# Quest of Emancipation among Jewish Women in Izmir

# İzmir'de Yahudi Kadınlar Arasında Kurtuluş Arayışı

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Özet

Kadınların evrensel haklarına dair kanaatlerin ve genel olarak aydınlanma düşüncesinin yaygınlaşması, İzmir Yahudi Cemaati'nde devrimci feminist fikirlere yönelik bir farkındalık oluşmasını sağladı. Somut olarak bakıldığında büyük oranda kültürel alanda kalan bu gelişme, kadın özgürleşmesinin daha başlangıç aşamasında olduğunu gösteren ve kendini sadece cemaatin seçkin tabaklarında hissettirebilen bir mahiyetteydi. Diğer toplumsal sınıflar için kadının özgürleşmesi, henüz emekleme aşamasındaydı ve daha ziyade gayri-ihtiyari bir nitelik arz ediyordu, yani bir icraat kadınları özgürleştirme maksadıyla yapılmazdı ama sonuç kadının özgürleşmesi olduğunda, geriye dönük olarak özgürleştirme etiketi kullanılırdı.

On dokuz ve yirminci yüzyıl Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndaki Yahudi Kadını, sadece İslam Dünyası ile Yahudi Dünyası arasında kalmamıştı, imparatorluğun modernleşmesiyle birlikte bir de Batı Dünyası'nın tesiri altında kalmıştı. İşte bu çalışma, yukarıda bahsedilen gelişmeleri dikkate alarak, İzmir'deki Osmanlı Yahudi Kadınları vakasına odaklanarak Osmanlı Yahudi Cemaati'ni incelemektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler**: İzmir, El Komersial, Alyans Okulları, Kadının Özgürleşmesi, Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi, Feminizm

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*Abstract*

*Universal ideas of women's emancipation and general enlightenment in the Jewish community of Izmir led to the emergence of the community's awareness of revolutionary feminist ideas. However, in concrete terms, this merely indicated the beginning of women's emancipation in the cultural sphere, a concept that prevailed only amongst the elite of Jewish society. Within the other social classes, emancipation was in its infancy and was more incidental, i.e., actions were carried out not for the sake of women's liberation, but for other reasons and were only post factum defined as emancipation.*

*The Jewish women of the Ottoman Empire lived in several worlds in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – the Muslim world, the Jewish world, and the Western world as it influenced the Empire. This study focused on the Jewish women of Izmir as a case study of Jewish communities in the Empire in light of these various influences.*

**Keywords:** Izmir, El Komersial, Alliance, women's emancipation, feminist ideas.

*Introduction*

The Westernization and modernization of the Ottoman Empire, which increased in intensity from the end of the eighteenth century onward, had a profound impact on Ottoman Jewry.[2] The origin of all the dramatic changes the Ottoman Empire underwent was the Tanzimat period (1839–1876). The reorganization of the Ottoman society in general through technical, administrative, and educational reforms, backed and approved by the European powers, also permitted changes within the Jewish communities. The overthrow of Abdülhamid II's autocratic regime, re-establishment of the Ottoman assembly and reinstalling of the constitution by the Young Turks in 1908 mark the second constitutional period (1908–1918) (Göçek, 1998). This period witnessed intensive social and ideological agitation that accelerated the establishment of women's education in new Western-style schools, women's presence in women's journals Most women's journals in the first stages of their existence restricted their coverage to "women's topics" such as home, domestic work, child raising, and fashion; however, during the second constitutional period (1908-1919), articles were severely criticized for disregarding their promises to emancipate women (Fleischmann, 1999) and voluntary women's aid associations to assist in war efforts throughout the extended period of wars after 1908, opening of universities to women, and integration of women in the workforce. More specifically, the issue of Western-style education of Ottoman women had come to the forefront in the mid-nineteenth century. Following political reforms, schools were opened to educate women as future teachers. Legal reforms included the abolition of slavery and concubinage, equal inheritance rights, and the

[2] Phillips Cohen claims that scholars of Ottoman history have paid considerable attention to the rapid Westernization of the urban non-Muslim mercantile classes in the nineteenth century, but only few have acknowledged how Ottoman Christians and Jews joined Muslims regarding their disillusionment with the prospects of Europeanization (Cohen, 2014).

ability to marry foreign men (Göçek, 1998).[3] This fact was even more critical considering that the scope of literacy in Muslim societies in general and in the Ottoman Empire in particular was limited until the beginning of the 20th century. Among Muslim men, the literacy rate was 2-3 percent in the beginning of the nineteenth century and 15 percent at the end. Accurate data on the literacy rate amongst Anatolian and Balkan Jews are available, but it is possible to estimate that since the Talmud Torah schools were open to the Jewish public in general, literacy among Jews was more common (Karkason, 2016). More importantly, discussions on women and family were produced by writers of Western, Islamic, and Turkish orientations (Hatem, 1999). Yet, modernization is tested first and foremost in family relationships (Hatem, 1999).

This study aimed at shading light upon the Jewish women of Izmir in the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries as reflected in *El Komersial*, the journal of Izmir's elites that has not been researched so far. This article explores the first stages of women emancipation in the Izmir community in various facets and assess the importance of these steps given the strictly religious community of Izmir. The study demonstrates how the social changes brought about the nationalist movements in other Ottoman communities (e.g., Turkish, Greek) impacted the change in social position of Jewish women and showed that involvement of women in nationalist movements. It shows that the national liberation aimed by nationalist movements did not necessarily imply female emancipation; rather that the nationalist movements aimed for a woman that serves national purposes rather than her own liberation. It was the same in the Balkans as well. The process of female emancipation of Jewish women in Izmir occurred in opposition to influences from the mainstream Ottoman Muslim community, European orientalist discourses, and strict norms of the religious Jewish community. This study also reveals the attitude toward women and the fight for their emancipation which

[3] Müge Göçek mentions that the first voluntary aid society was Aid Society [Cemiyet-i İmadadiye], which was founded in 1908 and provided winter clothing to Ottoman soldiers fighting in the Balkans.

reflected division within the Jewish community. I hypothesize that at the turn of the century, the first social and cultural signs of women's emancipation were limited to the elite only.

*Cultural Transformation and Female Emancipation in the Jewish Community in Izmir in the 19th Century*

The end of the 19th century period marked the beginning of a multifaceted cultural transformation of Jewish communities across the empire. This transformation was similar to the "Enlightenment" movement within the European Jewish communities because it transformed traditional cultural patterns and opened the formerly closed communities to new ideologies and experiences. The various identities and ideologies manifested mainly by the intellectual elite of the Jews in the Empire ranged from alignment with the Ottoman state during its existence and other governments after the empire's collapse. Some emphasized their Sephardic identity, whereas others became Jewish nationalists or Zionists during different periods (Cohen & Stein, 2010). This transformation manifested itself, among other areas, in feminism, or "female emancipation," as it was known at the time. Progress and modernization, as well as the secularism that accompanied modernization, appear to have been more profound in Izmir than in other regions. Their manifestations included changes in the dress and external appearance of men and women; the establishment of newspapers and journals mostly in Ladino whose quality and quantity were enabled due to girls' education from the 1870s onward and changes in educational institutions and curricula (Karkason, 2016). The changes were also reflected in increasing interest in literature, art, and language, and in demand for education, theatre, and music, as well as in decreasing religiosity. Furthermore, during the nineteenth century, Izmir became an important metropolis, as well as one of the most renowned cultural and commercial centers, not only in the Ottoman Empire, but on the global level (Goffman, 1999).[4] Izmir's

[4] Daniel Goffman, "Izmir: From Village to Colonial Port City", in Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman and Bruce A. Masters (eds.), *The Ottoman City between East and West – Aleppo, Izmir and Istanbul*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 128. On Izmir, see: Sibel Zandi-Sayek, *Ottoman Izmir: The Rise of a Cosmopolitan Port, 1840–1880*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

flourishing in the cultural and financial spheres, even in terms of the Ottoman Empire alone, attracted many Jews, as well as other minorities, such as Armenians and Greeks, and, of course, Turks. This explains the choice of Izmir as a case study for the Ottoman Empire in this article.

In the mid-nineteenth century, between fifteen to seventeen thousand Jews lived in six neighborhoods in Izmir, with the middle and upper classes living mostly in Karataş, whereas the poor were concentrated in Mezarlıkbaşı. During the Tanzimat period, the Jewish population of the city grew owing to the tolerance exhibited by the Ottoman authorities. Because of these strong external influences, the local elites also played a critical part in the modernization process. It should be mentioned that in general, the Ottoman women, Jews and non-Jews, who were involved in early efforts to emancipate women, were almost all educated and from middle-and upper- class backgrounds as was the case in the rest of the world. Their education acted as a catalyst, enabling them to feel confident and seek change. Furthermore, they also had more leisure than the poorer urban and peasant women. Therefore, Elite women organized themselves not only for the benefit of their poorer sisters but also for their own personal and intellectual development (Fleischmann, 1999). Moreover, Ester Benbassa claims that even before modernization and leaving Jewish neighborhoods took hold among Balkan Jewish communities, young, educated individuals had abandoned their traditional communities and adopted Western ways on their own (Benbassa, 2003). This abandonment was manifested in public violation of the Sabbath, the frequenting of coffee houses, recourse to the Sharia courts, wearing modern clothing, being clean-shaven, and so on (Bornstein, 2018). These and other trappings of modernization resulted in the collapse of the old social structure. The Jewish working class, for example, became self-aware and began to demand its rights, which led to social tension. In addition to the emergence of the working class, the Alliance also increased the

polarization between the bourgeoisie and ordinary people, which was manifested in a number of ways:

Considering **occupation**, the lower stratum continued to work in traditional occupations, including merchants, shoemakers, tinsmiths, and manual labor occupations, which offered little financial security, whereas Alliance graduates joined the free professions as bankers, pharmacists, translators, and so on.

Regarding appearance and clothing, traditional garments such as the *entari*[5] were still worn by the lower strata, whereas the new educated strata wore modern European clothing, such as jackets and European hats, which eventually became the norm in the entire Jewish community.[6]Charlotte Jirousek (2000) asserts that only as trade and diplomatic contacts increased in the eighteenth century and thereafter did European fashions and goods begin to seriously impinge on Ottoman tastes. The clothes reform was not related only to Western influence but also to inner procedure stemming from the Tanzimat and Ottoman nationalism,as by the end of the nineteenth century, efforts to bring Ottomans from different origins together had been ongoing for decades. All Ottoman males (with the exception of religious leaders) were required to wear the fez, tailored trousers, and a frock coat known as the istanbulin as of that point. Sultan Mahmud II issued legislation in 1829 repealing the empire's historical sumptuary laws that had divided people by religion, class, and professional status. Mahmud II's clothing reform, which was implemented to lessen the obvious distinctions amongst

[5] A robe that opened in the front and was made of silk or figured calico; it reached a little below the knee and was fastened round the waist with a sash passing twice round the body. Over this, a *jubbah* lined with cat fur was worn.

[6] On the clothes of the Jewish women in the Empire before and after the reforms see: Lucy M. J. Garnett, *The Women of Turkey and their Folk-Lore*, vol. 2: The Jewish and Moslem Women, London, 1891, pp. 13-16. The issue of clothing was widely explained in Julia Phillips Cohen's article. According to Phillips Cohen, the clothing reflected the cultural but also identity quest of the Jewish Ottoman society. For example, different Ottoman authors mocked: "half-westernized" types calling such individuals "fake Turk[s] turned European." In other words, no real Ottoman could be a European (Cohen, 2014).

Ottoman males, was a part of the global movement toward uniformity in middle-class male clothes that took place in the nineteenth century. The fez and frock coat acted as symbols of a predetermined male shape in this way (Cohen, 2014). The Tanzimat, or "Reordering," which took place between 1839 and 1876 and saw significant European meddling in Ottoman political and economic affairs, saw the introduction of novel equalizing measures by the Ottoman government among its citizens, most notably by granting new rights to the non-Muslims of the empire. This resulted in the nationality law and a constitution that referred to all imperial subjects as "Ottomans," allowing for the first time a common imperial designation. While some people from diverse backgrounds opposed the changes—refusing, for instance, to replace their turbans with fezzes to erase the professional, class, or religious affiliations associated with their dress—many non-Muslims embraced the new opportunities the reforms provided. There were reports of Christian and Jewish males embracing the fez with tremendous haste from Baghdad to Aleppo to Istanbul. Although the Ottoman administration did not proclaim an analogous uniform style for Ottoman women, upper- and middle-class women's attire saw significant modifications during this time in cities across the empire (Cohen, 2014). Jewish males quickly embracing the fez. Although the Ottoman administration did not proclaim an analogous uniform style for Ottoman women, upper- and middle-class women's attire saw significant modifications during this time in cities across the empire (Cohen, 2014).

Considering **residence**, until the departure from the Jewish “ghetto,” the majority of Izmir Jewry lived near the market, in areas such as Irgat Bazarı, Lazarato, and Basmane. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, wealthy families and some of the new bourgeoisie moved to the western side of the city, along the road to Çeşme. Even the traditional Jewish housing style of the *cortejos* that was characteristic of the ghetto was abandoned by the new bourgeoisie in favor of Western-style houses in neighborhoods such as Karataş, Karantina, and Göztepe. Furthermore, Ladino, the

language of the Talmud Torah schools, continued to serve as the lingua franca of the lower strata, whereas French and later Turkish came into use among the upper strata and were regarded as a sign of progress, culture, and education. French, which was the cultural language of Jewish society, was also the cultural language of all the Christian and Muslim elite. French was also the language of commerce in those days. Although French and Turkish have become hallmarks of progress, educated-oriented newspapers had continued to appear in the Ladino language. It is not inconceivable that because the publication of the newspaper was a function of a number of its readers, these continued to be published in the most prevalent language. This also includes various educated newspapers, such as *El Novelista* and others. In other words, the choice of Ladino as the language of the press in particular and as the language of secular literature in general was made regardless of a socio-cultural mark, but to meet the need for extensive publication of such literature (Cohen & Stein, 2010).[7]

*Women's Organizations and the Emergence of Nationalist Movements*

The fall of Abdülhamid's autocratic regime led to intense social and ideological changes, including the establishment of women's organizations and unions for working women, and allowing them to enter universities. Western-oriented writers aimed to comprehend the relationship between women and Turkish nationality and published articles on women's associations and family life. Moreover, women were involved in nationalistic circles and visions, which revealed the contradictions of the women's complex identities as women and national subjects or citizens, in addition to religion, class, and kin relations (Fleischmann, 1999). For many women, nationalism represented the "honorable door" for participating at new levels of public life. Thus,

[7] Some Jews of the intelligentsia of the Empire proposed that Ladino be promoted and standardized in order to facilitate communication among the Jews of the Balkans and Turkey.

initially, nationalism was a legitimizing discourse for women to achieve emancipation by incorporating feminist demands in nationalist ideology, in particular the issues of women's political equality and women's suffrage. Women expected that the achievement of the sovereign nation-state- would result in their emancipation as citizens with the newly established state (Fleischmann, 1999). Yet, such phenomena from Jewish women's history in Ottoman Empire are not known to us.

During the Balkan Wars, women were obliged as part of the Ottoman collective to make their contribution in areas where their feminine and maternal skills were required - mainly by volunteering to feed the wounded in hospitals, care for the families of soldiers and the fallen, and care for the welfare of soldiers. The war allowed Ottoman women - Muslim and non-Muslim - to leave their homes and operate in the public sphere, especially in the Red Crescent institutions, thus planting the first seedlings of women's organizations in Ottoman society (Ginio, 2005/2006). Furthermore, some Western-oriented reformists attempted to bring about modernization by focusing on women's status in their own societies (Fleischmann, 1999. The reason why women in these regions (but also in other parts of the Ottoman Empire) took part in the activity of the national movements, hoping for a change in their status within their families and societies, was because the modern state was depicted as "women-friendly," but this proved to be an empty promise. The main targets of the national circles were first and foremost young men, while young women were viewed as unskilled assistants (Tzoreff, 2001). Women were not trained to be providers or to work in public; their primary and ideal purpose was to serve as housewives and mothers, who needed more education mainly to raise their children properly and bring order and discipline to their homes (Lamdan, 2005). In other words, women were supposed to be educated to be more efficient in their housework and children's upbringing because to run their household well, they must have attained a certain amount of intellectual and cultural knowledge (Fleischmann, 1999). Furthermore, their duty was to give birth to more men because

men lost their lives in the wars for the motherland.[8] This national role assigned to the mothers was to empower the sons, the future generation of the nation, through the expansion of their education and upbringing. For this purpose, the national program stipulated that a wider education should be provided to the mothers of the nation, but not immediately broad, because overly educated women were portrayed as a threat in the eyes of male society (Tzoreff, 2001). Not only did the "enlightened mothers" not break the boundaries of the code of honor by leaving the women indoors, but this concept also demanded additional input from them as mothers, to fulfill the national. This is also the reason why instead of national motherhood splitting society, nationalism served as a unifying factor, transcending religious controversies and debates between conservatives and liberals. The national discourse borrowed, therefore, its terms and symbols from the gender discourse, but fortified the division of traditional roles between the sexes and set the woman in her place. As a national symbol, women were channeled into their traditional roles as wives and mothers and preserved the values of religion and tradition in the active, dynamic, and changing world of men (Tzoreff, 2010).

In contrast to the surrounding society, the role Sephardic-Jewish women in Izmir played in the process of female emancipation had no such motive. They did not take part in the forming of national identity, and Jewish women's emancipation was perceived as "cultural" only. However, despite the differences, there are parallels between the struggle of Jewish women and that of the women in the surrounding society in the context of nationalism, particularly in terms of the perception of the woman as

[8] See for example, Lois A. West (ed.), *Feminist Nationalism*, New-York: Routledge, 1997; Yeşim Arat, "The Project of Modernity and Women in Turkey", in Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (eds.), *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1997, pp. 95–112. For more on women and nationality in Turkey, see: Ayşe Gül Altınay, *The Myth of the Military-Nation: Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey*, New-York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

an educator because in both groups the woman was perceived as a "mother-educator."[9] This term was understood to mean a woman who was cultured and capable of breaking the vicious circle of the East's corrupt principles, which had led to the emergence of degenerate societies perpetuated from one generation to the next. Thus, the reason for educating women was ultimately to make them "good mothers" for the benefit of the nation (Rodrigue, 1991).

Jewish women's participation in charitable organizations and events, as in Izmir, neither advanced the Jewish woman nor implied any inculcation of feminist ideas. *El Komersial* covered many events of charity on behalf of the community's needy.[10] It also mentioned two highly active organizations: "Women of Talmud Tora" (Damas del Talmud Tora) and "Righteous Women" (Nashim Tzadkaniyot). The women members of these organizations organized charity balls and performances to raise money for the community and its poor people.[11] Obviously, women played a significant role in charitable organizations in other places in the world as well, but these activities never had a feminist motive in Izmir and were solely for preserving Jewish life and defending the Jewish community from exclusion. The roles Jewish women played in these

[9] According to Ben-Naeh, one cannot refer to "the woman" in Ottoman Jewish society because there was no typical model of one woman. See: Yaron Ben-Naeh, "The Ottoman-Jewish Family: General Characteristics", *Open Journal of Social Sciences* 5 (2017), p. 38. This article, however, focuses on the women emancipation procedure within the Izmir community rather than on the women themselves. For more on gender and ethics, see: Yaron Ben-Naeh, "Feminine Gender and Its Restriction in the Ethical Regulation of Ottoman Jewry" [Hebrew], *Pe'amim*, 105–106 (2006), pp. 127–150.

[10] All references to and citations from *El Komersial* (The commercial) appeared originally and for the first time in my M.A thesis: Efrat Aviv (Abravaya), *Kehila, Tarbut ve Feminism BaKehila HaYehudit BeIzmir Erev Mahapechat "Haturkim HaTzeirim"1899-1908* [Community, culture and the beginning of feminism – the Izmir community on the eve of the "Young Turk Revolution" 1899–1908]. [Master's dissertation, Bar Ilan University].

[11] *El Komersial*, February 7, 1908, pp. 3-51; El Komersial April 2, 1908, pp. 2-7; *El Komersial*, January 24, 1908, pp. 3-49.

organizations could never come at the expense of their primary roles as wives and mothers.

The event that pushed, or even began, the cultural women's liberation of the Jewish community was the opening of schools for girls. Prior to the opening of the Alliance schools in the nineteenth century, Jewish girls from high and middle-class society were sent to schools established by protestant missionaries in the Ottoman Empire and were active amongst non-Muslims only as conversion to other religions among Muslims was prohibited and whoever acted to convert Muslim risked in death. These institutions were strictly opposed by some Ottoman rabies (Karkason, 2016). Other schools were built by the initiative of the community itself**. For** example**,** Abraham de Camondo played a crucial role in the development of Jewish education, and from 1858 onward, he was the only financial supporter of Albert Cohen's[12] school opened in 1854 in Istanbul (Rodrigue, 1990). De Camondo was considered a great supporter of Westernization and Europeanstyle schools in particular before the Alliance activity in the Ottoman Jewish communities (Borovaya, 2011). With the establishment of Alliance schools throughout the Empire, when the first school for girls was opened in Edirne in 1870, two years after boys' school was established there (Borovaya, 2011), and approximately 20 years after the first government girls' schools were established in the 1850s and a twelve years after a secondary school for girls was founded (Fleischmann, 1999), outstanding students were sent to a teacher's seminary in Paris, while some of them were sent back later to their native countries as teachers according to the needs of the system to "educate the children of their country," eradicate their "bad habits," and inspire virtues such as love for one's country, so that less fortunate coreligionists would be better prepared for citizenship in their own countries (Malino,

[12] Albert Cohen (1877-1814), French philanthropist, director of the Rothschild House's philanthropic enterprise, one of the principals of the first modern Jewish school in Turkey, founded by Commando in 1854 in Istanbul.

2000, p. 57). From 1872, women were also included in this teaching force (Malino, 1998). Although it was difficult to send girls from the Eastern countries and the Ottoman Empire to Paris alone, many parents agreed to this, knowing that a teacher's position would secure economic security and even prestige for their daughter (Malino, 2000). In this period, teaching was the only position that enabled Jewish women to lead an independent life (Malino, 1998). These women provided a new role model among Jewish women in the Empire: modern women who had attained education, learned new languages, and lived in Paris, the city of progress and culture. These women could more easily present themselves as equal to men in Jewish society. Despite this, however, during their four years of studies at the teacher's seminary in Paris, the Sephardic and Eastern girls felt inferior to the boys, as they suffered for being "Eastern" and they had the "honor" of being called names due to their origin and culture. In the Alliance schools themselves, there was inequality between boys and girls in the curriculum, although a circular addressed to school principals from the Central Committee in Paris, dated June 1896 stated that instruction for girls should be equally divided between academic and vocational subjects. Although girls, in theory, studied the same subjects as boys, except for the addition of sewing to their curriculum, they generally spent fewer hours per week on each academic area. Thus, education for girls was skewed toward non-academic subjects and the girls had a shorter school day (Land, 2006). In addition, the boys' learning conditions were much better than the girls,' not only in terms of the curriculum, content, and number of weekly teaching hours, but also in terms of the educational aims. Although religious teaching was supposed to be the same for boys and girls, the Hebrew required from the girls was simple, restricted to prayers and at a maximum level of two hours weekly, whereas the boys had five to ten hours a week. The boys were given ten to twelve hours a week of French, whereas the girls received only eight hours a week. With the exception of sewing lessons, which were taught for seven to ten hours a week, the girls did not study any subject for more than five hours a week (Malino, 2000). Nevertheless, the fact that girls took part in the

Alliance's teaching force from the latter third of the nineteenth century probably marks the first attempt by women themselves in the history of Sephardic Jewry to bring about a real and active change in their status.

*Modernization of the Ottoman Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle*

From the mid-nineteenth century, the Alliance Israélite Universelle, an organization founded in Paris in 1860 by six French Jews whose objective was to educate in Western ways and instill openness to progress and new cultures throughout the Sephardic/Eastern world, began its activities among the Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire. The Alliance was established in response to the Damascus Blood Libel of 1840, when Jews living in Damascus were accused by Christian Arabs of the ritual murder of a Capuchin monk, as well as against the background of the Mortara kidnapping case of 1858, in which the Catholic Church refused to return a young Jewish boy to his parents after he had secretly been baptized by his nursemaid (Headrick, 2019). The Alliance teachers were motivated by a genuine sentiment of solidarity; yet, they approached the Jews of the "Orient" with many prejudices as they set themselves the goal of "regenerating" the Jews of the world vocationally, linguistically, morally, and spiritually. The means of achieving this goal included establishing a network of modern, intellectually rigorous schools for boys and girls, which played a critical role in the processes of Westernization and modernization of the local communities (Malino, 2010). By including universal values in their schools' programs, the Alliance endeavored to facilitate the adoption of new socio-political ideas stemming from the Enlightenment. Thus, Jews could retain their own traditions because their "revised" moral values were incorporated into the civil and moral codes of Western civilizations. According to Rena Molho, the greatest social impact achieved by this enlightened elite was in revolutionizing schooling for women whose literacy rate was very low (Molho, 2008).Another factor that accelerated the modernization of the Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire was the presence of the Francos, the descendants of Portuguese

*Anusim* (forced converts) who had arrived in the Ottoman Empire from Venice and Livorno first in the seventeenth century, followed by further settlers who arrived from Western Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This group constituted a financial elite that was active in the Jewish communities and donated large sums to charity. According to the capitulation treaties, they were foreign subjects and mainly worked as bankers and merchants. The Francos were often called "Señores Francos," a title which underscored their high social position.[13] They numbered around one thousand people in Izmir and gave the city a cosmopolitan character, constituting its financial and social elite. As noted, they were the catalyst in promoting Westernization and modernization processes within the Jewish community of Izmir and elsewhere.

The Alliance founded the first girls' school in Izmir in 1878, and by 1885, 277 girls studied there. In 1884, the school opened a vocational workshop, and 35 students were educated in this framework to find themselves a vocation. In 1895, there were two girls' schools in Izmir with 500 students. In 1908, 219 girls studied in Alliance schools, and in 1911, 984 girls and boys studied there (Rodrigue, 1991). The girl's education in the Alliance schools was considered critical owing to its plausible and potential influence on the next generations: the main cause was to shape the Jewish woman so that after several years of Alliance education, she would be able to pass on the same values to her children (Karkason, 2016). Already in 1867, Isaac Mitrani accused the Ottoman Jewish men of illiteracy among Jewish women in the Empire. According to Mitrani, the Maskilim of the Jewish communities should put an end to illiteracy and educate the girls as well as the boys. If all humans are equal in front of God, there is no

[13] For more on the Francos see: Minna Rozen, *In the Mediterranean Routes: The Jewish-Spanish Diaspora from the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv: Publications of the Chair for the History and Culture of the Jews of Salonika and Greece, Tel Aviv University Press, 1993; Rodrigue, *French Jews – Turkish Jews*.

reason why the girls should be discriminated against (quoted in Karkason, 2016, p. 116).[14]

*Journalism and Female Emancipation*

This idea of providing a modern education as part of a new cultural process was well expressed in *El Komersial,* the Ladino journal of the cultural elite of Izmir and in which progressive ideals were discussed to their fullest extent. As such, *El Komersial* devoted considerable space to the expression of feminist ideas. One idea was expressed in an article entitled "Respektemos la mujer" (Respecting the Woman), written under the pseudonym of *El Feminista* (The Feminist). Importantly, feminism in the Middle East was not expressed by women only. For example, the Turkish author Ahmad Mithat Efendi who attacked forced marriage, concubinage, and polygamy as "social ills," wrote about such subjects in his novels. Furthermore, Qasim Amin, the Egyptian judge and author of the influential *The Liberation of Women* in 1899, who was regarded by many as the "father of Arab feminism" and whose publications exceeded Arab countries, expressed emancipatory ideas regarding women (Fleischmann, 1999). The same happened within the Jewish society as expressed in *El Komersial*; although feminism was expressed by the writer's support of providing women with modern education, this is only nascent feminism.

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| Mujer ke defendes el avenir de la famiya, de las jenerasiones a venir! Kual es el rolo de la mujer?... No es la mujer ke persigue la noble i santa mision de bien elevar la famiya? | A woman who guards the family's future and the next generations! What is the woman's function? Is it not a noble and holy mission to raise the family well? Is not the future of humanity in her hands? |

[14] Mitrani was indeed the pioneer of Jewish education for girls in the Ottoman Balkan.

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| No es entre sus manos ke konfian el avenir de la umanidad?... Es eya ke tiene por mandado de preparar nobles sivdadinos, umanos, ombres en el bivo senso de la palavra… Es eya ke se enkarga de inkulkar a los chikos… las ideas sanas, los prensipios de la buena edukasion…i de las nobles kualidades. Ke rolo mas importante ke este? Ke mas noble misyon ke akea de la mujer? Okupemos nos dunke de preparar nuestras ijas en este senso… Lavoremos de manera a ke la mujer, apenas devinida madre, posee las kualidades i konosensias nesesitozas a la misyon ke eya es destinada a inchir…[15] | ... She is the one who needs to educate the children well, she is the one who needs to make them loyal, noble citizens, men in the full meaning of the word ... Let us make sure that the woman, once she has become a mother, will have the attributes and understandings needed for the task she is destined to fulfil… |

These words, coming from a man (*El* Feminista), express the first stages of ideas about the emancipation of women. The woman needs to free herself from her former status and to be educated as part of the process of cultural feminism as described earlier, but her underlying task remains the same: to be a good mother and a successful wife. Her mission would be fulfilled more successfully if only she were to obtain a modern

[15] *El Komersial*, April 22, 1907, pp.4-14, 10-22. All translations, unless indicated differently, are mine. I would like to thank Dr. Rivka Havassy, who graciously checked the translations for accuracy.

education. It, thus, appears that even if Jewish-Turkish male society accepts the attitude that women should be better educated, the basis for this attitude is the interest of the husband and children. Nevertheless, whatever the purpose of providing modern education was, education is what brought Jewish women out of their houses and into the working environment. The inclusion of Jewish women in this modernization process enabled the dissemination of the Alliance's ideals to the larger community. Without female education, it seems unlikely that these ideals could have taken root among Izmir Jewry (Rodrigue & Benbassa, 2003).

Another issue common to the two groups of women, Jewish and non-Jewish, is women's contribution to journalism. By the end of the 1890s, the readership in the Ottoman Empire had become broader and included a new audience: women and girls educated in Alliance (and other) schools. The openness toward more diverse journalism was a result of a change in the leisure pursuits of and for women. Yet, until the beginning of the twentieth century, most journals and newspapers were written and read by a limited number of elite women in Turkey (Maggid, 2019). Indeed, we did not find a purely women's newspaper in the Izmir community, one written exclusively by and for women. However, the women of Izmir did take an active part in general written journalism. Thus, for example, we found a writer named Lucie who brought to print common proverbs regarding women in the society in which they lived order to prove their inferiority. She gives as an example the sentence "kien mujer tiene – pelea tiene" (whoever has a woman – has a fight). Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the very participation of women in journalistic writing in Izmir is a sign of progress, regardless of the context of their writings. The existence of this phenomenon is even more critical when we note that the religious influence over Jewish society in Izmir was stronger than in any other community in the Empire, thanks to rabbis such as Haim

Palacci[16] and Eliyahu HaCohen HaItamari. The evidence of highly progressive feminist ideas, which were expressed not only by women but also by men, highlights the importance of journalism as the arena where such subversive ideas were mostly extensively expressed.

In an article signed again by the male writer "The Feminist," we find the following comment: "De la mujer dependen nuestro bien estar, nuestra ventura, i komo tal kale a todo presio fasilitarle su mision…"[17] (Our good condition is dependent on the woman… as such, we should make her task easier at any price…). The writer later notes: "eya es ovligada de armarse de lo menesterozo i de premunirse del bagaje de instruksion i edukasion ke la permetera de inchir kon siguridad el rolo edukador ke la sosiedad la asenio…"[18] (she must be equipped with appropriate weapons, and to give her education so she could certainly complete the educational task that society gave her...). These utterances, particularly considering that they were made by men, show that international feminist ideas were affecting Jewish society in Izmir. Importantly, this writer declares elsewhere that "the woman cannot do her job properly without change from men,"[19] implying that even men had undertaken to support local women.

[16] Haim Palacci (1788–1868) was an Ottoman- Jewish chief rabbi of Izmir. The greatest sage in Izmir in the 19th century - the most dominant, charismatic, and prolific among the rabbis. He was renowned for his strict administration of rabbinical affairs in addition to his excellence in the Torah. He was also accepted by the Ottoman authorities. He authored approximately a hundred books, and nearly seventy were printed. He served in this position until his death and was succeeded by his son Abraham Palacci. Eliyahu ben Rabbi Abraham Shlomo HaCohen (1659 (?) – 1729) Known as "HaItamari," he lived in Izmir until his death and a sought-after and influential preacher. He also studied Kabbalah. He authored dozens of books and approximatelyy twenty of them were printed, most of them after his death. His book *Shevet Musar* has been translated into Ladino and Yiddish and has enjoyed great popularity since its publication to the present day (Makovetsky-Bornstein, 2009).

[17] *El Komersial*, 20 June 1907, p.7-18.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

In another article advocating the participation of girls in the theatre, we discover a more radical expression of feminist ideas than seen hitherto. The female actors faced additional obstacles as women because their mere presence on stage outraged Orthodox citizens. Even after the Jewish communities had become less traditional, and plays would even take place during the Sabbath, the female actors' names would still be mentioned in the program by their initials only. Yet, women as women not only appeared as actors; their world was also a subject of some of the performances. After the *Dame aux Camellias* performance in Izmir, a writer of *El Komersial* commented that some young girls in love make a "one minute mistake" due to being sensitive and noble, but afterward, society shuts the door in their faces and denounces them for the rest of their lives—although some other women commit greater sins which society is willing to accept.[20] The writer not only discusses the world of women and society's approach toward it, but also calls for more tolerance to be expressed toward "sins" young girls commit while in love with a man.

Some authors also pushed for more intensive participation of women in the theatre:

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| Porke nuestros padres permiten tan difisilmente a sus ijas de partisipar a una reprezentasion al profit de alguna ovra de bienfezensia?...un otro punto ainda a konsiderar es el kontakto ke las ijas deven tener kon los mansevos. Es bien natural ke una piesa no se puede ensenyar de un punto i es menester de azer muchas | Why won't fathers permit their daughters to take part in a play benefiting the needy?…another issue that must be considered is the relationship that the girls must create with the boys. It is only natural that one can't put on a show just like that, without any rehearsal, and therefore it is a necessity for the girls to |

[20] *El Komersial*, December 20, 1907, pp. 7-44.

repetisyones, en las kualas las aktrisas son forsadamente ser en kontakto kon los aktores. No Podemos admeter ainda ke una ija avle o se entretenga mas longo tiempo kon un ijo…nozotros afeamos la ija (porke???) mientres ke no topamos nada a dizir del ijo. Es ayi ainda una bizareria de los buenos viejos tiempos ke kontinuamos a guadrar. Nozotros kreemos ke la vertud de una ija konsiste en el efasamiento i en el no avlar mucho kon los ijos… Es este estado de kozas, ke azen ke las uniones de sentimientos son tan raras en nuestra sivdad… Porke? porke los enteresados no tienen el tiempo de konosersen, de penetrarsen mutualmente. Eyos son ya atados por las kadenas del dezpozorio ke muchos preferan sufrir mas ke brizarlas. Es ya ora ke demos un poko mas de libertad a nuestras ijas. Es konsiderarlas komo no konosiendo sus dover, en kreendo ke kon la libertad eyas kedaran de ser virtuozas, inkulkimos les el dover ke les enkombeen la vida, lo ke nozotros esperamos de eyas, i yo esto seguro ke kon el instinkto ke gia el sekso ermozo eyas savran mantenersen a la altur de sus dover. En mi

come in some contact with the male actors…we cannot fathom a girl speaking or being in the same room with a boy for a long while…we always blame the girls (why???), while we can't think of anything to say to the boy. It is very odd, but this fact originates from ancient, better times we insist on preserving. We believe the girls' honour can survive only when she does not see or speak to boys…and that is also why a marriage of love is quite rare in our city…Why is that? Because the couple is not given an opportunity to get to know one another and bond. They are tied by the chains of the engagement which they would rather bear than rise against. It is time we allow our daughters more freedom. By trusting they remain respectable, we give them the need to create changes in their lives, and I am certain that they will know how to keep their virtue. Objectively, I feel I should add that it is time we understood that a female actor is nothing to be shocked of…the Catholics and the Greeks allow their girls to appear on stage, and so should we. Not because

imparsialidad yo devo tambien adjuntar… no ay en esto nada ke pueda shokarnos i es ya ora ke nozotros lo entendamos… Los Katolikos i Gregos permeten fasilmente a sus ijos i ijas a tomar parte en una reprezentasion. Permetamos a nuestras ijas i ijos a suvir sovre la shena, no porke los otros lo azen, ma lo repito, porke la koza es noble i no merese ningun deskredito.[21]

they do it, but because it is noble and absolutely not demeaning.]

The writer calls upon the readers not to look at the actresses performing in the play as "cheap." On the contrary, he claims that the theatre, a relatively new phenomenon in Jewish society, is a cultural institution and that more girls should perform, even if it means not keeping a strict physical distance between boys and girls. The writer states that moral-religious inhibitions are a primitive issue and that it is now accepted for women to take part in plays just as men do. Not only does this columnist call for dismantling the boundaries between boys and girls and for a gender-equal society, he also denigrates what was, until then, an unbreakable rule. For instance, a very strict response to women's performance was published in *El Nacional* in 1874 in Istanbul. A campaign for the establishment of a girls' school in Izmir that was supposed to include girls' performances angered the executive committee of the community, which decided that no girl would participate in the performance and that whoever did so would be excommunicated (Romero, the year). Moreover, as if that were not enough, the

[21] *El Komersial*, May 2, 1907, pp. 3,4-11.

columnist also indirectly preaches in favor of adopting the new social order prevalent in the modern world, in direct contradiction to Orthodox Jewish traditions.

*Folk sayings and women's emancipation*

If folk sayings represent the worldview and social attitudes of the general public, then the women's emancipation emanating from the folk sayings prevalent in the Sephardic society of the Ottoman Empire seems a bit different. As was common in the Muslim world, many proverbs emphasize the negative sides of women, their inferior status, their submissiveness and obedience, and the fact that they ostensibly are owned by their father or husband and subject to his authority. From a variety of folk sayings taken from the day-to-day life of the Sephardic family in the Ottoman Empire, we can learn what men thought of women. Some of the folk sayings praise women, such as "todo depende de la mujer" (everything depends on the woman) (Alkalai, 1984), or "El ke a la mujer siente, nunka se arepiente" (He who listens to his wife's advice, will never regret it). Another category includes the following types of sayings: "La mujer buena tiene su reynado detras de la puerta" (a good woman keeps her majesty behind the door) in a sense of "a woman's beauty is internal"; "Mujer sin criatura es arvole sin fruto" (a woman without a child is like a fruitless tree); and "Madre yugoza kita ijas nikocheras" (A diligent mother nurtures daughters to be housewives) (Alkalai, 1984). The former group of folk sayings reflects a positive perception of women. The latter may include an element of approval, but only when women are regarded in the familial context. More precisely, if a woman is diligent and raises the next generation of housewives, if she stays inside her house or raises children, then she is praiseworthy. When she "dares" exceed her domestic boundaries, she is considered a "dangerous" woman who fails to fulfill her primal destiny, meet her husband's wishes, and attend to the home. Some of the sages of the period saw women in precisely this way, and as the modernization

processes accelerated, the rabbis' opposition became stronger.[22] The rabbis, as well as conservative Jews in Izmir, particularly opposed the presence of women on theatre stages, which they regarded as an imitation of the non-Jewish surroundings and a threat to the purity of Jewish life (Aviv, 2002).

In *Yossef et Eḥav,* the book of laws and sermons written by Rabbi Yosef Palacci (1815–1896), the son of the famous Ottoman Rabbi Ḥaim Palacci, the negative stigma of women receives another expression. In his interpretation of the "woman of valor" from the Book of Proverbs, he writes, "... after he praised her deeds and her way of speaking that is not like other chattering women who speak of non-important things, but her mouth she opened in wisdom and Torah which are the laws relating to women (Palacci, 1886)." This implies that a woman usually blabbers and deals with nonsensical matters, and only a woman who is defined as a "woman of valor" is unique because she speaks words of holiness and charity. Similarly, while interpreting the deed of Jael and her murder of Sisera, Rabbi Abraham Palacci[23] notes that a woman is fit only if she fulfills her husband's wishes: "There is no fit woman, but a woman who fulfills her husband's wishes...(Palacci, 1888)." Despite the negative picture regarding woman's status in and outside her family deriving from the common concept that the Halakhah overtly places the woman/wife in an inferior position and that the woman almost always was under

[22] On Jewish ethical sources in the Sephardic communities see: Tina Rivlin, "Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) Ethic and Rabbinical Literature during the Westernization of the Bulgarian Sephardic Communities: A Generic and Thematic Study on *Las Madres Judias de la Epoca Biblica* by Rabbi Dr. Zemmach Rabiner (Istanbul 1913)", PhD dissertation, Bar Ilan University, 2011.

[23] Abraham Palacci (1809 or 1810–1898) was a chief rabbi of Smyrna (Izmir). He was the son of grand rabbi Haim Palachi and brother of grand rabbi Rahamim Nissim Palacci and rabbi Joseph Palacci. Upon the death of his father in 1868, Palacci was appointed a grand rabbi of Izmir, a position he held for thirty years until his death in 1898. Twenty books by Palacci remain in print; other writings burned in a great fire in Izmir. For more on Rabbi Palacci see: Dina Danon, The Jews of Ottoman Izmir: A Modern History (California: Stanford University Press, 2021), pp.137-139, 160-161, 166.

the aegis of men, especially under Muslim rule as in the Ottoman Empire, Yaron Ben-Naeh asserts that this conception is a mistake. According to him, there were parallel hierarchies, with each partner having a different set of rights and obligations. Moreover, under certain circumstances, older women could take priority in household and family affairs and even turn to the rabbinical or the Sharia court to assert their rights. Furthermore, Jewish women in the Ottoman Empire owned assets and property and had the ability to earn a living independently (Ben-Naeh, 2017).

In an attempt to resolve the contradiction, we can argue that the Izmir community, like other Jewish communities in the Ottoman Empire, had the ability to adjust to the changes of the period, on the one hand, whereas on the other hand, this adjustment reflected the attempts made by the rabbis to adhere to old traditions (Lamdan, 2005). More precisely, this conflict—which prevailed until modernization took over the communities in Izmir and elsewhere—was reflected through women's status more than in any other sphere of life. Of this contradiction, according to which women in Izmir were treated with a positive, progressive, and even a feminist attitude, while simultaneously being the objects of uncomplimentary labels, it could be said that feminist ideas existed in the Izmir community, as they were expressed mostly through journalism. However, these ideas, at least in the period this article is concerned with, were the purview of the upper-middle class, whereas the lower-middle class remained traditional.

The writer who called himself "The Feminist" notes that he takes examples from the surrounding society, but that Jewish feminist ideas are not general feminism; a meaningful difference stems from the struggle of the two groups of women. Jewish women did not mean to start a revolution against Jewish perceptions in Izmir and other places but wanted to stay within it. Thus, they could afford to enlist the principles of

the general feminist movement and improve their status, with the latter's help, in the Jewish community (Rafael, 2000).

*Conclusions*

The emancipation of Jewish women in Izmir was expressed in several ways. We must begin by emphasizing that this emancipation had no national context, as was usually the case in the surrounding non-Jewish society. This was purely cultural feminism, focusing on such issues as women's entrance to schools, and later their work as teachers, at least during the period discussed by this article. The Jewish women of Izmir played an active part in charity organizations, but not, as far as we know, in political organizations during this period. Second, women's emancipation, or feminism, was expressed by freedom of speech on "feminine" topics or through declarations praising women and their right to modern education, especially in newspapers. In this context, this article showed that men also cooperated and supported women's education, even if this was only intended to enable them to be better mothers and educators. In contrast, the rabbinical establishment, however, continued with the traditional approach according to which a woman's place is at home.

Despite some similarities, as mentioned above, it seems that Jewish feminism was not an established and directed process as it was in the surrounding society. Jewish feminism adopted more than one idea of progress and called for equal modern education for women but ended at the same point from which it started. Furthermore, in contrast to the surrounding communities, Jewish women in Izmir (as in Greece) did not seek to create a revolution against Jewish tradition and society, but to remain within it. To this end, they "adopted" the principles of international female emancipation, but only in order to raise their own status within Jewish society (Rafael, 2000). Even the men who wrote in favor of women's emancipation and expressed feminist ideas signed

not with their names, but with a nickname. Following Meriwether and Tucker's thesis of two "old" research categories (Meriwether & Tucker, 1999), more radical voices, which called for equality, were few and solitary and were incompatible with the elite of the Izmir Jewish population. It is hard to argue that feminist ideas trickled down to the various strata of the Jewish population, and even if they did, they were not assimilated among the lower-middle class, which remained mostly traditional.

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