

ARTICLE

The Yiddish Art Theatre in Paris after the Holocaust, 1944–1950

Nick Underwood

Department of History, College of Idaho
Email: niun4614@colorado.edu

Almost as soon as Paris was liberated from Nazi Occupation on 25 August 1944, Yiddish actors took back the stages on which they had once performed. In fact, on 20 December 1944, while war and the Holocaust still raged, a small cohort of actors produced what they advertised in the *Naye prese* as the “first grand performance by the ‘Yiddish folks-bine.’”¹ This performance was to take place at the four-hundred-seat Théâtre Lancry, a performance space located in Paris’s 10th arrondissement, not far from the Place de la République and the Marais. “Lancry,” as it was known, had played host to Yiddish theatre as early as 1903 and, during the interwar years, it was the center of Parisian Yiddish cultural activity: dozens of theatre performances occurred there and it was where the Kultur-lige pariz was based, among other institutions. During the postwar years, it also went by the name Théâtre de la République after 1947 and Théâtre du Nouveau-Lancry after 1951, but many still referred to it simply as “Lancry.”

Five months later, in May 1945, at a meeting of the Farband fun yidishe kultur-gezelschaftn in frankraykh (Union for Jewish Cultural Organizations in France, or the Farband), the playwright Haim Sloves called for the development of a theatre commission, which was to establish a new Parisian Yiddish theatre troupe. Yiddish theatre “will be an important, if not the most important, force guiding Jewish cultural life in [the] country,” reads a *Naye tsayt* report on the meeting, and “all Yiddish newspapers would be active in supporting the founding of Yiddish people’s theatre.”² Yiddish theatre was to be a community effort. Importantly, it was postwar Parisian Yiddish theatre that culture makers envisioned as the institution capable of buttressing a movement toward cultural pluralism in France, balancing both the desire for assimilation into French society after the Holocaust and Vichy and the insistence on maintaining a Yiddish-focused cultural life.

I would like to thank Mark Lee Smith for his generosity in sharing with me sources related to *Parizer shriftn*, Madeleine Cohen for her help in obtaining digital copies of some YKUT materials from the Widener Library at Harvard University, and Annette Aronowicz, Marlis Schweitzer, and *Theatre Survey’s* reviewers for their comments on earlier versions of this essay. The Western Society for French History’s Millstone Fellowship and a Fellowship from the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI) supported research for this piece.

Parizer shriftn was misspelled as *Parizer shrift* in the acknowledgment of the original online version of this article. This has been corrected here and a corrigendum has been published.

© American Society for Theatre Research 2020

Shortly after that May meeting, on 11 July 1945, the Parisian Yiddish Avant-garde Theatre (Parizer yidisher avangard teater / PYAT) returned to the stage to celebrate its tenth anniversary.³ PYAT had contributed to the world of Yiddish theatre during the 1930s and its return that evening proved a turning point for the troupe and for Parisian Yiddish theatre. First, the performance was a clear response to the members' wartime experiences, indicating some Jews' willingness to name their experiences during the Holocaust, thus demonstrating that in France, like in the United States, Jews were not silent about their particular experiences during the war.⁴ Second, the performance would be PYAT's last, but it was not the end of Yiddish theatre in Paris: the troupe would reform and rebrand itself as the Yidisher kunst teater (Yiddish Art Theatre / YKUT). PYAT and the later YKUT demonstrate how Yiddish theatre in Paris also promoted a French and Jewish postwar memory of the Holocaust and Vichy and offer a testament to theatre's power to coalesce transnational communities during this moment of mass Jewish European migration.⁵ In particular, this article focuses on PYAT's final performance and analyzes the rise and fall of YKUT, as well as three YKUT productions, to highlight the resurgence of Yiddish theatre in post-Holocaust France. I also analyze how YKUT pushed against full French assimilation and mirrored other twentieth-century, culturally pluralistic efforts throughout the Jewish world.⁶ Additionally, this article asserts that in their engagement with both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences, PYAT and YKUT were not marginal cultural phenomena but rather part of a larger postwar, French cultural reconstruction.⁷

France was no stranger to Yiddish culture. Beginning in the fin de siècle, Yiddish culture was a prominent feature of many immigrant Jews' daily lives in Paris.⁸ By the interwar years, that prominence was institutionalized with the opening of several Yiddish cultural institutions, a dynamic and international Yiddish theatrical scene, the presence of several Yiddish choruses, as well as a robust number of Yiddish periodicals, including daily and weekly newspapers. By the 1930s—and at the height of the Popular Front—Yiddish culture even made formal inroads within the French state when the Kultur-lige pariz became affiliated with the Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires (Association for Revolutionary Writers and Artists / AEAR) and its Maison de la Culture (house of culture, i.e., for cultural outreach).⁹

Like the interwar period, the immediate war years were filled with French Yiddish cultural production. First, the revitalization of performance-based Jewish life within Yiddish-speaking circles came from institutions that had existed before the war, most notably from PYAT and the Yidisher folks-khor (Jewish people's chorus). In addition, the Yiddish-language communist newspaper *Naye prese*, which opened in 1934, began publishing openly again in 1944. New Yiddish cultural output emerged too, including the journal *Parizer shriftn* and the organization Farband fun yidische kultur-gezelschaftn in frankraykh, which began during the war, in 1944, but after the liberation of France.¹⁰ The 1950 launch of a new theatre journal, *Der teater shpigl* (The theatre mirror) marked Paris formally as part of the European revival of Yiddish theatre.¹¹ Additionally, groups such as the Union des Juifs pour la Résistance et L'Entraide (Union of Jews for Resistance and Mutual Aid / UJRE), which began as a resistance organization in April 1943, would emerge as a central component of postwar French Jewish life, turning the building at 14 rue des

Paradis into a quasi-community center, not unlike the role Lancry played for Jews during the 1920s and 1930s. It was also during these years that the Centre de documentation juive contemporaine (Contemporary Jewish Documentation Center) took formal shape.¹² Therefore, the postwar Yiddish cultural world was based upon a series of groups and organizations that balanced the experiences of French, Yiddish-speaking Jews who returned to Paris (either from hiding or from Nazi concentration and death camps) and who had made their home in Paris before the war; those who were actively involved in the French Resistance;¹³ and Yiddish-speaking Jews who made their way to Paris in the wake of their war-time experiences in Central and Eastern Europe. All told, the postwar Jewish population in France was around a quarter of a million, which was similar in number to France's interwar Jewish population.¹⁴

France since Liberation was seemingly a hotbed for potential revolution. Yiddish-speaking Jews, many of whom tended toward leftist and revolutionary politics, would have fit in well with this particular political context. The uncertainty of postwar French life also seemingly enabled new Yiddish cultural experimentation. There were food shortages, inflation—which put prices at 17 percent above what they were in 1939—and a string of politically unstable government coalitions.¹⁵ Much of the country's infrastructure was in ruins: 20 percent of the buildings had been destroyed and only 40 percent of the railways were in operation by 1945. To complicate matters still further, individual experiences of the war differed considerably for the French,¹⁶ which led some to feel as if their particular stories might not fit into new emerging narratives about French belonging. It was this climate that would usher in the Gaullist Resistentialist myth, which, as evaluated by Henry Rousso, claimed that all French had stood together and resisted the Occupation and that there were only a few collaborators.¹⁷ Simultaneously, however, an overall expectation of justice permeated postwar France, which was undercut by de Gaulle's privileging national interests over local ones.¹⁸ In some cases, this would lead to cases of "justice" being carried out on the local level, leading to a starkly gendered understanding of collaboration.¹⁹ France, like other parts of Europe, also experienced continued anti-Semitism in the wake of the war.²⁰ However, despite France's Jewish emancipatory history (being the first European country to emancipate its Jews), this was not new. France had experienced ongoing waves of anti-Semitism during the nineteenth and twentieth century. It was within this cultural milieu that Jewish artists returned to the stage.

This article builds upon literature on Jews in France during the postwar years and adds to it a focus on Yiddish theatre to demonstrate how Yiddish-speaking Jews in France staged their postwar rebirth Jewishly. Scholarship on Jews in France during the postwar period typically focuses on the reintegration of Jews into the nation after Vichy, both from a political and social perspective.²¹ Additionally, although there has been a recent shift toward analyzing immigrant Jews in postwar France, there is still a propensity within the broader literature to center on the so-called native French Jewish community and French Jews' attempts to reconcile their Franco-Judaism with the internationalist identity politics of Zionism.²² However, much of this scholarship does not consider Yiddish-speaking French Jews of Eastern European origin. A focus on this group and their theatrical enterprise reveals how Jews in postwar France advocated for

themselves in Jewish terms. Indeed, challenging the long-standing notion that Jews upheld the universalizing myth of the French Resistance and avoided any urge for particularism during these years,²³ Shannon Fogg, Leora Auslander, and David Cesarani, among others, have begun to assert that within their European contexts, Jews framed their postwar belonging based on their Jewishness.²⁴ But the claims Yiddish-speaking Jews in Paris made were not all material in the ways suggested by Fogg and Auslander. They were cultural claims about community and rehabilitation, which certainly foregrounded their Jewishness, if not for any other reason than that these theatrical productions were produced (for the most part) in Yiddish.

This article also ties together the interwar, war, and postwar Franco-Yiddish experiences to demonstrate how Yiddish theatre was both an avenue for some Jews in France to reconcile their wartime experiences and a new way for others to reintegrate into the changing and chaotic postwar French cultural, social, and political landscape. Contrary to previous interpretations, I argue that the postwar reconstruction of the Jewish cultural community in Paris was not *only* assimilationist. As the case study of YKUT shows, there was seemingly room available for the development of a French and Jewish ethnic identity, as there was during the interwar years.²⁵

The troupes' overall activities help illuminate how Yiddish culture makers in Paris took from a variety of French, Jewish, and European cultural and historical experiences to create new modes of Yiddish theatrical cultural production and French belonging during the early Fourth Republic. It was between 1944 and 1950 that we see the emergence of a transnational survivors' community come to Paris and try to establish, by way of a transnational Jewish cultural form (Yiddish theatre), new ideas about Jewishness that balanced equally the experiences of occupation, resistance, genocide, and the contours of the French Republic.

Theatre was central to Yiddish-speakers' efforts to revitalize Yiddish culture in France in the wake of the Holocaust. Writing for *Parizer shriftn*, a recently established journal that ran for two years (1945–6) and produced four issues,²⁶ I. Vaynfeld wrote: "I am writing about theatre in August 1945—Yiddish theater. . . . I am writing about Yiddish theatre during a time when the majority of the Yiddish theatregoing public is dead . . . millions can no longer laugh, cry, be entertained . . . [those who speak Yiddish] ought to take pride in the important fact that there is a modern, bright, and positive Yiddish theatre in 1945." He would go on to say that "Our surviving actors should understand the importance and see in the theatre—in good Yiddish theatre—a sacred obligation and mission."²⁷ For Vaynfeld, Yiddish theatre was an inherent part of the European Yiddish-speaking Jewish community, and it was incumbent upon surviving actors to reconstitute it as soon as they could. Vaynfeld also understood that Paris was uniquely positioned to play host to this revitalization of European Yiddish theatre. The City of Light had been a hub of Yiddish culture during the interwar years; it held a central place within the grand history of theatre; and it was the primary European city to which Holocaust survivors from all across Europe journeyed if they could not leave the continent.²⁸

PYAT Returns to the Stage, July 1945

The Parisian Yiddish Workers' Theatre (Parizer yidisher arbeter teater) traces its origins to 1928 when the Kultur-lige pariz—a Yiddish cultural institution that opened

in Paris in 1922 and was tangentially part of the transnational Kultur-lige network—started its latest drama circle. In 1933, after the arrival of several luminaries of the Vilna Troupe, the drama circle broke off from the Kultur-lige to become its own troupe. From 1934 to mid-1935, they called themselves the Parisian Yiddish Workers' Theatre before changing their name to the Parisian Yiddish Avant-garde Theatre (1935 through 1940/1945)—though they were always known by their acronym, PYAT. Between 1934 and 1940, PYAT staged twenty-seven plays, and approximately 250 workingwomen and -men participated in the theatre group in some way.²⁹ By 1937, actors were unionized in the Union des théâtres indépendents de France (Union of Independent French Theatres) and affiliated with the AEAR's Maison de la Culture.³⁰ These were not “professional” actors, meaning many of the actors held “day jobs,” but they were interwar Paris's premiere Yiddish theatre troupe and the longest-running Yiddish theatre troupe in French history to date. PYAT remained open until the Occupation of Paris in June 1940.

After the Liberation of Paris, this 1930s Yiddish cultural stalwart took the stage as soon as it could amass a troupe and develop a program. On 11 July 1945 at 8 P.M. at Salle Pleyel, PYAT restaged its brand of Parisian Yiddish theatre to celebrate its tenth anniversary (technically it was their eleventh, as I discuss further below). Theatre historians have little to tell about the event that night, but what we have gives insight into how PYAT built the program and tried to communicate their sense of place within the postwar Yiddish and French world.³¹ Theatregoers entering the twenty-four-hundred-seat theatre in Paris's 8th arrondissement received a beautifully illustrated, full-color playbill that detailed the “Collective PYAT,” the evening's program, a list of PYAT's prewar repertoire, and a brief history of PYAT. This brief history signifies how PYAT wanted the audience to understand its past, and signaled toward potential growth for the troupe.

The illustration on the front of the playbill recalls a Marc Chagall painting, which would have resonated with Yiddish-speaking Holocaust survivors in France, given Chagall's prewar Parisian residency. It pieces together elements found in his paintings *The Fiddler* and *Over the Town*, which romanticize the Eastern European Jewish shtetl, with visual references to two Sholem Aleichem plays PYAT had performed during the 1930s: *Yidishe glik* (Jewish luck) and *Der farkishefter shnayder* (*The Bewitched Tailor*). In the illustration at the top of the playbill, the person—flying over the town, if you will—is dressed in a suit and an overcoat with a bowler hat; the figure is also carrying an umbrella. This image references the Sholem Aleichem character Menachem Mendl from both the interwar film and stage adaptations of his Menachem Mendl stories. Toward the right side of the image is a drawing of a man leading a goat, a clear reference to *Der farkishefter shnayder*—a play in which a goat serves a major plot point. PYAT, with famed director Jacob Rotboym at the helm, had performed *Der farkishefter shnayder* to much fanfare in 1938. (Rotboym would return to the Parisian stage with YKUT.) To further the connection to PYAT's interwar performances, the playbill illustration includes a drawing of a hand pulling back a set of curtains, giving the cover the illusion of a theatrical set. The listing of PYAT's repertoire reinforces this message, reminding those in attendance about some of the plays that PYAT had performed previously, including *Der farkishefter shnayder*.

While acknowledging the company's past, the playbill also marks the anniversary as a post-Holocaust, post-Occupation event, thereby demonstrating how this theatre troupe was building community memory of the Holocaust and Vichy. The section on the collective lists the names of the thirty-two PYAT members and their current status: ten are listed as "deported," and three are said to have "come back from deportation" or "war captivity." Four others are either "in Switzerland," "in the Soviet Union," "abroad," or "in the English army." The rest of the actors are listed with no information, such as the actor Leib Lensky, who we now know would survive the war and return to Paris to perform with YKUT before moving on to New York. In 1991, Lensky even had a short speaking part in the film *The Silence of the Lambs*. Interestingly, no one is listed as "murdered," perhaps demonstrating a sense of hope within the PYAT community.³² This decision is emblematic of the period itself, when information was still coming in—by way of family communications and some local newspaper reports—and colleagues' whereabouts were still unknown. However, there was already the urge to rebirth and restage Yiddish theatre.

That evening, the PYAT members in Paris staged three short pieces: a "montage" of H. Leivick's *Di oreme melukhe* (The impoverished state), which Rotboym directed and PYAT had premiered before the war, in January 1939; *Der sod* (The orchard) by R. Sander, which is described as "a one act drama from the time of the occupation adapted for the stage by A. Fesler [most likely Oscar Fessler]"; and *Mazel tov*, described as "a people's play [*folks-shpil*] by Sholem Aleichem, adapted for the stage by M[oishe] Kineman," who was an actor-director with the troupe in the 1930s and survived the war in hiding in France.³³ Kineman would also perform with YKUT. These plays speak to the past, present, and possible future for the group. Their first selection was based on a late 1930s PYAT production, Leivick's *Di oreme melukhe* (1927), which was known for its representation of social justice. Little is known about the play *Der sod*, but based on the program's description, it was most certainly performed because it was about France under Nazi Occupation. Sholem Aleichem's *Mazel tov* is a play about the relationships between the servants who live downstairs in a building, the cook, and the rich landlord who lived upstairs. Although *Mazel tov* was not part of PYAT's prewar repertoire, the group did perform Sholem Aleichem regularly, which they felt was a way to engage the Jewish masses, "lay the groundwork for a permanent Jewish theatre," and provide Jewish cultural literacy to immigrant, Yiddish-speaking Jews in interwar Paris.³⁴ The plays performed that night are indicative of the troupe's historical and artistic path. They began with a piece familiar to supporters from the interwar years. Then, they referenced the history, experiences, and memory of the Occupation of France. Finally, they performed a new play (for them) by a playwright whose work PYAT had performed regularly before the war. Overall, the program that night made anew the troupe's repertoire by placing it simultaneously in the prewar, war, and postwar years. This Yiddish theatrical cultural continuity demonstrates that postwar French cultural reconstruction did not rely on a break from previous years; rather, it was centered on a balance between the old *and* the new—the prewar, wartime, and postwar French and Jewish experiences.

Further evidence of the troupe's intentions arise from the playbill's brief synopsis of the troupe's makeup and an explanation detailing why the tenth anniversary was important for post-Holocaust Paris:

PYAT's tenth anniversary is a holy day for Yiddish art theatre. For ten consecutive years there was a group of Jewish workers and intellectuals in France that, through strong and talented actors, transmitted important stories; without money, without funding, they produced lovely plays and created a good Jewish theatregoing public.

With this tenth anniversary program, PYAT has produced an impressive program. They will spiritually encourage and lift our brothers and sisters and glorify the bright memory of our murdered and fallen fighters.

Ten years of PYAT—Today a modest number of extremely great works of wonderful material, inspired by the noble ideals of a great revolutionary movement.³⁵

Written by I. Spero, an interwar Yiddish culture figure who would wind up spending his postwar years memorializing murdered Parisian culture makers and writing on occasion for *Parizer shriftn*, this overview speaks to the group's past and present.³⁶ We read of a group that was successful artistically, if not financially, and learn that the program that night was meant to lift the audience's spirits. We also learn about the program's content: that it was inspired by revolutionary ideals. There was a strong leftist tendency among PYAT members, and two of the three performances that night are clearly about class difference, which I interpret as a clear reference to the night's revolutionary politics. We can also read an additional level of "revolution": because these performances speak to the survival of Yiddish and Jewish culture in the wake of the Nazi's attempt to eradicate Jews and lived Jewish culture, they take on a particularly Jewish revolutionary spirit—one that sees Jewish survival in the wake of the Holocaust as a revolutionary act. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that postwar Parisian Yiddish theatre attempted to position itself as an arbiter of cultural pluralism, where the theatre strikes a balance between assimilating into French society and maintaining a distinct Yiddish culture.

By celebrating their tenth anniversary in 1945, PYAT built a narrative of themselves as a specifically avant-garde troupe, per their full name. And Spero's testimony of the group even paints them specifically as an "art theatre" group, potentially tying them to the Yiddish theatrical legacy of Maurice Schwartz's Yiddish Art Theatre, based in New York. By ignoring their 1934 activities, during which they were known as the Parizer yidisher arbeter teater (i.e., a workers' theatre), they avoided contact with the era in which "workers" was a key feature of their identity. This omission is interesting given that Spero references both the workers who made up the group and the idea of revolution. However, it seems as if the effort to distance themselves from their former workers'-theatre identity was deliberate. Indeed, this program signals (perhaps unknowingly) the group's future. In a piece written for the first issue of *Parizer shriftn* in October 1945, three months after the comeback performance, Spero also highlights PYAT's tenth anniversary. Here, however, he *does* refer to the troupe by the name it used during its first season (1934–5). He writes with lament about this Parisian Yiddish *Workers' Theatre*, "especially in our dreadful time, as we begin to build our culture from ruins with people naked as Adam whilst the large, wealthy institutions look upon us so coldly and so indifferently."³⁷ Spero, by way of "workers," is indicating the need for a grassroots revitalization of Yiddish theatre in Paris. He certainly does not think that support will come from larger institutions in France. The July 1945 program calls PYAT an art theatre, *not* an avant-garde

theatre; this is noteworthy because, during the interwar years in France, the avant-garde were heavily affiliated with the Left, specifically the French Communist Party.³⁸ In fact, nowhere in the program is the acronym PYAT ever spelled out.

I understand PYAT's efforts to distance itself from its working-class history as a response to the cultural mission of its new postwar umbrella organization: the *Farband fun yidishe kultur-gezelschaftn in frankraykh*. Haim Sloves himself identified as a communist, but when he organized the *Farband* in January 1945, he envisioned a group that would bring together, "after four years of bloodshed . . . and martyrdom," a variety of left-leaning Jewish cultural organizations in an attempt to "revive [Jewish] life from the ruins."³⁹ To this end, the *Farband* called on "all Jewish organizations . . . and culture makers . . . to work together to create a unified approach to the development of Jewish Culture."⁴⁰ At the *Farband's* first meeting on 22 January 1945, ten groups vowed to work together; these included, among others, Bundists, communists, and Zionists. One of the groups, the one representing Yiddish theatre in France, was the Society of Friends of PYAT, creating a direct connection between the *Farband's* broad-spectrum cultural efforts and the theatre troupe.⁴¹ In accordance with the *Farband's* initiative to revitalize Yiddish culture in France for as many Yiddish speakers as possible, it seems that PYAT, and later YKUT, shied away from its shared working-class and revolutionary background in favor of more culturally pluralistic pursuits.⁴²

In late 1945, PYAT became YKUT. According to Gérard Frydman, an actor in YKUT, PYAT dissolved into YKUT because only three PYAT actors remained in Paris. (We know that there were more actors involved, but not many more.) This name change reveals how postwar Yiddish culture makers imagined their place within the larger French culture, perhaps pointing toward the actors embracing *some* aspect of the Gaullist myth of "unity" permeating postwar French society.

During the interwar years, *avant-gardists* in France (Jewish and non-Jewish) challenged the foundations of French society, advocating for a culturally pluralistic version of Frenchness.⁴³ Such a perspective allowed the PYAT members to balance their Franco-Yiddishness. The name change to YKUT shows how PYAT translated that interwar cultural and national imperative for a postwar context. By shedding "avant-garde" and reframing Yiddish theatre as "art theatre," Yiddish-speaking thespians in Paris sought to place their cultural production within the new social and cultural parameters of what would become the French Fourth Republic. By refracting Yiddish theatre through the lens of "art theatre," YKUT drew associations with Konstantin Stanislavsky's early twentieth-century Moscow Art Theatre and Maurice Schwartz's Yiddish Art Theatre. The name implied that the troupe would now disseminate art—not just Yiddish cultural literacy—to the Yiddish-speaking people of Paris. YKUT's repertoire would be vast and centered on both classic and popular works, however. Just like PYAT's.

The Yiddish Art Theatre and the Post-Holocaust Parisian Stage

YKUT was "born" as a project of the recently formed *Farband* on 8 November 1945.⁴⁴ This affiliation was important because it meant that, for the first time, the community was actively supporting Parisian Yiddish theatre outside of ticket sales. It is unclear what financial support was envisioned for PYAT when it was

affiliated with the Farband via its Society of Friends. Notably, too, it was YKUT, not a “society of friends,” that was affiliated with the Farband. The direct link to the Farband also spoke to Spero’s initiative to fund the rebirth of Yiddish culture in France from the grass roots. In contrast, PYAT never received funding from sources outside of its “friends” group. In *Parizer shriftn*, I. Vaynfeld wrote, “There were no speeches, and there were no flowers, but it brings its plots into the world at a very important time in our lives: it is ‘YKUT.’”⁴⁵ Vaynfeld felt that although YKUT entered the Parisian cultural landscape unceremoniously, there was a lot to be excited about its emergence.

YKUT was one of the most significant players in the community’s efforts to develop Yiddish theatre in postwar France. There were other Yiddish theatres active during the immediate postwar years in Paris, namely the Yidisher folks-teater (Jewish People’s Theatre) and the Yiddish marionette troupe Hakh-Bakl, formed by Ruth and Simche Schwarz in 1948 and featuring artistic designs by Marc Chagall.⁴⁶ Simche was an early participant in YKUT, too. Yiddish theatre during these years was also being translated and performed by young Jews in France. For example, a drama circle organized by the French Jewish youth scouting group the *Éclaireurs israélite* staged a French-language production of S. An-sky’s landmark Yiddish play *Der dibuk* (*The Dybbuk*) in a small theatre in 1947.⁴⁷

The Farband anticipated that YKUT would be highly active, and actors and directors were even salaried, a big departure from PYAT. In 1946 and 1947, for example, according to Tsentral kultur-rat (Central Culture Council) planning documents, YKUT was expected to plan one production per season, participate in the development of a theatre library, and start a group of artists and writers centered around YKUT that was “reasonable for theatre.”⁴⁸ Even though Lancry was still active, the Farband also led an ultimately failed campaign to build a new theatre space for the troupe, signaling the organization’s desire to create a standalone Yiddish theatre space in postwar France, mirroring some Yiddish theatre efforts in prewar New York City.⁴⁹

However, YKUT was seen as one of the key aspects in the revitalization of Yiddish culture in postwar France and Europe more broadly. Specifically, they were considered a part of the Yiddish community’s period of “growth and maturity” (*vuks un rayfkayt*).⁵⁰ YKUT also physically and explicitly connected itself to Jews’ French wartime experiences. As letterhead reveals, YKUT’s main office was located at 36 rue Amelot, the same location as the headquarters for the wartime Jewish Resistance group the Comité de la rue Amelot.⁵¹ Therefore, within its postwar Yiddish theatrical milieu, YKUT gives us an ideal entrée into evaluating how Yiddish theatre in France responded to peoples’ collective wartime experiences.

To reach out to Jews in postwar Paris, YKUT employed a marketing strategy that traversed, and potentially united, several political and cultural worlds. The troupe ran advertisements in a wide variety of Yiddish-language periodicals, including the communist *Naye prese* and *Yidisher vokh*, the Bundist *Unzer shtime*, the Zionist *Kium*, and the Labor Zionist *Unzer vort*—for which Mordechai Strigler famously wrote while he lived in Paris after his liberation from Buchenwald—demonstrating that YKUT felt that they could appeal to all corners of postwar Yiddish Paris.⁵² They also ran ads in the UJRE’s French-language, communist-sympathizing *Droit et liberté*. In addition to the placement of these advertisements, *Parizer shriftn*

in each issue ran listings about the Farband's activities, acting as a quasi-tickertape of the group's happenings. *Parizer shriftn* updated readers on what the troupe had recently performed and what was on the horizon.⁵³ It was here that readers would have learned about the activities of YKUT's own Society of Friends, which organized evening events in support of the group.⁵⁴ The Society of Friends, which was headquartered at Lancry, described YKUT as the "only serious Yiddish theatre in Paris."⁵⁵ Of course, they were biased, as the group's main objective was to "assure YKUT's existence" and help "develop a plan for each season," and they actively tried to come up with measures that they hoped would ensure the group's longevity.⁵⁶ For example, the society was active in amassing subscribers and involving a wide variety of Yiddish cultural organizations as supporters of the troupe. Members paid three thousand francs monthly, which entitled them to entry, with four seats, to every production. To build upon YKUT's goal of cultivating and educating new, up-and-coming actors, the troupe also organized a theatre school, which was led by YKUT (and former PYAT) member Oscar Fessler and other French artists.⁵⁷

Most striking about YKUT's advertisements is the regular use of a logo that invoked both secular and religious Jewish life. Across the bottom left of the square logo was the troupe acronym, YKUT, in a simple, plain font. The troupe's full name was not always spelled out within the advertisements, giving the impression that they felt that they were gaining some notoriety within the Yiddish theatregoing public. Centered within the image was a dark spot. Draped across the other three sides of the image was a wide piece of white fabric, which mirrored the visual look of a tallit (minus the tzitzit) as well as a stage curtain. In Yiddish, the word *bima* means "stage," in the theatre sense; the same word is used for the raised platform with a reading desk that sits in front of the Torah ark typically seen in *shul*.⁵⁸ This was a visual elevation of the *bima* of the Yiddish stage to that of religious iconography. While YKUT rarely used this logo on performance "invitations," which were small handout flyers the troupe used to announce plays or on wall posters, they used it on the front covers of all YKUT playbills. Indeed, the religious iconography would have resonated with the Jewish audience; French Catholics, some of whom were likely in attendance, would not have as easily made this connection.

During their five-year run, YKUT staged about fourteen different plays. Through a diverse repertoire, the group tried to (re)construct for Paris a Yiddish theatregoing public. They staged plays by Yiddish writers Mendele Moykher-Sforim, Haim Sloves, Sholem Aleichem, Peretz Hirschbein, and L. Katzowitch. They also staged Arno Dusso and James Goy's *Les Profondes Racines* (The deep roots), which troupe member Jacob Kurlender translated into Yiddish. When Jacob Rotboym returned to direct for YKUT in 1947, they staged his original play *A goldfadn kholem* (*A Goldfaden Dream*). It was during this performance that Henekh Kon made his *début* as musical director for the group. He would play this role again for the February 1949 production of Peretz Hirschbein's *Der shmids kinder* (The blacksmith's children), which, based on the plot synopsis printed in the program, was an adaptation of his *Dem shmids tekhter* (*The Blacksmith's Daughters*). YKUT also produced Haim Sloves's *Homens mapole* (*Haman's Downfall*).⁵⁹ Perhaps to capitalize on the French postwar rise in popularity of cabaret, YKUT even hosted a *klaynkunst* (the Yiddish term for "cabaret") event on 26 January 1947, with a

program that was to include several “sketches of prominent monologues by Mendele, Sholem Aleichem, Peretz, as well as modern writers.”⁶⁰ The troupe was open to staging plays by both classic Yiddish authors (here Sholem Aleichem and Mendele Moykher-Sforim) and relatively unknown playwrights and authors within the grand spectrum of the Yiddish stage, all in an effort to create an informed, culturally Yiddish theatregoing public in postwar France. Their repertoire was diverse, and that was the point. They were just as interested in producing classic Yiddish plays as they were in new works, suggesting that YKUT felt its role in the postwar French cultural landscape was to provide its audiences—which were not only comprised of Yiddish-speaking Jews—with the opportunity to become literate in the full spectrum of late nineteenth and early and mid-twentieth-century Yiddish drama.

The playbills highlight the overlaps with PYAT—actors such as Leib Lensky, J. Yachar, Moshe Kineman, Oscar Fessler, and Fela Feld were involved in both troupes, as well as the aforementioned Jacob Rotboym—but they also demonstrate new directions for Yiddish theatre in Paris. In late 1949, too, the famed Zygmunt and Rosa Turkow even performed in the troupe’s production of *Tevye der milkhiker* (*Tevye the Dairyman*) that season demonstrating the lengths to which YKUT was going to bring premiere Yiddish talent to the Parisian Yiddish stage.⁶¹ The overlaps in personnel, although important, are still minimal, which demonstrates how people were compelled to make European Yiddish culture anew in the wake of the Holocaust. To highlight further how these changes in both personnel and productions made YKUT visible to survivors in postwar Paris, I turn now to three YKUT performances: 1945’s *Fiskhe der krumer* (Fishke the lame); their productions of *Homens mapole*; and 1947’s *A goldfadn kholem*.

YKUT’s debut production was Mendele Moykher-Sforim’s *Fiskhe der krumer*. Simche Schwarz (later of Haki-Baki) directed and adapted the play for this production, in which Moishe Kineman and Leib Lensky played the two main roles. From the playbill, which included a synopsis in French, we learn how Schwarz adapted the play to resonate with a post-Holocaust Parisian Yiddish-theatregoing public.⁶² Most notably, in the description of the first act, there is an emphasis on children and abandonment, which was an issue on the minds of many Jews in postwar France, as Daniella Doron reminds us.⁶³ There is also a focus on rebirth. In the last line of the synopsis, after we learn of a dispute between the main characters, Alter and Fishke, we read that Alter gave his daughter to Fishke to “guide them toward a more dignified and beautiful life.”⁶⁴ In addition to a glimpse into how the play was adapted, we can also glean from the French synopsis that non-Yiddish speakers attended the play. Or, at the very least, YKUT *thought* non-Yiddish speakers might attend the play, just as non-Yiddish speakers had frequented PYAT performances. This adaptation of *Fiskhe der krumer* clearly references the contemporary moment and highlights Jewish thinking about abandonment, rebirth, and the future. It was through this type of production that YKUT engaged both its Frenchness and Yiddishness. YKUT was a catalyst for Jews in postwar France to think about their recent past and what Jewish future there might be on the Continent.

The advertisements that ran in advance of the performance did not mention the relationship between YKUT and PYAT, which suggests that YKUT saw itself as a

new contribution to Yiddish theatre in Paris and not simply a continuation of what had gone on during the interwar years. So too, *Parizer shriftn's* coverage of *Fiskhe der krumer* reads as a celebration of things to come, with no reference to PYAT.⁶⁵ As the reviewer, I. Vaynfeld, wrote:

There is a great theater . . . the Jewish Art Theater in France! . . . YKUT opened . . . a few months after the end of the great world war and after the greatest Jewish catastrophe. . . . But we have not forgotten, we, who are still alive . . . devote ourselves to a widespread . . . building of Jewish literature, after seven years of silence from Yiddish writers . . . here comes YKUT . . . we wait, and not just in Yiddish Paris.⁶⁶

Although he was not completely overwhelmed by the performance itself, Vaynfeld's coverage carried with it a note of enthusiasm because he felt that YKUT was central to the resurrection of Yiddish culture and Jewish life in France and Europe more broadly.

Whereas *Parizer shriftn's* coverage referenced the Holocaust and the potential for Yiddish theatre in Europe to which YKUT signaled, *Naye prese's* review pointed back to the troupe's origins. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that this journal was a product of the prewar years and had covered PYAT extensively during the 1930s. Reviewer Moyshe Shulshtayn wrote that "A grand gathering of Jewish workers, intellectuals, culture makers, journalists, and theatre lovers attended the premiere from the newly established [YKUT]."⁶⁷ There were "more [in attendance] than a typical premiere," wrote Shulshtayn, "especially if you consider that this was the premiere of a production from a brand-new theatre troupe and the first performance of such great scope after Liberation."⁶⁸ Shulshtayn, however, noted that the troupe was not all that new, and that YKUT featured former members of PYAT: "Piatlers," as he called them.⁶⁹ Shulshtayn wrote positively of the performance. Here, the reviewer makes a clear connection between the pre—and postwar years, even hinting that YKUT's success rests on the shoulders of PYAT's. It was this ability to bridge periods that made YKUT's rebuilding process unique.

With Schwarz's adaptation of Mendele's *Fishke*, YKUT established itself as a bridge connecting the interwar, Holocaust, and postwar years. First, this performance made it clear that the troupe was an integral part of the post-Holocaust Yiddish cultural revival in Europe. Second, this performance signaled their potential as an incubator for future Parisian Yiddish thespians because their efforts were met with praise. Additionally, YKUT's existence, put simply, provided the survivor community in Europe with a sign of hope—hope that there may still be room for Jewish life in Europe.

Any doubt of YKUT's ability to produce quality Yiddish theatre was put to rest in 1946 when they premiered their production of Haim Sloves's *Homens mapole* (*Haman's Downfall*). *Homens mapole* mirrors an avant-garde move to resurrect folk forms.⁷⁰ Similar efforts were at play in YKUT's staging of classic Yiddish writers' plays such as Mendele's *Fishke* and works by Sholem Aleichem. Scholar Annette Aronowicz asserts that with *Homens mapole*, Sloves wanted to preserve Yiddish culture after the Holocaust in Paris, and that his work and "fight for Yiddish culture in the Soviet Union was a fight to preserve something inner, to preserve an expression that comes from within, in the face of massive external pressure

to erase it.”⁷¹ Given the rise of the French Communist Party in the wake of the war, and its popularity among Yiddish-speaking Jews, this bifurcated alliance is not surprising, nor was it a paradox.⁷² Indeed, Aronowicz argues that this play was a highly political act: “Communist ideology merges with many other factors, both conscious and unconscious, to produce a play that celebrates a victorious resistance, rather than one that mourns the countless, powerless victims.”⁷³ Aronowicz’s work illuminates the importance of the play for how we understand Sloves’s playwriting, and, by extension YKUT. With *Homens mapole*, she claims, reviewers saw “Yiddish theatre as a symbolic representation of the Jewish people itself.”⁷⁴

For the troupe, *Homens mapole* marked further progress toward their goal of creating Yiddish theatre in postwar France that spoke beyond Yiddish-speaking circles. As with *Fishke*, the playbill for this performance was produced in French and Yiddish, including an extensive, French-language, act-by-act plot synopsis.⁷⁵ Additionally, the reviews of the play pointed to the “play as of a light emerging from the darkness, as a black curtain lifting, as a sudden change on a child’s face from tears to laughter.”⁷⁶ A reviewer in *Droit et liberté* wrote that this was “a Jewish play par excellence; it is a folk piece, but its theatrical translation ranks it among the most universal performances, such as the *Threepenny Opera*, works by Molière, or Chaplin films. It is played in language that is so simple and so human, it addresses a sense of general justice.”⁷⁷ The reviewer here makes three very important artistic references, none of which is specifically Jewish. One is to the antifascist Bertolt Brecht’s most famous staged performance; another is to one of the most beloved French playwrights; and a third is to Charlie Chaplin, whose work in the late 1940s was becoming more politically charged. Taken together, we can see the reviewer identify how *Homens mapole* created community by universalizing the Jewish tradition and making it the arbiter of justice.

Representations of justice were also made explicit in the staging of the play itself, and the allusions to the Nazis and Haman as a stand-in for Hitler were not subtle. One publicity photograph depicts a battle between the two main characters: Haman and Mordechai. Mordechai is dressed in a manner reminiscent of the aforementioned Menachem Mendl; his weapon is his umbrella. Haman’s weapon in this battle is a sword, one whose cross guard echoes visually the hooked cross of the Nazi swastika. With this obvious visual reference to a Sholem Aleichem character, YKUT staged Yiddish culture’s triumph over Nazism.

When the play was revived in 1948, YKUT created a French-language summary of the play, perhaps to include in the playbill or circulate to the press.⁷⁸ In the text, the troupe states that the play features the theme of communities “fleeing racial persecutions,” and that in the end one of the characters, Mardochée (i.e., Mordechai), “becomes leader of the . . . opposition, is appointed prime minister and proclaims . . . the equality of all races.”⁷⁹ Writing about the postwar productions of his play (which was originally written in 1940), Sloves reflected, “between the two versions lie years of work and experience and most importantly—the flood of blood over the world and the terrifying destruction of our people. . . . The hell fires of the crematoria disturbed not only the happiness of victory and the carefree nature of bright laughter, but also threw a new light on a number of characters in the play, a light that almost completely transformed them.”⁸⁰ This production, like its 1946 predecessor, was well received within the Yiddish—and French-language press.⁸¹

YKUT's performances of Sloves's *Homens mapole* established the group as the premiere Yiddish theatre troupe in postwar France and an important player in the reconstruction of post-Holocaust Jewish life in Europe. The troupe was also starting to gain prominence within the larger French theatrical world. Even more explicitly, Sloves had *Homens mapole* translated into French, extending his work's reach. Not, however, its praise.

In July 1948, André Barsacq, director of the Théâtre de l'Atelier in Paris, wrote to YKUT to say that he enjoyed their production of *La Triste Fin de Haman le terrible*—Sloves's French translation of *Homens mapole*—and to give YKUT and Sloves some artistic direction. Pointedly, Barsacq took issue with the fact that the play had been translated. He wrote, "I fear that the French adaptation takes away from the vividness of your work. You wrote this play in Yiddish, and, with the translation, the play has almost lost its strength and color."⁸² He also noted that he understood that YKUT must have done this in order to reach further into the community, but he insisted that they stick to the original language, Yiddish. One can read this critique as support for the culturally pluralistic vision seemingly put forth by YKUT. Barsacq, however, seems to be arguing that YKUT would best fit within the French theatrical scene by maintaining their high level of Yiddish-language productions. Full assimilation was not going to fuel YKUT's artistic and communal success; balancing Frenchness and Yiddishness would.

As with their productions of *Fishke* and *Homens mapole*, YKUT once again made waves in March 1947, when Jacob Rotboym returned to the Parisian Yiddish stage. Rotboym, who had directed for the Vilna Troupe and PYAT during the interwar years, had been invited to New York to work for Maurice Schwartz's Yiddish Art Theatre in 1940, effectively saving him from the wartime experiences of some of his PYAT comrades. In 1942, he had premiered in Detroit what would be his most celebrated play, *A goldfadn kholem*. This play would wind up being shown worldwide, and it was what brought him back to Paris after the war.

A goldfadn kholem was billed as a "musical people's play" (*folks-shpil*); it was a compilation of writings by Itzik Manger, Avrom Goldfaden, G. Aynbinder, and B. Fentster, with Rotboym credited as director and playwright.⁸³ Its playbill, like others for YKUT, was published in Yiddish and French and featured a detailed plot synopsis in French. It also included a piece by Rotboym that emphasizes the importance of this production, names Avrom Goldfaden as the "father of Jewish theatre," and notes that "his oeuvre can provide inspiration for modern art."⁸⁴ In particular, Rotboym makes it clear that this is not a presentation of Goldfaden's plays but rather a "new interpretation of Goldfaden's motifs." In fact, *A goldfadn kholem* was based on Itzik Manger's 1936 loose adaptation of Goldfaden's *Di kish-efmakhern* (*The Witch of Botoşani*), in which Manger had incorporated a wide-range of classic Yiddish writers' works, including Sholem Aleichem and Mendele Moykher-Sforim. So, in reality, this production was a performance of classic Yiddish writers and theatre through a modernist lens. "A *goldfadn kholem*," writes Rotboym, "reflects Jews' desire for a genuine popular Jewish art theatre, one that addresses current themes while not being detached from the classic traditions of Jewish culture."⁸⁵ Indeed, the play itself ends, according to the synopsis, with Oyzer (played by Leib Lensky), the protagonist, "deciding to create a genuine popular Jewish theatre based on the best theatric and literary traditions."⁸⁶

With *A goldfadn kholem*, Rotboym and YKUT attempted to blend classical Yiddish theatre and literature with a modern, artistic approach. Although composed during World War II and in the United States, this particular play with its theme of “rebirth” would have resonated with the Holocaust-survivor community in postwar France and elsewhere in Europe. It was on this theme, too, that many reviewers of the play focused. In an interview, Rotboym told *Naye prese* that he had high expectations for his visit to Paris and that he was looking forward to working with YKUT because he admired the work that Fessler and Kineman were doing with the young troupe. He also mentioned his time with PYAT, with reminiscence. “‘YKUT’ under the direction of Rotboym,” wrote *Naye prese* in conclusion, “will become a new high point in the artistic work of our theatre.”⁸⁷ Furthering the accolades placed upon YKUT, N. Danek wrote in the journal *Oyfsnay* (Renewal) that “the harmonization of all theater elements should be a considered a springboard, a trampoline for ‘YKUT’ . . . to help in the fight for a new life, for a new culture.”⁸⁸ Also that year, Rotboym staged Noah Luriah’s *Widershtand* (Resistance)—a play about Jewish resistance to the Nazis—at the Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt.⁸⁹ However, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, he did not employ YKUT as the troupe for this performance.

YKUT disbanded in January 1950 due to internal politics.⁹⁰ As reported by the Socialist-Zionist *Unzer vort*, YKUT broke up because the communal unity it was trying to effect could not stave off some of the factionalism of the postwar years. Financial troubles and lack of support were also contributing factors and may have been the primary reason that YKUT ceased operations. By the end of the decade, the group had amassed a deficit of around 1.4 million francs because they were spending approximately two hundred thousand francs a month.⁹¹ This included salaries for the actors. At a membership cost of three thousand francs a month, the Society of Friends of YKUT would have had to maintain more than sixty-six active memberships at all times simply to cover the troupe’s basic operating costs. During this postwar period of financial instability in France, and given YKUT’s level of debt, this was clearly too tall an order to fulfill. The Bund (Medem-farband) had promised to fundraise on their behalf in the United States as its contribution to the longevity of the troupe, but it never took up this effort. The Fédération des sociétés juives de France also lost interest in supporting the group.⁹² This was disappointing for a number of reasons, according to *Undzer vort*, but none more disheartening than the fact that the renowned Zygmunt and Rosa Turkow had just premiered in Sholem Aleichem’s *Tevey der milkhiker* (*Tevey the Dairyman*), which now had to be shut down midrun at Théâtre Lancry. Dovid Licht, another former member of PYAT and the Vilna Troupe, was also supposed to be featured in this fifth season, according to a Society of Friends newsletter, but it seems the season was cut too short for that production to come to fruition.⁹³ YKUT had yet again brought in international talent to help elevate their artistic direction and presence within the Parisian theatre scene. It seems, however, that the troupe’s intention to create art theatre and only art theatre occluded their ability to function long-term within the increasingly politicized and financially unstable post-Holocaust French and Jewish worlds.

Despite these troubles, the troupe struggled to stay alive, even though these efforts were in vain. Some members proposed divorcing YKUT from the

Farband and giving full control, and what funding was left, to the Society of Friends of YKUT.⁹⁴ Others envisioned downsizing too: instead of all actors earning a salary, only five would, and the rest were to take on an “amateur” status. Also, in lieu of paying Jacob Mansdorf fifty thousand francs per month as a regular director of the group, YKUT was now to capitalize on the “diversity” that using different directors would allow the troupe.⁹⁵ “It is clear that artistic, dramatic work plays a prominent role in our cultural activity,” reads an undated report on the future of YKUT. “Given recent immigration and the cultural needs of a certain part of the Jews of previous waves of immigration, YKUT deserves our full attention . . . [so we ought to] maintain its activity and even make it prosper.”⁹⁶

During its five-year run, the troupe produced plays that spoke to Yiddish Paris’s interwar, wartime, and postwar experiences. It was a group comprised of Holocaust survivors, some of whom had acted on the Yiddish stage in the 1930s; others were newcomers. YKUT also had help from a global group of Yiddish luminaries. Together, these culture makers attempted both to re-create and to create anew Jewish cultural life in Europe—and in Yiddish, thereby eschewing a normative, postwar brand of assimilation as the only means by which one could attempt to become part of French society. YKUT’s productions were diverse, but all touched on some aspect of resistance, abandonment, renewal, and antiracism,⁹⁷ as they also sought to tie together classic Yiddish theatre and literature with a new, modern artistic approach.

During the immediate post-Holocaust years, Jews from all over Europe made their way to Paris and attempted to rebuild their lives and communities. One of their immediate responses was to turn to culture, specifically a long-standing Jewish global tradition: Yiddish theatre. Through theatre, Holocaust survivors in France tied together the new and old, confronted their recent experiences, tried to develop a collective memory of those experiences, and staged new visions for the survival of Yiddishness in Europe. Between 1945 and 1950, YKUT stood at the center of this cultural experiment, one that expressed a desire to include both French- and Yiddish-speaking communities. In the City of Light, Yiddish theatre confronted European Jews’ wartime experiences—whether in the camps, in hiding, or as part of the French Resistance—all in an attempt to proclaim that they, Jews, were still there, and would continue to build a Yiddish and Jewish presence in Europe. It was their way to stage their survival and confront new political and social realities—namely, that they continued to live in countries that only years earlier had attempted their annihilation.

Notes

1 Press clipping, *Naye prese*, 9 December 1944, 4o COL 020/20 (3), Collection Gérard Frydman: Le Théâtre yiddish à Paris, 1889–1983, Le YKUT 1944–1950, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Richelieu, Paris, France (hereinafter, Collection Gérard Frydman). *Naye prese* was a Yiddish communist daily newspaper that dated to 1934 and had just resumed publication in 1944 after four years underground.

2 “Di grindung fun a yidishn folks-teater in pariz,” *Naye tsayt*, 12 May 1945, 3.

3 “10 yor PYAT, 1935 to 1945,” program, RG 1297, Leib Lensky Archives, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, USA. On PYAT, see Nick Underwood, “Staging a New Community: Immigrant Yiddish Culture and Diaspora Nationalism in Interwar Paris, 1919–1940” (Ph.D. diss., Dept. History, University of Colorado Boulder, 2016), chap. 3.

- 4 On France and the “myth of silence,” see Annette Wiewiorka, *The Era of the Witness*, trans. Jared Stark (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); and Judith Lindenberg, ed., *Premiers savoirs de la Shoah* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2017). In the United States, see Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).
- 5 On postwar Holocaust remembrances in France, see Johannes Heuman, *The Holocaust and French Historical Culture, 1945–65* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), and the recent special issue, guest-edited by Simon Perego, “Première(s) mémoire(s): Les Juifs de France et la Shoah, de la Libération à la guerre des Six Jours,” *Archives Juives* 51.2 (2018).
- 6 For example, see Daniel Greene, *The Jewish Origins of Cultural Pluralism: The Menorah Association and American Diversity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011). On France as a “melting pot,” see Gérard Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot: Immigration, Citizenship, and National Identity*, trans. Geoffroy de Laforcade (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
- 7 Debra Caplan argues that Yiddish theatre was seminal in the development of twentieth-century theatre. Caplan, *Yiddish Empire: The Vilna Troupe, Jewish Theater, and the Art of Itinerancy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 9.
- 8 Nancy L. Green, *The Pletzl of Paris: Jewish Immigrant Workers in the Belle Époque* (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1986).
- 9 On the AEAR, see Mattie Fitch, “The People and the Workers: Communist Cultural Politics during the Popular Front in France,” *Twentieth Century Communism* 9.9 (2015): 40–67; Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934–38* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 119–21; and Christopher Moore, “Music in France and the Popular Front (1934–1938): Politics, Aesthetics and Reception” (Ph.D. diss., Schulich School of Music, McGill University, 2006).
- 10 On Yiddish culture in Paris after the war, see Constance Pâris de Bollardière, “Fajwel Schrager (né Ostrynski), bundiste, directeur de l’ORT—France et du bureau parisien de l’Union mondiale-ORT,” *Archives Juives* 48.1 (2015): 136–40; de Bollardière, “Mutualité, fraternité et travail social chez les bundistes de France (1944–1947),” *Archives Juives* 45.1 (2012): 27–42; the essays by de Bollardière, “‘Écritures de la destruction’ et reconstruction: Yankev Pat, auteur et acteur de monde yiddish—Le cas de Paris, 1946–1948” (275–91), Simon Perego, “De l’écrit à l’oral: Le Recours aux œuvres littéraires dans les commémorations de la révolte du ghetto de Varsovie (Paris, 1945–1967)” (293–317), and Éléonore Biezunski, “Miroir des mémoires: *Der Teater Shpigl*, une revue théâtrale yiddish parisienne de l’après-guerre” (319–34), all in *Premiers savoirs de la Shoah*, ed. Lindenberg. See also Jan Schwarz, *Survivors and Exiles: Yiddish Culture after the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015); David Slucki, *The International Jewish Labor Bund after 1945: Toward a Global History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), chap. 2; and Annette Aronowicz, “Homens mapole: Hope in the Immediate Postwar Period,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 98.3 (2008): 355–88.
- 11 Biezunski.
- 12 Laura Jockusch, “Breaking the Silence: The Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine in Paris and the Writing of Holocaust History in Liberated France,” in *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence*, ed. David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist (London: Routledge, 2012), 67–81.
- 13 Robert Gildea reminds us that immigrant Jews were a fundamental component of the French Resistance. See Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows: A New History of the French Resistance* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2015).
- 14 After the Holocaust, the Jewish population of France was relatively large. Prior to the war, it was about 300,000 (including immigrant Jews and so-called native Jews). Of this, 75,000 Jews, two-thirds of whom were foreign born, were deported. Of those 75,000 deported Jews, Serge Klarsfeld estimates that 2,500 returned. See Klarsfeld, *Memorial to the Jews Deported from France, 1942–1944: Documentation of the Deportation of the Victims of the Final Solution in France* (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1983). Overall, approximately 200,000 French (native and immigrant) Jews survived. It is also estimated that 37,000 Jews who had not previously lived in France, moved there between 1944 and 1949. On these last figures, see Maud Mandel, “The Encounter between ‘Native’ and ‘Immigrant’ Jews in Post-Holocaust France: Negotiating Difference,” in *Post-Holocaust France and the Jews, 1945–1955*, ed. Seán Hand and Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 38–57, at 40–1.
- 15 A. C., “France: The Crisis of the Fourth Republic,” *The World Today* 4.10 (1948): 413–21; and Jean-Pierre Rioux, *The Fourth Republic, 1944–1958*, trans. Godfrey Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

16 See Rioux; Gildea, *Fighters*; and David Drake, *Paris at War: 1939–1944* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2015).

17 Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 15–18.

18 Megan Koreman, *The Expectation of Justice: France 1944–1946* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 260–1.

19 Fabrice Virgili, *Shorn Women: Gender and Punishment in Liberation France*, trans. John Flower (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2002).

20 Jockusch, “Breaking the Silence.” See also Jean Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken, 1995); Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (New York: Random House, 2007); Renée Poznanski, “French Apprehensions, Jewish Expectations: From a Social Imaginary to a Political Practice,” in *The Jews Are Coming Back: The Return of the Jews to Their Countries of Origin after WW II*, ed. David Bankier (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books), 25–57.

21 Maud S. Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth-Century France* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 5; Paula E. Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 199; Daniella Doron, *Jewish Youth and Identity in Postwar France: Rebuilding Family and Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015). Laura Jockusch shows that Paris was the centerpiece in Jews’ attempts to document the Holocaust in its immediate aftermath. See Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Also see Lisa Moses Leff, “Post-Holocaust Book Restitutions: How One State Agency Helped Revive Republican Franco-Judaism,” in *Post-Holocaust France and the Jews*, ed. Hand and Katz, 71–84. Relatedly, David Weinberg has argued that France was the site of the formation of a new type of international Jewish community, illustrating how the involvement of foreign aid organizations ushered in an era where American Jewish organizations seemingly had large influence over the growth of the French community. Weinberg, “The Revival of French Jewry in Post-Holocaust France: Challenges and Opportunities,” in *Post-Holocaust France and the Jews*, ed. Hand and Katz, 26–37, and Weinberg, *Recovering a Voice: West European Jewish Communities after the Holocaust* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2015).

22 For recent studies on the postwar years that analyze Eastern European Jews in France, see K. H. Adler, *Jews and Gender in Liberation France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Laura Hobson Faure, *Un “Plan Marshall Juif”: La Présence juive américaine en France après la Shoah, 1944–1954* (Paris: Éditions Armand Colin, 2013).

23 See Éric Conan and Henry Rousso, *Vichy: An Ever-Present Past*, trans. and annot. Nathan Bracher (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College [Lebanon, NH: UPNE], 1998); Rousso; and Robert Gildea, *France since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). For a challenge to this historiographical trend, see François Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence: Auschwitz, les Français, le mémoire* (Paris: Fayard, 2012); and Lindenberg.

24 Shannon L. Fogg, *Stealing Home: Looting, Restitution, and Reconstructing Jewish Lives in France, 1942–1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Leora Auslander, “Coming Home? Jews in Postwar Paris,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40.2 (2005): 237–59; and David Cesarani, “Challenging the ‘Myth of Silence’: Postwar Responses to the Destruction of European Jewry,” in *After the Holocaust*, ed. Cesarani and Sundquist, 15–38. On Bundist Yiddish culture in Paris after the war, also see de Bollardière, “Fajwel Schrager,” and de Bollardière, “Mutualité.”

25 On being French and Jewish before the Holocaust, see Nadia Malinovich, *French and Jewish: Culture and the Politics of Identity in Early Twentieth-Century France* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007).

26 For more on post-Holocaust writing in *Parizer shriftn*, see See Mark L. Smith, *The Yiddish Historians and the Struggle for a Jewish History of the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019). Also see Smith, “No Silence in Yiddish: Popular and Scholarly Writing about the Holocaust in the Early Postwar Years,” in *After the Holocaust*, ed. Cesarani and Sundquist, 55–65.

27 I. Vaynfeld, “Vegn yidish teater (a por batrakhungen),” *Parizer shriftn*, no. 1 (October 1945): 75–6.

28 David Weinberg, “The Renewal of Jewish Life in France after the Holocaust,” in *She’erit Hapletah, 1944–1948: Rehabilitation and Political Struggle*, ed. Yisrael Gutman and Avital Saf (Proceedings of the Sixth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1990), 169–74; Weinberg, *Recovering a Voice*; Hand and Katz; Schwarz; Slucki, chap. 3; and David G. Roskies,

"Dividing the Ruins: Communal Memory in Yiddish and Hebrew," in *After the Holocaust*, ed. Cesarani and Sundquist, 82–101, at 83.

29 PYAT is listed in Zalman Zylbercweig's *Leksikon fun yidishn teater*, where the entry correctly notes the connection between the development of PYAT and the arrival in Paris in the early 1930s of former members of the Vilna Troupe: David Licht, Avrom-Yankev (Jakob) Mansdorf, Yankev Kurlender, and Jacob Rothbaum. See "PYAT," in Zylbercweig, ed., *Leksikon fun yidishn teater*, vol. 3 (New York: Farlag Elisheva, 1959), 1757–8.

30 Union des théâtres indépendants de France, membership card, 1937, Archives Fela Feldman, Medem Bibliothèque, Paris, France.

31 "10 yor PYAT, 1935–1945," program.

32 In other postwar Parisian Yiddish publications, such as I. Spero et al., *Yizkor-Bukh zum ondenk fun 14 umgekumene parizer yidische shrayber* (Paris: Farlag Oyfsnay, 1946), the Yiddish word "ermordet" (murdered) is used to describe those killed by the Nazis or Vichy collaborators during the Holocaust.

33 "10 yor PYAT, 1935–1945," program. See Cyril Robinson, "Gerard Frydman, His Life in the Yiddish Theater in Paris," Part II, accessed 15 November 2016, www.jewishmag.com/117mag/yiddishtheater2/yiddishtheater2.htm.

34 Playbill, *Goldgreber*, 4o COL 020/8, Gérard Frydman Collection.

35 "10 yor PYAT, 1935–1945," program.

36 See Spero et al.

37 I. Spero, "Tsen yor 'PIAT,'" *Parizer shriftn*, no. 1 (October 1945): 78–9.

38 See Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

39 Haim Sloves quoted in "Manifest fun farband fun yidishe kultur-gezelschaftn in frankraykh," *Parizer shriftn* 1 (October 1945): 88–9, at 88.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 On this far-reaching mission of the Farband, see "Manifest fun farband," 88, 89; and "Tetikayt fun kultur-farband," *Parizer shriftn* 1 (October 1945): 90–1. Because of the postwar prominence of the French Community Party, which was well-supported because of its reputation as a major part of the French Resistance, PYAT's move away from workers' theatre ought to be read as different from similar moves away from these ideals elsewhere, for example, in the US "Red Scare."

43 For example, see Herman Lebovics, *True France: The Wars over Cultural Identity, 1900–1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

44 I. Vaynfeld, "Der 'YKUT' un *Fishke der krumer*," *Parizer shriftn*, nos. 2–3 (March 1946): 130–3, at 130.

45 Ibid., 130.

46 See Jacques Picard, *Gebrochene Zeit: Jüdische Paare im Exil* (Zurich: Ammann, 2009).

47 See M. L., "Der 'dibuk' oyf frantsoyzish," *Naye prese*, 30 January 1947, 3.

48 Tsentral kultur-rat's 1946/1947 plan, 2, CMXXV/10/6, Fonds David Diamant, Centre de documentation juive contemporaine, Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris, France (hereinafter, Fonds David Diamant).

49 YKUT theatre initiative campaign letter, n.d., Image ID W432172_51, Yiddish Theater in France Collection, 1907–1950, Widener Library, Harvard University, Boston, MA (hereinafter, Yiddish Theater in France Collection).

50 Alfred Grant, "Fun kegnzaytiker hilf—tsum kamf farn natsionaln kium," in *Tsen yor farband fun idishe gezelschaftn in frankraykh* (Paris: Farlag Oyfsnay, 1948), 9–42, at 37.

51 YKUT letterhead, Image ID W432172_52, Yiddish Theater in France.

52 Yechiel Szeintuch and Miriam Trinh, eds., *Between Destruction and Reconstruction*, vol. 1: *The Correspondence between M. Strigler and H. Leyvick, 1945–1952* (Yiddish and Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 2015); Schwarz, 69–74.

53 "Kultur-khronik," *Parizer shriftn*, no. 4 (September 1946): 95.

54 "Tetikayt funem farband fun yidisher kultur-gezelschaftn in frankraykh," *Parizer shriftn*, nos. 2–3 (March 1946): 136.

55 Society of Friends of YKUT, letters to supporters, n.d., Image IDs W432172_44, W432172_45, W432172_46, W432172_47, and W432172_48, Yiddish Theater in France Collection.

56 Society of Friends of YKUT, letter to supporters, n.d., Image IDs W432172_44 and W432172_45, Yiddish Theater in France Collection.

- 57 Ibid. The monthly membership fee would be roughly equivalent to US\$350 in 2020.
- 58 On *shuls* in France, see Saskia Coenen Snyder, *Building a Public Judaism: Synagogues and Jewish Identity in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), chap. 4.
- 59 On *Homens mapole*, see Aronowicz, “*Homens mapole: Hope*,” as well as Annette Aronowicz, “Haim Sloves, the Jewish People, and a Jewish Communist’s Allegiances,” *Jewish Social Studies* 9.1 (2002): 95–142; Aronowicz, “*The Downfall of Haman: Postwar Yiddish Theater between Secular and Sacred*,” *AJS Review* 32.2 (2008): 369–88; and Aronowicz, “Joy to the Goy and Happiness to the Jew: Communist and Jewish Aspirations in a Postwar *Purimshpil*,” 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): 275–94.
- 60 “Zuntig in konservatarie a klaynkunst forshetlung fun ‘YKUT,’” *Naye prese*, 23 January 1947, 4; “*Tetikayt funem farband*.”
- 61 YKUT also performed *Tevye der milkhiker* in 1948, receiving positive reviews in the French-language Jewish press. See Harry Melida, “*Les Filles de Tévié* au Théâtre de l’Ambigu,” *Quand Même!*, 3 (March 1948), 16.
- 62 Program, *Fischké le boîteux*, 4o COL 020/20 (2), Collection Gérard Frydman.
- 63 Doron, 2–4.
- 64 Program, *Fischké le boîteux*.
- 65 Vaynfeld, “Der ‘YKUT’ un *Fishke der krumer*.”
- 66 Ibid., 13.
- 67 Moyshe Shulshtayn, “*Fishke der Krumer* in yid. kunst-teater,” *Naye prese*, November n.d., 1945, n.p., news clipping, 4o COL 020/20 (3), Gérard Frydman Collection.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 See Aronowicz, “*Homens mapole: Hope*”; Aronowicz, “Haim Sloves”; Aronowicz, “*Downfall of Haman*”; and Aronowicz, “Joy to the Goy.”
- 71 Aronowicz, “Haim Sloves,” 131.
- 72 On the French Communist Party after the war, see Ronald Tiersky, *French Communism, 1920–1972* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), chaps. 5 and 6.
- 73 Aronowicz, “Joy to the Goy,” 281.
- 74 Aronowicz, “*Homens mapole: Hope*,” 358.
- 75 Playbill, *Homens mapole*, 4o COL 020/21 (1), Gérard Frydman Collection.
- 76 Aronowicz, “Joy to the Goy,” 282.
- 77 “Encore un fois, Aman-le-Terrible,” *Droit et liberté*, 20 February 1946, 2.
- 78 Typed summary of *La Triste Fin d’Aman le terrible* (1948), 4o COL 20 020/22 (3), Gérard Frydman Collection.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Haim Sloves, “Foreword,” in *Homens mapole* (Paris: Oyfsnay, 1949), reproduced in English in Aronowicz, “Joy to the Goy,” 292.
- 81 The playbill for this performance lists six pull quotes from the French-language press and six from the Yiddish press. Playbill, *La Triste Fin d’Aman le terrible*, 4o COL 020/22 (1), Collection Gérard Frydman.
- 82 Letter from André Barsacq, dated 10 July 1948, 4o COL 020/22 (2), Gérard Frydman Collection.
- 83 Playbill, *A goldfadn kholem*, 4o COL 020/25 (5); and typescript for *A goldfadn kholem*, 4o COL 020/25 (1), Gérard Frydman Collection.
- 84 Playbill, *A goldfadn kholem*.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 M. L., “Far der nayer oyfirung fun ‘yidishn kunst-teater,’ a geshprekh mitn rezshiser yankev botboym,” *Naye prese*, 29 March 1947, 3.
- 88 Quoted in Aronowicz, “Downfall of Haman,” 381; N. Danek, “Der kholem fun YKUT,” *Ofnsay*, n.d. 1947, “news clipping,” 4o COL 020/25 (7), Gérard Frydman Collection. N. Danek also covered *Homens mapole* favorably.
- 89 Khil Aron, “Jankev Rotboym’s retsital in teater sara bernhard,” *Naye prese*, 20 February 1947, 3.
- 90 “Geshlosn der ‘YKUT’-teater,” *Undzer vort*, 28 January 1950, 2.
- 91 Report, “Note sur l’YKUT,” n.d., 1, CMXXV/10/6, Fonds David Diamant.

92 Ibid.

93 Society of Friends of YKUT, letter to supporters, n.d., Image IDs W432172_47 and W432172_48, Yiddish Theater in France Collection.

94 The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (the Joint) contributed 150,000 francs for YKUT to use in its effort to move toward independence. Report, “Note sur l’YKUT,” n.d., 2. On the Joint in France, see Faure.

95 Report, “Note sur l’YKUT,” n.d., 2. Mansdorf, as mentioned in note 29, had been a Vilna Troupe member.

96 Ibid., 3.

97 In 30 January 1949, the newspaper *Yidishe vokh* ran a photo from the performance of *Tipe varstlen* that read, “a dramatic scene from the play *Tipe vartslen*, a play against racism,” *Yidisher vokh*, 30 January 1949, 4.

Nick Underwood is Assistant Professor of History and Berger-Neilson Chair in Judaic Studies at The College of Idaho. His first book manuscript is titled “Yiddish Paris: Staging Nation and Community in Interwar France,” and he has begun work on a second book project titled “Plural Jewish Communities: Yiddish Culture, Jewish Migration, and the Making of Post-Holocaust France, 1944–1965.” His articles have appeared in *Jewish Social Studies*, *French Politics, Culture & Society*, *Contemporary French Civilization*, *East European Jewish Affairs*, *Urban History*, and *Archives Juives*.

Cite this article: Nick Underwood, “The Yiddish Art Theatre in Paris after the Holocaust, 1944–1950,” *Theatre Survey* 61.3 (2020): 351–371. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040557420000277>.