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СОДЕРЖАНИЕ

ИСТОРИКО-КУЛЬТУРОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ

- О. Rakitianskaia** (*University of South Africa*)
BIG CATS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE: ANTHROPOLOGICAL ORIGINS
OF IMAGE DUALITY 5
- Ф. В. Шелов-Коведяев** (*Российский общественно-политический центр*)
ПРЕВРАТНОСТИ ПЕРЕВОДА: К ВОПРОСУ ОБ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИИ
ПРИТ. 29:25 25
- М. Freikman** (*Hebrew University of Jerusalem*)
“IT HAPPENED IN TSEIDAN, REGARDING A TREE”: A PROPOSED
IDENTIFICATION OF A MEGALITHIC MONUMENT OF KHIRBET ВТЕНА . . . 32
- Р. В. Светлов** (*Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет*)
ЮЛИАН АПОСТАТ И ОБЩИНЫ ИУДЕЕВ 42
- I. Slater** (*Ben-Gurion University*)
“THOSE WHO YEARN FOR THE DIVINE”: RABBI SHMUEL ALEXANDROV
AND THE RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS-PHILOSOPHICAL RENAISSANCE 55
- А. Jakubczak** (*University of Warsaw*)
JEWS AS THE AVANT-GARDE OF ANTI-PROSTITUTION DISTURBANCES
AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY 69

ЕВРЕЙСКИЕ ЯЗЫКИ

- А. В. Зорницкий** (*Житомирский государственный университет им. И. Франко*)
ОСОБЕННОСТИ АВТОРСКОГО СЛОВОУПОТРЕБЛЕНИЯ И. БУРГА
И ИХ ОТОБРАЖЕНИЕ В НАЛИЧЕСТВУЮЩИХ ЛЕКСИКОГРАФИЧЕСКИХ
ИСТОЧНИКАХ 83

M. Schulz (<i>Columbia University</i>)	
FOR RACE IS MUTE AND MAME-LOSHN CAN SPEAK. YIDDISH PHILOLOGY, CONCEPTIONS OF RACE, AND DEFENSE OF YIDISHKAYT . . .	98
J. Rock (<i>Humboldt University</i>)	
SPAIN AND SEPHARDIC-JEWISH IDENTITY FORMATION IN SARAJEVO TODAY	128

ОБЗОРЫ

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE “THE CRIMEA — CROSSROADS OF CIVILIZATIONS: HISTORY, LITERATURE AND CULTURAL INTERACTION OF CRIMEAN PEOPLES”	150
A. A. Sinitsyn (<i>St. Petersburg State University</i>)	
МЕЖДУНАРОДНАЯ КОНФЕРЕНЦИЯ «MID-DOR LA-DOR: ЯЗЫК И КУЛЬТУРА ЕВРЕЕВ»	156
E. С. Норкина, В. В. Федченко (<i>Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет</i>)	

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**FOR RACE IS MUTE AND MAME-LOSHN CAN SPEAK.
YIDDISH PHILOLOGY, CONCEPTIONS OF RACE,
AND DEFENSE OF YIDISHKAYT¹**

Abstract: This article pertains to the study of the Yiddishist school of Yiddish philology in the 20th century in particular, and the epistemological interdependence between the philological discipline and the racial paradigm in general. For the sake of conceptualizing and demarcating a Jewish nation by means of language study, Yiddish philologists who operated within the long established philological jargon necessarily also operated within the racial paradigm in their study of Yiddish. The task of this essay is to examine how this was done and to trace potential continuities of this thinking even after 1945, when the Holocaust made the racial paradigm seemingly passé. The examination will be anchored in texts of leading Yiddish philologists: Ber Borokhov's essay "The Tasks of Yiddish Philology" (1913) and a selection of Max Weinreich's oeuvre, including his *History of the Yiddish Language* (1973).

Keywords: Yiddishism, Yiddish philology, *mame-loshn*, "Jewish race", race sciences, language in nationalism, monolingualism.

Мириам Шульц, Колумбийский университет

**РАСА НЕМА, А МАМЭ-ЛОШН МОЖЕТ ГОВОРИТЬ.
ЕВРЕЙСКАЯ ФИЛОЛОГИЯ, КОНЦЕПЦИИ РАСЫ
И ЗАЩИТА ИДИШКАЙТА**

Резюме: Данная статья посвящена изучению еврейской филологической школы (идиш) в XX в., в частности, и эпистемологической взаимозависимости между филологической дисциплиной и расовой парадигмой. Для концептуа-

¹ The research for this paper was conducted thanks to the 2016 summer funding of the Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies, Columbia University. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Joshua Price, whose insightful comments and constructive criticism helped immensely to improve this paper.

лизации и определения еврейской нации с помощью языковых исследований, еврейские филологи, работавшие в рамках давней традиции восприятия идиша как «жаргона», по необходимости действовали в рамках расовой парадигмы при изучении идиша. Задача этой статьи — изучить путь еврейской филологии и проследить потенциальные последствия данной концепции после 1945 г., когда Холокост, казалось бы, отменил расовую парадигму. В статье проанализированы работы ведущих еврейских филологов: эссе Бера Борохова «Задачи еврейской филологии» (1913) и ряд работ Макса Вайнрайха, в том числе его «Истории языка идиш» (1973).

Ключевые слова: идишизм, еврейская филология на идише, *мамэ-лошин*, «еврейская раса», язык и национализм, одноязычие.

In 1917, Yiddish poet and playwright Moyshe Broderzon (1890–1956) published the children’s story *Temerl* (Little Tamar). *Temerl* is the daughter of a pious Jew in a Lithuanian *shtetl*,² who makes her way to a wonderland, where “strange trees and flowers are growing” and where “black people live, primitive people, who do not know — not how to pray or how to bless.”³ The Jewess is chosen to become their queen and takes it upon herself to educate her subjects about everything there is in the world in the only language she knows — Yiddish:

Let the queen explain everything to them / And the negroes became — white.⁴

Indeed, *Temerl*’s educational exercise turns the “wild, primitive blacks” into civilized white, Yiddish-speaking Jews. She returns home to Lithuania together with her formerly black, now pious Jewish husband *Zemerl*. They will live happily ever after and will be parents to *Nekhome* (solace), who bears a soul “white like snow.”⁵

What *Temerl* illustrates in all of its (seeming) simplicity is at the heart of the following study: the nexus of language and race and the idea of language as a creator of race in its image. In the late 19th and 20th century, Ashkenazi discourses on Jewish national identity in the post-traditional era orbited around the question of a Jewish national language — Yiddish, Hebrew, or surrounding majority languages like Polish or Russian. In the Yiddishist camp, the study of the Yiddish language developed as a key tool to underpin the ideological claims of the respective national project, be they Zionist, Territorialist, Diasporist, Socialist or Soviet or at times a synergy there of. Yiddish philologists aimed to elevate the vernacular into a widely accepted *kultur-sprakh* and to establish

² Transliteration of Yiddish follows YIVO standards. If not otherwise specified, all translations in this essay will be mine.

³ Moyshe Broderzon, *Temerl, a bobbe-mayselekh* (Moscow, 1917), p. 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

a hegemonic position over competing languages in order to transform Eastern European Jewry into a modern nation.

Concurrent to the advent of *yidische visnshaft* (science of everything Yiddish in Yiddish), the variously-defined term “race”⁶ was ubiquitous in European discourses and naturally permeated Jewish ones as well — including philological.⁷ Indeed, it has long been established that the social-historical construct of “race” is a derivative of modern philology. The comparative study of languages and texts in increasingly institutionalized the classification, characterization, and hierarchization of human groupings along ideas of provenance, descent, and civilizational potentials.⁸ In this vein, Yiddish philologists — intervening in debates over the definition of *Yidishkayt* (Yiddish “national” character) and working to achieve significant status gains for the vernacular through corpus-planning — operated within the long established philological jargon and necessarily also operated within the racial paradigm in their study of *zhargon* — i.e. Yiddish, according to its century-old derogatory name.

I will anchor my discussion in works by two key Yiddish philologists, representatives of the Yiddishist school of Yiddish studies: Ber Borokhov’s

⁶ The plethora of literature on European racism cannot be reviewed here, generally recommendable: Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, Joseph Ziegler (ed.), *The origins of Racism in the West* (Cambridge, 2009); George L. Mosse, *Towards the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (London, 1978); specifically regarding the consensus amongst scholars that “race” is a social-historically constructed rather than a biological-genetic phenomenon see Michael Banton, *Racial Theories* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 196–235; Robert Wald Sussman, *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea* (Cambridge, 2014); insightful regarding recent discussions on the “Jewish race,” see: Steven Kaplan, *If there are no races, how can Jews be a “race”?*, in: *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 2:1, 2003, pp. 79–96.

⁷ There are a number of studies that are looking at Jewish participation in other racialized discourses of scholarly disciplines, inter alia see: Matthew Hoffman, *From Pintele Yid to Racenjude: Chaim Zhitlovsky and racial conceptions of Jewishness*, in: *Jewish History*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2005), pp. 65–78; Dafna Hirsch, *Zionist Eugenics, Mixed Marriage, and the Creation of a “New Jewish Type”*, in: *The Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Sep., 2009), pp. 592–609; Shulamit Volkov, *German Jews: The Temptation of Racism*, in: *Lessons and Legacies XI. Expanding Perspectives on the Holocaust in a Changing World*, Hilary Earl, Karl A. Schleunes (ed.) (Evanston, 2014), pp. 211–228; Marina Mogilner, *Toward a History of Russian Jewish “Medical Materialism”: Russian Jewish Physicians and the Politics of Jewish Biological Normalization*, in: *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Fall 2012), pp. 70–106; John M. Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Mitchell Hart, *Racial Science, Social Science, and the Politics of Jewish Assimilation*, in: *Isis*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (Jun., 1999), pp. 268–297.

⁸ Cf. Christopher M. Hutton, *Linguistics and the Third Reich* (New York, 1998), p. 3, see also: Philipp Krämer, Markus A. Lenz, Markus Messling (ed.), *Rassedenken in der Sprach- und Textreflexion. Kommentierte Grundlagentexte des langen 19. Jahrhunderts* (Paderborn, 2015); Markus Messling, Ottmar Ette (ed.), *Wort Macht Stamm. Rassismus und Determinismus in der Philologie (18./19. Jh.)* (Paderborn, 2009).

“Di ufgabn fun der yidisher filologye” (The Tasks of Yiddish Philology) (1913) and a selection of Max Weinreich’s oeuvre, including his magnum opus *Geshikhte fun der yidisher shprakh* (History of the Yiddish Language) (1973). This school is considered the domineering branch of Yiddish philology, which developed to understand the language as a means in itself rather than a tool of a larger social ideology. Both, Borokhov and Weinreich, came to Yiddish as a second language. Their earnest ideological commitment to its philological upkeep and cultural future, as we will see, may in fact be explained with this “conversion.” Isn’t the “convert” (or even bal-tshuve) often the most enthusiastic and strict with “religious” praxis?

By examining these philologists’ relationship to and appropriations of the Yiddish language in light of their respective ideological framework, I hope to unravel their adoption of racial theory and their attempt to subvert the pejorative philological assumptions long established in regards to their scientific object. That Jewish intellectuals would utilize the same concepts, methods, and lines of argument of the intellectual currents they were part of is indeed hardly surprising. So, the following exploration is more about *how* rather than whether Borokhov and Weinreich reasoned in accordance with racialized thinking — even if they did not explicitly use the term “race” itself — both before and after 1945, when the racial paradigm as a common currency was morally condemned in favor of “political correct” ethnic classifications.

PHILOLOGY, YIDDISH, AND RACE, OR: WHAT YIDDISH PHILOLOGISTS HAD TO CHALLENGE?

But first, let’s consider the prevailing philological-*cum*-racial assumptions Yiddish philologists had to challenge in order to make their research meet the contemporaneous scientific standards. From the beginning in the 18th century, the discipline of modern philology constructed linguistic racial hierarchies that reflected prevailing European imperialism and colonialism. Far from scientifically objective, the concept of an “Indo-European,” “Aryan,” or “Semitic” language family was the forebear of the concept of race. In colonial philology, the study of languages served European scholars as a methodological and historiographical tool to discover the roots of European civilization and Christianity. The concept of language families based on the idea of the “affinity model” allowed scholars to trace Europe’s genealogical ancestry back to glorified Greece and Proto-Indo-Europeans, the so-called Aryans. The “affinity model” claims that resemblance across languages, which is revealed as *systematic* after thorough linguistic scrutiny, indicates a common origin of the respective languages. This belief led to the Aryan paradigm including the “Aryan Invasion Theory,” according to which a superior people speaking an “Aryan” language expanded from its original homeland, conquered and subdued inferior people, e.g. the Dravidians in ancient India. The originally pure Aryans and their civilization

gradually withered away due to interbreeding with the inferior Indians.⁹ These ideas had incisive consequences for the classification of Christianity — Europe’s cultural and spiritual heritage — which suddenly had Semitic roots thanks to the Hebrew Bible as one of its core texts. To harmonize Christianity with Europe’s Greco-Aryan ancestry, there was a strong ambition to “aryanize” it and a coexistent initiative to “genetically” cut off and degrade the opposing Semitic family. This controversy gained momentum in the discourse of philological discipline in the course of the 19th century, which by the century’s end covered “all university-standard activity related specifically to the study of language.”¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, the debate resulted in a “scientifically” established hegemony of Indo-European (“Aryan”) languages over “Semitic” ones due to the former’s supposedly perfect grammatical and inflectional capabilities.¹¹

Simultaneously, a process of equalization between the concepts of “biological race” and “culture” occurred, when the disciplines of comparative linguistics and anatomy started to cooperate in order to systematize how differences in “cranial capacity” and cognitive performance in human groupings, allegedly conditioned by the respective “race,” corresponded to the level of these groupings’ cultural and civilizational achievements and potentials. Subsequently, the concept of “race” was expanded to be the determinant of the entire character and history of an “imagined community.”¹² Taken together, thanks to their common Indo-European linguistic origins, European races were seen as dynamic, complete, and dominant as opposed to Jews (and Muslims), who thanks to their “Semitic” languages were held to represent backwardness and being in a state of degeneracy.

With the emergence of nationalism, these “imagined communities,” as we learn from Benedict Anderson, began to conceive of themselves to be a nation usually tracing its roots back to a specific territory with a unique tradition that is authentically verbalized only in a distinct national tongue — the bearer of the *Volksgeist* (national character). From here the step was easily taken to perceive one’s national belonging as corresponding to one’s race, which must be defended from exterior encroachments in the name of purity. Language, i.e. the mother-

⁹ Christopher M. Hutton, Fictions of Affinity and the Aryan Paradigm, in: *Wort Macht Stamm*, pp. 89–106, pp. 90, 95 f.

¹⁰ Karl D. Uitti, Philology, in: *The Johns Hopkins Guide to literary Theory and Criticism*, Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth (ed.) (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 567–574, p 570, quoted in: Barry Trachtenberg, Ber Borokhov’s “The Tasks of Yiddish Philology,” in: *Science in Context* 20 (2), 2007, pp. 341–352, p. 345.

¹¹ Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of world religion, or, How European universalism was preserved in the language of pluralism* (Chicago, 2005), p. xii-xiii; Barry Trachtenberg, Ber Borokhov’s “The Tasks of Yiddish Philology”, p. 346; Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Vol. 1 (New Brunswick, 1987), pp. 280–336.

¹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London, 2006); Dafna Hirsch, Zionist Eugenics, Mixed Marriage, and the Creation of a “New Jewish Type”, p. 603; Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London, 1995), pp. 42, 122.

tongue, has played an important role in this process of establishing a sense of national uniqueness.¹³ And from the eighteenth century onward, the mythic notion of monolingualism successively superseded previously-unquestioned *modi operandi* of polyglot communities in Europe. The monolingual paradigm emerged in service of the young nation-states, which placed utmost importance on the nation's "mother-tongue" and its inherent biologizing function to achieve racial homogeneity.¹⁴

Consequently, the polyglot condition of Jewish minorities in general consistently aroused deep skepticism amongst linguists in 19th and early 20th century.¹⁵ Because Jewish culture was based on a separation of the sacred Hebrew and the vernacular, German scholars of the time claimed that Jews have an "unnatural" relationship to language. Jews lacked a sense of loyalty to the mother-tongue. They lived dispersed around the world and easily assimilated linguistically, yet remained loyal to the Jewish "race." Jewish "race instinct" was therefore seen to be resistant to the concept of mother-tongue, which posed the ultimate threat to the integrity of other cultures: "The separation of mother-tongue and race meant that language for them was an instrument of communication only, and a means of entry into other cultures and countries."¹⁶

But this dichotomy aside, regarding Yiddish itself, philologists had agreed for centuries that the vernacular lacked the necessary grammatical structures to classify it as a distinct language, or even as a language at all. Yiddish was looked down on as nothing but a corrupt German dialect, a "jargon". This was held to reflect, on some deeper level, a conceptual or logical deficiency of the language and its speakers.¹⁷

More importantly, though, Yiddish's hybridity posed enormous difficulties for (non-Jewish) scholars to classify it in accordance with the aforementioned linguistic axioms, especially the "affinity model" and Aryan paradigm. Written in (Semitic) Hebrew script but deriving from (Aryan) Middle High German, Yiddish vocabulary and grammatical structures are by and large Germanic, but incorporate an abundance of Hebrew and Aramaic (both Semitic), Slavic

¹³ On the significance of language for the nation as "imagined community," see inter alia: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Ilker Aytürk, Revisiting the language factor in Zionism: The Hebrew Language Council from 1904 to 1914, in: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, Vol. 73, No. 1 (2010), pp. 45–64; Joshua A. Fishman, *Language and Nationalism: Two Integrative Essays* (Rowley, 1973); Stephen Barbour and Cathie Carmichael (ed.), *Language and Nationalism in Europe* (Oxford, 2000).

¹⁴ Yasemine Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother-tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (New York, 2012).

¹⁵ Aya Elyada, *A Goy who speaks Yiddish: Christians and the Jewish Language in Early Modern Germany* (Stanford, 2012)

¹⁶ Christopher M. Hutton, *Linguistics and the Third Reich*, p. 5.

¹⁷ Christopher Hutton, Normativism and the Notion of Authenticity in Yiddish Linguistics, in: *The Field of Yiddish: Studies in Language, Folklore, and Literature*, Fifth Collection, David Goldberg (ed.) (Evanston and New York, 1993), pp. 11–58, p. 28.

and Romance features. It was this mixture of “Aryan and Semitic” components, understood to be mutually exclusive, which represented the major crux regarding the classification of the Eastern European Jewish vernacular and its speakers. Since, if the characteristics of a language are indeed synonymous with its speakers’ race, native speakers of Yiddish had to belong to a mixed race, embodying Aryan and Semitic ancestry. This idea was incompatible with the idea of Aryan hegemony over the racially unrelated, degenerate, and marginalized Semitic Jew.¹⁸

As we have seen, the philological discipline had amply demonstrated how descriptive linguistics could be utilized in the service of ideological objectives. I will now turn to the ways Yiddish philologists reclaimed and domesticated the study of their language as a genuinely Jewish domain, yiddishized it, as it were,¹⁹ and blurred the line between science and ideology as did their non-Jewish predecessors.²⁰

BER BOROKHOV:
“NO GARDENER [...] HAS TRIMMED ITS OUTGROWTHS
OR GUIDED ITS WILD SPROUTS.”

Ber Borokhov (1881–1917) is nowadays mostly known for his founding role in Labor Zionism. Yiddishist circles, however, have crowned Borokhov as the father of modern Yiddish philology thanks to his manifesto “Di ufgabn fun der yidisher filologye” (The Tasks of Yiddish Philology),²¹ published in 1913 in *Der pinkes* (The Annals) — the foundational anthology of Yiddish scholarship.

It might come as a surprise that Borokhov was a Yiddishist despite his Zionist convictions, since the “victory” of Hebrew as the Jews’ national language

¹⁸ Barry Trachtenberg, Ber Borokhov’s “The Tasks of Yiddish Philology”, p. 346.

¹⁹ Susannah Heschel argued similarly in regards to *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and its handlings with scientifically supported German judeophobia, focusing especially on Abraham Geiger and his reclaim of Jesus. Applying Amos Funkenstein’s concept of “counterhistory,” Heschel argued that Geiger constructed a “counterhistory of Christian counterhistory” by making Jesus Jewish again, thereby radically refuting Christian supersecessionism. See: Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago, 1998); the effort to “judaize” philology has equally been traced in the works of Erich Auerbach, who in his *Mimesis* “discovers himself (or manifests himself) in his philology as a Jew,” see e.g.: James I. Porter, Erich Auerbach and the Judaizing of Philology, in: *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Autumn 2008), pp. 115–147, p. 116.

²⁰ Equally, Tal Hever-Chybowski demonstrated how Yiddish philologists blurred the boundaries by examining the Semitic component of Yiddish in service of their respective ideology, see: Tal Hever-Chybowski, The Semitic Component in Yiddish and its Ideological Role in Yiddish Philology, forthcoming in: *Philological Encounters*, 2016, p. 2. Many thanks to the author for sharing with me a preliminary version of his study.

²¹ Ber Borokhov, Di ufgabn fun der yidisher filologye, in: *Der pinkes: yorbukh far der geshikhte fun der yidisher literatur un shprakh, far folklor, kritik un bibliografye, ershter yorgang*, Shmuel Niger (ed.), (Vilnius, 19013), pp. 1–22.

in the state of Israel has led to the identification of Hebraism with Zionism. But the two factions of *Poale Zion*, Borokhov's revolutionary wing and Syrkin's Palestino-centric one, demonstrated that the language divide evolved between those who fought for the perpetuation of Jewish national existence in Diaspora and those who vetoed it.²² For Borokhov, Jewish national continuance in the Diaspora remained part and parcel of his political ambitions, which he embraced simultaneously with his advocacy of socialist Palestinism with Hebrew as the primary language.²³ And as much as his Marxist conviction could be synthesized with the Jewish national movement of Zionism (two ideologies previously thought of as being mutually exclusive), Yiddishism and Zionism could also be productively synthesized. For our discussion it is important to stress the reciprocal relation between his Yiddishism and Zionism, the latter of which arguably familiarized him with racialized thinking as well, being a common currency amongst his fellow campaigners. But why philology?

Dedicated to the late Dr. Philipp Mansch (1838–1890), pioneer in studying Yiddish through a Yiddish lens, Borokhov starts his essay with an aphorism, setting forth the tasks of a Yiddish philologist in botanical metaphors:

Just like any other *Volksdialekt* (dialect of a people), Jewish-German developed according to unconscious natural laws. No gardener has nourished or sheltered it. No one has trimmed its outgrowths and guided its wild sprouts. (Ph. Mansch, 1888)²⁴

Of course, Borokhov could not accept the term *Volksdialekt* since a “philologist presumes that,” as he proclaims, “the *language* to which he is committed has cultural-historical worth with respect to the past [...] [and] also in the future.”²⁵ But there is another aspect that is noteworthy. The philologist's tasks of nourishing and sheltering, trimming and guiding, is a spawn of the “etiological myth” of the civilizing process, according to which “humanity emerged from pre-social barbarity.” And by extension, certain races achieved higher stages of civilization than others along this process. This myth gave way

²² The Palestino-centric wing was led by Nahman Syrkin and focused on the creation of a Jewish socialist state in Palestine with Hebrew as the primary language. The revolutionary wing was headed by Borokhov and fought for a both Jewish socialist sovereignty in Palestine (with Hebrew as the primary language) as well as Jewish national autonomy in Eastern Europe (with Yiddish as the primary language). Cf.: David Fishman, *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture* (Pittsburgh, 2005), p. 16, 59; Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and politics: socialism, nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (New York, 1981).

²³ Regarding Borokhov's biography, see again: Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and politics: socialism, nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917*; Barry Trachtenberg, Ber Borokhov's “The Tasks of Yiddish Philology, in: *Science in Context* 20 (2), 2007, pp. 341–352, p. 342–344; Mitchell Cohen, Introduction, in: *Class Struggle and the Jewish Nation, Selected Essays in Marxist Zionism*, by Ber Borokhov, ed. Mitchell Cohen (New Jersey, 1984), p. 21.

²⁴ Ber Borokhov, *Di ufgabn fun der yidisher filologie*, S. 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, S. 1, Footnote 2, emphasis added [MS].

to the modern phenomenon of the “gardening state” (note again the botanical), which, according to Zygmunt Bauman, views “the society it rules as an object of designing, cultivating, and weed-poisoning.”²⁶ For the Jewish people, stateless as it was, the philologist was supposed to take on the role of the gardener to launch the transformative project of “nationalization” (i.e. turning Yiddish into a true national language by purification and enrichment) and of “humanization” (i.e. process of “incorporating the cultural values of the modern development of mankind into the Jewish people”).²⁷

Borokhov envisioned a significant gain in status for Yiddish and its speakers through corpus-planning (i.e. efforts to change a language’s lexicon, grammar, phonology, orthography).²⁸ His goals were mutually dependent on both the work of the philologist as corpus-planner and the Jewish masses who need to embrace Yiddish in its new attire. The feasibility of this task was based on the conviction that language is a “living organism” (*lebедiker organizm*) and a “free individuality” (*fraye individualitet*): hence, languages have distinct characters and can live and die, be more primitive or sophisticated, be purified and polluted. And due to the interdependence of mother-tongue and *Volksgeist*, all of this holds for the language’s speakers as well.

National culture consists not only of the poetic works of great poets, but first of all of the skill of its people to speak properly, to write properly in their mother-tongue.²⁹

Mother-tongue, transferred biologically within the community from mother to child, is the key to Jewish national cultural identity. This emphasis of mother-tongue is in line with one of the most prominent features of racial systems of classification: the emphasis upon descent.³⁰ Using the word *muter-shprakh* (“mother-tongue” taken from the Germanic component of Yiddish) as opposed to the conventional *mame-loshn* (also “mother-tongue,” but a combination of the Germanic and Hebrew component), he follows the footsteps of those influential German thinkers such as Johann Gottfried Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and, closer to home, Yehoshua Mordechai Lifshitz (1828–1878), pioneering Yiddishist philologist. They linked language and *Volks* and defended *Muttersprache* as the only original and authentic tool of com-

²⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 12–13; see also: 65, 91–93.

²⁷ Ber Borokhov, *Di ufgabn fun der yidisher filologie*, pp. 11, 17.

²⁸ This distinction of corpus- and status-planning was introduced to sociolinguistics by Heinz Kloss (1904–1987). Regarding the relationship between the two, see: Joshua A. Fishman, *Ethnicity and Supra-Ethnicity in Corpus-Planning: The Hidden Status Agenda in Corpus Planning*, in: *History and National Destiny: Ethnoscymoblism and its Critics*, Hoboken 2004, pp. 79–94.

²⁹ Ber Borokhov, *Di ufgabn fun der yidisher filologie*, p. 2.

³⁰ Cf. Steven Kaplan, *If there are no races, how can Jews be a “race”?*, p. 83.

munication — manifesting a “unique, irreplaceable, unchangeable biological origin that situates the individual automatically in a kinship network and by extension in the nation.”³¹

Indeed, Borokhov radicalized the theory of mother-tongue set forth by Lifshitz. In Lifshitz’ seminal essay “Di fir klasn” (The four classes) of 1863, an article Borokhov certainly was familiar with and refers to in “Di ufgabn,” he was the first to call the vernacular “Yiddish” rather than the pejorative “*zhargon*” or “*Yidish-daytsh*”. On the other hand, Lifshitz arbitrarily believed in the existence of two mother-tongues spoken by every ethnic community: Mother-tongue I is the language distinctive to a specific people (Hebrew for the unified, but transnationally dispersed Jewish people); Mother-tongue II, also called “*ertsungsh-prakh*” (educational language), is the language of upbringing, which is Yiddish for Eastern European Jewry. And he goes on to say that reformers “can generally only have an effect upon a people by using its mother-tongue or *ertsungsh-prakh*.”³² Fifty years later, though, faced with the rise of (linguistic) assimilation and mixed marriages and with the urgency of the language question in the wake of Czernowitz, for Borokhov mother-tongue could only mean Yiddish.

One has to remember: the weaker the people the more endangered it is. [...] But in case of a weak people where the young who are learning have a choice, the young could give up the mother-tongue and choose a different cultural means.³³

The ever-dying people once again felt itself to be at the threshold of vanishing.³⁴ As a response to this, Borokhov had to abnegate Lifshitz’ unifying mother-tongue theory, which, at once, proclaimed Hebrew as the Jews’ national language and allowed for Jews to have another language beside Hebrew (be it Yiddish, German, Polish, or Russian) without losing the bond to the Jewish nation.

The monolingual turn, called for by Borokhov, is indeed a radical refashioning of the polyglot reality of Eastern European Jewish life and an expression of a nationalistic agenda aiming to circumscribe a homogenous *folk* based on biological kinship. With the veneration of *mame-loshn*, Borokhov adopts the aforementioned assumption of German scholars who tended to see the will to the mother-tongue as the only guarantee for the survival of the people as

³¹ Yasemine Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother-tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (New York, 2012), pp. 6–14.

³² Yehoshua Mordechai Lifshitz, Di fir klasn, in: *Kol mevaser*, 1963, Vol. 23 (1 July), pp. 364–366, p. 364; for a thorough analysis of “Di fir klasn” see: David E. Fishman, Di dray penimer fun Y-M Lifshitz (an analiz fun “Di fir klasn”), in: *Yidishe shprakh* 38, 1984–1986, pp. 47–58.

³³ Ber Borokhov, Di ufgabn fun der yidisher filologye, p. 15–16.

³⁴ Simon Rawidowicz, The Ever-Dying People, in: *Israel, the Ever-Dying People, and Other Essays*, Simon Rawidowicz, Benjamin Ravid (ed.) (London, 1986), pp. 53–63, p. 53 f.

a racial unity.³⁵ But how can racial unity be claimed in the first place in light of the mixed character of Yiddish?

Tal Hever-Chybowski has most recently shown, how Yiddish philologists throughout the 20th century grappled the “Semitic” component of Yiddish. This problem stems from the indeed unresolvable ambiguity “as to whether these [Semitic roots, words, expressions, and even whole sentences in Yiddish] only derive from *loshn-koydesh* [Hebrew or Aramaic] (and are subsequently no longer *loshn-koydesh*, but Yiddish),” or whether they remain *loshn-koydesh* even after they entered the vernacular.³⁶ As much as this posed an ontological problem for Yiddish philologists, the “Semitic” component naturally had clear racial implications as well: Is “Jew-talk” more Semitic or more Aryan, more Germanic or more Slavic? Or is it maybe, possibly simply Yiddish?

Among the Zionists, Hever-Chybowski examined, it is long-forgotten Hebrew philologist, journalist, translator, and educator Yisroel Haim Taviov (1858–1921), who posits that there is no difference between Hebrew elements in *zhargon* and Hebrew itself. Indeed, Taviov understands Yiddish as the vessel through which the revival of Hebrew will be achieved — a parasitic relationship, in which one side feeds off the other and at its expense.

As much as German spoken by Jews has increasingly ‘jargonized,’ its Hebrew component has strengthened and multiplied. The Jargon was a sort of marriage between ‘Sem and Japheth’: the marriage did not turn out well for ‘Japheth’ [i.e. German], but it did for ‘Sem’ [i.e. Hebrew], who had seen a good life in this marriage.³⁷

Describing Yiddish as a marriage between German and Hebrew, Taviov participates in the concurrent Zionist discourse on the question of racial mixing and mixed-marriages.³⁸ According to him, Yiddish came into existence after a series of linguistic corruptions, when Slavic Jews adopted the dialect of German Jews, tantamount to a violation of racial boundaries.³⁹ What we can detect here is a conviction in the existence of the hierarchy of genetically distinct races with certain mutually exclusive, linguistic predispositions. Slavic and German Jews are inherently different due to centuries-long racial interbreeding, but they still have a Semitic core, their *Urrasse* (primal race), which is expressed in the vital Semitic component of Yiddish. Moreover, these assumptions, which are

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Tal Hever-Chybowski, *The Semitic Component in Yiddish and its Ideological Role in Yiddish Philology*, p. 2.

³⁷ Yisroel Haim Taviov, *The Hebrew Elements of the Jargon* [in Hebrew], in: *The Writings of Y. H. Taviov* (Berlin, Jerusalem, 1923), pp. 214–278, quoted in: Tal Hever-Chybowski, *The Semitic Component in Yiddish and its Ideological Role in Yiddish Philology*, p. 8.

³⁸ See e.g. Mitchell Hart (ed.), *Jews and Race: Writings on Identity & Difference, 1880–1940* (Waltham, Mass. 2011), esp. Chapter V: “Racial Mixing”: Intermarriage and Conversion.

³⁹ Ibid.

based on the ethno-nationalist myth of a common descent of the geographically dispersed and linguistically and culturally divided Jewish people, echo Zionist physician Leo Sofer's idea of "distillation" (*Entmischung*), according to which strong races (i.e. the Semitic race) supposedly preserve their original pure character, notwithstanding racial mixing with inferior ones (i.e. the Aryan race), who in this process slowly wither away.⁴⁰

Ber Borokhov, in contrast, understands the mixed nature of Yiddish to be much more than a marriage, which *per definitionem* can always be divorced. Far from unnatural, it is an organic mixture, completely independent from the source-language.

Exactly as in other mixed languages, when these different element enter Yiddish, they enter in an independent organic union: this is [...] simply a language, though a mixed one. German, Hebrew, Slavic elements, as soon as they enter the *folks-shprakh* [language], they cease to be German, Hebrew, Slavic — they lose the face they previously had and take on a new one: they become Yiddish.⁴¹

In contrast to the image of marriage, Borokhov's idea of the fusion of Germanic, Semitic, and Hebrew elements into Yiddish is reminiscent of the concept of conversion into Judaism. According to Jewish law, "the convert is adopted into the family and assigned a new 'genealogical' identity."⁴² What Borokhov suggests here with anthropomorphic imagery is a reconceptualization of the linguistic assumption of fixed language families and an abolition of their hierarchical order: racial boundaries are dynamic, and racial mixing can be conducive to the refinement of a people's character:

Because the three elements fulfil different functions in the language, its mixed nature doesn't stand in the way of the development of Yiddish. On the contrary, it is because of the mixed nature that our language becomes richer in vocabulary and expressions.⁴³

In 1892, Austrian anthropologist Felix von Luschan (1854–1924) first maintained that Jews are a mixed race (Aryan Amorites, the Semites, Middle Eastern Hittites, and additional elements as a result of the Diasporic condition). His theory won recognition amongst Zionists, who tried, however, to reconcile

⁴⁰ Leo Sofer, Über die Vermischung und Entmischung der Rassen, in: *Politisch-Anthropologische Revue* 1, 1902, pp. 435–438; Leo Sofer, Über die Entmischung der Rassen, in: *Zeitschrift für Demographie und Statistik der Juden* 1, 1905, pp. 9–12, quoted in: Dafna Hirsch, Zionist Eugenics, Mixed Marriage, and the Creation of a "New Jewish Type", p. 597.

⁴¹ Ber Borokhov, Di ufgabn fun der yidisher filologye, p. 10.

⁴² Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, Diapora: generation and the ground of Jewish identity, in: *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Summer, 1993), pp. 693–725, p. 705.

⁴³ Ber Borokhov, Di ufgabn fun der yidisher filologye, p. 10.

it with ideas of Jewish racial purity, as Dafna Hirsch has shown.⁴⁴ Accordingly, mixture does not necessarily mean degeneracy; it has primarily positive effects — a more common view throughout the 20th century.⁴⁵ What we ought not forget, though, is the basis on which such a salutary mixture succeeds: only when the primal bond between mother, child, and language is nurtured and sustained. Through the socializing force of the mother-tongue, the potentially racially mixed child will be shaped in the image and in accordance with the worldview of the language and fused in this manner with the body of the authentic *folk*, as we've seen in Broderzon's *Temerl*.⁴⁶

However, there is a fourth element created by the Intelligentsia, the youngest element of them all, which is incompatible with the construction of the other elements and cannot complement them.

Essentializing as Borokhov's ideas are, there are only certain elements, certain "converts" that are accepted as organic parts of Yiddish. Likewise, the language can only evolve according to certain laws, defined by the philologist, which confine the development of a previously proclaimed free linguistic "individuality" to a retrogression into an imagined primordial ideal. Therefore, elements can only enter the language in "yiddishized" form in order to have a positive impact. To return to the image of conversion, it "is not the establishment of a personal covenant between the convert and God, but the entry of the Gentile into the framework of the Jewish community."⁴⁷ This metamorphosis necessarily presupposes the existence of a *pureur*- Yiddish.

Nowadays termed the convergence approach,⁴⁸ it was a seminal shift in Yiddish philology to conceive of Yiddish as never having been German. Arguably, this shift can be explained as a response to the aforementioned "Aryan Invasion Theory" as well as negation of the "affinity model." Assumptions drawn from the Aryan paradigm had informed how the Germanic (Aryan) component in Yiddish had been interpreted for centuries — the degeneration that happened to the pure Aryan *Ursprache* in the mouths of primitive Dravidians in primordial India can be analogized to the decline of German in the mouths of Semites. Borokhov decolonializes Yiddish philology from this narrative and Weinreich will later attempt to further circumstantiate his theory. For now, Borokhov does not hypothesize about the *Ursprache*. It is in the hands of the Yiddish philologists to reconstruct

⁴⁴ Dafna Hirsch, *Zionist Eugenics, Mixed Marriage, and the Creation of a "New Jewish Type"*, p. 597.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 598.

⁴⁶ Christopher M. Hutton, *Linguistics and the Third Reich*, p. 13.

⁴⁷ Avi Sagi and Zvi Zohar, *Conversion to Judaism and the Meaning of Jewish Identity* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1994), p. 226, quoted in: Kaplan, *If there are no races, how can Jews be a "race"?*, p. 88.

⁴⁸ Neil G. Jacobs, *Yiddish: A Linguistic Introduction* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 11 f.

Jewish history and to trace back the linguistic divergence in dialects for the sake of bringing “order into this mishmash”⁴⁹ and turning Yiddish again into the unitary *ur*-language.⁵⁰

But let’s halt and reconsider the concept of “mixture” (or for that matter “conversion”) in its radical presuppositions: these concepts necessarily premise an idea of radically different elements that are subordinated and then disappear in the course of mixing with the dominant Yiddish. The seemingly “natural” process is *de facto* a construct meant to justify the welcomed disappearance of a certain linguistic entity and thus the culture of its speakers. In this construct, “mixing”/“converting” is only the flip side of “purification”⁵¹, both of which are directly connected to Borokhov’s discussion of the German component in Yiddish.

The effort to establish Yiddish as an autonomous linguistic entity had to go hand in hand with a concurrent unmaking of the German *Kultursprache*. Throughout, Borokhov tries to prove Yiddish’s independence from and even superiority over German in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and orthography. He makes German amongst other things into a mere “Gaunderdeutsch,” which, in light of its expressive poverty, had to borrow from “much older” Yiddish rather than the other way around. Borokhov in fact resumes and reverses discussions of early modern German philologists of Yiddish, for whom, as Aya Elyada has shown, the vernacular as the “thieves’ jargon” helped to conceal alleged Jewish criminality.⁵² But Borokhov goes further:

“[D]aytshmerish” [...] ruins our language and can take it to the level of a dirty jargon.⁵³

Daytshmerish was a Germanizing trend of Yiddish amongst *maskilic* intellectuals in the 19th century. Borokhov admits that Yiddish’s “origins lie before the 13th or 14th century, i.e. when German Jews started to settle in Galicia [...]

⁴⁹ Ber Borokhov, *Di ufgabn fun der yidisher filologye*, p. 2.

⁵⁰ In a way, Borokhov’s manifesto redrafted Simon Dubnow’s pamphlet “On the Study of the History of Russian Jews and the Establishment of a Russian Jewish Historical Society.” In 1891, Dubnow attributed major importance to the study of history and called upon the Jews in the Russian Empire to found a central archive and initiate research into the Jewish past. According to him, historical consciousness and knowledge were the guideline of a people’s spiritual development and would be the main factor of a modern, secular Jewish identity: after all, Jewish history “arouses in the Jew the desire to work unceasingly at the task of perfecting himself. To direct his attention to his glorious past, to the resplendent intellectual feasts of his ancestors, to their mastery skill in thinking and suffering [...]” see: Shimen Dubnow, *Jewish history : An essay on the philosophy of history*, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/7836/7836-h/7836-h.htm#link2H_4_0016 [accessed May 25, 2015].

⁵¹ cf. Dafna Hirsch, *Zionist Eugenics, Mixed Marriage, and the Creation of a “New Jewish Type”*, p. 605–606.

⁵² Aya Elyada, *A Goy who speaks Yiddish*, Chapter 6: The Thieves’ Jargon, pp. 99–116.

⁵³ Ber Borokhov, *Di ufgabn fun der yidisher filologye*, p. 11.

and in Poland [...].”⁵⁴ However, the language that gradually developed into “Schiller’s and Goethe’s” German and the language which matured into modern Yiddish — despite their shared origin — ripened linguistically, culturally, territorially, and racially distinct from one another. The incorporation of modern German words thus amounts to a harmful pollution of Yiddish with foreign elements. And for Borokhov, one of the tasks of Yiddish philology is precisely the elimination of such elements.

The discourse on *daytshmerish*, if examined through the racist lens, is clearly part of the discussion on racial mixing: the once “pure” Yiddish declined through “inter-breeding” with the inferior German. In this discussion, Borokhov once again embraced the racist terminology prevalent in fin-de-siècle philology and demands that Yiddish have to be cleansed of foreign elements and enriched with words from its native stock for the sake of regeneration and improvement.⁵⁵ To quote Dafna Hirsch, “concepts of ‘mixing’ and ‘purification’ are products of categorization processes and boundary-drawing between human groups. ‘The hybrid’ is no less a construct than ‘the pure’.”⁵⁶ In Yiddishists’ ideology — a national movement, that in contrast to most others could only rest upon its native tongue, which simultaneously had to function as a substitute for non-existent territorial sovereignty⁵⁷ — *mame-loshn* was absolutely central for defending identity, for demarcating and guarding boundaries. And because language was the most important ideological pillar of the *folk* without a territory, “the more charged its form [became].” That is why “‘purifying’ it and removing visible traces of internal multilingualism — that is, traces of constitutive contact with an Other — [was] paramount.”⁵⁸ In other words, Yiddish philology, insofar as it could both create a useful past for this language and determine its future form, was a particularly high-stakes enterprise.

Indeed, Yiddish philology had the task to not only manufacture a pure and purifying instrument of communication between Jews, but, to quote Barry Trachtenberg, this instrument was supposed to instill “within them a shared historical narrative, demarcating the nation’s borders, and [to determine] — by virtue [of nativeness] and fluency — one’s status as a ‘citizen.’”⁵⁹ At the

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

⁵⁵ Barry Trachtenberg, Ber Borokhov’s “The Tasks of Yiddish Philology”, p. 348.

⁵⁶ Dafna Hirsch, *Zionist Eugenics, Mixed Marriage, and the Creation of a “New Jewish Type”*, p. 605.

⁵⁷ Barry Trachtenberg, Ber Borokhov’s “The Tasks of Yiddish Philology”, p. 347.

⁵⁸ Yasemine Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother-tongue*, p. 77; Yildiz is here referring to the Nazi discourse on *Fremdwörter* (loan word) in the German language. She maintains that the “anomalous” dismissive attitudes of Nazism towards language purist can be explained by the minor function language played as the basis of identity as opposed to the significance of race. In Yiddishist circles, language took on all-encompassing identitarian force and as I argue was thus congruent to idea of a distinct Yiddish-speaking race. To counter Yildiz argument in this specific respect, see: Christopher M. Hutton, *Linguistics and the Third Reich*.

⁵⁹ Barry Trachtenberg, Ber Borokhov’s “The Tasks of Yiddish Philology”, p. 347.

heart of Borokhov's agenda was the desire to produce a refined breed of Eastern European Jew. He echoes Zionist fantasies of the creation of the "New Jewish Type" with the consequential difference that his vision is exclusively directed at Yiddish speakers. Turned against itself, it marks the root of Yiddish philologist's primal anxiety: (linguistic) assimilation.

MAX WEINREICH:

“[T]HERE IS A [...] CONNECTION BETWEEN NEGROES
IN AMERICA AND THOSE ‘WARSAW NEGROES.’”

Borokhov's "Di ufgabn" laid the ideological groundwork for Yiddish philology. His untimely death in 1917 left others to carry out his agenda. One of the most prominent was Max Weinreich (1864–1969), who would later refer to Borokhov as a "pioneer" with "visionary gaze."⁶⁰ He was one of the most distinguished philologists and historians of the Yiddish language, Bundist, and founding scholar of the Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO) and its research director for many years. Thanks to him and his tireless efforts to establish Yiddish studies as an academic field and YIVO as its representative institution, first Vilnius and then New York City emerged as a hub of Jewish scholarship.

The institute was dedicated to the construction of a modern Jewish nation in Eastern Europe, corresponding to the Bundist ideology of *doikayt* (hereness),⁶¹ not only by providing practical guidance for contemporary social and political challenges at the time but also by forging a self-sustaining modern culture based on the cultivation of Yiddish language and literature. It was YIVO that was tasked "to forge the intellectual weapons for our people"⁶² and to provide

⁶⁰ Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language* (Chicago, 1980), p. 299, quoted in: Trachtenberg, Ber Borokhov's "The Tasks of Yiddish Philology", p. 350.

⁶¹ Cf. Kamil Kijek, Max Weinreich, assimilation, and the social politics of Jewish nation-building, in: *East European Jewish Affairs*, 2011, 41:1–2, pp. 25–55; Tal Hever-Chybowski, The Semitic Component in Yiddish and its Ideological Role in Yiddish Philology, pp. 15 ff. While Kijek discusses Weinreich's youth research program as an ideologically induced nation-building program and leaves out Weinreich's philological work, Hever-Chybowski, who focuses entirely on Weinreich's discussion of the Semitic component in Yiddish, leaves the extent open for interpretation, to which ideological considerations influenced his philological work. My discussion ties in with this discussion. How much YIVO was devoted to the imagined *Yidishland* in Eastern Europe, can be seen in the heated discussions around the controversial decision to relocate YIVO's headquarters from Vilnius to New York City in 1939/1940. Max Weinreich was adamant to return to Eastern Europe with the institute he was leading after the war had ended. These plans were soon, however, obsolete. See: Kalman Weiser, Coming to America: Max Weinreich and the Emergence of YIVO's American Center, in: *Choosing Yiddish. New Frontiers of Language and Culture*, Lara Rabinovitch, Shiri Goren, Hannah S. Pressman (ed.) (Detroit, 2013), pp. 233–252.

⁶² *Yedies fun yidishn visnshaflekh'n institut* 81–82 (January–February 1939), (Warsaw, Vilnius and New York, 1939), p. 2, quoted in: Cecile Kuznitz, *YIVO and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 172.

Yiddish with the aspired gains in status. Several scholars have already demonstrated that YIVO strove to intellectually arm Eastern European Jews through diverse projects, which “would reach far outside the sphere of language.”⁶³ Likewise, Weinreich gradually pursued new interdisciplinary directions, but these studies served to inform his philological work and, as I will show, only accentuated the importance of a common language for minority cultures worldwide in the struggle for national survival. In short, the central role of *mame-loshn* for YIVO scholars as the imagined glue and biologizing device of a homogenous, national cohesion, of *Yidishland*, cannot be overstated, especially not for Weinreich. Because of this correlation, I will analyze his philological work in tandem with his projects in social science to ascertain the primary importance of language as the sole determinant of the uniqueness of a human grouping.

The genesis, implementation, and results of Weinreich’s Yugfor (short for *Yugnt forshung* or youth research) project have received ample scholarly attention.⁶⁴ In the academic year 1932–3, he had been chosen as fellow in a prestigious social science seminar at Yale University. His participation in the seminar on the “Impact of Culture on Personality” had incisive consequences, which are especially important for our analysis of Weinreich’s philological research and potential usage of the racial paradigm: Deeply influenced by linguistic anthropologist Edward Sapir, who emphasized cultural rather than phenotypically-defined explanations for group difference, Weinreich shifted his vocabulary accordingly. However, it was his research on African-American communities in the US South — another group for which race and culture was held to be synonymous — which would affect his research on the Jewish condition in Eastern Europe most prominently. Weinreich’s research on both African-Americans and Jews inevitably trafficked in racialized discourse, and may have been informed by regnant notions of racial hierarchies. Under the heading “Investigations of the *Negro* question in America,” Weinreich studied African-American strategies of coping with structural racism and oppression in order to apply his findings on self-help and self-sufficiency programs to YIVO’s efforts to ensure Jewish cultural survival in Eastern Europe.⁶⁵ Already at the

⁶³ Kamil Kijek, Max Weinreich, assimilation, and the social politics of Jewish nation-building, p. 27; see also: Cecile Kuznitz, *YIVO and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, 2014).

⁶⁴ Apart from Kijek, see: Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Coming of Age in the Thirties: Max Weinreich, Edward Sapir, and Jewish Social Science, in: *YIVO Annual Volume 23*, Deborah Dash Moore (ed.) (Evanston, 1996), pp. 1–104; Jennifer Young, Race, Culture, and the Creation of Yiddish Social Science : Max Weinreich’s Trip to Tuskegee, 1932, in: *Choosing Yiddish. New Frontiers of Language and Culture*, Lara Rabinovitch, Shiri Goren, Hannah S. Pressmann (ed.) (Detroit, 2013), pp. 217–232; Leila Zenderland, Social Science as a “Weapon of the Weak”: Max Weinreich, the Yiddish Scientific Institute, and the Study of Culture, Personality, and Prejudice, in: *Isis*, Vol. 104, No. 4 (Dec 2013), pp. 742–772; Cecile Kuznitz, *YIVO and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture*.

⁶⁵ Jennifer Young, Race, Culture, and the Creation of Yiddish Social Science, p. 217.

beginning of the 20th century, Y. L. Peretz, one of the acclaimed fathers of modern Yiddish literature, recognized the comparability between the Eastern European Jewish and African-American condition.⁶⁶ And with Hitler's rise to power in January 1933, the situation became more and more compatible. However, there was one important difference between the two, according to Weinreich:

In fact, the big mass of American negroes don't have a way of life of their own, no aspiration to develop a distinct culture. The norm they strive for is that of white America, *their language is English*; when they realize that blue eyes and brown straight hair is the key to paradise, they are thunderstruck.⁶⁷

Following Borokhov's credo, Weinreich was convinced of the civilizational power and identitarian force of language. Moreover, Weinreich seems to see having one's own language as the *only* way to guarantee cultural survival and renaissance. He does not acknowledge the power of African American literature (Harlem renaissance etc.) or blues, jazz, and Gospel in creating a distinct negro culture, since all of these are using English. It was the African-American community's lack of a unique national language, which would hinder its cultivation and sustainability and consequently its survival as a cultural minority.⁶⁸ Hence, turning to the Yiddish minority, only through the instilment of pride in Yiddish language can the same cruel fate be averted:

Early on, one shall give the child a feeling of uniqueness, of its difference, but not of it as being a problem. [...] The child shall conceive of his *Yidish-kayt* only by dint of speaking Yiddish at home, through a Yiddish sign at the door. Then the child will grow up with the awareness that there are different groups of people living in the world, and we are one of them, not better or worse than the others.⁶⁹

The arbitrary distribution of power and powerlessness in societies must not be confused with the worth of the respective cultures these societies contain. Once determined a minority, though, one has to cope with one's status and find remedy from within. Ergo, there is allegedly no hierarchy, yet distinct human groupings (read "races"). A minority is left with two choices: either embrace the concrete aspects of eternal cultural difference, meaning language, or otherwise to be lulled into the illusion of assimilation.⁷⁰ This assimilation will always be incomplete because of ineradicable racial difference.

⁶⁶ Yitskhok Leybush Peretz, Vos felt undzer literatur? (1910) in: *Ale Verk*, Vol 7: Literatur un Leben (New York, 1947), pp. 270–279, p. 275.

⁶⁷ Max Weinreich, *Der veg tsu undzer yugnt : yesoydes, metodn, problemen fun yidisher yugnt-forschung*, (Vilna, 1935), p. 190, emphasis added [MS].

⁶⁸ Jennifer Young, Race, Culture, and the Creation of Yiddish Social Science, 1932, p. 228.

⁶⁹ Max Weinreich, *Der veg tsu undzer yugnt*, p. 192. Emphasis added [MS].

⁷⁰ Jennifer Young, Race, Culture, and the Creation of Yiddish Social Science, p. 228.

Aiming to “reorganize [Jewish society] in the monistic form of a progressive Yiddishist nation,”⁷¹ Weinreich, like YIVO, had, of course, a clear yet essentialized concept of *Yidishkayt* and also a vision on how it ought to be defended: The primary weapon in this battle against assimilation and for an upkeep of Jewish identity was the Yiddish language. It is through his philological work that Weinreich laid bare his definition of *Yidishkayt* and manipulated the language accordingly. His interdisciplinary work was the playground where his philological findings and purified language could fully be put into execution — a performative Yiddish lesson for his readers and an implementation of Borokhov’s scheme of corpus-planning. This is especially apparent in the abundance of neologisms Weinreich’s texts were famous and feared for.⁷² Exemplarily, his *Der veg tsu undzer yugnt* (The path towards our youth) was prefixed with an apology:

Just another justification of the choice of language in this book. Yiddish doesn’t have an adequate term for everything. Several terms will seem alien, but [...] one has to become a partner in the creation of the world to a much bigger extent than one wants to... In my mind, a new, still unpolished Yiddish word is a thousand times better than a *daytshmerish* barbarism.⁷³

Leaving the pressing issue of *daytshmerish* aside for now, what is unique about the Yiddish language according to Weinreich? In his 4-volume masterpiece *Geshikhte fun der yidisher shprakh* (History of the Yiddish language), published in 1973, he followed the familiar scheme of questions posed within European linguistics: questions about the origin and historical homeland of people X, the nature of X’s proto-language, the migrations undertaken by X and the causes of contemporary diversity.⁷⁴ Following Borokhov, certain key aspects had to be dealt with, i.e. Yiddish’s hybrid character, and its connection to Hebrew and German.

The meager cow of the minority was swallowed up by the fat cow of the majority, and this led to the emergence of new Romanic languages, French and Provençal. With the Jews something peculiar happened. Coming to the territory, where different variants of German were spoken, Jews created a whole new language. In it they salvaged parts of *loshn-koydesh*, often adapted beautifully, and also elements of the languages of the co-territorial population,

⁷¹ Kamil Kijek, Max Weinreich, assimilation, and the social politics of Jewish nation-building, p. 43.

⁷² Regarding Weinreich’s obsession with neologism and the difficulties these caused for his audience see: Yudel Mark, Neologizmen bay Maks Waynraykhn, in: *For Max Weinreich on his seventieth birthday. Studies in Jewish languages, literature, and society* (The Hague, 1964), pp. 412–435, p. 435.

⁷³ Max Weinreich, *Der veg tsu undzer yugnt*, p. 4.

⁷⁴ cf. Christopher M. Hutton, *Linguistics and the Third Reich*, p. 231.

but the raw stock is recast in such a way that it became distinct. And when the majority of the Jewish community migrated further several hundred miles they took the language with them, developed it and later even took it with them overseas. [...] The innovation initiated in Loter was not only the new Yiddish language. The whole way of *Yidishkayt* became independent in this emerging community.⁷⁵

In his introductory remarks, Weinreich corrects Borokhov's findings, pre-dates, and relocates the birth of Yiddish with decisive implications regarding the language's stance in comparison to other Indo-European languages, especially German: Contrary to other standard Indo-European languages like French, which are substantially the result of a minority vernacular being swallowed up by a majority language, symbolizing the cultural weakness of its speakers, Yiddish came into being resisting this absorption by creating a distinct linguistic entity. As a matter of fact, Jews who came to the Rhineland (Loter) spoke their very own language all along, which challenges the prevailing assumption of Yiddish being of Middle High German origin. Being one of the most ancient, Yiddish developed as an autonomous linguistic system cross-fertilizing and territorially side by side with what evolved into modern German. Any hierarchical relationship, be it linguistic or racial, is thus effectively equalized.

Apart from stressing a consistent Jewish loyalty to its national language for a thousand years, Weinreich counters claims of the opposing German-Jewish scholars representing *Wissenschaft des Judentums* who argued that "Jews had always spoken the same language as the native population ever since they arrived in Germany (Jewish colonies are said to have existed there two thousand years ago)."⁷⁶ According to them, Jews' once perfect, pure German was spoiled in the course of both medieval ghettoization in Germany (thereby creating the "Ghetto-Jew") and Jewish emigration eastward thanks to the degenerate Polish *Ostjuden*. When the degenerate Eastern European Jew took on German, the pure Aryan language once again deteriorated, just like it did in ancient India (Aryan paradigm). Like Borokhov, Weinreich claims that Yiddish never was German. Weinreich's alternative, Yiddishist account of Yiddish's origins, when paired with the racial paradigm of "one language—one race" he inherited from his philologist forebears, unsettles and negates the idea of (Eastern European) Jews as a bi-race.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Max Weinreich, *Geshikhte fun der yidisher shprakh : bagrifn, faktn, metodn*, Vol. I (New York, 1973), p. 4.

⁷⁶ Max Weinreich, A Bird's-Eye View of the History of the Yiddish language, in: *Yiddish-Modern Jewish Studies*, a quarterly devoted to Yiddish and Jewish literature in other languages, Vol. 15:4, 2009, pp. 59–83, p. 64; first printed in Vol. 4:1, 1975, on the appearance of the 4 volumes of the original Yiddish edition of History of the Yiddish language.

⁷⁷ Max Weinreich, The reality of Jewishness versus the ghetto myth : the sociolinguistic roots of Yiddish, in: *To Honor Roman Jakobson. Essays on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday* (The Hague, 1967).

Two small groups of Jewish immigrants were speakers of two variants of Loez, vernaculars based on Old Italian and Old French fused with a Semitic component. It is the latter, the vessel of Jewish religious life, that begot Yiddish and gave it its core structure and unique character, as Weinreich had established already in 1931 in his article “Vos volt yidish geven on hebreyish?” (What would Yiddish be without Hebrew?) and later reiterated in *History of the Yiddish Language*.⁷⁸ The most striking feature of the Yiddish language is nonetheless its *fusion* character (*Shmelts-shprakh*), a concept coined by Weinreich, where the raw material of each component (Loez, Semitic, Germanic, and Slavic) has been reworked in order to fit the linguistic structure of Yiddish grammatically, phonologically, and morphologically. Again, this requires an *Ursprache*, which, according to Weinreich, has a Semitic core. Among its components, the relationship between Yiddish and *loshn-koydesh* is distinct insofar, as it is an inner-Jewish symbiosis.⁷⁹ But, as he further elaborates, Jews “always had the aspiration to create their own way of life” and to stay socially distinct by resisting interbreeding: “It is this separate environment that led to the development of a distinct Jewish language.”⁸⁰ Linguistic borrowings and transfers (“give-and-take on both ends”⁸¹) between Jewish and co-territorial languages arose *not* from intermarriage but from a high degree of social and economic interaction between Jews and non-Jews. Weinreich further argues that such borrowings were not indiscriminate or arbitrary: “the linguistic material of the determinants, which were theoretically subject to entering the Yiddish fusion (*geshmelts*), in fact only entered it to a limited degree. [...] Selectivity is merely another aspect of competition.”⁸² The linguistic structures of Yiddish are not a sign of degeneration from German conditioned by a backward Jewish — or shall we say Semitic — predisposition. On the contrary, Yiddish is the epitome of active resistance and selectivity against cultural, and implicitly racial,

⁷⁸ Max Weinreich, Vos volt yidish geven on hebreyish? in: *Di Tsukunft* 36, no. 3 (1931), pp. 194–205; Weinreich’s article was a reply to Nokhem Shtif’s “The Social Differentiation in Yiddish: Hebrew Occupation of Yiddish” ([in Yiddish] previously published in: *Di yidishe shprakh* 4–5 (17–18) (1929), pp. 1–22). Conforming to the Soviet party line, Shtif rejected the Semitic component as an unorganic part of Yiddish since it “occupied” the language thanks to the higher classes of Jewish society, representing primarily the religious sphere of Judaism. For a thorough discussion of both articles, see: Tal Hever-Chybowksi, *The Semitic Component in Yiddish and its Ideological Role in Yiddish Philology*, pp. 15–18; see also: Max Weinreich, *Geshikhte fun der yidisher shprakh*, Vol. II, Chapter VII., pp. 3–260.

⁷⁹ Max Weinreich, *Geshikhte fun der yidisher shprakh*, Vol I, Chapter V: Inner-Jewish bilingualism, pp. 251–321; later amended version: Max Weinreich, Inevyknike tsveyshprakhikeyt in ashkenaz biz der haskole : faktun un bagrifn, in: *Di goldene keyt*, No. 35 (Tel Aviv, 1959).

⁸⁰ Max Weinreich, A Bird’s-Eye View of the History of the Yiddish language, p. 65.

⁸¹ Max Weinreich, History of the Yiddish Language: The Problems and Their Implications, in: *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 103, No. 4, 1959, pp. 563–570, p. 563; —, *Geshikhte fun der yidisher shprakh*, Vol. II, p. 3.

⁸² *Ibid.* Chapter VIII, pp. 261–320, p. 261.

intermixing until today. Its pronounced selectivity was marked by an urge to battle Germanic imperialism in particular⁸³:

There is no graver enemy of a correct, aesthetic, precise, yiddishized standard Yiddish (*klal-yidish*) than *daytshmerish*. Ever since its beginnings, the natural tendency of the language of Ashkenazi Jews has been: distancing one's self from German, creating one's own. [...] Now, that we came to realize our linguistic and cultural powers, that we approach our standardized *kultur-shprakh* endowed with consciousness and love, every linguistic element needs to be put under quarantine. [...] A word in general, and all the more so if it is New High German one, has to demonstrate its right to be integrated into our standard language, has to prove, that it has kinsmen among us, who take it into our family. Being a "registered person" (*nikhtev*) in a dictionary is not enough.⁸⁴

Weinreich demands a yiddishized "*Ariernachweis*" for words which want to be included into standard Yiddish. This rhetoric smoothly fits into the prevailing one in 1938. And even though his language would considerably shift after 1945 to a less aggressive, de-militarized rhetoric, he stayed faithful to the overarching ambition to yiddishize Yiddish through purification, be it through the simple preclusion of words, the (manic) creation of neologisms or increased usage of the non-German components, primarily Semitic. In Weinreich's mind, this was not there modeling of the language, but rather a return to its original spirit as it was once realized in his imagined, idealized Loter.

Loter (cf. German *Lothringen*) has not only chronological and geographical implications. Indeed, Weinreich's historical reconstruction points up "the autonomism of Jewish cultural history and its intertwining with general cultural history [...] [which] could be expressed in a political metaphor as follows: there is no independence of language, but there is self-dependence everywhere where there is a language."⁸⁵ This political metaphor takes us back to Weinreich's earlier encounter and appropriation of the African-American condition:

I don't want to take the analogies too far, but one must acknowledge that there is a logical connection between negroes in America and those "Warsaw Negroes" [...].⁸⁶

The so-called "Warsaw Negro" is nothing else than Broderzon's *Zemerl* in reverse, yet without its happy ending: abandoning one's mother-tongue, one's culture, one can possibly immerse physically into the majority, but has to live with the recurring traumata of an always incomplete assimilation. Weinreich,

⁸³ Max Weinreich, *Geshikhte fun der yidisher shprakh*, Vol. II, p. 320.

⁸⁴ Max Weinreich, *Daytshmerish toygt nit*, in: *Yidish far ale*, no. 4, June 1938, p. 105.

⁸⁵ Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 347 f.

⁸⁶ Max Weinreich, *Der veg tsu undzer yugnt*, p. 191.

therefore, takes on Borokhov's assumptions about the race-creating force of language and brings them to the most radical conclusion. The enforced difference between Yiddish-speakers and speakers of another common language, which is thus racially defined as stemming from one's mother-tongue, cannot be transcended. Mixture, which Borokhov still understood to be potentially productive, is a myth. Similar ideas had been posited by Moses Hess or Chaim Zhitlovsky, whose concept of "rasn-yidishkayt" in return echoed the idea of the *Racenjude* (racial Jew) by the notorious anti-Semite Karl Eugen Dühring (1833–1921), according to which Jews remain Jews even after conversion to another religion.⁸⁷

Nonetheless, Weinreich didn't turn a blind eye to the common and inevitable fact of bilingualism amongst his brethren. He was receptive to this reality of the minority condition in Ashkenaz ever since settlement started. And it is in the question of bilingualism, so closely connected to the issue of assimilation, where we can trace the ideological differences between Weinreich and Borokhov.

Borokhov, an ardent Marxist-Zionist, who insisted on the struggle for Diasporic autonomy alongside the struggle for a Jewish state in Palestine, called for much more radical remaking of the Jewish condition in the diaspora than Weinreich did. To merely fight for Jewish autonomy in Eastern Europe like Bundists and Territorialists was simply not revolutionary enough, since it failed to fully acknowledge the abnormality of the diasporic condition, in which anti-Semitism would always be an immanent component. This is reflected in Borokhov's much stricter call for monolingualism in diaspora. Sure, he would support "experimentations with Hebrew in Palestine." But bilingualism could only be accepted if it stays in the Jewish linguistic sphere amongst Jews in the "new *yishuv*."⁸⁸

Weinreich, on the other hand, a Bundist in outlook, aimed for Jewish national and cultural autonomy in Poland, which would entail some degree of integration. Accepting this as a given, Weinreich needed to provide clear boundaries between the desired (yet restricted) adaptation to non-Jewish "culture," a process which approves of the "judaization" of "Western" behavioral patterns and condemns immersion in the external Jewish realm, namely "acculturation" or "assimilation". The former process, coined "Westernization", would inevitably lead to Yiddish-Polish bilingualism. To ensure that Yiddish prevails as the one and only identitarian force, Weinreich called for the Yiddish philologist to clear Yiddish from any potential pollution. He also called upon Jewish peda-

⁸⁷ Zhitlovsky (infamously) also came to argue that anyone (i.e. gentiles) who spoke Yiddish, regardless of faith, could be considered part of the Jewish nation; see also: Matthew Hoffman, *From Pintele Yid to Racenjude: Chaim Zhitlovsky and racial conceptions of Jewishness*, p. 69 f.

⁸⁸ Ber Borokhov, *Hebraismus Militans*, in: *Class Struggle and the Jewish Nation, Selected Essays in Marxist Zionism*, Mitchell Cohen (ed.) online edition: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/borokhov/1913/hebraismus-militans.htm> [Retrieved 14 June, 2016].

gogues to instill the predominance of *mame-loshn* in the Jewish child.⁸⁹ It was “the acculturation of the immigrants in the United States,” however, which would be the source of immense worry and frustration for Weinreich, once immigrated to America in 1940 and when his hopes for Jewish autonomy in Poland came brutally to an end.

As mentioned before, Weinreich had exposed himself to the American racial system and minority-majority interaction during the 1930s. But — and this is important to stress — he approached African American communities as part of the white majority, at a least from the latter’s perspective.⁹⁰ However, Weinreich didn’t confuse the ability to blend in with the ability to escape one’s *Yidishkayt* — the “idiom of [our] collective unconscious,”⁹¹ which can never be fully erased.⁹² This conviction didn’t change, when he immigrated to New York in the 1940s. Deeply frustrated about the dire straits of the Yiddish language and culture in America, he was sure that assimilated American Jewry needed to return to Yiddish in order to grasp the “hidden parts of their national personality.”⁹³ Weinreich’s concept of Loter was meant to serve as a paradigm for Jews’ *modus operandi* in the present and arguably a spawn of his concept of “Westernization”: just as Weinreich imagined the possibility for both social integration and the maintenance of Jewish cultural distinctiveness (through the fostering of Yiddish) in Poland, so too did he see a bilingual future for postwar American Jewry.

But in a post-Holocaust world, the loyalty to Yiddish is also a moral necessity: “We have an obligation to ourselves, an obligation to our overseas brothers and sisters in the grip of the hangman, an obligation for the entire future of the Jewish people.”⁹⁴ This line of thought anticipates Emil Fackenheim’s (1916–2003) understanding of Auschwitz as a revelation of the 614th commandment, which imposed an imperative on Jews after 1945 to carry on Jewish existence in order to deny Hitler a posthumous victory.⁹⁵ Read in this light, it was the com-

⁸⁹ Kamil Kijek, Max Weinreich, assimilation, and the social politics of Jewish nation-building, pp. 37–41.

⁹⁰ See: Eric L. Goldstein, *The price of whiteness : Jews, race, and American identity* (Princeton, 2006); Matthew F. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a different color : European immigrants and the alchemy of race* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).

⁹¹ Jennifer Young, Race, Culture, and the Creation of Yiddish Social Science, 1932, p. 220.

⁹² Weinreich’s conviction in an unchanging, unique Jewishness comes close to Chaim Zhitlovsky’s adoption of the mystical concept of the “pintele yid” combined with notions of “Jewish race” and “Jewish racial traits,” as discussed by: Matthew Hoffman, From Pintele Yid to Racenjude: Chaim Zhitlovsky and racial conceptions of Jewishness.

⁹³ Dan Miron quoting Max Weinreich in: Dan Miron, Between Science and Faith: Sixty Years of the YIVO Institute, in: *YIVO Annual* 19, 1990, p. 14.

⁹⁴ Weinreich quoted in: Lucy S. Dawidowicz, Max Weinreich (1894–1969) : The Scholarship of Yiddish, in: *The American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 70 (1969), pp. 59–68, p. 66.

⁹⁵ “Jews are forbidden to grant posthumous victories to Hitler. They are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish [...]” in: Emil Fackenheim, *The Jewish*

mitment to Yiddish for Weinreich that constitutes the most authentic, most effective, indeed the *only* way of post-Holocaust Jewish resistance to the forces of Auschwitz.

In this vein, he even engaged with the audience of the young state of Israel in 1959, one that was “doomed” to cast aside Yiddish for a monolingual Hebrew identity. In an article in *Di goldene keyt* (The Golden Chain), one of the very few Yiddish quarterlies in Israel, he returned to the discussion of the nexus between Yiddish and *loshn-koydesh* and called on his brethren to learn from their history. Israel could be the idealized Loter, the place of inner-Jewish symbioses of Yiddish and *loshn-koydesh*, where centuries-long harmonic “inner-bilingualism” (*ineveynikste tsveyshprakhikayt*) — the uniqueness of Ashkenaz’ “language ménage” (*shprakh-balebatishkeyt*) — was a reality.⁹⁶ Only with the advent of the *haskole* and the creation of modern Yiddish literature, Yiddish eked out “a position of equality and sovereignty,” when the formerly spoken word transformed into a proper written language.⁹⁷ The characteristic harmony between Hebrew and Yiddish had been perverted by the “War of Languages.” And now, with Hebrew as the national language in the State of Israel, their traditional roles have essentially switched. This imbalance, which was exacerbated by the Holocaust, must again be corrected. For Weinreich, just like the anglicized American Jews needed to return to Yiddish, so did the hegemonically Hebraist State of Israel need to accept Jewish bilingualism as a central inheritance of Ashkenazic identity and to understand that Israel needs Yiddish in order for it to culturally and nationally prosper. Weinreich implicitly excludes from this cultural vision the non-Ashkenazic Jewish citizen of Israel, effectively arguing for the cultivation of “true” *Yidishkayt* even at the cost of a decline in cultural diversity.⁹⁸

Broderzon’s *Temerl* in many ways expressed both Borokhov’s and Weinreich’s convictions as well as their biggest anxieties: after all, *Temerl* epitomizes the prevailing discourse within 19th and 20th century philology, which believed in language as race creator and divider. *Temerl*, who literally imbibes *mame-loshn* with her mother’s milk, is thereupon indoctrinated by the mother-tongue’s

Return to History. Reflections in the Age of Auschwitz and a new Jerusalem (New York, 1978), pp. 25–42, p. 32.

⁹⁶ Max Weinreich, *Ineveynikste tsveyshprakhikayt in ashkenaz biz der haskole : faktn un bagrifn*, in: *Di goldene keyt*, No. 35 (Tel Aviv, 1959).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁹⁸ At that time, there was an Ashkenazic (white) hegemony in politics, literature etc. internal to Zionism and the young state of Israel leading to an intra-Jewish conflict that, as some may argue, still is going on today, see e.g.: Sami S. Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish conflict in Israel : white Jews, black Jews* (London, 2010); Bryan K. Roby, *The Mizrahi era of rebellion : Israel’s forgotten civil rights struggle, 1948–1966* (Syracuse, 2015); Dafna Hirsch, *Zionist Eugenics, Mixed Marriage, and the Creation of a “New Jewish Type”*.

culture and world views, which has the Yiddish language both as its root and vehicle — the world of Eastern European Yiddish-speaking Jewry. Her quasi-colonizing trip presumably to an African country reveals not only the origin of the scholarly discipline of linguistics. It is also based on the concept of racial hierarchies as well as the conviction in the power of language, which is capable of creating a race in its own image while simultaneously being the voice of this very race. Corresponding to the principles of romantic nationalism, which was also the ideological root of budding Yiddish philology, it is the amount, range and complexity of Yiddish vocabulary and grammar available to Temerl that dictate what and how she “*derklert alts vos in der velt iz*” (explains everything that exists in the world).⁹⁹ In short, Yiddish language expresses the *Volksgeist* of the Yiddish nation, a unique, stable but dynamic condition — the essence of its national cohesion. But the race-creating strength of language is, in turn, a race’s ultimate point of susceptibility: just as the “*negers*” in Temerl’s wonderland were able to entirely transform themselves and become part of the white Yiddish *folk*, the same can be applied to a Yiddish speaker, who through linguistic assimilation would lose any connection to *Yidishkayt*. Yiddish philology of the Yiddishist school, represented here by Borokhov and Weinreich, aspired to be the voice of the language’s force aiming to create a pure and authentic *yidish folk* by means of a purified, yet enriched *mame-loshn*. For both Borokhov and Weinreich, looking backwards on Yiddish served as a perfect tool to corroborate ideological claims held in the present. They did operate within the discipline of philology and worked with the racist vocabulary and patterns of argumentation. Yet they made it their task to challenge and subvert a majority of its racist and anti-Semitic assumptions about Yiddish stemming from the discipline (Aryan paradigm, the “affinity model” etc.). Their findings indeed revolutionized the study of the Yiddish language. Nonetheless, this de-colonization of Yiddish didn’t lead to an abandonment or criticisms of the racial paradigm *per se*. By connecting the question of Eastern European Jewish genealogy with the study of the Yiddish language, Borokhov and Weinreich simultaneously harnessed the racial paradigm for the sake of their ideas of essential Jewishness. Yiddish’s supposed weaknesses like its hybrid form came surprisingly handy in that matter.

Contrary to scholars of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, who exercised an integrative strategy by de-emphasizing their Jewishness in the 19th century, Yiddishist philologists needed ideas of unbridgeable difference reflected in linguistic diversity in order to defend innate Jewish difference in this new post-traditional era. Their studies were based on an essentialized idea of modern secular Jewish identity, *Yidishkayt*, which was purely based on the linguistic content of *mame-loshn* as the sole identitarian and biologizing force. This uniquely modern Jewish identity itself, which transcends even ideological differences within

⁹⁹ Broderzon, Temerl, p. 6.

Yiddishist circles, could thus only be defended through a thorough weeding out and simultaneous cultivation of the “garden” of Yiddish. In order to secure the race’s continuity, philologists had to consequently enforce and defend racial difference and perpetually condemn linguistic assimilation as the equivalence of a complete loss of Yiddish identity and social affiliation. Indeed, linguistic assimilation was held to be synonymous with cultural and national suicide.

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