

Gender, Families and
Transmission in the
Contemporary
Jewish Context

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Edited by

Martine Gross, Sophie Nizard
and Yann Scioldo-Zurcher

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vii
Biographies.....	viii
Preface	xii
Chantal Bordes-Benayoun	
Introduction: Gender, Families and Transmission in Contemporary Jewish Contexts	1
Martine Gross and Sophie Nizard	
I- The Rearrangements of Gender Relations in Contemporary Jewish Worlds	
Thinking about Current Jewish Dilemmas: Assimilation, Solidarity, and Transmission - A Gender Perspective.....	14
Nelly Las	
Concealed Parental Involvement: Haredi Fatherhood	25
Dvora Wagner	
The Transmission of Sexual Mores, Norms of Procreation and Gender Expectations through Pre-Marital Counselling (<i>Hadrakhat</i> <i>Hatanim/Kallot</i>).....	38
Naomi Marmon-Grumet	
II- The Legal, Ethical and Religious Aspects of Changes connected to the Life Cycle: Marriage and Divorce, Procreation and End-of-Life	
Reforming Jewish Divorce: French Rabbis and Civil Divorce at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (1884-1907).....	50
Géraldine Gudefin	

Oocyte Donation, Surrogate Mother and the Gender Issue: Bioethics and <i>Halakha</i>	62
Liliane Vana	
Israel: Modern Transformation of Traditional Jewish Law Principles on End of Life.....	74
Ruth Levush	
III- The Transformations of the Family and the Couple, the Multiplication of Family Models and Reshuffling of Norms	
Transmitting the Nation: Family Individualization and Religion in Israel ...	90
Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui	
The History of <i>Beit Haverim</i>	102
Martine Gross	
Applying for Adoption: How are Jewish Families Perceived?.....	113
Sophie Nizard	
IV- Identities, Transmission and Memory as Stakes in the Continuity of Judaism	
Being a Jew of Muslim Descent, a Problematic Identity.....	124
Joëlle Allouche-Benayoun	
European Expectations, American Realities: The Emigration of Jewish Children from Occupied France to the United States, 1941-42.....	143
Laura Hobson Faure	
Circumcision? Yes, but...! The Study of “ <i>Bricolage</i> ” in Modern Judaism from a Psycho-Analytical Perspective.....	158
Muriel Katz	
Postface	170
Yann Scioldo-Zürcher	
Lexique.....	175

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Martine Gross, Sophie Nizard, Yann Scioldo-Zürcher
Paris/Jerusalem

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PREFACE

CHANTAL BORDES-BENAYOUN*

As in many cultures, in the Jewish world the family is the central pillar and transmitter of faithfulness to Judaism, its values and its history. Yet it is also within the family that the transformation of models, social behavior, and attitudes plays out with the greatest intensity. While in this, Judaism is no different from the broad changes common to society, it differs from others by the influence that the family institution has gained in Jewish history in a context of dispersion often marked by persecution. The family was often the seat of pressing resistance against the risk of destruction. The Jewish family unit can rarely be reduced to the nuclear family, a concept criticized today. The family played a role both in religious practice (rituals, the respective roles of men and women in daily life and the calendar, performing rites of passage from birth to death, relations between generations, etc.) as well as in its social role in diaspora societies, as a sort of bulwark against the threat of diluting identity and a refuge against external hostility. Finally, the family also provided a space for adapting to the standards of the majority culture.

It was therefore logical that the International Research Group Socio-anthropology of Judaism at the CNRS (GDRI-SAJ) placed current issues of kinship in its broadest sense, in the Diaspora and Israel, on its research agenda. Since Levi-Strauss, scholars have known the importance of kinship in regulating social interaction within the group and outside it. This anthropological question *par excellence* is fundamental in a world where the ways of identifying with one's 'origins' have become increasingly complex and reinvent themselves, where advances in science have opened up new ways to become a parent, and where geographical and virtual mobility has created new forms of collective affiliation by

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introducing distance and diversity within families, religious communities, and nations, which had traditionally been relatively stable groups.

In the spirit of the SAJ project, we must first consider Judaism in its multiplicity - hence the plural title - and the dynamics of its transformations. The issues at stake are important. Throughout history, identification as a Jew has been stable, constant, and faithful to tradition, but that does not mean it was unchanging. It was precisely the capacity for renewal, innovation and adaptation that enabled 'Jewishness' to continue to exist over the long-term. The multiple expressions of Jewishness, in all domains - religious, liturgical, linguistic, and cultural - is primarily the result of history: the diaspora caused an extraordinary diversification of the Jewish world. Moreover, the advent of modernity, by individualizing life in society, helped push Jewishness even further out of the only collective framework that was reserved for it, and whose most significant expression was the ghetto¹. From being an imposed condition, Jewishness has become almost optional and henceforth subject to individuals' desire to define their own relationship to Jewish identity, and at the same time their relationships to others in general².

Scholars have only begun to analyse the implications of these changes for kinship. Indeed, it is within the family that identities are redefined, religious norms and practices reorganized, and their degree of transmission to future generations worked out. In this respect, the Jewish world is not immune to significant developments that have affected family models in the West. The place of each person, regardless of filiation, gender, sexual orientation and choices about conjugality and parenting, has been subject to redefinition and to debate about legitimacy both within Judaism as well as outside it. The demands for women's rights is one of the strongest signs of this trend. While women now have access to rabbinical ordination and the knowledge of sacred texts equal to men, the tendencies of a return to strict orthodoxy are also making themselves heard. In this area, there is considerable tension.

Another subject of tension and regulation in the family is the social distance between Jews and non-Jews, seen through the two fundamental issues of exogamy and conversion. Whether referring to statistical facts (the number of exogamous unions have continued to grow in recent decades in Europe and North America) or symbolic value, the arrival of an

¹ This was the theme of an international conference organized by SAJ and the University of Ca'Foscari of Venice in March 2016: "(Re) Constructing the Ghetto: Minority and Ethnic Quarters in Texts and Images," whose proceedings are being prepared for publication.

² See the special issue, *Judaïsmes. Parcours dans la modernité*, directed by Chantal Bordes-Benayoun, *Diasporas, Circulations, migrations, histoire*, N°27, 2016.

‘other’ in families, through marriage, conversion, or adoption of a child, shakes up the ways of identifying with Judaism by transforming a space of predefined membership into a space of identity renegotiation. The plurality of Judaism is thus even greater—families themselves become plural and heterogeneous, revealing a multifaceted Judaism.

The effects of the diaspora are also making themselves felt in the family. The migratory movements of the second half of the twentieth century, after the Holocaust, the creation of the State of Israel, decolonization, and the fall of the Berlin Wall, and those of the early twenty-first century, resulted not only in the geographic dispersion of the Jews, but also in family ‘diasporization’. Families have sometimes become ‘miniature diasporas,’ living on different continents, speaking different languages, and living in different social and cultural experiences. This familial multiculturalism did not always weaken the bonds between its members, nor can it be situated on the side of tradition, nor on the side of modernity³. Yet it does help us to broaden the scope of a socio-anthropology of kinship, which specialists have called for.

No project could better match the purpose of the SAJ network. Bringing together social science researchers from a dozen institutions in six countries (Canada, USA, France, Israel, Italy, and Switzerland), this project analyses contemporary Jewishness within the constant dialectic between faithfulness to Jewish tradition and culture and adherence to the values of modernity and democracy. This project is evidently comparative and highlights the contrasting experiences of societies in the Diaspora and in Israeli society—societies that are different yet sometimes very close because of tensions around religious and identity boundaries. The scholarly approach of the network is deliberately sociological and anthropological, in that we seek to shed light on the social and religious community bonds being woven today between those who claim their Jewish identity and their contemporaries who do not, both Jews and non-Jews. This project is a way to revisit the relationship to the ‘other’ and the conditions for an ‘alliance’ among people, a notion dear to Judaism and on which this book sheds new light.

Translation by Sylvia Johnson.

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³ See in particular the work of Jean-Hugues Dechaux, *La parenté dans les sociétés occidentales modernes: un éclairage structural, Recherches et Prévisions*, 53-63, n° 72, 2003.

INTRODUCTION:
GENDER, FAMILIES AND TRANSMISSION
IN CONTEMPORARY JEWISH CONTEXTS

MARTINE GROSS AND SOPHIE NIZARD*

For over thirty years, social science research on Judaism has highlighted the fact that a multiplicity of contemporary Jewish worlds exists (Bordes-Benayoun, 2015). The international research group *Socio-anthropologie des judaïsmes* (SAJ) has allowed scholars working in this field to meet and give visibility to their work around a few broad themes¹. These themes shed some light on what Jewish identities can mean in a setting with uncertain borders, marked by globalization, individualization and secularization,

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Doctor Sophie Nizard is a researcher in sociology and anthropology of Judaism at the CéSor (Center for Social Research on Religion – Paris, EHESS/CNRS). She works in the field of Jewish identity and the transmission of Jewish memories in contemporary Judaism. Her interests include the study of food practices in the Jewish tradition (symbolical, ritual, economic, political aspects of *kosher* food), the study of contemporary religious rituals and practices, and an anthropology of adoptive kinship in Jewish families. She published many articles on those subjects and a monograph: *Adopter et transmettre. Filiations adoptives dans le judaïsme contemporain*. Éditions de l’EHESS, Col. En temps & lieux, 2012. (Adopting and Transmitting. Adoptive filiation in Contemporary Judaism).

¹ Since the creation of the GDRI SAJ (in 2013), the issues and methods of a Socio-Anthropology of Judaisms have been the subject of collective brain-storming and certain themes have come to the fore, each one becoming the main topic of a yearly international conference.

caught between the temptation to retreat into one's identity and the loss of references to Jewish tradition.

This volume is a sequel to the symposium held in Jerusalem in June 2015, organized by the SAJ members Martine Gross, Florence Heymann, Sophie Nizard and Yann Scioldo-Zürcher, by Cyril Aslanov with the support of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, and with the support of the CRFJ (*Centre de Recherche français à Jérusalem*), on the theme "Gender, families and transmission in contemporary Jewish contexts".

Since the end of the 1970s, the transformations of the family and of gender relations have gained momentum and led to a serious "rift" (Segalen, 2006). The so-called "traditional" family – married couples with children raised by non-working mothers – *i.e.* the family model that was prevalent after WW2 in people's representations even more than in their ways of life (Dechaux, 2007), is in a state of collapse. The institution of marriage is no longer the only way to enter family life, and blended families, as a result of separation or divorce – what Irène Théry calls "*démariage*" ("demarrying") (Théry, 1993) – have multiplied.

At the same time, changes in women's condition, especially with the generalization of female employment, new means of contraception and the legalization of abortion (Rochefort & Zancarini-Fournel, 2012), have considerably altered gender relations in the working world, the public domain and, to a lesser extent, in the sphere of family life.

Due to these evolutions, and to the rise of claims by same-sex couples to the right to found a family, due also to the more frequent use of medically assisted procreation or adoption in cases of infertility, conjugal and family models must therefore now be considered in all their diversity and spoken about in the plural form.

Married couples today exist side by side with people simply cohabiting (*concubines*) or with couples in other forms of partnership (the *PACS*, or civil contract of solidarity in France); families consisting of "a father, a mother, children" coexist alongside single-parent, same-sex, and blended families.

These socio-demographic and cultural changes have considerably modified the "parenting condition" (Martin, 2015). Although work-sharing in the home has not changed very much², the trend for fathers to partake in child-care is growing (Castelain-Meunier, 2006). A new definition of fatherhood is surfacing, making room for an idealized relationship which was lacking in the previous model, where the father was principally a

² On these questions, see for the French case, the latest surveys of the National French Statistics Institute (INSEE, *Institut national français de statistiques*) http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/document.asp?reg_id=0&id=3600.

breadwinner. Contemporary ways of living together and parenting question society's definitions of how to be a parent, of the family, of descent, and in the end of one's own continuity. That is why transmission is at the core of contemporary concerns.

But despite all the changes, surveys show that the family and marriage remain widespread social values. The family is still vested with the mission to socialize the children, to transmit values, names and property.

In France, the recent polemics over same-sex marriage revealed the antagonism of the main religious authorities, who defend a naturalistic conception of the difference between the sexes (Gross, Mathieu, & Nizard, 2011).

As to Jewish tradition, it has long developed normative models of parenting and of women's place in the family and society. Systems of family and gender normativity have durably influenced the traditional Jewish universe, but the norms and the institutions that embody them are today shaky. Individualization – the essence of modernity – is at work in the Jewish world as elsewhere, and new identities are emerging, giving way to phenomena of *teshuvá*^{3,4} (Podselver, 2010) the return to religious Orthodox observances or conversely, leading some Orthodox Jews to break with their religious practices or their families (Heymann, 2015). New family arrangements also intrude (Barack Fishman, 2014). Mixed unions (Allouche-Benayoun, 2008; Mathieu, 2009) and conversions (Tank-Storper, 2007, 2013; Scioldo-Zürcher & Cohen, 2012) are shaping the Judaism of today (Schnapper, Bordes-Benayoun, & Raphael, 2009).

Even in the most orthodox milieus, the advent of an individualistic and relational conception of the family has led to reorganizing gender relations. Feminism is echoed in the demands of Jewish women concerning the religious institutions, the possibility to access the texts and their role in the public and religious arenas (Bebe, 2001; De Gasquet, 2011; Las, 2011, 2013; Lipsyc, 2008; Vana, 2008a, 2008b). The religious norms themselves are challenged by the changes in the laws in affairs of divorce, same-sex unions (Gross, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2011, 2015) and inheritance (Nizard, 2012; Sartori & Guberman, 2014). Also, rabbinic Judaism is confronted by unprecedented questions in affairs of bioethics (Hashiloni-Dolev, 2006): the headway being made in genetics – prenatal quest for genetic compatibility or pathologies, pre-implant diagnoses – medically assisted procreation (Kahn, 2000) – *in vitro* fertilization,

³ We have harmonized the spelling of Hebrew words by choosing the one used by most authors in this book.

⁴ Generally rendered by “repentance” or “atonement” [translator's note].

donation of gametes or embryos – surrogate motherhood (Jotkowitz, 2011; Teman, 2010), and the preoccupation with end-of-life situations.

This volume aims to account for what all these challenges signify socially, religiously and culturally, to grasp how in this context, norms are rewoven and the transmission of Jewish identities and perpetuation of Judaism in all its dimensions are thought out (Nizard, 2015).

As a way of reacting to these developments, the various currents of religious Judaism have developed a range of contradictory strategies, from duplicating the existing, normative discourse (even to making it more radical) to accompanying the social and cultural changes under foot (Gross *et al.*, 2011). Renewing the reading of texts, practices and rituals, reconsidering the values appear to some unavoidable – the prerequisites for their transmission to take place (Dalsace, 2012, 2013; Horvilleur, 2015; Krygier, 1999).

Multiplying the ways of belonging to and identifying with Judaism contributes to bring about change; the borders of the group begin to fluctuate (Bordes-Benayoun, 2015). Collective memory – one of the dimensions of identity – allows connecting Jews to a “we” that espouses a temporality linking past, present and future. It is nurtured as much inside the families as by the institutions and has become the object of reconstructions after the tragic, historical upheavals: the Shoah, the exile of Jews from Arab countries, Communism in Eastern Europe. Memory has become a crucial stake in the transmission to the younger generations.

This book seeks to analyse, on the one hand, the transformations under way in gender relations and family models in the Jewish worlds of today and how they affect the sense of identity and continuity and, on the other hand, how religious, ethical, and legal norms are woven and rewoven in order to accommodate those transformations – or to keep them at arm’s length. The contributions tackle these phenomena in different – though tightly interconnected – locations: Israel (where the legal, political and religious factors are more intricately intertwined than anywhere else) as well as the diaspora, where these factors vary depending on the history, the demography and the relationships that Jews establish in their countries of residence.

Four major themes structure the four parts of the book:

- I- The rearrangements of gender relations in contemporary Jewish worlds
- II- The legal, ethical and religious aspects of changes connected to the life cycle: marriage and divorce, procreation and end-of-life.

III-The transformations of the family and the couple, the multiplication of family models and reshuffling of norms.

IV-Identities, transmission and memory as stakes in the continuity of Judaism.

The first part is devoted to the rearrangements of gender relations in three different fields. In her article, Nelly Las considers the second wave of feminism that took off in the United States in the 1970s, and how from then on, women explored the impact of gender on their multiple identities. A significant number of Jewish women started questioning their place as women in Judaism, as well as within the wider society. It gave birth to a sort of mixture of Jewishness and feminism, called currently, “Jewish feminism”. Many women declared that their feminist commitment has played a central role in their lives and has made them rediscover their Jewish identity. One of the interesting questions raised by this paper is the extent to which Jewish feminists have succeeded in transmitting their feminism and their Jewish identity. In other words, is “Jewish feminism” still a relevant issue, or is it a phenomenon bound up with a specific historical context, and hence an outdated concept? How does the new generation relate to gender relations, ethnic identities, religious and cultural traditions?

Exploiting a qualitative survey she conducted among ultra-orthodox families (*haredi*) in Israel, Dvora Wagner analyses the rearrangements of gender relations that have taken place over the past twenty years in those milieus. She notes that many *haredi* men have become active and essential in performing parental and domestic chores. Haredi men’s embrace of domestic roles normally performed by women has changed the *haredi* narrative, introducing a discourse of feminism and modern psychology into many *haredi* families’ consciousness and practices.

Again in Israel, Naomi Marmon Grumet studies the transmission of sexual mores, norms of procreation and gender expectations. She reminds us that in traditional Jewish society, norms and expectation regarding intimacy and sexuality, as well as gendered expectations in the family realm, were passed on from parent to child, in part through transmission of the rules of ritual bath (*mikveh*). Since *mikveh* immersion was incumbent upon women, they were often taught the laws (often called the laws of family purity) in greater detail than men. Thus, there was a gendered emphasis on women’s responsibility. Interestingly, transmission of knowledge was largely by women to women, despite having a strong Jewish legal (*halakhic*) component. In the last 50 years, a new norm has developed. Fewer and fewer individuals are taught by their parents, and

the transmission of these laws, as well as expectations within the realm of sexuality and couplehood, has been transformed into a pseudo-profession – premarital counselling (*hadrakhat kallot*). Additionally, there is a growing trend for men to also go through a learning process, calling upon a male counsellor (*madrikh hatanim*) to instruct them.

This qualitative research paper explores these trends in a small sample of the modern Orthodox community– both the substance of what is transmitted in *hadrakhat hatanim/kallot*, as well as the development of *hadrakhat hatanim*. The author wonders what gender messages are given about roles in the intimate realm and in marriage, as well as whether these norms have changed over the last generation. How are men’s responsibilities in these areas related to in the *hadrakhat kallot*? Likewise, is the impetus for *hadrakhat hatanim* an egalitarian view of marriage that sees both partners as equally responsible for the realms of sexuality and procreation, or an attempt to disempower women in the *halakhic* realm? Are sexual mores addressed explicitly in these classes or implied by the laws of *mikveh*? How are questions of birth control dealt with? And are men and women taught the same things, or is the emphasis in these sessions different?

The legal, ethical and religious dimensions of the different stages in the life cycle are presented in the second part of the book.

In her paper, Geraldine Gudelin investigates how the reintroduction of civil divorce in 1884, immigration from Eastern Europe, and the separation of church and state in France shaped the rabbinical proposals about the *get* (Jewish divorce). The longstanding controversy over the reform of Jewish divorce demonstrates the extent to which changes in French divorce law led to a far-reaching reexamination of the relationship between French and Jewish laws at the turn of the twentieth century.

Concerning the start of life, the new possibilities provided by medically assisted procreation have unleashed an endless debate over the conundrum of deciding who are the father and mother of a child: those who contributed the gametes or those who first embarked upon a project to become parents? (Porquieres, 2009).

In her paper, Liliane Vana tackles the donation of oocytes and surrogate mothers from the point of view of religious law (*halakha*) and bioethics. Depending on whether it is based on sperm or oocyte donation, Jewish law broaches medically assisted procreation (MAP) differently. When defining the child’s status, the identity of the biological father or mother and the religious rights and obligations of each, each method implies significant legal consequences. The author analyses the new laws that govern oocyte donation and MAP by examining the legal foundations

that allow defining the identity of the “*halakhic* mother”. For MAP medical techniques mean that one, two or even three women have participated in the procreation “process”. Liliane Vana thus explores the means by which the *halakha* manages to handle the multiplicity of family models obtaining in our society and the place attributed to the “traditional model” in this new landscape.

Questions pertaining to end-of-life also enter into bioethical thinking. Ruth Levush gives us insights into the Israeli laws that prevail in end-of-life situations and their connections to Judaic norms. Her text bears on the legal evolutions concerning terminally ill patients in Israel. She studies how, to meet the challenge of medical progress that makes it possible to prolong human life, Israel has been obliged to adapt its legal system in order to preserve both its democratic and its Jewish nature. In fact, Jewish law seems to prohibit any act that might curtail a person’s life, but at the same time it does not oblige physicians to prolong life artificially if doing so increases the person’s suffering. How does Jewish law cope with the sacred nature of life, the principle of personal autonomy and the importance of the quality of life? To answer these questions, the author presents the solution offered by Law 5766-2005 concerning terminally ill patients, adopted by the Knesset in December 2005, and its social consequences.

The third part of the book is dedicated to the transformations of the family and the multiplication of family models. Despite the process of individualization within the family, Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui notes that in Israel, institutionalized religious mechanisms provide traditional guidelines in order to produce normative families in terms of marriage, divorce, and children’s status. She further offers a tentative explanation for the institutionalization of religious family law in Israel and shows that what it is mainly about is transmitting the idea of nation.

In her article, Martine Gross studies the multiplication of family models from the point of view of homosexual French Jews. Taking off from the history of a gay and lesbian group, *Beit Haverim*, she shows how Jewish institutions in France have moved from “grossly ignoring” simply the possibility of a double identity – Jewish *and* homosexual – to gradually accepting *Beit Haverim* as an interlocutor. But she also tells the story of the growing awareness among rabbis and the organized community that a compound reality actually exists.

Sophie Nizard takes up the question of the multiplication of family models by examining the case of children adopted by Jewish families in France. She analyses how Jewish families wishing to adopt are perceived by social workers or the physicians employed by the French institutions or

agencies in charge of adoption. As soon as it is known that the project to become parents goes along with the will to transmit a Jewish identity to children “from abroad” these perceptions are frequently negative, which can jeopardize the entire adoption process for these families.

Lastly, the fourth part of the book concentrates on questions of identity and memory as being the factors on which the continuity of Judaism in European and American contexts depends.

Joëlle Allouche-Benayoun investigates the “problematic identity” of Muslims having converted to Judaism in France. In her article, the cases of conversion are based on two sorts of sources: testimony in the digital Jewish press (the internet), studying conversion files, and interviews carried out with Muslim men and women who converted or are in the process of converting to Judaism.

In the presently taut context of Judeo-Muslim relations, converted men and women stand by their choice in the name of what they call their “ideological proximity” to Judaism – or to Jews – but they also express their rejection of, or their intention to keep away from, “Islamic excesses”.

The problem of the memory of the Shoah is taken up by Laura Hobson Faure from the point of view of its impact on family reconfigurations. She analyses from a historical standpoint the way that Jewish children who migrated without their parents to the United States from Occupied Europe during World War II have received relatively little scholarly attention. Her paper focuses on one group of Jewish children (primarily from Austria and Germany) who experienced multiple migratory experiences: first in France as the wards of the *Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants* (OSE), and then in the United States, where they lived in foster care. Using a corpus of children’s writings and correspondence, this paper questions how multiple experiences of migration in extreme circumstances, in which children were separated from their birth families and then cared for in collective homes and then foster care, reconfigured Jewish families. Was the nuclear family model replaced by a collective familial model, as exemplified in the OSE children homes? If so, how did young child migrants experience their dispersion in foster-care in the US? To what extent did gender influence attitudes on and processes of family reconfiguration? Exploring how family was reconfigured among these children sheds light on an understudied phenomenon: the genesis of Holocaust survivor networks in the United States. Exploring how these children coped with losing their birth families and recreated new bonds during the Holocaust allows Laura Hobson Faure to contribute to the larger debate on the reconfiguration of the Jewish family after World War II and in the contemporary period.

Lastly, the circumcision ritual gives Muriel Katz the opportunity to study the psychological processes at work in contemporary “bricolages”. As a ritual act accompanied by words, circumcision aims to introduce the baby both into the family group and the community. But, like many other commandments governing traditional Jewish life, the birth ritual is today often subjected to a complex tinkering (“*bricolage*”) apparently, a compromise between loyalty to the ancestral, cultural heritage transmitted and the desire to integrate a national community. In mixed couples, these affiliation procedures are made even more complex by the parents’ double cultural heritage. Identity markers such as circumcision and given names therefore become the subject of an original mixing process aimed at acknowledging both lineages. Based on a body of interviews with Jewish persons living as mixed couples, the author highlights the main intra- and inter-psychological processes underlying such bricolages and what is at stake in terms of the continuity of Judaism.

Finally, by calling upon various disciplines of the humanities and the social sciences and carefully inspecting the concrete fieldwork carried out in Israel as well as the diaspora, the volume allows us to see the transformations ongoing in matters of gender, family and transmission in the Judaism of today. Our hypothesis is that taking the reshufflings and their subsequent diversity into account is one of the main conditions for continuity to exist.

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**THE REARRANGEMENTS OF GENDER
RELATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY
JEWISH WORLDS**

THINKING ABOUT CURRENT JEWISH DILEMMAS: ASSIMILATION, SOLIDARITY, AND TRANSMISSION - A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

NELLY LAS*

The issue of gender difference has been addressed in a number of contemporary philosophical texts. It is sometimes seen as a pivotal element in all thought, as well as the background to, and source of, all conceivable differences. This would make the masculine / feminine opposition the archetype of all differences. These controversial positions show that it is an existential issue, of interest to feminist studies as well as philosophical, sociological, and theological general disciplines¹.

One of our specific questions is to what extent the diverse theories regarding sexual difference (universalism², “differentialism”³ or post-

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¹ Among the French philosophers who have addressed this subject, see: Levinas, E. (1999). *Le temps et l'autre*. Praha-Liberec: Dauphin. Foucault, M. (vol. 1, 1976, Vol. 2 and 3, 1964). *Histoire de la sexualité*. Paris: Gallimard. Derrida, J. (1969). *L'Écriture et la différence*. Paris: Le Seuil. Bourdieu, P. (1998). *La domination masculine*. Paris: Le Seuil. Irigaray, L. (1984). *Éthique de la différence sexuelle*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit. Badinter, E. (1986). *L'Un est l'Autre. Des relations entre hommes et femmes*. Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob. Héritier, F. (1986). *Masculin / Féminin. La pensée de la différence*. Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 1996.

² The “universalist” feminist approach is based on the declaration that the difference between men and women is simply a power relationship: the specific nature of women is a social construct to justify their subordination as sex objects or

feminism⁴) can serve us as a tool of analysis for other forms of ethnic or cultural differences, as for example the “Jewish difference” (Itzkowitz, 1997: 184). We find also frequent analogies between hatred linked to sexual identities and other kinds of segregation: between misogyny, homophobia, and racism or antisemitism. Some historical concepts and questions are currently used for Jews as well as for women, such as otherness, emancipation, the question of their nature or essence, their millenary oppression, the quotation marks placed on the terms “Jew” (Lyotard, 1990: 2-3 ; Badiou, 2005: 23-26), and the term “woman” (Butler, 1992), or regarding the concept of “the feminine”, in its metaphoric sense: linguistically, it seems derived from the concrete women; but philosophically, some will argue that this notion has nothing to do with real women (Levinas, 1969: 157-58). However, the qualities attributed to this “feminine” are reminiscent of an essentialist stigmatization of the female gender: vulnerability, receptivity, empathy (not so far from the notion of “passivity”). Another example is expressed by some of Simone de Beauvoir's critics: the woman described in her famous essay *The Second Sex*, seems to be inspired by Sartre's definition of the Jew, in his essay *Anti-Semite and Jew* (Sartre, 1946: 42). Like the Sartrean Jew, the Beauvoir's woman has no appropriate identity. They are both defined with regard to something else: the women vs. male values

as mothers. So, the differences between the sexes must be neutralized as far as possible in order to achieve equality. One of the questions addressed by some Jewish feminist activists is whether “being Jewish,” like “being a woman,” is a choice or a given? In feminism, the issue of the “innate” and the “acquired” is central, especially since Simone de Beauvoir's famous assertion: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”.

³ The “differentialist” (or “naturalist”) approach – replies that to be equal does not mean to be identical. There are two distinct sexes with their specific qualities, which do not mean that they are unequal. In order to go beyond masculine domination, it is not necessary to eliminate all differences between the sexes, to become like men. This approach is favorable to the term “identity” and the concept of “Jewish identity” is sometimes even appreciated (Irigaray, 1984; Fouque, 2015).

⁴ The post-feminist approach rejects the gender binarism, which is inevitably hierarchical: no difference between the sexes but “in-difference”. It was adopted first in America by the *queer theory* and imported to France recently. Influenced by S. de Beauvoir, Judith Butler went further in sexual deconstruction; in other words: we are not born a woman, and we don't necessarily become one. On the general level, this trend is against any “identity based thinking”. In the era of globalization, identities are fluid, hybrid, without boundaries. The consequence is the “blurring of the frontiers” between sexual identities, as between cultural and religious identities (Butler, 1990).

and the Jews are defined by antisemites (“Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew), (Sartre, 1946: 42).

However, this does not mean that we intend to equate here the issue of the difference between the sexes and that of Jewish difference. It is clear that being Jewish is not of the same order as being a woman. “Jewish” involves cultural, religious and genealogical dimensions, and also a sense of belonging to a community, and more generally to a people. In contrast, the concept of “woman,” with its biological bias, is not necessarily governed by bonds of loyalty and faithfulness vis-à-vis the female gender in general. The women, who are divided into diverse ethnic and religious groups, do not have a common tradition, a founding “Bible”. When they are oppressed, it is “one by one”; in their home, their work, or in the street. This is the reason why it was so difficult to mobilize them as a collective of women. Sisterhood or solidarity between women – “the community of women” – was introduced by the feminist movement of the 1970s, and it did not take long for its limits to become clear⁵. So the analysis will be totally different for Jews than for women.

What can be compared, however, is the way in which people refer to identities. We can find common ground between ways of thinking about sexual identity, misogyny, homosexuality, homophobia, and modes of analyzing Jewish identity, and more specifically judeophobia and antisemitism. What are the Jewish questions which we intend to analyze through the gender theories quoted above?

Assimilation, Jewish difference and visibility

Jewish “difference” or “non-difference” is related to the notion of otherness, real or fictitious: the Jew as the “other”, as a main source of antisemitism. Some blame the Jews for their separatism; others fear the erasing of this difference and the difficulty of identifying them as Jews.

This is the main distinction between antisemitism and racism: in general, the hate of foreigners recedes with the disappearance of difference. In the case of antisemitism, we know that it sometimes increases with the assimilation of the Jew. Invisibility engenders fantasy, and an abstract image of the Jew. At diverse periods there have been different attempts to emphasize the Jew's visibility.

Well before the Nazis required Jews to wear the yellow star in order to identify them, there were many instances of attempts to mark the Jews

⁵ The expression “Sisterhood is Powerful” became the title of the first American feminist anthology, edited by radical feminist Robin Morgan (1970).