

2020

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Recommended Citation

Halevi, Sharon (2020) "'We were very much surprised at their worship': American Girls and Religious Tourism in the Early Republic, 1780-1835," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*: Vol. 8: Iss. 8, Article 7.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.21427/j8dz-ss57>

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp/vol8/iss8/7>

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Cover Page Footnote

Funding This research was supported by the Israel Science Foundation [grant number 864/19].

Acknowledgements I thank the organizers and participants of the conference on "Religion as Emotion Knowledge" at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development (Berlin, June 2019) for their invaluable comments and suggestions to an earlier version of this article.

‘We were very much surprised at their worship’: American Girls and Religious Tourism in the Early Republic, 1780-1835

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Following the Revolution, the United States formally embraced the ideal and practice of religious freedom. But how was this ideal instilled and practiced? Could a form of pilgrimage have been mobilised in order to inculcate it? In this article I argue that in the early American republic, religious freedom was demonstrated and imparted to adolescents through a unique form of pilgrimage: visiting and attending the worship services of religious minorities while on tour. I demonstrate my argument by considering the travel accounts of fifteen, Protestant, American adolescent girls (aged 10 to 21) between 1782 and 1835; I trace their visits to various houses of worship while on tour and discuss their experiences. Scattered amid their descriptions are reports of attendance at the religious services of other faiths and other Christian denominations and sects. By stopping to encounter members of these religious minorities and to attend their religious worship along the tour, parents may have sought to demonstrate that enjoying civil privileges was no longer a product of one's religious affiliation or beliefs, but rather the outcome of one's shared national belonging and solidarity. This article both highlights the connections between forms of youth tourism and religious tolerance, and contributes to the scholarship concerning citizenship formation during the formative years of the modern state in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Key Words: adolescent girls, Early Republic, religious tourism, pilgrimage, citizenship education

Introduction

With the adoption of the First Amendment (1791), the United States formally embraced the ideal and practice of religious freedom and legally disconnected political citizenship from religious membership.¹ However, the crucial context for this transformation took place not only in the legal but in the social sphere. One significant way in which Americans (the vast majority of whom were Protestants) signalled their commitment to this ideal was by visiting non-Protestant and non-Christian places of worship.² For example, President George Washington visited Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island in 1790 and in 1794, William Moultrie, governor of South Carolina, along with several other officials and clergymen attended the dedication ceremony of the new

Synagogue of Charleston's Jewish congregation, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim (Ackermann, 2007:159).³

Officials also took great care to include religious minorities in civic activities and celebrations. Describing the Fourth of July celebration in 1788, Philadelphia politician and educator Dr. Benjamin Rush proudly noted:

The Clergy formed a very agreeable part of the procession. They manifested by their attendance their sense of the connection between religion and good government. They amounted to seventeen in number. Four of the five of them marched arm in arm with each other to exemplify the Union. Pains were taken to connect ministers of the most dissimilar religious principles together, thereby to show the influence of free government in promoting Christian charity. The Rabbi of the Jews locked in the arms of two ministers of the gospel was a most delightful sight. There could not have been a more happy emblem contrived of that section of the new Constitution which opens all its power and offices alike not only to every sect of Christians but to worthy men of every religion (Butterfield, 1951:477).

1 Several states did place disabilities on elected Jewish officeholders, by requiring some kind of profession of Christian beliefs (see Diner, 2006:48-53).

2 According to the 1790 Census there were about 2,500 Jews and 35,000 Catholics in the US (1.6% out of 3,893,635 Americans); by 1840 their numbers rose to about 15,000 Jews and 600,000 Catholics (about 3.5% out of 17,069,453 Americans) (See also, Starke & Finke, 1988).

3 Such visits may be viewed as early expressions of a 'civic' or 'civil religion' (see Bellah, 1967; Marty, 1989).

Rush's words ('manifest,' 'show,' 'sight' and 'emblem') reveal that adherence to the principles of religious disestablishment and the free exercise of all faiths had to be publicly demonstrated, if not performed. However, nearly all examples of these practices in the early United States come from an adult, overwhelmingly male, perspective, and with one exception (Freidman 1949), women's or girls' visits have not been noted, let alone attended to, in scholarly literature. Thus, first, it is vital to supplement the adult perspective with a juvenile one, as during this period more than half of all citizens were under twenty-one years of age.⁴ Second, it is important to understand the role travel and tourism played in children's and adolescents' civic education, and last, it is necessary to consider the gendered goals of such activities (e.g., touring as a form of civic education), especially as American girls would not be afforded full citizenship rights upon adulthood.

I contend that one way an abstract, political value, such as religious freedom, was demonstrated and imparted to adolescents in the early American republic was through a unique form of pilgrimage: visiting and attending the worship services of religious minorities while on tour. After a brief discussion of the scholarship on youth tourism and citizenship education, I trace the visits of fifteen, Protestant, American adolescent girls (aged 10 to 21) to various houses of worship while on tour between 1782 and 1835. I examine the variety of their responses to the places they saw and the people they met as well as their reactions to the different styles of worship. I close by considering the gender implications of this practice, finding that it prepared the girls for their future lives as adult women by providing them with knowledge necessary to fulfil their new civic roles. This article both highlights the connections between forms of youth tourism and religious tolerance, and contributes to the scholarship concerning citizenship formation during the formative years of the modern state in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Literature Review

My study lies at the intersection of the study of children's and adolescents' tourism and their citizenship education. In recent years, as tourism researchers have expanded

4 In 1820, for example, the median age was 16.7 years, but even in 1860, the median age was still only 19.4. As historian Paul Boyer put it, 'in terms of numbers alone, to neglect the historical experience of children and youth in these years is to ignore 50 percent of the population' (2009:x).

their examination of travel experiences and spaces to include those of children and youths (e.g., Hilbrecht *et al.*, 2008; Richards & Wilson, 2012; Small, 2008; Sutcliffe & Kim, 2014; Therkelsen & Lottrup, 2014; Wood, 2001); they have also considered the various aspects of youth educational tourism. For example, they examined it from the perspective of heritage tourism, fostering re-ethnification (e.g., Cohen, 2008; Lev Ari & Mittleberg, 2008), studied its effects on youth civic engagement (Beyerlein, Trinitapoli & Adler, 2011) and its function as a 'civil religious pilgrimage' (Feldman, 2016). However, most of this scholarship focuses on contemporary children's and adolescents' experiences and has not examined earlier nineteenth-century practices.

Concurrently, scholars studying the various forms of children's citizenship education have considered the role formal education about religion plays in promoting religious tolerance (e.g. Jackson, 2003; Van der Straten Waillet & Roskam, 2013). They have found that together with knowledge about other faiths, meeting and engaging with members of other religions constitutes an important first step on the road to religious tolerance (e.g., Coleman & White, 2011; Ferrara, 2012; Schihalejev, 2013; Schweitzer, 2007). Although Yasim Bilim and Sevde Düzgüner have suggested that religious tourism may serve as a catalyst for religious tolerance (2015; see also Shinde, 2015), researchers have yet to consider the role of youth tourism (an informal educational practice) in fostering religious tolerance. Integrating these two bodies of research deepens the understanding of informal and gendered practices of adolescent citizenship education in the early United States and the role religious tourism played in it.

The Tour and the Journals

Before turning my attention to the visits themselves it is important to understand these 'small tours' and the girls' journals (Halevi 2020). Undertaken by numerous white, middle- and upper-class, Protestant American girls, most of these tours took place sometime between the end of their formal education (most often at a girls' school / academy or a female seminary) and their marriages.⁵ The tour served as an informal and pleasurable continuation of their formal education, especially their civic education (Eastman, 2007; Kelley, 2006; Sklar, 1993). Through the

5 Kelley estimated that 'between 1790 and 1830, 182 academies and at least 14 seminaries were established exclusively for women in the North and the South' (2006:67).

myriad of activities and sights offered along its route, it was intended to promote the formation of a new shared sense of national identity and solidarity, by familiarising adolescent girls with their nation's geographical and social landscape.⁶ Both parents and daughters ascribed great importance to this tour, one of many rites of passage for these young women. Parents invested considerable money and time to accompany their daughters,⁷ while the girls regarded the tours (and the journals) as lifelong emotional and intellectual resources (Halevi 2020).

The routes of these girls' tours lay within comparatively settled areas of the Eastern United States and the Hudson River Valley; they amalgamated a unique assemblage of sites and sights, which were intended to appeal to the girls' senses, to their intellects and emotions. The girls visited sites of natural beauty, a range of cultural institutions (museums, galleries, libraries and theatres), new industrial projects (factories, bridges and canals), philanthropic endeavours (hospitals, schools for the disabled), educational institutions (universities and colleges), historical sites (former battlefields and forts) and familiarised themselves during a host of social activities (dances, teas, and picnics) with its peoples, who had now become, in the words of the traditional motto of the United States, *e pluribus unum* (Out of many, one).

In order to document their journeys the girls usually kept a separate tour journal, covering the few weeks or months of their travels. The fifteen journals in this study were written in the form of an epistolary diary or short daily entries, and they begin and end abruptly.⁸ Six of the journals were directed to a best friend, sister or cousin, with whom the author intended to exchange journals upon return home (as was the practice between girls). The journals were action oriented and contain

6 This process had begun several years before in school. Both Brückner (2006) and Schulten (2017) respectively have contended that geographical literacy in the early American republic greatly affected conceptions of identity and demonstrated that map literacy and geographical terminology were an integral part of children's curricula, primers and textbooks in the early republic. Schulten argues that studying and drawing maps was 'even a way for students to connect to fellow Americans whom they would never meet' (2017: 198).

7 Most of the fathers were self-employed (as lawyers, merchants, etc.).

8 The fifteen journals discussed here are part of a qualitative longitudinal study of American girls' diaries written during this period. The girls range from age 7 to 21. Out of 97 diaries I have located so far, fifteen are 'small tour' journals.

extensive details of places and doings; however, in-depth descriptions of emotions, often associated with current texts about the self (autobiographies, diaries, travelogues, etc.) are lacking.

Pilgrimages to Other Religious Communities

The girls embarked on an unusual form of religious pilgrimage while on tour. This was not a pilgrimage to see religious sites and / or participate in rites specific to their own religious belief system (e.g., Blackwell, 2007; Stausberg, 2014), nor was it a form of 'secular pilgrimage,' in which tourists (regardless of their faith or religiosity) visit religious sites known for their cultural or historical significance (Marine-Roig, 2015; see also Digance, 2005; Knox *et al.*, 2014). Rather the aim of this pilgrimage was to observe or 'witness' the daily / weekly worship services of members of other faiths / sects and encounter these 'other,' at times very different, religious adherents. Anthropologist Alan Morinis defines a pilgrimage as 'a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state of mind that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal' (1992:4; see also Greenia, 2018: 10). And indeed, these visits were designed to display religious diversity so that the girls might recognise civic unity and derive a political value from this 'witnessing' (See Margery, 2008:17); most significantly they would appreciate the importance of religious freedom and the severance of religious membership from political citizenship. Thus these visits meshed with other activities and sights along the tour route which were also intended to familiarise the girls with their compatriots and thereby foster the sense of a shared national identity.

In their writings, all the girls recorded attending other Protestant sects' services; seven visited at least one Jewish synagogue, or Catholic church or Shaker meetinghouse along their tour route, three visited more than one such house of worship. The girls diligently recorded the various denominations and the houses of worship they saw and / or visited while traveling. For example, nineteen-year-old Elizabeth Bridgham (Patten; 1799-1882) included in her 1818 description of Albany, NY, a list of its churches:

There are eight houses for public worship in this City; one Episcopal Church in the Gothic order, one story in height; one Lutheran, of white marble, one Roman Catholic of brick, one Sicilian, also brick; three Presbyterian

Churches, very handsome, & one Reformed Dutch Church... (Bridgham, 1905: 25).⁹

These visits were an urban activity, usually carried out in a port city. Besides the Shakers in upstate New York, who lived in rural communities, Catholic and Jewish communities were to be found in the large, multiethnic cities of New York City, Philadelphia and Baltimore (in the United States) or in Quebec and Montreal (in Canada).¹⁰ As the girls' tour routes closely followed the general domestic tourism patterns, visits to cathedrals and convents in Canada were added on in the late 1810s and became an integral part of the tour regardless of tourists' age or gender; while visits to the Shakers slowly declined after the construction of the Champlain (1823) and Erie (1825) canals, which by-passed their settlements in upstate New York (Gassan, 2008). Such visits to religious places of worship along the tour's itinerary were not proposed in any of the period guidebooks, nor did the girls suggest that they were determined upon in advance. At times they were clearly a spur of the moment decision; Elizabeth Bridgham reported that her visit to the Shaker meetinghouse was the result of a dinner conversation at a wayside boardinghouse, where her father and she were staying (1905:26).

In the girls' travel writings, Shakers clearly represented the 'new,' while Jews and Catholics were positioned to represent the 'old.' Both Catholics and Jews embodied adherence to a rigid orthodoxy; the Catholic ritual was seen as too formulaic and ceremonial, while the Jewish ritual, text bound as it was, seemed chaotic, lacking in order and solemnity. In contrast the Shakers, who were overtaken by the Spirit, exemplified unorthodoxy in beliefs (e.g., the dualism of god) and behaviours (e.g., rejection of private property, celibacy, and equality for women). Although the girls explicitly rejected Shaker beliefs and affirmed their own particular form of denominational worship, none ridiculed the Quaker service. Most did however find their dancing and loud singing incongruous with religious observances. Elizabeth Bridgham, for example, commented that

their exercises, though solemn, I could not realise were devoted to God & when the dances began, it actually appeared more like a Theatre than the house of the Lord! (1905:91).

⁹ I refer to the girls by their names at the time the diaries were written, rather than by their married names (in parentheses) under which their papers are often catalogued today

¹⁰ While Jewish synagogues were also established in Newport, RI, Charleston, SC, and Savannah, GA, these cities were not on the tour route.

Visiting a few years later, twenty-year-old Elizabeth Ruffin (Cocke; 1807-1849) of Virginia found that while the Shakers were honest and devout, they were very 'deluded and misguided in their religious principles' (O'Brien, 1993:91).

But rejection of the Shakers' style of worship notwithstanding, all the girls recognised the Shakers' faith as sincere and acknowledged their other 'virtues'-neatness, cleanliness, industriousness, generosity, and hospitality. They described in detail the whitewashed buildings, the tidy communal kitchens and dairies, as well as the Shakers' simplicity of dress and their readiness to discuss their way of life. Significantly, the girls' respectful stance during the service (and in their writings) stood in marked contrast to the intolerant, disrespectful and at times abusive, behaviour reported in adult men's travel accounts (Wergland, 2007).

The visits to Sephardic Jewish synagogues, Sherith Israel in New York City and Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia, proved a more challenging emotional and cognitive step for these young tourists. Although the girls were accompanied by an adult, they did not record that anyone explained to them before or after services what was going on or what to expect and as a result they were both astonished and perplexed. For most girls this would have been the first time they stepped into a non-Christian place of worship or encountered people who were not Christian. The girls appreciated the visual simplicity of the buildings, as most synagogues were built according to the popular Palladian style, unadorned by pictures or statues; however, the behavioural and audial aspects of the service (e.g. the separation of the sexes, prayer shawls and covered heads during worship and the disharmonic chanting) seem to have been something of an affront to their senses and to their idea of what a religious service should look like. In October 1834, for example, nineteen-year-old Joanna Frances Shipman (Bosworth; 1815-1905) visited Mikveh Israel Synagogue in Philadelphia with her younger sister Betsey and another girl (also on tour). The three went up and sat in the women's gallery, but as the service was conducted in Hebrew, the girls were unable to understand or follow the words, which sounded like noisy gibberish to them; the result was, as Shipman put it, that the service seemed

more like the confusion of tongues at the tower of Babel than anything else (Bosworth, 1914:16).

While the sight of a Jewish synagogue and / or a Shaker meetinghouse could be figured out visually and the Shaker worship could be related to intellectually, Catholic churches and ceremonies posed a different challenge. First, while encounters with Jewish and Quaker communities took place within the United States, the overwhelming majority of encounters with Catholic communities took place in Canada, outside US borders. Second, most girls did not attend an entire service or mass, rather they visited convents at visiting hours or passed through churches while mass was conducted. The girls noted the nuns' politeness in receiving them, acknowledged their good works (caring for the orphaned, the poor and the sick) and commended them for their delicate lace and needlework (which they purchased). However, most found it exceedingly difficult to overcome the visual image which Catholic churches presented (e.g., the elaborate architecture, bejeweled statues and glittering icons, the priests' dark robes and the nuns' habits, the physical gestures), or move past the audial and olfactory components (the chanting of Latin prayer, incense and candles). Occasionally they mention priests and nuns at prayer, but descriptions of congregations were strangely absent. An unnamed Quaker girl from Philadelphia, who was touring Montreal with friends in 1822, passed through a church during a funeral mass; as she saw it:

It consisted of diverse prayings and sprinklings with holy water, laying on of the crucifix without anything of solemnity in it (Rosenberg-Naparsteck, 2000b: 21).

Added to this, the fact that Canada had remained (after the Revolution) a British-administered colony, populated by a Catholic French-speaking majority and a Protestant Anglophone minority, whose numbers were bolstered by American loyalist refugees, meant that on grounds of ethnicity, religion and political affiliation, Canada and all that was associated with it was designated as 'other.'

Elizabeth Ruffin, a southern Presbyterian, was the only girl to visit a Catholic church on American soil and sit through an entire service. Ruffin was accompanied by her older half-brother, Edmund Ruffin (1794-1865) who had converted earlier to Catholicism, which may explain why she sat through an entire service. While Ruffin noted the splendour of the priest's robes and admitted that the Catholic church in Philadelphia possessed a better organ (than hers did), she too concluded that the service was 'not only strange but nonsensical, ridiculous

and unmeaning in the extreme' (O'Brien, 1993: 78). Her comments suggest that in this case too, the ceremony was not discussed or explained in advance. It is possible that in the absence of such pre / post-visit discussions or explanations the girls too refrained from theological references to or interpretations of religious differences.¹¹ In their descriptions the girls clearly recognised these 'other' adherents as people of faith. But the recurrence of certain words: 'appear,' 'solemnity' (or lack thereof), 'performance,' 'theatre,' 'gaudy,' 'lacking taste,' and 'ludicrous,' suggest that in order to extend this recognition to their compatriots, they may have reduced religious/theological differences between Americans to variations in bodily practice, style, decor and taste.

Unfortunately, due to diary-keeping styles the girls did not record any immediate post-visit reflections. It is clear that some girls were simply overwhelmed by their tour experiences; Joanna and Betsey Shipman felt so overcome by the sights as to ask for their tour to be shortened, while a dazed Elizabeth Ruffin declared that: 'my eyes have seen till they are saturated and can do their part no longer' (O'Brien, 1993:77). Cognisant of the need for time for reflection, a few, such as nineteen-year-old Eliza Southgate (Bowne; 1783-1809), did indicate that they intended the travel journal to serve as an *aide memoire* for later discussions and / or writing about their experiences at home (Bowne, 1887:131). Unfortunately, while post-tour conversations and contemplations may have occurred, records detailing the long-lasting effects of such religious pilgrimage on their views and behaviours have not survived.

However, a few accounts of such visits can be found in the writings of adult women, who belonged to the same age cohort as the girls in this study. One of the most notable accounts is that of American author and social reformer, Lydia Maria Child (1802-1880), who visited Shearith Israel (Crosby Street) Synagogue in New York City in September 1841.¹² Child, who moved in early 1841 to New York City, was editor of the *National Anti-Slavery*

11 My examination of the reading practices recorded in five other girls' (non-travel) diaries (1796-1819) revealed that girls from a similar background were well-versed in the Bible and a wide range of religious texts, sermons and essays. Given that they were able to formulate a theological evaluation of their experiences, the absence of one is telling.

12 Although Child (born in Medford, MA) was educated in dame school, a women's seminary and trained as a teacher, she came from an artisan family and never embarked on a tour.

Standard and wrote a popular weekly-column. Her 23 September, 1841, 'Letters from New York' column was devoted to her attendance at the Jewish New Year services in the company of 'young lady' on tour. This was Child's first visit to a non-Christian place of worship and she too was totally unaware of Jewish practices during worship (Child, 1843; see also Friedman, 1949). She was surprised at the separation of the sexes in the synagogue and by the practice of covering the head during prayer. While Child did note the initial incongruity between her mental image of Jews based on her reading of the Bible, and the sight of the living, breathing Jewish congregants, she conceded that

There is something deeply impressive in this remnant of a scattered people coming down to us in continuous links through the long vista of recorded time; preserving themselves carefully unmixed by intermarriage with people of other nations and other faiths (1843: 31).

After providing a detailed description of the service and the congregation (including their dress and behaviour), Child concluded that overall the Jewish service did seem less solemn, and it gave her 'the idea of far less faith and earnestness in those engaged therein.' Nevertheless, she immediately conceded that her impression may be incorrect

first, because the common bond of faith in Christ was wanting between us; and secondly, because all the services were performed in Hebrew, of which I understood not a syllable (1843: 27-28).

Child then attempted to consider the service from a different viewpoint:

*I remembered the contumely with which they had been treated throughout Christendom, and I imagined how they must feel, on entering a place of Christian worship, to hear us sing,
'With hearts as hard as stubborn Jews
That unbelieving race'* (1843: 25-26).¹³

13 The quote is from Psalm 95 from Isaac Watt's *Hymnbook*:

But if your ears refuse
The language of his grace,
And hearts grow hard, like stubborn Jews,
That unbelieving race;
The Lord, in vengeance dressed,
Will lift his hand and swear,
'You that despise my promised rest
Shall have no portion there.'

I believe that it was this sense of perspective, the feelings of sympathy for a religious minority's discrimination, respect for its members' perseverance in face of persecution and the ability to imagine how one would feel if the situation was reversed, were what these visits aimed to generate. Building on the girls' own religious experiences and sentiments, these unmediated encounters were meant to foster a sense of civic solidarity with the adherents of other faiths and denominations. No longer would Protestant minorities, or non-Protestants or non-Christians have to fear the establishment of a state religion or be denied their right to the 'free exercise' of their faith. Thus, like many other attractions along the tour route, the sight of other believers at worship was designed to display a modern state's, in this case the United States', power to better the lives of its citizens and lay aside their other identity components, in favour of their civic identity.

Conclusions

Historian Chris Beneke has argued that while Americans of the revolutionary and early republican periods

did not celebrate diversity as a positive good or insist upon the preservation of every unique identity they did come to accommodate an unprecedented diversity of beliefs and practices. ... [As a result] ... the bounds of mutual respect and the expressions of solidarity expanded dramatically, and began to include previously marginal groups and unorthodox beliefs (Beneke, 2006:9).

Indeed, American girls' pilgrimages to houses of worship during the tours were clearly not intended to familiarise the girls with the fine points of Catholic or Jewish ritual or Shaker theology, but rather to provide them with unmediated encounters with 'religious others' and enable them to recognise their nation's uniqueness regarding religious freedom. Girls, who lived in the large cities on the eastern seaboard with a diversity of ethnic populations, encountered people of different faiths fairly frequently and were familiar with the practice of civic interfaith cooperation: public officials who attended other faiths' religious celebrations and services, or private citizens who donated money to build other denominations' houses of worship and cooperated on a range of civic, charitable and educational projects (Corrigan, 2012). But as the majority of girls hailed from rural areas and demographically homogeneous small towns, they were not exposed to such ethnic diversity and varied religious

practices; thus, they had to be shown this diversity in order to bolster their theoretical understanding of the civic importance of religious liberty and enable them to inculcate it in their children.

Within the newly formed American republic, while adult women were expected to adhere, display and foster republican virtues, they were increasingly expected to withdraw from any involvement in political and public matters. They were to satisfy themselves with the smooth running of their families and households by adopting the model of the 'republican mother' and place their intellects and abilities in the service of their families (Kerber, [1980] 1986; Lewis, 1987). Thus, although these girls would be considered citizens when they came of age, they would be denied full and equal political rights. Yet, many Americans (women and men alike) recognised the political value of women's private efforts to educate and influence through moral suasion and benevolence (Lasser & Robertson, 2010; Parker, 2010; Zboray & Zboray, 2010).¹⁴ These tours, pleasurable, informal educational practices, which lay at the intersection between girlhood and their future lives as adult women, enabled the girls to learn first-hand about their fellow citizens, most significantly members of religious minorities, and by providing them with this knowledge it enabled them to fulfil their new civic roles.

¹⁴ Indeed, studies have shown that during the period between 1830s to 1860s, middle and upper-middle class, white American women (mainly from the northeast) were involved in numerous reform campaigns, social activism, and numerous charitable and philanthropic endeavors (e.g., Ginzberg, 1990; Jeffrey, 1998; McCarthy, 1998).

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This research was supported by the Israel Science Foundation [grant number 864/19].

Acknowledgements

I thank the organizers and participants of the conference on 'Religion as Emotion Knowledge' at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development (Berlin, June 2019) for their invaluable comments and suggestions regarding an earlier version of this article.