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QUIETA NON MOVERE? THE B'NAI B'RITH IN EAST UPPER SILESIA, 1921-1934

Abstract

This article aims to narrate and examine a unique story of 'Polonisation' of a certain population group in the interwar Central-European border area. It deals with the question of belonging and affiliation of a group of members of a Jewish organisation in East Upper Silesia. The area, which was transferred to Poland from Germany after WWI, experienced an intensive process of nationalisation, or Polonisation. The article focuses mostly on the former German city Kattowitz, or Katowice, which after the border shift became the capital of Poland's new province, the Silesian Voivodeship. A period of thirteen years has been taken into account: from 1921, the year of the plebiscite in Upper Silesia, until 1934, when Poland and Germany signed the non-aggression pact. Both the plebiscite and the signing of the non-aggression pact were crucial for the Upper Silesian minorities. At the time of the plebiscite, these minorities had to opt for a national affiliation, while none of them considered themselves completely German or Polish. Therefore, after the plebiscite and with the borders rearranged, these groups should have been fit for getting Polonised. The article focuses at the Jewish test case, in a wide and comparative context of international political and diplomatic background. It therefore places micro-history cases within the macro-history of Central Europe between the two World Wars.

Keywords: Upper Silesia, Katowice (Kattowitz), Jews, B'nai B'rith Order, Polonisation.

In spite of the regional specificity of East Upper Silesia and its capital Katowice, the main questions of national belonging and nationalisation, multi-national state, and the national, linguistic, or religious definitions of minorities versus their own self-definition, were common to all the successor states during their interwar existence. My focus on Katowice is essential, since this rich capital city, which was 'relocated' together with the borders and became the centre

of the Polish Silesian Autonomy, gained an immense symbolic meaning in the eyes of Poland, Germany, and Western European states, and was a significant case for the League of Nations / the Court of Justice in The Hague.

For the Polish state, this city symbolised the victory of Poland over Germany and the end of the many years of Germanisation of the country's western borderlands. For Germany, this city became symbolic in terms of loss of not merely one of its most important eastern industrial towns, abounding in coal mines, but of all former Prussian territories which were shifted to Poland. For the powerful European countries like France, Italy or Great Britain, the attitude toward the city (as well as towards the whole area of Upper Silesia) signified in fact their own position not only in favour of Poland or Germany but moreover, towards the general unstable post-war balance of forces. Finally, for the League of Nations and for the Court in The Hague, the city was of high importance as a capital of an important region within a new successor state. Katowice was a symbol of a place where the post-war minority rights agreements were abided by in a proper way.

Therefore, East Upper Silesia and Katowice, being politicised areas of international importance, are highly applicable for examining 'macro-history' through 'micro-history' test cases. In such an area, the nationalisation of minorities occurring on a 'micro' level can therefore reflect certain less known aspects of a political and diplomatic 'macro-history' of interwar Europe. My approach shows in what ways the process of Polonisation in the area in question revealed valuable political and economic international discussions, and contributes to the understanding of the influence of 'micro-history' on 'macro-history' of the relationships between the minorities and the ruling majorities in the national discourse of the twentieth century.

Jews began to settle in Upper Silesia at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Toward the end of that century, the ideas of the French Revolution, together with the concept of Jewish Enlightenment (or Haskalah), and the changes the state was undergoing, drove the Jewish population in Prussia towards the process of emancipation.

Several Prussian laws, especially the 1812 *Edikt betreffend die bürgerlichen Verhältnisse der Juden*, whereby the Jews gained the status of citizens, gave the Jewry of Upper Silesia freedom of settlement, possession of property, choice of profession, and studies in universities.

When Kattowitz was granted the municipal status in 1865, there already existed a small Jewish community, which grew rapidly in the following years.¹

I will mostly focus on the B'nai B'rith's Silesian lodge 'Concordia', to which belonged the German speaking elite of the Jewish population of Kattowitz.

The B'nai B'rith (Sons of the Covenant) Order was established in New York in 1843, aiming at humanity, tolerance, and charity and unifying the Jewish society under ethic and intellectual values of Judaism.² The departments of the Order were named 'lodges', and its members, 'brethren'. In March 1882, the first European Lodge was founded, in Berlin. Soon afterwards, the lodges spread over all Europe. Every country that had a certain number of lodges was called a 'District'. In 1883, the B'nai B'rith lodge 'Concordia' of Kattowitz was founded.

Most of the Jewish elite members of the lodge lived in Kattowitz before the borders shifted, and therefore were part of the German Jewry. Their membership with the B'nai-B'rith Order reflected the Jewish part of their self-definition. But being deeply influenced

¹ Cf. Jacob Cohn, *Geschichte der Synagogen-Gemeinde Kattowitz O.S. Festgabe anlässlich der Einweihung der neuen Synagoge am 12. Sept. 1900* (Kattowitz, 1900), 1–46; Gabriela Waś, 'Dzieje Śląska od 1526 do 1806 roku. Śląsk we władaniu Habsburgów. Śląsk pod panowaniem pruskim', in Marek Czapliński (ed.), *Historia Śląska* (Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis, nr 3008, 2nd edn., Wrocław, 2007), 244–5; Marek Czapliński, 'Śląsk w 2. połowie XIX i na początku XX wieku (1851–1918)', *ibidem*, 284–5, 330; Marcin Wodziński, 'Languages of the Jewish Communities in Polish Silesia (1922–1939)', *Jewish History*, xvi (2002), 132–6. For more about the history of Silesian Jews, see *idem*, "'Walking in the Steel Boots of Faith...'" Anti-Semitic Journalism in the Voivodship of Silesia, 1922–1939', in Marcin Wodziński and Janusz Spyra (eds.), *Jews in Silesia*, trans. Rafał Kosowski et al. (Cracow, 2001), 99–124.

² Cf. Hanna Domańska, *Gdański Zakon Synów Przymierza. Dzieje żydowskiego wolnomularstwa w Gdańsku i Sopocie, lata 1899–1938* (Judaica, Biblioteka 100-lecia Miasta Sopotu, Gdynia, 2002), 74–80; Cornelia Wilhelm, *Deutsche Juden in Amerika. Bürgerliches Selbstbewusstsein und jüdische Identität in den Orden B'nai B'rith und Treue Schwestern, 1843–1914* (Transatlantische Historische Studien, 30, Stuttgart, 2007), 60–81; Leon Chajm, 'Związek Stowarzyszeń Humanitarnych B'nei B'rith w II Rzeczypospolitej', in *idem*, *Wolnomularstwo w II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw, 1975), 517–77; Bogusława Czajeka, *Archiwum Związku Żydowskich Stowarzyszeń Humanitarnych 'B'nei B'rith' w Krakowie (1892–1938). Zarys dziejów związku, historia zespołu i inwentarz* (Studia Polono-Judaica. Series Fontium, 1, Cracow, 1994), 9–11.

by German culture, these members regarded themselves as belonging to the German part of the city's community blend.³

After WWI, according to the Treaty of Versailles, the conduct of plebiscites in disputable European regions was made obligatory, in order to clarify which community would be the major population within the new successor nation-states.⁴ Due to its high industrial importance, the Upper Silesian region reflected intensive international discussions and tensions which formed the background of political or social development in the area during the interwar period. It was decided that the plebiscite be carried out on March 20, 1921, across the disputable area of former Prussian Upper Silesia.

As a result, the land was divided, leaving the area, which was then named 'Eastern Upper Silesia' on the Polish side, with Katowice as its capital. After the final split, the League of Nations worked out, on May 15, 1922, a Geneva Convention between Poland and Germany, by means of which Germany and Poland agreed upon economic and political provisions for the Upper Silesian area and signed agreements concerning minority rights.

On the way to the Silesian partition, there appeared a strong controversy. After certain parts of Upper Silesia fell into the control of the new Polish Republic, several lodges that had belonged to the German District now found themselves within Polish state territory.

³ For more information about the self-definition and the perception of the German Jews, see Moshe Zimmermann, *Deutsche gegen Deutsche. Das Schicksal der Juden 1938–1945* (Berlin, 2008), 12–21.

⁴ Another plebiscite area was the disputable province of north Schleswig, which after the plebiscite of 1920 was divided into North Schleswig belonging to Denmark and populated by a German minority, and South Schleswig, belonging to Germany and being home to a Dutch minority, respectively. The other such areas were the East and West Prussian regions of Allenstein and Marienwerde. Cf. Sarah Wambaugh, *Plebiscites since the World War. With a Collection of Official Documents*, 2 vols. (Concord, 1933), i, 48–103; Hunt T. Tooley, 'German Political Violence and the Border Plebiscite in Upper Silesia, 1919–1921', *Central European History*, xxi, 1 (1988), 56; Karen M. Pedersen, 'Die deutsche Minderheit in Dänemark und die dänische Minderheit in Deutschland', in Robert Hinderling and Ludwig M. Eichinger (eds.), *Handbuch der mitteleuropäischen Sprachminderheiten* (Tübingen, 1996), 32–56. For more on the interwar plebiscite area of Memel, see Ruth Leiserowitz, *Sabbatleuchter und Kriegerverein. Juden in der ostpreußisch-litauischen Grenzregion, 1812–1942* (Einzelveröffentlichungen des Deutschen Historischen Instituts Warschau, 24, Osnabrück, 2010), 287–312.

Three Upper Silesian lodges – or, the ‘Silesian’ ones, as they were later called – were relocated as the border shifted. The ‘Concordia’ lodge, which is the main focus here, was the most influential among the three.

The takeover of Katowice by Poland in June 1922, despite the plebiscite’s results, was a painful event for the members of the Silesian lodges. After 1922, in addition to the shift, and according to the statutes of the Order, they could no longer belong to the German District. Apparently, the German Jewish brethren of ‘Concordia’ and ‘Michael Sachs’ experienced severe humiliation. Another reason for such an assumption was presumably the one mentioned previously: an alien content, i.e. stranger and ‘inferior’ Yiddish- and Polish-speaking *Ostjuden*, who suddenly found themselves within the familiar frames of B'nai B'rith lodges. Each of the Order activities, which earlier caused satisfaction and pleasure – for instance, gatherings, lectures, or celebrated rites – became tinted with a rather negative shade as soon as all these activities were carried out by Eastern European Jews (who, according to those German Jews, did not entirely fit the Western European image of B'nai B'rith Order).

Frustration or discontent evidently caused rejection of this alien element from the daily life, even if such a rejection was rather an escape from the surrounding reality. For the German-Jewish members of ‘Concordia’ and ‘Michael Sachs’ lodges, such an escape was manifested in their desire to remain under the supervision of their native German District VIII, even after borders were displaced. According to the B'nai B'rith statutes, these lodges could no longer belong to the German District.⁵

A proposal that they join the Polish District, which was to be created in a short time, did not change the position or the decisions of the lodges of Katowice and Königshütte (Polish: Królewska Huta; later on, Chorzów) and led to their protest. In August 1923, Leon Ader, a future head of the Polish B'nai B'rith District and a prominent Jewish activist, was told by Fritz Reichmann, the head of ‘Concordia’, that resulting from the voting, it was decided that two Silesian lodges – namely, ‘Concordia’ and ‘Michael Sachs’ – be subjected to the

⁵ Cf. Andreas Reinke, ‘Between Ethnic Solidarity and National Allegiance: The German Order of the B'nai B'rith’, *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts / Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook*, i (2002), 341.

authority of the Executive Committee in the United States, instead of joining the Polish District.⁶

It seems, however, that the Order became more involved into the matters between the Upper Silesian lodges and the Polish District only since the end of May 1926. Such a long-lasting neutral position could be understandable, taking into account the political background of the Second Polish Republic in the years 1925–6. In April 1924, after a long inflation and due to a wealth of international loans contracted, Polish Prime Minister Władysław Grabski conducted a monetary reform, first stabilising and then converting the Polish mark to zloty. Successful in the beginning, by 1925, this reform – or, to be more precise, the loans drawn in order to conduct it – together with the problems with importations, the crop failure and the banking system crisis, contributed to governmental conflicts and an overall discontent.⁷

In June 1925, the Polish-German negotiations over a coal trade agreement failed, and a trade war began. The strategist of this war, Gustav Stresemann, who was German Foreign Minister then, coined a plan on his own: to make use of the economic war in order to achieve his political aims. This brought Poland to inflation and financial crisis. Since Poland had recently contracted a considerable loan from American bankers, the country's position from both the West European and American standpoint was not quite favourable. Such developments eventually brought about the Locarno Treaties in October 1925, which divided borders in Europe into two categories: western, which were guaranteed by the Treaties, and eastern (the Germany's frontier), which were open for revision.⁸ This division

⁶ Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie (hereinafter: ANKr), Akta B'nai B'rith (hereinafter: BB), 68, p. 19; Ludwik Hass, *Ambicje, rachuby, rzeczywistość. Wolność i państwo w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej 1905–1928* (Warsaw, 1984), 210.

⁷ Cf. Marian M. Drozdowski, *Władysław Grabski* (Rzeszów, 2002), 157–70, 209–23; Marek K. Kamiński and Michał J. Zacharias, *Polityka zagraniczna II Rzeczypospolitej: 1918–1939* (U Źródeł Teraźniejszości, Warsaw, 1987), 90–4; Wojciech Morawski, 'Władysław Grabski, premier rządu polskiego 23 VI – 24 VII 1920, 19 XII 1923 – 14 XI 1925', in Andrzej Chojnowski and Piotr Wróbel (eds.), *Prezydenci i premierzy Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* (Wrocław, 1992), 121–34.

⁸ Cf. Piotr S. Wandycz, *France and her Eastern Allies, 1919–1925: French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from the Paris Peace Conference in Locarno* (Minneapolis, 1962), 291, 352–72; *idem*, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, 1926–1936: French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from Locarno to the Remilitarization of the Rhineland* (Princeton, NJ, 1988), 20–1; *idem*, *Polish Diplomacy 1914–1945: Aims*

was humiliating for Poland and placed the Silesian Voivodeship in an unstable, if not dangerous, position. In November 1925, Premier Grabski dissolved the Government, and resigned. The autumn of 1925 thus clearly became a tense and problematic period for Poland, in terms of economic as well as political circumstances.

Therefore, in 1924–5 the Upper Silesian lodges constantly refused to join the Polish District. In this period of time, neither German nor the American Districts made attempts to change the situation and to incite the Silesian lodges to join the Polish District; they had made such attempts immediately after the plebiscite, though. Apparently, the Upper Silesian lodges, and the German and American Districts, preferred to take a waiting position, assuming the very possible return of East Upper Silesia back to Germany.

After the Coup of May 1926, which was perpetrated in Poland by Piłsudski, a new government was installed. Piłsudski headed the *Sanacja* movement, which supported the 'moral remedy [Polish, *sanacja*]' of the Polish politics, and which gradually strengthened the Polish state. However, in May 1926, the economic crisis, the humiliation Poland was subjected to by the Locarno Treaties, together with Germany's expectation to execute a revision of the borders and, in the end, the Polish coup d'état, which caused street fights and death of people, probably instilled in the minds of B'nai B'rith leaders in the U.S. and in Germany a sense of unsecure future of the Polish Republic, or at least, unstable state of its western borders.

On May 23, 1926, a mere eight days after the Coup took place, in the letters exchanged between the B'nai B'rith Districts, the German District described the situation of the Upper Silesian lodges as unusual. It stated that it would be better both for the Polish and the German B'nai B'rith to take towards the Upper Silesian lodges a waiting position, and to wait for news.⁹ The members of 'Concordia' also asked to withhold the joining of the Polish District until the matters became clearer. A fear of a new political reality and a feeling of a totally unclear future were well expressed in a letter from members of 'Concordia' lodge to Leon Ader of June 24, 1926. The brethren

and Achievements (London, 1988), 20–2; Martin Kitchen, *Europe Between the Wars: A Political History* (London, 1988), 62–3, 108; Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History 1919–1933* (Oxford History of Modern Europe, Oxford, 2005), 410–11.

⁹ ANKr, BB 68, p. 131.

officially denied in it their wish to return to Germany; however, on the other hand, they asked to withhold the joining of the Polish District until the issue became clarified and, finally, they described the reality they experienced at the time as “days when the highest ideals of mankind are in danger.”¹⁰

At the end of 1926, the political and economic situation in Poland improved, thanks to the *Sanacja* movement, the loans contracted from American banks, and successful exports of Polish-Silesian coal to England.¹¹ Poland had, therefore, no economic dependence on the German state. In the very beginning of 1927, the German government introduced a new tactic: to separate between the trade interest and non-trade issues. American and European political negotiations with Poland improved due to the new trade contracts and loans, and the question of territorial revision was abandoned.

Thus, on November 16, 1927, the Polish District received unexpected news: the heads of ‘Concordia’ and ‘Michael Sachs’ sent a letter to Leon Ader, reporting on their official final decision, made by a majority of members, to be incorporated within the District.¹² Two days later, on November 18, 1927, Ader announced that the lodges ‘Concordia’ and ‘Michael Sachs’ were officially incorporated in the Polish District. Alfred Cohen, the President of the Order, expressed his thanks for the cooperation and called the act of incorporation an encouraging one. Leo Baeck sent his best regards and expressed his deep delight.¹³ The story of a long discussion about a small group of people, created due to the political developments, international economic determinants and diplomatic relationships, finally came to an end.

However, new dramatic changes came after 1929. Upper Silesia, a highly industrial and commercial area, was crushed by the crisis,

¹⁰ ANKr, BB, 68, pp. 134–5.

¹¹ Cf. Michael C. Kaser and Edward A. Radice (eds.), *The Economic History of Eastern Europe, 1919–1975*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1985), i: *Economic Structure and Performance Between the Two Wars*, 43; Thomas S. Dyman, ‘Britain, Poland, and the Search for Security in Europe: Anglo-Polish Relations, 1924–1934’, Ph.D. thesis, University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign, 1985), 191–9; Zbigniew Landau and Jerzy Tomaszewski, *Zarys historii gospodarczej Polski 1918–1939* (6th extended edn., Warsaw, 1999), 163.

¹² ANKr, BB, 68, p. 383.

¹³ Cf. Anna M. Kargol, *Zakon Synów Przymierza: Krakowska Loża ‘Solidarność’ 1892–1938* (Warsaw, 2013), 118–20; ANKr, BB, 68, pp. 351–2, 387–93.

just like the rest of Europe was.¹⁴ Serious economic problems grew evident from November/December 1929 onwards. In the early days of 1930, the correspondence between 'Concordia' and the Grand Lodge of Poland mostly dealt with the lodge's payment debts. The lodge's members sent a long letter describing the complicated economic situation which made them unable to pay their membership fees, and asking for a reduction and delay of the payments.¹⁵

Despite the very difficult situation which, in a short time, caused many of the once-wealthy 'Concordia' members to lose at least a large part of their possessions, they participated in the lodge meetings, and the lodge's activity continued as usual.¹⁶ For instance, the script of an event dedicated to the Hanukkah, dated December 17, 1929, worded a request, for the first time ever: "The proceeds, in their entirety, are intended for charitable purposes; we send therefore to our dear brothers an urgent appeal to support us in our aspirations through your most active participation."¹⁷

In addition to the attempts to overcome the disaster and to behave as usual, the reaction of 'Concordia' to the economic crisis demonstrated one more aspect of their group-belonging, which gradually occurred during the autumn and winter months following their financial collapse. Apparently, during these first months of crisis, members of the lodge, willingly or unwillingly, became more closely associated with the Grand Lodge of Poland as well as, probably, with the other lodges, united by the same disaster. Given the difficult economic conditions prevailing in Poland, their fraternal existence within the Polish District depended, in large measure, on the decision

¹⁴ Cf. Patricia Clavin, *The Great Depression in Europe, 1929–1939* (European History in Perspective, London and New York, 2000), 90–105; Michael C. Kaser and Rudolph Nötel, *East European Economies in Two World Crises* (Papers in East European Economies, 71, Oxford, 1985), 1–6; Derek H. Aldcroft, *Studies in the Interwar European Economy* (Modern Economic and Social History, Aldershot and Brookfield, 1997), 122–87; Richard Blanke, *Orphans of Versailles: The Germans in Western Poland, 1918–1939* (Lexington, 1993), 145–8; Zbigniew Landau and Jerzy Tomaszewski, *Gospodarka Polski międzywojennej 1918–1939*, 4 vols. (Warsaw, 1971), ii: 1924–1929. *Od Grabskiego do Piłsudskiego*, 30–60, 300.

¹⁵ ANKr, BB, 358, pp. 21–5; BB, 68, p. 649.

¹⁶ See Leon Ader's reply to the members of 'Concordia' concerning the reduction of the lodge's payments: ANKr, BB, 68, pp. 625–6.

¹⁷ ANKr, BB, 68, p. 621.

of their *Ostjüdisch* brethren as well as on their individual conditions of existence under the Polish state's internal policy.

In the years 1930–2, the economic situation of Poland continued to worsen, which extended to the Polish District and to the Silesian lodges in particular.¹⁸ During a session of the Order's General Committee held in January 1930 in Berlin, it was resolved that 'Concordia' be given a concession in the matter of the non-paying brethren: "And this only due to the difficult and unfavourable financial situation that both these [Silesian] lodges are being through."¹⁹ Some of the lectures which were given dealt with questions such as, for instance: 'How can I rescue the remains of my fortune?' (from a session of December 1931).²⁰

An annual report issued early in 1932 described the economic situation of 'Concordia' brethren in a negative light:

... indeed, this year [has passed] under an unprecedented economic crisis, which paralysed all the powers and which unfortunately did not stop at the gates of our dear brethren, and brought instead some of them to a struggle for daily existence ...²¹

In the spring of 1932, a desperate letter was sent by the lodge's representatives to the Grand Lodge in Cracow, describing a miserable or, as they called it, 'catastrophic' situation in which many of the lodge's members, as well as the whole Silesian Voivodeship, found themselves at the beginning of 1932. The lodge itself admitted that it was unable to support its members' families. Therefore, in the conclusion of the letter, the heads of the formerly wealthy 'Concordia' requested for financial support from the Polish Grand District, which a few years before was a subject of their contempt. Leon Ader responded to this request immediately, and very soon afterwards, the Cracow brethren, albeit put in a tough financial situation themselves, succeeded in gathering a certain amount of money (though lesser than 'Concordia' requested) which was intended for the so-called *Katastrofenfond* – a fund created for the emergency expenses.²²

¹⁸ Cf. Landau and Tomaszewski, *Gospodarka*, 30–78, 154–67, 398–402; ANKr, BB, 359, p. 18; ANKr, BB, 358, p. 26.

¹⁹ ANKr, BB, 358, p. 30.

²⁰ ANKr, BB, 357, p. 37.

²¹ ANKr, BB, 360, p. 37.

²² ANKr, BB, 68, pp. 903–4, 977; BB, 358, p. 92.

Apparently, a dramatic event such as the economic crisis became an agent of 'Polonisation', bringing the former German and Polish Jews together more closely than they had been during the period of relative economic and social prosperity.

In addition to the permanent financial troubles experienced by members of the two Silesian lodges, the year 1933 gave them, and the B'nai B'rith Order in general, an additional challenge: the rise of the National Socialist regime and its anti-Jewish policy. Despite the financial collapse, 1933 was to appear to be one of the most solemn years for 'Concordia' brethren. In November 1933, the lodge's jubilee festivities had to take place, and this marked a point of pride for its members, since 'Concordia' was one of the oldest lodges, created in one of the historically oldest European districts.

So, the feelings of the lodge members turned bittersweet since the early spring of 1933. This ambivalence is clearly expressed in a 'Concordia' report on the lodge's annual activities, which was sent at the year's end to Leon Ader:

On the one hand, we hold the celebration of the fifty years of our existence, as the brightest feature of the year ...; on the other hand, however, two elementary facts whose shadows are hovering above us: the always-imminent severe economic crisis, with its overwhelming side effects; and, the tragic fate which hit so hard the sisters and brothers of our neighbouring land ..., [so severely affecting] today the extensive and deep family relationships in Germany. Thus, we in our feelings are led to the highest pride, but then soon again are we overthrown into a deep depression²³

The Polish District as a whole started responding to the anti-Jewish measures which were applied in Germany beginning with February 1933; the violent acts of the new regime grew severer in March and April.²⁴ The community had to witness the violence which was often

²³ ANKr, BB, 360, p. 67.

²⁴ Yfaat Weiss, *Deutsche und Polnische Juden vor dem Holocaust. Jüdische Identität zwischen Staatsbürgerschaft und Ethnizität 1933–1940*, trans. Matthias Schmidt (Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, 81, Munich, 2000), 26–32; Wolfgang Benz, *A Concise History of the Third Reich*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Weimar and Now: German Cultural Criticism, 39, Berkeley, 2006), 138–42; Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (Studies in Jewish History, New York and Oxford, 1999), 18–21; Wolfgang Benz, *Geschichte des Dritten Reiches* (Munich 2000), 132–4; Anna Novikov-Almagor, 'Zbąszyń, 1933', *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia*, vii (2009), 115–21.

targeted at certain members of Germany's *Ostjüdisch* society, who were brutally expelled from Germany to Poland. As far as it appears from the sources, Katowice turned into one of the points where the Jewish immigrants arrived after leaving Germany.

As it is evident from 'Concordia's' annual report, members of the lodge took an active part in absorption of those so-called 'Polish citizens living in Germany', or the *Reemigranten*, who, according to the report, were driven back by the 'Hitler movement' to their motherland (*Heimat*). The report said that Katowice, as one of the 'gates' of Poland for those coming from Germany, experienced on a daily basis 'uncounted' numbers of refugees, whom the lodge's brothers tried to help. Even if the report exaggerated the reality, it still seems that members of 'Concordia' had to assist large numbers of newcomers with their own resources, which became meagre and scarce due to the economic crisis. Hence, the brethren provided them with "first aid to reintegrate them into the Polish economy."²⁵

This 'first aid' was interpreted by the lodge's members as the need to teach the newcomers Polish, in the first place. It seems that despite the fact that the refugees traced their origins to the territory of the Polish Republic (or, close to its borders), at least a large part of them had hardly any command of Polish at all. These migrants, who, in majority, had left the East European areas between the end of the nineteenth century and WWI or thereafter, mostly spoke Yiddish (some of them, Russian and some – mostly those from Galicia – German). After the years of living in Germany, many of them could speak German (or, became speakers of German).²⁶ The overall internal realities of the newly-founded Second Polish Republic were rather unknown to them and, furthermore, to their children, who had been

²⁵ Yosef Khrust and Yosef Frankel (eds.), *Katovits: perihatah ve-shekiyatah shel ha-kehilah ha-yehudit; sefer zikaron* (Tel Aviv, 1996), 63; ANKr, BB, 360, p. 78.

²⁶ Cf. Trude Maurer, *Ostjuden in Deutschland, 1918–1933* (Hamburger Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Juden, 12, Hamburg, 1986), 17–27, 760–1; Shulamit Volkov, 'Die Dynamik der Dissimilation: Deutsche Juden und die ostjüdischen Einwanderer', in Dirk Blasius and Dan Diner (eds.), *Zerbrochene Geschichte. Leben und Selbstverständnis der Juden in Deutschland* (Geschichte Fischer, Frankfurt am Main, 1991), 69–77; Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Madison and London, 1982), 32–7; Shulamit Volkov, *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites: Trials in Emancipation* (Cambridge, 2006), 265–74.

born in what was then Germany, or at least grew up there. Therefore, their 'return' to their 'homeland' was in fact an exile into an unknown country, with a mostly unfamiliar official language.

The task of teaching/learning Polish, mentioned as a primary one, and absolutely necessary for the refugees, presumably proceeded from the previous experience of these German Jews who after the border shift were transferred to a new linguistic reality. Experiencing how language difficulties could disturb daily life, the lodge brethren (and sisters) tried to smoothen the newcomers' experience of sudden entrance to the unknown country by providing them with courses of Polish.

Thus, in quite a paradoxical way, the German Jewish citizens of Poland absorbed the Polish *Ostjuden* expelled from Germany by helping them learn Polish, while both groups were generally German-speaking. This action could be interpreted as an additional and essential step towards the further 'Polonisation' of the lodge members who shortly before then had insisted on German as its official language, tried to avoid any influence which was alien to German culture, and were loyal to the German state (whatever it should have been called).

Apparently, such a change in the lodge's approach to Germany and Poland was not coincidental and can be explained by a crucial change of values after the rise of the National Socialist regime to power. It would be overstated to suggest that the change in the self-definition of the Silesian German Jews was immediate and that all of them rapidly abandoned their values and their mother tongue, turning into Polish patriots. One can assume, however, that their personal preferences were left for their private intimate sphere of life and started to coexist with the new preferences, which gradually developed during the years within Poland and were significantly strengthened during 1933.

Hence, the organisation of the Polish language courses as well as a general care for the Jewish newcomers, from the position of Polish Jewish citizens, emphasised the Jewish part of 'Concordia' members' self-definition. Feeling Jewish could eventually be helpful to their cognitive dissonance, in that it 'softened' negative sentiments towards the 'Germanness'. The latter was an inseparable part of their own self-perception, to which they were born, in which they lived most of their lives, and which 'evinced' them.

Presumably, an essential shift in their self-definition was also caused by their attitude toward the surrounding political reality and

their own place within the 'shifting' context. For more than a decade, between 1922 and 1933, the German Jewish Silesian B'nai B'rith brethren regarded their relocation to Poland as a failure: politically, culturally, professionally, and linguistically. Moreover, in addition to this harm to their German identity, they now became the object of another humiliation, which this time affected the Jewish part of their self-definition (which, as it seems, was closely tied to the German one), manifesting itself in their organisational shift to join the group of *Ostjuden*. Even their final decision to incorporate to the Polish District was made not out of their affection to their Polish Jewish brethren or to Poland as a country, but out of a political and organisational necessity.

Thus, during most of the eleven years the reality within Poland was regarded by these brethren as unwanted, unfamiliar, and as less stable compared to Germany. It was also equally threatening. From the beginning of 1933, the situation changed entirely. The German Jewish inhabitants of Polish Silesia suddenly found themselves in a much more preferable position than their relatives, friends, and colleagues who continued to live in Germany and until then had been, to some extent, the subjects of envy of their eastern counterparts. For the Jews, the life within Poland now turned suddenly safer, and Polish citizenship became much worthwhile than German.

It would be interesting to compare this situation with the one described by David Rechter, which took place in 1917, when the B'nai B'rith members of Vienna witnessed a huge wave of the *Ostjuden* refugees flowing in. In this case, the situation was exactly the opposite to the one the Silesian B'nai B'rith met with in 1933, since in 1917, "The refugees had emerged from the darkness of their ghetto into the 'bright light of the west' and needed to be 'educated' to adopt a West European lifestyle."²⁷ In 1933, these former refugees of the same *Ostjuden* descent had, together with their children, to leave their 'West European' style they had adopted during the fifteen-year period and be re-educated to the language and the values of Poland, the unfamiliar successor state.

Eventually, these Jewish refugees, accustomed to German reality, could remind members of 'Concordia' of their own past and the

²⁷ Cf. David Rechter, *The Jews of Vienna and the First World War* (The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, London, 2001), 72–3.

feelings related to being in a new post-war reality. Therefore, it seems that their first drive to emphasise the importance of learning Polish, in addition to some practical reasons, was done more intuitively rather than consciously, bringing at least some feeling of safety to these frightened and confused people, by providing them with some basic knowledge of an unfamiliar (or, at least, not entirely familiar) Polish language.

Additionally, according to Yfaat Weiss, the German Jewish organisations provided a basic assistance to the pauper segments among the *Ostjuden*.²⁸ Therefore, the German Jewish members of 'Concordia' continued to feel towards their Eastern Jewish brothers responsibility as for the 'weakest' ones.²⁹ Such feelings might, however, be regarded as bizarre in the context of complete role reversal: the German Jewish citizens of Poland now supported their Germanised Eastern Jewish brothers.

It seems that for the first time Polonisation played a crucial role within the self-perception of the German Silesian Jews, since it was not 'brought' from 'outside' and implemented on them in a passive way, but, on the contrary, was actively manifested by them, in terms of being Polish citizens (even as German speakers). Another test case of the Silesian German Jewish belonging was the aforementioned anniversary of 'Concordia', which took place on November 19, 1933. Although the festivity was celebrated in a very solemn way, one could read between the lines of the report a slight discomfort and an attempt at 'retouching' the former German patriotism of the lodge and its foundation in Germany. Thus, at least in the report the use of the word 'Germany' was avoided. Instead of it, members of 'Concordia' began emphasising the lodge's regional belonging.

In the end of 1933, following the dramatic events and a deep afterthought, members of 'Concordia' were willing to represent their lodge not only as a German speaking milieu. Such representation, within the tense Polish-German political relations, was not welcomed by Polish state officials, who might have read the report. Therefore, it was

²⁸ Cf. Weiss, *Deutsche und Polnische Juden*, 80.

²⁹ For more on the philanthropic responsibility of the German Jews towards the *Ostjuden*, see: Maurer, *Ostjuden*, 741–60; David Rechter, 'Ethnicity and the Politics of Welfare: The Case of Habsburg Austrian Jewry', *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts / Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook*, i (2002), 257–9.

easier, both officially and psychologically, to stress the local, Silesian character of the lodge and, furthermore, its urban character, in the city of Katowice. Thus, the four decades of 'Concordia's' existence within Germany and within the German District were briefly described as forty years of belonging to District VIII. The final emphasis was put on the 'local' subject of pride: the attendance of two honourable members and founders of 'Concordia', who had had fifty years of membership in the lodge, from its very beginnings.³⁰ Therefore, the whole festivity was imbued with a 'regional' character, with the belonging of the lodge to Silesia, and Katowice in specific, emphasised.

The last point I would like to take a closer look at is the linguistic shift of 'Concordia' in the course of 1933. Precisely speaking, from June 23 on, the lodge started to publish its official announcements on the weekly and monthly events both in Polish and German, instead of in German only, as had been the case previously. Moreover, from the beginning of 1934, the lodge proclaimed Polish as its official language. From that point on, all its correspondence with the Polish District and with all its lodges began being made in Polish only.³¹ This action could only emphasise the assumption that this linguistic shift was made not only out of official consideration but out of some inner and deeper motives as well.

First, neither the local voivodeship nor the state authorities prevented such publications and therefore, in the year 1933, politically sensitive and clearly anti-German as it was in Poland, the German Jewish members of B'nai B'rith followed the example of the Jewish community of Katowice in publishing their official announcements. Secondly, the lodge followed the general pro-Polish policy which was clearly presented by the whole Polish District during 1933, emphasising the Orders members' civic loyalty to the state. One more paradox, which apparently followed the generally pro-Polish policy of Concordia outwardly, is that this pro-Polish behaviour and the language shift were made by the German Jews in order not to be injured by the anti-German policy of Poland. Hence, during the first year of the National Socialist regime in Germany, the German Jews tried to conceal their 'Germanness' so as not to be regarded

³⁰ ANKr, BB, 360, pp. 67–9.

³¹ For the official correspondence in Polish, see, for instance, ANKr, BB, 357, pp. 177, 183–5.

by the Polish authorities as Germans or as Germanophiles, and to remain in Poland.

In 1934, the members of the lodge proclaimed the Polish language as their official language. All their correspondence and publications were ever since either bilingual or in Polish only. In an ironic way, members of 'Concordia' became pro-Polish patriots in the mid-thirties, when the anti-Jewish forces in the government and the society grew stronger.

proofreading Tristan Korecki