

Return-to-tradition radical Jewish women organization 'Beit-Yakov' in interwar Lithuania

ABSTRACT

With the establishment of the Lithuanian state in the interwar period, an accelerated secularization process took place among its Jewish residents. In this atmosphere, a 'Beit-Yakov' women's organization arose in Lithuania, intending to bring Jewish women back to religion by studying basic books in Judaism and applying these studies in their lives. Soon, 'Beit-Yakov' evolved into an active organization that instilled in its members a belief in their ability not only to establish their homes on the foundations of religion but also to change the direction of the development of the Lithuanian Jewry from secularization towards a return to tradition.

KEYWORDS Lithuanian Beit-Yakov organization; Beit-Yakov study associations; Lithuanian Jewry; Lithuanian Tiferet-Bachurim movement; secularization process; return to Jewish tradition

Background

The First World War brought about a decisive change in the lives of the Jews of the Kovna Province in the Russian Empire. They were accused of collaborating with the German enemy, and most of them were expelled from their homes by the Russian army.¹ The deported Jews were joined a few months later by many other Jews who fled the Vilna Province, either out of fear of the German army, which broke through the front and advanced eastward or from the threat of the riots of the retreating Russian army. Most of the deportees and refugees settled in the southeast of the Pale of Settlement; When this became possible, many even migrated to the Russian interior. In the cities of exile, they were exposed to an atmosphere that was quite different from the traditions they were used to in the towns of their origin. From the end of 1917, they also felt the horrors of the Whites-Reds war, and after the victory of the Reds – the negative Bolshevik policy towards Jewish tradition as well. The return of these Jews from exile to their towns and homes in the State of Lithuania, which arose on the ruins of the Russian Empire, was, therefore, accompanied by a significant change in the traditional way of life of many of them and the adoption of an atmosphere free from religion.²

The rapid secularization of the reviving Jewish town in Lithuania was accepted as an almost natural process in the atmosphere created by the Jewish national autonomy, which was founded in 1919 on distinctly secular foundations and in which the Rabbinical Association, the supreme Orthodox institution that represented the rabbinate and religion in the country, was only a junior and uninfluential body.³ The local Orthodox circles were helpless in the face of these powerful processes. However, not everyone accepted the change as a decree from heaven, and unofficial Orthodox forces that gradually arose in Lithuania tried to fight the processes of secularization and turn back the tide. The beginning was humble and came from individuals who took action and worked to create study frameworks designed to provide

traditional knowledge to young men who were far from religion. In fact, these individuals were not required to be overly creative but to renew an old and well-known institution in the Lithuanian town – ‘*Tiferet-Bachurim* Association,’ whose purpose for several decades was to teach basic Jewish subjects to hardworking young men. The action of those entrepreneurs found fertile ground. New such associations began to arise in Lithuanian towns, and several dozen local young men joined each one. In the evenings, and sometimes for the first time in their lives these young people heard lessons in the weekly Torah portion, rabbinical writings, religious law, and *Aggadah* [non-legalistic exegesis].⁴ Soon the individual local initiatives developed into an organized and regulated nationwide movement. This movement grew and expanded, and within a few years, it controlled more than a hundred associations – significant dimensions in the fabric of the Jewish movements in interwar Lithuania.⁵

This minor revolution took place in the male domain only; The women remained outside the sphere of interest of any Orthodox circles. However, the proven success of *Tiferet-Bachurim* began to encourage women to try and imitate the male activity. Indeed, Orthodox women also began to set up study groups throughout Lithuania, and soon, a new women’s organization arose, the ‘*Beit-Yakov*’ organization, intending to educate Jewish women to full observance of the religious commandments and deep religious- national consciousness.⁶

This article will present the stages of the development of the *Beit-Yakov* women’s organization in interwar Lithuania, the difficulties along its way, and its achievements. It will claim that the Jewish social reality in the interwar period motivated *Beit-Yakov* to move from a passive study organization to an active one, working for religion and tradition throughout Lithuania. It will also claim that the initiative and activity of the organization came almost only and deliberately from women, with a negligible active involvement or help of men.

Here, it is appropriate to state a caveat that the article’s conclusions are based primarily on *Beit-Yakov*’s journal and reports in an Orthodox weekly since I have not found external sources or internal correspondence so far. I believe that it is nonetheless correct to publish on the basis of these limited sources about this innovative organization; I tried to extract objective data from the existing material and use the writing of the organization’s members as carefully as possible. Additional research by others on the subject may confirm or refute some of my conclusions. However, if I managed to be precise, then it would be correct to state that if one defines the phenomenon of the new Orthodox male organization in interwar Lithuania as revolutionary, the equivalent organization of the women can be considered groundbreaking not only in the Orthodox aspect but also in the gender-feminine aspect as a whole.⁷

The initial steps

The idea that the Jewish woman should actively learn the basics of tradition and religion was not new.⁸ However, a significant implementation that suited especially Orthodox girls in Eastern Europe appeared only in the first decades of the twentieth century. The beginning was humble, in the form of several religious schools for girls;⁹ One of them was ‘*Bais-Yakov*,’ founded by Sarah Schenirer (1883–1935) in 1918 in Kraków. Later, Schenirer established a large chain of *Bais-Yakov* religious schools for Jewish girls throughout Poland; In 1929, the network already numbered about 150 schools with more than 16,000 female students.¹⁰ A similar educational activity was also carried out in Lithuania: The Orthodox organization ‘*Yavne*,’ founded in 1920, set up a network of religious elementary schools for boys and girls in many

towns as part of the Jewish national autonomy.¹¹ At the end of 1920, it also established the first religious gymnasium for girls in Telz (Telšiai), and two others founded in Kovna (Kaunas) in 1925 and Ponevezh (Panevėžys) in 1928.¹² The elementary schools of 'Yavne' and the secondary high schools provided their students with the required knowledge of tradition and education for appropriate religious and moral behavior.

Despite the extensive Orthodox education in Telz for both young men and women, there were still circles that felt that the lack of a sufficient Torah atmosphere in this town limited the influence of the 'Yavne' girls' gymnasium on its students. As a first step, they established a local study group for the gymnasium's graduates and for other women.¹³ Moreover, in the spirit of their concepts, in 1931, some gymnasium students organized themselves into an 'activists' group' – to conduct propaganda among the Telz women to observe tradition and religion. The students of the 'Yavne' pedagogical course for female teachers that operated that year in Telz also joined this group until they were the majority. However, the membership of young female gymnasium students prevented the possibility of official recognition by the authorities of the 'activists' group;' It could only operate in a non-official manner and was thus limited in the scope of its activities.¹⁴

In the same year, an activity in an identical spirit began in another place in Lithuania, in Shadeve (Šeduva). In this town, no gymnasium required or enabled activity like the one in Telz, so it seems that the sources of inspiration for this awakening in Shadeve stemmed from its male part – the local association of the Tiferet-Bachurim movement which was at its peak at the time.¹⁵

The beginning of Tiferet-Bachurim was in the last decade of the nineteenth century when alongside common traditional learning associations in the Lithuanian provinces of the Pale of Settlement, study associations began to be established for hard-working young laborers and small merchants; They were called *Tiferet-Bachurim*. There it was possible to learn the basics of Judaism such as the weekly Torah portion with commentaries, religious law, chapters of the Bible, Aggadah, and even Jewish history several times a week and sometimes every evening.¹⁶ These associations grew and multiplied, but with the outbreak of the First World War and the disruption of regular life, they stopped operating. After the war, Tiferet-Bachurim associations began to be re-established in Lithuania on the initiative of individuals. Their essential characteristics were similar to the ones of the associations before the war, and their target audience, hard-working young men, did not change.

The number of Tiferet-Bachurim associations grew slowly, and in 1927, 26 associations already operated throughout Lithuania, with about a thousand members aged 17 to 40 regardless of marital status. At the end of the year 1927, a new center gathered the existing Tiferet-Bachurim associations. Already in the first months of its existence, it founded 12 new associations with about 500 members – a membership increase of 50%.¹⁷ By uniting such a considerable number of associations under the center, it was already possible to discern a growing movement, the Tiferet-Bachurim movement.

In July 1928, the First Nationwide Conference of Tiferet-Bachurim convened in Kovna. One of the issues discussed was the movement's attitude to parties and politics. At the end of the discussions on this topic, a decision in principle was made unanimously – to stay away from any political and party ideology and to concentrate on the only goal: spreading knowledge of the Torah and Judaism among the young.¹⁸ Indeed, this goal was implemented by setting up new associations and strengthening existing ones, and already at the beginning of 1929, there

were 50 associations throughout Lithuania with about two thousand members.¹⁹ This rapid expansion convinced the center that ‘a rare phenomenon is happening here, and it is the return of young people to Judaism. Large groups of Jewish youth are waking up and organizing themselves in “Tiferet-Bachurim” to learn Torah and be educated in the spirit of Judaism.’²⁰ Because of this emerging reality, the center felt that the time came to consider expanding the goals of the movement beyond mere study.²¹ Indeed, the Second Nationwide Conference of Tiferet-Bachurim, convened in Kovna in June 1930, set out on a new course of establishing guidelines for the studies’ application in practical life. For the first time in the movement’s history, an official emphasis was placed on the observance of the commandments: the members were asked to learn every Sabbath the laws of this day and to see to the Sabbath observance in their associations. Furthermore, they were required to avoid shaving with a razor and were asked to use electric shavers.²² These revolutionary demands from members, many of whom did not know what Torah observance was and whose studies in the association were until then only theoretical in their view, were a clear expression of the movement’s transition to a more advanced stage in strengthening the traditional image of the Jewish youth. And if the first stage intended to provide them with basic knowledge of Judaism, the second stage was already about implementing the studies in their practical life. These two stages were a condition for the growth of young men imbued with the Torah and reverence for God.²³

Among those who were impressed by the new call to apply the studies in the practical life of the members was Mina Henkin (1891–1941), wife of the Shadeve’s rabbi, Mordechai-David Henkin (1884–1941).²⁴ In this town, the Tiferet-Bachurim association was founded in 1927; Soon it became one of the most active in the movement, and the center praised it with the words: ‘Your association is considered one of the best, both by its spiritual condition and the number of dedicated members and because of the discipline to the center’s instructions.’²⁵ Rabbi Henkin served as a teacher in this association and was involved in its activities. Due to his dedication and influence, the members were very devoted to the association and the studies in it.²⁶ His wife was well aware of what was going on in the Shadeve association in particular and in the Tiferet-Bachurim movement in general; Their extensive activity in those years made a strong impression on her. Thus the Second Nationwide Conference’s decision fell on fertile ground for Rebbetzin Henkin. It was, in her eyes, very suitable for women as well. Indeed, a year later, on 26 May 1931, she founded a study association in Shadeve, a parallel to the local Tiferet-Bachurim one, for women only.²⁷

The expansion of ‘Beit-Yakov’

Mina Henkin decided to turn to local women from the popular classes; They, in her opinion, set the atmosphere in the town, and, therefore, it was essential in her view to teach them Torah and tradition. Indeed, 18 local women joined her new association.²⁸ She organized the members into two groups according to age, and in these groups, they regularly studied basic books of Judaism – the weekly Torah portion, chapters of the Bible, and Jewish History. Apart from studies, talks and speeches were held in the association from time to time about all kinds of problems, and these aroused interest and attracted more women to join.²⁹

Mina Henkin was not content with the association she founded; She wanted to establish more similar to it, in order to spread the news of learning and returning to tradition among women all over Lithuania. She suggested to name these associations ‘Beit-Yakov’ [the house of Jacob]

– a name traditionally attributed to Jewish women³⁰ – to hint at their purpose: learning Torah and tradition for the women.

It was no coincidence that she chose a name already widely used in Poland in association with spreading Torah and tradition among women. Indeed, there was a big difference between the educational activity of Bais-Yakov in Poland, which concentrated on establishing schools for girls, and the activity conceived by Mina Henkin. In Lithuania, there was no need to set up religious schools for girls since 'Yavne' did this; Rebbetzin Henkin aspired to establish study groups for women only after high school age. Besides, the Polish Bais-Yakov activity was under the partisan guardianship of the local Orthodox 'Agudas-Yisroel,' while Henkin preferred avoiding political involvement. However, in choosing the familiar name, she wanted the general public to accept her academic-educational activity not as an attempt to establish a new institution but as an expansion of an existing, known, and valued Polish movement to Lithuania. With this choice, she thus hoped to arouse among Lithuanian women a greater willingness to join her initiative and establish similar associations in their towns in Lithuania.

Mina Henkin began to travel alone to the towns to encourage old and young women who had strayed from religion to return to tradition.³¹ To enable the realization of this call, she simultaneously appealed to Orthodox women in those towns to establish Beit-Yakov associations in their places, like the one she founded in Shadeve. Indeed, her efforts began to bear fruit, and several new associations were established since January 1932.³² The awakening among the women soon matured into the setting up of a center that was supposed to unite the new associations and the approving of binding regulations,³³ a kind of imitation of the organizational structure of Tiferet-Bachurim and other organizations in Lithuania. After adding the existing associations to the center,³⁴ Mina Henkin could appeal more strongly to women in Lithuania to join the ranks of the new organization.³⁵ The 'activists' group' of Telz responded to her call and announced its readiness to act for Beit-Yakov. As mentioned, most of the members of this group were graduates of the pedagogical course for female teachers; When they got jobs in the 'Yavne' elementary schools, they spread throughout Lithuania, and there they had the opportunity and ability to work for the flourishing of the local Beit-Yakov associations.³⁶

Not long after, the center members realized that the study associations might be suitable also for the Orthodox woman and not only for the far-from-tradition working-class woman.³⁷ Moreover, they considered it essential that this woman would join the studies. According to the center's perception, the weak familiarity of even Orthodox women with the literature of religious law and more so with the literature of Jewish thought and ethics made it difficult for them to stand against the new spirit their children brought from outside the home. It seems that the center's member, Itta Minster, expressed this well:

Who is responsible for the spiritual decline? It should be established, that the blame lies with the Jewish woman. She is often alien to the richness of our Torah and thus cannot significantly resist foreign influences. To fight, you have to take up arms. If the Jewish woman wants to be able to influence her children again, she must first of all return to the source of Judaism, acquire knowledge and good traits, learn the basics of Judaism herself, take care of her children's education, and influence the family life to be according to the religion.³⁸

Indeed, the center attributed to the Orthodox women a considerable degree of responsibility for the fact that the tradition among the Jewish public weakened. However, almost

paradoxically, Beit-Yakov's activity was received by the Orthodox public with reservations, and the Orthodox women ignored its ideas. Some thought that there was no need for them to learn religious laws since they knew well the necessary ones,³⁹ which they received as an oral tradition from their mothers and grandmothers, from their studies in the religious schools or from the Yiddish religious books for women they used.⁴⁰ Others, who may felt the need to expand their religious knowledge, got the impression that the organization was intended for women who were far from the tradition; Some others, who recognized the importance of studying in the Beit-Yakov associations, considered it less respectable to join women who traded in the market or were craftswomen and sit on the same bench with them during studying.⁴¹ The center saw this Orthodox women's disregard and even reservation about the activities of Beit-Yakov as a great obstacle, but also a challenge to try and act in a way of persuasion. It sought to convince the Orthodox women that joining the organization would benefit them in knowing the details of the religious laws by studying the written sources themselves, increasing their awareness of their duties, and especially in understanding the measures they must take so that their children will not stray from tradition and religion. To conduct the propaganda, the center invited well-known lecturers, trained groups of young female speakers to bring the organization's message to the women eloquently and attractively, and printed publications that spread the Beit-Yakov idea throughout Lithuania, especially its journal 'Beit Yakov.'⁴²

This journal was edited and published by women – usually, it was the center's chairwoman, Ela Shmuelovitch (1898–1941) – and the writers of the journal were only women. This was a considerable achievement. If these characteristics are compared to the ones of the journal of the Polish Bais-Yakov movement, which was published in Łódź under the same name 'Bais Yakov' from the end of 1923, it will be found that it was edited by a male – Eliezer-Gershon Friedenon (1899–1943). Moreover, the majority of its writers were males who in their articles taught the female readers about the place of women and their roles in all kinds of aspects of life. Only occasionally did the Polish Bais-Yakov founder Sarah Schenirer also write an article, and rarely did other women join the ranks of male writers.⁴³ Furthermore, it seems that another comparison to the periodical 'Hane'emon,' which was published in Lithuania only a few years earlier, in 1927–1931, is the one that can highlight the magnitude of the revolution that the Lithuanian Beit-Yakov journal brought. 'Hane'emon' served as a 'platform for life and literature'⁴⁴ and was the brainchild of Orthodox circles in Telz, who would later actively support the goals of the Lithuanian Beit-Yakov and its work. Its editor was Yitzhak Shmuelovitch (1892–1941), the husband of the future editor of the 'Beit Yakov' journal, and its writers were only men. When a talented young Orthodox woman from Telz, Chaya-Bluma Schwartz (1902–1986; Ela Shmuelovitch's younger sister) wanted to write an article in it, she had to hide her female identity by using a pen name.⁴⁵ Only a few years later, the Beit-Yakov organization arose and in the journal that it founded, the women had complete control. During the entire period of the journal's existence, until 1940, men were not given a foothold there, not even the great rabbis of Lithuania! This unique characteristic was also noted in the words of the editor Ela Shmuelovitch, who wrote about the benefit to the organization, brought by the journal's issues:

With the appearance of publications in which only women and girls take part, Beit-Yakov wants to publicize the tradition, and as such, they have an outstanding value. Thanks to these publications, the Beit-Yakov idea penetrated the most remote corners of Lithuania. The journals are the constant stimulus for action and good deeds.⁴⁶

The editor, therefore, attributed the 'Beit Yakov' journal's publicity and achievements among Lithuanian women to the fact that it was all the women's work, from editing to writing letters to the editor. The high level of their articles was more suited to female readers of the Orthodox elite, and therefore this journal had the power to convince such women to join the Beit-Yakov organization as well.

Adherence to the Torah commandments at home and in public

What was the study content in the Beit-Yakov associations? Ideas were put forward to determine a uniform curriculum in all of them, and it was decided that beside the weekly Torah portion the religious law – Sabbath and Festivals, kosher food, modesty in clothing and head covering – would be a compulsory study.⁴⁷ Contrary to the policy of two stages in the goals of Tiferet-Bachurim, first study and only then the practical implementation of the religious law, the Beit-Yakov center decided to approach both of these stages together; It determined in advance that the goal of Beit-Yakov was to bring the Jewish woman to observe the mentioned Torah commandments in their entirety.⁴⁸ However, the center was not satisfied with the well-known Torah commandments and put on its agenda also fundamental commandments such as 'family purity'⁴⁹ and prohibition of 'defamation of character.'⁵⁰ These commandments were not often talked about in public either because of a sense of privacy or since their importance was not recognized, and the center sought to influence Jewish women to observe them as well. Since many women did not know about the centrality of these commandments in the Jewish religion, the center saw fit to showcase them at public events and explain their nature and importance. Similarly to the Tiferet-Bachurim movement, which held large and prominent nationwide conferences, the Beit-Yakov center also chose to organize the same; It managed to arrange two of them before World War II.⁵¹ These Beit-Yakov nationwide conferences were the right place, in the view of the center, to present the forgotten Torah commandments in public and call for their strict observance.

The First Nationwide Conference of Beit-Yakov was scheduled for the Chanukah holiday in December 1935, after the organization had already spread well in 12 towns at least.⁵² The call of the organization's journal and the propaganda in the press invited delegations from the associations and guests from all over Lithuania to come to the conference.⁵³ Its first session opened in the large hall of the beautiful and innovative 'OZE' building in Kovna, in the presence of a large crowd of women.⁵⁴ The rabbi of Kovna Avraham-Dubber Shapiro (1870–1943) delivered the main speech, whose topic was 'family purity.' To appreciate this choice of the topic for the main speech, and its significance for the ideas of Beit-Yakov, one has to read the words written by the center's chairwoman, Ela Shmuelovitch:

Family purity has recently been abandoned by many 'intelligent' Jewish women. This caused some of the women who observed it to be ashamed as if it were something old-fashioned and unhygienic. Things came to such a point that even when [the rabbis] were standing next to the Ark of the Covenant, they talked about it in such a concealed fashion that it was not clear what was being discussed. Beit-Yakov realized that to achieve something in this area, it is necessary to conduct outreach on the meaning of family purity for the life of the Jewish family. . .⁵⁵

The 'family purity' issue dealt with matters for which privacy was appropriate. In responding to the center's request and daring to speak publicly about this sensitive issue, the rabbi

followed the example set by one of the greats of Orthodox Judaism, Rabbi Yisrael- Meir Kagan (the 'Chafetz Chaim,' 1839–1933), when he lectured on this subject before a large audience of women in the Great Synagogue of Vilna (Wilno) five years earlier.⁵⁶

The speech was printed in Yiddish in the form of a booklet a short while after the conference.⁵⁷ It was well distributed, and within a short time the whole edition sold out; Due to demand a second edition was printed two years later.⁵⁸ This success spurred the center to bring up publicly, at the organization's Second Nationwide Conference, another important Torah commandment. This conference opened on the Jewish Arbor Day, 16 January 1938, in the 'Ateitis' auditorium in Kovna.⁵⁹ This time the center chose to schedule the main speech on the prohibition of 'defamation of character,' a subject that was not talked about much, and many ignored it and even underestimated its importance. The center planned for it to be delivered again by Rabbi Shapiro,⁶⁰ but his health did not enable him to comply with the request, and the lecturer chosen to carry it in his place was the rabbi of Mariampol (Marijampolè) Avraham-Ze'ev Heller (1886– 1941).⁶¹ His lecture presented the problematic nature of negative speech not only for an individual but for the entire nation. This time, the speech was not printed, so its effect can be learned just from the personal, praising words of Ela Shmuelovitch, the center's chairwoman: 'The speech made a huge impression on the listeners and raised the "Beit- Yakov" conference to a higher spiritual level by discussing this problem of the Jewish people in general and of the world of Jewish women in particular, from a deeper spiritual point of view.'⁶²

The center was not content with propaganda to bring women all over Lithuania closer to observing Torah commandments but also tried to influence the Jewish street. A fundamental Jewish value in its eyes was Sabbath observance. Indeed, the issue of desecration of the Sabbath, which continued to expand in the capital city of Kovna and even in the provincial towns, frequently came up on the center's table.⁶³ The center called on the organization's members not to be satisfied with themselves observing the Sabbath but also to make efforts and influence their husbands and children not to desecrate this holy day. Furthermore, it called on these women to take practical action even outside their home: 'Any member of Beit-Yakov who goes shopping at the store should first find out if it is closed on Sabbath,' and if it did turn out that the Sabbath was not observed there as required, the member was asked to refrain from shopping at that place.⁶⁴ And when the publisher of the 'Folksblat' began to publish its evening issue 'Ovntblat' on Sabbath, an act that was described in the organization's journal with the words: 'It is a shame. . . that in Lithuania, in the land of the yeshivas, the land of the geniuses and the great, in the land of the exemplary Judaism, will a Jewish newspaper be printed and sold on Sabbath?!,' the women were called to put pressure on the management of the parent newspaper by boycotting it on weekdays.⁶⁵ Thus, with these calls, the center tried not only to ensure the observance of the Sabbath among its members but through them also to exert financial pressure to reduce the dimensions of the Sabbath desecration on the Jewish street.

However, economic pressure was only an indirect means of influencing the street, while the center aspired to a direct positive activity of its members. Following is a typical example of the activity in a Beit-Yakov association, in Alshad (Alsédžiai), as reported in the organization's journal issues and in the religious press: The association was founded in 1932 by the 'Yavne' teacher Hindel Sherl. It was renewed in 1936,⁶⁶ The local dedicated activist of the organization, Freide Geffen, headed it, and thanks to her, the association's work was very successful.⁶⁷ A year later, it already had more than 30 members. Every week they studied the compulsory

subjects – weekly Torah portion and religious law, taught by the lecturer Rabbi Fass, who tried to maintain a high level of studies and especially made an effort for the members to put their studies into practice. In 1938, the association was already considered exemplary in the organization – in its dedicated ties with the center and its help in distributing the organization's journal issues. In 1939, the association also occupied a place of honor in the town's social life; Thanks to energetic work, the association's committee, with the help of the members, established a 'Tzdoke Gdole' [Great Charity] institution in the town, which included all aspects of charity – visiting the sick, distributing bread for the poor, and more.⁶⁸

Indeed, the center encouraged the Beit-Yakov members to use the knowledge they acquired to expand their activities beyond their homes and families and engage in community work by joining charitable organizations, where the atmosphere was far from tradition, or establishing new ones, where they were missing.

Beyond this desire to influence the atmosphere in public social institutions, there was a religious worldview behind the push for involvement in them. Beit-Yakov saw its vocation in the full implementation of the Jewish plan, that is, not only observing the commandments 'between man and God,' but also observing the ones 'between people,' without giving priority to one over the other. Since many in the Orthodox circles viewed the involvement and activity of Beit-Yakov in the social institutions with a negative eye as if this participation in them was not a commandment 'between people,' but a purely philanthropic activity that had nothing to do with religion, Beit-Yakov came to correct this misconception; It repeated and emphasized that the commandments of charity and kindness are in fact commandments 'between man and God,' since their obligation derives from the Torah just like the commandments of Sabbath and the family purity.⁶⁹

Politics

As mentioned above, Tiferet-Bachurim dealt with the sensitive issue of partisanship and even discussed it publicly at its first conference. It is natural that the center of Beit-Yakov also wrestled quite a bit with this issue throughout its early years⁷⁰ and found that the appropriate place for an extensive and public discussion of it was at the conference of the organization. Indeed, one of the main issues discussed at its First Nationwide Conference was the question of party affiliation. After discussions, the conference determined that Beit-Yakov would remain an independent and non-partisan women's organization – similar to the decision of the first conference of Tiferet-Bachurim regarding its nature.⁷¹

The decision to avoid partisanship did not bring about a solution to this issue. Its complexity resulted from the growing influence of the ideas of 'Agudas-Yisroel' in Lithuania. In July 1933, young Orthodox supporters of 'Agude' began to organize themselves, and like the Orthodox counterparts in Poland, decided to establish branches of 'Tze'irei Agudas-Yisroel' [Agudas-Yisroel Young Men] in Lithuania.⁷² This awakening of the Orthodox young men also motivated the young women to follow their path and establish their branches, and they too used a name that already existed in Poland: 'Bnos Agudas- Yisroel' [Agudas-Yisroel Daughters]; In 1935, there were already 30 'Tze'irei' and 13 'Bnos' branches in Lithuania.⁷³ This extensive activity made an impression, and it will therefore come as no surprise that the energetic members of Beit-Yakov also joined the 'Agude'ite initiatives by being active in the 'Bnos' branches or by establishing branches for young girls, 'Basye.'⁷⁴ Furthermore, the members of the Beit-Yakov

center, among them even Mina Henkin, were at the head of 'Bnos Agudas-Yisroel.'⁷⁵ The separation, therefore, between the party activity in the 'Agude' branches and the non-partisan activity in the Beit-Yakov associations was too complex to be resolved in some general decision.⁷⁶

Indeed, the non-partisanship decision of the Beit-Yakov's first conference was put to the test not long after its adoption. In August 1937, the Third Great Conference of 'Agudas-Yisroel' was supposed to convene in Marienbad in Czechoslovakia. At the same time and in the same town, a first-of-its-kind international Women's Congress of the 'Neshei uVnos Agudas-Yisroel' [Women and Daughters of Agudas-Yisroel] (NOWAJ), was convened with the intention to lay the foundation for a worldwide organization of Orthodox women under the supervision of the Council of Torah Elders of the 'World Agudas-Yisroel.'⁷⁷ Every country that had 'Agude'ite organizations sent messengers, men, and women, to these two gatherings. Lithuania sent a delegation to the Women's Congress, which was attended by Mina Henkin and Miriam Okliansky (1885–1941), Ela Shmuelovitch, and Miss Sara Chananovitch.⁷⁸ The four also headed the Beit-Yakov organization.⁷⁹

In the special issue of the 'Beit Yakov' journal from May 1937, commemorating the five years of the organization in Lithuania, the entire last page was dedicated to the calls: 'Religious Jewish women and daughters from all countries! In the name of God, unite!' and 'Religious women and daughters from all over the world! Get ready for the religious Women's Congress.'⁸⁰ Apart from these slogans, most of the issue's pages were occupied by a single article of Ela Shmuelovitch that spoke about the principles and goals of Beit-Yakov, and stated that 'for an organization to be able to progress and be sure of its existence, it should be considered as part of a worldwide organization. . . In terms of association with the other women's organizations, only "Neshei uVnos Agudas-Yisroel" can be considered, which is more or less organized,'⁸¹ and truly one of the many goals of Beit-Yakov defined in this article was the creation of a united religious front of women under a worldwide center.⁸² It seems, therefore, that with these words, Shmuelovitch tried to prepare the ground for a union with the worldwide 'Agude'ite organization of religious women and girls, which was about to gather in Marienbad.⁸³

The 'Agude'ite Women's Congress opened on 18 August 1937, with the participation of more than 160 delegates. The president of the interim women's committee of the NOWAJ world center, Flora Rothschild from Antwerp, opened the congress with a statement that its goal is to organize the Jewish women and girls, who will help men in increasing the spirit of Judaism through 'Agudas-Yisroel.'⁸⁴ An echo of the impression the congress left on its participants was reflected in the issue of 'Beit Yakov' from January 1938, in which large articles were devoted to the congress and its effects. One of the authors, Mina Henkin, even saw it as an important milestone for the organization she herself founded and expressed herself enthusiastically: 'At the end of the congress, a new era begins in the ranks of our organization, especially in the field of propaganda and advocacy – to bring Jewish women to awareness, to instill a sense of responsibility for their children, and to spread the idea of the permanent value of tradition among the general public . . . '⁸⁵ It seems that the editor of the issue – this time unusually Miss Sarah Chananovitch, a very energetic and talented member of the organization's leadership – saw in these articles a suitable platform for a renewed discussion regarding the partisanship of Beit-Yakov at the upcoming nationwide conference.

Indeed, the question of the Beit-Yakov organization joining the global NOWAJ was one of the main topics planned at the Second Nationwide Conference, which opened as mentioned on

16 January 1938, in the 'Ateitis' auditorium. As a result of the sensitivity of the topic, this question was pushed to the second session of the conference held on the second day in the 'Yavne' gymnasium for boys. Moreover, it was brought up only in the seventh and last lecture of the session, delivered by Ela Shmuelovitch. As expected, this lecture provoked a lively discussion and even interjections that interfered with the regular course. Although the majority of the associations' representatives who were present in the hall supported NOWAJ and its ideas in principle, it was decided not to change the Beit-Yakov's status as an independent and non-partisan organization to further enable Jewish studies in the associations for women who belonged to non-Orthodox parties.⁸⁶ This put an end to the questions on this issue, which also bothered the sister organization Tiferet-Bachurim, but which seems to have occupied a much greater emphasis in Beit-Yakov, because of the impressive strengthening of the female faction in the 'World Agudas-Yisroel.'

Summary

In a period of rapid secularization in interwar Lithuania and an atmosphere moving away from tradition, a women's organization, 'Beit-Yakov,' was founded, whose goal was to bring girls over 17 years old and married women back to tradition and religion through the study of basic books on Judaism.⁸⁷ Beit-Yakov referred to this study as a necessary infrastructure for knowing the exact religious law and applying it to its members' lives. However, the organization was not satisfied with the revolution in the personal lives of individuals and saw its members as the pioneers who would export this revolution to the streets of the cities and towns and influence the Jewish public in Lithuania.

The initial target audience of the founder of Beit-Yakov, Mina Henkin, was Jewish women from the working classes and the middle-low socio-economic status of Lithuanian Jewry, who had moved away from religion and tradition. Indeed, this is what was written in the journal 'Beit Yakov': 'Despite the cold attitude of the surroundings, as well as the indifference of the woman herself, the activists of "Beit-Yakov" did not lose their courage. They did a great deal to explain the necessity to organize and initiate real action for the Torah and Judaism. The common woman was the first to be recruited.'⁸⁸ In this way, Beit-Yakov resembled the older Tiferet-Bachurim movement, which appealed to a similar but male audience. The same journal mentioned this fact later: 'The only ones in Lithuania inspiring the masses to tradition are Tiferet-Bachurim, who organized the masses under the Torah. Beit-Yakov also made it its goal to organize not only the Orthodox intelligentsia but also the broad popular masses.'⁸⁹ And here, from these words, which were written on the occasion of the five years of Beit-Yakov's existence, it is implied that there was a change in the organization's priorities, and it began to emphasize its activities with the Orthodox women from the upper echelons. Indeed, Beit-Yakov realized that these women – even more than the common ones – needed knowledge adapted to the developing situation. In the organization's view, their basic knowledge was not enough to guide them on how to behave in the developing modern world and more importantly, how to deal with the new spirit that their children brought with them from the rapidly secularizing external environment. The direct result of the mothers' helplessness was described by a member of the Rasein (Raseiniai) association, Ela Grinshtein (1902–1941): '... the child is educated through the street more than through the parents. Things got to the point where the mothers lost all influence over the child.'⁹⁰ Beit-Yakov, therefore, saw the necessity and urgency of coming to the aid of the Orthodox Jewish mothers in providing them knowledge and a deep understanding of tradition and religion, and historical awareness.

Arming the mothers with these tools enabled them to approach their children's education in a more appropriate way to deal with external influences.

However, even after acquiring these coping tools, the Orthodox Jewish mother did not have the strength to stand firm in the face of the spirit that her children brought from the street, as she had to struggle with strong and attractive organized forces that competed for their hearts, whether the 'Hashomer-HaTza'ir' or 'Beitar' youth movements.⁹¹ In the face of this strong competition, one of the honorary presidents of the Beit-Yakov center, Rebbetzin Rachel Shapiro (1875–1943), came out with a sharp call to the Orthodox women: 'At the same time that the non-believers are well organized and wage war against everything Jewish and holy – will you be deaf?! . . . Will you not respond at all? Join the ranks of "Beit-Yakov," and create a common front of religious women.'⁹² Indeed, Beit-Yakov believed that victory in this difficult struggle was only possible by uniting the women's forces within the organization. This unification meant not only studying together the principles of religion and Jewish thought and applying them at home but also going out into the street and participating in all the social and charitable projects in which the other, secular organizations, were also active. Beit-Yakov, therefore, saw it as its role not only to teach and organize the Orthodox women and attract the women who were far from religion back to tradition but also to influence the Jewish public space as a whole, and this influence had to come from the activity of the organization's members.

This expectation was not obvious, since public activism was not a common phenomenon among Orthodox women. Therefore, the Orthodox circles did not believe that women, who were far from social action, would accomplish anything; Even the women themselves regarded this activism with great skepticism and did not trust their power to act and influence. Beit-Yakov turned this approach upside down. It began to publish a respectable journal by women and for women only, founded new social institutions in the towns, and its members entered existing public institutions in order to affect their atmosphere. The results were summed up by the chairwoman of the center Ela Shmuelovitch with these words: 'It takes a lot of effort and time to prove both to those around and to the woman herself that the religious woman can not only do something for Judaism through organizing but that there are areas in which this woman can do wonders.'⁹³

Much like the men's Tiferet-Bachurim movement, which underwent an evolutionary development from teaching basic Torah subjects to influencing the public atmosphere, the Beit-Yakov organization, which was founded as a learning and teaching organization, soon developed into an active organization for religion and tradition. The regular weekly classes at the Beit-Yakov associations brought women and girls, who had been far from tradition, closer to it and helped the Orthodox women to become familiar with the details of the Torah commandments and to correct many of the errors they made due to lack of knowledge. The knowledge and understanding acquired by the Beit-Yakov's members developed a new outlook and strengthened their awareness. Instead of feelings of shame, courage and pride were instilled in them to observe the commandments meticulously, and a desire to influence social institutions and the public atmosphere.⁹⁴

In the late 1930s, Beit-Yakov reached about 1,500 members in 30 associations.⁹⁵ Although these dimensions were significantly smaller than the dimensions of the men's Tiferet-Bachurim movement, the shared vision of these two organizations and their closeness in each town strengthened the power of Beit-Yakov several times more than the power that apparently stemmed from its actual numerical dimensions.⁹⁶

Beit-Yakov did not cease its activity even after the outbreak of the Second World War. Despite the financial difficulties, its attractiveness did not diminish.⁹⁷ It was the Soviet occupation of Lithuania on 15 June 1940, that brought about the cessation of the official and public activity of Beit-Yakov. One of the last actions that the organization managed to do before that occupation was to hold a large gathering of women for the sake of observing the Sabbath. In this gathering, the eighth anniversary of the organization was mentioned. Referring to this date in her speech, the poet Yehudith Glaz-Stein wished that the tenth anniversary would be celebrated in the Land of Israel.⁹⁸ However, Beit-Yakov did not get to celebrate this jubilee, neither in the Land of Israel nor in Lithuania. During several months after the date on which this jubilee was supposed to take place, the majority of the organization's members found their brutal deaths in long pits throughout Lithuania.⁹⁹

Notes

1. See Eric Lohr, 'The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportation, Hostages, and Violence during World War I,' *Russian Review* 60 (2001): 404–19.

2. On the impact of life in exile during the war years and afterward on the Jews of Lithuania, see Andrew N. Koss, 'War within, War without: Russian Refugee Rabbis during World War I,' *AJS Review* 34 (2010): 231–63. See also Mordechai Katz, 'LeMatzav Acheinu beRusia,' part 3, *Halvri* 6, no. 27 (1916): 8. The process of secularization of the Jewish town actually began in the second half of the 19th century. Gradually, it led to the situation that the religious lifestyle of some of the Jewish residents before WWI was derived not from their conscious commitment to Jewish law but from their traditional consciousness, and this, indeed, was severely fractured during the exile; See Asaf Kaniel, 'Al Milchama uShmirat Mitzvot: Vilna 1914–1922,' *Gal-Ed* 24 (2015): 73–4.

3. On autonomy and its institutions, see Tzviya Dvorzhetsky, 'Maavaka haPoliti shel haTziburiyut haYehudit beLita leMisuda haOtonomi baShanim 1918–1922' (master's thesis, Tel-Aviv University, 1980); Šarūnas Liekis, 'A State within a State?: Jewish Autonomy in Lithuania 1918–1925 (Vilnius: Versus Aureus, 2003), 115–57. In regard to the accelerated secularization processes in Lithuania, the results of the 1922 elections to the Autonomous Land Council can be an indication of the attitude the Jews had towards religion and tradition in their lives (Leib Garfunkel, 'Ma'avakam shel Yehudei Lita al Zchuyot Leumiyot,' in *Yahadut Lita*, vol. 2, ed. Raphael Chasman et al. [Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotzei Lita beIsrael, 1972], 55). See also Mordechai Zalkin, "'SheYihye Kulo Ivri": Reshet haChinuch "Yavne" beLita Bein "Chinuch Charedi" le"Chinuch Ivri,"' in *Zechor Davar leAvdecha: Asufat Ma'amarim leZecher Dov Rapel*, ed. Shmuel Glick (Jerusalem: Michlelet Lifshitz, 2007), 128, 131. On the Rabbinical Association and its power limitations, see Ben-Tsiyon Klibansky, 'Ma'amada shel Agudat haRabanim beLita,' *Zion* 75, no. 3 (2010): 313–46.

4. On the fundamental changes in the traditional elementary education of the refugee children during the First World War, see Koss, 'War within,' 245–6.

5. On this movement, see Ben-Tsiyon Klibansky, "'Tiferet Bachurim" – Tnuat Limud Rechava liVney Ma'amadot haAmelim beLita Beyn Milchamot haOlam,' *Zion* 82, no. 4 (2017): 439–88.

6. As explained later, this organization had no practical connection to the 'Bais-Yakov' schools established in Poland. The transliteration of the names of the organizations and periodicals

mentioned in this article is according to the transliteration in their official documentation. Therefore 'Bais-Yakov' and 'Beit-Yakov' are alternate pronunciations of the same name in Hebrew.

7. The described picture reinforces the trends of dynamism and assertiveness of the shrinking traditional Jewry in Eastern Europe in the twentieth century, discussed by Glenn Dynner, 'Jewish Traditionalism in Eastern Europe: The Historiographical Gadfly,' *Polin* 21 (2017): 285–99.

8. On home or institutional teaching of the elementary tradition for girls in the 19th and the 20th centuries until the First World War, see Shaul Stampfer, *Families, Rabbis and Education: Traditional Jewish Society in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2010), 168–80; Avraham Greenbaum, 'The "Girls' Heder" and Girls in the Boys' Heder in Eastern Europe before World War I,' *East/West Education* 18, no. 1 (1997): 55–62; Immanuel Etkes and David Assaf, *HaHeder: Mechkarim, Teudot, Pirkei Sifrut veZichronot* (Ramat-Aviv: The Institute for the History of Polish Jewry, 2010), 485–491. On studies of this kind in private schools for girls in 1830–1880, see Eliyana R. Adler, *In Her Hands: The Education of Jewish Girls in Tsarist Russia* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 28–43, 82–95.

9. These were the Real Gymnasium in Kovna ('Lita,' *HaTzefira*, no. 26, June 27, 1918, 13); 'Yehudiya' in Vilna (Andrew N. Koss, 'Two Rabbis and a Rebbetzin: The Vilna Rabbinate During the First World War,' *European Judaism* 48, no. 1 [2015]: 123–4), and 'Chavatzeles' in Warsaw (Rachel Manekin, 'From Anna Kluger to Sarah Schenirer: Women's Education in Kraków and Its Discontents,' *Jewish History* 33 [2020]: 56–7; Nathan Raphael Auerbach [ed.], *Zichronot HaRav Moshe Auerbach Zt"l* [Jerusalem: HaMa'ayan, 1982], 47–50).

10. Gershon Bacon, *The Politics of Tradition: Agudat Yisrael in Poland, 1916–1939* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996), 168. For slightly different numbers, 20000 girls in 160 schools, see *Hane'emon* 14 (1929): 16. Many of these schools only taught supplementary classes in traditional subjects. On Sarah Schenirer and the network she founded, see Naomi Seidman, *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement: A Revolution in the Name of Tradition* (London: Littman Library, 2019).

11. At that time, the Polish Bais-Yakov was still in its infancy, and there was no reason to consider its expansion into Lithuania; See the table in Bacon, *The Politics of Tradition*, 168.

12. Yitzhak Raphael Etzion (Holtzberg), "'Yavne"-Shuln in Lite,' in *Lite*, vol. 2, ed. Ch. Leykovitch (Tel-Aviv: Farlag Y.L. Peretz, 1965), 361, 363–4; M. Zalkin, 'SheYihye Kulo Ivri,' 121–43. The other Jewish autonomous educational networks in Lithuania were 'Tarbut,' which was Hebrew national but not religiously oriented although some of its students came from Jewish observant homes, and 'Kultur Lige,' which was clearly an anti-Zionist and anti-clerical (Berl Cohen, 'HaChinuch halvri beLita haAtzma'it,' in: Idem., *Yiddishe Shtet, Shtetlech un Dorfisher Yishuvim in Lite biz 1918* [New York: Simcha Graphic Associates, 1991], 723). The Lithuanian cities and towns will be indicated by the name that was customary among the Jews; In their first appearance, their official name at that time will be indicated in parentheses.

13. A first attempt was in 1926 ('BeAgudat Bnot Yisrael,' *Hane'emon* 1 [1927]: 16) and a more successful one – in 1930 ('LeZecher haRabanit P. Katz Z"l,' *Hane'emon* 23 [1930]: 18). For the extensive Orthodox male and female educational institutions in Telz, see Ben-Tsiyon Klibansky, "'Lekadesh Shem Shamayim baOlam": Lidmuta shel haMahapeicha haTelza'it,' *Mayim miDalyav* 21 (2010): 25–64.

14. See Ela Shmuelovitch, *5 yor 'Beit-Yakov' in Lite* (Kaunas-Vilijampolė, 1937), 9–10. On a decision in 1931 to establish a new girl's organization, see also 'Chagigat Yovel HaEser leKiyum haGimnasyon liVnot "Yavne" beTelz,' *Hane'emon* 30 (1931): 14. For the pedagogical course's graduates in 1931 see a photo in: Yitzhak Alperovitch, ed., *Sefer Telz (Lita)* (Tel-Aviv: Irgun Yotzey Telz beYisrael, 1984), 53.
15. See 'Krayz Tzuzamenfor fun "Tiferes-Bachurim,'" *Di Idische Shtime*, no. 3585, Aug. 21, 1931, 13; Klibansky, 'Tiferet Bachurim,' 473–4.
16. For their details and characteristics, see Yisrael Rozenson, 'Al haMifal haChinuchi "Tiferet Bachurim" beVilna,' *Hagut* 10 (2014): 19–28.
17. 'Unzer Vort tsu der Idisher Yugnt,' *Tsum Yugnt* 1 (1928): 2–3.
18. 'Protokol fun der Konferentz fun "Tiferes-Bachurim,'" *Yugnt* 2 (1928): 7.
19. General letter, January 25, 1929, Lithuanian Central State Archives (Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybės Archyvas, henceforth: LCVA), fondas 1143/aprašas 1/byla 2, lapas 221.
20. Center's letter to Brumshtein and Kluft, May 26, 1929, LCVA, 1143/1/2, 382 (from Yiddish; All the translations in the article are mine).
21. See the center's letters to Shidleve (Šiluva) committee, October 31, 1928; To Zhosle (Žasliai) committee, February 2, 1929; To Wittenberg in Riga, March 6, 1929, LCVA, 1143/1/2, 193–4, 235, 337 respectively; Yosef Fayvelzon, 'Kiyum haMitzves als Yesod haYahadus,' *Tsum Yugnt* 5 (1929): 6–8.
22. 'Hachlotes fun der Tzveiter Al-Litvisher Tiferes-Bachurim Konferentz. . .,' LCVA, 1143/1/7, 22. Direct shaving with a razor is prohibited by the Torah. The associations were asked to obtain electric shavers for the members.
23. See Circular no. 30 to the rabbis, June 1930, LCVA, 1143/1/7, 17.
24. Rabbi Henkin served as rabbi in Panemun (Panemunė) until 1925, then he was appointed rabbi in Shadeve and moved with his family to this town; See *Idisher Lebn*, May 9, 1924, 1; Protocol no. 17, March 4, 1925, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research Archives, collection RG 2, folder 1207, page 73; Dov Levin, ed., *Pinkas haKehillot – Lita* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1996), 497. He married the eighteen-year-old Mina nee Volfovich, a native of Malat (Molėtai; Recorded on July 22, 1909, Lithuanian State Historical Archives [Lietuvos Valstybės Istorijos Archyvas], fondas 728/aprašas 4/byla 176, record #265).
25. Center's letter to Shadeve association, August 12, 1928, LCVA, 1143/1/2, 170 (from Yiddish). See also center's letter to [Shmuel Dov] Mel from Ponevezh, March 3, 1930, *ibid.*, 546.
26. See 'Protokol fun der Konferentz fun "Tiferes-Bachurim"' and 'Unzer Bavegung: Shadeve,' *Yugnt* 2 (1928): 5, 17 respectively.
27. The date is according to the inscription on the photo of the Shadeve association's fifth anniversary, in: The Lost Shtetl Museum ('Dingęs Štetlas' Šeduvos Žydų Istorijos Muziejus), ŠMP829, courtesy of Yvette Sonkin.
28. Shmuelovitch, *5 yor*, 8–10, 23; 'Fun Ortodoksishn Lebn: Grandyeze Fayerung fun 4-Yorikn Yubileyum in Shadever "Beis Yakov,'" *Beit Yakov Shtim* (5696): 16.

29. 'Fun Beis-Yakov Lebn,' *Beit Yakov in Lite* (5694): 14.
30. Referring to the verse 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel' (Exodus 19:3 [Modern English Version]), the Jewish Biblical exegesis states that 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob' – these are the women, and 'tell the children of Israel' – these are the men (Exodus-Rabbah 28:2).
31. Shmuelovitch, *5 yor*, 10.
32. 'Grandyeze "Beis Yakov" Farzamlung in Kovne,' *Idishe Velt*, January 15, 1932, 4 (in Kovna); 'Provintz: Virbaln,' *ibid.*, April 20, 1932, 5 (in Virbaln [Virbalis]); 'Fun der "Beis Yakov" Bavegung,' *Beit Yakov* (5693): 9 (in Alshad [Alsėdžiai], Yelok [Ylakiai], and Godleve [Garliava]); 'Fun Beis Yakov-Lebn,' *Beit Yakov in Lite* (5694): 14–16 (in Kelm [Kelmė], Yanishok [Joniškis], and Keidan [Kėdainiai]). See also M. L., 'Di Greise Farzamlung fun "Beis- Yakov" in Kovne,' *Idishe Velt*, January 22, 1932, 3.
33. 'Lietuvos žydų tikybinės draugijos "Bet Jakob" įstatai,' December 22, 1933, registered on March 9, 1934, LCVA, 402/4/758, 3–6.
34. Including the study group that was established in Telz in 1930 (see 'Fünf Jahre Telscher Beth Jaacob,' *Der Israelit* 15 [1935]: 8; 'Fun der "Beis Yakov" Bavegung,' 7; 'Fun "Beis Yakov" Lebn,' *Beit Yakov in Lite* [5694]: 14, and cf. 'Hitorerut haNoar beTelz,' *Hane'emon* 30 [1931]: 16).
35. See 'Idishe Froy un Tochter in Lietuva – Greit Zich tzu der "Beis Yakov" Konferentz,' *Beit Yakov Shtim* (5696): 14.
36. Shmuelovitch, *5 yor*, 10.
37. It was presumably towards the beginning of 1933 since the first issue of the organization's journal was published then (see below, note 42).
38. I. Minster, 'Amol un Haynt,' *Beit Yakov Shtim* (5696): 2 (from Yiddish). For her roles in the Beit- Yakov see 'Pranešimas,' January 28, 1936, LCVA, 402/4/758, 10–11.
39. Shmuelovitch, *5 yor*, 13, 17.
40. On these books see Chava Weissler, 'The Religion of Traditional Ashkenazic Women: Some Methodological Issues,' *AJS Review* 12, no. 1 (1987): 82–3.
41. Shmuelovitch, *5 yor*, 13.
42. *Ibid.*, 14, 16, 21. The first issue, 'Beit Yakov,' is from Adar 5693 (February 1933; The 'Beit Yakov' issues were not numbered).
43. For example, Sarah Schenirer, 'Pesach-Gedanken,' *Bais Yakov* 4 (1924): 44–5; Scheindel Mayer, 'Azoi Kemft a Yudishe Tochter!,' *Bais Yakov* 5–6 (1924): 65–6. I did not find the first and second issues of the journal; However, see "'Beis Yakov,'" *Idisher Lebn*, October 19, 1923, 5.
44. As appears in the first editorial 'El haKorim,' *Hane'emon* 1 (1927): 1.
45. Her pen name was 'Schevach' [praise], actually an acronym of her name (in Hebrew). See her article (in two parts) 'Bat Yisrael Lefanim vahaYom,' *Hane'emon* 3 (1928): 9; 5 (1928): 12–13. 'Hane'emon' was published from late 1927 until late 1931 (see advertisement, *Beit Yakov in Lite* [1934]: 16). It seems that Yitzhak Shmuelovitch stopped publishing it after he founded

the 'Yavne' gymnasium for boys in Kovna and was its principal since the first school year 1931/2 (see LCVA, 391/2/608, 4).

46. Shmuelovitch, *5 yor*, 21 (from Yiddish).

47. '1-te Al-Litvishe "Beis-Yakov" Konferentz,' *Tsum Yugnt* 18 (1936): 24. See also Shmuelovitch, *5 yor*, 17.

48. Shmuelovitch, *5 yor*, 15.

49. 'Family purity' – the system of laws that govern Jewish marital life, according to which a couple is forbidden to have marital relations during menstruation and seven days after. After this period of abstention, the wife immerses herself in a ritual bath, and marital relations may be resumed.

50. Although the 'Chafetz Chaim' dealt a lot with this subject, and his books 'Shmirat HaLashon' and 'Chafetz Chaim' (after which he was named) were also widespread all over Lithuania, human nature made it difficult to implement the requirements in these books.

51. Article #25 of the Beit-Yakov regulations stated that the conferences would be held two years apart ('Lietuvos Bet Jakob įstatai,' 4).

52. See 'Fünf Jahre,' 8. According to the associations' reports there existed fourteen ones at the end of 1935.

53. '1-te Al-Litvishe Konferentz,' 23; An advertisement on the first page of the extended Friday issue of the widely used newspaper in Lithuania, 'Di Idishe Shtime,' called on the readership to come en masse and emphasized that the admission is free (*Di Idishe Shtime*, no. 5244, December 20, 1935, 1).

54. '1-te Al-Litvishe Konferentz,' 23. On the unique 'OZE' building, see J. Reklaitė, ed., *Kaunas: An Architectural Guide* (Vilnius: Lapas, 2017), 28. 'OZE' – 'Organization for the protection of the health of Jews' founded in St. Petersburg in 1912 by doctors to help Jews in need. In Lithuania, it was established in 1921 in the form of six branches and 14 institutions and dealt especially with public medicine.

55. Shmuelovitch, *5 yor*, 18–19 (from Yiddish).

56. See *Fortrag iber Taharas-haMishpoche* (Kaunas: Merkaz 'Beit-Yakov' in Lietuva, 1936), 4. On the speech of the 'Chafetz Chaim' on December 2, 1930, see Moses Meir Yoshor, *The Chafetz Chaim: The Life and Works of Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan of Radin* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1984), 649–52.

57. *Fortrag iber Taharas-haMishpoche* (Kaunas, 1936).

58. *Fortrag iber Taharas-haMishpoche* (Kėdainiai: Merkaz 'Beit-Yakov' in Lietuva, 1938), 5. The first edition was printed in 1936 and the second one in 1938. See also "'Beis Yakov" Nayas: Oysergeveynlicher Derfolg fun di Broshur. . .,' *Beit Yakov Ruf* (5697): 15.

59. 'Ateitis' (future) – founded in 1910 in Kovna as a secret student organization, it became an interwar Lithuanian youth organization with a Catholic approach to changing society according to Christian values.

60. 'Aktuele Fragn,' *Beit Yakov* (5698): 25.

61. In the ad for the ceremonial opening of the conference, the speech's mention was emphasized in large letters ('Fayerlechle Derefenung,' *Idisher Lebn*, January 17, 1938, 1. Cf. *Di Idische Shtime*, no. 5862, January 14, 1938, 1).
62. Ela Shmuelovitch, '2-te Al-Litvishe "Beis Yakov" Konferentz 15–17 Shvot 5698 (Baricht),' *Idisher Lebn*, February 4, 1938, 3 (from Yiddish).
63. 'VeEs Shabsosay Tishmoru (Tzum Kiyum fun Merkaz "Mazhirey Shabes" in Lietuva),' *Beit Yakov Shtim* (5696): 11. The writer preferred to hide her name and indicated it with three dots.
64. Merkaz 'Beit Yakov' beLita, 'Baym Ontzindn di Shabes Licht! (Fun Froyen Tsu Froyen),' *Beit Yakov in Lite* (5694): 3. The quote is from a call in *Beit Yakov in Lite* (5694): 4 (from Yiddish).
65. 'Tzum Ershtn Mol in der Geshichte fun Litvishn Yidntum. . .,' *Beit Yakov Lebn* (5700): 13 (the quote is a translation from Yiddish). 'Folksblat' was the newspaper of the Folkists in Lithuania (who advocated Yiddishism, secularism, and anti-Zionism), which offered an alternative to the very popular Yiddish daily 'Di Idische Shtime,' the newspaper of the General Zionists.
66. 'Fun der "Beis Yakov" Bavegung,' 9; 'Fun Chaveirishn Lebn,' *Beit Yakov* (5698): 24. The renewal date is according 'In di Reyen fun "Beis Yakov" un ire Snifim,' *Beit Yakov Vidmung* (5699): 16.
67. 'Tzu di Zilberne Hochtzayt fun di "Beis Yakov" Tuerin. . .,' *Beit Yakov Vidmung* (5699): 17.
68. 'In "Beis Yakov" Bavegung,' *Beit Yakov Ruf* (5697): 14; *Beit Yakov* (5698): 24; 'In di Reyen,' 16; 'Fun Merkaz "Beis Yakov" in Lite,' *Idisher Lebn*, May 24, 1940, 4.
69. Shmuelovitch, *5 yor*, 14–15, 19–20.
70. See, for example, Sarah Rivka Merkin, 'Ko Tomar leBeis-Yakov!,' *Beit Yakov in Lite* (5694): 4.
71. '1-te Al-Litvishe Konferentz,' 23–4. On the Tiferet-Bachurim decision, see above, next to the reference to note 18.
72. 'Plenum fun Merkaz "Tze'irei Agudas-Yisroel,'" *Idisher Lebn*, July 5, 1934, 2; Nosson Ordman, 'Der Tzunoifbund fun Unzere Keiches,' *Idisher Lebn*, November 26, 1934, 2. In Poland, 'Tze'irei Agudas-Yisroel' was founded in 1919.
73. 'Baricht fun der 2-ter Lands-Konferentz fun Tze'irei Agudas-Yisroel in Lite' and 'In der "Bnos" un "Beis-Yakov" Bavegung,' *Idisher Lebn*, September 13, 1935, 2, 4 respectively.
74. 'Fun Ortodoksishn Lebn,' *Beit Yakov Shtim* (5696): 15; 'Fun Beis-Yakov Lebn,' *Beit-Yakov in Lite* (5694): 15.
75. 'In der "Bnos" Bavegung,' 4.
76. On the pressures exerted on the center by the 'Agude'ite organizations' side to join them and by the Tiferet-Bachurim side to remain non-partisan, see: 'Fünf Jahre,' 8; Shmuelovitch, *5 yor*, 10.
77. *Idisher Lebn*, August 13, 1937, 1; August 20, 1937, 4. See also *ibid.*, August 27, 1937, 1; Shmuelit, 'Fun der Relig. Froyen Bavegung,' *Beit Yakov* (5698): 21. In Poland, associations of 'Neshei Agudas-Yisroel' began to organize in 1935 (*Di Agudistische Froyen-Bavegung Bnos Agudas-Yisroel in Poyln, Baricht 5686–5697* [Łódź: Tzentral-Sekretaryat, 1937], 6). In Lithuania, there was no need for such an organization, since 'Beit-Yakov' and even 'Bnos Agudas-Yisroel'

were more oriented for married women (see Em Gur-Ari, 'Di Vegn fun "Bnos,"' *Idisher Lebn*, March 12, 1937, 8).

78. 'Konferentz fun Histadrus Neshei uVnos Agudas-Yisroel in Marienbad,' *Idisher Lebn*, August 27, 1937, 1.

79. 'Pranešimas,' 10.

80. Shmuelovitch, *5 yor*, 23 (from Yiddish).

81. Ibid., 22 (from Yiddish).

82. Ibid., 14–15.

83. To her private attitude towards Agudas-Yisroel see Froy Shmuelovitch, 'Meldung,' *Idisher Lebn*, July 2, 1937, 4.

84. M. Yaffe, 'Di religyeze froi als Tregerin fun Idishn Folks-Last,' *Idisher Lebn*, September 10, 1937, 4; Mina Henkin, 'In Licht fun Knesiye Gdole,' *Beit Yakov* (5698): 2.

85. Henkin, *ibid.* (from Yiddish).

86. Shmuelovitch, '2-te Al-Litvishe Konferentz,' 3.

87. The minimum age was set in article #7 of the Beit-Yakov regulations; Girls over the age of 21 were entitled to full membership rights ('Lietuvos Bet Jakob įstatai,' 3).

88. Shmuelovitch, *5 yor*, 13 (from Yiddish).

89. Ibid. (from Yiddish).

90. Ela Grinshtein, 'Muter un Kind,' *Beit Yakov Ruf* (5697): 10 (from Yiddish).

91. On youth movements in Lithuania, see Dov Levin, *The Litvaks* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2000), 167–71. In 1931, the youth movements in Lithuania had about 8000 members (*ibid.*, 170).

92. Rachel Shapiro, 'He'asfi! (Tzu di Baforshteyende "Beis Yakov" Konferentz, Chanukeh 5696),' *Beit Yakov Shtim* (5696): 1 (from Yiddish).

93. Shmuelovitch, *5 yor*, 12 (from Yiddish).

94. See *ibid.*, 17–18, 21.

95. The associations' number is according to *ibid.*, 5–6 (in 1937) and data reported in 'Beit Yakov' and 'Idisher Lebn' magazines; The members' number – according to the same data supplemented by my minimalist estimates. The condition for the legality of an association was membership of at least 10 women (according to article #11 of 'Lietuvos Bet Jakob įstatai,' 3).

96. On the assistance of the chairman of the Tiferet-Bachurim movement, Rabbi Hillel Bishko (1881–1960), to the establishment of new Beit-Yakov associations, see: 'Fun Beis-Yakov Lebn,' *Beit Yakov in Lite* (5694): 15; Letter of Ela Shmuelovitch to Hillel Bishko, August 11, 1935, in: Bidspirit, Auction 441, item 214.

97. 'Fun Merkaz "Beis Yakov,"' *Idisher Lebn*, March 15, 1940, 2.

98. Ela Shmuelovitch, 'Ayndruks-Fule Froyen-Manifestatziye Far Shmires-Shabes,' *Idisher Lebn*, February 23, 1940, 4.

99. The jubilee date (according to the Jewish calendar) was supposed to fall on June 5, 1941. On the quick and brutal murder of the Jews in the Lithuanian province following the German invasion on June 22, 1941, see David Bankier, *Expulsion and Extermination: Holocaust Testimonials from Provincial Lithuania* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2011). On the activity in the Slabodka (Vilijampolė) Ghetto of the last association of Beit-Yakov see Ephraim Oshri, 'Korot "Beit Yakov" beGeto Kovno,' *Beit Ya'akov* 13 (1960): 7.