# Yiddish in Weimar Berlin

*At the Crossroads of Diaspora Politics and Culture*

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# INTRODUCTION

## *Yiddish on the Spree*

*Gennady Estraikh*

I

Jacob Lestschinsky, the well-known Jewish demographer, economist, and journalist, once observed that in urban terrain Jews often became conspicuous even in those localities where their population was relatively small.[1] Indeed, the few thousand Yiddish-speaking eastern European Jews, or, in the somewhat contemptuous German term, *Ostjuden*, formed a visible minority in Berlin at the turn of the twentieth century: they looked different, often with dark curly hair and wearing clothes that were unusual for a German city, they spoke a peculiar Germanic vernacular, and they lived many to one house. These incomers usually migrated to the city from the then-German territory of Posen (Poznań), as well as from Russian and Austro-Hungarian Poland. They would converge on the proletarian east of the city, above all the Scheunenviertel (Barn Quarter), sarcastically called 'Jüdische Schweiz' (Jewish Switzerland), the slum quarter 'a few blocks northeast of Alexanderplatz, bounded by Linienstrasse to the north, Oranienburgerstrasse to the west and south and Landsberger Allee to the east'.[2] The Scheunenviertel, however, never functioned as a Jewish ghetto in the true sense of the word, because *Ostjuden* lived there together with others who were outsiders twice over, being both non-German and foreign-born. Thousands of full-bearded 'caftan Jews' and their families never acquired the assets for social mobility and stayed put in the Alexanderplatz area, while many others would work their way up from the lowest rung on the social ladder and move to more elegant districts, including Charlottenburg, merging there with 'real' western Jews.[3]

Residents of other Berlin neighbourhoods experienced a culture shock walking through the poverty-stricken Scheunenviertel streets with their military names: Grenadierstraße, Dragonerstraße, and Artilleriestraße. On Dragonerstraße, the Jewish People's Home (Volksheim), founded by a group of German Jewish intellectuals, attempted to help culturally and socially disadvantaged children acquire skills they needed to begin their lives in Germany.[4] The whole area had a bad reputation because its deprived inhabitants were, according to Joseph Roth, often forced to 'become black marketeers, smugglers, and even common criminals'.[5] Solicitation was legal in Germany, and Münzstraße, a street perpendicular to Grenadierstraße, gained notoriety as a prostitutes' hang-out.[6] For all that, peddling, petty trade, and buying up old clothing were among the most common sources of income. Furthermore, migrants from Russia formed the majority of the city's cigarette rollers.[7]

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Alexander Granach, who came to Berlin in 1906, where he gained his first acting experience as a Yiddish actor and later established himself as a significant German theatre and film actor, remembered, among other things, the community life of the Alexanderplatz area: 'The more pious had their synagogues. The Zionists, Socialists, Social Revolutionaries, Bundists, and anarchists all had their respective societies. [...] Posters with big letters and pictures advertised minor actors and supernumeraries from the Yiddish theaters in Russia, Romania, and Galicia as famous international stars.'[8] As early as the late 1870s, local Yiddish speakers could enjoy the antics of touring actors. From 1890, Yiddish cultural life in Berlin was dominated by the brothers Anton and Donat (David) Herrnfeld, whose theatre, where unsophisticated musicals by Abraham Goldfaden, Joseph Latteiner, and other authors were performed, was popular among the inhabitants of the Scheunenviertel.[9] From time to time, some German Jewish intellectuals would also visit Yiddish performances. Eastern European Jewishness attracted them as the exotic, 'genuine' roots of their confused national identity and the most reliable way of avoiding assimilation. The Berlin-based magazine *Ost und West* (*East and West*, 1901–23), which at its height reached at least ten per cent of the German Jewish population, published translations of Yiddish literary works as part of its intention to construct a national ethnic identity that combined both eastern European and western European forms of Jewishness. Romanticization of the eastern European Jews had its roots also in the *völkisch*, neo-Romantic trend in German and Austrian intellectual circles, which sought a return to 'authentic' ways of life.[10] Peretz Hirschbein, the rising Yiddish literary star who spent three months in Berlin in 1907, came to the conclusion that 'ethnography rather than real Jewish life' fascinated the German Jewish intellectuals.[11]

The 1908 Yiddish Language Conference, convened in Czernowitz, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and now Chernivtsi in Ukraine, became a manifestation of pan-Ashkenazic symbiosis, especially as its main organizer, Nathan Birnbaum, was a speaker of German.[12] Yiddishism, or Ashkenazic nationalism, found an intense following in the late Russian Empire and, to a lesser degree, in other countries to which Yiddish speakers had turned. Pondering the shape of the future Jewish nation, Yiddishists of various hues usually believed that non-covenantal highbrow culture based on the eastern European Jewish vernacular should replace or supplement religion and thereby secure the endurance of Ashkenazic civilization. Echoing the historian Simon Dubnow's postulate that the Jewish people embodied the highest form of a cultural-historic or spiritual nation, Nathan Birnbaum saw in Yiddish culture the main source of national pride.[13]

The Czernowitz conference placed advocates of the Hebrew language on the defensive. In December 1909, a conference of Hebraists was convened in Berlin.[14] Zionists regarded Berlin as one of their nerve centres. Local activists and visitors would assemble in the Café Monopol, built in a Mauritanian style and situated 'right in the hell, in the middle of Friedrichstraße, with all the dirt and immorality of the three-million city streaming to this terribly tumultuous street'. Yet inside, behind the heavy curtains, Jewish intellectuals found a *gut-bruder-ort*, an amiable place, where Russia's Pale of Jewish Settlement lay at the centre of the interests of

the clientele, who discussed ad nauseam the future of *Yiddishkayt*, or the eastern European model of Jewish life. Yiddish literary luminaries, such as Sholem Aleichem and Sholem Asch, were among the visitors. People would 'speak Hebrew as a matter of principle and speak Yiddish as a matter of principle'. In Yiddish usage at the turn of the century, the German term *Stammgast*, 'regular customer', was modelled as *shtam-gast* (plural *shtam-gest*).[15] Before the war, the Yiddish writer Hersh David Nomberg, known for his sociability, had established a Yiddish literary *kibetzarnye*, 'talking shop', at the Café des Westens, then the bohemian hub of the city.[16]

Apart from global plans for modernizing Jewish life, Berlin-based intellectuals sometimes tried to realize local projects. At the end of 1911 and the beginning of 1912, Abraham Wieviorka, a young Yiddish story-writer and journalist from Poland, published in Berlin *Dos bukh* (*Book*), which was conceived as a 'monatshrift far kunst un kritik' [monthly for art and criticism] but was discontinued after its second issue. Although the journal was published in Cracow, the imprint of its first issue displayed the address of a Berlin editorial office. It contained an essay by the critic Shmaryahu Gorelik, who saw Yiddish literature at a crossroads: either it would succeed in achieving a level appropriate to the Jewish intelligentsia, or it would continue producing conventional writings for the masses, akin to the sought-after rugs from the Turkish town of Smyrna.[17] From September 1912 to May 1913, Berlin housed the satirical journal *Der Ashmeday* (Ashmedai is the king of demons), whose editors, Abraham Margolin and Meir Grossman, later played prominent roles in Jewish journalism.[18]

Both Margolin and Grossman were educated in Germany and belonged to the category of Jewish students who came from Russia after they had finished secondary school but been unable to gain access to an institution of higher education in their own country following the introduction of a percentage-based numerus clausus in 1887. This category of students began to outnumber the yeshiva-trained young men who could also gain admittance to the German universities (the enrolment procedures did not include checking the candidate's educational credentials), though only a minority of these essentially undereducated people from the yeshivas would ultimately gain a degree. Oranienburger Straße, the main artery of the Scheunenviertel, was the 'Latin Quarter' of Berlin, as this was where poor students often rented rooms. Among the 533 Russian students who studied in Berlin in the winter semester of 1912 to 1913, ninety-seven per cent were Jewish.[19] One of the students recalled, looking back to around 1904: 'Even the poorest among us could get by in Germany, so cheap and commodious was it there at that time. We could study and breathe freely, we felt good living among the Germans.'[20]

2

After the beginning of World War I, the German and Austro-Hungarian armies strove to persuade the Jews of Poland to welcome the coalition soldiers as their liberators from 'the yoke of Moscow'.[21] Indeed, whereas the Russian army showed a hostile attitude to the Jewish population of Austro-Hungary and even of its own

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country, the German army did not usually commit atrocities against the Jews. In German propaganda literature of the time, 'Yiddish suddenly became evidence of Jewish loyalty to the German language and culture rather than an example of linguistic "mongrelization"'.[22] Numerous guides to Yiddish began to appear, including Solomon Birnbaum's *Praktische Grammatik der jiddischen Sprache für den Selbstunterricht* (*Practical Grammar of Yiddish for Self-Tuition*; the author was the eldest son of Nathan Birnbaum).[23] In a witness's account we read that because the German troops were able to communicate with Jews to some extent, they 'were somewhat more lenient towards them'. Moreover, 'the Jews were of the utmost importance to the foreign occupiers, who were unable to communicate with the majority of the local population and therefore relied on Jews to be the interpreters'.[24] German officers, who could not attend Polish performances, went to Yiddish operettas, which sometimes starred German actresses imported to entertain the uniformed audience.[25] Some occupiers found Yiddish quaint, especially as it was the vernacular that helped them to communicate with local women. Vilna and Kaunas had the reputation of towns with very pretty women.[26]

The linguistically and culturally assimilated German Jewish soldiers, who previously had never heard Yiddish and knew (if at all) about *shtetl*-life from translations of Yiddish writers published in *Ost und West* or Martin Buber's German versions of Hasidic stories, were often embarrassed when they saw the primitive conditions of Jewish life in the occupied territories. Yet some of them admired eastern Europe as the quintessentially Jewish habitat and discovered those living there 'as a living image of their lost cultural identity'.[27] For German Jewish enthusiasts of Yiddish, Vilna was particularly appealing, not least because it combined '*shtetl* authenticity' with such urban conveniences as cafes and theatres and the presence of modern educated people. Paradoxically, the occupation contributed to reinforcing the city's reputation as the 'capital' of Yiddish culture. The Germans' suppression of Russian education and culture diverted local activists' energy into Yiddish-language organizations, publications, and cultural events, especially as many Russian speakers, non-Jewish and Jewish alike, chose to evacuate to the areas under Russian control. The Yiddish linguist and journalist Zalman Reisen and the prominent community leaders Dr Cemach Szabad and Dr Jacob Wigodski were among those intellectuals who did not evacuate; they used the new environment to 'Yiddishize' the nationalist sentiments in significant segments of the local Jewish population. The Vilna *Letste nayes* (*Latest News*), edited by Dr Eliyahu Olsvanger (who had gained his medical degree in Germany), was one of the Yiddish newspapers sponsored by the German occupying authorities.[28]

Sammy Gronemann, a Zionist functionary in pre-war Germany, served in the German Army's Eastern Supreme Command during the war as an officer with the role of keeping tabs on Jewish cultural activities. He was particularly impressed by the local amateur Yiddish theatre, known as the Vilner Trupe (Vilna Troupe), established in February 1916. After seeing their performance, he wrote in a letter: 'I am sure that in Berlin these people would have made noise and had a full house!'.[29] Several other German Jewish intellectuals, including the artist Hermann Struck and the playwright Herbert Eulenberg, also enthusiastically supported the Vilna

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Troupe. Zalman Reisen explained that 'for the western Jews, the troupe was a kind of a spiritual revelation. In its performances they felt a representation of living Jewish culture, which could appear only in such a nationally strong community as the eastern European Jewry.' The actors found in the moral support of the German Jewish intelligentsia 'a source of additional courage and hope. They could no longer be satisfied with their success in provincial towns.'[30] In 1921, Gronemann was instrumental in bringing the Vilna Troupe to Berlin. Following its first performances at the B'nai B'rith Lodge and the German Writers' Union (with Bernhard Kellermann's introductory talk on Yiddish theatre), two theatrical entrepreneurs signed a contract with the Vilna Troupe. In September 1921 they opened the season with Peretz Hirschbein's play *Di puste kretshme* (*The Haunted Inn*).[31]

When Samuel Lewin, an aspiring Yiddish prose writer, came from Poland to Berlin in 1920, he was supported by the German essayist and writer Fritz Mordecai Kaufmann, who under the influence of Nathan Birnbaum became 'passionately interested in the life of the eastern European Jews and their language Yiddish'. Lewin 'found his [Kaufmann's] Yiddish excellent. A little on the hard side, perhaps, but nothing wrong with it.' Kaufmann's wife, a Russian Jewess, was a native Yiddish speaker, and their daughter grew up with Yiddish as her first language. Through Kaufmann, Lewin met Dr Fishl Schneersohn.[32] A polymath, Schneersohn pursued two careers: that of a distinguished psychologist and that of a Yiddish and Hebrew man of letters.

More arrivals appeared in Berlin when Russia left the war after the signing of the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty on 3 March 1918. On 9 November 1918, the German Republic was proclaimed by the leader of the Social Democrats, Philipp Scheidemann. In August 1919, the new constitution, drafted in the city of Weimar, was adopted by the German National Assembly. Meanwhile, at the beginning of 1919, German troops abandoned Ukraine, and a small group of Jewish entrepreneurs from Kiev followed them, relocating themselves and portions of their wealth to Germany.[33] Earlier, during the war, thousands of Jews had come, or been brought to Germany by force, from the occupied territories, when the economy needed additional manpower to replace the men drafted into the army. Many of the migrants chose to stay in Germany rather than to return to their countries, which were stricken by the war and revolution.[34]

About seven hundred Berlin residents of eastern European Jewish origin formed the membership of the Perez-Verein, the workers' association named after the popular Yiddish writer I. L. Peretz. This organization had a stronger Bundist contingent and a weaker Labour-Zionist contingent. The majority of members came from relatively well-off families but had turned to proletarian occupations during the war. Many of them were familiar with contemporary Yiddish literature and subscribed to newspapers: the Warsaw-based Bundist *Lebnsfragn* (*Problems of Life*) had four hundred subscribers, and the Cracow-based Labour-Zionist *Der yidisher arbeter* (*Jewish Worker*) three hundred. In 1920, the police closed the association, but it later reappeared as the Kulturverein Progreß (Progress Culture Association).[35]

By the end of 1920, there were 13,000 Jews from the former Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires, as well as from Romania, in Berlin's population of four million,

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which included 137,000 Jews. In 1925, a quarter of the more than 172,000 Jews in Berlin were immigrants.[36] The Yiddish poet and essayist David Eynhorn described Berlin in 1921 as the transit centre for the whole ragged Jewish emigration from Europe, the place of refuge for

> those Jewish emigrants who due to certain unfortunate circumstances have found themselves cut off from the great stream of emigration that is flowing to America. Berlin houses those who were not allowed to embark the ship, those who were rejected by their families, or those whose papers were stolen. Berlin lures Jewish deserters from Poland, expelled Jewish workers from France, and the Jews pushed out from [Miklós] Horthy's Hungary. It's a station for *halutzim* [Zionist pioneers] heading for Palestine and for Jewish workers who want to reach Soviet Russia.[37]

Two years later, Eynhorn told the reader of the New York Yiddish daily *Forverts* (*Forward*) that walking along Friedrichstraße felt like being in Berdichev, reputedly the 'Jewish capital' of Ukraine. 'Broken Russian was heard from all sides — with [Jewish] intonation and gesticulation. There was also a good deal of Yiddish, predominantly Volhynian and Lithuanian Yiddish.'[38] Sholem Asch, the best-selling Yiddish novelist, found in Berlin 'all of Jewish St Petersburg, Jewish Moscow, Jewish Kiev, and Jewish Odessa'.[39]

The appearance, in June 1921, of the Vilna Troupe, which remained in Berlin until March 1923, symbolized the arrival of highbrow Yiddish culture, especially as the Vilna actors performed in the premises on Kommandantenstraße previously occupied by the Herrnfeld Theater, known for its light repertoire.[40] Alfred Döblin, then one of the most popular German writers, welcomed the troupe as 'genuine Jewish theatre'. He praised them, though it was hard for him to follow the actors' language: 'I could hardly understand more than in the Russian theatre. [...] The theatre was very badly attended in any case. [...] People who can understand this natural Esperanto, the linguistic mixture of Yiddish, live around the Alexanderplatz and don't have any money.'[41]

The Farlag Yidish was the pioneer Yiddish publishing house in Berlin. Its imprint initially appeared in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, where it was established in 1917 by the novice Lithuanian-born writer Kalman Zingman (Singman). In addition to his own and other authors' literary works, he published two issues of the miscellany *Kunst-ring almanakh* (*Art Circle Journal*), which he later reissued under the imprint of the Kaunas-Berlin Farlag Yidish. At the end of 1920 Zingman moved to Kaunas, now the capital of Lithuania, where he established himself as a publisher and a man of letters. In 1921, his operation produced a dozen titles (including reprints of Kharkiv editions), making Zingman the most prolific Yiddish publisher in pre-1922 Berlin. However, this was the last year of his publishing activities in Berlin. A possible explanation can be found in Zingman's novel *Oyfn shvindl-trep* (*On the Winding Stairs*), whose protagonist, a Kaunas publisher, fell deep into debt trying to compete with private and state firms.[42]

At least two factors could inspire such people as Zingman to publish books in Berlin. First, in the early 1920s Germany was a publisher's paradise, guaranteeing an ideal combination of low prices, high quality, and lax censorship. Dubnow punned

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FIG. 1. Kalman Zingman
By kind permission of K. Zingman's granddaughter Amalia Goldberg
(Kfar Menachem, Israel)

that the inflation of the German mark triggered the inflation of Berlin-based publishing. Many publishers targeted (usually misguidedly) Russia as a marketplace for their production.[43] Jewish books and periodicals could be produced at well-established printing shops such as H. Itzkowski and Son (founded in Berlin in 1874).[44] Second, Berlin boasted a glut of intellectuals who had fled the chaos that had consumed the former Russian Empire. In 1925, there were over two hundred foreign Jewish writers, editors, and artists living in Prussia.[45]

For his projects, Zingman recruited the artist Eliezer Lissitzky (who designed the publisher's logo) and the man of letters Herman Frank. Lissitzky came to Berlin in 1921 with the aim of establishing contacts between Soviet and German artists. In post-1917 Russia, he was a central figure in the Moscow Circle of Yiddish Writers and Artists.[46] A scholar who had gained his doctorate at the Humboldt University in Berlin with a thesis on the social and economic analysis of the Białystok Jewish community, Frank owned the Berlin-based Russian publishing house Argonavty (Argonauts). In 1921, the Farlag Yidish published his Yiddish translation of Martin Buber's three speeches on Judaism: *Dray redn iber yidntum*. In 1923 Frank moved to the United States, where he became a leading Yiddish journalist and editor.

A much more significant publishing outfit — the Yiddish-Hebrew publishing house Klal-Farlag (General Publishing House) — was set up at 73 Markgrafenstraße in May 1921. Shai (Saul Israel) Hurwitz, Simon Dubnow's relative and the central figure among Berlin Hebraists, laid the foundation for this Jewish offshoot of the German publishing firm Ullstein. The Yiddish department of the Klal-Farlag was headed by the master literary critic and journalist Bal-Makhshoves (Isidor Elyashev), and the august Hebrew poet Khaim Nakhman Bialik succeeded Hurwitz, after his death in August 1922, as the chief Hebrew editor. The Klal-Farlag announced a programme of providing wide Jewish circles with affordable quality books in all fields of classical and modern literature. Zeev Wolf Latzki-Bertoldi, another key person in this publishing undertaking, played a prominent role in post-1917 political and cultural life in Kiev. For a short time he even took on the portfolio of Minister for Jewish Affairs during the heyday of Jewish autonomy in short-lived independent Ukraine, but he decamped to Berlin after Kiev became Soviet in 1920.[47]

All in all, Yiddish book production in Berlin had reached a level second only to Warsaw. In 1921 to 1923, German, predominantly Berlin-based, publishers released one hundred and twenty-six Yiddish books, or fourteen per cent of all the Yiddish book titles produced in the world. Moreover, in terms of printed sheets, Yiddish book production in Germany made up about forty per cent of the worldwide total, because publishers in other countries often produced booklets.[48]

3

After the end of the war, the Romanisches Café, situated on the Kurfürstendamm, in the shadow of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche, became 'the adopted home for Berlin's bohemians'.[49] Ben-Zion Hoffman (better known as Tsivion), a leading journalist of *Forverts* who once studied in Berlin, highlighted the difference between the roles that cafes played in Berlin and Paris: 'in Paris people go to a cafe to eat and to entertain themselves, whereas in Berlin people live in cafes. Cafes are Berliners' second homes, perhaps even their most important homes.'[50] Multi-talented Yiddish men of letters, veterans, and young hopefuls, would visit various cafes, including the Café am Nollendorfplatz, favoured by émigré Russian bohemians. They had much in common, especially as Jewish intellectuals, professionals, and entrepreneurs formed the organized core of the local Russian-speaking population. The Berlin daily *Rul'* (*Rudder*) was widely regarded as a 'Jewish newspaper'.[51] Yet the rarefied community of Yiddish intellectuals was particularly drawn to the Romanisches Café.

Whereas studies and memoirs in German devoted to the Romanisches Café consistently ignore its Yiddish *shtam-gest*,[52] in Jewish writers' portrayals the cafe sometimes emerges as an almost entirely Yiddish place. In reality, only a few of over a hundred tables in this nerve centre of bohemian life were occupied by Yiddish-speaking patrons. 'Each [Jewish] group had its own table; there were the "Yiddishists", "Zionists", "Bundists" and so on, all arguing among themselves from table to table.'[53] The poet Abraham Nokhum Stenzel, whose Berlin stint, from 1921 to 1936, was one of the longest among Yiddish literati, knew the motley society of the Romanisches Café well. He recalled that the Romanisches Café was 'swamped with prominent Jewish cultural and communal activists, well-known Jewish lawyers from Moscow and St Petersburg, famous Jewish writers from Kiev and Odessa, and ever-travelling party leaders — from the extreme left to the rightmost currents'.[54]

The place, notorious for its poor food and run-down interior, was known as the *rakhmonishes* (or *rakhmones*) cafe, 'Cafe of Pity'. This Yiddish-derived name mirrored the depressive vibes among the cafe's clientele, many of whom eked out a pitiful existence. As in social life in other bohemian cafes, Jewish literati — uprooted, wandering people — bivouacked among their colleagues because they often had nowhere else to go or were fed up with being alone.[55] The loneliness of an emigrant who had retreated into fretful introspection appeared as a dominant motif in the Yiddish literary output devoted to Berlin life. The Symbolist writer Der Nister found Berlin the city where 'the Jewish intellectuals, left without roots, rot one by one and collectively'.[56] Outside Germany, the Romanisches Café sometimes became a byword for an ivory tower. In the words of the Warsaw poet Melech Ravitch, its society represented 'nothing more than deserters' who looked on from afar as other writers were 'pulling the carriage' of Yiddish culture. The highbrow journal *Milgroym* (*Pomegranate*), whose six issues appeared in Berlin from 1922 to 1924, epitomized the elitist inclinations of the denizens of the Romanisches Café.[57]

Although some observers argued that a concentration of scores of intellectuals rather than of thousands of Yiddish speakers had created the environment for a Yiddish cultural centre in Berlin,[58] it was certainly a peculiar centre, which left

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intellectuals with a limited choice of occupations. For instance, half of American Yiddish writers earned their living from working for newspapers (forty per cent) or schools (ten per cent).[59] Berlin, however, had scarcely any long-standing local Yiddish periodicals and no Yiddish schools. Thus, the lifestyle of the literati usually depended upon their success in finding work as correspondents of a foreign newspaper, and those favoured by fortune in this way formed the better-off group among the *shtam-gest* of the Romanisches Café. Otherwise, the life of the Yiddish literati in Berlin could be miserable, as it was in Stenzel's bohemian existence.[60] His friend, the poet Moyshe Kulbak, who came to Berlin 'to inhale Europe', lived there from hand to mouth for a few years (1921–23), finding casual income as a prompter for the Vilna Troupe, for example.[61] Der Nister and Leyb Kvitko, who were part of the Jewish cultural flotsam from Kiev, wound up in Hamburg, where both worked at a Soviet foreign trade enterprise, because they had no stable journalistic income and could not afford to stay in Berlin.[62]

Even so, for a number of Yiddish literati, journalism became the most important standby on which they could fall back. For instance, Leon Chazanovitch, one of the founders of Labour Zionism, briefly ran the Berlin office of the American Labour Zionist daily *Di tsayt* (*Time*).[63] Yeshayahu Klinov wrote for the Yiddish newspapers *Morgn-zhurnal* (*Morning Journal*, New York), *Haynt* (*Today*, Warsaw), *Yidishe shtime* (*Jewish Voice*, Kaunas), and *Yidishe tsaytung* (*Jewish Newspaper*, Buenos Aires), and the Tel Aviv-based *Ha'aretz* translated his reports from Yiddish into Hebrew. He also wrote for Russian newspapers. A committed Zionist, he however argued that no movement had the right to monopolize Yiddish or Hebrew.[64] Gershon (Herman) Swet, whose forte was theatre criticism, became a Berlin correspondent of *Haynt*, but also wrote for Russian and German newspapers. Daniel Charney was an accredited correspondent of the New York daily *Der tog* (*Day*). The New York *Forverts* had the strongest group of Berlin-based contributors. Jacob Lestschinsky, who served as head of its Berlin bureau and also pursued an independent research career, is an example of a Yiddish man of letters who was successfully integrated into his intellectual surroundings in Berlin.[65]

Some Berlin-based Jewish literati avoided appearing in the Romanisches Café. One of them was Simon Dubnow, who preferred to receive guests at home. Nokhum Shtif, the Yiddish linguist and organizer of Yiddish scholarship, also shunned the cafe and satirized it.[66] The *shtam-gest*, however, were addicted to cafe life and would assemble virtually every evening to 'pray a Romanisches evening service [*ma'ariv*]'. The educator and journalist Israel Rubin portrayed the Yiddish prose-writer David Bergelson as the toast of the cafe. A relentless talker, Bergelson would come there because he used to 'need an audience even during the process of crystallizing, conceiving his ideas', to 'need listeners who would imbibe his thoughts, even if only partly formulated ones, and follow the embryonic development of his new brainchild'.[67] Bergelson's son, Lev, remembers his father's regular visits to the cafe:

> Although he was not a *Caféhausliterat* [cafe writer], he was drawn to the atmosphere of that place, whose regular patrons included not only bohemians but also many other figures of Berlin life. There he would frequently see his Kiev friends. The Romanisches Café was not only a place for small talk. People

FIG. 2. 8 Ruhlaer Straße, in Berlin-Schmargendorf, near Grunewald, where Simon Dubnow lived in 1930–33. Photo by Henning Dohrn, 2009

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> wrote poems, read proofs, and played chess there. Thus, my father played a few times with the world champion, Emanuel Lasker.[68]

A contemporary found the cafe similar to 'a high-ceilinged, noisy waiting room at a railway station', where people would 'read and write poetry, draw pictures, compose music, gossip, flirt, argue, do business, have another cup of coffee, and smoke another, and yet another, cigarette'.[69]

The cafe's 'Yiddish corner' did not attract much attention from the German bohemians. From time to time, outsiders would come to the Yiddish tables, but they felt 'like a *goy* [non-Jew] who joined a Jewish *minyan* [prayer quorum of ten male adults]' there.[70] Else Lasker-Schüler would sometimes appear among the Yiddishists, especially after she made friends with Stenzel and found him 'an intimate heartfelt poet'. Stenzel would never forget their initial meeting on 4 August 1922, especially as it happened to be the day of the funeral of David Frischman, the pioneer Hebrew writer and editor of the Berlin-based Stybel Hebrew publishing house.[71] At the cemetery four people eulogized the deceased: the Zionist diplomat Viktor Jacobson, the Hebrew writer S. Ben Zion (Simhah Gutman), Khaim Nakhman Bialik, and David Bergelson. The latter's participation was somewhat controversial because many Yiddishists felt hurt by the funeral's organizers, who published information about it only in Hebrew, German, and Russian.[72] More importantly, Frischman 'had a disdainful approach to Yiddish literature. To him, the Hebraist, Yiddish was a low jargon. He did not have a friendly attitude to Yiddish writers, and in particular everybody knew of his feud with [...] Peretz.'[73]

An important place among the regulars of the 'Yiddish cafe' belonged to writers of the pre-war Vilna-Kiev 'literary axis'. In late Imperial Russia, the high- and middlebrow *nusekh Vilne* (Vilna style) of publication contrasted with the mass-culture commercialism associated with Warsaw, the main centre of Yiddish publishing. In 1917 to 1920, Kiev eclipsed Vilna, attracting scores of Yiddishist activists who were inspired by the prospects of Jewish autonomy in independent Ukraine. Cross-party spirit — a characteristic feature of the Kiev Yiddish heyday — dominated cultural institutions formed under the umbrella of the Kultur-Lige, or Culture League.[74] Established in January 1918, the League aimed at developing and promoting secular Yiddish culture based on democratic values. After a short, if fruitful, period of intense activity, the functions of the League were diluted by the appointment of Bolshevik functionaries, though it remained a latent presence in the Soviet Yiddish cultural network. At the end of 1921, several recent activists of the Kiev Culture League, led by Jacob Lestschinsky, established a similar league in Berlin, but it did not become a viable organization. Its organizers soon realized that Berlin was 'a city where Yiddish culture and politics were produced for export'.[75]

Bergelson, who emerged as a Yiddish writer in 1909 with the self-sponsored publication of his novella *Arum vokzal* (*At the Depot*), was the recognized literary star among the Berlin-based holdovers of the Kiev Culture League. Lev Bergelson remembers his father's routine of writing in the morning and spending the afternoon with his family or friends. Initially, such people as Wolf Latzki-Bertoldi, Fishl Schneersohn, Der Nister, David Eynhorn, Jacob Lestschinsky, the poet Leyb Kvitko, and the artist Issachar Ber Ryback formed his inner circle of friends. Later,

his social set also included local intellectuals such as the writers Alfred Döblin and Arthur Koestler, the actor Alexander Granach, the theatre director Erwin Piscator, and the theatre critics Herbert Jhering and Alfred Kerr.[76]

Döblin wrote warmly about Bergelson's stories, translated into German by Alexander Eliasberg.[77] Fascination with the Ashkenazic tradition brought Bergelson, son of a small-town merchant and educated primarily by his voracious appetite for books, together with Döblin, son of a Polish Jewish tailor who worked his way through German academia. In 1924 Döblin spent two months in Poland, visiting local Jewish communities. His travel diary, published the following year, gave a sympathetic picture of Jewish life, particularly in Vilna, where the writer came to the conclusion that the Jews were an 'impressive nation'.[78] Both Bergelson and Döblin were friends with Aron Singalowsky, who was a remarkable figure even against the backdrop of the many brilliant personalities in the circles of Russian Jewish emigrants in Berlin.

A veteran member of the Zionist Socialist (Territorialist) party, committed to building a Yiddish-speaking Jewish state outside Palestine, Singalowsky received his tertiary education in Kazan, Halle, Berlin, and Zurich, and obtained a doctorate in philosophy and law. In 1919 he edited the short-lived Berlin-based Yiddish weekly *Fraytag* (*Friday*). A number of people could have introduced Bergelson to Singalowsky. For instance, Nokhum Gergel, a leading Territorialist, knew both Singalowsky and Bergelson. Gergel and Bergelson apparently met around 1910, when Gergel was a university student in Kiev. Gergel later worked as the head of the bureaucratic machinery in the Ministry of Jewish Affairs in Kiev. After settling in Berlin in 1921, he was a functionary of the ORT, the Society for Promoting Artisanal and Agricultural Work among the Jews in Russia, and later directed the Berlin office of the Jewish Scientific Institute, YIVO, the embryo of which was created in Berlin in 1925.[79] Shmaryahu Gorelik also knew both Singalowsky and Bergelson. A literary critic for the German Jewish newspaper *Jüdische Rundschau* (*Jewish Review*), he contributed to *Fraytag* in 1919. Bergelson was also Gorelik's old colleague; as early as 1910, they had co-edited a Yiddish almanac in Kiev.

In the early 1920s, Singalowsky became an influential figure in international Jewish circles. This happened thanks to his clout in the ORT. On 31 July to 3 August 1921, the first post-war conference of the ORT was convened in Berlin, transforming the hitherto Russian organization (established in 1880) into the World ORT Union. Key roles in the restructured ORT were played by three lawyers: Leon Bramson, a veteran of the 'old' ORT, and two leading Territorialists — David Lvovich (Davidovich) and Aron Singalowsky. Yiddishists were trendsetters on the new international governing board, chaired initially by Dr Cemach Szabad.[80] Yiddish cultural activists were also well represented in other Berlin-based Jewish organizations. For instance, the Berlin office of HIAS, the (American) Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, was headed by Ilja (Eliyahu) Dijour, a Yiddish man of letters.

In the summer of 1923, Abraham Cahan, editor of the biggest New York Yiddish daily, *Forverts*, saw many notables sitting around the Yiddish tables of the Romanisches Café, including Dr Szabad and Jacob Lestschinsky.[81] Apart from its

*shtam-gest*, the Romanisches Café also had many *stam-gest*, or casual customers. In 1930, when a Canadian Yiddish writer visited the cafe, he found an assorted group of Jewish intellectuals there, such as the Zionist ideologue Jacob Klatzkin, the actor Alexander Granach, the folklorist Immanuel Olsvanger, the popular Yiddish novelist Israel Joshua Singer (who had just arrived straight from Warsaw), and finally Daniel Charney and David Bergelson, who came together around 11 p.m.[82] The holder of a Soviet passport and an active Yiddish man of letters in Moscow between 1917 and 1924, Charney remained in Berlin because his health did not allow him to emigrate to the United States. He soon established himself as the life and soul of Berlin's Jewish literary circle. Charney later recalled nostalgically that through the cafe

> had passed almost the whole of Jewish literature and almost all Jewish activists from all corners of the world!
>
> In the Romanisches Café there was born the good idea of establishing the Jewish Scientific Institute, YIVO [...].
>
> In the Romanisches Café there was also born the good idea of creating the *General Jewish Encyclopedia* [...].
>
> The Romanisches Café was, in a sense, the transit point for the whole of Yiddishland. Not a few writers became healthier in the cafe, they imbibed there the energy of immortality.
>
> 'The Romanisches Café is the best sanatorium for me!', [Hersh David] Nomberg would say, sitting and coughing over a cup of already cold coffee. 'The air is so filled with tobacco smoke that not a single bacillus can survive here.' [...]. In the cafe I healed my lungs, applying to them generous amounts of nicotine and caffeine, and I also learned important rules of the literary profession.
>
> Rule number one: don't bore, God forbid, your readers, even if you don't know them personally. This is the first and, at the same time, the last rule of the art of writing!
>
> In the Romanisches Café you could not be a *nudnik* [bore]. The moment anyone was recognized as a bore, his table would be immediately vacated, deserted in a flash.

As a result, all those who had 'graduated' from the Romanisches Café did not become *nudnik*s at their writing desks either.[83]

## 4

After the end of World War I, the Jewish intellectual centre in Weimar Berlin developed, to a considerable degree, as part of the 'capital' for intellectual immigrants from the former Russian Empire. However, the story of Charlottengrad (as the Russian-populated area of Berlin, Charlottenburg, was often called) did not last long — from the end of 1923 and the beginning of 1924, Paris began to function as the main centre of Russian intellectual life in the West, where many emigrants, particularly military men, had also settled earlier, because France was an ally in the fight against the Kaiser's Germany and, later, the Bolshevik regime.[84] Thus, 1924 can be seen as the moment when the scholar of emigration from Russia detects a change in the role played by Berlin that lasted until 1933: although its standing as the

Russian intellectual centre had rapidly declined, it remained the main crossroads on the whole landscape of the eastern European Jewish — most notably Yiddish-speaking — intellectual diaspora.

The following factors contributed to the unprecedented development of Yiddish cultural activities in Berlin. (1) Whereas the French language and French culture were all-important in Russian intellectual life, the modernization of Russian Jewish society followed predominantly German cultural models. Many Yiddish-speaking intellectuals could therefore operate in German as well. (2) Many German Jewish intellectuals developed a strong interest in eastern European culture and welcomed cooperation with their Yiddish-speaking peers. (3) Jewish socialists had strong links with German socialists. (4) Berlin housed the European (or even global) headquarters of several Jewish relief organizations, such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the ORT, and the HIAS. (5) Berlin also housed a significant colony of Jewish journalists, whose literati wrote for newspapers published in various countries. (6) Several Jewish academic projects were based in Berlin. (7) Diplomatic relations and lines of communication with directly or indirectly neighbouring countries, including the Soviet Union, facilitated contact with the 'old home' of Yiddish culture.

On 20 October 1923, the Berlin Russian Writers' Club, established in 1922, held its last meeting. By that time, only eight of its sixty-five members remained in the city. Other club members had relocated to Paris or elsewhere, trying to find a place with better economic conditions. In US dollar terms, life in Berlin was two times more expensive in September 1923 than in January 1923.[85] In addition, the Glavlit (Soviet censorship office), established in June 1922, made it increasingly difficult to export to Russia books and journals produced abroad, which severely affected the entire Russian publishing and literary colony in Berlin.[86] Berlin's Yiddish publishers faced similar problems with exporting their output across the Soviet border, but they had a number of alternative markets, most notably in the United States. In addition, numerous Jewish organizations and newspaper bureaus provided job opportunities for dozens of literati. In any case, the Yiddish literary community did not show signs of declining dramatically. Moreover, Yiddish literati formed a new hub for their activities and leisure.

Apart from the Romanisches Café, Yiddish literati would meet on the premises of the intellectual retreat called the Sholem Aleichem Club, situated in the western part of the city, at 9 Kleiststraße, near the Jewish community headquarters. Opened on 19 December 1924, the club was clearly modelled on the Literatn Fareyn, or Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists, established in Warsaw in 1916 during the German occupation. The club's members were writers, artists, and political activists of democratic orientation. It was essentially a men's club because women generally formed a very small minority among Yiddish literati. In Berlin, perhaps only the poet Rosa Gutman broke the all-male homogeneity of the milieu.[87]

A number of the Kiev Culture League's activists, including Bergelson and Lestschinsky, served on the new club's board. At the official opening of the club, in January 1925, the key speakers were Bergelson and Singalowsky. In contrast to the Culture League, outreach was not on the club's agenda. Lectures and other

Fig. 3. 34/35 Bleibtreustraße, Berlin, housed the ORT headquarters in 1921–26
Photo by Alexander Ivanov, 2009

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events would usually be organized for its members and invited people only. The club had a library with a reading room, and a cafe. Lev Bergelson remembers the club situated in a set of spacious rooms on the second floor of an apartment block. Staple dishes of eastern European cuisine, such as Ukrainian borscht, *esikfleysh* (sweet and sour meat), and *gefilte fish*, could be ordered there for a midday meal. In the evenings, there were literary parties, discussions, and, from time to time, fund-raising concerts. In one such concert, to which Lev Bergelson was allowed to come, his father and Albert Einstein performed together as violinists.[88]

The newspaper *Rul'* provided regular information about the club's activities. For instance, on 18 January 1925, the club opened an exhibition of works by the Kiev-born artist Abraham Minchin on its premises. In the first half of 1925, the club hosted such speakers as Moyshe Silberfarb, the former Minister for Jewish Affairs in the Ukrainian government and chairman of the Kiev Culture League (11 January), Daniel Charney (14 February), and Leon Chasanowitch (14 March). Some of the lectures at the club were in German. Alfred Döblin gave a talk on modern German literature (22 March), and the German journalist Hellmut von Gerlach spoke on the provocative topic 'Why I am not an Anti-Semite Any More' (5 May);[89] Berl Locker, the Berlin-based leader of the Labour Zionists, shared his impressions from after visiting the United States (4 June).

The club marked various anniversaries. Speeches by Bergelson and Shtif and recitations by the artist Abraham Morewski were devoted to the tenth anniversary of I. L. Peretz's death (13 April). A lecture by the Reichstag deputy Eduard Bernstein marked the hundredth anniversary of Ferdinand Lassale's birth (25 April). The frame of the Sholem Aleichem Club was too narrow for the sixtieth anniversary of the birth of Chaim Zhitlowsky, the New York-based Yiddishist guru. A committee chaired by Leon Bramson prepared a gala held on 21 January 1926 in the Musiker-Festsäle (31 Kaiser-Wilhelm-Straße) with such speakers as Bramson and Bergelson. Dubnow was also announced in the programme, but he decided to send a letter rather than attend the gathering.[90] Characteristically, the club marked the tenth anniversary of Sholem Aleichem's death not in its ivory tower but in a Jewish school near the Alexanderplatz (30 Kaiserstraße), apparently expecting the common people to participate.[91] The club often invited Yiddish writers to read from their new works. One such literary evening took place on 4 December 1927. The invited writer, Samuel Lewin, was to all appearances a maverick among the Berlin-based Yiddish literati. The success of German translations of his works was particularly annoying to Yiddish purists. It is revealing that Zalman Reisen refused to mention him when compiling his four-volume biographical *Leksikon fun der yidisher literatur, prese un filologye* (1928–29).[92] On 20 October 1928, the club marked the twentieth anniversary of the Czernowitz conference. The keynote paper was presented by a guest from Vilna — Max Weinreich, the head of the YIVO, spoke about the transformation of Yiddish from a 'jargon' to a 'language of culture' recognized in the world of literature and scholarship.[93]

5

The three main circles of Yiddish culture — American, Polish, and Soviet — as well as smaller ones would meet in the 'Yiddish corner' of the Romanisches Café or in the Sholem Aleichem Club. Although a no-compromise mentality reigned in all the Yiddish circles (any move toward, say, communism, could only be at the expense of ties with other circles), Berlin was the place where journalists writing for ideologically and aesthetically rivalling dailies could be seen around the same table. Thus, the editors of the journal *Milgroym* 'wanted to create a Jewish republic of art and letters that also engaged Jewish artists and writers all over, from Moscow to Warsaw, from Palestine and New York'.[94] An international, cross-party ideology was characteristic of the activities developed by the Berlin-based offices of the ORT, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and other Jewish relief organizations. Visits to Berlin helped literati in Lithuania and other small fragments of the former Russian Empire to overcome their feeling of isolation. In fact, this feeling was characteristic of numerous bohemian circles in larger Yiddish-speaking communities as well. From 1921 to 1923, Kalman Zingman published the literary periodical *Vispe* (*Islet*) in Kaunas, and the journal *Inzl* (*Island*) was launched in 1925 in New York. In October 1927, in response to the fractiousness of Yiddish literary circles, Israel Joshua Singer paraphrased Marx and Engels's slogan in his proclamation entitled 'Yiddish Writers of the World, Unite' and advanced the idea of a non-geographical spiritual centre of Jewish life. In 1929, Daniel Charney and the journalist, critic and translator Yehoshua Rapoport tried (unsuccessfully) to publish a literary monthly whose title, *Brikn* (*Bridges*), would symbolize international and inter-ideological ties.[95]

The journalist Yeshayahu (Shayke) Klinov, who toyed with an idea of publishing a book devoted to 'ten years of Yiddish literature in the Romanisches Café', emphasized the generally peaceful coexistence of the Berlin literati, though differing political views did cause friendships to cool in some cases. He surmised that this was due to the virtual absence of the mass activities which in other places antagonized Jewish intellectuals.[96] In addition, this circle of expatriates was so small that bitter conflicts would have easily destroyed their fragile environment.[97] For all that, it was an argumentative place that saw serious confrontations from time to time. Thus, in January 1926, Lestschinsky, Latzki-Bertoldi, and the historian Elias Tcherikower formed a court of honour, which met several times discussing — and condemning — sensational articles published by the Yiddish journalists Yehuda Hirsh Schajak and Zvi Lukaschewsky.[98] In October 1929, a Zionist court of honour chaired by Sammy Gronemann took Khaim Nakhman Bialik's side in his conflict with the veteran Hebrew and Yiddish essayist Reuven Brainin, who began to be regarded as a 'turncoat' by his former fellow literati. Brainin, an enthusiast of Soviet Jewish colonization projects, was accused of becoming a Soviet propagandist.[99] A year later, Bialik rattled some feathers by telling a Berlin audience that Yiddish had already had its day and had no future.[100]

The most bitter confrontations took place between the camps of supporters and enemies of the Soviet Union. In March 1927, when the leading Menshevik Raphael Abramovitch (Rein) was invited to speak about the February 1917 Revolution and

its influence on Russia's Jews, his presentation was several times interrupted by Communists. A particularly sharp response was given by Alexander Khashin (Zvi Averbukh), who led the Communist faction of the Labour Zionist movement in post-revolutionary Ukraine and later lived in Berlin (from the end of the 1920s to his disappearance in the Gulag in the late 1930s he worked as a Yiddish journalist in Moscow). The first round of the debates, on 13 March, had to be continued on 26 March, when only invited people were allowed to enter the club.[101]

Following the Treaty of Rapallo, signed by the Soviet and German governments in April 1922, economic, political, and cultural ties were established between the two countries, and business and cultural traffic between Moscow and Berlin was intense. As early as 1920, Berlin housed a publishing outlet of the Comintern and, from 1921, its Bureau for Information and Statistics; from 1924 the Comintern published its German-language journal *Inprekorr* in Berlin.[102] Berlin was the place where émigré and Soviet literary circles fraternized more often than in any other city where emigrants from Russia were concentrated.[103] Pro-Soviet writers formed circles that welcomed visitors from Moscow. Thus, when Boris Pasternak came to Berlin in 1923, he, according to a Russian memoirist, preferred to mix with writers who were planning to return to Russia, such as Aleksei Tolstoi, Viktor Shklovskii, and David Bergelson.[104]

Bergelson developed overt pro-Soviet leanings a couple of years later when he was attracted by the Soviet projects of Jewish land-settlement, initially in the Crimea and southern Ukraine and later in Birobidzhan. Bergelson edited the new journal, *In shpan (In Harness)*, launched in 1926 at Boris Kletzkin's publishing house in Vilna. Its first issue carried Bergelson's much-discussed article 'Three Centres', in which he denied any future for modern Yiddish culture in its two non-Soviet centres, New York and Warsaw, and hailed Moscow as the best place to be associated with. Apart from Bergelson, the new journal 'harnessed' two other habitués of the Romanisches Café: Alexander Khashin and Daniel Charney. Singalowsky was part of the editorial group of *In shpan*, but as an ORT functionary he did not want to see his name mentioned in the publication.[105]

In the early 1920s, the more market-driven environment of the New Economic Policy (NEP) had improved the image of the Bolshevik regime. Lestschinsky later succinctly characterized the NEP period, particularly the years 1922 to 1925:

> Breathing spell, revival, the peasant starts to plow the fields again, and the city begins to revive; production doubles inside a couple of years; Jews open stores in the largest cities of Russia; the artisan resumes work and hires a helper; the nationalized large factories begin to operate, and the non-Jewish workers, who fled to the villages under military communism, go back to the cities; urban industry grows apace, and so does the machinery of government. Jews flock to government jobs in great number; the spontaneous trend to agriculture gathers momentum.[106]

The notable German Jewish politician and philanthropist Paul Nathan compared the three models — Lithuanian, Polish, and Soviet — of contemporary Jewish life in eastern Europe and came to the conclusion that the most promising was the Soviet one. The well-developed Jewish autonomy in Lithuania resulted in

sharp conflicts with the Christian majority, whereas Poland, with her ostensible constitutional guarantees for Jews, turned into the most anti-Semitic country in the world. Nathan admitted that the Soviet environment had created serious obstacles for Jewish religious life, but these restrictions were devoid of anti-Semitism because all religious people in the Soviet Union faced similar problems.[107]

Pro-Soviet Yiddish activities in Berlin reached their climax in 1928, during the successful guest-performances of the Moscow Yiddish theatre. Next year Solomon Mikhoels, head of the theatre and the lodestar of the Soviet Yiddish stage, was invited to play the central role in Piscator's staging of Mehring's play *Der Kaufmann von Berlin* (*The Merchant of Berlin*). Although the Soviet authorities at some stage allowed Mikhoels to spend the period from 1 August 1929 to 1 December 1929 in Germany, he never came to Berlin, and Piscator had to bring in the New York Yiddish actor Paul Baratoff.[108]

1928 saw an attempt to establish in Germany an organization for supporting Jewish colonization in the Soviet Union. The *Denkschrift* (memorandum) devoted to this endeavour contains articles by Alexander Khashin, Ber Orshansky, and Daniel Charney. Bergelson was the only representative of Yiddishist circles on the new organization's Initiative Committee (Initiativ-Komitee zur Unterstützung der jüdischen Siedlungen in der Sowjet-Union), whose members included the German writers Alfons Goldschmidt and Arthur Holitscher, the seasoned Communist Eduard Fuchs, and the pacifist Helene Stöcker.[109] This initiative was presumably supported — or even advanced — by the Comintern apparatus, which created an international network for the Soviet mother organization, the Association for the Rural Placement of Jewish Labourers, known as OZET. Ber Orshansky, a Soviet Yiddish writer and Jewish functionary in Belarus, was dispatched to Berlin, where in March 1928 he spoke about a 'Jewish republic in Soviet Russia'.[110]

Another Soviet guest, Prof. David Baturinsky, a leading member of the OZET, came to tell Soviet supporters that a new phase of colonization was coming: the 'Siberian project'. Baturinsky participated in the expedition sent to the Far East to investigate the barely populated territory that soon became known as Birobidzhan. In Berlin, he was invited to a tea party with a group of intellectuals at the house of Prof. Adolf Damaschke, an advocate of agricultural reforms, and later addressed a rally with about five hundred participants. Among other speakers were the writer Walter Mehring, the American Yiddish writer Abraham Reisen, and the actors Alexander Granach and Solomon Mikhoels. Baturinsky spent a few months in Germany, speaking to various audiences in Berlin and other cities.[111]

The Birobidzhan project was on everyone's lips in the Romanisches Café and in Jewish circles generally. A Soviet correspondent reported that the project found support in the northern, proletarian part of the city, whereas the Zionists and other anti-Soviet activists were against creating a Jewish republic in the extreme eastern part of Russia. In February or early March 1928, the Arbeiter-Kulturvereine (Workers' Cultural Societies), which eastern European Jewish labour activists had set up in the early 1920s in a number of German industrial centres, including Berlin, organized a rally whose participants were addressed by Bergelson, Khashin, and Orshansky. Charney spoke on behalf of the Initiative Committee, declaring that it

was apparently the first rally of Birobidzhan supporters outside the Soviet Union. Some of the participants expressed their readiness to go to the Soviet Union.[112] On 13 September 1928, Khashin, who went from Berlin to Moscow, reported on the activities of the Initiative Committee to OZET leaders. He mentioned such supporters as Theodore Wolf, editor of the *Berliner Tageblatt*, George Bernhard, editor of the *Vossische Zeitung*, and Hellmut von Gerlach, editor of *Die Welt am Montag*. Although the writers Döblin and Arnold Zweig were 'somewhat inclined toward Zionism', they were also among the supporters of colonization. Birobidzhan created a new dividing line among supporters of Soviet Jewish land-settlement: some people were against the 'Siberian exile' and advocated colonization in the Crimea and adjacent areas.[113]

The Berlin Workers' Cultural Society continued its activities in 1929. The Soviet Yiddish poet Itsik Fefer described his literary party, organized by the society as part of a month-long programme devoted to the Soviet Union. Fefer was the first official representative of Soviet Yiddish literature sent abroad and his visit was covered by the German Communist newspapers *Die Rote Fahne* and *Die Welt am Abend*.[114] Soon after Fefer, the Workers' Cultural Society had two other Soviet guests, representing the Kiev-based Yiddish academic institute: Joseph Liberberg, the institute's director, and Nokhum Oyslender, head of its literary section.[115] In September 1929, the society, which drew audiences of several hundred people, celebrated twenty years of Bergelson's literary life.[116]

6

Following the demise of such highbrow journals as *Milgroym* and *In shpan*, the Berlin literary colony did not make serious attempts to establish its own publishing forums. In 1932, the Weimar-period history of the Yiddish press in the German capital ended with the decline of the *Berliner bleter far dikhtung un kunst* (*Berlin Pages for Poetry and Art*). It was edited by Yehoshua Rapoport, then an enthusiast of Soviet Jewish colonization. By that time, several *shtam*- and *stam*-gest of the Romanisches Café had settled in the Soviet Union. Among them were Alexander Khashin, Leyb Kvitko, Der Nister, Eliezer Lissitzky, and Moyshe Kulbak. David Bergelson would join them in 1934.

Meanwhile, the Sholem Aleichem Club had apparently become obsolete and been amalgamated to all intents and purposes with the Russian-Jewish Public Club, which was founded in June 1930 and had people such as the journalist Klinov among its activists.[117] Occasionally, however, the Sholem Aleichem Club would re-emerge on the Berlin landscape, organizing separate cultural gatherings, as happened on 9 March 1931, when Abraham Coralnik, co-editor of the New York Yiddish daily *Der tog*, visited the city.[118] Berlin, no doubt, still had an audience for Yiddish cultural events. Characteristically, in February 1930 the cabaret Kaftan was opened in Schöneberg (31 Martin-Luther-Straße) by the Jewish actor Maxim Sakaschansky and his wife Ruth Klinger. Alfred Döblin's brother, Hugo, a film and theatre actor, starred in the cabaret's 1930–31 programme. He would appear carrying a heavy bag marked '107', which was the number of National Socialist deputies in the Reichstag.[119]

FIG. 4. At a Jewish art exhibition in the Sholem Aleichem Club (1928). From right to left: (standing) Michael Wurmbrand (head of the Berlin office of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency), Ben-Adir (Abraham Rosin), Nokhum Shtif, Jacob Lestschinsky, Gershon (Herman) Swet, Zeev Wolf Latzki-Bertoldi, two unknown persons, Issachar Ber Ryback, Nokhum Gergel, an unknown person, Meir Kreinin (a Jewish civil leader), Mrs. Rebecca Tcherikower, Mrs. Deborah Shtrif, Elias Tcherikower; (sitting) Mrs. Leah Swet, Mrs. Sonya Ryback, Mrs. Gergel. From the Archives of the YIVO, New York.

'Finis Germaniae! This is the end of the free democratic republic where I was happy to settle 11 years ago', Dubnow wrote in his diary on 25 March 1933. Around the same time, the right-wing German nationalist journalist Friedrich Hussong felt victorious: 'The Kurfürstendamm [...], it was the enemy. [...] Today, the Kurfürstendamm is defeated and beaten.'[120] In May 1933, the Berlin offices of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee were searched by the Nazis and the Committee was forced to move its European headquarters to Paris.[121] While moving the ORT's offices out of Berlin, Singalowsky even managed to transport to Paris the library and furniture of Alfred Döblin, who had fled earlier. For a few years, Döblin (and a few other émigré German Jewish intellectuals) would flirt with Yiddish and Yiddishist Territorialism.[122] The vast majority of the Berlin-based Yiddish literati fled Germany in 1933, moving to such places as Warsaw, Paris, Riga, New York, or Tel Aviv.

In 1935 and 1936, the history of Yiddish publishing in Berlin came to an end when Stenzel published (at the Fürst printing house, 26 Goltzstraße) a few of his poetic collections and a pamphlet celebrating the centenary of the birth of Mendele Moykher Sforim, known as the grandfather of modern Yiddish literature. One of the last Yiddish literati to leave Berlin, Stenzel arrived in England in 1936, where he would establish himself as Stencl, the eccentric 'poet of Whitechapel', who

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occasionally looked 'back nostalgically to the poetic inspiration of the time in which he had written poetry in the ambience of Else Lasker-Schüler and members of the *Milgroym* group'.[123] In the nostalgic memory of Jewish literati who once populated the Romanisches Café and the Sholem Aleichem Club, Weimar Berlin remained a unique example of an intellectual crossroads whose tolerant atmosphere contributed immensely to the circulation of ideas, publications, and significant figures between all centres of Yiddish culture, most importantly in the United States, Poland, and the Soviet Union.

Ilja Dijour, who visited Berlin in 1946, wrote to Charney, who had been living in America since 1940:

> I cannot avoid thinking about you every time I pass the ruins of the Romanisches Café. Only a person who, like you or I, had spent thousands of nights in the Romanisches could understand the meaning that these ruins have for us.
>
> A few thousand tons of stones and bricks cover the tables around which there would sit Bergelson and Kvitko, Der Nister and you, Nomberg and Latzki-Bertoldi, [the Jewish activist] Israel Efroykin and Jacob Lestschinsky, Elias Tcherikower and Nokhum Gergel, Alexander Khashin and Y. Klinov, and many others. The entrance terrace has survived almost intact. One even can see part of the signboard on it: 'Romanisches Ca...'.
>
> And that's all! There are no people there (with the possible exception of those under the debris).[124]

## Notes to the Introduction

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83. Daniel Charney, *Oyfn shvel fun yener velt: Tipn, bilder, epizodn* (New York: Marstin Press, 1947), p. 36. 'Yiddishland' became a vogue word in the mid-1930s and, perhaps, was not used during the heyday of Yiddish at the Romanisches Café.
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87. See Anat Aderet, 'Di yidishe dikhterin Roza Gutman — ir lebnsveg un shafung', *Toplpunkt*, 2 (2001), 36–38. In many cases, female names that appeared in Yiddish periodicals were pseudonyms of male journalists — see, for example, A. Almi, *Momentn fun a lebn: Zikhroynes, bilder un epizodn* (Buenos Aires: Tsentral-farband fun poylishe yidn in Argentine, 1948), pp. 205–13.
88. Lev Bergelson, 'Erinnerungen an meinen Vater', p. 284.
89. On von Gerlach's turn from anti-Semitism, see Franz Gerrit Schulte, *Der Publizist Hellmut von Gerlach (1866–1935): Welt und Werk eines Demokraten und Pazifisten* (Munich: Saur, 1988), pp. 47–50.
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95. Estraikh, 'Utopias and Cities of Kalman Zingman, an Uprooted Yiddishist', pp. 36–37. Rapoport lived in Berlin from 1922 to 1924, but he later moved to Warsaw.
96. Yeshayahu Klinov, 'A briv tsu Daniel Charney', in *Daniel Charney-bukh*, ed. by Moyshe Shalit (Paris: Tsertta, 1939), pp. 166–67.
97. Weinper, pp. 18–19.

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122. *Alfred Döblin: Eine Ausstellung des Deutschen Literaturarchivs im Schiller-Nationalmuseum*, ed. by Jochen Meyer (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1998), pp. 36, 38.
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