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"But We Are Guilty for Our Daughters": Lessons Learned from the History of Jewish Girls' Education in Germany and Eastern Europe in the Nineteenth Century

by Laura Shaw Frank

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The nineteenth century witnessed radical transformation in the area of girls' education. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, formal education for Jewish girls, whether in Jewish religious studies or secular studies, was virtually non-existent in both Germany and Eastern Europe. Over the following century, the situation saw major changes in both locales. By the mid-nineteenth century, formal education—both secular and religious—for Jewish girls was nearly universal in Germany. By the dawn of the twentieth century, significant numbers of Jewish girls in Eastern Europe were enrolled in modern schools and receiving secular, but not religious, educations. The process of transformation that occurred throughout the nineteenth century with respect to girls' education was similar in certain ways in Central and Eastern Europe, but in other ways it was profoundly different. Although both German and Eastern European Jews began educating their daughters during this time, the point of time at which they began to do so, their reasons for doing so, the type of education they chose to give the girls, and the Jewish communal reaction to, and involvement with, their schooling differed significantly. These differences are important, not simply as lessons in Jewish history, but as models that continue to play out in the way the Orthodox Jewish community addresses the changing status of girls and women in their surrounding societies.

In Germany, where Jews were more accepted into German society and consequently adopted certain values and norms of that society, the Jewish communal attitude toward both reform of Judaism and gender roles in society led to the earlier development of Jewish education for girls. However, in Eastern Europe, where Jews were less integrated into society, and where the external society remained less modernized than that of Germany, Jews largely viewed religious Judaism as an alternative to

modernity, not a system that could itself engage in a process of modernization. Due to this societal structure, girls' education remained an enterprise focused almost entirely on secular studies, leaving Eastern European Jewish women largely lacking in Jewish knowledge. It was not until the era of the First World War that significant numbers of Eastern European Jewish girls began receiving a formal Jewish education.

In the pre-modern era, the only type of formal education received by Jewish children throughout Europe was Jewish education. As Jews lived in corporate Jewish communities, virtually cut off from the societies that surrounded them, there was no need for secular studies. Furthermore, the only children who received that education were male children. A prominent opinion in the Talmud stated that teaching a woman Torah was equivalent to teaching her *tiflut*, licentiousness. Thus, girls' education consisted of learning at their mothers' skirts the knowledge they needed to run a Jewish household. Boys, on the other hand, attended *heder* beginning at age three, and many continued on to study in *yeshiva* until their teenage years. The beginnings of the lifting of Jewish legal infirmities and the advent of the Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment in Germany, changed this reality.

Girls' Education in Germany

In response to the seventeenth-century secular Enlightenment, which brought values of reason, rationalism, and secularization to Western Europe, the Jewish community of Western Europe engaged in its own enlightenment, called the Haskalah.[1] The movement, born in the late seventeenth century, advocated integration with, and acculturation to, the surrounding gentile society, as well as the injection of rationalism and intellectualism to the Jewish religion. The father of the Haskalah, Moses Mendelssohn, believed that Judaism was a faith of reason, containing eternal truths. It should not be coercive and was not monolithic. Mendelssohn strongly identified with German culture and language. At the same time, he remained a loyal Jew who believed in the binding nature of Jewish law. The writings of Mendelssohn and other German *maskilim*, or proponents of Enlightenment ideas, set the stage in the German Jewish community for the religious reform movements of the nineteenth century by opening the philosophical possibility for change and modernization within the Jewish religion.

Beginning in the early nineteenth century, the German states engaged in various degrees of emancipation of their Jewish populations. This improvement in the legal status of Jews led to their greater integration into surrounding society and a move away from traditional Jewish communal authority. Until this time, the authority of the rabbinate was hegemonic in the Jewish community. In a non-integrated Jewish community, the rabbinate controlled all legal decisions—both religious and secular—for the members of the Jewish community. Jewish religious courts issued rulings that were controlling in their communities. However, once emancipation took place, secular governments wanted secular state-run courts to dictate the law to all citizens of the state. The power of religious courts dropped dramatically and the rabbinate lost its ability to exert its authority over all members of the Jewish community. Rabbinic rulings were no longer binding on all Jews, but only on those Jews who chose to be bound by them. This drop in traditional rabbinic authority opened the door for religious reform.

Hand-in-hand with emancipation and the weakening of Jewish communal bonds came assimilation and secularization of the Jewish population in Germany. Jews integrated into the surrounding society economically, culturally, and even socially. A drastic move away from traditional observance of Jewish law occurred.

At the same time, the German states began engaging in varying degrees of oversight of the rabbinic profession. An 1812 Prussian law required rabbis to prove that they finished a three-year course in the study of philosophy. Rabbis were required to undergo examination to prove competency in philosophy. *Yeshivot* that would not comply with this requirement of secular study were forced to close. This change in rabbinic education, albeit imposed externally by the state, began a process of modernization of the rabbinate that continued throughout the nineteenth century. This oversight went together with a meteoric rise in the importance of university education in Germany. Humanistic liberal education, a result of the secular Enlightenment, had a powerful effect on the Jewish community, and Jews increasingly wanted their rabbinic leadership to have extensive secular education in addition to

Jewish knowledge.

The combination of these societal and political forces with Haskalah philosophy led to efforts toward religious reform in the Jewish community. Initial religious reforms were aesthetic and related to decorum, not ideological in nature. Reformers wanted to make Judaism more appealing to the assimilating masses, so they sought to make Jewish prayer services more dignified and formal to resemble the current fashions in German Protestant churches. The most common reforms included the introduction of sermons given in German on moral rather than legalistic topics, choirs to sing during synagogue services, requirements of formal attire for both clergy and congregants in synagogue, and the advent of confirmation ceremonies either replacing, or in addition to, bar mitzvah ceremonies. These religious reforms had an enormous impact on the development of Jewish girls' religious education in Germany.

As noted above, formal education for Jewish girls, whether secular or religious, was virtually non-existent in Germany prior to the late eighteenth century. As Mordechai Eliav describes in his seminal work on Jewish education in Germany in the era of Haskalah and Emancipation,[2] there is a record of a handful of *hederim*, or traditional Jewish schools, that admitted girls as well as a handful of *hederim* that were solely for girls, but these were few and far between. Such *hederim* taught Hebrew reading, how to pray, reading and translating of the Pentateuch into the vernacular and knowledge of key Jewish laws. A greater number of Jewish girls, albeit only those from wealthier backgrounds, received at least a rudimentary secular education beginning in the seventeenth century. Wealthy German Jews hired private tutors to teach their daughters languages, mathematics, and music, recognizing that such subjects would be important for the girls' future role as mistresses of the home. Such education was even supported by some in the rabbinical establishment. Rabbi Yonah Lendsofer from Prague, for example, wrote that girls should be taught to read in German and that fathers should aim to marry their sons to women who were literate in German. At the same time, rabbis continued to object to the teaching of Torah to girls. Rabbi Y. Watzler, for example, instructed his followers not to teach girls Hebrew and Bible, but only to give them enough Jewish education so that they could read the prayerbook. He gave this ruling although he knew that girls were being taught German and foreign languages such as French.[3]

Over the course of the eighteenth century, traditional Jewish education for girls, minimal to begin with, continued to diminish. With the advent of the Haskalah, the tendency of wealthy Jews to hire tutors to give their daughters a secular education grew in response to similar practices in the general society. *Maskilim* were supportive of the practice of giving girls a good secular education. Moses Mendelssohn's daughters studied French and music. Initially, the *maskilim* did not recognize the danger of educating girls only in secular subjects. In 1786, certain *maskilim* even mentioned with special pride that Jewish girls could speak fluent and elegant German but did not know Hebrew. However, within a short number of years, the results of the maskilic emphasis on German and not Jewish education for girls became clear. Girls had little to no Jewish knowledge. They could not read the prayer book and were ignorant of their role in Judaism. As one *maskil* wrote in the pages of the Haskalah journal *haMeasef*, "Instead of dedicating their souls on Sabbaths and festivals to the words of a Living God, they read worthless books and salacious love stories in foreign languages which arouse their desires and corrupt their souls."[4]

It was at this time, during the late eighteenth century, that discussion regarding the need for educational reform in the German Jewish community began. Education reform had been a topic of discussion in general German society since the mid-eighteenth century. The professionalization of teaching and the beginning of a theory of pedagogy influenced the development of a modernized schooling system, which included classes divided by age, standardized school books, and a demand to teach girls like boys. In response to changes in education in the surrounding society as well as dissatisfaction among Jewish youth with their education, *maskilim* argued that Jewish studies needed to be conveyed differently than they had traditionally been. They felt that, rather than the intensive Bible and Talmudic studies taking place in boys *hederim* and *yeshivot*, and rather than the solely secular studies enjoyed by only wealthy Jewish girls, Jewish children needed a modern Jewish education that would address the needs of the times. Such an education would be based upon a catechism-style curriculum, the way Christian children were taught. In addition, they recommended that Jewish

education culminate in a confirmation ceremony similar to that used in Protestant churches.
In the last years of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth century, schools began to be established by *maskilim* and reformers for the purpose of giving poor children in the Jewish community both a secular and a Jewish education.[5] One example of such a school was the consistorial school founded in Cassel in 1809. The consistory intended that the school, serving poor Jewish boys, provide a model for other elementary schools to be established throughout Westphalia. The Jewish education received by these boys was meant to transmit the "principles and obligations" of Judaism rather than to concentrate on text-based study.[6]
During this same period, confirmation ceremonies took hold and became accepted in the reform-minded sector of the Jewish community. The first known confirmation ceremony, which was only for boys, took place in 1803 in Dessau. The first confirmation ceremony to include girls took place in 1814 in Berlin.[7] From this point forward, confirmation ceremonies became more and more widespread in the Reform Jewish community of Germany. Such ceremonies more often than not included girls, and the classes in preparation for them thus also had to include girls. Thus, the adoption of the confirmation ceremony led to an increase in girls' education in the German Jewish community.
Part and parcel of the discussion of the *maskilim* regarding educational reform was a discussion specifically about education for girls. One Berlin *maskil*, David Friedlander, described at length the neglect of religious or moral education for girls. He emphasized that in addition to the study of the German language, girls needed to have religious instruction in order to help prepare them for their responsibilities "as the not less important half of the human race."[8] *Maskilim* began to establish schools to educate Jewish girls. Initially, as it was with boys, these schools were aimed at poor Jewish girls whose parents could not afford private tutoring in the home. The hope of the *maskilim* was that ultimately such schools would serve the daughters of the wealthy as well, but in most cases, the schools were unable to shake their reputation of being schools for the poor, so wealthy girls stayed away. The first such school was established in 1797 in Breslau. The girls in the school studied an integrated Jewish and secular curriculum, including catechism-style religious studies, Hebrew and German.
In the next twenty-five years, other similar girls' schools were established in many German cities, including Hamburg, Dessau, Berlin, Koenigsberg, and Frankfurt. The curriculum of each of these schools varied slightly, but for the most part, they all included religious instruction in the catechism style, reading and writing in German, a small amount of Hebrew, mathematics, literature, and fine handiwork. Some of the schools included additional subjects as part of their curriculum, among which were Yiddish writing, prayer, Jewish history, and Bible. Schools that catered more to poorer girls had more of a focus on vocational training, while those that catered to the wealthy emphasized the arts and foreign languages, knowledge of which would be expected of an upper-class German young woman. By the 1830s, it was widely accepted throughout the maskilic and Reform Jewish community in Germany that Jewish girls attended school, whether single-sex or coeducational. Girls' education was not seen as significantly less important than that of boys. By the mid-nineteenth century, education for girls from this sector of the Jewish community was virtually universal in Germany. Most girls were enrolled in Jewish community schools that gave them a basic, if somewhat rudimentary Jewish education in addition to a secular education.[9] However, a significant sector of the German Jewish community still had not grappled with the issue of girls' education—the Orthodox community.
Orthodox Judaism did not exist as a movement prior to the birth of Reform. Due to the widespread changes brought upon the Jewish community by Reform thinkers, traditional-minded Jews felt that the traditional observance of Judaism was threatened. They reacted to this threat by engaging in several innovations, including leaving the unified Jewish community to create separate Orthodox institutions and adopting the strictest standards with respect to religious commandments and customs. These innovations were meant to create an environment that existed separate and apart from the Reform Jewish community and the surrounding society in order to keep modernity at bay and tradition vibrant. A key innovation embraced by the Orthodox community in terms of impact on girls' education was its heightened suspicion of modern culture, including secular education and schooling for girls. Orthodox girls did not participate in the Reformers' Jewish schools that were common in Germany by the mid-nineteenth century. Rather, they continued to be tutored at home, if they received any education at all.

Even Orthodoxy, however, was not monolithic in its beliefs and practices. A reform-minded stream of Orthodoxy later called Neo-Orthodoxy was founded by Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch in the mid-nineteenth century. Hirsch, the rabbi of the Orthodox community of Frankfurt am Main, espoused a philosophy of *Torah im derekh erets*, Torah study together with participation in the modern world. One of Hirsch's most significant legacies was his influence on girls' education within the Orthodox sphere. Indeed, as Mordechai Breuer, a scholar of the Orthodox movement in Germany wrote, "The most significant and far-reaching success of Orthodox education proved to be the complete reorganization of education for girls."[10]

Girls' education was a charged topic for Orthodox Jews. As reformers built a system of elementary and secondary schools for girls that taught both Judaic and secular studies, Orthodox Jews were fearful. Reform leaders had made it clear that the reasoning behind such schools was not only the education of women, but also women's social equality and the eradication of the denial of their rights under Jewish law. These concepts were dangerous to the Orthodox mindset. However, opposing girls' religious education, Orthodox leaders realized, was potentially even more dangerous. They noticed that the lack of Jewish education led girls to immerse themselves in the secular world and its general education and culture. This led to their resenting Judaism and possibly assimilating out of the Jewish community. Thus, Orthodoxy had to create a rubric for Jewish girls' education in order to keep their girls Jewishly affiliated. Without being given answers to their existential questions about Judaism, simple adherence to the faith of their parents would fall by the wayside. At the same time, changes in Orthodox synagogue practices in response to Reform also heightened the need for girls' education. The sermon in the vernacular that became widespread in Neo-Orthodox synagogues at this time led to increased synagogue attendance on the part of women. Once they were able to understand and enjoy what the rabbi spoke about, they wanted the education to fill out their knowledge.

Thus, rather than opposing girls' education, German Orthodox Jews embraced it, but reshaped it to suit their specific needs. Orthodox thinkers quickly began to portray girls' education as having "intrinsic religious value," and as being critical to the transmission of tradition to the next generation.[11] Adopting from the surrounding society's bourgeois cult of domesticity, Hirsch argued that women were the more moral sex, and had a critical position as mistress of the home, responsible for their children's loyalty to Jewish tradition.[12] *Der Israelit*, the Orthodox community's newspaper, cried out that "Our *mothers* have to *save* Judaism as in biblical times." Even the developing world of Orthodox fiction addressed the issue of girls' education. Sara Hirsch Guggenheim, the daughter of Samson Rafael Hirsch, published a number of stories in the Orthodox journal *Jeschurun*, in which a woman's lack of Jewish education led to her downfall.[13] Such a widespread philosophy led to significant improvement in Orthodox girls' education.

Hirsch's first foray into creating a modern school for the education of Orthodox Jewish girls came with the founding of his elementary school in Frankfurt in 1853. Not meant only for poor children, this school was meant to compete with the prestigious Philanthropin School. Hirsch wanted to put the ideology of education and culture into a school that would also have a strong Jewish component. The school admitted girls from the beginning, albeit in separate classes from the boys. Hirsch's son, Mendel Hirsch went on to create a Hirschian secondary school in Frankfurt. Mendel Hirsch believed that religious instruction should be as similar as possible for boys and girls. He theorized that "doing" was more important than "knowing" with respect to both sexes' relationship to Judaism. He thus focused the curriculum in his secondary school on education regarding religious duties. This led to greater equality of education between the sexes by lessening the Talmud instruction received by the boys, and increasing the Bible instruction received by the girls.[14] At the founding of this school, there were not sufficient pupils to hold separate sex classes, so boys and girls studied in a coeducational environment, a particularly unusual circumstance for Orthodox society of the time. However, as soon as the student body was sufficiently large, the boys and girls were separated.[15]

Other Orthodox schools for girls were established in Hamburg and Mainz in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Additionally, supplementary educational models were created in certain places to provide both boys and girls with a Jewish education separate and apart from their general schooling. One such school was founded by the Neo-Orthodox rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer in Berlin in 1869. Hildesheimer found that 25 percent of Jewish children in Berlin were not receiving any Jewish

education whatsoever. He began a co-ed supplementary school in his synagogue, Congregation Adass-Isroel, with separate classes for boys and girls. Hildesheimer felt very strongly about girls' education, stating that the prevailing notion that superficial religious knowledge was sufficient for Jewish girls was wrong and unacceptable. Like Hirsch, he also believed that the Jewish woman was the central figure in the Jewish home, and she thus needed a deep knowledge of Judaism in order to fulfill her role. The girls' curriculum in Hildesheimer's school took into account differences in women's and men's roles and responsibilities in Orthodox Jewish society. Girls had added responsibilities that boys did not, including helping out with chores at home and attending to their music and arts education. Thus, girls only had two-thirds of the weekly study hours of boys. However, even in their more limited curricular time, girls studied Hebrew language, Bible, and Jewish law and customs. Beginning in the 1870–1871 academic year, they also studied Ethics of the Fathers, which was a portion of the Oral Law—an area of Jewish study generally forbidden to women. Like the Hirsches, Hildesheimer's objectives were to prepare girls for occupying a central position in the Jewish household and for imbuing their homes with a "true religious spirit."[16]

Orthodox education of girls in Germany had enormous impact on the Orthodox community. Female graduates of Hirschian-style schools were well-educated both secularly and Jewishly, and because of their knowledge of Judaism, were often stricter in religious observance than their own mothers. The German Orthodox community was proud of its accomplishments with respect to girls' education, especially when those accomplishments were laid side-by-side with the situation of girls' education in Eastern Europe. "As superior as the average Eastern European Jewish man was to his Western European Jewish acquaintance in the knowledge of Torah, so the Orthodox woman, educated in Germany, often outdid her acquaintance from Eastern Europe."[17]

Girls' Education in Eastern Europe

The structure of the Eastern European Jewish community and the way the community interacted with the surrounding gentile society had a deep impact on the way girls' education developed there. Unlike Western Europe, Eastern Europe did not emancipate its Jews until the twentieth century. The greater legal and political disabilities suffered by the Jewish community of Eastern Europe led to its being more separate and traditional in nature than its counterpart in Germany. Although individual Jews could, and often did, assimilate into secular society, the community as a whole remained wedded to traditional observance. As historian Paula Hyman points out, "In the Russian Empire of the late nineteenth century, the process of assimilation can best be described as secularization that avoided both denationalization and religious reform."[18]

The option for religious reform did not exist to any significant degree in the Eastern European context due to a confluence of circumstances. Since the Jewish community was not integrated into the general surrounding society, the external society was unable to significantly influence Jewish religious practices as occurred in Germany. Additionally, since the external society itself did not engage in religious reform, whatever impact it might have had on the Jewish community did not occur. As Hyman argues, whereas Jews in Western Europe assimilated just as Jews in Eastern Europe did, "the importance assigned religious sentiment in the dominant bourgeois cultures of Western societies encouraged the fashioning of modern versions of Judaism that officially submerged Jewish ethnicity." In Eastern Europe, there was no pressure as there was in Western Europe "to reform their religion and assert an identity based upon it alone."[19] Thus, when the Haskalah occurred in Eastern Europe, decades later than it did in Germany, it did not initiate a process of religious reform; rather, it encouraged a process of Jewish assimilation.[20]

Without religious reform, the education of Jewish girls ended up in a strange position. The Eastern European Jewish community continued to abide by traditional prohibitions against teaching girls Torah, thus leaving them almost entirely without Jewish education. On the other hand, the influence of secular society on individual Jews led to increased secular education for Jewish girls. The dichotomy of the secularly well-educated and Jewishly ignorant woman proved to be a difficult one for both the women and the Jewish community to integrate.

It is important to note at the outset, that as historian Shaul Stampfer has argued, there is a widely held misconception that Eastern European Jewish women were entirely lacking in Jewish knowledge. Although widespread formal schooling in Jewish subjects did not exist for girls in Eastern Europe until the twentieth century, Stampfer cogently points out that many girls did receive some Jewish education through a variety of means. First of all, *hederim* for girls did exist in small numbers. One such *heder* was located in Tyszowce and the girls were taught by an elderly widow called "*Binele* the *rebetzin*." The girls in the Tyszowce girls' *heder* studied the siddur, reading and writing Yiddish, arithmetic, writing addresses in Russian (useful for the girls' future role as breadwinners for their families), and sewing. Additionally, some girls, usually those from a wealthier background, were taught at home, either by their mothers or by a learned woman tutor. Sometimes, girls would attend a boys' *heder*, although once basic reading skills were mastered, boys moved on to higher Jewish education and girls dropped out. Some girls learned to read Yiddish on their own and obtained Jewish knowledge through the reading of Yiddish religious texts such as *Tzeina U'Reina*, a Yiddish collection of Bible stories and commentary for women.[21]

Stampfer acknowledges that both men's method of learning (in a communally sanctioned school setting) and the content of what they learned (Jewish religious texts in Hebrew) were more prestigious in Eastern European Jewish culture than how and what women learned. He argues, however, that this system was actually appropriate for the realities of this society. Eastern European Jewish women typically worked outside the home in addition to having a high birthrate and a correspondingly high amount of housework. If they were expected by societal norms to engage in study of difficult Hebrew texts, the situation would have simply maximized frustration for them. As Stampfer argues, "Lack of 'school education' was part of a system that functioned to condition women to accept their role in the family and society with a minimum of conflict—just as the fact that most men were unlearned (and knew it!) was one of the ways that led them to accept communal authority." [22]

Historian Iris Parush, in her groundbreaking work "Reading Jewish Women," is critical of Stampfer's conclusions. She points out that Stampfer proposes what she calls a "functionalist and harmonicist" account to explain the differences in education of boys and girls in Eastern Europe that allowed women to "identify with their gender roles and reconcile themselves to their marginality." Parush argues that this argument is problematic because there are many ways that a society could structure itself to keep frustration among its members low. Stampfer's argument, albeit unintentionally, allows justification of an educational structure that was discriminatory toward and exclusionary of women. Additionally, Parush argues that Stampfer attributes "paternalistic motives" to those who created and upheld the educational system that evidence concern about women's welfare and frustration levels. "In a roundabout way," she argues, such an argument "shuts out consideration of other possibilities, less harmonistic or generous, which may have been behind the discrimination of women in the educational system." Lastly, Parush points out that many women remained illiterate in Eastern European Jewish society. Had societal leaders really wanted to prevent women's frustration, they would have ensured that all Jewish girls were minimally literate in Yiddish so as to enable them to read *Tzeina U'Reina* and other such texts. Moreover, even if all women had been literate in Yiddish, this would not have solved the inherent contradiction in their lives—that they were expected to negotiate the public sphere in their work lives, but excluded from the public sphere in their religious lives.[23]

Although there is significant dissent regarding the degree of Jewish education obtained by girls in Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century, historians do agree that improvement in Eastern European Jewish girls' education occurred during this period. Daughters of wealthy Jews studied foreign languages in their homes with nannies or private tutors. Girls of lesser means began to attend secular schools such as those founded in Warsaw in 1818 and Wilno in 1826. By the 1860s increasing numbers of girls were studying in modern schools, both public and private, that were founded across Eastern Europe, especially in large cities. Furthermore, rising marriage ages left wealthy girls with idle time in teenage years to devote to education and the surrounding society's increasing commitment to girls' education influenced higher numbers of Jewish girls to pursue schooling. By the end of the nineteenth century, the number of girls enrolled in formal modern schools was still small, but it was

significant. An 1899 survey of such schools in the Tsarist Empire found 193 girls' schools, 68 coeducational schools (most of which had separate classes for boys and girls) and 383 boys' schools. There were a total of 50,773 students enrolled in these schools according to the study, and approximately one-third of those students were female. However, although girls were finally receiving formal education in significant numbers, the education they were receiving was entirely secular. The curriculum in these modern schools was devoid of Jewish content; girls were educated in Russian and French as well as in the arts and music. Indeed, although boys' modern schools were supervised by the Jewish community and rabbinical establishment and had to allocate hours of classroom time each week to Jewish studies, girls' schools were totally secular and unsupervised by Jewish communal authorities.[24]

Parush argues that the absence of Jewish education for girls in Eastern Europe was due to a marginalization of women in a male-dominant society. The rabbinical establishment cared about two things: first, that boys receive a good Torah education, and second, that girls be prevented from receiving any Torah education. Thus, as long as girls were not transgressing the prohibition against their study of Torah, their education was of no interest to the rabbis. They could pursue high levels of secular studies without approbation or even concern. Parush concludes:

Whereas men's education reflected the manifest efforts of the rabbinical leaders to exercise absolute controls and hermetically seal the society from foreign influences, the education of women transpired through gaps in this system of controls, in the region left abandoned by the oversight apparatus in consequence of women's inferiority.[25]

This policy of neglect of the content of girls' education had significant ramifications both for the girls themselves and for Jewish society in Eastern Europe. Certainly, all historians agree that the lack of formal Jewish education placed side-by-side with increasingly intense secular education led to a secularizing of Jewish girls. Historians differ as to how this process of secularization affected the Jewish community. Parush argues that it led to Jewish women bringing enlightened ideas into the Jewish community and thus acting as the conduits for Haskalah and modern ideals in their world.[26] However, others have a different take. Paula Hyman and Rachel Manekin argue that the secularization of Jewish girls led to a fundamental disconnect between them and their communities—a disconnect that often had devastating consequences for the girls, their families, and the Jewish community as a whole. Some Jewish girls assimilated into the surrounding society and were lost to the Jewish community; many others went so far as to convert to Christianity. Even those girls who remained within the boundaries of the Jewish community could not be counted upon to transmit Jewish tradition effectively to the next generation.[27]

In a few different articles, Manekin explores multiple aspects of the phenomenon of Jewish girls' conversion to Christianity in Galicia in the nineteenth century and shows the Jewish communal debate that arose over this problem. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a significant number of Jewish women in western Galicia converted to Christianity. Indeed, during one fifteen-year period beginning in 1887, over 300 women converted in Krakow alone, representing 68 percent of the Jewish converts during that time period. Interestingly, almost all of these women converted at the convent of the Felician Sisters.[28]

Because the laws of the Habsburg Empire required that converts submit certain personal data to a municipal clerk, a socio-economic profile exists for many of these converts. According to this data, the vast majority of the converts were Jewish young women between the ages of 15 and 20 who came from families of middle-class merchants and shopkeepers. The women's signatures on the forms they filled out show that they were familiar with Polish writing. Through analysis of this data in conjunction with historical accounts of individual conversions as well as depictions of such conversions in Jewish literature and the Jewish press, Manekin concludes that the lack of Jewish education for girls coupled with their more extensive secular education played a significant role in the conversion phenomenon:

These young women were not provided with the means by which they could preserve their Jewish identity in their confrontation with Polish society. The dissonance between life at home and in the outside world became greater as they grew older, with the conflicts becoming deeper and more

pronounced. The climax would come when the parents expected them to marry a young man from the 'old world,' with whom they shared no language.[29]

This moment of facing a life with a man with whom such a young woman had nothing in common except that they were both born Jewish and had parents committed to the continuity of the Jewish people was often the breaking point that led the young woman to escape to the convent to convert.[30]

The Jewish community of Galicia had some limited recognition of the problems caused by the failure to give its daughters a Jewish education. Indeed, the issue came up quite a bit on the Jewish communal radar screen in the early years of the twentieth century. In 1902, the subject was addressed at length in the pages of the religious newspaper *Kol Mahzikei HaDat*. In an article entitled "But We Are Guilty for Our Daughters," a writer bemoaned the seduction of Jewish girls by secular society due to their lack of Jewish education. In a play on words of a famous rabbinic quotation, he wrote, "Ten measures of external education descended upon the daughters of Israel in our land; nine of them were taken by the city of Krakow."[31] The article discussed the failure of the marriages of such girls to yeshiva boys and the fact that some of them ended up leaving the Jewish community entirely. It was not a coincidence, the author pointed out, that girls from strict Hassidic families would leave their families and convert to Christianity. Hassidic fathers would pay a fine rather than send their sons to secular public schools, but they were willing to send their daughters to Catholic schools. He recommended the institution of Jewish girls' schools in Galicia to solve this terrible problem. In a harsh moment of reflection, the author noted that girls' Jewish education in Galicia is the equivalent to what had existed in Germany an entire century before.[32]

The issue of girls' Jewish education in Galicia also arose at the Congress of Rabbis in Krakow in 1903. One of the attendees, Rabbi Landau, rose to speak and bemoaned the fact that even among the "God fearing," girls receive the finest Western education and remain woefully ignorant about Judaism. He spoke of the rash of conversions and noted that even those young women who do not leave the community, "their hearts are not among the Jewish people anymore." Such girls would not be capable of raising the next generation of Jewish children. Rabbi Landau even spoke of the worst casualties of the failure of Jewish girls' education in Galicia—those girls who turned to a life of prostitution. The rabbis attending the conference requested that he cease speaking of this painful subject in order to prevent the desecration of the name of the Jewish people.[33]

Rabbi Landau put aside the issue of white slavery in the Jewish community, but returned during the conference to the issue of repairing girls' education. He argued that the only solution to the fundamental lack of knowledge and failure to observe commandments among even the most Orthodox of girls was to teach them Torah. When one of the lay leaders present at the conference suggested the establishment of a Talmud Torah school to educate girls in prayer and laws of the Jewish home, one rabbi responded, "God forbid we should educate girls in Torah!" Although other suggestions were presented for the improvement of girls' Jewish education in Galicia, all were tabled for a later date. This, Manekin argues, was the nail in the coffin for bringing change to Jewish girls' education in Galicia.[34]

Ultimately, the solution to the dilemma about girls education in Galicia came from a young woman in Krakow. Sarah Schenirer, with the support of the rebbe of the Hassidic sect of Belz, created the first Bais Yaakov school dedicated to the Jewish education of Orthodox girls in 1917. This school became the model for Orthodox girls' education and was duplicated throughout the world. Until Sarah Schenirer's efforts to create Bais Yaakov, however, the idea of girls' Torah education was an innovation that Eastern European Orthodox society simply could not stomach, even when faced with the devastation that the lack of this education caused. This stands in direct contrast to the German Orthodox model of integration of modern and Jewish ideals resulting in the far earlier and more extensive Jewish education for its girls.

The radically different development of the Jewish communities of Germany and Eastern Europe during the nineteenth century period of modernization had a powerful impact on girls' education in each society. German Jewish society, due to more successful integration with external German society, adopted some of the ideologies and practices of that society, which enabled the development of formal Jewish education for girls. Eastern European Jewish society, on the other hand,

remained excluded from western bourgeois ideas and was therefore unable to integrate modern philosophies of religion and education into their worldview. German Jews adapted and modernized their Judaism while Eastern European Jews reacted to modernization by either "circling the wagons" in defense of tradition or assimilating to the society around them. The inability of Eastern European Jewish society to engage in a process of religious reform ultimately sounded the death knell for the development of girls' education, a failure which had lasting consequences for their community. The German Jewish community solved the problem of girls' education by the third quarter of the eighteenth century; the Eastern European community did not solve it until the First World War. In the intervening decades, numerous Jewish girls were lost to Judaism, as they were prevented from having a stake in the future of the Jewish people due to a rabbinic refusal to educate them.

Conclusions for Today

The story of the development of Jewish girls' education in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Germany and Eastern Europe has particular resonance for the Modern Orthodox community today. The battle for Jewish education for Orthodox girls is thankfully long over, particularly in the Modern Orthodox community, where women have the opportunity to learn all Jewish texts at the highest of levels. However, unlike their male rabbinic counterparts, up until recently, Orthodox women received no standard and universally accepted title to certify their learning. Such a title is far from mere semantics. For a woman who wishes to devote her life to Jewish communal service, the title of "rabbi" carries along with it communal respect, job opportunities, and significantly higher salaries. Furthermore, in a world in which women are able to access the highest levels of academic and professional credentialing, the absence of a title for Orthodox women leaders was particularly glaring. Despite all of this, when the issue of women's ordination was raised in Orthodox circles, mainstream rabbinic leadership called it an impossibility and a dangerous break with tradition. Given that women's achievement at the very highest levels did not yield any professional titles or status, it is unsurprising that many of the brightest and most talented young Orthodox women chose careers outside the Orthodox community.

But the picture is not all grim. In the past decade, a select few synagogues have appointed women as "congregational interns" or "*madrikhot ruhaniot*" (spiritual advisors), giving women positions essentially comparable to rabbinical student interns or assistant rabbis in Modern Orthodox synagogues. Such women are able to give sermons, engage in pastoral counseling, and teach Torah in their synagogues. However, no more than a handful of Orthodox synagogues have created such a position. The mainstream centrist Orthodox world continues to view such positions as inappropriate. Furthermore, many critics have pointed out that whereas a "rabbinic intern" is training to become a rabbi, a "congregational intern" is not training for any permanent position at all. Even a *madrikha ruhanit* could not hope to lead an Orthodox congregation on her own.

In the Spring of this year, however, a transformation occurred in Modern Orthodoxy, when Rabbi Avi Weiss announced that he planned to establish a school to train Maharats, women leaders in halakhic, spiritual, and Torah issues. Like Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch in nineteenth century Germany, the rabbinic leadership behind this new initiative understands that we can incorporate certain ideas of modernity without breaking halakha or destroying our traditional values. And, like the German Orthodox leadership of the nineteenth century, this leadership knows that Orthodoxy must make changes in its own way and on its own timetable in order for such changes to take root among both the rabbis and the Orthodox laity. As our history has shown us, the path we now take will have massive consequences both for individual Orthodox Jews and for the very future of Orthodox Judaism.

[1] There were many Haskalah movements occurring between the late eighteenth and late nineteenth centuries. This discussion refers to the Haskalah in Germany. The Haskalah in Eastern Europe did not take place until later and emphasized different ideas. As will be seen below, these differences impacted greatly on the development of girls'education in Eastern

Europe.
[2]Mordehai Eliav, *HaHinukh HaYehudi BeGermaniya*. (Jerusalem, Israel: Sivan Publishing, 1960), 272.
[3]*Ibid*., 272; Mordechai Breuer, *Modernity Within Tradition: The Social History of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany*. Trans. Elizabeth Petuchowski. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 121.
[4] Eliav, 273.
[5] Meyer, 33–37.
[6] *Ibid*., 38.
[7] *Ibid.*, 39–40.
[8] Eliav 273.
[9] *Ibid.*, 279.
[10] Breuer,120.
[11]*Ibid.*, 122.
[12]*Ibid.*; Paula E. Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representations of Women.* (New York: University of Washington Press, 1995), 25–26.
[13] Hess, Jonathan M. "Fiction and the Making of Modern Orthodoxy, 1857–1890: Orthodoxy and the Quest for the German-Jewish Novel." *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 52 (2007): 49–86, 66.
[14] Breuer, 123. Of course, Talmud education for girls was still considered beyond the pale of acceptability in the Orthodox world at this time. As Reformers did not teach Talmud in their schools to boys or girls, formal Talmud education for girls did not begin until well into the twentieth century in the United States.
[15]*Ibid.*
[16] Meir Hildesheimer, "Religious Education in Response to Changing Times." *Zeitschrift fur Religions-und_ Geistesgeschichte* 60 (2008): 111–130, 121.
[17] Breuer, 124–125.
[18]Hyman, 53.
[19]*Ibid.*
[20]*Ibid.*I do not mean to argue that the Haskalah was the cause of Jewish assimilation in Eastern Europe. Rather, because of the unique political, economic, and social circumstances of the Eastern European Jewish community, Haskalah ideology did not give birth to religious reform as it did in Germany. Obviously, the *maskilim* of Eastern Europe were instrumental in the development of new political ideologies for Jews, specifically of course, Jewish nationalism and Zionism.
[21] Stampfer, 63–64.
[22]*Ibid.*, 74.
[23]Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women: Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth Century Eastern European Jewish Society*. (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 60–61.
[24]Stampfer, 78; Parush, 76.
[25]Parush, 58.
[26]*Ibid.*, 245.
[27]Hyman, 50-92; Rachel Manekin ,"*HaOrtodoxia beKrakow ad Sof Meah HaEsrim." Mehkarim B'Toldot Yehudei Krakow*. (Tel Aviv, Israel: Tel Aviv University Press, 2001), 155–190; Rachel Manekin, "The Lost Generation: Education and Female Conversion in Fin-de-Siècle Krakow." Polin 18 (2005): 189–220.
[28]Manekin, “The Lost Generation,” 191.
[29]*Ibid.*,192.
[30]*Ibid.*, 192, 211 and *passim*.
[31]*Ibid.*, 213; Manekin, "*HaOrtodoxia beKrakow ad Sof Meah HaEsrim*," 181. The original rabbinic quotation appears in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Kidushin*, 49:2 and states, “Ten measures of beauty descended upon the world; nine were taken by Jerusalem.”
[32]Manekin, *HaOrtodoxia beKrakow ad Sof Meah HaEsrim*," 186.
[33]*Ibid.*, 182.
[34]*Ibid.*, 183.