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Women and Hasidism: A "Non-Sectarian" Perspective

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Abstract Hasidism has often been defined and viewed as a sect. By implication, if Hasidism was indeed a sect, then membership would have encompassed all the social ties of the "sectarians," including their family ties, thus forcing us to consider their mothers, wives, and daughters as full-fledged female *hasidim*. In reality, however, women did not become *hasidim* in their own right, at least not in terms of the categories implied by the definition of Hasidism as a sect. Reconsideration of the logical implications of the identification of Hasidism as a sect leads to a radical re-evaluation of the relationship between the hasidic movement and its female constituency, and, by extension, of larger issues concerning the boundaries of Hasidism.

Keywords Hasidism · Eastern Europe · Gender · Women · Sectarianism · Family

Introduction

Beginning with Jewish historiography during the Haskalah period, through *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, to Dubnow and the national school, scholars have traditionally regarded Hasidism as a sect. This view had its roots in the earliest critiques of Hasidism, first by the *mitnagedim* and subsequently by the *maskilim*.[1] It attributed to Hasidism the characteristic features of a sect,

[1] The term *kat hahasidim* (the sect of *hasidim*) or *kat hamithasedim* (the sect of false *hasidim* or sanctimonious hypocrites) appears often in the anti-hasidic polemics of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. See, e.g., Mordecai Wilensky, *Hasidim umitnagedim: letoledot hapulmus shebeineihem bashanim* 1772–1815 (Jerusalem, 1970), 1:222, 320, 323. For more on the origins and development of the concept of Hasidism as a sect, see Ada Rapoport-Albert, "Was/Is Hasidism a Sect?" (forthcoming) and my own "The Question of Hasidic Sectarianism," *Jewish Cultural Studies* 4 (2013), 125–48. For the use of the term in Jewish scholarship without special reference to the case of Hasidism, see Albert I. Baumgarten, "Prologue: How do we know that we are on to something?" in *Sects and Sectarianism in Jewish History*, ed. Sacha Stern (Leiden, 2011), 3–19.

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suggesting a radical division between those who were affiliated with the movement and all other Jews. Scholars of sectarianism typically have labeled as sects groups that are marked by their strongly emphasized doctrinal, liturgical, and organizational self-differentiation from their mother religion, their exclusive approach to membership, their well-developed hierarchical power structure, the discrepancy between their declared and realized objectives, and the clandestine norms they generate to regulate both the life of the community and the personal conduct of individual members.[2] But Hasidism does not exhibit most of these characteristic traits,[3] and yet the notion of its sectarian nature continues to inform most of the scholarship on the movement.

Emblematic of the problems entailed in defining Hasidism as a sect is the difficulty of positioning women within it. If Hasidism had indeed been a sect, then membership would have reflected and encompassed all the social ties of the sectarians, including their family ties, and this would have forced us to consider their mothers, wives, and daughters as full-fledged *hasidim*. In reality, however, as will be shown below, these women were not themselves "hasidic," at least not in the terms implied by the definition of Hasidism as a sect. The present article therefore addresses the issue of women in Hasidism from a "non-sectarian" perspective. As I hope to demonstrate, this perspective allows for a radical re-evaluation of the relationship between the hasidic movement and its female constituency, and by extension, also of some larger issues concerning the boundaries of Hasidism.

The topic of women in Hasidism has been the subject of much discussion and research in the past twenty years. Works focusing on gender, utilizing the tools of sociology, anthropology, and ethnography, have dominated the field. These studies have concentrated on a description and analysis of the contemporary hasidic environment while ignoring the question of the origins and historical development of Hasidism, a question of much less relevance for these social science disciplines.[4] Fortunately, the growing number

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[2]See the classic sociological definitions of a sect in Ernst Troeltsch, "Kirche und Sekte," in *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (Tübingen, 1912); Max Weber, "On Church, Sect, and Mysticism," *Sociological Analysis* 34 (1973), 140–9; Peter L. Berger, "The Sociological Study of Sectarianism," *Social Research* 21 (1954), 467–85; Bryan Wilson, "An Analysis of Sect Development," *American Sociological Review* 24 (1959), 3–15; id., *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (New York, 1982); William H. Swatos, Jr., *Into Denominationalism: The Anglican Metamorphosis* (Storrs, 1979); id., "Church-Sect and Cult," *Sociological Analysis* 42 (1981), 17–26.

[3]See more on this in my "The Question of Hasidic Sectarianism."

[4]See Ruth Zakutinsky and Yaffa Leba Gottlieb, *Around Sarah's Table: Ten Hasidic Women Share Their Stories of Life, Faith, and Tradition* (New York, 2001); Stephanie Wellen Levine, *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers: An Intimate Journey among Hasidic Girls* (New York, 2003); and Tamar El-Or, *Educated and Ignorant: On Ultra-Orthodox Women and Their World* (Boulder, 1993).

of works by historians such as Ada Rapoport-Albert, Moshe Rosman, Naftali Loewenthal, Nehemia Polen, and others interested in the history of Hasidism and in women's place within it, has been gradually filling this gap.[5] Characteristically, however, the great majority of these studies either address the relationship of hasidic doctrine to women generally, or else they offer examples of women playing exceptional roles in the hasidic community. Only a few have addressed, even obliquely, the question of women's participation in Hasidism, and the notion that women were naturally affiliated with the movement still dominates today. Moshe Rosman has described this view as compensatory history or "me-tooism," that is, an apologetic tendency of earlier feminist criticism meant to stress the participation of women in all important historical processes.[6] Typically, examples of individual women occupying an important place in the structure of the movement, such as influential mothers and wives of *tsadikim*, or, in a few exceptional cases, women independently functioning as quasi-*tsadikim*, are adduced in support of the argument that women occupied a prominent place in Hasidism.[7] But this argument is highly questionable. The best-known and most frequently cited evidence for it is the case of Hannah Rachel Werbermacher of Ludmir [Włodzimierz Wołyński]

[5]For the most important of the historical studies on the place of women in Hasidism see Shmuel Abba Horodetsky, *Hahasidut vehahasidim* (Tel Aviv, 1953), 4:65–71; Ada Rapoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism: S. A. Horodecky and the Maid of Ludmir Tradition," in *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert and Steven J. Zipperstein (London, 1988), 495–525; ead., "The Emergence of a Female Constituency in Twentieth Century Habad Hasidism," in *Yashan mipenei hadash: mehkarim betoledot yehudei mizrah eiropah uvetarbutam. shai le'imanu'el etkes*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert and David Assaf (Jerusalem, 2009), 1:English Section, 7*–68*; Nehemia Polen, "Miriam's Dance: Radical Egalitarianism in Hasidic Thought," *Modern Judaism* 12, no. 1 (1992), 1–21; Naftali Loewenthal, "'Daughter/Wife of Hasid' or 'Hasidic Woman'?" *Mada'ei hayahadut* 40 (2000), English Section: 21*–8*; id., "Women and the Dialectic of Spirituality in Hasidism," in *Bema'agelei hasidim: Kovets mehkarim lezikhro shel profesor mordekhai vilensky*, ed. Immanuel Etkes et al. (Jerusalem, 2000), English Section, *7–*65; Gedaliah Nigal, *Nashim besifrut hahasidut* (Jerusalem, 2005); Moshe Rosman, "Al nashim vehasidut: He'arot lediyun," in *Yashan mipenei hadash*, ed. Assaf and Rapoport-Albert, 1:151–64.

[6]Moshe Rosman, "The History of Jewish Women in Early Modern Poland: An Assessment," *Polin* 18 (2005), 29–30.

[7]For interesting essays on Eydele, daughter of the tsadik Shalom Rokeah of Bełz (1779–1869), see Yoram Bilu, "The Woman Who Wanted to be Her Father: A Case Analysis of Dibbuk Possession in a Hasidic Community," *Journal of Psychoanalytical Anthropology* 8, no. 1 (1985), 11–27; Justin Jaron Lewis, "'Eydele, the Rebbe': Shifting Perspectives on a Jewish Gender Transgressor," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 6, no. 1 (2007), 21–40. For an analysis of women's participation in the process of the emergence of the dynastic tradition in Hasidism, see Nehemia Polen, "Rebbetzins, Wonder-Children, and the Emergence of the Dynastic Principle in Hasidism," in *The Shtetl: New Evaluations*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York and London, 2007), 53–84.

(1805?-1888), known as the Maiden of Ludmir—one of the very few women who apparently operated for a while as a female *tsadik*.[8] However, as Ada Rapoport-Albert has accurately shown, far from supplying evidence for leadership by women in Hasidism, the exceptional case and ultimate failure of the Maiden of Ludmir serve to demonstrate precisely the opposite, namely the limited role of women in the hasidic world. Werbermacher was able to become a quasi-*tsadik* only because she performed the religious duties that were traditionally restricted to men, thus crossing traditional gender boundaries, including those that were determined by religious law.[9] In other words, in becoming a *tsadik* she effectively ceased to be a woman, and conversely, when she relinquished her role as a *tsadik*—under pressure from the hasidic leaders of her time, who bridled at the notion of a female leader and forced her into a marriage—she resumed her female identity by becoming a wife.

Those who argue for the prominence of women in Hasidism on the basis of the exceptional roles of singular women in a small number of hasidic courts ignore the fundamental fact that not all the *hasidim* were *tsadikim*, and not all hasidic wives and daughters were related to the families of the dynastic leaders of Hasidism. In other words, the fact that some exceptional women occasionally played atypical roles tells us nothing about the position of most women within the overall structure of the movement, or their share in the experience of its numerous adherents within their own places of residence, far away from the centers of Hasidism. Admittedly, historians generally gather facts about famous and exceptional figures, not only because such subjects tend to fascinate and arouse curiosity, but also by dint of the simple fact that their lives and activities are better documented than those of most ordinary people. But this does not mean that we must accept uncritically the elitist perspective suggested by such an approach.

In view of these observations, two important gender issues deserve to be probed in the hasidic context. One is the relationship of women to Hasidism as a social movement, an issue that is often overlooked in hasidic scholarship.[10] The other, is the "from-below-upwards" view of women's place in the hasidic world, that is, a study of gender relationships within the hasidic family or the small-town hasidic community, away from the great courts and the celebrated *tsadikim*. The purpose of this article is, therefore, twofold. First, to pose basic questions about the historical and functional definition of women's

[8]For the most important studies on the Maiden of Ludmir see Horodetsky, *Hahasidut vehahasidim*, 4:65–71; Rapoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism"; Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Maiden of Ludmir: A Jewish Holy Woman and Her World* (Berkeley, 2003).

[9]See Rapoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism," 502–8.

[10]Of the few studies that do address this issue, see, above all, Ada Rapoport-Albert, "The Emergence of a Female Constituency," and Naftali Loewenthal, " 'Daughter/Wife of Hasid.' "

relationship to the hasidic movement, and through this, to re-evaluate the nature of the hasidic movement itself. Second, to draw attention to new types of sources, on the basis of which a new social history of Hasidism might be written in the future.[11]

One can look for evidence about the nature of women's ties to Hasidism by searching our sources for statements that designate female members of hasidic households as female *hasidim*. Such statements may come from the women themselves, from hasidic men, or from outside observers of hasidic society. Another approach is to obtain evidence by generating a functional definition of Hasidism, that is, a definition of what being a *hasid* (or a female *hasid*) might entail. Once we have delineated the characteristics we recognize as constituting the quintessential experience of being a *hasid*, we can begin to search for the presence of these characteristics in the historical figures in whom we are interested.

In what follows I propose to employ both approaches. First I offer an analysis of statements reflecting how nineteenth- and early twentieth-century contemporaries understood women's affiliation with the hasidic community, focusing specifically on women from rank-and-file hasidic homes rather than on those affiliated to the households of prominent hasidic leaders. Next, I turn to the more difficult task of creating a functional definition of Hasidism: what must one *do* in order to qualify as a (male or female) *hasid*? To this end, I abandon abstract doctrines that do not generally address the issue, starting instead with the historical sources that describe the basic modes of hasidic behavior, which constituted affiliation with the hasidic community, either from the community's own perspective or in the view of outside observers. All these sources single out a particular style or place of prayer and pilgrimages to the *tsadik*'s court as the two most distinctive behaviors signifying membership of the hasidic community. It should be noted that women never participated fully in these activities and often were completely excluded from them. This suggests that women were effectively excluded from affiliation with the hasidic community.

To be sure, being excluded from activities that define participation in the community does not necessarily preclude sympathy for, or identification with, at least some of its practices and values. Those excluded from formal

[11] The present article is an attempt to break away from the dominating presence of internal hasidic sources in hasidic scholarship, as these sources are often prescriptive and not descriptive in nature. Among the sources on which the article is based are both hasidic and non-hasidic memoirs, *yizkor* (memorial) books, *kvitlekh* (formulaic requests for intervention by a *tsadik*), visual materials, the nineteenth-century press, Jewish folksongs, and atypical archival sources, such as firefighting inspection records. An analysis relying on these types of sources draws attention to the lives of thousands of *hasidim*, not just their leaders, and brings us closer to an understanding of how Hasidism functioned on the popular level.

membership often find substitute modes of communal affiliation. Thus the characteristics that define the exclusively male hasidic community need not be the same as those that would define a putative community of “female *hasidim*.” I therefore proceed to ask whether women, who were excluded from participation in the hasidic community on terms established by men, may not have participated in the world of Hasidism in some alternative ways. As I intend to show, the answer to this question is negative. This, however, is not because of women’s relatively limited access to activities that defined membership in the hasidic community, but rather because of the very nature of the hasidic community as a social institution, which resembled the traditional *hevrah* (literally “society,” signifying a communal association or confraternity) rather than a sect. This suggestion will be elaborated below, where I explain why and how a non-sectarian definition of Hasidism allows us to redefine, and so to better grasp, the nature of women’s relationship to the hasidic movement.

Statements of Identity

Did female members of hasidic households see themselves, or were they perceived by others, as hasidic? Self-definition, or definition by outside observers, is not necessarily reliable, especially not in reference to women, who were formally excluded from the self-definition of most traditional societies, where only the males were counted as members. However, if women claim or are said to have positively identified with Hasidism, this would supply, at the very least, some important evidence on the nature of such connection as they did have to the hasidic movement.

Historically speaking, female members of hasidic households did not define themselves as *hasidim* nor were they defined as such by their husbands, fathers, and neighbors. The well-known *tsadik* Meir Rotenberg of Apt [Opatów] (1760–1831) expressed this clearly in 1824 during an investigation by representatives of the Polish government, when he stated that “women generally are not *hasidim*.”[12] To be sure, a direct statement of this type would appear only rarely, since it does not spring from any doubts that Meir of Apt (or any other hasidic leader, for that matter) might have entertained as to the

[12] Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Centralne Władze Wyznaniowe [henceforth: AGAD, CWW] 1871 pp. 168–79, 181–6. The protocol of the interrogation was reprinted in Marcin Wodziński, “‘Sprawa chasydymów.’ Z materiałów do dziejów chasydyzmu w Królestwie Polskim,” in *Z historii ludności żydowskiej w Polsce i na Śląsku*, ed. Krystyn Matwijowski (Wrocław, 1994), 235–9. See also id., *Hasidism and Politics: The Kingdom of Poland 1815–64* (Oxford and Portland, 2013), 100–3. For a detailed discussion of the truthfulness of this statement, see Ada Rapoport-Albert, “The Emergence of a Female Constituency,” 10*–1*.

status of women in Hasidism. Rather, the non-hasidic status of women must have seemed self-evident to him. Only those who were ignorant of the nature of the hasidic community, such as the ministerial clerk who conducted the interrogation (in this case, Stanisław Staszic—a leading Polish Enlightenment ideologue and politician), could have raised the question of women's hasidic status, and only the circumstances of an official inquiry would have necessitated the clarification that they were not counted as *hasidim*.

This conclusion finds indirect corroboration in the total absence, up until the twentieth century, of any evidence that women ever defined themselves, or were defined by others, as hasidic.[13] Clearly, this argument from silence is weak and its interpretation ambiguous, but it is supported by the relatively numerous statements that imply the exclusion of women from the status of *hasidim*. These occur, for example, in folksongs depicting *hasidim*, where the partners in a hasidic marriages are referred to not as *hasidim* but rather as "*hasidim* and their wives," only the husband being called *hasid* while his wife is invariably "the wife of a *hasid*."[14] These folk texts, valuable especially because they capture the social consciousness of lower levels of society, seem to indicate a broad understanding that the female members of hasidic households were not recognized as female *hasidim*.[15] Similarly, nineteenth-century Jewish memoirs, when referring to Hasidism, often describe women as a category which is quite distinct from the group they describe as *hasidim*.[16]

[13] I know of only one pre-twentieth-century reference to a woman who is designated *hasidah* as a counterpart of *hasid*. It occurs in an anti-hasidic folk song, where a *hasid* sings that when he drinks one glass of liquor after another, he starts dancing with a *hasidah*, even though he knows that this is a great sin: "mit a *khside*, mit a *khside* iz dokh a groyse aveyre; ober az ikh nem a kos nakh kos, hob ikh nisht kayn breyre." See M. Kipnis, *80 folkslider* (Warsaw, n.d.), 69–70.

[14] See, e.g., Aharon Vinkovetzky, Abba Kovner, and Sinai Leichter, *Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs* (Jerusalem, 1985), 3:92, 102–5.

[15] Similarly, most Yiddish language dictionaries either omit the term *hasidah* or give only the definition "wife of a *hasid*." It is also important to note that in Hebrew the feminine form of the term *hasid* does not mean only a pious female individual but also a "stork," a meaning that might discourage the use of this term in reference to a woman active in hasidic circles. Already in the Bible, the feminine noun *hasidah* is used only to denote a stork (see Lev. 11:19; Deut. 14:18; Isa. 5:7; Ps. 104:17; Job 39:13; Zech. 5:9), even though the masculine form *hasid* occurs many times in the sense of "one who is pious." The linguistic constraints should not, however, be understood as a major determinant in this case, as the adjective *hasidah* denoting a pious woman was used in medieval Hebrew, and features, e.g., in Eastern and Central European epitaphs dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see Marcin Wodziński, *Hebrajskie inskrypcje na Śląsku XIII-XVIII wieku* (Wrocław, 1996), 87) as well as in some other contexts.

[16] See, e.g., Israel Joshua Singer, *Of a World That Is No More*, trans. Joseph Singer (New York, 1970), 209; Joachim Schoenfeld, *Jewish Life in Galicia under the Austro-Hungarian Empire and in the Reborn Poland 1898–1939* (Hoboken, 1985), 101.

Even in testimonies dating from the twentieth century, when the relationship between women and Hasidism changed (on which see more below), female *hasidim* are mentioned only exceptionally, as a curiosity. Haykl, the female wagon driver (an unusual occupation for a woman) of Sochaczew, is described as "perhaps the only woman in Poland to be the *hasidah* (female follower) of a rebbe."[17]

A similar argument might be derived from the comparison between the explicit inclusion of the category "women" in the texts of the bans of excommunication pronounced against the Sabbateans, and by contrast, the total absence of this category from the texts of the bans against the *hasidim*, which are in every other way comparable to the anti-Sabbatean bans, and which do specify various other distinct categories of people to be banned. Moreover, both the anti-Sabbatean and the anti-hasidic bans were based on the same medieval *Kol bo* text of the most severe form of excommunication, providing the formula: "Jew or Jewess," which the anti-hasidic bans do not employ.[18]

Women excluded themselves as well. The most spectacular case comes from a well-known family of *tsadikim* and has been described by Ada Rapoport-Albert. During one of his lectures, the *tsadik* Shalom Dov Ber Schneersohn of Lubavitch (1861–1920) turned to his mother, Rebbetzin Rivka: "Mother, surely you are a hasidic Jewess [*a khsidishe idene*]." Rivka responded: "Whether or not I am a hasidic Jewess I do not know, but that I am of hasidic stock [*fun khsidim shtam*] is certain."[19] According to Rivka, who was the wife of one Lubavitcher Rebbe and the mother of another, her hasidic affiliation was a matter of sheer genealogy and not of her own consciousness. This example is striking because it comes from the close environment of a *tsadik* and from a woman of exceptionally high social status. However, we find similar statements by low-status women, who represent the majority of Jewish society. A good example is one of the autobiographies submitted for a competition held by the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in interwar Poland. Ester, a young girl from a hasidic family, wrote in the 1930s: "I was born in 1920 into a strict hasidic family. My father was a Gerer *hasid*. As far back as I can remember, I was steeped in hasidic traditions. At the age of five

[17] Leib Fursztenberg, "Ha'ishah haykl ba'al ha'agalah," in *Pinkas sohatshev: mukdash lezekher kedoshei irenu / Pinkes Sohatshev; geheylikt dem ondenk fun undzere kdoyshim* (Jerusalem, 1962), 713. For similar statements, see, e.g., Moshe Fruchter, "Beit harabi," in *Sefer zikaron likehilot rozniatov, perehinsko, broshniov, svaritshov vehasevivah* (Tel Aviv, 1978), 37.

[18] For this comparison see Ada Rapoport-Albert, *Women and the Messianic Heresy of Sabbatai Zevi, 1666–1816* (Oxford and Portland, 2011), 212–5.

[19] Hayim Mordekhai Perlov, "Likutei sipurim," *Kfar habad* (1966), 36:117, cited in Rapoport-Albert, "The Emergence of a Female Constituency," 32*–3*.

I remember feeling lucky that I was a Jew."[20] Interestingly, she clearly defines her father as a *hasid*, an identity which leads to the entire family being "steeped in hasidic traditions." Yet Ester does not define herself as hasidic; she writes that she was happy to be a Jew, not a *Hasid*. This does not seem to be accidental. She distinguishes the hasidic identity of her father from her own identity, which she derives from her Jewishness, not from her father's association with Hasidism. Similar distinctions between the clearly perceived hasidic identity of male family members, and the sense of identity of their female relatives, who do not derive it from affiliation to Hasidism, occur in other autobiographical testimonies preserved in the YIVO collection as well as in the memoirist literature of the same period.[21] We must, therefore, reject the notion that women described themselves or were described by others as female *hasidim*.

I turn now to the second step in this analysis of women's relationship to the hasidic world, by proposing a functional definition of Hasidism whereby the display of distinctive behaviors that are common to representatives of the hasidic community determines whether or not one may be assumed to belong to it as a member. The two types of behavior discussed below are taken to be the most distinctive and common to members of all hasidic communities.

Prayer

Among the ordinances issued by the communal *hevrat mishnayot* of Radoszkowice in 1800, one of the most important is the prohibition on admitting to its ranks candidates who belong to the "sect of the *hasidim*, i.e., those who attend their prayer house for three days, even if they are not consecutive, or every day for at least one service, or who travel to any rebbe of their sect."[22] The ordinance clearly identifies two defining hasidic behaviors: regular attendance at a hasidic prayer house (for three days in a row for all the prayers or every day for at least one prayer) and pilgrimage to a *tsadik*'s court. This definition is consistent with many accounts of characteristic hasidic behavior that appear in nineteenth-century writings emanating from both hasidic

[20] *Ostatnie pokolenie. Autobiografie polskiej młodzieży żydowskiej okresu międzywojennego ze zbiorów YIVO Institute for Jewish Research w Nowym Jorku*, ed. Alina Cała (Warsaw, 2003), 165–9.

[21] See, e.g., the unpublished memoirs in the YIVO Archives in New York, #3568. D.S., 1934, pp. 133314–440. I am grateful to Kamil Kijek for his assistance in researching these. For a memoir distinguishing the non-hasidic identity of women from the hasidic identity of their male relatives, see Helen Londynski, *In spigl fun nekhtn. Zikhroynes* (New York, 1972).

[22] Mordecai Wilensky, *Hasidim umitnagedim*, 1:320.

and non-hasidic circles.[23] If prayer in a hasidic prayer house according to the hasidic rite constitutes one of two basic markers of hasidic identity, then in order to determine whether or not women either embraced or were ascribed a hasidic identity of their own, we should consider the prayer practices of the mothers, wives, and daughters of men who were clearly identified as hasidic.

The historiography of Hasidism offers very little on the prayer practices of the women it presumed to be hasidic. This is at least partly the result of the dearth of sources on the subject,[24] but it is nevertheless possible to make some reasonable assumptions. Chava Weissler has claimed that there were no traces of hasidic influence on the traditional prayer books for Jewish women, the so-called *tkhines*. Apparently no prayers were composed especially for women who belonged to hasidic families.[25] This relates to the question of how and where these women prayed. Did hasidic women pray together with their fathers, husbands, and sons in hasidic prayer houses? Apparently not.

The first action usually taken by any newly formed hasidic group was to stop praying in the communal synagogue and to create an independent prayer house, known as the *shtibl* or, sometimes, *kloyz*. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the hasidic refusal to comply with the obligation to attend the communal synagogue was one of the two most frequent reasons for clashes between hasidic groups and the non-hasidic population (the other was disagreement over appointments to the Rabbinate).[26] Throughout the century, however, at different times in different places, the existence of hasidic *shtiblekh* was becoming socially accepted, and many communal synagogues were left half empty. As reported by British missionaries visiting the hasidic stronghold of Kozienice in 1828: "we went to the synagogue of Chasidim. It was crowded to excess, and the noise was so great that it might have been heard at a considerable distance .... We next went to the large synagogue, which was, indeed, the largest we ever saw: but here we found only a few Jews."[27]

The practice of abandoning the communal synagogue in favor of the hasidic prayer halls did not, however, extend to women, for whom the hasidic *shtiblekh* simply had no room. During one of the communal conflicts in Włocławek in 1836, the leaders of the Jewish Community Board accused

[23] This is elaborated in my ongoing and as yet unpublished research on the functional definition of being a *hasid*.

[24] As the historical sources on Hasidism are androcentric, they describe in great detail the modes of prayer adopted by hasidic men but they do not mention women's prayers.

[25] Chava Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women* (Boston, 1998), xxv.

[26] For more on this, see my *Hasidism and Politics*, 42–76.

[27] "Journal of Messrs. Becker and Miersohn," *Jewish Expositor and Friend of Israel* 13 (1928), 184–5.

a local hasidic group of only pretending to be the followers of Hasidism. As evidence, they noted that those purporting to be *hasidim* in fact lived outside of the Jewish district (*rewir*), on streets in which the Jews were not allowed to reside, that their style of dress was not Jewish, that they shaved their beards, and that their women frequented their prayer houses, while in the genuine hasidic prayer houses "women have no place."[28] This last claim implies that hasidic prayer houses were inaccessible to women, at least in central Poland around the middle of the nineteenth century. According to a contemporary hasidic tradition, accommodation for women was universal in the Galician *shtiblekh*, especially those of the Sandz [Nowy Sącz] and Bełz dynasties, but the hasidic *shtiblekh* of Congress Poland (Pshiskhe [Przysucha], Kotsk [Kock], and Gur [Góra Kalwaria]) did not make any provisions for women, who were thus unable to attend their services.[29] And some nineteenth-century memoirs point to a similar situation in "Lithuania" (Belarus).[30] Where, then, did the mothers, wives, and daughters of the Polish *hasidim* pray? It seems that they simply attended non-hasidic communal synagogues, as did women from non-hasidic households. This is corroborated by several historical testimonies. For example, a correspondent of the

[28] AGAD, CWW 1734 pp. 25–7. For more details on the conflict in Włocławek, see my *Hasidism and Politics*, 146–61.

[29] I thank David Singer and Efraym Grossberger for this information. For further confirmation see Eleonora Bergman, *"Nie masz bóżnicy powszechnej": Synagogi i domy modlitwy w Warszawie od końca XVIII do początku XXI wieku* (Warsaw, 2007), 73. No *ezrat nashim* existed in the hasidic *shtiblekh* in Mława; see *Mlava hayehudit: koroteiha, hitpatehutah, kilyonah / Di yidishe Mlave; geshikhte, oyfshtayg, umkum* (Israel, 1984), 503. According to local tradition, in Ciechanów, central Poland, the ban on women's attendance at any *shul* on Yom Kippur was imposed by the *tsadik* Abraham Landau (1789–1875); see Moshe Fuks, "Dos tog-teglekhe lebn fun di Tshechanover Yidn," in *Izker-buch fun der tshechanover yidishe kehile*, ed. A. Volf Jasni (Tel Aviv, 1962), 217. Interestingly, the same tradition was reported in Radomsko about the Radomsker Rebbe, Shlomoh Rabinowicz (1801–66); see L. Losh, ed., *Sefer-yizkor likehilat radomsk vehasevivah* (Tel Aviv, 1967), 54. On *ezrat nashim* in the *shtiblekh* of Śniatyń in Galicia see Joachim Schoenfeld, *Jewish Life in Galicia*, 82–3; on Oświęcim in Western Galicia see Hayim Volnerman, Aviezer Burshtin, and Shimon Geshuri, eds., *Sefer oshpitsin* (Jerusalem, 1977), passim; on Mińsk in Belarus see Shlomoh Even-Shoshan, ed., *Minsk ir va'em: korot–ma'asim–ishim–havay* (Tel Aviv, 1975–85), 509; on Janów in Lithuania see Shimeon Noy, ed., *Sefer yanovah: lehanetsahat zikaron shel yehudey ha'ayarah shenehervah besho'ah* (Tel Aviv, 1972), 331.

[30] A "Polish" *hasid*, Israel, living in Kamieniec in Grodno province (Belarus), never prayed together with his wife; see Yekhezkel Kotik, *A Journey to a Nineteenth-Century Shtetl: The Memoirs of Yekhezkel Kotik*, ed. David Assaf, trans. Margaret Birstein (Detroit, 2002), 208. An official report on the hasidic prayer house in Lubawicze in 1825 indicates similarly that it contained no space for women, though the function of "two small rooms" by the entrance is not entirely clear. See Barbara Stępniewska-Holzer, "Synagoga w Lubawiczach," *Midrasz* 5 (2003), 46–7.

British weekly *The Jewish Chronicle* reported in 1859 that "In some towns where the Khasidim abound, the synagogue is almost empty and kept open for the women who are not admitted into the Beth hamidrash of the Khasidim, and a few old Jews attend to conduct worship in the synagogue for the sake of the women."[31]

There exists some additional evidence, which is not as anecdotal as the testimonies cited above, supporting the conclusion that female members of hasidic households worshipped in regular communal synagogues, not in the hasidic *shtiblekh*. For example, the official inspection of firefighting readiness, conducted in 1857–58 throughout the Congress Kingdom, provides some information on the number of men and women praying in synagogues and prayer houses in several communities within two districts (gubernias): Lublin, where the adherents of Hasidism dominated, and Suwałki, traditionally a Litvak bastion, known for its low level of adherence to Hasidism.[32] According to the communal reports from the Suwałki district, 28 percent of the individuals attending communal synagogues were women.[33] In the Lublin district, on the other hand, the proportion of women was as high as

[31] *Jewish Chronicle*, March 25, 1859, 3, cited in Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning* (Cambridge and London, 1985), 105.

[32] Abraham Stern, the most anti-hasidic of the Polish maskilim (followers of the Jewish Enlightenment), claimed in 1824 that the province of Augustów (later renamed the district of Suwałki) was the only area of the Kingdom of Poland that was free from hasidic influence; see AGAD, CWW 1871 pp. 41–2, 47. Similar opinions were expressed by other observers at the time; see, e.g., AGAD, Komisja Rządowa Spraw Wewnętrznych [henceforth AGAD, KRSW] 6634 f. 238; also AGAD, CWW 1871 pp. 48–9; Raphael Mahler, *Hahasidut vehahaskalah* (*begalitsyah uvepolin hakongresa'it bamahatsit harishonah shel hame'ah hatesha-'esreh, hayesodot hasotsyaliyim vehamediniyim*) (Merhavia, 1961), 475–6. The very low level of support for Hasidism in these areas can also be seen in the yizkor-books, though they record the state of affairs in the interwar period rather than the nineteenth century; see, e.g., Mendel Sudarsky and Uriah Katzenelenbogen, eds., *Lite*, vol. 1 (New York, 1951), 1499 (Kalwaria), 1603 (Kupiskis). Notably, the district of Suwałki is the only province of the Kingdom of Poland that has no entry for any period in the voluminous index of hasidic leaders in Itshak Alfasi, ed., *Entsiklopedyah lahasidut* (Jerusalem, 1986–2004). By contrast, the district of Lublin had as many as twenty-four tsadikim in the second half of the nineteenth century alone. For more on this, see Wodziński and Gellman, "Toward a New Geography of Hasidism" in the present volume.

[33] The reports provide exact numbers for the worshipers attending synagogues in Władysławów, Preny, Mariampol, Pilwiszki, and Poniemonie only. See AGAD, CWW 1822 pp. 84–93; 1832 pp. 73–7; 1861 pp. 39–49; 1862 pp. 28–37. Although these are only five out of fifty-five Jewish communities in the entire district, they are representative of its Litvak part. In addition, at least some of the records report the number of worshipers specifically during the High Holidays, i.e., the period when the participation of women in the synagogue services was especially high. It might be concluded, therefore, that at all other times, the participation of women would have been even lower.

45 percent, half again as much as in Suwałki.[34] This information should be treated carefully, as the number of communities for which these data exist is limited and far from representative, but it nevertheless enables us to conclude that the proportion of women among those praying in communal synagogues was higher in the Lublin district, dominated by the *hasidim*, and significantly lower in the Suwałki district, where the number of *hasidim* was small. Why was this the case? In centers of strong hasidic influence, a significant proportion of the male population did not attend the communal synagogue but prayed instead at the *shtibl*. The percentage of men attending synagogue was therefore significantly lower than in areas in which hasidic influence was negligible. However, women belonging to hasidic households, if they wanted to participate in any kind of service, had to attend the communal synagogue, as they could not participate in the *shtibl* services together with their husbands, brothers, and sons. Thus the number of women attending the communal synagogues in centers of Hasidism was proportionately higher than in areas where Hasidism was less popular. If we accept this analysis of the data from Lublin and Suwałki, we can conclude that in nineteenth-century Congress Poland, "hasidic" women did not pray together with their hasidic menfolk, and thus did not participate in one of the two most important activities that defined membership of a hasidic community. Moreover, women were excluded from services not only when the male *hasidim* gathered for prayer in their *shtibl* but also during domestic celebrations, when "women were not allowed in the big room while the men were praying and singing."[35]

The principle of excluding women from any kind of hasidic prayer was not universal. In other regions, and in the later phases of the development of

[34] Data for the district of Lublin covers thirteen communities: Kraśnik, Zamość-Twierdza, Zamość-Osada, Krasnobród, Janów Lubelski, Sarnaki, Biłgoraj, Goraj, Frampol, Janów Podlaski, Kosów Lacki, and Mordy. See AGAD, CWW 1441 pp. 74–5, 78–82, 93, 96–104, 114–6; 1594 pp. 79–80; 1600 pp. 26–7; 1603 pp. 77–9; 1624 pp. 43–5. Moreover, in several other communities, e.g., in Biała Podlaska (AGAD, CWW 1441 pp. 96–7), Łosice (AGAD, CWW 1441 pp. 98–100), Kodeń (AGAD, CWW 1441 pp. 103–4), Łomazy (AGAD, CWW 1441 pp. 105–7), Terespol (AGAD, CWW 1441 pp. 108–9), Piszczac (AGAD, CWW 1441 pp. 112–3), it is reported that "usually [only] half of the men and women would gather" in the synagogue, which is very imprecise but relatively close to the numbers from communities for which we do have detailed data. Of course people (probably men) who did not worship in the synagogue may have prayed in private *minyanim* or other venues.

[35] See the testimony of Dora Moszkowska, born in Kraków in 1901, in the Leo Baeck Institute Archives, New York, microfilm MM108 p. 3. Recorded in Berkeley in 1987, the account of the visit to a hasidic home depicts events that took place in 1906. Likewise, Helen Londynski recalled that in her Warsaw home, in the early twentieth century, prayers for the recovery of her sick brother were attended only by men, while the women had to pray for him in the communal synagogue. See Londynski, *In Shpigl fun nekhtn*, 81. See also the evidence assembled by Ada Rapoport-Albert about the exclusion of women from the Rebbe's Seder table, in her "The Emergence of a Female Constituency," 61*–3*.

Hasidism (especially after World War I), it may be that women did attend hasidic prayer houses, especially on important festival days.[36] However, the fact remains that the traditional hasidic community did not legitimize the participation of women in its common prayer. This prevented women from taking part in one of the formative rituals of the hasidic community.

Nor were women present at the second most important hasidic gathering place, the communal *mikveh*. Ablution in the *mikveh*—traditionally the preserve of women, but adopted by the *hasidim* as a pietistic practice for men—not only had a ritual character, but, as many observers have stressed, was also an effective means of consolidating hasidic group identity. The group's social experience in the *mikveh* created a sense of solidarity and a shared identity among the men. By contrast, women's use of the *mikveh* was a highly individualized experience, and did not provide an opportunity for social bonding. In addition, the custom of going to the *mikveh* sometimes placed the male *hasidim* in a confrontational situation with women, on whose traditional right to the *mikveh* the *hasidim* were seen to be infringing.[37]

[36] For examples, see the testimony in the yizkor-book of Kamień Koszyrski (the district of Grodno), relating to the situation shortly before the Great War, by Yaakov (ben Moshe) Plot, "The Town's New Torah Scroll," in *From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry*, ed. and trans. Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin (New York, 1983), 96; the memoirs from the Galician community of Śniatyń, referring to the beginning of the twentieth century, in Schoenfeld, *Jewish Life in Galicia*, 82–3; and the account of Lublin in the 1930s in Róża Fiszman-Sznajdman, *Mój Lublin* (Lublin, 1989), 51. The memoirs of Malka Shapiro, the daughter of the *tsadik* Yerahmiel Moshe Hepstein of Kozienice (1860–1909), confirm the existence of a small women's section in the rebbe's prayer house around 1905, but, according to family tradition, that chamber had previously functioned as the bedroom of the wife of the Magid of Kozienice (1737–1814). So it is possible that during her time, there was no women's section in the prayer house. See Malkah Shapiro, *The Rebbe's Daughter: Memoir of a Hasidic Childhood*, trans. Nehemia Polen (Philadelphia, 2002), 13, 51.

[37] For a description of a typical conflict over the hasidic use of the ritual bath, see my essay "Chasydzi w Częstochowie. Źródła do dziejów chasydyzmu w centralnej Polsce," *Studia Judaica* 8, nos. 1–2 (2005), 279–301. On *hasidim* revoking women's right of access to the *mikveh* during the High Holidays, see an anonymous memoir recalling a pilgrimage to Bełz at the turn of the twentieth century in the Leo Baeck Archives, New York, microfilm MM93, 178. For more on hasidic customs relating to the *mikveh*, see Aaron Wertheim, *Law and Custom in Hasidism*, trans. Shmuel Himelstein (Hoboken, 1992), 215–6. The *hasidim*'s mode of using the *mikveh* differed from that of the women's, and this reduced the potential for conflict, but conflicts did occasionally arise, sparked, for example, by the anti-hasidic zeal of Jewish communal leaders, by the excessively aggressive demands on the part of the *hasidim*, or by modesty issues. See, e.g., Wodziński, "Chasydzi w Częstochowie'; AGAD, CWW 1560 pp. 191–4; 1632 pp. 145–80.

Pilgrimages

Next to the communal experience in the hasidic *shtibl* (which included feasting, storytelling, and other such activities in addition to prayer), the pilgrimage to the *tsadik*'s court was undoubtedly the most important means of forging a hasidic identity and strengthening the individual's ties to the hasidic community.[38] The personal connection of each *hasid* to his *tsadik*, and his obligation (at least in theory if not always in practice) to regularly visit the *tsadik*'s court, were viewed as the defining characteristic of hasidic identity.[39] As we have seen, in 1800, the aforementioned *hevrat mishnayot* of Radoszkowice recognized prayer in the *shtibl* and pilgrimage to the court as the two activities that identified the individual as a *hasid*. The degree to which women were involved in the pilgrimages to the hasidic courts would therefore help determine the nature of their relationship to the hasidic community.

Numerous female pilgrims were present at the hasidic courts. Those *tsadikim* who received women often gained fame as healers specifically of women and even acquired the nickname *vaybersher rebe* (women's *tsadik*).[40] One should remember, however, that many other *tsadikim* refrained from personally receiving female pilgrims, allowing them only to deposit their *kvitlekh* (the small notes requesting the *tsadik*'s blessing as an intervention on their behalf) with an aide (*gabai*). Consequently, women never saw the *tsadik*, did not hear his sermons, and could not form any ties with the hasidic community surrounding him.[41] For example, according to the hagiographic literature dedicated to the Schneersohn (Lubavitch) dynasty, each of their pre-twentieth-century leaders refused to admit women

[38] Scholarly literature on the hasidic pilgrimages to the courts is rather limited. For a popular introduction, see David Martin Gitlitz and Linda Kay Davidson, *Pilgrimage and the Jews* (Westport, 2006), 103–22. On the hasidic pilgrimage sites in Eastern Europe, see, e.g., Michael Greenberg, *Graves of Tzaddikim in Russia* (Jerusalem, 1988); Marcin Wodzinski, *Groby cadyków w Polsce. O chasydzkiej literaturze nagrobnej i jej kontekstach* (Wrocław, 1998). See also the bibliography on this topic in Zalman Alpert, "Selected bibliography of books dealing with hasidic pilgrimages to Eastern Europe," *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review* 17, nos. 1–2 (1995), 14–5.

[39] See Wertheim, *Law and Custom in Hasidism*, 236–41; Rachel Elior, *The Mystical Origins of Hasidism* (Oxford and Portland, 2006), 2–3.

[40] See for example Ben-Zion Gold, *The Life of Jews in Poland before the Holocaust* (Lincoln and London, 2007), 1. Numerous *tsadikim* were known as healers of barren women, e.g., Eliezer Tsvi Eichenstein ben Yitshak Ayzik of Komarno (1830–98). See Hinde Bergner, *On Long Winter Nights … Memoirs of a Jewish Family in a Galician Township* (1870–1900), translated from the Yiddish, edited and with an introduction by Justin Daniel Cammy (Cambridge and London, 2005), 92.

[41] For this, see Rapoport-Albert, "The Emergence of a Female Constituency," 17*–32*.

to his presence, and there are similar accounts about other hasidic leaders, including Meir of Przemyślany (the younger, 1783–1850), Yitshak of Neskhiz [Niesuchojeże] (1789–1868), Israel of Ruzhin [Różyn] (1796–1850), David Moshe of Tshortkov [Czortków] (1827–1903), and Israel Friedman of Husiatyń (1858–1949).[42] The same appears to have been the case at the courts of Pshiskhe [Przysucha], Kotsk [Kock], and Gur [Góra Kalwaria], while at the Alexander [Aleksandrów] court, women could appear before the Rebbe only in exceptional cases.[43]

At many other hasidic courts women were entitled to come before the *tsadik* and even to listen to his personal counsel and receive his blessing, but this does not mean that they participated equally in the experience of pilgrimage to the court. Numerous memoirs confirm that even where women could come before the *tsadik*, as a rule they had to be accompanied by a man (usually their husband or father).[44] The only extant collection of *kvitlekh*, sent or delivered to the *tsadik* Eliyahu Guttmacher (1796–1874) in Grodzisk Wielkopolski in the early 1870s, illustrates this. Almost all the *kvitlekh* begin with a request for intervention on behalf of a man, who is the father of the family (the only significant exceptions are widows' *kvitlekh*), but quite a few of them concern female members of the family who were just as much if not more in need of the *tsadik*'s intervention, and yet could not address him on their own behalf.[45] For example, the *kvitl* submitted by a certain Hayim Yitshak Meir ben Miriam from Ujazd (Sandomierz district) makes a standard request for "success in all that he does," but the real reason for submitting the petition is his wife Zisel bat Hayah Sarah, on whose behalf the supplicant asks "for a pregnancy of lasting seed ... because every delivery is very difficult at the beginning and she has blood clots which will quickly disappear

[42] See ibid., 19*; David Assaf, *The Regal Way: The Life and Times of Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin*, trans. David Louvish (Stanford, 2002), 282. On David Moshe of Czortków, see Hanokh Shechter, "Khorostkov," in *Sefer khorostkov*, ed. David Shtokfish (Tel Aviv, 1968), 53; on Husiatyń, see Beki Daymind, "Zikhroynes un historishe forshungen," in *Husiatin: podolier gubernie; yidisher yishev, gegrindet in 16-tn yorhundert, umgebrakht in 1942; lezikhron netsah*, ed. Beki Daymind (New York, 1968), 9.

[43] See *Sefer zgierz: mazekeret netsah likehilah yehudit befolin / Seyfer Zgierz; tsum ondenk fun a yidisher kehile in Poyln*, vol. 1, ed. David Shtokfish (Tel Aviv, 1975–86), 353.

[44] See, e.g., Bergner, *On Long Winter Nights*, 8, 45, 73, 92.

[45] Interestingly enough, the same formulaic structure has been preserved in the *kvitlekh* left at the grave of the *tsadik* Shlomoh Rabinowicz in Radomsko in 1940, as confirmed by a small collection of some 20 *kvitlekh* preserved in the personal archive of Jerzy Woronczak. What is more, hasidic literature confirms that such *kvitlekh* were interpreted as the requests of women and not of men; see, e.g., the memoirs of Israel Noah, son of Menahem Mendel Schneersohn of Lubavitch, about his first encounter with such petitions, in Rafael Nahman Kohen, *Shemu'ot vesipurim meraboteinu hakedoshim* (New York, 1990), 3:241, cited in Amram Blau, "Hatsero shel rabenu hatsemah tsedek n"a," *Heikhal habesht* 4, no. 3 (2006), 118–9.

with the prayers of the *tsadikim*." True, Hayim had an interest in his wife's successful pregnancy, but one can well imagine Zisel's anguish and how her own direct appeal to the rebbe might have addressed it, were it allowed.[46] Similarly, Hayim ben Zeydele from Wieruszów's (Kalisz district) petition concerned a match for his daughter Hannah, on whose behalf he requested an intercession "for happiness in marriage and permission not to provide a dowry" in light of particularly difficult financial circumstances. Here, too, the man who appealed, the father, had a clear interest in receiving an exemption from paying the dowry, but it was the daughter, Hannah, whose future hung in the balance, and if women had enjoyed supplicant status like the men, she would likely have made her own case to the *tsadik*.[47] Other *kvitlekh* from this collection exhibit the same structure: a request on behalf of a woman sent via her husband or father.[48] This confirms that only men could fully participate in the pilgrimage and submit their petition to the *tsadik*; the women on whose behalf they were pleading could take part only when accompanied by male relatives. The division of hasidic cultural labor made full pilgrim status a male prerogative which women might benefit from but not hold.

This symbolic exclusion of women, through the male authorship of *kvitlekh* even when they address concerns that are specific to women, is typical of many traditional cultures and says much about women's general social and cultural status (like children, they need someone to represent them) as well as displaying the exclusively male nature of hasidic status.[49] The fact that women did visit some of the hasidic courts should not be taken to mean that their status as pilgrims was equal to that of the male *hasidim*. The public activity of the *tsadik* and his court reached beyond the circle of his hasidic followers. Consequently, not all the pilgrims who sought his intervention necessarily identified with Hasidism or were members of his hasidic community.

[46] YIVO Archives, RG27, Eliyahu Guttmacher (1796–1872), box 1, folder 4.

[47] Ibid., box 1, folder 2.

[48] This is based on an analysis of a statistically representative sample of 355 (i.e., approximately 4 percent) out of some 9,000 *kvitlekh* collected by the *tsadik* Eliyahu Guttmacher of Grodzisk Wielkopolski, now held at the YIVO Archives in New York, RG27. I intend to analyse the entire collection in a forthcoming article that will highlight the popular aspect of the *tsadik*'s image and the nature of the pilgrimage to his court.

[49] For an overview of the position of women in traditional cultures and aspects of their exclusion (including its symbolic aspects) see Sarah Shaver Hughes and Brady Hughes, "Women in Ancient Civilizations," in *Women's History in Global Perspective*, ed. Bonnie G. Smith (Urbana, 2005), 2:9–46. There are numerous publications on women in early modern European societies, most of them pointing to different forms of exclusion and/or marginalization, e.g., Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (Stanford, 1975); Sherrin Marshall, ed., *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe: Public and Private Worlds* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1989), Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2000).

The *hasidim* themselves readily distinguished between the different types of visitors to the courts, while naturally ascribing to themselves the highest status.[50] Countless examples leave no room for doubt that individuals who were not *hasidim* at all could be found in the courts and were sometimes received with great honor. We know, for instance, of maskilim and integrationists who visited hasidic courts. As one of them remarked critically, all too often, people passing themselves off as progressives would turn for help to hasidic miracle workers at times of illness or under pressure from a wife (employing one of the misogynistic themes that mark anti-hasidic maskilic writings).[51] Similarly, numerous Christians readily visited the courts of the *tsadikim*, either in search of medical help, just as they sought it from Christian folk healers, or else simply out of curiosity—to witness the court as a spectacle.[52] Belief in the healing powers of the *tsadikim* was apparently common not only among simple peasants but also among the gentry and the *intelligentsia*.[53] Some of the *tsadikim* were even known for specializing in providing "medical" help for particular groups within the Christian population, for example Israel, the Magid of Kozienice (1733–1814), who offered various "miracle

[50] The anti-hasidic author Isaac Joel Linetsky described *hasidim* on their pilgrimage "for a *tikkun* and renewed enthusiasm" together with many other groups at the hasidic court, e.g., "adorable creatures are in distress over a spouse or a marriage; divorcees over the prospects of a husband; barren women come in hope of offspring." See Isaac Joel Linetsky, *The Polish Lad*, trans. Moshe Spiegel (Philadelphia, 1975), 251.

[51] See, e.g., "Listy żydowskie. List VIII. Izaak do Redaktora Jutrzenki," *Jutrzenka* 3, issue 14 (1863), 137–8. There are countless examples of the positive attitude towards hasidic leaders, and the respect shown to them by non-*hasidim*. See, e.g., Martin D. Kushner, *From Russia to America: A Modern Odyssey* (Philadelphia, 1969), 10–2, The author describes his childhood in a Ukrainian village shortly before the Great War, where his maskilic father "considered it a great honor when the great man consented to visit our house," the great man being the *tsadik* Yehudah Leib ben Mordecai Dov Twersky of Hornistopole (1867–1941).

[52] For a general discussion of the phenomenon, see Alina Cała, "The Cult of Tzaddikim among Non-Jews in Poland," *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review* 17, nos. 1–2 (1995), 16–9. See also the evidence of numerous ethnographic reports, e.g., Beniamin Wolf Segel, "O chasydach i chasydyźmie," *Wisła* 8 (1893), 680, 690; S.U., "Z aktów i rozpraw sądowych," *Lud* 10 (1904), 214–6; Chil Chajes, "Baal-Szem-Tow u chrześcijan," *Miesięcznik Żydowski* 4 (1934), 440–59, 550–65. For the typical reaction of a member of the liberal Jewish intelligentsia who was repelled by the visits of Christians to the courts of the *tsadikim*, see Samuel H. Peltyn, "Kosmopolityzm przesądu," *Izraelita* 9 (1874), 98. Many similar testimonies can be found in yizkor-books, e.g., "Ha'admor rabi Avraham Mordekhai Alter zts"l," in *Megiles Ger: gehaylikt dem onden fun di kdoyshim vetehoyrim fun undzere khorev gevorener geboyrn-shtot Ger—Gora Kalvaria in Poyln; matseves netsakh* (Buenos Aires, 1975), 49–50; Shlomoh Sukar, "Mit Vishnitser khsidim," in *Seyfer Horodenke / Sefer horodenka*, ed. Shimshon Meltser (Tel Aviv, 1963), 249–50.

[53] Sh. An-ski [Shlomoh Zanvil Rapoport], "Gegenzaytige kulturele eynflusen," in his *Gezamelte shriften* (Warsaw, 1928), 15:264–6; Segel, "O chasydach i chasydyźmie," 680; I. Feinkind, "Di pzshedbozsher dinastie," in *Sefer-yizkor likehilat radomsk*, 492.

working services" to, among others, the Czartoryski family, owners of the town of Kozienice, and to many infertile Christian women.[54] One of these *tsadikim* is said to have prayed on their behalf as follows: "My God! There are so many *goyim*! What difference would it make to you if there was to be just one more?"[55] In another variant of this tradition, R. David of Lelów is said to have prayed on behalf of a mute Gentile child: "Lord of the universe! As so many dogs bark, make just one more of them bark, too."[56]

In view of all the evidence of the presence of non-hasidic pilgrims in the courts, the functional definition of the *hasid* as pilgrim is clearly untenable, and it is consequently untenable to conclude that every woman who embarked on a pilgrimage to the court was a female *hasid*. Rather, the evidence on women's visits to the courts suggests that their status was particularly low, even lower than that of some of the Christian visitors, who were occasionally invited to sit at the *tsadik*'s table during important celebrations such as the Passover seder meal. Jiři Langer (1894–1943), an acculturated Prague Jew who became a Belzer *hasid* just prior to the Great War, told the story of two Polish *hasidim* who, at the recommendation of their rebbe, Yaakov Yitshak Horowitz, the Seer of Lublin (1745–1815), visited the *tsadik* Yitshak Taub (1744–1828) when the latter was resident in Hungary.[57] They found three Hungarian officers and an elegant woman in European dress sitting at the *tsadik*'s seder table alongside all the other guests. The author explains that the three officers were, in fact, the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the woman was the Shekhinah (the Divine Presence). Leaving aside the mythical interpretation of the tale, it may well reflect the real relations between the *tsadik* Yitshak Taub and his Christian companions. Jiři Langer also tells of a Christian follower of the *tsadik* Isakhar Dov Ber of Bełz (1854–1926), to whom he even refers as one of his *hasidim* (although this may represent a certain measure of literary license, arising from the fact that the book was addressed to a Christian readership).[58] Similarly, it was said of the *tsadik* Aharon Menahem Mendel of Olesko (d. 1923) that "believers of other faiths, particularly those belonging to the higher classes, turned to him for help,"[59] and of Shalom Dov Ber Schneersohn of Lubavitch it was said: "Women—the

[54] See, e.g., the record of such a visit in Józef Gluziński, "Włościanie polscy," in *Archiwum domowe do dziejów i literatury z literatury i dzieł najrzadszych* (Warsaw, 1856), 537–8.

[55] Sh. An-ski, "Gegenzaytige kulturele eynflusen," 264.

[56] Mordecai Brokman, *Migdal david: helek rishon bo ne'esfu sipurim nifla'im venora'im vehanhagot ... david milelov ...* (Piotrków, 1930), 35.

[57] See Jiři Langer, *Nine Gates*, trans. from the Czech by Stephen Jolly (London, 1961), 171–3.

[58] Ibid., 61.

[59] Segel, "O chasydach i chasydyźmie," 680.

Rebbe would not admit at all, while—*mutatis mutandis*—gentiles were occasionally granted a private audience," among them even gentile women.[60] At times, then, the exclusion of Jewish women was even more extreme than the exclusion of non-Jews, though this does not mean that the cultural capital of Jewish women visiting the court was lower than that of the visiting Christians (in whose case admission to the rebbe's presence was presumably prompted by political expediency, not by the inherent worth attributed to them, as is demonstrated by the aforementioned prayer by David of Lelów, who compared a Christian child to a dog).

The presence of Christians at hasidic courts is a useful point of reference in considering the question of Jewish women's access to these courts. It highlights the fact that unlike powerful Christians, Jewish women did not generally offer any benefit to the rebbe, which would have earned them some status at the court. Second, it demonstrates that not everyone visiting the *tsadik* was a *hasid*; visitors could come from far beyond the world of Hasidism. Thus even if some Jewish women were able to gain a personal audience with the *tsadik*, this was no proof that they belonged to the hasidic community.

Paradoxically enough, even the existence of miracle working *tsadikim* who specialized in the needs of women demonstrates the exclusion of women from membership in the hasidic community. According to Israel Joshua Singer, the *eyniklekh* (grandsons or other descendants of the famous *tsadikim*), who were generally despised by "real *hasidim*," used to travel from town to town, earning a meager living by offering their miracle-working services to women, among them the wives of the *hasidim*, who had to resort to their services instead of visiting a genuine *tsadik*.[61] This depiction of the *vaybersher rebbes* seems to suggest that *tsadikim* who attracted a predominantly female following suffered from low social status and prestige.[62] In the first half of the nineteenth century, the *hasid* Hillel Molisov of Porich [Parichi], initially a follower of the Chernobyl dynasty and then a "convert" to Habad-Lubavitch, reportedly stated: "Let women and madmen travel to Vilednik [Novyye Veledniki], while men and *hasidim* travel to Lubavitch," stressing in this way the low status of the miracle-working *tsadik* Israel of Vilednik (a student of Mordekhai of Chernobyl) and contrasting him with

[60] See Raphael Nahman Kahan, *Lubavitch vehayaleha* (Kfar Habad, 1983), 60–1, cited in Rapoport-Albert, "The Emergence of a Female Constituency," 28*–9*.

[61] See Singer, *Of a World That Is No More*, 209.

[62] See Gold, *The Life of Jews in Poland*, 1. The same social stratification of the *vaybersher rebbes* can be detected in popular accounts that appear in yizkor-books. See, e.g., Fishel Maliniak, "Brzeshin tsvishn tsvey velt-milkhemes," in *Brzeshin izker-bukh* ed. A. Alperin and N. Summer (New York and Israel, 1961), 90; Pinkhas Tsitron, *Sefer Kielts: toledot kehilat kielts miyom hivasdah ve'ad hurbanah* (Tel Aviv, 1956/1957), 171, 176, 177.

Figure 1. Women peeping in from the doorway to witness the hasidic tish. Source: Wall decoration for the festival of Purim, Vienna 1929; artist: Maier Schwartz; print on paper, 35.9 × 45.7 cm; donated by Dr. Harry G. Friedman, F 4308; in Vivian B. Mann and Emily D. Bilski, *The Jewish Museum New York* (New York, 1993), p. 73, fig. 95

the "real" *tsadik*, Dov Ber of Lubavitch, who did not admit women to his presence.[63]

Women were excluded from other activities that took place during the hasidic pilgrimages to the courts, such as communal study in the *beit midrash*, story telling, daily prayers, and, most importantly, the celebratory communal meals on festival days, as well as the more intimate Sabbath gatherings, during which the *tsadik* would deliver his *torah* and eat with those gathered around his table. Maier Schwartz graphically depicted this in a 1929 painting of a Purim celebration around the *tsadik*'s table, at which the women are shown to be peeking from the doorway (see Fig. 1). Not only are these women located outside the room, but the perspective appears to place them at a great distance from it, making them seem tiny and thus insignificant. The painting accurately conveys the nature of the women's exclusion. They stay outside not because they find the goings on uninteresting or emotionally distant from their own experience, as is evident from the fact that they seem to

[63] See Rapoport-Albert, "The Emergence of a Female Constituency," 20*.

be eager to look in. Rather they remain outside because group norms deny them entry.

The evidence adduced so far indicates that women were excluded from participation in the hasidic rituals of prayer and pilgrimage. If we accept that prayer and pilgrimage were the two rituals that defined hasidic identity, then we must conclude that by preventing women from participating in both these rituals, Hasidism denied women the opportunity of becoming *hasidim*.

How, then, did women express their affiliation with Hasidism, such as it was? In searching for an answer to this question we must look for alternative modes of women's religious expression in both the public and the private spheres.

Public Activity

Whether they belonged to hasidic or to non-hasidic households, women as a rule were excluded from every aspect of public life in the Jewish community of nineteenth-century eastern Europe. This pertained not only to formal political activity, e.g., elections to the governing bodies of the community, but also to semiformal public affairs, e.g., the production of petitions or reports to the local authorities. Even the involvement of women in communal conflicts of a spontaneous nature has left only the occasional trace on the extant sources.[64] Characteristically, the voices of women are excluded, and their involvement is effectively erased from accounts of such events that have come down to us. The authors of these accounts do not, of course, intend to falsify the facts; they are simply describing them in terms that conform to socially accepted categories. For example, in 1860, a certain Naftali Flomenbaum from Kazimierz Dolny [Kuzmir] testified to a state commission investigating the local rabbi: "I went to the rabbi to ask him for a marriage certificate, but he did not give it to me, because he wanted from me 5 złoty and 6 groszy, even though I am poor and in the fifth class."[65] In his last sworn testimony, however, Flomenbaum stated: "I can swear to this, because my wife told me all about it, because she went to the rabbi."[66] This contradicts his earlier statement to the effect that he, not his wife, had gone to the rabbi. Flomenbaum attributes his wife's actions to himself, and is willing to offer her testimony under oath as if it was his own. Though this in itself may seem trivial, the

[64] See, e.g., the memoirs of Chaim Aronson, *A Jewish Life under the Tsars: The Autobiography of Chaim Aronson, 1825–88*, trans. Norman Marsden (Totowa, 1983), 113.

[65] AGAD, CWW 1632 pp. 145–80. Members of the lowest, fifth fiscal class were exempted from paying fees for communal services.

[66] Ibid.

incident illustrates the elimination of women from records of public engagement or political action. For even though in reality, women did occasionally engage with communal authorities and institutions, their involvement was incompatible with the normative view of public life, a view which was shaped, on the one hand, by the exclusion of women from public life in all Eastern European societies, and, on the other hand, by the halakhic preclusion of women from active participation in the juridical process and from holding any kind of communal office.

This exclusion or camouflage of their actual involvement in public life affected all women, whether they belonged to a hasidic or to a non-hasidic milieu, and the *hasidim* certainly inherited the misogynistic kabbalistic tradition of associating women with the demonic.[67] This was never a universal attitude within Hasidism, but its impact may have been strengthened by the ascetic impulse characteristic of many pietistic movements, which resulted in a tendency to limit women's contacts with the male members of the hasidic community. Jiři Langer recalled that a real *hasid* was never allowed to look at a woman, not even his own wife, as was the practice of the *tsadik* Isakhar Dov Ber Rokeah of Bełz.[68] Although anti-hasidic folk literature implies that at least occasionally, *hasidim* were not indifferent to the illicit charms of the fairer sex,[69] it seems that they followed the practice of avoiding the sight of women rigorously enough for it to be considered a distinctive characteristic of hasidic men, even though it could be observed among non-hasidic pietists as well.[70] Abraham Cahan, a native of Wilno [Vilna], when describing the hasidic-dominated town of Wieliż [Velizh, district of Witebsk] in the 1870s, noted that "a man's wife followed him at a distance. To stroll together was a sign of moral laxness."[71] He remarked that he had never before

[67]For a typology of approaches to women in early hasidic literature, see Rosman, "Al nashim vehasidut," 156–8. For good examples of demonization of women in later and popular hasidic writing, see, e.g., Moshe Menahem hakohen Walden, *Sefer nifle'ot harabi* (Piotrków, 1911; repr. Bnei Brak, 2005), 16–8 §9, 22 §15.

[68]Langer, *Nine Gates*, 11. For similarly prescriptive texts associated with Elimelekh of Lizhensk [Leżajsk], Dov Ber of Mezerich [Międzyrzecz], Levi Yitshak of Berdichev [Berdyczów] and Nahman of Bratslav [Bracław], see Rosman, "Al nashim vehasidut," 159–61.

[69]See "Fort dos khosidl tsu dem rebn . . . ", in Vinkovetzky, Kovner, and Leichter, *Anthology of Yiddish Folksongs*, 3:126–8.

[70]In her recollections of Jewish Lublin in the interwar period, Róża Fiszman-Sznajdman (1913–85) highlighted this behavior as one of the most distinctive characteristics of *hasidim*. See Fiszman-Sznajdman, *Mój Lublin*, 12. See also *Book of Secrets* by Yitshak Ayzik Safrin of Komarno in *Jewish Mystical Autobiographies: Book of Visions and Book of Secrets*, trans. Morris M. Faierstein (New York, 1999), 280.

[71]*The Education of Abraham Cahan*, trans. Leon Stein, Abraham P. Conan, and Lynn Davison (Philadelphia, 1969), 165.

seen such a “thick cloud of superstition,” seemingly implying that the custom was unknown, or at least uncommon, in areas that were free of hasidic influence. Israel Joshua Singer recalled the same attitude in his description of Leoncin (district of Lublin) at the beginning of the twentieth century,[72] and the nineteenth-century Jewish Russian memoirist Grigorii Isaakovich Bogrow (1825–85) wrote in the 1860s that “Though the *hasidim* favor marriage, their women assume a subordinate, despised role, as among the barbarians. According to the *hasidim* themselves, a *hasid* rarely sees his poor, neglected wife, only occasionally exchanging a few words with her and responding to her caresses only under the influence of ‘diabolic temptation.’”[73] As a result of these social boundaries, which set the two sexes apart, the contribution of women to public life in the hasidic community was truly negligible. This does not necessarily mean that the exclusion of women from public life was more thorough among the *hasidim* than in other sections of traditional Jewish society, since there are no reliable comparative data on this issue, but we may conclude that even if women did occasionally play a part in public affairs, within the hasidic community, this was inconsistent with the social norms of the community, and would have been vigorously opposed.[74]

There was, however, one public role in which women were visible even within Hasidism. This was the role of benefactor or patron of the hasidic community or its leaders, of which the best known example was Temerl Sonnenberg, wife of Berek Sonnenberg, a wealthy patron of several Polish *tsadikim*.[75] But less wealthy and less influential women could also assume similar roles. For example, in Warsaw, in 1819, the daughter of a certain Melech Liwerant offered hospitality in her suburban home to the *tsadik* Moshe of Kozienice, and during the 1860s, a certain Krajndel Sejdenwajsowa offered “half of her home, part of the ground floor at No. 620 in the city of Lublin, in perpetuity as a new synagogue for the *hasidim* in Lublin belonging to the company of the rabbi of Kozienice.”[76] The role of patron and benefactor was not only a source of prestige for these women; it also enabled them,

[72] See Singer, *Of a World That Is No More*, 161.

[73] Grigorii I. Bogrow, *Memoiren eines Juden*, trans. M. Ascharin (Petersburg, 1880), 1:5–6.

[74] For an example from a yizkor-book of Radomsko see, e.g., Ze’ev Saba, “Rabi Avrahaml Kalish (der Amshinover),” in *Sefer-yizkor likehilat radomsk*, 124.

[75] See Glenn Dynner, *Men of Silk: The Hasidic Conquest of Polish Jewish Society* (London and New York, 2006), 150–9, id., “Merchant Princes and Tsadikim: The Patronage of Polish Hasidism,” *Jewish Social Studies* 12, no. 1 (2005), 64–110; see also Ignacy Schiper, *Przyczynki do dziejów chasydyzmu w Polsce*, ed. Zbigniew Targielski (Warsaw, 1992), 86–8.

[76] AGAD, CWW 1610 p. 549; for the visit of Moses Bria of Kozienice in Warsaw in 1819, see AGAD, CWW 1424 pp. 11–2. On Sejdenwajsowa and her donation, see AGAD, CWW 1610 pp. 547–50, 596–606, 611–28; CWW 1611 pp. 47–63, 172–89, 200–5.

as it enabled Temerl Sonnenberg, to exercise a certain measure of social influence.[77] Moreover, some *tsadikim* seemed particularly eager to obtain the support of wealthy Jewish women. According to the well-known anti-hasidic maskil Abraham Stern (1769–1842), each hasidic leader "strove to beguile and ensnare young people and the less prudent Israelites, especially the rich and women."[78] In this context, women's influence on public life was socially acceptable, since it could be justified as charity—a woman's virtue in the traditional system of values. At the same time, however, the ability to wield such influence was limited to a very small number of wealthy women, since in order to be socially effective, their charity had to be substantial. Nevertheless, alongside the few rich female benefactors, there were countless other Jewish women who supported hasidic communities or their leaders with much more modest means. Often their generosity was limited to a few pennies and a bottle of brandy, donated each Friday to a local hasidic leader, as recalled by a memoirist from Galicia, Hinde Bergner (1870–1942), about her own mother.[79]

The question may be asked whether when a woman's charity—large or small—was being targeted specifically at a hasidic cause, this was a marker of her affiliation with Hasidism. To be sure, at least in some cases, such charitable activity must have been an expression of the woman's sympathy and emotional attachment to hasidic ideals and values. But this did not necessarily amount to an affiliation with the movement. Charity is not always an expression of the donor's identification with the beneficiaries of the gift, as is evident from the cases of those Jews, including Temerl's husband, Berek Sonnenberg, who made substantial donations to various Christian institutions.[80] Moreover, in most cases, the same donors who supported a hasidic community or its leader also supported non-hasidic institutions and persons. For example, the above-mentioned Krajndel Sejdenwajsowa not only offered half of her house to the followers of the Kozienitzer Rebbe in Lublin but also made a substantial donation towards the non-hasidic great synagogue of the city. Similarly, Leib Rozenszer donated a thousand złoty to the hasidic *beit*

[77] See Dynner, "Merchant Princes and Tsadikim."

[78] AGAD, CWW 1871 pp. 43–6. See also AGAD, Komisja Województwa Kaliskiego 702 pp. 137–41; AGAD, KRSW 6634 ff. 239–42; Mahler, *Hahasidut vehahaskalah*, 477–81; Marcin Wodziński, *Haskalah and Hasidism in the Kingdom of Poland: A History of Conflict*, trans. Sarah Cozens (Oxford and Portland, 2005), 260–3. Earlier appearances of this accusation can be traced to the writings of David of Maków. See Wilensky, *Hasidim umitnagedim*, 2:211. It appears in many later anti-hasidic writings, too. See, e.g., memoranda by Eliasz Moszkowski in AGAD, CWW 1436 pp. 215–33; Mahler, *Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment*, 318–21.

[79] Bergner, *On Long Winter Nights*, 42.

[80] See Marcin Wodziński, "Tsava'ato shel berek sonenberg: hakaryerah hamafti'ah shel nadvan al korkho," *Gal-Ed* 22 (2010), 143–58.

midrash in Lublin, while at the same time contributing an equal amount to the non-hasidic communal *beit midrash* and the great Lublin synagogue.[81] Even Temerl Sonnenberg, the most acclaimed female patron of Hasidism, offered her charity to numerous non-hasidic institutions and individuals, including the Christian poor.[82] Needless to say, all this does not preclude the possibility that at least some, and perhaps even all of these women had certain hasidic leanings, but it demonstrates that their support of hasidic causes cannot in itself serve as proof of their hasidic affiliation.[83] Given the absence of any other types of women's public activity in the hasidic world, the public sphere is not where we should look for expressions of women's affiliation with Hasidism.

At Home

There are very few historical sources that shed light on the nature of the affiliation with Hasidism of women belonging to hasidic households, or on the degree to which this affiliation may have found expression in their domestic lives. The evidence on all this is therefore sparse and inconclusive. Such quantitative data as we have on hasidic domestic lives are not easy to interpret. For example, the research of Shaul Stampfer suggests that, statistically, the families of *hasidim* were neither less stable nor less fertile than non-hasidic families.[84] This kind of information is valuable and interesting in itself, but it only tells us about what can be measured, providing no insight into the balance of power and quality of gender relations within these families.

The only sources that do throw light on the real place of women in what might be called the hasidic family are nineteenth-century memoirs. Yekhezkel Kotik (1847–1921), for example, describes the relationship between his parents in some detail. His father, Moshe Kotik, who came from

[81] See AGAD, CWW 1611 pp. 35–46, 127–59.

[82] See "A.N." [Obituary of Temerl Sonnenberg], *Gazeta Polska* 5, issue 199 (1830), 2–3.

[83] For the women's charitable network created, a few years prior to the outbreak of World War I, by Sterna Sarah, wife of the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, in order to provide support for the Tomekhei Temimim Yeshivah, see Rapoport-Albert, "The Emergence of a Female Constituency," 34*–44*, where she suggests that this may have laid the foundations for the subsequent emergence of a female Habad constituency. The case is, however, atypical of Hasidism in the long nineteenth century, anticipating future developments in the inter-bellum and, especially, after the Holocaust.

[84] Shaul Stampfer, "Hashpa'at hahasidut al hamishpahah hayehudit bemizrah eiropah: ha'arakhah mehadash," in *Yashan mipenei hadash*, 1:165–84.

a non-hasidic family, married Sarah, the daughter of the rabbi and *mitnaged* Eliezer Halevi of Grodno (d. 1853). Both families belonged to the "Lithuanian" (actually Belarussian) anti-hasidic tradition, and Sarah's was a well-known rabbinic family. However, the young Moshe Kotik decided to become a *hasid*. Immediately after his wedding, he ran away from home to the court of the *tsadik* Moshe of Kobryń (d. 1858), becoming one of his ardent followers. It would have been difficult for him to return to his parents, as his father, Aron Leyzer Kotik, could not reconcile himself to his son's hasidic sympathies. His wife, however, reacted quite differently. According to Yekhezkel Kotik, his mother's greatest virtue was that throughout her life, the question whether her husband was or was not a *hasid* did not concern her at all. Rather, she was completely indifferent to his spiritual life. But then Moshe did not concern himself with his wife's spiritual life.[85] Similar accounts of husbands to whose hasidic beliefs their wives were indifferent appear in many other recollections from this period, including the colorful, and detailed description of the daily life of Pauline (Pesele) Wengeroff of Brisk (1833–1916), who was married to a Ukrainian *hasid* from Konotop.[86] In time, Pauline became accustomed to the strange customs of her hasidic husband, but she never adopted them herself, and she never understood the meaning of basic hasidic behaviors, such as pilgrimage to the *tsadik*'s court, which was so central to the hasidic worldview.[87] Similarly, according to the account of Israel Joshua Singer, brother of Isaac Bashevis Singer, their parents came from two different religious traditions. While their father was an "ardent *hasid* and the descendant of generations of *hasidim*," their mother came from a family of *mitnagedim*; and her father, the rabbi of Maciejów and later of Biłgoraj, was openly hostile to Hasidism. However, these differences did not prevent the marriage nor did they give rise to any tensions within the family over the years.[88] In another example, Michel Berciński, an influential *hasid* from Pińsk who was an adherent of the *tsadik* Aharon (the Second) of Karlin [Karolin], married his son into a well-known family of *mitnagedim* from Brest-Litovsk [Brisk], while his daughter married a graduate

[85] See Kotik, *Journey to a Nineteenth-Century Shtetl*, 187, 251–8.

[86] Pauline Wengeroff, *Rememberings: The World of a Russian-Jewish Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Henny Wenkart, ed. Bernard D. Cooperman (Bethesda, 2000), 154–6. See also Kotik's account of a "Polish" *hasid*, Israel, and his wife, Sara-Beila, in Kotik, *Journey to a Nineteenth-Century Shtetl*, 202.

[87] Wengeroff, *Rememberings*, 156, 164.

[88] See Singer, *Of a World That Is No More*, 17, 29–36. See also the interesting information (and erroneous interpretations) on the Rabbi of Maciejów and Biłgoraj in Robert Kuwałek, "Rabin Jakub Mordechaj Zilberman—dziadek rodzeństwa Singerów," in *Biłgoraj czyli Raj. Rodzina Singerów i świat, którego już nie ma*, ed. Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska and Bogusław Wróblewski (Lublin, 2005), 125–40.

of the Volozhin yeshivah, Nahum Meir Shaykevich (1849–1905), who later became a maskil and Yiddish writer known under the pseudonym Shomer.[89] The poet Eliakum Zunser (1836–1913), another follower of Haskalah, was matched with the daughter of the wealthy *hasid* Hillel. Zunser's father-in-law was so pleased with the match that immediately after the wedding, he took Zunser to the court of the *tsadik* Shlomoh Hayim of Keidanov (d. 1862) in order to show the *tsadik* the "treasure" he had acquired for his daughter.[90] Clearly, the non-hasidic origins of Zunser did not trouble his hasidic father-in-law, while the couple's harmonious marriage, and Zunser's love for his wife, demonstrate that her hasidic origins did not affect the quality of family relations.

Given that affiliation with Hasidism was an issue exclusively for men and did not affect the religious affiliation of their wives or the religious orientation of the entire family, it is not surprising to find "mixed marriages." To the extent that any conclusions may be drawn from such individual memoirs, which are unrepresentative by nature, marriages between the children of *hasidim* and non-*hasidim*, including those holding anti-hasidic views, occurred relatively often, and did not in fact carry any mixed-marriage stigma; they were, after all, arranged by the families with complete agreement on both sides, and the question of belonging or not belonging to the hasidic movement did not affect the relations between them.[91] The situation was, however, quite different for the families of the *tsadikim*, for whom connections by marriage with other hasidic courts were a matter of dynastic strategy. The

[89] See Miriam Shomer Zunser, *Yesterday* (New York, 1939), 98–9.

[90] Eliakum Zunser, *Tsunzer's biografie geshriben fun ihm alayn* (New York, 1905), 31; abridged English version: *A Jewish Bard, being the biography of Eliakum Zunser written by himself and rendered into English by Simon Hirdansky* (New York, 1905), 24. The visit ended with a scandal, when Zunser published a satirical description of the visit in his poem *Rabbi's Key*.

[91] See, e.g., Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl* (New York, 1952), 186, who note that "such marriages are frequent, and often arouse no opposition." The relatively high frequency of such mixed marriages transpires also from my (admittedly unsystematic) review of more than thirty family genealogical research projects. In a significant number of these, there was at least one intermarriage of this nature. This impression is corroborated by many other memoirs, e.g., Isaac Leib Peretz, *My Memoirs*, trans. Fred Goldber (New York, 1964), 132–3; Anis D. Pordes and Irek Grin, *Ich miasto. Wspomnienia Izraelczyków, przedwojennych mieszkańców Krakowa* (Warsaw, 2004), 32–5, 78–80, 114; Aliza Greenblat, *Baym fentster fun a lebn* (New York, 1966), 20. To be sure, this selection is not representative of post-Holocaust Hasidism, and it may also be atypical of the early phases of hasidic expansion, when relations between *hasidim* and *mitnagedim* were most fraught. I am, however, doubtful about the validity of this last assumption, as it is based on the notion that anti-hasidic sentiments were widespread and shared by wide circles of Jewish society in Eastern Europe, a notion that does not find support in the historical evidence.

yikhes of the *tsadikim*, namely, their prestigious line of hasidic descent, was an important factor in determining the choice of a son- or daughter-in-law.[92] But as argued above, the world of Hasidism cannot be interpreted on the basis of the exceptional lives of the *tsadikim*—a fundamental methodological error that obscures rather than explains the experience of the ordinary *hasidim*, who constituted the vast majority of the movement's adherents.

The examples drawn from the memoirs discussed above show that the strategy of marrying into non-hasidic, and even anti-hasidic, rabbinical families might be pursued by ordinary *hasidim*. Moreover, Eliakim Zunser's account, and especially the first-person narrative of Pauline Wengeroff, show that marriages between men and women who were indifferent to each other's religious affiliation or attitudes could still be based on mutual respect and love.

The above evidence, dating from the nineteenth century, certainly indicates a much reduced level of hostility towards Hasidism, suggesting the effective eradication of such boundaries as may have at one time kept *hasidim* and non-*hasidim* apart. This is but one measure of the social change that east European Jewry underwent in the course of the nineteenth century. In the present context, it is important to recognize that for a woman to marry or to be born to a *hasid* did not imply that she had thereby acquired a hasidic affiliation. Nor did it dominate her own or the family's religious practice, or have a significant impact on the quality of the relationship between husband and wife. No act of "conversion" to Hasidism or declaration of identification or sympathy with its values and practices was required of women from non-hasidic households who married *hasidim*. Affiliation with Hasidism was entirely the concern of the male members of the family. Fathers naturally transmitted it to their sons,[93] but they did not expect their own affiliation to extend to their mothers, sisters, daughters, or wives. This must be qualified by the fact that the women had at least to be seen to be conforming to hasidic customs, so as not to reflect badly on the head of the household, or to observe the rules concerning food and sex, where the men's compliance depended directly on the women's (on all of which see below). All this points to the conclusion that during this period, female members of hasidic households could not be considered female *hasidim*.

[92] See Dynner, *Men of Silk*, 117–35.

[93] As Yekhezkel Kotik stated: "It was as clear as daylight that once the father was a hasid, his children [i.e., sons] and their offspring would also be hasidim, and generations of hasidim were bound to follow in their footsteps." See Kotik, *Journey to a Nineteenth-Century Shtetl*, 188–9.

Were there any Female Hasidim?

If women's membership of a hasidic household did not in itself invest them with a female hasidic identity, how else might women's ties to Hasidism have been experienced or expressed? It should be noted that the hasidic affiliation of the head of the family did, after all, have a certain impact on the quality of family life, inasmuch as he and his male offspring would often be absent from home on the Sabbath, the High Holidays, or other festivals—the favored times of pilgrimage to the *tsadik*'s court. This would leave the female members of the household responsible not only for the family's livelihood but also in charge of conducting the most important domestic religious celebrations on their own, which may have enhanced their powers and invested them with a greater measure of authority in the home. It is thus possible to speculate that, ironically, the frequent departures of the *hasidim* from home, and their neglect of family obligations, may have been the source of relative empowerment for their women.

As noted above, conformity to some distinctly hasidic customs which had social ramifications for the husband was required of women who belonged to hasidic households. For example, according to the late nineteenth-century account by Joachim Schoenfeld of Galicia, in hasidic families, women did not eat in the *sukkah* during the festival of Tabernacles, which distinguished them from non-hasidic women.[94] Likewise, by the late nineteenth century, and perhaps even earlier, the affiliation of the head of the family to a particular hasidic group affected the style of dress worn by his wife and daughters, as some *tsadikim* demanded that their followers compel the female members of their household to comply with a particular dress code.[95] Other examples of the impact on women of their husbands' association with Hasidism have to do with food and sex, where women's behavior directly affected their husbands' style and standards of practice. For example, in the wake of the controversy surrounding hasidic ritual slaughter, women were often forced to choose between local purveyors of kosher meat, and the choice was dictated by the hasidic affiliation of their husbands who would be consuming this meat. This is only one of many other—mostly minor and relatively inconsequential—hasidic innovations introduced into the family kitchen, such as the avoidance of eating matsah-balls in soup during Passover, or the insistence on a partic-

[94]Schoenfeld, *Jewish Life in Galicia*, 101.

[95]The best known case of such radical changes was the *tsadik* Simhah Bunem of Otwock (1841–1907), described by his daughter Ita Kalish in her *Etmoli* (Ramat Gan, 1970), 31–42. On the dress imposed by Simhah Bunem on his followers and their families, see also Singer, *Of a World That Is No More*, 189–90.

ular number and shape of the Sabbath breads baked by the women.[96] These minor ritual innovations forced the women to conform to practices arising directly from their husbands' hasidic affiliation, and this could, at times, affect the very fabric of marital relations. For example, the custom forbidding the *hasid* to sleep on sheets on which his wife had slept could be emotionally wounding and lead to a weakened marital bond.[97] In a broader sense, the pietistic sexual ethics of Hasidism must have affected the quality of relations between the *hasid* and his wife, for despite the eighteenth-century hasidic masters' well-known rejection of the ascetic norms that were a part of their kabbalistic legacy, there is evidence that at least some *hasidim* persisted in the practice of mortifying the body and curtailing its "base" appetites, a tendency that appears to have resurfaced among some hasidic groups in the modern era.[98] This resulted in codes of practice that prescribed long periods of sexual abstinence within marriage, the avoidance of pleasure during marital intercourse, and the endeavor to keep the relationship between husband and wife as distant as possible. Even if, as anti-hasidic literature has always tended to suggest,[99] these regulations were not very strictly enforced in some hasidic quarters, they undoubtedly informed domestic relations and affected the lives of the wives of the *hasidim*.

Is this enough to make women female *hasidim*? Undoubtedly, such hasidic practices as were introduced into the home affected the lives of women and may have drawn at least some of them closer to the values of Hasidism. A good example is the wife of Yekhezkel Kotik, who "leaned toward Hasidism"[100] and was very disappointed when her husband rejected the hasidic way of life. The pressure she brought to bear on her husband shows that she

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[96] On these customs see Wertheim, *Law and Custom in Hasidism*, 261–2, 224–6. For an example of the head of the household forcing the entire family to comply with a hasidic custom, see Ester Shechter, *Di geshikhte fun mayn lebn* (Winnipeg, 1951), 29. In other cases, however, these special hasidic stringencies were not binding on the entire family, only on its head, even if his wife was supportive of his efforts to comply with them. See, e.g., Yesha'yah halevi ish Horowitz, "Toledot harabanut bistanislavov," in *Arim ve'imahot beyisra'el: matsevet kodesh likehilot yisra'el shenehrevu biydei aritsim utme'im bemilhemet ha'olam ha'aharonah*, ed. Dov Sadan and Menachem Gelerter, vol. 5, *Stanisławów* (Jerusalem, 1952), 72.

[97] See, e.g., Kotik, *Journey to a Nineteenth-Century Shtetl*, 302–3.

[98] On ascetic tendencies in the eighteenth-century, see David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to contemporary America* (New York, 1992), 121–48; on the post-Holocaust restrictive codes of sexual conduct, see Benjamin Brown, "*Kedushah*: The Sexual Abstinence of Married Men in Gur, Slonim, and Toledor Aharon," in the present volume.

[99] For cases of anti-hasidic literature suggesting sexual laxity among the *hasidim* see, e.g., M. Kipnis, *80 folkslider* (Warsaw, n.d.), 69–70; Ephraim Fischl Fischelsohn, "Teater fun Khsidim," *Historishe Shriftn fun YIVO* 1 (1929), 658.

[100] Kotik, *Journey to a Nineteenth-Century Shtetl*, 361.

was eager to be the wife of a *hasid*, and that hasidic affiliation (even if mediated through her husband) was important to her. Another example is Hinda Bergner, who describes her mother walking each Friday from Szczytna to Jarosław (about 8.5 kilometers), to offer the resident *tsadik* there, Shimon Merilus ben Israel Elbaum (1758–1850), a small amount of money and a flask of vodka, by which she expressed her personal piety.[101] Similar descriptions can be found in anti-hasidic literature,[102] in the works of the *hasidim* themselves,[103] and in the neutral testimonies of the yizkor-books.[104] Cases of women who identified with hasidic values, whether they had been brought up in hasidic households or married into them, are thus well documented.

As for the participation of women in the consumption of hasidic cultural products, it appears that even those who belonged to hasidic households, only rarely turned to the hasidic hagiographical literature that was accessible to them in "their" language, Yiddish, although this does not mean that they did not participate in the oral transmission of hasidic lore.[105] The mother of Shmaryahu Levin, for example, told hasidic stories to her children, which suggests that she identified with at least some of the values of the hasidic world (though her son trivialized this connection),[106] and there may have been other women like her.

Is identification with some of the values of Hasidism, and a partial or sporadic participation in the hasidic subculture, enough to make these women hasidic? I have my doubts. This is not because I consider these modes of association with Hasidism irrelevant. On the contrary, I believe that they prove an important, albeit unstructured, interrelation between women and Hasidism. Certainly, the engagement with hasidic values of many male members of the hasidic community was also less complete than we may imagine, especially if we recall Solomon Maimon's description of *hasidim* who expressed their piety by nothing other than smoking a pipe.[107] Why, then, do I refuse to call the women described here hasidic?

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[101] Bergner, *On Long Winter Nights*, 42.

[102] See, e.g., Fischelsohn, "Teyator fun Khsidim," 663.

[103] See, e.g., Menahem Manli Sofer, *Shloshah edrei tson* (Przemyśl, 1884; reprint Kiriat Joel, 2000), 30–1; Menahem Mendel Kestel, "Reshamav shel hasid (3): Zikhronot vesipurim me'izvono shel harav hehasid rabi Menahem Mendel Novikov z"l," *Heikhal habesht* 4, no. 3 (5766), 141–2.

[104] See, e.g., Fruchter, "Beit harabi," 37; Hayim Olsha, "Anshei ruah ukhlei kodesh," in *Sokoli bama'avak lehayim*, ed. Shmuel Kalisher (Tel Aviv, 1975), 311.

[105] See the interesting analysis in Rapoport-Albert, "The Emergence of a Female Constituency," 52*–5* [appendix 1].

[106] See Shmaryahu Levin, *Childhood in Exile*, trans. Maurice Samuel (London, 1929), 6–7.

[107] See Solomon Maimon, *The Autobiography of Solomon Maimon*, trans. J. Clark Murray (London, 1954), 172. Although Maimon's remark is clearly ironical, there are countless other such testimonies from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century eastern Europe. See, e.g.,

As explained in the introduction, the view that women associated themselves with Hasidism is in part the product of recent compensatory historiography, which reflects the tendency to recognize intuitively all women belonging to hasidic households as female *hasidim*. This tendency is reinforced by the conceptual error, which underlies most studies of Hasidism, of viewing the movement as a sect, since from the sectarian perspective, if the male head of the family belonged to the "hasidic sect," so necessarily did all the female members of his family.

Once we discard the false sectarian perspective on Hasidism, we may recognize that the organizational structure of the movement on the community level was, in fact, analogous to that of a well-known institution in Jewish society—the numerous confraternities or *havarot*, which functioned in virtually every east European Jewish community. In each *hevrah*, as in each hasidic congregation, membership was formally limited to men, while the women were excluded even if some of them might have identified with its goals and fulfilled some of its functions.[108] Significantly, women did not need and were not expected to be members of the communal *hevrah* in just the same way as they did not need and were not expected to become members of the hasidic congregation.

I should emphasize that I am merely pointing out an analogous organizational structure, not claiming that Hasidism was a *hevrah* in the strict sense of the term. Nevertheless, this revaluation of the conceptual framework appropriate for classifying Hasidism as a social organization allows us to understand the relationship between the exclusion of women from full affiliation and the nature of such ties as did nevertheless link them to the hasidic movement. Their exclusion from the formal organization of Hasidism, which precluded their participation in the hasidic community, cannot be interpreted as merely a manifestation of the exclusion of women from full participation in all traditional societies, where this exclusion has been crucial to the construction of the collective identity of the men.[109] The female relatives of the *hasidim*, like the women related to men who belonged to religious, philanthropic, or educational *havarot*, might have supported the involvement of their menfolk as an expression of their own piety, and might even have

Chaim Aronson, *A Jewish Life under the Tsars*, 104; Ben-Zion Gold, *The Life of Jews in Poland*, 127.

[108] I am currently preparing for publication a paper devoted in its entirety to the analogous relationship between the Hasidic community and the *hevrah*.

[109] For discussion of the exclusion of women from membership of societies and its role in the construction of collective male identity, see, e.g., Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York, 1996). For studies on the place of women in patriarchal Jewish society, see, e.g., Aviva Cantor, *Jewish Women, Jewish Men: The Legacy of Patriarchy in Jewish Life* (San Francisco, 1995).

gained from it some prestige, pleasure or pride, but they did not thereby become members in their own right. Ester, the author of the memoir submitted to the YIVO competition mentioned above, effectively said as much when she wrote that she was proud that her father was a *hasid* while defining herself as a Jewish rather than a hasidic child. Her identification with the values of the movement clearly did not break the gender barrier that precluded her own participation.

Conclusion

The analysis of statements pertaining to women's identification with the values of Hasidism or their involvement with the activities that defined participation in the hasidic community argues strongly that women's ties to the movement were limited. At least until World War I, women belonging to hasidic households, whom the historiography of Hasidism has often assumed to be hasidic, neither defined themselves nor were defined as such by contemporary others. In fact, women were not only excluded from the male community of Hasidism, but they seem to have distanced themselves, sometimes explicitly and more often implicitly, from any claim to a female hasidic identity of their own. They did not participate in any of the communal frameworks of hasidic life (above all the *shtibl* and the *mikveh*), nor did they go on pilgrimage to the hasidic courts. When they did appear as petitioners at the courts, this was only in the capacity of outsiders, which they shared with other non-*hasidim*.

Alternative modes of expressing affiliation with Hasidism available to women were few and generally confined to the private sphere of domestic life. In the public sphere such forms of expression were virtually nonexistent. Women's involvement with charity—the only socioreligious activity in which they could traditionally engage in the public sphere—was directed as much at hasidic as at non-hasidic causes, and thus could not count as an expression of their hasidic affiliation; rather it indicated that they conformed to the norms of conduct appropriate for women that prevailed in Jewish society at large. Even within the family, the hasidic orientation of one of the spouses did not normally have a significant influence on the religious outlook or practices of the other, except in matters of food and sex, where they were necessarily interdependent. The numerous marriages contracted between hasidic and non-hasidic families, as well as the many testimonies to the effect that each of the spouses in such unions was inclined to preserve the traditions brought over from his or her own parental home (while making necessary practical compromises), belie the notion that when the head of the family was a *hasid*, all his female relatives automatically became female *hasidim*.

Admittedly, we cannot rule out the possibility that some women did subscribe to the ideals of Hasidism in one way or another. This phenomenon is still insufficiently explored, as we have no data that would allow us to quantify it, nor any information about the place of hasidic values in the worldview of such women, and how it may have affected their self-definition. What is clear, however, is that the female relatives of men who belonged to the hasidic movement cannot be defined as female *hasidim*, just as the female relatives of men who belonged to the communal *havarot* did not themselves belong to these exclusively male institutions, even if they may have identified with some of their goals and values. It was only the adoption of the sect paradigm that obscured the reality of women's exclusion from participation in the activities that defined membership of the hasidic community.

What, then, should a study of Hasidism free from the paradigm of the movement as a sect address in order to establish the true nature of women's relation to the movement? As exclusion from membership in organizational structures does not preclude other types of association with them—whether social, emotional, or ideological—such a study must consider the ways in which Hasidism affected women's lives, and the nature of their response to that influence. The evidence adduced here suggests that some women were evidently interested in, and sympathetic to, at least some aspects of hasidic life. The best examples of this are the women who adopted, or introduced into their homes, certain customs that can be shown to be distinctly hasidic (although this may have been simply to satisfy their husbands' religious requirements), or those who visited the courts of the *tsadikim* (as is demonstrated by the illustration above of the women standing at the doorway). However, a sympathetic attitude to Hasidism, or even the desire to adopt some of its practices and values, does not amount to actual participation in it, and it cannot be used to extrapolate conclusions on the place of women in Hasidism.

Clarity regarding the nature of women's exclusion from Hasidism was achieved by means of defining the hasidic community as an organizational structure analogous above all to that of the communal *hevrah* or confraternity. In the wider context, however, we should also take into consideration the range of social and cultural changes—new sets of relations, new ideals and new modes of behavior—that were connected to the presence of Hasidism without necessarily themselves being its products. Some of these changes, for instance, in style of dress, the kitchen, and the home, concerned women's lives in particular. They should be investigated as an integral part of the history of Hasidism, in much the same way as have the changes brought about by the hasidic interactions with Haskalah, with politics (beyond the boundaries of the hasidic community), with Jewish education, and with cultural

creativity.[110] While all these changes may not belong in any definition of Hasidism, they do fall within the boundaries of a broadly contextualized history of Hasidism.

The relationship between women and Hasidism changed only in the twentieth century. As Naftali Loewenthal and Ada Rapoport-Albert have demonstrated, Yosef Yitshak Schneersohn in Habad, and at approximately the same time, several politically active hasidic leaders in central Poland, who supported the establishment of the Beit Yaakov school system for girls, realized the possibility of actively engaging women in the defense of Jewish tradition, promoting new types of activity and education for women within the hasidic movement. It was such initiatives that made it possible for the female *hasid* to come into being for the first time.[111]

The *tsadik* Meir of Apt was right when he stated in 1824 that "women generally are not *hasidim*." The question to which he responded, however, was based on a conceptual error that made it difficult for him, and for many others, to find the appropriate terms for describing the relationship between women and the "sect of the *Hasidim*." The present paper is an attempt to correct that conceptual error, and to provide the terms that might capture the nature of the relationship between women and pre-twentieth century Hasidism.

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[110] For studies of interactions between Hasidism and Jewish educational institutions see, e.g., Gershon Bacon, *The Politics of Tradition: Agudat Yisrael in Poland, 1916–39* (Jerusalem, 1996), 142–77. On Hasidism and cultural creativity, see, e.g., Moshe Idel, *Old Words, New Mirrors: On Jewish Mysticism and Twentieth-Century Thought* (Philadelphia, 2010); Ken Frieden, "Neglected Origins of Modern Hebrew Prose: Hasidic and Maskilic Travel Narratives," *AJS Review* 33, no. 1 (2009), 3–43. For my attempts to analyze Hasidism in relation to Haskalah and East European politics see *Haskalah and Hasidism in the Kingdom of Poland* and *Hasidism and Politics*.

[111] See, e.g., Naftali Loewenthal, "System medytacyjny dla dziewcząt w Rydze, przed Holokaustem," in *Duchowość żydowska w Polsce*, ed. Michał Galas (Kraków, 2000), 173–87; id., "Daughter/Wife of Hasid," 28; Rapoport-Albert, "The Emergence of a Female Constituency," 44*–51*.