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How Eastern European Jewish immigrants, modernist Yiddish culture, and anti-fascist politics dragged the Netherlands into the twentieth century

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ABSTRACT

My essay examines Yiddish-speaking immigrants in the Netherlands between the two world wars with a focus on Amsterdam, the Jewish center of the country. The Netherlands was never a major recipient of migrants of any kind, let alone Eastern European Jewish immigrants. Despite seeing the Netherlands primarily as a transit site, enough Yiddish-speakers stayed – either due to finding work in the country or because they failed to get entry papers to other countries – that they formed a visible presence in Amsterdam, The Hague, Scheveningen, and other cities across the country. Due to its small size and unstable immigrant population – since most immigrants did not plan on settling in Amsterdam – this community remained on the periphery of the global interwar Yiddish-speaking map. I argue that by being on the margins of the global Yiddish community Amsterdam’s left-wing Yiddish-speaking community, organized around the Ansky Society, remained above the sharp politicized polemics that drove a wedge between communists and non-communist leftists in other Yiddish cultural centers not located in the Soviet Union. (There, the Communist Party’s Evsektiia had long ago ended public internecine debates.) I also show that Yiddish-speaking immigrants affected Dutch culture more generally. Because it operated in Yiddish, the Ansky Society was perceived to be marginal in the Netherlands. That marginalization allowed its members the political space (on the margins of both Dutch society and the global Yiddish-speaking diaspora) to advocate for international political positions that in any Dutch-language institution, Jewish or not, would have been considered too radical in a political culture that avoided extremes of any kind. The Ansky Society nonetheless served as the Netherlands’ outspoken voice against the rise of fascism in all of its 1930s manifestations. Unlike the mainstream Dutch Jewish community, members of which enfranchised citizens and therefore deeply implicated in party politics and questions of loyalty, the Ansky Society had no such fears, because most of its members lacked citizenship. They were beyond (or perhaps beneath) questions of loyalty. Finally, the Ansky Society also publicly criticized the Dutch government’s complacency in the face of fascism spreading across Europe. In other words, Amsterdam’s Yiddish-speaking community in the interwar period was doubly marginalized – from global Yiddish culture and from Dutch politics – and was therefore politically empowered.

KEYWORDS

Yiddish; cabaret; immigration; theater; culture; The Netherlands
On August 23, 1939, one week before the German invasion of Poland, the foreign ministers of the Soviet Union and Germany, Vyacheslav Molotov and Joachim von Ribbentrop, signed a non-aggression pact that would profoundly change the world. Seven months later, on March 8, 1940, far from the battlefields of World War II, Amsterdam’s pan-political Yiddish culture organization, the Sh. Ansky Society, ruptured into two competing institutions. The rupture happened not because Germany had invaded Poland, but because of the pact that gave Hitler the green light to do so. The Ansky Society became a group for Communist Party members, who supported Stalin and the pact with Hitler. The new I.L. Perets Society was for all of those Amsterdam-based Yiddish-speaking immigrants who wanted to denounce the pact publicly. Two months later, as war raged around the Netherlands, which was ever neutral and always hopeful of avoiding conflict, on May 10, 1940, the German military invaded the country, ending both the Ansky and Perets Societies, along with all other independent Jewish organizations.

My essay examines Yiddish-speaking immigrants in the Netherlands between the two world wars with a focus on Amsterdam, the Jewish center of the country and home to the Ansky Society. The Netherlands was never a major recipient of migrants of any kind, let alone Eastern European Jewish immigrants, who preferred major cities in industrializing countries like New York in the US, Paris in France, or Buenos Aires in Argentina. If anything, the Netherlands was a country of emigration in the period before World War II. Although many Yiddish-speakers passed through Dutch ports on their way west, few of them ended up settling there. The interwar period saw the ongoing migration of hundreds of thousands of Yiddish-speakers, first from Eastern Europe to points west and south, and in the 1930s from other parts of Europe, including authoritarian Hungary and Nazi Germany, to places not as well known as sites of immigration like the Dominican Republic and Cuba. As Frank Wolff has shown, despite the 1924 restrictions in United States immigration policies, the same number of Yiddish-speakers were on the move as before the restrictions were put in place. They just ended up in different places. Despite seeing the Netherlands primarily as a transit site, enough Yiddish-speakers stayed – either due to finding work in the country or because they failed to get entry papers to other countries – that they formed a visible presence in Amsterdam, The Hague, Scheveningen, and other cities across the country.

Unlike interwar Yiddish-speaking communities in Warsaw, New York, Paris, Moscow, and Buenos Aires, Amsterdam’s Yiddish-speakers never established a permanent Yiddish theater or a Yiddish daily newspaper, cultural institutions that marked an immigrant community as rooted in a particular place. It did, however, establish the Ansky Society, which had a well-known drama group, and a small but important library made up of books donated by its members, and ultimately served as a place for immigrant social and cultural community. The Ansky Society also started a small hectograph called Friling (Springtime), better thought of as a newsletter, rather than a newspaper, for the society’s members. In addition, in 1931, due to their increasing numbers and political diversity, Eastern European Jews in Amsterdam established Het Oost-Joodsch Verbond (The Eastern [European] Jewish Union), which maintained a broader political mandate than did Ansky’s pan-leftist orientation.

 Nonetheless, due to its small size and unstable immigrant population – since most immigrants did not plan on settling in Amsterdam – this community remained on the
periphery of the global interwar Yiddish-speaking map. I argue that, by being on the margins of the global Yiddish community, Amsterdam’s left-wing Yiddish-speaking community, organized around the Ansky Society, managed to remain above the sharp politicized polemics that drove a wedge between communists and other leftists in those Yiddish cultural centers not located in the Soviet Union. (There, the Communist Party’s Evsektsiia had long ago ended public internecine debates.) Being on the margins allowed Amsterdam’s Yiddish community to choose its own newspapers, bring in theater troupes that met the needs of the community at a given moment, and have the political space to remain unified through culture when other Yiddish-speaking communities were going through what Matthew Hoffman calls the “Red Divide,” the public, angry debates happening between communist Jews and other Jewish immigrant political groups.7

One would be forgiven for asking, then, if the community had such a small communal infrastructure, why study Amsterdam’s immigrant Yiddish-speaking community? Scholarship on Yiddish culture has generally ignored the Yiddish-speaking community in the Netherlands. When these immigrants do appear, it is in scholarship on Dutch Jews, and there they are presented as a thorn in the side of the established Dutch Jewish community. Their presence marred the community’s prewar self-image as deeply integrated into Dutch society, not an unfamiliar story in other parts of Europe. Despite the consensus that Dutch-speaking and Yiddish-speaking Jews in the Netherlands had little in common except mutual suspicion, I will show that the Yiddish-speaking immigrants through the Ansky Society in fact connected with and shaped Dutch Jewish society.

I will go even further and suggest that Yiddish-speaking immigrants affected Dutch culture more generally. Because it operated in Yiddish, the Ansky Society was perceived to be marginal in the Netherlands. That marginalization gave its members the political space (on the margins of both Dutch society and the global Yiddish-speaking diaspora) to advocate for international political positions that in any Dutch-language institution, Jewish or not, would have been considered too radical in a political culture that avoided extremes of any kind. In addition, because Yiddish-speakers in Amsterdam were part of an interwar global Yiddish community that was tied together through newspapers, travelling theaters, writers, and other forms of mobile culture, they brought to the Netherlands radical and modernist culture unlike anything the Netherlands had seen before.

There is one other reason for the Ansky Society’s ability to be politically active and culturally edgy without being affiliated with any one political party. Its Yiddish-speaking members were generally not citizens, and, as non-citizens, according to Dutch law, these Eastern European Jewish immigrants were not allowed to be involved in party politics.8 The Ansky Society nonetheless served as the Netherlands’ outspoken voice against the rise of fascism in all of its 1930s manifestations. Unlike the mainstream Dutch Jewish community, who were enfranchised citizens and therefore deeply implicated in party politics and questions of loyalty, the Ansky Society had no such fears. They were beyond (or perhaps beneath) questions of loyalty. Finally, the Ansky Society also publicly criticized the Dutch government’s complacency in the face of fascism spreading across Europe. In other words, Amsterdam’s Yiddish-speaking community in the interwar period was doubly marginalized – from global Yiddish culture and Dutch politics – and was therefore politically empowered.
Although it had been nearly 250 years since Amsterdam gave birth to the modern Yiddish press, Yiddish as a vernacular Jewish language had mostly been lost to Dutch Jewry, with only echoes remaining in the way Amsterdam Jews speak Dutch and the common Dutch name for Amsterdam – Mokum. As Bart Wallet, one of the leading historians of Dutch Jewry, has shown, the first half of the nineteenth century saw the relatively rapid transformation of the Dutch Ashkenazi Jewish community from Yiddish- to Dutch-speaking through the concerted efforts of Dutch state leaders and the heads of the Hoofdcommissie (Main Commission), nineteenth-century Jewry’s central institution. The modern Dutch-language Jewish press in the form of its weekly newspaper, *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad* (New Israelite Weekly – *NIW*), was founded in 1865 making it the Netherlands’ central Jewish newspaper and the country’s oldest continuously operating consumer newspaper. Through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, the newspaper referred to the Yiddish language alternatively as “jargon” or “Jewish German” and in general had a negative attitude to its use among Dutch Jews. For example, in 1866, *NIW* condemned D.E. Sluis’s use of Yiddish in his eulogy at the funeral of the well-known Jewish physician and city planner Samuel Sarphati: “We must strongly condemn the use of jargon in sermons in the synagogue by someone who now has proven himself to have mastered our language very well.” By the early twentieth century, *NIW* was using the word “Yiddish” more frequently and referred to it in the context of Eastern European, mostly Yiddish-speaking Jewish migrants passing through the Netherlands to other shores. This was, after all, the way most Yiddish-speaking immigrants experienced the country, thus always leaving in doubt the very idea of a Yiddish-speaking community there.

At the same time, the native-born, now Dutch-speaking Jewish community had itself been attempting to integrate into a modernizing Dutch society structured on four primary social “pillars” or zuillen – two defined by religion – Calvinist and Catholic – and two by political orientation – socialist and liberal. These pillars moderated Dutch political culture by giving it a clear structure, but as a group with distinct political interests Jews were outside the pillars of Dutch society. This may have been one reason for Dutch Jews’ belief that they had successfully integrated – they did not structurally exist. As Salvador Bloemgarten and Philo Bregstein write about their self-perception, “The [Dutch] Jews deemed themselves safe and secure in the complacent isolation of the Netherlands, which had not been involved in any wars for over a century,” the country having remained neutral during World War I. One could say the same thing about Dutch society in general.

From a global Jewish perspective, Dutch Jews were seen as one of the most integrated European Jewish populations, which meant that they were perceived to show a deep lack of interest in the fate of global Jewry. In the semi-autobiographical travelogue of his trip from the United States to his birthplace in Poland, *When Yash Left* (*Ven Yash iz geforn*), Yankev Glatshteyn writes about his fictionalized encounter with a Dutch Jew on a ship heading from New York to Europe. After the unnamed Dutch Jew boasts to the Polish Jew of his Dutch, not Jewish, identity, Yash asks incredulously, “What keeps them connected to the Jewish people [Mit vos zenen zey tsugebundn tsum idishn kkl]?” To which the Dutch Jew proudly proclaims, “Nothing ... Dutch Jews are an entity unto themselves [Mit gornisht – di holendishe idn zenen epes a dershaynung far zikh].” Yash continues,
No less than their Christian neighbors, Dutch Jews detested the Polish Jews in their midst. With their long scraggly beards, the Polish Jews who shuffled about the streets of Amsterdam in their ridiculous garb were an embarrassment to the Dutch Jews… The Polish Jews were doing great harm to their Dutch coreligionists, and their presence was a slap in the face.

[Di holendishe yidn hobn faynt poylishe idn, nisht veniker fun di kristn. Ven di poylishe idn shlumpern zikh arum af di amsterdamer gasn mit zeyer lekherlakhn poylish-idishn trakhtn un mit zeyere lange koltenevate berd, iz es a shande far di kristn, velkhe zenen tolerant un geduldik… Di poylishe idn tuen di idn in holand a sakh shodn. Zey farpatshn zei dos ponim.]

An American Joint Distribution Committee report from 1936 “confirmed” that Yiddish-speaking Jews were indeed stirring up antisemitism in the Netherlands, as they sold materials to impoverished Dutch miners in the east of the country at “usurious” prices. In the end, however, as Yash himself points out, National Socialist politics, which came to power in Germany in 1933, flattened any perceived differences among Jews: “When we look at ourselves in the new Teutonic mirror, you [the Dutch Jew] and I, the Polish-American Jew, are equally non-Aryan [Ir un ikh, der amerikanish-poylisher id, ven mir kukan zikh on in dem nayem tevtonishn shpigl, zenen mir glaykhe nisht arier].”

Yiddish-speaking Jews arrived in Amsterdam as early as 1881 with the first great wave of emigration from Eastern Europe. Unlike Germany, which became home to many Yiddish-speaking immigrants, especially in places like Berlin, most Eastern European Jews saw the Netherlands as a weigh-station. Dutch Jews therefore saw Yiddish-speaking migrants as those in need of assistance to reach their final destinations, not as potential community members. Estimates are that although tens of thousands of them passed through the country, only about 1000 Eastern European Jews settled in Amsterdam between 1881 and 1914. During World War I, when Belgium expelled many Yiddish-speaking Jews as “enemy aliens” from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with which it was at war, quite a few ended up across the border in the neutral Netherlands, not to mention that Belgium had made it illegal for them to own businesses, leaving them destitute. The end of World War I meant that they could return. Some chose to stay in the Netherlands, and more and more Yiddish-speakers ended up settling in Amsterdam, as much of post-1918 Europe was in disarray.

These two waves of Yiddish-speaking Jews maintained a social and political life distinct from that of native-born Dutch Jews. That’s what immigrants do, and in this case, they did so because they found Dutch Jewish cultural life sorely lacking. This desire to establish a Yiddish-language cultural community has come down in both history and memory as a response to a mutual hostility between Dutch- and Yiddish-speaking Jews. As an unpublished history of the Ansky Society describes the situation, “a foreignness between the [newly arrived Eastern European Jewish worker] and the Dutch Jew” reigned. Or in Yiddish-speaking immigrant David Mindlin’s recollection, “There was a Yiddish society here called Sh-Anski that organized parties that only Yiddish people went to.”

Scholar of Yiddish culture and Dutch Jewry Shlomo Berger has argued, “The attempt to maintain native East European traditions is linked to the negative approach of the ‘rooted’ Dutch Jewish population towards Jewish immigrants.” He describes Dutch Jewry’s isolationist relationship to global Jewry by citing the Glatshteyn story described above: “Of all the points Glatshteyn makes, there are two which are an apt reflection of the local Dutch Jewry: the myth of uniqueness and the feeling of isolationism … A Dutch Jew does not
share the fate of other Jews and certainly not the fate of East European Jews. The ideal of the Dutch Jew is to melt into Dutch society, and East European Jews, who wished to keep native traditions, Zionists – or, for that matter, Hitler – were hindrances that had to be removed.” Berger then weighs in on its organization: “Since the An-sky Society members chose to conduct their activities in Yiddish, they ruled themselves out of the local community framework.”

Indeed, new immigrants sought out a Jewish cultural environment that wasn’t to be found on the streets of Amsterdam, which led them to establish the Ansky Society in summer 1921. M. Levenzon and eight young Yiddish-speaking immigrants, seven men and one woman, had the idea of building a community around culture, rather than politics, in a country where formal political activity among non-citizens was illegal. This membership-driven organization was both explicitly political, as it would come to be one of the loudest Dutch voices protesting Nazism, but simultaneously against affiliating with any political party. To be as clear as possible, the Ansky Society’s charter proclaimed, “this group exists beyond every political movement.” This may have been a purely practical tactic to maintain a big tent Yiddish organization in order to sustain its numbers, given the small size of the Amsterdam Yiddish-speaking community. Nonetheless, it would prove to be an important philosophy to maintain as European politics became more polarized.

As for the name of the organization, Sh. An-sky, ethnographer, playwright, and community activist (and the pseudonym of Shloyme Zaynvil Rapoport), had died less than a year earlier, in November 1920 in Warsaw, trying to establish the Warsaw Jewish Ethnographic Society. Near the end of his life, while in Vilna, An-sky insisted on using the opportunities that presented themselves in the wake of Tsar Nicholas II’s abdication to create a broad, liberal Jewish polity and a progressive, open Jewish culture. As Cecile Kuznitz shows, An-sky established the first democratically elected kehilah (Jewish communal authority) and insisted that all Jewish communal notices be published in both Yiddish and Hebrew. Itsik Gottesman describes An-sky’s relationship to party politics and the ethnographic society he founded: “At An-sky’s urging the organization was apolitical, and the board included Jews of all political persuasions.” In the wake of his death, in November 1920, many organizations adopted the name “Ansky,” most notably the Vilna Jewish Historical–Ethnographic Society, as a way of signaling a big tent approach to politics and culture. Although the Dutch Yiddish organization became deeply political, if by “political” we mean publicly advocating for changes in government policy, Amsterdam’s Yiddish community adopted Ansky’s name as an homage to a Yiddish cultural organization beyond party politics.

To launch the Ansky Society, the founders recognized the need to collaborate with locals, at the very least to supply a place for the group to hold events. They approached a furniture-making syndicate’s sympathetic secretary, who offered space for the society’s gatherings. The group began holding meetings there in summer 1921, and to emphasize the fact that the group was not affiliated with any political party the NIW’s first article about it was titled “Jewish Literary Circle.” One year later, in its “Letters from Readers” column, one unnamed writer waxed poetic about the Ansky Society’s cultural contribution to the life of Amsterdam: “Every culture is good and beautiful, and all cultures together are like a beautiful garden with a wonderful variety of colors and fragrant flowers which harmonize together [iedere cultuur is goed en mooi en alle cultuur tezamen is als een mooie tuin met
een heerlijke verscheidenheid van kleuren en geurende bloemen, die tezamen harmonieeren].”

The organization’s own history describes Ansky as “a Jewish cultural island,” which shared Amsterdam’s cultural landscape with other linguistically defined subcultures. These included Frisian cultural associations, which represented the most visible ethnic minority of the country, along with French-language cultural groups clustered around the Alliance Française and the Walloon Church (Église Wallone). Although Yiddish echoed with the sounds of the Netherlands’ distant Jewish past, in the 1920s and 1930s Eastern European immigrants were bringing Yiddish culture to the Netherlands seemingly ad novum. Unlike Frisian and French, Yiddish was not considered indigenous to the area.

But if that island in Amsterdam stood out as a foreign import among subcultures, it was also part of a global Yiddish cultural archipelago. Because of the institutionalization of Amsterdam’s Yiddish-speaking immigrant community in its Ansky Society, the city, as well as all of the Netherlands, was included on the interwar global Jewish touring circuit of Yiddish singers, writers, theater troupes, and other forms of mobile culture that bound together a transnational Yiddish-speaking community. Wherever interwar travelling Yiddish culture appeared publicly – whether in Berlin, Paris, London, or Amsterdam – its presence created a stir among local culture-makers, both Jewish and not. Despite the fact that the productions themselves, as well as the framing language of the event, took place in Yiddish, Dutch Jews as well as the non-Jewish Dutch intelligentsia showed deep interest in much of what the Ansky Society brought to town. Moreover, the fact that traveling Yiddish culture included the Netherlands on its tours suggests that the country’s Yiddish-speaking community had become institutionalized enough that theater and concert producers thought they would sell enough tickets to make the performances in question financially worth their while.

In June–July 1922, less than one year after the Ansky Society’s founding, the Vilna Troupe, considered the premiere Yiddish theater in Europe if not the world, brought 15 actors on a tour of The Hague and Amsterdam. This wasn’t the first time Dutch readers had encountered news of the Vilna Troupe. The 1921 Berlin production of its most famous play, An-sky’s The Dybbuk, at the Vilna Troupe’s temporary home at Theater in der Kommandantenstrasse had also been covered in Het Vaderland (The Fatherland), the country’s centrist–liberal newspaper. The newspaper noted in particular the “pure Yiddish, which is still spoken by hundreds of thousands in Eastern Europe.” Anticipation was high, then, when the Jüdisches Kunsttheater, the Berlin-based Vilna Troupe’s official name, came to the Netherlands one year later on its first Western European tour. As Debra Caplan points out, unlike in Berlin, where a German-speaking audience of both Jews and non-Jews could follow the Yiddish dialogue, this inaugural tour to Western Europe, which included England, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, was the first time the Vilna Troupe would be performing to audiences in which some members had no linguistic connection to Yiddish. In other words, the Vilna Troupe’s visual aspects – its lighting, costuming, and staging – along with the actors’ performances had to supersede the dialogue. The Ansky Society recorded the troupe’s visit in its minutes, making special note of its director Dovid Herman, who had become the most well-known figure associated with the troupe. According to its unpublished history, the Ansky Society’s Drama Troupe also participated in the Vilna Troupe’s show, a common practice when traveling Yiddish theater came to town.
Although it put on eight different shows from its repertoire, including Dovid Pinsky’s *Yankel the Blacksmith* (*Yankl der shmid*), it was the Troupe’s production of *The Dybbuk* which, as scholar and onetime member of the Ansky Society Leo (Leyb) Fuks reminds us, “became famous across Holland.” In The Hague, the Vilna Troupe put on its inspired production of Ansky’s play at the Princesse Schouwburg to a standing-room-only crowd made up of Jews and non-Jews alike. That theater – run by the German Jewish theater manager Hugo Helm, who had gained his experience in Berlin’s cabaret scene – was a film and play house that hosted many of The Hague’s cutting-edge productions. The run was such a success that the troupe put on an extra performance of *The Dybbuk* in The Hague on a Monday, often a dark night for the theater.

The success of the Vilna Troupe in the Netherlands should not have been a surprise to anyone familiar with its reputation in cities that had Yiddish-speaking communities. (It clearly wasn’t a surprise to Helm.) A Vilna Troupe production in one’s city often created a community beyond the Yiddish-speakers who were its core audience. The Troupe, which had launched the Yiddish art theater movement under the influence of Konstantin Stanislavsky back in 1916, generated a broad-based community around its avant-garde aesthetics that few other Yiddish cultural phenomena could garner. Caplan writes, “In London, every theatre in the city shut down for the Vilna Troupe’s opening night so that their actors could learn from the visiting Yiddish players who had attracted international acclaim.” Their productions in the Netherlands, which took place before the troupe’s first venture to the United States in 1924, were covered by all of the major Dutch press, including advertisements and reviews in *Het Vaderland*.

For the small Yiddish-speaking community in the Netherlands clustered around the Ansky Society, the visit was a symbol of Jewish national pride for a community normally on the margins of Dutch society. Now, Yiddish culture was being reviewed in the mainstream Dutch press. Because there was no Yiddish newspaper in the Netherlands (the closest ones were in Antwerp and Paris), I do not have access to the Yiddish community’s response to the Vilna Troupe’s Dutch visit. But as an Antwerp-based Yiddish theater critic wrote in the city’s Yiddish newspaper, *Yidishe prese*:

> You walk into a Yiddish theater. And yet one has the impression, one hundred percent, that you are sitting in a real theater – in a European theater that is Jewish, in a Jewish theater that is European. Here you are sitting in a theater where your face does not burn from shame but only from excitement. This is a Yiddish theater where we can open the doors wide and invite in cultured people, Jewish or non-Jewish. For we have nothing for which to be ashamed. We can be proud of this.

The 1922 visit was so financially successful that Helm brought the Vilna Troupe and *The Dybbuk* back one year later, this time for a three-city tour to The Hague, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam. Given the success of the previous year, its local impresario booked some of the most important venues in each city – the Koninklijke Schouwburg in The Hague, the Schouwburg in Rotterdam, and the Stadsschouwburg in Amsterdam. Although Helm organized the Vilna Troupe’s tour, it was the Ansky Society’s presence in the Netherlands that made a visit a potential financial success in the first place.

The Ansky Society’s precarious nature led it to close for two years, from 1925 through 1926, because “its community either assimilated into Dutch culture or left for other countries.” Key figures in the Society’s early years returned to Belgium and Paris,
respectively, after the end of World War I. At the same time, new migrants arrived in Amsterdam from Poland and Galicia, and the society started up again.

Although some touring performances and visits from writers were only of interest to the immigrant community, in 1927 and 1928 the Yiddish-speaking community pulled off two cultural coups that brought them even more attention from Dutch society, both Jewish and not. Again under the auspices of Helm, the famous Moscow Hebrew-language Habima theater, a theater troupe whose name was presented to Dutch readers in German (Moskauer Hebräisches Künstlertheater Habima), included the Netherlands on its last European tour from Moscow before going into exile in British Mandate Palestine.

The Dutch press celebrated the visit and included in the Algemeen Handelsblad and De Telegraaf photographs of several characters who would appear in Habima’s signature production – once again The Dybbuk. Since its productions were in Hebrew, there was little chance anyone in the audience would understand the dialogue. Therefore, to earn the acclaim it had already achieved beyond a tiny Hebrew-speaking audience, it relied on the theatricality of its presentation, for which it was widely known. Habima performed in Rotterdam, Utrecht, The Hague, and Amsterdam in November 1927 to admiring audiences, including Crown Princess Juliana, a royal appearance that made it into the society’s spotty records of its 1920s highlights as well as the pages of several newspapers.

Moscow was important not only as the global capital of communism but also as a center of international modernist culture and theater. Therefore, a second Moscow-based Jewish theater company came to the Netherlands. In late August 1928 the Moscow State Jewish Theater (GOSET) – that is, the Soviet Union’s state-sponsored Jewish theater – came to the Netherlands for the first time. A Yiddish theater actor, Boris Abramov, coordinated GOSET’s visit to Belgium and the Netherlands. Abramov was originally from Bessarabia, but he had settled in Brussels and gotten involved in the business of serving as a theater impresario in his new home.

The Dutch press generally referred to GOSET as the “Moscow Academic Jewish Theater,” as the theater had been referred to on its 1928 European tour. And, like earlier reporting on Jewish theaters, the press generally used the German “Moskauer Akademisches Jüdisches Theater.” As Het Vaderland reported, those hosting GOSET managed to secure the Hollandsche Schouwburg, one of Amsterdam’s most important cultural venues, for its three-evening visit with Sholem Aleichem’s 200,000 opening the run on Thursday, Mendele’s The Travels of Benjamin III on Friday, and Avrom Goldfaden’s Kishefmakherin (The Witch) on Saturday.

The Yiddish-speaking immigrant community and its taste for modernist theater made these travelling Yiddish (and in this case also Hebrew) theater companies an institution among the modest Dutch intelligentsia, never mind that Dutch royalty also imbibed culture produced by and imported from communist Moscow. It is true that the established Dutch Jewish community had good relations with Dutch royalty, as evidenced in, for example, the visit by Queen Wilhelmina and Crown Princess Juliana to the Great Synagogue of Amsterdam on its 250th anniversary. However, the Yiddish-speaking immigrant community did something the native Dutch Jewish community had not done – brought the cutting-edge culture of a marginalized people in a foreign language from a potentially suspect place to a relatively conservative Dutch society only gradually recognizing itself as part of a global world.

If there was one complaint about GOSET’s visit, it was not in the communist orientation of the theater company or in the fact that their plays were in Yiddish. Because Abramov...
had organized GOSET’s tours to both Belgium and the Netherlands, it seems that he printed only one set of programs, in French (and presumably in Yiddish, although I have not had access to the theater programs). As the reviewer for the social democratic newspaper *Het Volk* wrote, “Only one request to the impresario who owns this tour – he should produce the program and explanation in the Dutch language. It is not only foolish, but also disrespectful to the majority of visitors to sell a program [in the Netherlands] in French.” The reviewer’s comment reminds us that Dutch audiences wanted to be part of this theater sensation.

If the 1920s was an age when Berlin-based Yiddish art theater brought Yiddish-speaking immigrants to the attention of Dutch society, it was also a decade that closed with one of the sharpest rifts in the global Eastern European Jewish immigrant community – the response to the 1929 Arab Uprising against Zionist settlement in and British management of Palestine. Communist parties of all stripes, eventually including Jewish branches of them, celebrated the event as a popular response to British imperialism. The majority of Jewish political parties, including most socialist parties, denounced the riots as antisemitic responses to Jews living in their midst. In the United States, this rift became so full of vitriol that the Jewish National Workers Alliance, a Labor Zionist organization, conducted a public show trial of *Frayhayt* (Freedom), the American Yiddish Communist Party newspaper, with leading anti-communist socialists like Shmuel Niger and A. Mukdoni giving testimony against the newspaper. Similar stories played out in other global Yiddish communities.

These debates did not leave Amsterdam’s Yiddish-speaking community unscathed, but the city saw nothing like the public, visceral, and at times violent relations that ripped open the global Jewish left. What salved any wounds from the 1929 debates was a 1931 visit from writer Joseph Opatoshu, who brought Eastern European Jewish immigrants together. But Opatoshu’s visit not only healed the immigrant community. Organizers also invited a who’s who of Dutch Jews active in broader Dutch literary culture, such as Siegfried van Praag, to read with Opatoshu, thus bringing immigrant culture to non-immigrant Dutch society.

In the 1930s, a different phenomenon based in Berlin conspired to wake up Dutch Jewry, and more broadly all of Dutch society – the rise of Nazism just across the border. Nazi Germany was only the most violent manifestation of rising antisemitism across Europe in the wake of the Great Depression. In December 1932, the Ansky Society organized a public protest against pogroms in Lemberg/Lwow, Poland, an event covered in both the *Dagblad voor de arbeiderspartij*, the newspaper of the Dutch Socialist Party, and *NIW*. Coverage in both the mainstream Jewish newspaper and the Dutch socialist newspaper suggests that Ansky’s public anti-fascist activities, along with those of leading Dutch Jewish socialists, served as a link between the Dutch Jewish community and the socialist pillar of Dutch society. (It is also significant that only the socialist *Dagblad* among the mainstream Dutch press covered anti-Jewish violence in Eastern Europe.)

Due to increasing violence and poverty, and with restrictions on migration to the United States, new waves of Yiddish-speaking migrants landed and then settled in the Netherlands in the late 1920s and early 1930s. These new immigrants meant growth for the Ansky Society, so much so that in April 1933 it expanded into a new location to accommodate a burgeoning immigrant infrastructure including a school, library, and a performance space. Founded by Leyb Fuks, one of the new Yiddish-speaking immigrants who
would go on to become head of the Rosenthaliana Library, Amsterdam’s most important Judaica library, the Ansky school taught immigrant children both Yiddish and Hebrew and provided partial employment for immigrant adults as teachers and librarians. Ansky’s physical and institutional expansion marked the immigrant community as large enough and rooted enough to settle in the Netherlands, and the fact of Ansky’s new, larger space was even covered in Het Volk.  

Just as the society moved into its larger space, a new wave of exiles – made up of non-Jewish political leftists and Jews of all political affiliations – fled across the border from Germany as a result of Hitler and National Socialist anti-communism and antisemitism coming to power. These new exiles included socialists and communists as well as German-, Polish-, and Hungarian-speaking Jews, who had originally fled Eastern Europe for Weimar Germany in the 1920s and early 1930s. With their arrival, a more muscular Yiddish-speaking community around the society spread Jewish nationalist, Zionist, and leftist socialist ideas across the Netherlands. It also provided a social and cultural community for Yiddish-speaking and other communists in the 1930s Netherlands when communism was legal but marginalized in Dutch political society, and when political activity by refugees was illegal. Although Germany may have been happy to see these people leave the Reich, the Dutch government was worried about upsetting its vital economic relationship with Germany, especially since the Netherlands had been particularly hard hit by the Depression.  

Although the Dutch-German border was relatively open in 1933, those German citizens who crossed into the Netherlands were a source of suspicion and anxiety for the Dutch state. As historian Bob Moore writes, “Contacts between the German refugees and local left-wing groups were carefully monitored,” since the Netherlands was attempting to maintain positive relations with the new German regime given its dependence on the German labor market to provide work for otherwise unemployed Dutch workers. Therefore, Moore goes on to say, the “granting of asylum to these people was invariably an embarrassment in diplomatic relations with the new Germany.” Reflecting the country’s new anxiety about this wave of refugees, and not just any refugees but Jews and communists, Dutch government representatives referred to them in official literature as an “undesirable element” of Dutch society. Perhaps such a sentiment would make sense if these refugees were all communists aiming to upset Dutch state stability, but the label was applied to all of those fleeing Nazi Germany, regardless of political orientation.  

With Hitler coming to power, many forms of edgy culture that had been born in Berlin, went on the road. They did so not because of the desire to perform for broad audiences, but because they could no longer continue their work in Nazi Germany, which led some to settle in the Netherlands. These refugees felt like they didn’t belong as they lamented their time in the culturally and politically “backward” Netherlands. At the same time, they often became leading members of the intelligentsia in the Netherlands, and some of them were associated with the Ansky Society.  

Chaja Goldstein, born in Poland but raised in Berlin, made a name for herself as a well-known cabaret performer until she fled Germany in March 1933 for Amsterdam. On April 5, at the Conservatorium on Bachstraat, the Centrale Kunst Organisatie hosted this new Amsterdam resident for a Berlin-style Yiddish cabaret of “Hasidic songs and dances,” as the Dagblad reported. De Telegraaf advertised an evening of “ghetto dances and Jewish songs” to Amsterdam residents, both Jewish and not. Goldstein introduced a new type
of performance the city had rarely seen. As the Het Volk reviewer covering her wildly successful inaugural Amsterdam event stated, "non-Jews as well as western Jews" had little familiarity with Eastern European Jewish culture. Her show involved staging, costuming, and even masks, an innovation for Amsterdam avant-garde theater, and reviewers and audiences celebrated her inaugural performance. She even popularized in Amsterdam what would become a convention in 1930s Yiddish performance around the world: drag. She became known as the female performer who dressed up like a yeshiva boy to conjure up scenes of Eastern European Jewish life.

Goldstein also performed as part of the Ping Pong Cabaret, which originated in the Eastern European émigré community in Berlin in 1931. Kurt Wolff founded the cabaret. He emigrated to the Netherlands in January 1933, bringing Ping Pong with him and making it the first “exile cabaret.” Ping Pong’s first Dutch performance, on May 6, 1933, was advertised in all the major Dutch press and took place in the Rika Hopper Theater.

Despite being widely advertised, the Ping Pong Cabaret struggled to attract Dutch audiences to its political cabaret. Peter Jelavich argues that there were a host of reasons for political cabaret’s lack of success in the Netherlands, but leading among them were the country’s conservative politics and culture. This made German political cabaret suspicious, especially explicitly anti-fascist theater, in the minds of the broad Dutch public. Ping Pong had trouble extending its Dutch work permit, so it moved to Switzerland less than one year after arriving in the Netherlands. It returned the following fall but only under the condition that the Cabaret hire Dutch entertainers. As Jelavich writes about Ping Pong’s demise, “Since these new additions proved to be mediocre, and since most of Ping-Pong’s stars (Gerson, Goldstein, and Marcus) had started solo careers, the cabaret soon disbanded.”

Despite political cabaret’s failure, likely because of its anti-fascist politics, Goldstein’s solo performances of Eastern European Jewish culture were popular and were covered in Dutch newspapers throughout the 1930s. Her presence, along with that of many other members of the multinational, generally leftist refugee intelligentsia, themselves made up of Jewish migrants from Poland, Hungary, and elsewhere, frustrated the Dutch government’s plans to maintain neutrality with respect to Nazism. Whether the country liked it or not, the refugees and their cutting-edge culture opened up the Netherlands’ preferred isolation from global politics and modernist trends. Although these refugees may have been a political problem to the Dutch government, they were a cultural asset to Dutch society.

If anti-fascist theater struggled in the 1930s Netherlands, refugees, Yiddish-speaking immigrants, and native-born Dutch Jews found common cause in responding to the rise of Nazi Germany, which eventually drove an estimated 24,000 Jews from Germany across the border into the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, unlike Germany’s other western neighbors, Belgium and France, relief work on behalf of Jewish refugees, not just from Nazi Germany but from Poland, Hungary, and elsewhere, became the responsibility of private individuals and communal organizations. The Netherlands’ Committee for Jewish Refugees (CJV), an umbrella organization including nearly all Dutch Jewish institutions, supported them financially, either by helping them reach their final destination or by resettling them in the Netherlands.

However, the CJV was careful about managing its positive relationship with the Dutch state by remaining unaffiliated with any political party and staunchly anti-communist,
even if those communists were Jews. This included Jews who were communists. This cautious approach to Jews in need did not play well with the Ansky Society, which, although not party affiliated, served as a meeting ground for Jews and some non-Jews invested in supporting Jewish refugees and in drawing attention to the causes of the refugee crisis in the first place. They openly criticized Nazi Germany, rising antisemitism in Eastern Europe, as well as Dutch complacency in the face of both phenomena.

Despite their mutual suspicion, Jews organizing on behalf of refugees, both the Dutch-speaking Jewish citizens and the Yiddish-speaking Jewish migrants, merged into joint protests against Nazi politics. The first wave of anger at Nazi antisemitism reached a fevered pitch in 1935, when on September 19 “both Israelite religious communities,” in other words both the Sephardic and the Ashkenazi Dutch communities, held a major protest rally at Amsterdam’s Apollo Hall, which held 6000 people and, according to Ni&W, was standing room only. Although the press advertised the mainstream Jewish communities as the event’s sponsors, according to its own records the event was also co-sponsored by the Ansky Society. The Apollo Hall rally received a full page of coverage in the September 27 issue of Ni&W. The event was also sound-recorded and available for purchase as a gramophone record to allow those less comfortable with a live public protest to experience it in the privacy of their own homes.

The popularity of Nazi politics, not just in Germany but around the world, also encouraged global communism to move away from the sharp polemics against other leftist parties that had defined communism’s relationship with other socialist parties at least since the late 1920s. In 1935, the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern issued an official call to form a “Popular Front” to fight fascism. This new era in global organizing meant increased visibility for communist parties, nowhere more so than in Spain, where the election of the Popular Front in January 1936 led to the Spanish Civil War and in France, where a Popular Front government led by Leon Blum came to power in the summer of the same year. But the ebb and flow of global communist politics does not seem to have shaped politics in the Netherlands. Likely this was because of the Netherlands’ political structure organized around zuilen, which moderated tendencies toward radicalization. So too among the Netherlands’ Eastern European Jewish immigrants, among whom there is little evidence of either a “Red Divide” or a grand reconciliation during the Popular Front.

Instead, the Ansky Society continued hosting major cultural events at central institutions. In June 1935, Maurice Schwartz’s Yiddish Art Theater gave well-attended performances at the Stadsschouwburg in Amsterdam, and in the Koninklijke Schouwburg in The Hague. This visit was organized by one of the most well-known theater impresarios in the Netherlands, Ernst Krauss. The reviewer for the Catholic De Tijd lauded the acting and proclaimed the project “wonderful.” He also thought back to the late 1920s as he recalled that “Habima theater was of ‘higher quality,’” demonstrating the enduring impact travelling Jewish theaters had on non-Jewish Dutch culture.

On February 2, 1936, the society’s own drama group, under the direction of Jacob Waterlitz, well known in Amsterdam as a member of the Vilna Troupe, directed its authorial namesake’s Tog un nakht (Day and night), the same Ansky play that was the drama group’s first production back in 1922. This time, the local troupe performed at Bellevue, one of the most celebrated entertainment centers in Western Europe. As an Ni&W reviewer of Tog un nakht suggested, “For the Jewish Workers Cultural Union Sh. An-ski, it was a success, because the performance filled the hall at Bellevue, and the audience continued
warmly applauding, even after the curtain opened. We have never seen the great hall so full as we saw Sunday night.” The reviewer also lauded Yiddish theater in general, and referenced the Vilna Troupe’s visit the previous decade by mentioning Alexander Azro and his wife Sonia Alomis, both regular performers with the 1920s Vilna Troupe.79

By the mid-1930s, the Ansky Society was a well-known feature on the Dutch cultural landscape and was attracting members of the Dutch intelligentsia not just to attend its events but to perform in them. From its earliest days, the Ansky Society had hosted important political figures like Sam de Wolff, a long-time socialist and founder of Poalei Zion in the Netherlands, who lectured at the first public event hosted by the Ansky Society back in 1922. That event had been cosponsored by the social democrats.80 But in the mid-1930s local Dutch-speaking Jews were now performing in Yiddish, whether singing or acting, a new step in the Ansky Society’s integration into interwar Dutch society. This also demonstrated an increased comfort with Yiddish culture among non-Yiddish speakers.81 Liesbeth Sanders, the sister of Abel Herzberg, Chairman of the Dutch Zionist Union – both of them first-generation Eastern European Jewish immigrants in the nineteenth century, who knew Yiddish from home – began performing in Yiddish publicly with the Anski Drama Troupe in 1936. She gave a concert at an evening in honor of the writers Sam Goudsmit and Siegfried van Praag and then in October she performed in an event celebrating classic Yiddish writer Mendele Moykher Sforim’s hundredth birthday.82 The Zionist Herzberg gave speeches for the organization later in the decade. One assumes that, although he could have given his speeches in Dutch, Herzberg chose to give them in Yiddish.83

Lin Jaldati, the stage name of Rebekka Brilleslijper, a twenty-something Dutch Jew, had trained in the early 1930s with Lili Green, a well-known dancer in the Netherlands. Jaldati’s first performances were with touring Dutch dance revues, but when she was in Amsterdam she began a relationship with a Polish Yiddish-speaking immigrant, Boris Kowadlo, who introduced her to the Ansky Society. At Jaldati’s first performance for the society on April 21, 1935, she participated in an evening commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Sholem Aleichem’s death, which took place at the Building for the Working Class in Amsterdam. The evening opened with a performance of Sholem Aleichem’s 200,000, followed by Jewish folksongs and music led by German Jewish immigrant Hans Krieg. The evening closed with Jaldati, accompanied by Krieg, teaching Jewish folk dances to the assembled crowd. Her performative aesthetic echoed that of Goldstein, as she conjured up images of Eastern European Jewish folkways also by dressing up in drag as a yeshiva boy.84

Although she had participated in Amsterdam’s communist cultural scene since the early 1930s, with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 Jaldati joined the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN). That year, the CPN held four of 100 seats in the Dutch parliament, the peak of its prewar political power, which was never that strong in the centrist Netherlands. (In the 1937 elections, the CPN lost one seat while the National Socialists won four just as the influence of the Popular Front was cresting in France and as Loyalist forces seemed to be winning in Spain.) Through the Ansky Society, Jaldati also improved her Yiddish and ended up making performances of Yiddish song and dance her lifelong career.85 This Dutch Jewish dancer corresponded in Yiddish with the Vilna-based YIVO (Institute for Jewish Research), which served as an institutional space defining global Jewish national identity based in Yiddish. She wrote to YIVO in March 1940 soliciting new material for her Yiddish art shows, since she knew that one of YIVO’s core projects was collecting Yiddish-language folk culture.87
Because the Ansky Society remained unaffiliated with any political party and operated on the margins of Dutch society in Yiddish, it was not tainted by the communist politics of many of its members. It maintained its focus on culture, even as it served as a “safe space” for leftists of all varieties, including communists. Because of this, Ansky could be outspoken in favor of the Spanish Republic when the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, even though the Dutch government was neutral and threatened Dutch citizens with arrest if they fought with the International Brigades. (Only *Tribune*, the social democratic newspaper, offered regular coverage of the Civil War.) In the end, 800 Dutch citizens ended up fighting with the International Brigades in Spain. Upon return to the Netherlands, they had their passports confiscated and were stripped of their Dutch citizenship. According to Jaldati’s husband, Eberhard Rebling – a pianist, musicologist, and leftist non-Jewish German citizen who had fled Nazi Germany to the Netherlands – the couple performed in 1938–9 at solidarity events for the Republicans in Spain, presumably with support from the Ansky Society. Rebling performed from behind a curtain at those events. As a Dutch citizen, Jaldati could be politically outspoken, but, as a refugee from Germany, Rebling was forbidden from doing so.

Meanwhile, the Ansky Society continued to host visiting Yiddish artists, including Noah Nachbush of the Vilna Troupe, who performed a few sketches from Sholem Aleichem. Nachbush was accompanied on piano by “Mr Notowicz,” likely a reference to Nathan Notowicz, who like Rebling was a pianist and leftist who had fled Nazi Germany for the Netherlands. Unlike Rebling, however, who was Protestant, Notowicz was Jewish, which shows how the Ansky Society served as a safe haven for refugees no matter their political orientation or ethnicity. It also hosted talks with a political bent, such as J. Gompers’ January 1938 lecture, “The Jew as Visual Artist,” at a time when just across the border in the German Reich the “Degenerate Art” (“Entartete Kunst”) exhibition was travelling the country.

In July 1938, as the Dutch government attended the failed Evian Conference to deal with the continent-wide Jewish refugee crisis, and in the wake of the Anschluss of Austria, the Ansky Society hosted a large gathering at which several leaders talked about the dire situation of Jews in Poland and Germany. At the same time, the Dutch Ministry of Justice increased its pressure to drive Jews from Germany out of the country. The head of the Ansky Society, A. Landau, complained bitterly about the lack of response from the Dutch government to requests for help from “well-placed countrymen, who do not fulfill their obligations.” At the same time, Landau praised Dutch Jewry for responding to the needs of refugees and expressed “great appreciation.”

After Kristallnacht in November 1938, however, everything changed. Germany had expelled Jews with Polish citizenship residing in Germany east to the Polish border. Although they were citizens, Poland refused to let them enter, stranding them in no-man’s-land. The Ansky Society put on fundraising concerts to support these stranded refugees, along with a new influx of Jews crossing the ever-tightening Dutch–German border. It also continued to support refugees by hosting fundraising concerts, housing refugees when possible, and finding them jobs, especially in the candy business, a popular commercial activity for immigrant Jews across Europe and the Americas, all of this despite their own precarious position as non-citizens. On December 9, 1938, the society, along with the CJV, put on a special event “Jews, Do Not Despair,” at the De Leeuw. Its members’ generosity was mentioned in left-wing Dutch newspapers.
The Dutch government and the various overlapping agencies dealing with refugees were increasingly worried about the large number of Jews fleeing from Nazi Germany, both as a drain on the Dutch economy and as a further irritant in German–Dutch relations, so it attempted to close the Netherlands’ borders in December 1938. At the same time, it recognized that privately run refugee services were no longer adequate to meet the needs of the already existing refugee population. Under pressure from public opinion and opposition parties, the Dutch parliament decided to admit 2,000 and then 9,000 refugees in the months following Kristallnacht.

As an emergency response, it set up 25 centers across the country to house refugees until a more permanent solution was found. Such a “permanent” solution was found months later when, with Jewish community and Dutch state financial support, the government established a formal refugee camp at Westerbork. Construction began in November 1939, two months after the outbreak of World War II, and during the conflict within the Ansky Society which would lead to it sundering.

Because it was not affiliated with a political party and operated in Yiddish, the Ansky Society managed to operate beyond both the traditional boundaries of conservative Dutch society and the politicized atmosphere of the global Yiddish-speaking left. The society brought what for the Netherlands was cutting-edge culture – whether Yiddish art theater or drag cabaret – events that were covered in the Jewish and non-Jewish press and attracted a wide diversity of Dutch society, including Juliana, the future queen. Kristallnacht and its aftermath brought everyone together, especially the Dutch/Yiddish Jewish community, to support their brethren fleeing Germany.

The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939, and the German invasion of Poland one week later, felt like a Soviet betrayal to many in the Ansky Society, whose members had spent the 1930s rallying against Nazism through leftist politics. Many members demanded that the Ansky Society issue a public rebuke of the pact, but Ansky’s Communist Party members were absolutely opposed. Suddenly, party affiliation shaped the public political stance of the organization, and the Amsterdam Yiddish immigrant community began to resemble other Yiddish communities. To make a statement either in favor of or against the pact would be to make a statement about communism and the Soviet Union. Long-time members of the Ansky Society, including its leader Landau, who relished its lack of party affiliation and begged its members to stay focused on culture, sadly left the society that had served as the voice of the world in the Netherlands for nearly 20 years. The March 1940 creation of the socialist and Bundist-oriented I.L. Perets Society formally ended Ansky’s quiet but powerful role in fostering a unified Dutch response to global fascism.

The last prewar event put on by the now communist Ansky Society took place on May 3, 1940, just one week before the German invasion of the Netherlands ended all forms of public Jewish culture.

Notes
2. For more on Eastern European Jews’ “passing through” and the challenges that posed to the establishment of community, see Peter Tammes, ed., Oostjoodse Passanten en Blijvers: Aankomst, opvang, transmigratie en vestiging van joden uit Rusland in Amsterdam en Rotterdam, 1882–1914 (Amsterdam: Menasseh ben Israel Instituut, 2013).


4. On the question of Yiddish theater, according to Joseph Buloff, one of the last surviving members of the Vilna Troupe, when the Vilna Troupe first came to the United States in 1924, there were 24 professional Yiddish theaters in the US, 16 in Poland, six in Russia, six in Buenos Aires, four in Romania, three in Lithuania, and two each in Latvia, South Africa, France, England, and Canada. See Debra Caplan, “Nomadic Chutzpah: The Vilna Troupe’s Transnational Yiddish Theatre Paradigm, 1915–1935,” Theatre Survey 55, no. 3 (2014): 303.


8. The fact of the lack of citizenship and the concomitant inability to organize within political parties appears in the unpublished history of the Ansky Society. See Rafalovitch and Levitan, “Der yiddisher kultur-farayn Sh. Anski in Amsterdam,” 25.


15. That’s part of the reason why many have a hard time understanding how such an integrated population could suffer the highest death rates during the Holocaust of any country outside Eastern Europe.


24. Ibid., 117.
25. Ibid., 118.
35. The Theater in der Kommandantenstrasse, originally called the Brothers Herrnfeld-Theater, had a storied history as one of the leading Jargontheaters. It specialized in Yiddish theater and served as a central space more generally for Berlin’s Jewish popular theater. See Peter Sprengel, Populäres jüdisches Theater in Berlin von 1877 bis 1933 (Berlin: Haude und Spener, 1997); Marlene Otte, Jewish Identities in German Popular Entertainment, 1890–1933 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

42. On Hugo Helm bringing the Vilna Troupe to the Netherlands, see *Heldersche Courant*, June 16, 1923, 6, http://www.cinemacontext.nl/cgi/b/bib/bib-id?ccc=cccbioscoop;cc=cccbioscoop;sid=6f5f9ae833d7cad8fdee73661f4370d;page=reslist;fmt=long;size=1;tpl=details.tpl;start=1;view=reslist;type=boolean;q1=B000156;rgn1=BiosId (accessed June 29, 2015).


50. “Kunst en Lettern,” *Het Vaderland*, July 31, 1928, 6. See also Benjamin Harshav, *The Moscow Yiddish Theater: Art on Stage in the Time of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). On its side, GOSET went through extensive negotiations with the Soviet Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros), under whose purview Soviet theaters fell, to arrange this multi-national foreign tour, including negotiations over ticket price, sets and costumes to be brought along, and relations with foreign theater owners. See fond 2307 (GOSET) and the opisi relating to their 1928 tour, housed at the Russian State Archive of Arts and Literature (RGALI), http://www.idc.nl/ead/466.xml (accessed June 30, 2015).


58. “Sch. Anski slaat de vleugel uit” [Sch. Anski spreads its wings], *Het Volk*, April 1, 1933, 6. For more on the new building, see Fuks, *Oostjoden*, 209.


64. “Chaja Goldstein en Herman Kruyt,” *De Tribune*, April 3, 1933.


71. Ibid., 6.

72. Ibid., 160–4.


95. “Simpele sieraden van een arme: voor de slachtoffers der Duitse barbaarheid” [Simple jewelry from a poor person: for the victims of German barbarism], *Zaans volksblad*, November 16, 1938, 4.
98. Ibid., 365–75.
99. Hoffman shows that the pact resulted not only in the end of any rapprochement between communists and non-communists, but also in a wave of resignations of Yiddish-speaking Jews from the Communist Party itself. Hoffman, “The Red Divide,” 29.

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