology of the movements because they neatly fit conservative notions of women's appropriate activism.

*Protest:* In some movements, women participate in unruly demonstrations, protest, and even violent militant activity. As part of these activities, women intermix with men and often confront, even physically, male representatives of the state or a rival group. These activities are more transgressive, as they increasingly compromise the commitment to role difference between men and women, sex-segregation, and female modesty.

*Formal representation:* On occasions, women occupy leadership positions in the political institutions of their movements—such as parties or representative lists affiliated with the movements on the local and/or national level. In these roles, activists step out of the segregated women's sphere. They maintain a high public profile, speak to crowds of men as well as women, and hold executive positions that are directly superior to those of many men in their movements.

As the subsequent chapters that examine women's activism in each of the four movements demonstrate, in all of them women engage in "complementarian activism," which translates into practice the complementarian commitments of their movements. However, the two other types of activism—"protest" and "formal representation"—which increasingly challenge the boundaries of this circumscription, usually take place only in the movements that also advocate a nationalist agenda.

TABLE 1.1 Forms of Women's Activism by Movement Type

Movement Type	Movement	Activism Type		
		Compliant	Transgressive/ Expansive	
Proselytizing	Shas	Complementarian		
	Islamic Movement (proselytizing tendency)			
Nationalist	Islamic Movement (nationalist tendency)	Complementarian	Protest	Representation
	Settlers			
	Hamas			

Table 1.1 shows how forms of women's activism map onto the typology of nationalist/proselytizing. While the table has analytic utility, it could inadvertently reify the categories used, making them

appear fully bounded and distinct rather than more fluid. For this reason, I also provide figure 1.1 to chart the same dynamics while communicating that in practice these categories are really different ends of a spectrum between a proselytizing or nationalist agenda, and between compliance and transgression, and that reality is always graded. Given this empirical relationship between movement type and forms of women's activism, what are the mechanisms that link a religious-nationalist agenda to activists' transgression of their movements' gender ideology?

# Women's Activism

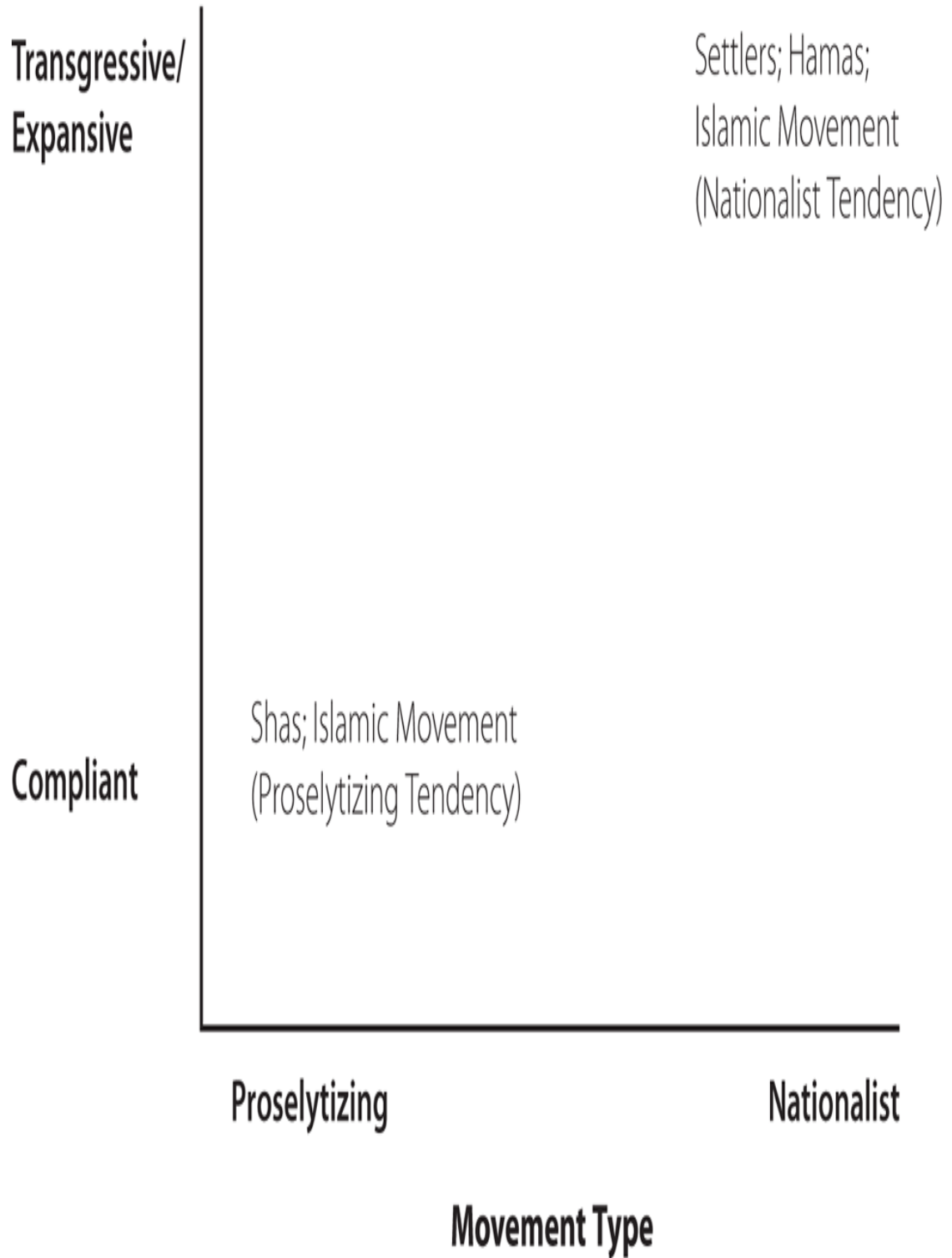


Figure 1.1. Forms of activism by movement type.

## The Argument: Frames of Exception and Righteous Transgressions

As we shall see, the religious movements in this study that are primarily concerned with nationalist politics provide women with discursive framing tools to justify and promote forms of political participation that diverge from the gender ideology upheld by the movements. Women activists in these movements argue for the temporary prioritization of the nationalist struggle over concerns with gender role-complementarity and female modesty. For the sake of the struggle, they claim, women must temporarily engage in “exceptional,” “unusual,” and even “immodest” public behavior. In other words, women activists convincingly deploy the movement’s religious-nationalist ideology to assert that the exceptional times under which the nation or community finds itself call for exceptional responses by women. Their religious-nationalist ideology provides them with conducive discursive resources for the construction of what I call “frames of exception.”<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the movements that are primarily concerned with proselytizing within their community of coreligionists—that is, with making their own society more religious—are less conducive to the divergence of women activists from the dominant gender ideology.

Women often serve as symbolic boundary-markers that distinguish a community or group from its other.<sup>19</sup> For the proselytizing Jewish and Muslim groups that are engaged in an identity struggle *within* a religious community, strengthening boundaries is a great preoccupation, as those could be extremely porous between the religious and nonreligious populations. The proselytizing movements strive first to offer an alternative to secular lifestyle and thus significantly stress boundaries between religious and secular norms, values, and practices. These boundaries are most visibly demarcated by women’s dress, conduct, and roles. Religious groups that are engaged in a nationalist struggle *between* communities of different faiths—*between* Israeli Jews and Muslim Palestinians—are also quite concerned with spreading piety among coreligionists, which entails the labor of boundary-making that is played out on women’s bodies and public presence. However, for these groups the nationalist agenda also requires the recruitment of their entire nation, including both its religious and its secular members, to the struggle against an external foe. The precedence of



the nationalist agenda means that for the sake of this cause other ideological commitments could be temporarily suspended.

My argument draws on the relationship between a movement's ideology and the framing processes undertaken by its members, as elaborated on in the cultural turn in social movement theory. The various conceptualizations of ideology, as Benford and Snow point out, often regard it as "a fairly broad, coherent and relatively durable set of beliefs that affects one's orientation not only to politics but to everyday life more generally." It is also seen as a "fairly pervasive and integrated set of beliefs and values that have considerable staying power."<sup>20</sup> But Snow and others also caution against an overly rigid and static approach to ideology. Instead, ideology should be "conceived as a variable phenomenon that ranges on a continuum from a tightly and rigidly connected set of values and beliefs at one end to a loosely coupled set of values and beliefs at the other end."<sup>21</sup> The movements I study can be placed on the more rigid side of this spectrum with regard to the fundamentals of their gender ideology. Moreover, these movements engage in elaborate ideological work to clarify, authenticate, and standardize ideals and prescriptions about religion, gender, and politics in the ideal pious societies they wish to create.

Different from ideology, collective action frames are "schemata of interpretation" that social movement actors construct to mediate ideology and experience by interpreting the latter in view of the former.<sup>22</sup> Frames are often, although not always, shaped by ideology and respond to it; they are constrained by ideology but also act upon it.<sup>23</sup> For conservative religious-political movements, a complementarian gender order is an integral component of their coherent and largely durable gender ideology. But religious-nationalist movements have an additional ideological dimension—the supremacy of the nationalist struggle. In these movements, women activists employ the nationalist ideological component in articulating diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames of exception.<sup>24</sup> Diagnostically, they frame current events in terms of an existential threat that requires unusual or exceptional responses by women. Their prognostic framing process, their answer to the question "what is to be done?" constructs a feminine action that temporarily violates the commitment to role complementarity and to feminine modesty. Their motivational framing process articulates women's need to act in these exceptional ways that might be considered "unfeminine" but that are motivated by a legitimate

concern for the movement's nationalist ideology and for the very survival of the nation. Frames of exception make possible righteous transgressions. Acts that are normally considered transgressive are made righteous in exceptional times and circumstances. Since a movement's ideology is both a resource and a constraint to possible framing choices, the religious-nationalist movements in this study offer greater framing possibilities for women activists due to a constant discursive presence of an exceptional threat. The ideology of the proselytizing movements lacks this facilitating component and thus limits framing options available to women activists.

This observation resonates with a vast literature on women and nationalism in the Middle East and elsewhere. However, most of the work on this subject in the Middle East context has focused on women in secular nationalist movements that did not have as part of their central agenda the spread of piety among coreligionists and the strengthening of the religious character of their states.<sup>25</sup> In these movements, women often consciously and purposefully used the context of the nationalist struggle and mobilization to break with cultural traditions they saw as limiting to women. Women mobilized through these movements often already had, or developed through their activism, a feminist consciousness; even if their nationalist movements remained, despite some egalitarian rhetoric, largely patriarchal.

On the other hand, women activists in the contemporary pious religious nationalist movements I work with express their commitment to the complementarity model advocated by their movements and reject what they see as the blurring of gender roles in the nonpious nationalist movements that have come before them (secular Zionism in the Israeli context, and Fatah and leftist nationalism in Palestine). When these women engage in activism that appears to transgress their own commitments and their movements' gender ideology, they inhabit greater contradictions than women who see the nationalist struggle as an opportunity (real or imagined) for gender equality. For these pious women, frames of exception are a concrete discursive tool that settles that contradiction by making transgression on the one hand righteous—given the demand of the nationalist struggle—and, on the other hand, temporary, as it remains a strategy for exceptional times that would and *should* be relinquished once normalcy is achieved.

At the same time, the mechanism of frames of exception might have parallels in other nationalist contexts, including secular ones. This book demonstrates not only that women acquire new roles as part of nationalist struggles (a well-established observation of the feminist literature) but also the specific mechanisms by which women justify, legitimate, and make possible such performative expansions through a framing process that explicitly suspends, rather than challenges, their movement's gender ideology for the sake of its nationalist goals.

But most importantly, the analysis of the relationship between religious-nationalist ideology and forms of women's activism on the Israeli and Palestinian religious right is not presented here as a deterministic law-like statement that holds true in all cases and at all times. Rather, I use it to illustrate two central theoretical points. The first is the reorientation from a focus on a movement's gender ideology when studying pious women's activism. As Clark and Schwedler caution, looking only at this will lead us to think that a process of "moderation" in a movement's restrictive gender ideology is what would facilitate expanded forms of women's activism and leadership within it.<sup>26</sup> However, in many patriarchal religious-political movements women are able to take on new roles even in the absence of a process of "moderation." My research proposes that the interaction between various components of a movement's ideological objectives, and in turn the framing resources that such an interaction provides activists, are essential in shaping patterns of women's activism.

The second point is the introduction of the concept of frames of exception. I illustrate the construction process of frames of exception in the context of religious-nationalist movements. But frames of exception are not confined to nationalist movements; these are just the most conducive to this framing process because their worldview already entails an "exceptional" temporality of struggle. In times of severe crisis, as for instance, the one the Egyptian Muslim Brothers currently face, frames of exception can also be effectively constructed by women activists in strictly proselytizing religious-political movements toward similar ends. The events of the 2011 Arab Spring and the contestations that followed them demonstrate that exceptional temporality can be discursively created around other axes as well. Events that movements interpret as constituting a break with normal or everyday reality allow women

activists to create and deploy frames of exception and engage in righteous transgressions in nonnationalist contexts as well.

The concept of frames of exception is relevant to the wider literature on women's engagement in contemporary conservative religious movements. This literature can be roughly divided into two approaches. The first searches for women's resistance to patriarchal practices within religious frameworks and explains moments of transgression in terms of a religious feminist struggle for gender equality. This research has produced illuminating accounts of religious feminism within traditional communities, spanning—to name but a few trends—Jewish Orthodox feminism,<sup>27</sup> Islamic feminism,<sup>28</sup> Catholic feminism,<sup>29</sup> Evangelical feminism,<sup>30</sup> and others. However, as Leila Abu Lughod and Saba Mahmood<sup>31</sup> have critiqued, the significant attention scholars give to women's resistance against limiting gendered practices and to explicit or implicit feminist contestations of such practices often reflects a feminist bias. This bias in turn overstates the prevalence of resistance and privileges it as the only form of female agency within patriarchal contexts.

This critique has generated the second approach to the study of women in conservative religious movements. Here, the focus is on the ways processes of adherence, rather than resistance, to nonegalitarian gendered practices is constitutive of the female religious subject and is also an expression of a particular form of pious agency.<sup>32</sup> While offering an important intervention, the “agency in adherence” approach is concerned almost exclusively with piety practices and complementarian activism and largely ignores more expansive political action.<sup>33</sup> The question that this book tackles is how women who do subscribe to the nonegalitarian gender doctrines of their religious-political movements and vehemently reject a discourse of feminist resistance nevertheless engage in forms of political activism that transgress (rather than adhere to) the roles assigned to them by these same doctrines. The answer to the question, as will become clear over the course of this book, is frames of exception. What would appear to be a contradiction or a dissonance in activists' practice when they profess adherence to gender role-difference but overstep and violate it at the same time, is resolved through their construction of frames of exception.

But I do not claim that feminist frames have no place in conservative religious-political movements in the Middle East. This

book explores the impressive creativity and power of women activists in such movements to shape discourses and their reality. It is conceivable that women activists could decide to explicitly challenge their movements' gender ideology by employing feminist or equality frames rather than frames of exception. Such a challenge will have significant consequences for their movements' commitment to a particular kind of sexual difference. The interviews with women activists that I present in this study as well as preliminary evidence from other studies suggest that this is a trend that might become more widespread in the future.<sup>34</sup> This, however, will require a radical reorientation of many of these movements with far reaching consequences for their ideology. It would require nothing less than a transformation of one of their core ideological tenets—a shift from the central stress on men and women's role-complementarity to an acceptance of their full equality in the religious, legal, cultural, social, and political spheres.

### **Notes on Method: Working Comparatively and Speaking with “Fundamentalists”**

Comparative work has plenty of hazards, and so it is imperative to make a few qualifications at the outset. First, I am acutely aware of the singularity of each case and have reservations about any generalizations that perceive the social-political world as operating according to some discoverable laws. To achieve a balance between generalizing theory building and the uniqueness and contingency of each case, I go to great lengths to touch on much of the nuance and complexity of each movement. However, this book is not an exhaustive ethnography of the movements. Covering four distinct groups in a time span of two years in the field is a difficult fit, and surely the treatment afforded to the movements in this research cannot cover all their various facets and intricacies. Instead, I selected those aspects of the movements that pertain to and eventually shape women's activism and that serve as building blocks for a theory that could be useful in other contexts as well.

I am also keenly attuned to the suspicion feminist scholarship maintains of reductive categories. “Women” as a unitary category whose substance and meaning transcend particular contexts and other markers of identity (such as race, class, ethnicity, nationality, and so on) is viewed as problematic in my comparative work.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, the conservative religious-political movements I present here allow to a certain extent a comparative approach to the

study of women's roles within them as they ideologically construct the category of "women" in comparable terms. Focusing on women as a comparative category (while eliciting the different experiences that make individuals and subgroups in this category distinct) is justified in the case of the four gender nonegalitarian religious-political movements in this study. This is due to the fact that women in these movements experience and adhere to a very clear official rhetoric that defines them as a group, and stresses heterosexual sexual difference as one of the movements' most fundamental ideological dichotomies. It is true that women are differently positioned in relation to their movements' official discourse and that their experience of this discourse is mediated through other identity filters. However, what constitutes them as a group is the fact that they all subscribe to a worldview that defines them as one.

Another methodological and ethical issue is the question of power. While this book is about conservative movements' gender politics, and not about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, readers may raise questions about balance, imbalance, and the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as they shape my approach. To clarify, I compare four cases here but do not attempt to create false symmetries or balance between them. The groups I study and their women members are differently positioned in relations to power, resources, and the state. Settler women are the most privileged in comparison to women in the three other groups. Their privileges stem from their Israeli nationality, their largely Ashkenazi ethnicity, their middle-class background, and their movement's almost unsurpassed access to state budgets and resources. In a sort of hierarchy of access to power, Shas women come after settler women. They are underprivileged in terms of ethnicity and class, but more privileged than Islamic Movement women in terms of religious and national identity, as well as access to state funding for their institutions and activities. In this schematic pyramid, Islamic Movement women come next, suffering marginalization in Israel due to their religious, ethnic, and national minority identity and socioeconomic origins, but nevertheless enjoying some political privileges that Hamas women in the occupied territories lack. At the bottom of the list, then, are Hamas women, who are under occupation and under double persecution by both Israel and the Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority. These intersectional differences, however, lend strong support to my argument about frames of exception. They provide certain "controls" over other

variables that could offer competing explanations to variations in forms of women's activism in the movements. We see that women in the most privileged movement—the settlers—and women in the most oppressed group—pious Palestinians under occupation—utilize the same discursive tools, or frames of exception, to enable activist transgressions.

A final concern that could arise from the comparison I make here is that I place side by side movements that may be in conflict with each other, and some of their members may take offense that I study them together. Yet, as a category of religious-political movements with particular gender commitments, I argue that the groups are comparable—in the sense that they can be compared to each other, not in the sense that they are identical. I recognize the distinction of the movements, and in the chapters that follow I am careful to draw attention to their wide differences as well as their similarities. It is my hope that even those in the groups that are resistant to being placed under the same rubric with the other movements might find in this comparative exercise some useful insight.

Moving to the specifics. I began the research by reviewing the movements' official publications, speeches, campaign platforms, and interviews with spokespersons and leaders from the 1980s to the present to justify the classification of movements into the nationalist and proselytizing categories. I also employed a gender analysis in my review of these sources. As Verta Taylor explains, “gender analysis of social movements requires that we recognize the extent to which gender dualist metaphors supply the cultural symbols that social movement actors use to identify their commonalities, draw boundaries between themselves and their opponents, and legitimate and motivate collective action.”<sup>36</sup> My analysis of the articulated gender ideology of each movement supports the claim that they all share a commitment to a divinely sanctioned complementarity model. The main publications I reviewed were as follows: for the settler movement, *Nekuda* (1979–2010) and *Besheva* (2002–2010); for Shas, *Yom Leyom* (1993–2010); for the southern branch of the Islamic movement, *Al-Mithaq* (1990–2010); for the northern branch of the Islamic Movement, *Sawt al-Haq wa al-Huriyya* (1989–2010); for Hamas, *Filastin al-Muslima* (1980–2010) and *Al-Risala* (1997–2010).

Alongside my research in the archives, I conducted participant observations and held formal interviews and informal conversations

with women activists in the movements. I spent over twenty-four months between 2008 and 2012 conducting fieldwork in Israel and the West Bank. I returned for visits of close to two months in 2013 and 2014. During my fieldwork, I joined activists in mosque and synagogue lessons, closed meetings, public lectures, mass gatherings, protests and confrontations, settlement outpost construction, and religious pilgrimages. I talked with women activists about their motivations, goals, and constraints and how they made sense of their worlds and activism. I worked primarily with women who were well known within the movements and some even outside of them and who spanned the generational and geographical diversity in each movement.<sup>37</sup> To reach activists, I used a snowball method, first approaching women and men in official leadership positions and through them contacting additional women who had a high profile of activism. Women's writings, and interviews published in the movements' print and social media platforms, provided an additional valuable source. The interviews and conversations, the participant observations, and women's writings served to evaluate forms of women's participation in each movement and understand how different types of activism are rationalized and enabled in the activists' discourse and actions. In addition, I also collected data from the Israeli and Palestinian Elections Commissions and Statistics Bureaus, and from the movements themselves on levels of women's formal representation in national parties and local council lists affiliated with the four movements.

The process of establishing trust and gaining access played out differently with each of the movements due to my identity and my position as an insider-outsider in the field. Being Jewish and Israeli at times facilitated and at other times challenged trust. With Shas, my distinctly Mizrahi (Moroccan) family name helped establish rapport with many activists who shared my ethnic background. I was first asked to briefly speak with a rabbi who oversaw some of the women's teshuva work. When I was introduced by name, he said without looking at me—in accordance with the requirements of modesty—"I understand that she can see things from our point of view." The activist who accompanied me, a woman with over twenty years of activism experience in the movement, answered: "She is one of us" (*hi mishelanu*), referring to my family name. Thereafter, I was invited to participate in activities and had no problem scheduling interviews and meetings.



In the settler movement, activists were mostly welcoming, but I did encounter suspicion from some who worried that I might be a journalist seeking to tarnish the movement's reputation, or even an agent of the Jewish unit in the Israeli General Security Service (Shabak). For example, when I met Yona, a well-known activist, in her office, she looked at my tape recorder and said, "put this aside for now." I proceeded to ask her some questions, and about fifteen minutes into our conversation she said, "You can turn your tape recorder on." When I asked about her initial reluctance and her change of heart, she explained that not long ago a young man claiming to be a researcher interviewed her and others and asked questions that seemed suspicious to her. After some time, she said, she found out that he was in fact from the Shabak and was posturing as a researcher. Another activist told me about journalists who use various pretenses to collect information they then use in sensational and demonizing articles about the movement.

With the Islamic Movement, I encountered varied responses. When I visited a prominent leader in the Movement's southern branch at his home, he repeated my name to himself several times. "Are you Jewish?" he asked. "Is your family in Israel?" When I answered yes to both questions, he considered it for a few moments and then said, "Welcome" (*ahlan wa-sahlan*), but proceeded to speak in what seemed to me a particularly diplomatic manner. My conversations with him and with others in the leadership remained very formal, but they generously put me in touch with prominent women activists. With the women, I found that conversations flowed naturally and with little inhibition, and I encountered enthusiastic hospitality, candor, and openness.

In my work with the northern branch, the fact that I was Israeli and Jewish but also spoke Arabic elicited guarded reactions from male leaders who ignored my e-mails and phone calls, put me off, and seemed reluctant to have me around. However, since I anticipated this, I had already made contact with women in the northern branch who invited me to events and were willing to engage in conversations. With women activists in both the settler movement and the northern branch of the Islamic Movement, I was able to overcome initial difficulties by being as forthcoming as possible about my research and by showing my genuine interest in the women's work. Many of the activists shared my view that while their contribution is essential and integral to their movements, not

enough attention and credit have been afforded to their efforts in the scholarship about the movements or in their coverage by the media.

With Hamas, however, identity posed an insurmountable barrier. As an Israeli, I was barred from entering Gaza, and my attempts to reach out to Hamas activists in the West Bank were largely frustrated. This was entirely understandable given that Hamas activists in the West Bank faced persecution by the security apparatuses of both the Palestinian Authority and Israel in the years I conducted my fieldwork. Fortunately, prominent Hamas women activists are prolific interviewees and writers, and Hamas has impressively sophisticated conventional and social media publication outlets in Arabic that provide a plethora of information. I was able to collect hundreds of interviews with Hamas women leaders that helped fill the gap where fieldwork was impossible. Nevertheless, the ethnographic richness that is present in the other three cases is missing in my discussion of Hamas. For this reason, a short discussion of the primary sources I use as well as their limitations and their utility is in order.

My materials for the Hamas case come from the following: *Filastin al-Muslima* (1980–2010) and *Al-Risala* (1997–2010), which are Hamas-affiliated publications; Hamas's official social media platform—*Al-markaz al-filastini lil-i'lam*; the official social media platform of Hamas's women's branch—*Nisa' min ajli filastin*; Hamas's TV channel, Al-Aqsa TV; as well as two Hamas-sanctioned hagiographies that present collections of prominent Hamas women's writings, interviews, and biographies: Ghassan Daw'ar Jarban's 2008 *Khansa' fi filastin*, and Ismail Al-Ashkar and Mu'min Bsaisou's 2004 *Al-mar'a al-filastiniyya fi da'irat al-istihdaf al-sahyuni*. The fact that the Hamas sources I use are officially sanctioned, that they present the public writings and words of women activists, and that they contain extensive evidence for the construction and deployment of frames of exception by these women show that the women's official rhetoric in fact makes extensive use of this framing device.

An astute reader would be right to point out that what women activists say in public may be different from what they say in private about their motivations for transgressive action. My argument, though, is about the public framing processes women utilize and about how effective and powerful these public strategies are. Furthermore, my ethics in my relation to my research subjects is one

that takes women's presentation of themselves and the rationales they put forth in public for their actions as genuine, even though I acknowledge and discuss how their choices have a strategic purpose as well. For this reason, I focus on what women *say* they believe and their public self-presentation, rather than on some possible or presumed "behind the veil" motives and motivations. This is something I do with all the movements and not just with Hamas. This also stems from the fact that unlike popular perceptions about these movements, my work reveals that women are not simply manipulated or controlled by the male leadership but possess a great deal of agency and are themselves among the shapers of the ideological, spiritual, and activist worlds of their movements.

Still, my treatment of Hamas is inevitably more limited than my treatment of the other movements. To address this shortcoming, I draw on other studies of Hamas that provide us with ethnographic richness and that highlight women's activism. In particular, Sara Roy<sup>38</sup> and Islah Jad<sup>39</sup> have given us the kind of fieldwork richness about Hamas that goes beyond the elite male leadership and introduces the variegated grassroots work of activists, including women.

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Ethnographic work among interlocutors with whose political projects the researcher may have profound disagreement, and even aversion, entails a host of theoretical, ethical, and personal challenges. When interlocutors are political actors in movements that many call "fundamentalist," such challenges become even more acute. In the next section, I share some of these challenges using the example of Rabbi Amnon Yitzhak. Many consider Rabbi Yitzhak and his Shofar movement that promotes teshuva to be a fringe and extreme phenomenon in Israel. However, his attention to boundary-making between the religious and the secular, and to sexual difference as one of the main arenas where these boundaries are demarcated, is shared in myriad forms by the other conservative religious-political movements on the Israeli and Palestinian religious right discussed in this book. By taking these commitments to their extreme, his style of presentation lays bare the fundamental logic that animates them.

*Speaking with "Fundamentalists"*

Tiberius, Israel, 2010. The crowd in the hall where Rabbi Yitzhak was to speak settled down on the rows of seats meticulously arranged around a central stage. The women dutifully sat at one end and the men at the other. When Rabbi Yitzhak approached the stage, loud whispers emanated from the women's side of the audience. The men also had a part to play in what was growing into a steady performance of sorts. They shrugged their shoulders and crumpled their faces and sighed in disciplined impatience for the show to begin.

Rabbi Yitzhak stood in front of a pale green cutout, an optical feat that created a receding background against which his black tunic appeared larger, more accentuated. His beard was a bouquet, splayed with improbably patterned halves of black and white. It had that gentle fall that all beards do when they grow beyond the chest and enter the midriff, a particularly monopolized jurisdiction for godmen of all persuasions. A black turban covered his head. Thin-rimmed spectacles sat firmly on his nose, and from behind these he peered out, surveying his audience.

“Ready?” he shouted to the crowd.

“Not ready!” he swiftly answered.

“Ready?”

Once again he answered, “Not ready!”

His intransigent eyes and his motionless face remained in place as he repeated himself over and over, three times, four times, five, six.... “Ready?” “Not ready!”

The audience fell silent, appearing confused but eager to listen.

“Ready?” And now a different answer, “BHAP!”

The ladies in front flinched.

“Ready!”

The point of today's gathering was simple, and Rabbi Yitzhak was quick to cut to the chase. The institution of music, all that is secular in tone and beat, is defilement and must be struck down. A cataloging of such sensorial ruination was in order, but before that, proceedings began with the obligatory wrecking of the technology that spreads this disease. Accordingly, at her cue, a large woman seated at the front stood up and faced the crowd. She was handed an unmarked CD, which she paraded with an extended arm from one

side to the other for everyone to see. We had to take it on good faith that this disc was not blank and that it indeed contained some foul musical repertoire. After all lingering doubts had been presumably put to rest, she commenced with the butchering. Her stubby fingers folded the circle into a messy half, after which she repeatedly yanked one side up and down. Again and again, she folded and yanked, folded and yanked, but the disc did not break. Her smile gave way to a mild look of concern and then evident frustration. But Rabbi Yitzhak compensated by simulating sounds of explosions—TICK TACK BOOMS that he croaked for effect, bringing back hope to the butcherer of CDs. Finally, after the point had been belabored, he brought an end to this opening gesture with a firm “GOOD! ENOUGH!”

The lecture that followed was captivating, especially if one were to judge by the enthralled audience that sat in deep concentration. A big part of the problem was American music, said Rabbi Yitzhak as he twirled his waist and spoke in a gruff voice. In a dizzying pace, he strung together Eisenhower, Sinatra, Rock, RROOCKK ‘N ROLLLL!, RRRAPPP!, Jazz. And what was worse, he said, was mixed-sex audiences. Even the purest of music that is sung strictly to praise *Hashem*, when performed in front of a mixed audience is an insult. Go home today and review your CD collection, he instructed. Any singer, even if he is the most observant Haredi musician, who has been performing in front of mixed audiences of men and women, must be shunned. Rabbi Yitzhak’s assignment to the crowd was to follow the lead of the CD butcherer and destroy any CD they own whose vocalist was known to entertain men and women together.

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The assertion that the secularization thesis has lost much of its purchase in the last decades of the twentieth century is now almost a cliché. High levels of religiosity, church/synagogue/mosque attendance and the rising visibility and popularity of new religious politics around the world have put into question the assumption that with the advent of modernization, secularization is largely inevitable. As Rabbi Yitzhak beautifully teaches us, modernization and secularization are hardly inseparable. While advocating the wrecking of CDs, Rabbi Yitzhak’s lecture was streamed live to thousands of online followers and later edited and archived on his enormously popular website. The stereotype of a maladjusted

“fundamentalist,” who had been left on the margins of the great march of modernization is no longer a useful image for even the most simplistic of commentators. The rise of highly modern and often quite intolerant religious politics has spurred much academic and popular interest in the workings of religious-political movements similar to the one with which Rabbi Yitzhak is associated. In the media, Islamist movements have received the bulk of attention, especially in the post-9/11 world. But as we have seen here, Rabbi Yitzhak, who hails from an entirely different tradition, can easily compete with the strictest shaykhs of Saudi Arabia or Egypt. While Islamists have their distinct features and contexts, they belong to a wider phenomenon that has developed into full-fledged influential movements in various contemporary faiths. These movements are, perhaps, the most prominent challengers of the secularization thesis.

Jose Casanova divides the phenomenon of secularization into three aspects: secularization as decline in individuals’ religious belief and practice; secularization as the privatization of religion and its withdrawal from the public sphere; and secularization as institutional differentiation, the separation of religion from the state.<sup>40</sup> Religious-political movements—such as the Egyptian Muslim Brothers, the Indian Hindutva movement, the Jewish settlers in the West Bank, and many others—challenge all three aspects of secularization. First, their efforts to promote piety counter secularization as religious decline. Second, these movements seek to deprivatize religion and reassert it as a presence to contend with in the public sphere. Finally, the movements challenge institutional separation by infusing the world of formal politics and state institutions with religious argument as a privileged source of public reasoning and law making.

Following Talal Asad and many other critics,<sup>41</sup> it would be misleading to see such movements simply as the antithesis of secularism. There is much merit to the claim that the very processes of modern secularization have created and shaped the forms of religious politics we see today. Yet, because my work analyzes the perspectives of religious movements themselves and because they present themselves as the challengers of secularization, I will make use of this uncomfortable dichotomy. In the last chapter of this book, I will return to this dichotomy to show how it is also at times dismantled in the articulations of some of the women activists I work with.

This book relies heavily on conversations with and the writings of activists in a subsection of contemporary religious-political movements that many call “fundamentalist,” although I avoid using this term due to its various loaded connotations and because I am unconvinced of its analytic utility. The conversation I wish to create in the research practice belongs to a growing literature on fundamentalist doctrines and liberal democracy. (Because of the literature’s use of the term “fundamentalism,” I will employ it in this section only for the sake of consistency.) Scholars committed to liberal democratic principles have attempted to assess the challenge waged by fundamentalism, understand its nature, and find methods for engaging with it in a nonviolent manner. But attempts to understand fundamentalism rarely go as far as engaging its agents in meaningful conversations.

Popular and scholarly constructions of fundamentalism, as Roxanne Euben points out, have often employed two lines of interpretation: fundamentalism as irrationality and fundamentalism as an epiphenomenon. First, as irrationality, fundamentalism has been described as a fearful, almost panicky, reaction to modernity and as “the persistence of the archaic and particularistic.”<sup>42</sup> The image of the fanatic religious fundamentalist, with clenched fists and a menacing frown, shouting religious slogans in a religious-political trance, is quite common in popular culture. This reductive account limits the possibility for conversation and is often used by critics of fundamentalism, as well as “fundamentalists” themselves (like Rabbi Yitzhak, for example) to foreclose conversation.

Second, and most common among scholars of fundamentalism in the Middle East, is the attempt to provide materialist explanations to the surfacing of fundamentalism. In this account, fundamentalism is not an irrational but rather a rational response to prevailing socioeconomic and political conditions such as the persistence of despotism, the failure of alternative ideologies like secular nationalism and socialism, growing economic inequalities, the frustration of the poor or the educated but unemployed youth, and so on. While such descriptions endow fundamentalism with rationalist capacities, as employing appropriate means toward a specified end, they empty the phenomenon of any unique ideological content. As Euben notes, fundamentalist ideology, which may include the effort to reenchant the world, to reinfuse into it a spiritual and moral meaning that is believed to have been lost or corrupted in the

modern world, is sidelined and is not considered a major source of the appeal of fundamentalism.

This book incorporates Euben's, and others', critiques of these two approaches by avoiding the irrational and epiphenomenal traps and taking seriously the ideology of activists in religious-political movements presented in their own words and with their own interpretations.<sup>43</sup> The life projects and beliefs of activists as they express them are at the center of the research. A conversation is required, I contend, for the purpose of understanding the nature of the challenge so-called fundamentalist movements represent to liberal democratic principles. It is also necessary for the possibility of a constructive response to this challenge. This conversation, however, is not easily achieved. It is difficult to accomplish not because activists are irrational or because they obscure their "real" social, economic and political agendas. Rather, the difficulty lies in some activists' "unreasonableness."

I pray to the Lord that he will have mercy. Because I have a check, a blank check [takes out a Bible from her shelf, this is God's blank check] and on the check it is written that the Land of Israel belongs to the People of Israel. You [Arabs] want to live here? Then live here in peace, you are our guests here, you can live as residents [meaning without citizenship rights]. You want to fight? Then we'll fight. You want to leave? Then leave. (Shlomit, field-notes 2008)

After Rawls, fundamentalist doctrines are unreasonable because they fail to support a political conception of justice underwriting a democratic society, including equal basic rights and liberties for all citizens, liberty of conscience and the freedom of religion. Most importantly, unreasonable doctrines do not meet the criterion of reciprocity, which requires acknowledging that one's comprehensive doctrine is one among many and, because all members of society are free and equal citizens, one's doctrine cannot be imposed on others.<sup>44</sup> (It is important to stress that Rawls is not referring here to religious actors per se as unreasonable, but only to those who reject reciprocity, which stipulates that one's religious worldview cannot be forced on others). Rawls states that "unreasonable doctrines are a threat to democratic institutions, since it is impossible for them to abide by a constitutional regime except as a *modus vivendi*."<sup>45</sup> He goes as far as to say about unreasonable comprehensive doctrines, "That there are doctrines that reject one or more democratic freedoms is itself a permanent fact of life, or seems so. *This gives us the practical task of containing them—like war and disease—so that they do not overturn political justice.*"<sup>46</sup>



In this book, I propose that instead of reacting to the challenge as one would to “war or disease,” instead of exclusion, we develop a different practice of conversation. When I engage with activists in religious-political movements who would be considered unreasonable in Rawls’s account, who would reject notions of the freedom and equality of all citizens or the idea that they should not impose their religious doctrines on others, I enter a strange kind of conversation. (It is crucial to note, though, that not all activists fall under this category. In my work, I have met many who accept the reality of pluralism and find methods by which worldviews that are fundamentally in conflict with their own could be accommodated. But having accepted reciprocity, equality, and pluralism, these interlocutors are no longer “unreasonable” by Rawls’s definition. Another important note is that in the context of Israel and Palestine, right-wing religious-political movements are not the sole representatives of “unreasonable” doctrines. Mainstream Zionism and Fatah-style Palestinian nationalism hardly meet the criteria of liberal-democratic pluralism.)

The conversation with those who qualify, on Rawls’s terms, as “unreasonable,” would take Habermas’s notion of translation but detach it from its reciprocal requirement.<sup>47</sup> While I am committed to listen to and translate “fundamentalist” arguments to notions I can understand, my interlocutor does not necessarily have such a commitment toward me. In fact, if I insist on conveying my own strong worldview, the conversation might end or never even begin in the first place. What might this engagement look like? A fully reciprocal conversation would inhibit engagement, as some of my interlocutors are not committed to its principles. To proceed, I suggest a method I call “acting as if.” Acting as if I can listen and hear, acting as if I could be open to eventually reevaluating my commitment to the principles of liberal pluralist democracy. In other words, acting as if openness is present on my part in this conversation.

Acting as if is not dissimulation, it is not meant to deceive oneself or others.<sup>48</sup> Nor is it a distancing method to gain objectivity or detachment. I am neither objective nor detached, as I have a personal stake in the kind of society in which I wish to live, one that is predicated on pluralism, reciprocity, equality, and freedom of and from religion. Acting as if is a behavior, not an imaginative act. It is embodied; it happens in real interactions and affects how we act, not what we think. We ask the questions: What would be the behavior,

the physical disposition and reactions, the speech, the reading practice of someone who could potentially be open to her interlocutor's life-project? What if you approached your interlocutors *as if* you were prepared to listen? Would it open up the possibility that you might hear something? Would working on the body facilitate a sort of listening? Certainly on the physical level, it would allow for an exchange to take place (an exchange that may have been foreclosed by acting "authentically"). Beyond enabling conversation, acting as if may also enable things to be said or read in a way you could hear.

A concern many readers might have with the notion of acting as if is its association with inauthenticity. The way I use this concept, however, relies on a different understanding of the relationship between interiority and exteriority, where the latter does not simply reflect the former, but rather acts upon it. Acting as if is meant as an embodied practice that works on the self in the context of interaction with others in order to cultivate a subject that is capable of being open to its interlocutor, even when ideologically it may not be. To clarify, I will give two examples drawn from religious practice. Saba Mahmood describes how women in the piety movement in Egypt don the veil even when they feel that internally they are still immodest—that they have not been able to inculcate true modesty within themselves. The veil is then used as an exterior tool to both embody modesty and to work on the self to cultivate interior modesty. The same goes for prayer in the group that Mahmood studied. The women she worked with maintained that performing the mechanics of prayer, even in the absence of true intention behind it, can ultimately generate internal meaning. We may also use as a model the Jewish emphasis on orthopraxis, or correct conduct, and its effect on belief and interiority. For instance, the notion of *mitokh shelo lishma ba lishma* is a Jewish educational principle that teaches that the study of the Torah or the observance of religious practices that is not motivated by true belief and conviction can nevertheless create in the practitioner the conviction and commitment he or she lacks. Embodying the practices of a person who could be open to being transformed by the encounter with her interlocutors' worlds, who could reconsider her ideological commitments to liberal pluralist democracy as a result of conversation, reflects my desire to work on myself in order to make conversation possible where it is often impossible. I intend acting as if not as a research method only. Rather I propose that it could be used as a political practice as well

that may facilitate productive public sphere conversations with political actors who are sometimes called “fundamentalists.”

The success or usefulness of this approach is left to the readers’ evaluation. It will become evident in the following chapters that this study includes an exceptionally large volume of the words of my interlocutors as well as thick descriptions of the activities they undertake, in which I was privileged to participate. These rich materials reflect the outcome of my engagement through acting as if. Laid bare for the reader, they bring to life the kinds of conversations I was able to have, the nature of things that were said, and the degree of my ability to really see my interlocutors’ worlds and life-projects. It is also the form of presentation of these materials, and not just their contents, which reflects the commitment to the possibility of conversation. My interlocutors’ words and worlds dominate this text, even at the expense of the space left for my commentary and interpretation. Moreover, the women’s words and actions at times undermine or disturb my interpretations. I believe that this choice makes the research even more valuable. It allows readers to engage with the women activists in a way that loosens some of my control over that engagement and opens up the possibility of new conversations.

### **Structure of the Book**

As a roadmap to these conversations, I provide here a brief sketch of the following chapters. [Chapter 2](#) introduces the historical and political evolution of the four movements from their inception in the 1970s and 1980s until this day. It outlines the structure and sociology of each movement and the ideological context in which each operates. The chapter offers a review of the articulated ideologies of the movements to justify their classification into the proselytizing and nationalist categories. Finally, the chapter examines the gender ideology of the movements as expressed by leaders, official publications, institutions, policies, and women activists’ articulations. As will become evident, the four movements share a religious commitment to a gender ideology that sets role-complementarity as a prerequisite for a moral society.

[Chapter 3](#) examines forms of “complementarian activism” that the movements see as the most appropriate for women. This form of feminine contribution involves distinctly gendered support to the community and the movement in the private sphere of the home and

in public, but largely sex-segregated forums or caregiving roles. The chapter is divided into four parts: settlers' domesticity; da'wa and the Islamic Movement's "third way"; teshuva and social work in Shas; and Hamas's complementarian activism under occupation. It includes detailed descriptions of these forms of activism drawing on field-notes from participant-observations, interviews, and women's writings. The chapter shows that though it might not challenge the hegemonic gender ideology of the movements, women's complementarian activism is indispensable to the movements and is vital to the very sustenance and advancement of their political projects.

**Chapter 4** addresses the framing processes that enable women's engagement in "protest action." The chapter analyzes instances of women activists' participation in unruly public protest, confrontations, and militant activity that at times require some degree of compromising physical interaction with men. In this chapter, women activists describe how they justify and make possible such actions that appear to undermine their commitment to complementarity and to notions of female modesty. In the cases of the Jewish settlers and the Palestinian Hamas, the nationalist vocabulary of an urgent existential threat and unusual or exceptional temporality provides women with discursive tools to construct diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames of exception that make certain actions not only legitimate but even necessary. In the settler movement, I explore the protest against the Oslo Peace Accord in the 1990s and against the dismantling of the Gaza settlements and of Amona outpost in 2005 and 2006, respectively. For Hamas, I look at the unique and exceptional participation of Hamas women in suicide operations and in the short-lived women's paramilitary brigade. Frames of exception are deployed within the Islamic Movement in Israel too, when the issue at hand involves a religious-nationalist concern, such as the perceived threat to the Al-Aqsa mosque posed by the Jewish state. An exploration of public activism by Shas women reveals that in the absence of an overriding nationalist agenda, boundary-making between the secular and the religious and thus between men and women remains an overriding concern that cannot be suspended.

**Chapter 5** compares women's "formal representation" in the four movements. As expected, in the settler movement and in Hamas, political representation of women has been significant. The rate of women's representation in Orthodox settlement local councils, for

example, exceeds their overall representation in local government across Israel. Interviews with women leaders in the movement demonstrate how they employ the urgency and exceptional nature of the threat to the national body to argue for women's political representation. In the case of Hamas, the chapter considers the 2004–2005 Palestinian local council elections and the 2006 national election to investigate the ways in which a mandatory women's quota, which was instituted at the time, interacts with the construction of frames of exception. In the case of the Islamic Movement in Israel, there have been women candidates on some of its lists for local councils and it even had a few women elected as council members. A study of the councils in which Islamic Movement women have run or have been elected reveals that in these instances election campaigns revolved around a nationalist or communalist theme. As expected, the proselytizing Shas movement has never had any female representative in any elected formal leadership body, including local government. However, this chapter argues that when it comes to formal representation, unlike protest action, other types of frames, including arguments about women's capabilities gained by their practice of complementarian activism, play a role alongside frames of exception.

[Chapter 6](#) then considers the implications of the various forms of women's activism in the movements to the wider politics of gender equality. Transgression of gender roles or their reversal where women undertake activities that are considered men's work has the potential to challenge the existing gender order. In the case of socially conservative religious-political movements, transgression could ultimately destabilize the strict patriarchal distinctions so central to the movements' doctrines. This book therefore concludes with an evaluation of whether women's transgressive activism in the two nationalist movements ultimately undermines or rather reinforces role-complementarity and its associated gender binaries. In this evaluation it draws on insight from queer theory that has dealt with similar questions in a vastly different context. It shows that women's transgressive activism in the settler movement and Hamas eventually reinforces, rather than challenges, the fundamental and rigid conceptions of sex and gender roles in their movements. The chapter then turns to a discussion of the concepts of freedom and agency in the context of women's activism in the proselytizing-focused movements. It shows that, paradoxically, it is activism in these two movements—Shas and the southern branch of the Islamic

Movement in Israel—where women’s activism provides them with liberatory narratives that surprisingly resonate with liberal conceptions of freedom and autonomy.

## 2

### Contextualizing the Movements

The objectives of this expository chapter are threefold. First, the chapter briefly introduces the historical and political trajectories of the four movements from their inception in the 1970s and 1980s until this day. In the course of this introduction, the chapter outlines the political structure of the movements and the sociological composition of their supporters and activists. Second, the chapter offers a brief exploration of the guiding political ideology and ethos of the movements. This is intended to bring out both the similarities and the differences between them on the level of doctrine and ideology. The four movements share a fundamental commitment to making their societies and states more religious. The mechanisms and methods by which such spread of piety should come about are of course contested and debated. Priorities shift and emphases change, but the four movements' self-definition cannot be disentangled from this paramount commitment. Through this exploration, this chapter also aims to justify the classification of each movement into the proselytizing and nationalist categories. We will see how ideological priorities are set and gain confidence in our categorization of the settler movement and Hamas as prioritizing a nationalist agenda over proselytizing, the Islamic Movement as vacillating between proselytizing and nationalism, and Shas as prioritizing proselytizing. Discussion and debate exist within each movement between "hardliners" and "pragmatists," and any strict categorization will inevitably flatten the complexity and dynamic nature of the movements' ideological composition. However, relying on a consensus in the secondary literature and familiarity with each of the movements, this chapter argues that the aforementioned classification is indeed valid and useful for the examination of the relationship between ideology and framing as it pertains to

women's roles in socially conservative religious-political movements and the construction of frames of exception.

This brings us to the final task of the chapter. A review of the gender ideology that each movement advocates reveals the underlying similarities between them. Here again, my aim is not to argue that gender ideology, discourses, and practices are static and unchanging. As priorities and political circumstances shift, so does the practice of activists in the movements. It is this tension between ideological commitments and actual performance that is in fact at the heart of this study of women's roles in these movements. However, four principal commitments have remained intact for all four movements over the last thirty years, and their relinquishing would mean not a transformation in but, rather, a revolutionary break with the movements' understanding of themselves and their *raison d'être*. First, for the four movements, religion as the main source of legislation remains an articulated commitment, although one whose contours are often vague. To what extent and in what areas religious law should be paramount is a subject of contention within the movements and in their interaction with secular political actors. Yet for all four, the one area where compromise cannot be accommodated is in the field of family law. The movements insist on the primacy of halachic and sharia law in matters of marriage and divorce grounded in traditions of religious jurisprudence that are inherently disadvantageous to women. It is crucial to note that given the movements' emergence in the 1970s and 1980s, they are not the ones responsible for cementing the hegemony of religious law in the legislation of family law; the religious court system currently in use in Israel and Palestine had been entrenched by the Ottoman, the British, and then the nationalist governments that succeeded them.<sup>1</sup> Yet the movements have now become the most vocal supporters of this system and opponents of secular reform efforts. Though they are open to measures mitigating some of the burdens such a system places on individuals, and particularly on women, they oppose efforts to make civil options available or to



establish full equality between men and women in matters of family law.

Second, for all four movements, heterosexual sexual difference and role-complementarity that is derived from that difference is a fundamental commitment. A sexual division of labor in which women's most important duty is motherhood and caregiving, while men dominate public religious and political leadership, occupies a central place in the movements' teachings and is promoted as an expression of an ideal, pious moral order. But it would be wrong to conclude that role-complementarity confines women to their homes. All four movements value and encourage women's secular education and women's employment to support their families. Women's education and professional attainment is viewed positively, as the movements see these as avenues that make them better mothers, wives, and homemakers. New forms of women-oriented religious study and women's public engagement in mostly sex-segregated activism is also an important facet of role-complementarity, which will be expanded upon in detail in [chapter 3](#).

Third, the regulation of the interaction between the sexes is paramount in the movements' teachings, rhetoric, and practices. Female modesty and sex-segregation where possible are emphasized as the fundamental tools to regulate public interaction between the sexes, and they make up the building blocks of a pious moral society. Degrees of stringency and mildness in practice vary within each movement. However, on the level of official discourse, the movements construct observance of feminine modesty through dress, comportment, and interaction with the opposite sex as an ideal to continually aspire toward. Finally, the four movements largely view feminism, both in its transnational and local manifestations, as a highly problematic foreign (Western) influence that threatens to undermine the proper, authentic, and moral social and religious order. They perceive feminist discourses as blurring sexual difference and gender role-complementarity, which imperils the morality and character of communities.

In drawing out the parallels between the movements, I also aim to counter essentializing tendencies that intentionally or unintentionally understand Islam, or political Islam, to be somehow exceptional (in the negative sense) in its relation to gender politics and to women's equality, freedom, and agency. As Denise Kandiyoti noted, "analyses of gender relations and ideologies in Muslim societies have been dominated by a persistent preoccupation concerning the role of Islam."<sup>2</sup> The comparative work in this chapter demonstrates that a socially conservative religious ideology has nothing inherently to do with Islam. Almost identical discourses appear in contemporary Jewish religious movements too. These discourses reflect a particular interpretive tendency rather than any essence to be located in either Judaism or Islam. Alongside this tendency, other interpretive practices—in particular, Islamic feminism and Orthodox Jewish feminism—are also present in the Jewish and Muslim spheres I explore, demonstrating that egalitarian readings are possible alongside nonegalitarian interpretations. But for the movements that I study, women who choose to cross the line and adopt explicitly feminist religious language ultimately do not have a place in the mainstream of the movements and end up as marginal or external interlocutors at best, if not outright antagonists.

### **The Jewish Settler Movement**

The Jewish settler movement became a major player in Israeli politics following the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula in the 1967 Six-Day War. A small group of mainly religious-nationalist activists first established a Jewish civilian presence on the site of Kfar Etzion, a Jewish settlement destroyed by the Jordanian army in 1948. Activists affiliated with this religious-nationalist stream went on to attempt to settle inside the city of Hebron in 1968 and to establish a settlement right outside the city. In 1974, this network of activists, now under the name of Gush Emunim (The Bloc of the Faithful) tried to establish a settlement outpost near Nablus and, following

numerous evictions by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), succeeded in laying the foundations for a Jewish settlement inside an army base in the Nablus area. After further negotiation with the government, the group established a civilian outpost that later became the settlement of Kdumim.

Although these first steps by Gush Emunim elicited a degree of largely feigned resistance from the Israeli state, the settlement agenda of the group soon became a central policy of a succession of Israeli governments. These began to invest unprecedented resources in the settlement project.<sup>3</sup> By 2013, there were over 349,000 Jewish settlers living in 125 settlements (not including East Jerusalem)<sup>4</sup> and about 100 settlement outposts<sup>5</sup> in the West Bank. This diverse population now consists of ideological settlers, who are mainly middle-class Orthodox religious-nationalists (*datiyyim leumiyyim*), and of nonideological, ultra-Orthodox, religious, and secular settlers. The latter groups were drawn by the cheap housing and the convenient proximity to the center of Israel rather than by the religious ideology of Gush Emunim. In this book, I focus only on activists who are religiously motivated and politically active. By “politically active,” I mean that they identify themselves and are identified by others as working to advance the goal of settling Judea and Samaria—the biblical name of the occupied West Bank.

From its early stages, Gush Emunim had marked itself as a religious movement. Affiliated with Merkaz Harav yeshiva in Jerusalem and the teachings of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook (1891–1982),<sup>6</sup> the Bloc advocated a messianic interpretation of the history of the State of Israel and the importance of settling the land to facilitate religious redemption and to fulfill a divine promise. Orthodox settlers have created coalitions with prominent secular supporters and often justified the project in security, economic, and social terms alongside religious ones. However, from its inception and throughout its expansion, the religious faction largely dominated the movement.<sup>7</sup>

The ideology of the pioneering Gush Emunim rested on several consensus points, which provided a unique synthesis of

religious and nationalist elements. These included the cardinal religious importance of the Land of Israel; current history as the unfolding of the redemption process; Arab opposition to Israel as representing the Jewish fight with the forces of evil; Israel's international isolation as proof of Jewish chosenness; and the impossibility of arriving at a negotiated peace.<sup>8</sup> The ultimate objective of Gush Emunim, as articulated in its first founding document, was "the complete redemption [*ge'ula*] of the People of Israel and of the entire world."<sup>9</sup>

Different from the other three movements in this study that have clear hierarchal structures, a high degree of centralization, and an official political party, the Jewish settler movement today is an amalgamation of various ideological groups, organizations, and parties committed to the goal of Jewish civilian presence in "Judea and Samaria"<sup>10</sup> Activists of Gush Emunim and their successors integrated themselves into different right-wing parties (the National Religious Party [NRP], Tehiya, Likud, Moledet, Ihud Leumi, Habayit Hayehudi) and promoted their objectives through lobbying, mobilization, and protest. In 1980, the settlers officially established the Yesha Council (The Judea, Samaria, and Gaza Council), which became the coordinating and representative forum for all settlement local councils. Since its establishment, the council has been one of the most powerful vehicles for obtaining government funding. It now serves as a mainstream, semigovernmental, bureaucratic apparatus to further the interests of settler communities.<sup>11</sup> The organization Amana, established in 1978, is another logistical organizational framework that sees to the practical aspects of settlement construction and expansion. Despite the conscious effort to appeal to mainstream Israeli public opinion, much of the rhetoric coming from settlers' institutions and ideological organizations clearly links the settlement project with an explicitly religious mission.

The settler movement's commitment to the Land of Israel takes precedence over other religious concerns such as promoting religiosity among the Jewish public or working

toward making state laws and institutions more religious, although these still remain an important secondary priority. Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook taught that religious redemption rests in the full realization of the Zionist nationalist objective and that “redemption precedes teshuva [a return to religiosity].” He instructed that “the order of redemption is as follows: agricultural settlement, restoration of the state, and through this, next, ascent in holiness, teaching the Torah, growing and glorifying the Torah.... Redemption does not depend on teshuva.... Redemption will come even if the People of Israel are completely wicked [that is, not religiously observant or faithful].”<sup>12</sup> Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook continued the approach his father, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook (1865–1935) was known for of perceiving the secular Zionists as central actors in the unfolding of the redemption process.<sup>13</sup> Contrary to the Orthodox rabbis of his time, Rabbi Yitzchak HaCohen Kook argued that the secular nationalists should be embraced for their heroic part in redeeming the Land of Israel.

One of the guiding ideological principles of the movement from its very beginning, then, was the acceptance of the secular Jewish majority in Israel due to its instrumental part in conquering lands—an action that brings the People of Israel and the world closer to redemption. Although constantly debated,<sup>14</sup> this prioritization of the Land of Israel over religious proselytizing is clear in many public texts and political pronouncements by the movement’s dominant religious leaders. The following example from Beit El Yeshiva, one of the most influential centers of settler religious learning, illustrates the nature of the debate and the consensus promoted:

This essay comes in response to the many written and oral statements which have been expressed lately, that claim that the work to promote religiosity [*hazara beteshuva*] should come before the injunction to settle the Land of Israel and that if we make the Jewish people become religious then the importance of the Land of Israel will be more apparent to them. In this pamphlet we ask to prove the reverse: That only through making the Land of Israel the very first among all things holy, will we see many people becoming religious and adhering to all the laws of the Torah. Furthermore, giving the Land of Israel the value that it deserves is the main key to our progress as a people in all areas and it is also the key to full

redemption for which we eagerly await.... The correct order is thus: The inheritance of the Land gives rise to religiosity.<sup>15</sup>

### *Structure and Support*

Because today the settler movement is a mixture of disparate bodies, it lacks a formal structure and the size of its following is difficult to gauge. Settler leadership can be divided into four groups:<sup>16</sup> The first includes the ideological heads of local and regional councils in settlements. The second group is made up of Members of Knesset (MKs) and lobbyists in various political parties who are ideological settlement residents or settlement advocates. Third, popular figures of the original Gush Emunim bloc—for example, Daniela Weiss, Israel Harel, and (the late) Hannan Porat. The fourth group includes leading ideological rabbis such as Rabbi Dov Lior of Kiryat Arba, Rabbi Zalman Melamed and Rabbi Shlomo Aviner of Beit El, and Rabbi Eliezer Melamed of Har Bracha, and many others.

The Yesha Council is a representative forum for settlements' local authorities. The council was created to answer the more mundane needs of settlements and of their residents, such as securing government funds and the construction of new housing projects. These were issues that the organizational framework of Gush Emunim, which was a social movement rather than a formal representative body, was unable to address. Although lacking the formal status of a local government body, the council has nevertheless become the official representative of the settlements in dealing with the state. The council also serves as a lobby that works to influence political decisions regarding the fate of the settlements and organizes public protest on political issues (for example, against the Oslo Accord and the Gaza disengagement). By diverting funds from the public budgets of local and regional settlement councils, the Yesha Council has been able to utilize government funds to further its agenda. This has allowed it to have a disproportionate influence and has made it one of the most powerful lobbies in Israeli politics.<sup>17</sup>

The council was originally comprised of the elected heads of the 24 settlement local councils and regional councils and a number of unelected leading settlement figures and founders. Following the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, the council underwent a restructuring, and its membership increased first to 124 and later to 130. It now includes 24 elected heads of settlement local and regional councils, elected representatives from various settlements, as well as rabbis and educators, public figures, and youth representatives.<sup>18</sup> The real decision-making power remains in the hands of the 26-member steering committee.<sup>19</sup> In addition to the council, a plethora of advocacy, lobbying, and political organizations have formed over the years, some of which are the Yesha Rabbis Union, Tkuma, Professors for National Strength, Homesh First, Women in Green, Komemiyut, and the Headquarters for Saving the People and the Land. Institutions within settlements such as religious-nationalist high schools (separate for boys and girls), yeshivas, and *yeshivot hesder* (yeshivas combining religious study and military service) serve as fertile grounds for ideological socialization of generations of settler youth. These all belong to the Israeli public education system and are funded by the state.

Most of the religious settlements, excluding the nonideological ultra-Orthodox ones, are relatively affluent and most of their residents are university educated.<sup>20</sup> Because they enjoy generous government funding and since housing prices are significantly lower than in other areas in the Israeli center, the settlements have attracted a large number of nonideological residents. It would therefore be wrong to take the number of over 300,000 residents as the size of the “settler movement.” The scholar Anat Rot, who has researched the movement extensively, cites Yesha Council numbers that indicate that only 34 percent of settlers are religious-nationalists. The rest are ultra-Orthodox (32 percent) and secular (34 percent).<sup>21</sup> The most extensive public opinion survey of West Bank settlers, carried out in 2002 among 3,200 settlement households, found that 77 percent of respondents chose to live in the West Bank for reasons of “quality of life.”

Only 20 percent of respondents said their motivation was ideological.<sup>22</sup> A subsequent examination in 2009 found similar percentages of “ideological” settlers.<sup>23</sup>

The political influence of ideological settlers in the Israeli Parliament (the Knesset) has increased over the years. A strong settlement lobby has existed within the dominant Likud party, which has supported the settlement project since its coming to power in 1977. Parties running primarily or exclusively on a settlement agenda have grown their share of seats in the Knesset from eight in 1981<sup>24</sup> to 12 in 2013 (out of a total of 120 seats in the Knesset). In the 2013 election, the Likud party has merged with the ultra-right-wing Yisrael Beitenu and has been dominated by Members of Knesset who are staunch settlement advocates. Moreover, in its time in power prior to 1977, between 1992 and 1996, and from 1999 to 2001, the left-leaning Labor party has catered to the settlement lobby and has been responsible for significant settlement expansion.

### *Gender Ideology*

As a diffuse and diverse movement, the settlers lack a central and authoritative religious or political leadership that can dictate an official gender ideology. However, religious ideological settlers do operate within a framework of norms and discourses that rest on gender complementarity with different roles for men and women as a central moral theme. Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, the spiritual guide of Gush Emunim, taught that there were fundamental differences between women and men. Most importantly, “The element of mind is more pronounced in the man while the element of emotion is more pronounced in the woman.”<sup>25</sup>

The Yesha Rabbis Union, a consortium of influential settlement rabbis who have come to dominate the public discourse of religious ideological settlers,<sup>26</sup> has provided an authoritative interpretation of this aspect of Rabbi Kook’s teaching. The opinions of the Yesha Rabbis Union on gender roles capture the sentiment of the most central and influential



religious-ideological stream in the settlements.<sup>27</sup> According to the Union:

Due to this difference [between men and women] in some areas the man is more active and the woman is more passive. After the mind deduces conclusions it creates and builds, while the character of the emotion is to absorb impressions from the environment.... Therefore leadership is given to men generally—kings, scholars, judges, policemen and military men.<sup>28</sup>

In the national religious school system in which the children of Orthodox settlers enroll, female and male students study in separate high schools and imbibe an education that prepares them for their different roles in life. The *ulpanot* (prestigious religious girls' high schools) stress women's roles as mothers and wives as the most sacred and important religious duty assigned to them. Religious nationalist men are entrusted with studying the Torah, serving in the military and being public leaders. Women are expected to build a Jewish home by having large families and by pursuing appropriate education and employment to support the family.<sup>29</sup> The halachic saying "The honor of a king's daughter is within" (*kol kvoda bat melekh pnima*) best captures the Orthodox religious preoccupation with female modesty and with her primary role in the private sphere.<sup>30</sup>

A popular piece by the influential Rabbi Shlomo Aviner artfully captures the emphasis on complementary gender roles. Writing in honor of the late Rabbanit (rabbi's wife) Hana Tao, who is a hallowed feminine role model among religious-nationalists, Rabbi Aviner adopts a feminine voice, speaking in the first person as a woman:

Yes, I will be a professor! My husband is finishing a PhD in physics. I am not jealous of him, but I will be a professor. I feel that I have the strength for it. I want degrees and a career. I will be a professor, I will succeed, and my students will appreciate me. I want equality. That's not my own idea, it is God who created man and women equal, we are both made in his image. I have a pure soul and I believe in myself. Certainly, I am different from my husband, but I am not lesser. I will be a professor, it is a dream I have cultivated since my days at the *ulpana*. I am set on it. I even know in what subject—a professor of education, the education of my children. With lots of degrees—a degree in femininity, a degree in marriage, a degree in motherhood. Why are you laughing? My husband produces some electronic parts for some important machine, and I will produce children. I will produce souls.... Is this less important? No, it is much more

important. I will be a professor of education of my children.... Today I am a schoolteacher, I love this job and am happy with it. But when my first child is born, God willing, I will quit. I belong only to my children. If I have to work for economic necessity, I will do it but as little as possible. I will be a faithful worker but only work to the extent necessary, and also if I feel the need to freshen up a little.<sup>31</sup>

In the discourse of Orthodox settlers, as in the other movements this book explores, complementary roles do not necessarily imply a hierarchy in which women are inferior. There is a serious commitment to men's and women's equality in the eyes of God as beings made in his image and possessing equal spiritual merit. As the popular Rabbanit Naomi Shapira explains, the fact that woman was created, according to the creation story in Genesis, as man's helpmate "can be interpreted as her being number two." But this interpretation, she argues, is a masculine reading that is inherently hierarchical. "However," she teaches, "a feminine interpretation says that helping is the most meaningful thing one can do in life.... Women tend to be drawn to professions that serve others, they tend to help, grow, nurture, care for. You can say they are servants or you can say that they create bonds.... Women [want] to enrich, give, create, build.... On the other hand, men see themselves as a presence, as trailblazers, as an independent reality that stands by its own power."<sup>32</sup>

This stress on caregiving and motherhood is intimately connected to the nationalist project. The discourse of the settler movement, much like that of all nationalist movements, emphasizes women's responsibility for the biological reproduction of the nation. Countless articles in settlers and religious-nationalist affiliated magazines and newspapers are devoted to the demographic struggle between Arabs and Jews and employ women's wombs as weapons in the fight for demographic superiority.<sup>33</sup> An illustrative example of the concern with demography is the title "The Religious Sector Is Saving Demography" of an article in *Hatsofe*, a newspaper of the religious-nationalist community in Israel. The article attempts to dispel fears among its readership that Arabs are winning the demographic battle with Jews and that Jews will

soon become a minority in Greater Israel (the territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean). “Even if Jewish immigration will not save us,” the article argues, “birth rates will be the significant demographic factor working in favor of the Jewish people.”<sup>34</sup> The religious sector is the one to thank for winning this battle, the article asserts, and goes on to cite studies of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian projected birthrates. The Yesha Council website also devotes an entire section of its Research and Publications page to studies examining Jewish and Arab demographic competition, and has launched a full campaign addressing this topic.<sup>35</sup> There, too, the high birthrates among religious Jews in Israel and in the occupied territories are cited as the crucial factor in the demographic war. As a consequence of this prevalent demographic discourse, ideological religious settler women are generally expected to have very large families as part of their religious-nationalist effort.<sup>36</sup>

Here it is important to mention that religious settlers do not monopolize the concern with demography in Israel and the attendant discursive transformation of women’s wombs into arms in the struggle. The Zionist left in Israel has often justified its call for a peace agreement and the establishment of a Palestinian state by warning against the inevitable shift in the demographic balance between Jews and Arabs due to higher Arab birthrates. The *Hatsofe* article cited earlier acknowledges this, stating that “The Israeli left’s propaganda has been successful in ways that cannot be ignored. It managed to convince the Israeli public, using media manipulations, that the real problem [in the conflict with the Palestinians] is territorial and demographic.”<sup>37</sup>

### *Engagements with Feminism*

Similar to various Muslim religious communities in the Middle East, women of the Jewish Orthodox community in Israel have developed new forms of religious literacy formerly unavailable to them. As Tamar El-Or fascinatingly outlines, from the late 1970s but most prominently in the late 1980s and the 1990s, there has been a growing demand by young

Orthodox women for greater access to disciplines of religious study and specifically the scholarly study of the Talmud, which traditionally was the exclusive domain of men. This demand has led to the establishment of numerous religious educational frameworks called *midrashot* devoted to women's religious studies.<sup>38</sup>

El-Or sees in this development a latent feminist revolution of sorts. And indeed, a new scholarly tradition of Jewish Orthodox feminism, similar to what has been termed Islamic feminism, has become increasingly visible in certain Orthodox circles. However, as Lara Deeb suggests, religious-political engagements with transnational feminist discourses are tremendously complex and require careful attention to how these discourses are taken up and debated.<sup>39</sup> In the case of Jewish Orthodoxy, interestingly, circles that explicitly uphold the mantle of Orthodox feminism have not overlapped with settler women leadership. On the contrary, prominent settler activists—many of whom have benefited from this feminist revolution and have studied religion in *midrashot*—repeatedly stress their objection to feminist agendas even when they appear in the garb of religious Orthodoxy. They find it important to distinguish between their life choices regarding religious study, secular education, employment or activism and a feminist project that they deem inherently secular, Western, and often destructive.

Rabbanit Merav is a well-known settlement advocate and a sought-after teacher of religious lessons for women. Rabbanit (plural, rabbaniyot) is the nominal title of a woman who is married to a rabbi. The role of rabbanit often depends on the personality of the individual. Some rabbaniyot, like Rabbanit Merav, are very active and take an interest in the affairs of the settlement community—teaching religious lessons to women and organizing various social projects. Other rabbaniyot choose a more private life. When I spoke to her about the subject, she conveyed the common perception among her community regarding feminism, which she also teaches in her lessons:

The feminist movement is destroying the institution of the family. I think we must raise [this point] and discuss it and clarify it, because otherwise it destroys the homes and people don't know why. We see that the institution of the family is almost completely shattered in the Western world, in the US and in Europe. People hardly get married, hardly have any children. It didn't happen without a reason.... The mindset today causes people not to get married, or to get divorced. It is difficult to maintain a good marital relationship with a feminist mindset. It always leads to situations of power struggle, if he [the husband] should do something or I should. In short, it does not create unity but rather a war situation. People cannot survive in this way. I feel that we must clarify this, strengthen this, and give women the tools that are appropriate in our age to build a good marital relationship.

The engagement with feminism in the movement is complex, and mixes recognition of some of the feminist movement's positive achievements, with denunciation of what activists see as its destructive consequences. Rabbanit Shapira teaches in her lessons that “the feminist revolution has created a great space for women to contribute and to be present, but it also created a great confusion in the woman's identity and in the man's identity. If the woman can do anything that the man does, then what is his place? What defines him? Who is he?” So even though feminism gave women important rights, Rabbanit Shapira says, it also created “a vacuum in the feminine character because it was equalized with a different character (the men) and was not given its own unique status.” The task today, as she defines it, is to recognize femininity and masculinity anew and to restore their proper difference.<sup>40</sup>

Another leading activist who in the past was involved in establishing an *ulpana*—a religious girls' school—explains the rejection of feminism. Like Rabbanit Merav and many of my interlocutors, she reiterates the dichotomy between what she terms Western feminism and the gender values of a moral religious community:

Today everything is very artificial and we see that around the whole issue of a sex that is not its sex, there is a great fall in our generation. It is not without a reason, it is because the Western world completely distorted the roles of men and women. Almost on purpose, with criminal intent. But in places where this issue is still natural—I can't say that the secular world is completely destroyed, but it is certainly much less repaired [*pahot metukan*] than the religious world and than the settler community, which is more religious, although very diverse—in the settler community these issues are more repaired. The issue of the woman's place, the husband's

place, the place and value of the family, of giving birth, it is in a more correct place, more precise, less artificial, less corrupt.

For a great many of the most prominent Orthodox settler women activists, a feminist agenda and discourse are not only intimately connected with a rejected secular, Western model, but are also inherently implicated in a dovish left-wing politics that is open to territorial compromises with Palestinian national aspirations.<sup>41</sup> Shoshi, a young and unusual settlement advocate who has worked for the *Besheva* settler newspaper and the settlers' lobby within the Likud party, explains that, "Generally, most of the feminist women, even in Orthodox bodies like Koleh,<sup>42</sup> are leftists or eventually become leftists." This claim is supported over the pages of the settlers' magazine *Nekuda*, where occasionally debates around challenges brought up by Orthodox feminists appear. There is a clear division in these debates between advocates of feminism who are markedly not, or are no longer, hawkish activists for the settlement cause (for example, Tamar Ross, Hanna Kahat, Bambi Sheleg, Malka Puterkovsky, Batiya Kahana-Dror) and the opponents of this approach who are consistently outspoken settlements advocates.<sup>43</sup> Shoshi further tells that, "Every time someone [from the settler movement] wanted to shut me up, he would say, 'You are a feminist,' and I would immediately respond 'No, no, I am not!'" In a provocative article in *Besheva* that she published in 2007, Shoshi argues that she is a "strange bird," because, she writes, "on the one hand I am a radical rightist and on the other I am a feminist."<sup>44</sup>

By professing to be a feminist, Shoshi has not only put herself in conflict with some in her own community, she has also had to grapple with the implications her commitment to full equality spells for the settlers' attitudes toward Palestinian independence aspirations. Shoshi, however, denies the legitimacy of the left-wing feminist linking of the two. "There are twisted leftist feminists, so what?" she writes, "Do we reject feminism because of that? Do we reject the whole Torah when some rabbis distort it? Or do we understand that the Torah is the most sacred of sacred and that these rabbis distort

the sacred? These leftist feminists are distorted and twisted, that does not make feminism itself a twisted agenda.” Shoshi’s case is telling in its rarity and in the response it generated from many in the activist settler community. A vehement opposition to feminist discourses, including ones that do not challenge the notion of Jewish control over the Greater Land of Israel, is the dominant attitude among the religious settler leadership.

Like all socially conservative religious-political movements, the settlers, too, have grappled with transnational feminist discourses. Within the wider Israeli Orthodox public, a negotiation between Orthodox religious values and feminist discourses has given rise to new forms of religious feminism. Among the most ideological Orthodox settlement activists, however, varieties of feminism stand for a rejected Western, secular agenda that is inherently implicated in dovish politics. For religious-political movements across the Middle East, feminism has been a placeholder for colonial and neocolonial Western politics. Islamists, for example, have viewed feminism as an arm of Western colonialism.<sup>45</sup> For many Orthodox settlers, feminism is a part of a completely different Western hegemonic agenda; one that is in their eyes patently pro-Palestinian and whose objective is the undermining of Jewish families and communities, and through this the Jewish hold of the Land of Israel.

### **The Islamic Movement in Israel**

The Islamic Movement in Israel (*al-haraka al-islamiyya fi al-dakhil*)<sup>46</sup> first emerged in the 1970s. The Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967 contributed to the resurgence of Islamist organizing in Palestine and, consequently, in Israel. The religious awakening across the Muslim world in the 1970s had its local expressions in the West Bank and Gaza and, on its part, Israel did little to suppress burgeoning Islamist groups, as it was mostly concerned with secular nationalist Palestinian resistance to the occupation.<sup>47</sup> The Muslim community in Israel, cut off from the rest of the Arab world since 1948, was able to reestablish contacts with the Palestinian population following the Israeli

occupation. These renewed exchanges also included access to new religious colleges in the occupied Palestinian territories. Several of the founders of the Islamic Movement in Israel, most prominently Shaykh Abdullah Nimr Darwish and Shaykh Raed Salah, attended these colleges and returned to Israel with authoritative religious credentials and with the message of Islamist activism.<sup>48</sup> In 1981, the Israeli authorities arrested Shaykh Nimr Darwish, the man who became the spiritual leader of the movement, along with sixty other activists on the charge of participation in a militant conspiracy under the name of *Usrat al-Jihad* (The Family of Jihad) that planned to execute attacks against Israeli targets.<sup>49</sup> After their release from prison, these activists adopted a nonviolent approach that sought to spread religiosity and establish a popular grassroots movement employing strictly legal means.

From the early 1980s, the activists who now operated under the banner of the Islamic Movement (*al-haraka al-islamiyya*) focused on three areas: social service, religious da'wa (spreading piety among Muslims), and political organizing. In the area of social action, the Movement first targeted lower income families through financial and material assistance. These activities expanded to include programs to fight drug addiction and youth delinquency; the establishment of formerly unavailable Islamic daycare centers, which enabled many women to pursue employment; assistance to schoolchildren by donating school supplies and providing tutoring; renovating schools and adding new classrooms; and offering small scholarships to university students. From 1984, activities encompassed the operation of youth public works camps to serve Muslim communities across the country. The Movement also established Muslim sports teams and a Muslim male singing group to replace the secular music played at public and private celebrations.<sup>50</sup>

Da'wa work included building numerous new mosques, helping to raise the number of mosques in Israel from 80 in 1988 to 240 in 1993;<sup>51</sup> offering religious lessons for all ages in mosques, in after-school programs, and in homes; encouraging



mosque attendance and religious observance; distributing religious books and publications; organizing religious festivals; and establishing a nonprofit organization for the protection of *waqf* properties and sacred Islamic sites. Both social and da‘wa work were made possible by recruitment of volunteers and the collection of Islamic charity (*zakat*)—through the Movement’s Zakat Association—and donations from abroad.

On the political front, in 1983 the Islamic Movement began to run in local council elections in the three regions across Israel where the Muslim population was concentrated—the Galilee in the north, the Triangle in the eastern Sharon plain, and the Negev in the south. The Movement chose to run for local councils in towns and villages in which it estimated it should have significant support and had an immediate success. Its representatives became the heads of two local village councils and the Movement’s lists won seats in three other councils. In 1989, the Movement experienced a boom in political representation, with its members elected heads of five local councils and gaining seats in nine others.<sup>52</sup>

Scholars attribute this remarkable electoral success to growing frustration among Muslim-Palestinians over their “triple marginalization” in Israel.<sup>53</sup> First, as a minority group in a state that approached them with suspicion and employed blatant discrimination against them, Palestinian citizens of Israel felt marginalized by the state. Second, the community also experienced disillusionment with traditional village authorities, the Mukhtars. Many viewed these as advancing the interests of the Zionist political parties and their own parochial interests in their role as mediators between these parties and the Palestinian community in Israel. And third, many felt disappointed at their neglect by the Communist party, the largest party at the time among Palestinians in Israel, that seemed to do little to improve life on the local level and was too focused on national politics. In the 1993 and 1998 local elections, Islamic Movement representatives were elected heads of five local councils and had representatives in eleven

and eight others, respectively. The 2003 local elections saw a decrease in the success of Islamic Movement's lists. Their representatives were elected as heads of councils in only three Arab councils, and Islamic Movement lists gained some representation in six other Arab councils. In 2008, Movement representatives were elected heads of four Arab local councils and won seats in five other councils.<sup>54</sup>

Within our classification of religious-political movements into proselytizing and nationalist types, the Islamic Movement in Israel is a hybrid one. The bulk of its activities fit the proselytizing model—disseminating religious knowledge and practice, encouraging Muslims in Israel to become more religious and focusing on social services and charity. However, the minority status Muslims occupy in Israel and the discrimination and identity complications they encounter due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict mean that communalist issues are unavoidable. The Islamic Movement aspires to be the voice of Muslims in Israel and to articulate a Muslim and Palestinian identity that is under threat of both persecution by, and integration into, the Israeli Jewish majority.<sup>55</sup>

These two pulls were a source of great debate and an eventual rift in the Movement. In the late 1980s, the leadership of the Movement began to debate the possibility of running in the national elections for the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset, an option that it had previously rejected. In 1996, disagreement over the question reached an impasse, leading to a split along ideological lines.<sup>56</sup> Shaykh Abdullah Nimr Darwish, the spiritual leader of the Movement, supported a pragmatic approach. The Muslim community in Israel, he explained, was a minority, and as such should emphasize strengthening its unique religious identity while participating in state institutions to ensure representation and allocation of resources.

In opposition to Shaykh Nimr Darwish, a prominent faction of the Islamic Movement under the leadership of Shaykh Raed Salah and Shaykh Kamal Khatib rejected what they saw as an illegitimate compromise and upheld a

rejectionist approach. They insisted that the Islamic Movement should not recognize the legitimacy of state institutions such as the Knesset that constituted a component of the Zionist project. The pragmatic faction under the leadership of Shaykh Nimr Darwish became known as the southern branch of the Islamic Movement after the location of Shaykh Nimr Darwish's home village of Kfar Qasem in the southern part of the Triangle. The rejectionist faction under Shaykh Raed Salah is referred to as the northern branch, after Salah's home town of Um Al-Fahm in the northern part of the Triangle.<sup>57</sup> Both branches enjoy support among the Muslim population in the Bedouin south (Negev), in the north (Galilee), in the Triangle, and in mixed Arab-Jewish towns.

In 1996, the southern branch of the Islamic Movement joined a coalition with a nonreligious Arab party for the Knesset election. As part of coalition parties of various permutations from 1996 to 2013, the Islamic Movement has maintained a representation of between two and three elected MKs in the Knesset.<sup>58</sup> On the local level, since the 1998 local council elections, the southern branch of the Islamic Movement is represented in lists for local elections in Arab towns and villages in the north, the south, the Triangle, and sometimes in mixed Arab-Jewish cities. The northern branch competes mainly in the town of Um al-Fahm, where it headed the local council from 1989 until 2013. In 2013, the northern branch chose to boycott local elections in Um al-Fahm.

### *Structure and Support*

At the head of the Movement stands a Shura Council that was established in 1992. The council serves as the spiritual and *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) authority of the Movement and is responsible for issuing rulings based, according to Shaykh Nimr Darwish, on two principles: (1) that the decisions of the Movement will be according to the principles of Islam and of the Islamic Movement; and (2) that the Movement's decisions will not contradict the laws of the state. Shaykh Nimr Darwish stresses that the council can overrule any decision by the Islamic Movement that contradicts these two principles. He

also emphasizes that the Shura Council is committed to a moderate approach, following, in his words, the example of Prophet Muhammad.<sup>59</sup>

While membership in the Islamic Movement is informal and based on participation in the Movement's activities, the membership elects the political leadership. The membership's National Congress, established in 1995, elects the Movement's administrative leadership and its candidates for the Knesset elections. The selection of candidate lists for local elections is less structured, and most lists are appointed or elected by various compositions of local and regional leadership. The northern branch, on the other hand, relies on the unelected charismatic leadership of Shaykh Salah and Shaykh Khatib. In the southern branch, while the spiritual leadership personified by Shaykh Nimr Darwish receives its credibility from its religious learning and charisma, the current organizational and political leadership is heavily composed of university-educated professionals—teachers, lawyers, engineers, and doctors. Shaykh Nimr Darwish's successor, Shaykh Ibrahim Abdullah Sarsour, was a graduate in English literature and linguistics at the Israeli Bar Ilan University. The current head of the Movement, Shaykh Hamad Abu Daabes of Rahat, studied social sciences at the Israeli Beer Sheva University and Sapir College.

Alongside its political institutions and activities, the Islamic Movement operates close to thirty religious, social, and cultural organizations. Prominent among these are the Islamic Organization for the Relief of Orphans and the Needy; Furqan Institute for Quran Teaching; the student associations Al-Qalam and Al-Risala; the Islamic Sports League; Islamic Arts and Music Society; the Mosque Da'wa Society; the Women's Branch; and the Al-Aqsa Association. The southern branch's official national weekly is titled *The Covenant (Al-Mithaq)*. The northern branch of the Movement has established competing organizations since its split in 1996, such as the Al-Aqsa Institute, its own students' organization called Iqra, the nonprofit Sanad for the support of mothers and

the family, and several others. The northern branch publishes a national weekly newspaper called *The Voice of Truth and Freedom* (*Sawt al-Haq wa al-Huriyya*) and the woman's magazine *Ishraqa*.<sup>60</sup>

The sociological background of the Islamic Movement activists and supporters is mixed. The Movement appeals both to lower income Palestinian citizens of Israel as well as to upwardly mobile university-educated professionals in this community. Women activists tend to be of two kinds. In the older generation of women, who are now in their forties and fifties, many have come from homes in which they were the first to pursue post-high-school education. Some have done so through formal university study, while others have found nonformal religious educational opportunities facilitated through their activism in the movement. The younger generation of activists, who are in their twenties and thirties, have all pursued, or are pursuing, higher education and see it as a duty and a right. Among the movement's supporters, women's workforce participation is still relatively low, as it is across the Palestinian community in Israel. But women who are formal activists are often employed, whether within the organizational frameworks of the movements or outside them.

It is difficult to measure the size of following the Movement commands, as there is no official membership count. The only available quantitative measure is the Movement's success in local and national elections. However, such an approach to measuring its popularity and power is somewhat flawed. The Movement has significant presence even in towns and villages in which it does not contest in local elections. The increase in the number of mosques—from 80 in 1988 to 363 in 2003<sup>61</sup>—the rise in mosque attendance and the spread of the hijab and the jilbab on the Arab street in Israel reflect a success of the Movement that goes beyond its electoral achievement. Also, the Movement often forms coalitions with other parties. Its Knesset political party is a coalition with a nonreligious Arab party. Similarly, on the local level the Movement at times runs as part of coalition lists

with other local parties or family-affiliated local lists. Moreover, the northern branch shuns national elections and has in the past called on Muslims to boycott Knesset elections with significant success in the early 2000s. Nevertheless, for the purpose of quantitatively capturing its strictly formal political gains nationally and locally, the Movement's electoral achievements are the only measure we have.

In the 2006 and 2009 national elections, the Islamic Movement coalition party received the largest percentage of votes in the Palestinian population and became the largest Arab party in the Knesset, superseding the Arab-Jewish Communist Party (Hadash), which had previously enjoyed this status. In the Knesset elections of 2009, 32.1 percent of Palestinian citizens of Israel voted for the Movement's coalition party. The highest level of support was among the Bedouins of the south, with 72.6 percent of them voting for the Movement. It is important to note that support among the Bedouins stems both from the popularity of the Movement and from the fact that its coalition party had the sole Bedouin representative in national politics. In the southern Triangle, the Movement's coalition party won 47.9 percent of the votes. In the northern Triangle, it received 30.2 percent of the vote, and in the north 25.7 percent. Only 6.8 percent of Christian Palestinians in Israel voted for the Movement's coalition party.<sup>62</sup> In the election of 2013, the Movement's coalition party was again the Arab party to receive most votes, and was followed by Hadash and the Arab secular nationalist Balad party. In the 2015 election, all Arab parties united under the Joint List and three representatives from the movement were elected to serve as MKs.

### *Gender Ideology*

Shaykh Ibrhaim Sarsour, the political head of the Islamic Movement from 1998 to 2010 and an elected MK until 2015, succinctly describes the Islamic Movement's ideological orientation. Following the teachings of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers, he argues that there are three possible reactions to the current crisis in which the Muslim *umma* (nation) finds

itself as a result of tribal, ethnic, and geographical divisions brought about by colonialism. The first he calls “traditionalism” (*tayyar al-taqlid*), entailing idealizing the past and rejecting everything Western. The second is blind “Westernization” (*tayyar al-taghrīb*), the uncritical adoption and imitation of Western values, norms, and practices. The third, which he argues is the approach of the Islamic Movement in Israel, is “revival and renewal” (*tayyar al-ihya’ wa-l-tajdid*). According to Shaykh Sarsour, this third option (or more literally “third current”) means taking what is best both from other nations and from the Muslim community in terms of innovation, creative thought and institutions, technology, and other elements that fit within the framework of correct Islam.<sup>63</sup> Rejecting strict traditionalism and Westernization, the Movement negotiates a third option that delicately treads between the two orientations. To achieve this, it heavily stresses a complementarian sexual division of labor. The Movement is keenly aware of women’s changing roles and repeatedly warns against the dangers of Westernization. Women’s bodies, behavior, and presence in the public sphere are therefore carefully managed in order not to violate the delicate balance the Islamic Movement’s “third way” strives to construct.

As in the settler movement, the Islamic Movement’s ideological discourse does not seek to bar women from entry into the public sphere and even encourages them to pursue education and employment within the boundaries of correct Islamic behavior. It offers, in this respect, a rejection of reactionary traditionalism. But the Movement is very much concerned with boundaries and appropriate roles for men and women and expresses deep anxieties about what it sees as Western blurring of correct gender distinctions. Shaykh Sarsour explained this to me in particularly nuanced, but also strained terms:

As an Islamic movement, we concentrate on yes for rights, yes for being an integral part of the society, yes to express and to search for identity in all fields of life, but within—I am not going to use the word “limitations”—within the garden and the walls of the garden of our religious orders. That is why within these walls, we can really do whatever

we like. When we speak about walls, walls mean the sky is the limit. We are not speaking about a prison. We are speaking about limitations that are supposed to be taken into consideration for us to keep our society pure, to keep our society strong and to keep our family united. Because we see what is going on in Western societies. Societies without family cells, without integrity. We want to be in the highest ranks in terms of civilization and modernity, but that modernity must be based on what we call *asalat al-judhur*, the purest roots of our ancient heritage.

The question of women's roles receives significant attention because of its foundational significance for society. An almost universally repeated phrase among activists that speaks to this centrality goes: "Woman is half of society but in fact she is the entire society, because she is responsible for rearing the next generation of Muslims."<sup>64</sup> As one activist put it, "Girls will become mothers and influence their children, we help them build their character and through this work reform society. When women come closer to religion society becomes better."

Both the southern and the northern branches of the Movement devote one to two pages in their weekly publications to their women audience. These combine a focus on women's role as righteous mothers with a stress on respectful companionship between husbands and wives and between family members, and the importance of women's education. With that, the preservation of the essential role-difference between men and women is repeatedly emphasized. Articles insist that for the sake of the well-being of families and the harmony of society, men and women should be aware of their particular assigned roles and not covet the role assigned to the other sex. Family problems and social troubles, the publications instruct, result from each sex's ignorance of its natural role and its usurping of the other sex's role. The following example captures the essence of this discourse as it appears in the Movement's publications. *Al-Mithaq* published several sections of Rashid Rida's *Women's Rights in Islam*, which outline the Movement's official teachings following the Egyptian Muslim Brothers on the sexual division of labor. In a section titled "Men's and Women's Roles and Work," Rida is quoted in *Al-Mithaq*:

Allah said: "And do not covet that by which Allah has made some of you excel others; men shall have the benefit of what they earn and women shall



have the benefit of what they earn; and ask Allah of His grace; surely Allah knows all things.” [Quran 4:32] ... The meaning of this verse is evident. Allah has bestowed certain types of work to men and women. For what is specialized for men, men receive their share of reward while women do not receive a share in that. Women have a share of the reward for the work that is special to them, of which men do not have a share. Neither should covet what is particular to the other. This verse addresses both groups.... Allah wanted to make women concentrate on the labor of the home and men on the difficult labor outside of the home so each can master his own work and undertake it fully and wholeheartedly. “And ask Allah of His grace” means ask Him for support and strength in what you were charged with and do not covet what another was charged with.<sup>65</sup>

Within the family and in the public sphere, men are, to a large extent, the natural leaders and spokespersons. In a section titled “Men’s Degree over Women: Leadership,” *Al-Mithaq* quotes Rida:

Woman [in marriage] conceded full equality and agreed that the man will have one degree over her, in providing and in leadership, and was satisfied with the monetary compensation she received for this concession. Allah said: “and they [women] have rights similar to those against them in a just manner, and the men are a degree above them” [Quran 2:228].... The purpose of this injunction is that the woman will benefit from the man and the man from the woman in the same way that the different parts of one body benefit from each other. The man takes the place of the head and the woman that of the body. This means that a man must not do injustice to the woman with his power nor that the woman will think his power is so great that it diminishes from her ability. There is no shame for a person if his head is better than his hand and his heart is nobler than his stomach, for example. The favoring of some parts of the body over others serves the well-being of the body as a whole. This is the same with favoring man over woman in strength and ability to provide and protect. This is what makes it possible for her to undertake her own natural roles such as giving birth and rearing the children while she is safe at home and has all she requires.<sup>66</sup>

As the public sphere becomes increasingly mixed, anxieties about sexuality and especially about boundaries between femininity and masculinity are an important theme in the Movement’s publication, as a representative example from *Al-Mithaq* explains:

Islam sees in the mixing of men and women a real danger.... Mixing leads to the deterioration of society, the loss of self-respect, the corruption of the heart, the destruction of homes and of families, loosening of morals and softening of manliness to the extent of intersexuality and softness [*al-khunutha wa al-rakhawa*].... That is why we declare that an Islamic society abhors mixing. The men in an Islamic community have their own society and women theirs. Islam has allowed women to be in the company

of men but for certain purposes and under certain circumstances. It has conditioned that she will not display herself, and that she cover her hair and her body, and not be alone with a stranger, regardless of circumstances. If social obligations require a woman to undertake a different work than her natural one inside the home, it is her duty to follow these rules that Islam gave her in order to separate the *fitna* [enticement, but also discord] of woman from the man and the *fitna* of man from the woman.<sup>67</sup>

This excerpt expresses a central theme in the Movement's discourse. Women's participation in the workforce and public sphere is not in itself objectionable. The Movement in fact encourages women to pursue education, employment, and activism. In this respect, it is cognizant of the changing realities of Palestinian Muslim women in contemporary Israel and across the Arab world. Since the 1990s, Palestinian women in Israel have made significant strides in both education and employment. While in 1990, only 1.8 percent of Palestinian women in the country had an academic degree, by 2006 their ratio increased to 10.3 percent. The percentage of women with a high school diploma increased from 18.4 percent to 27.6 percent in those years. Among young women aged 18 to 24, the percentage of those with a university degree increased from 11.7 percent in 1990 to 36.6 percent in 2006. Palestinian women's labor force participation almost doubled in this period, rising from 12 percent in 1990 to 22.5 percent in 2009. This rate is consistent with women's labor force participation in the Middle East, but is much lower than Jewish women's participation in Israel, which stood at 71.3 percent in 2009.<sup>68</sup> Among Muslim women within the demographic of Palestinian women (which also includes Christian and Druze Palestinian citizens of Israel), the rate of women's labor force participation was lower (rising from 9.8 percent in 1990 to 15.6 percent in 2009).<sup>69</sup>

Although women's employment is still low, this is due to various structural, social, and political obstacles and not primarily to "cultural" or religious objections. A 2005 survey by the Israeli Central Statistics Bureau found that 75 percent of Palestinian men and women surveyed said that it was important for both spouses to work. Attitudes were different

regarding women with children: 55 percent of respondents said that women with children should stay at home, while 25 percent of women and 20 percent of men said that mothers should work part-time.<sup>70</sup> In a reality in which women are increasingly seeking education and employment, the anxieties reflected in some of the Movement's publications are from the effect of these social changes on the sexual mores of society and most importantly on heterosexual sexual difference that is grounded in an essential division of labor that the Movement describes as complementary.

Some of the Movement's political actions also have a limiting effect on women's rights. Most significantly, just as other religious-political movements stress religious family law as the cornerstone of religious identity, the Islamic Movement has been a supporter of the sharia courts system.<sup>71</sup> The Islamic Movement Members of Knesset (MKs) have opposed legislation aimed at limiting the authority of religious courts in Israel or providing civil alternatives. The Movement links religious courts to the Muslim identity of Arabs in Israel and sees any attempt to limit them as an attempt to undermine this religious identity. In the 1990s, Arab women's organization in Israel began a campaign to promote equal rights in family law. In a response to a proposal advanced in 1998 by a secular MK, Nawaf Masalha, with the backing of the women's organizations coalition, the Islamic Movement opened a counter-campaign against the proposal.<sup>72</sup>

The women's organizations coalition was able to pass an amendment to the family law in 2001 allowing Muslims to choose between sharia courts and civil family courts for litigation of certain issues, thus equalizing the rights of Muslim women with those of Jewish women. Nevertheless, women of all religions remain discriminated against in religious courts in Israel, particularly in areas of marriage and divorce, and the Islamic Movement's political outfit in the Knesset remains a primary source of support for sharia courts and a central advocate for the preservation of their power.<sup>73</sup> The northern branch of the Islamic Movement, which has been

critical of the courts' lack of autonomy within the Israeli system and of the political appointment of qadis (judges),<sup>74</sup> has nevertheless also opposed the 2001 reform. Shaykh Raed Salah, the head of the northern branch, called the reform "a war on Islam" and "an attempt to impose foreign values that are not Muslim or Palestinian."<sup>75</sup>

### *Engagements with Feminism*

The rejection of "Westernization" in the Movement's publications predominantly revolves around the rejection of what are perceived to be Western gender practices. As one article puts it, "the Western woman" should not be imitated, as she "has lost her feminine qualities. The working woman is now referred to as the 'third sex' which no longer has the qualities of the fair sex of tenderness, softness and sensitivity, but also does not possess the qualities of the male sex with whom she tries to compete in the workplace. It is a sex 'in between.'"<sup>76</sup>

Feminism and international organizations concerned with women's equality are demonized as undermining harmony and civilization. In an article in *Sawt al-Haq*, feminism is referred to as "the extremist women's movement." This extremist women's movement "has become disastrous to femininity and to women and to human society in general.... And if it were to be successful, it would threaten the very existence of humankind." *Sawt al-Haq* argues that

[feminist] philosophy has increased significantly perversity in the West.... Today 60 percent of members of women's organizations in America are lesbians! And these American organizations, and other Western organizations like those, are in control of the women's committee in the United Nations. Through which they impose their perverse thought and conduct on the world. This is done by way of international conventions coming out of the population conference of 1993, the Beijing conference of 1995, the women's conference of 2000, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).<sup>77</sup>

Many in the Islamic Movement view local Palestinian women's organizations as insidious agents of the West. Sawsan Masarwe, a leading activist in the northern branch writes: "Our enemies know that our strength rests in the family

and they therefore try to destroy it. They placed plans and programs through the United Nations, on whose implementation work women's organizations that care only about money, and they spitefully hope that Islam and Muslims will fall into their swamp of lowliness and corruption."<sup>78</sup> Maryam, who works in the media section of the northern branch and writes profusely, further told me:

We know that women's NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] receive foreign funding and that this funding comes with intentions and interests. It is not because they love us and love our society. It has specific political or social purposes. When I rely on their funding I have to follow their politics.... No one says openly [to Muslim women] "abandon your religion" but there are things that are implied, under the table.... We do not work together with the women's NGOs. We have our line and they have their line and we do not meet on any point. Sometimes there are lectures by women from different parties but we refuse to attend, we have completely different points of view. We have different goals. Their goal is this world [*al-dunya*] and our goal is the next [*al-akhira*]. And when we talk about women's status, we talk about it from an Islamic perspective, how it was advanced by Islam, how the woman is a sister and wife and mother from the day she is born to the day she dies. But they say that a woman must have complete freedom and equality, that she can do whatever she wants with her body, that she must behave just like men. Things we do not believe in. There is no complete equality between man and woman. Our religion, the Quran, does not talk about equality, it talks about complementarity [*takamul*], I complete the man and the man completes me. There are different roles.

Shaykh Hamad Abu Daabes, the current head of the Islamic Movement, also sees a contradiction between the Movement's work and some of the efforts of local Palestinian women's organizations:

The women's organizations, we evaluate them based on their objectives and their activities and actions. There are actions that come to fight against Islamic principles. For example, promoting an agenda that we disagree with, like the agenda of woman's rebelliousness [*tamarrud*] against her husband. They claim that a woman's obedience to her husband undermines her freedom. They want to make the woman free from the responsibility of the husband.... If there is an organization that promotes women's education or the eradication of illiteracy, or advancing women's rights and equality, this is something good. We are not against all of them completely and not with all of them completely, we judge each organization based on what we know about it and what it advertises about itself.<sup>79</sup>

The conciliatory picture painted by Shaykh Abu Daabes is different from the one that appears in conversations with

Islamic feminist activists. As was the case with the settlers, where women who crossed the line to advocating full gender equality and pronounced themselves Orthodox feminists have not overlapped with the hawkish Orthodox settler women's leadership and have remained at most marginal or external interlocutors, so is the case in the Islamic Movement. Pious Muslim women who have taken upon themselves to offer an explicitly feminist exegesis of the Quran and the Sunna that finds within the sacred texts and legal traditions support for full gender equality have remained outside of the Movement's ranks, and at times have found their relationship with the Movement quite contentious. Dr. Naifeh Sarrissi, for example, who directs the organization Nisa Wa-Afaq (Women and Horizons, established in 2002), runs workshops across Israel that teach Muslim women about the gender-egalitarian message of Islam and present alternative feminist readings of the Quran and hadith tradition. She recounted an incident with Sanad, the largest women's organization of the Islamic Movement's northern branch. "We had two seminars in a village in the north, but Sanad informed the woman in the village who coordinated our workshop that Sanad will stop giving its seminars in the village if they allowed Nisa Wa-Afaq to run activities there. The coordinator who invited us told me that she would have liked us to give twelve lectures, but she didn't want to lose Sanad's seminars."

Two of my friends, who also consider themselves Islamic feminist activists and who lead a pious lifestyle, had similar experiences with the southern branch of the Islamic Movement. One of them, a director of a women's rights NGO, was shocked one day to find that the Islamic Movement's branch in her town was distributing pamphlets against her organization. The pamphlets stated that her work to help bring women who had been victims of domestic violence to women's shelters in the nearby Jewish city (since there was no women's shelter in her town) was a guise. In fact, the pamphlets claimed, these women's shelters push the women who take refuge in them to engage in prostitution. These accusations were severely harmful, as the stigma associated

with seeking shelter was exacerbated now with accusations of immoral conduct. My other friend, who has written extensively about various issues, including women's rights and sexuality, sought to work in an office affiliated with the Islamic Movement but was told that the fact that she was a woman presented a difficulty, given the long hours required and the fact that the position entailed spending time alone with the office's head, a man, which would be inappropriate for a woman. Her feeling was that this rejection came not only because she was a woman, but even more so because of her outspokenness about gender and sexuality and the fact that her Islamic gender politics did not align with the Movement's.

To conclude, the orientation that Shaykh Sarsour has identified between "traditionalism" and "Westernization" presents an ongoing complicated negotiation within the Movement. The Islamic Movement in Israel constantly strives to find a "third way" that can balance the demands of both and offer a more satisfying solution to a Muslim minority unhappily torn between these two divergent pulls. The prescription the Movement gives, at least on the level of discourse, stresses a control of sexuality and gender boundaries as the key to enabling women to gain new social roles while not overstepping religious mores and role-complementarity as the Movement understands them.

### **The Shas Movement**

As the trajectories of the other movements in this study reveal, the 1970s provided a fertile ground for the rise of new religious-political movements in Israel. Following the Six-Day War, independent social movements became increasingly active across the country. The settler movement was successful in effecting government policies of settlement building. The Peace Now movement organized mass protests against the settlement policy. An outspoken women's movement also appeared on the scene. Finally, inequalities between Ashkenazi (Jews of European descent) and Mizrahi/Sephardic Jews (Jews of Middle Eastern descent) gave rise to an organizing move by young Mizrahi activists. In 1971, a group of young, second-

generation Mizrahi residents of Jerusalem formed the Black Panthers movement. The group executed a series of mass demonstrations protesting the discrimination and marginalization of Mizrahim.

While unsuccessful, the Black Panthers protest made the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi cleavage a salient feature of Israeli politics, giving rise to a new pattern of Mizrahi political organizing in the 1980s—Mizrahi political parties. The first such party, Tami, was established in 1981. Its leaders broke away from the National Religious Party (NRP) to form an explicitly Mizrahi one. The party won three seats in the 1981 election and four in the 1984 election, but failed to widen its appeal, and by 1988 it no longer existed. Shas, first making its appearance in 1983, succeeded where both the nonreligious Black Panthers movement and the religious Tami party failed. The Union of Torah Observant Sephardic Jews (*Hitahdut hasfaradim shomrei torah*), or in short, “Shas,” began as a Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) unconcerted initiative in the 1983 local council elections. Three Haredi-Sephardic lists ran in three municipalities and won seats in each of them: three in Jerusalem, one in Tiberius, and one in Bnei Brak. The local efforts were followed by the establishment of a national list under the spiritual guidance of Israel’s former Sephardic chief rabbi Ovadia Yosef (1920–2013) and the influential Ashkenazi rabbi Shakh (1898–2001).

In its 1984 national election campaign, Shas’s mobilization efforts focused on Haredi Mizrahi Jews who were substantially discriminated against in ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazi educational, religious, and political institutions.<sup>80</sup> By emphasizing a Mizrahi-religious identity, Shas also offered an attractive alternative to non-Haredi, low-income Mizrahi Jews who felt marginalized by the secular establishment.<sup>81</sup> However, the solution to marginalization, according to Shas, was not simply an affirmation of a distinct Mizrahi identity opposed to an Ashkenazi one. Instead, Shas put forward an integrative religious identity that could serve as a new platform for unity among the different Jewish ethnic groups in



Israel. As Yoav Peled, a leading Shas scholar, observed, “The key to Shas’s success, where other efforts to organize Mizrahi political parties have failed, is its integrative, rather than separatist, ideology. Shas seeks to replace secular Zionism with religious Judaism as the hegemonic ideology in Israeli society, and presents this as the remedy for both the socio-economic and the cultural grievances of its constituency.”<sup>82</sup>

Shas’s political slogan, “To Return the Crown to Its Former Glory,” offers a reclamation of a glorious but inclusive Mizrahi identity, one whose main element is a religiosity that can potentially unite all Jews, Ashkenazi and Mizrahi, under a shared umbrella. The solution to discrimination and to socioeconomic difficulties, according to Shas’s platform, is a return to religion. While Shas often utilizes socioeconomic claims and ethnic-identity claims for mobilization around election times, Shas scholars agree that it is religiosity, rather than these other features, that forms its dominant characteristic. For example, a quantitative discourse analysis of Shas’s official publication, *Yom Leyom*, found that between 1993 and 2003 there were 272 articles addressing the religious identity of the movement—topics such as the struggle against elements that threaten the world of the Torah, Shas’s responses to these, the exclusive authority of Rabbi Yosef, addressing women separately to support the movement’s religious efforts, the religious education system of the movement, and the threats to the Jewish nature of the state. Only 30 articles addressed social or Mizrahi-ethnic issues.<sup>83</sup> Tessler describes the relationship between Shas’s various ideological elements. She argues that Shas’s core activists stress religious identity, which is the main commitment of the spiritual leadership. While some attention to a social-ethnic identity is promoted by the political leadership, both the political and spiritual leaders accept the priority of the religious element.<sup>84</sup>

As a social movement for Jewish religious revival, Shas also developed its own separate education system including religious schools, kindergartens, yeshivas, and synagogues. These served to socialize diverse populations into the

movement and to spread religious observance. Throughout the 1990s, the party's influence grew with each election. In the 1992 election, the party won 6 seats in the Knesset (out of a total of 120 seats). In 1996, it grew to 10 seats, and in 1999 it reached 17 seats and became the third largest party in Israel. In the three twenty-first century elections, the party's share of the vote decreased, and it has occupied between 11 and 12 seats.<sup>85</sup> As an important partner in coalition governments, Shas has had influence beyond its size in the Knesset. Shas MKs have held several important cabinet positions such as the ministry of interior, ministry of housing, and ministry of religious services. These positions allowed the movement to funnel significant government funding to its various religious institutions. However, with the forming of Netanyahu's 2013 government, Shas was left out of the coalition and joined the ranks of the opposition, a position that has put some of its funding in danger of being reduced.

In their political activism while in ruling government coalitions, Shas representatives prioritize religious legislation over social legislation that could help the plight of the Mizrahi poor.<sup>86</sup> For instance, in his tenure as labor minister in 1996–1999 Eli Yishai, Shas's former political head, focused most of his energies on closing and fining businesses employing Jews on the Sabbath. Shas also vehemently insists on Orthodox conversion to Judaism and objects to the Reform and Conservative streams. Cohen also observes that Shas's efforts are not aimed at bringing its poor voters closer to the center, but rather at making them and the state more religious—offering an identity and cultural alternative to the center—hence its focus on budgets for its education system and for its proselytizing efforts. Shas scholars agree that “in cases where Shas will have to choose between advancing a social economic policy improving its supporters' material conditions and between religion and state policy or achievements in the area of a religious revolution, it will choose the latter.”<sup>87</sup>

Given this prioritization, Shas has been able to display significant political flexibility. Most significantly, it has

remained ambiguous on the main political cleavage in Israeli politics—that between the peace camp and the hawkish nationalist camp.<sup>88</sup> Although most of its voters could be considered hawks on the question of peace with the Palestinians, Shas has been a member of both right- and left-leaning governments, including the Rabin government that signed the Oslo Accord in 1993. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, Shas's spiritual leader, had famously ruled at the time of the peace agreement with Egypt that land can be conceded to Israel's Arab neighbors in cases where such an action could prevent war. According to Yosef:

If the heads and commanders of the army together with the members of the government rule that the matter involves *pikuah nefesh* [saving lives], that if territories of the Land of Israel are not returned [to the Arabs] there is an immediate danger of war with the Arab neighbors, and many lives will be lost, and if the territories are returned to them, the danger of war will be reduced, and there are chances for lasting peace, it appears that according to all views it is permitted to return territories of the Land of Israel for the sake of achieving this goal, since nothing is more important than *pikuah nefesh*.... [And] if there is disagreement on the matter, then the doubts concerning life take precedence, and one must return the territories and remove the fear of war.<sup>89</sup>

Shas has never articulated a clear position on the question of peace and relations with the Palestinians. Its ambiguity on the matter has allowed it to comfortably maneuver between dovish and hawkish government coalitions. A brief review of Shas's official elections platforms reveals that issues of peace and security do not feature prominently.<sup>90</sup> In fact, in recent years the growing rift between the ultra-Orthodox community and religious-nationalist parties, Shas leaders have indicated their openness to initiatives advancing peace with the Palestinians.<sup>91</sup> Shas MK Yitzhak Cohen went as far as sending Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, a letter in 2013 in which he called on the prime minister to accept the Arab Peace Initiative that was presented to Israel in 2002. MK Cohen wrote, "I beseech you to not leave any stone unturned and examine the prospect for the Peace Initiative, seeing that we live in a region that is almost entirely Muslim and given the belief that this initiative contains the seeds for a bridge of understanding between Islam and Judaism and the Jewish

state.”<sup>92</sup> Shas can therefore be comfortably defined as a proselytizing movement for the sake of our analytical categorization of movements into proselytizing and nationalist ones. As another Shas expert puts it: “Both religious Zionism and Shas are concerned with reasserting the prominence of religion. But the religious Zionists believe that by advancing a joint nationalist agenda the seculars will come to accept religion, while Shas undertook intensive proselytizing efforts.”<sup>93</sup>

### *Structure and Support*

At the spiritual helm of the movement stands the Council of Torah Sages (*mo'etzet hakhmei hatorah*), under the leadership of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef until his passing in 2013 and his replacement by Rabbi Shalom Cohen. The political leadership of the movement is composed of university-educated Mizrahi Haredi men who see to Shas's elections efforts and make up the party's list in the Knesset. In addition, Shas runs a plethora of powerful religious and educational institutions. Its most influential institution is the Wellspring of Religious Education Network (*Reshet ma'ayan hahinukh hatorani*), an ultra-Orthodox education system established in 1986. Through its cabinet appointments, Shas has been able to secure significant government budgets as well as funding from local authorities for this independent education system. By 2007, 21,334 students were enrolled in Shas-affiliated schools according to official government sources.<sup>94</sup> According to Shas figures, its network of religious education encompassed, as of 2010, over 33,000 students, 12,000 kindergarten students, 156 institutions, and 500 kindergartens.<sup>95</sup> In 2013, the figure stood at approximately 40,000 students in 180 schools (not including kindergartens).<sup>96</sup> The network's budget in 2013 was about 527 million NIS (close to 150 million dollars)—most of it provided by the state.<sup>97</sup>

Through its activities in local authorities, Shas has been able to expand religious services, bring about the construction of new synagogues and ritual baths (*mikva'ot*), and expand its proselytizing efforts. The Shas women's organization,

Margalit Em Beyisrael (Margalit: A Mother in Israel) concentrates Shas's efforts among adult women. The organization offers free religious law (*halacha*) and morals (*musar*) lessons, organizes trips to the tombs of religious sages, and raises money for Shas—for example, by selling letters for writing Torah scrolls in return for a blessing from Rabbi Yosef. According to Yafa Yom Tov, the head of Margalit, her organization runs 600 classes nationally every month with an average of thirty participants per class.<sup>98</sup>

Shas also collaborates with other proselytizing organizations that help recruit voters for Shas during election campaigns. All of Shas's institutions and affiliated organizations also work to recruit voters during election time. Parents whose children attend Shas's subsidized kindergartens and schools, and the women who come to Margalit classes, are all encouraged to vote for Shas. Amulets and blessings from Rabbi Yosef and from other prominent folk spiritual figures are promised in return for a vote for Shas. These organizations also put together mass gatherings to strengthen religion and to tie correct piety to support for Shas. The movement also has a weekly national publication titled *Yom Leyom* (Day to Day).

Shas's core leaders are ultra-Orthodox, but its support base has historically been mainly composed of traditional (*masorti*) and nonreligious Mizrahi voters of lower income background. Most studies find that only about 25 percent of Shas voters are Haredi, although their share has likely increased in the 2015 election. Although they are mainly Mizrahi, surveys show that a Jewish identity and attraction to making the state more religious is a higher motivating force for voters than concern for Mizrahi ethnic affiliation. For example, a 1999 survey found that 67 percent of Shas voters voted "so that the state will become religious," and only 11 percent voted "because of their concern for Sephardic communities."<sup>99</sup> Generational differences similar to the ones found in the Islamic Movement are present among Shas's women activists. The older generation of women came from mainly poor backgrounds and have not had an opportunity to pursue university education.

But through their involvement in Shas they have received professional training that has allowed them to be gainfully employed within the Shas institutional frameworks as well as in the public sector (mainly in positions that cater to the ultra-Orthodox community). Younger activists, as we shall see in [chapter 3](#), have been increasingly pursuing formal post-high-school education through the expanding avenues that provide an educational environment that accommodates an ultra-Orthodox lifestyle.<sup>100</sup>

### *Gender Ideology*

Like the Islamic Movement in Israel, Shas is a staunch supporter of the implementation of religious law, especially in the area of marriage and divorce, over which religious courts hold a monopoly in Israel. The Shas party in the Knesset has been the most vehement opponent of civil marriages and any non-Orthodox stream of Jewish marriages that tend to be more egalitarian toward women.

In the Shas education system, girls and boys study separately and receive different educational content. Young men gain an intensive religious scholarly education that focuses on Talmud study. Girls and women are not instructed to study Talmud, and therefore their curriculum includes little scholarly religious learning. Rather, girls' education focuses on piety and modesty as well as practical skills for running a home and for generating small income for the family. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef has pronounced on different occasions that women are not required to pursue Torah studies.<sup>101</sup> A typical address by Rabbi Yosef captures this approach:

The *mitzvah* of studying the Torah is only for men and not for women.... But women, for what are they rewarded? For sending their sons to *talmud torah* [institutions of Torah study] and their husbands to study the Torah. These are the precious and righteous women. They raise their sons in the way of the Torah ... the father is responsible for providing, he goes out to work in the morning and returns in the evening ... so the one who raises the sons is the woman, she is the housewife and is assigned with the duty of raising her sons to study the Torah.<sup>102</sup>

A clear division of labor is established in Shas's dominant discourse. Men are charged with religious study and women

with raising children and attending to the private sphere of the home. It would be misleading, however, to conclude that Shas's ideology confines women strictly to the home. On the contrary, many ultra-Orthodox women are very much responsible for providing for the home and are at times the sole breadwinners. A righteous woman, according to the Shas ideal, pursues employment to allow her husband to devote himself full time to his studies, and takes care of the home and the family, to unburden her husband of duties that might keep him away from his studies. As will be discussed in later chapters, Shas leaders have encouraged women's secular education and have been among the first to support Haredi women's higher education that allows women to work in better paying jobs and better support their families.

Nevertheless, since establishing boundaries between the religious and the secular world is one of Shas's primary concerns, modesty and the separation of sexes is a constant central issue in Shas's activities, teachings, and discourse. However, different from other ultra-Orthodox streams, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef has been known as a pragmatist and in his rulings has tended to choose what he calls the "lesser evil" rather than insisting on an uncompromising line. For instance, when asked about whether sex segregation in schools is absolutely required, his position was that indeed "it is forbidden to establish mixed schools where boys and girls study together and whoever does so must not be supported, because he violates the fence of modesty, and he must be shunned from the community of Israel." Yet as a testament to his pragmatism, he also added that:

In case there are not enough students per class, and it is thus not possible to open two separate classes, one for boys and one for girls, because the Ministry of Education will not accredit the school, and there is a danger that the children will go to a secular school instead, the lesser evil must be chosen, and it is better for the boys and girls to learn together in a religious school than go to a secular school. But this only applies up to the third grade [after which it is strictly forbidden to attend a mixed sex class].<sup>103</sup>

Similarly, on questions of female modesty, Rabbi Yosef has been unbending in his fight against women replacing of the headscarf or headcover with a wig, which is a practice

common among Ashkenazi Haredi women that some Mizrahi women have adopted. However, when asked to give an opinion regarding a school with female students who were not religious enough and would come to school with short skirts, Rabbi Yosef ruled that the girls could wear long pants, even though that violates the rules of modesty, as this was a lesser evil than short skirts.<sup>104</sup>

Shas organizations as well as prominent persons and institutions affiliated with the movement produce a plethora of manuals and guides for proper religious observance and Jewish life. Many are geared specifically to women and have a clear notion of feminine piety that is embodied in a woman's role at home and in the family, as well as her general conduct and modesty. Ahuva Yosef, a prolific and popular Shas activist, provides in her manual *To Worship You Truly*, which is subtitled *A Manual for Guidance, Peace at Home, and Morals from Genesis for Women and Brides*, advice for maintaining peace between husband and wife in a Jewish home. To achieve peace at home (*shlom bayit*), Ahuva writes, there are specific feminine qualities and behaviors a wife should cultivate. For instance,

- She needs to belittle herself slightly in the presence of her husband, and feel a little lesser than him (even if she feels she is smarter than he is).
- She speaks with calm and grace (in order not to provoke a quarrel).
- She always wears clean clothes and beautifies herself for her husband.
- She must not be lazy (she makes sure that the dishes, clothes and objects in the home are clean and tidy. A pleasant home makes a man happy with his house and his wife).
- She is calculated and careful not to stress her husband financially and not to demand things he cannot afford. In difficult times, she strives to spend less.
- She must not speak the praises of another man to her husband, or the praises of another woman.
- She strives to send him to Torah lessons and to prayers (so that they both can advance spiritually and bring to their home the light of God).

### *Engagements with Feminism*

In the following chapter, I describe how activists use such literature in religious lessons to draw distinctions between the secular and the religious worlds through the proper conduct of



women. As in the settler and Islamic movements, great attention is given to the different modes of action and patterns of behavior men and women should adopt. With gender roles and differentiation being a central concern for activists in Shas, the word “feminism” elicits the same negative reactions that we find among the settlers and the Islamic Movement women activists. Noa, for example, is a relatively young and popular activist who had become religious only in her mid-twenties and now runs Margalit lessons for women in which she teaches about a proper Jewish home and women’s central role within the home. Her attitude captures the common, somewhat complex, perception of feminism among Shas women activists:

I understand feminists, but I disagree with them. There’s no such thing as feminism, not in the Torah and not in the world. A woman has an essence. You can have power, you want power you will get it. Women that turn to feminism should go all the way, go work in construction also, and drive trucks and buses, everything that a man does you should do. But that is not our essence. Why do we want to be men? A man has his roles, these are the roles *Hashem* [God] gave him. We know his roles, he has more physical strength. If you are physically stronger than a man then you are a man, not a woman. The beauty of the woman is not to say “I want also.” You will get it but not aggressively. A woman’s status should not be low. You need to be educated, you need to be a professor and many other things in the world. But you shouldn’t declare yourself a feminist. This is not the way. I do understand them, because the ambition is to stop women’s oppression, to improve their status. But there is a right way to do this. You don’t need to demonstrate or do such actions. You need to sit with a group. I think that a woman should receive equal pay, otherwise that’s really unfair. There are many things that are not fair but we can repair them in a different way. Not with war and declarations of feminism, because it looks disgusting, you don’t look like a woman anymore. A woman’s entire essence is her beauty. Your softness. A child, whom does he miss? His mother. A mother is everything in the house, the core of the home [*ikar habayit*]. Take this core and your strength and demand things but in a different way.

You need to know where the limits are. For a woman to sit and study *gmara* [Talmud], that’s unnecessary. No one asked her to study it. That’s what a man needs to do. If you want to know in order to be more educated for your own sake, that is fine. But it creates a situation where you are the “rabbi” in the home and your husband is nothing. I see women who are being trained. They are told “study and learn *gmara* and everything” but that creates conflicts with the husband. It is nonsense. Why are you arguing with him? Are you trying to prove you are more learned than he is? That’s the worst thing, even if he is an idiot you have to make him feel like he is the smartest man in the world. Otherwise you destroy the essence

of your home. What do you want to be? You want to be a housewife [*'akeret bayit*] and woman of virtue [*eshet hayil*]. You need to know your limits.

Ahuva, Noa, and the other teachers of women's religious lessons in the movement support women's advancement. They believe women can study and work and achieve tremendous accomplishments. Like the women in the other movements, however, they associate feminism with the blurring of gender boundaries. A part of their mission, therefore, is to warn the women who attend their lessons against this blurring of boundaries and to fortify the walls of appropriate gendered behavior. The difference in roles is not simply a social arrangement, they argue. Rather, it is a divinely sanctioned distinction that stems from the different duties bestowed upon men and women. Chana's remarks that conclude this section resonate powerfully with Rabbi Kook's writings on gender, with Rashid Rida's interpretation as presented in the Islamic Movement section of this chapter, and with Rabbi Yosef's approach. All three movements draw on religious traditions that assign men different duties and ask women to be first and foremost mothers, wives and homemakers supportive of other family members.

Men are the ones who are required to study the Torah, women should do what they were commanded to do by the Torah. And I wish we were able to do all that we were required to. You should not spend your time instead doing something you were not required. I do not encourage this at all. It does not belong to women. It is written, "women die in labor for three things: for not being careful in *nida* [purity rules around menstruation] and *halla* [separating *halla* from dough] and lighting [Shabat] candles." We need to implement these, not beyond. Protect the principles of the Jewish home, send your sons to *talmud torah* and your daughters to *bayt ya'akov* [Haredi girls' school] and your husband to study the Torah and that's it. And her recompense is equal to that of her husband. What he studied, or when she sends him to prayer, the recompense is divided in half between the two of them. Even if he doesn't go, she still receives her half. No one can take her recompense from her. To wake your husband up for prayer every morning, is that not a big enough challenge?

## **The Palestinian Hamas Movement**

The name "Hamas" is an acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement (*Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*). Officially, the movement was created with the outbreak of the first

Palestinian Intifada in December 1987, but its history goes further back to the establishment of branches of the Society of the Muslim Brothers (founded in Egypt in 1928) in Mandatory Palestine in the 1930s and 1940s. The Muslim Brothers in Palestine oscillated between a clear stress on nationalist resistance to Zionism before the creation of the State of Israel, and then a strict prioritization of proselytizing work during the 1970s, when Israel came to control the West Bank and Gaza after the 1967 war. Under the Israeli occupation, the Muslim Brothers in Palestine concentrated their efforts on da'wa work, which included mosque construction, religious lessons, and other efforts to spread piety among the Palestinian population. Partly through their work, between 1967 and 1975 the number of mosques rose from 200 to 600 in the Gaza Strip and from 400 to 750 in the West Bank.<sup>105</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, the movement also focused on the enhancement of its social services and on social institution-building that encompassed Islamic student associations, youth organizations, health clinics, kindergartens, and charitable societies.<sup>106</sup> In 1973, Shaykh Ahmed Yassin, a leader of the Gazan Muslim Brothers who later became the spiritual head of Hamas, founded the Islamic Center (*Al-mujama' al-islami*) and later the Islamic Association (*Al-jam'iyya al-islamiyya*) to coordinate these religious and social endeavors.

The fact that the focus at the time was not on the nationalist struggle against the occupation is evident in the fact that Yassin's civil associations were legally registered with the occupying Israeli civil administration. According to some sources, Islamic activism received tacit, and at times even material, support from the Israeli authorities that saw it as a counterweight to the resistance efforts of the nationalist Palestinian factions working under the umbrella of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).<sup>107</sup> Over the years, from the 1950s to the 1980s, members of the Muslim Brothers who sought to prioritize the nationalist struggle have had to leave the movement. Many of them subsequently became founding figures in nationalist organizations such as Fatah,

established in 1958, and the Islamic Jihad that was formed in the 1980s.<sup>108</sup>

The early 1980s signaled a shift in the Brothers' political orientation, with a growing realization that the nationalist agenda could no longer remain secondary. The Muslim Brothers were facing rising criticism by many in the Palestinian public who advocated a more active resistance to the occupation, and the cause of national resistance led many Brothers to leave the organization and join the nationalist factions. In response, the Brothers created clandestine military apparatuses, called al-Majd and al-Mujahideen, which led to the subsequent arrest in 1984 of Shaykh Yassin and other Islamist leaders by the Israeli authorities, who charged them with stockpiling arms and planning attacks on Israeli targets.<sup>109</sup>

With the outbreak of the first Palestinian intifada in December 1987, the cadre of Muslim Brothers leaders announced the formation of the Islamic Resistance Movement. In August 1988, the movement published its official Charter, which outlined its ideological and organizational agenda. The Charter set as primary the nationalist struggle for the liberation of Palestine and couched that goal in its Islamic context. Article 12 of the Charter captures this sense powerfully:

Nationalism from the point of view of the Islamic Movement is part and parcel of religious ideology. Nothing is loftier in nationalism or deeper in devotion than this: if an enemy invades Muslim territories, then Jihad and fighting the enemy becomes an individual duty on every Muslim.... If other nationalism have materialistic, humanistic, and geographical ties, then the Islamic Resistance Movement's nationalism has all of that and in addition, which is more important, divine reasons providing it with spirit and life, raising in the heavens the divine banner to connect the earth with the heavens with a strong bond.<sup>110</sup>

From its official formation in 1987 and throughout its evolution, the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, has been primarily a religious-nationalist movement. While it has maintained and expanded its proselytizing and social service institutional network and continues to see in the spread of piety a key to the creation of a moral and just society and an important facet of its nationalist effort, the nationalist agenda has received priority in the movement's discourse and policies

to this date. Politically, the movement has held a rejectionist stance toward several compromise efforts that sought to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including the 1988 decision by the PLO to accept in principle a two-state solution framework, the Madrid talks in the early 1990s, the Oslo process that started in 1993, the Clinton framework from 2000, and subsequent Israeli and Palestinian negotiations. In particular, during the Oslo period from 1994 to 1996, Hamas launched a campaign of suicide operations inside Israel and in the occupied territories that targeted both military personnel and civilians. These attacks came in response to violence from the Israeli side (such as the massacre of worshippers in the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron by an Israeli settler, and Israeli targeting of Hamas leadership and operatives), and as an attempt to further undermine the peace process.<sup>111</sup>

During this period, Israel and the newly established Palestinian Authority redoubled efforts to clamp down on Hamas's military and political activities in the occupied Palestinian territories. Under this pressure, Hamas partially shifted its concentration to the movement's social and religious proselytizing component.<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless, it remained in its orientation a primarily religious-nationalist movement; it has retained its paramilitary infrastructure and has never returned to the strictly proselytizing framework of the 1960s and 1970s. With the failure of the Camp David peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in the fall of 2000, Hamas and other nationalist Palestinian factions including Fatah returned in earnest to armed resistance as a strategy for achieving national liberation. While continuing with their proselytizing and social efforts, Hamas's agenda of nationalist struggle had remained paramount to the organization during the years of the second intifada (2000–2005).

At this time, rising Palestinian dissatisfaction with the faltering peace process and with the corruption of the Fatah leadership contributed to a rise in support for Hamas. These changes in public opinion and political realities led to a change

in Hamas's stance toward the political process in the Palestinian Authority. Whereas in the previous national election held in 1996, the organization officially avoided participation,<sup>113</sup> in the national election of January 2006 Hamas decided to participate in the democratic process by running for seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). A Hamas victory in the 2006 election led to a unity government of Fatah and Hamas that soon disintegrated into a factionalist fight between the two organizations. As a result of this conflict, Hamas came to control the Gaza Strip from 2007 to the present, while Fatah currently maintains its dominance in the West Bank.

As this very brief historical outline demonstrates, Hamas has been largely pragmatic in its approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to both external and internal Palestinian politics. The movement has changed tactics and strategies in response to changing circumstances. The majority of experts who have studied the movement's evolution have pointed out that Hamas's leadership on several occasions has declared possible a *temporary* agreement that would end the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and will establish a Palestinian state in these territories. However, officially the movement continues to reject any *permanent* agreement that would be based on the existence of two states between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River and would grant Israel permanent recognition following an end to the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank.<sup>114</sup> In this respect, Hamas's ideological commitments mirror the position of the Israeli right and the settler movement on the matter of a final resolution to the conflict.

### *Structure and Support*

The movement in its current form operates in four arenas—political, military, social, and da'wa. On the political level, its leadership is divided between a local one based largely in the Gaza Strip, and an exiled leadership, whose headquarters were based in Jordan and later in Syria (until the outbreak of the Syrian uprising in 2011). A Shura council that includes

representatives from both the Palestinian territories and from abroad elects fifteen members to the movement's political bureau about every four years.<sup>115</sup> The current elected head of the political bureau is Khaled Mashal. In the Gaza Strip, Hamas formed a provisional government after the 2007 split with Fatah and the West Bank that operates under the premiership of Ismail Haniya. The military arm of the movement, established in 1992 under the name of Izz a-Din al-Qassam Brigades, includes about 10,000 operatives, according to Israeli sources.<sup>116</sup> Since Hamas's takeover in Gaza, its government has established an internal security force of about 5,500 to oversee law and order in the Strip.<sup>117</sup>

In the field of social services, Hamas has been perhaps the most significant actor in Palestine, competing with the services provided by the Palestinian Authority. Islamic charities that are loosely affiliated with the movement run orphanages, kindergartens, health clinics, vocational training, and a variety of other services. Experts estimate that by 2000, about 40 percent of social institutions in the West Bank and Gaza were run by Islamic charities (both officially and unofficially affiliated with Hamas),<sup>118</sup> and that in 2003, 65 percent of primary and middle schools in Gaza were Islamic. By that same year, Hamas's Islamic Society in Gaza, together with other Islamic charities, provided financial support to at least 120,000 individuals on a monthly basis.<sup>119</sup>

Hamas's da'wa efforts include the operation of hundreds of mosques, various Quranic memorization centers, religious lessons, the Islamic students bloc in university campuses and schools, and proselytizing organizations. The impact of this work is exemplified in the continued rise in the number of mosques (from 1,472 in 1998 to 2,228 in 2006) and Quranic memorization centers (from 361 in 1998 to 1,413 in 2006) in the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>120</sup> Hamas's founder, Shaykh Ahmed Yassin (1937–2004), had a primarily religious educational training and served as a spiritual guide—although he was not the religious authority of the movement and did not issue binding religious rulings or fatwas. His successors, men such

as Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, Khaled Mashal, and Ismail Haniya, among others, have come from largely professional backgrounds (doctors, engineers, university professors), rather than a religious-scholarly one. Hamas considers as its religious authority scholars associated with the Muslim Brothers movement such as Shaykh Yousuf Qaradawi and others. In addition, the Palestinian Ulama Association is a body of religious scholars operating from the occupied Palestinian territories that has close ties to Hamas.

Despite Hamas's extensive service provision network, its proselytizing outreach and its nationalist and military credentials, support for the Islamists among the Palestinian population never exceeded the public support for the PLO and Fatah during the 1990s. After the signing of the Oslo Accord in 1993, two-thirds of Palestinians expressed their support for the agreement, and support for the Islamists gradually decreased from 25 percent in 1993 to 15 percent in 1996.<sup>121</sup> But things changed drastically during the second intifada and following it. In the 2004–2005 local council elections, Hamas achieved significant victories in many municipalities, and in the 2006 national election to the PLC, as mentioned earlier, Hamas won 74 of the seats in the 132-seat legislative council, far superseding Fatah, which won only 43 seats.

In the years since Hamas's coming to power in the Gaza Strip, its popularity has begun to diminish due to its inability to administer effectively the affairs of the Gazan population. A combination of factors—international pressure and a suffocating Israeli blockade, factional rivalries with other political groups in the Strip, Hamas's increasingly nondemocratic tendencies, the Syrian civil war that had brought tension to Hamas's relationship with its backers within the Syrian and Iranian regimes, and the fall of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt in 2013, which tightened the stranglehold on Hamas and on Gaza—have all contributed to the movement's deteriorating public approval ratings. Although Fatah and the Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas have suffered diminishing legitimacy among



Palestinians, public opinion surveys from 2013 show that Fatah and Abbas nevertheless are more likely to win elections if those were to be held in the Palestinian territories. A survey from the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, conducted in September 2013, estimated that in the event of a presidential election, Abbas is likely to receive 51 percent of the vote, while Haniya, Hamas's prime minister in Gaza, would take about 42 percent of the vote. Fatah is estimated to win 38 percent of the vote in a legislative election, while Hamas is estimated to get 31 percent of the vote.<sup>122</sup> But even though the Islamic Resistance Movement's popularity has decreased since its height in 2006, it is still the most viable political contender and challenger of Fatah hegemony. In addition, the devastating war on Gaza in 2014, in which Israel killed over 2,000 Gazans, and Hamas fired hundreds of rockets into Israel, has somewhat improved Hamas's popularity.

Sociologically, the movement's leadership composition has changed. The older generation were mainly schoolteachers and religious leaders from middle- and upper-middle- class urban backgrounds (Ahmed Yassin, Ibrahim Yazuri, Abd al-Fattah Dukhan). The younger generation of leaders came from low-income families in the refugee camps who acquired higher education and subsequent professional employment as doctors, engineers, lawyers, and professors.<sup>123</sup> Although Hamas's electoral support base is quite diverse, the movement's male and female activists today are usually students and university-educated professionals who come both from pious middle-class and educated homes as well as from poor conservative families.

On the grassroots level today, the movement draws its supporters from diverse populations, very similarly to Fatah. In an extensive survey following the 2006 election, respondents who had voted for Hamas came from refugee and nonrefugee backgrounds, various levels of education (from illiterate to university graduates), a plethora of professional profiles (merchants, housewives, professionals, laborers, and unemployed), and different socioeconomic backgrounds (from

poor to middle class). This same diversity was true of respondents who had voted for Fatah. The main notable difference, perhaps, was that those who described themselves as religious supported Hamas (52 percent) in greater numbers than they did Fatah (40 percent).<sup>124</sup>

### *Gender Ideology*

Hamas's gender ideology is neither static nor immune to changing realities and engagement with various political interlocutors. The movement has changed some of its language as well as its practices from the time of its establishment to the current moment. Yet some essential core principles have remained at the heart of its teachings. The movement's establishment came at a time of increasing social conservatism, and Hamas's Charter—its founding document from 1988—captures the spirit of the time. Articles 17 and 18 of the Charter directly address the role of Muslim women. Article 17 opens with a statement affirming the importance of women's contribution to the national project, stating that “the Muslim women have no lesser a role than that of men in the war of liberation.” However, the specification of this role defines women not as agents in and of themselves but as vehicles for the production of masculine agents: “They manufacture men and play a great role in guiding and educating the [new] generation.”<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, women are described as innocent and passive beings who can be led astray by the enemies of Islam and therefore require protection and correct guidance in order to remain on the straight path. “The enemies,” article 17 reads, have understood women's central role in the reproduction of the nation and “therefore they realize that if they can guide and educate [Muslim women] in a way that would distance them from Islam, they would have won that war. Therefore, you can see them making consistent efforts [in that direction] by way of publicity and movies, curricula of education and culture, using as their intermediaries their craftsmen who are part of the various Zionist Organizations which take all sorts of names and shapes such as: the Free Masons, Rotary Clubs, gangs of spies and the

like.”<sup>126</sup> The main role of Muslim women according to the Charter is that of mothering and child rearing. Their contribution is mainly inside the home:

Article 18: The women in the house and the family of Jihad fighters, whether they are mothers or sisters, carry out the most important duty of caring for the home and raising the children upon the moral concepts and values which derive from Islam; and of educating their sons to observe the religious injunctions in preparation for the duty of Jihad awaiting them. Therefore, we must pay attention to the schools and curriculums upon which Muslim girls are educated, so as to make them righteous mothers, who are conscious of their duties in the war of liberation. They must be fully capable of being aware and of grasping the ways to manage their households. Economy and avoiding waste in household expenditures are prerequisites to our ability to pursue our cause in the difficult circumstances surrounding us.<sup>127</sup>

As is in the Jewish settlers’ example, it is important to mention that this type of gender ideology is not unique to the religious-nationalist project. Rather, Hamas’s discourse in this respect is similar to the one employed by the non-Islamist Fatah during the first intifada<sup>128</sup> and belongs to a tradition of secular nationalist and anti-colonial gendered discourse. Nationalist movements often assign to women the role of preserving the cultural “authenticity” of society through abiding by what is imagined to be their traditional roles.<sup>129</sup> During the early years of the intifada, a limited number of Hamas activists engaged in what became known as the “hijab campaign,” which went beyond preaching about the importance of women donning the hijab and included instances of violence against unveiled women in the Gaza Strip.<sup>130</sup> This, again, was not unique to Hamas. As Islah Jad notes, for all Palestinian factions at the time “women’s purity became, in the context of the struggle, a foundational building block in the strengthening of the collective spirit which was based on struggle and sacrifice and suffering. Women’s “immodesty” was seen as offending the honor of the martyrs—and women’s preoccupation with vanities and fashion [was seen as] an offence to those who are fighting for liberation.”<sup>131</sup>

But today, many in Hamas say that the Charter no longer reflects the movement’s positions. While the Movement has not distanced itself from the ideas and principals expressed in

the Charter in any official formal manner and nor has it amended it, there has been a growing discomfort with the language and phrasing of the 1988 document, in particular with some of the blatantly anti-Semitic language it uses in some places.<sup>132</sup> However, in terms of Hamas's gender commitments, Jamila Shanti, the current Hamas minister of women's affairs in Gaza, states that "[the Charter] was written in the early 1980s but it expresses Hamas's standpoint on the Palestinian woman."<sup>133</sup> In particular, the idea of women as the biological reproducers of the nation is a privileged theme in speeches and the movement's publications. This role is personified most ubiquitously in the movement's discourse in the image of Um Nidal Farhat. Crowned as the Khansa of Palestine,<sup>134</sup> she is the ultimate symbol of maternal contribution and sacrifice, as three of her children died in martyrdom operations while her only remaining living son is imprisoned. Her tragic fame came from a videotape in which she encourages and bids farewell to one of her sons before he embarked on a martyrdom attack on an Israeli settlement in 2002. She has been widely celebrated by Hamas as a role model for the pious women of the nation.

While the blunt phrasing of the Charter may no longer be representative of the movement's contemporary language, Hamas's more recent public articulations still reflect a conservative gender agenda similar to the one that animated the Charter. Take for example what is considered as Hamas's most progressive public document—the 2006 election campaign platform of its Change and Reform party that was meant to appeal to a range of Palestinian voters and represent Hamas as a politically legitimate and moderate party. First, the platform states that the party will strive to "Establish Islamic Sharia as the main source of legislation in Palestine" (section 5.1). This means that when it comes to personal status or family law, the platform stipulates, a single law "derived from the Sharia and from the recognized [Islamic] jurisprudential schools" would be enacted (section 9.5). Section 11 of the document, titled "Women, Children and the Family," offers a more progressive approach toward women's roles than the one

in the Charter, stating the party would seek to guarantee women's rights and support women in their efforts to contribute to social, economic, and political development (section 11.3). Yet just following this promise, the document also stresses the party's commitment to "shield women with Islamic education and make them aware of their Islamic legal rights and affirm women's character based on chastity, modesty and observance" (*al-iffa wa al-ihtham wa al-iltizam*) (section 11.4). This emphasis, which singles out women as targets for shielding through Islamic education and the cultivation of pious modesty, is quite reminiscent of article 17 in the original Hamas Charter. Needless to say, no equivalent stipulation for men exists in the 2006 election platform.

A comprehensive study by Ala Lahlouh based on Hamas's official publications and extensive interviews with elected Members of Parliament from Hamas in the period of 2006–2010 reveals that in fact in the area of family law the consensus in the movement has been on a strong objection to any reform that is considered to be in contradiction with the Islamic sharia. This includes attempts by women's rights organizations to lobby for reform that would make men and women equal in matters of family and personal status law.<sup>135</sup> Yet here it is important to note that under Hamas's rule in Gaza, no "Talibanization" of society has occurred, as Hamas's greatest critics and opponents would have predicted. Like the other movements reviewed in this chapter, Hamas encourages women's education and employment while emphasizing that such opportunities should be provided in an appropriate manner that maintains the regulation of the interaction between the sexes and essential heterosexual sexual difference, through women's modest dress, behavior, and monitored professional interaction. Hamas's gender ideology and practices quite strikingly parallel the efforts of the other movements—the settlers, Shas, and the Islamic Movement. For instance, the promotion of sex segregation in schools in Gaza<sup>136</sup> and the increased religious content in textbooks and curricula,<sup>137</sup> including emphasis on appropriate gender roles

and proper Islamic behavior, are fairly similar to the state of affairs in Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jewish schools in Israel and the settlers' and Shas's work.

### *Engagements with Feminism*

Like the other movements, Hamas's engagement with feminism is a dialectical one. On the one hand, the movement rejects feminism as a political agenda and opposes international and local feminist organizations, seeing them as a foreign imposition whose sinister attempt to blur the differences between men and women are part of a wider colonial scheme. On the other hand, the movement has had to constantly grapple with and even integrate some issues raised by the Palestinian women's movement.<sup>138</sup> This latter integration is evident in the adoption of a language of rights, and, in particular, women's rights. Although it was secular Palestinian feminists and the proliferation of an international discourse that introduced this concept in this particular formulation, its adoption by Hamas has largely denied this origin and instead sought to ground "women's rights" in an Islamic sharia context.<sup>139</sup>

One example of this contentious relationship is Hamas's rejection of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In 2011, both the Hamas-affiliated Palestinian Ulama Association and the Women's Affairs Ministry in the Hamas government in Gaza held seminars addressing the grave dangers of CEDAW and the need to reject the convention. The Ulama Association declared that the document, which Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas symbolically ratified in 2009 (because Palestine is not a state, it cannot be an official signatory), is "a danger to Islamic societies" and "aims to destroy the social relationship between men and women, while falsely claiming to fight discrimination against women." The association called for "pressure on [Muslim] governments who have signed the convention to withdraw from it and withdraw their recognition of the document because of the grave danger it poses to the social structure of the community."<sup>140</sup> In the

workshop organized by the Women's Affairs Ministry in the same year, participants decried CEDAW's contradiction of Islamic law, including in the realm of inheritance and what they termed women's freedom to use their bodies as they pleased, which "has been prohibited as part of the prohibition against adultery/fornication (*zina*)."

Another element that was deemed unacceptable was what lecturers described as the harmful psychological effects of the convention and in particular, in their words, "the article that speaks of motherhood as a function that can be performed by a person other than the mother ... which leads to harmful psychological effects for the mother, the child, and society."<sup>141</sup>

Interviews with Hamas male and female activists often elicit similar attitudes toward women's rights organizations, as we have seen in the other three movements. Shaykh Yunis Al-Astal, for example, who is a member of the Ulama Association and a Hamas Member of Parliament from Khan Yunis, explains in *Al-Risala*, Hamas's publication, that:

The bones of society are plagued by organizations that target women in the name of countering the injustices they face and activating their role, and other empty talk and weak excuses. But they in fact implement the foreign agenda of their donors, who provide money to make the Palestinian woman rebel against her religion and her morals and our traditions, to make her a cheap good.... But women are capable of reviving the message of Islam and replacing the corrupt ones, and creating a pioneering role for women in childrearing and housekeeping first, and then in schools and kindergartens and the universities, and in medicine and nursing and other positions, in which women can play a role alongside guarding their morals and chastity and their domestic mission as mothers.<sup>142</sup>

Another high-ranking woman activist expressed that the women's organizations are made up of "elites" and feminist leaders who are "isolated in their intellectual salons and are distant from the real concerns of women." Unlike what she considered the feminist focus on women as individuals, she said, "We see the woman as a part of the family. Society in our view is not made up of individuals but rather the smallest and essential unit of society is the family. We don't view men's interests and women's interests separately, that kind of approach destroys them both, we rather look to the interest of the family." Raja Halabi, one of the most visible leaders of

Hamas's women's branch, states that the establishment of the branch was the natural result of the absence of Islamic consciousness within the Palestinian society and the appearance of currents that contradicted Islamic principles and promoted imported ideas. The purpose of the women's branch, therefore, was to counter such foreign influences that have taken root among women and foster a return to Islamic values and fundamentals.<sup>143</sup> In conversations with other activists, the sense is often that feminist and women's organizations represent a foreign agenda while Hamas's women and their organizational frameworks are more in touch with an authentic Palestinian worldview that is grounded in Islam. Moreover, as was the case in the other movements, advocates of explicit Islamic feminism are usually external interlocutors of Hamas rather than members of its ranks. For instance, the first two women to take the qualifying exam for the position of judges in Palestinian sharia courts in 2009, Asmahan Youssef Al-Wihidi, and Khulud Mohamed Ahmed Faqih, have been active in feminist women's rights organizations rather than in Hamas's organizations, and have been appointed by Hamas's secular rival, Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas.

### **Family Resemblances and Differences**

In this chapter, I have outlined the family resemblances that exist between the four movements and serve as the rationale for the comparative work and for placing them side by side as different iterations of a similar modern phenomenon. They are all expressions of contemporary socially conservative religious movements that have become increasingly visible and influential since the 1970s and that offer a particular fusion of religion and politics. I have also charted the contours of the gender ideology that the movements advocate, highlighting points of similarity that exist despite the contextual differences and the specific formulations that have been developed in each of the movements. [Chapter 3](#) will describe the ways in which women activists take up the essential gender complementarity that the movements promote and translate it into a form of



“complementarian activism” that, while adhering to a socially conservative ideology, is nevertheless highly political and empowering to women. This will be done through an exploration of the activities women undertake and the “dialogical sites”<sup>144</sup> in which they discuss, debate, and elaborate on the meanings and practices of their ascribed roles.

The primary difference I wanted to draw out between the movements, however, is one of doctrinal priority between proselytizing and nationalist commitments. In the schematic categorization in this research, the settler movement and Hamas are described as prioritizing a religious-nationalist agenda (while still pursuing proselytizing work, though one that has become ideologically secondary to the nationalist goal). The Islamic Movement in Israel oscillates between these two pulls and has split exactly along this line, with its southern branch often prioritizing the spread of piety and its northern branch stressing Muslim Palestinian nationalism. Shas has been consistently devoted to its teshuva, or Jewish proselytizing mission, and is close to the ideal type in this category. Yet as the brief histories I sketched lay bare, ideological prioritization is not static and unchanging. As we saw, the Islamic Movement in Israel started as a clandestine religious-nationalist paramilitary initiative, and transformed into a da‘wa movement, only to later split between those who prioritized a nationalist agenda and those who wanted to focus on da‘wa. Hamas’s precursor, the Muslim Brothers in Gaza, thought that reform through the spread of piety and social services was the correct direction to pursue in order to advance their society, only to later be swept up in the nationalist resistance fervor that ignited and sustained the first Palestinian intifada in 1987. Among the settlers, some groups called for a return to teshuva following their devastating disappointment with the Zionist state—an entity that their ideology elevated to divine status—when it decided to destroy the Jewish settlements of the Gaza Strip and withdraw from that territory in 2005. These voices did not gain significant traction but, nevertheless, their presence demonstrates that ideology is always debated.

Yet from the 1980s to the present, I argue, the dominant position in each of these movements was in line with the categories I describe, and shaped women's activism in particular and differing ways. As we will see in [chapters 4 and 5](#), a primarily religious-nationalist ideology has enabled women activists in some of the movements to create frames of exception that made transgressions not only tolerable but also righteous. On the other hand, the movements that focused on proselytizing did not offer their women activists the same powerful discursive tools to construct such frames of exception and pursue activism that in practice would appear to undermine the commitment to gender complementarity. Nevertheless, in all movements, women's complementarian activism that is derived from the movements' official gender ideology makes up a large portion of what women activists actually do. The following chapter explores the dialogical sites in which activists engage with each other, with men, and with women audiences to discuss, debate, and authenticate the parameters of women's appropriate roles in and pious duty toward society.

### 3

## Complementarian Activism: Domestic and Social Work, Da‘wa, and Teshuva

This chapter offers a rare glimpse at one form of activism women undertake in all four movements. This type, which I term “complementarian activism,” involves providing distinctively gendered support to the community and the movement. Much of the work that I describe here is recent and quite transformative for women as social movement actors. However, these roles and this labor are described by activists and in the official discourse of the movements as reflecting a correct, religiously prescribed gendered order expressed in a particular complementary sex-based division of labor. By being supportive wives, mothers, and homemakers, engaging in social service activities for the community, and spreading the message of religion through proselytizing among women, activists offer a uniquely feminine contribution to their movements that comfortably sits with their official gender ideology. This type of activity does not challenge the sexual division of labor the movements uphold as a religious ideal and is therefore noncontroversial and does not require extensive discursive justification by women activists.

This chapter includes extensive descriptions of some of the activities the women undertake and is based on field-notes, interviews, conversations, and women’s writings. It brings to life the meaningful and complex experiences this work entails. As only very little research on women in these movements is available in English, the detailed field-notes in this chapter help bring outsiders into the rich worlds of women’s activism. Many comprehensive studies on each of these four movements either ignore women’s work entirely or include one contained chapter, separate from the rest of the work, that addresses women’s activism. This neglect could imply that women’s work is tangential to the movements. But as the literature on women and social movements more broadly demonstrates, all social movements are inherently gendered in their emergence, discourse, processes, and outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, in the movements

under study, as will become clear in the following pages, women's labor is essential to their very sustenance.

The fact that the activities I describe here conform to the movements' conservative gender ideology does not make them less significant, challenging, and powerful. In fact, they reveal that women's complementarian work provides the backbone and foundation for the movements' success and growth. This is achieved in several ways. First, women have personal access to other women, which, in movements that espouse sex-segregation, means that women's activism is essential if the movements desire to recruit women and, through them, their families. Second, engaging in both religious proselytizing and providing social services for women and their families cement social networks that are based not strictly on a shared ideology, but also and perhaps more importantly on emotional bonds of care and help. Similar to the women's self-help movements described by the sociologist Verta Taylor, women's work in conservative religious-political movements gives rise to "personal relationships stitched out of participants' giving and getting emotional and other very individualized kind of support."<sup>2</sup>

In addition, as Stacey Yadav observes in the case of the Yemeni Islamist *Islah* movement, the neat distinction between the public and private spheres is untenable when describing women's activism in socially conservative religious-political movements.<sup>3</sup> Women's complementarian work is not confined strictly to a domestic private sphere that is entirely separated from a public domain. Rather, their activism within arenas that are considered private—for example raising a family in a settlement, teaching their children to be better pious subjects, holding religious study groups for women at home, and developing feminine networks of trust and support—has the inherent public aim of reforming society. Often the women explicitly articulate these efforts as an integral part of their public mission to further the goals of their movements. In addition, women's social and religious work for the benefit of the community and the movement is increasingly performed in what Yadav has termed "segmented publics" rather than in private. Women work to advance their movements' public, political objectives among other women and in public, although one that often is sex segregated.

### **West Bank Settlers' Domesticity**

The settlement ethos rests on a narrative of pioneering and sacrifice in the face of severe hardship. Even though the settlement project has been generously cushioned by government budgets, the establishment of new settlements in the past and of outposts presently has been accompanied by some, at times tense, negotiation with the state. The women of Gush Emunim, the first generation of settlers, tell of the hardships and challenges they had endured in the early years. Women who are settlement and outpost pioneers today live the ethos of the first generation of settlers by constantly pushing forward, against what they perceive to be government obstacles, to establish new outposts and to face, like their mothers before them, the difficult lives of pioneers. It is in this area of creating a normal life for a family and for a community in the context of what they see as daily struggle and challenging living conditions that women's unique feminine contribution is most felt by activists. This task that the women are charged with is often linked in the settlers' discourse to biblical feminine role models and the standards they set for feminine contribution. Rather than being men's "equals," performing similar work inside and outside of the home, women's contribution is "behind the scenes," complementary to men's roles and enabling of men's political success. Shikma, a prolific journalist and activist from a prestigious line of settlements pioneers, artfully describes the distinct feminine contribution as she and many of my other interlocutors understand it:

I think that in Judaism in general the woman has a very special role. You can see it very clearly with our [biblical] mother Sarah.... Avraham our father sits outside his tent and three angels approach. He runs toward them and invites them to dine with him. They ask him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" and he says, "She is there in the tent." The woman is in the tent. Today people say, "The woman is in the kitchen." "My wife is in the tent," she is not with him outside, she is not with the guests. Then he tells her, "Hurry, prepare the food," in the following verses. But at the same time, when there is a confrontation between Sarah and Avraham.... *Hashem* [God] says, "All that Sarah tells you do as she says." It is this combination in which the woman is not at the front, you will not see her on every hill, but ... in practice, under the surface, she is the one that directs things, she is the one who makes the decisions.... The woman is never waving the feminist flag and she always occupies a very important place. I don't think that we can say that the woman is undervalued, that she is inferior. The man is the leader on the surface and the woman is the leader under the surface. It is not a contradiction, on the contrary, I think it is very powerful. I can see the same thing in the settler movement.... My dad who is a well-known person, he wanted to lead this move in Samaria.<sup>4</sup> But the wife could always say, "Excuse me, you have to provide for the family, go out to work and bring home money." That is something that happens a lot, that the men have a vision but the wives tell them, "Money, house, car, clothes," and the big ideas then have to be left to other people or to other times. First of all, my mother gave my father this space to run ahead with what he wanted to do. And later in practice, when he made it happen, she was there. If the technical

details had to be attended to, he wasn't alone, he had an entire family. She took care of that. If he brought guests home, she took care of the guests. Without her he would not have succeeded, he would not have stood a chance without her. So it's true that all the glory, all the flashlights were pointed at him and not at her, but if she would have told him, "We are now packing our bags and going back," at that very day the whole [settlement] project would have been finished. He could have had wonderful ideas from here till eternity, it would not have gone anywhere without her. And it's not just her ... all the women [of Gush Emunim] I talked to said, "We worked like donkeys, from morning till night, many guests came and we had to cook for them and take care of them." You can easily discount this but I think that it requires a lot of strength. It is like a fancy car, without gas it will not move.

Nurit, a founding member of Gush Emunim, describes the first settling initiatives and women's contribution. After seven attempts to settle in Samaria, which have been repeatedly frustrated by the Israeli army, a group of settlers finally managed to set up camp in the winter of 1976 in what later became the settlement of Kdumim. "We went up to the military camp with its unbearable conditions," Nurit relates. "We lived in a 2 by 3 square meter cube with no bathroom, no water, with a communal kitchen, with army bathrooms and showers in a train-like row." Nurit highlights that women's quotidian work was essential, though less outwardly visible than the explicitly political public work of the men in the group. "It is clear to me," she explains, "that a family that came with three and four children and the husband appeared to be dominant on the outside, the real difficulty was borne by the woman. It's true that the men worked really hard, my husband for example had to travel to Tel Aviv every day and he was in the group's secretariat, and the other men worked and were active.... But the everyday, that's the hard part, and that would not have been possible if the women did not do what they did."

The perceived difficulties and sacrifices women face in the settlers' narrative encompass not only the discomfort of living at first without basic utilities in cramped tents or tiny mobile caravans, but also the danger of violence in an unfriendly terrain. As one activist puts it, "Even today, young women travel these roads at day and night. They are in outposts alone without their men [who work in the cities or settlements]. During the [second] intifada [the Palestinian uprising] when soldiers were afraid to travel and would wear helmets and bullet proof jackets, and ride in bullet proof vehicles, women—old ones, young ones—drove around with their babies. And it is clear to me that if a woman is not strong her man would not be able to withstand life here." In the activists' words, women's willingness to live and raise a family in the settlement is

one of the essential keys to the viability and success of the project. The personal choice is an explicitly public and political one. A leading young activist captures this linking of the personal and the political, saying, “For me the fact that I live in a settlement is sort of a public thing, since I don’t live there because it is comfortable, the choice is not about the quality of life.... It is a kind of a public mission.”

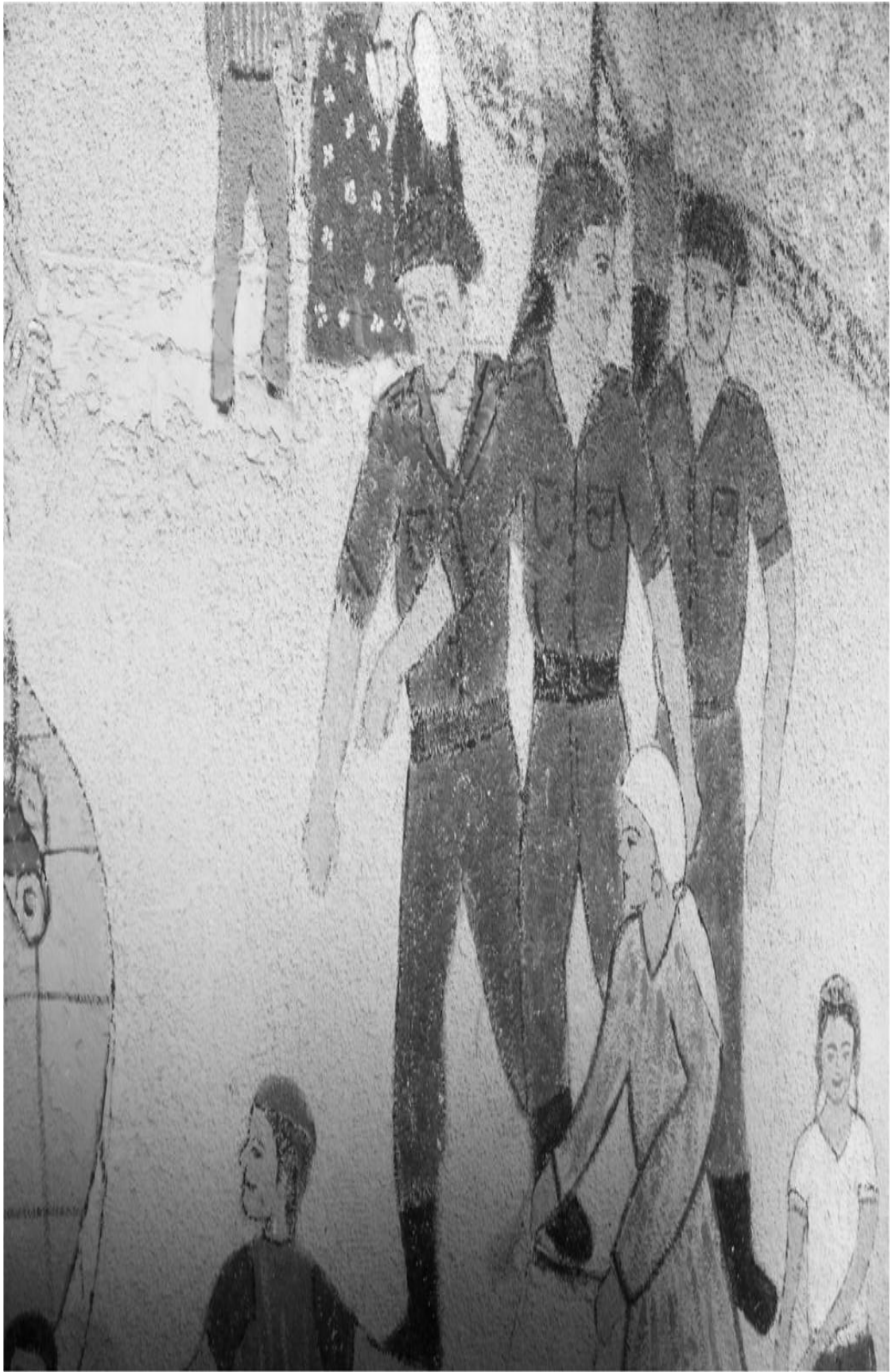


Figure 3.1. Mural at the Jewish settlement enclave in Hebron.



The notion that it is women's perseverance that gives sustenance to the settlement project is highlighted not only by women but also by men in the movement. An anecdote that captures this sentiment was told to me by Rabbanit Merav, who is in her forties and is married to a rabbi of a highly ideological settlement. She related that in a graduation event in a girls' school in one of the settlements, the rabbi of the school asked the female students, "Thanks to whom do you live here [in the settlement]?" The girls replied that it was thanks to [biblical] Joseph the righteous, but the rabbi said, "Incorrect! It is thanks to your mothers! If they had refused to live here you would not have been living here." That the settlements must be viable homes to flourish, and that it is women's work that domesticates what could otherwise have been a barren and cold military enterprise is part of the shared narrative to which many in the movement explicitly subscribe.

But as part of their public mission, women activists extend their efforts beyond their immediate families and carry out a variety of community services. Mutual help committees, organizing to support new mothers, religious lessons, and social enrichment activities are among the informal community frameworks in which women participate. This community activism, again, is explicitly linked in the activists' articulations to the wider political settlement project. Women involved in community work see in their effort a contribution to community building and to strengthening the social fabric of the settlement, which strengthens the settlement's capacity to survive. The younger activist I quoted earlier explains this move from private choice to public community work as part of a clear political agenda:

I think that the fact that I feel like I am doing something important by living in Samaria, in a settlement that is hard to live in, that in itself contributes to the settlement project. It is expressed for example in that I am aware of the fact that I want people in the settlement to be happy so that they will stay to live here or will buy a house here, so that they will convince others to join, it is expressed mainly in small things, not in big activism—to be nice, to invite people over for meals. The point is that I want the settlement to grow and the reason I want it to grow is so that our hold of [the West Bank] will be stronger.

More formally, women's community work in the settlements, as elsewhere, often centers on public areas that are considered as still within women's domain, like children's education, social services, and social activities for women. As the settlements grew, an increasing demand for facilities and institutions required women's involvement in formal community work. Yifat of Hebron tells,

“When we came here there were only a few families here, there was no daycare and no kindergarten, no grocery store, nothing. We had to build everything from scratch.” She describes the process by which informal women’s involvement in community work became increasingly formalized:

We had eleven children [in the Jewish settlement within the city of Hebron]. Very soon I fitted into the coordination of the children’s education. I did it voluntarily for many years. There was nothing here, the pioneer families were older and their children were my age. But when the young families came here, it was the first year that you had eight children in Hebron. It required a daycare, a kindergarten, after-school activities. I found myself busy over my head with it. During these years, I remember myself walking in the *yeshuv* with a stroller, my three children always with me, and organizing everything. We set up a daycare, then a kindergarten. We didn’t receive anything from the authorities, no government services, we had to do everything by ourselves slowly. *Baruch hashem* we advanced. At some point it became my official position.

Despite the early stages of tense negotiations, Israeli governments from the late 1970s onward began to invest heavily in the settlements. The flow of public funds to settlements’ local government authorities has enabled a variety of public resources and employment opportunities<sup>5</sup> that allowed women to work inside the settlements in positions that advance the well-being of their communities.<sup>6</sup> Like their personal/political choice regarding their place of residence, these aspects of women’s contribution to the settlement project do not undermine a commitment to a sexual division of labor in principle. Rather, these public areas are, according to the activists, symbolic extensions of the private sphere to the community as a whole and are therefore grounded in women’s essential tendencies as mothers to be nurturing caregivers. As Rabbanit Merav explains, “I feel that the official leadership is of the men and the rabbis, but the whole spirit here, the atmosphere, everything we have in the community, the education of the children, it’s all thanks to the women.”

In their article about the women founders of the settlement Rehelim, El-Or and Aran attempt to identify the feminist elements in settler women’s actions and self-perception. They describe what they interpret as the criticism the women articulated against their male counterparts and the forms of resistance women’s actions conveyed. Resistance, El-Or and Aran suggest, is to be found in the subversion of the political and combative rhetoric of the men and the articulation of an alternative feminine narrative. They write:

The women preferred to describe their political action in a terminology of creating, giving birth, continuity, and education, which supplanted the usual vocabulary of

seizing, struggling, constructing, and resisting. They claimed to have chosen a nonviolent way of remaining in the territories. The fact that they wished to depict their activities in these terms while dissociating themselves from the male choices should not be underestimated. These choices were important, even if the women were not actually changing the objectives toward which the men were striving.<sup>7</sup>

Tamara Neuman, on the other hand, rejects the interpretation of the women's discourse as a form of resistance because these women do not advance a political agenda that is different from that of the men in the movement.<sup>8</sup> According to Neuman, women settlers work to depoliticize the settling action. Feige similarly reads the strategic importance of women's presence in the settlement as being the endowment of a sense of civilian "normalcy" to the settlement project, presenting it as a community-building effort rather than a violent political act of occupation.<sup>9</sup>

In short, El-Or and Aran argue that the women's actions are political in that they offer a feminine alternative to the male narrative. Neuman and Feige contend that the women attempt to depoliticize the settlement project with their maternal, feminine discourse. Indeed, contrary to El-Or and Aran, women settler activists do not claim to offer an alternative to the male narrative. Their narrative complements the men's project. It facilitates rather than challenges or contests it. But neither do they obscure the political aspect of their personal choices and of their community activism, as Neuman and Feige suggest. When asked, they explicitly and consistently claim that these activities advance the political and religious cause of settling the Land of Israel. In fact, without this uniquely feminine contribution, they correctly point out, the political project itself would have been unsustainable.

At the same time, Neuman is also correct in arguing that these types of community activities do not challenge the underlying gender ideology of the movement. [Chapter 4](#) describes a different type of activism by settler women. It shows that women in fact engage in types of activism that transgress their movement's dominant sexual division of labor ideology. Women organize and participate in demonstrations, unruly political public action, and confrontations with state authorities—activities that, unlike the ones described in this chapter, severely compromise their commitment to female modesty and to the halachic injunction "the honor of a king's daughter is within." [Chapter 4](#) studies how these transgressions are enabled. But first, another component of women's activism should be addressed, as it is shared between the settlers and the other

movements in this book. Women also engage in various forms of informal religious study. While many such lessons are delivered by wives of rabbis (*rabbaniyot*), more explicitly political lessons are usually taught by male rabbis. The following notes from a class in a settlement stronghold in East Jerusalem shed light on the gendered content and form of these classes.

*Why We Are Not Allowed to Speak about the Mothers*

Ofra's house is located at the heart of a large East Jerusalem Palestinian neighborhood. In the midst of some 14,000 Palestinian residents, a Jewish neighborhood is being constructed with the help of a right-wing foreign billionaire. One hundred Jewish families had already moved in. In the past weeks, during the winter of 2009, tensions have been rising in the city due to the closure of the Al-Aqsa mosque by Israeli authorities following clashes between the police and Palestinian worshippers. Matters were further exacerbated by the eviction of several Palestinian families from their apartments in the nearby Shaykh Jarrah neighborhood to make room for settler families. To get to Ofra's house, one drives through the Palestinian neighborhood, passes a traffic circle, and then the "green mosque" to the left. In the dark, the mosque's minaret tower spreads bright green neon rays that light up the empty street. Inside, at the backyard of the mosque is Ofra's house, guarded by five Israeli border police officers in a shabby post.

When I reached Ofra's house for the monthly lesson she hosts, I was greeted by two almost naked toddlers. They were in their diapers and were running around, in and out of the house and around the entrance balcony with naughty smiles on their faces, clearly doing something they were not supposed to be doing at this late hour. Both had soft long strands of very light golden hair. I smiled and said hello and they immediately ran away, giggling. Through the open front door, I saw Ofra and her husband mopping the living room floor with their five children. The two older girls, about six and seven years old, were helping them, while the remaining three younger children made sure to undo all of the parents' and older sisters' work. When an older sister mopped a patch of the floor with a wet cloth, a younger one would come and step on that patch, leaving muddy footprints. When Ofra picked up a toy lying in a corner and placed it on a table, a younger child would grab it and throw it back on the floor. The balcony of the house had an assortment of old pillows and colorful rugs reminiscent of a Bedouin

tent where guests could sit on the floor. Like the descriptions by women activists in this chapter, the domestic atmosphere at Ofra's house bestowed a sense of normalcy and pleasant, routine family life.

But together with the fact that the house was located in the backyard of the green mosque, the view of a Palestinian neighborhood which stood on the opposite hill served as a reminder that Ofra's house was not just a domestic domain, it was a political thorn. This was clearly a Palestinian neighborhood, large private houses built impossibly close to each other, giving a sense of suffocating crowdedness. In the heart of this distinctly Palestinian landscape, a mammoth building complex rose up like a fortress, higher than everything else around it and painfully out of place. Parts of the complex were still under construction, promising many more settlers will be brought to the neighborhood.

The living room was finally ready, and the nine women who by now had arrived from around East Jerusalem and from Hebron were invited to enter. The house was dome shaped, with the high white concave ceiling making the small space feel enormous. A long antique metal chandelier stretched down from the tip of the dome, filling the room with gentle light. The exposed pink-gray stone walls arched into several alcoves containing countless religious books. The walls were mostly bare, although a few pictures of the children decorated one side of the room. Several antique candleholders and some peacock feathers stood on two shelves in a corner, and next to them an old cowboy hat hung from the wall with a red glass lamp suspended from it by a string of dyed glass beads. The women sat on the two sofas and several chairs that were arranged in a semicircle facing a table with a large kettle for hot water, tea and coffee containers, glasses and cakes.

Rabbi Uri arrived, greeted us, and sat on the chair next to the table. He was in a rush and wanted to start immediately. He placed a pile of photocopied sheets with today's text on a chair and we each took one.<sup>10</sup> I started reading the text, which discussed the dangers of living in exile, away from the Land of Israel, when Rabbi Uri began to read the first lines aloud. His teaching method consisted of reading a few lines and then interpreting them for the women. He explained, following the text, that living in exile (*galut*) away from the light of the Torah that shines only in the Land of Israel always entails idolatry ('*avoda zara*).

He continued to read and expound:

Our [biblical] father Jacob worried about the fate of his sons in exile and asked God that some of the Torah will be available even in exile. He was worried that when one goes into exile one will forget to return. And he was right, until this very day, even after the Holocaust, most of the Jewish people still lives in the *galut*. How could this be? It is because in the *galut* God is forgotten.... The Land of Israel has a power, if its sacredness is discovered, to draw back all the souls that assimilated into gentile peoples. But since its sacredness was not discovered, the *galut* existed so the people of Israel can bring back the assimilated souls, such as Ruth and Pharaoh's daughter and Rabbi Akiva.

“Jacob and the [biblical] Fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob),” Rabbi Uri asserted,

were less aware of the complexities and trouble that exist in the world, they were more naïve. But the Mothers (Sarah, Rachel, Lea, Rivka) sensed everything. They saw reality more clearly. For example, Jacob wanted to reconcile with Esav, but Rivka told him, “you will not succeed.” Similarly, Abraham wanted to bring Ishmael close and Sarah told him he would not succeed. As is said: “all that Sarah tells you do as she said.” The Mothers never made a single mistake. They saw things much more clearly than the Fathers. That is why there are many more stories about the Fathers than about the Mothers, because the Mothers didn't make any mistakes. And this is why we are not allowed to speak about the Mothers.

When the rabbi said this last sentence, a murmur sounded in the circle of women. Michal, an energetic plump woman in her thirties raised her hand and, interrupting the rabbi before being called to speak, said, “Why can't we talk about the Mothers? All we want to hear are stories about the Mothers, all we want to learn about are the Mothers!” The other women nodded in agreement, why shouldn't they speak and learn about their greatest female role models? Rabbi Uri answered, “We cannot speak of them because when you attempt to describe them you will do them an injustice. The same goes for the Land of Israel, even after we praise her and count her glories and her good qualities, we will not capture even one percent of what she really is, of her greatness. The same goes for the Mothers, they are so great that we will never be able to do them justice in description.” Michal accepted the answer but seemed dissatisfied still. She asked, “But then how can we learn from the Mothers' example?” Rabbi Uri replied, “You learn about them in your heart, quietly, not by praising them publicly and telling stories about them, how can you even begin to describe our mother Rachel?” Michal did not relent, “Through stories one can feel closeness to the Mothers.” The rabbi replied with a warning, “There is a trend today in academia to tell the stories of the Bible at eye level [simplify, popularize], we must be more careful.” Michal seemed to agree, and she told the room, “Women writers today write outrageous stories, they take a verse or

a story from the Bible and build scandalous tales and publish them. I got one of these books as a gift and was shocked!” The rabbi concurred, “All these things that are being written today are nonsense.” Although an agreement was reached between Michal and the rabbi, she continued to challenge him, saying, “This is why we must learn more about the Mothers, so we can balance against this trend and counter it with knowledge.” The rabbi conciliated her, “There are things one can read and learn about the Mothers, but we must do it with humility, and maintain this humility when we speak of the Mothers.”

This class touches on several themes that were apparent in the women’s descriptions of their complementarian activism and their feminine contribution. First, the biblical matriarchs serve as role models for correct conduct. Rabbi Uri sets up the matriarchs as steadfast and uncompromising in comparison to their husbands who were more “naïve,” idealistic, and less grounded in the harshness of reality. In a subtle parallel with contemporary Israeli politics, he offers the examples of Sarah and Rivka, who refused to compromise with a foreign enemy when their husbands were inclined to do so. But while he describes the matriarchs as adamant, clear-sighted, and uncompromising, it is their very infallibility that requires that they would not be spoken of. Because they are so perfect and modest, they should not be touted and praised publicly. Even more important, they should not be depicted as “feminist” role models, as the Rabbi sees some in academia and popular culture trying to do. While the biblical forefathers are the leaders in the spotlights, the biblical matriarchs are “behind the scenes,” just as in Shikma’s depiction of Sarah’s power, and my other interlocutors’ understanding of the notion of female leadership in the settler movement.

### **Da‘wa and the Islamic Movement’s “Third Way”**

In the early years of the Islamic Movement’s organizing, women who were mostly wives and family members of the Movement’s founders played a supportive but limited role. Their contribution at the time, as Shaykh Ibrahim Sarsour, puts it, “was to support their husbands in pushing them forward.”<sup>11</sup> They were encouraging when their husbands spent long days and nights away from home, traveling across the country for their da‘wa work and spending money out of their own pockets for the sake of the Islamic project. In this respect, Shaykh Sarsour and other founding leaders mention, the women in those early days emulated the model of Prophet

Muhammad's first wife, Khadija, who supported him when he was struggling to spread his message.

Shaykh Sarsour recounts that "after about ten years [from its establishment], the Islamic Movement began to think deeply about [women's] role, about how can we utilize positively the powers, the skills of women, in terms of bringing women [to religion].... The vast majority of women in those times did not attend prayers in our mosques. So we began with that. We began to call upon women to come to the mosque, to attend sermons, to attend the Friday sermon for instance, to attend lectures in mosques and in cultural centers." Sarsour explains the transformation this new thinking ushered. "The women in the Islamic Movement," he says, "began to understand that their role is not only at home. Of course her main role is the home, she must educate her children, she has a role to support, to create the needed atmosphere, for her husband who is a *da'i*.<sup>12</sup> But we came to the conclusion that this was not enough. Because we men did not succeed to address women.... We came to the conclusion that women can address women better, especially in delicate issues which are related to women." But it was only in 1985 that the Islamic Movement officially established its women's branch. This new activism brought a sort of role inversion, now it was time for the founding men of the Movement to support their wives, or in the words of Shaykh Sarsour: "The husbands began to raise the children because the women were outside for the sake of *da'wa*."

Today, the women's branch is highly established and is entrusted with planning and organizing the Movement's activities for women.<sup>13</sup> In each town or village where the Movement is present, a local women's branch sees to activities for girls and women. As part of this effort, women work to spread piety, provide social and charity services, and promote community building. *Da'wa*, or promoting religiosity, is pursued in various tracks. One very visible example is teaching Quran memorization for girls and women of all ages. There are centers for Quran memorization in many Muslim towns across the country, and activists also lead recreational memorization camps in the summers. The largest Quran memorization organization for girls is associated with the northern branch of the Islamic Movement and has about 500 teachers and 5,000 students from the age of four to the age of eighteen.

Another central activity is the organizing of religious festivals and the public celebration of religious occasions. The women's



branches put together activities specific to women and separate from the men's gatherings.<sup>14</sup> In addition, social activities, such as visits to other towns and meetings with young women activists from various places, as well as recreational and educational trips are arranged. In the 1990s and onward, some religious trips and camps for women have even lasted more than one day, requiring young women to sleep away from home.<sup>15</sup>

Social support for the community also figures prominently among women's activities. The women's branches raise money for needy families, especially during religious holidays and the start of the school year. They arrange trips to hospitals to visit with the sick, support children with disabilities, engage in literacy teaching for illiterate Bedouin women in the south, and participate in mourning rites by teaching religious lessons during the mourning period in the house of a deceased. Many of the women activists work in the field of education, mostly as teachers at all levels, from kindergarten to high school. Kindergartens and daycares run by the Movement are especially sought after. One kindergarten I visited in the Triangle region, for instance, had over 400 children enrolled. The building that housed the institution was large and well kept, with pictures drawn by the children adorning the hallways. The staff was highly professional and dedicated and the door to the principal's office was always open, allowing both staff and children to enter as they please and seek her guidance, advice, or even (for the children) a hug.

The bulk of the women's activities are in the field of *da'wa*, which focuses on raising religious consciousness and practice among women and, through women, among families. In the early 1980s, there were only a few mosques and not many qualified women working in the *da'wa* field, so women would gather at homes and hear religious lessons by shaykhs coming from around the country. As the Movement grew, the local women's branches became more organized. The largely self-taught women activists began to lead lessons for women in the newly built mosques; attend new institutes of religious learning in Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and the Arab world; and create extensive *da'wa* programs.

Women engaged in *da'wa*, called *da'iyat* (singular, *da'iya*), now offer religious lessons in mosques for groups of young girls, students, teachers, and women of all ages. The Islamic Movement has transformed the local mosque from a space exclusively

dominated by older men to a popular social gathering place for children, youth, men, and women of all ages. A visit to a Movement mosque will invariably reveal a place teeming with voices and activity. In mosque lessons, women study specific Quranic verses and their interpretation, the sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammad (*ahadith*), stories about the life of the prophets (*qisas al-anbiya'*), and stories about important women in the history of Islam who are role models for piety and moral conduct. The contents of the classes are adapted according to the audience; a class for older women will be different from a class for younger women or high school girls.

Mosque lessons at times explicitly address women's and men's different roles. Contention, debate, and discussion are welcome when addressing such topics in lessons, and attendants at times challenge a da'iya's interpretation of the material she presents. However, the goal of such exchanges, as was the case in a settlers' religious lesson I described earlier, is not to critique and question the authority of religious texts as presented by a knowledgeable teacher, or to offer a reformist reading that would discard nonegalitarian language and practices. Rather, the objective is to arrive, through discussion and debate, at an appropriate explanation for a certain practice or rule, which is satisfactory to the women attending the lesson.

Consider the following discussion in a lesson for women who are public school religious studies teachers, which I attended at one of the popular Islamic Movement mosques. Before the lessons began every week, the second floor of the mosque, covered with wall-to-wall green carpets and with a clear view of the main prayer hall downstairs, was packed with young girls and women. Some of the girls were daughters of the teachers attending the lessons while others were there to practice Quran memorization. "Unfortunately," a young teacher told me before one lesson, "in the schools religion is not being taught sufficiently. The textbooks do not have religious content, and when they do, it is not in depth. Children learn only the basics: praying, fasting. All of the schools are coed; we don't have separate schools for boys and girls, not even separate classes."<sup>16</sup>

The teachers attend the mosque lessons in order to enrich their own teaching in their classrooms. In one particular lesson, the woman conducting the lesson, who was a self-taught leading da'iya in her forties, discussed women's status as witnesses and explained

why two women witnesses are equivalent to a single male witness. She said to the eight young teachers present, “Some people say that this is because a woman is deficient in intellect and in religion [*al-mar’a naqisat ‘aql wa-din*] in comparison with man.” A debate ensued among the teachers. Two of them argued that the hadith recounting the prophet’s saying about women’s deficiencies was a weak one (*hadith da‘if*) and therefore less authoritative. The other women insisted that it was a sound hadith. The da‘iya put to rest the argument by asserting that the hadith was sound but explained:

Some people interpret this hadith as saying bad things about women, that they don’t think, that they don’t have the ability to be religious. But the Prophet, Peace Be Upon Him, explained that since a woman experiences several days each month in which she cannot pray, fast or read the Quran [when she is menstruating] she is “deficient” in religion. It is simply in terms of the quantity of religious duties she carries out in comparison with men. And as for the intellect, it is not that women don’t have a mind. Rather, the requirement that for each male witness there will be two female witnesses is because the woman often forgets and she needs her sister to remind her. She forgets because she has so many more responsibilities than the man—all the work in the house, taking care of the children—so she has too many things to remember at any given moment.

A significant aspect of the mosque lessons, as this short description demonstrates, is their rather informal style. The da‘iya is a religious authority for the women teachers, but they interrupt her lecture to express their own knowledge and opinions, as in the argument about whether the hadith under discussion was weak or sound. Moreover, the da‘iya weaves into her explanation authoritative elements, such as the Prophet’s saying about women’s temporary exemption from fulfilling religious duties, with elements from the women’s lives to which they can relate, for example, her explanation about how women forget because they are constantly multitasking. The lesson captures an important aspect of da‘wa lessons that touches on women’s roles in society. On the one hand, the lesson confirms a discriminatory approach to women’s testimony, but on the other, it also seeks to counter those who would justify the practice in a manner demeaning to women. In this case, the da‘iya unequivocally rejects those readings that “interpret this hadith as saying bad things about women, that they don’t think, that they don’t have the ability to be religious.”

It would be a mistake, however, to interpret the da‘iya’s approach, which is shared by all the da‘iyat I have encountered, as one advocating resistance to the hegemonic gender ideology and practices that their Movement promotes. Saba Mahmood has made us aware of the need to resist our natural temptation to read such

interpretive strategies as reflecting a latent feminist consciousness that rejects women's subordination. Rather, Islamic Movement da'iyat's interpretive approaches are very much in line with what Shaykh Sarsour has called the Islamic Movement's "third current." Between traditional cultural customs that understand religiously sanctioned gender distinctions as indicative of women's inferiority on the one hand, and what the Movement calls "Western" ideologies of women's full equality on the other, the da'iyat call for a reassertion of Islamic principles interpreted through a prism that sees women not as inferior but rather as having different, complementary roles.

### *Emotional Support and Self-Help*

Unlike this lesson for teachers that encompassed a theoretical debate about the rationale behind a specific principle of Islamic law, most women's lessons utilize a more practical approach that highlights everyday aspects of living a moral Islamic life. These lessons often provide a forum for expression of difficulties in women's lives and advice on how to tackle those difficulties in an appropriate manner. The mosque lessons are therefore unique in that they provide an open, supportive, and nonthreatening forum to discuss painful aspects of women's lives outside of their immediate family. In the lessons, the da'iyat's instructions about proper Islamic everyday behavior let women comfortably raise difficult issues and receive practical, authoritative advice on appropriate responses.

In a weekly mosque lesson for older Bedouin women who have had little or no formal education, Um Ahmed, the da'iyat, instructed women explicitly about proper everyday behavior. Her lessons often turned to an open discussion about various emotional challenges these older women dealt with but had no other forum in which to sincerely express feelings that they have been struggling with. Um Ahmed, a da'iyat in her late forties who did not attend a formal institution of religious study, was the youngest woman present but nevertheless commanded almost obsequious respect due to the breadth of her knowledge and her position as a leading activist in the Islamic Movement. The lessons took place in the Islamic Movement's Masjid al-Nur, an imposing stone mosque with a marble entryway. The combination of size and marble gave the structure a Taj-Mahal-like presence, and this grandeur seemed out of place in the poor Bedouin town where it was built. The class met twice a week in the basement of the mosque where women (most of

them aged sixty and above) would sit in a circle on the green wall-to-wall carpet to hear Um Ahmed's lecture. Some older women were not comfortable on the floor, so they towered over the group perched on plastic chairs.

As Um Ahmed began her lessons, the women listened carefully to her every word, interrupting only to ask for clarification, but never to disagree or dispute. Her teaching resonated with the women's everyday lives, and they were anxious to hear her opinion about situations in which they found themselves. As she spoke, the women nodded in agreement. The lesson I describe here addressed the Prophet's saying "Do not hate one another, nor be jealous of one another; and do not desert one another, but O Allah's worshippers be Brothers."<sup>17</sup> Um Ahmed wanted to tackle the sickness of jealousy (*hasad*) first. She explained:

Jealousy only brings negative things to a person. Sometimes a person doesn't intend to be jealous but he involuntarily says things that reveal his jealousy. A person who sees something beautiful that his friend has and says "*mashallah*" or mentions Allah in another way, we can be sure he is not jealous. But if he says "may his home be destroyed!" [*yekhrab baiyto*] we know he is not happy in his friend's happiness. How many times have we said "*yekhrab baiyto*, where did he get that Mercedes car?" or whispered "My neighbor is cleaning her windows while I lie in bed with a back ache and cannot do anything, *yekhrab baiyta!*" As it is in this world, some people are wealthy and some are poor, some are healthy and some are sick, some have boys and others have girls, you should not be jealous of each other because of these differences. Some people, which we all know, have an evil eye. We can't help feeling jealous at times, but we must say *mashallah* to remind ourselves not to be jealous.

As Um Ahmed moved to discuss in a mixture of colloquial Bedouin dialect and literary Arabic each one of the sicknesses—jealousy, hatred, and turning one's back on one's Muslim brother—the women repeatedly interrupted her. They wanted her advice on different experiences they have had with these feelings. One woman spoke of her jealousy of families whose sons were doing better at university than her son. Another woman brought up her relationship with her husband, and yet another talked about problems she has had with the family of her daughter-in-law. The women described the situations, the contexts, and with much sincerity, their difficulties in fighting the kinds of feelings Um Ahmed warned against. Like Um Ahmed, many leading *da'iyat* have made themselves available to women in the community at all times. They offer confidential spiritual and mental support for women facing a variety of difficulties that, the *da'iyat* instruct, could be avoided by a more correct adherence to Islam.



Figure 3.2. Mosque in the Bedouin town of Tel Sheva.

*Sanad: Edifying Muslim Mothers*

The women activists do not confine da‘wa work and guidance on correct Islamic behavior to small mosque lessons. They also organize public events that draw hundreds of women. Sanad (*Jam‘iyyat sanad li-salah al-usra wa-al-mujtama‘*), the northern branch’s most influential women’s nonprofit organization, leads educational conferences across the country on a variety of topics such as good Islamic parenting, proper communication within the family, raising adolescent girls, children and globalization, fathers’ responsibilities in bringing up children, how to discuss the hijab with a young girl, and others. These conferences are very popular, and attendance ranges from 200 to 500 women in each.

As one of the leading women’s organizations within the Islamic Movement, Sanad is able to reach thousands of women across the country. The organization tackles the social challenges women and families face in contemporary Israel and offers correct Islamic piety as the solution to the problems. Sanad’s members are highly qualified; among its leading staff are women activists with degrees in education, psychology, and social work. The contents of Sanad lectures reflect the professional background of the staff and Sanad conferences include scientific, as well as religious argument, often delivered with visual and technological aids such as PowerPoint presentations and videos.

The following account of a Sanad conference illustrates several themes central to women’s activism within the Islamic Movement. The activists are highly organized and are able to effectively draw significant crowds of women from different backgrounds. Sanad activities also reflect what Shaykh Sarsour calls the “revival and renewal” approach of the Islamic Movement—its “third way” between traditionalism and Westernization. The lectures present Islam as a solution to everyday problems but go beyond simply stating an axiom. Rather, the women use their knowledge in psychology and education alongside their emphasis on religion to offer a kind of “third way” approach to current challenges to women and the family. On the one hand, they warn against the corrupting influences of aspects of modern social developments in the community, such as, for example, premarital relationships. On the other, they ask their audiences to work on better communication and more freedom within the family and to abandon the traditional practices of heavily restricting children, especially girls, and of avoiding conversations about issues that are considered shameful (*‘ayb*) in a traditional society.

## *Sanad Conference, 2010*

The doors to the main hall of the community center of the medium-sized Israeli Muslim town were large, like floodgates opened wide to ease a strengthening current. Women began to flow through, a tide of hijab-clad mothers, daughters, and sisters that noisily congregated around islands of furniture. The chairs soon ran short, spilling the crowd against the walls of the lecture hall. To inform women about the event, Islamic Movement local volunteers distributed leaflets from house to house and advertised in the mosques. Without an e-mail list or even a phone list, attendance was incredible. When the lecture started, about 300 women were present. The discomfort of those who were left without a seat was offset by endless cups of black coffee and mint tea and a steady anticipation. At first, the energy all around was loose and untethered, fueling an excited chatter. But a cry was soon heard, “*allahu akbar wa-lilah al-hamd,*” a praise for Allah. The din evaporated, and the crowd repeated the praise in unison.

In the falling silence, a panelist on stage issued a warm welcome to the women of both the north and south, to mothers who now will be bettered by this occasion—bettered to raise heroes and to groom pious daughters, to cultivate identities of an Arab-Islamic-Palestinian confluence, to bring forth a righteous new generation. “We know that Muslim women raise heroes and that the mother is important in bringing forth a righteous new generation. The mother gives her children their sense of identity, she endows them with Islamic, Arab, and Palestinian consciousness.” Invigorated, the women repeated the praise for Allah, and then, in preparation for a day of lectures, turned off their cell phones.

Haneen, a Sanad lecturer and a school principal by profession rose to speak about mother-daughter communication. “What is communication?” she opened,

It is the exchanging of ideas, knowledge, and feelings between two people. When we talk about communication between a mother and a daughter, we are not talking about means of communication—such as cell phones, e-mail, or Internet. Communication between them is what is spoken or expressed through body language. Communication is composed of 7 percent words, 38 percent sounds, 55 percent body language. Young girls, especially adolescents, often have complaints against their mothers: “The mother has a temper; she is not interested in her daughter; she is closer to her friends than to her daughter; the mother doesn’t trust her daughter; doesn’t believe that the daughter will succeed; she always assumes that she will fail; she goes through the daughter’s possessions—books, bags, her



room—and doesn't respect the daughter's privacy; she spies on her; or lacks gentleness and tenderness.”

The mother has complaints against her daughter too: “My daughter raises her voice at me; she is secretive and keeps things from me; she is impolite; she doesn't study; she is irresponsible; she doesn't listen to me; she spends all her day on the cell phone or computer; and so on.” These problems and mutual dissatisfaction are almost always a result of inadequate communication between mother and daughter. There are differences in ways of speaking and styles between the two, differences in ideas and needs, lack of trust, differences in cultural levels, and a sense of timing—when it is appropriate to speak on certain issues, and others.

The first thing that needs to be done is to impart religious knowledge and practice to the child: praying five times a day, taking the child to the mosque, teaching about appropriate clothing and behavior, memorizing the Quran together, allocating time for religious study with the child and teaching and sharing from your experience. But beyond these religious duties, children are influenced by the relationships between the members of the family. That is why it is important to exchange good words between family members. Husband and wife need to speak respectfully to each other, as well as to the children. The family should find time to have conversations together as a family, instead of sitting for hours in front of the TV, or with each person doing his own work without sharing with the other members of the family.

To demonstrate the point, the lecturer chose to screen excerpts from a popular Egyptian film *The Secrets of Daughters* (*Asrar al-banat*). Due to a technical problem, the video played with no sound and the audience was left to interpret the scenes. We saw a baby with her two parents. Then we saw the child a few years later, she was older now, on the beach with her parents. In the next scene, her parents introduced the hijab to the girl as she turned twelve, and the family celebrated this joyous occasion. Next, the girl was much older, she was in a hospital bed. The doctor said something to her mother, who was shocked and then broke down and fell to the ground; the father looked helpless. A murmur was heard in the crowd, some women were losing their patience; they wanted to know what happened to the girl. Others explained to their neighbors what they thought was going on, the noise slowly increased. The speaker decided to refocus the audience so she began to narrate the story:

Most girls here have seen this movie. It tells the story of Yasmin, a 16-year-old-girl from a religious family who has gone to a girls' school, used to fast, pray, and do all that was required of her. The parents find the daughter in the bathroom one day, covered in blood. In the hospital, the doctor tells them that she has performed an abortion on herself. This is a true story. In the film, the parents married the girl off to prevent a scandal, but in the real story the family disowned the girl. The girl started a relationship with the neighbors' son. The parents didn't suspect anything. She was a virgin and she became pregnant the first time she had sexual relations.”

“What do you think went wrong?” the lecturer asked the audience. “She had the best upbringing, the family was religious.

Young women and mothers,” she addressed the crowd and pointed to the scene on the screen, “see what the girl is doing here in an earlier scene. She is sitting in between her mother and father on the sofa and she is trying to make them hold hands. But there is no communication or affection between the parents. She asks for affection subtly but they don’t respond, they don’t ask her about how she feels.”

I would like to ask you, the mothers who are present, can something like this happen in our society which is religious and traditional? Maybe some of you think it is impossible. But I have to tell you that in this society that is conservative [*muhafiz*] and traditional [*taqlidi*], this happens much more often than you can imagine. It is not because we are not good. It could happen in a family that is completely religious. At home, the daughter might get a good example, but you don’t know what she is exposed to outside of the home, in school or after school, who she associates with.

The discussion opened up to the panel of three women from Sanad. A second panelist explained,

The girl’s problem in this film is an emotional crisis caused by a problem in the relationship between the father and the mother. Most of the problems happen because the child is not receiving attention and affection from the parents so she looks for this affection in someone else, outside of the home. Even if you give them all the money and all the objects they want, that does not replace the tenderness of the mother. Illegitimate sexual relation is a result of a lack of affection at home. The girl is looking for love and affection. The mother has to teach her daughter how to make decisions, what is allowed and forbidden, in simple, subtle, and affectionate ways, not by fighting with her. A while ago, I worked with a girl who had a child out of wedlock. She talked to me and I embraced her, I gave her the love she needed. That embrace meant so much to her. I am still in touch with her today after seven years. Her child, *inshallah*, will start a normal family in the future and will have a normal life.

Another panelist added,

Also, mothers should give their daughters more freedom. They have to impose boundaries stipulated by religion, but they should not interfere in every small aspect of their daughters’ lives, the mother has to let her daughter live. If the girl wants to leave religion or the family, or break cultural norms, the mother has to guide her gently to the right path. Beyond that, parents have to take interest in their children’s lives. You have to ask them “How are you?” “How was your day at school?” and you have to really listen. Even if the mother doesn’t work, even if you are at home all day, you still need to make sure you deal with your daughters with warmth and affection, show interest in their feelings and thoughts.

The contents of this Sanad conference are telling. Two main themes that come to the surface here illustrate the concerns, discourses, and work associated with women’s complementarian activism in the Islamic Movement. First, as discussed earlier, between “traditionalism” and “Westernization,” women activists attempt to tread a middle ground that promotes religious practice

and concern with the protection and strengthening of an Islamic lifestyle in face of a barrage of modern cultural as well as technological harmful influences. At the same time, the women reject traditional practices such as restricting young girls and the avoidance of open communication about sensitive issues. Second, in agreement with the sex-based division of labor discussed in the previous chapter, the main topics the activists focus on, as they address the crowd of women, are family life and appropriate motherhood, issues that are within the purview of the private sphere of domesticity. In this respect, though they articulate new notions of mother-daughter relationships, and advocate for greater freedoms for young women and more involvement of fathers, the framework of the discussion remains within the confines of topics considered at the heart of women's work.

*The Successful Da'iya: The Secret to the Organizing Success of the Women Activists*

Today, some da'wa lessons even take place in public schools after hours. Over the years, there has been a change in the schools' attitude toward this work. Activists tell that while in the past they were largely barred from entering schools by the schools' staff, today the same schools invite them to give lessons to girls and mothers in the schools because of the huge demand for such contents. This change is a testament both to the success of the Islamic Movement in recruiting members of the community and spreading the message of Islam and to the increased confidence and independence of the Palestinian sector in Israel.<sup>18</sup>

Some lessons for female students in high schools also include instruction in da'wa work. These endow women not only with religious knowledge and the principles of proper Islamic conduct, but also with organizational skills and methods for becoming a successful da'iya. A lesson for young women in the da'wa field that I attended used an instructional text titled *The Successful Da'iya*. The pages of the text were photocopied, without a bibliographical reference.<sup>19</sup> Three principal aspects of the successful da'iya that were taken up by the text are particularly noteworthy. First, the text stressed religious learning and practice. The women activists in the da'wa field come from a variety of backgrounds, and they are not required to have an official accreditation from an institute of religious study. Many of the older da'iyat are devout, self-taught women whose authority stems from their demonstrated knowledge

acquired through reading religious books and manuals as well as religious resources on the Internet and attending mosque lessons.

Second, the *Successful Da'iyah* manual also examines her social conduct with her environment and how a da'iyah should build relationships with her surroundings. For example: "If she sees something that is wrong, she corrects it with kindness, and if she requires something, she asks for it with self-restraint"; "Her clothes are modest, her stride is modest, her voice is quiet and her glare is soft"; "She does not scold and does not demand and does not badmouth others and does not curse." And indeed, distinctive features of the women in the da'wah field that I interacted with were their friendliness, kindness, openness toward others, and their charisma. These make the da'iyah an approachable figure to whom women can turn to for advice on personal, religious and other matters.

Um Sayyid, a popular da'iyah from the Israeli south, embodies these character traits. She always wears a modest black jilbab and a large white khimar that covers her head, neck, shoulders, and chest; she speaks very softly but with a permanent smile; and she is clearly loved by girls and women of all ages. Even secular feminist activists that I worked with in the region appreciate her style and her character. She succinctly describes her approach:

I help adolescent girls, they are young and confused and I give them guidance, how to solve problems, how to cope with difficulties. When I see a woman doing something wrong I tell her, give her a little advice. I say "this is wrong, here is a hadith that explains why." Sometimes they respond well and sometimes they don't. When I see women in the street talking or laughing loudly or not following the correct way, I approach them. I don't say right away "come to Islam," I find a way to reach that woman gently. If she is responsive, I invite her to class.

But most importantly for the work of the Movement, the da'wah training helps develop skills for effective organizing. These skills make the women activists in the Movement able to carry out an extensive array of activities with tremendous outreach and impact. This training explains to some extent the success of the Movement in effective organizing, reaching new constituencies, and cultivating existing ones. The manual instructs about the da'iyah:

- She prioritizes the interests of the Muslims over her own interests.
- She looks after the daughters of the great da'iyahs who have devoted all of their time to da'wah and to jihad in Allah's path far from their families and homes.
- She looks for new and interesting methods to spread her da'wah, but within the limits of sharia.
- She contributes to da'wah work by writing in Islamic journals and magazines.

- She organizes a week of activities for the Muslim sisters in which they can participate in an Islamic women's conference.
- She hosts da'iyat from other cities to receive advice and exchange experience.
- She gives her sisters the opportunity to work with her and initiate and plan da'wa activities and she is happy for that.
- She studies the challenges of da'wa work and tries to devise solutions beforehand.
- She designates in her house an office for da'wa with relevant equipment for research and writing.
- She plans a daily and weekly schedule for the da'iyat.
- She teaches her sisters about the importance of establishing personal relationships and asks each of them to invite a new sister to the da'wa work.

The successful implementation of these instructions serves as one of the building blocks of the Islamic Movement's grassroots strength. The trained and experienced da'iyat are invaluable to the Movement. The women constantly reach new audiences and nurture the audiences they already have. They are highly organized and stress strategic planning for their programs and da'wa activities with a significant emphasis on evaluation and improvement. They cultivate networks across the country and host events to strengthen ties between women and between female students from different communities. In [chapter 5](#), we will see that these da'wa networks also serve the Islamic Movement during local and national elections. Campaign activities are often segregated, and so women activists organize single-sex campaign events, conduct house visits, give lectures to other women about the importance of voting for the right list, and even accompany women to polling stations or provide women-only transportation to enable women to vote.

### **Teshuva and Social Work in Shas**

The wives of Shas leaders, much like the wives of the founding leaders of the Islamic Movement described by Shaykh Sarsour in the previous section, also occupied important supportive roles to their husbands and their movement. The most acknowledged female figure in Shas's founding history is Rabbanit Margalit Yosef, wife of Shas's spiritual leader, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef. She is credited not only for attending to the domestic needs of her husband and running his highly public household, where the stream of visitors never ceased, but also for making instrumental political connections. According to Shas sources, Rabbanit Yosef was responsible for fostering the relationship between Rabbi Yosef and Aryeh Deri, the young and charismatic politician who orchestrated Shas's meteoric rise in Israeli national politics in the 1990s. While the Rabbi was not much

taken by the young politician, Margalit liked him from his first visits to the Rabbi's house, and began to invite him to her kitchen for personal conversations, and later even to family dinners. It is said that Deri soon began to call her his "little mother," and that thanks to her facilitation, his relationship with Rabbi Yosef grew closer.<sup>20</sup>

Even after her death in 1994, Rabbanit Margalit continues to serve as the ultimate feminine role model in Shas discourse. She is described as "the woman in the tent" who strengthens its foundations. "Wherever you go I will go," was her promise to her husband, according to the Shas narrative. She devoted her life to the support of his Torah study and his religious vision, say her admirers, "not only by supporting, encouraging, and agreeing to sacrifice personal comfort in order to save every penny to purchase another book of learning and [allow her husband] to devote every minute to Torah contemplation, but she was also active on the practical level, looking after all the technical arrangements so that her husband would not have to see to them and be distracted from his preoccupation with the sacred."<sup>21</sup>

The place of Rabbanit Margalit as the manager of Rabbi Yosef's household shifted after her death to the Rabbi's daughter-in-law, Yehudit Yosef. Yehudit, who worked in the past as the office manager of Eli Yishai, Shas's political leader after Ariye Deri, is a more controversial figure, with both supporters and critics in Shas. She is considered highly influential and has been said to have some degree of control over who could and could not be granted an appointment with Rabbi Yosef, until his death in 2013.

The wives of other Shas leaders have also been public figures, especially in the field of charity and social service. When Aryeh Deri was at the head of the Shas party, the work of his wife, Yafa Deri, on behalf of the community was frequently featured in Shas publications. Yafa Deri helped found in the mid-1990s an organization by the name of Yehuda Yaale. Its purpose, among other things, was to undertake charity work through donation of food and clothing to needy and large families; establish a fund for brides and grooms; run subsidized summer camps for girls and women; organize religious gatherings, conferences, and home classes; and offer training courses in different fields.<sup>22</sup> When Eli Yishai became Shas's political head, the focus shifted to the efforts of Zipi Yishai, his wife, who established a charity bridal salon named Tiferet Chen

to assist young Haredi women of limited means with wedding expenses.<sup>23</sup>

But women's activism in Shas is not confined to the wives of its male leadership. Rank and file Haredi women activists hold central positions in the Shas education network—The Wellspring of Religious Education (*Ma'ayan hahinukh hatorani*). This network encompasses, as of 2010, over 33,000 students, 12,000 kindergarten students, 156 institutions, and 500 kindergartens, according to Shas sources.<sup>24</sup> The women work as kindergarten teachers, schoolteachers, and principals of girls' schools. In all these capacities, they are subordinated to a male religious leadership, rabbis who supervise and guide their work in the field of education. In the institutions of the Shas education network, girls study in separate schools where they are trained primarily to become modest, religiously observant homemakers and providers. Boys' education focuses on Torah study while girls are instructed more extensively in secular subjects that could facilitate future employment.<sup>25</sup>

One example of the emphasis put on appropriate women's behavior and particularly on female modesty is the recent project "The Wellspring of Modesty," which was implemented in Shas educational institutions in 2010. As *Yom Leyom* reported, "The honor of a king's daughter is within. The sages of Israel always repeat that one of the central issues that need strengthening in this generation is fortifying the fences of modesty."<sup>26</sup> The then director of the education network, Rabbi Yoav Ben Zur, decided to initiate a special project on issues of modesty in all schools belonging to the network. He appointed Malka Ozer, the national supervisor, to the task of running the project and the efforts to come up with creative ideas, innovative curricula, and activities for girls. *Yom Leyom* describes the organizational work and strategy the project entailed:

The country was divided into five regions: north, south, center, Bnei Brak, and Jerusalem, which coordinated the program. It began with study days in all the schools with participation of rabbis and lecturers ... [these] expressed the importance and value of the king's daughter, which lies in her strict observance of modesty.... Training seminars for teachers were held by supervisors and trainers.... Preparation of materials such as training manuals and suggestions for activities ... manuals, posters, creative games, active walls, cards, monopoly.... The female students learned and memorized *halachot* pertaining to modesty and were tested on these and won scholarships and prizes.

The program culminated in a conference for thousands of eighth graders and their mothers with organized shuttles from across the country. In the conference, participants heard rabbis, viewed an

exhibition of selected works from schools, and watched a musical on the theme of modesty. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, who attended the conference, explained to the women present the significance of women's appropriate contribution. According to Yosef's speech, modesty, Jewish home-making, and sending husband and children to study the Torah are the greatest support a woman could lend her family and the People of Israel.<sup>27</sup>

The particular division of labor in the Haredi community, which demands of men to devote much of their time to religious studies, leads to a unique positioning of many Haredi women as the main providers for the family. Although differently from their Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox counterparts, many Mizrahi Haredi men do work, the division of labor in which men study Torah and women look after the home and support their families is touted by Shas as the domestic ideal.<sup>28</sup> It is not surprising then, that Shas has devoted significant energy and funding to setting up a network of childcare centers as well as smaller daycares that women run in their homes. The organization Neot-Margalit that coordinates Shas's childcare activities has operated, according to the organization's figures, 100 childcare centers and 750 daycares, accommodating 9,000 infants and toddlers in 2014. These subsidized institutions allow more women to work, and also provide employment for hundreds of women as daycare teachers, administrators, special assistants, cooks, supervisors, and pedagogical consultants.

Shas religious authority figures encourage women's employment as a means of supporting the religious home. As a result, alongside the attention to religion, modesty, and appropriate feminine domestic roles, Shas activists and leaders acknowledge women's further educational needs, once they graduate from high school, that entail acquiring a profession as well. It is no surprise then that women affiliated with Shas have been the main innovators in Haredi women's professional education. Yafa Deri is the founder of the Margalit Institutes, a girls' high school and seminar that provide low-income students with academic and professional education. Adina Bar Shalom, daughter of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, established the first Haredi college where ultra-Orthodox women, and now also ultra-Orthodox men, can study accounting, social work, speech therapy, and other practical professions in an appropriately religious and sex-segregated environment. Although not a Shas member, Bar Shalom made sure to obtain her father's blessing and the accompanying supervision of prominent rabbis at every step of the



way to establishing the college. She has also stressed that the purpose of the college was not to change Haredi lifestyle and women's roles, but rather to strengthen women's ability to carry out the work they were already expected to perform and help the preservation of the Haredi way of life, with the men devoting a significant portion of their time to Torah studies.<sup>29</sup>

Shas members also established a similar college for Haredi women in 2009 in Netanya, offering professional certificates in fields previously not available to Haredi women such as graphic design and visual communication. In this case as well, the stated purpose of professional education was to support a distinctly Haredi lifestyle, as *Yom Leyom* emphasized in an article covering the college opening ceremony: "The female students stated that the real goal for which they intend to pursue studies is building a home of Torah.... With these certificates, the girls could in the near future support with dignity true homes of Torah, grounded in the tradition of Israel Saba (the generations of the People of Israel) which will honor our People."<sup>30</sup>

Shas's rhetoric, as reflected in its coverage of women's professional education and employment in positions other than kindergarten teachers and school teachers—the traditional occupation of many Haredi women—attempts to play down the truly transformative nature of these new opportunities for women. However, it is undeniable that Shas leadership in higher and professional education for ultra-Orthodox women and its system of subsidized kindergartens and schools have revolutionized the role of the Mizrahi Haredi woman. These allow many women to work outside the home in demanding fields, at times requiring daily interaction with men. It has also helped some keep their families out of the poverty cycle.

Most of the older Shas women activists I came to know described facing poverty and financial and social difficulties before turning to religion or becoming active in Shas. One of my interlocutors, a woman in her fifties from a developing town, was in debt, her husband was unemployed, and her family of six shared a tiny apartment of two rooms. She enrolled in a Shas course on family purity and then a course on bridal guidance. She was then hired as a *balanit* (family purity expert) by the rabbinate and, in addition, started to teach bridal guidance courses and family purity courses. The income that she generated helped support her family,

and she was able to advance professionally, eventually coming to hold a high position in the Shas education network. Today, in the religious lessons she teaches, attended by young Mizrahi women, she preaches about economic self-reliance and entrepreneurship, encouraging them to tackle their economic hardships through income-generating activities, whether by finding employment or starting a small business.

Here is how Rabbanit<sup>31</sup> Mimi, another one of my interlocutors who is also in her fifties, describes her and the movement's views on women's employment that she shares with other women in some of the religious lessons she teaches:

The foundation of the home is the woman, she is the backbone of the home. Take for example women who have high positions, it helps the home. It gives confidence to the children. There are many cases where the husband only studies the Torah and the woman works and provides for the family, and there is wonderful harmony. The children grow up with a sense of mutual giving. This teaches them about cooperation, mutual concessions. There is a goal and you work toward that goal. The woman's role is very important, because she both raises the children and works; it is not easy. In the past, she used to be only at home. Today, she is also outside of the home. She is both the minister of interior and the foreign minister; she is everything. She attends to the children's education, she gives from herself, she sits and spends time with the children, makes sure they do their homework and go to their extracurricular activities. The husband helps her when he can, but her role is very important. She builds the home. The woman has *bina yetera* [a surplus of wisdom], from the word *binyan* [to build]. *Bina* is a foundational word, all the *binyan* and *bniya* [building] is a woman's role, she is the one who builds.

Alongside employment, education, and charity work, women also participate in the movement's extensive proselytizing efforts. While Shas is a Haredi movement, only 25 percent of its voters are ultra-Orthodox. The bulk of Shas's political support, approximately two-thirds of its voters, come from the traditional and even secular Mizrahi segment of Israeli society, mostly in developing towns of lower social economic means (although this ratio has probably decreased in the recent elections).<sup>32</sup> Due to Shas's outreach to communities outside the ultra-Orthodox, women activists interact with a variety of audiences. In their work in the fields of education, social and religious services, and teshuva (proselytizing among Jews), the women activists come in contact with women of varying degrees of piety, requiring them to adjust the content of their message appropriately.

Margalit Em Beyisrael, Shas women's teshuva organization, is the largest organization in the movement devoted to proselytizing among women and offering religious lessons for women. The

organization was established in 1994, following the death of Rabbanit Margalit Yosef, and was named after her. According to Rabbanit Yafa Yom Tov, the director of the organization, its purpose is “to distribute lessons among the women of Israel that will strengthen the Jewish home, following the rulings [*halachot*] of Rabbi Yosef, under his guidance and the supervision of Shas rabbis.” Margalit Em Beyisrael receives some funding from the Ministry of Education and from El-Hama‘ayan, one of Shas’s educational organizations. According to Yom Tov, in 2010 Margalit ran 600 classes nationally every month with an average of thirty participants per class.

The rabbaniyot who teach the classes describe them as a place in which women not only learn about religion but also get one hour all to themselves, away from the responsibilities and challenges of the home, where they can express themselves freely and openly, and receive guidance and advice. Some of the rabbaniyot I spoke with talked about their lessons as “group therapy,” where women can speak about marital relationships, childrearing, intimate questions regarding family purity, and a whole host of other topics that are of concern to women.

Many of the women in Margalit Em Beyisrael started their work in poor neighborhoods, teaching in community centers, homes, and synagogues. They say that alongside strengthening the women religiously, they also empower them to turn their lives around. Rabbanit Mimi explains: “I work with populations that are in the worst social and economic conditions ... there are people who are struggling. We help these people build a sense of self-worth, that they are worth a lot and that they can go out and study and learn and give from themselves, and see things differently.” Through organizing lessons, trips, conferences, and invited lectures by rabbis, she says, “We provide a lot of strengthening [*hizuk*], mentally, to people who cannot find their way. We give them the right tools and the right path to strengthen them. We save the state a lot of money on psychological care and counseling and social work and support.... This organization has helped a lot of people, people who didn’t know how to behave or how to speak. Halachically, too, they didn’t know anything, what is allowed, what is forbidden, how to do things.” The assistance that is provided in the free lessons that Shas offers, Mimi argues, is multifaceted. She explains: “People come and get all the important information in the lesson, as well as support and help in all areas. It is a great contribution to society. You give

tools to people to cope with difficult situations, to know that you have someone to turn to and someone who can help. Even though some people from the outside don't necessarily understand what we do or the extent of our contribution to society."

Though they preach a particular complementarity model, the rabbaniyot accommodate the diverse realities of the women they work with. Rabbanit Rukhama gave me the following example: "The Temple has three names, or parts—*dvir* [sanctuary], *heikhal* [hall], and *hatzerot* [courtyards]." This, she says can also reflect three types of women. The first, *dvir*, "is a woman who cooks and cleans and sees to her house all day and respects her husband and her children. But when you ask her about her work, she says 'oh, it's nothing!' She doesn't need a good word, a compliment, gifts, recognition. She feels that this is her role and her privilege that God has given her a husband and children to care for." The second type, *heikhal*, "is a woman who cooks, bakes, takes care of her husband and her home, but she also wants compliments and acknowledgments; she wants to be seen [like a fancy hall]." The third type, *hatzerot*, "her home is like a neglected yard, the children are out in the streets until eight or nine at night, they are not showered, their clothes are not fresh, there's a mess in her home." Yet Rabbanit Rukhama teaches that "each of these homes is God's home," and that "every woman is the great priestess of the home, the one who sacrifices," regardless of her degree of success in managing the home well. Like the da'iya Um Ahmed, she teaches not to judge other women because of their shortcomings or the challenges they face.

Another important part of the teachers' role is to maintain open channels with the women who come to their lessons and to help them in their personal lives. Many rabbaniyot assist women with *shlom bayit* (peace at home). When marital problems arise, they provide counseling and guidance. In severe cases, they bring in rabbis for mediation between couples who are on the verge of separating. The scholar Anat Feldman has identified this community-work aspect of the Margalit organization as one that provides Shas with decisive political advantages. Margalit has access to large publics that are not necessarily ultra-Orthodox through the daily interaction and community outreach its activists carry out in and around their neighborhoods. This, Feldman maintains, largely increases the pool of potential voters for Shas to draw on during elections.<sup>33</sup> In what follows, I provide detailed

descriptions of two Shas synagogue lessons in order to draw out important aspects of the movement. First, I want to introduce readers as much as possible to the content and form of the lessons. Second, I present one lesson taught by a rabbi and one by a rabbanit to highlight the distinction in styles, if not necessarily in content, of lessons taught by a man and a woman instructor. This offers a view into the uniquely gendered aspect of the lessons, particularly in their creation of horizontal bonds of trust and care that are much more palpable in the women-only lessons.

In piety lessons, women learn about correct halachic practice for the Jewish home as well as about moral behavior. Lessons are divided into two kinds, Jewish law (*halacha*) and morals (*musar*). As in the Islamic Movement examples presented in this chapter, the women attending the lessons discuss relevant texts and religious injunctions. They receive instructions about proper Jewish lifestyle and the Jewish home, as well as advice, inspired by religion, for everyday matters. Morals classes tend to be more vivid, utilizing spectacular stories and allegories intended to keep the audience captivated and deliver a moral lesson. The fantastical and realist elements are often combined to generate an emotional effect. These two examples illustrate the style and format of lessons I participated in during 2010, as part of Margalit organization's national network of classes for women.



Figure 3.3. Women praying at the tomb of Rabbi Meir *ba'al ha-nes*.

*Preparing for the Month of Judgment—Margalit Synagogue  
Lessons*

In a room above a Shas synagogue in a lower-middle-class religious neighborhood of Jerusalem, Yaacov, a middle-aged rabbi in the recognizable Shas style—trimmed black beard, rimless glasses, black yarmulke, black pants, and a tailored white shirt—served once a week as teacher and storyteller. Between twenty and thirty women of various ages attended the class each week, the majority of whom were young women in their twenties, but there were a few teenagers and a few women over fifty. All came dressed in a traditional (*masorti*) fashion; they were not ultra-Orthodox. Shas classes offered by Margalit Em Beyisrael are open to all who want to “strengthen” religiously and there is no strict dress code.

The lesson I describe here took place during the month of Elul in the Jewish calendar, before Yom Kippur, which is a time to reflect on one’s deeds and behavior and correct one’s ways for the judgment on Yom Kippur. The sleekly dressed Rabbi Yaacov kept the women’s attention by including captivating stories in his lecture to deliver a useful moral for these important days. Fantastical coincidences, cross-generational family curses, deliverances and miracles large and small, were packed into an hour and a half. But first he abided by the Shas rule of ten, “Next time, each one of you should bring ten more women to this lesson!” Although the participants did not in fact bring ten new women to the lessons each week, many did try to convince their friends and relatives to attend.

The rabbi expounded on the ideal division of labor as advocated by Shas, with women facilitating their husbands’ and children’s religious scholarship. “A woman must push her husband to study the Torah as much as possible,” he told the women present, “this guarantees resurrection. If she has no husband, she must encourage her children to study Torah, to go to Torah lessons. This will bring her recompense during resurrection. She herself can strive to support the Torah. She must take some of what she earns and donate it to institutions of Torah learning.”

He then moved to provide more general, and less gendered, advice in preparation for Yom Kippur. “The most important thing is correcting our ways and first and foremost in this is to not give in to the inclination to judge other people negatively. In life, we always judge other people, but how can you judge before you were in their

shoes?” The warning against judging others here is similar to the advice given by the Islamic Movement da‘iya Um Ahmed, when she instructed against jealousy, hatred, and turning one’s back on one’s fellow Muslim. Not only are these directions for better personal conduct, they are also important in fostering a community where members’ interactions are predicated on principles that advance better relationships with others.

The rabbi’s instructions then naturally turned to women’s relationships with their husbands. “Another advice for judgment day,” Rabbi Yaacov stressed, “is to be yielding [*vatran*]. Sometimes, maybe always, your husband gives you trouble. He comes home and shouts ‘Why is the food not ready, why have you not done this and that!’ And sometimes he is right. When your girlfriend comes for a visit, you prepare a wonderful table with all sorts of foods for her, but when your husband comes home you bring him old tea the color of Coca-Cola. When you say, ‘He did this and that and I do not forgive him,’ in heaven they say, ‘We will not forgive her too.’ A person who is yielding, heaven will be lenient toward him. If we are not yielding and forgiving, why should they forgive us in heaven?”

The instruction to be yielding was not gender specific here. Rabbi Yaacov even used the adjective in its masculine (*vatran*) rather than feminine (*vatranit*) form. But his illustration of the concept relied on a clear gendered context, which, paradoxically, does not necessarily reflect the reality of the lives of the women to whom he was speaking. His description of a typical domestic scenario was one in which the wife was at home and the husband came home from the outside, an implicit gendered private-public setup. However, as we have seen in this chapter, women who are active in or supportive of Shas, whether ultra-Orthodox, traditional (*masorti*), or “strengthening”—making the transition between secular life to religious life—mostly work outside the home and share in the financial sustenance of their families. Yet, they too subscribe to the gendered ideal promoted by Shas, in which women are providers and homemakers, while the husbands devote their time to studying the Torah as much as circumstances permit.

In the same synagogue where Rabbi Yaacov taught his class, lessons for younger women were offered by Rivka, who was in her thirties. The young women who came to her classes, mostly in their early twenties but also some seventeen- to nineteen-year-olds, called her rabbanit. She insisted on correcting them, explaining that she



was not a rabbanit since her husband was not a rabbi. But the women did not heed her pleas; they continued to express their respect for her with the title. In this particular lesson during the month of Elul, her appearance was as stylish as always. Many Shas activists seemed to be exceptionally careful to wear clothes that are unmistakably ultra-Orthodox but that do not compromise on chic. She wore a white silk headscarf with a delicate pattern of black leaves. Her eyes and lips were accentuated with a generous amount of makeup. As she delivered her lecture, she leaned back and forth as if in prayer.

Given that her audience was younger, her focus tended to be on issues that would interest younger women. Relationships with parents, friends, and members of the opposite sex took the place of concerns with marital affairs or childrearing. Like other Margalit teachers, she used evocative, vivid, and at times frightening images and allegories to make her point: “Let me give you an allegory for the month of Elul so that you can better understand its significance,” she told the lesson attendants.

Think about a mayor whose city is in great debt. There is a budget deficit because the residents did not pay their taxes. The mayor hires a lawyer and gives all the residents thirty days to settle their debts. In the month of Elul, we are like the residents. But when it is Rosh Hashana judgment, the prosecutor does not want our money, or our house, it is our lives that he is after, in the court of the King of Kings. This is our time to choose, and any small choice we make correctly is with the help of the heavens. Each small choice matters, every time you decide to wear a shirt that is a little less tight, a little more modest, that counts. The prosecutor comes down from heaven to tempt us, then goes back up to incite against us, then returns down to punish us.

She offered the following examples:

You want to go out in the afternoon and it is hot outside. You open your closet and eye the short-sleeve t-shirt and the shorts. You think, people will say I am crazy if I wear long sleeves, they will say I have gone mad, they will say that religious people sweat and stink. What do you choose then? Or your work pays well and you think, let me work a few more hours and earn more money instead of going to religion lessons. The prosecution angel is there looking at you after he had tempted you. He says, “Look at her, she is out at the discotheque, look at what she is wearing, doesn’t she know she is bringing disaster upon the entire People of Israel?!” He asks the heavens to punish. The month of Elul must bring fear into our hearts. When I am afraid, I call my rabbanit. We, who live the Torah, must wake up. We buy fashionable clothes at Castro [an Israeli fashion chain store] and other stores, I do it too, but these clothes are not modest, they show everything. We see that sometimes we are in a place where men and women are separated, but women and men speak freely there. We think that because we are already religious we no longer have to be extra careful.”

Modesty is of utmost importance, but the way to alert others’ attention to it and help them mend their ways is not by denouncing,

shaming, or coercing them. Rather, Rivka explained, “We must judge others positively. You mustn’t look at another girl and say, ‘what promiscuity, what is she wearing, she brings disasters to the People of Israel.’ Instead you should say, ‘She doesn’t know, but I can help her.’ And there are many other girls that go to religion lessons and save us.”

Previously in this chapter, we have seen that piety lessons also serve as a forum for participants to share personal experiences and difficulties with the rabbanit or da’iya. This sharing is not unidirectional, and although there is some pedagogical hierarchy in the lesson, with the rabbanit in this case being an authoritative source on religious conduct, women teachers also confide in their students about their own personal challenges. In Rivka’s lesson, she introduced one of her own hardest battles. She said, “God has given me cancer and I am combating it now. *Hakadosh barukh hu* gives us many signs before He actually harms our body. I cannot say that I understand everything or know precisely what *hakadosh barukh hu* wants from me. So I pray to Him and say show me what You want from me. There are moments of fear but I know He is our father and He wants what is in our best interest. I don’t judge His actions, who am I to judge? I don’t ask why. Others ask why. We ask what for. What is the purpose of His lesson and what can we learn from it.”

The rabbaniyot or da’iyat’s disclosure of their stories of personal struggles serves several purposes. First, it establishes reciprocity between teacher and student. It is not only the participants who reveal their private challenges to the group and to the rabbanit; she also exposes herself in a similar manner. The affective bond that is established is therefore not strictly a vertical one of participants’ emotional dependence on the rabbanit. Rather, a horizontal bond, in which both the rabbanit and the participants have shared painful stories with each other, and in which the rabbanit too can receive support and care from the participants, is created. When Rivka told the young women about her cancer, it was clear that some had already known about it. They nodded their heads knowingly, not surprised. Rivka had perhaps already confided in them in personal conversations, as all had her cellphone number and were encouraged to call her at any time with any problem. Others, however, displayed great distress and shock at the news of the cancer. The two youngest women in the group had tears of disbelief in their eyes.

But when teachers shared personal stories in piety classes, there was always another dimension to the narrative that served the second purpose of this practice—a lesson for the ways in which piety and faith are the most powerful means for addressing life’s struggles and crises. This comes out clearly in Rivka’s example, as she explains that she does not ask “why.” Asking why she has cancer or questioning God’s decision will only lead to frustration. Instead, she asks “what for.” She strives to uncover the reason behind her predicament and the message that God is sending her through it. Her contemplation of this leads her toward greater understanding of her distinctly feminine purpose in life. She explained, “I want to go on living and overcome the disease in order to raise my children, so there will not be *bitul torah* (a neglect of Torah study)—so that my husband can study Torah and not look after the children because I am gone. I want to work so that I can have an income and he can study and I can study. I want enough money to provide for my family and have time to study the Torah.”

If Rivka is gone, she tells her students, there will be *bitul torah*, meaning that the time her husband should have devoted to Torah study would be wasted instead on childcare and on income-generating work; the services she currently provides to free him for his studies. After revealing her personal challenge, Rivka’s subsequent beseeching of the women to continue to attend piety lessons had a much stronger effect. Her own story and commitment made her plea sharper and more urgent than before. “Think about this,” she said, “if there’s a wedding or a party you will do everything in your power to attend, but what about Torah lessons? You have an opportunity to meet face to face with *hakadosh barukh hu*. That is the most important thing and you must do all that is in your power to come to these classes.”

The power of reciprocal sharing in establishing emotional bonds of trust and care is one of the crucial features of women’s activism in Shas, as well as in the other movements. Sarit, a student of one of my interlocutors, Rabbanit Aliza, told me about her rabbanit: “She is like a spiritual mother to me, she accompanies me on every question, the good and the bad. I share everything with her, it’s a part of my life. She is not a teacher who gives a class and that is it, she becomes a part of your family. I don’t know how she finds the time to be a mother to so many women, it must be because *Hashem* is with her and supports everything she does.”

It is important to note that this does not usually happen to the same degree in lessons and lectures provided to women by male religious figures, as Rabbi Yaacov's lesson described earlier shows. The segmenting of a distinctly feminine space, defined as such by the movement itself, facilitates exposure that would have been perhaps more difficult in a mixed-sex forum. Rabbanit Rivka ended her class by joking with participants about the differences between men and women. The reason men are required to study the Torah and women are exempt from it (though they could and should take it up, in a format appropriate for women and if they can make time for it) is because when it comes to piety and spirituality the difference between men and women is "like in debt and weight—the man is always in the minus [that is, he is always in debt and underweight] and the woman always has a plus [that is, has extra money and extra weight]."

### **Hamas: Complementarian Activism under Occupation**

In Gaza today, it is hard to find a woman who does not wear the hijab. In the West Bank too, the hijab is highly widespread. This has not always been the case, and it is a testament to the tremendous success of the Islamic revival among women that was spearheaded by Hamas and its organizational predecessors. The concerted toil of Islamist women from the 1970s to the present, through service provision, proselytizing, and university activism should be partly credited for this transformation of Palestinian society. Jamila Shanti, perhaps the highest-profile Hamas woman leader, who currently serves as the minister for women's affairs in the Hamas government in Gaza, relates that when Shaykh Ahmed Yassin created the Islamic Center (*Al-mujama' al-islami*) in 1973, among the first tasks he undertook was to establish a kindergarten. He had the foresight, she explains, to know that by providing a framework for children, the Islamists could reach mothers and fathers and spread their religious message.<sup>34</sup>

Shanti explains that under the uncertain conditions of occupation, which entailed the lack of personal safety and stability, many people felt their children were safe only in the hands of pious teachers and administrators in Islamic kindergartens. She further states that many families would not allow their girls to go out for after-school trips and seminars unless the organizers were the sisters in the Islamic movement. "The sisters were known," she explains, "each in her region. They had a support base and enjoyed the trust of

the people.”<sup>35</sup> The Islamic kindergartens were an essential first step in bringing women to religion. Najah al-Batniji, assistant director of the women’s department in the Islamist nonprofit *Islah* organization, who worked with Shaykh Yassin from the time of the *mujama‘*, says:

[Islamic] kindergartens were the first seed and the key to the society as a whole.... The core of these kindergartens is that through them children absorb religious conviction, then we see that they learn to read and write. But we focus first on religious upbringing [*al-tarbiyya al-diniyya*]. We have children of foreign women who when they come to the kindergarten tell me “my son refuses to let me accompany him if I am not wearing a hijab, he said that the teachers told him that a woman who wears the hijab will win heaven.” And there are fathers who started praying due to their sons’ insistence, and many children have forced their fathers to go to the mosque. In this way, the child becomes a *da‘iya*.<sup>36</sup>

As a leader of the Muslim Brothers and then the Islamic Center in Gaza before the founding of Hamas, Shaykh Yassin stressed that the religious development of society “will be complete only with the participation of women.”<sup>37</sup> He established a women’s section in the Center that offered religious lessons and training in practical skills such as sewing and embroidery, ran the Islamic kindergarten, and provided various services and material assistance to women. Jamila Shanti further outlines the rationale for this approach: “In the beginning, women’s role [in the Islamic Movement] was to reach each and every Palestinian woman in any place.... Many [men] were in prison, and their homes needed assistance and care. The occupation’s intelligence targeted the Palestinian family. As an Islamic women’s movement, we focused on the family, which was the homefront [*al-jabha al-dakhiliya*], the power of the homefront will allow us to be strong when confronting the Zionist enemy.”<sup>38</sup>

As in the cases of the settlers, Shas, and the Islamic Movement in Israel, social services and *da‘wa* formed the core of women’s activism in Hamas in Gaza and the West Bank (though in the latter it had a more circumscribed nature). The creation of the Association of Young Muslim Women (*Jam‘iyyat al-shabbat al-muslimat*) in 1981 served to consolidate the work among women that Yassin initiated in the Center. Its stated goal was: “[Developing] the Palestinian woman through the creation of various social, cultural and professional training opportunities, the protection of the Palestinian woman’s character and identity in the face of the [Israeli and Western] intellectual invasion [*al-ghazw al-fikri*], the promotion of an Islamic consciousness, advocating for virtuous morals, and the activation of women’s role in the family and in institutions.”<sup>39</sup> Today, the

association supervises Quranic memorization activities for girls and women in mosques and Quranic centers across the Gaza Strip, offers training workshops not only in traditional skills but also in computers, design, administration and other subjects. It runs 17 kindergartens and five nurseries, and organizes a plethora of other activities.<sup>40</sup>

In the 1980s, women's activism in the Islamic revival effort was strengthened through the movement's work on university campuses and the creation of an Islamic student bloc at the Islamic University in Gaza and then elsewhere. The activists targeted for recruitment female students of mainly rural or refugee camps origin, but who displayed leadership potential. The Islamists worked to pull these students away from the influence of the secular and leftist political factions and to endow them with a religious-political sensibility.<sup>41</sup> A growing number of female students began to wear the hijab in that period and engage in activism on campuses, in mosques, and in the Islamic social services frameworks. Rasha Adlouni, the wife of former Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantisi who was assassinated by Israel in 2004, describes the creation of a new atmosphere at the time: "The female students of the Islamic University had a big part in providing role models, when we wore the hijab in the correct way, and female students went out from the university to raise the awareness of women [*taw'iyat al-nisa'*] in mosques. This had an active role in making women conscious about the hijab."<sup>42</sup> Before the first intifada and the nationalist turn of the Palestinian Islamic Movement, student activism focused on internal religious reform of society, rather than inculcating a religious-nationalist resistance agenda. Huda Naim, who was involved in Islamic student activism for ten years, sheds light on these contours of women's student activism:

We thought: how could we gather women, or if we couldn't gather women in order to speak to them, what were the places where women congregated, so we can go to them. We visited each house of mourning in order to reach women there, give lectures there, speak there. Our discourse in that first stage focused on the religious dimension. Teaching women about religion, prayer, purity, the hijab, everything that pertained to women's *fiqh*. We would go to weddings, and try to find an Islamic alternative for the celebration.... The Islamic youth would contact us and ask us to provide the entertainment in the wedding with an Islamic alternative, with Islamic song [*nashid*], with Islamic customs, stirring away from racy music and the mixing of men and women.<sup>43</sup>

Today, the student bloc has a palpable presence across Gaza, not only at universities and colleges, but also in schools. According to

the organization, it has delegates in every class and neighborhood. Activities in schools include lectures and campaigns on religious topics, guidance, training in leadership skills, volunteer opportunities, recreational trips, summer camps, and various other initiatives. In a recent program in 2011, which was coordinated with the ministry of education in Gaza, for example, 130 lecturers from the fields of social services and civil society, mental health, religious da'wa, and student activism, spoke to female high schools students across the Strip, with the aim of strengthening morals and proper conduct and discouraging undesirable behaviors (*sulukiyat ghayr marghub fiha*). Six thousand female students were the recipients of the program in 118 schools.<sup>44</sup>

In her expansive study of the Islamic social sector in the Gaza Strip, Sara Roy provides a detailed account of the size, nature, and character of both Hamas-affiliated and non-Hamas Islamic social services organizations. In her description of the al-Salah Islamic Association, an organization that provides assistance to 5,000 orphans and their families in Gaza, supporting over 20,000 people (including many mothers—as children who have lost their fathers are considered orphans), Roy highlights the social, economic, and psychological empowerment that many Hamas social organizations provide. In al-Salah, regular group meetings for struggling single mothers with al-Salah social workers focused on the health and education of children, parent-child relations, social problems, and religious instruction. Roy writes that the women shared stories and advice and that beyond the practical utilities of the sessions, their greater importance lay in the emotional and psychological connections they established between the women.<sup>45</sup>

Hamas-affiliated social services that cater specifically to women provide material and practical assistance, but also tools for self-empowerment. From the creation of the *mujama'* to the present day, the Palestinian Islamic movement has encouraged women to seek employment and has assisted them in gaining the required skills. The focus on kindergartens also helped free women for employment. Training workshops in practical skills included religious consciousness-raising (*taw'iyya*). Rasha Adlouni explains that when women came for training the organizers made sure that they will also receive religious content. “We want everyone, including the woman who teaches beauty salon skills, to deliver the Islamic message to the women to whom she teaches these skills.”<sup>46</sup>

In practice, Roy observes, the link between Islamic social service institutions and activities and religious or political indoctrination has not been as seamless as it appears to be in Hamas women leaders' discourse. Roy found that on the ground in Gaza, the everyday work of Islamic social institutions took precedence over political and religious objectives, and she observed little attempt to "impose an Islamic model of social, economic, legal, or religious behavior or create an alternative Islamic or Islamist conception of society."<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, as Roy also observes, at least on the level of stated objectives, many of the Hamas-affiliated organizations that cater to women, and the women activists who lead and coordinate their efforts, formally state that their aim is to reform society by fostering adherence to Islamic religious principles.

This is even more vehemently emphasized in the da'wa efforts that the movement has undertaken since the 1970s among women. Encouraging women to come to mosques, learn about religion, and adopt a more pious lifestyle has been central to Hamas's work. This began in the early days when Shaykh Yassin and other religious figures started to deliver women-only lectures in mosques and at homes, providing religious instruction and consciousness-raising, and extend to the work of the women's da'wa movement today. Mosque lessons specifically address women's daily challenges and problems, and serve a similar purpose as the piety lessons in the other movements discussed in this chapter. Activities at the mosques include religious content instruction—textual exegesis (*tafsir*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), doctrine (*'aqida*), the life of the prophet—but also more social activities such as cultural events, first-aid training, educational sessions on Islamic childrearing and marital relations, trips to historical sites, promoting social solidarity (*al-takaful al-ijtima'i*), and summer religious and recreational activities. Activists in the da'wa field say that in each mosque in Gaza about 200 women participate in such programs.<sup>48</sup>

Hamas women today are active in the widespread network of mosques, kindergartens, schools, clinics, and charitable and social organizations, whether formally or loosely affiliated with Hamas, in Gaza and to a lesser extent in the West Bank. I provided here only a brief overview of these activities, as information on this subject is available from several other sources—although mainly in Arabic<sup>49</sup>—and also because complementarian activism in Hamas is very similar to this type of women's engagement in the other three movements that I have elaborated on in detail.



Hamas is distinguished from the other movements in that it operates in the context of military occupation. There is almost no aspect of Palestinian life that the occupation does not affect, and naturally, women's complementarian activism is also shaped by this reality. For this reason, in what follows I examine complementarian activism as articulated by the women who form Hamas's elite and serve as role models for Hamas's activists and supporters—the wives of the martyrs, those men who gave their lives fighting the occupation.

### *The Best Delight Is the Good Wife*

The wives of several top Hamas leaders who had been killed in Israeli “targeted assassinations” hold central symbolic as well as administrative positions in the movement. Through their lectures and work with women, the wives of Hamas's martyred leaders embody several of the core elements of complementarian activism under occupation. The first is their emphasis on women's supportive roles as the caretakers of their husbands' homes, and the (re)producers and facilitators of male resistance fighters. Yet, while they say that their domestic labor “behind the scenes” of the political national struggle is their most valued contribution, this aspect of their private lives is paradoxically placed on the center of the public political stage. The second feature of their complementarian activism, therefore, is the blurring of private and public distinctions. They consistently employ their intimate marital relations, family life, and their coping with loss to engender a discourse in which they personify an empowering and comforting model for other Palestinian women whose husbands were imprisoned, exiled, injured, or killed. Furthermore, their personal loss also requires reaching out to other women and supporting the Palestinian society as a whole, beyond their first obligations to their own homes and families.

The discourse of the wives of martyrs in Hamas reaffirms the movement's ideology of a sex-based division of labor. Their message to the women of Palestine is that they must stand behind their male relatives (husbands, sons, brothers) in the latter's resistance endeavors. They locate women's most valued contribution in what are considered to be traditional feminine roles. Aisha Abu Shanab (Um Hassan), the wife of Hamas's second-in-command Ismail Abu Shanab, who was assassinated by Israel in 2003, relates: “I want to assert a truth that each Palestine woman who shares her

husband's Jihad and da'wa must live—it is imperative for the wife not to be a burden on her husband, and not to preoccupy him with the concerns of the children and family life.... The wife's attending to the problems of the home by herself is a big part of her support for her husband."<sup>50</sup> She explains that when her husband was a lecturer in al-Najah University in Nablus, and was working on his master's thesis, he would stay up until the late hours of the night working, and she would stay up with him and would not sleep in case he needed something. She says, "What preoccupied me the most was providing mental calm to my husband in his home, and to not busy him with trivialities. I tried as much as possible to relieve his pain. I would not ask him for things or tire him with our needs. I would not criticize him if he came late or express the difficulties I experienced because he was too busy for us."<sup>51</sup>

In her public "Letter to the Palestinian Woman," Um Hassan succinctly summarizes the ideal Palestinian woman that she wishes to embody and set as an example,

To the fighting sister, the daughter of the great Islam, the granddaughter of Khadija and al-Khansa, the producer of men and the one who raises heroes.... We want you, my sister, to be a helper to [the fighting husbands, sons, brothers, fathers and grandfathers]. Take care of them and encourage them and carry the responsibility following their martyrdom.... We want you to embody the Quran [literally: "we want you to be a Quran which walks on the earth"—*nuriduki quranan yamshi 'ala al-ard*] with your Islamic morals and your firmness on the truth. We want you to be the wife who assists her husband in all of his affairs, that encourages his Jihad and stands beside him and practices the saying of the prophet: "... The best delight is the good wife, [the one that] when you look at her you are pleased and when you command her she obeys you and when you are absent she is loyal to you and takes care of your money."<sup>52</sup>

In public interviews and lectures, Um Hassan explains that she and her husband agreed from the time they were married that they will "raise children that will serve the nation and religion." For this end, she explains, "we divided the responsibility so that I would be in charge of the affairs of the children, while asserting my husband's stewardship [*qiwama*], and that he would be in charge of the public and da'wa work, so that we divide the recompense from God."<sup>53</sup>

A woman's reproductive contribution at home is touted as her most valued facilitation of her husband's and the nation's struggle, or Jihad. As Rasha Adlouni puts it, "The woman is the producer of men [*al-mar'a sani'at al-rijal*].... The woman is not half of society, as people say, but she is the entire society and if she is righteous and knows her mission, society as a whole will be righteous. If she is corrupted, society will become corrupt." Providing her husband with

“comfort at home” and also “carrying the burden of raising the children,” according to Adlouni and the most prominent Hamas’s wives, are a part of women’s fundamental mission.<sup>54</sup>

While the picture painted here is of women in supportive roles, the purpose is not to advocate a model of marriage in which the woman is devalued or is submissive to her husband. On the contrary, while they valorize their support for their husbands, Hamas wives put forth an image of ideal marriages based on affection, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to a common cause. To begin with, they describe the pious men of Hamas as uniquely ideal mates. Um Hassan recounts her marriage to Ismail Abu Shanab in the 1970s:

In those days, most young men would imitate singers and actors. I remember clearly their blind copying of fashion trends in hairstyles and high shoes and flared pants. My father laid a condition to any man who came to ask for my hand that he would be religious and upright, and that he would not smoke at all. But such men were very rare at that time. When I was nineteen my cousin Ismail asked to marry me. He was religious like we wanted, and I saw that he was different from the rest of the young men in his nature and conduct, and even though he was religious, he was easygoing.<sup>55</sup>

Their marriage, which was based on shared principles and vision, is described as a model of marital bliss. Um Hassan continues, “The first thing we agreed on when we got married is that we will always remain faithful to God. At the time my husband wanted to complete his engineering studies, and my relationship with him was special, we never spent a day away from each other, even in the time he was imprisoned I always saw him before me, he was never absent from my thoughts.”<sup>56</sup>

Rasha Adlouni’s account of her marriage is another illustration of the construction of Hamas’s leaders as ideal partners. She says, “God has blessed me with marriage to the leader doctor al-Rantisi, and for that I felt proud. I do not say this as women sometimes do, to brag among other women ‘I am the wife of so and so.’ Rather, I say it to carry a responsibility, and walk with him in this path ... the path of dignity and honor. Yes, this path carries burdens, but it is the only one that can be called the straight path.”<sup>57</sup>

### ***The Public Private Lives of Hamas Wives***

The focus is on the domestic and private nature of the support that women provide, yet the lives of the wives of Hamas’s leaders are hardly private. Mona Mansour describes the following conversation with her husband Jamal Mansour, a West Bank Hamas leader, a

week before he was assassinated by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in 2001.

He told me: “Will you be upset if I were martyred [*idha istashhadtu*]?” And I replied: “Our house is small, we will not have room to receive all the people who would come to offer condolences, and you are an important person [so there will be many visitors].” He said: “They will host the mourning in a local charity organization.” And in fact, the mourning was held at the charity, as he requested.”<sup>58</sup>

This short dialogue captures the blurring of the public and private lives of women married to Hamas leaders. Mansour’s very intimate conversation with her husband about the possibility of his death, as she chooses to recount it, revolves not around their personal feelings, but around their public duties instead. When he asks whether she would be upset if he were killed, she does not offer her emotional reaction to the prospect of a personal tragedy and loss. She instead expresses concern about her ability to receive all the guests who would come to bid farewell to an admired leader.

Hamas’s wives are undeniably public figures. They speak to the media very often, they offer lectures and seminars to women, and they serve in official capacities in various Hamas institutions. To give but a few examples, Rasha Adlouni, who holds a degree in Islamic studies, is active in the da‘wa field, offers religious lessons and lectures, and publishes her writings. She is also the current head of the women’s department at the Islamic Center, which today supervises Islamic kindergartens, libraries, Quran memorization centers, and the women’s professional training center (*Markaz ta’ahil al-fata al-muslima*). Aisha Abu Shanab is a board member of the Mothers of the Prisoners Association (*Jam ‘iyyat ummahat al-asra*), which organizes monthly visits to the families of prisoners and martyrs, and provides spiritual and psychological support for family members. Mona Mansour has run for election on the Hamas list in the 2006 national election and has won a parliamentary seat in that election. (Women’s political representation will be addressed in detail in [chapter 5](#).)

The personal sacrifice that Hamas’s wives have endured, many of them say, allows them to better feel the pain and better understand the needs of the many Palestinian women who have had to deal with the absence or loss of loved ones. It also makes them more relatable in the eyes of Palestinian women, as Adlouni puts it, “When Abd al-Aziz [Rantisi] was martyred, I was shaken deeply, as any wife would. But several things helped push me forward. The first was that

we sought martyrdom. The second was that we should be models as leaders and sacrifice—showing that the wives of the leaders sacrifice like every mother or woman.”<sup>59</sup> Um Hassan similarly explains that she can speak better to women who have lost dear ones because she has also sacrificed. Women listen to her and trust her because they know she shares their experience. “When you speak from personal experience that you have lived,” she says, “you sense that people feel that you are close to them.”<sup>60</sup> Mona Mansour’s words also resonate with this widespread sentiment:

My mission did not end with my husband’s martyrdom. My coming out to society has made me feel that life has not ended and that society needs me. My work encouraged other wives of martyrs and other women, and it has had a big role in relieving the pains of those who have suffered. My female friends from across the West Bank contact me the moment they face a crisis to speak with me and to understand from me the method of my perseverance. For this reason I feel that I am a teacher and a role model.<sup>61</sup>

The model that they personify, therefore, is not strictly one of domestic assistance. In their public work to help other women and society at large through da‘wa, community work, social service, and moral and spiritual support, Hamas’s wives put forth public engagement as another important duty of the pious Palestinian woman, which goes well beyond the confines of her home and family. For this reason, they stress in their meetings with women the notions of self-reliance and educational and economic empowerment that will allow women to carry on even in the absence of a husband. Adlouni, for example, asserts that “The Muslim woman who adheres to her Islam has made her mark in every field, not only in the home but in the universities and schools and unions, in mosques and hospitals and in all places, and her work did not conflict with her adherence to her religion and her hijab.”<sup>62</sup> Hamas’s complementarian activism, as we have seen, is similar to the frameworks that the other three movements explored in this chapter offer. A woman’s uniquely feminine contribution starts at the home, where she offers support to her husband and raises pious children. But educational attainment, professional training, and economic self-reliance are also features that Hamas not only encourages but facilitates for women. Being model wives and mothers and being educated and able to generate an income enable women to most effectively participate in the da‘wa and social work aspects of Hamas and to serve as effective agents in the Islamic revival movement.

## **Conclusion: Rethinking Complementarian Activism**

The term “complementarian activism” may be misleading because rather than preserving patriarchal social arrangements, it in fact involves a great deal of personal and social transformative action. Women’s support for their families, communities, and the message of religion as the movements and the activists construct it, make public/private distinctions precarious. Women’s contribution in the home is considered a part of their movements’ very public mission of reforming society. The extension of their caregiving from their immediate family to the wider society also makes them very visible public actors. In this chapter, we have seen that complementarian activism is highly political and that it offers benefits to the movements and to the women who are active in them. First, the movements clearly see women as an important constituency and as a key to society. Women’s complementarian activism among other women provides the movements with outreach and access that would have been difficult for male activists and leaders to achieve, as many of them admit. Especially due to the sex-segregation that the movements’ consider fundamental for the moral societies they wish to bring about, the creation of women’s spheres in proselytizing, in socializing, and in social service provision is imperative for outreach with women. The women’s spheres that are created are not clientelistic in the traditional sense. They are not built on vertical relationships in which middle-class women provide assistance to lower-income women and families. Rather, women activists often share a class background with the women they work with and to whom they reach out. As Janine Clark<sup>63</sup> observed among Islamists in Egypt, Yemen, and Jordan, religious movements’ networks are often cemented through horizontal social connections. Class does play a role in some instances when, for example, Hamas activists engage poor women from rural or refugee backgrounds, when Shas women reach out to women in poor neighborhoods and poor development towns of the Israeli periphery, or when younger Islamic Movement activists work with older, illiterate Bedouin women. But in these instances, the nature of the engagement is not transactional and alienating. It is as far as possible from our idea of vote buying and clientelism. The women’s relationships are built through repeated interaction, emotional availability, and trust, and reflect a politics of care much more than they do a politics of interests. Women who participate in activities are encouraged to become activists themselves. The message that they imbibe in these interactions is one of spiritual, emotional, educational, and economic

empowerment and self-reliance. But these ideas are not meant to encourage individualism and women's relinquishing of patriarchal structures. Rather, they aim to reconfigure women's roles within these patriarchal arrangements. Women's supportive and caregiving roles are expanded to encompass appropriate advanced education and employment, community work, and public activism among other women.

## 4

### Women's Protest: Exceptional Times and Exceptional Measures

Within the religious-nationalist movements in this study, women activists employ the nationalist ideological component of their movements in articulating motivational, diagnostic, and prognostic “frames of exception.” As we shall see, in the process, activists also use affectivity and their maternal credentials. In this respect, their framing process is similar to the construction of “maternal frames” that women have employed in other contexts of collective action—as, for example, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina,<sup>1</sup> the mothers of the “disappeared” in Pinochet’s Chile,<sup>2</sup> the Four Mothers movement in Israel, and many others.<sup>3</sup> The activists’ motivational framing rests on the following discursive construction: women as affective beings and mothers who must see to their children’s future argue that they are moved to act in unusual ways. Instead of openly challenging the dominant gender ideology of their movements, the activists employ the essentialized traits attributed to women by this very ideology to expand their areas of public action and overstep the boundaries this ideology places on women’s action. In their framing, the activists explain that it is because they are essentially maternal, nurturing, emotional beings, that women experience the urgency of the external threat to the community more intensely. Therefore, they argue, they are compelled to act in ways that contradict certain norms of female modesty and women’s primary duties.

But women activists also maintain a fragile balance between “unruly” affectivity or zealotry, and the strategic benefits of performing such affectivity. In their writings and in interviews, activists insist that their transgressions, while affective and authentic, also serve a strategic purpose; that they contribute to the nationalist cause and are therefore quintessentially righteous. Zealous affectivity and zealous rationality and calculation work together in the women’s discourse, rather than in contradiction.

The Israeli and Palestinian cases presented here simultaneously support and complicate some of the established theory about the



intersection of nationalism and gender. As in many other instances of nationalist conflict, women are interpellated into the struggle as biological reproducers of the nation, and as cultural reproducers through their role of transmitting the group's "national culture" to the next generation.<sup>4</sup> Beyond these tasks, much of the literature on women and nationalism has also pointed out the ways in which women are used as symbolic boundary markers between the nation or group and its other. Women's appearance, behavior, and bodies are used in this process of boundary-making in fairly predictable ways. They are expected to adopt dress and behavioral patterns that serve to distinguish the community from its rival. Their bodies are also guarded as vulnerable sites of potential encroachment by men of the rival community.<sup>5</sup> All four movements on the Israeli and Palestinian religious right in fact construct women and their bodies as boundary markers, but in ways that complicate the relationship between gender and nation. In the four movements here, women's dress and behavior is first and foremost a mark of piety that distinguishes the pious from the secular. The boundaries that they demarcate are not *between* Jews and Muslims, but rather the distinctions *within* each community between the religious and nonreligious. Thus the head-cover and modest dress, the sexual division of labor, and the separate spaces for men and women in the settler movement and in Shas are used to distinguish members of these movements from both secular Zionist as well as other ultra-Orthodox groups. In the Islamic Movement and in Hamas, these same markers delineate the difference with other groups within the Muslim communities in Israel and Palestine, respectively—be they secular nationalists, communists and leftists, or traditionalists.

The boundaries between Jews and Muslims, paradoxically, have been so well established over decades of conflict such that crossing and infiltration from one group to the other is less of a pressing concern and so women's bodies do not need to be scrutinized and recruited for the labor of this separation. In the context of Israel and Palestine today, there is little danger of excessive intermixing, intermarriage, or the blurring of clear group distinctions between Jews and Muslims. The legitimacy of women's claim to righteously transgress gender mores for the sake of the nation is facilitated because the task of national identity border-making in this nationalist struggle may not be as paramount as it is in other anticolonial and nationalist conflicts.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, for the sake of the nationalist struggle, religious-nationalist movements need to recruit

the entire nation, including its secular members. Temporarily blurring the lines between the religious and secular through women's transgressions is a strategy that further assists, rather than undermines, the nationalist cause. On the other hand, for the primarily proselytizing movements, establishing and fortifying the easily penetrable borders between the secular and religious is a primary concern that cannot be suspended, as it is in the nationalist-religious movements, for other overarching goals.

Frames of exception resonate differently in the different religious-nationalist movements explored here. The exceptional temporality women construct builds on the already established sense of grave urgency that is an integral part of the official rhetoric and teachings of their movements. Their engagement in transgressive acts that are couched in the language of feminine affectivity and maternal instincts, rather than in a feminist language of equal rights and roles, also resonates with the overall gender complementarity model of their movements. Moreover, if or when they are criticized, women activists are able to rebut their critics by arguing that the latter are simply not committed enough, politically and emotionally, to the nationalist struggle.

Research on gender and nationalism has extensively shown that nationalist mobilization and conflict create new opportunities for women.<sup>7</sup> Peteet, for example, working on Palestinian women in Lebanese refugee camps in the early 1980s, shows how national crises are periods of cultural ambiguity that allow women to break gendered cultural traditions and expand forms of political participation.<sup>8</sup> Yet most studies on gender and nationalism in Israel and Palestine focus almost exclusively on women's mobilization in secular, leftist, and feminist nationalist movements. In these, women often consciously and purposefully use the context of a nationalist struggle and mobilization to break with cultural traditions they see as limiting of women. Women mobilized through these movements either already have, or develop through their activism, a feminist consciousness—even if the nationalist movement in which they engage remains, despite some egalitarian rhetoric, largely patriarchal.<sup>9</sup>

There has been very little study of women in the newer Israeli and Palestinian religious-nationalist movements that have appeared on the scene since the 1970s. Women in these movements express their commitment to the complementarity model that their

movements advocate and reject what they see as the blurring of gender roles in the nonreligious nationalisms that have come before them (secular Zionism in the Israeli context, and Fatah and leftist nationalism in Palestine). When these women engage in activism that appears to transgress their own commitments and their movements' gender ideology, they inhabit greater contradictions than women who see the nationalist struggle as an opportunity (real or imagined) for gender equality. For these pious women, frames of exception are a concrete discursive tool that settles that contradiction by making transgression on the one hand righteous—given the demand of the nationalist struggle—and, on the other hand, temporary, as it remains a strategy for exceptional times that would and *should* be relinquished once normalcy is achieved.

But the mechanism of frames of exception might not be unique to women activists in religious-nationalist movements. While studies of women's engagement in nationalist movements more broadly have pointed out that women acquire new roles during the struggle, many of them have not fully elaborated on how women justify, legitimate, and make possible such performative expansions. It is quite possible that the concept of frames of exception has descriptive and explanatory utility in other nationalist contexts as well. One example that comes to mind appears in Begoña Aretxaga's study of nationalist republican women in Northern Ireland in the 1970s. These conservative Catholic women explained to Aretxaga in interviews that their entrance into the activist sphere was a "choiceless decision." She explains: "This sense of choiceless decisions ... expresses an existential predicament, the confrontation of dilemmas that led to extraordinary forms of action. The concept of choiceless decisions embodies a moral discourse in which the social order is accountable for communal principles of justice that, when broken, make rebellion necessary."<sup>10</sup>

### **Prioritizing the Land of Israel in the Settler Movement**

The settler movement's commitment to the Land of Israel takes precedence over other religious concerns such as promoting religiosity among the Jewish public or working toward making state laws and institutions more religious. Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook preached the approach his father was known for—namely of perceiving the secular Zionists as central actors in the unfolding of the redemption process. Contrary to the ultra-Orthodox rabbis of his time, Rabbi Kook senior argued that the secular nationalists should

be embraced for their heroic part in bringing the Land of Israel back under Jewish sovereignty.<sup>11</sup>

Although constantly debated, this prioritization of the Land over religious proselytizing is evident in many public texts and political pronouncements by movement leaders.<sup>12</sup> In this context, women settler activists continually expand their roles and visibility in the public sphere. This section examines the ways in which women frame the urgent concern for the fate of the Land to pursue activities in a way that enables them in practice to overstep their religiously sanctioned roles. As we saw in [chapter 3](#), the “appropriate” role for women in the struggle as articulated in dominant settlers’ discourse is a complementary one. Women are expected to contribute by creating a Jewish home and family and extending their maternal care to the larger settlement community.

This section explores how women construct frames of exception to justify unruly public political action that goes beyond building a home in the settlement, creating large families, and participating in local community building. The exceptional, “unusual time” that religious ideological settlers inhabit, a time of looming existential threat that could undermine the Jewish hold on the Land of Israel, makes necessary and even righteous the temporary overstepping of other religious concerns with appropriate female roles and behavior.

Moved to act out of great passion for the Land, the women confront police officers and soldiers, at times in ways that even lead to physical scuffles. This has been evident in three recent major junctures in the history of the settler movement: the mobilization against the Oslo Accord that started in 1993, against the Gaza disengagement in 2005, and against the dismantling of structures in the Amona outpost in 2006.<sup>13</sup> Scores of settler women activists participated in public protests that involved dragging, pushing, physical restraining, and arrests by police officers and soldiers. Such patterns of protest have become common in moments when the settler community has experienced a sense of intense existential threat. It is in these contexts of perceived urgency that Orthodox settler women’s presence in militant protest and confrontation, including physical confrontation, has become a prevalent pattern of political action.

For Orthodox women who are *shomrot negi’ya*—who avoid any physical touch, including handshakes, with unrelated men—such behaviors are particularly exceptional. Even as some religious and

political figures in their own community criticize the inappropriateness of their actions, women activists defy these critiques by emphasizing the prioritization of the Land of Israel that is facing the imminent threat of a Palestinian takeover, over concerns with “appropriate” and modest female behavior. And in fact, the frames they create are powerful and convincing to many in the community. To use the language of social movement theory, their framing “resonates” effectively with many in their movement. Moreover, the perceived effectiveness of this type of behavior in undermining the efforts of the state to dismantle settlements further legitimates the women’s conduct.

### *Rachel’s Tears in Shdema: Motherhood as a Motivational Frame*

Shdema illegal settlement outpost is a veritable wasteland, a confluence of ruin and rubble and abandoned landscapes. A demolished IDF post just outside of East Jerusalem, neighboring the Palestinian town of Beit Sahour, Shdema is located in a territory that is still fully under Israeli control (Area C). At Shdema, abandoned structures sit on top of each other and buildings with gaping holes in the mortar stare out onto the surrounding expanse of Judea. These monuments are graffiti-emblazoned everywhere in all shapes and forms of the Star of David and the phrase, “The People of Israel Live!” (*‘Am yisrael hai*). But such destitution is a fuel here, a valuable commodity that inspires and spurs the spirit. Since 2008, the Committee for a Jewish Shdema, a settler initiative, has worked to reclaim the area. The committee has gathered activists and youth to ascend to the outpost every Friday and to assert their presence by building a settlement outpost.

In a large room in one of the structures, with missing windows and doors, thirty women waited on the last Friday of October 2009 for the charismatic former Member of Knesset and founding member of Gush Emunim, Rabbi Hanan Porat. Rabbi Porat soon entered as a schoolboy would, with a black bookbag on his back and a smile. With his hands folded behind him, radiating congeniality, he began to tell the women of biblical Rachel.

“We are not ashamed to say that we are messianic,” Rabbi Porat encouraged the women, “we are expectant.” He held fast to the podium and tilted it back and forth as he spoke,

Our mother Rachel is the one who teaches us what longing is, what passion is and what is weeping and wailing for the sons to return to their home.... It is written that, “Rachel cries for her sons because he is gone,” [and] God says to her, “Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded ... and thy children shall return to their own border” [Jeremiah 31:15–16]. What “work” is God speaking of? It is clear here that the action is the crying. Since when do we call crying work? Indeed crying could be simply an expression of pain, of sorrow, of nostalgia. But in its essence it has a very functional purpose.... Anyone who hears the crying from a distance says: Our mother is crying, we must return to her. Rachel’s crying awakens Israel and they return from enemy land.... After the Six-Day War, a few days before Rosh Hashana, we passed by Rachel’s Tomb and we read these verses and felt that they were speaking about us there and then. It was an existential experience, we were wiping Rachel’s tears and telling her: Mother do not cry, we are coming back home.

Casting the homeland in the role of a long-suffering mother awaiting her sons is, of course, not the brainchild of the settler movement. It is hard to find a nationalist movement that does not liken the land to a forgotten and endangered mother requiring the defense of her virile sons.<sup>14</sup> What stands out in Porat’s presentation of Rachel’s model is his description of her crying as “action.” Drawing on the biblical verses, he chooses to highlight for his female audience an effective feminine action. Vulnerability and affectivity are appropriate and powerful feminine responses to a reality of exile and foreign (now Arab) rule. Rachel’s tears move her sons to action, and in this way her weeping is an active undertaking, effecting change in the world rather than passively reacting.



Figure 4.1. Rabbi Hanan Porat lecturing at Shdema outpost.

However, the women to whom Porat was speaking take a very different course of action. While Rachel weeps for her sons and calls on them to come home to wipe her tears and defend her, the women settler activists explain that they sometimes act in a particular, often explicitly militant, manner in the public sphere in order to protect their own children. They employ motherhood as a motivational frame,<sup>15</sup> a legitimate justification for action, one that is well within the accepted boundaries of the dominant religious discourse. Yet motherhood in this framing work is used to legitimate acts that go beyond these boundaries to include confrontation with police, soldiers and Palestinians.

Yifat, a member of the militant Hebron settler community explains how she became active in regular confrontations with the IDF and with Palestinians in the city, which led to her repeated arrests. The Hebron settler children, she says, were consistently mistreated by the IDF soldiers stationed in the city. When friction arose between settler children and Palestinian residents, Yifat argues, the army would always scold the children. She says that she very quickly “grasped the children’s pain, their frustration,” and she understood that if the Hebron settlers wanted to raise healthy children, they must support them. This realization led to her entrance into the confrontational public space, even though, as she sees the correct order of things, “Naturally the child is out in the yard and the mother is inside the home, cooking, cleaning, doing thousands of chores; naturally the father is at work, the mother is at work or in the house, and the child is outside alone.” She continued to recount:

The children are outside in the street and therefore are also in the front line of the friction, with the Arabs or with the soldiers. It was clear to me that if we want healthy children, we cannot leave them alone in the street. I started hanging out with the children.... I was outside with the children every time something happened. They saw I was there and that they were not alone. If my reward is that a child feels he is not alone, that’s what counts for me. But with it came the arrests, and the criminal record in the police, and the blows. We heard the soldiers and the police say, “Check where Yifat is and hold her,” even before something started.... It was a very difficult period. There was physical violence, but there was also the violence of arrests and levying criminal charges against me. They turned me into a persecuted person.... I paid a price from the authorities and from the Arabs.

In her own description, Yifat’s motive was not to seek confrontation with the IDF or with the Palestinian residents. It was rather her responsibility as a mother and as an educator to protect defenseless children in their natural place in the public square. Her entry into the confrontational public space is justified by her maternal instincts and duties.



*Besheva* newspaper, a mouthpiece of the most active strand of religious settlers and the most popular newspaper in the settlements, founded by a woman, often features stories of leading settler women who were moved to public activism when they lost a husband or a child in a terror attack. Being mostly private before the loss, the women are portrayed as overcome by their bond to the settlement or outpost where they had built their now bereaved families. Their relentless activism is never motivated by a predisposition toward political work. On the contrary, they are almost uniformly described as severely averse to politics and as seeing politics as a masculine space that is an unnatural arena for women. However, their maternal and wifely sense of duty and the threat that other women might experience their fate at the hands of Palestinian terrorism, make their unusual activity in the public sphere a necessary, although uncomfortable, reality.<sup>16</sup>

Hanna, who is in her late fifties, is a central organizer for the settlers' cause. She is an Orthodox woman who is a mother of eleven children and a grandmother of many more. Hanna narrates in even more urgent terms how she got involved in organizing protests and in confrontations with police and state authorities. She frames her actions as arising from a natural feminine concern to secure the future of her children and her country in the face of an existential threat. The urgency of the struggle compelled her to act. "It started when I felt that my home is on fire," Hanna explained, pointing to the Oslo process as a trigger for internal torment, "I couldn't sleep at night." As she linked the political process to the literal collapse of her domestic domain, she felt "that the state has gone mad ... that the government has lost its mind. I felt that my home is being destroyed and about to bury me." From that panic, she summoned up the power to confront this threat, a power borne of her responsibility to her children. At the time, she was pregnant with her seventh child, and she felt she "could not afford not to leave a future for my children." She found, too, religious authorization for her incipient rebellion, recalling: "There are a few *midrashim* [rabbinic interpretations of biblical stories] on the exodus from Egypt and the way the women saw to the continuation of the next generation. The men were desperate and didn't want to have children, and the women devised all sorts of ways to bring about a continuation."

Hanna explains her political action by insisting that she only sought to safeguard the future of her children in a secure Israel. As in Hanna's case, much of women's activism for the settlements is

framed in affective terms. For instance, in a 2009 support action through the illegal settlement outposts in the West Bank, which I attended, Nadia Matar, founder of the settlers' group Women in Green, extended her emotional, maternal language to include not only children but also religious monuments. In an outpost overlooking Joseph's Tomb in the heart of Jericho, the male guide of the tour elaborated on the religious, historical, political, and strategic importance of Jewish control over the Tomb. Nadia soon interrupted him and said loudly through her loudspeaker to the crowd, "Now I want to speak from the heart, from the emotions. Joseph is lying down there all by himself, surrounded by so many enemies. It is so moving, how he guards the place all alone for us." As a woman, Matar chose to speak "from the heart, from the emotions" as opposed to the cold analytical and political tone of the male guide.

The question of women's modesty is even more of a concern when political action involves physical confrontations. During the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip and the demolition of Jewish settlements there in the summer of 2005, Hanna was arrested with a group of young women in a confrontation with policemen. She described to me a pattern of settler women's political action that has become highly visible during that time. Hanna speaks of the increasingly "unruly" and fierce women's behavior:



Figure 4.2. Nadia Matar (right) at an outpost support tour.

They kept us for one night in the Russian Compound jail.... Then they moved us to another jail. And there I saw the way they [the young women] work. First, on the bus over there they almost toppled the bus by going wild, they shook it from side to side. Then in jail they were completely unruly but their rebelliousness was genuine, each small one stood up courageously, they made a mess of that place, these young and soft and fresh girls threw chairs on the door when the guard came over without blinking. They took all the mattresses off the beds and screamed, and the guards just didn't know what to do with them. When they took us back to Jerusalem the girls got hold of all the arrest files and tore them to pieces and threw them out of the window, they were uncontrollable.

Several rabbis and settlement leaders criticized such acts by women during the disengagement and later in physical clashes in the Amona illegal settlement outpost in 2006, declaring these immodest and inappropriate for religious women. But Hanna explained to me Orthodox women's participation in unruly confrontations using an allegory:

There is a story about the way the Maccabean rebellion against the Greeks started [in the second century BC]. One of the stories is that there was a law that the right to a bride's first night was reserved for the [foreign] ruler. And Matityahu's daughter was about to get married and they found some halachic ways to justify this practice, to accommodate. So everybody was out celebrating and she came out and tore up her clothes and stood there naked. Everyone was outraged and said, "What is this behavior?!" But she said, "How can you sit here and eat and drink, when you know what is about to happen tonight?! How can you talk with me about modesty and then give me to that villain?! And that is what caused the rebellion. Men can philosophize and find halachic maneuvers to justify things but [the woman] sees the larger picture, she sees the humiliation. I don't know if this really happened or not, but in legend and tradition it is the woman who sees the truth and rebels. And that later awakens the men, because they are the ones who physically carry out the war.

While in peaceful, routine times, women might be quiet and modest, in exceptional times, according to this narrative, they are the ones who lead the struggle. Hannah does not describe the women's behavior during the disengagement as "immodest." On the contrary, acts that may be immodest in normal times—like Matityahu's daughter appearing naked in front of a party of men—are in fact the most feminine of actions in unusual times. "Of course [settler women] are brought up to be obedient (*tsaitaniyot*)," Hanna told me, "it is not a contradiction. But with this fact you are also more aware of these unusual times," she said, "times that are out of the ordinary. In ordinary life, you can be very obedient."

Because the settlers' project is both a political project and a spiritual struggle for the redemption of the Land, the People of Israel, and the world, displays of emotions and affectivity, which characterize women activists' framing work, can be understood as both strategic and authentic. Affectivity is integral to the nature of

the settlers' project. It stems from the intense religious belief of the activists that their actions are sanctioned by God, and from their genuine frustration with the inability of others to see this truth. For women, however, affectivity resting on an essentialized feminine character can be all the more significant. It allows women activists, like the young women Hannah described, to participate in political action that severely compromises their religious commitment to female modesty and "appropriate" behavior. Women activists can perform unruly and "unreasonable" actions because they frame them as a natural expression of their uncompromising attachment to the Land and their commitment to the settlement project that is under imminent threat.<sup>17</sup>

The following account by Sarah Nachshon demonstrates how activists describe feminine affectivity that is sparked by an urgent existential peril. Nachshon is one of the founders of the Jewish settlement in Hebron and is famous for having insisted on circumcising her son in the Tomb of the Patriarchs. When her infant son died in 1975, she carried his body in her arms and proceeded, in defiance of military orders and IDF officers who tried to stop her, to bury him in the ancient Jewish cemetery in Hebron. This story of her heroism, defiance, and perseverance is well known in settler circles and has been written about by several scholars.<sup>18</sup> Here Nachshon describes a confrontation with Palestinians and her surprising response:

Thirty years ago an American couple wanted a tour of Hebron and wanted to go to the old cemetery. When we came out of Beit Hadasah, three young Arabs, 18 or 19 years old, called out, "Shalom, Shalom" to us. I said, "Shalom." One of them came up to me and said he wanted to shake my hand. I said "What? You want to shake hands with a woman?" ... and then I said, "Get out of here." When we went up to the cemetery, it was a steep climb, and on top of the hill we saw these same three Arabs, and the one who wanted to shake my hand had an enormous knife and the two others were clapping and cheering him on to kill me. The [American] couple said, "We are going to New York tomorrow, we don't want to be killed here in Hebron." I said, "I am not going to New York tomorrow, but I also don't want to be killed here in Hebron." They asked me, "What are you going to do?" I said, "Fight." They said, "What?" I said, "You stay here." I stood there, and I was certain these were my last moments. I called a *shema* prayer that was out of this world, I was between life and death. But after saying the *shema* I received strength that was not mine and I shouted at him in Arabic, because I knew some Arabic, I said, "Let's see you big hero, you want to kill a woman? Then why are you standing all the way over there, come here! Come here to fight!" I saw that he was shaking, with the knife. I started to run toward him and I came very close. [Then] the security patrol car passed by, and I shouted at them to help me grab the knife, and someone jumped off that car with a gun and told him to drop the knife or he will shoot. The man dropped the knife and said, "I am crazy, I am crazy."<sup>19</sup>

When the young Palestinian men wanted to shake her hand, Nachshon already sensed that something was wrong. As an Orthodox woman in interaction with young men from a traditional society, the question of physical touch was out of the question for reasons of modesty upheld by both parties. But while observing the rules of pious modesty, when she was confronted with a physical threat, instead of retreating or calling for help, Sarah says she decided to charge at the man with the knife. In a miraculous turn of events, the Palestinian men became terrified of her unexpected reaction, and even more, an armed security patrol appeared out of nowhere and came to her help. In a poetic twist in her narrative, her “crazy” action of running toward the knife had completely unsettled her assailant and caused him to assume the role of the irrational, the mentally unstable, as he proclaimed, “I am crazy.”

### ***Prognostic Framing and Physical Confrontation: An Outpost Scuffle***

The ways by which some women settler activists self-consciously deploy feminine affectivity, unruliness, and the delicate play between reason and “fanaticism” are fascinatingly demonstrated in my conversation with Shlomit, which I alluded to in the opening of the book and which I present here in full. Shlomit, who is in her fifties, hosted me in her office at the settlement’s municipal council building. She showed me a YouTube video and boasted, “You will see me now, this is the outpost in E. [an illegal settlement outpost], the anarchists came here with the Arabs, and we had a big confrontation.” We watched an abandoned structure which was either an incomplete or a rundown house, the walls were of exposed cement with missing windows. Inside the structure, blankets, newspapers, and empty cardboard boxes were scattered. On a nearby hill, we could make out the bright white houses of Shlomit’s settlement with their red-tile roofs. Their neat and orderly suburban rows posed a stark contrast to the mess and abandon of the outpost.

In the video, five young Israeli peace activists (belonging to an Israeli protest group called Anarchist against the Wall, according to Shlomit) stand at the outpost. Several settler men and some women now arrive at the outpost, they are accompanied by a few teenagers. Some verbal confrontations and then a physical scuffle commence between the settlers and the activists. Suddenly Shlomit appears and approaches the group, she demands, “Who are you?! What is your name?!” She shouts at the activists and inserts herself between the

fighting men. Shlomit then shouts at the heavily armed Israeli border police officers on the scene, “Why are they here?! These are Arabs and leftists!” Five soldiers now surround Shlomit, she is the only woman among male soldiers, “anarchist” activists, and Palestinians.

A border police officer who seems to be in charge takes out a piece of paper and instructs Shlomit, “Read this!” Shlomit shouts, “Why did they [the soldiers] grab me like that?!” The officer replies, “Can you read Hebrew?!” “First apologize!” she demands, but the officer continues, “Can you read Hebrew?” Shlomit is now very angry, “First apologize! I am a grandmother and I could be your mother!” The officer sneers, “If I had a mother like you, I would be ashamed.” Shlomit cannot believe what she is hearing, “How are you speaking to me?!” she admonishes the officer. Very calmly, the officer replies, “I speak Hebrew, when a person who has no culture speaks to me, I speak to him in a way he can understand, so go ahead, read what is written.” Shlomit takes out a digital camera and waves it about. The officer asks her to leave, and when she refuses he grabs her elbow. “You are hurting me,” she says, and breaks loose from his grip. Three soldiers now take hold of her. Two of them lift her by her shoulders and the third by her legs. As they lift her up in the air and carry her away, the two civilian cameramen film her.

The two Palestinians present do not actively participate in the confrontations. Shlomit is now back on the scene, on the margin of the main action. She tries to engage the two Palestinians who are sitting on the ground under a tree with a tall bearded Israeli activist. “These are good Jews,” she tells the Palestinians as she points at the bearded activist. “You will not murder them, right? The murderer from your village murdered I. Z. [a settler youth], that’s OK, but these people [the activists] you will not murder. They are your friends, they will defend you, they will save you. They are bastards [*menuvalim*]! traitors! They don’t want you here. They hate you, they don’t love you, they hate you!” The activist leaves, and the two Palestinians are doing their best to ignore Shlomit. Eventually one of them loses his patience and says, “This land is mine.” Shlomit demands to see documents supporting this claim. “Who are you that I need to show you any documents?” The Palestinian tries to sound angry but appears more tired than infuriated. He asks her, “Tell me, who is evicting you from here?” “The army,” Shlomit says. “Yes, the army,” he repeats triumphantly.

At this point, Shlomit paused the video and explained, “Here, this is me. If you saw me in demonstrations and things like that, you would think I was crazy. I am never afraid in these situations, but my husband worries about me. I was arrested many times. But I always feel that I have courage. Let me tell you, it’s like when you collect money for a charity and not for yourself, you are not embarrassed. The situation is very embarrassing, to ask for money, but since it is not for me I am not embarrassed, I tell myself that it is for the sake of the community. It’s the same thing here, I am willing to shame myself, I have no problem because it is not personal. My children are sometimes very embarrassed when they see me behave like this. Look here.” She pressed play, and we now saw her making fun of the tall bearded anarchist who was complaining to the officer that not enough soldiers came to protect the activists. In the video, she is pretending to whine and cry loudly, in a parody of the complaining anarchist. “It’s all an act,” she told me when she paused the video again. “You might think I am crazy, he is being interviewed and says that they were beaten up and I break out in fake whining.”

There was a striking difference between the YouTube Shlomit and the Shlomit I was speaking with at the municipal council office. The one on the screen was violent, both in speech and in action. She tried to make her interlocutors uncomfortable by standing too close to them, waving her hands and pointing her finger at them. She shouted offensive remarks and refused to engage in conversation. Moreover, though very religious, wearing a head-cover and observing the rules of female modesty, she nevertheless put herself in a position in which she was carried away by three male soldiers. To most people watching the video, her behavior would seem strange—confronting soldiers, shouting abuses, harassing Palestinians, and appearing to be out of control. But she was not overcome with anger in these situations, nor was she out of control, she confided. Rather, she constructed a prognostic frame that stipulated that an enactment of strong affectation and unruly, inappropriate behavior served her and the settlers’ cause.

And indeed in this case, she was right. By performing so powerfully the role of the unruly “religious fanatic” woman settler, Shlomit was able to make everybody else in this play of confrontation fall out of character. The Israeli “anarchists,” whose role was to be critical and confrontational in their interaction with the army, when facing Shlomit became excessively deferential to the representatives of the state. The activists requested the border



police's protection, insisted that the IDF had granted them permission to come to the outpost and complained to the officer and soldiers about Shlomit's behavior. Her parodying of the bearded anarchist as a "whiner" exposed the activist's stepping out of his assigned role in this play, while she herself, showing no respect to or fear of the authority of the state, usurped his anarchism as part of her performance of fanaticism.

Similarly, the two middle-aged Palestinians who owned the land on which the outpost was built and who came to reclaim it were able to perform neither anger at the theft of their land nor victimization in response to it. Shlomit's behavior exclusively commanded the attention of the cameras, participants, and observers. Her relentless anger exhausted her Palestinian interlocutors who quite paradoxically had to invoke the authority of the IDF in their argument with her. Moreover, her confrontation with the soldiers positioned her, rather than the Palestinians, as the target of the soldiers' disrespect and roughness.

As Shlomit explained, she was able to perform this unruliness because she was doing it for a greater cause. She likened her actions to a person asking for money for a charity rather than begging due to a personal need. Since her objective was the cause of the Land of Israel and Redemption itself, she was not embarrassed by performing actions that in another context would be inappropriate and even shameful. Her children, however, were embarrassed by her improper behavior, and her husband worried about her arrests. But she was not concerned with family, social, or even religious censure because the frames she constructed justified her behavior—she was simply doing what was necessary and effective in response to the threat of Arabs, "anarchist" activists, and the state to Jewish control of the Land.

The feminine behavior in this case, as Shlomit and other activists construct it, combines genuinely felt impulses with a degree of intentional, calculated performance. Displays of physical disobedience and defiance seem to challenge the women's commitment to the ideal of feminine modesty. However, as their diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames of exception articulate, the gravity of the threat and the intensity of the struggle require women to act in ways that transgress this ideal. The enacting of the "emotional zealot woman" role serves very consciously the cause of the settlements and is thus accepted and even righteous.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that this type of action comes easily to the activists. Yona expresses a widely shared sentiment that such actions are both unpleasant and problematic, yet are still very necessary: “It is very unpleasant [*lo na'im*] when soldiers drag you, when they grab you from the neck and from your clothes and pull you inside, and their language is very rude, it is definitely unpleasant, but it is worth it. You feel you are doing right action [*asiya nekhona*], the overcoming of the wish to be quiet, to be nice, obedient, and walk the accepted path.”

In demonstrations and confrontations, as these accounts show, activists are exposed to “immodest” physical contact with police officers or male soldiers. Emily Amrusy, former spokeswoman for the Settlements Council (Yesha Council), explains the severity of the impact of such interactions on religious settler women. Describing the removal of protesters from the illegal settlement outpost of Amona in 2006 that was characterized by excessive violence, Amrusy explains the difficulties girls and women activists faced, “For religious girls, it could be the simplest of touches, but they experience it like rape because they are religious. They are really innocent, and any touch, or lifting their skirts to pull them off the roof and exposing their legs, is something very intrusive and very violating to any woman but especially to a young religious woman.”

Due to this problematic physical aspect of confrontations with the police, some Orthodox rabbis have publicly criticized women’s participation in confrontations.<sup>20</sup> Women activists, however, insist that because women’s participation serves the cause of the struggle, it is both legitimate and necessary. Like Yona, many women activists openly refuse to accept the objections of some male religious or political figures to this particular form of political action:

In the religious public there were rabbis who were really against this unruliness, and they stopped it later. Some of these behaviors actually stopped because many rabbis came out against them, so there is an acceptance of authority. I think that that was a complete silliness and it reflected the lack of courage of these rabbis, but that is my personal opinion.... There were some rabbis who said that it wasn’t modest. There was a discussion about it, that it is a violation of women’s modesty to be struggling like that. But the problem is with the person who touches me, not with me. Don’t touch me. If he [the policeman] touches me in a vulgar way, it’s his problem, I would be very happy if he didn’t touch me.

Some activists argue that the censuring by certain settlements’ rabbis and leaders of women’s participation in physical confrontations with state representatives is an attempt to undermine the struggle. By stressing the utmost urgency of the struggle and their own

commitment to it while questioning the motives of their critics (claiming, for instance, that they are not motivated by a concern for modesty but rather by a desire to undermine the cause of the settlements), women activists further assert their ability to act in “unusual ways” in the public sphere. As one young activist puts it, “If someone wants to undermine the struggle, he can criticize women’s participation. In Amona, for example, women were beaten up too, so some leaders said, ‘Why do the women come, they shouldn’t be there.’ But those who say this are the ones who are against the struggle, they do not want any struggle at all, so they try to find reasons why this person shouldn’t come and that person shouldn’t come.”

Following Sabah Mahmood, it is not my contention that women’s agency within gender nonegalitarian frameworks is located only in acts of resistance. Furthermore, though some among the male Orthodox settler leadership object to women’s enactment of such behaviors, many others are supportive. Overall, there seems to be an understanding that the women’s actions do advance the cause of the settlements and therefore override, or make sensible the suspension of, certain concerns with female modesty and appropriate behavior.

Moreover, in the case of the settler movement, women advocates, whose credentials of activism for the Land of Israel are undeniable, are also able to publicly criticize and challenge the opinions of established religious authorities. On matters pertaining to the Land, women activists at times openly reject the opinions of rabbis they consider insufficiently committed to the struggle. To give but a few examples, consider Shulamit Melamed, an important leader in the movement. Melamed has publicly contested religious opinions issued by rabbis that forbid disobedience by IDF soldiers when ordered to dismantle settlements. Many rabbis argue that religious conscientious objection is not justified in this case. Melamed writes in the newspaper she established, “Would the rabbis argue, following the same logic, that soldiers cannot disobey orders requiring them to violate the sanctity of the Sabbath or other religious prohibitions, all in order to preserve military discipline?!” Melamed states that in all likelihood the rabbis will sanction disobedience in order to defend the sanctity of the Sabbath. She asks, “Why is the Sabbath more important than the prohibition of giving the Land of Israel to foreigners? On the contrary, harming the

Land of Israel will have grave consequences for future generations whereas violating the Sabbath is a onetime incident.”<sup>21</sup>

Melamed’s words reveal several trends. First, she feels justified to challenge the opinions of established religious authorities. Second, she is basing the force of her argument on the importance of the Land of Israel above and beyond all other religious concerns. There is a direct link in her line of argumentation between the correct prioritization of religious commitments and her ability to speak authoritatively and confidently in defiance of male religious authorities. When these latter betray the Land of Israel, it is the activists’ duty to remind them of the correct prioritization.

Nadia Matar, head of Women in Green, makes a similar move. She also consistently contests the attitudes of rabbis and other male leaders, basing the force and legitimacy of this stance on the urgency of an existential threat. “Most Rabbis and public figures in our camp,” she writes, “continue to bury their heads in the sand and refuse to understand that the imperative today is the physical struggle on the ground, over every part of the Land of Israel. Enemies from within and without want to take it from us and we must not continue with our life’s routine. The words routine (*shigra*) and expulsion (*geirush*) have the same root.”<sup>22</sup>

As we have seen in this section, in the activists’ framing, routine temporality or usual time is disrupted by the urgent threat to the Land by Palestinian usurpers and their Israeli collaborators. The unusual time or exceptional temporality that ensues, which is tied, in the women’s discourse and in official settlers’ discourse, to the advance of the messiah, requires women to step out of their “routine” roles. If they simply act in a routine, appropriate manner, which includes avoiding the overstepping of religious modesty ideals and appropriate women’s roles, the Land might be lost and their children will be in danger. This sense of national urgency serves as the building block for women’s construction of frames of exception that enable their righteous transgressions.

### **Framing Protest in the Islamic Movement**

Women of the Islamic Movement also occasionally participate in more transgressive activities such as unruly protest and even physical confrontations. This section explores how the communalist and nationalist aspects of the Movement’s ideology, its struggle as a discriminated Muslim-Palestinian minority facing a Jewish majority,

enables women to take part in such actions. The section focuses on the Movement's campaign for the sake of the Al-Aqsa mosque, a symbol of Muslim identity that the Movement sees as under imminent threat from the Jewish state.

*Between "Coexistence" and Communalism in a Da'wa Class*

Religion in the Movement's discourse is intricately connected to the present situation of Muslims in a Jewish state as a marginalized and discriminated minority. At a school where I attended a young shaykh's lesson for eleventh-grade female students who wanted to learn about da'wa, the complexity of the Muslim-Palestinian identity in Israel was present already at the very entrance. Inside the school, above the front door, a wall featured a huge mural, at the center of which were the Israeli and Palestinian flags, each painted as a wing of a strange butterfly. The mural captured the conflicting pulls Muslims in Israel confront as, in practice, each wing of this metaphorical butterfly leads in an opposite direction.

The walls of the classroom in which the da'wa lessons took place were covered with religious posters, among them a large picture of Al-Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock, and illustrated instructional posters teaching the steps of correct prayer. A metal closet near the door hosted a library of Islamic CD lectures on various topics that students could freely borrow. The most popular CD at the time, I was told by the young activist that accompanied me, included a lecture on the corrupting pagan roots of Valentine's Day.

Five girls entered the classroom. Usually, the group was between eight and ten eleventh-graders, but today attendance was low. After a few minutes, Shaykh Yousef arrived. He was a young man in his late twenties with a thin beard and a white *taqiyyah*. He had studied sharia in Jordan and had written a few religious booklets. He attended high school in this very school and now he was back to guide the students who wished to pursue da'wa work. The students did not receive academic credit for the class and their attendance merely reflected their desire to become better Muslims and better proselytizers. A short conversation between one of the girls and the shaykh ensued. This conversation is exemplary of the way in which the Movement and the young girls attempt to negotiate conflicting influences and identities in contemporary Israel.

“Can I invite you to an event?” Yusra, one of the girls, asked the shaykh.

“No, what event?” the shaykh inquired.

“Why do you first say no and then ask what event? You’ve made up your mind before you knew what it was about, that’s not right.” She rebuked him.

“I am sorry, did I say no? I meant to ask what event.”

“It is a coexistence party we are organizing in town. Jewish groups will come and we will host them in a Bedouin tent, we will wear traditional Bedouin clothes and make Bedouin food, we will teach them about our culture.”

“You already know my answer.”

“No, you have to explain yourself. We are not doing anything wrong, so why do you disapprove?” Yusra refused to take an unreasoned no for an answer; she demanded an explanation.

“Will there be music?” The shaykh asked.

“Yes.” Yusra said in a way that implied “Yes, and so what?”

“Then I cannot come.”

“But it will be traditional Bedouin music.”

“Will there be boys and girls together?”

“Yes.” She replied, this time a little less defiant, understanding the shaykh’s position.

“Then I cannot come. I cannot take part in things I disapprove of, things that tie me to the world, to bad influence.”

“But this is something we are doing for our community, it’s all volunteer work, what’s wrong with doing things for the community?” She knew she would not convince him to come, but she wanted him to approve.

“You have all my respect, I encourage the youth to volunteer in the community. We just have to remember to be appropriate, there are correct ways in which we can carry out such activities.”

“OK, OK, I get it,” she said feigning irritation, “You’ll never come to anything we invite you to.”

This short dialogue encompasses several themes that come up in the Movement's activities with youth. Secular music is one of the corrupting conduits of a culture the Movement strives against. Movement activists constantly warn of the ills of contemporary popular culture and encourage a whole set of alternatives, from CDs with Islamic songs (*anashid*) and religious sermons and lectures, to religious TV programs. One major effort of the Islamic Movement since the 1980s has been the introduction of Islamic music groups in wedding celebrations to replace both the traditional music and contemporary popular music that used to play in these events. When Yusra first invited the shaykh to an "event," he immediately refused, predicting that the character of the event will be objectionable. Yusra repeatedly challenged the shaykh rather than capitulating. She refused to settle for an unreasoned rejection and continued to pester him when he said he will not attend because music will be playing in the event. While she understood his objection to popular music, she pressed him on the question of why he should disapprove of traditional Bedouin music as well.

The alternative Islamic cultural products that the Movement promotes, however, at times also include imported communalist elements that are not indigenous to Palestinians in Israel. For example, the turn toward pious cultural consumption has led to the rising popularity, in the time I was conducting fieldwork, of a Jordanian children's TV program called *Tuyur al-Janna* (Birds of Paradise), which broadcast video clips of religious songs and other songs with religious-educational content. Many viewed these as appropriate alternatives to secular children's programs available on TV and encouraged their children to view them. I came to know *Tuyur al-Janna* when I first heard some children in an after-school program singing distractedly to pass the time. When I listened to their lyrics, I was surprised. The children sang, "*lama nisthashhed binruh al-jannah*" (when we become martyrs we go to heaven). After hearing the song on several other occasions and being informed about its popularity, I was finally shown the *Tuyur al-Janna* video of the song by the children of a friend. The video opened with a pretty girl of about ten, wearing an angelic white dress and singing in a sweet voice: "when we become martyrs, we go to heaven." As she repeated this line, the camera panned out to show several small children playing on a stage; they tended to a tree and played in the sand, performing normalcy in a theater. The girl continued to sing in

the background: “Don’t say that we are small, this life has made us old. Without Palestine what meaning does childhood have?”

The peaceful scene was then interrupted by three ten- to twelve-year-old boys wearing blue camouflage fatigues, big white yarmulkes on their heads, and carrying large guns. The ostensibly “Jewish” soldiers performed by the boys watched the other kids playing from one side of the stage with menacing looks. They began to shoot at the children, who fell down dead to the ground in slow motion. An adult male singer now joined the children, repeating the lines sung by the girl. Next, we saw the children conducting a funeral march on stage. They carried a coffin on their shoulders and waved green flags and the Palestinian flag. Together with the adult singer, they sang: “There is no God but Allah, and the *shahid* [martyr] is beloved by Allah.” Two boys then took out guns and shot the children dressed up as Jewish soldiers, who now fell to the ground. The adult singer sang: “You have taught us the meaning of manliness” (*‘alamtuna shu ma‘ana al-rujule*).

The images and language in the video draw from a religious cultural production that is characteristic of movements such as Hamas, but that is quite recent in Israel among Palestinian citizens of the state. Its popularity reflects the deteriorating relationship between Israel and its Arab citizens. The killing of thirteen Arab citizens by the Israeli police in a demonstration in 2000 marked the lowest point of Arab citizens’ treatment by the state in recent years. Since then, the consistent veering of Israeli governments to the right and the growing marginalization of Palestinian citizens has added much strain to this already difficult relationship.

Now returning to Yusra and Shaykh Yousef, implicit in the shaykh’s rejection of the event was another element of the Movement’s ideology. The Jewish-Muslim interaction component of the event to which Yusra invited the shaykh was an objectionable aspect that he subtly rejected. Though Shaykh Yousef did not elaborate on this issue, he and many others in the Islamic Movement—mostly within the northern branch but also some (although fewer) within the southern branch—are critical of “coexistence” efforts that maintain, rather than undermine, the explicit hierarchy in Israel which favors Jewish citizens of the state over Muslim ones. Some in the Islamic Movement, as we shall see in what follows, advocate a Muslim-Palestinian agenda that rests on vocal resistance to the threat posed to the community by the Israeli state. Some in the movement



consider “coexistence” initiatives that aim to acquaint Muslim and Jewish students as integrationist attempts that undermine the nationalist Muslim-Palestinian cause of separation and distancing from the Jewish state. Later we will see communalist rejections by the Movement that are much more explicit and will explore how they enable a different form of women’s activism. While women and men’s mixing in a “coexistence” event was unacceptable according to Shaykh Yosef, such interactions become permissible, even necessary, in cases in which the very existence of the Muslim community and its attachment to its most sacred places of worship is perceived to be in grave danger.

### *Al-Aqsa in Danger*

In some of its rhetoric, the Islamic Movement endows political critique of the State of Israel with a religious character that turns the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from a political one around questions of citizenship and national borders into an existential religious clash. In this respect, some of the Movement’s discourse mirrors the religious-nationalist language and imaginary that we have seen in the case of the settlers. Consider the following lecture by Shaykh Jamal, a leader in the Islamic Movement in a medium-sized Muslim town. I present lengthy excerpts from the lecture, as it offers a rare inside look into this aspect of the Movement. It also helps us understand how the linking of religious and communalist political grievances allows women in the Movement to construct frames of exception that legitimate their engagement in more transgressive forms of activism.

I was invited by women activists in an Islamic Movement students’ branch to attend a lecture by Shaykh Jamal that they had organized at their university. The lecture took place on a wintery, smoggy day in 2010. The pollution and sand in the air made everything dark even at two in the afternoon, and a strong wind caused the palm trees at the university’s gardens to sway violently. Female students’ skirts were flapping too and their hair covered their eyes. Everyone had a messy look, as if caught in a rush. There was a certain urgency that a furious wind gives to people’s gestures, everyone looked late for something or worked up about something. Inside one of the classrooms, Shaykh Jamal’s lecture echoed the fury of the weather outside with talk of calamity approaching—Al-Aqsa mosque, he announced, was in grave danger. The house of worship was in danger, we were in danger, Palestine was in danger. As the

cornerstone of an ancient synagogue in the old city of Jerusalem was laid, Shaykh Jamal told us, the conspiracy to destroy Al-Aqsa mosque and rebuild the Jewish Temple was well under way.

On the second floor of a gray, indistinct university building, a classroom had been reserved for the event. In it, the young women from the Movement, in dark *jilbabs* and white *khimars*, arranged snacks on plastic plates. Female students came in groups of twos or threes, most wearing more color than the Movement women—their hijabs were green, burgundy, blue. Fourteen women took their seats at the back of the classroom. Male students then began to arrive. Unlike the women, nothing distinguished them from the Jewish university students. They wore t-shirts and jeans, some were more formal with shirts tucked into pants. Only the male organizer had a beard, trimmed and groomed, a visual mark of his piety.

The men sat in the front rows where the women could see only their backs. There was very little interaction between the men and women, except for the polite greetings exchanged as the men entered the classroom. Shaykh Jamal was a tall and large man. He wore a khaki *thobe* reaching his ankles and a heavy *kufiya* with thick frills. His checkered white and black beard reached all the way to his chest. He was an unlikely sight at the university. For the students present at the lecture, secular knowledge was important. For them, a university degree was the key to advancing in life. But the shaykh had religious knowledge, something that these students felt strongly about, something without which secular knowledge and the material advancement it may bring, meant nothing.

Shaykh Jamal took his place behind the podium and recited the first verse of *surat al-isra*: “Glory be to Him Who made His servant to go on a night from the Sacred Mosque to the remote mosque [*al-masjid al-aqsa*] of which We have blessed the precincts, so that We may show to him some of Our signs; surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing” (Quran 17:1). The “remote mosque” is *al-masjid al-aqsa*, where Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven. As he began his lecture, the shaykh’s voice was soft, almost inaudible, and though he was speaking of subjects that stir the emotions—martyrdom, the path to heaven, attacks on one of the most sacred places to Islam—he appeared calm. He never raised his voice for effect, never sounded angry when recounting atrocities done to Muslims. One of the women organizers respectfully asked him to raise his voice to

reach the back rows. “Is Al-Aqsa mosque in danger?” was the subject of today’s talk.

“What do you know about the history of Al-Aqsa?” the shaykh asked the audience. The students were silent. He berated them,

You are students, lovers of knowledge, and yet you know little. We often visit Al-Aqsa, we take pictures, maybe do some shopping in al-Quds [Jerusalem]. But how do we come to love a place? If I know a type of food well, or if I know a person well, his qualities, his life, I come to love him. The more I know the more I love. That is why we must know the history of Al-Aqsa so that we love it properly. The first attack on Al-Aqsa took place in 1099 with the first crusade. In three days, 70,000 Muslims were killed. Can you even imagine such a number?

The women in the audience shook their heads, the number was too large to grasp. “For days, al-Quds smelled of the decaying flesh.”

That is the ancient history, but in the modern period we’ve had many disasters [*nakabat*]. And it shouldn’t surprise us. When Abi Taleb went to the Sham [Syria/Levant] with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) [Peace Be Upon Him], he was told by Bukhaira: “Protect your nephew [Muhammad] from the Jews. They will try to kill him.” There have been many conspiracies against Islam, and they go back to our early history. The first *nakba* happened in 1948 with the Dir Yasin massacre. The second *nakba*, do you know when it happened? I will give you a prize if you remember when. The second *nakba* occurred in June of 1967. And why then? Because it was in June in the year 628 that the Prophet (PBUH) attacked the Jews in Khaybar. When [Israeli Prime Minister at that time] Mrs. Golda Meir went to Um Rasras, which is now called Eilat, she said that she smelled the scent of her forefathers there.

The shaykh twitched his nose, caricaturing Meir taking in the Eilat air and eliciting giggles from the women. “She was there on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August, and what she was referring to were the ninety-three Jews who were killed in Khaybar on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August. Yes, ninety-three Jewish carcasses [*fatisa*] were the result of that battle.” Again, the students giggled at the word “carcasses,” this time with some discomfort.

The shaykh continued,

We see the Jews tying leather strings around their hands, and it makes us laugh. But the joke is on us because these strings represent their tie to Al-Aqsa. Every year on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August, ninety-three Jews come from all over the world to Al-Aqsa to commemorate the death of the ninety-three in Khaybar. They do not forget and they promise to take revenge.... In 1969, the Spanish Jew, Denis Rohan, attempted to destroy the mosque. Again, this was on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August, the important date we had mentioned.

Shaykh Jamal proceeded to sweep through Jewish extremists’ attacks on the mosque in recent history, ending with the visit to Al-Aqsa of Israel’s former prime minister Ariel Sharon in 2000 that served as the immediate spark for the second Palestinian intifada:

Finally, on the [29th] of September 2000, Ariel Sharon came to Al-Aqsa in an attempt to destroy the mosque. These efforts continue. The Jews are digging under the mosque. They claim these are archeological digs, but we know the real aim is to topple the mosque from below. Today, they are laying the cornerstone for a synagogue in the Old City, which is actually the foundation for their Temple. They are waiting. They had brought in chairs, robes and clothes, knives and gloves, equipment to be used in their Temple. Everything is ready for the arrival of their red cow from Sharon's farm. Al-Aqsa is in danger, we are in danger, Palestine is in danger.

He ended on a note that stretched an undisturbed thread through hundreds of years of Islamic history: "Islam speaks of dialogue, of coexistence. Are we terrorists? I will tell you who is a terrorist. Who were the first to try to kill Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)?" Shaykh Jamal asked the audience. "The Jews," the classroom answered matter-of-factly. The students knew the answer they were expected to give but were quite dispassionate, the hashing of ancient hatreds did not seem to be high on their minds.

"Yes, it was the Jews who tried to poison the prophet. They said that if he were a true prophet the poison would not harm him."

As of 1996, the Islamic Movement, under the leadership of its northern branch, has coordinated an increasingly popular campaign by the title "Al-Aqsa in Danger" (*Al-aqsa fi khatar*).<sup>23</sup> The northern branch denies any attachment of Jews to the holy site, and Shaykh Raed Salah, the head of the northern branch, argues that "Jews have no rights in the Temple Mount area or in a single stone of the mosque. Researchers and archeologists had proven this.... We believe that the Old Testament had been forged and this is also written in the Quran." Ironically, Shaykh Salah denounces the manipulation by "extremist Jews who use in the name of religion Jewish sentiments on this issue."<sup>24</sup> Like the Jewish right's approach, for many in the Islamic Movement the dispute over the holy site is not only about political sovereignty but also entails an existential fight over religious truth and sacred history.<sup>25</sup> In a protest by the northern branch that I attended in Jerusalem in the summer of 2014, Shaykh Kamal Khatib echoed this language by stating in his speech that Al-Quds (Jerusalem) is not only the future capital of the Palestinian state, but it will also be the capital of the reestablished Islamic Caliphate.

As part of the campaign for Al-Aqsa, the Movement's northern branch has orchestrated demonstrations, public gatherings, and even riots and violent clashes with the police. The Al-Aqsa campaign has consistently included women. The urgency of the call, as is clearly

reflected in Shaykh Jamal's lecture, requires all Muslims in Israel to participate in the defense of Al-Aqsa, even if that entails participation in activities that are traditionally the reserve of men. Thousands of women participate yearly in the Al-Aqsa mass public gatherings in Um al-Fahm's soccer stadium and in many other public venues across the country. The organization Muslim Women for Al-Aqsa (*Muslimat Min Ajl Al-Aqsa*), associated with the Al-Aqsa Institute (*Mu'assasat Al-Aqsa*) of the northern branch,<sup>26</sup> organizes many of the activities around the issue. *Muslimat Min Ajl Al-Aqsa* was established in 2002 as an initiative of Um Sayf from Um al-Fahm (the sister of Shaykh Salah), who began to recruit women from around the country as members of the organization. The women's mass protests adhere to the discourse of communal rivalry articulated in lectures and speeches by the male leaders. At one such gathering, Ola Hijazi, the current director of Muslim Women for Al-Aqsa, addressing hundreds of women in Qalanswa, articulated the diagnostic frame for the public actions by women, "It is a secret to no one that Al-Aqsa mosque is suffering under the yoke of occupation and the injustice of the oppressors, and that it faces every day conspiracies to destroy it or to burn it or to Judaize (*tahwid*) it, and attempts to build the alleged Temple," she said.<sup>27</sup>



Figure 4.3. Islamic Movement demonstration in Jerusalem, 2014.

Shaykh Salah has repeatedly called upon women to take their part in this important struggle. He couches his call on women in strictly communalist language, “We see the enemies of Allah storming Al-Aqsa every day, there are settlers from Kiryat Arba and Ariel and Alfei Menashe charging at the mosque. And where are its [Al-Aqsa’s] people and its rightful owners?” In response, Salah demands, Muslims must create an overwhelming presence in Al-Aqsa and this presence must be multiplied by “tens of thousands of Muslim women every day. The steadfast bond of a thousand Muslim women to Al-Aqsa is stronger than all of the armed Arab militaries.”<sup>28</sup> The religious sentiments that make Al-Aqsa such a mobilizing cause also help unite Muslim women from across the country around the struggle. As one activist explained during a mass gathering in Um al-Fahm, the gatherings provide “an opportunity for the sisters to expand their connections with each other.” The solidarity that women feel “consolidates their relationships with each other and strengthens those especially as their mutual affection is mixed with the love for Al-Aqsa.”<sup>29</sup>



Figure 4.4. Islamic Movement demonstration in Jerusalem, 2014.



Similar to the settler women who frame their motivation employing maternal sentiments, women participating in the protests emphasize their roles as mothers in these events. The Movement's coverage of the gatherings pays particular attention to women who attend with their small children. The women say they bring the children in order to raise a new generation committed to the cause of Al-Aqsa and ready to struggle for its sake.<sup>30</sup> The urgency of the cause, according to the women, motivates them to participate and also justifies their prioritizing of a political call over other demands on their time. "We as women," asserted Sana Issa, a participant in one of the mass public actions, "will not stop or fail to attend any activity, gathering or action for the sake of Al-Aqsa and the Al-Aqsa Hostage."<sup>31</sup> (This is the popular title used to refer to Shaykh Raed Salah when he was repeatedly held in police custody due to various charges of incitement.) Another activist at the event explained that the women's feeling of duty toward Al-Aqsa "makes us overcome all the difficulties we face as women, such as the difficulty to travel and to move around with our children."<sup>32</sup>

As part of the campaign to protect Al-Aqsa from Jewish encroachment, the Movement has encouraged men and women to travel as often as possible for prayer in Al-Aqsa. The sense of imminent danger the Movement foments has helped suspend some restrictions on women. For example, the Al-Aqsa Institute has repeatedly announced that women who come to pray in Al-Aqsa must be accompanied by a male chaperon (*mahram*). These announcements went so far as stating that, "Any sister without a *mahram* will be turned away."<sup>33</sup> Especially in the Bedouin south, many women are traditionally forbidden to travel alone without a *mahram*. However, Maha, a Bedouin activist in the students' organization of the Movement recounted for me the following informative episode:

We [the women] decided to organize a trip to Al-Aqsa and stay in Jerusalem. There was resistance to this from the men's leadership [of the Movement's students' organization at the university]. They said, "You are girls, you cannot spend nights away from home on your own." We said, "We are not alone; we are in Al-Aqsa with all the Muslims." And *mashallah* one of the shaykhs stood up for us and said, "For the sake of Al-Aqsa, I give you permission to go for three days," and he decided to fund our trip.

The shaykh was willing not only to challenge the objection of the male students and of other more conservative shaykhs. He went so far as to fund the female students' journey and took upon himself the

tasking responsibility of travelling one evening all the way to Jerusalem to personally see to it that the women were safe.

Um Amer, a leading Movement activist for Al-Aqsa (and the wife of Shaykh Salah) constructs women's motivational frames around the existential threat that rival Jewish women's groups pose. "Because there is a Jewish plan to rebuild the alleged Jewish Temple in 2005, and in the shadow of the existence of Jewish organizations such as 'Jewish Women for the Temple,' I ask who should be first, the professors of falseness or those who demand and act to obtain what is rightfully theirs?"<sup>34</sup> One of the roles some women in the Movement have taken for themselves is to protest against and even, when possible, prevent the entrance of Jewish groups that seek to pray in the premises. When such groups attempt to enter, with the escort of the Israeli police, the women take to congregating near the entrances, shouting the *takbir* (*allahu akbar*) and protest calls, banging on the metal gates, and physically confronting policemen or soldiers.

Sawsan Masarwe from the northern branch explains that "The Palestinian community of the interior [that is, in Israel] has become more aware of the occupation's schemes against Al-Aqsa," and for this reason every person, old and young, man or woman, cannot "relinquish the protection of Al-Aqsa mosque and marching to it, which is now considered a part of the *jihad fisabil allah*." One of the roles that women have taken up, she says, is to be present around the mosque at all hours, and to "rush to its defense when they feel that the danger of the [Jewish] extremists is posed." She tells of one instance of bravery when she and other women left the mosque for some shopping following the noon prayer, after they made sure no Jewish extremists or foreign tourists were present. Soon enough someone informed them that soldiers were storming the mosque, and the women immediately rushed in to "support and protect the worshippers."<sup>35</sup>

Yet somewhat differently from the settlers' case, where women's unruly protest is supported by some male leaders and criticized by others, in the northern branch of the Islamic Movement the consensus is in support of women's public action for the sake of Al-Aqsa. When the men are prevented from coming to the mosque, the women say that they fill their place. As Ola Hijazi puts it, "When the men are unable to enter ... women take upon themselves this role." She explains that "History has shown that when men were prevented

from carrying their roles in the Islamic da‘wa, women carried on the da‘wa. The prophet’s female companions carried the message and had a role in raising the banner of Islam.”<sup>36</sup>

The parallels with the settlers, however, are apparent in some of the more “unruly” conduct by women. Among the settlers, women’s unruliness is constructed as stemming from innate feminine affectivity. Moreover, the prognostic framing involved, the awareness of the effectiveness of their performance of zealotry and the difficulty state authorities find when confronting such actions by women, as in the case of Shlomit, for example, is present in Islamic Movement protests for Al-Aqsa too. In one such event that I attended in 2013, older women led the way and behaved in a manner that not only would normally be unusual for pious women, but that also only women could carry out, given that they would be perceived by the riot policemen present not as threatening but as, perhaps, “crazy”—just like Sarah Nachshon or Shlomit. The particular protest I describe here took place after the Friday prayer at Al-Aqsa on a summer day in 2013. About a hundred worshippers gathered at Damascus gate. Eleven older women, between the ages of fifty and sixty, stood at the front of the crowd, facing policemen and journalists’ cameras. They began to chant slogans about freeing Al-Aqsa and against the State of Israel. The refrain “with soul and blood we will redeem you, Al-Aqsa,” was the most popular one.

At this point, the police, on horseback and on foot, charged at the crowd and pushed it away from the space facing the gate. As the mounted charging became more violent, threatening to topple the protestors, many ran and dispersed. Now it was the older women who remained to lead the protest. One woman stood before four horse-mounted police in full riot gear, with helmets and guns. She was dressed all in black, from her hijab to her jilbab, and she waved a Palestinian flag in front of the policemen. Soon she became the center of attention, performing a sort of a dance with the flag, coming close enough to touch the horses. Cameramen and spectators pushed each other to take her picture. The other women called out to the observers, “Shame on those who just watch, join us *ya shabab!*” The woman in black continued her enchanting dance in front of the policemen, who seemed confused. More women, under the vocal leadership of five activists, joined her at the center of the action and resumed their chants. The mounted police oscillated between annoyance and amusement, while the women called to them, “Hey donkey, get off of your horse!” (*ya hmar, inzil ‘an al-hisan!*).

After a few minutes, one of the officers turned to his colleagues and said in Hebrew, “How did we end up with these women singing for us like this? What are we doing here?” He decided that by their presence they were providing a target and an audience for the women’s chants; they were spectators in a performance in which they were supposed to be participating. The chanting women were not seen as a threat, with their calls of “*khaybar khaybar ya yahud*, Muhammad’s army will return” (*jayshu Muhammad sawfa ya’ud*); and “with soul and blood, we will redeem you, Al-Aqsa.” After a few moments of hesitation, the police retreated, to the cheers of the protestors and the crowd.

The protesting women I spoke to explained that they were there to “stand with our children” and “support our *shabab* and our children.” “Al-Aqsa is being stolen,” some of them said with a sense of urgency. Under these circumstances, they found courage, brought about by the necessity of the exceptional situation, the grave danger to Al-Aqsa. They claimed that all fear vanished. “I am not afraid,” Um Maher, the woman who danced alone in front of the horses, explained when I asked her, “I fear only Allah. These Jews are nothing but their weapons.... But they, with their weapons, are afraid of us. They are the ones who are afraid of us.”

Activists for Al-Aqsa often recount stories of bravery and confrontation. When the security services raid the outer premises of the mosque, demand identity cards, or interrupt the access of worshippers, women at times take the lead in protesting, shouting at the police, and even engaging in physical confrontation. Although women’s protest may appear less threatening than men’s protest to the Israeli security forces, the latter do take steps to stem such activism. Several of the women activists who reside in Jerusalem say that their pictures had been taken as they engaged in this type of activism, their identity cards confiscated, and some even faced police interrogation and restraining orders banning them from coming to Al-Aqsa.

Similarly to what we saw with the settlers, affectivity is also constructed as a formidable feminine impetus for activism, one that stems not just from rational consideration but from uncontrollable need to protect the holy place. This affectivity is touted as a model of feminine devotion in the Movement’s discourse. The following is a typical description of such behavior by a Movement publication.

When Jewish settlers came to the premises to “desecrate” (*tadnis*) it with by their presence,

A woman of over fifty entered swiftly and ran toward the women attending religious lessons at the premises, while sobbing uncontrollably. After they calmed her down and asked her about her predicament ... [they brought her to the men] and she informed them about her calamity, saying: I was at home doing housework, tidying and cleaning, and the television was on the al-quds channel, I saw the urgent news that at this very moment Al-Aqsa mosque is being stormed by settlers and that they are in its precinct and so I left my housework and came out of my home to defend the sanctity of Al-Aqsa.<sup>37</sup>

The growing centrality that Al-Aqsa mosque occupies in the Movement’s discourse vis-à-vis the communal threats that it is subjected to, as we have seen in the previous examples, opens up opportunities for women to participate in protest action as well as to transgress certain cultural and religious norms that restrict and monitor their presence in the public sphere. Before the public political mass action on the Al-Aqsa issue, women from the Movement did not often participate in demonstrations. Today, they are usually present in protest on urgent issues of religious-nationalist concern. In December 2008, for instance, when Israel executed an intensely violent raid on Gaza, Shaykh Salah led a protest in support of the Palestinians of Gaza and of Hamas rule there. Women participated in the demonstration separately from the men.<sup>38</sup> “The men walk first and the women behind them,” Maryam, a prominent activist explains, “it is not mixed, each sex keeps to its separate space.” As is the case of the Al-Aqsa campaign, the theme of that demonstration highlighted the Palestinian-Muslim identity aspect of the Movement that is under imminent threat from Jewish action. The exceptional gravity and urgency of the threat outlines the contours of the frames that women activists construct to justify and promote participation in such public, at times transgressive, actions.

### **The Importance of Being Modest: Boundary-Making in Shas**

In both the settler movement and the Islamic Movement, women find or create opportunities to take part in unruly public protest in the context of a nationalist or communalist struggle that they both authentically and strategically frame as urgent, existential, and exceptional. For women in these movements, there exist more pressing commitments that can overshadow and make trivial an unrelenting preoccupation with female modesty. When the holy Land of Israel is about to be usurped, or when Al-Aqsa mosque is

facing Judaizing, women say they must engage in protests—even unruly ones that may compromise modesty and proper behavioral norms. As the previous two sections described, women in the settler movement widely participate in public protest and demonstrations when these are about the fate of the nationalist settlement project. Women in the Islamic Movement also come out to the streets when the religious-nationalist fight for the sake of Al-Aqsa mosque is at stake.

For Shas, which is above all a proselytizing movement, the ultimate ideological concern remains the mitigation of the attractions of a secular world and the fortification of the boundaries that distinguish Shas from other nonreligious alternatives. A main distinction effort is played out on the bodies of women, with modesty constituting a central preoccupation and one of the most pivotal boundary markers. The few Shas demonstrations and protests that have taken place over the years—most significantly protests against the 1999 trial of Aryeh Deri, Shas party head who had been charged with corruption, protests against the Israeli high court of justice that Shas organized in the 1990s, or even the recent demonstrations against a government plan to extend mandatory military service to the ultra-Orthodox community, normally do not include Shas women activists.

In many of the Shas activities in which I took part, the crowd of women was mixed. There were Haredi women but also traditional (*masorti*) Mizrahi, and “strengthening” women, those who try to gradually ascend the ladder of piety. The following description of a mass conference for women captures the constant negotiation by Shas, its proselytizing partners, and their varied constituencies in their attempt to strengthen the boundaries between the secular and the religious. Sex segregation in public is one of the central battlegrounds. Shas, together with other organizations, at times organizes impressive conferences and gatherings for women. The content of these events focus on boundaries with the secular, and in these gatherings women are assigned the pivotal responsibility of maintaining these boundaries mainly by upholding their religiously assigned gender roles and guarding their modesty.

### *An “Enormous” Women’s Conference*

At one of the largest sports stadiums in the country, located in Tel Aviv, I attended in the summer of 2011 what was, and was not, like

every other spectacle this hall was accustomed to. It ran into the thousands, like most other gatherings in the stadium. The audience radiated energy, as do fans of the basketball leagues in Israel who frequent the same rows of seats. They stood up, impatiently, stealing a peek here and there of something far more important, perhaps someone far greater, as if this were the biggest gig of the year showering the brightest stars on Israel.

Scattered across the rows of numbered seats were participants of an “Enormous Women’s Conference” (*Kenes nashim ‘anak*), organized by several religious and proselytizing organizations, of which Shas was the largest. Scores of women, almost entirely Mizrahi, had converged from across Israel in free shuttle-buses, big and small, that had crisscrossed the length and breadth of the country. As they entered the variously numbered gates of the stadium, they brought with them their stringencies and their mildnesses, their relative scales of modesty, here a full-body covering or there a tightly fitting skirt that spoke equally a language of chic as it did of faith. And, as in a concert or a big game, the entrances to the stadium were lined with vendors. Leaflets and pamphlets and brochures exchanged hands at alarming speeds, telling of evils that must be fended off and truths that must be preserved. Blessings were offered with a free book and a CD of teachings. Religious pilgrimages to sacred destinations were feverishly being organized. And then, among the profundity of such matters, there always remained room for everyday lives, of matchmaking services that come with promises of a love made greater by religious sanction and of appetites that can be sated with the strictest of kosher certifications.

On a projection screen, with pretensions to enormity that aligned well with the conference’s name, the star of today’s lineup, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, was scheduled to appear with a blessing. But first, a team of less-renowned rabbis addressed the women, delivering that ubiquitous message and with it that well-known burden—to steady the People of Israel, its men and its sons, to be nothing less than the very authors of a force that will bring Israel unto its own.

The stadium, with blue chairs that can accommodate up to 12,000 people, was slowly filling. The loudspeakers blasted religious tunes, the equivalent of the Muslim *anashid* heard in the Islamic Movement events. A row of plastic chairs was arranged in front of a long table at the center of the huge hall, with water bottles

awaiting the speakers. A podium stood beside the table for the speakers who wanted to stand up as they preached to the gathering crowd of women. Rabbi Ayalon, director of a teshuva organization, addressed the women entering the stadium. About 15 percent of the chairs were already occupied, and women were making their way between the remaining seats, paying little attention to the young, red-bearded rabbi. He shouted into a microphone placed too close to his mouth, "You women must encourage your husbands and sons to study the Torah. And you must fight pride [ga'ava]. Anyone that tells you that there is a remedy for pride is lying. There is only one antidote, and that is a better relationship with God. All the organizations devoted to bringing the People of Israel back to the Torah must work together. We must use all the social networks that are used against us, in the media, Internet, we can use them to advance our message and to bring it to every home in Israel."

Rabbi Ayalon left the podium with little acknowledgment from the audience, and was replaced by Rabbi Hamami, a popular teacher of religious lessons. Rabbi Hamami received some applause from the women; the stadium was now about fifty percent full. "Today we came here from all corners of the country in order to strengthen, so that *hakadosh barukh hu* will send us his true messiah and will bestow *shechina* and with her peace at home [*shlom bayit*] and peace." Rabbi Hamami received moderate applause from the women, now occupying 70 percent of the seats.

Next came Rabbi Luggasi, who was even more popular. Many of the seated women stood up to clap and cheer him on. A popularity contest of sorts was taking place. Speakers could be appraised by the volume of applause they generated. Rabbi Luggasi's message seemed to resonate well with the women in the crowd.

We were privileged to be chosen by *Hashem* among all the nations to be his worshippers. Our purpose is to sanctify and worship his name. Men do it by undertaking their mitzvot and women by undertaking women's mitzvot. When a woman knows her goal and objective she will pursue it against all odds. A man told me, "Thanks to my wife I have strengthened [became more religious]." He was a rich man and he asked his wife what gift he can buy her. She said, "go to Torah lessons every day, this would be the most precious gift you could give me." He was so moved by how devoted she was to the Torah and that helped him strengthen. When the woman understands the value of Torah and mitzvot, of modesty, modesty in dress, humility, when a woman truly connects in prayer and faith, when she has no material desire from this world, she brings happiness to her home, she understands that the Torah is bliss and not a burden.

We are now in the midst of a crucial and important period. The dominant current in the street is one of ignorance. Ignorance of the goodness of the Torah.... Today we face challenges, difficulties in our marital relations, difficulties



providing for our families, challenges raising our children and the challenges of bad culture around us [*tarbut ra'a*]. Pleasing *hakadosh barukh hu* requires great devotion, even if it entails struggle with our surrounding, and degradation from the people around us. We need devotion in our dress. Not to cheat when we get dressed. A woman cannot rule for herself about the codes of modesty and say, "This is modest enough for me." Women have to learn how to act in the work place. A woman should not serve her boss anything directly, and she should not call him by his first name. She should not wear tight clothes. A woman that sanctifies herself [*mekadeshet et 'atsma*] and guards her modesty saves herself and the entire People of Israel. On judgment day one woman that has guarded her modesty is better positioned than hundreds of women who have not been modest. Her modesty counts in her own defense and for her family members and the entire People. As our ancestors were saved in Egypt by the merit of righteous women, so will we be saved by the merit of women.

When Rabbi Luggasi left, Rabbi Pinhas, another of the event's organizers called out, "I request all the men present to exit the stadium." The rabbis left immediately while the disgruntled, secular security guards slowly and reluctantly exited, exchanging exasperated looks with each other. The singer Kineret Cohen, wearing a tight-fitting shimmering dark dress reaching down to her feet, with long sleeves and a high collar, and with a large barrette decorated with a felt flower, came on stage. Her performance included three songs that might belong in the Eurovision song contest. A fascinating fusion of disco music and Arab tunes accompanied her lyrics as she made sharp dance moves, pointing repeatedly at the ceiling when singing lines about Our Father Who Is in Heaven (*avinu shebashamayim!*). Some of the women in the audience stood up to dance, others swayed from side to side or tapped their feet and clapped their hands. A female technician with a long denim skirt and a baseball cap was the only crew member who remained to videotape the performance, as her male colleagues were not allowed to hear a woman's singing voice.

Rabbi Pinhas, excited from the energy in the stadium following the performance encouraged the audience, "Trash is thrown to the street, but diamonds are kept in a safe! The daughter of Israel that knows her value and guards her modesty is this diamond!" He next called on Rabbi Moshe Ben Moshe, who also maintained the higher level of excitement now rippling through the crowd by shouting his words into the microphone in a high pitch. "I see you and I cry of joy for the *nahat* [contentment] you give to *hakadosh barukh hu!* Each one of you had good reasons not to be here today. Errands, family issues, but you came here for an evening of sanctifying heaven. Girls like you deserve blessings and saving, thanks to you the People of Israel deserves redemption." The crowd of about

twelve thousand women responded enthusiastically with cheers and shouts that intensified Rabbi Ben Moshe's passion.

We would have expected that a gathering before the eve of *matan Torah* will be a gathering of men, as men are the ones obligated to study the Torah. But *hakadosh barukh hu* placed in our hearts the idea to hold a gathering of women. Because by this gathering *hakadosh barukh hu* wants to give you women the recognition and appreciation you deserve, and to tell you: Without your support and encouragement for your husbands and children, your brothers and sons-in-law, there would have been no Torah in Israel! Rabbi Akiva became Rabbi Akiva thanks to his wife. Each one of you, whether you are married or single—may you be blessed with a match—each one of you can raise a Rabbi Akiva in her home, whether you are the wife of a scholar who studies the Torah all day, or the wife of a laborer who only studies for one hour each day. If Israel's camp will be holy and the daughter of Israel will be modest, *Hashem* will not allow anyone to harm the People of Israel. Dear women, guard modesty and we will have nothing to fear!

There might be 1,000 women who are modest, or 10,000 women who are modest, but even though there are so many, *hakadosh barukh hu* loves each daughter of Israel as if she is the only one who guards her modesty. In your class you might have 30 other girls that are modest, but for *Hashem* you are the only one!

The women cheered and waved their hands at this last sentence. The rabbi responded,

You make an incredible, awe-inspiring sight! Please, I beseech you to strengthen the Torah at home, strengthen modesty, because it will save us. The People of Israel needs saving and it is all in your hands. You have a great power in your hands, the power to influence the People of Israel! Soon the messiah will come and he will tell you, dear daughters, you were the ones who brought me, you were the ones that pleased *Hashem*. *Hakadosh barukh hu* has so much sadness because of all the daughters of Israel who are not modest, but you appease Him! You brought me here with your modesty, it is thanks to you that redemption will come! Rabbi Pinhas, please take the microphone from me, otherwise I will speak all night to this great crowd of righteous women! May all of you be granted matches, health, peace at home, plenty, blessing, and success. You have made me happy, you have made the rabbis and rabbaniyot happy, you have pleased *hakadosh barukh hu*!

As he left the stage, the speakers blasted unbearably loud music, the song "*Hakadosh baruch hu, we love you*" was playing to the cheers and applause of the women. One of the rabbis present could not contain himself and started singing to the microphone, utterly out of tune, "*hakadosh barukh hu, we love you!*" With the crowd warmed up and spirits running high, it was time for the much awaited televised message from Rabbi Ovadia Yosef. The *maran* appeared with his signature oriental cap and trendy John Lennon sunglasses. Due to his old age and his difficulty speaking, his words were barely audible as he mumbled his blessing and advice. Scores of women ran closer to the screen to get a better view of him, and many of the older women smiled at his image and beamed with affection for the beloved spiritual leader. He blessed the women for

their attendance and devotion and reiterated his much-repeated message: “Wear headcovers, not wigs! And guard your modesty.”

Rabbanit Siani, a tall frail woman wearing spartan black and white, slowly glided to the podium, but young women who wanted to hug or touch her stopped her at every step. Some young girls in the crowd jumped up and down in unison calling her name, as if she were their favorite pop star. “Please refrain from taking pictures of the Rabbanit,” Rabbi Pinhas instructed all present. The Rabbanit repeated this request: “I beseech you to respect my modesty and not take any pictures of me; please also turn off the cameras.” She addressed the crowd in a calm and commanding voice:

This is a holy occasion, daughters of *Hashem*. Each one of you is a king’s daughter, the daughter of the King of Kings. And you know, in three seconds each one of you can perform thousands of mitzvot. I will tell you how “love thy friend as you love yourself” [*ve’ahavta lere’akha kamokha*] is one *mitzvah*. By loving a Jew you perform a *mitzvah* of the Torah. Now if each one of you here will direct this love to all the women present, what a powerful deed we will be a part of! If we now love each other, we perform thousands of mitzvot, equivalent to the great number of women present. We can create a small version of Mount Sinai [*ma’amad har sinai*].

“All of you repeat after me: I hereby perform a *mitzvah* of the Torah, love thy friend as you love yourself, and I hereby love each and every woman present!” The women all dutifully repeated the words with eyes shut and with great intention. “We have just created millions of angels,” the rabbanit congratulated them.

Why have we come to this world? Each one of you must be sure of the answer. The answer is that we are on this earth to do *Hashem*’s will. There is no other reason. Not career, not to see the world, not to travel, not to achieve self-fulfillment. If any one of you is not certain of this, she must urgently clarify this with herself, there are seminars and one-on-one lessons that can help you realize this.

You are confronted with evil inclination at every step of the way: delays, confusions, trials, difficulties. *Hashem* gave us freedom to choose between good and evil but in our generation evil inclination is especially strong. In the past, a woman would wake up and thank *hakadosh barukh hu*; today, she wakes up and surfs the *interkhet* [a play on the word “Internet” meaning interSin]. In the past, only men had to study the Torah. Today the evil inclination is so strong that women must study once a week too, even if it comes at the expense of one hour of her husband’s studies. Each woman should ask her rabbi if he approves of this, but the need is there and it is strong. In these Torah classes, you can hear *Hashem*, he places his words in the mouths of the rabbis and rabbaniyot and tells them what you need to hear. Every woman must send her husband to study every day, one hour at minimum. Even if it inconveniences the family or reduces your income. Send your kids to study the Torah.

For all the single women, my advice is not to compromise, the man with whom you will build your home must find time for the Torah, otherwise do not marry him. You might think that the women who are not observant are happy, that they

have money and spend their days shopping and jogging and that they look great. But I saw a study that said that the most widespread medicine in the country is Prozac, which is a pill that addresses depression. The happiness that you see is just a superficial façade. You have to work hard to receive recompense. Like when you get a degree, it takes four years but it is worth it, doing God's will is very difficult and takes a lot of time, but it is worth it in this world as well as in the next. Modesty is the protective charm of the daughter of Israel. A man is protected by *tfilin* and *tsitsit*, a woman is protected by her head cover and modesty in dress, that is the greatest protection of all. In Israel, every third couple gets a divorce, but family purity [*tahara*] protects the marital relationship; it is worth it.

The famous Rabbanit Kook then came to give her spectacular performance, and many women in the crowd stood up in anticipation. She walked up and down the stage with the microphone close to her mouth “only God, only God, only God, only God, only God” (*rak hashem*), she chanted her mantra in an exceedingly faster pace. She broke the rhythm with screams “ahhhhhh, ahhhhh, ahhhhh,” and in softer, lower voice, “adonai is God, adonai is God, adonai is God” (the Lord is God), which slowly intensified into a loud cry. “My righteous women!” she cried out, “*Hashem* loves you!” She then asked all the women to stand up and chant with her “MESSAIAH, MESSAIAH, MESSAIAH, MESSAIAH, MESSAIAH.” She instructed the women, “Let us now shout for one minute, “MESSAIAH, MESSAIAH, MESSAIAH, MESSAIAH, MESSAIAH.”

I describe in length this particular event because it highlights quite powerfully several crucial elements in the politics of proselytizing movements and Shas in particular. The first thing that is important to mention is that Shas maintains a delicate relationship with these other varieties of teshuva organizations that helped organize this event. When combining forces, as they did for this event—advertising it on Shas's and the other organizations' print and social media platforms, recruiting activists and volunteers to spread the word and sell tickets, and sponsoring shuttles—these organizations have a tremendous reach. In addition, these other organizations also grow Shas's constituency as those Mizrahi “converts” who make the full transition to religiosity will likely enroll their children in Shas's institutions, and will likely vote for Shas in national and local elections. Many of the rabbis and rabbaniyot who spoke at the event also explicitly call on their audiences to vote for Shas during elections. The rabbaniyot from Margalit that I worked with also receive referrals from such organizations, like Hidabrut, Shamayim, and Shofar, of individuals or families that need help in the religious “strengthening” process.

On the other hand, when such organizations begin to signal competition with Shas, the relationship transforms drastically. The most recent and high-profile case of such a fall-out occurred when Rabbi Amnon Yitzhak (the head of the Shofar teshuva organization whom we have met in the first chapter) decided to start his own party and compete in the 2013 Knesset election. This led to a bitter media battle in which both sides stopped at almost nothing to tarnish the other's reputation.

In terms of content, what comes to light is the attempt to make the journey toward greater religiosity fun and entertaining. Like a pop concert or a music festival, the event offered women pious entertainment. It helped cement for those who are already convinced, and convince those who are still hesitant, that a pious life can also be fun and that a religious women's gathering could be as enjoyable as the competing temptations of secular culture.<sup>39</sup> The themes of modesty and women's roles clearly proliferated and dominated the contents on offer, but there was a noteworthy difference in the manner of presentation of such themes. One had the option to connect to the theme via the moralistic preaching of some rabbis, the emotional beseeching of others, the contemplative and reflective approach of rabbanit Siani, or the inviting ecstatic trance of rabbanit Kook. Even more important, while the rabbis seemed single-mindedly obsessed with the theme of modesty, both of the rabbanioyt who spoke chose to focus on other aspects of a righteous life. Rabbanit Siani spoke about creating bonds of love and social and spiritual connections between women, a theme we saw in [chapter 3](#) promoted in Shas's classes taught by women. She also stressed religious study for women that should come even at the expense of the husband's study, of household chores and even at the expense of the family's income.

But the most significant aspect of the gendered politics of proselytizing that this event captures is that at their most spectacular mass gatherings for women, the primarily proselytizing movements' core labor is one of boundary making between the religious and the secular, even as they offer secular and "strengthening" interlocutors various pathways and styles for making the unidirectional journey across these lines. Women are explicitly recruited as the border guards, patrolling themselves and the boundaries of piety. In the absence of a nationalist or communalist preoccupation, such boundaries cannot be righteously transgressed.

## **“Necessity Permits the Prohibited:” Hamas Women and the Armed Struggle**

Like the settlers and some in the Islamic Movement, women in Hamas also engage in various forms of public protest, similar to the ones described in the previous sections of this chapter. That Hamas women use the nationalist component of the movement’s ideology to justify more transgressive public political activity is apparent in the demonstrations and marches protesting the occupation that they have organized over the years, some of which have included clashes with IDF soldiers. Raja Halabi argues, for example, that the Islamic women’s movement “has a prominent role in resistance to the siege [on Gaza] by various means, including demonstrations.”<sup>40</sup> As part of this, Hamas’s women’s branch has organized protest around the Rafah checkpoint and even storming it in an attempt to force it open.<sup>41</sup> Samira Halaiqa, a prominent activist from the West Bank, links the more transgressive forms of women’s activism to the reality of occupation which compels them to act, whether they want to or not. She says,

When the woman finds herself standing in front of the Israeli soldier, as he knocks on her door, this is something that the Palestinian woman experienced a lot, and it is repeated everyday. I personally, when I visited the prisons or went to court for my husband’s or son’s trial, I realized what it means for the woman to perform her role.... When she is facing the soldier ... or the female soldier who inspects you ... this forces her to say no to the occupier ... she finds herself in the middle of the public square, confronting and fighting and performing a dual role ... she has to perform the role of the father and the mother and the son, and the role of the provider.

Halaiqa further argues, “Hamas did not consider this to be women’s role, but the woman found herself performing it.”<sup>42</sup>

The blurring of private and public distinctions by the reality of occupation that we also saw in [chapter 3](#) is not unique to Palestine. Begoña Aretxaga, writing about Republican nationalist women activists in the 1970s in Belfast, mentions, for example, that British interment and raids on people’s homes, “blurred the boundaries between household and communal space and at certain moments practically erased them. Army raids transformed the secure intimacy of the household into a vulnerable space, susceptible to arbitrary violation by armed men.”<sup>43</sup> Like Hamas women, conservative Catholic Republican women felt compelled to act when the war was brought inside their homes.

In what follows, however, I want to focus on the first Hamas woman to carry out a “martyrdom operation.” I chose to focus on this woman, Reem Riyashi, even though she is an unusual and extremely rare case, because in her story the exceptional temporality that is already inherent in Hamas’s ideology, and the way in which it facilitates the construction of frames of exception, is so powerfully evident.

### *The Martyrdom of Reem Riyashi*

On January 14, 2004, Reem Riyashi, a Hamas activist and a mother of two, detonated an explosive device strapped around her body at the Erez checkpoint in the Gaza Strip, killing herself and four Israeli soldiers and wounding dozens of people. Riyashi’s action appeared in contradiction to Hamas’s stated reluctance to send women on martyrdom operations. Two years earlier, when Dareen Abu Aisheh, a member of the Hamas-affiliated Islamic Bloc at Al-Najah University, expressed her interest in carrying out a suicide attack, she was turned down by Hamas leader Jamal Mansour, who told her that the movement did not use women for such operations.<sup>44</sup> In an interview in 2002, Shaykh Yassin explained Hamas’s position on women’s role in the resistance to the occupation:

The woman is the second line of defense in resistance to the occupation, because she shelters the fugitives and she is the one who loses sons and husbands, and bears the consequences of this loss and the difficulties of the siege and hunger and carries the responsibility to look after the home and its finance.... Women have a big role in protecting the fighters and supporting them.... There are women who are ready to sacrifice their sons like the historical Khansa. The truth of the matter is that there are many women who want to participate in the Jihad and in martyrdom, as much as the men, but there are specificities pertaining to women and their role. Islam has placed several requirements for a woman who participates in the Jihad and in fighting, and in particular that she must have a specified chaperon. Women’s conditions are different from men’s and at this stage there is no need for their participation since we are not even able to take up all the requests [to participate in martyrdom operations] that we receive from men.<sup>45</sup>

The concern with the modesty and safety of the woman embarking on a martyrdom operation, which requires her to be accompanied by a chaperone, together with the fact that women’s primary role is supportive, while men are the ones who are tasked with carrying the fight, and given that there are enough men to do the job, led Hamas to discourage the women who sought martyrdom. In this, the movement’s practice was in line with the classical Islamic position on women’s participation in wars of jihad. Classical jurists have considered jihad to be a duty that is obligatory for Muslims who meet certain criteria, among them being male (alongside being an

adult, a free person, mentally healthy, and other conditions).<sup>46</sup> A hadith attributed to the prophet's wife Aisha, has been often invoked to support this division of labor. According to the hadith, Aisha asked the Prophet whether women were required to undertake jihad. He answered that they were required to engage in jihad but not of the combative kind. Women's jihad, or striving, he said, is the pilgrimage to Mecca—the Haj and the Umra.<sup>47</sup>

Riyashi had to repeatedly pressure Hamas operatives in the Qassam brigades and even Shaykh Yassin himself, to the point of harassment by some accounts, until they finally agreed to plan and execute her operation.<sup>48</sup> Despite the organization's reluctance and Shaykh Yassin's public rejection of the use of women, Riyashi was successful. How did she, and subsequently the Islamic Resistance Movement, justify this seeming transgression of Hamas's stated sexual division of labor? In what follows, I will show the extent to which Hamas's religious-nationalist ideology is built on the construction of exceptional temporality that provided Riyashi, and other women activists in Hamas, the discursive tools to create gendered frames of exception.

Suicide attack missions, or martyrdom operations, are already embedded within a frame of exception in Hamas's official rhetoric in which exceptional conditions brought about by an external threat sanction a defensive jihad. When enemies "set foot on the land of the Muslims," according to article 12 of Hamas's Charter, engaging in the religious-nationalist war of defense, or jihad, becomes an individual duty (*fard 'ayn*) incumbent on each individual.<sup>49</sup> While normally the obligation for jihad rests on the community as a whole (*fard kifaya*), under exceptional circumstances of invasion, that duty is transformed to encompass the individual as well. But exceptionality does not lie solely in the condition of invasion. The case of Palestine is considered by the religious authorities that Hamas follows as particularly unique. In the writings of Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, whom Hamas considers to be one of the most authoritative contemporary jurists,<sup>50</sup> the exceptional nature of Palestine is paramount. In his exposition on the *fiqh* of jihad, Shaykh Qaradawi states that martyrdom operations (*'amaliyyat istishhadiyya*) are everywhere forbidden, *except* in Palestine. He writes, "We permit these operations to the brothers in Palestine due to their special circumstances, for their self-defense, for defending their families and children and holy places. [T]hese [circumstances] are what force them to resort to such operations, as they do not have



an alternative. But we do not permit the use of these operations outside of Palestine because of the absence there of the same necessity which makes such actions required or permissible.”<sup>51</sup>

Those who use the Palestinian example to argue for the permissibility of martyrdom operations in countries other than Palestine, like Algeria, Egypt, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, or Pakistan, according to Qaradawi, are constructing “false analogies,” and their arguments are therefore unacceptable from the perspective of the sharia.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, while civilians should not be targeted in jihad, Israel is an *exceptional* case because all of its citizens are to be considered soldiers, whether active or reserve. “The Israeli society ... in its entirety is a military society [*mujtama’ ‘askari*]”; this is due to the fact, Qaradawi writes, that “all adults in it, whether men or women, are conscripted to the Israeli army, each Israeli is a soldier or a reserve soldier. Those who are called ‘civilians’ are in fact soldiers.”<sup>53</sup>

Martyrdom operations, therefore, are permitted in exceptional situations, which the context of the Israeli occupation of Palestine presents. Here Qaradawi explicitly constructs a frame of exception specific to Palestine in which urgent necessity temporarily suspends even the most venerated religious obligations. In this case, Qaradawi invokes an established legal principle that is in itself a frame of exception—“necessity permits the prohibited” (*al-darurat tubih al-mahdhurat*):

There are two types of rules: rules for times of choice and rules for conditions of distress and necessity. Things that are forbidden to a Muslim in a time of choice are permitted in times of necessity. For this reason although God forbade in the Quran [the ingestion of] four things—what dies of itself [carrion], and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that over which any other [name] than [that of] Allah has been invoked—He permitted these taboos in cases of necessity. “[B]ut whoever is driven by necessity, not desiring, nor exceeding the limit, no sin shall be upon him; surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful” [Quran 2:173]. From this the *fuqaha* [jurists] established a rule: *necessity permits the prohibited* and our brothers in Palestine are in a condition of necessity without a doubt, it is an urgent and imperative necessity to undertake these martyrdom operations, to disturb their enemies ... to instill fear in their hearts, to make their lives miserable until they have no choice but to leave and return to where they came from.<sup>54</sup>

The vocabulary of exception is explicitly gendered in the aforementioned article 12 in Hamas’s Charter stipulating the nature of jihad in Palestine. Because it is an individual duty (*fard ‘ayn*), it becomes “binding on every Muslim man and woman; a woman must go out and fight the enemy even without her husband’s authorization, and a slave without his masters’ permission.”<sup>55</sup>

Normally, the article implies, women should seek the permission of their husbands. However, the exceptional situation that exists in the Palestinian territories demands a modification. Women are therefore instructed to participate in the jihad even without their husbands' agreement. The urgent and unusual temporality of the nationalist struggle modifies religiously sanctioned gendered relations.

Yet until Riyashi's operation, Hamas's practice and official rhetoric interpreted women's role in jihad as supportive—sheltering fighters, providing logistic support, contributing materially to the resistance, and most importantly, producing and rearing children for the cause of liberation. Riyashi's action was exceptional and was followed by only one more woman from Hamas to execute a martyrdom operation. In the following section, I present Riyashi's own explanation for her motivation and her interpretation of the source of legitimacy for her seemingly transgressive act. I quote Riyashi extensively also to correct a lacuna in writings on women's engagement in terrorism and specifically in martyrdom operations. As others have pointed out, popular and academic treatments of the subject tend to either bestow deviant agency that is sexualized and gendered in a way that represents women terrorists as *femme fatales*, or deny them any agency by depicting them as dupes or victims of men's machinations.<sup>56</sup> A typical report by the Israeli Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, for example, argues that "women's willingness to carry out suicide bombing attacks stems, to a great extent, from personal problems and not specifically religious Islamic or Palestinian nationalist motivation. An analysis of the female suicide bombers profile shows that most of them were on the fringes of Palestinian society because somehow they had disobeyed one of the unwritten laws governing the behavior of women in conservative Palestinian society."<sup>57</sup> The words of the women themselves are almost never heard in such analyses because what they have to say is often not taken seriously.

### *Femininity, Masculinity, and Jihad—Reem Riyashi's Last Message*

Before embarking on her martyrdom mission, Riyashi left a message to be shared with the Palestinian public and with the world after her death.<sup>58</sup> I bring here most of Riyashi's text in order to analyze the framing process that militant women undertake within the context of Hamas's religious-nationalist objectives. In decrying the state in which Palestinian men and women find themselves, Riyashi plays

on the reversal of roles between the sexes, in which women become masculine and men become feminine. Denouncing secular and religious male leadership and the men of the Arab and Muslim world for having abandoned their roles as fighters and protectors of the nation, Riyashi calls on women to temporarily assume these roles that have been relinquished by the men. Her underlying message is that this reversal of roles is absurd and transgressive, but it is also righteous and imperative due to the urgency of the exceptional situation and the existential peril under which the nation finds itself. Her text reveals a complicated subversion of femininity and masculinity, which on the one hand challenges accepted gender constructions by framing women's transgressive action as necessary, righteous, and required by the nationalist struggle, while on the other hand is ultimately bound by such constructions and mourns their loss:

My dear sisters, women and children of the Arab nation, allow me to speak to you my last words before the action I am about to carry out, hoping that Allah will accept my martyrdom and will help me kill a great number of the occupying Zionist soldiers. I address you and not the men because I no longer see men in our nation except for a few remaining ones in Palestine and Iraq. You [the women] are the only remaining hope of this nation after it had been emptied of men. You are responsible for leading this nation to victory and to strength and honor after the pseudo-men [*ashbah al-rijal*] had brought her to this present lowliness and shame which envelop her from west to east. You are the ones who shall carry the nation's banner and raise it among the flags of the other nations after the pseudo-men among the rulers and the ulama and the intellectuals and those who call themselves the "elite" had degraded it.... And I advise [these pseudo-men] to attach the feminine "nun" to [the] adjectives and verbs [that they use to describe themselves] for they are indeed worthy of it.

Her words are clearly meant not only for a female audience but perhaps more significantly to the men in Riyashi's community and in the wider Arab and Muslim community. Calling them pseudo-men and telling them they should start referring to themselves with feminine adjectives, Riyashi challenges their masculinity for having failed to take action for the cause of Palestine and Islam. The fact that women are the ones left to carry the flag of the nation is an indictment of men's failure. The purpose here is not to advocate equality between men and women in the struggle but rather to expose the desperation of the nation which has no men to carry its fight. These unusual conditions lead women to acquire roles that are normally inappropriate for them, according to Riyashi. Taking on such roles does not stem from women's choice but is rather imposed on them within an exceptionally catastrophic situation in which choice is not available. The assumption of transgressive gender roles

takes place only with their simultaneous disavowal. By emphasizing the unavailability of choice, Riyashi denies the possibility of transgression as a function of a coherent feminist alternative to Hamas's dominant gender doctrine.

From your wombs, women of the nation, there will emerge children who will return this nation to its former glory with their blood and their severed bodies. From the children of this nation will come those who were brought up throwing stones and facing tanks with their bare chests and they will deliver this nation from its rulers, then from the deserters and the hypocrites and the saboteurs and lastly, they will deliver it from the usurper Jews!

Riyashi asserts the almost universal nationalist trope of women as "wombs" whose role is to create male agents. The preceding paragraph clearly indicates that Riyashi sees her and other women's transgression as a temporary one. Once they give birth to a new generation that is more righteous than their present one, it would be their sons, and not they, who will lead the fight against the occupation.

My sisters, I beseech Allah to accept me as a martyr tomorrow, and I yearn to meet Him. I long to bear witness in front of Him to my nation and my era and my time. I burn with the wish to bear witness against the rulers of lowliness and treachery. I wish to bear witness in front of Him against every ruler who has given up our Quds and our Palestine and our people. I will bear witness to every person who has deprived our children of the little and wretched aid, abiding by the command of his ruler in the White House. I bear witness to everyone who has extended his hand to the Jews and deprived it from his brothers, the Muslims. I bear witness to every person who has fought his own people and has forsaken the fight against its enemies. I bear witness to every person who has lived for his throne instead of for his people and every person who sold his homeland in return for rule.... I yearn to come to my Lord as a witness against the ulama who are more concerned with fatwas on marriage and divorce than with the bombs and missiles that fall on us like rain.... I want to bear witness that they are silent devils who say only what can preserve their position and provide them with money.... I want to bear a special testimony against Shaykh Al-Azhar, Al-Tantawi, the slave of Mubarak, but I will not share it with you, as it is a secret between me and my Creator.

After my martyrdom tomorrow ... you will hear many who will say that I had put myself in a perilous situation. Some will say I committed suicide, and some will say I was a fool who left her children and did not respect the honor of her husband and family and people. To these I say: leave alone my poisoned flesh and be satisfied with the morsels that the ruler throws at you to eat and the discarded scraps on which you raise your children. But as for me, I believe that my provider and the provider of my children after I am gone is God ... who will be in charge of raising my children once I am gone.

Riyashi's is an extreme case, but her powerful words, and the attention they received at the time, are telling. The diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames she constructs, though significantly harsher, resonate with the ones we have seen in the case of the settler movement and the nationalist elements in the Islamic

Movement in Israel. Riyashi's stated motivation is a burning concern for the fate of the nation and its future generations. As a mother, she is moved to act in defense of the helpless nation that is under attack. In a time of unbearable danger posed to the nation, she feels empowered to criticize secular male leadership, as well as a religious leadership that is more concerned with rulings on marriage and divorce, or with issues of modesty and patriarchal obedience than with the fight against occupation. The prognostic frame she employs identifies women's action as temporarily necessary in order to support the fight and stir men's sense of responsibility. As the preceding discussion makes clear, however, Riyashi does not seek to challenge Hamas's gender ideology, which upholds complementarity and a sexual division of labor. But the shortcomings of the men within the context of the nationalist struggle and the exceptional temporality that is brought about by the nature of the threat and the feeble response to it are identified as the cause for women's transgression; the latter is deemed necessary and righteous considering the unusual circumstances of occupation, betrayal, and paralysis.

### *Motherhood and Jihad*

Riyashi was not only the first woman suicide bomber from Hamas, she was also the first mother to execute such an operation. Riyashi was a mother of two, unlike the seven preceding female suicide bombers belonging to other factions who did not have children. Hamas's official discourse is highly committed to motherhood as a woman's foremost duty. However, when an impossible conflict arose between the two, Hamas's publications worked to justify the precedence that women's commitment to jihad takes over their duties as homemakers and mothers.

In Hamas's publications after Riyashi's attack, articles covering her story extensively addressed the problem of motherhood. In the conflict between the mother's duty to raise her children and her commitment to a militant jihad that required her to put her life at risk and thus relinquish her maternal responsibilities, the duty of jihad received prominence over motherly duties. "The love of God, His religion and its tenets," it is asserted in one of the articles covering the issue, "comes before all other love or sentiment."<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, an attempt to negate the presence of a conflict appears in the assertion that Riyashi had actually greatly benefited her children through her act. A piece in *Filastin al-Muslima* titled "Reem

Riyashi's Martyrdom—An Honor to Her Children"<sup>60</sup> rebuts criticism by Palestinian commentators who have questioned Hamas's use of a mother of two and who have spread rumors that tarnished Riyashi's reputation, in particular arguing that she was unfaithful to her husband and had no choice but to seek martyrdom as repentance. In response to such charges, the article says that Riyashi chose to undertake this action out of her own free will and belief in God. It is impossible, the article argues, to force anyone to perform such an act. In addition, the fact that Riyashi left behind two children is transformed from a negative thing, as the critics argue, to a positive gift she has bestowed on her children. Her martyrdom honors her children, and this bliss will accompany them for the rest of their lives. Moreover, the article claims, although they have lost their mother, they will be compensated for her loss by all the women of Palestine, who will offer to assist them and care for them.<sup>61</sup>

Another article, titled "Reem Riyashi—A Different Kind of Martyr," addresses similar issues. The article states, "Amongst the Palestinian martyrs, Reem is a special case, she is the first of her kind, not because she is the first Hamas martyr or because she is the first woman to undertake such an operation—many women have preceded her—but because she is the first female martyr who is married and has children."<sup>62</sup> The article also mentions that Riyashi ends her videotaped message of departure with an assertion of her strong love for her children. The article reinforces this in order to remove any doubt about Riyashi's commitment to her children. However, it goes on to say that, "Reem was not only a wife and a mother, but also a faithful believer. Her motherhood did not prevent her from realizing her dream of martyrdom in the path of God.... Reem continues a tradition of female martyrdom. Women have urged their sons to undertake martyrdom and have supported their husbands' martyrdom."

Though addressing different kinds of women's action, Riyashi's and Hamas's discourse is strikingly similar to the discourse emanating from the settlement activists that dealt with participation in physical confrontations. In the framing process that takes place in these two religious-nationalist movements, the prioritization of the nationalist struggle over all other considerations opens spaces for women's significant transgression of the dominant gender ideology of their movements. However, women's new acts are framed as being exceptional and atypical—the consequence of troubling and

unusual times in which the hazard to the nation leaves no choice but to engage in temporary transgressions.

### *Modesty and Jihad*

As in the case of the conflict between motherhood and jihad, on the issue of modesty, Hamas's official rhetoric embraced frames of exception around Riyashi's action, resolving what would appear as a contradiction by building on the logic of exception in which the unique circumstances of an existential threat create a necessity "that makes the forbidden permissible." As was noted earlier, Shaykh Yassin had for many years objected to female military participation for reasons of modesty. After Riyashi's operation, Hamas circulated a fatwa issued by Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi that bestows religious legitimacy on women's participation in suicide missions and resolves the problems posed by the compromising of female modesty.<sup>63</sup> The fatwa begins with a justification of women's participation in jihad because it is a *fard 'ayn* in Palestine, where the jihad is defensive and imposed by an invasion, rather than offensive and a matter of choice. In this case, women can take part even if their husbands or fathers object to their participation because, "there is no obedience to a creature in disobedience to the Creator" (*la ta'ata li-makhluqfi ma'asiyat al-khaliq*). It then addresses the question of the *mahram*, the male chaperone women are required to have when traveling: "As for the point that carrying out this operation may involve woman's travel from one place to another without a *mahram*, we say that a woman can travel to perform Haj in the company of other trustworthy women and without the presence of any *mahram* as long as the road is safe and secured. Travel, nowadays, is no longer done through deserts or wilderness; instead, women can travel safely in trains or by air."

Most importantly, according to the fatwa, the necessary and urgent nature of the jihad overrides a woman's obligation to wear the hijab at all times when outside the home:

As for the question of the hijab, she can wear a hat in order to cover her hair... Moreover, if at a critical moment she must take off the hijab in order to carry out the operation, since her purpose is to die in the path of Allah and not to flaunt and expose herself, we do not need to be concerned about the removal of her hijab, as the issue is permitted and there is no problem with it.

For Qaradawi, if the existential need of the community, meaning here a defensive jihad, conflicts with other individual religious requirements—like the donning of the hijab—the individual

requirement, in this case the rules of modesty, should be temporarily suspended for the sake of the greater communal need.<sup>64</sup> Qaradawi, and Hamas following him, construct here a frame of exception, a condition of necessity that “makes the forbidden permissible.”

In 2005, Hamas announced the creation of a women’s brigade within its military wing Izz a-Din al-Qassam. The women’s branch was small, subordinated to the men’s branch, and did not take part in the same activities as the men’s did. Even if the creation of the women’s brigade was meant more for public relations purposes than for operational duties, it is significant that Hamas women and men chose to highlight women’s militarism as a facet of the organization’s work. An article on the women fighters demonstrates the importance Hamas assigns to motherhood and homemaking as an essential part of a woman’s role, but also shows how in the case of the women fighters, as in Riyashi’s case, an accommodation of women’s multiple duties within the religious-nationalist struggle is sought.<sup>65</sup> In the interviews in the women’s training camp, a reporter from Hamas’s paper *Al-Risala* asks questions pertaining to the accommodation of the women’s military role with their domestic duties: “What has motivated these women to come here? ... Wouldn’t it be more appropriate for them to sit at home and devote themselves to raising children and providing them with a religious upbringing?” The female commander he interviews answers: “And who told you that was not a main part of these women’s agenda? It is important to remember that the occupation forces never distinguish between children, youth, women and the old, every Palestinian is a target for them. Therefore everyone must train in order to defend himself and his family, including women.”

When asked about the women’s brigade’s goals, the female commander explains that in their activity, the women fighters do not challenge the fact that the battlefield is a male arena. She presents the women’s activity as providing support for the men rather than attempting to assume the men’s role. “We are not here to prove that women can compete with men, we are here to perform the orders of Allah who has instructed us, men and women, to participate in the jihad.... It is our honor to ‘compete’ with the men in jihad but the men are much more advanced in this field and they are the ones who have been fighting and sacrificing, but we are trying to lift from them some of this load.” The article reflects the tension that exists between Hamas’s gender ideology and the activities in which it says



its members must engage due to the exceptional requirements of the religious-nationalist struggle.

### **Conclusion: The Effects of Asymmetry**

In the movements that advocate a religious-nationalist agenda, the tools for constructing frames of exception are available within the foundational ideology of the movements and their official discourse. Yet despite the similarities in the discursive deployment of frames of exception by women in the different groups, it is also important to draw out specific distinctions that arise from the fact that these groups are differently positioned in relation to the power structures that make up the conflict in which they are entangled. The settlers and Hamas are of course asymmetrically positioned in terms of power and resources. While the settlers are supported and protected by an established state and one of the strongest militaries in the Middle East, Hamas operates within a context of occupation in which, although it receives support and financing from regional backers, its work is highly circumvented by both Israel and rival Palestinian factions.

In such differing realities, the understanding of what does and does not fall within the realm of exception also differs. In both movements, women say they are compelled to engage in more transgressive acts for the sake of their children, land, and nation. In the face of incredible danger, they say, they suspend some gendered commitments for a greater defensive need. However, what counts as defensive acts varies between these two movements. In the settlers' case, women rarely participate in explicitly violent attacks on Palestinians—for example, in retaliatory and offensive “price tag” attacks, which target Palestinian property and, sometimes, individuals. The fact that the settlers are backed by a military apparatus means that it is highly unlikely that such attacks could be construed as defensive. For Hamas, on the other hand, the condition of a suffocating occupation and the reality of siege and lack of choice means that acts such as suicide attacks can and are described as defensive, a part of a defensive jihad in Palestine, and so women and the movement can convincingly deploy frames of exception for participation in them. Although, of course, this participation in itself remains exceptional and rare. Out of 156 participants in martyrdom operations during the second intifada (2000–2005), only eight were women, and only two of these were from Hamas.<sup>66</sup>

## 5

### Women's Formal Representation: Overlapping Frames

Not only conservative religious-political movements have low levels of women's formal representation in their leadership or representative bodies. A wide array of social movements—secular, religious, progressive, left and right wing—lack significant representation for women in the highest decisionmaking roles.<sup>1</sup> In addition, women's representation in most political parties, parliaments, and local government around the world still lags behind that of men.

Within socially conservative religious-political movements whose core ideological commitments include a divinely sanctioned role-complementarity and a sexual division of labor, women's formal political representation is often exceedingly low. Yet, in some of these movements women attain an impressive degree of public visibility and presence in formal decision-making bodies. How does this seemingly contradictory reality, which appears to pit the movements' actual practice against their professed gender ideology, become possible?

The central argument of this book is that it is the other ideological commitments of the movements, which are unrelated to women and gender, that enable women to perform roles that do not accord with their movements' complementarian ideology. Most powerfully, a concern with a nationalist or communalist agenda provides women and movements with the discursive tools to create diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames that justify an exceptional, temporary, and out-of-the-ordinary transgression of gender ideology for the sake of a more urgent cause. This framing process, as [chapter 4](#) outlined, is most powerful in enabling conservative religious women to engage in forms of public protest that could be deemed "immodest." Beyond this, the religious-nationalist movements in this study aim to recruit the entire nation—whether religious or not—to their nationalist struggle. This recruiting requires the maintaining of a certain tolerance toward

secular members of the nation as well as the need to appear less “other” to the mainstream national community. The boundaries between the religious and secular at times need to be intentionally blurred in order to bring closer, rather than alienate, the secular. The primarily proselytizing movements, on the other hand, strive to offer a strict alternative to secular lifestyle and thus significantly stress boundaries—between the religious and the secular—most visibly demarcated by women’s dress, behavior, and roles.

This chapter investigates levels of women’s formal representation in the four movements, and how these are enabled. As expected, we find significant representation of women in the two movements that are primarily religious-nationalist—the settlers and Hamas. We also find no women’s formal political representation in the predominantly proselytizing Shas movement. The chapter argues that first, the urgent, “unusual” temporality that religious-nationalists inhabit and the prioritization of the existential struggle against a threatening “other” facilitate a particularly potent framing process by women activists and even by the male leadership. Second, the chapter shows that the effort to recruit the entire nation, in which religious-nationalist movements engage, requires the strategic placement of women in visible positions. Finally, the chapter brings the relatively unheard voices of women activists in all four movements that offer a different worldview than the official gender ideology of the movements. Women’s significant activism, which is essential to all religious-political movements, leads some of them to argue that they have the skills and qualities required to become formal leaders, and that as women they *should* be involved in such work.

### **Women’s Formal Representation in the Settler Movement**

The decentralized structure of the settler movement makes the identification of its formal leadership bodies more complicated than the other three, significantly hierarchal, movements. There are three arenas in which settlers’ formal leadership is most evident. First, in past and present political parties affiliated exclusively or partly with the cause of the settlements (the National Religious Party (NRP), Moledet, Tehiya, Ihud Leumi, and Habayit Hayehudi) or with religious factions within other parties (most prominently in the Likud party). Second, in the Judea and Samaria Council (Yesha Council), which serves as the formal bureaucratic coordinating

forum for settlements local government. And finally, in each settlement's local council.

In the Knesset, the representation of Orthodox settler women has been miniscule. The National Religious Party (NRP) that has existed since the first Knesset and much prior to the birth of the settlement project, has had at least one woman Member of Knesset (MK) since 1959. However, from its establishment the NRP was the political representative body of the entire Zionist Orthodox community in Israel rather than the subsection of Orthodox settlers, and sought to promote the interests of this larger group. In fact, until the rise of Gush Emunim ideologists within the NRP in the 1980s and their eventual takeover, which led to the party's demise, the NRP was more closely aligned with the Labor party than with the Israeli right.<sup>2</sup> None of the women MKs at the NRP were settlers or settlements advocates.<sup>3</sup> The other explicitly settlement-affiliated religious parties that came to take the place of the NRP—Ihud Leumi (National Union) and Habayit Hayehudi (Jewish Home)—have not included women representatives until 2013, when Orit Struk from Hebron and Shuli Mualem from Neve Daniel joined the Jewish Home list. The Land of Israel faction within the Likud party similarly includes religious women but no Orthodox women settlers. The absence of religious women settler representatives from the Knesset is striking especially in view of the manifest over-representation of settlers in the Knesset in comparison with the size of the settler population.<sup>4</sup>

The Yesha Council has historically been dominated by religious men. However, a small number of women have also been a part of the council. For example, Daniela Weiss, the former head of Kdumim local council (1996–2001) has been a long-time member. The council has also had a woman spokesperson (Emily Amrusy, 2005–2007). Following the Gaza disengagement, the council underwent a restructuring, and its membership rose from 24 to 124 and later to 130. Though still overwhelmingly male, the representation given to individual settlements, including secular ones, has increased the number of women represented in the council. The real decision-making power remains in the hands of the 26-member steering committee. On average, two women serve on the steering committee, and one even served as the deputy head of the council (Sarah Eliyash of Kdumim).<sup>5</sup>

In settlement local government, women have significant representation. There are six regional councils, each representing a cluster of small settlements, and seventeen local councils in the West Bank.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, information about the gender composition of local councils is not available. Neither the Elections Committee, nor the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, nor the ministry of the interior and other government ministries compile these data. Therefore, an analysis of trends in women's representation in settlements' local government over time is difficult. For levels of women's representation in local and regional councils in 2010, as presented in table 5.1, I collected information found on councils' websites or through phone inquiries with councils' offices and from the Central Elections Committee.

As can be gleaned from table 5.1, women do have some representation in religious settlement's local government. The overall rate of representation of women in settlement local councils in 2010 was 12.79 percent. Orthodox settlements had 17.14 percent women in local councils, secular settlements had a rate of 20 percent, mixed settlements had 13.21 percent and ultra-Orthodox settlements had no women council members. The overall rate of women's representation in settlement councils was close to the national rate of women's representation in local councils, which stood at 11 percent in 2009<sup>7</sup> and at 12.7 percent in 2013.<sup>8</sup> The national rate for local councils in Jewish municipalities in 2013 excluding Arab and ultra-Orthodox municipalities was close to 19 percent.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, the fact that the settlement municipalities have mostly middle-class residents and that they are more affluent than many municipalities within Israel has played a role in accounting for the levels of women's representation there. But the strategies by which Orthodox settler women justify, and even promote, women's involvement in local politics merit close consideration. These strategies share similarities, but also significant differences, with those that women more broadly use to facilitate political participation.

TABLE 5.1. Women's Representation in Settlement Regional and Local Councils 2010

Council	Religious Composition <sup>a</sup>	Population <sup>b</sup> 2008 (thousands)	Socioeconomic Cluster <sup>c</sup>	Number of Council Seats	Number of Women in Council <sup>d</sup>	Percentage of Women in Council
<b>Regional Councils</b>						
Gush Etzion	8 Orthodox settlements, 2 secular, 2 mixed, 2 ultra-Orthodox	14.4	4	17	6	35.29%
Mount Hebron	8 Orthodox, 4 secular, 1 mixed	6	2	13	1	7.69%
Binyamin	14 Orthodox, 7 secular, 3 mixed, 2 ultra-Orthodox	45.6	3	30	2	6.67%
Samaria	12 Orthodox, 9 secular, 5 mixed	23.6	4	35	2	5.71%
<b>Local Councils</b>						
Elkana	Orthodox	3.1	8	8	2	25%
Efrata	Orthodox	8.2	6	9	2	22.22%

Kdumim	Orthodox	3.5	5	9	2	22.22%
Beit El	Orthodox	5.4	4	9	0	0%
Ariel	Mixed	16.7	6	11	2	18.18%
Ma'ale Edumim	Mixed	33.8	6	15	2	13.33%
Oranit	Mixed	6.3	7	9	2	22.22%
Kiryat Arba	Mixed	7.2	3	9	0	0%
Karnei Shomron	Mixed	6.6	5	9	1	11.11%
Alfei Menashe	Secular	6.6	8	9	2	22.22%
Givat Zeev	Secular	11.1	6	11	2	18.18%
Har Hadar	Secular	3.1	9	9	2	22.22%
Beit Aryeh	Secular	3.8	7	9	2	13.33%
Ma'ale Efrayim	Secular	1.4	5	7	1	22.22%
Beitar Ilit	Ultra-Orthodox	34.8	1	15	0	0%
Emanuel	Ultra-Orthodox	2.9	2	9	0	0%
Modi'in Ilit	Ultra-Orthodox	41.9	1	15	0	0%

<sup>a</sup> Gathered from settlements' websites and from the Yesha Council website.

<sup>b</sup> Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics data for 2008, available at [www1.cbs.gov.il/webpub/pub/text\\_page\\_eng.html?publ=100&CYear=2008&CMonth=1](http://www1.cbs.gov.il/webpub/pub/text_page_eng.html?publ=100&CYear=2008&CMonth=1) (accessed April 17, 2015).

<sup>c</sup> 10 is the highest socioeconomic level, and 1 is the lowest.

<sup>d</sup> Israeli Elections Committee, settlements' websites, and phone conversations with council offices.

Scholars have identified local government as a more natural domain for women's political participation.<sup>10</sup> This level of government is concerned with local issues such as health, education, welfare, and social and cultural life. Although public, these arenas are perceived as closer to the private sphere and to appropriate women's concerns than national-level foreign policy, national security, or economic policy. Daniela Weiss of the Kdumim settlement local council, for instance, says that "Municipal work is an especially feminine work. It is like running a large household."<sup>11</sup>

Orthodox settler women who are engaged in formal politics generally explain that the domain of national politics is not suitable for most women. Hanna explains the unique features of women's activism. As she sees it, women naturally prefer to work on the grassroots local level and shy away from formal leadership positions:

In the activities of *Zu Artzenu* [a protest initiative against ceding territories to the Palestinians following the Oslo Accord], there were many women, the majority was women, I think, also in the demonstrations. But the moment we consolidated ourselves into a more structured political movement, I saw the auditorium with the people who were proposing themselves for candidacy, to be members of the central committee, all of a sudden there were so many men. The women are not interested in this, even though in practice formal institutions are necessary to bring forth the realization of our ideals for which we took to the streets. But this doesn't interest the women, they are not concerned with being at the head, they are not motivated by that.

As [chapter 4](#), on women's participation in protest, showed, women justify their actions by stressing their emotional, uncompromising commitment to the struggle. This same rationale is also used by some activists to explain why women should not be placed in high-level decision-making roles. Tzviya, an activist who had considered running for office, says, "There is a problem, a person who leads a struggle doesn't belong in the Knesset because that person is very idealist, very sharp in his ideology, so he can't be a member of Parliament because he doesn't compromise. In the Knesset you need people who are more general."

Yona, a civil society leader in the settler movement, expresses precisely a common sentiment of many of my interlocutors—both in formal and informal leadership positions:

I was asked to run for head of the municipal council, it was on two occasions, and it was with the support of the rabbis. I was very conflicted because I'm always debating between two things: first, on the one hand I know the woman's determination, I know her dedication, the persevering, that you do not stop until you reach the goal. But on the other hand, I feel that the woman's role is not in



this. And it is possible that her effectiveness, when she does it, is not in the front row but a little behind the men. I think that sometimes her power is greater there.... I think that the man has a side that is stronger in him, he is less emotional. I can testify about myself that often emotions are very much involved, in a powerful way, and sometimes it causes the flames to rise too high. And in this stage in life, right now, I feel that this is right. The front line is not what's important. In the last elections to the *Ihud Leumi*, there was no woman representative. I think that did a lot of harm. But I and other active women worked hard to explain that this is not the main issue at this moment—whether women are in the front or not in the front, whether women are on the list or not on the list—but rather what the representatives will do for the sake of *Eretz Yisrael*.... What's important to me is what's being done more than who is doing it. I think that men can represent the issue of *Eretz Yisrael* and they can struggle for it. That is the issue—the What not the Who.

The focus on the *What*—fighting for the Land of Israel—rather than the *Who*—the ascriptive identity of the leadership in the struggle, however, leads other women activists in a different direction than the one Yona suggests. There is no debate that the *What* is indeed the most important objective. Precisely due to this, some activists within the settler movement have pointed to the strategic importance of choosing the right people to be on the front line in promoting the cause. People such as Moshe Feiglin, Daniela Weiss, and others, for instance, have criticized the Yesha Council for being homogenous and unrepresentative and consequently, they argued, antagonizing or marginalizing groups within Israeli society that could have been allies in the fight for the settlements.<sup>12</sup> Especially following the Gaza disengagement in 2005, an event that caused many in the movement to feel isolated and estranged from the wider Israeli public, the Yesha Council and the settlements' affiliated parties have lost legitimacy and support within the settler activist community due to their failure to prevent the disengagement.

It was within this context that several women activists publicly voiced their critique over the unrepresentative nature of the settlers' leadership. Ella, a member of the original Gush Emunim cohort and a leading figure in her settlement, and her friends, even took action. She told me that before the 2009 election, she and a group of women went to Uri Ariel, Aryeh Eldad, and Beni Eylon (MKs of the *Ihud Leumi* party) and complained to them about the homogenous character of the leadership elite; all Ashkenazi, male, old—sixty something—and their monopolizing of power. They threatened that if the party candidate list did not include a younger person, a Mizrahi person, and a woman, they will not vote for them. They threatened that they would establish a women's party. Although the

MKs seemed to have listened to them, when the election came, nothing was changed and the list was again exclusively male.

Ella explicitly links the exclusion of women and other groups from leadership positions to the electoral failure of settlers' parties in 2009. She argues that this marginalization directly harms the struggle for the cause.

There was a woman journalist, a leftist, secular, who went to interview the Yesha Council ... and she said, "There is one thing that I don't understand. The girls are the big fighters, they are at the head of the struggle, they do everything, they are the courageous ones, and all of a sudden a rabbi says this or that about them, what do you care what the rabbi said?!" There is this thing with rabbis, we women cannot be rabbis, and also on the political level ... the people that led the struggle were mainly women, even in Gush Katif [Gaza settlement]. It was the women and the youth. But when it came to elections they didn't have a woman or a young person on the list. That is why they don't get that many votes. This is something that we need to work on, we should have created a big party of all the people from the Right, [a party] of Land of Israel people.... We should have had representatives from the periphery also, a lot of good people that we don't even reach. We should have had a woman, we should have had a young person.... [But] the men are really stuck there.

Activists in the movement, and some men too, were able to use the urgency of the struggle for the Land to construct frames that advocated greater women's representation. Within the diagnostic framing process, they identified the unrepresentative composition of the settlers' leadership as alienating to the general Israeli public. Their prognostic frame—what is to be done about this—argued that the leadership should therefore be more representative. Their motivational frame, the reasons and motivations for acting toward greater representation, did not rest on a feminist notion of gender equality. Rather, it was the concern for the Land and the imminent threat to the settlements that urged women to act. In response to the rising criticism against the traditional settlers' leadership and in an attempt to restore its legitimacy, the Yesha Council undertook a restructuring. As mentioned earlier, this move opened up membership to nonsettlers and, by including representatives from each settlement rather than only local and regional council heads, increased the number of secular and women members.<sup>13</sup>

This has been a feature of settlers' activism even before the disengagement. For example, Gush Emunim founders like Hanan Porat did not shy away from running for the Knesset as part of a right-wing party led by a secular woman—Tehiya (1979–1992), under the leadership of Geula Cohen. The need to appeal to nonreligious and nonsettler Jewish Israeli publics has also meant that

the movement has at times employed a particular kind of spokeswomen. Women like Michal Shvut (spokeswoman for some of the first settlements established by Gush Emunim), Inbal Melamed (unofficial spokeswoman of the Yesha Rabbis Union), and Emily Amrusy (Yesha Council spokeswoman, 2005–2007) share several features. The three of them have had some secular background and therefore an understanding of the “secular world” (the Melamed and Amrusy families became religious when they were in middle school, Amrusy has been a journalist in the secular media, and Michal Shvut does not wear a head-cover), and all three are attractive, talented, and articulate women. In a way, these women’s public appearance is the antithesis of the zealot, armed, bearded settler stereotype.

One of my interlocutors who served as a spokeswoman suggests that the fact that she was “a little different from the [religious settlers’] group” attracted the secular media and gave her an edge as a spokesperson. Amrusy, on the other hand, objects to the suggestion that her appointment as a spokeswoman had some strategic consideration. She told me, “I didn’t like these statements, ‘They appointed her because she is a woman and she is softer, and so on and that will help us with PR.’ I preferred to believe that I was chosen because of my skills.” She does admit, though, to a certain advantage that having someone that looks like her might generate, “Once you [the secular public] make us into such complete ‘others,’ you can justify not listening to us and not confronting our positions. But if I look like the next door neighbor or your sister or your friend, and the only difference is that I wear a hat or a headscarf, then it’s confusing. But if I am a complete other, then you are exempt from confronting what I have to say.”

Blurring the external, visible boundary markers between the religious and nonreligious—most commonly embodied in women’s appearance and behavior—is a unique feature of the religious-nationalist movement. In order to recruit secular members of the nation to the settlement cause, boundaries at times are deemphasized rather than fortified. Nadia Mater, for example, told me of employing this logic in the establishment of her settlement civil protest group, Women in Green:

In 1993, Rabin and Peres came to power and everything was shattered. In May of 1993 there was much talk about withdrawing from the Golan Heights so we went to Jerusalem to a demonstration against a withdrawal. The next day the news broadcasted a scary picture of a bearded, Uzi-toting settler and a small child with a

big yarmulke and a banner standing next to him. My mother-in-law told me: The Israeli media always delegitimize people who oppose the forsaking of the Land of Israel. They broadcast scary stereotypes and say that we are using our children for political purposes. Let's start a movement of women—grandmothers, mothers, aunts, who dress like women dress in New York and Paris. We will be the state's conscience.<sup>14</sup>

Countering the stereotype of the masculine, threatening, armed religious zealot, the women who “dress like women dress in New York and Paris” strategically strive to paint a different, nonthreatening image of the settler.

This logic played a central role in the settler movement strategy for the 2013 and 2015 Knesset elections. Habayit Hayehudi, which is the settler-dominated reincarnation of the NRP, was headed by Naftali Bennet, a young and wealthy entrepreneur who wears a small, almost imperceptible yarmulke, and does not have a beard. Bennet's message in his 2013 campaign was that he was a “brother” of the secular middle class, rather than a strange, bearded “fundamentalist.” His list included a secular right-wing woman, Ayelet Shaked, in an attempt to appeal to secular voters. More importantly, the list also included Orit Struk from Hebron, and Shuli Mualem of Neve Daniel, who became, to the best of my knowledge, the first Orthodox settler women to be elected to the Knesset.

Even as they try to blur the symbolic boundaries between the religious and nonreligious, prominent women in formal positions within the movement explain their choice to pursue formal political work as a necessary evil they undertake for the sake of the struggle. The motivational frame they craft argues that though it might not be their natural or religiously sanctioned place, they are willing to sacrifice and get their hands dirty for the Land of Israel. The following interview with Orit Struk is an example not only of the way settler activists justify entering politics, but also that ultra-Orthodox nationalist settler rabbis authorize these women's activities by referring to the larger goal of the Land of Israel and the “unusual time” of urgent threat. In an interview with Tkuma, the settler list she was affiliated with, Struk was asked, “Your decision to partake in intensive public activity does not undermine the religious idea of female modesty?” She answered, “I did not want to leave the modest realm of ‘the honor of a king's daughter is within,’ but every time I was unsure about something—I asked a rabbi. When they asked me to run on the Tkuma party list, I conditioned my acceptance on the permission of Rabbi Dov Lior. I agreed only after he asked me to

join, and told me that in such a time it is permissible and even necessary for me to be on the list. And this is indeed difficult for me: I operate now in a masculine world, I hardly meet women and it's not easy, that is why I did everything based on a rabbi's advice."<sup>15</sup>

The interviewer then raised the question, "How does this work fit with raising your eleven children?" Struk's answer reveals the notion that for the sake of the Land of Israel many sacrifices, including readjustment of women's roles, are required. She says,

It is not easy at all, but for the sake of the Land of Israel we do many things that are not easy for us. When I had young children I had to get up at night for them; I used to motivate myself in the following way: When I did not sleep all night because of my public activities I told myself, "For your children you were willing to lose sleep but for Hebron you are unwilling to do so?" And when my children kept me up I said, "For Hebron you were willing to lose sleep but for your children you will not do so?"<sup>16</sup>

When I spoke to her, Struk, like many other women quoted in [chapter 4](#), explained women's activism in terms of women's uniqueness. Rather than being rational and calculated like men in politics, she argues, women become active when passionately and emotionally moved by commitment to the cause. This involvement, they say, is not like men's involvement, it is motivated by an uncompromising, maternal, emotional commitment to the Land:

It is clear that women come with an emotional and empathetic baggage. Usually, not always, they have greater motivation. Women do something because they believe in it, not to advance their careers. Even women in Peace Now, they have a much stronger emotional, internal, ideological, motivation [than the men]. They stick to principles rather than take a practical or pragmatic line. On the other hand, it could be that a woman who doesn't feel so strongly will not get into politics because women have it harder, they have to deal with many more barriers, so those who become active are those who could not have had it any other way, they had to get involved because they felt so strongly.<sup>17</sup>

Daniela Weiss is perhaps the most well-known woman settler leader. She has been the general secretary of Gush Emunim in the 1980s and the charismatic head of the Kdumim settlement local council (1996–2001). At the time of my fieldwork, she was leading a militant group of mainly young activists called The Land of Israel Loyalists. Weiss is among the staunchest advocates of prioritizing the Land over other religious and political concerns. She explains her choice to pursue even more militant activism following the Gaza disengagement by outlining the frames that utilize the nationalist component of the movement's ideology:

Some people argue that following the [Gaza] expulsion, we have to direct our efforts to other areas such as reconciliation [*kiruv levavot*—among Jews] or

deepening and strengthening religious faith. The approach I believe in, following Rabbi Kook, is that everything grows from the Land of Israel, and especially in our generation. It is in these days especially, when the wolves of the world's nations come together to sink their teeth into the flesh of the sheep, it is even more important to intensify the effort to settle the Land. We believe that the Land of Israel influences the unity of the People of Israel and their religious faith. She is the source of everything. Strengthening our hold of the Land unites the People.<sup>18</sup>

The problem, as she diagnoses it, is the danger to the Land of Israel posed by external enemies. The prognostic frame Weiss offers is to prioritize the fight for the Land over other issues of concern that the movement might have. These together lead naturally to the motivational frame—women act out of great concern for the Land of Israel and the sense of urgency the current threats bring. In the interview, Weiss was asked whether her decision to run for political office and her subsequent appointment of women to official leadership positions in her settlement was an intentional act to promote women's leadership. She answers, "It is typical of the generation of redemption, that the Land of Israel demands so much and, therefore, women come forth to serve with their heart and soul. It is this period [of approaching redemption] that caused it, not me." She explains that women have an exceptional attachment to the Land of Israel, "Women have always shown tremendous loyalty to the Land of Israel." It is this loyalty that forced her, too, to run for office and serve the settlements' cause. She was able to do so and manage her home and her public duty since, as she explains it, "G-d sent me a blessing on this subject, because I did things for the sake of the Land of Israel and not from personal interests." Weiss insists that she herself never wanted a leadership position but that it was her husband who understood that she could contribute to the settlers' cause, who pushed her toward this work. "He did a great deed for the people of Israel," she says, "In the test between the personal interest and the national interest—he chose the general Israeli interest over his personal need."<sup>19</sup>

### **The Islamic Movement: Explaining Regional Variation**

No woman holds a leadership position at the highest ranks of the Islamic Movement's administrative bodies (except for representatives charged specifically with managing local women's branches). In addition, no woman has ever served as a Knesset Member on behalf of the Movement's national coalition party. However, an examination of local politics reveals that the Movement does at times appoint women to its affiliated lists running in local

council elections, and a few women have even served as local council members as a part of some Islamic Movement local lists.

For the 2003 and 2008 local council elections, the Israeli Elections Committee did collect data on the sex of candidates running on local lists. This allows us to examine where the Islamic Movement included women on its lists as candidates and where it did not. The pattern that emerges reflects a geographic tendency. In the northern and Triangle regions of Israel, the Movement at times includes women candidates in two cities—Nazareth and Um al-Fahm—while in the southern Bedouin region the Islamic Movement never nominated women.

When we examine the data for all local council elections in Arab councils in Israel in 2003 and 2008, we find that the same pattern exists among all other parties and lists. In general, some women are included as candidates in the north and in the Triangle regions, but no women are included in the Bedouin south. This suggests that local norms in the regions in which the Movement operates may play a role in shaping the Movement's decision on whether or not to include women. However, local norms are not the whole story. A closer look at the instances in which the Islamic Movement included women on its lists in the north and the Triangle shows that in each of these a nationalist or communalist concern had been at the heart of the local election. This pattern supports the thesis that the nationalist or communalist aspect of these religious-political movements facilitates women's ascendance to formal political positions and engagement in forms of activism that, to a certain extent, transgress the Movement's official ideology.

Like the three other movements in this study, the Islamic Movement does not object on principle to women's political representation. Both women and men can, in theory, compete to become party candidates for the Knesset at the Islamic Movement membership congress elections. The only requirement to running is at least five years of membership in the Movement.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the Islamic Movement's Knesset party has never had a woman representative. Both men and women leaders and activists in the Movement point to three central barriers to women's formal representation. The first obstacle, they say, is women activists' own lack of interest in politics and their preference for working in other realms. This rationale fits with the Movement's role-complementarity model in which political leadership is seen as a

masculine domain and the reserve of men. The second obstacle, some women activists say, is that the Movement has not prioritized women's representation and has therefore not provided activists with the required training to pursue such work. Even though some women may be motivated to join politics, they do not receive the necessary tools and sufficient support from the Movement. Finally, leaders also point to conservative cultural norms which are not derived from Islam but rather from local customs and traditions, and which inhibit women's entry into formal politics.

While women's representation is highly stunted, there is a broad agreement that women's grassroots political work is essential for the Movement. In my conversations, members estimated that women's work probably accounts for 60 to 70 percent of the campaigning work during elections. The women build on their strong networks established through their complementarian activism to reach out to women, their families and friends. They organize election conferences and gatherings, distribute literature and social media content specific to women, and even at times organize segregated buses or rides to shuttle women to the polls. One example of the overlap between complementarian activism and political work is an event that Amal, an Islamic Movement kindergarten principal in the Triangle region told me about, that she organized at her kindergarten before the 2013 Knesset election. In coordination with the Movement's local leadership, she gathered over a hundred women at the kindergarten one evening for a sort of "women's town hall meeting" with Shaykh Sarsour. The purpose of the meeting was for the women to present all their questions and concerns to the MK, and for him to answer these, take note, and explain how the Movement through its political work in the Knesset would address these issues that were specific to women and their interests.

The male leadership in the Movement acknowledges that despite women's political instrumentality, they have not acquired commensurate formal representation. Shaykh Daabes says that, "until now, women's political role in the Islamic Movement is in its very early stage, in its beginning, it is not strong. But we share with women our positions, they assist us in distributing and promoting our political perspective. We recognize that their political role until now has lagged behind men's political role." As for the reasons for this lag, high-ranking leaders argue that while they are invested in promoting women to leadership positions, the women themselves



reject this offer, stating that politics is not where they want to exert their efforts. Shaykh Sarsour explains:

We have been trying for the last ten years to convince women in the women's branch in the Islamic Movement to choose some of them to be a part of our elections, whether local or parliamentary. They discussed that issue deeply and they came to us saying that with all the respect we have for your suggestion, we do believe that in the meantime we have to go on working on our educational, social agenda, and so on. We don't feel that the political arena needs us in the meantime. So you can go forward and work in the political arena, and let us work on these fields which are backing the political. That means we are backing you and you have to back us from all your positions, whether in the local authorities or in the Knesset, or any other field. That is their own decision concerning participating directly in these fields of political life. I hope that in the near future they might change their opinion. The minute they change their opinion, all the gates are open. In the local council elections and in the parliamentary elections. And they have the power to do that.... They have the power, the courage, the skills, the education, and the ability to represent their society in all fields, not only in the field of women. But in the meantime they prefer to go on concentrating on these educational and local issues.... The priority for women at this time is not political activity, or being an integral part of the political life. Their priorities include all fields of life, but not the political one. Maybe in the future they might change their mind.

Each male leader I spoke to stressed that if women were to be included on the local and national party lists, they are likely to bring in many votes, due to their high profile of activism and contribution to society. Yet this stated enthusiasm is belied by the structural organization of the Movement, as well as by some of its action. In many villages, towns, or localities in which the Islamic Movement participates in local elections, a local Shura council chooses the Movement's candidates for the local list. There are no women on these Shura councils normally, as women have their own branches and focus on these branches' complementarian work.

The Islamic Movement's approach to the matter of women's formal representation is in fact a mixed one. While there is no religious objection and leaders of the Movement state that they are supportive of women's inclusion, some of the actions of the leadership also reflect a more complicated stance. For instance, the northern branch of the Islamic Movement was the only Palestinian group to object to the imposition of a women's quota in the most important representative body of the Palestinian community in Israel—the Israeli Arab Higher Monitoring Committee. The committee is a nonpartisan forum for heads and mayors of Arab local councils, Arab MKs, and representatives of Arab civil society organizations.

Palestinian women's organizations in Israel have repeatedly criticized the lack of women's representation on the committee.

Their efforts culminated in an unprecedented proposal in 2008 by the head of the committee to double the number of committee members in order to allow each represented body to appoint an additional woman to the committee. This proposal elicited fierce resistance from the northern branch of the Islamic Movement. *Sawt al-Haq* published a series of articles protesting the proposal and an official communiqué by the Movement expressing objection. In the communiqué, the Movement explained that it was not against the representation of women per se, but rather objected to the quota system and the imposition of representation. The communiqué, titled “The Imposition of Women’s Representation Is Unacceptable” stated, “We in the Islamic Movement reject this insult to the committee. A party which wants instant representation for women must promote this through its present member and at the expense of his seat [that is, appoint a woman instead of a man to the committee] rather than increase the committee’s membership in order to impose a quota on us.”<sup>21</sup> *Sawt al-Haq* further explained that:

Shaykh Raed Salah [head of the northern branch] clarified our position by stressing that we will not allow anyone to manipulate us, not any party or movement and not half an NGO working for foreign agendas. We refuse to play the game others play, where they pay lip service in order not to be scolded by the “women of Qureish.” ... We are not against women’s representation, but rather against the imposition of decisions in an illegitimate, deceptive manner. We also object to the quota system on principle.... We reject any attempt to impose something on us from above. We invite the other parties to appoint women to the committee but we do not accept foreign agendas nor ideas which are promoted with foreign money.... The women’s issue is important and needs to be discussed on the level of values and principles. But the question is not just women’s representation but rather what kind of representation and from what perspective. The quota is an American patent and its imposition is Colin Powell’s agenda as part as the New Middle East agenda. This must also be discussed in depth. The issue is not fully understood. The parties that curse America and globalization and imperialism and capitalism [referring to the Communist party] need to explain to us how this sits with supporting women’s organizations which work for an essentially American and Western agenda.<sup>22</sup>

Due to the Islamic Movement’s objection, the committee did not implement the women’s quota. This episode reveals the consequences the Islamic Movement’s gender ideology can have for women’s representation. As we saw in [chapter 2](#), the Movement associates certain gender practices with negative Western influences. Among these is the quota system for guaranteeing women’s representation. Even though Movement leaders express their theoretical approval of women’s representation, neither they nor other political actors in the Palestinian community in Israel (except for the mixed Arab-Jewish communist Hadash party) have done

much to promote this issue. Palestinian parties in the Knesset have had only one woman MK in the entire history of Palestinian participation in Knesset elections until 2015 (when their number rose to two) and Palestinian women remain appallingly underrepresented in Israeli local politics as well. The proposal to introduce a quota in the Monitoring Committee was a groundbreaking one. The Islamic Movement succeeded in turning the debate from one around women's representation to one about colonialism and Western influence, in this way discrediting those who have worked to promote women's representation.

While some women activists in the Movement concur with the leadership's claim that women are simply not interested in formal politics, others provided different accounts for the lack of women's representation. Um Abdullah, for example, a teacher who is in her thirties and a well-regarded activist from the Triangle region, told me: "If the Movement put [women's representation] on the agenda as a priority, and started preparing and training women for politics over the next ten years, then there will be women candidates who would have the skills, knowledge, and motivation to run as candidates."

Although the Islamic Movement's record on women's representation on the national level and in the Monitoring Committee reflects a reluctance to include women in representative decision making bodies, in local-level politics there exists more variation. Three women have served as local council members as part of Islamic Movement local lists. Though a small number, it is nevertheless significant as there have been a total of fewer than thirty Palestinian women ever elected as members in Palestinian local councils in the history of local elections in Israel according to scholars' estimates.<sup>23</sup> Women's representation in Jewish local councils in Israel has also been comparatively low. In fact, women's representation on the national level, the Knesset, has been higher than on the local level. The percentage of women's representation in Jewish local councils has risen gradually from 4.2 percent in 1950 to 10.9 percent in 1993, and 14.9 percent in 1998. In the 2003 local council elections, 14.3 percent of elected council members in Jewish councils were women. In the 2008 elections, the number increased to 15.4 percent, and in 2013 it was close to 19 percent (excluding ultra-Orthodox councils).<sup>24</sup>

In Palestinian local councils in Israel, percentages have been much lower. From 1969 to 1998, only five Arab women served as council members. In 1998, three women were elected as members to local Palestinian councils out of a total of 770 council members.<sup>25</sup> Two of the elected women were part of Islamic Movement–affiliated local lists—Itaf Jabarin in Um al-Fahm (from the northern branch of the Islamic Movement) and Siham Fahoum in Nazareth (as part of the southern branch’s coalition United Nazareth). In other words, two-thirds of all Arab women elected in 1998 were from the Islamic Movement. In the 2003 local elections, again only three women were elected council members, out of a total of 577 elected members. One of the three, Salima Jafali, was elected as part of an Islamic Movement coalition (on the United Nazareth list).<sup>26</sup> In each of the latest local elections in 2008 and 2013, six women were elected to Arab local councils, none of whom belong to the Movement.<sup>27</sup>

Local council elections in the Palestinian sector in Israel are extremely competitive. The stakes are higher since control of local authorities means real power over budgets and jobs and the exercise of a much greater influence for Arab citizens than seats in the Knesset.<sup>28</sup> The number of lists competing is vast, and voter turnout in local elections in Arab towns and villages is higher than in the national elections. While in Jewish local council elections voter turnout has hovered around 50 percent in the last rounds of elections (2003, 2008, 2013), in Palestinian local councils turnout has been consistently around 90 percent.<sup>29</sup> Palestinian turnout to Knesset elections has declined from high 80 and 90 percents from 1949 to 1999, to low 60 and 50 percents in the more recent elections (although it was up to about 65 percent in the 2015 election).<sup>30</sup> In this competitive environment, which is to a large extent still dominated by local clan politics accompanied by socially conservative norms regarding women’s roles, Arab women tend to be severely marginalized.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, we see variation in the willingness of lists to nominate women. Some local lists do not have any women, while others have some in various places, from the top five to the lowest ranks. In some Palestinian towns and villages, no women are nominated on any list, while in others many are. The Islamic Movement’s decisions regarding the nomination of women candidates to local lists also display variation.

Tables 5.2 and 5.3 show the variation in women's representation on the Movement-affiliated local lists in 2003 and 2008 (the list is based on information that appeared in *Al-Mithaq* and *Sawt al-Haq*, and on data from the Israeli Election Committee). When we examine this variation, a pattern emerges. In the northern and Triangle regions, both Islamic Movement lists and other lists tend to include some women as candidates. Strikingly, in the southern local councils in which Islamic Movement-affiliated lists contested elections—all Bedouin townships—neither the Movement's lists nor any of the other lists presented even one women candidate in 2003. In 2008 again, the Movement included no women on any of its lists in the Bedouin south. While all other lists similarly did not have women candidates, one woman affiliated with the secular nationalist Balad party did participate as a candidate in the election in the Bedouin town of Rahat.

TABLE 5.2. Women's Representation on Islamic Movement Lists: Local Elections 2003

Local Council	Council Size	Population <sup>a</sup>	Socio-economic Cluster <sup>b</sup>	Women Candidates on Islamic Movement List	Number of Women Candidates on Other Lists
<b>Northern Region</b>					
Mrar	13	18,302	3	0	0
<b>Nazareth</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>62,706</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5 (one elected)</b>	<b>19</b>
Sahnin	14	23,224	2	0	4
<b>Triangle Region</b>					
Jaljoulya	9	7,112	3	0	1
Kfar Qasem	11	16,250	2	0	3
Tirah	13	19,779	4	0	3
<b>Um al-Fahm</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>39,046</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Southern Region (Bedouin)</b>					
Rahat	15	35,760	1	0	0
Tel Sheva	11	11,916	1	0	0

Sources: *Al-Mithaq* and *Sawt al-Haq* (September–December 2003 issues). Data received from the Israeli Elections Committee for the 2003 Local Elections. Not including mixed Arab-Jewish councils.

<sup>a</sup> Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics data for 2003, available at [www1.cbs.gov.il/www/publications/local\\_authorities2003/local\\_authorities\\_e.htm](http://www1.cbs.gov.il/www/publications/local_authorities2003/local_authorities_e.htm) (accessed April 17, 2015).

<sup>b</sup> Ranking method by Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, with 10 being the highest socioeconomic level and 1 being the lowest; *ibid.*

TABLE 5.3. Women's Representation on Islamic Movement Lists: Local Elections 2008

Local Council	Council Size	Population <sup>a</sup>	Socio-economic Cluster	Number of Women Candidates on Islamic Movement List	Number of Women Candidates on Other Lists
<b>Northern Region</b>					
Nazareth	17	66,400	4	2	10
<b>Triangle Region</b>					
Jaljoulya	9	8,300	3	0	0
Kfar Qasem	11	18,500	3	0	0
Tirah	14	21,900	4	0	6
Um al Fahm	16	44,500	2	3	8
<b>Southern Region (Bedouin)</b>					
Rahat	15	43,900	1	0	1
Hura	9	11,800	1	0	0
Tel Sheva	11	14,600	1	0	0
Segev Shalom	9	7,100	1	0	0

Sources: *Al-Mithaq* and *Sawt al-Haq* (October–December 2008 issues). Data received from the Israeli Elections Committee for the 2008 Local Elections. Not including mixed Arab-Jewish councils.



<sup>4</sup>Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics for 2008, available at [www1.cbs.gov.il/webpub/pub/text\\_page.html?publ=58&CYear=2008&CMonth=1](http://www1.cbs.gov.il/webpub/pub/text_page.html?publ=58&CYear=2008&CMonth=1) (accessed April 17, 2015).

As these tables show, the Islamic Movement tends to include women candidates only in regions where other lists include women. This tendency suggests that variations in forms of women's participation in the Movement are related to the more general geographic context. These data reveal that while Islamic Movement lists do not include women *because* other lists include them, a regional atmosphere of inclusion is necessary for the Movement to nominate women. The Movement lists include women candidates only in the two regions where women's candidacy is an accepted (though limited) practice. In the Bedouin south, where no list ever nominates women, the Islamic Movement as well refrains from doing so.

And indeed, the accounts of women Movement activists from the different regions support the argument that their regional cultural context shapes to some extent their experience as activists. Take Um Ahmed and Suheir, who are both in their 40s and are both leading figures of equivalent stature in the women's da'wa work in their towns. Um Ahmed is a da'wa leader in the south, while Suheir does similar work in the Triangle. Both are skillful and effective organizers who are very popular and could potentially make highly competent politicians. When paving their road to da'wa work by acquiring their educational qualifications, the two women's experiences diverged enormously. Um Ahmed relates:

I finished 12 years [of school] and wanted to continue to college but I was married at 18. After the marriage my husband's family forbade me from pursuing higher education. I tried very hard, I was an excellent student at school and I had very good final grades. I tried with all my power to convince them to let me study, but they refused. But I loved to study so I bought many books and read a lot and also participated in some religious—social educational programs, which aim to develop women's consciousness [*wa'i*] and thought. When there were religious lectures I would attend those. My husband allowed me to go to these classes, thinking that this was different from going to college, as it required going out for only a few hours in the afternoon, and no one would say anything about me spending a lot of time out of the house to pursue education.

Um Ahmed's story is almost universally shared by women of her generation in the Bedouin south. In contrast, Suheir's experience with education had been strikingly different. She earned a BA and then continued to a master's degree: "My family, *al-hamdulillah*, was with me on all issues. My father was the one to encourage me to

study in the sharia college. He encouraged me to be active and give to society, he encouraged me also to pursue my MA.”

What might appear to an outsider as a rather trivial aspect of activism work—transportation and travel—is experienced utterly differently by an activist from the south and an activist from the Triangle. Um Ahmed recounts:

At the beginning, my husband’s family complained about my going out too much. Occasionally, they wouldn’t let me go out. I had to go out once, twice, and sometimes three times a day [for teaching mosque lessons]. At that time, I lived close to my husband’s family and they were not happy with my activities. But then we moved to this house, farther away from them, and I became more independent, and now I go out. My husband supports me in this. He helps me by driving me everywhere even though I have a driver’s license. I prefer to be driven by him everywhere so everyone can see that there is agreement on the part of the husband [that he approves of my going out—*fiḥ muwafaqa min aljoz*]. It is better and more appropriate that the husband drives his wife when she goes out.

For Suheir, transportation was not an issue:

My car that I have with me 24 hours a day, in the morning I leave with it and return in the evening, it is not mine; it belongs to my family. But they don’t tell me you must return at this or that hour because we have to go somewhere, no. Whenever I work for God, they always tell me “Go on, there is no problem.” And if they want to go somewhere with the car they ask me first “Do you have any meetings you need to go to?” *Al-hamdulillah* they understand my work and know that when I go out I might come back very late, sometimes I return at 8 or 9 at night due to da‘wa work. They all encourage me. No one criticizes me for going out so much.

In the south, the social restrictions on women shape the experience and activities of some of the younger activists as well. Shirin, a prominent Bedouin da‘wa activist, explains:

There are some differences between the activities of men and of women in the Movement. Some activities women cannot participate in without a chaperone. The men have camps that they go to for two days or three or a week without any companion from the family. But women’s situation is different, so for her protection she is not allowed to undertake such things. We do the same things the men do, but we make sure an activity does not span more than one day. We do it in a different way, the men stay to sleep outside their homes but we do not. There are also seminars that take place at night. For the women, we do not organize seminars at night, this is an important point. When the women go out and then return home, things might happen to them on the way, so it is important that Islam protects women’s dignity [*karama*] and her safety and well-being.

The male leadership of the Movement in the south points to local customs as inhibiting women’s full participation in politics. Shaykh Issa Abu Riyash, the regional head of the Islamic Movement in the south, explains:

As an Islamic movement, we believe that women are partners in all aspects of our work. The man cannot carry out certain activities and say this is for men and

women cannot do this. There is no field in which the man can say that women have no place. But, we in the Islamic Movement in the south until now, we haven't found a woman who takes part in the political work. We have not experienced it to this day. This is not to say that women do not participate in the political work. When there are elections to the Knesset or in the local councils, the sisters work normally (*'adi*) like the men—organizing meetings in the mosques and meetings at homes and campaigning in that framework for the Islamic Movement.... Their participation is limited due to society's customs and traditions [*'adat wa-taqalid*]. According to these, the women can carry out some work, but there are some things they are prevented from doing. Not from an Islamic perspective but because of the customs and traditions. Her father or brother or husband might decide it is not appropriate for a woman to take part in political work. It depends on her situation and the preference of her family.... If we had found a sister who was prepared to run as a candidate in the south, we would have had no problem. But there are no women who say that they are ready to run as candidates because of the customs and traditions present.

Due to restrictive cultural norms in the Bedouin community, the Islamic Movement in the south, like all other lists in the region, does not address women as independent political agents during elections. The Movement does not think that in this region it can mobilize women independently or in contradiction to the political choices of their male family members.<sup>32</sup> Shaykh Abu Daabes, who is a native of the Bedouin south, explains:

In the south, women's political role in all parties and lists lags behind men's role. This is also true of the Arab population throughout the country. Women's local political role is weak. In some of the villages and towns in the north, there are one or two women in the local councils, but here [in the south] there aren't any.... On the local level here, families usually adopt a certain position and all the members are supposed to adhere to that or vote for that specific list, it is not that every person can act according to his opinion.

The regional context, as we have seen here, plays a role in shaping the Islamic Movement's decisions regarding the nomination of women candidates. First, it influences the availability of qualified and motivated women who would even consider running in local elections. The cultural limitations placed on Bedouin women in the south who are now in their forties and fifties have prevented many of them from pursuing higher education (or even completing high school) and pursuing work and travel outside the home, except for activism in the Movement. These severely restrict the pool of potential women candidates. In the Triangle and in the north, however, women of that generation have had better opportunities and therefore more women in general can participate as candidates in local politics. Second, the Islamic Movement also takes into account local sentiments and norms pertaining to women's political representation. In the south, women candidacy is not practiced, and in the one rare occasion in which a woman presented her candidacy

—as the experience of Mona al-Habnen, who ran in 2008 on the secular Balad list, the only woman to ever run in elections in the south, demonstrates—it elicited wide resistance in the community. In the north and Triangle, on the other hand, several women participate as candidates in each round of local elections.

Regional cultural norms and the supply of motivated and qualified candidates help explain why the Islamic Movement has fielded women candidates only in the north and the Triangle but none in the south. However, what accounts for the variation in women’s inclusion among the Movement’s various lists in the north and the Triangle? The argument for righteous transgressions suggests that nationalist or communalist elements should be associated with women’s representation. And indeed this association becomes evident when we pay attention to the particular contexts in which women were included in Islamic Movement lists. We find that there are two towns, Um al-Fahm in the Triangle and Nazareth in the north, where Movement-affiliated lists have included women since 1998 and where women have even served as council members on behalf of those lists. What has distinguished the 1998 local elections in these two towns and the following rounds of elections from elections for other councils in which the Movement has participated? The answer is that in both these cases, the local political context around election time was characterized by a particularly salient nationalist-communalist conflict.

### *Um al-Fahm*

The 1998 local elections were the first after the dramatic 1996 split in the Islamic Movement over participation in Knesset election. As described in [chapter 2](#), in that year the Movement reversed its stand on Knesset elections and began negotiations with several Arab national parties to form a coalition for the Knesset election. The rejectionist faction that came to be known as the northern branch under the charismatic leadership of Shaykh Raed Salah objected to participation by Muslims in national Israeli politics. The northern branch based its decision on the principle, articulated by Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, that “The correct stance, from the shar‘i point of view, makes it obligatory to disapprove of entry into the Zionist enemy’s parliament because [such a step] would inspire potential recognition of their right to exist or remain on the usurped land and this is what we should consistently, and emphatically deny.”<sup>33</sup> In a recent interview, Shaykh Salah explained that “The Knesset is

essentially a part of the Zionist project. It does not make sense for us to warn against the Zionist project and at the same time participate in this very project and in its instruments, the most prominent of which is the Knesset.”<sup>34</sup> This approach also reflected a deep mistrust of the state’s democratic and legal institutions and their relationship with the Palestinian minority. Shaykh Salah argues that “The role of the Arab Members of Knesset, from the day the first Arab entered the Knesset as an MK, leads to one conclusion. The Knesset of Israel is a stage for protest for the Arab MKs and nothing more. Nothing can be accomplished through the Knesset except for protest.”<sup>35</sup> Going even further, Shaykh Salah has occasionally called on Islamic Movement followers to boycott the Knesset elections. Beginning from the late 1990s, the northern branch has also sided with Hamas’s rejectionist approach to the question of a peace agreement and denied the right of the PLO to sign a settlement with Israel.<sup>36</sup>

The ideological split manifested itself on the local level in the diverging understanding of the northern and southern branches of their social and political role. Shaykh Hamad Abu Daabes, the head of the Islamic Movement (southern branch) since 2010, argues that the movement’s role on the local level is to work alongside and in cooperation with state institutions and not as a competitor or an alternative. He explains:

It became clear that we are organized and committed to serving society, that we acknowledge the role of the official institutions and that we are not trying to be an alternative to them [*lasna badilan ‘anha*]. For example, we were the first to establish kindergartens, before any were available in our region. But when the municipality began to provide kindergarten services we integrated our kindergartens into the municipal system. We did not clash with it since our primary objective is serving society. Similarly, our zakat committee is not an alternative to the state’s social services or to social security. It is complementary to those and fills the gaps where the latter are unable to help. Also, we thought about establishing an Islamic medical clinic when there were no clinics in Rahat [a Bedouin town in the South]. But when the universal mandatory health care law was passed and different health care providers began to compete and build clinics, we abandoned the idea of the Islamic clinic as there was no longer a need for it. This shows that when the official institutions provide certain services, we are flexible in our program and address other aspects of social life that are not attended to.<sup>37</sup>

In contrast, according to Shaykh Salah and the northern branch, the Muslim minority should strive to establish an autonomous society (*al-mujtama‘ al-‘isami*) offering alternative services and institutions, which will prevent integration with the country’s majority. While accepting the necessary framework of the state in the current

political situation Muslims in Israel find themselves, Shaykh Salah insists on communal separation, to the farthest extent possible, between Muslims and the Jewish state. His goal, as he articulates it, is to make the Muslim community in Israel a completely self-reliant society with independent, productive enterprises in trade, industry, agriculture, education, and other services that he hopes will lay the foundations for an eventual Arab autonomy from Israel.<sup>38</sup>

Following the split, the northern branch has attempted to sway Muslim public opinion in Israel to its hardline positions. The 1998 local elections in Um al-Fahm took place in the shadow of that ideological rift and solidified Um al-Fahm as the headquarters of the hardline, religious-nationalist approach. During that time, Um al-Fahm also became the center of the Al-Aqsa in Danger campaign, which as the previous chapter detailed, allowed Movement women to assume public visibility in organizing explicitly political public actions. In this context, the first Islamic Movement woman became a candidate on the Movement's list in the local elections. Itaf Jabarin, who was eventually appointed a council member in Um al-Fahm in the 1998 election as part of the Islamic Movement list, wrote extensively in the Movement's publication before and following the local elections. Like many of the women in the settler movement that we met in the preceding section, she also maintained that women's entry into formal politics should not be perceived as being in opposition to or in competition with men: "[It is] imperative that we remember that our work in the local authority is never a means for us to fight men or usurp their role, or to show men that we are stronger and more able than they are. I mentioned this in our meetings with women at the local authority center, and I stressed that our role is a supportive and shared role, alongside the role of our brothers in the Islamic Movement, and that we succeed when they succeed politically and socially, since we are, as our Prophet said 'the sisters of men' [*shaqa'iq al-rijal*]." <sup>39</sup>

In the electoral campaign run under the banner of increasingly religious-nationalist rhetoric on the part of the northern branch, Jabarin was not only able to carve out a space for participation and a seat on the list. She was also able to masterfully use the communal rivalry with the Jewish majority to reframe an often used restrictive element in the Movement's gender ideology. As the struggle over the women's quota introduced in this chapter revealed, the Islamic Movement often equates demands for greater women's formal participation (or for equality in other areas, such as family law) with

a Western imposition and the Jewish majority's encroachment on the Muslim community. Jabarin turns the equation on its head by using the Jewish-Muslim cleavage to argue for greater representation of women. Flipping the leadership's gender rhetoric, Jabarin argues that the Islamic Movement's inclusion of women is a contrast to Jewish resistance to women's participation. Appropriate inclusion, she argues, is the purview of Islam. She says, "In order to sense the greatness of our Islamic project, we must remember what the Jewish women had to face, what anger and discontent they felt because men did not want them to reach leadership roles in political life, and fought them. A testament to that is the small number of Jewish women in politics who have reached leadership positions, despite their educational and economic privileges. What we are concerned with is to reach all sectors of women and to realize the elevation of the Muslim woman's status by opening the doors of knowledge and faith." According to Jabarin's pronouncement, women's well-being and righteousness are the keys to a healthy and moral society.<sup>40</sup>

The great fit that Jabarin had been able to accomplish is to use the context of a campaign dominated by extremely nationalist tones to not only insert herself into a position of power, but also to advance the idea that this reflects authentic adherence to Islamic principles. She writes:

The Islamic Movement has adopted in Um al-Fahm the inclusion of women members in its work for the town, and is distinguished in this position, as women have long lost their positive role by which they can help improve conditions in this town. This role the Um al-Fahm woman is now undertaking again, while stressing her Islamic and Arab identity and her insistence that her work will be completely devoted to bring to her society and her town security and peace. We [women] consider this role a duty and not a nominal honor. It is a religious duty [*wajib shar'i*] which we must strive to realize. Just like man was assigned this role, we believe in Allah's words that: "And (as for) the believing men and the believing women, they are guardians of each other; they enjoin good and forbid evil" [Quran 9:71].<sup>41</sup>

### *Nazareth*

In Nazareth, too, the 1998 local elections and those that followed were painted in distinctly communalist colors, although between Muslims and Christians in this case. In preparation for Pope John Paul II's visit to Nazareth scheduled for 2000, the city council—controlled by the Communist party—created a renovation and development plan in the late 1990s, titled "Nazareth 2000," to accommodate the visit and the thousands of tourists expected to flock to the city for the event. The plan included the construction of

a wide modern plaza adjacent to the Church of Annunciation at the city center. In 1997, a group of local Islamic activists and the head of the Islamic Waqf Committee argued that the entire area designated for the plaza was a Waqf property since a portion of the plot included the site of the Muslim Shihab al-Din shrine.<sup>42</sup> Activists from the Islamic Movement soon bolstered the small group of local activists, erected a protest tent, and placed loudspeakers calling for mass prayers at the site and Muslim resistance to the plan.<sup>43</sup> The activists demanded that a large mosque be constructed instead of the plaza. A deadlock between the municipality and the Waqf Committee ensued, and the Islamic Movement seized the conflict to mobilize Muslim voters in the Christian-Muslim city toward the 1998 local council election.

The Nazareth city council had long been dominated by the Communist party, until then the largest party among Palestinians in Israel. Although the party line has been secular and nonsectarian, a large proportion of Christian Arabs occupied some of its highest ranks in Nazareth. The city, which is the largest Arab city in Israel, is 70 percent Muslim, but the communal division has never been a central theme in local elections. The Islamic Movement effectively used the Shihab al-Din issue to surface Muslim grievances and encouraged Muslims to vote along communal lines. The Movement formed the all-Muslim coalition list “United Nazareth” to run in the approaching 1998 local election. The list’s campaign centered almost exclusively on the Shihab al-Din dispute, with flyers around the issue circulating daily, and fiery mosque sermons delivered weekly.<sup>44</sup> At the center of its platform, the list highlighted “the need to protect holy Islamic sites and bring an end to the discrimination against Muslims by the city’s communist leadership.”<sup>45</sup> The campaign appeared to have touched on grievances felt by Muslims in the city over systematic neglect and the failure of the Communist party to improve their living conditions and opportunities.<sup>46</sup>

The 1998 local election results were unprecedented. While the Communist party mayor retained his position, he was elected by only 52 percent of the votes. The Islamic Movement coalition list, “United Nazareth,” won ten of the nineteen council seats, for the first time depriving the communists of majority in the council. For the first time also, a woman, Siham Fahoum, became a council member as part of a list affiliated with the southern branch of the Islamic Movement.<sup>47</sup> It was only in the context of an election campaign dominated by communalist rhetoric that a woman was



elected on a list associated with the southern branch of the Islamic Movement.

The contention over the Shihab al-Din site continued following the election, leading to impasses in the local council and occasional violent clashes between Muslim and Christian groups around the city. Actions by the Israeli government severely contributed to the continuation and escalation of the conflict.<sup>48</sup> First declining the demand to construct a mosque at the site, the government, in response to Muslim protest, then rescinded its decision and proposed to build a mosque on 700 square meters of the plot. As the implementation of the compromise decision was delayed, Islamic Movement activists began to lay the foundations for the mosque independently. The compromise decision and the burgeoning construction provoked condemnation from Christian leaders around the world and from the Vatican. Once again, the Israeli government rescinded its former decision and decided the mosque would be built at an alternative site.<sup>49</sup> In July 2003, three months before the planned local council elections, the foundations for the mosque were demolished by a court order.<sup>50</sup> It is not surprising that in this continued communal clash, again, a woman activist was able to carve out a seat in the local council as part of the Islamic Movement-affiliated list. Salima Jafali became the second women council member in Nazareth as part of the Islamic Movement list.

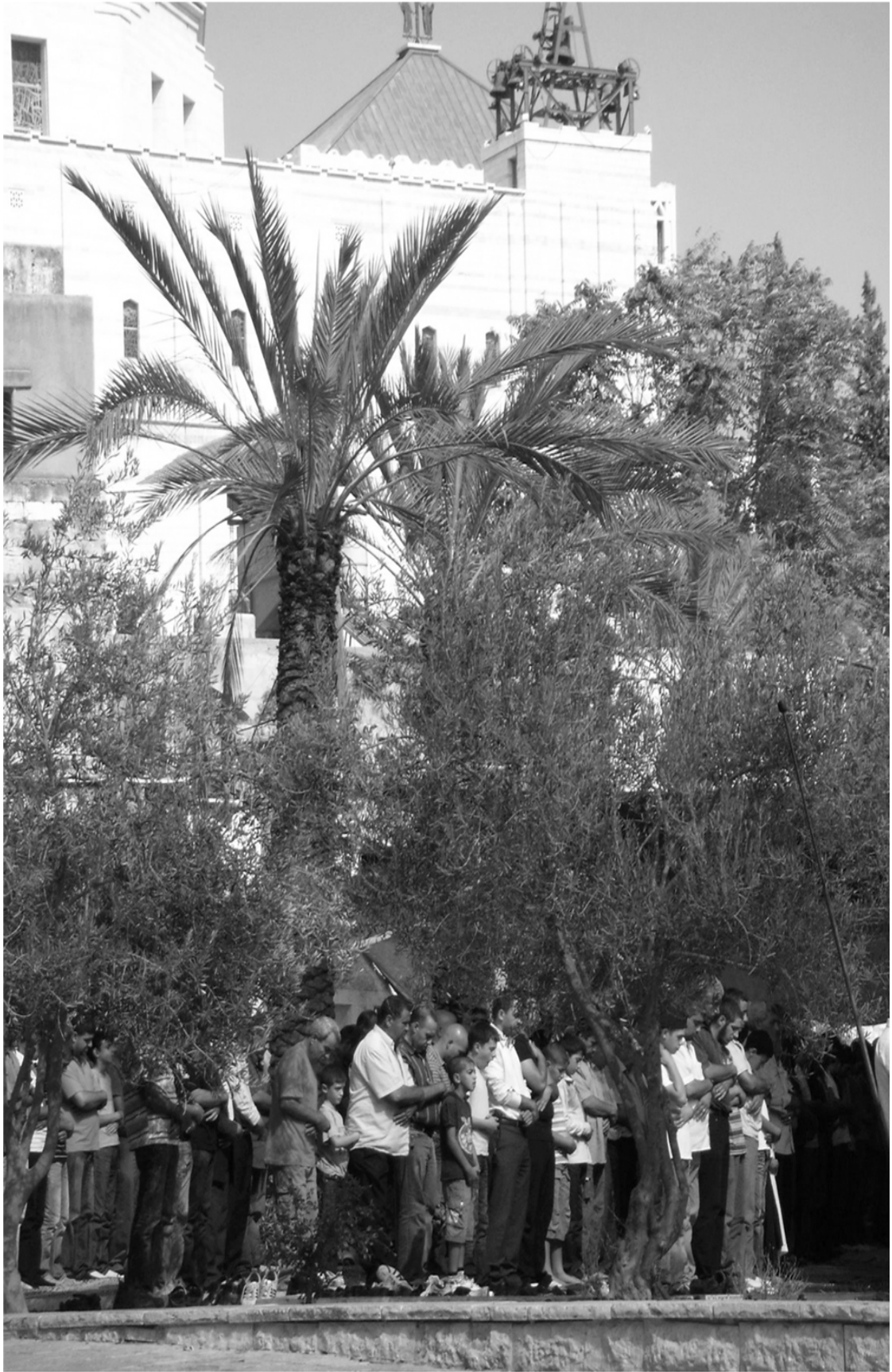


Figure 5.1. Muslim prayer outside the Church of the Annunciation, Nazareth.

The Shihab al-Din site has remained a contentious issue, fueling rhetoric that intensifies prior to each round of local elections. As one activist from the Movement explained at the time, “the more this continues the more we will gain politically. The mosque has united Muslims. It is good that the issue remains on the agenda, on the back burner. Shihab al-Din will go down in history as the symbol marking the end of the communist rule and the start of the Muslim rule in Nazareth.”<sup>51</sup> In the 2003 and 2008 elections, the local council has been split along communal lines, with the Islamic Movement–affiliated list holding between ten and seven seats after each round. Outside the Church of the Annunciation, an enormous sign still hung during my visits in 2010 and 2011, greeting visitors: “And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him. And in the hereafter he will be one of the losers.” (Quran 3:85).

### **“He Elected You and You Elect Him:” No Formal Representation in Shas**

Shas has never appointed women to run on its party lists in local or national elections. However, like the leaders of the other three movements in this study, on this matter Rabbi Ovadia Yosef has toed a characteristically pragmatic line. While other Haredi parties have traditionally objected in principle to women’s inclusion in politics, and in the early days of Israeli democracy have even resisted women’s franchise, Rabbi Yosef and Shas do not object to women’s representation in principle. Rabbi Yosef has commented that although it is preferred that men shall be public leaders, if the choice for political leadership is between a “nonkosher” man, who is not religiously observant or who is corrupt, and a “kosher” woman (*isha kshera*)—a religious woman or one that advances the cause of religion—the latter must be preferred.<sup>52</sup> As with Rabbi Yosef’s other rulings that were discussed in [chapter 2](#), here too the lesser of the evils is preferred, in theory, for the sake of upholding the place of religion in the public sphere. In 2011, Rabbi Yosef had also approved of the appointment of women to religious councils in Israel.<sup>53</sup> In practice, however, Shas has done little to support women’s representation in formal elected bodies. The Israeli high court of justice had ruled back in 1988 that women must be permitted to sit on religious councils. Shas party, which had control over religious councils for many years, did not advance women’s representation. By 2011, women made up only 0.5 percent of religious council members.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, Shas representatives do appoint women to official, unelected positions pertaining to traditional women's fields such as family purity and girls' education and to administrative positions in its various institutions and government offices in which it has influence. Eli Yishai, the head of Shas party from 1999 to 2012, at times speaks of women's empowerment as a part of the Shas agenda. In one interview, he asserted, "We do not discriminate between men and women. We have equal opportunities. We have appointed women to many positions. Compare our appointments to other places. We worked a lot on it, to give women the tools to make a decent living. It is important to give them the power and capabilities to go out to work and support the home. It is an important issue in the Haredi community."<sup>55</sup>

Before the 2013 Knesset election, several women's organizations appealed to the Central Elections Committee with a request to disqualify Shas and another ultra-Orthodox party, Yahadut Hatora, from participation in the election. The organizations argued that by excluding women from their candidate lists, these parties were undermining Israel's democratic character. Striving against Israel's democratic character had in the past constituted a legal reason to disqualify parties, and the women's organizations asked to apply the same logic in the case of the two ultra-Orthodox lists. The Elections Committee rejected the appeal on the grounds that barring lists from the democratic process should be minimally applied and reserved to the most egregious cases, due to the risk of undermining citizens' democratic right to choose their own representatives. What is worth examining though, is Shas's official written response to the challenge.<sup>56</sup> The party employed four arguments to counter the charge of discrimination and the nondemocratic nature of their appointment policies. First, it affirmed the legitimacy of role-complementarity as a valid social arrangement, stating: "A lifestyle that includes separation between the sexes is a legitimate choice and must not be seen as invalid or deplorable." It argued that this separation is sanctioned by Jewish law (*halacha*) "for reasons of modesty." Men in the movement have "one role and women have another role. This division of roles does not exclude women or discriminate against them, nor implies that women are lesser than men."

The second argument rested on the principle of democratic pluralism and cultural groups' right to choose their unique lifestyle. "Is it conceivable that in a democratic state a party that desires to act

according to the rules of halacha could be barred from being elected to the Knesset? Isn't such a claim clearly anti-democratic? Is the appellants' desire to disqualify from election those whose worldview is different from theirs an appropriate and acceptable claim? Isn't it the pot calling the kettle black? [*kol haposel bemumo posel?*].”

The third reason the movement invoked was that it did not deny women's right to be elected to the Knesset and does not prevent anyone from voting for a woman. It was in fact Shas's women who did not want to run for office, as this contradicted their commitment to religiously sanctioned role-complementarity. Similarly to the male leadership of the Islamic Movement, Shas also attributes the absence of Shas women's representation in formal political positions to a lack of desire on the women's part. Eli Yishai explained, “Back in the day, Dvora the prophetess led the people of Israel, there is no halachic objection to that. In today's reality, our women are not interested in working in the Knesset. They work more in the fields of health, education, welfare, nonprofits, and schools. They are more interested in the constant, everyday real work of saving the nation and the youth especially, than in the Knesset.”<sup>57</sup>

Though they are never nominated to Shas lists, women do mobilize powerfully on behalf of the party's electoral campaigns, and this is worth exploring when discussing women's activism in the movement. Under the leadership of the wives of Shas party leaders (Yafa Deri when Aryeh Deri was head of the Shas Knesset list [1992–1999 and 2012–present] and Zipi Yishai during Eli Yishai's term), a women's elections branch (*mate nashim*) has operated in each of the Knesset elections. Local women's branches also exert efforts during elections for local councils. Women's branch headquarters are set up across the country, and volunteer coordinators recruit activists who in turn recruit voters. Activists refer to this practice as Shas's “method of ten.” Ten coordinators recruit ten activists each, who subsequently recruit ten voters each, to create a wide ripple effect. The women's branches organize women's gatherings and lectures leading up to election day. On the day itself, activists coordinate an intensive effort to phone potential female voters and encourage them to vote. They also provide transportation for women to voting centers and even offer childcare services for campaign activists.

The forms and discursive content that this activism takes act to strengthen gender roles rather than to open spaces for transgression

or reframing. The activities of the women's elections branch receive significant positive coverage in Shas publication *Yom Leyom*. This coverage emphasizes women's unique contribution as women. Their work is highlighted as a distinctly feminine act of altruism and giving. A *Yom Leyom* article from the 2009 election campaign defines the role of the "Woman of Valor" (*eshet hayil*) during election time:

The Women of Valor who are known for their great devotion and their contribution to the Jewish home, are doing all they can to strengthen the spiritual character of the People of Israel. They will not receive any appointment, or any position, except for the position of a housewife, which they undertake with great desire and enthusiasm. They will not be appointed, so why are they contributing so greatly to the election campaign? It is out of a sense of personal responsibility for the fate of the Jewish People and for sanctifying *Hashem's* name.<sup>58</sup>

Rabbanit Yehudit Yosef, Rabi Yosef's daughter-in-law and a woman of great influence in the movement, similarly emphasizes women's self-sacrifice and giving when addressing campaign activists. Participating in an electoral effort does not bring with it any personal political gain for the women leaders, she argues, and the example of Rabbanit Margalit Yosef, departed wife of Rabbi Yosef, serves as a beaconing model. In women's elections gatherings, Rabbanit Yehudit Yosef repeatedly shares with the women activists the story of Margalit's passing:

In that same year [as Margalit's death], *maran shlita* [Rabbi Ovadia Yosef] fell ill and was hospitalized. Rabbanit Margalit looked up to heaven and said: "*Ribono shel olam*, if the decision has been made, let it fall on me, as the People of Israel are in great need of *maran shlita*, his guidance and his leadership." After a few months, Rabbanit Margalit passed away. This is the dedication of a righteous woman, a woman that sees only the best interest of the People of Israel. We must learn from her and emulate her.<sup>59</sup>

Zipi Yishai, who has been alongside Rabbanit Yehudit Yosef one of the most prominent women leaders in Shas, describes her own activism as an altruistic act that she has taken upon herself, even though, she claims, politics is not her field. She decided to act at the request of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef and out of a great devotion to him. "I am firstly a grandmother and a mother, all year, except for elections time," she says. "I received a personal call from *maran*, he said to my husband: ask Zipora that the women will go out and start being active. He addressed the women directly, and when the Rabbi asks, it is very powerful. No woman asks questions, they all come on board."<sup>60</sup>

Noa was a Shas campaign spokesperson for women audiences. She explains why women should act in supportive roles, behind the

scenes, rather than demand the spotlight through running for elected positions:

A woman can go to politics if you want, that's not bad. But you need to do it with balance. You can't be involved in every kind of activity. You are a woman and you have to guard your modesty. You cannot stand in the street and shout "end to unemployment" in front of the world. You need to do things in a different way. Zipi Yishai is a woman who acts behind the scenes, but she acts! It doesn't mean she doesn't act. But she stands behind her husband, not in front of him. Behind every great man there is a great woman. I worked with Shas during the elections. I was a spokeswoman because that's my strength. A known journalist asked me "why aren't you out there?" I said I am not out there because we can do things quietly much more effectively than with noise. It's not only by raising your voice or going out to the street that you accomplish things. The saying goes, "speak little and do much." The less energy you exert outside, the more you work on the small scale, meet women, speak with them, give lectures, sit with women, you will accomplish more in this way.

As a movement and a political party, Shas recognizes the tremendously important political work women perform and seeks to encourage this type of activism. However, as is now clear, representatives of the movement repeatedly articulate the essentialized role of women as being different from that of the male politicians. A telling invitation for a Shas women-only election conference invites women to participate in the following way:

You are invited to an amazing experiential evening in which you are the elected! [*at hi hanivheret*] When do you ever get to take a deep breath, to concentrate, to feel that you are the elected one? You, the mother, the wife, you are the essence of the home, the only daughter of the Creator of the World, who has chosen you to be His daughter.... In an hour of pleasure and happiness, dance and songs and wonderful music, we will create a bond and will connect to the key sentence: "He elected you and you elect Him" [*hu bahar bakh ve at boheret bo*]. God elected you to be His daughter and you elect Him—and those who work for His name (i.e., Shas). We believe that it is you, the mother, the wife and the girl, who can understand the pressing needs of the hour, the great necessity to strengthen those who perform the sacred work—Shas movement and its head *maran shlita*. You cannot stand silent when you see how the most important issues are left unaddressed by elected officials. As we all know—Shas movement has organized under the banner of returning the crown to its former glory, to re-awaken the Jewish consciousness among all Jews, without difference in status, ethnic affiliation or origin. The representatives of the movement are fighting fearlessly—in the Knesset against the outrageous decisions of our enemies, and across the country by opening religious educational institutions and addressing pressing religious needs.... It is no secret that *maran shlita* cries when he hears about the plight of education, about the pure children of Israel that do not know what is *shema yisrael*, about cities and towns with no *mikva'ot* [ritual baths], about the painful cuts in child support.... These are the painful subjects that the movement's representatives address.<sup>61</sup>

Women's explicit political activism is distinct from that of men, Shas leaders explain, because women's strengths are different from men's. The power of speech for example, which is often used to

deride women's "chatter," is transformed in the discourse of Shas women leaders into a great advantage in political campaigning. In a creative and artful manner, an essentialized feminine trait is turned from a flaw into a great asset. Yehudit Yosef says in one of her elections addresses to women, "It was said about us [women] 'Ten measures of conversation came to the world, nine were taken by women.' I thought, they are making fun of us. Let's use it for something good. Let's each one of us call ten other women, and talk and convince them to vote for Shas."<sup>62</sup>

Zipi Yishai also emphasizes the work that women's prayers perform. "The women's elections branch work is different from the men's branches," she says. "We believe in the power of women's prayer. In the special days we organize, all the women who support Shas pray together."<sup>63</sup> As carrying unique speech, prayer, and emotional capabilities, women are also strategically positioned to reach certain audiences. Being the queens of the private sphere, they can bring the political campaign into the home itself—theirs as well as the homes of other women in their family and their female friends. A Shas male representative in another election event for women explained, "Women enter the homes easily, they develop warm relations with people, and address the emotions. They know the needs and can speak not only as political activists but also as mothers of small children and as educators. In every one of Shas's elections campaigns, women were considered the most active and effective activists."<sup>64</sup>

Rabbanit Aliza, who is a dynamic Shas activist from Margalit Em Beyisrael, told me that she does not speak about politics and does not have a "concept of politics." However, she identifies Shas women's access to other women, which is established through their various activities, as providing an advantage to women campaigners. The sexual segregation, which Shas seeks to advocate and uphold, makes women's activism during elections extremely important because mixed-sex engagement is discouraged and censored. Without women campaigners, it would be difficult for Shas to reach many of its potential female voters:

It is natural that in a community that is very conservative [*shamranit*], a religious community, it is natural that women have to be with women and men with men. I believe that most of us women follow the method of our rabbis—"do as you are told".... During elections time we women do a lot of work for the party, I am very active, I am a regional coordinator in the branch, I speak with the women and the men speak with the men. These are things that are easier for a woman, to get the message from a woman and to connect to her. This is because she is religious, and



he is a married man, and she is a single or a married woman and it is forbidden. We have *halachot*, and we abide by them.

This section addressing Shas women's activism during elections time shows that though an articulated official sexual division of labor clearly exists and though it is accompanied by an essentialized discourse about women's character, particular strengths, and "natural" capacities, Shas women are instrumental to the movement's electoral success. The women speak about working behind the scenes, in the private sphere, about knowing women's limits, and about providing supportive assistance rather than demanding voice and representation. In practice and in speech, however, as the extensive examples and quotes in this section reveal, women do engage in work that is highly visible and public. I would like to end the section with the words of Rabbanit Aliza. The tensions that exist between Shas's official discourse on women's distinctly feminine, segregated and behind the scenes electoral contribution and the actual central work that women perform for the sake of Shas's political success, become painfully apparent:

If our rabbis would allow it, I would be the first one to run for election. I think that we [women] have something to say. It is a need. But since woman follows "the honor of a king's daughter is within," "within" is a definition that is open to interpretation. I tell the women I lecture to, what is "within?" It means your own personal interior, when your interior is pure and clean you can work with everyone. It is true that you will not go with a man at night to the beach for an interview, but you can contribute on women's issues. I think with all modesty that women do not contribute any less than the men, even in politics. We campaign and get women together, we speak to them. The home is important but I have to help society too and advance society.

Rabbanit Aliza told me she has no "concept of politics," and yet she also asserted that women could make successful and effective political leaders. Tensions and ambiguities clearly exist and come to the surface in women's activism. While they and their movement acknowledge the instrumental utility of their political work, they do not receive recognition in the form of formal representation. Women like Noa say they fully abide by the logic of role-complementarity, whereas other activists, like Aliza, express a degree of muted frustration with this state of affairs as translated into the political realm. But as is apparent in Rabbanit Aliza's account, there is very little room to question and criticize the exclusion of women by male religious authorities in the way that we have seen happen in the religious-nationalist settler movement.

That Shas has never appointed a woman to its political list for the Knesset or in local elections is not surprising given the

movement's gender role-complementarity ideology. It is the instances where women are chosen as representatives on behalf of socially conservative religious-political movements, as outlined in the settlers and Islamic Movement sections of this chapter, which require explanation. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 discussed the central importance for Shas of appropriate gender roles and the theme of female modesty to the task of erecting and maintaining boundaries between fluid populations whose members could potentially move from one to the other. Due to these and in the absence of a dominant religious-nationalist ideological component that activists could use to frame actions that transgress Shas's gender ideology, formal political representation for women in Shas lists is currently nonexistent.

### **Hamas and the Mandatory Women's Quota**

Until 2006, Hamas did not have to articulate a reasoned official position on the matter of women's election to the highest echelons of government. However, Hamas women have participated as candidates in lower level representative bodies such as student governments and trade unions, local councils, and even candidates in the short-lived Islamic Salvation Party in 1995, which was populated with Hamas's affiliates.<sup>65</sup> As became evident in the previous chapter, which addressed women's participation in the nationalist struggle, a religious-nationalist agenda provides women with discursive tools to frame as necessary and urgent forms of public sphere participation that transgress the movement's gender ideology.

The road to Hamas women's formal representation has not been an easy one though. Since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, a lobby of secular women's NGOs, united under the National Campaign to Advance Women's Participation in Elections, has constantly pressured legislators for the introduction of a women's quota in local and national elections. Although all Palestinian factions persistently resisted the quota, it was Hamas that published an official position against the quota, claiming that it contradicted the Palestinian Basic Law, that it discriminated on the basis of gender, and that it would lead to unqualified representatives.<sup>66</sup> The movement also expressed a view, which it continues to hold, that women should be barred from serving in the position of head of state. Representatives of the movement argue that "Hamas's refusal to allow woman to take the position of president is a *shar'i* matter which is derived from [the hadith] ... 'a

people that places their affairs at the hand of a woman will never prosper.”<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, following unrelenting efforts, a mandatory quota was accepted for the local and national elections that took place in 2004–2005 and 2006, respectively.<sup>68</sup>

For local elections, the new law stipulated that in each council election in which women candidates participate, two seats should be reserved for the women who have obtained the greatest number of votes, even if they did not get enough votes to win a seat.<sup>69</sup> For the national election to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), the election law required that parties include one woman among the first three candidates on their proportional representation (PR) closed list, at least one woman among the next four candidates, and one woman among every five candidates throughout the rest of the list.<sup>70</sup> Because half of the PLC members were elected through the PR system and another half from multi-member districts, and the quota applied only to the PR component, the quota guaranteed the inclusion of about 20 percent women among all candidates.

The Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement formed the Change and Reform Party for the 2006 election. This was the first time the movement participated in a parliamentary election, having boycotted the first national election of 1996. Like other parties, Hamas abided by the quota requirement and included thirteen women candidates on its national PR list. As a religious-nationalist organization vying to represent the Palestinian nation as a whole, Hamas could not boycott the election over the issue of the women’s quota. Rather, since Hamas women activists had been able to create spaces for activism of the other types that are studied in this book, they in fact presented an electoral advantage. The well-known, highly visible activists could serve as attractive candidates.

Both in the local and national level elections, the women’s quota generated great gains for women.<sup>71</sup> On the national level, the quota increased the ratio of women elected to the PLC from 5.6 percent in the 1996 election to 13 percent in the 2006 election. Hamas’s national list won 29 seats, out of which 6 were dedicated to women candidates, as stipulated by the quota requirement. Fatah’s list won 28 seats, of which 8 were occupied by women. Sixty-six of the PLC seats were won through national party lists (the PLC has 132 seats). The rest of the Parliament members were elected by districts where no women’s quota was required.

Prior to the election, *Al-Risala*, Hamas's newspaper, ran articles introducing the candidates on Hamas's Change and Reform party list, and women candidates received their share of coverage. The candidates tended to be leaders in the field of da'wa and in Hamas's network of charity, educational, and social organizations, and most of them had university degrees. For example, Dr. Mariyam Saleh, number twelve on the Hamas list, holds a PhD in Islamic Sharia and teaches hadith and hadith sciences in the Da'wa College in Al-Quds University. Other female candidates on the list such as Jamila Shanti, Mona Mansour, Noha Saima, and Samira Halaiqa have university degrees or teaching certificates and have all been social and religious activists within Hamas's frameworks.

In interviews with them, many Hamas women candidates stressed that their nomination was not something that they themselves had initiated. It was rather a call to duty that they had accepted. Tamam Nofel, a Hamas candidate, says, "I considered this [nomination] an assignment from the movement and I could only accept and follow its decision to choose me." Noha Saima, another candidate, similarly states, "I accepted my nomination only after I saw there is no objection to it [from a religious perspective] as long as it comes to serve the interests of the people."<sup>72</sup> Like the settler women politicians, Hamas women frame their entrance into politics as a necessary duty to the nation and the cause that women must fulfill, as opposed to personal proclivity toward politics.

In the election campaign, Hamas held separate election rallies for women in which Hamas male leaders addressed crowds of women, pointing to, as expected, their relational and reproductive capacities. Ismail Haniya, the head of the Hamas list, greeted women at the launch of the party's campaign stating, "[The woman] must take her role, and society must appreciate the extent of her sacrifice and effort. She is the mother and the sister and the wife and the daughter, who raises the heroes and the martyrs and the next generation."<sup>73</sup>

Nevertheless, the women candidates also insisted that the inclusion of women on the list stemmed from women's long contribution to the movement and Hamas's appreciation for women's contribution. It was not the women's quota nor an electoral tactic that brought Hamas to include women on the list, they argued. In one article in *Al-Risala* titled "Women Candidates in Gaza, a Real Need or an Electoral Tactic?" Um Nidal rejects such claims. She

argues that, “The Islamic movements are the ones that give women their rights more than any other movement, since they derive their thought from Islam, which does not deny woman her political right and has given her a role shoulder to shoulder with men in all areas of life.”<sup>74</sup>

Um Nidal represents a particular kind of militant femininity that the nationalist ideology of the movement gives rise to. She is one of the most known “mothers of the martyrs,” and has gained her fame due to her support for her son’s suicide mission. In a videotape filmed before her son’s attack on an Israeli settlement, she is seen congratulating him for his decision. *Filastin al-Muslima*’s issue from September 2004 dedicated an entire page to the praise of the “Khansa of Palestine”<sup>75</sup>—Um Nidal. In the coverage, she was described as the “producer of shahids” and a model of Palestinian sacrifice and perseverance.<sup>76</sup> This new construction of motherhood, while steeped in Islamic references, does not represent an Islamic ideal, as we have seen with the case of Reem Riyashi. It is rather the reality of occupation and military resistance that brings about this new form of feminine militancy. In an interview, Um Nidal stated, “We, Palestinian women, do have emotional feelings like all mothers in the world if not more, but we employ our feelings and emotions in service of our faith. We are ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of Allah, including our lives and children.”<sup>77</sup> Despite this affirmation of faith in the sacrifice she has made, she goes on to say that, “We neither have wished to die nor wished our children to die, but we are under the worst form of occupation modern history has ever witnessed, and we had no choice but to sacrifice ourselves and our children if it was the only way to get rid of occupation.”<sup>78</sup>

The reality of occupation and the religious-nationalist struggle has brought Um Nidal her tragic fame. The *Al-Risala* article about her candidacy asks whether the fact that she is famous and a popular mother of martyrs is the reason she was included in Hamas’s list. As stated before, however, both Um Nidal and other female candidates reject this reading of their appointment. Fathiya Qawasme, another candidate, draws on the Quran, Islamic history, and the sharia as sources of legitimization for her participation in politics. Quoting *aya* 9:71 of the Quran, she explains that the work of “enjoining the good and forbidding the evil” as stipulated in the verse is the duty of both men and women and that the improvement or reform of society is entrusted in the hands of every believing man and woman. The Muslim woman, she says, has already proven herself capable of this

important work through her significant endeavors in and contribution to Hamas's social, educational, and religious organizations. Qawasme uses women's undisputable accomplishments in social work, a realm that is considered to a certain extent a "women's sphere," in order to support women's participation in politics.<sup>79</sup>

Even though in entering the political sphere, women seem to be gaining access to a "male domain" and undertaking work that is perceived to be the work of men, Qawasme draws parallels between social work and political work in explaining that both are aimed at helping, developing and serving society. Thus the skills and experience women have gained in the social work arena endow them with the tools required for political work. Qawasme argues that women have always played an important role within the movement and participated in the nationalist struggle. For example, she points out that when the leaders of Hamas were exiled in the 1990s, the women affiliated with them took charge of publicizing their predicament in the media and in working toward the betterment of their conditions and their return from exile. Similarly, she says, Hamas women participated in public political action such as demonstrations since the first intifada and up to the second intifada.<sup>80</sup> Samira Halaiqa, another candidate on the Hamas list, also stresses women's endurance of the occupation as the distinguishing factor in their activism and the greatest challenge they have had to face.<sup>81</sup> Women's proven political activism and contribution to the religious-nationalist struggle makes them, according to the candidates, suitable leaders and politicians.

Hamas exerted tremendous efforts during the election campaign to do several things. First, it strove to correct what it called a false image of Islamists as restrictive of women's public roles, and particularly women's roles in formal politics. A significant portion of Hamas's focus on this issue aimed at convincing the public that Hamas's inclusion of women did not stem from capitulation to the agenda of the feminist women's movement, which Hamas has consistently criticized and condemned as Western agents and as detached elites in the past and even during the election. Rather, Hamas's decision to include women, the movement argued, stemmed from an authentic commitment to Islamic principles. Thus the movement worked to legitimate and make indigenous, authentic, and Islamic the practice of women's participation as parliamentary candidates and elected representatives. It worked to convince its

supporters and potential voters that women were indeed capable of serving as elected representatives and that this was in fact a part of their Islamic tradition rather than a break from it. Second, much of the discursive effort Hamas exerted also focused on alleviating the fears of a traditional society and voter base about the issue of women's representation.

It is not surprising that Hamas would worry about appearing as capitulating to the quota requirement that was imposed through the work of the women's movement. Given Hamas's well-known stance on complementarian gender roles, its decision to include so many women candidates on its list could appear as an acceptance of a feminist agenda that Hamas has denounced consistently. Hamas's candidates therefore insistently stressed in interviews and articles in the movements' paper *Al-Risala* that they still abided by their rejection of this agenda. Many of Hamas's candidates denied in interviews that the movement included women due to the quota requirement in the new election law, insisting that Hamas from its establishment has been conscious of the role and status of women.<sup>82</sup>

Prior to the election, Hamas also published on its website the official decision of the Palestinian Ulama Association on women's participation in the election.<sup>83</sup> The text announces that women's participation in the election is permitted according to Islam. This position rests on "numerous Quranic verses and ahadith as well as historical accounts of the lives of the prophet's companions." The decision further declares that, "Islam gave women the right to share with men in voting, being nominated as parliamentary candidates, holding positions in representative bodies and other general governmental and administrative posts." The symbolic effect of the quota here is paradoxical. While Hamas candidates, and the movements' publications and social media platform, expressed a reluctance toward and at times outright opposition to the women's quota and the political agents that have advocated for it, they generated an unprecedented amount of discursive support for women's political representation. Moreover, they couched this support in Islamic principles, making women's inclusion a central tenet of the movement's religious-political outlook.

Alongside authenticating women's political representation as an Islamic principle, during the election campaign, the movement also worked to convince its voters and the public that women made capable leaders. Campaign activities for women and women's

electoral efforts, for instance, received unprecedented attention.<sup>84</sup> Women candidates featured in Hamas's publications and social media and were described as apt leaders with extensive experience. In these profiles, the candidates were described as being untiring public figures while at the same time maintaining their commitment to their homes. Some candidates explained that their first duty is as housewives and that they strive not to let their public work interfere with their housework for the sake of their families.<sup>85</sup> Others, like Samira Halaiqa argued that, "when women only devote themselves to housework and nothing else, many of them just waste most of their free time on unimportant or useless things."<sup>86</sup> Many candidates explained that women's entry into the political realm will allow them to focus on the issues and concerns of women, while others argued that Hamas women will be involved in all policy areas and will represent the entire population.<sup>87</sup>

In some profiles, the candidates' husbands also offered their perspective, emphasizing their support for their wives and for women's political leadership. Some explained how they have started to help with housework, while others stressed that men should accept the personal sacrifices entailed in a wife's public work for the sake of the greater good of society and the nation that would benefit from her work. The following quote from a Hamas piece on the husbands of candidates reflects the extent to which the movement strove to alleviate the concerns of a traditional audience over women's leadership, and to highlight the compatibility between women's representation, Islamic activism, and the realities of a traditional society:

Women's decision to enter the public realm in a society that still possesses many traditional ideas about women's role doubtlessly raises questions about the position of their husbands and their feelings, and even more so when the issue involves the wife's entry into Parliament. Will the husband accept his wife's rising to such a prominent position and social status as a member of Parliament? Especially as her new responsibility, which is not confined to regular hours, might come at his expense or the expense of his home.... When Hamas decided to nominate women, it proved wrong the conviction of many who did not think that Islamist<sup>88</sup> women would be allowed to take certain positions and duties, and that Hamas will not allow them to do so. Moreover, many in our society thought that their [Hamas women's] husbands would not be able to be so understanding and encouraging of their leading wives, [to such an extent] that they would be able to say: "the day has come when it is possible to say that behind every great woman there's a great man."<sup>89</sup>

In a different vein, Jamila Shanti, the highest placed woman on Hamas's list (number three), admitted that her elevated placement on



the list was in fact due to the quota requirements. She also stated that she hopes through her entry into Parliament to increase women's representation even further in the future.<sup>90</sup> In addition, new voices appeared even on the issue around which there seemed to be a consensus in Hamas—the prohibition to place a woman at the head of the affairs of the community. Huda Naim, for example, who was number seven on the Hamas parliamentary list, stated that there is a disagreement on the issue among religious scholars, with some accepting and some rejecting this stipulation. In an interview, she advised women to “excel and strive and compete strongly and succeed in the arenas in which women are present. If women succeeded as ministers and as parliamentarians and in other positions, then the discussion about the possibility of [a woman] assuming the presidency would make sense. Women's performance is what would do them justice, if they excelled the doors will open before them.”<sup>91</sup> Samira Halaiqa holds a similar position, claiming that there is no agreement among the *'ulama* and pointing out that there is significant evidence in the Quran and the Sunna to suggest that women do have a right to occupy such positions in accordance with the necessity and the general interest of the Muslim community.<sup>92</sup>

It is hard to deny that the quota had played an important part in advancing women's political representation among all Palestinian political factions, including Hamas. Symbolically, the quota also forced Hamas to articulate a clearer position on women's political role than it has ever done before. It also compelled the movement to authenticate its decision to place women candidates high on its list as a move stemming from Islamic principles and commitments rather than a capitulation to feminist pressures. Nevertheless, even prior to the quota, women activists in Hamas were able to participate in politics as candidates and representatives in student governments and in professional unions. Islah Jad's extensive study of the women of Hamas in the late 1990s lends greater support to the link between religious-nationalism and opportunities for various forms of women's political activism.<sup>93</sup> Jad demonstrates that the Islamist women of Hamas were able to surpass even the women of secular political factions in political gains because they focused on what was perceived to be a legitimate and unassailable religious-nationalist agenda instead of on a discourse of individual rights and feminist demands.

## 6

### Conclusion

Transgression of complementarian gender roles and their reversal has the potential to challenge the existing gender order. In the case of socially conservative religious-political movements, transgression could challenge their underlying gender ideology. In this sense, the performance by women activists in the nationalist-religious movements that I explored in the previous chapters resonates, surprisingly, with the literature on drag performance and social protest. A central debate in this literature is whether the dissociation between biological sex and gender performance that is at the heart of drag undermines dominant binary understandings of sex and gender by exposing the socially constructed mechanisms that constitute these. Or, on the other hand, as some argue, drag performance reinforces such binaries by drawing on traditional tropes of femininity and masculinity. Taylor et al. provide a useful conceptual framework with which to evaluate when drag performance becomes a subversive (in the sense of subverting dominant gender norms) political tactic. The three elements they consider are “contestation,” “intentionality,” and “collective identity.”<sup>1</sup> In the following, I apply each of these elements to the transgression performed by women activists in Hamas and the settler movement, and to some extent in the Islamic Movement in Israel as well.

Contestation means the extent to which the symbols, bodies, practices, identities, and discourses employed in a performance “subvert rather than maintain dominant relations of power.”<sup>2</sup> In Hamas and the settler women’s protest and militant action, the location and movement of their bodies—in public displays of disobedience and at times in “unruly” physical contact with men—is a deviation from three central and fundamental ideological commitments of their movement: a complementarian division of labor, the regulation of interaction between the sexes, and female modesty. However, their use of feminine and maternal affectivity to articulate their motivation undercuts the contentious nature of women activists’ action in relation to their movement’s ideology. They employ essentialized notions about femininity to justify more

expansive forms of activism. In this process, they in fact strengthen rather than destabilize their movements' gender role binaries.

This is, of course, not to say that any deployment of what has been called “maternal frames,” is inherently untransformative. Aretxaga, for example, shows how the use of motherhood by Republican nationalist women in Northern Ireland in fact modified the dominant gender discourse that propelled women to action in and through practice. She observes that “their involvement in popular resistance led women ... to an increased appreciation of the political character of gender inequality. That is, gender relations came to appear as susceptible to transformation as were other social relations. The disruption and new accommodations of gender relations, which intensified in the mid-1970s, represent the recognition of that possibility of change.”<sup>3</sup> Other examples abound of women who were moved to social or political protest because of their positioning as mothers and who developed, as a result of their activism, a feminist consciousness.<sup>4</sup> The women in Aretxaga's case, to continue with our comparison, developed through their participation in the nationalist struggle what she terms “republican feminism,” which critiqued traditional feminism for its universalizing tendencies and marginalization of national identities and struggles, but also critiqued Republican patriarchy and existing gender arrangements. As I have shown in [chapter 4](#), however, this was not the case with the religious-nationalist women I studied. Unlike cases of nationalist women who before becoming active were unaware or unreflective of gender inequalities and constraining sexual politics that pervaded their world, or who took these to be cultural givens, the women I worked with were committed to promoting, consciously and out of great conviction, a model of gender role complementarity in their communities. Their commitment to the complementarian model did not change in the process of their activism.

The second element is “intentionality”—that is, “referring to the performers' conscious and intentional action geared towards challenging dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity, [and] sex and gender categories.”<sup>5</sup> But unlike the drag performers in Taylor's research, who articulate their intention to undermine heterosexual norms and gender binaries, the religious-nationalist activists in my study seem to be doing the opposite. The framing of their actions within exceptional times that necessitate such transgressions and bring them about highlights that the performance

has a place only under the condition of exceptionality. This contextualization draws further attention to the cataclysmic instability and out-of-the-ordinariness of their practices and implies that when things are in order, when the desired normalcy returns, transgressions will no longer have a place.

“Collective identity” that a performance aims to define is the final element in this framework. In drag performance, gender identity boundaries are often destabilized and transformed in a way that expands categories of belonging. The transgressions of the activists in the cases explored here, on the other hand, work to strengthen a dominant religious-national identity that is profoundly committed to a clear gender dichotomy and to exclusionary nationalism. The overstepping of ascribed gender roles in the activists’ action is ultimately intended to reinforce, rather than shake, the ideological identity binaries in their movements, and in their societies more broadly.

Nevertheless, I would argue that the effect of their actions may be more ambiguous than the activists intend. The disconnect between their expressed commitment to role complementarity and their actions that do not conform to this binary, as well as their effort to reconcile this contradiction, translate into patterns of activism that, on the ground, open spaces for and inadvertently routinize a different kind of public behavior by women. In particular, as [chapter 5](#) showed, women in these movements are able to combine frames of exception with other arguments about women’s competency in order to increase their political representation in parties and political lists associated with their movements. Yet, the finding that it is nationalist or communalist frameworks in particular that provide women on the Israeli and Palestinian religious right framing options to expand political participation is quite challenging to observers with egalitarian commitments. The fact that women carve new spaces for activism by using a menacing “other,” an enemy who creates an urgent existential threat that justifies women’s nontraditional activism, is disheartening.

I struggled with whether or not to offer judgment or critique of frames of exception and women’s activism in the religious-nationalist movements I study as ultimately conservative, as opposed to transformative. In the chapters of this book, I have tried to withhold evaluation of women’s activism based on feminist criteria that privilege resistance to, subversion of, and emancipation from

oppressive power relations. Saba Mahmood argues that “our analytical explorations should not be reduced to the requirements of political judgment... By allowing theoretical inquiry some immunity from the requirements of strategic political action, we leave open the possibility that the task of thinking may proceed in directions not dictated by the logic and pace of immediate political events.”<sup>6</sup> Still, after providing an exploration of women’s activism, I think the question of women’s equality and emancipation as a desired commitment should be raised in a work that upholds a feminist lens. It would be dishonest not to disclose that the very motivation for this research was a concern about and interest in the politics that constrain or open new opportunities for women in various spheres of their lives. Furthermore, I do not subscribe to the argument that preoccupation with the idea of women’s freedom from oppression and relations of domination is a Western liberal commitment that is entirely foreign to the conservative sites that I study.

Here I take issue with arguments that suggest that in order to study conservative or illiberal pious women’s lifeworlds, we must dissociate our understanding of agency from emancipatory desire and action, and a purportedly Western privileging of autonomy. While women in various contexts can exhibit and do experience agency by either resisting or by upholding non-egalitarian frameworks and politics, I do think that we can normatively question which of these forms of agency is more desirable and more ethical. The women in the religious-nationalist movements I presented in this book are powerful agents, but their political agenda ultimately works to restrict, rather than expand, women’s freedoms and choices. Their frames of exception, or in Aretxaga’s formulation their “choiceless decisions,” construct women as simply affective, maternal, nationalistic beings who step out of assigned roles only for the sake of the “nation,” and in defiance of a menacing, uncomplicated “other.” In this respect, they promote politics that work to reduce women’s options for autonomy from their “nation” and their “land” and make concern with the well-being of the nation the only legitimate justification for women’s transgressions.

But this is not the only option women have in conservative religious-political movements in Israel and Palestine. Paradoxically, I found that it was the two proselytizing movements that I studied that offered greater potential for social transformation. In my work with women activists in the southern branch of the Islamic

Movement and in Shas, I found that these movements offered women powerful liberatory narratives.

### **Women, Freedom, and Agency in Shas and the Southern Branch of the Islamic Movement**

In Shas and the southern branch of the Islamic Movement, I found that often women activists' interpretations of agency in piety practices were highly invested in the idea of the autonomous individual. The validity of practices, according to activists, rested on the choice and consciousness of the individual and on the rejection of submission to social norms. Furthermore, when we take into account the class and cultural contexts of these women's piety practices and activism, we find that for many women such religious movements offer real liberation from oppressive socio-economic realities and limiting cultural norms. Liberatory narratives in these two illiberal movements are not hidden; they do not appear only in confined spaces away from public view. Rather, they present themselves in religious lessons and lectures by leading women, and in conversations with the women who shape the popular discourse of the movements and whom other activists regard as role models of feminine piety.

In her groundbreaking work, *The Politics of Piety*, Saba Mahmood argued that Western feminists mistakenly look for acts of resistance by women to locate their agency. They then wrongly associate the absence of resistance to oppressive norms with an absence of agency. The conflation of the concept of agency with emancipatory desire or action, according to Mahmood, is a manifestation of a patently Western tradition that privileges the autonomous individual. The pious Muslim women she studied, she argued, can experience agency in practices that ultimately uphold their subordination, rather than in resistance to oppressive norms.

Mahmood writes that feminist notions of freedom, conceived as self-realization, rely on the liberal requirement that "in order for an individual to be free, her actions must be the consequence of her 'own free will' rather than of custom, tradition, or social coercion."<sup>7</sup> Drawing on poststructuralist insight, she argues that such a separation between an "autonomous individual" and "external" forces like custom, tradition, and social coercion is untenable. Following Foucault, she convincingly claims that these external forces are constitutive of the individual; they give rise to a subject

that does not exist prior to them or transcend them. Agency, therefore, should not be understood as the individual's ability to act for self-realization in opposition to and against the weight of external customs, traditions, or norms. Rather, agency could also be understood as the work individuals perform on themselves to better comply with the external norms that constitute them. Emancipatory desire, she writes, is not a universal attribute of the individual.

Shirin, a leading Bedouin da'iyah in the Islamic Movement, who is in her twenties, offers a discussion of freedom, which she shares with her peers in the Movement's activities she oversees and in her work with high school girls:

Freedom is to give woman the key, and teach her how to use this key.... I give this allegory about Islam: Islam gives woman a key and tells her, there are two gates. This key opens both. It can open the first gate, which will lead you to heaven, to happiness, to satisfaction, and conviction. The second gate, if you open it, a lion will leap at you. We give her this information but let her choose for herself; she is rational and intelligent, and she has to choose what is better for her life. The key is in her hand, and she is the one to decide. We don't give her the key and say open whichever gate you'd like without telling her what lies behind each gate.

Here we see that the idea of the autonomous self is not inherently alien to Shirin, and neither is the commitment to an emancipatory discourse. In Shirin's account, negative freedom, the complete absence of interference by others, conflicts with self-interest. Withholding guidance from an individual inhibits rather than enables her to pursue her self-interest. Shirin describes the individual as an "intelligent" and "rational" agent that should act in her own best interest. However, her ignorance can come in the way of her realizing this best interest. It could make her open the door that would lead to the lion.

Islam, according to the prevalent discourse among women leaders in the southern branch of the Movement, helps guide the individual to the right path that is in accordance with her true self-interest. It helps her overcome other harmful aspects within her like unthinking ignorance or misguided and superficial desire. The Islamic narrative here espouses self-realization through correct guidance. In other words, this guidance helps the individual uncover her true interests that are obfuscated by desire, ignorance, or habit. Islam is the framework through which one can achieve autonomy from harmful internal and external influences. Religious knowledge here performs the same role that reason, knowledge, education, or consciousness (as opposed to false consciousness) plays in liberal feminist accounts of freedom.

Furthermore, Mahmood argues for the disassociation of the concept of agency from the notion of the autonomous self. The agency of the women in the piety movement she studies is formed by the very customs, traditions and norms they inhabit and not prior to and autonomously from them. Agency is not located only in one's ability to achieve autonomy from what might be considered oppressive customs and traditions or to subvert them, but also in actively inhabiting them. The women activists in the Islamic Movement in Israel, however, vehemently insist on the individual's resistance to unexamined customs and traditions.

Unlike those who would equate customs and traditions, as well as social norms that subordinate women, with Islam, the Movement's activists make an unequivocal distinction between the two. The women associate customs, traditions, norms, and social coercion with the internal and external elements that interfere with the individual's free and conscious choice. This is clear in following discussion of *'ada* (custom) and *'ibada* (worship) by a leading da'iyah in the movement:

There is *'ada* and there is *'ibada*. For example, some women wear Islamic dress as *'ibada*. I know that Islam says that a woman, when she leaves her house, must be *muhajjaba* [veiled] and wear the *jilbab*.... Now, there are some women that wear this as *'ibada*, as it is mentioned in the Quran. Some other women don't wear it as an *'ibada*, they wear it as *'ada*. They wear it because most of the women in their family wear the hijab outside the home. Or because they are used to wearing certain clothes that their families think restrict women.... If we want to enter heaven, we must think of everything we do as *'ibada*, this should be our intention. If I work for others it counts as *'ibada*—for example, if I clean and cook for my husband and help him, I profit from it as if it is *'ibada* [it counts as if I have performed *'ibada*]. I receive my reward because these are things I was not required to do or forced to do but I still chose to do them.

In their teachings, the da'iyat draw a sharp distinction between *'ada* and *'ibada*. The act performed is identical in the eyes of an outside observer—for example, donning the hijab. What makes one worthier than the other and what determines whether one would receive recompense from God, however, is the intention behind performing the act. The act of wearing the hijab because it is an established tradition, a social norm, or because of coercion (because one's family uses it to restrict female members) does not have the same status as wearing it out of real conviction in its religious meaning. What validates an act as an *'ibada* thus is autonomous choice; the conscious decision of the individual to perform it independently of customs, traditions, or coercion. Some da'iyat go even further to stress choice as the integral component of *'ibada*. The recompense



from God is not given for simply performing the act but for choosing freely to do so. Again, it is the independent intention of the conscious agent who understands Islam that validates the act as worship. The criterion for classifying an act as *'ada* or *'ibada* is not so different from the liberal classification of an act as free or coerced. The consent, intention, and choice of the agent are at the heart of both.

The following is Rabbanit Nitza's story of embracing the headscarf. This account, told by one of the most high-profile women in Shas's teshuva network, could have been just as easily related by an Islamist activist. I selected this story because of its function within the work of the movement among women. Shas women leaders often employ accounts of personal triumph through faith over adversity as a means for encouraging women who face similar struggles.

I mentioned my shortcomings, I used to wear a wig. Then Rabbi Ovadia [Yosef] came out against wigs. My husband came home and told me, "I will give you everything you wish." I said, "Why?" He said, "As of today you must only wear a head-cover." I cannot say that it was an easy step. It wasn't at all easy. [Adopting] the head-cover wasn't easy because everyone knew me with a wig. I woke up in the morning, put on the head-cover and had to take the children to kindergarten. When I came to the kindergarten, the teacher saw me and asked me if I wasn't feeling well. I told her I was fine, and so she asked me, "Why are you wearing a head-cover, where is your wig?" I said, "I sent it to be mended." ... Then we had a family occasion. I asked my husband, "Do you permit me to wear the wig?" He said, "Absolutely not." I said, "But people are going to react, mouths will drop." He said, "Pray, ask *Hashem* [God]." I said, "What can I possibly ask?" He said a sentence that stayed with me since then and that I pass to others. He said, "When a person does a deed for the sake of God, not for personal gain, not for what other people are going to say, but really you do it because God commanded it, he prays." I asked him, "How do I pray about such a thing?" He said, "Ask that your deed will please God and man and you will see that when God is pleased with your deed people will also be pleased." ... I always wanted to know if I was really doing God's will. I wanted a sign. Women told me I looked old, that the head-cover made me look unwell, it wasn't easy.... It wasn't easy to deal with the public, especially someone like me who is well known in the community.... One day I went out, and one woman reacted very badly. She said, "You look a hundred years old." And I was a young woman. I asked God again to give me a sign, to see that my act was pleasing to God. Because I accepted it but everybody around me seemed to react badly.

After a while, we had another family occasion ... and I prayed to God, that it will please God and men: "*Ribbon-ha-olamim* [master of the universe], this is in Your honor, not mine, it is to glorify Your name." When I came to the event, what was the reaction? Women told me, "How the head-cover suits you!" and this was the response not just from one or two women. Most of the women present told me the same thing. I came to my husband and said, "My prayer had been answered, I received the sign. God has tested me until now to see if I stumble in my way or if I am firm in His decision, *barukh hashem* [blessed is God]." And from then until today I wear it; it has been about twenty years.

Nitza sees this as a liberatory story. Remaining true to the requirements of religion can cause conflict or disagreement with activists' surroundings. The pursuit of appropriate piety, often signified in the acceptance of severe modesty practices, is portrayed by Nitza as a triumph of her faith in face of opposition and ridicule from others. She struggled to convince others and herself to accept her new appearance. Encountering negative looks and criticism from her environment, she persevered in her adherence and triumphed. Her act came in opposition to her community's norms. Her labor was to see the new covering as what the Islamic Movement activists call *'ibada*, so that the conviction will come from her and through her conviction will become acceptable in the eyes of her critical family, friends, and wider community.

Such stories of struggle were very common in my work with activists. For example, Salma and Safiya are sisters from a mixed Arab-Jewish town. In the 1980s, when they were in the ninth grade, they were the first women to adopt the hijab in their town. Since at the time no women, except for elderly grandmothers, would cover their hair in their town, the sisters tied scarfs around their heads in what they described to me as a funny-looking wrap. They sewed high collars onto their high-school uniforms, and convinced their mother to sew ankle-length skirts for them. Stores selling Islamic dress were unavailable, so they had to resort to these improvisations. At their school, in which all students were Muslim, they recount, they encountered ridicule. The boys made fun of them, and the girls told them that they looked like old grandmothers and that no one would marry them. Even their mother asked them to keep some distance from her when they walked together in the streets in order not to draw attention to the strange sight of a "modern"-looking mother and her two daughters who "looked like nuns." They had to endure these difficult reactions for the sake of their conviction. In their narrative, they were triumphant when they eventually managed to get together a group of other girls who wanted to adopt Islamic dress and created a small alternative community where they could both offer and receive support.

Shas activists, like the Islamic Movement women, also distinguish between *'ada* and *'ibada*—between doing something simply because it is required or for outward appearance, and doing it out of real conviction in its religious merit. An allegory that I heard in a Shas women's class to stress this point is of a rabbi who once met one of his students who had abandoned the religious lifestyle.

When the student saw his former rabbi, he tried to hide and avoid his gaze because he was wary of the rabbi's judgment. The rabbi approached him with affection and love and the student, embarrassed, admitted, "I didn't want you to see me without a yarmulke." The rabbi laughed and said, "I am a short man, I only reach the height of your chest so all I can see is your heart, not the top of your head."

The discourse of leading women activists in these two conservative religious movements is not one of submission. They mention struggle, opposition, and resistance to accepted norms, unthinking habit, and social impositions. The validating authority for a practice, what makes it meaningful, is not a woman's submissive acceptance but a conscious effort by an autonomous self who is able to make choices. Claims that the privileging of free choice and the idea of the autonomous self is a foreign Western liberal construct could obfuscate the extent to which such concepts are central to women in Muslim, Jewish, and other contemporary conservative religious groups.

### **Emancipatory Narratives**

Paying attention to the political, cultural, and class contexts of religious revivalist movements sheds light on another crucial area in which practices of piety offer a powerful emancipatory narrative.<sup>8</sup> The extent to which Islam carries within it an emancipatory narrative for the women activists in the Islamic Movement is explicitly present when cultural customs and norms conflict with what the women activists understand to be true Islam.<sup>9</sup> This conflict is most apparent among the Bedouin activists in the Negev Desert. Maha, a young da'iyah who leads the Islamic Movement's student group at her university, describes an instant of such conflict:

As I started to learn [about Islam] I felt that my understanding developed further, I understood what my obligations were and what my rights were. How to do everything within the accepted framework, what is forbidden and what is allowed. I feel that our society tries to suppress me and tell me that everything is forbidden, but I know that they impose rules on me that are not from Islam. These are customs and traditions [*'adat wa-taqalid*] that are oppressive. They have their own history but Islam is not their origin; Islam does not even say one sentence to their effect. They always try to confine the woman, keep her at home. But I have respect for the girl that goes out to study, to advance our society.

Other Bedouin activists, like Maha, take the distinction between *'ada* and *'ibada* a step further. Their knowledge of Islam and their membership in the Islamic Movement gives them authority, in their

eyes and in the eyes of others, to resist certain customs and traditions that they view as oppressive to women, as un-Islamic and therefore unauthoritative. One of the issues that came up often in conversations with Bedouin activists in the Movement was that of marriage between relatives and restricting women's choice of husbands. Even as the Bedouin community in Israel has transitioned to urban life, old tribal alliances remain intact. According to the restrictive tribal code, marriages must take place only between families sharing a historic tribal alliance. A hierarchy favoring the families that originated in Saudi Arabia over families from Egypt that are considered "inferior" severely limits women's choices. Men from the more privileged families can marry women both from inferior families and from non-Bedouin families, while women do not have the same freedom in choosing their husbands.<sup>10</sup> The Islamic Movement women activists consider this practice *'ada* and therefore openly reject it. In conversations and in their work with other women, activists invoke the following Quranic verse to argue that such a practice is un-Islamic: "O mankind! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. The noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Allah is Knower, Aware" (Quran 49:13). They interpret this verse to mean that Allah has given women the right not to stay within the limited confines of family and tribal alliances when it comes to marriage. They argue that endogamous marriages only increase tribalism (*'asabiyya qabaliyya*) and are therefore in contradiction with the Islamic injunction to "know one another." Activists told me of instances in which they, or other activists they knew, invoked this principle to refuse arranged marriages.

Women activists overall argue that the practices they find oppressive to women stem from customs and traditions and that a better adherence to Islam helps eradicate those. In a religion class for Bedouin women in the Negev, one woman argued:

Twenty years ago people followed *'adat* [customs] much more than religion. Today it is better but there is still work to be done. The religion encourages women to go out and participate in all aspects of community life, so you see more of that today. I think it is the customs that create all the social problems that women are affected by. When Islam is stronger the situation for women is better. The religion weakens the *'adat*, it takes precedence over them.

Becoming more religious and being active in the Movement endows Bedouin women activists with a certain authority within their families that stems from their learning—when their mothers are often illiterate—and from their piety that families deeply respect.

Several younger activists described transformation in family relations when they became religious. Their parents started to listen to them and expanded the freedoms given to them, including more freedom to travel alone and less monitoring of their behavior, actions, relationships, and movement.

Education is another source of conflict between many young Israeli Bedouin women and their families.<sup>11</sup> The Islamic Movement activists attribute these oppressive practices to customs and traditions, and they consistently strive to expand women's opportunities. While many of the older generation women were married off before they turned eighteen and were not allowed to pursue education, the younger activists today often marry later and pursue higher education. Older da'iyat tell of their stunted education, as their families pulled them out of school before they started high school because they were worried about them traveling unchaperoned and about the prospect of mixing with men and concerns about the family's reputation.

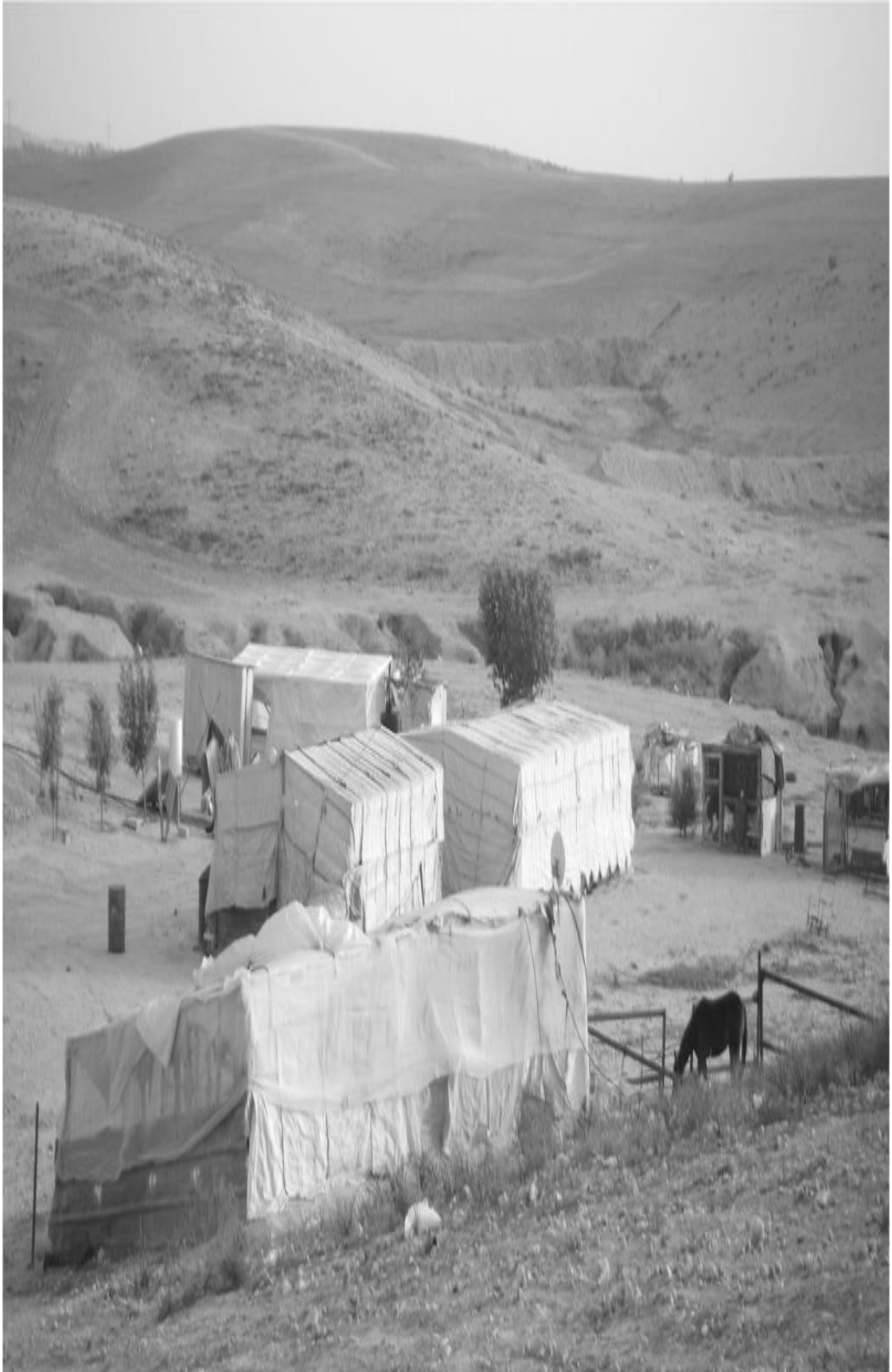


Figure 6.1. Unrecognized Bedouin village in the Negev.

Women of the younger leadership of the movement have a completely different experience. Their activism in the movement helps alleviate their parents' fears of letting them attend university, and most of them have acquired or are currently pursuing higher education. The experiences of women in the Islamic Movement, of which I have tried to present a few illustrative examples, show that indeed they do not advocate "negative freedom" that encourages the individual to do whatever she desires. However, they do adhere to a conception of emancipation and an autonomous self that struggles against external sources of oppression to expand freedom and opportunities for women.

Chapter 3 also demonstrated how women who have faced poverty and other social challenges have been able to overcome these and create better conditions for themselves and their families through their activism in Shas. When we consider class, we see that Shas offers material and emotional liberation from oppressive socioeconomic conditions for many women. The image of Rabbanit Rukhama preaching to her class of twenty women to "never say I can't," and to forcefully pursue education and employment in order to overcome material difficulties, most vividly captures this aspect of Shas activism for me. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that women choose to become active in these movements only because of material necessity. During my fieldwork, I also encountered women whose background was one of relative material comfort and who have found their way to Shas through a whole set of other reasons. Noa, for example, had a successful career when she was diagnosed with cancer. The doctors said there was little hope, and her health rapidly deteriorated. In her desperation, she contacted Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's household to ask for his help. He agreed to see her in spite of his impossibly busy schedule and, she tells, when he leaned forward to bless her—she was in a wheelchair at the time—she saw tears in his eyes. Noa then quickly recovered from the cancer, stunning her doctors, she says. She attributes her healing to Rabbi Yosef's intervention and has worked since to help other women "strengthen" and find their way to God through Shas.

Another of my interlocutors, Hava, who immigrated to Israel from an East Asian country, gave up a lucrative profession and the comfort of her middle-class family when she discovered Judaism and decided she wanted to be Jewish. When she arrived in Israel, the religious establishment, represented by the Rabbinate, denied her request to convert for several years. In these years, she had to hide

from the immigration police, work in menial jobs, and face rejection from Orthodox Jewish communities that did not accept her and her family. An influential rabbanit from Shas then took Hava under her wing and has supported and encouraged her in her own spiritual journey and in the work she has undertaken since her conversion to help other women who face the insurmountable obstacles that the Rabbinat places in front of those who wish to convert to Judaism in Israel. Hava, like other rabbaniyot, stresses intention above all in her support group for women. It is not enough, she tells them, to want to embrace Judaism because their husbands are Jewish or because conversion will allow them to gain legal status in Israel. The connection to *Hashem* and to his *mitzvot*, she teaches, should be the main underlying motivator in the process of conversion; without it, there is little value to the process.

Similar stories of conversion exist in the Islamic Movement. Lina, for example, who is from a Russian Jewish and Christian background, never found her place when her family immigrated to Israel from Russia in the 1990s. For years, she had felt isolated and had a hard time creating friendships with Israelis. When she started university, the women of the Islamic Movement's student organization embraced her and offered friendship, support, and a new community. Salma and Safiya also told me that they felt lost growing up in the 1980s in a poor mixed Arab-Jewish town where religion was reduced to folklore, '*adat wa-taqalid*, and in their eyes, there was little sense of a meaningful and distinct religious identity, especially for the Muslim minority. The Islamic revival that took shape in those years gave them the sense of identity and of a coherent community that they had been searching for.

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Women leaders' interpretations of piety practices in these two highly conservative movements reveal that a commitment to emancipatory desire, narrative, and action are not simply Western feminist impositions. The stories and teachings of the women that shape the discourse of the Islamic Movement and of Shas, as they circulate among women in religious classes, lectures, and conversations, emphasize the conscious choice and reflection of the autonomous individual as an important criterion for judging the adoption of a piety practice. It is what distinguishes genuine worship from unthinking submission to external social, cultural, and even religious pressures. Furthermore, through their involvement with the Islamic



Movement, Bedouin women in the Israeli south have been able to expand educational and marriage opportunities, as well as the freedoms their traditional families grant them. Shas women, who generally share a history of poverty, have also succeeded in expanding possibilities for higher education, professional training, and employment as a result of their activism. Although less common, other women who came from more materially stable backgrounds found in Shas's and in the Islamic Movement's teachings the strength needed to confront personal crises and social and spiritual challenges.

The attention that activists give to women's autonomy and choice, however, should not be confused with a feminist consciousness. Different from new trends in Orthodox Jewish feminism and Islamic feminism, which afford women new forms of religious authority formerly deemed inappropriate for women, both Shas and Islamic Movement women do not demand for themselves, for now, religious roles that the movements reserve for men. The leaders and activists I worked with insisted that women should not seek to perform tasks such as leading prayer or studying the Talmud. Whether the liberatory narratives constructed by women leaders and activists might ultimately undermine the overall nonegalitarian gender ideology and practices of their movements remains to be seen. Until now, the movements have accommodated evolving social roles for women without fundamentally reformulating the parameters of their fairly stable ideological frameworks.

In this concluding chapter, I sought to counter a tendency toward the romanticization of difference that runs the risk of essentializing certain patriarchal practices as "authentic" expressions of local, non-Western ethics or subjectivities. At the same time, I do not argue that liberatory narratives and commitment to free, uncoerced choice are the true "authentic" expressions of local traditions, nor do I trace the origin or lineage of emancipatory discourses. Shirin Hafez's fascinating work on pious women activists in the Egyptian context has demonstrated that they are "complex, multifaceted subjects whose desires take shape through imbricated notions of pious self-amelioration and secular political values."<sup>12</sup> Hafez deconstructs the "pious Islamic subject" that is supposed to be the nonliberal opposite of the liberal, freedom-desiring subject, and shows that such firm and bounded dichotomies rarely exist on the ground and that religious and secular, conservative, and liberal desires may simultaneously shape the same subject. This chapter offers

additional evidence that liberatory narratives and commitments are as present among women activists in non-Western illiberal conservative religious movements as they are in Western and non-Western liberal feminist agendas.

# Notes

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction: Frames of Exception and Righteous Transgressions**

1. It may be useful here to clarify what I mean by the rather inelegant term “socially conservative religious-political movements,” which will be used in this book. In earlier scholarship, the sort of groups I study would be called fundamentalist movements (Marty and Appleby 1991). But given the historical specificity of this term and the pejorative connotations now attached to it, I do not employ it. Instead, I adopt Nikki Keddie’s definition of what she calls New Religious Politics, which includes (1) “an appeal to a reinterpreted, homogenized religious tradition, seen as solving problems exacerbated by various forms of secular, communal, or foreign power”; (2) a political agenda, an engagement with formal or informal politics in an attempt to influence policy; and (3) conservative social views. “For most groups this includes patriarchal views regarding gender, family relations and social mores” (Keddie 1998, p. 697).

2. It is important to note, though, that this complementary division of labor does not at all mean restriction of women’s education or employment. In fact, as will become clear in this study, some conservative religious-political movements have done significant work to facilitate women’s secular education and employment. These areas have been incorporated in their discourse as necessary for women’s ability to be adequate mothers and homemakers. It is rather the maintenance of women’s and men’s divinely sanctioned natural distinctions in the context of rising female education and employment, and managing the interaction between the sexes so that gender boundaries are not blurred, that is the concern of many of these movements.

3. Casanova and Phillips (2009); Hawley (1994); Appleby (1993). Of course, such conceptions are not the sole monopoly of religious-political movements. Plenty of secular worldviews also rest on various patriarchal arrangements. The distinguishing feature of contemporary religious-political movements is their claim that the patriarchal arrangement they advocate is divinely sanctioned and is therefore inherently required for the establishment of a moral society.

4. For discussions of the gendered nature of the modern public/private division, see Elshtain (1981) and Okin (2008).

5. Wallach Scott (2013).

6. For an example of the evolution of private/public distinctions as they relate to men and women’s different roles in Islamist discourse, and this discourse’s reliance on Enlightenment understandings of this dichotomy, see Abu-Lughod (2005).

7. For examples of this approach see: Brink and Mencher (1997); Nachtwey and Tessler (1999); Blaydes (2008); Ben Shitrit (2013).

8. Mahmood (2005); Bracke (2008); Deeb (2011). In this shift from “why” to “how” questions, feminist scholars have been taking their cue from Foucault (1982).

9. Mahmood (2005); Deeb (2011); El-Or (2002, 2006); Ahmed (2011).

10. But see also Hale (1996); Clark and Schwedler (2003); Arat (2005); Yadav (2010); Tadros (2011); and White (2011) for case studies of women's explicitly political activism in religious-political movements.

11. Outside of the Middle East, conservative women's formal political activism has been addressed more extensively. See, for example, Nickerson (2012); Critchlow (2005); Blee (2009); Basu (1998); Sarkar and Butalia (1995); Power (2010).

12. This is, of course, not simply assumed. Rather, in chapter 2 I review the official texts, publications, pronouncements, and policies of the movements under study to justify my claims about their official gender ideology.

13. Mansbridge (1999); Phillips (1995).

14. There is no politically influential Christian religious-political movement in Israel-Palestine.

15. See, for example, Clark and Schwedler (2003), who direct attention to non-gender-related ideological cleavages in studying women's participation in Islamist parties in Yemen and Jordan.

16. Keddie (1998), p. 696.

17. More elaborate justifications for my classification appear in chapter 2, which expands on the history, sociology, and ideology of each movement.

18. Agamben (2005) elaborates on Schmitt's (2005) concept of "state of exception," which entails a temporary suspension of law due to an urgent threat, a defining feature of sovereignty. He demonstrates how historically this has transformed from a provisional measure to a permanent paradigm of government. Frames of exception, on the other hand, do not refer to a legal discourse and action by states, but rather to collective-action discursive framing processes, which enable social movements' members to act in ways that under normal circumstances would violate the ideology to which they are committed and which they themselves try to promote.

19. Kandiyoti (2004); Yuval-Davis (1997).

20. Benford and Snow (2000), p. 613.

21. Snow (2004), p. 400.

22. Benford and Snow (2005).

23. The framing literature has been incredibly productive, but has also come under extensive critique. (For a good overview of this critique, see Benford 1997 and Oliver and Johnston 2000.) In my use of the concept in this book, I am conscious of the problems pointed out, and I try to avoid many of the pitfalls associated with the concept. First, I employ the term "frames of exception" comparatively, across cases, in an attempt to offer a more systematic account of its operation. Second, I see framing processes as dialogic and analyze the ways in which actors engage in framing construction and elaboration in relation to, and interactively with, their movement's ideology, the political context in which they act, and their own positionality in relation to their movement and its leadership. In this respect, I also avoid the elite bias in much of the framing literature, by addressing the ways in which less privileged or marginalized groups within a movement—in this case, women—engage their larger movement politics in frame construction. Finally, I avoid the reification of socially constructed ideas as if they

are independent of the actors involved in creating them. I disaggregate social movements from a unified core to collectives encompassing an array of individuals with diverse interests, objectives, and affective worlds. Emotions and affectivity play an important role in this book. Framing processes, as I describe them, involve both strategic and affective elements, and the women activists who undertake them are, as we shall see, fully aware of the interactive nature of political strategy and emotional authenticity.

24. See Benford and Snow (2000) for a description of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing processes.

25. Notable exceptions to this are Hale (1996), who studied nationalist Islamist women in Sudan, and Baron (2005), who has written about nationalist Islamist women in Egypt.

26. Clark and Schwedler (2003).

27. El-Or (2002); Ross (2000, 2004).

28. Karam (1998); Moghadam (2002); Barlas (2002); Badran (2005); Mir-Hosseini (2006).

29. Katzenstein (1999); Beattie (2004); Henold (2008).

30. Ingersoll (2003).

31. Abu Lughod (1990); Mahmood (2005).

32. For work in this vein, see Avishai (2008); Bracke (2008); Bilge (2010); Bucar (2010); Rinaldo (2010).

33. Selim (2010).

34. See for instance El-Ghobashy (2005); Abdel-Latif (2008).

35. Mohanty (1988); Mohanty et al. (1991).

36. Taylor (1999), p. 21.

37. In the settler movement, I worked mainly with women activists from two settlements in the northern West Bank (the area that settlers call by its biblical name, Samaria), five settlements in the southern part of the West Bank (biblical Judea), and several illegal settlement outposts throughout the West Bank. The Islamic Movement activists I worked with came from two cities and three villages in the Negev region, two towns in the central Triangle region, and one city in the north of Israel. Shas activists were mainly from two cities in central Israel that have significant Shas presence, two cities in the center of the country that have a more limited Shas presence, and one city in the south. Because Israel is a tiny country and everyone pretty much knows everyone else, and because the social milieu of each movement is even smaller and the women I interviewed are well known, I have gone to great lengths to disguise the identity of the women who spoke with me candidly and extensively about their activism. I have tried to blur identifying marks by using pseudonyms, altering personal information, and withholding the names of towns that could reveal the identity of my interlocutors. The only persons who are identified by their real names are those who spoke with me in an official capacity (for example, members of Parliament, heads of organizations, or official spokespersons) and who consented to be named. It is my hope that I have taken adequate measures to conceal the identity of the women who have contributed to this study.

38. Roy (2013).
39. Jad (2008).
40. Casanova (1994).
41. Asad (2003).
42. Euben (1999), p. 15.
43. Also see Harding's (1991) excellent discussion on representing fundamentalism and the problem of the "repugnant cultural other" and Dalsheim (2011).
44. Rawls (1997), p. 801.
45. Rawls (1997), p. 806. For critiques of Rawls's approach to "unreasonable doctrines," see Mouffe (1996); Quong (2004); Friedman (2000); Kelly and McPherson (2001).
46. Rawls (1993), p. 64, emphasis added.
47. Habermas (2006) suggests that religious arguments and secular ones can be articulated in the public sphere followed by cooperative and mutual translation in which secular citizens can translate religious arguments into secular ones in order to understand their value and contribution and vice versa. For this to happen, both religious and secular citizens have to undergo a "change in mentality," where each realizes the fact of pluralism—that their own doctrine is one among many equally legitimate positions.
48. Lisa Wedeen (1998) uses the term "acting as if" to describe Syrian citizens' dissimulation of allegiance to the Syrian dictator Hafiz al-Assad. My use of the term is different, as it is not meant to invoke deception or dissimulation.

## **Chapter 2: Contextualizing the Movements**

1. Ghandour (1990); Sezgin (2013).
2. Kandiyoti (1992), p. 237.
3. Zertal et al. (2007).
4. Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (2014), not including the Gaza Strip settlements dismantled in 2005 and East Jerusalem Jewish neighborhoods. Available at [www.cbs.gov.il/shnaton65/st02\\_16x.pdf](http://www.cbs.gov.il/shnaton65/st02_16x.pdf) (accessed April 22, 2015).
5. Peace Now data, "Ma'ahazim: ktsat seder ba-balagan." Available at <http://peacenow.org.il/content/מיזחאמ-תצק-רדס-תלבב-וגלבו> (accessed April 15, 2015).
6. Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook was the son of Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak Kook (1865–1935), the founder of the Merkaz Harav Yeshiva and the first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Mandatory Palestine. Rabbi Kook Jr. took it upon himself to offer a strong nationalist reading of his father's philosophy and provided much of the theological basis for the settler movement. Aran (2012).
7. Rubinstein and Lubin (1982); Lustick (1988); Taub (2010); Aran (2012).
8. Lustick (1988), pp. 72–90.
9. Quoted in Aran (2012), p. 196. Full text available in Kook and Shtemler (2010).

10. In this work, I leave out discussion of the settlements in the Golan Heights, Gaza, and the Sinai Peninsula before its return to Egypt, as some of these no longer exist (Sinai and Gaza) and others in the Golan Heights are currently less central to religious settler activism.

11. Rot (2005).

12. Quoted in Aran (2012), p. 196. Full text available in Kook and Shtemler (2010).

13. Rubinstein (1982).

14. See the following excellent discussions of these debates: Sheleg (2006); Inbari (2012); Rot (2014).

15. Sharbef (2008).

16. Atkens (2006).

17. Rot (2005).

18. Yesha Council, "The Renewed Yesha Council." Available at [www.myesha.org.il/?CategoryID=209](http://www.myesha.org.il/?CategoryID=209) (accessed January 23, 2011).

19. Yesha Council, "List of Council Members." Available at [www.myesha.org.il/?CategoryID=251&ArticleID=2591&print=1](http://www.myesha.org.il/?CategoryID=251&ArticleID=2591&print=1) (accessed January 23, 2011).

20. Israeli Statistics Bureau (non-Haredi settlements rank between 5 and 10 in the Bureau's socioeconomic ranking).

21. Rot (2014), p. 14.

22. Peace Now survey quoted by *Haaretz*, July 25, 2002. Available at [www.haaretz.co.il/misc/1.812175](http://www.haaretz.co.il/misc/1.812175) (accessed April 17, 2015).

23. Rot (2014), p. 15.

24. Tehiya (3); National Religious Party (NRP) (5).

25. Aviner (2001), p. 413.

26. Newman (2005).

27. To learn more about this group's gender ideology, refer to Beit El Yeshiva classes on women and gender at [www.yeshiva.org.il](http://www.yeshiva.org.il) (accessed January 23, 2011).

28. Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, "Equal but Different," Beit El Yeshiva. Available at [www.yeshiva.org.il/midrash/shiur.asp?id=2013](http://www.yeshiva.org.il/midrash/shiur.asp?id=2013) (accessed October 9, 2008).

29. Rapoport et al. (1995); El-Or (2002); Rapoport (1999).

30. Herzog (2009).

31. Available at [www.sarog.co.il/modules.php?name=articles&op=ViewItem&vid=587](http://www.sarog.co.il/modules.php?name=articles&op=ViewItem&vid=587) (accessed May 7, 2014). I would like to thank Ronit Irshai, who alerted me to this piece and also includes it in her book (Irshai 2012, p. 96).

32. Rabbanit Shapira Lesson, "ma'amad ha'isha," *Arutz Me'ir*, August 8, 2012. Available at [www.meirtv.co.il/site/content\\_idx.asp?idx=56408&cat\\_id=4212](http://www.meirtv.co.il/site/content_idx.asp?idx=56408&cat_id=4212) (accessed August 3, 2013).

33. For some examples, see the settlers' newspaper *Besheva*, 07/31/2003; 04/22/2004; 11/13/2003. The Yesha Council website also devotes an entire section

of its Research and Publications page to studies examining Jewish and Arab demographic competition: <http://myesha.org.il> (accessed July 5, 2014)''

34. Huberman (2007).

35. Available at [myesha.org.il/?CategoryID=336](http://myesha.org.il/?CategoryID=336) (accessed May 30, 2014).

36. Amrusy (2003, 2009); Melamed (2008).

37. Huberman (2007).

38. El-Or (2002).

39. Deeb (2009).

40. Rabbanit Shapira Lesson, "ma'amad ha'isha," *Arutz Me'ir*, August 8, 2012. Available at [www.meirtv.co.il/site/content\\_idx.asp?idx=56408&cat\\_id=4212](http://www.meirtv.co.il/site/content_idx.asp?idx=56408&cat_id=4212) (accessed August 3, 2013).

41. *Besheva*, 05/20/2004. Also see, for example, Nadia Matar writing on women's organizations, available at [www.womeningreen.org.il](http://www.womeningreen.org.il) (accessed January 10, 2010).

42. A Jewish Orthodox feminist group, available at [www.kolech.com](http://www.kolech.com) (accessed April 15, 2015).

43. Examples: the settlers' magazine *Nekuda*, 05/1999, pp. 41–43; *Nekuda*, 03/1999, pp. 35–46; *Nekuda*, 07/2003, pp. 18–25; *Nekuda*, 10/2007, pp. 59–61; *Besheva*, 03/26/2009; *Besheva*, 03/12/2009; although see Amrusy (2003), for a different voice.

44. Shoshi Greenfeld, "Gam ani feministit," *Besheva*, 01/24/2007.

45. Ahmed (1992); Deeb (2009); Winter (2001).

46. The Islamic Movement refers to itself as "The Islamic Movement in the Interior." This "interior" for the Movement refers to the parts of historical Palestine that now make up the state of Israel. The West Bank and the Gaza Strip are therefore the Palestinian "exterior." In this book, however, I refer to the Movement as the "Islamic Movement in Israel" for the purpose of clarity.

47. Rabinowitz (1994).

48. Al-Okbi (2010).

49. Israeli (1993); Rekhess and Rudintzky (2009).

50. Israeli (1993); Rabinowitz (1994); Al-Okbi (2010).

51. Etinger (2003).

52. Rekhess and Rudintzky (2009), p.30.

53. Rabinowitz (1994).

54. Sources: Yisraeli (1989); Rekhess and Ozacky-Lazar (2005); Rekhess and Rudintzky (2009); *Al-Mithaq, Sawt al Haq*, Israeli Elections Committee data for the 2003 and 2008 elections.

55. Rekhess and Rudintzky (2011).

56. For a detailed analysis of this split, see Rekhess (1996).

57. Rekhess (1996).



58. Knesset website, at [www.knesset.gov](http://www.knesset.gov). As of 2006, the coalition party includes the nonreligious Arab Movement for Change (TAAL) led by MK Ahmad Tibi. In the 2015 election, the Movement had secured three MKs as part of the new coalition list called the “Joint List.”

59. *Al-Mithaq*, 07/31/1998, p. 3.

60. Fahum (2009), p. 88.

61. Etinger (2003).

62. Rekhess and Rudintzky (2009).

63. *Al-Mithaq*, 11/28/2008, pp. 16–23.

64. This line was repeated in many of my conversations with activists.

65. *Al Mithaq*, 09/19/2003, p. 22.

66. *Al Mithaq*, 09/19/2003, p. 22.

67. *Al-Mithaq*, 08/07/1998.

68. King et al. (2009), pp. 1–3. Also see this report for the reasons for the low levels of Palestinian women’s workforce participation in Israel and the various structural, social, and political obstacles they face.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

71. In Israel, religious courts for Jews, Muslims, Christians, Druze, and other religious communities have considerable authority and a monopoly over marriage and divorce. Although Israel signed CEDAW in 1991, it included reservations in areas where the state systematically discriminates against women. Israel made a reservation to article 16 guaranteeing equality in marriage and divorce as this conflicts with the religious laws of the various religious communities in Israel. It also expressed a reservation to article 7b which guarantees women’s equality in access to public office and in performing all public functions at all levels of government. This was made so that the state-sponsored religious institutions could remain exempt from appointing women. UN Women, *Declarations, Reservations and Objections to CEDAW*, available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reservations-country.htm> (accessed April 15, 2015).

72. For example, Abdulmalek Dahamshe, *Al-Mithaq*, 03/07/1998, p. 14; *Al-Mithaq*, 06/26/1998.

73. Monterescu and Abu Ramadan (2008).

74. Peled (2001).

75. Jalal (2001).

76. *Al-Mithaq*, 12/04/1998.

77. *Sawt al-Haq*. All issues from August 2008.

78. *Sawt al-Haq*, 10/17/2008, p. 24.

79. Interview with Shaykh Hamad Abu Daabes, 2010.

80. Tessler (2003), pp. 77–78.

81. Baum-Banai (2004), pp. 19–20.

82. Peled (2000), p. 1.
83. Gues (2003).
84. Tessler (2000).
85. Data available on the Knesset website: [www.knesset.gov.il](http://www.knesset.gov.il).
86. Shalom-Chetrit (2001).
87. Cohen (2006a), p. 343.
88. Yuchtman-Yaar and Herman (2000).
89. Ovadia Yosef, "Love Truth and Peace [Ve'haemet ve'hashalom ehevy]: Return of Territories as against the Preservation of Life," in *Oral Torah* lectures at the 21<sup>st</sup> National Conference of Oral Torah, 1985 [in Hebrew], quoted in Yuchtman-Yaar and Herman (2000).
90. See, for example, the Shas 2009 official elections platform, available on [shasnet.org.il](http://shasnet.org.il) (accessed May 2, 2010). For a historical review of past Shas elections platforms, see Baum-Banai (2004).
91. Etinger (2013a).
92. Lees (2013).
93. Schwartz (2006), p. 388.
94. Wergen (2007).
95. Elyahu Yishay, *Yom Leyom*, 07/15/2010, p. 18.
96. Etinger (2013b).
97. Zarhiya and Detel (2013).
98. Interview with Rabbanit Yafa Yom Tov, August 10, 2010.
99. Tessler (2000), p. 240.
100. Malach (2014).
101. Sheleg (2006).
102. *Yom Leyom*, 07/15/2010, p. 18.
103. Daily Halacha, "Piskei maran harav Ovadia Yoesf Shlita" (Rulings by Rabbi Ovadia Yosef) (2009). Available at <http://halachayomit.co.il/> (accessed October 5, 2010).
104. Picard (2006); Sheleg (2006).
105. Abu 'Amr (1994), p. 15.
106. Roy (2013), p. 23.
107. Mishal and Sela (2006), p. 204.
108. Hroub (2000), pp. 24–33.
109. Roy (2013), p. 24.
110. Full text of the Charter is available in Hroub (2000), pp. 267–291.
111. There is now an extensive literature critiquing the Oslo Accord. The consequences of the accord to the Palestinians have been largely negative, as the transformations in the mechanisms of the occupation led to increased political and

economic vulnerability in the Occupied Territories (Berda 2012; Gordon 2008; Said 2007; Weizman 2012). However, Hamas's objection to the Peace Process, according to its public statements and literature, was based on its rejection of the parameters of a two-state solution, rather than on critique of the specific parameters of Oslo.

112. Roy (2003).

113. While Hamas officially advocated a boycott, there was disagreement inside the movement's leadership about whether or not to participate in the election of 1996. Kurz and Tal (1997) outline this internal debate in which leaders from the Occupied Territories were inclined toward an acceptance of the election if not participation in it, while the external leadership in Jordan and Iran maintained an uncompromising rejectionist stand that led to the movement's boycott of the election.

114. Hroub (2000); Tamimi (2007); Jaraba (2010).

115. "Mashal Reelected Leader of Hamas Politburo." *Maan News*, April 27, 2009. Available at [www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=210134](http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=210134) (accessed April 11, 2014).

116. Information from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Available at [www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Terrorism/Palestinian/Pages/The%20HAMAS%20Terror%20Organization%20-%20%202006%20update%2015-Mar-2007.aspx](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Terrorism/Palestinian/Pages/The%20HAMAS%20Terror%20Organization%20-%20%202006%20update%2015-Mar-2007.aspx) (accessed April 11, 2014).

117. Ibid.

118. Roy (2003), p. 16.

119. Hroub (2007), p. 69.

120. Lahlouh (2010), p. 17.

121. Shikaki (2002).

122. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, available at [www.pcpsr.org/arabic/survey/polls/2013/p49a.pdf](http://www.pcpsr.org/arabic/survey/polls/2013/p49a.pdf) (accessed December 12, 2013).

123. Jad (2008), p. 110.

124. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, available at [www.pcpsr.org/arabic/survey/polls/2006/exitplca.pdf](http://www.pcpsr.org/arabic/survey/polls/2006/exitplca.pdf), pp. 4–5 (accessed July 10, 2007).

125. Israeli (1995).

126. Ibid.

127. Ibid.

128. Massad (1995).

129. Yuval-Davis (1989).

130. Hammami (1990); Abdo (1991).

131. Jad (2008), p. 126.

132. Tamimi (2007), pp. 150–156.

133. Al-Aqsa TV (Hamas media channel), *Tarikh al-haraka al-nisa'iya fi hamas*, December 6, 2012.

134. The venerated historical figure of Al Khansa is used to endow such sacrifice with Islamic significance. Al Khansa was a woman poet from the seventh century AD (575–646) who lost her brothers in a battle and later lost her four sons in an early Islamic battle. She is known for supporting and encouraging war in the name of Allah (during the battle of Qadisiyya) and for telling those who wished to console her for the death of her sons that they should rather congratulate her for their martyrdom.

135. Lahlouh (2010).

136. Spocci and Vio (2013).

137. Akram and Rudoren (2013).

138. See Jad (2011) for an excellent review of this dialectical relationship between Islamists and feminists in Palestine in the late 1990s

139. At the outset, it should be noted that Hamas has not been the only Palestinian political movement to have a contentious relationship with feminism and the women's movement. The Palestinian factions that made up the PLO, including Fatah, have historically found it difficult to accommodate demands for gender equality, tended to view such agendas as undermining the primary struggle for national liberation, and have been extremely patriarchal in their structure and cultural practices (Abdo 1991).

140. Palestinian Ulama Association website, available at [www.rapeta.org/Rapta/ar/?page=news&portal=mn&id=259](http://www.rapeta.org/Rapta/ar/?page=news&portal=mn&id=259) (accessed April 2, 2014).

141. Press release on this workshop and its content is available on the website of the Hamas Women's Branch, North Gaza, "Wizarat shu'un al-mar'a t'aqid warshat 'amal fi al-shimal li-munahadat wathiqat cedaw." Available at <http://whamaspress.wordpress.com> (accessed August 3, 2011).

142. Al-Risala 01/12/2006, p. 7.

143. Nisa Min Ajl Filastin (2013). Available at <http://womenfpal.com/site/page/details.aspx?itemid=5204#.U0gEbqhdWSo> (accessed May 4, 2013).

144. Osanloo (2009).

### **Chapter 3: Complementarian Activism: Domestic and Social Work, Da'wa, and Teshuva**

1. For a review of this literature, see Taylor and Whittier (1998) and Einwohner et al. (2000).

2. Taylor (1999), p. 20.

3. Yadav (2010).

4. The biblical name for the northern part of the West Bank.

5. Newman (2005).

6. Herzog (2009).

7. El-Or and Aran (1995), p. 74.

8. Neuman (2004).

9. Feige (1995).
10. The text was from Harlap (1950).
11. Interview with MK Shaykh Ibrahim Sarsour, July 10, 2013.
12. A man who preaches the call to Islam (the Islamic da'wa).
13. For an excellent review of the historical development of women's activism in the Movement, see Tal (2012).
14. For just a few examples, *Al-Mithaq*, 07/17/98, 07/04/2003, 08/08/2008; *Sawt al Haq*, 11/07/2008.
15. *Al-Mithaq*, 08/15/2008, 09/26/2008, 07/25/2008.
16. The Islamic Movement has established one school for girls only in Um al-Fahm, but generally the public school system for Palestinian citizens of Israel is not sex-segregated like Orthodox Jewish schools.
17. Sahih Bukhari, vol. 8, book 73, Hadith 99.
18. Shaykh Abu Daabes explains that when the Movement took its first steps in the 1980s, many in the Arab community in Israel were worried about drawing the attention of the state's security services that were monitoring the Movement. Shaykh Abu Daabes attributes this fear to the trauma of 1948 and to the experience with military rule that Arabs in Israel were subjected to until 1966.
19. These pages could have been taken from a book by the same title, *Al-da'iyat al-najihah*, by Shaykh Ahmed al-Qattan (1990).
20. Dayan (1999), p. 80.
21. This is the way a Shas girls' school named after Rabbanit Margalit (Beit Margalit) in Netanya describes the role model she provides for female students and for women more broadly.
22. *Yom Leyom*, 11/26/98, p. 13.
23. *Yom Leyom*, 01/19/2006, p. 4.
24. Elyahu Yishay, *Yom Leyom*, 07/15/2010, p. 18.
25. Lehmann and Siebzehner (2006).
26. *Yom Leyom*, 07/15/2010, p. 15–18.
27. *Yom Leyom*, 07/15/2010, p. 18.
28. Feldman (2005), p. 312.
29. Ofra Lax, "Mada beshvil haparnasa," *Besheva*, 06/06/2011; *Yom Leyom*, 01/26/2006, p. 5.
30. *Yom Leyom*, 02/05/2009, p. 7.
31. *Rabbanit* is the title of a woman who is married to a rabbi. In Shas, women use the word *rabbanit* to honor great female religious teachers, even if they are not married to rabbis and thus are not formally *rabbaniyot*. The use of the word here is very similar to the title of *da'iyah*, which is bestowed on female religious teachers and preachers regardless of any formal education or official position they hold.
32. Yuchtman-Yaar & Herman (2000).
33. Feldman (2005).

34. Al-Aqsa TV (2012).
35. Ibid.
36. Interview with Najah al-Batniji, 03/21/2011, *Nisa min ajl filastin*, available at [www.womenfpal.com/site/page/details.aspx?itemid=4058#.VNI-0lpYXww](http://www.womenfpal.com/site/page/details.aspx?itemid=4058#.VNI-0lpYXww) (accessed February 4, 2015).
37. Washah (2012).
38. Al-Aqsa TV (2012).
39. Bajes (2013), p. 74.
40. Ibid., p. 75.
41. Jad (2008).
42. Washah (2012).
43. Ibid.
44. Interview with Muhammad Siam from the Gaza Ministry of Education, Al-Kutla al-Islamiyya, Gaza (video): Presentations and Discussions in Primary and Secondary Schools (2011). Available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=uchq0DN1gjE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uchq0DN1gjE) [in Arabic] (accessed March 9, 2014).
45. Roy (2011), p. 122.
46. Washah (2012).
47. Roy (2011), p. 187.
48. “ ‘Alaqat al-mar’a bi-l-masjid,” *Nisa min ajl filastin*, available at [www.womenfpal.com/site/page/details.aspx?itemid=4021#.UzyB\\_6hdWSo](http://www.womenfpal.com/site/page/details.aspx?itemid=4021#.UzyB_6hdWSo) (accessed February 21, 2010).
49. Jad (2008, 2011); Bajes (2013).
50. Jarban (2008b), p. 395.
51. *Filastin al-Muslima*, April 2005, p. 50.
52. Al-Ashkar and Bsaisou (2004), 243.
53. Interview with Aisha Abu Shanab, *Feleestin*, 03/12/2013, p. 16.
54. Al-Ashkar and Bsaisou (2004), p. 249.
55. Ibid., p. 238.
56. Ibid.
57. Jarban (2008b), p. 379.
58. Ibid., p. 416.
59. Washah (2012).
60. Ibid.
61. Jarban (2008b), p. 414.
62. Al-Ashkar and Bsaisou (2004), pp. 249–250.
63. Clark (2004).

## Chapter 4: Women's Protest: Exceptional Times and Exceptional Measures

1. Bosco (2006); Howe (2013).
2. Noonan (1995).
3. For example, Jetter et al. (1997); Nickerson (2012); Scheck (2004).
4. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989).
5. For some examples of this literature, see Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989); Yuval-Davis (1997); Kandiyoti (1992); McClintock (1993); Nagel (1998); White (2013).
6. Yuval-Davis (1997); Mayer (2000); Ranchod-Nilsson and Tétreault (2000).
7. Abdo (1991); Fantasia and Hirsch (1995); Jacoby (1999); Gluck (1995); Johnson and Kuttub (2001); Katz (2003); Sharoni (1995).
8. Peteet (1991).
9. Hasso (2001).
10. Aretxaga (1997), p. 61.
11. Aran (2012).
12. See [chapter 2](#) on the ideology of the settler movement.
13. Similar actions were also taken against the 1982 removal of the Jewish settlement Yamit in the Sinai Peninsula as part of the peace agreement with Egypt and the return of the Sinai to Egyptian control.
14. McClintock (1993); Yuval-Davis (1997); Najmabadi (1997).
15. For discussions of the use of the “maternal frame” in other contexts, see Noonan (1995); Lemish and Barzel (2000); de Volo (2004).
16. Some examples: *Besheva*, 05/25/2004, 01/08/2003, 11/20/2008.
17. For background on affectivity and social movements, see Goodwin et al. (2000); Jasper (2011). With particular attention to gender, see Taylor (1999); Hercus (1999).
18. Neuman (2004), p. 255; Zertal and Eldar (2005).
19. Sarah Nachshon in Shdema, October 25, 2013, available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ng0Rge4Ubwc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ng0Rge4Ubwc) (accessed January 29, 2014).
20. *Besheva*, 02/15/2006.
21. Melamed (2003).
22. This and other writings by Nadia Matar can be found on her Women in Green organization's website: [www.womeningreen.org](http://www.womeningreen.org).
23. *Sawt al-Haq*, 11/07/2008.
24. Jalal (2001).
25. For Jewish activism on the Temple Mount issue, see Inbari (2009).
26. Established in 2000 as a rival to the southern branch's Al-Aqsa association.
27. *Sawt al-Haq*, 11/07/2008, p. 6.

28. Ibid.
29. *Sawt al-Haq*, 08/29/2003, p. 8.
30. *Sawt al-Haq*, 08/29/2003, p. 8; 09/26/2003, p. 10.
31. *Sawt al-Haq*, 09/26/2003, p. 10.
32. Ibid.
33. *Sawt al-Haq*, 11/14/2003, p. 24.
34. Interview with Um Amer Salah, *Laha Online*, April, 21, 2005. Available at [www.lahaonline.com/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=8435](http://www.lahaonline.com/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=8435) (accessed April 23, 2014).
35. "Al-murabitat fi al-masjid al-aqsa: qisas li-butulat yumiyya," Al-Aqsa Foundation, July 8, 2012.
36. "Nisa al-aqsa 'ala khat al-muajaha ma'a al-ihtilal," Al-Aqsa Foundation, September 20, 2013.
37. "Murabitat min ajli al-masra: al-mar'a alati abkat al-rijal," Al-Aqsa Foundation, June 27, 2012.
38. *Sawt al-Haq*, 12/05/2008.
39. For a fascinating discussion of this in a Muslim context, see Deeb and Harb (2012).
40. *Nisa Min Ajli Filastin*, 02/12/2009.
41. Ibid.
42. Al-Aqsa TV (2012).
43. Aretxaga (1997), p. 69.
44. "Al-shahida al-istishhadiyya al-batala Daren Abu Aisha," Hamas website (the Palestinian Information Center), available at [www.palestine-info.com/arabic/palestoday/shuhada/impshuhada/daren.htm](http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/palestoday/shuhada/impshuhada/daren.htm) (accessed March 20, 2014).
45. Abu-Hshish (2005), p. 1552.
46. Cook (2005).
47. Safi and Youssef (2007), p. 44; Qudah (2011), p. 41.
48. Account of Riyashi's insistence and Hamas's refusal appear in Safi and Youssef (2007), p. 56; Milton-Edwards and Farrell (2013), p. 198; as well as on Hamas's website, available at [www.palinfo.com/site/pic/newsdetails.aspx?itemid=84959](http://www.palinfo.com/site/pic/newsdetails.aspx?itemid=84959) (accessed March 21, 2014).
49. Full text of the Charter available in Israeli (1995).
50. In its Fatwas section, the Hamas's website features Shaykh Qaradawi's fatwas on matters such as jihad. See for example [www.palestine-info.com/arabic/fatawa/alamaliyat/qaradawi.htm](http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/fatawa/alamaliyat/qaradawi.htm) and [www.palestine-info.com/arabic/fatawa/alfatawa/2005/jehad.htm](http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/fatawa/alfatawa/2005/jehad.htm) (accessed March 20, 2014).
51. Qaradawi (2009), p. 1092.
52. Ibid., p. 1092.
53. Ibid., p. 1086.



54. Ibid., p. 1088, emphasis added.

55. Israeli (1995).

56. See Hasso (2005); Sjoberg and Gentry (2007); Naaman (2007); Allen (2009) for this critique.

57. “Suicide Bombing Terrorism during the Current Israeli-Palestinian Confrontation (September 2000–December 2005),” January 1, 2006, Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, p. 38, available at [www.terrorism-info.org.il/data/pdf/PDF\\_19279\\_2.pdf](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/data/pdf/PDF_19279_2.pdf) (accessed April 17, 2014).

58. “Reem Riyashi wa-kasr al-hajiz al-wahm al-isra’ili.” Full Arabic text available on the Muslim Brothers’ Wiki collection: [www.ikhwanwiki.com](http://www.ikhwanwiki.com). Some may question the authenticity of this letter, but even if it was not written by Riyashi herself, its circulation in Hamas’s publications and website grants support to the argument that frames of exception, as appear in the letter, are powerful discursive tools to justify women’s transgressions.

59. “Reem Riyashi’s Martyrdom—An Honor to Her Children,” *Filastin al-Muslima*, February 2004.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. “Reem Riyashi—A Different Kind of Martyr,” *Filastin al-Muslima*, February 2004.

63. Palestine Information Center, “Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi’s Fatwa on Women’s Participation in Martyrdom Operations.” Available at [www.palestine-info.com/arabic/fatawa/alamaliyat/qaradawi1.htm](http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/fatawa/alamaliyat/qaradawi1.htm) (accessed March 20, 2014).

64. For Qaradawi’s full discussion of this question, see Qaradawi (2003), pp. 46–50.

65. Al-Risala 08/18/2005, p. 8.

66. Milton-Edwards and Farrell (2013), p. 195.

## **Chapter 5: Women’s Formal Representation: Overlapping Frames**

1. Kuumba (2011).

2. Ben Meir (2008).

3. Information regarding the residence, biography, and political activities of all MKs throughout the history of the Knesset can be found on the Knesset website, at [www.knesset.gov.il](http://www.knesset.gov.il).

4. Beker (2009).

5. Available at [www.myesha.org.il/?CategoryID=251&ArticleID=2591&print=1](http://www.myesha.org.il/?CategoryID=251&ArticleID=2591&print=1) (accessed January 21, 2011).

6. Though there are only twenty-three settlements’ local and regional councils in the West Bank, the Yesha Council includes an additional representative for the now demolished Gaza settlements.

7. 2008 local councils' elections data received via personal communication with the Israeli Elections Committee.

8. Available at [muni-index.co.il/2013/10/29/womenin2013municipalitelection/](http://muni-index.co.il/2013/10/29/womenin2013municipalitelection/) (accessed November 10, 2013).

9. Ibid.

10. Herzog (1994).

11. *Besheva*, 11/29/2007.

12. *Besheva*, 01/04/2007, 04/29/2007.

13. "Hanhalat yesha hamithadesheth 2007," available at [www.myesha.org.il/?CategoryID=209](http://www.myesha.org.il/?CategoryID=209) (accessed January 21, 2011).

14. Interview with Nadia Matar, July 19, 2008.

15. Tkuma website, 2008. "Al orit struk me-hevron," available at [www.tkuma.co.il](http://www.tkuma.co.il) (accessed September 5, 2008).

16. Ibid.

17. Interview with Orit Struk, May 30, 2008.

18. *Besheva*, 11/29/2007.

19. Ibid.

20. *Al-Mithaq*, 11/07/2008, p. 4.

21. Islamic Movement Communiqué, "The Imposition of Women's Representation Is Outright Rejected," *Sawt al-Haq*, 09/19/2008, p. 8.

22. *Sawt al-Haq*, 09/19/2008, p. 20.

23. Abu Aksa Daud (2002), p. 106; and Israel Elections Committee data on 2003 and 2008 local elections.

24. Herzog et al. (1999), p. 5; and Central Elections Committee.

25. Three additional women joined Arab councils as members later, as part of rotation agreements (Abu Aksa Daud 2002, p. 106).

26. Elections Committee data, 2003.

27. Elections Committee data, 2008.

28. Rekhess and Ozacky-Lazar (2005); Rekhess (2009).

29. Atmor (2013).

30. Sheperman (2009).

31. Abu Bakr (1998).

32. Marteu (2005).

33. Rekhess (1996, 3).

34. Interview with Shaykh Raed Salah, September 20, 2007, *IslamOnline*, available at [www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA\\_C&pagename=Zone-Arabic-Daawa/DWALayout&cid=1209357957236](http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&pagename=Zone-Arabic-Daawa/DWALayout&cid=1209357957236) (accessed November 13, 2011).

35. Ibid.

36. Haider (2003).
37. Al-Okbi (2010).
38. Ali (2007).
39. *Sawt al-Haq*, 10/16/1998, p. 12.
40. Ibid.
41. *Sawt al-Haq*, 11/06/98, p. 7.
42. For analysis of the Shihab al-Din affair, see Tsimhoni (2010).
43. Yosef Algazi, "A Show of Power." *Haaretz*, 01/06/1998.
44. Sharon Gal, "The Great Nazareth Bang." *Haaretz*, 04/19/1999.
45. Jalal Bana, "Holy to the Christians, Controlled by the Muslims." *Haaretz*, 03/10/2002.
46. Rabinowitz (2001).
47. For Siham Fahoum writing on Nazareth, see Fahum-Ghunaym (2003).
48. Jabareen (2006).
49. Jalal Bana, "Holy to the Christians, Controlled by the Muslims." *Haaretz*, 03/10/2002.
50. Uri As, "The Demolition of the Shihab a-Din Foundations in Nazareth Took Place in Relative Calm." *Haaretz*, 07/02/2003.
51. Sharon Gal, "Nazareth Returns to Allah." *Haaretz*, 09/01/2000.
52. Yosef (2009).
53. Yair Etinger, "Rabbi Ovadia Supports the Appointment of Women to Religious Councils." *Haaretz*, 05/17/2011.
54. Ibid.
55. Ynet interview with Zipi Yishai, "Maran Told My Husband: Ask Zipora to Go Out and Be Active." December 25, 2008. Available at [www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3643093,00.html](http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3643093,00.html) (accessed June 12, 2010).
56. "Teshuvat ha-meshivot la-bakasha le-psilat reshima lefi se'if 7a le-hok yesod: haknesset." Israeli Central Election Committee, 2012.
57. Ibid.
58. *Yom Leyom*, 02/05/2009, p. 3.
59. Ibid.
60. Ynet interview with Zipi Yishai, "Maran Told My Husband: Ask Zipora to Go Out and Be Active." December 25, 2008. Available at [www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3643093,00.html](http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3643093,00.html) (accessed June 12, 2010).
61. *Yom Leyom*, 02/02/2009.
62. *NRG* interview 02/14/2009, available at [www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/853/108.html](http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/853/108.html) (accessed June 12, 2010).
63. Ynet interview with Zipi Yishai, "Maran Told My Husband: Ask Zipora to Go Out and Be Active." December 25, 2008. Available at [www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3643093,00.html](http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3643093,00.html) (accessed June 12, 2010).

64. Avirama Golan, "Yishai: gidul Shinui mesaken mekomenu bakoalitsiya." *Haaretz*, 11/26/2002.
65. Jad (2011).
66. Amira Haas, "Arafat's Feminist Legacy." *Haaretz*, 12/04/2005.
67. Lahlouh (2010), p. 33.
68. Allabadi (2008).
69. Local Council Election Law No. 10, 2005, Central Election Commission, Palestine.
70. Election Law No. 9, 2005, Central Election Commission, Palestine. See also the Quota Project Palestine Country Profile, available at [www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=PS](http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=PS) (accessed April 22, 2015).
71. Figures obtained from the Palestinian Central Election Commission and NDI observers.
72. *Al-Risala*, 01/12/2006, p. 3.
73. *Al-Risala*, 01/05/2006, p. 2.
74. *Al-Risala*, 12/15/2006, p. 5.
75. *Filastin al-Muslima*, "Khansa Filastin," September 2004, p. 56.
76. Palestine Information Center, "Um Nidal Farhat in a Special Interview with the Palestinian Information Center," February 8, 2006.
77. Palestine Information Center, "Moments with Um Nidal Farhat While Embracing Sand Mixed with Her Son's Blood," October 6, 2005.
78. Ibid.
79. Palestine Information Center, "An Interview with Fathiya Qawasme: The Palestinian Women Is a Partner in Resistance, Decision Making, and in Development," January 6, 2006.
80. Hamas Women's Branch in Gaza distributes a weekly newsletter in which the activities of the branch are described. These include not just da'wa, social, educational, and charity work but also participation in demonstrations and public protest.
81. Personal correspondence with Samira Halaiqa, 2011.
82. "Women Candidates in the Parliamentary Election in Gaza: A Real Need or an Electoral Tactic?" *Al-Risala*, December 15, 2005, p. 5.
83. Palestine Information Center, "The Palestinian Ulama Association Approves of Women's Participation in the Election," October 13, 2005.
84. *Al-Risala*, 01/19/2006, 02/02/2006.
85. *Al-Risala*, 01/12/2006 p. 3.
86. *Al-Risala*, 01/23/2006.
87. *Al-Risala*, 01/12/2005, p. 3; 01/05/2006, p. 14; 12/08/2005, p. 12.
88. Actually "Muslim women," but here means women affiliated with Hamas, so I translated as "Islamist women."

89. *Al-Risala*, 01/23/2006.
90. *Al Risala*, 01/05/2006, p. 14.
91. Lahlouh (2010), p. 34.
92. “Al-wajh al-siyasi lil-mara’a dakhil al-haraka al-islamiyya” *Nisa min Ajli Filastin*, 11/28/2010.
93. Jad (2011).

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

1. Taylor et al. (2005).
2. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
3. Aretxaga (1997), p. 78.
4. Abdo (1991); Fantasia and Hirsch (1995); Jacoby (1999); Gluck (1995); Johnson and Kuttab (2001); Katz (2003); Sharoni (1995); Peteet (1991).
5. Taylor et al. (2005), p. 120.
6. Mahmood (2005), p. 196.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
8. Shively (2014).
9. For a similar distinction by women between “Islam” and cultural practices, see Abu-Lughod’s (2008) study of Bedouin communities in Egypt and Sondra Hale’s study of Islamist nationalist women in Sudan (1997).
10. Abu-Rabia-Queder, Sarab (2007a).
11. Abu-Rabia-Queder, Suheir (2007b); Abu-Saad et al. (2001); Pessate-Schubert (2004).
12. Hafez (2011), p. 5.

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# Index

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*Note:* pseudonyms of research interlocutors are enclosed in quotation marks.

Abbas, Mahmoud, [72](#), [76–77](#)

Abu Shanab, Asiha (Um Hassan), [122–125](#)

Abu Shanab, Ismail, [122](#)

*‘ada*, [230–231](#), [233](#), [234–235](#)

*‘adat wa-taqalid*, [237](#)

Adlouni, Rasha, [119](#), [120](#), [123](#), [125–126](#)

Agamben, Giorgio, [242n18](#)

agency, [16](#), [144](#), [173](#), [228](#), [229](#), [230](#)

Ahmed, Leila, [6](#)

Aisha (wife of Prophet Muhammad), [170](#)

“Aliza” (Rabbanit), [117](#), [215–216](#)

Al-Aqsa Institute (*Mu’asasat Al-Aqsa*), [153](#)

Al-Aqsa mosque, [30](#), [146](#), [156](#); Al-Asqa in danger (*Al-asqa fi khatar*), [150–160](#), [206](#); centrality of, [159–160](#); inclusion of women in the Al-Aqsa campaign, [153](#)

Al-Astal, Yunis, [77](#)

Amana, [36](#)

Amona illegal outpost, [137](#), [143](#)

Amrusy, Emily, [143](#), [183](#), [189](#)

Arab Spring (2011), [15](#)

Aran, Gideon, [86](#), [87](#)

Aretxaga, Begoña, [169](#), [226](#), [228](#)

Ariel, Uri, [188](#)

Asad, Talal, [25](#)

Association of Young Muslim Women (*Jam’iyyat al-shabbat al-muslimat*), [118–119](#)

Aviner, Shlomo, [37](#), [40](#)

Ayalon (Rabbi Ayalon), [162](#)

Balad party, [50](#)

Bar Shalom, Adina, [107](#)

Baron, Beth, [243n25](#)

al-Batniji, Najah, [118](#)

Bedouins, [234](#); and the issue of education for women, [235–236](#); support of for the Islamic Movement in Israel, [50](#)

Beit El Yeshiva, [37](#)



Ben Zur, Yoav, 106

Benford, Robert D., 13

Bennet, Naftali, 190

*Besheva*, newspaper, 19, 135; feature stories of concerning leading settler women moved to public activism, 135

Black Panthers (in Israel), 58–59

Bracke, Sarah, 5

Casanova, Jose, 24–25

“Chana,” 67

Change and Reform party: campaign platform of, 75; formation of, 218

Clark, Janine A., 15, 127

coexistence, 147, 149, 153

Cohen, Asher, 60

Cohen, Geula, 189

Cohen, Kineret, 163–164

Cohen, Shalom, 62

Cohen, Yitzhak, 61

colonialism, 45, 50, 197

Committee for a Jewish Shdema, 133

communalism, 8

Communist party, in Israel, 47, 50, 197, 208–209

complementarity, between men and women. *See* gender, gender complementarity

complementarian activism, 24, 10, 16, 78, 79, 80–81, 101, 117–121, 126–12

consciousness-raising (*taw‘iyya*), 120, 121

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 76, 77, 246–247n70

Council of Torah Sages (*mo‘etzet hakhmei hatorah*), 62

Daabes, Hamad Abu, 49, 56, 195, 203, 250n18, 205

da‘iya, 93, 94–95, 250n31; aspects of the successful da‘iya, 102–104

Darwish, Abdullah Nimr, 45, 47; on the pragmatic faction under the leadership of (the southern branch), 47–48; stress of concerning the Shura Council overruling decisions made by the Islamic Movement, 48

da‘wa, 8; and the Islamic Movement’s “Third Way,” 91–95; da‘wa class, 146–149; and the edification of Muslim mothers, 97–98; and effective organizational skills, 103; and emotional support and self-help among women, 95–97; women’s activities in the field of da‘wa, 92–94, 102–104

Deeb, Lara, 5, 6, 42

demography, 41–42

Deri, Aryeh, 104–105, 160–161, 212

Deri, Yafa, 105, 107, 212

dialogical sites, 78

drag performance, 225

Dukhan, Abd al-Fattah, 72

education, of women, 60, 107–108; activism of women in the field of education, 92; of Bedouin women, 235–236; encouragement of women in the Islamic Movement to pursue education, employment, and activism, 53–54; focus of on kindergartens, 120; Haredi women activists in the Shas education network, 105–106; Islamic kindergartens as essential in bringing women to religion, 118; personal challenges/struggles of women teachers confided to their students, 115–116; religious education, 94–95; secular education and employment of women, 33

Egypt, 6, 9, 25, 50, 127, 244n10

Eldad, Aryeh, 188

Eliyash, Sarah, 183

El-Or, Tamar, 6, 42, 86; on women’s actions as political in offering a feminine alternative to the male narrative, 87

emancipatory desire, 238

emancipatory narratives/discourses, 234–238, 239

Etziyon, Kfar, 35

Euben, Roxanne, 25, 26

Eylon, Beni, 188

Fahoum, Siham, 198, 208

Faqih, Khulud Mohamed Ahmed, 78

Farhat, Um Nidal, 75, 220, 219–220

Fatah, 14, 70, 71, 72, 130

Feiglin, Moshe, 187

Feldman, Anat, 111

feminism: Catholic feminism, 15; the dichotomy between Western feminism and the gender values of a religious community, 43–44; engagements with, 42–45; Evangelical feminism, 15; as the “extremist women’s movement,” 55; feminist consciousness, 238; feminist elements in settler women’s actions and self-perception, 86; and international organizations, 55; Islamic feminism, 15; Jewish Orthodox feminism, 15; as a placeholder for colonial and neocolonial Western politics, 45; religious feminism, 15; “republican feminism,” 226; settler activists’ objections to feminist agendas, 42; transitional feminist discourses, 45. *See also* feminism, and conservative religious politics in the Middle East; feminism, engagement with

feminism, and conservative religious politics in the Middle East, 4–7; how women support conservative religious politics and agendas, 5; support of conservative religious movements by women, 5; suspicion of reductive categories in, 17

feminism, engagement with: in Hamas, 76–78; in the Jewish settler movement, 42–45, 55–58; in the Shas movement, 65–67

*Filastin al-Muslima*, magazine, 19, 176–177,

*fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), 48, 119, 121, 171

Foucault, Michel, 229, 242n8

Four Mothers Movement (Israel), 128

Frames, collective action, 13, 242n23

“frames of exception,” 2, 128, 179–180, 228, 242–43n23; as a concrete discursive tool, 130; and the cultural turn, 13; descriptive and explanatory utility of, 131; in differing religious-nationalist movements, 130; frames as the “schemata of interpretation,” 13; mechanism of, 14; as not confined to nationalist movements, 15; and the process of moderation, 15; and righteous transgressions, 12–16. *See also* “frames of exception,” use of by women to justify unruly public political action

“frames of exception,” use of by women to justify unruly public political action, 132; use of motherhood as a motivational frame, 132–140; use of prognostic framing and physical confrontation, 140–146

freedom 98, 101–102, 228–230, 235–239

fundamentalism/fundamentalists, 17–29; as an epiphenomenon, 25–26; as irrationality, 25–26; speaking with fundamentalists, 22–24

Gaza Strip, the, 30, 68, 70, 119, 121, 244n10; diminishing popularity of Hamas in, 72; Jewish settlements in, 79; war in (2014), 72; wearing of the hijab in, 117; Israeli disengagement from, 136, 183, 188, 192

gender, 58; gender analysis of social movements, 18–19; gender complementarity, 6, 33, 78, 225; and nationalism, 128–129. *See also* gender ideology; gender politics

gender ideology, 8, 39–42, 128; and the Orthodox religious preoccupation with female modesty, 40. *See also* Hamas, gender ideology of; Islamic Movement, in Israel, gender ideology of; Shas movement (ultra-Orthodox), gender ideology of

gender politics: conservative gender politics, 2, 7–8; and the political character of gender inequality, 226

gender quotas, 196–197, 217–224

Golan Heights, 244n10

Greenfeld, Shoshi, 44

Gush Emunim (The Bloc of the Faithful), 35, 37, 38; activists of, 36; tasks of the women in, 82; women of, 82

Habayit Hayehudi (Jewish Home) party, 36, 182–183, 190

Habermas, Jürgen, 27, 244n47

Hadash party, 50, 197

*Hadith* (pl. *ahadith*), 57, 93, 94–95, 103, 170, 218, 222

Hafez, Shirin, 6, 202, 229–230, 239

Halabi, Raja, 77–78, 169

Halaiqa, Samira, 169, 219, 221, 222, 223

Hale, Sandra, 243n25

Hamami (Rabbi Hamami), 162

Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement [*Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*]), 4, 9, 21, 30, 31, 67–70, 72, 149, 178, 225, 248n112; and complementarian activism under occupation, 117–121; and Islamic Sharia, 75–76; da‘wa efforts of, 71; electoral base, 72–73; distinction of from other Islamic movements, 121; election campaigns, 221; engagements of with feminism, 76–78; gender ideology of, 73–76; “hijab campaign” of, 74; and the mandatory women’s quota in representation, 217–224; military arm of (Izz a-Din al-Qassam Brigades), 71; objection of to the Peace Process, 248n110; official formation of, 69; pragmatism of, 70; as primarily a religious-nationalist movement, 69–70; social and religious proselytizing component of, 69, 71–72; social services and organizations of, 71, 120–121; structure and support of, 70–73; suicide operations of, 69, 171, 172; Islamic student bloc of, 119–120; women/women activists of, 18, 74, 118; Women’s Branch of in Gaza, 256n80. Hamas wives: discourse of the wives of Hamas martyrs, 122–124; the public private lives of, 124–126. *See also* Hamas, Charter of

Hamas, Charter of, 74–75; Article 12 of, 69, 171, 172; Article 17 of, 73; Article 18 of, 74

Haniya, Ismail, 71, 72

“Hanna,” 136–137, 186, 189

Harel, Israel, 37

“Hava,” 237

Headquarters for Saving the People and the Land, 38

Hebron, 35, 85, 134–139, 191

Hezbollah, 6

*hijab*, 50, 74, 97, 98, 100, 117–118, 119, 126, 158, 178, 231, 233

Hijazi, Ola, 157

Hindutva, 25

Homesh First, 38

Ihud Leumi (National Union), 36, 183

intifadas: first intifada, 9, 74, 119, 221; second intifada, 70, 72, 83, 180, 221

*Ishraqa*, magazine 49

Islamic Association (*Al-jam‘iyya al-islamiyya*), 68

Islamic Center (*Al-mujama‘ al-islami*), 68, 117, 118, 120

Islamic charity (*zakat*), 46

Islamic Movement, in Israel, 4, 9–10, 45–48, 79, 246n46, 250n16; approach of to formal women’s representation, 196; coalitions of with other parties, 50; cultural, social, and religious organizations run by, 49; electoral success of, 46–47; engagements of with feminism, 42–45, 55–58; establishment of its women’s branch, 91–92; focus of (social service, religious da‘wa, and political

organization), 46; as a hybrid movement, 9–10, 47; membership in (the National Congress), 48; northern branch of, 9, 20–21, 48, 49, 52, 55, 92, 157, 196–197, 204, 206;; southern branch of, 9, 47, 48–49, 52; structure and support of, 48–50; gender ideology of, 50–55

Islamic Salvation Party, 217

Islamic Society, of Hamas in Gaza, 71

Islamic University (in Gaza) 119–120

Israeli Arab Higher Monitoring Committee, 196

Israeli Central Statistics Bureau, 54

Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), 35

Israeli Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 173

Israeli Parliament. *See* Knesset, the

Issa, Sana, 156

Izz a-Din al-Qassam Brigades (women’s brigades of Hamas), 71, 178–179

Jabarin, Itaf, 198, 206–207

Jad, Islah, 74, 224, 249n137

Jafali, Salima, 198, 209

“Jamal” (Shaykh Jamal), 150–153

Jewish settler movement, 4, 6, 20, 34–37; acceptance of by the secular Jewish majority in Israel, 37; aspects of the contemporary Jewish settler movement, 36; commitment of to the Land of Israel (prioritization of the Land of Israel over religious concerns), 36, 37, 131–132, 145–146; leadership of, 37, 188; community work of women in the settlements, 85–86; engagements of with feminism, 42–45; expectation of religious settler women to have large families, 41; guiding ideological principles of, 37; and the idea that women’s perseverance gives sustenance to the overall settler project, 84–85; ideological settlers, 35; Israeli government investment in, 86; non-ideological settlers, 35; percentage of religious-nationalists among, 38; settler women as privileged, 18; secular settlers, 35; structure and support of, 37–39; ultra-Orthodox settlers, 38; in the West Bank, 8–9, 25, 39

jihad, 170, 180; femininity, masculinity, and jihad, 173–176; and modesty, 177–179; and motherhood, 176–177

Joint List, the, 50

Jordan, 127

Kahana-Dror, Batiya, 44

Kahat, Hanna, 44

Kandiyoti, Denise, 34

Kdumim, 35

Keddie, Nikki, 8, 241n1

Khadija, 91

Al Khansa, 249m113

Khatib, Kamal, [47](#), [48](#), [153](#)

Kiryat Arba, [154](#)

Knesset, the, [48](#), [50](#), [60](#); political influence of ideological settlers in, [39](#); as a Zionist project, [204–205](#)

Komemiyut, [38](#)

Kook (Rabbanit Kook), [167](#), [168](#)

Kook, Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen, [36–37](#), [131](#), [244n6](#)

Kook, Zvi Yehuda, [35](#), [36](#), [39](#), [67](#), [131](#), [244n6](#)

Kurz, Anat, [248n112](#)

Labor party, [39](#)

Land of Israel Loyalists, [192](#)

Likud party, [36](#), [39](#); Land of Israel faction within, [183](#)

“Lina,” [237](#)

Lior, Dov, [37](#)

local councils: in Israel, [46–48](#), [59](#), [183](#), [193–195](#), [198–203](#); In Palestine, [72](#), [217–218](#)

Luggasi (Rabbi Luggasi), [162–163](#)

Lughod, Leila Abu, [15](#)

Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Argentina), [128](#)

“Maha,” [156](#)

Mahmood, Saba, [5](#), [6](#), [15](#), [28](#), [95](#), [144](#); on women’s political judgment, [227](#)

Mansour, Jamal, [124](#)

Mansour, Mona, [124–125](#), [219](#); on her mission as teacher and role model, [125–126](#)

Margalit Em Beyisrael (Margalit: A Mother in Israel [the Shas women’s organization]), [62](#), [112](#), [109](#), [110–113](#), [212](#)

Margalit Institutes, [107](#)

martyrdom/suicide missions, [69](#), [171](#), [172](#)

Masalha, Nawaf, [54](#)

Masarwe, Sawsan, [56](#), [157](#)

Mashal, Khaled, [71](#)

Matar, Nadia, [136](#), [145](#), [252n22](#)

“maternal frames,” [128](#), [226](#)

Melamed, Eliezer, [37](#)

Melamed, Inbal, [189](#)

Melamed, Shulamit, [145](#)

Melamed, Zalman, [37](#)

“Merav” (Rabbanit Merav), [42–43](#), [84–85](#)

Merkaz Harav yeshiva, 35

“Mimi” (Rabbanit Mimi): on empowering women, 110; on women and the home, 108–109

*Al-Mithaq*, newspaper, 19, 49, 52–53

Mizrahi-Ashkenazi cleavage, 58

modern, 3, 24, 25, 26, 78, 98, 102, 151, 207, 220, 233

modernity, 51

modernization, 24

modesty, of women, 65, 106, 137–138; importance of, 115; and jihad, 177–179; Orthodox religious preoccupation with, 40 Moledet party, 36

mosques: in Israel, 46, 49–50; in Palestine, 68, 71; mosque lessons 93–95, 119, 121

motherhood: as connected to the nationalist project, 41, 75, 123, 219; and jihad, 176–177; use of as a motivational frame, 132–140

mothers of the “disappeared” (Chile), 128

Mothers of the Prisoners Association (*Jam ‘iyyat umahat al-asra*), 125

Mualem, Shuli, 183, 190

Muhammad, the Prophet, 48, 91, 93, 206

Muslim Brothers: in Palestine, 68; in Egypt, 6, 9, 25, 50

Muslim Women for Al-Aqsa (*Muslimat Min Ajl Al-Aqsa*), 153

Nachshon, Sarah, 139–140, 158

Naim, Huda, 223, 119

National Religious Party (NRP), 36, 58, 182–183; demise of, 183; Gush Emunim ideologists within, 182

nationalism/nationalist-religious movements, 241nn1–3; and the assigned role of women in preserving cultural “authenticity,” 74; communalist aspects of, 193–194; differences and similarities between movements, 78–79; Fatah-style Palestinian nationalism, 27; and the gender complementarity model of in differing movements, 130; ideology of, 8; leftist nationalism in Palestine, 14; in the Middle East, 14; secular nationalism, 26; and women’s appearance and behavior, 190

nationalists: Orthodox religious nationalists (*datiyyim leumiyyim*), 35; ultra-Orthodox nationalists (*hardalim*), 9. *See also* Shas movement

Nazareth, 207–209; and contention over the Shihab al-Din site in, 208–209; as the largest Arab city in Israel, 208; “United Nazareth” coalition list of formed by the Islamic Movement in, 208

Negev, 48, 234–236

*Nekuda*, magazine, 19, 44

Neot-Margalit, 107

Neuman, Tamara, 86–87, 8786–87; on women’s community activities, 87

Nisa Wa-Afaq (Women and Horizons), 57

“Nitza” (Rabbanit Nitza), 231–233

“Noa,” 66–67, 213–214, 216–217, 237

Nofel, Tamam, 219

non-governmental organizations (NGOs), of women, 56, 217

“Nurit” 83

“Ofra,” 87–89

Orthodox-nationalist (*datiyyim leumiyyim*), 9

orthopraxis, Jewish emphasis on, 28

Oslo Accord (1993), 38, 248n110

Ozer, Malka, 106

Palestinian Authority, 76

Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), 70, 218

Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), 68, 72

Palestinian Ulama Association, 76, 221–222

Peace Now movement, 58

Peled, Yoav, 59

Peteet, Julie Marie, 130

Pinhas (Rabbi Pinhas), 163, 164

*Politics of Piety, The* (Mahmood), 229

Porat, Hannan, 37, 133–134

private/public dichotomy (the association of the private sphere with women and the public sphere with men), 3, 24–25, 29, 40, 51, 53, 81

Professors for National Strength, 38

Puterkovsky, Malka, 44

al-Qaradawi, Yusuf, 71, 171, 204; fatwa issued by, 177–178

Qawasme, Fathiya, 220–221

al-Rantisi, Abdel Aziz, 71

Rawls, John, 26–27

Rehelim, 86

reproduction: reproduction contribution of women to the nation’s struggle, 123, 219; reproductive rights, 3; women as biological and cultural reproducers of the nation, 129

“repugnant cultural other,” problem of, 244n43

Rida, Rashid, 52–53, 67

*Al-Risala*, newspaper 19, 77, 218–219, 221, 219

“Rivka,” 114, 116, 114–115

Riyash, Issa Abu, 202–203



Riyashi, Reem, 169–176, 253n58; article in *Filastin al-Muslima* entitled “Reem Riyashi—A Different Kind of Martyr,” 177; article in *Filastin al-Muslima* entitled “Reem Riyashi’s Martyrdom—An Honor to Her Children,” 176–177

Ross, Tamar, 44

Rot, Anat, 38

Roy, Sara, on Islamic social service organizations, 120–121

“Rukhama” (Rabbanit Rukhama), 236–237; on the diverse realities of women, 110; on the three types of women (*divr, heikhal, hatzerot*), 110–111

“Safiya,” 233, 237–238

Saima, Noha, 219

Salah, Raed, 45, 47, 55, 154–155, 156, 160; on the Knesset as a Zionist project, 204–205; on the Muslim minority striving to establish an autonomous society (*al-mujtama‘ al-‘isami*), 205–206 the rejectionist faction under (the northern branch), 48

al-Salah Islamic Association, 120

Saleh, Mariyam, 219

“Salma,” 233, 237–238

Sanad (*Jam ‘iyyat sanad li-salah al-usra wa-al-mujtama‘*), 49; and the edification of Muslim mothers, 97–98; high qualifications of its members, 98

Sanad Conference (2010), 98–102; discussion concerning The Secrets of Daughters, (*Asrar al-banat*) at, 100–101; main themes of, 101–102; speech on mother-daughter communication at, 99–100

“Sarit,” 117

Sarrissi, Naifeh, 57

Sarsour, Ibrahim Abdullah, 49, 50, 58, 194; on the Islamic Movement, 51; on the Islamic Movement’s “third current,” 95; on the “revival and renewal” approach of the Islamic Movement, 98; on the role of women in the Islamic Movement, 91–92, 195

Saudi Arabia, 234

Schmitt, Carl, 242n18

Schwedler, Jillian, 15

Scott, Joan Wallach, 3

Secrets of Daughters, The (*Asrar al-banat* [2000]), 100–101

secularization, 24–25

Shaked, Ayelet, 190

Shakh, Rabbi, 59

Shanti, Jamila, 74–75, 117–118, 219, 223

Shapira, Naomi, 41; on the dichotomy between Western feminism and the gender values of a religious community, 43–44

Shas movement (ultra-Orthodox), [4](#), [6](#), [19](#), [30](#), [58–61](#), [217](#); boundary making in, [160–161](#); childcare centers established by, [107](#); collaboration of with proselytizing organizations, [62](#); core activists of, [59–60](#); dominant characteristic of, [59](#); and the education of women, [107–108](#); engagements of with feminism, [65–67](#); expansion of religious services by, [62](#); gender ideology of, [63–65](#); generational differences among women activists of, [63](#); influence of, [60](#); integrative religious identity of, [59](#); issues of modesty and the separation of the sexes in, [64](#), [106](#); leadership of, [62](#); manuals and guides of for proper religious observance and Jewish life, [65](#); mobilization of at election times, [59](#); platform of, [59](#); political flexibility of, [60–61](#); prioritization of religious legislation over social legislation by, [60](#); proselytizing efforts of women in, [109–110](#); as a proselytizing movement, [61](#), [160](#); religious and educational institutions of, [62](#); representation of women in, [209–217](#); separate educational system of, [60](#); and the Shas women’s-only election conference, [214](#); structure and support of, [62](#); teshuva and social work in, [104–111](#). *See also* Margalit Em Beyisrael (Margalit: A Mother in Israel [Shas women’s organization])

Sheleg, Bambi, [44](#)

“Shikma,” on the role of women in Judaism, [82–83](#)

“Shlomit,” [1](#), [2](#), [157–158](#); involvement of in a scuffle at an illegal settlement outpost, [140–143](#)

Shofar movement, [22](#)

Shura council, [48](#), [71](#)

Shvut, Michal, [189](#)

Siani (Rabbanit Siani), [165–167](#), [168](#)

Sinai Peninsula, [244n10](#)

Six-Day War, [58](#)

Snow, David A., [13](#)

“state of exception,” [242n18](#)

Struk, Orit, [183](#), [190](#), [191–192](#)

Successful Da’iya, The, [102–104](#)

“Suheir,” [202](#)

Sunna, the, [57](#)

synagogue lessons, [111–117](#)

Tal, Nahman, [248n112](#)

Tami party, [58](#)

Tao, Hana, [40](#)

Taylor, Verta, [18–19](#), [81](#), [225](#), [226](#)

Tehiya party, [36](#), [189](#)

Tessler, Riki, [59–60](#)

Tiferet Chen, [105](#)

Tkuma, [38](#), [191](#)

tradition/traditionalism, [50](#), [51](#), [58](#), [98](#), [102](#), [208](#), [221](#), [223](#), [230](#)

Tuyur al-Janna (Birds of Paradise), [148](#)

*ulpanot* (religious girls' high schools), [40](#)

"Um Abdullah," [197](#)

"Um Ahmed," [95–97](#), [113](#), [201–202](#); on jealousy (*hasad*), [96](#)

Um Amer, [156–157](#)

Um al-Fahm, [153–154](#), [204–207](#)

Um Hassan, [122](#)

"Um Maher," [159](#)

"Um Sayyd," [103](#)

"Uri" (Rabbi Uri), [89–91](#)

*Usrat al-Jihad* (The Family of Jihad), [45](#)

Voice of Truth and Freedom, The (*Sawt al-Haq wa al-Huriyya*), newspaper [19](#), [49](#)

*waqf*, [46](#)

Wedeen, Lisa, [244n48](#)

Weiss, Daniela, [37](#), [183](#), [187](#), [192–193](#)

Wellspring of Religious Education, The (*Ma'ayan hahinukh hatorani*), [105–106](#)

West Bank, the, [68](#), [70](#), [71](#). *See also* West Bank, settlers' domesticity in

West Bank, settlers' domesticity in, [81–87](#); and women speaking of their mothers, [87–91](#)

"Westernization" (*tayyar al-taghrib*), [50–51](#), [55](#), [101](#)

Al-Wihidi, Youssef, [78](#)

Women in Green, [38](#), [136](#)

Women's Affairs Ministry, [76](#), [77](#)

women's bodies, as boundary markers, [12](#), [129](#), [160](#), [190](#)

Yehuda Yaale, [105](#)

"Yaacov" (Rabbi), [112–113](#)

Yadav, Stacey, [81](#)

Yahadut Hatora party, [211](#)

Yassin, Ahmed, [68](#), [71](#), [72](#), [117](#), [118](#), [177](#)

Yazuri, Ibrahim, [72](#)

Yemen, [127](#)

Yemeni Islamist Islah Movement, [81](#)

Yesha Council (The Judea, Samaria, and Gaza Council), [36](#), [37–38](#), [182](#), [183](#), [187–188](#), [254n6](#); as the official representative of settlements in dealings with the state, [38](#); restructuring of, [189](#)

Yesha Rabbis Union, [38](#); opinion of on gender roles, [39](#)

*yeshivot hesder*, 38

“Yifat,” 85–86; arrests of after repeated confrontations with both the IDF and Palestinians, 134–135

Yishai, Eli, 60, 105, 211, 212; on the work of women’s prayers, 215

Yishai, Zipi, 105, 212, 213

Yisrael Beitenu party, 39

Yitzhak, Rabbi Amnon, 22, 23, 24

Yom Kippur, 113

*Yom Leyom (Day to Day)*, newspaper, 19, 59, 62, 106, 107–108, 212–213

Yom Tov, Yafa, 62, 109

“Yona,” 143–144, 187

Yosef, Ahuva, 65, 67

Yosef, Margalit (Rabbanit), 104–105, 250n21

Yosef, Ovadia, 59, 61, 62, 104–105, 162, 209–210, 213; pragmatism of, 64; on questions of women’s modesty, 65; on women and the study of the Torah, 63–64

Yosef, Yehudit, 105, 213

“Yousef” (Shaykh Yousef), 146–147, 149

“Yusra,” 147

Zakat Association, 46

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