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INSTRUMENTALISING SOVIET YIDDISH PRESS
A quantitative Survey of Bibliographic Records as an Indicator of Soviet National and Media Policies

Ilia Uchitel and **Petro Yakovenko**

The article uses a bibliographical database of Soviet Yiddish periodicals from four major libraries in Russia and Ukraine to analyse the development of the Yiddish press from 1920 to 1941, examining regional differences and its connection with Soviet national and media policies. The findings highlight two pivotal moments for the Yiddish press during this period: 1923, when the supportive korenizatsiia national policy was enacted, and 1928, when the state implemented a 'mobilisational journalism' policy to rally the population around industrialisation and collectivisation goals. In the Yiddish press, mobilisational practices peaked in 1932–1933 after the initial grain procurement campaign in Ukraine fell short. The data also suggests that periodicals in other minority languages in the USSR followed a similar pattern.

KEYWORDS Soviet Union; Yiddish; Ukraine; Digital humanities; Bibliography; Newspaper history

Introduction

The collapse of the Russian Empire led to the abolition of its repressive policies, including cultural and language restrictions,[1] towards non-Russian minorities. For the Jews, political liberation meant a window of opportunity for ethnic, cultural and political groups to promote their values and agenda by a variety of means, including publishing. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Yiddish was still one of the main languages of communication for Ashkenazi Jews in the Russian Empire, and even though in many places they were already switching to Russian, the Jewish press was mainly published in Yiddish. However, the liberation from the tsarist rule was overshadowed by the Civil War, which was particularly bloody on Ukrainian soil, and saw numerous pogroms causing enormous suffering for the Jews.[2]

The Bolshevik party quickly gained the upper hand in the struggle for power after the fall of the Russian Empire, regaining control over Ukraine and Belarus by early 1920, and the Soviet State began actively intervening in the cultural activities of minority ethnic groups. The window of opportunity opened in 1917 was quickly closing. In the

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Jewish case, one of the earliest examples of that is the government intrusion into the Yiddish-Hebrew cultural rivalry on the side of groups supporting the development of Yiddish, forbidding Hebrew publishing in 1919.[3] After a brief period of uncertainty, in mid-1919 the Yiddish cultural project gained comprehensive support for its publishing and cultural activities, most notably *Kultur-Lige*, an organisation promoting Yiddish culture which was founded in Kyiv in 1918, prior to the Soviet conquest.[4]

Generally speaking, in the first half of Soviet Rule, between 1917 and 1941, Yiddish culture and press in the USSR experienced unprecedented growth, peaking in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Two drivers are apparent: the continuation and development of cultural activities started in 1917, and the national policies supporting minority languages and cultures enacted in the mid-1920s. Even though after 1938 Yiddish cultural activities were suppressed, the Yiddish press was not fully banned.

The invasion by Nazi Germany in 1941 and subsequent annihilation of millions of Jews in Ukraine and Belarus meant that no return to the pre-war reality was possible. However, Soviet Jewish life suffered another tragic setback in 1948, when Stalin undertook a massive anti-Semitic campaign, which included purges of Jewish intellectuals and the closure of all but one Jewish publication.[5]

Even after the death of Joseph Stalin and the end of his harsh anti-Semitic policies, Yiddish culture in the Soviet Union never fully recovered. This may be attributed to rising levels of anti-Semitism in the Soviet establishment[6] as well as lower demand due to significant language attrition among the Jewish population, with about 75% reporting Russian as their mother tongue by 1959.[7] From 1961 until the breakup of the Soviet Union, the press in Yiddish was limited to only two periodicals. This makes the pre-war Soviet period of utmost importance for scholars working on the history of Jewry in the region.

In research about Soviet policy toward Jews and other national minorities, textual data of publications as well as the bibliographical metadata of the Soviet national press is often used as evidence. Even though metadata such as a newspapers' language, place of publication and circulation do not provide a deep insight into the publication's content, it has clear temporal and spatial scales and can be easily quantified. For example, David Shneer uses book publishing data to compare the development of minority cultures in the USSR, such as German and Yiddish. Similarly, Terry Martin uses data on the number of periodicals published in minority languages in the Russian SSR in the 1930s to measure changes in national policy in numerous regions of Russia.[8] Bibliographical data can be used as an indicator of the existence of a certain political or cultural group in a particular time and place. For example, the opening and closing of Hebrew and Yiddish periodicals in Russia 1917–1919 demonstrates the victory of the Yiddish cultural project in the USSR.[9]

From 2020 to 2022, the authors of this article built a unified database of Soviet Yiddish Press (SYP) bibliographical data, held in four central libraries in Russia and Ukraine, as well as an online application that allows the data to be explored and visualised.[10]

This article offers a data-driven analysis of the SYP by using this bibliographical data. We argue that the period, number, place, and type of SYP publications were highly dependent on the national and media policies of the Soviet government. We discuss in detail a particular period of this dependence, the period of 1928–1935 when SYP was instrumentalised to its greatest extent and used as a propaganda tool for core state policies: collectivisation and industrialisation. Methodologically, we aim to show that the data on the

number of unique periodicals is a valid source of information that can augment other metrics used in discussions about national and media policies of USSR, such as circulation of the newspapers or books.[11]

In this article, we set the following limits to our discussion. Geographically, we discuss the SYP of central and western Russia, Belarus, and, in particular, Ukraine—regions where the majority of Soviet Jews lived due to the Pale of Settlement policy that existed until 1917, forbidding the majority of the Jewish population to reside outside a set of western regions of the Empire. We limit the discussion to the period between 1920, the year when the USSR gained control over these territories, and 1941, when Nazi Germany attacked the USSR. We limit our study only to the territories that belonged to the USSR before 1939 when the Soviets annexed the Baltic States and western Ukraine, where a huge number of Jews lived and a rich Yiddish printing culture existed.

Methodology

During this project, the authors compiled a united catalogue of SYP kept in four libraries: the Russian State Library in Moscow (RSL), the National Library of Russia in Saint Petersburg (NLR), the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine (NLU) and the Ukrainian Book Chamber (UBC) in Kyiv.

The paper records of the catalogues of NLU and RSL were manually digitised, and then unified with digital files representing of the UBC and NLR catalogues. The data were then manually unified. Thus, copies of the same periodical in different libraries are not counted multiple times. Overall, the database represents 580 unique periodicals published between 1900 and 1955. We included all the records that the libraries defined as belonging to a periodical: scientific compilations or news sheets that were published only for a single occasion were included.

The database also indicates the geographical and temporal distribution of the periodicals, which facilitates data browsing. This catalogue includes records of all the Yiddish language (or partly Yiddish language) holdings[12] available in the chosen libraries.

The metric used in this article is the number of periodicals' year volumes (YV). The term volume is widely used in librarianship to refer to a collection of all issues of a periodical in a given year, bound as a single book. The respective terms in other languages highlight the yearly criteria of the selection of issues to be included in the book, for example German *Jahrgang* or Russian *godovai͡a podshivka*. To emphasise the same yearly criteria, we will use a slightly modified term, 'year volume' (YV).

The total number of entries surveyed is 2338. Using YV as a metric means that both a full-year file of a daily periodical and a single issue of a minor periodical have equal weight in the following analysis.

This, of course, results in simplification. Nonetheless, it allows us to easily compare data on different types of periodicals with varying circulation (cf. a quarterly scientific journal and a daily newspaper) and publishing frequency. In addition, this approach provides more insights into the activity of publishing by the editorial teams behind the periodicals: for example, a small village periodical with a small circulation in our visualisations has equal 'weight' with a huge daily newspaper.

The database was designed to answer the following questions:

1. How many periodicals were published in a given year in the three main regions of SYP: Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine?
2. How diverse were the locations where the periodicals were published?
3. What was the distribution of different types of periodicals?
4. Was there a relationship between known historical events and policies and the number of periodicals?

Through data analysis and visualisation, we identified the years and regions with the most significant changes in SYP development trends. Our subsequent review of historical documents and research on Soviet national and media policies confirmed the relevance of these findings.

Censorship and 'Book Purges' of Soviet Yiddish Publishing

Let us address the problem of censorship and how it may affect the data discussed. While it is a fact that from the early 1930s there were 'purges' of books in libraries of all levels, in central libraries, the materials marked by the authorities as inappropriate (i.e. books authored by or containing specific articles written by 'enemies of the people', such as Trotsky or Bukharin) were usually not destroyed, but sent to *spetskhran*, a department with restricted access.[13] In smaller libraries, however, the materials that were deemed inappropriate were often destroyed. Sometimes, in particular during the years 1930–1932, books were 'purged' in a chaotic manner, often without any specific order from the authorities.[14] In some cases, chaotic purges happened in the late Stalin era, most notably in Birobidzhan, the capital of the Jewish Autonomous Region in the Far East of the USSR, where a major part of the Yiddish library holdings vanished.[15] Nonetheless, the holdings of already published and deposited periodicals remained relatively intact, with books being the most often targeted type of materials.[16] While books in Yiddish were put in *spetskhran* departments or even destroyed throughout the country,[17] the practice of destroying all the copies of a newspaper was only implemented in the late 1940s.[18]

Nonetheless, there are many missing materials, from individual issues to whole periodicals that are completely lost. Fortunately, for the Yiddish language, we have an incredibly valuable source which allows us to estimate the amount of this loss—Avrom Kirzhnits' bibliography of the Yiddish press published from 1917 till 1927 in the USSR.[19] It provides extensive information on the number of periodicals published in different regions of the USSR between 1917 and 1927.

The processed data suggests that the number of periodicals that were actually published and then indexed in Kirzhnits' work exceeds the number of periodicals that can be nowadays found in the libraries we surveyed, but only until 1922 and 1923. After this year, the number of periodicals available today roughly equals or even exceeds the number of periodicals indexed by Kirzhnits.

That Kirzhnits' records of the number of periodical titles published in the late 1920s as well as the trends throughout the decade of 1917–1927 match the project data indicates that the project findings, which are based only on the data currently available, accurately reflect the actual number of periodicals published. However, it also highlights the

gaps in our records of the periodicals published during the years of the Revolution and the Civil War.

Results

1920–1927: NEP and Implementation of Korenizatsiia

On 21st of March 1921, the *New Economic Policy* (NEP) was introduced. Intended to stabilise the economy in the wake of the Russian Civil War, *NEP* reintroduced, to an extent, private enterprise and free markets. For the press, this meant they could no longer rely entirely on government subsidies and had to partially fund their own operations.[20] As a result, publications that were not financially viable soon had no choice but to close down. Even *der Emes* (Moscow, 1918–1938) the main organ of Communist Party of the USSR in Yiddish, struggled financially.[21] Paper shortages also contributed to the closures (Figure 1).[22]

Our data demonstrates a notable decrease in the number of SYP in 1921–1923. For some periodicals, such as the literary almanacs *Baginen* (Kyiv, 1918–1920) and *Shtrom* (Moscow, 1922–1924) we have evidence that low readership and economic insufficiency were the primary reasons for closure.[23]

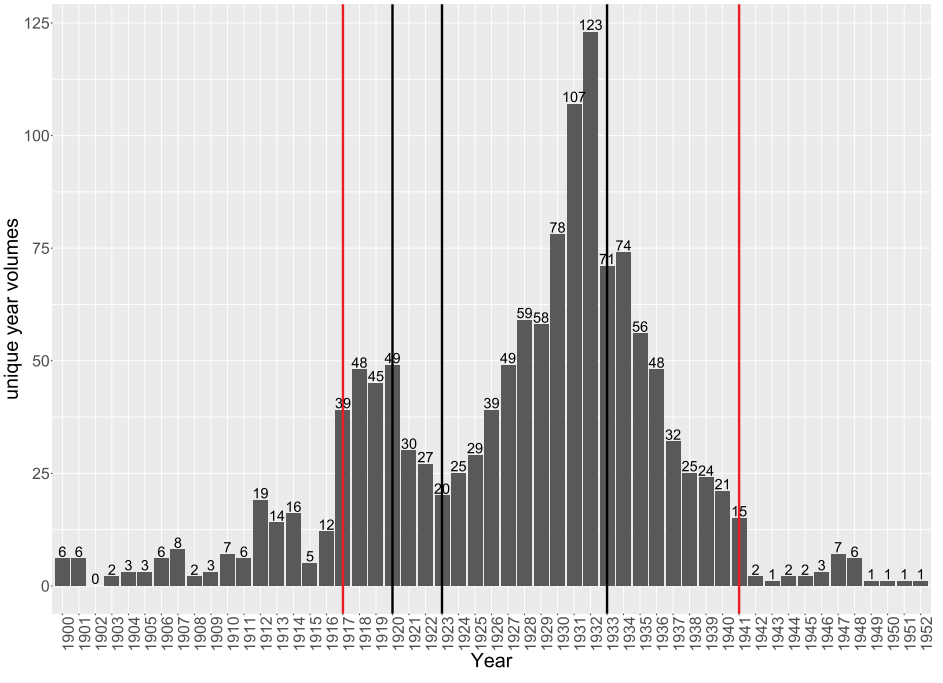


Figure 1.
Number of unique SYP year volumes per year, 1900-1955. The red lines plotted on the bars represent the main historical events that influenced the press in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union: the 1917 Russian Revolution, and 1941, the invasion of the Nazi Germany. The black lines depict the periods discussed in the article.

In other instances, we do not have this evidence. In some locations, we can infer that it was because Jews were highly Russified, as in the case of St. Petersburg,[24] where the last Yiddish newspaper, *Der Yidisher Arbeter* (1921–1922) ceased its operations in 1922. However, in smaller cities that lost their Yiddish press, the main reason was not necessarily Russification. For example, in Kremenchuk, a city in Central Ukraine with 38,098 Jewish inhabitants in 1926, with 76.5% of them claiming a knowledge of Yiddish,[25] the bi-weekly *Dos Kommunistishe Vort* (1920–1921), an official organ of the local Communist Party Committee, closed down in 1921. It was quite an established periodical, with more than 40 issues published. This resonates with evidence suggesting that the interest in local Yiddish press, in particular local, among Yiddish-speaking Jews even in smaller cities and towns was low, and the Russian-language press was more popular (Figure 2).[26]

In 1923, a comprehensive *korenizatsiia* ('indigenisation') national policy was adopted, with two respective resolutions approved in April and June of that year.[27] The policy endorsed different aspects of the use of minority languages, including book publication, school education, and even territorially-limited official status in smaller localities (*national districts*),[28] where official proceedings were available in the minority language.[29] The rationale behind this policy was to integrate ethnic groups, in particular those which seemed prone to nationalism, for example Ukrainians (the independent Ukrainian People's Republic was taken over by Bolsheviks in 1919) or Germans and Poles, which had their own nation states.

Even though the Jews were a significant minority in the USSR, they did not have their nationally-defined territory. They traditionally lived in small towns (*shtetls*) and pursued small crafts and trading, not being as highly involved in agricultural work as ordinary peasants in Ukraine or Belarus. This posed a certain problem for Soviet ideology, which viewed the working class as a binary between peasants and industrial workers, and deprived free traders of some rights. The deprivation of Jews according to their economic status was, in turn, a contradiction with *korenizatsia* policy which had to support the integration of different ethnic groups into Soviet society.[30] As the policy was primarily meant

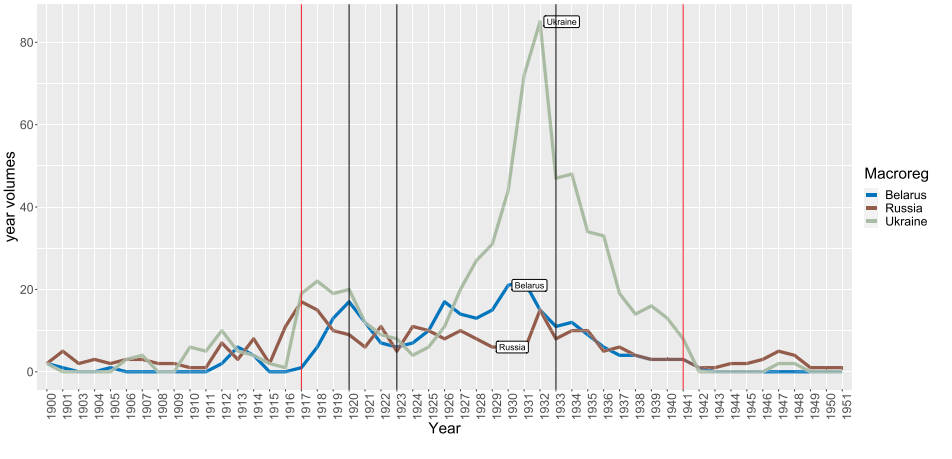


FIGURE 2:
Amount of unique year volumes published in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine per year.

to be applied to people living in territories with clear geographic borders, the solutions were geographic: to establish national districts in rural Jewish settlements, some of which were newly founded, in particular in Southern Ukraine and Crimea, and promote emigration there. This was followed by proclaiming the Jewish Autonomous Oblast in the Russian Far East, with Birobidzhan as its capital.

To promote and support re-settlement to these rural territories the OZET, *Obshchestvo Zemleustroystva Yevreyskikh Trudyashchikhsya* ('Society for Settling Toiling Jews on the Land') was founded in 1925. Even though the project clearly required propaganda support to convince people to leave their native *shtetls*, we did not find any periodicals associated with OZET published between 1925 and 1928.

Korenizatsia was fully applied to the Yiddish language. In Belarus, where Yiddish had been granted official status in 1920, this policy gained more support from the local authorities than similar efforts in Ukraine.[31] This matches with the data (Figures 2, 4) demonstrating faster absolute and relative growth of the number of year volumes of SYP in Belarus than in Ukraine and Russia in the years 1924-1928. In Belarus, the Jewish schools and higher education were ramped up.[32] Scholarly and literary journals were founded, such as *Tsaytshrift of Vaysrusishe Visenschaftlekhe Akademie, Yidishe Sektor* ('Journal of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences, Yiddish sector', Minsk, 1926–1931), as well as children's periodicals, such as *Der Yunger Pioner* (Minsk, 1926–1931). Figure 3 demonstrates that the number of magazines and journals grew from 4 to 15 in the period 1924–1928.

The data, however, does not show a significant growth in the number of newly founded periodicals in Russia. This might be a sign that the new *korenizatsiia* policy did not significantly affect press publishing in Russia, as there the Yiddish press had already reached an equilibrium. Moscow was the only place in Russia where SYP was published at this time, but its distribution was very wide: the journals and newspapers such as *der Emes* were read throughout the country, as a 1924 study of the reading preferences of Jews living in a Ukrainian village showed.[33]

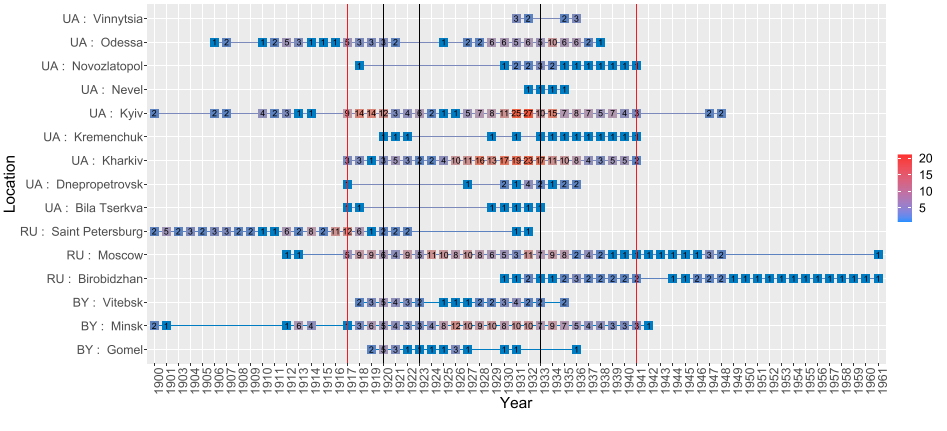


FIGURE 3:
Amount of unique year volumes published in a selection of the cities, per year. Colour marks the numbers stated in the boxes.

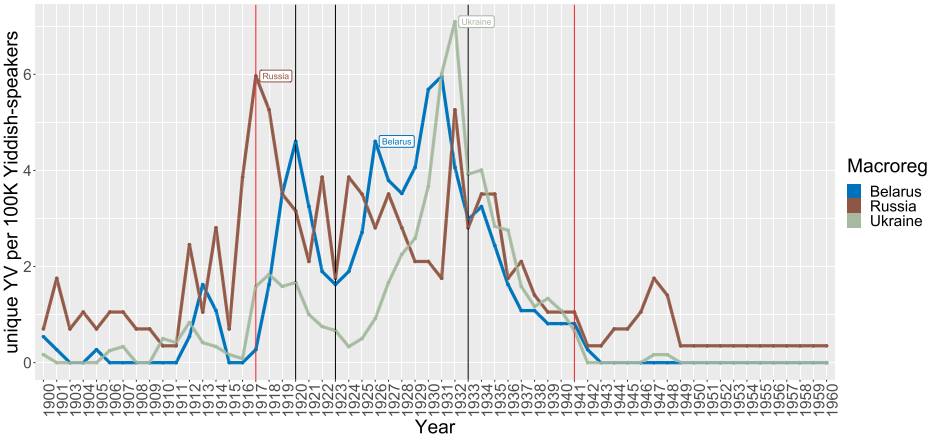


FIGURE 4:
Amount of unique year volumes published in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine per year, Yiddish-speaking population-adjusted.

As Figure 3 shows, by 1928 the number of periodicals published in centres of SYP publishing such as Moscow, Minsk, Kyiv or Kharkiv had increased, while in other cities with significant Jewish populations, such as Odesa or Vitebsk, their number had not risen considerably. This suggests that the implementation of *korenizatsiia* in media still had to cope with economic reality where the demand for such locally bounded periodicals (such as dailies) in smaller locations was not necessarily high[34] and a distribution system of centrally-published periodicals was more rational.

We can estimate the readership size of the SYP in the different regions in the 1920s. The 1926 All-Union Census[35] collected regional data on the distribution of 'ethnicity' and 'language' variables. This difference was particularly pronounced among the Jews, as in many regions, especially Russian cities, they were already highly assimilated.[36] In Leningrad, of 84,480 respondents stating their Jewish ethnicity, only 26,312 claimed Yiddish as their mother tongue. In Moscow, the respective numbers were 131,244 and 45,477. This might explain the absence of Yiddish periodicals in cities like St. Petersburg.

The adjusted metrics of periodicals published per 100,000 Yiddish speakers in three Soviet Republics, plotted in Figure 4, demonstrate that on a per-capita basis the number of periodicals lagged in Ukraine, where 1,197,969 Yiddish speakers lived (compared with 369,252 speakers in Belarus and 285,010 in Russia). The number of periodicals published in Ukraine reached similar levels only after 1928, when the social situation in the USSR changed.

1928–1933. Collectivisation, Industrialisation and Mobilisational Journalism

By 1928, Joseph Stalin had consolidated power. The New Economic Policy was abandoned and the period of forced industrialisation and agricultural collectivisation began. State terror was increasingly used, in particular in the collectivisation, which led to famine in Ukraine (the Holodomor), as well as in southern Russia and Kazakhstan.

The Soviet press also underwent transformations in the late 1920s. While propaganda had always been a major purpose, only after 1926 did the regime start to use the press as a instrument of mass mobilisation around party directives, whose main purposes after 1928 were industrialisation and collectivisation.[37] Stalin himself argued that the press was a tool by which 'the Party daily speaks to the working class'.[38] Following Matthew Lenoe, we use the term *mobilisation* to describe the practice of the press transmitting a propaganda message urging a certain action, such as joining a collective farm.[39]

In addition, the Soviet press turned to 'mass organisational journalism', which meant that the press was directly involved in production processes. The role of 'worker and peasant correspondents' (*rabkor* and *selkor* in Russian), first introduced in 1923, gained more importance. These were activists working in factories or agriculture, trained to write about their employment facilities and to uncover productivity problems and underperformance.[40]

Even in this increasingly totalitarian environment, *korenizatsiia,* in its essence, supportive of national diversity, was not abandoned. A period of uncertainty among local party officials towards it, observable in the late 1920s, ended in 1930, when Joseph Stalin re-stated his support for this policy in a speech at the 16th Congress of the Communist Party.[41]

Some of the patterns characteristic of the period manifested directly after 1928, such as publishing in smaller localities. Usually, these were irregular single-day periodicals (*odnodnevnai͡a gazeta* in Russian) dedicated to a particular case, mainly harvest campaigns. For example, all of the OZET Yiddish-language periodicals found in our database were published between 1928 and 1930. The central organ of the OZET, the *Tribuna* magazine (Moscow, 1928–1937), was also founded in the beginning of this period. Its language, notably, was Russian. However, it was not until 1931 that we see this approach fully employed.

One of the crucial agricultural policies of this period were grain procurements (*khlebozagotovki* in Russian), which replaced a consistent monetary taxation of the peasants, that had been in place under NEP. Central authorities set a fixed number for the grain requisitions in every region of the USSR. The quotas were extremely tough for the peasantry. In addition, after 1929, the numbers were decided even before sowing season and were therefore not connected to realistic estimates. Well-off peasants, in particular those who had not yet joined the collective farms (*kulaks*), had to give up any agricultural surplus they had saved.[42]

The extreme hostility of the peasants, both toward the forceful collectivisation and the procurements became clear in 1929, when peasants slaughtered their cattle en-masse in order not to give it to collective farms, and both *collectivised* and *uncollectivised* peasants hid grain wherever possible. The procurement campaign of autumn 1930 proceeded with extreme difficulties, in particular in Ukraine. In Dnepropetrovsk region, only between 66% and 88% of quotas were filled, the worst result in the whole Ukrainian SSR. In autumn 1932, this number was even worse, ranging between 22% and 72%[43] The government answered with violence and mobilisation of the propaganda apparatus. [44]

This provides a context for the resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party 'on the rural, district and grassroots press',[45] adopted in January 1931, which mandated an increase in the publishing of local press, including village and factory

papers. It stated that 'in the activity of the local newspapers some crucial drawbacks are still visible: […] inability to systematically connect the issues of grain procurements and mobilisation of financial means with the matters of collectivisation and liquidation of *kulaks* as a class'. The development of the press in national districts (*nastoblast*) was particularly encouraged. The document suggests the party saw these efforts as crucial considering the campaign of collectivisation.[46]

This demonstrates that the press, including the Yiddish language press, was used as a device to mobilise the population for collectivisation and industrialisation. The village press promoted the messages about the 'battle for the harvest', resistance to the *kulaks*, and after 1930 also *podkulachniki* ('kulak hirelings', essentially any disobedient peasant, even one from a collective farm).[47] Quite typical is the following message found in a September 1931 issue of *Kolvirt Emes* (Kherson region, Ukraine, 1931–1940)[48], article titled 'The breach is not yet liquidated', submitted by a correspondent from the Bobrovy Kut village:

> we still have have a big breach in the autumn sowing campaign, for 24th of September we have only fulfilled 55% of the plan. The issue is that not the whole towing forces have been used for the sowing. […] The provocative rumours spread around, that 'the collective farmers will be left without bread'. […] The party chamber is performing thorough education measures of the masses. Two newspapers had been published, the battle is fought against the simulants and slackers, against the impact of *kulaks* and *podkulachniki*.

This contribution highlights the purpose of the village newspapers, in case of the village mentioned, probably single-day sheets.

Also, in the contribution, we read a characteristic term of 1930s propaganda: 'breach' (*durkhreyz* in Yiddish, in Russian—*proryv*), referring to missing a target. Usually, this term refers to a breach in a military defence line. This usage referring to the economy emphasises a typical narrative of 'mobilisational journalism', comparing economic activity to a war.[49]

Quantitatively, SYP was affected greatly. The unique year volumes of Yiddish periodicals peaked in 1932 when, according to the data collected, more than 100 unique periodicals were published. In addition to regular village periodicals, which were established in 1930 in Jewish national districts located in southern Ukraine: Kalinindorf (Kherson region) and Novozlatopol (Zaporizhzhia region) and Laryndorf along with Stalindorf (Crimea, then a part of the Russian SSR), a high number of smaller Yiddish periodicals were published in workplaces during the years 1931 and 1932 (cf. Table 1): in cities, these were published at factories. In the countryside, journalists from big city papers in places like Kharkiv or Odesa went to rural areas to set up a *vyezdnaya redaktsiia* ('visiting editorial office') and produce (from a couple to dozens) of newspaper issues tackling core issues, mainly harvest campaigns. Characteristically, in our data we see the most village periodicals published in Dnepropetrovsk region, which was struggling with the procurement plan in 1930–1932.

But not all of the village periodicals of this period were published as a 'visiting editorial office'. At least one surviving paper found in NLU, the *Komunar* (1932, Zelenopol village, Denpropetrovsk region), was published by the local Party chamber alone. In the absence of the mass printing facilities it was written by hand and then copied by hectograph (Figure 5).

TABLE 1:
Amount of the independent village newspapers, vyezdnaya redaktsiya ('visiting editorial office') and factory periodicals published in years 1928–1935.

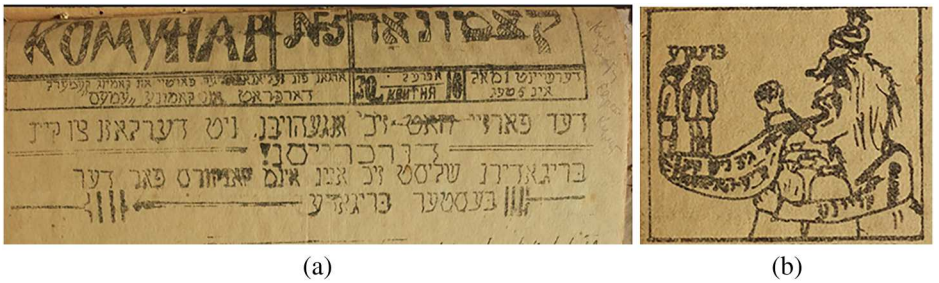
Year	Independent village newspapers	Vyezdnaya redaktsiia	Factory newspaper/single sheets
1928	0	0	0
1929	1	1	0
1930	3	1	1
1931	5	3	6
1932	11	6	7
1933	5	3	0
1934	5	0	1
1935	5	0	0

The number of these publications, especially in villages, decreased in 1933, when the procurements were eased somewhat, reducing the need for aggressive propaganda campaigns.[50]

As data presented in Figures 2 and 4 show, after 1928 the number of periodicals, most of which were local newspapers, grew dramatically in Ukraine, but not in Belarus and Russia. This is probably due to the larger scope of collectivisation and industrialisation in Ukraine, compared to Belarus and central Russia, which were less affected by collectivisation and its calamities. The data[51] shows that urbanisation, which reflects the scope of industrialisation (as the rural population moved to urban centres to work in newly opened factories), was almost five times more intensive in Eastern Ukraine than in Belarus in the years 1926–1939, and about 29% more intensive than in Central Russia, including Moscow.

While the turn towards mobilisation journalism meant that the number of propaganda newspapers grew rapidly after 1928, magazines covering general topics of the economy, culture and science, many of which were founded as a result of the *korenizatsiia* policy, stagnated after 1928, as we see in Figure 6.

The divergence in trends after 1928 demonstrates the different trajectories of the periodicals founded because of *korenizatsiia,* and those published as a consequence of



(a) (b)

FIGURE 5:
a. An extract from the *Komunar* newspaper. The title proclaims: 'The sowing campaign has begun. Don't let the breach [of the plan] happen! Brigadiers, join the competition for the best brigade'. Holdings of the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine. b. Illustration from the *Komunar* newspaper denouncing the villagers refusing to give their grain away.

the general media policy of 'mobilisational journalism' in all languages. However, as we do not have baseline data for mobilisational periodicals (e.g. Russian periodicals), we cannot determine whether the decline in the number of Yiddish periodicals published in workplaces after 1935 is attributable to the reversal of *korenizatsiia* or if this trend held for all publications of this kind throughout the USSR.

1934–1941: Decline of Soviet Yiddish Press

According to our data, all the Yiddish language village periodicals published outside national districts ceased operations after the procurement crisis of 1931–1932. The factory periodicals lasted longer, but generally closed down by 1936. In the years 1935–1936 the regular periodicals in regional centres with a significant Jewish population, such as Gomel and Vitebsk in Belarus, or Vinnytsia and Dnepropetrovsk in Ukraine, had all ceased publication. The reason for this steep decline was most likely the gradual reversal of *korenizatsiia* policy.

After 1936, *korenizatsiia* was being reduced throughout the USSR. The press data vividly illustrates that sometimes the change was violent and sudden, as we see in the case of the Soviet Polish Press.[52] In 1926, 476,435 Poles lived in Ukraine, mainly in the western parts of today's Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr and Khmelnytskyi regions. From 1918-1921, a considerable number of periodicals (up to six different publications annually), were published in Kharkiv, Kyiv and Odesa. After 1921 we see a decline, with only one periodical published until 1924, when two additional publications were founded.

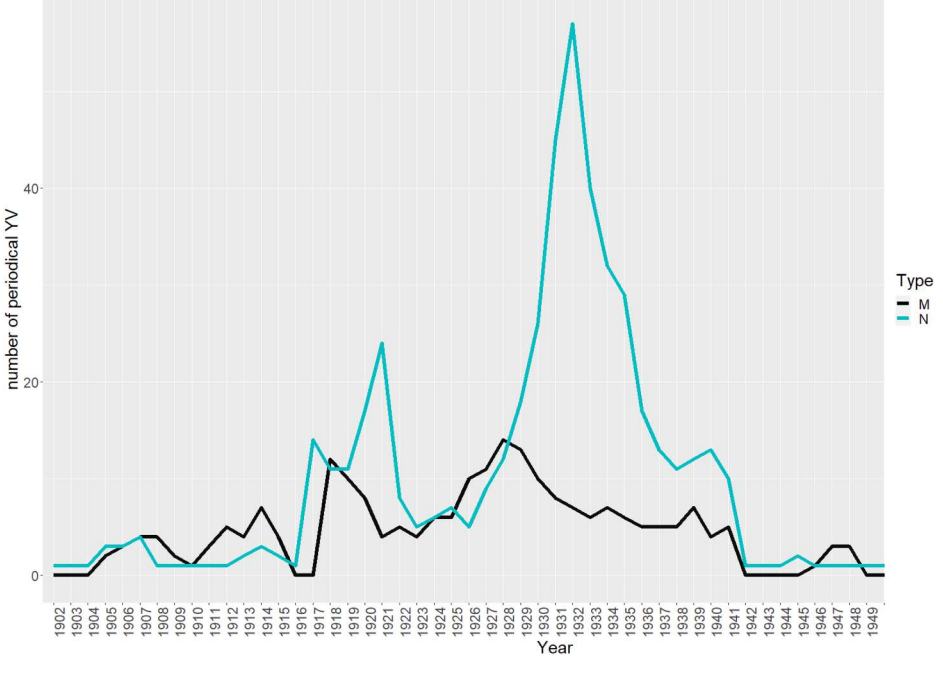


FIGURE 6:
Amount of year volumes of two types of periodicals: magazines (M) and newspapers (N), in data of the Russian State Library.

Even though the Poles were long viewed as a suspicious 'diaspora' nation, who had their own and hostile nation state, *korenizatsiia* was still applied. After it became clear that the Poles would try to evade collectivisation at all costs, exemplified by a peasant uprising against collectivisation in the western regions of the Ukrainian SSR in 1930, the number of village newspapers increased drastically in 1932, as we see in Figure 6. However, the plan to reach the aims of collectivisation through propaganda and *korenizatsiia* policies was abandoned in early 1935, and the Soviet policy toward the Polish minority changed dramatically. Massive deportation of Poles from the region took place,[53] with a corresponding closure of almost all Polish periodicals, schools and national districts (Figure 7).

Until 1948, the Soviet stance toward Jews was not as draconian as it was toward the Poles. Nevertheless, the effects of *korenizatsiia* reversal on the Yiddish language were evident, too. In 1936–1937, in Ukraine and Belarus fully-fledged institutes dedicated to Yiddish had been transformed into smaller divisions of Republican Academies' of Sciences.[54] After 1938, Yiddish schools and culture clubs were quickly closed down.[55] For SYP, in some known cases, direct interventions did take place: most notably, the biggest Yiddish periodical *der Emes* (Moscow, 1918–1938) was closed down in 1938.

After the last periodical in Odesa closed down in 1938, the only Yiddish periodicals remaining active until the summer of 1941 were those published in the capital cities (Moscow, where a literary almanac *Sovetish* (1934–1941) survived, Minsk, Kyiv and Birobidzhan) and in three national districts in Southern Ukraine and Crimea. In two national districts in Ukraine the periodicals, *Kolvirt emes* and *Kolvirt shtern*, remained intact until 1941. Similar newspapers in national districts in Crimea, which at the time was a part of the Russian SSR, were closed down in 1938 and 1940.

This suggests a national press configuration viewed as balanced by Soviet officials in the late 1930s: a limited number of periodicals of 'non-hostile' nations published in the capitals of the territorial divisions with a considerable representation of a given nation.

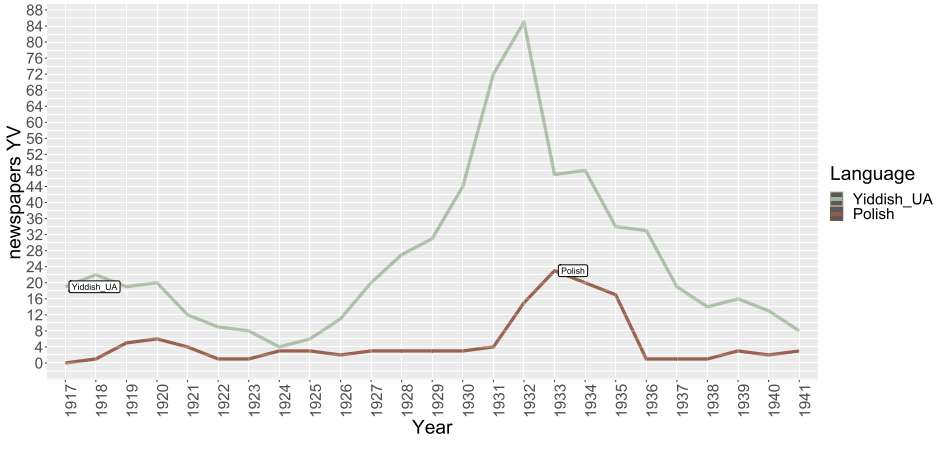


FIGURE 7:
Amount of unique year volumes published in Ukrainian SSR in Yiddish (data from our project) and Polish (data gathered from Skachkov et al. *Presa Ukraïns'koï RSR, 1917-1966.* (Kyiv: 1967) and https://prasapolukr.ijp.pan.pl/).

In the case of Yiddish—the capitals of Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian Soviet Republics as well as the remaining national districts and regions (Birobidzhan). This fits with Terry Martin's view, who, using bibliographical data of minority newspapers published in the Russian SSR, states that in Russia after 1938 the *korenizatsiia* policy was generally maintained in officially recognised non-Russian territorial divisions.[56]

However, our data highlights a remarkable exception of a periodical published after 1938, neither in a national district nor in a capital. A newspaper *Kremenchuger Arbeter* (1934–1941) was published in Ukrainian Kremenchuk, a medium-sized city on the Dnepr river with about 38,000 Jewish inhabitants, until the city was occupied by the Nazis in August 1941. Together with the case of national district newspaper closures, this could be a sign of more liberal or, rather, less consistent Ukrainian local policies towards the Yiddish language, differing from those in Belarus and Russia. Another reason might be a real local demand for a periodical in the Yiddish language.

Another example of suppressive policy reversal in Ukraine was seen after the annexation of Western Ukraine in 1939. In 1937, the Kyiv children's newspaper *Zay Greyt*, along with the German children's newspaper of the same format, was shut down by order of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR of 11th December 1937 after a request by Ukrainian officials.[57] Remarkably, the same newspaper re-opened in 1939.[58] This happened most likely due to the annexation of the western territories with a large Jewish population which was not Russified, and a need for Jewish children's periodical there. Supplying them with newspapers and spreading propaganda was an important task for Ukrainian authorities: in 1940 the head of Department of Propaganda and Agitation of the Ukrainian Communist Party requested an increase in the circulation numbers of the *Shtern* (Kharkiv, 1926–1940), the main organ of Communist Party in Ukraine, due to 'Unsatisfied demand of the readership in western parts of Ukraine'.[59] The party refused due to shortages of paper.

Paper shortages and other financial problems may have played a role in the closures of SYP in the late 1930s. For example, David Shneer considers the closure of *Emes* in 1938 to be a result of the campaign aiming to consolidate the publishing of the minority press and alleviate the shortages of paper.[60] The previous example of *Shtern* supports this view. Without centralised orders to maintain Yiddish publishing, a considerable number of periodicals may have closed due to lack of funds.

Conclusion: Bibliographical Data an Indicator of Soviet Media and National Policies

As in other research on Soviet national policy, most notably the work of Terry Martin,[61] we found the bibliographic data, year volumes, the number of unique periodical titles published over time to be a valid measure capable of highlighting the changes in Soviet national and media policies.

This data showing a number of periodicals in a certain language being simultaneously opened or closed can be used as an indicator that certain media or national policies had changed or, on the other hand, had not changed. Moreover, we suppose that for local officials the closure of 'excessive' periodicals in minority languages, along with other measures such as shutdowns of ethnic schools and research institutes, was viewed as one

of the measures that would fulfil the new understanding of the national policy, as the individual single decisions of particular SYP periodicals show.

Our research also shows that the SYP was greatly impacted by national policies. The decline in the number of SYP periodicals in all three studied regions seen in the early 1920s was broken by enactment of *korenizatsiya* policy, but our data shows the different pace of its implementation. Belarus was the most affected region during mid and late 1920s, followed by Ukraine. In terms of the number of periodicals (but not circulation) Russia was not affected significantly. On the other hand, our data shows that in Ukraine the impact of *korenizatsiia* on the press lasted the longest.

However, our research shows that another source of great impact on the SYP were the general decisions applicable to the whole Soviet press. The aggregated data showing a peak in year volumes in 1931–1932 highlights the media policy of *mobilisational journalism*, which was the case for the press in every language in the USSR. Moreover, it also suggests a precise region and period of the peak of this trend in the Yiddish press—southern Ukraine in 1931 and 1932.

In addition, the year volumes' data pinpoints the notable exceptions in the trends discovered: the case of *Kremenchuger Arbeter* suggests that the widespread closure of Yiddish periodicals in late 1930s was not a result of a single unified decision, as was the case with the Polish press, but rather a result of a changed environment due to the reversal of the *korenizatsiia* policy that had granted political and financial support to the SYP.

These exceptions indicate that in some regions, minority groups were allowed to continue publishing so long as they had the means. Yet, the overall environment was challenging. The Yiddish press was often neglected by Yiddish speakers, and once state national policy stopped supporting publishing in minority languages many periodicals had no means to continue publishing.

Data Sources Used in the Project

National Library of Russia: http://nlr.ru/res/inv/ukazat55/cat_show.php?rid = 17046.

Ukrainian Book Chamber: http://www.ukrbook.net/Nauka/Yid_Sov_press_cat_1922-1948.xls; http://www.ukrbook.net/fond_arhiv_druk.html.

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Notes

1. Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multi-ethnic Story*, 346.
2. Budnitskii, *Jews Between the Reds and the Whites*, 217.
3. Moss, *Jewish Reinaissance in the Russian Revolution*, 226.
4. Ibid., 241.
5. The newspaper *Birobidzhaner Shtern*, published in the capital of Jewish Autonomous Region founded in 1934.
6. Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, 233.
7. Estraikh, *After Stalin*, 120.
8. Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 407.
9. Moss, *Jewish Renaissance*, 225.
10. Available at https://parasolcorpus.org/syp/.
11. Estraikh, *Soviet Yiddish*, 52.
12. It was a common practice to add a Yiddish language section in a newspaper generally published in another language, for example, in Ukrainian.
13. Futrell, *Banned books in the Lenin library*.
14. Savin, *O chistke bibliotek,* 2019.
15. Zhuravleva, *Birobidzhan Judaica*, 75.
16. Smilovitsky, *T͡senzura v BSSR*, 138.
17. Ibid., 144.
18. Ibid., 121.
19. Kirzhnits, *Di Yidishe prese*.
20. Babyuk, *Soviet Press Economic Aspects, 8*.
21. Shneer, *History of 'the Truth'*, 136.
22. Babyuk, *Soviet Press Economic Aspects,* 5.
23. Estraikh, *Kharkiv Yiddish literary world,* 85.
24. Nathans, *Beyond the Pale*, 111.
25. *Vsesoi͡uznai͡a perepis' naseleniia͡* 1926, 111.
26. Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher*, 63.
27. Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 10.
28. In additional to national districts, which were larger geographical entities including several villages, there also existed *Village Councils* (Natsionalny Selsovet), respective of single village.
29. Glaser, *Taking Yiddish to Court*.
30. Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 43.
31. Bemporad, *Becoming Soviet Jews*, 83.
32. Ibid., 99.
33. Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher*, 64.
34. Ibid., 65.

35. *Vsesoi͡uznai͡a perepis' naseleniia* 1926, 28.
36. Estraikh, *Soviet Yiddish*, 23.
37. Brandenberger, *Propaganda State in Crisis*, 25.
38. Lenoe 1998, *'Stalinization' of the Soviet Press*, 23.
39. Ibid., 58.
40. Brooks 1989, *Public and Private in Soviet Press*, 22.
41. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 245.
42. Lewin, *Taking Grain*, 287.
43. https://gis.huri.harvard.edu/procurement-and-grain-loans.
44. Ibid., 289.
45. In Russian: *О сельской, районной и низовой печати*.
46. *Reshenii͡a Partii o pechati*, 133.
47. Lewin, *Taking Grain*, 290.
48. *Kolvirt Emes* nr. 212, 26.09.1931, p.2, available online: https://libraria.ua/issues/1176/101002/.
49. Lenoe 1998, *'Stalinization' of the Soviet Press*, 33.
50. Lewin, *Taking Grain*, 300.
51. Lewis, Rowland, *Urbanization in Russia and USSR*, 1897–1966
52. See detailed description of the Soviet Polish Press at https://prasapolukr.ijp.pan.pl/content/about?language=en.
53. Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 328.
54. Bemporad, Becoming Soviet Jews, 103.
55. Estraikh, *Soviet Yiddish*, 97.
56. Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 411.
57. Gatagova et al., *T͡sK VKP(b) i nat͡sional'nyĭ vopros*, 314.
58. See digitised issues available: https://www.nli.org.il/en/newspapers/zaygreytkiev.
59. Gatagova et al., *T͡sK VKP(b) i nat͡sional'nyĭ vopros.*, 603.
60. Shneer, *History of 'the Truth'*, 139.
61. E.g. Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 92, 108, 369.

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