

# Women Realizing the Zionist Idea in the Ladino Zionist-Literary Periodical *El Maccabeo*, 1914-1917

Nitsa Dori

Correspondence: Dr. Nitsa Dori, Head of the Department of Early Childhood, Shaanan Academic College, Haifa, Israel.

Received: August 28, 2017

Accepted: October 17, 2017

Online Published: October 22, 2017

doi:10.11114/jets.v5i11.2720

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v5i11.2720>

## Abstract

This article will discuss women's writing in the Ladino Zionist-literary periodical, *El Maccabeo*, during early twentieth century Thessaloniki. We will sketch the writers' profiles, and examine their goals and the literary means used to realize them. These indices will help us evaluate women's place in shaping Thessalonikian Jewry in general, the realization of the Zionist idea in particular, and how the articles serve as a literary and historical source for Thessalonikian Jewry during this period.

Likewise, we will attempt to organize their articles along a historical-literary continuum and understand how they reflect the move from tradition to innovation.

**Keywords:** women's writing, Thessaloniki, *El Maccabeo*, literature, Zionism

## 1. Introduction

The heralds of Zionism and the Zionist Movement were an inseparable part of the Westernization process of Sephardic Jewish culture, particularly during the second half of the nineteenth century (Benbassa & Rodrigue, 1993). The blooming of Zionism in the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire, after the establishment of the World Zionist Organization in 1897, occurred on the foundations laid by individuals and movements that had nurtured earlier nationalist plans. Bulgaria was the most important center of the Ladino-speaking communities in the Sephardic Jewish world. It had already become the cradle of world Zionism in 1878 (Note 1).

The Westernization, secularization, and modernization processes among the Jewish communities that had begun in the mid-nineteenth century continued to influence life during the years preceding and during the First World War. However, there were other special circumstances in Thessaloniki – in addition to these changes that occurred among all the Sephardic Jewish communities throughout the Ottoman Empire – that had a crucial effect on the history of this particular community.

The cultural changes in the Balkan Jewish communities included very important changes to the Jewish communities' educational systems. The most crucial were the effects of the network of schools established by the Alliance Israélite Universelle in all the important Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire (and North Africa). The curricula in these schools included courses in general subjects, professional training, French, and other languages (Rodrigue, 1965).

For the first time in Sephardic Jewish history, a large number of girls also began attending the schools. These changes led to the Sephardic Jewish communities being exposed to Western culture, particularly French culture and fine literature in that language. We can also see the rapid spread of the printing press and the expansion of Jewish newspapers (Gaon, 1965).

## 2. Changes in the Balkan Jewish Communities

### 2.1 Changes in Sephardic Jewish Literature

As a result of this cultural revolution, the map of Sephardic Jewish literature also changed. Up until that time, it was of religious-traditional character and was written in a special style, totally different from the community's everyday language (Bunis, 1999). There was also literature with secular content. New literary styles emerged, such as romances and novels, drama, didactic essays, textbooks, historiographic books, biographies of Jewish personalities, poems, translations from Hebrew and foreign languages, and newspapers. Writing in Hebrew was pushed into second place, and limited to scholarly and religious circles. The newspapers spread historical knowledge and fulfilled an important role in disseminating the common intellectual trends, while also continuing traditional culture (Benbassa & Rodrigue, 1993).

## 2.2 *The Growth of Zionism in the Balkan Jewish Communities*

From 1908 onwards, several Zionist organizations were founded in Thessaloniki, under the influence of the “Young Turks”, a movement greatly admired by Jewish youth (Quintana-Rodriguez, 2002). These organizations were involved with the revival of Jewish nationalism, and included Kadimah, Maccabi, Bnei Zion, Theodore Herzl, Bialik, and Max Nordau. At the same time as the Zionist organizations were being established, conditions were created for tens of thousands of readers – as compared to the few thousand from previous decades – to need Hebrew newspapers and literature (Shakhevits & Perry, 1972) that would spread the ideological ideas of each movement and organization. We can identify two prominent reasons for the development of these conditions:

The objective socioeconomic development, that brought ever-increasing sections of the Jewish middle class to the same sociocultural state during this period, which, in turn, produced the willingness or even the necessity to step beyond the limits of the traditional religious cultural world. These were accompanied by Anti-Semitic incidents that produced a new phenomenon of extremely intense, communal, self-awareness among the Jewish community.

## 2.3 *The Jewish Press*

### 2.3.1 Beginnings of the Jewish Press

The appearance of Jewish newspapers in the nineteenth century was one of the most blatant signs of the effects of modernization on the society. Publication of a periodical, writing for the purpose of publishing articles, and the consumption of newspapers by readers, were all new events that indicated both the increasing influence of the European communicative publications within Jewish society, and the great changes in the Jews’ social organization and cultural habits (Bartal, 1994).

The Jewish press in its various languages served as a mouthpiece for the masses in the Diaspora for two generations, and was close to their day-to-day problems (Gilboa, 1992; Govrin, 1990; Hal, 1975; Kressel, 1969; Levi, 1982; Mattityahu, 1988; Mevorah, 1980; Nahshon, 1989; Pur, 2002; Refael, 2000; Shmuelevitz, 1993; Von der Osten-Sacken, 2002). Lacking a government organization or common forum for the entire people, this press served during its period of tremendous success – from the early twentieth century up until the Second World War – as an expression and faithful guide to Jewish public opinion, the tool responsible for creating the nation’s nationalist and spiritual image, and the bridge between the various Jewish communities worldwide. The Jewish press reached its peak between the two world wars. After years of suffocation, great communal-cultural forces burst out, after having been hidden in the Jewish communities. The Jewish press seized its freedom before it had even been granted it. Despite the poverty and hardship, hundreds of organizations, clubs, libraries, and political parties emerged during this time. The world lived in a flurry of ideological and communal awakening, particularly after the Balfour Declaration in 1917 (Gothelf, 1973). Alongside profound amazement regarding the path of the nation and its spiritual creativity, sources, and objectives, the reader found polemics on the place of Hebrew literature within world literature and to what extent the latter was influencing Jewish creative works (Sadan, 2000). The newspaper reviewed the changing reality for its readers, by providing meaning, explanations, and organizational tools to understand the significance of the new events in the context of the group’s consensus and cultural tradition (Blondheim, 1997). The rising circulation and standard of the Jewish press was, as mentioned, a result of the great changes that were then taking place within the nation: a nationalist and socialist arousal, the activation of the masses, the broadening of the spiritual horizons of some of the Jewish communities followed by a great fervor to know about what was going on in the outside world, and the organization of the masses in political and professional frameworks (Hal, 1975). The same mergence and consolidation processes that affected other nations also influenced the life of the Jewish people. These processes built bridges between the different Diaspora communities (Dinur, 1955). A newspaper in one of the Jewish languages was intended by the new style Jewish cultural elite to “educate” the broader masses, express a wide range of ideas, and engage different communities; however, common to all the members of that elite was the innovative character of media, and the non-traditional social significance (Bartal, 1994). The *Gazeta de Amsterdam*, published in 1675, is generally considered the first Jewish newspaper (Gothelf, 1973). Its Judaeo-Spanish (Ladino) language proves that it was aimed at those expelled from Spain and Portugal and the Anusim [Marranos].

### 2.3.2 Role of the Jewish Newspaper

The Jewish newspaper was more than a source of information and entertainment for its readers. They not only searched for news items and sensational pieces, but also protection for their civil rights, encouragement regarding their struggle for existence, consolation during times of trouble and distress, and guidance for the future (Hal, 1975). The Jewish press in the Diaspora filled a unique role. It served as a faithful herald for the interests and wishes of the Jewish masses and shaped Jewish public opinion. The newspaper helped the Jews hold their heads high, banished their apathy, and served as a kind of institution and guide for fighting for their rights (Gothelf, 1973). The appearance of Jewish newspapers was one of the most blatant signs of how modernization affected society (Bartal, 1994). Writing for the purpose of

publishing articles and the consumption of a newspaper by readers were new events that indicated both the increasing influence of the European communicative publications within Jewish society, and the great changes in the Jews' social organization and cultural habits.

Almost all the Jewish press demonstrated an active or warm attitude towards Zionism and aided the growth of literature. Non-Jewish authors gain fame by their writings being published in book form. Many Jewish authors mainly became famous through the daily Jewish press that often printed their stories in installments (Gothelf, 1973). Even when physically dispersed, the Jews are a society that enjoys nationalist unity among its various groups (Dinur, 1955). Indeed, the Diaspora Jews maintained various connections among themselves. The connections were religious, connected with Torah study, familial, social, economic, and to a certain extent – even organizational. Far beyond those connections, there was a constant feeling of Jewish unity that encompassed all Diaspora Jewry. By its very existence, the Jewish press served as a framework linking the different Jewish communities in a period where there was still no intergroup institution or organization.

Menachem Blondheim studied the Jewish press from the angle of a researcher of mass media. His article reveals similarities and a continuum between the traditional sermon and the newspapers, and he suggested that studying the connection between the two could contribute to creating a broad outline for defining the study of Jewish newspapers as an institution for evaluating its historical significance (Blondheim, 1997; Ilan, 2002). Blondheim determined that the Jewish press was the dynamic arena for expression of the collective identity and the common historic awareness – the same arena which the sermon had served for many previous generations (75). It should also be noted that the Jewish press in the Diaspora filled a unique role. Without general organization or a common parliamentary platform for the Jewish communities, the Jewish press served as a faithful expression of their interests, the wishes of the masses, and as a forum for shaping Jewish public opinion (Gothelf, 1973).

### 2.3.3 The Ladino Press

The bibliographic papers regarding the Jewish Ladino press list over three hundred different kinds of periodicals that were published at various intervals and were of different publication frequency, character, and quality (Beinart, 1992). These periodicals had a real influence on the field of literature. The pages of the various periodicals opened up to new genres, publishing novellas, plays, and poems, and thereby became a window by which modernization could reach the eastern communities, together with the new literary forms (Note 2). There were publications with general knowledge, ideological journals – belonging to political movements or community bodies – and those with many different kinds of content, including cultural, entertainment, and humor (743). These newspapers are a true mirror of internal communal life – the concerns, desires, and hopes of the Sephardic Jews for close to one hundred years. This is particularly blatant in light of the fact that up to the first half of the nineteenth century, almost all Ladino literature bore a religious-traditional character, totally different from the daily language of the wider public (Bunis, 1999).

Studies of the Ladino press are gradually creating an interesting picture of a unique publishing culture, with the Ladino newspaper standing out not only as a means of communication, but also a first-class literary tool. The first of these studies is that of Moshe David Gaon, who exhaustively describes in his article, "Ha-itonut Beladino" [The Ladino Press], around three hundred Ladino newspapers that were published throughout the Diaspora of the Jews who spoke this language. Gaon's book is arranged alphabetically, and he lists most of the kinds of Ladino newspapers, from daily newspapers, to those published every three days, weekly, and monthlies, political, organizational, and humoristic newspapers, short-term newspapers and Ladino papers that served as one of the main information pipelines among Ladino-speaking Sephardic Jewry, but simultaneously also publicized hundreds of literary works, such as songs, plays, or serialized romances that encouraged the readers to regularly purchase the papers. Many writers did not publish their work in their own books, only in the Ladino newspaper, and that served as a worthy home for publicizing their literary works (11).

Programs in the Ladino-speaking community newspapers were also supported by the Jewish newspapers in Eretz-Israel, where a variety of newspapers emphasized the importance of disseminating the Zionist Enterprise among the Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire (Benbassa, 1996). Gradually more and more people showed interest in the Zionist newspaper, and the number of subscribers – that steadily increased – serves as a criterion for noting public interest in the Zionist idea, and adopting the newspaper as a literary framework for spreading it. A large number of periodicals slowly absorbed the Zionist philosophy due to almost every communal event – including unimportant ones – serving as an opportunity for didactically introducing the main ideas of the Zionist Movement, based on tangible examples.

This article will focus on one representative periodical, the Ladino Zionist literary annual, *El Maccabeo*, published by the Maccabi organization in Thessaloniki from 1914-1931. The periodical served as an ideological, journalistic platform by displaying the climate of opinion in Sephardic Jewish society, with emphasis on women's writing in that society and its connection to the Zionist idea, dilemmas in the fields of education, culture, society, and economics, Jewish identity and their perspective on the realization of the Zionist-literary idea.

In addition, study of research literature in the field of Ladino newspapers shows that the studies up until now have

examined periodicals in general, primarily with a bibliographical approach. Most investigated the Ladino press from an external viewpoint, and did not really study them with regard to their being a platform for future authors.

This article sets out to rescue women's writings – that no longer have any use – from oblivion. The more the scientific community becomes familiar with literature from the Ladino periodicals, the more we will understand the Sephardic Jewish literary treasures and their universal complexity, and fully comprehend the content and principles of this heritage, including its different kind of expression in general and in its women's writing in particular.

### 3. The Maccabi Thessaloniki Women Realizing the Zionist Idea during the Early Twentieth Century

#### 3.1 Changes in the Status of Jewish Women

One of the main aspects of the cultural revival by Mizrahi Jews during the modern era was the profound change in the status of women. Thanks to the ideological enthusiasm of the Alliance Israélite Universelle teachers, women gradually gained equality with men, and it was only due to this that women's opportunities for acquiring an education became the same as those of Sephardic Jewish men (Rodrigue, 1965).

In Maccabi, Jewish women participated with great gusto in the activities of the nationalist movement and the women's division (Recanati, 1972). But it wasn't simple. It was necessary to overcome the tradition of "All the glory of the king's daughter is within", and people's preconceptions regarding a woman's active participation in public life. The committee, wishing to advance women and engage them in the movement's work, made great efforts to improve the division. However, firm principles were laid down from the beginning regarding complete separation between boys and girls. The girls' division had its own areas of activity, managed through different channels. They did not participate, for example, in the general meetings that discussed past activities and future programs; they exercised separately and participated in joint celebrations, but held separate meetings. The organization appointed a group of adults to carefully supervise the behavior of boys and girls at dances and on trips. In its girls' division, closed to men, Maccabi held physical education lessons on weekdays (the girls exercised in shirts with a closed collar, sleeves to the wrist, and long pants), and Jewish-oriented activities on the Sabbath. The organization opened a Hebrew course in 1914 that was very successful, particularly among the girls (almost two hundred attended), who also came to learn Hebrew songs. The girls participated in courses about Jewish history, anti-Semitism, and more. Maccabi also organized plays and performances connected with sport, literature, and Jewish holidays. They shattered the myth of "the apathy of the young girls of Thessaloniki", that had been discussed at length in the journal, and participated in the nationalist revivalist movement alongside the Maccabi members. Prominent activists included Tamar Astromasah, Dodon Hasun, Tamar Zion, Rachel Zion, Miriam Mataraso, Matilda Angil, Anna Benjamin, Rivkah Recanati, Alegra Molho, Julie Amario, and Matilda Sibi.

Shmuel Recanati, editor of the *El Maccabeo* periodical, does not underestimate the value and great contribution of the girls in the movement, and writes in the journal's first volume (1914) that the girls should be given the same physical training as the boys because Maccabi encourages strengthening the body and mind equally for both genders.

You should imbue the girls with deep love for the nation and the homeland, so that they will contribute their part in building up the crushed Jewish spirit, for they are the ones concerned about the next generation. When the fire of nationalist love will be lit in their hearts, and the Jewish fate will be entrusted to them, their sons and daughters will imbibe these feelings with their mother's milk, and the generation after our 'generation of the wilderness' will merit entering the Land of Israel prepared.

In the 1916 *El Maccabeo* issue, Recanati also notes that he views the training of the girls' division of the organization as extremely important – teaching them Jewish history in particular and Jewish-Zionist issues in general, as the first stage in returning to the Land of the Patriarchs. He writes that women study Hebrew and have greater awareness of their role to teach the next generation love for the Jewish people and Eretz Israel. They attend various courses regarding the problem of interfaith marriages, tuberculosis, Jewish music, travel descriptions from the Land of Israel, Auto-Emancipation, etc. According to the above, it is clear that Thessaloniki emphasized women's participation in realizing the Zionist vision, despite the fact that the Zionist Movement's communication was with the men.

It is important to note that women writing in *El Maccabeo* were not unique – there were also women authors in the literary anthology *Hatehiyah* that was published in Thessaloniki at the beginning of the twentieth century, and greatly encouraged the Zionist idea and the spreading of trends of nationalist revival (Refael, 2000). *Hatehiyah* was founded following a split in Maccabi, a split due to leadership crises and disagreements regarding the movement's goals. Those who left Maccabi established a women's organization that served as a suitable substitute for the Maccabi Women's organization. Officially *Hatehiyah* was a women's organization, but men were also active in it and the organization was run by Avraham Recanati, one of the founders of Maccabi and the first editor of *El Maccabeo*. Possibly the women who originally wrote in *El Maccabeo* later also wrote in *Hatehiyah*, due to the interconnection between the two organizations and publications.

It is also possible that male writers wrote in *Hatehiyah* under women's names, although the reason is unclear, and even

submitted articles for publication in *El Maccabeo*. The assumption is that the men who had left Maccabi felt uncomfortable, while they still wanted to be involved in the movement and its periodical. Hiding behind a woman's name allowed them to be involved and continue writing.

There were only four female writers for *El Maccabeo*, among dozens of males authors: "Devorah" (1914, 1916), "Rivkah" (1915, 1917), "Maccabistah" (1916), and "Tzipporah" (1917). Six incidences of women writing spread over seventeen volumes and seventeen years of *El Maccabeo*. They also wrote only from 1914-1917, meaning during the annual's first three years of publication. After the great fire of 1917 and the establishment of the women's anthology *Hatehiyah*, the women's writing in *El Maccabeo* ceases and moves to *Hatehiyah*.

The women's articles in *El Maccabeo* were intended to portray the Jewish woman in Thessaloniki as an equal partner in the role of "recruiting members to Maccabi", which earned her identical status to that of the Jewish man – who was expected to show interest in events in the Jewish world and recruit and excite more people to join Maccabi.

We will now examine the women's articles in chronological order.

### 3.2 *The Woman's Role in the National Effort*

In the first volume (1914), editor A. S. Recanati introduces "Devorah" as:

A Jewish daughter from a good family, full of love for the homeland, and able to write spontaneously to advance the Jewish nationalist recognition (Note 3). Up until now, the women were distanced from all the existence of the *Hatehiyah* movement in our city, and now we are beginning to see the first women's writings and we thank Devorah, who has shown the way to her sisters who are far from Judaism, and her loud call will herald the return of young women to the ranks of Maccabi.

Recanati's connection between Judaism and Maccabi is obvious by the end of his comment, "who are far from Judaism... will herald the return" by their return to Maccabi. Returning to Maccabi symbolizes returning to Judaism.

This introduction by Recanati can be understood in light of the fact that the Hebrew press from its outset belonged solely to men (Govrin, 2008). Men wrote in it and wrote primarily only for male readers. Women were absent as participants and readers for decades. This conclusion is not surprising, and is parallel to women's almost total absence as readers, and primarily as writers, in general, until the early twentieth century. Therefore Recanati tries to soften the introduction of women's writing to *El Maccabeo*. He doesn't see a need to introduce the men's articles, but for the first article published by a woman he felt the need to "open the gates for her" to *El Maccabeo*.

Devorah turns to the women and writes that they are no doubt surprised to see a young Jewish-Salonican woman writing about the revival of her nation, for the first time. In her opinion, the role of the modern Jewish woman is to protect the Jewish nation, and instill nationalist feelings based on solid foundations in the hearts of her sons and daughters. When a woman educates her children to have national pride, they won't have difficulty in surviving the long Exile. Women must provide Jewish-nationalistic education. For generations, the woman was the one to comfort the nation and preserve its traditions – like Deborah, Esther, and many others. Thousands of women were killed in the Inquisition for their Jewish faith. These heroines should be honored and admired. "And the Maccabi organization educates to these ideals," Devorah emphasizes, "but 'unfortunately' there are more boys than girls in it. Can there be a substitute for the women? What ideal? Are they aware of the fate of the Jews in the Diaspora?" asks Devorah, and protests the women's indifference to the Zionist effort, "that is an unforgivable crime".

"The ignorance and indifference shame the female race. Women are occupied only with questions of fashion day and night." She turns to the women and demands a radical change in their mentality, "Let us learn from our sisters in Europe, and participate in the spreading of Jewish revival. And, as a first step, join the Maccabi organization." Because anyone who already feels the fire of love for the Jewish nation in her heart, must join Maccabi and make her contribution." She expects the women to unite with the men who are active in Maccabi and shatter the myth of the "indifference of the women of Thessaloniki."

Devorah's essay that was targeted at women, as well as the (few) advertisements in the annual that were also intended for women, testify that women also read *El Maccabeo*. The market share of the "woman as a reader" steadily increased during the nineteenth century as literacy spread to the various classes, and more people knew how to read and write (Herzog, 2000). At the same time, reading was identified as an activity that took place in someone's private home library. Since the woman is perceived as being at the center of the world of the private home, she also became the center of reading. Her leisure time became an indicator of her gender – free time was essential for developing women's writing in the various genres.

Expressions of the female voice begin to be heard in the newspapers at the beginning of the last century. This is not the dominant, or even consistent, voice, but the accumulation of writings over the years teaches us about the critical-unique female position, that gradually takes form, not only with its own nationalist discourse, but even with its own nationalist identity (Bar-El, Schwartz, & Hess, 2000).

If we still wish to investigate the nature of women at the beginning of the century, including their opinions, thoughts, emotional reactions, and first and foremost how they understood the exciting historic event of the modern Return to Zion, we will find this interpretation only in the writings of the women themselves (Berlovitz, 1996). It is true that there are not many of these writings, but they are the primary source for any study of the woman of the times, with their ability to contribute direct and authentic information to her voice (Refael, 2000).

In the 1915 issue Rivkah writes in similar vein, and notes that the women must stop being so apathetic, and take an active part in the nationalist revival movement because the salvation will begin with them (Note 4).

She claims in her article that the women have a somewhat negative image of Maccabi, but the movement was born due to the lack of sufficient Jewish education and the women should be active in it.

It is true that the clubhouse is unimposing, and many girls start coming to Maccabi for non-ideological reasons, but within a short space of time they are all captivated by the magic of the place and see that they can realize the general ideal by their actions.

She ends her words like her predecessor, Devorah, with a call to join Maccabi.

### 3.3 *Girls' Education in Thessaloniki*

If we want to list several common characteristics of these women writers, we can say they were privileged to be given an education unusual for Jewish women of the times – high school, professional, or even university (Note 5). The ideological nationalist awareness encompassed a community that was mainly men, with the woman continuing her traditional feminine role – her home and family. Meaning even if the moods of education and nationalism raised the issues of a woman's education and qualifications, and even if initiatives to establish girls' schools in the large cities were implemented, most of the women in the Jewish communities were not educated or earning qualifications.

Poor girls in the Middle East and North Africa studied a few crafts, such as sewing, but they were considered marginal relative to the primary goal of educating the girls to become good mothers. Since it is the "mother-educator" who must break the vicious cycle of continuing production of the "bad character traits" of the east that led to the creation of "decadent" societies (Rodrigue, 1965).

In this context, it is important to mention the findings of the Kohn Report, published in Thessaloniki in 1927 (Refael, 2000). The report was a result of a special survey entitled "*Las eskolas komualas de saloniko - los ke eyas son, los ke eyas devrian ser*". The pedagogue, Kohn, raised the problem of Jewish education in Thessaloniki in general, and of the girls in particular. We can understand from what he wrote that the increase in the number of students was a result of the inclusion of girls in the city's educational system, a move that Kohn supported.

Another mark of the women writers that was not a result of the influence of their homes, but rather of their own worldview and development, was their awareness of self, and the importance of their role not only as daughters and wives, but also as equal partners in the growing social enterprise in Eretz-Israel. Thus, despite the fact that they lacked any rights and could not make decisions, they offered their involvement and help in their own, non-establishment ways. They also longed to tell the story of the new life that was taking form before their eyes, and they wrote both about their own experiences and also those of the community (Berlovitz, 1996).

### 3.4 *Topics Addressed by the Writers*

In the 1916 annual, Rivkah writes, after an introduction in which she notes that her essay is intended for women, that Maccabi is the only organization in Thessaloniki where men and women have equal roles. Maccabi's role is to achieve emancipation for women. "Every girl must have an ideal in life. Life without a goal is a dark, miserable life. We, the women, are responsible for the people's education. The women must educate their sons and daughters to remember the foremothers, Sarah, Rebecca, Judith, and harness themselves to the national task."

It is worth mentioning that the Zionist movement in Thessaloniki viewed the education of the Jewish girls as simultaneously both a means and an end (Refael, 2000). We can find the connection between the Zionist idea and girls' education in what was published by Rabbi Refael Habib, the rabbi of Thessaloniki in the early 1930s. He writes that girls' education should interest the community at least as much as that of the boys (Molho, 1967).

Rivkah continues that throughout history, since the Jewish people were exiled from their land, Jews have lived in accordance with the spirit of the countries where they were living. Whether in liberal lands, considered the leaders of civilization, or in primitive countries, the state of the Jews was always the same, full of suffering. The Christians have always blamed the Jews for killing Jesus. Add to this the pogroms, persecutions, and expulsions due to prejudice. This anti-Semitism, of religious nature, generated cruel laws that oppressed our people. Jews were slaughtered because people envied their financial and commercial acumen.

The topic of Rivkah's writing is a global-national one. She could have used her platform in *El Maccabeo* for writing

about feminine or communal issues, but she prefers to discuss the lofty issues she sees as having supreme importance. She also has a particular goal in mind when raising the problem of anti-Semitism to her male and female readers: I will show you the reality, and you, on your part, draw the conclusions.

Devorah also writes in the 1916 issue that the Jewish newspapers have discussed the closure of the Bikkur Cholim hospital at length in the last few days (Note 6):

This step has left many of the city's poor without help. From now on they will have to knock on doors of strangers, who will look at them "like a step-mother". Throughout the generations, the Jewish woman was the angel of mercy, comforting the unfortunate, concerning herself with the burdens of others, supporting the elderly and the weak. How can she stay silent in the face of this move? In the past the poor had somewhere to eat their Sabbath meal. The Jewish women of Europe devote their time and money to helping the unfortunate, but today the female gender in Thessaloniki is indifferent to the suffering of others.

Devorah offers her own hypotheses as to why this is the reality, and argues that the Thessalonikian women are not interested in community work because of their preconceptions that women are not entitled to interfere. "This is a very wrong perspective that must be quickly discarded," writes Devorah. Devorah's approach displays seeds of feminism, but she is also still captive to preconceived definitions, and notes that women should be more involved in charitable activities since they have more patience. In almost all the hospitals in the world, it is the women who are busy with the acts of kindness. She ends her article by calling on the women to join the struggle to reopen Bikkur Cholim and to contribute in general to communal life in Thessaloniki. It should be noted, that even when the topic of the article was female rather than general, it was still part of the struggle for equality and recognition. The writing emanated from competition, with the goal of unquestionably proving that women had no less writing ability than men, and were their equals (Govrin, 2000).

In the 1917 annual, Tzipporah writes about the war and the subsequent large numbers of fallen soldiers and their broken families, but how the battlefield is ironically called the "field of honor". "The war has raised the hopes of many nations," she notes, "including those of the Jewish nation who wish to return to their land. But for some reason, while all the nations enthusiastically greet the consequences of the war, the Jewish people are drowsy and indifferent:

"Rise up Israel! Awaken from your long sleep! Cry out to the world about your tragedy! Demand your right to life forcefully!" she spurs them on (Note 7).

Tzipporah also allots an important role to the women. In her opinion, they must join Zionist women's organizations. "To work for the auto-emancipation of our nation. Women's influence on the men in the family – fathers, husbands, and sons – is crucial and can bring about miracles."

It is interesting to note that the women writers use the same expressions as the men to compare the Jews of Thessaloniki with those of other countries. The men wrote, "We will take an example from our brothers", the women write, "We will take an example from our sisters".

In the 1930 annual, "Maccabistah" [Maccabit] writes a critical article about the young Jews who sit in coffee shops and casinos, poisoned by smoke and wasting money, who destroy their time and health and their parents' peace of mind, instead of meeting for intellectual activity at the sports' center and giving their bodies what they really need – some exercise:

"Maccabi needs young people to fulfill its mission, and, unfortunately there is a shortage of members, and a shortage of funds."

We need to remember that 1930, the year when the article was published, was the year before the publication of the last volume of *El Maccabeo*, and Maccabistah's words reinforce the assumption regarding the reasons for the periodical's closure. Conversely, the writer expresses her satisfaction with the physical education lessons in the school, thanks to the teacher, Izak Cohen, and the "Maccabi scouts".

"We need to show the Greeks that we are not only the People of the Book, but also a people with an ideal, a people that cherishes its own value and the value of its nation," she concludes. Maccabistah's dissatisfaction emphasizes what was written by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, who opined that it is the woman who builds the nation (and not the man), because of her dominance in raising the children in the house and family. This dominance, he wrote, is critical, particularly during this time when the nation is being formed as it was originally, and its patterns and infrastructure are currently being determined. Therefore, the woman's influence is critical, not only for the current generation, but also regarding the nation's future character and nature (Note 8).

### 3.5 Strengthening Maccabi through Women's Writing

In the 1915 annual, Devorah writes that many parents do not send their children to Maccabi because of their erroneous views regarding this organization. Maccabi espoused gender equality and Devorah believed that many parents thought

this was in contradiction to Judaism. She explains that Judaism actually supports equality. Judaism never espoused differences in status. Before all the other peoples, it was the Jewish nation that protested discrimination of any kind.

The parents who do not allow their children to join Maccabi, withhold power from the movement that is faithful to the tradition and the religious revival. "Maccabi needs the cooperation of all strata of the people," writes Devorah and asks those who don't send their children to look at the nations of the world – how they are imbued with the love of the people and the nation. In her opinion, it is precisely because the Jewish people is scattered to the four corners of the earth that it must unite and not distance itself from the Jewish sources because of its preconceived views.

"Right now, the children are not non-Jews and not Frenchmen, without character, without color, and are studying in non-Jewish schools, and therefore they need a movement like Maccabi that will strengthen their body and soul."

### 3.6 *The Significance of the "National Home" for the Women Writers*

In the 1916 issue, "Rivkah" writes:

Only we ourselves will be able to solve our problems. By returning to our home. Moving to Eretz-Israel and making it bloom. And to whoever thinks that this is utopia, he was told that this isn't a dream.

The image of the "home" about which Rivkah writes – Maccabi as a home, the state as a home, the community as a home, is the key to understanding the feminine nationalist discourse. It alternates between changing configurations and layered meanings in accordance with the political and cultural contexts, even when she translates the structure of the old religious collective of the holy house (synagogue) into the new Zionist collective structure of the National Home, such as in Tziporah's article in the same volume, where she writes that everyone is moving away from their customs and their ancestral customs:

Everything is gradually taking on a non-Jewish character. Where are those beautiful customs of old? When the family gathered together on Friday night around a table covered with a white tablecloth, and everyone stood and heard kiddush [sanctification of the Sabbath said over wine], the clean children around their father (Bar-El et al., 2000).

Tziporah writes about weakened religious feelings among the Jewish population in Thessaloniki, and the beautiful customs that are becoming lost. She claims that the Jews no longer celebrate their holidays with the same radiance, they no longer have love inside them for anything Jewish, they adopt foreign customs without considering that it will bring about their end, and they no longer live the same pure lives as they once did. Finally she calls on everyone to return to the National Home:

We have a glorious past, and we have no reason to be ashamed of our Jewishness. We should return to our traditions of old and the beautiful holidays, Hebrew language, the holy sources. Thanks to the nationalist organizations including Maccabi, a new spirit is breathing hope into the realization of the return to the National Home and to our land. After a long period of darkness, there is a ray of light in the gloom. The return to our old-new homeland. But we first need to return to our Judaism so as to return to the land.

In her writing, Tziporah emphasizes the accepted process for settling the land: Returning to Maccabi will lead to returning to Judaism, and returning to Judaism will result in return to the National Home in the Land of Israel.

### 3.7 *Women Realizing the Zionist Idea, as Seen by Male Authors*

In the 1918 volume, Eliyahu Frances wrote an article entitled "The Jewish Woman and Zionism" in which he notes that the Jewish people have been saved from many troubles thanks to women like Judith and the prophetess, Deborah. By their bravery, they saved the Chosen People from mass extermination. Frances's choice of figures like Deborah and Judith is intended to cause women to stand tall. It would seem that alongside the rich and active history that took place and was recorded by men, she also has her own history, her own dynasty, and her own mothers who serve as a shining example.

Characteristics that would appear to be the sole province of men, such as decisiveness and courage under the strain of war (Deborah), or daring and planning in a hopeless situation (Judith), represent women whose recognition of their own value and functioning are no longer dependent on decisions by men, but rather, they know how to make their own voice heard.

Frances continues to write that when the Jewish people lived in their homeland, women were part of the national tragedies and celebrations. The Jewish woman knew how to preserve our beautiful traditions and values throughout our exile, maintain the family with bonds of love, and most of all, infuse us with love of Judaism and our holy sources. They are the faithful guardians of doing kindness and truth, but are also building the future, by influencing their husbands and sons to gain freedom with an independent nationalist life.

After the detailed report, Frances reaches what he wanted to emphasize: it is the women who are advancing the Zionist ideals. It is time that the Jewish-Salonican women will be recorded in the pages of history as among those who contributed to the nationalist revival.



#### 4. Concluding Comments

The Jews of the Eastern lands and the Sephardic Jewish communities greatly contributed to the historic-literary processes that shaped the image of the Jewish people and led to the establishment of the State of Israel.

One of the active areas in which this contribution was expressed is that of periodicals. This activity of Sephardic Jewish, Ladino-speaking writers writing for Ladino newspapers, took place on two planes: writing in important newspapers in the Balkan lands and in Eretz-Israel, and their work in publishing their own newspapers as publishers and editors. When reviewing the content of the various genres of women's writing in the Hebrew press, the trend seen is that of high-level feminine awareness. This awareness is expressed in the women's perspective in their writing, in their struggle for recognition of their intellectual prowess, and in their protests against discrimination against women in Jewish traditions and society (Govrin, 2008).

This article examined women's writing in the Ladino Zionist literary periodical, *El Maccabeo*, from 1914-1917 in Thessaloniki, and looked at its unique contribution to realize the Zionist idea in the Jewish people in general, and the Jews of Thessaloniki in particular.

#### References

- Bar-El, Y., Schwartz, Y., & Hess, T. S. (Eds.) (2000). *Ben sifrut lahevrah: Iyunim batarbut ha'ivrit hahadashah*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad. [In Hebrew].
- Bartal, I. (1994). Mevasser u-modia le'ish Yehudi – Ha'itonut hayehudit k'afik shel hiddush. *Cathedra*, 71, 156-164. [In Hebrew]. <http://www.ybz.org.il/?CategoryID=235&ArticleID=694#.WM6bzGcIGos>
- Beinart, H. (Ed.). (1992). *Moreshet Sepharad: The Sephardi legacy*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press.
- Benbassa, E. (1996). *Hayahadut ha'otamanit bein hitma'aravut leziyonut 1908-1920*. Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center. [In Hebrew].
- Benbassa, E., & Rodrigue, A. (1993). *The Jews of the Balkans: The Judeo-Spanish community, 15th to 20th centuries (Jewish communities of the modern world)*. Oxford, England, and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell.
- Berlovitz, Y. (1996). *Lehamtzi eretz, lehamtzi am*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad. [In Hebrew].
- Blondheim, M. (1997). Cultural media in transition: From the traditional sermon to the Jewish press. *Kesher*, 21, 13-14.
- Bunis, D. M. (1999). *Voices from Jewish Salonika*. Jerusalem, Thessaloniki: Misgav Yerushalayim and Ets Ahaim Society.
- Dinur, B. (1955). *Hazemanim hahadashim betoldot Yisra'el: Avhanatam, mahutam, u'dmutam bemafneh hadorot*. Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik. [In Hebrew].
- Gaon, M. D. (1965). *Ha-itonut beladino – Bibliografia*. Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute. [In Hebrew].
- Gilboa, M. (1992). *Lexicon ha'itonut ha'ivrit bame'ah hats'hah esrei*. Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik. [In Hebrew].
- Gothelf, Y. (1973). *Itonut Yehudit shehayta*. Tel Aviv: World Federation of Jewish Journalists. [In Hebrew].
- Govrin, N. (1989). *Devash misela: Mekhkarim besifrut Erets Yisra'el*. Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense. [In Hebrew].
- Govrin, N. (1990). The 'Ha-Za'ir': Portrait of a literary journal." *Kesher*, 8, 90-93.
- Govrin, N. (2008). Nashim be'itonut ha'ivrit – Hahathalot." In N. Govrin (Ed.), *Kri'at hadorot – Sifrut Ivrit b'ma'agalehah* (Vol. 3, pp. 271-291). Tel Aviv: Gvanim and Tel Aviv University. [In Hebrew].
- Hal, G. (1975). Shlosh meot shanah l'itonut hayehudit ba'olam, 1675-1975. In A. Dulzin et al. (Eds.), *Shlosh meot shanah shel itonut yehudit*. Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization. [In Hebrew].
- Herzog, H. (2000). The women's press in Israel: An arena for reproduction or for challenge? *Kesher*, 28, 43-52.
- Ilan, N. (2002). The voice of the east – Hebrew periodicals by and about Sephardi and Oriental Jews." *Pe'amim: Studies in Oriental Jewry*, 93, 113-48. [In Hebrew]. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23429524>.
- Kressel, G. (1969). *Ha'itonut ha'ivrit b'erezt Yisra'el bashanim, 1863-1904*. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University. [In Hebrew].
- Levi, A. (1982). Sefaradit-Yehudit (Ladino). In I. Bezalel (Ed.), *Kitvey sofrim Yehudim Sefardi'im u'mizrahi'im bilshonot Yehudiot vezarot* (pp. 227-254). Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University. [In Hebrew].
- Mattitياهو, M. (1988). The Jewish press in Salonika. *Kesher*, 3, 43-48. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23895168>
- Mevorah, B. (1980). Nitzanehah shel ha'itonut hayehudit ha'ispaniolit ba'olam". *Yad Lakoreh*, 19, 35-46. [In Hebrew].
- Molho, M. (1967). *Saloniki: Ir v'em beyisrael*. Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: The Institute for the Study of the Jews of

Salonika. [In Hebrew].

Nahshon, G. (1989). The Ladino press in the United States. *Kesher*, 6, 53-57. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23901024>

Pur, D. (2002). 'Der Jude' (1899-1902): Profile of a Zionist periodical published in Yiddish". *Kesher*, 31, 58-67.

Quintana-Rodríguez, A. (2002). Hatirgum lejudemo k'emtza'e lehafatzat ha'ideologi'ah hatziyonit b'kerev hayehudim hasefaradim. In W. Zeev Harvey et al. (Ed.), *Tzion vetziyonut b'kerev yehuday sefarad vehamizrah* (pp. 507-527). Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim. [In Hebrew].

Recanati, D. A. (Ed.). (1972 and 1986). *Zikaron Saloniki: Gadluta vehurbanah shel Yerushalayim debalkan*, (Vols. I and II.) Tel Aviv: The Committee for Publishing the Thessaloniki Community Book. [In Hebrew].

Refael, S. (2000). 'Hatehiah' – Ma'asaf sifrut beladino lenashim tsi'oni'ot besaloniki. *Pe'amim: Studies in Oriental Jewry*, 82, 81-94. [In Hebrew].

Rodrigue, A. (1965). *Hinukh hevrah v'istoriya*. Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute. [In Hebrew].

Sadan, D. (2000). *Mekhharim besifrut ha'ivrit: Hasifrut ha'ivrit bepetah hame'ah ha'esrim* (Vol. IV). A. Holtzman (Ed.). [In Hebrew]. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University.

Shakhevits, B., & Perry, M. (1972). *Sefer hayovel leshimon helkin*. Jerusalem: Mass. [In Hebrew].

Shmuelevitz, A. (1993). Two Hebrew weeklies in Turkey. *Kesher*, 13, 46-48.

Von der Osten-Sacken, T. (2002). Tribulations of a world Zionist newspaper: The rise and fall of the 'Jüdische Welt-Rundschan'. *Kesher*, 31, 68-77.

## Notes

Note 1. It is worth noting that the founders of Maccabi in Thessaloniki had emigrated from Bulgaria in 1908.

Note 2. Interesting information appears in Gaon, 1965; Levi, 1982.

Note 3. The pseudonym of his wife, Dodon Hasun, according to an interview with their son, Mr. David Recanati, on 1 February 2005. It should be noted that the author chose the name of a biblical heroine, see Judges 4 and 5.

Note 4. Avraham Shmuel Recanati's sister, Rivkah Recanati (later Rivkah Cohen) in an interview with Avraham Shmuel Recanati's son, Mr. David Recanati, 1 February 2005.

Note 5. For comparison purposes, see Nurit Govrin's study on Nechama Pohatchevsky, Devash Misela (1989), p.114. Nechama Pohatchevsky (1869-1934) was a farmer and author and a member of the First Aliyah. In her stories, she discusses new issues raised by the new reality in Eretz-Israel, during a time when such stories had not yet become common and it was necessary to begin such a tradition. The stories are dominated by themes of despair and hopelessness, and most are based on actual events that occurred in her immediate environment.

For more examples of this genre, see Berlovitz, 1996, p.50. It should also be noted that once the Zionist organizations began operating in Thessaloniki, there was also a turnaround in the status of women, until they founded women's Zionist organizations, such as Tzofot Hakoah, Bnot Moriah, the Mizrahi women's battalion – Ahei Trumpeldor, Hatehiah, and others. See: Refael, 2000, pp. 85-86. There were also several women's organizations with other purposes in Thessaloniki: Clara Hirsch (helping the needy), The Jewish Organization for Help in the Winter (providing warm clothing to the needy in the winter), Devorah (helping the sick), The Organization for Helping Orphans (mainly helping orphan pupils).

Note 6. Dodon Hasun, Recanati's wife. There was a women's organization in Thessaloniki that aided the sick, called Devorah. There was possibly a connection between the writer and the organization, and perhaps the article was published by that organization.

Note 7. "Alevntate dunke Israel! despertate de tu longo esfueno! grita por el mundo tu dezgrasia!, reklama alta boz tus deritos a la vida" (ibid., p.39).

Note 8. Regarding the woman's role in the education of the nation, see further elaboration: Govrin, 1989, 114, in her study about Nechama Pohatchevsky.

## Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution license](#) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.