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Introduction

To the Österreichisch-Israelitischen Union, Vienna,

My husband died thirteen years ago, and I was left behind with three children, among them a daughter, Lea, who was then four years old. I ran an inn in Czchów and worked hard in order to feed and educate my children. My children grew and thrived, and I had my joy in them; they were my bliss, my pride, my solace. Particularly close to my heart was my only daughter Lea, who after completing the primary school was assisting me in the inn and at the counter. She was already 17 years old. She was well-behaved, hardworking, and diligent. Then the misfortune happened! On November 12, 1907, at 7 o'clock in the evening, my daughter disappeared from our home. All the searches were in vain. [. . .] I asked the police for help, but the answer they received after calling the convent about my daughter was that Lea Gänger was not there. Only when a police commissioner appeared personally in the convent was my daughter found there [. . .]

Czchów, December 8, 1907
Mirla Gänger¹

1. "Interpellation des Abgeordneten Dr. Straucher und Genossen an Ihre Exzellenzen die Herren k. k. Minister des Innern und der Justiz, betreffend geeignete Massnahmen zur Hintanhaltung von Kinderraub, beziehungsweise Mädchenentführung," 130. Sitzung der XVIII. Session am 29. Jänner 1909, *Stenographische Protokolle* (1909): 14617–14633, esp. 14626–14627. Lea (Leonor) Gänger converted to Catholicism in 1908. See the National Archives in Kraków, Magistrat miasta Krakowa, Kr 144–31804/08.

IN JANUARY 29, 1909, Benno Straucher (1854–1940), the Bukovina Jewish delegate in the Austrian parliament, submitted an interpellation to the Ministers of the Interior and Justice in which he described the disappearance of thirty Galician Jewish minor girls, including Lea Gänger of Czchów. The girls were subsequently discovered in the Felician Sisters' convent in Kraków, where they prepared themselves for baptism, but most of them refused to return to their parental homes. Straucher characterized these stories as “kidnappings” and accused the convent and the local authorities of disregarding the parental custody over their underage daughters.

The allegations in Straucher's interpellation were not new to the Austrian parliament members or to the broad public. Between the years 1873 and 1914, hundreds of Jewish girls disappeared from their homes, found shelter in the Felician Sisters' convent in Kraków, and converted to Roman Catholicism. Stories about these women, most of them minors according to Austrian law, were often published under sensational titles in the Viennese press, Jewish and non-Jewish, as well as in the major Hebrew newspapers. The liberal press blamed the Catholic Church for allowing such a phenomenon to take place, explaining that this was happening specifically in “backward” Galicia, where clericalism ruled the day. The Catholic and conservative press claimed that the girls were not abducted but rather abandoned their parental homes and freely chose to be baptized. Each of the two narratives found support in legal arguments, adding fuel to the anti-Semitic atmosphere in the Habsburg Empire during that period. Many of the parents enlisted the help of the Österreichisch-Israelitische Union, the Viennese Jewish organization that was established in 1884 to fight anti-Semitism. But despite legal intervention, parents were generally unsuccessful as the courts sided with the convent and the girls, who declared that they had entered the convent of their own free will.

What makes the phenomenon of the runaway girls especially noteworthy is that it was particular to Galicia, the southeastern part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which was annexed to the Habsburg Empire in the first and third partitions of Poland in 1772 and 1795. Unlike in other Habsburg crown lands, a majority of Galicia's Jewish population was Orthodox, many of them Hasidim.² Indeed, most of the runaways came from traditional homes. There were many converts from Judaism in other Habsburg provinces, including in Vienna where their numbers were particularly high,

2. See Wodziński, *Hasidism*, 151. Based on a variety of sources, Wodziński concludes that “slightly above 50%” of Galician Jews were Hasidim.

but the essential feature distinctive to Galicia—large-scale disappearance of female minors from Orthodox homes—was unheard of in any other Habsburg territory.

The few scholars who have noticed the large proportion of Jewish females among the converts in Kraków have tended to view these converts within the broader context of Jewish conversion in “Eastern Europe,” namely, Imperial Russia, ignoring the specific conditions in Habsburg Galicia.³ True, there were some common aspects between female conversion cases in both Imperial Russia and Kraków, such as the abduction narrative.⁴ Likewise, conversion of underage girls occurred also in Imperial Russia, where age fourteen was considered the age of majority for the purpose of conversion of Jews.⁵

But despite these similarities, the Galician runaways and the subsequent conversion of many of them demand a separate historical treatment because the Galician context differed significantly from that of the Russian Empire. For example, school attendance was mandated by law for all children in Galicia and, indeed, throughout Cisleithania (the Austrian half of the dual monarchy), but such a law didn’t exist in Imperial Russia.⁶ Galician Jewish girls didn’t abandon home in order to marry a gentile peasant or a soldier passing by, as in many of the Russian cases. Regardless of the economic status of their families, Galician Jewish girls experienced a growing gulf between their dreams and aspirations as educated young women and their parents’ traditional norms and expectations. When parents arranged a match for their educated daughters with a Hasid who lacked a modern education, a family crisis often ensued. Strong-willed daughters rebelled, and some ran away to a place that would offer them shelter for a few months, such as the Felician Sisters’ convent in Kraków, which acquired a reputation for harboring female Jewish runaways.

How was it possible for such a phenomenon to take place in Habsburg Galicia? As citizens of a constitutional monarchy since December 1867, a *Rechtsstaat*, Galician Jews enjoyed equality before the law, and freedom of

3. Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold*, 123, 135–137; Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation*, 72–75.

4. Schainker, *Confessions of the Shtetl*, 105–106, and Freeze, “When Chava Left Home,” 153–188, esp. 156.

5. Schainker, *Confessions of the Shtetl*, 38; Freeze, “When Chava Left Home,” 155, n. 11, 169, 186.

6. See Adler, *In Her Hands*. Adler shows that as a result of private initiatives by Jews, many private Jewish schools were established for girls in the Russian Empire, something that didn’t exist in Western Galicia prior to World War I, where almost all Jews sent their daughters to public or private non-Jewish schools. After the 1867 *Ausgleich*, the Hungarian Ministry of Education issued its own laws regarding education mandating in 1868 six years of primary school.

movement, domicile, assembly, religion, expression, occupation, and association, as well as access to public offices. Although in practice the extent of these rights in their application to Jews was sometimes limited, such rights were something Jews in the bordering Russian Empire could only imagine. As we shall see, the answer lies in the peculiarity of the Habsburg legal situation that allowed minors to convert while still under the custody of their parents. That is one reason why the issue of the Galician female converts has to be researched within the Galician and Habsburg contexts rather than in a general (and often vague) “Eastern European” context.

Although several important contributions to the study of Galician Jewry have appeared in the past few years in the English language, they have focused almost entirely on the experience of males, whether in politics⁷ or the 1898 anti-Jewish riots in Western Galicia.⁸ The increased tension between Jews and Christians during and following those riots did not stop young Jewish women who lived in Western Galicia from running away and preparing themselves for baptism. The attraction of Catholicism for some Galician women from Orthodox Jewish homes calls for explanation, and the present study attempts to provide one. More broadly, it attempts to provide insight into experiences of what was called the “lost generation” of Galician Jewish women.⁹ It does not, however, discuss the phenomenon of prostitution or sex trafficking (“white slavery”), which in most cases affected young women from very poor families and thus requires a different type of analysis.¹⁰

This book focuses on Western Galicia, specifically Kraków, because it was the main arena in which the stories of the runaways took place. That the majority of female Jewish converts to Catholicism were from villages and small

7. Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism*, is devoted to Jewish national politics, politics being a sphere from which women in the Habsburg Empire were legally barred. A volume of the annual *Polin* that concentrates on Jews in Galicia has twelve articles, none of which deals with women, see *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 12 (1999).

8. Unowsky's *The Plunder* analyzes the background and describes in detail the riots against Jews in Western Galicia at the close of the nineteenth century. Unowsky mentions also the involvement of women in these series of attacks, both as perpetrators and as victims, but their testimonies are rather brief and limited.

9. In 1925, R. Tuvia Horowitz used this phrase when lamenting the “neglect of the lost Jewish generation [*ferloyrenen yudishen dor*] that was torn from the body of the Jewish people”; see Horowitz, “What Do Jewish Daughters Lack?” 75.

10. For scholarly works on this topic see Stauter-Halsted, *The Devil's Chain* and Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice*.

towns in Western Galicia is not surprising. First and foremost, Polish Catholics constituted the absolute majority in rural and urban areas in Western Galicia, including in Kraków, the most important city of the region.¹¹ Kraków was the center of religious, intellectual, and cultural life in Western Galicia, with an elite class that included conservative academics, high-ranking church and state officials, authors, and artists. By contrast, the population in Eastern Galicia, whose capital was Lwów (Lviv, L'viv, Lemberg), was composed of a majority of Ruthenians (Galician Ukrainians) with Polish, Jewish, and Armenian minorities. In addition to being multi-ethnic, it was multi-religious, with Christians of different denominations in addition to Jews, all living in close proximity to each other.¹² In contrast to the distinctly Polish and Catholic character of Kraków, Lwów, the seat of the Austrian central administration in Galicia, had a long legacy of German culture, and its atmosphere was more tolerant and cosmopolitan.¹³ School education in Western Galicia was marked by its emphasis on Polish language and history and the cultivation of a strong Polish identity, of which Catholicism was an essential part.

Of course, most young Jewish females in Western Galicia did not vanish from their homes and enter convents. But the fact that more than three hundred of them—according to the records I found; there likely were more—formally declared their intention to convert set off alarm bells among the Jewish population and generated a debate on the causes of this problem. Jewish publicists claimed that even young women who remained Jewish had to find ways to reconcile their wishes as modern educated young women with the expectations of their parents, who in most cases subscribed to traditional ways of life. *The Rebellion of the Daughters* looks at the challenges young Galician Jewish females experienced during this period and highlights the growing family conflicts in the face of a new reality—compulsory education, Polish acculturation, and the growth of feminism—that was alien to their parents' generation. It is based on archival police investigations, court records,

11. In 1910, Roman Catholics constituted 88.5% of the population in Western Galicia, Greek Catholics—3.24%, and Jews—7.92%. See Mark, *Galizien unter österreichischer Herrschaft*, 85.

12. In 1910, Roman Catholics constituted 25.3% of the population in Eastern Galicia, Greek Catholics—61.68%, and Jews—12.36%. See Mark, *Galizien unter österreichischer Herrschaft*.

13. In 1910, Roman Catholics constituted 51% of the population in the city of Lwów, Greek Catholics—19.1%, and Jews—27.8%, *ibid.*, 100. By contrast, Roman Catholics constituted 76% of the population in the city of Kraków, Greek Catholics—1.1%, and Jews—21.3%. See Mark, *Galizien unter österreichischer Herrschaft*.

government correspondence, Polish, German, and Hebrew press reports, parliament protocols, law codes, and scholarly literature.

To be able to understand the world in which the runaway young women lived, it is crucial to chart the opportunities and challenges created by the new laws enacted by the Austrian government and carried out by the Galician administration. Chapter 1 traces the imperial legal context of both compulsory education and religious conversion and their selective application in Galicia. It presents the necessary backdrop against which the stories of the runaways in the following chapters unfold. The chapter considers also the new cultural and intellectual opportunities for females in Kraków, as well as the spread of feminist ideas with which the highly acculturated Orthodox women would be familiar. An analysis of archival records on Jewish conversion provides data such as the age and geographical origin of the female Jewish converts, as well as the time period when their baptism took place. The last section of the chapter discusses the lack of rabbinic response to the growing phenomenon of the female runaways.

The next three chapters reconstruct the histories of three runaways: Michalina Araten, Debora Lewkowicz, and Anna Kluger. Araten came from an affluent Hasidic home and enjoyed an education in a private prestigious primary school in Kraków. Attracted to Catholicism while in school, Araten initiated an acquaintance with a military officer who lived across from her home. The acquaintance was short lived, but when informed by her father that she was about to be engaged to a man of his choice, she ran away and entered the Felician Sisters' convent and later disappeared. The Araten affair was broadly reported in the Habsburg press as well as in major newspapers outside Austria. The second young woman, Debora Lewkowicz, a daughter of a village tavernkeeper, completed her primary school education in the city of Wieliczka in Western Galicia. She had a close relationship with a young Pole, as a result of which her father quickly arranged for her to marry a Jewish man. Debora ran away on the eve of her wedding and entered the Felician Sisters' convent, where she stayed for several months. She was subsequently baptized there and prepared for the profession of governess. Finally, Anna Kluger, a daughter of an affluent family in Podgórze and a direct descendant of R. Hayim Halberstam, the founder of the Sandz Hasidic dynasty, was sent to one of the best private girls' schools in Kraków. She had a passion for learning and received her gymnasium matriculation certificate as an external student, since her parents expected her to marry and stop her schooling after completing primary school. Kluger continued her studies at the university

in secret after getting married and finally ran away from home to pursue her dream. Kluger did not convert but rather hid in a convent while trying to be released of her father's custody. (Her religious marriage was not officially recognized.) All these cases were brought to court, with the parents demanding that the state authorities help them bring their underage daughters back home.¹⁴

Chapter 5 interrupts the historical narrative with a short literary interlude that identifies and discusses works of contemporary fiction in German, Polish, Yiddish, and Hebrew, that were inspired by press reports of the Galician female Jewish runaways. It shows how different authors—males and females, Jews and non-Jews—interpreted the predicament of the contemporary young Galician Jewish women.

Paradoxically, the devastation of the war years bore the first initiative for a change in the traditional practice of female education. While spending time as a refugee in Vienna, Sarah Schenirer, a young woman from Kraków, was inspired to establish a religious afternoon school, a plan she carried out when she returned to her hometown. This breakthrough subsequently paved the way for the creation of the Orthodox Beit Yaakov female school network. As shown in the book, while the Beit Yaakov movement introduced formal religious education for Orthodox girls, it also controlled and filtered their exposure to secular studies. The school and the home in effect became partners in an effort to preempt the allure of secular culture and to tame potentially rebellious daughters. The last section in the chapter looks at the model of Orthodox female education developed in Kraków, where the teachers' seminary, rather than the gymnasium, was adopted as the highest learning institution for young Orthodox women.

This book places particular emphasis on the voices of the women recorded in a variety of sources. Since female voices documented in real time, especially of traditional women, are quite rare for this period, these sources offer us a glimpse into the life of young women as *they* experienced it at that time. I have included within an appendix some of their letters and statements. As is the case with ego-documents, the records of these voices should be read and

14. The explicit expressions of emotions such as insult, anger, loneliness, shame, and shock in all three cases by the daughters, as well as by the parents and even some state and church authorities, might be further examined in the context of the history of emotions in an attempt to understand how they shaped the ensuing events; however, this is beyond the scope of this book.

analyzed in light of the specific conditions under which they were written, and which are discussed in the relevant chapters.

A concluding word concerning the origin of this book: In 2002, while conducting research in the National Archives in Kraków on another project, I stumbled upon several files that included copies of hundreds of notifications about Jews, mostly female, intending to convert to Christianity. The copies were sent to the Kraków rabbinate by the office in charge of Jewish records in the Kraków magistrate; the originals had been sent to the Bishop's consistory in Kraków. Since the phenomenon of female conversion had gone virtually unnoticed in histories of Kraków Jewry, I slowly began to collect materials on such conversions on subsequent research trips. I also began to search for relevant news items in the contemporary press. I learned quickly that the stories of young Jewish women runaways who found shelter in a Kraków convent had often involved police investigations, court cases, ministerial intervention, and parliamentary debates. Press reports of "kidnappings" of young Jewish women in Kraków appeared throughout the world.

That all this occurred in Habsburg Galicia, where Jews enjoyed, at least in principle, full and equal rights and privileges of citizens, was intriguing; that the runaway young females were coming from Orthodox homes even more so. As I started analyzing the sources I collected, I soon realized that the runaway phenomenon touched upon several internal and external aspects of Jewish life that were unique to Galicia during this period, and that attempting to explain the phenomenon would require examining the broader social, religious, political, and legal contexts. Since these aspects were not addressed in the scholarship, I began to research and publish several preliminary studies that touched upon the broader phenomenon, and that included the basic outlines of the stories of several young women.¹⁵

The decision to include within this book an account of the beginning of formal education for Orthodox Jewish women reflects my view that a main cause of the rebellion of the daughters was the cognitive dissonance they experienced as a result of their Polish acculturation and their lack of formal

15. See Manekin, "Something Completely New"; "The Lost Generation"; "Orthodox Jewry in Kraków"; Manekin, "Tehilla's Daughter and Michalina Araten," *Haaretz*, Literary Supplement, June 27, 2003 [Hebrew].

Jewish education. But equally interesting was the much-delayed Orthodox response, which was to create the Beit Yaakov school network. That the first Orthodox school was established by a young Kraków woman, Sarah Schenirer, and that later the flagship educational institution of the movement was built in Kraków, are both critical points for understanding the path female Orthodox Jewish education took in subsequent years.

Schenirer has been portrayed in traditional Beit Yaakov literature as a pious Jewish seamstress who spearheaded an educational movement designed to attract young assimilated Jewish women back into the Orthodox fold. This was the portrait of her that I received from my teachers when I was a student at the Beit Yaakov school and teachers' seminary in Tel Aviv. Recent academic studies have tended to portray her as a woman learned in Jewish religious texts who, despite significant male opposition, launched an educational movement for young Orthodox women that aspired for, and achieved, excellence in both Torah study and secular subjects.¹⁶ Both these analyses tend to view Schenirer through the prism of later concerns rather than in her immediate historical context. Neither sufficiently take into account the problems of using internal sources, which in many cases are the only sources we have about the life of Schenirer and the beginning of Beit Yaakov.

I have grappled with the often tendentious and promotional nature of these sources by looking carefully at the context in which they appeared, seeking conflicting narratives and evaluations (especially in memoirs), and balancing them with external sources, when available, and internal sources that were not intended to be made public (such as protocols of faculty meetings). In this manner, I have tried to establish the most plausible account given the specific historical context of the Orthodox Jewish community in prewar Galicia and interwar Poland. As a result, Schenirer is portrayed in this book as neither female saint nor scholar, but rather as a learned religious enthusiast and Orthodox ideologue who sought to rescue the daughters of her contemporaries by providing them with an emotional and intellectual allegiance to Orthodox Judaism that their mothers lacked. The physical walls of the Felician Sisters' convent that had sheltered some of the rebellious daughters, and the Polish

16. The traditional portrayal appears in publications and memoirs of Beit Yaakov administrators, teachers, and students, and in the Beit Yaakov journal (which was published beginning in 1923 and ending in 1939). Recent scholarly works include Weissman, "Bais Ya'akov"; Oleszak, "The Beit Ya'akov School in Kraków"; Seidman, "A Revolution in the Name of Tradition" and Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer*.

acculturation that had been the hallmark of others who remained Jewish, were replaced by religious commitments and restraints inculcated by the first female Orthodox Jewish educational movement, one that created a neo-traditional model of female Jewish piety. The ideological founders of the Beit Yaakov movement hoped and believed that through indoctrination and education, and employing the tools of contemporary youth movements, the daughters of the “lost generation” of Orthodox Jewish women would proudly and enthusiastically embrace their Orthodox identity.

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