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POST-SECULAR JEWISH FEMINIST THEOLOGY?

The view from Israel

About 25% of the Jewish population in Israel consists of "secular believers." They self-identify as secular but also believe in God or some kind of higher/deeper power(s). Their identity conflicts with the conventional identification of secularism with atheism, as do post-secular theologies, whose theological ideas reject traditional religion while adopting concepts of faith. Western feminism proved especially conducive to the development of post-secular theology. This study addresses both Israeli Judaism and feminist theology from a post-secular perspective. It analyses two academic fields of discourse—feminist Jewish theology and feminism in Israel—to determine whether, how and why they are developing a Jewish post-secular feminist theology. The study reveals that such theologies are rare and suggests that discursive field structure limits their development.

Introduction

The post-secular turn in the study of religion and society proposes a radical revision of the paradigm of secularization, including criticism of the paradigm's (mis)understanding of the role of religion as an institution, as well as religious belief and practice in the modern "secular age."

Within this framework, *post-secular theology* is not an oxymoron, as one might believe initially, but a key concept engendered by post-secular contemplation, challenging the dichotomous distinction between secularism and religiosity and the identification of secularism with atheism. It is an umbrella term for theologies that seek to contain divinity within an outlook that adopts a considerable share of the basic assumptions of secular enlightenment.

Identification of secularism with atheism is also challenged by post-secular sociological studies in Israel, which reveal the existence of a large group of *secular believers*, who identify themselves as secular but also believe in God or some kind of higher power(s).

This study approaches the concepts *secular believers* and *post-secular theology* from a feminist perspective, applying them to investigate whether and to what extent feminist post-secular theological thought exists in Israeli academic discourse. It concludes that such thought has hardly developed in Israel because of the present structure of the discursive field and the boundaries it delineates between the religious and the secular.

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Secular believers: post-secular contemplation

The dominant narrative of secularism, often called the *secularization thesis*, is based on dichotomous differentiation between secularism and religiosity. The secular–religious dichotomy is linked hierarchically with additional concepts that are also categorized in a binary manner, such as modernity (secularism = modernity; religiosity = primordialism), reason, universalism, enlightenment, progress, separation of religion and state, privatization (secularism is situated in public space and religiosity in private space), freedom and so on. This conceptualization has a normative meaning, besides its sociological–historical interpretation. As such, the secularization paradigm not only proposes a possible historical and sociological narrative (presented as the only possible narrative), but also embodies ethical claims regarding the moral advantage of secularism (see, for example, Asad 2003; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008; Kosmin 2007).

In Israel, studies revealed the dominance of the secularization thesis in political, cultural and academic discourse (see, for example, Jobani 2008; Katz 2008; Liebman and Yadgar 2003; Shenhav 2007). Most of this discourse tends to portray realities in which the secular and the religious (at times the ultra-Orthodox) are considered opposites, sometimes even at war against each other. It relates to secularism as the "natural" and "normative" default (and therefore concerns itself, for example, with the sociology of religion but not the sociology of secularism (Yadgar 2010) and ascribes enlightened values to secularism, such as freedom, personal autonomy and tolerance.

The post-secular perspective challenges both the analytical and normative components of the secularization paradigm and emphasizes the need to reassess and redefine the social place of religion and secularism under contemporary, post-Enlightenment auspices (Dallmayr 1999). Post-secular writers perceive religion and secularism as social components that exert a mutual influence on one another in a multidimensional manner and engender an abundance of hybrid spaces of religiosity and secularism (see, for example, Asad 2003; Bellah 1991; Casanova 1994; Connolly 1999; Hammond 1991; Taylor 2007). These studies address the return of religion to public life in various nation states, the development of new religious movements and a yearning for spirituality,[1] the function of religious belief and practice in secular space and similar issues.

In Israel, extensive research has been dedicated to traditional (*masorti*) Jews as a social group that reflects hybrid relations between religiosity and secularism (see, for example, Benyamini 2011; Buzaglo 2009; Hever, Shenav, and Motzafi-Haller 2002; Shenhav 2003, 2008; Yadgar 2005, 2010). Other studies concern the practices and conceptions of Israelis/Jews active in new religious movements and New Age space (see, for example, Ruah-Midbar 2007; Shemhai 2009; Tavori 2008). Some devote special attention to the link between Jewish practices and the manner in which New Age ideas are expressed (Ruah-Midbar and Klin Oron 2010). From another point of view, research topics included secular Jews who study Judaism, learning communities, pluralistic *Batei Midrash*, secular houses of worship and more (Azoulai and Wurzburger 2009; Sheleg 2010; Yair et al. 2006). All these studies point to the existence of hybrid religiosity–secularism spaces in the Israeli polity and culture.[2]

The claim that hybrid relations obtain between religiosity and secularism is also supported by epistemological analysis, proposing that theological conceptions (primarily Christian) are at the foundation of Western, ostensibly secular thinking. Such criticism

points to the religious origin of fundamental liberal principles (such as sovereignty, protection and abandonment, charisma and Adam Smith's "invisible hand" that supposedly controls the markets) and through them seeks to uncover the religious fundamental principles of secular Western thought (see, for example, Agamben 1995; Asad 1993; Milbank 1990; Roberts 2002; de Vries and Sullivan 2006). In the Israeli context, the study revealed the deep religious layer in the secular Israeli ethos (Almog 1996) and the theological and messianic basis of so-called secular Zionism. These studies indicate that the Israeli polity is full of theological ideas, especially concerning the seemingly divine connection between the people of Israel and the land of Israel (see, for example, Raz-Krakotzkin 2004; Schmidt and Schonfeld 2009; Shapira 1994).

The post-secular discipline further criticizes the universal sense of secularism in the secularism thesis and points out that this particular understanding was developed within the Protestant West (Asad 1993, 2003; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2000). Post-secular research indicates that the concept of secularism cannot be imported easily from one culture to another, but requires special sensitivity to the particularistic features of the secularism examined.

The Jewish religion's substantive components differ from those of Christianity (Dan 1997); Judaism is not only a religion, but also an ethnicity and culture (and in the Israeli case a nationality) that were largely secularized in Israel within and by means of Zionism. Hence the secularism that grew within it and in response to it has a unique character. Secular Jews in Israel appear different in terms of two of the three chief categories of the study of religions—belonging and behaviour:[3] Most do not belong to religious institutions, but define themselves as belonging to the Jewish collective; most observe at least some of the Jewish religious precepts,[4] especially those connected with the cycle of time and life (holidays, marriage[5], circumcision, mourning and the like), although these are accorded more of a cultural–ethnic significance than a religious one (Keissar-Sugarmen 2012).

The uniqueness of Jewish secularism in Israel originates not only in its difference from Christian secularism, but also in the special qualities of Jewish culture and history. In Israel, Jewish identity is sovereign and, above all, normative. The Jewish identity of Jews in Israel, including secular Jews, is preserved, protected and strengthened by the state, its market and culture. The use of the Hebrew language and calendar, the legal system that does not separate between religion and state, school curricula, shops featuring traditional foods during holiday seasons, the change in radio broadcasting tone on Friday afternoons[6] and so on make Jewish identity self-evident in the same manner that Christmas trees and Easter bunnies do in Christian cultures.

Under such circumstances, the simple solution to problematic relations with religion is not leaving Judaism (assimilation), but leaving religion. The availability of this solution to Jews in Israel, enabling 50% of them to maintain an identity that is both Jewish and secular, hints that secular Jews in Israel can differentiate (even if intuitively rather than selectively and precisely) between their Judaism and the Jewish religion, releasing their grasp on the latter without adversely affecting the stability of their Jewish identity (Yovel 2007).

Another secularism thesis component that is subject to post-secular criticism is the assumption (often not stated explicitly) that secularism is identical to atheism (or at least agnosticism) and that there is no place in secularism for belief in God, regardless of the way that this term is understood (Taylor 2007). Sociological data, however, point to a

disparity between self-definition as secular or non-religious and the existence of belief-oriented, religious or spiritual feelings.[7] This disparity reveals the existence of "spiritual but not religious" people (Fuller 2001), who maintain both a secular identity and spiritual conceptions and cannot be defined as atheistic.[8]

In Israel, the disparity between secular self-definition and belief-oriented outlooks is particularly outstanding: while about half of Israeli Jews defined themselves as secular, 80% claim that they believe in God (Keissar-Sugarmen 2012), including about half of the 50% of Israelis who define themselves as secular (Beit-Hallahmi 2007). We may estimate that 20%–30% of Jewish Israelis are what I would call *secular believers*.[9] As such, they define themselves as secular, but also manifest spiritual and belief-oriented sentiments. They reject (de facto if not *de jure*) both traditional religion and atheistic secularism and accord belief a significant place in their lives.

Limited attention has been accorded to this issue. For the most part, secular believers are not differentiated as a distinct group and do not possess a self-identity that merits institutional legitimacy. For example, the category is not offered as an option in surveys that seek to determine the religious–secular identity of Jews in Israel. As such, we still lack considerable information, both quantitative and qualitative, on the characteristics of secular believers. We do not know what their identities are in terms of gender, ethnicity, economic status, etc., nor are we aware of how they combine the different components of their identity or the nature of their beliefs and religious sentiments.

Post-secular theology: feminist contemplation

The term *post-secular theology* refers to attempts to propose a more-or-less coherent set of beliefs that correlates with the sociological position of secular believers (Lahav 2014). Generally speaking, post-secular theology is a theology of relations with a *More* (James [1902] 2002, 492). It maintains that past religions are incompatible with contemporary knowledge and ethics, although they may show some attempt to express awareness or feelings relevant to the secular individual. The result may be various belief-based options that are not traditional (monotheistic) yet do not reject the basic assumption regarding the existence of divinity.

This theology is "secular" in the sense that it adopts secularism's critique of classic religion, identifies repressive elements within it and refuses to accept religious authority as binding. Furthermore, it does not consider the Scriptures to be a source of authoritative information (nor even of particularly high quality), declaring human experience to be its key methodology rather than hermeneutics (critical or otherwise) of the religious canon. At the same time, it is theological in its opposition to the atheistic demand for the obliteration of God.

All in all, post-secular theology does not ascribe authority to traditional institutions, texts or religious practices, nor does it seek to institute other obligatory texts or ceremonies in their stead. At the same time, it proposes that forgoing the divine to liberate oneself from the religious establishment, as propounded by atheism, constitutes "throwing the baby (belief) out with the bath water (religion)." Post-secular theology claims that spirituality, religious experiences, feelings of sanctity and a sense of connection with deep/lofty power(s) also take place in secular space and are significant for individual quality of life and the moral development of the collective.

Western feminism proved a fertile field for development of the post-secular theology concept. The relative prominence of this philosophy in the feminist sphere is hardly surprising, considering that much of feminist thinking criticizes traditional monotheism, especially its deep-rooted patriarchy, not only from an epistemological point of view (that is, differing with its claim to truth) but also, perhaps primarily, from an ethical standpoint (on gender aspects of Judaism and Israeliness, see, for example, Almog 2002; Elior 2006; Herzog 2000; Peskowitz and Leavitt 1997). At the same time, feminist thought also levels ethical criticism at secular space that is perceived as perpetuating male dominance in other ways, at times no less effective than those of religious space.

Among the feminist writers who could be read as post-secular theologians, one may list American Post-Christian philosopher Mary Daly (1973, 1984), American theologian (theologian of the Goddess) Carol Christ (1992), British Post-Christian theologian Daphne Hampson (2002, 2009) and French philosopher Luce Irigaray (1993). Their works are grounded, first, in secularism's critique of traditional monotheistic religion. They claim that the patriarchy inherent in Abrahamic monotheism produces, preserves, reinforces and legitimizes oppression of women (Isherwood and McEwan 1993). One key object of criticism in this context is the endocentric and transcendental character of monotheism's understanding of "our Father in heaven": While God is defined officially as a spirit that exists beyond corporeal-gender definition, the language used to speak about God—as a king, warrior, judge or father—transmits the message that God is male (for example, Johnson 1994). In the well-known words of Daly (1973, 19), "if God is male, then male is God," as the symbolism of the patriarch in heaven justifies and reinforces patriarchal structures of the family, society and church. Moreover, the "God is male" language is so integrated into the culture that it is not even denied by those who deny the existence of God (Gross 1992).

These theologies also criticize the dualistic mentality that places soul and spirit in opposition to body and flesh, transcendental vs. immanent, human vs. divine. According to them, whether God is presented as good and loving or conceptualized as threatening and punishing, the relationship between "God and His creatures" is depicted as a relationship between an all-powerful master and a powerless creature (Radford Ruether 1992). This mentality estranges male from female as a central sexual symbol that epitomizes the dualistic nature of perception of this world: the physical characteristics of the transcendental spirit and the autonomous are identified with the male, while women remain with the opposite characteristics—the fleshly, the earthly and the subjugated. The symbolic God–male–female hierarchy is thus created (Radford Ruether 1993).

Feminist post-secular theology also claims that as it is impossible to repair traditional religion, women should leave it. Mary Daly expressed this view as follows: "We can demonstrate our exodus from sexist religion … We cannot really belong to institutional religion as it exists … Singing sexist hymns, praying to a male god breaks our spirit, makes us less than human" (cited in King 1995, 163).

At the same time, post-secular theologians maintain that secular space in itself cannot offer secure refuge from the religious patriarchy. In this context, Carol Christ indicates that even people who no longer believe in God are not free of the power of *His* symbolism. As such, feminists cannot afford to leave it [religion] in the hands of the fathers and simply stop speaking about God. Furthermore, post-secular theology claims that belief itself is a praxis of liberation (Hogan 1995, 75). This claim embodies

two complementary meanings. On the one hand, it emphasizes the importance of spirituality in modern/postmodern life. Spirituality is perceived as a personal sense of a deep connection with a power beyond oneself that creates a "sacred core" in individual life, reflecting a yearning for renewal of energy, meaning and value. Daphne Hampson calls on women not to deny that they are spiritual beings, claiming that spirituality is likely to be the source of women's strength. On the other hand, emphasis on belief also originates in recognition of the mighty power imprinted in the concept of God (at the political and personal levels alike). Irigaray (1995, 62) formulates such understanding as follows: "Divinity is what we need to become free, autonomous, sovereign. No human subjectivity, no human society has ever been established without the help of the divine."

The post-secular writers jointly claim that feminists must create new paths of belief for women. They affirm that if women were repressed through the spiritual symbols of traditional religion, they may be liberated by creating alternative spiritual symbols (Christ and Plaskow 1992). In their attempt to create new symbols of belief, these post-secular theologians also draw on existing spiritual traditions, although they openly avoid using religious texts—especially the Scriptures—as an authoritative source of knowledge. These theologians do not view such writings as references; they do not attempt to claim them as their own and at times even call explicitly for nullification of their unique theological status.[10] Instead, post-secular theologians base their thoughts on "secular" knowledge regarding the physical existence of the universe[11] and derive ideas from secular feminism (such as the conception of women's experience as a key source of knowledge about the universe and the self-in-relation conception). At times, they also appeal to knowledge created in religious cultures outside their own (such as Irigaray's concern with yoga as a source of corporal/spiritual knowledge).

Feminist post-secular theologians thus go beyond religiosity and secularism with the intention of using belief-based concepts to achieve social, political and ethical objectives. They apply claims regarding "that which we call God" (Hampson 2009) as an instrument to encourage "women's active processes of self- and social construction, relocat[ing] women on the map of being, from objects to living, world-making subjects … " (Hoagland and Frye 2000, 3).

Equipped with alternative symbols, these four writers all reject the "God of history" approach—the same Creator, autonomous and all-powerful, with a mighty will, who created the universe and acts therein. While two of them (Christ and Irigaray) speak openly of divinity with a gender-feminine quality, the anthropomorphic approach to God is rejected outright, as is contemplating God as an agent in this world. Instead, Irigaray (1993) presents "the feminine divine" as a power that exists among wo/men, a feminine "sensible-transcendental" dimension, "a figure for the perfection of [t]he[i]r subjectivity … who can open up the perspective in which their flesh can be transfigured." Christ (1992), by contrast, proposes that the Goddess is a concept intended to impart presence to women's experience, thereby constructing a new matrix of methods and motives for spiritual thinking.

The other two scholars relate to the concept of ungendered divinity (although Daly intentionally applies the feminine gender in referring to this ungendered concept, maintaining that in patriarchal thinking, ungendered objects and subjects are gendered by default as male). In this context, Hampson (2002) refers to God as a dimension of perfection that is accessible in all places and at all times, that people have experienced

throughout history and what they call God. Daly (1973, 1984) proposes interpreting the concept of God as a Verb, an expression of the act of be-ing, that signifies participation in the Ultimate/Intimate Reality, in which the human being is being created and becoming in the world, so that she no longer constitutes mere unchanging material (Warren 2000).

Jewish feminist post-secular theology in Israel?

Combining our knowledge about secular believers in Israel and post-secular feminist theology, we may now ask: Does the existence of the secular-believer group in Israel demonstrate feminist theology? Was Jewish feminist post-secular theology developed in Israel? And if not—why not?

To investigate these questions, I analysed and mapped two interfaced academic discourse fields[12]—feminist Jewish theology and feminism in Israel—from a post-secular point of view.

In this analysis, I follow Bourdieu's (1994) conceptualization of a field as a social sphere in which practices of production, distribution and consumption of material and cultural resources organize and materialize surrounding a particular *cultural capital*. Assessment of the field's structure and history, as well as at its relations with other fields, enables us to understand the modes of social changes. Thus, changes in the field are not unavoidable outcomes of the structure, as claimed by the structuralism paradigm, nor are they exclusively results of spontaneous acts by individuals. Instead, agents operate with and against each other within existing social structures to promote their social capital. I thus investigate the structures and the chief agents that operate within and around the research field to map limitations and options for the development of post-secular Jewish feminist theology.

Mapping of the structure of the feminist Jewish theology field reveals, first, that theology is largely situated at the fringes of Jewish feminist discourse both within and outside Israel. The discourse accords much concern to practices, the status of women in various institutions and critical analysis of texts, but not to theology (Plaskow 1983). Concerned scholars tend to ascribe this positioning to the relative marginality of theology in Judaism, as well as to women's apprehension about touching the *sanctum sanctorum* from which they were excluded for millennia. These scholars tend to agree that avoidance of theology limits the space of attainable feminist change.

The three most outstanding writers dealing with Jewish feminist theology, by date of publication of their key writings, are Judith Plaskow (1991), Rachel Adler (1998) and Tamar Ross (2004). Plaskow performs a feminist critical analysis of the three key categories she perceives in Judaism: Torah, Israel and God; Adler inquires how the full participation of women can alter Jewish law, prayer, sexuality and marriage, while Ross concentrates on Jewish Orthodoxy and Halakha, proposing a feminist-theological interpretation of the Bible based on the theology of Rabbi A. I. Kook. Other scholars addressing the topic include Rebecca Alpert (1997), who deals with sexuality and lesbianism; Lynn Gottlieb (1995), who offers midrashim concerning the Divine Presence (*Shekhina*); Marcia Falk (1999), who has reformulated traditional blessings; Jenny Kien (2000), who proposes a conception of the goddess in Judaism, and Melissa Raphael (2003), who presents a feminist theology of the Holocaust. Such literature draws on

Jewish sources, as well as on the feminist criticism (theological and other) that developed within and in response to Christianity.

Jewish feminist theology is developing primarily in the USA: All books mentioned were published in English, a decisive majority of them in the USA (Raphael's book is the exception, possibly explaining its relative lack of prominence in the discourse). Many of the writers are Americans and even the two Israelis (Ross and Kien) are both of American origin. Very little feminist-theological activity takes place in Israel and most discourse on the topic is imported from the USA. Two of the three most outstanding books, Adler's and Ross's, were translated into Hebrew.

Notwithstanding the difference in feminist theologies, Ross (2004, 117) insists that all major scholars in this field belong to one of the religious branches of Judaism—Orthodox, Reform or Conservative[13]—and as such they are not secular believers and their theologies are not post-secular. The writers differ from one another in their view of revelation, the origin of the Bible (divine or human), authority derived from Scripture and in other respects, but all exhibit several outstanding religious dimensions in their works:

Despite the differences among them, Adler, Plaskow and Ross do not aspire to create a feminist theology using Jewish means, but to change Judaism in a manner that suits women's wishes and conceptions. In this context, Plaskow (2003) writes that she is not promoting "a broader liberation theology from a Jewish feminist perspective," but "the transformation of Jewish Religion." In this sense, their point of departure is very far from that of post-secular feminists, who do not seek to change religion internally but to liberate women through theology. In other words, the three are not using religious thinking as "theological paradigms to talk about the transformation of larger patterns of social and economic injustice," but rather the "transformation of the religious sphere—its categories, rituals, and symbols" (2003, 93).

All these scholars ascribe great significance to the preservation of the traditional forms of Jewish spirituality and ritual. They accept the claim that the divine language in Judaism is androcentric, but many express varying degrees of apprehension that the creation of new feminist texts and liturgies that address God by another name may engender loss of contact with traditional Judaism (Heschel 1992).

The need to defend the Jewish identity of the writer and reader is presented in this literature as essential, alongside the feminist point of departure. Nevertheless, as feminist identity and Jewish identity are perceived as mutually contradictory, the writers must attempt to link these two ostensibly contradictory identities. Moreover, there is another, more difficult question in the background, as expressed by Greenfield (2009) in her review of Adler's book in *Ha'aretz*:

> Why does she, or do women in general, have to make such an effort? It is clear that Jewish identity is very important to Adler and the multicultural norms prevailing among the American elite respect and encourage such attachment. But it is precisely because the patriarchal tradition of Judaism truly excludes the woman from every sphere of meaning in Jewish life and transforms her into a tool serving male needs … the perturbing question is why indeed? Why exert such arduous efforts to remain connected to such a troublesome tradition? Wouldn't it be easier just to leave the past behind us?

A contradiction between Jewish identity and feminist identity is perceived because all these writers identify to some extent or other with Judaism and religious institutions (such as the synagogue or the "Jewish home") and its religious texts (particularly the Bible and rabbinic literature). Although there is consensus regarding the misogyny and sexism prevailing in these texts, they are perceived as forming the core of Jewish life (Alpert 1997, 8). This conception preserves the significance and centrality of religious texts and institutions in a manner that does not allow for their outright rejection. The basic assumption is that rejection of these religious texts and institutions means rejection of Judaism itself. Consequently, they are maintained as key (even if not exclusive) sources of information and thus their authority is preserved as well (to varying degrees, depending on the writer).

Keeping the centrality of the Scriptures thus demands that these theologies depend on reading and interpreting the Bible in a manner that enables it to be "purged"—to whatever extent possible—of its patriarchal components and to be addressed in a feminist manner. Adherence to the text is maintained even when the writer admits that "the feminist critique of the patriarchal nature of (most of) the Jewish canon raises the broader issue of whether and how traditional texts can continue to have authority in today's world" (Plaskow 2008, 3). There is thus a marked difference between the interpretive methodology of feminist-religious theology and the post-secular approach, which rejects canonic texts as a suitable source of obligatory information.

The extent and nature of adherence to religious texts vary from writer to writer. Ross presents an overtly Orthodox point of view, according to which the Torah was given at Sinai. Raphael uses concepts such as "the God of Israel" and citations from the Bible and Rabbinic literature in her analysis of the "female face of God at Auschwitz." Falk changes the wording of traditional blessings to reflect gender justice, especially by substituting the expressions "source of life" or "wellspring of life" wherever the traditional text says "God" or "the Lord." Kien, perhaps the most radical of these writers, uses the Bible and archaeological findings to support her claim of belief in a goddess within that which she perceives as the original and authentic Judaism/Hebraism of the biblical era, before the return to Zion. Many of the writers (Plaskow, Gottlieb, Raphael and Kien) are aided by a kabbalistic perception of the *Shekhina* (Divine Presence) as the feminine component of the godhead as a traditional source enabling feministic interpretation of Judaism. Reliance on this source is often accomplished uncritically, without any deep revelation of the patriarchal components in the traditional perception of the *Shekhina*, that is, mere existence always depends on the male God.[14]

Another relevant component of the religiosity of Jewish feminist theology is its attitude towards Halakha. Some of the scholars do not relate to the issue at all (such as Gottlieb, Kien and Falk), but among those who do, it appears that there is opposition to rejection (at least to total rejection) of Jewish religious law. To a varying extent, all perceive Halakha, with its bias against women, as an important source of Jewish ethics and traditions that is worthy of preservation, at least to some extent.

These analyses reveal that post-secular thinking is not expressed in feminist Jewish theological discourse. The absence is partially explained by the observation that most Jewish feminist theology developed outside the borders of Israel. In this context, Greenfield (2009) claims that a religious approach was chosen because Jewish theology outside Israel cannot free itself of its religious fetters, as it lacks the benefits that a sovereign State of Israel offers its Jewish population.[15] In other words, it appears that proponents

of these theologies feel they must cling to religion to avoid losing their Jewish identity. Considering that Jewish identity is not only religious but also ethnic and cultural, one may understand the desire to maintain it despite all its shortcomings. Being post-Jewish is not the same as being post-Christian: While Daly and Hampson can forgo significant parts of their religious identity as Christians without detracting from their ethnic, national and cultural identities, one who cannot separate Judaism from the Jewish religion cannot relinquish religion. This situation does not characterize Jewish society in Israel, in which Jewish identity is protected in the secular sphere as well.

Analysis of the discursive field of feminism in the Israeli academic world, however, reveals that in this case as well, structural limitations prevent the development of post-secular feminist Jewish theology. The field is largely divided into two sub-fields—a feminist-secular (called "the feminist field," reflecting the basic assumption of the universality of secularism) and a feminist-religious field, called "Jewish feminism." The concept of Jewish feminism, thus, symbolizes Jewish religious feminism, while other types of feminist activity conducted in Jewish space in Israel by Jewish feminists and for Jewish women (such as concern with women's poverty, sexual assault in non-religious environments, underrepresentation in public-secular space and the like) are largely depicted as irrelevant to the sphere of Jewish feminism. Because of their ostensible secularity, they are defined as feminism but not as Jewish feminism. Even though the two fields are not entirely detached from one another, they largely take place in parallel, without much contact between them.

Jewish feminism (that, as indicated, is religious in nature) is inundated with concern for women in religious institutions and organizations, halakhic questions and readings of traditional canonic texts. The field is controlled by Orthodox, Reform and Conservative Jewish women, with very little, if any, representation for secular women. For example, The Judaism and Feminism session of the World Congress of Jewish Studies (Jerusalem, August 2009) discussed Torah study by women, traditional women's prayers and Orthodox feminism, but included no lecture addressing secularism or post-secularism. Similarly, in Elyse Goldstein's (2008) book, *New Jewish Feminism: Probing the Past, Forging the Future*, which won the U.S. National Jewish Book Award, the chapter on Israel discusses Orthodox, Reform and Conservative women but devotes not one word to secular women (about 50% of the Jewish female population of Israel!).

The subliminal message arising from this discourse is that Judaism and secularism are mutually contradictory terms, wherein "Judaism" is ascribed to "the Jewish religion." As such, the discourse reflects and reinforces religious–secular discourse in Israel that was discussed and criticized earlier in the article. It does not leave room for feminists who perceive key elements of their identities in both secularism and Judaism. Feminist-secular believers, if they exist, are denied not only a role in the discourse but also legitimation of their identity.[16]

In parallel, the "secular" feminist field in Israel devotes virtually no attention to theology. Some of the post-secular theologians mentioned in the previous section (especially Irigaray) are well known, but both teaching and research focus on their philosophical writings and their critical analysis of the patriarchy (religious and secular), rather than on their theological solutions. The feminist-secular field in Israel preserves the identification of secularism with atheism (sometimes unconsciously and sometimes undeclared) and is hardly concerned with belief, instead concentrating on sociological issues rather than theological description and analysis (Shadmi 2011).

In Israel, the dichotomous structure of feminist discourse parallels that of religious–secular dialogue. Just as the religious–secular discourse presented in the first part of this study ignores and excludes secular believers, so too does feminist discourse in Israel ignore and exclude the post-secular option in general and its theological manifestations in particular. Just as the secular believer group, in which feminists can be a source of post-secular feminist-theological thinking, is not accorded recognition and legitimacy, theologies likely to be relevant to it are largely ignored.

Discussion

The field's structure and its limitations notwithstanding, one may propose that several processes are likely to change in the situation. First, as suggested by the studies reviewed in the first part of this article, we are witnessing the growth of hybrid religious–secular spaces in Israel, as well as increasing awareness of their existence. It may be assumed that these developments will have implications regarding both feminist thinking and theological thinking, as well as the intersection between them.

Several signs of initial feminist post-secular theological thinking were evident, for example, in lectures at the Israeli Conference for the Study of Contemporary Spirituality that takes place annually in Israel. Despite the extensive difference among speakers, this conference addresses hybrid religiosity/secularity. At least one session is reserved for gender and feminist aspects and lectures on similar topics are presented at other sessions as well. Although most of these lectures do not deal with post-secular theology, at least a few of them touch on related topics from very different points of view. Thus, for example, the teachings of Yemima Avital were assessed according to the analysis proposed by Daphne Hampson (Kauffman 2011) and conceptions of the goddess (Feraro 2010, 2011) and Wicca (Benyovits-Hoffman 2010; Katz-Henkin 2010; Salinas Mizrahi 2011) (both of which have outstanding post-secular dimensions, including, at times, a post-secular return to pre-monotheism as a source of ethical concepts that oppose the patriarchal religion) were presented as well, although not always in a Jewish context.

Yet another area worth mentioning is the (still embryonic) realm of *Critical Theology* in Israel (Benyanini and Hotam 2015). A first conference on that topic was held at Tel Aviv University in 2012, providing a platform for a variety of thinkers, some of whom may be considered to be feminist, who address hybrid secular–religious theologies. In this context, one may mention Benyamini (2003) and Freibach-Heifetz (2009).

Such conferences may well be the harbingers of development in the field. I do not claim that they are necessarily the most relevant or central sociological space in which feminist Jewish post-secular theology is likely to develop. At this stage, the lack of sociological data on post-secularism in Israel—especially its gender and feminist components—renders it impossible to estimate which social framework, if any, is most conducive to the development of such philosophy and which personalities will be its most outstanding proponents.

Similarly, we are still unable to present a precise portrait of a feminist theology that does not attempt to rectify Judaism in light of feminist values, but rather seeks to nourish aspirations for feminist spirituality with Jewish content—without necessarily

perceiving these two elements as mutually contradictory. The type of philosophy capable of responding to these questions has not developed to date.

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Notes

1. Spirituality will be defined here as a way of life that internalizes "the deepest values and meanings by which people seek to live," with emphasis on experiences and spaces of sanctity and belief in realities that transcend the material, whether perceived as transcendent or immanent. Even though religions are among the outstanding reflections of the spiritual approach, the concept of spirituality is not limited to them but today includes a broad range of outlooks and schools of thought that focus on aspiration towards realities broader than the material world. In this respect, the concept describes an individual process or situation centring on a personal quest for a spiritual path (see, for example, Sheldrake 2007, 1–2; Wexler 2008; Zinnbauer and Pargament 2005).
2. As noted by Eliezer Schweid (2000), a renowned scholar specializing in the place of Jewish thought in Israeli culture, one should not confuse this post-secular hybridity with the dialectics of religion and nationality that characterized part of Jewish philosophy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, because secularization, in the sense derived from the secularization thesis—and considering its connection to modernity—is today a given fact that can no longer be challenged in the West. The historical aspects of this developmental process are beyond the scope of the present study. Also beyond the scope of this study is the movement challenging the dichotomous division between secularism and religiosity, which originates in schools of thought defined as "religious" that seek to separate religiosity from definitions of identity and rigid institutional affiliations (such as the rebirth of various neo-Hassidic movements).
3. The third category, believing, will be considered in the following. In research discourse, these three categories are often referred to as the Three B's.
4. As dwelling in the Land of Israel is itself a religious precept in Judaism, all Jews in Israel effectively observe at least one such precept.
5. This has to do with the lack of separation between church and state and the lack of official civil marriages in Israel, but even people who decide not to marry under the Israeli Orthodox law tend to assimilate Jewish traditional rituals such as the wedding canopy (*hupa*) when celebrating a couple's unification.
6. Liebman and Yadgar (2003) insist that Friday afternoon radio broadcasts have virtually no traditional Jewish content; their most significant component is a change in tone rather than content, a shift that symbolizes Jewish time.
7. A US survey, for example, revealed that even though 16% of Americans do not consider themselves as affiliated with any religion whatsoever, 92% believe in God or in some kind of spiritual forces (The Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life 2008).
8. In this context, Brinker (2007) proposes differentiating between "soft secularism," characterized by transfer of religion to public space, and "hard secularism" that is

"anti-theology, stubbornly agnostic or even heretic and atheistic." Brinker estimates that only 10% of the population of Israel consists of hard secularists. Research commissioned by the Avi-Chai Foundation and the Guttman Center (Keissar-Sugarmen 2012) shows that only 3% of Israeli Jews define themselves as anti-religious. In contrast to Brinker's views, the post-secular approach does not perceive what he terms soft secularism to be a weaker conception than the hard variety, but rather as one that expresses the lack of dichotomous differentiation between religiosity and secularism.

9. In the USA, there is also a substantial group of secular-believers: 27% of Nones can be classified as firm believers and 24% as Deists (Kosmin and Keysar 2007). Among American Jews who are "secular" (profess no religion), there is a similar level of belief (Pew Research: Religion and Public Life Project 2013).
10. Hampson (2002) proposes relating to the Bible in the same manner as the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*—a great literary work that has no authority or basis for claims of truth.
11. For example, Hampson (2002) writes that scientific knowledge about the universe no longer corroborates belief in a Creator situated somewhere in heaven, nor claims of "| interruptions in the causal nexus of history," as in the resurrection of Jesus.
12. I refer to the discourse taking place at institutions of higher learning and by scholars active at these institutions. Feminist theological discourse that takes place in other spaces, such as feminine spirituality groups, is beyond the scope of this study.
13. This does not mean that these theologies are identical to one another. The most outstanding difference is between Tamar Ross, who is Orthodox and largely defends the validity of Halakha, and the other writers, who espouse a more liberal, American Judaism. Their theologies interface with one another at many key points that differ from those of the post-secular conception.
14. This topic is beyond the scope of the present study. For more information, see Lahav (2007) and Wolfson (1994).
15. In this context, Levitt (2008) claims that in the USA, the Protestant idea that detaches religion from nationality and ethnicity impels the Jews towards the synagogue, the only legitimate institution for expressing their Judaism.
16. When attending Jewish feminism conferences, I have been asked on more than one occasion: "What are you doing here among us religious women?" My explanation was always accepted with respect, but my estrangement in that space was always evident. On the other hand, at times, after delivering lectures at such conferences, women came to me from the audience to say things like "I'm also essentially a secular believer, but until now I did not know how to define myself," meaning that in the sphere of Jewish feminism in the academic world, there are indeed women who manifest such identity, even if they have not yet made their voices heard.

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