



# Who, What, When, Where, and Why Is Polish Jewry? Envisioning, Constructing, and Possessing Polish Jewry

Scott Ury

## Envisioning

“Go back to North Tel Aviv and eat gefilte fish with all the other Polanim! Go already, your Auntie Bella is waiting for you!” With this burst of anger, resentment, frustration, irony, and ridicule, I was once thrown out of a taxi in Jerusalem. For years, the driver’s hostile references to Polish Jews—and not the actual act of being kicked out of the cab—puzzled me. How could the authentic representatives of a pure and noble past that I instinctively associated with the words of Y. L. Peretz and a handful of yellowed family photographs be the target of such invective? Little, in fact, seemed further from the fond memories of my grandparents, their fellow immigrant cronies, and the worlds that their stories created than this native-born Israeli’s image of Polish Jews. In his eyes, Polish Jews (*Polanim* in Hebrew) were a snobbish, elitist, and often racist group that had commandeered key positions throughout all sectors of Israeli society and had collectively conspired to exploit and oppress Jews of Middle Eastern origin. Polish Jews had become a metonym not only for larger, more abstract social and political inequalities but also for the very tangible state of inequality in which this driver found himself serving me.<sup>1</sup>

Later, I would discover that entire generations of Israelis grew up with completely different images of Polish Jewry than the one that I (and presumably others of my generation) had formed in suburban America. Few caricatures seem to embody the Israeli image of the Polish Jew better than those presented in the long-running, immensely popular television series “Zeh-hu-zeh.” The pretentious, condescending, tacky women portrayed in this weekly comedy show helped forge an image of Polish Jewry that had almost nothing in common with the one that I had formulated in the United States. (Were Polish Jews purposely presented as either feminine or effeminate, and thus defeated, foils to Israeli concepts of masculinity?)<sup>2</sup> In fact, these differences were so stark that it often seemed as though I were referring to a completely foreign entity when I spoke of Polish Jewry with Israeli students. Although we all employed the same term, our radically divergent images of the same object often turned our discussions into exercises in miscommunication.

Several years later, on a research trip to Warsaw, I looked up from my seat at a sidewalk cafe and was confronted with another image of Polish Jewry. There on the market square stood dozens of wooden caricatures of musicians, craftsmen, innkeepers, and rabbis in traditional Jewish garb. (As opposed to the association of Polish Jews with women in Israel, here, for some reason, most of the images were male.) Their exaggerated noses, lurid grins, and disproportionately large ears as well as their gold coins, oversized books, and, at times, pitchforks made me realize that here, too, several particular images of the Polish Jew—all of which seemed to be wholly distinct from anything that I had come to know in either Israel or the United States—had taken hold in the local culture and public landscape.<sup>3</sup> Later, through discussions with Polish colleagues and acquaintances, I discovered that Polish Jewry filled several different ideological, political, and cultural roles in contemporary Poland and that none of these functions even remotely coincided with the roles that Polish Jewry played in Israel or America. On many occasions, I was both irritated and confused by these and other, alternative interpretations. “How dare they manipulate my (our) past!” I complained to friends, as though the past was somehow exclusively mine to uncover, construct, present, and possess.

These observations—ironic, random, and even angry—serve as the inspiration for this article. As Jewish history ceases to be the exclusive domain of renegade Yeshiva boys and Israeli academics, and as an increasing number of scholars in different countries turn to topics related to Jews in Polish lands, the question arises: Who is a Polish Jew?



More specifically, how can scholars from different cultures, countries, and generations engage in academic discussions on Polish Jewry when no commonly accepted definition of Polish Jewry exists and, to the best of my knowledge, no successful, definitive attempt has been made to determine who and what constitutes a Polish Jew?<sup>4</sup> Finally, throughout this article I will concentrate on the roles that the particular constructions and uses of this historiographical term play in our present lives and the reciprocal influence that our present-day agendas (conscious and unconscious) have on the contours, direction, parameters, and content of academic research.

In presenting this seemingly straightforward question—“Who is a Polish Jew?”—I ask that we consider the following hypothetical cases. What, for example, are we to make of a Jewish woman who was born into the world at the turn of the twentieth century, spent her youth in the ethnically mixed city of Vilna, fled to southern Russia during the Russian retreat of 1915, returned west to Warsaw for the majority of the interwar period, and immigrated to Chicago in 1936. Was this former subject of Nicholas II and one-time citizen of the Second Polish Republic a Polish Jew or a Russian Jew? Or did she become an American Jew once she arrived in the New World? Can she simultaneously and accurately be referred to by all these terms?

What of her contemporaries? Imagine the situation of a student in the Breslau Rabbinic Academy in 1938 who returned home in 1946 to discover that the city had not only been incorporated into the newly reconstituted Polish state but had also been renamed Wrocław. Ten years later, he immigrated to Tel Aviv as part of the “Gomulka Aliyah” of 1956–57. Was this German-Polish-Yiddish-Hebrew-speaking man a German Jew from 1910 to 1933, a superfluous man from 1933 to 1945, a Pole of Jewish origins until 1957, and an Israeli from 1957 until his final days?<sup>5</sup>

Let us also consider the case of Jews in the multiethnic, ever-contested city of Lemberg-Lwów-Lviv. Caught in the middle of the Polish-Ukrainian war of 1918–19, these Jews served as scapegoats for both Ukrainian and Polish frustrations. Were they Polish Jews when the Ukrainian forces that “liberated” Lviv threatened the “pro-Polish” Jews? And what happened to this externally applied Polish identity when the Polish counter-offensive degenerated into an assault on the “anti-Polish Jews” of Lwów? After surviving World War II by fleeing east, many of these Jews were repatriated (along with an unknown number of Russian-born Jews who managed to convince the appropriate authorities that they, too, were documentless war refugees from Poland)<sup>6</sup> to western parts of post-World War II

Poland (Wrocław, Lower Silesia, and Szczecin) as Polish citizens, only to again become refugees in 1968. Should these Lwów-born Jews who spent the war years in the Soviet Union, the immediate postwar period in newly “liberated” parts of Stalinist Poland, and the period after 1968 in Sweden or Denmark also be considered inseparable parts of “Polish Jewry”?

This sampling is, of course, anything but random. However, ever since the partitioning of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth marked the beginning of the long nineteenth century in Eastern (Central) Europe,<sup>7</sup> Poland has gone through a series of seemingly endless geographic and political transformations. What of the Jews living in these lands? Are we to apply the term Polish Jew to all Jews living in lands that were once part of the Polish Commonwealth (from Poznan to the Dniepr, from the Baltic Sea to Bukovina)?

Furthermore, how are we to reconcile these geographic, political, and demographic changes with a linear conception of time? Assuming historical continuity, how do we label and define Jewish communities in areas whose dominant cultural milieu, political frameworks, and actual members changed so radically from one period to another? Consider the fundamental transformations that took place in Breslau-Wrocław and Lemberg-Lwów-Lviv as well as the impact of massive Jewish in-migration (or should it be seen as another wave of immigration?) in the late nineteenth century to cities like Warsaw and Lodz. Were the new arrivals from the eastern parts of Congress Poland, the Lithuanian provinces of the Pale of Settlement, and Russia proper immediately transformed into Polish Jews upon their arrival in Lodz and Warsaw? What do the Jews of 1855 Lodz really have in common with the Jews of 1956 Szczecin and 1788 Wilno-Vilna-Vilnius? Can we honestly and accurately refer to all of them by the same name—Polish Jewry?

Now that I have raised the point, I would like to ask: does Polish Jewry really exist as a single continuous body throughout the entire partition period? Or is it transformed between 1772 and 1795 into Prussian, Austrian, and Russian Jewry only to miraculously reappear as a single unit in 1918? Even if we are willing to give this collective entity such magical powers, what are we to do with the individuals who embodied these communities? Sadly, though these questions may hinder our research, they haunted many individuals throughout their lives. Still, there is, at times, something somewhat cynical and disingenuous about the use that both historians and laypersons make of this surprisingly provocative, exceptionally malleable, ever-manipulated body: Polish Jewry.

## Constructing

[209]

*Polish Jewry*



Scott Ury

These academic dilemmas become even more entangled when we turn to the different concepts of Polish Jewry that have taken hold in various cultures. Thus, many Israeli historians of the nineteenth century will point exclusively to the Jews of the Congress Kingdom as “Polish Jews.”<sup>8</sup> According to this school of thought, Jews in the Lithuanian provinces and Galicia are usually included within the larger framework of East European Jewry. Hence, most classes on nineteenth-century Jewish history at the Hebrew University refer to East European Jewry and not to Polish Jewry. In contrast to these divisions, Polish historians will, more often than not, refer to Jews in all lands that were once part of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as “Polish Jews.”<sup>9</sup> One result of these different interpretations is the somewhat bizarre situation in which Jews from Galicia are included in studies on Austrian Empire Jewry, on the one hand, and in studies on Polish Jewry, on the other.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps neither categorization is correct; perhaps these Jews ought to remain “Galician Jews.”<sup>11</sup> But what happens to these Galician Jews when they immigrate to the big city (Martin Buber to Berlin and Salo Baron to New York) or when national cultures come to them (Bruno Schulz and Maurycy Gottlieb)?

Part of this problem is, of course, ideological and political. For Israeli and Jewish scholars influenced by the Jerusalem school of Jewish history<sup>12</sup> and loyal to the concept of a sociopolitical entity known as “the Jewish People,” Jews in Polish lands are often assumed to have more in common with Jews in the Pale of Settlement than with their non-Jewish neighbors. Hence, it is no accident that the Hebrew University’s department “Historia shel am yisrael” (History of the Jewish People) bears a significantly more nationally oriented title than its U.S. counterparts. The commonly accepted American title “Jewish History” leaves the exact nature of this collective body open to further debate and thought. Likewise, the concept of an East European Jewry implies that Jewish society in Eastern Europe was united by linguistic, religious, social, familial, and institutional bonds that far outweighed the impact of non-Jewish cultures, governments, and borders.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, the all-inclusive term East European Jewry not only diminishes the historical importance of Polish Jewry but also questions its very existence by subsuming Polish Jewry into a larger body independent of local nations and states.

Recently liberated from yet another period of foreign domination, Polish scholars are apt to use a more geographically sweeping definition of the Polish nation as a framework for identifying Polish Jews.

From their perspective, Polish Jews are to be found wherever Poles (and therefore Poland in its stateless state) dwelled. If Poland and Poles could continue to exist throughout the long nineteenth century without a formal political infrastructure, then why cannot Polish Jews similarly continue to exist right by their side? Furthermore, any division of Polish Jewry into empire-oriented bodies (Russian, Austrian, or Prussian Jewry) inherently undermines Polish claims to both a continuous historical presence and an undisputed sovereignty over these lands. Thus many studies will include Jews in areas of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth such as Posen-Poznan, Lemberg-Lwów-Lviv, and Wilno-Vilna-Vilnius within the framework of Polish Jewry.<sup>14</sup> In conjunction with a more general interest in seeking and recording the experiences of Polish émigrés in every corner of the earth via studies on emigration and Diaspora communities, the size and achievements of an enlarged pool of Poles (by including Poles of Jewish origin) can, it seems, indirectly contribute to the Polish national heritage. Still, the oft-repeated Polish refrain that Tel Aviv is a center of Polish Diaspora culture would sound utterly foreign to most residents of “the city that never sleeps.”

Whereas Jews in Poznan, Galicia, and the Kresy are usually included in these studies, their eastern contemporaries in St. Petersburg, Moscow, or Odessa are, in Polish eyes, clearly not part of the Polish-Jewish heritage. Despite the fact that many of these Jews were, in all likelihood, recent arrivals from Polish lands that Russia swallowed in the partitions, this Polish Jewry ends where Poland meets its centuries-long nemesis, Russia. This division is bolstered by Polish attempts to wean Polish society of any and all Russian-Soviet influences. Yet, however noble these goals may be, such divisions (which are, admittedly, just as arbitrary as any other academic demarcation) indirectly contribute to the development of separate academic discourses. Thus, many works that address Russian Empire Jewry are often overlooked by Polish scholars—and, therefore, inadvertently left out of the Polish historiographical canon—simply because they portend to deal with “Russian” Jewry.<sup>15</sup> However, while few Jewish historians will claim that Jewish communities in Warsaw and St. Petersburg were identical, many will point to parallel cultural and political developments as well as mutual economic, familial, and intellectual influences. Furthermore, few would assume that one community could be fully understood without analyzing and understanding the experiences of the other. Such dissonances make one ask what kind of an academic dialogue is really taking place if scholars disagree not only about who deserves to be included in the body of Polish Jewry and what the geographic borders of that

body ought to be, but also about what kind of relationship (from nonexistent to intimate) this body is supposed to have with other Jewish communities.

Even if these issues of geography and politics are resolved, however, the historian is still confronted with linguistic and cultural factors when trying to determine the nature and composition of Polish Jewry. According to these criteria, one could argue that many Jews in Polish lands were not Polish Jews but simply Jews until the 1930s. Should Hasidic Jews who barely knew Polish, had minimal contact with Polish society, and were rejected by the majority of Polish nationalists during their lives be posthumously awarded the somewhat patriotic title Polish Jew? In the interest of justifying and fortifying the barriers between Jews and non-Jews today, many disciples of these Hasidic groups would find this very question preposterous. Yet many other observers almost automatically associate Hasidim with Poland and Poland with Hasidim.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the covers of many books on Jews published in Poland bear images of Hasidic or religious Jews.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, should completely integrated or assimilated Jews who knew neither Yiddish nor Hebrew and who continually insisted that their Jewish origins played no significant role in their lives be considered Polish Jews? Or should they be referred to as Poles of Jewish origin or, simply, Poles? This issue becomes particularly explosive when discussing such infamous (in many Polish minds) Jewish figures as Rosa Luxembourg, Hilary Minc, and Jakub Berman. Not surprisingly, these figures and the whole issue of the *Żydo-Komuna* (a pejorative Polish term that translates, roughly, to Judeo-Communism or Commie-Jew), which so preoccupy Polish scholars, are rarely discussed in either Israeli or Jewish forums. With the beginning of a new epoch in 1989, many in Poland are interested in exploring how the country became part of the Soviet bloc. Thus, Polish eyes are often turned toward the post–World War II era and the presumed role of Jews in supporting and administering Polish communism and Stalinism. However, the Revolutions of 1989 were barely felt in Israel or the United States, where they certainly did not have the transformative effect that they had throughout East Central Europe. Hence, though Polish historians are most interested in researching post–World War II Polish Jewry, Jewish scholars in Israel and the United States often relate to the period as a postscript to hundreds of years of Jewish life in Polish lands.<sup>18</sup> These researchers are inclined to address specific events such as the Kielce pogrom, immigration to Palestine, and the expulsion (or was it another wave of Jewish emigration from Poland?) of 1968, not long-term processes or changes within an actual Jewish community, when writing

[211]

*Polish Jewry*



Scott Ury

about Jews in postwar Poland. Hence, whereas books published in Poland on the postwar era usually cover a period of several decades, those printed in Israel tend to use the immediate postwar period as a signpost marking the end of an historical era. More often than not, the impression is one of finality and not one of historical continuity.

Here, again, we see how the particular image of Polish Jewry in different cultures serves each respective society's needs and, in doing so, indirectly creates two different academic discourses. It is, at times, an almost futile situation in which academic discussion is handicapped from the very outset by different interpretations of identical historiographical terms. These interpretations, in turn, serve as the basis for radically different visions of the past that often end up turning into parallel (if not competing or contradictory) histories. As Michel Foucault has noted in another context, quite often it seems as though "we are not dealing with the same madmen."<sup>19</sup> The following examples relay the degree to which these renditions of the past remain divided and inhibited by academic dialogues rooted in wildly divergent interpretations of, ostensibly, the same terms, people, and events.

### **Possessing**

The issue of post-World War II Polish Jewry raises a central dividing line in the historiographical debate: on the one side, the exact weight of antisemitism in Polish and Polish-Jewish history, and, on the other side, a teleologically rooted assumption that Polish Jewry ceased to exist soon after the end of World War II. Since the onset of the Polish-Jewish dialogue in the early 1980s, Polish scholars have maintained that Jewish historians have placed a disproportionate share of the responsibility for the destruction of Polish Jewry on the Poles themselves. Pointing to books like Celia Heller's *On the Edge of Destruction* and documentaries like Claude Lanzmann's "Shoah,"<sup>20</sup> Polish scholars contend that Poles are repeatedly stereotyped as thuggish antisemites who could not wait to dispose of their Jewish neighbors.<sup>21</sup> Polish historians have countered this image with a litany of books, articles, and movies on Poles who saved Jews, Polish-Jewish "co-existence," and the democratic, multiethnic nature of Polish society.<sup>22</sup> As a result of this attempt to correct such "historiographical oversights," Polish historians often concentrate on, bring to the fore, and even create topics that had, until now, been of little if any interest to Jewish historians.

The influence of this wave of historiographical revisionism can be seen by the recent publication of several studies by Jewish authors





(most notably Eva Hoffman's best-seller *Shtetl*) that attempt to rectify the "oversights" of previous researchers. Indeed, Hoffman speaks of ameliorating the discord between the two "touchy" and "proud" partners of the "Polish-Jewish marriage" via a "dialogue that is healing rather than divisive."<sup>23</sup> However, these discussions have also had a somewhat less than positive impact as some people have expressed their unease about challenging other scholars on these and related points.<sup>24</sup> These dilemmas raise the specter of such ominous and presumably long-irrelevant issues as concealed origins, imagined enemies, and public confessions. Of course, all academic discourses are defined by unspoken—yet universally understood and accepted—borders of inclusion and exclusion. The only question that remains is the exact price (both academic and intellectual) of this particular brand of self-censorship.

However, both the academic and the popular image among Jews of Poland as "the world's largest Jewish graveyard" and of Polish Jewry as a community that has long ceased to exist are anything but random developments. Indeed, the end of Polish Jewry in 1943 or 1948 (with a final nail in the coffin in 1968) stands at the heart of the Zionist-influenced Jewish master narrative of the twentieth century. At the core of this conceptual framework lies the teleologically rooted assumption that World War II and the creation of the State of Israel marked the end of both the European Diaspora and the entity that had become practically synonymous with that community—Polish Jewry. For it was at this moment (somewhere between April 1943 and May 1948) that the European Diaspora—and its consummate symbol, Polish Jewry—ceased to exist and the New Jew, the Israeli, and his nation rose.<sup>25</sup> From destruction to rebirth, from gray ashes to green deserts, from slavery to redemption—few stories are as compelling as a Zionist reading of the past century.

Furthermore, the experiences of Jews in Poland and the seemingly eternal nature of antisemitism in Poland seem to validate Theodor Herzl's warnings about the eternal nature of antisemitism and the subsequent need for a Jewish homeland. As the chorus of a well-known Israeli folk song contends, "Eyn li erets aheret" (I Have No Other [Home] Land). Indeed, the army-produced video on the Holocaust that I saw with my entire platoon at the end of our lone "educational day" (an army-guided tour of Israel's shrine of national memory, Yad Vashem) during basic training ended with this very song. Nothing validates Zionist charges about the futility of the Diaspora more than a collectively redemptive, Zionist reading of the Holocaust.<sup>26</sup> In the eyes of the army's education department as well as of many Israelis and

Diaspora Jews, Polish Jewry has become not only the symbol of Diaspora cowardice and defeat but also the very antithesis of the brave New Jew, the Israeli.<sup>27</sup>

The ramifications of these two postulates are far-reaching. Thus most Jews (both Israeli and American) simply refuse to even consider my observations that not all Poles are rabid antisemites and that there is still a Jewish community in Poland. "Maybe they were putting on a front," many commented about the supposedly non-antisemitic Poles who had apparently duped me into thinking that something may have actually changed between 1943 and 1998. "Are they really Jews?" they would almost always ask, refusing to entertain the thought that there can be Jews in post-World War II Poland. In many cases, these refusals took on almost irrational proportions. After a series of confrontations, it became clear that I was not only raising a sensitive topic but also questioning (and threatening) concepts that served as supporting pillars of a collective consciousness, identity, and purpose. Despite the many dramatic changes that have taken place since 1989, the image of Polish Jewry among many Jews remains, apparently, frozen in time as proof of the eternal nature of antisemitism, the historically predestined destruction of European Jewry, and the need for a Jewish State.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps all collective bodies have an intrinsic need to feel threatened by an enemy (internal or external, imaginary or real) that can simultaneously heighten their sense of vulnerability and strengthen a feeling of cohesion and belonging.

On the academic level, the somewhat tempered yet still omnipresent influence of these basic assumptions is often crippling. For how can an intellectual discussion take place if one party is not even fully convinced that the subject being examined actually exists during the very period that most interests the other party? Whereas some Jewish academics have altered their approach to the Jewish past, a state-supported national ideology, the central place of the State of Israel in mainstream American Jewish identity, and the seemingly eternal state of enmity between Arabs and Jews in the Levant do not bode well for any widespread changes on this front. For what is the representation of the past but a reflection of the present?

Recently, however, there has been a discernible effort by some Jewish academics in America to construct a counter-history to the mainstream, Zionist-influenced interpretation of the Jewish past. Generally speaking, this wave of historical revisionism attempts to rehabilitate the image of the Diaspora by emphasizing Yiddish (as opposed to Hebrew) culture, reassessing the motives of Jewish integrationists, and highlighting the plight of Jews who straddled both the Jewish and non-Jewish



world.<sup>29</sup> In many cases, these topics are designed—both consciously and subconsciously—to reconfigure the connection between the Jewish past and the Land of Israel and to create both a counter-history and an alternative identity that is not intimately tied to Israel and Zionism. The effects of these developments on the study of Polish and East European Jewry are still somewhat unclear. However, at this stage, it appears that a middle school—lying somewhere between the standard Polish and the mainstream Israeli approaches—is beginning to crystallize.

Despite the academic give-and-take on several issues, a veritable chasm remains between the Jewish and the non-Jewish visions of Polish Jewry and the history written to define, refine, and employ these images. A brief exchange between a non-Jewish European moderator and an Israeli scholar vividly illustrates many of the historiographical differences discussed above. After the Israeli's lecture on violent clashes between Bundists and antisemites in Warsaw, the chair introduced the next speaker with the seemingly innocent, yet telling, comment: "And now on to a lighter topic."<sup>30</sup> The Israeli scholar seemed somewhat taken aback. For what would the Jewish past be without pain and suffering, fear and hatred? However, this vision of the past was, apparently, too controversial for some observers. Have certain issues become too problematic and, therefore, academically passé? When does the unpopular pass into the realm of the forbidden? (In all fairness to those involved, perhaps these developments are more reflective of larger, sociopolitical changes than of any conscious, politically motivated attempts to rewrite the past. Hence, perhaps this hesitancy to address potentially painful topics should be viewed as an indirect result of larger processes such as globalization, the increasing dominance of American consumer culture, and the dissemination and internalization of such quintessentially American concepts and values as achieving "progress" and "happiness" via "cooperation" and "avoiding conflict.")<sup>31</sup>

Regardless of the exact origins of these developments, others will insist that the full exploration of such entangled topics (much like the open and uninhibited discussion of all issues) is vital to our understanding of the Jewish past in East Central Europe and our efforts to represent that past. Some will even go so far as to invoke the memory of the dead in order to create a moral pact between the dead and the living. In many cases, these pacts often depend upon, and therefore mandate, the public discussion of such problematic topics so that the living can openly declare their dedication and loyalty to the martyrs

and the cause for which they perished and, in doing so, publicly manifest their place within the collective body politic.<sup>32</sup>

[216]

Jewish  
Social  
Studies

Here, as well, I would like to argue that both conscious and unconscious political interests lie at the root of this division. Indeed, what is the “objective” historian to do when the very types of histories that are most often used to promote cohesion and unity within a given society—those that revolve around heroism, martyrdom, and a collective sense of victimhood—can also serve as impediments to improving understanding and promoting integration between different groups?<sup>33</sup> Should Polish Jewry be envisioned as yet one more branch of the Jewish Diaspora, a community that was reunited and redeemed with the rest of the nation in 1948? Or should it be portrayed as an eternal and inseparable part of Poland’s multicultural, multiethnic heritage? Again, can the same referent simultaneously fill both roles?

As the era of the nation-state and national(ized) history confronts processes of globalization and the movement to deconstruct national myths, the role of history and the historian in helping to reconfigure collective identities and influence public opinion again becomes pivotal. Thus, some will argue that a history which emphasizes the multicultural, open side of Polish society is popular simply because it is good for Poland’s political aspirations. These cynics will claim that attempts to highlight the positive side of Polish-Jewish relations are little more than calculated efforts to reformulate Poland’s image in the West as a society with a long democratic tradition that rightfully deserves to sit within the European body of nations. However, there is another, less utilitarian side to these efforts. Indeed, few will protest the creation of a popular image in Poland of Polish society as one in which Jews and others were (and are) welcome parts of the national landscape. Furthermore, most observers would probably agree that the development and widespread internalization of such a history is far preferred to one in which Jews are represented as a dark (or, alternatively, invisible) horde of parasitic anti-Polish, pro-Soviet, internal enemies. Hence, from a domestic perspective, the importance of researching and emphasizing the multicultural, democratic aspect of Poland’s past remains practically undisputed.

This entire discussion returns to questions of definitions, interpretations, and propriety. Does any one group really have the ultimate right to tell the story of the Jewish past in Polish lands? Perhaps the story ought to be told by an impartial observer. But this, too, is unrealistic, because history has taught us that nothing can be manipulated more than the past itself.



These questions of legitimacy and historical inheritance are not limited exclusively to discussions between Jews and non-Jews. Witness the recent dispute between the Federation of Jewish Congregations in Poland and the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) regarding the right to pursue Jewish claims to private and communal property in Poland.<sup>34</sup> At the core of this infighting stands not only the financial assets of Polish Jewry but also the right to be recognized as the sole, legitimate heir to this past (again, the lone point of understanding seems to be that only one past exists). Thus, some Jewish leaders in Poland today refer to themselves by the seemingly redundant yet loaded term “Polish-Polish Jews”—lest there be any doubt about who the true, pure-blooded heirs of Polish Jewry really are.

Here, too, it is by way of history that this fledgling community often seeks to carve out its place in the world. Hence, a conference organized in March 1998 by the “young generation” of Warsaw’s Jewish community to commemorate the 30-year anniversary of the 1968 expulsion/emigration seemed more like a high school reunion than a moment of collective mourning and soul-searching. Throughout the day old friends embraced, speakers humorously retold their experiences, and the master of ceremonies repeatedly asked every speaker whether or not they had returned “home”—to Poland.<sup>35</sup> The overall message was clear: 1968 was to be seen as one of a series of historical events through which Polish society repeatedly showed its true, democratic face. Just like in the January Uprising of 1863, Poles and Jews stood united in 1968 against the foreign occupiers under the traditional Polish banner, “For Our Freedom and Your Freedom.”<sup>36</sup> In fact, many of those present connected the student protests of 1968 (and not the nation-wide antisemitic witch-hunt and the subsequent expulsion/emigration of anywhere from 10,000 to 30,000 Jews) to the Solidarity movement and the final liberation of Poland from Soviet domination. In the eyes of the younger generation of Jews in today’s Poland—many of whom came of age in 1968—the events of March 1968 represented nothing less than the long-awaited return of Polish Jewry into the fabric of Polish society. At long last, the Jews—whose role in the (Polish) Warsaw Uprising of 1944 was conspicuously absent from the mainstream collective memory and who were repeatedly accused of collaborating with the Soviet-aligned Stalinist regime—were on the side of the angels.

In marked contrast, an open, town hall-style meeting hosted one week later by the Jewish community’s “older generation” to remember the very same set of events was significantly less upbeat. Frustrated by the seemingly endless line of tearful speakers mourning their personal

and communal losses, a member of the “younger generation” protested: “What’s all this talk about the end of Jewish life in Poland? We’re still here. Our community exists!” From the back, an older voice cried out, “When you’re at a funeral, you cry.”

Hence, even within the same, relatively small community, we have separate renditions (divided, not coincidentally, along generational lines) of the same events that simply refuse to intersect.<sup>37</sup> Was March 1968 the first step toward 1989—was it the moment at which Polish society exhibited its true colors by readmitting the remaining Jews into the warm, protective embrace of the Polish nation? Or was it yet one more incident testifying to the eternal nature of antisemitism and serving as the final chapter in the pain-filled history of Polish Jewry—a people that history predestined for destruction?

For that matter, can it be both? Can one academic dialogue have enough space for two separate versions of the same events (or past) that periodically intersect at random moments only to again separate and, perhaps, re-intersect at later points? At what point do these interpretations (histories) begin to vary so greatly that they actually create different pasts? Once this line is crossed, can these parallel, competing, and contradictory versions of the same events coexist within the same academic discourse, or are their joint claims to historical truth mutually exclusive? What determines the spatial boundaries of one academic discourse: when one person’s truth becomes another’s profanation; when participating societies feel secure enough to allow sacred cows to be brought to slaughter; or when time, generations, and memories fade?

Finally, I would like to ask: what is it about Poles, Jews, and the past that evokes such emotional responses? Is it the stark image of the sudden and complete loss of an entire civilization and romantic longings for irretrievable (and therefore utopian, pure, and unadulterated) worlds? Or is it the role that Polish Jewry plays as a central symbol in so many different sociopolitical realities? Are different parties so at odds because the same entity simultaneously serves as a symbol of Poland’s democratic tradition, the folkloristic roots of American Jewry, and the validation of Zionist ideology? What impact would the complete internalization of these opposing concepts have upon each society’s collective sense of self? Can Poland have a democratic future if it has a checkered past? Can American Jewry (or any American ethnic group, for that matter) exist without warm, fuzzy memories of the Old Country? Can Israel fulfill its role as the center of world Jewry without even attempting to negate the Diaspora? Then again, maybe the answers to these questions cannot be found in the calculated decisions of senior

politicians under the sway of national ideologies; maybe our burning interest and our heated debates represent the displaced expression of wounds that neither time nor words seem able to heal.

[219]

*Polish Jewry*



Scott Ury

## Notes

My experiences as a visiting student at Warsaw University's Mordechai Anielewicz Center for the Study of Polish Jewry during the 1997–98 academic year provided me with the opportunity to explore many of the methodological dilemmas raised in this piece. I would like to thank the Center's director, Prof. Jerzy Tomaszewski, as well as Prof. Emeritus Jan Kancewicz of Warsaw University's Institute of History and Dr. Alina Cała of the Jewish Historical Institute of Warsaw for their many stimulating conversations and challenging questions that forced me to reconsider my own preconceptions regarding Jews, Poles, and the past. I am also indebted to the participants in the Hebrew University's Friday morning research seminar on East and East Central European Jewish history who encouraged me to rethink, reexamine, and refine many of the issues discussed here. Israel Bartal, Rachel Manekin, Ezra Mendelsohn, Shaul Stampfer, and the anonymous reader for *Jewish Social Studies* all made helpful suggestions and comments regarding drafts of this article. Research for this project was funded, in part, by a Fellowship for East European Studies from the American Council of Learned Societies as well as support from the Hebrew University's Institute of Contemporary Jewry and Center for Research on the History and Culture of Polish Jews.

1 On the national level, few seemed to epitomize this association of Polish Jewry with institutionalized discrimination against Jews of Middle Eastern, North African, and Sephardic origin more than the so-called "Yiddishe Mama," Prime Minister Golda Meir. Her ineffective response to the Black Panther movement and the wave of social protest that hit Israel in the early 1970s led to the implementation of such sarcastic and revealing slogans as "Golda, teach us Yiddish!" (Dan Giladi, "Klilat aliyah, avodah ve-hakikah sotsialit [1949–1956]:

Epilog," in Meir Avizohar et al., eds., *Golda: Tsemihatah shel manhigah, 1921–1956* [Tel Aviv, 1994], 382). Charges that "the Polanim" were responsible for this quasi-official policy of ethnic discrimination and political domination continue to appear. For example, a disgruntled resident who was recently interviewed in a television documentary on the municipal elections in the Tel Aviv suburb of Holon angrily charged that "Until 1977 we were second-class citizens. . . . They wanted us to be the wood choppers and the water boys for the Polanim

- of the country” (“Jessie Congo,” *Tevat teudah*, producer Gil Karni [Jerusalem, May 29, 1999]). On the image of “Polanim,” see Batya Gur, “Polanim geim,” *Ha-areztz*, June 11, 1999, p. B10. For a summary of the connection between socioeconomic and ethnic background and historical memory in contemporary Israeli society, see Tamar Rotem, “Ha-masa hashuv, ha-mehir shaaruri,” *Ha-areztz*, Nov. 23, 1999, p. B3. In his study of Zionist-Israeli political culture, Zeev Sternhell claims that the early stigmatization of Polish Jewry was rooted in an effort to neutralize the political and economic threat posed by those Polish Jews who arrived in Palestine as part of the Fourth Aliyah (Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism and the Making of the Jewish State*, trans. David Maisel [Princeton, N.J., 1998], 219–20).
- 2 Note, for instance, Tom Segev’s description of former prime minister Shimon Peres: “In contrast to the stereotypical ‘new man’ of Israel, Peres, formerly Perski, preserved a certain measure of ‘Polishness,’ or sentimental Jewishness that may have taken root during his political youth. . . . He was an avid reader and wrote poetry; he never served in the army” (Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, trans. Haim Watzman [New York, 1993], 395). See also Batya Gur’s comments regarding recent caricatures of Polish Jewish women in Israeli pop culture (Gur, “Polanim geim,” B10).
  - 3 For a more in-depth discussion of the different functions that various images of Jews play in contemporary Polish culture and society, see Alina Cała, *The Image of the Jew in Polish Folk Culture* (Jerusalem, 1995).
  - 4 Early attempts to arrive at such a definition include two distinct essays by Dinur and Ettinger that bear the same title: Benzion Dinur, “Darkah ha-historit shel yahadut Polin,” in Dinur, *Dorot u-reshumot* (Jerusalem, 1978), 193–201, and Shmuel Ettinger, “Darkah ha-historit shel yahadut Polin,” in Ettinger, *Ben polin le-rusyah*, ed. Israel Bartal and Jonathan Frankel (Jerusalem, 1994), 1–11.
  - 5 By “superfluous man,” I am referring to Hannah Arendt’s analysis of the impact that the rise of the nation-state had upon the nature of the individual, the reconstruction of political communities, and the fate of the stateless (Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* [New York, 1973], 267–302).
  - 6 In his memoir of Jewish life in post-World War II Lodz, Józef Dajczgewand comments on the arrival of “many Russian Jews” in Lodz in the 1950s. Although the editors note that these “Russian Jews” were, in fact, former “citizens of pre-War Poland,” the author’s remark points to the confusion, tension, rumors, and prejudices regarding these repatriates from the East (Dajczgewand, “Nie chcę być kimś innym,” in A. Mieszczanek,



ed., *Krajobraz po szkolu* [Warszawa, 1989], 135; quoted in Alina Cała and Helena Dąbner-Śpiewak, eds., *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce, 1944–1968* [Warszawa, 1997], 253 and n. 238).

Avraham Kaufman's account of his experiences as a Jewish community leader in the Far East includes repeated references to the presence of Polish Jews there both during World War II and immediately thereafter (Kaufman, *Yad Vashem Archives, Oral Testimony Division, File No. K 2435/208*, pp. 48, 56, and 64–65).

7 For a thought-provoking discussion of the creation and evolution of the concept of "Eastern Europe," see Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, Calif., 1994). Several pieces on the contemporary debate regarding the location and definition of Central Europe include Czesław Miłosz, "About Our Europe," in Robert Kostrzewa, ed., *Between East and West: Writings from Kultura* (New York, 1990), 99–108; Milan Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," *New York Review of Books* 31, no. 7 (Apr. 26, 1984): 33–38; Robert Bidelux and Ian Jeffries, *A History of Eastern Europe: Crisis and Change* (London, 1998), 1–34; Tony Judt, *A Grand Illusion? An Essay on Europe* (New York, 1996); and Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York, 1997).

8 Rafael Mahler's classic work on Hasidut and Haskalah is, liter-

ally, structured around this division between Jews in Congress Poland and Jews in Galicia (Mahler, *Ha-hasidut veha-haskalah be-galitsiya uve-polin ha-kongresait ba-mahasit ha-rishonah shel ha-meah ha-tsha-esreh* [Merhavia, 1961]).

David Assaf continues this argument in his piece, "Hasidut polin' o 'Ha-hasidut be-polin': Li-veayat ha-geografyah ha-hasidit," *Gal-ed* 14 (1995): 197–206. Also note that Mendelsohn's engaging essays on "Jewish historiography on Polish Jewry" concentrate almost exclusively on the interwar period. Although this periodization accurately reflects the secondary material, it avoids the thorny issue of whether or not one can identify and discuss a distinctly Polish Jewry during the partition period. See Ezra Mendelsohn, "Interwar Poland: Good for the Jews or Bad for the Jews?" in Chimen Abramsky, Maciej Jachimczyk, and Antony Polonsky, eds., *The Jews in Poland* (Oxford, 1986), 130–40; and Mendelsohn, "Jewish Historiography on Polish Jewry in Interwar Poland," *Polin* 8 (1994): 3–13.

9 Thus, a Polish article on Jewish emigration opens with the clarification that any of the following English terms can be used in place of "Jews from Polish Lands": "Russian Jews, Polish Jews, Lithuanian Jews, Jews from Russia, Jews from Polish Lands, or Jews from Lithuania" (Arkadiusz Żukowski, "Żydzi z ziem polskich w Afryce Południej na przełomie xix i xx

[221]

Polish Jewry



Scott Ury

- wieku," *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego*, no. 172–74 [1994–95]: 37 n. 1). See also Eli Lederhendler, "Did Russian Jewry Exist Prior to 1917?" in Yaakov Ro'i, ed., *Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Ilford, Essex, Engl., 1995), 15–27.
- 10 For discussions of Galician Jewry within the larger framework of Austrian Empire Jewry, see Robert S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph* (Oxford, 1990), 42–54, 76–87; Marsha L. Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna, 1867–1914: Assimilation and Identity* (Albany, N.Y., 1983), 22–45; and David Rechter, "Neither East nor West: Viennese Jewish Politics in World War One" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1994), 93–135. One collection emphasizing the connection between Galician Jewry and Polish history is Feliks Kiryk, ed., *Żydzi w Małopolsce: Studia z dziejów osadnictwa i życia społecznego* (Przemyśl, 1991).
- 11 Rachel Manekin's article on relations between Poles and Jews in the political sphere offers a fresh perspective on the unique situation of "Galician Jewry" (Manekin, "Ha-brit ha-hadashah: Yehudim orthodoxim ve-polanim katolim be-Galitsyah, 1879–1883," *Zion* 64, no. 2 [1999]: 157–86).
- 12 For an analysis of "the Jerusalem school," see David N. Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History* (New York, 1995). See also David N. Myers, "Was There a 'Jerusalem School'? An Inquiry into the First Generation of Historical Researchers at The Hebrew University," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 10 (1994): 66–92.
- 13 Thus a compilation of Israel Halpern's articles is entitled "Eastern European Jewry" (Halpern, *Yehudim ve-yahadut be-mizrah eropah: Mehkarim be-toldotehem* [Jerusalem, 1968]). Also note that a collection of articles by Shmuel Ettinger bears the English title "On the History of Jews in Poland and Russia" and includes an introductory essay by Bartal and Frankel, "Historia ve-shlihut: Shmuel Ettinger—Hoker yahadut mizrah eropah" (Ettinger, *Ben polin le-rusyah*, 11–23).
- 14 See, for example, an article by Alina Cała on assimilation "in Poland" that addresses not only the experiences of Jews in the Kingdom of Poland but also those of Jews in Prussian and Austrian lands (Cała, "Tenuat ha-hitbolelut be-polin," in Israel Bartal and Israel Gutman, eds., *Kiyum ve-shever: Yehudei polin le-dorotehem* [Jerusalem, 1997], 337–51). See also Piotr Wróbel, "Migracje Żydów Polskich: Próba Syntezy," *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego*, no. 1–2 (185/186) (1998): 3–30.
- 15 See, for example, Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and the*

*Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (Cambridge, Engl., 1981).

- 16 Few works seem to present this conflation of Polish Jewry with Hasidim more than Roman Vishniac's powerful popular photographic history (Vishniac, *A Vanished World* [New York, 1983], photos 1–12, 75–95). In an earlier collection by Vishniac, almost every adult male presented is bearded and has his head covered (Vishniac, *Polish Jews: A Pictorial Record* [New York, 1965]). For additional, literary representations of ultra-Orthodox society, see Nathan Englander's collection of short stories, *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges* (New York, 1999), 81–106, 139–91.
- 17 See, for example, Tadeusz Radzik, ed., *Żydzi w Lublinie: Materiały do dziejów społeczności żydowskiej Lublina*, 2 vols. (Lublin, 1995, 1998); Feliks Kiryk, *Żydzi w Małopolsce* (Przemyśl, 1991); and Andrzej Żbikowski, *Żydzi* (Wrocław, 1997). Also note the cover photo of two bearded Jews (one with a large black hat characteristic of Hasidim) that accompanied a recent article on Jews in one of Poland's leading news magazines: Joanna Podgórska, "Ilu jest Żydów w Polsce?" *Polityka* (May 30, 1998), 3–8. Compare, for instance, these images to the photo of the grenade-toting, bare-chested, larger-than-life statue of Warsaw Ghetto hero Mordechai Anielewicz that regularly serves as the cover photo for

the Israeli Holocaust studies journal, *Yalkut moreshet*.

- 18 Krystyna Kersten's study remains one of the more thorough analyses of the entire "Żydo-Komuna" issue (Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, komunizm: Anatomia półprawd, 1939–1968* [Warszawa, 1992]). For a recent Polish compilation of primary sources from this period, see Alina Cała and Helena Datner-Śpiewak, eds., *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce, 1944–1968* (Warszawa, 1997). An overview of Poland's Jewish community in the immediate postwar era can be found in Irena Hurwic-Nowakowska, *A Social Analysis of Postwar Polish Jewry* (Jerusalem, 1986). For an English account of 1968, see Paul Lendvai's ominously entitled book *Anti-Semitism Without Jews* (New York, 1971), 89–243. So far as the postwar era and Israeli academia are concerned, a recent Hebrew collection of articles entitled "Polish Jewry: Existence and Catastrophe" contains only one article on post-World War II Polish Jewry; furthermore, that article addresses the years 1944–50 and is grouped in the table of contents under the subject heading "Independent Poland and Shoah" (Hanna Shlomi, "Hitargenut shel sridei ha-yehudim be-polin le-ahar milhemet ha-olam ha-shniyah, 1944–1950," in Bartal and Gutman, eds., *Kiyum ve-shever*, 523–47). For another Hebrew analysis of Jewish life in Poland immediately after World War II, see David Engel, *Ben shihrrur li-*

[223]

*Polish Jewry*



Scott Ury

*vrihah: Nitsolei ha-shoah be-polin vaha-maavak al hanhagatam, 1944–1946* (Tel Aviv, 1996).

Here, as well, note the Palestine-Zionist-Israel orientation of the book's subject—Polish Jewry in literal transition to British Mandate Palestine—as well as the book's historical periodization.

- 19 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1972), 32.
- 20 Celia S. Heller, *On the Edge of Destruction: Jews of Poland Between the Two World Wars* (Detroit, 1977). A summary of the public debate surrounding Claude Lanzmann and "Shoah" can be found in Timothy Garton Ash, "The Life of Death," *New York Review of Books* 32, no. 20 (Dec. 19, 1985): 26–39; see also Dominick LaCapra, "Lanzmann's *Shoah*: 'Here There Is No Why,'" *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 2 (1997): 231–69.
- 21 Note Piotr Wróbel's assessment that "many Jews outside Poland seem not to have noticed these changes and still view Poland as a macabre cemetery populated by hostile barbarians" (Wróbel, "Double Memory: Poles and Jews After the Holocaust," *East European Politics and Societies* 11, no. 3 [1997]: 567). An entire collection has recently been published to clarify this issue. See the provocatively entitled study: Ireneusz Krzemiński, ed., *Czy Polacy są antysemitami? Wyniki badania sondażowego* (Warszawa, 1996). See also the piece by the Polish ambassador to the Jewish Diaspora,

Krzysztof Śliwiński, "Towards a Polish-Jewry Dialogue: The Way Forward," *Polin* 10 (1997): xxi, xxiv, and xxv, as well as Jerzy Tomaszewski, "Polish History Through the Eyes of Three Popular Jewish Historians," *Polin* 11 (1998): 312–18.

- 22 Works that highlight Polish efforts to save Jews during the Holocaust include Barbara Stanisławczyk, *Czterdzieści twarych* (Warszawa, 1997), and Ewa Kurek-Lesik, *Gdy klasztor znaczył życie: Udział żeńskich zgromadzeń zakonnych w akcji ratowania dzieci Żydowskich w Polsce w latach 1939–1945* (Kraków, 1992). The latter has been translated into English as Ewa Kurek, *Your Life Is Worth Mine: How Polish Nuns Saved Hundreds of Jewish Children in German-Occupied Poland, 1939–1945* (New York, 1997). For an interpretation of Jewish communal life that stresses coexistence among "Polish Catholics and Polish Jews," see Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, "Shtetl Communities: Another Image," *Polin* 8 (1994): 89–113. Orla-Bukowska's comments are quite instructive: "It is true that the primary tie between Jews and non-Jews was economic, but there were more personal friendships . . . contact was daily and everywhere . . . it epitomized interdependence, reciprocity and a working equilibrium. . . . In all cases, the essence was two halves forming a symbiotic whole," and "a skewed image is formed which ignores the reality that ethnic

groups, living in a traditional culture and occupying shared territory, will find each other's world and together create their own. . . . While it is true that they will periodically find themselves in confrontation, most of the time they will live in co-operative symbiosis. . . . There is great need for more research into and emphasis on the intercultural contact between Polish Catholics and Polish Jews" (112, 113). See also Piotr Wróbel's call to reevaluate the actions of Judenrate leaders and employees (Wróbel, "The Judenrate Controversy: Some Polish Aspects," *Polish Review* 42, no. 2 [1997]: 225–33).

- 23 Eva Hoffman, *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (Boston, 1997), 255, 18. Hoffman also observes that "it might be possible to see the story of Polish-Jewish co-existence as a living experiment in multiculturalism *avant la lettre*" (9). In the introduction to his lucid analysis of Polish memory of the war, Michael Steinlauf reflects upon his own attempt to move beyond partisan history: "I pride myself on being perceived as 'pro-Jewish' among Poles and 'pro-Polish' among Jews" (Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* [Syracuse, N.Y., 1997], xi).
- 24 For a recent discussion of some of these issues, see Tony Judt's review of Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* as well as Judt's insightful contextualization of Davies' response to criticism

(Judt, "Crimes and Misdemeanors," *The New Republic*, Sept. 22, 1997, pp. 36–42). See also Jonathan Mahler's description of the public and academic controversies surrounding Davies' work and Davies' decision to sue an American university for "discrimination on the basis of politics and creed" (Mahler, "The Polish Perplex: Is Norman Davies Innocent?" *Lingua Franca* [Mar. 1998]: 45–50). Although Davies' suit was, apparently, quickly rejected, one wonders what impact his charges and the accompanying public battles have had on the field.

- 25 For a discussion of the various attempts to construct a "New Jew," see Anita Shapira, *Yehudim hadashim, yehudim yeshanim* (Tel Aviv, 1997). One particularly striking visual representation of the "New Jew" can be found in the previously cited cover photo of *Yalkut moreshet* as well as the actual statue itself. The placement of Anielewicz's statue at the foot of a war-torn water tank that served as a fortress during the War of 1948 conveys the message that Anielewicz actually fought (and died) for Israeli independence in 1948—yet he perished in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943. I would like to thank Hava Ben Sasson for her comments regarding Anielewicz, Kibbutz Yad Mordechai, and the construction of memory in contemporary Israel.
- 26 See Omer Bartov, "Defining Enemies, Making Victims: Germans, Jews and the Holocaust,"

- American Historical Review* 103, no. 3 (June 1998): 771–816, esp. 800–801. See also Abraham Brumberg, “Anniversaries in Conflict: On the Centenary of the Jewish Socialist Labor Bund,” *Jewish Social Studies* (n.s.) 5, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 1999): 196–217, esp. 199–200.
- 27 In all fairness to the much-maligned Jewish national movement, why should its parricidal impulses be any different from those of any other national or revolutionary movement?
- 28 Although these comments may resemble arguments made by Polish ultra-nationalists wishing to minimize the level of anti-Jewish sentiments in present-day Poland, they are not, in any way, meant to imply that Poland is a society free of antisemitic prejudices and expressions. A core of liberal activists and the generation of 1989 have made significant progress in correcting stereotypes in and about Poland. However, the task is rather daunting, and much work remains.
- 29 See Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, “Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity,” *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 4 (Summer 1993): 693–725; David Biale, “Modern Jewish Ideologies and the Historiography of Jewish Politics,” *Studies in Contemporary Jewish History* 10 (1994): 3–16; Brumberg, “Anniversaries in Conflict”; Todd M. Endelman, “The Legitimization of the Diaspora Experience in Recent Jewish Historiography,” *Modern Judaism* 11, no. 2 (1991): 195–209; David N. Myers, “History as Ideology: The Case of Ben Zion Dinur, Zionist Historian ‘Par Excellence,’” *Modern Judaism* 8, no. 2 (1998): 167–93; and Roni Gechtman’s review of Arye Gelbard’s book, “Sofo she-lo kitehilato,” *Gal-ed* 15–16 (1997): 262–67. Also note Robin Reisenfeld’s statement regarding this search for a new balance between past and present: “For the modern Jew, the memory of the Holocaust provides a common touchstone, given the Jewish population’s strong assimilationist tendencies, Jewish migration, and ideological disillusionment with Zionism” (Reisenfeld, “Collecting and Collective Memory: German Expressionist Art and Modern Jewish Identity,” in Catherine M. Soussloff, ed., *Jewish Identity in Modern Art History* [Berkeley, Calif., 1999], 128). Compare, for example, these pieces to Dinur’s interpretation of the place, role, and fate of the Diaspora in Jewish history (Benzion Dinur, “Galuyot ve-hurbanan,” in Dinur, *Dorot u-reshumot*, 175–92). I am grateful to Israel Bartal for his insightful comments regarding Dinur’s conception of the Diaspora.
- 30 In fact, the next paper was entitled “From Conflict to Cooperation: The Jewish Bund and the PPS, 1897–1939.”
- 31 For a collection that addresses the manner in which various emotional concepts have been constructed and understood in American culture, see Joel Pfister and Nancy Schnog, eds.,

*Inventing the Psychological: Toward a Cultural History of Emotional Life in America* (New Haven, Conn., 1997).

32 The air-raid sirens and public moments of silence that mark both Yom ha-shoah and Yom ha-zikaron in Israel stand as some of the most vivid examples of such collective rituals binding private memory and public acts of remembrance. Hence, news reports in past years regarding those who have either refused or neglected to observe these ceremonies have led to public debate regarding these individuals' loyalty to and place in Israeli society. Also note the importance that different governments and opposition movements in post-World War II Poland have lent to public commemorations of both the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943 as well as the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. On the invention and implementation of such a bond between the living and the dead in the Jewish world and beyond, see Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*; Segev, *The Seventh Million*; Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, "Introduction," in Kugelmass and Boyarin, eds., *From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry* (New York, 1983), 1–22; George Mosse, *Confronting the Nation: Jewish and Western Nationalism* (Hanover, N.H., 1993), 13–25, 41–59; Patrick Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, N.J., 1994); and Rachel Greenblatt,

"'Memory' and the Relationship Between the Living and the Dead in the Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague: A Reading of Evidence in Stone" (Master's thesis, the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1998).

33 For further discussion of these issues, see Jacek Woźniakowski, "Tożsamość, pluralizm, edukacja," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 33 (Aug. 15, 1999). In his definitive work on the West and the Orient, Edward W. Said discusses, at length, the arbitrary nature of academic fields (Said, *Orientalism* [New York, 1978]).

34 For a summary of the troubled relations between international Jewish organizations and local Jewish communities in East Central Europe, see Yossi Klein Halevi, "The Accounting: Who Has the Right to Negotiate for the Assets of Jews Murdered by the Nazis?" *Jerusalem Report* 7, no. 22 (Mar. 6, 1997): 26–32. See also "Ha-rekhush ha-tsiburi," *Ha-aretz*, Dec. 4, 1998, p. B7. For further discussion of international Jewish organizations, questions of historical legitimacy, and attempts to repossess both the physical and spiritual legacies of the past, see Netty C. Gross, "The Old Boys Club: New York's Jewish Claims Conference Keeps Heirs from Their Inheritance," *Jerusalem Report* 8, no. 1 (May 15, 1997): 30–36; Netty C. Gross, "The Outrage Grows: The Claims Conference, Part II," *Jerusalem Report* 8, no. 2 (May 29, 1997): 30–32; editorial, "Rekhush yehudi li-vealav," *Ha-aretz*, Oct. 26, 1999,

[227]

*Polish Jewry*



Scott Ury

- p. B1; and Yair Sheleg, "Meshikhah aharonah mi-bank ha-zikaron," *Ha-aretz*, Apr. 6, 1999, p. B6.
- 35 Later that week, newspapers in Poland and abroad carried the news that the Polish government had decided to reissue Polish citizenship to all Poles of Jewish origin who had their citizenship revoked in 1968. An American friend spoke of this decision as an "historic development." "What good does a piece of paper do them now?" I asked. "It's a good start," he responded with an American emphasis on the positive. For a contemporary account of the impact of 1968 on Poland's Jews as well as a discussion regarding the return of some of these Jews (or should their return to Poland mandate that they subsequently be referred to as Poles?) to Poland, see Jerzy Sławomir Mac, "Marzec Hańby," *Wprost*, Mar. 8, 1998, pp. 26–28, and Jerzy Sławomir Mac, "Strażnicy Grobów," *Wprost*, Mar. 8, 1998, pp. 29–30.
- 36 As Timothy Garton Ash, one of the unofficial Western spokespersons for the democratic opposition in East Central Europe, has noted: "In Solidarity, conservatives, liberals, and socialists, Christians and Jews, united on a common platform of these basic European values that it is our common task to define and defend" (Ash, "A Few Ideas . . . Nothing New," in Ash, *The Uses of Adversity: Essays on the Fate of Central Europe* [New York, 1990], 160–61). The theme of Polish-Jewish cooperation in a joint battle against foreign occupation is not new to the historiographical literature. See Majer Bałaban, *Album pamiątkowy ku czci Berka Joselewicza pułkownika wojsk Polskich w 125-letnią rocznicę Jego bohaterskiej śmierci, 1809–1934* (Warszawa, 1934); Ignacy Schiper, *Żydzi Królestwa Polskiego w dobie Powstanie Listopadowego* (Warszawa, 1932); F. Kupfer, *Ber Meisels i jego udział w walkach wyzwoleniczych narodu polskiego (1846, 1848, 1863–1864)* (Warszawa, 1953); Magdalena Opalski and Israel Bartal, *Poles and Jews: A Failed Brotherhood* (London, 1992); and Jerzy Tomaszewski, ed., *Żydzi w obronie Rzeczypospolitej* (Warszawa, 1996).
- 37 For another interpretation (the liberal Polish one) of the events of 1968, see Marcin Kula, Piotr Osęka, and Marcin Zaremba, eds., *Marzec 1968: Trzydzieści lat później* (Warszawa, 1998). The fact that only a handful of the 20 articles in this collection address specifically Jewish issues demonstrates the degree to which this interpretation and understanding of 1968 varies from the two "Jewish" interpretations.