

(What Was Once) The World's Largest Jewish Community

NANCY SINKOFF

- Israel Bartal. *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772–1881*. Translated by Chaya Naor. Jewish Cultures and Contexts. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005. Pp. vi + 203.
- Gershon David Hundert. *Jews in Poland–Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity*. S. Mark Taper Foundation Imprint in Jewish Studies. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. Pp. xix + 286, maps.
- Magda Teter. *Jews and Heretics in Catholic Poland: A Beleaguered Church in the Post-Reformation Era*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. xxxiii + 272.
- ChaeRan Freeze, Paula Hyman, and Antony Polonsky, eds. *Jewish Women in Eastern Europe*. Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry 18. Oxford and Portland Ore.: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2005. Pp. xiv + 470.

TAKEN TOGETHER, these four books suffice for a crash course in the history of Polish Jewry from the early modern period until shortly after World War I. They offer specialists and nonspecialists alike an understanding of the newest trends in the historiography of “the Jews of Eastern Europe,” who are still often relegated to a sidebar in the master narrative of modern Jewish history and too frequently only appear within it in relation to their destruction. In fact, these four books demonstrate conclusively that this narrative must be rewritten. The seminal impact of the partitions of Poland (1772, 1792, and 1795) as the dividing line between early modern and modernizing Polish Jewry is asserted directly by Israel Bartal and assumed implicitly by Hundert’s and Teter’s work and by the numerous essays in the Polin anthology. We do well therefore to address the issues of the two books that are squarely in the early modern period and then continue with a discussion of the two books whose focus is the nineteenth century.

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Lucid, vivid, and brimming with archival detail and description, Gershon Hundert's book is a bold, sophisticated, revisionist analysis of eighteenth-century Polish Lithuanian Jewry that culminates years of scholarly work. Focusing on (what was once) the largest Jewish community in the world, Hundert seeks nothing less than a redefinition of the term "modernity." He rejects the conflation of Westernization, "the progressive integration of Jews into society at large and the exchange of particularistic Jewish values, in varying degrees, for a more universal worldview," with modernization (p. 1) and seeks to anchor the study of modern European Jewry in the continent's east rather than in the narratives of "small Jewish communities comprising tiny proportions of the total populations of the countries in which they lived and of the total number of Jews in Europe" (p. 233). The term "modernity" is merely chronological, and Hundert defines it as "roughly the past two centuries." Purging the term "modernity" of its conventional meanings and teleology (namely, political enfranchisement, religious transformation and secularization, dissolution of Jewish autonomy, and migration), Hundert offers up instead *Annaliste* geological terms to underscore the significance of Polish Jewry's unique *mentalité*, hoping "to identify on a *magmatic* level of Jewish experience, that is, the *elemental* continuities that persist from the early modern period almost to the present" (my emphasis, but see pp. 3 and 234).

Hundert makes an elegant and convincing case for the singular culture of eighteenth-century Polish Jews. Due to their enormous numbers, indispensable role in the economy, and sense of cultural superiority, Polish Jews created and lived a sense of their own importance, what Hundert calls a "social-psychological translation of the concept of chosenness" (p. 4). This *mentalité* drew from the spiritual well of *Haside Ashkenaz*—the medieval German Jewish pietists¹—which was transmitted to Poland as Ashkenazic Jews moved eastward, and deepened in the Commonwealth, the vast state formed by the union of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1569. Following Jacob Katz and Benzion Dinur, Hundert insists on telling Jewish history from within its own narrative. In his reading, East European Jews were *essentially* different from other Jews. Polish Jews refused to be defined by others and were particularly immune to the promise of *embourgeoisement* and its quid pro quo of attenuated Jewish identity; this refusal, and the tenacity of the East

1. On medieval Ashkenaz's sense of its religious exceptionality, see Haym Soloveitchik, "Religious Law and Change: The Medieval Ashkenazic Example," *AJS Review* 12.2 (1987): 205–11.

European Jewish *mentalité*, is the defining element in the modern Jewish experience (p. 240). Because the Jews of Poland-Lithuania formed the core of European Jewry, the historiography on the modernization of European Jewry that has evaluated Polish Jewry against Western criteria is therefore deeply flawed.

While Hundert's reluctance to use the term "modern" for the majority of Jews in the Commonwealth—and hence for most of eighteenth-century European Jewry—is justified, his own argument for the emptiness of the term "modernity" is undermined by his convincing analysis of the cultural contours of eighteenth-century Polish Jewish life. His portrait of a secure, economically integrated, and religiously self-sufficient Jewry illustrates that the unusual features of the early modern Polish Lithuanian state—its decentralized political structure, ethnic and religious heterogeneity, and two tiered social-class system dominated by a powerful socio-economic elite who controlled the rich soil of the southeastern Polish borderlands—allowed the Commonwealth to become home to the largest concentration of Jews in the world. Because the Polish Lithuanian state did not westernize or modernize in the eighteenth century, neither did its Jews. Rather the "backwardness" of the Commonwealth's social, economic, and political structure sheltered the Jews from the forces of Westernization until the partitions.

That the word "modernity" does have meaning is proven with clarity by Israel Bartal, following in the footsteps of Salo Baron and Shmuel Ettinger: "modernity" was produced by "modernization," the process by which the centralizing state interacted with the Jewish community and particularly with its autonomous structure of self-government. Hundert's interpretation of Hasidism, which emphasizes its increased power by the end of the eighteenth century because of its radical assessment of *gashmiyut* (corporeality) as a positive condition in contrast to the traditional rabbinate's conception of the body's inherent sinfulness, underscores the significance of the state in thrusting Polish Jews into modernity. Charismatic hasidic *tsadikim* proffered a *tikun* to corporeal sin and created a separatist Jewish subculture, independent of the traditional rabbinate, and beyond the reach of the state. Paradoxically, it was Hasidism's ability to remain *outside* the purview of the state that allowed it to resist the latter's modernizing trends and to flourish (p. 210).

Although he includes a chapter on the Church's attitude toward the Jews, Hundert's study of the interiority and security of eighteenth-century Polish Jewry leaves little room for its religious otherness, which is at the heart of Magda Teter's fine first book. Teter explores the early modern anti-Jewish rhetoric of the Polish Church by contextualizing its

problem with the Jews. Against the prevailing historiographic opinion that sees the seventeenth century as marking the triumph of the Counter-Reformation in Poland-Lithuania, Teter seeks to show that the anti-Jewish rhetoric of the Church derived from its weakness rather than its strength. In its campaign against Christian heresy, the Jews were the Church's Ur-deviants.

What Teter accomplishes in her detailed study, which is packed with translations from Polish and Latin sources, is to show how the centrality of the Jews to early modern Polish society threatened the Church's efforts to harmonize its temporal and spiritual authority. No one living in or even visiting eastern Poland could ignore the density of Jewish settlement and the degree of Jewish integration in that society. Poland's Jews could thrive in Poland because they were indispensable to the economy, thoroughly integrated into the urban life of the state (particularly in noble lands), and enjoyed vast political privileges and autonomy. Poland's nobility regularly thwarted the Church's desire to impose a Catholic social ideal onto Polish society, doing so in symbiotic relationship to the Church's first religious rivals, the Jews, who were the Commonwealth's most numerous religious "Other."

A paradox existed, however, as Teter shows, between the nobles' economic "toleration" of the Jews and their personal and political commitments to Catholicism, particularly in the seventeenth century, when Protestant Sweden, Eastern Orthodox Russia, and Muslim Turkey waged war against the Commonwealth. These political events were key to the nobility's "re-Catholicization" and their growing association of Polishness with Roman Catholicism but had little impact on their economic symbiosis with the Jewish community. While the Church hierarchy railed against the Jews, the nobility continued to use Jews as managers of their estates, lands, taverns, and grain production and to employ them as collectors of their taxes and tariffs.

Teter's work ably demonstrates the threat that Jewish integration in the "Nobles Republic" posed to the early modern Polish Church. In a fascinating section, she shows how Jewish conceptions of Poland and anti-Jewish polemicists' view of Polish Jewish life mirrored one another. Famously, premodern Jews created etiology tales of Poland's forests comprised of trees on which whole tractates of the Talmud were inscribed. So, too, anti-Jewish preachers condemned the Polish nobility for creating a paradise for Jews who lorded their position over Christians (p. 97). Her work lays bare a truth of European history under the Cross. The Jews were "both liminal and central" to the Church's efforts to assert

control because they were the necessary antithesis in the rhetorical dialectic of Christian supersessionism.

While never explicit, the subtext of Teter's work appears to be the murderous demonization of the Jews in the twentieth century. No historian of Poland can escape the long shadow cast by the Shoah. While Teter's concern is to emphasize that the equivalence of Pole and Roman Catholic and the homogeneity of the Polish state were not products of the early modern world but of the post-World War II era, she nonetheless claims in the introduction:

Once religious identity, nationality, and the state became one, Polish Jews, after centuries in Poland, found themselves regarded as strangers. The premodern anti-Jewish stereotypes that challenged the Jews' very humanity and extended beyond religion to permeate their very nature translated into racist anti-Semitism that denied even most assimilated Jews their identity as Poles. (p. 6)

The book's central motif, the symbolic power of anti-Jewish rhetoric as a foil for the vulnerability of the early modern Polish Catholic Church, becomes in the above quote "translated" into modern Polish nationalism and modern anti-Semitism. This is a thorny leap. Historicizing how and when the bile spewed at symbolic Jews, the model heretic employed as a trope against all non-Catholics, becomes the bile spewed at real, life-and-blood Jews continues to vex Polish history and Polish Jewish relations. Determining the power of a symbol and the influence of rhetoric is always problematic, but is particularly perilous for the post-Holocaust historian of Polish Jewry.

Israel Bartal is interested in neither symbol nor rhetoric but in the "role of the modern state in shaping the similarity and the disparity between different [Polish Jewish] communities in the era of modernization" (p. 124). Like Hundert's book, Bartal's is a sophisticated synthetic work that offers a revisionist account of the field. Originally published in Hebrew, it has been faithfully translated by Chaya Naor into English² but given

2. Two translation choices—one major, the other minor—however, beg explanation. Throughout the book, the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth is translated as "kingdom" from the original Hebrew *malkhut*, but in English, the word "kingdom" is inaccurate to describe the state that was formed by the Union of Lublin in 1569. The term "Commonwealth" only appears in the superb conclusion, which was written for the English edition. On the minor side, the translator chose the obscure word "pulses" that sent me running to the *OED* for the Hebrew *kitniyot* (p. 122 in the English, p. 155 in the original Hebrew) when describing the flexibility of the Lithuanian rabbinate during a famine that coincided with Passover. "Legumes" would have been a better choice.

an unfortunately bland title, *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772–1881*, which not only loses the alliterative richness of the Hebrew, *Me-‘umab’ li-‘le’om’*: *Yebude Mizrah-Eropah, 1772–1881* (From “Corporation” to “Nation”: The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772–1881), but attenuates its historical claims. Bartal’s choice of the word *‘umab* (corporation) that he enhances as “religious corporation” sounds the correct lexical and historical note to understand the vast community of early modern Polish Jews. This one word solves Hundert’s lexical conundrum (the word “magmatic” is ambiguous) and also roots Polish Jewry in the history of the region, in which nation and state were not coterminous and distinct ethnic-religious groups lived adjacently. The Jews were one among many ethnic-religious corporations in Eastern Europe who played a discrete role in the economy and society of premodern Poland-Lithuania, spoke their own language (Yiddish), viewed themselves and were viewed by others as different from other corporations, and had an organic sense of their own identity. The Jews did not constitute a minority because there was no ethnic-religious majority in Poland-Lithuania. In other words, the Jews *became* a religious corporation that enjoyed a vast lattice of privileges because of their huge numbers and role in the local feudal economy. Put more boldly, Polish Jews became the interior, secure, assertive people with agency they were and constituted a people not because of any special heritage—although religious tradition and folklore affirmed their self-image—but because of the structure of early modern Polish society.

Bartal brings the history of Polish Jewry to the forefront of modern Jewish history when he asserts, in chapter 2, that the partitions were effectively the “end of the old order.” The partitions of Poland were for Poland and its Jewish denizens equivalent to the French Revolution for European history. Rejecting Hundert’s dismissal of the term “modernity,” Bartal argues that Polish Lithuanian Jewry’s interaction with the centralizing Imperial states after partition is what defines modernity. Succeeding masterfully as a model of comparative Jewish history, *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772–1881* succinctly explains how the shifting political landscape in the former Polish lands transformed the cohesive ethnic corporation of Jews into modern Galician and modern Russian Jews.⁵

3. While nodding to the Jews of the Prussian Posen, Bartal claims that their history belongs to Western European Jewry; he does, however, devote a chapter to the Jews in the semi-independent Congress Kingdom of Poland. What his book does not do, nor purport to, is to compare the Jews to the modernizing experience of other ethnic corporations in the partitioned lands of Poland. See Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven, Conn., 2003), for the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century results of the Commonwealth’s demise.

State and economy are the most dynamic engines in Bartal's narrative. Each chapter details the fate of the Jews in the context of the dissolution of the Poland's remarkably tenacious feudal structure. The early modern nexus between Poland's nobility and its Jews served both communities well and the Imperial centers of Vienna, St. Petersburg, and Berlin, while eager to curtail Jewish self-rule, were reluctant to integrate the Jewish community fully into the body politic. Educational reform initiated by the centralizing state—and welcomed by Jewish modernizers, the *maskilim*—and the extension of compulsory military service were the two most favored means by which the state encroached upon Jewish communal autonomy. Given the tenacity of Polish Jewry's sense of self and the incomplete dissolution of the feudal economy until the mid-nineteenth century, the Jewish community that wanted to resist the efforts of the state *could*. The 1850s mark a watershed for Bartal because midcentury denotes the entry of capitalism into East European society, an economic shift that was delayed in comparison to Western Europe due to the entrenchment of serfdom.

Like the partitions, Austria's abolition of serfdom in 1848 and Russia's in 1861 "upended" Jewish life. The liberation of the serfs propelled these backward societies toward industrialization and urbanization and "the transformation of the feudal economy meant the transformation of the Jewish economy" (p. 113). As the centralizing states' attitudes toward the Jews changed and their role in the economy shifted, the elites within the Jewish community were compelled to restructure their political alliances. Both liberal and radical modern Jewish politics were born in the nineteenth century. The Habsburg state offered Jews new political rights (enfranchisement) and residential rights (legal migration to Vienna) in 1867 and the Russian state proffered "selective emancipation," the right to exit the Pale of Settlement, to Jewish merchants and male university students;⁴ in both societies, bourgeois Jewish elites identified with the state and the rule of law. The creation of a radical Jewish proletariat was also a result of serfdom's abolition. The continued allegiance of these new workers to their Jewish identity was a consequence of continuities in Jewish settlement patterns. Losing their anchor in the feudal estate, Jews migrated to cities with burgeoning industry in both Eastern Europe and the United States. Concentrating in "light industry" (i.e., textile and food production), these Jews inhabited Jewish neighborhoods, spoke Jewish

4. Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, Calif., 2002).

languages, read the Jewish press in a Babel of languages, and as Jews created a politics of agitation against the state.

Judaism takes a back seat in Bartal's history, except when he reiterates the arguably reductionist view that "the [Jewish] spiritual world operated within a given political reality, influencing social life and modes of economic activity, and in turn was influenced by them" (p. 47). For Bartal, the ideas of modernity are less compelling than the societal changes that set modernity in motion, transformed Jewish religious life, and unleashed the culture wars that erupted between maskilim, *mitnagedim*, and Hasidim, and later the Orthodox. Neither *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* nor the publication of maskilic tracts were the real enemies of premodern Jewish cohesiveness: "Traditional society's death knell was sounded by the social and economic changes that occurred in the 1860s and the 1870s" (p. 120). Ideological responses, both secular and religious, were the primary means by which East European Jews made sense of their shifting political and economic landscape.

Given Bartal's revisionist bent, his choice of 1881 as the book's terminus is a bit surprising. But it is the dissolution of the feudal order, not the violence of 1881–82, which severed East European Jewish culture from its traditional moorings. The pogroms were a *response* to the new society and economy and highlighted the problematic status of Jews in the modern world; without the protection of the Polish nobility, the Jews of Eastern Europe were left on their own. Politically inexperienced and economically vulnerable, they fell victim to erratic violence, which was almost always fueled by the toxic mixture of economic competition and religious distrust that rocked the Ukraine. While many Russian Jews chose emigration as a solution to this plight, even more Jews from the Habsburg Empire moved west, suggesting that tsarist anti-Semitic measures and the pogroms were not the major stimuli for migration (p. 132). Moreover, Bartal argues—in agreement with Michael Stanislawski—that the maskilic disillusionment with Russian state and the birth of modern Jewish politics preceded the pogroms.⁵ Nonetheless, 1881 was a watershed, marking the transformation of the Jews from a religious corporation that fit (even if fitfully) in the premodern feudal structure of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth into a modern nation competing with other national groups in fin de siècle Eastern Europe.

5. Michael F. Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Russian Jewish Society* (Philadelphia, 1983), and idem, "The Transformation of Traditional Authority in Russian Jewry: The First Stage," *Jewish Migration: 1881 and its Impact*, ed. D. Berger (New York, 1983), 23–30.

Bartal's summation owes much to Salo Baron's now-classic article "Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?" (1928) in which he concluded that the organic quality of premodern Jewish life was predicated on the feudal state's legal structure of corporate autonomy. Dissolution of that autonomy as the state modernized left the Jews without a compulsory structure of communal life and consequently exposed to modern forms of anti-Jewish hatred. While all the forms of modern Jewish nationalism sought to preserve the earlier organic form of Jewish unity, the centralizing state, whether in its radical French integrationist republican- or its paternalistic liberal Imperial-form, could not tolerate Jewish separatism. While Jewish nationalistic ideologues blamed their people's modern defenselessness on the alleged vulnerability of their past, Bartal's work, coupled with Hundert's, indicates the opposite.

The pressing need for a new narrative of the modernization of European Jewry that places the Jews of Eastern and Central Europe in the foreground is underscored by the anthology *Jewish Women in Eastern Europe*, which reminds scholars that one-half of the world's largest Jewish community was composed of women. The volume, which includes articles by senior historians as well as younger scholars, covers a wide array of topics between the early modern period and the interwar years. Ill-served by its title, which appears to collapse the vast historical experience of the Jews who inhabited the Commonwealth and its partitioned lands into one narrative and to sidestep the newest innovations in gender theory, the volume actually delivers much more. The historiographic survey by ChaeRan Freeze and Paula Hyman and Moshe Rosman's article "The History of Jewish Women in Early Modern Poland: An Assessment" directly address the intellectual tension between scholars who use gender as a category of historical analysis and those who do "women's history." The editors eschew compensatory "herstory," the simplistic telling of women's experience as a supplement to normative male experience. Yet, as with all anthologies, its contents are varied in quality and not all of the authors succeed in going beyond description of "what" women experienced (p. 24).

A corollary of the tension between gender analysis and women's history is the distinction between the concepts of historical agency and power. A product of the feminist revolution of the 1970s, practitioners of women's history sought to transform contemporary women's lives through scholarship. By making the invisible visible and giving voice to the voiceless, historians of women hoped to create social change that would lead to women's social, political, economic, and sexual empower-

ment.⁶ The earliest works on Jewish women's history were born of the same impulse and, as Moshe Rosman shows in his analysis of Chava Weissler's work, overly optimistic about locating an "authentic" women's sphere of spirituality. Using Weissler's *Voices of the Matriarchs* (1998), Shaul Stampfer's article "Gender Differentiation and Education of the Jewish Woman in Nineteenth Century Eastern Europe" (1993), and Iris Parush's Hebrew monograph recently published in English as *Reading Jewish Women: Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth-Century Eastern European Jewish Society* (2004) to assess the validity of the "separate spheres" construct of nineteenth-century women's history, Rosman concludes that this paradigm is too rigid to explain the ways in which men and women lived in traditional Jewish society. Social and religious roles between the sexes were sometimes complementary, sometimes contested, and occasionally inverted. While the status of most women (as daughters and wives) was dependent upon their relationship to men (fathers and husbands), there were examples of wealthy Jewish women in Poland, many of them widows, who wielded economic power as arrendators (leaseholders), merchants, factors (brokers), guarantors of bail, collectors of women's charity, and lenders of money (p. 51). Rosman knows that early modern Jewish society in Eastern Europe was incontestably invested in gender distinction and hierarchy, but it clearly bothers him, as it does many of the collection's authors. He concludes his essay by dwelling on the question of women's power in early modern Poland and rightly asks historians to investigate what they mean by power (p. 56). But is the quest to find women's empowerment really the task at hand? At the risk of being considered retrograde we must ask: what is the investment in locating women's "empowerment" in the past? I found myself agreeing with Stampfer's informal reply to Rosman's suggestion that Joan Scott's criticism of functionalist analyses about the complementary nature of male and female spheres in traditional societies also applied to Jewish

6. See, for example, Gerda Lerner's assertion: "It is by now quite obvious that this long history of marginalization decisively affected women's self-perceptions, attitudes, and group actions, even though it only recently has been properly 'named.' Denied any knowledge of their history, women were also denied heroines and role models. In the absence of stories of resistance and opposition, women internalized the ideology of patriarchy and participated in maintaining and strengthening it by transmitting its rules faithfully to their children of both sexes . . . People without a history are considered not quite human and incorporate that judgment in their own thinking. Unaware of any possible alternative, they cooperate in their own oppression." Gerda Lerner, *Why History Matters: Life and Thought* (Oxford, 1997), 207–8.

society. In Scott's critique, a power struggle inheres in all relationships between male and female spheres.⁷ Stampfer asked, "When and where did this struggle take place? Who were the protagonists?" (p. 34, n. 28). Is the preoccupation with premodern women's putative empowerment not anachronistic? When the laudable desire for equality becomes the determining feature of a historian's assessment of the past, it tends to obscure more than it illuminates.

The best pieces in the anthology assume women's *agency* as historical actors without adjudging whether or not they were powerful. In ChaeRan Freeze's thoroughly researched "When Chava Left Home: Gender, Conversion, and the Jewish Family in Tsarist Russia," she artfully demonstrates that female conversion was informed by state policy (there was no civil marriage in Imperial Russia), residency restrictions, and educational possibilities, much as male conversion was. Freeze shows that conversion always involved a gendered narrative, not just the religious act of accepting the baptismal waters. Those who bemoaned female conversion most often described it as a result of penury, powerlessness, and unattractiveness while depicting male conversion as an act of generational rebellion and assertiveness. In "The Lost Generation: Education and Female Conversion in *Fin-de-Siècle* Kraków," Rachel Manekin demonstrates the richness of newly discovered archival material and emphasizes the agency of Jewish girls from rural western Poland without dwelling on their "power" or absence of it. Lacking the fuller Jewish life of their urban counterparts but benefiting from higher Polish education, though not a comparable Jewish one, Jewish village girls from western Poland were likely to convert at the end of the nineteenth century because of the appeal of Polish culture (pp. 211–12). Both Freeze's and Manekin's articles stress the significance of region, reminding us that we cannot generalize from the experience of a rural Jewish girl in western Galicia to that of the daughters of the Jewish elite in St. Petersburg.

Several of the articles (Tova Cohen, Shulamit Mages, Ellen Kellman, and Eva Plach) treat women as authors and literary personalities. Thematically and chronologically broad, these pieces consider the lives and work of such diverse figures as Miriam Markel-Mosessohn (1841–1920), a Hebrew writer in late Imperial Russia; Pauline Wengeroff (1833–1916), a Russian Jewish memoirist who composed in German; and Khane Blankshteyn (1860?–1939), a Yiddish feminist in interwar Vilna. Their respective historical contexts, late nineteenth-century tsarist Russia where

7. See Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in her *Gender and the Politics of History* (rev. ed.; New York, 1999), 28–50.

Markel-Mosessohn dared to assert, albeit anxiously, the legitimacy of her Hebraist authorship, and independent post–World War I Poland where a female Yiddish writer could found a weekly magazine entitled *Di Froy* (The Woman), bear little in common. What they show, however, is the centrality of education and the rise of the press as stimuli for the modernization of all subjects of Eastern Europe generally and for the Jews in particular.

Secularization and the expansion of religious educational opportunities for girls challenged the gendered structure of traditional Jewish society. All the female protagonists in these articles benefited from an education that was broader than that customarily prescribed; they acquired German, French, or Russian through private tutors or by attending state schools. For Hebrew, they were fortunate to have fathers who desired that their daughters be literate in the “holy tongue.” Language was, indeed, power, as it allowed these women the possibility of participating in contemporary debates, or at least of recording their experiences for posterity. Access to education was also decisive for the move from province to capital. While all Russian Jewish male university students were allowed unrestricted residency rights after 1861, only female medical students enjoyed this privilege after 1879 (while female university students in other fields only gained this advantage in 1911), which helps to explain the relationship between female doctors, *embourgeoisement*, and russification (see Balin, p. 143). And entrée to education or its lack thereof was also central to the decision of Jewish women to cross the boundaries of their ethnic-religious corporation.

As late as the interwar years, the young Hinde Bergner escaped to the small east Galician city Yerslev (Jaroslaw) from her market town, Redim—against the will of her father who needed her labor and in the face of the opposition of her pious mother who feared for her vulnerable Jewish soul—in order to acquire more education.⁸ Her desire and ability to flee the confines of her traditional family exemplifies what these four important books illustrate. Once unfettered from the compulsory corporate identity shaped by the structure of premodern Polish Lithuanian so-

8. “When I finished school, Mother wanted to tie me down to housework immediately, while Father wanted me to become involved in his business. But I had a powerful young will to learn. I fought with my parents until I was allowed to realize my dreams. [One winter dawn] . . . I pleaded with him [the coachman driving onto our property] not to tell a soul, and to drive me directly to my aunt’s house in Yerslev . . . While my family was busy eating, I ran away.” Hinde Bergner, *On Long Winter Nights . . . : Memoirs of a Jewish Family in a Galician Township (1870–1900)*, trans. and ed. J. D. Cammy (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 43.

ciety, Jews living in the environments of centralizing Austria and Russia—and later in independent Poland—would, to varying degrees, be able to choose their affiliations with the Jewish community and did so in great measure depending upon the degree of their inclusion in the educational agenda of Jewish elites or of the state. These East European Jews expressed their historical agency *as Jews* (or as converts) in a staggering variety of languages, ideologies, religious practices, and locales. Whether they were empowered or powerless is beside the point. They had become modern.

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