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Feeling Communists: Communism, emotions, and gender in interwar Polish Jewry

Emma Zohar

Max Plank Institute for Human Development, Center for History of Emotions, Berlin, Germany

ABSTRACT

Bina Garncarska-Kadary and Esther Rosenthal-Schneiderman, two young female Jewish-communist activists during interwar Poland, published their autobiographies in Israel. Their life stories had much in common, but also some differences. This article focuses on the emotions that these two women expressed in their autobiographies, with an emphasis on those related to their political activities. In this way, I aim to shed new light on these women's motivations for joining and engaging in activity within the Communist movement. A better understanding of the emotions they expressed provides us insight into the dynamics of political affiliation and the driving factors in extreme conditions. I argue that political parties, encouraged and used emotions as a working tool to recruit and to motivate activists.

KEYWORDS

Emotions; gender; Communist Party; Poland; Jewish life; interwar years

Introduction

So as not to allow an inner life that does not serve any purpose to sink into nothingness, so as to assert herself against the given that she endures in revolt, so as to create a world other than the one in which she cannot succeed in reaching herself, she needs to express herself. Thus, it is well-known that she is talkative and a scribbler; she pours out her feelings in conversations, letters, and diaries. If she is at all ambitious, she will be writing her memoirs, transposing her biography into a novel, breathing her feelings into poems ... When she decides to paint or write just to fill the emptiness of her days, paintings and essays will be treated as “ladies’ work”.¹

Bina Garncarska-Kadary and Esther Rosenthal-Schneiderman (formerly Sara Fuchs) published their autobiographies in Israel. Rosenthal-Schneiderman's three-volume work was published in 1970, and Garncarska-Kadary's autobiography was published posthumously in 2008. The life stories of these two women had much in common, but also some differences. They were both born into religious Jewish families in Poland, Schneiderman at the beginning

CONTACT Emma Zohar  zohar@mpib-berlin.mpg.de  Max Plank Institute for Human Development, Center for History of Emotions, Lentzeallee 94, Berlin, 14195, Germany

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of the twentieth century and Kadary toward the end of World War I. Both spent the interwar years as young political activists in major cities, Kadary in Łódź and Schneiderman in Warsaw. These urban spaces influenced their subsequent political and ideological transformation: Schneiderman began working as a teacher in a leftist CYSHO School in Warsaw (Central Yiddish School Organization which was founded by the Jewish Socialists parties: the *Bund* and *Poalei-Zion Left* and the *Folkspartei*) and was later inspired by the Communist movement and the new Soviet approach, and Kadary's move to Łódź helped her develop a left wing political consciousness that quickly led her to the Communist party.

This article focuses on the emotions that these two women expressed in their autobiographies, with an emphasis on those related to their political activities within the Communist movement (though references to their emotions are found throughout their autobiographies). In this way, I aim to shed new light on these women's motivations for joining and engaging in activity within the Communist movement despite the risks involved, as Communism was illegal in Interwar Poland. A better understanding of the emotions they expressed provides us with additional insight into the dynamics of political affiliation and the driving factors in extreme conditions. I argue that political parties in general, and the Communist Party in particular, encouraged and used emotions as a working tool to recruit and to motivate activists.

Their life stories

To facilitate a better understanding of the motivations of the two women around whom our discussion revolves, the following is a general overview of their backgrounds and life stories.

Esther Rosenthal-Schneiderman

Esther Rosenthal-Schneiderman (hereinafter, Schneiderman) was born as Sara Fuchs at the beginning of the twentieth century. Her family lived in a basement apartment in Częstochowa. Her father was a carpenter, and together he and her mother raised seven children.² Schneiderman's family maintained a religious lifestyle, and, like her other siblings, she attended a *Heder* religious school from an early age which was not common for girls at the time.³ From there she went on to attend a public Jewish elementary school and then enrolled in the Polish Gymnasium.⁴ Overall, Schneiderman described her childhood as modest but happy, even though she and her siblings were compelled to work to supplement the family's income.

During World War I, Schneiderman found herself drawn to the Jewish Zionist-Socialist Workers party (SS) and soon became a major activist in the local party branch.⁵ In 1918, she graduated from the gymnasium and was

accepted for university studies in Warsaw.⁶ During her studies, Schneiderman worked as a teacher at a Jewish school, and, not long after moving to the city, she found a position at a CYSHO school.⁷ As a teacher in this Yiddishist institution, she established close relationships with Communists circles. She initially continued working as a teacher at the CYSHO school and tried to organize her colleagues and even her students into a secret branch of the “Pioneers”, the Communist movement’s youth organization. However, the school’s administration considered this to be an act of betrayal; Communist activity was reviled by her supervisors and her students’ parents alike, and Schneiderman was fired.

In 1926, Schneiderman decided to leave Poland as the persecution of the Communists in the country increased,⁸ and she moved to Russia under a false identity.⁹ Soon after arriving in Russia, she began working at the Scientific Research Committee for the Study of Jewish Culture and History in Birobidzhan.¹⁰ Within a short time, she acquired a job as a teacher at the Jewish school in Kiev.¹¹

In the late 1950s, Schneiderman and her husband, Nisan Rosenthal, immigrated to Israel and settled in Jerusalem. During their time in Israel, they both wrote autobiographies. Schneiderman also resumed her educational work, working with children of Holocaust survivors and writing a number of textbooks for the fledgling Israeli education system.¹²

Bina Garncarska-Kadary

Bina Garncarska-Kadary (hereinafter, Kadary) was born toward the end of World War I (most likely during the end of summer 1917, based on her assertion that she was two months old at the outbreak of the October Revolution¹³) in the city of Końskie in Kielce Voivodship (*Województwo kieleckie*). This historic industrial city’s large Jewish community, which Kadary describes as poor and Orthodox, constituted approximately 60% of its total population.¹⁴ For both of Kadary’s parents it was their second marriage, and Kadary described it as unhappy. Kadary had seven siblings, three from her mother’s first husband, four from Kadary’s father, and another who died soon after birth. According to Kadary, both sides of her family came from well-known rabbinic families, and they observed strict rules of Judaism in their home, even though Kadary’s father was not a *yeshiva bokher* (yeshiva student) but rather a log trader. As a young girl, her father sent her to study at the local *Heder*. When Kadary was eight years old her mother passed away (as well as her two younger siblings), and soon after her father married his third wife, with whom Kadary did not have a good relationship.¹⁵

At the beginning of November 1932, when she was only 15 years old, Kadary left home and moved to the major city of Łódź.¹⁶ There she lived with relatives and in occasional apartments. Immediately following her arrival in the city she began working with her older sister as an independent seamstress out of a small kitchen they rented from a Jewish couple, which also served as the sisters’

home.¹⁷ The meager conditions in which Kadary lived and worked during her years in Łódź are well described in her autobiography and, in a way, are representative of Jewish life in Poland as a whole. To improve her living conditions, her older brother (who moved to Łódź when she was young and was well established) asked her to move in with him and his family and to work as a nanny for his son.¹⁸ However, she soon resumed her work as a seamstress in various workshops and factories.

Kadary began to be drawn to Communist ideas soon after her move to Łódź. According to her account, most of her social circles revolved around leftist political activities (before she joined the Communist movement, she and her sister had been affiliated with the Zionist youth movement *Gordonia*). As a result of this political activity, Kadary was arrested and jailed for approximately a year (this will be discussed in greater detail below). However, her political activity also brought her substantial personal development, happiness, and joy. It was in this context that she and Henik, her future husband fled to Russia at the outbreak of World War II.¹⁹

After the war, Kadary and her husband decided to stay in Poland, where she became a well-known journalist and was a supporter of the Communist regime. She also managed to complete a master's degree and raise two children. Like most members of the Jewish community in Poland after 1945, the Kadary family immigrated to Israel in 1968 (the Gomułka immigration), and Kadary began a Ph.D. program at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and subsequently acquired a position as a lecturer at Tel Aviv University's Department of Jewish History. Kadary passed away in 2008, after publishing three books on the Jewish contribution to Poland's industrial and economic life and a masterpiece on the Poalei-Zion Left party, many inspiring articles, and the autobiography that lies at the heart of our discussion.

Feminine writing and emotions

Socialization processes affect the way we learn to remember and process memories.²⁰ We tend to relate to people as socialization agents of the community or the society, almost as sub-players in their own life.²¹ Therefore, we often read autobiographies as a source that proves the lack of free will; as a writing of autobiography is frequently used as a tool in the process of creating a common collective narrative. However, in one's autobiography more than one identity may be present; those identities often include contradictions and internal conflicts.²² These conflicts can be seen in Kadary's and Schneiderman's autobiographies – they were both women, Jewish and communists who converted to Zionism. Each of these identities is reflected in their writing and in the choice of what to include in, or dismiss from, the autobiography.

Similar to the way we learn to remember, we learn what and how to feel. The common approach in the field of History of Emotion emphasizes the importance of processes of learning emotions. The lingual expression of certain

feelings has no meaning,²³ the meaning of emotions derives from the specific cultural-social and political circumstances in which it was expressed.²⁴ In this paper I will follow this approach and will present different expressions of emotions in certain situations. I argue that the context in which the two autobiographies were written influenced the way emotions were expressed.

One assumption of this article is that women tend to share more of their inner world when writing than men do. However, can we truly assume that there is only one kind of feminine writing? The relationship between gender and emotions has been considered by a number of scholars. In her book *Speaking from the Heart*, Stephanie Shields maintains that the belief that women are more emotional than men is one of the strongest gender stereotypes in Western cultures.²⁵ Ute Frevert articulates that this belief was well rooted until the mid-twentieth century and slowly started to change after the Second World War.²⁶

In an article titled “Leading with their Hearts?” Victoria Brescoll holds that it is females, not males, who have to navigate and control their emotions. According to Brescoll, women first need to assess how much emotion they are “allowed” to display and then identify the kind of emotions they should display. On the other hand, Brescoll notes that being emotionally unexpressive may also result in penalties, as unemotional women are seen as failing to fulfill their warm, communal role as women.²⁷

Is it legitimate to allow personal emotions to “interfere” in public and political activity? What are the emotions that survive self-censorship? These questions are addressed to varying degrees by both women under discussion.²⁸ In her autobiography, Schneiderman mentions her concern that her writing was not as objective as she would have liked it to be, or as might have been expected from a work in the genre of political autobiographies.

Even before I started writing my memoirs I was concerned they would have an over-emotional feeling. And indeed, after reading what I had written I realized that my concern had been justified. I was unable to present an objective picture. It felt as if I was suddenly once again the same young Communist activist who just arrived from the hatred of capitalism across the border [Poland] and was re-exposed to the stormy days of the era and the extensive Soviet-Jewish cultural activity.

I also realized that I was presenting the course of events from the perspective of those days [the second half of the 1920s and the early 1930s] and was not taking note of the change in my ideology over the years. And my ideology today could not be more different than it was back then.

I am amazed and shocked, and while considering the “pros” and “cons”, I ask myself – is there any point in publishing a chapter that is so subjective? Should I destroy the manuscript, or should I rewrite and “cleanse” it of all the emotional “trash”?

It is starting to become increasingly clear: I cannot fool myself. As hard as I may I try, I will not be able to reduce my personal involvement [...] I have reached a decision: the

manuscript should be published as originally written; a version that is saturated with the youthful fervor of a young Jewish activist who, like many others, deeply believes that the salvation of her misery-taught people will occur under the protection of the red flag of the hammer and sickle. Perhaps in the future I will have the privilege of writing a more balanced historical review of those times; when the memories of the past are not accompanied by such an intense inner vibration. And if, because of my age, I am unable to complete this undertaking, then this manuscript will serve as an aid for the historian, who will be capable of analyzing the era in a more objective and balanced manner.²⁹

As a historian of the era in which she grew up, Kadary was also well aware of the methodological challenges of this kind of personal writing.

I am now 83 years old, which is beyond my wildest expectations. I have completed my research and my projects, and I lack the enthusiasm to start any new project. Nevertheless, my children and my granddaughters expect me to do and to say more. I feel as if I am disappointing them. If there is anything else I can tell them, especially my granddaughters, it is my personal memories. It pertains to the century that is drawing to a close, to events that I experienced or in which I was directly involved. The time I have left will be devoted to collecting those crumbs of memories. Memory is selective. Generally speaking, one remembers personal experiences, some of which may have been overshadowed or somehow transformed over the years; some, are still stuck and unchanged, as thorns in our memory. I am fully aware that the same events may be perceived differently by different people. As the years go by, some past events and people are idealized, especially loved ones, whereas other elements may become vague or vanish. In spite of this all, I will try to assemble the pieces of my memories in order to depict the events of my long life as I remember them.³⁰

As noted, both Kadary and Schneiderman displayed a high level of self-criticism and were aware of the emotions involved in their writing. On the surface, the two autobiographies are very similar: both were written by Eastern European Communist women who shared similar life stories and published their memoirs in Israel. However, we can also observe a fundamental difference in their approach. Whereas Kadary opted to write her autobiography as the final chapter of her career and addressed it to her relatives, Schneiderman viewed her autobiographical writing as part of the Zionist commemorative project and regarded her emotional involvement in it as a major disadvantage which she hoped she would be able to overcome.

The similarities and differences of these two autobiographies allow us to tackle the question of emotional motivations for political activity and to examine to what extent the context in which they wrote emotions affected the characteristics of its expression. I now turn to a discussion of the emotions (regarding political activity) that are expressed in both autobiographies in an effort to reveal the similarities and the differences between them.

A sense of hopelessness

A sense of depression and hopelessness was not only characteristic of the young Jews in Poland but rather was present in the public discourse of the country's Jewish population as a whole. That being said, it is important to note that this sense of hopelessness enjoyed a greater presence during certain periods and in certain circles than others. Both Kadary and Schneiderman note a connection between this sense of hopelessness and the draw of activism and radical leftist ideology.

Schneiderman concentrates on the desperate dead-end situation that Jews faced during this period: "Difficult days began for the Jewish population: days of anxiety and fear of the raging antisemitism in soldiers' uniforms."³¹ She also articulates the disappointment that Jews felt when trying to integrate into the general public sphere and emphasizes this desperation by focusing on several events in which she was involved or that she witnessed while riding a tram just after the end of World War II in Warsaw, where random anti-Semitic attacks increased.³² What is important here is not the historical detail of the account but rather the symbolic meaning of the sense of stagnation that Schneiderman expresses, in contrast to the element of movement that this form of public transportation represents. According to Schneiderman, each and every tram ride became torturous for Jews.

Kadary, on the other hand, focuses on the oppression of Jews by the allegedly anti-Semitic Polish government in the mid-1930s: "In 1934, Poland quickly deteriorated into the abyss of murderous antisemitism. The Jews, and the Jewish youth in particular, felt as if they were caught in a civic and political trap."³³ Kadary continues by arguing that the cure for the "Hopeless younger generation was to seek a solid ideology onto which to grasp."³⁴ In this way, Kadary was stating that this sense of depression caused the Communists' utopian ideology to appear as a beam of light and a source of hope for dozens of young Jews.

Both Kadary and Schneiderman maintain that antisemitism was the primary cause of hopelessness among the Jewish population. Each describes an era of increased spontaneous antisemitism (with the end of World War I and establishment of independent Poland) and organized state antisemitism (with the death of Józef Piłsudski and the establishment of the Endecja government in the mid-1930s). Each also focuses on a different aspect of antisemitism as the main reason for Jewish hopelessness which led them, like many others, to political activity.

Love and sexual attraction

We cannot ignore the fact that both Kadary and Schneiderman were politically active during adolescence, which is a period characterized by emergent sexual

awareness. Both autobiographies contain several references to such issues, and when we trace these references, the significant difference between the two authors in this respect becomes evident.

When writing about love, intimacy, and relationships, Schneiderman focuses on the collective aspect of mixed marriage and mixed relationships between Poles and Jews. Mixed marriages, she notes, were rare in the general population but were common in Communist circles. Most of these couples consisted of a Jewish woman and a non-Jewish man, largely because few non-Jewish women were involved in the Communist movement.³⁵ Schneiderman also notes that such Jewish women regarded marrying a non-Jewish political activist man as the ultimate way of fulfilling the radical Communist way of life. She continues by explaining that these women selected their partners not based on love or affection but based primarily on their profile as non-Jewish Communists who were willing to marry a Jewish woman and live a radical life. On more than one occasion she mentions that young Jewish women chose to marry non-Jewish men even when they were separated by huge cultural or economic gaps and even in the absence of love or sexual attraction.³⁶

Kadary, on the other hand, related on a more personal level to the relationship between love and sexual attraction and political activity. In this context, she recounted a visit by an attractive man named Arthur to a “girls’ only study group” with which she was involved. Her description was detailed: “A young fellow, around our age, tall, blond hair, with a provoking face.” Later, she acknowledges that “my friends were all fascinated by him at first sight ...”³⁷ Kadary also hints that this ostensibly incidental visit was actually arranged by Kadary’s cousin, who was aware of the group, wanted to persuade the girls to get involved in the communist movement, and thought that an attractive male such as Arthur could convince them to do so more easily. The role of love and sexual attraction in Kadary’s political activity was also palpable later, when she left the Communist movement in order to steer clear of two boys who were competing for her affection. However, when some of the movements’ leaders asked her to return to the movement she agreed to do so.³⁸

Love and sexual attraction as motivations for political activity also emerge elsewhere in Kadary’s memoirs, as she enumerates the so-called “relationships” she had over the years during her involvement in the *Folkspartei* (which served as a cover for the Communist youth movement in Łódź for few years). These extremely private thoughts shed new light on Kadary’s approach to love and relationships, as does her explanation that her childhood and her education helped cause her to abstain from attachment to men. The loss of her mother, her relationship with her father after her mother’s death, and her relationship with her father’s third wife made her introverted and suspicious of others, especially men.³⁹ Also relevant here is Kadary’s anger at the above mentioned two boys who were competing for affections, and her decision to leave the

movement to avoid seeing them again. Despite this abstention on her part she noted that a number of the boys (four, according to my count), who were as involved in the political movement as she was, were attracted to her.⁴⁰ Thus, not only were girls seeking love during their political involvement, but so were boys. Indeed, one such boy ultimately became Kadary's husband and the father of her two children.

Whereas Schneiderman's autobiography focuses on collective emotions, Kadary describes her own experiences; both were, at least partly, politically driven. The difference can be attributed to different factors from the time at which the text was written, its purpose, and its target recipients.

Fear

Fear and anxiety regarding the Communist movement were well rooted in the public discourse of interwar Poland. Young Jews were not the only ones afraid of the mysterious illegal movement; parents were also in constant fear that their children would join the Communist movement, and politicians feared being identified as Communists.⁴¹ In both the autobiographies under discussion here, a sense of fear is constantly present.

When describing her feelings at her first meeting of Warsaw's local Communist branch, Schneiderman focuses on how frightened she felt: "And when I decided one hot summer night to finally cross the line and, with a raised heartbeat, to enter...the Communist party's secret meeting, my first meeting, I sat there alienated and somewhat frightened..."⁴² Schneiderman was clearly not frightened solely because of her unknown surroundings. Although she does not explain the reason for her fear, it seems that it stemmed from the fact that she knew she was taking part in an illegal activity.

From the moment Schneiderman became a proper activist within the Communist movement, she emphasized her sense of fear and anxiety about getting caught by the Polish secret police or by her supervisors at school. This kind of fear was typically accompanied by descriptions of physical sensations such as intense heartbeat, dry mouth, and a heightened sense of hearing.⁴³

As noted above, this "Red Scare" was also the product of activists' awareness of the shifts that they, and sometimes even their close relatives, would undergo after joining the Communist movement. This private sense of threat is very much present in Kadary's autobiography. One of the main aspects of change that Kadary articulates is the fear of losing her femininity, particularly after being arrested by the Polish secret police:

I arrived at the new place. After a few moments, the warden led me through a long, damp corridor to cell # 13, pushed me in, and closed the door behind me. I stood close to the door for a few moments, looked around and felt a strange feeling. I saw a line of

women with faces that were an odd color – such as gray or ash. I was 19 years old at the time, at the height of my blossoming. My first thought was that I too would soon look like ashes.⁴⁴

Quantitatively, the emotion that recurs most frequently in the two autobiographies is fear, stemming primarily from the movement's illegal status and the fact that its members, and young Jews in particular, were under close government supervision. This reflects the central role played by this emotion in the lives of these two women, leading to an awareness of the dramatic transformation that the lives of the activists were about to undergo as a result of their political activity.⁴⁵ Furthermore, if we accept the assumption that we learn how to remember, then memory has political aspects.⁴⁶ The fact that the two women left the communist movement, joined the Zionist movement and wrote their memories in retrospect in Israel may have led them to emphasize (even unconsciously) the negative aspects of their life in Poland in general and of their political activity in the communist movement in particular.

A sense of belonging and solidarity

In the wake of the sense of not belonging that many young Jews felt within the general public sphere in interwar Poland, we can understand how this population found comfort in political activity that contained them and their needs.⁴⁷ The sense of belonging which their affiliation with the Communist movement imbued Kadary and Schneiderman is palpably present in both autobiographies. And yet only the formative move that led the two to join the Communist movement is described in the sense of personal belonging. All descriptions of the sense of belonging experienced after becoming full members of the Communist movement are accompanied by expressions of a deep sense of social and ideological responsibility, as well as a sense of communal solidarity with their movement companions.

Kadary describes the time she accidentally stumbled across a socialist-Communist protest march as follows: “It was a procession of power, and of much joy at recognizing this power.”⁴⁸ The account continues with a metaphorical description of a physical and spiritual sense of belonging. She initially felt how the physical contact with the bodies in the crowd surrounding her made her feel part of something bigger. The sense of belonging and closeness that she felt during the protest sowed the seeds of her joining the Communist movement. Her sense of belonging intensified after she began participating in the Communist youth movement activity operating under the cover of the *Folkspartei*. When she participated in their meetings and activities, she again felt that she was part of something valuable and meaningful. This sense of belonging also found expression in social responsibility: “We just felt more responsible for the work we aimed to do.”⁴⁹

Schneiderman, like Kadary, also articulates what seems more like a collective sense of belonging than a private sense, with the exception of the first time she was introduced to the extreme leftist agenda. Schneiderman describes the left-wing study group she attended as a place of comfort: “I felt more at home there than in my own apartment.”⁵⁰ From that moment on, she expresses her sense of belonging to the secret Young Pioneers group that she ran in conjunction with some of her colleagues at the CYSHO school. This sub-group within the Yiddishist school was characterized by a close bond among its members, some of whom were Schneiderman’s pupils. Their sense of closeness increased along with the pressure the group started to feel from the school’s administration and the parents that opposed the group’s Communist activity. According to Schneiderman, this group was considered to be an “internal school enemy.”⁵¹

The tension between a private sense of belonging and a collective sense of responsibility or solidarity is vividly manifested in both autobiographies. Both women found their home away from home in Communist party circles; but, in their activity, they also expressed their sense of responsibility to the collective and to the Communist community as a whole.

Hope and a willingness to sacrifice

One of the cornerstones of political activity is the hope for change. It is the essence of political ideologies; it is why political parties are established; and it is what politicians promise to their constituents. When the political activity is illegal, the willingness to sacrifice rises, demanding a strong belief in the movement’s ideology. Kadary effectively portrays this dynamic when she describes Communism as a religion, like any other religion, and maintains that she replaced her Jewish Orthodox faith with belief in secular leftist ideas, and later with Communism.⁵²

Both Kadary and Schneiderman depict their transition from a great hope for the new world promised by left wing ideas into the extreme ideology of Communism. Both also note that this shift ushered them into the “state of mind of sacrifice” reflected in the assertion that Communist activists should be prepared to give up their lives for movement ideals.⁵³ That being said, it is difficult to find a specific reference, in either of the autobiographies, to a conscious decision to take such risks. Both women, however, emphasize how, in Communist circles, group singing in particular was viewed as a dangerous act associated with substantial risk, as it was one of the only “Communist actions” conducted in public in order to defy and tease the authorities. At the same time, it gave the activists a great sense of hope.

Kadary considers how the collective singing of Communist songs during protests influenced her emotionally and was one of her reasons for joining the Communist movement.⁵⁴ She returns to this paradigm of singing as

an emotional tool later, in her descriptions of episodes from the year she spent in prison. In these accounts, she makes mention of the First of May protest, which started with the prisoners' collective singing of the illegal leftist anthem "The Internationale", which was the cue to begin an illegal demonstration in prison. Kadary recounts that the episode made her feel "excited and made a great impression ... even though we were beaten by the guards ... Even now, as I write these memoirs, it gives me the chills."⁵⁵ Collective singing served as a cue for illegal action because it encouraged people to act in a manner that could lead to punishment while creating a sense of unity and solidarity that blurred the sense of the individual. Kadary also expresses how quiet recitation and the singing of leftist songs with her cellmates made her feel part of the leftist women's community that assembled in prison, further intensifying her devotion to Communist ideology and ideas.⁵⁶

The impact of collective singing on the building of solidarity and a sense-of-community is not new to the research. Benedict Anderson highlights how such singing contributes to the process of nation building.⁵⁷ Moshe Bensimon's research focuses on the impact that collective singing has had on protesters in the Gaza Strip. Indeed, Bensimon's work shows how "protesters used collective singing to evoke emotions that would help them raise morale through euphoria, vent negative emotions as anger and disappointment, strengthen solidarity, experience spiritual transcendence, foster hope, empower themselves, mourn and achieve closeness."⁵⁸

Yet, in Kadary's account, collective singing was charged with various emotions that are part of solidarity and was linked to the uprising and taking risks. Schneiderman also felt that quietly singing the illegal left-wing anthems with her students made them feel as if they were protesting against the authorities.⁵⁹

Guilt and a sense of failure

Schneiderman's and Kadary's autobiographies reflect a generation gap in their expression of a sense of failure and of disappointing their parents. Schneiderman expresses this sentiment at the beginning of her memoir as follows: "My delicate mother never complained in my presence, even though I caused her a great deal of pain and suffering [with my communist affiliation]."⁶⁰ A similar feeling is manifest in the memoirs of many young Jews from the period, as shown by studies of the YIVO's autobiography collection. However, we can argue that the gap between parents and children prior to World War I was much more significant than it was during the interwar years.⁶¹

Schneiderman concludes the first volume of her memoirs by again referring to her parents in the context of leaving Poland for Russia:

In a few hours I will be near my parents' home. Now, more than ever, guilt is eating me alive ... It has been some time now since any of us [she and her two Communist brothers] can show our face in the home of my broken and hopeless parents. The police are regular visitors at their home. But how can I leave without saying goodbye? Will I never be able to hug my mother's weak body? Hell! I shake off this depressed mood. It is inappropriate for an adult ... for a Communist. I scorn my weak character. Shame on me for torturing my pained heart! Someone in my situation should feel glad right now, I keep telling myself.⁶²

Kadary also articulates the guilt she felt about her father. She initially tried to conceal her political involvement from him, but after she spent time in jail such concealment was no longer relevant. In her autobiography, Kadary asks her father to forgive her for the disappointment and sense of failure she felt she had caused him:

When I found myself on the defendants' bench I felt horrible. The court was full and I surveyed the audience. In addition to the many people I did not know, I recognized all my friends from the *Folkspartei*. My close family was also there, but my gaze focused on my poor father who sat quietly, tears falling onto his beard. I felt a stab in my heart. Meir was sitting next to him murmuring *Tehilim* [psalms].⁶³

Kadary continues her description of her father after she is found innocent and released from jail: "He was sad and quiet the entire way home. My heart went out to him ... Now, toward the end of my life, I bow my head and stand humbly before the ashes of my father, who did not receive a Jewish burial, to tell him with great sorrow that all the ideology I believed in was not worth a single one of his tears."⁶⁴

Both autobiographies reflect the authors' sense of guilt regarding their parents for the actual physical and mental harm they suffered as a result of their daughters' political activity. But whereas Schneiderman argues that her sense of guilt was unjustified, Kadary chooses to emphasize and to justify it, even in retrospect.

Happiness and joy

Some scholars argue that human behavior is motivated by the desire for pleasure, based on our instinct to maximize pleasure and to avoid pain.⁶⁵ If we accept this premise, we need to be asking ourselves where one finds pleasure, happiness, and joy in being active in an illegal movement while putting oneself and sometimes one's family and friends at risk. Both Kadary and Schneiderman provide answers to this question that are well rooted in their strong faith in the righteousness of their ideology. But the alter ego is not alone in playing a role here; also relevant are the very practices and pragmatic aspects employed by the movement or the community that gathered around the movement in order to attract new members and encourage them to remain activists.

Kadary expresses the joy of being part of a rich illegal political community operating under the cover of the youth movement of a legal political party: the *Folkspartei*. It is important to note, however, that she does not straightforwardly express her emotions and that one must go below the surface to understand that joy was behind these descriptions. She mentions that the reality of the activities of this group enriched and intensified her life. These activities included sports clubs, drama groups, educational clubs, and the like, as well as the opportunity to take part in conferences and to get to know other people and places, such as Warsaw. These experiences and activities filled her life and satisfied her curiosity. Kadary also appears to have found such activities comforting while she served her jail sentence. For her, the hours after 8 pm, when the prisoners would start to talk and sing, constituted a precious time in which they could dream of freedom and inspire themselves.⁶⁶

Unlike Kadary, Schneiderman expresses her happiness and joy in a more explicit manner. The common thread running through her descriptions of happiness is that they reflected success in her political activity. For example, she expresses such a sentiment after successfully smuggling illegal literature and pamphlets to Warsaw from the free city of Gdańsk: “My heart is filled with joy ... I am not walking! I am running and dancing in my favorite streets of Warsaw.”⁶⁷ Later, she describes how she felt when she received the movement’s authorization to move to Russia, which was considered to be the ultimate ideological act: “I cannot fully describe the immense happiness I felt at the time.”⁶⁸ She then focuses on the moment she met a Communist activist named Sonin, who provided her with the fake passport she needed to leave Poland: “Oh ... I am so happy right now ... I cannot contain myself! I am holding Sonin tight and am ready to start dancing with him.”⁶⁹ These examples reflect her happiness at her successes and her great pride in helping achieve the grand plan of the Communist movement.

Overall, in both autobiographies the author’s political affiliation is accompanied by a sense of happiness: for Kadary, this happiness stems from the self-fulfillment resulting from her political activity, whereas Schneiderman depicts her pure joy at being able to contribute to the ideological and political struggle.

Conclusions

This article revolved around two primary trajectories: the role of emotions as a tool to create and enhance motivations for joining and activity within a political movement, and the expression of emotions in autobiography writing. To better understand these issues, I explored the expression of emotions in the autobiographies of two Jewish women who were active in the illegal Communist movement in urban spaces of interwar Poland. Both Kadary and Schneiderman express a wide range of emotions with regard to their political activity; both

express a sense of hopelessness and despair that was common in the younger generation of Poland's Jews. This sense of hopelessness and lack of belonging led many young Jews, Kadary and Schneiderman included, to seek something of which they could be part. The political movements, and especially the youth activities within these movements, were a safe haven of belonging.

In addition to the sense of belonging provided by the political movements, the ideology of the political movements offered hope for change in the life of the Jewish community and the young activists. In illegal movements such as the Communist movement, activists' identification with the ideology bordered on religious faith. Activists in such movements needed to be willing to sacrifice their familiar way of life – as did Schneiderman, who lost her job and later had to leave Poland – and their personal freedom – as did Kadary, who spent a year in prison as a result of her political activity in the Communist movement. Being an activist in the Communist movement was associated with constant fear, not only because the activity was secret, undercover, and illegal, but also, as described by Kadary, out of concern regarding the loss of femininity due to the extreme experiences that were part of such activity.

Having said that, political activity was also charged with positive emotions. Movement activity brought considerable joy, happiness and pleasure, as expressed in both autobiographies. Kadary and Schneiderman describe the spiritual and social development that accompanied their political activity, which is something that encouraged them to join the movement in the first place and, later, to deepen their involvement in it. In retrospect, we also know that both found their future husbands in movement circles. Based on all of the above, it is clear that emotions played a paramount role in the decision to take part in this political and largely illegal activity. The party acknowledged this role and sometimes used it; as in the case of the young handsome boy that was sent to recruit young female activists to the party. The use of emotions as a tool was not necessary always a manipulation and did not replace the ideological identification, however it should be recognized.

The article's second major trajectory deals with autobiography writing and emotional expression within it. On the surface, the two autobiographies presented here have similar characteristics, and the two women shared a similar life story. And indeed, certain aspects of emotional expression are similar in the two autobiographies. In both, the tension between the private and collective emotions can be noticed. For example, both Kadary and Schneiderman referred to the sense of collective hopelessness that characterized the young generation rather than to their own experience. Both use the autobiography to try to heal their complex relationship with their parents. Kadary used the writing in order to ask for forgiveness from her father for the disappointment she caused him with her activity in the Communist party. Like Kadary, Schneiderman elected to reveal her most personal emotions, particularly the sense of guilt stemming from disappointing her parents.

However, differences in emotional expression can be found. One important difference between the two pertains to inter-gender relationships. Whereas Kadary openly discusses her own emotions and describes her love life and her aversion to men, which she maintains was caused by the complex relationships she had with her family while growing up; Schneiderman's autobiography offers a collective analysis of the characteristics of romantic relationships among young activists within the Communist movement.

As presented, the context in which the autobiography was written influenced the emotional expression. It can be assumed, in accordance with Frevert's approach, that this difference stems from the periods during which the two autobiographies were written and the prevalent approach toward sexuality in Israeli society during each. In the 1970s, Israeli society was much less tolerant of open discussion of love and sexual attraction than it was in the early 2000s, when Kadary's autobiography was published. Other possible explanations include each of the autobiographies' genre and target audience. Whereas Kadary addresses her autobiography primarily to her children and grandchildren, Schneiderman writes as part of the established Zionist historiography, which included many other autobiographies of Jewish political activists of the early-to-mid twentieth century. In any case, both Schneiderman and Kadary poured their feelings into writing and allowed us a glimpse of their inner world.

Notes

1. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 836. Despite the fact that De Beauvoir related specifically to bourgeoisie women, I chose to relate to her statement regarding the need of women to unload their emotions into their writing.
2. Rosenthal-Schneiderman, *Winding Roads*, 7, 17–18. [Hebrew]
3. *Ibid.*, 29–30.
4. *Ibid.*, 72–73.
5. *Ibid.*, 121.
6. *Ibid.*, 159.
7. *Ibid.*, 212.
8. *Ibid.*, 391–394.
9. *Ibid.*, 400.
10. Rosenthal-Schneiderman, *Winding Roads*, 52. [Hebrew]
11. *Ibid.*, 88; Rosenthal-Schneiderman, *Winding Roads*, 7. [Hebrew]
12. Schneiderman, *V. III*, 7.
13. Garncarska-Kadary, *My Twentieth Century*, 11. [Hebrew]
14. *Ibid.*, 17.
15. *Ibid.*, 37.
16. *Ibid.*, 49.
17. *Ibid.*, 54. The sisters' occupation was very common in large cities such as Łódź and Warsaw, where independent seamstress and seamstresses would work out of their homes using sewing machines or spinning wheels. Manufacturers and large factory owners would supply them with raw materials and pay them for their work. The

- practice, by Jews without means, of renting a small space to serve as both a home and a place of work was also quite common. See also: Mer, Smocza, 27–28. [Hebrew]; Shmuel Shem Flakowitch, *Memories*, Yosef Komem private archive, 154. [Hebrew]
18. Kadary, 64–65.
 19. *Ibid.*, 125.
 20. Smith et al., *Reading Autobiography*, 16.
 21. *Ibid.*, 42.
 22. *Ibid.*, 35.
 23. See for example: Kaster, *Emotion, Restraint, and Community*, 6–9; Frevert et al., *Learning How to Feel*, 3.
 24. Frevert, “The History of Emotions,” 49–65.
 25. Shields, *Speaking from the Heart*, 21–22.
 26. Frevert, “Defining Emotions,” 30.
 27. Brescoll, “Leading with their Hearts?,” 415–428.
 28. I do not pretend to compare men’s and women’s autobiographical writing in this paper. However, reading autobiographies written in Israel by Jewish political activists in Eastern Europe we can draw some preliminary conclusions. Often these men wrote their life stories as ‘the collective story’ of the party or the movement to which they were affiliated. As part of this ambition they aimed to achieve false “objectivity”. Emotions and feelings are rarely mentioned, as well as personal non-political events. Two examples may be found in the autobiographies of two of the political leaders of the Zionist movement in Western Galicia: Mendel Singer and Anshel Reis. Reis wrote in the introduction of his autobiography: “I admit that I hesitated whether to write the story of my public activity. I hesitated even more before I sent the manuscript for publication, in spite of the fact I tried to minimize the parts in which the personal aspect of my activity was prominent. [...] I accepted my friend’s opinion and did my best to share my historical knowledge in my memories while aiming to avoid giving my book an autobiographical character.” In: Reis, *In Stormy Era*, 1. [Hebrew]
- Singer articulated the collective aspects of his personal story by writing: “I won’t be able, I’m afraid, to erase the personal stamp stamped on the descriptions of the events and its evaluation. I recall that even back then I did not live a personal life, I was not alone in any of the acts I took part in, and when I discuss and evaluate those acts, it is not an individual expression but rather a collective expression of many that felt, wondered, and thought like me and I am only their spokesman. Therefore, these words [the autobiography itself] are an expression of my generation in the Socialist-Zionist movement.” In: Singer, *Four Events with a Lesson*, 9. [Hebrew]
29. Schneiderman, *V. III*, 9–10.
 30. Kadary, 11–13.
 31. Schneiderman, *Vol. I*, 186.
 32. *Ibid.*, 186–192, 200–201.
 33. Kadary, 77.
 34. *Ibid.*, 106.
 35. Schneiderman, *Vol. I*, 382.
 36. *Ibid.*, 382–383.
 37. Kadary, 76.
 38. *Ibid.*, 108.
 39. *Ibid.*, 86–87.
 40. *Ibid.*, 93–92.

41. *Ibid.*, 70. See also: Zohar, *For a New World!*, 145–148. [Hebrew]
42. Schneiderman, Vol. I, 275.
43. *Ibid.*, 315, 317, 332, 335, 398.
44. Kadary, 96.
45. Schneiderman, Vol. I, 370.
46. Smith, *Reading Autobiography*, 18.
47. Kijek, *Dzieci modernizmu*.
48. Kadary, 75.
49. *Ibid.*, 85.
50. Schneiderman, Vol. I, 268.
51. *Ibid.*, 299.
52. Kadary, 66.
53. Schneiderman, Vol. I, 288–289.
54. Kadary, 75.
55. *Ibid.*, 104.
56. *Ibid.*, 100–101.
57. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 145.
58. Bensimon, “Sociological Role of Collective Singing,” 241.
59. Schneiderman, Vol. I, 289.
60. *Ibid.*, 14.
61. In the YIVO autobiographies collection, the majority of young writers mention their grandparents as irrelevant for the new world. The grandparents’ generation of the interwar period are the parents of Schneiderman’s generation. See: Basok, *The Youth Revival*, 51–52. [Hebrew]
62. Schneiderman, Vol. I, 397–398.
63. Kadary, 105.
64. *Ibid.*, 105–106.
65. See: Shapiro, *Pleasure: A History*, 2.
66. Kadary, 100.
67. Schneiderman, Vol. I, 337.
68. *Ibid.*, 393.
69. *Ibid.*, 400.

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Notes on contributors

Emma Zohar is a post-doctoral fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, the Center for History of Emotions, Berlin. Zohar hold PhD degree from the Hebrew University (2019), and MA degree from Haifa University. In her PhD dissertation Zohar focused on the Jewish non-Zionists educational institutions in interwar Poland. Zohar’s current project “Within the Pale of Pleasure: Polish Jews and the Pursuit of Happiness (1918-1939)” deals with the everyday life practices of Polish Jewry in independent Poland. The research analyzes the consumer and leisure habits of the Polish-Jewish community in contrast to the image as the epitome of Jewish suffering. Her main academic interests include Eastern European Studies, Jewish History, History of Emotions, Gender, and Cultural History.

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