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“‘Youth in Maccabi.’ Negotiating Greek Jewishness in Zionist Youth Male Associations, 1922-1940”

Zionism was a major political and cultural force in the Sephardic Jewish communities of the late Ottoman Empire and its successor states. A latecomer, with a feeble presence in the first decade of the twentieth century, it established itself as a major force after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, further expanding as well as diversifying during the post-Ottoman and interwar periods.¹ Historians have noted its symbiotic relationship with the imperial ideology of Ottomanism, a feature distinguishing Sephardic from European Zionism and its focus on establishing a Jewish national home in Ottoman Palestine. Sephardic Zionism advocated Hebrew cultural revival and defense of Jewish communal rights, but only as part of an Ottoman imperial polity, thus animating plural social and political identities.²

¹ On Zionism and Jewish communal life in the Ottoman Empire see Esther Benbassa, « Presse d'Istanbul et de Salonique au service du sionisme (1908-1914) », *Revue Historique* 560 (1986): 337-365 ; Esther Benbassa, “Zionism in the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century,” *Studies in Zionism* 11/2 (1990): 127-140; Esther Benbassa, “Associational strategies in Ottoman Jewish society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,” in Avigdor Levy (ed.), *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, Princeton 1994, - 484; Esther Benbassa, “Zionism and the politics of coalition in the Ottoman Jewish communities in the early twentieth century,” in Aron Rodrigue (ed.), *Ottoman and Turkish Jewry: community and leadership*, Bloomington 1992, 225-251; Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews. The Alliance Israelite Universelle and the politics of Jewish schooling in Turkey*, Bloomington 1990, Chapter 6. On Zionism in Ottoman and post-Ottoman Salonica, see more specifically Rena Molho, “The Zionist movement in Thessaloniki, 1899-1919,” in I.K. Hassiotis (ed.), *The Jewish communities of Southeastern Europe*, Thessaloniki 1997, 327-350; Minna Rozen, *The last Ottoman century and beyond. The Jews in Turkey and the Balkans, 1808-1945*, Jerusalem 2005, Chapter 7; Maria Vassilikou, *Politics of the Jewish Community of Salonika in the Inter-war Years: Party Ideologies and Party Competition*, Unpublished PhD dissertation, University College London 1999; “Le Sionisme à Salonique,” report of Sam Yoel (19.08.1919), Archives of the Alliance Israelite Universelle, Archives Grèce I G 3; Nehama (Salonica) to Alliance (Paris) (19.05.1916), Archives of the AIU, Archives Grèce I G 3.

² Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Making Jews modern: The Yiddish and Ladino press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires*, Bloomington 2004; Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans. Sephardi Jews and imperial citizenship*, Oxford 2014, Chapter 4; Esther Benbassa & Aron Rodrigue, *The Jews of the Balkans: the Judeo-Spanish community, 15th to 20th centuries*, London 1995; Michelle Campos, “Between ‘Beloved Ottomania’ and ‘The Land of Israel:’ the struggle over Ottomanism and Zionism among Palestine’s Sephardi Jews, 1908-1913,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37 (2005), 461-483.



By contrast, historians exploring Sephardic Zionism in the post-imperial environments of successor states like Greece have treated Zionism as a major political force of opposition against the assimilationist politics of a nationalizing state turning Zionism into a metonymy for the strained relations between Jews and Greeks and for the development of an embattled, self-contained and ultimately defensive Jewish identity.³

However, such a contrast in the treatment of Ottoman and post-Ottoman Zionism becomes less sharp if one shifts away from viewing Zionism as a political discourse within the context of state-minority relations and pays greater attention to the complex social worlds within which it operated and the cultures of sociality it sustained. A focus on the extensive associational culture Zionism nurtured allows for a view of the movement as a means of productive engagement with Greek national culture, of negotiating the place of Jews in the broader Greek society while reconfiguring Jewish identity itself.

Following Greek expansion to Ottoman European lands after the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, around 100,000 Jews found themselves reconsidering their future place within a homogenous Christian nation state. Nowhere did this self-reflection take more dramatic proportions than in the treatment of the youth. Standing for the fate of Judaism at large, Jewish youth became a social question, a contested group claimed by the different forces vying to determine the place of the Jews in Greece.⁴

³ Vassilikou, *Politics of the Jewish Community of Salonika*; Katherine E. Fleming, *Greece. A Jewish history*, Princeton 2008; Mark Mazower, *Salonica, city of ghosts. Christians, Muslims and Jews 1430-1950*, London 2004, Chapter 21; Kallis, “The Jewish Community of Salonica under Siege;”; Rozen, *The last Ottoman century and beyond*; George Th. Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn republic: Social coalitions and Party strategies in Greece, 1922-1936*, Berkeley 1983; Bernard Pierron, *Εβραίοι και Χριστιανοί στη νεότερη Ελλάδα. Ιστορία των διακοινοτικών σχέσεων από το 1821 ως το 1945*, Παρίσι 1996, Athens 2004, Chapter 7; Δημοσθένης Δώδος, *Οι Εβραίοι της Θεσσαλονίκης στις εκλογές του ελληνικού κράτους, 1915-1936*, Athens 2005.

⁴ Μαρία Βασιλικού, “Η εκπαίδευση των Εβραίων της Θεσσαλονίκης στο Μεσοπόλεμο,” in Εταιρεία Σπουδών Νεοελληνικού Πολιτισμού και Γενικής Παιδείας (ed.), *Ο Ελληνικός Εβραϊσμός*, Athens 1999, 129-147; Anastassios Anastassiadis, « À quoi servent les langues aux enfants? Elèves juifs et apprentissage des langues dans les écoles de Thessalonique durant les années 1922-1932 », in Jérôme Bocquet (ed.), *L’enseignement français en Méditerranée. Les missionnaires et l’Alliance israélite universelle*, Rennes 2010, 239-262.



As elsewhere, youth was also at the core of the Greek Zionists' thinking and action.⁵ It sustained their vision of a reinvigorated Jewish nation and generated the establishment of a multitude of youth associations in the center of Judaism in Greece, Salonica, home to 70,000 Jews and the focus of my paper⁶. However, the official discourses about the youth, the associational practices of youth sports and cultural associations and the understandings of the young Zionists themselves were not congruent and uni-dimensional leading to the formation of singular Jewish identities. Rather, as I will argue, the divergence between official discourses and associational practices gave rise to what can be called 'post-cosmopolitan identities', which although different from those Zionism had crafted in the late Ottoman period, were still similarly plural, an attempt to forge a modern Sephardic Jewish identity as part of a broader Greek polity.

Official discourses: the cultural logic of Zionist youth associations

Notwithstanding internal divisions Salonican Zionists shared a common understanding of Jewish youth and the urgency of its reshaping. Borrowing heavily from the dominant western Zionist discourse they attributed Jewish physical frailty and moral decadence to the Jews' diasporic condition, urban life and inordinate concentration on non-manual occupations. Jewish national survival was linked to individual physical and moral regeneration turning the young, muscular male body into a key symbol in local Zionist discourse. Numerous publications stressed the physical and moral importance of sports and gymnastics and a number of youth and athletic associations were established to inculcate a proper Jewish identity in the younger generation.⁷

⁵ The bibliography on Zionism and youth is already sizeable. Among the most important monographs, see Israel Oppenheim, *The struggle of Jewish youth for productivization: the Zionist youth movement in Poland*, Boulder 1989.

⁶ The most important Zionist youth associations or associations for the youth in interwar Salonica were the 'Maccabi' sports club and boys' scouts (est. 1908), the sports club 'Akoah' (1925), the literary clubs 'Theodore Herzl' (1924) and 'Max Nordau' (1924), the 'Association des Jeunes Juifs' (1923), Betar, the youth sections of the 'Misrahi' (1924), and 'Tikvat Israel' (1937). Statutes of Jewish associations, Archive of the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki, Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.

⁷ On Zionist bodily discourses see Todd Samuel Presner, "'Clear Heads, Solid Stomachs, and Hard Muscles': Max Nordau and the Aesthetics of Jewish Regeneration", *Modernism/Modernity* 10/2 (2003): 269-296; George L. Mosse, "Max Nordau, Liberalism and the New Jew," *Journal of Contemporary History* 27/4 (1992): 565-581.



Promoting national rejuvenation was further informed by more particularistic concerns. To begin with, Salonican Zionists had internalized the orientalist Ashkenazi discourse of Sephardic backwardness and cultural inferiority.⁸ Elevating the youth would secure an equal place for the Sephardim in the broader Jewish nation⁹. More importantly, Zionist associations would impede ‘assimilation’, a threat associated not with hellenization alone but also with Salonica’s numerous foreign schools.¹⁰ In the fluid period of transition from empire to nation-state, these schools constituted a graver danger than the still unsystematic nationalizing policies of the Greek state. An anti-imperialist undercurrent informed perceptions of an ‘endangered Jewish youth’ as Sephardic Zionists operated within an Eastern Mediterranean world still determined by European cultural imperialism as much as the nation-state.

Political anxieties also mattered. Like their Greek Christian peers, Zionists espoused the anti-communist discourse of the day viewing communism as an anti-Jewish, morally corrupt ideology rapidly expanding among the poverty-stricken young Jewish proletarians. Such fears translated into an intense associational activity among lower-class youth and turned sports, music and Hebrew-language learning into means of promoting social coherence and moral order as much as strengthening Jewishness.¹¹ Finally, the Zionists were attuned to a pan-European concern with modern youth mass cultures tying the café and the club to physical, intellectual and moral degradation and offering instead sports, music and immersion into tradition as a remedy¹². A multi-layered sense of cultural despair thus legitimized Zionist intervention, shaped associational initiatives, and endowed Zionist youth sociality itself with normative meanings.

On local Salonican discourses stressing physical strength and the importance of physical exercise, “Los djidyos e la zimmastika”, *El Makabeo* (1913), 12-13; “El movimyento zimmastikal djidyos komo faktor de renasensya nasyonala en el galut”, *El Makabeo* (1914), 14-15; “El rolo de las Makabis”, *El Makabeo* (1931), 2-5.

⁸ Daniel J. Schroeter, “From Sephardi to Oriental: The ‘decline’ theory of Jewish civilization in the Middle East and North Africa,” in Richard Cohen and Jeremy Cohen (eds.), *The Jewish contribution to civilization: reassessing an idea*, Oxford 2007, 125-148.

⁹ « La prima konferensya dela gioventud Mizrahista de Grecia », *El Djidio* (1928), 10.

¹⁰ « Los sionistas e las eskolas », *La Renasensia Judia*, 4.2.1927.

¹¹ D. Kalapothakis, director, the Thessaloniki Press Bureau, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (29.05.1930), in Photini Konstantopoulou and Thanos Veremis, *Documents on the history of the Greek Jews* (Athens 1998), p. 159. « Aktivida dela organizayon Mizrahi de Saloniko en el 5686 », *El Djidio* (1927), 15-28.

¹² « La moral del skautismo », *El Makabeo* (1920), 36-37.

Practical Zionism: Zionist associational life

Viewing youth as both a problem and a salvation to the Jewish question, official Zionist discourse treated sports clubs and cultural associations as instrumental in forging a distinct, respectable, Jewish and Sephardic identity. However, a closer look at ‘practical Zionism,’¹³ the formalized rituals *and* informal practices of associational life, reveals a public sociality endowed with different meanings. While Zionist societies sustained a distinctly Jewish youth culture, they were also spaces of inter-religious encounters, an important medium for young Jews to negotiate their place within the broader urban and Greek national culture.

Zionist youth associations expanded and politicized Jewish associational life. Reflecting Zionism’s egalitarian ethos, youth clubs sprang in Jewish working-class suburbs introducing marginalized youngsters to associational life.¹⁴ Zionist sociality questioned class boundaries, but it also worked through them. Zionist youth associations were not class-bound but they were class-specific. While suburban associations catered specifically for the lower strata,¹⁵ others, such as the ‘Association des Jeunes Juifs’, were places of strictly middle-class socialization.

Lending libraries, reading sessions, Hebrew language instruction, singing classes, music making and lectures about the Jewish past and present, as well as annual accounts of activities and literary and propagandistic publications were an integral component of every youth society materializing Zionism’s intention to transform Jewish selfhood in its entirety.¹⁶ A dense program of events organized the members’ sense of community. Zionist youth societies collaborated closely and participated regularly in each other’s events. The Maccabi boy scouts performed gymnastic shows in Zionist bazars¹⁷ and the Misrahi youth run the collection

¹³ Anat Helman, *Young Tel Aviv. A tale of two cities*, Waltham 2010.

¹⁴ Nehama (Salonica) to Alliance (Paris) (19.05.1916 and 19.11.1909), Archives of the AIU, Archives Grèce I G 3.

¹⁵ « Aktivita de la organizasyon ‘Mizrahi’ de Grecia en el 5687 », *El Djidio* (1928), 28-34 ; « Al torno dela quinta koferensya de los sionistas de Grecia. El lavoro en los foburgos », *La Renasensia Djudia*, 22.4.1927, 4 where the need to act in the working-class neighbourhoods is emphasized.

¹⁶ See indicatively “La ovra dela societa Makabi en 5674”, *El Makabeo* (1915), 33-35.

¹⁷ Thus in 1925, the Maccabi boy scouts participated in the bazaar of the Association des Jeunes Juifs “Efimerides delos drores Makabi”, *El Djidio* (1926), 41.



drives of the Jewish National Fund,¹⁸ while the Maccabi brass band animated the congresses and meetings of the Zionist Federation of Greece.¹⁹ Similarly, the Association des Jeunes Juifs was active in communal politics engaging with the Zionist party's electoral campaign. A dense and multi-layered associational network was thus established sustaining a sense of belonging to a greater and yet tangible collectivity.

The regularity of open and closed meetings, the celebration of major Jewish religious holidays in the associations' venues²⁰ and the introduction of new temporal points of reference, chief among them the commemoration of the Balfour Declaration and Herzl's birthday²¹ re-signified time and colored it as Jewish anew.²² So did the memorialization of the Jewish past. Institutional labels, such as the Maccabi Sports Club or the 'Joseph Trumpeldor' library of the Association des Jeunes Juifs, honored a pantheon of ancient and modern national heroes. Local Zionists were also monumentalized. In 1926, the Maccabi honored its founder, the gymnast Aaron Pardo, naming its soccer team after him.²³ New temporal understandings thus followed a dialectical logic. They attuned local Jewish time to a homogenous Zionist calendar, but they also claimed a place for local identities in the transnational Zionist culture. Either way, Zionist youth associations promoted a new, modern and secular, sense of time for local Jewry at a period when older, religious markers of Jewish time in Salonica, such as the Saturday rest, were challenged due to secularization and the nationalizing state's systematic attempt to establish a Greek time in the city through national celebrations and the introduction of a mandatory Sunday rest.²⁴

¹⁸ « Aktivida dela organizayon Mizrahi de Saloniko en el 5686 », *El Djidio* (1927), 22.

¹⁹ « La fête nationale du 2 Novembre à Salonique. Importante manifestation Juive à la Tour Blanche », *Pro Israel* 33 (18.11.1918), 5.

²⁰ « La ovra dela societa Makabi en 5674 », *El Makabeo* (1915), 33.

²¹ « Le Sionisme à Salonique », Report of Sam Yoel for the AIU (19.08.1919), Archives AIU, Archives Grèce, I G 3. « La ovra de la Makabi en el 5676 », *El Makabeo* (1917), p. 22.

²² On Zionist treatment of religious holidays, see François Guesnet, "Chanukah and its function in the invention of a Jewish-heroic tradition in early Zionism, 1880-1900," in Michael Berkowitz (ed.), *Nationalism, Zionism and ethnic mobilization of the Jews in 1900 and beyond*, Leiden 2004, 227-246.

²³ « Efimerides delos drores Makabi », *El Makabeo* (1927), 48.

²⁴ As Yoel again remarked, « La Fédération a organisé tous les ans des manifestations importantes dans des établissements publics. Les manifestations sont ou périodiques ou improvisées. Le Yom Achekel, le Yom Aivri (fête de l'hébreu), Hanouka, le jour anniversaire de la naissance de Theodore Hertzl, le deuil de Tich ha Beav reviennent tous les ans », *Ibid.* On the debate around the compulsory Sunday rest see Pierron, *Εβραίοι και Χριστιανοί στη νεότερη Ελλάδα*, 187-193.



The creation of a Zionist-Jewish sense of ‘counter-time’ was accompanied by new spatial practices. For the members of the Zionist youth and sports associations, the club venue, the track field, the football ground, and no less the regular excursions to the countryside established new uses of space and novel spatial referents²⁵. In the interwar years an older Jewish urban topography was fading away due to the devastating effects of the 1917 fire which resulted to the destruction of most synagogues, the uprooting of lower-class Jews from the burnt city center, its subsequent rebuilding as a showcase of a Greek Salonica, and the continuing incursions into the vast Jewish cemetery.²⁶ During this period of growing Jewish invisibility, youth Zionist associations played a key role in redefining the contours of Jewish space. The open concerts of the Maccabi brass band and the parades of the young Maccabeans in the main streets of the city when returning from excursions or when welcoming eminent Zionist leaders were means of reclaiming Salonica as a Jewish space not only due to its past but also its present and most crucially its future.²⁷ Greek fascist attacks in the Maccabi offices in 1931²⁸ similarly show how for Greek Christians as well, it was the visibility of the Maccabi and more broadly of the Zionist youth that was increasingly defining an assertive Jewish presence in the modernizing city. Vocal and visible, the young Maccabean increasingly stood for the community at large.

The practical Zionism of youth associations was therefore instrumental in the reemergence of a Jewish public sphere within a Hellenizing and modernizing Salonica. Did Zionist sociality thus nurture a “Jewish subculture, (to follow David Sorkin), that is, an introspect, purely Jewish associational world separate from the broader Greek public culture, whose forms of sociality, social norms and cultural values it replicated?”²⁹ After all, while Jewish and Greek youth associations were animated by similar cultural anxieties and ideals,

²⁵ On such activities see among other mentions “La ekskursyon dela Max Nordau”, *La Renasensia Djudia*, 10.6.1927, 4; “Efimerides de los Droles-Makabi”, *El Makabeo* (1927), 59-63.

²⁶ See Mazower, *Salonica, city of ghosts*, Chapters 16, 18, 21, 22.

²⁷ “Diskorso de senyor Eli Franses a nombre delas societas Makabi e Teodor Herzl”, *El Makabeo* (1926), 29-31. On the visit of Zabolinski in Salonica, see “La grande demonstrasyon sportive dela Makabi en onor de sr. Zabolinski”, *La Renasensia Djudia*, 3.12.1926, 1.

²⁸ Kallis, “The Jewish community of Salonica under siege;” «Μετά την συνέχισιν των επεισοδίων με τους Μακαμπή», *Εφημερίς των Βαλκανίων*, 25.6.1931.

²⁹ David Sorkin, *The transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840*, Detroit 1999, chapter 5.



societies like the Derorim Maccabi were essentially Jewish renderings of the Greek Christian Boy Scout movement. Additionally, most Zionist youth publications were not in Greek, but in Judeo-Spanish, Salonican Jewry's mother tongue, and rarely if ever did they include references to Greece or Greco-Jewish relations. They sought to prepare the future citizens of a Jewish state in Eretz Israel rather than craft a way of being Jewish in the diaspora.³⁰ However, a turn away from normative Zionist discourse and a refocus on Zionist youth associational practices and individual lifestories indicates a productive engagement with the broader Greek national culture. While reshaping Jewishness, Zionist youth societies were also means to regulate interethnic encounters and negotiate the Jews' place in the local and national public domain.

Many statutes of Zionist associations did not limit their aim solely to the propagation of Zionist ideals or the cultivation and spread of Hebrew culture. Several, such as Maccabi's, stated a two-fold task –educating the Salonican youth to be good Jews *and* loyal Greek citizens³¹. Such declarations of intention followed a pan-European pattern of Zionist thinking about the place of Judaism in the diaspora.³² But they were also in tune with a civic version of Greek national identity espoused in principle (though admittedly less so in practice) by the Liberal Party, the dominant force in Greek interwar politics.³³ More indicatively, the life story of Josef Matalon, the president of Maccabi in the 1930s, reveals some further “Greek” aspects of Salonican Zionism. Matalon was a decorated officer of the Greek army who had fought in two wars against the Ottoman Empire.³⁴ His exposure to Greek nationalism and parallel

³⁰ See indicatively, “Una ovra fekonde. Los estudyantes djidyos salonikyotes en Palestina », *El Makabeo* (1915), 5-7.

³¹ Statute of the society Maccabi, Historical Archives of Macedonia, Archive of the Associations of Thessaloniki.

³² On Poland, Britain, France and Germany, see David Aberbach, “Zionist patriotism in Europe, 1897-1942: ambiguities in Jewish nationalism,” *The International History Review* 31/2 (2009): 268-298. On Czechoslovakia, Tatjana Lichtenstein, “Making Jews at home. Jewish nationalism in the Bohemian lands, 1918-1938,” Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Toronto 2009.

³³ On the Venizelist concept of the nation see Σπύρος Μαρκέτος, «Η ενσωμάτωση της σεφαραδικής Θεσσαλονίκης στην Ελλάδα: το πλαίσιο, 1912-1914», στο Εταιρεία Σπουδών Νεοελληνικού πολιτισμού και γενικής Παιδείας, *Ο Ελληνικός Εβραϊσμός*. Επιστημονικό Συμπόσιο 3-4 Απριλίου 1998, Athens 1999, 65-92.

³⁴ «Μνήμες για τους εκλεκτούς. Αβραάμ Σαλβατόρ Ματαλών», *Η Καθημερινή*, 14.12.1987; «Οι Βούλγαροι Μακαμπή δεν θα διέλθουν εκ Θεσσαλονίκης», *Μακεδονία*, 20.3.1932, 6; Ασέρ Μωυσής, «Η στρατιωτική ιστορία των Εβραίων της Ελλάδος», in Ασέρ Μωυσής, *Κληροδόστημα*, Athens 2012, 161-172.



Zionist activities indicate that Zionism was also an attempt to positively rethink Jewishness as a distinct but integral part of the Greek nation.

Several associational practices enacted such elaborations of a Greek and Jewish identity. Important gatherings of the Maccabi opened with the playing of the Jewish and Greek national anthems taught to the young Zionists by a Christian music instructor the society employed.³⁵ Outside the confines of the club's locale, groups of Maccabeans in khaki uniforms together with the brass band were a regular feature in the official public celebrations of Greek national holidays –the public face of a Jewish community part of the national polity.³⁶ Similarly, Jewish sports clubs participated regularly in the local championships, were often organizers of pan-Salonican athletic events themselves, and their athletes were regularly included in mixed teams representing the city elsewhere in Greece³⁷. In the mid-1930s Maccabi sprinter Leon Passy, a national and Balkan champion, became a popular icon standing for a reinvigorated Jewish virility as well as inclusion into the Greek nation.³⁸ Indeed, at times, the Jewish press even treated Zionist sports associations as bearers of Greek national honor: “The directors of the Maccabi”, the Jewish newspaper *Le Progres* advised in 1933, “must work hard to honor Greek colors in the upcoming Jewish Maccabiade in Tel-Aviv.”³⁹ Local encounters with Christian teams and participation in international Jewish athletic events helped promote the idea of a shared homeland, Salonica and Greece, making Zionist sports one of the chief means through which the younger Jewish generation negotiated its place into the urban and national culture.

The place of Zionist sociality in the lives of young Jews and the meanings they ascribed to it further indicate the emergence of a symbiotic perception of Greek and Jewish nationhood. Charles Molho remembers with pride how his “life was all sports” as he was a

³⁵ “Imposante manifestation sioniste », *Pro Israel* 10 (11.01.1918), 7; “La actividad delos Droles-Makabi en el 5687. Lavoro fecondo », *El Makabeo* (1928), 38.

³⁶ «Η εορτή του Βασιλέως. Πρόσκλησις προς τον λαόν Θεσσαλονίκης», *Μακεδονία*, 19.5.1921, 1; «Η εικοσαετηρίς της καταλήψεως της Θεσσαλονίκης», *Μακεδονία*, 27.10.1932, 3; «Ευχαριστήρια», *Μακεδονία*, 31.12.1929, 3.

³⁷ «Αι αμερικανικά παιδια εις τον αθλητισμόν. Το Μακεδονικόν ποδόσφαιρον και αι πρόοδοι του», *Μακεδονία*, 1.1.1930, 6; «Οι ποδηλατικοί», *Μακεδονία*, 15.5.1926, 2; «Οι Παμμακεδονικοί Αγώνες», *Μακεδονία*, 24.08.1925, 3; «Η χθεσινή έκθεσις των προσκόπων μας», *Μακεδονία*, 31.3.1930, 4.

³⁸ « La rencontre athletique interclubs de dimanche », *Le Progrès*, 22.5.1934.

³⁹ « A l'intention de la jeunesse sportive juive », *Le Progrès*, 29.08.1933.



member not only of the Betar, the Misrachi and the Maccabi athletic associations, but also of the YMCA where he enjoyed playing basketball and water polo and socializing mainly with non-Jews who “never singled me out.” “I was treated like everyone, like every Greek. You were a Greek,” he insisted.⁴⁰ Similarly, Leon Perahia, a scout and boxer of Maccabi, remembers how steeped he was in both “Greek history” and the Jewish “boy scout movement” and stresses how these two passions eventually gave birth to “an admiration for the Zionist leader Zabotinski.” “I say it and I am ashamed to be saying it,” he confessed, “I do not have the mentality of the pre-war Salonican Jew. I grew up with the Greeks (Ρῶμιούς) and I am thankful for having grown among them because it was they who made me understand that I have to be strong and take risks.”⁴¹ In the case of Leon Perahia, Zionism and Greek nationalism were not just compatible but actually mutually reinforcing working through a common, reprimanding critique of the effeminate and emasculated diasporic Jew to construct a strongly virile, self-assertive, and agonistic Greek Jewish identity.

Normative discourses constructed Jewish youth as a national and social problem and promoted Zionist sociality as a means for the physical and moral regeneration of Sephardic Judaism in the post-Ottoman world of the Eastern Mediterranean. Thus conceptualized, youth associational practices nevertheless generated additional significations of Zionist sociality. Indeed, sociality helps us understand how social practices work not only as repositories but also as generators of meaning. Zionist public culture redrew the boundaries of Jewishness and reconfigured its place as a publicly performed identity. However, these boundaries were porous, established in order to be traversed. In the Sephardic Mediterranean, practical Zionism responded to the dilemmas and predicaments of adjustment in a post-imperial world by following older Ottoman patterns of multiple allegiances, furthering what Michael Berkowitz has termed a ‘supplementary nationality’ – that is, a ‘double’ identity resting on the conviction that one could be both a good Jew and a loyal Greek.⁴² Zionism, (as

⁴⁰ Audiovisual testimony of Charles Molho, Shoah Foundation Institute’s Visual History Archive VHA 17796.

⁴¹ Erika Kounio-Amariglio and Alberto Nar, *Προφορικές μαρτυρίες Εβραίων της Θεσσαλονίκης για το Ολοκαύτωμα*, Thessaloniki 1998, 337-345.

⁴² Berkowitz, *Zionist culture and West European Jewry before the First World War*, xv.



experienced by its younger bearers rather than its ideologues), actually developed a fertile relation with Greek national culture furnishing a legitimate way of being an integrated Jew in Greece. Young Zionists were actually becoming Greek as they were becoming Jewish, developing a certain sense of Greekness which was in reality the flip side of a certain sense of Jewishness. National ideologies, it seems, can after all sometimes produce hybrid identities.