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Sarajevo and the Sarajevo Sephardim

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This article highlights issues pertaining to the Sephardim ([-im] is the masculine plural Hebrew ending and Sepharad is the Hebrew name for Spain. Sephardim thus literally means the Jews of Spain) in Sarajevo from the time of their arrival in the Ottoman Empire in the late fifteenth century until the present day. I describe the status quo for the Sephardi minority in post-Ottoman Sarajevo, in the first and second Yugoslavia, and in today's post-Communist Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The objective is to shed light on how historic preconditions have influenced identity formation as it expresses itself from a Sephardic perspective. The aim is moreover to generate knowledge of the circumstances that affected how Sephardim came to understand themselves in terms of their Jewish identification. I present empirical findings from my semi-structured interviews with Sarajevo Sephardim of different generations (2015 and 2016). I argue that while none of the interlocutors conceive of Jewish identification as divergent from halachic interpretations of matrilineal descent, they moreover propose other conceptions of what it means to be Jewish, such as celebrating Shabbat and other Jewish holidays, and other patterns of socialization. At the same time, these individuals also assert alternative forms of being Bosnian, one that includes multiple ethnicities, and multiple religious ascriptions. This study elucidates a little-explored history and sheds light on the ways in which historical conditions have shaped contemporary, layered framings of identification among Sarajevo's current Jewish population. This article is relevant for those interested in contemporary Sephardic Bosnian culture and in the role and function of ideology in creating conditions for identity formation and transformation.

Keywords: historical approach; Sarajevo; Sephardic culture; semi-structured interviews

Introduction

Having been expelled from Catholic Spain in the late fifteenth century, the Sephardim settled in the European part of the Ottoman Empire and became an integral part of the Balkan urban population. Research on the Sephardim almost exclusively deals with linguistic aspects, more precisely with the Old Spanish dialect, Judeo-Spanish, preserved until today, including the phenomena of language contact and language mixing, as well as attrition and obsolescence (Astrologo-Fonzi 1992; Shewmon Seitz 2008). In this case study with the Sephardim in Sarajevo, I shift the focus from the dominating research paradigm (which is Romanic Studies and contact linguistics).

My point of departure is the context of Jews in Ottoman-period Sarajevo. I will furthermore reflect upon the Jewish group in post-Ottoman Sarajevo and during the time of the first

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and second iterations of Yugoslavia. Hence, I foreground contemporary Sarajevo Sephardim against historic events so that it will be possible to grasp the changes in identification, and to pinpoint the socio-political realities that Sarajevo Jews have experienced.

Brink-Danan's (2012) anthropological study of contemporary Turkish Jewry provides meaningful parallels to contemporary Jewish identification in Sarajevo. Brink-Danan (2012, 9, 20) notes from his field studies that most Jews he met in Istanbul conceived of themselves as secular Jews and at the same time they confidently identified as Sephardim as well. Moreover, Naar's (2016) recent book on Salonican Jews provides avenues of similar developments within the broader Ottoman/post-Ottoman Jewry. In Cohen and Stein's (2014) documentary on Sephardic history, the Sarajevan Jews are only addressed tangentially.

In this study, in terms of sources, apart from secondary literature, I conducted semi-structured interviews with nine Sarajevo Sephardim of different generations in 2015 and 2016. I have selected data that I find meaningful in relation to the development of the Sarajevo Sephardim in relation to the identity-creating factor of Sarajevo.

I see identity formation as a result of socialization processes. Yet, in this regard, it is important to take a closer look and to analyze the "self-constructing" aspect: if identity creation is a (cultural) process, to what extent can we influence it, and to what degree are we merely products of the society in which we live, with its attendant power structures and preconceptions? There can be, for example, a normative thinking in relation to what people should integrate in order to call themselves Jewish/Sephardic (as in my case). I believe that the narratives of my interlocutors shall tell the story of Sarajevo through the lens of Jewish history. Nonetheless, "how Jewish/Sephardic can one be after the *Shoah* and after Communism?" is a question that I do not intend to answer in this study.

Method and material

My search for interviewees began when I contacted the Jewish Community center in Sarajevo in 2013. I am aware that since I have sought informants through a Jewish institution, I most probably come in contact with persons declaring that they have a Jewish identity. Although I want to find out if the interviewees are interested in Jewish identification, I do not assume, just because they have Jewish roots, that they *a priori* declared having a Jewish identity.

The interviewees are from heterogeneous backgrounds having various occupations. As for the three generations, I think in terms of persons of three groups: (1) who were socialized in Yugoslavia and lived most of their life there; (2) persons who were socialized in Yugoslavia and Bosnia; and (3) persons socialized in Bosnia (cf. Dilthey 1990, 37). Many from the generation older than 55 years are pensioners.

The interviews were conducted in Sarajevo, in Bosnian, with the use of a video camera or iPhone.[1] A local translator and cameramen assisted me during the interviews. When seeking clarifications, I communicated with the interviewees in English. In order to understand some statements in more depth, I carried out additional conversations via Skype, email, and Facebook Messenger. I informed the interviewees about the research and its objectives and they decided whether they wanted to participate.

When conducting the interviews, I did not introduce myself as someone who has a Jewish background, though the interviewees asked me about my identity and they were possibly less suspicious when I told them that I am indeed Jewish. They also asked about my translator (who is a Muslim from Sarajevo). I am, of course, aware that the

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researcher is part of the research process, and that the interviews take form out of a social dynamic between the researcher and the interviewees.

In my analysis, I aim to create a meaning of the informants' subjective interpretations and experiences. Thus, it is not about facts – which in turn also are more or less constructed – but rather about memory and the role of memory in creating meaning. How representative my qualitative results are for Sarajevo Jews in general is, of course, open to discussion. I see my results as a perspective, rather than as a truth-claim. Moreover, I consider my interviewees as forming a reference group rather than representing all possible responses to the question of Jewish identification.

The Jews in Ottoman Sarajevo

Sundhaussen (2014, 11–12, 363) pinpoints the unique character of Sarajevo, namely, the coexistence of Catholics, Muslims, Christian Orthodox, and Jewish Sephardim ever since the early sixteenth century. Non-Muslims were categorized by their religion and were free to practice religion although they had to pay a special tax to the Sultan. The status of the non-Muslims was hence regulated by *jus religionis* since they were forming relatively autonomous religious communities (Benbassa and Rodrigue 2000, 3, 17–18).

In Ottoman Sarajevo (1462–1878), rabbis served as lawyers for Jews even if the Sephardim sometimes also turned to Muslim *sharia* courts. In 1581, a Jewish neighborhood in Sarajevo had its own synagogue and in 1630, the still existing old Jewish cemetery was probably established.[2] Movement in and out of the Jewish neighborhood was unrestricted. Moreover, not all Jews – especially not the wealthy ones – were living in the Jewish neighborhood and thus it could not be considered a ghetto (Sundhaussen 2014, 81–84). It was nevertheless not allowed for non-Muslims to live near mosques or in Muslim districts (Benbassa and Rodrigue 2000, 32).

The Sephardim often lived in residential quarters, so called *mahalles*[3] and their cultural sphere was formed by the *millet*[4] religious segregation policy. In fact, it was against this backdrop that the Sephardim managed to preserve their ethnic-religious and linguistic identity (Judeo-Spanish) during the 400 years of the Ottoman era, largely by maintaining their own schools (Greble 2011, 37; Harris 2008, 21).

Vučina Simović (2013, 180) argues that Sephardic women ensured that the Sephardic language and culture were maintained in daily life. They were monolingual and housewives in the traditional Sephardic Ottoman society. Sephardic girls stayed at home and usually married at the ages of 16–18 years (Freidenreich 1979, 21).

Post-Ottoman Sarajevo

After 1878, Bosnia's population was extremely poor (Sundhaussen 2014, 170). Sarajevo was seen as an intellectual and economic backwater. The community was conservative and there was never an *Alliance* school in Sarajevo (Kerenji 2008, 32–33; Simović Vučina 2016, 124).[5] In Habsburg Sarajevo (1878–1918), the city was, however, starting to thrive again – it was the Bosnian center for culture, economy, and science. The Jewish community had close ties with Salonika's Jewish community – the spiritual center of the Balkans – which was the origin of the first Sarajevo rabbis (Freidenreich 1979, 13).

It was with the occupation of Bosnia by Austro-Hungarian armies (1878) that Ashkenazi Jews started to settle in Sarajevo as well. The Ashkenazim decided to establish their own religious community. Successively they built their own synagogue and had their

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own religious educational institutions, cemetery, and charitable organizations (Birri-Tomovska 2012, 37).

In 1894 and 1902, the humanitarian, educational, and cultural association *La Benevolencia* and the musical association *La Lira* were formed as Sephardic cultural institutions. Moreover, the Bosnian Sephardic newspaper, *La Alborada*, was founded and distributed in Sarajevo in 1900–1901 (Greble 2011, 40).[6]

The Sephardim lived according to their wealth. The poorest, who formed the majority, were concentrated in the Bjelave district, whereas the richest remained in the city center (Freidenreich 1979, 18, 20). Most Sephardim were merchants and it is estimated that Jews contributed to about one-third of Sarajevo's commercial activity. Many of the Sephardim were also doctors, pharmacists, and tin-smiths (Freidenreich 1979, 19; Simović Vučina 2016, 96). Moreover, the Sephardic male received strictly religious education in Ladino and in Hebrew and very few Jews sent their children to public schools (Simović Vučina 2016, 80).

In 1910, however, the Sephardi religious school ceased to exist and the building turned into a public school, which "ended the tradition of Jewish separate schools in Sarajevo and the use of Ladino as a language of instruction in the school." Twenty-one years later, in the Yugoslav census, approximately 60% of the Sephardim regarded Ladino as their mother tongue and 40% reported Serbo-Croatian to be so (Freidenreich 1979, 21–22).

The Jews in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1945)

In the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1945), Jews were considered a religious minority, and speakers of Ladino began using Serbo-Croatian (Birri-Tomovska 2012, 127–128, 179–180; Ivanković 2011, 135). Simović Vučina and Filipović (2011, 566, 576), however, point to the fact that the Zionist movement had an impact on language ideologies, and that there was an interest in revitalizing Hebrew as a global Jewish language. Zionism was in fact essential in uniting the Ashkenazi and Sephardic "Yugoslav Jews." Nevertheless, only 1.5% of Yugoslav Jewry had left for Palestine by the time of World War II (Kerkkänen 2001, 23, 27). Birri-Tomovska (2012, 163, 169) argues that the reason why so few Jews emigrated to Palestine was possibly because they were treated well in Yugoslavia. Immigration to Palestine had increased during the 1930s but it was only in 1940 that the first anti-Jewish laws were adopted (Goldstein 1999, 1, 6).[7]

The Yugoslav Zionist movement was promoted by Ashkenazi Jews in Zagreb after World War I. They had been educated in the West – in Berlin and in Vienna – and imported the Zionist ideology to Yugoslavia in order to respond to a growing anti-Semitism (Goldstein 1999, 3). The Westernization of life, however, prompted the Sephardic communities to switch to the majority national languages and/or to French, which resulted in Judeo-Spanish being spoken less.

When the war broke out in 1941, 10% of Sarajevo's population (10,000 people) was Jewish. The Sephardim constituted 85% of the Jewry and seven out of eight synagogues in the city at that time were Sephardic (Greble 2011, 12, 37). During World War II, more than 80% of Yugoslav Jews – 82,500 people – were killed (Kerkkänen 2001, 29).[8] Due to the extreme loss of speakers during the Holocaust, Judeo-Spanish could not be maintained.

The Jews in the second Yugoslavia (1945–1992)

In Tito's Yugoslavia (1945–1992), the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in Yugoslavia – a group of 42 Jewish communities – was re-established in 1945

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(Kerkkänen 2001, 42).[9] More than 90% of Jews in Yugoslavia lived in mixed marriages between Jews and non-Jews (Kerkkänen 2001, 169), and after World War II, intermarriages between Sephardim and Ashkenazim were also usual (whereas before World War II intermarriages between Sephardim and Ashkenazim were unusual) (Birri-Tomovska 2012, 183, 187; Simović Vučina 2016, 103, 220). However, Kerkkänen (2001, 49) maintains that intermarriages between Sephardim and Ashkenazim were unusual even after the war, and that the earlier distinction between the two communities was only discontinued post-World War II.

Almost all Yugoslav Jews lived in urban centers (such as Belgrade, Zagreb, and Sarajevo). Less than 5% lived in rural areas where organized communities did not exist (Birri-Tomovska 2012, 149). Because of their concentration in the big cities, most Jews were active in trade and banking rather than in agriculture (Birri-Tomovska 2012, 148; Ivanković 2011, 132). Additionally, regime-loyal Jews held high positions in the state-administration, as diplomats, and in the army (Kerkkänen 2001, 98). Tito's right-hand man, Moša Pijade, who was Jewish, came to function as a middleman between Jews and Yugoslav authorities. Pijade was engaged in migration issues and ensured that it became easier to migrate from Yugoslavia than it was from East European countries (Hofmeisterová 2016, 270; Kerkkänen 2001, 100).

Six major *aliyot*[10] took place in 1948–1952, and already after the first two *aliyot* the Yugoslav Jewry was reduced by 60% (Ivanković 2009, 318, 339). On emigrating to Israel, Yugoslav Jews lost their property ownership rights in Yugoslavia (Ivanković 2011, 150). The largest of the remaining communities were in Belgrade, Sarajevo, and Zagreb (Hofmeisterová 2016, 272–273). However, many Yugoslav immigrants were not happy with their lives in Israel and returned to Yugoslavia (Ivanković 2011, 150).

It should be noted, too, that discussions were ongoing whether the Yugoslav Jewish federation should be considered ethnic or religious (Hofmeisterová 2016, 271–272, 275; Ivanković 2011, 134). These debates prompted the government to issue a new law on the legal status of religious communities in 1953. It granted the right to conduct religious activities, but political activities by religious communities were not allowed. Consequently, the Jewish Federation's collaboration with Israel was suddenly problematic (Kerkkänen 2001, 89). In the same year, the League of Communists also promulgated a new law emphasizing that atheism was one of their basic principles. This meant, of course, that one could not be a member of a religious organization and the League of Communists at the same time. In order to get around this problem, the Jewish Federation deleted the word religious and renamed themselves as a national minority instead. A separate religious section of the Federation was founded that came under the law on religion. Moreover, the new atheist principle of the Communists – stated as an anti-religious clause introduced in the constitution – pushed Jewish members of the party to boycott Jewish holidays (Hofmeisterová 2016, 278). According to Ivanković (2011, 144), however, religious activities (such as services in the synagogue) were never explicitly discouraged. However, in reality, religious practice was considered taboo and as a result, many Orthodox Jews migrated to Israel (Ivanković 2011, 143; Kerkkänen 2001, 69).

One could argue that Jews were privileged in the second iteration of the nation of Yugoslavia by the mere fact that they were considered equal to others. As Jović (2011, 122) writes: "The Yugoslav system was based on the idea that nobody could be treated as a minority, but as equal to the majority" (Jović 2011, 122). In other words, Jews did not have any special status or constitute a group set apart in order to be protected (that is, by being recognized as an official minority with special support).

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In Sarajevo before the war of the 1990s, there were 0.6% Jews, 49.3% Muslim Slavs, 6.6% Croats, and 29.9% Serbs (Kočović 1998, 332, 338). None of Yugoslavia's constituent nations had an absolute majority.

The Jews in Sarajevo today

During the 1992–1995 siege of Sarajevo, there were eight convoys and the Jewish community was very welcoming to every person no matter if he/she was Jewish or not; many left Sarajevo for Israel or refugee hotels in the Balkan region. The evacuation was financed by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. In fact, during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, a majority of Yugoslav Jewish community members fled to Israel and many other countries (Canada, Spain, etc.) with help from their respective communities (Kerkkänen 2001, 177). After the war in Bosnia ended in late 1995, many Bosnian Jews who had fled to Israel returned to Sarajevo. They were often highly educated and could not necessarily find work in Israel and moreover it was expensive to live there and many of them had apartments back home to return to (Jakob Finci, personal communication, 26 December 2016).

After the war, the Jewish confederation emerged as five separate entities in Croatia (with approximately 1700 community members); Serbia (3200 members); Bosnia-Herzegovina (1000 members); Slovenia (100 members); and Macedonia (200 members). In Montenegro, there were only 25 living Jews who were all registered in Belgrade's Jewish Community (Kerkkänen 2001, 186). From 2012, however, there is an independent Jewish community in Montenegro with around 100 members.

The Jews in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as other small minorities in the country, faced the special situation of having three major ethnic groups dominating the country: Muslims, Serbs, and Croats that in turn give the Jews the status of being both insiders and outsiders. In Sarajevo today, Muslim Slavs make up 80.5%, the Serbs 7.5%, and the Croats 12% (Sundhaussen 2014, 352). According to Kerkkänen (2001, 194), Jewish identification either with the Muslims, Serbs, or Croats was unnatural and thus a quest for Jewish identity emerged.

Furthermore, Jews did not follow the usual post-Serbo-Croatian state-regulated and elitist-dictated language division of Orthodox speaking Serbian, Catholics speaking Croatian, and Muslims speaking Bosnian. Thus, other/individual/anti-national language-classifications have emerged such as referring to ones' language as "our language" (cf. Bugarski 2013, 166–167).

Today's Bosnian Jewish Community organization is registered in accordance with the Law on the Freedom of Worship and the Legal Position of Churches and Religious Communities. Religious communities (such as the Jewish one in question) in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not integrated into the budget of the central government and thus must finance themselves. There is also an open competition to apply for state funding for humanitarian and cultural projects. In one conversation (26 December 2016), Jakob Finci who is President of the Jewish Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina, related that the Jewish community receives 15,000 Bosnian marks every year from the government for the ceremonies commemorating the Holocaust (Figure 1).

Moreover, the Ministry of Education is giving financial support to schools so that their pupils will learn about the Holocaust. Apart from the state-funded projects, there are international organizations supporting the Jewish community and non-Jewish Sarajevan citizens. Benevolencija Deutschland e.V. has given 20,000 Euro to elderly people in Sarajevo (non-Jews) in order to improve their standard of living. Connections and World

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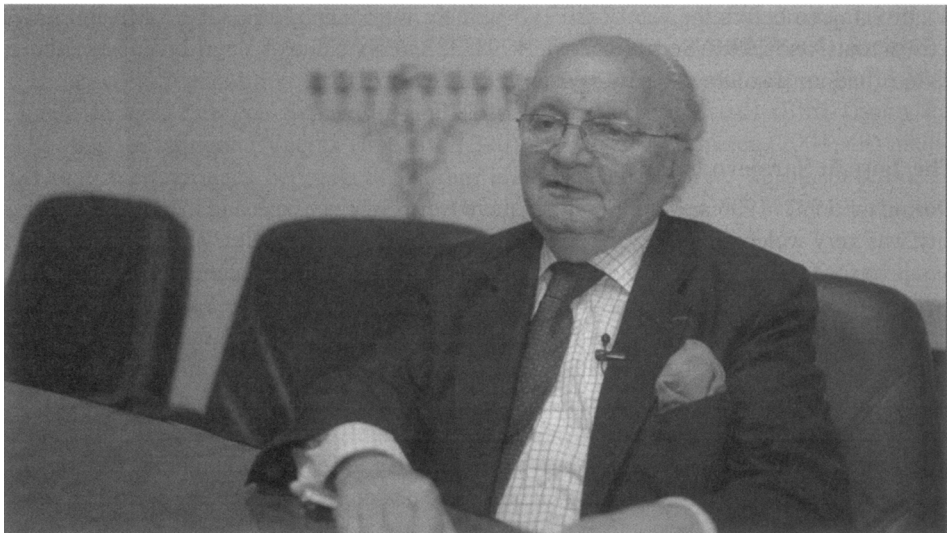


Figure 1. Jakob Finci, December 2016.

Jewish Relief London is also providing scholarships for Jewish university students in Sarajevo, and the Claims Conference is giving aid to the 85 Holocaust survivors living in Bosnia and Herzegovina (64 of them are based in Sarajevo). The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee is additionally providing funding to the community and to the work of La Benevolencia (Jakob Finci, personal communication, 26 December 2016; Vladimir Andrle, personal communication, 27 December 2016).

La Benevolencia of today is a non-governmental organization that is operating in close cooperation with the Jewish community. One of La Benevolencia's humanitarian projects is to provide support to Bosnian Holocaust survivors. Additionally, Eli Tauber founded a non-governmental organization, the Haggadah, in December 2014.[11] The association helps to promote Jewish culture and tradition and also to increase the city's tourism potential.

Currently, there is no law on Return of Property in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Jakob Finci thinks that the Bosnian government should follow the example of Serbia (Jakob Finci, personal communication, 26 December 2016). Since 2006, there has been a law on property restitution there, requiring that the Serbian government will give the Belgrade Jewish community 950,000 Euro every year (with the first installment in 2017) as compensation for the community's property losses during WWII (cf. Ivanković 2009, 73).

Furthermore, according to the 1995 Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is a distinction among the three "constituent Bosniac (Bošnjaci), Serb, and Croat peoples" and the "others." The "others" are members of ethnic minorities and persons who do not declare affiliation with any particular group. As a matter of fact, only persons declaring affiliation with a "constituent people" are entitled to run for the House of Peoples (the second chamber of the State Parliament) and the Presidency (the collective Head of State). Because this regulation is discriminatory, Jakob Finci and Dervo Sejdić, the Roma Monitor of the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe, filed a lawsuit in the European Court of Human Rights, which in turn, in 2009, found that the constitution does indeed violate human rights. Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot be a candidate for the membership of the European Union until the constitution is amended.

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According to Jakob Finci (personal communication, 27 December 2016), the 2016 Bosnian Questionnaire – that is requested by the European Commission to the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the preparation of the Opinion on the application of Bosnia Herzegovina for membership of the European Union – is the longest among the questionnaires for other applicants to the European Union, totaling 399 pages. Bosnia and Herzegovina are expected to hand in the answers by the end of May 2017. Under the sub-section on *Respect for and Protection of Minority Rights* (48–51), the European Commission requested assurance that persons belonging to minority groups enjoyed full access to political and civil liberties. Moreover, according to the questionnaire, information from the State Council for National Minorities in Bosnia must provide information regarding the number of people belonging to minority groups according to the latest census in 2013. However, when Jakob Finci contacted the State Council for National Minorities in Bosnia in 2016, they still did not have information available regarding how many persons declared themselves as Jews (Jakob Finci, personal communication 26 December 2016).[12] Only recently, the number has been made public. There were 300 declared Jews and in total the Jewish community has 880 members (Jakob Finci, personal communication, 6 May 2017).

In the 2012 and 2015 Periodical Reports on Bosnia and Herzegovina (which are compiled by the council of experts of the Implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages), the Jews appear to be one of the 17 listed national minority groups (Perry and Keil 2013, 383). The others are: Albanians, Montenegrins, Czechs, Italians, Hungarians, Macedonians, Germans, Poles, Roma, Slovaks, Slovenians, and Ukrainians. According to the law, the minorities should enjoy the same rights that all other citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina do. However, this was not the case when Jakob Finci wanted to run for the presidency.

There are no Jewish schools and kindergartens in Sarajevo. Within the Jewish community, there are two educational options: the Sunday School in which currently 15–20 children from the age of 3–13 meet once a week on Saturdays; and the Teenage Club where teenagers from the age of 13–17 meet once a month. Currently, this club has only about four members, so they have merged with the Student Club, consisting of 15 members who are 18 years and older. The teenagers and students usually meet on Fridays and attend the Shabbat service together. There is also a community choir with 10 female vocal members and one male guitarist. Six female persons are responsible for the community's educational work (Vladimir Andrle, personal communication, 29 December 2016).

Furthermore, the Bohorete Women's Club[13] consists of approximately 20 members who meet once a week, on Tuesdays, in the facilities of the Jewish community to discuss current happenings and to socialize with each other. The community also has a clinic and anyone, not only members, can come to do basic health checks and receive prescriptions (Figure 2).

David Kamhi has until recently been chazan in the Sarajevan Jewish community and his mother tongue is Ladino and therefore he used Ladino during the services as well. Since he retired in 2016, the 37-year-old Igor Kožemjakin is chazan. Specifically, in order to attract younger members of the community to, for instance, attend the Shabbat services on Friday evenings, he has approached the Teenage- and Student Clubs and informed them about the Shabbat service. This has inspired the younger generations to attend the services in the synagogue (Kožemjakin, personal communication, 28 December 2016).

Igor Kožemjakin is also responsible for the Jewish burial ceremonies, and he says that some members choose to have a secular Jewish burial ceremony and others want to have a religious one. The Jewish Community does not charge their members for

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Figure 2. The Bohorete Women's Club, March 2016.

the burial, but the state company wants 1200 Bosnian marks for any kind of burial. In order to make it possible for their members to be buried, the Jewish community thus asks for five Bosnian marks from each of their members when someone dies so that the whole community can help cover the burial cost (Igor Kožemjakin, personal communication, 28 December 2016).

The 48-year-old non-residential rabbi Eliezer Papo comes to Sarajevo for the High Holidays. He was raised in Sarajevo and left for Jerusalem during the war in the 1990s. According to him, there were about 20 Jewish wedding ceremonies before the civil war and after that, there was not a single Jewish marriage ceremony (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Eliezer Papo and Igor Kožemjakin, Pesach 2015.

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Moreover, the converts (that in turn have learned with Eliezer Papo) are circumcised but most of the Jewish-born boys are not, since they do not need to in order to be recognized by the community as Jews. According to my male interviewees, however, they are all circumcised. Furthermore, there have been just a few Bar- and Bat Mitzvahs in the community and today nonetheless the community is more "traditional" than before. For instance, the average age of the people attending the services is 40 and before it was 60 (Eliezer Papo, personal communication, 15 December 2015).

Jewish-Sephardic identification in Sarajevo

In the following section, I present empirical findings I have collected during my fieldwork in Sarajevo in April 2015 and March 2016, and I discuss which observations are relevant in relation to my interviewees' reflections upon Sarajevo and Jewish-Sephardic identification in Sarajevo.

I spoke to three community members under the age of 30. One of these, Tea Abinun, was born in Sarajevo in 1998 and is a BA student of Musicology in Sarajevo. She can speak English, Bosnian Serbian Croatian Montenegrin, and a little Spanish. She has no self-reported connection to Israel. In the latest census in 2013, she declared herself as Jewish in terms of both religion and ethnicity, and that her mother tongue is Bosnian. Her family lost property during World War II that was never returned to them or compensated for.

My second source, Vladimir Andrle, was born in Sarajevo in 1986 and is a coordinator of humanitarian and cultural activities who has completed a BA degree in Music in Sarajevo. He speaks English, Bosnian Serbian Croatian Montenegrin and a little German and Spanish. He has been to Israel once in his life for a weeklong leadership program. In the latest census in 2013, he declared himself as Jewish in terms of both religion and ethnicity and that his mother tongue is Bosnian. His family lost property during World War II that was never returned to them or compensated for.

My third source, A.A., did not wish to be named. She was born in Sarajevo in 1994, and is a BA student of Musicology in Sarajevo. She can speak English, Bosnian Serbian Croatian, and has no self-reported connection to Israel. In the 2013 census, she declared herself as Jewish by religion and Croatian by ethnicity, and noted that her mother tongue is Bosnian. Like my other sources from this generation, her family lost property during World War II that was never returned to them or compensated for.

Among these interviewees younger than 30 years, Vladimir Andrle, states:

> I started to engage in Jewish "community life" when I was 16. I think the majority is Sephardic but it's the Ashkenazi synagogue … . There are Sephardic books and jewelry in the synagogue. We have a non-residential rabbi coming twice a year, he is very relaxed … . Everything I know about Judaism I've learnt in the Jewish Community. I would say the community is both Sephardic and Ashkenazi because after World War II both communities are one. The community is open every day and you can eat lunch here.

It is clear from these utterances that the Jewish community in Sarajevo that functions as a hub of the Sephardic-Jewish network in Sarajevo and that the community's restaurant is a crucial building block in the process of identity creation. Tea Abinun elaborates further on the Jewish community restaurant:

> Some of the meals at the Jewish Community restaurant are influenced from the Sephardic cuisine. My father is the cook there and he makes pashas di poru, mina di kezu, fritulikas, guevos haminadus, sungatu, pastel and lukumis. The food in the restaurant is not kosher and during the regular week the lunch that is served is from a mixed cuisine and there are also

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> traditional Bosnian meals: sarma, buranija, čorba and mućkalica. There is a book, "Dobar tek" by Sonja Samokovlija with some of my fathers' Sephardic recipes.

The same girl explains:

> My father was born Sephardic-Jewish and my mother was born Serbian-Orthodox but she is practicing Judaism. To practice Judaism is to celebrate Shabbat, that is enough. We only celebrate hanukkha at home and all other holidays in the community. I am of course Jewish by blood because my father is Jewish but Halacha is not important. I think I am just as much woman, Jewish and Bosnian and all identities are equally important. There is no real conflict between the different identities.

There is a contradicting belief that, on the one hand, practice of Judaism is non-important, probably because Jews were persecuted throughout history and thus should not have to prove their vitality in order to be considered a vital culture. On the other hand, celebration of Shabbat is crucial. AA stresses that religion is explicitly a private and secondary matter:

> My nationality is Bosnian and Herzegovinian and my religion is separate. It's personal and involves some of the holidays' like pesach, hanukkha, and purim. I come from a mixed family. My mum's mum is Bosnian-Muslim and her dad is Serbian-Orthodox, my dad's dad is Jewish and his mum is Croatian-Catholic. I am Bosanka and/or Jevjrejka in different contexts. I think most of all I am Sarjevan. I see someone as a person. The religious belonging is not important.

In her statement, hybrid and hyphenated identifications are prevalent due to memberships in different identity-creating processes. She continues:

> It's not common in the Balkans to be proud of one's Jewish heritage and there are very few Jews here so I don't think one has to celebrate the holidays in order to be considered Jewish. You can be Jewish also if you have Jewish roots. I was in a Jewish Sunday-school when I was 3–12 years old and then I attended the youth-club and we also have a choir where we sing in Hebrew and Ladino. *Jevrejski glas* is given out by the Jewish Community but there are no Jewish TV shows in Sarajevo. Once there was a TV documentary about Hanukkha. They always broadcast documentaries about Bajram and Christmas and I was really happy that they once sent a program about Hanukkha. Nevertheless, there is no need for a Jewish store here. It would be really expensive to import wine for instance but it's not expensive to be a member of the community. You pay a minimum sum every year, I think it's 15 marks. Pesach is special in the Jewish community. A rabbi is coming here and usually we don't have a rabbi. We read the Haggadah and it's special in every way.

Her Sarajevan Judaism is thus oscillating between practice and non-practice and between the conception of seeing a vital Sephardic Judaism and an absent or deserted one.[14]

Among the youngest generation, it is moreover clear that there is no special place today where Jews live:

> (VA) I live in the center and the majority is Muslim but there are also Serbs and Croats and probably other peoples (naroda). I think Serbs are closer to Jews because they were also victims of genocide during the Holocaust in the Independent State of Croatia.
>
> (AA) I live with my parents in novi Sarajevo, it's 10 minutes with tram from the center. There is no Jewish ghetto.
>
> (TA) I live with my parents in the center of the city and before there were ethnic borders but not any longer. Maybe I would feel close to Toledo if I would go there .... But it was 500 years ago! It's difficult to imagine.

Unlike sources I spoke with who were under 30, those between the ages of 30 and 55 appeared to demonstrate more of an outspoken religious identification. The political context of a particular generation in which an interviewee was raised has presumably helped to shape their views. The reason why this second generation – having been socialized in both Yugoslavia and Bosnia – are more outspoken about their religious

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identification is probably because two of the three interviewees lived in Israel during their formative years, which was also during the war in the 1990s. The third interviewee, Yehuda Kolonomos, has not lived in Israel but he said in one of our conversations that he grew up in a pro-Israel atmosphere and he very much would like to do *Aliyah* in the future. Even if religion was legally accepted in socialist Yugoslavia, religious practice was considered relatively taboo and this fact that it was taboo is probably a reason why religion has become an attractive option for this generation in today's Sarajevo.

Yehuda Kolonomos was born in Sarajevo in 1968 and is a university lecturer who has completed an MA degree in Musicology in Oslo. He speaks English, Croatian, Macedonian, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Italian, Hebrew, and Ladino. He has been in Israel a few times as a tourist. In the future, he would like to do *Aliyah* and settle down with his family (his wife, one daughter, and four sons) in Israel. In the latest census in 2013, he declared himself as Jewish in terms of both religion and ethnicity and that his mother tongue is Croatian.

Tina Tauber was born in Sarajevo in 1982, and she works as a tour guide. She completed one year of Jewish Studies in Stockholm and has studied English in Sarajevo. She speaks Hebrew, English, the Yugoslavian languages, and a little Russian. She made *Aliyah* in 1992 and returned to Sarajevo 2004. In the latest census in 2013, she declared herself as Jewish by religion, Bosnian by ethnicity, and that her mother tongues are Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian.

Finally, Igor Kožemjakin was born in Sarajevo in 1980, and is a counselor whose work involves ethnic-religious cooperation. He has completed one year of Jewish Studies in Stockholm and has also studied law and economics in Sarajevo. He speaks English, Russian, Hebrew, Bosnian Croatian Serbian Montenegrin, Bulgarian, and Macedonian. He made *Aliyah* in 1994 and returned to Sarajevo 2001. In the latest census in 2013, he declared himself as Jewish in terms of both religion and ethnicity and that his mother tongues are Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian.

All my sources from this demographic bracket lost property during and after World War II that was never returned to them or compensated for.

Among this generation older than 30 years, the Sarajevan Sephardic community life is commented in the following way. Igor Kožemjakin stated in a Facebook message (5 June 2015):

> There is a baby-boom in the Jewish community now and about 50% of the newborn have Jewish names. Not Sephardic, no. I have learnt about Sephardic culture and religion from our non-residential rabbi, Eliezer Papo. I would say, in the community, the liturgical melodies are Sephardic and the food.

The same person elaborates when we meet:

> I am optimistic about the future of our children, sure. If I wasn't I would have left long ago. I think the future is going to be brighter for my family and I and our community; that's one of the reasons keeping me here. I read the *Jevrejski glas* of course and Jewish information from Belgrade and Zagreb. There are TV-programs in the Internet in Hebrew and the Jerusalem Post. Jewishness is a religion first of all and then a nationality in relation to Israel. Shabbat is in the center of our lives. We light candles, read prayers and go to the synagogue. I have the traditions from my mother. For Hanukkah and the other holidays, we all come together in the community unlike Jews from other countries, who I think celebrate mostly at home.
>
> We are a small community and we can bring all our members. We put a big Menorah here in the garden of our Synagogue and at this event our friends from different religious groups are coming to join us. The fact that people from other religions participate brings us closer honoring the Torah. Even people who say they're atheist come before Shabbat and other holidays to at least keep the tradition.

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> On Friday evening, there are maybe 12–13 men, because there are still no women allowed in the Minjan. It's a contradiction but it's the traditional Sephardic life. The Sephardim behaved this way even during socialism. I would love it to have a female Minjan and I think it's going to happen. With new generations, this community will turn more to the essence and less to the form of the religion. I would like this contradiction to be nullified. However, the community feels good with it and I think that the younger population is more interested in reformed Judaism.

It is clear from his statement that the community is tradition-oriented but at the same time, the younger are interested in a reformed Judaism with more gender equality.[15]

Yehuda Kolonomos says:

> I direct a choir and we mix various traditions to capture the whole picture of the Jewish tradition. We sing in English, Yiddish, Ladino, and local languages. The choir members are non-Jewish. They are students of music. We turn to everyone, not only towards Jews.
>
> My children listen to Hebrew songs on You Tube and in Zagreb there is a kosher bakery.
>
> Intermarriages are common in this society. Because of the mixing of different cultures there is not much tradition and religion. It's a very delicate question. When I was a child, my mother told me Orthodox rabbis came to Sarajevo and tried to encourage a more Jewish way of life in the community. And all their attempts were suppressed. Our Jewish community didn't want that it was too strict. Probably it's because of Communism. You couldn't just go around and spread your religion because there was a strict regime of Communism.

Only Yehuda Kolonomos longs for a more Orthodox Jewish way of living which he still finds a difficult prospect in Sarajevo. He explains that he has plans to learn how to slaughter animals in a kosher way. He has already begun to bake kosher bread, and has found a list of kosher products one can find in the regular supermarkets. Moreover, he plans to do *Aliyah* and to become a chazan in Israel. It is important to him to live in Israel so that his children can learn Hebrew.

Tina Tauber from this generation reveals:

> Just because you don't celebrate Shabbat doesn't mean you're not Jewish. You can't choose it, it's in your blood. I am Jewish "po narodnost." It's a blood-ties thing. I am Bosnian and Herzegovinian "po nationalnost" but we mix the definitions; national, ethnic, religious, and I switch identity according to the context. I like the Jewish holidays.

The celebration of Jewish-religious acts, that is, maxims, festivals, and holidays are considered to be important to her but it is not necessarily connected with a faith in G-d. Moreover, she mentions blood-ties but it does not correlate with Halacha since her father was born Jewish, but not her mother.

When reflecting upon living conditions this generation reveals:

> (TT) There is of course a welcome-sign when you enter Republika Srpska but no checkpoint .... Before you knew exactly where the Jews lived, in a special part of the Old Town, but now we are so few. The Jewish Community is neutral.
>
> (YK) 5–6 ethnic groups live together in one Mahala. Sarajevo is very multiethnic even if today many would declare themselves as Bosniaks. There are also many minorities.
>
> (IK) If not in Sarajevo, I would like to live in Stockholm. I studied there for one year and that's where I met my wife.

I moreover spoke with three sources older than 55, all of whom are members of the Bohorete Women's Club: Matilda Finci was born in Sarajevo in 1935 and she studied Romance Languages (French, Italian, and Latin) in Sarajevo. In addition to Serbo-Croatian, she speaks French, Italian, Russian, Hebrew, and a little Spanish and Ladino. She lived in Israel during the war from 1992 to 1999. In the latest census in 2013, she declared herself as Jewish in terms of both religion and ethnicity, and that her mother tongue is Serbo-Croatian.

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My second source, Laura Papo Ostojić, was born in Sarajevo in 1939 and she studied architecture in Sarajevo. In addition to Serbo-Croatian, she speaks English as well as a little French and Italian. She has been to Israel once to visit her two sons who were living there during the Bosnian war, but who have since come back to Sarajevo. In the latest census in 2013, she declared herself as Jewish by religion and ethnicity and that her mother tongue is Serbo-Croatian (this was not a given option, but she asked the person asking the questions to write Serbo-Croatian anyway).

Both Matilda Finci and Laura Papo Ostojić lost property in 1948 that was never returned or given compensation for.

Finally, Erna Kaveson Debevec was born in Sarajevo in 1933 and she studied law in Sarajevo. In addition to Bosnian, she speaks English, Spanish, and Ladino. She has never lived in Israel, but has family there. In the latest census in 2013, she declared herself as Jewish in terms of both religion and ethnicity and that her mother tongue is Bosnian. During the Communist regime, her family lost property that was never returned or given compensation for. The state has recently sold her former property to a private person.

Additionally, I consulted two key experts, Jakob Finci, the President of the Sarajevo Jewish Community and Eli Tauber, who is responsible for cultural activities at the Jewish Community.

For this generation that is older than 55 years, the ideas about a Sephardic-Jewish Sarajevan community life are as follows:

> (LPO) The holidays in the synagogue are in Serbo-Croatian and the prayers are in Hebrew and in Ladino. I celebrate Jewish national holidays. Only Orthodox Jews keep kosher! There are no real Orthodox Jews in this country.
>
> (MF) Judaism is like an ethnicity because we were living in socialism and religion was not central. I have a Jewish name and I feel sentiments towards Israel. We come to the community and celebrate the holidays.
>
> (ED) Its not really a religious community. There is Shabbat in the synagogue every Friday but most people come to meet friends.

The ethnic identification is crucial for the elderly Sephardim. Jakob Finci, the President of the Jewish community expresses in this context the following in one of our conversations (10 April 2015):

> I was born Jewish and brought up in a Jewish family. I had a Jewish childhood with Jewish friends. Usually we know each other just by nicknames and I don't know the real name or a persons' nationality or religion. First of all, we are human beings. Because of many mixed marriages some don't know where they belong. It's important "who you are" and this is why you fall in love with someone – because you feel good in somebody's company.

Eli Tauber who is responsible for cultural issues at the Jewish community explains (10 April 2015):

> Every nation here is part of my everyday life. Important is if someone is a good man or not. That one's mother is Jewish-born is not so important. My children's mother was born Serbian Orthodox and I come from a Ashkefardi family. My mother's parents were Sephardim, and my father's parents were Aschkenazim. That means .... In Sarajevo, we call people who come from intermarriages of Sephardim and Aschkenazim – Ashkefardi.

Regarding the living conditions, the elderly generation contemplates:

> (ED) I live in novi Sarajevo and there are no ethnic boarders. I am the only Jew in my house.
>
> (LPO) We have neighbors from many countries, from Albania, Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia. Before the war, the Jews used to live in the Old City but now they live all over.

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(MF) There was never a ghetto here. I live in the center and there is no strict division of peoples.

Their statements regarding the Jewish community life in Sarajevo clearly indicate that they intermingle with people outside of the community, learning about different traditions and ideas. They then construct their own Sephardic identification based on these new experiences.

Despite the fact that the interview subjects grew up in vastly different political contexts, there are indeed commonalities across the generation. For instance, the youngest share the view that practice of Judaism is not important but at the same time they fear that the Sephardic Jewish identification will disappear. There are, moreover, differences inter-generationally as well as commonalities between generations. The elderly who were socialized solely in Yugoslavia see Judaism as an ethnicity, whereas the second generation is more interested in the religious dimension – now that religion is not seen as taboo. None of the generations seem to emphasize the maintenance of Judeo-Spanish as a crucial obstacle for the continuation of Sephardic culture in Sarajevo. One can be Sephardic without speaking or understanding the Sephardic language, and the celebration of holidays is more important across the generations than a collective Jewish language.

Conclusion

I argue that among the Sephardim in Sarajevo, hybrid and hyphenated identities are present to a high degree and the identity-creating factor Sarajevo is key in this process. This is manifested through the facts that they, that is, all three generations: (1) live all over in Sarajevo and are not concentrated in a separate area and are thus not segregated from others; (2) moreover that they do not stick to a halachic interpretation of Judaism; according to which the mother must be Jewish in order to transmit the Jewish heritage; and (3) that the mixed marriages and backgrounds are appreciated in positive terms. These three factors singled out (non-segregation from others, distancing from the Halachic interpretation of Judaism, and positive view of mixed marriages) are factors that impacted previous periods and are not specific to the current times.

The present-time "reinforcement of religion" is a well-known trend in all post-Yugoslav states and is thus not specific for Bosnia and Herzegovina, or the Jews there, or the city of Sarajevo. In some ways, the situation of Jews in Sarajevo may resemble similar cases elsewhere in Europe and specifically Southeastern Europe. In other ways, the situation in Sarajevo is unique.

The unique characteristics in this context are the role of minorities with regard to (1) the discriminatory Bosnian Constitution; (2) the lack of a law on the Return of Property; (3) the special situation of having three major ethnic groups dominating the country – specifically, Muslims, Serbs, and Croats that in turn give the Jews the status of being both insiders and outsiders; and (4) the lack of a Jewish cultural infrastructure, as there is no *mohel*/residential rabbi, and kosher store or Jewish schools. Despite all of this, a reinforcement of religion is taking place. Moreover, I think that the framework of having a young and open-minded chazan, Igor Kožemjakin – who functions as a religious activist – has attracted younger members to the religious services and that this is important in the revitalization process.

Igor Kožemjakin would also like to open a Jewish kindergarten and elementary school in Sarajevo, while maintaining that "these institutions should of course be welcoming non-Jews as well" (Igor Kožemjakin, personal communication, 28 December 2016). Igor Kožemjakin has already asked the state to return property to the Jewish community so that they can establish Jewish educational institutions. However, he received the answer

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that the Jewish community would have to rent rooms for this purpose, and this demotivated Kožemjakin to continue working to have these Jewish institutions in the city. As he notes of the past, "the Jewish community once owned 10% of the properties in the city center and 30% of the houses were in private Jewish hands" (Kožemjakin, personal communication, 28 December 2016). If the Jewish community could get property returned, he would go ahead and try to establish the institutions.

To sum up, while all of the informants seem to conceive of Jewish identification as divergent from a matrilineal descent, they nevertheless see themselves as Jews. The younger generations define themselves more in religious terms than the elderly but there are also continuities across the generations regarding their conceptions of what it means to be Jewish. They speak of a sentiment toward Israel as well as to the celebration of Shabbath, and other Jewish holidays. Among the youngest, a grief and loss is expressed because the place for Judaism in the Bosnian society is marginal. Simultaneously, the individuals – across the generations – seem to be also asserting alternative forms of being Bosnian, one that includes multi-ethnicity, and hyphenated religious ascriptions.

Typically, identities of people are classified in the following categories: national, ethnic, religious, and cultural identities. These constitute an identification with people of the same kind who share the same background. It seems that in this case, the individuals are completely reconfiguring understandings of what it means to be Jewish, and often on an individual basis rather than collectively; moreover, certain individuals seem to be generating identity-creation and preservation (Eliezer Papo and Igor Kožemjakin). Additionally, it is illustrative that the older women name their society the Bohorete Women's Club, recalling the feminist writer Laura Bohoreta Papo and the influential role she had on Ladino literature and culture within and beyond Sarajevo. What specifically marks identity in the minds of these interlocutors seems to be that Sephardization and the identification with Judaism are transferred from the elderly to the younger generations. Among the younger generations, the concept of Sephardism is present throughout the conversation, filtered, on the one hand, by the notion of a parallel coexistence of ethnicities and languages and by the conception of multiple and hyphenate identifications, and, on the other hand, especially among the youngest, a fear of loss of the Sephardic-Jewish dimension in their lifestyles.

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Notes

1. Judeo-Spanish is hardly spoken anymore among the Sarajevo Jews and this is why the interviews were not conducted in Judeo-Spanish. The pattern seems to be that the elderly are "rememberers" of Judeo-Spanish rather than semi-active or active speakers.
2. The cemetery is the second largest European-Jewish cemetery after Prague's and is famous for the rounded tombstones (Sundhaussen 2014, 81–83). Today, Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews are being buried together but before World War II, the Sephardim were buried on the right side of the cemetery and the Ashkenazim on the left-hand side (Eliezer Papo, personal communication, 8 May 2014).
3. *Mahala* is a Turkish loan word in Bosnian for district or neighborhood.
4. During the Ottoman period, *millet* was a legal court under which religious communities ruled themselves and thus had their own judicial systems. After the so-called Tanzimat reforms (1839–1876), *millet* was another term for religious minority groups. The word *millah* literally means nation in Arabic (Sachedina 2001, 96–97).
5. The Alliance israélite universelle was a Paris-based Jewish organization founded in 1860. One of the missions of the organization was to promote a more advanced and Westernized Jewish educational system with French as language of instruction (Birri-Tomovska 2012, 89, 152; Brink-Danan 2012, 16).
6. In this Habsburg period, the Sephardic women, for instance, started to spend time in cafés which was something that was being criticized in *La Alborada*. Another topic that was elaborated upon in the journal was Zionism and the question of having Hebrew as the language of the Sephardim instead of Judeo-Spanish (Simović Vučina 2016, 134, 136, 259).
7. In 1940, the Yugoslav authorities passed two anti-Jewish laws: one banning foodstuff enterprises which were owned by Jews, and another one introducing *numerus clausus,* which reduced the number of Jews enrolled at schools and universities according to the percentage of Jews in the total population (Goldstein 1999, 10).
8. There were survivors as well who had been hiding with friends, and approximately 6% of the Yugoslav Jews were part of the Titoist partisan movement which fought against the occupiers (Greble 2011, 110, 113).
9. In Yugoslavia's second constitution, there were two official categories of nationality: *narod* and *narodnost.* In the constitutions of the federal republics, there was another category: *etničke zajednice. Narod* were people from one of the Yugoslavian republics, that is, Croats, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Muslims, Serbs, and Slovenes. Serbs and Croats had two homelands in Serbia/Croatia and in Bosnia. *Narodnost* were national minorities whose "home" often was situated outside of Yugoslavia, the largest being Albanians and Hungarians. Etničke zajednice were those groups of people considered geographically scattered, that is, Jews, Greeks, Russians, and others (Blum 2002, 29). The categories of nationality attributed to these groups were, however, shifting and the Romani people were recognized as a *narodnost* in 1981 in the Bosnian, Croatian, and Montenegrin republics (Matasović 1989, 119).
10. When one immigrates to Israel, it is termed to go on *Aliyah* from the so-called diaspora to Israel.
11. The Haggadah is read during Passover and it's a Jewish text about the Book of Exodus in the Torah. The Sarajevo Haggadah was brought by Sephardim to Sarajevo from Spain. The text has been saved throughout history and is until today to be found in Sarajevo's National Museum (Greble 2011, 37–38).
12. In the same *Questionnaire* (December 2016) requested from the EU, the subsection on *Right to Property* furthermore states that Bosnia and Herzegovina should provide information regarding any legal uncertainties in relation to property restitution, as well as their plans to solve these uncertainties (44).
13. Luna (Laura) Papo Bohoreta (1891–1941) was a very productive Sarajevo-born feminist writer and playwright. She wrote her works in Judeo-Spanish and cared deeply about preserving the Sephardic culture.
14. According to the president of the community, Jakob Finci, they are a "traditional Sephardic community" even if it is not 100% clear-cut defined to anyone in the community what this actually means (Jakob Finci, personal communication, 26 November 2015).
15. The Sephardic tradition was not reformed as the Ashkenazi was (Brink-Danan 2012, 19).

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