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The article discusses the construction of racialized visual discourses concerning Jews as depicted in caricatures published in interwar satirical magazines. Its content reflected ethnic and cultural tensions in the multinational state that Poland was at the time. In cartoon humour, this was manifested, among other things, in the constitution of patterns of depicting national minorities by means of specific visual codes. The author, drawing on H. Pollin-Galay's ecology of witnessing, proposes an analysis of caricatures through the lens of an ecology of representation. This perspective can be delineated, in practical terms, into three categories: anti-Semitic, liberal-assimilated, and Yiddish. The article describes the characteristic codes of visual racialized discourse, including those that were captured by ideologically disparate groups and functioned in multiple ecologies. Visual scripts of blackness play an important role among them. In addition, patterns of autostereotyping and racialisation within and at the border of the Jewish milieu are discussed. A gender perspective is taken into account, with which the disproportion in the representation of Jewish women and men is indicated. The methodology used includes quantitative analysis using the auxiliary program MAXQDA and visual discourse analysis. The source material consists of selected annuals of interwar satirical magazines in Polish and Yiddish: *Cyrulik Warszawski*, *Szpilki*, *Der Blofer*, *Der Mehabel* and *Szabeskurjer*.

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Imaginarities of Racialization: Ecologies of Representing Jews in the Interwar Caricature Art

A caricature¹ is a specific form of visual culture where images enter a symbiosis with words and often provide the words with key meanings. Adam Gopnik defines this type of satire as part of the underbelly culture,² which uses a mundane, popular medium to convey social critique. Ernst Gombrich proposes a different approach and emphasizes the role of caricature in constructing a collective identity through the exclusion of the Other.³ Meanwhile, Martha Banta notes caricature's power in the social sphere, as caricature holds the tendency to differentiate between us and them.⁴ Scholars have already conducted many studies on the visual representation of race, often considering the regional specificities and the media of visual humor.⁵ This analysis is also part of this trend, and my sources will include Polish and Yiddish satirical magazines of the interwar period.

At the time, national minorities constituted almost one-third of Polish population, with the Jewish minority as one of the biggest groups.⁶ The community was internally diverse: linguistically, politically, and culturally. However, the antisemitic discourse often presented it as homogenous. Conflicts, tensions, and the nationalistic and ethnic violence directed at the Jewish minority remained a permanent element of the then reality. These sentiments were visible in the press, including humoristic magazines.

Thus, visual forms of satirical representations became the environment for reproduction and constitution of racializing codes—easily distinguishable elements which, individually or jointly, denoted the ethnicity of the represented character. The creation of caricatures links to the characteristics of the medium of satirical drawing. The latter builds on simplification,

condensation of meanings, and deformation.⁷ Racial codes function as elements of figure identification, but the object of the ridicule is sometimes the notion of “race” itself.⁸

I suggest a perspective where we analyze visual codes within their ecologies. I refer to the terminology of Hanna Pollin-Galay, who defines ecology as a disarranged yet unusually influential web of sensibilities.⁹ Instead of the dependencies between organisms and their environment, Pollin-Galay analyzes ecologies of witnessing, which emerge from the effects of ideologies, bodily practices, poetic tendencies, material space, and other factors that model our recollection and narration.¹⁰ Pollin-Galay draws on Charles Taylor’s concept of the social imaginary, which she expands with spatial, auditory, and material dimensions. In this approach, ecology assumes a more material, less imaginary form and is, therefore, better rooted in space and time. This ecology does not focus exclusively on the ways of textual and visual representations; it also considers the broad context of the medium’s physical creation. Thus, this ecology differs from imagological analysis, which studies textual representations of nations and is mainly present in literary studies.¹¹

Following this line of thought, I wish to analyze the press’s satirical illustrations as elements of different ecologies of representation. I refer to complex networks of visual codes’ and their designates’ interdependencies; their meanings and interpretations result from the ideological and worldview nature of the environment from which they emerge. These elements always function in relation; when moved from one ecology to another, they may become neutral or objectifying. Simultaneously, such ecologies have strong roots in specific realities—we can determine the names of the magazines, the people who create them, the places of issue, the print runs, and the number of caricatures. The material aspect of satirical drawings affects their perception. Other important factors

that shape the reception include the placement, size, and range of distribution.

Created as part of various ecologies, visual representations of national minorities fit the existing or emerging frameworks of stereotypes about these groups. The visual representations constitute a particular testimony to the perception of marginalized communities. Although the irreverent perception of the time's satirists filters the image (and makes the press illustrations examples of the period's humor), the racializing codes of the drawings exceed the frameworks of the interwar period and become fixed media for orientalizing narration.

We can initially divide the ecologies of representation into antisemitic, liberal–assimilated, and Yiddish—keeping in mind that the categories may overlap and that the division is a large simplification. The division does not reflect the diversity of the entire press market at the time—for example, the Orthodox Jewish community, as there were no Orthodox satirical media. However, I believe that such a division serves comparative purposes, as it helps create a general map of satirical environments, their media and ideology, and allows one to grasp how the images functioned within these environments. Moreover, this division establishes the framework of thinking about this historical period and facilitates the understanding of the dynamics of socio-political tensions. I will present the division in an analysis of entire annuals of representative magazines from a similar period.¹²

Antisemitic Ecology

Antisemitic racial codes were common in right-wing and nationalistically oriented satirical magazines. However, for this article, I will limit my analysis to the periodical that implemented the racial codes most explicitly. *Szabeskurier*, with Michał Kulik as the editor-in-chief, functioned as an organ of the extreme-right Stowarzyszenie "Rozwój" ("Growth" Association).¹³ *Szabeskurier*

was a strongly antisemitic satirical magazine. The title and subtitles alone expressed this antisemitic orientation: "Zbudź się i walcz!" (Wake up and Fight!), "Front Aryjski" (The Aryan Front), "Najstarszy ilustrowany tygodnik walczący z zalewem żydowskim" (The Oldest Illustrated Weekly Fighting the Jewish Influx).¹⁴ We could say that *Szabeskurier* served as the Polish equivalent of the German *Der Stürmer*, with which it shared the format and ideology. Active opposition against the Jewish minority on the economic, cultural, and political levels formed the principal agenda of the magazine's content. Visual messages played an important role—the weekly printed caricatures and photographs that stigmatized local Jews and Poles. *Szabeskurier* deemed the latter traitors for reasons such as maintaining trade relations with Jewish people.

Although the circulation of *Szabeskurier* was relatively low (approximately 5,000 copies),¹⁵ the collective print run of antisemitic magazines in 1938 amounted to twenty times that.¹⁶ The power of antisemitic ecology press varied depending on the location, and its epicenter became the Western parts of the Second Polish Republic—the former Prussian Partition territory, where the Jewish community was least numerous.¹⁷ The territory also served as the operation area for the German propaganda ministry, which controlled twenty-five German magazines issued there.¹⁸ Sometimes, Polish magazines adopted the Nazi propaganda directly, as we can see on the example of *Der Stürmer* caricatures reprinted in *Szabeskurier*. Philipp Rupprecht's viciously antisemitic drawings,



Fig. 1 JK (Unknown Author), *Those who squeeze the last juices*, in "Szabeskurier," 1935, no. 5, p. 1. National Library in Warsaw.

Der Stürmer's trademark,¹⁹ constituted approximately 15% of the caricatures in *Szabeskurier* in 1935.²⁰

Using the example of this periodical, we can see how the geographical, personal, ideological, and institutional conditions create an ecology which produces a visual discourse. The ecology's influence had measurable effects. Tomasz Kawski mentions the Krajna region events that Michał Kulik described:

In 1933 Michał Kulik visited Więcbork. A direct consequence of the visit were anti-Jewish events that took place in the town in July and September of 1933. People painted over windows and advertisements in Jewish stores. Slogans "Beat the Jews" appeared on homes, banners, and pavements. The boycott of Jewish stores in other towns in the region²¹ intensified.

Szabeskurier was a medium of political agitation, and the editor-in-chief actively implemented its slogans. The aspect of economic rivalry constituted the basic topic of satirical drawings in the magazine. The drawings present Jews as oppressors, frauds, and monopolists who take over the Polish market. The diversification of the characters' images appears as an intentional practice. Small Jewish merchants, wealthy bankers, or assimilated bourgeoisie—in the representations, all these groups share the same motifs and pose a common threat to the Polish economy. On an illustration from February 1935 (Figure 1), two Jews operate a press that symbolically presses Polish trade, industry, and finance. In the metaphor of Jewish exploitation, the figures represent different social strata. One figure is a bearded Jew in a kapote, a flat cap, and an exposed tallit which symbolizes religiosity. His companion, a Jewish banker, wears a suit and glasses and has no facial hair or headwear. The common elements of their appearance are big noses and a money satchet, which stands for greed in this context.

In this ecology, Jews sometimes appear as animals and monsters known from Nazi iconography. The creatures include a lion, a spider, a raven, or the Hydra, which threaten or attack Poles and Polish towns. This symbolism connotes an image of invasion, reinforced in symbolic attributes, such as a spider's web trapping a young woman or black clouds gathering above the city hall, around which birds with stereotypically Jewish faces circle.

The military discourse of battle functions in both the linguistic ("fight," "attention," "act") and visual spheres. The symbolic Jewish figure's opponent is often a Polish soldier, as in Figure 2. In this case, the soldier wearing a uniform and a peaked cap wields a sword. He is ready to attack the Hydra, whose one head presents elements coded as "typically Jewish" in this ecology: a yarmulka, sidelocks, beard, and an unproportionally large nose. The remaining heads constitute symbols of masonry, Judaism, and communism, which refers to popular in Poland anti-Jewish conspiracy theories, such as the myth of *żydokomuna* (Jewish communism) in which Jews are inherently connected to communism. The monster has a significantly bigger size than the soldier, and an angry expression on its face emphasizes the monster's hostility. The drawing is in black and white, but the shading creates a contrast between the dark figure of the Hydra, which symbolizes the Jew, and the light figure of the Polish soldier. The illustration draws from the metaphorical opposition between the light/good and the dark/evil.



Fig. 2 Unknown Author, satirical drawing, in „Szabeskurjer”, 1935, no. 13, p. 1. National Library in Warsaw.

The representations of Jews' victims reinforce the message of the defensive war against Jewish people. The characters depicted include e.g. the figures of a Polish young woman and male and female peasants portrayed as innocent, unaware victims of fraud.

The motif of *zazydzenie*—a pejorative term that, in nationalist discourse, referred to Jewish immigration and settlement from outside (Poland from abroad and towns from other regions)—further reinforces the narrative. One of the tropes that remain within this semantic field is the metaphor of a wave or a flood,²² which connotes a natural disaster and introduces a dehumanizing aspect. On a visual level, the objectifying operation of fragmentation underpins the process of dehumanization—the sea wave incorporates human faces depicted with antisemitic stereotypical features: a large, hooked nose, prominent lips, sidelocks, and a beard (Figure 3).

The stigmatizing hooked-nose stereotype dates back to the Middle Ages, when physical deformations—particularly of the nose—were used to characterize immoral figures,²³ though they initially carried no specific ethnic connotations.²⁴ However, this trope—which eventually became strictly antisemitic—constituted, for ages, an element of the scheme that racialized Jews.²⁴ The trope corresponded to the visual code of blackness, which attributed dark skin to Jews. This motif had medieval origins as well.²⁵ The evil was flawed, demonic, and black. Johann Kaspar Lavater described the connotation between Jews and dark skin in the eighteenth century. Lavater popularized the pseudoscience of physiognomy, which linked individual personality traits to facial features.²⁶

Among distinctive Jewish features, Lavater listed short, curly hair and brown skin. The concept explaining the alleged



Fig. 3 Jotko (Unknown Author), Great wave?..., in „Szabeskurjer”, 1935, no. 24, p. 1. National Library in Warsaw.

connection between Jews and black Africans as a result of race-mixing was pushed in Nazi propaganda.²⁷ As a supposed effect, Jews also had big eyes, curly hair, and big lips.²⁸ The combination of the above-listed physiognomic features belongs to the canon of Jewish antisemitic representations and is present in most *Szabeskurier* illustrations.

Stylistically, the *Szabeskurier* caricatures frequently drew from the realist convention, with shading and attention to detail. More often than in other ecologies, the drawings came with extensive commentary and illustrated the text. The magazine also printed collages that combined drawings and photographs.

The construction of Jews as enemies occurred on multiple levels. Caricature captions often employed pejorative terms and racial slurs, such as *Mosiek* (a derogatory term for a Jew, derived from the diminutive form of the name Moses), *parch* (meaning scab or mange, associated with skin diseases), and *żydłak* (an augmentative form of *Żyd*, meaning Jew). Sometimes, deictic expressions address Jewish figures, for example: "Gdzie dwóch naszych się kłóci, tam 'nasz' robi interes"²⁹ (Where two of ours fight, the 'our' profits). At the same time, on the visual level, Jews' denotation consists in the accumulation of symbols that refer to different clichés and stereotypes. These elements constitute the phantasm of the Jewish Stranger—the invader from the outside but also the schemer hiding in the community; an ally of the Bolsheviks and simultaneously the anchor of capitalism. In this approach, the Jew poses an inherent threat. Using the condensation of often opposing but always negative meanings, the thus constructed figure has the propagandistic impact and consolidates recipients against a common enemy.³⁰

As Grzegorz Krzywiec writes about theoretical–analytical frameworks that enable the creation of mobilizing political projects:

Each framework must offer a utopian vision as well as its dystopian opposite. Respectively: “the blissful realm of fantasy” and “the expected catastrophe, which will happen if the obstacle remains invincible—the terrifying realm of fantasy.” This “obstacle” (or obstacles) constitutes an element that prevents the realization of the expected state of affairs. In xenophobic discourses, this element is usually present in the form of the “stranger” or minorities.³¹

In the *Szabeskurier* caricatures, the Jew becomes the obstacle on the road to a homoethnic, nationalistic utopia. The strongest propagation of this phantasm occurred in places where the uninational idea was the most realistic. In the region Greater Poland (Wielkopolska), Jews constituted less than 1% of the population and proved to be better assimilated than anywhere else in the country.³²

Liberal–Assimilated Ecology

The Polish-language liberal and left-wing press functioned in an environment to which I will refer as a liberal–assimilated ecology. The satirical weeklies from that environment include *Cyrulik Warszawski*³³ and *Szpilki*³⁴ – the former being a centrist magazine, and the latter the leading anti-fascist satirical journal of the interwar period.³⁵ Poets and writers, also of Jewish origin, co-created these magazines. Jewish illustrators, for example Jakub Bickels and Mendel Reif, worked for the weeklies as well. Therefore, the above magazines became a place where the circles of the Polish intelligentsia and the assimilated Polish–Jewish intelligentsia intertwined. *Cyrulik Warszawski* was founded following the May 1926 coup d'état in Poland, which established the authoritarian rule of Marshal Józef Piłsudski. The publication aligned itself with the policies of the new right-wing

authorities..³⁶ However, in the 1930s, the magazine's ideological agenda clearly drifted away from the government politics.³⁷ When *Cyrulik* shut down, *Szpilki* assembled some of its former authors and published content that openly criticized the government and its increasingly nationalistic inclinations in the late 1930s. *Szpilki* had the reputation of a socialist magazine associated with the Polish Socialist Party³⁸ and the only left-wing satirical periodical of the time.³⁹ The editorial staff of both magazines also had personal relations.⁴⁰ The fact that many staff members belonged to Warsaw's intellectual and artistic elites affected the nature of the published content. The weeklies printed literary texts and drawings that often proved artistically superior to those published in the rival periodicals, for instance, the works of Maja Berezowska, who experimented with the Art Deco style, or the metaphoric realist drawings by Bronisław Linke.⁴¹

While the print run of *Cyrulik* amounted to 25,000 copies,⁴² *Szpilki* rarely exceeded 10,000 copies.⁴³ Consequently, the magazines' content reached a relatively small group of big-city audiences. The distribution was even more difficult because of censorship issues and a lack of cooperation from *Ruch*, which had a monopoly on press distribution at the time.⁴⁴

The magazines' regular collaborators—Julian Tuwim, Antoni Słonimski, and Marian Hemar—stood at the forefront of satire creators, and Jewish humor constituted an important element of their work.⁴⁵ Therefore, it seems natural that visual Jewish humor, *szmonces* (from Yiddish *shmontses*, meaning idle talk or nonsense—comedy rooted in parodying speech patterns and stereotypical Jewish characteristics, often originating from cabaret traditions⁴⁶) developed in these periodicals. The thematic scope of the drawings was broad. The satire used stereotypes relating to Jews, as well as some universal tropes, such as family conflict, intimate relations, and financial problems.⁴⁷

It is also important to note the class dimension of *szmonces*.

The basis of the linguistic layer here was to emulate the speech of Jewish orthodox circles and people from lower social classes, and the mocked characters were often merchants and shopkeepers.

The satire also aimed at assimilated Jews. Interestingly, the latter comprised a large part of readers. The humor was largely created by the Polish-speaking Jewish elite, intended for those who aspired to join this group.

In this ecology, *szmonces* visual satire utilized rather uniform racial scripts. The Jewish figures' distinguishing features included a beard and headwear (a flat cap or a hat). However, this was not the rule—*szmonces* illustrations presented neutral images as well. Drawings often illustrated a joke in the form of a dialogue. Both periodicals had special columns exclusively for verbal humor.

In this context, Jerzy Zaruba's series of caricatures which show interactions between the figures of Żółtko and Eierweiss serves as an exceptional example. The names themselves already have satirical overtones, with Żółtko (from the Polish word for yolk) and Eierweiss (a surname connoting German name for egg white). The drawings appeared in *Cyrulik* between 1932 and 1934 (Figure 4). On the visual level, the comic potential of these two Jewish characters stems from strong contrasts. Żółtko is tall and thin, with no facial hair. Meanwhile, the short and fat Eierweiss has a beard. The characters' clothing lacks ethnic coding. There is no strict rule as to how the characters dress; usually, Eierweiss wears a coat, while Żółtko—trousers and a shirt. However, both characters

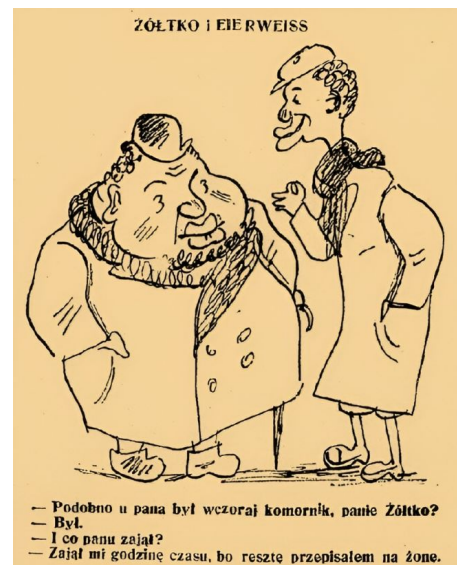


Fig. 4 Jerzy Zaruba, Żółtko and Eierweiss, in "Cyrulik Warszawski", 1934, no. 2, p. 2. Polona, National Library in Warsaw.

have excessively emphasized lips, which we can read in the context of exploiting the racist script of blackness. Zaruba's drawings also show the characteristic comic-book style, which includes bold lines and simplifications.

The line between *szmonces* and antisemitic satire is fluid. Both genres employ racializing codes, such as language mockery, stereotypical connotations, or ethnic slurs. Although the two types of satire use these elements with different intensities, the main difference that stemmed from the identity and environment of the jokes' creators was sometimes questioned, and some Jewish communities saw *szmonces* as antisemitic.⁵⁰ We can see the tension that could result from such a satire in the reaction to the article from an *Cyrulik Warszawski* issue. The article's author, Władysław Popławski, mocks the Yiddish language and Jewish speech in the style of ironic praise:

Their beautiful language goes: *Haste precedet a milech?* (Did you strain the milk?). The proud language does not fear to use the thick, Slavic core *preced* (from *przecedzić*) together with the beautiful, Germanic–Romanic suffix. The language does not fear to transform the German *hast du* into the simplified *haste*, because it is not about silly sounds, but the idea, the message ... Jews can do anything. They are talented people. If only they spoke a bit better... [...] Very dim people.⁵¹

The editor of the Yiddish periodical *Der Mekhabel*, Pinkhes Kats, reacted to the text and published a response.⁵² He deemed Popławski's article a "white-gloved" expression of antisemitism, where irony conceals racist clichés and contempt for Yiddish culture. Kats writes:

Let hooligans prosper with smiles on their faces, civilized manners, a monocle, and a curtsy. [...] Mister Wiktor Popławski jokes in the manner of *oy vey, tatele mamele*; such an *elegant*, such *jaśnie wielmożny* [these words were conveyed phonetically in Polish, using Yiddish alphabet–A.G.].

In the bold style of “Jewish jokes” from Polish cabarets, he⁵³ ironically comments on Jewish speech.

In the conclusion to his response, Kats notes that this ridiculed “dim people” produced Julian Tuwim, whose Polish language and style outshine “all the Popławskis and Cyruliks.” The whole statement abounds with resentment and shows distance from the variation of *szmonces* considered Polish and, consequently, foreign and hostile.

Another group of racially coded visual satire proved important for the liberal–assimilated ecology, namely satire that included Jewish figures but ridiculed antisemites, not Jews. Such jokes subversively intercepted the antisemitic visual scripts and gave the concepts an opposite direction. The stereotypical visual and thematic codes had a relational nature—they functioned as citations from antisemitic discourse. Sometimes, the citation was literal—a reprint from nationalistic magazines with an ironic commentary that changed the meaning of the illustration. We can interpret this group of jokes in the context of the tension release theory, which assumes that mirth results from a release of accumulated emotions.⁵⁴ This type of jokes responded to the threat of increasingly powerful nationalistic movements and the nationalistic ideology that led to limiting Jews’ rights and to physical attacks on Jewish people.

Both *Cyrulik* and *Szpilki* featured sections with names that suggested their function and interpretation. The names included: "Kolumna antysemiticka" (Antisemitic Column), "Kącik dla endeków" (National Democracy's Corner), or "Dodatek dla antysemitów" (Antisemites' Supplement). The titles mocked the nationalistic obsessions and played on antisemitic language and iconography. Zaruba's illustration (Figure 8) presents "Marzenie endeka" (A National Democrat's Dream)⁵⁵, a picket where Jews protest against themselves, with a banner saying: "Precz z nami" (Down with us). The people in the drawing all look alike—they wear kapotekapotes and have big lips and noses. Zaruba uses the most readable stereotypes from the antisemitic iconosphere to mock the actual users of the discourse. Some figures have beards or sidelocks, as well as hats. The bodies blend into one black mass, evoking the cliché of blackness applied to the poor Jewish population of Warsaw, not only in the antisemitic milieu but also among the liberal intelligentsia circles.⁵⁶ In this ecology, the representations of Jews had an ambivalent status. The environment within which they functioned opposed nationalism and antisemitism by definition. However, the environment's elitist nature sometimes led to the reproduction of stereotypical scripts.

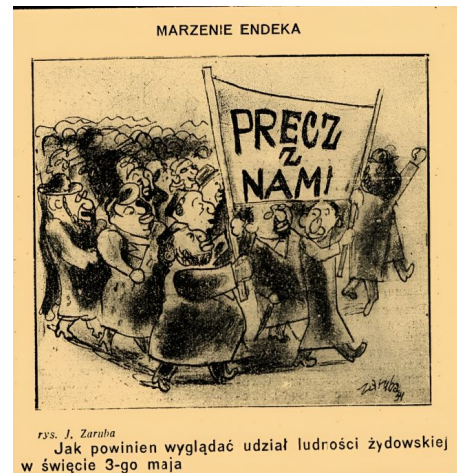


Fig. 5 Jerzy Zaruba, *Endek's dream*, in "Cyrulik Warszawski", 1934, no. 19, p. 5. Polona, National Library in Warsaw.

Yiddish Ecology

In this comparison, two satirical weeklies represent the Yiddish ecology: *Der Blofer* (Bluffer) and *Der Mekhabel* (Devil).⁵⁷ Pinkhes Kats, one of the leading Jewish satirists, initially connected to the humor section of the Zionist journal *Haynt*, served as the editor-in-chief of both periodicals.⁵⁸ By design, *Der Blofer* wanted to avoid serious issues and focus on daily satire.⁵⁹ However, *Der Mekhabel* was somewhat more ambitious. The subtitle alone— Satirical Biweekly Devoted to Politics, Cooperatives, Literature, and Theater—suggested an expansion of the editorial board's interests. Both magazines printed drawings by the most prominent Jewish cartoonists, such as Shaye Faygenboym (who practically monopolized the domain) or Chaim Goldberg. Both magazines were located in Warsaw, but some authors sent their drawings from abroad. Leon Dawid Izrael, who emigrated to New York, exemplifies such a situation.⁶⁰ As its distinctive feature, the Yiddish ecology included many religious symbols that referred to the Jewish tradition, though it had a secular character.⁶¹ The dominant style was Faygenboym's simplified, bold lines. The periodical also featured many images in the realist convention and even Leon D. Izrael's drawings resembling woodcuts.

The manner of creation and diversity of Jewish representations in this context is well illustrated by the recurring schematic figures, such as the Jew symbolizing the entire minority, the wealthy landlord, the representative of orthodoxy, and the assimilated Jew. These types draw from the arsenal of stereotypical markers of Jewish identity while maintaining significant differences among themselves.

One can interpret the frequently recurring figure of the traditional Jew as a *pars pro toto* of the entire community. The figure constitutes a bearded man in a traditional outfit with a kapotekapote and a flat cap. We can see it in Figure 6, where the character takes the position of a victim. The author seems to suggest that in the face of the escalated antisemitic politics in the mid-1930s, the minority was on its own. On the visual level, the drawing uses codes that refer to the stereotypical figure of the Jew. It thus functions as a type of self-stereotyping but does not mock the Jewish identity. In this context, the stereotypes serve identification and resemble the metonymies of countries, such as the German Michel, French Marianne, or English John Bull. Unlike the other mentioned figures, the figure of the Jew in a kapotekapote does not personify a country, nor does it have a codified version. However, the figure frequently symbolizes the entire community—especially if the caricature’s subject is the situation of Jews as a minority or in comparison to the figures of Polish antisemites. We can interpret such an opposition as the interception of certain elements from the image of a *chataciarz* (pejoratively, a kapote-wearer) present in antisemitic discourse. Simultaneously, this interception takes the antisemitic meanings away from the figure. An analysis of the illustrated rebuses also confirms this interpretation: the figure of a bearded man in a kapotekapote and a flat cap signifies *der Yud* (a Jew),⁶² while



אם אנוי קלאפט זיך די וועלט על חטא...

Fig. 6 Unknown Author, *Ot azoy klapt zikh di velt al khet...*, in "Der Mekhabel", 1935, no. 15, p. 2. The National Library of Israel. (Translation: *And this is how the world beats its chest [for sins]*. This is a paraphrase of a Jewish prayer recited on Yom Kippur. The joke is that the world does not beat its chest.)

a similar figure, only with a shtreimel⁶³ on his head, represents Rebe (a rabbi).⁶⁴

Nevertheless, when the satire refers to Jewish politics, the racial scripts activate in a different form and introduce differentiation between the figures, depending on their ideological identification. For example, racialization mechanisms appeared in reference to the Jewish Orthodoxy of the Agudat party. The images of party members also presented men in kapotekapotes, but with additional religious elements, showcasing tallits, tzitzit (fringes attached to tallits), and the shtreimel, a fur hat worn by Hasidic Jews (Figure 7).⁶⁵ Furthermore in caricatures, one can also encounter portrayals of Orthodox Jews using one of the most popular features known from antisemitic iconography – a large nose – as well as through codes referencing dirtiness. The codes correspond with some liberal elites’ prejudices that concern the “backwardness” of the Orthodox community,⁶⁶ as well as the popular antisemitic stereotypes that connect the concept of the allegedly “darker Jewish race” with a lack of hygiene.⁶⁷



Fig. 7. Unknown Author, *Vi azoy volt oysgezehn ven di Agude volt ferkhapt di makht?*, in „Der Blofer”, 1928, no. 11, p. 5, Library of the Warsaw University. (Translation: *What would it look like if Aguda took power? The drawing depicts Aguda politicians terrorizing members of other Jewish parties by forcing them to pray and transforming secular institutions into religious ones.*)

Yiddish caricatures of a *szmonces* nature comprise a separate category. Although *szmonces* as a genre emerged as a cabaret performative form and developed among the assimilated Jews in Poland,⁶⁸ the term's semantic field seems broader than that and includes the comic form, the key characteristic of

which is a parody of stereotypical Jewish features and speech.⁶⁹ In cartoon humor, the parody also exaggerates the cliché physical features. This becomes visible in the series of jokes that illustrate the dialogues and monologues of protagonists, such as the beggars Feyvel and Getzel, the Warsaw landlord, or the pair of hard-of-hearing Jews. The humor in the dialogues of the latter (Figure 8) consists in the conversation's absurd course. The cartoon uses visual codes of Jewishness—the bearded figures wear *kapotekapotes* and have big noses. Meanwhile, among other things, the figure of *Itshe Hoyzvarfer* (Yiddish: *hoyz* –home, *varfn*–throw out; Figure 9) represents the Jewish landlord. *Itshe Hoyzvarfer* speaks the Warsaw dialect of Yiddish,⁷⁰

and his representation as a Jewish banker is practically a transplant from the antisemitic ecology. The character wears a suit and a hat and carries a cigar; his dark face has traces of facial hair, and his nose seems unnaturally large. This fits a certain principle of the Yiddish ecology, where the stigmatizing racial scripts do not reflect the ethnic and national differences but the political and class ones.



Fig. 8 Szaja Fajgenbojm, *Un vider di tsvey toybe*, in: „Der Mekhabel”, 1935, no. 4, p. 6. (Translation: And again, two deaf men. The National Library of Israel.)

The above figures share one feature: their images serve mainly an illustrative and complementary role. The dialogues in the images constitute individually comprehensible jokes. The created characters (always men) differ in their appearance and refer to different clichés, showing the representatives of (partially?) assimilated Jewish bourgeoisie and the members of the communities that preserve the Jewish tradition in different degrees. The features—repetitiveness of characters, ridicule of stereotypes, and references to tradition—bring cartoon *szmonces* closer to their performative original. However, Yiddish *szmonces* differ from the original in one essential aspect: the language. The cabaret sketches that emerged among assimilated intelligentsia were performed in Polish, with an important element of the so-called *żydłaczenie*— a pejorative term referring to the use Polish language by some Jewish communities. In Yiddish caricatures, the object of ridicule is not Yiddish itself but its dialects or the Jewish adaptation of Polish. Consequently, the caricatures mock community members whose position seems more peripheral and those whose unsuccessful attempts at speaking Polish testify to their aspiration to assimilate and belong to the cultural center.



Fif. 9 Unknown Author, the character of Itsze Hojzwarfer, in: "Der Blofer", 1930, no. 6, p. 8, Library of the Warsaw University.

Although male figures dominate this ecology, there is also a group of cartoons where female characters appear notably more often in several variants.

For example, some caricatures addressed customary changes, such as deviation from tradition and liberalization of sexual habits (Figure 10). Such caricatures combined the image of the Jew (father or husband in

a kapotekapote and with a beard) with the figure of an emancipated woman (daughter or wife), as a symbol of tradition clashing

with modernity. Moreover, in Yiddish cartoons, women appeared as overbearing shrews who dominate the whole family and the husband in particular.

Another image related to the latter trope presented the figure of a overweight Jewish woman, whose physique—contrasted with a notably smaller man—was the object of ridicule.

Despite the fact that Yiddish caricatures use elements that remain consistent with antisemitic tropes, it would be difficult to attribute this to hostility toward their own community. Christie Davies notes that Jewish humor is a particular example of a more general phenomenon—the asymmetry between the humor of the culturally dominating majority and the humor of the subjected minority groups.⁷¹

This asymmetry assumes that the minorities that function in two cultures at once (their own and the dominant one) mock both cultures because they have certain connections to each.

Meanwhile, the majority only has one culture and mocks the fact

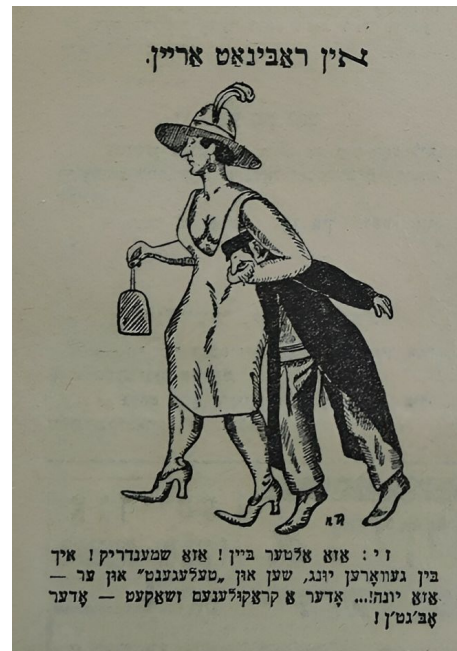


Fig. 10 R. D. (Unknown Author), *In rabinat arayn*, in: „Der Blofer”, 1928, no 35, p. 5. (Translation: *In the Rabbinical Court. Such an old geezer! Such a fool! I was young, pretty, and elegant, and he was such a ragged mess!... Either a new jacket or a divorce!*)

that another group does not fit into it.. Because of the high diversification of the minority communities, their members can joke at their own community in different ways—including the ways of the dominant group—while also maneuvering and moving between points so that the joke never concerns them personally.⁷² This mechanism proves visible in the Yiddish ecology, where the objects of jokes are both Orthodox Jews and Bundists (members of the socialist, anti-Zionist, left-wing party “Bund,” one of the most prominent Jewish political movements in interwar Poland.); Poles as the members of the same community and as antisemitic enemies; Jewish traditionalists and assimilated Jews. Homi Bhabha indicates another possible interpretation of the self-ironic joke, seeing it as an act of rebellion. In this interpretation, the interception of the normalized stereotype becomes a strategy for resisting culture and reclaiming agency.⁷³

Conclusion

All the ecologies share a certain characteristic: the dominance of the image of a Jewish man. It seems clear considering the fact that it was usually the men who worked due to social and economic conditions, and thus, the stereotypes that referred to their jobs used the male image. If at all, women appeared rather as the characters’ partners. The few exceptions of merchants or housekeepers constitute a small fraction. The male image, with traditional attire, facial hair, and sidelocks, helped easily code the Jewish identity. Therefore, the visual figure of the Jew in satirical cartoons remains strongly gendered.

We see differences between Yiddish and Polish *szmonces*. While some of the jokes in both languages mock the Jews’ manner of speaking Polish, they have different departure points for the jokes. Yiddish jokes mock those who want to abandon their Jewish identity, while Polish jokes laugh at those who want to acquire Polish identity. In the latter case, the jokes also refer to the assimilated Jewish intelligentsia’s aversion to the Yiddish

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language.

The ecologies mutually affected and inspired each other. Each ecology used various degrees of the same type of racialising visual codes, but the meanings they conveyed differed. The ecologies also employed the codes in different configurations. For example, in the Yiddish and liberal–assimilated ecologies, the figure of the traditional Jew, who symbolized the entire Jewish minority, was more subjective than in the antisemitic ecology, where this type of image belonged to objectifying representations of a uniform collective. The antisemitic ecology also had the strongest tendency toward orientalizing the images of Jews.

The three ecologies I present here originate from different networks of personal and ideological arrangements, and the differences between them are also visible on the level of their geographical effect. Each ecology catered to different groups of readers, though it seems possible that some readers (especially of the Yiddish and liberal–assimilated magazines) consumed content from more than one ecology. Simultaneously, the ecologies did not constitute autonomous systems—they functioned within one shared iconosphere. They adopted and modified images, from which they produced different meanings. Using the ecologies of representation, the analysis of visual codes and their combinations helps trace the semantic changes to the codes, depending on the environment from which they emerge.

- 1 The term “caricature” often functions in literature interchangeably with “cartoon joke” and “satirical drawing.” Some scholars suggest differentiating between those terms (see Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, “Praca dowcipu rysunkowego,” *Konteksty*, no. 1 (2006): 82). However, for simplification, I will not introduce this differentiation here.
- 2 Edward Portnoy, “Exploiting Tradition: Religious Iconography in Cartoons of the Polish Yiddish Press,” *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 16 (2003): 244.
- 3 Murawska-Muthesius, “Praca dowcipu,” 82.
- 4 Martha Banta, *Barbaric Intercourse: Caricature and the Culture of Conduct, 1841–1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 4.
- 5 I conduct a review of the most important studies on Polish caricature (especially the representation of Jews) in the article “Wizerunek Żydów w dowcipach rysunkowych na łamach ‘*Muchy*’ (1935–1939),” *Studia Judaica* 26, no. 1 (51) (2023): 213–214. Other texts on the subject include the recently published anthology of texts about caricatures edited by Piotr Kułak (*Śladem karykatury. Polskie teksty do 1939 roku. Antologia*, ed. P. Kułak (Gdańsk–Warszawa: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2024) and Ewa Stańczyk’s monograph (Ewa Stańczyk, *Cartoons and Antisemitism: Visual Politics of Interwar Poland* (University Press of Mississippi, 2024) devoted to visual strategies of portraying Jews in Polish-language satire press of the second half of the 1930s. In the context of studies on such images, Sara Lipton’s works (Sara Lipton, *Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014) where she indicates the medieval genesis of the anti-Jewish representations, studies on the overlapping stereotypes of blackness and Jewishness and on the connections between the strategies of colonial and antisemitic visual politics (Tudor Parfitt, *Hybrid Hate: Jews, Blacks, and the Question of Race* (Oxford University Press, 2020); Birgit Haehnel, “‘The Black Jew’: An Afterimage of German Colonialism,” in *German Colonialism, Visual Culture, and Modern Memory*, ed. V. Langbehn (Routledge, 2010), 239–259), and analyses of race representations in different geographical regions (Frank Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture, 1660–1830* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Baigell 2017; *Visual Antisemitism in Central Europe: Imagery of Hatred*, ed. J. Hauser and E. Janáčová (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021)) are particularly important.

- 6 Tomasz Wysocki, "Struktura narodowościowa mieszkańców Polski w 1931 roku na podstawie deklarowanego języka traktowanego jako ojczysty," *Sprawy Narodowościowe*, no. 26 (2005): 32.
- 7 Ernst Hans Gombrich, "The Cartoonist's Armoury," in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, ed. Ernst Hans Gombrich (London: Phaidon Press, 1971), 130–132.
- 8 I use the term in the interpretation of W.J.T. Mitchell, for whom it is a set of filters that mediate vision, not an objective category. Jacek Zwierzyński, "Rasa jako medium," *Teksty Drugie*, no. 5 (2017): 197.
- 9 Hannah Pollin-Galay, *Ecologies of Witnessing: Language, Place, and Holocaust Testimony* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 2. Pollin-Galay compares Holocaust testimonies of different provenience (in Yiddish, English, and Polish) and shows the differences in narration building.
- 10 Pollin-Galay, *Ecologies of Witnessing*.
- 11 Aleksandra Niewiara, *Imagologia: pamięć zbiorowa, umysł i kultura* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2019), 11.
- 12 The magazines I use include: *Szabeskurier*, nos. 4–26 (1935); *Cyrulik Warszawski*, nos. 1–11, 13–37 (1934); *Szpilki*, nos. 1–26, 28–45 (1936); *Der Mekhabel*, nos. 1, 3–4, 6, 8–28 (1935); *Der Blofer*, nos. 1–3, 5–17, 19–52 (1928). For the analysis, I employed the MAXQDA software, where I coded the elements that constitute satirical cartoons: the physical features of the characters and their identity, the attributes, subjects, presented locations, etc.
- 13 Zdzisław Biegański, "Bydgoski 'Szabeskurjer' – Przyczynek do dyskusji na temat kształtowania stereotypu Polaka-antysemity," in *Konflikty w przestrzeni kulturowej*, ed. Z. Biegański, Ł. Jureńczyk, and J. Szczutkowska (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, 2015), 51.
- 14 *Szabeskurier* was issued irregularly between 1924 and 1939 on the former Prussian Partition territory. The editorial office was in Bydgoszcz, although it periodically moved to Poznań and Katowice. Zdzisław Biegański, "Bydgoski 'Szabeskurjer'," 45.
- 15 Biegański, "Bydgoski 'Szabeskurjer'," 51.

- 16 Andrzej Paczkowski, *Prasa polska 1918–1939* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1980), 291.
- 17 Biegański, "Bydgoski 'Szabeskurjer'," 51.
- 18 Jakub Pietkiewicz, *Pomiędzy diagnozą rzeczywistości, a kreacją stereotypów. Problematyka publicystyki "Małego Dziennika" w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* (Ph.D. diss., Uniwersytet Łódzki, 2016), 209.
- 19 Daniel Roos, *Julius Streicher und "Der Stürmer" 1923–1945* (Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh GmbH, 2014), 135.
- 20 Own compilation based on twenty-three *Szabeskurier* issues from 1935, preserved in the National Library.
- 21 Tomasz Kawski, "Mniejszość żydowska na Krajnie w XIX i XX wieku," in *Dziedzictwo kulturowe na Krajnie i Pałukach. Wybrane problemy z dziejów Krajny Nakielskiej (związki Krajny z Pałukami)*, ed. S. Łaniecki and L. Skaza (Nakło nad Notecią, 2004), 233.
- 22 This anti-immigrant trope proved common globally, also in relation to other minorities, as we can see on the example of the Yellow Peril. The trope is also strongly present in contemporary racist discourses. Stanford M. Lyman, "The 'Yellow Peril' Mystique: Origins and Vicissitudes of a Racist Discourse," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 13, no. 4 (2000): 692; Marcin Pielużek, "Wizerunek imigrantów w komunikacji brytyjskiej skrajnej prawicy na przykładzie publikacji Britain First i Brytyjskiej Partii Narodowej," in *Badanie komunikacji*, vol. 1, ed. A. Siemens, M. Wszolek, and M. Grech (Wrocław: Libron, 2018), 112.
- 23 Mikhail R. Maizuls, "Facial Stigma. Medieval Origins of the 'Jewish Nose'," *RSUH/RGGU Bulletin, Literary Theory. Linguistics. Cultural Studies*, no. 5 (2020): 21–22.
- 24 Eduard Fuchs, *Die Juden in der Karikatur: Ein Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte* (München: Langen, 1921), 162.
- 25 Maizuls, "Facial Stigma," 21–22.
- 26 Tudor Parfitt, *Hybrid Hate: Jews, Blacks, and the Question of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 101–102.
- 27 Birgit Haehnel, "'The Black Jew': An Afterimage of German Colonialism," in *German Colonialism, Visual Culture, and Modern Memory*, ed. V. Langbehn (New York–London: Routledge, 2010), 244.

- 28 Haehnel, "'The Black Jew'," 247.
- 29 Caricatures from *Szabeskurier*, no. 12 (1935): 2.
- 30 Grzegorz Krzywiec, *Polska bez Żydów. Studia z dziejów idei, wyobrażeń i praktyk antysemitycznych na ziemiach polskich początku XX wieku (1905–1914)* (Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 2017), 59.
- 31 Krzywiec, *Polska bez Żydów*, 60.
- 32 Jolanta Żyndul, "II Rzeczpospolita," in *Dzieje Żydów polskich*, ed. W. Sienkiewicz (Warszawa: Demart, 2019), 257.
- 33 It was printed in Warsaw between 1926 and 1934. J. Lechoń served as the first editor, followed by J. Paczkowski from 1929. Wiesław Władyka, "Prasa Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej," in *Dzieje prasy polskiej*, ed. J. Łojek, J. Myśliński, and W. Władyka (Warszawa: Interpress, 1988), 118.
- 34 Periodical under Zbigniew Mitzner's editorship, published in Warsaw in the years 1935–1939. Bohdan Piątkowski, *Polska prasa satyryczno-humorystyczna w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej (1918–1939)*, typescript, sign. DR 23/1980 (Warszawa, 1980), 65.
- 35 Stańczyk, *Cartoons and Antisemitism: Visual Politics of Interwar Poland*, 85.
- 36 Jerzy S. Ossowski, "Satyra Gałczyńskiego w prasie krakowskiej lat trzydziestych," in *Kraków–Lwów. Książki, czasopisma, biblioteki XIX i XX wieku*, vol. 5, ed. J. Jarowiecki (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pedagogicznej, 2001), 640.
- 37 Piątkowski, *Polska prasa*, 53.
- 38 Piątkowski, *Polska prasa*, 94.
- 39 Paczkowski, *Prasa polska*, 289.
- 40 Agata Napiórska, *Ha-Ga: obrazki z życia* (Warszawa: Marginesy, 2023), 66–68, epub.
- 41 Marek Hendrykowski, "Autobus Linkego jako parodia PRL. Studium intertekstualne," *Images. The International Journal of European Film, Performing Arts and Audiovisual Communication* 14, no. 23 (2014): 66.
- 42 Władyka, "Prasa Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej," 118.
- 43 Piątkowski, *Polska prasa*, 65.

- 44 Eryk Lipiński, *Drzewo szpilkowe* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1976), 28.
- 45 Agnieszka Uścińska, "Szmonces – polska specjalność," *Teatr*, no. 12 (2008): 77.
- 46 Agnieszka Żółkiewska, "Humor pogranicza polsko-żydowskiego na przykładzie szmoncesów Juliana Tuwima," *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów*, no. 4 (2017): 316.
- 47 Anna Krasowska, "Fleksyjne wykładniki stylizacji na polszczyznę Żydów w przedwojennym szmoncesie kabaretowym," *Socjolingwistyka* 33 (2019): 245.
- 48 Krasowska, "Fleksyjne wykładniki stylizacji," 246.
- 49 Żółkiewska, "Humor pogranicza polsko-żydowskiego na przykładzie szmoncesów Juliana Tuwima," 319–320.
- 50 Żółkiewska, "Humor pogranicza polsko-żydowskiego," 317.
- 51 Władysław Popławski, "Trochę o języku i o ślicznych Żydach," *Cyrulik Warszawski*, no. 42 (1928): 6.
- 52 Pinkhes Kats, "Szanowny Cyruliku! A bisel vegn shprakh un vegen h' Poplawski's 'tshemne lud'", *Der Mekhabel*, no. 3 (1928): 4–5.
- 53 Kats, "Szanowny Cyruliku!" 4.
- 54 Lisa Glebatis Perks, "The Ancient Roots of Humor Theory," *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 25, no. 2 (2012): 120.
- 55 Narodowa Demokracja (National Democracy), referred to as enedecja, was the leading right wing and nationalist political movement at that time.
- 56 We can see evidence of the belief in the backwardness of the Orthodox community in the socio-cultural weekly *Wiadomości Literackie*. The weekly published Antoni Słonimski's critical articles on mental narrowness and Jewish isolationism, as well as *Czarny Iqđ*, a series of Wanda Melcer's reports from Nalewki, where Melcer condemned backwardness and the role of religion among Orthodox Jews. Cf. Jolanta Kruszniewska, "The Jewish Question in *Wiadomości Literackie* (1924–1939)," *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia* 9 (2011): 149.

- 57 *Der Mekhabel* was published in Warsaw, with long breaks, in the years 1919–1936. *Der Blofer* was issued in Warsaw between 1926 and 1930 and, according to Marian Fuks, is the most representative Jewish satirical weekly. Cf. Marian Fuks, "Żydowska prasa humorystyczno-satyryczna," *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego*, nos. 2–3 (1980): 33, 42.
- 58 Fuks, "Żydowska prasa humorystyczno-satyryczna," 31.
- 59 Fuks, "Żydowska prasa humorystyczno-satyryczna," 33–34.
- 60 Agnieszka Żółkiewska, *The free bird: der Frayer Foygl. Humour in the Jewish press in independent Poland/Wolny ptak: der Frajer Fojgl. Humor z prasy żydowskiej w Polsce niepodległej* (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2019), 49.
- 61 Portnoy, *Exploiting Tradition*, 253.
- 62 Rebus no. 39, *Der Blofer*, no. 46 (1928): 7.
- 63 Shtreimel, originally headwear of Jewish elites, gradually became an item commonly associated with Hasidic Jews. Vladimir Levin, "Kultura materialna," in *Chasydyzm. Źródła, metody, perspektywy*, ed. M. Wodziński (Kraków–Budapest–Syracuse: Austeria, 2019), 372–373.
- 64 Rebus no. 32, *Der Blofer*, no. 38 (1928): 5.
- 65 The Orthodox party Agudat Israel (The Union of Israel) was formed in 1912 in Katowice. The party had representatives for different branches of the Orthodox tradition, but the dominant group included Hasidic Jews, and especially the Tzadik from Góra Kalwaria. Marcin Wodziński, *Chasydyzm: wszystko co najważniejsze* (Kraków–Budapest–Syracuse: Austeria, 2019), 335–336.
- 66 Kamil Kijek, "Religia a społeczeństwo Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej," in *Religia a społeczeństwo Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, ed. T. Stegner (Warszawa: Neriton, 2013), 291.
- 67 Sander Gilman, *Jew's Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 173.
- 68 Rafał Żebrowski, "Szmonces," in *Polski Słownik Judaistyczny*, accessed April 14, 2024, <https://delet.jhi.pl/pl/psj?articleId=18773>.
- 69 Żółkiewska, "Humor pogranicza polsko-żydowskiego," 316.

- 70 Dariusz K. Sikorski, "Litwak: uchodźca czy wróg? Wokół medialnej figury innego na początku XX wieku," in *Żydzi Wschodniej Polski*, ser. 6: *Żydzi białostoccy. Od początków do 1939 roku*, ed. J. Ławski, K. Pilichiewicz, and A. Wydrycka (Białystok: Prymat, 2018), 81.
- 71 Christie Davies, "Exploring the Thesis of the Self-Deprecating Jewish Sense of Humor," *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 4, no. 2 (1991): 189–190.
- 72 Davies, "Exploring the Thesis," 192.
- 73 Homi Bhabha, "Joking Aside: The Idea of a Self-Critical Community," in *Modernity, Culture and "the Jew,"* ed. L. Marcus and B. Cheyette (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1998), XVII.
- 74 Anna Landau-Czajka, "Zasymilowana inteligencja żydowska w okresie międzywojennym," in *Badania nad dziejami społecznymi XIX i XX wieku*, ed. J. Żarnowski (Warszawa: Neriton, 2007), 134.

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