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The "Tempered Radical" Revolution: Multifocal Strategies of Religious-Zionist Feminism in Israel

Tanya Zion-Waldoks

Department of Education, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem 9190501, Israel; tanya.zion-waldoks@mail.huji.ac.il

Abstract: Agunah activism, a flagship struggle of Religious-Zionist feminism, links gender politics, Jewish-Orthodox politics, and national Israeli politics. This qualitative study focuses on agunah activists' strategies and conceptions of change, highlighting the complex ways religious women radically transform conservative contexts, complicated by intersections of religion, gender, and state. It examines dynamic boundary-work and how activists deploy the inner workings of "the Halakhic framework" to shift creatively between social positioning, ideological or cultural positioning, and a political positioning to create "change from within". My case study troubles the premise that religion and feminism are antithetical, and that distinct identities or set social locations predetermine social movements' frames or actions. I expand upon the term "tempered radicals" which challenges reformist/revolutionary and conservative/radical binaries. "Tempered radical" strategies are two-pronged: a tempered mode of modulation and moderation to rock the boat without falling out (avoid the red lines, find "the right way") and a radical mode of stirring the sea and creating horizons (arrive there, one way or another). Dynamically holding both modes together, through a "multifocal lens"—the world-as-it-is and the world-as-it-should-be—enables their strategic maneuverings. They remain "within" while radically transforming individuals, communities, Jewish law, Orthodox society and the Israeli public sphere. This study demonstrates how religious and gendered structures are at once constitutive and mutable.

Keywords: Orthodoxy; feminism; tempered radical; boundary work; Religious-Zionism; Modern-Orthodoxy; activism

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> *TEMPERED (adjective) tem·pered | \ ˈtem-pərd \ [1] treated so as to impart increased strength . . . [2] having a specific temper . . . [3] (a) having the elements mixed in satisfying proportions (b) qualified, lessened, or diluted . . . [4] conforming to adjustment by temperament.*
>
> *RADICAL (adjective) rad·i·cal | \ ˈra-di-kəl\ [1] . . . (d) designed to remove the root of a disease . . . . [2] of, or relating to, the origin, fundamental [3] (a) very different from the usual or traditional, extreme (b) favoring extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions (c) associated with political views, practices, and policies of extreme change (d) advocating extreme measures to retain or restore a political state of affairs.*[1]

1. Introduction: "Change?!"

"How many Orthodox rabbis does it take to change a light bulb?" asked Sophie, a middle aged Jewish-Orthodox feminist activist in Israel. With mock-horror, she replied: "Change?!". Chuckling, Sophie explained that in Orthodoxy, "change is a dirty word, you don't use the word change. [. . .] We 're-interpret' it. We have been doing [re-interpretation in Jewish tradition] all along, and we have found solutions." Historians agree that Jewish tradition has transformed dramatically throughout history, and that Orthodoxy, a conservative and stringent version of Judaism, is itself is a modern phenomenon rapidly

morphing and diversifying. However, Sophie suggests Orthodoxy presents change as antithetical to its collective identity as the authentic, and only, loyal heir of tradition (Eleff 2020). Jewish Orthodoxy is less concerned with set belief systems than with "loyalty to Halakha (Jewish law)" (Sagi 2006), associated with rigorous religious praxis, legal methodologies, and an ethic of social conformity. How religious communities conceptualize and negotiate change is deeply entwined with matters of identity and power, narratives and norms. Both proponents and opponents of "change" engage in intense politics of boundary-work and meaning making (including labeling certain phenomena as "change"). This paper delves into the boundary work involved in Religious-Zionist feminists' strategies of change, as exemplified by women like Sophie who struggle for Jewish women's right to divorce (agunah activism) in Israel.

Reflecting on the joke, Sophie explains Orthodox Jews, particularly Religious-Zionists in Israel (and their Modern-Orthodox US contemporaries), often justify changes in Halakha by reframing it as "re-interpretation", as a hermeneutic contribution to a vibrant discursive tradition. This method of legitimation smooths over the potential threat of temporal rupture, internal defiance or external influence, representing transformations as faithful continuations rather than discordant shifts or threats. However, not every interpretation is equally valid and not all change is easily incorporated as "re-interpretation". Nor are all change makers cast as authentic disciples—some are seen as rebellious troublemakers, even heretics (Ferziger 2009). Religious-Zionist women promoting greater gender equality within religious and national contexts are a case in point.

For most of Jewish history, Jewish culture and law have been structured by, and for, men, within a heteronormative patriarchal paradigm. Knowledge created from women's standpoints and calls for the expansion of women's roles, voices, and status within Jewish tradition are often perceived as a radical threat to the Jewish social order and religious ideals. Thus, women demanding gender equality, or even equity, are often met with severe pushback and censure, accused of seeking to undermine the very basis of Orthodox life. Orthodox gatekeepers have a vested interest in promoting a certain understanding of '*The* Halakha' (singular, capitalized), representing it as a fixed, authoritative, and coherent body of knowledge, practices, and collective meaning (Picard 2012; Schremer 2019). This framing allows rabbinic authorities to label any claim for "change" as inherently destabilizing, and mark changemakers as heretical, disloyal, foreign, and inauthentic to "tradition". What is crucial here is the subtle move "from a discourse of legality to one of legitimacy" (Hartman 2007, p. 128). It shifts the conversation from belief or practice to identity and belonging, from debates about possible "re-interpretations" within an evolving tradition, to silencing and delegitimizing voices that hegemonic forces consider disruptive. Orthodox feminists, who seek to subvert the patriarchal social order while remaining "loyal to Halakha", bear the brunt of these mechanisms of labeling and othering.

The question at the heart of this paper is how Jewish-Orthodox feminists, specifically Religious-Zionists engaged in highly political agunah activism in Israel, successfully promote change within their conservative tradition and communities while avoiding being silenced and ostracized. What strategies comprise creating "change from within" the Halakhic framework? Is articulating a well-argued Halakhic claim, offering an innovative commentary, or bringing an ancient prooftext enough to induce change? These are key questions for Orthodox feminists: How to rock the boat without falling out? How to steer the boat in your desired direction without being labeled a usurper? What if it turns out that Audre Lorde (1984) was correct, and "the master's tools cannot dismantle the master's house", should one abandon ship? Answers to these questions have spiritual, social, and cultural ramifications as well as significant personal and political implications for individuals, families, and collectives. This paper picks up such questions which have rarely been discussed, not since early scholarship on the agenda-setting years of Religious-Zionist women's efforts to improve "women's status" (El-Or 2002; Sered 1997; Ross 1993; Hartman 2007).

Blu Greenberg, a leading US-based Orthodox feminist, famously coined the saying "where there's a rabbinic will, there's a halakhic way" (Gordan 2020, p. 329). Greenberg suggests that the onus of creating morally necessary change lies squarely on rabbinic shoulders. Now, nearly half a century after the movement's first stirrings, and thirty years into its diverse struggles, I return to assess questions of strategy: How can Religious-Zionist feminists in Israel divert "rabbinic will" to align with their own? How do they have their way without losing their way? This paper analyzes activists' conceptualizations and strategies of change, insights gained from Orthodox women's flagship struggle, agunah activism in Israel. I examine how activists challenge and re/de-construct what a legitimate "halakhic way" means, detailing how their boundary work allows them to remain "within" while also legitimizing subversive actions as "change from within", enabling deep transformations. Developing the notion of "tempered radicals", originally offered by Meyerson and Scully (1995) and Meyerson (2001) in the organizational context, my study upends limiting and reductive binaries (e.g., insider/outsider, reform/revolution, conservative/radical) still prevalent in literature on the intersection of gender, religion and politics. More generally, this case study contributes to scholarship on Religious Zionism which has a dearth of bottom-up empirical studies on lived religion (Caplan 2017; Zion-Waldoks 2022).

2. Agunah Activism as Flagship Struggle over Gendered Jewish-Orthodox Boundaries

The struggle for agunah rights is a flagship issue for Orthodox feminist movements in both North America and Israel. An agunah (*agunot*, pl.) is a woman denied a Jewish divorce due to the hierarchical structure of Jewish marriage and Halakhic restrictions, as currently ideologically interpreted and enforced by Orthodox rabbis (A. Westreich 2010; E. Westreich and Westreich 2019). In Israel, the agunah issue is further complicated by contentious entangelments between religion, gender, and (the Jewish) state, because Jews' marriage and divorce is only adjudicated in the Israeli Rabbinic Court (IRC), a body controlled by (competing) Orthodox forces and empowered by the State.[2] The IRC, whose status parallels civil courts and whose all-male Orthodox justices appointed, funded and authorized by the democratic state, is agunah activism's main focal point. Although Israel boasts an impressive record of progressive legislation ensuring women's rights, it accords sole jurisdiction over citizens' marriage and divorce to "religious authorities [who] are the most powerful opponents of equal rights for women" (Feldman 2011, p. 13; Weiss 2008). This arrangement enforces severe gender discrimination which negatively affects all Jewish (and non-Jewish) women in Israel regardless of religious observance (Weiss and Gross-Horowitz 2012; Halperin-Kaddari 2004).

The agunah movement—led by learned women who are rarely agunot themselves—grew directly from Orthodox feminism's historic "Torah study revolution," where women gained cultural literacy and significantly increased their participation in Jewish life including scholarship, rituals, and public leadership (Shilo 2006; El-Or 2002; Seidman 2019; Rosenberg-Friedman 2018; Irshai and Zion-Waldoks 2013; Fuchs 2018; Cohen 2006).[3] On the one hand, it is unsurprising that Orthodox women, equipped with Halakhic knowledge, spearhead efforts to oppose these injustices because they hold "dual citizenship" in the religious and civil spheres (Feldman 2011). Indeed, relations between religion and state were rarely addressed by Israeli secular feminism prior to the rise of Orthodox feminism (Graetz 2003). On the other, Orthodox agunah activism confounds the "religious-secular cleavage" paradigm (Peres and Ben-Rafael 2006) because both mainstream Orthodox and secular discourses in Israel tend to label critics of religious institutions "anti-religious", whereas here pious women are among the harshest critics of religious leadership.[4]

Although goals and strategies differ, collectively the agunah movement works to abolish, circumvent, or, at least, severely limit the pervasive abuse, extortion, and discrimination against Jewish women and children in IRC divorce processes. In its more moderate framing, agunah activism demands a massive "clean up" of the IRC, accused of bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption, unprofessionalism, human disregard, and gender bias. In its most radical framing, which not all activists subscribe to, agunah activism im-

plicates Jewish-Halakhic marriage, Orthodox institutions, and the nation-state in women's subjugation. Over the years, activists' erudition and professionalism has gained some Orthodox respect, though support often depends on framing activism as rescuing specific *agunot* from abusive husbands denying them a *get* (Jewish writ of divorce). Overt systemic critique—which gains traction for the issue in the "secular" media—is virulently censured by Rabbinic discourse. Despite consisting of only a few dozen activists with a wider circle of allies, the movement's public campaigns and legal work have achieved substantial success over the past quarter century.[5] Overall, the tactics employed by the movement are legal and nonviolent measures and, in this sense, they fall within the norm of democratic protest and reform efforts. However, viewed in its cultural context and through a gender lens, the movement proves itself to be quite provocative and disruptive, resulting in a high degree of risk to the social order and activists alike.

My findings draw from a larger qualitative study of Orthodox Agunah activists in Israel. The research is grounded in hermeneutics and critical theory and is feminist in its aims and methodology. From 2009 to 2012, I recorded 33 in-depth interviews, later transcribed and approved by participants, and conducted four participant observations (in Agunah advocacy organizations, a Rabbinic Court, and an Agunah's post-divorce celebration). My analysis utilized tools from grounded-theory and narrative analysis (Wertz et al. 2011). Being an Israeli Orthodox feminist previously active in this field, I used my amicable relationships with activists to recruit participants and my position as insider/outsider enabled a strong rapport, elicited empathy and deeper understanding.[6] I chose only women directly involved in the field, asking each to share her "story as someone active in the Agunah field." Although I categorize Agunah activism as feminist politics, participants do not all self-identify as feminists. Participants all self-associate with Orthodoxy, most with various streams of Religious Zionism. Agunah activism, heavily linked to Halakhic/legal expertise, correlates with relative privilege. All are educated professionals: Most are certified Rabbinic advocates and/or lawyers, with some therapists and academics. Aged 32–72 at the time of the interview, all are middle class, mostly Israeli-born, many of Ashkenazi descent, and concentrated around Jerusalem (Orthodox feminism's hub). Contrary to stereotypes, the overwhelming majority of Agunah activists are married and all are mothers of several children—they are rarely agunot themselves.

The importance of this case study lies in its complex linkage between three overlapping fields: gender politics, Jewish-Orthodox politics, and national Israeli politics. Agunah activists confront gender boundaries as feminists of faith who step into the public sphere to voice critical opinions despite being socialized into modesty, piety, subordinance and domesticity. Moreover, they challenge gendered boundaries by critiquing Jewish family law, as structured by "*kiddushin*" (lit., sanctity, Halakhic marriage and divorce) and/or as currently implemented in the IRC. The Jewish family is a core social and symbolic structure of Jewish-Orthodox collective identity, which activists are invested in. However, activists oppose how this value is misused to underwrite hierarchical constructions and create rampant gender injustices (Zion-Waldoks, forthcoming). Agunah activism also challenges Jewish-Orthodox politics because contemporary stances on gender issues are litmus tests for determining denominational boundaries—distinguishing Orthodoxy from more liberal versions of Judaism, as well as intra-Orthodox differentiations (Rosenberg-Friedman 2018). Moreover, agunah activists also impinge upon national politics because they challenge the IRC as an arm of the nation-state, critiquing both religio-political authorities and the civil institutions that uphold them. Thus, beyond advocating for women's rights, agunah activists agitate boundaries and question who is the true "guardian" of multiple collectives: Jewish families, Orthodox communities, the Jewish People, and the Jewish State (Zion-Waldoks, forthcoming). Thus, I build upon the idea that religion, gender, and politics are co-constructed categories (Herzog and Braude 2009), and agunah activism is a prime example of how "the shifting nature of gender identities and power relations in a religious world that tries to uphold the fixity of both" (Griffith 1997, p. 200) leads to a wealth of contentious politics and fertile opportunities for analysis.

Political voices of religious women, previously sidelined, are currently gaining attention—in historical works on Jewish women's contribution to the US radical feminist movement (Antler 2018; Glenn 2019), in the many debates about religious women's agency, moving beyond a dichotomous submission/resistance binary (Zion-Waldoks 2015), or regarding women in conservative religious movements' shifting engagement with both private and public spheres and traversing the boundaries between them (Ben Shitrit 2021; Rinaldo 2010; Kook and Harel-Shalev 2020; Blumen 2002). However, scholarship on the intersection of religion and feminism has been dogged by the persistent notion that the two are antithetical (Braude 2004, 2018; Zwissler 2018). This paper posits that religious feminism should be associated "less with secularization and more with the continuing negotiation of living faiths" (Braude 2004, p. 572), as religions can be a force for conservation and/or change. It is therefore important to ask what agunah activism adds to our understanding of the wider historical struggle it is rooted in. Jewish Orthodox feminism is an identity, a theological intervention, and a moral call to reform ritual practices, hermeneutic traditions, social and educational norms, legal strictures and religio-political institutions—all while maintaining faith, remaining committed to the Halakhic framework, and staying rooted in Orthodox communal structures. Orthodox feminism usually frames its methods as seeking evolutionary, not revolutionary, change, and sets goals such as repairing gender inequities—or restoring tradition to its origins (Hartman 2005)—rather than aiming for systemic overhaul. Even so, the multiple and substantial changes occurring in some pockets of Orthodoxy, and its wider reverberations, reveal the irrefutably revolutionary consequences of Orthodox feminism (Rosenberg-Friedman 2018; Hartman 2007, Irshai and Zion-Waldoks 2013). Therefore, it is crucial to critically analyze its strategies and unpack its "change from within" motto.

3. Why "Within" Matters: Boundary Patrols and Strategically Straddling an Insider/Outsider Position

The extensive and multidisciplinary literature on social and symbolic boundaries examines "conceptual distinctions individuals make in the course of their everyday lives, and how these distinctions can—and do—influence more durable and institutionalized social differences" (Pachucki et al. 2007, p. 331). Scholars call attention to the "boundary-work" involved—the mechanisms "associated with the activation, maintenance, transposition or the dispute, bridging, crossing and dissolution of boundaries" (Lamont and Molnár 2002, p. 187)[7]. Well established in social movement theory, boundary work is a relative newcomer to the study of religion, although determining boundaries of cultural membership is a core function of religion (Edgell 2012; Tranby and Zulkowski 2012; Olson 2011). This perspective highlights how religion—as a source of cultural tools, social networks and institutional resources—categorizes and differentiates between groups, assigns worth, truth or goodness, sets goals, justifies action, and relates to resources. A symbolic boundaries perspective also provides "insights on the use, and limits, of religion as cultural power to shape symbolic boundaries around gender and sexuality" (Tranby and Zulkowski 2012, p. 871). This is of crucial importance for this study because "gender is an especially salient feature of religion [and] in many parts of the world, and in many religious traditions, cultural and religious continuity hinges on gendered and sexual practices and regimes" (Avishai et al. 2015, p. 7; Zwissler 2018).

The matter of boundaries—particularly patrolling questions of inclusion/exclusion, hierarchies, and authenticity/legitimacy—is central to Orthodoxy (Eleff 2020; Zion-Waldoks 2022). Gender issues are a key way for Orthodoxy to differentiate from its external "constitutive other" (Gunnarsson 2016)—namely secular and Reform Jews—and position itself as the dominant form of Israeli Judaism. Questions of gender and rabbinic authority are also major internal fault lines, given that scholars have diagnosed a deep internal "identity crisis" and fragmentation within Religious Zionist society (Sheleg 2019; Schwartz 2012; Ettinger 2019). As a result, critiquing gender injustice in Jewish life is perceived as threatening, undermining and even heretical (Ferziger 2009; Hartman 2007). An even

riskier endeavor is to practice "devoted resistance"—to insist on critiquing while remaining rooted within religious communities, and articulating claims in religious terms and for *Halakha's* sake (Zion-Waldoks 2015). Overall, within Orthodox society, gendered and religious boundaries are intertwined and heavily patrolled.

Thus, outside the (growing) bubble of Orthodox feminist subcultures, a common experience of Orthodox feminists is one of exclusion, or even negation, because skeptics often consider religious feminism an oxymoron: The religious establishment sees feminism as a subset of modern, external Western culture which infiltrates age-old Jewish tradition and seeks to undermine the authority of *Halakha* and the rabbinic establishment. They cast suspicion on religious feminists' motivations as illegitimate and inauthentic and accuse them of "not being religious enough", "not really religious", or a fifth column. Secular feminists suspect them of "not being feminist enough", "not truly feminist", or suffering from false consciousness and being complicit in the propagation of patriarchy. However, Orthodox feminists have refused to accept this dichotomous "choice" between "exit, voice, and loyalty" (Hirschman 1970). Considering this dilemma both unsolvable and unfair, they remain loyal to both religious and feminist identities, actively claiming inclusion in both worlds and negotiating ongoing tensions between them (Hartman 2007; Israel-Cohen 2012; Antler 2018).

There is extensive research on how Jewish and, specifically, Orthodox women negotiate identity dissonance between religion and feminism (Fishman 1995; Kehat 2008; Dufour 2000). However, not enough attention has been given to analyzing the kind of politics their positionality produces. What boundaries shape feminists of faith's lives and political maneuvering? What boundary work does advocating for change while staying "within" entail? How does women's dynamic boundary work construct new understandings of both feminism and Orthodoxy? To interrogate activists' boundary work is to examine what limits and enables their actions as well as what makes up their strategies of change—how they try to have what they want (Jasper 2006).

Overall, scholarship on religious Jewish women engaging in public feminist activism has a limited focus on strategies.[8] The central strategy discussed is cultural literacy—scholarship highlights women gaining power and promoting change through access to religious knowledge, interpretive tools, and text-based discourses, thereby accruing voice, authority and leadership positions (Kehat 2001; El-Or 2002; Feuchtwanger 2009; Ferziger 2018; Frishman 2019). This strategy is indeed fundamental in hermeneutic traditions like Judaism and Islam that base cultural meanings and social norms on sacred texts and historically limit women's authority to interpret and implement them. However, as my case study shows, religious knowledge is rarely enough because religion is multifaceted and embedded in a matrix of intersectional forces that shape women's experience, belonging, and access to power. What you know and how well you argue might not even matter if you are delegitimized because of who or how you are perceived to be.

Analyzing the early years of Orthodox feminist struggles in Israel, Susan Sered (1997) defined women's efforts as "rebellion" (seeking a bigger piece of the pie) or "revolution" (attempts "to overthrow the system and change the essential rules of the game", p. 4).[9] However, in the same early years of the movement, Tamar Ross (1993) blurs these distinctions, claiming Religious Zionist feminism is a "holy rebellion" which is in fact a "quiet revolution" because although women are not initially armed with a "radical approach towards rabbinic authority", their gradual evolution carries the potential for far-reaching and unstoppable change. This prediction was echoed over a decade later, by Tova Hartman (2007), also an Orthodox feminist leader and scholar: "[T]he challenge of feminism to Modern Orthodoxy is far deeper than a challenge to specific aspects of halakha, or even to the halakhic process as a whole. It advances a different kind of stance in the world" (Hartman 2007, p. 16). Perhaps from an insider's perspective, rebellion and revolution, reform and radical change are not necessarily wholly distinct? How is this revolution-qua-rebellion (or vice-versa) achieved?

My approach draws upon Deniz Kandiyoti's (1988) foundational work on bargaining with patriarchy, which views strategy as inherently contingent on context, with its concrete (intersectional) constraints and distinct 'rules of the game'. Given this insight, I adapt and develop the notion of the "tempered radical" to the Religious Zionist context. The concept of tempered radicals was originally presented by Meyerson and Scully (1995, p. 586) within the organizational and management field as referring to "Individuals who identify with and are committed to their organizations, and are also committed to a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with the dominant culture of their organization." Tempered radicals often experience themselves along the lines of Patricia Hill Collins' notion of being "outsiders within" (Collins 1986; Sasson-Levy et al. 2011). This internal tension, explains Meyerson (2001, pp. 5–6), is because they "are people who operate on a fault line. [. . .] Tempered radicals at once uphold their aspiration to be accepted insiders and their commitment to change the very system that often casts them as outsiders."

Meyerson argues it is important to differentiate tempered radicals from radicals, maintaining the key distinction lies in tempered radicals' overarching strategy of "working within". Their ambivalence is caused by being "constantly pulled in opposing directions: toward conformity and toward rebellion" and they manage it by "navigating a middle ground". This means that even when promoting seemingly radical goals and intentions such as "questioning fundamental principles [. . .] or root assumptions [. . .] they do not advocate extreme measures" (p. 7).[10] However, my study pushes the concept further, departing from Meyerson's original arguments by destabilizing her clear distinction between tempered and radical characteristics and broadening what "working within" means. My case study shows that moderate measures and modulation are only one element, complemented by a drive to push beyond limits and get to the root of the problem, whatever it takes.

4. What Does "Within" Mean?

Claiming they are—and insist on remaining—situated "within" Orthodoxy is an overt and central theme in Agunah activism. This is not surprising, given Orthodox society's pressures to fit in, and how women promoting a feminist agenda live under threat of being labeled an outsider, as discussed above. However, what activists mean by this and how they strategically use this notion as part of their boundary work is far from obvious. Dalia, a devout *Aguna* activist, began her narrative like many of my interlocutors with a declaration of loyalty to "the Halakhic framework", yet a close reading exposes multiple strands of this relationship, and how they shape the logic behind her groundbreaking legal and political efforts.

> I am in a place of having the framework, and I don't try to breach the framework. I am talking about the Halakhic framework. [. . .] I came to make possible what is possible within the framework. I really believe in that, by the way, truly believe in it. [. . .] I think things should be changed from within. It is possible to change things from within and I believe in it. (Dalia)

Dalia assumes a relationality between structure and agency. She anchors her Halakhic loyalty by intentionally situating herself in relation to "the framework". Rather than positing the a priori existence of an unchanging, independent, and impermeable "Halakhic framework" that regulates her life top-down, she recognizes her role in sustaining or potentially rupturing it through her words, affective commitments, and actions. She is actively involved in determining the framework's boundaries and what falls "within" it: she can embrace ("having"), define and interpret ("make possible what is possible") or disrupt ("breach") the framework.

Dalia alludes to three different understandings of the phrase "within": it refers to the social location in which she is embedded ("I am in a place"), a worthy and valued way to be and act ("should" . . . "believe in") and an effective mode of action ("it is possible to"). This is somewhat reminiscent of Nira Yuval-Davis' (2011, p. 7) identification of three

major ways belonging is constructed which are interrelated but must also be analytically differentiated: "people's positioning along socio-economic grids of power, . . . people's experiential and identificatory perspectives of where they belong; and . . . their normative value systems". My research has identified and characterized three conceptualizations of "within" which correspond to the definitions offered above:

The first perceives "within" as a **social positioning**: activists' Orthodox identity markers (normative behaviors, dress code, social ties to community members and institutions, etc.) are believed to inform activists' ability to successfully lead processes of change. This understanding exposes the intimate and intricate connections between the activists' private lives and public endeavors which can have both a restrictive and enabling effect on their activism and its degree of radicalness.

The second definition relates to an **ideological or cultural positioning**: working from "within" means endorsing a set of values, beliefs, modes of interpretation, bodies of knowledge and discourses which are identified as "traditional" Jewish or Orthodox cultural modes. For example, expressing claims based on canonical texts and rabbinic hermeneutics is considered a positive method of implementing change. Promoting ideas which align with core values, or re-instating voices anchored (but overlooked) in tradition, allows change that draws from the cultural toolkit to be presented as rightfully "within". This is particularly important given the structured gender bias in the Jewish hermeneutic tradition and how women have, for the most part, been left out of its cultural development.

The third understanding of change from within is a **political positioning**, a stance of pragmatic idealism, the logic of efficacy: this refers to an assumption that inducing processes of socio-legal change on women's behalf is most likely to succeed if framed and conducted within the bounds of what are considered appropriate channels and tactics. Activists adopt modes of being and doing considered less threatening by Orthodox leaders and communities. The logic being that producing a reasoned, controlled and moderate rocking of the boat ensures the Orthodox status-quo will not exceed its capacity to absorb gentle shock waves, thereby presumably contributing to both short term acceptability *and* long-term incorporation of transformation. As Ayala puts it: "[It] matters to what degree you can say "I come from within and therefore [. . .] I am allowed to say so and so". To come from within not only in the sense of "I have the knowledge, I have the training, I have the tools", but in the sense of "I care, this system is mine too, I am a part of it". [. . .] that's a valuable tool. That's a place I cannot afford to lose. [. . . It's] a question of legitimacy." However, this is a realpolitik approach driven by idealism. In other words, "change" is necessary, urgent and vitally crucial, and "from within" is preferable because it makes success more likely. Unless it does not. In situations where moving "outside" sanctioned Orthodox bounds becomes practically feasible, when the risk attached to taking action is worthwhile or mitigated, when the risk of inaction becomes unbearable, or when change "from within" becomes simply impossible, then activists feel morally justified to do whatever works.

Each of the meanings opens paths to slightly different (and sometimes overtly contradictory) outcomes and methods. However, it is the simultaneous multiplicity of meanings and the ability of activists to flexibly move between different positionalities—and even use them to offset one another—that enables Orthodox feminists to achieve radical change while sustaining a sense of belonging and maintaining a claim of loyalty. By maneuvering between positions they demonstrate that Orthodox belonging is not uni-dimensional, top-down, or all-encompassing. It is differential, contingent, multifaceted and relational (Zion-Waldoks 2022).

How then does positionality connect to strategy? How can shifting between positions or meanings of "within" serve as a strategy? In an early blueprint for the movement, Tamar Ross (1993, p. 483) argued that to create justifiable lasting change, Orthodox feminists' goals must preserve "the integrity of Halakhah" and she must work "in a manner authentic to the system" (p. 483). Does this mean women must simply conform and accommodate? Far from it; Ross suggests transformation requires tapping into the "inner logic" of the Halakhic

framework as well as developing the power to re-frame the framework, by employing one's "imagination to discover some unconventional method of *modus Vivendi* with the tradition" (pp. 489–90). While Ross refers to innovating interpretive, legal, and theological arguments, my study reveals navigating "the inner logic" of Orthodoxy includes multiple mechanisms beyond deploying religious knowledge. The following sections present findings that enumerate the practices that comprise two complementary yet distinct strategies of agunah activists' "tempered radicalism": the first—finding the "right way" given "the framework" as-it-is, and the second—leading the way towards a reimagined world as-it-should-be.

5. Finding "The Right Way" and Avoiding Red Lines: Mapping, Moderation, Modulation

> *[. . . She] continues to find ways to rock the boat, but not so hard that she falls out of it*. (Meyerson 2001, p. 4)

Beyond honing their knowledge of Halakhic texts and facility with its methods, all activists reported developing a vital new expertise: they learned about power. They acquired a keen ability to read the room to assess what is politically viable and culturally acceptable in each situation. The goal, as Nurit Fried[11] put it, was to "very carefully walk between the drops" for fear of setting off the tripwire along Orthodoxy's "red lines". Fried, who pioneered the first professional program training Orthodox women to become Rabbinic Advocates, recounted opening the doors of the IRC to women for the first time in history:

> [People] very much tried to dissuade me from it, and said 'it won't work for you, the rabbis won't agree'. So I walked really in such a way without great irreverence [chutzpah] but not with total submission to everything they said, rather somehow between the drops, and it helped. (Nurit)

Fried's attitude of exhibiting neither "total submission" nor "great irreverence" towards male religious authorities translates into everyday practices such as modulating one's voice, affect, and relational position. Activists learned to constantly assess complex situations, and dynamically modulate and moderate their performances accordingly for maximal political effect. For example, to gain a public voice and maintain its resonance (despite the critical and subversive content of their core message), they learned to speak in just the "right" tone, volume, and culturally-recognizable and acceptable codes. Some activists describe enlisting a soft, empathic voice and stance, aimed at lowering tensions and enabling dialogue. Such accommodation to gendered stereotypes of femininity is perceived as a means of lowering the risk of heated confrontation. For example, Naama depicts "talking" to authority figures as a "quiet" process which harnesses her voice as a tool for gently "awakening" change "within the system". She rejects the alternative—an aggressive "loud outcry [. . .] through the media"—which she believes will not "help".

Sarah reveals how slippery the boundaries between aggression and amiability can be:

> A year and a half ago I just attacked them [the rabbinic leadership I was working with], in a nice way, they didn't feel attacked [. . .] but I felt it was like planning [a battle]. (Sarah)

Sarah aims to portray quiet, "nice" interactions with minimal-risk, but actually experiences the field as a bloody battleground (Zion-Waldoks and Motzafi-Haller 2018). Many activists describe becoming masterful warriors but lament the emotional and spiritual price they pay for their aggressive engagement with brute power, particularly given the cost of transgressions of gendered norms. In their efforts to minimize overt confrontation, and avoid suffering from, or being coopted into, the field's violence, some activists highlight the importance of carefully choosing one's battles or becoming skilled at multiple forms of combat. This requires being perfectly attuned to timing and space, as Malka describes:

> The concept of confrontation doesn't exist with me, because when we exit [the courtroom] I automatically, spontaneously, I don't know why or how, I converse with the other side. [. . .] In the court we said what was needed. There were

> times when I raised the tone [of my voice so much so] that I think the walls shook. When there was a need and that was the situation, they heard from me, I don't know where those shouts came from, I don't know where they reside within me [laughs], hidden. But, anyway, in a normal, reasonable, normative, regular manner, I don't have the concept of raising the tone [of my voice], or yelling, or talking—neither at home nor in the courts. I'll say what needs to be said, what they need to hear, and what I need to make heard, but not in an aggressive way, [. . .] I don't impose myself forcefully anywhere, not in the court and not at home. (Malka)

Malka's narrative is seemingly rife with internal contradictions and apologetic justifications, but only if we assume that Malka is a static gendered religious subject who must comply with a singular set of rules at all times. To Malka, her behavior makes complete sense: maneuvering between various spaces and times, she "automatically, spontaneously" assesses each socio-spatial situation for risk and opportunity, and acts accordingly. She distinguishes between "normal, reasonable, normative, regular" situations where she embodies a respectable feminine professional behavior, and extreme times of special "need" where her loud combative shouts burst forth from "hidden" interior spaces. Although she concludes by constructing a coherent unified self who "never" uses blunt aggression to "impose" herself "forcefully anywhere", this does not mean she meekly submits to preordained normative rules about what is deemed appropriate. She requires the rabbinic world to shape up and match *her* standards; *she* determines "what needs to be said, what they need to hear, and what I need to make heard". She views her ability to modulate and adapt as a valued source of power: she is capable of shaking walls when necessary, unsettling the court's foundations and upending gendered expectations, without shaking her own foundation or crossing the red lines of "normal".

Another method of modulation to avoid red lines is becoming the "right" agent of change. For agunah activists, this means strategically performing female piety, representing the correct image as part of a "politics of respectability". They believe packaging is a necessary condition for successfully delivering their radical message because it opens the door and enables an argument on substance rather than an a priori silencing. Miri explained she feared becoming registered in "the rabbis' black books" alongside Orthodox women who "lose their ability to speak in this [rabbinic] language, [. . . because they supposedly] said too many things against religion, the Torah, the establishment [. . . and] will no longer be listened to". Miri reflects on her modest attire, admitting that "maybe that's even why I dress and look this way, even more than how I feel, since [. . .] the people with whom we speak about these things only listen to a certain kind of woman who needs to look and dress [a certain way] and preferably have seven children." Thus, though the embodied habitus of Orthodox observance is a genuine reflection of Miri's beliefs and values, her activism makes her conscious of being evaluated on the quality and authenticity of her performance. Dressing, emoting, mothering, and relating (and seeming relatable) in just the right way becomes a strategic tool. Activists learn to use these means of exhibiting conventional belonging to offset other actions that may otherwise be perceived as too dangerous and radical.

Shlomit, a seasoned activist trained in both civil and religious law, a formidable woman who dons a traditional headdress, shared an anecdote which details these practices:

> We once went to meet [a senior rabbi . . .] so we said the group of women who goes should [. . . be those] who always go with a head covering, [. . .] like I said: I look like his wife, [. . .] He should understand that these women, we come from within, not from the radicals, the provocative [sort . . .], not at all, we really defined ourselves [. . . as] Orthodox women. [. . .] We want to create the changes properly. But from below, we create the changes. We don't come to be oppositional or do things confrontationally, [. . .] the idea is to arrive at change the right way. Many times [. . .] the right way is the quiet way, the seemingly hidden way, but [you must] reach results. [. . .] Do it matter-of-factly,

> from below, create the coalition, create the partnership, minimize, reduce fears. It needs to be done slowly, slow educational action. (Shlomit)

Shlomit manages risk both preventatively by avoiding being othered, distancing herself from any whiff of transgressive personas or threatening affect, and, proactively, by performing closeness. By exhibiting Orthodox female normativity (piety, modesty, motherhood, respect for male authority), she is intimately recognizable and relatable, forming an imagined community which includes the Rabbi, women like her, and his wife. A tangible sense of insider-ness elicits trust. Similarity and recognizability articulate the assumptions of shared socio-cultural givens and red lines safely intact.

However, becoming the "right" person and not being perceived as the *wrong* one is an ongoing task. The burden of proving and clarifying "we" are not like "those" women is constant. Several activists spoke of distancing themselves from an imagined collective of feminist warriors (angry, oppositional, confrontational, disrespectful, "reform", radicals, provocative). For some, this represents a genuine differentiation between players in the field. Most activists, however, saw themselves as encompassing all of the above at different times. With a sly smile, several activists recounted how such differentiations lost all meaning because they themselves often played both roles, confounding others' expectations.

Near the end of her statement, Shlomit describes another strategy which, despite initially seeming contradictory, complements the first and is no less central: "It must be done! Demonstrate [what's] possible, create the change [you want to see]. [Forge] the horizon." Rather than focusing on identifying obstacles and modulating the self to conform to the "right way" or limiting herself to "what is possible", this strategy relentlessly forges a new path, generating new realities and possibilities on the ground. She forms "horizons", leading others towards a previously unimaginable way forward—a strategy I unpack in the next section.

6. Getting There, One Way or Another: Subverting, Steering, Normalizing, and Stirring Up the Sea

> *I won't stop wanting/I won't stop wanting/I won't give in to the idea that/It isn't possible/because it isn't possible/It's a matter of survival/Even if you tell me that's enough, it's over/I have no choice but to want the possible*. (Rona Kenan 2007)

As its name suggests, this strategy is less concerned with cautiously avoiding the red lines than reaching the finishing line. Ma'ayan smiled sadly when recalling a case that brought her face-to-face with an undeniable *Halakhic* red line.[12] "If we have a commitment to Jewish law then we are also committed to this," i.e., accepting that this case "doesn't really have a solution, because some cases don't have a solution, what can you do?" Ma'ayan faced a clear-cut cultural and legal stop-sign, requiring her to come to a standstill or cross, causing peril to herself and others. Ma'ayan refuses this binary choice, and pivots instead, driven by the conviction that giving up on her goal, stopping her movement, is simply not a possibility. Change is inevitable because she denies the possibility of leaving things as they are:

> It cannot be that you will leave a woman in this state [. . .] it's illogical [. . .] it can't be. [. . .] So I told [my fellow activist]: "You know what? I've decided that I'm not resolving this question of commitment to Halakha versus the fact that it cannot be." [. . .] Our working assumption is that it can be, [. . .] that there is no case that cannot be resolved, every case has a solution and we will work until we find a solution. (Ma'ayan)

Ma'ayan does not ignore tensions with the existing Halakhic framework, but intentionally puts aside the discourse of loyalty and identity or concerns for what is appropriate or possible. She enters a different mindset whose crystal-clear assumption is that the world-as-it-is is unacceptable and where there is a will there is a way. Ma'ayan expresses an adamant belief that eventually—one way or another—something will have to give; and

it will not be her determination or efforts. She paraphrases but also flips Blu Greenberg's famous "rabbinic will/Halakhic way" equation. A similarly singular focus arises from Malka, who states her goal unequivocally:

> I don't compromise, and I insist on exactly what I want. You [the *Dayanim*, religious justices] will find the way, the path. That's my goal. I marked my own goal [slaps the table]. The goal is usually one: the *get* [divorce]. It can be [achieved] positively or negatively (laughs). (Malka)

Ma'ayan and Malka's resolve reflects a radical mindset fueled by the urgency and moral importance of the ultimate destination. The moral validity of the end justifies even highly controversial tactics or risky behaviors which defy gendered norms or challenge Orthodox boundaries. Malka is unphased by the risk of transgression and conflict: Her goal can be achieved "positively or negatively [laughs]". She adds that "sometimes when confrontation is needed [we] confront them, no doubt [smiles]". The knowing smile and laugh which accompany Malka's words conveys the core experience of this strategy: a strong sense of agency, entitlement, determination, creativity and desperation.

While Ma'ayan intentionally put aside the question of red lines, Malka went so far as questioning the notion there are clear boundaries to Halakha at all. This despite the fact that she herself is a paragon of Orthodox piety and lives in a relatively strict Orthodox community. She imagined the *Halakhic* framework as a broad, inclusive and dynamic expanse, referring to it as a 'wide open sea' of possibilities to be navigated. The sticking point is that women are denied the right to serve officially at the helm. Thus, to reach her goal, Malka must contend with the current sailors and learn how to, in her words, "steer them, to guide them" in the "right" direction (as defined by *her*).

Shlomit draws a subtle but important distinction between "fixing" the Halakha and undermining it:

> As far as I was concerned, [my activism] wasn't subversive. It was *tikkun olam*[13] [*lit.* fixing the world], that's how we defined it. [. . .] I did it from a feeling and thought that it needs to be done because it is *tikkun olam*, it's fixing the Halakha, "fixing" [air quotes] the Halakha, straightening it back, bringing it to deal with the right things, bringing the religious society to deal with things it should be dealing with and not shutting [your] eyes, disregarding and sweeping them [under the rug]. It wasn't with the purpose of undermining someone, subverting something or damaging the status of rabbis. [Agunah organizations] will always be accused of aiming to undermine rabbis' status. Absolutely not, absolutely not, rather [the goal is] to fix their mindset [*lit.* to organize their head], so they'll work as needed.
>
> Tanya: [laughs] what do you mean by "fixing their mindset"?
>
> Shlomit: [. . . I heard of a scene in the film "My Big Fat Greek Wedding"] where the women say the men are the head and the women are the neck, the head turns wherever the neck turns it. So I'm the neck.

Shlomit's self-appointed responsibility to fix the broken system is achieved by re-aligning religious leaders' perspectives to match her own standpoint and recalibrating the boat's compass to restore its original course (see Hartman 2005). Although she recognizes the explosive potential of her work, she downplays the power struggle by supplanting her detractors' vocabulary with functionalist imagery: Shlomit asserts agunah activists do not engage in "subverting", "undermining", or "damaging", they "organize", "fix" and realign so the machinery will "work as needed".[14] She recognizes and seemingly accepts the gendered structural imbalance: She is the navigational "neck", offering the ship's leadership a moral compass, order, movement, and flexibility—because they are clearly in need of some eye-opening direction. Faced with a rabbinic establishment deeply entrenched in its ways, she tries to generate some movement in the hope that once the blockage is freed up, the dynamic and free flow of Halakha's waters—in which she too is immersed—will be renewed.

To follow through with Shlomit's metaphor, women playing this "neck" role must remain close, they must—literally—remain connected to those at the helm.[15] It is this proximity, and the intimate knowledge they gain from this vantage point, which allows them to de-facto steer the boat "from within".

Some activists envision this relationship in educational terms—casting decision-makers as sheltered, innocent or "ignorant babes" (a *Halakhic* term) in need of a re-education, upending the image of rabbis as knowledgeable and authoritative figures. This patronizing maternalistic position of superiority relieves rabbis of accountability and responsibility while placing the moral burden of "helping" them on enlightened and caring Agunah activists. However, the relationships are more complicated. Sarah expresses great joy at having achieved a position close enough to authority figures to affect rabbinic decision making. She highlights open dialogue and common goals but remains cognizant of the power structure—they did not invite her into the conversation willingly: "We had to fight for this [right to have a voice within the system], to take the tests. Once [you] get the [. . .] legal certificate, the *Dayan* (religious justice) cannot not listen to you." Having forced her foot in the door, she then "forced them to confront this [agunah] problem, and now [my presence is] taken for granted." However, there is ongoing risk involved in this achievement: "[I am] a woman who entered [. . .] the lion's den, and started influencing from the inside." Acutely aware of what is at stake, her metaphor raises concerns: Is she the lion tamer, or their next meal?

Another way to keep sailors at the helm in check is to apply external pressure. Activists use different forms of leverage to shift the internal dynamics: they express their critical view and enlist the secular media or religious communities to shame and prod rabbinic leadership, submit official grievances against wrongdoings, and even appeal to civil courts for recourse. Executing such power-plays (or at least threatening to do so) is deemed radical and traitorous by the mainstream Orthodox establishment which disapproves of airing dirty laundry in public and sees some of these civil and secular institutions as rivals. Such tactics are considered out of bounds, yet activists justify applying external pressure as a means of getting their voice heard "within". Naomi acknowledged this stretches Orthodoxy's boundaries, but explained she sometimes resorted to such tactics to try and "achieve change from the back door. [. . . It is] a shame, I'd prefer it if [change] came through the front door [. . .] but there's no choice, no choice". Activists feel spiritually, morally and socially invested in the bettering of the religious courts and view their actions as working with—not against—the courts' best interest at heart. They hope the court will be encouraged to autocorrect, but either way, activists will at least have nudged the system to shift in the right direction.

Another central tactic is forcing change by altering the reality on the ground until such notions and actions become so prevalent and normalized, they even become incorporated within change-resistant cultural structures and legal institutions. Activists recount personally taking on the risk of heading out into wild unknown waters to establish a bridge upon which others may follow safely. They bridge the world-as-it-is and the world-as-it-should-be by bringing the distant—seemingly impossible—shore closer, putting it within view of the boat's horizons. Shlomit has faith, "radical hope" (Lear 2006):

> Changes in the Halakha [. . .] don't occur from one day to the next, it's a matter of decades maybe more until a change solidifies, until the minority view becomes the majority opinion, turns into the central stream, an acceptable stream, it takes time. It's true that our impression [as Agunah activists] is that there is no time, [. . . but] every time I see buds, and another and another, I am very happy. For example, [. . .] I see that certain issues which initially were totally unacceptable [. . .] today [rabbis] quote them and treat them as though they were *their* idea! These are ideas that came from women, from the women's organizations, from so-called "radical" elements, and today they are adopted and they really do think these are their ideas. [. . .] What's better than that? (Shlomit)

For Shlomit, navigating and steering means moving ideas from the margins into the center, including taking the heat for pioneering "radical" ideas. Eventually, she feels pride when leaders appropriate and take credit for implementing her way.

Other activists flipped the script—they promoted the same "radical" ideas but built on rabbis' fear of controversial boogey-women, so-called "radical" feminists, and highlighted their own coloring-within-the-red-lines socio-religious capital. Using this to their advantage, they marketed *their* path as the safer way compared to that of demonized 'others' (even though they knew the tactics and goals were, in fact, extremely similar). Ma'ayan described a pivotal conversation she had with a rabbinic court judge behind closed doors:

> I said to [the rabbi]: 'Look, [. . . the negative] stories are already out there [in the media], [. . . and] I think we are the only ones who [may] succeed in getting you out of this [situation] in good shape. Because the call and the current direction [of the Israeli public is . . .] towards this issue of civil marriage, leaving the Jewish Halakha, leaving the rabbinic court, that's the direction. And we, our organization still argues [. . .] that there is a possibility for a solution from inside, and I believe there is. [. . .] We are the only ones still saying there is [hope], we are the saving grace.' [. . .] After that conversation they ruled [in the Agunah case . . .] as I had requested. (Ma'ayan)

Miri provides another example of how radical solutions can be welcomed by framing them as fitting 'within' the system, though their true value lies in forcing the authorities' hands:

> Since I despaired of justice coming to light [through the court . . .], I said 'OK, change must come from below, let's give them tools that will change the game'. [. . . An] internal [tool] which can force change within, because you are introducing a whole new player onto the field. (Miri)

Sarah highlighted the importance of introducing a "game changer" that shifts power relations—essentially seeking to lessen dependence on current authorities by transferring power back to the people:

> The salvation, in air quotes or not in air quotes, the way to solve the problem—must come from below. [. . .] This whole huge effort [to educate the public aims] to expose all the sectors of the population to the problem and [argue] that the solutions are actually in their hands. That the pressure [put] on rabbis—in [those] solutions which require the rabbis' [involvement]—will come from below and en masse; since it'll only work that way, we'll skip over the rabbis. (Sarah)

In the activists' views, the specific tactic or solution is less important than the constant movement and unrelenting push to instigate change, so urgently needed. Any advancement is always at risk of slipping away—standing still inherently means losing ground to rigid conservatism or the backlash of fundamentalist forces. Therefore, Agunah activists must always keep the ball rolling; they must constantly stir up the sea or else they and the whole project may sink.

7. Discussion: A Multifocal Perspective: The Artfulness of Stretching Boundaries

> *Rabbi Pappa said in the name of Rabbi Shimon Ben Lakish: "The Torah which God gave to Moses was delivered as white fire engraved in black fire".* (B. Shkalim 16b)

This paper explores the understudied question of Religious Zionist feminism's strategies of change, through a qualitative analysis of an emblematic case—agunah activism. The study demonstrates how strategies are dynamically shaped by interactions in the "arena", the multifaceted context in which "players" are embedded (Jasper and Duyvendak 2015), rather than set by a priori fixed identities or ideological positions. Agunah activists contend with a complex entanglement of gender, religion, and state which produces intertwined forces and overlapping intersecting boundaries, both social and symbolic, which are heavily patrolled. They are motivated by "devoted resistance"—enabled and limited by the power-laden structures which they critique, believe and live in, and aim to transform

(Zion-Waldoks 2015). This study shows how activists operationalize their multifaceted insider's knowledge to successfully map and navigate the current topography, savvily rocking the boat without falling out, but also pushing ahead, despite boundaries, to radically re-form them. In his book *"The Art of Moral Protest"*, James Jasper (2008) argues protestors, like artists, conduct "experimental efforts to transmute existing traditions into new creations" while "offer[ing] ways of getting from here to there" (pp. 7–8). Jasper's metaphor highlights Orthodox feminists' strategic "artfulness"—their experimentalism, creativity, and critical reflexivity within culture. This study demonstrates how religious and gendered structures are at once constitutive and mutable.

Whereas the previous literature was primarily interested in how Religious Zionist feminists manage identity conflicts, or use religious knowledge to acquire voice, status and authority, this paper exposes how a wider range of performative, affective, ideological and social elements play a part in shaping religious and political subjectivities and actions; processes whose outcomes shape individual lives, communities, Judaism, and the Israeli public sphere. This paper shifts the conversation away from considering identity, religion or feminism as fixed categories and draws attention to religious feminists' dynamic politics of belonging and the kind of strategies their positionalities produce. Notions that religion and feminism are inherently at odds often lead to judgements about religious feminist's "progressiveness" or "authenticity", and attempts to assess them on a scale of conservative-to-radical politics. My case study challenges this premise and the binaries it generates. Analytically, I move away from assigning supposedly distinct and predetermined reformist/radical labels, religious/feminist credentials, or rebellion/revolution goals. Such terms are of interest only in so far as they act as politically powerful rhetorical tools for marking symbolic boundaries in the field. However, as scholars, we need not adopt them as stable categories because they are often assessed on an ideologically-based linear spectrum, and hide nuance and complexity.

Religious Zionist feminism's loyalty to "the Halakhic framework" recognizes what only true insiders know—about the framework's constructed nature, its multiple meanings, and its malleability. Their commitment to "change from within" produces three different meanings for "within"—social positioning, ideological or cultural positioning, and a political positioning—and shifts between them. Thus, "within" is not a fixed category, it is a boundary which activists constantly negotiate and strategically deploy. They practice cognitive "mapping" (Zerubavel 1991, 1997), re/locating self in relation to others and re/imagining the field of action, yet the map is not static; it is constantly created through relational interactions and taking up situation-specific positions (Lichterman 2008). Thus, mapping serves not only as a means of survival—navigating within set boundaries—but as a strategy of transcending supposed red-lines and restructuring the field itself.

My central intervention is adapting and developing the notion of "tempered radicals" (Meyerson and Scully 1995; Meyerson 2001) by applying it to a large-scale socio-cultural shift in a complex religious context (see Ngunjiri 2010) and developing it to show that it consists of a two-pronged strategy: a tempered mode of modulation and moderation (avoid the red lines, hone in on just the right way) *and* a radical mode of stirring the sea and creating horizons (get there, one way or another).[16] Both strategies require boundary work, with the central difference being what is being manipulated, modified and moderated—the self or the system. Even though these are two seemingly contradictory strategies they form an intertwined assemblage with most agunah activists engaging in both strategies.

Moreover, given the structural limitations on their access to direct power, activists purposely use each strategy to play off the other and achieve their goals. For example, avoiding Orthodoxy's "third rails" is not only about caution and accepting limitations, but it is also about gaining freedom. The discursive construction and reification of supposedly distinct "red lines", and activists' repeated public pledge of allegiance to uphold and never cross them, enables activists to locate themselves firmly "within" the territorial borders of normative Orthodoxy. They thereby provide themselves with insurance, certified travel documents that allow them greater leeway to explore the fuzzier grey zones. However,

they maneuver within these Halakhic borderlands, realizing many of the lines are not as impermeable or clearly defined as they seem from a distance. Activists nurture nascent potentialities, whose precariousness they tend to play down until red lines give way to new horizons and become normalized.

How does one manage the relationship between these strategies, like two sides of a coin? This requires developing a multifocal view of "the Halakhic framework", of one's own position and power, and of the context both function in. Meyerson describes a practice of "blurry vision"—a tendency amongst tempered radicals to avoid clearly articulating long-term goals or visions. For Meyerson, this censoring of one's radical imagination limits describing a transformed world thereby allowing one to intentionally minimize conflict in the present world. I would argue, however, that activists' visions are not blurry; rather, they practice a multifocal perspective. They practice being simultaneously near-sighted and far-sighted, maneuvering between the concrete limitations of a contextually contingent present and the potential of an alternative future. Multifocal vision trains activists' eyes on both set codes and the spaces between them—they simultaneously keep in their sights both the red lines and the endless possibilities, and dynamically shift between. The fuzziness is thus not a result of being too focused on the incremental or being fearful of radical re-vision. Activists often lack a clear blueprint of their path, but the ultimate goal fills them with determination to forge the way to it. They recognize their limitations and remain situationally flexible to meet the world-as-it-is while staying attuned and open for opportunities to transform it.

This can perhaps be likened to the Talmudic image quoted above, which describes the holy text of the Torah as far more than black ink inscribed on white scroll, markings in a void. It is a dynamic interaction between white and black fire, engaged in a shifting dance of contouring and counterbalance, that makes sense only when seen together. The Torah—which literally means the teaching that guides towards the right way—only achieves meaning by adopting a multifocal view of both white and black fire. It is thus the very intertwining of, and the strategic interplay between, these two strategies that enable Agunah activists' boundary work and makes it both loyal to the Halakhic framework and potentially revolutionary.

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Informed Consent Statement: Written informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1] Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "Tempered", https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tempered (accessed on 4 August 2021), s.v. "Radical" https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/radical (accessed on 4 August 2021).

[2] Currently shaped heavily by ultra-Orthodox forces, the IRC is also strongly upheld by Religious Zionist ideology which accords the State with historic value, as an emblem of national unity or even of a messianic return to the Jewish homeland (Katsman 2020).

[3] In the early 1990s, following an extensive legal campaign to grant women access to the necessary Halakhic training and certification process, Orthodox women entered the IRC in the revolutionary professional capacity of Rabbinic advocates (toanot rabbaniot), de-facto Halakhic lawyers (Shamir et al. 1996). Their entry into the field was initially motivated by a desire to deepen their Jewish learning, accompanied by an altruistic orientation towards supporting agunah women and easing their predicament. At least in its early years, few women came into this work self-identified as feminists, nor do they remember being fueled by radical ideas or politics—such identities and beliefs developed as a direct result of their interactions with the IRC.

[4] The question of activists' agency, and what spurs and enables them—as religious women—to take such risky activism is key. In my previous work (Zion-Waldoks 2015), I defined this form of agency as "devoted resistance", when devout subjects' loyal dissent arises from within culture, moving them to speak critically in its name and for its sake.

[5] Agunah activists helped hundreds of women obtain a *get*, instigated public debate, led educational campaigns, passed groundbreaking legislation, petitioned both Rabbinic and civil courts, accrued political power including sway over appointments of Rabbinic Court judges, and promoted numerous solutions to the problem (most unimplemented).

[6] Participants, usually wary of speaking on record because their public image determines political efficacy, showed rare openness. I am aware that my position as both researcher and trusted ally committed to them and the shared cause requires critical self-reflection and delicate ongoing negotiation, because "as an intimate insider, 'the field' is not only my site of work and learning, but [. . .] my place of personal belonging" (Taylor 2011, p. 19).

[7] Boundary-work can also refer to internal classifications, cultural attitudes, or normative interdictions expressed in temporal, spatial, emotional, and cognitive distinctions; collective representations which interact to produce cultural schemas and change (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003; Shoshana 2007; Zerubavel 1991).

[8] Recently, Lisa Anteby-Yemini (2019) detailed Orthodox-Jewish women's contemporary strategies of advancing equality in the US and Israel. These include: creating separate female spaces for study and ritual; "radical" reconfigurations of communal ritual in "partnership" with men; and advancing masculine spaces 'from within' through para-rabbinic feminine roles. I argue that the tempered radical strategies analyzed here are the meta-strategy that enables each of the above actions.

[9] Sered's model tied the success/failure of these strategies to traditional power-holders' perceptions. When they read rebellion as revolution, as threatening the sacred immutable symbols at the core of gendered Jewish life, then it sparked a backlash that did not allow women to negotiate or compromise.

[10] Meyerson goes on to detail a spectrum of strategies of resistance and change undertaken by tempered radicals, primarily recognizing "modest and doable choices in between, such as choosing their battles, creating pockets of learning, and making way for small wins." However, tempered radicals also face several significant risks: difficulties of ambivalence, incremental lures of co-optation, potential damage to one's reputation; and frustration and burnout.

[11] Fried granted permission for this section to be published under her full name, via private correspondence.

[12] The case at hand was an extreme case of a 'hard-core' Agunah, a woman whose husband's free will was inaccessible because of his medical condition and mental incapacity, so she was to remain irredeemably stuck.

[13] Lea Shakdiel (2004) makes a similar argument regarding feminism as a form of *tikkun olam*.

[14] Shlomit boosts the legitimacy of her view by using the phrase *Tikkun Olam*, which has become a key motto within liberal streams of Judaism when referring to the Jewish calling to take action in service of progressive world-healing aims. But Avi Sagi (2015, p. 118) discusses this term's roots—particularly its limited scope and non-utopian nature—and argues that "in halakhic literature, *tikkun olam* denotes a concrete action meant to correct a specific wrong, not a comprehensive reorganization of reality by placing another, perfect world as an alternative to it".

[15] Some of the activists describe making use of familial connections and social networks which they share with Rabbis and Rabbinic Court judges to gain knowledge, voice and empathy within the system.

[16] What is beyond the scope of this paper, and complicates my argument further, is another strategy of "radicalization" which I discuss elsewhere (Zion-Waldoks unpublished), which represents a distinct shift away from—or even a harsh break with—the tempered radical model; but not its direct reverse.

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