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EDITED BY HELEN EPSTEIN



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTRIBUTORS	1
EDITOR'S NOTE	7
<i>by Helen Epstein</i>	
JEWISH WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES.	13
<i>by Riv-Ellen Prell</i>	
WOMEN AND RESEARCH ON WOMEN IN ISRAEL.	21
<i>by Hanna Herzog</i>	
ITALY	31
<i>by Micaela Procaccia</i>	
LATIN AMERICAN JEWS.	39
<i>by Judith Laikin Elkin</i>	
IRANIAN JEWISH DIASPORA WOMEN	49
<i>by G.B.</i>	
JEWISH WOMEN IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA	59
<i>by Ana Lebl</i>	
BEING A JEWISH WOMAN IN FRENCH SOCIETY	65
<i>by Regine Azria</i>	
SOUTH AFRICAN JEWISH WOMEN	71
<i>by Sally Frankental</i>	
MIZRAHI WOMEN IN ISRAEL: THE DOUBLE ERASURE ...	79
<i>by Pnina Motzafi-Haller</i>	
JEWISH WOMEN IN MEXICO	97
<i>by Paulette Kershenovich</i>	
ISRAELI WOMEN AND HEALTH	109
<i>by Susan Sered</i>	
REPORT FROM LITHUANIA	117
<i>by Basia Nikiforova</i>	
CANADIAN, JEWISH AND FEMALE.	123
<i>by Norma Baumel Joseph</i>	
HOMING PIGEON: A SEPHARDIC JEW	129
<i>Ruth Knafo Setton</i>	

continued



TABLE OF CONTENTS, *continued*

THE MOTHERS OF PASTEUR STREET: THE STRUGGLE FOR PLURALISM IN ARGENTINA	137
<i>by Edna Aizenberg</i>	
IRANIAN JEWISH WOMEN DISCOVER THE POWER OF WORDS	145
<i>by Farideh Dayanim Goldin</i>	
TESHUVAH AMONG FRENCH JEWISH WOMEN.	161
<i>by Laurence Podselver</i>	
JEWISH WOMEN IN CHILE	169
<i>by Marjorie Agosin</i>	
ISRAELI WOMEN: COLLECTIVISM AND INDIVIDUALISM	173
<i>by Eetta Prince Gibson</i>	
HUNGARY	183
<i>by Katalin Taliygás</i>	
BOOKENDS.	187
<i>by Pamela S. Nadell</i>	
JEWISH WOMEN IN BRITAIN	191
<i>by Marlena Schmool</i>	
GENDER AND LITERACY AMONG YOUNG ORTHODOX JEWISH WOMEN	199
<i>By Tamar El-Or</i>	
JEWISH WOMEN IN LATVIA	233
<i>By Ruta Marjasa</i>	



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EDITOR'S NOTE



FOR SEVERAL MONTHS NOW, I have been editing the papers of 24 women working in different fields and in different places throughout the world. These women also come from very different parts of the Jewish community and work in a variety of settings: some are academics; some are writers; some are social workers. All originally presented papers in 1997 and 1998 at the Hadassah Research Institute on Jewish Women located at Brandeis University. Reading their work, thinking about their ideas, and sometimes struggling to translate them into English has been an unexpectedly absorbing experience for me and I've wondered what it is, exactly, that I find so rewarding. I've concluded that spending time in the company of an international, interdisciplinary group of Jewish women begins to fill a most basic and persistent need in me: the need of human beings to see themselves sympathetically represented and reflected in their culture.

As a Jewish woman growing up in post-war America, I rarely saw any semblance of my reflection in the mainstream culture. Although I grew up in the middle of New York City where almost everybody in my immediate world was Jewish, representations of Jews were absent from the museums I visited, the movies I saw, or the books I read in school. Except for *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which I consider problematic reading for a young Jewish girl, there was no Jewish heroine in the books of my childhood. I identified with active, adventurous girls like Jo March, Nancy Drew or Cherry Ames and liked reading about the dramatic lives of European and English queens. I didn't then notice that none of the women I was reading about were Jewish, or that Archie and Veronica seemed to have no Jewish friends; that there were no Jewish Mouseketeers; or that there were no Jewish girls in *American Girl* or *Seventeen*.

I was in my forties and listening to West Indian writer Jamaica Kincaid speaking at the Isabella Gardner Museum in Boston, when I suddenly perceived their absence (like Pnina Motzafi-Haller in her essay about *mizrahi* women in Israel, I applied the insight of an African-American woman to my own life). Jamaica Kincaid had done a brilliant and audacious thing: invited to choose her favorite painting at the museum and speak to a large audience about the reasons for her choice, she had beamed an old snapshot of her mother on the museum's large screen and talked about it.



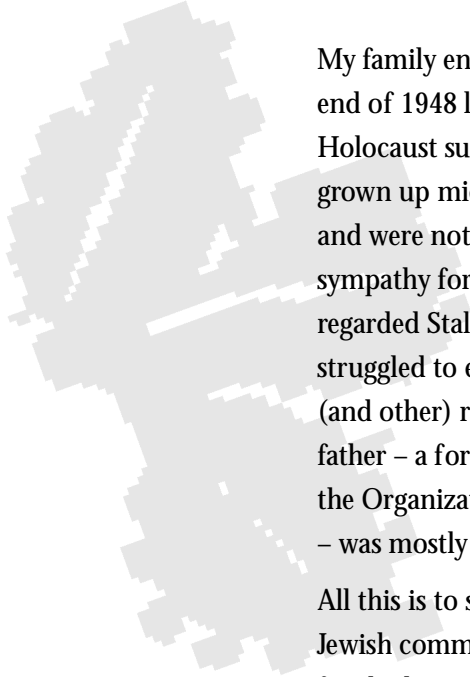
All of us in the audience, of course, had been accustomed to viewing the parade of art history on such a screen – from the Greeks to the Renaissance masters to the Impressionists and Abstract Expressionists. We were accustomed to oil portraits and elaborately framed photographs. The effect of Kinkaid's snapshot was shocking and made the author's point more forcefully than her words: Had we ever seen the image of an ordinary West Indian woman on the walls of a museum? Had we ever contemplated her face? Her body? Her surroundings? Her life? How did we ascribe value to this snapshot when it was viewed in a private photo album, in a newspaper, or here, in the context of other portraits in the museum? We had all read or at least heard of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, but what about the invisible woman? In this case, what about an entire sub-culture usually hidden by the majority African-American minority culture?

I viewed many of these working papers as such snapshots that raised some of these and many other questions.

In addition to experiencing a kind of invisibility as a Jewish girl in America, I also felt an invisibility in the Jewish community as the daughter of Czech Jews (of *ashkenazi* descent on my mother's side; *sephardi* on my father's). We lived on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, where there were many Jewish refugees from Central Europe but where the definition of Jewish culture was determined by people who, like the majority of American Jews, were of Russian and Polish descent.

This particular group, I later learned, had jettisoned their working-class, Yiddish-speaking parents (as well as their working-class culture) in the Bronx, or Brooklyn, or Queens, or the Lower East Side. They were West Siders now, middle-class, highly educated, new Jews, who frequented the American – not Yiddish-language – theater and Lincoln Center, collected art, read the cultural sections of the *Times* and the *New Yorker*. The men worked as professionals; the women were delighted to be full-time homemakers in the image of Betty Crocker. Most were political liberals who had flirted with Communism or Socialism in college; they had friends or acquaintances who were blacklisted and were deeply affected by McCarthyism. They had also been deeply affected by the events of the second world war and were in every way invested in a prototypically 1950s American mainstream lifestyle.

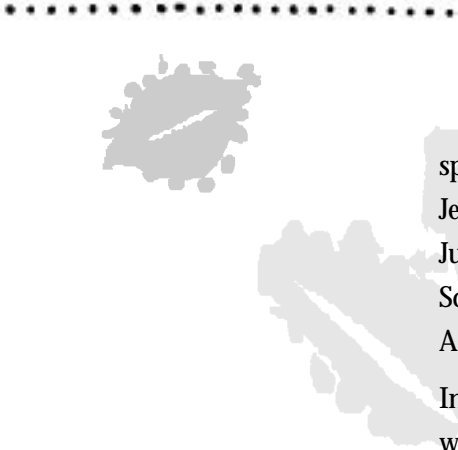
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My family entered this Upper West Side Jewish milieu towards the end of 1948 like creatures from another planet. My parents were *both* Holocaust survivors and political exiles from Communism. They had grown up middle-class, did not speak Yiddish, had never seen a bagel, and were not especially interested in Israel. Although they had no sympathy for McCarthyism, they were staunch anti-Communists who regarded Stalin as another version of Hitler. During the 1950s, they struggled to earn money and to adjust to America. Like many Jewish (and other) refugee women, my mother supported the family. My father – a former Olympic water polo player and sometimes officer of the Organization of Czech Sportsmen in-Exile-in-the Western World – was mostly unemployed until I was ten years old.

All this is to say that, as I was growing up, I felt as invisible in the Jewish community as I did in the American one. And when I had finished growing up, although I was counted as an American Jew, I still did not feel like American Jewish culture included me. G.B. could have been describing the Epsteins when she writes “Iranian Jews do not easily mesh with the majority Jewish culture. Those who live in North America feel marginalized: their experience has been that American Jews know nothing about them... The Iranian Jewish diaspora is triggering a re-examination of hegemonic notions of American Jewish identity. Iranian Jews with their own ethnic and cultural tradition are challenging the American Jewish culture that was brought from Eastern Europe and that is presumed to apply to all arriving Jews regardless of their background. This ashkenazi standard for Jews is similar to the WASP standard for assimilation to North American society.”

The issue of cultural hegemony is addressed in an even more dramatic way by South African Sally Frankental. “It is a truism to note that all Jewish communities, in all times and places, reflect the context in which they are located,” she writes. “In the South African case, the segregationist policies of the colonial authorities, the Boer republics, and the Union, followed by the apartheid system of the past fifty years, form the inescapable frame for all who live in South Africa... the disproportionate numbers who arrived from one region, Lithuania, gave the community an unusual degree of homogeneity relative to other diaspora communities. This was reflected in the virtual absence of Hasidism (until the 1970s), in the particular form of Yiddish



spoken, and in a variety of foods and customs particular to Lithuanian Jewry. In addition, the east Europeans' lack of exposure to Reform Judaism meant that Reform or Progressive Judaism was established in South Africa only in 1933, far later than in most diaspora communities." All this, of course, shaped the lives of South African Jewish women.

In reading these papers, I was struck by how many kinds of Jewish women there are, how profoundly we are influenced by our country of origin and the continuity or discontinuity of Jewish life within its borders, and by our experience of such factors as entitlement, dislocation, prejudice and outsider status. History, particularly this century's history, has not treated all Jewish women equally. In writing their papers, some authors – like Katalin Talyigas of Hungary – was reconnecting to and reconstructing the history of Jews in their country for the first time. Others, like Micaela Procaccia, who lives in Rome, is steeped in her history and writes with the surety of long immersion in the past: "In the year 1537, a Roman Jewish working class girl named Lariccia cried for days because of an unwanted match," begins her paper. "The day before the *qiddushin*, or betrothal, a washerwoman named Clemenza heard Lariccia saying to her father: "I do not like this man, nor do I desire him. I refuse him and reject him, nor do I want him." She declared herself to be "the unhappiest of all women," and on the next Shabbat, she told her father that she would not agree to let "the *qiddushin* become *nissu'in*.' Her father then hit her with the butt of a knife."

The biographical section of this volume itself makes for fascinating reading – as much for the wide geographical spectrum represented as for the facts each woman deemed important to include. As different as each woman is, I find much in common with her. It was easy for me to enter into her world.

Although this first HRIJW collection of writing by Jewish women around the world is inevitably uneven and incomplete, it is a respectable beginning. The authors represented here are, in some countries, part of a larger scholarly and cultural project of researching and writing about women's lives; in others, they are pioneers – the first of their kind. In some countries, they have been able to draw on a large body of data and literature; in others, they are themselves creating that data and literature. Ana Lebl from Split (now in Croatia) lives in an aging and relatively poor community of only 100 Jews



with scarce resources; Americans Riv-Ellen Prell and Pamela Nadell enjoy the support of Jewish Studies as well as Women's Studies departments at major American universities. Our Israeli and Latin American contributors bring both these realities into yet another perspective.

Some of the authors chose to spend time reworking their original presentations; others were content to have published what they originally presented. Many have struggled to express themselves in English – their second or third or fourth language. As a writer who has often had to communicate in foreign languages, I admire their pluck; as editor, I hope they forgive my journalistic bias, my many questions, and my inadvertent mistakes. Parts of all their work – even where it represents a starting point – moved and inspired me. I hope it will move and inspire you.

Helen Epstein

October, 1999

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TESHUVAH AMONG FRENCH JEWISH WOMEN

by Laurence Podselver

This paper began with a conversation with a dear colleague, D. Kaufman, while she was in Paris giving a lecture on feminism and Jewish Studies. She spoke in a particularly skeptical milieu as most scholars here suspect that feminism is an invention of American women.¹ I myself had no training in Women's Studies since it is not taught at a university level in France, but the social group I was studying prescribed a feminine – if not feminist – approach.



Contrary to procedure among American sociologists, for whom the history and sociology of women constitutes a special field of research, I did not expressly choose to study women. It was my fieldwork among North African Lubavitcher Jews in the Parisian suburb of Sarcelles that led me to a specifically women's subject, the lives of *ba'alot teshuvah*. The decision to study women rather than men and to deal with the separation of the sexes was out of my hands.

The anthropological method, based on the researcher's role as participant-observer, demanded that I respect the strict separation of the sexes in every facet of everyday life. I could not have studied Lubavitcher Jews at all had I not participated in meetings organized by women or taken on some of their roles, such as teaching in a kindergarten, preparing meals, preparing for holidays, helping children with their schoolwork, etc. Being an outsider, I was sometimes allowed to conduct interviews with men in public places or in certain families but I had real access only to the female sector of Hassidic society.

My approach then is in contradistinction to both Lynn Davidmann's *Tradition in a Rootless World* and D. Kaufmann's *Rachel's Daughters* who make gender category the main focus of their studies. In their work, gender is not only a fact derived from the field of study where the separation of sexes is explicit, but also an intellectual construct.

Sarcelles is a lower-middle-class suburb 15 km north of Paris, with a population of 57,000 people. Developed in the 1960s to resettle people returning from Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco after France withdrew from its North African colonies, Sarcelles is now a city whose population is 15-20% Jewish.

This density of Jews is exceptionally high for France and the result of two unusual factors. First, Sarcelles is the site of large, homogeneous housing projects in contrast to the socially diverse urban housing in France. Second, historical conditions specific to the transplantation of North African Jews (*Mahgrébins* in French) influenced the development of the Jewish population in the city. Today, Sarcelles' Jews are no longer victims of decolonization, brought to the city by necessity, but Jews who chose to live there because it is attractive to them.

¹ D. Kaufman, *Rachel's Daughters*. Newly Orthodox Jewish Women, Rutgers University Press (1991)

There are many Jewish organizations and schools in Sarcelles and their many services enable one to live a Jewish life “according to Torah.” Since the 1980s, the city has attracted neo-orthodox as well as Lubavitcher families. There are so many “men in black” and the city’s complexion has so changed that one might call Sarcelles a French version of Israel’s B’nei Braq.

The phenomenon of North African *ba’alei teshuvah* may be seen in a larger cultural context, similar to that of the United States in the 1960s. During the 1970s and throughout the mid-eighties, the younger generation in France rebelled against the parental culture, experimented with politics and created a “counter-culture” founded on the ideals of community, solidarity, authenticity, and opposition to the materialism of a consumer society void of spiritual values. Students embarked on travels to distant lands, exploring oriental religions such as Hinduism and practices such as vegetarianism. In the context of this search for the exotic the fervent Judaism of the Chassidim seemed authentic, giving no ground to French lay culture, and even signifying its otherness. Yiddish, the language of the Chassidim, their orthodoxy, distinctive clothing, chanting, and liturgy were all factors that facilitated the development of a social model different from the mainstream.

Young North African Jews, like the rest of their generation, rebelled by choosing a style of life that was at once familiar (they were, after all, Jewish) but also exotic, since it was a culture previously unknown to them. The majority of Lubavitchers now in France come from the families of North African Jews. In becoming *ba’alei teshuvah*, they managed to remain Jews while breaking away from the culture of their parents. In so doing, they also adopted a form of *ashkenazi* culture in its most socially visible form. All were born Jewish but religious affiliation had not been a meaningful form of self-identification. In France (where claiming lack of religious interest is very common) returning to religion was also a way to challenge the dominant ideology.

Ba’alei teshuvah of the 1970s, whatever their country of origin, were often on a spiritual quest. The men – more than the women – had been “on the road,” travelling to faraway places on quasi-religious quests. They often stopped in Israel on their way home from the Far East. This stopover in Israel often turned into an extended stay during which they took part in study groups at *yeshivot* that welcomed alienated youth. Young women, bound more by family tradition, travelled less extensively but went to Israel to visit members of their extended families. The holy places, linked with their discovery of dispersed family, triggered a strong emotional response. An experience at the *Kotel* often gave them the feeling that, there, they had found their roots and that Judaism provided their fundamental identity. Young women discovered in religion both a past and a foundation for their future, which would begin by establishing a Jewish family.

This born-again Jewish prototype is a familiar figure in socio-anthropological studies and has almost become a cliché of the 1970s.² Following that group was a population of young American professional women. Secular, well educated, independent, living on their own, they experimented with sexuality and were in all ways integrated into society. Their main dissatisfaction in life centered around male-female relations and the status of women in society. Kaufman and Davidman argue that orthodox Judaism was

² See Herbert M. Danzger, *Returning to Tradition, The Contemporary Revival of Orthodox Judaism*, Yale University Press, 1989, and Janet Aviad, *Return to Judaism: Religious Renewal in Israel*, The University of Chicago Press, 1983

appealing to them because “it offered a clearly articulated identity constructed in the context of an inherited religious tradition and a community of memory.”³ D. Kaufman convincingly demonstrated that the *ba'alot-teshuvah's* choice was a post-feminist reinterpretation of patriarchy – even though they did not formulate it in feminist rhetoric.

The reinterpretation went something like this: Patriarchal society is characterized by male authority; religious thought and life are produced and controlled by men; and women are reduced to their function of procreation. In this traditional patriarchal society, however women are the custodians of values that modern egalitarian society ignores. The secular world has devalued motherhood and the woman's role in the home in exchange for women's rights and an uncertain role in the workplace. According to Kaufman, *ba'a lot teshuvah* reinvest dignity into the traditional woman's role.

All this would be relevant for the few *ba'alot teshuvah* in France with similar backgrounds, that is to say from the *ashkenazi* middle class and it is true that in the 1980s, some Jewish intellectuals shifted their commitment from politics to marginal religious groups. But the vast majority of *ba'alot teshuvah* were coming not from the ranks of the *Ashkenazim* but were daughters of the wave of *sephardi* immigrants that arrived in France between 1950 and 1967 most of them belonging to the *petit bourgeois* and lower class of French colonial society.

At that time, the Lubavitchers were actively recruiting young Jews in order to accelerate the coming of the *Mashiah*. Claiming at least ten thousand adherents in France, they made Judaism visible, taking it out of the home and into the public arena. Following the American model, the Lubavitchers made use of the media and above all, the streets with Lag B'Omer parades, *mitzvah*-mobiles and by lighting enormous Chanukah menorahs in symbolic parts of Paris such as under the Eiffel Tower and at the Place de la Republique. In areas known as Jewish neighborhoods (rue des Rosiers, but also Belleville or rue Montmartre) they began a campaign of approaching men and suggesting they don *tefillin*. This public and ostensibly proselytizing approach was completely unheard of in France where religion belongs in the private realm and its expression is confined to the home or to the synagogue. The “street” in France, as opposed to the United States, is viewed as a neutral zone where no signs of particular ethnicity or religious affiliation are to be displayed. The Lubavitchers behaved like outsiders in a traditionally quiet and discreet Jewish community that had long regarded Jewish identity as a private matter. Their success can now be regarded as an anticipation of the new configuration of ethnicity and religion in the construction of contemporary French identity.⁴

In France, as in the United States, the Lubavitchers attracted people looking for individual commitment, warm relationships with fellow Jews, and a community that filled the needs that their often scattered families did not. As in traditional Hassidism, feelings and emotions were accepted as acts of faith.

By choosing “tradition,” the *ba'alot teshuvah* could choose tradition of “the other” that is to say, the *Askenazi*. This tradition would erase their own cultural past which they perceived as linking them too

³ L. Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World. Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism*, University of California Press, 1991 p.136

⁴ The so-called franco-judaism model which prevailed until today is now confronted by a new one inspired by US society. On that subject see *Une Société fragmentée?* M. Wiewiorka editor, Paris, ed. La Découverte 1996.

strongly with the Arab immigrants who sometimes lived in the same neighborhoods. My hypothesis is to consider their return to Judaism as a part of what Bourdieu calls a “distinction strategy.”⁵

The women “returning” were typically at the end of their adolescence and contemplating the question of breaking away from their parents to forge families of their own or else they were still students deciding whether or not to stop their studies to get married. They often wanted to escape the strictness of their fathers and the old-fashioned ideas those fathers held about women’s lives. Not yet adults, they were having the same conflict with their parents as other children of North African immigrants, trying to honor family tradition as well as wishing to integrate into French society.

Many *ba’alot teshuvah* regarded the mixed marriages of their brothers and sisters as a major danger to themselves as well as to the Jewish people as a whole. It is important to remember that the Crémieux Decree of 1870 accorded French citizenship to Jews but not to Muslims, who were classified as *dhimmi* or “natives.” The Decree allowed Jews to escape this inferior status and aligned them with the colonials rather than with the colonized. They were happy to begin their *longue marche vers l’Occident*, “their long march toward the West” through the integrative mechanism of the French school system and progressively acculturate to French values.⁶ In fact, our *ba’alot teshuvah* thought that their parents went too far: the “Frenchification” of the Jews looked like renouncing Judaism and Jewish identity to them.

Returning to their roots was not a solution because it would leave them in an inferior position. If young women wanted more religion in their lives, they were nevertheless not ready to return to a time when Jewish women were confined to the home. It is a paradox that what appeared as the most traditional Jewish option would finally help them to resolve their problem of integration into modern French society.

For a North African Jewish woman in France, becoming a Lubavitcher was almost like converting. The newcomer would completely change her way of living, her friends, and her family. Young women in their teens and occasionally even women with some university education would drop out of school and begin religious education with the Lubavitchers. Many decided against completing high school and entered their working lives by taking jobs that didn’t require higher education or professional training.

Their North African families practiced a traditional Judaism with ties to local Jewish communities from North Africa. Even if an Algerian family, that had acculturated more more than a Tunisian or Moroccan family, had established bonds with French Jewry and its children were attending French schools, their way of leading their religious life involved the whole community in a public way. Since the French Revolution, Judaism, like any other religion, had to be practiced either in houses of worship or at home. Jews were no longer considered a nation but became citizens “of the Israelite faith,” Jews at home, citizens in public. That was the motto of French Jewry.

But in North Africa, the situation was radically different. There, Jews were a protected group but one without full rights (according to the *Statut de dhimmi*). The differences in situation between North Africa and France resulted in different ways of life. In North Africa, the community rather than the individual was central. This community, geographically circumscribed and visible as the *hara* or *mellah* (Jewish quarters)

⁵ La Distinction, Paris, ed Minuit 1979.

⁶ A. Chouraqui...

in Tunisian or Moroccan cities, then in the European parts of those cities, embodies the historical changes and evolution of Jewish communities in North Africa. Because the social habits of group life and religious expression go far beyond the domestic sphere, this social visibility travelled with the North African Jews to France and remains one of their characteristics.

In fact, when the North African Jews met the Lubavitchers they shared more commonalities than one could imagine. It is a joke to think of a Tunisian Jew learning Yiddish or a woman with a *gefilte fish* recipe in her hands when she knows how to cook a tasty *couscous*. But even though the cultural contrasts were profound, the popular beliefs and some of their respective liturgies make North African and Lubavitcher Jews closer than one might think.

Sociologists David Glanz and Michael Harisson, who observed *ba'alei-teshuvah* in Israeli *yeshivot*, proposed a typology of identity transformations dependent more on the process of accumulation rather than alteration.⁷ Nevertheless, ruptures in family life are also a consequence of the transformation of identity. In our study, young women found in the Lubavitcher group an honorable affiliation, perhaps in contrast to their family of origin and undervalued culture. In their homes, you see the *Rebbe's* photograph displayed among photographs of the children as though he was the true grandfather.

What about the authentic ancestors: the real grandmother and grandfather? They are often very close geographically but their world is off-limits to the children.⁸ They are not permitted to transmit their knowledge and experience because it is called into question by the new norms and orthodoxy of the Lubavitcher teachings. One of the critical paradoxes of teshuva is the relationship between those who have "returned" and their family of origin who have not and the refusal of the former to conform to the traditions of the latter.

For the *ba'alot teshuvah*, breaking with their family of origin begins with strict observance of the Jewish dietary laws. They view their parents as not *kosher* enough, so that the parents begin to feel as though they are not good enough Jews, that they are almost gentiles. The conflict is also linked to cultural prejudice. Young women, not yet free of their family but rebelling against it, found that by marrying into the Lubavitchers (the group is endogamous) they could find a way to escape *contradiction*. Caught between the cultural antagonism that undervalues North African Jewish culture and distrusting secular French society, young women choosing a third way were experimenting with individual freedom. Becoming a Lubavitcher meant escape from North African Jewry and escape from family of origin.

The Lubavitch movement started in France in the early 1960s with no means and no scholarly institutions except, eventually, a small *yeshiva*. Women attended special classes in a room near the synagogue where they learned to keep a kosher home and to observe the laws of family purity.⁹ But whatever the benefits of subordination, we found as did El-Or, that this subordination has to compete with some features of a democratic society and behavior in it that *ba'alot teshuvah* are eager to maintain.

⁷ David Glanz and M. Harrison "Varieties of identity transformation: the case of newly orthodox Jews" *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*, XX. 2. December 1978 pp129-141.

⁸ Regarding generation and family problems, see: Denise Weill et Laurence Podselver (La nouvelle orthodoxie et la transmission familiale), *Pardes*, n° 22, 1996, pp 149-165.

⁹ nothing very different from what Tamar El-Or describes in her work about Ger women in terms of their subordination to men scholars (The length of the slits and the spread of luxury: reconstructing the subordination of ultra-orthodox jewish women through the patriarchy of men scholars), in *Sex roles*, Vol. 29, n° 9-10 Plenum Publishing Corporation 1993. pp.585-598.

None of the women I met would consider themselves *hassidot* (they would make jokes about the migratory birds!) but only learning to live *b'torah*. In their everyday life they learn the appropriate way of doing, making, acting. The famous “women’s biological destiny”¹⁰ concerning the irreducible link between women and substance (feeding and reproducing) is raised by a schedule of Jewish rituals and a system of religious law to the status of knowledge.¹¹ In a Levi-Straussian view, the women are in charge of the transformation of nature to culture.

However, these two observations do not seem relevant to Lubavitcher *ba'alot teshuvah*. They do not themselves regard their feeding or table festivity functions as central to their roles. Perhaps because of their first criticism of materialistic society as being “overfed” they have a kind of ascetic behavior concerning food. Maybe this ascetism has developed in opposition to their mothers. They are not reluctant to use the most industrially processed foods and easily made dishes in order to spare their time.

For them – unlike their mothers – culture happens outside the kitchen and they are always attending lectures, conferences, and meetings. Through the *dinim* (laws) they are trying to reach another realm. The question then presents itself: why are they constraining themselves in such a male-centered society? If there are any answers, one of them could be that the Lubavitcher religious groups provide a culture that the larger society was unable to provide.

At the *ba'alot teshuvah*'s home, the door is always open. Other women come in, sit down, drink coffee, chat, relate problems, help one another. I once attended a more formal meeting in an apartment. All the women of the block were there listening to a rabbi, or a man pretending to be a rabbi. He was the son of our hostess who had become religious under his influence. His talk was not clear. He spoke in a mixed language of French and Hebrew, using many metaphors and images. But for the women who had come to listen to *divrei torah*, rational comprehension was not the point. They wanted to share sacredness.

Since the home is considered by religious people to be a second sanctuary, women are conscious of a need to keep it kosher. Still, they don't want to be confined to it. Historians have shown how civic matters began to infiltrate the *shul* and how men used to use the *beis medrash* as a forum. Women have no such institutional place or opportunity, so they decided to have their own meetings. They, of course, have lectures that instruct them in their specific roles in the community, particularly in order to help newcomers adjust to their new life. But they also have workshops where they speak freely and where they are able to continue the hobbies they had in their secular lives such as dancing, painting, or singing, but that they are no longer allowed to practice in public or in a mixed male and female group. Because of their secular background, they have to negotiate with tradition.

¹⁰ Yvonne Verdier, a social anthropologist of Christian peasant society made an insight analysis of women knowledge in *Façons de dire, façons de faire Paris* Gallimard 1979.

¹¹ Susan Star Sered (“Food and holiness: Cooking as a Sacred Act among Middle Eastern Jewish women”) *Anthropological Quarterly* Vol. 61, n° 3, 1988.

For them, becoming Lubavitcher did not mean totally renouncing modernity for tradition. The *ba'alot teshuvah* want aspects of both worlds. As a result, their duties are growing. They are the mothers of many children (they are religious and for them, more is best), but they still want to work. Then the problem arises of how they are able to hold onto their jobs, being pregnant so often? Having seven, eight, or nine children does not allow for a job, unless you pay other people to take care of them. Even if you can afford it, is it the way to be a mother? They have to give up working outside the home.

Some of the *ba'alot teshuvah* have continued to work, but inside the community. The messianic activities which were so developed till the *Rebbe's* death would meet their need to be active and, as they say, "in the world" (not contemplative). Even if their activities were limited to Jewish society, they were meant to change the world. Modernity means to be an acting power of history and messianic ideology can be regarded as a way to incorporate religion into that agency. For women, it was also an opportunity to open up their assigned space.

Looking at the American and French women's *teshuvah* movement, we find social determinants for our explanation of both situations. But we ought to go further. A therapist pointed out to me that contrary to what I saw as the *ba'alot teshuvah's* break with the family, particularly with the father, most of the women were in fact accomplishing what their family really wanted for them. They all told me that being a Levi, Cohen, Sultan, Goldberg, or whatever, they could not betray their father's name. I then thought of a quote from one of our historians. M. Hadas Lebel wrote, "Like our mother Rivka, women have a tendency to carry with them the idols of their father's homes."

