**Devoted Resistance**

**The Jewish Religious Feminist Art Movement in the US and Israel, 1990–2017**

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**Part III**

# Body and Ritual – Criticism of Jewish Rituals: Immersion in the Mikva

The breaking of taboos surrounding women’s bodies and sexuality is a pervasive theme among feminist American artists of the 1970s, who, in the words of American artist Carolee Schneemann (b. 1939), sought to “reclaim their bodies.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Feminist artists in 1970s America who dealt with their bodies as a subject offered new perspectives that subverted common patriarchal precepts and the control of the male gaze over women throughout the history of art. Their work has been received and discussed as the most significant artistic contribution to feminism.[[2]](#footnote-2) In the Jewish world, many feminist thinkers believe that the policing of women’s bodies is directly reflected in the rituals of *niddah*.[[3]](#footnote-3) These rituals, originating in Jewish biblical literature, were developed down to the smallest detail by rabbinical literature dating back to the first centuries AD. The Tractate Niddah in the Mishnah and Talmud is dedicated to the subject. Later, *niddah* laws were further developed and included in the core halakhic codices: the Mishneh Torah by Maimonides and the Shulchan Aruch*.*[[4]](#footnote-4) In the modern era, dozens of books, halakhic and otherwise, have been written on *niddah*, and recent decades have seen many books of instruction on the subject as well. The current section will examine the preoccupation with laws and rituals of *niddah* and *tevila* (immersion) among two artists from the modern-Orthodox Jewish world. The first chapter will discuss the works of Israeli artist Hagit Molgan (b. 1972), who generated far-reaching critical discourse on *niddah* laws and customs. Chapter 2 will examine the works of renowned American artist Mierle Laderman-Ukeles (b. 1939), who broke the taboo on public discussion about *tevila* and *mikva* as early as the late 1970s, becoming the first feminist artist to address these subjects.

Contrary to widely-studied feminist art (particularly feminist American art) concerning the female body and menstruation,[[5]](#footnote-5) Jewish feminist art on *niddah* has been scantly researched. Most studies on the art of *niddah* and the *mikva* attempt to thematically characterize this art and lend it a historical narrative in their interpretations.[[6]](#footnote-6) However, studies have thus far avoided discussion on how these works were received, and have not examined them in the context of the unique discourses emerging from various feminist Jewish schools.[[7]](#footnote-7) Investigating the reception of *niddah* art in the art world and within religious Jewish communities in the US and Israel, illuminates the various discourses generated by the artists, and the ways in which the artists subverted body-policing constructs characteristic of the Orthodox Jewish world. Examining *niddah* and *mikva* art against the background of particular Jewish feminist discourses lends insight into the unique contribution this art makes to the feminist art world, and into the Orthodox Jewish feminism driving the artists themselves.

**Chapter 5.**

## Not Prepared!: Hagit Molgan

Born in 1972 into a religious Mizrahi family in Petah Tikva, Hagit Molgan graduated in 2001 from the Faculty of the Arts – “HaMidrasha” at Beit Berl College, among the leading fine arts schools in Israel. Molgan’s works are critical of the Orthodox rabbinical approach to women undergoing menstruation. In 2004, only a few years after completing her studies at HaMidrasha, Molgan showcased her work in an exhibition titled *Not Prepared* (curator: Ziva Yellin) at the Kibbutz Be’eri art gallery. The exhibition propelled Molgan’s work into the public eye, where it caught the attention of various media platforms, leading, for instance, to a review by art critic Dana Gillerman in the daily *Haaretz* newspaper, mentions in the *Maariv* newspaper and Israeli television’s Channel One news, and an interview on Israeli radio station Reshet Bet.

Despite the public exposure and positive reviews, Molgan’s works garnered neither actual nor symbolic capital within the commercial and creative art worlds of Israel and the US. Though they received exposure through Israeli media, the works were never purchased and hardly exhibited in prestigious arts establishments. As mentioned above, in the last decade of the 21st century, when Molgan was showing her work, Jewish feminist artists in general and the Orthodox among them in particular, were excluded from Israel’s premiere arts spaces. It was not until 2012 and the exhibition of *Matronita: Jewish Feminist Art* at the Mishkan Le’Omanut Museum of Art in Ein Harod, that feminist art by religious and traditional Jewish artists gained significant public visibility in the Israeli art world. *Matronita* was the first museum show to widely exhibit Orthodox and traditional Jewish female artists, including Molgan.[[8]](#footnote-8)

With her exhibition, Molgan was the first artist to bring the *bedika* cloth into the public arena in Israel. She was also the first to encourage discussion within both the art world and modern-Orthodox society on the meaning and effect of religious practices surrounding menstruation in the Orthodox world. During the period of menstruation (*niddah*), a married Jewish couple is prohibited from any act that might result in physical contact. Only when the woman’s period has ended completely, and there is no sign of blood for seven days, are couples allowed to resume intimacy. After menstruation ceases, Orthodox Jewish women must immerse in a *mikva* (ritual bath) before they can resume sexual relations with their husbands. The *bedika* napkin is a piece of cloth that an Orthodox woman uses to check whether menstruation has stopped. Following the end of her cycle, she inserts the napkin into her vagina every morning and evening for a period of seven days. If on any of those days the napkin is stained with blood, she must begin a new cycle of seven “clean” days. If the nature of a stain is unclear, it is customary to bring the napkin to a source of halakhic authority who decides whether the stain is “impure,” or in other words, whether it is menstrual blood. *My Patchwork Quilt* (2004), one of the works in Molgan’s exhibition, was made from square, serrated-edged white cotton *bedika* cloths glued together in rows. Some were stained with red drops or the artist’s fingerprints, arranged in series of five stained cloths and seven white cloths, in-line with the halakhic definition of five days of menses followed by seven ‘clean days’ (Fig. 2).

Molgan told Gillerman about the experiences that led her to create this work, and her account was published in *Haaretz* in honor of an additional exhibition at a gallery in Kibbutz Be’eri. Molgan underscored the gap between the religious taboo and the disruption of that taboo in her work: “I didn’t know what it was about until I met the bridal consultant before my wedding. It is kept secret; mothers do not discuss it with their daughters. I meet young religious women at the exhibition who have no idea what *niddah* laws are. These are laws written by men according to their interpretation of the halakha, and these laws make women feel inferior and impure for half of their lives […].”[[9]](#footnote-9) In the exhibition text, curator Ziva Yalin brought a quote by Molgan in which the artist emphasized the oppressive foundation that supports these customs, which she believes are damaging to women:

Every time I sent an envelope with a *bedika* to a rabbi, I felt injured. I felt it wrong that I was allowing a stranger to decide if I were in a state of “purity” or “impurity.” … I became anxious from the actions being imposed on me and forcing me to relinquish control and free choice over myself and my body. I felt part of a perverse and prejudicial system that allows an anonymous rabbi to decide whether I am “pure” or “impure.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

For Molgan, the *bedika* cloth represents the rabbinical establishment’s incursion into the very core of her body, into the innermost place of her being. According to her, presenting a *bedika* cloth to a rabbi forces a woman to participate in her own objectification and loss of autonomy and control.[[11]](#footnote-11)

 In another work titled *Kosher,* Molgan used a quilt similar to the one in the former work. Molgan placed stamps with the word “kosher” on a table next to the quilt, and visitors were encouraged to stamp the quilt with red ink (Fig. 3). In so doing, she sought to challenge viewers to consider their own position regarding the policing embedded into the practice of *bedika*. Molgan’s *bedika*-cloth artworks correspond with American artist Carolee Schneemann’s (b. 1939) iconic 1972 grid-artwork *Blood Word Diary*, into which she incorporated her own menstrual blood. Contrary to Schneemann, who sought to reclaim the menstrual blood tainted by patriarchal culture,[[12]](#footnote-12) Molgan does not focus on menstrual blood as such, but rather seeks to expose the oppressive halakhic structures that impinge on the lives of religious women’ in the traditional Jewish world. According to Molgan, “What we are shocked by is not the red on the cloth, but the cloth itself.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

In another work, Molgan glued four *bedika* napkins onto a canvas (Fig. 4). In black marker, she wrote out the verse from the Mishnah that is read in the synagogue on Friday evenings: “Women die in childbirth for three transgressions: If they are not careful with [the laws] of menstruation; and if they are not careful [to separate some] dough [when baking to give to the priest]; and if they are not careful with the lighting of the [Sabbath] lamp” (Mishnah, *Shabbat*, 6, 2). Molgan explained the connection between the penalizing nature of *bedika* cloths and the text prescribing women’s’ traditional, gendered role: “I am appalled by the text of the Mishnah that relates to me, to my mother, to all the women I respect. I cover my ears because it binds me—on pain of death in childbirth—to the role of the modest and humble woman [who is] a mother, that is all, end of story. I rebel [against it].”[[14]](#footnote-14) By linking the Mishnaic text to the *bedika* cloths, the artist places the purity ritual that they embody within a broader context in which women are confined to traditional, gendered roles through the threat of terrible punishment.

Another work by Molgan that references *bedika* cloths and criticizes women’s gender roles in the traditional Jewish world, is an object in the shape of a large *bedika* cloth, which is comprised of white sugar cubes (image 5). The artist explains that sugar cubes were chosen for their strong association with rituals of serving men in her traditional family. Molgan explains the role of women in her family: “Women, who were in the kitchen all day long, would serve tea and sugar cubes throughout the day to the men sitting in the balcony or living room.” [[15]](#footnote-15) For the artist, connecting the tea and sugar ritual, a symbol of women’s oppression in the traditional Jewish world, to the *bedika-*cloth shape of her work, depicts purity practices and *niddah* laws as part of the oppressive patriarchal system that dominates the traditional Jewish world.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Molgan’s video work *Five Plus Seven* (2004) depicts seven women whose heads are not visible, wearing white dresses with a square-shaped exposure at the navel, alongside three metal towers lit in neon blue. To the ticking of a metronome, which also sounds like dripping water, the women march in a line, stepping in bowls filled alternately with red water and clear water (Fig. 6). The setting and repetitive action are reminiscent of dystopian videos such as *Another Brick in the Wall* by the band Pink Floyd.

The marching women’s feet stay red even after they “immerse” them in the clean water. The “blood,” notes Haim Maor in his critique of the Be’eri exhibition, “sticks to the feet of the marching women like mud, and they cannot be rid of its impurity.” [[17]](#footnote-17)As the video ends, the camera zooms-in on one of the women, as though penetrating through her exposed stomach. A superimposed[[18]](#footnote-18) hand appears in the frame, holding a rod wrapped in a piece of cloth. It penetrates the stomach, uncovers a receptacle reminiscent of a tampon cover, and clears it out (Fig. 7). The image of the hand holding the rod is duplicated at the end of the video, filling the screen (Fig. 8). The rod suggests a halakhic instruction regarding *bedika*: “And put it deep into that place [=the vagina], deep into the holes and crevices, to the place of the *shamash* [=where the male genitalia enters during intercourse] and see if it has reddish appearance […]” (*Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah*, 196:6).

In the exhibition text at the Kibbutz Be’eri gallery, Yalin introduced Molgan’s work with a series of questions that interpreted it as a critical piece: “The endless repetition of the marching women raises questions. Who are they? Where are they marching to and why? What is the meaning of the ritual in which they are participating and when will it stop?”[[19]](#footnote-19) Later, in 2017, Yalin described the work as follows in her doctoral dissertation: “In this work and others, Hagit Molgan explicitly deals with menstrual blood, and attempts to break through the barrier of social taboo and the conspiracy of silence, which is particularly acute in the religious community.”[[20]](#footnote-20) In his review of the show, Maor also emphasized the critical gender references he detected in Molgan’s work:

The background for this action is three metal buildings, erect like male phalluses and lit in metallic blue. The women look small and inferior next to them. A square opening in the women’s dresses allows viewers to take a peek of the reproductive system of these anonymous birthing machines. A hand grasping a rod-shaped cleaning instrument penetrates them, a computerized image that duplicates itself and multiplies. A metronome clicks throughout the video, nagging at the viewer. [[21]](#footnote-21)

Therefore, despite its use of indirect metaphors, Molgan’s work was experienced as a troubling look into the lives of women in a system that polices their bodies through obsessive preoccupation with monthly menstruation. Similar to Molgan’s other works, this video was interpreted as a critique of *niddah* laws.

An additional work presented by Molgan in the US and Israel, titled *Tzitzit* (images 9), is comprised of two readymade *tzitziot*.[[22]](#footnote-22) In the exhibition text at the Be’eri gallery, Yalin described it as follows: “The simple display, free of any intervention, of the two *tzitziot*, uncovers the secretly phallic shape of these religious garments, worn by men on a daily basis.”[[23]](#footnote-23) Maor similarly described the phallic shapes in the work: “A pair of male *tzitziot* hung on the wall, with the shape of their authentic openings for the head visually reminiscent of a penis and testicles.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Gillerman, on the other hand, saw both phallic and vaginal imagery in the work: “The shape of the head openings in the *talitot* is simultaneously reminiscent of male and female genitalia.”[[25]](#footnote-25) Gillerman herself interpreted the work as a depiction of male dominance in the Jewish world, describing it as “two white, pure *talitot*, a symbol of male control.”[[26]](#footnote-26)

In the Orthodox Jewish world, this work was seen as crude and blasphemous for its use of a ritual object to create a seemingly sexual image, even though it simply displayed the *tzitziot* as they were, and is open to various interpretations. The shocking effect of this work was evident in one of the discussions at the Be’eri gallery, which included women from the religious Kibbutz Sa’ad. One of the women at the discussion said, “The work that was most difficult for me… [is the work] with the *tzitzit* […] the genitalia is just laid out there […] there is something very crude about it, it was a very hard experience for me.”[[27]](#footnote-27) Similarly, at a conference on art and feminism that I organized in 2015 for the Gender Studies Program at Bar-Ilan University, in which Molgan lectured on her work, I used an photograph of *Tzitzit* (Fig. 10) on the invitation. Orthodox Jewish students in the program were appalled at the image, which they perceived as provocative and blasphemous. One of the women who demanded that the image on the invitation be replaced was Shlomit Stern-Hazan, then-coordinator of the program, who wrote to me: ““I think that the cut-outs in the *tzitziot* in the shape of male genitalia are crude […][[28]](#footnote-28) The shape of male genitalia? Cut out of a *tzitzit*? […] I think that this completely crosses the line of what religious people can live with, even if they are very liberal.”“[[29]](#footnote-29) Although Stern-Hazan clearly expressed her disdain for the image combining a sanctified object with a phallic shape and described it as provocative, she emphasized that the censorship, meaning her demand to remove the image from the invitation, stemmed mainly from wanting to avoid “drawing attention in a crude way.”“[[30]](#footnote-30) She explained: “We are in a conservative environment [Bar-Ilan University], where we need to repeatedly defend our principles. So to falter over this? […] We [at the Gender Studies program] have always preferred to focus on the content […] In the end, these things get in our way when we try to promote real issues […].”[[31]](#footnote-31)

Much like the high-heels work by Nechama Golan discussed in the first chapter, Molgan’s work was perceived as critical and subversive by the art world; however, like Golan’s work, its shocking effect was at play mainly in the Orthodox Jewish world and not in the art world. The negative critique of Molgan’s work affirms its direct and provocative nature, and its refusal to yield to the dominant discourse of the Orthodox Jewish world, not even to the feminist iteration to which Stern-Hazan subscribes. Molgan: “I say it out loud, but I know that to do a piece on it, and to give it representation […] comes at a price.” [[32]](#footnote-32)

Molgan views her art as an act of feminist activism aimed at making an impact beyond the walls of the art gallery, an act of generating real change in the Orthodox Jewish world: “There is an inner circle of artists in Israel that I very much respect—some were my teachers, others were fellow students at ‘HaMidrasha.’ They test the boundaries of the language of art . . . I, on the other hand, deal with elements of social art, of protest, that come from the four walls of the ‘I’.”[[33]](#footnote-33) Nonetheless, the artist stresses her commitment to the religious Orthodox world in which she was born and raised. At a 2015 conference organized by the Gender Studies Program at Bar-Ilan University, she presented her work as criticism that stems from a belief in and acceptance of the Orthodox halakhic system. Nonetheless, Molgan did note that she does not refrain from criticizing the oppressive foundations of this system.[[34]](#footnote-34) Her comments on her own work illustrate the radical nature of the discourse she promotes. She speaks frankly about “the feeling of pain and overwhelming despondence generated by these commandments, which marginalize me and say things about me that I do not accept. I do not agree that my menstruation should be seen as repellant. I will not consent to being called impure.”[[35]](#footnote-35) The artist summarizes her straightforward, radical, uncompromising stance as follows: “In the *mikva* [ritual bath], the attendant asks the woman before checking her, Are you prepared? And I answer that I am no longer prepared, that this whole procedure and the way in which it is conducted does not suit me.”[[36]](#footnote-36)

**Precedents for Molgan’s *Niddah* Works in Israeli Art**

Comparing Molgan’s work to its precedents in Israeli art elucidates its singularity and its degree of contribution to this field. The most significant precedent to Molgan’s preoccupation with *niddah* laws is a work often referred to as the “*niddah* performance” (1976) by Yocheved Weinfeld (b. 1947), one of the key figures in Israeli art during the 1970s and among the pioneers of body art in Israel.[[37]](#footnote-37) Weinfeld’s performance intertwined purity and grieving laws from the Jewish codex *Shulchan Aruch* with her own texts; it was featured at the Debel Gallery in Jerusalem in 1976 (Fig. 11), documented on film (which was later lost), and featured at the “Exhibition ‘76” event at the Artists House in Tel Aviv as well (1976, curator: Gideon Ofrat). Weinfeld’s work was a milestone in the history of Israeli art, and images of it are used in nearly every text and exhibition on the period. Weinfeld created a ceremony in which she read texts based on purity laws and laws of mourning from the *Shulchan Aruch*; despite the prevalent use of “the *niddah* performance” or “the *Shulchan Aruch* performance” (as it was referred to in the Jerusalem Post) as titles for her work, its true name is in fact “Untitled.” [[38]](#footnote-38) In actuality, apart from the *niddah* texts, Weinfeld also incorporated aspects of Jewish rituals related to banishment, elements of Christian ceremonies, and references to social constructs of beauty and regimentation in general society. [[39]](#footnote-39)

The performance depicted the artist as a passive woman, whose body endures humiliating acts, some of which border on abuse.[[40]](#footnote-40) Around the same time, Weinfeld created an 8mm film titled *Hatzitza* (intervening object), which also touched on the subjects of impurity and *tevila* laws (the film was later lost). The film included a soundtrack of a reading of definitions of *hatzitza* from the *Shulchan Aruch* in relation to the *mikva*. At a certain point in the film, three tampons appear as they are being pulled out of a vagina one after another, as well as sanitary napkins and masking tape being removed from different body parts.[[41]](#footnote-41) Similarly, in another work she exhibited by the Debel Gallery at the time, Weinfeld addressed the myth according to which Haredi couples have intercourse through a hole in a sheet.

Certain art critics saw Weinfeld’s *niddah* performance as a critique of the religious world,[[42]](#footnote-42) but the artist herself did not think of it as critical. Thirty years after the performance, Weinfeld still denies that feminism had any impact on her work, discussing it only through the prisms of formalism and conceptualism.[[43]](#footnote-43) The artist has ruled out a feminist reading of the work over the years. In 1991, she was quoted as follows in *Maariv*: “I may have addressed *niddah* as part of my preoccupation with *Shulchan Aruch*, but I would not draw the equation of woman=*niddah*. It’s too simple […] I arrived at the *Shulchan Aruch* as a way to break free from formalism—from the sweeping cultural guidelines prescribed by Raffi Lavie. I found an available text. But my choice was spontaneous. I was not seeking to submit an intellectual protocol of the woman’s status in Hebrew law.” [[44]](#footnote-44) Yael Guilat has shown that the Israeli art field also discussed Weinfeld’s work mainly through a formalistic lens, and not through the prism of feminist critique on Judaism. [[45]](#footnote-45)

The artist’s negation of possible feminist interpretations of her work is curious, considering that in 1979, she exhibited work at the A.I.R Gallery, one of the first feminist galleries in the US and the first feminist arts cooperative. Weinfeld also showcased her works at the Magers Gallery in Bonn, Germany (1976-1977), alongside prominent feminists such as Judi Chicago, (b. 1939), Marina Abramović, (b. 1946), Valie Export (b. 1940), and Gina Pane (1939-1980).[[46]](#footnote-46) The pervasive discourse of the Israeli art world until the end of the 20th century might account for Weinfeld’s denial of her work’s feminist nature in the 1970s. At the time, many Israeli women artists and curators rejected feminism, and until the 1990s there was no designated “feminist art” category in the Israeli lexicon.[[47]](#footnote-47) Curators Ilana Tenenbaum and Einat Amir sum up the issue as follows: “In the 1970s, this pairing of words [feminism and art] was not legitimate and was largely rejected even by artists who explicitly dealt in ‘feminine’ or gender-related art.” [[48]](#footnote-48) At any rate, Weinfeld’s work was largely interpreted as a personal, revealing exploration of herself, and of the materials and processes of artistic creation. This in complete contrast to Molgan’s exhibition, which was driven by critical feminist motives and was discussed and interpreted as direct criticism of *niddah* laws.

Another precedent to Molgan’s work is *Bad Tzach* (“Clean Cloth”), a solo work by Ayana Friedman (b. 1950), which also utilized *bedika* cloths (image 12). It was displayed in 1996 at a Jerusalem gallery belonging to the feminist organization Isha L’Isha (Woman to Woman) (curator: Talia Birkan). Unlike Molgan’s works, Friedman’s did not make waves. *Bad Tzach* was created as part her broader exploration of protest against religion. The work consisted of photographs of a nude figure and strips of white *bedika* cloths, sewn together with gold thread. Each row of cloths bore a stain in a different color: bronze, gold, and ivory. Friedman recounts: “The figure appears several times, fading slightly from one appearance to the next, just like the stains. The harder the woman works to preserve her good looks – the fainter she grows, fading away into religious and social demands that she prove her pureness and cleanliness, while invading the depths of her body.”[[49]](#footnote-49) Unlike Molgan’s exhibitions, which prompted discussion in the art and modern-Orthodox worlds (as further described in the following section), Friedman’s work garnered neither the attention of the art world nor served as a catalyst for communal discourse about *niddah*. In contrast, other works by the artist did gain visibility and discussion in the art world.[[50]](#footnote-50) The precedents to Molgan’s work underscore the uniqueness of her work and the discourse she generated, which was both public and explicit.

**The Reception of Molgan’s Works in the Modern-Orthodox Jewish World**

**in Israel**

Although the art world is Molgan’s sphere of activity, her art is, to a great extent, intended for the religious Jewish world as well. Molgan describes her work as art created within and derived from the Orthodox world in two ways, one theological and one social. In terms of the theological perspective, at a conference I organized in the Bar-Ilan Gender Studies Program in 2015, Molgan introduced her work as critique stemming from a position of faith, which accepts the Orthodox halakhic system. Nonetheless, Molgan stated that she does not refrain from criticizing the oppressive elements embedded into this system. The social-activist element of her work arose in Molgan’s 2016 interview with Ze’ela Dok-Diyuk, in which she discussed her need to criticize the religious Jewish world “from the inside,” as a strategy that might promote true change within the societal framework she inhabits.

I prefer to create my work in a way that keeps me on the inside. So that my statement remains clean and authentic. Because if I come at it from the outside, they will say “Well, she has already left the religion, she has no connection to us. It is like anyone else saying they do not like our customs, we don’t care.” That is why it’s important to me […] to stay inside […] I will keep living here [=the religious kibbutz Sa’ad]. It is important to me to do this work while I am in this community, this affiliation group. [[51]](#footnote-51)

Molgan describes her choice to remain in religious society as parallel to her commitment to her life on the kibbutz, stating that these two choices allow her to make effective criticism “from the inside.” As such, the artist underscores her fundamental position in which the Orthodox halakha is inherent, while also criticizing the Orthodox-Jewish institution “from the inside” in an effort to effect change.

Molgan describes her process from a time when it was difficult for her to present her *niddah* artworks in public, to the public display and discourse that exists about its significance. As I will show, her explicit preoccupation with *niddah* links her to a trend of religious-Jewish feminist criticism in various disciplines of 21st century Israeli art. In her interview with Dok-Diyuk around the time of her exhibition, Molgan stated that when she first dealt with the subject while studying at HaMidrasha, she did not explain the meaning of her work to viewers, and they were usually analyzed through a formalistic lens, or discussed as art about lesser-known esoteric rituals from the past.[[52]](#footnote-52) At first, Molgan was unwilling to publicly display her work or explain it because it dealt with taboo subjects. She recalls that Be’eri gallery curator Ziva Yalin saw her video work *Five Plus Seven* when it was playing in an editing room and contacted her. But Molgan was not interested in showing her work at the time: “I thought, I don’t feel like bringing this subject to the surface; it felt to me like revealing a secret I was not ready to tell.”[[53]](#footnote-53)

The artist connects her decision to publicly exhibit her artwork with the emergence of public discourse on the subject, which began around the time of the release of *Tehora* [“Pure”] (Anat Zuriah, Israel, 2002), a documentary film on the laws of *niddah*.[[54]](#footnote-54) *Tehora* depicts the covert and overt struggle of religious women against Jewish halakha, which shapes their lives, including their relationships and sexuality.[[55]](#footnote-55) The film broke the taboo around the subject and prompted a surge of discussions in various religious forums, followed by numerous articles and books on the *mikva* and women’s relationship with it.[[56]](#footnote-56) It opens with a dramatic scene: A woman is walking alone at night, her footsteps resounding loudly. In a voice-over,[[57]](#footnote-57) the director says, “Women have been going to the *mikva* for two-thousand years. Fulfilling the ritual of *tehara* [purity]. For two-thousand years, a conspiracy of silence. Always at night, in the dark, not to be seen.” Molgan’s video work *Five Plus Seven* preceded *Tehora*’s release, but before the latter came out, Molgan never thought to present her work in public; the discourse surrounding *Tehora* drove her to exhibit her work and publicly express her point of view.

Molgan’s exhibition stirred up harsh criticism within the modern-Orthodox Jewish world, due to both her public exposure of taboos and her perspective on them. Most of the criticism did not refer directly to Molgan’s work itself, but rather to her statements in the exhibition text and in gallery discussions. In fact, most of those opposed to Molgan’s work never visited the exhibition nor saw the art itself. An analysis of these critiques attests to the unique brand of discourse Molgan forged within the modern-Orthodox world and illuminates the tactics she used in her subversive endeavor, namely exposing the taboo and taking an adamant stand against the patriarchal construction of *niddah* laws.

When the exhibition opened at the Be’eri gallery in 2004, it received mixed reviews from the religious kibbutz movement and the modern-Orthodox community in Israel. Some saw it as trailblazing feminist art. Conversely, a significant portion of critiques called it blasphemous, an obscene breaking of taboos. In an interview for *Kol Yisrael* radio station, aired in parallel with the opening of the exhibition, Molgan recalled a conversation with a religious woman who said the exhibition prompted her to discuss *niddah* practices with her spouse from a female perspective for the first time.[[58]](#footnote-58) Molgan also relayed that “many types of women with many types of lifestyles really wanted to talk about it.” [[59]](#footnote-59)

In the Kibbutz Sa’ad local newspaper, a female kibbutz member described her positive experience at the opening of the exhibition: “Despite my concerns, the discussion with the artist was well-attended and fascinating. We saw a brave young woman discuss her point of view as a religious woman, and raise subjects shrouded in a conspiracy of silence. She displays objects from the religious world – which follows the laws of purity and impurity. The exhibition is surprising and bold. Her statement is felt and evokes feeling through the ‘whiteness’ and purification obsession.”[[60]](#footnote-60) On the other hand, Molgan notes that every “gallery discussion with religious women included ‘recruited’ participants who patiently waited to say that displaying this kind of exhibition was wrong.” [[61]](#footnote-61) In the Sa’ad local newspaper, a kibbutz member by the name of Dalia Roi criticized the show, emphasizing that it was wrong to air the subject in the secular world: “The *mitzvoth* of family purity have just been presented to our secular neighbors in a critical and ironic light, and buses from Sa’ad went in droves to witness the miracle, which, forgive me, had a degree of *chillul Hashem*.[[62]](#footnote-62) I felt that such misgivings and criticism should be resolved among ourselves before depicting it as a barbaric, tribal custom to Jews who are not familiar with the deeper layers of the issue and could develop certain conclusions and strange ideas about our holy Torah.”[[63]](#footnote-63) Molgan emphasizes that most members of the religious kibbutz reacted to the exhibition in a critical and negative manner: “Most of the significant responses were admonishing and fiercely critical of me. Their primary contention was that I was guilty of *chillul Hashem*. They were angry with me for arguing with the halakha[…] The harsh criticism came in various forms, both direct and indirect. Letters were sent to me, and critical articles were published in the local newspaper.” [[64]](#footnote-64)

Criticism also came from the institutional side of the religious kibbutz. Molgan stated that, “Most are very upset by the exhibition and several articles have been written on it in the kibbutz newspaper. I had a personal conversation with them [=with the kibbutz rabbi and secretariat]; they did not really reprimand me because they are very good people, but I could feel that they were very uncomfortable, and the rabbi even said, ‘I wish you would have told me you were going to do this.’”[[65]](#footnote-65) Rabbinical objection to Molgan’s works was also expressed within the American Jewish community prior to the exhibition’s US opening.[[66]](#footnote-66) Molgan: “I remember Magda [=initiator of the US exhibition] telling me that a rabbi had called her and voiced his objection. He said that when efforts are finally made to bring an Israeli artist [to the US] – they bring one who speaks against herself, and it would be better to bring someone who speaks in favor.” [[67]](#footnote-67)

Other than responses focused on the ‘secret’ being revealed to outside eyes and the presumably blasphemous nature of the work, the exhibition also attracted direct criticism of Molgan’s standpoint. Yona Berman, editor of the *Amudim* periodical of the religious kibbutzim movement, wrote and published an article on the exhibition.[[68]](#footnote-68) Like many other critics, she admittedly had not seen it. She described the exhibition with the terminology of an art critic: “Exceptionally brave and aesthetic, it demands that the viewers engage in discussion on a subject considered taboo in religious society” [[69]](#footnote-69)0; but more so, she highlighted the opposition to the artist’s point of view. Her article quoted Tal Wiesel, a young, recently married woman from Sa’ad. In Sa’ad’s *Alim* newspaper, Wiesel described the fulfillment of *niddah* laws as a positive and uplifting experience and criticized Molgan’s perspective on the subject.[[70]](#footnote-70) Also in the local newspaper, the kibbutz rabbi, David Asulin, explained the concepts of purity and impurity from a halakhic perspective, while gently urging that Molgan’s approach to the issue be disputed.[[71]](#footnote-71) Following the exhibition, the rabbi and his wife Shifra Asulin also offered to hold meetings on the subject. In a flyer distributed in the kibbutz, they described the exhibition as one that “raises questions and thoughts” and invited female kibbutz members to “a discussion on the various subjects raised by the exhibition and as a result of it.”

A harsher response to the exhibition, published anonymously in the *Amudim* periodical, began with a quoted verse: “I will remove the unclean spirit from the land” (Zechariah 13:2). This title carried a double meaning; it referred to the subject of the exhibition (purity and impurity), while simultaneously rendering the exhibition itself an “unclean spirit” that should be “removed from the land.”

The writer, who did note that, “it might not be fair to voice an opinion about an exhibition I have not seen,” stated:

[…] I wish to express my objection to the degradation of unique Jewish values. Judging by the description [=published in a previous article in *Amudim*], the exhibition uses motifs generally associated with wounds, surgery, sterilization, rape, and perhaps murder. The internal femininity is a victim, a victim of meaningless, merciless religious rites. I ask myself: Is this a personal statement, or art that extends beyond the personal into the religious life of our society? Have the waters of the purifying *mikva* indeed been sullied? Should it be our generation, in particular, which has freed itself from “antiquated” notions about the concealment and repression of sexuality, that suffers this? How have the natural acts of *bedikat tehara* and immersionin the *mikva* become so contemptible and invasive? I hope and want to believe that this is not the true state of affairs […].[[72]](#footnote-72)

The writer has amplified the subject and associated it with rape and murder, which she followed by offering an alternative to Molgan’s critical outlook. She described the ritualimmersion in the *mikva* and the distance from the male partner as powerful processes of renewal: “I say, ‘Blessed are you who has made me a woman’[[73]](#footnote-73) at every stage, and am renewed each month.” [[74]](#footnote-74)

Beyond the criticism itself, Molgan underwent a difficult process of marginalization in her kibbutz following the Be’eri show, to the point of a pseudo-excommunication: “I realized that in my home, here in the kibbutz, I was being treated differently; it was very hard for them to accept me […] I went through a slow, long process of exclusion […] because people were wary of me. Even two years after the exhibition, a senior kibbutz member told me that I have no idea just how angry they were with me […].”[[75]](#footnote-75)

In 2017, Yalin described Molgan’s exclusion in hindsight: “They would not let her take on different roles in the kibbutz. The appointing committee approached the community director when she was nominated for the kibbutz administration; they also would not allow her to go study… they were afraid. She was a threat to the status quo.” [[76]](#footnote-76) As such, Molgan fostered discourse about *niddah* in the modern-Orthodox community no less than she did in the art world. The criticism and exclusion she experienced emphasize the radical nature of her work, the public exposure of the taboo, and how it inspired acts of resistance to body-policing practices of Orthodox Judaism.

**Molgan’s *Niddah* Art and Orthodox Jewish Feminism**

Examining the reception of Molgan’s works in the feminist Orthodox-Jewish world further corroborates the unique precedent her work set by forging feminist Orthodox-Jewish thought and activism regarding *niddah*. While Molgan’s work fits into the trend of religious criticism in Israeli art of the early 2000s surrounding *niddah*,among other topics, feminist Orthodox-Jewish thought in Israel had yet to address the subject, and it remained a taboo not to be publicly discussed or disputed. At the time, feminist discussion in the Israeli Orthodox community dealt with the boundaries of *niddah* practices and attempted to advance halakhic justification for alleviating them. For instance, a collection of articles accompanying the fifth conference of the feminist Orthodox organization *Kolech* (2009), dedicated, for the first time, considerable discussion to the issue of *niddah*, but made no attempt to challenge the laws themselves or their construction by male rabbis. The discussion focused solely on the boundaries of these laws.[[77]](#footnote-77) The collection included several articles offering “friendlier” versions of bridal consultation,[[78]](#footnote-78) alongside discussions on the issue of “halakhic infertility.”[[79]](#footnote-79) The collection also touched on a subject that became a symbol of religious Jewish feminism at the time: the proposal to eliminate the custom of observing seven clean days and to base *niddah* practices on Torah law (“*de’oraita*”) alone. This would mean shortening the period of abstinence between couples to the duration of the menstrual cycle, eliminating the additional week of abstinence.[[80]](#footnote-80)

Contrary to the non-radical feminist approach of Orthodox women around the time that Molgan exhibited her work, in the art world, *niddah* and *tevila* laws were discussed from a critical perspective. Jewish historian Tali Berner notes this in her article, which was published in the *Matronita* exhibition catalogue in 2012:

In recent years, the debate over the woman’s body has grown more trenchant, mainly as it pertains to the impurity of menstruation and the primary importance of fertility in the religious community. In 2010, Kolech held a conference on the subject of religious women’s health, which seems certain to remain on the religious-feminist agenda in the years to come. Strangely enough, this subject, which remained largely unseen and unspoken throughout history, has received widespread notice in the cinema and visual arts. [[81]](#footnote-81)

The film *Tehora* (Anat Zuria, 2002), the play *Mikva* (Nurit Hadar-Feuerstein (Galron), 2003), and the contemporary dance performance *NIKBA* by the Tarantula Dance Group,[[82]](#footnote-82) brought the subject into the public sphere and broke the taboo surrounding it.[[83]](#footnote-83) According to literature scholar Yael Shenkar, “One could notice the discourse developing in the national-religious community in Israel – which the movie [=*Tehora*] became a part of; a discourse on femininity, sexuality, the body, and status in the religious community of Israel.”[[84]](#footnote-84)

Indeed, in the 2000s, sexuality and the body became prevalent themes in religious cinema.[[85]](#footnote-85) For our purposes, the films *Shira* (Miryam Adler, 2009) and *Blessed* (Hadas Kahan-Schlissel, 2010), both by graduates of the Ma’aleh School of Film and Television, Jerusalem, were the first cinematic portrayals of *bedikat tehara* using the *bedika* cloth. Molgan’s work therefore fits into a dominant taboo-breaking trend in the art world at the time, which was absent from other feminist-religious discourse. However, while the above-mentioned films can be interpreted in different ways, Molgan created pointed, incisive discourse against the male construction of *niddah* laws.

Noting the distinctions between feminist Orthodox discourse on Molgan’s works around the time of her exhibition, and the direct discussion on these works a decade later, after they were displayed at *Matronita* in 2012, illuminates just how far-reaching the discourse Molgan generated in the early 2000s was—far beyond the accepted norm in Orthodox feminist thought and activism during this period. In 2004, when the exhibition opened at the Be’eri gallery, it was primarily discussed within the religious kibbutz movement. An article by Lea Shakdiel, among the pioneers of Orthodox feminism in Israel, was written around the time of the exhibition and published in *Deot*,the journal of the modern Orthodox movement “Ne’emanei Torah Va’Avoda” and the Ya’acov Herzog Center of the religious kibbutz movement. It extended discussion on the exhibition into wider circles of the modern-Orthodox world in Israel. However, in-line with the pervasive feminist discourse in the modern-Orthodox world at the time, the article framed the exhibition in the discourse of “female empowerment,” and effectively dampened its radical nature. Seven years later, in 2012, after Molgan’s works had been presented at *Matronita* and discourse on sexuality and the body became far more public and explicit in the modern-Orthodox world, [[86]](#footnote-86)Ayelet Wieder-Cohen, chair of the religious-feminist Kolech organization, honed her radical criticism of *niddah* laws and the religious institution through her discussion of Molgan’s work.

Under the title “A Free Woman” and the subheading “Women’s empowerment must take place: Reflections on the exhibition *Not Prepared* by Hagit Molgan,”[[87]](#footnote-87) Shakdiel discussed the exhibition through a Marxist-feminist lens, which invited an examination of feminine existence within a patriarchal world. Shakdiel focused on analyzing the text Molgan had written for the exhibition, in which she described her childhood experience in the men’s section of the synagogue and her banishment from it as soon as she reached puberty. Shakdiel presented Molgan’s rebellion as associated with the insight that it is the male gaze that constitutes reality. According to Shakdiel, this gaze “purports to include her [the woman’s] perspective but also excludes and fixes her in a position that is subordinate to his.”[[88]](#footnote-88) Shakdiel asks, “When will man stop being the representative of the human race while woman represents only the female?”[[89]](#footnote-89) Shakdiel emphasizes, “Molgan does not offer us a solution that will silence the cry and this is just as well . . . pioneering artists like Molgan sit on the fence for us all . . . so that we may take note of the problem.”[[90]](#footnote-90) Shakdiel’s conclusion is that it is imperative to develop awareness-raising groups that will help reposition women in a more central place within religious society. The article thus presented the exhibition through the lens of women’s empowerment’, but in the spirit of the time, did not relate whatsoever to the taboo issues Molgan exposed, such as the *bedika* cloths.

About a decade later, when radical religious feminist discourse on the issue of *niddah* had become more widespread, Ayelet Wieder-Cohen presented Molgan’s works in a more straightforward and critical way, and directly addressed the taboo subjects she had publicly exposed.

At the closing ceremony of the *Matronita* exhibition, held at the Ein Harod Arts Center, Weider-Cohen discussed the work through her own personal experience in facing the patriarchal institution’s control of the *mikva*. Weider-Cohen described *Matronita* as “A collection of works made with blood, created and emerging out of a deep wound, a wound inflicted by thousands of years of oppression, silencing, and control, of invasiveness and erasure.” [[91]](#footnote-91) In this context, she discussed her personal acts of resistance: “Every month I fight with the *mikva* attendant for the right to immerse myself without supervision or a *kashrut* certificate from the religious council […] and each time more women join the struggle who voice issues that I did not see or did not want to see […] Anger and bitterness are overflowing.”[[92]](#footnote-92) Weider-Cohen associated her actions with Molgan’s brave work: “I was amazed by Hagit’s courage in presenting a solo show, the courage to step forward alone, without an organization, without a *hevrutah*, without a group, and to stand exposed with her trenchant message.”[[93]](#footnote-93) Like Molgan, Weider-Cohen used radical language, concluding with words aimed to subvert the patriarchal framework she believes controls and enforces *niddah* laws: “Can men continue to set emotional and social frameworks for us that affect our basic lives as women? […] Women should be involved in the rewriting of halakhic laws pertaining specifically to them.” [[94]](#footnote-94)

Later, in a debate that took place in the pages of the *Makor Rishon* newspaper regarding immersion in the *mikva*, Wieder-Cohen used descriptions of Molgan’s works in order to present the challenges engendered by these religious laws. Wieder-Cohen stated, “Whoever wishes to understand the difficulties faced by a woman with regard to the laws of *niddah* is invited to listen to the artistic and feminist discourse in this context.”[[95]](#footnote-95) Wieder-Cohen honed Molgan’s radical critique, but as befits an activist, also put it into a practical context, claiming that, “changing religious law apparently necessitates breaking through a steel wall.”[[96]](#footnote-96) It is therefore safe to assume that Molgan’s radical demand is still far from being realized.

Thus, two prominent Orthodox feminists in Israel directly addressed Molgan’s exhibition, their responses separated by nearly a decade. Shakdiel positioned Molgan’s exhibition in the framework of feminist critique regarding power relations characteristic of Jewish patriarchal society, but she did so in accord with the Orthodox feminist discourse of the time, which did not propose a radical shakeup of *niddah* laws. She did not address the works themselves nor the artist’s radical stance on the laws of *niddah*. About a decade later, using Molgan’s works as a point of departure, Wieder-Cohen offered direct criticism of male domination over women’s bodies, as expressed in the laws of *niddah* and the *mikva*. The transformation in religious feminist discourse on *niddah* laws over the second decade of the 21st century—from a topic rarely discussed in public to a direct, radical discourse critical of religious laws and the rabbinical establishments—accounts for the different attitudes of feminist leaders to Molgan’s work. The difference between the restrained, limited nature of Orthodox feminist discussions on Molgan’s works around the time of the exhibition, and the direct and radical discussions held approximately ten years later, indicates the extent to which the radical discourse prompted by Molgan’s work at the beginning of the new millennium went beyond customary Orthodox feminist thought and activism at the time. Moreover, Wieder-Cohen’s discussion of Molgan’s works underscores the importance of art in the context of feminist discourse within the Orthodox Jewish world. Even in the second decade of the new millennium, when an Orthodox feminist leader wishes to discuss the topic of *niddah* and voice the critical discourse of Orthodox women on the subject, she finds critical treatment of the issue precisely, and predominantly, in the arts.

Molgan’s critical preoccupation with *niddah* laws in the early 2000s and the discourse she generated, preceded the critical approach characteristic of feminist Orthodox thought and activism in the second decade of the 21st century. It therefore seems appropriate to offer some explanation of Molgan’s precedence to intellectual, political, and halakhic discourses of the Jewish Orthodox world in Israel. Since the 1960s, arts scholarship has proposed institutional theories that examine art as an object within an institutional framework characterized by a set of internal rules and driven by certain “agents.” Significant among them are the “art world” theory by art critic Arthur Danto, [[97]](#footnote-97) the institutional theory of art developed by aesthete George Dickie,[[98]](#footnote-98) and the field theory by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.[[99]](#footnote-99)

Unlike Dickie and Danto, who emphasized the influence of the art world on the sanctification and isolation of the aesthetic space, Bourdieu developed concepts relating to the dynamics of the art field, its laws, structure, and logic, and addressed the ideological and status-related aspects of defining art. Bourdieu suggested that the sphere of artistic production be analyzed as a field comprised of social factors that make an impression on the artist and the art. Such dynamics promote certain values, impose certain meanings onto the artwork, and construct its cultural value, while concealing the power relations that enable these actions in the first place. Bourdieu found that innovation and rebellion are the primary producers of value in the art field.[[100]](#footnote-100) Israeli art theoretician Sara Chinski insisted that the term “rebellion” was the main pillar of early art discourse in Israel.[[101]](#footnote-101) Curator Tami Katz-Freiman noted the critical tendency of Israeli artists who dealt with Judaism as a subject in the 1990s:

It seems that nostalgic, yearning attitudes toward tradition are totally nonexistent in Israeli art of the nineties. If there appear, from time to time, symbols originating in Jewish tradition or the Bible, it is always from a critical perspective, rather than a consecrating or nostalgic one.[[102]](#footnote-102)

Israeli art critic Dalia Manor also points to Israeli art writers’ common use of terms such as contradiction, confrontation, revolution, avant-garde, and rebellion, emphasizing that these are not necessarily accurate descriptions of artistic activity in Israel. According to Manor, the use of these terms attests to writing that is steeped in modernist ideology, and an attempt to anchor artistic trends in Israel in the progressive narrative of West.[[103]](#footnote-103) Though Chinski and Manor criticize this approach, it seems that this institutional perspective is what encourages artists like Molgan to generate subversive and critical work, and is undoubtedly what allows such subversive voices to be heard. This fact emphasizes the significance of the art world, which serves as a hub of subversiveness and creates a school of cultural criticism, giving a platform to voices absent from hegemonic religious discourse.

To summarize, studying the reception of Molgan’s work indicates that the artist brought into the Israeli art world direct, critical feminist discourse on the policing of sexuality and the body in the Orthodox Jewish world. To this day, feminist Orthodox discourse on *niddah* laws largely eschews direct criticism of halakhic laws written from a patriarchal perspective, and focuses mainly on attempts to break away from the rabbinical grasp on *mikvas* in Israel.[[104]](#footnote-104) In contrast to this environment, which she inhabits, Molgan offered critique that disputed the patriarchal construction of these laws, and her work elucidates the unique ability of the art world to project a radical feminist voice within the Orthodox Jewish world.

**Chapter 6.**

**Mikva Dreams: Mierle Laderman-Ukeles**

Mierle Laderman-Ukeles’s (b. 1939) maintenance art of the 1970s and 80s—in which she performed maintenance tasks as art—dealt with institutional critique and subversion of accepted norms regarding private and public spaces. Within this broad treatment the artist also related to her own Orthodox Jewish world by bringing the ritual of Jewish women’s immersion in the *mikva* (ritual bath) into the art world. This chapter examines the mikva works of Laderman-Ukeles in light of the American feminist spirituality movement at the time. It also studies the mikva works, which have remained unrecognized by the art world in relation to her canonical maintenance art. By investigating Laderman-Ukeles’s feminist Jewish art from the 1970s and 1980s against the background of her maintenance art from the same period, I will argue that along with reclaiming Jewish women’s rituals, she also offered a critique of the Orthodox Jewish world.

**The Reception of Laderman-Ukeles’s *Jewish Art* and her *Maintenance Art***

Laderman-Ukeles is one of the only Orthodox Jewish artists who was active in the feminist art movement in the United States during the 1970s. Most of her work focused on creating public and environmental art, and she became a prominent figure in the American art world due to her maintenance art. Although she focused on conceptual environmental art (eco-feminist art) in the 1970s and 1980s, she also dealt with the mikva (Jewish ritual bath) in her work. Her maintenance art and her “Jewish” art, were received very differently in the American art world: whereas the first was exhibited in major art institutions and became part of the American and feminist art canon,[[105]](#footnote-105) her Jewish art created in the same time did not have a broad impact, and has been the subject of little critical study.[[106]](#footnote-106)

The exclusion of art that concerns religion, which is characteristic of the American art world, might account for the fact that while her maintenance art garnered institutional recognition, Laderman-Ukeles’s Jewish art did not. Samantha Baskind investigated the reception of notable American Jewish artists in the US and found that works by them which did not explicitly deal with subjects from the Jewish world were accepted into the canon of American art, while works dealing with their Jewish identity and sensibility were excluded from it.[[107]](#footnote-107) Baskind’s findings are illuminated by Sally M. Promey’s claim that until the 1990s, the American art world was controlled by the modern secularization thesis, and art with religious content was therefore expelled from it.[[108]](#footnote-108) Furthermore, Promey showed that until the 1990s, religion-centric art was discussed in scholarly studies only when it could be classified in secular terms.[[109]](#footnote-109) In 2004, art scholar James Elkins published his book *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*, in which he directly pointed to the exclusion and repression of the link between art and religion in contemporary art discourse.[[110]](#footnote-110) However, this state of affairs shifted slightly over time, as art scholars began to explore the connection between art and religion. Promey herself indicated that since the 1990s, more discussion has been dedicated to religion in studies on American art. [[111]](#footnote-111)

Indeed, the Jewish and religious content present in the work of Laderman-Ukeles has received greater visibility recently in the American art discourse. For example, the *New York Times* art critic Holland Cotter, writing in 2016 about the artist’s retrospective exhibition that was then on view at the Queens Museum in New York, explicitly remarked on the Jewish context of her work.[[112]](#footnote-112) Similarly, the art critic and curator Lucy Lippard, in her essay in the book that accompanied the exhibition, wrote that, “For all her avant-garde flair and eventual art world recognition, she has maintained her traditional Jewish faith.”[[113]](#footnote-113) As a matter of fact, the book’s main essay, written by the exhibition curator Patricia C. Phillips also surveys Laderman-Ukeles’s Jewish art and even points to the Jewish and religious connections of her maintenance art, which had not been discussed in the art discourse in the past.[[114]](#footnote-114)

**The Mikva Works of Laderman-Ukeles in the 1970s and the 1980s**

As early as the 1970s, the subjects of *tevila* and the *mikva* were at the center of Laderman-Ukeles’s works. She depicted *tevila* as an uplifting feminine ritual, contrary to the bleakness of Yocheved Weinfeld’s (b. 1947) *niddah* exhibition, which was showcased in Israel around the same period, or to Hagit Molgan’s (b. 1972) fervent criticism in her work, presented in Israel in the 2000s (see Chapter 5).

During the time of *niddah* (menstrual flow) a woman is considered impure, and a Jewish couple is forbidden from any physical contact or act that might lead to physical intimacy. After the cessation of their menstrual period, Orthodox Jewish women are obligated to immerse in a mikva before they can resume sexual relations with their husbands. The mikva is constructed like a small bathing pool into which rain water collected from a cistern, is passed by gravity via a duct.[[115]](#footnote-115) Laderman-Ukeles’s performance *Mikva Dreams*, which dealt with the immersion in the mikva, was the first time that the subject had been addressed directly in the American art world. It was presented in 1977 at the Franklin Furnace Gallery in New York. During the performance, the artist read aloud a text she had written, while covering herself with a white sheet, just as a member of the Jewish priestly caste (kohen) would cover himself in a *tallit* (a fringed garment traditionally worn by religious Jews) during a special prayer in the synagogue (Fig. 1). In a second version of the performance in 1978, Laderman-Ukeles again covered herself in a white sheet and read the text aloud, this time standing on the banks of the Hudson River in New York (Fig. 2). [[116]](#footnote-116)

The performance began with a declaration by the artist: “Sisters! In this new time for all of us, I take this time to tell you of these private things.”[[117]](#footnote-117) Laderman-Ukeles then read a detailed description of the technical aspects of constructing a mikva that demands using naturally occurring water as its source. Her methodical description of the mikva was followed by a depiction ofher own personal experience of the ritual immersion—the preparations before it and the act itself—and the feeling of joy it gave her. She described the ritual immersion in the mikva as an act of rebirth and a return to the Garden of Eden, extolling the immersion as a ritual that connects a woman with her own self: “She goes in, naked, all dead edges removed [...] The Mikva is for her intrinsic self. Her self-self […] The blood stopped flowing a week ago. She is the moon.”[[118]](#footnote-118) The artist also presented the practical aspects of the immersion as a ritual with erotic characteristics:

In all the gentleness of continuing love, she goes to the Mikva. The Mikva water hit above her breasts when she is standing up. The waters have pressure in them. She pushes into it as she comes down the steps. When she leaves, it seems as if the waters softly bulge her out, back to the world. No, she doesn’t want to tell you about it. It is secret between her and herself. […] The water is warm, body temperature. […] a square womb of living waters.[[119]](#footnote-119)

The performance concluded with a meditation, during which the artist repeated the words “immerse again” two hundred and ten times, the precise number of times she immersed in the mikva during her reproductive years. *Mikva Dreams* portrayed the mikva and immersion in it as an elevated ritual connecting feminist consciousness with Jewish ritual.[[120]](#footnote-120) Laderman-Ukeles presented immersion as a personal and intimate act, although in the performance she called for her sisters “In this new time [… to] choose life,”— and to be reborn as both Jewish and feminist women.[[121]](#footnote-121)

In 1986, Laderman-Ukeles exhibited another mikva work, this time in the form of an installation piece that she constructed at the Jewish Museum, New York.[[122]](#footnote-122) Laderman-Ukeles’s installation dealt with the structure of the mikva and the experience of transition that immersion is meant to generate (Fig. 3). The artist built a mikva in the museum. The ordinary mikva staircase was replaced in this work with very unusual set of stairs in which each step faced in a different direction. This was meant to connote the idea of immersion as a transition from onestate of consciousness to another. Laderman-Ukeles explained that with each tread a woman takes toward her immersion, she must consciously choose to move from one condition to the next.[[123]](#footnote-123) Claiming that the essence of Jewish thought lies in the idea of transformation and cyclical rebirth, she placed two doors in the work, one an entrance and the other an exit, which symbolized for her the two circumstances necessary for creating the transformation. The entrance door represented the woman’s willingness for rebirth, and the exit door society’s readiness to accept the rebirth she has undergone.[[124]](#footnote-124) Like her performance nearly ten years earlier, in this installation immersion was presented as an act of recreation connecting renewed feminist consciousness and women’s ritual in the Jewish world. [[125]](#footnote-125)

Despite the explicit Jewish context of her *mikva* art, and despite the artist’s desire to be active in her Orthodox Jewish community as well, her work was not discussed by it whatsoever. In hindsight, in a 2006 interview with gallerist and curator Marisa Newman, she spoke about the complete disregard for her works in the Jewish community and voiced her disappointment about that fact.[[126]](#footnote-126) Laderman-Ukeles’s works were also disregarded by the feminist Jewish world in the US at the time they were presented. It was only later, in the 1990s, that the text of *Mikva Dreams* was included in the feminist Jewish anthology *Four Centuries of Jewish Women’s Spirituality: A Sourcebook* (1992), edited by Dianne Ashton and Ellen M. Umansky.

***Mikva Dreams* and the Feminist Spirituality Movement**

The mikva works of Laderman-Ukeles can be interpreted in the context of the feminist spirituality movement, specifically the great goddess debates, which played a role in American feminist art of the 1970s.[[127]](#footnote-127) Artists such as Carolee Schneemann (b. 1939), Mary Beth Adelson (b. 1933), Ana Mendieta (1948–1985), Betsy Damon (b. 1940), and Donna Henes (b. 1945), turned to the goddesses of ancient times as their source of inspiration,[[128]](#footnote-128) and adopted matriarchal ideas from the past to enrich the feminist experience and discourse of the present.[[129]](#footnote-129) In analogy with goddess art, the installation *Mikva Dreams* turned to women’s ritual and exalted it. The *Mikva Dreams* performance was reminiscent of the feminist meetings common in the 1970s, whose enactment was intended to reinvigorate the great goddess religions. During these gatherings, a priestess or witch held a public ceremony that combined discussion of “femininity” with critique of the patriarchal religions.[[130]](#footnote-130) In a similar way, Laderman-Ukeles used her performance to praise the act of ritual immersion with language comparable to that used in the great goddess dialogues:

Like most goddess traditions, Matronit-Shechina, the Jew’s female divinity, has been pictured from ancient times as magically combining all these aspects: eternal renewed virgin, and eternal passionate lover, and eternal creating mother. Mikva is the site-intersection of all these holy energies.[[131]](#footnote-131)

Laderman-Ukeles’s *Mikva Dreams* clearly echoed Schneemann’s earlier *Interior Scroll*, a piece she first performed in 1975.[[132]](#footnote-132) At the start of the performance Schneemann covered herself with a white sheet, as did Laderman-Ukeles. She began by telling the viewers that during the performance she would read from her book *Cezanne, She was a Great Painter*.[[133]](#footnote-133) Laderman-Ukeles similarly read her own writings during her performance. Schneemann linked her artistic activity to the great goddess and feminist spirituality, seeing in its forms and images the source of the sacred feminine knowledge connected to birth and transformation.[[134]](#footnote-134) Laderman-Ukeles likewise sought to connect herself and the viewers of her performance to the ceremony of Jewish ritual immersion, which she saw as a source of holy energies transferred down by women from generation to generation. The artist clearly designed the *Mikva Dreams* performance in the spirit of the great goddesses and in 1978, the text she read in the performance was published in the feminist magazine *Heresies* in an issue devoted entirely to the great goddess feminist discourse (Fig. 4).[[135]](#footnote-135)

Despite the evident connection between *Mikva Dreams* and the feminist goddess performances, this work is also distinct from it. The dominant feminist exchanges in the United States during the 1970s linked Jewish law regarding menstruation with the patriarchal view that menstrual blood is impure, which led feminists to critique the Jewish laws of purity. In an interview in the book *Performance Artists Talking in the Eighties* by Linda Montano, published in 2000, Laderman-Ukeles explained that many feminist women at the time objected to the ritual of the mikva and viewed it as primitive,[[136]](#footnote-136) though she herself saw it as a continuation of the matriarchal religion of the past.[[137]](#footnote-137) She clarified her position in the performance itself, saying: “[…] misunderstandings have adhered to the concept and power of the Mikva. No. Mikva is not about women as dirty.”[[138]](#footnote-138) As opposed to the dominant American feminist deliberations of the 1970s, the works of Laderman-Ukeles were consistent with the approach that aimed to reclaim the immersion practices as empowering rituals for women, views that, as I will show later, were prevalent in American Orthodox Jewish feminism at the time.

Laderman-Ukeles’s appropriation of the ritual of immersion is sharpened considering the gap that separated the feminist criticism emerging from the Christian world and feminist theology that was developed in the Jewish world in the United States. Whereas the Christian discussions were divided between those who sought to fix the religion,[[139]](#footnote-139) and those who saw no point in that and suggested instead to disconnect from the church institutions and to found a new sort of religion that will be based on feminine spirituality,[[140]](#footnote-140) in the various religious branches of Jewish feminism there was almost never a demand to permanently split from tradition nor was there a dominant call to establish a post-Judaism religion.[[141]](#footnote-141) Jewish theologians dealt with criticism of the Jewish rituals and texts through acts of interpretation and reclaiming of elements from within Jewish tradition, which they viewed as feminine. Despite the critique of the tradition by these feminist thinkers, they never sought to disengage from it, but chose instead to criticize it in order to reinvent it.[[142]](#footnote-142) In the same way, Laderman-Ukeles connected the feminist speech with the feminist thought of the Orthodox Jewish world of the time, which proposed a reinterpretation of the laws of *niddah* with the intention of freeing them from the dichotomy of pure and impure as they were constructed in the rabbinic tradition. Jewish Orthodox feminists acted to reinvent these laws as empowering practices for women. In the Jewish religious discourse of the period women’s ritual immersion was perceived as taboo for public discussion. Laderman-Ukeles argued that suppression and concealment of the immersion ritual was itself a patriarchal construction.[[143]](#footnote-143) In her performance she announced that the menstrual ritual barely survived “these centuries cultural hang-ups towards menstruation itself: superstitions which are really fear and loathing of a woman’s body itself, woman’s deep mysterious fertile magic body and her times.”[[144]](#footnote-144)

It was in this spirit that Laderman-Ukeles presented an alternative to the accepted perception that marks menstrual blood as dirty, and stressed that the Jewish ritual of immersion was not based on these distinctions. In her performance, she quoted Rachel Adler, the foremost Jewish American feminist theologian who, in the 1970s, presented a feminist critique of Jewish thought and halakha (Jewish law), but dealt positively with the laws of *niddah*. At that time, Adler held an empathetic view of ritual bathing and the mikva as a place of immersion from hallowed days of yore.[[145]](#footnote-145) Similarly, the contemporaneous Jewish Orthodox feminist thinker Blu Greenberg wrote a poem in which she praised dipping in the mikva and the cooperation between the womanimmersing herself and the mikva attendant. The text of Laderman-Ukeles’s *Mikva Dream* is very reminiscent of the poem by Greenberg in its exaltation of the practice of purification and of the ritual bath attendant.[[146]](#footnote-146) Hence, the work by Laderman-Ukeles corresponds to the concept that was intended to form a connection between feminism and Judaism and reclaim the ritual immersion practice as an empowering rite for Jewish women.

 Laderman-Ukeles is unique and exceptional among the Jewish feminist artists who were active in the United States in the 1970s. Most of the American feminist artists of Jewish origin at the time did not deal with aspects of Jewish religion in their art—Schneemann, Judy Chicago, (b. 1939), Hannah Wilke (1940–1993), Miriam Schapiro (1923–2015), Joan Semmel (b. 1932), Nancy Fried (b. 1945), Eleanor Antin (b. 1935), and Rachel Rosenthal (1926–2015).[[147]](#footnote-147) In contrast, Laderman-Ukeles dealt with her heritage and religion directly.[[148]](#footnote-148) In the wider feminist context of the 1970s, her performance was remarkable, but it expressed notions that were typical of the American Orthodox Jewish feminist discourse of the day. The common approach in the general feminist debateof the 1970s was of Judaism as a patriarchal religion and anti-feminist sphere that oppressed women through, among other ways, the religious laws of *niddah*. Religious Jewish feminist women objected to this. The feminist scholar Susan Gubar described the negative attitude of American feminists toward Judaism in the 1970s, and stressed that at that time in American feminist discourse, to be Jewish and a feminist was perceived as an oxymoron.[[149]](#footnote-149) Generally, in the United States in the 1970s, Jews were still labelled as “others” in relation to the majority American society.[[150]](#footnote-150) Ellen M. Umansky notes that there were clear anti-Semitic undertones in the American feminist talk of the 1970s and claims that these anti-Semitic voices were what led some Jewish feminist women to relate directly to their Jewish world and to reclaim it. In parallel, Jewish women working within the Jewish communities began to introduce feminism into their own community with the aim of importing the feminist achievements from the American majority culture into their particular Jewish world.[[151]](#footnote-151) According to the art historian Edna Kantorovitz, who further refines the unique aspect of Laderman-Ukeles’s *Mikva Dreams* performance in the 1970s, religious Jewish women were viewed at the time as out of touch with their bodies and sexually repressed by the laws of *niddah*. Kantorovitz argues that Laderman-Ukeles challenged these assumptions and aimed to reveal the unknown face of the Jewish world.[[152]](#footnote-152) Thus, her positive approach to ritual immersion was in keeping with the oppositional spirit of religious Jewish feminist women who were active in America in the 1970s. The artist herself stressed the gap between her work and the reining anti-Jewish feminist discourse at the time. In the early 2000s, when she spoke about the inclusion of the text of *Mikva Dreams* in the journal *Heresies* at the end of the 1970s, she stressed that the publication of the text in a feminist journal at that time was not at all self-evident: “I was apprehensive about the piece being accepted by the [*Heresies*] collective, because there was a lot of anger against patriarchy in Judaism and in religion generally. But it was also very well received.”[[153]](#footnote-153) Thus, unlike most of the feminist artists of Jewish origin who were active in the United States in the 1970s, who were secular and did not deal directly with Jewish religion, and like the religious Jewish feminist discourse, which sought to connect Judaism and feminism, Laderman-Ukeles dealt with her religious Judaism in public, while being conscious of the rift between her work and mainstream feminist debate. She offered the art world a unique treatment that celebrated religion and adopted an extraordinary outlook on the mikva and its laws.

***Mikva Dreams* and Jewish Feminist Art in the United States during the 1970s**

Laderman-Ukeles’s connection between Judaism and feminism is enhanced by a comparison of her artwith works by the Jewish American artists Ruth Weisberg (b. 1942) who dealt with immersion since the 1970s until the 2000s, and Helène Aylon (b. 1931), from later in the 2000s. Like Laderman-Ukeles, Weisberg dealt with immersion in the framework of the feminist discourse of rebirth. Aylon, however, unlike Laderman-Ukeles and Weisberg, criticized the laws of ritual immersion, albeit in a minor way. From the beginning of the 1970s Weisberg created works in which a naked woman is seen dipping in a pool of water. In one, the woman is viewed from the side as she bends in a fetal pose. Above her, a reflection of light in warm oranges and reds serves to exalt the scene (Fig. 5). Matthew Baigell connects these works by Weisberg who was active within the feminist art movement of the 1970s and 80s in Los Angeles with the art of the first generation of feminist artists who dealt with birth.[[154]](#footnote-154) In the 1980s, Chicago created images of women giving birth as part of *The Birth Project*.[[155]](#footnote-155) In 1972, the feminist art collective that worked with Chicago and Schapiro in *Womanhouse* in Los Angeles, created the performance *Birth Trilogy* (Judy Huddleston, Jan Oxenburg, Shawnee Wollenman, and Nancy Youdelman). Baigell claims that like these artists, Weisberg dealt with birth in the framework of an attempt to reestablish women’s connection to themselves and as a metaphor of their own rebirth as feminist women.[[156]](#footnote-156) Yet, as opposed to the *Womanhouse* artists’treatment of birth, Weisberg (like Laderman-Ukeles) dealt with immersion.[[157]](#footnote-157) Moreover, Weisberg, like Laderman-Ukeles, distinguished herself from her American feminist artist colleagues at that time by dealing with religious Jewish subjects. In fact, Weisberg was the first American artist to exhibit works claiming a broad Jewish narrative from a feminist perspective.[[158]](#footnote-158) Despite Weisberg’s straightforward handling of the theme of bathing, when these works were created she did not interpret them in the context of Jewish ritual immersion. They were presented by the artist only as depicting a woman submerging herself in water and as an act of rebirth, while emphasizing at the same time the scene’s sensuality. Only later, in the 2000s did she openly discuss these works in the context of the Jewish ritual of immersion and connect them to the biblical Genesis myths.[[159]](#footnote-159) Thus, while Laderman-Ukeles presented ritual bathing in a Jewish context during the 1970s, clearly and openly connecting feminism with Judaism, Weisberg, at the same moment in time left the Jewish context of her immersion works implicit.

Aylon’s later work from the beginning of the 2000s corresponds with Laderman-Ukeles’s mikva works.[[160]](#footnote-160) However, whereas Laderman-Ukeles refrained from direct criticism of the Jewish world, Aylon presented a more ambivalent view. Aylon’s installation *My Bridal Chamber* (2000–2001), included in its various versions of a number of works, among them *My Marriage Bed* (2001), and *My Clean Days* (Fig. 6). In *My Marriage Bed* the artist covered a bed with white cloths, like ones she had used in the past as a *bedika* napkin (a piece of cloth an Orthodox woman uses to check whether her monthly bleeding has stopped) and projected images from the adjacent installation *My Clean Days* on to them. *My Clean Days* was comprised of panels that marked the ten years of Aylon’s marriage. On the panels the artist marked all the days when she was pure and was permitted, according to halakha, to engage in sexual relations with her husband over the ten years of their marriage. Like Laderman-Ukeles’s performance where she repeated the words “immerse again” hundreds of times, Aylon stressed the practical repetitive aspect in the practice of ritual purification in the form of a calendar that marked the days of her impurity and purity over the course her married life.[[161]](#footnote-161) Similar to Laderman-Ukeles’s reading in *Mikva Dreams*, in thetext presented alongside the installation, Aylon described the purification acts in the mikva as an ancient female ritual connecting women to the lunar cycle. Like Lederman-Ukeles, Aylon opposed portraying the practice of purification in terms of the dichotomy of impure and pure. In her text, Aylon noted that “immersion […] was an idea that had to come from a woman, not from those who do not bleed,”[[162]](#footnote-162) but also commented that “the term ‘unclean’ came from those who do not bleed.”[[163]](#footnote-163) Aylon presented an ambivalent view of the laws of purity: alongside a description of the immersion as an ancient and exalted feminine ritual, she pointed to the patriarchal rabbinical system’s regulation of women. Aylon explained, “It is my contention that ancient women founded the traditional bath long before Leviticus, but were never credited for this. Instead, the concept of the bath was distorted by patriarchal rulings.”[[164]](#footnote-164) Aylon’s critical approach is similar to that of Adler, who in the 1970s presented the rituals of immersion with empathy but later, in 1993, recanted and criticized the laws of *niddah*.[[165]](#footnote-165) While Aylon did not present a firm critical position on the mikva, like Adler’s late stance on the matter, she was critical of the regimentation of purification within the patriarchal Jewish world. Comparing Lederman-Ukeles’s works with those of Jewish American feminist artists clarifies the empathic, non-critical view of Lederman-Ukeles and her approach of reclaiming the Jewish ritual of purification.

**“The Personal is Political”: The Mikva Works of Laderman-Ukeles in Light of her Maintenance Art**

Let us now look at Laderman-Ukeles’s mikva works, which have received only a marginal place in the art world, through the lens of her much better known maintenance art. This examination will show that in spite of her seemingly merely celebratory and non-critical point of departure, in practice, her mikva works actually shattered religious taboos by undermining the patriarchal structures of Orthodox Jewish society. Laderman-Ukeles developed maintenance art after the birth of her first daughter in 1968. In response to the perceived clash between being an artist and a mother, she composed the *Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!*[[166]](#footnote-166) In the manifesto, she declared that she would henceforth perform all housework as art. She saw housework as being equal to maintenance work, which society viewed as being inferior to other forms of work.[[167]](#footnote-167) Following the manifesto, Laderman-Ukeles produced the *Maintenance Art Performance* series (1973–1974) that included washing museum floors and cleaning the works on exhibition (Fig. 7). The artist placed the daily drudgery of motherhood, managing a household, and other maintenance tasks at the center of her maintenance art. She expanded her feminist approach to maintenance to encompass all service jobs, including those usually performed by men, who society then viewed as “women,” that is, second-class citizens.[[168]](#footnote-168) Accordingly, the *Touch Sanitation* performance project (1978–1980) was meant to give voice to working people in this lowest of professions. In the performance, Laderman-Ukeles set out to shake the hand of every single worker of the New York City Department of Sanitation (where she has been the artist-in-residence since 1977), to thank them for the work they do for the city (Fig. 8).

Maintenance art is rooted in Marxist feminism of the 1970s.[[169]](#footnote-169) Feminists claimed that women’s inferior economic status is responsible for their dependency on men and leads to their becoming non-autonomous beings. The solution that liberalism offered in the 1960s was simple: women going out to work will grant women independence.[[170]](#footnote-170) Feminists developed this and eventually demanded equality for women in the work force. However, the Marxist feminism that developed in the 1970s demanded that the transparent women’s work (the “care”) be recognized and validated by income.[[171]](#footnote-171) In this spirit, Laderman-Ukeles did not rebel against “women’s work” that was designated as her share, but rather argued that the private sphere should be seen as no less important as the public one and therefore housework should be considered as work worthy of symbolic remuneration. Accordingly, the second part of her manifesto was a proposal for an exhibition entitled *CARE*.[[172]](#footnote-172)

Miwon Kwon and Helen Molesworth proposed that the central thesis of maintenance art is institutional critique.[[173]](#footnote-173) Kwon argued that maintenance art publicly exposed the invisible work that is the basis of, and the condition that enables, the existence of works of art, going so far as to undermine the dichotomies between public and private, high and low, and art and everyday life.[[174]](#footnote-174) According to her, as opposed to works of art or other works that receive visibility and prestige, maintenance work is best done out of sight. And yet, in practice, despite its transparency, it is what enables the existence of the works of art. Molesworth claimed that maintenance art undermined the “private” and “public” spaces as they are structured in art institutions.[[175]](#footnote-175) According to this approach, transforming maintenance tasks into art awards maintenance visibility and prestige, for example through the museum curators’ attitudes towards the maintenance artworks. The entire project pointed to the inferior status given to maintenance work in museums, galleries, and even in private homes, and challenged the common perception that relegates maintenance work to the invisible. Similarly, Shannon Jackson claimed that the premise underlying maintenance art was to expose the societal establishment that created meaning and prestige.[[176]](#footnote-176) According to Jackson, when Laderman-Ukeles transferred maintenance work to museums and reconstructed it into art, she was effectively indicating the institutional aspect of giving value to social practices. Later, Helena Reckitt situated maintenance art as a critical feminist endeavor, and pointed out that it was based on the insight that “art” and “work” always operate within strict power relations and social structures. Reckitt critiqued the exclusion of Laderman-Ukeles’s maintenance art from what the curator Nicholas Bourriaud defined as “relational aesthetics.”[[177]](#footnote-177) Reckitt pointed out that Laderman-Ukeles preceded the relational aesthetics practices of the 1990s, but was entirely unacknowledged by Bourriaud, receiving no credit in his influential category of relational aesthetics.[[178]](#footnote-178) She argued that while Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics claim situated the artist as universal and did not present his art in relation to race, class, and gender, maintenance art dealt with social contexts and relations from an awareness of the power relations and social structures that dominated society. In other words, while Bourriaud’s thesis refrained from the political, maintenance art operated in light of the feminist theories underlying the understanding that “art” and “work” are always created in terms of who does what to whom and under what conditions.[[179]](#footnote-179)

Looking at Laderman-Ukeles’s mikva works in light of her maintenance art shows how very interconnected they are. In fact, Laderman-Ukeles herself saw them as being linked and part of one artistic corpus. Unlike her later “Jewish” works, which she exhibited in Jewish institutions,[[180]](#footnote-180) she performed *Mikva Dreams* at the Franklin Furnace Gallery as part of a performance series entitled *Maintenance Art Tales*. Lisa E. Bloom argues that, like the artist’s maintenance work, which aimed to challenge the hierarchies separating art and maintenance and the prevailing perception that housework and cleaning were lowly despicable fields, so the artist’s interest in ritual immersion pointed to the sanctity embedded in it and gave it prestige. According to her, in contrast to the contemporary common perception of ritual immersion which classifies it simply as activity intended to purify a woman of her sexual impurities that will then allow her to resume sexual relations, Laderman-Ukeles presented immersion as an exalted ritual act. In this move, contends Bloom, the artist aimed to place immersion in the realm of the sacred.[[181]](#footnote-181) Going beyond Bloom’s analysis, it is important to note that women’s immersion is discussed in the halakha primarily in terms of physical impurity and purity. In Judaism, there are two types of immersions: one is for the sake of purification meant for women and transforms the woman from impure to pure in legal halakhic terms; the other is a symbolic immersion for the sake of *kedusha* (holiness) which is a custom that men perform mainly on the eve of the High Holidays (Rosh Hashanna and Yom Kippur).[[182]](#footnote-182) Biblical law applied the terms of purity and impurity primarily to men. However, the later rabbinic law freed men of the pure/impure categories and made these laws relevant only to women.[[183]](#footnote-183) Therefore, male immersion in the mikva is viewed in the rabbinic discourse as optional and portrayed in terms of an addition to sanctity, whereas a woman’s immersion is deemed a halakhic obligation and discussed mainly in terms of the technical aspects of purification from the impurity of menstruation. Thus, like maintenance art which challenged the construction that placed women’s work and maintenance work as lacking symbolic value, so the mikva works challenged placing women’s rituals in the margins as in want of prestige.

Moreover, it is essential to connect Laderman-Ukeles’s works on the mikva with her broader preoccupation with institutional critique and the undermining of accepted relations between the public and the private. Most importantly in my view, Laderman-Ukeles recast a subject viewed by the Jewish world as private and discreet and made it public. Presenting ritual immersion in the public domain was a radical departure from the Jewish religious discourse of the period, which saw women’s ritual immersion as a personal and intimate act that should remain invisible and was, moreover, taboo for public discussion. When in the year 2000 Laderman-Ukeles looked back on the work, she stressed the taboo surrounding *niddah* in the Jewish world and placed her work in sharp opposition to it:

You do not tell your family, you do not tell your children, you do not say where you are going [when going to the Mikva]. [...] and yet here’s the artwork, which gives me the permission to talk about anything.[[184]](#footnote-184)

The link between Laderman-Ukeles’s mikva art and her broader engagement in the subversion of the private and public spheres becomes clearer when considered in relation to the gap that existed between exhibiting a mikva and immersion in the art world and the taboo surrounding menstruation, the mikva, and ritual immersion in the Orthodox Jewish world. Just as she challenged the accepted perceptions between the private and public in maintenance art, in her mikva works she objected to the parallel opinion found in the Jewish world.

Furthermore, for many generations, the customs and traditions of women in the Jewish world were perceived as belonging to the private sphere alone. Hence, they were excluded from Jewish history and, consequently, many have even been forgotten. Apparently oblivious to the important intellectual changes that feminists asserted, for example in Joan Scott’s groundbreaking article, “Gender as a Category of Historical Analysis” (1986), the historian Jacob Katz expressed (as late as in 1996) the patriarchal view that the religious life of women in traditional Jewish society was not a significant issue since women in that world did not play an active part in shaping the realm of culture, and therefore, there was no reason to treat them in the framework of historical research.[[185]](#footnote-185) Since the the1980s, feministscholarshave been critical of the historical narratives written from a patriarchal perspective, and argued that gender is a crucial category for historical analysis.[[186]](#footnote-186) Accordingly, from the beginning of the twenty-first century, feminist Jewish scholars have shown that Jewish women in the past had rich and full religious and spiritual lives, and that their religious activities had communal characteristics.[[187]](#footnote-187) In fact, women’s religious activities formed a kind of “religion of one’s own” with their unique rituals separate from those of the men. Reclaiming women’s rituals, these feminist scholars granted women’s customs and rituals a more central role in contemporary Jewish culture. Laderman-Ukeles preceded this important move by several decades in the art she made. For this reason, I have argued that by shifting the laws of ritual purity from the private sphere to the public sphere of art, she undermined the patriarchal regulatory power structure of the Jewish Orthodox world, which eliminated women’s rituals of the mikva from the visible public domain.

The breaking of taboos in relation to women’s bodies and sexuality was widespread in the work of American feminist artists active in the 1970s, who in the words of Schneemann attempted “to bring our bodies back to ourselves.”[[188]](#footnote-188) Feminist artists in America of that time who dealt with their bodies, offered new views that undermined the accepted patriarchal perceptions and the dominance of the masculine view of women throughout the history of art. Their work was accepted and discussed as the most significant contribution of art to feminism.[[189]](#footnote-189) In the same way, the work of Laderman-Ukeles shattered the taboo of the public discussion of ritual immersion and the mikva in the Jewish religious community, and she was the first American feminist artist to deal with these subjects.

Feminist thinkers and activists during the 1970s sought to undermine the dichotomy between the public and the private. The radical American feminist discourse of the 1970s objected to favoring the public over the private in everything having to do with creating economic, social, and symbolic capital, and claimed that the division between the public and the private created problematic hierarchies. As feminist thinkers demonstrated, to associate men with the public domain and women with the private—marginalized women and maintained their positions of subordination.[[190]](#footnote-190) In the same way, the mikva artworks of Laderman-Ukeles presented in public the act of purification as an exalted female rite, and located in the public sphere what in the religious Jewish world is denoted as “modest,” (i.e., must remain invisible). In transferring the laws of purification and women’s ritual from the private to the public space, the artist undermined the regimented structure of the Orthodox Jewish world, which creates a hierarchy between men and women by placing women’s rituals in the private realm. Indeed, already at the end of the 1970s, Laderman-Ukeles’s mikva performance offered a thorough challenge of the patriarchal structure of Jewish traditional society with the aim of linking Judaism and feminism. At the crucial moment of the second wave of the feminist movement in the United States, the appropriation of women’s rituals of purity constituted a powerful call for women to be “reborn” as Jewish feminists.

**Between the US and Israel – Breaking Taboos: The Art Worlds, Feminist Discourses, and Modern Orthodox Society**

Hagit Molgan (b. 1972) in Israel and Mierle Laderman-Ukeles in the United States, were raised within the modern-Orthodox Jewish world and associate themselves with it to this day. Despite geographical distance and the different communities in which they work, both artists have illuminated the gap between the dominant discourse in their society and that of the art world in which they create. The art world provides them a space in which to openly express issues that are unspoken and deemed taboo in the religious Jewish world. For instance, in an interview conducted several years following her exhibition, Molgan touched on the challenge of discussing *niddah* laws in the Orthodox Jewish world. At the other end of the spectrum, she placed the art world, an arena that allows her to break through the boundaries of the society in which she lives. She recounted the process which led her to address *niddah* laws in her art, stating, “I suppose I began thinking about it a long time ago, before actually doing it [=the *niddah* art], but the art allowed me to get it out.” [[191]](#footnote-191)

In retrospect, Molgan deepened the dissonance in the 2000s: “Religious society’s demands on a woman inhibit her from leading the life of an artist, from creating, for bringing up subjects for open debate.”[[192]](#footnote-192) Molgan explained that despite how difficult it was to create in a religious society, she “could not give it up, it [=religious society] is a part of me. I cannot cut off my arm just to go there [=to the art world]. On the other hand, when I go to the religious side, I have to give up my art.” [[193]](#footnote-193) The artist describes her condition as one of a split identity: “The split identity is the most painful aspect of creating in this field. In order to live in religious society, I have to give up my art. […] I will not, I say it out loud. But I know that making art about it and representing it in the secular sphere comes at a price.”[[194]](#footnote-194)

Similarly, as previously discussed, Laderman-Ukeles came to understand the distinction between what the art world allowed and what the Jewish Orthodox world allowed. Like Molgan, Laderman-Ukeles focused on the taboo of *mikva* immersion. In an interview with Lisa E. Bloom in the 2000s, Laderman-Ukeles described a dual existence in which, on the one hand, she inhabits the modern Orthodox world, and on the other, she works within the art world. In her religious world, she cannot discuss *tevila*, which is considered a taboo subject that demands a modest approach; the art world, however, allows her to deal with the subject openly.[[195]](#footnote-195) Regardless of their distinct geographical locations and communities, Molgan and Laderman-Ukeles are linked by their use of the art world to break religious taboos.

Despite the similarity between the two artists in terms of their taboo-breaking work, their respective positions on *niddah* laws are polar opposites: Laderman-Ukeles praised *niddah* rituals and worked in the spirit of the feminist spirituality movement, while Molgan was blatantly and uncompromisingly critical of them. This distinction reflects the differences between the art worlds in Israel and the US. In the Israeli art world, a critical or apprehensive approach to *niddah* is very common. As previously noted, Weinfeld shed a somber light on the subject as early as the 1970s, before Molgan. In fact, since the 2000s, several modern-Orthodox Israeli women took a critical approach to *niddah* laws and *mikva* immersion. For instance, Ayelet Weil-Nebensal (b. 1976) printed images of well-known, prominent women from various fields (Golda Meir, Ilana Dayan, and Gila Almagor) onto *bedika* cloths. The cloths were sewn into small pillows that had images of ants printed on the other side (Fig. 12). She explained the work as follows: “I see the customary self-examination with the cloths as a minimization and reduction of the woman’s essence. […] With this work, I wanted to draw attention to the way the rituals associated with the *mitzvoth* of *niddah* minimize and diminish the woman.” [[196]](#footnote-196)

Unlike the critical art generated within the Israeli modern-Orthodox world, almost no Jewish-American artwork deals with *tevila* from a critical perspective. Already in the 1970s, when Yocheved Weinfeld (b. 1947) presented her disconcerting exhibition in Israel, Laderman-Ukeles praised the *tevila*. Later Jewish-American artists shed a similarly positive light on *tevila* and the *mikva*. Since the early 2000s, the works of American artists such as Janice Rubin (b. 1932) and Shari Rothfarb-Mekonen (b. 1968) portrayed the *mikva* as part of a separate “feminine religion” that was developing in an isolated arena safe from male infiltration, unrelated to the *mikva*’sassociation with authorizing martial relations.[[197]](#footnote-197) These works reflect the religious eroticism of the *mikva* and depict *tevila* as an exhilarating moment, a connective channel to the days of genesis. *The Mikva Project* (2002, Fig. 12) by Rubin, which displays photos of women in the *mikva,* lends the ceremony a broad range of possible meanings, from a monthly act of halakhic purification to a declaration of lesbian Jewish identity.[[198]](#footnote-198) Similarly, in 1999, Rothfarb-Mekonen presented a documentary video installation at the New York Jewish Museum titled *Water Rites*. The installation video showed interviews with Jewish women from different worlds, including Haredi, feminist, and lesbian women, who positively discuss their feelings about the *mikva* and the place it has in their lives.

Interpretive discourse on *niddah* art in Israel is also distinct from its US counterpart. While American discourse does not tend to interpret *mikva* art as critical even when it carries critical aspects, Israeli discourse adopts a radical interpretation of this art even when on its surface, it is not so.[[199]](#footnote-199) I will demonstrate this briefly: *My Marriage Bed* and *My Clean Days* by Helène Aylon (U.S., b. 1931) (discussed in Chapter 6) were not interpreted as critiques in the US, despite the critical aspects of the ritual that she displayed as part of the installation.[[200]](#footnote-200) In Israel, on the other hand, in light of Weinfeld’s precedent and much like Molgan’s works, Aylon’s art was interpreted as being critical of *niddah* laws. In the exhibition catalogue of *Matronita: Jewish Feminist Art* at the Mishkan Le’Omanut, Museum of Art in Ein Harod, I wrote, “Aylon exposes the repression’s implications for the lifestyle of women’ in the traditional Jewish world.” [[201]](#footnote-201) Art critic Smadar Sheffi also perceived *My Clean Days* as a pessimistic documentation: “What stings here is the policing of intimacy, the dichotomous division between pure and impure applied to the woman’s body. The calendars look like charts of desperation, tracking spans of time that in the end yield no release.”[[202]](#footnote-202) In similar fashion, the works of Hila Karabelnikov-Paz (b. 1981) and Ruth Kestenbaum Ben-Dov (b. 1961), which dealt with the *mikva*, were perceived as critical in Israel, even though the artists’ themselves never intended them to be so. Karabelnikov-Paz described her *mikva* works not as a critique of *niddah* laws, but rather as an attempt to take ownership of the *mikva* space and transform it from one of alienation to one of intimacy.[[203]](#footnote-203) Orna Oryan, however, described them as works of “internal” criticism: “The artist portrays her experience of *niddah* as one of objectification, loneliness, and passivity. […] It seems that the artist’s criticism stems from a meaningful bond and connection to the *mitzvoth* of *tehara*.” [[204]](#footnote-204) Likewise, though Kestenbaum Ben-Dov described her paintings of women in the act of immersion as an attempt to test the boundaries of depicting nude figures in a Jewish religious context (Figs. 14-15),[[205]](#footnote-205) Oryan referred to them as a direct critique of *niddah* laws, as well.[[206]](#footnote-206) This tendency of Israeli discourse on art to interpret Jewish feminist works as critical and rebellious coincides with the common characteristics of Israeli texts on art, whose interpretation places such works in opposition to religion.[[207]](#footnote-207)

Despite the widespread tendency in Israel to categorize creative works as critical, and despite Oryan’s imposed interpretation of Karabelnikov-Paz and Kestenbaum Ben-Dov’s works, one cannot ignore the distinct chasm between the critical approach to *niddah* and *mikva* characteristic of Molgan, Weil-Nebensal, and others, and the approach of American artists’ on these same subjects, which is characterized by a sense of “taking ownership”. The chasm I have noted corroborates claims by Oryan, who also asserted these distinctions.[[208]](#footnote-208) According to Oryan, the works originating in the US deliver an affirming message that centralizes the “positive.” These works focus on the spiritual aspect of the *mikva* and depict the positive transformation women undergo during *tevila*. In contrast, claims Oryan, in Israel the issue is more multifaceted and complex: On one hand, much like Jewish-American artists, Israel-based Varda Polak-Sahm (b. 1953) and Shuli Nachshon (b. 1951) present the *mikva* as a source of female empowerment. For instance, in Nachshon’s 2006 video work *Tevila*, she is seen at the *mikva* with her mother and sisters, and the *tevila* is depicted as part of a transformation and a connection with the spiritual-ritual world and *Sephardic* Jewish tradition (Figs. 16).[[209]](#footnote-209) On the other hand, works by Molgan and other modern-Orthodox women focus on reflecting the “negative”—the woman experiencing *niddah* rituals as bereft of her sovereignty, whose body has been hijacked by an oppressive social regime.

The clear distinction between Jewish-Israeli and Jewish-American depictions of the *mikva* begs a broader cultural explanation for this phenomenon, one that draws upon existing knowledge of the social, cultural, and religious differences between Jewish worlds in Israel and the various Jewish communities in the US. However, comparative studies on the subject are quite scarce, and almost none have been conducted on Jewish feminism in the US versus Israel.[[210]](#footnote-210) I will therefore offer an explanation of this chasm using the minimal research that is available on the development of Jewish feminist schools in both locations. I will position the artists’ different stances in the context of their respective feminist discourses and art fields. Laderman-Ukeles is unique and unusual among feminist Jewish artists of 1970s America; while her peers did not incorporate Jewish religion into their art, she dealt with the subject directly. Her work on the Jewish religious world and her positive outlook on the *mikva* were an exception in the broader feminist context, but was typical of the pervasive feminist Orthodox Jewish discourse of her time. As discussed in Chapter 6, in the 1970s, general feminist discourse largely regarded Judaism as a patriarchal religion and an anti-feminist sphere that oppresses women, partly through *niddah* laws. Jewish feminists challenged this perspective. Laderman-Ukeles’s positive outlook on *tevila* aligns with the oppositional and combative spirit of Jewish feminists in the US during the 1970s. Her direct preoccupation with Judaism alone, not to mention her positive approach to *tevila*, differed greatly from the pervasive feminist discourse in America at the time. The artist herself underscores the gulf between her work and the dominant anti-Jewish feminist discourse of the period. In the early 2000’s, while discussing the publication of the *Mikva Dreams* exhibition text in *Heresies* magazine in the late 1970s, Laderman-Ukeles emphasized that its inclusion in a feminist publication was quite unusual at the time: “I was apprehensive about the piece being accepted by the [*Heresies*] collective, because there was a lot of anger against patriarchy in Judaism and in religion generally. But it was also very well received.”[[211]](#footnote-211)

Therefore, contrary to most feminist Jewish artists working in the US during the 1970s, who did not address Jewish religion directly, and in-line with Jewish feminist discourses that sought to connect Judaism and feminism, Laderman-Ukeles explored her Judaism openly, while maintaining an awareness of the chasm between her own work and dominant feminist discourse.

At the same time, in Israel, Weinfeld shed a somber light on *niddah*, representing the polar opposite of Laderman-Ukeles’s approach. While Laderman-Ukeles’s *mikva* works were unusual in the context of 1970s American art, Weinfeld’s canonic “*niddah* performance” in Israel was hardly an exception. In the 1970s, secular Israeli artists who were accepted into the canon of Israeli art directly and blatantly dealt with Judaism as a subject, expressing a grim or at least ambivalent approach toward it. Many works around this time portrayed a physical entity engaged in the use of Jewish symbols, such as works by Michal Na’aman (b. 1951), Haim Maor (b. 1951), Michael Druks (b. 1940), Michael Sgan-Cohen (1944-1999), Moshe Gershuni (b. 1936), and Motti Mizrachi (b. 1946).[[212]](#footnote-212) Curator Adam Baruch attributed a restrained critical approach to these works, one that deconstructs religious symbols and experiences, scatters them, and reconnects them in conceptual-formalist contexts. According to Baruch, the works used Jewish symbols as raw material for the purpose of personal-creative “exorcism.”[[213]](#footnote-213)

The differences between Laderman-Ukeles’s work in the US and Weinfeld’s work in Israel should therefore be considered in light of their respective communal and cultural contexts. The secular Weinfeld worked in Israel and generated art in the spirit of the Israeli art world, which adopted an apprehensive approach to religion. Laderman-Ukeles on the other hand, worked in the context of an oppositional Jewish minority discourse within an American majority. She offered an alternative to the dominant feminist and art discourses in the US, while seeking to empower her own identity as a Jewish and religious woman.

Critical preoccupation with *niddah* among modern-Orthodox Jewish women working in Israel since the early 2000s is highly distinct from the positive perspective on the *mikva* commonly expressed by secular or traditional artists. As previously mentioned, while non-Orthodox Jewish artists such as Polak-Sahm and Nachshon adopted an empathic perspective on the *mikva*, Orthodox artists like Molgan and Weil-Nebensal took a critical approach to the act of *tehara*. Similarly, Yael Guilat found that since the early 2000s, video works by non-Orthodox Jewish artists in Israel do not focus on criticizing tradition but rather on the relationship between the halakhaand religious custom, and the influence these have on shared culture and space in Israel. In Guilat’s words, “The works affirm the tradition and its rituals, or at least explore them according to the halakhaand the custom […].”[[214]](#footnote-214)

The pervasive criticism of *niddah* laws among modern-Orthodox Jewish women in Israel is consistent with the central role these women perform in the fight against rabbinical authority, which operates under the wing of the Government of Israel. Although any woman planning to legally marry in Israel is exposed to *niddah* laws through the “bridal consultation” provided by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, and is obligated to immerse in the *mikva*, it is modern-Orthodox women who spearhead the opposition to Israel’s rabbinical institution.[[215]](#footnote-215) In 2012, Tali Berner described the issue as follows:

[…] in recent years, a great deal of feminist activity and creative endeavor in Israel has been taking place in the religious arena. Many of the challenges faced by feminism in Israel relate to this arena, and several of the more prominent feminists come from the religious world. All of this activity proves that it is not only possible to build a bridge between traditional religiosity and feminist commitment, but that tremendous potential lies in the encounter between them, in the realms of politics, society, and art.[[216]](#footnote-216)

Furthermore, Orna Sasson-Levy and Chen Misgav noted that, “[…] the religious feminist movement is the most important feminist movement in Israel due to its vigorous activity, the plethora of subjects it addresses, the diverse spheres in which it operates, and the many women who participate in its various activities.”[[217]](#footnote-217) Molgan, like other Israeli Orthodox women engaged in criticizing the laws of *niddah*, weaves her critique of the Jewish Orthodox world and its customs into her critique of the rabbinical institution in Israel. Her critical work is illuminated by the particular context in which she works, one in which modern-Orthodox Jewish women spearhead the feminist struggle against the male rabbinical institution’s control over individual status in general, and the *mikvas* in particular.

Contrary to the critical outlook of Israeli women artists who associate themselves with modern-Orthodox society, the positive nature of Laderman-Ukeles’s work is characteristic of several non-Orthodox US artists (Rubin, Rothfarb-Mekonen), as well as certain secular and traditional female artists in Israel (Polak-Sahm, Nachshon). However, despite the affinity between these artists’ contemporary works and Laderman-Ukeles’s past work, they effectively operate within a different feminist discourse. Unlike the subversive discourse of Laderman-Ukeles, which offered an alternative to the dominant feminist discourse of her time, contemporary women artists who share her approach are now part of mainstream feminist discourse. Third-wave feminism aims at diversity and the empowerment of women from varying groups and cultures.[[218]](#footnote-218) Moreover, post-secularism has brought many feminist scholars to the conclusion that religious identity in particular can develop a female subject who fights for liberation. These scholars lament the automatic adoption of secularism by western feminism.[[219]](#footnote-219) Contemporary feminist Jewish discourse in the US and Israel expresses a less definitive approach to *tevila* laws, as well. Several scholars have questioned approaches that regard *niddah* laws strictly as regulations of female sexuality. Tova Hartman and Naomi Marmon claim that, while feminist women criticize *niddah* laws as patriarchal practices, they rarely address the fact that many women find them empowering. They therefore suggest that women’s perspectives be investigated and represented for their diversity, without surrendering to the simple oppressor–oppressed dichotomy. [[220]](#footnote-220) In the spirit of the new postmodern feminist discourse, recent decades have seen a trend of women’s return to the *tevila* ritual unrelated to *niddah* laws. Jewish women in non-Orthodox American communities, formerly opposed to *tevila* rituals, have built *mikvas* in their communities.[[221]](#footnote-221) Therefore, one could conclude that it is precisely the dominance of such “ownership” discourse that emboldens the subversive perspective and oppositional activism of both Molgan and Laderman-Ukeles, despite their differences.

Judaism and gender scholar Tamar Ross further elucidates the clear distinction between the subversive *niddah* art of Orthodox Israeli women artists, and the “ownership art” of US-based Orthodox artists. Ross pointed to the radical nature of Orthodox feminist discourse developed in Israel since the 1980s, and claimed that contrary to it, Orthodox Jewish feminism in the US usually operates in the spirit of liberal feminism. According to Ross, in the modern-Orthodox American community, the potential invasion of secular values associated with the non-Jewish majority is a centralized issue, one developed by dominant theological discourse aimed to mitigate and prevent the infiltration of such values into Jewish society, or to dismiss the dilemmas arising from gaps between traditional Judaism and modernity. In the modern-Orthodox Israeli community, on the other hand, the pervasive approach is more holistic, and seeks to connect between the *kodesh* (holy, sanctified) and the *chol* (mundane, ordinary) within the framework of non-oppositional national Jewish discourse. This approach, claims Ross, is reflected by the tendency of Israeli Orthodox-Jewish discourse to operate in the spirit of radical feminism.[[222]](#footnote-222) The reverence for *tehara* and *niddah* laws as foundational values of the Jewish people [[223]](#footnote-223) illustrates their significance within American-Jewish society. This might be the root cause behind the non-critical approach typical of Jewish-American artists. On the other hand, the social reality of modern-Orthodox Judaism in Israel is that of a minority within a Jewish majority society, in which feminist Orthodox women work to repair injustices perpetuated by the marriage of religion and state, and where religious artists adopt critical views of *niddah* and *tevila*.

To summarize, this chapter showed that critical art on *niddah* and *tevila* in the Jewish-American and Jewish-Israeli worlds expresses more radical feminist ideas than those visible in religious Jewish spheres, or even feminist religious spheres. I have demonstrated how feminist-Jewish art in the US and Israel uncovers dominant taboos in religious Jewish communities, and how, through their work, women artists seek to spotlight issues that rarely garner public attention; these then become part of religious feminist discourse and sometimes a part of mainstream discourse in religious societies. Indeed, various scholars have noted that in the Orthodox world in Israel, art, literature, poetry, and cinema often deals with taboo subjects and lends them visibility.[[224]](#footnote-224) For instance, the scholar of Jewish thought Dov Schwartz claims that in the Israeli modern-Orthodox world, the exploration of sexuality and the body in different cultural and creative fields (poetry, literature, cinema, television, and dance) has allowed religious discourses on these subjects to evolve.[[225]](#footnote-225) Schwartz argues that art and *halakhic* rulings are linked; he supports this by referencing halakhic discussions about LGBT individuals after they appeared in novels by Orthodox authors.[[226]](#footnote-226) Valeria Seigelshifer also found that films by religious directors in Israel were the first step in changing the discourse on sexuality in Israeli religious society, which is now undergoing a revolution around the issue.[[227]](#footnote-227)

Likewise, Molgan and Laderman-Ukeles’s works on *niddah* and *tevila* in Israel and the US, respectively, exposed the dominant taboo in their Orthodox-Jewish worlds, with Molgan’s work preceding intellectual and activist discourses on *niddah* and *tevila* in Israel’s feminist Orthodox community by roughly a decade.

**Conclusions**

The artists discussed in this book engage in feminist critique of Jewish tradition, halakha, and religious institutions in various ways. Helène Aylon (b. 1931) and Nechama Golan (b. 1947) target regulatory religious Jewish texts; Nurit Jacobs-Yinon, Hila Karabelnikov-Paz (b. 1984), Hagit Molgan (b. 1972), and Andi Arnovitz (b. 1959) critique the Jewish halakha (*mikva* for conversion, modesty, and *niddah*), and Mierle Laderman-Ukeles (b. 1939) focuses on the relegation of female rituals in the symbolic order of religious Jewish worlds. The artists’ methods differ as well: Aylon follows the strategies of contemporary activist art—using her privileged social status and symbolic capital as an artist in order to foster dialogue with rabbis that may effect change. Jacobs-Yinon on the other hand, operates in the spirit of feminist activist art originating in 1970s America, which garnered visibility through the media. Jacobs-Yinon also uses camouflaging tactics typical of Orthodox Jewish feminism. In contrast, Golan, Laderman-Ukeles, Molgan, and Arnovitz, do not subscribe to the characteristic camouflaging practices of Orthodox feminism, but rather expose taboos and offer direct criticism of Jewish tradition, halakha, and religious institutions. Golan uses shock value to engage viewers, and is denounced and labeled blasphemous by religious critique; Molgan and Laderman-Ukeles publicly expose taboos concerning women’s bodies, sexuality, and rituals; and Arnovitz provocatively employs images of breasts and pubic hair, thereby revealing to the public the pornographic dimension of the rabbinical radicalization of modesty laws.

**The Contribution of Jewish Feminist Art to the Feminist Art Worlds in the US and Israel**

All artists discussed in this book generate socially engaged and activist art that criticizes rabbinical institutions—given that textual interpretation, halakhic law, and the formation of religious rituals are primarily institutional constructs. Feminist art is one of the significant fields of activist art, and merges research, creative output, and social activism. Since its inception in 1970s America, such art has played a significant role in the social change prompted by feminism.[[228]](#footnote-228) It continues to combine creative activity, social activism, and political thought. Jewish feminist artists enact this approach, adding current rabbinical institutions and their patriarchal foundations as subjects of criticism.

The critical feminist Jewish art discussed in this study is not concerned with the **validity** of tradition, but rather with its **formation**.[[229]](#footnote-229) Its use of tempered radicalism, which is dominant in religious feminist schools, is an innovation within the field of feminist art. The ideology at the core of tempered radicalism does not fundamentally reject the institution and its laws, but rather criticizes them in efforts to advance reform. The artists discussed in this book are radical in their criticism of the patriarchal foundations that support Jewish religious schools. At the same time, their radicalism is tempered by their commitment to Jewish religious tradition: although Golan criticizes and challenges the patriarchal values reflected by religious texts (such as the acquisition of women through marriage), she simultaneously emphasizes its sanctity by using the *genizah* stamp on photographs of her “high-heel” work. Aylon did not erase the biblical text or even mark the *chumashim* she used in her work. Instead, she highlighted the misogynist and anti-humanist verses on transparent paper laid over the holy books. In so doing, she positioned her work within the borders of the hermeneutic religious community that attributes sanctity to these texts. Jacobs-Yinon, too, does not attempt to dismantle or devalue the judicial Orthodox institution but rather to expand it, so that it may include female rabbinical judges as well. Arnovitz similarly emphasized that she does not question the necessity or significance of modesty regulations, but rather objects to male rabbis constructing them and generating pornographic discourse through them. Furthermore, Arnovitz does not reject the Orthodox Jewish halakha, but demands that women be included in the formation of religious law, and that halakhic discourse thereby include their point of view, which it has thus far omitted. In fact, throughout this book, I have shown how the criticism of feminist Jewish artists in the US and Israel always manifests as the re-enforcement of tradition rather than a departure from it. This approach indeed coincides with dominant feminist-Jewish attitudes in the US and Israel that value **subversive** activity over **revolutionary** activity. Their tactic, also referred to as “devoted resistance,” is to express critique in the name of the religion and culture with which they identify while working to repair their patriarchal tendencies.

My findings regarding the nature of feminist criticism by Jewish artists align with the conclusions of art critic Eleanor Heartney, art scholar Gannit Ankori, Israel-based scholar of visual culture Yael Guilat, and art scholar Tal Dekel. Heartney investigated depictions of the Catholic image of the Virgin Mary in the art of American women artists during the end of the 20th century; [[230]](#footnote-230)Ankori studied the works of Palestinian artists who interact with their traditional environment (Christian or Muslim); [[231]](#footnote-231) Guilat discussed video art by secular and traditional Israeli artists who explore the halakhic approach to gender issues; [[232]](#footnote-232) and Dekel examined the works of Ethiopian women artists in Israel who criticize the rabbinical institution while seeking to foster a sense of communal belonging for themselves and their community.[[233]](#footnote-233) Through their respective fields, these scholars have shown that contemporary artists in various geographical and cultural spheres do not reject their culture, but rather affirm it by challenging the oppressive patriarchal dictation that excludes them as women.

The work of feminist Jewish artists also coincides with these findings, as they remain deeply connected to their culture of origin despite rejecting its patriarchal foundations. However, their work is also distinct from that of artists discussed by the above-mentioned scholars, and is unique in its effect not only within the art world, but also within the religious communities to which they belong. The commitment of feminist Jewish artists to the rituals, texts, and customs of their religious worlds is expressed precisely in the incisive criticism of their works, i.e. in their endeavor to shake up male control of religious Jewish institutions. Indeed, religious feminist Jewish women in general, and feminist Jewish artists in particular, are critical of the religious world, their approach rooted in the prevalent theological outlook of religious Jewish feminism, which regards critical discourse as a truly religious act.

Throughout this book, I have shown that critical feminist Jewish art in the US and Israel has had a reciprocal relationship with the general feminist and activist art in the US since the 1970s. According to art scholars Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, American feminist artists of the 1970s were significant in inserting the female voice into works of art, and using art to express their experience.[[234]](#footnote-234) The feminist Jewish art discussed in this book follows in the footsteps of feminist American art of the 1970s in its subject matter, iconography, the critical discourse it strives to foster, and its combined use of activism and aesthetics. Like feminist American artists who worked during the 1970s, Aylon, Jacobs-Yinon, and Molgan are not content to exhibit objects in galleries or museums, but use their art to be active outside of the art world, as well, and therefore work within the religious Jewish worlds. Art by Molgan, Laderman-Ukeles, and Arnovitz is reminiscent of works by feminist American artists of the 1970s, which introduced a new outlook that subverted common patriarchal attitudes and challenged the male gaze. More explicitly, the *niddah* art by Aylon, Laderman-Ukeles, and Molgan directly corresponds with the 1972 work by feminist American Jewish artist Carolee Schneemann (b. 1939), and *Mikva Dreams* by Laderman-Ukeles echoes Schneemann’s work *Interior Scroll*, presented in 1975.

Works by feminist Jewish artists brought a direct, critical preoccupation with the religious Jewish establishment—including religious texts, halakha, and institutions—into the fields of feminist art in the US and Israel; therein lies their uniqueness. Laderman-Ukeles’s work was unusual in the context of feminist American art during the 1970s and 1980s, as it dealt with Jewish subjects otherwise omitted from it. Works by Aylon from the early 1990s on, are unique for marking the leap of feminist Jewish American art toward critical preoccupation with religious subjects. In Israel, modern-Orthodox artists Golan, Molgan, Arnovitz, and Jacobs-Yinon, have, since the 1990s, generated within the art world a subversive feminist critique, which had previously been absent from Israeli art, and therein lies their significance.

**The Contribution of Jewish Feminist Art to the Jewish Religious Worlds in the US and in Israel**

The artists discussed in this study work to incite reform within religious Jewish worlds via the art world, which allows them to foster public and political discourses that may inspire change in their religious environments. The *toenet rabbanit* (rabbinical court advocate) Rivkah Lubitch, whose feminist *midrash* was presented at the exhibition *A Tale of a Woman and a Robe*,discussed in Chapter 3,[[235]](#footnote-235) offered her own explanation on the significance of religious criticism in the media and art world. On the exhibitions’ closing night, Lubitch explained that art by feminist Orthodox women in various artistic disciplines is acutely important, as these women are still excluded from involvement in the halakha and their influence within religious communities remains limited. In 2017, the rabbinical leadership of the OU (Union of Jewish Orthodox Congregations of America) published a policy document regarding the integration of women into community leadership roles. The document, which aims to pave the way for all modern-Orthodox US synagogues, allows women to provide social services within their community such as spiritual guidance, but restricts them from becoming leaders of religious life in the synagogue. In fact, even when women do engage in halakhic or Torah study, their low symbolic status as religious leaders keeps them from promoting significant change. Therefore, claims Lubitch, the worlds of media and art serve as an alternative sphere of activity for change: “If we think a halakhic change should be made […] we need to do more than write halakhic articles […] we will make paintings, and create artwork, and write *midrashim* […] only this can successfully effect change.”

In her exhibition catalogue, Jacobs-Yinon also described the significance of the art world as an alternative sphere of feminist activity to those of the Orthodox Jewish world—namely, feminist activism in the areas of Torah study, halakhic law, and religious thought, which, though it does exist, still rests in the margins of rabbinical discourse.[[236]](#footnote-236) The artist noted her ineligibility to serve as a witness or judge in rabbinical courts; in this context, she described the art world as a unique space that allows her to submit her “testimony” and make her voice heard: “The work of art is the only witness I am permitted to bear, from **without** and not **within**” [author’s emphasis].[[237]](#footnote-237) Molgan and Laderman-Ukeles, too, stated that it is the art world which allows them to openly address subjects that are considered taboo in their religious worlds.[[238]](#footnote-238) Therefore, feminist Orthodox artists work to cultivate reform specifically through the worlds of art and media, which allow them to generate public and political discourse that can effect change within their religious worlds.

Through this study, I found that when the artists actively cooperated with other agents in the field to foment meaningful discourse on their works and the issues they raise, within the religious communities, they succeeded. This is a significant finding given the marginality of the arts in religious Jewish communities in Israel and the US.[[239]](#footnote-239) Throughout the book, I have shown how Jewish feminist artists in the US and Israel interact with different fields agents, including those outside of the art world. I contended that the activism of the artists and other field agents is that which generates discourse around these works: Aylon cultivated discourse not only with curator Norman Kleeblatt, who showcased her work in Jewish museums around the US, but also with rabbis whom she invited to museum discussions, which were very fruitful. Jacobs-Yinon was active within the art world but also stimulated discourse outside of it; she engaged the media and screened her film in numerous religious communities and on many public stages, her artwork challenging even the religious establishment itself. Hagit Molgan’s work was widely discussed by Israeli art critics, but the engagement of the Israeli Orthodox community with her art was prompted by the gallery discussions she organized for male and female members of her religious kibbutz, which eventually caught the attention of feminist Orthodox women leaders. Disseminating images of the artwork through the media played a central role in generating discourse on them within religious communities, as was the case for both Nechama Golan and Karabelnikov-Paz. On the other hand, works by Arnovitz and Laderman-Ukeles, who did not make a concerted, active effort to create visibility for their work in religious Jewish communities, did not emerge beyond the art world, although the artists themselves wished to be active within their religious communities, as well.[[240]](#footnote-240) The agency of the artists and the efforts of various field agents to cultivate discourse outside of the art world is therefore of acute importance.[[241]](#footnote-241) Without these, the artwork remains an object that may be discussed in public, but does not evolve into the kind of ongoing discourse that extends beyond the confines of the art world and inspires religious discourse that could lead to change.

**Between the US and Israel**

Comparing the nature of feminist criticism emerging from feminist Jewish art in Israel to its US counterpart, suggests no substantial difference between the two. Both US-based Aylon and Israel-based Golan engaged in moderate-radical critique of Jewish religious practices. Both Jacobs-Yinon, born in Israel, and Arnovitz, who immigrated to Israel from the US, were critical of the rabbinical establishment in Israel, and in this perspective, their works share more commonalities than differences. Indeed, contrary to earlier decades, since the 1990s the two feminist Jewish worlds have operated in parallel, with much resemblance between activity in the US and Israel,[[242]](#footnote-242) and this has largely applied to feminist art, as well. One exception is *aginut* (which was not extensively discussed in this study),[[243]](#footnote-243) one of the primary issues in modern-Orthodox halakha. *Aginut* is addressed by American artists, but is nearly absent from the works of Israel-born artists.[[244]](#footnote-244) Aylon’s work *The Women’s Section* (1997), touched on the subject, as did a series of works by Arnovitz (2005-2010).[[245]](#footnote-245) Its absence from Israeli art coincides with its eradication from religious feminist discourse in Israel. This distinction between Israel and the US was expressed in a conversation between Israeli rabbinical advocate Rivkah Lubitch and Belda Lindenbaum, who was a US-based feminist activist and major contributor to religious feminist initiatives.

Lubitz describes a lecture she gave at the “Lavi Conference” in 1998, and recalls Lindenbaum’s critical comment at the event: “But… you forgot about one thing. What about the *aguna* issue?”[[246]](#footnote-246) In hindsight, Lubitz concludes:

Belda was right, the issue of women’s personal status wasn’t a top priority to me […] questions like why am I excluded from *avodat hashem* (service of God); how am I, as a woman, supposed to perform *avodat hashem*; what is my role in the world; and what is my place and status in Judaism as a woman—I saw these as the big, existential questions of life, rather than matters concerning the duties of husband and wife, division of property, and the like, which I thought carried a “lighter” religious weight.[[247]](#footnote-247)

Indeed, it was not until the 2000s that the subject truly became a part of religious feminist activism in Israel,[[248]](#footnote-248) this despite the fact that more women are negatively impacted by *aginut* in Israel than in the US, as the Israeli government does not recognize civil marriage or divorce.[[249]](#footnote-249)

In one case, I did find a clear distinction between the spheres of significance put forth by Israel-based works and the feminist criticism of US-based works. In the Israeli art world, criticism or at least ambivalence regarding *niddah* laws has been widespread since the 1970s. In the US on the other hand, it is nearly impossible to find artwork that deals with *tevila* from an explicitly critical perspective. It is therefore in Israel, where state law assigns exclusive authority over religious affairs to the Chief Rabbinate, and grants Orthodox institutions control of the *mikvas*, that criticism on these subjects prevails. In the US, on the other hand, where religion is separate from state, Jewish artists employ a free minority discourse that operates within an American majority society and in relationship to it, and seek to empower their identity as Jewish, feminist women.

The most significant differences between Jewish feminist art in Israel and its US equivalent can be found in its reception and in the nature of the discourse surrounding it. Jewish art, including feminist Jewish art, and art by religious women in particular, does not earn recognition in the art world and is rarely displayed or collected by prestigious museums in the US or Israel. Yet, while in Israel there is no designated Jewish art field and women producing Jewish art therefore attempt acceptance into the general Israeli art field from which they are excluded, in the US Jewish art is an established field that operates through museums, Jewish cultural institutions, curators, private collectors, artists’ organizations, and artists’ *beit midrash* groups. The Jewish art field in the US enables women artists who deal with Judaism to gain visibility and recognition in this niche field, which is not an option for women artists in Israel.

The reception and social impact of artistic work in the two Jewish worlds is culture-specific and is influenced by the artistic fields in which the artists operate; it is also influenced by the social and theological foundations that distinguish various contemporary Jewish sects and Jewish societies in the US and Israel. Throughout this book, I have argued the influence of dominant discourse in religious Jewish communities and different Jewish sects in the US and Israel on interpretations of the artists’ works. I have shown that, in fact, the various dominant theological outlooks in these communities produce different interpretations of the art, prompting either its acceptance or rejection. For instance, Golan’s works were accepted by the discourse of Jewish art in the US and Israel but did not penetrate the Israeli art world, and were harshly criticized by the conservative Orthodox community in Israel. Aylon’s works on the other hand, which are no less radical than Golan’s, were accepted by the Jewish art world in the US and managed to penetrate the Jewish non-Orthodox world, a center of gravity in the American Jewish community. In the US, Aylon’s works were interpreted based on a theological foundation that carries weight in the non-Orthodox American community. In contrast, Golan’s works in Israel were not supported by a broad, established theological platform that could channel them into the conservative mainstream of the dominant Orthodox community, and were therefore rejected by it. In addition, critical theological American discourse is foreign to the Orthodox world in Israel, so much so that Aylon’s *My Notebooks* was dismissed as an example of “victimhood discourse,” and her entreaty for *tikkun olam* was not understood.

Interpretive discourse on *niddah* and *mikva* art in the US is also distinct from its Israeli counterpart. While the Jewish art field in the US tends not to interpret *mikva* and *niddah* art as subversive even when it incorporates critical elements, Israeli discourse favors a radical interpretation of it.[[250]](#footnote-250) For instance, Aylon’s *My Marriage Bed* (2001) and *My Clean Days* (2001) were not perceived as critical in the US. In Israel, on the other hand, in light of the precedent Weinfeld set in the 1970s and in-line with the critical discourse Molgan generated in the 2000s, Aylon’s art was interpreted as a bleak, despondent, and critical perspective on the laws of *niddah*.

In summary, critical feminist Jewish art in the US and Israel serves as a subversive workshop for the persistent scrutiny of tradition; it subverts its regimenting constructions in an attempt to reform it. Despite the artists’ critical approach, acts that seem like provocation, anti-halakhic, or anti-religious, are upon closer examination revealed to be religious acts that aim for *tikkun olam*. German sociologist Ulrich Beck begins his book *A God of One’s Own* with an explanation of the book’s title,[[251]](#footnote-251) which draws from *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), the title of a book by feminist English writer Virginia Woolf. Woolf asserted the woman’s need for a room of her own in order to discover her creativity. Beck adds to her words, stating that a woman who is able to close the door behind her has the opportunity to break conventions. The lock on the door means freedom to develop independent ideas.[[252]](#footnote-252) At the core of Beck’s theory, which responds to the collapse of the secularization thesis, is the claim that Orthodoxy today manages to grip modern individuals due to the freedom they have to create a “God of one’s own” in a way that aligns both with religious ideas and modern liberal outlooks that place the individual at the center. [[253]](#footnote-253)

The different spheres of meaning that the artists engage in, and the “third spaces” they create for themselves, allow them to generate art that is both critical and traditional without any contradiction. In Beck’s terms, their ability to “close the door behind them” and disconnect from the authority of the religious establishment allows them to break its conventions. Once they do so, the art world becomes a sphere in which they can reshape their Jewish world, and thereby redeem it.

1. Jane de Hart Mathews, “Art and Politics in Cold War America,” *American Historical Review* 81 (1976): 774. See more Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Laura Meyer, “Power and Pleasure: Feminist Art Practice and Theory in the United States and Britain,” in *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*, ed. Amelia Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 317–342. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Many studies on *niddah* laws have focused on its conceptual association with ‘purity’ and ‘impurity’ from a critical feminist perspective. See: Rachel Adler, “‘In Your Blood Live’: Re-visions of a Theology of Purity,” *Tikkun* 8.1 (1993): 38–41; Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. On changes in the rationale of *dinei tehara* (family purity laws) over generations, see Jonah Steinberg, “From a ‘pot of filth’ to a ‘hedge of roses’ (and back): Changing theorizations of menstruation in Judaism,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 13.2 (1997): 5–27; Rahel Wasserfall, *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish life and law* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See, for instance, Joan Semmel and April Kingsley, “Sexual Imagery in Women’s Art,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 1.1 (1980): 1–6; Lisa Tickner, “The Body Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists since 1970,” in *Looking on Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media*, ed. Rosemary Betterton (London: Routledge, 1987), 235–253; Miriam Schapiro and Faith Wilding, “Cunts/Quilts/Consciousness,” *Heresies* 24 (1989): 6–17; Nead, *The Female Nude*, 60–69; Rosemary Betterton, *An intimate distance: women, artists, and the body* (London: Routledge,1996); Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London: Routledge, 1997); Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A history and theory of identification and the visual arts* (Oxon: Routledge, 2012); Emily E. Culpepper, “Positively Breaking Taboos: Why and How I Made the Film PERIOD PIECE,” *The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22.2 (2006): 140–145; Gannit Ankori, “Living it Out: Period Piece – Response (Reflections on its Art Historical Context),” *The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22.2 (2006): 140–144; Anna C. Chave, “‘Normal Ills’: On Embodiment, Victimization, and the Origins of Feminist Art,” *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, eds. Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2006), 132–157; Christine Ross, “The Paradoxical Bodies of Contemporary Art,” *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*, ed. Amelia Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 293–390; Abigail Solomon Godeau, “The Woman Who Never Was,” *WACK! Art and the feminist Revolution* [catalogue, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC; PS1,New York; Vancouver Art Gallery], curator: Cornelia Butler (Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 2007), 328–337; Gail Levin, “Beyond the Pale: Jewish Identity, Radical Politics and Feminist Art in the United States,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 4.2 (2005): 205–232; Gail Levin, “Women’s Sexuality in the Work of Jewish-American Feminist Artists,” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies and Gender Issues* 14 (2007):63–96; Gail Levin, “Review Essay: Jewish American Artists: whom does that include?” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 9.3 (2010): 428–429; Lisa E. Bloom, “Barbie’s Jewish Roots, Jewish’ Women Bodies and Feminist Art,” in *Jews and Sex*, ed. Nathan Abrams (Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications, 2008), 121–137. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See David Sperber, “The Abject: Menstruation, Impurity and Purification in Jewish Feminist Art,” *Matronita: Jewish Feminist Art* [catalogue, Mishkan Le’Omanut, Museum of Art, Ein Harod], curators: David Sperber and Dvora Liss (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 2012), 142–117 (page numbers are in reverse in the bilingual publication); Orna Oryan, “Female Artists in their Pollution and their Purity,” in *Period: Studies of Menstruation in Israel*, eds. Inbal Ester Cicurel et al. (Israel: Sapir Academic College, 2017), 106–136 (Hebrew); Roni Tzoreff, “Beyond Abjection: The Niddah in Contemporary Art, a Gender-oriented Halakhic Discussion,” *Muza: Journal for Graduate Students in the Humanities* 1 (2017): 88–108 (Hebrew), http://mandelschool.huji.ac.il/sites/default/files/mandel/files/muza1-tzoreff.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. An exception to this is a study by Paula J. Birnbaum, who asserted the uniqueness and significance of the *Matronita* exhibition, and examined the institutional criticism produced by Orthodox Jewish feminist artists in relation to Israeli rabbinical institutions. In this context, among other things, Birnbaum discussed Molgan’s works, placing them in the broader context of the art world and the Jewish religious and Haredi worlds in Israel.

See Paula J. Birnbaum, “Modern-Orthodox Feminism: Art, Jewish Law, and the Quest for Equality,” *Contemporary Israel: New Insights and Scholarship*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 131–165. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. On the significance of the *Matronita* exhibition, see: Paula J. Birnbaum, “Modern-Orthodox Feminism: Art, Jewish Law, and the Quest for Equality,” *Contemporary Israel: New Insights and Scholarship*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 131–165. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Dana Gillerman, “Adom Meza’aze’ah” (Shocking Red), *Haaretz*, February 3, 2004, http://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/1.943443. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ziva Yellin, “Hagit Molgan, ‘*Lo Mukhana*’” (Hagit Molgan, *Not Prepared* [exhibition text, The Gallery at Kibbutz Be’eri], curator: Ziva Yellin (Kibbutz Be’eri, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Linda Weintraub et al., *Art on the Edge and Over: Searching for Art’s Meaning in Contemporary Society, 1970s–1990s* (Litchfield, CT: ArtInsights, Inc., 1996), 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Gillerman, “Adom Meza’aze’ah.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. In Lea Shakdiel, “Isha meshuḥreret: Bat shel abba o bat she ima? Hirhurim be-ikvot hata’arukha ‘*Lo Mukhana*’ shel Hagit Molgan” (Free Woman: Father’s Daughter or Mother’s Daughter? Thoughts about Hagit Molgan’s Exhibition *Not Prepared*), *De’ot* 19 (2004): 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Orna Oryan, *Your Body’s Blood* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2013), 81–82 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Later, in 2017, Molgan made the video work *Nabat*, which also incorporated sugar cubes, and criticized the patriarchal *Mizrahi* religious world in which she was raised. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Haim Maor, ‘‘Exhibition: the Red Mark,’’ *Ha’daf Ha’yarok*, *Kultura*, 22.2.2004, p. 20, http://www,kibbutz,org,il/itonut/2004/haver/040122,kultura,htm (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. When the screen displays an image on top of an image, and both are simultaneously visible in various degrees of transparency. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Yellin, “Hagit Molgan, ‘*Lo Mukhana*’.” [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ziva Yalin, *Teudat Zehut: Yitzugim Bikorti’im shel Zehuyot BeO’manot Yisraeli Akhshavit* (Identification Card: Critical Representation of Identities in Contemporary Israeli Art), Doctoral Dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 2017, p. 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Maor, ‘‘Exhibition: the Red Mark.’’ [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. A *tzitzit* is a special garment, also called *tallit katan* (small tallit), with knotted fringes on each corner in accordance with the biblical commandment in *Bamidbar* (Book of Numbers) 15:38-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Yellin, “Hagit Molgan, ‘*Lo Mukhana*’.” [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Maor, ‘‘Exhibition: the Red Mark.’’ [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Gillerman, “Adom Meza’aze’ah.” [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. From video documentation of the discussion, undated, artist’s private archive. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Essentially this was the display of a readymade object; the artist did not cut into the *tzitziot* but displayed them as they were in the gallery. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. From a message correspondence between Hazan-Stern and myself, 2.9.2015. Hazan-Stern has given her approval for the quotation of an originally private discussion between her and myself. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Yalin, *Teudat Zehut*, 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Hagit Molgan, “Me’aḥorei ha-kela’im shel ha-ta’arukha ‘Lo mukhana’ [Behind the Scenes of the Exhibition *Not Prepared*],” *Alim, Sa’ad* 2228 (January 16, 2004): 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. David Sperber (Organizer and Chairperson), Contemporary Feminist Art, departmental colloquium, Gender Studies Program, Bar-Ilan University, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ze’ela Dok-Diyuk, “Ta’arukhata shel Hagit Molgan ‘Lo mukhana’” (Hagit Molgan’s Exhibition *Not Prepared*) unpublished seminar paper, supervised by Ruth E. Iskin (Department of Art History, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2006), 29–30. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Gillerman, “Adom Meza’aze’ah.” [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Adam Baruch, “The Women Emerging from the Box of Taboo,” *Yediot Akharonot*, *Mosaf 7 Yamim*, 14.3.1978, 40-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Similarly, in the work *Kriah*, presented by Weinfeld at the *Ke’evim* Exhibition (1975, Debel Gallery, Jerusalem, curator: Yona Fisher), a halakhic text is displayed that defines the obligations of *kriah* (the ritual of tearing one’s garment after a relative’s death) in the context of the laws of mourning. Additionally, *Mukkat Etz* (lit. “injured by a stick,” which refers to women who have lost their virginity)—the title of Weinfeld’s work from 1979—invokes a Talmudic phrase relating to the loss of virginity. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. For more on Weinfeld’s pioneering works, see Gannit Ankori, “Yocheved Weinfeld’s Portraits of the Self,” *Women’s Art Journal* 10 (1989): 22–27; Gannit Ankori, “The Jewish Venus,” in *Complex Identities: Jewish Consciousness and Modern Art*, eds. Matthew Baigell and Milly Heyd (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 247–250; Gannit Ankori, “Living it Out: Period Piece – Response (Reflections on its Art Historical Context),” *The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22.2 (2006):140–144; Tal Dekel, “Feminist Art Hitting the Shores of Israel: Three Case Studies in Impossible Times,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 33.2 (2012):113–117; David Sperber, “The Abject: Menstruation, Impurity and Purification in Jewish Feminist Art,” *Matronita: Jewish Feminist Art* [catalogue, Mishkan Le’Omanut, Museum of Art, Ein Harod], curators: David Sperber and Dvora Liss (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 2012), 142–117 (page numbers are in reverse in the bilingual publication). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. A description of the performance and the halakhic texts read by the artist are quoted in a booklet documenting the performance. See Gideon Efrat, *Meitzag 76*, Israel Painters and Sculptors Association, Tel Aviv: The Tel Aviv Artists House, 1976. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. This description is according to statements by Sarah Breitberg-Semel in an electronic correspondence with myself, 10.11.2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. For instance, in the *Yediot Akharonot* newspaper, critic Ilan Nachshon wrote that the artist “attacks the way in which religion and religious individuals treat her and her fellow women.” See Ilan Nachshon, “*Lo Buba Motek*” (“Not A Doll Sweetheart”), *Yediot Akharonot*, 5.6.1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Dekel, “Feminist Art Hitting the Shores of Israel,” 127 n. 17; Sperber, “The Abject,” 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Emanuel Bar-Kedma, “*Mikreh Isha*” “A Woman’s Case,” *Maariv*, 18.1.1991. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Yael Guilat, “Gender, Ritual and Video Art,” in *Beyond Halacha: Secularism, Traditionalism and ‘New Age’ Culture in Israel, Iyunim bi-tkumat Israel* (Studies in Israeli and modern Jewish society)*, thematic series*, eds. Gideon Katz, Shalom Ratzabi, and Yaacov Yadgar (Sede Boker: Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2014), 586 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Also see Ankori, “Yocheved Weinfeld’s Portraits,” 22–27. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Tal Kedel notes that Miriam Sharon (b. 1944) was the only artist who explicitly and openly worked in the spirit of feminism in 1970s Israel. See Tal Dekel, “Center-Periphery Relations: Women’s Art in Israel during the 1970s, the Case of Miriam Sharon,” *Consciousness, Literature and the Arts* 8.3 (2007), 1–22. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. *Passing the Batonette: Four Decades of Feminism in Israeli Art* [catalogue, Haifa Museum of Art], curators: Ilana Tenenbaum and Einat Amir (Haifa Museum of Art, in collaboration with HaMidrasha, School of Art, Beit Berl College, 2007), no page number, quote taken from the first page of text (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. See Sperber, “The Abject,” 127. On this work see Ziva Amishai-Maisels, “Ayana Friedman: Layers of Feminist Struggle*,” Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 15.1 (2016): 143–144. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Dok-Diyuk, “Hagit Molgan’s Exhibition,” 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Ibid., 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid., 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Irit Koren, *You Are Hereby Renewed unto Me: Gender, Religion and Power Relations in the Jewish Wedding Ritual* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2011), 91, n. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid., 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Audible speech whose source is not visible on-screen. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Miri Krimolowski, ‘Miri Krimolowski interviews Hagit Molgan,’ the *Ma Yihiyeh* radio program (Yoav Ginai), *Kol Yisrael* radio station (23.1.2004), *YouTube*, 13.6.2012, https://www,youtube,com/watch?v=eIyBCRQqD5o&feature=youtu,be. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Dok-Diyuk, “Hagit Molgan’s Exhibition,” 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Alice Efraim, “Impressions of the Hagit Molgan exhibition: *Lo Mukhana* [*Not Prepared*],” *Alim*, Sa’ad 2288 (16.1.2004), 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Dok-Diyuk, “Hagit Molgan’s Exhibition,” 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. *Chillul Hashem* is when the name of *Hashem* (God) is desecrated by the actions or behaviors of followers. In Jewish tradition, *chillul Hashem* is considered a particularly severe offense. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Dalia Roi, “A Response to a Response to a Response,” *Alim*, Sa’ad 2370 (4.6.2004), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Ayelet Wieder-Cohen, ‘Restoring Autonomy to Women, in Response to “*Leharbot Tehara*” by Yael Levin,’ *Makor Rishon, Mosaf Shabbat La’Torah*, *Hagut*, *Sifrut Ve’omanut*, 1.5.2012, https://musaf-shabbat,com/2012/06/01/%D7%AA%D7%92%D7%95%D7%91%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%9C%D7%92%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%A7%D7%95%D7%93%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%9D ((Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Dok-Diyuk, “Hagit Molgan’s Exhibition,” 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. The exhibition was shown in the US in 2006 at the Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery, at Wesleyan University, Connecticut, US, 2006, curator: Nina Felshin. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Dok-Diyuk, “Hagit Molgan’s Exhibition,” 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Yona Berman, “Exhibition: *Lo Mukhana*, Hagit Molgan-Hemel,” *Amudim: The Religious Kibbutz Periodical* 680 (5) (2004), 31-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Ibid., 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Tal Wiesel, “Hasimkha she’ba’teharah [The joy of *tehara*],” *Alim*, Sa’ad 2289 (23.1.2004), 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. David Asulin, “Tum’a ma’hi? Niflaot miToratecha [Impurity: What is it? Miracles of your teachings],” *Alim*, Sa’ad 2291 (6.2.2004), 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Anonymous female kibbutz member. “Letters to the Editor: ‘I Will Remove the Unclean Spirit from the Land’ (Zechariah 13:2),” *Amudim: The Religious Kibbutz Periodical* 682 (7-8) (2004), 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. In the traditional morning blessings in the Jewish siddur, men say, “Blessed…Who has not made me a woman,” and women say, “Blessed… Who has made me according to his will.” [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Anonymous kibbutz member, letters to the editor. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Dok-Diyuk, “Hagit Molgan’s Exhibition,” 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Yalin, Identification Card, 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. See for instance Rivkah Shimon, “Family Purity in Our Generation,” Tova Cohen (ed.), *Lihiyot Isha Yehudiyah: Divrei Ha’kenes Ha’beinleumi Ha’khamishi ‘Isha Ve’yehudata, 2007*,’ [To be a Jewish woman: Proceedings of the fifth international conference, ‘Woman and her Judaism,’ July 2007]. Jerusalem: Kolech – Religious Women’s Forum, 2009, 165-182 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Every betrothed Jewish woman in Israel is obligated by law to undergo “bridal consultation” through the Chief Rabbinate. The consultation includes studying the basics *niddah* laws. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Halakhic infertility is a condition in which a woman with either a short or long menstrual cycle cannot conceive due to *niddah* laws, which are stricter than the biblical commandment on the subject; the *niddah* laws delineate a minimum of five menstruation days plus seven clean days during which couples must abstain from intercourse. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. See for instance Daniel Rosnack, “Halakhic Infertility and its Medical, Moral, and National Implications – Discussions on Jewish Purity Laws in Light of a Shifting Reality,” *To Be a Jewish Woman*, 183-219 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Tali Berner, “Religious Feminism: Origins and Directions,” *Matronita: Jewish Feminist Art* [catalogue, Mishkan Le’Omanut, Museum of Art, Ein Harod], curators: David Sperber and Dvora Liss (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 2012), 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. See: Maayan Liebman-Sharon, NIKBA (2005), *YouTube*, 19.7.2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3ljRBe9GvA [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Irit Koren, “The Entrance of Women as Partners into the Field of Halachic Discourse: Sociological and Cultural Aspects,” Doctoral Dissertation (Bar-Ilan University, Israel, 2006), 87 (Hebrew); Orit Avishai, “Imagining the Orthodox in Emuna Elon’s Novel Heaven Rejoices: Voyeuristic, Reformist and Pedagogical Orthodox Artistic Expression,” *Israel Studies* 12.2 (2007): 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Yael Shenkar, ‘To Immerse, to Perform *bedika*, to Drive, to Divorce, to Celebrate the Ramadan, to Ride the Bus, to Live Your Life as a Woman According to the Halakha: on Women in a Religious World in the Films of Anat Yuta-Tzuria,” *Takriv: Ktav et La’kolnoa Docomentari* 5 (undated)

 http://takriv,net/article/%D7%9C%D7%98%D7%91%D7%95%D7%9C-%D7%9C%D7%91%D7%93%D7%95%D7%A7-%D7%9C%D7%A0%D7%94%D7%95%D7%92-%D7%9C%D7%94%D7%AA%D7%92%D7%A8%D7%A9-%D7%9C%D7%97%D7%92%D7%95%D7%92-%D7%90%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%9E/ (Hebrew) [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. For instance, in the films by graduates of the religious school Ma’aleh: “Eshet Cohen [Cohen’s wife]” (Nava Nussan-Hefetz, 2000), “Harat Olam [New Year’s Resolution]” (Ayala Zamir-Glick, 2007), “Lama Ha’Shemesh [Why does the Sun]” (Efrat Kaufman, 2011), and “Mishkafayim Tzehubim [Yellow Glasses]” (Shira Steinberg, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. See David Sperber, “Body and Sexuality in the Work of Modern-Orthodox Women Artists in Israel,” *Journal of Culture and Religion*,1–2 (2015): 17–39. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Shakdiel, “Free Woman,” 20–25. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Ibid., 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Ibid., 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Ayelet Wieder-Cohen, “Notes on the Closing Night of *Matronita* (11.4.2012),” *Kolech: Religious Women’s Forum* (undated),

http://www,old,kolech,org,il/maamar/%D7%93%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9D-%D7%91%D7%9B%D7%A0%D7%A1-%D7%A0%D7%A2%D7%99%D7%9C%D7%94-%D7%A9%D7%9C-%D7%9E%D7%98%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%AA%D7%90 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Ayelet Wieder-Cohen, “Restoring Autonomy to Women, in Response to *Leharbot Teharah* by Yael Levin,” *Makor Rishon*, *Musaf Shabbat La’Torah*, *Hagut, Sifrut* *Ve’omanut*, 1.5.2012, https://musaf-shabbat,com/2012/06/01/%D7%AA%D7%92%D7%95%D7%91%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%9C%D7%92%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%A7%D7%95%D7%93%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%9D (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Arthur Danto, “The Art World,” *Journal of Philosophy* 61 (1964): 571–584; Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Wesley Shrum, *The Role of Critics in High and Popular Art*, ed. John G. Richardson (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974). [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Pierre Bourdieu, “But Who Created the ‘Creators’?” in *Sociology in Question*, Trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage, 1993 [1981]), 139–148. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Pierre Bourdieu,“The Metamorphosis of Tastes,”in *Sociology in Question,* 108–116.

Bourdieu, the Metamorphosis, 159-160. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Sara Chinski, *Kingdom of the Meek: The Social Grammar of the Israeli Art Field* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2015), 39 (Hebrew). See more Sara Chinski, “Silence of the Fish: The Local versus the Universal in the Israeli Discourse on Art,” *Teoria Ubikoret* (Theory and Criticism)4 (1993): 105–122 (Hebrew); and Sara Chinski, “Eyes Wide Shut: The Acquired Albino Syndrome of the Israeli Art Field,” *Teoria Ubikoret* (Theory and Criticism)20 (2002): 57–86. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Tami Katz-Freiman, “A Matter of Distance,” *Desert Cliché: Israel Now—Local Images* [catalogue, Arad Museum, Israel; Museum of Art, Ein Harod, Israel; Herzliya Museum of Art, Israel; Baas Museum of Art, Miami Beach, Florida; Grey Art Gallery & Study Center of New York University, New York City], curators: Tami Katz-Freiman and Amy Cappellazzo (Tel Aviv, 1996), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Dalia Manor, “Pride and Prejudice, or: Frequently-found Models in the Historiography of Israeli Art,” *Protocols: History and Theory* 1 (2005), bezalel.secured.co.il/zope/home/he/1126095346/1126096536-manor/#\_edn6 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. In 2015, a petition was submitted to Israel’s Supreme Court asking that women of all religious sects be permitted to immerse in the *mikva* according to their respective beliefs and customs. Additionally, in 2016, Israel’s State Attorney’s Office accepted the petitioners’ request that the Supreme Court instruct the Ministry of Religious Services to uphold a “preservation of individual privacy regulation” for women wishing to immerse in the *mikva*, which would obligate religious councils to allow *tevila* without an attendant when women request it. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Laderman-Ukeles’s important position in the field of feminist art was first marked in the 2007 exhibition *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, organized by Cornelia Bulter, summarizing the work of feminist artists active in the 1970s. In fact, already in 1980, the art critic and curator Lucy Lippard included maintenance art in her essay, “Sweeping Changes,” one of the first attempts to offer a broad theoretical base for the feminist art of the 1970s, and discussion of feminism’s contributions to the art world. See Lucy R. Lippard, “Sweeping Exchanges: The Contribution of Feminism to the Art of the 1970s,” *Art Journal* 39 (1980): 362–365. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Lisa E. Bloom, *Jewish Identities in American Feminist Art: Ghosts of Ethnicity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Samantha Baskind, *Jewish Artists and the Bible in Twentieth-Century America* (Philadelphia, PA: Penn State University Press, 2014), 7. Baskind claims that the American art canon is characterized not only by its preference for white male artists but also, undeniably, for Christian artists. See Ibid., 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Sally M. Promey, “The Return of Religion in the Scholarship of American Art,” *The Art Bulletin* 85.3 (2003): 583–585. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Ibid., 600, n. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. James Elkins, *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (London: Routledge, 2004). For a review of studies and exhibitions on the link between art and religion, see: S. Brent Plate, “Reports of the Death of Religious Art Have Been Greatly Exaggerated,” *LARB*, 24.1.2017, https://lareviewofbooks,org/article/233865/. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Promey, “The Return of Religion,” 591. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Holland Cotter, “An Artist Redefines Power. With Sanitation Equipment,” *The New York Times*, 15.9.2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/16/arts/design/an-artist-redefines-power-with-sanitation-equipment.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Lucy R. Lippard, “Never Done: Women’s Work by Mierle Laderman-Ukeles,” *Mierle Laderman-Ukeles: Maintenance Art* [catalogue, Queens Museum, New York], curator: Patricia C. Phillips (New York: Queens Museum, New York and DelMonico Books, 2016), 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Patricia C. Phillips, “Making Necessity Art: Collisions of Maintenance and Freedom,” *Mierle Laderman-Ukeles: Maintenance Art*, 65, 70, 74–80. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. See Evyatar Marienberg, “What is Niddah? Menstruation in Judaism,” a presentation given at Polin: Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw (23.11. 2017), *YouTube*, 28.11. 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpLtiScoj4c. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Phillips, “Making Necessity Art,” 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, “Mikva Dreams: A Performance,” *Heresies: The Great Goddess* 5 (1978): 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Ibid., 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Dianne Ashton and Ellen M. Umansky, eds., *Four Centuries of Jewish Women’s Spirituality: A Sourcebook* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Laderman Ukeles, “Mikva Dreams: A Performance,” 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Displayed in the exhibition *Jewish Themes/Contemporary American Artists II*, curator: Susan Tumarkin Goodman, The Jewish Museum, New York, 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Marisa Newman, “Art as Transformation: An Interview with Multi-Media Artist Mierle Laderman-Ukeles,” *Jofa Journal* 6.2 (2006): 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Another performance by the artist in the same exhibition at the Jewish Museum focused on the transformative act of ritual immersion in the mikva as part of the conversion process, which joins the person to the Jewish people. See Bloom, *Jewish Identities*, 54–55. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Newman, “Art as Transformation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. On the feminist spirituality movement see Cynthia Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spiritualty Movement in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 38–61. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Gloria F. Orenstein, *The Reflowering of the Goddess* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990). [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Jennie Klein, “Goddess: Feminist Art and Spirituality in the 1970s,” *Feminist Studies* 35.3 (2009): 575–602. See more Cynthia Eller, “Divine Objectification: The Representation of Goddesses and Women in Feminist Spirituality,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16.1 (2000): 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Wendy Griffin, “The Embodied Goddess: Feminist Witchcraft and Female Divinity,” *Sociology of Religion* 56.1 (1995): 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Laderman Ukeles, “Mikva Dreams: A Performance,” 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Helena Reckitt, ed., *Art and Feminism* (London: Phaidon Press, 2001), 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Carolee Schneemann, *Cezanne, She Was a Great Painter: The Second Book January 1975, Unbroken Words to Women, Sexuality Creativity Language Art History* (New York: Tresspuss Press, 1975 [1974]). [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Linda Weintraub, Arthur C. Danto, and Thomas McEvilley, eds., *Art on the Edge and Over: Searching for Art’s Meaning in Contemporary Society, 1970s–1990s* (Litchfield, CT: ArtInsights, Inc., 1996), 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. ###  Laderman Ukeles, “Mikva Dreams: A Performance,” 52–54.

 [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Julia Kristeva emphatically articulated this position. See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982 [1980]). Criticism of the reigning discourse on the *niddah* ritual like that offered by Laderman-Ukeles, was suggested by the anthropologists Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottleib. See Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). In its Jewish context see Tova Hartman, *Feminism Encounters Traditional Judaism: Resistance and Accommodation* (Hanover & London: Brandeis University Press, 2007), 81–98. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Linda Montano, *Performance Artists Talking in the Eighties: Sex, Food, Money/Fame, Ritual/Death* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 457. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Laderman Ukeles, “Mikva Dreams: A Performance,” 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Phyllis Trible, “Eve and Miriam: From the Margins to the Center,” *Feminist Approaches to the Bible: Symposium at the Smithsonian Institution* 5 (1994): 5–24; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: a Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1994); Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent: Sex and Politics in Early Christianity* (New York: Random House,1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards Philosophy of Women’s Liberation* )Boston: Beacon Press, 1985 [1973](; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985); Naomi Goldenberg, *Resurrecting the Body: Feminism, Religion, and Psychotherapy* (New York: Crossroad, 1993); Daphne Hampson, *After Christianity* )London: SCM Press, 1996(; Carol P. Christ, *The Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (London: Routledge, 1997). See more Susan S. Sered, *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister: Religions Dominated by Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Rachel Adler, “The Jew Who Wasn’t There: Halacha and the Jewish Woman,” *Response: A Contemporary Jewish Review* 7 (1973 [1971]): 77–87; Paula Hyman, “The Other Half: Women in the Jewish Tradition,” in *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives*, ed., Elizabeth Koltun (New York: Schocken Books, 1976 [1972]), 105–113; Sally Priesand, *Judaism and the New Woman* (New York: Behrman Hose, 1975); Leonard J. Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow,1976); Charlotte Baumet, Paula Hyman and Sonya Michel eds., *The Jewish Woman in America* (New Yok: New American Library,1976); Rachel Biale, *Women and Jewish Law: The* *Essential Texts, Their History, and Their Relevance for Today* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984); Judith Baskin, “The Separation of Women in Rabbinic Judaism,” in *Women, Religion and Social Change*, eds., Yvonne Y. Haddad and Elison B. Findly (New York: State University of New York, 1985), 3–18; Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism From a Feminist Perspective* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990); Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988); Tamar Ross, “Can the Demand for Change In the Status of Women be Halakhically Legitimated?,” *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 42.4 (1993): 478–491. See more Ronit Irshai and Tanya Zion-Waldoks, “Ha-feminism ha-Ortodoxy-ha-moderni be-yisrael: bein nomos le-narativ,” (Modern-Orthodox Feminism in Israel: From Nomos to Narrative), *Mishpat u-mimshal* (Law and Government) 15.1–2 (2013): 247, nn. 21 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Ibid. See more Tanya Zion Waldoks, “Politics of Devoted Resistance: Agency, Feminism, and Religion among Orthodox Agunah Activists in Israel,” *Gender & Society* 29.1 (2015): 73–97. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. In the same way Christian feminist Carol Christ, in the 1970s, challenged feminist criticism of the Bible, arguing that it reflects a submission to the historical patriarchal interpretation of the text. See Carol P. Christ, “Women’s Liberation and the Liberation of God: An Essay in Story Theology,” in *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives*, ed. Elizabeth Koltun (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 11–17. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Laderman Ukeles, “Mikva Dreams: A Performance,” 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Rachel Adler, “Tum’ah and Taharah: Ends and Beginnings,” in *The Jewish Woman*, ed. Elizabeth Koltun (New York: Schocken Press, 1976 [1973]), 63–71. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Blu Greenberg, “The Mikva,” in *Four Centuries of Jewish Women’s Spirituality*, 314. See more, Blu Greenberg, “Integrating Mikva and Modernity,” *Sh’ma: A Journal of Jewish Ideas* 11.205 (1980): 37–38. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Bloom, *Jewish Identities*, 3; Matthew Baigell, *Jewish-American Artists and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 103; Matthew Baigell, *American Artists, Jewish Images* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 153–154. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Bloom, *Jewish Identities*, 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Susan Gubar, “Eating the Bread of Affliction: Judaism and Feminist Criticism,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 13.2 (1994): 293–316. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Norman L. Kleeblatt, “Passing into Multiculturalism,” *Too Jewish? Challenging Traditional Identities* [catalogue, The Jewish Museum, New York] curator: Norman L. Kleeblatt (New York and New Brunswick: The Jewish Museum and Rutgers University Press, 1996), 5–6; Bloom, *Jewish Identities*, 22–23, 84–85. The most important study on the issue of American Jews as “others” is Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006). See also, Karen Brodkin, *How the Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Ellen M. Umansky, “Feminism and the Reevaluation of Women’s Roles within American Jewish Life,” in *Women, Religion and Social Change*, eds. Yvonna Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1985), 478. On this, see also, Sylvia Barack-Fishman, *A* *Breath of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish Community* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 1–15; Dina B. Pinsky, *Jewish Feminists: Complex Identities and Activist Lives* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 67–68, 74–77. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Edna Kantorovitz, “Bloom, Lisa E. *Jewish Identities in American Feminist Art: Ghosts of Ethnicity*. New York and London: Routledge, 2006,” [Book Review], *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 5.1 (2007), <http://wjudaism.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/wjudaism/article/view/3159/1303>. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Newman, “Art as Transformation,” 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Matthew Baigell, “The Scroll in Context,” *Ruth Weisberg: Unfurled* [catalogue, Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles] curator: Barbara G. Gilbert (Los Angeles: Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles, 2007), 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Francesca DeBiaso, “Judy Chicago: Visions for Feminist Art,” *The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College Student Publications* 6 (2012): 32–38, http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student\_scholarship/6. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. See Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, “Female Imagery,” *Womanspace* *Journal* 1.3 (1973): 11–14. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Baigell, “The Scroll in Context,” 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Ibid., 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. See Rabbara C. Gilbert, *Ruth Weisberg: Unfurled*, 48. See also, Ruth Weisberg, “A Life in Art (2),” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies and Gender Issues* 7 (2004): 231–232. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. The performance “Four Questions,” showed by Lederman-Ukeles and Aylon at the Jewish Museum, New York, in June 1988, was the first artwork that presented a direct feminist critique of the Jewish tradition. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Aylon’s work is reminiscence of an earlier work by Schneemann, “Blood Work Diary,” (1972). See http://feministlibrary.tumblr.com/post/116368435045/carolee-schneemann-blood-work-diary-detail. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Helène Aylon, *Whatever Is Contained Must Be Released: My Jewish Orthodox Girlhood, My Life as a Feminist Artist* (New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 2012), 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Ibid. On the Biblical terms “pure” and “impure” and the gender relations they represent see Nicole J. Ruane, “Bathing, Status and Gender in Priestly Ritual,” in *A Question of Sex: Gender and Difference in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Deborah W. Rook (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 66–81. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Helène Aylon, *Official Website of the artist* (“[My Bridal Chamber”: “My Marriage Bed”/ “My Clean Days](http://www.heleneaylon.com/Bridal_Chamber.html)“) (2014), <http://www.heleneaylon.com/My_Marriage_Bed.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Rachel Adler, “In Your Blood Live: Re-visions of a Theology of Purity,” *Tikkun* 8.1 (1993): 38–41. On Adler’s changed viewpoint regarding the mikva see Mary Farrell-Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 39–41. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. The full version of the *Maintenance Art Manifesto* appears here: <http://www.queensmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Ukeles_MANIFESTO.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Tom Finkelpearl, “Interview: Mierle Laderman Ukeles – On Maintenance and Sanitation Art,” in *Dialogues in Public Art*, ed. Tom Finkelpearl (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 301–303. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Julia Kristeva suggested at the same time to view “femininity” as a position and not a definition. According to Kristeva “femininity” is what the patriarchal symbolic order pushes to the margins. See Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984 [1973]). [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. See Heidi I. Hartmann, “Capitalism, patriarchy, and job segregation by sex,” *Signs*: *special issue: Women and the Workplace: The Implications of Occupational Segregation* 1.3 (1976): 137–169. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. See for example, Betty Friedan, “The Problem That Has No Name,” in Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963), 15–32. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1989), 51–60. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. For an examination of the connections between maintenance art and the Marxist discourse and feminist Marxism, see Helen Molesworth, “Work Stoppages: Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Theory of Labor Value,” *Documents* 10 (1977): 19–22; Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site* *Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge. MA: MIT Press, 2002), 19–23; Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art*, Supporting Publics (New York: Routledge, 2011), 75–103; Rebecca L. Giordano, “Readymaintenance: systems, feminist economics, and the immaterial readymade in the work of Mierle Laderman Ukeles,” masters’ thesis (The University of Texas, Austin, 2015), 11–19. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Miwon Kwon, “In Appreciation of Invisible Work: Mierle Laderman Ukeles and the Maintenance of the ‘White Cube’,” *Documents* 10 (1977): 15–18; Molesworth, “Work Stoppages;” For more on maintenance art as institutional critique see Julia Bryan Wilson, “A Curriculum for Institutional Critique, or the Professionalization of Conceptual Art,” in *New Institutionalism*, ed. Jonas Ekeberg (Oslo: Office of Contemporary art, Norway, 2003), 89–109. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Kwon, “In Appreciation of Invisible Work,” 15–18; Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 19–23. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Helen Molesworth, “Cleaning Up in the 1970s: The Work of Judy Chicago, Mary Kelly and Mierle Laderman Ukeles,” in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, eds. Michael Newman and John Bird (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 107–122; Helen Molesworth, “House Work and Art Work,” *October* 92 (2000): 71–97; Helen Molesworth, *Work Ethic* (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art in association with Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 131–135. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Jackson, *Social Works*, 75–103. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Relational aesthetics is an art aims at creating connections among people through the interaction of the viewer with the works. See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon and Paris: Les Presses du Reel, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Helena Reckitt, “Forgotten Relations: Feminist Artists and Relational Aesthetics,” in *Politics in a Glass: Case Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial* *Transgressions*, eds. Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry(Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 107–122. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. For more on this seeChristine Wertheim, “After the Revolution, Who’s Going to Pick Up the Garbage?” *X-TRA Contemporary Art Quarterly* 12.2 (2009): 13–21. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. See Fred Wasserman, “From Maintenance to Repair: Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Birthing Tikkun Olam,” in *Rupture and Repair in Art, Judaism, and Society,* eds. Emily D. Bilski and Avigdor Shinan(Jerusalem: The Adi Foundation in Memory of Adi Dermer [Blumberg] z”l, 2010), 46–47. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Bloom, *Jewish Identities*, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. See Daniel Sperber, *Minhagei Yisrael* (Jewish Customs), vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 2001), 185–188 (Hebrew); Daniel Sperber, *Minhagei Yisrael* (Jewish Customs), vol. 4 (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 2005), 298–299 (Hebrew). In the Hasidic world, it is customary for men to immerse in the mikva before morning prayer. This immersion is for the purpose of symbolic sanctification and not for the purpose of purification. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Niza Yanay and Tamar Rappoport, “Nationalism and Niddah: The Women’s Body as a Text,” in *Will You Listen to My Voice? Representations of Women in Israeli Culture*, ed. Yael Atzmon (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2001), 213–215 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Bloom, *Jewish Identities*, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Jacob Katz and Chava Weissler, “On Law, Spirituality and Society in Judaism: An Exchange between Jacob Katz and Chava Weissler,” *Jewish Social Studies* 2.2 (1996): 87–115. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Joan Wallach-Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 91.5 (1986): 1053–1075. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. See for example, Varda Polak Sahm, *The House of Secrets: The Hidden World of the Mikva* (Ben Shemen: Modan, 2005), 122–158 (Hebrew); Yemima Hovav, *Maidens Love Thee: The Religious and Spiritual Life of Jewish Ashkenazic Women in the Early Modern Period* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press & Carmel Press, 2009), (Hebrew); Aliza Lavie, *Women’s Customs – A Feminine Mosaic of Customs and Stories* (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth, 2012), (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Jane de Hart Mathews, “Art and Politics in Cold War America,” *American Historical Review* 81 (1976): 774.

 The work of later artists in this field were marked by the expression “Bad Girls,” introduced into the art world by the curator Marucia Tacker in the framework of a series of exhibition she organized under the same name. The first exhibitions took place in 1994 in The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York and the UCLA Wight Gallery. For a condensed survey of the “Bad Girls” phenomenon in feminist art in the past and present see Eleanor Heartney, “Bad Girls,” in *The Reckoning: Women Artists of the New Millennium*, eds. Eleanor Heartney, Helaine Posner, Nancy Princenthal, and Sue Scott (Munich, New York and London: Prestel, 2013), 15–23. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Laura Meyer, “Power and Pleasure: Feminist Art Practice and Theory in the United States and Britain,” in *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*, ed. Amelia Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 317–342. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. These conclusions were presented in the 1970s by the anthropologists Karen Sacks, Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and others. On this, see the survey by Hanna Herzog, *Realistic Women: Women in Israeli Local Politics* (Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 1994), 27–34 (Hebrew). See more Ruth Gavison, “Feminism and the public/privet Distinction,” *Stanford Law Review* 45.1 (1992): 1–45; Tracy E. Higgins, “Reviving the Public/Private Distinction in Feminist Theorizing,” *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 75.3 (2000): 847–867; Endnotes, “The Logic of Gender: On the Separation of Spheres and the Process of Abjection,” *Endnotes* 3 – Gender, Race, Class, and Other Misfortunes, 2013, https://endnotes.org.uk/issues/3/en/endnotes-the-logic-of-gender. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. In: Ze’ela Dok-Diyuk, “Ta’arukhata shel Hagit Molgan ‘Lo mukhana’” (Hagit Molgan’s Exhibition *Not Prepared*) unpublished seminar paper, supervised by Ruth E. Iskin (Department of Art History, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2006), 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Yalin, Identification Card, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Yalin, Identification Card, 147-148. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Lisa E. Bloom, *Jewish Identities in American Feminist Art: Ghosts of Ethnicity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. David Sperber, “The Abject: Menstruation, Impurity and Purification in Jewish Feminist Art,” *Matronita: Jewish Feminist Art* [catalogue, Mishkan Le’Omanut, Museum of Art, Ein Harod], curators: David Sperber and Dvora Liss (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 2012), 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Danya Ruttenberg, “Heaven and Earth: Some Notes on New Jewish Ritual,” *Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Art and Design for Jewish Life* [catalogue, The Jewish Museum, New York], curator: Daniel Belasco (New York: The Jewish Museum; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 87. Sperber, “The Abject,” 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Since 2001, the project had been shown in museums and Jewish centers across the US, and later in Europe, as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Roni Tzoreff demonstrated this tendency of the Israeli art world in relation to Hagit Molgan’s *My Patchwork Quilt*, discussed in Chapter 5. The flaw in Tzoreff’s interpretation of the work is her attempt to isolate it from the context in which it was presented, and to examine it as separate from the discourses generated by the artist. See: Roni Tzoreff, “Beyond Abjection: The Niddah in Contemporary Art, a Gender-oriented Halakhic Discussion,” *Muza: Journal for Graduate Students in the Humanities* 1 (2017): 88–108 (Hebrew), http://mandelschool.huji.ac.il/sites/default/files/mandel/files/muza1-tzoreff.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. See for instance Matthew Baigell, *American Artists, Jewish Images* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Sperber, “The Abject,” 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Smadar Sheffi, “Won’t be *Shomrot Negiah*: On the *Matronita* Exhibition,” *Haaretz*, *Galleria*, 17.2.2012, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/art/1.1643785> (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Sperber, “The Abject,” 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Orna Oryan, “Female Artists in their Pollution and their Purity,” in *Period: Studies of Menstruation in Israel*, eds. Inbal Ester Cicurel et al. (Israel: Sapir Academic College, 2017), 125 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Sperber, “The Abject,” 121–120. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Oryan, “Female Artists in their Pollution and their Purity,” 117–120. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. David Sperber, “‘A Love that Does Not Corrupt’: Art in the Sphere of Traditional and Religious Judaism in Israel,” in *The Paths of Daniel: Studies in Judaism and Jewish Culture Presented to Rabbi Professor Daniel Sperber*, eds. Adam Ferziger and David Sperber (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press), 639–679 (Hebrew).

Also see: Dalia Manor, “Pride and Prejudice, or: Frequently-found Models in the Historiography of Israeli Art,” *Protocols: History and Theory* 1 (2005), bezalel.secured.co.il/zope/home/he/1126095346/1126096536-manor/#\_edn6 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Oryan, “Female Artists in their Pollution and their Purity,” 133–131. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Sperber, “The Abject,” 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Alice Shalvi wrote one of the only comparative studies on the development of feminism in Israel, the US, and Europe up until the 1990s. Her article focuses on mapping feminist activism more so than the various schools of thought and points of view characterizing feminist Jewish women in the different spheres she investigated. See: Alice Shalvi, “Geopolitics of Jewish Feminism,” *Gender and Judaism: The Transformation of Tradition*, ed. Tamar M. Rudavsky (New York & London, 1995), 231–243; Rochelle Furstenberg, *The Women’s Movement in Israel* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1994), 20–22; Elana Maryles-Sztokman, *Orthodox Feminist Movements in Israel and the United States: Community Struggle versus State Struggle* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, Argov Center for the Study of Israel and the Jewish People, 2014), 21–22, <http://www>.argovcenter.org/images/pubs-center/ebrew/Elana-Argov.pdf; Tamar Ross, “Radical Feminism and a Theology of Jewish Autonomy: An Anatomy of Unexpected Alliances,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* (*JSQ*)23.4 (2016): 374–401. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Marisa Newman, “Art as Transformation: An Interview with Multi-Media Artist Mierle Laderman-Ukeles,” *Jofa Journal* 6.2 (2006): 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. See *Perspectives on Israeli Art of the Seventies, Tikkun* [catalogue, The Genia Schreiber University Art Gallery, Tel Aviv University], curator: Mordechai Omer (Tel Aviv: Muze’on Tel Aviv LeOmanut, 1998), 22–23; Adam Baruch, “They’re Shooting Memory: Young Israeli Artists on Religious Experience: An Anti-religious Response?” *Monitin* 27 (1989): 56–58, 128 (Hebrew). See also Gideon Ofrat, *Within a Local Context* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2004), 315–323, 324–338, 339–345, 383–395 (Hebrew); Yael Guilat, “Gender, Ritual and Video Art,” in *Beyond Halacha: Secularism, Traditionalism and ‘New Age’ Culture in Israel, Iyunim bi-tkumat Israel (studies in Israeli and modern Jewish society), thematic series*, eds. Gideon Katz, Shalom Ratzabi, and Yaacov Yadgar (Sede Boker: Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2014), 580–581 (Hebrew), 584. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Adam Baruch, “They’re Shooting Memory.” [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. Guilat, “Gender, Ritual and Video Art,” 595. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. On the central role of modern-Orthodox women in the feminist movement, see: Sylvia Barack-Fishman, “Women’s Transformations of Contemporary Jewish Life,” *Women and Judaism: New Insights and Scholarship*, ed. Frederick Greenspahn (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 182–195; Ruth Halperin-Kaddari and Yaacov Yagdari, “Between Universal Feminism and Particular Nationalism: Politics religion and gender (in)equality in Israel,” *Third World Quarterly* 31.6 (2010): 905–920. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Tali Berner, “Religious Feminism: Origins and Directions,” *Matronita: Jewish Feminist Art* [catalogue, Mishkan Le’Omanut, Museum of Art, Ein Harod], curators: David Sperber and Dvora Liss (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 2012), 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Orna Sasson-Levy and Chen Misgav, “Gender Studies in Israel in the Early 21st Century: Between Neo-Liberalism and Neo-Colonialism,” *Megamot* 41.2: 176 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art* [catalogue, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum, New York], curators: Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin (London & New York: Brooklyn Museum & Merrel, 2007), 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. See for instance Rosi Braidotti, “In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism,” *Theory, culture & society* 25 (2008): 1–24. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Tova Hartman and Naomi Marmon, “Lived Regulations, Systemic Attributions: Menstrual Separation and Ritual Immersion in the Experience of Orthodox Jewish Women,” *Gender & Society* 18.3 (2004): 389–408. The article was also published in another version, titled: “The Hands of the Rabbis: Orthodox Women and Niddah” In: Tova Hartman, *Feminism Encounters Traditional Judaism: Resistance and Accommodation* (Hanover & London: Brandeis University Press, 2007), 81–98; Aimee Rubensteen, “Jewish Women Open Up About Getting Their Periods,” *TeenVogue*, 18.9.2017, http://www,teenvogue,com/story/jewish-women-on-menstruation.

Also see Inbal Ester-Cicurel and Neomi Silman, “Blood Sisters: Use of Nida by Israeli Jewish Women as a Means of Empowerment and Protest,” in *Period: Studies of Menstruation in Israel*, eds. Inbal Ester Cicurel et al. (Israel: Sapir Academic College, 2017), 175–198 (Hebrew).

This discourse is not characteristic of Orthodox Jewish feminism alone, but is also clearly expressed in a broad scope of writings that challenges Western notions of menstrual rituals as strictly oppressive acts. See: Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Allison Hoffman, “The New American Mikveh,” *Tablet,* 13.8.2012, http://www,tabletmag,com/jewish-life-and-religion/109120/the-new-american-mikveh. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. Ross, “Radical Feminism and a Theology.” [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Norman Lamm, *A Hedge of Roses* (New York: Phillip Feldheim, 1966); Tehilla Abramov, *The Secret of Jewish Femininity* (Michigan: Targum Press, 1988); Rahel Wasserfall, *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish life and law* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999); Naomi Marmon-Grumet, “The Intersection of Tradition and Modernity: An Examination of the Interface of Taharat Hamishpacha and Identity among Modern-Orthodox Women and Men,” Ph.D. Dissertation (Bar-Ilan University, 2008), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. See for instance: Orit Avishai, “Imagining the Orthodox in Emuna Elon’s Novel Heaven Rejoices: Voyeuristic, Reformist and Pedagogical Orthodox Artistic Expression,” *Israel Studies* 12.2 (2007): 51; Berner, “Religious Feminism,” 166; David Sperber, “Body and Sexuality in the Work of Modern-Orthodox Women Artists in Israel,” *Journal of Culture and Religion*, 1–2 (2015): 17–39; David Sperber, “The Vagina and De Facto Feminism in the Artwork of Na’ama Snitkoff-Lotan,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 13.1 (2017): 143–153. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Dov Schwartz, “A Short History of Sexuality in Religious Zionism: Following Yakir Englander and Avi Sagi’s “Body and Sexuality in New Zionist-Religious Discourse,” [opinion article], *Akdamot* 29 (2014), 177-181. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Ibid., 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Valeria Seigelshifer, ”Filming What Cannot be Said: Sexuality in the Films of Israeli Orthodox Women Filmmakers,” a lecture at the conference “Women and Gender in Israeli Art,” The Association for Women’s Art and Gender Research in Israel, The David and Yolanda Katz Faculty of the Arts, Tel Aviv University (1.2.2017), *The Association for Women’s Art and Gender Research in Israel*, undated, https://media,wix,com/ugd/96819b\_9204e3421a344963bdcac29d19700638,pdf (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Lucy R. Lippard, “Sweeping Exchanges: The Contribution of Feminism to the Art of the 1970s,” *Art Journal* 39 (1980): 362–365; Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995 [1994]); *WACK! Art and the feminist Revolution* [catalogue, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC; PS1, New York; Vancouver Art Gallery], curator: Cornelia Butler (Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 2007), 16; Suzanne Lacy, *Leaving art: Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics, 1974–2007* (Durham & London: Duke University Pres, 2010), 83–91, 114–119. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. This distinction was raised in a different context by Nadav Berman, “Traditionalism: Challenge or Threat?” *De’ot* 44 (2009): 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Eleanor Heartney, *Postmodern Heretics: The Catholic Imagination in Contemporary Art* (New York: MidMarch Arts Press, 2004), 134–170; Eleanor Heartney, “Thinking Through the Body: Women Artists and the Catholic Imagination,” *Hypatia* 18.4 (2003): 3–22. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Gannit Ankori, *Palestinian Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 176-219; Gannit Ankori, “Re-Visioning Faith: Christian and Muslim Allusions in Contemporary Palestinian Art,” *Third Text* 20.3–4 (2006): 390.

Since 2005, Ankori has been working on a book titled *A Faith of Their Own: Women Artists Re-Vision Religion*. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Yael Guilat, “Gender, Ritual and Video Art,” in *Beyond Halacha: Secularism, Traditionalism and ‘New Age’ Culture in Israel, Iyunim bi-tkumat Israel* (studies in Israeli and modern Jewish society), thematic series, eds. Gideon Katz, Shalom Ratzabi, and Yaacov Yadgar (Sede Boker: Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2014), 595 (Hebrew).

Art scholar Aaron Rosen makes a similar claim in the broader context of contemporary art and religion. See: Aaron Rosen, *Art+Religion in the 21st Century* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2015), 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Tal Dekel, “Welcome Home? Israeli-Ethiopian Women Artists and Questions of Citizenship and Cultural Belonging,” *Third Text* 29.4–5 (2016): 310–325. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, eds., *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (Oxford: Westview, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. The Zaritsky Artists’ House, Tel Aviv 2013. Curator: Raz Samira. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. As shown in Chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Nurit Jacobs-Yinon, “Epilogue,” A Tale of a Woman and a Robe: New Reflections, 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. As shown in the conclusion of Part III. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. See David Sperber, “‘A Love that Does Not Corrupt’: Art in the Sphere of Traditional and Religious Judaism in Israel,” in *The Paths of Daniel: Studies in* *Judaism and Jewish Culture Presented to Rabbi Professor Daniel Sperber*, eds. Adam Ferziger and David Sperber (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press), 647 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. See quoted statements by Laderman-Ukeles in Chapter 6. Similarly, in an interview conducted by Galia Bar Or with Arnovitz in 2016, the artist noted her desire to influence her religious society, but also discussed the challenge of doing so considering the lack of interest in her works (or in art, in general) in the religious Jewish public. Galia Bar Or, “Haute couture’ à la Andi Arnovitz,” *Andi Arnovitz: A Threshold Space* [Artists’ House, Jerusalem] curator: Tamar Gispan-Greenberg (Jerusalem: Artists’ House, 2017) 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. Similarly, contemporary artists dealing with the canons of art use the term ‘canonization’ and describe it in active, shifting terms related to struggles within the art world over value, recognition, and prestige. See Ruth E. Iskin, “Introduction: Are Pluriversal Canons Possible?” in *Re-envisioning the Contemporary Art Canon: Perspectives in a Global World*, ed. Ruth E. Iskin (London: Routledge, 2017), 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. Chana Kehat, *Feminism and Judaism: From Collision to Regeneration* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense Publishing House, 2008), 51 (Hebrew); Tamar Ross, *Expanding the Palace of Torah: Orthodoxy and Feminism* (Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press and University Press of New England, 2004), 229; Ronit Irshai and Tanya Zion-Waldoks, “Modern-Orthodox Feminism in Israel: From Nomos to Narrative,” *Mishpat u-mimshal* (Law and Government) 15.1–2 (2013): 236, n. 3 (Hebrew); Elana Maryles-Sztokman, *Orthodox Feminist Movements in Israel and the United States: Community Struggle versus State Struggle* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, Argov Center for the Study of Israel and the Jewish People, 2014), 29, http://argovcenter,org/images/pubs-center/hebrew/Elana-Argov,pdf; Ross, “Radical Feminism and a Theology of Jewish Autonomy,” 377–378. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. *Aginut* is a state in which a woman remains obligated to a previous marriage that is effectively inactive, but prevents her from remarrying under the halakha. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. Although it should be noted that Golan’s criticism of the woman’s acquisition in marriage also encompasses criticism of *aginut* as related to the act of acquisition. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. Dvora Liss, “Tear / Repair,” *Tear/Repair: Andi Arnovitz* [catalogue, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA and Yeshiva University Museum, New York] no curator (Jerusalem, 2010), 5; Paula J. Birnbaum, “Modern-Orthodox Feminism: Art, Jewish Law, and the Quest for Equality,” *Contemporary Israel: New Insights and Scholarship*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (New York: NYU Press, 2016): 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. Rivkah Lubitch, *From One End of the World to the Other: The Perilous Journey of Women in the Rabbinical Court* (Jerusalem: Yediot, 2017) 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. Ibid., 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. The subject of *aginut* received widespread public visibility in Israel through cinema, including in the films: “Mekudeshet” [Sanctified] (by Anat Zuria, Israel, 2004), and “Gett” [Divorce] (by Shlomy Elkabetz and Ronit Elkabetz, Israel, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. See for instance Ruth Halperin-Kaddari, *Women in Israel and State of their Own*, Pennsylvania Studies Human Rights Series (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 227–262; Susan M. Weiss and Netty C. Gross-Horowitz, *Marriage and* *Divorce in the Jewish State: Israel’s Civil War* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. This finding coincides with Dalia Manor’s findings while investigating the tendency of the Israeli art world to prefer radical discourse. See Dalia Manor, “Pride and Prejudice, or: Frequently-found Models in the Historiography of Israeli Art,” *Protocols: History and Theory* 1 (2005), bezalel.secured.co.il/zope/home/he/1126095346/1126096536-manor/#\_edn6 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. Ulrich Beck, *A God of One’s Own* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Ibid., 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Similar to the phrase “doing identity,” which emphasizes identity as a dynamic, ongoing, shifting process, studies have also offered the term “doing religion.” This definition is particularly significant in relation to the political agency of religious feminist women who cultivate a “religion of their own.” Much has been written on the subject; see for instance: Phyllis Mack, “Religion, feminism, and the problem of agency: Reflections on eighteenth-century Quakerism,” *Signs* 29 (2003):149–177; Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety, The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Orit Avishai, “‘Doing religion’ in a secular world: Women in conservative religions and the question of agency,” *Gender & Society* 22 (2008): 409–433; Sarah Bracke, “Conjugating the Modern-Religious, Conceptualizing Female Religious Agency: Contours of a ‘Post-secular’ Conjuncture,” *Theory, culture & society* 25 (2008): 51–68; Sirma Bilge, “Beyond subordination vs. Resistance: An intersectional approach to the agency of veiled Muslim women,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 31 (2010): 9–28. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)