

Dovid Katz (Vilnius)¹

The Present-day Importance of Czernowitz (Reflections on the 110th Anniversary)

It seems hard to believe that we have gathered here in the earthy City of Czernowitz, today's Chernivtsi, when for us in the field of Yiddish, be it modern Yiddish culture or academic Yiddish studies, this city's mythical status has withstood the test of years and cataclysmic events in the ensuing history. It is the place where 110 years ago, in 1908, Yiddish was proclaimed a national Jewish language. People willing to stand up and fight for the rights of the language and its development in society came together in a conference to do some pretty serious fighting right then and there, and the first-ever academic paper on the Yiddish language written in the Yiddish language was read.

The Czernowitz Conference has been studied by fine scholars over the last half-century or so (see e.g. Goldsmith 1976; Fishman 1981b; 1987; Moskovich 2010). The mythical status of the conference in Yiddishist lore stands quite apart from the many other Jewish aspects of the overall history of Czernowitz. Renditions of the city's name include (in transcription) Yiddish Tshérnevits, more formally Tshérnovits; Romanian Cernăuți; Russian Chernovtsy, today Chernivtsi in western Ukraine). But in English and other Western languages, the *concept* of Czernowitz (also spelled Chernowitz) is a permanent one in Jewish history as well as in the history of struggles for the survival and enhancement of small languages more generally.

First, a word of thanks to those who have made our inspiring gathering possible, Mr. Yosyf Zissels of the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine, and, on the academic side, my dear friend and teacher Professor Wolf Moskovich of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who is the founder and director of this extraordinary series of conferences. Thanks to him, the very notion of Czernowitz remains a potent factor in the field in our new century, and, in the spirit of Yiddish idiom, let the cycle of conferences every ten years be a portent of many more years for us all to meet in this very spirit of constructive collegiality and mutual regard.

Incidentally, I first met Wolf Moskovich 39 years ago at the Oxford Yiddish conference of 1979 where he read the learned paper "The Typology of Lexico-Semantic Systems in Jewish Languages." There is something else I want to say

¹Dovid Katz is Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Studies at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (VGTU) in Vilnius, Lithuania. His personal website is www.DovidKatz.net. He also edits the web journal *Defending History*.

here and now about dear Wolf. In addition to being the dean of Yiddish linguists and lexicographers of our time in the academic sense, he has in recent years done much, after some difficult years for the field, to rebuild the social, spiritual, and academic edifice of Yiddish studies via a new tone that places emphasis first on academic achievement, and second on the need for respect for one another, the spirit in which we congratulate colleagues on their successes, and offer support in times of tribulation, all the while building Yiddish studies for the future, as best we can.

And in that spirit, there can be no more beautiful Yiddish word than *tshérvovits*. In the realm of the History of Ideas, in cultural history and a collective memory replete with rejection, failure, infighting and finally, genocide, the Yiddish word *tshérvovits* has come to signify a genuine cultural miracle: a proclamation of the capacity of a stateless folk vernacular to seemingly at once (as history goes) to become an international language of high culture output that produces a vast and top-notch literature on a par with some of the European nations, with rapidly growing successes in theatre, press, and in short order in the years following the Czernowitz language conference of 1908, growth in educational systems from early childhood through higher education. In fact, for all the conference's short-term practical failures (for example, no stable office organization carried on to work on its official resolutions), the achievements of the modern Yiddish language for which it became a potent and stable symbol and indeed, one-word moniker, were if anything, breathtaking. And this, in the spirit of that rarefied way in which words in natural language have a propensity to take on a life of their own.

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But turning to the actual twentieth-century history of the Yiddish word *tshérvovits* (perhaps most frequently: [čérnəvic]), things “were not always like that.” As is often the case, the semantic history of a word, even a relatively “new word,” is more complex than meets the eye, even (or: especially) of those with intimate interest. In the years right after the conference, the Yiddish word, especially as an exclamation, *Tshérvovits!*, was not a word beloved of the Yiddishists (“those who love and support the development of the modern Yiddish language”) but rather of their contemporaneously determined opponents, the Hebraists or *hebreystn*, who thought the development of Yiddish a direct challenge to efforts to turn Hebrew into a modern vernacular, and whose stance included an array of anti-Yiddish ideas, ranging from claims that it was an ugly substandard jargon that brought shame to the Jewish people to the claims that those who supported its development were ipso facto dangerous radicals who hated the Jewish religion, the Hebrew language and the governments of the East European nations where most Yiddish speakers lived.

Here in Ukraine, what more appropriate source to cite than of Ukraine's greatest Yiddish son, Sholem Aleichem himself (Sholem Rabinovitch, 1859–1915), master Yiddish humorist and one of the storied triumvirate of founders of modern Yiddish

literature. In his *Kasrilevker progrés*, written not long before his death in 1915, we read of many internal societal divisions and quarrels in his archetypal shtetl Kasrilevke, with various internal Jewish dichotomies that are at once emblematic of the larger world, for example between the pious old-fashioned and the revolutionary modernist, ever tied to the universal human tendency toward rivalry, quarrel, and competition. Section 12 is devoted to the topic “Yiddishists and Hebraists”. Things start with some remarks at a town hall-style meeting by the town’s chief Yiddishist, and things take off from there:

The writer sat down upfront, quite confidently, like a president, and called the meeting to order with a bang on the table:

“Khavéyrim un khávertes!” [Gentlemen and Ladies!]

But he did not manage to say more than these two-three words. They wouldn’t let him. Who? Well, those who are against Yiddish. They hate Yiddish because Yiddish is “Zhargón” and Zhargón is *feh!* They, therefore, came out with a protest:

“Ivrít! Hebréyish!” [modern Hebrew and Yiddish for “Hebrew”]

But the writer with the black locks of hair, though not one of those lads who are so easily scared off by a protest, nevertheless fell right into a state of momentary confusion. He went on to pat himself on the stomach, adjusted his vest and once again called out as if all the fuss out there was nothing to do with him, but this time at a successive level of loudness:

“Khavéyrim un khávertes!...”

At that point an even bigger racket broke out with banging, whistling and a chorus of shouts that could be heard up in heaven:

“Ivrít! Ivrít! Ivrít!”

It seems that all of this was organized beforehand. This was a demonstration against Yiddish organized by Kasrilevke’s Hebraists. And even the holy prayer *Shmá-Yisróel* [“Hear O Israel”] wouldn’t have helped. The writer, poor thing, had to leave the podium with some shame. In his place there appeared the young writer with a face full of pimples and with an old jacket, also of his own accord, not waiting for the honor of being chosen by someone. He too gave a bang on the table with his hand and began to speak in Hebrew:

“Rabotáy” [modern Hebrew for “Gentlemen!”].

Not “rabóysay” [Yiddish and Ashkenazic Hebrew for “Gentlemen!”] but indeed, “rabotáy,” the way they pronounce it out there, in the Land of Israel... And it so happened that this young writer with the old jacket had a booming voice, and his “Rabotáy!” rang out like a great big bell. But what? He didn’t manage to get out more than this one word. They didn’t let him.

Now we’re talking already about the Kasrilevke “Yiddishists” who came out with a protest demonstration against Hebrew. It seems that this one was also all organized beforehand and with the same utensils, in other words, they began to rant and rave and stomp with their feet and scream at the top of their lungs and shout as loud as they could. A real obstacle to continuing, it was. The yelling reached the sky, the walls shook and the windows rattled as the Yiddishists yelled out:

“Mikhnatáyim! Lókshn-Kóyletsh! **Yiddish! Yiddish! Yiddish!**” [*mikhnatáyim*]

is a purposefully hypercorrect form of modern Hebrew *mikhnasáyim*, making fun of the frequent Yiddish/Ashkenazic *s* vs. Israeli *t* (but in a case where it's *s* everywhere); the second term is a parody of the traditional name for sacred old Hebrew, *lóshn-kóydesht* ("language of sanctity") via the similar-sounding Yiddish words for challah (kóyletsh) made with noodles (*lókshn*).

That was when God put it right into the head of one of the Hebraists he should, smack in the middle of all the other screams, hurl out a veritable bomb, and yell out:

"Tshérvovits!" . . .

Now come to think of it, what's the big deal, what could there be about this word, "tshérvovits"? Czernowitz is no more than some town out in Bukovina, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, over which two countries are fighting, and where one keeps driving the other out of there. Today it belongs to one, tomorrow to the other.

Nevertheless, for the Yiddishists of Kasrilevke, if they are reminded of the name Czernowitz, it is a thousand times, ten thousand times, worse than cursing the honor of their own mothers. You can throw up to them the most shameful misdeed, you can say to them just about anything you can think of, as long as it isn't *tshérvovits*. That's just the way it is among the Yiddishists of Kasrilevke.

The same is true of the local Hebraists as well. If you want to drive a Kasrilevke Hebraist banana, hit him where it hurts, all you have to do is utter a single word, *mikhnatáyim*, but in that case you better be careful because he might well split open your head. . . . All in all, they are a strange kind of people, this new generation of folks in Kasrilevke. [...]

Now then, upon hearing the word *tshérvovits*, one of the Yiddishists, he happened to be something of a weakling, someone who coughs a lot, but a hotheaded fellow, he didn't think very long, he took off his boot from his left foot and hurled it at one of the Hebraists. It hit him in the face right at the point where the nose just starts, right underneath his left eye. Thank God he wasn't wearing glasses, or he might have ended up losing an eye. [...]

(Sholem Aleichem 1914–1915: 68–70)

Hence it emerges that some few short years after the conference, the *word* for Czernowitz in Yiddish, far from being something to be celebrated among the ardent proponents of the language, was, by sharp contrast, a veritable insult that could be invoked by their opponents to drive them to a state of rage. It was a word that elicited feelings of anger and shame among Yiddishists.

How could that be? A number of factors come into play here. The mainstream Jewish press, including the overwhelming majority of newspapers and magazines in Yiddish, misreported the conference as one of a posse of unruly fanatics, far-left political oddballs who hated the Jewish religion, the revived modern Hebrew, the Land of Israel, and most dangerously, the political order and stability of the countries of Eastern Europe, being tied up with extremist revolutionary parties. If a single "sound bite" grade issue were needed to encapsulate the whole lot, it would need to be something that all symbolized commonness, ignorance, lack of higher education

and finesse. Something “like” proclaiming the language of the lowly to be some kind of false-god idol replacing the eternal values of the Jewish people. All in a toxic mix with revolutionary anti-state politics that are liable to bring calamity upon all. Then add into the mix PR hyperbole and misreporting of facts, by which the final resolution was misreported to be not the actual resolution that Yiddish is *a* national language of the Jewish people, but the rejected proposal of a small minority that the resolution proclaim Yiddish to be *the* national language of the Jewish people, and you have an early twentieth-century case of the media spin against an event rapidly winning out in the war of narratives against the honest, hardworking makers of that event. So much so, that Yiddishists themselves became, for some years, ultrasensitive about anyone even mentioning “the word *tshérnovits*”.

All this changed only after the First World War. With the rise of new independent states following the collapse of various empires, and particularly the Russian Empire, and the enshrinement of minority rights, including language rights in those states, history had taken a turn whereby various of the “promises of Chernowitz” were becoming true on a massive scale, most noticeably in the Polish Republic, whose interwar territory included over three million Yiddish-speaking Jews, and whose cities included the symbolic main cities of both the Polish (Mideastern Yiddish) and Lithuanian (Northeastern Yiddish) cultural and dialect areas. Its territory extended to much of Ukrainian (Southeastern) Yiddish too. All of today’s western Belarus in the north and western Ukraine in the south were inside the borders of the interwar Polish Republic, which made also for a borderless Yiddish language space that included Warsaw and Vilna, Cracow and Pinsk, Wroclaw and Lemberg (Lviv).

With the rise of fully legal, well organized and highly professional school systems at every level, featuring Yiddish as the language of instruction, and a vibrant press, theatre, literature and diverse political life, the modern Yiddish life envisaged by Czernowitz came true. In fact, consumers of modern Yiddish language and culture could now feel themselves equal to the other local languages and cultures, both majority and minority, in an Eastern Europe where people had since time immemorial been overwhelmingly multilingual. This feeling was not belittled by the existence of the Hebraize and Zionist parties who could for their part develop *their* language and culture, whether locally as non-vernacular high culture, and who of course had an increasingly successful ancient homeland to which they could aspire to migrate. It can be hard, in post-Holocaust retrospective, to fully grasp the degree of an internally Jewish multifaceted and multicultural life that had achieved an equilibrium unimaginable in the years before the Great War (one of the best introductions to the interbellum years remains Mendelsohn 1983).

It was, in fact, the rise of truly high Yiddish culture in interwar non-Soviet Eastern Europe, including an intellectual elite actually trying to build a history of its own movement, that paved the way for the concept “Czernowitz” and the word *tshérnovits* to rapidly undergo the shift from a source of ignominious shame to one

of beaming pride. Moreover, the genuine heroes of the 1908 Czernowitz were in *most* cases (the one great exception will be discussed) personalities who would in the ensuing years have nothing to do with the rise and maintenance of Soviet Communism and its straightjacketed but extensive Yiddish component in the early years of the USSR; this is important because Communist sympathies were regarded as a threat to state security in the countries to the immediate west of the aggressively ideologized USSR. A generation of history had shown, by the late 1920s, that the heroes of Czernowitz were generally people who had remained heroes for Yiddish culture internationally, including Y. L. Peretz, one of the three so-called *klásiker* of modern Yiddish literature, and others who went on to become famous writers or cultural leaders in America or indeed, on the territory of then Poland. Their socialist or social democratic personal politics was not an impediment in that time and place.

It, therefore, makes a kind of linear sense that when the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research was founded in Vilna (then Wilno, Poland, today's Vilnius in Lithuania) in 1925, two of its founding leaders, Max Weinreich (1894–1969) and Zalmen Reyzen (1887–1940?), would embark on a Czernowitz remake. In a culture where round-number anniversaries are cherished, it was natural that marking the 1928 milestone of twenty years since Czernowitz would find itself on some cultural, educational and journalistic calendars of a wide swath of Yiddish-speaking East European Jewish interwar culture. The image of Czernowitz as secularist and pro-socialist “here-ist” (in other words, working to build a better life in situ rather than agitating for emigration), excluded large swaths of the (majority) traditionally Orthodox Jewish population and of the spectrum of Zionist movements (with the notable exception of the “Left Poalei Zion”). Nevertheless, it represented a massive Jewish reality that was to its participants within and observers and critics without a large, stable, growing, creative, viable modern Jewish culture being built in Yiddish. The same word that once evoked shame could rapidly be made to evoke pride in the annals of a retrospectively constructed Yiddishist movement, of which *tshérmovits* would now become something akin to “the proudest foundational event in our history.”

This transformation took place in the hands of the exquisite scholars who were in fact “Yiddishist” in some variegated and yet interlinked senses. First, they were talented scholars and researchers who centered Yiddish as their primary subject of research (rather than it being peripheral to Germanic, Hebraic, Slavic, or other fields). Second, they believed that scholarship centered on the people's native language is ipso facto a critical component of the modern cultural movement to advance that people and its culture. This, in turn, meant that as much as possible of Yiddish scholarship would be carried out *in* Yiddish, and it meant, frankly, that there *would* of necessity be an academic bias toward aspects of the field that lend themselves in a dual-purpose way to increased modern fascination of people with their own inspirational past.

In fact, one of the everyday terminological quandaries that arose in those years was the dual meaning of “Yiddishist”, which could refer either to (a) an ideological

supporter of Yiddish language, literature, and culture or (b) an academic specialist centered on the Yiddish language rather than dabbling peripherally to a main interest in Germanic, Semitic, Slavonic, or other studies. One solution that came into usage was *a Yidishist in Borokhóvishn zin* (“a Yiddishist in Borokhov’s sense”) referring to the founder of academic Yiddish studies, Ber Borokhov (1881–1917), whose two seminal works published in Vilna in 1913 laid the groundwork for the new field of academic Yiddish studies (see Borokhov 1913a; Borokhov 1913b). Borokhov himself, incidentally, had made the analogous differentiation in different terms, those of *lingvíst* vs. *filológ*, in his unforgettable footnote: “Whosoever does not believe in the survival of the Yiddish language might still be a Yiddish linguist, but not a Yiddish philologist,” specifying further that philology believes in the “cultural and historic value” of the object language studied (Borokhov 1913a: 2, n. 1).

Borokhov, who died in 1917 aged 36, did not live to see even the first realization of his explicit academic dream: that talented scholars in the spirit of a Yiddish scholarship that is proudly linked to the thriving Yiddish civilization would arise as if *ex nihilo* and collectively write weighty scholarly works that were *in* Yiddish, *on* Yiddish, and in a wider sense, *for* Yiddish, and that before long a Yiddish language institute would rise (see Katz 1986). Two of the most talented researchers to emerge, both of whom settled in Vilna during or right after the First World War were Zalmen Reyzen and Max Weinreich, who were among the founders of the *Yidisher vísnschaftlekher institút*, better known by its acronym Yivo, that rose in Vilna (in Yiddish *Vilne*). One of the early projects of the newly risen Yivo in Vilna was indeed a primary act of intellectual synthesis of scholarship and a cultural imperative, one in which the power of building collective memory was truly brought to bear. It was the salvaging of the Chernowitz conference in two senses. First, in the academic sense of reconstructing the lost records of the event itself and publishing a collection of gathered materials for historians and other researchers. Second, the establishment, preservation, and growth of the *concept* of Chernowitz as a near-mythical event. The first ten-year anniversary of the 1908 conference fell in the course of the war. The rise of the interwar republics of Eastern Europe, and the Yivo in Vilna in 1925 meant that 1928 would make for a fine two-decade anniversary featuring a handsome academic volume on the conference itself.

So much had dramatically changed in the fortunes of Yiddish in those two decades.

First, in Piłsudski’s Poland, with its more than three million Jews, much of the agenda of Chernowitz had come to fruition to a degree unanticipated. There were systems of secular Yiddish schools at all levels, a plethora of emerging new literary talents along with writers’ organizations and publications for them to be published in, alongside a mass-readership daily press and weekly and monthly magazines.

Second, this could now all take place openly and freely under the political aegis of a basically, if very imperfectly, democratic society. In Poland and other countries, the Yiddishist movement was led by leaders, many of whom were sympathetic to a

legal socialism that was in most cases anti-Zionist. Most famously, the Bund, whose underground exploits as an illegal organization in czarist Russia became the stuff of legend, could now publicly be running Yiddish school systems, or be the major power behind many of them. In fact, the majority of Yiddish writers, educators, performers, and sundry cultural activists were close to a Bundist ideology of anti-Communist, anti-Zionist, and anti-religious democratic socialism, or to versions propagated by other groups including the Folkists, Territorialists, Anarchists, and other tendencies that were on the overall wavelength of the legal and acceptable Left in the wider body politic.

Third, the stage had been set by the historical narrative that was being provided by the progress of Yiddish literature itself. Yiddish had by then the myth of *Di dray klásiker* (“the three classic writers”), referring to Mendele Moykher Sforim, Y. L. Peretz and Sholem Aleichem. They had all died during the World War I years, Sholem Aleichem in New York in 1915, Peretz in Warsaw in 1916 and Mendele in Odesa in 1917. Peretz had been the most prestigious personality at the actual 1908 conference in Czernowitz, and had been the most active of the three in actually building a Yiddish literature outside of his own writing; for years his home in Warsaw, Tsiglyana 1, had been the near-mythical international address where young Yiddish writers from anywhere and everywhere had made the journey to show Peretz their work and hear his view on whether they had met the test of serious Yiddish belles lettres. Becoming for the duration of the actual this-worldly foundational conference of Yiddishism the status as king of Czernowitz was a perfect complement. Mendele and Sholem Aleichem had in fact not turned up at the 1908 conference, but both sent telegrams – good enough for mythmaking. Moreover, Mendele’s name had appeared on the actual invitations to the conference, or at least in the version that appeared in some papers. It did not take inordinate acrobatics to link the three *klásiker* to Czernowitz, and more subtly, to fashion that demise as the end of an era also bookmarked by the Great War, one that would thereafter feed into the optimism of Yiddish cultural autonomy in the newfound republics, to varying degrees a reality in the wake of the various peace conferences’ assurances of minority rights, particularly the Paris Peace Conference (see Tenenboym 1957/1958).

Fourth, the brilliant minds at the forefront of the movement to pursue Yiddish scholarship in Vilna who together made the new Yivo into a serious institution at its very foundation, consolidating ongoing separate work across the world around a central address that would provide the means of publication, were people well aware of the role of language conferences internationally, and particularly in Eastern Europe, as a means of launching a movement for the raising of a vernacular to national-language status. There would be no need to call a new international language conference to declare Yiddish a national language of the Jewish people. That had been done, but the deed needed to be rescued for its contemporary and future life in a people’s collective cultural memory.

And if an extra dose of conference mystique was missing, Chernowitz had that

too. Its protocols and papers had been lost, as almost none of its practical plans came to any rapid post-conclave fruition, least of all its own projective permanent office. That meant that one of the first tasks of the new Yivo, headquartered in its early years in Max Weinreich's Vilna apartment at Great Pohulanka Street 14, would be to assemble the papers from and about the event, from the earliest gleams-in-the-eye of its founder, himself the exotic German-speaking Jew who turned to Yiddish, Nathan Birnbaum (1864–1937), all the way to the aftermath, when the press reports helped turn the triumph into a debacle by way of Fake News, particularly in the misreporting of the resolution as one that proclaimed that Yiddish was declared *the* national Jewish language, making it an anti-Hebrew, anti-Zionist event par excellence; the conference had of course duly adopted the moderate resolution of Yiddish being declared *a* national language of the Jewish people.

One thing that has not changed with technology is the proclivity of collective academic volumes, especially those not supported by any state entity, to be delayed. The volume, edited by Yivo cofounders Max Weinreich and Zalmen Reyzen, with the editorial assistance of Chaim Broyde, who is thanked in the preface for having begun the task in the summer of 1928, finally appeared in 1931, its 288 pages jam-packed with data. In many ways, its modest appearance was so much in the spirit of Vilna's Jewish heritage as the Jerusalem of Lithuania, a spirit of being rich in learning and minimalist in production and form. In fact, the founders of Yiddish scholarship in post-World War I Vilna (most had moved there rather than being from there) were, in a sense, consciously extending the Jewish romanticism of a rabbinic world long known as the Jerusalem of Lithuania (*Yerusholáyim d'Lite*) that had then become the location for the rebirth of Hebrew literature in the nineteenth century, and would now, in the new relatively free Polish Republic of post-World War I Eastern Europe, become the center for the new field of academic Yiddish studies that Borokhov had proclaimed in his 1913 essay published, it so happened to be the case, in Vilna. Now the history of modern Yiddish studies carried out in the Yiddish language would have another foundational volume, the Chernowitz book, alongside the much larger folio collections of *Filológishe shriftn* that Yivo had started to publish in 1926. Let it, therefore, be remembered that this modest volume is the first address and the first foundation for all the subsequent studies and books about Chernowitz and its protagonists. Had "Rezyen, Weinreich, and Broyde 1931" not appeared, it is not likely we would be gathered here today.

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Looking back with a clearheaded desire to comprehend the environment of ideas of a bygone generation (in the sense of "as they were then understood"), not via retrospectively imposed lenses of later sensibilities, it is also, frankly, incumbent upon us to acknowledge that the leaders of the Vilna Yivo who selected Chernowitz as a prime symbol for the launch of the twentieth century's Yiddishist movement were mostly anti-(modern) Hebrew, anti-Zionist, and anti-religious. Though avidly

anti-Communist (/anti-Soviet), they were deeply Socialist in their worldview, seeing Yiddish as one of the great new secular cultures to enrich a new tolerant Europe with written-in guarantees for cultural autonomy for its minorities. As for the degree to which they were truly “here-ist” or discouraging of migration abroad besides their general dislike of Zionism and its cultural strings, that needs to be studied properly.

All these “politics” make both the challenge and the interwar success achieved by the Yivo all the more startling. Without giving up their personal politics, the new institute’s leaders learned to neatly compartmentalize them and to keep them away from the institute’s academic work. Everybody “knew” that the Yivo was antagonistic toward religion, Zionism, and its associated modern Hebrew activity, and Communism, but people from those circles could nevertheless sometimes participate, whether at events or in publications, or even, in the case of scholars, have their own work published in Yivo’s publications. For its wider standing in the Polish Republic, and even more significantly for its still wider standing internationally, particularly in Western Europe and the United States (along with the “secular Yiddish cultural colonies” far and wide, including Argentina, Australia, and South Africa), the Yivo could not have maintained its mainstream cultural status if it were associated with “radical movements”. Its leaders had to keep its academic projects and publications far from the culture wars of the days, in which nearly all of Yivo’s interwar leaders were, in fact, personal combatants.

When it came to setting out to prepare the Czernowitz volume for the twenty-year anniversary, that belatedly appeared some three years thereafter, its compilers had to decide what to do with the two young radical stars of Czernowitz whose ideas were proverbial dynamite. They were two of the century’s most talented Yiddishists, Esther Frumkin and Matisyóhu Miseses, both of whom suffered tragic deaths, by some accounts in both cases shortly after liberation from Soviet and Nazi enslavement, respectively.

Esther Frumkin was born Málke Lifshitz, in Minsk, in 1880. She is best remembered by her pen name and nom de guerre *Éster*. *Éster* was the primary pioneer of Yiddish textbooks for the new modern schools arising at the turn of the twentieth century. She was the prime personality who converted the entire Bund in its earliest period from indifference to Yiddish to a passionate embrace of the language of the masses. It is said (and I promised Professor Moskovich I would say at least one new thing today, whether or not I could prove it) that she personally persuaded the young Max Weinreich to abandon Bundist politics in favor of a life dedicated first and foremost to Yiddish scholarship; he became one of the twentieth century’s major masters. Virtually all of this was forgotten in the middle of the 1920s, and indeed in the middle of the 2010s because she had switched sides to join the Soviet Communists in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. She had been written out of the history of Yiddish to a large extent, not least by the Bund itself. Most of its fulsomely sanitized hagiographic histories do little justice to the founding personality who

turned it into the major pro-Yiddish party that it so powerfully became in interwar non-Soviet Eastern Europe. By including at least *some* of the materials of Éster's role in the Czernowitz Conference, the editors of the Czernowitz volume helped preserve at least part of her role in the rise of modern Yiddishism. The extant work on her life's work represents a good start that needs to be supplemented by a full-length biography including her (possibly lost) speeches from Czernowitz and its time (see Reyzen 1926; Gelbard 1985; Shepherd 1993: 137–171; Ruthchild 2012).

The second young intellectual radical was radical in a very different way. The twenty-three-year-old Matisyóhu Miseses (known among Jews of Galicia as Mátés Mízes) read a learned paper at Czernowitz that was the first academic study about Yiddish to be written *in* the language itself. Combining the attributes of the sharp scholar, the passionate cultural partisan, and unfettered youthful daring, he dared, a year before Czernowitz, to take on famed Zionist personality Nahum Sokolov (1859–1936) in a debate about Yiddish in the Hebrew journal *Ho-oylom* (*Ha'olam*) in 1907 (Miseses 1907a, 1907b). The issue for June of that year carried the sensational article in Hebrew, “Bizkhus ha-sofo ha-yehudis” (*Bi-zekhut hasafa ha-yehudit*, “In defense of the Jewish language”). Then, some two years after the conference, in 1910, Miseses debated about Yiddish with no less a leader of cultural Zionism than Ahad Haam (Asher Ginsberg, 1856–1927), in the journal *He-osid* (*He'atid*, “The Future”) where he published his remarkable essay, “Li-she'eylas ha-loshoyh ha-yehudis” (“On the Question of the Jewish Language” = Miseses 1910).

Notwithstanding some inevitable errors and weaknesses in the first-ever analysis of a language written in the language itself, by a young man, the first-ever indeed from the *viewpoint* of that language rather than another language, or other languages, “Miseses paper” (*Míseses referát*) was the direct precursor to the actual foundational document, Borokhov's *Úfgabn*, written less than five years later that appeared in Sh. Níger's *Pínkes* in 1913 in Vilna. Among the ideas in Miseses's paper that would prove enduring: The simplification and streamlining of complicated older Germanic grammatical norms is a symptom of human progress, not of linguistic corruption. Yiddish is, according to Miseses, the genuine historic and moral heir to ancient Hebrew and Aramaic. On the sociological side of things, he posited that much of the enmity toward Yiddish was imported by Jewish elites directly from the writings and work of antisemites, particularly German antisemites. He delved into the issue of self-hate, explaining how the German antisemitic mockery of the Jews' language had been internalized by some Jewish elites as hate against their own people's mother tongue and in the final analysis against their own people themselves.

Miseses's paper, which takes up some fifty pages at the heart of the 1931 Yivo volume, recognized the chances for success of the experiments to revive (a form of) Hebrew in the renewed settlement of the Land of Israel (Miseses 1908: 175–176). But he considered the chances for the revival of Hebrew as the everyday language of Jews in the Diaspora as zero and he expressed himself clearly:

Yiddish is the language of Jewishness. This language alone can protect us from assimilation. This language alone can be a shield against attacks from outside. Whether one is or is not a friend of Yiddish, one has to concede one point: as for one as for all, where people stop talking in Yiddish, the Angel of Death of national desertion takes its toll. When instead of Yiddish, Jews would be speaking Russian in Russia, Belarusian and Lithuanian in the Lithuanian lands, Polish in Poland, Ukrainian in Ukraine, Hungarian in Hungary, Croatian and so forth, then there would be no more tie to replace today's still unified Jewry, and the bubble would burst in a disintegration among the neighboring peoples. Bereft of unity, of its means of communication, the Jewish nation will melt away. You can see this clearly in Western Europe, in places where the majority of Jews once spoke the Ashkenazi Language, and today, in the wake of their assimilation, they are with one another as utter strangers.

The Hebraists make a grave error when they claim that strengthening Yiddish would somehow harm the Holy Language. It has never been the case that anyone [in the Ashkenazic lands] exchanges their Yiddish in everyday life for Hebrew. In the place where Yiddish goes silent, there Jewishness also goes silent. Nobody in such a place dreams about speaking Hebrew during the days of the week, there the national language takes all. And in the fullness of time, if not in the first then in the second generation, assimilation triumphs with all its radical consequences.

(Mises 1908: 181–182)

Turning in his talk's final moments to more provocative rhetoric, rhetoric that led at Chernowitz to girls starting to weep and some fistfights among the menfolk:

The Holy Tongue should not again become the language of life. It can be pleasant to pluck flowers at the cemetery, but living in the cemetery is not for those who want to live [...]

Turning his ire to the Jews who abandoned Yiddish in favor of the national language:

Half gentile, half-Jew, speaking Gentile and feeling Jewish? This amphibious life is a pale caricature, much sadder and worse than actual assimilation. A twittering existence makes for being rendered flat and just a half of something or other.

(Mises 1908: 192, 193)

The close of Mises's paper is the unforgettable eloquent call-out of Czernowitz to the young new century:

The nineteenth century brought forth the Rights of People, the twentieth has the high task to bring forth the Rights of Languages. Whoever believes in the progress of humanity should come and join our ranks and with courage and hope strive for our sacred national cause: the capacity for development of our Yiddish language.

(Mises 1908: 193)

Unfortunately (for us – perhaps not for the interbellum cause of mainstreaming Yiddish...), the volume does not do the same justice to the primary pronouncements of Esther Frumkin at the conference, which may be lost to the ages.

By sharp contrast to both young firebrands, and indeed to Peretz's lofty Yiddishist

rhetoric that remained inherently usable more or less to this very day, the invitation to the Czernowitz Conference was comprised of the standard fare of conferences on languages on their way from folk language to standard or national language status in which the theoretical or “status declaration” component is in its usual place as one amongst many:

The following issues will be put forward for consideration:

(1) orthography; (2) grammar; (3) use of loan words; (4) a dictionary; (5) Bible translation; (6) press; (7) literature; (8) drama and theatre; (9) significance of the language as a national or as a folk language and its relationship to Hebrew; (10) guarding of moral international literary rights [intellectual property].

(Reyzen, Weinreich, and Broyde 1931: 3)

As it happened, items 1 (orthography) and 3 (vocabulary and “loan words”) would go on to become a central and ultimately disproportionate focus of the work of the Yivo, particularly during the later 1930s. The early major Yivo publications of the 1920s, most famously the three folio-size volumes of *Filológishe shriftn* (Philological Writings) that appeared in 1926, 1928, and 1929 became with virtual immediacy the international pacesetter not only for the rapid development of Yiddish scholarship by providing the forum for scholars to start producing their academic work in Yiddish. They also became the standard for Yiddish language usage, adopting the *Náye ortográfye* of Borokhov (1913a: 18–22) and Reyzen (1920: 123–162). The most salient (and frequent) reform was the removal in most positions of the “silent áyin” that had been introduced in the nineteenth century in an attempt to mirror German spelling. They were also perfecting a policy on lexicon and usage that was sophisticated, workable, and inclusive of a broad cultural center ground with plenty of tolerance for the digression. In other words, it was easy, so to speak, at the stage of development of academic Yiddish style in the 1920s, for the Yivo to fulfill items 1 and 3 from the Czernowitz list without much fuss.

But in the 1930s, Yivo abandoned those two late 1920s accomplishments, and in a spirit of “permanent language reform” took to pursuing normative goals that were extremely linguistically and radically charged, in the first case by politics, and in the second by cultural purism. For twenty-first-century westerners, both categories can seem inscrutable to the point of being incredible. But every culture must be judged by its own measures, and in Jewish culture, details of writing in the ancient Jewish alphabet have carried enormous emotive, symbolic, and ideological weight in Hebrew, Aramaic, and indeed other languages, and that tradition itself was carried into modernity with a set of older issues being replaced in a new incarnation. In the case of the societal rise of Yiddish, digressions over “the spelling and the words” on grounds of ideology were paramount, and, that is just the way it is in the history of the language during this period (see Katz 1993: 25–35, 93–116; 166–185; 2015: 268–271; 2019).

On the issue of spelling, the years of late-1920s stability gave way by the mid-1930s to a new passion for *further* reform in the direction of the Soviet Yiddish orthography that had been decreed by law from the late 1920s. This was not a modern orthography intended to be as inclusive as possible. It was a Communist-dictated system intended to evoke anti-religious and anti-traditional passion at first sight. It did this in two ways. First, by eliminating the “silent álef” that is of a thousand years vintage in Yiddish and goes back to the Hebrew and Aramaic eras in Jewish (written) language history at the start of words and syllables, and that had come in Yiddish to fulfill the everyday function of the boundary between double vov representing the consonant *v* and single vov for the vowel *u* (*i* in most cases in southern dialects). To compensate, they recycled Hebrew diacritics in a new role as “necessary concomitants” to spelling Yiddish, flying in the face of the Jewish tradition whereby most diacritics are for learning the language and then abandoned in the mature script and in printed products intended for competent readers. The second major reform was the wholesale abandonment of the traditional (etymological) Semitic spellings of words of Northwest Semitic (Hebrew and Aramaic) origin by the phonetic system. In the later 1930s in the Polish Republic, following Marshal Piłsudski’s death, the rise of Hitlerism to the west, and the increased Soviet propaganda from the east, the Yivo’s leaders were under political pressure to go along with the “secular radical” Communist spelling of the Soviet Union. In the face of opposition, a compromise was reached in 1937 that came to be known as the “Yivo spelling” (Yivo 1937). It was overwhelmingly ignored by the mainstream of Yiddish literature and education internationally, who continued to use the “New Orthography” of Borokhov and Reyzen, and which was acceptable to many among the traditional religious “silent majority” of East European Jewry, much of which continued with the “Old Orthography” (a magnificent irony of history, as *that* spelling had earlier, in the nineteenth century, come with a wave of secularization and cultural globalization that replaced the earlier religious traditions of many centuries’ standing).

Also by the later 1930s, the Yivo embarked on a purist campaign that went beyond the earlier decades of return to “real Yiddish words” (like *moyl* for “mouth”) that the radical Yiddish press had replaced with modern German words rewritten in Jewish script (like *mund*). The new campaign started to “go after” Yiddish words of nineteenth-century German vintage (as opposed to old Yiddish words that came down the line over many centuries) that added new modern concepts, and to replace them with proposed neologisms; words that had become widespread or even universal over the course of a century or so. The degree of such replacement patterns in the spirit of linguistic normativism varied depending on which of the Yivo’s scholars was opining, and indeed it became a heated topic between various of the top Yiddishist scholars (for an overview see Katz 1993: 166–185, 205–218).

When the rarefied achievements of secular academic Yiddish scholarship in the interwar period are fathomed retrospectively, through a post-Holocaust lens, one

is left aghast at the huge accomplishments in literary history, linguistics, folklore, and other branches of modern Yiddish studies, in the hands of individual scholars internationally, and most strikingly, those associated with the Vilna Yivo, all in the absence of state budgets and compulsory education systems that are generally associated with such achievements. In that rear-view mirror, the exaggerated late-1930s attempts at radical spelling reform in a Soviet spirit and the similarly exaggerated attempts during those years to “purify” Yiddish from nineteenth-century borrowings would be but two stray minor details of a culturally creative period of prodigious proportions, so abruptly brought to an end by the worst case of genocide in human history.

* * *

Let us now skip from the time of the Czernowitz Conference in 1908 and the interwar aftermath period of large-scale fulfillment to our own times, the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century. In the cultural language status terms of Czernowitz itself, what has happened over these one hundred and ten years?

First, in the course of the twentieth century, both the quality and quantity of Yiddish literature surpassed even all the “dreams of Czernowitz” all the way to a Nobel Prize in Literature in 1979, and a library of thousands of works that continue to be rediscovered and translated into languages in various parts of the world. Those who study the field with an eye to seeking out ever new writers of those years continue to find more and more, realizing rapidly that thousands of works wait for their rediscovery. Also, the academic field of Yiddish has in some cases achieved or surpassed at least some of the aspirations of the Dreamers of Czernowitz.

Second, the Holocaust, in which more than five million Yiddish-speaking Jews perished, permanently wiped out the bustling Yiddish civilization in its East European homeland, in whose cultural economy Yiddish was every bit as natural as any other language, including the mighty official state languages. Although the “death of Yiddish” had been foretold or announced many times before the Holocaust, it was after the genocide that such pronouncement took on an air of sad but true reality.

Third, in the Soviet Union, where Communist straightjackets limited the scope of creative freedom but great writers nevertheless flourished, the Stalinist regime’s destruction of the literature and culture, and the murder of its greatest authors, brought to an end also those locations that had been out of Hitler’s reach.

Fourth, the rise of the modern Israeli language, *Ivrit*, to the status of the successful state language of the State of Israel was closely intertwined with a bitter campaign against Yiddish during much of the twentieth century, perhaps peaking in the years leading up to, and following, the rise of the state per se. The modern Yiddishist sector of society was delegitimized and marginalized (see Katz 2007: 310–323).

Fifth and in some sense most psychologically painful for Yiddishists today, the

millions of Yiddish-speaking Jews who settled in America, Argentina, Australia, Britain, Canada, France, South Africa, and numerous other free lands, between the late nineteenth century and the Holocaust, failed to raise new generations of fluent speakers, let alone writers and cultural leaders, though the immigrant generation itself continued to produce fine works and to lead Yiddishist institutions (books, newspapers, magazines, schools, political organizations, theater, and more) to the end of their days. It is no disrespect to the significant exceptions of second or third generation Yiddishists to point out that they are exceptions rather than the norm. In sociolinguistic parlance, it was a case of voluntary abandonment of the language writ large throughout the free world, without a single geographic exception (though there were differences of degree, to be sure, for example, multilingual Montreal holding out longer than New York). There was also a political factor. Just as the Cold War was heading for its peak in the postwar years, the Socialist, leftist-oriented politics of the vast majority of secular Yiddish publications, educational and cultural institutions seemed doubly out of place in these postwar times and places, not least in the McCarthy years.

So where does that leave us today? We are, nowatimes, sad as it is to say, bidding farewell to the last full exemplars of the language and its pre-Holocaust culture, in other words, to people who came to significant linguistic and cultural maturity before the onset of World War II. In many cities in the free world, the end of “modern Yiddish culture as we knew it” could be dated to around the year 2000, in some places earlier, in some later. Indeed, for many years, the remarkable Israeli (Polish-born) Yiddish writer Shloyme Vorzoger (the name can mean “seer” or “foreteller”), would tell people from near and far: “Mark my word. We and our literature will come to an end in the year 2000”. Indeed, it is hard to complain to doctors, or for that matter God, when people in their eighties and nineties pass away peacefully surrounded by loved ones.

But the failure of the once-mighty Yiddishist movement to raise new postwar generations of Yiddish speakers (and creators) at the level of sociolinguists’ minimal speech communities cannot, and must not, be equated with “death” or “disappearance”. Far from it. Just as each individual is important in a study of society, so is each individual speaker, reader, writer, activist, or accomplisher in one sense or another important to a state of the language, the more so in our globalized internet epoch. In fact, there have been three major Yiddish entities that have thrived for some decades now.

First, there is the record of achievement of academic Yiddish Studies, a cover term for work in linguistics, sociolinguistics, literary history and analysis, comparative literature, folklore, and other disciplines that have found, finds and will continue to find in the vast and in a sense inexhaustible corpus of still unstudied “Yiddish things” of the last thousand years, objects of fascination to which actual scholars and institutions are prepared to invest time and resources, and to which end studies of

the language itself are ipso facto requisite. For many late-twentieth-century Yiddish speakers and cultural figures, the very notion *Yidish in di universitétn* (“Yiddish in the universities”) was a kind of balm to the soul that could provide comfort to a scene of utter intergenerational washout.

Second, there has arisen a veritable industry around “Yiddish” and “saving Yiddish” that has included tens of millions of investment in an array of institutions and buildings dedicated to “Yiddish culture” in various senses *other* than centering the simple goal of language preservation via training new generations of teachers, writers, scholars, and activists who are fully competent in reading, writing, and speaking the language (not just “Yiddish 101”). While such mundane definitions are taken for granted when it comes to French or Spanish, or indeed Swahili or Urdu, the American Yiddish PR industry, with tentacles abroad as well, has generally succeeded in delinguification of Yiddish (see Katz 2015: 279–290). Delinguifying Yiddish leaves the “consumer” convinced that he or she is able to have the pleasure and benefit of the feel, taste, aura or mystique of the product to replace the product itself, the product being a language that must be studied and mastered just like any other. Miriam Hoffman, perhaps the leading Yiddish writer alive today, has immortalized the phenomenon in her satire “A Congress of Yiddish Savers” (Hoffman 1994). Strange as it may sound, “Yiddishless Yiddish” did succeed in turning around widespread prejudices against the language sometimes spread by Jewish elites determined that only modern Israel/*Ivrit*-centered culture, and/or only literal religion per se constitute Judaism rather than the language, literature, and culture in the very family background of the overwhelming majority of American and other Western Jews.

Third, there is an important though small group of non-Haredi (mostly secular) Yiddishists who *do* speak it every day to their loved ones and continue to raise families in the language. While the net result might still be under a dozen families internationally, the circle’s cultural products, including magazines, plays, books, and courses actually *in* Yiddish reach some thousands of people each year, a substantial number of whom (particularly in Europe) are themselves non-Jewish. Various criticisms have been leveled, especially on the issues of literary or scholarly or cultural quality of the endeavors, but as is the case in any cultural movement, there is substantial internal variation. Moreover, many of the critics are themselves involved in the same limited cultural space. Surprisingly, what has held the group’s progress back is something that few would have predicted: a near-fanatic loyalty to those two late-1930s Yivo “overshoots” on spelling and purism of vocabulary, mostly in the sense of a permanent war on ever more Yiddish words of nineteenth-century Germanic vintage. The group’s “foundational event” is not Czernowitz but a 1970 picket line, not against Jewish institutions that boycotted Yiddish but against the last Yiddish daily newspapers in New York City for not accepting *their* norms of spelling and vocabulary (see Orenstein et al. 1970; Katz 2019: 570–571). The group has spawned a large number of devotees who enjoy inserting Latin-letter-

Yivo-transcription of Yiddish phrases in their English emails, and who have been “well trained” to regard the core group’s opinions on (a) spelling, and (b) vocabulary, as cardinal matters of the highest Yiddishist principle. This second category further subdivides into an ongoing campaign against words of nineteenth-century German origin, substituting invented variants, and a passionate attachment to neologisms for “new things” that in circles where the language is really spoken, cannot compete with the internationalisms adopted by many of the world’s languages, e.g. the insistence on “internets” for *internet*, or *blitspost* for *i-meyl* (See Moskovich 2017; Katz 2019: 573–574). The saga goes back to the last decades of the twentieth century when the group’s founding leaders established the pattern of disdaining the usage of the last great Yiddish writers in favor of invariant and purist academic model of orthographical and lexical norms that took the struggling language away from its ageing writers and teachers. Near the end of the twentieth century, the group was strengthened by the migration of veterans of Aaron Vergelis’s Moscow-supported Communist monthly, *Sovétish héymland*, who took over a number of the vacated Yiddish institutions with funding, particularly in New York, usually for personal or group benefit, and with little interest in the future of the language beyond their group’s interest; they often went along with the linguistic demands of the baby boomers on site, without however the same degree of caring about such things. Despite these drawbacks, a number of significant achievements accrued to these groups, most importantly, success in interesting people far and wide in things Yiddish, and in some cases, in actually learning Yiddish.^[P]_[SEP]As if the catalogue of mishaps and misfortunes was not enough, politics came into it as well, sometimes in a major way on multiple occasions. The postwar Yiddishist movements being “too left” for the great democracies where Yiddish continued to thrive in the hands of the last prewar-born generation has been referred to previously. But in the twenty-first century, with numbers and demographic strength vastly smaller, new versions of politics have arisen as potential stumbling blocks to wider dissemination.

This is particularly true of the European branch of the secular Yiddish movement, which after the collapse of the Soviet Union rapidly spread to the countries of East-Central and Eastern Europe as well. Over the last few decades, a remarkable political Yiddish dichotomy has come into evidence. In Western Europe, particularly in Germany, but also in the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and occasionally Britain, hard-core leftwing opponents of the State of Israel or its policies have studied Yiddish, and contributed to the field, almost as if to demonstrate that their espousal of Palestinian causes and BDS [the pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli “Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions” movement. – *Ed.*], for example, does not in any way suggest antisemitism. Some have taken this further, choosing to concentrate on the socialist heritage of so much of pre-Holocaust secular Yiddish language, literature, and culture in Eastern Europe.

In Eastern Europe, most famously Lithuania, but also throughout the Baltics and

in Ukraine, Yiddish has, by sharp contrast, emerged as a favored tool of right-wing Holocaust revisionists who are determined to retain actual Holocaust collaborators or perpetrators as national heroes and to rewrite history in the direction of “Double Genocide” revisionism, which downgrades the Holocaust, and in some cases regards the Jewish partisans who escaped the ghettos to join up with the Soviet-sponsored anti-Nazi resistance as “war criminals” inherently equal to Holocaust collaborators). The deflection is often supplemented by a will to demonstrate the love of pre-destruction local Jewish culture as a gesture to the Jews in some general sense. Poland, which has produced more Yiddish-speaking non-Jews of the younger generation than any other country, and falls between the two blocks geographically and historically, would need to be studied in its own right on this score, reflecting its own and often unique dynamics.

* * *

Yiddish is rich in expressions for the general idea that when God wants it so, the strangest things can happen. During all these decades of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, Ashkenazic Haredi (“ultraorthodox”) groups internationally were verily – and, so to speak, quietly – creating hundreds of thousands of new Yiddish speakers, without any interest in secular Yiddish culture or the literary treasures Yiddishists hold so dear, and far from the avant-garde egalitarian and universalist mores of the classic secular Yiddishist movement sometimes encapsulated in the word “Czernowitz”. Even as “we in the Yiddishist movement” were working our hearts out to create books, courses, programs, and institutions for a select few – a noble and productive endeavor in which the many participants may take substantial pride, – the unreconstructed remnants of bona fide Eastern Ashkenazic civilization, in the form of Haredim, the overwhelming majority of them Hasidim, were creating Yiddish-thinking, Yiddish-speaking children, Yiddish-speaking families, Yiddish-resplendent streets, schools, synagogues, and myriad institutions. Although it was never their core intent, Hasidic Yiddish in 2019 produces a number of thick Yiddish weekly newspapers in New York, as well as an array of periodic magazines.

In the months leading up to our Czernowitz Conference of 2019, we enquired of some of the world’s leading specialists in Jewish demography (none of them with any axes to grind in things Yiddish) about the present-day number of Haredi Yiddish speakers at the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century. The estimates ranged from a low of 525,000 (Barry Kosmin) to a high of 1.1 million (Sergio Della Pergola; see Katz 2019: 580, n. 4).

So what will the scholarly world of Yiddish Studies be saying a hundred years hence, here in Czernowitz, or for that matter anywhere, about this period, when scholars of Yiddish language were immersed in their own issues of standards, purism, devotionals to diacritics while totally ignoring, or arrogantly dismissing the

living communities of Yiddish speakers where the language thrives among hundreds of thousands?

While much work remains to be done, it seems that the Yiddish divide is part of the wider utter disassociation of virtually all modern Jewry in all its many guises (including the modern religious, of course) from the Haredi Hasidic world that has maintained East European Jewish life as a veritable civilization that includes clothing, daily mores, deeply held beliefs and of course, daily language. The separation between the two principal blocs of world Jewry encompasses an array of differences in worldview, including the age of the world, the role of women, the literal reality of life after death and coming of Messiah, the literal giving of the Five Books (the Torah, or Pentateuch, not just the Ten Commandments) by God. There are multiple ironies and nuances. Those who care deeply about the Yiddish language per se as a conscious distinct “issue” and cherish the great works of Yiddish literature did not pass the language on to their children while those who do not have created hundreds of thousands of speakers.

But the plot thickens: Not only is the subject matter of most of the classic Yiddish literature precisely that unreconstructed religious world that would today be called “Haredi” but not far from 100% of the great Yiddish writers grew up and were acculturated in their youth in precisely the world of traditional Eastern Ashkenazic civilization, whose continuity today is called Haredi, and is, as noted, among Ashkenazim overwhelmingly Hasidic.

Whoever looks back from our Czernowitz Conference here in 2018 at the historic event of 1908, whose one hundred and tenth anniversary we are together marking, can go beyond those great ironies to some more specific realities that are nowadays culturally and politically quite incorrect. To take just one, the young Matisyóhu Mises predicted at Czernowitz that a revived vernacular Hebrew has no prospect for survival in the Diaspora, that wherever Yiddish will be abandoned it will be replaced by the local or national language of the relevant locality. I dare say that there is not a single Hebrew-speaking planet on the planet outside of Israel whose members did not live in Israel. Modern Hebrew – or *Israeli*, as some scholars prefer (Zuckermann 2008) – has been a major language revival success story in Israel, and a total vernacular failure everywhere else. Mises was right. In a larger sense, Czernowitz was right.

If the Yivo leaders who edited our classic Czernowitz Conference reconstructed proceedings in the volume that appeared in Vilna in 1931 omitted from the volume some outspoken statements by Esther Frumkin, they were, as meticulous scholars, determined to publish in full the wholly revised views of the Czernowitz Conference founder, Nathan Birnbaum, a major “wandering intellectual” whose founding role in Yiddishism came after his founding role in Zionism and before his founding role in the strictly orthodox Agudas Yisroel (Agudath Israel) movement (see Solomon A.

Birnbaum 1964; Fishman 1987).

By the time the two decades had passed from the time of the conference, Birnbaum was in his latter phase. Citing someone who had left Yiddishism for profound religious orthodoxy would in any case not “endanger” Yivo’s status the way a full-blown treatment of Esther’s role would have done, given Esther Frumkin’s late 1920s and early 1930s role as a devout Soviet Communist based in Minsk, precisely the sort of thing the Vilna Yivo could by no means afford to be connected with. It would be an act of straightforward intellectual honesty and accurate historical record-keeping. What they did not know, perhaps when a day would come when Nathan Birnbaum’s letter to the Czernowitz volume’s editors would take on a wholly new twenty-first-century meaning.

Here is an excerpt from Birnbaum’s essay-cum-letter entitled “Then and Now” that appears in the introductory material to the 1931 Yivo volume:

But today – because I have returned to the Jewish Torah and to the Jews who have not abandoned her, – I look at all this with feelings of worry: The radical parties have ostensibly monopolized the Yiddish language. They thereby did more than awaken suspicions among the masses of religious Jews who are the primary and genuine creators of Yiddish. They have moreover also brought about for Yiddish the danger that cut off from its source, it would lose its autonomy, its quintessential Jewishness, its powerful hues and become a gray shadow of itself, whether a dried-out kind of being or just any some European any-old language. May this danger pass peacefully. May Yiddish remain the Jewish treasure, for which it paid to call together the Czernowitz Yiddish Language Conference.

(Birnbaum 1931: xi)

The current Czernowitz Conference, of 2018, needs in the first instance to begin the difficult and sometimes awkward work of coming to terms, fully and with dignity, to the fact of life that vernacular Yiddish survives and will survive in the communities of Haredim, overwhelmingly Hasidim, not in secular Yiddishist communities such as existed in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust and internationally before the passing of the immigrant generations. That means learning to respect the empirically real Yiddish of the twenty-first century in all its magnificent internal diversity and forms of use. On a psychological level, we who have worked for decades, and continue work in the so-called “secular” spheres of Yiddish, can feel proud of our achievements while conceding fully that engendering Yiddish-speaking communities was just not one of them.

We too, just like the real mother in King Solomon’s Judgment (I Kings 3: 16–28), must do what is best for Yiddish and its future even though she is now owned – in the hearts and souls of many who follow secular Yiddishism in principle – by the Other Mother. We need to learn to experience veritable jubilation that the vernacular language has survived the Holocaust with stunning demographic prognoses of millions of speakers in the course of our still young century. We need to figure our

own role in that context. The twin gods-of-Samaria of “Yivo spelling” and “purist vocabulary” as some kind of prime intellectual or spiritual principles of Yiddishism must be consigned to history’s junk heap as goals for the future, with no prejudice against the many fine texts published or reprinted by their proponents. We must begin to study the rich variation within Haredi Yiddish as a primary goal of Yiddish descriptive linguistics while reaching out to modern Hasidic scholars (not to mention “everyday folks”). The organizers of our conference, and Professor Moskovich in particular, did a great thing by taking care to include New York doctoral candidate Chaya R. Nove whose own new paper on these subjects will remain a classic in the launch of the new period in the field of Yiddish whose launch may well come to be symbolized by the Time Of Czernowitz 2018 (see Nove 2018; cf. Katz 2019: 575).

But what of literature and more broadly the written language? Common sense dictates that a diverse and international Yiddish speech community of hundreds of thousands rapidly growing into millions will be producing a lot of fascinating written Yiddish in the years and generations to come. But what about now? Very often, the Yiddish newspapers, books, and magazines of the Hasidic world are dismissed as not worthy of study by specialists in the language. “They don’t follow the Yivo rules, standard Yiddish grammar and look at all those loanwords!” is one of many variants of complaint. Even professional linguists who are ostensibly trained to fathom the majesty of language in transition have failed to live up to the task and proceeded to wrongfully delegitimize Hasidic Yiddish (e.g. Jacobs 2005: 291–293; cf. Katz 2006: 471–472).

Looking at Hasidic Yiddish periodicals today, one fathoms a rich variation of publications whose names, “strangely enough,” harken back to the kind of names beloved of earlier generations of “secular” periodicals. A recent visit to a New York Hasidic neighborhood kiosk yielded purchases of brand new issues of an array of publications. Many do have names somewhat suggestive of the religious environment, such as *Di Balebóste* (“Lady of the House”), *Bnóys Tsíyen* (“Daughters of Zion”), *Shá(a)re(y) Tsíyen* (“Gates of Zion”). But the majority have names that could have been (or actually were) names of once-upon-a-time secular periodicals, e.g. *Der Blik* (“The View”), *Dóyres* (“Generations”), *Der Shtern* (“The Star”), *Di Vokh* (“The Week”). Perhaps most symbolic of historical cultural irony are such passionate names as *Der Flam* (“The Flame”) that would have suited a radical leftist journal a century ago, *Der Momént* (“The Moment”, which was, without the definite article, the name of a famous Warsaw Yiddish newspaper) or *Der Véker* (“The Awakener”, once the name of more than one secular radical journal). One magazine, *Máles* (*Maalos* on its English label, standard Yiddish *Máyles* “advantages”) is at its best on the level of the finest prewar East European Yiddish young people’s and family magazines.

What has been lost in the narrative of Yiddish of our times, linguistically, culturally, and sociologically, is that Hasidic Yiddish is, believe it or not, the genuine linguistic heir to the earlier universal literary Yiddish of yesteryear, including its

radical journalistic branch. The secular game players with Latin letter transcriptional Yiddish and their focus on spelling and purity of lexicon, are heir, by contrast, to the purism of a handful of Bronx-based scholars who were under the influence of the German sociolinguist Heinz Kloss (see Katz 2019: 572), who argued that *Ausbau* languages, too close to their origin languages, need to be made further away, all this after Yiddish has been separated from German speech territory for centuries; and, a century or so after anyone looked in German dictionaries for new Yiddish words.

* * *

Where the *word* “Czernowitz” does occur in Hasidic magazines, it refers to that city’s Hasidism and Hasidic masters, particularly the heritage of the Boyaner Rebbe and his four sons, each of whom moved each to his own court, the eldest, Reb Menachem Nochem (1869–1936) becoming Boyaner Rebbe in Czernowitz, or for many, the Czernowitzer Rebbe. But that has no special relation to Yiddish or the movement for its preservation and enhancement.

But it so happens that the Haredi movement for Yiddish in Eastern Europe does emanate from the general Czernowitz area. It was in the course of nineteenth and twentieth-century intra-Jewish battles that cities just to the west of Czernowitz, largely in the area known to Hungarian Jews as *Ínterland* (standard Yiddish *Únterland*, though partly in *Óyberland* too; see U. Weinreich 1964). A section of this area became the home of Haredi parallels to the Czernowitz Conference in the sense of pro-Yiddish declarations, but needless to say, the parallels cannot be drawn too far. The Haredim were codifying the use and sanctity of Yiddish in connection with uncompromising religiosity, and in combat with Jewish modernizers turning toward other languages. The Yiddishists of Czernowitz, though nearly all of the traditionalist (“Haredi”) childhood background themselves, were proclaiming a secular cultural heritage based upon the Yiddish language and its literary and cultural products. Still, the location of the Haredi pro-Yiddish cities in this very area is more than a little tantalizing given that it played a major role, ultimately, in the twenty-first-century preservation of spoken Yiddish by hundreds of thousands of people. That is no peripheral detail.

It was in Preshborg (Pressburg, today’s Bratislava in Slovakia) that the famed Khsam Sóyfer (Hatam Sofer, 1762–1839), popular (book-derived) name of Rabbi Moyshe Shrayber (Moses Schreiber), a native of Frankfurt, Germany, came to see the language of East European Jewry as sacrosanct and integral to Jewish religious continuity, just as Nathan Birnbaum, originally of Vienna and originally German-speaking, went on to be a pioneer of secular Yiddishism (before coming to deep religiosity himself). The language was of course but one component in the emerging movement of ultraorthodoxy, or Haredism, as a response to modernizing orthodoxy, in the nineteenth century (See Silber 1992).

The Khsam Sóyfer ruled as a matter of Jewish law that it is forbidden to learn

Torah from a teacher in a non-Jewish language, and he famously added that to have a rabbi preach in such a language is akin to an idol in the holy temple (in his response on *Khóyshen Míshpot / Choshen Mishpat*, sec. 197; see Katz 2007: 250). His most resolute follower, who picked up the mantle after his death, was Akiva Joseph Shlezinger (1837–1922).

Shlezinger, before migrating to Palestine, published some Yiddish tracts, the best-known of which appeared in 1864 in *Íngver* (standard Yiddish *Úngver*, today's *Uzhhorod* in Ukraine). It is an extensive and explicit codification of preservation of living Yiddish language as a firm prerequisite to being a proper Jew (see Katz 1997). His book, called *Séyfer Léiv Ho-Ívri* ("Book of the Heart of the Jew") comments:

And thus our master [the *Khsam-Sóyfer*] warns us not to do as some do, when given the name Aaron they call themselves Adolph, or *Móyshe* and call themselves Moritz [...]. Our sacred forefathers recast the national language to become their own language, the language of Judaism as our master has explained [...].

The language that the Jews established and is unique to them has sanctity and its law is the law of the sacred language Hebrew. And therefore, our master of blessed memory commanded us not to change our language. [...] And that is our Yiddish language.

(Shlezinger 1864)

And so the city known in the local Yiddish as *Íngver* joined Pressburg as another source of the territory where the passionate pro-Yiddish feeling was developed and being codified religiously. For Yiddish academics, there is more than a little irony that this book-length Yiddishist declaration came out in 1864, the same year that secular Yiddishists celebrate as the birthdate of modern Yiddish literature, in light of Mendele Moykher Sforim's debut in Yiddish that year in Alexander Tsederboym's *Kol meváser* in Odessa.

Still, a more convincing analogy with Czernowitz would be a rabbinic conference per se that made a proclamation somehow codifying Yiddish as "a vital Jewish thing to be preserved". That in fact was the *Mikhálevits Conference* of 28 November 1865 (for irony's sake one could mention almost a year to the day after the precise date of Mendele's Yiddish debut on 24 November 1864). *Mikhálevits* (also *Mikháylevits*, Hungarian *Nagymihály*) is today's *Michalovce* in Slovakia. The conference, attended by twenty-five rabbis, issued a nine-point proclamation that became, as Michael Silber put it, the "Manifesto of Ultraorthodoxy" (Silber 1992: 39–40). In the time, it was signed by seventy-one rabbis, the number of the ancient Sanhedrin's judges. Point number one of the nine-point declaration (in Hebrew) reads:

It is forbidden to give a sermon in the language of the peoples of the world. Similarly, it is forbidden to hear a sermon that is given in the language of the peoples of the world. Therefore, every one of the People of Israel who hears a rabbi or someone else giving a sermon [or "religious discourse"] in a gentile language must leave the synagogue and go outside. And whoever is teaching [/"giving a sermon"/] must

teach in the Language of Judaism that kosher Children of Israel speak, people of the selfsame land.

(Psak Bes Din (1866): [1])

After the First World War, some of the same debates continued in newer incarnations. But there was a big difference. The non-Hasidic Khsam Sóyfer's true spiritual heirs were virtually all Hasidic. The most dramatic event was again – a conference. In 1922, the Minkatsher Rebbe, Chaim-Eluzer Shapiro (“the Minkhes Elúzer”, 1872–1937), veritably an heir of the Khsam-Sóyfer's warnings against any modernizations and concessions, convened a conference of several hundred rabbis at a conference in Tshop (Chop, Czap, Tshap, etc.), then in Czechoslovakia, today in western Ukraine (near the borders of Slovakia and Hungary). Its major purpose was to denounce Agudas Yisróel (Agudath Israel) for its alleged accommodations to compromising Orthodox movements, such as German-Jewish orthodoxy or the Mizrahi Zionist movement and Zionists in general, and to its alleged failure to stop secular studies from creeping into its seminaries (particularly its seminary in Warsaw). Though perhaps not a technical excommunication, strictly speaking, the conference's resolutions mandated having nothing to do with the Agudah, amounting in modern times to much the same thing. The rabbinic texts that have survived from the conclave, published in Goldshtein (1936), are in traditional rabbinic Hebrew but use everyday Yiddish words for insult-words like *di tsiyenístn* (“the Zionists”).

It is important to note that “the Yiddish question” was not prominent in the surviving documents, primarily because Yiddish was spoken *anyway* in the Agudah and other Orthodox branches of traditionalist religious Jewish movements. This is the case of a non-Yiddish conference signaling the emergence of a bloc that *would in the future*, after the Holocaust, remain loyal to Yiddish and would, sound as it may hyperbolic, provide the empirical key to saving Yiddish as a viable vernacular after the Holocaust. To be sure, the language question is just beneath the surface. For example, in mocking an Agudah publication, the conference protocols use a Yiddish term for modern Hebrew, *Hebréyish*, the language of a certain *organ ho-ofitsyél* (“official organ”) of Agudah to show how it has betrayed Jewish values in the views of the conference (in contrast to the traditional written forms of the language known as *loshn-kóydes*).

Beyond the geographic closeness of Tshop to Czernowitz (nowadays: Chop to Chernivtsi), some 350 kilometers (as the crow flies), there is another eerie parallel. Just as Mieses and Esther were enfants terribles of the 1908 Czernowitz Conference, there was an enfant terrible who stole the show at Tshop, notwithstanding his youth in the face of so many venerably aged rabbinic masters. That was the young Yóyelish Táytlboym (Joel Teitelbaum, the “Vayóyel-Móyshe,” 1888–1979). His signature appeared first on the ban on Agudas Yisroel, before all those much more famous rabbis. It was however *after* the Holocaust that Teitelbaum's uncompromising and

theologically motivated anti-Zionism would render him, also, as a “by-product” in the eyes of some, the leader of the Hasidic group that would be among the most loyal to the retention of Yiddish as the one vernacular language of the Jewish home, and the group destined to become the numerically largest Hasidic group anywhere. Though nowadays bitterly divided between his two grandnephews, the *Zalmónim* (Zalmenites) cantered in Brooklyn and the *Aróynim* (Aronites) centered in Kiryas Joel in Orange County, upstate New York (recently separated from Monroe to join Palm Tree).

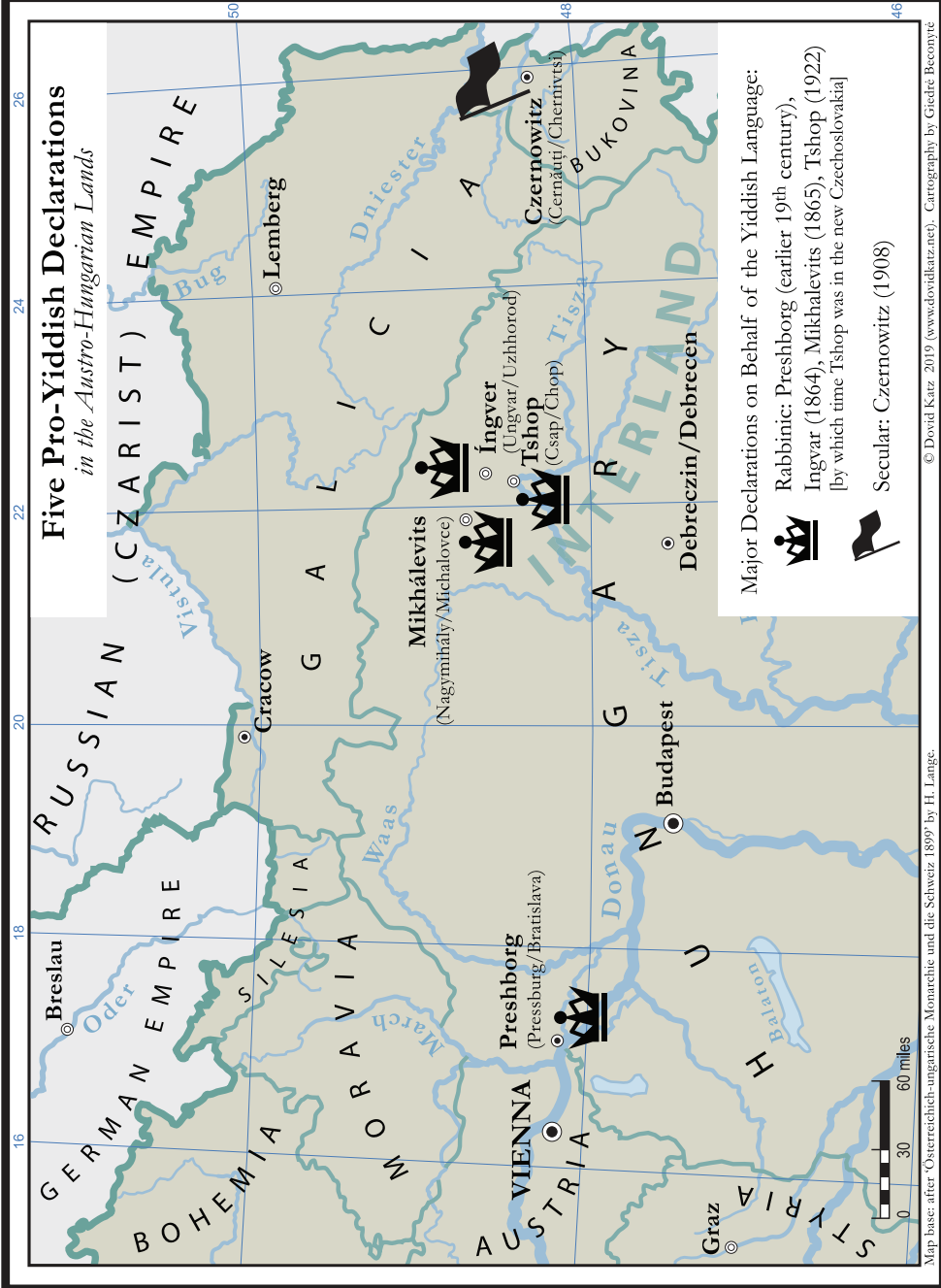
And so it comes to pass that the vital conferences in the modern history of “uplifting via conference” the status of Yiddish include not only Chernowitz but also Mikhálevits and Chop, and the vital places for the issuing and publication of edicts include not only Chernowitz but Preshborg and Íngver. This is illustrated by the map “Five Pro-Yiddish Declarations in the Austro-Hungarian Lands.”

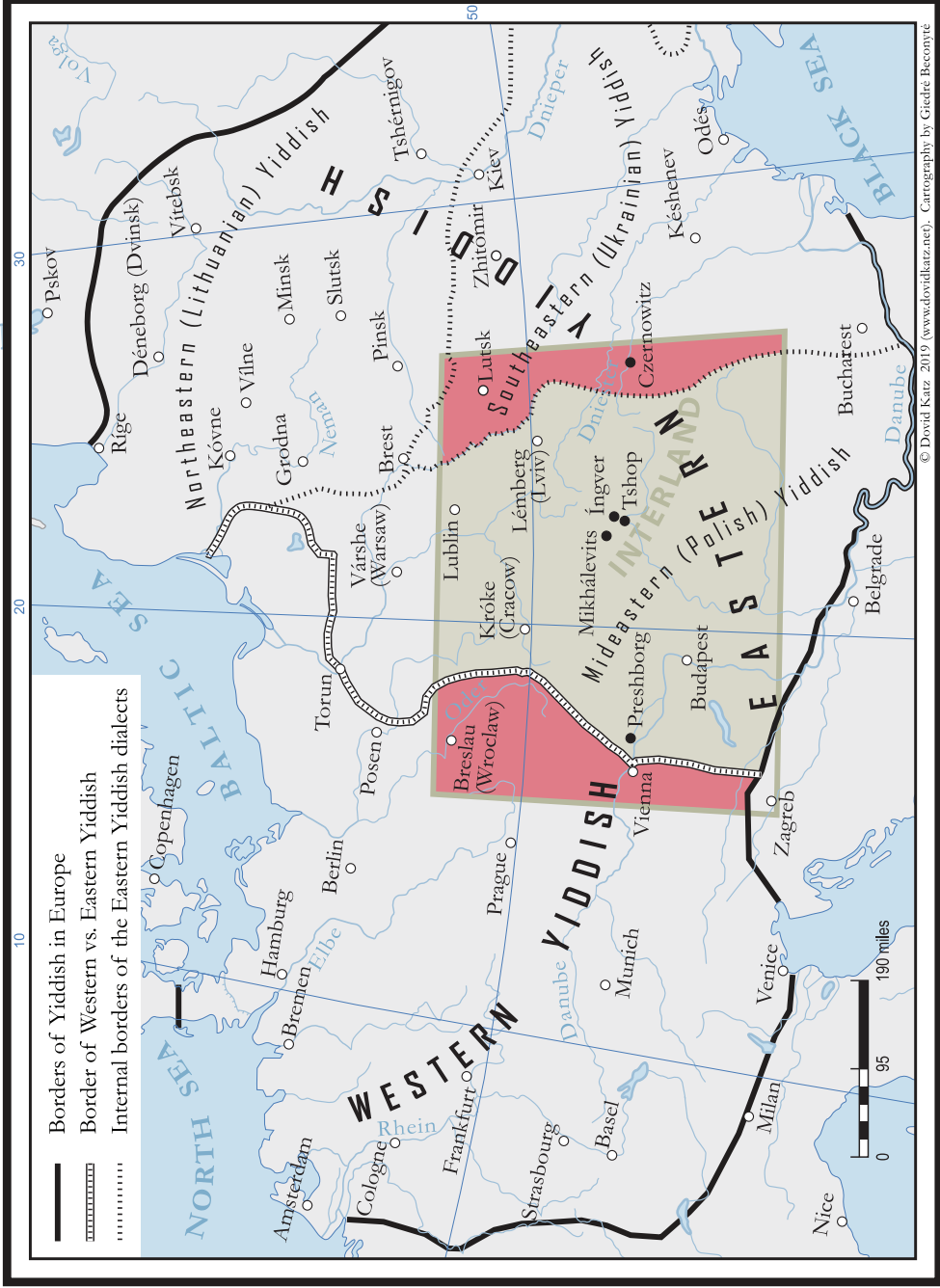
The map illustrates another usually unmentioned aspect of the entire saga of the rise of conscious and articular pro-Yiddish declarations. All five of the cities from which pro-Yiddish declarations of great historic import emanated, one in the secular sphere (Czernowitz), and four in the Haredi/ultraorthodox sphere (Preshborg, Mikhálevits, Íngver, and Tshop) are in the same general area within the pre-World War I Austro-Hungarian Empire. At their center lies the area known in regional Jewish lore as *Ínterland* (standard Yiddish *Únterland*), which is the heartland of the dialects of Yiddish that were the starting point for today’s hundreds of thousands of Hasidic Yiddish speakers, modified over time to a more Polish-based emerging standard in the twenty-first century, in any case, all within Mideastern Yiddish.

The second “locator map” shows the first map’s area within the larger context of the historical geographic area of Yiddish in Europe highlighting the small area of the first map in the rectangle. The rectangle has western and eastern cut-outs differentiated by red coloration. While the western rim of the target area is around the old border areas with the erstwhile (and defunct) dialects of Western Yiddish, the easternmost area, including Chernowitz itself, is in the Southeastern Yiddish dialect area. In all cases, these cities that gave rise to the durable movements for Yiddish, secular and religious alike, are all in the southeastern area of Eastern Yiddish, in cultural terms quite removed from the most famous centers of Vilna, Minsk, Zhytomyr and Odesa, and even from Warsaw.

For most secular Yiddishists and their circles, including academic circles, the dramatic rise of vernacular Hasidic Yiddish coinciding with the collapse of secular vernacular Yiddish has come as a rude and unanticipated shock, one that is emotionally unwelcome for reasons analysed by Chaya Nove (2018).

But some of the leading Yiddish scholars of the twentieth century saw this coming, at least to some degree. One of them, Solomon Birnbaum, son of the aforementioned Nathan Birnbaum and the lone major Yiddish scholar who was traditionally Orthodox through much of the twentieth century, noted that





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There is still a religious core among whom there has not been a break in the generations and whose mother tongue is Yiddish.

(S. A. Birnbaum 1979: 43)

Joshua A. Fishman, even while allowing himself to become a guru to the circles of Ausbauist Heinz-Kloss-addicted normativists, understood a larger dynamic historic truth:

If I could pick the populations to monitor most closely (from the point of view of variance in connection with ongoing sociocultural processes), I would select the ultra-Orthodox in the United States and in Israel.

(Fishman 1981c: 746)

Moreover, many years before that, the wholly secular wunderkind of Yiddish linguistics in the United States, Uriel Weinreich, in his study of Transcarpathian Yiddish, noted almost parenthetically:

In the United States and in Israel, the flourishing of extreme Hassidic orthodoxy is due to a very considerable extent to the efforts of emigrants from the Transcarpathian Unterland. In this movement the Yiddish language is reported to be entrenched more successfully, and more thoroughly communicated to new generations, than in any other sector of Jewish society. Thus the dialect of the Unterland, whose recency and hybridity may previously have given it a low priority on the agenda of historical Yiddish dialectology, may yet turn out to outlive some other dialects which formed earlier and contributed more to the permanent treasury of Yiddish literary culture. It may thus be destined to an importance which it never enjoyed on its home grounds.

(U. Weinreich 1964: 264)

So much of what secular Yiddish has achieved has, incidentally, seeped into today's Hasidic Yiddish without the sources being thought about very much, in the normal progression of cultural developments and synthesis in the context of myriad times and places. In that sense, many of the achievements inspired by Czernowitz are already there. In the more concrete sense of cities home to conferences and declarations that had a major impact on the development and future of the language, Czernowitz will forever, alongside the pronouncements of Preshborg and Íngver, and the conferences of Mikhálevits and Chop, retain its historic place at the perpetual conceptual table.

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2018

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Contact Address:

Prof. Wolf Moskovich

P.O.Box 7823

Jerusalem 91078 Israel

E-mail: wmoskovich@gmail.com

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