IN GEVEB A JOURNAL OF YIDDISH STUDIES

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"Di Yidn Kumen!": Israeli and Multicultural Identities in Israeli Yiddish Light Entertainment Shows

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Abstract: This article examines aspects of Israeli identity found in previously undiscussed posters of Yiddish light entertainment shows performed all over Israel from the late 1960s till the 1990s (Collection of the Israeli Centre for the Documentation of the Performing Arts at Tel Aviv University). The posters were intended for advertising light musical comedies and sketch-oriented programs, which expressed *shund* characteristics and comprise a unique, hidden source regarding the place of Yiddish culture in Israeli society. The article aims to explore how Yiddish was recognized in Israel, especially in relationship with national historical events such as the Six-Day War, the repatriation from the Soviet Union in the 1970s, the post-Soviet repatriation, and the celebrations of Israel's 25th and 50th jubilees.

Introduction

In 1967, the Israeli Yiddish comedy theatre group Shpilkes,[1] under the direction of Yosef Hayblum and Misha Nathan, came out with a new musical comedy titled *Di yidn kumen! di yidn kumen!* (The Jews are Coming! The Jews are Coming!), aimed at celebrating the victory in the Six-Day War.[2] This production was part of the Yiddish light entertainment industry, which was considered and referred to as an expression of *shund* culture.[3] The poster that advertised the comedy (figure 1)

[1] A lot of Yiddish theatre groups in Israel, including *Shpilkes*, had been working in a format of wandering theatre, and performed in different locations throughout the country.
[2] S. Gelbert, "Milḥamtenu Bi-r'ei Ha-Humor."
[3] On the identification of the deprecating term *shund* (trash) as light entertainment, in contrast to *kunst* (art), see: Nahma Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars: A World History of Yiddish Theatre* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 110. See also Joel Berkowitz, "Introduction: Writing the History of the Yiddish Theatre," in *Yiddish Theatre : New Approaches*, ed. Joel Berkowitz (London: The

manifested a number of paradoxical situations, the most striking of them being the representation of war as a comedy. This extraordinary combination of war and comic atmosphere was strengthened by the visual images. The paratroopers, who occupy most of the poster's space, remind one of a group of aerialists dancing in the air, whose celebratory parade, disproportionately large heads, and thin legs turn them into funny and grotesque figures. In addition, the clothing of the brave clown-parachutists–especially their helmets—show them to be soldiers of the Israeli army—the victors of the Six-Day War. In contradiction to typical war drawings, the victors rather than the defeated appear here as the comic personages.[4] Here, the Jewish folk tradition of humor, whose salient characteristic is laughing at oneself,[5] supplanted a serious and heroic approach. Thus, the Yiddish theatre poster advertised laughter and a view of life as entertainment, which invaded Israeli reality. Moreover, below the ensemble of brave Yiddish parachutists there is a comic drawing (from right to left) of Abba Eban, the Israeli minister of foreign affairs; Levi Eshkol, the Israeli prime minister; and Moshe Dayan, the Israeli defense minister, all riding on a tank with the flag of Israel on it. Moshe Dayan holds a sling, just like the biblical King David in his battle with Goliath. The Israeli tank chases five injured Arab soldiers, one of them riding a camel. In this section of the poster as well, the caricatural language neutralizes the military message of the event. Overall, the poster does not criticize the war, nor does it try to say that the war victory makes no sense; it just offers a humorous look, from a bird's-eye view. This caricature, coming from a Yiddish cultural perspective, urges us not to take ourselves too seriously.[6] Nonetheless, the celebratory elements here appear as part of the patriotic sentiments expressed by Israeli mainstream culture at the time. No less significant was the very fact that Yiddish theatre, which had been ostracized in Israel for years, now openly proclaimed its definite affiliation with Israeli historical events and current reality.[7] The poster represents a number of issues that are essential for understanding Yiddish theatre in Israel and its place in Israeli society; it also reveals the

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Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008), 1–25; Nina Warnke, 'The Child Who Wouldn't Grow up: Yiddish Theatre and Its Critics," in *Yiddish Theatre: New Approaches*, ed. Joel Berkowitz (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008), 201–16. The *shund* characteristics in Israeli Yiddish theatre were discussed in the mockumentary film *Shund,* directed by Yael Leibovic-Zand in 2010. The film contained interviews with many prominent Yiddish artists in the Israeli Yiddish theatre world. On the term *shund* in Yiddish writing in general, see for example: Chone Shmeruk, "Letoldot Sifrut Ha-'Shund' Be-Yiddish," *Tarbitz* 52 (1983): 325–54; Nathan Cohen, *Books, Writers and Newspapers: The Jewish Cultural Center in Warsaw, 1918-1942* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 2003) 93–114.

[4] For example, one can find this principle in the famous propaganda posters OKNA ROSTA. See Nicoletta Misler, "A Public Art: Caricatures and Posters of Vladimir Lebedev," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 5 (1987): 60–75.

[5] On the concept, or even the "myth," of Jewish humor and its self-deprecating character, see Dan Ben-Amos, "The 'Myth' of Jewish Humor," *Western Folklore* 32, no. 2 (1973): 112–31.

[6] The role of humor and its therapeutic and social functions in relation to war subjects were widely discussed in Clémentine Tholas-Disset and Karen A. Ritzenhoff, eds., *Humor, Entertainment, and Popular Culture during World War I* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); See also Allen Douglass, *War, Memory, and the Politics of Humor: The Canard Enchaîné and World War I* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

[7] The rejection of Yiddish theatre and Yiddish culture started at the very beginning of the new Jewish Yishuv in Palestine. See Olga Levitan, "Theatre in the Land of Israel: Between Hebrew and Yiddish," *Theatralia: Theater and Jewish Studies* 7 (2005): 139–51; Diego Rotman, "Language Politics, Memory, and Discourse: Yiddish Theatre in Israel (1948-2003)," *Skenè: Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies* 6, no. 2 (2021): 115–45.

social-cultural situation that the Yiddish performers in Israel faced in the first five decades of the state's existence.

Similarly noteworthy is the multilingual character of the poster, whose verbal component comprises Yiddish, Hebrew, and English, endowing the subject and significance of national victory with a multicultural character. The relationships between the expressiveness of the letters, written in different languages, and the graphical elements of the poster are meaningful as well. At the top of the poster, the genre of the performance and its theme are declared in large letters in English: "Musical comedy (About the 6 Days War)," leaving no doubt as to the subject of the performance. The Yiddish title, "די יידן קומען!," placed in two lines above the heads of the brave parachutists, is written in larger letters. The double appearance of the Yiddish title and its diagonal direction, parallel to the line of the parachutists, strengthens the generally triumphal tone of the poster. The same title in three languages—Hebrew, English, and Yiddish (this time written in Latin transliteration)—appears below the tank and fleeing Arab soldiers. Finally, at the bottom of the poster, the title appears once more, written in large, red letters. The verbal element of the poster amplifies the effect of the parade while introducing an unexpected, multicultural atmosphere into this Israeli Yiddish theatre production.

Viewed in the context of the iconography of Yiddish theatre advertising, this poster fits into a well-established tradition. The close-up and highlighted representation of the faces of the parachutists are a typical component of Yiddish theatre posters, which frequently features the faces of famous artists, whose names often appeared in writing as well. In accordance with Yiddish theatre conventions, the poster often highlighted the importance of the performers, insisting on their primacy: the artists are the main "miracle" of the show.

It should be noted that the comic and celebratory mood characterized a large number of the visual images that were common in Israeli popular culture after the Six-Day War,[8] and the Shpilkes poster used a system of signs that were typical of the Israeli Hebrew entertainment of the time—though most of them differed from the Shpilkes poster, in which the victor rather than the vanquished was the main object of ridicule. The dual sense of belonging to both Israeli and Yiddish culture, which is evident both in the visual language and semantics of the poster, testifies to the dialogic relationships and interpenetration of the Israeli and Yiddish worlds. In this situation, the plasticity of the Yiddish entertainment culture, which both preserves its own signs and perceives the signs of the surrounding culture, is especially intriguing.

Examining the poster in light of the common assumptions regarding the status of Yiddish culture in Israel leads us to a surprising discovery. From the very beginning of the new Jewish Yishuv in Palestine in the first decades of the twentieth century onwards, Hebrew cultural discourse tended to treat Yiddish theatre as a kind of "outside" culture, which represented values that differed from those of the young

[8] *Shpilkes*' comedy was not the only Yiddish performance produced in Israel during 1967 in order to celebrate the Israeli victory in the Six-Day War. The celebration of the triumph appeared also in the Yiddish musical comedy *Geshosn un getrofn* ("Shoot to Hit"), headlined by the famous Israeli singers, Israel Itzhaki and Aliza Azikri (1967). See also: Gelbert, "Milḥamtenu Bi-r'ei Ha-Humor (Our War in a Humoristic Point of View)." On the beneficial popular representations of wars in Israeli culture of the time, see: Dalia Gavriely-Nuri, "The Pretty War: Representations of War in Israeli Culture 1967 - 1973," *Democratic Culture* 11 (2007): 51–76 (Hebrew).

Zionist, Israeli state.[9] Nevertheless, in *Shpilkes*' *Di yidn kumen! di yidn kumen!* poster, the Yiddish actors are portrayed not as outsiders, but rather as "Sabra"[10] as anyone can get, dressed in the uniforms of one of the most renowned units of the Israeli Defense Forces.

This article examines previously undiscussed posters of Yiddish light entertainment shows performed throughout Israel from the 1950s until the late 1990s and preserved in the archive collection of the Israeli Centre for the Documentation of the Performing Arts at Tel Aviv University. The posters were created to promote Yiddish musical comedies and sketch-oriented programs, and exhibit characteristics typical of the iconography of Yiddish popular theatre advertising. However, they can also be examined as a unique, largely overlooked source for exploring the place of Yiddish culture in Israeli society. As will be shown below, these posters use Yiddish and Yiddish theatre to suggest an "inside" multicultural perspective of Jewish as well as Israeli identity.

Theatre Posters and Theatre Discursive Practices

Theatre posters constitute an inseparable and unique element of theatre art and theatre history. From one point of view, posters of Israeli Yiddish theatre from the later decades of the twentieth century are undoubtedly historical documents that testify to specific cultural events of the past. Paraphrasing Thomas Postlewait, we can claim that theatre posters present evidence of productions that existed in the past and are absent in current times.[11] Nonetheless, the poster itself belongs not only to the past but to the present as well. Representing the Yiddish productions of 1960s, the encounter between the poster and its recipient always occurs in the present, just like the live theatre production, which always performs in present time. In practice, theatre posters are not only the records of historical theatre events such as reviews, memories, and production daybooks. Theatre posters act as performative events of their own, and their visual images and visual rhetoric are as important as the basic information regarding the date and the place of the show.[12] In this sense, theatre posters appear as double agents—of the past and of the present as well—being both the secondary and the primary source of theatre research.

The duality of theatre posters is manifested in their double purpose as well: the initial aim of a poster is to present the aspirations of both the creators of the show and its audience. Posters seek to demonstrate the most significant components and the message of the performance and to build a bridge between the performance and the spectators. This usually comprises the presentation of an interpretation of

[9] See Diego Rotman, *The Yiddish Stage as a Temporary Home: Dzigan and Shumacher's Satirical Theater (1927 - 1980)* (Berlin and Boston: De Grueter Oldenbourg, 2021); Rotman, "Language Politics, Memory, and Discourse: Yiddish Theatre in Israel (1948-2003)."

[10] The term "Sabra" refers to any Jew that was born in the Land of Israel.

[11] "By definition, the historical event, located in the past, is absent." Thomas Poslewauit, "Historiography and the Theatrical Event: A Primer with Twelve Cruxes," *Theater Journal* 43, no. 2 (1991): 160.

[12] On the meaning of theatre posters' aesthetic and their visual rhetoric as an independent value, see Jillian Kruse, "Postermania: Advertising, Domesticated," *Art in Print* 7, no. 1 (2017): 7–10. On the specific importance of Yiddish theatre posters in the Esther-Rachel Kaminska Theater Museum Collection and their role in exploring Yiddish theatre history, see: Alyssa Quint, "Visual Artists and Yiddish Avant-garde Theatre in Poland," *Digital Yiddish Theatre Project* (June 2018). Accessed August 28, 2022.

the production for the audience through different signs, which reflects the socio-cultural reality and mirrors the audience's aspirations. Thus, the analysis of posters can be extremely productive vis à vis the performance, the audience, and the general cultural characteristics of the moment.[13] Following the semiology concept of Erika Fischer-Lichte by which theatre is treated as a cultural system, one can discuss the poster as a network of cultural codes and signs, whose task is to represent the encounter between the art product and society.[14] Fischer-Lichte claims that the specific features of the theatre cultural system lie in the impossibility of separating the performance from both its creators and its spectators: the audience is "a constitutive part of theatre – without an audience there can be no performance. […] Theater always occurs as a public event."[15]

Research discourse in the field of Israeli Yiddish theatre can be divided into two main views. One of them, represented by Diego Rotman, offers a new view of Yiddish theatre and its meaning for Israeli culture in general. Specifically, Rotman emphasizes the conflict of interest between Israeli cultural policy and Yiddish culture. In this context, Israeli policy towards Yiddish theatre is characterized as a repressive one, whose aim during the first decades of the State of Israel was to hinder the development of Yiddish theatre in Israel, which had the character of traditional Jewish culture while also turning into a kind of unofficial protest culture. In his research as well as in his artistic practice, Rotman relates to the relationships between the repression and the protest.[16] A different view is expressed in Rachel Rojanski's *Yiddish in Israel*, which suggests a more complicated picture of Israeli official cultural policy. Rojanski mentions the administrative rules and even laws against Yiddish performances in Israel. However, she claims that beginning in the early 1950s, Israel tried to present itself as the main center for Jewish culture and tradition all over the world. This resulted in a policy of support for several Yiddish theatre projects inside Israel as well as triumphant visits and performances of a number of Yiddish theatre stars in Israel (such as Ida Kaminska, Max Perelman, Peysachke Burstein, Lilian Lux, and others).[17] Both schools of thought regard the subject of Yiddish theatre in Israel as a highly political issue. Neither, however, gives due attention to the theatre posters themselves. Thus, reading the history of Israeli Yiddish theatre through the visual content of the posters adds new data points to the discourse concerning the relationship between the Israeli Hebrew-language culture

[13] For a discussion of this phenomenon, see: Elena Millie and Andrea Wyatt, "American Drama as Reflected in the Theater Poster Collection at the Library of Congress," *The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress* 37, no. 1 (1980): 114–51.

[14] In the recent times the semiology method in discussing theatre poster appeared in a number of studies, see: Pei-ying Wu, "A Critical Analysis of Theatre Posters" (MFA Thesis, Rochester Institute of Technology, 1997); Jelena Nikolić and Uroš Nedeljković, "Semiological Analysis of Polish Theater Posters,"*Issues in Ethnology and Antropology* 10, no. 1 (2015): 113–33.

[15] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Semiotics of Theatre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 6-7. Fischer-Lichte's view corresponds with the later concept of the theatrical event, developed by Willmar Sauter, in which the communicative function of the performing arts and the objectiveness of theatre studies play a central role. See William Sauter, *The Theatrical Event: Dynamics of Performance and Perception* (Iowa City: University Iowa Press, 2014).

[16] Rotman, "Language Politics, Memory, and Discourse" and Rotman, *The Yiddish Stage as a Temporary Home*, 145-257. Besides being an academic scholar, Rotman is one of the central figures in Israeli contemporary performance art.

[17] Rachel Rojanski, *Yiddish in Israel: A History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), 26-47.

and the Israeli Yiddish-language culture.[18] The posters reveal how Yiddish theatre in Israel—an institute of a cultural minority of Yiddish speakers—fulfilled numerous, significant functions.[19]

Overview of the Collection

The collection of Israeli Yiddish theatre posters at the Israeli Center for the Documentation of the Performing Arts contains about 150 items, most of which exist in one copy only. These items chart the development of Israeli Yiddish theatre iconography over half a century, from the 1950s to the late 1990s—and an ongoing relationship with issues of *shund* elements and multiculturalism. Almost all the posters correspond to the activities of small theatre groups or independent one-off projects. Some of the participants of these projects were not preserved at all in Israeli cultural memory, except for a number of posters that testify to their existence and the general meaning of their efforts.

The collection features posters spanning about fifty years of Israeli reality, a fairly long period of time. Israeli culture, as stated in the major studies, was highly complicated and dynamic.[20] The State of Israel was constantly changing. This period includes a few major demographic changes, which were a result of the many immigration waves from different parts of the world (Central and Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa). During this period, Israel experienced a significant political turn: Mapai, the democratic socialist political party that ruled from 1948, lost the elections for the first time in 1977 to the Likud, the liberal right-wing party. This shifted Israel from a social-democratic economy to a capitalist one. Moreover, in this period, Israel participated in six wars.[21] Each of these major turning points, as well as many others, affected Israeli culture, and of course the Yiddish culture in Israel. However, we believe that examination of the posters as meaningful cultural objects, the study of their linguistic, visual, and social characteristics, can reveal unexpected situations and substances in the history of the Yiddish theatre in Israel, especially concerning the relationships between Yiddish theatre groups and their audiences. The discussion in this article attempts to read history through the agency of posters, and to explore the cultural narrative as it is presented in the posters examined here.

The collection can be divided into three periods. The first relates to the 1950s and the very beginning of Yiddish theatre in the State of Israel, the second period includes posters from the beginning of the 1960s until the mid-1980s, and the third period is associated with the second half of the 1980s and the 1990s. During the first period, which roughly coincides with the first decade of the State of Israel, Yiddish theatre posters advertised classic Yiddish plays by Jacob Gordin and Sholem Aleichem, as well as musical comedies and cabaret-like shows, emphasizing light entertainment in which *shund* visual characteristics had no clear expression. In

[18] Another attempt to read Israeli history through posters appeared in Inbal Ben-Asher, "Visualizing Democracy, Difference, and Judaism in Israeli Posters, 1948–1978," *Israel Studies* 22, no. 3 (2017): 48–76.

[19] This situation reflects the ideas of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari regarding cultural minorities and their importance for the majority culture. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature," *New Literary History* 16, no. 3 (1985): 591–608.

[20] For later examples of attempts to portray Israeli cultural history in its multicultural and complex character, see: Anita Shapira, *Israel. History* (London: Orion Publishing Co, 2015); Israel Bartal, *Tangled Roots: The Emergence of Israeli Culture* (Providence, RI: Brown Jewish Studies, 2020).

[21] See: Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel* (New York: Knopf, 2007).

contrast, most of the posters of the second period highlighted visual features of light entertainment, with their dramatic exaggeration, sensational visual principles, and a passion for entertainment above all. However, at the peak of this period in 1967 and its major historical event, the Six-Day War, posters began to appear in which the signs and images of the traditional shtetl began to mix with Israeli current affairs or were even replaced by them. Posters of the third period are characterized by a strong "Russian" accent, an obvious influence of the first and second waves of Jewish repatriation from the Soviet Union in the second part of the 1970s and in the 1990s. At that moment, the *shund* elements in the Israeli Yiddish theatre posters acquired intercultural verbal characteristics, though their picturesque features weakened noticeably.

The multitude of posters and their focus on entertainment elements testifies to the revival of Yiddish entertainment culture. This is especially interesting in the context of the continuing attempts of pre-Second World War Yiddish theatre to struggle against "lowbrow" *shund* characteristics and to turn itself into "highbrow" art.[22] It can be assumed that a kind of justification of the *shund* world within the developing Israeli culture was important for Jewish culture in general.

Case Studies

The First Period: From Dzigan and Schumacher to Charlie Chaplin

The first period of the posters in the collection is from the first years of the State of Israel. In these years, Israeli society was primarily a population of immigrants, many of them from European countries. The immigration waves of the first years of the State of Israel created a society in which more than half of the population spoke in more than one language on a daily basis. Yiddish was the main language of many of the Jews who immigrated from Europe before and after the Holocaust.[23] Most of the posters of the first period presented the productions of the Abraham Goldfaden Theatre, founded by a number of Yiddish artists from Eastern Europe who came to Israel after the Second World War. Their credo was professionalism and a canonic Yiddish repertoire.[24] Describing the activities of this theatre, Rojanski stressed that some of its participants knew Hebrew. Nevertheless, they chose Yiddish as their stage language and as a language of their national home culture, which was relevant for their post-Holocaust audiences.[25] The history of this theatre included an appeal to the High Court of Justice over the restrictions placed on Yiddish troupes in Israel and the cancellation of these restrictions by the Court's order.[26] The minimalism and succinctness of Abraham Goldfaden's theatre posters (figure 2) and the expressiveness of the fonts themselves are reminiscent of the innovative European graphic language of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

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[22] The struggle with the *shund* elements was discussed in Kenneth B. Moss, "Bringing Culture to the Nation: Hebraism, Yiddishism, and the Dilemmas of Jewish Cultural Formation in Russia and Ukraine, 1917-1919," *Jewish History* 22, no. 3 (2008): 263–94; Jolanta Mickutė, "The Vilner Trupe, 1916–30: A Transformation of Shund Theater—For the Sake of National Politics or High Art?" *Jewish Social Studies* 22, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 2017): 98-135.

[23] Rojanski, *Yiddish in Israel*, 9-11.

[24] Rojanski, *Yiddish in Israel*, 108-117.

[25] Rachel Rojanski, "The Struggle for a Yiddish Repertoire Theatre in Israel, 1950–1952," *Israel Affairs* 15, no. 1 (2009): 6.

[26] Rojanski, "The Struggle for a Yiddish Repertoire Theatre in Israel," 9-10, 12-14.

Notably, the theatre used the same graphic format for all its productions, with the title of the performance, the names of its creators, the place and the time of the performance and other details written on a white background within a red frame. This frame looks like a theatre curtain drawn across the entrance to a booth at a fair, designed in pyramid form, denoting the stage and theatrical reality and promising entertainment. It could not fail to attract attention, and its restrained visual language was probably the most relevant advertising opportunity for artists who survived the Holocaust. The text of the poster was written in Yiddish (with Latin transliteration), and in Hebrew. The Yiddish title *In di hoykhe fenster* (In the High Windows) is an idiomatic term, denoting "the high society." The Hebrew translation *Mah nishmah ba-khalonot ha-gevohim?* (What is going on in the high windows?) preserves the idiomatic term, which has a similar meaning in modern Israeli Hebrew, but adds to it a question ("what is going on") and a colloquial intonation.

Israeli Yiddish theatre posters in the 1950s contained almost no drawings and were extremely modest in color, including mostly black, dark blue, and red, where only the red color bestowed a kind of picturesque atmosphere. This restraint apparently reflects the financial difficulties in Israel's first decade, which was characterized by various policies of austerity.[27] These policies affected all aspects of daily life in Israel.[28] The lack of available materials, such as high quality paper, influenced the theatre advertisements of the time: Hebrew theatre posters from the same period had similar characteristics. In fact, all the Habima posters from the 1950s had a similar minimalistic design and were printed on cheap paper. Thus, the combination of economic constraints, the post-Holocaust historical circumstances, and the concept of minimalist art created a specific language for most Yiddish theatre posters in the 1950s.

However, in contrast, the huge poster of the Dzigan and Shumacher performance (1956), with the huge smiling faces of the two legendary Yiddish artists on a red background (figure 3), gives the impression of a great public success.[29] The two appeared at the top of the poster, looking at the world from above. The bow ties of the artists emphasized their belonging to a different non-Israeli artistic reality, recalling the world of European cabaret theatre. It was certainly not *shund* as it is typically thought of, but a kind of laughter culture. The text of the poster was written in Yiddish and Hebrew, and the names of the artists in Hebrew and Latin letters. The eye-catching difference between this poster and the other ones discussed above may be related to the exclusive place of Dzigan and Shumacher in Israel: their fame in the Jewish world, their anarchist reputation, and the support they enjoyed from both the Israeli public and the Israeli press.[30] While the Goldfaden theatre appeared as a troupe of Holocaust survivors, the satirical duo of Dzigan and Shumacher, armed with the power of laughter at the whole world, amazed by their vitality and were perceived as "bombs of laughter,"[31] as powerful. This despite their personal experience in Gulag. Nonetheless, we cannot ignore the fact that the other twenty

[27] For a short description of the economic situation in the first decade of Israel, see Nahum Gross, "The Economy of Israel," in *The First Decade: 1948 - 1958*, ed. Zvi Zaneret and Hannah Yablonka (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1987), 138–50 (Hebrew).

[28] For example, see Orit Rozin, "The Austerity Policy and Rule of Law: Relations Between Government and Public in Fledging Israel," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 4, no. 3 (2005): 273–90.

[29] On the history of Dzigan and Shumacher, see Rotman, *The Stage as a Temporary Home*.

[30] Rotman, *The Stage as Temporary Home*, 157-267.

[31] Yehezkiel-Moshe Neyman, "Dzigan Ve-Shumacher: Le-Hofa'atam Ba-Areẓ (Dzigan and Shumacher: About Their Performance in Israel)," *Davar Ha-Sahavua*, June 1, 1950.

posters of Dzigan and Shumacher's Israeli shows did not differ from the regular, unpretentious and plain format.

Another engaging poster from the early 1950s advertised a humoristic show, titled in Hebrew *Erev kokhavey ha-humor* (An Evening with the Comedy Stars) (figure 4). The Yiddish title of the show was *Lebedig un lustig* (Merry and Gay). While the Hebrew title just declared that the event will be an "evening with comedy stars," the Yiddish title tried to capture the spirit of the show, using a colorful Yiddish idiom that represents joy and laughter. The program consisted of short performances by famous Israeli Yiddish performers such as Hilda Dulitzkaya[32] and Mordecai Hilsberg,[33] and artists that used to perform both in Yiddish and Hebrew, such as the comedian Maksim Zakashansky[34] and the singer Emma Tauber. Their names were written in Hebrew and Latin letters, and the title of the show in Hebrew and Yiddish. This poster also used the color red as a particular means of expressiveness. The astonishing detail is that the only figure in this poster was not any of the abovementioned stars of the Jewish and Israeli stage, but Charlie Chaplin with his usual stick, hat, and bewildered facial expression. Below Chaplin's figure, the organizers of the show wrote in Hebrew "The king of laughter," clearly presenting him as an ideal artistic source for the Yiddish light entertainment show. In fact, the organizers of the event manifested their pluralistic views, promising their audience not only an encounter with the masters of Russian and gypsy dance, but also texts in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Russian. This "quotation" of the internationally renowned character in the framework of a Yiddish theatre poster was not exclusive to this production. A poster from the Comedy Yiddish Theatre, under the direction of L. Lichtenberg and Lipman, invited the spectators to the operetta *Der galitzianer cowboy* (The Galician Cowboy, 1956). The poster was dominated by the image of a typical American cowboy with a smiling Jewish face, and indicated the genre of the production—the operetta—without mentioning the names of the composer or the script author, which was unusual for the popular performing arts.

It is hard not to notice that all the posters described above demonstrate their intercultural character and connections with different cultures—Hebrew-Israeli as well as European, American, and Russian. The situation was provoked in part by the

[32] Hilda Dulitzkaya (1892-1953) was a Yiddish theatre actress and singer, especially famous as a performer of Yiddish folk songs. She was born in Ukraine and fled from the Soviet political regime after the revolution of 1917. In the middle of the 1920s, Dulitzkaya studied in the Vienna Conservatory, and afterwards took part in many Yiddish performances throughout Europe. She came to Palestine in 1940.

[33] Mordechai Hilsberg was an experienced actor, singer, and theatre manager, born in Poland. Before coming to Israel, he appeared in a number of professional Yiddish theatres in Warsaw, Kyiv, and Wilno. He also conducted a tour of Yiddish performances in Paris, London, Russia and Argentina. In 1944 he took part in the performance "Seven Stars of the Jewish-Polish-Refugee Stage" in Palestine. In the beginning of the 1950s, Hilsberg was an actor in the Avraham Goldfaden Theatre and appeared in a number of Yiddish theatre programs in Israel.

[34] Maksim Zakashansky (1885-1952) was an Israeli actor, singer, and conferencier of light productions, specializing in cabaret performances. He started his professional career in Riga, and at the end of the 1920s came to Berlin, where he became famous as a performer of Jewish songs and in 1930 founded the literary cabaret "Lapserdak." In 1933 he arrived in Palestine and in 1934 performed a satiric show together with Ruth Klinger on the stage of the "Intimate Theatre," which they also established. In 1935 a review in the *Do'ar Ha-Yom* newspaper characterized him as the most promising comic artist in the Hebrew Palestine theatre ('Maksim Zakashansky," *Do'ar Ha-Yom*, February 19, 1935). In 1948, a festive evening in honor of his 60th anniversary was organized in the Edison Cinema in Jerusalem.

official Israeli cultural policy toward Yiddish culture in the 1950s, which gave rise to a compromise and a demand to write the title of the play not only in Yiddish, but in Hebrew as well. Likewise, poster headlines in English or Spanish stressed that the Yiddish artists were welcome not as Israelis but as guest performers from Europe, the United States, and Latin America.[35] This resulted in an intercultural effect, whereby Israeli Yiddish theatre posters served as a link between the young Israeli state and the international world community.

The Second Period: Weddings and Jubilees

The second period in the collection is the longest one. It contains posters from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. Historically, this period contains events that changed many aspects of Israeli society and culture. There were three major wars (the Six-Day War in 1967, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, and the First Lebanon War in 1982), a political change with the election of Menachem Begin to prime minister in 1977, and the first wave of immigration from the Soviet Union. Israel changed demographically and geographically. Although historically this period is extremely varied, the posters from this period show a distinct emphasis on visual language, which can be seen as one of the expressions of the beginning of the end of the negation of the Diaspora.[36]

The posters of the second period continued the use of Yiddish, Hebrew, and sometimes English verbal elements; however, their main power was in their visual images, which were connected both to the cultural atmosphere of the shtetl and to the new Israeli reality. A case in point is the poster for *Sore-sheyndl fun yehupets* (Sarah-Sheyndl from Yehupets, 1967) (figure 5), written by Joseph Lateiner, one of the first and most renowned Yiddish playwrights.[37] The image shows us typical *shtetl* residents in traditional clothes, among them a Hasid in a *shtreyml* (a fur hat worn by Hasidic men), a man in an Ashkenazi cap with a hard visor, and white goats with fluttering beards. All of them, including the goats, look like they are performing as dancers at a festive and comic dance. The goats, holding in their teeth a red theatre curtain on which the name of the performance is written, appear as representatives of pure folk theatricality. In the center of the poster, a comic, operetta-like scene takes place, whereby a young man in trendy plaid trousers and Ashkenazi cap is striving with all his being toward the young pretty woman on the right but is firmly seized by the middle-aged one on his left.

The charm of the mixture of styles and genres is complemented by the festive slogan in Hebrew letters, which displays a repeated rhyme with a comical effect: "*Yidish, khsidish, negidish un satirish*" (יידיש, חסידיש, נגידיש און סטיריש, Jewish, Hasidic, rich and satiric); at the same time, this refers to the different characters in the play and the general comical tone. The poster also explains that *Sore–sheyndl fun yehupets* is staged by the Yidisher Folks-teater and produced by Israel Vollin[38] and L. Lichtenberg. The visual language and the wording of the poster indicate a new carnivalesque self-confidence of Yiddish popular art in Israel. However, the heads of the characters seem artificially glued to their bodies, as if they are unconnected to the

[35] Diego Rotman explored this situation in the context of Dzigan's and Shamacher's artistic activities in Israel. See Rotman, *The Stage as a Temporary Home*, 145–257.
[36] Anita Shapira, *Jews, Zionists and in between* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2007), 93-110.
[37] See Zalmen Zylbercweig, "Lateyner, Yoysef," in *Leksikon fun yidishn teater* (Warsaw, 1934).
[38] Israel Vollin, one of the major figures in the world of Yiddish theatre productions in Israel, was a producer and manager of a number of Yiddish theatres during the 1960s and the 1970s.

entire portrayal. A number of elements of the poster and its theatricality remind one of Marc Chagall's visual language. This is not the only theatre poster that seems to have been influenced by Chagall. For example, the poster of *Kabtsonim zukhn glikn* (Paupers Seek Happiness, 1967) by the Goldfaden Yiddish Theatre, also produced by Vollin, presents personages that fly above the typical shtetl spaces, with low wooden buildings, fences, and even Russian Orthodox churches, all closely pressed together and looking like a replica of Chagall's world.

At the same time, many posters from this period articulate an attempt to connect to the innermost Israeli, "Sabra" culture. Some of them linked Yiddish productions to Israeli current events or celebrations that were not necessarily related to Yiddish. For example, the poster of Yidisher Yisroel Teater's production of the famous Abraham Goldfaden opera *Shulamis* (1973), starring Jenny Kesler (figure 6), announced in Hebrew that it was a celebratory production, aimed at commemorating the twenty-five-year jubilee of the State of Israel.

The connection between the content of the classic Yiddish musical play, written many years before Israel's declaration of independence, and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Jewish state is unclear. Maybe the fact that the plot of *Shulamis* occurs in ancient Palestine created the connection; perhaps the connection involved two successful productions of Goldfaden's play on the Hebrew stage (1957): one in the Do-Re-Mi Theatre, directed by Menachem Golan as a musical, and the other in the Ohel Theatre, directed by Moshe Halevi as a stylized biblical play.[39] The success of Goldfaden's play on the Israeli Hebrew stage testified to its acceptance by Israeli Hebrew speaking audiences, a consideration that producers usually took into account. Thus, the later Yiddish production refers both to the Yiddish and the Hebrew-Israeli theatre traditions. It seems this was an attempt to make the production more relevant to current Israeli reality by creating a connection between Yiddish theatre and the State of Israel.

The same strategy of connecting a Yiddish production to the twenty-five-year Israeli jubilee appears in the poster of Yidisher Yisroel Teater's production of Avrom Goldfaden's *Tsvey kuni-leml* (The Two Kuni-Lemls, 1973) (figure 7). Here the performers are dressed as typical Ashkenazi Jewish characters, taken from the imaginary shtetl. They sit inside a wagon, with Abraham Goldfaden as their *balegole* (driver). Instead of horses, the wagon is driven by two Kuni-Lemls, the main antagonistic characters of the play. Although their visual appearance is absolutely similar, their social status and views regarding Jewish life are completely different. The presentation of these two figures, as the horses who are leading the wagon and the performance, highlights the mood of comic theatricality. On the front side of the wagon, above the personages, there is a white-and-blue banner proclaiming, "*lekoved 25 yor yidish teater in Yisroel*" (in honor of 25 years of Yiddish theatre in Israel). Thus, the jubilee of the Israeli Yiddish theatre is linked to the State of Israel jubilee.

However, in the case of *Tsvey kuni-leml*, the visual elements of the poster were extremely similar to the 1966 *Der fareynikter yidisher teater*'s production of the play (figure 8). Both productions, the one from 1973 and the one from 1966, were

[39] See also Donny Inbar, "No Raisins and Almonds in the Land of Israel: A Tale of Goldfaden Productions Featuring Four Hotsmakhs, Three Kuni-Lemls, Two Shulamits, and One Messiah," in *Inventing the Modern Yiddish Stage: Essays in Drama, Performance and Show Business*, ed. Joel Berkowitz and Barbara Henry (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012), 295–320.

directed by Nathan Wolfovich.[40] The same cart with Goldfaden and others appears in the 1966 and the 1973 *Tsvey kuni-leml* posters, indicating that the Yidisher Yisroel Teater did not propose a special production for the twenty-five-year Israeli jubilee, but just used one that was already in existence and that probably happened to run until the year of the jubilee celebrations.[41] It seems that in both cases—*Shulamis* and *Tsvey kuni-leml*—the producer of the Yidisher Yisroel Teater, Israel Vollin, who frequently presented Yiddish plays revolving around weddings, chose to mention Israel's jubilee celebration as an advertising strategy in order to attract the attention of a wider audience, even if there was no tangible connection between the content of the plays and the celebrations themselves.

Another example of the attempt to connect Yiddish productions to Israeli current events can be seen in Vollin's 1970s production *Mayn mame der general* (My Mother the General) at the Yidisher Yisroel Teater (figure 9). This was a Yiddish translation of one of the most popular Israeli comedies of the 1970s, originally written in Hebrew by the Israeli writer Eli Sagi, first performed in 1970 and adapted into a movie in 1979. The comedy tells the story of a mother who visits her son at a military base in the Sinai Peninsula. *Mayn mame der general* was also performed outside of Israel and translated into German.

The Yiddish version of the play was created by the author and translator Moshe Sachar and directed by the Yiddish-speaking Israeli-Romanian director, actor, and producer Carol Feldman. *Mayn mame der general* suggests a specific phase in the history of Yiddish theatre and the complicated relationships between Yiddish and Hebrew theatre. The trigger for this phase was the same trend of advertising Yiddish theatre through its connection to the current Israeli reality; nonetheless, it symbolizes a new variant in the relationships between Yiddish and Hebrew culture. If, in the period of early Hebrew productions in the beginning of the twentieth century, the national repertoire consisted mainly of plays that were translated to Hebrew from Yiddish,[42] here we see the opposite phenomenon: a popular Israeli Hebrew play that deals with that most Israeli of subjects—the Israeli army—being translated into Yiddish.

Vollin's production was one of the first times in Israeli Yiddish theatre that a play originally written in Hebrew was translated to Yiddish. This was preceded by Efraim Kishon's short plays, which at the end of the 1950s were written in Hebrew especially for the Dzigan and Shumacher satirical shows and translated from Hebrew to Yiddish.[43] However, Vollin's production differed from Dzigan and Shumacher's case. Vollin presented a Hebrew play from the popular Hebrew theatre repertoire, which was well known to the Israeli audiences. In subsequent years, a number of notable Hebrew plays were translated to Yiddish and performed at the Yiddishpiel theatre, including texts of canonical Israeli authors such as S. Agnon (*A Simple Story*, 2002) and Ch. Levin (*Solomon Grips*, 2013).[44] Unfortunately, The Yiddish production did not achieve the success of the Hebrew original.

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[40] Nathan Wolfovich, a Polish Israeli actor (1907–1999), performed both in Yiddish and Hebrew, in theatre and films. During the 1950s he performed in the Yiddish Goldfaden Theatre, and he is best known for his satirical text against the Israeli ban on Yiddish performances.

[41] Unfortunately, there are no archival documents testifying to the full run period of the production.

[42] Levitan, "Theatre in the Land of Israel: Between Hebrew and Yiddish"; Inbar, "No Raisins and Almonds in the Land of Israel."

[43] Rotman, *The Stage as a Temporary Home*, 154.

[44] See the Yiddishpiel repertoire website: https://yiddishpiel.co.il/en/plays/.

The poster of Vollin's Yiddish production is strongly influenced by the posters of the Hebrew version of the play (figure 10). It presents the main actress, Geta Luka,[45] dressed as a mother and looking like the famous Jewish American actress, Gertrude Berg, who was famous for her *yidishe mame* character. She is holding a gun in one hand and a basket filled with food and a champagne bottle in the other. The character wears a military helmet and an eye patch, just like Moshe Dayan, the Israeli defense minister during the Six-Day War and the ultimate symbol of the Israeli army. Next to her stands the actor Hayim Banay,[46] dressed as a soldier. However, unlike the Hebrew version, which contained only two characters, in the Yiddish poster there is another soldier, performed by the director Carol Feldman. The two posters even have the same slogan, written in both cases in Hebrew: "The comedy that is making the whole country laugh." To emphasize the current Israeli context of the production, the Yiddish poster states in Yiddish that the play is "a militarishe [!] – yisroel komedye" (a military Israel comedy), insisting on the affiliation with Israeli popular culture that had arisen around the army, in which carnival laughter about military issues was one of the major components.[47]

In the poster of *Mayn mame der general* we can trace a new strategy of Vollin as a Yiddish producer in Israel. If, for the 1973 jubilee, Vollin tried to create a connection between famous Yiddish plays and the current Israeli situation, here Vollin tries to bring the Israeli Hebrew atmosphere onto the Yiddish stage through creating a Yiddish version of an Israeli hit comedy.

Another element that emerges from the Yiddish posters of the 1970s is the use of Cyrillic letters. During the 1970s, Israel experienced a large immigration wave from the Soviet Union, characterized by a highly romantic nationalism and Zionist ideology.[48] For the producers and artists in Israel who were involved with Yiddish theatre, the newcomers were a new potential target audience for their productions. After all, they hailed from some of the same areas that served as key centers of modern Yiddish culture in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century. At this moment, a variety of captions written in Cyrillic letters appeared in Yiddish theatre posters. For example, the poster for the 1976 production of the famous play *Tevye der milkhiker* (Tevye the Dairyman), adapted from stories by Sholem Aleichem, presented the title of the play as well as the name of the director and star, the Yiddish artist Zalman Koleshnikov,[49] in Hebrew, Latin, and Cyrillic letters (figure 11). The Cyrillic title of the play *Тевье Молочник* (*Tevye molochnik*) provides a direct translation of the Yiddish title *Tevye*

[45] Geta Luka (1921–2001) was an Israeli actress and singer that performed in Yiddish and Israeli theatre and cinema. She sang in the satiric Israeli theatre *Li la lo*.

[46] An Israeli actor and entertainer (1937–2008). Banay was mostly famous for playing Mizrahi characters in the Hebrew-speaking theatre and cinema.

[47] The Israeli army was one of the focal points of Israeli entertainment culture, which developed a specific humoristic language. See Liora Sioni and Eyal Ben-Ari, "Imagined Masculinity: Body, Sexuality, and Family among Israeli Military Reserves," *Symbolic Interaction* 32, no. 1 (2009): 21–43; Zipi Israeli and Elisheva Rosman-Stollman, "Men and Boys: Representations of Israeli Combat Soldiers in the Media," *Israel Studies Review* 30, no. 1 (2015): 66–85.

[48] The specific character of the Russian *aliyah* in the 1970s and its absorption into Israeli society is described in Elazar Leshem and Judith Rosenbaum, *Immigrant Absorption in Israel: Current Research* (Jerusalem: Research and Planning Division, Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, 1978). See also *Moscow Symposium: "White Book": Book II - Reports Prepared for the Symposium (Translations of Lectures) - 1977, 12/21/1976-23/1976* (1976).

[49] Zalman Kolesnikov, actor, director and producer, was born in Białystok. After the Second World War, he became a central figure of Yiddish theatre activities in Europe, Argentina, and Israel.

der milkhiker, which was also the common title of Sholem Aleichem's famous literary piece in Russian cultural tradition. Koleshnikov as Tevye reminds one of the conventional theatrical representations of this character, with a long beard and stereotypical *shtetl* clothes. He appears as the leader of the Yiddish performers group, all presented below in a line, smiling and looking surprisingly similar to contemporary personas, far from the *shtetl*-like Tevye. It is clear that the use of Cyrillic characters was aimed at attracting Russian speakers—most of them probably new immigrants—to the Yiddish production. Interestingly, the names of the other performers in the production appear only in Hebrew letters, while above their faces it is stated in Yiddish that they are "di balibte shoyshpiler" (the beloved performers).

On the whole, the visual language of the posters of this period differs from that of the previous one. Unlike the minimalism of the posters from the first period, here there are numerous joyful, smiling and dancing characters who express a love for extroverted gaiety. Their exciting acting, strengthened by the multi-lingual wording, emphasizes the theatricality effect, whose power lies in nonverbal performative action. This context also highlights the value of addressing immigrants from the Soviet Union in the posters as a potential audience. This became even more prominent in the late 1980s and the early 1990s.

The Third Period: Spektakl' na iidish [!]

The Yiddish Theatre in Israel, later known as the Yiddishpiel, was established in 1987 under the direction of the well-known Israeli stage artist, Shmulik Atzmon-Wircer. The Yiddishpiel, which is still active in the third decade of the twenty-first century, is the most long-lived Yiddish theatre establishment in Israel. It was founded and is supported by different state institutions, including the Tel Aviv municipality and the Israeli Ministry of Culture.[50] As Diego Rotman has noted, from the very beginning, Yiddishpiel did not aim to develop a new repertoire, but to preserve many elements of Yiddish theatre and culture in general, and to become a "living museum for Yiddish theatre and language."[51] As part of its preservation project, the theatre tended, especially in its early years, to perform old, familiar Yiddish plays that are considered classics. The second project of the theatre was a new production of *Di megile*, based on Itzik Manger's *Megile lider* (Megillah Songs, a poem cycle based on the biblical Book of Esther) and directed by one of the leading directors of the Hebrew theatre of the time, Shmuel Bunim. This was Bunim's second experience in directing *Di megile*. The first, staged in 1965 in the Jaffa theatre club Hammam, became the most successful Yiddish production in Israel up to that point.[52]

A comparison between the posters of the 1965 and 1988 productions reveals major differences in the representation of the play and of Yiddish culture. The Hammam poster (figure 12) displays an "Oriental" picture, with the houses representing an Eastern-style construction of stylized domes, as opposed to a European style, and a figure dressed in fancy Oriental clothes. This portrayal of the image of the city is similar to other posters of Hammam productions that were performed in Hebrew. The only crucial difference is the image of the adorned hand

[50] Rotman, "Language Politics, Memory, and Discourse," 137.
[51] Rotman, "Language Politics, Memory, and Discourse," 138.
[52] On Hammam's *Di megile*, see: Rafi Ilan, 'Nes ha-megila, 1965: hatzagat mofet be-yidish be-te'atron ha-hamam be-yafo', *Davka* 4 (2008): 44–47 (Hebrew). Rojanski, *Yiddish in Israel*, 225-249; Rotman, "Language Politics, Memory, and Discourse," 130-133.

with a pointing finger, which is used in the ritual reading of the Torah. The general visual image brings the viewer closer to the landscape, which is very much like the Israeli Mediterranean environment. It offers an idea of a non-European Jewish cultural identity, while also referring to Jaffa, where the Hammam theatre was located.

The image of the city comprises the figure of a bird, which in the imagination of a Yiddish-speaking audience relates to the fantastic wandering peacock, a typical traditional image in Yiddish culture and literature. Manger reflected this tradition in his landmark poem "Dos lid fun der goldener pave" (The Song of the Golden Peacock). The golden peacock is part of the overall picture and blends with the scenery portrayed in it. Furthermore, transferring the events of Manger's play to the local Mediterranean setting in the poster design reflects the Israelization of Yiddish culture, which surprisingly corresponds to the shift made by Manger himself, who moved the story of the Book of Esther, its characters and events, to the Jewish *shtetl*.

The 1988 Yiddishpiel poster (figure 13) reveals a completely different picture, emphasizing the Eastern European Jewish elements and practically displacing the visual elements related to the Book of Esther story. In the later poster, the picture is mostly of a large peacock, which represents Manger's poem about the golden peacock. However, unlike the small peacock that appears in the Hammam poster, the Yiddishpiel peacock takes up the central position and includes, among other things, distinctive entertainment elements: it is wearing a bowtie and dressed in a colorful, funny suit and is somewhat reminiscent of a cabaret show host. Drawn under the peacock is a Jewish violinist dressed in Eastern European clothing, which echoes motifs from Marc Chagall's paintings. The Jewish violinist is playing on the top of a wagon, which suggests a touring theatre. These images emphasize motifs related to Itzik Manger's literary world and the landscape of the Jewish *shtetl* and that correspond less to the biblical story of the Book of Esther. The poster does not necessarily emphasize the content of Manger's play, but the fact that it is a Yiddish performance.

The two visual models of *Di megile* reveal an intriguing process of seeking an Israeli identity through Yiddish theatre production. In the case of the Hammam poster, the roots of Israeli Yiddish cultural identity appear in the biblical past, while Yiddishpiel offers to find them in the *shtetl* culture.

During the late 1980s and the early 1990s, Israel experienced an extreme change in its demography. More than one million immigrants from countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union came to Israel. As had occurred after a major immigration wave in the 1970s, Israeli Yiddish actors and performers saw this latest wave of a new potential target audience. For example, the Yiddishpiel included in its productions both Hebrew and Russian subtitles. This strategy suited the complex identity of Russian Jews, who wanted to "maintain their Russian identity as well as their Jewish and Israeli identity, and they are under no pressure to discard either one."[53] It also verbalized the prevailing attitude of the new immigrants to Yiddish, who without necessarily knowing the language saw it as a symbol of Jewishness.

[53] Tamar Horowitz, "The Integration of Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union," *Israel Affairs* 11, no. 1 (2005): 120. Horowitz pointed out the necessity of a specific cultural strategy in relation to this wave of immigration, stressing the importance of flexible "scripts" instead of rigid models in Israeli absorption policy. In fact, plenty of Israeli Yiddish productions at the time appeared as relevant elements of this policy. See also Moshe Lissak and Elazar Leshem, *From Russia to Israel: Identity and Culture in Transition* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2001).

Chernin presents the Yiddish theatre activities as one of the most important areas of Yiddish culture and Jewish identity in the former Soviet Union territories.[54] Majid Al Haj pointed out that a vast majority of immigrants from the former Soviet Union defined their identity as Jewish (78%) and not Israeli.[55] The combination of this data testifies to the importance of "Jewish" elements and motives such as the Yiddish theatre for the Russian Jewish immigrant society, regardless of their actual knowledge of the language.

It is important to clarify the dissimilarity between the post-Soviet immigrants in the 1990s and the Russian wave of immigrants in the 1970s, which is expressed in the less Zionist character of the former. While the wave of the 1970s was shaped by the so-called "Russian neo-Zionism,"[56] the post-Soviet Russian-speaking wave of the 1990s identified itself as a subcultural, and to some extent multilingual, group.[57] This was accompanied by a Yiddish cultural renaissance in the post-Soviet territories[58] and in Israel.[59]

Targeting Yiddish entertainment productions to the new immigrants from the former Soviet Union was also a common strategy within smaller Yiddish theatre ensembles. These ensembles rushed to address their new target audiences through posters, inviting the newcomers to join the Israeli world through Yiddish performance. Most of the posters are characterized by commercial designs simply meant to sell, usually without any attempt at artistic expressiveness. The most impressive element in these posters is the use of different languages. The posters include information written in Hebrew, Latin, and Cyrillic letters. However, many times there are significant differences between the different languages concerning what exactly is being presented. One typical example is the poster for *A kale oyf probe* (A Practice Bride) (figure 14), a production of the *Yidisher muzikalisher komedye teater*. As in many other cases, the name of the play's author did not appear on the poster.[60]

The poster includes texts in Hebrew, Yiddish (with transliteration to Latin letters), English, and Russian. However, the text in each language offers different textual details. The title of the play, *A kale oyf probe*, is translated into Hebrew as *Kala le-nisayon be-yidish* (A Practice Bride in Yiddish), where the word "Yiddish"

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[54] Velvl Chernin, "Spiritual Potential of the Communal Revival: Yiddish Culture and Postsoviet Jewry," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 14, no. 1-2 (2002): 103-132.

[55] Maljid Al Haj, "Identity Patterns among Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union in Israel: Assimilation vs. Ethnic Formation," *International Migration* 40, no. 2 (2002): 56.

[56] Jehoshua A. Gilboa, *The Black Years of Soviet Jewry* (Boston: Little Brown, 1972).

[57] Ze'ev Khanin, "Russian-Jewish Ethnicity: Israel and Russia Compared," in *Contemporary Jewries: Convergence and Divergence*, ed. by E. Ben-Raphael, Y. Gorny, and Y. Roi (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 216–34.

[58] See Victoria Mochalova, "Jewish Studies in Russia in the Post-Communist Era," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 3 (2011): 119-133; Irina Kopchanova, "Academic Jewish Studies and Secular Jewish Identity in Post-Soviet Russia and the FSU," in *Formal and Informal Jewish Education: Lessons and Challenges in Israel and in the Diaspora*, ed. by L. Remennick (Tel Aviv: Bar Ilan University, 2012-2013).

[59] Leonard Prager, "Yiddish Studies in Israel Face the Twenty-First Century," *La Rassegna Mensile Di Israel* 62, no.1-2 (1996): 451–64.

[60] An attempt to date the performance revealed that Zvi Goldberg, the leader of *the Yidisher muzikalisher komedye teater*, performed this play in 1995 together with another Yiddish ensemble called *Di freylekhe bande*, which he established in the second half of the 1990s and existed until the early 2000s. The name *Yidisher muzikalisher komedye teater* appears only on the discussed poster, which allows us to assume that it presents an earlier version of the production.

had been added to the original title. The Russian text does not present the name of the play at all; instead, it states, *Spektakl' na iidish* (A Performance in Yiddish). Strangely, the word иидиш in Cyrillic is written as a transliteration of the Yiddish writing and not according to the proper way of writing in Russian (идиш).

Examining the relationships between the various languages in the poster reveals that Zvi Goldberg and his ensemble tried to address Russian and Hebrew speakers as potential audiences. However, it was clear to him that the Hebrew- and Russian-speaking spectators would come to the performance not because of the play itself, but due to the fact that the production was in Yiddish and performed by Yiddish actors.

As in the earlier productions, we can also trace in the Yiddish productions of the 1990s references to specific events in the history of Israel, which may have been relevant to the target audience of the shows. An example of this phenomenon is the poster of the *Undzer nayer teater*'s production from 1993, *Di mizinke oysgegebn* (The Youngest Daughter Married Off), starring the Yiddish performers Carol and Betty Feldman (figure 15). In this poster, we can see a clear reference to the historical waves of immigration to Israel in the same period. The title of the production, taken from an iconic Yiddish song, is written in Hebrew, Cyrillic, and Latin letters; it is not translated into any other language. The poster contains a short text written in Yiddish and Hebrew that refers to both the Jewish newcomers to Israel and veteran Israelis:

> A new entertainment program!
> Contemporary! For the ʻolim and the ʻaliyah!
> For the veterans, for the parents and the children!
> For the entire nation! In happy times only!

Although the short text does not appear in Russian, it is clear that the producers of the show saw the immigrants from the former Soviet Union as a potential audience for their Yiddish production and stated that their program referred to the current experiences of the new immigrants. From the text in the poster, it seems that the artists tried to strengthen the connections between the new and old immigrants: the citizens of Israel are called "veterans," meaning that they were also immigrants, but ones who happened to come earlier. Moreover, the poster also refers to the "entire nation," emphasizing that the new and old-time immigrants are all part of one big family.

Although the poster clearly refers to Israeli current events, its graphic contains an image from the old European Jewish world: a drawing of a klezmer band, though in white and blue, the colors of the Israeli flag. A rose on the right side of the production's title reminds one of the visual images of popular greeting cards.

Another reference to a historical event can be found in the posters of Carol and Betty Feldman's 1998 entertainment program *Freyd fun 50 yor yidish* (Joy From 50 Years of Yiddish), which was dedicated to the fiftieth anniversary of the State of Israel (figure 16). The production contained short performances of different artists, which changed from show to show. Besides elderly Israeli Yiddish performers, such as Nathan Hekht,[61] and of course Carol and Betty Feldman themselves, the cast included performers who immigrated to Israel in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Among them were the Reifer Sisters, twins who immigrated to Israel from Poland in the late 1980s and performed popular Yiddish, Polish, and

[61] An Israel actor who performed in both Hebrew and Yiddish, including in the Yiddishpiel.

Russian songs, and Valeri and Svetlana Izekson, two salon dancers that immigrated to Israel in the early 1990s and appeared in different productions of Carol and Betty Feldman. In the case of the Izekson couple, it is not clear how, if at all, their salon dances were connected to Yiddish entertainment.

Once again, the poster presents a combination of the colors of the Israeli flag and an illustration that contains references to Eastern European Jewish imagery: two Hasidic figures that unexpectedly bear a slight resemblance to two theatre masks. The poster for the production at the Theatre Mofet in Ramat Gan, written only in Hebrew, declares that the production is part of a series of special events dedicated to the fifty-year jubilee of Israel. Unlike the aforementioned productions dedicated to the twenty-five-year jubilee of *Shulamis* and *Tsvey kuni-leml*, the current one is not presented as a Yiddish production that was almost accidentally performed during the jubilee year, but as a special event, dedicated to the jubilee celebration.

The title of the event suggests a surprising connection between Yiddish and the State of Israel. In fact, the celebration of the fifty-year jubilee of Israel was also the celebration of fifty years of Yiddish culture in Israel. The production by Carol and Betty Feldman declared the existence of a deep connection between the history of the Yiddish language and the culture and history of Israel as an independent country. Yiddish here is an inseparable part of the Jewish state.

It is useful to close the discussion of the third period with the idiom *Di yidn kumen*, which returned in the poster of the Di naye yidishe bine theatre group (1991), led by the aforementioned Zvi Goldberg. The poster advertised a new "freylekher muzikalisher spektakl" (cheerful musical show) titled *Yidn kumen!.. yidn kumem!..* (Jews are coming! Jews are coming!) (figure 17). The title of the production was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Cyrillic letters, all of them suggesting a transliteration of the Yiddish title, without translating it. The red-colored poster highlights the photos of the three main stars, Alexander Yahalomi, Dorothea Livio, and Goldberg himself. The background of the poster presents a caricature of an extremely long line of people with suitcases, women and men, young and old—a clear reference to the great immigration from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s. Thus, surprisingly, the parachute-like *Yidn* from the *Shpilkes* 1967 production are replaced in the 1990s by the wandering *yidn*, a long line of new *olim* waiting to get into the land of Israel, to watch an entertaining Yiddish performance, and become Israelis.

Conclusion

Israeli Yiddish theatre posters allow an exploration of the role of Yiddish theatre in Israel as an intercultural agent inside and outside Israel, distinctly important for the formation of contemporary Jewish and Israeli identity. Examining the posters of Yiddish light entertainment shows in Israel from the 1950s to the late 1990s reveals the complicated relationships between the Yiddish entertainment market in Israel and the social conditions in Israel. Especially interesting in this context are the changes that took place in the visual language of the posters and their contents during the three periods under examination here. This includes the surprising move from an international and intercultural emphasis, which characterized the Yiddish theatre posters in the first years of the Israeli state, through quoting the *shtetl* image, to the manifestation of Israeli patriotism in Yiddish theatre in later decades. The dual reality of Yiddish theatre, as presented in the discussed posters, testifies to the development of two important tendencies: overcoming the outsider character of

Yiddish culture in Israel and the incorporation of the traditional Yiddish world into Israeli reality. The noticeable multilingual character of the 1990s posters, connected to the immigration wave from the former Soviet Union, marked a return to the intercultural roots of Israeli Yiddish theatre and its nomadic features. However, this time the intercultural features of the posters emphasized the Israeli character of the Yiddish theatre instead of the international ones. In these posters, the Yiddish theatre was presented as a tool for the absorption of the newcomers.

The popular culture of entertainment represented in the discussed posters is revealed as a social instrument, active in the absorption processes of both spectators and artists from the new-immigrant community. The Yiddish productions served as an artistic and support framework for the artists who repatriated to Israel in different periods of its history. In a variety of situations, light entertainment components of the posters appeared as the representatives of an unofficial culture that refused to be serious and provided vital energy to everyday life. Although the posters presented in this article were naturally aimed mostly at what may be perceived as a relatively small cadre of Yiddish speakers, it is interesting to explore the multifunctional character of Yiddish culture as expressed in these posters: it served as an instrument of connection to the Jewish *shtetl* past, to present-day Israeli history and the waves of repatriation, and to the worldwide character of Jewish culture.