To Embrace or to Evade? Jewish Women in Algeria Confronts Modernity

Yossef Charvit, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel

Abstract

This article is the product of several years of research in Hebrew, rabbinical, and Maskilic archives that may shed light on the history of Algerian Jewry from the beginning of the French occupation (1830) to this day. The purpose of this investigation is to gain familiarity with the narrative that these sources convey and, thereby, enhance the integrity of this community’s historical tableau. Historical-sociological studies depict the Jewish woman as the main force behind the drive for modernity or, indeed, the embodiment of this force. The rabbinical literature, in contrast, portrays the Jewish woman as a victim of modernity, for which reason the Halakhic authorities rushed to protect her. In effect, they reflect the historical reality of women in Algeria in all its complexity: a female identity that seeks a path between the surrounding French society and the Jewish society, with their different focal points of identity. Women maneuvered amid the delicate tension of a personal drive for modernity in a society that remained traditional.

A. Introduction

The article that follows is the product of several years of research in Hebrew, rabbinical, and Maskilic archives that may shed light on the history of Algerian Jewry from the beginning of the French occupation (1830) to this day. The purpose of this investigation is to gain familiarity with the narrative that these sources impart and, thereby, enhance the integrity of this community’s historical tableau. The dominance of the French narrative in the research was far from obvious. The Hebrew dimension of these sources reestablished the community’s Jewish credentials and set up an encounter with its traditional intellectual elite, which had ostensibly expired for good with the eradication of Jewish autonomy in Algeria (1841).

In several cases discussed in previous studies, it is found of interest to compare the narratives that these different sources – the French and the Hebrew – yielded. In this article, too, a comparative approach is taken toward the Jewish woman in Algeria in an era of changes. Paula Hyman’s pioneering book on the Jewish woman’s confrontation with progress, of course, inspires scholars to turn their attention to communities not yet discussed through the prism of gender. What the current article proposes to add, however, is an element of comparison among the available sources. It should be noted that historical-sociological studies depict the Jewish woman as the
main force behind the drive for modernity or, indeed, the embodiment of this force. Amid the severe shock that the Jewish family sustained in the nineteenth century, especially at the beginning of the French era, the paterfamilias remained the pillar of tradition and the materfamilias—who was better acquainted with modernity than her husband because the French colonial presence facilitated encounters between Jewish and French women—became the principal family vector in the drive toward the relished destination of modernity. Children, in contrast, served as Trojan horses, strongly influenced by their French schools and confused by the observance of tradition at home and in their Jewish schools. This, again, left the mother to mediate between tradition and modernity.

The rabbinical literature, in contrast, portrays the Jewish woman as a victim of modernity, for which reason the Halakhic authorities rushed to protect her. The Jews of Algeria faced two judicial systems—the French one, binding from the statutory perspective, and the Hebrew one, binding in terms of identity. The rabbinical elite was often called upon to resolve difficulties that were inherent in the encounter and the collision between the systems. The taqana (rule) allowing the annulment of an engagement, even after the financial requirements have been satisfied, the broadening of this rule to annul a marriage consecrated by sexual relations, and matters related to gittin (writs of divorce), ‘aginut (the “chaining” or “shackling” of one spouse through the withholding of a get by the other), and conversion were only a few of the matters she had to cope with. Although these Halakhic issues are typical of societies in transition and were discussed in all “Oriental” Jewish communities, the purpose here is to determine what they may demonstrate about the modern or traditional nature of the Algerian Jewish woman.

The question, then, is: was modernity something that the Jewish woman in Algeria desired, or was it something to be consciously avoided?

B. The Jewish Woman in Algeria in the Modern Era as Reflected in Historical-Sociological Research and Secular Sources.

The social crisis that struck Algerian Jewry in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries gathered intensity when the French occupation began—the departure of...
rabbits of stature from Algeria; a relatively large outflux to Eretz Israel that left behind a sense of abandonment; migration to Algeria from elsewhere in the Maghreb and the Ottoman Empire; uncertainty and instability due to policy vagueness on the part of the French military regime; the flow of French settlers to Algeria and the impoverishment, to the point of eradication, of the veteran social and economic elites; the abrupt transition from a Muslim traditional social environment to an encounter with secular French culture with its liberal Western ways of life and, concurrently, the activities of clerical and missionary circles on Algerian soil— all set in motion a socio-ethical crisis that left its mark on the Algerian Jewish family.

The Jewish family began to show signs of long-term, far-reaching changes and transitions. Mired in internal stress and confusion in view of modernity and acculturation processes, it began to erode. Apparently, the Jewish family welcomed immersion and integration into French society by not having rejected the two institutions that ushered Algerians into the bosom of French society and culture— the French school and the French army. One may, however, observe an internal dichotomy within the Jewish family. Historical and sociological research reveals the Jewish woman in modern Algeria as a key figure in propelling Jewish society into modernity and its attendant reality. While the paterfamilias remained the traditional pillar and symbol of the familial legacy, his wife, the materfamilias, was typically the agent of modernity and the main familial vector that drove toward French acculturation. Men— especially in the nineteenth century— tended to engage in trade and crafts among each other and, for this reason, avoided exposure to matters outside their closed circle. It was the woman who injected manifestations of modernity— French ways of life, the French language, French settler attire— into the Algerian Jewish family because the jobs she held— domestic, seamstress, petty white-collar worker— brought her into more frequent contact with French colonial society. Her educational development in adolescence may have contributed to the phenomenon. Not until the twentieth century were girls admitted to settings of Jewish community education; therefore, they took neither Hebrew nor Jewish studies. Instead, they acquired French in the French schools that had begun to admit them in the middle of the nineteenth century. For these two reasons— attending French schools and working
among French settlers – Jewish women in Algeria developed a stronger connection with French secular culture. It was they, more than the men, who bequeathed this culture to posterity. The Franco-centric sociocultural process intensified when the Décret Crémieux (1870) granted French citizenship to women and men equally. As the Jews felt increasingly integral as members of the French nation, their identification with the fate of the French nation intensified despite the anti-Semitism that was exhibited in late-nineteenth century Algeria.

The schism within the Jewish family widened and became more acute when the children began to attend French schools because now they began to inject new values into the family cell. At school, the children were exposed to the surrounding French society and culture, which left a deep imprint on them. While mothers prodded their children to “pound the books” and monitored their progress to make sure they attained various milestones, fathers began to lose contact with their children as their Judeo-Arabic dialect ceased to be the vernacular and the observance of the religious commandments in the contexts of synagogue, community life, religious traditions, and rabbinical authority – everything that the paterfamilias symbolized – eroded.

The erosion of the Algerian Jewish family proceeded at additional levels. There was an uprising of sorts by women against the status of “Jewish homemaker.” Traditional attire gave way to European dress, especially when anti-Semitic crises erupted; it was again women who made sure to dress their children in the European manner even when they themselves continued to dress traditionally. Mothers gave their children French names and established a phonetic relationship between Judeo-Arabic names and French ones: Fortuna instead of Masouda, Marie instead of Miriam, Maurice instead of Moshe, Raymond instead of Rahamim, Alfred instead of Freij, and Georges instead of Yihie. Hebrew names were given by fathers in synagogue and did not necessarily appear on ID cards. The observance of religious commandments slowly retreated to the private domain, as in “A Jew in the home and a man [a Frenchman, as it happened] in the street.” Children went to school on the Jewish Sabbath; parents did not seek to have them excused. The dietary laws were observed painstakingly at home but not necessarily in the public domain. An explicit cultural syncretism became entrenched in Algeria. For example, Jewish children felt
somewhat obliged to celebrate Christmas and exchange gifts with their Christian classmates. The family adhered to religious ways of life but opened itself to the surrounding majority society and introduced the exchange of gifts and a festive meal for the Gregorian New Year. The celebration of “national” or “public” observances gained legitimacy. This syncretism did have a red line: conversion to Christianity was not sanctioned despite the presence of formidable missionary circles in Algeria. Ritual immersion also fell into some desuetude with the advance of sanitation; the concepts of ritual purity and hygiene, of *miqve* with *hamam*, quickly became blurred. Some women immersed themselves ahead of their wedding but not after.

Ritual immersion also fell into some desuetude with the advance of sanitation; the concepts of ritual purity and hygiene, of *miqve* with *hamam*, quickly became blurred. Some women immersed themselves ahead of their wedding but not after.

While driving toward modernity, women did not necessarily abandon the tradition. Their conduct corresponded to the secularization process that was sweeping the Islamic countries generally and Algeria particularly. One cannot speak of secularization and modernity en bloc as an all-inclusive and monotonic phenomenon in all corners of the Jewish Diaspora. Among European Jewry, the modern world was associated with remonstrations, protests, and rebellions against the world of tradition. The resulting interpersonal and intergenerational tension gave secularization a militant, bellicose, and angry tenor. Things were different in the Islamic countries, where the “climate” of modernity was much more temperate and rarely involved intergenerational tension. Modern ways of life were adopted pragmatically, allowing tradition and modernity to coexist. Modernity and respect for community elders, honoring of Jewish traditions and sanctities, and the relatively strong preservation of the traditional family structure were not mutually exclusive; they even intermingled. Accordingly, when one speaks of tradition and crisis in the Algerian Jewish context, one should circumscribe these terms with this principled methodological remark. This dimension, which drew on the tolerant, liberal, and pluralistic Sephardic legacy, passed the tests and challenges of modernity.

Furthermore, the women strove for a specifically Algerian modernity, in which tradition and modernity, the French imprint and the Jewish imprint, would intermingle. Sociological research on women who were children in the early twentieth century reflects their nostalgia – fond retrospection – for the vividness of the festivals in their broad sense: pomp and circumstance, culinary wealth alongside richness of
custom, traditional melodies and modern music hip-to-hip with fragrances and a profusion of colors. Each festival carried a charge of kinship, tribalism, solidarity, and fraternity, in which women were central as organizers, advisers, and aides. No detail was left to chance, even the tailor who visited the home to make new clothes under the inspiration of mother and wife. The cadence of family festivities paralleled that of the life cycle: bar and bat mitzvah, engagements and weddings. Yom Kippur, Passover, and Purim were the festivals that left the deepest marks on the women: Yom Kippur and the kapparot ritual, Passover with its intensive housecleaning, and Purim with its abundance of sweets. The social cohesion produced by this festive rhythm lost its acuity when the community adopted French lives on French soil.

Once that happened, the Jews of Algeria rued the loss of other matters that their places of resettlement in France did not offer: the sea, the sun, strolling along the boulevards, the aromas of the ports and ships, the carobs, climbing the cliffs, and the joy of shopping in the open-air market. Their most conspicuous object of nostalgia is their childhood: the French school above all (La Fontaine’s fables and Victor Hugo’s poems, recited from memory), the Scouts and the other youth movements in Algeria, warm family life, “Moorish” (Algerian-Arab or Berber) girlfriends and “French” ones. Marriages and childbirth were important milestones in the women’s adult lives. No less, however, the Algerian war, the Arab terror against the Jews (whom the Arabs identified with the French), their frantic departure; and, in particular, the abandonment of their loved ones’ graves – are well remembered as difficult moments and the genuine rending of the fabric of a life that had abounded with pleasantness.

Where did the Jewish baggage rest in the lives of Algerian Jewish women? As they expressed it, Jewish life was taken for granted and was flush with traditions, customs, and even superstitions. For the most part, they rued not having plunged into Jewish studies as men did and allowing their role as homemakers to deter them from understanding more deeply the traditions they maintained in their homes. Festival preparations and honoring of traditions that passed from generation to generation were entrusted to mothers and mothers-in-law. To honor the Mimouna, held on the day after Passover, and the hilula for the righteous, women would prepare
a se’udat mitsva – a feast associated with a religious imperative. Even though they did not always understand the profundity of the customs, the very act of observing them was enveloped in family warmth, which they remembered with immense fondness after their emigration. Their dialect was peppered with Hebrew concepts such as shemsiyenu [Hashem yatsienu, may God save us], g’zera [gezera, an evil decree], shabah la-il [shevah la-el, praised be God], hareini kapara [I’ll be an atonement], to name only a few. Observance of the menstrual laws was very much an unspoken topic in the family. Intermarriage, assimilation, and anti-Semitism remained their paramount concerns in the preservation of their community legacy. Their message, however, was far from pessimistic; it exuded hope for better days – a message quite often connected with the Land of Israel. The result, as stated, was modernity viewed through a traditional prism.

C. Jewish Women in Algeria in a Legal Tangle between Jewish Law and French Law.

The purpose of this section is to derive from various Halakhic discussions a profile of women in Algerian Jewish society in the modern era and focus on the intricacies of the judicial dualism that, as stated, gave women the appearance of victims of modernity. Behind the Halakhic arguments, the objective is to identify the systematic worldviews of major rabbis regarding the Jewish woman at a time of complex psychological, social, and legal changes.

The influence of the rabbis of Eretz Israel on those of Algeria in Halakha and Halakhic case law (pesiqta) in the modern era has already been noted. The rabbinical authorities of Eretz Israel stewarded and guided their counterparts in Algeria in many senses, as Algeria became the first in the modern Diaspora collective to tackle the challenges of modernity. In the absence of French governmental backing for Jewish autonomy, the leading rabbis in Eretz Israel became an alternative source of authority. Above, attention has already been called to the sociological and legal-Halakhic problematique into which the Algerian Jewish family had tumbled. The community rabbis played a prominent role in solving it by invoking the guiding principle of dina de-malkhuta dina, i.e., affirming the supremacy of French law, while stressing the
value obligation to heed Jewish law, the Halakha, as a matter of Jewish identity. In treating modernity as the objective and universal process that it was, the rabbis of Algeria had to walk a narrow line. Instead of automatically rejecting manifestations of modernity as did some of their colleagues in Europe, they entered into a topical and point-specific confrontation with these manifestations.23

The rabbis of Algeria, in common counsel with those of Eretz Israel, often sought to settle conflicts that arose between Jewish law and French law. In this context, women stood at the forefront of the Halakhic debate, the thrust of which was the vigorous defense of women by the rabbis of Algeria against the socio-ethical implications of modernity. Wherever a woman was liable to be hurt by the collision between the French and the Jewish legal systems, the rabbis of Algeria stood up and defended her. Their motives were concern and acceptance of responsibility for resolving objective distress.

Preeminent examples of this were issues surrounding the engagement annulment tagana, gittin, 'aginut, matrimonial loyalty, and conversion. While these Halakhic issues, typical of societies in transition, were discussed in all the “Oriental” Jewish communities, Algerian Jewry is exceptional among the Islamic countries in that the community consolidated itself as a Western one by all parameters, and the changes it underwent should be viewed as such. The French imprint on the women of the community was not only sociocultural but also juridical. The collective embrace of civil status in Algeria by women – together with the rest of the community – was unparalleled in the Muslim world. This background makes all the more unique the way women coped, as viewed through the prism of dayanim (rabbinical judges), with more “inflexible” judicial systems and integrated education systems that made no distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish girls. Finally, the nature of the Jewish woman in Algeria— was it modern or traditional?

Below an attempt is also made to make a chronological and regional distinction between the capital, Algiers, and the peripheral towns that were exposed to different levels of modernity and tradition: those of Algiers and Oran provinces, which embodied the tendencies to assimilation, as against Constantine Province and
peripheral towns such as Mascara and Tlemcen, which epitomized the traditional leanings.  

a. *Hafqa’at qidushin – Annulment of Engagement.*  
A trenchant debate took place in Algeria between 1865 and 1914 about the existence and validity of the annulment of a marriage when the purpose of the annulment was to obviate the need for a *get* and preventing the creation of *’agunot* and *mamzerim* (*mamzer* = the offspring of a woman who remarried without a *get*), thereby mitigating damage to the Jewish family generally and the materfamilias particularly. The Chief Rabbi of Mascara (Oran province, western Algeria), Rabbi Abraham Ankaoua, the rabbis of Constantine (Constantine Province, eastern Algeria), Rabbis Shlomo Zarka and Eliaou Allouche, and the *dayanim* of Algiers (the capital) and of Tlemcen (a peripheral town in Oran Province), Rabbis David Muati and Hayyim Beliah, discussed these matters from one direction, and the rabbinical emissaries from *Eretz Israel*, rabbis Eliyahu Hazan, Rahamim Franco, and Benzion Alkalai, did so from the other direction. The intention here is not to retrace the Halakhic course of the annulment *taqana* but to clarify the status of women and the attitude toward them in different contexts of modernity.  

Modernity was perceived as a universal process that had good implications for the contemporaries and pernicious ones as well – including the crisis that beset religions generally and rabbinical authority particularly. The well-known rabbinical emissary Eliyahu Hazan identified what he considered an anarchistic element in modern liberalism:

> High-handed transgressors have proliferated and [the rabbis] are helpless in offering salvation. Political freedom has brought on the destruction of all faiths and everyone does as he pleases; indeed, the *goyim* [Christians] are not observing their faith and some work on their festivals. The reason is that political freedom has been the ruin of all religions.

In the Halakhic give-and-take among Rabbis Eliaou Allouche, Shlomo Zarka, and Eliyahu Bekhor Hazan, one senses the Algerian rabbis’ aversion to and disapproval of the audacious ruling handed down by the sage from *Eretz Israel*, to which they ultimately deferred. However, Rabbi Allouche’s pain, revolving around the fragility of women’s status, stands out. As he expressed it, women were exposed
to the problematic implications of the clash between Jewish law and French law and the arbitrariness of men who were blinded by the magic of the liberal cravings of that generation:

Our eyes behold everything that is happening in these generations, a generation of upheavals, young men with virgins in public and in the streets, young people indulging in merriment and frivolity...and God’s perfect Torah is steadily being diluted. This has brought about the sanctioning of the grave marital offense of woman’s going over to another man and becoming his companion. The two of them, intending to transgress against the redemption and the liberation, stand up and present themselves to the governor to make the whole thing official and formalize the bond as [husband and] wife in every respect, even though she is married to another...And the kosher daughters of Israel have become others’ prey, shackled and bound. We fail to find a path of hope with which to remove the obstacles and fence the gaps, and we cannot concur in annulling the marriage after we saw that RIBaSH of blessed memory [R. Isaac b. Sheshet Perlet, Algiers, 15th century] took an abrasively strict approach, even though it was a time when Part B of Sefer Hayyim ve-Shalom, by our mentor, Hagaon Hayyim Palagi of blessed memory [Izmir, nineteenth-century] made its way to us, which agreed to this in theory and in practice...Nevertheless, our hearts hesitated...because we are concerned for the view of those were stringent...Now, at this opportune moment, the eminent exalted rabbinical emissary, Rabbi Eliyahu Hazan, has spread his luminescence to our border. We presented him with the contents of this question and [when] he realized the great and ghastly mishaps that were presenting themselves,...He girded his loins like a man...and plunged into the mighty waters to illuminate the law pertaining to these girls...His just words found favor in the eyes of the sages and rabbis of the holy city of Jerusalem, made it swiftly be rebuilt, and of Tunis, may they be long-lived, who concurred in theory and in practice. If so, we, too, girded ourselves with much boldness and proclaimed our signed consent in all the synagogues...and the Jews upheld and accepted, for themselves and their progeny, to affirm and obey this taqana as long as the raised hand of the government, may its magnificence ascend, forces us to assent in this law and practice.27

In such a setting, this annulment taqana was an audacious novelty. It released the woman from the shackles of being an ‘aguna and from arbitrary conduct by her husband on the possibility of granting a halakhically sound certificate of divorce.28

Rabbi Hayyim Beliah of Tlemcen raised the annulment question again. He consulted Rabbi Rahamim Franco, a rabbinical emissary from Hebron who documented and commemorated this entire issue at great length in his responsa, Sha’arei Rahamim.29 It was Rabbi Beliah’s intention to broaden the annulment taqana in use in Algeria and again arrive at a solution involving annulment even where “consecration by intercourse” had taken place. His purpose was to prevent ‘aginut and the need for a get under more difficult conditions. His intention joins the general tendency among the rabbis of Algeria to alleviate the legal entanglement that beset Jewish women.30 Again, it was women’s misery that lay at the focus of the debate.
When asked to dissent from Rabbi Hayyim Beliah’s view, Rabbi Rahamim Franco refused. The dissenters’ main argument was that one could not annul a marital arrangement by means of a taqana that disqualifies the payment tendered for qidushei qiha (consecration of engagement by the presentation of a ketuba, a Halakhic marriage contract). The emissary’s conclusion – seconding the view of the Rishon Lezion Ya’akov Shaul Eliachar (author of Yissa Berakha and so called himself) – is that a woman must receive a get and the annulment taqana cannot be relied upon all. Accordingly, she may not remarry before “le maire” (i.e., a civil ceremony presided over by the mayor), since she is lawfully married and the offspring of her second “marriage,” if any, are liable to be mamzerim.\(^\text{31}\)

Within this constellation, then, the Jewish woman in Algeria appears to be a weak element in local Jewish society. Therefore, the community rabbis in the capital and the peripheral towns, in common counsel with leading rabbis in Eretz Israel, moved quickly to prevent possible social and moral injustices to the women of the community.

b. Gittin and ‘aginut.

Rabbi Rahamim Franco, staying in Algiers, was asked by the rabbinical court of Mascara (Al Maskr) several questions related to ‘aginut and gittin. His responsa in these matters usually affirmed the judicial competence of the local rabbinical court.

One such question concerned a get that had been given over by a messenger and was disputed in its wording, especially in the sentence “and she shall be divorced from him by its means and me-’akhshav [from now on] shall be allowed to any man.” The word me-’akhshav created difficulty because its wording might disqualify the get and make the woman an ‘aguna. After all, how could a woman be divorced “from now on” at a time when the get had not come into her possession? Rabbi Franco found the wording puzzling and proposed one that is considered more appropriate: “from this day and forever.” Ultimately, however, after thoroughgoing discussion of many responsa, including those of the Hatam Sofer (Rabbi Moses Schreiber, a.k.a., Rabbi Moshe Sofer), Rabbi Franco ruled the get kosher and the woman not an ‘aguna.\(^\text{32}\)
Another question concerned a problematic engagement.\(^\text{33}\) in the engagement proceeding, the word \textit{li} [“unto me”] \textit{harei at mequdeshet li} [“Behold, you are consecrated unto me”] had been inaudible. After vacillating, Rabbi Franco answered the question due to many entreaties from the rabbis of Mascara. He went out of his way to express his appreciation of the local rabbis as being fit to adjudicate the matter and felt uncomfortable intervening in the local courts’ verdicts. What tipped the scales in giving his response was the need to find “succor for the daughters of Israel, who are being defrauded and exploited in this generation of freedom and license, of all times.” The need to repair the local women’s socio-ethical standing was one of the considerations behind his ruling:

...My inquirer asked me to adjudicate the case of this girl...and [determine] what should be done with her. Although it is God Who knows and witnesses that I did not undertake this and insinuate myself into something that is not mine from my heart, especially in a place of severe sexual misconduct. One cannot stand up to prohibit or allow it by force of one’s intellect only; instead, I will arm myself with knowledge on the basis of authors and books...On these grounds I undertook to carry out the wishes of the leaders of this town, Al-Maskr [Mascara], among them the heads of the Consistoire [the French Jewish community organization]...which have awaited my [response] to this matter. And yes, the letter of the law allows us to \textit{turn in favor of the daughters of Israel, who are snared in the trap of fraud and injustice like prisoners of war} ...\(^\text{34}\)

His response establishes no leniency. Admittedly, he says, most decisors tended to view the matter leniently but “We cannot take a lenient approach against those who counsel strictness in a place where grave sexual misconduct is taking place.” After a thoroughgoing discussion of concepts such as “testimony,” “disagreement among witnesses,” and “repudiation of the engagement proper,” Rabbi Franco ruled that no engagement had existed, the engagement is annulled, and the woman does not need a \textit{get} at all. Thus Rabbi Franco preempted a potential ‘aguna situation.

In another case, the rabbinical court of Algiers turned to Rabbi Benzion Alkalai concerning the status of marriages dissolved under French law from 1884 on.\(^\text{35}\) Husbands who had divorced their wives under French law but had not issued them with a \textit{get} concurrently left these women in the state of ‘aguna. The rabbis who headed the court described in gloomy colors the family crisis that the community of Algiers was going through and spoke in the name of the agonized, distressed Jewish...
wife. Their poetic manner of expression, too, cannot but engage the reader’s emotions:

Righteous women…shed tears over their bitter fate day and night, screaming in our ears with a hundred gaping mouths: please! Extricate us from our bind…Should we be captives in the anguish of ‘igun [the state of ‘aguna] forever? Shall we be mired hopelessly in our sorrow until the end of days? Is the arm of our holy Torah too short to offer succor?…Wealthy and poor alike are turning their backs on Jewish women, who cry from the farthest reaches to the foundations and are emerging veiled from the limits that have been spurned to subject their husbands to contempt, saying: ‘Are they not considered Gentile women unto them? Why should our portion be any less than that of the other French women? Do we not live under the same law? Are Hebrew women not akin to Christian women? And what do we have to do with the tyranny of the barbs of ‘igun that have been piercing our organs since the ban against separation des corps fell in 1884?

By allowing uncircumcised judges who teach in contravention of the law [the Torah] to dissolve their marriages without a get and cutting of the letters, they shall become wives to whomever they please via the civil heads of the towns who are called maire [mayor, i.e., civil marriage] and will enter into their second relationships in non-Hebrew languages… Then, due to our many sins, the stain of mamzerim will spread throughout Jewish families. Woe onto the ears that so hear and the eyes that so behold…And even after they separate in the government’s courts…the merciless husband will surely refuse to give his wife a sefer keritut [a get] that would separate her from her nonreligious companions.

Accordingly, we [approached]…your Torah eminence, knowing you as a supreme source of knowledge who can resolve [Halakhic] difficulties as towering as mountains, asking you in your great beneficence to turn your unsullied attention in your spare moments to the anguish of these sisters. Perhaps by dint of your prodigious powers of reasoning and with the aid of the omnipotent [God] you will succeed in setting new regulations atop the pillars of our holy Torah…and then the shackles of ‘igun will no longer await [women] like a sword. 

This interesting excerpt reflects a state of severe socio-ethical decline. Family cohesion and husbands’ loyalty to their helpmeets were in crisis; the enchantment of the French culture had not skipped over the Jewish family and its members’ relations with the surrounding society. These husbands were ostensibly exempt from the imperatives of rabbinical law. Morally, however, they were not because the integrity of the Jewish family had been harmed. It was this that Rabbi Alkalai wished to prevent by promulgating his taqana.

In his erudite and edifying eighty-five-page responsum, Rabbi Alkalai vacillated at length about the matter of the taqana. To prevent ‘aginut, he believed, corrective action must be taken in regard to the engagement ritual itself. Thus, according to his taqana, before the blessing of the engagement, with two qualified witnesses looking on, the groom should give the dayanei get (specific rabbinical judges who handle
divorce cases) in his town or province, even if not to their faces, the authority to write a get, sign it, and present it to his wife whenever she should need it. In other words, a situation in which a husband who divorces under French law may leave his wife without a issuing her with a halakhically sound get should not be allowed to arise at all:

After exhaustive and focused study and much labor, I have devised an innovation, a great corrective measure with which to stop and fill lacunae in the treatment of our people’s daughters, so they should no longer say “We’ve given up because our rabbis cannot reach far enough to dig under their thrones to offer us a ray of hope...lest we be trapped in the fetters of the bitter and horrifying state of ‘igun.”

In essence, when a groom and a bride complete the act of marriage before the mayor as is the custom and come forward to marry in accordance with the holy Torah, may it be exalted, before they recite the engagement blessing the groom should stand before two qualified witnesses and turn to the known dayanet get in that city or province, even if not in their presence, [and say] that he authorizes them to write a get, sign it, and present it to his wife at such time as she should need it from the day they divorce through the [civil] courts onward. The husband shall write out everything in his hand and affix his signature before these witnesses...Then [he] shall place this handwritten [document] in his wife’s hand or in the hand of one of her relatives along with the ketuba, to be kept with her until such time as she will need it. And then, when they separate and divorce in the [civil] courts and the tie is undone, and the husband refuses and is unwilling to give his wife a get in accordance with Jewish law and intends to leave her as an ‘aguna to the end of her days and she is powerless to obtain a get from him in any manner, then this woman shall visit the dayanet get and show them the husband’s handwritten [document] and [identify] the witnesses, via which he instructed them to write and present her with a get as aforesaid. These dayanim shall deliberate the matter and, if they see that is impossible for them to bring the husband before them to grant his wife a get as the Torah states, they will be allowed under [Jewish] law to write a get and present it to her on the basis of the husband’s statement and instruction, as is written in his handwriting and under his signature as aforesaid, rendering her free to marry anyone. After the woman receives her get as aforesaid, they shall issue her with a statement in the name of the rabbinical court to the effect that she was divorced by dint of a proper get from her husband, ploni son of ploni, by their hand under Torah law, as evidence in the woman’s possession.37

Thus, the gist of this taqana is the vehement wish of the rabbis of Algeria to prevent cynical treatment of a wife by her husband and avert contempt for women who are trapped between clashing judicial systems. This taqana aimed to prevent the insufferable ease with which “get refusal” could be practiced.

c. Women’s Loyalty

The rabbinical emissary Rabbi Yosef Nissim Burla joined the roster of rabbis from Eretz Israel who instructed their colleagues in Algeria in Halakhic issues related to Jewish family life.
The first question concerned “shotgun marriages” involving Jews in Oran that were taking place in the city streets at night. The question of the credibility of the witnesses came up: not only did they not view the engagement clearly; they could not even identify the bride for sure. The engagement text, too, was not recited properly. All these factors prompted the dayanim Judah and Jacob Darmon [Tsarmon] to rule that no engagement had taken place and the woman was free to remarry with no need for a get. It was on this that Rabbi Burla was asked to tender his opinion. Surprisingly, he took a hard line and disagreed with the local rabbis, defining the matter as a “grave ‘erva,” i.e., an engagement ultimately consecrated by the testimony of two witnesses who, with all due disclaimers, had seen the ring being handed over, thereby consecrating the woman to her husband. Accordingly, the outcome should be considered a full-fledged engagement. The local rabbis, inspired by Rabbi Burla’s directive, ruled that the woman needed a get to remarry.

It is interesting to compare Rabbi Burla’s positions on two cases in which he vigorously defended women’s dignity – one in Ternifine (today: Tignennif), near Mascara, and one in Mascara itself.

In the first case, Seigneur Jacob Abecassis, a leading personality on the Consistoire, approached Rabbi Burla and asked him how to deal with a woman who was suspected of having betrayed her husband with a Gentile. Rabbi Burla took vehement issue with the testimony about the betrayal, stating that it did not suffice to incriminate the woman. (“No Jew should speak ill of this woman on that basis.”) He emphasized that “witnesses of yihud” (the woman and the man together alone) were not enough; only “witnesses who had literally seen them in the sexual act” could incriminate a woman for betrayal, and only then could her husband divorce her without giving her the property reserved for her in the ketuba. In other words, suspicion did not suffice; eyewitnesses to intimate relations must be present. Rabbi Burla even mentioned extreme situations that raised grave suspicions about a woman’s behavior but did not suffice to incriminate her. Furthermore, Rabbi Burla accused the husband of failing to do his duty toward his wife:

…No Jew should speak ill of this woman on that basis, either because by doing so he would be speaking ill of her sons or because she is a married woman and “It is the glory of God to conceal things” [Prov. 25:2]. Instead, the husband of this woman
should not leave her alone at night; he should be with her at night and at sleeping time...And it is not a good thing to leave the door open...because all such things create a opening through which the wrongdoer may enter whenever the husband is not with her...

Mere undifferentiated suspicion does not suffice to implicate a woman in disloyalty. Rabbi Burla attacked the intolerable flippancy with which the husband treated his wife, being willing to destroy his marriage by releasing fatuous rhetoric into the air. Rabbi Burla points to the permissiveness that has overtaken Jewish society, resulting in relatively open social relations and challenging family cohesion.

The second case sheds light on the phenomenon of nouveau riches who, in their state of moral decline, were willing to divorce their wives without adequate reason as explained in the Shulhan ‘Arukh: “A man shall not divorce his first wife unless he finds ‘ervat davar [‘some unseemliness,’ i.e., sexual betrayal] in her” (Even ha-’ezer 119). Rabbi Abraham Ankaoua of Mascara ruled that absent this condition, a husband has no authority whatsoever to divorce his wife. As was customary, this local rabbi solicited Rabbi Burla’s opinion, and indeed, the latter backed him all the way: “She should not be divorced against her will.” This injunction, to his mind, was even more serious than that pertaining to marrying another woman. His words resonated with particular ferocity against the background of his era – a time of moral loosening, in which the woman at issue was a victim of the same abandonment of moral thinking:

Breachers of limits have been proliferating in this orphaned generation particularly. Each man should impose limits on himself so that the daughters of Israel not become ownerless property in desecration of God’s name. [One who allows this to happen] has breached a limit, and he who heeds us will dwell safely and enjoy good blessings... What is more, he has no permission to divorce her against her will; in such a case he would be aiding criminals and transgressors in each and every city, all of whom will learn to behave nefariously in this manner and betray the wives of their youth. This is not from G-d and it is the duty of all dayanim and rabbis in each and every town to remove the obstacle and raise the banner of Torah, which is our life and the length of our days, and he who heeds us will dwell safely...

The struggle against the slackening of Jewish family cohesion in Algeria was waged consistently. Repeatedly women were seen to be the weak link, the one most vulnerable to harm due to the onerous legal duality and misplaced desires. The community rabbis’ intention in this struggle is to minimize the damage occasioned by the legal duality.
d. Conversion

Another Halakhic aspect that sheds light on women’s identity in Jewish Algeria pertains to conversion and intermarriage. The case at hand was discussed by Rabbis Eliyahu Hazan and Rahamim Franco, who were consulted about the conversion of a Gentile (French) woman in Algiers. A Jew, an acquaintance of Rabbi Hazan’s, had been living with the woman and had had children with her. The man had been allowed to convert the children; Rabbi Hazan was asked whether he could convert their mother as well.

From the day God delivered me to this place, Algiers…there has been one special issue in this city as is known to your Torah eminence…He is married to a Gentile woman and has had sons and daughters with her, and his [Jewish] brothers wish to convert the woman so that henceforth she will be his legitimately, with a ketuba and qidushin. I recall that your Torah eminence, may you be long lived, made great exertions in this matter.

After consulting with Rabbi Franco, Rabbi Hazan took a dual approach toward both “mixed” couples and the mother’s conversion. On the first point, he believed that if the rabbinical court realized clearly that the spouses were inseparable, it might face two negative outcomes. First, the Jewish spouse would remain true to the Gentile spouse even if it meant leaving the Jewish fold; second, the Jewish spouse would not out-convert but would continue to live with the Gentile, thereby committing a dire transgression. Given the extreme Halakhic gravitas of each possibility, the court preferred to convert the non-Jewish spouse.

As for the second point, Rabbi Hazan believed, and stated, that the children’s natural predisposition to their mother should be borne in mind. A mother dominates her child physically and psychologically, he stressed. Her children would continue to adhere to her either way: under Gentile influence if she remains a Gentile and under Jewish influence if she converts. Therefore, he reasoned, it is for their own good to convert their mother even though her conversion would not be “for the sake of heaven.” Furthermore, if she did not convert now and were to have additional children with her Jewish husband, they would be non-Jews under the Halakha. Even if these offspring would be converted like her older offspring, they would be converts “and not conceived and born in sanctity.”
To give these future children the preferred status of “birth Jews,” Rabbi Hazan ruled that their mother should be converted even if her motives were not pure:

…I hereby inform you that when I was there\textsuperscript{45} in 1872, one of [a Jewish man’s] sons from a Gentile woman reached the age of thirteen. They asked me if he could put on tefillin. I apprised them of God’s laws, stating that this boy and all his siblings are absolute Gentiles because it is a plain rule that a male fetus descends on the basis of the flawed [Gentile] parentage and the female fetus does likewise. That they circumcised him at the appropriate time does not suffice to qualify him as a convert because one who undergoes circumcision but does not immerse is tantamount to not having been circumcised. Therefore, I subordinated myself to the mitsva and we immersed him as the law specifies. Then they asked me if there was permission in Halakha to convert their mother, who had been living with him for many years; was exclusively his as a real wife would be, had borne him sons and daughters, and was inseparable from him…I told them that \textit{in such a case I am of a mind to allow her to be converted in order to correct the children whom she had already borne and are bound to her, as well as those whom she would bear, so that they should be conceived and borne in sanctity.}\textsuperscript{46}

It is interesting in this context to note Rabbi Hazan’s psychological observation about women: Jewish or not, they are dominant in educating and shaping the family. For this reason, the rabbis of Algeria, in common counsel with those of Eretz Israel, sought the solutions that would best maintain the integrity of the Jewish family, the future of the community, and the present and future Jewish welfare.\textsuperscript{47}

\textbf{D. Conclusion – Clashing and Complementary Intentions}

The diverse sources investigated above lean in different directions that originate in different points of departure and patterns of identity. The contrast between the implicit feminist and Orientalist approach in the French sources and the traditional attitude wafting from rabbinical sources – which views the family cell as the supreme value and stations woman in the center – reveals intensions that clash structurally but also complement each other. In effect, they reflect the historical reality of woman in Algeria in all its complexity: a female identity that seeks a path between the surrounding French society\textsuperscript{48} and the Jewish society, with their different focal points of identity.\textsuperscript{49} Women maneuvered amid the delicate tension of a personal drive for modernity in a society that remained traditional.\textsuperscript{50} The various sources agree that Jewish women had a special relationship with modernity but disagree about how to interpret the connection. This is due to their different points of departure: historio-
sociological research and secular sources consider the connection an advantage; rabbinical sources see it as disadvantageous and problematic.

The French narrative takes an assimilationist approach, stating that women plunged deep into general society\(^{51}\) and were able, in their own way, to usher Jewish society into the majority society\(^{52}\). The rabbinical Halakhic narrative in Algeria, in contrast, while not ruling out modernity as a ubiquity that could not be denied, decried out its assimilationist aspects, which blurred the Jewish identity and marred Jewish family cohesion. In any case, the two types of sources, taken together, present a more accurate and less one-sided historical tableau.

The feminine portrait of the Jewish woman in Algeria mirrors the historical portrait of modern Algeria. It is typical of an era of changes; its colors and rhythms are sharp. Community and society change their features, tradition and modernity struggle for supremacy, periphery, and center swap identities, focal points of identification and orientation turn hither and yon in search of their path. The centrifugal systems of the early nineteenth century, evidencing processes of destabilization, reoriented themselves in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the direction of community and family restabilization.

Against this background, women stood out as an island of stability and, concurrently, as a vector of dynamism. They also shaped a pattern of “behind-the-scenes leadership” even though sometimes they came across as a soft and fragile link. They fought for the Jewish identity of the future and served as a seismograph, so to speak, for a society being rocked by an earthquake induced by modernity\(^{53}\).

From this standpoint, the Algerian Jewish woman embodied ambivalence toward the tradition. She definitely held it in favorable regard; while perceiving the modern world as the “coming thing” and a positive value, she did not reject the world of tradition\(^{54}\).

The ethnographic findings of a study based on postcards in which photos of Jewish women in northern Africa and particularly in Algeria appear (1885–1930)\(^{55}\) reveal the same ambivalence, the same acceptance of the divergent narratives. According to the authors of that study, women did experience emancipation but it was a slow, veiled, and opaque one. Indeed, the colonial archetype epitomized a mixed
society in which men and women encountered each other outside the family zone without disrespecting the traditional desiderata of the family. Furthermore, the authors emphasize, spouses in the Westernizing family regarded the pre-modern era of polygamy with disgust and developed more refined personal relations that powered “the individualization of personal life, as against the previous overshadowing of frank and direct communication between spouses that traditional life and parental authority had once imposed.” As time passed and spousal relations became freer, however, women felt more willing to return to the status of homemaker. Now, however, the notion of a homemaker had been elevated from an instrumentality to an essence – the individual who preserves the desiderata of the Jewish family in Algeria. According to the other scholars’ conclusion – which is shared in this article – Algerian-Jewish women at the turn of the twentieth century did not tilt toward assimilation and radical Westernization, which the French literature describes as redeeming, liberating, and progressive things, but toward traditionalism in custom, shaping a social and religious behavior that corresponds to the integration of tradition and modernity.

The Jewish feminine legacy in Algeria, on both French and Israeli soil, wishes only the best for itself and aspires to perpetuate values of leading healthy lives, imparting customs to posterity, being worthy of being called a mother and a grandmother, being surrounded by families, intensifying Jewish identity, and imparting humanitarian and ethical values such as concern for the general welfare and for tolerance. These aspirations are enveloped in doubts and concerns: what does the future hold in store? Did we women give our children enough? Where will they figure in Jewish history? Although intermarriage, assimilation, anti-Semitism remain their main concerns, their message exudes hope and urges the taking of a sober approach.

 Algeria’s multicultural scene projected onto the Jewish woman. The Arab-Berber, French, and Hebrew cultures invested her with syncretism and a profusion of facets and points of view, as the present study has shown. This variegated identity – of Iberian-Arabic-Berber origin in general cultural terms, of Sephardic complexion in terms of tradition and custom, of French coloration in official civic terms, and of Hebrew nature in its liturgical sense, all of which with the diverse strains of Andalusian music in the background – indicates that the portrait of Jewish women in
Algeria is endowed with something colorful and three-dimensional. Moreover, insofar as it illustrates her, it further conveys aspects of her surroundings and her relations with them.

**Bibliography:**


Bergman, Tamar. *Like a Polished Mirror*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1996. [Hebrew]


Freiman, Avraham Hayyim. *Order of engagements and marriage after the ceiling of the town, a historical-an example study in Jewish law*. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1945. [Hebrew]


Kaplan, Marion. *Gender, Class, and Family: the Growth of the Jewish Bourgeoisie in Imperial Germany*. Jerusalem: Leo Baeck Institute and Zalman Shazar Centre, 2011. [Hebrew]


ENDNOTES:

1 This study was facilitated by a grant from the Carl and Helen Chair for the History of the Rabbinate in Europe during the Modern Period; I thank Dr. Ruth Roded of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for her edifying remarks and insights.

Jewish Women in Algeria Confronts Modernity

3 Paula Hyman points to a “Western model” of gender and assimilation research (relating to the Jewish communities in Germany, France, Britain, and the United States) and depicts the Jewish woman as the main imparter of the Jewish culture and tradition that shapes the modern Jewish identity on the battlefield of gender power struggles; it is she, Hyman states, who draws the borders within which assimilation takes place. See Paula E. Hyman, Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Role and Representation of Women (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1995).

4 Marion Kaplan’s research on Jewish women in Germany is also noteworthy. Unsurprisingly, her findings correspond to many of mine about Jewish women in French Algeria (1830–1962) (See below).

5 I also add a visual element in the form of postcards, as was done by Clémence Boulouque and Nicole S. Serfaty, Juives d’Afrique du Nord Cartes postales (1885–1930), Collection de Gérard Silvain, Bleu autour, 2005, pp. 52–71, 122–131.


8 I realize that this term is overly inclusive and overlooks class differences among families. My aim here, however, is to identify trends at the level of principle.


10 This, even though the Napoleonic code did not consider women autonomous legal entities.


12 Here even greater caution is advised. One should not speak in sweeping generalizations about Algerian Jewry because the community in Algiers should not be likened to that of Oran, nor that of Constantine to that of Tlemcen. The latter two were considered the most traditional in Algeria; the Jews of the capital, Algiers, and its province, and the port city, Oran, and its province were the most modern and secular in the country.

13 In the 1980s, by which time the Jews of Algeria were on French soil, the Algerian Jewish cuisine underwent a rebirth and again was portrayed as exotic: “Eating was serious business – feeding guests was the epitome of courtesy, generosity, and hospitality. It was literally a gastronomic ritual.” See
views of the editors.

All material in the journal is subject to copyright; copyright is held by the journal except where otherwise indicated. There is to be no reproduction or distribution of contents by any means without prior permission. Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.


Allouche-Benayoun, J., & Bensimon, D., *Juifs d’Algérie : hier et aujourd’hui* (Toulouse, 1989), pp. 125–152. This book is largely based on testimonies of elderly women who disclosed to Allouche-Benayoun, a sociologist, and Bensimon, a historian, the world of beliefs, views, and customs of Algerian Jewry in the modern era (from the middle of the nineteenth century) from a pronouncedly feminine point of view. See also idem, “Rituels sacrés, rituels profanes: L’eau, les femmes, la judéïté,” in Evelyne Pewzner (ed.), *Question(s) d’identité* (Editions Sens, 1999), pp. 87–104.


Unlike the French education, in which girls were enrolled by 1873, they did not attend any setting of Jewish education in Algeria until the 1930s. In Algeria, there was no organized religious education for Jewish girls until the advent of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in 1900. “The Alliance” wished to include girls in religious education from the moment it settled in at the end of the first decade of its activity in Algeria. “The female element projects onto everything – family life, child raising, and the community’s future; we attribute the highest importance to the religious and moral education of the girls, who will become tomorrow’s mothers in their homes,” the heads of the Alliance proclaimed. There was a gap between women’s formal schooling in French and their Jewish knowledge. The Alliance believed that girls and women treated superstitions and legends as though imperatives of Judaism. Albert Confino stressed the supreme importance that his institution attributed to girls’ religious and moral education; “[The girls] will be tomorrow’s mothers and will tenaciously observe in their homes the Jewish tradition, which is meant to make their children into good and useful citizens to their homeland and community.” Girls’ education did not succeed immediately; it was offered only in the major centers – Algiers (from 1936 onward), Oran (1930), and Constantine (1935). In the small communities of the Algerian interior, parents did not enroll their daughters in *Talmud Torah* (traditional religious school) due to their conservatism; only boys attended. Even in large communities, many women did not enroll their daughters in *Talmud Torah* on Sundays and Thursdays, maintaining that the girls were needed in the household. (See note 9).


See note 2.


27 Emphasis added.

28 The pioneering study that explains this taqana belongs to Prof. Zvi Zohar, “The Halakhic Teachings of the Rabbis in Modern Egypt,” *Pe’amim* 16 (Jerusalem: 1983, in Hebrew), pp. 65–88. In this article, Prof. Zohar develops the mechanism of the “Annulment Taqana” as it was introduced in Egypt. The *taqana* was invoked across all of northern Africa, including Algeria.


31 For further study, see Avraham Hayyim Freiman, *Order of engagements and marriage after the ceiling of the town, a historical-an example study in Jewish law* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1945, in Hebrew); Zvi Zohar, *Tradition and Change* (Jerusalem: 1993, in Hebrew).


33 Ibid., 22.

34 Emphasis added.


36 Rabbi Benzion Alkalai, *Taqanat ‘agunot*, manuscript (Algiers, 1901, in Hebrew). I thank Mrs. Sylvie Rachel Morali, daughter-in-law of Rabbi Morali, who kindly allowed me to photocopy the manuscript.


39 Ibid., 9, 11.

40 Ibid.
41 Intermarriage was very uncommon in Algeria; see Yossef Charvit, *Elite rabbinique d’Algérie et modernisation* (Jerusalem, 1995), p. 130.


43 On the question of the conversion and “mixed couples” generally and this case particularly, see Zvi Zohar, *Conversion and Jewish Identity, Studies in the Foundations of the Halakha* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute and Shalom Hartman Institute, 1995, in Hebrew), pp. 59–82.

44 One of the main sources of support for this method of adjudication is Maimonides (Rambam), who ruled that it is correct to allow the non-Jewish spouse in a mixed marriage to convert. Rabbi Hazan, however, noted the difference between Maimonides’ era, when “the rabbinical court had a firm hold on the public,” and the modern era, a time of “freedom and license in this French-rulled country,” in which the court lacks the power to force Jews to heed its instructions. Rabbi Eliyahu Hazan, *Ta’alumot Lev Responsa*, Part 3 (Alexandria, 1903, in Hebrew), 29.

45 He wrote responsa not only in Algiers but also in Constantine and Bône. *Ta’alumot Lev Responsa*, Part 3 (Alexandria, 1903, in Hebrew), 4–5.


47 Zvi Zohar, *Conversion and Jewish Identity*, p. 75.


50 In the testimonies of the interviewed women, one can sense the tension between tradition and modernity in the women’s dialectic attitude toward modernity and secularization, on the one hand, and the Jewish culture and tradition, on the other.


52 The Jewish woman in Germany offers a noteworthy and interesting parallel. Marion Kaplan’s research describes her as an active participant in the social, economic, and political processes of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germany. See Marion Kaplan, note 49 above. Again, my source is the revised and more recent Hebrew edition, p. 9.

53 In this sense, the following quotation from Marion Kaplan fits my findings amazingly well, even when one takes into account the singularity of Algerian Jewry, a more traditional community than that of Germany: “Over time, it was the Jewish family and community, and not the meticulous observance of the traditional religion, that came to embody the Jewish identity in Germany. Women played a
definitive role in the formation of a modern Jewish identity. They, as the guardians of tradition and of modern femininity, nurtured the Jewish customs in their homes and invested them with new contents [...]. They were central in the formation of a modern Jewish identity.” Marion Kaplan, note 49 above, pp. 408–409, emphasis added.

54 Like their Jewish counterparts in Germany, where the West–Central European cultural characteristics resembled those among Jewish women in France and Algeria, the Jewish women in Algeria “served as powerful catalysts in the consolidation of their status and their cultural adjustment; conversely, they tenaciously defended the survival of the tradition.” Marion Kaplan, note 49 above, p. 9.


