

Ein anderes Gesicht der Moderne. Fundamentalismus und Geschlechterordnung

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Fundamentalism and Gender in Judaism Rabbiner Professor Dr. Dr. Jonathan Magonet, London

Before turning to the particular topic before us, it is important to remember that Judaism understands itself as in a covenantal relationship with God. That covenant is described and defined within the pages of the Hebrew Bible. Within that context the actual partner with God, the one who is directly addressed, is the adult Israelite male, to whom belong wife, children, slaves, land and animals. In that Biblical world, women are legally understood as extensions of their fathers or husbands. Thus the position of widows is problematic, and the Bible often refers to them, alongside orphans, as in need of special protection from God. Nevertheless the Bible acknowledges the wider roles played by women within society, particularly at significant occasions in Israelite history. They are prominent actors at certain transitional moments like the prelude to the exodus from Egypt and the role of Hannah in the change to the monarchy. Moreover the story of the daughters of Zelophehad indicates that legal struggles took place, in that case for women's right to inherit. In later rabbinic Judaism, the rabbis sought to counterbalance some of these inequalities, particularly in matters of divorce, but could not remove the basic patriarchal bias. These legal issues remain today and are acted out in new ways in contemporary Jewish life.¹

In addressing this topic we are faced at the outset with the problem of defining the term 'Fundamentalism' in the Jewish context. The term itself originates amongst American Protestants at the beginning of the twentieth century. The 'fundamentals' that concerned them included a literal interpretation of Scripture and belief in certain core doctrines. However such a characterisation breaks down when it comes to Judaism where there is an openness to a variety of interpretations of Scripture, and matters of belief take second place in a tradition governed by a system of law and practice. Nevertheless, although the term itself is actually misleading from an etymological point of view, it does cover a range of movements within the major world religions which share a common struggle against what they perceive as the assault of modernity on their traditions. Karen Armstrong in her book *The Battle for God* cites the work of Marty and Appleby who:

argue that the 'fundamentalisms' all follow a certain pattern. They are embattled forms of spirituality, which have emerged as a response to a perceived crisis.

¹ For a useful study of the nature of Jewish law, particularly with regards the rights of women to inherit, see Mary F. Radford 'The Inheritance Rights of Women Under Jewish and Islamic Law' *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review* Vol 23 Issue 2, Article 2 pp 135-184.

They are engaged in a conflict with enemies whose secularist policies and beliefs seem inimical to religion itself. Fundamentalists do not regard this battle as a conventional political struggle, but experience it as a cosmic war between the forces of good and evil. They fear annihilation, and try to fortify their beleaguered identity by means of a selective retrieval of certain doctrines and practices of the past. To avoid contamination, they often withdraw from mainstream society to create a counterculture; yet fundamentalists are not impractical dreamers. They have absorbed the pragmatic rationalism of modernity, and under the guidance of their charismatic leaders, they refine these 'fundamentals' so as to create an ideology that provides the faithful with a plan of action. Eventually they fight back and attempt to resacralize an increasingly sceptical world.²

Armstrong argues that

the most important factor to understand this widespread religious militancy is that it is rooted in a deep fear of annihilation.... This profound terror of annihilation is not as paranoid as it may at first appear. Jewish fundamentalism, for example, gained fresh momentum after the Nazi Holocaust, when Hitler had tried to exterminate European Jewry, and after the 1973 October War, when Israelis felt vulnerable and isolated in the Middle East.³

Along the same lines the distinguished American Jewish sociologist Samuel Heilman of City University, New York, offers the following broad description of fundamentalism which he will later apply to the Jewish context..

The fundamentalist view is that there is a single truth, that the people who share this truth are tied in an unbroken chain to the past, and that this truth is not limited to the private domain but can and should be imposed on the public square. This truth is articulated as fundamentals of the faith, which must be practiced or believed if one is truly to be among God's defenders. Of course, despite the fundamentalist assertion that these essentials are tied to tradition, and often demanded by an inerrant text, fundamentalism reinvents that past by selectively retrieving from it those elements that challenge alternative truths that are offered by contemporary culture. As such it constitutes a kind of counterculture and society. Fundamentalism is therefore often engaged in an intense battle against forces in the contemporary world that, in its view, seek to undermine or to defile the world as it sees it.⁴

A briefer definition is offered by Ian Lustick:

² Karen Armstrong *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (HarperCollins Publishers, London 2000) xi.

³ Karen Armstrong *Intolerance and Fundamentalism Seminar* Wednesday 26 January 2005, London School of Economics p 5.

⁴ Samuel C. Heilman 'Jews and Fundamentalism' in *Jewish Political Studies Review* 17:1-2 (Spring 2005) <http://www.jcpa.org/cjc/cja-heilman-s05.htm> pp 1-8, 1.

A belief system is defined as fundamentalist insofar as its adherents regard its tenets as uncompromisable and direct transcendental imperatives to political action oriented toward the rapid and comprehensive reconstruction of society.⁵

This definition allows him to make the following distinction:

In the Jewish context, this notion of fundamentalism helps avoid including 2,000 years of rigorously observant, but politically cautious, rabbinic Judaism within its compass.⁶

Two possible lines of enquiry emerge from these descriptions. The first is to identify what it is in the contemporary situation that has given rise to fundamentalist reactions; the second, to examine the nature and effect of these reactions.

In the case of Judaism the threat can be traced back to the impact of emancipation on Jewish society. What was formerly a closed, self-contained world, largely self-regulating under the all encompassing framework of Jewish law, *halakhah*, was now part of an open society. Jews found themselves as individuals with freedom to choose whether or not to remain within the Jewish fold, and if they remained, to what extent and in what manner. Jewish law that had previously governed all aspects of life, social, cultural, political and religious had ceded major legal domains to the authority of the wider society. Effectively the only areas within which it still had power and sanctions, overseen by rabbis acting as scholars and judges, were those of Jewish status: who is considered to be a Jew, how are issues like marriage and divorce to be governed; and the area of ritual and liturgical practices.

For Jews who chose to remain within a recognizable Jewish religious framework, two major movements emerged, though each with a variety of sub-groups: Orthodoxy, that sought to preserve intact the world that had previously existed, and Reform in its various denominational groupings, that sought to draw on what it considered to be the best of past traditions and the best of modernity. Both movements called on history to justify their authority, itself an indication of the extent to which the values of the enlightenment had affected their self-understanding. Inevitably the conflict between them was fought over those two areas of status and ritual, particularly the former, since its effects had consequences for the entire Jewish world. The struggle expresses itself particularly in the perennial debate on 'Who is a Jew?' The classical definition was that Jewish identity was determined by the Jewish status of the mother, matrilineal, but also that it was possible to convert to Judaism through a recognized rabbinic authority. But a rabbinic authority recognized by whom? So effectively the battle lines were drawn around the real question, which is 'Who is a rabbi?'. Thus, the Reform movements (variously called Conservative, Masorti, Reconstructionist, Reform, Renewal, Liberal or Progressive – with different meanings in different countries!) claimed the right to convert to Judaism, something unacceptable to Orthodoxy, even if performed under stringent Jewish legal norms. Moreover the American Reform movement even challenged the 'matrilineal' tradition, granting Jewish status to children of Jewish fathers, as long as certain educational requirements were met.

⁵ Ian S. Lustick 'Introduction' *For the Land and The Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (Council of Foreign Relations) 1988.
(<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/penncip/lustick/lustick11.html>).

⁶ Ibid.

Bitter though these struggles may be, as long as they were acted out in the neutral territory of the Diaspora, they merely represent twin options for preserving Jewish identity and continuity, with time alone determining which, if any, might prevail. Moreover, mainstream Orthodoxy was willing to accept the benefits of modernity as long as it was able to preserve its own internal religious integrity. The pattern was established by the leading 19th century Orthodox rabbi and opponent of Reform, Samson Raphael Hirsch, with his formulation 'Torah im derekh erez', 'traditional Jewish teaching combined with a practical existence within the world'. It continues today, particularly in the United States, under the general heading 'Modern Orthodoxy'. One expression was the motto of Yeshivah University, 'Torah u'Madda', literally 'Torah and Science', but understood to mean the parallel values of Jewish observance alongside engagement with the modern world. Yet according to Michael Kress this comfortable alliance is being undermined by the growing influence of more fundamentalist strands, so that some are redefining the motto in terms of 'Madda' as meaning support for making one's livelihood in the secular world, not culturally or intellectually engaging with it.⁷

Of course, the third great post-emancipation movement was Jewish nationalism, Zionism, leading ultimately to the creation of the State of Israel, where real issues of power and control over a Jewish population exist, with impact also on Diaspora communities. Moreover because Israel defines itself both as a democratic society and a Jewish state, the conflict between modernity and the classical tradition is acted out in the political arena and the public square.

Heilman describes two kinds of fundamentalism:

One can be called active fundamentalism, in which the battle is waged aggressively, taken to the enemy who is to be completely obliterated....A second phase of fundamentalism is its quiescent or passive stage. Adherents believe they are in possession of the truth that will ultimately triumph and dominate the public square but for the moment must remain in protected waiting... All true believers have to do is to insulate themselves from becoming defiled until that judgment day, when history will right itself as stated in the prophecies of the inerrant text.... Whether quiescent or active, cultural and social struggle is at the heart of fundamentalism. There must be an enemy... Hence, it is not surprising that at least in the case of Jewish fundamentalism, one finds its adherents in two of the most visible precincts of secularity and modernity: the United States and especially New York, as well as the modern state of Israel. In both these locales, the enemy and the counterculture are quite close and visible.⁸

Heilman goes on to identify active fundamentalists as

largely confined to those religiously inclined messianists who believe that through a particular set of activities they can hasten the day of redemption. For some these activities mainly involve religious settling what they consider the biblical Land of Israel....This is the fundamentalism of the religious bloc that once called themselves Gush Eminim. For these Jews any compromise in settlement activities, especially within the territories conquered in 1967, is tantamount to

⁷ Michael Kress 'The State of Orthodox Judaism Today' *Jewish Virtual Library* (<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org.jsource/Judaism/orthostate.html>).

⁸ Heilman op cit p 2.

retarding the redemption....There are other active fundamentalists for whom the redemption can be hastened not by settlement but by acts of Jewish ritual activity...This is the approach of Chabad Lubavitch. For them the religious transformation of the nonobservant and secular Jews into Lubavitcher Hasidim as well as the assurance that the 'Seventy Nations' – that is the non-Jewish world – abides by the seven Noahide commandments is the key mission of Judaism....

Quiescent fundamentalists also believe that the world will someday learn the truth. They too emphasize certain essentials of the faith. But they are ready to wait patiently. In the meantime, they build the walls of their fortress, remain within their enclaves and construct a corps of believers and defenders of the faith. This is largely the strategy of the haredi world... This is a society that has used the yeshiva as its instrument of choice, raising study in it and life around its strictures and leaders to the highest level.⁹

Heilman recognizes that today fundamentalist views have infiltrated even modern Orthodoxy, particularly in America. He finds a number of factors that account for this. One is a perceived decline in American culture in the 1970's and hence second thoughts about being associated with it. At the same time there had been a transformation of women's roles in Orthodox Jewish life, partly because of the feminist movement and partly the result of college education and career possibilities in the wider society rather than more traditional roles in Jewish education. Modern Orthodoxy had invested heavily in day school education, but the staff of these schools were increasingly drawn from haredi circles who promoted a more fundamentalist way of life, often leading to discontinuity between what was taught at schools and what was experienced by children at home. Moreover, because of concerns about assimilation and the influence of universities, many young people are sent to study for a period in the yeshivas and women's seminaries in Israel, where the fundamentalist influence is very powerful. They return one or two years later indoctrinated and dissatisfied with the level of religious commitment and practice they find at home.

This has led us indirectly to our second topic, namely the role and perception of gender roles in Jewish fundamentalist society. While Reform Judaism is still perceived as a threat to the continuity of what is understood as authentic traditional Judaism, a far greater challenge actually arises from the long-term impact of the women's movement. One of the leading figures of the women's movement Rachel Adler indicates some of the specific concerns that needed to be addressed:

The feminist critique of society and culture initiated in the 1960s and 1970s posed profound challenges to every branch of Judaism. Before this time, in no form of Judaism did women have equal access to communal participation, leadership, or religious education. Liberal Judaisms influenced by Enlightenment universalism made women invisible by regarding them as 'honorary men,' but did not, in fact, give them the religious opportunities afforded men. Discrimination against women on halakhic (Jewish legal) grounds was common, not only in Orthodoxy but in all the other branches of Judaism. Halakhic discrimination is considerable. Women may not be included in the minyan and hence may not lead worship. They may not be called to the Torah. Their credibility as witnesses is

⁹ Heilman op cit 2-3.

severely limited. Moreover, they are powerless to effect changes in their own marital status. Orthodoxy, which affects not only its own practitioners but also all Jewish Israeli citizens, does not permit women to initiate divorce. Women whose husbands are untraceable, insane or simply unwilling may not free themselves to remarry...

At the core of Judaism is the devotion to sacred text and to the interpretive process that continually recreates the text. Yet women were excluded from the interpretive process both by Orthodox and non-Orthodox Judaism, nor did interpreters note how the texts themselves ignored or marginalised women.¹⁰

L. Levitt, writing in the *International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences* describes the progress of the women's movement, though largely in the non-Orthodox sectors.

By the 1970s Jewish women used notions of liberal justice and equality to demand their inclusion in all aspects of communal worship. By arguing that specific Jewish communal practices either excluded women or treated them as inferior to men, they demanded their rightful place on the *bema*, reading torah and leading prayer services...The increasing presence of Jewish women and attention to issues of gender have occasioned the rewriting of Jewish history and the rereading of classical Jewish texts in the various fields of Jewish Studies scholarship (religion, literature, history, sociology, political science, and language study) as well as a resurgence in Jewish cultural production including art, poetry, fiction, film, music and dance.

In Jewish religious worship these changes have been palpable. They include a transformation in the language of prayer. Not only is there now gender inclusive language but whole new liturgies that take account of the experiences of Jewish women...Since the 1970s, in increasing numbers of Jewish communities, women are engaging in once restricted religious practices. They are chanting sacred texts, participating in worship services, having honours once granted only to Jewish men and they are leading communal worship as rabbis and cantors... They are also becoming presidents of congregations and Jewish religious organizations... Even among certain modern Orthodox communities those roles and practices are changing. The growth of orthodox Jewish feminist prayer groups, study centres, conferences, and the creation of women rabbinic interns throughout the 1990s all attest to the growth of an Orthodox Jewish feminist movement...Even within ultra-orthodox communities, women are reclaiming the rituals of family purity, for example, as attractive Jewish practices for women... Through these efforts other changes are also being fostered. Feminist efforts have also opened up Jewish communal life to gay and lesbian Jews. Here lesbian Jewish feminists have made substantial contributions as rabbis, lay leaders, activists and scholars...They are powerfully challenging notions of family,

¹⁰ Rachel Adler *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics* (The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, Jerusalem 1998) p xvii.

community, and religiousness by their strong presence within and outside of organized Jewish communities....¹¹

It is evident that the 'gender' challenge to Judaism posed by Jewish feminists goes far beyond the adjusting or correcting of certain legal inequalities. Rather it poses a question to the nature of Judaism itself, which must clearly also undermine the very structure of fundamentalist belief. Some twenty years ago Judith Plaskow could write:

Equality cannot be the central feminist aim, for equality assumes as given the system in which women are to be equal. Women joining egalitarian minyanim often take for granted the content of weekly worship. Women fighting for equal rights in the public Jewish forum do not necessarily question the sexual division of spheres that undergirds women's marginalization. Women striving for halakhic change generally assume the legitimacy and authority of halakhah. Women as individual Jews seeking entry into a male-defined system do not necessarily look at the ways in which the Otherness of women as a class has shaped the development of Judaism from its origins....

The central issue in the feminist redefinition of Israel is the place of difference in community. Judaism can absorb many women rabbis, teachers, and communal leaders; it can ignore or change certain laws and make adjustments around the edges; it can live with the ensuing contradictions and tensions without fundamentally altering its self-understanding. But when women, with our own history and spirituality and attitudes and experiences, demand equality in a community that will allow itself to be changed by our differences, when we ask that our memories become part of Jewish memory and our presence change the present, then we make a demand that is radical and transforming. Then we begin the arduous experiment of trying to create a Jewish community in which difference is neither hierarchalized nor tolerated but truly honoured. Then we begin to struggle for the only equality that is genuine.¹²

For now, such a radical transformation can only begin to operate within non-Orthodox circles. Nevertheless, even within the Orthodox world, there are also changes taking place. Michael Kress notes:

But feminism – combined with stronger Jewish education for Orthodox girls – has left many Orthodox women (and men) dissatisfied with traditional gender roles and restrictions. Being Orthodox, they retain their adherence to halakhah but have sought change within the limits of Jewish law – sometimes via creative re-interpretations – and also seek shifts in Jewish culture and attitude. This has resulted in bitter disputes over women's issues.

The debate threatens to split Jewish communities while at the same time creating new opportunities for female religious participation. More synagogues are holding women-only prayer groups, allowing the Torah processional to pass

¹¹ L.Levitt 'Judaism and Gender' International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences pp 8011-8012.

<http://www.temple.edu/jewishstudies/levitt/isb40608...> This article has a valuable bibliography.

¹² Judith Plaskow *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (Harper San Francisco, 1991) 89-90. goes

through the women's section, or taking other steps to increase women's religious participation. And as these synagogues take these steps, they inevitably face bitter condemnation from within and without, driving a wedge between them and the mainstream Orthodox community...

To feminists, the change in women's status in the secular world is a monumental and permanent shift that must be reflected in Jewish life and observance.¹³

As noted earlier, the one place where Orthodox religious authorities still have powers that affect the Jewish community as a whole is in the State of Israel, where a particular set of political circumstances at the outset of the foundation of the state continue to play a significant role. In a useful survey of the situation Nira Yuval-Davis outlines the history:

The Zionist movement needed the legitimization of Orthodox Judaism for its claim on the country and its settler colonial state project, as well as for its claim to represent the Jewish people as a whole. The Orthodox movements have used the Israel state, both to gain more resources for their institutions and to impose as many orthodox religious practices on Israeli society as possible. The relationship between religion and the state of Israel was dominated for many years by the agreement reached between David Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, and the religious parties... According to this agreement, known as 'the status quo' agreement', the control of Jewish religious law would remain as it had been in the Zionist *yishuv* (as the Jewish settler society in Palestine used to be known before the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948)...¹⁴

In a detailed study of 'Religion, Politics and Gender Equality among Jews in Israel' Ruth Halperin-Kaddari and Yaacov Yadgar of Bar-Ilan University note the implications of this agreement.

Most generally, the status quo refers to the preservation (usually through rules, laws and regulations) of the Jewish character (interpreted mainly through an orthodox prism) of the public sphere, while preventing a similar over-reaching interference in the private conduct of the individual's daily life. It should be noted, however, that Israeli citizen's private life is far from being free from intervention by religious institutions. The 'status quo' arrangement endows the rabbinical (orthodox) establishment (which, it should be stressed, also functions as the spiritual leadership of the religious political parties) with unique influence on personal matters, which are legally under the jurisdiction of religious courts... The religious rule in matters of personal status is thus viewed as a reflection of the infamous 'religious coercion', forced upon the secular political forces. However, a deeper examination of the political process that preceded the passage of the Rabbinical Courts Law (1953) suggests that 'gender inequality in Israel had rested not only on political compulsion..., but was deeper, and stemmed from an agreement in principle with the religious establishment about

¹³ Michael Kress op cit pp 3-4.

¹⁴ Nira Yuval-Davis 'Jewish Fundamentalisms and Women' (Women Living Under Muslim Laws) (www.wluml.org/sites/wluml.org/files/import/english/pubs/pdf/wsf/nira.pdf) p 28,.

the essence of the woman'.... 'By adopting the religious marriage and divorce laws...Political-Zionism found the way to construct the new Jewish male as a powerful patriarch, who holds almost unlimited privileges and control over his wife, whose honour within the family sphere resembles that of the mythological patriarchs of the ancient world, and immeasurably supersedes that of Western men.'¹⁵

Examples of the issues that affect women include the inequality in matters of divorce, which can only be instituted by the husband, and the desperate situation of 'agunot', women whose husbands have disappeared, either as a result of war or abandonment, and who are unable to remarry. In such matters women's organisations have had recourse to the secular courts. As Halperin-Kaddari and Yadgar express it, regarding the case of an amendment to the Spousal (Property Relations) law in 2008:

In this the rabbinical establishment has unmistakably placed itself on the side of the husbands, closing its eyes to the suffering of countless women, who had to make extensive concessions to achieve their *get* (divorce document) and their liberty. But the truth of the matter is that the Rabbinical Courts and the religious parties backing them were simply afraid of losing their complete control over the separation procedures between the spouses. Thus the battle over this amendment boldly brought together the two war zones that sadly govern the painful area of divorce law in Israel: the gender war, and the war between the rabbinical establishment and the secular legal system. If this language might seem too harsh, one only needs to read what Israel's Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar had to say to his fellow Rabbinical Judges in a conference convened just one month after the amendment was passed: 'Even those Rabbinical Courts that used to be strong were hurt, as a result of many laws passed in recent years, and the battles are tough. Women's organizations are the fear of the country, and it is because of them that we are in such acute positions in this war.'¹⁶

The gender issues that have already been indicated are already deeply embedded in Orthodox Jewish life and society, so it is unlikely that the new Jewish Fundamentalists are different in the way they control their internal community existence. The only major change, at least amongst the haredi community is to put greater pressure on the secular society of Israel to conform to their views about restricting the public presence of women. Nevertheless this is itself in curious contradiction with previous Jewish values. As Nira Yuval-Davis explained in an interview:

The Jewish religious tradition is patriarchal and women are excluded from leadership positions; in religious courts, for example, their evidence is not acceptable. At the same time, since men have to be dedicated to the study of

¹⁵ Ruth Halperin-Kaddari and Yaacov Yadgar 'Religion, Politics and Gender Equality among Jews in Israel (Draft) UNRISAD (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development), Heinrich Boll Stiftung. Pp 18-19. Published as Between Universal Feminism and Particular Nationalism: politics, religion and gender (in)equality in Israel, (together with Yaacov Yadgar) 31 *Third World Quarterly* 905-920 (2010).

¹⁶ Ruth Halperin-Kaddari and Yaacov Yadgar op cit p 41.

religion, women have to be economically active and thus while segregated are not excluded from the public sphere. Indeed women have been very active in the settler movement, demonstrating their role as sacrificial mothers. Some religious feminists have fought against the equation between segregation and disempowerment. They have argued for instance that they should be allowed to lead prayers provided this does not involve mixed congregations, and have attempted to do so at the Wailing Wall (and were repeatedly arrested). There was also contestation about segregation on buses going to ultra-orthodox neighbourhoods; the religious communities felt entitled to segregated buses even though these also go through other neighbourhoods. Religious feminists did not contest segregation *per se* but protested by sitting at the front of the bus claiming there was nothing in the scriptures suggesting women should sit at the back... In certain neighbourhoods... ultra-orthodox women started wearing the equivalent of a burqa as a signifier of extreme piety (the global and regional 'ecumenical' fundamentalist effect is clear here). Interestingly the rabbis (who are always male) objected to it because the women had acted on their own initiative and without consultation with the proper authorities. The fact that they were exercising agency was not appreciated by the rabbis.¹⁷

The public role of women is clearly something that is perceived as threatening to some within the Jewish fundamentalist camp, yet this is not always the case, at least so it would seem when viewed from outside.

After the 1967 war and the occupation of the Palestinian territories not taken over during and after 1948 – especially the West Bank, including East Jerusalem – the balance of power between the various political agents started to change in Israel. During the late 1970's, the right wing *Likud* party led an Israeli government for the first time ever... The religious parties gained extra powers in this process, as *Likud* needed their support. This provided an economic and political environment favourable to the growth of the two main kinds of Israeli Jewish fundamentalist movements.

The Messianic settlers of *Gush Emunim* (the Bloc of the Faithful) and the greater Israel movement saw themselves as the new Zionist pioneers, who had taken over the traditional Labour role at the forefront of the *hagshama* (which in Hebrew means both 'realisation' and 'fulfilment') of the Zionist project by settling in the Occupied Territories, especially in militarily strategic places as well as near the Jewish holy sites.¹⁸

At various times political events have required that the Israeli government attempt to reign in the settler movement, and even remove them from their settlements. Halperin-Kaddari and Yadgar describe one such event.

There is another, often overlooked angle to the feminist-evolutionary process that the religious community is currently undergoing... [that] takes it to the much more openly political field.... The outcome of this process is clearly evidenced in the recent confrontations between the Israeli army and the right-

¹⁷ Nira Yuval-Davis 'Symptoms of crisis ? Religion and women's rights in Israel. (<http://www.siawi.org/article3843.html>) pp 5-6.

¹⁸ Nira Yuval-Davis op cit pp 29-30.

wing mostly religious settlers, supported by the right-wing national religious constituency, over the 2005 disengagement from Gaza, and the ensuing evacuations that followed. The presence of women, mostly young women, in utterly disproportionate rate to their actual numbers, completely overshadowing the actions of their male counterparts, cannot be overstated. If one picture is indeed worth more than a thousand words, then there is no doubt that those pictures that are engraved in Israelis' collective memory as epitomizing the trauma of civil disobedience as well as violent resistance (on the verge of 'brethren war') have this in common: the resisting settler, who blocks a line of soldiers, who gets dragged on the ground, who is being pulled to a ladder, who prays in devotion while soldiers get ready to their task, who holds a baby before being carried out of the home – is always a woman.... We would like to suggest ... that this phenomenon cannot be separated from the broader feminist-evolution within the religious community, and yet it is also related to the legacy of the Israeli settlement movement in which women played a major role, both publicly and politically as well as internally within their own communities... It has internalized the unique combination of high-level learning, including religious learning, and the openly feminist discourse that has gained legitimacy within the religious community, together with that legacy of their mothers' active political participation.... Even if these young female settlers' activism is not explicitly feminist, it does break the patriarchal order. It remains to be seen whether this will lead to more explicit feminism.¹⁹

In the time available for this presentation it is only possible to note other matters that need to be addressed. The issue of homosexuality is seriously addressed in non-Orthodox circles, to the extent of ordaining gay and lesbian rabbis and offering same-sex commitment ceremonies. But it remains highly problematic for modern Orthodoxy and a taboo area for the fundamentalists.²⁰ The annual Gay Pride march in Tel Aviv provokes anger and death threats from the latter circles. The desire of women to express their religiosity through public worship is dramatised by the daily actions of the Women of the Wall, who conduct services before the Western Wall of the Temple in Jerusalem, leading at times to arrests for 'disturbing the peace'. The ongoing debate about the exemption from army service of Orthodox yeshivah students, places the Israeli sense of patriotic duty at the forefront of the struggle with the religious power structure. All of these and related issues reflect bitter divisions within Israeli society. But despite the general awareness in the population of the need to change, the ongoing conflict with the Arab world effectively offers successive governments the excuse to put issues of gender inequalities on the back burner, and similarly ignore any issues, like the recognition of non-Orthodox rabbis, that challenge the power of the religious parties. For the conceivable future it is likely to be the Diaspora Jewish communities that will continue to use their freedom to explore all the various ways in which gender issues affect Jewish religious life. Whether such developments affect the fundamentalists will probably

¹⁹ Halperin-Kaddari and Yadgar op cit pp 41-42.

²⁰ For a variety of views on the subject see Jonathan Magonet (Ed.) *Jewish Explorations of Sexuality* (European Judaism Vol 1) (Berghahn Books, Providence, Oxford 1995).

depend on the power the women of their communities take upon themselves to redefine their status in the light of the opportunities that are now open to them.