

YIDDISH BOOK CENTER
2018 Great Jewish Books Book Club Video Conference
My Life as a Radical Jewish Woman by Puah Rakovsky
with Prof. Karen Auerbach
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JESSICA PARKER: So, hi, everyone, and welcome to our fourth and final video conference of the 2018 Book Club. I'm so glad that you're all joining us this evening. I'm Jessica Parker, the coordinator for the Great Jewish Books Book Club. In just a moment, I'm going to introduce our featured guest, Professor Karen Auerbach.

But first, I want to tell you about the structure for this evening, which will be like the structure for the other evenings. All participants will be muted to prevent excessive background noise. Prof. Auerbach will start with a fifteen-minute introduction, and then we'll open it up to questions for about forty-five minutes. Prof. Auerbach, you already have questions coming in, so people are keen and ready to go. You can ask her questions by typing in the chat box.

To access the chat box, hover over the bottom of your Zoom window. You should see a speech bubble with "chat" written underneath it. Click on that speech bubble to open the chat window. You'll be able to send messages privately to individuals, or to everyone. Please address your questions to everyone, not just Prof. Auerbach. It's helpful for me and the rest of the group to be able to see them.

Professor Auerbach will be repeating the questions for our members who will be watching the video recording after the fact and won't have access to the chat box. I will be posting the video recording to Vimeo and sharing the link with you all as soon as possible. Rest assured that no one's video, other than mine and the Professor Auerbach's, will be part of the recording. So, feel free to have your webcam on. You're not being recorded.

In addition, we have live captioning for this video conference. If you would like to see the closed captions, hover over the bottom of your Zoom window. You should see an icon that says "CC." To turn them on, click on that "CC" icon. To turn them off, click on the "CC" icon again. There is a four- to five-second lag time for the captions as a result of the software integration and the fact that it's being live captioned. Thank you to our captioner, Heidi, who has been

working with us for the last three webinars.

And, if you're having a technical difficulty or issue this evening, please send a private chat message to me at "Jessica Parker." You can just click the drop-down list and instead of messaging everyone, you can just choose my name. You can also email me at bookclub@yiddishbookcenter.org, or call me at 413-256-4900, extension 131. And, I'll be muting myself during the conference, so you won't be interrupting everyone if you call me.

So, without further ado, I would like to introduce Professor Karen Auerbach.

Karen Auerbach is Associate Professor of History and Stuart E. Eizenstat Fellow in the Department of History and the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, where she teaches about East European history, Jewish history and the Holocaust. Her first book, *The House at Ujazdowskie 16: Jewish Families*—sorry if I messed it up a little bit—*The House at Ujazdowskie 16: Jewish Families in Warsaw after the Holocaust*, published in 2013, told the story of the reconstruction of Jewish life in postwar Poland through the lives of ten families that were neighbors in one apartment building.

Professor Auerbach is currently completing a book about a young woman in late nineteenth-century Warsaw, her Jewish family, and the social and political world in which she came of age. She previously taught at Monash University in Australia, the University of Southampton in England, and Virginia Tech. So, without further ado, I would like to turn it over to Professor Auerbach. Thanks so much for being with us.

KAREN AUERBACH: Great, thank you, Jessica, for the introduction and for your invitation to speak with all of you this evening. I've never done this kind of technology before, so I will, as we go along. It's a pleasure to talk with all of you, and I look forward to our discussion about Puah Rakovsky's memoir.

I'd like to begin by thinking about Puah Rakovsky in the early 1940s, writing in Yiddish whether in Haifa or in Tel Aviv, about her life over the previous three quarters of a century and mostly a continent away from her at that time. I've been thinking about what motivated her to write and, in particular, what motivated her to write in Yiddish.

Now, to some degree, the epigraph to her memoir, that is, the opening lines with which she begins it, suggests two concrete answers to that question, that is, her motivations for writing. She wrote that a friend demanded she do so, and that perhaps her "personal revolution," as she refers to it, could provide lessons for the younger generation of Jewish women, as she wrote in those opening comments.

The epigraph also refers to two less tangible motivations, and it is her hints at these less tangible motivations for writing that I would like to draw out as a way to help us read and discuss her memoir as an historical source for understanding the world about which she wrote.

Her life, she wrote in those opening lines, is “an interesting manifestation of a bygone age in Jewish life.” And then, as she often does throughout the memoir, she makes a biblical reference, in this case to Ecclesiastes, a biblical book that grapples with the meaning of life, perhaps in the face of death, as well.

Now, it would be facile to read these lines solely in the contexts of the Second World War and the Holocaust, that is, too easy—too facile—to understand her motivations as lying in the genocide of European Jewry, which, after all, was unfolding as she was writing her memoir.

She took pen in hand first in 1940, that is, after the outbreak of the Second World War but before the onset of genocide, before the onset of mass shootings in the summer of 1941—including in the area of Bialystok—before the mass murder through gassing at Nazi death camps.

Of course, we don't know at what point she penned the lines to her epigraph, whether it was when she began writing the memoir in 1940 or at the end of her writing in 1942. And of course, as a 75-year-old woman, as Rakovsky was in 1940, could be forgiven for grappling with the question of the meaning of life in her advanced age, even if she had been contemplating the course of her life at a time of peace rather than in wartime.

But I also feel that we cannot dismiss the shadow of war and Nazism entirely in reading her memoir. Rakovsky rarely refers explicitly to events happening at the time she was writing; they only occasionally rise to the surface as when she describes her uncertainty about her sister's fate in Bialystok toward the end of her memoir, or one comment that struck me on “how hard it is to believe now” that a German official she encountered in 1905 was a sympathetic individual.

As Professor Paula Hyman pointed out in the introduction you read to the memoir, Rakovsky ended the memoir abruptly with a brief reference to the outbreak of war in 1939, and she did not update her narrative before it first appeared in Hebrew translation in 1951, or three years later when it was published in the original Yiddish.

Now, I would argue that it is important to take into account the impact of Nazism and the Second World War on the picture of East European Jewish life that Rakovsky paints. In many ways, she depicts a world that, by the time of her final emigration from Poland in 1935, was on the “edge of destruction,” a world in which antisemitism was leaving no place for Jews in the newly independent nation-states of East Central Europe, whether Poland or Romania, at least in Rakovsky's telling, as I interpret her explanations of that time.

Certainly, by the mid-1930s, relations between Jews and their neighbors were deteriorating, and antisemitism in both politics and society—in Poland, Romania, and elsewhere—were worsening. In Poland, boycotts of Jewish-owned businesses were further impoverishing a population already suffering, as their neighbors were, from the Great Depression, and a wave of anti-Jewish violence occurred between 1935 and 1937 in Poland, especially beginning a few

months after Puah Rakovsky left Poland for the last time.

Now, this picture that she paints, as I said, is an important part of understanding that time period. But at the same time, what I'd like to—one of the historical issues that I thought would be important to point out at the start—is that there was also at that time in interwar Poland a Jewish cultural flourishing taking place between the World Wars. It was a cultural flourishing that took place in three languages, not only in Yiddish and not only in Hebrew, but also in Polish, through literature, newspapers, theater, cabaret, café life, and perhaps most importantly for Puah Rakovsky, in education and schooling, schooling which was connected both with the politics of language, and in politics more broadly, politics more broadly. Zionism, the Bund, Bundism, socialism.

So, there was this tension in Poland between the World Wars that was the culmination of historical threads that began previously, that is, a tension between antisemitism on one hand and Jewish cultural life that—between the World Wars in Poland—really was coming into its own. And that second part, this flourishing, is really for me, in the memoir, was evident almost in passing. It was evident through her descriptions of who visited her in her apartment, through all of the different literary characters, and I believe it was one of her daughters who performed in, I believe it was a Yiddish play, various kind of details that rooted her memoir in this cultural flourishing, but was not that aspect of life at the time, did not seem to be part of her own interpretation of the world that she was painting.

So, I'd like you to keep that in mind, for me Puah Rakovsky's memoir was one of my first introductions to everyday life among East European Jews at that time period, at the end of the nineteenth century through the 1930s, and I think that it's important to keep in mind both what is there, what is in the memoir, as well as what is missing and to ask that question of why are certain aspects missing or more subdued than other aspects.

Now, I'd like to go back to this question of why Yiddish, so the first question of motivations. The second question of why did Puah Rakovsky write her memoir in Yiddish in 1940 to 1942 as opposed to in Hebrew. She was a translator into Yiddish, but she was living in a world in which her more natural audience in terms of proximity, one could say, would be Hebrew and yet she chose to write her memoirs in Yiddish.

I'd like to point out in trying to answer that question of why Yiddish is that Puah Rakovsky's memoir is not the only Yiddish memoir written by a Jewish woman writing about East European Jewish life before the Second World War. Paula Hyman pointed out a couple of examples in her introduction. There are approximately, by my count, at least two dozen other Yiddish memoirs written by Jewish women in which Jewish life before the Holocaust in Eastern Europe is the focus.

Almost all of those memoirs were published after the author left behind the world that the language of Yiddish can be said to embody, that is, after they left behind the world of Jewish Eastern Europe either through emigration, such as in Puah Rakovsky's case to Palestine, for

others to the United States, or after survival of the Holocaust. Of the ones that I have counted, approximately seven were published between the 1920s and the end of the end of the 1950s, that is, a few of these memoirs, Yiddish memoirs, written by Jewish women were actually written before the Second World War, and yet and still viewed that time and place as a kind of a “bygone era,” to use Rakovsky's words.

Okay. There are also memoirs written by women about East European Jewish life that were written in other languages and not just in Hebrew, but also in Russian and in Polish.

What really strikes me is, on the one hand, there are differences between Rakovsky's memoir and these other memoirs, as Paula Hyman pointed out. A significant difference is that Puah Rakovsky was a public figure in her own right, whereas several other individuals who wrote memoirs in Yiddish, an example being Chaim Weizmann's sister, Vladimir Medem's wife, who was also a political activist; the mother of the Yiddish writers Melech Ravitch and Herz Bergner, all wrote memoirs, but their significance as individuals were in relation to their male relatives. Puah Rakovsky was a prominent individual in her own right, and that makes her memoir different.

A number of these other Yiddish memoirs that I have looked at that were published in very small numbers were just the opposite. They were individuals who not only were not, they were not prominent through relation to a male relative, they were not prominent in their own right, they wrote really—this other group of Yiddish memoirs that I'm talking about—were written after the Second World War by individuals who wrote about their own personal life, private life, family life, rather than about political life and kind of the public world intellectual life that Puah Rakovsky and other memoirs focus on.

So, the result is that what's really distinct about Puah Rakovsky's memoir is that she's writing about both public and private life, right? Where she is writing both about her own family, her home, her children, as well as her political involvement as a Zionist, as a feminist, about Zionist institutions, about Zionist women's institutions. It's really a melding of both public and private worlds.

Another distinction, I would say, is that unlike most of these other Yiddish memoirs, Puah Rakovsky's is available to us in English because of the dedication of Professors Paula Hyman and Barbara Harshav, who made this accessible to us. As you know, through your involvement in the National Yiddish Book Center, there's a wealth of material in Yiddish that is simply not accessible to most readers because they have not been translated into English. So that alone distinguishes Puah Rakovsky's memoir.

But I'd like to point out an important similarity or set of similarities between the memoir you've read tonight and a number of these other Yiddish women's memoirs, which is that the themes that Puah Rakovsky—and I'm going to, as aside, I'm sometimes referring to her as “Rakovska” and sometimes as “Rakovsky,” because this has to do with the Polish female, the ending of “a” for a Polish last name, so my apologies, I'll try to stick with Puah Rakovsky as it's been published

as—but there are a set of themes that are really common in these Yiddish memoirs, and not just Yiddish but memoirs written by Jewish women about their lives in Eastern Europe before the Second World War, and those themes are the role of education and reading, so formal education as well as informal education, such as reading groups and other kinds of self-education, as a way to escape restrictions that traditional Jewish life placed on women. And we see that really is one of the main themes that Puah Rakovsky felt explained her life path, that is really common to how Jewish women writing about East European Jewish life explained their life paths, as well.

A second common thread is political activism and radicalism, so Puah Rakovsky was a radical, a political activist in socialist Zionist politics, but there were women who were active in the Communist party, in the Bund, in other strands of Zionism who also wrote memoirs, and found that political activism and that radicalism, as they defined it, and used similar language as Puah Rakovsky did, really defined their life paths and coming of age.

So, the threads of Puah Rakovsky's narrative are actually very common, they're not distinct to her own life, despite her exceptional life path as such a prominent woman in the Zionist movement or Zionist movements and as the founder of schools for girls of Hebrew, schools that taught Hebrew to girls. So, despite the exceptional kind of aspects of her biography, these common threads of her narrative I think help to bring out broader themes in experiences of everyday life in Eastern Europe for Jewish women.

So, in terms of political life, we have her activism as both a Zionist and a feminist, the events and institutions and ideas of those politics. We have her professional life, her role as an educator and a founder for schools for Jewish girls that taught Hebrew, and then we have her private life. First of all, her coming of age story, a young woman who left behind traditional Jewish life, the traditional life of East European Jewry above all through the pursuit of education. And, we also have her broader family story, of two generations, first of all her own and her siblings, her sisters and brothers, about whom we've read, and her children, as well as her grandchildren.

So, I see a lot of questions coming up now, and I—Jessica, should I go ahead and choose...?

JESSICA PARKER: Yes, please go ahead.

KAREN AUERBACH: Let's see, I seem to have missed everything—okay, looking at—let's see. This is an interesting...oh, I see. I'm looking at all of your questions.

So, one question I find very interesting, a question— “looking at all that is happening with women, my question is: How much do we know about domestic violence against women in Yiddish families, Yiddish-speaking families?”

It's an interesting question that, when I think of the Yiddish memoirs that I have read, there's not a great deal of focus on domestic violence, but when I think about kind of gets to the

question of perhaps vulnerability...

That this is a new process for me, so I'm sort of reading the questions and thinking out loud, and I seem to not be getting...

Let's see. Jessica, I don't seem to be getting...I have your question.

JESSICA PARKER: Do you want me to ask you the questions?

KAREN AUERBACH: I have one question here. "Do we know what happened to Puah Rakovsky's son in Moscow? He very easily could have wound up in the Gulag or shot in the 30s or later because of his contacts in the West."

I actually had the same exact question and I'm not aware of an answer to that question. But I had the very same question. I believe she indicated that she last had contact with him in 19—I can't recall what was the last year that she said she had contact with him, but I had the same question and I don't have an answer to that, but I was planning to look into that very question, as well.

"Barbara Harshav"—from Jessica—"was involved as a translator and our last book, too."

"Why was her memoir published under the name 'Puah Rakovsky'? Did she use the last name 'Rakovska'?"

I've seen it actually referred to as "Rakovska" and spelled in both Polish the way it would have been spelled in Polish, as well. I've seen it spelled and—spelled differently, spelled with an "a" at the end, an "i," and a "y," and I believe, this is simply in terms of the spelling, I believe it's just a result of transliterated Yiddish, but in terms of why it was translated under sort of the male, the male ending of "y," or "i," I don't know why that choice was made.

Let's see. Okay. So, here's one question. "You mentioned that this was one of the first books you read about real life in that time period in Poland. In your subsequent reading, did this version of family religious social life continue to ring true? What aspects, if any, of Rakovsky's life were unique?"

I should say that I first read this book very shortly after it was published, I believe, in 2003, and of course taught by Ellie Kelman at Brandeis University on Jewish women in Eastern Europe, and I did find that the private—the aspects of everyday life that Puah Rakovsky described in terms of, for example, the impact of covering one's hair, the impact of arranged marriage, the role of women in religious life, restrictions on the role of women in religious life, various aspects of her description of everyday life definitely rang true and seemed to be indicative of broader trends as opposed to specific, something specific to her own experiences.

Just one example, the essay that I wrote about for that course with Professor Ellie Kelman came

from that. There was one segment in her memoir that talked about suicide, her sister's suicide, I believe, and how she referred to a dozen such young women that she knew from Bialystok who also committed suicide, that those sort of specific small details seemed to...I wrote an essay about that question of suicide among Jewish women in Eastern Europe as a result of that sort of small part of this memoir, and that sense of displacement, that sense of uprooting, of kind of the uprooting of old ties of community that were bound together with religious tradition, and small-town Jewish life and the sort of the disorientation of urbanization, of moving to the big city, of young people kind of searching for new roots really does ring true, or really does seem to be a thread of many memoirs for both men and women.

I think that the aspect of her life that seems to be most unique for me is her role as an educator. There were many women who were teachers, of course. There was a teacher seminary that many young women attended, Yiddish teachers' seminary in Vilna. Other teachers' seminaries.

I think what is specific, if not entirely unique, to her life is her two aspects. One is her real importance in creating new educational institutions. This was a time when a system of private girls education was developing and so she was not the only one doing this, but I think that is part of what makes her trajectory so specific, and I also think that her—the completely intertwined character of her views as a feminist, and her views as a Zionist, also seem—if not entirely unique—seem to be very specific, or are not common to all memoirs that I've read.

Let's see. So, I also—there's a question from someone named Rosaline: “On page 154 she writes about the first book she translated into Yiddish, which was *All Quiet on the Western Front*. She writes, ‘I considered it a duty to introduce Jewish readers, particularly mothers and young people, to the terrors and horrors of the first world slaughter in order to evoke disgust and resistance to the futile bloodbath, and to rouse and develop an anti-war spirit in them.’ Can you comment on this deliberate choice to be such an anti-war educator/crusader? Is it possible to measure the impact that the translated book actually had on its readers?”

And I'm just going to just jot down some thoughts about this.

I also was really struck by the fact that this was the first book she translated into Yiddish. My immediate response to her own explanation was displacing World War I with World War II, not displacing but, as with the book that you read, *The Brothers Ashkenazi*, the book was written at a time—in the case of *The Brothers Ashkenazi*, in the 1930s in which World War I looms really large, right, in that earlier book that you read. That's also the case with this memoir in which the book is written in a time period of the Second World War but in which World War I looms really large.

I wondered how much her explanation that that was why, the anti-war message of that book is what drove her to decide to translate it. I think points, first of all, to the actual real huge impact of the First World War in general, and specifically for Jews who experience both the war itself and the widespread anti-Jewish pogroms and violence in the aftermath of the war and the

Russian Revolution. That is, the First World War and the Russian Revolution. I think that her emphasis and her explanation of why she chose that points to both that real impact of World War I and, perhaps in terms of this anti-war message, that sort of shadow of the war that was occurring as she was writing, as well.

Another aspect that that question reminds me of is a question of the particular—I considered it a duty to introduce Jewish writers, particularly mothers and young people. She emphasizes the importance of mothers in educating their children. And this question of women's roles in their children's—and the choices—the importance of women's choices for their children's education, and how that affect both their children's worldview, in general, and their children's identity as Jews, I think is a really important part of Puah Rakovsky's memoir that fits into a broader literature.

And I'm just going to use the opportunity of this question to kind of go on a tangent about that, which is that there's—there are various arguments about how women's education, women's reading, and their children's identities interact. And one argument, this is by an Israeli historian or literary scholar named Iris Parush, made the argument that, in fact, because Jewish women's education in Jewish religious text was neglected, that is, that because most Jewish women were not taught Talmud and did not study Hebrew, that, in fact, it made it possible for them, that there was sort of a permissiveness to teach them in foreign languages, for example, as we saw with Puah Rakovsky, that then shaped their children's worldview and fostered assimilation. That is, that because Jewish religious tradition—in this argument—ignored women's, or kind of constrained religious education for Jewish women, therefore Jewish women were able to learn secular subjects and secular and non-Jewish languages that were not allowed or not supposed to be allowed for—in traditional Jewish men's education and that, therefore, that had an impact on their children's identities in a way that moved them away from Jewish tradition. I think, actually, Puah Rakovsky's memoir pushes against that argument, although she does make an allusion to that phenomenon in her own book.

Okay, let me take a look. I don't seem to be getting—let's see.

JESSICA PARKER: Perhaps if you scroll up? Did you see this question about—"What is the status of the translation of women members of the Bund from Yiddish?"

KAREN AUERBACH: "The translation of women"—yes, I do, I see that now. I don't understand—the status of the translation of their memoirs? Is that what that question means? "If there's still many that have not been translated into English? Were arranged marriages common in the greater Polish society outside the Jewish community?"

I'll answer the second question first. As far as I know, arranged marriages at that time in broader Polish society, in the way that were not common in the sort of strict way that they were—that Puah Rakovsky describes in her own—in terms of her own arranged marriage, so that's the second question of were arranged marriages common in the greater Polish society outside the Jewish community. No, not at that time in the way that's described by women in

traditional Jewish life.

There are excerpts of—there are excerpts of recollections or memoirs written by women in the Bund from Yiddish. There's the collection by Lucy Dawidowicz, and a collection called *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, both of those include, I believe, excerpts of translations of Bundist women's memoirs from Yiddish.

Let's see. This question of: "Do you know why the memoir ends so abruptly?"

It seems to me that that really does—that abrupt ending that the introduction, Professor Hyman's introduction points to—to me highlights and through silence really highlights the—I think she refers to, Professor Hyman refers to the word "rupture" that Puah Rakovsky was experiencing at the time she was writing and that helps us to understand why she took pen in hand, that not only did she, even though she ends the last line, I believe, of the memoir, one of the last lines, says basically, with the outbreak of war in 1939, then she refers to something relating to her work, even though she does end with the outbreak of war, she doesn't talk about—she doesn't write about hearing about the outbreak of war, right? She doesn't write about her experiences in Palestine of what was going on in Poland, for example. There's a lot she could have written in that last chapter that she didn't, and she also did not update it. The memoir was first published in Hebrew translation in 1951. She doesn't update it. She doesn't tell us what happened, what she was able to learn about what happened to her family members that, perhaps, those who did remain in Europe.

My understanding is—why did she end so abruptly—is that there's a sense of upheaval or almost a closed chapter, it seemed to me. That's how I read this epigraph—"at the beginning of a bygone era"—for me, that was both about an historical process, her reference to a bygone era, and about her writing in the crucible of the Second World War. We don't know at what point she added that, again. Perhaps she even added it much later on. But for me, "a bygone era," that term, that phrase—"a bygone era"—referred, to me, to sort of a generational story where, even before the Second World War, despite the picture, actually, that is painted in her memoir, most Jewish children in interwar Poland were not actually educated in Hebrew language or Yiddish language schools; they were actually educated in Polish language schools.

And by the time she left Poland in 1935, more and more young people of her grandchildren's generation were actually studying or actually speaking to their friends and sort of living their lives in Polish, even if they still spoke Yiddish with their parents, and that's because most Jewish children could only afford to go to public schools, and in interwar Poland, there were public schools for Jewish children that did not meet on the Jewish Sabbath, did not meet on Shabbat, but were taught in Polish, with Polish as the language of instruction. So, I think her reference to "a bygone era" is actually referring to an historical process of kind of generational change on the one hand, but also it seemed to me that that rupture of silence about—after 1939, and sort of the abrupt ending to that book, also kind of made—kind of a—gave me a sense that she was already seeing the world that she knew as a place that no longer existed for her. Even though she was not aware of—she could not have been aware of what was going on in 1941, in the

summer of 1941, when the genocide began, she, even though she would have heard and read about in 1942 even, would have read about death camps, that news would have gotten to her in Palestine, she could not have been aware of the extent of the genocide, but it does seem to me that epigraph, to me, really did give me a hint at her mentality as she was writing this memoir.

Let's see. "Are there living descendants of Puah Rakovsky alive today? If so, where are they? Are they still vocal or politically active?"

Paula Hyman, I believe, interviewed members of Puah Rakovsky's family in Israel. I believe it was her niece that Professor Hyman cited, and there were definitely—there are definitely a number of family members still living in Israel today. I don't know whether there are family members who survived in Europe, for example. I don't have that information.

Let's see.

JESSICA PARKER: There's a question about whether there are reviews of the book from its original publication and, if it was distributed in both places, how was it reviewed in Israel and in Poland, or in the Polish Jewish Diaspora?

KAREN AUERBACH: I do not know if there were reviews from the original publication, unfortunately. I've read all that I could about Puah Rakovsky's memoir of what others have written about it and I'm not aware of reviews. There must have been reviews at the time, but at the moment, I don't recall.

I'm just going to read—"I have a general question about Jewish girls' education in Poland and White Russia (Belorussia). I was fascinated to learn about the origins of these schools and Rakovsky's extraordinary visionary educational initiatives but was confused about whether the girls' schools founded or inspired by Rakovsky's efforts continued to exist after World War I and after the Russian Revolution.

I have a photo of my grandmother with twenty classmates of her graduating class from *cheder*—Hebrew school—circa 1920s, and it's clearly a co-educational class although there are only three girls in the photo. Obviously, there's no way to know about this specific *cheder*, but at this point, were co-educational Jewish schools common? My grandmother was a Zionist, perhaps it was a Zionist *cheder*."

There are a couple of questions here that I'll begin with. The first is that, yes, these private schools—let me go back, specifically, to this part of the question. These private girls' schools continued into the period after the First World War, not in the Former Soviet Union, so not in the areas further east, so Bialystok, for example, became a part of interwar Poland. In interwar Poland, that tradition of private girls' schools continued and expanded, actually, and as I said, although most Jewish children could not attend these private schools because their parents simply could not afford to send them there, but there were several networks of these schools

that were connected with two ideological issues. One of them was Jewish politics, so there were Zionist schools and there were Bundist schools. There were Agudas Yisroel schools, there were schools of the Orthodox, Agudas Yisroel.

There were schools of different strands of Zionism, and at the same time, of course, language was connected with this question of political affiliation. So, teaching with Yiddish as the language of instruction clearly would be connected with the Bund, right? And that tradition and that sort of politicization, or, I would say, the flourishing as opposed to the tensions, but the flourishing of Jewish educational life and cultural life through education continued and expanded greatly in interwar Poland. In terms of White Russia further east, the area that became part of the Former Soviet Union, of course, that did not continue there.

There were different kinds of girls—there were different kinds of co-educational institutions, so there were co-educational *gymnasia*, the equivalent of high school, and there were also, there wouldn't have been co-educational, formally co-educational *cheder*, but if I recall correctly, Puah Rakovsky studied at a boys' *cheder*, right, which was common. Girls would be sent to a boys' *cheder* to study, even though there were also girls' *chedarim*. So, I can't know for sure without having some more information about this questioner's grandmother. I hope that provides some information about that. Let's see.

JESSICA PARKER: Did you see Deborah's question about Rachel Katznelson?

KAREN AUERBACH: Okay, from Deborah: “Rachel Katznelson, wife of the third president of Israel [Zalman Shazar], wrote the introductions to the Hebrew and Yiddish versions. Do we know what she wrote about Puah in those introductions? Have they been translated?”

I do not know what was written about her in those introductions, no, and they have not been translated.

JESSICA PARKER: “What is the custom about breaking dishes at celebrations, such as announcing engagements?”

KAREN AUERBACH: “What is the custom about breaking dishes at celebrations, such as announcing engagements?”

That's right. You know, I can't tell you—I don't know off the top of my head. I can't answer that question off the top of my head.

Let's see. “She might have had some hints at the catastrophe in Europe through postal correspondence. We have postcards from my grandmother in Slonim through 1942. She even mentioned the address of the Nazi POW camp where my uncle was interred.”

This is why I'm so struck by Puah Rakovsky's silence about the period of the Second World War in her memoir. Because she talks about the initial personal correspondence with her sister and

then the—sort of—the ending of that personal correspondence with her sister in Bialystok during the Second World War, presumably because of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union and the mass shootings that began there. But it wasn't just through personal correspondence that she would have known about what happened, what was happening in Poland in 1941 and 1942. It was broadcast on the BBC. It was published in newspapers, so it was—the extent and sort of the—there was not a sort of systematic understanding of what was happening, of genocide taking place, and sort of information is one thing and understanding is another thing, right? But there was information about what was happening in Bialystok, and in Warsaw, and elsewhere at the time she was writing, and so I think that, yes, she would have had access to that information, and she seemed to make a conscious decision not to include it.

Okay. “Can you comment further on the intertwining of the ideas of women's emancipation, and the idea that women should be productive members of society and the emancipation of the Jews via the Zionist movement?”

This is one of the issues that I find to be most fascinating in this memoir, that Puah Rakovsky has a very clear ideology and worldview that brings her Zionism and her feminism together, that she is—and also brings her socialism together with those other two strands of her ideology, of the emancipation of the most oppressed individuals, right? She talks about this, I believe, in her conversation with her son in Moscow, in particular, she seems to bring all those threads together.

It seems to me that I think from a reader, from a sort of a public reader today, what may be most surprising is that Puah Rakovsky's socialism and her Zionism were not mutually exclusive ideologies, that there was and is socialist Zionism, that for her made—were parts of one whole worldview, and I think that her feminism and her push, her push for full rights for women went hand-in-hand with her push, and she says this explicitly, with her belief in the need to fight for full rights for Jews, to sort of liberate all society.

And I think it's important to point out, and this is one sort of factual issue that I wanted to point out, is that in the Russian Empire proper, in the city that—in Bialystok, that's so central to this memoir, Jews did not receive—were not emancipated, really, until the Russian Revolution, that the situation in Warsaw and the areas around Warsaw, the Polish lands, is more complicated, but I think that the idea of emancipation in general is so central to Puah Rakovsky's sort of hope for what would be, and it seems to me that part of her disillusionment, it seemed, with Poland and her explanation for why she left, she said that she had hoped that Poland would be better, is what—she put it in different words.

But she—there seemed to be the hope that the Russian Revolution and the—sort of the emancipation was going to fulfill a promise that the world in which she lived in, in Poland between the World Wars, was not fulfilling, and that seemed to be the case more for sort of the Jewish part of that, and the socialist part of that, than for the feminist part of that.

Let's see. Let's see.

JESSICA PARKER: I'm not sure we have any more questions at this point, but I did want to mention that we have both [her translation of *All Quiet on the Western Front*](#), as well as [Puah Rakovsky's Yiddish original with Rachel Katznelson's introduction](#) in our online digital library, so I posted links to both to our private Facebook group.

Did you want to add anything else in response to the question about domestic violence in Yiddish-speaking homes?

KAREN AUERBACH: I'm trying to think of where—I believe that Natan Meir has been working on issues—if anyone is interested, if anyone would like to look up Natan Meir, I can send Jessica some information about this, about his research, which may touch on that issue of domestic violence, but I don't have further information about that at the moment.

JESSICA PARKER: Okay, great. We maybe have time for one last question if anyone else has something they want to add or ask. Or, Professor Auerbach, if you feel like we missed anything that you want to address.

KAREN AUERBACH: Let me take a look at my own notes. No, I believe that I've said everything that I wanted to bring up.

JESSICA PARKER: Okay, great. So then maybe we will wrap up for the evening.

So, thank you, Professor Auerbach, for sharing so much of your time and expertise. Thank you, Heidi, for your expert live captioning, and thank you to all of you for joining us.

The recording of the video conference this evening, including the live captioning, will be posted online shortly, and I'll send out the link as soon as it's available.

We will wrap up our 2018 Book Club on December 31st, but we hope you'll consider joining us for the 2019 Book Club, and of course, tell your friends and family about it, too. Registration closes this Sunday, December 16th. You can register quickly and easily at register.yiddishbookcenter.org. Please be in touch if you have any questions or need help with the registration process. I can even help you to register over the phone, if you prefer. We look forward to reading with you again next year. It's been such a pleasure being in this group with you all, have a good evening or day or morning depending on time zones, and thank you again for joining us for this video conference and for the 2018 Book Club. So, thank you.

KAREN AUERBACH: Bye-bye, everyone.

JESSICA PARKER: Bye. Thank you so much.

Bye everyone. Thank you! Thank you, Heidi!

[End of conference]

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