

Between Socialism and Jewish Tradition: Bundist Holiday Culture in Interwar Poland

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The General Jewish Workers Union (Algemeyner yidisher arbeterbund), popularly known as the Bund, was one of the most influential Jewish political parties in interwar Poland.¹ Advocating a socialist society and international workers' solidarity, the Bund was successful in attracting thousands of Jewish workers to its ranks. At the same time, it had to deal with a tension inherent in the very concept of a Jewish socialist party that made universalist claims but also retained particularistic elements of Jewish tradition. Bundist leaders addressed this tension by characterizing their party as anti-Zionist and anti-religious, but still manifestly Jewish. In place of the Orthodox and Zionist concepts of *khal-yisroel*,² the Bund promoted the idea of an East European Jewish workers' community. Along these lines, it called for an autonomous status for the Jewish minority within the Polish state, particularly with regard to cultural affairs.³

Thus, in the interwar period the Bund not only played an important role in the political arena but also put much effort into establishing cultural and educational institutions with a distinctly anti-elitist character.⁴ For example, the Kultur-lige (though not officially a Bundist institution, it had many Bundists among its leadership) supported Yiddish literature, theatre, and music; other institutions catered to women, young adults, and children.⁵ A sports organization, Morgnshtern, promoted physical education among Jewish workers. In addition, together with two other groups, the Folkistn and Poale Zion, the Bund helped create a secular, Yiddish-language Jewish school system known as the Tsentrale yidische shul organizatsiye (Tsisho).⁶ The Bundist Yiddish press, and in particular its main organ, the *Naye folkssaytung*, was a crucial element in the party's cultural enterprise. To be sure, the main task of Bundist newspapers was to spread socialist views and propaganda among the workers. However, the newspapers also aimed at educating and cultivating their readers by means of articles about Yiddish cultural events and literary contributions by writers such as Isaac Leib Peretz and Sholem Asch. In order to further enhance the establishment of a special community known as the "Bundishe mishpokhe," additional editions and supplements were published for women and children.⁷

The Bund also fomented a distinctly Jewish and socialist holiday culture. It sought to establish its own calendar of holidays and commemorative days as a radical alternative to the traditional Jewish calendar. To this end, it put out a “workers’ calendar,”⁸ and the Bundist press regularly reported on important dates and figures in the history of the movement. The central date of this socialist year was May Day, the *yontef fun arbet* (workers’ holiday).⁹ The workers’ calendar stressed dates such as the outbreak of the French Revolution, which, though regarded as a bourgeois revolution, was nonetheless considered to be a progressive milestone.¹⁰ In addition, it listed the Jewish high holidays as well as the birth and death dates of important Yiddish writers. In common with secular Zionists who offered their own version of the Jewish calendar, Bundists transformed religious holidays. However, in contrast with the Zionists, the Jewish socialists had a much more ambiguous attitude toward certain concepts, such as national liberation and the notion of the land of Israel as the Jewish homeland, that were central to holidays such as Passover.

Many scholars have pointed to the significance of rituals for the construction and affirmation of communities. Emile Durkheim was the first to highlight the way in which societies use rituals to develop self-consciousness; in his view, societies produced, refined, and advanced collective dogmas through what he termed “cult worship.”¹¹ Similarly, through celebrations, social groups create separate, or “sacral,” spaces in which they communicate and debate the basic assumptions of their communities.¹² This was the case with regard to the Bundist celebrations. As Jack Jacobs has pointed out, Bundist leaders considered the cultural and educational arenas to be crucial in fostering socialist values and convictions among the workers.¹³ As opposed to promoting religious or bourgeois concepts, the Bund offered its own leisure activities and cultural events in an attempt to create an alternative socialist culture. Yet the implementation of a Bundist subculture was not a one-sided process in which the party’s elite simply communicated its values to the workers. Operating in an environment in which Jewish religious traditions were pervasive, the socialists had to take them into account. Hence they found themselves striving to reconcile different and sometimes clashing concepts, namely, the universalist notion of an international working class (as dramatized in the May Day celebrations), as opposed to the particularistic notion, stressed in the traditional Passover hagadah, of the Jews as a unique and even chosen people.

These two very different holidays, May Day and Passover, are the focus of this essay. In analyzing the Bundist rituals connected with these days, I pay particular attention to the ways in which the party sought to create a vibrant new workers’ culture combining socialist and Jewish traditions.

A Workers’ *Yontef*—Jewish May Day Celebrations

First proclaimed by the founding congress of the Second International in Paris in 1889, the first of May, or International Labor Day, is marked by socialist parties around the world as a day for political action. In interwar Poland, Jewish labor leaders planned and organized May Day demonstrations well in advance. A special committee of leading Bundists discussed and arranged all of the processions. Every party

member was asked to pay a special May Day tax, and workers were responsible for organizing themselves in their unions, arranging meeting points and procedures to be followed during the demonstrations, and preparing flags and banners. The actual proceedings commenced early in the morning on May Day. Following several introductory speeches and the singing of the Bundist hymn, “*Di shvue*” (“The oath”), the procession began.¹⁴ The instructions were for workers to march in neat rows of five people each; in theory, anyone unwilling to comply with the strict rules laid down by the Bundist leaders would have no place in the demonstrations.¹⁵ The emphasis placed on order and punctuality was an expression of the party leaders’ concern that May Day demonstrations could easily turn chaotic.¹⁶

In preparation for the celebration, streets and houses in the workers’ neighborhoods were festooned with red flags. Large banners were hung at the Bund headquarters, some of them featuring slogans and demands and others the portraits of former party leaders and martyrs. Many workers wore holiday clothes and red ties, or tucked red carnations in their buttonholes; members of the May militia,¹⁷ the Morgnshtern sports club, and the Tsukunft youth club wore their distinctive uniforms. Despite the festive atmosphere, the underlying goals of May Day events were quite serious—both to bring public life to a halt and to impose a proletarian *yontef* throughout the country. This was particularly true in the case of Warsaw, where the strikes that commonly accompanied May Day demonstrations curtailed industrial production and paralyzed traffic, at least in the city center. Moreover, although Polish newspapers were published as usual, no Yiddish newspapers came out on May Day, since Bundists controlled the union of Jewish printers.¹⁸

The route of the march reflected the workers’ struggle for public space. The marchers deliberately bypassed typical workers’ districts such as Praga (a Warsaw suburb) in order to symbolically “take over” neighborhoods inhabited by the bourgeoisie. Downtown Warsaw was targeted for special attention. At the climactic point of the procession, workers headed toward Theater Square; during those years in which worker cooperation was at its peak, a mass rally was co-sponsored there by the Bundists, the Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna [PPS]), and other, smaller socialist parties. They chose Theater Square because it symbolized the power of the Polish metropolis, whereas the march through the streets represented the irrepressible advance of socialism: “The proletarian world army marches toward victory.”¹⁹ In towns with a socialist majority, workers were able to advance this message by flying a red flag from town hall.²⁰ In Warsaw, though, there were many years in which the gathering at Theatre Square was banned. This was especially true in the late 1930s, when the right to demonstrate was almost exclusively granted to workers’ organizations that identified with the regime, thus demonstrating the powerlessness of the socialist opposition.²¹

Socialist demonstrations were perceived to be a symbolic attempt to (re)write the script for Poland’s future, a performative act that challenged the official culture’s claims to authority and stability. The staging of demonstrations in the central squares of Polish cities and towns resulted in a “dialectical-theatrical split into protagonists and antagonists.”²² In 1938, a year after a child had been shot during the course of a May Day demonstration, Baruch Sheffner, a columnist at the *Naye folkstsaytung*, declared that the sidewalk had ceased to be neutral ground: bystanders were no longer

like the audience at a play but had rather become part of the struggle.²³ Indeed, by this time, violence had become inextricably linked with Polish May Day demonstrations. Apart from Communist-inspired harassment and frequent police brutality, May Day demonstrators were often confronted by supporters of the extreme right-wing National-Democratic movement (Endecja) who sought to break up Bundist rallies by chanting anti-Jewish slogans, beating up Bundist demonstrators, snatching away flags and banners, and throwing smoke-bombs.²⁴ In Warsaw, student supporters of the Endecja regularly ambushed Jewish workers in front of the university. In most of these instances, the Bundist militia fought back.

As indicated, May Day events were marked by a certain amount of cooperation between the Bund and other socialist parties, most importantly the PPS. Bundist leaders went to great lengths to coordinate the day's events with their non-Jewish socialist counterparts because such cooperation reflected the ideal of Polish-Jewish brotherhood—an important theme in the Bundist worldview. Notwithstanding, May Day events were rarely the product of joint Polish-Jewish sponsorship. Political differences between the different groups, the fear of violent excesses on the part of the (other) group's members, and ever-increasing constraints by Poland's quasi-authoritarian government all worked to impede cooperation. Given these obstacles, the joint marches that took place in the years 1928, 1930, 1931, and 1934 took on even greater symbolic meaning. During those years, as the workers marched together through the center of Warsaw, their struggle appeared to be truly united. Ethnic antagonisms dissipated at least temporarily as Polish and Jewish workers jointly sang the "Internationale."²⁵

Yet despite the mutual avowals of cooperation on the part of their leaders, it is doubtful whether the bulk of Jewish and Polish workers ever came into close contact. For one thing, Jewish and non-Jewish groups often followed different processional routes. And even when they marched in the same procession, Polish and Jewish socialists were grouped separately—a situation that reflected Bund leaders' determination to maintain their party's distinctive Jewish identity.²⁶ Otherwise, it was felt, Bundist demands such as equal rights for Jewish workers and state recognition of Jewish secular schools might drown in a sea of Polish flags. In a similar vein, the Bundists declined offers of assistance from the PPS militia, not wanting to rely on their "goyishe friends" to protect them as they were marching through "Polish" streets.²⁷ Then, too, there was the question of language: the Bundists' struggle for the recognition of their own language could hardly be waged by using Polish slogans. On several occasions, the Warsaw May Day coordinators addressed this last issue by setting up two separate stages in Theater Square. Although this measure somewhat undermined the notion of Jewish and Polish workers comprising a single, unified entity, it allowed the Bund to assert its separate demands for cultural autonomy while at the same time situating the Jewish collective of workers within the broader socialist movement.

Outside of Warsaw, the cooperation of different Jewish worker groups was easier to achieve. In smaller towns, activists were not subject to the same level of party scrutiny.²⁸ Moreover, Polish laws and restrictions were less carefully monitored in the provinces.²⁹ As in the larger cities, workers in outlying towns viewed the celebrations as vehicles for communicating and negotiating social values. This point

appeared in many of the accounts of local demonstrations published in the *Naye folkstsaytung*.³⁰

Bundist May Day propaganda generally adhered to the larger socialist narrative and conveyed Marxist tenets. In addition, however, the Bund leadership made use of Jewish concepts and rhetoric. Thus, for instance, the Bund was termed “a messiah” that would lead the workers “out of the czarist and capitalistic exile.”³¹ In a May Day article published in the *Naye folkstsaytung* in 1928, Baruch Sheffner drew a socialist lesson from a well-known talmudic story about a potential convert who wanted to study the Torah as quickly as possible. In the talmudic account, the Gentile first approaches the renowned scholar Shammai, who turns him away. He then seeks out Hillel, who grants the man’s wish, explaining that the Torah in its entirety can be summarized in one phrase: “That which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor.” According to Sheffner: “Thus there are two ways leading to every doctrine, to every religion. One leads through the intellect and the other through the heart. . . . The same holds true with regard to socialism. There is one difficult way of socialist theory, that of hard studies. And there is a way in which ‘the light of the sun is leading the workers,’ the way through the heart.”³²

A statement by Bernard Goldstein, the leader of the Bundist militia, similarly demonstrates the extent to which some party members were still rooted in a traditional Jewish discourse. In order to denounce a political opponent, Goldstein labeled him a “geshmadter yid.”³³ The word “geshmadter,” translated as “baptized” or “renegade,” has strongly negative connotations. By using this expression, as opposed to attacking the other leader on the grounds of his political identity, Goldstein relied on internal Jewish polemics. Moreover, by referring to his opponent as the embodiment of extreme assimilation, Goldstein was underscoring his own organization’s folk-national basis. To be sure, leading Bundists had abandoned the religious observance typical of many East European Jews. Nonetheless, and in spite of their revolutionary and anti-traditional rhetoric, they continued to be deeply steeped in the symbolic system and language of Jewish religion and culture.

A Workers’ Exodus—The Bund’s Revisionist Passover Narrative

In creating their own holiday culture, the Bundists attempted to detach their adherents from religious concepts. Allegedly outdated values, ideas and behavior were to be discarded. At the same time, traditional holidays were deemed useful, both as targets of criticism and as a means of subversion. The Bundist strategy was to retain the outward trappings of traditional Jewish holidays while emptying them of religious content and imbuing them with socialist meaning.

Thus the Bundists (like the Zionists) took holidays such as Passover and filled them with new and ideologically relevant content.³⁴ They emphasized the festive element of Passover with activities such as sports events and communal dinners.³⁵ Yet even more significant was the way in which the Bundists attempted to read socialist meanings into the holiday by reinterpreting the biblical narrative. Such exegesis was carried out both in the party press and in Bundist revisions of the traditional Passover hagadah, one of which was published in Cracow in 1919.³⁶ Although it is extremely

difficult to evaluate the extent to which workers accepted this revised hagadah, its frequent reprintings attest to the fact that Bundist leaders regarded it as an important vehicle for spreading their socialist message.

Written mainly in Yiddish, the Bundist hagadah marked a radical break with the traditional Jewish understanding of the Passover narrative and its significance. The first paragraph, for instance, describes a Jewish worker coming home and searching for leftover leavened food. This scene echoes the ritual search (*bedikat ḥamez*) that takes place on the eve of Passover, where the intention is to rid the home of leavened food. Here, however, the worker, tired and hungry, is searching for a piece of bread to eat. Taking this scenario as a starting point, the Bundist hagadah goes on to describe the hardships and bondage of the workers. Throughout the text, history advances in Marxist terms from slavery in Egypt to the current bourgeois exploitation of the proletarians. Beginning with its description of the workers' poverty, the story line proceeds to subjects such as self-liberation, freedom, and the belief in progress, and ends with the call for redemption in the form of socialism.

The Bundist narrative ignores or changes other key elements of the traditional Passover seder. For instance, the socialist hagadah hardly mentions the ritual foods that are an essential part of the traditional seder. There is only a brief allusion to *maror*, the bitter herbs symbolizing the bitterness of slavery in Egypt. In contrast, "matzo" (in Hebrew, *maḥzah*) undergoes an etymological and ideological transformation, becoming *masa* (burden). At the Bundist seder this matzo is not even meant to be eaten. Rather, it symbolizes the fact that oppressed workers are so poor that they have to "eat" one another in order to survive.³⁷

In the Bundist hagadah, God is largely edited out of the narrative. One instance involves Psalm 146, appearing in its entirety in the traditional Hebrew hagadah, whose refrain repeatedly praises God, "for His kindness is everlasting" (*ki le'olam ḥasdo*). In the Bundist version, "progress" stands in the place of the deity and, as noted in the refrain, "its actions will last forever" (*zayn virkung doyert eybik*).³⁸ In another instance, the counting song "Eḥad mi yode'a?" (Who knows one?) is thoroughly reworked. Whereas the original text enumerates basic motifs of traditional Judaism ("two tablets of the Law, three patriarchs, four matriarchs..."), the Bundist version recounts the myriad evils of the time, among them capitalism, militarism, the religious establishment, and the oppression of the proletariat.³⁹ And whereas the final song in the traditional hagadah, "Ḥad gadya" (An only kid) allegorically describes a cycle of evil broken by God's slaying of the angel of death, the Bundist version features the struggle of socialism against capitalism. According to its upbeat conclusion: "In the end socialism will triumph and liberate everybody. Amen."⁴⁰

Indeed, when mentioned at all, God is blamed for not following up on the divine promise of redemption. Since the workers still live in bondage, they have to free themselves. In lieu of appeals for redemption, the Bundist hagadah substitutes Georg Herwegh's famous declaration: "If your mighty arm wills it, all the wheels will come to a halt" (*Wenn dein starker Arm es will, stehen alle Räder still*).⁴¹ The people—that is to say, the workers—take center stage in the process of salvation. Instead of God, "progress" is worshiped for its ability to accomplish miracles, bring light into the darkness, break the iron chains, defeat the despots, redeem the workers and, ultimately, usher in socialism.

Both the redemptive aspect of socialism and the Bund's rewriting of tradition are emphasized in a subtle play on words appearing near the end of the revisionist *hagadah*. One of the most controversial sections of the traditional Hebrew text is an appeal addressed to God: "Pour out Your wrath upon the nations that do not acknowledge You" (*shefokh hamatkah el hagoyim asher lo yeda'ukhah*). In the Bundist version, the Hebrew term for "wrath," *hemah*, is replaced by *hamah*—deriving from the same root but translating as "heat" or "warmth" (it is also the biblical term for the sun)—and God is replaced by socialism. With this change in wording, a call for vengeance is transformed into a cry for unity. Instead of being destroyed by God's consuming anger, those nations that have not (yet) acknowledged the new social order will bask in the warmth of socialism.⁴²

In line with its internationalist ideology, the Bundist *hagadah* also annuls the linkage between the Jewish people and the land of Israel. Thus, the Bundist version first cites the original Hebrew text when talking about "the land that was promised to our forefathers" (*haarez asher nishba' laavoteinu*) but then reinterprets "the land" as the emergence of a new world order:

He will lead us to the land that was promised to our forefathers. . . . Everybody has to understand that he has the same rights as anyone else. This holy idea (blessed be it) will grow stronger and stronger, and will teach us to build up the world that already has been promised to our parents. We will be redeemed and we will establish a society of true felicity for all working people.⁴³

In observing the seder ritual, Jews symbolically reenact the historical scenario as well as renewing and replenishing their national memory. As Yosef Yerushalmi has noted, memory in this sense is not merely recollection, which preserves a certain distance, but re-actualization.⁴⁴ Such a performance of commemorative rituals opens the possibility not only of reviving and affirming older memories, but also of modifying them. In the Bundist retelling, the Exodus story that was transmitted throughout the generations—a tale of divine redemption of a specific people, the children of Israel—gives way to a narrative focusing on the self-liberation of the workers, the calling into question of the traditional Jewish laws, the axiom of all men being equal, and a Marxist understanding of history.⁴⁵ Thus, in the course of sabotaging traditional authority by launching an attack on the bourgeois elite, the rabbis, and even God, the Bundists abolished the conventional narrative and filled the void with its own "master fiction" (in the terminology of Clifford Geertz). At the same time, they did not strive for a complete breach with the past.⁴⁶ As Michael Walzer has argued, the biblical account lends itself to political interpretation as an alternative to messianic and millenarian thought, as a secular and historical account of redemption that does not require a miraculous transformation of the world.⁴⁷ In fact, other (non-Jewish) revolutionaries had previously alluded to the Exodus. For the Bundists, however, the biblical story had the additional significance of being a central component of Jewish tradition. Retaining the seder along with its narrative theme of liberation, the Bundists sought to infuse Jewish culture with elements of Marxist tradition and in this way create a "pre-history" for the latter that began much earlier than working-class struggles. Indeed, the Bundist *hagadah* goes so far as to claim that its narrative represents the "original" text as opposed to an "invented rabbinical tradition." The rabbis, it is

claimed, were not satisfied with the *peshat*, the simple and direct reading of the text, and had therefore forged another version with the help of their sophisticated, but class-driven, exegesis.⁴⁸

Another important disparity between the traditional hagadah and the Bundist version concerns their differing emphases on the past and future as opposed to the present. The traditional Passover ritual displays a certain tension in its turning both to a mythic past and a redemptive future while disregarding current circumstances as being unimportant. This stance complies with an aspect of Orthodox Jewish thinking that views current events as relevant only as indicators of the process of salvation. The socialist narrative takes the opposite approach. Although past and future also have significance, the focus is on the present; rather than relying on an inchoate future, workers are urged to change their present reality. This declaration is, of course, one of the basic tenets of Marxist ideology.

A Marxist understanding of history and historical processes is present throughout the revised hagadah, especially in its socioeconomic re-interpretation of the Passover myth. Traditionally, the Exodus does not merely bear the meaning of liberation from physical bondage but includes as well a strong spiritual dimension. It reminds the Jews that their forefathers had been idolaters—idolatry being understood as the worship of idols that are alien to Judaism (the Hebrew term *'avodah zarah* translates as “foreign worship”). In the Bundist text, the word *'avodah* (*avoyde*) is translated literally as “work,” and the phrase becomes reinterpreted as “work for strangers,” that is, the proletariat’s selling of his labor to others. Accordingly, the socialist text continues with a short outline based on a socioeconomic understanding of history, and sacrality is transferred from God and His people to the new revolutionary community.⁴⁹ Whereas traditional Judaism teaches that the Jews help prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah and the ultimate revelation of God’s glory, the proletarian Passover message transfers the eschatological mission to the workers, the new chosen people.

Particularism versus Universalism

Both Bundist May Day celebrations and Bundist leaders’ attempts (as in the case of the Passover hagadah) to transform Jewish rituals and adapt them to their own ideological orientation reflect the tensions inherent in the concept of a Jewish socialist workers’ culture. To what extent were the Bundists successful in their efforts? With regard to the Passover seder, it is difficult to provide a clear-cut answer, since this was a private ritual conducted among individual families.⁵⁰ May Day celebrations, in contrast, were public events that were the subject of numerous reports both in the Bundist and non-Bundist Polish Jewish press. Such reports provide evidence of broad and constantly growing support for the mass worker celebrations.⁵¹

Both cases, however, attest to a similar combination of socialist and Jewish elements. To be sure, the emphasis was on the socialist rather than the Jewish aspect. At the same time, as has been seen, the Bundists took socialist concepts and infused them with elements of the Jewish world and tradition. Such blending, in turn, created a tension that can be discerned in many accounts of the celebrations. At Bundist May

Day celebrations, particularism and universalism were yoked together but at times led to audible dissonance, as in the discussions concerning joint Polish-Jewish processions and the issue of Yiddish banners and speeches. On many occasions, Jewish socialists had to stand up for specifically Jewish interests in some areas while conceding to their Polish counterparts in others.

Perhaps the best example of the tension between universalism and particularism is provided by the phrase *yidisher arbeter-klal*. “Arbeter-klal,” referring to the workers’ community, stands in sharp contrast to *klal-yisrael* (the community of Israel), the ethno-religious notion advanced by both Zionist and Orthodox Jews. However, even though “arbeter-klal” stresses the priority of class affiliations over ethnicity, it also insists that a particular *Jewish* working class exists apart from the general labor movement.⁵² Moreover, *yidisher arbeter-klal* was far from being a fixed concept. The question of how much emphasis should be given to its different and partly opposing components—ethnicity and class affiliation—was the subject of frequent debate.⁵³

In a manner similar to that of the Zionists, the Bund contributed to a secularization of Jewish concepts. Such a process, however, was inevitably slow and subject to contradictory trends, as it proved to be impossible to build a modern Jewish national consciousness without referring to religious traditions.⁵⁴ For one thing, the origins of the Jewish people were inseparable from biblical events and therefore from the Jewish religion. In addition, the Yiddish language, containing numerous words and expressions deriving from Hebrew, was itself tightly linked to religious traditions and concepts. Thus, the Bundists had to adapt their new teachings and rites to Judaism’s traditional symbolic system. And this process went in both directions. On the one hand, the teachings of socialism deeply influenced the Jewish workers. On the other hand, Jewish workers adjusted the socialist ideology to the religious traditions from which they could not entirely escape.

While similar strategies of Jewish labor leaders in the United States may be regarded as a manifestation of the gradual Americanization of the East European Jewish immigrants, the situation in Poland was quite different. There, the often hostile environment and the vulnerable civil and legal status of the Jewish minority fostered a strong feeling of social cohesion among Jewish workers and cast doubt upon the prospects of acculturation to the Polish majority.⁵⁵ Far from being a lopsided process, the interchange between socialist and religious tenets created a particular Jewish-socialist culture.⁵⁶ In interwar Poland, a “new song, a splendid song”⁵⁷ was clearly audible in the Jewish milieu, providing some of the workers with confidence and dignity.

Notes

I would like to thank Professors Ezra Mendelsohn, Kiran Patel, and Shaul Stampfer for their extensive comments on earlier drafts of this essay and their sustained support throughout the period of my research.

1. The Bund was founded in the Russian Pale of Settlement in 1897 and developed into one of the leading Jewish political movements in the empire. After the Russian Revolution and the liquidation of the Bund by the Bolsheviks, the party’s center shifted to Poland. There, during the period of the Second Republic, the Bund was one of the main Jewish parties.

2. *Klal-yisroel* is an ethno-religious concept denoting the entire Jewish people, regardless of any religious or political divisions. The term acquired additional significance with the emergence of Zionism; see Ehud Luz, “The Limits of Toleration: The Challenge of Cooperation between the Observant and the Nonobservant during the Hibbat Zion Period, 1882–1895,” in *Zionism and Religion*, ed. Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinhartz, and Anita Shapira (Hanover: 1998), 45.

3. Bundist leaders only gradually came to appreciate the cultural aspect of their mission—it was only after 1905 that these issues were taken into account. See David E. Fishman, “The Bund and Modern Yiddish Culture,” in *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Pittsburgh: 2003), 107–119.

4. Gertrud Pickhan, “*Gegen den Strom*”: *der Allgemeine Jüdische Arbeiterbund “Bund” in Polen 1918–1939* (Stuttgart: 2001), 222–223.

5. The Kultur-lige was founded in 1918 in Kiev, but many of its socialist members left Ukraine in the early 1920s. In interwar Poland, the Kultur-lige was led by members of several Jewish parties; from 1924, it was dominated by the Bund. See *ibid.*, 230–235.

6. Nathan Cohen, “The Bund’s Contribution to Yiddish Culture in Poland between the Two World Wars,” in *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100*, ed. Jack Jacobs (Basingstoke: 2001), 112–130. For a detailed description of Tsisho, see Pickhan, “*Gegen den Strom*,” 236–248.

7. Pickhan disputes the allegedly unique character of the Bundist *mishpokhe* (“*Gegen den Strom*,” 110–177), arguing that the self-representation of the party as a family resembled self-depictions of the Polish socialists. On the Polish socialist community, see Stephanie Zloch, “Demokratie und Nationalismus in Polen (1918–1939)” (Ph.D. diss., Humboldt University of Berlin, 2007). I am grateful to Dr. Zloch for allowing me to read parts of her dissertation.

8. See, for instance, *Arbeter tashen-kalender 1930* (Sotsialistische yugent-bibliotek, no. 7) (Warsaw: 1930).

9. *Yontef* (holiday) derives from the Hebrew *yom tov*, or good day. Originally, the term was used exclusively for Jewish holidays.

10. Whenever the Bundist press commemorated events of the bourgeois struggle, it made sure to point out the half-hearted aspect of that struggle as opposed to the dedication of the true revolutionaries—the proletariat. Thus, in an article appearing in the *Naye folksdaytung*, the writer noted that the French Revolution should have taken place a few days before it did, but was deferred because of bad weather. See *Naye folksdaytung* (4 May 1927), 4; see also *ibid.* (13 April 1933), 4; *ibid.* (30 April 1929), 3.

11. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London: 1976), 416–417.

12. For a very useful outline of the different theoretical approaches to rituals and their role in the process of fostering communities, see Malte Rolf, *Das Sowjetische Massenfest (1917–1941)* (Hamburg: 2005).

13. Jack Jacobs, “Creating a Bundist Counter-Culture: Morgnshtern and the Significance of Cultural Hegemony,” in *idem* (ed.), *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe*, 59–68.

14. See descriptions in the following issues of the *Naye folksdaytung*: (2 May 1927), 1; (3 May 1929), 1; (2 May 1930), 1; (3 May 1931), 1; (2 May 1932), 2; (2 May 1933), 1–2; (2 May 1934), 1–2; (2 May 1935) 1–3; (2 May 1936), 1–3; (2 May 1937), 1–2; (2 May 1938), 1.

15. In their frequent appeals to workers, Bundist leaders urged them to be on time, warning that latecomers would not be allowed to take part in the proceedings. In this regard, it appears that the leaders were battling an allegedly ingrained element of Jewish behavior, “Jewish chaos.” See, for instance, *Naye folksdaytung* (30 April 1937), 12. Notwithstanding their frequent calls to order, Bundist leaders do not seem to have been notably successful in their attempts: neat rows of five workers each are not to be seen in photographs taken at the time.

16. The Bundists were well aware of the risk of chaos. Thus, they blamed the PPS for being against joint demonstrations merely because the Polish labor leaders feared losing control over the demonstrations; see *Nasza Walka*, nos. 5–6 (May–June 1926), 113.

17. The May militia was established by the Bund; one of its primary functions was to provide protection for Bundist events. For the May Day celebrations, the militia was reinforced

by additional Bundists. See Leonard Rowe, "Jewish Self-Defense: A Response to Violence," in *Studies on Polish Jewry 1919–1939*, ed. Joshua A. Fishman (New York: 1974), 105–149.

18. This was a point of considerable annoyance to the management of rival, non-socialist Yiddish newspapers, among them *Haynt* and the *Yidishe togblat*. The Bund, meanwhile, was vocal in its triumph. See, for instance, *Naye folkstsaytung* (2 May 1931), 3; cf. *Haynt* (30 April 1931), 4; *Yidishe togblat* (2 May 1933), 1.

19. *Naye folkstsaytung* (19 April 1929), 3. A similar point regarding socialist demonstrations in general is made by Winfried Gebhardt, *Fest, Feier und Alltag. Über die gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit des Menschen und ihre Deutung* (Frankfurt: 1987), 135.

20. *Naye folkstsaytung* (29 April 1927), 7 (describing pre-May Day preparations in Zamość); *ibid.* (29 April 1928), 2 (describing preparations in Lublin and Lodz).

21. The workers supporting the Sanacja (the pro-government forces) had split from the PPS and became known as the PPS – Dawna Frakcja Rewolucyjna' (PPS-F.R.). The Jewish parties referred to them as *frokes* (from "tailcoat," an allusion to their ambitious quest for power). See Bernard Goldstein, *20 yor in varshever bund 1919–1939* (New York: 1960), 116–117; Antony Polonsky, *Politics in Independent Poland, 1921–39: The Crisis of Constitutional Government* (Oxford: 1972), 264–265. On at least one occasion, the Bund itself acknowledged that the larger demonstrations of the PPS-F.R. in Theatre Square reflected the distribution of power. See *Naye folkstsaytung* (3 May 1931), 1.

22. Richard Schechner, *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance* (London: 1993), 88.

23. *Naye folkstsaytung* (6 May 1938), 4.

24. Reports on the most serious of these incidents for the period under question appear in the following issues of *Naye folkstsaytung*: (2 May 1928), 3–4; (2 May 1934), 1–2; (2 May 1937), 2.

25. See the following issues of *Naye folkstsaytung*: (2 May 1934), 1; (2 May 1931), 1; (3 May 1931), 1; (2 May 1934), 1f.

26. Goldstein, *20 yor in varshever bund*, 219.

27. *Ibid.*, 219f.

28. On a number of occasions, the Bund's central committee explicitly came out against joint processions with the rightwing Poale Zion. Nonetheless, there are several accounts detailing such cooperation between the two groups. See *Naye folkstsaytung*: (2 May 1932), 7; (7 May 1935), 4; (12 April 1939), 9.

29. For instance, whereas joint Polish-Jewish processions were not allowed in Warsaw between 1936 and 1939, the workers in Grodno marched together. See *Naye folkstsaytung*: (3 May 1936), 2; (3 May 1937), 4; (2 May 1938), 3; (7 May 1939), 5.

30. In fact, editors of the *Naye folkstsaytung* often apologized for not being able to print all the reports that had been sent in; see, for instance, the following issues: (5 May 1936), 6; (3 May 1937), 4.

31. Emanuel Nowogrodski (ed.), *Beynish Mikhalewicz gedenk-bukh* (Buenos Aires: 1951), 199.

32. *Naye folkstsaytung* (30 April 1928), 2.

33. Goldstein, *20 yor in varshever bund*, 118.

34. The Zionist treatment of Jewish holidays has been examined widely. See, for instance, Anita Shapira, "The Religious Motifs of the Labor Movement," in Almog, Reinhartz, and Shapira (eds.), *Zionism and Religion*, 251–272; Yaacov Shavit and Shoshana Sitton, *Staging and Stagers in Modern Jewish Palestine: The Creation of Festive Lore in a New Culture, 1882–1948* (Detroit: 2004); François Guesnet, "Chanukah and Its Function in the Invention of a Jewish-heroic Tradition in Early Zionism, 1880–1900," in *Nationalism, Zionism and Ethnic Mobilization of the Jews in 1900 and Beyond*, ed. Michael Berkowitz (Leiden: 2004), 227–246. Other socialist parties, among them the German SPD, also dealt with the relationship between socialism and religion, using sacral language and attempting to present socialism as the logical successor of Christianity: Christ himself was often depicted as the first socialist. See Lucian Hölscher, *Weltgericht oder Revolution. Protestantische und sozialistische Zukunftsvorstellungen im deutschen Kaiserreich* (Stuttgart: 1989); Heinrich Basilius Streithofen, *SPD und*

katholische Kirche. Eine Untersuchung über das Kirchenbild des Vorwärts (Stuttgart: 1974). On French revolutionaries and holidays, see Michel Vovelle, *Die französische Revolution. Soziale Bewegungen und Umbruch der Mentalitäten* (Munich: 1982), 127.

35. See, for instance, the following issues of *Naye folkssaytung*: (8 April 1927), 8; (30 March 1931), 5; (10 April 1936), 1; see also Goldstein, *20 yor in varshever bund*, 129.

36. *Hagode shel peysekhn, mit a sotsialistishn nusakh* (Cracow: 1919). For the purposes of this essay, this version of the hagadah is termed the “Bundist hagadah” though in fact it is a revision of a version originally written in 1887 by Jewish socialists in Vilna, which was reprinted several times and in different places, including London and New York. In 1900, three years after its founding, the Russian Bund published a considerably revised version of the text in Geneva. This revision was marked by a moderation in tone and content; former versions had called on the Jewish workers unambiguously to “take up their rifle” and “destroy the parasites,” that is, the bourgeoisie. The version discussed here was used by Bundists during the interwar period in Poland.

For a history of the hagadah, see Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Haggadah and History: A Panorama in Facsimile of Five Centuries of the Printed Haggadah from the Collections of Harvard University and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America* (Philadelphia: 1975). For additional background regarding both the socialist hagadah analyzed here and an earlier version written in Yiddish (with a Hebrew translation), see Haya Bar Itzhak, “He’arot lahagadah shel pesah shel ‘haBund,’” *Hulyot* 2 (1994), 255–271. See also David P. Shuldiner’s *Of Moses and Marx: Folk Ideology and Folk History in the Jewish Labor Movement* (Westport: 1999), 119–140, which discusses an earlier socialist version of the hagadah produced in Yiddish for the American Jewish labor movement. On alternative versions of the hagadah that were used by members of the Jewish labor movement in Mandatory Palestine, see Derek J. Penslar, “The Continuity of Subversion: Hebrew Satire in Mandatory Palestine,” *Jewish History* 20, no. 1 (March 2006), 19–40.

37. Matzo was the subject of an article appearing in *Naye folkssaytung* ([4 April 1928], 3), where it was derided as a relic of ancient times. According to the article, whereas people in ancient times were unfamiliar with bread and thus prepared “a kind of cookie” with unleavened dough, it was now the case that this unleavened bread was being produced on modern, assembly-line machines. The Bundists regarded this as clearly absurd—yet another example of the inanity of religion. The article hints at the fact that there was an ongoing dispute among hasidim with regard to the halakhic status of mechanically produced matzo. On this issue, see also Mendel Piekarz, *Hahasidut bepolin: megamot ra’yoniyyot bein shetei hamilhamot uvegezerot 5700–5705 (“hashoah”)* (Jerusalem: 1990), 93–96.

38. *Hagode shel peysekhn*, 17. The Germanized diction harkens back to the older version of the text published in New York, which included many *daytshmerish* (Germanizing) elements. Often coming out of a Russian-speaking background, many New York-based activists learned German before switching to Yiddish. Therefore their Yiddish absorbed many German expressions. See Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge, Mass.: 2005).

39. See *Hagode shel peysekhn*, 20 (“Who knows two? I know two—mankind is divided into two parts: poor and rich. Who knows three? I know three—The Christian trinity embitters [*farfinstert*] the world. Who knows four? I know four—capitalism, militarism, religion, and the government enslave the working class”). Similarly, the Zionist movement (especially among certain kibbutzim in Palestine) inserted its own messages into the hagadah and used elements such as “Ehad mi yode’a” to deal with current political and social problems, among them the unfulfilled promise of the Balfour Declaration and the Arab revolt of 1936–1939. See, for instance, David C. Jacobson, “Writing and Rewriting the Zionist National Narrative: Responses to the Arab Revolt of 1936–1939 in Kibbutz Passover Haggadot,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 6, no. 1 (March 2007), 1–20; Penslar, “The Continuity of Subversion.”

40. *Hagode shel peysekhn*, 23.

41. This line appears as part of a song (“Bundeslied für den allgemeinen deutschen Arbeiterbund”) composed in 1864 by Herwegh, a German revolutionary, for the General German

Workers Association. In the song, the lines are reversed: “Alle Räder stehen still, wenn dein starker Arm es will.”

42. *Hagode shel peysekhn*, 15. In the original Hebrew text, “nations that do not acknowledge You” refer to nations that oppress the people of Israel, as noted in the following verse: “For they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation” (*ki akhal et ya'akov veet navehu hashemu*). The Bundist hagadah omits this reference.

43. *Hagode shel peysekhn*, 13–14.

44. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: 1982), 44.

45. *Hagode shel peysekhn*, 3–4.

46. As has been argued for the French revolutionaries; see Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: 1984).

47. Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: 1985), 17.

48. According to the “rabbis” quoted in the Bundist hagadah: “No, the simple *peshat* is not enough for us; we have to find another *derash* [a homiletical or interpretive meaning], we must not give [the workers] time to understand the simple *peshat*” (*Hagode shel peysekhn*, 5). This, of course, is what the Bundists were doing as well.

49. *Hagode shel peysekhn*, 8–9. Cf. Mona Ozouf’s observations on the French revolutionary festivals in her *Festivals and the French Revolution* (London: 1988), 262ff.

50. What seems clear is that many Jewish workers, although not strictly observant, were nonetheless fairly traditional in their beliefs and practices, as evidenced by the fact that Bundist newspapers regularly carried advertisements for kosher food and beverages. See, for instance, *Naye folkstsaytung* (4 April 1928), 3, which contains both an article about the “anachronism” of eating matzo and advertisements for (kosher for Passover) matzos.

51. Although reporting lower numbers than the Bundist press, both *Haynt* and the Orthodox *Yidische togblat* could not ignore the increasing numbers of workers participating in the demonstrations. Naturally, they tried both to downplay the significance of the demonstrations and to ridicule them. Concerned about the growing popularity of May Day observances, the Agudat Israel movement published a pamphlet in 1930 that explained why Jews should not celebrate the first of May. See L. Szeizekacz, *Der ershter may – farvos m’darf im nisht fayern* (Warsaw: 1930).

52. On this distinction, see Yosef Gorny, “Bein ma’amadiyut le’amamiyut—ha’bund’ hapolani 1917–1932,” *Gal-Ed* 18 (2002), 194.

53. The constant renegotiation of these different components can be detected, for example, in the changing Bundist rhetoric with regard to Passover during the interwar period. In contrast to the Bundist hagadah, later Bundist propaganda reinserted the Jews (in place of the working class) as the protagonists of the Exodus story. While still refraining from characterizing the Jews as the “chosen people,” this later material remained closer to the original Hebrew text. See, for example, *Naye folkstsaytung* (24 April 1929), 1; *ibid.* (1 April 1931), 1–2.

54. On the difficulties of abandoning old traditions, see Yehuda Eres, “Tanakh umasoret yehudit bitnu’at hapo’alim hayehudit,” in *Sozializm yehudi uteun’at hapo’alim hayehudit bemeah ha-19*, ed. Moshe Mishkinsky (Jerusalem: 1975), 20.

55. On the connection between the workers’ movement and Americanization, see, for example, Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: 1976). In contrast to Howe and others, Tony Michels makes a strong argument that the American Jewish labor movement should not be seen simply as an agent helping the East European immigrants to adapt to their new environment (Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, 20–21).

56. Jack Jacobs recently published an excellent study about what he terms the “Bundist counterculture,” in which he argues that Bundist institutions such as the Tsukunft and Morgnshtern were critically important to the party’s political success during the 1930s. Roni Gechtman calls the same phenomenon “national-cultural autonomy in the making.” See Jack Jacobs, *Bundist Counterculture in Interwar Poland* (New York: 2009); cf. Roni Gechtman, “‘Yidisher Sotsializm’: The Origin and Contexts of the Jewish Labor Bund’s National Program” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2005), 17.

57. *Hagode shel peysekhn*, 14 (“Un mir velen im zingen a naves lid, eyn herlikhes lid”).

