

Transforming Rituals: Contemporary Jewish Women's Seders

Sonia Zylberberg

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Religion

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

February 2006

© Sonia Zylberberg, 2006



Library and
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-16280-4
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-16280-4

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.


Canada

ABSTRACT

Transforming Rituals: Contemporary Jewish Women's Seders

Sonia Zylberberg, Ph.D.
Concordia University, 2006

The women's seder, a new Jewish ritual, was created in the 1970s by and for Jewish feminists. Consciously constructed, it transformed the traditional Passover seder to focus specifically on women and the issues they faced. The feminist atmosphere in which it originated encouraged experimentation, resulting in rituals that reflected and increased female spiritual empowerment. Since that time, the women's seder has evolved to become an annual ritual event for many Jewish women, some of whom are feminist but many of whom are not. The ritual resonates with practitioners' hybrid identities, with what I have termed 'belonging-sense'. It provides the opportunity for Jewish women to ritualize together as full active participants and ritual experts.

In order to properly investigate the ritual, I used an inter-disciplinary methodology and developed a concept and term, 'belonging-sense', which links rituals, ritualizers, and identity. I then used these tools to examine how a ritualizer's personal sense of belonging effects and affects transformation, making possible the continuation of tradition.

The thesis also traces the development of the women's seder along with its Jewish and feminist roots. It portrays a number of particular rites, and formulates a description of a generic women's seder. It explores the development of two new ritual objects, the orange on the seder plate and Miriam's Cup, and discusses new and modified texts, or haggadahs. From questionnaires and interviews, I was also able to compile information on the characteristics and attitudes of many ritualizers, and to describe a generic participant. A common priority for most of my respondents was that the ritual combine innovation with tradition, and that it enrich and increase their ritual world, not diminish it. They loved the new ritual for its own sake but did not want to lose the old one. The women's seder has also begun to have its own transforming effect

on many regular seders, as participants have brought changes home with them; this study examines some of these sites of transformation and contributes to an understanding of how limits of change are established: when a change can be incorporated and when it is just too extreme.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the extraordinary dedication and continual help of two good friends: my thesis supervisor, Norma Joseph, and my editor, Rose Ftaya. I have no words with which to convey the depths of my gratitude to both of them – I only hope that I have been able, in some measure, to reciprocate their warmth, generosity, and tangible assistance.

The Religion Department at Concordia is a place that I have been privileged to call home during the last 15 years (during my qualifying, masters, and doctoral studies). Throughout that time, the atmosphere of congeniality and support has made it possible for me to pursue my studies, my research, and my academic and personal growth. All the professors I worked with have contributed to these endeavours, and I thank them. In particular, the members of my thesis advisory committee, Michael Oppenheim and Ira Robinson, have been unfailingly helpful and supportive as they reread countless versions of my chapters and provided feedback and suggestions. And, of course, the department administrators, Tina Montandon and Munit Merid, were essential – they somehow manage to be always (or almost always) cheerful and helpful, and without them, none of us would get anything done!

In the course of my study, I met with many people who contributed to the success of my project, and I thank them all. The staff at Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project in New York, in particular Eve Landau, Barbara Dobkin, and Tamara Cohen, were very enthusiastic and donated their time, advice, and support. Paula Weitzman at Na'amat Montreal, Marla Spiegel at Hadassah-WIZO Toronto, and Michele Landsberg also spent time with me, discussing my project and being interviewed. Members of my own women's seder group and many other practitioners across the country responded to my request and provided me with feedback.

The Hadassah International Research Institute on Jewish Women at Brandeis University gave me a research grant to help me pursue my project, for which I am very grateful. The Association

for Jewish Studies' Women's Caucus and the Association for Canadian Jewish Studies both gave me travel grants so that I could present parts of my study at their conferences.

And, of course, I want to thank my family and friends, who have been very patient. They fed me, gave me moral support, and were understanding about my preoccupation and absence during this long process. I hope they will find the end product worth the trouble.

Finally, I want to thank the innovative women who first conceived of and created this ritual, and the practitioners who have embraced and celebrated it since that time. I can only hope that reading this thesis brings to readers a sense of the joy and excitement that was evident at the women's seders I attended.

Table of Contents

1. Seeking a Place of Belonging	1
2. Histories of Change	32
A. Seders	32
B. Women's rituals	42
3. Sites of Transformation	52
4. Transforming Objects	
A. Oranges	76
B. Miriam's Cup	94
5. Transforming Texts	114
A. Gender	119
i. God-language	120
ii. Seder Participants	126
iii. Human-Language in English Translations ...	129
B. Inclusivity and Accessibility	132
C. New Ritual Objects	140
D. Characters	143
E. Activism	147
F. Summary	152
6. Questionnaires	158
A. Demographics	169
B. Participation	180
C. After-effects	195
D. Summary	203
7. Transforming Rituals: Towards a Sense of Belonging	207
Bibliography	242
Appendix A: Ma'yan questionnaire	251
Appendix B: Na'amat questionnaire	253
Appendix C: Hadassah-WIZO questionnaire	255
Appendix D: Independent questionnaire	257

Chapter 1. Seeking a Place of Belonging

The seder ritual which celebrates the Jewish holiday of Passover is about the telling of a story. It is a story about transformation, the telling of which is intended to be transformative. Although the *maggid*, the ‘telling’, is only one of the 14 components of the seder (literally: order), it is by far the largest and longest portion, and the story is meant to be directly meaningful to every person at the seder table. Even those things that are not a telling (the ritual foods, ritual objects, and ritual actions) reinforce the immediacy of the story as each participant is exhorted to personally re/live the experience of coming out of Egypt.

A dissertation is also in many ways the telling of a transformative story, the recounting of a lived experience. For me, this dissertation, this story, lies in the conjunction of the personal and the academic. I began participating in women’s seders in the early 1990s; at the same time I started my academic study of religion. The co-incidence was not accidental—both actions stemmed from a personal search for spirituality and meaning, which my previously secular and business-world life lacked.

I fell in love with study and practice. The studies have proved to be an as-yet-unending source of discoveries that capture and captivate my intellect and imagination. The women’s seders married intellect and imagination to physical expression. They attracted many strands of my hybrid self, teasing them out and speaking to them in ways I had not experienced before. Between my academic pursuits, the women’s seder, and the Rosh Hodesh and other Jewish rituals enacted by my alternative Jewish Renewal group, I felt that I had, for the first time, found a place I belonged, a place I could call home.

The practical expression of my homecoming is this dissertation. Inspired by the effect of the women’s seder on my sense of belonging, I decided to investigate the ritual, not only for its own sake but also to assess its significance in a larger context. I knew that women’s seders, even if they were wildly successful, would always appeal to a circumscribed group. But small numbers

do not necessarily equate to limited influence. It occurred to me that, if these relatively few ritualizers were taking innovative ritual elements back to their regular seders,¹ women's seders and women's seder participants had an enormous potential to transform the lives of individual Jews and the Jewish ritual tradition, and might have already begun to do so.

The kinds of changes I envisioned led me to consider other questions. Positing the new ritual as a form of resistance, I thought I might examine the ways in which it was subverting the existing power structure and religious authority of Jewish communities. I initially intended to describe the ritual, locate the transformations, investigate how they were affecting the larger tradition, discuss implications for resistance and power dynamics, and theorize about sites of ritual authority.

Having set out, it became apparent that my itinerary was too ambitious for this stage of my research. The first three parts (describing the ritual, locating the transformations, and investigating the effects on the larger tradition) were sufficiently rich that in order to do them justice, the other parts would have to wait for a follow-up study. The richness stemmed at least partially from my discovery of the extent to which the new ritual both responded to and constructed a sense of belonging among the participants.² If one of the powers of ritual is to sustain tradition by giving identity to participants, my research shows that it is also participants who give identity, form, and meaning to tradition by transforming rituals.

With Victor Turner, I see rituals as a great source for the re-invigorating of social structures:

[R]itual is not necessarily a bastion of social conservatism; its symbols do not merely condense cherished sociocultural values. Rather, through its liminal processes, it holds the generating source of culture and structure.³

This generating potential is especially accessible to "liminal *personae*", i.e. "threshold people": those who are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and

¹ The term 'regular seder' is used throughout this thesis to refer to the traditional type of seder ritual, as opposed to the women's seder.

² This reinforces Clifford Geertz' positioning of cultural patterns, which includes rituals, as both "models of" and "models for" particular worldviews (Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 93–94).

³ Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, 158.

arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial”.⁴ According to Turner’s formulation, it is their very lack of status that empowers liminal people in their roles of critics and agents of regeneration. He cites court jesters and hippies as examples of those with liminal roles. Ironically, Turner’s strict definition implies that the position of liminality is comprehensive, and, further, that it is not only an in-between state, but actually one of marginality. It does not allow for people who do have positive communal status and are only liminal in certain of their actions. This is the situation of Jewish women who step outside the boundaries of the tradition’s rituals. By stepping beyond existing boundaries, they enter uncharted territory where there are no established rules or roles. However, they do not necessarily lose the status accorded by the tradition to Jewish women which, while ambiguous and ambivalent, is also often real and valued. Indeed, they often have great authority in the ritual arena, particularly within the family setting. So, if they bring elements of the new ritual back to the regular seder, they do so in their role of entrenched family member. They are positioned to change themselves, their rituals, and, perhaps, even the communities to which they belong.

The intent of this thesis is to move from the general to the specific by describing women’s seders, locating transformations, and investigating effects on the larger tradition. And, within this context, to examine how a ritualizer’s personal sense of belonging effects and affects transformation. And, against that background, to understand the liminality of women’s seders as a bi-directional bridge that, through a process of transformation, makes the continuation of tradition possible.

Method and Theory:

Until recently, the study of rituals was primarily descriptive and unidisciplinary. Anthropologists studied the ‘exotic’ rituals of ‘others’, while religionists analyzed the evolution of textual liturgies. As Ron Grimes outlines them, the various approaches adopted by scholars

⁴ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95. See below for a more complete discussion of Turner’s views.

have been to describe phenomenology; identify underlying structures; consider a ritual's social functions; focus on individual and group psychology; explain a given ritual as an ecological operation; trace historical and theological precedents and consequences; and concentrate on the use of ritual in constructing life-worlds and ultimate realities. As to the limited approach of religionists in particular, Grimes goes on to posit that “[r]eligious studies has generally avoided theorizing about ritual in favor of the classification or history of it..., because it fears explaining ritual away.”⁵ As he points out, all of these are primarily methods for either charting historical developments or for classifying. They yield results but they calcify the rituals.

In the 1960s, the study, and even the understanding, of rituals began to change. Grimes suggests that this was due to reciprocal shifts in popular culture and academic studies, especially in the work of Victor Turner. Turner “reinvented ritual”, highlighting and bringing into the field the concepts of “liminality, communitas, ritual process, and social drama.”⁶

Turner’s formulation extended concepts first articulated by Arnold van Gennep in 1908. Van Gennep observed that “rites de passage”, i.e. rituals enacted at “life-passages” or transitional moments in people’s lives, shared a common pattern: a three stage process of separation, transition, and incorporation. His description was intended literally; the separations and incorporations he observed were physical in nature, and he used spatial metaphors to describe them: borders between countries, neutral zones, doors, and, at their most minimal, thresholds. The image of a threshold, or *limen*, was central to his expression, and he employed the terms pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal to describe the three stages. For van Gennep, all three stages were equally important and the significance of the threshold lay primarily in its function as separator.⁷

⁵ Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 38–39.

⁶ Grimes, “Reinventing Ritual,” 22. A similar rethinking was taking place in other academic disciplines, most notably textual analysis. See, for instance, the works of Robert Alter and Jacob Neusner, two scholars who began to examine ancient Jewish texts within their social contexts.

⁷ van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, originally published in French as *Les rites de passage*.

In Turner's formulation, the liminal phase is anything but passive. It is the central and most effective moment, both dangerous and creative. Turner recasts van Gennep's model by integrating it with the ideas of Mary Douglas regarding taboos and pollution. Douglas describes the way that beings/objects/acts/phenomena that do not fit into societal structures become "matter out of place", and are perceived as polluting to established structures.⁸ Turner links Douglas' "matter out of place" to the liminal realm:

[O]ne would expect to find that transitional beings are particularly polluting, since they are neither one thing nor another; or may be both; or neither here nor there; or even be nowhere (in terms of any recognized cultural topography), and are at the very least 'betwixt and between' all the recognized fixed points in space-time of structural classification. In fact, in confirmation of Dr. Douglas's hypothesis, liminal *personae* nearly always and everywhere are regarded as polluting.⁹

Turner sees those in the liminal state, those who are 'polluting bodies', as inhabiting a literal and/or symbolic space where the structures of society do not exist. The liminal state can serve as a source of great creativity because it is "a condition ... of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories."¹⁰

Ritual is, for him, one of the paths to the liminal state, but it must be authentic ritual with all its "richness, flexibility, and symbolic wealth" and not simply ceremony: "In Turner's theory—perhaps more accurately, in his vision—*ritual* is subversive, the opposite of *ceremony*, the staunch conservator of culture and guardian of the status quo."¹¹ However, he finds authentic rituals primarily in non-industrial societies, and regrets the "deliminalization" of religions and the concomitant loss of creative energy in contemporary industrial societies.¹²

Turner has, perhaps, judged too quickly. Many instances of liminalizing ritual can still be found in industrial societies. And, even though van Gennep's and Turner's models are most

⁸ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 41.

⁹ Turner, "Betwixt and Between," 97.

¹⁰ Turner, "Betwixt and Between," 97.

¹¹ Grimes, *Deeply into the bone*, 122, emphasis in the original.

¹² Turner, "Variations on a Theme of Liminality." Although he sees evidence of some liminal processes within industrial societies, these are in the realm of leisure rather than spirituality, and he uses the terms "liminoid" to describe this state in order to differentiate it from the liminality that arises from ritual.

applicable to life-cycle rituals, especially rituals of initiation, they are also useful for others, as most rituals contain some elements of transition, at least on the symbolic level. Ron Grimes, for example, applies the three-stage model, focusing especially on the liminal aspect, to rituals ranging from rites of passage to an annual festival in Santa Fe to the ritual-like activities of an improvisational theatre group. He even personalizes the model, describing his own experience of liminality, during a “cross-cultural baptism”, that reached “deeply into the bone.”¹³

Because of its focus on transition and movement, Turner’s model, in particular, is helpful in analyzing the effective transformational aspects of all rituals. His description of how rituals can place people in positions of great creative potential also suggests another line of inquiry. Although he discusses in only general terms the creative energy released, it is possible that an examination of how that energy is used could shed light on how and why rituals themselves are recreated and transformed by ritualizers.

Regrettably, academic theories and definitions have not taken sufficient advantage of Turner’s “reinvention of ritual”. According to Grimes, scholarly works still tend to use older views of ritual as being defined by four criteria: collectivity, traditionality, pre-critical consciousness, and meaningfulness. “The view of ritual as traditional (rather than invented), collective (rather than individual), pre-critical (rather than self-conscious and reflective), and meaningful (i.e., referential) is so widespread and unquestioned as to make it virtually sacrosanct”.¹⁴ Theories and methodologies dealing with ritual are tied to this viewpoint and to these criteria. In most cases, studies are limited to specific contexts of time and space. Important information is collected but mechanisms of change are neglected and rituals are still primarily understood in static terms.

Bruce Lincoln is among a group of contemporary ritual scholars (including Ron Grimes, Tom Driver, and Lesley Northrup among others) who do follow Turner in viewing rituals as highly

¹³ Grimes, *Deeply Into the Bone*, 123–124.

¹⁴ Grimes, “Reinventing Ritual,” 23.

dynamic in nature. He understands this dynamism both in terms of rituals' effects on ritualizers and the ritualizers' effects on rituals. He is encouraged by the trend towards studying change and discontinuity in rituals, but for himself finds that it has not yet progressed to the point of being helpful in many cases: "To date, however, we have seen relatively little in the way of systematic reflection on the broader question of when, where, why, and how change takes place in ritual, or attempts to identify the manifold forms such change can take".¹⁵ While his work is dedicated to addressing these questions, I have not found it particularly helpful for my own research.

Grimes is also fascinated by the reciprocity between the transformative power of ritual and the power of ritualizers to transform. He also seeks to understand how change occurs and to what effect. For me, Grimes' way of exploring rituals provides a perspective as well as tools and a language for deconstructing their dynamics. He is interested in all their aspects, especially that of innovation. In building on Turner's formulation, he suggests the category "emergent ritual", or "ritualizing", for rituals that are still being created and lack some or all of the classical characteristics described above.¹⁶

The women's seder fits the category and, at the same time, expands it. The ritual is brand new, only 40 years old and still very much in transition. On the other hand, it is derived from an established ritual with which it shares many features. It is simultaneously traditional and invented, collective and individual, pre-critical and self-conscious, and involves ritualizers who create their own referential meanings. Thus the traditional criteria *are* present, but they are continually challenged. Like other emerging rituals, women's seders cannot be properly

¹⁵ Lincoln, "On Ritual, Change, and Marked Categories," 487. Lincoln cites Catherine Bell's *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* as an exception to this constraint, but I find that text to be mostly descriptive. A better example is Bell's "Ritualization of Texts and Textualization of Ritual in the Codification of Taoist Liturgy", where she analyzes the reciprocal relationship between the ritual and its textual description. However, neither that study nor the rituals Lincoln analyzes in his article are similar enough to my own project to be applicable.

¹⁶ Grimes, "Reinventing Ritual." He uses the term "ritualizing" as both a verb and a noun, for the act of constructing emergent rituals and for the emergent rituals themselves, as it "is a reminder that I am highlighting the processual phase in the life history of a rite" (39 n2).

addressed by conventional theories and methodologies. They require an approach that appreciates their flexible character.

As mentioned above, older approaches to ritual studies are mostly descriptive and unidisciplinary. Once the idea of ritual as subversive, changeable, and malleable is introduced, analysis becomes more complicated. Description is important but not sufficient. To capture the symbiotic relationship between ritual, ritualizers, and community, an interdisciplinary approach—some combination of religious studies, anthropology, sociology, literary studies, philosophy, theology, and history, where each field can contribute its particular strength—is much more likely to be fruitful.

The problem is that few interdisciplinary models actually exist for examining rituals.¹⁷ In compensation, interdisciplinary studies have a great strength: the researcher is allowed a good deal of scope and personal initiative in approaching the subject. A methodology is constructed by the individual researcher to fit the particular subject being investigated and the particular questions being asked. For my project, I have gathered my own unique set of tools, culled from the disciplines of history, ritology, anthropology (especially ethnography), textual analysis, and sociology.

Chapter 2 of this thesis provides the historical setting for the women's seder. While the ritual is relatively young (as mentioned above, it has been practiced only since the 1970s), it did not spring into existence in a vacuum; it was created, consciously and purposefully, from an existing model. The history of the new ritual thus takes its place within the 2000 year history of the Passover seder. The body of literature on the original Passover ritual is extensive, but, because my focus is on change, I concentrate on sites of significant modifications of the symbolic seder foods, as their history of change from biblical to modern times has been documented and often

¹⁷ Ron Grimes is one of the few who does do this by example. But each particular study requires its own particular model, with its own particular set of appropriate disciplines and tools.

discussed. This history clearly illustrates some of the ways in which changes have been intentionally incorporated into the seder over time.

In the second half of the chapter, I explore the context within which the new ritual was born. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed an upsurge of activism for women's rights in North America. Amongst other demands, the feminist movement pushed for greater participation and authority for women in all domains. Inspired and empowered Jewish feminists created new women-oriented and women-centred rituals, one of which was the women's seder. An overview of Jewish ritual changes resulting from the feminist movement provides an understanding of the context within which the women's seders were conceived, and an appreciation for the underlying ideology and the high value placed on innovation.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the history of women's seders in general, and to the history and description of the particular women's seders that are the direct objects of my study. The body of literature on women's seders is small, and that on the history even smaller.¹⁸ While the seder's beginnings are hazy, it does seem to have been a specific response to a specific situation. It was created and, at first, nurtured within a feminist environment, but, over time, its initial ideological underpinnings were diluted as its popularity spread. Grassroots and individual at first, the ritual has also expanded into institutional and more mainstream realms. What is consistent throughout is that the ritual is a Passover seder purposefully modified to focus on women and women's issues.

To the information on women's seders gleaned from the literature, I was able to add my own direct observations as well as those of women's seder practitioners who responded to questionnaires. I attended as a participant/observer and distributed questionnaires at four

¹⁸ This is not surprising given that the ritual itself is relatively new. However, it is small even in comparison with the literature on Rosh Hodesh, another of the Jewish women's rituals created by feminists in the 1970s. Since I began my research project, a two-volume anthology devoted to the subject of women's seders has been published (Sharon Cohen Anisfeld, Tara Mohr & Catherine Spector, eds. *The Women's Seder Sourcebook* and *The Women's Passover Companion*). Although I thought this would result in my having to make substantial changes to my project, this was not necessary as the material does not overlap significantly with my own.

women's seders hosted by four different groups. The rites were a 2001 seder hosted by Ma'yan, the Jewish Women's Project in New York; the 2001 seder hosted by Na'amat Montreal; the 2002 seder hosted by Hadassah-WIZO Toronto; and the 2002 seder hosted by the Jewish Renewal group Har Kodesh in Montreal.¹⁹ The Ma'yan seder was an obvious choice because it is the largest and most well-known annual women's seder, drawing participants not just from its own locality (New York), but from many other places as well. In addition, the haggadah that accompanies the seder has been distributed to groups throughout North America, is available in retail outlets, and has provided inspiration for other haggadahs and seders. The other three seders in my study are much more local events and, because I particularly wanted to gain an understanding of the ritual's status in Canada, they are all Canadian. I included Na'amat's rite as it is the largest women's seder in Montreal. In order to expand the Canadian perspective, I attended the Hadassah-WIZO event, a large public seder held in Toronto. The fourth seder was the one held by my own group, which I attend every year, and which offered interesting points of comparison with the others as it differed in many respects. I also solicited information from people who had attended other women's seders throughout the country.

I turned to Ron Grimes for suggestions on how to document my observations. The field of ritology is relatively new, and Grimes suggests, first of all, a common language so that the terminology can become consistent throughout the discipline. In this schema, 'rite' is used to refer to specific enactments at concrete times and places; 'ritual' denotes the general idea of which rite is a specific instance; and 'ritualizing' is the activity of deliberately cultivating or inventing rites.²⁰ This is the way these terms are used throughout this dissertation.

¹⁹ The study is focused on one particular rite for each group. However, this was not the extent of my observations. I attended four Ma'yan seders in three different years, two Na'amat seders in two different years, and have attended Har Kodesh seders every year since 1993. I also distributed questionnaires at all four Ma'yan seders held in 2001. In addition, I distributed a modified version of the questionnaire at the four 2002 Ma'yan seders, but these are not included in this study.

²⁰ Grimes, *Ritual Criticism*, ch.1. He also defines a fourth term, 'ritualization', as an activity which someone interprets as potential ritual.

There are many ways in which rituals and rites can be and have been documented. Grimes proposes a method for “mapping the field of ritual”:

If we are to understand a rite adequately, the first prerequisite is as full a description as possible...[F]ull descriptions of rites are both hard to produce and difficult to interpret...[W]e must work with full, evocative descriptions, not mere summaries of the values and beliefs implicit in them.²¹

Grimes’ mapping deconstructs the rite into six components, each of which is described separately: ritual space, ritual objects, ritual time, ritual sound and language, ritual identity, and ritual action. I followed his categories in my description of each of the rites I observed.

I obtained my observations of the four rites, not by passively attending, but by personally and actively participating. In my role of participant/observer, I drew on anthropological and, in particular, ethnographic methods. Chapters 3 through 7 are informed by my position as participant/observer and dependent on the theoretical work of several feminist anthropologists and ethnographers.

We live in a society with many culturally constructed boundaries, among which are the lines between subject and object, between researcher and subject, between academy and non-academy, between self and other. Recently, many anthropologists have recognized the need to make explicit their interest and involvement in what they study and to transgress some of these boundaries, raising questions such as: as we study others, how much of our self do we bring to bear on what we study? is there, in fact, any part that we leave behind, or do we bring our whole self into relation with the other?²²

Ruth Behar describes an anthropology that is passionate and engaged. For her, the study must touch and affect the researcher personally: “Call it sentimental, call it Victorian and nineteenth century, but I say that anthropology that doesn’t break your heart just isn’t worth doing

²¹ Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 25.

²² Within contemporary anthropology, the streams of feminist anthropology and experimental ethnography both address these questions in detail. See, for example, Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, ch. 2, for a detailed discussion of the issue.

anymore.”²³ She discusses the situation of the vulnerable observer, the anthropologist whose engagement with her study stems explicitly from her self and life, and, in turn, results in changes to both of these. Although critics have accused Behar of “nouveau solipsism”²⁴ and navel gazing, labeling her approach self-serving and superficial, I find it offers much that is useful and theoretically sound.

An engagement with the study does not mean that the researcher is focused on herself. Nor does it necessarily result in revealing heartbreaks or baring the innermost soul. What it does mean is that the researcher must understand and communicate what moves her and what she connects to in her study, clarifying the personal perspective. This makes the study real and authentic for the writer, and allows the reader, in turn, to be moved and triggered by her/his own concerns. Engagement provides a reason for the studying, for the writing, and for the reading. The study cannot be (mis)construed as knowledge only for the sake of knowledge; it is clearly relevant to lived lives. The explicit acknowledgement of the researcher’s engagement also raises the level of sensitivity in both the researcher and the reader to biases that might influence the research. Behar’s formulation inspired me to follow this approach in my own study, to situate myself within the study and to always pay attention to the aspects with which I felt the strongest connection.

A benefit of this approach was that I became aware of the centrality of my own feminist orientation in this project. The ideal towards which I personally strive is one of complete gendered equality of opportunity and access, with the requisite structural changes in society and a concomitant change in the way individuals, women and men, perceive themselves and behave towards others. Basic to this feminism is the insistence that theories of equality are meaningless when separated from practice, a conviction that informs the way I live my own life and the way I

²³ Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer*, 177.

²⁴ From Daphne Patai, “Sick and Tired of Nouveau Solipsism” (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Feb 23 1994), quoted in Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer*, 14.

interpret the actions of others. As a result, I approach accepted traditions and interpretations with a hermeneutic of suspicion and skepticism and work to redress imbalances. This attitude is so engrained that my inclination is to take it for granted in others. I have a tendency to view, for instance, women's participation in new rituals as motivated by resistance to and rebellion against the status quo: I have to struggle to see that not everyone participating in these activities accepts the existence of gender inequality or shares my desire to transform societal structures.

The subject of this study, the women's seder, was conceived within a feminist framework recognizably similar to my own. That framework is also the underlying principle informing my research and analysis of women's seders. It is clear that feminism and feminist ideas are pivotal elements permeating the entire project. But it does not necessarily follow that my subjects, contemporary practitioners, all share this perspective. Behar's approach warned me against imposing this viewpoint on individual ritualizers, who might be completely indifferent or even antagonistic to feminism and might be responding to quite different impetuses.²⁵ It became important to me to note and analyze the use or non-use of terms such as 'feminist' and 'feminism' by the participants, and to discuss their own understanding of the issues.

In any case, terms such as 'feminist' and 'feminism' are problematic. Both of them are elastic and open to interpretation; we cannot take for granted that they are always used to mean the same things. Along with this ambiguity of terminology is the fact that a backlash against feminism has occurred since the 1970s.²⁶ The words themselves have become discredited in many forums, and today many people are reluctant to use either of them.²⁷ They are highly charged, and their use or non-use is often controversial, as is evident in the data of this study. Questionnaire responses and interviews with the seder organizers indicate varying levels of comfort with feminism and

²⁵ See Chava Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs*, ch.10, for a discussion of the ways in which initial feminist assumptions may be challenged by actual research and may even have to be dropped.

²⁶ For a more complete discussion of this topic, see, for instance, Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*.

²⁷ For example, for a discussion on young women and feminist terminology see Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards' *MANIFESTA: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*.

'feminism'. The absence of the word itself is sometimes intentional and significant, while at other times it is arbitrary. When evaluating and interpreting the data, I had to bear in mind that this was not necessarily a question of semantics, but was sometimes linked to an explicit and conscious application or rejection of feminist ideology.²⁸

Feminism is only one of many ways in which I relate to my research project. Anthropologist Kamala Visweswaran introduced me to issues of hybridity in both the researcher and the research topic, and the way the concepts of 'fieldwork' and 'homework' are separate from and also overlap with each other. Visweswaran was born in the United States of an Indian-born father and an American (non-Indian, of Scottish descent) mother. Her skin colour marked her as different from the white children with whom she grew up; to this day she does not know whether the term 'Indian' applies to her or not, or what to answer when she is directly questioned regarding her ethnicity/origins. She traveled to India as an anthropologist engaged in an ethnographic study. But, once there, she found herself continually confronted with questions and uncertainties regarding her own self. She offers the term 'hyphenated ethnography' to describe ethnographical studies undertaken by 'hyphenated ethnographers': Indo-Americans doing work in India; Japanese-Canadians in Japan, etc. Her own situation is complicated by the fact that she is a second generation immigrant, born in the United States: she is at home in neither America nor India; for her there is no comfortable homeland and the terms 'field' and 'home' defy any simple definition.

My own narrative has begun with the 'field' and worked its way steadily homeward... This essay... has been a part of my own homework exercise, an attempt to understand how one anthropologist, enabled by a particular kind of 'field', attempts to rewrite the terms of 'home' and 'world' through a regenerated feminist praxis... I also recognize that *field* and *home* are dependent, not mutually exclusive terms, and that the lines between fieldwork and homework are not always distinct.²⁹

Visweswaran's discussion highlighted for me the ways in which we function within the many

²⁸ This is particularly relevant to the discussions of haggadahs (ch.5) and questionnaire responses (ch.6).

²⁹ Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, 112–113; emphasis in the original.

diverse groups to which we belong, and the ways we navigate between them. Visweswaran is certainly not alone in being 'hyphenated', or hybrid; we are all in this situation to a greater or lesser extent. In my case, an explicit description of my hybrid identity would be something like: Canadian feminist secularly-raised Jewish child-of-Holocaust-survivors woman single immigrant student ... (in no particular order). Each of these categories could be field and/or home, as each is an area in which I feel at home and, at the same time, uncomfortably foreign. Visweswaran reminds me to pay attention to the ways in which I simultaneously do and do not belong to many groups, and the ways in which this affects my study. As the people I intended to study overlapped with my own hybridity to a significant extent, this was especially pertinent. It also helped me recognize the importance of each individual ritualizer's hybridity and the complexity of each one's relationship with the women's seder.

Visweswaran and Behar reveal and examine their vulnerabilities and their positions on the margins of various social constructs, not in order to wallow in solipsism, but to examine and call into question relevant social issues, traditions, and boundaries.³⁰ The critical perspective of marginality is one that I share with Behar and Visweswaran and was able to bring to bear in this study. As an active participant in women's seders, I was privy to an insider's view at the same time as I consciously distanced myself in order to observe. Other ethnographers helped me understand how to do this, and some of the advantages and dangers involved.

Barbara Myerhoff came to the study of a community of elderly Jews after the Chicanos she had first approached asked her why she did not study her own kind. Although obviously and unalterably Other from her subjects in terms of age, she shared many attributes with them. She was a second-generation American whose grandparents had emigrated from the Eastern European

³⁰ Marginality, while often uncomfortable, confers certain advantages, one of which is the ability to examine ethnographic and anthropological interactions from a critical perspective. As Visweswaran puts it, "I have wanted to detail how those of us engaged in identifying ethnography may be moved by different sets of questions concerning power, domination, and representation; how we may ourselves be positioned (and not always by choice) in opposition to dominant discourses and structures of power" (*Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, 140).

shtetls which were the birth places of her subjects; in fact, many of her subjects reminded her of her grandparents and, for their part, many of them came to look on her as a kind of daughter or granddaughter, one that took the place of their own absent children: one man went so far as to claim that she was his long-lost granddaughter. Myerhoff saw her subjects as less and less Other; as she says, “I would be a little old Jewish lady one day”.³¹ This was such a key point for her that she repeated it in the film she made to publicize the plight of her subjects. It was evident to her subjects as well that she was not completely Other: one of the first things that they did on meeting her was to confirm their impression that she was Jewish.

Susan Sered, also Jewish, also studied a group of elderly Jews, in this case women only. However, the boundary between Sered and her subjects was more clearly drawn. Sered was much younger and conspicuously more literate and educated than her subjects, who were not entirely fluent in any language.³² But Sered notes that her pregnancy during most of the time of her fieldwork affected her research substantially, allowing her access to information surrounding birthing that would not normally have been available. However, although she certainly seems to have attained a level of closeness and intimacy with her subjects over the course of the two years of study, neither side blurred the boundary between them. Sered explicitly refers to herself as an outsider.

Myerhoff and Sered present different examples of ethnographic studies of Jewish groups undertaken by Jewish researchers who are recognizably simultaneously insider and outsider to themselves and to those they are studying. From different vantage points, they struggle with and discuss issues that this position raises. Each one has a different point at which fieldwork begins to merge with homework. This was very helpful to me in locating my own overlaps as I interacted

³¹ Myerhoff, *Number Our Days*, 19. Unfortunately, this prediction did not, in fact, come to pass. Barbara Myerhoff died on January 7, 1985 at the age of 49.

³² “Unfortunately, most never learned any language thoroughly, and their conversations typically vacillate from Hebrew to Kurdish to Arabic, and often end midthought and midsentence with the words ‘you know’ or ‘I don’t know’” (Sered, *Women as Ritual Experts*, 10–11).

with the different groups in my study. Even though I shared my Jewishness with all of them, my relationship with each of the groups in my study was different, ranging from being an actual member of the group to being other in many aspects. I brought Behar's, Visweswaran's, Myerhoff's, and Sered's perspectives and experiences with me as I conducted my field/home work, which is presented in chapters 3 through 7.³³

Because we are embodied and live in a physical world, the activities in which we engage are most often materially based and involve tangible objects, and so, for chapter 4, I turn to the branch of anthropology concerned with material culture. As Vanessa Ochs reminds us in her material-culture-based study of Miriam's Cups and tambourines, "[w]ithout things in their thingness, there is no Passover, only an idea of Passover."³⁴ Besides using many of the centuries-old ritual objects of the traditional Passover seder, women's seders have introduced two new objects into the Jewish ritual realm: an orange on the seder plate and Miriam's Cup on the seder table. Since its appearance in the early 1980s, the orange on the seder plate has become an increasingly popular symbol of the wrestlings of Jewish women.³⁵ I loved it on sight. I found the combination of vibrant sensory stimulation and connection to Jewish feminism irresistible; it has sat in a place of honour on my seder tables ever since. I welcomed the opportunity to explore its ambiguous origins and symbolic values. I reviewed the available literature; I conducted an in-depth interview with a women's seder practitioner who had brought the orange to her family seder. I contacted Ma'yan participants who had indicated that they add an orange to their own

³³ The position of simultaneous insider and outsider is not necessarily a comfortable one, and incorporating feminist praxis and ideology into research is a difficult process that involves subjecting established methods to rigorous scrutiny and questioning. As I contemplated the task before me, with all its potential pitfalls, I felt myself threatened by paralysis and an inability to actually start the study. Luckily, I found Diane Wolf, whose *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork* identifies and discusses some of the same difficulties I was facing, and the ways in which other researchers had responded. In her discussion of insiders and outsiders, Wolf lists a number of problems that other 'insiders' experienced; the ones I especially identified with were "concealment of information", "the restricting expectations of others", and "overidentification" (15). Recognition of the difficulties in being simultaneously insider and outsider is not new in anthropological studies or unique to feminist research. What is new in Wolf's work is a discussion of the added complications when the two are combined.

³⁴ Ochs, *Miriam's Object Lesson*, 15.

³⁵ An earlier version of this section of the chapter was published in *Nashim*.

seder plate and invited them to describe the meaning the symbol held for them. These sources all provide the input for the historical and symbolic analysis of the ritual object.

I followed a similar process for the analysis of Miriam's Cup. But, because this is a different object with its own unique attributes, my examination takes a different path. Miriam's Cup has explicit parallels with an existing Jewish ritual object (Elijah's Cup), and these parallels are significant in both its history and its symbolic value; my literature search takes this into account. I also use the data obtained from the questionnaires, but found it unnecessary, given the scope of this research project, to conduct supplementary interviews or seek additional responses.

A third ritual object used in women's seders is the ritual text, the haggadah, which is examined in chapter 5. At first, I considered not even including the haggadah in my study. As a ritualizer, I wished to shed the weight of the traditional haggadah. As a researcher, I wished to understand participants in women's seders through their own actions and reactions, not through haggadahs written before the enactment. My primary interest was in what ritualizers did, and what they themselves said about what they did. In this, I was supported by Ron Grimes:

Ritual studies, unlike liturgics, does not begin with a consideration of traditions and texts...A ritology is the ritual profile of a religion, culture, or individual; it concentrates on a rite's communicative, performative, and symbolic aspects.³⁶

But keeping in mind Behar's engaged anthropology and its inherent warnings about bias, I realized that ignoring the haggadahs would present a picture coloured by my own anti-textual leanings.³⁷ The haggadah is considered a key component by most women's seder practitioners. Thus it was important to examine textual innovations as one of the ritual changes, and without pre-assigning it a position either more or less privileged than that of others.

In fact, the inclusion of haggadahs in my study offered the opportunity to view the feminist effect on the mainstream religious practice in progress. I decided to use the texts to conduct an

³⁶ Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 91.

³⁷ My resistance was sufficiently strong that it required the encouragement of my thesis advisor, Professor Norma Joseph, to get past it, and I thank her.

initial assessment of the transformation itself: to see ways in which parts of the women's seders had already affected regular seders. I selected a number of ideologically divergent texts and compared passages that were significant from a feminist perspective, word by word and line by line. I was able to identify and trace differences, both between the newer texts and the traditional haggadah, and also between the newer texts themselves. These were extremely helpful in situating feminist-inspired changes within the context of the larger Jewish community.

The findings from my observations of the rites were highly interesting and illuminating, but limited by my own powers of perception. To supplement them, I turned to sociological methods. I distributed questionnaires at the four rites previously mentioned and solicited feedback from women's seder participants throughout Canada; the responses are summarized in chapter 6. Because the information I was gathering was of a non-statistical nature, it was more important to elicit the spirit and viewpoint of the participant than to create statistically-rigorous questions. I formulated the initial questions together with the organizers of the Ma'yan seders, taking into account the information they wished to obtain as well as my requirements. The result was a questionnaire with three discrete areas of inquiry: demographics; seder participation; and after-effects. From these, we hoped to ascertain who attended the seders, how they were affected by the experience, and how they, in turn, transformed their regular seders. I condensed the set of questions so that they would fit on one, double-sided, sheet of paper as we believed this would result in a higher response rate. The Ma'yan questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Because each group was different and had its own concerns and interests, I followed the same process with the organizers of the Na'amat and Hadassah-WIZO seders; this resulted in the questionnaires in Appendix B and C. Most of the questions in the three are identical, and the questionnaires are similar enough for the results to be combined and compared. Because the fourth questionnaire was aimed at people who had attended any women's seder in Canada other than the ones hosted by Na'amat and Hadassah-WIZO, I added a section asking about the seders themselves. This version can be found in Appendix D.

Each question is analyzed by calculating the total number of respondents in each group who selected each particular choice. The overall number of attendees, as well as the percentage of respondents, for each of the four groups is very different. The Ma'yan group is particularly large in comparison with the others. For this reason, the numbers are not combined into one 'total' statistic, but left as four distinct values, presented in tabular form.

I analyze the results for information about the individuals who responded. I then combine the almost 1000 individual voices of those who responded into a group picture of women's seder attendees at these particular rites who chose to speak about their experience when given the opportunity. With extreme caution, I then generate a preliminary picture of who attends this ritual, how they are affected by the experience, and how they, in turn, effect the transformation of their religious traditions.

I also conducted interviews with the organizers of the three institutional seders I observed. The interviews were taped and then transcribed. This provides a third set of perspectives on the rites and ritual, from individuals who have given the subject considerable thought. The organizers also talked with me about their intentions in holding the seder and how those were satisfied or frustrated; the history of the seder within their organization; and what they saw as its future. I use their views as a basis for comparison with my own observations and the questionnaire responses.

Having accumulated data using the various disciplines of history, ritology, anthropology, textual analysis, and sociology, I began to develop my conclusions and immediately ran into a problem of terminology. I had discovered a wide diversity of women who felt a strong attachment to a new traditionally-based ritual that in many ways remolds the tradition. A ritual, furthermore, that is so new that it is still in a constant state of 'becoming'. What was attracting and holding the women? How could I describe the texture of the interaction between women's seders and practitioners? I needed a term that would give full expression to the complex and shifting nature of the relationship.

I started with the concept of identity, one often used to describe connections between individuals and groups, and to explain attractions and affiliations. And one that might be particularly apt, since ‘identity’ has historically been both imposed on and embraced by Jews, with great consequences for individuals and communities.

In pre-Enlightenment Western societies, individuals were assigned identities by outside forces and an identity came with fixed rights and responsibilities. Being Jewish, for instance, meant having membership in the Jewish community, which negotiated and contracted the rights and responsibilities of its members. Each member had the same identity, which carried religious, cultural, and legal implications. Although a given individual may also have been female, middle-aged, and single, these privately definitive factors were subcategories of the public overwhelmingly concretely-consequential Jewish identity.

Emancipation changed the relationship between state and individual. States now contracted rights and responsibilities directly with individuals, not communities. This decreased the overriding weight of community affiliation in determining a person’s identity. A given individual could choose to accentuate other aspects of themselves without necessarily losing legal rights. Often, being Jewish became a matter of choosing to regard that identity as significant, incidental, or somewhere in between.³⁸

The myriad of discussions on the subject of ‘Jewish identity’ attests to the enormous effect this change has exerted on both individuals and community. A ‘Google search’ in July 2005 produced over 230,000 hits, with topics ranging from legal and cultural to psychological and philosophical. This intense interest in the subject is also evident in the academic realm. Michael Oppenheim refers to the “avalanche” of studies, so copious that they “oftentimes seem to imply

³⁸ This has not always been the case. An obvious example is Nazi Germany’s imposition of Jewish identity, which was redefined as being racial, on the Jews of all the states it controlled. Many of its victims considered their ‘Jewish identity’ minimal or non-existent. The Nazis murdered Jews, whether self-identified or state-identified, for this affiliation.

that it is *the* fundamental issue within modern Jewish life.”³⁹ This avalanche of interest, popular and academic, has many different sources; for some, it is a desire to increase the importance of this one identity factor for other Jews; for others, it is part of their own personal identity searches as they try to figure out where being Jewish fits in with the rest of their self image. For most Jews, as for most people today, identity is not monochromatic, and various values and affiliations compete for attention. Choices must be continually made and reevaluated. When a major feminist event is held on a major Jewish holiday, Jewish feminists must choose which is more important to them.⁴⁰ Even the label one chooses to express identity can involve difficult decisions: what is the difference between being a Jewish feminist and a feminist Jew?

Identity studies have been instrumental in developing a more sophisticated view of how people relate to their communities. One of their great contributions, when speaking of individuals, has been to conceptualize ‘identity’ as ‘identities’, giving expression to the multiple affiliations that coexist in a single person. Thus, the term can now accommodate the hybridity highlighted by Visweswaran, either her ‘Indo/American’, or my own more exhaustively detailed ‘Canadian/feminist/secularly-raised/Jewish/child-of-Holocaust-survivors/woman/single/immigrant/student’. Using ‘identity’ in this way allows the various strands to be easily separated, as the group to which each is attached is clearly visible. Changes in identity can be expressed by attaching new strands or detaching old ones.

If I were looking at a direct causal identity-based relationship—Jewish women are attracted to the women’s seder simply because it is a Jewish women’s ritual—‘identity’ would be exactly the term I needed. A complication in my study, however, is that I am not focusing on the direct relationship between individuals and identity-groups, but, rather, on a vehicle through which the

³⁹ Oppenheim, “Modern Jewish Identity,” 95 and 102; emphasis in the original.

⁴⁰ In 1981, the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres (CASAC) voted to hold annual “Take Back the Night” marches (since renamed to “Days of Action Against Violence Against Women”) throughout Canada on the third Friday of September. This date has sometimes coincided with either Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, both Jewish High Holy Days. Recently, the Quebec branch (Regroupement québécois des CALACS) has made the decision to move the day of action to another week when this conflict arises (Personal communication from Diana Yaros, member of CASAC, July 2005).

relationship is experienced and expressed. And that vehicle, the ritual, is itself connected to different individuals (the ritualizers) and different identity-groups (Jews, women, feminists, North Americans, etc). The ritual itself also has many discrete rites. And, while some ritualizers attending some of the rites are connected to some of the identity-groups, no particular rite is connected to all the ritualizers or all the groups.

Another requirement for my study is that the term must accommodate and express the fluidity of the connections. None of the three elements (ritualizer, ritual, identity-group) is static, either on its own or in relation to the others. The ritual was first created by a small group of people, but has, in the intervening years, attracted an ever-increasing number of new practitioners; the population of 'women's seder ritualizers' is neither stable nor constant. The ritualizers, old and new, have exerted their own influence on the ritual, which has undergone, and is still undergoing, a continual process of modification. And to this must be added the fact that identity-groups themselves are in a constant process of redefinition and flux. Witness the difficulties encountered in the legal and political arenas when attempts are made to pin down the definition of any particular group.⁴¹ The law courts are filled with subsequent demands to clarify definitions and determine the limits of membership. The previously mentioned proliferation of texts on 'Jewish identity' also attests to this effort in a social scientific realm, as authors attempt to define who is a 'Jew'.

⁴¹ The definition of 'First Nations' or 'Indian' is a case in point. Although being a First Nations person in Canada has often resulted in being subjected to various forms of discrimination, it also carries a number of economic benefits. But who exactly is included in the category? Prior to 1985, First Nations women who married non-First Nations men automatically lost their 'Indian status'. Bill C-31, an *Act to Amend the Indian Act*, was an attempt to redress that inequity by restoring the status to the women who had lost it that way, and to give it to their children. In theory, the category should now be both more clear and more fair, including both women and men who marry non-First Nations partners, and including, as well, those who lost it unfairly. But the women who were cut off before the bill was passed are not automatically reinstated. They must go through a political process of filling out all the required documents and asking the government to change their status; the government must agree. And the option of reinstatement is available to their children, but not to their grandchildren. "The difficulty that women encountered with reinstatement procedures was often mired with confusion, costly documentation and arbitrary decision making" (Huntley, "Aboriginal Women's Action Network Releases Report on Bill C-31"). A precise definition of 'First Nations' has not yet been achieved.

Dictionary definitions of ‘identity’ do not include the element of fluidity; they emphasize, rather, sameness, permanence, and consistency.⁴² Scholars in identity studies have challenged the perception of identity as static, insisting that it must incorporate the idea of movement. Stuart Hall clearly articulates a link between ‘identity’ and motion: “Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, ... we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process”.⁴³ Hall’s formulations have been influential in shaping some of the ways in which we think about how people think of their ‘selves’, and how identities are culturally, and often consciously, constructed.

Scholars in particular fields have followed Hall’s lead. In the area of Jewish identity studies, for instance, Steven Cohen and Arnold Eisen have introduced the idea of process as a key component: for their subjects, “*identity is far more fluid than ever before.*”⁴⁴ But the fluidity they describe is different from the one formulated by Hall. They explain that one “can change Jewish direction, and change again, at many points in life.” In their description, identity is fixed at any given moment. It can be changed, but then it is again static. This is not the same as saying that identity carries within its very core the idea of change, and that, at every moment, it is reconstructed. In Hall’s formulation, and in my thinking, there is a continual process of negotiation for each person living in our pluralistic and diverse society.

Neither Hall nor his successors have applied the idea of mobility to the other side of the identity partnership. Although they insist on the fluidity of the individual, the groups seem to remain fixed. Their formulations do not address the reciprocal nature of the relationship: being part of the group changes the person, the particularities of the individuals change the group and the group’s rituals, participating in the rituals changes the individuals, and their changes affect the

⁴² This is true at least for the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Miriam-Webster Online*, and *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*.

⁴³ Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” 222.

⁴⁴ Cohen and Eisen, *The Jew Within*, 38; emphasis in the original.

groups, even as changes in the groups affect the rituals, resulting in a never-ending circle of interaction.

So I come back to my terminology problem. How can I express all the attributes and nuances in the relationship between ritualizers and ritual? 'Identity', whether alone or qualified (cultural-, religious-, national-), seems inadequate for a number of reasons. Aside from the fact that it is used so often and so ubiquitously that it seems to mean both everything and nothing, the way it is usually used focuses on the characteristics of individuals or groups. It does not concentrate on the relationship between them or on the vehicles that express the relationship. Nor does it necessarily express, or even imply, dynamism or movement. And when a concept of fluidity is introduced, so far it has been applied to only one side of the identity relationship. The multiple identities of groups and individuals that can now be encompassed within the academic use of the term 'identity' remain discrete: identities within an individual are discussed as if they are layered, separate, and isolatable. Identities are also used as legal categories, a factor which muddies the discussion. And, finally, while often self-determined, identities can be imposed by external institutions and forces. Rather than being owned by the individual, the identities form an outer layer over the 'true' identities, the ones to which the individual feels a strong connection.

I suggest 'belonging-sense' as a new term that can describe a relationship between ritualizer and ritual, while encompassing the idea of an individual's multiple group affiliations as a dynamic and constructive force. One of the connections between people and rituals is the sense of belonging evoked among/for/in the ritualizers by the performance of the ritual. This sense is activated to some extent by the explicit and implicit values that the ritual expresses, and that the ritualizer recognizes and shares. It is also kindled by vocalized or tacit links with groups connected to the ritual and to which the individual feels a kinship. The more group connections embedded within a given rite, the more potential that rite has to produce the feeling of being 'at home'/'chez soi' for a ritualizer. The strands of a person's hybrid identity—ethnic, national, racial, denominational, linguistic, ideological, gendered, class, etc—form the basis for her/his

belonging-sense. This is not to say that the belonging-sense is the only motivating factor for a person's ritualizing activities, but it may well be the one that accounts for the degree of personal engagement and comfort, and it is the one of primary interest for this study. The new term does not replace 'identity'; it is intended to express a concept of gathering together a person's multiple identities, personal tastes, and values, in an effort to investigate the holistic manner in which these interactions function.

Belonging-sense is not static, but constantly in flux. Major readjustments occur to one's sense of belonging when identity strands are attached or detached as a result of changes in group affiliation. When a person reaches a milestone age, such as 21, s/he often feels cut off from the former group ('children' or 'adolescents'), to which s/he no longer belongs; s/he now feels more comfortable as a member of the new group ('adult'), s/he belongs.

Sometimes belonging-sense varies in more subtle ways, as a result of changes in degree rather than content. In different circumstances, a person pays more attention to one or another of their strands, prioritizing affiliations according to the moment, and these different priorities result in a different belonging-sense. A middle-aged Jewish woman could be attached to all three of these identities, but her sense of belonging is very different in different circumstances. In one context, perhaps because she is in a Jewish environment or perhaps because she is in a non-Jewish environment, she is most aware of her Jewishness. At another time, it is her femaleness that she feels most strongly; this may be evoked by being in a primarily-female context, or it may be provoked by being in a mostly-male situation. In a different moment, neither of these are prominent in her consciousness, but it is her age of which she is most aware, perhaps as relief at no longer being caught up in adolescent angst or as frustration due to reduced physical stamina. One day she might feel more comfortable with young Jewish women than with middle-aged Jewish men, on another the opposite. If she were a feminist, she might feel more comfortable with middle-aged Christian male feminists than with a group of not-particularly-feminist young Jewish women, and this might change the following week. She feels a certain amount of

belonging, whether positive or negative, whether evoked by pleasant or unpleasant associations, to each of these groups in differing proportions in each moment.

Another factor that affects the degree of belonging-sense is the relationship with other individuals performing the same ritual. The presence of friends with whom s/he has interactions outside the co-ritualizing one strengthens the amount of attachment she feels, and hence the connection to the ritual. If the presence of the other ritualizers makes her uncomfortable in any way (because of their appearance, values, personalities, ideologies, sexual preferences), this will have the opposite effect. The presence, in spirit, of previous practitioners is also a factor. In traditional or long-standing rituals, the fact that the ritual was performed by the person's ancestors over a significant period of time seems to be a major contributor to belonging-sense; in rituals that are still practiced but have lost much of their meaning for contemporary ritualizers, this is often one of the most important connections.⁴⁵

If a ritual changes, for whatever reason, it may no longer evoke the same kind of response in the ritualizer as previously. Changes in a ritual may be due to changed connections to groups, or because of changes effected by ritualizers, or for completely external reasons, such as the building in which the ritual is usually practiced not being available. The effect of the change on the ritualizer, for all of these, is a changed belonging-sense, but not necessarily a change in identity. If the ritualizer particularly liked the old building, the belonging-sense may be decreased; if s/he hated it, s/he may experience an increased sense of belonging, and hence be more completely engaged in the performance of the rite.

The combined belonging-senses of the celebrants can, in turn, affect the ritual. When many of the ritualizers experience a strong belonging-sense and are intensely engaged, they create an atmosphere that is almost tangible. The more of these strong belonging-senses evoked by any

⁴⁵As Eisen notes, "Evocation of the ancestors has always featured prominently in Jewish liturgy, but in the past century and a half it has taken on still more importance, both as a motivation for nontraditional observance ... and as the force behind more traditional practice" (Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism*, 14).

given rite, the greater the potential intensity of the experience for all the ritualizers. Conversely, when most of the ritualizers do not feel a strong belonging-sense, their engagement is minimal, and this affects the experience for all those present. The belonging-senses of the ritualizers may also affect identity-groups through the vehicle of the ritual; this is, in fact, one of the themes of my study.

The ideal ritual would provide a forum for all the values, affiliations, and relationships, in the same proportion and order of significance as they are experienced by a ritualizer in the ritualizing moment, and would allow for a sense of being completely at home for this individual. If we were to analyze the ritual, we would find indications of the connections between ritual, ritualizer, and groups. In communal rituals with multiple participants, ideal conditions are unlikely to prevail. Nonetheless, the connections are present, although they may be more difficult to trace. This is partly because the number of connections is tied to the number of people involved: many ritualizers results in a many-stranded web of groups, connections, and individuals. But it is also because the number of connections per individual in a given rite is not constant. The degree to which each ritualizer is drawn to the ritual is an indication of the degree of belonging-sense s/he expects to find there; the more connections, the stronger the attraction. The degree of belonging-sense may also vary within each individual over the course of the rite's enactment, as her/his actual experience diverges from her/his expectations.

Another complication is the fact that each rite, even for communal rituals practiced regularly within a particular community, differs at least to some extent. It is rare that the exact same group of individuals is present at each particular enactment. And, even when the people are the same, they themselves are not identical in the different instances—their priorities and belonging-senses shift with shifting circumstances. Each particular rite is connected to the exact composition of individuals present. Examining the rite by focusing on evidence of belonging-sense can uncover indications of the actual group and its priorities, or at least indications for those who were

strongly drawn to the ritual. From feedback afterwards, we can determine if belonging-sense was reinforced or weakened by this particular rite's enactment.

The indicators are not always obvious or easy to see. One way to make them more visible is through comparisons. When the same ritual is enacted multiple times by the same group or community, changes in the rites highlight the differences between the ritualizers of the different instances. If the changes are incidental and impermanent, they are probably a product of minor fluctuations in the belonging-senses of individuals. If they are significant, they may be an indication of changing circumstances for the entire ritualizing group, or even the identity groups. Not all significant changes are intentional. Intentional changes are implemented in response to a variety of historical, ideological, philosophical, theological, and/or political circumstances. The physical world in which the ritual is enacted may no longer allow for the previous practice (e.g. an earthquake destroys an altar site). Rituals may be carried, along with other physical and spiritual baggage, across borders and oceans, and then be adapted to the characteristics of the new home. Spiritual or intellectual changes in the ritualizers may result in conscious modifications more in keeping with new worldviews. Whatever the root cause, the result is that ritualizers are prompted to re/think and re/form the ritual. Whether the changes are large or small, conscious or accidental, they are sites that can provide much information for the ritual scholar. A comparison of subsequent versions of the same ritual highlights aspects that have been altered. An examination of the historical, ideological, philosophical, theological, and/or political contexts within which rites are enacted helps account for major changes and helps identify the belonging-sense of a community, while minor changes help identify the belonging-senses of individual practitioners.

This is the approach I follow in chapter 7, the conclusion to my study of women's seders. I examine and compare different rites to see what they have in common and where they differ. Using belonging-sense as the focus of my analysis, I formulate a description of the 'generic' women's seder, the ritual that corresponds most strongly to the belonging-sense of most of the

practitioners. What I found is a mixture of the new and the old, innovative characteristics alongside traditional elements. The ritual is recognizably a Passover seder, but, just as recognizably, a seder that has been radically modified. Aside from the fact that all claimed the right to Jewish identity, the only factor that was common to all women's seders, without exception, is also the one that is different from most regular seders: the ritual roles were all performed by women. The rites differed from each other in many ways. Those that were either too similar to or too different from the regular Passover seder did not speak to the belonging-sense of the majority of ritualizers, suggesting that a desire for innovation and a strong link with the traditional are both important elements of belonging-sense for those practitioners interested in this new practice. There are limits and the possibilities for change are bounded on both sides. The fact that the new ritual seems to accommodate both these needs and to have developed a following suggests that the women's seder may continue to be significant and perhaps even become a regular part of the ritual calendar for many of its practitioners.

This double attachment, innovation and continuity, was also evident in the feedback from the ritualizers. I found that the respondents loved the new ritual but were also, for the most part, attached to their traditional family celebrations and unwilling to give them up. They want the new ritual, but not at the expense of the old one; they want more, not less. Elements of their belonging-sense are drawn to the new ritual (e.g. a desire for inclusivity; a need to actively participate), but other parts require the continued celebration of the old.

The same dual attachment is present in North American Jewish communities. The tradition, embraced and protected, still absorbs North American values of all kinds. Changes affecting entire communities are linked to changes in the communal belonging-sense and tend to happen more slowly than changes involving fewer individuals. But, although only thirty years have passed since the first women's seder was celebrated, I found some evidence that regular seders, influenced by women's seders, individual women's seder practitioners, and a generalized feminist sensibility, have slowly started to move in similar directions (greater inclusivity, increase of

women's leadership roles, presence of new symbolic objects). The transformation I hypothesized at the beginning of my study has already begun, although we cannot yet know how effective or long-lasting it will be.

*

This story, this dissertation, began with a personal journey. It seemed to me essential then, and it seems no less so now, that Jewish rituals must change to include women in all aspects—not only as performers of existing rituals but also as creators and innovators. Tapping into this potential has the capacity to re-invigorate and re-vitalize Jewish practice, to have it speak to the sense of belonging of many disenchanted yet potential practitioners. I maintain that the women's seder has already begun this process of connecting to belonging-senses. Whether the tradition will stretch, shrink, or remain indifferent in response remains to be seen. As for the future of the new ritual itself, we will have to wait and see. This is the beauty and the strength of rituals: once created, they take on a life of their own, independent from the desires and intentions of those who conceived them and of those who would contain or direct them.

Chapter 2. Histories of Change

Women's seders were created consciously, using existing rituals and practices as models. There are two major antecedents for this new ritual. One is the Passover seder itself; the other is the proliferation of Jewish women's rituals in the 1970s. Throughout its history, the seder has undergone many changes and adaptations. The women's seder may be a radical modification but is still recognizably a Passover seder. While still recognizable as a Passover seder, however, it is one that has been significantly altered. The second major impetus, the new rituals of the 1970s, created an atmosphere of female spiritual possibility and empowerment. Examining other rituals that came into existence at the same time can help us understand the motivations and processes involved in the creation of women's seders.

A. Seders

Passover is a major holiday in the Jewish ritual calendar. Although the holiday is seven or eight days long, for many Jews the seder ritual of the first, and sometimes second, night is Passover. And, as Ruth Cernea notes, for all kinds of Jews it has become the primary, or even only, Jewish ritual expression:

Seders are observed in every country where Jews reside, among every social class, in one form or another, in even the most difficult circumstances of war, poverty, physical danger. Those who come to the Seder share little except their self-identification as "Jew." Although some participants are extremely pious and learned in the biblical stories and commentaries that provide the rationale for the Seder and a code for daily living, others openly disavow belief in the teachings and exclude themselves from all other ritual participation. Still, these disbelievers come, and the Seder continues to be celebrated.¹

Most seders share certain attributes, including a ritualized liturgical portion and an extensive meal. Following Ron Grimes' suggestion for mapping rituals, I've deconstructed the regular seder into six components: ritual space, objects, time, sound and language, identity, and actions.² The result is a description of a 'generic' seder that is not intended to be definitive, but, rather, to serve

¹ Cernea, *The Passover Seder*, 1.

² Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, ch.2.

as a background against which to discuss historical and contemporary innovations.

Ritual Space

The seder is enacted in the home, which has previously been ritually cleansed of leavening, often with a gathering of extended family and friends. The centre of the ritual arena is the table, around which the participants gather. On the table are placed the ritual objects and the food with its accompanying utensils. The table and house are often decorated in a festive manner, with special dishes and table linen that are used only on holiday occasions.³

Ritual Objects

The symbolic foods for this ritual are: matzah (unleavened bread), wine, salt water or vinegar, greens (*karpas*), bitter herb (*maror*), a shank bone (*zeroa*), an egg (*beitzah*), *haroset* (a paste made from fruits, nuts, fruit syrups, and/or wine), and sometimes a second bitter herb (*hazeret*). The last six are placed on a special seder plate; the matzahs are also placed on their own special dish and covered, often with a specially embroidered cloth. An extra wine glass is placed on the table for Elijah the Prophet. The hagaddah is the ritual text, and copies are usually available for every participant.

Ritual Time

Passover begins on the 15th of Nisan according to the Jewish calendar, and lasts either seven or eight days, depending on geographic location and denominational affiliation.⁴ The seder is enacted on the first and, optionally, the second evening, depending on whether the holiday is observed as a seven or eight day event. The ritual, especially in traditionally observant households, lasts many hours. The eating of the meal, which is part of the ritual, typically occurs fairly late in the evening, and can be quite lengthy.

³ In many traditionally observant households, the dishes used at the seder are kept for use only at Passover.

⁴ In the State of Israel, Passover is observed for seven days. Elsewhere in the world, it is observed as a seven day holiday by Reform Jews and some Conservative Jews, but as an eight day holiday by most other Jews. The eight day version is an adaptation that was instituted because of Jewish migration and the resulting uncertainty as to when the holiday actually started in any given year.

Ritual Sound and Language

Most seders include the reading of the haggadah, although the extent of the reading varies from traditionally observant practitioners who read the entire text to those who read selected excerpts. The haggadahs themselves also vary. The traditional version of the text is a mixture of ancient and more recent passages in Hebrew and Aramaic; many of the contemporary North American versions also use varying amounts of English text. Many seders include the singing of songs associated with the holiday of Passover and/or the theme of liberation. These songs can be in Hebrew, English, or any of the other contemporary Jewish languages such as Yiddish, Judeo-Spanish, Judeo-Arabic, French, etc.

Ritual Identity

The seder offers participants a number of possible roles: (co-)leader, reader, discussor, questioner, storyteller, singer, audience, cook, food server, person cleaning up; each of these may be taken on by one or more persons, and each person may play more than one role. The first seven roles are focused on the liturgical portion of the ritual; the last three are concerned with the traditional festive foods. All the attendees, adults and children, participate to varying degrees, depending on the particular rite and their level of interest.

Ritual Actions

The sequence of events is dictated by the haggadah, which lays out the order of the evening. The liturgical actions, which are performed before and after the meal, include reading, discussing, questioning, reciting blessings, and singing. Some of these are taken directly from the haggadah; others are improvised or taken from supplementary texts. During the course of the ritual four glasses of wine are drunk, the symbolic foods are blessed and tasted, and the festive meal, usually a large and extensive meal with many courses, is eaten. Children are encouraged to participate; there are actions for them specifically to perform, such as asking the 'Four Questions' and, in some traditions, searching for the *afikomen*, the missing piece of matzah required to end the meal.

*

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to trace all the changes that the seder ritual has undergone throughout its history. Instead, I will discuss the symbolic foods, as their history highlights the adaptive nature of the seder. Looking at the way this has been accomplished is particularly useful to understanding how the women's seder follows in the tradition while changing it.

The seder as we know it began in mishnaic times, although its roots lie in the Hebrew Bible.⁵ Exodus 12:1–27 describes precisely how Passover is to be observed: details of clothing and bodily comportment, foods and method of preparation, where the food is to be consumed, and with whom and within what time period it must be eaten; the roasting of an unblemished lamb, the unleavened bread, and the bitter herbs are all specified.⁶ The holiday is explicitly commanded as one of remembrance lasting seven days, during which time no leavened bread is to be eaten.

Passover, appropriated from a pre-biblical spring festival, was initially celebrated by family groups in their own environments.⁷ During the Second Temple period (538 BCE–70 CE) it became a pilgrimage festival and entire families gathered outside the Temple in Jerusalem to eat their sacrificed animals.⁸ With the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, it was no longer possible to continue this practice. The rabbis invented an alternative ritual for the holiday, one that was derived from and linked to the Temple practice, but that, like the biblical observance, could be celebrated by a dispersed population. The one thing that could be neither preserved nor

⁵ Mishnaic times refer to the first and second centuries CE, the time of the tannaitic rabbis who created the Mishnah.

⁶ In Hebrew, these three foods are called *pesach*, *matzah*, and *maror*, and they are critical elements of the seder. The *pesach* is also referred to as the paschal sacrifice.

⁷ “Pesach was originally a nature festival, an observance of the coming of spring. Later, as time went on, it became a historic and national holiday, the festival of the deliverance from Egypt, and it thus assumed a newer and higher meaning” (Schauss, *The Jewish Festivals*, 39).

⁸ According to Schauss, the groups had to consist of at least 10 people, because “it takes that many to eat an entire sheep at one sitting” (*The Jewish Festivals*, 51). This eating of the entire animal was one of the requirements of the ritual practice. While women may not necessarily have come to Jerusalem for the other two pilgrimage festivals (Shavuot and Sukkot), they did so for Passover because they, along with the men, were required to eat the paschal lamb.

abandoned was the sacrificial lamb: “The impetus for recasting the celebration lay in the need for continuity with the past and for overcoming the loss of the paschal lamb.”⁹ With the enactment of the sacrifice no longer available to serve as the focus of the celebration, the rabbis substituted symbolic foods together with ritual acts and liturgy. In order to do this, they drew on other rituals and celebrations, some internal and some external. Today, there are six symbolic foods on the seder plate: *karpas* (greens), *maror* (bitter herb), *haroset*, *hazeret* (second bitter herb—this is not always present in contemporary seders), the *zeroa* (shank bone), and the *beitzah* (egg). The other symbolic food, the matzah, sits on its own plate.

The greens (*karpas*) with which the ritual commences, not mentioned in the Bible, may be tied to the spring festival that pre-dated the Exodus theme. Some of the other foods and customs are linked to the Greco-Roman world within which Palestine was situated. Nahum Glatzer notes that, during the first and second centuries CE, a typical Roman festive meal “usually began with wine and hors d’oeuvre.”¹⁰ He hypothesizes that these evolved into the raw greens and the first cup of wine of the seder. John Cooper adds that the Roman hors d’oeuvre may account for the presence of the ritual egg as well: “Among the Romans the hors d’oeuvre called *gustatio* often consisted of eggs.”¹¹ These Roman origins are not accepted by all scholars. While Joseph Tabory and Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus agree with Glatzer’s view, Baruch Bokser concedes that the origin of the seder was a feast but argues that there were also Jewish models to provide precedents, and that the rabbis of the period expanded on existing indigenous forms.¹²

The Mishnah, compiled in the second century CE, defines the basic format of the Passover ritual, and describes a seder similar to the one outlined in the haggadah and still practiced today. Over the course of the ritual, the participant drinks four cups of wine, “dips the lettuce [in

⁹ Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder*, 53.

¹⁰ Glatzer, *The Passover Haggadah*, 6.

¹¹ Cooper, *Eat and Be Satisfied*, 74.

¹² Tabory, “Towards a History of the Paschal Meal”; Brumberg-Kraus, “Meals as Midrash: A Survey of Ancient Meals in Jewish Studies Scholarship”; Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder*.

vinegar]”,¹³ and eats “unleavened bread and lettuce and the *haroset*” (Mishnah *Pesahim* 10:3). The passage also mandates the obligation to declare “*pesach*, matzah and *maror*” (Mishnah *Pesahim* 10:5), and gives reasons for their inclusion: “*pesach*—because God passed over the houses of our ancestors in Egypt; matzah—because our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt; and *maror*—because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt” (Mishnah *Pesahim* 10:5). Although the Mishnah requires the presence of *maror*, i.e. a bitter herb, it is the Babylonian Talmud that first lists the various vegetables that qualify, and from which contemporaneous authorities selected a romaine-like lettuce—*hazeret* (BT *Pesahim* 39a–b).¹⁴ In the 14th century, the German Rabbi Alexander Suslin allowed horseradish where lettuce was not available,¹⁵ and today horseradish is frequently used at the seders of Jews of European origin. Some ritualizers place only one bitter herb on their table, referring to it as *maror*, and omit the *hazeret*.

Haroset is first mentioned in the Mishnah but not described, nor is its religious significance established. The Mishnaic ambivalence as to whether *haroset* is obligatory is taken up in the Talmud. The position that it is only customary is explained as its being used “on account of the *kappa*” which is explained in the commentary as “a poisonous substance in the *hazereth*” (BT *Pesahim* 116a; 115b).¹⁶ The rabbis who defend it as obligatory present religious allusions: “In memory of the apple-tree”; “In memory of the clay”; and “In memory of the straw” (BT *Pesahim*

¹³ The translation is Jacob Neusner’s from *The Mishnah: A New Translation*. “In vinegar” does not appear in the text of the Mishnah, but Neusner inserts it on the basis of the Tosafists’ commentary to *Pesahim* 114a. In what is apparently the earliest textual reference to this custom, the Tosafists remark that Rabbenu Tam dipped the lettuce in vinegar or salt water.

¹⁴ “[A]lthough in recent sources and modern speech *hazeret* means horseradish, in the early sources - the Mishna, the Gemara, the laws of Passover Seder, and...Rashi - *hazeret* means lettuce” (Klarberg, “Morsels of Hebrew Grammar”).

¹⁵ This may have been based on a mistranslation: “The German authorities appear to have identified horseradish incorrectly, *Merretich* in German with *merirta*, the Aramaic form of *maror*, the Hebrew for bitter” (Cooper, *Eat and Be Satisfied*, 116).

¹⁶ Bokser expands the talmudic explanation by saying that the *haroset* is “required ... by *etiquette*, as a standard concoction in which to dip hors d’oeuvres to remove insects from the vegetables or to counteract a poisonous substance on the vegetables” (“Ritualizing the Seder,” 453–454; italics in the original).

116a).¹⁷ That is, with the transformation of the feast into a ritual, a relevant symbolic meaning was attached to the dip. The Talmud even gives a basic recipe for the *haroset* (apples, spices, acrid or acidic taste, and thick consistency).

Throughout the ages, many different ingredients have been used,¹⁸ and the composition of the *haroset* is often a differentiator between various Jewish groups: Sephardi recipes tend to use dried fruits, as opposed to the chopped apples of Ashkenazi versions. Ira Steingroot's *Keeping Passover* contains fifteen different recipes from geographically and culturally diverse groups. The *haroset* is eaten in combination with the matzah and bitter herbs as a 'Hillel sandwich'. This act of *koreikh* (literally: combining) is attributed to Hillel, a sage of the Mishnaic period, who apparently derived the requirement to eat these foods together from Numbers 9:11: "They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs." Many people today eat two sandwiches, the first with only *maror* and matzah, and the second with *haroset* as well. When the second bitter herb, *hazeret*, is present, it replaces the *maror* in the Hillel sandwich.

As a definite ritual requirement rather than a customary *hors d'oeuvre*, the greens on the seder plate are a later addition: something to dip into the *haroset*. In the earliest known haggadah, composed in the ninth century, celery (*karpas* in Hebrew) is listed as the first choice for the green vegetable that was now required.¹⁹ A 15th-century explanation for the choice is that the Hebrew letters of the word *karpas*, read in reverse order, spell out '60 forced', which was taken as a reference to the 600,000 Israelites who did forced labor in Egypt.²⁰ Alternatives in case celery

¹⁷ The commentary explains each allusion: the Israelite women gave birth to their children under the apple trees (presumably this allowed them to hide their activity); the clay was used to make bricks; and the straw was kneaded into the clay.

¹⁸ For example, from the 12th century we have Maimonides' instructions on how to make *haroset*: "take dates, dried figs, or raisins and the like, and crush them. Add wine vinegar and mix with shredded stick cinnamon and fresh ginger until it is mixed like clay in straw" (Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* as referenced in Steingroot, *Keeping Passover*, 239). Isaac Luria, the 16th-century kabbalistic rabbi from Safed, gives his mother's recipe: three kinds of spices (sweet spikenard, ginger and cinnamon) together with seven kinds of mashed fruit (grapes, figs, pomegranate, kernels, dates, walnuts, apples, and pears) (Moshe Cordovero, *Sha'ar Hakavwanot* 83d, note 6 as quoted in Guggenheim, *The Scholar's Haggadah*, 334).

¹⁹ This haggadah was not a separate text but was included in the prayer book, *Seder Rav Amram Gaon*, which was composed by R. Amram Gaon, the head of the Jewish Academy in Sura, Babylonia, and includes liturgy for the entire year.

²⁰ Kasher, *Israel Passover Haggadah*, 31.

was not available were leeks, parsley, or, failing these, any other raw vegetable. In late medieval times, due to a lack of green vegetables, Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe substituted a cooked potato, with the explanation that “its green shoots conferred greenness on the whole plant.”²¹

During the medieval period, the custom of dipping the *karpas* into the *haroset* also changed, and the greens were dipped into either salt water (Ashkenazi) or vinegar (Sephardi). The 16th-century *Shulhan Arukh* explains that this change was intended to save the *haroset* for later in the ritual. This change followed the mandate of earlier rabbinic authorities. According to Heinrich Guggenheimer, it was originally initiated by Rashi’s grandsons Shemu’el (Rashbam) and Jacob (Rabbenu Tam) before being codified.²² A symbolic meaning was attached to the salt water, which came to represent the bitter tears of the slaves in Egypt.²³

The last two symbolic foods, the shank bone and the egg, were also introduced in post-mishnaic times, and their symbolic assignment is intentionally and explicitly attached to a change in the historical circumstances of the Jews. The talmudic rabbis were unable to fulfill the biblical mandate to offer and eat the sacrificial lamb, but, unwilling to ignore it, they decided to devise a substitute. To the mishnaic text that specifies, “They bring before him unleavened bread and lettuce and the *haroset*” (Mishnah *Pesahim* 10:3), they added the phrase: “and two cooked foods”, and then gave several suggestions as to what these should be, one of which was “a fish and the egg on it” (BT *Pesahim* 114b). Controversy regarding the composition of the substitute continued until the time of the *Shulhan Arukh*, when Joseph Karo, the author, and Moses Isserles, whose glosses adapted it to the usage of European Jews, both agreed that the two foods should be a shank bone and an egg. Cooper believes that the surrounding Christian culture may have played a part in their choice of an egg: “[it] may have been a creative response to the challenge of

²¹ Steingroot, *Keeping Passover*, 35.

²² Guggenheimer, *The Scholar’s Haggadah*.

²³ Strassfeld, *The Jewish Holidays*, 20.

medieval Christianity at Easter.”²⁴ According to Menachem Kasher, the egg was chosen to represent the sacrifice because it is called *be’ah* in Aramaic, “which also means desire, alluding to the thought ‘The Eternal Be Willing and Redeem Us’.”²⁵ Guggenheimer suggests that the choice of the shank bone may have been influenced by the fact that “the Hebrew name (זרוע) [*zeroa*] also means ‘arm’ and therefore is a symbol of God’s ‘outstretched arm’.”²⁶ The egg and the shank bone are not usually given symbolic meanings other than their representation of the sacrifice, but they are there as an eternal reminder that Jews once had a Temple at which they offered the paschal sacrifice, and that the seder is a substitution for the ancient ritual.

In early instances of the seder, a small table was used to hold the ritual foods. This was eventually replaced by a special plate placed on the large table. By the time of the 16th-century *Shulhan Arukh*, this was the mandated practice. Different arrangements of the foods on the seder plate have been proposed; the most popular one today is that of Isaac Luria, whose arrangement is connected to a kabbalistic interpretation of the foods in which the ten *sefirot*, or divine emanations, are symbolized by the six foods on the seder plate, the three matzahs, and the plate itself.²⁷

Thus, we can see that seder traditions have changed over time and in response to changing circumstances, often by combining contemporaneous symbols with symbolic interpretations that link them to the tradition. Of the six foods on the seder plate, four act as symbols of the ancient biblical celebration of the festival: the shank bone, the egg, and the two kinds of bitter herbs. Along with the matzah, these foods fulfill the biblical commandment expressed in Exodus 12:8, either directly or through substitution. The *haroset* is also linked to the paradigmatic biblical story of the Exodus, serving as a reminder of the state of slavery. The greens, perhaps the least symbolic and weighty of the foods, are made significant by being dipped in salt water or vinegar

²⁴ Cooper, *Eat and Be Satisfied*, 115.

²⁵ Kasher, *Israel Passover Haggadah*, 29.

²⁶ Guggenheimer, *The Scholar’s Haggadah*, 202.

²⁷ Guggenheimer, *The Scholar’s Haggadah*, 202.

(the tears of slavery). Together, these six foods are a constant reminder of the struggles and the wrestlings of the Israelites, the ancestors of today's Jews. They are the result of a process initiated by the mishnaic rabbis, who transformed a pilgrimage festival into "an opportunity to reaffirm that the message of redemption was ongoing."²⁸ Over time, the significance of the seder has been extended by focusing in a new way on the original three elements (*pesach*, *maror*, and matzah) and by adding new elements. The change in the biblical Passover ritual was highly significant and overarching, a result of a major change in circumstances (the loss of the Temple led to the original replacement of sacrifice ritual with seder ritual). Changes to the seder are, comparatively, minor: for instance, accommodation to cultural practice (e.g. hors d'oeuvre being incorporated) or substitution of unavailable ingredients (e.g. potatoes becoming a customary ritual food). Some changes are given long explanations, while for others a simple analogy by colour is all that is considered necessary. And, while some changes are dramatic and obvious, others are quite simple. Many changes have been introduced into the ritual; some of these have endured, others have not. Nonetheless, the ritual as practiced today is still recognizable as the one described in the Mishnah.

Perhaps because of its theme of liberation from slavery, the holiday of Passover has been seen as an appropriate vehicle for raising modern concerns and addressing contemporary issues. Various modified seders have appeared, with focuses ranging from the particular liberation of the Jews in Egypt to the general theme of freedom from oppression for all peoples at all times. The ancient rabbis had very innovative approaches to dealing with changing circumstances in their communities. While contemporary North American Jews are not subject to the same kind of external edicts, they do have to accommodate internal disaffections and tensions. Using methods similar to those of their predecessors, modern innovators have incorporated issues such as civil rights in the United States, the Holocaust and its survivors, the plight of Soviet Jewry, and

²⁸ Bokser, "Ritualizing the Seder," 443.

women's rights into their seders. For the most part, when these concerns have been addressed, it has been by adding to existing haggadahs and seders. But for some people and some concerns, it has become necessary to make significant modifications to the ritual itself or even to invent new rituals. The women's seder is one of these new rituals.

B. Jewish women's rituals

Jewish women have always ritualized, both alone and in groups. However, their ritual activities throughout history have been sparsely documented and it is difficult for us to know precisely what women of the past did.²⁹ We know something about their participation in traditional ritual activities which included men, such as those involved with kashrut and holiday celebrations. We also know something about their activities in realms traditionally associated with women, such as candle lighting, baking of challah, and mikvah attendance. Current research is now beginning to provide fragmentary glimpses of other, previously-unsuspected, aspects of their ritual lives. As far back as the second century CE, Jewish women were heads of synagogues, although it is not clear exactly what ritual activity this office entailed, nor is there evidence that these women were ritually active in women-oriented activities.³⁰ Jewish women may also have been involved in women's celebrations of Rosh Hodesh as early as talmudic times, but little is known about these historical activities.³¹

We know that by the 12th century Ashkenazi women had developed several women-only ritual activities. Women, known as *firzogerins*, led prayers within women-only groups.³² There is evidence of a medieval ritual enacted by women who walked in a circle around a cemetery or individual grave, measuring the distance with a candlewick which they subsequently made into

²⁹ This is true of women's activities in general and is one of the reasons that the feminist attempt to reclaim women's past activities is so difficult. Most of the recorded texts were written by men who were either not aware of, or else not particularly interested in, what the women were doing.

³⁰ For more information on women as heads of synagogues, see Bernadette Brooten's *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*.

³¹ See discussion on Rosh Hodesh later in this section.

³² *Firzogerin*, in Yiddish, means literally 'the one who says'. For more information on *firzogerins*, see Judith Baskin's *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*.

candles; the two candles, one for living family members and the other for ancestors, were burned at Yom Kippur. Ashkenazi women also developed their own form of prayer. These *tekhines*, from the 16th through 19th centuries, were in Yiddish, the vernacular language; petitional in nature, they often focused on the domestic realm.³³ These earlier rituals and prayers provided both the seeds and the justification for contemporary Jewish women's ritualizing creativity. As Jewish women learned more about the ritual activities of their predecessors, it strengthened both their desire to engage in more ritual activity as well as their sense of authority and entitlement in the ritual arena.

In the 1970s, many North American Ashkenazi women entered a period of dynamic and creative ritual innovation. It is not that Jewish women had ever been ritually inactive but, rather, that the feminist activism and exploration of the 1960s and 1970s stimulated a marked departure from traditional forms. Feminists explored rituals as a way of reclaiming and affirming women's experiences and lives as normative, central, and significant. Since then, as women's lives themselves became the texts in which change and innovation were written, there has been a proliferation of new and diverse Jewish women's rituals.³⁴ The new rituals are enacted for a wide range of occasions and come in many different forms. Some incorporate previous ritual actions, objects, and roles; others bring in new aspects and elements that may or may not be obviously Jewish. Some have become fairly well established and widespread; others remain marginal and ephemeral, sometimes evoking controversy and even hostility. Penina Adelman uses the metaphor of weaving to describe the ways in which ritual innovations are linked to the fabric of past tradition: the warp is the constant unchanging Jewish written law, but the weft is the ever-changing oral law, subject to ongoing interpretations and renewal.³⁵ Contemporary women are

³³ For more information on these rituals and prayers, see Chava Weissler's *Voices of the Matriarchs*.

³⁴ See the discussion by Rebecca Alpert regarding the way in which Jewish women re-appropriated the power of cultural authority exemplified in the creation and performance of ritual; as she articulates: "asserting the authenticity of Jewish women's self-expressions such that our lives become the text" (Alpert, "Our Lives *Are* the Text," 67).

³⁵ Adelman, "A Drink from Miriam's Cup," 152.

weaving new tapestries, adding their particular interpretations to the already multi-stranded and many-layered Jewish cloth.

The new women's rituals include several previously performed almost exclusively by men, such as the recitation of the mourner's kaddish and the wearing of *tefillin*, *tallit*, and *kippah*. They also include rituals marking female life-cycle transitions; although the male equivalents have been celebrated with great visibility, female passages have historically gone unmarked. Today there are increasing numbers of celebrations for the birth of girls and for their bat mitzvah at the age of 12. In addition, many women who did not get the opportunity when they were younger are now participating in adult bat mitzvah rituals. Some of the many other rituals being created are discussed in articles, books, websites, and presentations; many more are performed locally and only publicized, if at all, by word of mouth. Most of these new rituals mark events in women's life cycles, whether usual or unusual, planned or unexpected; the creators draw on a variety of existing Jewish, feminist and/or female motifs to develop meaningful rituals that mark significant moments in the lives of the practitioners.³⁶

Not all the new rituals celebrate life cycle events. Some are created so that women can celebrate the traditional Jewish holidays in new ways and as active ritualizers and full participants. Three holidays for which women's rituals have recently emerged are Rosh Hodesh, Sukkot, and Passover. The women's seders that celebrate Passover are the subject of this dissertation and will be discussed in the next chapter. Women's rituals for the other two are briefly described here, as they can help us to contextualize and better understand the women's seders themselves.

Appropriately, because of a historical connection to women, one of the first of the modern Jewish women's rituals was created for Rosh Hodesh, the festival of the New Moon. The Jewish celebration of Rosh Hodesh has been observed since biblical times, when it was commemorated

³⁶ Many of these rituals can be found on the Internet at *ritualwell* (www.ritualwell.org) and in *Lilith* magazine.

with a special meal.³⁷ By the Late Antique period, Rosh Hodesh had become associated with women, as a day on which they rested rather than worked.³⁸ Women's celebrations continued into the medieval period, when at least one rabbi tried to stop women from gambling the day away.³⁹ But by the modern period, the association with women had mostly died out. In the 1970s, a number of small groups of women in North America revived the holiday and created new forms of observance. This revival began in Orthodox communities and the observances in the early Orthodox groups mirrored the traditional synagogue practices for the holiday. "For religious feminists seeking inclusion without revolution, celebrating Rosh Chodesh quickly became important."⁴⁰ Women led services, sang, recited prayers, and danced with and read from Torah scrolls.⁴¹

The marking of Rosh Hodesh by women's rituals caught on and spread quickly throughout the North American Jewish world to women in all the denominations as well as to those who were unaffiliated or secular.⁴² The diversity of actual practices is great, ranging from traditional Rosh Hodesh services to rituals incorporating elements from many different Jewish and other religious traditions: text study, prayer, meditation, dancing, singing, drumming, and story telling. This is still a growing and dynamic area; many groups have already been in existence for a long time, while new ones continue to emerge.⁴³ The first women's seders were born in an environment in which Rosh Hodesh groups already existed, and some of these groups moved on to include a women's seder as another of their ritual activities.

³⁷ The biblical references include what is considered to be the defining statement for the holiday of the New Moon (Exod 12) and references to observances for the holiday: blowing the *shofar* (Num 10:10), sacrifices (Num 28:11), and special meals (I Sam 20:5).

³⁸ According to legend, the holiday was granted to the women because they did not give their jewelry for the building of the golden calf, unlike the men, and because they willingly gave their jewelry for the building of the Tabernacle (Arlene Agus, "This Month Is For You," 86).

³⁹ Agus, "This Month Is For You," 87.

⁴⁰ Agus, "This Month Is for You," 4.

⁴¹ This was legally permissible because the groups consisted only of women. However, it was still contentious.

⁴² There are also some amount of women's Rosh Hodesh celebrations in Europe and Israel, but the activity is more limited than in North America.

⁴³ Susan Berrin's *Celebrating the New Moon*, an anthology devoted to Rosh Hodesh published in 1996 with material ranging from the scholarly to the practical, lists nearly a hundred Rosh Hodesh groups worldwide.

Not all the responses to Rosh Hodesh have been favourable. One hostile reaction was from Orthodox rabbis unhappy with women performing activities from which they were usually excluded in mixed-gender congregations. In particular, they were troubled by women conducting services and praying with Torah scrolls. "The rabbinic response to women's *tefillah* groups has been, with the exception of very few rabbis, extremely negative."⁴⁴ One group of prominent Orthodox rabbis published a major attack on women's Rosh Hodesh and prayer groups in 1984, using inaccurate and misleading statements to prohibit their activities.⁴⁵ Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, a leading authority in Jewish law, wrote an ambiguous letter concerning the subject; women's groups interpreted it as permission for the practice while others interpreted it in an opposite way.⁴⁶ Although a few Orthodox rabbis have encouraged and actively helped the women in their congregations and others have been, if not actively helpful, at least silent on the issue, they are in the minority.

This kind of hostility was not encountered with women's seders. Two factors that might account for the differing receptions are that the Orthodox Rosh Hodesh celebrations are often performed in synagogue sanctuaries and often mirror the male observances. That they do this, even in the limited context of a women-only assembly, raises the possibility that women can, and perhaps should, be performing these activities at all times. This is not an issue for women's seders, which are most often held in homes or halls.⁴⁷ They do not involve Torah scrolls or prayers that are contentious in terms of women's involvement, such as ones that require a *minyan* (traditionally defined as 10 adult Jewish males); important as well is the fact that they do not even look like a *minyan*. They thus do not visibly trespass or encroach on the traditionally male-

⁴⁴ Haut, "Women's Prayer Groups and the Orthodox Synagogue," 46. '*Tefillah*' is the Hebrew word for prayer.

⁴⁵ This group is known as the Riets Five, referring to the five rabbis who signed the decision (the word Riets comes from the initials of the Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Theological Seminary). Their decision prohibits women's prayer groups. The Women's *Tefillah* Network was formed in large part in reaction to and in order to respond to this attack.

⁴⁶ Norma Joseph, personal communication, 2003. For more information on this debate, see Avraham Weiss, *Women At Prayer*.

⁴⁷ Even if they do take place in synagogues, it is usually within the recreational areas of the building and not those designated for prayer services.

dominated ritual arena. In addition, the women's seder is not usually performed on the holiday itself, as is the Rosh Hodesh observance; thus it does not interfere with the regular seder, and can be more easily dismissed as 'just something that women do by themselves that need not concern anyone else', or simply ignored altogether. This has both positive and negative repercussions: positive in that hostile or conflictual responses are not evoked; negative in that women's activities are trivialized and discounted and remain invisible.

Outside the Orthodox world, this active antagonism towards Rosh Hodesh observances does not exist. But what does arise is the issue of why women need meet separately and engage in women-only rituals at all. Reform, Reconstructionist, Renewal, and some Conservative congregations are, at least in theory, egalitarian. Because of this, some see the gender issue as having been resolved. But the actuality does not match the theory, and gendered inequities still abound in all these communities. This results in tensions between theoretical and actual constructs; between those who espouse the ideal and those who experience the discriminatory reality. These tensions continue to surface, and women's groups continue to emerge and exist, in all the different denominational movements, indicating a need that has not yet disappeared. Women's Rosh Hodesh celebrations are as popular as ever, and might well be the most widespread and widely practiced Jewish women's ritual at this time.

Although they were still a relatively recent phenomenon at the time, Rosh Hodesh celebrations were already in existence when the women's seders first appeared. Another Jewish women's ritual, the *ushpizot*, associated with the holiday of Sukkot, shares many similarities to the women's seder but is of more recent origin.

Sukkot is similar to Passover in several respects: they are two of the three major Jewish annual festivals;⁴⁸ they both have biblical origins; and for both, a major portion of the traditional observance occurs in a domestic setting. The home celebration for Sukkot involves dwelling in a

⁴⁸ The third major Jewish annual festival is Shavuot, which commemorates the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses and the Israelites at Mount Sinai.

sukkah, a temporary and insubstantial booth (Lev 23:42); the act of dwelling usually includes eating one or more meals within the *sukkah*. The medieval Kabbalists added their own innovative practice: they suggested that seven holy guests be invited into the *sukkah* at mealtimes, a different one for each night of the holiday.⁴⁹ This practice is called ‘*ushpizin*’, which literally means ‘guests’ in Aramaic, and the original choice for the seven were all biblical ancestors and all male, based on their correspondence with the seven lowest *sefirot* in the kabbalistic tree of life.⁵⁰ One kabbalist, Menahem Azaria Fano, suggested a similar correspondence between the *sefirot* and female ancestors; he selected the seven female prophets listed in the Talmud: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther.⁵¹ Unfortunately, inviting the female prophets did not become custom and, when the ritual has been practiced in the centuries since, only the males have been invited, named, and welcomed.

Recently, Ma’yan: The Jewish Women’s Project in New York has made a conscious and active attempt to create a female version of the ritual and their *ushpizot* expands on Fano’s idea of including female ancestors.⁵² Their website offers suggestions for various ritual components that can be combined to create a women’s celebration: text study; art; dance; and invoking female ancestors, not only the traditional biblical prophets but also others who are meaningful to the particular participants. There is an invocation, adapted from the original Aramaic for the contemporary ritual, to formally welcome the guests.⁵³

Ma’yan’s ritual is intended to take place before the actual holiday. In this, it parallels the

⁴⁹ This custom was first mentioned in the *Zohar* and was popularized by the Kabbalists in the 16th century (Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies*, 196).

⁵⁰ These ancestors are Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and David.

⁵¹ This correspondence was noted by Fano in his *Sefer Asarah Ma’amarot*, Part 2 Section 1. This is the source listed both on *ritualwell* and in Ellen Frankel & Betsy Platkin Teutsch’s *Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols*. Both of these credit Fano with originating the *ushpizot* idea as well, although this does not actually appear in his text. According to Yael Levine Katz, Fano was not the first to make this association; his predecessors included, among others, Rabbenu Bahye in his commentary to Exodus 15:20 (posting on H-JUDAIC Digest, March 2 2003 < www.h-net.org/~judaic >).

⁵² The name of the ritual has also been Hebraicized in the process. ‘*Ushpizin*’ is an Aramaic word, the female form of which is ‘*ushpizan*’. ‘*Ushpizot*’ is the feminine plural form in Hebrew (Susanna Levin, posting on The Women’s Tefillah Network, March 4, 2003 (private listserve)).

⁵³ This invocation was adapted by Tamara Cohen.

women's seders held by Ma'yan and other institutions. It does not interfere with the family celebration, and participants do not have to choose; they can attend both. Besides enjoying the women's ritual for its own sake, they can use it as preparation for their family celebration. The Ma'yan organizers have drawn on their experience with the women's seders to further their expressed goal of increasing Jewish feminist ritual activities, of being both "a catalyst for change and an instrument for transformation".⁵⁴ Besides being themselves affected by the world around them, the women's seders have already also, in turn, affected that world.

Another women's ritual for Sukkot, the "*Sukkah-by-the-water*" which was held in Toronto from 1992 to 1996, had as its impetus both a feminized *ushpizin* and a women's seder. Sponsored by the New Israel Fund, it was organized largely by newspaper columnist and political activist Michele Landsberg. Landsberg's inspiration was two-tiered. She had recently returned from a year in New York, where she was introduced to and became part of the 'Seder Sisters', a group of women who meet each year to create and participate in a women's seder.⁵⁵ In New York, she had also attended a '*sukkah* in the sky', a celebration for Sukkot initiated by women in the New Israel Fund and held in a *sukkah* on the roof of a skyscraper. Although it was not a women-only event, it did have a feminist tone and during the ritual participants invited female ancestors to enter the *sukkah*. When she returned to Toronto, Landsberg approached the New Israel Fund there and offered to organize a feminist event for Sukkot with their help. The result was a sold-out 500-person event held in a huge tent on the Toronto waterfront. Inside the tent was a *sukkah*, the walls of which were silk paintings commissioned from local women artists. The event included singing and dancing; women gathered in groups of 10, identified themselves by their matrilineages, and waved a *lulav*. For many of the women, this was their first opportunity to perform these actions. There was also an *ushpizot* ritual, organized and led by Norma Joseph.⁵⁶ Landsberg describes the

⁵⁴ Personal interview with Eve Landau, 2001.

⁵⁵ This group and seder are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

⁵⁶ The first year, the *ushpizot* invited biblical women; the second year, the guests were relatively unknown women from Jewish history (Norma Joseph, personal communication, 2003).

event as “magical”. She organized the event for four consecutive years. It was a lot of work, even with the help from the New Israel Fund, and she tried to pass it on to other organizers but, after one not particularly successful event, the *Sukkah-by-the-water* ceased to exist.⁵⁷

One of the conflicts that Landsberg faced, especially in the first year, was over the choice to restrict the event to women only. Some of her co-organizers repeatedly challenged this decision, finding the idea of a women-only celebration unnecessary and not to their liking. But Landsberg was adamant in her conviction that it was necessary:

There’s no such thing as a feminist *sukkah* that includes men. If we want to have a *sukkah* with men, just go to a big *shul*, have a *sukkah* with men. The idea is to reclaim it and to make something spectacularly women-focused. And I really had to work so hard persuading these women.⁵⁸

Landsberg’s struggle echoes that of Rosh Hodesh groups which have to continually justify their decision to celebrate in women-only spaces.⁵⁹ But her conviction that feminist ritual requires women-only groups is obviously shared by the many Jewish women who continue to participate in Rosh Hodesh groups and women’s seders.⁶⁰ Perhaps in the future, if the mainstream Jewish world becomes more egalitarian and accessible to women at all levels, this may not be a requirement. But perhaps, even then, many women will still want to ritualize in women-only groups. Certainly, for the moment, this is essential to many of the women who participate in the women’s rituals.

The *Sukkah-by-the-water* shares many elements with women’s seders, especially those held by institutions such as Ma’yan. Both are large sold-out events with 500 or so participants, some

⁵⁷ Personal interview with Landsberg, 2002.

⁵⁸ Personal interview with Landsberg, 2002.

⁵⁹ A compromise adopted by some Rosh Hodesh groups is to allow men to attend some events on some occasions, such as the bat mitzvahs of family members, but only if they remain behind the *mehitzah*. In some groups, they are further requested not to wear a *tallit* or to pray, especially if there are more than 10 men present, so as to ensure that there is no *minyan* present, using the strictest Orthodox interpretation of this term. This solution is obviously only available to those groups who enact their rituals in a location that contains a *mehitzah*, i.e. an Orthodox sanctuary.

⁶⁰ Although not all women’s seders are limited to female participants, the majority of them are. And even in those that allow men to participate, the numbers of men who do so is very low. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

of whom travel great distances to attend. Because of their size, logistics are complicated, and it takes a lot of organization to create and re-create them each year. But the energy generated by so many women gathered in one place to celebrate their Jewishness, their femaleness, and their ritual lives is substantial. For many women, this is their first experience in this kind of environment; they describe it as tremendously exciting and energizing.

It is difficult to know what, if any, were the after-effects of the Sukkot event, and what, if any, aspects the participants took back to their family *sukkahs*. Unlike Ma'yan's *ushpizot*, this ritual was not explicitly intended to provide a model for a subsequent home celebration. But if the effects are less concrete and not specifically linked to the one experience, they are still there. The memory of this large-scale and exciting Canadian ritual continues to inspire Jewish women's ritual activities and creative efforts, even for those who were not present personally. The *Sukkah-by-the-water*, the *ushpizot*, the monthly Rosh Hodesh celebrations—all these are part of the same phenomenon as the women's seders—the affirming and confirming of the sense of identity of Jewish women as ritual innovators and experts.

Chapter 3. Sites of Transformation

Seders for women are not a new idea; they have been the subject of debate for centuries. In an article published in 1998, Moshe Zvi Polin discusses the halakhic implications and historical views on the subject of what widowed, divorced, and never-married women can do on Passover.¹ At issue are the exact obligations of the women, and the question of whether they are permitted to recite the blessings. Polin is not sure whether these seders were ever actually performed or if the discussions were posed theoretically. It seems likely that at least some instances of women-only seders did occur, as the question continued to surface. However, they differ from the ones being studied here in that neither the seder rituals nor the texts were altered to focus specifically on women. Thus, if they occurred, these were regular seders attended by women only, rather than ‘women’s seders’. The women’s seders that are the subject of this study were created intentionally by and for women. They resemble the traditional seder from which they are derived, but have been modified to various extents and in various ways to focus specifically on women and to give women an educational and/or spiritual experience. Their emphasis can vary from teaching about women characters in Jewish history to celebrating women and their lives to activism for political/social/legal/religious/economic rights.

The earliest of the modern women’s seders were created within an environment actively advocating a feminist ideology and were consciously named as feminist rituals situated within the overall feminist movement. Some of the subsequent rites were called ‘women’s seders’, as their organizers intentionally avoided the controversial term ‘feminist’; of these, some also avoided feminist content, while others were feminist in nature if not in name. Today the two terms are often used interchangeably and, while some people still differentiate between them and either accentuate or avoid the controversial ‘f-word’ (feminism), for others the nomenclature is

¹ Polin, “A seder on the night of Passover by women together: prohibited or permitted, long or not long?” My thanks to Ira Robinson for telling me about this article.

insignificant and arbitrary.

In order to achieve their goals, be they educational, celebratory, and/or activist, women have redesigned the seder in several ways. For instance, some women's seders add new physical activities, often linked to the biblical Miriam;² new ritual objects have been added;³ segments of rites have been dedicated to addressing specific causes; and the actual day on which the rites are held has been shifted. But, aside from the centrality of women as the ritual performers and the primary focus, by far the most consistently changed element is the haggadah.⁴

The exact origin of the women's seder is unknown. Our best sources are references in books and articles, participants' testimonies, and, particularly, women's haggadahs. In fact, it is difficult to separate the early history of women's seders from the first appearance of these haggadahs. Both occurred in the early 1970s but not necessarily in conjunction with one another. There may have been women's seders that did not use women's haggadahs. Conversely, the presence of women's or feminist haggadahs does not necessarily imply the occurrence of a women's seder. What did develop at some point was a reciprocal process in which the new rituals and haggadahs reinforced one another.

The first women-oriented haggadahs were privately developed and circulated; many only existed as temporary collections of mimeographed pages. One of the earliest dates from 1971, when a group of women in Portland, Oregon created a haggadah in which they used Shifrah and Puah, the midwives in the Exodus story, as models for women's liberation.⁵ They used the haggadah, which was written on sheets of rice paper, at mixed-gender seders that were not

² Described as a prophet, Miriam, sister of Moses, is a key figure in the story of the Exodus, in both biblical and midrashic narratives. Amongst other actions attributed to Miriam, she "took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her in dance with timbrels. And Miriam chanted for them" (Exod 15:20-21). In keeping with this passage, many women's seder celebrants play tambourines, dance, and sing. In addition, they honour Miriam by naming her, telling her story, and decorating haggadahs with her image. Some of the seders even name themselves after her, such as the Miriam's Seder held at the Temple Emanu-El Beth Sholom in Montreal for several years in the late 1990s.

³ Miriam's Cup and the orange on the seder plate are described in detail in chapter 4.

⁴ Haggadahs are discussed in chapter 5.

⁵ Shifrah and Puah refused to obey the Pharaoh's order to kill all Hebrew male newborns (Exod 1:15-22).

focused primarily on women. Soon after, the haggadah moved to New York with one of its creators, Bria Chakofsky, where it provided the basis for at least one women-oriented seder, described by participant bobbi spalter-roth in a 1973 issue of the feminist magazine *Off Our Backs*.⁶ Among the innovative aspects that particularly impressed spalter-roth were references to “foremothers”, and songs for which the ritualizers spontaneously created verses decrying racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. The haggadah then moved back west with Chakofsky, where it grew into the *Haggadah of Liberation* published in 1984.⁷

Around this time, women’s seders were appearing on both coasts of the United States. In 1973, a group of women held a women’s seder in Berkeley; in 1974, another group held a women’s seder in Los Angeles;⁸ and in 1974, Aviva Cantor published a “Jewish Women’s Haggadah” and described the “Jewish women’s seder” in New York at which it had been used.⁹ In 1976, Esther Broner and Naomi Nimrod held concurrent seders in New York and Israel, respectively, using *The Women’s Haggadah* they had co-written.¹⁰ The one in New York became an annual event, with a core group of participants who called themselves the Seder Sisters. Although the composition of the group has changed somewhat, this annual event is still being held.¹¹ A revised version of their haggadah was published and made commercially available in 1992.

The women’s seder created by Broner and Nimrod received more publicity than the others. In 1977 they published an account of the ritual in the newly-inaugurated feminist *Ms. Magazine*.

⁶ spalter-roth, “This year in brooklyn: a seder to commemorate ourselves,” *Off Our Backs*, 1973.

⁷ The *Haggadah of Liberation* is not exclusively focused on women, but, rather, “sees energy for redemption and social transformation as coming from human struggle” (Waskow, Introduction to *The Shalom Seders*, 10). Waskow is the source for the history of this haggadah.

⁸ According to Maida Solomon, the haggadah produced for the first seder was *Pesach Haggadah: A Statement of Joyous Liberation – Women’s Seder, Berkeley, California 5733-1973*, created by Fayla Schwartz, Susie Coliver & Elaine Ayela (Berkeley, CA: self-published, 1973). Several years later, this haggadah had evolved into the *Women’s Passover Seder – 1977* (Solomon, “Claiming Our Questions”).

⁹ Cantor, “Jewish Women’s Haggadah.”

¹⁰ For a description of the Israeli event, see Marcia Freedman’s *Exile in the Promised Land*. The New York rite is described by Esther Broner in *The Telling*.

¹¹ Personal Communication from Michele Landsberg (one of the Seder Sisters), 2005.

Included with the article was an excerpt from the haggadah for readers to use in creating their own rites. This was the effect for at least one reader: Canadian journalist Michele Landsberg read the article, cut out the excerpt, and used it as the basis for her family seder. Although her seder included both women and men, she was the main organizer, and the other participants were happy to participate in the feminist rite she led. In 1985, during a sojourn in New York, Landsberg became one of the Seder Sisters and has since participated in the annual event with Broner, although she has returned to live in Toronto.¹²

After the article appeared in *Ms. Magazine*, women's seders continued to spread, perhaps at an accelerated pace. I am not sure when they first reached Montreal, but in 1982 a group of Montreal women organized a feminist seder which 40 people attended. As did many of the other groups at the time, they wrote their own haggadah, using bits and pieces from various sources as well as writing their own passages. Along with the specifically feminist orientation, this seder also contained lesbian-oriented material.¹³

Women's seders were also gaining popularity in New York. By the 1990s the feminist seders that Barbara Dobkin had been holding grew too large for her house. This was one of the impetuses for her co-founding, with Eve Landau, the Jewish feminist organization Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project. From its inception in 1993, one of Ma'yan's goals has been to provide tools and resources for women to create new rituals; the first one on which it focused was the feminist seder. A major difference between the seder held by Ma'yan and many of the others was its public nature. Rather than holding an invitation-only event, Ma'yan opened this celebration to the public. That first year, 200 people attended and at least 100 more were turned away. Since then, the annual event has been expanded to four nights with 500 attendees each night.¹⁴ The

¹² Personal interview with Michele Landsberg, 2002.

¹³ This information is based on a personal communication from Laura Yaros, one of the organizers of this event.

¹⁴ In 2004, Ma'yan still held four seders, but only three were the same large-scale events. The fourth one was a smaller, more intimate seder, with more input and participation from the attendees. In 2005, Ma'yan decided to stop holding seders altogether. As Eve Landau, director of Ma'yan, explained: "Ma'yan's goal has been to act as a catalyst for change—to create programs that are replicable and can be disseminated and used by others. We feel that we have made a real impact with the seders—they have been picked up and are being done all over the

Ma'yan haggadah, *The Journey Continues*, is now probably the most well-known and widely used women's haggadah. Initially rewritten each year, in 2000 its content was fixed and it was made available for purchase at bookstores, etc; a second edition was published in 2002. Some groups order in bulk directly from Ma'yan, giving an indirect indication of the extent of the ritual practice. In 2002, 30 different groups ordered haggadahs from Ma'yan. The size of the orders varied; the largest was from a group in San Francisco that ordered 400 copies. The groups were located throughout the United States, with the majority in the Eastern parts of the country.

In Canada, there have also been a myriad of women's seders, both large and small. Some are hosted by existing groups that have added a seder to their list of activities; others are more private events. One large public women's seder in Montreal is held by Na'amat Canada. The first Na'amat seder was a word-of-mouth celebration held in 1997; the organizers were taken by surprise at the large turnout when 50 women showed up. In 2001, at the fifth annual event, there were 200 participants and a waiting list. Hadassah-WIZO Toronto held its second annual public seder in 2002 and attracted 150 people. Entitled 'an educational evening on women and Passover' rather than a women's seder, it nonetheless shared many characteristics with the actual ritual. Another, smaller, Canadian seder held in 2002 was the annual one hosted by my own Jewish women's group, at which 24 people were present. Attached to the Jewish Renewal *havura* group Har Kodesh, it is a semi-public event: it is publicized only within the group and by word of mouth, but is open to any woman who shows up. The women's seders of this group have been celebrated since the early 1990s and are held in private homes. Even more private are some of the independent women's seders held throughout Canada, most of which are by invitation only.

This dissertation uses data primarily from four particular rites: the 2001 Ma'yan seder in New York, the 2001 Na'amat seder in Montreal, the 2002 Hadassah-WIZO seder in Toronto, and the 2002 Har Kodesh seder in Montreal. These are described below, using Grimes' categories for

country and in some places in Europe and Israel and it is time for us to move on." (Eve Landau, personal communication, May 2005)

mapping rituals. Results from the questionnaires distributed at these rites are discussed in chapter 6. In the version of the questionnaire that I distributed to independently-held Canadian women's seders, there was an additional section on the seder itself. The details of the rites from those sources are presented below as well.

Ma'yan 2001:

Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project is a Jewish feminist organization in New York.

Ma'yan's mission is to act as a catalyst for change in the Jewish community in order to create an environment more inclusive of and responsive to women, women's needs and women's experiences. Ma'yan facilitates this transformation by training and supporting advocates for change and developing and disseminating innovative and educational programs.¹⁵

Ma'yan was founded in 1993 and has been holding annual feminist seders since 1994. In 2001, four discrete seders took place, one each night for four consecutive nights; the one described here in detail is the first one, although I also include some information about the other three. The seder was open to everyone, but tickets costing \$75.00 had to be purchased in advance. A number of scholarships were available to those who requested them.

Ritual space

This seder was held at Bridgewater's, a large restaurant in Lower Manhattan, and the food was provided by a kosher catering service. The restaurant, located on the third floor, was accessible only by elevator; a tuxedoed male doorkeeper escorted the participants from the front door to the elevator. On the third floor, tables were set up for registration and for the selling of music and ritual objects. The ritual room itself was a very large slightly L-shaped but mostly rectangular space, with floor to ceiling windows on two sides overlooking the river and bridge; during the course of the evening the sun set and the view was spectacular. Along one side, in front of the windows, was a large raised stage for the musicians and ritual leaders. The rest of the room held round tables, each of which seated 10 people, and on each of which were tablecloths,

¹⁵ *Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project*, <www.mayan.org/info/mission.html>.

dishes and cutlery, a frame indicating the table number, and the ritual objects. The tables were quite crowded together and the room held approximately 500 participants.

Ritual Objects

Each table held objects traditionally associated with a seder: two candles; bottles of kosher red wine and grape juice; a box of matzahs; a covered plate holding three separate matzahs; a bowl of *haroset*; and a seder plate. There were also several objects not traditionally associated with seders: the seder plate held the traditional symbolic foods, but beets were substituted for the shank bone¹⁶ and an orange was added. There was another new ritual object, a cup for Miriam. A copy of the Ma'yan haggadah was at each place setting.¹⁷

Each table also held a *tzedakah* box for contributions to “No Small Change”, a program sponsored by Ma'yan which was described in detail during the evening.¹⁸ The tables held tambourines with coloured ribbons, which participants were encouraged to play during the rite. Hand painted tambourines were also for sale in the lobby, and many of the participants played these or others that they had brought themselves.

¹⁶ This substitution has become accepted practice among some contemporary seder practitioners, especially vegetarians. The Ma'yan haggadah links it to the Talmud (*Pesachim* 114b), stating that “According to the Talmud vegetarians may substitute a raw beet, which also bleeds when cut” (13). However, this is not what is actually stated in the talmudic passage. According to Scott Aaron (as quoted by Mark Hurvitz), “Those who are referencing *Pesachim* 114b as the source are mixing issues. *Pesachim* 114b's citing of the beet and rice are to the two extra dishes on the table that are mentioned in the preceding Mishna as being required at a Seder table with matzah, maror and charoset. This was proof of the early practice that a seder should be a vegetarian meal so as not to give any appearance in a post-Temple world that we were attempting to replace or offer our own Zeroa [shank bone] without the Temple. The later additions of meat dishes as representing the Paschal sacrifice and the Hagigah in the Gemara are just that, later additions from a differing and apparently persuasive tradition. This is also where the addition of the Zeroa on our plate come from. The Beet used today in veggie seders is actually meant to replace the Zeroa due to its blood-red color which also reminds us of the Paschal sacrifice. To my knowledge, it is not connected to *Pesachim* 114b but rather an innovation for modern-day vegetarians who may or may not have realized how connected to tradition they actually are through a veggie seder.” (Hurvitz, “What do vegetarians use for the Zeroa (Shankbone) on the Seder plate during Pesach?”) The substitution was made by Ma'yan so as not to offend vegetarians.

¹⁷ The orange on the seder plate and Miriam's Cup are new women's symbols that are discussed in chapter 4. The haggadah is discussed in detail in chapter 5. In addition, it is mentioned in the section below on “Ritual Sound and Language” as it is involved in an audio component of the ritual.

¹⁸ This is a program in which women in their late 20s and early 30s meet with teenagers to explore issues around money, *tzedakah*, and *tikkun olam*.

The food for the meal was prepared by a kosher caterer. Salmon was chosen to allow for multiple individual tastes and requirements, and there was also a strictly vegetarian option. Dessert consisted of fruit and cookies.

Ritual Time

The Ma'yan seders were held on March 25–28, 2001 (Sunday through Wednesday). Four discrete seders were held in order to accommodate the large number of people that wanted to attend; even so, there was a waiting list. The four nights of the ritual occurred two weeks before the actual beginning of Passover.

Each seder lasted approximately four hours; the one on Sunday started at 5:00 p.m.; the others, because they were held on work days, started half an hour later. Most of the seder was devoted to the liturgical part of the rite; the time for eating and socializing was relatively minimal.

Ritual Sound And Language

Ma'yan used its own haggadah, *The Journey Continues*, which was created for the seder. The leaders encouraged participatory reading, suggesting that those seated at odd numbered tables read aloud with one of the leaders while the rest read with the other.

Parts of the text were in Hebrew; these were mostly passages taken from or based on the traditional haggadah and were written in Hebrew using Hebrew characters, in transliterated form using the Roman alphabet, and in English translation. There were two versions of the blessings: a new feminized form and the traditional masculine one; participants were instructed to recite the one they preferred.¹⁹ New passages in the haggadah were written in English.

There was also a lot of music and singing, led by Debbie Friedman, a well-known contemporary Jewish songwriter. Many of the songs were Friedman's own compositions; the words were in the haggadah, and many attendees were apparently already familiar with them as

¹⁹ The new blessings are discussed in detail in chapter 5.

they sang, played tambourines and clapped along. Friedman's CDs and song books were among the items sold in the lobby. The music was an integral and very high-energy component of the rite.

Ritual Identity

The seder was organized by a committee consisting of Ma'yan staff: Tamara Cohen, Erika Katske, Eve Landau, Paulette Lipton, Susan Sapiro, Rabbi Rona Shapiro, and Ruth Silverman.

The ritual leaders of the seder stood on the stage at the front of the room. Tamara Cohen was the main leader for the readings;²⁰ she remained on stage for the entire evening and invited a series of people to join her as co-leader for portions of the rite. Debbie Friedman led the music together with four other musicians, all of whom were on the stage for the entire rite. Many of the attendees participated fully in the reading and singing. Others did so partially, and some sat and watched these activities.

The ritual roles connected to food were absent, as the food was prepared, served, and cleared by paid employees.

The attendees were mostly women,²¹ and most were dressed as for a celebration; there was a festive atmosphere. Many of the attendees were present in groups, and had reserved entire tables; some of these groups were synagogue sisterhoods or Rosh Hodesh groups. Some came in cross-generational family groups, with mothers and daughters attending.

Ritual Action

The attendees gathered in the lobby before the fixed part of the rite. They registered and put on name tags, mingled and chatted, and browsed and bought Friedman's CDs and song books, tambourines hand painted by a local artist, and extra copies of the Ma'yan haggadah. Eventually they all found their assigned tables and sat down.

²⁰ Tamara Cohen also led the second seder; Rona Shapiro led the third and fourth that year.

²¹ Of the attendees from all four of the Ma'yan rites who responded to my questionnaire, 3% (22 people) were male. See chapter 6 for a more complete discussion of male attendees.

The ritual leaders introduced the event and suggested that the participants read along with them and participate as fully as possible in both the readings and the singing. The leaders, accompanied by many of the attendees, read from the haggadah. At various points, the reading was paused, and people were encouraged to perform ritual activities at their own tables: lighting candles, pouring wine, eating symbolic foods, and breaking matzahs.

Attendees sang, played tambourines, and clapped to the music. At several points some of the participants got up and danced at and around their tables. At one point almost all the participants got up and danced in a line around the entire room; this dancing and singing were wonderfully energetic and lasted for approximately 15 minutes, seeming to invigorate everyone present, even those who did not dance.

The four cups of wine, drunk at intervals throughout the rite, were dedicated to four Jewish women deserving recognition; the specific individuals change each year.²²

The fixed part of the rite was interrupted for the meal; this was accomplished very efficiently as uniformed waiters served the one-plate meal and then the dessert to each participant.

The text readings were then resumed, and at the end everyone stood up and came close to the stage. Many people held hands or placed their arms around their neighbours' shoulders as they sang the final song. Then everyone left very quickly, especially as the next day was a work day and many of them had long distances to travel to get home.

Na'amat Montreal 2001:

Na'amat is a Jewish women's volunteer organization, originally called Pioneer Women, the Women's Labour Zionist Organization of America. It is "part of a worldwide, secular Zionist movement dedicated to improving the lives of women, children and families in Israel and around

²² These women are selected annually by the Jewish Women's Archive. The four women celebrated in 2001 were: Mila Racine, a Holocaust victim who helped save the lives of thousands of Jewish children by smuggling them from France into Switzerland; Rose Freedman, a lifelong crusader for worker safety and against greed, class divisions, and poor labour conditions; Gertrude Elion, the winner of the 1988 Nobel Prize for medicine; and Ray Frank, the first Jewish woman to speak from a pulpit in America. More information can be found on all these women on the Jewish Women's Archive website (www.jwa.org).

the globe.”²³ Na’amat Canada was founded in 1925, and the Montreal branch has been holding annual women’s seders since 1997. The seder was open to everyone but reservations were required; the entry cost was either \$50.00, or \$25.00 plus a food dish for the pot luck meal.

Ritual space

This seder was held at the Dorshei Emet Reconstructionist Synagogue in Montreal. The synagogue at that time consisted mainly of one large room on the ground floor, which is where the rite was enacted. A few tables were set up in the small lobby for registration and provided information on Na’amat itself. The large room was divided into two areas: one for the seating and another for the food.

Situated at the front of the seating area was a large rectangular table with microphones. Off to one side on the wall was a richly coloured and detailed quilt, ‘Quilt of the Ten Plagues’, created by Gail Flicker, one of the organizers. Facing the head table were many small round tables, each seating eight people, and on which were flowers, place settings and ritual objects. The tables were quite crowded together and the room held approximately 200 participants.

The other part of the room had long tables for the food. Folding walls separated the two sections, and these were closed during the rite until the time to eat. The walls were then folded back, and the tables were revealed laden with food.

Ritual Objects

Each table held bottles of kosher red and white wine, grape juice, and water; a box of matzahs; a seder plate containing the traditional symbolic foods, with beets once again taking the place of the shank bone; a dish of salt water and a plate of hardboiled eggs. On each table were flowers and tambourines and other percussion instruments. The haggadahs, written specifically for the event, were handed out to participants as they registered in the lobby.

²³ Na’amat Canada, <www.naamat.com>.

The food for the meal was prepared by attendees, who were asked to bring a non-meat dish that reflected their family's Passover tradition,²⁴ and included many different kinds of fish, vegetables, kugels, rice, and legumes, cooked according to a mixture of Ashkenazi and Sephardi recipes. There was also an Ethiopian flat bread.²⁵ Whether the presence of the Ethiopian bread or the Sephardi rice dishes would have bothered some of the attendees was not an issue as the rite was held before the holiday. The many, many varieties of dessert were presented on a separate table. A meal ordered from a kosher venue was available for attendees who requested it.²⁶

Ritual Time

The Na'amat women's seder was held on Wednesday, March 28, 2001, one and a half weeks before Passover.

The seder lasted approximately three and a half hours, beginning at 7:00 p.m. The portion of time spent on the meal was significant. This was partly due to the fact that the food was served buffet-style, but also because many of the attendees had prepared their own special dishes and so a lot of time was spent discussing the food and exchanging compliments and recipes.

Ritual Sound And Language

Na'amat produced its own haggadah by combining some original material with passages from other haggadahs, especially the Ma'yan text. In addition to the reading of the haggadah, a short film was shown celebrating the Na'amat organization.²⁷

The haggadah was read aloud in turn by designated people located throughout the room. The parts of the text taken from or based on passages in the traditional haggadah were in Hebrew, using Hebrew characters and transliterated using the Roman alphabet. Most of the text was in English. The blessings were presented only in the new feminized form.

²⁴ Na'amat's policy is to always have a non-meat meal, a common solution among Jewish organizations for accommodating different food requirements.

²⁵ "During Passover, Ethiopian Jews eat *shimbera*, a, crisp[y]... matzo-like cracker made from chickpeas." (*Ras Dashen Ethiopian Restaurant* website).

²⁶ There were less than half a dozen requests for kosher meals.

²⁷ This was the only year that this was done.

Janie Respitz, a local singer and guitarist who specializes in Yiddish music, led the singing of traditional Passover songs. Some attendees sang and played the tambourines and other percussion instruments placed on the tables for that purpose.

Ritual Identity

The seder was organized by a committee consisting of Gail Flicker, Donna Goodman, Chantal Lasry, Jillian Ubal, and Paula Weitzman. Some of the eight people seated at the head table were members of the organizing committee; others were invited guests. Other members of the committee were seated at the smaller tables throughout the room. Janie Respitz led the music from one of these tables.

The pre-selected readers, some of whom were at the head table, took turns reading to the attendees, who only read aloud the parts marked 'ALL'.

The attendees were all women, mostly dressed as for a celebration, and there was a festive atmosphere. Many of the attendees knew each other as they were members of Na'amat.

More than half the participants had played a role in the food preparation (and, in consequence, paid the \$25 admission instead of the \$50 full price). The seder organizers had assigned to each one the kind of dish she was to bring (i.e. fish, salad, dessert), but each cook had determined the actual recipe.

The other ritual roles connected to food (set up and clean up) were absent; paid employees took the food dishes from the cooks, put them onto the tables, and cleared the tables after the meal.

Ritual Action

The attendees gathered in the lobby and in the main room before the fixed part of the rite began. They registered, mingled, and chatted. Eventually they all found their assigned tables and sat down.

The ritual leaders introduced the event. Then the pre-assigned readers took turns reading the text of the haggadah. At various points attendees were encouraged to perform ritual activities at their own tables along with those seated at the head table: lighting candles, pouring wine, eating the symbolic foods, and breaking the matzahs.

At one point many of the participants got up and danced in a line around the room to a medley of songs; this energetic dancing and singing went on for a short while.

The four cups of wine were dedicated to four Jewish women deserving recognition; the specific individuals change each year.²⁸

The liturgical part of the rite was interrupted for the meal; this was in many ways the high point of the evening. It was a pot-luck meal, for which many of the attendees had prepared dishes. There was a lot of discussion among all the participants regarding the different foods; many requested recipes and compared ingredients and methods of preparation. In fact, the Na'amat organizers are planning to produce a cookbook containing many of the recipes. The food was served buffet style, and the attendees lined up to fill their plates, a lengthy process. Dessert was served similarly, and this also took some time. During all this time, there was a lot of socializing among the attendees. Many people left after the meal, as it was already fairly late and this was a weekday evening.

A short film was then shown which celebrated the achievements of Na'amat Montreal; the text readings were resumed, and the reading of the hagaddah was completed.

Hadassah-WIZO Toronto 2002:

“Hadassah-WIZO Organization of Canada is an association of Canadian women dedicated to the support of health, social welfare and educational programs in Israel, and to the enrichment of

²⁸ These women are selected annually by the organizers of the Na'amat Women's seder, and often include a local woman who is still alive and who is invited to attend the seder. The four women celebrated in 2001 were Chaya Surchin, who was active in Na'amat Canada for many years; Krisha Zlotowska Starker, a Holocaust survivor who is now residing in Montreal and who was present at the rite; Rita Levi-Montalcini, who received a Nobel prize in physiology and medicine in 1986; and Queen Yehudit, a 10th-century warrior and ruler of Abyssinia.

Jewish life in Canada.”²⁹ Hadassah Canada was first established in 1916, affiliated with the Hadassah organization already existing in the United States, and, in 1921, joined with the Women’s International Zionist Organization (WIZO). Hadassah-WIZO first held a women’s seder in 2001, calling it an ‘enhanced seder’. In 2002, they held an ‘educational evening’ with the title of ‘Women and Passover: Past, Present, and Future’. It was not a complete seder, but, rather, an event based on one, with information, texts, and suggestions that could be used by attendees to modify their own subsequent seders. The evening consisted of a guest speaker followed by readings from a prepared text. The event was open to everyone, and had an \$18.00 entry fee.

Ritual Space

The event was held in a large hall at the Adath Israel Synagogue in Toronto. This large Conservative synagogue has many rooms, and other events were being held at the same time. In the lobby outside the hall, tables were set up for registration and the selling of Passover chocolates and books by Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, the featured speaker.

At the front of the hall was a large rectangular table set up with microphones. Facing the head table were many small round tables, each seating 10 people, and on which were placed the ritual objects. Each table also held a big placard with both the name and the story of one of the many women being honoured that evening. Each place setting included a ritual booklet, a small book of Passover recipes, and a Passover chocolate bar. At the back of the room was an area set aside for the four musicians, with amplifiers and microphones. The room was not filled by the approximately 150 participants

Ritual Objects

Each table held two candles; a plate of matzahs; a seder plate containing the traditional symbolic foods plus an orange; a Miriam’s Cup; and a bowl of salt water. In the middle of the table were flowers, a water pitcher, and a stack of *chumashim* (the first five books of the Hebrew

²⁹ *Hadassah-WIZO Organization of Canada*, <www.canadian-hadassah-wizo.org/who/index.html>

Bible). Copies of the ritual text were placed at each setting. As the evening was not intended to be a complete seder, the text was not a haggadah; it was a booklet containing a number of passages that could be used to supplement or replace portions of a traditional haggadah.

Just as the event was not a complete seder, the food was not a complete meal but only dessert. Sweets and fruits were served with coffee and tea during the break between the two parts of the evening.

Ritual Time

The Hadassah-WIZO's educational evening was held on Wednesday, March 20, 2002, eight days before Passover.

The entire event lasted two hours, beginning at 7:45 p.m. There were three distinct parts to the event: a half hour speech, a half hour break in which dessert was served, and the part in which the ritual text was read.

Ritual Sound and Language

The first part of the Hadassah-WIZO event was a talk by Elyse Goldstein entitled 'Women of the Exodus Story'.

In the part after the dessert break, the ritual leaders read excerpts from the ritual text. This was written mostly in English, with a small amount of Hebrew used for the traditional blessings. These blessings were presented only in their traditional masculine form. The texts were read aloud by designated people seated at the head table.

There was also music and a small amount of singing of traditional Passover songs, led by the musicians at the back.

Ritual Identity

The seder was organized by a committee chaired by Marla Spiegel and consisting of Meredith Caplan, Rebecca Gluck, Ellen Goldstein, Myrna Hanet, Marna Snitman, Carol Lou

Spiegel, and Hedi Unger. The organizers and leaders of the seder were seated at the head table facing the room along with Elyse Goldstein, the featured speaker.

The musicians, at the back, were all male. This was not intentional; the organizers had planned for a woman musician to provide a female voice, but a last minute emergency obliged them to substitute the available men. However, the men did not sing, as the woman would have; they only played instruments.

The readers at the front took turns reading from the text.

The attendees were all women, except for one man who came with his wife and was not turned away. Most were dressed as for a celebration, and there was a festive atmosphere. Many of the attendees knew each other, as they were members of Hadassah-WIZO.

The ritual roles connected to food were absent, as the food was prepared, served, and cleared by synagogue staff.

Ritual Action

The attendees gathered in the lobby and in the hall before the fixed part of the rite began. They registered, mingled, chatted, and bought some of the items available.

The event began with the singing of the national anthems of Canada and Israel. The president of the Hadassah-WIZO group presented an award to the chair of the organizing committee, Marla Spiegel, who then introduced the evening. She suggested that people at the individual tables introduce themselves to one another using their matrilineages; this got very lively as participants tried, not always successfully, to remember the names of their grandmothers and great-grandmothers.

Elyse Goldstein then gave a talk, "Women of the Exodus Story", in which she discussed ways in which these characters can serve as role models; she also suggested ways in which they and their stories could be inserted into a regular seder without the "eye-rolling" that often accompanies feminist suggestions.

During the dessert break, in which waiters brought plates of sweets and fruits to each table along with coffee and tea, the leaders suggested that the attendees discuss issues relating to Rabbi Goldstein's talk; they distributed discussion questions for this purpose.

After the break, the readers read passages from the text. At one point many of the participants got up and danced in a line around the room to the music of "Mayim Mayim", a traditional song.

Only one cup of wine was dedicated, to the pioneer women, even though the ritual text designated four different dedications.³⁰

Har Kodesh Montreal 2002:

Har Kodesh is a *havura* group affiliated with the Jewish Renewal Movement and very different from the other three groups described in this section. It is small, having approximately 35 members, and there is no organizational framework or support structure on which to draw for help. The larger mixed-gender group has been in existence for 13 years; the women's sub-group celebrates Rosh Hodesh each month and has been holding a women's seder each Passover since the early 1990s.

This rite was different from the others not only in content, but also in form. As a feminist re/claiming of the seder, this group created a form in which women were central to the actual structure of the rite as well as to the story. The seder consisted of five sections: one for each of the women of the Exodus story, with Shifrah and Puah grouped together because they have no separate stories within the biblical text.³¹

In each section of the seder, the story of the character was recounted and a song for her was sung. Although in previous years this seder had also included sub-rituals in each of the five

³⁰ In this case, the women being celebrated were general groups rather than individuals, and were not even all women. They were: The women of Exodus; the pioneer women; our mothers; and future generations of daughters and sons. However, plaques on the individual tables held the names and stories of 15 individual women, biblical and historical: Lilith, Eve, Glueckel of Hamelm, Hannah Rachel Webermacher, Rebekah, Hannah, Yocheved, Lot's wife, Devorah, Leah, Rachel, Esther, Sarah, Ruth, and Henrietta Szold.

³¹ The other four women are Miriam, Yocheved, Batya (Pharaoh's daughter), and Zipporah (Moses' wife).

sections, this was changed in 1999 because it took too much time. Since then, only one major sub-ritual has been performed each year.

The five sections were separated by four cups of wine, dedicated to the biblical matriarchs. The telling of the stories and the songs remained the same from year to year, but the sub-ritual varied. The event was open to everyone, with no entry fee. However, attendees were asked to bring a food dish for the pot luck meal.

Ritual Space

The women's seder was held in the private home of one of the members of the group. The food brought by the attendees was laid out on the table in the dining room. The rite itself took place in the living room, a fair-sized space that became very full when the 24 women crowded into it. It contained a couch and some chairs; legless chairs and cushions were scattered on the floor. The room had a central glass fireplace and a cabinet holding many candles. Some of the ritual objects were placed on several small tables while others were on the floor. The seder plate was on the floor in the middle of the room.

There was no designated front part of the room, the leaders sat among the other attendees.

Ritual Objects

There were enough candles for each attendee to light one. There were various bottles of kosher and non-kosher wine and grape juice, both red and white; boxes of matzahs; several bowls of *haroset*; a cup for Miriam and a pitcher of water. A seder plate held all the traditional symbolic foods (including a shank bone), and several oranges were present, on the seder plate itself and on a separate plate. Although it was not evident until they were cut open, these were blood oranges.³² There were many instruments on hand: drums, tambourines, and noise-making shakers.

There was no ritual text; this is significantly different from the other rites described in this dissertation.

³² The significance of the blood orange is discussed in chapter 4.

The food for the meal was prepared by attendees, who were asked to bring dishes that were kosher for Passover and vegetarian.

Ritual Time

The seder was held on Sunday, March 24, 2002, four days before Passover.³³

The event began at 4:00 p.m. and lasted approximately four hours. The food was not eaten during a break in the ritual activity but was incorporated into the rite.

Ritual Sound and Language

There was a lot of singing and playing of instruments throughout the rite. Hebrew and English songs were sung; some were traditional Passover songs but many were new, some written by contemporary Jewish women songwriters.³⁴ In addition, many of the members of this group had written songs, some specifically for the women's seder. These are sung each year, along with new ones both specifically related to the Passover theme of liberation as well as to women and women's issues. There was a lot of drumming and shaking of tambourines and other noise-makers to accompany the singing.

There was no reading of prepared texts, although the stories of the women of the Exodus story were recounted by designated attendees. The rest of the time was devoted to activities in which all the attendees participated. The blessings were recited using the new feminized forms.

Ritual Identity

There were two ritual leaders for this event, myself and Vera Kisfalvi. We introduced the individual ritual elements, and explained each section of the rite. However, we did not participate more fully than the other attendees, and changed our plan at various points to accommodate suggestions and wishes from the others.

³³ In previous and subsequent years, this group's women's seders were held during Passover, although not on the first two days when the regular seders are held. In 2002, the seder was held before the holiday for logistic rather than for ideological reasons, at the request of one of the leaders. The organizers the next year reverted to holding it during the holiday itself because a majority of the practitioners preferred it that way.

³⁴ The songwriters are Shefa Gold, Hannah Tiferet Siegal, and Linda Hirschorn.

The singing was led by several of the other participants, according to who had written the particular song and who had the best ability to lead singing. Similarly, the dancing was led by another of the ritualizers. The individual stories were told by various attendees who had prepared in advance.

Most of the attendees participated completely and fully; a few newcomers sat towards the back of the room and observed more than they participated.

All the participants brought food for the meal. Some had cooked, others had bought ready-made dishes. Everyone helped to some extent to put the food out and clean up afterwards, although a few of the participants did most of this work.

Ritual Action

The attendees deposited the food they had brought on the dining room table; they mingled and chatted and eventually found places in the living room and sat down.

The event began with a *niggun* (tune) and then a song about women gathering.³⁵ There was then a 'go-round' in which each person said her name and the name of a person, real or fictional, living or dead, whom she wished to have join her in spirit for the rite.

The leaders then introduced the event and explained its structure. Each woman came up in turn to light a candle, while the entire group sang a song written by one of the attendees.

One of the leaders explained the orange on the seder plate; the group recited a blessing for the diversity it represented and each person ate a piece of the blood orange.

There was a dance in Miriam's honour to a song written by another group member. And then, in tribute to Yocheved, Moses' mother, a plate of food was prepared for overworked mothers everywhere and offered symbolically to one of the mothers present. The non-mothers then served plates of food to the other mothers, and then to themselves. While they ate, designated narrators

³⁵ Linda Hirschorn's "Women Gathering Round". This song can be found on her *Gather Round: Songs of Celebration and Renewal*, produced by Oyster Albums in 1989.

told the stories of Pharaoh's daughter, Batya, and Zipporah, Moses' wife. Another group member recounted the story of the midwives, Shifrah and Puah, through a song she had written.

The major sub-ritual took place after the meal, starting with a guided meditation that ended with each person writing on handmade paper what she considered a 'right action', in the personal or social activism realm, for herself at the present time. The pieces of paper were burned in the fireplace, symbolizing the intent of each person to actually perform the action she had named. In order to help her do this, each person's name was chanted repetitively by the entire group for a period of several minutes. This show of support, helpful when undertaking a new venture, was inspired by the encouragement that Miriam is said to have offered each person as they walked into the Sea of Reeds during the Exodus.

After this the group sang and danced to a final song.

During the course of the event, four cups of wine were dedicated to the biblical matriarchs, and a final toast of water was drunk to all ten women celebrated in the ritual: the four matriarchs and the six women of the Exodus story.

Independently-held Canadian women's seders:

This information came from the 49 individuals who responded to my soliciting, in newspapers, magazines, Internet listserves, and word of mouth, for people who had attended women's seders in Canada.³⁶ The respondents answered questions describing the rite they had attended; this information is summarized in Table 1 (the rest of the data is discussed in chapter 6).

³⁶ Seven of these respondents had attended the same women's seder.

Table 1: *Characteristics of Independent Seders*

Geographical range: from Montreal in the east to Salt Spring Island in the west, including Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary, Vancouver and Victoria.
65% in private homes.
57% during the eight days of Passover, one afterwards, and at least two varied from year to year.
88% women-only.
58% private, i.e. for invited individuals rather than open to the public. Some were organized by individuals, and the groups that hosted the others ranged from Rosh Hodesh groups to groups of friends or neighbours, to synagogue sisterhoods, to lesbian groups.
Size varied from 3 to 200, with 20 being the most common size (9 of the reported rites), and 200 the second most common (7 of the reported rites).
94% included singing, in which most of the attendees took part.
53% included dancing.
All included food in some form; for 67% there was an entire meal, mostly pot luck events where all the participants contributed.
61% included an orange or lemon on their seder plate (almost all of these were oranges—only one respondent used a lemon).
69% used haggadahs prepared by their own participants and a few used commercially available feminist haggadahs. In one case these two coincided: <i>Like an Orange on a Seder Plate</i> is a lesbian haggadah written by a woman in Victoria and used at her seder, and it is also available commercially.

*

Women's seders differ radically, from the regular seder and from each other. Some are large public events, while others are small private affairs. Some occur during Passover, others are held before the holiday, a few are held afterwards, and some change from year to year. For a few of the practitioners, the women's seder is not an additional ritual, but has become their primary seder. Most are attended by women only but not all, although in all of them the majority of participants are female. Some are formal sit-down affairs; others are more casual pot-lucks. In some the meal is central and substantial; in others it is symbolic. Almost all include at least the symbolic foods of the traditional seder, although these may be modified, often with a vegetarian substitution for the shankbone; some add new symbolic foods linked to women's issues. Some follow the traditional order closely; others deviate radically or even reject it entirely. Some use well-defined haggadahs as ritual texts, either creating their own or using existing ones; others improvise and adlib. And at least one rejects the traditional format entirely, creating a completely different form. But they all focus on women's issues, women's concerns, women's experiences.

They use traditional themes and elements to highlight and enhance women's roles; they introduce new symbols that are explicitly linked to women's roles and experiences. They all maintain some measure of continuity and introduce some amount of innovation. And, despite all the differences between them, there are similarities that identify all them as being recognizably 'women's seders'. In chapter 7 I will describe the 'generic' women's seder, and the characteristics, variations, and variability within that single category.

Chapter 4. Transforming Objects

A. Oranges

The orange first materialized on the seder plate in the early 1980s. Initially conceived by Jewish feminist Susannah Heschel, it has since become an increasingly popular symbol of the wrestlings of Jewish women. Like all good symbols, different versions of its origins began circulating, giving it an aura of ambiguity, mystery, and complexity. Heschel originally placed an orange on her seder plate in solidarity with Jewish lesbians, gay men, and other marginalized groups. The orange replaced an object which she did not want on her table: a crust of bread.

In 1979, the Jewish Women's Group of the Hillel Association at the University of California at Berkeley held a public meeting to which they invited Chabad House rebbitzin Hilda Langer. One of the members, Riki Friedman, asked Langer about the place of lesbians within Judaism and Langer replied that it was a minor sin, analogous to eating bread during Passover.¹ Members of the group disagreed with Langer's assessment, as their own experiences suggested that lesbianism was more often treated as a major problem. But they liked the symbol so, at Passover they placed a crust of bread on their seder plate to express the struggle of lesbians searching for a place within the Jewish tradition. Although, according to Langer, eating bread during Passover may be a relatively minor transgression, putting it on the seder plate is much more serious for most Jews. Bread symbolizes all that is forbidden during Passover; according to Jewish law, it cannot even be in the house. Having it on the seder plate, in the centre of the ritual arena, forces everyone present to see and acknowledge it, to witness the fact that the holiday has been compromised. Linking this to the position of lesbians brings both them and their position out of the closet. It makes visible the women themselves along with the difficulties they face in finding a comfortable place within Jewish communities and traditions.

¹ Although Langer may consider the eating of bread during Passover a minor transgression, this is not the majority opinion of Jewish authorities. The seriousness is derived from the biblical prohibition, and the Bible itself mandates a severe punishment for the sin: "for whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel" (Exod 12:15).

Heschel heard about the group's action and wished to practice it as well, in solidarity with marginalized people struggling to find their place. But she didn't want bread on her seder plate, jeopardizing the holiday. In addition, she found the symbol not entirely appropriate, as it indicated that lesbianism was 'not kosher': "it suggests that being lesbian is being transgressive, violating Judaism." So she substituted an orange. "I felt that an orange was suggestive of something else: the fruitfulness for all Jews when lesbians and gay men are contributing and active members of Jewish life. In addition, each orange segment had a few seeds that had to be spit out—a gesture of spitting out, repudiating the homophobia of Judaism."²

These stories begat other stories. The myths spread along with the custom. Heschel herself recounted the tale at different times and in different places; others heard the story and passed it on, introducing changes in the process. Most of the versions that exist today focus on the more general position of women in Judaism, rather than that of lesbians. Many introduce a man into the story; he is usually nameless, traditional, and hostile. Some still include Heschel but change her role, as in the version in which the hostile man challenges the notion that women should take a more active role in the synagogue, and Heschel responds that "women bring to the *bimah* what an orange would bring to the seder plate: transformation, not transgression."³ In another version, the idea of the orange is attributed to the man: during a presentation by Heschel he "rose in a fury and proclaimed that women belong on the *bimah* as much as an orange belongs on the seder plate."⁴ In yet another variation, Heschel has disappeared and been replaced by the hostile man, who has moved up onto the stage. When a nameless woman in the audience asks about the place of women in Judaism, "[t]he 'learned rabbi' responded, stroking his beard: 'A woman should be on

² Heschel, email sent to Rabbi Patricia Karlin-Neumann, Associate Dean for Religious Life, Stanford University and circulated on the Internet, 2001.

³ Solomon, "Claiming Our Questions," 283 n45. A *bimah* is the raised platform in the sanctuary from where the service is led and the Torah scroll is read.

⁴ The Store at Jewish.Com. Although this version sets the story 50 years ago, this is perhaps simply a typing error as it dates the ordination of the first female rabbis to the same period ("The story is told that 50 years ago, when women were first beginning to join the rabbinate"). In fact, the ordination of the first woman rabbi, Sally Priesand, was in 1972 at the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College; and the second woman rabbi, Sandy Sasso, was ordained in 1974 by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

the bimah like an orange should be on the Seder plate!”⁵ Another version focuses on women reading from the Torah scrolls: “it was suggested that a woman read from the Torah. When a rabbi ... heard about that idea, he said, ‘A woman belongs at the Torah like an orange belongs on the Seder plate’.”⁶ A version with two major differences involves a lemon rather than an orange, and the place of feminism rather than women. In this rendition, the impetus for questioning feminism’s place in Judaism is the huge amount of housework required before the holiday, work that is done mostly by women. The (male) rabbi’s answer is that the place of feminism in Judaism is like a lemon on the seder plate.⁷ In 1997, Rebecca Alpert published what has become a definitive account of the origin, describing how the bread was transformed into an orange and naming Heschel in a footnote.⁸ The Ma’yan Haggadah, published in 2000, gives two different versions, without naming Heschel or any of the other participants, while the 2002 version gives a more complete account and quotes Heschel herself. All these stories coexist and interconnect, referencing and affecting each other, weaving a web around the symbol.⁹

Heschel herself recently commented on these changes:

Somehow, though, the typical patriarchal maneuver occurred: My idea of an orange and my intention of affirming lesbians and gay men were transformed. Now the story circulates that a MAN said to me that a woman belongs on the bimah as an orange on the Seder plate. A woman’s words are attributed to a man, and the affirmation of lesbians and gay men is simply erased. Isn’t that precisely what’s happened over the centuries to women’s ideas?¹⁰

⁵ Simkin, *Like An Orange on a Seder Plate*, frontispiece.

⁶ bat Mildred, “The Torah As I See It”.

⁷ This version was told to me by a young woman who had heard it at her synagogue youth group. Since then, she has placed a lemon on her family seder plate every year, and told her version of the story. She had never heard of the orange on the seder plate.

⁸ Alpert, *Like Bread on the Seder Plate*.

⁹ And the stories do not end. At my women’s seder in 2004, one of the participants placed a fig on the plate, referencing it to Susannah Heschel, who had apparently been at another gathering where Jewish gay men and lesbians had claimed the fig as their symbol. I asked Heschel, but she knew nothing about either the symbol or the gathering. It turns out to have been not Heschel, but Rabbi Goldie Milgram, who originated the story: “A fig, you might ask? I’d suggested a symbol might also be on the plate for the struggle for freedom to receive and confer the sacraments of one’s religious tradition, regardless of gender orientation. The gay and lesbian students suggested, with humor and pride, that it couldn’t be a vegetable - it had to be a fruit! And so the succulent fig, the fig-ment of what had to be imagined so that it could begin to become a universal reality, equality for gay and lesbian people in marriage, as citizens and employees and the right to be ordained as clergy, will appear on our seder plate. And perhaps yours” (“2004 Innovation for the Seder Plate”). However, for all the women who were at my seder, this symbol remains associated with Heschel.

¹⁰ Heschel, email, 2001.

The orange has traveled. It began as a transgressive act, an affirmation of belonging for marginalized groups. In the mouth of a mythical hostile man, it came to represent the way in which all women occupy a non-central position in Judaism. Now it has been re-appropriated, as feminists insist that its origins as well as its current use reflect their own concerns and voices.

Two different foods are involved in these source stories, bread and oranges. Although they are related in their original use on the seder plate, their symbolic values are very different. The practice of placing bread on the seder plate has not lasted, at least not in the popular arena. In contrast, the placing of an orange on the seder plate has not only endured, but continues to increase in popularity. It may be that many Jewish women share Heschel's discomfort with the presence of bread in the Passover context; they want transformation, but not abrogation. And it may also be that more women are concerned with the issue of women's place than that of lesbians. But, for whatever reason, the orange has caught on. Seder plates are being created with a specific place for the orange; others use the orange as decorative motif. A women's haggadah was published in 1999 with the title *Like an Orange on a Seder Plate*.¹¹ In most of the feminist haggadahs being produced, the orange is present. Many individual women have incorporated the orange into their own seders. Along with *kos miriam*, Miriam's Cup, the orange has come to symbolize women's ongoing struggles and achievements within Judaism, and has a particular connection to the Passover holiday and ritual.

Many women are using the new symbol. One of the questions on the questionnaire I distributed for this project asked what, if any, subsequent changes the respondents made to their own seders. 324 of the 797 responses I received from attendees at the Ma'yan seders had attended the seder on previous years; of these, 49 (15.1%) said that among the changes they had made was the addition of an orange.¹² When I invited the 33 members of this subgroup who had also

¹¹ Although this is an explicitly lesbian haggadah, the version it tells of the myth refers to the place of women in Judaism rather than lesbians.

¹² Although some of the other respondents may have made changes to their own seders prior to attending a Ma'yan seder, this was not one of the questions asked in the survey, and so these respondents are not included in this part of my analysis.

provided an email address to supply more details regarding this change, 11 responded. For all of them, the purpose of the orange was to emphasize the presence of women, either in the specific ritual and/or in the entire tradition. For some, it was a pointer to the already existing active participation of women. Following are direct quotes from these responses:

“inclusiveness”

“it represents the equality of women in Judaism”

“I felt it was important to recognize the significance of women in the story of Passover”

“I thought that women, beginning with the very youngest girls, should feel they have always been an integral part of our Jewish history, not just its witnesses and guardians”

For others, it called attention to needed changes:

“to include women in a tradition that previously had primarily male symbols”

“I thought it was a perfect chance to do some feminist teaching”

“the power of women to transform Judaism and the world”

Of the 11, only one mentioned lesbians and, even for her, the symbol was also about feminists: “the inclusion of feminists and lesbians into the seder ritual”. The orange has become more significant in a women-oriented and/or feminist capacity than as a lesbian or gay representation.¹³

Rivka, a participant in my own women’s seder, also adds an orange to her family’s seder. This is a setting in which she feels mostly invisible. The older men “mumble their way” through the traditional haggadah; her father sometimes invites her to participate by reading a paragraph, but no more active participation is available for her. The symbolic foods are served following a strict hierarchy that for her represents her less-than-significant presence:

¹³ Email communications from respondents to my original questionnaires.

They do it traditionally, and I just have to tell you this, because it gives you an idea of the context. Whenever they serve anyone anything, so whenever there's a *bracha* on the matzah or anything, the eldest man gets it first. It goes all the way down the men, to the very youngest boy. And then it's the eldest woman, and then it goes down to the youngest.¹⁴

When Rivka had previously tried to introduce alternatives, these had been mostly ignored, especially by the older men. And the younger people were more interested in getting to the meal and less interested in prolonging the ritual, for whatever reason.

Rivka placed the orange on the table, feeling that she was inserting herself into the ritual.

There it sat, bright, shining, obvious, and visible:

...all these elders, males, leading the service, and there I am, plonk with the orange, and then I give this explanation, from a woman's point of view, of why it's there—so I think definitely it was a way to get myself into it.

She told the version of the origin that included Heschel and was about women on the *bimah*; there was some interest, albeit only among the younger people. For Rivka, it was a way of affirming her self unequivocally:

I think it says, pretty clearly, in my act of putting it on the seder plate, that I'm there, and that's really the crux of it. I'm there and you're going to have to deal with me.

But, even though she wants acknowledgement and visibility, Rivka is not willing to provoke confrontation; she does not want conflict to ruin the seder, for others or for herself. And that is part of the reason she likes the orange:

...without really being an affront, but at the same time I think it makes the point in a really graphic visual way.

At our women's seder this past year, Rivka suggested that we use a blood orange, and that we eat it. Her reasons for the blood orange were twofold: because the outside looks ordinary, but opening it reveals an unexpected treat:

...because when you look at it you can't really tell, so it's the shock of opening it up and seeing that wonderful colour;

¹⁴ Personal interview with Rivka (a pseudonym), 2001. The following quotations are all from the same interview.

and also because of the traditional link between blood and women that derives from menstruation:

that, to me, was an important thing, that instead of it being a horrible thing, it's a wonderful thing.¹⁵

The blood orange was a huge success: everyone enjoyed the surprise of the brilliant red colour inside. The eating was also a triumph: it embodied and concretized the symbol, allowing us to experience the significances corporally as well as intellectually.¹⁶ None of my other respondents used a blood orange or even ate the orange on the seder plate. One did recite a blessing on the orange, using the traditional blessing on the fruit of the tree (*borei pri ha'eitz*); most of the others used the orange as a catalyst for discussion.

The orange is at the beginning of its life as a Passover ritual food. And it plays a role similar to that of the other symbolic foods. Just as they reference the story of the Exodus as an archetype of liberation, the orange focuses attention on a contemporary story of freedom from oppression. Most of my respondents said that they recounted the story of Susannah Heschel and the place of women in Judaism when they introduced the orange at their seder. They credit the orange as a stimulus for seder discussions on women's rights, women's place, and women's roles. One mentioned: "We have a Q and A format and include provocative questions, using the orange and Miriam's Cup as a way to incorporate change and educate."¹⁷ Of course, with provocative questions and discussion come diverse reactions. Most of the respondents reported primarily favorable responses, ranging from surprise and curiosity, with some joking, to enthusiasm and agreement with what it represents. Some witnessed changing responses over time: "no one laughs—any more."¹⁸

Reactions to Rivka's orange were mixed:

It was ok. ... My aunt and uncle are quite open, they have a son who's gay, and they have a daughter who I think they know is bisexual.... They're reasonably open people.

¹⁵ Although Rivka did not mention this, the blood orange is also particularly appropriate as its colour evokes the blood of the paschal sacrifice. In this, it parallels the beet that some people substitute for the shank bone because it 'bleeds when cut'.

¹⁶ This is similar to the way in which many people eat some of the other symbolic foods on the seder plate.

¹⁷ Respondent, email communication.

¹⁸ Respondent, email communication.

So the fact that I would come with an orange in the context of a feminist context, I don't think it really fazed them. I think some of the people just didn't care. My father dismissed it, I think, as silly. I think his response was: oh it's just another one of Rivka's things.¹⁹

The story that Rivka told her family is the one about Heschel and women's place in Judaism; before this year, she had never heard of the connection between oranges and gays or lesbians. Yet she herself adds a gay aspect to the symbol: she credits the fact of their having gay and bisexual children as a reason for her aunt's and uncle's openness to the innovative practice.

The orange exists not only as a symbol, but as a tangible object. And it arrives at our seders, not alone, but with its own history, tradition, and symbolisms. Although these are mostly separate from the Jewish tradition, they are part of the Western cultural context in which North American Jewish rituals are situated. Clifford Geertz reminds us that cultures are made up of "webs of signification" with all their interconnections; our analysis consists of "sorting out the structures of signification ... and determining their social ground and import."²⁰ These significations have participated in the creation of the society in which both we and the oranges exist, and influence our perceptions. As such, they all, even the Christian associations, contribute to interpretations, and to unconscious, subconscious, and conscious associations. An examination of the history of the orange can deepen our understanding of what the orange sitting on the seder plate signifies and evokes for those sitting at the table.

The entire citrus family apparently originated in Southeast Asia, from where it spread, first to Eastern Africa, and then to the Mediterranean region. Oranges may or may not have been known to the ancient Greeks, but by the first century, both Greeks and Romans believed that the title fruit in the myth of the Golden Apples of the Hesperides were, in fact, oranges.²¹ Roman mosaics

¹⁹ Personal interview with Rivka, 2001.

²⁰ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 9.

²¹ The myth is part of the legend of the labours of Hercules. Eurystheus commanded Hercules to bring him the golden fruit belonging to Zeus that gave the gods their eternal youth, and which were guarded by the Hesperides, the daughters of Atlas, along with a hundred-headed dragon, named Ladon. Hercules tricked Atlas into getting the fruit for him from his daughters. However, they could not remain with humans, and were returned to Athena who took them back to the garden from which they had been stolen. The fruit were almost certainly not apples, as the Greeks referred to all strange fruit as 'apples', "distinguishing it only by the name of the country they

and paintings depicted oranges; an example is in the 3rd-century CE mausoleum built by Constantine for his daughter Constantia.²² Oranges seem to have been absent from Christian Europe during the succeeding centuries, but continued to be cultivated by the Moslems, who eventually reintroduced them into European culture. Orange and lemon trees filled the courtyards of the Alhambra, a series of palaces and gardens built in 14th-century Spanish Granada, a time and place with a rich and vibrant Jewish culture. During the 16th century, the Portuguese introduced into Europe oranges from China that became very popular and gave the sweet orange its botanical name, *citrus sinensis*. When Columbus sailed to the Americas, he took oranges, lemons, and citron seeds with him, and introduced these into Haiti; Ponce de Leon brought them to North America, taking citrus seeds to Florida in 1513.²³ And in the 20th century, oranges, formerly a food of the elite, became affordable and “at last a fruit of the community”.²⁴

But it was another member of the citrus family, the citron, that was first cultivated and used extensively, especially in the Mediterranean. This is particularly relevant to this discussion, as it was probably the use of the citron in Jewish ritual that led to its widespread distribution at the time.²⁵ The holiday of Sukkot requires the fruit of the ‘goodly tree’ as one of the four species of plant used in the ritual observance (Lev 23:40); at least by the 2nd century BCE, this ambiguous Hebrew term was assumed to indicate the citron (*etrog*). As the Jews dispersed throughout the world, they planted citrons wherever they went, to ensure their ritual needs. And they planted many citrons, in order to make sure that they would have enough of the proper kind. “[F]or ritual purposes the citrons had to be from an ungrafted tree, of a certain size and shape, fresh and

believed it came from” (Visser, *Much Depends on Dinner*, 310). Today, however, it is generally believed that the fruit were not oranges, but quinces.

²² A depiction of the mosaic in Constantine’s mausoleum is shown on Plate XXX1, in Tolkowsky’s *Hesperides: a History of the Culture and Use of Citrus Fruits*, 108.

²³ “The Florida Citrus Commission likes to promote him as a man who was trying to find the Fountain of Youth but actually brought it with him” (McPhee, *Oranges*, 89).

²⁴ McPhee, *Oranges*, 7.

²⁵ Isaac, “Influence of Religion on the Spread of Citrus,” 179.

unblemished.”²⁶ The fruits vary significantly, even on the same tree; they can differ in size, shape, and even species. So the Jews planted many citron seeds.

Planting seeds is not the usual way that citrus is propagated today; the process of grafting is much more common. Grafting joins different plants together into one; it is preferred because citrus seeds do not necessarily produce the same fruit as the parent. An orange seed can grow into a citron, lemon, or any other citrus species. “Citrus does not come true from seed.”²⁷ And more than one scion (upper part of the plant) may be grafted onto a single rootstock (root and lower parts): “A single citrus tree can be turned into a carnival, with lemons, limes, grapefruit, tangerines, kumquats, and oranges all ripening on its branches at the same time.”²⁸ Most of the oranges grown in Florida today have rootstocks of a hardy kind of lemon, but in earlier times, it was the citron that provided the most common root for the orange. Thus, the orange carries within it not only its own ‘orangeness’, not only a whiff of the citron and a link to Sukkot, but, also, the whole richness of its connections to the rest of the citrus family. The orange on the seder plate is a perfect symbol for diversity within singularity and singularity within diversity.

Oranges have often been associated with fertility, although this meaning was more often attached to the tree and its flowers rather than to the fruit itself. However, these are not separate, and, in fact, it is because of its ability to produce flowers and fruit at the same time that the orange tree became such a potent symbol of fertility in 19th-century England. Bridal costumes came to include orange flowers, especially as wreaths of blossoms worn in the woman’s hair. The custom was dictated by the very influential etiquette journals, and even Queen Victoria wore a wreath of orange blossoms at her wedding in 1840. This practice spread to the United States,

²⁶ Visser, *Much Depends on Dinner*, 312. Yehuda Amital says: “The Gemara never addresses the suitability of such an etrog for the mitzva of the four species on Sukkot. Nor do we find any Rishonim who address the issue. The discussions concerning this issue begin to appear only in the last several centuries. The Acharonim dealt with this question at length and gave different reasons to disqualify an etrog ha-murkav [citron from a grafted tree] from use on Sukkot” (“Etrog Ha-murkav’ – The Grafted Etrog”).

²⁷ McPhee, ix.

²⁸ McPhee, 22.

where wax replicas were used if fresh flowers were not available.²⁹ In ancient China, brides also wore orange blossoms, but there they represented purity, chastity and innocence. The two meanings seem to have merged in our own times; according to the online store Supply Curve, which sells essences of oranges and orange-based products, “[o]range has become a symbol of both innocence and fertility”.³⁰

Medieval Europeans linked oranges to love, both emotional and physical. Giovanni Boccaccio’s 14th-century *Decameron*, which has ‘*amore*’ as one of its main motifs, uses the imagery of oranges, orange blossoms, orange-flower water, and orange perfume. A century later, young women were dropping oranges from balconies in Germany for their suitors to pick up. At the same time in France, Francis I was pelted with oranges by Marseillaise women, as a sign of their gratitude for his having saved their city. The fruit was also associated with Venus, the goddess of love. A legend that it was Venus herself who had brought oranges to Italy inspired Botticelli to line the background coast with orange trees in his famous painting of *The Birth of Venus*.

Oranges also have a place in medieval Christian iconography. The Virgin Mary has as one of the “ever-recurring symbols of her virtues ... a citron or an orange-tree”.³¹ Painters of the Renaissance striving for greater realism often mistakenly included oranges and orange trees in their paintings of Jesus.³² For example, many depictions of the Last Supper have oranges on the table, such as the 15th-century Italian (anonymous) painting “Cena”, which shows an orange cut into halves for a seasoning for roast lamb, and a painting by the 15th-century Spanish painter Juan de Juanes in which the only food on the table is one thick slice of orange.³³ As it is now

²⁹ Powell, “To Gather Orange Blossoms.”

³⁰ *Apothecary at Supply Curve*.

³¹ Tolkowsky, 178.

³² Their error was based on reports from Crusaders. However, the Crusaders were present in Palestine many centuries later. During the first century CE, there were no orange trees in the area, only citrons. Examples of depictions showing Jesus with oranges include the 15th-century “Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane” painted on an altar piece by Mantegna (Plate L, Tolkowsky, *Hesperides*, 174).

³³ Tolkowsky, 152–153, plate XLII.

believed that the Last Supper was, in fact, a Passover seder, this contributes an ironic precedent to the contemporary practice of placing an orange on the seder plate.

Within Judaism, the orange on the seder plate is not the first citrus fruit to challenge the patriarchal apple eaten by Eve. In the medieval period, Ashkenazi women bit off the end of the citron at the end of Sukkot, in order to ensure a safe and easy childbirth. The 16th-century *tsenerene*, the ‘women’s Bible’, includes a prayer to accompany this practice; the introduction to the prayer suggests that the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden was actually a citron tree, and that women can reverse Eve’s punishment by this practice. In the prayer itself, the women compare and distance themselves from Eve. “By implication, then, since the woman would not have committed Eve’s sin, she should not suffer Eve’s punishment.”³⁴

In recent history, there is also a strong connection between oranges and Judaism, although not in the North American context. Oranges were one of the early agricultural products of the Jewish farmers in Palestine and the State of Israel. They were a great success and the Jaffa orange came to represent the way in which the Jewish pioneers had, putatively, ‘created a garden from the desert’. In 1997, 348,200 tons of oranges were produced, 156,000 of which were exported.³⁵ However, this connection is multi-faceted and multi-valenced. “[T]he farmers forgot they lived in a desert land, where every drop was precious. They chose crops that were water-wasteful, like cotton and oranges, making more and more money by basically exporting the country’s precious water supply.”³⁶ The recent water shortage in Israel has made this a controversial issue in the local media: “Every three oranges that we send abroad—and we export a lot of oranges—is a whole bathtub of water.”³⁷ Thus, while the orange on the seder plate brings in a strong connection between Jews and fruitfulness, it is also a symbol tinged with drought and destruction.

Perhaps it is no accident that the custom of placing the orange on the seder plate is associated

³⁴ Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs*, 73. This comment by Chava Weissler should not be understood as an endorsement of the patriarchal view of Eve.

³⁵ Israeli Citrus Marketing Board & Central Bureau of Statistics, homepage.

³⁶ Ragen, *Turning the Bloom into a Desert*.

³⁷ Manor, *In a Desert Land*.

with California, another arid landscape where oranges constitute a significant percentage of the economy.³⁸ Because of this, Los Angeles is sometimes referred to as ‘the Big Orange’ in opposition contrast to ‘the Big Apple’, New York.³⁹ The popular expression ‘mixing apples and oranges’, which emphasizes the differences between the two fruits, and the way in which they cannot be commingled, has relevance here: the oranges, symbol of West Coast California, are not to be confused with the apples of East Coast New York. Similarly, the orange, new symbol of contemporary Jewish feminists, is distinct from the patriarchal apple, popularly assumed to be the fruit eaten by Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:6), and used to justify the subservient position of women.⁴⁰ However, the new symbol also, simultaneously, breaks down the barrier between the categories; the patriarchal position of the apple is challenged by the feminist orange. Apples (present in the *haroset*) and oranges are mixed, on the table and in the religious tradition; the net result is an increased diversity of choices for Jewish women practitioners.

Heschel states that she consciously used the orange because it represented “the fruitfulness for all Jews when lesbians and gay men are contributing and active members of Jewish life.” She also liked that “each orange segment had a few seeds that had to be spit out - a gesture of spitting out, repudiating the homophobia of Judaism.”⁴¹ Her symbolic use of the orange is added to all these other symbolic values that have been given to the orange throughout history.

Objects are only things until the culture in which they are situated gives them meanings. And neither the object, the symbol, nor the meaning exists in a vacuum or in isolation. “A symbol only has meaning from its relation to other symbols in a pattern. ...[N]o one item in the pattern can carry meaning by itself isolated from the rest.”⁴² In her study of taboos, Mary Douglas analyzed

³⁸ Although oranges are also produced in Florida, the majority of the Florida oranges are used for juice; California is the largest American producer of the whole fruit.

³⁹ e.g. see Doug Camilli, “Let’s be clear”.

⁴⁰ It is unlikely that the fruit was actually an apple. The biblical text mentions only “the fruit of the tree of knowledge”; scholars today think the fruit was most likely a fig. “It was the Renaissance painters who first invented or popularized the notion that the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden was an apple tree” (Cooper, *Eat and Be Satisfied*, 12–13).

⁴¹ Heschel, email, 2001.

⁴² Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 11.

some of the ways in which groups with strong internal affiliations create categories with well-defined boundaries. She examined the injunctions in the Hebrew Bible that have become the basis for the Jewish laws of *kashrut*, concluding that the dietary prohibitions were based on the need to establish and maintain clear and separate categories. According to Douglas, this structure is not arbitrary, but derives from the biblical perception that ‘holy’ is synonymous with wholeness and completeness; this concept was applied to the human as well as the divine arena, and to the physical as well as the social context. Not only humans, but other species and categories are also required to fit into this structure if they are to be considered *kosher*, or ‘pure’. “Hybrids and other confusions are abominated” and “holiness requires that different classes of things shall not be confused.”⁴³ The dietary laws “merely develop the metaphor of holiness on the same lines”, so that only complete animals are suitable as food. This conception results in a system where the boundaries between categories are highly significant, and strictly monitored and enforced; this is the Jewish tradition in which the seder ritual exists. Anomalies are “matter out of place”: they must be dealt with in such a way as to minimize their threat to the social and cosmological structures.⁴⁴

Douglas lists five ways in which various cultures deal with ambiguous or anomalous events, attempting to impose order on what is perceived as non-order, as pollution, as taboo, one of which is to use them in rituals so as to minimize or contain the danger.⁴⁵ The word ‘seder’ means, literally, ‘order’. It is used as the name for the Passover ritual because there is an order to the event; there are set steps, actions, foods, and prayers. These have continued, albeit with changes, for some 2000 years. And there is a comfort, a security, from this ordered continuous tradition. The word ‘seder’ also implicitly brings with it the meaning explored by Douglas, that of non-

⁴³ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 54.

⁴⁴ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 55, 41. Douglas’ thesis is not accepted universally. Some scholars dispute her conclusions; others offer their own variations.

⁴⁵ The five provisions for dealing with ambiguous or anomalous events are: 1. choosing one of the possible interpretations and ignoring the other(s); 2. physically controlling anomalies; 3. avoiding anomalies; 4. labelling them dangerous; and 5. using them in ritual (Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 40–41).

chaos and non-pollution. In the ritual space where the seder is enacted, order has been established and maintained: all is right in the world. Everything is where it should be and as it should be; there are no anomalies, and no ambiguities. But what happens when this ordered universe is invaded by a dangerous new element, an object that is definitely out of place?

The orange is not the first invader; it is merely the latest in a long line of newcomers. And some of the elements that the orange brings with it fit very well with the traditional context. First is the association with fertility, appropriate to the spring motif: the orange complements the green vegetable (*karpas*) that is already on the table. This was the explicit meaning conferred by Heschel, although her 'fruitfulness' was more metaphorical. The link with the citron of Sukkot also confers a measure of legitimacy. The orange is not a complete stranger, but the relative of a friend who is already part of the ritual tradition. And even its association with women is not unprecedented; in this it sits easily between the female *haroset* and egg.⁴⁶

But there is a significant difference with the orange; it is intended to be jarring and shocking. Some of the other symbols began in a similar manner, as evidenced by the four questions posed in the liturgy. The questions ask: 'why is this night different?' and then specify the differences: eating unleavened bread, eating bitter herbs, dipping the vegetables twice, and reclining. These were obviously not ordinary activities, and thus required explanations. However, they were instituted in the early days of the ritual's life. When subsequent innovators made changes, they did so because of changing customs and the unavailability of foods, and they used existing symbols to validate and incorporate the new foods. But this is not the case for the orange. The

⁴⁶ In her anthropological and kabbalistic-influenced analysis of the seder, Ruth Fredman Cernea finds *haroset* to be symbolic of the traditional view of the female within Judaism. According to this view, both *haroset* and women occupy an ambiguous and paradoxical position somewhere between 'nature' and 'culture': the *haroset* suggests life (because of the fruits and nuts), but at the same time includes the element of decay (wine being fermented liquid). Further female association is intimated by the moistness of the *haroset*, which is linked with the female through her associations with blood and the waters of ritual immersion. This association is emphasized by the spatial arrangement of the foods on the seder plate emphasizes these connections. The usual position of the *haroset* is in the lower right section, a position Cernea associates with the human and natural aspects, as opposed to the divine and cultural dimensions (Cernea, *The Passover Seder*). The egg is also given a female symbolic value in some traditions: there is a Sephardic custom for unmarried daughters to remove the roasted egg from the seder plate and eat it behind the door because the egg represents marriage and children (Cooper, *Eat and Be Satisfied*).

intention of those who bring it to the table is not for it to blend in with the other items, but for it to be conspicuously out of place. As such, it brings with it intimations of danger and taboos. It calls into question, not only the actual seder ritual, but the entire cosmological construct of categories and purity in the Jewish tradition. Perhaps not as much as the bread that it replaced, but enough so that it is still an uncomfortable symbol, forcing us to rethink our categories, our view of the world, and our places within it.

And with all this, where have the lesbians gone? Have they been banished, rendered invisible yet again, and relegated to a realm from which they cannot intrude their disquieting presence? Only one of my respondents even mentioned lesbians in connection with the orange. Lesbians are an ambiguous category. In a culture where heterosexual marriage is the prescribed norm, women who refuse to participate in this social custom are, by definition, ‘matter out of place’. They do not fit into the normative categories; they are betwixt and between and, therefore, dangerous and anomalous. Even more than the jarring orange and the image of women agitating for transformational changes, lesbianism challenges the traditional Jewish structures by its very nature.

Women’s seders are not the only time that oranges have been associated with lesbians: *Oranges are not the only fruit* is the title of a lesbian novel written in the 1980s. However, the orange in the book does not represent transformation or hope; it is, instead, the symbol of the coercion the young hero faces from both her mother and her mother’s church, as they attempt to cure her of her lesbianism. Her authoritarian mother gives her oranges as if “oranges are the only fruit”.⁴⁷ It is with relief that the hero eventually discovers that, in fact, this is not the case. Oranges are not the only fruit; she has options and can live the life she chooses. Here, rather than representing struggle and wrestling, the orange symbolizes restraint and conformity. This connotation ties in with Heschel’s second signification, that of the orange also containing the

⁴⁷ Winterson, *Oranges are not the only fruit*, 29.

seeds of homophobia that have to be spit out. Like many symbols, the orange represents many aspects, some positive and some negative. Thus, even if only by implication, lesbians are still present in the thick web of signification that enters with the orange. They are on the seder plate, albeit in a closeted form.⁴⁸

The orange is an ambiguous symbol. Although some of its attributes fit well within the context of the seder plate, others do the opposite. And it is not a subtle object, either in its physical incarnation or in its symbolic constructs. The only way to guarantee a uniform fruit, other than by planting many seeds, is by grafting, a process that breaks the boundaries between pure categories and forces hybridity. The orange sits on the seder plate, glaringly obvious, calling into question some of the most basic and cherished beliefs of those whose ritual it has invaded. Yet it also, at the same time, inspires hope for the increased fruitfulness of the tradition. It is, in fact, an appropriate symbol for the wrestlings of Jewish women.

Women are undeniably part of the Jewish tradition, but also, in many respects, invisible within that tradition. They participate in most of the rituals, but are still excluded in some venues from central ritual acts. Contemporary Jewish feminists actively denounce this exclusion and invisibility even as they continue to enact the same ancient rituals that their ancestors performed. Some things have changed in response to feminist demands; many more still need to be changed. In this time of transition, many Jewish women, feminist and not, find themselves between stable and comfortable categories. This in-between state is well symbolized by the anomalous orange; “The individual in transition from one social status to another is like matter out of place, impure and to be ritually re-integrated.”⁴⁹ The seder ritual is one of the places in which this re-integration can occur. But not just re-integration into the existing system. As Victor Turner suggests, those in

⁴⁸ Another connection between oranges and lesbians is the campaign waged by Anita Bryant, beauty queen and representative for Florida Orange Juice. In 1977, Bryant organized a ‘Save Our Children’ campaign in Dade county, which overturned a statute prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation. Activists, in turn, organized an orange juice boycott that lost Bryant her job. In 1998, an ordinance was finally passed in the county, where it is now illegal to discriminate against lesbians and gay men. Part of the campaign included the slogan: “Squeeze a fruit for Anita”.

⁴⁹ Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 174.

transition have options other than re-integration; they may also overturn the existing structures. In his formulation, the liminal, or transitional, state is very powerful, and has the potential for reinspiring society, for breathing new life and fresh ideas into existing social structures.⁵⁰ Jewish feminists, because they are 'betwixt and between' the social structures, have access to this pool of regenerative potential, which is a powerful tool for change.

But liminality does not guarantee transformation; it is also possible to retreat, or to move in a different direction. The lesbians, linked to the original orange, are no longer the major referents, and the question now is the way in which this symbol will evolve as it continues to have a life separate from those whose intentions placed it on the table. There are many possible scenarios.

The orange may, over time and with familiarity, lose its conspicuousness and, after awhile, invite no more comments or questions, thus losing its symbolic efficacy. Rivka worries about this:

After a couple of generations you have no idea why you're doing it, but you keep doing it. because your parents did it, or whatever. But that's a pity if that's what would happen, if somehow it's just a custom that we do at my house, we put the orange on.⁵¹

She worries that it will become an obscure practice like the candle lighting of the Spanish crypto-Jews who performed their rituals in hiding. Their descendents were still lighting Sabbath candles in windowless rooms, but many of them had no idea why or what the candles represented. In order to counteract this tendency of no longer seeing what has become familiar, Rivka is considering incorporating the blessing and eating of the orange into her family seder, as well as using a blood orange. We have also decided to continue these practices in our women's seder: to pass around sections of the orange, to bless, and then to eat them. We have written a new blessing to accompany the symbol, one that expresses what it means for us: thankfulness for difference and diversity, for the way individual orange sections, and individuals, make up, unite, and enrich the whole.

⁵⁰ See chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion of Turner and the creative potential of the liminal state.

⁵¹ Personal interview with Rivka, 2001.

Even if the symbol remains conspicuous, there may or may not be an accompanying transformation. An obvious orange may serve as a reminder and affirmation of the secondary nature of women's place, rather than as an incentive for change. Or its stubborn obtrusiveness may provide an ongoing impetus for change, a yearly prod. At some future point, if the desired transformation has been achieved, the orange may itself be transformed from a symbol of challenge into one of confirmation that neither oranges, nor Jewish women, are any longer matter out of place. At that time, the orange may join the other symbolic foods as an evocation of past victories. This is the hope of many of the women who enact the practice. If the symbolic orange endures and achieves popular recognition, it will provide an opportunity to chronicle the history of a symbol of Jewish ritual during the course of its evolution. It will also provide a gauge of the visibility of Jewish women within the Jewish community in general, and in this Jewish ritual in particular. As we proceed through this evolution, we can continue to use the Heschel orange as a yearly reminder and a measure of how far we still have to go.⁵²

B. Miriam's Cup

Another new ritual object associated with women's seders is Miriam's Cup. 'Miriam's Cup', or '*kos miriam*',⁵³ refers to both the object and the ritual that uses it. Although now also associated with Passover, Miriam's Cup first made its appearance in the context of Rosh Hodesh. In 1989, Kol Isha, a Rosh Hodesh group in Boston, filled a cup with clear spring water, recited a blessing over the filled cup, and then drank the water. After being filled, the cup was raised while the leader recited, in both Hebrew and English: "This is the Cup of Miriam, the Cup of Living Waters. Strength, Strength, and may we be Strengthened".⁵⁴ The whole group then recited two blessings: "Let us bless the Source of Life that gives us living waters" and "Blessed are You, G-d,

⁵² Naming is an important element in maintaining visibility. Many women throughout Jewish history have been rendered nameless; their actions and words have become anonymous. We remember Hillel each year when we eat the sandwich he invented; Susannah Heschel deserves no less.

⁵³ *Kos miriam* is a Hebrew term that means, literally, 'Miriam's Cup'.

⁵⁴ The last sentence consists of the exact words traditionally recited at the conclusion of each of the five books during the communal Torah reading ritual.

Life-Source of the universe, by Whose word everything is created". The participants passed around the cup, each one drinking some of the blessed water.⁵⁵

Kol Isha created three separate versions of their ritual. In addition to the one described above, they created a variation for Passover and another for menstruation.⁵⁶ The Passover form differed in several ways. The first intonation became: "This is the Cup of Miriam, the Cup of Living Waters, which we drink to remember the Exodus from Egypt". The participants responded with "These are the living waters, G-d's gift to Miriam, which gave new life to Israel as we struggled with ourselves in the wilderness". And a third blessing was added: "Blessed are you G-d, Who brings us from the narrows into the wilderness, sustains us with endless possibilities, and enables us to reach a new place". The additions make clear reference to the exodus from Egypt and the sojourn in the wilderness which form the basis of the Passover narrative. They also add an explicit celebration of transformation and change, along with a valorization of the difficulties and ambiguities that make transformation possible.

Perhaps because of its celebratory tone, and perhaps also because of its potential for stimulating reinspiration, the ritual has increased in popularity.⁵⁷ An examination of the history of Miriam's Cup illustrates one process by which a new ritual may survive and become more widely practiced. In addition, it shows how the ritual is both changed by and, in turn, itself affects existing rituals. Because it is not created in a vacuum, a new ritual is integrated and intertwined with existing motifs and concerns in the lives of the performers. In this particular instance, these included Miriam, women's agency, the place of women within Jewish tradition, and a desire to create new rituals. The ritual of Miriam's Cup was a conscious response to these concerns.

⁵⁵ The proclamation and blessings were recited in both Hebrew and English. The Hebrew is: "*Zot Kos Miryam. Kos Mayim Khayyim. Khazak, Khazak V'Nikhazeik*" and "*N'varekh et Eyn ha-Khayyim she natnah lanu mayim Khayyim. Barukh atta adonai, Eloheinu Khei ha-Olamim, she-ha-kol nih'ye bi-d'varo*". The account of this ritual is found in Penina Adelman's "A Drink from Miriam's Cup," 163.

⁵⁶ The group copyrighted these rituals. Although this is unusual, they specified that the rituals might be used by anyone who notified them. According to Tamara Cohen, they also created versions for Friday night and for Havdalah (Cohen, "Filling Miriam's Cup"). However, these were not included in the versions they copyrighted.

⁵⁷ Miriam's Cup is increasingly making its appearance in Jewish mainstream culture, in family haggadahs, children's books, and art exhibits (Ochs, *Miriam's object lesson*, chapter 3).

Even though brief, the history of this ritual is one that twists and turns. Miriam's Cup was first performed at a Rosh Hodesh celebration, but the woman who presented it to Kol Isha had enacted an earlier version at her family Sabbath the previous week. And the inspiration for the Sabbath ritual had been her experience, at the preceding month's Rosh Hodesh celebration, of imagining a journey to Miriam's Well.⁵⁸ Miriam was already a key figure, and Jewish women were already experimenting with creating rituals; a new ritual linked to Miriam would seem an obvious development. While the inevitability of a phenomenon is often only apparent in hindsight, in this case it was felt at the time by the creators of the ritual: it "seemed to have come into being in such a natural and spontaneous way that ... 'it was as if *Kos Miryam* already existed and was just waiting to be discovered'."⁵⁹ The various strands—Rosh Hodesh, Sabbath, Rosh Hodesh, Miriam's Well—intertwined, producing a new weaving from both old and new elements. Using Penina Adelman's metaphor of weaving, we can see different colours being added to the weft and resulting in new and exciting patterns.⁶⁰ What emerged is a ritual that is resonant, organic, and dynamic.

By 1989, the biblical character Miriam had already been reclaimed by many Jewish feminists. Several years earlier, Penina Adelman had published *Miriam's Well*, a book on rituals for Jewish women. Adelman had also been involved with the Kol Isha group as a participant-observer from 1981 to 1987. She describes how the group used her book as a basis for discussion and exploration, and how one of the results of this process, through the imagined journey to Miriam's Well of one Kol Isha member, was the new ritual of Miriam's Cup.⁶¹ The relationship between Adelman's text and Jewish women's celebrations of Miriam was mutual and reciprocal: Adelman attributes the genesis of her book to an experience at a different Rosh Hodesh group in Philadelphia in 1979, where she first heard the legend of Miriam's Well. The elements of this

⁵⁸ Cohen, "Filling Miriam's Cup."

⁵⁹ Matia Angelou as cited in Adelman, "A Drink from Miriam's Cup," 156.

⁶⁰ This metaphor is described in chapter 2 section B.

⁶¹ Adelman, "A Drink from Miriam's Cup," 156.

legend are not contemporary creations; they are an intrinsic part of traditional Jewish lore.

However, the feminist construction is new; it assembles the different stories regarding Miriam into a more comprehensive narrative of a strong, resourceful, and successful woman who can and does serve as a role model for women today.

Miriam is an appropriate choice for Jewish feminists seeking a symbol and model that is steeped in the tradition but that also emancipates women's position within that tradition. In the biblical text, Miriam is referred to as a prophet (Exod 15:20), a title she shares with only three other women: Deborah (Judg 4:4), Huldah (2Kings 22:14), and Noadiah (Neh 6:14).⁶² The biblical narrative recounts how Miriam watched over her baby brother, Moses, after their mother, Yocheved, placed him in a basket in the river; it was Miriam who then went to Pharaoh's daughter and volunteered the services of Yocheved as wet nurse for the baby (Exod 2).⁶³ After the Israelites crossed the Sea of Reeds, Miriam sang, played the timbrel, and danced with all the women (Exod 15:20–21). Miriam also challenged the male prerogative and exclusive claim to knowing God's will by declaring, along with her brother Aaron, "has God spoken only through [Moses]? Has He not spoken through us as well?" (Num 12:1). Although God struck her with leprosy in response to her challenge, she was so popular with the Israelite people that they refused to move until she was cured.⁶⁴

Jewish legend adds to the biblical narrative. According to stories from tannaitic times, without Miriam there would have been no Moses. Her parents had separated after and because of Pharaoh's decree that all male Hebrew babies should be killed. But Miriam, in her role as prophet, knew from a dream that her parents would bear a child who would save the people of Israel and be their leader forever. She told her father that his refusal to have more children would result in the destruction of all Jewish children, male and female, and that this would be worse

⁶² The Talmud adds four more women prophets: Sarah, Hannah, Abigail, and Esther (Megillah 14a).

⁶³ Although Yocheved is not referred to by name in this passage, her name is provided in a subsequent passage (Exod 6:20). Miriam is not named either until Exod 15:20; in the earlier passages she is referred to only as the sister of Moses.

than Pharaoh's intention to kill only the boys. Even though she was apparently only five years old at the time, her parents listened to her. They remarried and Moses was born.⁶⁵

There are also stories about Miriam's Well. Although not referred to by this name in tannaitic texts, the rabbis do associate the well that accompanied the Israelites during their wanderings in the desert with Miriam; they tell how the well was given to the Israelites because she was so worthy. It was after Miriam died and the well dried up that the Israelite people realized that it was because of her presence among them that they had had access to it through all those years. The rabbis believed that the dried up well could still be found in their days, either "at a certain spot of the Sea of Tiberias" or under a particular "sieve-like rock" near Mount Carmel.⁶⁶

Even though the rabbinic legends add to the fullness and complexity of women's roles in the biblical narratives, they also reduce women's agency and particularity. Yocheved, Miriam, Shifrah, and Puah are all named as distinct and separate characters in the biblical text.⁶⁷ However, in the rabbinic commentary, Shifrah and Puah are collapsed into Yocheved and Miriam; the commentaries assume that there were only two women, not four. They explain the conflation of the characters Miriam and Puah by linking the name 'Puah' to Miriam's actions: "Hence was she called Puah, because she dared to reprove her father."⁶⁸ Although this increases the visibility and significance accorded to Miriam, the comment leaves the rabbis' attitude to her somewhat ambiguous, and, in any case, the number of significant women is reduced. At its most positive, the rabbinic gloss makes Miriam, more than ever, an exceptional woman who defies the norm and attains a position of leadership that is not available to other women. The feminist reclaiming rejects this construction, and portrays Miriam as a model to which all women can aspire.

⁶⁴ Apparently only Miriam suffered a consequence for her challenge; the biblical text does not record anything happening to Aaron.

⁶⁵ Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* vol. 2, 264 and 262; *Exodus Rabbah* 1:13.

⁶⁶ Ginzberg vol. 3, 53-54. The legends also tell that, luckily for the Israelites, the well was subsequently reinstated due to the merits of Miriam's brothers, Moses and Aaron.

⁶⁷ Shifrah and Puah are the midwives of Exodus 1.

⁶⁸ This is based on the similarity between the Hebrew letters in the name 'Puah' and the word '*hoft'ah*', literally 'she lifted up', because she lifted up her face against her father (*Exodus Rabbah* 1:13). The conflation attributes to Miriam Puah's actions and their consequences.

But it is not Miriam alone that is invoked in the new ritual—it is Miriam with her well. The biblical narrative takes place within a mostly desert environment where water can never be taken for granted; the presence of a well is often a matter of life and death. Wells are such important characters in the early narratives that they are often named, and wars are fought over access to wells.⁶⁹ Although wells also appear at significant moments in the lives of biblical men, they are often associated with women. Young unmarried women are found drawing water at wells, where they encounter their future husbands. In these recurrent ‘type scenes’, the well is the location for the betrothal.⁷⁰ Rebekah, Rachel, and Zipporah all meet their husbands or husband’s emissaries at wells.

In a variation on the betrothal-at-the-well scenario, Ruth meets Boaz in a field. Yet the well is not entirely missing: Boaz tells her “When you are thirsty, go to the jars and drink from what the lads draw” (Ruth 2:8–9). The well is still present in a modified and reduced form; it has become a jar of water. And the jar still contains within it links and allusions to the original well. According to the analysis formulated by Robert Alter, the absence or modification of a key element in a type scene is indicative of a major difference within the story itself, and these changes would have been evident to the audience of the time. In Ruth’s story, the substitution of a field and jar for the well would have raised questions regarding the difference between her betrothal to Boaz and the betrothal of the other women.⁷¹ In our own times, the well and/or jar has shrunk to a cup. But does it still signal a betrothal scene? And, if so, who are the betrothed? Miriam stands apart from

⁶⁹ Examples of named wells are: Beerlahairoi (Gen 16:14); Beersheba (Gen 21:30–31); Lahairoi (Gen 24:62); Esek (Gen 26:20); Sitnah (Gen 26:21); Rehoboth (Gen 26:22). Examples of wars being fought over wells are: “And Abraham reproved Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech’s servants had violently taken away” (Gen 21:25); “And Isaac’s servants dug in the valley, and found there a well of springing water. And the herdsmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac’s herdsmen, saying, The water is ours” (Gen 26:19–20).

⁷⁰ The term ‘type scenes’, originally coined to describe recurrent scenes in Homeric epics, was used by Robert Alter to identify betrothal scenes as well as other recurring biblical scenarios (Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*).

⁷¹ The differences on which they focused may have included: that Ruth has no father or even mother to negotiate the betrothal for her; she does this on her own and for herself; that Ruth is a widow, not a young woman who has never been married; that she is a foreigner, and that this is an exogamous marriage. One of their constructions may also have been that the story of Ruth represented an “idyllic reinterpretation of the history of the founding mothers of Israel” (Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible*, 99) and, especially, of the story of Leah and Rachel.

these other women in an important aspect: she is not married.⁷² Her significance in the biblical narrative lies in both her own actions and her relationship with her brothers; she has neither husband nor son, and does not appear to miss these. The presence of an unmarried woman leader, essential to the survival of the wandering Israelites, provides a different model for Jewish women than the one portrayed by the matriarchs. The presence of her well reminds us that, although a woman's role as childbearer is important, especially in the biblical context, this is by no means the only possibility for women. From well—to jar—to cup. And, with Miriam's Cup, Miriam arrives at the seder table accompanied by the host of other biblical women also associated with wells.⁷³

One further distinction about Miriam's Well is that it travels. In the other narratives, it is the people who move. They go to the well, they draw their water, and they leave. But in this case, the well accompanies the person; it goes where she goes. The well is Miriam's long-term and constant companion. The relationship between them, from the well's point of view, could be described by the pledge that Ruth makes to her mother-in-law:

Wherever you go, I will go. And wherever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people will be my people, and your God, my God. And where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. (Ruth 1:16–17)

The well does accompany Miriam throughout her life and does dry up when she dies; it seems that the connection between them is so strong and deep that one cannot survive without the other.

Ruth and Naomi end in a harmonious sharing of their lives and even of their child, as opposed to the competitive rivalry between Leah and Rachel. The well-become-jar may have helped signal this reinterpretation.

⁷² Despite the total lack of evidence in the biblical text, some Jewish commentators have decided that Miriam was, in fact, married. Some, such as Josephus, name Hur (who is introduced in Exod 17:10) as her husband (Josephus book 3, chapter 2:4); others decided it was Caleb (Josh 14:6) (Singer & Lauterbach, "Miriam"). We can speculate that the reason for this was a fear of the kind of role model that would be provided by an unmarried woman, and especially by an unmarried woman prophet and leader.

⁷³ Besides evoking the biblical matriarchs, the well-turned-cup also summons the presence of another biblical woman, one that is not an ancestor of the Jewish people and is more problematic in many respects. In the episodes related in the biblical narrative, Hagar, servant of Sarah and mother of Ishmael, encounters not only one, but two, wells. And both these wells are witness to an encounter between Hagar and God or God's emissary (Gen 16:7–14 & 21:17–19). In addition, the second well explicitly saves the lives of both Hagar and Ishmael. In our contemporary times, when the descendents of Sarah and Isaac and the descendents of Hagar and Ishmael are fighting and killing each other, the fact that the God of the Bible saves the lives of both peoples can perhaps remind us of the possibility of a more peaceful relationship.

The attachment between Ruth and Naomi has been reclaimed recently by Jewish feminists. Ruth's pledge to Naomi is being recited as the wedding vow in many contemporary Jewish lesbian commitment ceremonies.⁷⁴ Their relationship is also being used to articulate the non-sexual sisterly bonds that tangibly express the feminist slogan 'Sisterhood is Powerful';⁷⁵ in a poem based on Ruth's pledge, Marge Piercy compares the connection between Ruth and Naomi to that between a woman and her "double, heart's twin, ...sister of the mind".⁷⁶ The bond between Miriam and her well can also be envisioned as one between a heart and its "heart's twin". This relationship can be appreciated as historical memory; it can also be celebrated as living empowerment and inspiration for women's lives today. The two, past and present, are intertwined in the symbolic cup, which sits on the seder table as a celebration of women's bonding. We do, in fact, have a variation of the betrothal type scene at our seder table: the commitment between women that forms the basis for feminist ideology and practice.

Even as ritual objects accrue multiple levels of symbolic valence, they do not shed their physicality. They are often meant to be used, and their associated function is not separate from, but intrinsic to, their identity and definition. Both the cup and the well are containers; they are meant to hold water. An empty well would not have been adequate for its purpose, would not have empowered or even sustained Miriam and her people in their wanderings. The cup on the seder table is also not empty: it is filled with water. And not just any water; the water in Miriam's Well was, and still is, often characterized as *mayim hayim*: living water, waters of life. Unlike regular water, which is used for cleansing, 'living water' in the Jewish tradition is used to effect ritual purification.⁷⁷ The mikvah, or ritual bath, has been used at least since the rabbinic period to hold the living waters for this purpose.⁷⁸ Although originally both women and men were required

⁷⁴ Alpert, "Finding Our Past."

⁷⁵ The slogan was popularized by the book with the same name published in 1970 (Morgan, *Sisterhood is Powerful*).

⁷⁶ Piercy, "The Book of Ruth and Naomi."

⁷⁷ The difference is that living water must be running rather than stagnant (Adler, "Tumah and Taharah," 67).

⁷⁸ The mikvah, or ritual bath, must fulfill certain conditions in order to effect ritual purification: it must consist of only water; it must be built into the ground or be an integral part of a building attached to the ground; it cannot

by Jewish law to purify themselves in the mikvah, over time this ritual has become primarily associated with women.⁷⁹ The mikvah and the associated laws of *niddah* (menstruating woman), which specify that ritual purification is required for women after menstruation and childbirth, are controversial in the contemporary context. Ritual impurity is often described as ‘unclean’, and many women find the idea that they require ‘cleansing’ on a regular basis to be extremely degrading with its implication that menstruation, a normal bodily function for women, is ‘dirty’.

Many Jewish feminists denounce the practice as demeaning to women:

It is difficult to avoid the implication that we are dealing here with the potent residue of an ancient taboo based on a mixture of male fear, awe, and repugnance toward woman’s creative biological cycle... She is treated, after all, as though bearing a rather unpleasant contagious disease.⁸⁰

Even some previously pro-*niddah* Jewish feminists have changed their views; in the article she wrote in 1976, theologian Rachel Adler promoted the view that it was possible to salvage the original intention and holiness associated with the *mitzvah*:

Tumah/taharah remains one of the few major Jewish symbolisms in which women had a place. Having so few authentic traditional experiences on which to build, is it worthwhile to reject *niddah*, because later generations of men have projected their repugnance for women upon it?⁸¹

20 years later, Adler published her changed opinion. She explained that her argument had become untenable and that “[m]y theology upheld the rules and practices that sustained women’s impurity.”⁸²

consist of any vessel that can be disconnected and carried away; the water cannot be running or flowing unless it is a natural spring or a river whose water is derived mainly from springs; the water cannot be drawn, i.e. it cannot be brought through direct human intervention; the water cannot be channeled through anything that can become unclean, such as pipes or vessels made of metal, clay or wood; and it must contain at least 200 gallons (40 *sa’ah*) (Wasserfall, *Women and Water*, 13).

⁷⁹ The Bible requires both men and women to undergo ritual purification after various kinds of bodily emissions before they can enter the Temple. In post-Temple times, ritual purification is no longer relevant for either women or men as its physical referent no longer exists. However, the laws of *niddah* are commonly associated with the idea that women need to purify themselves after their monthly menstruations and after childbirth before they can resume sexual activity. Although some men also use the mikvah, especially on the Sabbath, this practice is not nearly as widespread as that of women. Rebirth by immersion in a mikvah is also a requirement for conversion to Judaism, and in this case it applies equally to both women and men.

⁸⁰ Koltun, Editorial Note, *The Jewish Woman*, 69.

⁸¹ Adler, “Tumah and Taharah,” 71. In Jewish law, *tumah* is the state of ritual impurity and *taharah* the state of ritual purity.

⁸² Adler, “In Your Blood, Live,” 40.

The practice of *niddah* remains problematic for Jewish feminists, and, because it is most often associated with these laws, so is the mikvah. Some women have recently chosen to begin a practice of mikvah attendance, but, for the most part, this is not a return to the traditional Jewish women's practice of *niddah*.⁸³ Rather, it is a process of reclaiming the mikvah on its own as a powerful site and symbol for women's spiritual practice. "[T]he contemporary mikvah movement can be regarded as one of the important avenues of the transformation of Judaism into a culture in that women take on defining roles."⁸⁴ As Adler explains, contemporary Jewish women find resonance in using the mikvah, because "[i]n waters whose meaning they had transformed and made their own, they blessed God for renewed life."⁸⁵

These new spiritual practices with the mikvah still include purification rituals, but often for traumatic events in women's lives that require some kind of rebirth, such as a healing after rape, miscarriage, or abortion.⁸⁶ Elyse Goldstein even suggests turning the mikvah into a Jewish women's centre, complete with Torah learning, books, and lectures. "To take back the water means to see mikvah as a wholly female experience: as Miriam's well gave water to the Israelites so too will the mikvah give strength back to Jewish women."⁸⁷ And with this, we are back to Miriam and her well.

The cup on the seder table symbolizes the strength that Goldstein envisions, but as a centre of focus rather than a physical location; this centre includes all the tables, at both traditional and

⁸³ This observation was made by Sylvia Barak Fishman in 1993 (Fishman, *A Breath of Life*, 136). Even this may be changing. In a recent article, third wave Jewish feminist Danya Ruttenberg explores her own journey towards following the laws of *niddah*. "I believe that, like women's (former) exclusion from many ritual roles, the laws of *niddah* are ripe for transformation ... Radical measures clearly need to be taken—to restore our right to define ourselves and to re-sanctify our bodies, on our own damn terms—if we're ever to get all of that mud out of the mikveh" (Ruttenberg, *Yentl's Revenge*, 80–81, 85).

⁸⁴ Fonrobert, "A Mikvah for Feminists."

⁸⁵ Adler, "In Your Blood, Live," 41.

⁸⁶ Some examples include mastectomy (Goodman, "Mastectomy: Twelve Months after Surgery: a Bathing ritual for the End of Mourning"); miscarriage (Solomon, "A Midwife's Kaddish"); and rape (Levitt & Wasserman, "Mikvah Ceremony for Laura"). Other examples can be found at *ritualwell*, a website devoted to contemporary Jewish feminist rituals: "Contemporary Jewish women are reclaiming the mikveh for other uses of purification and rebirth - after marital difficulties, after a rape, before a significant transition" ("Mikveh (ritual bath)", *ritualwell*).

⁸⁷ Goldstein, "Take Back the Waters," 16.

women's seders, on which a Miriam's Cup sits. The common symbol draws together all the women who have placed it there and who ritualize its presence. And the living waters that are drunk from the cup proclaim the purification of women as a positive and deliberately self-chosen ritual.

As mentioned above, the biblical exodus took place in a desert environment in which the presence or absence of water meant the difference between life and death. Miriam's Well provided this presence as it nourished the Israelites in their desert wanderings: it was, literally, the water of life. In our era, many of us live in environments where water is not as scarce as it was in the desert. However, from a global perspective, the scarcity of drinkable water is becoming critical. The term 'living waters' takes on a new meaning as water pollution becomes an increasingly present phenomenon; it is more and more difficult to find water that confers health and life rather than disease and death. Many feminists combine a concern for environmental health with their ideology; ecofeminism advocates clean, unpolluted water, available to everyone, as essential. "[A]n ecofeminist approach to water justice advocates ... a partnership culture in which water and energy flow freely."⁸⁸ Jewish ecofeminists credit their ideology to the Jewish ethical tradition that calls for social justice and the kabbalistic concept of *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world that must be accomplished in order for the broken world to become whole again.⁸⁹ This repair requires ecological activism as well as political struggles. "A purpose to heal the earth—a purpose that is not, in fact, brand new but is described in the Torah as one of the great purposes of the Jewish people."⁹⁰ The clean and living waters of Miriam's Well are still needed today, literally as well as symbolically.

Spiritual and physical thirst have merged today in a world where concern about the fundamental availability of pure water and questions of how to live simply and ethically in relation to each other and to the earth prevail in the larger community.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Gaard, "Women, Water, and Energy: An Ecofeminist Approach."

⁸⁹ Plaskow, "Feminist Judaism and Repair of the World," 75.

⁹⁰ Waskow, "And the Earth is Filled with the Breath of Life."

⁹¹ Adelman, "A Drink from Miriam's Cup," 159.

The acknowledgement and blessing of the living waters at the seder remind us that we must remain conscious and aware of the imminent danger of non-living, or dead, water. The cup sitting on the table is intentionally filled with waters that confer life, and it reminds the practitioners to take a moment to recognize and appreciate this fact.

The ritual that Kol Isha developed draws on all these narratives and contexts, bringing together the themes of water, women's power, purification, women's bonds, and environmental health. These motifs are combined with the traditional Jewish holiday themes of creation, redemption, and revelation.⁹² The ritual thus uses elements already present in the Jewish tradition to empower contemporary women.

These themes, especially that of redemption, are especially relevant for the Passover version of the ritual. Redemption is an intrinsic element of the Passover heritage, and Miriam's Cup bears a marked resemblance to one of the symbols traditionally associated with this theme. This is not accidental, but was an intentional effort to highlight and reinforce the symbolic value of the new ritual object. Miriam's Cup complements and parallels the traditional cup which is filled with wine during the seder as an offering to the prophet Elijah.⁹³

The origins of Elijah's Cup are not clear. The cup is not mentioned in the mishnaic or talmudic descriptions of the seder. However, later accounts trace its origin to the discussion in the Talmud regarding the drinking of wine during the seder. In the version of the Babylonian Talmud that is in contemporary use, Rabbi Tarfon explains that "at the fourth [cup] he concludes the Hallel and recites the great Hallel" (BT *Pesahim* 118a). According to the later accounts, in earlier versions of the Talmud he specified the fifth, rather than the fourth, cup.⁹⁴ The number of cups

⁹² These themes were first described in Franz Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* and later popularized by Jacob Neusner (*The Way of Torah: An Introduction to Judaism*). Adelman notes that "[t]he folklore about Miriam focuses on the themes of birth, water, salvation, creativity, innovation, risk-taking, and celebration. *Kos Miryam* likewise encompasses these themes" ("A Drink from Miriam's Cup," 158)

⁹³ The filling of a cup for Elijah is part of the Ashkenazi tradition. It can also be found in some contemporary Sephardic rituals, adopted from the Ashkenazi version (Dobrinsky, *A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs*; Guggenheimer, *The Scholar's Haggadah*).

⁹⁴ References to the earlier version of this passage can be found in writings from, among others, Saadia Gaon, Rav Amram, Maimonides, and Rashi (*Kasher, Israel Passover Haggadah*, 333).

was linked to the number of redemptions that God would perform for the Israelite people in the future; the rabbis based this on the biblical passage Exodus 6:6–8:

6. Therefore say to the people of Israel, I am the Lord, and I **will bring** you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I **will rid** you from their slavery, and I **will redeem** you with a outstretched arm, and with great judgments; 7. And I **will take** you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

Where the rabbis disagreed was on whether to include the next passage, which also includes a redemptive action:

8. And I **will bring** you in to the land, concerning which I swore to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it to you for a heritage; I am the Lord.

According to the later accounts, Rabbi Tarfon maintained that five cups were required to correspond with these five actions, while the other rabbis insisted on limiting the scope to the first two passages. They were unable to resolve the controversy, and the compromise at which they arrived was to fill a fifth cup but not drink it. This fifth cup subsequently became associated with Elijah the Prophet, who had previously been linked with the holiday of Passover by the rabbis because of the common theme of redemption. His connection to the controversial fifth cup was reinforced by the talmudic tradition that he would answer all unresolved questions when he arrived to herald the Messiah.⁹⁵ It thus seemed appropriate for the rabbis to leave the question up to Elijah, who was going to be making his appearance anyways.

Miriam's Cup and her presence both correspond to and diverge from Elijah's Cup and his participation in several significant ways. Miriam's actions parallel those of Elijah but are situated in the past rather than the future. They both usher in redeemers: Elijah will announce the Messiah; Miriam announced the birth of Moses. Just as the Messiah will be a redeemer of the Jewish people in the future, so was Moses a redeemer of them in the past. The rabbis portray Miriam "as 'an Elijah-figure' who announced the birth of Moses, the redeemer".⁹⁶ A cup for

⁹⁵ It was believed that Elijah would return as a herald of the Messiah, based on the biblical passage: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord" (Mal 3:23).

⁹⁶ Norman J. Cohen, "Miriam's Song," 183.

Miriam sitting on the seder table thus accesses this signification along with the others already mentioned. However, Miriam's Cup is intentionally and explicitly filled with life-giving, non-toxic water, as opposed to the intoxicating wine in Elijah's Cup. Miriam brings fundamental health, Elijah provides the luxury of wine. We cannot do without Miriam's gift; it is essential for life.

Another difference between the two guest prophets is the fact that Elijah is awaited every year but has, at least until this point, never actually appeared.⁹⁷ Miriam is not actually present either. However, because she serves as exemplar of the fact that women's leadership is not limited to one exceptional woman in the past, but accessible to all women today, she is present symbolically when everyday women are present and celebrating her. This difference in presence/absence is reinforced by the fact that Miriam's Cup is not only a symbol, it is actually used. Although there is also ritual associated with Elijah's Cup—the opening of the door—his cup is not actually used; nobody at the table drinks the wine. With Miriam's Cup, there is not only a ritual associated with the object, but an actual ingestion. As described at the beginning of this section, the water in the cup is drunk after being blessed. The participants incorporate the contents of her cup and, by extension, her well.

Although a new symbol, Miriam's Cup sits relatively easily and comfortably on the seder table. Unlike the provocative orange, with its jarring colour and connotations, the cup is more easily integrated into the existing ritual arena. While also challenging the perceived place of women within the Jewish tradition, it does so in a manner more obviously connected to the tradition that it is challenging. As Vanessa Ochs notes,

⁹⁷ Another Jewish ritual to which Elijah is invited is the *brit milah* (circumcision of boys). "The ... chair, known as *kisse shel Eliyahu* ('the chair of the Prophet Elijah') was placed on the right of the sandak's chair. This medieval custom was based on midrashic lore regarding God's promise to Elijah that he would be privileged to attend all circumcisions" (Bloch, *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies*, 11). However, Bloch is somewhat misleading on this point—according to the *Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer*, it is more of a sentence than a privilege for Elijah, who is required by God to be present at all circumcisions to make sure the covenant is being observed (213–214). A chair for Miriam is sometimes present in contemporary naming ceremonies for girls, providing a female counterpart similar to the Cup at the seder. However, this is a relatively

the orange evokes no Jewish sacred texts or practices (although it could be argued that it is a reminder of the precept to empathize and care for the stranger, the one who is different). In contrast, Miriam's cup evokes both texts and practices. Once the shock of the novelty has passed, the cup can *feel* as traditional as anything else on the seder table can.⁹⁸

Arnold Eisen's list of the five criteria necessary for effective Jewish ritual performance in our postmodern age includes nostalgia, by which he means the link to former times: "Rituals must wrap participants in memories of previous ancestral performances, linking present-day observers to the ancestors, giving the sense of following in their ways". Another of his criteria is tradition, which allows for changes as long as they are seen as "something the ancestors would have done".⁹⁹

The cup satisfies both of Eisen's conditions more easily than does the orange. It brings to the table not only Miriam, but a myriad of other Jewish ancestors: Rebekah, Rachel, Zipporah, Ruth, and even Hagar. It complements and balances the Cup of Elijah already present. Although introducing a new, and female, element, it does so in a non-confrontational manner, while still not sliding into subservience or apologetics. It simply takes its rightful place alongside and equal to the male element. And it is not a weak symbol, but one that stands for strength and leadership, for women's active roles as prophets and agents. The cup connects to the traditional link between women and water, but reclaims this in a new and empowering manner; it is the bringer of the waters that confer life: on individuals, on the group, and even on the planet. With all these connections, Miriam's Cup is not perceived as matter out of place by those whose ritual it is joining, but rather matter in place.

The seder ritual is a commemoration of a difficult passage: the transition from slavery to freedom, the journey through a narrow place.¹⁰⁰ It is also, at the same time, a symbolic re-

new practice and not consistent. "Some families use Elijah's Chair for a girl. Others symbolically invoke a Chair of Deborah or Miriam" ("Ritual Thrones," *ritualwell*, accessed Feb 2005).

⁹⁸ Ochs, *Miriam's Object Lesson*, 73; emphasis in the original.

⁹⁹ Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism*, 260 & 261.

¹⁰⁰ *Mitzraim*, the Hebrew word for Egypt, means literally: 'narrow places'. The exodus from Egypt is often envisioned as a journey from, or through, a narrow place.

enactment of that passage and participants are invited to re-experience it for themselves. Although Kol Isha's blessing celebrates the difficulties and ambiguities of the journey, it is nonetheless true that difficulties are, by definition, difficult. And arduous journeys can be assisted by navigational aids. Perhaps one such aid in this case is the link to tradition. The more obvious link of Miriam's Cup, the fact that it is more easily located as 'matter in place' makes it a more effective aid than the 'out of place' orange. Although they both require explanation, the cup's requirement is more subtle and less jarring. And, while it also extends the role and power of women, it does this in a way more intimately connected to the Jewish and Passover traditions. The links to the biblical matriarchs, to Elijah the Prophet, to the well that accompanied the Israelites, and to the already known and beloved character of Miriam, allow for a more seamless and palatable integration.

In chapter 1, I introduced the term 'belonging-sense' to describe the relationship between ritualizer and ritual that includes multiple group affiliations as a dynamic and constructive force, and that evokes a feeling of belonging and 'rightness' in the ritualizer. The term can be applied not only to the ritual as a whole, but also to ritual components, and a study of the orange and Miriam's Cup illustrates a benefit of using the new term. Both new objects are connected to ritualizers in a multitude of ways; for many of the ritualizers, both objects are included in the holistic belonging-sense they construct. But the effects of the objects are not equal. Miriam's Cup, because it connects to more strands in more ritualizers, ends up being more significant in the belonging-sense for more of the ritualizers. We see this reflected in the fact that more of the ritualizers embrace that object, incorporating it into their own particular set of ritual symbols.

The power and/or effectiveness of a symbol is difficult to determine. However, it is a fact that Miriam's Cup has increasingly appeared at both regular and women's seders since it first surfaced. The object is often accompanied by a ritual; most versions are based to varying extents on the one created by Kol Isha, where the cup of water was blessed by the group and then passed

around to all the participants, each of whom drank from it. All four of the seders detailed in chapter 3 included actual Cups for Miriam together with a variation on the ritual.

At the Ma'yan seder, each table of ten people had its own Cup which was initially empty. Close to the beginning of the seder, right after the candle lighting, the Cups were passed around at each table; each person added water to it in turn while the entire group read an explanation of Miriam's Cup. When the Cups had finished their turns around the table, the group recited the blessing. The first part of the blessing was identical to the one from Kol Isha; the last part substituted "May the Cup of Miriam refresh and inspire us as we embark on our journey through the Haggadah".¹⁰¹ The contemporary journey being experienced at that moment was explicitly and consciously linked to the past journey described in the Exodus story, and Miriam invoked as the guide for both of them. The water in the Cup then sat on the table until the end of the seder, when it was again passed around and this time each participant took a sip of the water just before leaving, at the end of the evening's journey. The Ma'yan ritual differed from the original Kol Isha version in that the water remained on the table during the entire seder, and also in that each person added their individual part to the communal well.

By involving every Seder participant in the filling of Miriam's Cup, the participatory nature of the seder is also immediately established. ... when the Miriam's Cup is filled with water from each person's glass, we are enacting our hope of refilling the magical healing Well of Miriam through inclusiveness and collectivity.¹⁰²

The Na'amat version was also based on the original Kol Isha ritual and also took place near the beginning of the seder, after the candle lighting and the description of the contents of the seder plates. There was one Cup at the head table. Initially empty, it was filled with water while an explanation of the Cup was read.¹⁰³ When it was filled, the entire group recited the original blessing from the Kol Isha ritual. As in the Ma'yan ritual, the first sentence was recited in both

¹⁰¹ Tamara Cohen, *The Journey Continues*, 30.

¹⁰² Tamara Cohen, *The Journey Continues*, 29.

¹⁰³ In the 2002 version, a much longer two page explanation of Miriam's Cup was added to the haggadah and was read aloud as part of the seder.

Hebrew and English, with the rest of the blessing in English only. Perhaps because there was only one Cup and it was not logistically possible to pass it around, there was no drinking of the water.

The context within which the Hadassah-WIZO ritual took place was not a complete women's seder, but rather a selection of activities and readings compiled for this event. Miriam was not abandoned—her Cup was explained, but without an accompanying ritual or blessing. The explanation differed from the others in drawing explicit parallels between Miriam and Elijah and specifying the need for both of their Cups to be present; at the other seders, there was no Cup for Elijah. The explanation was followed by a song about water.

The Har Kodesh seder consisted of a ritual filling of the cup by all the participants, followed by a blessing and then by a ritual drinking from the Cup by everyone present. One of the members of the group had put the original Kol Isha blessing to music; she sang the blessing to the rest of the group, who then recited it together. There was no explanation given for the Cup; the organizers did not think it necessary as the Cup and accompanying ritual had been explained in previous years.

Although the Kol Isha version is the most commonly used, other forms of the ritual also exist. These use the same symbolic values and themes, but express them in different forms. In one example, described at *miriamscup*, a website devoted exclusively to Miriam's Cup, the leader raises the empty cup and says: "Miriam's cup is filled with water, rather than wine. I invite women of all generations at our seder table to fill Miriam's cup with water from their own glasses." The Cup is passed around the table while Miriam's story is told. The filled Cup is raised while the leader says: "We place Miriam's cup on our seder table to honor the important role of Jewish women in our tradition and history, whose stories have been too sparingly told." A blessing written by Susan Schnurr is recited, and the story of a particular Jewish woman, chosen by the organizers, is narrated.¹⁰⁴ Like the Kol Isha version, this ritual also uses the themes of

¹⁰⁴ "Miriam's Cup: A New Ritual for the Passover Seder."

water, spiritual nourishment, and redemption, and honours Miriam's role as prophet and leader, holding her up as an example for contemporary women to emulate.

An indicator of the increasing popularity of this new ritual can be found in the results from the questionnaires I distributed. I asked about changes in ritual objects that the attendees had effected at their own regular seder as a result of their attendance at a women's seder. I did not specifically mention Miriam's Cup, but asked what, if any, changes had been made regarding objects. Of the 922 total responses I received, 412 had attended previous women's seders. Of these, 87 (21%) specified that they added a Miriam's Cup and 58 (14%) that they added an orange (23 (5.5%) indicated that they added both).

These same results are mirrored in a second version of the questionnaire distributed at the Ma'yan seders in 2002. In this version, I explicitly asked whether, if this was their first women's seder, the respondent planned to make changes. I also specifically asked whether their changes, either planned or actual, included a Miriam's Cup or an orange. The results are as follows:

Table 1: *Attendees at Ma'yan 2002 who changed or planned to change objects at their regular seders*

		number	%
not first-time at a women's seder (number of respondents = 264)	added Miriam's Cup	154	58.3
	added an orange	109	41.3
	added both	91	34.5
first-time at a women's seder (number of respondents = 237)	plan to add Miriam's Cup	95	40.1
	plan to add an orange	67	28.3
	plan to add both	48	20.3

Again we see that, although many either have added or intend to add an orange to their seder table, more respondents are drawn to Miriam's Cup. Even though my asking regarding the specific objects may have influenced the decision of the first-timers to subsequently make these changes, the results still show a greater percentage drawn to Miriam's Cup than to the orange. This supports my premise that the Cup is the more powerful, or at least the more palatable, symbol.

Along with the ritual, the cups themselves are becoming increasingly available. Besides being functional objects, Miriam's Cups can also be beautiful. Attractive items are often used at seders to enhance the sensory experience; items such as seder plates, matzah plates, matzah covers, and Elijah's Cup can be purchased at many Judaica stores, often one of a kind items created by artists. Although any cup or glass may be used as a Miriam's Cup, many are being created especially for this purpose, especially in venues that cater to feminists and to women's seders. At their 2002 Women's Seder, Na'amat Montreal even sold Miriam's Cups created by a local artist.¹⁰⁵ A number of art shows have been created dedicated exclusively to Miriam's Cups; one of these was held by Ma'yan in 1997, where 80 artists were invited to create and sell Miriam's Cups.¹⁰⁶ The popularity of the cups is also evident in some more mainstream websites: online sites such as Judaism.com and JudaicaWorldwide.com list an assortment of Miriam's Cups. These are mostly decorated with images of women or with Miriam's name. At Judaism.com, many are available with matching Elijah's Cups. However, the website provides an explanation for Miriam's Cup that is not provided for Elijah's:

Miriam's Cup is a new ritual for the Passover seder. Its purpose is to honor the role of Miriam the Prophetess in the Exodus and to highlight the contributions of women to Jewish culture, past and present. 'Miriam's cup' is filled with water to symbolize Miriam's miraculous well. The well was given by G-d in honor of Miriam, the prophetess, and followed and nurtured the Israelites throughout their journey in the desert.¹⁰⁷

Thus, we see that the symbol of Miriam is making its way into more and more seders, serving as a role model for women leaders and prophets. Although its origin was in the more segregated world of women's rituals, it is now finding its place in the normative seder space.¹⁰⁸ As with the orange, the cup sits in the centre of the ritual arena and proclaims publicly that women are significant prophets and leaders, and that this must be acknowledged and celebrated.

¹⁰⁵ They sold 200 cups, some at the seder, others to their members beforehand.

¹⁰⁶ This invitational exhibit, "Drawing from the Source: Miriam, Women's Creativity and New Ritual", was created by Ma'yan and was held at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York in 1997.

¹⁰⁷ *Judaism.com website.*

¹⁰⁸ The increasing importance of Miriam's Cup within Jewish culture is discussed in Vanessa Ochs' *Miriam's object lesson*. Her study somewhat parallels the examination presented here, but with a focus on material culture.

Chapter 5. Transforming Texts

The haggadah is the ritual text of the Passover seder. Although many versions exist, they generally share some basic elements and resemble each other fairly closely. Common to all haggadahs is a liturgical service derived from the talmudic model. In addition to the liturgy, haggadahs may also include instructions for the ritual, commentaries, and optional songs that may be sung during or after the liturgical portion.

The texts used at women's seders are usually women's (or feminist) haggadahs.¹ These are also sometimes used at regular seders, complementing, supplementing, or even, in rare instances, replacing the traditional haggadah. While they are similar in many ways to the text on which they are based, sharing both the format and some of the content, women's haggadahs have been modified to focus specifically on women. They vary widely in the ways that they either retain, reject, or reconfigure elements of the traditional model, yet some aspects of the model are found in changed form in most of the women's versions. Common innovations include feminized blessings, references to oranges and to Miriam's Cup, an emphasis on Miriam as a leader and prophet, the explicit inclusion of women in the story of the Exodus, the articulation of ten plagues that affect contemporary women, the choice of four daughters as questioners, and the introduction of *dayeinus* that focus on women's issues.²

Women's haggadahs began to appear in the early 1970s. The first ones were collections of photocopied pages, stapled together and passed from hand to hand. The earliest one for which I have been able to find a specific reference dates from 1971. It originated in Seattle as a single copy handwritten on rice paper; it then resurfaced in New York where it was subsequently

¹ The distinction between feminist and women's haggadahs is not consistent. Although the conflation of terms sometimes masks a difference in ideology and intention, at other times the distinction is only a matter of terminology; see chapter 1 for a discussion of the issue. In this dissertation, the texts will be referred to as women's haggadahs unless the feminist aspect is specifically relevant.

² Note that not all of the women's haggadahs contain all of these innovations.

published in the feminist magazine *Off Our Backs* in 1973.³ By then, at least one other women's haggadah (*Pesach Haggadah: A Statement of Joyous Liberation*), put together by a group of women in Berkeley, was already in circulation.⁴ Since then, many different women's haggadahs have been created. Some are still photocopied and passed from hand to hand, especially those used at private seders. Others, produced for institutional women's seders, are printed by the organizations hosting the seders.⁵ A few have been commercially published and are more widely available.⁶

The idea that the haggadah can be rewritten in response to historical and social circumstances was not born with women's haggadahs. As discussed in chapter 2, Passover often serves as the site for raising contemporary concerns related to the theme of liberation from slavery, a theme that has been expanded to include all freedom struggles, including less extreme ones for social liberation. Since the beginning of the 20th century, this focus has coincided with an inclination among many North American Jews to modernize the ritual and make it both more comprehensible and more relevant to their own experience. Amongst the first changes was the modification of the haggadah.

One of the earliest innovative texts was the *Union Haggadah*, published by the Reform movement in 1908. Although not the first English haggadah geared towards the modern American audience, it was "the first lasting accomplishment in that direction".⁷ Written almost entirely in English, the *Union Haggadah* modified ritual and liturgical components in order to be

³ This history is recounted by Arthur Waskow in the Introduction to *The Shalom Seders*. The published version is bobbi spalter-roth's "this year in brooklyn: a seder to commemorate ourselves".

⁴ Maida Solomon, "Claiming Our Questions," 225–226.

⁵ The earliest local Montreal women's haggadah that I have located, *Montreal Women's Haggadah*, is dated 1982. A local example of an organizational-produced haggadah is *The Na'amat Women's Haggadah*, which has been modified and reprinted each year that the Montreal chapter of Na'amat has held a women's seder (1997 to present). As well, the Temple Emanu-El Beth Sholom in Montreal held women's seders in 1999 and 2000, for which they used *Miriam's Seder*, a haggadah created by the Canadian Women for Reform Judaism.

⁶ Women's haggadahs that are commercially available are *San Diego Women's Haggadah*; *A New Haggadah: A Jewish Lesbian Seder*; *The Women's Haggadah*; *Dancing with Miriam Haggadah: a Jewish women's celebration of Passover*; *Like an orange on a Seder plate: our Lesbian Haggadah*; and *The Journey Continues: The Ma'yan Passover Haggadah*.

⁷ Balin, "The Transformation of the Passover Haggadah," 192.

“consonant with the spirit of the present time”. There was no dipping of vegetables into salt water representing ancestral tears, the four traditional questions were replaced with the single query, “What is the [defining] characteristic of this Seder Haggadah?”, and the final line of the traditional haggadah (“next year in Jerusalem”) was replaced by the wish that “God [will] Keep Us Safe from Year to Year”.⁸ In 1941, Mordecai Kaplan (who had founded the Reconstructionist movement several decades earlier) published *The New Haggadah*. This haggadah omitted “all references to events, real or imagined, in the Exodus story” that conflicted with the ethical stance of the Reconstructionist movement, and added passages explicitly advocating that ethical ideology. For example, slavery was presented not only as a state of physical bondage, but also as a self-inflicted condition: “When laziness or cowardness [sic] keeps them from doing what they know to be right, ... they are slaves to themselves.”⁹ Arnold Eisen, writing in 1998 and commenting on the evolution of modern haggadahs, credits Kaplan’s haggadah as an important step in the innovative process: “It is as if all the authors of these new texts ... read Mordecai Kaplan ... and signed on to his strategy of ritual continuity combined with ideational ‘reevaluation’.”¹⁰

In 1969, Arthur Waskow, who has since become one of the prominent leaders in the Jewish Renewal movement, continued the process of revising the haggadah in view of contemporary social issues and created the *Freedom Haggadah* “in memory of Dr. [Martin Luther] King and in commitment to carry on the work of liberation”.¹¹ This haggadah includes poetry by Allen

⁸ *The Union Haggadah: Home Service for The Passover Eve*, edited and published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, Cincinnati, 1908. As quoted in Balin, “The Transformation of the Passover Haggadah,” 193–194.

⁹ Mordecai M. Kaplan, Eugene Kohn, and Ira Eisenstein, eds, *The New Haggadah for the Pesach Seder (for the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation)*. New York, 1941. As quoted in Balin, “The Transformation of the Passover Haggadah,” 195.

¹⁰ Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism*, 257.

¹¹ Waskow, “Passover and America Today.” In 2003, Waskow was invited to speak at a rally marking the 40th anniversary of King’s last appearance before his murder. In his speech, Waskow used the symbols of Passover to indict the current United States government for its attitude towards the poor and its racist policies. “Are we prepared to become the midwives who resisted Pharaoh, to become Pharaoh’s own daughter who broke the law to save the life of Moses, to become Moses, to become Aaron, to become Miriam?” (Waskow, “40 years after the ‘Dream’ March”) For 2004, Waskow called for the resumption of freedom seders in order to continue the work of King. And once again he used the imagery and symbols of Passover in the name of justice and freedom: “In

Ginsberg, passages about Vietnam and civil rights, and a retelling of the Exodus in which Moses is cast as a labor organizer among the Hebrew bricklayers. It was the text used at a seder held in a black church in Washington which was broadcast live on a New York radio station and rebroadcast on Canadian television several days later. The haggadah stimulated many reactions, both positive and negative; some people used it at their own seders the following year while others, inspired by the process but not by Waskow's interpretations, created their own texts. In Waskow's own words, "[I]t showed people for the first time how you could open up the Haggadah."¹²

At the same time that religious reformers were creating new haggadahs, humanists also found in the haggadah an appropriate and effective vehicle for expressing their social concerns. Their texts, written from secular perspectives, also focused on themes of liberation but they downplayed or eliminated the divine and supernatural components of the Exodus story. "These haggadot eschew the use of the word God", concentrating instead on a "[c]onnection to Yiddishkeit, wanting to engage in Jewish custom".¹³ The fact that secular Jews found the seder worth both preserving and transforming is indicative of the centrality and strength of the ritual. Secular seders using secular haggadahs were first celebrated in the 1960s.¹⁴

Since the 1960s, many other innovative haggadahs have been created, each highlighting its own particular theme. The variety of concerns addressed includes the Holocaust and its survivors, the plight of Soviet and Ethiopian Jewry, the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, and vegetarianism. This last one, featured in the *Haggadah for the Liberated Lamb*, advocates liberation not only for humans but for all animal life. Clearly, modifications in contemporary

the world of Knowing: We will name and give the evidence for the behavior of the governmental-corporate amalgam that is trying to rule us as Pharaoh ruled ancient Egypt" (Waskow, "Next Passover: Facing Pharaoh, Once again").

¹² Waskow, quoted in J.J. Goldberg, "Seasons of reinterpretation: Radical demonstration 32 years ago changed Passover culture."

¹³ Steingroot, *Keeping Passover*, 193.

¹⁴ Schwartz, "The Secular Seder," 124. This was the case in North America. Secular haggadahs were also created in the kibbutzim in pre-Israel Palestine, in which "the exodus from Egypt is presented as a symbol of the struggle for liberation of oppressed classes all over the world" (Liebman & Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel*, 34–35).

haggadahs have frequently stemmed from an awareness of ongoing injustices and a desire to confront and eradicate inequities. However, some of these texts remain completely oblivious to gender imbalance and perpetuate the invisibility of women. It is within this context of ritual innovation and diversity that women's haggadahs were first conceived. A result of the same processes, but created to specifically address the gender issue, their focus is on women and women's issues.

Obviously the women's haggadahs, and the women's seders at which they are most often used, have connections to feminist perspectives. They are not, however, alone in this. Other post-60s haggadahs also evince feminist elements to greater or lesser extents. These display varying degrees of feminist consciousness and of familiarity with specifically Jewish feminist issues. Although they lack the pronounced focus on women's issues, their co-existence with women's haggadahs is not accidental but a reflection of common concerns. With this in mind, and in order to help situate the women's texts within the larger framework of innovation and change, I examined feminist elements in liberal haggadahs not specifically designed for women. By comparing liberal haggadahs with both traditional and feminist texts, I hope to illuminate the ways in which the existence of women's rituals and ritual texts have already affected mainstream ritual practices, and to offer an initial assessment of the influence of the Jewish feminist movement on the larger community.

The Open Door: A Passover Haggadah (2002), is the recently published family haggadah of the Reform movement. It was written by Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell, a committed feminist and co-author of an early version of the feminist haggadah *The Journey Continues*. Although *The Open Door* does not focus on women or women's issues and is intended for a general audience, it is consistently and explicitly gender-egalitarian. As well, feminist elements can be identified throughout the text and women are certainly visible and present.

An earlier liberal text, *In Every Generation: A Family Haggadah* (1989), was edited by the local Montreal Reconstructionist rabbi, Ronald Aigen, and published privately by the

congregation.¹⁵ It was not written by a feminist and does not include changes commonly found in the women's texts. In addition, it does not deviate as radically from the traditional model as do others.¹⁶ It does, however, demonstrate some of the common concerns and tendencies and even some, limited, influence from the feminist movement.

The following discussion is a comparison of these two liberal haggadahs (*The Open Door*, Reform, 2002 and *In Every Generation*, Reconstructionist, 1989), a traditional haggadah, and an explicitly feminist text. The focus is on similarities and differences most relevant to a feminist perspective. The traditional haggadah used in this study is Nathan Goldberg's *Passover Haggadah/hagaddah shel pesach: A New English Translation and Instructions for the Seder* (1993 edition, first published in 1949). The feminist haggadah is the most widely known of the genre: Tamara Cohen's *The Journey Continues, Ma'yan Passover Haggadah* (2000 edition, first published in 1994 but substantially changed since). For ease of discussion, I refer to the four texts as 'Reform', 'Reconstructionist', 'traditional' or "Goldberg", and 'Ma'yan', and, for ease of reading, specific references are placed in the body of the dissertation (as Ref, Rec, Tr and Ma) rather than in footnotes. The examination is divided into five themes: gender, inclusivity and accessibility, new ritual objects, characters, and activism.

A. Gender

Any feminist discussion must, by definition, include the subject of gender. The ways in which females and males are included/excluded and portrayed is one of the key indicators of feminist influence or lack thereof. This is not a simple dichotomy, but rather a complex and nuanced relationship. This section untangles some of the threads to reveal the underlying but very different feminist influence in all four of the haggadahs.

¹⁵ Note that this is an experimental version, not intended for general distribution, which was published privately for use by one specific congregation, a very different situation than that of the text written by Elwell. In addition, although it was written by a Reconstructionist rabbi, it is not representative of the Reconstructionist movement as a whole.

¹⁶ In this it perhaps reflects the general tendency of Montreal Jewish communities towards traditionalism and conservatism, as compared with Jewish communities elsewhere in North America.

i. God-language

In regard to gender, one of the major differences between the four texts concerns God-language and is most evident in the blessings. The same pattern is repeated in all the basic blessings: *chameitz*, candles, *shehecheyanu*, wine, *karpas*, *rachtza*, matzah, *maror*, and the counting of the *omer*.¹⁷ They all begin by addressing God directly, with some version of the traditional

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם ...

baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam ...

Blessed art Thou [masc.], Eternal our God, Ruler of the universe ...¹⁸

In the traditional and Reconstructionist haggadahs, these are the only forms presented.¹⁹ This is not the case in the Ma'yan and Reform texts where they are preceded by feminized versions:

ברוכה את יי אלהינו רוח העולם ...

b'rucha at ya eloheinu ruach ha-olam ...

You [fem.] are Blessed, Our God, Spirit of the World ... (Ma)

Blessed are You [fem.], our God, Soul of the world ... (Ref)

The introductions to both of these haggadahs provide explanations of the feminized blessings, together with suggestions on their use. The Reform text suggests that the participants either choose the preferred form or alternate them throughout the seder, while the Ma'yan text suggests that each individual simply choose the one they prefer as similarities in rhythm and word length allow for concurrent reciting of different forms by different people.

In addition to adding the feminized version, the Ma'yan haggadah has also modified the traditional form in that a single literal English translation of the feminized form is provided for

¹⁷ Even though the traditional haggadah does not itself contain two of these blessings (on the candles and counting the *omer*), these can be found in other traditional prayer books and are generally included in the seder ritual.

¹⁸ Indications of gender in the English are my own. This is the translation in the traditional text. The Reconstructionist version is "You abound in blessings, Adonai our God, Source of Creation"; the differences are not relevant to the discussion of gender. The Reform and Ma'yan translations are discussed in the body of this section.

¹⁹ I use 'forms' to distinguish the Hebrew and the English blessings, a distinction whose relevance will become evident in the discussion.

both the traditional and feminized blessings.²⁰ The traditional form is thus not actually translated but rather interpreted. Such discrepancies are not unusual in Jewish liturgical texts. For instance, the English blessing in the traditional haggadah includes the word ‘eternal’, a word that does not actually appear in the Hebrew text although it is implied in the word *olam* which means ‘eternity’ as well as ‘world’ or ‘universe’. What is significant for this discussion is the nature of the discrepancies, as these are indicative of the intentions and biases of the authors.²¹

There are three differences between the feminized and traditional blessings in the Hebrew: the gender of the words referring to the deity is feminine; *רוח* (*ruach*, meaning spirit) replaces *מלך* (*melech*, king);²² the name of God is written as the word *יה* rather than *יהוה*. Of these, the first and third are not apparent in gender-neutral English translations.

The first difference (the feminized references to God) proceeds from the fact that the Hebrew language is completely gendered; every noun and pronoun is either feminine or masculine, there is no neuter.²³ This situation is further exacerbated by the fact that verbs and adjectives are similarly gendered, so that it is impossible to present subjects or objects without at least an implied gender. In the portion of the blessing presented above (*baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam*), the gendered aspects are present in the fact that *baruch* is the masculine form of the verb ‘you are blessed’; *atah* refers to a male ‘you’; *adonai* is a masculine noun, which literally means ‘my lord’, a term with male connotations even in English; *elohim* is a grammatically

²⁰ Note that the Reform haggadah contains two English forms, corresponding to the two Hebrew forms.

²¹ Interestingly, the Reform haggadah is the most literal of the four. This is perhaps indicative of a desire within the Reform movement to achieve a balance between tradition and innovation in a straightforward and direct fashion. The question of translation has been controversial for at least 2000 years: in his “Translator’s Introduction” to *The Zohar Pritzker Edition vol 1*, Daniel Matt writes that “All translation is inherently inadequate, a well-intentioned betrayal” (xviii) and invokes the words of the second-century Rabbi Yehuda to support his assertion: “One who translates a verse literally is a liar, one who adds to it is a blasphemer” (*BT Qiddushin* 49a). Choices are made, either consciously or unconsciously, and these reflect the values and worldviews of the translators.

²² Although this particular change was instituted to emphasize the immanent and non-hierarchical nature of God, it also increases the feminine content.

²³ This is different from English, where inanimate objects are characterized as neuter (‘it’). In English, it is also possible to use neutral pronouns for groups of people (‘they’). In Hebrew, groups are always characterized as masculine unless the speaker is absolutely sure or wishes to stress the fact that only women were included, in which case the feminine form is used.

masculine name for God; and *melech*, 'king', is masculine in form and content. Even *olam*, 'world' or 'universe', is grammatically masculine. There are no feminine elements whatsoever in this formulation. Not surprisingly, the phrases that complete the blessings are also masculine; the blessing on the wine, for instance, continues with:

בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן
borei pri hagafen
 who [masc.] creates the fruit of the vine²⁴

The word *borei* is the masculine form of the verb 'to create', and *pri* and *gefen* are grammatically masculine nouns.²⁵ There is no counterbalance to the masculine presence. In the feminized blessings, *brucha* and *at* are the feminine forms of the verb and pronoun, the word *ruach* is grammatically feminine, and the masculine *elohim* is retained. In the phrase that completes the blessing on the wine, the verb (*boreit*) is presented in its feminine form. The blessing contains female and male elements; neither gender completely eclipses the other, either in grammatical construction or in reference to God.

Jewish theology sees God as having no attributes and, therefore, any words used to describe God are presumed to be metaphorical. Because of this, feminists claim that female descriptions and grammatical forms are as appropriate as male ones: neither are precise or explicit, being only human approximations or metaphors of the ineffable and indescribable divinity. But feminine metaphors serve as a way of inviting and welcoming women as active equal participants in the rituals and religious practices. This redressing of the grammatically imposed disequilibrium is made explicit in Cohen's introduction to the Ma'yan haggadah:

While the masculine language does not necessarily imply a male God, its constant and universal use has had the effect of gendering God as male. Thus, the use of feminine God-language in this Haggadah is intended to offer a balance, enabling us to name God

²⁴This is the translation in the Reconstructionist and Ma'yan texts. The one in the traditional and Reform haggadahs is 'Creator of the fruit of the vine'.

²⁵I am not trying to suggest that participants are faced with a wall of exclusively masculine objects; it is a question of language. In Hebrew, the assignment of gender to inanimate objects is almost always arbitrary; it is a strictly grammatical construction. Objects themselves are not seen as gendered. However, the fact remains that the language is gendered, and the use of predominantly masculine constructions may produce an emotional effect in readers.

as truly beyond gender and at the same time, as fully encompassing both femaleness and maleness (Ma 8).

Cohen links this re-balancing to issues of power and to the struggles of contemporary feminists. Although she does not go into detail here, Jewish feminists have elaborated elsewhere on the ways in which God-language functions to either maintain existing male-privilege or to subvert that hegemony.²⁶ The Reform haggadah does not specifically address either the history of women's exclusion or the place of women in Judaism, but does cite "more inclusive" as a reason for the alternative feminized blessings (Ref xii).

The second difference in the blessings is the substitution of *ruach* for *melech*, replacing the male 'king' with 'spirit', a word that is neutral in concept but feminine in its Hebrew form. Besides the difference in gender, this change also indicates a modified worldview, one that envisions a non-hierarchical relationship between humans and the divine in which the immanence of God is emphasized. Rather than viewing God as king above with subjects below, this metaphor presents God as the spirit that resides within people. It is an especially effective metaphor because of the ambiguities and nuances of the word *ruach*, which can mean 'breath' and 'wind' as well as 'spirit'. The Ma'yan haggadah explains these other meanings of the word as "two additional images that many people find useful in thinking about God" (Ma 10). These other meanings enhance the metaphor: 'breath' adds a sense of that which both gives life and renews it on a continuous basis; the image of wind adds the dimension of movement and communication, of a life-force that touches and connects all peoples and aspects of the world. The English translation of *ruach* in the Reform haggadah embraces the richness of these many connotations: "Soul of the world" (Ref xiii).

The third change in the blessings is the replacement of the word ך with ך. This substitution reinforces both gender equality and an egalitarian and non-hierarchical view of the relationship

²⁶ See, for instance, Plaskow's *Standing Again at Sinai* and Adler's *Engendering Judaism*.

between God and people. Although not actually a written word in the Hebrew formulation, *adonai* is the conventional utterance for the unpronounceable term ך which is a name of God. But the term *adonai* is not neutral; it has both male and hierarchical connotations: literally it means ‘my lord’ and in Hebrew, as in English, ‘lord’ is also used to refer to an upper class male. The feminized blessings use the term ך, pronounced ‘ya’. ‘Ya’ is one of the biblical names for God and is traditionally understood to be an abbreviated form of the tetragrammaton.²⁷ ך is also an abbreviation of the tetragrammaton, but one that made its appearance somewhat later.²⁸ In contrast to the overtly male term *adonai*, the tetragrammaton and its abbreviations (ך and ך) are as ungendered as Hebrew words can be. This is very important for a feminist analysis it allows one to move from the dichotomy “female/male” and into the concept of an ungendered God.

As representations of what cannot be described, they are not associated with anything tangible but simply function as indications of an ineffable God; in addition, a kabbalistic interpretation views the tetragrammaton as containing within it both male and female elements.²⁹ But ך in the context of blessings has, for the most part, lost these other connotations and has come to be associated primarily with *adonai*. This has not occurred with the word ‘ya’, which can thus be considered as simultaneously neutral and bi-gendered, contrasting with and challenging the maleness of the traditional term *adonai*.

The use of ‘ya’ as an expression for the divine adds another dimension to the modified blessing, as it resembles the sound made when breath is exhaled. This correspondence between sound and meaning is used in Jewish forms of meditation as a way of bringing together the

²⁷ “ ‘Yah’, an abbreviated form of the Tetragrammaton, occurs 23 times [in the Bible] ... : 18 times in the Psalms, twice in Exodus, and three times in Isaiah. This form is identical with the final syllable in the word ‘Hallelujah’, which occurs 24 times in the last book of the Psalms” (Toy & Blau, “Tetragrammaton”).

²⁸ The origin of the form ך is obscure. It does not appear in the Bible or Talmud, but is common in the ancient liturgy.

²⁹ Kaplan, *Jewish Meditation*, 154.

individual and the divine through the human breath.³⁰ The use of this term in these blessings reinforces the envisioning of God as the breath of life suggested by the term *ruach*.

Together, these changes imply a worldview and a consciousness significantly different from the one embedded in the traditional blessings. The Ma'yan and the Reform haggadahs are virtually identical in this respect. They present an alternative perspective of God as non-gendered, or equally female and male, or both. They also present an egalitarian relationship between God and people, where God is not seen as above the practitioners, but as alongside or even inside them. This helps subvert the paternalistic view of God as king and/or father, and humans as 'His' subjects and/or children.

Whereas in the Ma'yan haggadah the feminization of God-language is primarily located in the blessings, in the Reform text the change has been extended into the rest of the liturgy (such as the *oseh shalom* prayer which will be discussed below). This may be more indicative of denominational than of feminist ideologies. Reform Judaism has, from its inception in the 19th century, regarded all liturgy and rituals as expendable and modifiable, although this flexibility has decreased somewhat in the intervening years. The authors of the Ma'yan haggadah are not associated with any one particular denomination; they have a variety of affiliations and inclinations. And, while some may share the Reform perspective, others are more attached to the traditions. In addition, the Ma'yan haggadah has retained less of the Hebrew liturgy overall, and the English text replacing it, being ungendered, does not present the same problems. Neither of these texts appears in any way to be inconsistent in its use of gendered God-language. In this regard, the Ma'yan and Reform haggadahs present the same challenge to the androcentrism of the traditional and Reconstructionist texts.

³⁰ "The spiritual source of this vitality is the name of G-d, Ya-H. Working with the breath is intrinsically a way of bringing stability to the mind. As the breathing becomes smoother, longer, and deeper, the mind becomes quiet, like a still body of water. When we let the breath 'say' the name of G-d, the breathing becomes united with the conscious awareness. We come to understand that every breath is a gift of life from the Source whose name we are calling on. The awareness of the body in the meditation is based on the correspondence of letters to the body. The 'yod' relates to the head; the 'heh' relates to the heart. The awareness draws from the infinite Source.

ii. Seder Participants

The issue of gender is not limited to God-language. It is also evident in the way seder participants are addressed, particularly in the ritual instructions. All four haggadahs use primarily gender-neutral terms for the ritualizers. What is noteworthy is the way in which the 1993 traditional haggadah deviates from the 1966 edition as well as from the haggadah that is currently part of the Artscroll series.³¹ The Goldberg (traditional) text has been modified to suit the sensibilities of many of its contemporary users; the Artscroll haggadah makes no such concessions, even though it was published nine years later, in 2002. This indicates a lack of homogeneity within the traditional, or Orthodox, community with regard to gender issues. While this is undoubtedly also true for the other denominational communities, I highlight and emphasize the changes in the Orthodox world because this is where the greatest opposition to change vis-à-vis the place of women and girls has been, and continues to be, located, and therefore where it is hardest to effect change. It is also where the claim of faithful and unchanging adherence to older forms is most often voiced, leading to a general perception that the Orthodox contemporary texts are the same as those of ancient times.

In the 1966 edition of the Goldberg haggadah, women are completely invisible. The nouns and pronouns for the participants are all masculine and it requires an imaginative effort to understand women as included. In the newest edition, published 27 years later, this is no longer the case. It is not that women have been inserted into the text, but rather that the androcentricity has been decreased and replaced, to some extent, by gender-neutrality. One such change is the removal of unnecessary pronouns. For example, the gendered “Every one at the table has a glass

to first fill the head and then the heart, unifying both” (Zavidowsky, “The What Why and How of Jewish Meditation”).

³¹ *The Family Haggadah* is published by Mesorah Publications as part of their Artscroll Series, which consists of “translations, commentaries and expositions on Scripture, Mishnah, Talmud, Halachah, liturgy, history, the classic Rabbinic writings, biographies, and thought” (frontispiece). The Artscroll texts are reasonably priced and contain a lot of explanations and instructions, so that even those with little or no background or knowledge can use them fairly easily. They have become increasingly popular and are widely available; they are generally considered to be very traditional. In the remainder of this dissertation, I will refer to this haggadah as ‘the Artscroll haggadah’.

or cup of wine before him” is replaced by “Every one at the table has a glass or cup of wine” (Tr 5). An even more noticeable change is the replacement of gendered nouns by ungendered alternatives, so that “the master of the house” becomes “the leader of the Seder” (Tr 8). These changes have been made throughout the haggadah, resulting in a text and, by extension, a ritual, in which both women and men can see themselves as legitimate participants and practitioners. This is in contrast to the Artscroll haggadah, which uses the term ‘head of the household’ when referring to the seder leader. Although it could be argued that this phrase is gender-neutral, it is a term most commonly applied to men and applied to women only when there is no man around. The possibility that this term is intended as or can even be used in a gender-neutral sense is negated by the consistent use of the masculine pronoun (‘he’ or ‘his’) when referring to the ‘head’, and by other unmistakably gendered references to the leader, such as: “the littlest member of the household is coaxed, bribed, and encouraged to stand before Zaidy or Daddy and say the *Mah Nishtanah*” (Artscroll, 9).³² Zaidy and Daddy are always male; Bubbie and Mommy are not mentioned.

Along with the traditional (Goldberg, 1993), the Reconstructionist, Reform, and Ma’yan haggadahs also use gender-neutral terminology to refer to the participants. The instructions in the Reconstructionist text are presented either in the second person imperative (‘do this’) or the first person plural form (‘we do this’), neither of which have gender, either explicit or implicit, in English. The nouns referring to the practitioners are ‘leader’, ‘person’, ‘participant’, and the pronouns are ‘our’, ‘one’, ‘we’. The Reform text uses nouns and pronouns in a like manner. It also introduces the egalitarian phrase ‘him and her’, with the masculine form listed first. In the Ma’yan haggadah, all instructions are written exclusively in the second person imperative form, and nouns similar to those of the Reconstructionist and Reform texts are used. The egalitarian phrase ‘her or his’ is used, as in the Reform haggadah except that the feminine pronoun is listed

³² ‘Zaidy’ is the Yiddish term for ‘grandfather’, and ‘Bubbie’ is Yiddish for ‘grandmother’.

first. There is one place where the pronoun 'her' is used by itself, but it is unclear whether this is an intentional replacement of the androcentric 'him' (which supposedly includes both genders) by its gynocentric counterpart, or whether it is simply an oversight (Ma 44).

None of the four haggadahs exhibit an explicit gender bias in terms of seder participants, even in terms of the ritual roles. While these biases may still be in effect at the rituals where the haggadahs are used, they are no longer embedded in the texts. All four could be used without modification at seders where either women and/or men were leaders and/or participants. This is not the case with the Artscroll haggadah, with its explicit references to male leaders.

The Ma'yan text goes a step further and includes references to another role, one usually completely overlooked: that of the preparer(s) of the food. Although the preparation of the meal is not only labour intensive and time consuming but also essential to the ritual, most haggadahs neither sanctify nor acknowledge this activity. They simply announce the end result: "The Seder meal", "The festive meal is served", "We now enjoy the seder feast!" (Tr 28; Rec 53; Ref 77, respectively). The implication is that preparation of the seder meal is outside the ritual and not worthy of comment. The omission is striking and invokes a hermeneutics of suspicion,³³ especially since food preparation has been traditionally and is still today mostly performed by women and considered to be 'women's work'. The Ma'yan haggadah rectifies this oversight and, at the same time, subverts the gender assumption that underlies it. A new passage has been added at the beginning of the *bareich* ('blessing after the meal'), thanking those who prepared the food. The instructions as well as the actual passage contain no gender-bias. The passage reads:

תנו לה מפרי ידיה ויהללה בשערי מעשיה

T'nu la mipri yadeiha v'yihalleluha vash'arim ma'ase'ha.

Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own deeds praise her in the gates.

³³ I refer here to the method of critical reading first proposed by Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza to expose and peel away the androcentrism underlying biblical texts. The first stage in her method is a hermeneutics of suspicion in which the reader asks questions, examines premises, and suggests possible answers. See Fiorenza's *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* for more details.

תנו לו מפרי ידיו ויהללו בשערים מעשיו

T'nu lo mipri yadav v'yihalleluhu vash'arim ma'asav.

Give him of the fruit of his hands; and let his own deeds praise him in the gates
(adapted) [sic] (Ma 95)

The passage is from Proverbs 31:31, and is the last line of the verse commonly referred to as *eshet hayil*, 'woman of valour', a verse often invoked to praise women for their performance of traditional women's activities. Many feminists object to the way in which *eshet hayil* has been used to stereotype women: identification of women with the private/home realm and the corresponding pressure on them to remain within it. The Ma'yan haggadah alludes to and challenges the traditional usage by including a masculine version. It rescues the verse and valorizes the activities that are praised, but in a gender neutral context. Food preparation is no longer to be taken for granted nor is it to be dismissed as 'women's work', nor is the work that women do to be devalued; just as a leader has an important ritual role, so does a cook, and just as women can be leaders, so can men be cooks.

iii. Human-Language in English Translations

As mentioned above, Hebrew is a gendered language in which there are no neutral nouns. This results in differing opinions regarding the meaning of some words. For example, the word בניִים (*banim*) literally means 'sons', but is also sometimes used in the general sense of 'children'. It depends on the context and on the interpreter. This word is used in the section about the *arba'ah banim*, a highly significant passage in a feminist analysis because it refers to children in general but at the same time to the actual children sitting around the ritual table. If 'sons' is understood, then, although the four types of *banim* mentioned (wise, contrary, simple, ignorant) are supposedly all-inclusive, in actuality sons are valorized while daughters are marginalized, excluded, and rendered invisible. The older edition of the Goldberg haggadah translates *arba'ah banim* as "four sons" and uses exclusively masculine terminology to refer to them. The newer edition has changed this to "four children" but still uses masculine pronouns. The terminology in

the Artscroll haggadah is exclusively masculine, referring consistently to four sons. The Reconstructionist text is similar in this regard to the more recent Goldberg haggadah: it uses the neutral noun ‘children’ but refers to them with masculine pronouns. The Reform text is egalitarian (as opposed to neutral), using neutral nouns and both masculine and feminine pronouns. The Ma’yan haggadah replaces the entire section with one highlighting contemporary women’s issues, which will be discussed in the section on activism. But the sidebar commentary explains that many contemporary texts change ‘sons’ to ‘children’ in order to be more inclusive (Tr 10, in both editions; Artscroll, 29; Rec 19; Ref 40; Ma 61, respectively).³⁴

The move away from exclusively male translations between 1966 and 1993 can also be seen in many other passages, both biblical and liturgical, of the traditional haggadah. For example, the response to the four questions begins with an explanation in which the phrase “even were we all wise, all men of understanding” has been replaced by “even if we are all learned and wise, all elders”, and “the more one tells of the departure from Egypt, the more he is to be praised” has been rendered completely neutral by “the more one dwells on the Exodus from Egypt, the more is one to be praised”. Similarly, the often-quoted injunction that “in every generation one must look upon himself as if he personally had come out from Egypt”, has been modified to “in every generation one must see oneself as though having personally come forth from Egypt”, and the biblical verse invoked to support this injunction has been changed from “thou shalt tell thy son” to “you shall tell your child”. Another modification in this text is the consistent use of the word ‘ancestor’ to translate the Hebrew word אבות (*avot*), which literally means ‘fathers’. Examples of this include both liturgical (“This promise made to our forefathers” becomes “This is the promise that has sustained our ancestors”) and biblical passages (“Your forefathers went down into Egypt” becomes “Your ancestors went down into Egypt”) (Tr 9, 23, and 12 respectively; in both

³⁴Note that in the Reconstructionist haggadah, the commentary in the margins (and in smaller text) contains one example of egalitarianism, using ‘he’ in one sentence, ‘she’ in the next, and ‘his/her’ in the last line (18). Note also that the masculine pronoun is listed first in the Reform text.

editions).³⁵ The Artscroll haggadah is comparable to the older version of the Goldberg text in retaining the masculine terms.

The other three haggadahs are all similar to the newer version of the Goldberg text in their treatment of the English terms. However, the Reform and Ma'yan haggadahs also modify the Hebrew text. As it is not possible to render the Hebrew neutral, masculine allusions are balanced by the addition of their feminine counterparts. Thus, for example, *לאבותינו* (*l'avoteinu*, lit. 'for our fathers') becomes *לאבותינו ולאמותינו* (*l'avoteinu u'l'imoteinu*, lit. 'for our fathers and for our mothers'), and the entire phrase is translated into the English 'for our ancestors' (e.g. Ref 68; Ma 76).

The Reconstructionist haggadah is closer to the current traditional text. Although the English translation is neutral, the Hebrew passages, biblical and liturgical, have not been touched. Just as *avoteinu* is left unmodified, so is *acheinu* ('brothers'), even as the English translation reads 'brothers and sisters'. The traditional *rabotai n'vareich* ("friends [masc] let us give thanks") has been retained at the beginning of the *birkat hamazon*, a phrase that has been modified to *chaveirim vacheveirot n'vareich* ("friends [masc] and friends [fem] let us give thanks") in the Reform text (Rec 11 and 54; Ref 80, respectively). It should be noted that the instruction in the Reconstructionist haggadah differs from that in the traditional text in specifying that the blessing be recited when "three or more adults" have eaten, as opposed to when "three or more men" are present. This is consistent with the Reconstructionist movement's inclusion of women in quorums for all occasions, a result of the same feminist influence that is being examined here for its effect on seders and haggadahs. In the Ma'yan haggadah, the entire introduction to the *birkat hamazon* has been replaced with the passage referred to above, in which thanks are offered to both female and male food providers. This negation of gendered cooking roles contrasts with the reinforcement of those roles presented in the Reconstructionist text, which includes a midrashic

³⁵ The first biblical verse is from Exod 13:8, the second from Deut 10:22. Note that the English translations of the 1993 edition also use a more contemporary and colloquial English.

story depicting the men sleeping in the fields and the women in the cities and relates how the women “would warm up food and bring it to their husbands” (Rec 31).

B. Inclusivity and Accessibility

The haggadahs also differ in the ways they address the relationship between Jews and the rest of the world. In all four, the *birkat hamazon* (blessing after the meal) contains the passage:

עשה שלום במרומו, הוא יעשה שלום עלינו ועל כל ישראל, ואמרו אמן
oseh shalom bimromav, hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu v'al kol yisrael, v'imru amen
 May the Creator of harmony in the heavens create peace for us and for all Israel and
 let us say, amen (Tr 32)

The traditional version, shown above, explicitly requests peace only for the people of Israel.

The Ma'yan version is as follows:

עשה שלום במרומו	<i>Oseh shalom bimromav</i>
הוא יעשה שלום עלינו	<i>hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu</i>
ועל-כל-ישראל ועל-כל-ישבי תבל	<i>v'al kol yisrael, <u>v'al kol yoshvei teivel</u></i>
ואמרו אמן	<i>v'imru amen (Ma 91, my emphasis)³⁶</i>

The phrase *v'al kol yoshvei teivel* has been added after *v'al kol yisrael* ('for all Israel'). Even though there is no English translation at all for the passage, the additional phrase means 'for all inhabitants of the world'; at least in Hebrew, peace is unmistakably requested for everyone.

The Reconstructionist version is unchanged in the Hebrew, but both the translation and transliteration have been modified:

עשה שלום במרומו הוא יעשה שלום עלינו ועל כל-ישראל ואמרו אמן
Oseh shalom bimromav, hu ya-aseh shalom aleinu v'al kol yisrael, v'al kol ha-
adam, v'imru amen
 May He who brings peace to His universe bring peace to us, and to all the people of
 Israel and to all humanity. And let us say, amen (Rec 60–61, my emphasis)

³⁶ Note that the gendered God-references in this passage have not been altered. As mentioned previously, the Ma'yan haggadah locates its feminization of Hebrew God-language primarily in the blessings.

In the transliterated passage, the phrase *v'al kol ha'adam* ('to every human') has been inserted after *v'al kol yisrael*. The third petition for God's peace has been added to the English phrase and to the transliterated Hebrew formulation.

The Reform passage contains several significant departures from the traditional text:

עשה שלום במרומיו, הוא יעשה שלום, עלינו ועל כל-ישראל, ואמרו אמן	עשה שלום במרומיה, היא תעשה שלום, עלינו ועל כל-ישראל, ואמרו אמן
<i>Oseh shalom bimromav, hu yaaseh shalom, aleinu v'al kol Yisrael, v'imru amen</i>	<i>Osah shalom bimromeha, hi taaseh shalom, aleinu v'al kol Yisrael, v'imru amen</i>

May the Source of perfect peace grant peace to us, to all Israel, and to the world.
And let us say, Amen (Ref 81–83, my emphasis).

First, although the Hebrew and transliterated versions are unchanged in themselves, they are supplemented by feminized forms, similar to the way in which the basic blessings discussed in the previous section have been modified. In this form, the verbs and pronouns referring to God (*osah, bimroheha, hi, taaseh*) are feminine. Second, there is a common English translation for the alternative blessings and, like the Reconstructionist addition, this English phrase also requests that peace be granted 'to the world' (Ref 83). In neither of these haggadahs are the changes immediately apparent since they are not visually separated from the rest of the transliterated and translated passages (the emphasis is mine). The only change to the Hebrew text (the Reform addition of the feminized form) is much more obvious.

These modifications and their variations indicate differences in attitudes regarding chosenness, exclusivity, and pluralism, and in whether the community leans towards insularity and exclusion or to openness and welcome. Historically and traditionally, Judaism has tended towards the former, a tendency that can still be seen in the traditional haggadah.³⁷ The other three haggadahs have all made attempts to counteract or at least to balance this tendency.

The Ma'yan haggadah includes all peoples as the recipients of God's peace but omits the

³⁷ In fact, this tendency is less pronounced at other holidays, such as the High Holy Days, where the prayers and blessings do include the larger world.

English form entirely; the changes are inserted into the original Hebrew request. The Reconstructionist and Reform texts also include all peoples, but in a less radical manner. In the Reconstructionist version the *oseh shalom* passage itself is unchanged in Hebrew, but modified in English and even in transliterated Hebrew. The Reform haggadah leaves the original Hebrew unchanged, adds a feminized but otherwise identical Hebrew form, and translates both with the extra phrase 'to the world'. So, despite this haggadah's concern with issues of inclusivity, evidenced in the radical innovation of a feminized form, its author has not gone so far as to insert into either Hebrew version the inclusive phrase 'to the world'; that addition is reserved for the English. Clearly, questions of inclusivity and exclusivity are carried in the choice of each of the authors of these haggadahs as to where to place inclusive terms.

English and Hebrew are not equal in status in Jewish tradition and practice. Because of its pedigree, the Hebrew text is considered more authentic and more authoritative, and, therefore, changes to the Hebrew are considered more consequential. Even for many acculturated Jews, the words and sounds of the ancient prayers hold a more profound significance than do their English forms. The traditional Hebrew often commands an emotional response that is not necessarily linked to the actual meaning of the words; it speaks strongly to a belonging-sense.³⁸ The Ma'yan use of key phrases from the *oseh shalom* passage reflects this attachment: it is one of the few times that a Hebrew passage is presented without translation. For those who understand Hebrew this is not necessarily significant. But many of the haggadah's users are not familiar with Hebrew and probably do not understand the literal meaning of the words they are uttering. Perhaps the passage is included because the authors, knowledgeable in both Hebrew and traditional liturgy, consider it so central that the liturgy feels incomplete without it. This may be true even for those who do not understand Hebrew, especially if they grew up in an environment where the liturgy was recited. For many practitioners, what resonates is the sound of the words rather than the

³⁸ This emotional attachment is even more evident when the Hebrew words are sung rather than spoken.

actual meaning of the blessing.³⁹ This strong attachment to the ancient Hebrew is also indicated in the Reconstructionist use of the passage where, significantly, the Hebrew is completely unchanged, even while the modification is written into the ‘transliterated’ form. The Reform versions use Hebrew to support gender equality within Judaism, but not as a way of including other peoples in the request for peace. It is as if Hebrew is reserved for the ‘us’ and not to be used for ‘them’.

These changes to the *oseh shalom* passage are attempts to deal with two levels of inclusivity. While their content addresses the relationship between Jews and others, choices of one language over another imply a sensitivity to problems of inclusivity among Jews themselves. Different language choices raise questions regarding access to the text. Some practitioners can read and understand Hebrew, some can read without understanding, some understand Hebrew but are unable to read the Hebrew characters, and yet others have minimal or no familiarity with the language. As more traditional Jews are more likely to know Hebrew well, they will be the ones most likely reading the unchanged less-inclusive forms in the Reconstructionist and Reform haggadahs. The less traditional/more acculturated Jews, less likely to be at ease reading Hebrew, will read the more inclusive passages. The practices of each group will be different, depending on the degree of familiarity with tradition and language. Even if this was not the intention of the authors, it is the result. In addition, because the changes are not highlighted, each group will probably be unaware that the practices are different, unless the individuals go out of their way to read the entire passage in both languages. While the Ma’yan haggadah is more radical than the liberal ones, insisting on the change in perspective for all its users, the fact that the passage is in Hebrew only has an odd effect: non-Hebrew readers are excluded from understanding that they are being inclusive.

³⁹ This factor is especially relevant for this passage, which is probably somewhat familiar even to not particularly observant Jews as it is also part of the many kaddish prayers in the daily and weekly Sabbath liturgy and of the mourner’s kaddish that is recited at funerals and on anniversaries of a person’s death.

As the handling of the *oseh shalom* passage in each of the four haggadahs shows, balancing desires for inclusivity with needs for particularity can be difficult. Different groups have different levels of comfort with changing the traditional liturgy, different perceptions of the proper interactions amongst Jews, and different ideas about how the relationship between Jews and others should be expressed and conducted. The question of who is to be included, who excluded, and how, is a recurring issue in these haggadahs.

For instance, the tension between inclusion and exclusion can again be seen in the passage traditionally recited when the door is opened for Elijah the Prophet. It asks God to:

שפך חמתך אל הגוים אשר לא ידעוך ועל ממלכות אשר בשמך לא קראו
*sh'foch chamatcha el ha'goyim asher lo y'da'ucha v'al mamlachot asher
 b'sheemcha lo kara'u*

Pour out Your fury on the nations that do not know You, upon the kingdoms that do not invoke Your name⁴⁰

The recitation of this passage has been omitted from the Ma'yan liturgy. However, the passage itself is not entirely absent; the text mentions that at one time Jews recited these words in response to “persecution during the Crusades” (Ma 101) and then includes a discussion of peace and redemption. The presentation actively counteracts the message of the actual passage, which calls for violence against all non-Jewish nations.⁴¹ The Reconstructionist haggadah includes the passage in Hebrew, but the English ‘translation’ directs God’s wrath only towards those who deserve it because they “pour out their hatred upon Your earth and people”. This is prefaced with a recounting of historical persecutions of Jews, especially the Holocaust; the emotional and political content is thus contextualized as a regrettable but understandable, and even sometimes

⁴⁰ This is the translation from *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (the passage is from Ps 79:6). The translation in both the traditional and Reform haggadahs is similar to this while the Reconstructionist haggadah presents a non-literal interpretation of the passage.

⁴¹ Although it could be argued that the nations referred to in this passage do not include those that are Christian or Moslem, as both these religious traditions recognize the God of the Hebrew Bible, all three of these haggadahs assume that these groups are also included. The Ma'yan haggadah refers to Jewish communities who recited this plea during the Crusades, when they were persecuted by Christians (101); the Reconstructionist haggadah prefaced the passage with “Help us to pour out our wrath against those who have oppressed us” and positions it immediately after a discussion of the oppression of Jews during the Holocaust (71); the Reform haggadah states that these words were shouted defiantly at neighbors blinded by “prejudice and hatred” (86).

necessary, response to oppression. The text also includes a note on the controversy surrounding the passage; it explains that while some people find it objectionable and would remove it, others insist that it be included so that feelings of rage and revenge are not ignored. The author concludes that “[h]ow we deal with evil and the strong emotions that evil evokes within us brings yet another dimension to our discussion of liberation” (Rec 71).⁴² In the Reform haggadah, the passage has been relegated to a sidebox where it is explained and contextualized within a history of past “times of terror” (Ref 86); in the liturgy itself, it has been replaced by a number of biblical verses against violence and anger. This is the most active and strongest change of the three. Not only is the offending passage excised and marginalized with explanation, in the main text it is replaced with a biblical and hence authoritative injunction to do the opposite. All three texts show an awareness of and a willingness to engage with the very difficult questions raised by the passage regarding relations, past and present, between Jews and their neighbours. They discuss the ways in which historical circumstances can necessitate and justify attitudes and actions that at other times seem reprehensible. Even though the Ma’yan liturgy does not include the recitation of the passage, it clearly, like the other two, positions itself in relation to it. All three haggadahs show different ways of dealing with what many people nowadays consider an offensive attitude. Unlike the traditional haggadah, which not only does not address the problem but actually perpetuates an attitude of ‘us with God against the non-Jew’, none of these three ignore the issue. All three indicate that the audience being addressed considers non-Jews to be an important part of their daily life.

As the discussion of the *oseh shalom* passage shows, the haggadahs also address difference among Jews, and display differing attitudes towards the ‘other’ within—the Jew who is unfamiliar with the tradition, the Jew who does not speak Hebrew, the Jew who is alienated.⁴³

⁴² This passage has been problematic for the Reconstructionist movement from the beginning; it was omitted entirely from the haggadah published by Mordecai Kaplan in 1941.

⁴³ The Jews described here are similar to the second and fourth children in the seder liturgy: the second is the one that separates her/his self from the community, while the fourth is the one that knows nothing about the tradition.

The four haggadahs all make themselves accessible to various practitioners but they do so in different ways, raising the question of intended audience. It is difficult for a person to feel included in the 'us' group if the words of the text are incomprehensible. All four haggadahs are intended for an English-speaking North American audience. Even the traditional haggadah, while obviously primarily a Hebrew text, acknowledges this fact. It is fully translated into English and the instructions are presented in English only.⁴⁴ The other three go further; in addition to the translated (and sometimes transliterated) liturgy and the English ritual instructions, they also offer supplementary material in English. In the Reconstructionist text, the extra material is situated in the margins and mostly on the left hand pages, interspersed with but physically separated from the English translation of the traditional liturgy. The Reform haggadah has many more English additions and these are so integrated into the text that it is impossible to separate them from the traditional liturgy without using a traditional haggadah as a point of comparison. This text also has commentary in sidebars and optional material set apart in enclosed boxes. The Ma'yan haggadah is even more English-oriented than the Reform text: some Hebrew text is retained from the traditional liturgy, but most of the service is in English only. New material is both integrated into the liturgy and presented separately as commentary. The Ma'yan haggadah also differs from the other three in that it was created for two purposes: to be usable as a complete text for a seder as well as to provide excerpts and ideas to supplement a more traditional seder. This further complicates the question of accessibility and audience, as practitioners using the Ma'yan haggadah at a regular seder may be using parts without being familiar with the complete text. The Reconstructionist, Reform, and Ma'yan texts contain a great deal of English material so English-only users will understand most of what they are reciting. But, while the Ma'yan haggadah presents a consistent perspective, the other two are problematic in that different values are

⁴⁴ This is perhaps an indication that those who read Hebrew are more familiar with the tradition and do not require instructions, with the corollary implication that those who need them are more removed and therefore less central; this would then be another example of a hierarchy of access and belonging based on language skills.

espoused in the two languages, and English-only readers will only be aware of this if it is pointed out to them. It does not necessarily follow that they would object or even want to modify the Hebrew. Many of them would probably not be particularly surprised. However, the fact that the readers of the transliterated text in the Reconstructionist haggadah will also be espousing different values than the readers of the Hebrew characters is much more startling.

All four texts are accessible to English-speaking participants; none of them requires a knowledge of Hebrew. But in each of the non-traditional texts there is an obvious attempt to be usable, relevant, and meaningful to the lives and concerns of contemporary practitioners, even those unfamiliar with the traditions. While many practitioners using the traditional haggadah also find the liturgy relevant to their daily lives, they must draw the parallels and insert the contemporary material themselves if they so choose. Practitioners using the other three haggadahs do not have the choice, as the contemporization is an integral part of the texts.

The 'other within' exists in many manifestations: any Jew who feels both attached and alienated to any extent falls into this category. But along with estranged individuals, there are also groups that occupy this ambiguous status. In particular, the position of women in Judaism is simultaneously very much that of insider and outsider. Women are included in the greater community for some purposes and excluded for others. This has resulted in very serious questions for the Jewish tradition: questions regarding the presence/absence of women at foundational moments in the collective memory of the Jewish people, their presence/absence in legal and historical documents purporting to be addressed to and to include the Jewish people, and their active exclusion from many pivotal rituals.⁴⁵ Because of this, many Jewish women have trouble feeling that they truly belong within the Jewish tradition; at the same time they feel attached to and included in some, if not all, of that same tradition. In addition, many feminists have personally experienced exclusion and belittlement, which has resulted in an increased sensitivity

⁴⁵ For a more detailed discussion of these questions see, among others, Plaskow's *Standing Again at Sinai*; Baskin's *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*; Weissler's *Voices of the Matriarchs*.

to and decreased tolerance of such attitudes. Feminist ideology in general has embraced inclusivity and an appreciation of difference as necessary requirements for a just society. The feminist Ma'yan haggadah and the egalitarian Reform haggadah, which was authored by a feminist, both reflect this approach. However, in a less pronounced fashion, even the male-oriented Reconstructionist haggadah exhibits this tendency, as can be seen in the request for all people to be recipients of God's peace and in the contextualization of the 'Pour out your fury' passage. All three haggadahs display evidence that we live in a pluralistic society where tolerance and interfaith respect are valorized. Even the traditional haggadah shows this tendency to some extent, with its increased inclusiveness of women, but this welcome has not been extended beyond the Jewish community. The extra step taken in the Ma'yan and Reform texts is perhaps due to Jewish women's personal experiences as 'the other within'.

C. New Ritual Objects

The new ritual objects linked to women's celebrations of Passover are the orange on the seder plate and Miriam's Cup. These have already been discussed in chapter 4. The traditional and Reconstructionist haggadahs contain no mention of either of these objects; the Ma'yan and Reform texts include both of them and in similar capacities.

The seder plate holds the symbolic foods for the ritual and is placed in a prominent position on the table. The contents of the plate is mandated by tradition, which prescribes the items and their spatial arrangement, and all four haggadahs instruct the practitioners accordingly. The Ma'yan haggadah has a paragraph of detailed explanation for each item, including the orange. Along with a brief history, it specifies that the orange is a new object added by many feminists. The Reform haggadah also includes the orange but presents it as optional. There is a brief paragraph explaining the orange's two-pronged symbolism of representing the inclusion of gay

men and lesbians as well as the full participation of women. A sidebox presents the history of the orange on the seder plate.⁴⁶

Although both these haggadahs include the orange as a ritual object, it is referred to only in the introductions and never mentioned or used in the liturgies. This is in contrast to Miriam's Cup, the other new ritual object. Miriam's Cup is much more prominent and integrated in both these texts. Like the orange, it is first presented in the introduction. In the Reform haggadah, one paragraph explains the Cups of both Elijah and Miriam; they are presented as complementary and parallel objects, each with its accompanying ritual. In the Ma'yan text, there are separate paragraphs for the two Cups and here as well they are presented as parallel objects and symbols. This is explicitly articulated: "Miriam's Cup can be seen as a symbol of all that sustains us through our journeys, while Elijah's Cup is seen as a symbol of a future Messianic time." (Ma 15). The Ma'yan text also has images of Miriam's Cups (taken from a Ma'yan exhibition of 1997) interspersed throughout the book.

As well as being explained in the introductions, Miriam's Cup is also used in the liturgical services. In both, a *kos miriam* ritual has been inserted near the beginning. Interestingly, in light of the discussion regarding language in the previous section, the ritual is presented in Hebrew as well as English even though it is brand new. It would seem that the belonging-sense of many practitioners is strongly attached to Hebrew sounds.

In the Ma'yan version, the ritual is performed following the candle lighting; it consists of an explanation, a declaration, and the passing around of the Cup so that each participant can pour some water into it. The declaration is the one developed by Kol Isha and discussed in chapter 4. The Cup filled with water then sits on the table until the end of the seder, when the participants pass the Cup around again so that everyone can take a sip of water while they sing the song *t'fillat haderech* (May we be blessed as we go on our way) before leaving. Just as Miriam's Well

⁴⁶See chapter 4 for details of the history.

accompanied the Israelites in their wanderings through the desert, so Miriam's Cup accompanies the seder participants in their journey through the haggadah and seder.

The *kos miriam* ritual in the Reform haggadah follows another addition, a blessing for children. The declaration is virtually the same as that of Ma'yan, with minor differences in the English translation. However, this version is presented with two melodies, so that it can be sung if the participants so desire. After the declaration (and/or song), there is an English poem about Miriam and her Well. The instructions are to fill the Cup before the declaration and then to pour some of the water into each participant's cup. In this haggadah the entire ritual is performed near the beginning of the seder.

Further on in the liturgies of both these haggadahs, Miriam is invoked as the complement to Elijah, this time without her Cup. Added to the familiar song *eliyahu hanavi*, in both texts, is a verse in her honour:

מרים הנביאה, עז חמרה בידה
 מרים תרקוד אתנו להגדיל זמרת עולם
 מרים תרקוד אתנו, לתקן את העולם
 במהרה בימנו (היא) תביאנו, אל מי הישועה, אל מי הישועה
mir 'yam han 'vi 'a oz v 'zimra b 'yada
mir 'yam, tirkod itanu, l'hagdil zimrat olam
mir 'yam, tirkod itanu, l'takein et ha-olam
bim 'heira v'yameinu, (hi) t'vi-einu. el mei ha-y'shua. el mei ha-y'shua.
 Miriam the prophet, strength and song are in her hand
 Miriam will dance with us to strengthen the world's song
 Miriam will dance with us to heal the world
 soon, and in our time, she will lead us to the waters of salvation (Ma 102, Ref 88)

The song is included in the Reconstructionist haggadah as well but only with the verse naming Elijah. The traditional haggadah does not include the song in the body of the liturgy at all, situating it on the last page and then only in transliterated Hebrew and, again, referring only to Elijah. This is in contrast with many of the other songs, which, though appended at the end of the haggadah, are still presented in both Hebrew characters and English translation.

The Ma'yan and Reform haggadahs have not eliminated the Elijah ritual and song; these are traditional and recognizable for many of the participants, with a strong connection to their belonging-sense, and would most likely be missed if not present. Instead, they have chosen to imbue the existing ritual with additional meanings, so that it becomes more multi-faceted and multi-leveled. Elijah is still there but he has been joined by Miriam, who is named as prophet alongside him, thus challenging the stereotyped view that privileges male prophets. Nor is the one-sided view replaced by another equally exclusive one, with women as the privileged class, but rather by one that is gender-balanced and egalitarian.

Clearly, the innovation of acknowledging Miriam as prophet does not appear out of context. The recognition of Miriam and her prophethood is an expansion of the traditional recognition granted Elijah and his prophethood. But, although she is brought into the conversation through rituals associated with Elijah, she is also shown as a character with the strength to stand alone. The result is that the ritualizers are given the experience of a strong female presence that balances the existing male presence. In the same way that the orange on the seder plate and Miriam's Cup are placed alongside and among traditional symbols, with which they share many features, so is Miriam partnered with Elijah. In the same way that female metaphors for God serve to invite and welcome women as active equal participants into the rituals and religious practices, so does the inclusion of female prophets and feminine symbols invite Jewish women to become leaders and innovators within their own Jewish tradition.

D. Characters

Another difference between the haggadahs is in the characters they feature. The treatment of groups of characters, such as children and ancestors, has already been discussed. In this section I will examine the way in which specific characters are included.

In the traditional haggadah, the main character in the story of the Exodus is God, portrayed as hero and agent of the narrative. The only other characters present are the ancient rabbis, who

discuss the biblical events and the ways in which they are to be commemorated. Some of the early biblical ancestors from Genesis are mentioned, but briefly and only in the context of explaining how the Israelites ended up in Egypt. The principal human actors in the Exodus narrative are hardly mentioned; in the one passage where Moses is named, he is not a subject or actor in the story but rather the object of the people's action, and not even the principal object but an adjunct to God: "the people revered the Eternal and believed in the Eternal and His servant Moses" (Exod 14:31, cited on p.18). There is no reference at all to Miriam or Aaron. Elijah is named once, during the prayers of the *birkat hamazon*, which are not particular to the Passover liturgy. Pharaoh is the one human who plays a part, although his role is minor. He is referred to several times as the slave-owner (e.g. "We were slaves of Pharaoh" and "they built ... cities for Pharaoh"); although he is also portrayed as the source of persecution against the Jews (e.g. "While Pharaoh decreed only against the males"), the passage is there to highlight the greater evil done by the biblical Laban in earlier times, referred to in the continuation of the sentence ("Laban desired to uproot all"). Other than these, those referred to are not individuals but groups: 'we', 'us', 'the Egyptians'. The haggadah narrative takes the form of a rabbinical discussion interspersed with biblical passages that feature God as agent (Tr 31, 9, 13, and 12 respectively).

In the Reconstructionist haggadah, there is a slight shift in perspective. The basic format has been retained and both God and the rabbis are still the principal actors. Some human characters have been added to the narrative but only in the English commentary; they are also introduced via biblical quotations which gives their inclusion an authoritative justification. Shifrah and Puah, the midwives who saved the Israelite babies from the first death decree of the Pharaoh, are described and named; in a later passage, they are also upheld as exemplars of freedom fighters. Miriam is portrayed in her act of dancing with the women after the crossing of the sea. These three are the only new characters. Aaron is mentioned, but only in the context of being Miriam's brother. Moses has been removed completely; in fact, the passage from Exod 14:31 has been replaced with the one about Miriam dancing and singing (Exod 15:20). Pharaoh is still mentioned in his

capacity as slave owner; he is no longer presented as a foil for Laban's wickedness, but is, instead, shown to be the originator of deliberate persecution: "The first step in Pharaoh's plan was to sow fear and envy of the Israelites."⁴⁷ These changes do not, however, change the basic form of the haggadah narrative; they simply augment it (Rec 39 and 27 respectively).

The Reform haggadah moves the rabbis from their central position. They are still mentioned, but contextualized as teachers who gathered in their own times to question and discuss, thus providing the model for Jews doing the same today. God is still an actor in the narrative, but so are the human characters: Pharaoh, Shifrah, Puah, the father and mother of Moses (they are not named in this text), Moses' sister (who is also not named during the recounting of the story), Pharaoh's (unnamed) daughter, Aaron, and Moses.

The Ma'yan text dislodges the rabbis. They are mentioned, but briefly and in the same context as in the Reform text, as previous teachers. The passage goes on to commemorate actual contemporary teachers: the women who went to pray with a Torah scroll at the Western Wall in Jerusalem in 1988 and subsequently formed the nucleus for the activist group Women of the Wall.⁴⁸ This haggadah limits its narration of the Exodus story to several brief paragraphs, then continues with a more general discussion of oppression and freedom. It commemorates both Miriam and Pharaoh's daughter as fighters against tyranny and, in this, it is consonant with the Reconstructionist and Reform texts. It then goes on to compare the oppression that Sarah inflicted on Hagar with that inflicted on the Israelites by Pharaoh. So, while some of the biblical characters

⁴⁷ The reference to Laban has been omitted entirely from the Reconstructionist haggadah.

⁴⁸ The women who went to the Western Wall in Jerusalem for a prayer service were interrupted by vocal assaults. When subsequent attempts met with vocal and physical opposition while the police stood by, a group of women submitted a petition to the Supreme Court to uphold their rights and provide police protection. The Court asked for a response from the State and in the interim issued an injunction against women praying out loud at the Wall. The Israeli group 'Women of the Wall' and the North American 'International Coalition for the Women of the Wall' have been working since that time to attain this basic religious right. The case has still not been resolved. On May 22, 2000 the Supreme Court did unanimously uphold the rights of women to pray at the Wall out loud and wearing prayer shawls, but the government appealed that ruling and the court subsequently ruled that the government must find a way to satisfy the needs of the women but without disturbing the '*mitpallim*', those who pray there, implying that the women were not 'real' prayers. The government finally responded in April 2003 with the decision that the women should pray at an alternative site (Robinson's Arch), which, however, needed to be prepared for them. As of April 2004, it was still not ready.

belong to the Exodus, others are drawn from different biblical narratives. In effect, the emphasis is changed from the particularity of the Exodus to a more general focus on oppression and resistance. The number of women and their roles as agents is further augmented with the introduction of contemporary women. The four cups of wine traditionally used to punctuate the service are now also dedicated to historical and/or living women. Four different women are selected each year for commemoration at the Ma'yan women's seder; the biographies of all these women are included in the appendix, so that practitioners may select from this group of women if they wish. During the Ma'yan seder, the selected biographies are read as the corresponding cup is blessed.

The difference in narrative characters across the four haggadahs results in a difference in the sense of remoteness or immediacy generated in the practitioners. In the traditional text, where the principal actor is divine and the other characters are the rabbis of ancient times, there is a distance that makes it difficult for many people, myself included, to relate to the text on an intimate level. We are in the realm of the mythological rather than the actual; the characters are not people of our own stature and experiences. We can discuss, we can learn, we can admire, we can even fear, but for many it is not easy to relate to the text in a personal way and to feel included. Even though the haggadah exhorts us to feel as if we were personally experiencing the Exodus, we can only insert ourselves into the text with much imagining and effort.

This is not the case with the Ma'yan text which features not only biblical but contemporary women. The distance has been bridged and it requires little effort for us to feel included. Some of us may not only have heard of the women being commemorated, we may know them personally. Some of us may know, or even be, the Women at the Wall. Some of us may have experienced the oppressions listed in the text, or else our parents may have. The text is no longer describing an 'other'; it has become ours.

The Reform and Reconstructionist texts are situated between the Ma'yan and the traditional haggadahs. The Reconstructionist haggadah brings in a few human characters, so that there is

some acknowledgement of human action and agency in the miraculous story. However, the fact that these are present only in the English additions raises the same question discussed above: are the modifications intended only for the more acculturated practitioners? As well, the reason for the inclusion of only female characters is not explained or obvious. As the haggadah is not women-oriented, the special focus on Shifrah and Puaah is unclear. The Reform haggadah also inserts human agency into the Exodus narrative, but in a way that is more comprehensible and egalitarian. All the major biblical characters are portrayed and this allows us to appreciate the power and diversity of human action and agency. In fact, this haggadah reinforces the theological argument that human agency is required for miracles to occur. The traditional haggadah seems content to leave events in God's hands; the Reform text declares that people need to act as well. The Reconstructionist haggadah does not directly address the question of human agency. And the Ma'yan text insists that women, in particular, can, did, and must act.

E. Activism:

The traditional haggadah tells the story of the Exodus and reports on discussions among the rabbis, discussions stimulated and inspired by the story. The rabbis are depicted as active and vocal participants. Their discussions have served as a model for some contemporary haggadahs to discuss other instances of bondage. Other texts bring in examples of oppression using different methods. The Reconstructionist haggadah, for instance, inserts this additional passage at the beginning of the *maggid* (telling the story) section:

These words, 'Let all who are hungry come and eat,' remind us of our obligation to work for those who cannot participate with us now. We remember the homeless in our community shunned by us as we step around them. We remember those whose lives are oppressed by poverty; we remember the children who continue to die from starvation in a world which produces sufficient food to feed all of its inhabitants. We remember the prisoners of conscience and political refugees, the victims of apartheid and all forms of social injustice - the doors of freedom are shut behind them by the oppressors of their homelands and before them by the heartless in the free world. All these we remember and we set aside this empty chair for them as a symbol of our awareness of their suffering. Our freedom is diminished by their continual bondage and desperation (Rec 11).

The words are powerful and evocative. They remind the practitioners of their privileged position, that basic requirements of food, water, and shelter should not be taken for granted. They remind the practitioners to be compassionate towards those less fortunate, and they urge the practitioners to work for them. And the passage is inclusive: the victims are not limited to the Jewish community. But the passage is primarily commemorative; it stops short of suggesting concrete actions to alleviate the suffering.

The Reform haggadah also includes this commemorative component, and to a greater extent. Throughout the liturgical service are many passages remembering the less fortunate and pointing out injustices. At the same point in the service where the Reconstructionist text places the above passage, the Reform haggadah has a sidebox labeled ‘Seder in Prison’:

The inmates are led from their cells by surly guards into a dingy room filled with folding chairs, a television in the corner, and a bare table set with plastic plates and cups. A ceramic seder plate with ritual foods sits in the center of the table next to a silver kiddush cup filled with grape juice. Another plate holds a pile of square matzot.

How many Jews have gathered in jails and prisons to mark this festival of freedom?
Who is guilty? Who is innocent?

The strains of *Avadim Hayinu* travel down concrete corridors. Under the watchful eye of a guard, one of the prisoners opens the door for Elijah. Every head turns to see if he will really come. And when he does, will freedom follow? (Ref 28)

The juxtaposition of the freedom celebration and the confines of a prison adds another dimension to the discussion of freedom and slavery. This confinement is not historical, mythological, or abstract; it is concrete and immanent. And, although the passage only discusses a group within the Jewish community, the accompanying commentary is more general, reminding the practitioners of the responsibility to do something about hunger, poverty and persecution. It concludes by asking: “How can we open our hearts and communities to those who are hungry or in need of a home? How can you pledge time or money to bring greater justice to the world this year?” (Ref 28). The responsibility is thus personalized and brought into the realm of the individual practitioners.

This haggadah contains other such passages, referencing slaveries, injustices, and oppressions. But these passages, like the one in the Reconstructionist haggadah, are primarily informational. They tell about the injustice, they remind us of the oppression, they commemorate the victims. They may stimulate discussion and may also, hopefully, stimulate action. But they generally stop short of inciting action. They are also situated, for the most part, in sideboxes and in smaller letters in the margins, easily overlooked by participants making their way through the lengthy liturgy of the seder.

The Ma'yan haggadah is different. Interspersed throughout the book are prominent 'Do Something!' boxes containing suggestions for specific actions linked to the theme of the section. Although the idea of social activism may be implied in the other haggadahs, in this one it has been rendered concrete. This is partly due to the stated purpose of this text, which is to function as a ritual text and to also provide ideas and models for on-going action. In this way, this haggadah is a manifestation of the feminist ideal of engaged praxis:

Part of what makes the Haggadah different is the way in which it insists on a connection between our wishes for a better, freer world and our power to make those wishes a reality. This Haggadah tries to bridge intention with action (Ma 11).

Where the passages quoted above have been inserted into the Reconstructionist and Reform haggadahs, the Ma'yan text also has passages remembering those less fortunate, citing statistics regarding poverty and hunger, and urging practitioners to take responsibility and act. In this, it does not differ significantly from the other two. But it also contains a 'Do Something!' box that identifies specific actions:

Do Something! Collect *tzedakah* or *tzedakah* pledges. Bring food to a local shelter. Buy lunch for a homeless person. Approximate how much money you would spend to invite one extra guest to your seder, and donate that money to Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger. Support the Jewish Fund for Justice Women and Poverty Purim Fund. Find out about the Shefa Fund's TZEDEC community investment program. Ask your local women's foundation about other micro-enterprise projects that need support (Ma 53).

Although some of these organizations are specific to New York City, practitioners can easily substitute their own local equivalents. The commemorations and implied responsibilities have

been translated into concrete actions.

This concrete attitude towards activism is apparent not only in the ‘Do Something!’ boxes, it is also embedded in the liturgy. Further on in the *maggid* section of the traditional haggadah, four children (designated as the wise, the contrary, the simple, and the one who doesn’t even know how to inquire) ask questions and are answered in ways that teach them about Jewish practice. Commentary in the margins of the Reconstructionist haggadah probes the reasons behind the different kinds of questions:

Why is it that the wicked child feels excluded? Does he feel alienated due to his own ignorance of the tradition? Is she choosing to distance herself from a form of religious hypocrisy that emphasizes the outward display of ritual but ignores the eternal values? Is this child a challenge or a threat to us? (Rec 18)

The commentary shifts the focus from one of learning the rules and procedures of the established religion to questioning whether that religion has retained its spiritual commitment. While this is certainly noteworthy and significant, it must be pointed out that the commentary is situated in smaller letters in the margins and can be overlooked by practitioners.

The Reform haggadah retains the questions but relegates the traditional answers to smaller letters in the margins. The new answers validate the questioners and their questions:

You are the angry child. What is the source of your anger? Is your place at the table too narrow for your spirit? Open the door and look out, beyond this room, beyond this night. Can you see a freedom that is beyond our sight? (Ref 40)

Like the Reconstructionist version, the focus is on the relationship between the individual and the community. The text suggests that there is room within the group to accommodate many different kinds of individuals, a statement of intra-community diversity and pluralism.

The additions in both the Reconstructionist and the Reform haggadahs are substantially innovative in their welcoming of diversity within the Jewish community, but they do this in general terms and by focusing on individuals. The Ma’yan haggadah focuses on an entire marginalized group. It uses the structure of the original text but the questions, answers, and teachings are all about contemporary women’s issues. The section begins by noting that the

traditional text “ignores the possibility of female students and teachers”. It then goes on to ask “The daughter in search of a usable past. *Ma hi omeret?* what does she say?” and answers with: “...teach her that history is made by those who tell the tale. If Torah did not name and number women, it is up to her to fill the empty spaces of our holy texts” (Ma 61). A specific action is recommended, an action that is, in fact, being performed by many contemporary Jewish feminist activists. The reader of this text is thus provided with models, both of actions and persons, for redressing the secondary position of the marginalized group to which she belongs. It is not a matter of the individual fitting into the group, or even of the group accommodating the particularity of the individual, as is suggested by the two liberal haggadahs. According to this text, it is the sub-group that must act to change the entire community and their own under-privileged position.

Other parts of the Ma'yan haggadah address smaller groups in desperate need of help. The traditional haggadah explains bitter herbs (*maror*): “They are eaten to recall that the Egyptians embittered the lives of our forefathers [‘ancestors’ in the 1993 edition] in Egypt”. The Reconstructionist haggadah supplements this with an explanation in the margin: “The taste of the maror reminds us that slavery often begins sweetly but always ends in bitterness”, but does not change either the focus or significance of the bitter herbs. The Reform haggadah also begins with the bitterness in Egypt, but expands the focus to include oppression in general: “Cruelty, violence and oppression plague every human society, darken our world, embitter our lives, and challenge us to raise our voices in the name of justice.” Not only is oppression in general castigated, but the reader is encouraged to, at the very least, speak out against it. In the Ma'yan haggadah, this encouragement has been expanded to an incitement to specific action, at the same time that the focus has been reduced to particular oppressed persons. The liturgy contains a reading on bitterness and Jewish women: “This is the way to experience bitterness: recall the pain of exclusion that is part of the legacy of Jewish women.” It quotes historical Jewish women activists Bertha Pappenheim and Henrietta Szold, and then asks: “And what if I've known enough pain

this year? And what if exclusion is not just a memory for me?" The 'Do Something!' box in this section highlights the plight of battered wives and *agunot*, chained women whose lives are embittered because of the gendered inequality embedded in Jewish law. The blessing on *maror* that follows is thus rendered more poignant and directly relevant to contemporary women's experiences: it is about specific sexist oppressions occurring today in the Jewish community and outside it, as well as and at the same time that it is about slavery in Egypt (Tr 23; Rec 19; Ref 64; Ma 86, respectively).

The traditional haggadah contains the seeds of social activism. Both the form and the content provide a framework on which it is easy to impose a concern for contemporary issues and an advocacy for bettering societal conditions. Although the ancient liturgy does not take that step, the other haggadahs do. All three name specific injustices and suggest that it is our responsibility to work towards their elimination. The Reform haggadah is more adamant than the Reconstructionist text, positioning these passages in more central and prominent locations on the physical page. But it is the Ma'yan haggadah that goes farthest, moving from urging to demanding. It is this text that places less privileged and oppressed women directly in our gaze, using pictures as well as words, and tells us what to do to alleviate their suffering. It is this text that insists that discussion is not enough, that it must be accompanied by unambiguous and determined action.

F. Summary

The Ma'yan haggadah is a brand new text and a radical departure from the tradition. Although it has strong and obvious connections to the traditional haggadah, it is also obviously infused by a feminist perspective and focus on women. Intended for an audience of North American Jewish feminists, it makes no apologies for its stance and choices. While its primary use as a complete text is at women's seders, some regular seders use portions extracted from its

feminist model.⁴⁹ The use of the Ma'yan extracts brings in elements of feminism and subverts the androcentric hegemony of the Jewish ritual tradition. Since this is a relatively new and undocumented phenomenon, in the questionnaires distributed at the Ma'yan seders I asked about subsequent use of the haggadah and the extent to which this exchange occurs. The responses will be discussed in chapter 6.

The other haggadahs are used at 'regular' seders, i.e. where no particular sub-group is the focus of the text or ritual, at least not in theory. But the older version of the traditional haggadah and the current Artscroll haggadah are not so inclusive. Based on the model from antiquity, a model formulated when androcentrism was the norm, they show no awareness of women. The pronouns are male; the ancestors and characters featured in the text are male; the four children are male; God is male. Women are invisible and can only consider themselves addressed and included if they read themselves into the masculine text, imagining that the male 'they' includes females as well, that the male rabbis intended to include women in their formulations, that the male God-King is really non-gendered and is interested in 'His' female subjects as well. They must believe that women have also been involved in the tradition since its inception, affirming, with Judith Plaskow, that women were present at the foundational Sinai events which follow the Exodus story, even though the biblical narrative does not explicitly include them.⁵⁰

The newer Orthodox and the two liberal modern haggadahs lie between these and the Ma'yan text in their treatment of gender. While the newer Goldberg text does not go so far as to actually include women, unlike its predecessor it does not actively exclude them. The language referring

⁴⁹ Although not as radically innovative as the women's seders, these rituals do tend to be fairly modernized and non-traditional.

⁵⁰ When Moses is preparing the people of Israel to receive the Torah, he says to them "Be ready for the third day: do not go near a woman" (Exod 19:15). This instruction seems clearly intended for men only; even with the extremely doubtful possibility that he included lesbians in his injunction, it would still not include heterosexual women. This raises the question of whether the women were present for the receiving of the Torah, for the covenant with God. Plaskow examines this question in her book *Standing Again at Sinai* and concludes that "Of course we were at Sinai; how is it then that the text could imply we were not there?" (27). Plaskow recognizes that she is not alone in either her question or her conclusion; she refers to both the Talmud and Rashi having reached a similar inference.

to God remains exclusively masculine, but the English terms for the participants are gender-neutral.

The Reconstructionist text is somewhat more inclusive. Like the Goldberg haggadah, it retains exclusively masculine language for God and uses gender-neutral references for humans in the English translations. Unlike the Goldberg text, it also includes female characters: Miriam, Shifrah, and Puah. Although this seems a positive step from a feminist perspective, it is not unmixed. These are the only characters named in the portion dedicated to the Exodus narrative. While Miriam, because of her central role, seems a likely candidate for inclusion, the presence of the midwives is not so easily understood, especially as they are the only other new characters, female or male, to be mentioned. Since their singularity is neither obvious nor explained, there is a possibility that they were inserted so that the creators and/or users could claim that the ‘women’s issue’ was being addressed, and their inclusion becomes a token gesture rather than an act of substance.⁵¹ Despite the presence of a few female characters and a few egalitarian translations, women are still marginalized in this text.

The Reform haggadah is very different: women are central and obviously present. But, unlike the Ma’yan haggadah, this is not a women-oriented text, and women do not predominate.⁵² The Reform text presents a world in which there are social problems but in which equality of gender has been achieved, in which women and men co-exist in harmony as normative, central, equal, and active participants. This contrasts with the stance of the Ma’yan haggadah, which presents the world we live in as one in which gender is a source and instrument of oppression. The Reform worldview portrays gender issues as resolved, requiring no further action. The Ma’yan text, on the other hand, exhorts its readers to continue to actively strive to create a society in which the

⁵¹ Questions concerning women’s roles in Jewish tradition were already being raised at the time this haggadah was created. Women’s seders and haggadahs were already in existence and it is quite probable that they were major factors for the inclusion.

⁵² It is not a women’s text and is not intended for use at a women’s ritual. However, this was the text used at the women’s seder held at the Temple Emanu-el Beth Sholom in Montreal in 2003.

ideal of gender as merely an expression of difference among equals is realized.

The Reform haggadah presents an ideal. By its existence and its use, *The Open Door* is a step towards that ideal future. Elwell herself considers her creation of inclusive texts to be one aspect of the feminist project of transforming Judaism. The support of the Central Conference of American Rabbis for her haggadah and the many copies sold since its appearance in 2003 is encouraging and suggests that many others share Elwell's optimistic outlook. But because of its very fairness and balanced perspective, this haggadah does not actually address or redress the inequities that exist today. It may even, to some extent, help perpetuate the myth that there are no more inequities to redress, that the 'women's issue' has been resolved. While not disagreeing with Elwell's assessment, I am uneasy with the integrated approach; it is possible that the very inclusivity expressed by her text might serve to once again render women invisible. For me, there is a positive and even greater value in the way Ma'yan's feminist *The Journey Continues* keeps the issues in front of us and, at the same time, provides a vehicle to express and act out feminist Judaism/ Jewish feminism. However, *The Open Door* and *The Journey Continues* are not mutually exclusive. Judaism has room and need for both the example Reform sets and the activism Ma'yan demands.

The attitudes of the four haggadahs towards inclusivity also differ in other ways. The traditional haggadah, even the more recent edition, remains firmly anchored at the one extreme of the particular vs. general continuum. Its narrative of liberation concerns and is concerned for the Jewish people, and seems unaware of the non-Jewish world except as a source of oppression and as a target of Jewish fury. The only possible exception is the passage inviting the hungry and needy to the seder, as it does not specify the range or limits of the invitation. However, the haggadah is somewhat pluralistic when it comes to the Jewish community, at least in terms of gender. Belying the often cited Orthodox claim of immutability, a comparison between the haggadah and its earlier incarnation, or between the Goldberg and the contemporaneous Artscroll

haggadah, shows that the Orthodox text has, in fact, changed. While not explicitly welcoming women, it is no longer excluding them either.

The other three haggadahs direct their inclusivity both within and without the Jewish community. They have shifted their positions along the continuum away from the particular and towards the general; they all contain allusions to the rest of the world and encourage their audiences to alleviate the suffering of all peoples. That this is a controversial area can be surmised from the ways in which the various passages are presented. The Reconstructionist haggadah's insertion of a pluralistic phrase into the transliterated Hebrew and the English but not into the Hebrew text itself is especially problematic, as accessibility to the original Hebrew becomes the determining criterion for espousing values. Similarly, the different values in the Hebrew and English passages in both the Reconstructionist and Reform haggadahs raises serious questions regarding community composition and representation. Who speaks for and makes decisions for these communities, Hebrew speakers or English-only speakers? The treatment of inclusivity within the Jewish community is much less problematic in both these texts. Even though the Reconstructionist haggadah is not women-oriented or explicitly inclusive of women, it does not exclude them and does attempt to use gender-neutral terminology for the most part. As already mentioned, the Reform haggadah is consistently egalitarian and explicitly includes women as well as men. The Ma'yan text is also somewhat inclusive. Although a women-oriented text, it does not exclude or omit men; in fact, it occasionally even expands their participation, as can be seen in the extension of *eshet hayil* to refer to men as well as to women.

For some practitioners, there are passages that must be removed or at least counterbalanced before they can feel at home at the ritual. *sh'foch chamatcha* ("Pour out your fury") produces such a strong sense of unease in some people that it outweighs the sense of familiarity. The situation is not unlike that faced by the ancient rabbis who, due to a physical constraint, needed to find a replacement for animal sacrifice which was no longer possible. Contemporary practitioners who cannot tolerate the passage are responding to an ideological situation, but the process is

similar. And the three contemporary haggadahs show various suggestions for softening the impact of what has become a problematic passage, reflecting an awareness of the issue and of modern sensibilities.

All four of these texts show the influence of the same factors that gave rise to the women's seders: modernity, civil rights movements, feminism, etc. Although the influence of feminism is not always explicit or even consistent, it is perceptible in all of them. The effects of traditional practices on the women's rituals are obvious and linear: the traditional ritual and text are the models from which the women's versions derive. But the reciprocal influences are also there. Regular seders and haggadahs have changed in varying degrees in response to feminist ideology and practice. Some have begun to incorporate gender sensitivity, neutral or feminine God-language, inclusivity, and the visible and active participation of women. This is apparent in all four haggadahs discussed in this chapter, haggadahs that are situated in different denominational loci of the Jewish community and thus indicative of the range of feminist influence.

Feminism has effected significant changes in all these texts, and the transformation I set out to examine seems to be already in progress. This is not to say that all seder practitioners have become feminists. In fact, as we shall see in the next chapter, not even all the participants at women's seders are feminist. The responses to the questionnaires reveal a wide diversity of attitudes and approaches towards ideology and towards ritual practice. This data reinforces the conclusion in this chapter that different participants require different parts of the traditional text to be present or absent in order for the ritual to feel satisfying, as the belonging-sense of each ritualizer is unique.

Chapter 6. Questionnaires and Interviews

In the preceding chapters, I presented the history, objects, and texts associated with women's seders and it seems clear that oranges, Miriam's Cups, women's haggadahs, and women's seders are all increasingly present in North American Jewish women's ritual worlds, at least as options. However the discussion has been based mostly on information from published texts. While these often include either first- or second-hand accounts of actual ritual occurrences, the accounts are filtered through the lens of author and/or editor. They are informative, interesting, and useful, but are limited in several ways. One limitation is the fact that they portray only a small number of similar experiences. Another is that we are inevitably presented with snapshots frozen in time; because the ritual is still so volatile, the more time that passes, the less the depictions correspond to contemporary experiences. In order to refresh the picture and to gain access to unfiltered and current first-hand narratives, I distributed questionnaires at various women's seders. The questionnaires were designed to gather information on the participants and events, and also on the way that these new rituals are experienced and perceived by practitioners.

It is important to note that many of the respondents were already aware of the significance of the new ritual and of themselves as innovators, transformers, and transmitters. They themselves had written, discussed, and read about their roles in the constantly changing realm of Jewish ritual and practice, and about the historical, sociological, and theological implications of their involvement. This self-reflexiveness was true of both participants and organizers. On the questionnaire, I asked what the seder signified for the attendee, and whether s/he considered the ritual to have been a success. I also interviewed the main organizer(s) of the institutionally-hosted seders regarding their intentions and whether their objectives were realized. As the detailed discussion in the rest of this chapter will show, both often responded with cogent analyses indicating that they had already thought about these questions. As I myself was one of the

organizers of an 'Independent' seder from which I gathered questionnaires, I have also included my own observations.

I distributed the questionnaires to four different groups. Three consisted of attendees at large public committee-organized institutionally-hosted women's seders, while the fourth group (Independent)¹ comprised a variety of individuals from across Canada who had attended women's seders and with whom I came into contact through posted notices or by word-of-mouth. The information obtained from the questionnaires and interviews is presented in this chapter.²

The first group participated in the Ma'yan women's seders in New York in 2001. Approximately 500 people attended each of the four consecutive evenings. The questionnaires were distributed to all the participants along with the haggadahs. I was personally present at the first two seders, where I spoke about my project and invited participants to fill out the questionnaire. As people were leaving, I stood at the door, collecting questionnaires and reminding those who had not filled one out to do so and send it to me. On the other two evenings, Eve Landau, director of Ma'yan, spoke on my behalf. Most of the completed questionnaires were handed in immediately; some were submitted by mail shortly after. In total, I received 798 responses from the approximately 2000 participants over the four nights.

The second group consists of the approximately 200 people who attended the Na'amat women's seder in Montreal in 2001. I did not distribute the questionnaires at the seder because the organizers thought there were too many other things going on and that it would be overwhelming for the participants to fill out a questionnaire as well. I mailed the questionnaires to the participants the following week; Na'amat provided the mailing list and wrote an accompanying letter encouraging the attendee to fill out and return the questionnaire. I received 53 responses.

¹ For the rest of this dissertation, this group of respondents will be referred to as 'Independent'.

² The seders themselves are described in chapter 3.

The third group attended the Hadassah-WIZO women's seder in Toronto in 2002, at which approximately 150 people were present. My questionnaire was not placed on the tables along with the haggadahs and other materials because the organizers had their own evaluation form and did not want theirs confused with mine. Marla Spiegel, the chairperson of the organizing committee, mentioned my project during her speech, and I handed out the questionnaires as people were leaving. I suggested that they fill them out immediately and 15 people did so. Others promised to send them, and I subsequently received another 7, bringing the total to 22.

The fourth group consists of individuals who responded to the notices I placed in newspapers and magazines, with university Hillel associations, and on Internet listserves, as well as those who heard of the project by word of mouth. In all the notices, I invited people who had attended a women's seder to respond, and I mentioned that I was looking specifically for people who had attended women's seders in Canada (as I was especially interested in the Canadian context). I also brought questionnaires to my own women's seder. I sent questionnaires to all the people who contacted me, and most of them were filled out; I received 49.

The questionnaire response rates differed significantly between the three institutionally-organized groups. Approximately 40% of the Ma'yan group filled out the questionnaires, as compared with 27% for Na'amat and 15% for Hadassah-WIZO. Several factors may account for the variations. First is the way the questionnaires were distributed. At the Ma'yan seders, the questionnaires were placed on the tables along with all the other seder materials, and the participants were specifically urged to fill them out. The organizers' obvious interest and enthusiasm for my project positioned the questionnaire as an integral and important aspect of the seder. This was not the case at the other two. The Na'amat participants did not even hear about the questionnaire until after the event. Even though it was accompanied by a letter from the seder organizer, it was not given the same central focus as it was by Ma'yan. At the Hadassah-WIZO event, the questionnaire distributed with the seder materials was the feedback form from the organization itself. Even though the chair of the organizing committee mentioned my project in

her speech, the fact that the participants did not have the questionnaire in front of them positioned it as secondary.

There was also a time factor. The Ma'yan participants had the whole evening to fill in their responses. The Hadassah-WIZO participants, on the other hand, were handed the questionnaires as they were leaving. Although I urged them to fill them out immediately, it was late on a weekday evening and they were on their way home. For those who took the questionnaires with them, as well as for the Na'amat attendees who received theirs in the mail, there was the additional fact of having to mail it back.

The different response rates may also be related to attitudes towards academic studies. Not everyone is interested in participating in research projects. At the Ma'yan seders, especially the two at which I was present, the attendees were told about the project by someone (myself or Eve Landau) actively engaged with it, and they were urged to personally contribute to the success of the project. Many of the participants subsequently spoke to me about my study and told me they were eager to see my results. In the cases of Na'amat and Hadassah-WIZO, the only people exposed to this personal element were those individuals to whom I spoke directly about my project. Even though the cover letter for Na'amat enthusiastically explained the project, it is probable that most recipients did not read it carefully. At Hadassah-WIZO, I tried to speak to as many participants as possible, especially on their way out, but did not manage to reach that many.

Differing attitudes towards feminism may have also played a part. The questionnaires were presented to all the groups as part of a feminist study; as not everyone is comfortable with, or in agreement with, feminist ideology, this may have contributed to some participants ignoring the questionnaires.³ Because the four groups differ in their relationship with feminism, and because, as I noted in chapter 1, the perspective of any particular practitioner can not be assumed to coincide with either that of this researcher or that of the original creators of the ritual, it is

³ Difficulties with the term feminism and the feminist ideology were discussed in chapter 1.

important to note and analyze how the ritualizers use, or avoid, terms such as ‘feminist’ and ‘feminism’, and to discuss their own understanding of the issues.

The controversy surrounding these terms and beliefs is evident in the responses I received from practitioners. The interviews with the organizers indicate that the three hosting institutions themselves also have varying levels of comfort with feminism and ‘feminism’. The four groups were not consistent about either ideology or terminology. Again, it is important to understand that the presence or absence of the word is sometimes, but not always, linked to an explicit and conscious application or rejection of feminist ideology in the ritual and the haggadah.

The Na’amat group’s position in relation to feminism is ambiguous. Na’amat Canada (a member of the international Na’amat network) was created in 1925 and, in its current literature, describes “members of Na’amat” as “[t]he first to embrace feminist ideals”.⁴ This quote is immediately followed by a picture of Golda Meir, one of Na’amat’s earliest members. Here feminism is equated with the achievement of power by a woman. But calling Golda Meir a feminist is problematic; although she was the first (and is still the only) woman to have been elected prime minister of Israel, she did not advocate a feminist agenda and, in fact, according to a leading Jewish feminist, was the kind of “woman who climbs to the top, then pulls the ladder up behind her.... [A]t the end of her tenure her Israeli sisters were no better off than they had been before she took office.”⁵ Nonetheless, Na’amat does publicly identify itself with a feminism that is linked to a reference to Golda Meir. But when we look at the specifics of the seder itself, any public use of the term ‘feminist’ is missing: neither the haggadah nor the promotional literature for the seder used the term ‘feminism’ or any of its derivatives. When I asked organizer Paula Weitzman about this absence, she explained:⁶

When we describe it informally, we call it a women’s or feminist seder. But for us, you know, for our definition of feminism, it is the promotion of equality for women. In all

⁴ www.naamat.com/mission.htm, accessed July 2004.

⁵ Letty Cottin Pogrebin, “Golda Meir”, 903.

⁶ The following discussion and all subsequent quotes by Paula Weitzman are extracted from a personal interview I held with her in 2002.

aspects of her life. Politically, economically, professionally, in her family. So that's our perception. And ... the word feminist is sometimes politically loaded, and people respond to the word, so rather than to get into that kind of an argument, [we] call it a women's seder.

She went on to say that "I use [the word 'feminist'] informally when I describe it." But when I asked about the difference between the Na'amat and Ma'yan haggadahs in regard to the use of feminist terminology, she responded:

I don't see a place for the word 'feminism' in the haggadah—just because the whole haggadah is feminist. You don't have to label it, you don't have to define it. It is *all* about women. It's about women historically, it's about women today, it's about the issues today.... So to have to label it and define it as such is, for me, irrelevant.

I asked whether the difference was simply a question of labels or whether it indicated a deeper difference in attitude and ideology, and she replied that

Na'amat, since the very beginning, has been a feminist organization that promoted women's rights and it helped the status of women through programming and services.... [W]ell, you know, you can start defining the semantics of what feminism means.

Weitzman consistently affirmed an affinity between Na'amat and feminism. However she found the terminology problematic, whether for herself or for her colleagues. In her perception, it was both "politically loaded" and divisive. This sensitivity seems to be borne out in that her choice of a more neutral reference, i.e. 'women's seder', also caused some discomfort within her organization. Even this, perhaps less political and more descriptive, term was controversial:

[I]n the very beginning, there was some resistance to [the term 'women's seder'] from certain very conservative pockets here. And there was: "What, this is going to be a gay event in Na'amat?" And it certainly is not a gay event. Although certainly anybody is welcome. But it is a woman's event. It's a Jewish women's event.

In Na'amat's seder, in their haggadah, and in their promotional literature, feminism and 'feminism' were never identified as such. Whatever feminist ideology was present remained publicly unacknowledged; according to the organizer, the participants would have found allegiance to such concepts unacceptable.

Hadassah-WIZO (Toronto) is in many ways similar to Na'amat (Montreal) in being a long-established women's organization with a fairly conservative membership. The term 'feminism' was also conspicuously missing from their seder, haggadah, and literature. In Hadassah-WIZO, as

in Na'amat, the main organizer was apparently considerably more radical than much of the membership and even of the organizing committee. Marla Spiegel was also younger than most of the Hadassah-WIZO membership, although the members of her particular chapter shared her demographics: "20-something, downtown, women's, young women's, active professional chapter, that's a pretty good description of our group."⁷ She was a member of the committee for Hadassah-WIZO's first women's seder in 2001 when, as with Na'amat, even the term 'women's seder' was too difficult for some members:

I was the youngest committee member by 20 years. There was a definite generational gap that I experienced. And so last year's wasn't a feminist seder. They wouldn't even call it a women's seder in the end. On the invitation they called it a 'more enhanced' seder.

In 2002 (the year of this study), Spiegel became chair of the planning committee and ran into similar difficulties over terminology. The committee did welcome women-oriented content, but only by completely avoiding the problematic term:

I was consciously careful not to use the word feminism around my committee, knowing that some of them would probably knee jerk against it. So I never used that word. I like the word. I identify as a feminist, but I saw that several members of the organization [committee] were uncomfortable. And when it did come up in the readings that I collected and presented to them, as "let's do this reading", there was a heated discussion over the word feminism.... If you're not labeling it as feminist, you're ok. There's something about putting that label on.... So they really didn't want to use that word. But this year [2002] definitely they were absolutely set on celebrating women's part ... they were *very* fine with that, they were very positive.

Difficulties with the term 'women's seder' did not arise in 2002 because organizers decided to make the event an 'educational evening', entitled 'Women and Passover: Past, Present, and Future', rather than a complete seder. Ironically, this solution resulted in the introduction of a great deal of feminist content. In the first half of the evening, the invited speaker was Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, an avowed and committed feminist. Her talk was not only women-oriented but

⁷ This quote and the following discussion and all subsequent quotes from Marla Spiegel are extracted from a personal interview I held with her in 2002.

explicitly feminist, and she used the term itself numerous times.⁸ Perhaps because this was presented and perceived in the context of education, rather than ritual, there was no obvious negative reaction from the audience. However, in the second half, which was the seder, or ritual, portion of the evening, references to feminism were completely absent. In effect, the overt feminist content was kept at arms length and the ritual components were completely free of feminist terminology.

Ma'yan is a feminist organization that publicly identifies itself as such; all its activities are similarly identified and have been since its inception in 1993. It does not have chapters which meet regularly, as do Na'amat and Hadassah-WIZO; instead, it sponsors projects and public activities, one of which is the annual women's seder. The use of the term 'feminist' is taken for granted and the 2001 ritual was titled and publicly advertised as a "Ma'yan Feminist seder".⁹

Both Eve Landau and Barbara Dobkin, the co-founders of the organization, consistently referred to the ritual as a 'feminist seder' during our interviews:

Doing a community feminist seder that was open was very much the first thing, the first public project that we talked about doing as an organization... The organization was focused on really more feminist than women stuff.¹⁰

At the Ma'yan seder, feminist terms and content were not only visible, they were highlighted. But, once again, the views of the organizers did not necessarily reflect the perceptions of the participants. Data from the questionnaires (see Figure 4 below) suggest that participants viewed this more as a women's than a feminist event, even though they were attending a seder clearly labeled as feminist. The source of this disjunction is not clear. It could be that the participants did not find the content sufficiently feminist; it could be that questions regarding feminism being asked within the context of an academic study made respondents wary of the researcher's

⁸ In fact, it was Goldstein's (serendipitous from Spiegel's point of view) availability that prompted the change in format. The biographical reference to her book, *ReVisions: Seeing Torah through a Feminist Lens*, accounted for the only occurrence of the term 'feminist' in all the literature for this event.

⁹ "Seder 2001", *Journey Winter 2001*, 53.

¹⁰ This and all subsequent quotes from Eve Landau are extracted from a personal interview I held with her in 2002.

interpretation of the term 'feminist'; it could be that the seder's feminist content was much less important to them than their participation in a communal women's event. Whatever the reasons, even at this explicitly feminist seder, divergent valuations of feminism and 'feminism' seem to have been at play.

The Independent seders varied from group to group in their feminist orientation and use of feminist terms. One example is the Har Kodesh ritual of 2002, for which I was one of the co-organizers. Although the view presented here is my own it is shared, to differing degrees, by my co-ritualizers. Similar to Ma'yan, feminism at this seder was not only visible, it formed the infrastructure of the entire ritual. However, there was no haggadah or other text, and the only promotional literature was a notice in the monthly bulletin sent to all members of the group. Like the Na'amat seder, this event was referred to as a 'women's' rather than a 'feminist' seder. However, this was in no way intended to de-emphasize the feminist orientation. Rather, it was an intentional choice to foreground particular women and their particular issues; the feminist ideology that inspired the process was assumed. This idea (that "what we are doing is by definition feminist and therefore doesn't need to be labeled") is evocative of Paula Weitzman's statements regarding the absence of any feminist terminology at Na'amat's seder and in their haggadah. The resemblance underscores my point about the fluidity of definitions of feminism and about how carefully one has to look at the relation of the participants to feminist terminology and ideology. For Na'amat and Hadassah-WIZO, whatever the organizers' intentions, it is clear that many of the participants were at the very least uneasy with associations to feminism, and avoidance of feminist terms allowed them a more comfortable atmosphere. In the case of Har Kodesh, the idea of feminism was, in fact, embraced by a majority of the participants, and there was no need to spell out the connection.

The four groups had many different interpretations of, and attitudes towards, feminism and 'feminism', and the respondents within each group held many different positions on the continuums of interpretation and attitude. By leaving the term undefined, the questionnaire did

not project or impose any particular interpretation of 'feminism'—it was left to each respondent to supply her/his own meaning. It is unlikely that any participant took the extreme position of rejecting equality for women, but most of the other points along the continuum were probably held by some of them. Some were uncomfortable or uneasy with the ideology, or parts of it; some disliked the terminology. At the same time, others actively and enthusiastically embraced both ideology and label. All these contradictory attitudes were present in the multitude of questionnaire responses—my discussion will try to deconstruct and untangle them.

The four questionnaires are basically the same (see Appendices 1–4); minor variations will be described where relevant. Questions are grouped in thematic sections: the first establishes demographics; the second investigates respondents' relationships to the women's seder (both in practical terms and on the level of personal significance); and the third is concerned with specific after-effects that the experience of women's seders had on respondents' participation in traditional seders. In addition, the questionnaire distributed to the Independent group has a section on the form and content of the seder itself; the results from that section were summarized in chapter 3. This section was not required for the other three, as I attended and observed those seders myself (they are also described in chapter 3).¹¹

The response rates highlight a critical point. The percentage of the participants who responded was less than 50% for each of the three institutionally-hosted seders; it ranged from a high of 40% for Ma'yan to a low of 15% for Hadassah-WIZO. These numbers, especially the latter one, are so low that the responses cannot be taken as representative of the entire group. Even for the Ma'yan group, with 40%, this would be a questionable procedure. The respondents were self-selecting and it is very possible that, in each group, the participants who chose to respond to the questionnaire were the ones who were most engaged with and interested in the significance of the ritual; they may even be the only ones who made changes to their regular

¹¹ The Na'amat version also included several questions regarding the person's activities in the Jewish community, which were added at the request of the Na'amat executive and are not relevant to my thesis.

seders afterwards. The responses therefore need to be examined very carefully with this limitation constantly in mind: respondents provided information only about themselves.

The Independent group's response rate was very different, but the same limitation is present. I received 49 responses, about 95% of the total who contacted me. But there were, without a doubt, more than 49 people in Canada who had participated in women's seders. The people who contacted me were those I managed to reach. A disproportionate number came from my own women's seder, which was the only Independent one at which I distributed questionnaires. Again, each respondent only represented her/his self.

Besides the response percentage being much higher for the Ma'yan group, the absolute numbers were also much higher. For this reason, I did not combine all the responses into a 'total' category, as the Ma'yan responses, with their disproportionate weighting, would have skewed the data and obscured differences between and commonalities among the groups.

No attempt was made either to access a random sample of the population or to provide a control group against which to measure the responses. I do not claim that these results can be extrapolated to provide a reflection of the Jewish population in general, or even of all those who attend women's seders. These questionnaires were designed to illuminate the processes by which individuals transform their own ritual practices. With extreme caution, these individual stories can be combined into the beginnings of a picture of who attends these seders, how they are affected by the experience, and how they, in turn, effect the transformation of their religious traditions.

The responses to the questions are summarized below. For the most part, they appear in the same order as on the questionnaires, but some have been presented out of sequence for logical reasons. The option chosen by the most respondents in each group is highlighted.

A. Demographics

Table 1: *Gender*

	Ma'yan		Independent	
	number	%	number	%
female	767	96.1	47	95.9
male	22	2.8	0	0
didn't answer	9	1.1	2	4.1
Total	798	100	49	100

This question did not appear on the Na'amat and Hadassah-WIZO questionnaires as they were women-only events. Even though both of these women's organizations hold other events where men are welcome, their women's seders were for women. The Independent seders attended by the respondents varied: some included men and others did not. The Ma'yan seder was open to both women and men. As Eve Landau explained,

[T]he biggest discussion that was always sitting like an elephant in the middle of the table was : "Was this exclusively for women?"... The compromise was that any man that wanted to come would be welcome, but our priority was that ... it was more important for women to have this experience.¹²

The results show that the overwhelming majority of respondents at the Ma'yan and Independent seders were female. My observation of the Ma'yan seders I attended confirms this as being accurate for the entire group. At the Ma'yan seders, the men who were present came with women, mostly with female family members.¹³ At Hadassah-WIZO, one woman did bring her husband, even though it was a women-only event; no-one asked him to leave. Also, as mentioned in chapter 3, at the Hadassah-WIZO event male musicians were hired, albeit unintentionally. In all the groups and at all the women's seders, most participants were female.

¹² Personal interview with Eve Landau, 2001.

¹³ This is ascertained from the results of the question below which asked: *Did you come alone? with friends? with family members?* The responses from all the male respondents show that none had come by himself.

Table 2: *Would you like the seder to be open to male attendees?*

	Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO	
	number	%	number	%
yes	6	11.3	13	59.1
no	45	84.9	8	36.4
don't care	1	1.9	1	4.5
didn't answer	1	1.9	0	0
Total	53	100	22	100

For the women-only seders (Na'amat and Hadassah-WIZO), I asked whether the attendees would have liked the seder to be open to men as well. The Na'amat respondents overwhelmingly preferred that the event be restricted to women. Coupled with the organization's (and presumably the members') ambiguous stance towards feminism, this result suggests that the desire to ritualize in a women-only environment was not necessarily linked to an ideological preference, at least not in the group who chose to respond. The Hadassah-WIZO results were opposite. Although they attended a women-only event, for 59% of the respondents, men would have been welcome, i.e. their absence was not a necessary characteristic of the seder.

The difference in the figures of Na'amat and Hadassah-WIZO may reflect a different orientation among members of the two organizations in terms of celebrating exclusively with women. It is also possible that the respondents were mostly non-members and that there is no reflection on the organizations themselves. As Table 3 shows, Na'amat respondents were equally divided between members and non-members, whereas Hadassah-WIZO respondents were primarily members.

Table 3: *Are you a member of xxx? (where xxx is either Na'amat or Hadassah-WIZO)*

	Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO	
	number	%	number	%
yes	23	43.4	15	68.2
no	23	43.4	7	31.8
didn't answer	7	13.2	0	0
Total	53	100	22	100

Membership may be a determining factor in the willingness to share the event with men. A larger number of Hadassah-WIZO respondents were members, and a larger number of Hadassah-WIZO respondents wanted the event open to men. Their preference may also be connected to the fact that this event was advertised as primarily educational rather than celebratory, and some respondents may have wanted the learning to be available regardless of gender.

Table 4: *Ethnic background*

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Ashkenazi	677	84.8	47	88.7	19	86.4	42	85.7
Sephardi	21	2.6	3	5.7	0	0	2	4.1
Ashkenazi/Sephardi	10	1.3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mizrachi	3	.4	0	0	0	0	0	0
other	34	4.2	1	1.9	3	13.6	3	6.1
didn't answer	53	6.6	2	3.8	0	0	2	4.1
Total	798	100	53	100	22	100	49	100

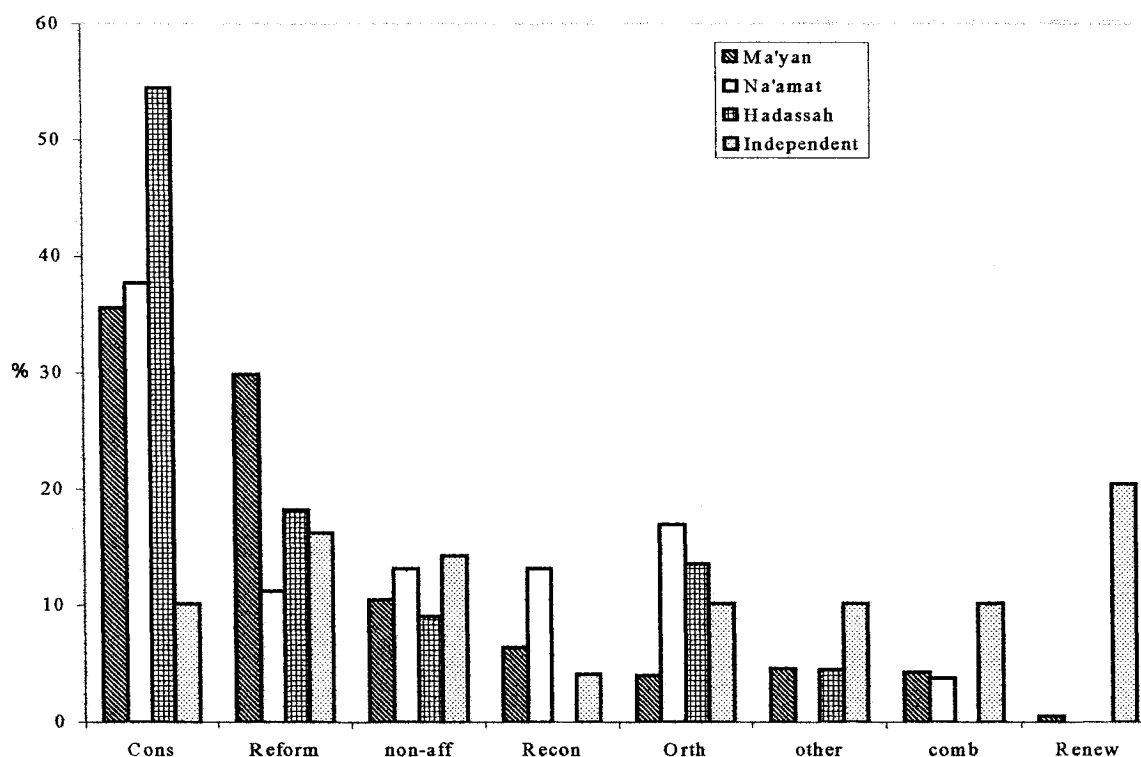
In all four seder groups, the respondents were overwhelmingly Ashkenazi. Note that the 'other' group included the options of 'Jew by choice' and 'non-Jewish', as well as a number of other, not necessarily Jewish, ethnicities. The Na'amat questionnaire also included 'Ethiopian' as an explicit option, as the organizers were expecting members of the Montreal Ethiopian Jewish community to attend the seder. Unfortunately the weather was bad that day, and the snowstorm may have prevented most of the Ethiopian group from attending. Whether or not this was the case, I did not receive any responses specifying Ethiopian background. I also included the Ethiopian option on the Hadassah-WIZO questionnaire, but it was not selected by any respondent.

Table 5: *Denomination*

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Orthodox	32	4.0	9	17.0	3	13.6	5	10.2
Conservative	285	35.7	20	37.7	12	54.5	5	10.2
Reform	238	29.8	6	11.3	4	18.2	8	16.3
Reconstructionist	51	6.4	7	13.2	0	0	2	4.1
Renewal	4	.5	0	0	0	0	10	20.4
non-affiliated	84	10.5	7	13.2	2	9.1	7	14.3
combination	34	4.3	2	3.8	0	0	5	10.2
other	37	4.6	0	0	1	4.5	5	10.2
didn't answer	33	4.1	2	3.8	0	0	2	4.1
Total	798	100	53	100	22	100	49	100

Because of the large variety and small numbers of responses for denominational affiliations not listed, I have grouped them under the heading 'other'. The 'combination' category is one that I constructed after the fact and consists of all the respondents who selected more than one denominational affiliation; these were not counted in the separate categories. Denominational affiliation was more varied among the groups than either ethnic background or gender. The following graph illustrates this diversity.

Figure 1: Denominational distribution



In the Ma'yan, Na'amat and Hadassah-WIZO groups, the majority of respondents were Conservative. For Ma'yan, Reform was second, and the third largest cluster was non-affiliated. For Na'amat, Orthodox was second and Reconstructionist third.¹⁴ Reform was in fifth position, after non-affiliated. For Hadassah-WIZO, Reform was second as it was for Ma'yan, and, even though Orthodox was third, non-affiliated was close behind. The Independent group was very different in this respect: the largest cluster was Jewish Renewal, followed by Reform and non-affiliated; next were equal numbers of Conservatives, Orthodox, combinations and 'other'.¹⁵ The fairly even distribution of the different denominations among the Independent respondents

¹⁴ This may be related to the fact that the Na'amat seder was held at the Reconstructionist synagogue, although this is counter-balanced by the fact that the event was publicized among Na'amat members and in the general press.

¹⁵ The large number of Jewish Renewal responses are probably related to the fact that my own women's seder, which is affiliated with a Renewal group, was the only women's seder at which I distributed questionnaires and is probably the only seder that provided more than one respondent.

contrasts with the situation in the three institutional groups, even though none of the three organizations is denominationally affiliated and all of the three institutionally-hosted seders were open to the general public. The consistently high percentage of Conservative affiliation of the respondents in the three groups is worth noting, but its significance is unclear. It is not a reflection of the Jewish population in general: data from the 2001 National Jewish Population Survey in the United States show denominational affiliation at only 25% Conservative versus 33% Reform.¹⁶ The greater number of Conservatives in the Canadian groups may be tied to the generally more conservative tendencies in Canada, a factor which would also account for the much higher percentage of Orthodox respondents in all three Canadian groups than in Ma'yan, the only American group. The fact that Na'amat had the highest percentage of Orthodox respondents may be a reflection of the demographic composition of the Montreal Jewish community, which has a larger Orthodox-affiliated population than either Toronto or New York.

Table 6: *Country of origin*

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Canada	17	2.1	36	67.9	15	68.2	38	77.6
United States	499	62.5	3	5.7	1	4.5	5	10.2
other	39	4.9	13	24.6	6	27.2	4	8.2
didn't answer	243	30.5	1	1.9	0	0	2	4.1
Total	798	100	53	100	22	100	49	100

Note that the Ma'yan seder took place in the United States while the seders of the three other groups took place in Canada. The highest cluster of respondents in each group originated in the country where the seder was held. Even though the number of Ma'yan respondents who did not answer this question may seem high, most of them had answered a previous question concerning citizenship which showed that 92% were U.S. citizens. The situation was very different in the Canadian groups, where a fair number of respondents in all three groups were immigrants. No

¹⁶ "NJPS Special Reports".

single country accounted for a significant proportion of the respondents. In the Na'amat group, the countries from which most emigration had occurred were the United States and Poland (with 3 from each); in the Hadassah-WIZO group, it was Israel (with 2); and 5 of the Independent respondents came from the United States.

Nor was there any discernible pattern regarding emigration dates. In the Na'amat group, the year of arrival stretched from 1934 to 1993. The other two groups were similarly distributed, but in narrower ranges: from 1950 to 1977 for Hadassah-WIZO and from 1954 to 1984 for the Independents. In all cases, no one year witnessed multiple arrivals.

Table 7: *Marital status*

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
single	146	18.3	4	7.5	7	31.8	11	22.4
married	504	63.2	38	71.7	10	45.5	23	46.9
partnered	27	3.4	0	0	0	0	6	12.2
divorced	55	6.9	6	11.3	3	13.6	7	14.3
widowed	41	5.1	5	9.4	0	0	0	0
engaged	5	.6	0	0	0	0	0	0
separated	5	.6	0	0	2	9.1	0	0
in transition	1	.1	0	0	0	0	0	0
didn't answer	14	1.8	0	0	0	0	2	4.1
Total	798	100	53	100	22	100	49	100

The Ma'yan version of this question did not include the category 'widowed'; however, 41 respondents specified it themselves. The option was added to the other questionnaires. The majority of respondents in all the groups were married. Even in the Hadassah-WIZO and Independent groups, where less than half were married, the number was still over 45%. If we add the partnered and married categories together, the Independent was also well over 50% (59.1%). Ma'yan, Hadassah-WIZO and Independent groups also all had a fair number of single respondents; this was not true for Na'amat. The following graph illustrates the diversity.

Figure 2: Distribution of marital status

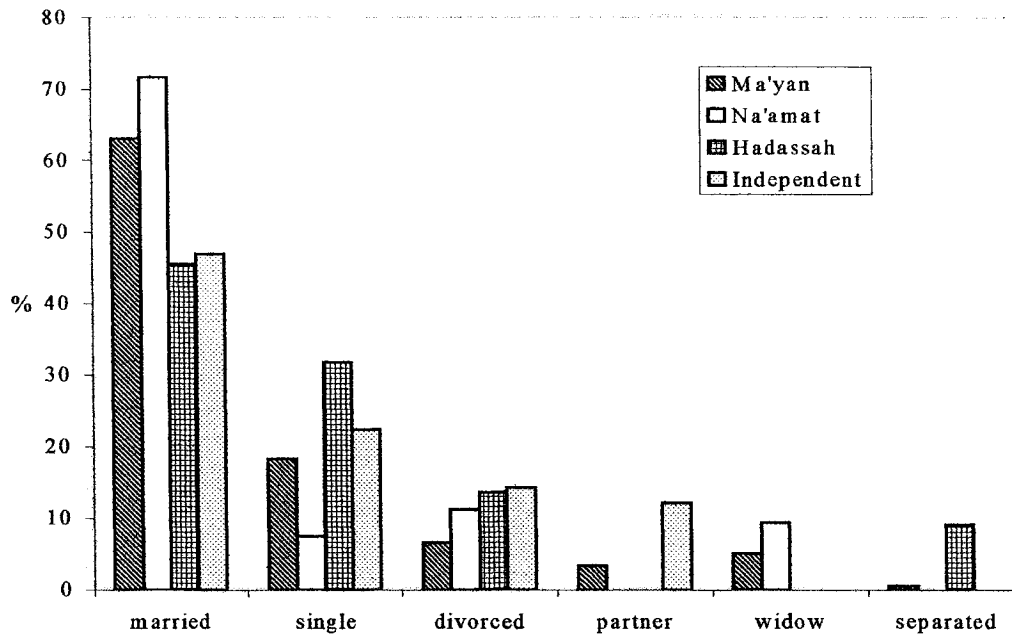


Table 8: Number of children

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
0	188	23.6	7	13.2	5	22.7	13	26.5
1	108	13.5	5	9.4	2	9.1	12	24.5
2	278	34.8	27	50.9	3	13.6	9	18.4
3	140	17.5	10	18.9	3	13.6	7	14.3
4	26	3.3	1	1.9	1	4.5	2	4.1
5	3	.4	0	0	1	4.5	1	2.0
6	1	.1	0	0	0	0	0	0
didn't answer	54	6.8	3	5.7	7	31.8	5	10.2
Total	798	100	53	100	22	100	49	100

The Na'amat group differed from the others in that over half the respondents had two children. Although the Ma'yan group also peaked in the category of two children, the percentages were more evenly distributed; in this, it was more similar to the Hadassah-WIZO and Independent groups. The reason for the large percentage of Hadassah-WIZO respondents who didn't answer this question is unclear; although almost half of these also put their marital status as

'single' and may therefore have felt that it was unnecessary for them to specify the number of children.

Table 9: *Primary sexual orientation*

	Ma'yan		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
heterosexual	724	90.7	22	100.0	36	73.5
lesbian/gay	31	3.9	0	0	9	18.4
bisexual	9	1.1	0	0	1	2.0
celibate	2	.3	0	0	0	0
undecided	1	.1	0	0	0	0
didn't answer	31	3.9	0	0	3	6.1
Total	798	100	22	100	49	100

Sexual orientation was not included on the Na'amat questionnaire as the organizers were worried that the question itself might offend some of their members.¹⁷ The overwhelming majority of respondents in the three other groups were heterosexual. The percentage of lesbians was much higher in the Independent group; the percentage of non-heterosexuals was very low in the Ma'yan group and non-existent in the Hadassah-WIZO group. Presumably, the confidentiality and anonymity of the questionnaires allowed participants to answer freely and this represents an accurate demographic for those who responded.

Table 10: *Age*

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
minimum age	7		26		21		25	
maximum age	86		82		73		73	
average (mean) age	46.45		56.25		46.45		50.74	
most common (mode)	48		50		35		53	
didn't answer	100	12.5	33	62.3	2	9.0	6	12.2

¹⁷ Although they were reacting to previous encounters with members who worried that a 'women's seder' was a gay event, the Na'amat organizers were also helping perpetuate a homophobic atmosphere in which any members who were lesbians would be encouraged to remain closeted.

The number of non-responses for Na'amat was very high because it included those respondents who clearly gave their children's age(s) rather than their own. This was apparently due to the fact that the previous question on sexual orientation had been removed, and the question on age directly followed the one on the number of children. Many of the respondents seem to have therefore interpreted the question as asking the age of their children rather than their own.

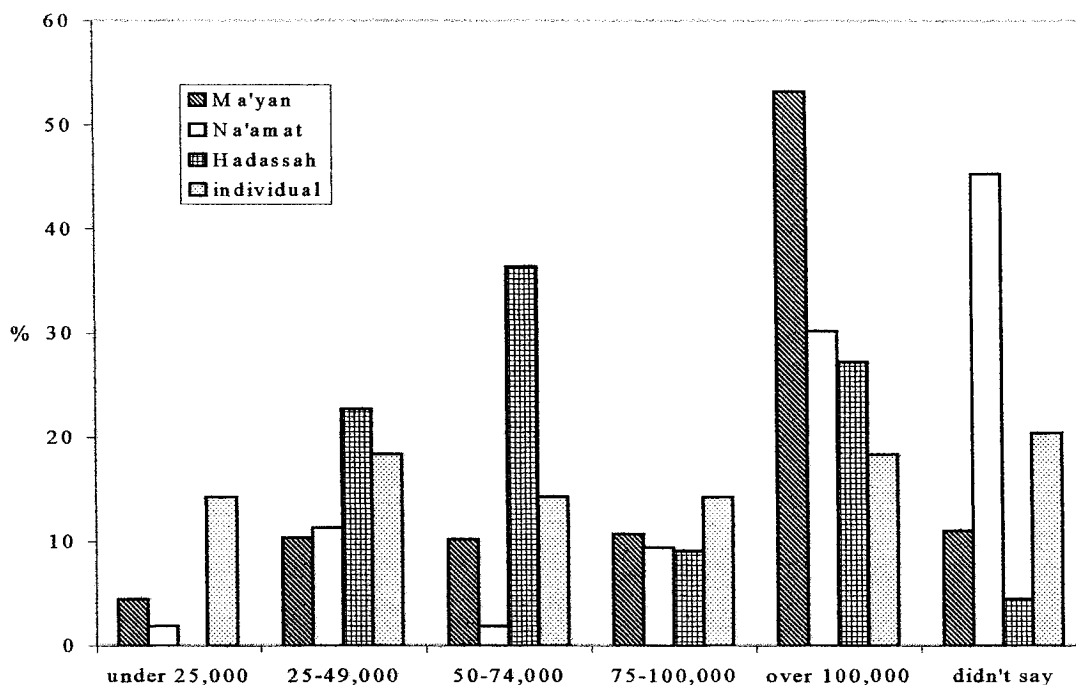
The age seems remarkably consistent for the respondents across all the groups if we look at the average (mean). However, this demonstrates a problem with general statistics: using the mean rather than the mode obscures the fact that the most common age for the Hadassah-WIZO respondents was significantly younger than for the other three groups. But we also cannot grant this fact any more significance than it warrants. The entire number of respondents for this group was only 22 out of the 150 participants, and two of these did not answer this question. All this data can tell us is that, among the 20 attendees who responded, the most common age was 35. From my visual assessment at the seder, it did not appear as if the audience was generally any younger than that of Na'amat. Perhaps the Hadassah-WIZO organizer, who was younger than her co-members and was consciously recruited for her youth, brought in other, younger, participants, who may also have been the ones most willing to fill out the questionnaire. The differences among the other three groups, with the Ma'yan mode slightly lower and the Independent one slightly higher, do not seem significant. The range of ages was quite consistent among all four groups, although Ma'yan had the youngest respondents. There were few, if any, children present at the Na'amat and Hadassah-WIZO seders, and none of the children filled out the questionnaire.

Table 11: *Family income*

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
under \$25,000	36	4.5	1	1.9	0	0	7	14.3
\$25,000—49,000	83	10.4	6	11.3	5	22.7	9	18.4
\$50,000—74,000	81	10.2	1	1.9	8	36.4	7	14.3
\$75,000—99,000	85	10.7	5	9.4	2	9.1	7	14.3
over \$100,000	425	53.3	16	30.2	6	27.3	9	18.4
didn't answer	88	11.0	24	45.3	1	4.5	10	20.4
Total	798	100.1	53	100	22	100	49	100.1

Family income was high in all the groups. Over half of the Ma'yan respondents had family incomes greater than \$100,000. This is perhaps due to the entry fee of \$75, which may have functioned as a filter on participation even though Ma'yan offered a certain number of scholarships. However, we should also bear in mind that most of the respondents were married and almost all were female. It is therefore more than likely that for many of them, this figure represents a combined rather than a single income. In the Canadian groups, the income was also high, although not as uniformly as in the Ma'yan group. Almost half of the Na'amat respondents did not answer this question (45%); however, most of the other half had high incomes (30% were in the > \$100,000 category). For the Hadassah-WIZO group, the incomes were much more spread out, and the Independent respondents had the most evenly distributed income levels. This diversity is illustrated in the following graph.

Figure 3: Distribution of family income



B. Participation

Table 12: First time at women's seder

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
first time	467	58.5	19	35.8	12	54.5	8	16.3
not first time	327	41.0	34	64.2	10	45.5	41	83.7
didn't answer	4	.5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	798	100	53	100	22	100	49	100

The question on the Ma'yan and Na'amat versions asked only about previous attendance at those particular groups' seders and did not allow for respondents who had previously attended other women's seders to indicate this fact. As a result, on the questionnaire distributed at Hadassah-WIZO, there were two questions: the first asked whether this was the first Hadassah-WIZO women's seder that the respondent had attended, and the second asked whether she had attended other women's seders. The Independent questionnaire also asked the more

comprehensive question. In order to have a consistent basis for comparison, I combined the responses of each version into an indicator of whether or not this was their first time attending a women's seder. However, bear in mind that for both Ma'yan and Na'amat this indicator does not tell us if they had attended other women's seders.

Over half the Ma'yan respondents were present for the first time. This fits with the assessment of Eve Landau: each year she asks how many people are there for the first time, and each time approximately half the people raise their hands. Slightly over half the respondents at Hadassah-WIZO were there for the first time. As this was only the second year for this event, this is not surprising. At both the Na'amat and Independent seders, most respondents had previously attended women's seders. The number is especially high for the Independent group, where 84% were repeat attendees. This suggests that the Independent respondents differed from the others in attending women's seders year after year, that this was not an isolated event so much as an integrated part of their annual ritual calendar. This also appears to be true for a fair number of Na'amat respondents. The women's seder has become one of the organization's annual activities, and many of its members regularly attend. The figures do not, therefore, necessarily represent a receptive attitude towards women's rituals but could be tied to a loyal involvement in Na'amat. Although Ma'yan is also an organization hosting an annual women's seder, it does not have a membership from which to draw. People who had attended in a previous year may have chosen not to return for a number of reasons: they may have been following Ma'yan's recommendation to use the experience to initiate their own women's seder; they may not have been in time to get tickets for the sold-out event; the high cost may have been a consideration; or one experience may have been sufficient. However, the number of Jewish feminists in the Greater New York area is large enough that there were still many who had not yet been to a Ma'yan seder and the four nights were filled with participants.

The Ma'yan group also reached an audience beyond New York. On this questionnaire, I asked how far the participant had traveled to get to the seder.¹⁸ Most of the respondents lived in the New York area but a few had traveled significant distances to get to the seder. This included people living in Washington (D.C.), Philadelphia, Baltimore, Albany, Boston, Florida, Detroit, North Carolina, and Toronto. There was also one person from Madrid and another from Australia, but both were already in New York and had not come there specifically to attend the seder.

Table 13: *Did you come alone? ...with friend(s)? ...with family member(s)?*

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
with friend(s)	417	52.3	27	50.9	9	40.9	16	32.7
with friends & family	223	27.9	7	13.2	0	0	9	18.3
with family	114	14.3	13	24.6	1	4.5	7	14.3
alone	29	3.6	5	9.4	10	45.5	14	28.6
didn't say	14	1.8	1	1.9	2	9.1	3	6.1
not alone	1	.1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	798	100	53	100	22	100	49	100

The question on the Na'amat and Hadassah-WIZO questionnaires was more detailed and listed some of the family members as choices; this detailing was in response to the Na'amat interest in seeing if many people attended as part of inter-generational groups from the same family (e.g. mother-daughter, grandmother-mother-daughter). Because of this, Na'amat respondents gave more information regarding the family member(s) who accompanied them: 17% came with their daughters and 5.7% with their mothers.¹⁹ Although it was not a listed choice, one of the Independent respondents noted that she came with her husband. As mentioned in chapter 3, one of the respondents from Hadassah-WIZO also came with her husband, although this is not reflected in the questionnaire responses.

Not many people came by themselves. Many came with friends and many came with both

¹⁸ This question was not asked on the Na'amat and Hadassah-WIZO questionnaires, as those seders were basically local events targeted at organization members and further publicized only in local newspapers.

¹⁹ This suggests that more of the mothers responded to the questionnaires.

friends and family. The largest group of respondents who attended alone was at the Hadassah-WIZO event; a significant number of respondents also attended the Independent seders by themselves. This latter was perhaps due to the fact that these seders were not large community events, but smaller ones where the participants were more likely to already know most, if not all, of their co-participants. The other seders were community activities, with the participants bringing their personal communities into the larger one.

*

The next few questions focus on the timing of the rites, which occurred before Passover in the case of all three institutional seders. The Independent questionnaire asked whether the seder took place before Passover, and, if so, whether the respondent preferred it that way.

Table 14: *Do you like the fact that the women's seder occurs before Passover?*

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
yes	750	94.0	49	92.5	21	95.5	19	38.8
no	23	2.9	3	5.7	0	0	11	22.4
didn't answer	22	2.8	1	1.9	1	4.5	18	36.7
no preference	3	.4	0	0	0	0	1	2.0
Total	798	100	53	100	22	100	49	100

The overwhelming majority of respondents at all three institutional seders preferred the seder to occur before the holiday. Less than half the Independent respondents did. However, note that over a third of the Independent respondents didn't answer this question, maybe because their seders did not, in fact, occur before Passover: 18% of the Independent respondents' seders occurred before Passover; 57% were held during the holiday; 2% took place after; and one respondent's seder had been held before, during, and after the holiday in different years.

The next part of the question asked the reason for the before-Passover preference. On the Ma'yan and Independent versions, two options were listed (*so you have time to change your own seder, so you can participate in both this and your regular seders*) as well as a blank line for other reasons. On the other two versions, there was only a blank line. 209 people specified

reasons for their preference and, as they all wrote their own words, the reasons were all different. However, there were similar themes, the most common of which were so that they could participate in both; the women's seder provided ideas in time to incorporate them into their regular seder; to get in the mood; they were too busy during Passover; this way, they don't have to worry about Passover kashrut (note that these are not mutually exclusive; some people gave more than one reason).

Table 15: *Would you prefer the xxx seder to occur during Passover? (where xxx is 'Ma'yan', 'Na'amat', 'Hadassah-WIZO', or 'women's')*

response	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
yes	55	6.9	2	3.8	2	9.1	24	49.0
no	690	86.5	50	94.3	18	81.8	15	30.6
no preference	11	1.4	0	0	0	0	3	6.1
maybe	3	.4	0	0	0	0	0	0
didn't answer	39	4.9	1	1.9	2	9.1	7	14.3
Total	798	100	53	100	22	100	49	100

The responses to this question were similar to the ones above, reinforcing the conclusion that the overwhelming majority of respondents from the three institutional seders did not want the seder to occur during the holiday. This coincides with Ma'yan's vision:

It's the holiday that's celebrated the most. So we in no way wanted to interfere. And because of Mayan's mission, we wanted people to have the experience of being able to take home some of the stuff to their own seders.²⁰

The intention for the organizers at Ma'yan, as well as at Na'amat and Hadassah-WIZO, was not to replace the existing ritual but to add a new event. And this highlights again the difference in this respect with the Independent respondents, approximately half of whom indicated that they would like the ritual to occur during Passover.

²⁰ Personal interview with Barbara Dobkin, 2001.

Table 16: *Do you like participating in family seders?...community seders? Do you prefer one over the other?... If Yes, which and why?*

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
prefer family seder	448	56.1	42	79.2	14	63.6	16	32.7
prefer community seder	24	3.0	3	5.7	0	0	11	22.4
no preference	25	3.1	8	15.1	3	13.6	5	10.2
didn't answer	301	37.7	1	1.9	5	22.7	17	34.7
Total	798	100	53	100	22	100	49	100

The respondents' written comments indicated some ambiguity in the interpretation of the question: some of them did not equate community seders with women's seders, although that was my intention in asking. They therefore compared family seders with community but not women's seders. The responses to this question are therefore not clearly indicative of any trend other than the fact that family seders seem important to many of the respondents.

Table 17: *Did you consider the seder a success?*

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
yes	764	95.7	53	100.0	18	81.8	47	95.9
no	6	.8	0	0	2	9.1	2	4.1
yes and no	1	.1	0	0	2	9.1	0	0
didn't answer	27	3.4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	798	100	53	100	22	100	49	100

There was no explanation given of the term 'success'—it was up to each respondent to answer according to their own definition and standards. There was also room for comments immediately following this question, and many of those who added comments did so in relation to this question. For all the groups, the overwhelming majority of respondents considered the seder a success. Many of the comments listed things that the respondent had liked or loved about the event. In the Ma'yan group, many included exclamation marks and words like 'loved', 'energy', 'highlights', 'enjoyed', 'moved', 'wonderful', and 'inspirational'. Na'amat respondents also used words like 'great' and 'wonderful'. The Hadassah-WIZO respondents offered only a

few comments, among which were words like ‘interesting’. The Independent responses were more like Ma’yan’s and used terms like ‘empowering’, ‘very important in my life’, ‘smashing success’ and ‘great spirit’.

*

Question: *What was the xxx seder for you? Indicate the one(s) that apply. Rank these in order of importance where 1 is the most important and 7 is the least important:*

This question is different from all the others in that it invited the respondent to choose the meaning(s) the seder held for them and to rank the meaning(s) in terms of personal importance. Six options were listed along with a blank line. The ‘other’ option was selected by so few respondents in all four groups that it will not be included in this discussion. The results are presented in two ways. First, each option is presented separately with its rankings. Then the options are presented in order of the importance given them by the respondents. The options are not mutually exclusive, and some respondents ranked more than one option at the same level; others used a check mark rather than a numerical ranking. When one or two options were checked, I converted these to a ranking of ‘1’; when three or more were checked, they are indicated by ‘unranked’.

Table 18: *A model that provided ideas for your regular seder*

	Ma’yan		Na’amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
1	68	8.5	3	5.7	2	9.1	4	8.2
2	74	9.3	6	11.3	2	9.1	2	4.1
3	93	11.7	5	9.4	3	13.6	6	12.2
4	109	13.7	6	11.3	1	4.5	2	4.1
5	99	12.4	7	13.2	2	9.1	8	16.3
6	111	13.9	9	17.0	2	9.1	5	10.2
7	12	1.5	3	5.7	0	0	1	2.0
unranked	33	4.1	0	0	4	18.2	2	4.1
not chosen	199	24.9	14	26.4	6	27.3	19	38.8
Total	798	100	53	100	22	100	49	100

Although this was important for some of the respondents, it was not all that important for most of them. In the Ma'yan group, its relative importance reached a peak at the fourth and sixth positions; this shows that the largest cluster who considered the seder important as a model for their own seder did so as fourth or sixth in importance out of a possible seven options. The Na'amat and Independent groups gave similar results, with the largest cluster placing it in the sixth and fifth positions respectively. Hadassah-WIZO was different: the largest cluster was in the third position, followed closely by the first, second, fifth, and sixth positions. However, the largest cluster in all four groups was the 'not chosen' category. This suggests that the seder was not very important as a model to the majority of participants.

Table 19: *A learning experience*

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
1	116	14.5	6	11.3	10	45.5	8	16.3
2	115	14.4	12	22.6	3	13.6	6	12.2
3	138	17.3	18	34.0	2	9.1	5	10.2
4	101	12.7	7	13.2	1	4.5	10	20.4
5	90	11.3	2	3.8	0	0	4	8.2
6	49	6.1	2	3.8	0	0	1	2.0
7	8	1.0	0	0	0	0	1	2.0
unranked	41	5.1	0	0	3	13.6	3	6.1
not chosen	140	17.5	6	11.3	3	13.6	11	22.4
Total	798	100	53	100	22	100	49	100

The results for this option are very different than for the previous one, even though conceptually the two choices could be considered fairly similar. But 'learning experience' was ranked highest in the Hadassah-WIZO group—perhaps because the evening was promoted as such. It was ranked third highest at Na'amat and, even for the Ma'yan respondents, where it was highest in the 'not chosen' cluster, this was followed closely by the third position, with first, second, and fourth not far behind. In the Independent group as well, where it was the least important, the clusters at the fourth and first positions were not far behind the 'not chosen'

selection. This suggests that, even though this was not the most important aspect of the seder for most of the participants, it was still significant for many.

Table 20: *A woman-oriented Jewish ritual*

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
1	272	34.1	30	56.6	7	31.8	24	49.0
2	155	19.4	10	18.9	3	13.6	12	24.5
3	85	10.7	4	7.5	1	4.5	3	6.1
4	59	7.4	3	5.7	1	4.5	1	2.0
5	49	6.1	1	1.9	2	9.1	1	2.0
6	19	2.4	2	3.8	0	0	1	2.0
7	8	1.0	0	0	0	0	1	2.0
unranked	43	5.4	0	0	2	9.1	2	4.1
not chosen	108	13.5	3	5.7	6	27.3	4	8.2
Total	798	100	53	100	22	100	49	100

This was the favorite choice in all the groups. Approximately half of the Na'amat and Independent respondents, and around one third of those in the Ma'yan and Hadassah-WIZO groups, considered this to be the most important aspect of the women's seder.

Table 21: *A feminist celebration*

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
1	103	12.9	4	7.5	0	0	9	18.4
2	120	15.0	5	9.4	1	4.5	6	12.2
3	101	12.7	10	18.9	6	27.3	10	20.4
4	94	11.8	6	11.3	0	0	7	14.3
5	86	10.8	12	22.6	1	4.5	4	8.2
6	69	8.6	3	5.7	3	13.6	1	2.0
7	14	1.8	4	7.5	1	4.5	2	4.1
unranked	36	4.5	0	0	1	4.5	4	8.2
not chosen	175	21.9	9	17.0	9	40.9	6	12.2
Total	798	100	53	100	22	100	49	100

The difference in response between this option and the previous one suggests that a feminist celebration was viewed very differently than a woman-oriented ritual. If the respondents had been using the terms 'feminist' and 'women's' interchangeably, we would expect the responses to the

two choices to be fairly similar. Instead, they show a marked preference for the latter. We might have expected this for the Na'amat and Hadassah-WIZO groups in light of the reluctance of many of the organizations' members to be associated with the term: these results support the organizers' claims that the term was problematic for their membership and to be avoided. However, we see the same phenomenon in the Ma'yan group, despite the organizers' intention to make this a feminist occasion. The Independent group was the only one where the 'feminist' option was ranked highly at all: at the third position with the first close behind. This was still lower than we might have expected from the supposition that the terms were synonymous for this group, as suggested in the beginning of this chapter. For Na'amat, the largest cluster was at the fifth ranking, and for both Ma'yan and Hadassah-WIZO, the largest cluster was for those who did not select it at all. These results suggest that the Na'amat respondents were more interested in the feminist aspect than those at Ma'yan. It may be that the respondents at both were very different from the organizers' views of them and that the Na'amat respondents were, in fact, actually more comfortable with the term 'feminism' than the Ma'yan respondents; or it may be that a preference for one term was unrelated to a dislike for the other, and the choices were a result of perceptions of this particular ritual and not related to a general attitude towards feminism; or it may be that those Na'amat participants who chose to respond were those more favourably disposed towards feminism, while the Ma'yan respondents were more representative of the group as a whole; or it may be indicative of difficulties with questionnaires, where respondents are forced to choose from amongst options presented to them.

Table 22: *A celebratory event in its own right*

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
1	190	23.8	21	39.6	1	4.5	15	30.6
2	129	16.2	9	17.0	1	4.5	7	14.3
3	99	12.4	2	3.8	0	0	8	16.3
4	77	9.6	8	15.1	5	22.7	2	4.1
5	86	10.8	5	9.4	2	9.1	4	8.2
6	47	5.9	2	3.8	2	9.1	5	10.2
7	9	1.1	0	0	0	0	3	6.1
unranked	42	5.3	0	0	1	4.5	0	0
not chosen	119	14.9	6	11.3	10	45.5	5	10.2
Total	798	100	53	100	22	99.9	49	100

As a celebration on its own, this ritual was very important for Ma'yan, Na'amat and Independent respondents: the largest cluster in all three placed it in first position. This differed greatly from Hadassah-WIZO respondents, where the largest cluster did not include it at all.

Table 23: *An outing with friends/family*

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
1	65	8.1	3	5.7	1	4.5	4	8.2
2	84	10.5	5	9.4	4	18.2	1	2.0
3	109	13.7	6	11.3	0	0	3	6.1
4	106	13.3	10	18.9	3	13.6	9	18.4
5	67	8.4	9	17.0	3	13.6	6	12.2
6	123	15.4	9	17.0	2	9.1	6	12.2
7	20	2.5	1	1.9	0	0	3	6.1
unranked	44	5.5	0	0	2	9.1	2	4.1
not chosen	180	22.6	10	18.9	7	31.8	15	30.6
Total	798	100	53	100	22	100	49	100

This option was not very important in any of the four groups.

*

The results for this question are interesting, but difficult to interpret. Another way to look at the data is by relative ranking. Because the questionnaire format forced the respondent to choose between different, although similar, options, we can examine their choices to see which one(s) were most/more important.

First we see how many respondents ranked each option highest (as first in importance):

Table 24: Respondents' first choice regarding the importance of the seder experience

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
model	68	8.5	3	5.7	2	9.1	4	8.2
learning	116	14.5	6	11.3	10	45.5	8	16.3
woman's ritual	272	34.1	30	56.6	7	31.8	24	49.0
feminist	103	12.9	4	7.5	0	0	9	18.4
celebration	190	23.8	21	39.6	1	4.5	15	30.6
outing	65	8.1	3	5.7	1	4.5	4	8.2

From this, we see that the women's seder was most important to most respondents as a woman-oriented Jewish ritual. In the Ma'yan, Na'amat and Independent groups, this option received the largest number of votes; in the Hadassah-WIZO group, it came in second. The celebration option was also very important for many others; this was the second most popular choice in the Ma'yan, Na'amat and Independent groups. These results are illustrated in the following graph:

Figure 4: Distribution of the ranking of first choice of the seder experience

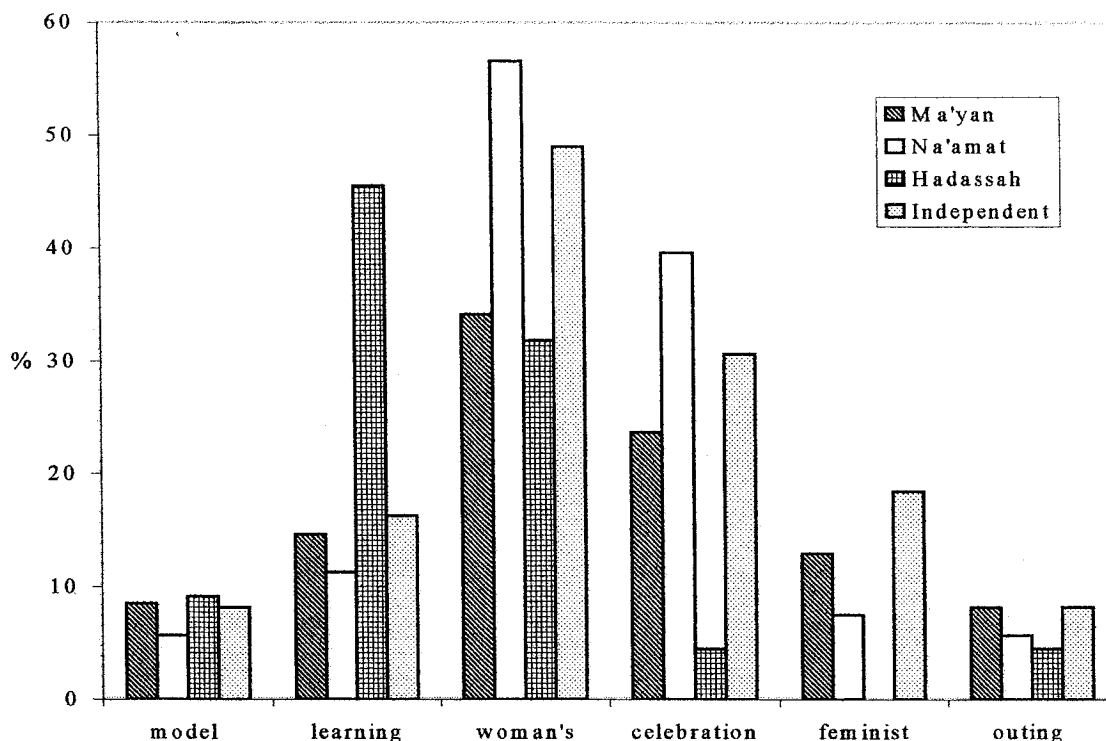


Table 24 shows the results for each option as the first choice of respondents. If we widen the scope slightly and include either first or second choice, we get the following results:

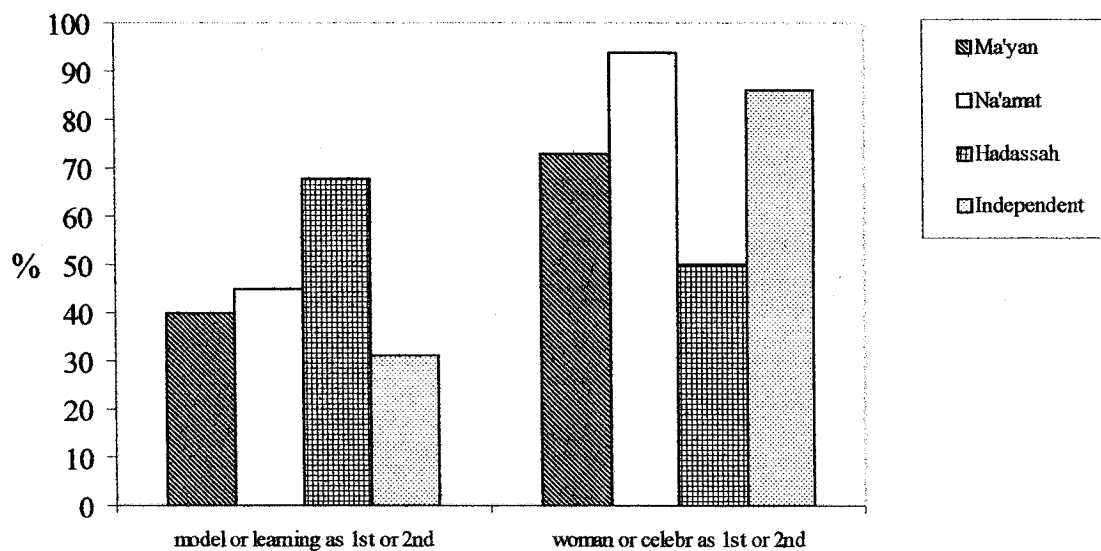
Table 25: Respondents' first and second choices regarding the importance of the seder experience

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Hadassah-WIZO		Independent	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
model	142	17.8	9	17.0	4	18.2	6	12.2
learning	231	28.9	18	34.0	13	59.1	14	28.6
woman's ritual	427	53.5	40	75.5	10	45.5	36	73.5
feminist	223	27.9	9	17.0	1	4.5	15	31.6
celebration	319	40.0	30	56.6	2	9.1	22	44.9
outing	149	18.7	8	15.1	5	22.7	5	10.2

The results reinforce the findings of Table 24. Again, the majority of respondents at the Ma'yan, Na'amat and Independent seders considered the seder highly important as a woman-oriented ritual, as did almost half of the Hadassah-WIZO respondents. Over 40% of the respondents at Ma'yan, Na'amat and the Independent seders considered the seder important as a

celebration. However, we also see that the percentage of those who considered the model and learning aspect is not that low; almost 30% of respondents in these three groups, and almost 60% in the Hadassah-WIZO group, found it very important as a learning experience (this is again consistent with the way the Hadassah-WIZO organizers positioned the event). The results are illustrated in the following graph.

Figure 5: Distribution of first and second choices regarding seder experience



The data show that the Ma'yan participants did not primarily experience the seder in exactly the way the organizers intended:

It was always intended to be ... a seder experience with opportunities for people to take pieces of the haggadah and use it in their own seders. So the intention was always—and that's why we did it before Passover, because the hope and the intention was that people would find parts of this that they could incorporate at home.²¹

The celebratory aspect ended up the most important. In effect, the participants changed the nature of the seder:

²¹ Personal interview with Eve Landau, 2001.

The idea was to do these things and let go, you know, but since Ma'yan's focus has sort of changed since we started, it's the one success that everybody gets to see and it is, it feels very good. So people just aren't ready to let go yet.²²

But the learning aspect did not disappear. The responses from the 'After-effects' portion of the questionnaires show that the women's seder did, in fact, serve as a learning experience and a model for many of the respondents.

The results are more obviously consistent for the Hadassah-WIZO group, where the organizers meant the event to be educational and advertized it as such. It was intended from the beginning to be

part of the education mandate, that's where the program fit in.... This is what I was wanting, was for people to leave with that program in hand, saying I'm going to bring this home and we're going to try this at my house.²³

The responses from the Na'amat group also reflect the intentions of the organizer :

I saw it as being a women's exploration of their Judaism.... We see it as a women's, Jewish women's, observance within the framework of our history.²⁴

And the results from the Independent group parallel my own intentions. The educational aspect of our women's seder was incidental—its main purpose was to provide a spiritually meaningful and satisfying ritual for the participants by foregrounding women and women's experiences. As well, we must bear in mind that some of the Independent seders have been annual events since 1973, and this was not the first women's seder for any of the respondents in this group. They had already had a lot of time to learn; perhaps now they just wanted to celebrate. In addition, for at least some of the women in this group, the women's seder *was* their main seder, it was not providing material for another seder.

²² Personal interview with Barbara Dobkin, 2001.

²³ Personal interview with Marla Spiegel, 2002.

²⁴ Personal interview with Paula Weitzman, 2002.

C. After-effects

The third section of the questionnaire focuses on changes participants initiated as a result of having attended a women's seder. As mentioned above (Section B), the wording of the questions on the Ma'yan, Na'amat and Independent questionnaires did not ask about other women's seders that the participant might have attended whereas the Hadassah-WIZO questionnaire, distributed a year later, was rephrased to account for this possibility. Because this section concerned changes that participants had already made as a result of their experience, I include only responses from non-first-timers. This amounts to 327 for Ma'yan, 34 for Na'amat, and 41 for the Independent group. For Hadassah-WIZO, the one respondent who was at her first Hadassah-WIZO seder but had previously attended another women's seder was counted as a non-first-timer, bringing the number to 10. As the focus was on changes made to a regular seder, I further restricted the results to those respondents who regularly participated in a more traditional seder: 309 for Ma'yan, 30 for Na'amat, 7 for Hadassah-WIZO, and 34 for Independent. The version of the questionnaire distributed to Ma'yan, Na'amat and Independent did not ask first-time attendees about planned changes. As Hadassah-WIZO was the only group that provided this information, the data is included at the end of this section by itself.

Table 26: *Where does the seder usually take place?*

	Ma'yan (out of 309)		Na'amat (out of 30)		Hadassah-WIZO (out of 7)		Independent (out of 34)	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
home	304	98.4	29	96.7	7	100	33	97.1
synagogue / community centre	13	4.2	0	0	0	0	3	8.9
didn't say	2	.6	0	0	0	0	0	0

Note that the options are not mutually exclusive as some respondents attended more than one regular seder, in different locations. As a result, the numbers do not add up to 100%. For the overwhelming majority of these respondents, the regular seder took place in a private home and not in a public or community setting.

Table 27: *In what capacity(ies) do you participate?*

response	Ma'yan (out of 309)		Na'amat (out of 30)		Hadassah-WIZO (out of 7)		Independent (out of 34)	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
leading	79	25.6	2	6.7	1	14.3	10	29.4
co-leading	128	41.4	9	30.0	5	71.4	12	35.3
reading	242	78.3	22	73.3	4	57.1	26	76.5
discussing	189	61.2	18	60.0	5	71.4	21	61.8
storytelling	51	16.5	11	36.7	2	28.6	8	23.5
cooking	221	71.5	30	100.0	3	42.9	23	67.6
serving food	217	70.2	24	80.0	3	42.9	23	67.6
cleaning up	226	73.1	22	73.3	3	42.9	24	70.6

Eight specific roles were listed as well as a blank line. The roles were not mutually exclusive; many respondents selected more than one option. The roles can be divided into those that deal with the liturgy (the first five) and those that involve the food (the last three). Many respondents were actively involved in the liturgical portion of the seder, in which they performed leadership roles. Even in the Na'amat group, which had the lowest percentage of leaders (7%), 30% were co-leaders. It is difficult to know whether the high percentage of leaders shown by these statistics is a consequence of the fact that the people attracted to these women's seders, and especially those who chose to respond to the questionnaire, were already interested and active in ritual leadership. The high numbers for the other roles show that the participants were definitely interested in active ritual participation. But we also see that performing in a leadership capacity did not mean that they relinquished the traditional women's involvement with food preparation. Just as the Na'amat respondents had the lower number of leaders, it also had the highest number of cooks (at 100%). But the Ma'yan and Independent responses were also high in this area.²⁵ Even Hadassah-WIZO, with the lowest numbers in terms of food preparation, show over 40% involvement in this area.

²⁵ This was perhaps either a factor in or a cause of the Ma'yan haggadah's acknowledging and sanctifying the act of food preparation—see chapter 5 for details.

*

Respondents also specified additional roles on the blank line. The following is a sampling of some of these: planning; songleading/singing music; guest; adding/supporting feminist readings/interpretations; creating/modifying haggadah; props & special effects; eating; host; everything; playing with children; coaching leaders; *kiddush*; presenting skits; listening; assisting; creating; choosing theme; enjoying; whatever needs doing; preparing; dancing; *kvetching*. This list reinforces the conclusion that the women who attended these seders, at least those who responded to the questionnaire, were interested and involved in all the different aspects of the ritual. Even *kvetching* was recognized as an important ritual activity.²⁶

Table 28: *After attending the xxx seder, did you modify your ritual activities?*

	Ma'yan (out of 309)		Na'amat (out of 30)		Had-WIZO (out of 7)		Independent (out of 34)	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
made changes	249	80.6	12	40.0	3	42.9	26	76.5

After ascertaining in what capacity the respondents participated in their regular seder, the questionnaire asked about the changes they made subsequent to their participation at the women's seder. Six specific changes were listed as well as a blank line. The options were not mutually exclusive; many respondents selected more than one. Respondents were also invited to briefly describe the change(s), and some did so.

As a result of their experience, the respondents made changes. The percentage was very high in the self-identified more-feminist groups, i.e. Ma'yan and Independent; and even though it was only half as high in the other two groups, it was still at least 40%. Although the overall majority of respondents did not consciously experience the seders as models or even learning experiences, these results indicate that the seders did function that way.

²⁶ For more on 'grumbling' as one of the resistant strategies available to and used by dominated groups within power-differentiated relations, see James Scott's *Domination and the arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, 154–156. Among the tactics he lists are gossip, anonymous letters, euphemisms, grumbling, and foot-dragging. I would add another to his list: the creation of new rituals.

The following tables address the changes these respondents made to their regular seders: the kind of changes, how they made them, the reactions they received; as well as projected changes. In each table, the number used as a basis for comparison is the number who made changes rather than the total number of respondents. This gives an indication of the relative importance of each kind of change, but, at the same time, makes the percentages in each category much larger. These figures must therefore be used judiciously, and not in a way that seems more representative than they actually are. This is especially true for Hadassah-WIZO, where there were only 3 respondents.

Table 29: *What did you change?*

	Ma'yan (out of 249)		Na'amat (out of 12)		Hadassah-WIZO (out of 3)		Independent (out of 26)	
haggadah	109	43.8	7	58.3	3	100.0	16	61.5
songs	134	53.8	2	16.7	1	33.3	12	46.2
prayers	78	31.3	4	33.3	1	33.3	9	34.6
music	84	33.7	0	0	0	0	6	23.1
dancing	31	12.4	0	0	0	0	2	7.7
objects on the seder table	163	65.5	6	50.0	1	33.3	20	76.9
[orange]	[49]	[19.7]	[0]	[0]	[1]	[33.3]	[10]	[38.5]
[Miriam's Cup]	[75]	[30.1]	[5]	[41.7]	[1]	[33.3]	[5]	[19.2]

The types of changes that respondents made varied with the groups. The number who made changes to prayers was fairly consistent across all four groups. The Canadian participants made more changes to haggadahs than their American counterparts. The more feminist groups changed (or added) music and dancing, whereas none of the respondents in the other two groups included these at all.²⁷ The most common changes in all four groups were to the haggadahs and the objects on the seder table; changes to songs were also common. Although the questionnaire did not specifically ask, many respondents volunteered the information that they had placed an orange

²⁷ This is interesting in light of my observation of the importance of dancing at the women's seders. At all the rites that I attended, without exception, there was a high-energy point at which many of the participants got up and danced together around the room. This perhaps indicates that they view dancing with other women's seder participants differently from dancing with family and friends. Or perhaps it is a result of the lack of available physical space in most people's homes.

and/or Miriam's Cup on the table. This information was included in the above table because it is of interest, but because the data is incomplete, it is enclosed in square brackets. The significance of these new ritual objects was discussed in chapter 4. More details on the haggadah changes are seen in the responses to the next question.

Table 30: *Did you incorporate parts of the xxx haggadah into a different haggadah?*

	Ma'yan (out of 249)		Na'amat (out of 12)		Hadassah-WIZO (out of 3)		Independent (out of 26)	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
yes	185	74.3	10	83.3	3	100.0	16	61.5

Most of the respondents from the institutionally-hosted seders based part of all of the changes they introduced on the institution's haggadah; the percentage from the Independent seders was also significant, although slightly lower. This suggests that some regular seders may now include some amount of feminist, or at least women-sensitive, content, reinforcing the conclusions in chapter 5. The most favoured parts, for respondents who provided details, were: various things about Miriam; four cups; four daughters; *dayeinu*; four questions; plagues.

Most regular haggadahs for regular seders do not contain much women-oriented content. The supplemental materials most often selected by the women's seder respondents to use at their regular seders were, on the contrary, extremely women-focused. Some of these passages, like the plagues and the modern-day *dayeinu*, are also very topical as they deal specifically with issues of modern-day women. Their inclusion brings a contemporary focus on women to the traditional seder ritual.

Table 31: *Did you modify your seder by raising questions and discussing issues?*

	Ma'yan (out of 249)		Na'amat (out of 12)		Hadassah-WIZO (out of 3)		Independent (out of 26)	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
yes	165	66.3	8	66.7	2	66.7	19	73.1

Many respondents indicated that raising questions and discussing issues were activities they had always performed at their seders. The raising of new questions following the women's seder was seen as a natural extension. The issues and questions described was varied; most were focused on the role of women; women's issues; feminism; and the use of the Exodus as a metaphor for personal journeys on the physical, intellectual, and spiritual levels. This list suggests that, at least after the women's seders and for some of the respondents, women's issues were of some importance and at the forefront of their consciousness.

Table 32: *If you made changes, what was the response?*

	Ma'yan (out of 249)		Na'amat (out of 12)		Hadassah-WIZO (out of 3)		Independent (out of 26)	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
very positive	26	10.4	1	8.3	0	0	1	3.8
positive	69	27.7	4	33.3	1	33.3	7	26.9
ok	10	4.0	1	8.3	0	0	3	11.5
mixed	32	12.9	1	8.3	0	0	4	15.4
first negative, then positive	0	0	1	8.3	0	0	2	7.7
negative	18	7.2	0	0	1	33.3	1	3.8
indifference	0	0	0	0	1	33.3	1	3.8

This data was difficult to quantify as the respondents used many different wordings, but it broke down approximately as shown above. The number of responses overall to this question was low. But in the responses, we see that the percentage of positive reactions was high in all the groups. In the Hadassah-WIZO group, percentages for the negative and indifferent reactions were equal to the positive, but the fact that there were only three respondents prevents us from reading anything into this result. The small numbers in the other groups must also be kept in mind.

*

And, finally, what lies ahead?

Table 33: *Do you plan to continue with these changes? ...to go back to your previous structure? ... to modify the changes?*

	Ma'yan (out of 249)		Na'amat (out of 12)		Hadassah-WIZO (out of 3)		Independent (out of 26)	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
continue	227	91.2	11	91.7	3	100.0	20	76.9
revert	5	2.0	0	0	0	0	6	23.1
modify changes	101	40.1	4	33.3	2	66.7	6	23.1

Most of the non-first-time respondents planned to continue with their changes, and many of them planned to go on making more changes as well. For many of these respondents, this is a continually evolving ritual.

This is borne out by the responses from the Hadassah-WIZO respondents who were attending their first women's seder but planned to make changes to their regular seder as a result of their experience. As explained above, this question appeared only on this version of the questionnaire and so does not apply to the other three groups of respondents. The data are summarized in the next two tables.

Of the 22 Hadassah-WIZO respondents, 12 were first-timers. Of these, one did not participate in a regular seder, so the number of responses used for the first table (Table 34) is eleven. Of these, nine were planning on making changes of some kind to their regular seders; this is the subset considered in Table 35, which describes the kinds of changes planned. Nine out of eleven seems like an incredibly high percentage, but is probably more indicative of the correlation between wanting to make changes and being interested in a study such as mine than of a general tendency among the group of 150 participants.

Table 34: Responses from first-timers at Hadassah-WIZO who attend regular seders

	Hadassah-WIZO (out of 11)	
	number	%
seder takes place at: home	9	82
didn't say	2	18
capacity: leading	1	9
co-leading	2	18
reading	7	64
discussing	5	46
storytelling	1	9
cooking	3	27
serving food	7	64
cleaning up	6	55
plan to make changes	9	82

Table 35: Responses from first-timers at Hadassah-WIZO who plan to change their regular seder

	Hadassah-WIZO (out of 9)	
	number	%
plan to change: haggadah	3	33
songs / music	1	11
prayers	1	11
dancing	0	0
orange on the seder plate	4	44
Miriam's Cup	4	44
plan to use part of Hadassah-WIZO haggadah	8	89
plan to raise new questions	6	67

D. Summary

Each of the respondents to these questionnaires represented only her/his self; all we have are the individual voices of the women's seder participants who chose to speak, to respond to the questionnaire, to participate in this study. We can hypothesize a number of reasons for their self-selection, some logistical, others related to ideology. But we do not know the actual reason in each individual case. And we also do not know to what extent the self-selection brings other characteristics with it—in terms of demographics, participation, or after-effects. It may be that this subgroup is entirely representative of the general population of women's seder attendees, but this seems unlikely. It may be that this subgroup includes all the participants who subsequently made changes to their regular seders, but this is no more likely. All we know is that these particular people, with these particular characteristics, made these particular changes.

Nonetheless, the fact remains that we have almost 1000 responses. Although each respondent was representative only of her/his self, this is still a large number of voices. We can combine their individual voices into a group picture of, at the very least, women's seder attendees who chose to speak about their experience when given the opportunity.

Who attended these seders?

The characteristics most prevalent in this group are: female; Ashkenazi; somewhat denominationally conservative but tending towards liberalism; North American born;²⁸ heterosexual; married with two children; comfortable economically. The most common age for the group is around 50.²⁹ They regularly participate in family seders where they are involved in both the food preparation and the liturgical service. They have a strong affinity for women-oriented content but are reluctant to use feminist labels.

²⁸ Although there is a fair possibility that they may be immigrants, especially in a Canadian context.

²⁹ The younger age of the Hadassah-WIZO respondents does not affect the composite picture very much, because of their small number. As my visual assessment did not see their youthfulness as typical of the group, this is not a problem.

How were they affected by the women's seder experiences?

They greatly enjoyed the women's seders, so much so that many used superlatives in describing the experience. Although many appreciated the educational potential of the event to some extent, it was the women-oriented and celebratory aspects that were most appealing. Most enjoyed the seders because they were women-oriented Jewish rituals and many enjoyed them as celebrations in their own right, appreciating the fact that they were held before Passover so that they could attend regular seders as well.

They were multidimensional people, whose hybrid identities were attracted by many of the strands of connection embedded in the ritual. Their belonging-senses were strongly evoked by the women's seders; the belonging-senses, in turn, inspired the ritualizers to strengthen the connection; the rituals modified in this manner reinforced the belonging-senses; this, in turn, stimulated the ritualizers to participate even more fully. A more comprehensive analysis of the relationship between the women's seder, the participants, and belonging-sense will be presented in chapter 7.

How will they, in turn, effect changes to the regular seder?

Some have already made changes to the content of their family seders by bringing in female-oriented material. For some, this consisted of placing an orange on the seder plate or a Miriam's Cup on the seder table. For others, it involved adding women-oriented passages into the traditional liturgy which, in many cases, injected feminist content into the traditional seder. Most of the respondents who made changes used the women's seder haggadahs as sources; the Ma'yan haggadah, which was discussed in detail in chapter 5, contains a large amount of explicit feminist content; even the Na'amat haggadah, while carefully avoiding the label, has some feminist content, such as the "Four Daughters" taken from the Ma'yan haggadah and its own version of the "Four Questions", which has since been incorporated into the array of feminist resources

made available by *ritualwell*.³⁰ This suggests that feminist content has been spreading, perhaps slowly, perhaps even very slowly, throughout the mainstream Jewish world, at least in the New York and Montreal areas.

The changes were, on the whole, fairly well received. Although not many of the reactions were 'very positive', the fact that there were so many more 'positive' than 'negative' in all the groups is encouraging. This reinforces the indication that feminist, or at least women-oriented, content is spreading, and finding increasing acceptance, in mainstream seders.

Nor is the process finished. These change-makers plan to keep on making changes: they will change the changes they have already made, they will make other modifications. Transformation is still in progress. And it is a transformation that maintains that women-positive attitudes can be compatible with traditional Jewish practices.

*

Along with changing the regular seders, many of these respondents indicated that they would like to continue participating in women's seders as separate events. They loved the experience. Even though most respondents were very attached to their family seders, they also found the women's seder exciting and fulfilling. If forced to choose, they would opt for the family ritual, but they did not want that choice forced on them. This suggests that there is a future for this ritual; that even if and when the regular seder is transformed into a more women-inclusive ritual, many women may be loathe to give up their women's version. This fits well with the vision of at least one of the organizers at Ma'yan:

My vision for the seder, I think that the women's seder has become and I hope that it becomes entrenched, as a part of how Jewish communities celebrate Pesach. And, for a long while more anyways, the event should just happen.³¹

³⁰ *ritualwell: ceremonies for jewish living*.

³¹ Personal interview with Tamara Cohen, 2001.

In the meantime, as this chapter has demonstrated, some number of regular seders are being transformed by these celebrants. The incorporation of women's seder elements into mainstream seders will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 7. Transforming Rituals: Towards a Sense of Belonging

The purpose of this thesis is twofold: to document and analyze the women's seder, and to assess its potential for transforming the Passover seder from which it is derived. The body of this dissertation describes the history of the women's seder, the new objects it inspired, associated textual innovations in haggadahs, and details of actual seders from the viewpoint of the ritualizers. From the data presented in chapter 6, I compiled a group picture of the almost 1000 participants who responded to my questionnaire, in which I focused on the similarities across the different response groups. Despite the similarities, there were also many differences, and yet the same ritual appealed to the diverse audience.

What did slightly-older more-conservative Na'amat members who wanted to avoid gay events have in common with committed Ma'yan feminists? Na'amat (and Hadassah-WIZO) are structured organizations with established procedures whose members pay dues and are officially recognized. This is very different from Ma'yan, where the community includes all those who support Jewish feminist actions, primarily but not exclusively in New York City. There are no members, only supporters. The women's seder at Na'amat became one of the organization's main events and many members returned year after year. Many of the Ma'yan participants also returned enthusiastically every year even though there was no formal community. What was it about the ritual that was so captivating to all of them? Was it the energy, the exhilaration of being in a room with 500 (Ma'yan) or 200 (Na'amat) (mostly) women, ritualizing, on their feet singing and dancing?

The same commitment to the ritual is seen in my group. The Rosh Hodesh observance at Har Kodesh has had its ups and downs over the years, and now exists in a much diminished form. But the women's seder continues as a strong and energetic event in the ritual calendar. One year we almost didn't have a women's seder because we were all too tired to take on the organizing. But

in the end we couldn't envision Passover without it; we found the energy and the ritual took place.

Hadassah-WIZO as a whole has not continued holding women's seders. After Marla Spiegel stepped down from the organizing committee in 2002, no one volunteered to take her place. But the ritual has continued on a smaller scale as individual chapters have incorporated a women's seder into their program of activities: "The nice thing is that my chapter (and possibly others) have continued the tradition and we have an annual women's seder with just our group."¹

In 2005, after twelve years of hosting women's seders which were attended by about 20,000 people in total, Ma'yan made the decision to stop. "Ma'yan's goal has been to act as a catalyst for change—to create programs that are replicable and can be disseminated and used by others. We feel that we have made a real impact with the seders—they have been picked up and are being done all over the country and in some places in Europe and Israel and it is time for us to move on."²

All of this seems to support the findings in chapter 6 that there is a healthy future for the ritual. However, the lack of young people participating indicates a possible limit, suggesting that the appeal, although strong, is age-dependent.³ When gathering my data, I tried to find young people participating in women's seders, but was mostly unsuccessful. It is possible that they exist and that I was unable to reach them. It is also possible that young people are not interested. So, strong and vibrant as the ritual seems, it may die out with its practicing generation. This question must be left for a future study.

What we do know is that for those who participate in women's seders today, the ritual is significant. I have discussed ritualizers and organizers, and what they have to say about the ritual and how it affects them. If we look the other way, if we concentrate on the rites themselves, we

¹ Marla Spiegel, personal communication, May 2005.

² Eve Landau, personal communication, May 2005.

³ The younger age of the Hadassah-Wizo respondents, as discussed in chapter 6, does not seem indicative of the group as a whole.

can understand something about the larger group (all women's seder ritualizers), and not just my almost 1000 respondents. We can see which elements seem to sit most comfortably within this new women's ritual, which are embraced and which are rejected, and which are carried forward into more traditional seders. From there, we can begin to understand some of the mechanisms that may make change acceptable to ritualizing communities.

*

In chapter 2, I discussed evidence for the Passover seder (that is, the 'ur' model from which the women's seder is derived) having been created consciously and intentionally in response to changed historical circumstances, and for the rabbis having invented the new ritual to fit the new conditions of the Jewish community of their time.⁴ Certainly, there is a modern perception that they gave the matter careful consideration and based their invention on existing symbols, holidays, traditions, myths, foods, and rituals. The previous practice no longer fit the second century Jew, not only from an ideological point of view but also on a practical level: the biblical ritual required a temple which no longer existed. In Bokser's interpretation, "The rabbis extended the Pharisaic notion that God could be experienced outside the temple as well as inside, the implication being that the experience of God was not contingent upon the temple."⁵

The new ritual was an expression of changed belonging-senses associated with diasporic lives, practices, and values.⁶ The rabbis used their extensive knowledge and ingenuity. They brought together elements of belonging-sense from existing rituals, from prevailing belief systems, and from available resources, and presented their invention as if a Passover seder tradition had always existed. It is impossible from our vantage point to know how much of the mishnaic rite was descriptive and how much prescriptive, but the new ritual must have suited the practitioners fairly well, been sympathetic to many of their needs, and reinforced their own

⁴ In fact, this underscores the difficulties in positing 'ur' models of any kind as this presupposes an actual and absolute starting point, from which all subsequent instances are derived.

⁵ Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder*, 1.

⁶ The concept of 'belonging-sense' is explained in chapter 1.

belonging-senses: the seder the rabbis imagined has survived to become the cornerstone of one of the most important holidays in the Jewish calendar.

The precedent established by the second century rabbis, that ritual practice can be adapted to circumstances while maintaining a fiction of permanence and timelessness, is one to which Jews have had recourse since then. The Passover seder has continued to evolve in response to the needs of practicing communities,⁷ and the performance of other rituals has also been changed, sometimes deliberately, often in response to perceived external or internal threats.

A challenge that had been growing since the Emancipation was intensified within the context of the New World values of the early 20th century. Although more subtle than the destruction of the Temple—there was no dramatic physical loss with practical consequences—it was perceived as a danger to the survival of Judaism: North American Jewish leaders viewed with increasing alarm the degree of assimilation occurring among the members of their community. Their response to one manifestation of this tendency, a secular celebration of Christmas, was a creative solution analogous to that of the mishnaic rabbis. They decided to make Hanukah a much more significant and conspicuous holiday, hoping that it would compete favourably with Christmas, and thereby encourage Jews to embrace Jewish, rather than Christian, rituals in the new land. While extolling the virtues of the Jewish holiday, they shifted its emphasis: “[C]oncerned rabbis and educators alike transformed Hanukkah ... into a vaguely Judaized version of the prevailing, late-nineteenth century Christmas”.⁸ According to Jenna Joselit, this conscious promotion of the holiday succeeded in making Hanukah “the domestic Jewish holiday par excellence”. While still retaining the distinctly Jewish nature of the celebration with its referents to historical and traditional elements, the ritual in its changed form made at least two concessions to the changed belonging-senses of turn-of-the-century North American Jews. First was the similarity to the Christmas celebrations with which they were surrounded and which attracted many of them. And

⁷ Some of the changes are detailed in chapter 2

⁸ Joselit, “Merry Chanukah,” 309.

second was the ritual's increased focus on family and children, reflecting the values of the community, "as it symbolized the ordered world, bourgeois probity and family centered values of the American middle class."⁹ The new observance offered a way for the new and old facets to be expressed concurrently, thereby apparently satisfying enough of the belonging-sense to stem the acculturation.¹⁰

Groups of practitioners within Judaism have also followed the rabbinic model for ritual change. Faced with a spiritual gap caused at least in part because existing rituals did not sufficiently address their need to be central and fully participating ritualizers in a Jewish context, Jewish feminists in the 1970s created a new ritual occasion for themselves. They retrieved an ancient characteristic of Rosh Hodesh and re-declared the holiday a women's celebration. Some performed the same ritual being performed by men, and found the missing component of their belonging-sense satisfied by enacting it in a female environment. For others this was not enough, and their rites incorporated many other elements, such as female-God language, feminized blessings, story-telling, singing, dancing, and drumming.¹¹ Each variation and each individual rite testified to a variation in belonging-sense, linked to variations in values and sense of self, on the part of individuals and groups. Although the variations were somewhat denominational, this categorization is too simplistic as the enacted rites testify to a more complex and nuanced variation in belonging-sense.

The origins of the women's seder are similar to that of Rosh Hodesh: Jewish feminists invented it to fill a lacuna in their ritual lives. Like the mishnaic rabbis and the Jewish leaders at the turn of the twentieth century, they surveyed their surroundings and found a model appropriate to their current need; their invention derived from a mixture of existing model and contemporary

⁹ Joselit, "Merry Chanukah," 309.

¹⁰ However, their solution may have only stemmed the acculturation process temporarily. A 2004 article in *The Globe and Mail*, entitled "Do they know it's Chrismukkah?" (Dec 4, 2004), discusses the increasing numbers of families celebrating Chrismukkah, a combination of Hanukah and Christmas.

¹¹ The variations of Rosh Hodesh rituals are described more fully in chapter 2.

elements. Each inventor/creator/organizer used, and still today uses, a different mixture, with differing proportions of old and new. Each practitioner is aware of, and, as chapter 6 shows, many still practice, the antecedent as well as the women's version. Each practitioner feels a different amount of attachment to that antecedent, ranging from a desire for the entire traditional seder to a complete rejection, and these attachments are part of the belonging-senses with which the new ritual is built, maintained, and modified.

The term 'women's seder' covers a range of discrete rites, each with its own particularity. These particularities refer back to the actual group that created/enacted a given rite. That the Har Kodesh women's seder in 2002 used no haggadah, apparently the only rite to do so, is a strong indication of that group's preference for non-textual embodied rituals.¹² Hadassah-WIZO's choice to call their event an 'educational evening' suggests a discomfort with feminist terminology, a fact confirmed in an interview with the organizer. We could apply this process to each individual seder and learn something about the group enacting the rite. We can also apply the same process to the ritual as a whole to learn something about the entire community of 'women's seder participants'.

A first step is to describe what a women's seder consists of. There were many characteristics shared by the individual women's seders, but no rite included all of them. Using the prototype approach suggested by Benson Saler to define 'religion', we can gather a "pool of elements that more or less tend to occur together in the best exemplars of the category" 'women's seder'.¹³ We can arrange the rites according to their similarities, placing those with most of the pool-elements in the centre, and those with the fewest at the edges.¹⁴ Specific rites will differ in one or more

¹² In all my research, I have come across no other seder that did not use a haggadah, other than the same group in different years. However, even Har Kodesh's women's seders are not consistent in this regard—it depends on the organizers for that particular year. As one of the two organizers in 2002, I can vouch for the preference for non-textual rituals on the part of the organizers for that year.

¹³ Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion*, 225.

¹⁴ As Jonathan Z. Smith notes in his discussion of the "polythetic mode of classification", which is very similar to Saler's prototype approach, it is possible that "the individuals at either extreme would scarcely resemble one another, that is, they may have none of the properties of the set in common" (*Imagining Religion*, 4). In our example, it is unlikely that the extremes will differ quite so radically, but we will still see many variations.

aspects from the generic women's seder ritual that emerges. Even this ritual, which is itself marginal with respect to the regular seder, has instances that are more marginal than others. We can identify and focus on the generic ritual, the one with the most elements from the common pool, but it is important that we do not eliminate or ignore those on the edges. We need to hear all the voices, to not cancel out the marginal ones in the search for a generalized view or larger picture.

When I applied Saler's model to my data, the following picture emerged. All the rites had characteristics that did not differ from the regular seder (the 'ur' model): they all used candles, wine and/or grape juice, matzahs, and a seder plate with some combination of the traditional symbolic foods. They all made reference to the story of Israelite slavery and freedom as narrated in the book of Exodus. But they also all had characteristics that differed from the regular seder. These differing characteristics are listed in Table 1 below, grouped according to their popularity as measured by frequency of occurrence. Note that these frequencies are somewhat quantitative values, but ones that were derived subjectively and in relation to one another, and that the list is not necessarily exhaustive. For each characteristic, I have listed a subjective description of the frequency: 'most', 'many', 'some', and 'few'. Some of the characteristics are mutually exclusive—obviously, they did not occur in the same rite. Some of the elements are also shared by modernized regular seders, which is not surprising as the latter are also derived from the 'ur' model. For each characteristic, I have listed the method(s) by which its presence was determined in my study: direct observation on my part, responses to my questionnaires, the haggadah used at the seder, or personal interviews.

Table 1: *Characteristics of women's seders that differ from those of regular seders*

		observ.	quest.	haggad.	intervw.
most	new haggadahs	x	x	x	
most	links to Miriam: naming her; telling her story; decorating with her image; presenting her with offerings	x	x	x	x
most	women-only participants	x	x		x
most	Miriam's Cup	x	x	x	x
most	feminized blessings	x		x	
most	references to contemporary and historic women	x		x	x
most	mostly adults present	x			
most	viewed as a new woman-oriented Jewish ritual	x	x	x	x
many	new physical activities added	x			
many	tambourines	x			
many	dancing	x	x		
many	singing	x	x		
many	orange on the seder plate	x	x	x	x
many	feminist ideology			x	x
many	seders held before Passover	x	x		
many	feminized God-language	x		x	
many	group-organizers and group-leaders (rather than 1 person)	x			x
many	lots of English for liturgy	x		x	
many	contemporary songs	x		x	
many	ritualized blessing and drinking of glass of water	x		x	
many	inclusion of human characters in the haggadah	x		x	
many	take place in communal locations	x			
some	seders held during Passover but not on 1st or 2nd night	x	x		
some	God-references immanent and egalitarian (vs. transcendent and hierarchical)	x		x	
some	increased participation in ritual actions (often written into the haggadah or built into the ritual structure)	x		x	
some	references to biblical women (other than Miriam)	x		x	
some	explicit acknowledgement of diversity within the Jewish community and within the larger community	x		x	x
some	explicit inclusivity	x		x	
some	explicitly activist for social change aspect	x		x	x
some	open to the public	x			x
some	existing group or association holding the seder	x	x		x
some	explicitly feminist content	x		x	x
some	adults only present	x			
some	intended / used as model for regular seder		x		x
few-some	completely new rituals developed especially for the occasion	x			
few-some	lesbian content		x	x	
few	additions to traditional haggadah		x	x	
few	replacements of portions of traditional haggadah		x	x	
few	short efficient meal	x			
few	no meal—only dessert	x			
few	eating of the meal incorporated into the ritual part	x			
few	completely new songs written especially for the occasion	x			
very few	seders held after Passover		x		
1	no haggadah or written text	x			
1	lemon on seder plate		x		

Not listed in the table are the many elements retained from the regular seder: as well as the candles, matzahs, and seder plate already mentioned, women's seders usually include a full meal and follow the traditional 'order' of the ritual, including most or all of the ritual steps.¹⁵ If we add, from the list, the most common elements particular to women's seders, we can construct a picture of a generic women's seder which would have the elements that occur most often and that are most likely to be present.

Along with the elements carried over from the regular seder, the generic women's seder also has a haggadah, but it is a new one. And, unlike the traditional seder, both the text and the ritual include feminized versions of the traditional blessings, feature a Miriam's Cup, and contain links to Miriam as well as references to contemporary and historic women. All the participants at the ritual are women, mostly adult, who view the event as a new woman-oriented Jewish ritual.

It is probably held before Passover in a communal location, organized and led by more than one person. It probably includes an embodied aspect with a fair amount of dancing, tambourine playing, and singing, especially of contemporary songs. Certainly, if my observations are anything to go by, the dancing is a required element: in all the rites that I attended, without exception, many of the participants danced together around the room, creating an energy peak that was almost tangible. Feminist ideology is probably evident in the ritual and feminized language is probably used to refer to God. The haggadah probably includes references to human characters, and much of the liturgy is probably in English. Miriam's Cup is not only present, but probably contains water which is ritually blessed and drunk, and an orange probably joins the other symbolic foods on the seder plate.

A particular rite possibly differs from the generic women's seder described above in various ways. It may be held not before, but during Passover; but, if so, it will almost assuredly be held after the first and second nights, times reserved for the regular seder. It may be hosted by a group

¹⁵ The 'order' of a seder consists of 14 parts: *kadeish*, *urchatz*, *karpas*, *yachatz*, *maggid*, *rachtzah*, *motzi matzah*, *maror*, *koreich*, *shulchan oreich*, *tzafun*, *bareich*, *hallel*, and *nirtzah*.

which already existed for another purpose and it may be open to the public, publicized by newspaper notices, word of mouth, etc. It may explicitly advocate an ideological agenda such as feminism, the need for social change, promotion of social activism, and/or inclusivity both within the Jewish community and between Jewish and other communities. It may call for increased group participation in all ritual aspects. Its liturgy may represent God as immanent and egalitarian, as opposed to the traditional transcendent and hierarchical views. And Miriam may be joined by other women from the biblical narratives.

As we progress to the characteristics that occur less frequently, we find even more radical departures from both the regular seder and from the generic women's seder. In this group we find seders held after Passover, instances where the meal has been decreased in time and importance, brand new rituals and songs, lesbian content, and seders that don't use a haggadah at all. But in this group we also find seders that deviate less radically from the regular seder, such as those that use a slightly modified traditional haggadah rather than an altogether new text.

Working back from this generic women's seder, it is now possible to try and understand something about the needs and values of women who choose to participate in women's seders, and the effectiveness of the seders in response. The characteristics that appear most often are ones that correspond most strongly to the belonging-sense of most of the ritualizers. The generic women's seder is certainly a radical departure from the regular seder, but still shares much with it. The form of the ritual, the 'seder' (i.e. the 'order') is virtually unchanged in all the instances of women's seders—the ancient rabbis that created it are still present in spirit even if they are not explicitly mentioned. The components of the traditional seder are recognizably present, even if the content has been changed to include or focus on women. Those seders that deviate from the rabbis' model do not speak to the belonging-sense of many of the larger group of ritualizers. A strong link with the traditional is apparently an important element of belonging-sense, even for those who are drawn to the new ritual. It is not that they don't find the regular ritual meaningful,

but rather that they find it to be missing key components. They want to add those missing aspects, but not at the expense of the existing ones. Wanting the new does not negate cherishing the old.

The force of tradition in belonging-sense is also evidenced by a number of other characteristics of women's seders. One is the fact that Miriam's Cup is more popular and more widely present than the orange on the seder plate; as discussed in chapter 4, Miriam's Cup has more links to the traditional seder elements than does the orange. Another place where we see the importance of this aspect of belonging-sense is in the inclusion of key passages from the traditional haggadah, even when they are problematic. Thus we find references to the *sh'foch chamatcha* ("Pour out Your fury") passage in haggadahs that otherwise completely disagree with its apparent message. The use of Hebrew language is also connected to this component of belonging-sense. Even in liturgies that are almost completely English, a few Hebrew phrases are retained, those phrases that are most familiar, even to acculturated Jews who don't know Hebrew. One example is the inclusion of the *oseh shalom* passage in untranslated Hebrew in the otherwise English haggadah *The Journey Continues*. A more complex example is *The Open Door's* keeping of the original Hebrew of the *oseh shalom* passage while making ideological alterations to the English text. These examples all tap into the belonging-sense strands of familiarity, of history, and of tradition.

Arnold Eisen found nostalgia, authority, and tradition to be major determining factors for contemporary Jewish ritual observance.¹⁶ All three link the new to the old, bringing ancestors and their practices into contemporary ritual, providing both legitimization and familiarity. Nostalgia, in particular and in its most positive sense, allows the ritualizer the sensation that the new has melded with the old. The belonging-sense component referred to by Eisen as 'nostalgia' is satisfied by many of the characteristics of the women's seder. He himself uses the women's seder

¹⁶ Eisen goes on to say that nostalgia is "arguably the most widespread reason for Jewish practice in America today. Evocation of the ancestors has always featured prominently in Jewish liturgy, but in the past century and a half it has taken on still more importance, both as a motivation for nontraditional observance...and as the force behind more traditional practice." Eisen uses the term to refer to the feeling of a practitioner that s/he is

as an example, focusing especially on the invoking of ancestors within the ritual and on how this serves to anchor the ritual more easily and comfortably within the participants' lives. He lists five ways of how this anchoring works, one of which is "to justify the hyphenated identities of seder participants, which in this case include a *female* identity allegedly precluded by the tradition or inhibited by its silence".¹⁷ Here, Eisen is making the referent of nostalgia the female ancestors, i.e. mothers, grandmothers, or historical women of personal significance, and invocation as imaging them within the new ritual. It is also possible to understand nostalgia as referring to a memory of childhood experience of family celebrations. Together, these three increase the sense of belonging for practitioners. Ritualizers are complex hybrid beings, each with a different belonging-sense derived from her/his different attachments, some of which are in conflict with one another. Using the remembered form of invoking ancestors at the family seder table, but modifying the content by replacing the ancient rabbis of the regular haggadah text with biblical or contemporary women, may help resolve some of the contradictions by allowing a person's group identity and individual particularity to coexist through the medium of nostalgia in a ritual arena where intellectual compatibility is not always necessary. The belonging-sense is the end result and resolution of this tension.

Ancestor invocation also carries with it a sense of continuing tradition and legitimate authority. In this study we saw evidence of ancestor invocation—via traditional language, symbols, and acts. Some of the ancestors were invoked also in their persons; the one most often invited to women's seders was Miriam. Miriam was present in one form or another in all the seders that I know of, without exception, either by herself or in the company of other ancestors. Sometimes her story was told, ritual objects associated with her often sat on the table, and in some cases the event and/or haggadah was named for her. She obviously speaks to the belonging-

following in the footsteps of previous practitioners (*Rethinking Modern Judaism*, 14).

¹⁷ Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism*, 253; emphasis in the original. I find Eisen's discussion helpful to my own study, but would prefer that he omit the word "allegedly" from his discussion. I don't think there is any doubt about the androcentrism of the Jewish tradition.

sense of many of the participants, although not necessarily in the same capacity to each one. For some, it is the introduction of a female presence that draws them, a counterbalance to the overwhelming maleness of the regular seder. For some, she provides a human counterpart to the divine actor of the traditional ritual. For others, it is not only the femaleness and humanness of Miriam that is important, but her particularity. The fact that she is reported to have sung, danced, and played the tambourine during the Exodus has inspired the addition of embodied rituals involving these three acts. For some, the fact that Miriam is referred to as a prophet in the Bible supports the claim that not only men are/were prophets; for others, Miriam's questioning of God's choice of Moses as sole prophet is translated into a challenge to the male hegemony of the Jewish tradition. For some, the fact that Miriam is one of the only unmarried women named and featured in the biblical narrative affirms the lifestyles of women living in non-traditional arrangements. And, for some, Miriam's connection to life-giving water is celebrated as a connection to the unpolluted, rejuvenating, and revitalizing natural world.

So much rests on the shoulders of this one woman. Speaking as she does to so many participants on so many levels, Miriam functions as a gathering point for many different women with many different senses of belonging. Because of her biblical credentials, her presence is legitimized and, in turn, legitimizes these women's insistence that they be visible within the seder ritual. She becomes the bridge between the new and the old. Connected to this is the upholding of women as role models. When the non-traditional presence of Miriam at a seder is made possible through the traditional form of ancestor invocation, she becomes available to serve the traditional function of ancestor-as-role-model, but as a new type.

Along with emphasizing Miriam's role as prophet, most of the women's seders examined in this study depicted and affirmed a number of non-traditional roles available to women. The rituals were led by women, and most of the seders were attended only by women. Many of the seders and haggadahs showed a high level of learning and knowledge. The women-only context did not result in simplistic or 'dumbed-down' rituals; women taking on previously-male roles did not

result in a deterioration of quality. Some of the women's seders and haggadahs also had women rabbis involved in their creation or performance—thus confirming that the roles available to women include those that carry status and authority in the regular arena. Examples include the presence of Rabbi Elyse Goldstein as the invited speaker at the Hadassah-WIZO event; the commercially published women's haggadahs written by women rabbis; the fact that the organizing committee of the Ma'yan seders often included at least one woman rabbi; and the fact that one of the leaders at the Ma'yan seders has often been a woman rabbi.

The seders showed that non-rabbinical women also were comfortable in the role of religious authority. None of the organizing committees included men. Even the less-feminist organizations such as Na'amat and Hadassah-WIZO seemed to have no problem making decisions about ritual and determining for themselves the extent to which they would follow and the extent to which they would deviate from the tradition. This is apparently something with which most of the ritualizers were also comfortable—it fit their sense of belonging to see women being public leaders and making decisions.

There was a corresponding de-emphasis of men's roles in the women's seders, but we cannot take this as an indication of a devaluation of men or their roles. All of the participants had the experience of the regular seder and also of contemporary society in general—in both of these, they were faced with many examples of men valorized for acting in all kinds of leadership roles. This validation was not de-affirmed in the women's seders, it is simply that men and their roles were largely absent from this particular context. This absence in no way corresponds to the absence of women in the traditional ritual. There, the absence of women as active ritualizers derives from and, in turn, leads to a view of their ritualizing role as secondary and less important, and their actual absence today reinforces and affirms that view. In the case of women's seders, it is not that men are being demoted, but that women are being promoted.

Besides affirming women's actions in non-traditional roles, women's seders explicitly acknowledge, affirm, and confirm women's importance in all aspects of life. The celebration of

women's achievements and promotion of women as ritualizers, ritual leaders, and religious authority was not done by devaluing women's traditional activities in the domestic and food preparation realms. Most of the women's seders in this study included meals as elaborate as those at regular seders. Seders that minimized or eliminated the meal and the preparation of the food were uncommon. For the most part, it seems that the sense of belonging for most participants was reinforced by the food aspect. Cooking and food preparation were not sacrificed; a curtailed or catered meal was among the marginal characteristics of women's seders. Instead, we see a valorization of food-related activities. This valorization took various forms: at the Na'amat seder, the pot-luck meal was the highlight of the evening and the participants spent a lot of time discussing the various dishes and trading recipes; the Ma'yan liturgy included praise for the food preparers;¹⁸ and the Har Kodesh seder incorporated the eating of the meal into the ritual portion of the evening, creating a sub-ritual involving food and food preparers for that purpose. The belonging-senses of participants at the women's seders are drawn to new women's roles but also, most definitely, to the old ones—more women's activities are added without eliminating existing ones.¹⁹

From chapter 6, we have a description of the 'generic' respondents: female, Ashkenazi, denominationally somewhat conservative but tending towards liberalism, North American born,²⁰ heterosexual, married with two children, comfortable economically, 50 years old, regular involvement with both the food preparation and the liturgical service in family seders, and great enjoyment of the women's seders, especially as celebrations in their own right. Some have already made changes to their family seders, bringing in female-oriented material. These changes

¹⁸ Even though the Ma'yan seder contained a curtailed and catered meal, it was obvious that this was done for logistical rather than ideological reasons, due to the large size of the group. But it also fits with the role of their seder as the organizers see it: to provide tools for participants to use at their regular seders, where the food aspect will not be minimized.

¹⁹ See Susan Starr Sered's *Women as Ritual Experts* for a discussion of the ritualizing significance of women's traditional activities.

²⁰ Although there is a fair possibility that they may be immigrants, especially in a Canadian context.

were, on the whole, fairly well received, and they plan to keep on making changes. They would also like to continue participating in women's seders as a separate event.

All these characteristics are connected to belonging-sense. These women are attached to their tradition(s) and unwilling to give it (them) up—they want more, not less. They want to lead rituals, and also to continue preparing food. They want to sing and dance with Miriam, and also to have the rabbis present. And while some of their belonging-sense is drawn to and affirmed by celebrating the new women's seder ritual, mostly but not necessarily exclusively with other women, another part requires the continued celebration of the regular seder, especially in the company of family. For them, the new ritual represents an addition rather than a rejection.

Steven Cohen and Arnold Eisen recently published a study on Jewish identification, for which they conducted 50 in-depth interviews with Jews across the United States, as well as drawing on data from approximately 1000 mail-back questionnaires. The target group for the interviews was between 30 and 50 years old and moderately affiliated with Jewish community and religious organizations; they took care to include people who lived in large urban centres as well as those who lived in smaller locations. Their demographic group was similar to mine in many respects, although slightly younger; the most significant difference was gender—their group was half female and half male. Because of the similarity, their findings may be applicable at least to some extent to my group, and might be useful in highlighting certain characteristics suggested by my study. In addition, although the survey group they used was the same size as mine (approximately 1000 people), it was selected so as to “approximate the demographic characteristics of the [National Jewish Population Survey]”,²¹ i.e. to be as representative as possible of American Jews. It is therefore interesting to see the extent to which their findings coincide with my own, and see if my respondents are somewhat representative of the Jewish community in general in at least some respects.

²¹ Cohen and Eisen, *The Jew Within*, 6.

They found a major emphasis was placed on personal fulfillment and choice. In their own words, “[t]he single most important finding is...the ‘first language’ that our subjects speak is by and large one of profound individualism.” This individualism translated into the ritual life of the respondents as a continual decision and re-decision about which rituals to practice and, perhaps even more importantly, how to practice them: “[t]he more committed and active among our sample told us repeatedly that they decide week by week, year by year, which rituals they will observe and how they will observe them.” These practitioners want to enact religious rituals, but the rituals must be, and must remain, meaningful to them on a personal level. There is no assurance that rituals will continue to be enacted just because they have been in the past, and there is no assurance that the form of the rituals will remain static. These ritualizers do not consider themselves bound to or by the tradition(s) into which they were born or in which they grew up; they consider themselves able and competent to make ritual decisions for themselves. “Each person now performs the labor of fashioning his or her own self, pulling together elements from the various Jewish and non-Jewish repertoires available”.²² Each person has become a religious authority, a ritual expert, and a ritual consumer.

These points parallel some of the findings in my study. The sense of self-sufficiency regarding ritual decisions is similar to the one found in my respondents. From Cohen and Eisen’s input, it seems that my respondents are part of a larger trend towards self-determination and personal authority. Contemporary ritualizers, at least in the demographic group common to these two studies, consider themselves sufficient authority; this is a marked change from much of Jewish history in which ritual decisions were referred to authoritative rabbis, who delivered their *responsa*. Some of the subjects of Cohen and Eisen’s study are very committed to religious

²² Cohen and Eisen, *The Jew Within*, 7,7,2. This reliance on personal decision making regarding ritual practice would not be acceptable to most Orthodox practitioners. Only 7% of their respondents identified as Orthodox, whereas 17% of Na’amat, 14% of Hadassah-WIZO, and 10% of the Independent respondents in my study did so. Women’s seders, which add a new ritual but do not necessarily change an existing one, do not interfere with Orthodox observance or the desire to continue with traditional practices. The respondents in my study are not faced with a conflict or a need to make choices and, in this respect, differ significantly from those studied by Cohen and Eisen.

practice, and ritualizers at women's seders care enough to have created and to continually recreate and enhance a new ritual.²³ But in both cases, they exact their own price for this commitment. The rituals to which they are committed must provide a high degree of personal fulfillment in return. The ritual must speak to enough of the hybrid selves that make up belonging-sense. This attitude is true of both the participants at the women's seders and of the active ritualizers in Cohen and Eisen's group, as "Jewish meaning is not only personal but constructed, one experience at a time."²⁴ Contemporary Jewish practices, at least in these groups, are continually re-negotiated and re-examined based on the shifting belonging-sense of the moment.

This "profound individualism" cannot help but affect communities. Communal cohesion is based, at least to some extent, on a shared belonging-sense. But for each individual, there are parts of their belonging-sense that are shared with the group and others that differ. People continue to relate to and within their communities because the parts that are shared are significant enough in their lives. So what happens when the search for individual fulfillment becomes more significant? One result is the creation of new communities, ones that stress more personal fulfillment for ritualizers and thus strengthen an individual member's sense of belonging. In the case of the women's seder participants, these new communities are being constructed without an accompanying destruction of existing communities. In fact, most women's seders are intentionally scheduled so as to not conflict with regular seders. This is also true at another level. We see from the list in Table 1 that some of the seders were held by existing groups or associations. In some cases, these were groups that had no previous connection to religious rituals: Na'amat is an example of a group creating women's seders and thereby becoming a ritualizing community. But it is not the same community that constitutes Na'amat in general.

²³ Although the participation of rabbis in some of the leadership roles indicates that, at least for some of the organizers and participants, the authentication provided by actual certified rabbis confers an added degree of authority.

²⁴ Cohen and Eisen, *The Jew Within*, 36.

Even though half the attendees at the seder, or at least half the respondents, were Na'amat members, the other half were not. This was a new community brought into existence at least for this one occasion. In other cases, the existing group that chooses to hold a women's seder is one that is already focused on religious rituals; Har Kodesh fits into this category—they have simply expanded their repertoire of rituals to include this new one. But in this case, as well, many of the participants are not members or regular attendees of the group. Here, too, we see a new community brought into existence for this occasion. In both these cases, the regular community continues virtually unchanged, although some of the non-member attendees may subsequently choose to join the regular group.

We also see brand new communities brought into existence through the medium of the women's seder. Ma'yan does not have a membership that meets on a regular basis. The 500 participants coming together to enact the women's seder each night are a brand new community—for each individual, it is any combination of the characteristics in Table 1 that draw her/him.

Part of what it does, [the women's seder] does just create community for women. I think that being in a room with 500 women does something all on its own. That's powerful. And then dancing. The first time that I realized that we were ... dancing the Miriam song and that that was ... the closest to being able to realize what it must have been like crossing the Red Sea. Even if I don't believe necessarily that that happened, that was very powerful just to feel that.²⁵

Enough of a belonging-sense is shared by the group for many individuals to find the personal fulfillment they are seeking within the communal event—the overwhelming number of respondents testified that the seder was a success for them. But joining this new community does not correlate with leaving existing communities. In fact, many of the participants bring their existing communities with them. Entire tables at Ma'yan seders are often reserved for groups comprised of members of Rosh Hodesh groups, synagogue sisterhoods, friends, and/or families. These tables are communities within communities: joining the new community adds another

²⁵ Tamara Cohen, personal interview.

strand to the hybrid belonging-sense of both the individuals and their groups.

The ‘community within a community’ phenomenon also occurs at Na’amat, although in a different way. Here the groups who come together are primarily families, and this has become a significant aspect of the event for the organization: the women’s seder has become a time for female members of families to ritualize together. In her interview, the seder organizer stressed the intergenerationality of the participants: “sisters and mothers and daughters and grandmothers are all coming together”.²⁶ It is a characteristic that was very satisfying to her, and, presumably, to the organization in general. For one thing, Na’amat has an aging membership, and would most likely view the participation of younger women as a possible infusion of younger members.

What is especially interesting about this ‘family-phenomenon’ is that, once again, something familiar is used to introduce a radical innovation. The existence and cohesion of family sub-units within ritualizing communities is very much in the Jewish tradition, but in the active public realm is most often seen amongst males. The women’s seder allows for a parallel version, in which female family members function as the public actively ritualizing sub-group. This new version resembles the familiar, but, at the same time, subverts it. The belonging-sense of women as legitimate public ritual performers is reinforced by reference to traditional practices. Friends, family, and community are being joined together.

If, as Cohen and Eisen say, “[c]ommunity and commitment...are repeatedly redefined and apprehended...in terms acceptable to sovereign and ever-questing selves”,²⁷ my study shows that the comfort of “sovereign and ever-questing selves” is very much attached to making the new consonant with the old. Because of their needs, these women are constructing new communities for women’s seders, they are modifying existing communities, and, at the same time, they remain committed to the traditional seder performance. So, what does this do to the pre-existing regular community? and to the regular seder? What happens when this counterpart with its overwhelming

²⁶ Paula Weitzman, personal interview.

²⁷ Cohen and Eisen, 7.

presence of women becomes an annual event in the ritual calendar of a significant number of seder participants? Does the pre-existing ritual remain unchanged?

In each group in my study, at least 40% of the respondents who had previously attended women's seders went home afterwards and changed their regular seder. In fact, the number is much higher, and it is more accurate to say that *only* 40% made changes in the Na'amat group as opposed to over 80% in the Ma'yan group (see Table 28 in chapter 6). The Ma'yan seders have been occurring for twelve years. Since roughly half the attendees are new each year (59% in 2001), if these numbers are consistent and at all representative of the entire group, there are an additional 1000 people each year who have had their first women's seder experience, 800 of whom go on to change their previously-unchanged (at least with regard to women-oriented content) regular seder. As we have seen that some people travel large distances to attend the Ma'yan seder, this results in a fair number of changed seders not only in the New York area but also spreading out and reaching into other cities, states, and even countries.

There is additional data to support the premise that Ma'yan participants are making changes each year and that 2001 was not exceptional in this regard. I distributed slightly modified questionnaires at the 2002 Ma'yan seders which asked first-time attenders about planned changes.²⁸ The results are shown in Table 2 together with those from the previous year.

²⁸ I received 501 responses in 2002, a lower number than the previous year. However, there were also less total attenders, because the first of the four seders was held in a smaller venue. The response rate is somewhere around 30%. Of the 501 respondents, 264 (53%) were repeat-attenders and 237 (47%) were first-timers. These are the numbers used in Table 2 for comparison purposes.

Table 2: *Ma'yan responses re changes at regular seder*

	2001 non-first-timers: made changes (out of 307)		2002 non-first-timers: made changes (out of 264)		2002 first-timers: planned changes (out of 237)	
made changes	249	80.6	206	78.0	161	67.9
changed: haggadah	109	43.8	98	37.1	43	18.1
songs	134	53.8	109	41.3	72	30.4
prayers	78	31.3	71	26.9	38	16.0
music	84	33.7	0	0	0	0
dancing	31	12.4	24	9.1	17	7.2
objects on the seder table	163	65.5	172	65.2	114	48.1

The statistics for 'non-first-time' respondents for 2002 are somewhat similar to those of 2001 in that they show almost the same total percentage having made changes to their regular seders, although the lower percentage in every category other than objects on the seder table indicates a possible change in attitude that could be explored in future studies. This is also largely true for the planned changes by first-timers where, again, changes are indicated for a large percent of the total group even though the numbers in each category are lower. This supports the hypothesis that there has been a continual outflow from the Ma'yan women's seder into the surrounding Jewish communities.

The number of Canadian seder respondents who made changes is much lower: 40% for Na'amat and 43% for Hadassah-WIZO. This was only the second year for Haddasah-WIZO, which might account for the lower number. But this is not the case for Na'amat: 2001 was their fifth annual seder and 64% of the respondents were not first-timers.²⁹ This suggests that in Canada, at least in Montreal and maybe in Toronto, there are fewer changed seders proportionally than in New York.³⁰ The number of Independent respondents who made changes is, like Ma'yan and unlike the other Canadian groups, very high (77%). However, because, unlike Ma'yan, the number of non-first-timers in this group was extremely high (84%), the respondents were mostly

²⁹In 2006, when this dissertation is published, Na'amat will hold its tenth women's seder.

³⁰This may be a result of the tendency for Canadian Jewish communities and individuals, in general, to be more traditional and conservative than their American counterparts.

repeat attenders whose regular seders had already been changed. We therefore might expect that, although many changes may already have emanated from their activities, the process has slowed down.

Table 3: Responses re nature of changes at regular seder (reprinted from chapter 6, Table 29)

	Ma'yan		Na'amat		Had-WIZO		Independent	
haggadah	109	43.8	7	58.3	3	100.0	16	61.5
songs	134	53.8	2	16.7	1	33.3	12	46.2
prayers	78	31.3	4	33.3	1	33.3	9	34.6
music	84	33.7	0	0	0	0	6	23.1
dancing	31	12.4	0	0	0	0	2	7.7
objects on the seder table	163	65.5	6	50.0	1	33.3	20	76.9

From Table 29 in chapter 6 (reprinted here as Table 3), we see that the most common changes were those concerning objects on the seder table and haggadahs. The number who made changes to the seder objects was high in all the groups, and we have information from other sources to support this finding.

Vanessa Ochs' study shows Miriam's Cups making their way onto the tables of regular seders: "American Jewish families are now encountering Miriam's cup as one tradition among other venerable traditions (such as eating matzah, or dipping a green vegetable in salt water)." Ochs also found Miriam's Cup included in regular haggadahs, i.e. haggadahs created for use at a regular seder. For Ochs, as for me, this was an indication of its encroachment into the mainstream arena: "If there is any indication that Miriam's cup has gone mainstream, it is in its inclusion in family haggadahs."³¹ She also found references to the new seder object in various Jewish publications: *Lilith* (in 1992 and 1999), *The Reporter* (in 2000), and *Moment* (in 2000). Although *Lilith's* readership probably has a large overlap with the group that participates in women's seders, this is not the case for the other two. *The Reporter*, the publication of Women's American ORT, is aimed at a mostly female audience, but not necessarily one attracted to or knowledgeable

³¹ Vanessa Ochs, *Miriam's Object Lesson*, 70 & 89.

about feminist-inspired practices or Jewish ritual. And *Moment* is not at all gender-specific in its target audience. Canadian articles have also appeared, situating the new object within the regular seder:

Miriam deserves recognition in the seder and there are many today who set out a sixth cup of wine, Miriam's cup, in honor of this charismatic figure and of the significant and under-recognized role of women in our history.³²

These articles have helped Miriam's Cup become known to wider audiences, and not as an exotic custom but, rather, as a potential object for their own seders.

Another indication of the increased popularity of the new object is its availability. As noted in chapter 4, Miriam's Cups can now be purchased in mainstream Judaica stores. The fact that *Judaism.com* felt compelled to provide an explanation for their Miriam's Cups implies that they thought that the object would not be familiar to their audience; the fact that the store stocked an assortment of the Cups suggests that they expected a reasonable number to be sold. In 2002, Na'amat sold 200 Miriam's Cups, some to its general membership and some at the women's seder.

My data also supports the idea that Miriam's Cups are spreading throughout North America. Although the questionnaire asked the general question about changing objects on the seder table without specifying the objects, 21% of the total non-first-time respondents volunteered the information that they had added a Miriam's Cup. As this detail was not requested, its absence on the other responses does not indicate a negative: it means that *at least* 21% added a Cup. In the modified 2002 questionnaire distributed at the Ma'yan seders, I changed the question to ask specifically about Miriam's Cups and oranges:

³² Roy Bernard Mann, "Miriam's cup and Exodus gifts." Note that Mann presents Miriam's Cup as filled with wine. It would be interesting to discover if, in its movement from women's seders to regular seders, water has, in fact, been turned into wine.

Table 4: Respondents at Ma'yan 2002 who changed or planned to change objects at their regular seders (reprinted from chapter 4 Table 1)

	change	number	%
not first-time at a women's seder (number of respondents = 264)	added Miriam's Cup	154	58.3
	added an orange	109	41.3
	added both	91	34.5
first-time at a women's seder (number of respondents = 237)	plan to add Miriam's Cup	95	40.1
	plan to add an orange	67	28.3
	plan to add both	48	20.3

58% of the respondents who had previously attended a women's seder had already placed a Miriam's Cup on their regular seder table, and 40% of the newcomers were about to do so. In absolute numbers, even if those who responded to the questionnaire were the only ones who made the change, this translates into an additional 95 seder tables holding a Miriam's Cup.

The data suggests that a similar phenomenon is occurring with the orange on the seder plate, although to a lesser extent. In the responses to the original questionnaires, where oranges were not explicitly mentioned, 14% of the non-first-timers volunteered the information that they had added an orange. Using the figures from Table 4 above and applying the same logic as for Miriam's Cup, we expect at least 67 more seders with oranges. Supporting this contention, we find commercially available seder plates with a built-in place for the new object. 'Regular' stores such as the Bariff shop for Judaica (www.bariff.org) and the online store at Jewish.com (www.jewish.com/store) both offered the same glass "Orange Seder Plate" in 2002; the 2004 inventory of AllThingsJewish Store (www.allthingsjewish.com) included a ceramic "Orange Seder Plate". It must be noted, however, that these stores also sold many other seder plates that made no mention of an orange. The orange may be present, but is not yet very conspicuous.

As with Miriam's Cup, we find a number of newspaper articles mentioning the orange on the seder plate, and not always in the larger urban centres where we might expect it. The following is excerpted from the Passover 2001 bulletin of The Sons of Jacob, a congregation located in Belleville, Ontario:

A New Passover Tradition!
 An orange on the Seder plate?
 ...
 Our seder plate will have an orange on it!³³

As well, and again similar to the journey of Miriam's Cup, we find the orange making its way into regular haggadahs:

The Traditional Egalitarian Passover Haggadah by Leona S. Green (Norlee) is described by its author as a bridge between Orthodox and liberal Haggadahs. ...she also includes an explanation as to why people put an orange on the seder plate, "as a symbol that women belong wherever Jews carry on a committed Jewish life."³⁴

The Open Door, discussed in detail in chapter 5, is another regular haggadah that includes the orange on the seder plate. However, the orange is presented as optional, and only discussed in the introduction and never referred to in the liturgy. The orange may have entered the mainstream seder but, so far at least, it has done so in a marginal capacity. This is very different from the presentation of Miriam's Cup, which is introduced and then used in a ritual.

These are only some of the many feminist changes found in this regular haggadah. But *The Open Door* represents an extreme in terms of feminist-inspired or -influenced modifications. At the other extreme we find the Artscroll Haggadah (discussed in chapter 5), which has made no concessions at all. Between them, we find all kinds of other texts, most influenced by the 'modernizing' tendency discussed in chapter 2 and appealing to a somewhat liberal audience. For instance: *A Night Of Questions: A Passover Haggadah* (by Rabbis Joy Levitt and Michael Strassfeld, released in 2000) includes a Miriam's Cup and accompanying ritual; *A Different Night: The Family Participation Haggadah* (by Noam Zion and David Dishon, published in 1997) has pictures of four daughters among its illustrations of "the four children"; *A Passover Haggadah* (by Herbert Bronstein and Leonard Baskin, published in 1994) is written in gender-neutral language. These are not so surprising. What is much more unexpected is the discovery that a traditional Orthodox haggadah has also been influenced by the feminist agenda and is, at

³³ "A New Passover Tradition!" It is ironic that this congregation has embraced a symbol of women's emancipation within Judaism, the orange on the seder plate, but still calls itself the 'Sons' of Jacob.

³⁴ Sandee Brawarsky, "This Year's Model: New Haggadahs for a new year, and for a timeless story."

least to some extent, gender neutral in its assumption of leadership roles (see chapter 5 for a discussion of these changes). Although the changes in this text may seem minimal in comparison to the ones made in others, they are in some ways much more significant. The more liberal denominations declare themselves open to change when warranted. But the Orthodox world prides itself on its ‘immutability’ and often claims that neither its practices nor its texts have been modified.³⁵ A change, any change, belies that claim. It raises the prospect of other changes being incorporated, even if the spokespersons adamantly refuse to admit such a possibility. The subtle way that the change has been integrated into this text is reminiscent of the method used by the ancient rabbis who invented the ‘ur’ seder—it is inconspicuous and does not call attention to itself, it simply sits there as if it had always been. Perhaps the change introduced this way may prove to be as much a catalyst for transforming the Jewish ritual tradition as the one introduced by the ancient rabbis; perhaps this is a small step towards gender blindness for all Jewish ritual leadership roles.

Haggadahs with no feminist content may also be used in conjunction with feminist-inspired texts. Many regular seder ritualizers, especially in non-Orthodox settings, use bits and pieces from several haggadahs, and most of my respondents who changed haggadahs did so by using sections of the women’s texts. The extracts most often included various activities associated with Miriam such as singing her song, telling her story, and blessing a Miriam’s Cup filled with water; used the four cups of wine to honour Jewish women, either historical or contemporary; had four daughters ask questions to balance the traditional four sons; and included a contemporary *dayeinu*, four questions, and/or ten plagues that focus on women’s issues.

It is unlikely that many regular seders include feminized references to God, or even feminized blessings. But they may incorporate a *dayeinu* verse that highlights the continuing violence against women:

³⁵ For a more complete discussion of this topic, see Norma Joseph’s “A Feminist Scenario of the Jewish Future.”

If we break the silence about violence against women and children in the Jewish community and everywhere,
 If we teach our students and children to pursue justice with all their strength,
 If we care for the earth and its future as responsibly as we care for those we love,
 If we create art, music, dance, and literature
 Dayeinu³⁶

The reader(s) may expand on the traditional plagues and include modern equivalents, such as rape, sexism, and homophobia, or translate the ‘slaying of the firstborn’ as domestic violence or female infanticide.

Feminist content may also be of a more celebratory nature. Many of the respondents who changed their regular seders did so with songs, which may be easier to introduce than some of the other changes, especially as so many regular seders are already occasions for family singing. Debbie Friedman is a popular musician whose presence at the Ma’yan seder each year has undoubtedly contributed to the significance of music for that event. Many of the 2001 attendees were already familiar with her songs and sang along with her. First-time attenders or those unfamiliar with her music could buy songbooks and CDs so they could learn the songs in time for their regular seder; Friedman’s music can also be purchased in regular retail outlets. We can imagine more and more households reverberating to the sound of her refrain:

And the women dancing with their timbrels
 Followed Miriam as she sang her song,
 Sing a song to the One whom we’ve exalted.
 Miriam and the women danced and danced the whole night long.³⁷

Dancing is not as common as singing, but has been introduced into some regular seders by women’s seder attendees. One reason for its lower popularity is probably lack of space. Most regular seders take place in private homes (the overwhelming majority of my respondents who attend regular seders do so in their homes—over 95%). At many of these, there is barely enough room to seat the extended family that has gathered for the holiday, and no room for everyone to get up and move at the same time. Some of the women’s seders, especially the ones hosted by

³⁶ This version of the *dayeinu* was included in the texts for the Ma’yan, Na’amat and Hadassah-WIZO seders.

³⁷ Cohen, *The Journey Continues*, 71.

institutions, take place in large halls, where there is room for the dancing. Perhaps because of this, dancing has become popular in most women's seders. "It has become a feminist seder tradition to dance with tambourines in honor of Miriam's Song at the Sea."³⁸ And maybe the dancing also occurs in private homes where there is room. At my own family seder one year, I had everyone get up and dance out of slavery with dishtowels on their heads as protection from the hot sun and to the accompaniment of percussive instruments. However, it is unlikely that many people have a family as willing as mine to accommodate their feminist change-maker(s)! This highlights an important characteristic of potential for change. Many people may be comfortable with a certain amount of innovation—perhaps a Miriam's Cup or even an orange—but they may find getting up and dancing so non-traditional and bizarre that they feel estranged. Innovation in ritual and its integration into traditional practices involves the balancing of the belonging-senses of those who desire change and those who are comfortably at home in the current practice.

In any case, the regular seder has changed, and this is not accidental. Whatever the intentions of the individual participants, Ma'yan and Hadassah-WIZO organizers are very clear about their goal:

I want every seder table across the country, across the world, from haredi to secularists, to have a Miriam's cup on it.³⁹

At the end of the seder ... I find myself really getting nervous. Like I want to remind them, and I always try to remind them: "OK, this isn't just about this moment, take this home with you. Do this...go home and use this again. Don't just stay with the feeling."⁴⁰

Because of Mayan's mission, we wanted people to have the experience of being able to take home some of the stuff to their own seders.... Absolutely, the whole idea of Ma'yan is to make change and the best thing about Passover is that everybody celebrates it no matter how they do it....it is the holiday that is celebrated the most.⁴¹

Ma'yan's mission is to act as a catalyst for change in the Jewish community, to make it a better place for women; that's a shortened version but that is the gist. The seder has been successful as an experience, but I guess our question is: is it successful as part of the catalyst for transformation?... So that's where our focus is now, to transfer the knowledge...giving people a specific thing to do, for instance, try at your seder using feminist guidelines for one of the blessings, or read this *dayeinu* or another feminist

³⁸ Cohen, *The Journey Continues*, 71.

³⁹ Tamara Cohen, personal interview.

⁴⁰ Tamara Cohen, personal interview.

⁴¹ Barbara Dobkin, personal interview.

dayeimu or ... put *kos Miriam* on your table...or pick a feminist organization and give *tzedakah* to that organization. Or ask a question about women and poverty in the United States. So we've tried to give some direction that raises feminist consciousness around this event.⁴²

We decided on a theme, which we thought was very embracing—and it was to a lot of us, which was “Women and Passover: past, present and future”.... And on the present and on the future, we would present elements of how to currently bring women’s voices and experiences to your seder table. And with the idea that that will change, in the future, your seders.⁴³

The goals of the organizers coincide with the actions of the attendees, and, perhaps, with their intentions as well. Although very few respondents saw the women’s seders primarily as a model for their regular seder, many of them did see it as a learning experience. Perhaps the difference stems from a semantic understanding of ‘model’ as implying using the entire ritual, vs. ‘learning experience’ which is more in line with extracting parts or extrapolating attitudes. Certainly, it seems that many of the participants did the latter. And, while their primary reason for attending the event may have been for a women’s celebration, their subsequent actions show that they also did use the celebration as a model.

They came to have a good time. They had a good time. And they took some of their experience home.

*

The changes to regular seders are not going to disappear. They are not even going to remain static. Many of the first-time respondents plan to make many changes to their regular seders. Many of the respondents who already made changes plan to continue, not only using the changes they have already initiated, but also modifying those.

The regular seder is in flux—it will continue to respond to women-oriented influences for the foreseeable future. And, although my data shows that seders in the United States have been more affected by the women’s seders, we have also seen the effect on Canadian rituals. As mentioned previously, rituals are always in transition—they change for many reasons, large and small,

⁴² Eve Landau, personal interview.

⁴³ Marla Spiegel, personal interview.

intentional and accidental. Changes may be revolutionary, as happened with the 'ur' seder (even if the inventors went out of their way to not portray it as such). Or they may have a slower evolution. But, over time, rituals are transformed, regardless of the intentions of the original creators.

Belonging-sense is complex and many-layered. We belong, simultaneously, to many groups, and we have, simultaneously, many allegiances. The constructs of homogeneous 'Jewish identity', practices, and communities are being challenged from many sides. And these challenges come not only from marginal, young, unestablished sources. It is mostly well-off, middle-class, married women who attended the women's seders and asserted their own ritual expertise and religious authority. These women did not see themselves as marginal—they did not hold their rituals in obscure or shabby surroundings. The lavish restaurant for the Ma'yan seder, the beautiful quilt decorating the Na'amat space—these ritualizers are claiming their space openly and proudly.⁴⁴ They support at the same time as they resist, conform at the same time as they confront. The resistance is within, and so are the seeds for fruitful and liberating transformation.

The regular seder has already changed. In many homes throughout North America, it now includes a tangible female presence. Many Jewish women today are as knowledgeable as their brothers and other male relatives, and more women sit at the seder table as ritual participants, while less are hidden in the kitchen as the seder unfolds. In many homes, the presence is enhanced by changes emanating from the women's seders, whether or not the participants recognize the origins. It would be very interesting to conduct a random survey of seder participants throughout the Jewish world to see how many, and which particular, parts of women's seders are familiar to Jews who have never attended the ritual. It seems unlikely that the feminist-inspired changes will be reversed—the changes made to the Orthodox haggadah encourage the hope that this presence will increase rather than diminish. The regular seder will

⁴⁴ And, because they recognize that not everyone can afford luxury, they give scholarships so their not-so-privileged sisters can claim space beside and with them.

continue to change. Even if young people do not themselves attend women's seders, they are reaping the benefits of the older generation's participation. At some future point, we will be able to look back and ascertain whether the mainstream ritual was, in fact, profoundly transformed by the women's seder. In the meantime, we can only see the individual instances, without yet knowing what they will add up to.

Future studies may help chart the subsequent progress, both of the women's seder itself and consequent changes to regular seders. A study over the next several years may determine whether the decreasing numbers of changes noted above actually represent a trend towards diminished interest and participation in the women's seder. Different researchers, bringing their own perspectives and belonging-senses, may focus on and notice other aspects in both these rituals. Perhaps a researcher particularly drawn to young people's activities will take up the challenge to find the young ritualizers and trace their connection to the women's seder. Maybe a researcher interested in Marxist materialism will undertake a class analysis of the new ritual. Or perhaps a comparative-religionist will document comparisons between the new ritual and other new non-feminist-inspired Jewish rituals or with new feminist-inspired rituals in other traditions.

Future studies may also concentrate on the regular seders and their responses. When 'foreign' elements, such as those emerging from the women's seder, are introduced to a regular seder, how is the sense of belonging of the ritualizers affected? When I described my research project to a modern Orthodox man of my acquaintance, I saw his eyes glaze over—for him, this was 'women's stuff' and, therefore, of no interest. Someone might undertake a study of how these changes are perceived by and affect ritualizers such as my acquaintance. Do the previously-at-home participants feel invaded and displaced? If the new elements are accepted, are ritualizers enriched or transformed? or are they merely humouring the change-makers?

Belonging-sense has been described in this dissertation as constantly shifting and in continual reconstruction. I have also shown that many contemporary Jewish ritualizers engage in a conscious process of continual re-evaluation of their attachment to tradition. Given these factors,

it is possible that the model of the linear development of tradition may have to be readjusted. A more useful approach may be one more in keeping with Saler's model, where pool-elements are continually in a state of flux, in terms of composition and of balance.

And, lastly but certainly not leastly, what are the limits of transformation? How many new elements can be absorbed before alienation occurs? At what point is a new element too extreme for the belonging-sense to accommodate? For the Jewish lesbians protesting the way they had been treated, bread on the seder plate was acceptable; they already felt so alienated that the symbol, radical and jarring as it was, fit within the boundaries of their 'Judaism'. For my Orthodox friend, an orange on the seder plate might even be too radical. And, like the tradition they are attached to, these limits are continually shifting; we need studies that analyze the relationships between belonging-sense, time, and surrounding conditions.

*

This dissertation documents a piece of the history of a ritual in its early stages, and increases our knowledge in a number of areas. First is, of course, the shedding of light on a ritual that is little known outside of the circle of participants. But, as I have shown, the ritual is linked, firmly and inextricably, to other rituals and to the larger community. The women's seder has become an important component of the ritual calendar of many of the participants. It is also affecting the ritual lives of many who may never have heard of it, as they participate in regular seders that have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by the newcomer.

Rituals reflect the world as viewed by the ritualizers; they also help shape that world and transform it.

By inducing a set of moods and motivations—an ethos—and defining an image of cosmic order—a world view—by means of a single set of symbols, the performance makes the model *for* and model *of* aspects of religious belief mere transpositions of one another.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Geertz, 118 (emphasis in the original).

While creating and performing rituals that harmonize with their belonging-senses, the ritualizers are, at the same time, helping change their world into one that fits more comfortably with those belonging-senses. The vibrant ritual activities of Jewish women are helping bring into being a society where they are public ritual experts and religious authorities, acknowledged as such by themselves and by the wider Jewish community.

The original creators of women's seders were inspired and motivated by a feminist ideology. Since that time, women's seders have been created, performed, transmitted, discussed, recreated, modified, and enjoyed by many different people, some of whom share that feminist ideology, some of whom are indifferent to it, and some of whom actually oppose, or at least disassociate themselves from, it. But, regardless of the intentions of the ritualizers, the end result of the ritual's existence has been to further the feminist cause. The very fact of substantial numbers of Jewish women taking part in, and being influenced by, women's seders has resulted in many regular seders being changed to accommodate the changing belonging-senses of those women, and, by extension, their families, and, eventually, their communities. The feminist-inspired new ritual has resulted in the feminist transformation of one of the fundamental Jewish rituals.⁴⁶

Besides documenting the existence and influence of the new ritual, in this study I have also presented a way of examining and analyzing rituals. The field of ritual studies, as I discussed in the introduction, is still young and provides few models, especially with regard to ongoing changes. This study shows one way of combining tools and methods from different disciplines, grounding them with an integrated and coherent framework, and using the resulting custom-made model as the basis for the analysis. This same approach can be applied throughout the field of ritual studies, with the particular tools and methods varying with the particular requirements. In the hybrid world in which we live and study, inter-disciplinarity is a way to increased perception and understanding.

⁴⁶ At least in North America (at least for the time being).

Terminology is a critical aspect of analysis, and new terms must be coined when existing ones do not adequately serve our needs. As part of this study, I created the term “belonging-sense” to describe the way in which the multiple strands of a person’s identities, tastes, and values interact and result in an affinity for or an aversion to a particular ritual. The new term proved its usefulness throughout the dissertation, allowing for a simultaneous discussion of holistic and component levels of connection between persons and ritual.

*

And so I have come to the end of my dissertation. I find myself, many years later, transformed, and yet some things have not changed at all. My research into women’s seders and other transforming Jewish women’s rituals has strengthened my love for these rituals and my appreciation of their empowering, motivating, and inspiring capacity. I am encouraged by what I found. Each piece has shown me new paths that beckon. When I first started this process, I had no idea where it would end, and this is no less true now. The process is as fascinating and inspiring as it was then, and the future just as unknown...

Bibliography

Interviews:

- Cohen, Tamara. Interview with author. New York, 2001.
- Dobkin, Barbara. Interview with author. New York, 2001.
- Rivka [pseudonym]. Interview with author. Montreal, 2001.
- Landsberg, Michele. Interview with author. Toronto: 2002.
- Landau, Eve. Interview with author. New York, 2001.
- Spiegel, Marla. Interview with author. Toronto: 2002.
- Weitzman, Paula. Interview with author. Montreal: 2001.

Sources:

- Adelman, Penina. "A Drink from Miriam's Cup: Invention of Tradition among Jewish Women." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10.2 (1994): 151–166.
- _____. *Miriam's Well: Rituals for Jewish Women Around the Year*. 2nd ed. New York: Biblio Press, 1990.
- Adler Rachel. *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1999.
- _____. "In Your Blood, Live: Re-Visions of a Theology of Purity." *Tikkun* 8.1 (1993): 38–41.
- _____. "Tumah and Taharah: End and Beginnings." *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives*. Ed. Elizabeth Koltun. New York: Schocken Books, 1976.
- Agus, Arlene. "This Month is for You: Observing Rosh Hodesh as a Woman's Holiday." *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives*. Ed. Elizabeth Koltun. New York: Schocken Books, 1976.
- Aigen, Ronald, ed. *b'chol dor va'dor / In Every Generation: a Family Haggadah*. Montreal: Congregation Dorshei Emet, the Reconstructionist Synagogue of Montreal, 1989.
- Alpert, Rebecca T. "Finding Our Past: a Lesbian Interpretation of the Book of Ruth." *Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story*. Ed. Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer. New York: Ballantine Books, 1994.
- _____. *Like Bread on the Seder Plate: Jewish Lesbians and the Transformation of Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- _____. "Our Lives Are the Text: Exploring Jewish Women's Rituals." *Bridges* 2.1 (1991): 66–80.
- Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: BasicBooks, 1981.
- Amital, Yehuda. "'Etrog Ha-murkav' – The Grafted Etrog." Adapter Yitzchak Ben-David. Trans. David Silverberg. *The Virtual Beit Midrash*. Accessed March 2005 <www.vbm-torah.org/sukkot/suk64rya.htm>.
- "A New Passover Tradition!" *The Nudnik Sons of Jacob Synagogue* 29 March 2001. <<http://www.lks.net/~soj/nudnik/Nudnik44.pdf>>.
- Anisfeld, Sharon Cohen, Tara Mohr and Catherine Spector, eds. *The Women's Passover Companion*. Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing Company, 2003.

- _____. *The Women's Seder Sourcebook*. Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing Company, 2003.
- Apothecary at Supply Curve* Homepage. Accessed October 2001 <www.supplycurve.com>.
- Babylonian Talmud*. General trans. and ed. Rabbi Dr. I Epstein. Vol. 2 *Seder Mo'ed*. "Pesahim." Trans. Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman. London: Soncino Press, 1967.
- Balin, Carole B. "The Transformation of the Passover Haggadah." *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times*. Ed. Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999.
- Baskin, Judith, ed. *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991.
- bat Mildred, Stella. "The Torah As I See It." Homepage. Accessed October 2001 <www.gurpages.com/humorme/workweek.html>.
- Baumgardner, Jennifer, and Amy Richards. *MANIFESTA: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000.
- Behar, Ruth. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.
- Bell, Catherine. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- _____. "Ritualization of Texts and Textualization of Ritual in the Codification of Taoist Liturgy." *History of Religions* 27.4 (1988): 366–392.
- Berrin, Susan, ed. *Celebrating the New Moon: A Rosh Chodesh Anthology*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1996.
- Bloch, Abraham P. *The Biblical and Historical Background of Jewish Customs and Ceremonies*. New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1980.
- _____. *The Biblical and Historical Background of the Jewish Holy Days*. New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1978.
- Bokser, Baruch M. *The Origins of the Seder: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- _____. "Ritualizing the Seder." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 56 (1988): 443–471.
- Brawarsky, Sandee. "This Year's Model: New Haggadahs for a new year, and for a timeless story." *The Jewish Week: Serving the Jewish Community of Greater New York* 1 March 2002.
- Broner, E.M. *The Telling*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.
- _____. and Naomi Rimrod. "The Women's Haggadah." *The Telling*. E.M. Broner. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.
- _____. and Naomi Rimrod. "A Woman's Passover Hagaddah and Other Revisionist Rituals." *Ms.* April 1977: 53–56.
- Bronstein, Herbert, and Leonard Baskin. *A Passover Haggadah*. New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1994.
- Brooten, Bernadette. *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982.

- Brumberg-Kraus, Jonathan. *Meals as Midrash: A Survey of Ancient Meals in Jewish Studies Scholarship*. Accessed May 2004
<<http://acunix.wheatonma.edu/jkraus/articles/MealsasMidrash.htm>>.
- Camilli, Doug. "Let's be clear: Montreal is not like New York. They're too obsessed with their money, their toys, and themselves. We have a twin somewhere else." *Montreal Gazette* 4 Nov. 2000: A7.
- Cantor, Aviva. "Jewish Woman's Haggadah." *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives*. Ed. Elizabeth Koltun. New York: Schocken Books, 1976.
- Cernea, Ruth Fredman. *The Passover Seder: An anthropological Perspective on Jewish Culture*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995.
- Cohen, Norman J. "Miriam's Song: a Modern Midrashic Reading." *Judaism* 33 (1984): 179–190.
- Cohen, Steven M., and Arnold M. Eisen. *The Jew Within: Self, family and Community in America*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000.
- Cohen, Tamara. "Filling Miriam's Cup." *ritualwell.org: ceremonies for jewish living*. Accessed December 2002 <www.ritualwell.org>.
- _____. ed. *The Journey Continues: The Ma'yan Passover Haggadah*. New York: Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project, 2000.
- Cooper, John. *Eat and Be Satisfied: a Social History of Jewish Food*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1993.
- Driver, Tom. *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998.
- Dobrinisky, Herbert C. *A Treasury of Sephardic Laws and Customs: The Ritual Practices of Syrian, Moroccan, Judeo-Spanish and Spanish and Portuguese Jews of North America*. New York / Hoboken, NJ: Yeshiva University Press / Ktav, 1986.
- Douglas, Mary. *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. 1970. London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1973.
- _____. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. 1966. London & New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Eisen, Arnold M. *Rethinking Modern Judaism: Ritual, Commandment, Community*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Elwell, Sue Levi, ed. *The Open Door: A Passover Haggadah*. New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2002.
- Faludi, Susan. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. New York: Anchor Books, 1992.
- Fano, Azaria Menahem. *Sefer Asarah Ma'amarot*. [Hebrew]. Jerusalem: Mekhon Yismah Lev - Torat Mosheh, 1999.
- Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schussler. *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.
- Fishman, Sylvia Barack. *A Breath of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish Community*. New England: Brandeis University Press, 1993.
- Fonrobert, Charlotte Elisheva. "A Mikvah for Feminists." *Journal from the the 2nd Conference of European Women Rabbis, Cantors, Jewish Scholars and Activists*, Berlin, 2001.

- Frankel, Ellen, and Betsy Platkin Teutsch. *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols*. Northvale, NJ: Aronson, 1992.
- Freedman, Marcia. *Exile in the Promised Land: A Memoir*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1990.
- Gaard, Greta. "Women, Water, and Energy: An Ecofeminist Approach." *University of North Texas website*. Accessed May 2005 <www.phil.unt.edu/talks/gaard.htm>.
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: BasicBooks, 1973.
- Ginzberg, Louis. *The Legends of the Jews*. Vol. 2. Trans. Henrietta Szold. Vol. 3. Trans. Paul Radin. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1968–1969. 7 vols.
- Glatzer, Nahum N. *The Passover Haggadah, with English Translation, Introduction and Commentary, Based on the Commentaries of E.D. Goldschmidt*. Rev. ed. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- Goldberg, J.J. "Seasons of reinterpretation: Radical demonstration 32 years ago changed Passover culture." *Jewish News of Greater Phoenix*, April 21, 2000.
- Goldberg, Nathan. *Passover Haggadah/hagaddah shel pesach: A New English Translation and Instructions for the Seder*. New York: KTAV Publishing House, both 1966 and 1993 editions.
- Goldstein, Elyse. *ReVisions : Seeing Torah Through a Feminist Lens*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Pub., 1999.
- _____. "Take Back the Waters." *Lilith* 15 (Summer 1986): 15–16.
- Goodman, Jerilyn, "Mastectomy: Twelve Months after Surgery: a Bathing ritual for the End of Mourning." *Lilith* 20.3 (1995): 25–26.
- Grimes, Ronald L. *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1985.
- _____. *Deeply Into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- _____. "Reinventing Ritual." *Soundings* 75.1 (1992): 21–41.
- _____. *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990.
- Guggenheimer, Heinrich. *The Scholar's Haggadah: Ashkenazic, Sephardic, and Oriental Versions*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1995.
- Hadassah-WIZO Organization of Canada website*. Accessed October 2002 <www.canadian-hadassah-wizo.org/who/index.html>.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990.
- Haut, Rivka. "Women's Prayer Groups and the Orthodox Synagogue." *Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue*. Eds. Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut. New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1992.
- Heschel, Susannah. email sent to Rabbi Patricia Karlin-Neumann, Associate Dean for Religious Life, Stanford University and circulated on the Internet. 2001.
- _____, ed. *On Being A Jewish Feminist: A Reader*. New York: Schocken Books, 1983.

- Huntley, Audrey. "Aboriginal Women's Action Network Releases Report on Bill C-31." *Vancouver Rape Relief & Women's Shelter*. 21 April 2000. <www.rapereliefshelter.bc.ca/issues/audrey.html>.
- Hurvitz, Mark. "What do vegetarians use for the Zeroa (Shankbone) on the Seder plate during Pesach?" *Davka website*. 1999. <www.davka.org/why/bejewish/vegeshankbone.html>.
- Isaac, Erich. "Influence of Religion on the Spread of Citrus." *Science* 129 (Jan 1959): 179–186. *Israeli Citrus Marketing Board & Central Bureau of Statistics* homepage. Accessed October 2001 <www.israel.nl/ambassade/agritech/citrus_fruit.html>.
- Jewish Women's Archive*. Accessed October 2002 <www.jwa.org>.
- Joselit, Jenna Weissman. "'Merry Chanukah': The Changing Holiday Practices of American Jews, 1880–1950." *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*. Ed. Jack Werthemier. New York: Jewish Theological seminary of America, 1992.
- Joseph, Norma. "A Feminist Scenario of the Jewish Future." *Creating the Jewish Future*. Eds. Michael Brown and Bernard Lightman. Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 1999. *Judaism.com*. Accessed December 2002 <www.judaism.com>.
- Kalechofsky, Robert and Roberta. *Haggadah for the Liberated Lamb*. Marblehead, MA: Micah Publications, 1988.
- Kaplan, Aryeh. *Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide*. New York: Schocken Books, 1985.
- Kaplan, Mordecai. *The New Haggadah*. 1941. Rev. ed. New York: Behrman House, 1942.
- Kasher, Menachem M. *Israel Passover Haggadah*. New York: Shengold Publishers, 1964.
- Katz, Yael Levine. "Re: Rabbi Menahem Azariah Defano and Ushpizot." Online posting. 3 March 2003. H-JUDAIC Digest. <<http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~judaic/>>.
- Kaye / Kantrowitz, Melanic, and Irena Klepfisz, eds. *The Tribe of Dina: A Jewish Women's Anthology*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.
- Klarberg, Meshullam. "Morsels of Hebrew Grammar." *Shema Yisrael Torah Network*. <www.shemayisrael.co.il/parsha/klarberg/archives/toledot61.htm>.
- Koltun, Elizabeth, ed. *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives*. New York: Schocken Books, 1976.
- Levin, Susanna. Online posting. 4 March 2003. The Women's Tefillah Network. Private listserve.
- Levitt, Rabbi Joy, and Rabbi Michael Strassfeld. *A Night of Questions: A Passover Haggadah*. Elkins Park, PA: The Reconstructionist Press, 2000.
- _____, and Sue Ann Wasserman. "Mikvah Ceremony for Laura." *Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality: A Sourcebook*. Eds. Ellen M. Umansky and Diane Ashton. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.
- Liebman, Charles S., and Eliezer Don-Yehita. *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983.
- Lincoln, Bruce. "On Ritual, Change, and Marked Categories." *Journal of the AAR* 68.3 (2000): 487–510.
- Manor, Dan. "In a Desert Land." *Eretz Daily Archive* 5 April 2001. <www.erezt.com/archive/apr0501.htm>.

- Matt, Daniel. Translator's Introduction. *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*. Trans. and commentary Daniel Matt. Vol. 1. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004. 2 vols.
- Ma'yan: *The Jewish Women's Project*. Accessed October 2002 <www.mayan.org/info/mission.html>.
- Ma'yan: *The Jewish Women's Project*. Accessed May 2005 <www.jccmanhattan.org/mayan.asp>.
- Mcphee, John. *Oranges*. London: Penguin Books, 1966.
- Milgram, Reb Goldie. "2004 Innovation for the Seder Plate." *Reclaiming Judaism as a Spiritual Practice*. Accessed April 2004 <www.rebgoldie.com/pesachrituals.htm>.
- Miriam's Cup: *A New Ritual for the Passover Seder*. Accessed December 2002 <www.miriamscup.com>.
- Mishnah: A New Translation*. Trans. Jacob Neusner. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.
- Moise, Elaine and Rebecca Schwartz. *The Dancing with Miriam Haggadah: A Jewish Women's Celebration of Passover*. Palo Alto: Rikudei Miriam, 1997.
- Morgan, Robin, ed. *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*. New York: Random House, 1970.
- Myerhoff, Barbara. *Number Our Days*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978.
- Na'amat Canada. Accessed October 2002 <www.naamat.com>.
- Neusner, Jacob. *The Way of Torah: An Introduction to Judaism*. 4th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1988.
- "NJPS Special Reports." *United Jewish Communities: the Federations of North America* website. Accessed December 2004 <www.ujc.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=60346>.
- Northup, Lesley A. *Ritualizing Women: Patterns and Practices*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997.
- Ochs, Vanessa. *Miriam's object lesson: a study of objects emerging in the new ritual of Jewish women*. PhD dissertation. Drew University, 2000.
- Oppenheim, Michael. "Modern Jewish Identity: The Prominence of the Issue." *Forum on the Jewish People, Zionism and Israel* 51:2 (1984), 95-103.
- Pardes, Ilana. *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Piercy, Marge. "The Book of Ruth and Naomi." *Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story*. Eds. Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer. New York: Ballantine Books, 1994.
- Pirkei de Rabbi Eliezer*. Trans. and annot. Gerald Friedlander. New York: Hermon Press, 1970.
- Plaskow, Judith. "Feminist Judaism and Repair of the World." *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*. Ed. Carol J. Adams. New York: Continuum, 1993.
- _____. *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*. Harper: San Francisco, 1990.
- Pogrebin, Letty Cottin. "Golda Meir." *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*. Eds. Paula E. Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore. 2 vols. New York: Routledge, 1997.

- Polin, Moshe Zvi. "A seder on the night of Passover by women together: prohibited or permitted, long or not long?" [Hebrew]. *Hadarom* 66–67 (Elul 5758), 29–38.
- Powell, Cornelia. "To Gather Orange Blossoms." *Victorian Weddings*. Accessed October 2001 <www.victoriana.com/bridal/powell/blossoms.htm>.
- Ragen, Naomi. "Turning the Bloom into a Desert." *Naomi Ragen*. 20 April 2001. <www.naomiragen.com/Columns>
- Ras Dashen Ethiopian Restaurant*. Accessed July 2005 <www.rasdashenchicago.com/ethiopian_jews.html>.
- "Ritual Thrones." *ritualwell: ceremonies for jewish living*. Accessed Feb 2005 <www.ritualwell.org/Rituals/ritual.html?docid=127>.
- ritualwell: ceremonies for jewish living*. Accessed April 2004 <www.ritualwell.org>.
- Rosenzweig, Franz. *The Star of Redemption*. 1912. Trans. William W. Hallo. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971.
- Rubin, Anna et al. *Women's Passover Seder – 1977*. Los Angeles: Self-published, 1977.
- Rutenberg, Danya, ed. *Yentl's Revenge: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism*. Seattle: Seal Press, 2001.
- Saler, Benson. *Conceptualizing Religion: Immanent Anthropologists, Transcendent Natives, and Unbounded Categories*. New York & Oxford: Bergahn Books, 2000.
- Schauss, Hayyim. *The Jewish Festivals: History & Observance*. New York: Schocken Books, 1938.
- Scherman, Nossou, ed. *The Family Haggadah*. Artscroll Mesorah Series. New York: Mesorah Publications, 2002.
- Schwartz, Anita. "The Secular Seder." *Between Two Worlds: Ethnographic Essays on American Jewry*. Ed. Jack Kugelmass. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Scott, James C. *Domination and the arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Seder Rav Amram Gaon*. Warsaw, 1865.
- Sered, Susan Starr. *Women as Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- The Shalom Seders: Three Haggadahs Compiled by the New Jewish Agenda*. New York: Adama Books, 1984.
- Simkin, Ruth. *Like An Orange on a Seder Plate: Our Lesbian Haggadah*. Winnipeg: Hignell Book Printing, 1999.
- Singer, Isidore, and Jacob Zallel Lauterbach. "Miriam." *JewishEncyclopedia.com*. Accessed May 2005 <www.jewishencyclopedia.com>.
- Smith, Jonathon Z. *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Solley, Patricia G, ed. "Citrus - Lemons, Limes & Oranges, Tangerines, Grapefruit and Pomelos." *Soup of the Evening*. Accessed Oct 2001 <www.soupsong.com/fcitrus.html>.
- Solomon, Diane. "A Midwife's Kaddish." *Lilith* 15.3 (1990): 22–23.

- Solomon, Maida E. "Claiming Our Questions: Feminism and Judaism in Women's Haggadot." *Talking Back: Images of Jewish Women in American Popular Culture*. Ed. Joyce Antler. Hanover, NH : Brandeis University Press Published by University Press of New England, 1998.
- spalter-roth, bobbi. "this year in brooklyn: a seder to commemorate ourselves." *Off Our Backs* 3.8 (1973): 15–18.
- Stein, Judith A. *A New Haggadah: A Jewish Lesbian Seder*. Cambridge, MA: Bobbeh Meisehs Press, 1984.
- Steingroot, Ira. *Keeping Passover: Everything You Need to Know to Bring the Ancient Tradition to Life and Create Your Own Passover Celebration*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995.
- Strassfeld, Michael. *The Jewish Holidays: a Guide and Commentary*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985.
- Tabory, Joseph. "Towards a History of the Paschal Meal." *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times*. Eds. Paul Bradshaw and Lawrence Hoffman. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame, 1999.
- The Store at Jewish.Com*. Accessed October 2001 <www.jewish.com/store>.
- Tolkowsky, Samuel. *Hesperides: a History of the Culture and Use of Citrus Fruits*. London: J. Bale, Sons and Curnow, 1938.
- Toy, Crawford Howell, and Ludwig Blau. "Tetragrammaton." *Jewish Encyclopedia.com*. Accessed Sept 2003 <www.jewishencyclopedia.com>.
- Turner, Victor. *The Anthropology of Performance*. New York: PAJ Publications, 1986.
- _____. "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*." *The Forest of Symbols: aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967.
- _____. *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience*. Tucson & London: University of Arizona Press, 1985.
- _____. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- _____. "Variations on a Theme of Liminality." *Secular Ritual*. Eds. Sally F. Moore and Barbara Myerhoff. Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977.
- van Gennep, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage*. 1908. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.
- Visser, Margaret. *Much Depends on Dinner: The Extraordinary History and Mythology, Allure and Obsessions, Perils and Taboos, of an Ordinary Meal*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1986
- Visweswaran, Kamala. *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Von Hahn, Karen. "Do they know it's Chrismukkah?" *Globe and Mail* 4 Dec. 2004: L3.
- Waskow, Arthur. "And the Earth is Filled with the Breath of Life." *The Shalom Center*. Written in 1996. Accessed July 2005 <www.shalomctr.org/index.cfm/action/read/section/earth/article/earth01.html>.
- _____. *The freedom seder: a new Haggadah for Passover*. Washington: Micah Press, 1969.

- _____. "40 years after the 'Dream' March." *Thought-letter from The Shalom Center*. ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, September 2003.
- _____. Introduction. *The Shalom Seders: Three Haggadahs Compiled by New Jewish Agenda*. New York: Adama Books, 1984.
- _____. "Next Passover: Facing Pharaoh, Once again." Distributed via email by The Shalom Center, December 29, 2003.
- _____. "Passover and America Today." *The Shalom Center*. Accessed May 2003 <www.shalomctr.org/html/peace150.html>.
- Wasserfall, Rahel R, ed. *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*. Hanover & London: Brandeis University Press, 1999.
- Weiss, Avraham. *Women At Prayer: A Halakhic Analysis of Women's Prayer Groups*. Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Pub. House, 1990.
- Weissler, Chava. *Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1998.
- Winterson, Jeanette, *Oranges are not the only fruit*. 2nd edition. London: Vintage, 1990.
- Wolf, Diane L., ed. *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1996.
- Zavidowsky, Zvi. "The What Why and How of Jewish Meditation." *Nefesh Haya Jewish Meditation Website*. Accessed March 2003 <www.angelfire.com/pe/o/ophanim>.
- Zion, Noam and David Dishon. *A Different Night, The Family Participation Haggadah*. Jerusalem: The Shalom Hartman Institute, 1997
- Zones, Jane Sprague, ed. *San Diego Women's Haggadah*. 2nd edition. San Diego: Women's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education, 1986.
- Zylberberg, Sonia. "Oranges and Seders: symbols of Jewish women's wrestlings." *Nashim: A Journal of Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 5 (2002): 148-171.

Appendix A. Ma'yan version of questionnaire

1. Participation in Ma'yan seder

1. First year you attended a Ma'yan seder: _____ 2. How many have you attended? _____
3. How far did you travel to get here? _____
4. Did you come alone? Y/N with friend(s) Y/N with family member(s): Y/N
5. Do you like the fact that the Ma'yan seder occurs before Passover? Y/N
 If Yes: so you have time to change your own seder? Y/N
 so you can participate in both the Ma'yan and your regular seders? Y/N
 other reason _____
6. Would you prefer the Ma'yan seder to occur during Passover? Y/N
 If Yes, would you like it to replace your regular seder? Y/N
7. Do you like participating in family seders? Y/N community seders? Y/N
 Do you prefer one over the other? Y/N If Yes, which and why? _____
8. What was the Ma'yan seder for you? Indicate the one(s) that apply. Rank these in order of importance where 1 is the most important and 7 is the least important.
 _____ a model that provided ideas for your regular seder _____ a learning experience
 _____ a woman-oriented Jewish ritual _____ a feminist celebration
 _____ a celebratory event in its own right _____ an outing with friends/family
 _____ other (please specify): _____
9. Did you consider the seder a success? Y/N
 Comments _____

2. Demographics: please circle or write the appropriate response(s)

1. gender: female male other (specify): _____
2. ethnic background: Ashkenazi Sephardi Mizrahi other (specify): _____
3. denomination: Orthodox Conservative Reform Reconstructionist Renewal non-affiliated
 other (specify): _____
4. citizenship: _____ country of origin: _____
6. if other than North America, year in which you came to North America: _____
7. marital status: single married partnered divorced other (specify): _____
8. number of children: _____
9. primary sexual orientation: heterosexual lesbian / gay other (specify): _____
10. age: _____
11. family income under \$25,000 \$25,000-49,000 \$50,000-74,000 \$75,000-99,000 over \$100,000
12. We will randomly pick several responses for interviews. Would you be interested in participating? Y/N
 If Yes, please print name: _____
 Address: _____
 phone number: area code: _____ phone number: _____
 email address: _____

3. After-effects: PLEASE ANSWER EITHER SECTION 3A OR SECTION 3B

Did you regularly participate in a seder before attending the Ma'yan seder?

If yes, answer questions in group 3A. If no, answer question 3B.

SECTION 3.A.

1. Where does the seder usually take place (home, synagogue, etc)? _____
2. In what capacity(ies) do you participate?

leading	co-leading	reading	discussing
storytelling	cooking	serving food	cleaning up
other (specify): _____			
3. After attending the Ma'yan seder, did you modify your ritual activities? Y / N

What did you change?	haggadah	songs	prayers	music	dancing
	objects on the seder table		other (specify): _____		
Briefly describe your changes _____					
4. Did you incorporate parts of the Ma'yan haggadah into a different haggadah? Y / N

Which parts of the Ma'yan haggadah did you include? _____

5. Did you modify your seder by raising questions and discussing issues? Y / N

If Yes, briefly describe your changes _____

6. If you made changes, what was the response? _____
7. Do you plan to continue with these changes? Y / N

to go back to your previous structure? Y / N	to modify the changes? Y / N
--	------------------------------

If you answered question 3A, please stop here.

SECTION 3. B.

1. Did you initiate a seder after attending the Ma'yan seder? Y / N **If no, stop here.**
2. Where did the seder take place? home synagogue other (specify): _____
3. Who attended the seder? family friends women only other _____
4. How many seders have you held since then? _____
5. In what capacity(ies) do you participate?

leading	co-leading	reading	discussing
storytelling	cooking	serving food	cleaning up
other (specify): _____			
6. Did you use the Ma'yan haggadah? Y / N If No, what did you use? _____

If No, did you use ideas, songs, from the Ma'yan seder? Y / N
7. If your seder contained Ma'yan-influenced content, what was the response? _____

Appendix B. Na'amat version of questionnaire

1. Participation in Na'amat Women's Seder

1. First year you attended the seder: _____ 2. How many seders have you attended? _____
3. Did you come alone? with friend(s) with grandmother? mother? daughter(s)?
 granddaughter(s) other family member(s): relationship to you: _____
4. Do you like the fact that the Na'amat seder occurs before Passover? Y / N
 Why? _____
5. Would you prefer the Na'amat seder to occur during Passover? Y / N
 If Yes, would you like it to replace your regular seder? Y / N
6. Do you prefer family seders or community seders? _____
 Why? _____
7. Would you like the seder to be open to male attendees? Y / N
8. Did you consider the seder a success? Y/N
 Comments _____
9. What was the Na'amat seder for you? Indicate the one(s) that apply. Rank these in order of importance where 1 is the most important and 7 is the least important.
- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| _____ a model that provided ideas for your regular seder | _____ a learning experience |
| _____ a woman-oriented Jewish ritual | _____ a feminist celebration |
| _____ a celebratory event in its own right | _____ an outing with friends/family |
| _____ other (please specify): _____ | |
10. Do you consider yourself active in the Jewish community? Y / N
 If Yes, are you a member of Na'amat? Y / N supporter of Na'amat? Y / N
 If neither, are you now interested in becoming more involved in Na'amat? Y / N
 If Yes, and you would like to be contacted, print name and phone number :

- If No, is this your only contact with the Jewish community? Y / N
 Do you want more involvement now? Y / N

2. Demographics: please circle or write the appropriate response(s)

1. ethnic background: Ashkenazi Sephardi Mizrachi Ethiopian other(specify): _____
2. denomination: Orthodox Conservative Reform Reconstructionist Renewal
 non-affiliated other (specify): _____
3. country of origin: _____ 4. if not Canada, year in which you came to Canada: _____
5. marital status: single married partnered divorced widowed other (specify): _____
6. number of children: _____ 7. age: _____
8. family income under \$25,000 \$25,000-49,000 \$50,000-74,000 \$75,000-99,000 over \$100,000
9. We will randomly pick several responses for interviews. Would you be interested in participating? Y/N
 If Yes, please print name: _____
 Address: _____
 phone number: area code: _____ phone number: _____
 email address: _____

Appendix C. Hadassah-WIZO version of questionnaire

1. Participation in Hadassah-WIZO Women's Seder 2002

1. Is this your first Hadassah-WIZO Women's seder? Y/N
2. Have you attended other women's seders? Y/N If Yes, what year did you attend the first one? _____
3. Are you a member of Hadassah-WIZO? Y/N
If No, how did you find out about the seder? _____
4. Did you come alone? with friend(s) with grandmother? mother? daughter(s)?
granddaughter(s) other family member(s): relationship to you: _____
5. Do you like the fact that the Hadassah-WIZO seder occurs before Passover? Y / N
Why? _____
6. Would you prefer the Hadassah-WIZO seder to occur during Passover? Y / N
If Yes, would you like it to replace your regular seder? Y / N
7. Do you prefer family seders or community seders? _____
Why? _____
8. Would you like the seder to be open to male attendees? Y / N
9. Did you consider the seder a success? Y/N
Comments _____

10. What was the Hadassah-WIZO seder for you? Indicate the one(s) that apply. Rank these in order of importance where 1 is the most important and 7 is the least important.

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| _____ a model that provided ideas for your regular seder | _____ a learning experience |
| _____ a woman-oriented Jewish ritual | _____ a feminist celebration |
| _____ a celebratory event in its own right | _____ an outing with friends/family |
| _____ other (please specify): _____ | |

2. Demographics: please circle or write the appropriate response(s)

1. ethnic background: Ashkenazi Sephardi Mizrahi Ethiopian other(specify): _____
2. denomination: Orthodox Conservative Reform Reconstructionist Renewal
non-affiliated other (specify): _____
3. country of origin: _____ 4. if not Canada, year in which you came to Canada: _____
5. marital status: single married partnered divorced widowed other (specify): _____
6. primary sexual orientation: heterosexual lesbian / gay other (specify): _____
7. your age: _____ 8. number of children: _____
9. family income under \$25,000 \$25,000-49,000 \$50,000-74,000 \$75,000-99,000 over \$100,000
10. We will contact some of the responses for followup. Would you be interested in participating? Y/N
If Yes, please print VERY CLEARLY name: _____
Address: _____
phone number: area code: _____ phone number: _____
PRINT CLEARLY email address: _____

3. After-effects:

1. Is this your first woman's seder? Y / N
2. Do you regularly participate in a seder? Y / N If No, do you plan to initiate one now? Y/N

If Yes, please answer the following questions:

3. Where does the seder take place:
- house: yours parent(s) child(ren) other family other: _____
- institution: synagogue other: _____

4. In what capacity(ies) do you participate?
- leading co-leading reading discussing storytelling cooking
- serving food cleaning up planning / organizing
- other (specify): _____

5. If this is YOUR FIRST woman's seder:
- A. At your regular seder, do you plan to change: haggadah songs / music prayers
dancing orange on the seder plate Miriam's Cup other (specify): _____
- B. Briefly describe your proposed changes _____
- C. Do you plan to incorporate parts of a feminist haggadah into a traditional haggadah? Y / N
- D. Which parts of the haggadah will you change? _____
- E. Do you plan to raise new questions and issues? Y / N
- If Yes, briefly describe these _____

6. If this is NOT YOUR FIRST woman's seder:
- A. At your regular seder, did you change: haggadah songs / music prayers
dancing orange on the seder plate Miriam's Cup other (specify): _____
- B. Briefly describe your changes _____
- C. Did you incorporate parts of a feminist haggadah into a traditional haggadah? Y / N
- If Yes, which feminist haggadah did you use? _____
- D. Which parts of the haggadah did you change? _____
- E. Did you raise new questions and issues? Y / N
- If Yes, briefly describe these _____
- F. If you made changes, what was the response? _____
- G. Do you plan to continue with these changes? Y / N
- to go back to your previous structure? Y / N
- to modify the changes? Y / N

Appendix D. Independent version of questionnaire**PLEASE MAIL THE COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE TO:**

email: sonia@vax2.concordia.ca
 or regular mail: Sonia Zylberberg, Religion Department, Concordia University
 1455 de Maisonneuve Blvd West, Montreal
 Quebec, Canada H3G 1M8

PLEASE MAKE SURE YOU COMPLETE ALL 4 QUESTIONS**1. Seder details**

1. In what city did the seder take place? _____ 2. What year? _____
3. Where did the seder take place: private home community centre synagogue
 other: _____
4. When did the seder take place: before Passover during Passover after Passover
5. Was the seder organized by:
 - an individual
 - an existing women's group: what kind of group _____
 - an existing other group: what kind _____
 - other: _____
6. Is this an annual event for this group? Y / N If Y, what was the first year _____
7. How many people attended the seder? _____ 8. Were the attendees all women? Y / N
9. Was the seder open to the public? Y / N
 - If Y, did it require reservations in advance? Y / N
 - If Y, were there more people than could be accomodated? Y / N
10. Other than the organizer(s), how did the participants find out about the seder?
 - by personal invitation
 - by word of mouth
 - by public announcements: where? _____
 - other: _____
11. Was there singing? Y / N
 - If Y, what songs were sung? (check all that apply)
 - traditional Passover songs
 - contemporary Passover songs by song writers _____
 - other: _____
- Did most people participate in the singing? Y / N
12. Was there dancing? Y / N If Y, did most people participate in the dancing? Y / N

13. Was there a seder plate? Y / N

If Y, what were the objects on the plate? _____

14. Was there food at the seder? Y / N

If Y, was it an entire meal other: _____

Was it: prepared by one person pot luck catered

other: _____

15. Was a haggadah used? Y / N If Y, was it:

prepared by a participant at the seder

a commercially available haggadah: which one _____

other: _____

2. Your Participation in the women's seder

1. In what capacity(ies) did you participate? organizing (co) leading reading

discussing storytelling cooking serving food cleaning up

other _____

2. First year you attended a women's seder: _____ 3. How many have you attended in total? _____

4. Did you come alone? with friend(s) with family member(s)

5. If your seder occurs before Passover, do you like this? Y / N If Y:

so you have time to change your own seder

so you can participate in both the women's and your regular seder(s)

other reason _____

6. Would you prefer the women's seder to occur during Passover? Y / N

If Y, would you like it to replace your regular seder? Y / N

7. Do you like participating in family seders? community seders?

Do you prefer one over the other? Y / N If Yes, which one and why? _____

8. What was the women's seder for you? Indicate the one(s) that apply. Rank these in order of importance where 1 is the most important and 7 is the least important.

_____ a model that provided ideas for your regular seder _____ a learning experience

_____ a woman-oriented Jewish ritual _____ a feminist celebration

_____ a celebratory event in its own right _____ an outing with friends/family

_____ other (please specify): _____

3. After-effects: PLEASE ANSWER EITHER SECTION 3A OR SECTION 3B

Did you regularly participate in a seder before attending the women's seder?

If yes, answer questions in group 3A. If no, answer question 3B.**SECTION 3.A.**

1. Where does the seder usually take place (home, synagogue, etc)? _____
2. In what capacity(ies) do you participate?

leading	co-leading	reading	discussing
storytelling	cooking	serving food	cleaning up
other (specify): _____			
3. After attending the women's seder, did you modify your ritual activities? Y / N

What did you change?	haggadah	songs	prayers	music	dancing
objects on the seder table other (specify): _____					
Briefly describe your changes _____					
3. Did you incorporate parts of the haggadah from the women's seder into a different haggadah? Y / N

Which parts of the women's haggadah did you include? _____

5. Did you modify your seder by raising questions and discussing issues? Y / N

If Yes, briefly describe your changes _____

6. If you made changes, what was the response? _____
7. Do you plan to continue with these changes? Y / N

to go back to your previous structure? Y / N	to modify the changes? Y / N
--	------------------------------

If you answered question 3A, please proceed to question 4.**SECTION 3. B.**

1. Did you initiate a seder after attending the women's seder? Y / N **If no, stop here.**
 2. Where did the seder take place? home synagogue other (specify): _____
 3. Who attended the seder? family friends women only other _____
 4. How many seders have you held since then? _____
 5. In what capacity(ies) do you participate?

leading	co-leading	reading	discussing
storytelling	cooking	serving food	cleaning up
other (specify): _____			
 6. Did you use the women's haggadah? Y / N If No, what did you use? _____

If No, did you use ideas, songs, from the women's seder? Y / N
 7. If your seder contained content from the women's seder, what was the response? _____
- _____

4. Demographics: please circle or write the appropriate response(s)

- 1. gender: female male other _____
- 2. ethnic background: Ashkenazi Sephardi Mizrahi other _____
- 3. denomination: Orthodox Conservative Reform Reconstructionist
 Renewal non-affiliated other _____
- 4. country of origin: _____
- 5. if other than Canada, year in which you came to Canada: _____
- 6. marital status: single married partnered divorced widowed other _____
- 7. number of children: _____
- 8. primary sexual orientation: heterosexual lesbian / gay other _____
- 9. age: _____
- 10. family income under \$25,000 \$25,000-49,000 \$50,000-74,000
 \$75,000-99,000 over \$100,000

11. Did you consider the seder a success? Y/N

Comments _____

12. We will randomly pick several responses for interviews. Would you be interested in participating? Y/N

If Yes, please print name: _____

Address: _____

phone number: area code: _____ phone number: _____

email address: _____