

ABSTRACT

Reconstructing a Nomadic Network: Itineraries of Jewish Actors during the First Lithuanian Independence

This article discusses the phenomenon of openness and its nomadic nature in the activities of Jewish actors performing in Kaunas during the first Lithuanian independence. Jewish theatre between the two world wars had an active and intense life in Kaunas. Two to four independent theatres existed at one time and international stars were often touring in Lithuania. Nevertheless, Lithuanian Jewish theatre life was never regarded by Lithuanian or European theatre society as significant since Jewish theatre never had sufficient ambition and resources to become such. On the one hand, Jewish theatre organized itself in a nomadic way, that is, Jewish actors and directors were constantly on the road, touring from one country to another. On the other hand, there was a tense competition between the local Jewish theatres both for subsidies and for audiences. This competition did not allow the Jewish community to create a theatre that could represent Jewish culture convincingly. Being a theatre of an ethnic minority, Jewish theatre did not enjoy the same attention from the state that was given to the Lithuanian National Theatre. The nomadic nature of the Jewish theatre is shown through the perspective of the concept of nomadic as developed by Deleuze and Guattari.

Keywords: Jewish theatre, Kaunas, nomadic, first Lithuanian independence, Yiddish culture.

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Networking and the maintenance of horizontal links were always common to European theatre communities. No doubt the productivity of these links depends on political circumstances: the more open the countries are, the more intensive intellectual and artistic interactivities become. This phenomenon of openness and its nomadic nature can be observed in the activities of Jewish actors performing in Kaunas during the years of the first Lithuanian independence (1918-40). This article will discuss how different Jewish theatre activities developed during this period, what interrelations Jewish theatre had with both the state and with local Jewish authorities, society's attitude towards it and which specificities characterized it. In this context, Jewish theatre is characterized as those theatre groups that based their repertoire mainly on Yiddish plays, consisted of Jewish actors and performed for predominantly (but not exclusively) Jewish audiences.

In order to show the nomadic nature of the Jewish theatre of that time from socio-political, cultural and aesthetical perspectives, I will use as a methodological tool the ideas of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as developed in their "1227: Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine" and will refer to some texts of theatre historians, which confirm the nomadic nature of Jewish theatre. Deleuze and Guattari relate nomadic to a war machine and give examples of tribes living in a nomadic way. I presume that this concept can also be adapted to describe the development of Jewish theatre in Lithuania. The following quotation from Deleuze's and Guattari's text relates the life of a nomad to a theatrical genre

of *intermezzo*¹ and thus implicitly shows the interrelation between theatre and the nomadic: "The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.). But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence. To begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse of what happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the *intermezzo*."²

In order to show the relevance of this comparison of nomadic life style to *intermezzo* I will shortly describe the socio-political conditions in which the Jewish community developed itself in Lithuania during the interwar period. After World War I, Lithuania, as well as other Baltic countries, had a political opportunity to become an independent state and to start its existence as a democratic country. The Vilnius region was annexed by Poland after the political conflict with Lithuania in 1920, with Kaunas becoming the temporary Lithuanian capital. The creation of the independent state was based on ethnographic principles; this fact allowed the Lithuanian Jewish community to become actively involved in the social and political life and even to achieve autonomy. Although this autonomy, supported by the Ministry of Jewish Affairs and Jewish

local councils, existed only until 1926, it nevertheless allowed a rapid development of Jewish community, culture and education. Jewish political parties, especially the Zionist ones, supported the creation of several educative and cultural organizations. For example, the *Tarbut* and *KulturLige* organizations were amongst the most significant for Jewish cultural development in Lithuania. An active presence in political and cultural life transformed the Jewish community of the temporary capital, which until that period was considered as poor and secluded, and made it much more open to the social processes that were taking place in Europe: modern schools and public libraries were opening, the publishing of magazines and newspapers was flourishing, and Jewish theatres in the Yiddish language were created.³ As Dovid Katz pointed out, “Yiddish language and culture were at a peak during this period [...] Kaunas (Kovna) became a major center for modern Hebrew education”.⁴ These cultural and educational activities were nevertheless poorly supported financially. Therefore many Jewish artists, be they of Lithuanian origin or coming from abroad, did not regard Lithuania and its temporary capital as a place where they would settle down. They used it mostly as a temporary station for moving forward. That is, their stay in Kaunas was regarded as an *intermezzo*.

From a cultural point of view, one must recognize that Jewish theatre in Lithuania was and still is almost completely ignored by the community of local and international researchers. Various activities of Jewish theatres in Kaunas and other cities receive no attention. During the Soviet period Lithuanian theatre historiography concentrated itself solely on the Lithuanian theatre. One can assume that it was the only possible way for the occupied country to maintain its threatened national identity. Historiographers of Jewish theatre have not analyzed Jewish theatre history during the first Lithuanian independence. The non-recognition of this tradition in history makes possible again some parallels between a nomadic life style and Jewish theatre. As Deleuze and Guatarri put it, “the nomads have no history, they only have a geography”.⁵ Up till now, Lithuanian Jewish theatre was absent from the international cultural map. Some research has been carried out on the Jewish musicians that were active at the

National Opera and Ballet, or in Kaunas musical cafes,⁶ but no articles shed light on the activities of theatre artists. Certain research about Jewish theatre in Lithuania is restricted to Vilnius and its famous Vilna Troupe,⁷ even though Vilnius was part of Poland during the years under investigation here. One could probably presume that Jewish theatres in Kaunas were of minor importance and had no cultural impact on the society, but the statistical facts show the contrary. In 1924-39, there were between two to four Jewish theatres (Theatre of the Jewish Minority, Young Theatre Group, Jewish Folk Theatre, Kaunas Jewish Theatre). More than 90,000 spectators were attending Jewish performances in the year 1931, compared to the 84,000 spectators of the Lithuanian National Theatre. For the sake of balance, it could be said that later on these numbers were favorable to the National Theatre, but taking into account that the National Theatre was composed of three different troupes (drama, opera, ballet), the relationship between spectator numbers in Lithuanian or Jewish theatres remains almost identical to the one mentioned above. Again, if one considers the statistics of that period, the Jewish population in 1935 was 26% of the whole population, whereas that of Lithuanians was 60%.⁸ These numbers lead to the conclusion that Jewish theatres were popular among the citizens and were important cultural organizations, with the strong possibility that they were frequented not only by Jews, but also by other people of different nationalities.⁹

An intense Jewish theatre activity is illustrated by the press of that time, be that Lithuanian or Jewish. Important daily newspapers or art journals describe performances of Jewish theatre troupes and tell about various tours of famous foreign troupes or actors. This information, as well as some archives, allows us to trace the tracks of Jewish actors in Lithuania and gives us an idea of their nomadic nature.

The first ambitions to create a local Jewish theatre are detected in the beginning of the twenties. A group of actors under the guidance of Leonid Sokolov (Lipman) performed in 1920 in the building at the City Theatre under the name of Jewish Drama Theatre.¹⁰ The aim of the group was to perform popular Yiddish plays and thus to contribute to the formation of the Jewish community that



Fig. 1. Poster of a Jewish theatre. Kalisch's *Forced Father*. Source: Museum of Lithuanian Theatre, Music and Cinema.

would base its identity on Yiddish culture and language. This phenomenon of using the Yiddish language as a means of strengthening Jewish identity can be observed at that time in all European countries where the Jewish diaspora was present. The first Jewish play-writers, such as Abraham Goldfaden, Yitskhok Leyb Peretz, and Sholom Aleichem found the Yiddish language more suited to the portrayal of Jewish life than Hebrew. The latter was meant to transmit spiritual values.¹¹

Later on, Sokolov's group became the core of the First United Jewish Artist Company, which started its activities in the autumn of 1923 but, as we shall see, it was later dissolved in 1925 because of financial fraud. Another effort to create a formal theatre was evident in 1929. As the press of that time shows, Jewish troupes in Kaunas suffered from a constant lack of financial support, be it from the local Jewish community or the state. The New

Jewish Theatre, which had its own statutes and its board, according to the announcement in the global Jewish news source JTA, was already on the brink of bankruptcy in the first year. The JTA declared that the theatre was forced to close, "because the Lithuanian Minister of Culture has refused to give the theatre a subsidy this year. Last year, Premier Voldemaras granted the theatre a subsidy of one thousand dollars."¹² Nevertheless, probably with the help of local entrepreneurs, the theatre succeeded to survive and existed until 1934, according to the statements of the tax office. The New Jewish Theatre was reborn two years later under the official name of the Jewish Theatre in Lithuania, with the help of the newly created association for Jewish Theatre. Several other theatres started their activities at that time, such as the already mentioned Theatre of the Jewish Minority, the Young Theatre Group, the Jewish Folk Theatre, and the Kaunas Jewish Theatre.¹³

The activities of these private commercial theatres were supported by the Jewish Theatre Studio, which was founded in 1923¹⁴ and persisted with interruptions during the first Lithuanian independence. The studio was initiated by a theatre critic, Alexander Mukdoni, who was an important personality for the theatre of the Jewish diaspora in the United States and in Europe.¹⁵ The studio wanted to distinguish itself from the Yiddish language theatre, which was considered as commercial or vulgar, and aimed at following the best practices of the Russian Jewish Habima theatre, initiated as a Studio at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1918. In the beginning, the Studio was supported by *KulturLige*, but later on it was taken over by the *Tarbut* organization because of a lack of finances. Young theatre artists of the Studio wanted to oppose themselves to the conventions of the traditional Jewish theatre that, according to them, was satisfying the low tastes of the public. They wanted to give Jewish theatre a new mission and a new quality, which would be based on ensemble acting and on precise work with a role.¹⁶ The studio staged famous European and Yiddish plays like Molière's *Scapin's Pranks*, Gozzi's *The Love for Three Oranges*, and Peretz's *The Golden Chain*.

The tours of the foreign Jewish troupes were also of great importance for the development of local theatre. The Habima theatre came to Lithu-

ania twice – in 1926 and in 1938.¹⁷ The local press praised the performances of the theatre on both occasions. Independent Jewish actors appeared with their individual programmes in Kaunas from time to time, namely former Habima theatre actresses Miryam Elias and Chajele Grober, both in 1930. The Vilna Troupe and Ha-Ohel theatre actors were also present in Lithuania at different time periods.

Although these theatre activities were formally independent from one another, they were related in fact by the personalities who initiated or supported them. For instance, the figure of Gabriel Lan,¹⁸ owner of a printing house and former entrepreneur of the Kaunas City Theatre (Kaunas was the centre of the Russian province between 1843 and 1918 and the Russian government founded the City theatre in 1890), appeared in many documents related to the first official Jewish troupes. Another entrepreneur was Boris Bukanz (Bukancas), and he was associated

with two troupes – the New Jewish Theatre and the Theatre of the Jewish Minority. Sokolov's (Lipman) name reemerged in 1932 when he gathered actors for the newly established Jewish Folk Theatre.

Seen through Deleuze and Guatarri's theory, the Jewish actors' and directors' territory can be defined as points where the realization of theatre performances are possible. A path was followed which has been previously examined by other preceding Jewish actors and companies, or which actors themselves knew from previous journeys. Nor were touring Jewish actors ignorant of the places where other Jewish communities performed. Even if they travelled alone, Jewish actors were met at certain points by other members of the tribe. As the correspondence between the theatre makers show, they informed each other of the prices in different cities, the possibilities of getting working visas and helped each other with technical and material matters.¹⁹



Fig. 2. Photo of the troupe of the Kaunas Jewish Theatre. Source: The Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum.

To perform at a certain point was not their definite aim; while physically being in one place, they were concerned with future destinations more than with coming back to the present place. This state of mind was reflected by the actors themselves who affirmed that, “even in the most peaceful and normal times, we were always without a foundation under our feet or a roof over heads, like gypsies who sleep tonight in a different place from the last night”.²⁰

The activities of the Studio and those of the local Jewish theatres, and the tours of the internationally famous Jewish actors paralleled and supported each other, raising discussions in local newspapers on the mission of Jewish theatre. This dialogue allowed Jewish theatres to ameliorate the quality of acting and that of the repertoire. At the end of the twenties and at the beginning of the thirties Jewish theatre was recognized by Lithuanian theatre society as a “genuine theatre that was working hard and had the signs of national authenticity”.²¹ This opinion was supported by Balys Sruoga, a famous Lithuanian theater critic of that time, who noticed that

the young Jewish theatre was organized as a “family which was psychologically united and based its activities on creativity”.²² Despite this recognition, Jewish theatre did not feel itself as an established institution. One of the reasons why Jewish theatre could not enjoy much recognition was the nomadic nature of its many actors and directors. Most Jewish theatre practitioners stayed in Lithuania for only one season and then would move on to other countries of the world. Debra Kaplan’s analysis of the itineraries of the Vilna Troupe provides some insight into those aspects that relate the Jewish theatre to the nomadic. On the one hand, Jewish actors, like nomads, mostly travelled alone while, on the other hand, their “basic aesthetic strategy” was “to embrace itinerancy as an artistic advantage”.²³ The following itineraries of some of the most important Jewish actors illustrate this lonely wandering and the wide nomadic geographical space they embraced.

Let us start with the already mentioned Leonid Sokolov. Similar to many Jewish actors, Sokolov was born in Eastern Europe, specifically in the Ukraine.



Fig. 3. Poster of a Jewish theatre. Concert of Myriam Bernstein-Kohan. Source: Museum of Lithuanian Theatre, Music and Cinema.



Fig. 4. Programme of operetta Sweet Moments staged by Rudolf Zaslavski. Source: Lithuanian National Library.

He left for Russia and acted with various Yiddish troupes. In 1919, he created the Jewish Drama Theatre of Lithuania and later on the First United Jewish Artist Company in Lithuania. Together with his wife Ninina he left Europe for Argentina in 1925, then came back to Poland and guest-starred again in Argentina and Brazil in 1928. Sokolov was to be found again in Poland in 1929, while in 1930 he was in Antwerp, Paris, then in London and again in Kaunas, where he had been ten years earlier. He subsequently left again for Argentina and returned to Kaunas in 1932, where he initiated the Jewish Folk Theatre.

Other personalities that illustrate best the trajectories of the Jewish actor community are Rudolf Zaslavski and his brother Shlomo Naumov. They were born in the Ukraine and grew up in Odessa. Zaslavski and Naumov toured with itinerant troupes in Russia and Moldova before World War I. Zaslavski also played in Warsaw, Vilnius and Łódź, after which he again toured in Russia. Both brothers were present in Kiev after the war, but later on Zaslavski moved to Petrograd and then both brothers, like Sokolov, acted in Argentina and Brazil. Zaslavski went to Philadelphia and New York at the end of 1926, then both brothers came back to Europe and mostly acted together in Paris, Poland, then in Romania, and France again. Subsequently, Zaslavski toured in Brazil and Argentina, and arrived with his brother in Kaunas for the first time in 1931, after which he toured to London. Zaslavski came back to Kaunas in February 1932, where he directed at the reestablished New Jewish Theatre. At the end of the same year, he was no longer visible in Kaunas as both brothers were performing in Danzig, Poland, in 1933 and 1934. According to the *Leksikon Fun Yidishn Theater*,²⁴ both of them probably disappeared during the Holocaust, since there are no further traces concerning their biographies.

Other prominent actors of that time worked in Kaunas for brief periods, such as Menachem Rubin²⁵ in 1929 and in 1933, Zygmunt Turkov²⁶ in 1933 and in 1938, Jonas Turkov²⁷ in 1936 and 1937, and Ossip Runitch²⁸ in 1933, leaving their traces mostly in the same places as the actors mentioned earlier. After World War II, the brothers Turkov settled for a while in New York, after which

they left for Israel. Runitch left Europe for South Africa in 1939, where he organized a theatre group, while Rubin wandered as from 1934 mostly in the United States, Canada and Argentina.

Another feature belonging to the nomadic discourse and evident when we talk about Jewish artists of that time is their conscious choice not to possess any property, so that they would be ready “to embrace itinerancy” and to leave the country whenever it was necessary. The case of the First United Jewish Artist Company in Lithuania, created in 1923, illustrates this tendency. The company consisted of fifteen actors and was led by the aforementioned Leonid Sokolov (Lipman). It existed formally until 1925, but it had dispersed itself in 1924 for different reasons: some of the actors left Lithuania for other countries for instance, but a more important reason was the accusation made against the troupe that it did not pay the obligatory state taxes. As the protocols of the case show, one of the members of the group responsible for finances, a certain Menachem Rabin, had run away from Kaunas with an amount of money that was equivalent to the sum, which the company had to pay the tax office. As the tax officers could not find this person, they claimed the amount from the actors of the troupe. The case continued for more than sixteen years and the tax officers tried many times to seize the goods that were supposed to belong to the actors. However, it transpired that none of the actors had any property. When the officers visited the places the actors were supposed to live, they found out that the actors were already living elsewhere, mostly aboard. When the whereabouts of some of the accused actors were at last traced, as was the case in 1940 with the actor Moisei Gurevitch, the officers realized that he had already retired and that, as before, he had no goods. The case was finally closed that same year, probably because the Soviets, who at the time were more supportive of the Jewish community, overtook the governance of the country.

The investigation of the Jewish theatre from an aesthetic point of view permits the application of the notion of the *rhizomatic* in the context of theatre. According to Deleuze and Guattari, “the rhizome itself [is a phenomenon that] assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all

directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers. [...] A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance.”²⁹

Numerous examples show that Jewish theatre organized itself in a horizontal and fluid way that expanded in time and space in an unlimited manner: performances could be shown just one time in one place and then reappear in other places; actors were replaced or their parts played by other actors while keeping the same general direction, etc. This perception is supported by the theatre historian Nahma Sandrow in her study about the history of Yiddish theatre, where she affirms that actors were not going “along a neat geographical route, but (were) constantly crisscrossing”.³⁰ Therefore, when seen through the lens of the *rhizomatic*, Jewish theatre was not regarded as a stable phenomenon that manifested a clear and planned repertoire. It can be contrasted with the Lithuanian National Theatre, which, contrary to the *rhizomatic*, displayed (in Deleuze’s and Guattari’s terms) an *arborescent* nature, particularly in the way it was administered. On the other hand, Jewish theatre was an organism that fluctuated constantly, while being on the move meant that it could be dissolved, reconstructed or transformed. It could produce performances for entertainment’s sake, the so-called *shund*³¹ plays (mostly operettas and melodramas), without any obligations or pretense at creating serious spiritual theatre, but it could also create performances, based on the internationally recognized repertoire. The wide geographical span of Jewish performances in Lithuania shows that Jewish performers were not precious about their working conditions and performed everywhere, wherever there was a Jewish audience. In one month they could tour in more than ten Lithuanian small cities, perform in the halls that were not acceptable, for instance, to Lithuanian theatre makers, and thus create a relationship with audiences. The unwillingness of Lithuanian theatre artists to be as flexible as Jewish ones was regarded by some theatre observers as a threat to the Lithuanian national theatre. A journalist writing in one of the Lithuanian magazines in 1930 noticed that the unwillingness of the Lithuanian actors to perform

on the stage of the Kaunas Summer Theatre (that was installed near the main theatre building of the National Theatre and was used by Jewish theatres and touring actors) determined that 100% of the repertoire played on that stage was not Lithuanian.³² This observation shows the extent to which Jewish theatre was open to its audiences and, similarly, the lengths to which they approached the audiences in places they could access.

Apart from the Summer Theatre, other frequented places were the Folks House in the Kaunas Old Town, the Hall of Tilmann’s Factory, the Hall of the Society of St. Zita, the ancient restaurant Miramar, whereas Lithuanian actors mostly played on one stage, that of the National Theatre. These spaces were small and lacked technical facilities, but they allowed Jewish actors to create an atmosphere in which the audience could become united with the characters and the stories. One must admit that the Jewish theatre community made an attempt to build its own theatre in 1934. A proposal was made for the reconstruction of a hall, which had to be adapted to the needs of a theatre.³³ However, the project was not realized because of a lack of funding and the liquidation of the association of the New Jewish Theatre, which was supposed to support this endeavor.

The discussions in the press about Jewish theatre and the competition between different troupes forced Jewish theatre makers to create programmes that would encourage higher quality. Besides popular Jewish operettas, theatre makers could be seen to stage performances based on classic texts from the beginning of the thirties. The latter ones, as Rudolf Zaslavski, a prominent Jewish theatre director, noticed in one of his interviews, could educate young audiences, especially pupils.³⁴ A classical repertoire was also demanded by a more educated and mature audience. As a correspondent in the Lithuanian daily *Dienos Naujienos (News of the Day)* noticed, “the Kaunas Jewish community had surely enough of the American Jewish comedies and melodramas with endless Hassidic dances, enough of the platitude of the content”.³⁵ He praised a new production of Molière’s *Misanthrope*,³⁶ created by Zygmunt Turkov, and affirmed that, “after having seen this piece of art, surely, the Jewish community will not

attend semi-Hassidic, semi-American farce”.³⁷

Particular attention was paid to the repertoire when the artistic leadership of the Jewish Theatre in Lithuania was taken over by the actress Rachel Berger in 1936. According to the press, she came to Kaunas in 1931 from Paris, played at the New Jewish Theatre and soon became one of the public’s favorites, attracting special articles in the local dailies.³⁸ Berger wanted to introduce contemporary Lithuanian plays in the repertoire of this theatre. One can presume that in this way she wanted to bring the two ethnic communities closer together; on the other hand, the integration of the Jewish theatre into the Lithuanian cultural field allowed her to expect more subsidies from the Lithuanian government. *The Sinful Angel* (*Nuodėmingas angelas*), a play by the popular Lithuanian writer Petras Vaičiūnas, was staged by Jonas Turkov in 1936. Berger mentioned this fact in her 1939 letter to the Minister of Education, when she asked to augment the allowance for the “only Jewish theatre that is active in the winter period”.³⁹ Another letter, written to the Cultural Department of the Ministry of Education in 1937, shows that Berger had the ambition to stage performances of high quality to make the Jewish Theatre play an important role in Lithuanian cultural life. She described in the letter the achievements of the 1936/37 season and praised the freshness of the repertoire, which “allowed theatre people to see the theatre anew”. She also vaunted herself regarding the “total confidence that the Kaunas society had in the theatre” and affirmed that “every play that was staged in the theatre, was not only a simple theatre product but also had educative aims”.⁴⁰ One could suppose that at the end of the thirties Jewish theatre was ready to reject the nomadic way of existence and to become a firmly installed cultural establishment. However, the internal competition between the artistic leaders of the different troupes and the above mentioned nomadic nature of the actors and directors did not allow for the realization of such a theatre. Instead of financing one Jewish theatre, the Ministry of Culture subsidized several Jewish theatres, thus dividing the sum dedicated to Jewish theatre into several small amounts and avoiding diplomatic conflicts with Jewish society. Berger led the theatre until 1940 when Lithuania

was annexed by the Soviet Union. In that year, the Soviet government opened several theatres – two in Vilnius, namely the Jewish Theatre and the Jewish Marionette Theatre Maidini, and one in Kaunas, which kept the former name of the Kaunas Jewish Theatre.⁴¹ Berger continued to play in the newly established theatre. Although the working conditions in the Kaunas theatre were difficult, several performances were nevertheless produced until June 1941. The German army entered Lithuanian territory that same month and the massacres of Jewish inhabitants began. In August all Jewish citizens were put into the Kaunas ghetto and by 1943 almost all of Kaunas’ Jewish community had disappeared.

From a contemporary perspective and bearing in mind that the Jewish community was almost all destroyed during World War II, we can definitely affirm that Jewish cultural prosperity lasted in Lithuania a very short time and therefore it can also be considered as an *intermezzo*, which nevertheless deserves to be recognized as an important part of the whole in the development of the independent Lithuanian state and the Jewish theatre.

CONCLUSIONS

Jewish theatre between the two world wars had an active and intense life in Kaunas. Two to four independent theatres existed at one time during the first Lithuanian independence, and international stars often toured in Lithuania. Nevertheless, Lithuanian Jewish theatre life was never regarded by Lithuanian or European theatre society as significant since Jewish theatre never had sufficient ambition and resources to become such. The reasons why Jewish theatre could not become a well-established institution were several. On the one hand, Jewish theatre organized itself in a nomadic way, that is, Jewish actors and directors were constantly on the road, touring from one country to another, never showing an aspiration to work in one definite place. This attitude is supported by the fact that Jewish entrepreneurs or actors did not have any property or real estate in the countries where they worked. On the other hand, there was a tense competition between the local Jewish theatres both for subsidies and for audiences. This competition did not allow

the Jewish community to create a theatre that could represent Jewish culture convincingly. Third, being a theatre of an ethnic minority, Jewish theatre could not enjoy the same attention from the state that was given, for instance, to the Lithuanian National Theatre. Last but not least, the sinister atmosphere in Europe in the late thirties was also one of the reasons why Jewish theatre was regarded with a certain neglect. Although the Soviets tried to establish Jewish state theatres in Kaunas and in Vilnius in 1940, the German invasion abruptly stopped the development of these theatres and the Jewish artist community was destroyed.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 An *intermezzo* is a short composition that fits between the scenes of musical or dramatic performances.
- 2 Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, "1227: Treatise on Nomenclology – The War Machine" in *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London 2005, p. 402.
- 3 Vladas Sirutavičius, Darius Staliūnas, Jurgita Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė, *Lietuvos žydai (Lithuanian Jews)*, Baltos lankos, Vilnius 2012, pp. 297-329.
- 4 Dovid Katz, *Lithuanian Jewish Culture*, Baltos lankos, Vilnius 2010, p. 324.
- 5 Deleuze, Guattari, op. cit., p. 415.
- 6 More about Jewish musicians in the interwar period in: Leonidas Melnikas, *Lietuvos žydų muzikinio paveldo pėdsakais (The Musical Heritage of Lithuanian Jews)*, Charibdė, Vilnius 2009.
- 7 Debra Kaplan, "Nomadic Chutzpah: The Vilna Troupe's Transnational Yiddish Theatre Paradigm, 1915-1935" in *Theatre Survey*, vol. 55, no. 3, 2014, pp. 296-317.
- 8 *Kauno miesto statistikos metraštis 1937 (The Annual of the Statistics of Kaunas)*, Kauno miesto savivaldybės statistikos biuro leidinys, Kaunas 1938, p. 108.
- 9 Other nationalities: German – 3.5%, Polish – 4%, Russian – 3.3%, other – 2.8%. Ibid., p. 10.
- 10 Announcement in *Di Jidiše Štime*, no. 43, 1920, p. 2.
- 11 Nahma Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars*, Harper & Row, New York 1977, p. 44.
- 12 <http://www.jta.org/1930/03/17/archive/yiddish-theatre-in-kovno-to-close-for-lack-of-subsidy#ixzz2qN6VGYU2> (accessed 3 September 2014).
- 13 "Kauno žydų teatrai" ("Kaunas Jewish Theatres") in *Lietuvos žinios*, 15 January 1937, p. 5.
- 14 *Jewish Acting Studio*, a booklet. Lithuanian Museum of Theatre and Music, fond no. TK-8.
- 15 Alexander Mukdoni lived in Kaunas for several years and edited here a journal *Neys*. After having initiated the Hebrew Studio, he soon left it under the pretext that the Studio had no future without decent support from the Jewish authorities and moved to the United States.
- 16 *Jewish Acting Studio*, op. cit.
- 17 Habima Theatre came to Kaunas in 1926 from Moscow via Riga. As one of the Lithuanian daily newspapers reported, "it was greeted by the Jewish community and Jewish students at the railway station with flags". The troupe successfully showed four performances in the Lithuanian National Theatre. For the second tour, the troupe came from Palestine and again successfully presented four performances. (*Rytas*, 9 February 1926, p. 4; "Habima Lietuvoje" ("Habima in Lithuania") in *Apžvalga*, 2 January 1938.)
- 18 Gabriel Lan was one of the entrepreneurs of the Kaunas City theatre. He initiated tours of such famous actors as Caruso, Shaliapin, Batistini, Mazini, Davidov, Smirnov, Sobinov, Petrauskas, Lipovskaja, Kuznecova, Barsova, Slobodskaja, Pavlova, Kshesinskaja, Preobrajenskaja and others. ("Gabrielius Lanas – 60 metų sukaktuvės" ("Gabriel Lan – his sixtieth anniversary") in *7 meno dienos*, no. 104, 1934, p. 9.)
- 19 "Life in Vilnius is less expensive than in Kaunas. With 120 Guilds one can easily get along." This and other household matters are discussed in a correspondence between two theatre makers in 1939. One of them, staying in Kaunas, instructs another one about the procedures of getting a working visa, and asks him to send the necessary papers in order to help him to obtain it. (Lithuanian Central Archive, fond no. 12, inventory no. 120, file no. 232.)
- 20 Sandrow, op. cit., p. 313.
- 21 *7 meno dienos*, no. 34, 1929, p. 7. An article without a title, written by Borisas Dauguvietis, stage director of the Lithuanian National Theatre.
- 22 Balys Sruoga, "Valstybinio dramos teatro dešimtmetis" ("Ten Years of the National Drama Theatre") in *Apie tiesą ir sceną*, Scena, Vilnius 1994, p. 121.
- 23 Kaplan, op. cit., pp. 304, 306.
- 24 <http://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/yw/zylbercweig/zz-lex.htm>
- 25 Menachem Rubin (1892) died in 1962 in New York.
- 26 Zygmunt Turkow (1896) left Poland in 1939 and entered Brazil in 1940. In 1952 he moved to Israel. He died in 1970.
- 27 Jonas Turkow (1898) died in 1988 in Tel Aviv. During World War II, he was in the ghetto of Warsaw, but escaped it in 1943. In 1947 he moved to New York and in 1966 to Israel.
- 28 Ossip Runitch (1889) died in 1947.
- 29 Deleuze, Guattari, op. cit., pp. 28, 46.
- 30 Sandrow, op. cit., p. 85.
- 31 *Shund* (trash) plays are considered as art for the masses. They satisfy the needs of amusement and excitement. See Sandrow, op. cit., pp. 91-131.
- 32 "Apžvalga" ("Review") in *Židinys*, no. 8-9, 1930, p. 161.
- 33 Lithuanian Central Archive, fond no. 391, inventory no.

- 4, file no. 449.
- 34 Rudolf Zaslavski wanted to stage Ibsen's *Ghosts* at the New Jewish Theatre ("Žydų teatro planai" ("The Plans of Jewish Theatre") in *Dienos naujienos*, 15 March 1932).
- 35 "Moljeris Kauno žydų scenoj" ("Molière on the Kaunas Jewish Stage") in *Dienos naujienos*, 10 October 1933.
- 36 *The Misanthrope* was staged in 1933 at the New Jewish Theatre.
- 37 "Moljeris Kauno žydų scenoj", op. cit.
- 38 "Nepaprasti Paryžiaus artistės nuotykių Kaune" ("Extraordinary Adventures of Paris Actress in Kaunas") in *Dienos naujienos*, 30 October 1931.
- 39 Lithuanian Central Archive, fond no. 1622, inventory no. 4, file no. 404.
- 40 Lithuanian Central Archive, fond no. 391, inventory no. 4, file no. 553.
- 41 Central Lithuanian Archive of Literature and Art, file no. 289, 254, 268, 328.