General Music Education in a Multi-Ethnic Context,

on the Example of State-Run Schools in Poland between the World Wars

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ABSTRACT

The paper concerns the presence and ideological identity-building function of Polish folk music in Polish state-run schools between the World Wars, and the experiences of Jewish children and teenagers in this regard. The young Polish state brought together populations from the former three partitioned territories, which included numerous national minorities. The need for bond-forming, powerfully symbolic elements supporting a collectively developed national identity was soon strongly felt. Polish folk music, with particular emphasis on its regional varieties, perfectly fitted into the ideological current of patriotic and civic youth education in both state-run and private schools. Dances and songs which children learned at music and PE lessons familiarised them with the wealth of traditions, imbuing them with pride and the love of national culture. The paper quotes examples of young Jews' experiences in this context, as they encountered Polish folksongs and dances in state-run schools: their responses to this issue and the impact of such contacts on their identities. The source material comes from pre-WWII press, in which we hear the voices of the children themselves, reporting their experiences.

Keywords: Polish folk music, music in education, Jews in Poland between the World Wars, Jewish music in Poland

Studies on folk music as an element of Jewish children and youth's school education in Poland between the World Wars (1918–39) constitute a considerable challenge for researchers, primarily because the sources have either been lost or scattered. The school authorities' official forms, syllabuses, and handbooks have largely been preserved, but material concerning young Jews' experiences in Polish schools is rather scanty. The press is a major source, in particular *Mały Przegląd* children's weekly, which in 1926–39 constituted a forum for children and teenagers to share their accounts of all they saw as important in their lives. School played a major role in these accounts,[1] which frequently considered school trips, celebrations, visits, and everyday school realities. Many such reports concern the learning of songs and dances, which accompanied school parties and official commemorations as well as activities initiated by the children themselves. While looking back at their school experiences, one should consider, first and foremost, the role that folk music played in Polish schools between the World Wars, and the situation of the youngest representatives of the Jewish nationality in Poland in this context.

Those young Jews were an extremely large, culturally and socially varied group. They lived both in great cities and small towns or settlements, in the ethnically diversified territories formerly ruled by three empires that had partitioned the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. These Jews were citizens of a state that had just regained its independence. It was therefore one of the aims of its internal policy to shape the national identity of its inhabitants by ideological means. The Polish Jews, as the largest of the national minorities inhabiting the interwar Poland, were, in political and cultural terms, an extremely diversified group. The main indicator of these differences was every individual's degree of identification with the religion (Judaism) and attitude to his or her own community as nation-wise separate from others. At one end of the spectrum, there was religious orthodoxy and a strongly separate cultural identity (even reflected in command of the Polish language, which was poor or none at all in this group). Further along the axis, we find factions promoting various social and political concepts, which emphasised (to a varying degree) the need for national autonomy and advocated different visions of the future (one of these was the Zionist Movement).[2] At the other end of the spectrum, one observes nearly total assimilation with the Polish element.

In the case of (particularly pre-adolescent) schoolchildren, their adherence to one or another of these groups was determined by their family home. However, it was in the interwar period that the phenomenon of teenagers rejecting their family traditions first became distinctly noticeable (Kijek 2017: 65–66). This great diversity was reflected, to some extent, in the extremely complicated educational system in Poland, including that of Jewish schools. Though the Polish Constitution guaranteed access to free education in their native tongues

1 Education was compulsory under the Act of 7 February 1921 for children and teenagers aged 7 to 14. Cf. S. Mauersberg, *Szkolnictwo powszechne dla mniejszości narodowych w Polsce w latach 1918–1939* [*Publicly Owned General Education of National Minorities in Poland, 1918–1939*], Wrocław, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1968, p. 162.

2 Zionism – the ideology of Jewish national revival through building their own national seat in Palestine and a renaissance of Hebrew as a native tongue. Originally Zionism was the basis of the Zionist Movement. After the establishment of the state of Israel, it became the foundation of official state ideology. Cf. N. Aleksiun, 'Syjonizm' ['Zionism'], in *Polski Słownik Judaistyczny. Dzieje, kultura, religia i ludzie* [*Polish Judaic Dictionary: History, Culture, Religion, and the People*], Z. Borzymińska and R. Żebrowski (eds), Warszawa, Prószyński i S-ka, 2003, vol. 2, pp. 589–591.

to national monitories,[3] this right was not respected and enforced in practice. Publicly owned schools for Jewish children (the so-called 'Sabbath schools', *szabasówki*) were in fact not distinguishable from Polish ones except that their overall level was lower, which discouraged parents from sending their children to such institutions. A vast proportion of Jewish pupils was therefore forced to choose between free, state-run Polish primary schools and private Jewish education, which comprised a wide range of different types. Some institutions, dedicated to traditional religious teaching, were addressed mainly to boys. These cheders were supervised by 'Chorew' Central Educational Organisation, established under the auspices of the Jewish orthodox party Agudat Israel Poland in 1929. 'Chorew' ran male religious schools which, in order to satisfy the demands of state educational authorities, also devoted about a dozen hours a week to secular subjects taught in Polish (Żebrowski 2003b: 291). Jewish girls' schools were run by 'Bejs Jaakow' (Hebr. House of Jacob) – an orthodox educational board affiliated to Agudat Israel. They provided their pupils with basic education in the spirit of religious orthodoxy and respect for tradition, even though many of the (mainly social) solutions applied in those girls' schools were quite innovative for that time (Żebrowski 2003a:16). Other types of schools included those operated by 'Jawne' Cultural and Educational Society, which was founded by the Zionist religious party Mizrachi Poland in 1922. In the 'Jawne' schools, the curriculum combined religious with national-Zionist teaching (Żebrowski 2003c: 665). There were also various secular schools, including bilingual ones, with classes in Polish and one of the Jewish languages – a type of education that was gaining popularity in the 1930s. Prominent in this group were schools under the patronage of 'Tarbut' Jewish Educational and Cultural Society, operating under the auspices of the Zionist Organisation. As a secular association, 'Tarbut' opposed the clericalism of traditional Jewish schools. It promoted modern Jewish culture and a national focus in youth education, cultivating love for Palestine and involvement in the project of building the foundations for the future Jewish state (Żebrowski 2003d: 694–695). One of the most interesting Jewish educational projects in the interwar period was that of secular schools affiliated to CISZO (from Yiddish: C*entrale Jidisze Szul Organizacje*, The Central Jewish School Organisation), in which classes were taught in Yiddish. They promoted the 'school-of-work' concept by means of the latest methods of contemporary pedagogy.

Publicly owned schools were attended by those Jewish children and teenagers who either came from well assimilated families or whose parents could not afford private education. That this experience was not always easy for the Jewish youth is corroborated by comments printed in *Mały Przegląd*, which take the form of complaints or only recall unpleasant incidents as if 'by the way', as a normal thing. This may be taken as proof of interiorisation of a deep-rooted inferiority complex as a result of experiencing discrimination at different stages of growing up. Some of these problems may have resulted from the lack of systematic educational solutions that would respect the minorities' cultures (especially the Jewish one). Others stemmed from the reluctant or hostile attitudes of the Polish social environment, as reflected in the following complaint printed in *Mały Przegląd*:

> I wrote that attending a Polish school is not a good thing, and it's true. When the school organises a trip, they go on Saturdays, when jewish [sic!] girls can't go. Or they eat at Polish restaurants during such trips, which again makes it hard to reconcile. But the worst thing is when [children] are at play and something happens; parents forbid Polish girls to play with jewish [sic!] ones.[4]

The question is, to what extent the school syllabuses, with their numerous references to Polish culture, could be perceived by the Jewish youth as an ideologically oppressive tool. Apart from the dominance of a narration that supported the national perspective (reflected in a suitable music repertoire), folk music was also commonly invoked. Official directives of the school authorities recommended the use of Polish folklore as an instrument of ideological formation of youth, of building a Polish national identity, while the cultural heritage of the numerous national minorities was almost completely left out. The integrating potential of Polish folksongs and dances, with special emphasis on forms proper to the given region, could help to familiarise the population with local traditions, and thus – reinforce the narration intended to unify the culturally

3 The so-called Little Treaty of Versailles, signed on 31 July 1919, part of whose directives entered the Polish Constitution of 17 March 1921, guaranteed (in Article 9) elementary education in publicly run schools with non-Polish language of instruction to all citizens whose native tongue was different from Polish, provided that they constituted a significant proportion of the population in the given city or province. Cf. Article 9; Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland, 1920, no. 110, item 728; see also Mauersberg, *Szkolnictwo powszechne…*, p. 18.

4 Lucia, *Mały Przegląd*, vol. 4, no. 8, 22 February 1929, p. 2.

heterogeneous Polish society. Jewish children attending state-run, publicly owned schools were particularly strongly exposed to such syllabuses. In private schools, this ideology was replaced by other narrations suited to the given school's profile. In Jewish Hebrew-language schools, the curricula of Zionist-nationalist education included learning the so-called Palestine songs in Hebrew, which were part of a wider process of reinventing the traditions of the newly formed Jewish national seat in Palestine. In CISZO schools, where Yiddish was the language of instruction, folksongs in Yiddish were a particular focus since Yiddish-language folklore was viewed as an integral part of the nation's cultural heritage. In both cases, this contributed to the accumulation of cultural and symbolic capital, which shaped the students' national identities. However, even children from Hebrew- and Yiddish-language schools came into contact with Polish folklore on various occasions by participating in the town or city's cultural life or observing the still traditional village society during trips and summer holidays.

The official syllabuses constituted a point of departure for state-run schools. Prepared by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education, they defined in much detail the scope of knowledge and skills that needed to be acquired at the successive stages of education in state-run primary schools and in those secondary schools that implemented the state's educational system. In primary schools, Polish folk music played a major role in the broadly conceived educational process. Learning dance songs from various regions was recommended. These were typical song forms derived from dances characteristic of the given region, such as cracoviennes, kuyaviaks, mazurkas and obereks, *krzesany*, and *zbójnicki* (Mayzner 1934/1935: 7). Folksongs and dances, which schoolchildren learned at singing and PE lessons, constituted part of the compulsory repertoire, along with religious and patriotic pieces as well as works written by eminent Polish composers (Stanisław Moniuszko's songs were most frequently mentioned). It was recommended that ca fifteen new pieces should be introduced every year (Mayzner 1934/1935: 5). Their choice depended on the teacher, which could sometimes lead to unpleasant situations such as the one described below (alternatively, the same song could have been sung by the author's classmates):

> Yes, this has been a very beautiful dream, after which one has to return to one's old way of living. And once again one is forced to sing the humiliating song 'Little Jew's A-Walking down the Street' at school.[5] I believe we could only be truly free in Erec [i.e. Palestine].[6]

The Jędrzejewicz reform[7] put even more emphasis on regionalism,[8] attention being paid to the (then already vanishing) local dialects, which were to be cultivated by singing local songs and songs in local melodic variants. Only three most prominent tunes: the national anthem, *God, Who Hast Poland*, and *The Legions* – were canonical and immutable.[9] Paradoxically, regionalisation could in many cases lead to a softening of the repertoire's national overtones, and thus facilitate its acceptance by members of minority groups. Learning and presenting the folk culture of one's region during school events frequently proved to be an attractive task for all the pupils alike, including Jewish ones.

> 'A Silesian night' is to be held at our school in May, and Morcinek has been invited! The folk's chosen ones, who will get the chance to distinguish themselves with their songs, dances, or exceptionally good memory in presenting papers, work without a moment's rest. It's rehearsal time all the time,

5 It is not certain which song the author had in mind. In the Grodzka Gate Centre's Oral History Archive in Lublin we find an interview with Zofia Mazurek (b. 1926, speaking in 2000), who recalls a mocking song that started with the words 'An old Jew's walking down the street and singing'. Cf. Z. Mazurek 'Przedwojenne piosenki żydowskie' ['Pre-WWII Jewish Songs'], Archive of the programme: Historia Mówiona Ośrodek Brama Grodzka, https://biblioteka.teatrnn.pl/dlibra/show-content/publication/edition/121036?id=121036&dirids=1 (accessed 13 September 2022).

6 K. Jehudit, 'Mój sen' ['My Dream'], *Ceirim*, vol. 1, no. 3, December 1928, p. 12.

7 The reform prepared by Janusz Jędrzejewicz (of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education) and implemented from 1932 onwards; its directives were binding till 1948. Its aim was to create a unified system of education in the three former territories of partitioned Poland, and to adjust syllabuses to all the stages of education. Cf. Mauersberg, *Szkolnictwo powszechne…*, p. 172.

8 Regionalism was often interpreted rather broadly, as in the case of soldiers' songs, which were incorporated into the repertoires of regional folksongs 'for the sake of their non-Polish, foreign original melodies. […] A soldiers' song becomes a traditional one on the very next day after it has been sung for the first time. Since in its lyrics it only speaks the truth, its melody never lies, either.' This peculiar type of ideological 'regionalism' most likely 'derived not from any given stretch of land and its geographic qualities, not from human ethnic qualities, but from the time of the land and its history.' Cf. T. Mayzner, 'Pieśń żołnierska i patriotyczna' ['Soldiers' and Patriotic Songs'], *Śpiew w szkole*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1933, pp. 6–7.

9 Mayzner, 'Pieśń żołnierska…', p. 7.

excitedly reported a Polish primary school pupil from Sosnowiec, one of three Jewish girls attending that school in that period.[10] Despite the presence of the radio in the audiosphere and the society's ever-growing mobility, music from faraway regions was frequently just as 'exotic' to Polish kids as it was to the Jewish ones. *Mały Przegląd* reports on a visit of highland folk musicians from the Nowy Sącz region at a school in Radom, which, as we can glean from the author's words, was most likely that girl's first contact with live highlander music.[11]

Folksongs and dances were also part of school theatricals, which could take the form of short song-based spectacles or stage productions of entire folk rituals such us the harvest festival or a wedding. Such rituals were presented, for instance, in Lucjusz Komarnicki's 'Muza' theatre at Ewa Szlezynger's Jewish Girls' High School in Warsaw.[12] Less ambitious school spectacles, usually made up of a *potpourri* of loosely related numbers – folk dances and songs – were invariably much welcome and contributed a patriotic note.

Apart from teaching songs and dances in class, the syllabuses afforded space for founding instrumental ensembles and for extracurricular, facultative music lessons catering for those interested. Such projects called for dedicated and experienced teachers, required the purchase of instruments for the school ensemble and, most importantly, acquiring members from among gifted pupils, preferably ones who were already learning music privately and could thus become the mainstay of the orchestra. A string quintet or an all-violins ensemble was the most desirable line-up. While folksongs were strongly represented in the school vocal repertoires, folk material was avoided in instrumental music, except possibly for stylised adaptations and arrangements. While commenting on the Jędrzejewicz reform, Bogusław Sidorowicz rejected the possibility of including in school ensembles such plucked chordophones as 'mandolins, balalaikas, or the Yugoslav *bisernica*' (soprano tamboura).[13] This is notable in that the mandolin was one of the most popular instruments among teenagers in that time, used both for individual domestic music-making and in ensembles. The rejection of this group of instruments, clearly motivated by a preference for classical repertoire, also excluded any non-classical type of musical material (including non-Polish folk music, for instance of the kind associated with the balalaika). Practice, however, questioned these idealistic principles, and mandolin orchestras, sometimes very large ones, operated in many schools, performing in such cases the pupils' own favourite numbers, including folksongs.

School education was supplemented by listening sessions familiarising students with instrumental music. In such programmes, folk repertoire mainly served the task of gradually developing in pupils the ability to listen to classical music.[14] In large cities, schools organised excursions to theatres and philharmonic halls.[15] A pupil recalled:

> Our class attended a musical matinee. It was for the first time in my life that I had seen such a huge and beautiful hall. In the beginning,

10 Lesia z Sosnowca, *Mały Przegląd*, vol. 12, no. 18, 30 April 1937, p. 2.

11 Menasza z Radomia, 'Dwie uroczystości. Koncert górali' ['Two Celebrations. A Highlander Concert'], *Mały Przegląd*, vol. 9, no. 23, 15 June 1934, p. 2.

12 L. Komarnicki, *Teatr szkolny. Ogólne założenia z praktyki teatru szkolnego, teorja teatru szkolnego* [*School Theatre. General Principles based on Practice as well as the Theory of School Theatricals*], Warszawa, Gebethner i Wolff, 1926, p. 12. 'Muza' school theatre was an original artistic and educational project implemented by Ewa Szlezynger's (later Janina Świątecka's) Girls' High School's long-time headmaster, who gave his students full autonomy as authors of the spectacles. The productions involved a close, democratically conceived collaboration with and between students in preparing the productions. After Komarnicki's death, 'Muza' was successfully moderated by Natalia Landau and Helena Silbercwejg, who worked with the students using Komarnicki's method. Cf. N. Silbercwejg and H. Landau, 'Metoda realizacji pracy w teatrze szkolnym' ['Work Methodology in a School Theatre'], *Teatr w szkole*, vol. 3, no. 6, 1936/37, pp. 133–149.

13 B. Sidorowicz, 'Problemy orkiestrowe w szkole' ['Issues Related to School Orchestras'], *Śpiew w szkole*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1935/1936, pp. 65–68, at p. 68: 'It is the teacher's task to explain to the mandolinists, whose artistic pride may be hurt, that not letting them join the ensemble is not directed against teenage music-making, but, on the contrary, it attracts their attention to the need to educate themselves rationally in the field of music.'

14 'While taking into account teenagers' degree of interest, musical works ought to be graded from the most accessible to the most demanding ones, in the following order: dance music and marches, folk and artistic songs, dance poems, operatic arias, works from the Romantic period, from the Classical era, polyphony, and contemporary music. The broadcasts ought to present, first and foremost, Polish music, primarily by F. Chopin and S. Moniuszko.' Cf. B. Rutkowski, 'Muzyczne audycje w szkole' ['Listening to Music at Schools'], *Śpiew w szkole*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1934/1935, pp. 20–24.

15 Considerable role in promoting classical music in provincial towns and villages was played by ORMUZ (an organisation founded by TWMP Polish Music Publishing Society). Cf. M. Kosińska, 'Tadeusz Ochlewski', Culture.pl, 2007, https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/tadeusz-ochlewski (accessed: 13 September 2022).

> a gentleman talked about music and how humans learned to sing. Then the orchestra played several dances. After the interval, there were Polish folksongs, and an academic choir sang Polish Christmas carols. A gentleman with a violin was applauded as he entered. He played so beautifully that everyone had tears in their eyes.[16]

Dorka from Warsaw proudly reported:

> At the Philharmonic we also listened to folksongs performed by the orchestra, and here the matinee ended. Professor Mayzner announced which school was to leave the hall first, to avoid jams on the way out. For those schools that still stayed in the concert hall, the professor played the piano. And he was just about to play the song 'Close by the Lake', which our school knows, so he told us to sing. We did, and the other schools applauded us. Then Mr Mayzner said, 'now let that school leave the hall that sang so nicely'. And he pointed at us. We felt proud. I came back home warmed up with the song, with my head full of impressions.[17]

One of the instruments for developing the love of music in schoolchildren was the radio and its educational programme, with a varied offer. There were weekly singing lessons (addressed alternately to older and younger kids) and music broadcasts (once a month for two-year senior colleges, once for four-year junior high schools, and on the remaining Thursdays – for primary schools). The programme featured Polish folk and artistic music.[18] Folk music became a regular part of the radio programme in the early 1930s – usually, however, in versions orchestrated and arranged by well-known composers, and performed by professional musicians. 'Raw' authentic peasant performances only began to appear on the air directly before World War II.[19] At school and in the media, schoolchildren thus came in contact with folklore usually only its artistically arranged, frequently stylised form.

Both the radio and the gramophone had the potential to play roles that were not merely ideological or purely educational (i.e. serving as an introduction to the world of music). In the press, children frequently recall school parties at which music was played back from records, or even spontaneous dance events held during school breaks to music coming from the gramophone or the radio. This was particularly common where the school had a day-care room or a playroom. Though the radio remained a luxury until the end of the 1930s and was not available in many of the relatively poorer schools as well as some private homes, children welcomed the new medium with enthusiasm. 'Now we have a five-valve radio set at school, a gift from the town hall, and we listen to concerts every week,' wrote enthusiastically Lejb, the only Jewish pupil in a Polish school where a radio set appeared as early as in 1928, just two years after the Warsaw broadcasting station presented its first broadcasts.[20] As reports sent in to *Mały Przegląd* demonstrate, the new medium greatly appealed to the young generation, and music broadcasts on the radio generated many emotions. Among suggestions concerning the radio programme, Lusia from Częstochowa asked for 'more folk and art music' on the radio.[21] Some of the weekly's correspondents noted the relatively scanty presence of Jewish folk music on the air.[22] A boy shared his observations after listening to the radio during the shared holiday time of Christmas and Hanukkah:

> While sitting by the radio set and listening to Polish Radio broadcasts presenting Christmas carols and Nativity scenes, I thought how pleasant it must be for Christian radio fans to listen to [their] religious festival songs. The songs of Hanukkah candles are also sung to the same shared tunes, but everyone only sings them for themselves and their family, while the community of these songs is little known to the general population. If these songs were broadcast on the radio during the candle lighting ceremony, it would be a pleasant experience to us Jews, and possibly an interesting one to the others.[23]

16 Efraim, 'Rozrywki: poranek w Filharmonii' ['Entertainment. A Matinee at the Philharmonic'], *Mały Przegląd*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2 January 1931, p. 2.

17 Dorka z Grzybowskiej, 'Co u nas słychać? W Filharmonii' ['How We Are Faring: At the Philharmonic'], *Mały Przegląd*, vol. 13, no. 22, 3 June 1938, p. 4.

18 M. Dzierzbicka, *Radio w szkole* [*The Radio at School*], Warszawa-Lublin-Wilno, Nasza Księgarnia, 1939, p. 10.

19 P. Dahlig, *Tradycje muzyczne a ich przemiany. Między kulturą ludową, popularną i elitarną Polski międzywojennej* [*Musical Traditions and Their Transformations. Between Folk, Popular, and Elite Culture in Poland between the World Wars*], Warszawa, Instytut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1998, pp. 502–503.

20 Lejb, 'Kronika szkolna. Dwa lata w chrześcijańskiej szkole wieczorowej' ['A School Chronicle. Two Years in a Christian Evening School'], *Mały Przegląd*, vol. 3, no. 23, 18 May 1928, p. 8.

21 Lusia z Częstochowy, 'Audycje dla młodzieży' ['Broadcasts for Teenagers'], *Mały Przegląd*, vol. 8, no. 43, 28 October 1933, p. 5.

22 Jewish folk music was sometimes presented on the radio in artistic solo or choral arrangements, such as those for the then extremely popular Mosze Szneur Choir. Cf. M. Fuks, *Mój wiek XX. Szkice do memuarów* [*My Twentieth Century. Sketches for a Memoir*], Poznań, Sorus, 2009, p. 330.

23 Israel, 'Chanuka na prowincji. Konin' ['Hanukkah in a Provincial Town: Konin'], *Mały Przegląd*, vol. 3, no. 54, 14 December 1928, p. 2. During Jewish religious festivals, concerts of synagogue music, featuring famous cantors and the choir of the Great Synagogue in Tłomackie Street, Warsaw, were

As we can see, some children noticed the insufficient representation of Jewish cultural symbols in their phonosphere; this could in many cases aggravate their inferiority complex. The author of the above-quoted account, however, demonstrates a positive attitude to the Jewish repertoire and considers it worthy of attracting the interest of other national groups.

Nevertheless, a large proportion of Jewish youth attending publicly owned schools and thus regularly coming in contact with Polish folklore adapted, at least in part, both the symbolic and the practical dimensions of the Polish national discourse. The press accounts show that many Jewish children knew Polish dances and songs very well and liked them. They spontaneously drew on them at play or during trips and approached them as a natural element of their own soundscapes. Child correspondents writing for *Mały Przegląd* frequently recalled state celebrations and their artistic component. As their words demonstrate, they were moved and inspired both by the events themselves and by the accompanying songs and dances:

> We very solemnly celebrated the tenth anniversary of Poland regaining independence at our school. The building was beautifully decorated. We sang various folksongs, recited poems, and our teachers talked about Poland. Then we walked in pairs to the synagogue. Red-and-white bows were distributed in front of the school. The synagogue was full of people.[24]

Artistically arranged folksongs and dances also accompanied school celebrations marking such events as Marshal Józef Piłsudski's and Polish President Ignacy Mościcki's name days. It was to the latter that a school event was dedicated with dances prepared by the children featuring in the programme: 'We celebrated Mr President's name day at our day-care room. We recited poems and sang songs. At the end we danced a cracovienne.'[25] Other, just as frequently mentioned dances included the oberek, the mazur, the polka, and the kuyaviak. Children learned to dance all of them at Polish publicly owned schools. From their accounts we learn that they were very fond of them and danced them spontaneously during private parties and games side by side with the then extremely popular ballroom dances.

Some of the Jewish students exhibited a more in-depth interest in the broadly conceived Polish folklore. One of them, Józef of Nowogródek (now Navahrudak), wrote an article on the Polish folk's death-related beliefs for *Mały Przegląd*, in which he quoted, among others, excerpts from a soldiers' song in one of its many folk variants. Though he may have come in contact with this song at school, the interesting selection of ethnographic material seems to suggest that he read some expert paper or book on this subject, and the press article may originally have been written as a school assignment.[26] Other Jewish children eagerly and spontaneously sang Polish folksongs, or even creatively transformed them, adapting the folk lyrics to everyday school realities. Lusia from Częstochowa created a humorous remake of the popular song 'Tam na błoniu' ['In Yon Pasture'], which she shared with the readers of *Mały Przegląd*. Here are the opening lines:

> In yon pasture amid the nettles / stands a rather rickety schoolboy
> While a lass as sweet as an apple / is carrying a pile of books.
> 'Stop, wait, my little one, / you are surely playing truant.'
> 'Poor me, the school's so stringent / so I've bunked off school today [...].[27]

Excellent knowledge of Polish songs, even those from faraway regions, was also common among the Zionist youth, who had their own Hebrew-language repertoire, elevated to the status of 'new Jewish folksongs' and introduced as an element of cultural ideology in Zionist organisations. These young people most likely became acquainted with Polish folk music at publicly owned Polish schools as well as on the radio:

> Noise and clatter can be heard from the room next door. The broad-shouldered carpenter Lumek, owner of a beautiful bass voice, and the dainty shoemaker Różka, a 'sopranist', two great lovers of Polish folklore, sing vigorously to the beat of the plane and the hammer: 'Hey, for I am a highlander fine…'[28]

It should be stressed, though, that for the Zionist youth societies the Polish repertoire, if performed at all, played a markedly secondary and auxiliary role in relation to Hebrew songs, which were of primary ideological importance. There are no mentions of Polish music to be

sometimes broadcast on Polish Radio. Cf. Fuks, *Mój wiek XX…*, p. 330.

24 Zosia, 'Prowincja: Otwock' ['From the Provinces: Otwock'], *Mały Przegląd*, vol. 4, no. 48, 8 November 1929, p. 4.

25 Sala i Henia, 'Co u nas słychać. Uroczystości imienin Pana Prezydenta' ['How We Are Faring: Mr President's Name Day Celebrations'], *Mały Przegląd*, vol. 14, no. 8, 24 February 1939, p. 4.

26 Józef z Nowogródka, 'Śmierć w wierzeniach ludu polskiego' ['Death in Polish Folk Beliefs'], *Mały Przegląd*, vol. 13, no. 39, 30 September 1938, p. 3.

27 Lusia z Częstochowy, '"Tam na błoniu" w mojej przeróbce' ['My Remake of "In Yon Pasture"'], *Mały Przegląd*, vol. 8, no. 38, 20 September 1933, p. 5.

28 J. Recher, 'Fragmenty' ['Fragments'], *Zew Młodych*, vol. 4, no. 1, January 1937, p. 9.

found in official documents, and only a few – in articles written by young people for the periodicals run by those organisations. These scanty mentions, as well as the surviving handwritten songbooks, demonstrate, however, that Polish folk and popular songs were well known also among the Zionist youth, and served them mostly as entertainment or an element of integration (especially in circles where Hebraization was not sufficiently advanced yet).

Even, however, the best assimilated individuals sometimes found it hard to identify with Polish culture. What usually stood in their way were the hostile attitudes of their Polish peers, reflected for instance in being excluded from participation in school spectacles on the grounds of nationality, as one reader reported in *Mały Przegląd*:

> Why is it that I haven't been able to take part in any spectacles so far? So many of my schoolmates have appeared in different plays, so why not me, even on a single occasion? Those schoolmates of mine did not wish it, so I had to stand aside and just watch. What an irony! And all this because I'm a Jew. At our school, Jews do not appear in spectacles.[29]

There are more examples of social exclusion due to nationality. Jewish children were sometimes even refused participation in school parties:

> At our school jewish [sic!] girls learn with Christian kids. The school once held a party, but jewish [sic!] girls were not invited. You can imagine the envy it aroused in our hearts. We attend the same school, sit at the same desks, and yet we can't attend a school party.[30]

Even where Jewish children were invited to such events, they could meet with an ostracism in such contexts. 'At Sara's school ball there were two snack bars: one for the Jews, one for Christians. Teachers did not buy anything at the Jewish one, nor did they ask jewish [sic!] girls to dance,' wrote a pupil from Krasnystaw[31]. No wonder that for the Jewish children school events involving singing or dancing were frequently connected with the traumatic experience of rejection or a symbolic exclusion from participation in Polish culture, whose models and symbols they had already managed thoroughly to internalise.

Naturally, this was not the only possible scenario of relations at publicly owned schools. Many of the accounts written by children for *Mały Przegląd* describe a more or less harmonious collaboration of both national groups during school events, including Polish national festivals that involved a vast array of attributes derived from the symbolic capital of the Polish state in the process of moulding its young statehood. Due to certain circumstances, however, children were particularly susceptible to outbursts of aversion leading to hostility and rejection, even though such behaviour was not quite conscious and premeditated but resulted 'only' from deep-rooted negative stereotypes. One such a sensitive moment was Christmastide, when schools staged Nativity plays and collective singing of carols. A girl thus described an unpleasant incident that took place at her school:

> A Nativity play was being prepared at our school. Roles were assigned to Catholic kids who, oblivious of our comradeship, started quoting some insulting lines. At one moment, as soon as we opened the door, they greeted us with this hymn: 'Hey, Jewish tribe, you wicked tribe, teaming like a hornets' nest, filled with venom and malice; you should be skinned with no mercy.' I shivered. I had no idea what this was about. I had to turn my head away to hide my blushed cheeks. My spirit suffered greatly. I knew I should not be angry with anyone because my classmates only showed their ignorance in this case. We conferred about it and decided to complain to the class tutor. He did scold them, but what can it help? Now the situation has calmed down, but the very memory of that sad incident stands in our way and constitutes a gap that prevents us from harmonious coexistence.[32]

This example shows how the figure of the 'alien' rooted in traditional folklore and frequently identified with the Jew became the subject of a vulgar 'joke', testifying, if not to hostility, then at least to the fact that the Nativity play team perceptibly alienated themselves from their Jewish classmates.

At the same time, the children frequently felt that their own folk culture was neglected and out of favour. Only present in a limited circle, it was frequently rejected not only by the Polish neighbours, but by the Jews themselves. In *Mały Przegląd*, a girl described a school soiree dedicated to the folk culture of different regions of Poland, at which dance medleys were presented along with staged versions of popular folksongs and short scenes based on legends, accompanied by the school choir. She ended her detailed account with a brief but telling remark: 'It's a pity that, in

29 Pierrot, 'Marzenia. O czem ja marzę' ['Dreams: What I Dream Of'], *Mały Przegląd*, vol. 4, no. 6, 8 February 1929, pp. 1–2.

30 Hela, 'Kronika szkolna. W miasteczku' ['School Chronicle. In a Small Town'], *Mały Przegląd*, vol. 3. no. 23, 18 May 1928, p. 8.

31 'Z kraju. Krasnystaw' ['Domestic News. Krasnystaw'], *Mały Przegląd*, vol. 7, no. 15, 8 April 1932, p. 4.

32 Hania, 'W polskiej szkole. Smutne zajście' ['At a Polish School; A Sad Incident'], *Mały Przegląd*, vol. 5, no. 44, 7 November 1930, p. 2.

a Jewish school, not a single Jewish song was performed'. At the same time, she evidently enjoyed the event well enough to undertake a detailed description, even though she was painfully aware of the absence of her own culture from the Jewish school, that is, from the very space that should represent such culture.[33]

This does not mean that Jewish folklore was invariably neglected. While visiting Warsaw Philharmonic with their class, children sometimes had the opportunity to listen to Jewish folksongs:

> Afterwards [Mr Małkowski[34]] announced that a folksong would be performed, and the lady played a melody that we know on the piano: a Jewish song about how a boy and a girl fall out with each other but wish to make up with the other.[35]

At the same concert, the Jewish child dancer Musia Dajches[36] performed a highly stylised Hasidic dance, but the host presenting the programme said nothing specific about this number: 'Mr Małkowski was reluctant to talk about this dance. He only said it was a national piece. This was probably because he is Christian.'[37]

Children seem to have sensed the Polish society's lack of interest in, or even depreciation of Jewish music. Their culture thus only belonged to the private world of the family and the Jewish community, whereas the universally present Polish folklore was viewed as a tool of integration with the Polish society and a chance to improve their social status, to which some of those children certainly aspired. In this situation, they adopted an attitude of resignation, which led to a crisis described in the 1930s by researcher Max Weinreich.[38] The crisis consisted in individuals becoming aware that they belonged to a discriminated group, and in the realisation of the social consequences of such a status. Contact with Polish folk music, employed at publicly owned schools in the service of building national identity – a music that Jewish children had already come to love and see as their own – proved to be, in many cases, the source of a painful internal conflict, as they became aware of their own separate identity and the need to find their own place in the dynamically changing world. On the other hand, though, those melodies accompanied them later in their lives as vivid memories of childhood, and co-formed their identities as a local component, an emotionally charged 'musical homeland' to which they would fondly return after many years.

33 Madzia, 'Wieczór pieśni ludowych w gimnazjum' ['A Folksong Evening at the Junior High'], *Mały Przegląd*, vol. 4, no. 20, 17 May 1929, p. 9.

34 Most likely the theatre and film actor Henryk Małkowski (1881–1959), who acted here as an MC.

35 B.a., 'Występ Musi' ['A Performance by Musia'], *Mały Przegląd*, vol. 16, no. 4, 19 April 1929, p. 3. The song in question was possibly 'Bistu mit mir brojges?' [Yiddish for 'Are You Cross with Me'], popular in that period. Cf. M. Kipnis, *80 Folks-lider. Fun Zimrah Zeligfelds un M. Kipnis kontsert-repertuar*, Warszawa, A. Gitlin, 1930, p. 15.

36 Musia Dajches (1921–1980), born Miriam Dajches – an actress, dancer, and poet, one of the 'child prodigies' of the Polish stage during the interwar period. She also appeared in the 1928 film *Przeznaczenie* [*Destiny*] (dir. Janusz Star). She was extremely popular among the readers of *Mały Przegląd*, who dedicated many enthusiastic accounts and memories to her performances. An Auschwitz-Birkenau prisoner during World War II and victim of Dr Josef Mengele's pseudo-medical experiments, she settled in Israel after the war, writing poems in Yiddish.

37 B.a., 'Występ Musi', p. 3.

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