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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.

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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.¹ 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.² 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.³

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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶ 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 differernt 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 sup-

porting 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.⁷ 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 agendas⁸—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 veiling⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³ 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).¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

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

Women’s Activism

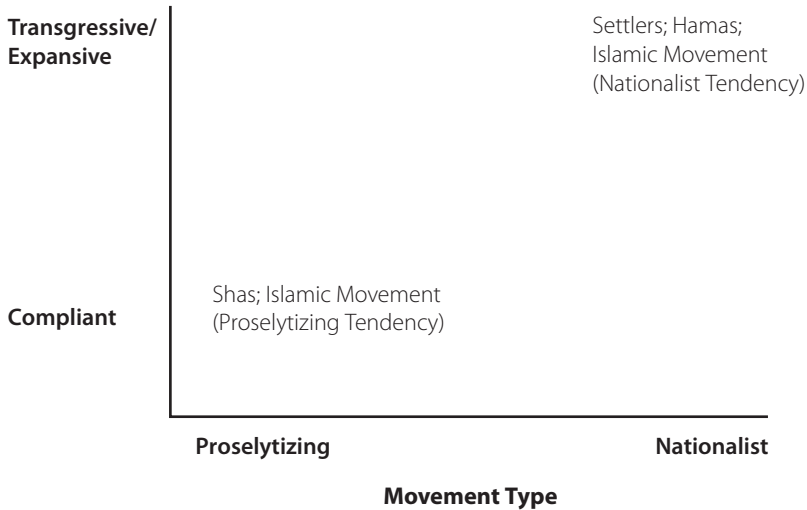


Figure 1.1. Forms of activism by movement type.

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?

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.”¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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."²⁰ 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."²¹ 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.²² Frames are often, although not always, shaped by ideology and respond to it; they are constrained by ideology but also act upon it.²³ 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.²⁴ 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.²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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,²⁷ Islamic feminism,²⁸ Catholic feminism,²⁹ Evangelical feminism,³⁰ and others. However, as Leila Abu Lughod and Saba Mahmood³¹ 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.³² 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.³³ 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.³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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 religion-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 rec-

ognize 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.”³⁶ 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.³⁷ 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 Roy³⁸ and Islah Jad³⁹ 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.

* * *

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, RROCKK '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.

* * *

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.⁴⁰ 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,⁴¹ 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.”⁴² 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.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ (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*."⁴⁵ He goes as far as to say about unreasonable comprehensive doctrines, "That there are doctrines that reject one or more democratic freedom 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.*"⁴⁶

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.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ 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.