



**Marci Shore**

## Legacies of "Judeo-Bolshevism"

*Scenes from post-communist Poland*

For young Polish Jews, the historical injury of the Holocaust is often complicated by their grandparents' participation in the communist project. Many of the twenty-somethings interviewed by Marci Shore reappropriated their Jewish identity after 1989, and grapple deeply with questions of inner-Jewish politics and their relations with non-Jewish Poles. Affection, hostility, passion... one thing emerges above all: contradiction.

"Do you have Jewish roots?" asked an ad in one of the very first issues of *Midrasz*, a Polish-Jewish magazine founded in 1997. "Is it a problem? Or a secret?"

Perhaps you're afraid to tell friends or colleagues? Your children? Your husband or wife? You don't have to face these problems alone, the advertisement promised. For those struggling with their Jewish identity, a confidential hotline was now accepting phone calls. "We promise discretion."

I had a subscription to *Midrasz*. Each issue arrived in my mailbox wrapped in an indistinctive brown envelope with no return address.

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Ryszarda was born shortly after the war. She was among the founders of the confidential hotline for Poles struggling with their Jewish identity. Her father, a fairly prominent figure in Poland's Stalinist regime, had come from a poor Orthodox family with some dozen children; at least one brother remained a religious Jew, another had become an anarchist. What happened to most of the others Ryszarda didn't know, most likely they had been killed before she was born. In 1917, when her father was still a teenager, he joined a labour Zionist party. The following year, though, he changed his mind and became a communist. He remained deeply attached to Jewishness, but he came to believe that the Jews' fate would only be improved when all men could live as brothers.

Ryszarda's mother was educated. Her father was not — or rather, he never finished school. As her mother told the story, when her father was a child his parents sent him to a traditional *kheder* — until one day the *malamed* caught him reading a Yiddish translation of *Robinson Crusoe* under his desk and expelled him, leaving the thirteen year-old to be sent to work in a factory. Ryszarda's father's real education came later — during the lost years he spent in Polish prison together with the other pre-war communists, studying Marx and Engels and Lenin.

Habits learned in prison lasted. Even many years later, when he was thinking about something he would pace diagonally between the window and the door. This was typical, Ryszarda told me; many of his friends had the same habit.

"Rigid," Ryszarda described him. Firm in his beliefs and in his behaviour. The only guests in their home were Jewish communists. Her parents taught her to address everyone as "comrade". The first grown-up word she learned was "revolution".

He was a father who loved his family, but who cared only about politics. "He didn't have anything to talk to me about," Ryszarda said.

Ryszarda was still living out the clash between the world presented to her in childhood and the world as she later came to understand it.

"In the Stalinist period — that is, until 1956, when I was ten years-old — the world was very homogeneous in my eyes. The whole world that I knew, it was these comrades and they were almost all Jews. I knew that somewhere out there, there was a different world, but that different world was not good, or at least it was foolish for not subscribing to communism. And so it was natural, everything was homogeneous — communism, Jewishness, Polishness."

It was only later in her life, when she was no longer a child and had made Polish friends, friends not from communist families, that she heard about the 1940 Soviet massacre of some 15 000 Polish officers in the Russian forest of Katyn. And even then she didn't believe it, in the beginning she thought it must be anti-communist propaganda.

Her parents felt themselves to be Jews. But they also felt themselves to be Poles. Even her father — a native Yiddish speaker who never learned Polish well, who until the end of his life spoke with a heavy accent and made grammatical mistakes — was very attached to Poland.

"The only thing was," Ryszarda added, "he didn't know Poland at all."

1968 was the caesura. But even then, during the anti-Semitic, "anti-Zionist" campaign, her parents did not leave the Party. Her father was enormously pained — but unable to accept that he had given his entire life for nothing. That he had wasted it. Or worse.

This was what Ryszarda believed her father felt and thought. By nature, though, he was a closed person. He didn't speak to her about what happened in 1968, when the Party embraced anti-Semitism and purged itself of Jewish communists, the army of Jewish officers and the universities of Jewish professors. In the aftermath some 13 000 "Poles of Jewish origin" left Poland. The last children to be devoured by the revolution.

I had the impression, I told her, that many of the Jews who remained in Poland today were not at all a representative sampling of the very large Jewish community who had lived in Poland before the war — when in fact there had been relatively few communists among the Jews. After all, even if one chose to reject the wisdom of the rabbis, beckoning were the General Zionists, the Labour Zionists, the Revisionist Zionists, the Polish Socialists, and not least the mass Jewish workers' movement, the Bund. Today, though, of the handful of Jews who remained in Poland, it seemed that very many were communists — or had been...

"Of course, the majority," Ryszarda said. "Of course, because anyone who wasn't a communist would have left."

Ryszarda lived alone, in what had once been her parents' apartment in Warsaw. She was here, in this room where we now sat, when Stalin died. She was in kindergarten and she heard it over the radio, she saw her father grab his head with his hands.

"Thousands of years of Jewish history," she told me, looking at place where the radio had once stood, "led to this..."

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Her name was Natalia; the first time we met we sat in a café on Nowy Swiat, near the gates to the university, and Natalia cried. She cried because her grandfather had not crossed the border into Czechoslovakia after the war, because he had not crossed the border to Czechoslovakia from where he could have gone on illegally to Palestine. As had so many others.

And so, some quarter-century later, she was born in Poland, where she did not feel at home. She could not escape from her grandfather's refusal to cross the border, this moment of decision, the moment when her life might have been a different one. She could not forgive her grandfather for having misunderstood History, for having made the wrong choice — and thus for having thrown Natalia from the current of History.

Recently she had been to see Pani Irena, the sister of Jakub Berman, one of a triumvirate of leaders of post-war Poland, the man in charge of the security apparatus during the bloodiest years of Polish Stalinism. Jakub Berman was the face of *zydokomuna* — the anti-Semitic stereotype suggesting that communism in general and Stalinism in particular was a Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy against the Poles. Pani Irena, now elderly and frail, had been a lifelong communist. She had spent the war years in Stalin's Soviet Union, where she nearly died of hunger. Nonetheless she survived, unlike most of her family who remained in Warsaw — they died in Treblinka.

"I felt as if my grandfather had risen from the grave," Natalia told me when she returned. Her grandfather, who had not crossed the border into Czechoslovakia, had instead stayed in Poland to build the communist utopia.

Natalia introduced me to her friend Bogna, The Last of the Diaspora Nationalists, who was teaching herself Yiddish and who hated Israel for seducing Natalia away from her.

Bogna invited me to Shabbat dinner at her apartment in Praga, on the other side of the Vistula River. On the table were potatoes and salad and candles and around it some of the last twenty-something Polish Jews. Hostility, affection, passion. Bogna's friend Anka was silent, she spoke to no one apart from Bogna and then only in whispers, and only in Yiddish.

Dagmara wore a fiery red sweater and a Star of David dangled around her neck. She was feisty and saucy and full of anger. She hated the Israelis, who did not even want to talk to the few remaining Polish Jews they encountered on their pilgrimages to Poland. She also hated the Israeli government, who was so dismissive of her and her friends, who declined to acknowledge their voices.

"And what are we?" she cried, "only the guardians of gravestones?"

She wanted apologies, trials, vindications. Their friend Kuba rejected this. He was in favour of education.

"And what then?" Dagmara shouted at him. "Maybe my great–great–great grandchildren will see the results..."

In a jacket and tie and a *yarmulka*, Kuba looked as if he were a child dressed up as an adult. He'd come with Miriam, who wore a long black shawl draped over her shoulders, and a hat covering her hair, although she was not married, although she might not even have been religious. She paced in and out of the kitchen, smoking cigarettes on Shabbat.

The potatoes were sitting on the table. When Miriam learned that I had brought a friend who lived in Jerusalem, she wanted to speak Hebrew.

"That would be amusing," Dagmara said, glaring at Miriam. Among them it was only Miriam who spoke some Hebrew.

A moment later the object of Dagmara's anger had shifted from Israelis to Poles. Now she screamed at Kuba, who rejected her insistence on both collective and inherited guilt.

"Should Bartoszewski also apologize to the Jews?" Kuba shouted back at her. Wladyslaw Bartoszewski was a member of the Polish parliament. During the war, as a very young man — and a Catholic — he had risked his life to save Jews. And he had saved many. Kuba did not believe that the Poles were, on the whole, so hostile. He, too, would stay in Poland — unlike Miriam, who had spent a year at a women's yeshiva in Jerusalem and would perhaps make *aliya*.

"There is no such thing as inherited responsibility!" Now it was Miriam who was shouting at Dagmara. No one could apologize to Miriam for her grandmother's death in the Holocaust, those to whom apologies were owed were dead, and therefore no apologies were possible. In any case, the Poles were guilty not of extermination but of apathy, which was a responsibility of a different kind. Miriam demanded apologies from no one — it was just such collectivized thinking that had led to the Holocaust in the first place.

Dagmara protested: Miriam's was a philosophical argument, and Dagmara was speaking of politics.

"And who am I?" Miriam shouted, trembling now. "My father and my uncle built communism. Am I also responsible for that?"

"You're speaking personally!" Dagmara answered. She was thinking of symbolic apologies, political statements.

Yet of course here the political was always personal.

It was late when I left with Kuba and Miriam. We waited at the bus stop, talking quickly, Miriam and Kuba still agitated. Some young men arrived to wait for the bus and Kuba and Miriam suddenly fell silent. On the ride into town we did not talk at all.

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After the fall of communism, hundreds of Jewish teenagers, from the United States, from Israel, from dozens of other countries, began coming to Poland. They came to Poland wearing stars of David. They came here on a tour of the death camps, to mourn the dead in the country they regarded as a cemetery. The tours were called Marches of the Living, and they concluded in Israel: the new world, the new hope, the land of the New Jew. They did not want to talk to Polish journalists — they did not want to talk to Poles at all.

They didn't come to Poland for dialogue, one boy told a Polish reporter. They came to say *kaddish* for their dead.

A Polish girl who lived today in the town the Germans called Auschwitz and the Poles called Oswiecim said to the young visitors, her contemporaries: "My grandmother remembered that when the wind blew, they could smell the stench of burning Jews."

The visitors were angry. "Why," they asked, "didn't you say the stench of burning *people*?"

Yet they themselves had come as Jews.

When Poles tried to talk to them, these young Jews wanted to know how they could live there — in a land that was a cemetery. They wanted to know why the Poles hadn't saved the Jews. They believed it was not by chance that the Germans had chosen Poland as the site of the death camps. They didn't know about the heroic Polish underground. They didn't know that Poles also died in Auschwitz. They didn't want to know.

It was not only the Poles who were hurt by the young Jews who came to their country and wanted to see nothing more than the remains of crematoria. It was also Bogna and Dagmara and their friends, the few remaining Polish Jews.

A Jewish university student in Warsaw joined a March of Living, and travelled to Israel with the group for the journey's conclusion. The final evening the students spent on an Israeli army base. They were all young, they held hands and danced.

"In Poland we were reviving a memory, here we were to feel like Jews. In Poland we'd suffered, here we rejoiced, tasting the flavour of Israel. And suddenly everything revealed itself to be an illusion. When representatives of forty-three countries, participants in the March, were called to the stage so that they could each say a few words in front of the microphone, Polish Jews were passed over. It was the greatest humiliation of my life."

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I went to see Kostek, the editor of *Midrasz*. The confidential hotline was not a joke: the magazine, Kostek explained, was aimed at Jews who were still in the closet.

A former Solidarity activist, Kostek was now a *Gazeta Wyborcza* journalist who had won awards for his reporting as a war correspondent in Bosnia. Kostek was the son of devoted communists, "non-Jewish Jews," a son who had loved his parents very much — and who had spent much of his adult life working to dismantle the system they had spent their lives working to build. It had been in these years, the communist years during which he had found his

way to the opposition, that he also began to find his way to Judaism. Now he wore a *yarmulka* and observed Shabbat.

"Natalia feels as if she's been thrown off the train of History and must, at all costs, get back on," I said to Kostek.

"I'm not on a first-name basis with History myself." He smiled.

We spoke about fascism, communism, Zionism.

"And Israel exists," I said to him.

"Yes, it exists."

"Every time I go there I'm surprised that the country exists at all."

"Me, too. Only I'm also surprised that Poland exists at all."

We spoke about the war. Kostek told me that for the Polish Right, the war was a war between nations. For the Left, it was a war between ideologies. If I were a Jew in Poland in 1939, wouldn't I, too, greet the arrival of the Red Army with cheers? The Poles could never forgive them.

Or did he say, "The Poles could never forgive us"?

Kostek's mother had served in the second Polish division that fought alongside the Red Army. She had lain in the trenches and shot at Germans.

"It was her division," Kostek said, "that was present at the liberation of Majdanek; when she arrived, the ovens were still hot. For her the choice was clear: the gulag or the gas chambers. And people came back from the gulag..."

Kostek told me about his friend Staszek, the great-grandson of Adolf Warski, Rosa Luxemburg's friend, one of the leaders of the Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, which was the predecessor of the interwar Communist Party of Poland. Staszek was the son and the grandson of Stalinists and he believed that the Jews should make a collective apology for communism.

I was fascinated. But Kostek, the Solidarity journalist who was also the son of Stalinists, did not agree.

"Fascinating? No, it's stupid. I feel responsible for communism as a person on the Left, but not as a Jew."

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Anita was beautiful, as if she had come to life from a photograph taken in the 1940s: a cranberry hat, thick black glasses, a flared cream coat. She felt guilty because it was Shabbat and we'd taken the bus from the synagogue to her apartment. Inside, twenty-six Shabbat candles stood on the table, for today was Miriam's twenty-fifth birthday. We drank tea and Miriam and Anita read their poetry. Miriam wrote about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. No, she was not beautiful, Miriam wrote of Eve. It was Lilith, Lilith bearing a soul created by Satan: she was the beautiful one.

When Anita was sixteen she'd fallen in love with an anti-Semite, who left her to marry a Christian woman. He did not want his children to be Jewish. Now Anita was married to a Jew, but it was not her husband but rather this anti-Semite who awakened her femininity, she confessed shyly.

You are that man whom I don't want  
You are that man, whom I desire," she read to us.

Anita, like the others, was not raised as a Jew. She came to Judaism later, as a young woman. For a time, she was a Buddhist, sitting, breathing, meditating, watching her thoughts flow in and out of her mind. The Buddhist master had told her that she was going through life with her hands closed, and that this was wrong, for her hands should be open, open so that things could pass in and out, could come and go.

Kuba read a poem written to his son, before his son was born. He and his wife separated less than three years later. It was the first time I learned that Kuba had a child — or that he once had a wife. He looked like a child himself.

Miriam begged Kuba to read more of his poems, and I saw now that she was in love with him. Miriam who had spent a year in a woman's yeshiva in Jerusalem, where the nineteen year-old Orthodox girl who was her tutor did not want to teach her about impurity and the *mikvah* because she was embarrassed. But Miriam had insisted.

She was not an anti-Zionist like Bogna. After all, Miriam believed, it was because of the Holocaust that there was a Jewish state — in her mind, the Jews *did* win the War.

Bogna was enraged. How could Miriam speak that way about the War? Yes, since the Holocaust there had been no ghetto benches — because there were no Jews! Would she have been baptized if there had been no Holocaust?

Bogna spoke of her Catholic baptism as of a rape, an unforgivable violation done to her. Miriam had been baptized as well. They all had. It was 1982, martial law, and their parents had given themselves to Solidarity in atonement for the sins of their own godless parents. And Solidarity had given itself to the Catholic Church. It was a sign of moral freedom.

"I was a Catholic, I was religious, I believed!" Bogna cried, consumed with guilt and hatred. She would never forgive her mother.

Anita tried to comfort her. "Was it Bogna's fault that her mother did not bring her to the synagogue when she was a child?" Anita asked all of us. There was no synagogue. None of them had been taught how to be a Jew.

Kuba and Bogna shouted at each other, and the women began to cry.

"Bogna has no right...," Kuba said.

"And who are you to judge Bogna's rights?" Miriam shouted at him. Their anger was more than anger. In it was a kind of malice and pain and betrayal.

Bogna despised Israel for having stolen her few friends. When she once visited, she met her cousin for the first time. Why was he there and she in Poland? If it had been Bogna's grandmother who had been the one to make a

different choice... They said nothing to each other. They just stood and looked at each other, and then walked away, having said neither hello nor goodbye.

"We live in Warsaw," Bogna said to me. "The city of two uprisings during the War, and of many uprisings before that. You can never forget that here. Our grandparents were never happy — there was the war, the Holocaust. Our parents were never happy. There was communism, martial law, the memory of the Holocaust. We grew up, and we could never be happy. It was impossible, obscene, to be happy. Anything that gave pleasure was bad. Anita once wrote a poem..."

Kuba interrupted her. He did not want to talk about the poetry they wrote when they were teenagers.

Bogna cried out, "I let you talk! Why must you interrupt me, if I feel I need to say two more sentences, to explain myself?"

"Read the poem," Miriam encouraged her.

But Bogna could not now, she was too angry at Kuba. We all waited until she grew calmer, until she began to read Anita's poem. It was a poem about swimming, about coming back to the water after having been away for a long time, about feeling her body in the water, "the pleasure between my legs."

"This poem helped me," Bogna said. "For years I remembered it and it helped me. When we were growing up, it was as if everyone were in mourning."

They spoke endlessly at an unsustainable pitch. All the angst of the past converged with that of the present until there was no distinction.

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At the university I met Kostek's friend Staszek, a mathematician preoccupied with moral philosophy. Staszek's father had remained a Stalinist even after Stalin had killed his mother and father — Staszek's grandmother and grandfather — in Moscow during the Great Terror.

Jews were like a family, Staszek believed, and when someone in your family did something wrong, you felt bad too. And so perhaps the Jews could collectively...

"I did not use the word "apologize," he insisted, "but perhaps acknowledge, engage in dialogue..."

The Jews who survived usually survived by themselves, without their families. After the war they found themselves alone, in void, surrounded by emptiness — the result was radicalism. This was such a large phenomenon, it should not be taboo to speak about it.

Staszek spoke to me as well about Jewish tradition, a tradition he, like Kostek, had acquired as an act of will — through much effort and study, for there had been no one to pass it on to him. It had happened when he was already an adult, during the Solidarity years, the years of the Jewish Flying University. He began to see the deep affinities between Judaism and Marxism: the role of the *tsadik*, the tradition of textual commentary, the messianic hope. Stalin became the messiah — at a time when it seemed that one had to choose between Stalin

and Hitler. For Staszek the tragedy was not that the Jews chose Stalin over Hitler, but rather that they confused Stalin with the Messiah. Only in 1968 did they learn that communism and fascism were alike.

Before he left the café at the university, Staszek puts on a black *yarmulka*. Poles respected him more, he believed, now that he was openly Jewish.

"Otherwise it's much worse," he said, "they accuse you of concealing your origins."

As he began to walk away, Staszek turned to me one more time. "*Lokomotywa historii*", he said in parting. "The Engine of History".

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In September 1999 *Gazeta Wyborcza* published an open letter to Polish Jews written by an Israeli woman, a young philosophy professor named Shoshana who had found herself in Warsaw when her diplomat husband was appointed to the Israeli embassy there.

Shoshana was unimpressed by Poles — "even those worldly and intelligent Poles" — who reacted with embarrassment when she introduced herself as a Jew. She was still less impressed by the confidential hotline for closet Jews listed alongside the confidential hotlines for alcoholics and AIDS sufferers.

Above all, she was unimpressed by Warsaw's "Jewish revival". With great condescension she pointed out the pathetic character of the "rediscovered Judaism" of people like Kostek and Staszek — who, in rather whimsically deciding to return to Jewishness, had chosen the most narrow-minded kind. Moreover, half of them weren't even *halakhically* Jewish: they would not be accepted by Orthodox Jews elsewhere — thus rendering their constructed identities still more absurd — and hypocritical.

The choice of orthodoxy by 'New Jews' in Poland points not only to a lack of understanding of the essence of Judaism and of what it means to be a Jew. It seems to me that it also testifies to a feeling of inferiority, to a lack of self-confidence [...] I claim that it's possible to be a Jew in many ways, and the way chosen by the 'New Jews' in Poland is the worst of them all."

Shoshana herself suffered from no inferiority complexes, and she advised Polish Jews to follow her lead: proposing secular Jewishness — liberal, pluralist, and tolerant — in the spirit of Spinoza, the Haskalah philosophers who came after him, and modern luminaries like Freud, Einstein and Kafka. It was the secular Jews who were the more secure, the more intelligent, the better Jews. "A non-religious Jew," wrote the young philosophy professor, "has a sufficiently strong Jewish identity to acknowledge that in a story short by Kafka there can be more wisdom than in several chapters of Talmud."

Kostek was angry. He responded in the same newspaper: today very few Jews remained in Poland. Those who were living in Poland were dispersed throughout the country, entirely assimilated, speaking neither Hebrew nor Yiddish, and unable to create their own distinctive culture. It was not anti-Semitism — although this was still very much present — but rather demography that was the main obstacle to rebuilding a Jewish community. In

these circumstances only Judaism — a religious identity — provided this handful of Polish Jews an opportunity to engage immediately, in some sense fully, with the Jewish world.

It was a reasoned defence. But in the end Kostek could not bear Shoshana's condescension, and added:

In the name of intellectual curiosity, I'm prepared to countenance the possibility that one story by Kafka, as she writes, can contain more wisdom than several chapters of Talmud. It's difficult, though, for me to believe that [Shoshana], in speaking of the Talmud, knows what she's talking about. And even about Kafka I'm beginning to have my doubts.

Soon afterwards, a public debate between Kostek and Shoshana was held at the Yiddish Theatre. *Jak byc Zydem w Polsce?* was the title. *How to be a Jew in Poland?*

Staszek was there. Most of the room, though, was filled with elderly Polish Jews, the oldest generation of survivors, the last to remember the large Orthodox community that for centuries before the war had made its home in Warsaw. The ones who stayed in Poland because they were committed to building socialism here. Atheists and communists. Old enough to be Shoshana's grandparents, sharing no language with the young Israeli professor. People, in turn, about whom she knew almost nothing.

And they had come to cheer for Shoshana. Shoshana, a secular Israeli who wrote about Nietzsche and Wittgenstein and was too young even to remember 1968, who spoke in English through an interpreter, who had hardly been thinking of these elderly people who had once been devoted to building socialism when she wrote her open letter to Poland's "New Jews".

An elderly woman introduced herself by saying that she'd lived the first fourteen years of her life before the War. "To live through all of it and be normal — this is too much," she said.

Nobody applauded for Kostek.

"These are my people," he said a few days later, "and they hate me." Now he tried to comfort himself with the thought that God would also like to be making the world with better Jews than He had.

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I spent the evening of Christmas Day with Natalia's friend Bogna, at her small apartment in Praga. We talked about her father, who'd spent his childhood in a Siberian orphanage, where he was constantly hungry — and where he was treated as "an enemy of the people," for his communist parents, like so many Polish communists, had fallen out of Stalin's favour.

I asked Bogna about her grandparents, her father's parents.

"My grandparents? They built communism. They built it before the war. And they also built it after the war."

Her father was a Jew by birth, her mother was not. In the 1970s he became involved in the opposition. In 1979 and 1980 he was a political prisoner; during martial law, he was imprisoned for over a year. Afterwards their apartment was wired for eavesdropping, and her father was periodically detained.

The parents of many of Bogna's friends, twenty-something young Jews, had belonged to the opposition, casting their lot with Solidarity — in rebellion against, and perhaps atonement for, the choices made by their own parents, who had been among the builders of Polish communism. Pope John Paul II was Solidarity's greatest patron — for the parents who baptized their children, this Catholic ritual was an act of freedom.

Bogna, though, remained bitterly resentful of having been baptized: had she lived in a free country, there would have been no baptism. She would have been a religious Jew, she would have had a Bat Mitzvah.

Or so she believed.

Now it was too late for a Bat Mitzvah, but not too late to learn Yiddish, the language she now saw as preserving the essence of her identity.

Bogna described communism as a "frozen time". The ideologies and emotions she encountered as a student in the 1990s, she believed, were the same ones that had been frozen some half-century earlier, "as if that time hadn't been, as if there hadn't been those fifty years." The anti-Semitism of the present day she understood as pre-war anti-Semitism. Like so many other ideas and attitudes, after 1989 anti-Semitism thawed, emerging in the same form in which it had been frozen.

Yet in some way Bogna, too, lived in the pre-war years, she'd recreated those years in her mind. Her way to Jewishness was not only through Yiddish, but also through Yiddishism; she'd defined herself as a diaspora nationalist and took impassioned part in debates against the assimilationists, the Hebraicists, the Zionists. In fact the greatest of her wrath she reserved not for Polish anti-Semites, but for Zionists. Yet Bogna was close to Natalia — despite their ideological antagonism.

"When I talk with Natalia," I told her, "often I have the feeling that she feels as if her entire life here were a mistake. That she should be in Israel; that in a certain sense she was thrown off the current of history."

"I feel this entirely differently," Bogna said. "I consider myself to have been absolutely in the centre of the current of history — and this I can only regret."

Bogna did not lament that her grandparents did not cross that border into Czechoslovakia and from there go on to Israel. On the contrary: it would have been terrible if they had.

When the Marches of the Living began, Bogna was a teenager, and by chance once found herself invited along. She accepted — she thought the programme was about the Holocaust, no one had told her it was a Zionist programme. When, after visiting the camps in her own country, she left with the group for Israel, she thought they were going to Yad Vashem. Instead she learned that the time for talking about the Holocaust was over. The group's time in Israel was a time for celebration, there were songs and marches — in which Bogna

refused to participate. When it was time for her to return to Poland, the young Israelis told her she was betraying her country. Bogna was offended. The truth was precisely the opposite: she was returning to her country.

Later she would meet more Israelis, and more American Jews, as they passed through Warsaw on the March of the Living. She was not fond of them: they were aggressive, they hated Poland and they couldn't understand why Bogna and her friends were here.

"But that's their problem," she added.

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In the Stalinist years, Ryszarda told me, it was a pleasant thing to be the daughter of someone so respected. Since then it had not been so easy. Time and time again she was asked the same question: "are you the daughter of *that...*?"

"And I have to answer, yes, I am."

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A special issue of Bogna's magazine, *Jidele*, was devoted to "the grandchildren of Judeo-Bolshevism". The twenty-something editors of *Jidele* — Bogna and her friends — had organized a discussion among Polish Jews of their own generation on the topic of *zydokomuna*. Bogna co-authored the introduction:

Often it is repeated to us that a Jew who becomes a communist ceases to be a Jew. Not wanting to become entangled in a futile discussion about the Jewishness of Jewish communists, we must be aware of a fundamental fact: a considerable, if not the dominant portion of ourselves, people regarding themselves as young Polish Jews, have grandfathers and grandmothers who were once engaged in creating a communist system.

Bogna's co-editor Michal began the discussion with a vexed question: if we're proud of Freud, how, then, should we treat Jakub Berman?

A poignant question without an answer.

Shortly after she prepared that issue, Bogna left for Israel and did not come back.

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