Modern Greek Jewish Women: Paths and Identities

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Abstract

Throughout their long-lasting presence in Greece, the Jewish Communities have monitored the political and social changes that are taking place in a gradually secularized and modernized Greek society. It is noteworthy that these communities are organized not on the basis of a religious institution (religion), but of a secular one (community). The identity of contemporary Jews is therefore secularized and their religious identification is actually expressed in a cultural manner, as the role of community eventually outplays the role of the synagogue. Jewish women in Thessaloniki, in this context, balance between tradition and modernity. On the one hand, they accept their full integration into the secular Greek society, while on the other, they are considered to be conveyors and maintainers of the traditional Jewish identity.

Keywords

Jewish Women, Tradition, Modernity, Identity, Greece.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to discuss, from a sociological point of view, the modern identity of women in the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki (J.C.T., Greece), approaching them as agents for the cultivation and transmission of their Jewish ethno-religious culture and identity. Exploring the tripartite relationship between tradition, women, and modernity, this paper addresses the issue of female Jewish identity in the secularized context of Thessaloniki, and more specifically, the position of women in a Jewish Community surrounded by the Greek context. The methodology is based on qualitative as well as quantitative empirical data derived from fieldwork, which was conducted as part of a doctoral research in four Greek cities: Athens (J.C.A.) (49.3%), Thessaloniki (J.C.T.) (28.7%), Larissa (J.C.L.) (14.7%) and Volos (J.C.V.) (7, 3%). One hundred and fifty (150) people participated in the survey (52% of which were women), the majority of whom were born in Athens (44%) and in Thessaloniki (24.7%). 23.3% of the participants were between the ages of 56 and 65.

Jewish Female Presence: A Brief Historical Overview

In Thessaloniki, despite the initial co-existence of four Jewish ethnic groups —the Romaniotes (316, 140 B.C.E., from Alexandria, Egypt), the Ashkenazim (1376, 1470, from Central Europe), the Italiotes (1536, from Italy) and the Sephardi Jews (1492-93, from the Iberian Peninsula)— the dominant Jewish identity at present is the Sephardic, or Judaeo-Spanish one.
On March 31, 1492, after the issue of the Alhambra Decree, the Catholic monarchs of Spain ordered the expulsion of all Jews from their territories. From the end of the 15th until the 16th century, Sephardic Jews fled to the Ottoman Empire, paving the way for the so-called “golden” period of Thessalonian Judaism, at an intellectual, religious, professional, and economic level.\(^3\)

In spite of the crisis that lasted from the 17th to the 18th century,\(^4\) the Jewish Community in Thessaloniki rose to prominence again, from the mid-19th to the early 20th century, with the modernization of the city and the arrival of the liberal, French-based Jewish organization, “Alliance Israélite Universelle” (A.I.U., 1873-1910).\(^5\) It is worth noting that with the assistance of the A.I.U., which saw women as “equal to the m[e]n, (as) [their] partner in life,” and in cooperation with prominent bourgeoisie female figures, as well as community institutions, the position of Jewish women was undoubtedly redefined. As a result, women’s activities expanded into the public sphere, particularly in the fields of education and social welfare. Consequently, the first women’s faculties, professional training centers, and girls’ schools were established.\(^6\) In some of those, women also held administrative positions. Indicatively, remarkable work was carried out by women at private Jewish schools for girls (1867), a vocational school for housekeeping (“Atelier de jeunes filles”), the Aboav orphanage for girls (1925), the 300 Ladies Association, and the Alliance schools. Another important step was the establishment of the first organized philanthropic associations with a resolve to educate young girls.\(^8\) In 1935, the first all-female community organization, named Vizo [WIZO], was also established, the social and charitable activity of which continues until the present day.\(^9\)

During these crucial years, which witnessed the annexation of the city to the Greek state (1912-1922), the Jewish identity was redefined along the twin axes of national and religious identity, Greek and Jewish, that was a result of the official recognition of the Jewish Community by the Greek state (1920).\(^10\) Until the arrival of Minor Asia refugees (1922-23), the Jewish population undeniably constituted the majority in the multiethnic society of Thessaloniki. In 1944 —after the outbreak of World War II, the invasion of German troops (1941-44), and the adoption of the Nuremberg race laws by the Nazi regime (2 August 1943)— Jews, within the short period of six months, were expelled and eventually murdered, losing most of their population (around 96%, i.e. fifty-six thousand people). Thereafter, the center of the Greek Jewry moved to the capital, Athens, and the Jewish presence in Thessaloniki was reduced to just one thousand people.\(^11\)
According to the historian Mark Mazower, after the Second World War, Thessaloniki was “…(a) City of Ghosts.”12 Within the Jewish Community, but also in the broader local community of Thessaloniki, the Jewish women survivors made an effort to restore themselves to their former position amidst complete social disorganization and poverty. On the one hand, these female Greek Jewish survivors of the concentration camps, “…thought about and longed for one thing only—returning home…But what is home?”12 they came to wonder afterwards.13 On the other hand, those Greek Jewish women who were rescued, found themselves actually suspended in a shattered postwar community, attempting to reconstruct and reinstate it, either through volunteer work with youth, or by getting married and starting families. Admittedly, the majority of the Jewish population was characterized by a strong shift towards the institution of marriage as the only way that leads to personal safety, stability and reintegration into society. The Jewish women commented characteristically: “…There were two or three marriages at the same time… People were getting married to start a new life with a partner,” and “…to overcome their loneliness…”14 To sum up, it is clear that the postwar Jewish female identity, under the pressure of the dramatic historical and social developments, was shaped, reshaped and renegotiated not in terms of communal identity, but in terms of personal survival.

**Jewish Identity, Women and Secularization: The Paradigm of the Jewish Community in Thessaloniki**

Women’s subservient position and unrecognized role in society began to be perceived as a social problem towards the end of the 19th century, both in Europe and America. Some of the historical milestones that marked the protracted efforts for radical change include the unshackling of the individual from the constraints of traditional society, and the sense that it was feasible for someone to act outside their communal boundaries. Especially with the advent of feminism, women’s voices began to be heard and their vision quickly transformed from an idealized goal to a reality.15 Women’s exit from the domestic to the public sphere —i.e., from the traditional to the modern, to having access to public goods and benefits (e.g. education)— was based on the declaration of their political and social rights (United Nations, 1946, 1952), along with their active participation in the workplace. The reformist “female” zeitgeist of the time even extended to rereading of the Hebrew Bible.16
Indubitably, in modern urban European societies, cultural and religious pluralism is a tangible reality. At the same time in Greece, issues regarding religion, due to the changes brought about by modernity, are still in the process of secularization. The individual precedes the collective, and social subjects, using their free will, shape their own individual identities and narratives. Nonetheless, in the framework of these socio-political developments, the collective religious identity is also subject to change.  

In contemporary Greek society, the issue of religious identity is a matter of individual conscience and choice. The attempt to separate the state from the institutional church has been an agonizing one, as the latter’s ethnocentric tendency seeks to equate being Greek with being an Orthodox Christian. Despite the claims of the institutional ecclesiastical order, the right to religious freedom was enshrined in the Constitution of 1975, according to which every citizen has the right to express their religiosity, individually or collectively.

In academia, much research has been carried out regarding religious, ethnic identity, both individual and collective, in both historical religious communities and in immigrant ones. It should also be mentioned here that, in recent studies, female identity in particular has constituted a central theme of primary importance.

In order to better understand women’s role within the J.C.T., one should first briefly present the community itself and its functions. The Greek state officially recognized the indigenous Jewish Communities of Greece as religious communities in 1920. The present J.C.T. is usually considered a traditional community, imbued with conservative religious forms; there is no sign of progressive religious movements, such as the “Reformed” (also called “Liberal” or “Progressive”) or the “Reconstructionist,” which appear in the United States. It is thus obvious that there are no corresponding women’s movements, which struggle in different ways to secure an institutionally established role for women in the communal as well as religious milieu.

Nowadays, the aim of the contemporary J.C.T. is, primarily, to serve the needs of its members at the communal, extra-communal, and social level of life, and secondarily, to maintain and reshape their ethno-religious and ethno-cultural identity. Communal organizations are founded on a secular, rather than religious system and are run by institutional community personnel, as well as decision-making centers, i.e., councils and community committees. The community is seen as a multivalent center with a multifaceted character, the most important task
of which is to strengthen the sense of belonging, solidarity, and cohesion among its members. The members who completely identify with the community are few, though; some regard it as part of their lives; but practically everyone considers it to be a reference point in times of trouble.24

The activities carried out in the context of communal organization are oftentimes social, cultural or religious and normally focus on the members’ ethno-cultural Jewish identity. However, due to external cultural and religious influences, exercised by the surrounding Greek society of Thessaloniki which constitutes the majority, and given the risks, on the one hand, of assimilation and, on the other, of the dangers posed by anti-Semitic tendencies, members, in recent years, especially the young get together in social and religious gatherings. Thessalonian Jewish women are the main protagonists in the organization of these communal initiatives which are aimed first at the establishment of social networks for mutual aid and solidarity among all members, and secondly at the religious and cultural empowerment and mobilization of younger members.25

In the present Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, the concept of religion is identified with the word “synagogue.” The religious structure is understood as part of communal life, without completely coinciding with it. The religious element, in other words, is a reality, but not of major importance; the synagogue, as the actual worship place, does not represent for its members the entire communal existence, but only part of it; they do not avoid it but they also do not consider it to be the foremost element of their collective identity either.26

Generally, Jewish women express their Greek citizenship and their Jewish faith by referring to themselves as “Greek Jewish.” The harmonious synthesis of the Greek-Jewish self-referentiality is triumphantly depicted in the following phrase of an Athenian: “… If we were trees, the seed is Jewish and the land which it was cultivated on is Greek... It is a combination; the seed came from somewhere else but it fell on this land and this land brought it up!”

Several participants equate their identity with a social affiliation, while, others evidently have a more secular, even atheistic perception, expressed as “… I would say that I am an atheist Jewish woman. The word ‘Jew’ characterizes me because I have grown up with these people ... it is something that unites us and makes us a family, a bond that is not essentially religious, but mainly social…”

The current data suggests that the vast majority of Greek Jews (68%) are defining themselves as both Greek and Jewish (see Chart 1).
More specifically, some Greek Jewish women accept their Greek citizenship so emphatically that they claim that “We grew up here, we were born here! We are Greeks!”.

The percentage of participants that responded in this way is very high; it actually ranges from 55 to 92.3%, depending on the specific Jewish Community (see Chart 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Only Greek</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Greek and Jew</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>68,0</td>
<td>71,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Greek and Sephardic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>72,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. A Jew who happens to live in Greece</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>74,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. European Citizen</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>77,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Other</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tbody>
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Chart 1 - Distribution of answers to the question ‘E13 National-religious identity. How do you identify yourself?’

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>JCA</th>
<th>JCT</th>
<th>JCL</th>
<th>JCV</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only Greek</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek and Jew</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek and Sephardic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Jew who happens to live in Greece</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Citizen</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson Chi-Square = 87.867 (p=0.000), Cramer's V = .342 (p=0.000)
The majority of Jewish women seem to be integrated into the Greek social network and environment. They all developed friendly interpersonal relationships with people of other faiths, people outside the community, as well as secular co-citizens, while a considerable percentage intermarried, which could be seen as an indication of their smooth integration into the local society. The vast majority of Jewish females believe that their Greek identity is inextricably tied to their religious one. In some cases, the only difficulty lies in the identification of Greekness with Orthodox Christianity, particularly among the younger generations, where there is an obvious and strong connection with the modern state of Israel.  

In conclusion, the empirical evidence creates a portrait of Jewish women’s identity in the city of Thessaloniki: The aspects of female identity are described on ethnic and religious terms, while the present socio-political developments marry the erstwhile purely religious with a more secular, social role, not only within the community, but also beyond its limits.  

**Jewish Identity: Between Tradition and Modernity**

The Jewish women of Thessaloniki are brought up with value-systems that were shaped at older times and generations. Therefore, despite living in a modern and secularized society, they are characterized by a unique community dynamic. These Jewish women, either through communal action, or through work in their religious space—the synagogue—being convinced of the unbroken cultural unity of their Sephardic tradition, make an effort “...to be the editors ... of Judaism for their children, and to create memories for them.”

In fact, it is feasible for the Jewish female identity to be in active dialogue with the present. Preserving national Greek characteristics, as well as ethnic and religious Judaic traits, Greek Jewish women shape their identity both inside and outside the community through cultural activities, which promote their female Sephardic background through charitable acts. The purpose of this philanthropy, as the Greek Jewish women themselves describe, is “…the common good (which springs) from our inner world (and is targeted) to the outer world.”

It can be deducted from the survey that the overwhelming majority of Greek Jewish women and men, believe that women are the third most important factor that preserves, in an informal but dynamic way, their ethno-religious customs (46.3%) [see Diagram 1].

**Diagram 1** – What are in your opinion the “key persons” that guarantee the continuation of your ethno-religious, Jewish customs?
[President of the Jewish Community (44%), Rabbi (70%), Chabad of Greece – Athens (15,3%), Seniors (46,7%), Greek Jewish Women (45,3%), Other (16%)]

It is understood that the transmission of the Jewish cultural tradition to younger generations is particularly important to these women. At present, the Greek Sephardic Jewish females are the cultural transmitters, the last guardians, and the custodians of the Sephardic Jewish ethno-religious heritage in the Greek reality of Thessaloniki. As one Jewish woman noted: “...It is the most valuable part of my life, which I want to pass on to my children, and that is the reason why we are all trying to preserve what could be lost.”

The Social Theory of religion may shed some light on the debate over the unseen role of females within the conservative, patriarchal religious environments. More specifically, social theorists currently discuss “symbolic (gender) roles,” in “non-official religions.” They mention characteristically that “non-official religion has provided women with a “chance to express their own specific concerns for meaning and belonging,” and also that, “…(it) can be recognized as specifically feminist dissent, … (with) alternative gender roles for women … only indirectly —by providing alternative world images.” Obviously, as Walter and Davie claim, the dynamics of the official male-dominated system may not, in some cases, impede women’s diverse spiritual, intellectual, and communal activity, because, if congregational life is distinguished by free...
participation, the religious space “…is the social life built up by (women’s) congregation over decades.”

Moreover, the contribution of Jewish women in the communal arena takes place both formally and informally. The women’s formal contribution is manifested in some staff positions they hold in the communal council, and in their capacity as members of communal organizations. Alternatively, women’s interest mainly lies in various informal and non-institutional levels of Jewish life, such as religion, dietary habits (“Kosher”) education, building relationships with Jewish youth around Greece, and finally, offering charity and social work. More specifically, they offer voluntary work both inside and outside the community, for example in the youth camp which is run by female members of the Jewish Youth of Greece (J.Y.G.); the Jewish school that provides teaching and information on the Judaic religion; the communal charitable organizations and initiatives; the Greek Israeli association; the Jewish choir; events that promote Sephardic music and cuisine; and, finally, commemorations of the Jewish Genocide (“Holocaust”).

Furthermore, two entirely female charitable associations — the oldest organization “Vizo” and the contemporary “Ziv” — share the task of preservation and conservation of Jewish cultural heritage. Women over the age of seventy participate in Vizo, while women over the age of twenty-eight are involved in Ziv. The institutional structure of the two organizations involves a president, treasurer, a secretary, and of course Jewish women as its members. Their mission is philanthropic, such as supporting the poor or “…those who have substantial needs,” inside and outside the community — as, for example, in Thessaloniki or in Israel. It is therefore clear that, while these women’s organizations are Jewish, their sphere of activity is multidimensional, encompassing the entire social fabric of the city.

Despite their obvious and varied communal activities, Jewish women believe that they “…could do more both inside and outside the community…” The majority of young women who are involved participate in the events organized by J.Y.G., while the majority of older women, i.e., between forty and seventy-five years of age, are the ones that are entrusted with the preservation of customs, traditions, and the overall Jewish cultural heritage.

In the Jewish religious sphere, within the realm of the synagogue, one can easily observe the informal yet traditional female presence and active engagement as a unifying element and cultural conveyor of the religious Judaic heritage. It is worth mentioning here that Jewish women,
even though they enjoy, according to rabbinical teachings, equality with men in worship and religious life, are in fact not able to pursue any liturgical or priestly office.\textsuperscript{43} Women—who, unlike men, are free from the vast majority of religious commandments (“Mitzvot”\textsuperscript{44})— are limited to participation and supplication of the divine. Even though women’s religiosity is visibly weakened, they make their presence clearly felt with their mass arrival on Friday evening for the lighting of candles, the Saturday morning service, as well as the major Jewish holidays. Unlike other religious groups,\textsuperscript{45} Jewish men often outnumber Jewish women, perhaps due to the orthodox Jewish standard, according to which at least ten adult males—not females—could participate in the rituals (“Minyan”\textsuperscript{46}).\textsuperscript{47} When asked individually how she feels about her participation in religious life, an active female member remarked: “I feel proud to be born a Jew... It makes me stronger...,” and “I am ready to defend my religious identity.” At the collective level however, many of them maintain that “the role of religion has waned... We remember it only in times of need.”\textsuperscript{48}

In the synagogue, the rabbi has the highest institutional post, that of the religious leader, and is surrounded by male-dominated hierarchical positions, such as that of the cantor (“Hazan”\textsuperscript{49}). The female roles are informal, non-specific, and non-institutional, but nevertheless meaningful, since they contribute significantly, and in various ways, to the transmission of Jewish tradition. Jewish women have never renounced their traditional role; even when they lead a secular life, they are active in social networking, and are fully integrated into the local society. In the synagogue, they willingly, and voluntarily, accept the responsibility of strengthening the Jewish element in members’ identity. They offer valuable assistance when it comes to liturgical and practical needs at the daily sacred services and immediately after the concluding blessing (“Kiddush”\textsuperscript{50}); the same applies to sacred ceremonies such as the Jewish marriage, circumcision, coming of age ceremonies (“Bar” and “Bat Mitzvah”\textsuperscript{51}) memorials, always making sure that they observe the religious dietary regulations.\textsuperscript{52}

At this point, one might reasonably liken the role of Jewish women in the synagogue to that of the Orthodox Christian women in the church. Those are, of course, two quite different examples of monotheistic faith and worship in the context of modern Greek society, but they are similar in the way their patriarchal leadership provides essentially no space for an institutional female presence.\textsuperscript{53} Despite all this, the “feminine” hue” of Greek Christian women also represents a tangible female model of a symbolic religious expression. Although women do not hold any
priestly office, they still actively participate in various tasks, both inside and outside the area of worship, albeit in an atypical way.\textsuperscript{54}

Lastly, apart from the communal and religious spheres of activity, there is a strong sense of female Jewish belonging to the local historical community of city. This is because their dynamic activities often turn them into ambassadors of goodwill, not only within but also outside their communal area. They communicate in various ways with people in the Greek public sphere of action creating conditions for reconciliation and fruitful cooperation. In fact, this goodwill is often given institutional approval, in the form of recognition for their local, municipal, and private contributions to society.\textsuperscript{55} Indeed, Jewish women are not only the ones who disseminate and transmit their tradition to younger and future generations, but at the same time they are also the non-official carriers of Jewishness ("Sephardic heritage"); they are actually the traditional ethnocultural promoters and supporters of the modern J.C. in Thessaloniki.

**Conclusion**

To summarize, although Jewish women in Thessaloniki are fully embracing the challenges of late modernity, they have not renounced their traditional, religious, Jewish identity, despite its obviously secularized nature. They live in the modern realm while they are simultaneously passing on, in a humble and silent way, their Judeo-Spanish heritage to the younger Jewish generations, admirably balancing the concepts of tradition and modernity.

For such an attempt though, more quantitative and qualitative research should be carried out, in order to provide answers to the following questions: "Is the Jewish women’s attitude a reaction to conservative religious structures?"; "Is it a new feminist movement in the making?"; "Is it a way to delay and manage their eventual full assimilation in the future?"; "Or is it just a direct and at the same time traditional way of passing Sephardic culture from one generation to the next, from a Jewish mother to a Jewish child?"

**Acknowledgements**

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Interviews

Endnotes

1. Concerning the first draft of this article, see Maria Sidiropoulou, “Diasporic Gender Identities in a Secularized Context: Jewish Women in Greece” (Paper presented at the 3rd Workshop of a series of International Workshops, “Is Secularism Bad for Women? Women, Religion and Multiculturalism in Contemporary Europe?” on the theme: “Political and Public Approaches to Gender, Secularism and Multiculturalism,” Center of Social Studies, Lisbon (Portugal), November 11, 2015.


4. Ibid., 115, 301. For a historical research on Sephardic Jewish women’s presence in the medieval and early modern times in the Iberian context, see also, Renée Levine, Melammed, “Sephardi Women in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” in Jewish Women in Historical Perspective (Dedroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 19982), 128-149.


7. At the same period in Europe (19th cent.), Jewish women were gaining a dynamic family-positioned role and were also taking part, for the first time, not only in a traditional, but also in a secular educational system, see, Iris Parush, Reading Jewish Women: Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth-Century Eastern European Jewish Society (United States of America: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 38-56. See also, Naomi Shepherd, A Price below Rubies: Jewish Women as Rebels and Radicals (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 19983).

8. Like, Bienfaisance (1895), Tiféreth or Association des Anciennes Élèves de l’ Alliance (1909). See ibid., Molho, Οι Εβραίοι της Θεσσαλονίκης 1856-1917, 177 (In Greek). See also, Michael Molho, In Memoriam (Thessaloniki: Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, 1976), 29-30 (In Greek).


Orthodox Jewish Women,” Jewish tradition for their femin


For more on Orthodox Jewish Feminist movements in traditional Jewish communal environments, see, Blu Greenberg, On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1981). See also, Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut, eds., Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992). Sometimes even in traditional Jewish Communities the fear of losing members, leads indirectly to the improvement of the status of women, see, Christel Manning, God Gave Us the Right: Conservative Catholic, Evangelical Protestant, and Orthodox Jewish Women Grapple with Feminism (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 236. For surveys on newly Orthodox Jewish women who are being attracted by Orthodox Jewish tradition for their feminist reactions, see, Debra Renee Kaufman, “Patriarchal Women: A Case Study of Newly Orthodox Jewish Women,” Symbolic Interaction 12, no. 2 (1989): 299-314. See also, Orit Avishai, “‘Doing Religion’


24 See, Maria Sidiropoulou, Θρησκεία και Ταυτότητα στην Ισραηλιτική Κοινότητα Θεσσαλονίκης (M.Th. thes., Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2015), 78-79; 84-85 (In Greek).

25 Ibid.

26 See ibid., Sidiropoulou, Θρησκεία και Ταυτότητα..., 86-89.


29 See, Sylvia Barack Fishman and Daniel Parmer, The Gender Imbalance in American Jewish Life (Massachusetts: Brandeis University – Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies – Hadassah Brandeis Institute, 2008), 75.


31 For an ethnographic survey on Jewish women living as cultural safeguards, and at the same time as “innovators” of their patriarchal Jewish tradition in the city of Jerusalem (Israel), see, Susan Starr Sered, Women as Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). On the contrary, one research found that women who were attracted to Orthodox Jewish groups, desired and accepted an unaltered traditional role, switching from a public, secular sphere to a private, religious one, that is to say “a home-centered” role inside their family. See, Lynn Davidman, Tradition in a Rootless World: Women turn to Orthodox Judaism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).


35 “Kosher,” or “Kashrut(h),” or “Kashrus” [In Greek: “Κόσε(έ)ρ,” “Κασ(σ)είς,” “Κασ(σ)ρούτ,” In Hebrew: “תורשׁוּרֶשׁ צְרֵשׁ”, “תורשׁוּרֶשׁ צְרֵשׁ”]: This means what is considered appropriate to eat according to the Jewish dietary laws. It is the dietary restrictions that determine whether or not some food is kosher and how it should be prepared (“Leviticus 11,” “Deuteronomy 14”). The three main classifications of Kosher food are: 1. The separation between approved and forbidden animal, fish and bird flesh, 2. the ban on blood that may never be consumed and 3. the ban on mixing meat and milk as well as their derivatives.

36 For surveys on Jewish education under construction, in a secular world, see, Michael Rosenak, Commandments and Concerns: Jewish Religious Education in Secular Society (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1987). For research on “Jewish education” in the Greek context, and especially in Greek public schools, see indicatively, Maria Sidiropoulou, “Educational Activities Undertaken by Schools and Universities: Greek...


38 “Vizo” and the newly created “Ziv” [In Greek: “Βίζο,” “Ζιβ”]: It is a Jewish women’s sorority formed in 1935, which by 1963 C.E. came to encompass the full spectrum of female femininity, and was then structured by older women, the so-called Ladies. In collaboration with other Jewish women’s organizations, Vizo helps to support charities in the Lauder Jewish School (Athens), co-organizes nationwide conferences and seminars as well as charity events, and sponsors cooking actions.

39 For a similar research on contemporary Jewish female’s active social and communal role, as today’s “women of labor” in the American context, see, Beth Wenger, “Jewish Women and Voluntarism: Beyond the Myth of Enablers,” American Jewish History 79, no. 1 (1989): 16-36.

40 From interviews with Greek Jewish Women (J.C.T., May 2015 – April 2018).

41 Ibid.


44 “Mitzvah/-ot (Day)” [In Greek: “Μτσβά/-ότ,” “Ημέρα Μτσβά,” In Hebrew: “תּוֹוְצִמ/הוְצִמ”]: It means commandment, moral deed, and refers to the 613 ethically-ordained God-given commands outlined in the Torah. Of these, 248 are positive and 365 negative. Mitzvah is central to Judaism, since it emphasizes on the behavior of each Jew. A systematic collection of Mitzvot is found in Maimonides’ finest work “Mishneh Torah.”

45 Sociology researchers demonstrate high levels of religiosity in Christian’s women (higher than in men’s), in Western Europe. Indicatively, see ibid., Walter and Davie, “The Religiosity of Women in the Modern West,” 640-660. See also, Grace Davie, Κοινωνιολογία της Θρησκείας (Athens: Kritiki, 2010), 360-367 (In Greek).

46 “Minyan” [In Greek: “Μινιάν,” In Hebrew: “מנין”]: The quorum of the minimum number of ten Jewish adult males required to perform Jewish rituals, according to the Jewish standard. The strict observance of the number of the assemblies is mentioned in the Torah (“Exodus 18:21”).
For non-refundable participation of women in the religious service of “Minyan”, which is something that still exists in Orthodox Jewish Communities, see indicatively the sociological study of Ronald Johnstone, *Religion in Society: Sociology of Religion* (New Jersey: Upper Saddle River, 2007), 249.

From interviews with Greek Jewish Women (J.C.T., May 2015 – April 2018).

“Hazzan,” or “Chazzan” [In Greek: “Χαζάν/-νίμ;” In Hebrew: “חנין”]: It is the cantor that, together with the Rabbi, leads the congregation to chant their prayers in the synagogue. He may be a professional or a simple member of the religious community, while in small Jewish Communities the Rabbi and Hazzan are, quite often, the same person.

“Kiddush” [In Greek: “Κιντούς;” In Hebrew: “שים”]: It means sanctification, a Jewish custom according to which wine (or grape juice) is sanctified for the blessing of Sabbath or other Jewish festivals.

“Bar,” or “Bat Mitzvah” [In Greek: “Μπαρ-Μπατ Μιτσβά;” In Hebrew: “רו נצвро - הט נצвро”]: 1. Bar Mitzvah means the son of the command. It is a coming of age ritual for boys. When the boy is 13 years old, he is considered accountable for his actions, he becomes a bar mitzvah and is called up to read a Torah passage in the synagogue, a practice that makes him religiously an adult. The celebration of post-synagogue religious adulthood symbolizes the beginning of a life in which he is called upon to act with a high sense of responsibility. Ritually, the practice of adulthood is done collectively in the synagogue, with the young men wearing white attire. 2. Bat Mitzvah means the daughter of the command. It is a characterization of a girl who is twelve (12) years old and obliged to follow Jewish orders. This new custom came from America to Greece in the context of gender equality and today it is widely used in the Jewish diaspora around the world.

Ibid. From interviews with Greek Jewish Women.


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