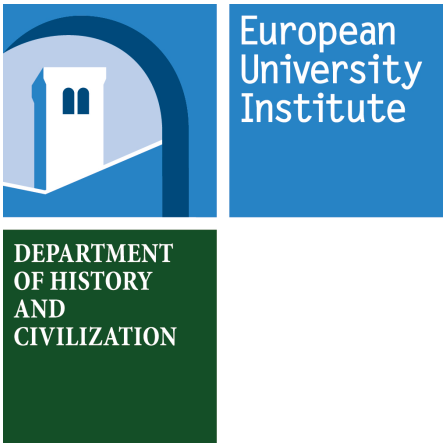

Bolsheviks' Great Expectations

Sovietizing Jews in the Ukrainian Province, 1919-1930

Maryna Batsman

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to
obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilization
of the European University Institute

Florence, 16 December 2019

European University Institute
Department of History and Civilization

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the Sovietization of Jews in the interwar Ukrainian province. It is concerned with the transformation of Jewish life during the early Soviet nationality policy officially known as *korenizatsiia* (*Rus*. nativization, indigenization, lit. "putting down roots"). I discuss the process of making a secular, loyal, Soviet citizen out of a shtetl Jew through Yiddish schools, local councils, the anti-religious campaign, and secular culture. Focusing on three main domains of Jewish life around which the nationality policy was organized on the territories of the former Pale of Settlement—education, religion, and culture—I explore the extent to which Soviet institutions in the 1920s-1930s changed daily practices of the provincial Jewish population in private and public spaces. I argue that contrary to what Bolsheviks hoped for, Sovietization of Jews in the province in the interwar period was far from successful. The local population sometimes openly resisted the novelties, although more often it opted for reconciliation, combining them with their traditional lifestyle. In general, the Jews distrusted the agents of the new power, seeing in them the descendants of the imperial oppressive regime. Sovietization of Jews was inhibited by numerous factors, including distance from Moscow, poor financing, double loyalty of intermediary agents, and opportunism of Jewish elites who used the nationality policy to foster their national revival. More broadly, I argue that the nationality policy was a continuity of imperial discrimination of the Jewish population.

Contents

Acknowledgements

I owe greatest indebtedness to my supervisor, Alexander Etkind, and Laura Lee Downs, the secondary reader of this dissertation, whose instructive guidance and criticism were indispensable for completing my project. Sasha's and Laura's friendly encouragement when I thought that I would not succeed in writing the dissertation and their tolerance of my, at times, lousy writing were admirable. I am especially grateful for the perspective which Sasha and Laura gave me as a scholar, urging me to seek ideas and interpretations outside the confined spaces of Soviet and Jewish history.

I was fortunate enough to have other insightful people commenting on previous drafts of the dissertation, in writing or in person. I would like to thank Andrej Doronin, Mayhill Fowler, Mihailo Gauhman, Catherine Gibson, Alexey Golubev, Pieter Judson, Pavel Kolář, Börries Kuzmany, Elżbieta Kwiecińska, Georgii Mokrickii, Evgeny Monastyrsky, James Plumtree, Jan Rybak, Balász Trencsényi, Carsten Wilke, and Serhy Yekelchyk. Parts of the dissertation were presented at The European University Institute (EUI), The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, The German Historical Institute in Moscow, and the American University of Central Asia. I am thankful to the audiences for their criticism and suggestions. I reserve special thanks to Oksana Dmyshchyk, for assistance in Ukrainian archives, to Michael Dorfman, for help with Hebrew and Yiddish, and to Joyce Kuaowi, for providing a place to stay in Moscow.

The dissertation was written with generous financial support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the EUI. The EUI was the most congenial environment for studying. My appreciation goes to all the people who made my stay in Florence pleasant.

My friends and family were the source of constant support, understanding, and forbearance. I am particularly grateful to my husband, Anton Markoč, for his love and care.

List of Abbreviations

AUCP(b) – The All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik)

CP(b)U – The Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Ukraine

Evobshchestkom – The Jewish Public Committee to Aid the Victims of the War and Pogroms

Evsektsiia – Jewish section of the Communist Party

Evkom – The Commissariat for Jewish National Affairs

INO – The Zhytomir Pedagogical Institute

Joint (JDC) – American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee for Jewish War Sufferers

Komnezam – Committees of Poor Peasants

Komsomol – The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League

Narada – The Educational Council of High Schools

Narkomnats – The People's Commissariat for the Affairs of Nationalities of the RSFSR

Narkompros – The People's Commissariat for Enlightenment of the RSFSR

Narobraz – Committee of People's Education

NEP – The New Economic Policy

NKVD – The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs

OINO – Odessa's Institute of People's Education

Okrnarobraz – Regional Department of People's Education

ORT – The Society for Handicraft and Agricultural Work among the Jews of Russia

RCP – The Russian Communist Party

RSDLP – The Russian Social Democratic Labor Party

RSDLP(b) – The Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Bolshevik)

RSFSR – The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic

Sotsvosp – Department of Social Upbringing

Sovnarkom – The Council of People's Commissars

SSR – Soviet Socialist Republic

SSWP – The Zionist Socialist Workers Party

TSIK – Central Executive Committee

TSK – Central Committee

TSYSHO – The Central Yiddish School Organization

UCP – Ukrainian Communist Party (Ukapist)

UCP(b) – Ukrainian Communist Party (Borotbist)

UNR – The Ukrainian National Republic

UONO – The County Department of Public Education

USSR – The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

VUTSIK – The All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee

Zhenotdel – Women's Department of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party

Archives:

DAZO – State Archive of Zhytomir Region, Zhytomir, Ukraine

GARF – State Archive of Russian Federation, Moscow, Russian Federation

RGASPI – Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, Moscow, Russian Federation

TsDAVO – Central State Archive of Highest State Authorities of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine

TsDKFFA – Pshenychnyi Central State CinePhotoPhono Archives of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine

ZKM – Archival Collection of Zhytomir Museum of Local Lore's Library, Zhytomir, Ukraine

List of Figures

Maps:

Illustrations:

A Note on Transliteration and Dates

I have used the following translations and abbreviations for the archival units:

Fund – Fond
Inventory (inv.) – opys, opis
File (f.) – sprava, delo

I have used standard anglicization of familiar Russian, Ukrainian, and Yiddish proper names and place names, such as Krupskaya and Zhytomir. I have followed a simplified version of the Library of Congress's transliteration rules for Russian, in the sense that I have used 'I' for 'и, й, ы' ('ia' for 'я', etc.) and have not used transliteration for hard signs or diacritical marks. In other respects, I have followed the Library of Congress's rules, for Russian and other languages.

All dates before February 1918 are given according to the Old Style (Julian) calendar, and after it to the New Style (Gregorian) calendar.

"… Jewish workers are for us. This is best seen in Berdychiv and Zhytomir. … Despite the difficult situation in these Jewish towns, they do not want either the war, or the arrival of Poles, or the arrival of another government. They are for the Soviet power. There is nothing positive going on there, as they did not receive any material gain from the revolution. But they did get political rights, they are not being prosecuted, etc."

Lazar Kaganovich

Speech on the Sessions of the Commission for the Examination of the Border Strip

September 13th, 1927 (RGASPI, Fund 81, inv. 3, f. 124)

"The Pole did shoot, because he is the counterrevolution. And you shoot because you are the Revolution. But Revolution is happiness. And happiness does not like orphans in its house. A good man does good deeds. The Revolution is the good deed done by good men. But good men do not kill. Hence the Revolution is done by bad men. But the Poles are also bad men. Who is going to tell Gedali which is the Revolution and which the counterrevolution? … All of us learned men fall to the floor and shout with a single voice, 'Woe unto us, where is the sweet Revolution?'"

Gedali, a Jewish antiquarian from Zhytomir

Isaac Babel, *The Red Cavalry*

Introduction

Exactly at midnight on one cold winter evening in the first year of the new century a train departed from Shpola to Kyiv. Shpola was no different from other towns in the Pale of Settlement, a region of the Russian Empire in which Jews were allowed permanent residency but which they could rarely exit. It was a poverty-ridden, godforsaken place at the Empire's outskirts.

"A man must earn his daily bread," thought an eleven-year-old Zosia Zel'manzon while boarding the train to Kyiv. His father Iosif died when he was just four, leaving his mother to take care of ten children. Zosia could no longer watch his mother's agony. He made a daring decision to leave Shpola and to start earning a living in a city he barely knew.

Kyiv did not greet him lightly. Zosia's bitter memories start from the time he found a job in a bookbinding store owned by a master Kudel'man. Kudel'man preyed on the unexperienced boy. Days were spent in the store, nights in the owner's barn. Servitude, harassment, and starvation repeated in a vicious circle of despair. One day Zosia decided to break the circle. He resolved to escape Kudel'man and never to allow himself to be abused again.

Wandering the streets of Kyiv, destitute and helpless, Zosia thought that his end was near and he prayed that it would be painless. Little did he know that his life began at the moment he met a man named Korsunski and his fellows. They fed and clothed him and gave him hope. They were people like him, simple workers whose lives depended on the whims of their masters. But they spoke a different language. They called each other "comrades", lectured about "the underground" and "the Revolution".

The words appealed to young Zosia Iosifovich more than anything he had heard before. It was through comrade Korsunski that he began to read socialist literature and to attend the meetings of workers in Kyiv's Slobodka, Solomenka, and in the Demeevsky forest. At one of the meetings, he met a fellow Jew Maxim Litvinov, from Białstok, the Polish part of the Pale, who would become a prominent Soviet diplomat. Zosia saw in Litvinov a modern man with a sharp mind, a model of what one could become if he were to embrace the socialist cause.

And so, he did. Zosia turned his hand to spreading *Iskra*, the official newspaper of Russian revolutionary socialists, in the regions of Kyiv. *Iskra* was banned in the Russian Empire and printed in exile under the management of Lenin, Plekhanov, and other masterminds of the Party. Its motto, "From a spark a fire will flare up," forebode a stormy decade in which Zosia's path was no different from that of other quintessential tough revolutionaries.

He was soon to forge his character in imperial prisons, first in Kyiv's Lukyanivka and then in Yarensk, a notable exile town in the Far North's Vologda Governorate. Ten years of prison were times of hardship but also of good fortune. Zosia befriended fellow socialists and with three of them escaped the prison and traveled back to Ukraine, settling in Kremenchug. There he formed a family, had two sons, naming the firstborn after his father whose face he did not remember.

Working as an electrician in a sawmill in Kremenchug, Zosia was far away from turbulent events of Petersburg. He remained devoted to the socialist ideals and greeted the February and the October Revolutions. But it was the Civil War that brought him back to the center of world's stage. Zosia joined the Red Army and soon waged battles against Anton Denikin's White Army, Ataman Grigoriev's Green Army, the anarchists of Nestor Makhno and Marusya Nikiforova, as well as the German occupation forces and their collaborator Hetman Pavlo Skoropadskyi. He saw numerous atrocities, in particular, the torture and murder of Jewish Komsomol teenage girls by the Whites in Kremenchug haunted him for years after.

The chaotic war of all against all in Ukraine was a lottery in which remaining alive was the first prize. But the biggest prize that Zosia got was to meet Vladimir Illyich Lenin, and he met him three times. Zosia, then in his late twenties, brought the question of joining the Bolshevik Party to Lenin but he was refused on the pretext of his poor health. He got reassurance that his devotion was highly appreciated.

Zosia joined the Party in 1924. His sons would become pioneers, then Komsomol members, then themselves Party members. The eldest one, Iosif, became an officer and an aviator, testifying "the wonder that everyone can get education under the Soviet power and contribute towards the building of communism."

Those are the words that Zosia Zel'manzon uses to end the story of his life, the story written in Kharkiv in 1957 and dedicated to the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution.[1] Or more

[1] GARF, Fund P9503, inv. 1, f. 10. pp. 1-13.

precisely, he ends the story he constructed. For it is too good and too typical to be entirely true. It tells the path of an ideal Bolshevik going from hardship towards success. The narrative consists of episodes which are at moments Dickensian, at moments Gorkyan, and at moments plain social realist kitsch. Chapters on Zosia's childhood poverty, the repulsive shopkeeper Kudel'man, gaining class consciousness, meeting Litvinov, the prison years, the war heroism, meeting the Leader himself, joining the Party, and the final triumph of socialism on the example of universal education for the new generations follow each other in a linear fashion, slowly building a tale of progress, a tale in which "the one who was nothing became everything," as said in the Russian version of *The Internationale* which Zosia was certainly fond of singing.

Zosia prudently emphasizes his underprivileged background and the fact that he became a revolutionary by the sweat of his brow. He knew what it is to be hungry, to be exploited by greedy capitalists, to rot in Tsarist prisons, and to fight battles against reactionary forces. The reader is to appreciate a true believer in the socialist cause from its early days. That he did not join the Party earlier despite his own efforts to the contrary, Zosia is cautious to add (or forge), is to be blamed on his ill health. However, the hard work paid off in the end and its fruits are deservedly eaten by his sons in a state that gallops towards communism (1957 was the dawn of the Khrushchev Thaw, marked by the launching of Sputnik 1).

Zosia's Jewishness is secondary to the whole story. He is first and foremost a Bolshevik. The relation to his Jewish background is blurry and riddled with stereotypes characteristic for the time of writing the memoir. We learn next to nothing about his parents or his early education. That he was from a big family is not a proof of it being particularly religious, as such were many families in the Russian Empire. However, there is little doubt that Zel'manzons were an observant Jewish family, who kept kosher, attended the synagogue, talked in Yiddish and prayed in Hebrew. They lived in Shpola, a Hassidic pilgrimage site, the birthplace of a famous tzadik Rabbi Aryeh Leib. Zosia likely received elementary religious education in Hebrew, the Scriptures, and the Talmud.

None of this deserves a place in Zosia's memory. On the contrary, Shpola is depicted as a pitiful shtetl (in reality it was a large town), a retrograde place, impoverished and lacking basic necessities, a bastion of conservatism and superstition. Zosia's message is clear: Shpola craved urbanization, industrialization, electrification, secularization – the canon of Bolsheviks' policies. The train, a symbol of the new age, takes a prominent place in the story. The train is not only a

means of transport to an urban environment but a means of transformation in consciousness from a traditional shtetl Jew to a civilized, secular, Bolshevik.

Zosia is also detached from his mother tongue, Yiddish. His voluntary Russification begins in Kyiv. While he is distributing the Russian-language *Iskra*, many Yiddish-language newspapers, associated with Jewish socialists, Bundists, circulate in Ukraine. By opting for *Iskra*, Zosia does not only side with the Russian socialists but, by his own example, advocates Jewish emancipation through Russification.

Zosia's relation to his Jewishness can be examined through his encounters with three kinds of Jews: the moneybag Kudel'man, the high-ranking Bolsheviks Litvinov and Lenin, and the girls of the Party's youth wing, Komsomol, tortured and murdered in the war. Kudel'man is depicted as an archetype petite bourgeois exploiter who treats Zosia as less than human. If Zosia primarily identified as Jewish before his arrival to Kyiv, that identity evaporated in contact with Kudel'man. In Zosia's perception, 'us' and 'them' no longer referred to Jews and gentiles but to the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, benevolent Jews in the story are renowned Party members. Litvinov and Lenin are the role models of Jewish emancipation. The veracity of the encounters is beside the point. What matters is that Zosia brings these established figures in the story as people with whom he meets on equal footing. That testifies to Zosia's conviction in the genuine egalitarianism of the new system, which provides opportunities for every citizen regardless of their background. What a better apology of the Revolution than an impoverished provincial Jew, a low-ranking non-partisan Bolshevik, meeting Lenin three times! Finally, Zosia sincerely takes part in the socialist martyrology, adding to the list of righteous ones the full names of six Jewish Komsomol girls who fell to the hands of Denikin's soldiers. Given the ubiquity of the White Terror in Ukraine, Zosia might have witnessed the atrocity. However, though he mentions the victims' Jewishness, he does not lament their torments and deaths as fellow Jews but as fellow socialists and factory workers. Zosia's focus is on the political motivation of a war crime which most probably had an anti-Semitic component as well.

The story of Zosia Zel'manzon is the story of a shtetl Jew who deliberately abandoned his old life, his birthplace shtetl, his religious tradition, and his native Yiddish for city life, the Marxist worldview, and the Russian language. It is a portrayal of a provincial Jew's progressive social and political transformation into a Soviet citizen with a plain cut off point dividing his life before and after the transformation. Though some details of the story are undoubtedly embellished under the

influence of the anniversary's official narrative and the author's desire to make his life meaningful by conforming to that narrative,[2] Jews like Zosia of the memoir existed. High-ranking Bolsheviks from the Pale, such as Maxim Litvinov and Lazar Kaganovich, are representative examples of such Jews.

However, to which extent is Zosia's story representative of the whole Ukrainian provincial Jewry in the 1920-1930s? Did most such Jews celebrate the Revolution? Did they greet the new power, its agents and institutions? Did they become Soviet citizens by leaving the shtetl, joining the Bolsheviks, and speaking and thinking in Russian? Did they abandon their traditional lifestyle, their parents' religion and customs? Were they willing converts to the ideology of anti-capitalism, internationalism, and atheism? Did these Jews steadily become the New Soviet Men and Women, the learned, rational, secular, selfless, loyal citizens who exerted themselves towards building a classless society?[3]

This dissertation answers these and similar questions, mostly in the negative. It strives to dispel the myth that the Sovietization of Jews in the Ukrainian province in the 1920s and early 1930s followed the pattern exemplified by Zosia and characters similar to him. Social, political, and cultural transformations of of these Jews' lives were significantly more complex than Zosia's story would suggest. Contrary to the Bolshevik official rhetoric, it is not a story of steady, peaceful, progression from superstition to enlightenment, poverty to affluence, barbarism to civilization, in which the Jews were willing participants. It is a story of suspicion of and resistance to the Soviet authority, its policies, agents, and institutions, the story of the preservation of traditional lifestyle, and of violence and oppression, in which the Jews often fought against each other. Before I explain the dissertation's argument in more detail, I will define my preferred terminology and specify the study's timeframe.

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[2] On diary as a means of re-creation of one's personality in line with the official Soviet ideology, especially during the Stalinist period, see Hellbeck, Jochen. *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2009.

[3] On the concept of the New Soviet Man and its history, see Soboleva, Maja. "The Concept of the "New Soviet Man" and Its Short History," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 51, no. 1 (2017), pp. 64-85.

1. Terminology

To describe the process of this change in the lives of provincial Jews, I will primarily use the term 'Sovietization'. The term is used in different senses, for example, for the adoption of the Soviet model of government, or the Soviet policy of territorial expansion in the Baltics, etc.[4] I will use it in its restricted sense, which refers to the changes in society and culture, and more specifically, in the mindset and daily living practices of the population of the Soviet Union as a result of political and economic innovations, such as urban development, secularization, collectivization, universal access to education, etc. as well as to the population's perception and experience of these changes. The term had negative connotations in the Cold War rhetoric but is nowadays generally accepted in the scholarship.[5] By using the term 'Sovietization', I do not mean to pass any value judgment, positive or negative, about the societal changes brought by the Soviet power. While the term is not restricted to the 1920-1930s, I will use it only in relation to those decades.

The terms 'Sovietization', 'transformation', 'acculturation', 'accommodation', regardless of whether they are applied to the changes in the lives of Jews, Russians, or other nationalities, are used interchangeably in the scholarship. I will also use them in this way. It might be argued that, with respect to Ukrainian provincial Jews, the term 'transformation' is broader than 'Sovietization' since the changes in the lives of these Jews in the 1920s-1930s were not caused only by Bolsheviks but were an element in a larger context of Jewish modernity. However, since Bolsheviks were the main cause of the transformation, the two terms can be treated as synonyms. Similarly, while the

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[4] See Rees, E. A. Introduction. In Apor, Balázs, Apor, Péter and Rees, E. A. (eds.). *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe: New Perspectives on the Postwar Period*. Washington, New Academia Publishing, 2008.

[5] See Bemporad, Elissa. *Becoming Soviet Jews: The Bolshevik Experiment in Minsk*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2013, Suny, Roland G. *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1993, Vinogradov, Anna. "Religion and Nationality: The Transformation of Jewish Identity in the Soviet Union," *Penn History Review* 18, no. 1 (2010), pp. 51-69, Zamoyskii, Andreii S. *Transformatsiia mestechek Sovetskoi Belorussii 1918-1939*. Minsk, I. P. Logvinov, 2013, Ro'i, Yaacov. *Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and the Soviet Union*. New York, Routledge, 2016, Shternshis, Anna. *Soviet and Kosher: Jewish Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006, Shneer, David. *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture: 1918-1930*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *In the Shadow of the Shtetl*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2013, Khalid, Adeeb. *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2015, Ackermann, Felix. *Palimpsest Grodno: Nationalisierung, Nivellierung und Sowjetisierung einer mitteleuropäischen Stadt 1919-1991*. Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010, Zeltser, Arkadii. *Evrei Sovetskoi provintsii: Vitebsk i mestechki, 1917-1941*. Moscow, Rosspen, 2006, Yalen, Deborah H. *Red Kasrilevke: Ethnographies of Economic Transformation in the Soviet Shtetl, 1917-1939*. PhD dissertation, Berkeley, University of California, 2007.

terms 'acculturation' and 'accommodation' are frequently used in their narrower senses, referring to changes in a culture as a result of adaptation to the prevailing culture, I will use them in a broader sense, to refer to changes in any social institution. Importantly, each of these terms is bi-directional: it has a top-down and a bottom-up side. Sovietization in terms of plans and policies of the Soviet power towards its population must be kept apart from the population's experience of Sovietization and its adaptation to those plans and polices. One of the contributions of my project is to shed light on the bottom-up part of the story.

The term 'Jewish assimilation' is less clear. What counts as assimilation, whether it is a stage in acculturation and integration in a larger society or a broader term, encompassing the other two, and whether it can be employed in a value-neutral sense, given the history of its derogatory usage, by the Jewish traditionalists, and commendatory, by the modernists, are debated issues in the global history of Jews and general sociology.[6] By 'assimilated Jews', I will mean the Jews of the former Russian Empire who, for various reasons, fully embraced the Russian language and the secular, modernizing, and emancipatory aspects of the Russian culture but who did not necessarily convert to Christianity, become atheist, urban, and better off, or abandon Jewish identity. Though the assimilation I have in mind is the last stage of acculturation, it comprises additive assimilation, which preserves some aspects of the ancestral culture. Using the term in this way allows me to count as assimilated not only the Jews who, like Lenin and Trotsky, were born in Russian speaking families, attended only Russian schools, etc., but those who, like many fully assimilated Jews of the province, knew (but rarely spoke) Yiddish, attended religious Jewish schools (besides Russian ones), etc.

I will sometimes talk about the Soviet 'modernization' of Jewish life. I follow the authors who consider the Soviet project a belated manifestation of the Enlightenment, in the rational and secular values it professed and its industrializing and emancipatory character.[7] The concept of

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[6] See, for example, Frankel, Jonathan and Zipperstein, Steven J. (eds.). *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, Morris-Reich, Amos. *The Quest for Jewish Assimilation in Modern Social Science*. London and New York, Routledge, 2008, Endelman, Todd M. "Assimilation." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Assimilation (accessed August 30th, 2019).

[7] See Kotkin, Stephen. *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997, Kotkin, Stephen. "Modern Times: The Soviet Union and the Interwar Conjuncture," *Kritika* 2, no. 1 (2001), pp. 111-164, Hoffman, David L. *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941*. Berkeley, University

modernity in this context purports to be a value-neutral concept, and certainly need not be positive, since the authors consider the illiberal, totalitarian, side of the Soviet project compatible with its modernity. While I am aware that some features of the Soviet politics, culture, and society were markedly pre-modern (e.g. patrimonial politics, mystification of the leader, patron-client networks, etc.),[8] when it comes to the 1920-1930s innovations in the social lives of provincial Jews it seems justified to talk about their modernization, especially when describing the top-down perspective of the Soviet power towards them and less so when describing the ordinary Jews' subjective perception of the innovations. Moreover, in this case it is possible to talk about several other visions of modernity associated with different, sometimes overlapping, strands of Jewish intelligentsia and their views on the future of the Jewry, such as advocates of full assimilation in the Russian culture, advocates of national specificity and of Yiddish as the national language of Jews, the Zionist minority, etc.[9]

I will use the term *korenizatsiia* (*Rus*. nativization, indigenization, literary "putting down roots") only as the official title of the Soviet affirmative action policy towards national minorities in the 1920s, which aimed to speed up their development, deliver the message of socialism in their native languages, and preserve the territories of the former Russian Empire by incentivizing them to cooperate with the new system. The policy was exemplified in promoting political, educational, and cultural institutions in national languages, developing these languages and supporting them in publishing, employing minority cadres in public positions, etc. The term had a positive meaning for Bolsheviks, as it implied the endorsement of indigenous (*korennoi*) populations. However, the policy differed in practice, especially in the Jewish case. Since the twentieth-century Jewish culture did not have a common denominator, the policy pushed one way of Jewish assimilation in the Soviet society, that of the Yiddish-speaking, secular, socialist Jew, a loyal Soviet citizen. Instead

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of California Press, 1995, Hoffman, David L. *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914-1939*. Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 2011.

[8] See Fitzpatrick, Sheila (ed.). Introduction. In *Stalinism: New Directions*. London, Routledge, 1999, Leone, Matthew. *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2004, Getty, Arch J. *Practicing Stalinism: Bolsheviks, Boyars, and the Persistence of Tradition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013, Etkind, Alexander. "Soviet Subjectivity: Torture for the Sake of Salvation?," *Kritika* 18, no. 1 (2005), pp. 171-186.

[9] A roughly analogous idea of multiple modernities in relation to the Sovietization of Central Asian nationalities is examined in Khalid, Adeeb. *Making Uzbekistan*. Khalid differentiates between the Bolshevik modernizing project and that of the Jadids, a Central Asian Muslim intelligentsia advocating Turkic national liberation, educational reforms, and reinterpretation of Islam.

of promoting Jewish culture, Bolsheviks encouraged what in their vision represented a suitable form of Yiddish culture with the intent to forge a new citizen. Since former members of Jewish socialist political parties, Zionists, and the old Jewish elites did not correspond to the ideal type of Soviet Jew, the policy ended up violently repressing their cultures. Using the term 'korenizatsiia', one accepts the language of the Soviet officials and risks presenting it as a uniquely good thing. I will instead use more neutral terms 'the nativization policy' and 'the nationality policy'. I will also use 'Yiddishization' and 'Ukrainization' to refer to versions of that policy when there is a need to make a clear distinction between them.

I will refer to the provincial Jews as Ukrainian Jews, or simply as the Jews. Russian Jews is a commonly used term for the majority of the Jewish population in the Russian Empire. The standard position in the scholarship is to distinguish Russian from Soviet Jewish history, the former starting with 1772, during the first partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, when the Russian Empire "gathered her Jews"[10], and the latter with 1917. This view also stipulates homogeneity and continuity between Russian and Soviet Jews. Some authors use the term 'Russian Jews' for Jews living on the territory of Ukraine during the Civil War (1917-1921).[11]

This terminology obscures more than it illuminates. First, 'Russian Jews' can be considered a unified category only from the second half of the 19th century, as before that time the differences between Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and Polish Jews were striking.[12] Second, by calling the Jews living in the former Pale of Settlement 'Russian' after 1917 and especially after the establishment of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) in 1920, one risks adopting the imperial language and arguing for the continuity with the Russian Empire when, territorially, there is not one (saying that, culturally, there is such a continuity is even more problematic as it implies a nationalist position). True, the Petersburg events of 1917 had no immediate impact on these Jews. At that time, Ukraine falls into civil war. While in the left-bank Ukraine (East of Dnieper) Bolsheviks seized Kharkiv

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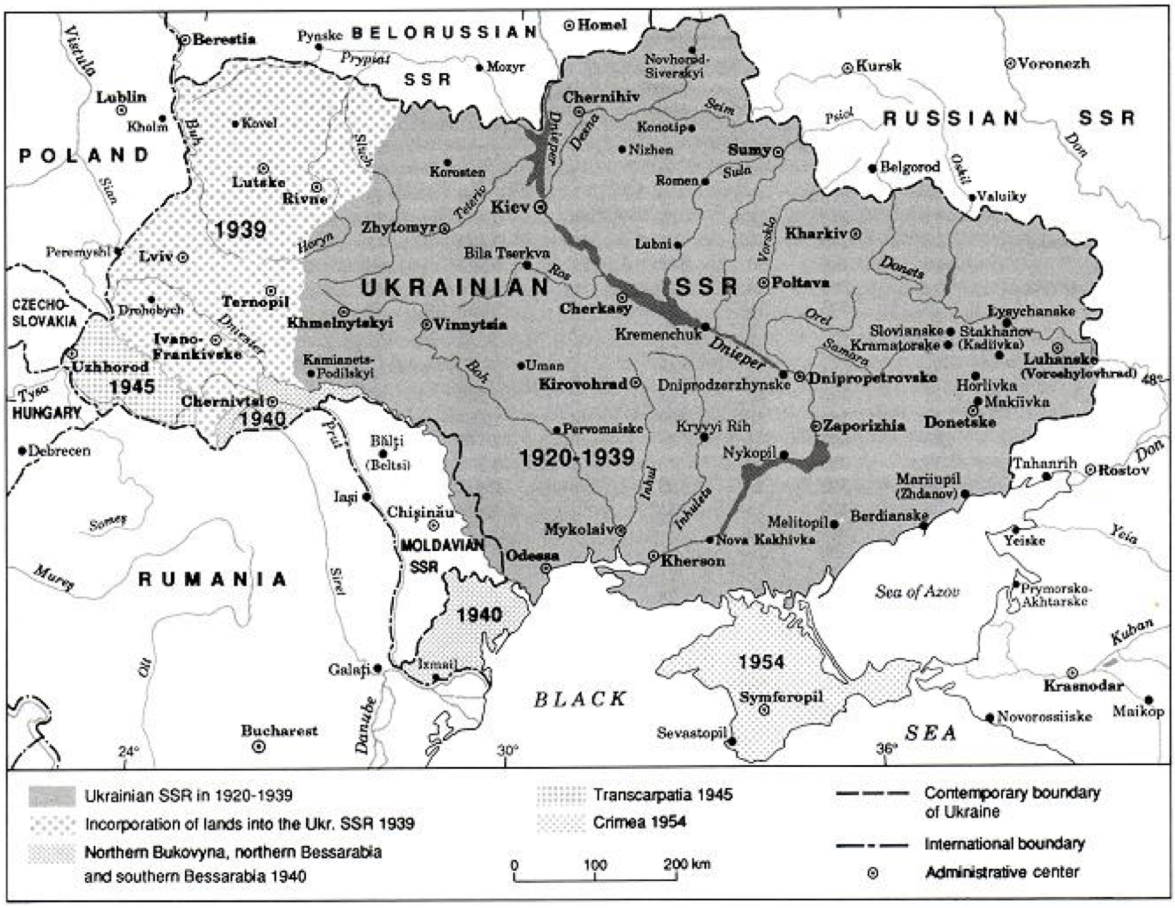
[10] Klier, John. *Russia gathers her Jews: The origins of the "Jewish question" in Russia, 1772-1825*. DeKalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 1986. See also Stanislawski, Michael. 2010. "Russia: Russian Empire." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Russia/Russian_Empire (accessed March 4th, 2016).

[11] For example, Budnitskii, Oleg. *Russian Jews Between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, Bullock, David. *The Russian Civil War, 1918-22*. Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 2008.

[12] See Pinkus, Benjamin. *The Jews of the Soviet Union: The History of a National Minority*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, Ch. 1, Kochan, Lionel (ed.). *The Jews in Soviet Russia since 1917*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1970.

and established power in 1917, the former capital, Kyiv, was taken only in 1922. From 1917 until 1922 a large part of Ukraine was involved in the First World War, the Civil War, and the Polish-Soviet war. Despite the significance of the year 1917 for Jewish and Ukrainian history, changes in the Jewish life can be traced only with the constant presence of the Reds, that is, after the Civil War had ended and when Bolsheviks started to organize Soviets, or local councils (1919-1922).

Since I start with de-facto establishment of the Soviet power in localities of central and western parts of the Ukrainian SSR, I call its provincial Jewish population Ukrainian Jews.[13]



Map 1. Ukrainian SSR (1920-1939)

Source: *Internet Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CU%5CK%5CUkrainianSovietSocialistRepublic.htm (Accessed May 6th, 2018)

[13] I follow Inna Shtakser's understanding of the Jewish community, which is not "an organized, self-governing Jewish community, that existed in Poland and Russian Empire (…) until 1844", but "informal societies of neighbors with mutual religious and ethnicity-based interests". See Shtakser, Inna. *The Making of Jewish Revolutionaries in the Pale of Settlement: Community and Identity during the Russian Revolution and its Immediate Aftermath, 1905-07*. London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 1.

2. Timeframe

It is difficult to make a cutting point when the Soviet history of Jews began since pre-revolutionary ways of Jewish life overlapped with the life under the new regime.[14] Most studies mark 1917 as the year of radical reforms, which shuttered foundations of the old Jewish life and started to modernize it. The growth of Jewish parties and Jewish participation in state politics, secularization, and urban growth are often mentioned to confirm this view, as well as the effects of the First World War on emergence of Jewish refugees, their forceful resettlement, emigration, and the pogroms.[15] Another cutting point frequently mentioned is the official beginning of the nativization policy in 1923. Most scholars take 1923 as the time of launching affirmative action policy towards various nationalities, including Jews.[16]

I find this approach untenable. It implies that there are fixed dates which mark the cutting points of Jewish history, associating it either with the collapse of the Russian Empire, the October Revolution, or the policies of modernization towards the nationalities. This periodization relies on the recorded time of events, most notably on the official Moscow party decrees, which often do not correspond to what happens on the ground. Considering 1917 and 1923 as the defining years disregards the importance of events at the local and regional levels in between these years. Despite the accepted opinion that 1923 marked the turning point in the relation to the Jewish nationality policy, de facto Yiddishization (as well as Belorussization and Ukrainization) started much earlier

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[14] Pinkus, Benjamin. *The Jews of the Soviet Union*, Introduction, xviii, p. 49. Pinkus provides 'internal' Soviet periodization based on Soviet policy. See also Kochan, Lionel (ed.). *The Jews in Soviet Russia since 1917*.

[15] See Pinkus, Benjamin. *The Jews of the Soviet Union.* Pinkus calls the time from October Revolution until the Second World War "a period of construction" and claims that this period has distinct features. However, he does not show that the problem with taking revolution as a period of change was not only due to the coexistence of the forms of old life but also because the same Jews were labeled as disfranchised elements. It is the criteria that changed. In practice, many Jews were denied work, educational opportunities, and voting rights. One should bear in mind the difference between political promises and everyday reality.

[16] See Liber, George O. *Soviet Nationality Policy, Urban Growth, and Identity Change in the Ukrainian SSR 1923-1934*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, Martin, Terry D. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001, Hirsch, Francine. *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2005, Suny, Ronald G. and Terry Martin (eds.). *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, Slezkine, Yuri. "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism." *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994), pp. 414-452, Smith, Jeremy. "Nation Building and National Conflict in the USSR in the 1920's." *Ab Imperio* no. 3 (2001), pp. 221-265.

due to the Bolsheviks' need to cooperate with local Jewish, Belarus, and Ukrainian parties to get support for their cause. Later on, the members of the merged parties became active promoters of the new cultural policy within the Russian Communist Party (RCP(b))[17].[18]

I begin my story in 1919, 1920, and 1921. Those years mark the start of negotiations between Jewish elites and the Soviet power at the local level. I record my story from the first official interactions with the Soviet power on each particular locality as reflected in the archival documents. This sheds light on the logic of Soviet leaders in their local activities, and also fills the gap between the official version of the nativization policy reflected in the directives from the center and its understanding by the actors in the province. These local initiatives preceded the decision of the RCP(b) to initiate the nativization policy.

There are two reasons for having a flexible timeframe. First, it is difficult to establish a common timeframe because, during the Civil War, the Bolsheviks were winning and retreating in different localities (Kyiv alone was taken and lost eleven times). Second, I focus on the impact of the Russian Revolution, the Civil War, and the nativization policy only to the extent that they affected the provinces of Ukraine that are the object of my research. The sources suggest that the first seeds of the new policy were sowed as soon as the Bolsheviks established rule in the localities and the Jewish elites started their negotiations with them. I argue that the nativization policy started

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[17] The Communist Party changed its name four times. In 1917, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) became RSDLP(b), (b) indicating Bolshevik, RSDLP's major faction after the 1903 split (RSDLP(b) functioned as a separate party from 1912). In 1918, RSDLP(b) became the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik), or RCP(b), itself to became All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik), or AUCP(b), in 1925, and finally the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), in 1952. In Ukraine, the Party was officially known as the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Ukraine, or CP(b)U, from 1918 until 1952 (when the title 'Bolshevik' was removed). CP(b)U should not be confused with Ukrainian Communist Party (UCP), or Ukapists, a left-nationalist anti-Bolshevik party, or with Ukrainian Communist Party (Borotbist), UCP(b) or Borotbists, a left-nationalist party most of whose membership merged with Bolsheviks after the party dissolution in 1920. I will refer to official names of the Communist Party only when that is necessary for understanding some claim.

[18] See Hirik, Serhiy. "Indigenization before Indigenization," *Russian Studies in History*, 56, no. 4 (2017), pp. 294-304. Hirik sheds more light on the importance of 1919 for actual start of the policy. He describes the processes of incorporating national-communist political groups by the Soviets in Ukrainine and Belarus as "indigenization before indigenization". This was done in order to recruit the local cadres who were able to conduct the nationality policy among the local populations. Hirik also describes how the recruitment of local officials was first officially launched in 1921, on the 10th Party Congress, and how Jewish national-communists were gradually absorbed by the Party. See also Suny, Ronald. *The Revenge of the Past*, pp. 102-109.

earlier than it was officially approved, in 1923. This goes not only for Jews, but for Ukrainians as well.[19]

There is also the question of the nativization policy's end. Most studies take the 1930s, when the regime initiated the campaign to eradicate Jewish distinctiveness, starting with the closure of Evsektsiia, the Jewish Section of the Communist Party, in 1930. Though 1930 marks the end of an independent Jewish policy within the Party,[20] the nativization policy did not finish officially before the abolition of the last Yiddish school[21] and the purges of the Jewish intelligentsia in 1936-1937. Since I am concerned only with early stages of the policy and since it no longer makes sense to talk about the nativization policy towards the Jews, as it was initially designed, after 1930, I do not focus on the later years.[22] Moreover, writing about these later years is problematic owing to the scarcity of source material, since most sources were intentionally destroyed during the Great Terror or perished during the Second World War.

3. Argument of the Dissertation

My research question is: what kind of social and cultural transformation happened with the Jews in the interwar Ukrainian province during the nativization policy? What was the role of different Soviet institutions and agents in educational, religious, and cultural aspects of transforming the Jewish life?

My reply is that, contrary to the expectations of Bolsheviks, Sovietization of Jews in the province did not go smoothly. It met resistance from the local agents and the larger population. The provincial Jews managed to preserve much of their traditional lifestyle. They maintained Crypto-Judaism, combining new and old practices, celebrating Jewish holidays at home and Party

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[19] These conclusions are made on the basis of documents from Zhytomir and Berdychiv regional archives in Ukraine. See the next chapters for more details.
[20] Gitelman, Zvi Y. *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917-1930*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2015. Gitelman argues that after the closure of Evsektsiia in 1930, it does not make sense to talk about the autonomous Jewish policy.
[21] See Schulman, Elias. *A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union*. New York, Ktav Publishing House, 1971.
[22] Liber shows that the state closed cultural and educational institutions for promoting small nationalities, such as the Jews, by the mid-1930s. See Liber, George. *Soviet Nationality Policy*, p. 180.

holidays in public.[23] They preserved their faith and customs by appealing to Soviet laws, which were often open to double interpretation. The lack of bureaucratic skills of some Soviet Jewish cultural workers, their poor financing and double loyalty as intermediaries between the Jewish community and the high apparatchiks of the state, also slowed down the pace of Sovietization. My broader point is that in many aspects the nationality policy continued imperial oppressive and discriminatory practices. Bolsheviks invented novel criteria for disenfranchising the Jews. Access to education, career opportunities, and achieving higher status in social hierarchy were open only for young Jewish Bolsheviks while the rest of the Jewish people remained where they were.

I focus on three sites of Sovietization of Jews: education, religion, and culture. In traditional Jewish society, these three domains intertwined. Education and culture were fully subordinated to the religious worldview. The only existing form of school and culture were those occurring in and around synagogue. In this traditional worldview, there was no place for Yiddish culture apart from folk songs and everyday communication. Yiddish was perceived as a "jargon", unworthy of a high place in a society regulated by Judaism. With the nativization policy, Bolsheviks separated religion from education and culture, taking religion as a private, not a communal, affair. They prohibited Hebrew and sponsored the rise of Yiddish culture and schooling. This gave birth to a secular type of Jewish identity which could exist independently of Judaism and Hebrew. The cornerstones in creating this new identity were the new Yiddish school, the anti-religious campaign, and the new Yiddish intelligentsia, with its literature, theatre, music, etc.

In each of these three domains, I assess discontinuity from the imperial structures and the ways in which these structures were still present in the new institutions and practices. I start with the Yiddish school since its role in implementing the nativization policy towards the Jews was

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[23] The "Marranism" of Eastern European Jewish population, in the sense of secret adherence to Judaism and public professing of another faith or worldview, was acknowledged already in the late imperial period and discussed among the Yiddish intelligentsia as an osbtacle to Jewish national unification. "False" or "reverse Marranism" were terms used by some members of the intelligentsia to describe the Jews who presented themselves as Jewish nationalists but were fully assimilated in the Russian culture. See Safran, Gabriella. "Reverse Marranism, Translatability, and the Theory and Practice of Secular Jewish Culture in Russian." In Norich, Anita and Eliav, Yaron Z. (eds.). *Jewish Literatures and Cultures: Context and Intertext*. Providence, Brown Judaic Studies, 2008, pp. 177-200. I use the term "Marranism" in its value-neutral sense, as a synonym for Crypto-Judaism.

supposed to be crucial. Rather than writing a separate history of the school community,[24] I examine the extent to which the Yiddish school affected the lives of the Jews. I focus on the connections between the Yiddish school, mid-level actors and organizations, and the Party.[25] Yiddish schools had a bad reputation in the Jewish community, and they remained largely marginal in comparison to other secular schools in Russian and Ukrainian and traditional Jewish religious schools which functioned illegally. I then turn to the anti-religious campaign, which was meant to "release" the shtetl Jews from the superstition of their religious beliefs and to modernize them. In reality, the campaign met resistance from the locals because it was not possible to target Judaism without discriminating against its believers. Anti-Semitism emerged as a side effect of the campaign. I then proceed to the status of Yiddish culture under the nativization policy. I show that the hopes for its renaissance were short lived, did not permeate the masses, and remained largely an urban phenomenon.

Writing about the Sovietization of Jews, I take them always in context with their most populous neighbors, Ukrainians. Contrary to the dominant tendency to describe Ukrainians as the perpetrators of violence against Jews, I argue that the interaction between the two was more complex and that their cooperation was most visible in the cultural sphere. Despite being crucial

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[24] The main works about Yiddish schools, written in 1970s, are mostly based on Yiddish newspapers and teachers' writings. They provide an account of the Yiddish school as such, without placing it in the broader societal context. The development of the Yiddish school is described from 1911, with the first school in Demievke, until 1937, when the state decided to close them. See Schulman, Elias. *A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union*, and Halevy, Zvi. *Jewish Schools Under Czarism and Communism: A Struggle for Cultural Identity*. New York, Springer Publishing Company, 1976. Schulman writes about the efforts to establish Yiddish schools in Western Ukraine in 1939-1941. See also Fux, Silvia. "Tekhanim le'umiyim be-vet ha-sefer ha-yesodi be-yidish bi-Verit ha-Mo'atsot," *Beḥinot* no. 8-9 (1979), pp. 89-112. Fux analyzes the content of the Yiddish textbooks for schools, showing how the Jewish content in them was gradually diminishing from 1920s till 1930s. According to Fux, Soviet schoolbooks contained strong Jewish content until the beginning of 1930s and were not simply a Communist ideology written in Yiddish. These studies focus on the continuity between the pre-revolutionary Yiddish and the Soviet school but they approach school teleologically, writing its history from it rise to decline, as if it had to have that trajectory. They are based mainly on periodical press and teachers' publications and do not take into account local peculiarities of school life within the Soviet Union.

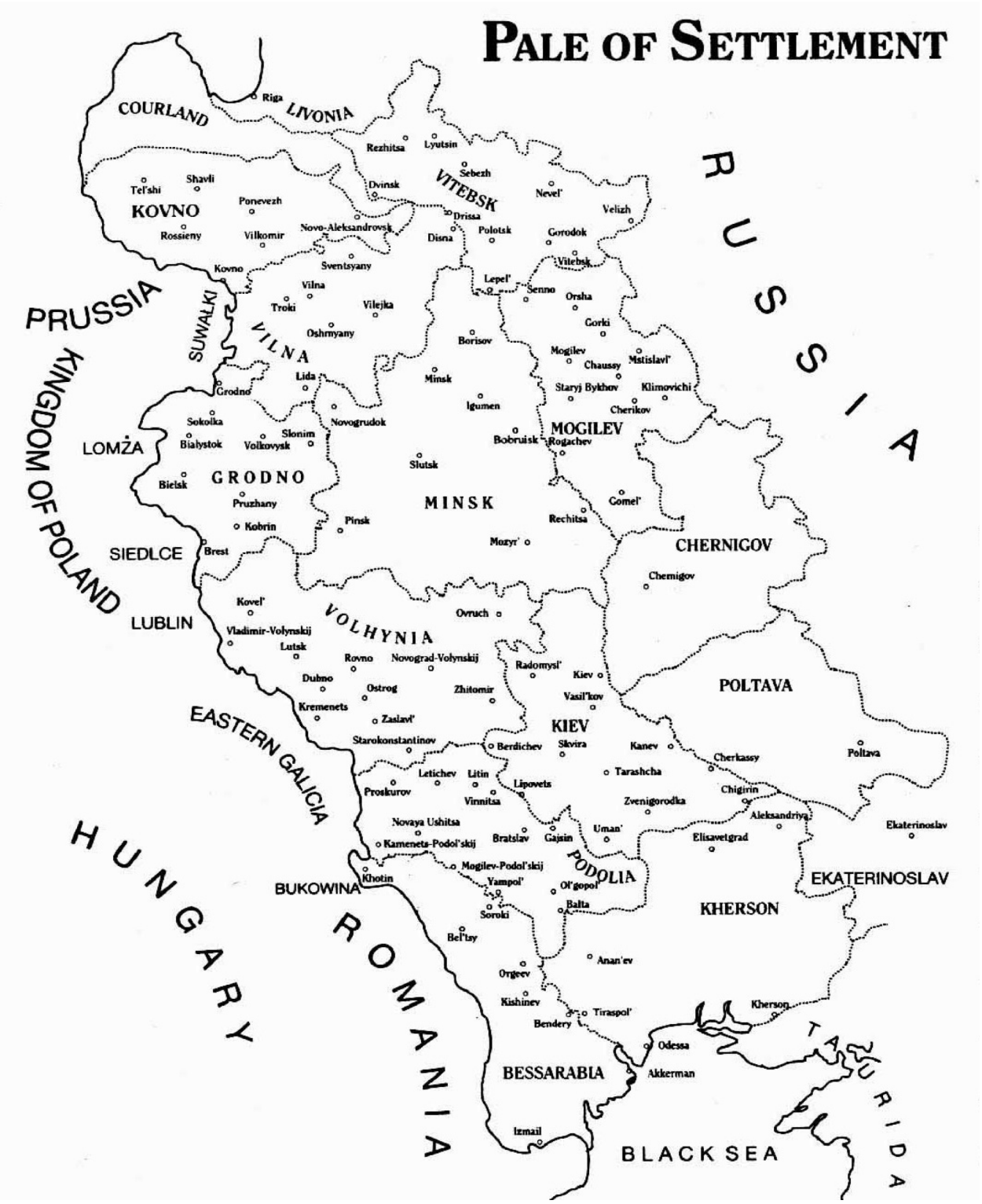
[25] A similar approach with respect to Poland is taken in Nishimura, Yuu. "On the Cultural Front: The Bund and the Yiddish Secular School Movement in Interwar Poland." *East European Jewish Affairs* 43, no. 3 (2013), pp. 265-281. Nishimura argues for the connection between the Central Yiddish School Organization (TSYSHO), Bund, and the school community. She illustrates how Bund was using its power to accumulate finances around the school by making workers conscious contributors to the future of their children. On Bund in general, see Blatman, Daniel. 2010. "Bund." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Bund (accessed June 8th, 2017).

for understanding the 1920s and 1930s, interaction between the Jews and Ukrainians remains an under researched topic.[26]

I focus on two regions (*oblasts*) of contemporary Ukraine, Zhytomir and Vinnytsia, which roughly correspond to historical provinces (*gubernii*) of Volyn and Podolia.[27] Both regions had been in the Pale of Settlement during the Russian Empire. After the abolition of the Pale, the Volyn region became part of the USSR bordering Poland, which was a disputed territory and hence the country's strategic stronghold. Significant numbers of Jewish, Polish, and German inhabitants lived in Zhytomir and Vinnytsia. Owing to the location of the Pale, the Jewish population on these territories was still largely unassimilated. My choice of these regions is based on several reasons.

[26] Notable exceptions are Abramson, Henry. *A Prayer for the Government: Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times, 1917-1920*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1999 and Petrovsky-Shtern, Yohanan. *The Anti-Imperial Choice: The Making of the Ukrainian Jew*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009.

[27] I refer to contemporary administrative divisions because the Soviet ones changed over time and in some places co-existed with the imperial ones. In Ukraine, provinces (*gubernii*) existed until 1925, when regions (*okrugi*) and districts (*raioni*) were created through repartition of the Tsarist-era counties (*volosti*). Pauly, Matthhew. *Breaking the Tongue: Language, Education, and Power in Soviet Ukraine, 1923-1934*. University of Toronto Press, 2014, pp. xix-xx.



Map 2. The Pale of Settlement (1772-1917)

Source: Beider, Alexpander. *A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire*, New Haven, Avotaynu, 1993, http://cherlvin.nfshost.com/HT/MF/L/pale-f1.html (Accessed February 4th, 2019)

First, in comparison to the big cities, like Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, and Kyiv, Jewish life in the provincial towns of Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus is under researched, apart from a few works of interwar Ukrainian Jewish history.[28] The lack of attention to the province is typically the result of the belief that it is backward and underdeveloped. Provincial Jews are taken as the minority of Jewish population living at the outskirts of history. There is a bias in the scholarship which treats the history of non-mainstream Soviet Yiddish-speaking Jews, those who did not urbanize and Russify quickly, as less important. In my opinion, on the contrary, all abovementioned factors are the reasons why this non-mainstream, marginal, part of Soviet Jewry is well worth studying.

Second, by researching local history, I aim to compare the Sovietization of Jews from the big cities with Sovietization of provincial Jews and to examine the differences and similarities between them. This is an important question since it provides some keys to answering the broader question as to whether the factor of distance was decisive for the success of Sovietization. I argue that distance was relevant. Local actors of Sovietization enjoyed greater autonomy. Since high Party officials did not know Yiddish, problems in communication emerged rapidly between them and the local agents. They could not supervise the local agents as diligently as those in the center. Finally, owing to its borderland location, the provinces needed more cadres and finances, which they did not get.

Third, focusing on provincial towns, I aim to shed light on an enduring and often politicized question of whether local actors' disparate understanding of the nationality policy from that of high ranking officials prompted the former's elimination in the 1930s (it goes without saying that

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[28] On the interwar Jewish life in Russia see Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater: Jewish Culture on the Soviet Stage*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006, Beizer, Mikhail. *The Jews of St. Petersburg: Excursions Through a Noble Past*. Philadephia, Jewish Publication Society, 1989. On Belorussia see Kaganovich, Albert. *The Long Life and Swift Death of Jewish Rechitsa: A Community in Belarus, 1625-2000*. Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2013, Sloin, Andrew. *The Jewish Revolution in Belorussia: Economy, Race, and Bolshevik Power*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2017. On Poland see Redlich, Shimon. *Together and Apart in Brzezany: Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians, 1919-1945*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2002. Finally, the only studies done on Ukraine are Estraikh, Gennady. *In Harness: Yiddish Writers' Romance with Communism*. Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 2005, Brown, Kate. *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2005, and Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *In the Shadow of the Shtetl*. Veidlinger's book is based mostly on oral interviews. In contrast, my study introduces local archival documents. I critically review Veidlinger's book below.

a part of the elites were destroyed before).[29] My answer is that the liquidation of national parties, their incorporation in the Communist Party, and the purges of local national elites, were not primarily a consequence of their ideological dissent or inability to implement the nationality policy but of the nature and design of the policy itself, which meant to be concessional and short-lived and in which the disappearance of the old structures of society was regarded as inevitable once its goals were fully implemented.[30]

4. Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is structured as follows. The first chapter critically reviews the existing literature on Sovietization and places the dissertation in the context of some recent historiographical debates. The second chapter explores the role of the Soviet Yiddish schools in Sovietizing Ukrainian Jews and the problems the school faced in its competition with traditional Jewish schools and previously established socialist Yiddish schools. The third chapter discusses anti-Semitism as an integral part of the anti-religious campaign and the new forms it took as a consequence of ascribing Jews to the class of exploiters. The fourth chapter explains the collapse of Jewish and Ukrainian artists' efforts to create joint cultural products. The fifth and final chapter is a case study of failed Sovietization using the example of the Zhytomir Pedagogical Institute.

5. Sources

This dissertation is based on sources and documents collected from achives and libraries in Kyiv, Zhytomir, Berdychiv, Moscow, and Jerusalem. Among the primary sources, I have used archival documents, periodical press, memoirs, diaries, and photo documents. Some of the archives I have used include protocols of decisions of the regional People's Educational Committee, circulars to commissions about the education of national minorities, documents about the composition of

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[29] The struggle between the center and the periphery in nativization of the Jews is first discussed, in broad terms, in Smith, James. *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-23*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, Ch. 5. The issue is embedded in much of Ukrainian national historiography of the period. For an overview of the literature, see Borisenok, Elena. *Fenomen sovetskoii ukrainizatsii, 1920-1930 godi*. Moscow, Izdatel'stvo Evropa, 2006.
[30] For a similar conclusion on a wider scale, see Martin, Terry. *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pp. 2-6.

nationalities in the region, documents of Jewish village councils, protocols about settling Jews on the land, lists of members of the society for helping unemployed Jews, party cell meeting minutes, information about student enrollment, teachers' salaries, closing praying houses, Jewish teachers' questionnaires and correspondence, proceedings of Jewish schools, reports on the condition of people's education, reports on conditions of schools, lists of cultural workers, and alike.

I have worked with archival collections of State Archive of Russian Federation (GARF), Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), and Central State Archive of Highest State Authorities of Ukraine (TsDAVO), archival and photo archival collections of State Archive of Zhytomir Region (DAZO), collection of periodical press in Yiddish in Judaica Department of Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine and in the National Library of Israel, photographs and diaries in Library of Zhytomir Museum of Local Lore (ZKM), and with photo documents from Pshenychnyi Central State CinePhotoPhono Archives of Ukraine (TsDKFFA). I have also used published memoirs.

The main archives with documents about the interwar life of provincial Jews are located in Kyiv, Zhytomir, Berdychiv, and Vinnytsia. As a matter of law, Soviet officials' reports from the provinces had to be sent to Kyiv. They are preserved in original or in copy, sometimes only on microfilm. Kyiv archives are also better preserved than the provincial archives because their materials were evacuated more effectively during the Second World War. Kyiv archives contain more material about the provinces than the provincial archives themselves and funds of Kyiv archives are much better structured than those in Zhytomir and other provincial towns. The last reason for the scarcity of material in the provincial archives is due to the tendency of a central archive to gather all documents. Kyiv archives had finances and power to take materials from the smaller archives. Disadvantage of appropriation of local documents is that when they are taken by the main archive, they are often structured according to the system of that archive. Working with the documents of Berdychiv of Zhytomir region, I have encountered inventories with signs 'taken to Zhytomir archive' but the documents were missing in Zhytomir. On their way to the regional archive, these documents got lost or were recorded under a different archival number, so I was not able to access them. The same applies to documents from the Zhytomir regional archive, which were sent to Kyiv archive. Despite these difficulties, local archives are indispensable for research on Jewish traditional life under the Soviets since they contain valuable materials on Yiddish schools, Jewish cultural organizations and political parties, and Jewish religious life.

In TsDAVO, I have worked with Fund 413 (Commissariat for the Affairs of Nationalities) and Fund 166 (Commissariat for Enlightenment). Information about the Jews were found combining the partial information from the two funds. While Fund 166 contains detailed reports on the work of Ukrainian teachers but little on Jews, Fund 413 contains valuable information on Evsektsiia. Since Fund 166 contains documents from Central Rada's takeover of Zhytomir Pedagogical Institute, it was useful in tracking the early stages of this institution.

In Berdychiv and Zhytomir, I have worked with funds Fund P-31 (Volyn gubernial Commettee of Peoples Education) and Fund P-142 (Chudniv revkom), among others. These funds helped me to track the coexistence of many pre-revolutionary educational institutions with the new Soviet Yiddish school. Many documents I found in them became the basis for the second chapter, which discusses the struggle between traditional Yiddish school and the Soviet Yiddish school.

In Moscow, I have worked in GARF and RGASPI. At GARF, I have mostly worked with Funds A296 (Department for Enlightenment of National Minorities of People's Commissariat for Enlightenment of the RSFSR), in which I have explored the correspondence between Narkomnats and Narkompros, and P9503 (Collection of Memories of Old Bolsheviks from the Collection of Manuscripts), in which I have researched short memoirs of Jewish revolutionaries describing their pre-revolutionary life in Ukrainian towns and their motivations to join the Bolsheviks. These funds provided supplementary information about the early stages of the nativization policy, mobilization of cadres among the national minorities, the Zhytomir Pedagogical Institute, and the reception of interwar events in the official Soviet memory several decades after.

In RGASPI, I have mostly worked with Fund 445 (Central Bureau of the Jewish Section of the Communist Party, or Evsektsiia), in which I have analyzed the reports to central bureau of Evsektsiia in order to compare them with the work of local departments of Ukrainian Evsektsiias. I have found confirmations for the thesis that no uniform policy towards the Jews existed in the center and the provinces, that Moscow functionaries were receiving reports with huge delays, that they were constantly questioning the power of Kyiv functionaries, etc. I have also researched the activity of a Communist Party activist, Semen (Simon) Dimanshtein, who was the first chair of the central bureau of Evsektsiia in its founding years and the person who fought for its autonomy as an organization.

In Vernadsky library, I have worked with the collection of Soviet Yiddish pedagogical and cultural journals and newspapers such as Berdychiv's newspaper *Arbeter Shtime*, Kyiv's journals

Ratnbildung and *Shul un Lebn*, Moscow's *Af di vegn tsu der nayer shul* and others. I have worked with *Pedagogisher Biuleten* and *Proletarishe fon* in the National Library of Israel. Periodical press helped me to investigate teachers' and cultural workers' professed views on the nativization policy. Comparing them with archival documents, such as protocols and reports, provided a picture of mismatches between the declared and the fulfilled in the nativization policy.

Finally, I have worked with three collections of photo documents from DAZO, ZKM, and TsDKFFA's folders on national minorities and education in the 20th century, most of which are published for the first time in this dissertation. To complement my work with the spirit of the time, I have used memoirs and a diary, Arnol'd Margolin's *Ukraina i politika Antanti: Zapiski evreia i grazhdanina,* Boris D. Bogen's *Born a Jew*, and others. During the archival work, I have used archival guidebooks on the history of Jews in Ukraine. I have also relied extensively on secondary sources.

Chapter 1
Historiography Overview

Introduction

This chapter provides a critical overview of recent historiography on Sovietization of Jews. I first discuss the nativization policy in general works of interwar Soviet history, where Jews are not the main focus but are discussed together with other nationalities. I then discuss recent works of Jewish political, cultural, and social history in the interwar period. I place my research at the intersection between them, taking from Soviet history the logic of the nativization policy and the debates over it and from the Jewish history the complexities of Jewish life at the local level.

1. Sovietizing Jews in Soviet History

Post-Second World War Soviet historiography in the English-speaking world was divided among the so-called totalitarian school and the revisionist school. Both aimed to give an understanding of how the Soviet Union functioned by focusing on the explanation of major events such as the Great Terror (1936-1938).[31] The totalitarian school took the top-down approach, emphasizing the role of

[31] The cornerstones of the totalitarian school are Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York, Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1951, and Friedrich, Carl and Brzezinski, Zbignew. *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*. Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1956. For representative works of the totalitarian school specific to the Soviet context see Kenez, Peter. *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 1985, Conquest, Robert. *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991. For such tradition of thought with respect to the nationality policy (perceiving it as a duel between the open-minded Lenin and the close-minded Stalin) see Pipes, Richard. *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1997 (1st ed. 1954). Some classics of the revisionist school are Koenker, Diane. *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981, Smith, Steve A. *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories 1917-1918*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union 1921-1934*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 1979, Fitzpatrick, Sheila (ed.) *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931*. Bloomington,

Stalin, his personal animosities and convictions, and arguing that his usage of terror was a means of control of state institutions and the populace. The revisionist school articulated a more complex story, shifting the stress from Stalin's personality to the decision of various institutions and local and regional agents, as well as examining internal struggles among them. As it usually happens in such debates, both sides captured a part of the truth. More importantly, however, they were both significantly limited in their access to sources and interpreted those they had so as to fit their preconceived paradigms. With the opening of Soviet archives in the late 1980s, a new era of Soviet historiography began.

The new era gave rise to interest in hitherto neglected topics, including the nativization policy.[32] The nativization policy was first addressed only indirectly, through the lenses of upward social mobility policies and the creation of new elites.[33] The pioneer works directly addressing the nativization policy emerged in the 1990s with Ronald Suny's *The Revenge of the Past*, George Liber's *Soviet Nationality Policy*, Yuri Slezkine "The USSR as a Communal Apartment", and Jeremy Smith's *The Bolsheviks and the Nationality Question*. Each of these works provides useful introductory guidance to the logic of the nativization policy but it does not go in depth to examine particular nationality projects and when it does focuses on high level decisions and debates.

Indiana University Press, 1978, Getty, John A. *Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, Chase, William J. *Workers, Society, and the Soviet State: Labor and Life in Moscow, 1918-1929*. Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1985, Lynne, Viola. *The Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1987, Kuromiya, Hiroaki. *Stalin's Industrial Revolution: Politics and Workers, 1928-1932*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988. On the debate itself see Fitzpatrick, Sheila. "Revisionism in Soviet History," *History and Theory* 46, no. 4 (2007), pp. 77-91.

[32] Some other classics of the new era include, Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1994, Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, Getty, Arch J. and Naumov, Oleg V., eds. *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939*. New Heaven, Yale University Press, 1999, Davis, Sarah. *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda, and Dissent, 1934-1941*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, Viola, Lynne (ed.). *Contending with Stalinism: Soviet Power and Popular Resistance*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2002, Viola, Lynne. *The Unknown Gulag: The Lost World of Stalin's Special Settlements*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2007. Some new era works were in cultural history, the most notable being Kotkin, Stephen. *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*.

[33] Most notably in Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union*. Fitzpatrick focuses on the affirmative action policy in education which helped to promote the new generations born in proletarian families into high social and political positions.

An early classic which created the framework for discussion of the nativization policy for many years, Slezkine's article tracks the origins of Soviet nation building policies, discussing the views of Party officials. Slezkine's position is that the nativization policy was not a concession to popular demands but a way to satisfy the needs of nationalist groups and parties.[34] His view of the policy is very optimistic. Bolsheviks were ethnophilic because they promoted the rights of various nationalities (being hostile to individual rights).[35] Nationalities embraced the policy, each of them having equal opportunity to develop together with others peacefully. Slezkine pursues the analogy with a communal apartment, first invoked by the Soviet author I. Vareikis, claiming: "If the USSR was a communal apartment, then every family that inhabited it was entitled to a room of its own."[36] Similarly, he describes the policy, in Bakhtinian fashion, as "a feast of ethnic fertility, an exuberant national carnival sponsored by the Party."[37] Moreover and controversially, Slezkine claims that not even high Stalinism could eliminate the achievements of the nativization policy.

Slezkin's view that Bolsheviks were ethnophilic is somewhat exaggerated. From the fact that Bolsheviks sponsored the nationalities it does not follow that they were altruistic. Bolsheviks were motivated by a variety of reasons, such as the need for political alliances and an ideology that claimed that sponsoring nations striving for modernization leads to their eventual disappearance and unification into one, Soviet nation. What at first might seem as an ethnophilic tendency was usually a minor phenomenon, a first step, reserved for the ethnic siding of some high politicians with their own nations.

Moreover, the metaphor of a communal apartment obscures more than it clarifies. Some nations, such as Teleuts of Siberia and Sarts of Central Asia, were not "entitled to a room of its own" but incorporated into bigger nations. Though life in a real communal apartment was far from peaceful, Slezkin's metaphor builds upon the ideological image of the communal apartment as the place where an ideal communist society is raised. If under the nationality policy the Soviet state was a communal apartment, it was the real and not the ideologized one. Many nations fought for a bigger share, in language imposition, cadre politics, land distribution, border changing, etc.

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[34] Slezkine, Yuri. "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," p. 414.
[35] Ibid, p. 415.
[36] Ibid, p. 434.
[37] Ibid, p. 439.

Suny's work discusses the nativization policy in relation to imperial Russian politics towards non-Russians. He argues that the concept of nationality did not exist in the Empire. Ethnic and class identity were intermingled. Jews were treated as *inorodtsi*, indigenous ethnicities with special legal status. The only way for them to integrate was to convert to Christianity. Jewish distinctiveness was a response to restrictive governmental measures, constraining their lives to the Pale and imposing on them a series of other legal barriers, rather than a result of their religion and tradition. Suny's position is that Bolsheviks broke with imperial politics towards minorities in the sense that they invented nationality politics by supporting native languages, creating national elites, promoting local cadres, etc. The practice of nativization, Suny shows, started already during the Civil War and lasted until the early 1930s. The impulse of the policy stretched all the way to the 1960s.[38] Most republics were national in the respect that the titular nationalities dominated others demographically and in political and cultural spheres. Much like Slezkine, Suny claims that the effects of the nativization policy survived Stalinist Great transformation.[39] Concerning the relationship between the center and the periphery, everything was as in imperial times, with Russia dominating the other republics. The early Soviet state, Suny writes, became the "prisonhouse of nations."[40] Suny's picture of the nativization policy is exactly the opposite of that of Slezkine, where the USSR resembles a functional though conflict-ridden "communal apartment". However, Suny's is not a typical Cold War view. He is explicit that the USSR became the prisonhouse of nations only after creating and supporting them itself.

Though I agree with Suny on many points, I disagree that Jewish self-distinctiveness was only a response to imperial politics. Jews remained special even in the societies with liberal policies towards them. Religion, tradition, and occupational specialization played as much role in this as the state policies towards them. Suny's observations are helpful in understanding the general lines of the nationality policy but they are restricted when it comes to the Sovietization of Jews or the role of Yiddish.

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[38] Suny, Ronald. *The Revenge of the Past*, p. 109.
[39] Ibid, p. 125.
[40] Ibid, p. 114.

In contrast, Liber's book pays more attention to the local context. Its main focus is the role of urbanization and industrialization in integrating non-Russians in Soviet society and facilitating the nativization policy. Liber concentrates on the Ukrainian SSR and integrating Ukrainians into the new, urbanized, and industrialized society. He argues that national movements started as a result of both intentional and unintentional industrialization of backward regions and countryside's collectivization.[41] Soviet secular Ukrainian identity, he argues, was an urban phenomenon because Ukrainians, being mostly peasants, did not have self-awareness. Ukrainian national consciousness arose in 1917, as before they did not distinguish themselves from Russians.[42] Similarly to Suny, Liber argues that the policies of the 1920s-1930s aimed to maintain and legitimize that which was achieved during the Civil War and that in those processes the role of the center was primary.[43] However, unlike Suny, Liber claims that Bolsheviks did not create but merely fostered national identities. Liber also thinks that the nativization policy did not involve discrimination of Russians, since all languages and cultures had an equal standing.[44]

Liber does not elaborate on the Sovietization of Jews, even though urbanization played as big role in modernizing the provincial Jews as in the case of Ukrainian peasants. On a more general point, Liber's thesis that urbanization and Sovietization supported each other is only partly correct since urbanization was a sign of modernity, occurring much earlier than Sovietization.

Smith's book is the first comprehensive analysis of the nativization policy to introduce the chronology of the policy and to explain it not as centrally imposed decision but as a negotiation process between Bolsheviks and local nationalist parties. Smith not only explains objective reasons which made Bolsheviks to adopt the policy but argues that the policy was "a struggle between the center and the periphery in which it was, perhaps surprisingly, the center which supported local autonomy."[45] Smith claims that the policy was partially a result of Bolsheviks' inconsistency and improvisation in their decisions owing to their lack of internal unity as well as the peculiarity of the nationality question in imperial Russia. In his account on the center's support to the peripheries,

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[41] Liber, George. *Soviet Nationality Policy*, p. 3.
[42] Ibid, p. 4.
[43] Ibid, pp. 175-176.
[44] Ibid, p. 2.
[45] Smith, James. *The Bolsheviks and the National Question*, p. 6.

Smith focuses on Ukrainian Borotbists, Jewish Bundists, and Muslim National Communist Parties. Among the causes of the new Soviet policy, Smith admits, were alliances with various nationalist movements which helped Bolsheviks to win the war.[46] At the same time, Smith regards the policy as a "unique Bolshevik experiment" and approaches the national engineering as a power issue as well.[47]

Unlike Suny and Liber, Smith's book is an in-depth analysis of the relationship between the periphery and the center. It explains why the Moscow decision-making process was sometimes inconsistent, which is why Bolsheviks gave concessions and delegated a part of responsibility to national communists in the newly formed republics. A shortcoming of Smith's approach, in my view, is that he treats the center-periphery relationship mainly through the lenses of Soviet high officials.

Another advantage of Smith's book is its concentration on the Jewish issue. Commenting on Stalin's definition of nationality and the way it excluded Jews because they lacked a common territory and language, Smith is cautious in calling Jews a "nationality", preferring to deal with them only as a minority.[48] Smith's book provides interesting accounts of Jewish Bund and its alliance to Evsektsiia.[49] Smith sheds light on the composition of Evsektsiia and Evkom, and helps to reconsider the connection of Bund to Evsektsiia. He states that the party affiliation was not the thing which mattered the most in promoting non-Communist Jews to Evkom. Moreover, Smith provides a sound critique of Gitelman's *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics*. It is one of the rare criticisms of Gitelman in Soviet history dedicated to the nationality policy, whose book is usually taken as the most authoritative work on Evsektsiia.

The first work on the nativization policy based on extensive archival material was Terry Martin's *The Affirmative Action Empire*. Martin's book is more comprehensive than any previous work on the topic. It is also the first book to elaborate on the theoretical grounds of the nativization policy. Martin distinguishes four pillars of the policy: understanding nationalism in Marxist terms, as an ideology aimed to preserve the interests of the exploiters (Marxist Principle); understanding nations as products of capitalist modernity, as a historical stage towards the inevitable classless

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[46] Ibid, p. 240.
[47] Ibid, pp. 241-242.
[48] Ibid, p. 109.
[49] Ibid, pp. 111-114.

society (Modernization Principle); the fight against Russian nationalism, perceived as the most dangerous nationalism due to its expansionistic ambitions (Colonial and Great Danger Principle); and, finally, the belief that fostering nationalities in the borderlands will influence their fellow nationals in the other countries and present the Soviet Union positively in their eyes (Piedmont Principle).[50]

Martin calls the Soviet Union in the 1920s-1930s the Affirmative Action Empire, meaning that it positively discriminated the formerly oppressed nations. The nativization policy, in his view, was the policy of decolonization of the Russian Empire through the creation of national republics. However, Martin adds that the Soviet state was no less violent and centralized in implementing the policy.[51] He argues that the nativization policy differed with respect to 'Western' and 'Eastern' nationalities. The concepts were primarily used to differentiate the culturally 'advanced' from 'backward' nations. Jews were counted in the former category.[52] Jews were also counted as a diaspora nationality and seen as potentially disloyal. This facilitated their deposition from the high positions in the mid-1930s. Strikingly, Martin claims that Jews as a group were not repressed in the Great Terror before the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (August 23rd, 1939) because there were no decrees specifically targeting them for repression.[53] Lastly, Martin touches upon a sensitive and tragic unintended consequence of the nativization policy. He shows how the policy led to ethnic conflicts. "The combination of ethnicity, control of territory, and land ownership", Martin writes, lead to "a politicization of ethnicity."[54] Martin explains the development of ethnic conflicts after the creation of the national soviets and borders but he does not elaborate much on the different reasons that accompanied the conflicts.

Despite being impressively researched and providing credible guidance on the policy's functioning in general, Martin's book does not address some important aspects of the policy. For one, Martin does not have a particular interest in the Jewish issue apart from demonstrating why the assimilationist approach of Lenin and Stalin towards the Jews was changed to the affirmative

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[50] Martin, Terry. *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pp. 4-9.
[51] Ibid, pp. 18-19.
[52] Ibid, p. 23.
[53] Ibid, p. 336, n. 158.
[54] Ibid, p. 44.

action. By writing institutional or administrative history, Martin leaves behind personalities and aspects of individual policymaking. He does not explain how the policy was understood by the local officials, nor does he write about the responses of ordinary people.[55]

Francine Hirsch's *Empire of Nations* discusses the role of ethnographical knowledge in the new regime and ways in which Bolsheviks collaborated with the former imperial ethnographers and local elites in the nativization policy. Hirsch calls the process of incorporating peoples of the former empire in the new Soviet state "double assimilation". She argues that Bolsheviks used ethnography to justify and preserve the Russian Empire. Ethnographic argument, Hirsch insists, was the basis for giving some peoples the right of self-determination and depriving others from it. Ethnography was a mere tool in Bolsheviks' struggle to preserve the power. The book's main point stands diametrically opposed to Slezkine's thesis of Soviet ethnophilia and the state as a "communal apartment".

Hirsch shows the difficulties the ethnographers had in categorizing the Jews who inhabited the Soviet Union, as ethnographers believed that the same tribal origins united them.[56] She also discusses how government officials appealed to the ethnographic argument to deprive Jews of their national republics during the 1924-1927s, while at the same time justifying their agricultural settlements.[57] Some Soviet officials, Hirsch notes, used the ethnographic argument to prevent the organization of separate Jewish autonomy to these "dispersed people".

Despite Hirsch's book being the first study thoroughly dedicated to the role of imperial ethnography in Bolshevik decision-making processes,[58] the focus on ethnography has problems of its own. The ethnographic argument cannot explain the political rationale behind the nativization

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[55] For other criticisms of Martin's book, see Pearson, Raymond A. "Review of 'The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939'." *Reviews in History*, review no. 278, http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/278. (accessed March 9th, 2016).

[56] Jews were divided in five *narodnosti* based on their geographical locations. See Hirsch, Francine. *Empire of Nations*, pp. 132-133.

[57] Ibid, p. 132.

[58] Hirsch is not the first to stress the political role of Jewish ethnographical expeditions. For An-sky ethnographic expeditions see Lukin, Benyamin. "An-ski Ethnographic Expedition and Museum." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/An-ski_Ethnographic_Expedition_and_Museum (accessed March 10th, 2016). For Lev Shternberg's expeditions see Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *Going to the People: Jews and the Ethnographic Impulse*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2016. See also Deutsch, Nathaniel. *The Jewish Dark Continent: Life and Death in the Russian Pale of Settlement*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2011.

policy. To what extent Bolsheviks ignore ethnographic knowledge when it went contrary to their interests and why they prioritize some nationalities are more important questions than the question to what extent the ethnographic knowledge shaped their policy. For example, Hirsch does not explain what the ethnographers' motivation was in their attempt to categorize all the Jews as tribal.

While Martin's book focuses on the creation of new nationalities through the nativization policy, Hirsch argues in favor of the presence of imperial continuities. She states that in the 1920s-1930s the integration was done through assimilation.[59] Soviet Union is presented as "a new type of scientific state" which transformed clans and tribes into socialist nations with the help of map, census, and museum.[60] In my view, the argument that Soviet categories and new vocabulary helped to assimilate different peoples into "the Soviet fold" even when they resisted these categories needs to be clarified and specified.[61] It is true that peoples were consciously and unconsciously integrated into the Soviet Union with the help of new vocabulary and that they often had to act in ways ascribed to them. But it does not follow that they did not preserve their old identifications, nor that they "assimilated" into the Soviet family of the peoples. It is also not the case that Bolsheviks were innovators in their attempts at nationality-building. The rise of national culture in the interwar period was initiated, to no less extent, from below. Finally, while Hirsch pays attention to the Jews in the context of Soviet ethnography, she does not comment on the objective differences of Jewish communities on these territories, nor does she provide historic background about their life and different treatment in the Russian Empire. Jews who lived in the Pale of Settlement were obviously different from, say, Georgian or Bukhara Jews.

The nativization policy is still a hot topic in the Soviet history. The most recent studies try to overcome binary oppositions between the interests of the central political establishment and the local indigenous initiative in pursuing the policy's goals. Scholars are starting to pay attention to the role of local intelligentsia and the influence of pre-revolutionary factors on the formation of early Soviet state.[62]

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[59] Ibid, p. 312.
[60] The triad comes from Benedict Anderson. Ibid, p. 14, p. 312.
[61] Ibid, p. 15.
[62] For example, see Korobeinikov, Aleksandr. "Yakutskaia avtonomia: postimperskie politicheskie proekti yakutskoi inteligentsii, 1905-1922 gg." *Ab Imperio* no 3, (2017), pp. 77-118.

2. Sovietizing Jews in Jewish History

General works of Jewish history of the interwar Jewish life do not provide much information on that period and portray it as a relief after the Civil War pogroms.[63] Soviet power is described as the main oppressor of the Jewish religious identity and as responsible for the collapse of the Jewish traditional society.[64] Scholars also emphasize the benefits and losses of the Russian Revolution for the Jews[65] and present Soviets as oppressors of the Jews, not better than the Tsars. The narrative suffers the absence of stories of Jews who benefited from the Soviet power (apart from high party ranked Jews who did not identify themselves as such). More importantly, the interwar period is overshadowed by the Holocaust research. Questions addressed to the interwar nationality politics are usually examined in relation to the later tragedy. The interwar Jewish life is presented as a transformative stage towards total assimilation, stretched between the two forms of existence – the Jewish prewar traditional life and the Soviet Russified power.[66] The internal dynamic of the processes occurring between 1920s and 1930s is largely ignored.

The best books in Jewish history pursue a different kind of approach. The clearest example, Yuri Slezkine's *The Jewish Century*[67], analyses Jewish life as a series of broad patterns. Slezkine argues that there were three main destinations of Jewish migration in the 20th century. Two of them, to the States and Palestine, were "totally unknown", while the third, from the shtetls the former Russian Empire to its big cities, was "relatively familiar but rapidly expanding." Kyiv, Kharkiv, Leningrad, and Moscow became the destinations where the Jews climbed up the social ladder, got "converted to Pushkin's faith", and fell in love with revolutionary ideologies. These Jews strived to escape home and to cut the ties with the old shtetl in terms of language, religion,

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[63] See Mendelsohn, Ezra. *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987, Levin, Nora. *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917: Paradox of Survival*. New York and London, New York University Press, 1990.
[64] Ibid. See also Shternshis, Anna. *Soviet and Kosher.*
[65] See Haumann, Heiko. *A History of East European Jews*. Budapest and New York, Central European University Press, 2002.
[66] Shternshis, Anna. *Soviet and Kosher.*
[67] Slezkine, Yuri. *The Jewish Century*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004.

and family. They became a part of Russian-speaking intelligentsia, who often denied their Jewish origin.

Slezkine omits a huge part of the Jewish story, which does not fit his narrative. Taking as an ideal-type for his story Sholem-Aleichem's *Tevje the Dairyman*,[68] Slezkine reaches conclusions relevant to the history of minority of Jews who made their careers outside the Pale of Settlement and, presumably, never came back to it. The real history, however, complicates such a picture. In the 1920s and 1930s, the majority of the Jews still lived within the Pale of Settlement, and their native language was Yiddish. This was one of the reasons why the Jewish socialist party, Bund, switched the language of socialist propaganda from Russian to Yiddish to reach the Jewish masses. Slezkine's story is the story of Jews coming from the shtetls to the Russian-speaking big cities. This dissertation gives the opposite story, the story of Jewish intellectuals returning from those cities to the former shtetls, speaking Yiddish, and opening Yiddish schools in them. It does not only contradict Slezkine's assumption that Jews had to give up their faith and language and never return to their birthplaces and families. It states that Jews did not abandon their language and faith and that they were able to find a place for themselves within the frames of the nationality policy before it turned to Russification in the mid-1930s. Moreover, Jewish Soviet activists often relied on their former connections in the province. The history of the interwar Jewish life is incomplete if such facts are not considered.

Perhaps the best-known book in the field is Zvi Gitelman's *The Century of Ambivalence*[69], which describes the problem of transformation of the Jewish life in the interwar period. According to Gitelman, the first official agent of Sovietization was Evsektsiia, a body composed from the former socialists whose plan was to Sovietize the Jewish population by spreading the Communist ideology in their native language. Evsektsiia was supposed to replace the Jewish community

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[68] *Tevje the Dairyman* is a series of short stories about Tevje, a pious Jewish milkman from the Ukrainian shtetl and his seven daughters. Tevje is an archetypical, illiterate, shtetl Jew who sees the challenges that modernity brings to his life, in particular the emancipation of women in the choice of their husbands, as a danger which he cannot help but agree with. Each of his daughter makes, in Tevje's eyes, a wrong choice, marrying for love, converting to Christianity, etc. Slezkine particularly focuses on the story of Hodl, Tevje's second daughter, who marries a revolutionary and leaves the Pale of Settlement. For Slezkine, she is an archetype of Russian Jewry's unique fate who achieved social advancement by leaving the Pale.

[69] Gitelman, Zvi Y. *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2001.

institutions (*kehila*).[70] It also supervised anti-religious campaigns and had a major role in closing synagogues. Bundists who composed Evsektsiia's core, were opposed to the rabbinical elites, and not to Judaism as such. However, Evsektsiia's aim was to eliminate any sign of the Jewish religion from the masses.[71]

The scope of the book does not allow Gitelman to concentrate on particular details which characterized the Jewish interwar life. Many had been attributed to Soviet activists, for instance the phonetic reform in Yiddish. This was a feature of transformation of the Jewish life – to make Yiddish language secular by cleaning it up from Hebraisms and Hebraic spelling. Gitelman claims that it was Jewish Communists who eliminated the Hebrew elements, following the socialists in Poland.[72] However, in my previous research on Soviet pedagogical journals,[73] I argued that, with respect to *Shul un Lebn*[74], the phonetic writing had been used before the Soviets. This was done in order to make the language standardized for schoolbooks and periodical press.

As for the changes in province, Gitelman rightly argues that the shtetl should be analyzed as a complex phenomenon. However, his contention that industrialization resulted in massive emigration of Jews to bigger cities because it opened up career opportunities does not tell us much about the shtetls.[75] Industrialization usually happened in the bigger cities and it only had an indirect influence on the inhabitants who stayed in the shtetls.

Because communists associated themselves with religion fighters, Gitelman portrays the conflict within the local Jewish community as a conflict between the external forces represented by the Communists, on the one hand, and the local Jewish community, which wished to preserve the values of the traditional society, on the other. Gitelman claims that, despite the violent anti-religious campaign, "sometimes in smaller localities Communists were defeated, as they had little

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[70] Gitelman argues that Jewish masses were alien to Evsektsiia. See his *A Century of Ambivalence*, Ch. 5. See also Gitelman, Zvi. "Evsektsiia." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Evsektsiia (accessed March 7, 2016).
[71] Gitelman, Zvi. *A Century of Ambivalence*, p. 74.
[72] Ibid, p. 77.
[73] Batsman, Maryna. *Crafting a Jewish School System for Soviet Ukraine: Interwar Nationality Policies and Yiddish Pedagogical Writing*. MA dissertation, Budapest, Central European University, 2015.
[74] *Shul un Lebn* (*School and Life*) was pedagogical periodical published in Kyiv from 1918 to 1920. See Zeltser, Arkadi. "Soviet Yiddish-Language Schools." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Soviet_Yiddish-Language_Schools (accessed March 10th, 2016).
[75] Gitelman, Zvi. *A Century of Ambivalence*, p. 89.

support among the populace."[76] Unfortunately, Gitelman does not answer more specific but no less important questions such as which those localities were, which population inhabited them, and why such things happened in some places but not others.

Another feature of transformation of the Jewish community in the interwar period was its secularization.[77] Gitelman debates the question to what extent the campaign for fighting Judaism was influential among the shtetl population. He measures the success of the campaign on the basis of degree of its influence on change from trade and craft to industry, describing it as "ineffective."[78] Such approach overlooks the internal dynamic of the Jewish, leaving aside the young generation which supported closing synagogues as well as the assimilationists, Zionists, etc.[79]

Gitelman argues that Bolsheviks had to transform the Jews "from above".[80] He mentions that Jewish masses saw little attraction in Bolshevism apart from the educational and vocational opportunities aligned with it.[81] While this might be true of Jews living in bigger cities, it was not true of those in the localities, where the possibilities of social benefits were limited. Without close examination of case studies, the question of composition and motivation of local actors of the Evsektsiia remains unanswered. The Communist Party absorbed the majority of Bundists after the Bund split in 1919 (on the communist and social democratic Bund), together with other socialists.[82] While some socialists were against Hebrew language as the language of rabbis, others were more tolerant.[83] It is not clear how these problems were solved on the ground.[84] For instance, while some former Bundists used their new position of power to fight Zionists, in some localities this was not the case. The events of the 1920s were extremely different in the sense that people constantly changed their political orientations. For example, we lack the explanation of the behavior of Moshe Litvakov, who switched his political side many times, at the end becoming a Communist and fighting against his former colleagues, and whom Estraikh describes as the "main watchdog of the

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[76] Ibid, p. 79.
[77] In Gitelman, Jewish society of the shtetl is usually represented as a homogeneous entity.
[78] Gitelman, Zvi. *A Century of Ambivalence*, p. 82.
[79] Shternshis, Anna. *Soviet and Kosher.*
[80] Ibid*,* p. 71.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Gitelman, Zvi. *A Century of Ambivalence,* pp. 72-73.
[83] Ibid, p. 76.
[84] Ibid, p. 74.

Soviet Yiddish cultural world"[85]. Therefore, it is difficult to make sound conclusions about the personal motivations of the actors of Sovietization given the complexity of the situation on the local level.

Gitelman's book is by far the most comprehensive study of Evsektsiia. Evsektsiia was the main chain in the relationship between the Soviet authorities and Jews. It was formed in 1918 and existed until 1930, with the aim of spreading the cultural work among the Jewish populace. Its composition was rather diverse. Among its members, there were Jewish Communists but also former activists of various Jewish parties, the latter having no choice but to join the Bolsheviks. Gitelman argues that the Yiddish secular culture was necessity in times when Jews had to choose between modernizing themselves and preserving their identity.[86] In his view, modernizing Jews had horizontal and vertical tasks, the former being to merge Jews among other nationalities and the latter to connect the Jewish political elite to the Jewish masses.[87] Gitelman claims that the basic tasks of Evkom (Jewish Commissariat) and Evsektsiia were to destroy the old order, to Bolshevize the Jewish proletariat, and to reconstruct the Jewish national life.[88] He attributes the story of Evsektsiia to the history of all modernizing societies. Its tragedy was its transitional role. The more effective Evsektsiia was, the less was it needed by the state.[89] Gitelman argues that Evsektsiia's work was of minimal efficiency, as terror and state violence were major factors in transforming the Jewish population.[90] He suggests that the Bolshevik ideology cannot sufficiently explain the zest with which Evsektsiia activists destroyed the old order. The conflict originated from pre-revolutionary cleavages within the Jewish community.[91] Evsektsiia was used by the Party as a tool to carry out its destructive work against the traditional Jewish society so that communists could avoid being suspect of anti-Semitism.[92] In the third chapter, I show that there is much truth in this line of thought.

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[85] Moshe Litvakov (1875/80-1939) was a Yiddish theoretician, critique, and founder of the territorialist Zionist Socialist Workers Party (SSWP). He was also a founder of the first Yiddish secular school in Eastern Europe in Demievka (Kyiv), and later the leader of the Fareynikte and one of the founders of Kyiv Kultur-Lige. In 1920, Litvakov went to Moscow and joined the Party. See Estraikh, Gennady. "Litvakov, Moyshe." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Litvakov_Moyshe (accessed March 6th, 2016).
[86] Gitelman, Zvi. *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics*, p. 502.
[87] Ibid, pp. 12-13.
[88] Ibid, p. 491.
[89] Ibid, p. 450.
[90] Ibid, p. 492.
[91] Ibid, p. 14.
[92] Ibid, p. 495.

For Gitelman, there is a strict division of three categories in the population. The first is the Communist Party, which was anti-Jewish. The second is Evsektsiia, which was simultaneously modestly Jewish and anti-Jewish. The third category is the traditional Jewish society. This society, as Gitelman claims, was divided in two camps, both of which were opposed to modernization. I think that all these categories need to be carefully revised. The Jewish society consisted of more than two groups which opposed modernization. There was at least third group – those who would willingly accept assimilation in the Russian culture, and they were the biggest problem both for the Communist and various Jewish parties. Despite not sharing Gitelman's categorization of the Jewish population, I agree with him on the anti-Semitic tendencies of the Communist Party and Evsektssiia's instrumentalization by the Party to carry out its unpopular policies.

Jewish history largely neglects interwar Ukrainian Jews.[93] The focus of attention are the dominantly Russian-speaking acculturated Jews. The Jews who remained in the shtetls or returned to them are forgotten. The history of the shtetl is usually written on the basis of memories of the assimilated Jewish émigrés who only saw the Shtetl in their childhood. The real shtetl was alien to the memory of émigrés, who preferred to mourn the loss of the old shtetl. The shtetl was equally alien to Bolsheviks, who had to prove the success of proletarization of the Jewish population and its victory over the religiously dominated lifestyle. The shtetl questioned the success of the Soviet narrative, be it in the ways in which the traditional Jewish life persisted in occupational roles, religious practices, language, or elsewhere.

Jeffrey Veidlinger's *In the Shadow of a Shtetl* is perhaps the most prominent study which analyzes the issue of transformation of those Jews who remained in the province. In that respect, its subject matter is the same as that of this dissertation. Based on interviews of Holocaust survivors

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[93] The most prominent work which focuses on "the stories of successful Jews who left the Pale" is Slezkine, Yuri. *The Jewish Century*. This is mentioned in Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *In the Shadow of the Shtetl*, Introduction. A similar book on Jews of Saint-Petersburg is Beyzer, Mikhail. *Evrei Leningrada: 1917-1939: natsionalnaia zhizn' i sovetizatsiia*. Jerusalem and Moscow, Gesharim and Mosty kul′tury, 1999. For general works on Yiddish culture see Shneer, David. *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture: 1918-1930*. Cambridge University Press, 2004, Fishman, David E. *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005, Shternshis, Anna. *Soviet and Kosher: Jewish Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Indiana University Press, 2006, Estraikh, Gennady. *In Harness: Yiddish Writers' Romance with Communism*. Syracuse University Press, 2005, Estraikh, Gennady, Kerstin Hoge, and Krutikov Mikhail. *Children and Yiddish Literature from Early Modernity to Post-Modernity*. Routledge, 2016.

and written memoirs of Jewish settlers, Veidlinger's book is a well-written piece on the interwar Jewish life. Veidlinger's interviewees returned to the shtetls trying to reconstruct their lives. The book is not only an effort to collect remained sights of the Jewish life in the shtetl on the basis of conversations with the remaining Jews (which, in itself, is valuable) but an effort to propose an alternative, more diverse narrative of the shtetl.

Veidlinger's main argument is that the shtetl was not destroyed by the Nazis or by the Bolsheviks. The belief that the shetl was destroyed was held by Jews who left the shtetl and never remembered it again and by those who remained or returned to it. The latter claimed that the old, peaceful, and multicultural, shtetl of their memoirs was destroyed.[94] Based on the oral histories of witnesses, Veidlinger claims that the story of traditional non-existence of the provincial Jewish life in the shtetl is much more complicated. He touches on an important question of intersection between Jewish and Ukrainian histories. The issues heavily addressed by Ukrainian historiography —such as the debate about the two hungers in the rural areas, the collectivization campaign, which to a large extent facilitated them—are usually neglected about the Jewish case.[95] Veidlinger claims that those events significantly affected Jews as well.

The archival material of Veidlinger's book is limited to the Vinnytsia province. Interaction with Ukrainians is described from the Jewish point of view, which is natural, having in mind that the book focuses on the Jewish life in the shtetl, but not sufficient to provide a complete picture. Veidlinger does a good job in what he calls "complicating the narrative" but his respondents are only the Jews. The book willy-nilly follows the traditional pattern of writing the Jewish history as something so peculiar that it seems legitimate to neglect the Jewish neighbors.

With regard to Sovietization, it is important to analyze the extent to which the masses were aware of the same ideological language as the officials. This helps to understand the relationship of state propaganda to Sovietization from below. Veidlinger explains Jewish ignorance of Soviet terminology as unawareness towards the logic of political decisions. In most cases, he claims, Jews did not mention Communism, Soviet ideology, and they often "interpreted the official decisions in their own, rational logic."[96] This is not surprising given that none of the interviewed Jews were

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[94] Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *In the Shadow of the Shtetl*, p. 280.
[95] Ibid, Introduction.
[96] Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *In the Shadow of the Shtetl*, p. 283.

Soviet officials and that only a few of them were teachers at the Yiddish schools. It is also possible that these people did not speak the ideological language of the officials.

Despite the ignorance of the state decisions and the fact that the Yiddish school was one of the closest institutions to the population, it was still a place where the Soviet Jew was forged. We should proceed with caution in measuring its influence. Indeed, many Jews featured in the book attended the Yiddish school in their early years and then switched to Ukrainian or Russian school.[97] But we do not know much about the process of their transformation during the 1920s-1930s. According to Veidlinger, at that time shtetl Jews were both loyal to the Russian culture and supportive of the Ukrainian state.[98] They were not unique in this respect, as the same was true of Ukrainians.[99] I am also skeptical towards Veidlinger's conclusion that respondents were proud of attending the Yiddish school.[100] Obtaining any education was considered a matter of prestige in Soviet and Jewish societies and it increased one's job opportunities. It comes as no surprise that for the Jewish children a school was a matter of socialization and gave them a sense of community. However, Veidlinger does not address the issues of motivation of their parents and officials who decided to which school the children should go, and of reasons why some Jews went to Ukrainian school afterwards.

An important part of change, Veildinger argues, was reflected in space and memory. He pays particular attention to the architecture as a "marker of shtetl town" and its change during the Soviet time in renaming the streets and quarters.[101] He mentions a story of Yerushalaimka quarter and other streets with 'Jewish' names, which were replaced with names of Soviet heroes. He also laments that Ukrainians settled in former Jewish houses, writing that the previous glory of Hassidic shtetl was erased by a cruel Soviet past. Though I disagree with Veildinger's contrasting of pre-

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[97] This argument repeats the Evsektsiia book, where it claims that, since Russian Jews considered Russian culture of greater political value than the Jewish culture, they were more prone to assimilate in it. See Gitelman, Zvi. *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics,* p. 499.
[98] Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *In the Shadow of the Shtetl,* p. 288.
[99] Ukrainian peasants did not see a reason to learn the language they spoke, and the town population did not prefer Ukrainian to the imperial Russian. In his *Breaking the Tongue*, Pauly analyses the cases of Odessa and Kharkiv where Russian-speaking Ukrainians were a problem for the Soviet power with their uncertain loyalties. However, we often overlook this process when looking backward by thinking that Ukrainization was doomed to fail. We should not make the same mistake with regard to Yiddishization.
[100] Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *In the Shadow of the Shtetl*, p. 283.
[101] Ibid, p. 15.

Soviet shtetl as blossoming with the shtetl under the Soviets as declining, I do think it is fruitful to analyze the space and geography in the interwar shtetl, such as the decisions to rename particular streets or to turn synagogues into workers clubs, focusing on how those changes affected the lives of shtetl dwellers.[102]

The standard picture of the shtetl is that of it as a backward place, far away from the big centers, and as something that had to be transformed. The idea that revolution happens in the cities leaves the impression that nothing happens in the shtetl. Veidlinger questions this picture of shtetls as "isolated islands of transition." Another widespread tendency to which Veidlinger juxtaposes his story is the provincialization of the shtetl. Though the shtetl is in province, it is not provincial. The shtetl is the center of religious learning and later the place of revolutionary activities and ideas. I agree with Veidlinger and similarly argue against the standard narrative. I pay attention to how and why the Bolsheviks constructed this picture of shtetl as backward in the process of fighting the 'undesirable elements' in it, and how their ideology of modernization contributed to that picture. Apart from the shtetl inhabitants, I widen the picture and include the voices of Ukrainians. I approach shtetl dwellers not per se but as a part of the modernizing experiment of the Soviet state and its nationality policy.

The crucial work for understanding the short-term Ukrainian-Jewish alliance during 1917-1920 is Henry Abramson's *A Prayer for the Government*.[103] Abramson's attention is the Jewish autonomy, a half-utopian and half-fulfilled idea of Jewish socialists, which Ukrainians supported. The book's name is a reference to the Jewish hopes for a stable government. Abramson argues that there were objective reasons for Ukrainians' positive stance to the idea. The Jewish autonomy was a useful tool for maintaining the socialist utopia in which the collaboration between the working classes of various nationalities would bring a brighter future for all. Another reason was the lack of Ukrainian bourgeoisie in the predominantly agrarian Ukrainian society with low literacy rate. Ukrainian leaders, such as Volodymyr Vynnichenko, searched for Jewish intelligentsia to fulfill this role until Ukrainians developed their own intelligentsia. Finally, Abramson argues, there was

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[102] On turning synagogues into clubs during the anti-religious campaign see chapter 3. See also Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher*, pp. 7-14.
[103] Abramson, Henry. *A Prayer for the Government*. See also his "Jewish Representation in the Independent Ukrainian Governments of 1917-1920," *Slavic Review* 50, no. 3 (1991), pp. 542-550.

a strategic reason to offer Jews autonomy – to make them support the Ukrainian government and to use that support against the Provisional Government in Saint Petersburg. Attracting Jews for their cause was a matter of political game between Kyiv and Saint Petersburg.[104]

Abramson's view of Ukrainian-Jewish relationships rejects the simplified and prejudiced concept of eternal hatred between the two during their existence as neighbors. Abramson claims that anti-Jewish violence and pogroms were often not anti-Semitic but a consequence of war events that affected everyone. He warns against using anti-Semitism as an explanatory tool for every kind of anti-Jewish violence during the Civil War and proposes to treat modern interethnic violence as a self-standing and contingent phenomenon.

Abramson's book, however, leaves many questions unanswered. Though he calls the Jews 'Ukrainian', Abramson never explains what was Ukrainian about them and their culture except for the political alliance with Ukrainians. He does not provide reasons for the tragic failure of the Jewish autonomy which ended in pogroms. Contrary to Abramson's inference, Jewish seeking for stable government did not imply their Ukrainophilia. Jews preferred to vote for those who they believed would prevent the risk of pogroms and violence.[105] Abramson concludes with stories of atrocities during Symon Petliura's rule (1918-1921). Though he does not find Petliura responsible for the atrocities, the fact that they were happening on a large scale shows the futility of the hope that a stable Ukrainian government would suppress local violence. Abramson's insistence on not equating anti-Jewish violence with anti-Semitism is in principle correct. However, as I will show, most acts of anti-Jewish violence were in fact anti-Semitic. Jews suffered as a collateral during the war, but the war unleashed the old hatreds between the neighbors. Though Abramson's analysis is based on high-level decisions and does not include the voices of common people, it is very useful for understanding the nature of Ukrainian-Jewish relationship in the political sphere.

Another influential study is Anna Shternshis's *Soviet and Kosher*,[106] which approaches Sovietization by asking what assimilation meant for the Jews. Following Gitelman, Shternshis

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[104] Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government*, pp. 71-73.
[105] See Liber, George. *Soviet Nationality Policy*, pp. 19-21.
[106] Shternshis, Anna. *Soviet and Kosher.* This book is different from Veidlinger's in the type of sources used. *Soviet and Kosher* was written after interviewing mainly émigrés, or urbanized Jews. The majority of respondents settled in Berlin, Moscow, and New York. While Shternshis claims that she tried to interview residents of the shtetls as well, her research is disproportionately small with respect to those respondents.

argues that in one generation the Jewish culture was transformed from 'thick' (language, religion) to 'thin' (memory, feelings). Shternshis illustrates this with a survey from 1991, which she claims shows that Jews who had some knowledge of Judaism constituted less than one percent of the Jews in the Soviet Union.[107] However, deriving conclusions about the late 1930s based on the surveys from 1990s is rather problematic. For Shternshis, the 1920s and 1930s are the times of shaping the identity of the Soviet Jew who, she maintains, did not change until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Shternshis argues that the core of the Jewish identity was formed during that period. However, this approach assumes that in the beginning of the 1920s Jews had a fixed culture. But the division between thick and thin culture is artificial and had no firm basis in the reality. Moreover, Shternshis calls the generation of children who grew up in 1920s "transitional", as they lost the knowledge of Judaism, though the dissociation of Jewishness from Judaism was also characteristic of the post-Soviet Jewish generations.[108] The interwar culture, and the generation of this period should be seen as self-sufficient, and not as transitional, in the sense of underdeveloped culture (neither Jewish nor fully Soviet).

The main argument of the book is that it was the Soviet state policy in the cultural sphere that shaped the content of Soviet Jewish identity in the 1920s and 1930s. Interestingly, Shternshis differentiates between "natural" and "forced" secularization in arguing that the USSR was the only state which created a special apparatus in the government to secularize the Jews.[109] The issue of transformation gives rise to the question of purpose of the interwar institutions. Like Gitelman, Shternshis doubts that cultural institutions were designed to survive the nationality policy.[110] She argues that Jewish schools, party cells, and trade-unions were designed to break the connection between Jews and Judaism. An interesting question remains whether, for example, Yiddish cultural workers understood those institutions as temporal and transformative.

I have benefited from Shternshis's analysis of ordinary Jews as consumers and producers of the Soviet culture, especially in their anti-religious performances in synagogues.[111] Her down-

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[107] Shternshis, Anna. *Soviet and Kosher*, Introduction, xiii-xiv.
[108] Ibid, Introduction, xiii. Shernshis's research is based on oral interviews taken from the Jews who had both parents Jewish. Veidlinger's criteria were wider. He conducted interviews with the Jews who remained regardless of whether their parents had intermarried or not.
[109] Ibid, xiv.
[110] Ibid, xvi. Gitelman has similar argument on Evsektsiia. See Gitelman, Zvi. *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics.*
[111] Shternshis, Anna. *Soviet and Kosher*, Introduction, xvii.

to-top approach in analyzing popular culture and its influence on people's minds is innovative. However, I do not share Shternshis's distinction between thick and thin cultures, not only because interwar Jews did not abandon Judaism, but also because the pace of the 'thick to thin' turn was different in each particular shtetl and was not determined exclusively, or even primarily, by individual choice.

I finally turn to Elissa Bemporad's *Becoming Soviet Jews*, the book that outlined directions for this dissertation. Bemporad's is a study of how Jews turned Soviet in Minsk. Due to their location, Minsk's Jews enjoyed more autonomy from Moscow than those in Ukraine. Yiddish was established as a state language in Belarus.[112] Though Minsk was not a province, Bemporad defines it as a city which preserved traces of a shtetl, meaning that the Jewish population was able to preserve its usual ways of life because of their number, unlike in Moscow or Kyiv.[113] Bemporad's work is based on a variety of sources – Moscow state archives, letters of instruction between Minsk and Moscow, periodical press, and oral testimonies.

There are similarities between the process of Sovietization in Minsk and Ukrainian shtetls. Bemporad helpfully discusses the concepts of 'Jewish' and 'Soviet'. She distinguishes "acting as Bolshevik" from "acting Jewish"[114], and argues that such behavior was not necessarily labeled as deviant, nor did it signify opposition to the system. Bemporad also shows examples of ruptures between the "universal Communist practice" and the "particular Jewish identity."[115] She concludes that Soviet and Jewish were not contradictory identities and, indeed, that Jewishness sometimes helped Sovietization, which was in a way the Bolsheviks' intention.[116]

Bemporad refuses to idealize interwar Minsk. We read the stories of Jews who became the deprived ones and formers (*lishentsi* and *bivshiie*)[117], Jews who had difficulty obtaining education, work, and medical care because of their class origin. She gives stories of Belarus Jews who were forced to hide their parents' occupation or their Jewishness and who ended up fleeing to Moscow

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[112] Ibid, pp. 52-53.
[113] Bemporad, Elissa. *Becoming Soviet Jews*, p. 50.
[114] Ibid, p. 49.
[115] Ibid, p. 211.
[116] Ibid, p. 50.
[117] The former term refers to disenfranchised people and the latter to those who lost their civil rights and social status in general, both being discriminated as 'enemies of the people' after the October Revolution.

where it was more difficult to check their biographies.[118] Bemporad argues that the process of secularizing the Jews started before the Bolsheviks and that the old trends were emphasized and reinforced by the nativization policy.[119] Yiddish as a language of the public sphere, diminishing role of religion, ethnic self-identification instead of religious one were the characteristics of the early 20th century Jewish society, which Bolsheviks only embraced and promoted.[120] Bemporad also emphasizes that emancipation of Jewish women who sought alternatives for their traditional role as fireplace-keepers and embraced new ideologies as a means of social advancement did not emerge with Bolsheviks. Adaptation to Russian language and intermarriages were a part of this adjustment.[121] Bemporad also argues that the Soviet Union was unique in its press to secularize, conform, and assimilate its Jews through propaganda and terror.[122] She compares it to neighboring Poland in the 1930s, where Jews had more freedom in religious expression and more political alternatives to Communism (such as Social-Zionism, Bundism, and Revisionism) but where anti-Semitic laws and violence were more widespread.[123] The Yiddish dailies and cultural institutions survived the Great Purge but not the Hitler-Stalin pact.

I have relied on Bemporad's concepts of 'acting as a Jew' and 'acting as a Bolshevik'. Being a Jew and being a loyal Soviet citizen were not always contradictory. While some Jews were eager to abandon parts of their identities, such as obeying Shabbath or keeping kosher, there were Jewish Bolsheviks who, when that was not costly for them, did not see any problem in combining their political convictions with elements of Judaism in daily practices. In addition, in the fourth chapter, I demonstrate that Bemporad's idea of Yiddish as a working language of some institutions and Russian as working language of others is not applicable to the Ukrainian case. Unlike Belarus, where the affirmative action policy of making Yiddish the working language of educational and cultural institutions of Jews succeeded, Yiddish in Ukraine conflicted with the dominant legacy of the Russian language.

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[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid, p. 211.
[120] Bemporad, Elissa. *Becoming Soviet Jews*, p. 122.
[121] Ibid, pp. 211-212.
[122] Ibid, p. 212.
[123] Ibid, pp. 212-213.

Conclusion

The preceding literature review exemplifies a personal selection of works which influenced this dissertation more than others. It does not purport to offer an extensive overview of Sovietization of Ukrainian Jews either in the Soviet or Jewish historiographies. I am aware that some important books were left out, though they will be less directly engaged with in the next chapters. The books critically discussed were the starting points for this dissertation, with the help of or in contrast to which my arguments were formed.

Chapter 2

Socialism in Yiddish: Continuity and Rupture of the Jewish Soviet School

Introduction

This chapter discusses the role of the Soviet Yiddish school in Sovietizing Jews in the Ukrainian province. I describe aspects to which the Yiddish school brought changes in lives of the local population and to what extent it had success. Despite the fact that the Yiddish school was the official instrument of the early Soviet regime, its presence in the province was rather weak. The main reason for the weakness was that the Soviet Yiddish school could not compete with the existing network of old Yiddish schools, supported by the Kultur-Lige[124] and the Ministry of Jewish Affairs.[125] The official Soviet rhetoric was that the new Yiddish school would bring winds of change and sever the ties with the old system. However, in reality the school lost not only the battle with traditional, illegal, Jewish schools (Talmud-Torahs, cheders, and yeshivas), which locals preferred to attend, but also with its non-Soviet, although socialist and secular, ancestor, whose members refused to give up their positions.

I first give a brief overview of the structure of traditional Jewish education. I describe the new types of schools for Jews emerging in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th

[124] The Kultur-Lige is a general name for a number of cultural organizations functioning between 1920s and 1930s in Eastern Europe. The Kultur-Lige was founded in 1918 in Kyiv as a result of Central Rada's policy of granting Jews cultural autonomy rights. Its goal was to support and promote Yiddish in all spheres of Jewish culture and to supervise cultural and educational institutions in Yiddish, including a network of Yiddish schools. The term Kultur-Lige also refers to a network of similar institutions in Poland at the same time. See Kazovsky, Hillel. "Kultur-lige." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Kultur-lige (accessed May 10th, 2017).

[125] The Ministry of Jewish Affairs was a shortly lived organ within Central Rada (July 1917-April 1918), headed by Moshe Silberfarb. See Abramson, Henry. *A Prayer for the Government: Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times, 1917-1920*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1999, Batanova, Tetiana. *Jewish National Autonomy in Ukraine 1917-1918: Institutional Organization, Self-Perception Attitudes, and Historiographical Interpretations*, MA dissertation, Budapest, Central European University, 2008, Ch. 3.

century on the territories of the former Russian Empire. It is important to mention these schools since they preceded the Yiddish school. They also show the diversity of educational institutions in the early 1920s and the complexity of schooling practices. Discussing various schools illustrates the importance of the local context for the functioning of the Yiddish school, as its success was directly proportional to the reaction from the local community.

I then discuss Soviet rhetoric regarding the new school and theoretical foundations for creating it. I show how the idea of the new school to bring up the New Man intersects with the Jewish socialist idea of the New Jew raised in Yiddish culture.

To illustrate different kinds of entanglement between the schools and the authority in the former Pale of Settlement, I show that the Yiddish school was an object of struggle between the Kultur-Lige and the Jewish Section of the Communist Party. Due to this unstable position, the new school was unable to sustain itself. Bolsheviks tried to limit the Kultur-Lige's responsibility over it and at the same time they lacked influence to take over the Kultur-Lige's schooling network.

I conclude on the legal status of the Yiddish school, arguing not only that its status did not help it to establish its power in the province, but it was very often abused by the same power.

1. The Plethora of Schools in the Province

Despite the fact that in the traditional Jewish society[126] most children attended schools, education was not a ticket for upward social mobility. This was a highly stratified society whose stability was secured through education, in particular through a traditional elementary school for Jews of Eastern Europe – cheder.[127] Cheder means 'room' in Hebrew and it literally was a room. Teaching was done in a private house of a melamed (*Heb.* 'teacher'), who was usually paid a small amount of money by the child's parents. The impoverished sent their children to Talmud-Torah (*Heb*. 'study of Torah'), which were sustained on a communal budget. Talmud-Torah was the type of

[126] In the 19th century all European Jewish societies were traditional in the sense that they had traditional institutions and everyday practices. At the end of that century none of them were. See Stampfer, Shaul. *Families, Rabbies, and Education: Traditional Jewish Society in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Europe*. Oxford, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010.
[127] Stampfer, Shaul. *Familes, Rabbies, and Education*, p. 145.

schooling usually reserved for Jewish orphans and children of poor Jews.[128] Children started to attend cheder at the age of three or four and stayed in it until they were twelve or thirteen. A minority of children continued their studies in yeshiva (*Heb*. from yshb, 'to sit'), a school designed for the study of Talmud and its commentaries.[129]

The late 18th century marks a decline in the traditional Jewish religious education. In the 19th century, studying in yeshiva was substituted by studying in bet medrash (besmedresh). This was a communal house of study and it also served as a synagogue. Young men who studied at bet medrash were supported by the practice of 'kest' – their parents-in-law sponsored their studies.[130] Bet medrash was also sponsored by a similar institution, kloyz, which depended on a private donor. The importance of kloyz weakened with the spread of Hasidism and the novelties it introduced.[131] In the late 19th and early 20th century, the term 'kloyz' was used for Musar[132] schools and later for a Hasidic synagogue. Despite the fact that synagogue was very often located in the same building as the former kloyz, the two did not share any institutional relations.[133]

By the end of the 19th century a reformed Zionist cheder appeared, Cheder Metukan.[134] Cheder Metukan was a version of a traditional school with some modernizing elements. It offered a study of Hebrew language, Jewish history, geography, and literature. Classes were conducted in Hebrew, *ivri-b-ivri*[135]. Cheder Metukan was a poor solution for the problem of modern education: it was too modern for religious Jews. It was not the most popular school among the middle-class Jews who wanted to provide a more general education for their children. For such people, Cheder Metukan lacked Russian language, arithmetic, and other subjects which would help their children

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[128] See Harris, Jay M. 2010. "Talmud Study." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Talmud_Study (accessed March 28th, 2017).
[129] See Reiner, Elchanan. "Yeshiva: The Yeshiva before 1800." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Yeshiva/The_Yeshiva_before_1800 (accessed May 12th, 2017).
[130] See Reiner, Elchanan. "Bet ha-Midrash." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Bet_ha-Midrash (accessed May 12th, 2017).
[131] See Reiner, Elchanan. "Kloyz." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Kloyz (accessed March 30th, 2017).
[132] The musar movement (from *musar*, instruction in Hebrew) was founded in Lithuania in the 19th century. Its followers, Orthodox Jews, promoted greater piety and ethical conduct.
[133] See Zalkin, Mordechai. *Modernizing Jewish Education in Nineteenth Century Eastern Europe: The School as the Shrine of the Jewish Enlightenment*. Boston and Leiden, Brill, 2016, pp. 95-100.
[134] Schulman, Elias. *A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union*, p. 3.
[135] The name of teaching method of Hebrew in Hebrew.

to raise on the social ladder.[136] There were also efforts to reform Talmud-Torah schools. There were some efforts to introduce Yiddish in the curriculum of Talmud-Torah. Yiddishists supported this idea, claiming that "life demands the knowledge of Yiddish."[137]

There were also state Russian Jewish schools (Haskalah) in the Pale of Settlement. They opened under Minister Uvarov.[138] Teachers of such schools were civil servants whose principal aim was to Russify Jewish children. The teachers were also Jewish maskilim[139], who did not enjoy much respect in the Jewish community, though some of them later taught at Hebrew and Yiddish schools. The curriculum of state Russian Jewish schools had few Jewish subjects which were taught on a very low level.[140]

Cheder remained the only secure school for Jews in the Pale of Settlement, mostly due to financial reasons. Completion of cheder marked the end of any education for many children in the shtetls.[141] The plethora of schools in the province reflects the changes in the Jewish community at the turn of the century. Jews tried to overcome isolation and to make their education competitive. The changes were also caused by the rise of nationalism and the new challenges which nationalism generated in education. School became a solution for the nationality question.

On the eve of the Revolution of 1917, Jewish schools, both traditional (cheder, Talmud-Torah, and yeshiva) and socialist (Yiddish schools, Zionist Talmud-Torah, Tarbut[142]), coexisted

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[136] Schulman, Elias. *A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union*, p. 4.
[137] Ibid, pp. 5-6.
[138] Bloomberg, Jon. *The Jewish World in the Modern Age*. Jersey City, Ktav Publishing House, 2004, p. 14, Polonsky, Antony. *The Jews in Poland and Russia: 1881-1914*. Vol. 2. Oxford, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010, pp. 367-371, Stanislawski, Michael. *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825-1855*. Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983, pp. 97-109, Klier, John. *Russia Gathers Her Jews*, pp. 144-150.
[139] Followers of the ideas of the Jewish Enlightenment or Haskalah. See Zalkin, Mordechai. *Modernizing Jewish Education in Nineteenth Century Eastern Europe*, pp. 95-100.
[140] Schulman, Elias. *A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union*, p. 5, Polonsky, Antony. *The Jews in Poland and Russia,* pp. 367-371.
[141] Access to other education was limited because of family's financial hardships and because there were few school options in the Pale of Settlement in the last quarter of the 19th century. On that issue, see Kaganovich, Albert. *The Long Life and Swift Death of Jewish Rechitsa*, p. 170.
[142] The network of Zionist schools with Hebrew language of instruction. Founded in Poland, Tarbut schools comprised most Zionist schools in Ukraine. See Kazdan, Khayim S. *Di geshikhte fun yidishn shulvezn in umophengikn Poyln*. Mexico City, Gezelshaft 'Kultur un hilf', 1947, pp. 411-433.

and competed for the right to educate new generations.[143] Though the majority of the population supported Zionists, it was the Jewish socialist school in Yiddish which became promoted after the establishment of the Ukrainian National Republic (UNR). This was a consequence of the fact that the majority of Jews in the Parliament of Central Rada—UNR's central council—were socialists.[144] During the short-lived rule (March 1917-April 1918) of Central Rada, which promoted national-personal autonomy for Jews, the Ministry of Jewish Affairs was formed. The Ministry supervised Jewish cultural and educational issues together with the Kultur-Lige. Jews were granted national autonomy and the Vice-Secretary for Jewish Affairs, headed by Moshe Zilberfarb, was formed.[145] Educational national minority institutions set up in this period continued to function under the ensuing governments – Hetmanate, the Directorate,[146] and the Ukrainian SSR.[147]

When Bolsheviks took Kyiv for the fourth time in 1922, they immediately started school reform there and in the provinces. Following the instruction of the gubernial Department of People's Education, schools supervised by the Department of People's Enlightenment had to be reorganized into the Unified Labor School (*Edinaia trudovaia shkola*), which was Lunacharsky's project of the country's uniform system of education, from kindergarten to university, where the children of workers and peasants would get free polytechnical education so as to eventually

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[143] This period characterizes strong connection between education and political movements: Zionism, Yiddishism, Poaley-Tsionism. See Katz Dovid, *Yiddish and the Power*. New York, Palgrave Macmillian, 2014.
[144] Abramson, Henry, *A Prayer for the Government*, pp. 23-31.
[145] See Mantovan, Daniela. "The Yiddish 'Children's Republic' of Malakhovka. A Revolutionary Experiment in Education", *Aschkenas* 24, no. 1 (2014), pp. 129-143, p. 38.
[146] Hetmanate (April-December 1918) was an anti-socialist dictatorial government installed by German authorities and headed by Pavlo Skoropadskyi. It was overturned in a rebellion and succeeded by the Directorate, a provisional revolutionary state of the UNR, which lasted for less than a year, when it was taken over by Bolsheviks in February 1919. See Velychenko, Stephen. *State Building in Revolutionary Ukraine: A Comparative Study of Governments and Bureucrats, 1917-1922*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2011, Chs. 3-5, 7, Plokhy, Serhii. *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*. New York, Basic Books, 2015, Chs. 18-20, Pipes, Richard. *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, Ch. 3, Yekelchyk, Serhy. *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, Ch. 4.
[147] See Batanova, Tetiana. *Jewish National Autonomy in Ukraine 1917-1918*, p. 54.

achieve upward social mobility.[148] Though religious and Zionist schools (Tarbut) were banned,[149] Bolsheviks inherited one institution from the old regime – the Yiddish school. Leading advocates of Yiddish language and culture, pedagogues, and ideologues of national Jewish autonomy continued their work in the Jewish Committee and the Jewish Section of the Communist Party (notable examples are Esther Frumkin[150] and Moshe Litvakov).

It is difficult to say which school was the exact origin of the Soviet Yiddish school. It owes its existence to the Yiddish socialist school and the Hebrew Zionist school, which were united by the idea of promoting modern, up-to-date, and secular education in the national language of Jews, Yiddish or Hebrew. Even when the school was not directly linked to the state-building project, such as the Yiddish socialist school, it still contained the national dimension for Jews.[151] The 20th century Jewish school emerged as the offspring of two conditions: the need of Jews to modernize and their desire to study in the national language.[152] The first condition was partially fulfilled by including secular subjects in school curricula. The second condition resulted in the introduction of Yiddish (or *mame-loshn*, mother tongue) as the main language of instruction. The closest predecessor of the Yiddish Soviet school was the Yiddish socialist school supported by Bundist leaders, most notably by Frumkin. Importantly, the latter school did not promote forceful secularization of Jews. Bundists and other Yiddish socialists held religion to be a personal issue and they refrained from intervening in religious aspects of schooling (the same could not be said of Soviet educational activists).

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[148] See Fiztpatrick, Sheila. *The Commisariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts Under Lunacharsky, October 1917-1921*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 31-32, and McCLelland, James C. "The Utopian and the Heroic: Divergent Paths to the Communist Educational Ideal." In Gleason, Abbott, Kenez, Peter, and Stites, Richard (eds.). *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1985, pp. 114-130.

[149] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 3, f. 1, p. 5.

[150] Esther Frumkin (1880-1943) was a pseudonym of Khaye Malke Lifshits, Bundist and later Communist leader (and a member of Evsektsiia), who professed the idea that Jewish children should study in their national language. See Gechtman, Roni. 2010. "Lifshits, Khaye Malke." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Lifshits_Khaye_Malke (accessed May 7th, 2017).

[151] On parallels of cultural vision of Yiddishists and Hebraists and their belief in creating secular intelligentsia see Moss, Kenneth B. "Bringing Culture to the Nation: Hebraism, Yiddishism, and the Dilemmas of Jewish Cultural Formation in Russia and Ukraine, 1917-1919." *Jewish History* 22, no. 3 (2008), pp. 263-294. See also Halevy, Zvi. *Jewish Schools Under Czarism and Communism*, pp. 122-130.

[152] On similar development of the Yiddish schools in Poland see Mendelsohn, Ezra. *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars*.

The Soviet Yiddish school was not, nor was it meant to be, merely the socialist school in the national language with subjects providing up-to-date and secular education. It was meant to create the new system of social relationships, the New Man. Putting the Yiddish school under its control, Bolsheviks made other schools illegal. However, many cheders and Talmud-Torahs, as well as Zionist schools, continued to exist illegally or half-legally, fostering contacts with officials and demanding registration, apartments, and funding. Moreover, some Talmud-Torah's pupils became students of the Yiddish school. In provincial localities, the best Talmud-Torah's pupils were recruited by the Yiddish school.[153] For instance, in 1921 a person named Fishbeyn, probably a Soviet activist, together with a teacher of the workers' school, went to Talmud-Torah in Narodichi to conduct exams and choose 25 pupils for the Jewish workers' school (*Yevreiskaia trudovaia shkola*).[154] Such educational combinations might seem surprising but in the early 1920s they were quite common.

Attendance of schools in the 1920s was often complementary to other studies. Children of wealthier families had private teachers or went to cheder and Russian gymnasium at the same time. Others went to communal Talmud-Torah and cheder but due to the lack of financial means, they had to drop studying after several years and to switch to the Yiddish school. Many Jews recall they went to cheder before they enrolled in the Yiddish or the Ukrainian school.[155] In fact, for many of them the standard educational trajectory was first attending cheder, then the Yiddish, and then the Ukrainian school.[156] The Yiddish school often coexisted together and was mixed with the Russian and the Ukrainian school. There were also mixed Jewish Ukrainian schools, Jewish orphanages, and places for young delinquents, the latter being self-sustained universes. Although cheder was

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[153] Bolsheviks were not alone in threatening Talmud-Torah schools, which were weak as they depended on communal money. In Belarus, Bundists threatened those who did not want to participate in communal gatherings by depriving Talmud-Torah of financial aid so that their children would not be able to attend the school. See Kaganovich, Albert. *The Long Life and Swift Death of Jewish Rechitsa*, p. 85.

[154] DAZO, Fund P-2196, inv. 1, f. 5, p. 29, "Protocol zasedaniia chlenov Kultur-Ligi, 3. 02. 1921."

[155] According to Zeltser, illegal cheders continued to exist in Belarus until 1930s, when NKVD undertook severe measures against them. Cited from Kaganovich, Albert. *The Long Life and Swift Death of Jewish Rechitsa*, p. 241.

[156] Smilovitskii, Leonid. *Jewish Life in Belarus: The Final Decade of Stalin's Regime.* Budapest and New York, Central European University Press, 2014, pp. 125-127. Children from three to five years of age attended cheder, which was lower than the school age. So strictly speaking, education in such cases did not overlap.

officially banned, provincial Jews did not see any contradiction in studying both in cheder and in the Yiddish school. In their imagination, they both belonged to the same, Jewish, world.[157]

Simultaneously, Bolsheviks started mass trials against cheders. The trials were usually held in former theatre buildings. The aim of a trial was to convince population that cheder is dangerous and to close it. The authorities used force to suppress the population which resisted. In many cases, it was not possible to close all cheders because the number of Soviet schools was much lower than the demand for education. With the decree from January 1922, Evsektsiia disregarded this fact.[158] The oppression had the opposite result from the intended: in a short period, it gave rise to a variety of illegal cheders.[159] Children secretly attended cheders in small groups and those who could afford it had individual tutors. However, many children did not attend any school. More than 30 percent of Jewish children in Ukraine and Belarus in 1923 did not go to school at all.[160]

In 1931, there were more than 1,100 Yiddish schools with 130,000 students in the Soviet Union.[161] By the beginning of 1920s, when korenizatsiia started off, one half of Jewish children attended traditional schools, some of whom went to underground Tarbut and Yiddish socialist schools. Only a small number of children attended Soviet Yiddish schools, which tried to establish the legitimacy of the nativization policy. Despite the official declarations that the Yiddish school would satisfy the demands of Jewish children, in reality none of the other schools in the province were able to do so. The overall literacy rate was quite low.[162] This was not only due to the habits of the local population and their resistance to Soviet Jewish schools but also due to the inability of

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[157] For a similar story of combining the Yiddish school with Talmud-Torah, cheder, and underground yeshiva in Derazhnya of Khmel'nitsky region see Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *In the Shadow of the Shtetl*, p. 96.
[158] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 1, p. 3.
[159] The data comes from the short notes located at the very end of the periodical *Pedagogical Biuleten*. They usually contain a brief description of the town, notes on religious life, information about the existing schools, and burdens of activists' work. Other sources are scarce reports from local inspections of Peoples Education to Evsektsiias. Smaller and bigger towns with Jewish majority appear in these notes as backward shtetls, lacking any decent schooling, and "surviving on speculation". Some of these notes mention the struggle between the traditional but still strong Talmud-Torah and its Soviet competitor – Yiddish schools.
[160] Kaganovich, Albert. *The Long Life and Swift Death of Jewish Rechitsa*, p. 240. Kaganovich gives numbers from Altshuler, Mordechai. *Ha-Yevsektsiyah bi-Brit-ha-Mo'etsot, 1918-1930*, p. 326.
[161] Gitelman, Zvi. "Do Jewish Schools Make a Difference in the Former Soviet Union?" *East European Jewish Affairs* 37, no. 3 (2007), pp. 377-398.
[162] According to the 1926 census, 49 percent of the Jewish population of age nine and above was illiterate. See Altshuler, Mordechai. *Soviet Jewry on the Eve of the Holocaust: A Social and Demographic Profile.* Jerusalem, The Center for Research of Eastern European Jewry, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1998, p. 104.

those schools to accept the entire population of Jewish children. In addition, local officials frequently complained about the difficulties of opening a Yiddish school. Lacking support from the Jewish community and disconnected from the center, they failed to fight against the communal authorities and could not change the habits of people to send their children to traditional schools.[163]

The Soviet Yiddish school found itself in the sea of traditional schools embedded in Jewish society in the province. The path towards its dominant role in education was not plain sailing.

2. Soviet Rhetoric about Schools in Yiddish

This section deals with Soviet rhetoric about the Jewish school in Yiddish, in particular with claims about its supposed novelty in education. Bolsheviks described their educational achievements with the rhetoric of rupture with the old schools. They portrayed the Yiddish school as the best school and the only alternative to the old educational system. They claimed that the Yiddish school was a place of equal opportunities for all and that it prepared children for the challenges of the modern world and equipped them with necessary skills. The schooling was supposed to be conducted in the native language, which Jews could not enjoy in the imperial times.[164] While in their rhetoric about the new schools Bolsheviks drew comparisons with the imperial Russian school or with an unspecified 'old school', with respect to the Yiddish school they targeted cheder.[165] The most common claim was that the Yiddish school did not exist legally before the Revolution. The Revolution had created it.[166] I first discuss the officially expressed ideology about the place and role of the new school in Jewish society, turning to reasons why Bolsheviks thought it important to emphasize their split from the previous regime.

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[163] *Pedagogisher Biuleten* no. 5-6 (1923), pp. 126-127, 143-146.
[164] Yiddish secular schools were prohibited in the Russian Empire. The first Yiddish school was opened in 1911 in Demievke, Kyiv, and it claimed to the authorities to be a religious school.
[165] Vivid examples are articles in *Pedagogisher Biuleten* (*Pedagogical Newsletter*), Kyiv, Kultur-Lige Kooperativer Farlag, 1922-1923, and *Ratnbildung* (*Soviet Education*), Kharkiv and Kyiv, Ukrmelikhenatsminfarlag, 1928-1930.
[166] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 3, f. 308-309, p. 2.

According to Marx and Lenin, Jews were not a nation because they lacked two necessary characteristics: common language and territory.[167] Similarly, in his essay "Marxism and the National Question", Stalin denied Jews the right to national-personal autonomy. Stalin was also not favorable to Zionism, calling it a reactionary and bourgeois movement.[168] Bolsheviks thought that there was no place for Yiddish, the "jargon" of Jews in the Pale of Settlement, as they called it, in the new state.[169] Therefore, they proposed assimilation as a solution for Jews. However, after the October Revolution, this view changed sheerly due to pragmatic reasons. Bolsheviks needed allies. Their support was the weakest in the places with numerous urbanized Jewry of Ukraine and Belarus.[170] The non-assimilationist agenda gradually won over. In 1923, the RCP(b) adopted the nativization policy, which required the implementation of affirmative action towards the nationalities and, in particular, promoting national languages.[171]

With respect to education, Bolsheviks espoused the idea of Bund's activists that the Jews' education should be in Yiddish. The reasons were twofold. Education in the mother tongue was seen as more effective for a child due to its positive impact on his studies and as a means of raising national awareness.[172] Esther Frumkin wrote:

> [T]he language of instruction in each school must be in the mother tongue of the children – for each nationality must be established separate schools and national schools should be in the language of the nationalities. […] The demand should

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[167] Pinkus, Benjamin. *The Soviet Government and the Jews 1948-1967*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 11. See also Traverso, Enzo. *The Marxists and the Jewish Question: The History of a Debate (1843-1943)*. New York, Humanity Books, 1994.
[168] Ibid, p.12.
[169] The idea was not unique to Bolsheviks. They repeated the claims of Jewish intelligentsia which termed Yiddish "jargon" and considered it a low-status language (in comparison to Hebrew). See the next chapter for more details.
[170] See Rabinovitch, Simon. *Jewish Rights, National Rites: Nationalism and Autonomy in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2014, p. 253.
[171] See Dowler, Wayne. *Classroom and Empire: The Politics of Schooling Russia's Eastern Nationalities, 1860-1917*. Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001, pp. 232-233. On korenizatssia see Martin, Terry. *The Affirmative Action Empire*, Slezkine, Yuri. "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism.", and Suny, Ronald and Terry Martin (eds.). *A State of Nations*.
[172] See Pauly, Matthew. *Breaking the Tongue*, Ch. 5.

> also be made that among the various languages which will be used as languages of instruction, Yiddish must be recognized.[173]

Though Bolsheviks shared the idea of effectiveness of education in the mother tongue, it was more important for them to approach Yiddish as a language through which they would spread the communist ideology. They also interpreted the idea of national awareness in their own way: providing Jews with the opportunity to study in their national language, Bolsheviks hoped, would reduce the threat of nationalism. The needs that would otherwise give rise to nationalist sentiment would be satisfied and curtailed within the socialist state.[174]

Jewish communists were not especially keen on the Yiddish language. They approached it as a convenient tool for educating the Jewish worker. Semen Dimanshteyn, the head of the Jewish Secretariat, reasoned:

> Since we [Jews] speak a distinct language, we are obligated to ensure that the Jewish masses have an opportunity to satisfy all their spiritual needs in that language. We are not fanatics of Yiddish language. For us, Yiddish is not holy, as it is for the Jewish nationalists. No, the language for its own sake is not important for us. Our task is to bring together workers of all nationalities and to unite them in one international family.[175]

Therefore, the Yiddish language taught at school became the main tool of Sovietization. It was thoroughly secularized, that is to say, purified from Hebraisms having links to the traditional Jewish culture. Its existence was justified by the claim that the Jewish worker desired to have his

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[173] Frumkin, Esther. "Vegn Natsionaler Detsiung," *Tsait Fragn*, 5 (1911).
[174] During the time of war, the prevailing position was that language can be sacrificed for the interests of the revolution. With the New Economic Policy, NEP (1921-1928), the view changed. Schools in national languages became a model for education. The Department of National Minorities worked within the NKVD USSR from 1921 and in 1923 the Central Commission for Nationality Affairs was launched within the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee (VUTSIK). See Borisenok, Elena. *Fenomen sovetskoii ukrainizatsii*, p. 114.
[175] Quoted from Shneer, David. *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture*, p. 30. See also Smilovitskii, Leonid. "Shkola na idishe v perviie desiatiletiia Sovetskoi vlasti," *Pedagogicheskii al'manah*, 11 (2002), http://old.ort.spb.ru/nesh/njs11/smilov11.htm (accessed May 11th, 2017).

own school. The Yiddish language and the Yiddish school were seen as means of fighting clericalism and overcoming *shteyger*, the traditional Jewish lifestyle. The goal of the Yiddish school, Soviets often claimed, was to take children "out of the captivity of religious superstitions"[176]. The press also emphasized the role of the new school in creating the New Jew. It claimed that the national question for Jews was solved and that the Yiddish school was part of the Soviet enterprise: "The rumors about the school in Yiddish are means of discrediting it from the Soviet family – the national question has already been solved." [177]

The rhetoric of rupture with the previous regime became an important subject of the public press. The press stated that the Yiddish school had nothing to do with its ancestor – the dark and gloomy cheder.[178] Bolsheviks stressed this point even at the level of hygiene. The Yiddish school was supposedly clean, it followed the newest trends of hygiene, caring not only for the intellectual but also for the physical development of a child.[179] In this respect, Bolsheviks stressed the uniqueness of the new school in comparison to those in the West. They claimed that many practices introduced in the new school (hygiene, sports, or soil science) never existed before them.[180]

It is interesting to note that the press almost never compared the Yiddish school with Jewish socialist or Zionist schools. The traditional cheder was a convenient target because it was in all respects different from the Soviet school. But the validity of comparison did not bother those who wanted to emphasize the rupture with the previous system.

The particular claims about the rupture were the following. First, it was claimed that the Soviet school was the first legal school which had Yiddish as its language of instruction. In the Russian Empire, all such schools, apart from the religious ones, were banned. The Yiddish school,

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[176] Holdisheym, A. "Di muter-shprakh iz a werktseig tsu boyen di internatsionale proletarishe kultur." *Proletarishe fon* (May 1928), p. 6.
[177] Gorokhov, G. "Tsum shul-ufnam." *Proletarishe fon* (May 1928), pp. 1-2.
[178] Hayim Bialik described his early years in Zhytomir attending cheder as a place "gloomy as a death's shadow." See Eisenberg, Azriel L. and Abraham Segal. *Presenting Bialik: A Study of His Life and Works*. New York, Jewish Education Committee of New York, 1956. Similarly, Ben-Zion Gold talks about "dreary cheder in the care of a gloomy melamed." See Gold, Ben-Zion. *The Life of Jews in Poland Before the Holocaust: A Memoir*. University of Nebraska Press, 2007. There are many such examples.
[179] Golomb, A. "On Child Development." *Pedagogisher Biuleten* no. 3-4 (1922), pp. 7-8.
[180] See Kelly, Katriona. "Malen'kiie grazhdane bol'shoi strani: internacionalizm, deti i sovetskaia propaganda." *Novoie literaturnoie obozrenie*, 60, no. 2 (2003), pp. 218-251. http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2003/60/katrion-pr.html (accessed November 5th, 2017). Kelly argues that this claim was largely exaggerated.

Soviets professed, "allows a poor, uneducated person to be secular, proudly working-class, and proudly Jewish."[181] The other claim, therefore, was that of equality. The Yiddish school provided equal opportunities for every child.[182]

An important claim was that the Yiddish school was not only brought by the Revolution but was revolutionary itself, in terms of its pedagogical aims. Unlike the traditional system of education, which aimed to preserve the structure of society, the Yiddish school revolutionized the Jewish masses. Its goal, Nadezhda Krupskaya[183] wrote, was to prepare the masses for life:

> The school has also to teach one how to work. The old school was not fostering students' ability to work but their ability to kill time, not the ability to calculate their own forces but to do what is ordered. […] The goal of the working school is to […] perform every work with a purpose, expediently.[184]

According to Krupskaya, this would be accomplished when students had purpose in their studies and when the old and outdated subjects were removed from the curriculum.[185] Lenin's view was less radical. He admitted that there were things from the old school which had to be preserved. Erasing everything from the old school, Lenin argued, went against the aim of Communism to take the best from the world's educational achievements:

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[181] Shtakser, Iryna. *The Making of Jewish Revolutionaries in the Pale of Settlement*, p. 31.
[182] In reality the poorest kids went to the Yiddish school which, as mentioned, became the Soviet version of Talmud-Torah.
[183] Nadezhda Krupskaya (1986-1939) was a Bolshevik revolutionary, politician, and Lenin's wife. She was a Deputy Minister of Education from 1929 until her death.
[184] Krupskaya, Nadezhda. *Trudovoie vospitaniie i politekhnicheskoie obrazovaniie*. Moscow, Direkt-Media, 2013, pp. 53-54.
[185] Such ideas were, to an extent, an influence of John Dewey, American educator and philosopher. Dewey was invited by Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875-1933, Russian politician and educator, Head of the Commissariat for Enlightenment) to visit the Soviet Union in 1928. Dewey's views were very close to Krupskaya's. When Dewey met her, he said that Krupskaya spoke his own language. He especially appreciated her view that every human being should be able to "obtain personal cultivation." See Martin, Jay. *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2002, pp. 350-351, p. 355. Lunacharsky and Krusphaya disagreed on whether education should be general or more practice oriented. On this debate see Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *The Commissariat of Enlightenment*, Chs. 3-4, and Kenez, Peter. *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, pp. 74-82.

> Some say that the old school used to be the school of studies […], the school where children were boning up on the subjects. That is true but we should distinguish what was bad in the old school from what is useful for us. And we should be able to choose from it those things that are necessary for Communism. […] It would have been a mistake to think that it is sufficient to learn the Communist slogans without obtaining the sum of knowledge, the consequence of which is Communism itself.[186]

Another frequently raised claim in the rhetoric of rupture was that unlike in cheder, where the teacher literally "terrorized poor students"[187], there was no violence in the Soviet school.[188] The discipline was to substitute violence of the 'old bourgeois school'. "Instead of the old drill, which was carried out in the bourgeois society against the will of the majority," Lenin wrote, "we place the conscious discipline of workers and peasants who combine the hatred for the old society with determination, skill, and readiness to unite and organize forces for this struggle. (…) Without this cohesion, without this conscious discipline of workers and peasants, our cause is hopeless."[189]

The new Soviet school claimed to change the approach in the child-teacher relationship. It perceived children as full and equal members of the society and started to take the child's personality seriously. A child was supposed to be turned "from a yeshiva-bokher to a pioneer"[190] – the full-fledged Soviet citizen.[191] The best model for that transformation was the child who lost

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[186] Lenin, Vladimir I. *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 41, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1972, p. 303.
[187] The idea of abusive cheder in Soviet visual propaganda was taken from the East European Yiddish literature and memoirs. The issue of journal *Bezbozhnik* from 1923 depicted a rabbi preparing to cane young Jews. For other such examples in the journal *Bezbozhnik u stanka* see Weinberg, Robert. "Demonizing Judaism in the Soviet Union during the 1920s." *Slavic Review* 67, no. 1 (2008), pp. 120-153, p. 135.
[188] Shternshis, Anna. *Soviet and Kosher*, p. 5.
[189] Lenin, Vladimir I. *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 41, p. 303.
[190] I compare it to Michael Wex's definition of traditional Jewish education, whose aim was to turn "cheder-yingl to bar-mizva bokher." See Wex, Michael. *Born to Kvetch: Yiddish Language and Culture in All Its Moods*. New York, St. Martin's Press, 2007, p. 219.
[191] "By the mid-1920s", Svetlana Boym writes, "[…] the pedagogical ideal is […] the "reformed orphan", the former homeless hooligan-*besprizornik*, a child of the Civil War turned into an exemplary builder of Communism. The orphanage […] turns into a model socialist republic." Boym, Svetlana. *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 91.

his family in the anti-Jewish pogroms and was brought up in a communal house, his new family.[192] Soviet pedagogues perceived a child as a 'small adult', an individual able to make autonomous decisions and to stand by them.[193] Children were to have a role in decision-making concerning curricula, holidays, and other school plans. They were to be given self-administration and self-government (*zelbst-farvaltung*). In *kinder-komune*, children had a right to make collective decisions.[194] *The Republic of ShKID*, a pedagogical utopian novel published in 1927, promoted that right, stating that "self-governance and trust are essential attributes of humans"[195]. Such methods were used in the reeducation of juvenile delinquents as well.[196]

The anti-violence rhetoric coincided with and was partly motivated by special attention given to the child's personality in the early Soviet pedagogy.[197] In the 1920s, Soviet pedagogues tried to accommodate children with traumatic pogrom experiences.[198] Attention to the child's psychology coincided with the question of individual and collective liberty which Soviet citizens were said to be able to enjoy. One declaration reads: "Unlike in bourgeois school, where people were promised liberty through education, in the Soviet school, education came through liberty."[199]

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[192] Jewish pedagogues debated how to deal with problematic children: "You should not forbid such children to talk, write, or draw about pogrom-experience when they are in such mood and tired by various fears", cited from B. S. "Khronik." *Shul un Lebn*, no. 4-5 (March-April 1919), p. 97.
[193] Ibid.
[194] One of the first and the most famous children colonies was in Malakhovka, in the vicinity of Moscow. The colony advanced a new approach to relationship between the child and the teacher, unimaginable in the traditional system of education. Anton Makarenko's project "Gorky colony", opened in 1920, was a blueprint for Malakhovka's school. See Mantovan, Daniela. "The Yiddish 'Children's Republic' of Malakhovka. A Revolutionary Experiment in Education", pp. 129-143.
[195] Balina, Marina and Dobrenko, Evgeny (eds.). *Petrified Utopia: Happiness Soviet Style*. London, Anthem Press, 2011, pp. 99-100.
[196] Ibid, p. 100.
[197] Child's self-government, independence, recovery from pogroms, and the adaptation of orphans feature prominently in *Pedagogisher Biuleten* (1922-1923). Jewish pedagogical writings in Yiddish often stress the influence of Dewey to their child-centered psychology. Dewey is cited as a defender of child's individuality. However, in his *The School and Society* (1899), Dewey argues that education should be society-centered and not child-centered and that the destiny of children is to become members of society. He is often misinterpreted as being a child-centered pedagogue. Moreover, Dewey's main focus in schooling was on progress and not on revolution. See Martin, Jay. *The Education of John Dewey*, p. 199.
[198] After the First World War and the Civil War, many parents neglected their children and the mortality rate was tremendous. See Kirschenbaum, Lisa A. *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932*. New York, Routledge, 2001, pp. 34-37.
[199] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 7.

"The Jewish (Yiddish)[200] educational institutions (kindergarten, school, vocational school, etc.)," wrote one teacher, "play a colossal role in revolutionizing the Jewish environment and help to involve huge masses of adult working population in building the Soviet society."[201]

Let us now turn from rhetorical and ideological claims about the Yiddish school to its actual position in the province. Its weakness was caused, first and foremost, by institutional reasons and to a lesser extent by the unwillingness of locals to collaborate with the new regime.

3. Yiddish School between the Fires of the Kultur-Lige and Evsektsiia

The problem in which the Soviet Yiddish school found itself had several dimensions. One is the competition between it and the rest of schools, which were banned but functioned illegally. The other is an ambiguous and, therefore, weak position of the Yiddish school in the new regime's system of power. The Yiddish school tried to integrate in the old system of social relationships and was met with resistance, especially among Jewish Orthodox and Hassidic groups.

Two bigger actors captivated the Yiddish school – the Kultur-Lige and Evsektsiia (along with Evkom, the Jewish Commissariat). The Kultur-Lige was created in 1918. It was preserved under Soviets until 1924 due to great efforts of many Jews to preserve autonomy over their cultural affairs.[202] Evkom was established as a subsection of Narkomnats, the People's Commissariat for Nationality Affairs, in 1918. Evsektsiia, the Jewish Section of the Communist Party, was established in the same year. The difference between the two was largely administrative, though they shared similar responsibilities. Ukrainian Evkom was mostly composed of the same people who worked in CP(b)U's Evsektsiia.[203] Evsektsiia's duties were to spread the official ideology in Yiddish and to fight Bund, other socialist parties, and Zionism. The creation of Evsektsiia marked

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[200] In Yiddish, the words 'Jewish' and 'Yiddish' have the same analogue – 'idishe'. As it is not always clear from the context which word is more suitable, I indicate both. The tricky thing is that 'Jewish' ('idish') school in 1920s was indeed a Yiddish school.

[201] Gorokhov, G. "Tsum shul-ufnam," pp. 1-2.

[202] See Kazovsky, Hillel. *Khudozhniki Kul'tur-Ligi*. Jerusalem and Moscow, Gesharim and Mosty kul′tury, 2003, pp. 172-173, and Rybakov, Mykhailo O. (ed.). *Pravda istorii: Diial'nist' ievreiskoi kul'turno-prosvitnyts'koi orhanizatsii 'Kul'turna Liha' u Kyievi, 1918-1925*. Kyiv, *Zbirnyk dokumentiv i materialiv*, 2001.

[203] On the responsibilities of these two organs see Ro'i, Yaacov. *Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and the Soviet Union*, p. 54.

the institutional transition in solving the problems of the Jewry, meaning that the authority was delegated from a governmental body to the Party.[204]

Though Evsektsiia tried to control old Yiddish schools and to establish new ones, the old 'cadres'—Yiddish cultural activists involved in the Kultur-Lige—did not allow members of Evsektsiia to interfere.[205] A third actor involved in this power battle was the local community and its influence should not be underestimated. In Ukraine, as in Belarus and Russia, the local Jewish community played a decisive role in issues regarding the school innovations, property disputes, and the success or failure of the anti-religious campaign. However, here I will focus on institutional rather than communal reasons for the Yiddish school's powerlessness. Involved in a bigger war between these institutions, the Yiddish school suffered as collateral damage. Behind its weakness lies a larger problem of the role of Evkom and Evsektsiia in modernizing the Jewish society.

When Bolsheviks entered Ukrainian provincial towns, they quickly released the decree that all theaters, cinemas, and cultural organizations should be nationalized and kept under the supervision of local committees of Peoples' Education (*uyezdnarobrazi*). All musicians, artists, and other cultural workers[206] had to fill out questionnaires about their activities and were then hired by the state.[207] Members of the former Ministry of Jewish Affairs switched to work in the Evkom. Beyond these decrees, the change of power did not go smoothly. Cultural workers employed by the new regime had to overcome opposition from the local community or, at best, its indifference and unwillingness to collaborate.[208]

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[204] Gitelman, Zvi. Y. "Evsektsiia."
[205] See Gitelman, Zvi Y. *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics*, pp. 23-25.
[206] The general term used in the official documents and, sometimes, as self-descriptive.
[207] DAZO, Fund. P-31, inv.1, f. 2, p. 9. See also Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union*, pp. 4-5.
[208] For instance, in Smolensk, Russia, locals mobilized against Evsektsiia's anti-religious campaign, defending their synagogue from turning it into a school. They appealed to their interpretation of the Soviet law on the freedom of conscience. See Hickey, Michael C. "Communists vs. Clerics: The Smolensk Choral Synagogue, The Khislavichi Rov Stibel Synagogue and the Nep Antireligious Campaign." *The NEP Era: Soviet Russia* 1921-1928, 2 no. 1 (2008), p. 46. However, as Norah Levin states, neither this law nor the Party policy are sufficient to explain the "meandering course of Soviet policy" and the divergence in the regime's treatment of different religious groups. See Levin, Nora. *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917*, p. 69. Local defenses of synagogues as an opposition to the anti-religious campaign are discussed in the next chapter.

In Ukraine, members of the Kultur-Lige and Evsektsiia fought over the "proper vision of Yiddish culture."[209] The main struggle appeared between those Yiddishists who shared the same ideology, Yiddishism, but stood in different relations to the Soviet power. Some were members of Evsektsiia while others used to work for the Kultur-Lige. Despite their common passion about the Yiddish language, they did not collaborate. Many Yiddishists did not want to become Soviet. They sensed that the Soviet Yiddish schools, which were to replace autonomous Yiddish schools, were never designed to promote ethnic identity; rather, they were instruments of assimilation.[210]

The struggle went on in part because of the confusion about the responsibilities of each administrative body. With Bolsheviks reappearing in Kyiv in December 1922, the Kultur-Lige lost its primacy in cultural and educational affairs in the region, though for some time it managed to keep its autonomy. This was facilitated by the fact that the Kultur-Lige was directly subsidized by the RCP(b), which was also one of the cornerstones of the conflict between Ukrainian Evsektsiia and the Kultur-Lige.[211] Evsektsiia was disturbed by the overstretching power of the Kultur-Lige. It was anxious about its own position and the indifference it received from local communists.[212] Evsektsiia sought enemies within the Kultur-Lige, among members of Poale Zion[213], Fareynikte, and Folkspartei[214]. It accused the Kultur-Lige of spending money on culture rather than education. Evsektsiia promoted the view that there was no need for a separate institution of Jewish cultural affairs. The Kultur-Lige was blamed for producing and covering up enemies of the regime.[215] The

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[209] Rybakov, Mykhailo O. (ed.). *Pravda istorii,* pp. 24-25.
[210] This is also the argument of Zvi Halevy's *Jewish Schools Under Czarism and Communism*. Halevy compares these schools to Yiddish socialist and Zionist schools which taught subjects from a secular, non-assimilationist, perspective.
[211] Shneer, David. *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture*, pp. 20-23.
[212] See Moss, Kenneth B. *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2010, p. 255.
[213] Poale Zion (Workers of Zion) was a Marxist-Zionist Jewish movement which emerged in Europe and the Russian Empire at the turn of the century primarily as a response to Bund's rejection of Zionism. Some members of Poale Zion formed Fareynikte (United Jewish Socialist Workers Party) in Kyiv in 1917, fighting for Jewish national autonomy. See Frankel, Jonathan. *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 329-365, Gitelman, Zvi. *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics*, pp. 90-92, 197-215.
[214] Folkspartei (Jewish People's Party) was organized in 1905 by Simon Dubnov and Israel Efroikin as an opposition to Zionists. The party program relied on principles of Russian Social-Democratic Party combined with the extended version of the program of Federation for Equal Rights for the Jewish People in Russia. See Gitelman, Zvi. *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics*, pp. 50-51.
[215] Moss, Kenneth B. *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution*, p. 254.

situation was so tense that some leading Yiddishists refused to be part of Evsektsiia under any circumstances. The Yiddishists' attitude towards Evsektsiia was negative from the beginning.[216]

This partly explains the difficulties that local cultural-workers, who were members of Evsektsiia, experienced when they arrived to the province. First of all, they had to deal with what they called "the shtetl mentality" – the mentality of conservative, religious, and narrow-minded towns, which remained important centers of religious movements. One of Evsektsiia's responsibilities was also to "fight clericalism."[217] As we have seen, even when parents sent their children to local Yiddish schools, they were often engaged in parallel studies in traditional schools. However, it seems that the concession between the parents and the Soviet activists was possible only under the condition that the Jews had their own religious education after attending the official, legal, school.

Consider Evkom's report on Proskurov, a town which used to be a center of Hasidism.[218] According to the report, 67 percent of Jewish children (or 5788 of them) in Proskurov between the age of 8 and 15 attended 20 Jewish schools (half with 7 years of studies and half with 4 years of studies) and another 25 percent of the Jewish children (or 1400 of them) attended Ukrainian schools. The report stresses the parent's eagerness that their children attend schools "in the native language of instruction." But it also reports that after these studies, "parents send their children to cheders or to the teachers of Old Hebrew language."[219] It should be emphasized that we are talking here about 89 percent of the Jewish population attending the Soviet schools.[220] Since the majority of these schools belonged to the network of the Kultur-Lige, the Soviet activists report that they faced difficulties when trying to take them over.

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[216] Rakhmiel Peltz argues that despite the negative attitude towards Evsektsiia among the traditional Jewish circles, Evsektsiia was rehabilitated in scholarship for its manifold nature and some positive accomplishments in development of the Yiddish culture. Peltz advocates the positive role of Evsektsiia due to its necessity to justify its own existence in the Communist Party. However, this is still an open question in the scholarship. As the story with the Kultur-Lige shows, the situation was not black and white. See Peltz, Rakhmiel "Di Yiddish-Imperye: The Dashed Hopes for the Yiddish Cultural Empire in the Soviet Union", pp. 281-282 in Kreindler, Isabelle T. (ed.) *Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Soviet National Languages: Their Past, Present and Future*. Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1985.
[217] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 1057.
[218] Proskurov (currently Khmel'nitsky) was the administrative center of the Podolia Governorate. In 1740s, Proskurov became one of the centers of Hassidic movement thanks to its closeness to and influence of Medzhiboz, a town most famous for being a residence of rabbi Nachman Bratslavsky or Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810).
[219] TsDAVO, Fund 167, inv. 7, f. 338 (microfilm), 1926-1927.
[220] It is difficult to estimate the real number of children attending the schools.

What is more, in some cases Evsektsiia indirectly sabotaged the Yiddish school. In 1923, in Berdychiv, Evsektsiia proposed to unite the Russian and the Yiddish school, arguing that parents withdraw children from the Yiddish school, as "it is better to have a good Russian school than a bad Yiddish school."[221]

The political aim of Evsektsiia and Evkom was to fight Zionist centers and other Jewish local organizations. However, Evsektsiia and Evkom also tried to promote their own vision of the Jewish culture which did not fit into the traditional Jewish culture nor in the plans of the Soviet high administration. The problem of Evsektsiia was, as Gitelman puts it, that it was "increasingly committed to the simultaneous modernization of Soviet Jewry and the preservation of its distinct identity."[222] Its position did not comply either with the position of "those who were so strongly attached to the traditional Jewish values and culture that they rejected almost any form of cultural modernization" nor with "those who were convinced that they were imprisoned by backward and parochial culture which had to be thrown off completely in order to become modernized."[223] It should be added that the position of Evsektsiia did not comply with that of the Kultur-Lige, the latter practicing modernization but not the Sovietization of Jews.

Conflicts also occurred within the local Party cells. In Chernigiv, the local Communist organization rejected the necessity of maintaining a separate Jewish Commissariat and refused to comply with its requests.[224] The Jewish Commissariat blamed the lack of finance and the absence of clear guidance from the Kharkiv's leadership. "We are dispatched from the central Ukrainian workers and peasants government…", it claimed, adding, "we inherited unregulated apparatus from the minister Revutsky, the coworkers, unprepared for the work and, importantly, the empty budget, so we were unable to function and had to wait until the center's directives."[225]

The most important problem was that Evsektsiia's members had to deal with the non-Soviet Yiddish school. Lacking strong support from the center, they struggled to establish vital spots of

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[221] DAZO (Berdychiv dept.) Fund P-208, inv. 1, f. 30, p. 28. Zeltser noticed a similar situation in Vitebsk, Belarus. Apart from supporting schools in Russian, many Evsektsiia members refused to work in Yiddish. See Zeltser, Arkadii. *Evrei Sovetskoi provintsii*, p. 24.
[222] Gitelman, Zvi. *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics*, pp. 10-11.
[223] Ibid, p. 10.
[224] TsDAVO, Fund 3304, inv. 1, f. 1, pp. 5-7.
[225] TsDAVO, Fund 3304, inv. 1, f. 5, p. 10.

Soviet Yiddish cultural life. Numerous reports about poverty in the shtetls illustrate this point.[226] Evsektsiia's activists also complained that local commissariats could not coordinate each other's activities. They blamed the central leadership for not providing them with a coherent policy and straightforward instructions.[227] Activists of one local Evsektsiia were frequently unaware of the situation even in a nearby town: "The format of work in one town did not comply with the pattern in another."[228]

Those in charge of Yiddish cultural life also faced the choice between joining the official political line, thereby receiving certain possible benefits, or conducting a self-governing policy, thereby relying on the Kultur-Lige's network. Faced with this problem, people behaved differently from shtetl to shtetl. Therefore, it was not only the Yiddish school which stood between the two fires, the Kultur-Lige and Evsektsiia. Evsektsiia itself had to balance between the local and the central level, not being fully underpinned by any of them.

It should not come as a surprise that relying on such a weak supporter as Evsektsiia, the position of the Soviet Yiddish school was unstable and shaky. However, what did happen when the Yiddish school was prominent in the shtetl? Leaving aside the problems facing Evsektsiia and Yiddish schools, I proceed to analyze the relation between one traditional and one modern school in the province, the Talmud-Torah and the Soviet Yiddish school, showing the complexities of bringing up the Soviet Jew in the periphery on their example.

4. The Uneasy Way of Transition: 'Legal' and 'Illegal' Schools

Soviet Yiddish schools faced difficulties in justifying themselves to the local population. Despite the fact that they were the only legal schools, locals rarely saw them as legitimate. Soviet activists faced hardships in interpreting and implementing the law whenever they had to negotiate schools' property, finances, employing cadres, etc.[229] Through several examples I show that the categories

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[226] Ibid, pp. 23-28, 32-34.
[227] TsDAVO, Fund 3304, inv. 1, f. 5, pp. 10-13.
[228] Ibid, p. 13.
[229] This was especially so in those cases where, during the anti-religious campaign, some synagogues were turned into Yiddish schools. Despite the fact that all property was nationalized after 1917, the community was able to claim back the synagogues. This created numerous conflicts between the people and the state which had to be resolved by the law being adjusted on a case by case basis. See Gitelman, Zvi. *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics*, pp. 271-272; Levin, Nora. *The Jews in the Soviet Union Since 1917*, p. 69.

of legality or illegality do not adequately reflect the messy educational politics in the 1920s. The following stories about the schools in the province illustrate an interesting but paradoxical situation where the legal Yiddish school had to justify itself in front of the locals while illegal schools did not.

Yiddish schools had to justify their legality primarily because Evsektsiia was poorly prepared for its tasks. Evsektsiia's work in the province was undermined by two factors. The first was the inconsistency of early Soviet politics.[230] The issue was not only the lack of coordination between Evsektsiia's activists in the center and those in the periphery. The inconsistency was also a rational strategy: in their policy of banishing religion, Bolsheviks prioritized short-term political alliances with religious authorities in order to hijack their power afterwards.[231] Such pragmatism led to a number of religious Jewish communities existing semi-legally in Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus in the 1920s. These communities were able to keep their religious practices and could even obtain kosher meat.[232] Under such circumstances, the role of an intermediary institution like Evsektsiia was futile.

Secondly, Evsektsiia was hampered by illegal (or semi-illegal) pre-revolutionary networks, ranging from Zionist and socialist groups to kehilas (local Jewish community organizations or congregations). In 1919, Evkom and Evsektsiia issued a decree which dissolved kehilas, though they managed to exist until at least the mid-1920s. At the same time, Bolsheviks registered Tarbut in Zhytomir. The Tarbut society was opened in the building of the former trade-industrial bank on Big Berdichevskaya Street.[233] Its members were officially enlisted under the management of the sub-department of extracurricular education.[234] Wanting to be officially registered, Tarbut's leaders declared that their "society pursues only cultural goals and not political goals, spreading

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[230] Connected to this is the fact that Yiddish cultural institutions were designed to be short-lived and liquidated after the Sovietization is completed. See Shternshis, Anna, *Soviet and Kosher*, Introduction.
[231] Levin, Nora. *The Jews in the Soviet Union Since 1917*, p. 70.
[232] Though there was no legal prohibition of consuming kosher meat, the state made its production nearly impossible by arresting *shoykhets* (ritual slaughters) and introducing other barriers. See Bemporad, Elissa. "Defying Authority in the Pale: The Making of Soviet Jewish Rituals and the Emergence of Folk Legitimacy," in Smollett, Brian M. and Wiese, Christian (eds.), *Reappraisals and New Studies of the Modern Jewish Experience*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2014, pp. 62-82.
[233] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv.1, f. 1, p. 7.
[234] Ibid, p. 2.

the old Jewish language [i.e. old Hebrew] and making it equal language with others."[235] As the Tarbut school system was quite developed in Zhytomir, it could negotiate its legality with Bolsheviks.

According to one report, in 1926 there were as many as 1000 such semi-legal groups on the territory of Ukraine with overall 137,437 members.[236] When there was no Evsektsiia in a shtetl, kehilas and other organizations functioned unfettered by state intervention. In some shtetls, they were the only organizations conducting administrative and other institutional work.

For similar reasons, a shtetl sometimes had no Yiddish school. In Lipovets, a regional center of the Vinnytsia region, there was no Yiddish school despite the fact that the majority of its inhabitants were Jews. According to the report of Esektsiia's head, Voltman, the Yiddish school did exist in Lipovets for some time but it was closed by its officials, who wanted to open a working school instead. The decision to reorganize the working school back to the Yiddish school was directed to the Department of Social Education. In order to reopen the Yiddish school, Voltman argued that "the population has a great desire for having the Jewish school."[237] Nonetheless, it seems that the situation was exactly the opposite from the reported.

Whereas local Jews were supported by kehila, within which societies (or khevras) helping poor, orphans, widows, and other vulnerable groups functioned, Evsektsiia's activists could only rely on the state for support. They were isolated, lacked the trust of the locals, had no knowledge of local Jewish networks, and found themselves in a strenuous material and political situation. One report mentions that in Belaya Tserkov, "Yiddish educational activists experienced fear and moral and material crisis," but somehow managed to continue their work due to Evsektsiia's support.[238]

Jewish socialist parties were finally liquidated in 1921.[239] Bolsheviks tended to reorganize community councils and to delegate community affairs to the Commissariat of Jewish Affairs. Bund played the leading role in this reorganization. Its main committee reported that the Jewish

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[235] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv.1, f. 1, p. 2.
[236] Levin, Nora. *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917*, p. 82.
[237] DAZO (Berdychiv dept.), Fund P-208, inv.1, f. 39, p. 24.
[238] A. P. "Belotserkov." *Pedagogisher Buileten* No. 5-6, (1923), pp. 127-128. During the study year of 1921-1922, seven groups of children, overall two hundren of them, were taught by nine teachers in Belotserkov. There were only four children houses, all functioning in very difficult material conditions.
[239] Levin, Nora. *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917*, p. 72. The exception was Poale Zion, which was legal until 1927.

council was closed and that a Soviet institution performing similar functions had been installed.[240] However, the former representatives of the Jewish council continued to work in Evsektsiia's and Evkom's local departments, which sometimes were not even fully reformed from the previously existing Jewish Community Council.

In Romny, a small town in the Sumy region, the Jewish Commissariat fell in the hands of two members of Bund and a member of Fareynikte: Faynberg, Vorobyevsky, and Torsh. The inspector visiting Evkom complained that these people were "very reluctant to change anything in the former Jewish council," and that they "kept operating the affairs of the Jewish community,"[241] taking no instructions from the center. What is more, Evkom's plans to turn Talmud-Torah schools into one craftsmen school and three people's schools remained empty promises. In Romny, Evkom was less of a Soviet institution managing Jewish issues and more of a modernized Jewish kehila. Former Bundists and other socialist party members did not want to cooperate with the new power and continued to disregard the work of Soviet activists, whether local or central.

A similar story happened in Chernigiv. Here the conflict occurred between members of the local Communist Party and a person who represented the Jewish community. A representative of the Jewish community council, whose name is unfortunately unknown, resisted the liquidation of the community's files and insisted on the organization of a Jewish Commissariat, contrary to the desire of local communists. This man came into conflict with Chernigiv's communists by insisting that the Jewish Commissariat should be established as "a completely autonomous agency of the Jewish proletariat."[242] Being jeopardized by the Jewish representative, local communists reported the situation to the center pending instructions from Kyiv. They proposed to substitute the Jewish Commissariat with national sections within the corresponding commissariats because, as they put it, at that moment the existence of the Jewish commissariat was "utterly superfluous."[243] What is striking here is not that much a fight between the local communists and a member of Evkom but that the same person who was in charge of the local Jewish community moved to Evkom. That

[240] TsDAVO, Fund 3304, inv. 1, f. 1, pp. 1-2.
[241] TsDAVO, Fund 3304, inv. 1, f.. 1, p. 3.
[242] Ibid, p. 6.
[243] Ibid.

kind of 'Evkom' was just another, modernized, form of kehila, loyal to the Soviet power. It is also striking that that institution had nothing to do with usual Evkom and Evsektsiia.

One inspector reported to the Peoples' Commissariat of Jewish Affairs in Kharkiv that contrary to the directives of the center, Evkom barely existed in Chernigiv.[244] The same was true of the Soviet Yiddish school. The inspector wrote that local communists closed the Yiddish school under the pretext that there "should be no national context in upbringing."[245] The formulation sounds a bit odd because it goes contrary to the official aim of the nativization policy to promote education in national languages. We do not know why local communists found this formulation appropriate and this decision legal, but we can safely assume that their motivation was to reduce competitors and to take power in their own hands.[246]

These three stories show how problematic it was for Evsektsiia to establish authority in the province. Being subverted by powerful local organizations, its position was shaky and frequently redundant. The representatives of the Jewish community had certain agreements with central power and Evsektsiia's provincial departments often had nothing to do with real Evsektsiia apart from sharing the same name. An institution being legal in the 1920s did not mean it had authority, let alone power. Moreover, the stories signify that there was no single principle regarding how Evsektsiia operated in a shtetl. Everything was determined by the local circumstances. Early Soviet politics was diverse and inconsistent.

Conclusion

At the turn of the 20th century there was a genuine competition between Jewish schools and the Soviet Yiddish school. In this fight, the former schools were winning over the Yiddish school up

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[244] TsDAVO, Fund 3304, inv. 1, f.. 1, p. 4.
[245] Ibid, p. 6.
[246] In other localities, due to their conflicting interpretations of the nationality policy, members of Evsektsiia clashed with Jewish socialists who managed Jewish issues under Central Rada and worked for the Ministry of Jewish Affairs. Usually the people who worked under the Ministry of Jewish Affairs (the same people were often members of local Kultur-Lige) wanted wider autonomy for the Jews and by extension for the Jewish school in Yiddish. The two groups also could not agree on the program for the school and its ideology. Fearing that it would be risky to allow autonomous non-transparent Jewish council, Evsektsiia accused Jewish socialists for "bourgeois nationalism." The latter, understandably, did not want to concede their management of Jewish community affairs and the autonomy granted to them in the previous regime. See Zeltser, Arkadii. *Evrei Sovetskoi provintsii*, pp. 21-31.

until 1931, when the state started to intervene in the local matters, using violence to implement a new, Russificationist, educational policy. The Yiddish school was weak as it was cut off from traditional Jewish life; it was, to an extent deliberately, an artificial creation. The school was a result of negotiation between the Bolsheviks and Jewish activists and partly a vision of Yiddishists to establish the secular Jewish education in Yiddish. Due to its curricula, teaching in Yiddish, and celebration of Soviet holidays, Yiddish school was not genuinely Jewish. However, it was neither fully Soviet, as Jewish holidays and Hebrew language remained an important part of its identity throughout the decade.

In some shtetls, which used to be the center of Hassidic life, and others, where the authority of a local rabbi was strong, the position of a Yiddish school was negligible. Sometimes a shtetl had no Yiddish school at all. The rabbi often supported the local community with the money given by the Joint[247]. This presented a threat to the social role of Yiddish schools, as the representatives of the Joint not only distributed money and clothes and provided vaccination for the population but often supported the political activity of the illegal Jewish parties. Therefore, the Joint was later obliged to work with Evobshchestkom, the Jewish Public Committee for Assisting Pogrom Victims, which was controlled by Bolsheviks.

In 1931, the system of national schools, including those in Yiddish, became unified.[248] This was not merely an institutional change. Centralization of the schooling system inevitably meant limitations of freedom in curricula and an increase in control over schools' administration. The 1920s were rather different. Those were the times when the authorities had to learn to live with the locals and to try to adjust their ideological canon to common sense.

In this chapter I tried to answer the question as to whether the Soviet state brought a radical break in the old system of schooling in the province and by allowing the Jews to raise in the social

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[247] The Joint (or JDC, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee for Jewish War Sufferers) focused on supporting agricultural activities for Jews in Ukraine and sometimes delivered money to the shtetls. It worked until 1938, when its members were arrested, and its organization prohibited. For general information about the Joint see Beizer, Michael. "American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2017. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/American_Jewish_Joint_Distribution_Committee (accessed April 28th, 2017). For the Joint's role in agricultural colonization of Jews in South Ukraine and Crimea see Dekel-Chen, Jonathan L. *Farming the Red Land: Jewish Agricultural Colonization and Local Soviet Power, 1924-1941*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008.

[248] The events overlap with the liquidation of Evsektsia. See Gitelman, Zvi. "Evsektsiia."

strata, which they were unable to do under the old regime. The question of continuity and rupture of institutions due to regime change is a cornerstone of Soviet historiography.[249] My answer was that the story of the Yiddish school is a story of persistence of the old institutions rather than the one of rupture, despite the official declarations to the contrary. While the Soviet rhetoric portrayed the Yiddish school as the institution which would bring the light of education to the shtetl, in reality it could hardly defend itself from traditional Jewish schools and the schools established by Jewish socialists under the supervision of the Kultur-Lige. Though the official rhetoric appealed to the desire of the "proletarian Jewish masses" to study in their national language, Jews of the province preferred Ukrainian and Russian schools, as they hoped that these schools would guarantee greater social mobility and that the children would be less exposed to the anti-Judaism campaign than they would be in the Yiddish school.[250] In places where the Yiddish school functioned more or less successfully, its position was weakened because of the conflict between the Kultur-Lige and Evsektsiia.[251]

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[249] The debate features prominently in the works of Terry Martin and Francine Hirsch. Martin's *The Affirmative Action Empire* is a case for rupture while Hirsch's *Empire of Nations* is a case for continuity.

[250] See Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *In the Shadow of the Shtetl*, p. 91. However, as Pauly shows, attending Ukrainian schools usually did not help one climb the social ladder. See Pauly, Matthew. *Breaking the Tongue*, pp. 321-325.

[251] The claim of continuity with the old regime should not be exaggerated. Bolsheviks did their job to train the teachers. However, despite the presence of old cadres, the category of a teacher in the province was rather blurry, since almost anyone could become one, from a passionate Yiddishist to a poorly educated Jew. See DAZO, Fund P-5185, inv. 1, f. 99, 100, 101, and 102.

Chapter 3
Anti-Semitism in the Bolshevik Anti-Religious Campaign

Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the Soviet anti-religious campaign among the Jewish population in the 1920s Ukrainian province. I argue that the campaign against Judaism foreseeably turned out to be anti-Semitic. Contrary to the nativization policy's professed support for the Yiddish culture (the only permissible form of Jewish culture according to Bolsheviks) and for the criminal prosecution of anti-Semitic actions, Jews were directly and indirectly discriminated by the state: qua Jews and qua followers of Judaism.[252] I show how the Soviets engendered anti-Semitism by progressively prohibiting Judaism, by limiting the number of Jewish cadres in its institutions, by taking private and religious property of Jewish citizens, and by failing to suppress interethnic tensions between Jews and others. I discuss Jewish resistance to the new measures and the extent to which it was more successful in remote provinces.

The chapter discusses two aspects of the anti-Jewish atmosphere in the shtetl: the conflicts between Jewish Bolsheviks and the local Jews as a consequence of the anti-religious policy and the exploitation of anti-Semitic aspects of this policy by the non-Jews (combined with their old prejudices) for their material benefits. I describe these aspects across three domains of Jewish life: the private domain of religion, the public domain of schooling, and the intermediate domain of property (given the shift towards its nationalization).

I first provide a brief overview of the situation with respect to anti-Semitism in the shtetl in the early 1920s. I argue that at the beginning of the nativization policy the atmosphere of anti-Semitism was persistent in the shtetl, a place torn apart by pogroms and the Civil War. Though

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[252] Similar is the thesis, on a general level, of Gennadii Kostyrchenko about anti-Semitism being an inseparable part of Bolshevik politics. See his *Tainaia politika Stalina: Vlast' i anti-Semitism*. Moscow, Mezhdunarodniie otnosheniia, 2003. On resurgence of anti-Semitism in the USSR after 1917, see Pinkus, Benjamin. *The Jews of the Soviet Union*, pp. 84-89.

Bolsheviks formally established their rule in the province, they met strong resistance from the locals precisely because many Bolsheviks were Jewish. The policy worked against the interests of Jews and the anti-Semitic old prejudices fueled new hatred. Jews were hated not only as non-Christians but as Bolsheviks, exploiters, and, most importantly, as ethnically[253] Jewish.

I then show that during the first part of the anti-religious campaign, which was aimed at secularization but not atheization, the state closed synagogues against the will of the locals. I discuss several cases where the state and the local community waged wars over synagogues. I show how the state tried to justify turning synagogues into workers' clubs and to close them by changing definitions of what was legally permissible. Synagogues would change their ownerships from the Jewish community to Jewish workers, a signifier of how uncertain and unprotected the right of religious expression for a Jew was.

I then argue that in property conflicts between Jews and non-Jews the state often favored the latter, basing its decisions on anti-Jewish prejudices about Jews as exploiters of peasants. I focus on a case of a Jewish landowner from Zhytomir region who lost his property as a result of such decisions. Despite the declared policy of giving Jews the right to cultivate their land, the court disregarded the testimonies of witnesses favorable to his property rights and explained the decision by the prejudice that Jews are incapable of cultivating land by themselves.

The discussion then turns to the anti-Pesach campaign which caused Evsektsiia's officials to clash with the local Jews. The clash complied with the Party's intention to carry out the anti-religious campaign against the Jews "by the hands of the Jews," trying to avoid the accusation of its policies being anti-Semitic in character. Despite the fact that many former Jewish socialists who joined Evsektsiia were tolerant or indifferent towards Judaism, they had to show the hard hand as an expression of loyalty to the new regime. Evsektsiia was in a difficult position and it failed to fulfill its role as an intermediary institution between the Jews and the state. Local Jews hated it because of the anti-religious campaign and the higher state officials distrusted it because of their

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[253] In imperial times, Jewishness was perceived as a matter of religion. A baptized Jew was seen as the person who dissociated from his Jewish community and Judaism. In the early Soviet state, Jewishness started to be a matter of cultural practices together with one's ethnic traits. That is why anti-Semitism in the 1920s was not only, or primarily, hostility and discrimination of one's religion but of one's ethnicity. See Vinogradov, Anna. "Religion and Nationality: The Transformation of Jewish Identity in the Soviet Union". *Penn History Review* 18, no. 1 (2010): 51-69, and Shternshis, Anna. *Soviet and Kosher*. Vinogradov's is a study of how the Soviet Union invented Soviet secular Jewish identity by disassociating Jewishness from Judaism.

suspicion that it was an umbrella institution of Jewish nationalists. A similar situation was with the concept of class enemy, whose initial purpose was to redirect the attention from hated minorities, such as Jews, to imaginary traitors, but which in reality heated the old hatred since Jews were the first to be associated as class enemies.

1. Anti-Semitism in the Shtetl on the Eve of the Nativization Policy

The nativization policy, approved at the 12th Party Congress in Moscow in 1923[254], was devised to support local or native languages and cultures as well as to promote cadres of nationalities oppressed under the Russian Empire. The policy meant to support, first and foremost, the Jewish population.[255] The policy came as a result of numerous and very often controversial debates within the Communist Party. The Jewish situation was peculiar because Jews were doubly oppressed under the imperial rule. They experienced numerus clausus, economic burdens and restrictions in trade, greater taxes, limitations in occupations and could not, or could to a very limited extent, legally engage in political action.[256] Moreover, Jews were victims of imperial anti-Semitism.[257]

Emerging in the ruins of empire, the nativization policy was intended to liberate Jews from this double oppression. Social democrats criticized anti-Semitism in their official party program. As Martov put it in 1913, anti-Semitism was not only a concern of one vulnerable minority but a

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[254] On some views, the course towards the nationality policy had already begun at the 10th Party Congress in 1921. See Kostyrchenko, Genadii. *Tainaia politika Stalina*, p. 53. Martin proposes 12th Congress as an official start of the policy. He argues that in 1923 the aims of the policy—the strengthening of national elites, languages, territories, and cultures—were finally approved. See Martin, Terry. *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pp. 9-10. I agree with Sergii Hirik that the policy started much earlier at the local level, before being approved by the Party. While Hirik indicates the 10th Party Congress as its official commencement, he traces both *Ukrainizatsiia* and *Yidishizatsiia* to 1919 and 1920, depending on the region. See Hirik, Serhiy. "Indigenization before Indigenization," p. 295.

[255] Pavliuchenkov, Sergei. "The Jewish Question in the Russian Revolution, or Concerning the Reasons for the Bolsheviks' Defeat in the Ukraine in 1919." *Revolutionary Russia* 10, no. 2 (1997), p. 25. As Pavliuchenkov notes, it is impossible to avoid what used to be known as the Jewish question when speaking about the Russian Revolution and its upshot. Jewish question is a problem of negotiating relationship between the Jews and the state. Solving the Jewish question meant integrating Jews in the state, assimilating or acculturating them, and modernizing their lives.

[256] Being member of the revolutionary movement in Tsarist Russia meant almost invariably being censored, arrested, prisoned, and exiled. See Levin, Nora. *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917*, p. 9.

[257] I have in mind discriminative policy of selective integration of Jews in the second part of the 19th century rather than their assimilation. See Nathans, Benjamin. *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002.

violation of any minority rights.[258] To remain in the social-democratic party meant for each member to abandon anti-Semitism. Similarly, Lenin was highly critical of anti-Semitism. He wrote:

> It is not the Jews who are the enemies of the working people. The enemies of the workers are the capitalists of all countries. Among the Jews there are working people, and they form the majority. They are our brothers, who, like us, are oppressed by capital; they are our comrades in the struggle for socialism. (…) Shame on accursed tsarism which tortured and persecuted the Jews. Shame on those who foment hatred towards the Jews, who foment hatred towards other nations.[259]

The spirit of Bolshevik's official commitment to anti-Semitism is manifest in the Decree of the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) "On Combating anti-Semitism and Jewish Pogroms," issued on July 18th, 1918. The Decree announces that "any persecution, of any nation, is unacceptable, criminal, and shameful. (…) The anti-Semitic movement and pogroms of Jews are death for the cause of workers' and peasants' revolution." The Council calls for "the working people of Socialist Russia to fight these evils with all means" and instructs "all Soviets to take decisive measures to nip in the bud the anti-Semitic movement. Pogromists and the organizers of pogroms are to be outlawed."[260]

One should not, however, imagine Bolsheviks as Jewish benefactors. Reasons for their fight against anti-Semitism were mostly practical. Bolsheviks issued a law on the prosecution of anti-Semitic violence in order to attain political support from Jews. Despite his criticisms of anti-Semitism, Lenin was fully supportive of Jewish assimilation, the idea which he abandoned only for the sake of political alliances with Jewish socialists.[261] He found the idea of Jewish nationality

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[258] Harris, Nigel. *National Liberation*. London and New York, I.B. Tauris, 1990, p. 60. See also Rabinovitch, Simon. *Jewish Rights, National Rites*, pp. 271-272.
[259] Lenin, Vladimir I. "Anti-Jewish Pogroms." In *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 29, pp. 252-253. Retrieved from: https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1919/mar/x10.htm.
[260] Valk, S. N. et al (eds.), *Dekreti Sovetskoi vlasti*. Vol. 3. Moscow, Gosudarstvennoie izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literaturi, 1964.
[261] Stalin held similar assimilationist views. See "Marxism and the National Question" and the polemics with Bund in his *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, Feb. 1907-Feb. 1913, Ch. 1-7. Moscow, Red Star Press, 1953-1954, Retrieved from:

repugnant to the interests of the Jewish proletariat because "(…) it creates a mood hostile to assimilation, a 'ghetto' atmosphere".[262] Another reason for Bolsheviks' philo-Semitism was their enemy's anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitic agitation was a means of resisting the Soviet rule, not least because of the myth of Jewish Bolshevism.[263] In Soviet interwar rhetoric anti-Semite was often a synonym for a member of the opposition. In these respects, there was nothing altruistic about the new power's defense of Jews. Bolsheviks were well aware that their philo-Semitism was fruitful, for the most part, at the level of propaganda. They knew that the decrees professing protection of Jews and combating anti-Semitic violence would bring them political benefits but that it would be difficult to implement them in numerous small towns across the country.[264]

In shtetls, the situation with anti-Semitism was even more complex. After the wave of 1903-1906 pogroms in and outside the towns of the Pale of Settlement, many Jews emigrated.[265] Those who stayed hoped for a relief. The next decade saw a blossoming of national politics. In 1917, Arnold Margolin[266] described in his memoirs a Ukrainian town as the place of hope for a better life, the place that witnessed the rise of various political movements among both Jews and Ukrainians, and where everyday politics was anarchical. Margolin describes the shtetl with an allure of sadness:

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https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1913/03a.htm. Lenin's and Stalin's later nativization policy was perceived as a short-term strategic concession to national demands.

[262] Cited in Lustiger, Arno. *Stalin and the Jews: The Red Book: The Tragedy of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the Soviet Jews*. New York, Enigma Books, 2003, p. 31. High ranking Jewish Bolsheviks, like Lenin or Trotsky, did not see the Jews as their own. They were highly assimilated, "non-Jewish Jews", in Isaac Deutscher's memorable phrase. See his *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays*. New York, Verso, 2017.

[263] See Hanebrink, Paul. *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2018. See also Pavliuchenkov, Sergei. "The Jewish Question in the Russian Revolution", pp. 25-36, and Lustiger, Arno. *Stalin and the Jews*, pp. 42-43.

[264] See Kostyrchenko, p. 56. This does not mean that the Red Army did not prosecute pogromshiks. Whenever it was possible, Bolsheviks prevented anti-Semitic violence. See Budnitskii, Oleg. *Russian Jews Between the Reds and the Whites*, and Pavliuchenkov, Sergei. "The Jewish Question in the Russian Revolution", pp. 25-36.

[265] On pogroms, see Dekel-Chen, Jonathan, Gaunt, David and Meir, Nathan (eds.), *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2010, pp. 74-94 (on the history of anti-Jewish pogroms in revolutionary Russia), pp. 95-110 (on the Jewish responses to violence).

[266] Arnold Davidovich Margolin (1877-1956) was a Ukrainian diplomat, lawyer, and a member of the Ukrainian delegation to the Versailles Peace Conferences 1918-1919. Margolin was one of the defenders of Mendel Beilis in the blood libel trial in Kyiv in 1913. Despite his criticism of Bolshevism, Margolin's memoirs are a valuable source for political and social history of the period.

> Under such conditions, there could be no question of any common language. […] Along with the paralysis of the state organism, the social forces were scattered into a multitude of disparate cells. Closing themselves into their national or party shells, people did not know what was happening around them – sometimes in the same city and even in the same house – in national or party life of other nationalities or in other political organizations.[267]

Margolin's emphasis on the difficulty of creating a stable political unit comprising both Jews and Ukrainians reflects tribalism in the shtetl. As a social-democrat, Margolin could only see despair in a society whose members assessed every policy only through the benefits it might bring to them as Jews, or as Ukrainians.

Before the Bolsheviks' final takeover, a Ukrainian town was a place of competing powers—Hetmanate, Directorate of UNR, the White army, the Ukrainian Army, Polish forces, anarchist groups and local bands—all of which offered scenarios for the future Ukrainian state and the status of Ukrainians and Jews in it.[268] These powers, some to a small, others to greater degrees, were nevertheless engaged in pogroms of Jews.[269] This was not only because their main players were anti-Semites but because of the geopolitical situation in which the Jews found themselves. The Pale of Settlement was located at the frontline of the Kyiv Offensive in 1920 in the Polish-Soviet War. The atrocities against Jews were committed both by the advancing Piłsudski's and Petliura's armies and by Budyonni's Red Cavalry in the Soviet counterattack.[270]

Moreover, the interethnic violence between the civilians was widespread. For Ukrainians, fighting Jewish civilians meant fighting the Soviet power. Ukrainian hatred toward the Jews as

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[267] Margolin, Arnol'd. *Ukraina i politika Antanti: Zapiski evreia i grazhdanina*. Berlin, Efron Publisher, 1930, p. 1.
[268] See Velychenko, Stephen. *State Building in Revolutionary Ukraine*, Chs. 3-5, 7.
[269] See Pinkus, Benjamin, *The Jews of the Soviet Union*, pp. 84-85, Kochan, Lionel. *The Jews in Soviet Russia since 1917*, pp. 26-27.
[270] For more on the status of Jews during the Polish-Soviet War see Hagen, William W. *Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1914-1920*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, Chs. 8-9, Piotrowski, Tadeusz. *Poland's Holocaust: Ethnic Strife, Collaboration with Occupying Forces and Genocide in the Second Republic, 1918-1947*. Jefferson and London, McFarland & Company, 1998, as well as "A Forgotten Genocide: The Pogroms in Ukraine, 1918-1919, and Their Impact on Memory and Politics", Conference at *YIVO Institute for Jewish Research*, May 16th, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RlfQrgziSTk (accessed March 2nd, 2018).

agents of Soviet power was motivated by their association of Jews with Communism, which was strengthened by the visibility of Jewish cadres in the Party.[271] The recent practice of pogroms and anti-Jewish atrocities of the Civil War were shortly but unsuccessfully silenced by Bolsheviks.[272] In addition, anti-Semitic violence occurred due to countless property issues. The conflict had two components. The first part of it was the tension between the appointed officials and the ordinary locals, and the second part between local Jews and Ukrainians.

Whereas Ukrainian peasants wished that as the result of war they would become owners of the land they cultivated, the major concern for the Jews was peace. Anti-Semitism was spreading among the deserters. Margolin recalls his conversation with some of them:

> Soldiers who at that time were returning in huge numbers from the front on their own, already called themselves Bolsheviks. When I asked them what Bolshevism was, I always got the same stereotypical answer: 'It means no more fighting'. All soldiers were saying the most abusive words about Kerensky, arguing that he 'and all 12 ministers' are Djidi[273]. They were delighted with Lenin and Trotsky. When I tried to convince them that 'all 12 ministers' and Kerensky were not Jews, they did not believe me, and sometimes they said that I myself was a Djid, and that that is why I stood up for the Djids.[274]

The Treaty of Riga (March 18th, 1921) brought peace. The nativization policy, however, was not uniquely favorable to Jews and it did not terminate the ethnic tensions. The policy prioritized the titular nationality – Ukrainians in Ukraine. This had the effect of decreasing the proportion of Jews in the TSK of the CP(b)U, universities, republican people's commissariats and similar institutions. Despite comprising more than two thirds of the population in many localities,

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[271] At that time the myth of Jewish Communism (*Zhydocommuna* in Poland) was widespread in eastern and central-eastern Europe. The myth was the result of combining anti-Semitic and anti-Communist moods. See Gerrits, Andre. *The Myth of Jewish Communism: A Historical Interpretation*. Brussels, Peter Lang, 2009, pp. 9-10.
[272] Pinkus argues that the new wave of anti-Semitism hit the high spot in 1928-1929. See Pinkus, Benjamin, *The Jews of the Soviet Union*, p. 87.
[273] 'Djid' ('Zhid', 'Zhyd') is an ethnic slur, a disparaging term for a Jew. It is derived from 'Yid', an endonym among Yiddish-speaking Jews.
[274] Margolin, Arnol'd. *Ukraina i politika antanty*, p. 15.

Jews were in the minority when it came to political decision making. Dodging the policy's proclamation of proportional representation,[275] Ukrainians were often favored even in places where Jews were a sizable majority. Moscow's pragmatic position—often motivated by the officials' own anti-Semitism—that Jewish visibility in the CP(b)U provoked the anti-Semitism of Ukrainian peasants presented another constraint on the promotion of Jews. For Ukrainians, Bolshevism was a 'Jewish thing' and they attributed any of its failures to Jewish conspiracy.[276]

One of the strongest arguments in support of the continuity of interwar anti-Semitism was the new wave of blood libel accusations.[277] Blood libel originated in the worldview, popular among the gentiles, which perceived Jews as a traditional, closed, superstitious, and hostile community. Under the new circumstances, blood libel found its place in the worldview associating Jews with Communists, enemies of the Soviet regime, and expropriators of grain. On that new prejudice, Jews were class oppressors and bourgeois because they were shopkeepers and peddlers, regardless of their earnings. All these assumptions led to only one conclusion: that, whether they are of modern lifestyle or an Orthodox community, Jews are enemies of non-Jews. The concept of class enemy which Bolsheviks hoped would solve the interethnic tensions did not work as intended.[278]

Instead of expected equality, relief, and stability, Jews felt even more discriminated against and had to fight on a number of frontiers. They had to defend their property, including religious ones, against both their neighbors and the Bolshevik authorities. They became *lishentsi*, 'disenfranchised ones'. They needed to protect their religious identity as observing Jews, deprived of their liberty of faith as a community.[279] They had to deal with the new reality in which

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[275] See Martin, Terry. *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pp. 220-221.

[276] Kostyrchenko, p. 54. Kostyrchenko cites Merezhin, a communist Jewish official, who complained that Jews were overrepresented in the high position of the Party. Kostyrchenko argues that the overrepresentation of Jews was done only for the sake of "satisfaction of the power ambitions of national-bureaucrats" among the Jews. Ibid, p. 53.

[277] Bemporad, Elissa. "Empowerment, Defiance, and Demise: Jews and the Blood Libel Specter under Stalinism," *Jewish History* 26, no. 3/4 (December 2012), pp. 343-361.

[278] On the concept of class enemy in Bolshevism see Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *Tear Off the Masks!: Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005, pp. 29-50, and Popova, Olga. *Obraz vnultrishnogo voroga v periodichnii presi radianskoii Ukrainii, 1928-1939*. PhD dissertation, Donetsk, Donetsk National University, 2014, Chs. 2-3.

[279] The Soviet state allowed religious expression in the private sphere and on individual level. However, the religious expression did not extend to the autonomous activity of religious denominations. The two conflicting decrees were issued in January 1918: "Decree on Freedom of Conscience" and "Decree on Separation of Church from State and

Ukrainians associated them with Bolsheviks and Bolshevism. Finally, the Jews became more vulnerable to anti-Semitism because the state definition of who was a Jew had changed. Jews were no longer a religious but an ethno-territorial minority. In addition to the old hatred towards them as the Christ killers, Jews faced a new kind of violence, based on ethnic criteria.[280]

Anti-Semitism was never abolished de-facto. This was partly because Bolsheviks did not want to put much effort to oppose it. They limited the ban on anti-Semitism to declarations and slogans, enough to receive political support from Jews.[281] The anti-religious policy turned into a successful tool in the hands of locals who targeted Jews. It was difficult to draw the point at which the policy against Judaism worked for the interests of anti-Semites and at which it was a part of building the Soviet Jew.

2. The Place of no Religion: Whose Property is the Synagogue?

During the Civil War and its many pogroms, Jews experienced objective constraints on gathering for minjans[282] and celebrating Shabbat. The Bolshevik rule introduced even greater hardships on Jewish observance. Efforts to create the atheistic state resulted in direct interventions into private domains of Jewish life. Synagogue, as the centerpiece of those domains—the place for praying, studying, and social, political, and cultural life—became the first target in the Bolsheviks' attack on Judaism, and the object whose ownership they first contested. Bolsheviks claimed that the war they waged against Judaism was not directed against the Jews but against the religious authority of the rabbis who, they claimed, exploited the Jewish masses. The reality, however, was different.

School from Church". I discuss problems owing to the conflict between them below.

[280] The category of nation became a stable unit, with particular characteristics, because of benefits and quotas given to each nation. See Vinogradov, Anna. "Religion and Nationality," pp. 51-55, Baberovski, Jorg. "Stalinism i natsiia: Sovetskii Soiuz kak Mnogonatsionalnoie gosudarstvo", *Ab Imperio* 1, no. 1 (2006), p. 187.

[281] Bolsheviks employed the same tactic approaching other denominations. They presented themselves as protectors of Islam while fighting Muslim elites who did not embrace their policies. See Yemelianova, Galina. *Russia and Islam: A Historical Survey*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 99-120, D'Encausse, Hélène C. *Islam and the Russian Empire: Reform and Revolution in Central Asia*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988, pp. 148-167, Haugen, Arne. *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, Khalid, Adeeb. *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998, Bobrovnikov, Vladimir. "Bezbozhniki risuiut islam: soveiskaia (anti)religioznaia propaganda v kommentariiakh vostokoveda." *Polit.ru*, May 7th, 2009, http://polit.ru/article/2009/05/07/bobrovnikov/ (accessed April 3rd, 2018).

[282] Minjan is a quorum of ten adult men required for public worships and some other religious obligations in Judaism.

Though it is difficult to say whether Bolsheviks prosecuted Christianity or Judaism more, the difference between the prosecutions was that of a kind, not a degree. Fighting Christianity, Bolsheviks attacked a religion. Fighting Judaism, they attacked a particular lifestyle. Unlike with their prosecution of the church, Bolsheviks' assault on the synagogue was an assault on Jews, not only on Judaism.[283] The church and the synagogue played entirely different roles in the lives of their congregations. In a traditional Jewish society, cultural life revolved around the synagogue. Being prevented to attend services in synagogues, Jews were not only detached from their religion but from their community and culture. About the importance of synagogue for Jews, Richard Pipes writes: "[a]n Orthodox Russian, unable to attend church services, still had his Pushkin, Tolstoy, and Chekhov; an observant Jew cut off from the Torah, the prophets, and the Talmud was left in a cultural no-man's land."[284] Pipes's claim is undoubtedly an overstatement. However, it is not an overstatement that a traditional Jew was more dependent on Talmud or Torah than a Ukrainian or Russian peasant was on Bible or Pushkin. Religious texts regulated every aspect of Jewish life even when a Jew did not know them by heart, or even believed in them. Synagogue was more than a house of prayer. It was a place of study. Religious schools, cheders and Talmud Torahs, were always close to synagogues' buildings or built within them.[285] Synagogue also held a symbolical meaning for the Jews. It was a communal place where families interacted and where the Jewish identity was built. On the importance of synagogue in shaping his identity, Margolin writes:

> Synagogue left its mark on my soul for a long time. Even now, an appearance of synagogue, as something concrete and tactile, brings me closer to my people than all the teachings and laws on the personal-national autonomy. Alas, these feelings

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[283] Cf. Pipes, Richard. *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*. New York, Vintage Books, 1994, p. 362. However, Pipes argues that the synagogues and synagogues' property remained untouched until 1922, while church's expropriation started immediately after the decree was issued, in 1918.
[284] Pipes, Richard. *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, p. 362.
[285] This was an additional reason for closing synagogues. Bolsheviks portrayed synagogues as non-sanitary places, where studying is inappropriate. The first propaganda book invoking those accusations was issued in 1922. See *Kazakevich*, H. "*Der ershter alfarbandisher* tsuzamenfor fun yidishe kultur-tuers 25. 11–2. 12. 1924," *Di royte velt* 1 (1925), p. 29. Cited in Shternshis, Anna. *Soviet and Kosher,* pp. 4-5.

> are no longer known to my children, who were born and grew up under other conditions.[286]

Margolin speaks from the point of view of a secularized Jew who left the shtetl but who preserved good memories of his place of origin. Margolin's nostalgia was also a result of his primary religious education in cheder. He was a typical example of a secularized Jew who had been well-educated in the Jewish tradition notwithstanding, and it is that tradition, rather than the secular ideas, which primarily built his identity.[287] However, contrary to Margolin's nostalgia, synagogue was not an idyllic, peaceful, place. Its cantors yelled at Jews doing business instead of listening to prayers. Yiddish writers sometimes compared synagogues to marketplaces,[288] and as long as the service itself was concerned, that was not far from the truth.

The communal, booming, and vivid, life happening in and around the synagogue was not reserved for the Jews. Besides the synagogue being a meeting place for Jews, it was a space, its gardens in particular, where Jewish and non-Jewish children would interact and play. The picture that follows, given by Sholem Aleichem, illustrates the atmosphere:

> It is clean in the synagogue, it is light in the synagogue, it is festive in the synagogue, and it is cheerful in the synagogue. All the chandeliers, all the lamps are polished, they shine, and the candles are burning. Jews, all washed, dressed in festive clothes, pray with all their heart. And we, mischievous boys, examine each other: whose caftan is longer, and whose – shorter, whose cap is more beautiful and shines more brightly.[289]

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[286] Margolin, Arnol'd. *Ukraina i politika antanty*, pp. 2-3.
[287] I discuss secular Jewish identity as an outcome of the state policy from above. Secular Jewish identity was not exclusively a state-imposed phenomenon. It was a product of the late 19th century Russian Imperial Jewish thought approaching Jews as a nation. Along with history, culture, and language, religion was a part of that identity, though it was neither an essential nor a required component of it. See Mendelson, Ezra. *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars*, pp. 44-45.
[288] For example, see Sholem Yankev Abramovich's *Fishke der krumer* (Fishke the Lame), published in 1869.
[289] Aleichem, Sholem. "Arbe-koyses." *Der yud* no. 15/16 (1900), pp. 2-8.

Although synagogue started to lose its superior place in the Jewish community at the turn of the century, its importance in the lives of Jews was still immense.[290] Bolsheviks foreseeably and perhaps deliberately targeted synagogues as places of that kind of importance. They started to implement the anti-religious campaign during the Civil War and officially declared it in 1921. The campaign lasted until 1928. Churches were the first places of worship to be attacked. On January 12th, 1918, the state issued the "Decree on Separation of Church from State and School from Church", which aimed to secure secularization but which very soon secured the legal ground for seizing the church property.[291] The fate of synagogues at the start of the campaign was better, as they remained largely untouched until 1922.[292]

Suppression of synagogues was part of the campaign which attacked cheders and yeshivas, demonized Judaism, prohibited Hebrew, suspended kosher meat production, obstructed Shabbat celebrations, etc. However, the anti-religious campaign was diverse in the scope of its targets and the pace by which it combated them. There were periods when Bolsheviks allowed synagogues to function while at the same time prosecuting Jewish educational institutions. Synagogues were sometimes untouched due to poor functioning of regional and local institutions and the attitude of its functionaries who took the people's side or remained indifferent to the directives.[293]

Perhaps the only genuine obstacles to Bolsheviks' anti-synagogue activities were Jewish charity organizations from abroad and local societies of mutual help. These institutions financed impoverished Jewish communities and people who returned to the shtetls after the pogroms. For instance, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, or the Joint, challenged the legacy of many Soviet institutions which sought to substitute Jewish communal organizations. The Joint was favorable to Jewish religious activities, gaining more authority and respect among the locals than the state organs. Solitreman, Evobshestkom's[294] official in Podolia complained to the higher organs that Pikov, Yanov, Voronovitsa, Priluki, Vakhnovka, Gaisin, Bershad', and many other

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[290] Altshuller, Mordechai. *Soviet Jewry before the Holocaust*, p. 98.
[291] *Dekreti Sovetskoi vlasti*, Vol. 1, pp. 371-374.
[292] Pipes, Richard. *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime,* p. 363.
[293] Hickey warns us from deriving the conclusion that the Soviet regime was the only cause of religious conflicts at the local level. See Hickey, Michael. "Communists vs. Clerics," p. 40.
[294] Jewish regional public committee.

shtetls and towns ("not to mention the border towns"[295]), received significant amounts of money from the Joint:

> The material basis for Jewish religious community is not only local money which is gathered through fees among the population (*moyois eitsim gmilas khesed*)[296] but through fairly large sums of money from abroad. These sums are mostly used for religious needs, because they are received on private names of rabbis and other faithful (*blagovernikh*) orthodox persons and kulak elements. In Zhmerinka, such expenditure caused indignation among the Jewish workers, who demanded part of the money for their cultural needs.[297]

Soliterman argued that the activity of the Joint and local Jewish mutual aid organizations should have been restricted. The Joint's money should have been received and distributed by the members of Evobshestkom according to the interests of the Jewish workers. Although he uses the Marxist vocabulary of 'material basis', showing his commitment to the Party ideology, Soliterman must have been aware that the Jews observed the rituals not because they received money for it from abroad or from community taxes but because they followed the tradition. His usage of Hebrew and knowledge of rituals show his immersion in the Jewish tradition. Soliterman might have even been born in one of the communities he criticized. In addition, he was cynically complaining that the members of Evobshestkom were proudly taking part in the traditional Jewish communal life:

> In some places the Jewish religious communities show the signs of their activities. You are informed about the Bershad community and its influence on the Jews in

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[295] He says so because these towns were the most affected by the war and pogroms.
[296] Solitreman's report is written in Russian but this phrase appears in a mixture of broken Hebrew and Aramaic, written in Cyrillic. *Gmilas Khesed* is a Yiddishized phrase for doing good deeds (*gmilut Hassadim* in Hebrew), doing charity, and providing social assistance to the poor. It is one of the sacred religious duties of a Jew. *Moyois eitsim* is a Yiddishized phrase for giving the poor the money to buy matzah (from *maot khitin* in Aramaic – literally, coins for wheat).
[297] TsDAVO, Fund 413, inv. 1, f. 2, (March 31st 1923 – January 21st 1924), p. 14.

returning them to the righteous path. Truth be told, even state organs are not always restrained in this respect. For example, Haisyn's regional Department of communal economy (*okrkomkhoz*) built a "mikve"[298] in a bathhouse and put a flashing sign on a butcher's shop with an inscription in old Hebrew 'Bosor Kosher'[299].[300]

Though Soliterman's report illustrates the difficulties which agents of the anti-religious campaign faced in the province, local Jews were generally having a hard time keeping synagogues under their sway. This was partly due to a legal conundrum with decrees regulating religious rights. The anti-religious campaign was characterized by the ambiguity in content of its decrees, which both the state and citizens used for their favor.[301] Article 3 of the "Decree on Separation" granted every citizen the right to confess and profess any religion or none at all. Article 5 of the same Decree specified that the "free performance of religious rights is provided insofar as they do not violate public order and are not accompanied by encroachments on the rights of citizens of the Soviet Republic."[302] The latter article is written in a way that although it does not explicitly prohibit religious expression, it leaves open the crucial questions of what counts as a violation of public order and the encroachment of citizens' rights. The ambiguity was repeated in the "Decree on Freedom of Conscience, Church and Religious Societies," released just eight days later.

Legal ambiguities worked in the interests of both the state, which got a carte blanche for nationalizing the property of synagogues, and the Jews, who appealed to them in order to reclaim the property of synagogues to the community and to mobilize public support for that cause.[303] In some cases, Jews cooperated with authorities to preserve synagogues. In the summer of 1923, a curious legal transfer of property from the state to a religious community happened in Zhytomir. The Jewish Community of Zhytomir Choral Praying School, referring to themselves as citizens of Zhytomir, signed a contract with a representative of the executive committee of the region,

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[298] *Heb*. Mikveh or mikva is a bath used for the ritual immersion in Judaism.
[299] *Heb*. Kosher meat.
[300] TsDAVO, Fund 413, inv. 1, f. 2, p. 14.
[301] Sternshis makes similar observations, calling these 'curious situations'. See Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher*, p. 7.
[302] *Dekreti Sovetskoi vlasti*, Vol. 1, pp. 373-374.
[303] In July 1918 the Basic Law of Russia was brought, granting the right of religious expression in its article 13. On how Jews used their legal rights to protecting Smolensk synagogues see Hickey, Michael. "Communists vs. Clerics" pp. 39-59.

secretary Turzhinski, about "the transfer of a permanent right to use property and premises of the school in Zhytomyr on Staro-Vil'skaia Street No. 10."[304] The Jewish community promised to preserve "people's property (*narodnoie dostoianiie*)" and to use it only for religious purposes. They also agreed that no political gatherings "hostile to the Soviet power movement" would take place in the synagogue and that, in case of breach of the contract, the synagogue's property would be transferred to the Council of workers' and peasants' deputies.[305] The case illustrates how some Jews retook their synagogue by working inside the Soviet legal framework.[306]

A similar situation happened in Chernakhov of Volyn gubernia, where Moshko Shlemov and Shmul Fel'dman, representatives of the Jewish community Beys ha-Medresh, signed an agreement with the authorities to ensure their communal religious practices.[307] Behind Shlemov's and Fel'dman's signature stood more than a hundred members of the Chernakhov Jewish community who debated with the authorities their responsibilities regarding the praying school, synagogue servants, charity issues, cemetery, and school property.

These two Jewish communities won in the battle with the Soviet state over the ownership of their religious property by appealing to their legal rights of religious expression. However, such cases were rare. More often a reclaimed synagogue went to the hands of what Soviets called, as a legal entity, "Jewish workers and peasants"[308]. Synagogues were expropriated by the state so as to open a workers' club or a museum of atheism which supposedly were in the best interests of the Jewish workers. The following argument was used for turning the place of religion into the place of no religion. Synagogues, Bolsheviks argued, are not used for religious service but for political propaganda and gatherings of Zionists. Since Jewish workers do not need to pray and since the synagogues breed dangerous elements to the regime, they should be turned into institutions which

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[304] DAZO, Fund 1657, inv. 1, f. 103, p. 1.
[305] DAZO, Fund 1657, inv. 1, f. 103, p. 2.
[306] For similar cases in Smolensk, see Hickey, Michael. "Communists vs. Clerics", pp. 39-59.
[307] DAZO, Fund P-1657, inv. 1, f. 218, p.1.
[308] The category of Jewish workers and peasants came out as a result of Bolsheviks' ideology productivization and construction of the New Jew. One of the forms of productivization was forceful collectivization of the countryside. For more about the productivization project, see Dekel-Chen, Jonathan. *Farming the Red Land*, and his article "Jewish Agricultural Settlement n the Interwar Period: A Balance Sheet," in Gitelman, Zvi Y. and Ro'i, Yaacov (eds.), *Revolution, Repression, and Revival: The Soviet Jewish Experience*, New York and Toronto, Rowman & Littlefield, 2007, esp. pp. 77-78.

serve the interest of workers.[309] This argument was a camouflage for closing synagogues and taking their property. In later years, the official rhetoric became harsher. The cudgel was the only argument that Bolsheviks invoked.

What happened with the Choral Praying synagogue in Zhytomir, Beys ha-Medresh' of Chernakhov, and most other synagogues in the Pale of Settlement can be illustrated through a comparison with the famous case of the closure of the Brodsky synagogue in Odessa.[310] In Odessa, representatives of the Revision Commission came for a regular inspection of the synagogue's library on October 30th, 1924 looking for prohibited literature. After finding literature "of Zionist content" and "counterrevolutionary literature,"[311] they initiated a case against the synagogue on the pretext that Zionist political activity was happening in it. The Jewish community tried to defend its right to synagogue in court for a year, denying that it was used for any political purpose. The case was closed and reopened several times. Turning more aggressive in their demands, Bolsheviks played with the concepts of legal permissibility, contrasted progressive Jewish workers with the backward Jewish community of Odessa (despite the former being a part of the latter), and claimed that the real needs of the Jewish workers would be met by closing down the synagogue. They won the case eventually and turned the synagogue into a workers' club.

However, the campaign did not stop at the level of taking communal property crucial in the collective lives of Jews. By not protecting private property of the Jews, Bolsheviks turned a blind eye to forceful eviction of Jews from their land and houses by the local non-Jews.

3. Stripping Jews of Land Rights

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[309] For more on this rhetoric see Sloin, Andrew. *The Jewish Revolution in Belorussia: Economy, Race, and Bolshevik Power*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2017, pp. 129-141. On confiscation of choral synagogues of Minsk, Gomel, and Kharkiv and their conversion into Communist centers, *clubs*, and restaurants see Pipes, Richard. *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, pp. 364-366.

[310] TsDAVO, Fund 413, inv. 1, f. 24, 'Documents on transfer Brodsky synagogue into workers' club' (November 6th, 1924 – February 14th, 1925).

[311] They found the following books: *The History of Zionism*, *The Zion: The History of the Lovers of Zion*, Theodor Herzl's *The Jewish State*, *The Jewish Theater in Palestine*, and a brochure *In Memory of the Coronation of Alexander III*.

In 1913, Stalin argued that Jews did not constitute a nation. Apart from a common language and economy, they lacked a common territory, the condition Stalin deemed necessary for a group to constitute a nation.[312] Bolsheviks took on the task to correct what they saw as a major historical injustice to Jews. Jews were to be given land and taught to cultivate it. Providing Jews with land meant solving the economic problem of absolute poverty in the shtetls after the First World War. Crimea and southern Ukraine, considered to be "uninhabited," would improve the lives of Jews and make them productive. The Soviet land project, or "Jewish productivization", was also attractive to the Joint, which sponsored the agricultural initiatives of East European Jews. Last but not least, Bolsheviks greeted agricultural colonization, believing it would turn the Jews away from the Zionist objective of settling in Palestine. Jews were to get their own territory within the borders of the Soviet Union and, therefore, become a nation.[313]

Speaking about the idea of Jewish productivization, many would recall Abram Room's *Jews on the Land* (1927), a propaganda film on the peaceful life of Jewish colonists in Crimea. The film gives a series of contrasting images of impoverished shtetls, from which Jews escaped, and the southern Ukraine, where they found a better life. Though shtetls were overwhelmed with poverty, the lives of the settled Jews were far from those shown in Room's film. Following the narrative of a backward shtetl, the film does not mention that Jewish colonies originated in shtetls.[314] Some of the colonies were first designed in the Pale in collaboration with agricultural schools. That all Jews were landless was a myth. Before the Revolution, a minority of shtetl Jews worked on the land, by themselves or with the help of wage workers. Running away from the front line of the First World War to the interior of the Russian Empire, shtetl Jews left their houses and land behind. Those who returned had to fight with Ukrainians, who took their property or compelled them to sell it to them.

The following story is about that fight. It is a story of the state actively denying Jews the right to return to their own property and turning a blind eye to the local anti-Semitic hatred. The

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[312] Similar claims were already expressed by Lenin. See Pinkus, Benjamin. *The Jews of the Soviet Union*, p. 50.
[313] For more on the settlement of Jews in Ukrainian SSR, see Dekel-Chen, Jonathan. *Farming the Red Land*. On the idea of Jewish productivization, see Sloin, Andrew. *The Jewish Revolution in Belorussia,* Ch. 3.
[314] On the depiction of Jewish productivization in Soviet cinematography, see Aunoble, Eric. "Yevreiskaia kommuna (1927-1939): ot sotsial'nogo koshmara k kinematograficheskim grezam", *Histor!ans*, August 13th, 2013. Retrieved from: http://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/en/doslidzhennya/814-eryk-onobl-evreiskaia-kommuna-1927-1939-ot-sotsyalnoho-koshmara-k-kynematohrafycheskym-hrezam.

court would take the Ukrainian side, invoking the stereotype of Jews as incapable of cultivating the land. While in the course of the new policy Jews were encouraged to cultivate the land, in the popular imagination they remained unskilled at farming, a job thought to fit Ukrainians only. The court would reproduce this stereotype even when Jews were the legal owners of the land. Disputes over land ownership between Jews and Ukrainians show that Bolsheviks took the anti-Semitic ideas for granted while ignoring their own about productive Jews.

To understand the controversy, we have to briefly mention the prehistory of the idea of Jewish "improvement" through land cultivation and the way Bolsheviks dealt with the issue. For centuries, Jews in the Russian Empire fulfilled the role as intermediaries for gentiles. They worked as money lenders, shopkeepers, peddlers, tavern owners, accountants, and alike.[315] Accustoming the Jews for land cultivation started during the reign of Alexander I, though the full reforms began with the edict of Nikolas I in 1835. The idea of modernizing Jews and making them "productive" was influenced by the Haskalakh (Jewish Enlightenment). Jews were allowed to become peasants and were given lands in Novorossia.[316] The new colonists were exempted from military service and had tax credits for buying the land. They usually rented these lands or bought them from Ukrainian landowners (*pomeshics*). As a result of the reforms, a small minority got accustomed to this type of life. In the Pale of Settlement, a minority of Jews, living in villages surrounding the shtetls, were engaged in agriculture. In addition to their trade and crafts, the shtetl Jews would keep chickens and cows, though there was no agriculture in the shtetl.[317]

In the mid-1920s Bolsheviks started to implement the plans for Jewish productivization. According to the demands of the nativization policy, the former *Luftmenschen*[318] had to be settled on the land. The impoverished and oppressed Jew was to be replaced by the New Jew who, through land cultivation, was to escape the backwardness of his traditional life and become the vanguard of modernization. The Jewish story was meant as an ideal type for other minorities to follow.[319]

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[315] On 'typical' Jewish occupations, see Slezkine, Yurii. *The Jewish Century*, Ch. 1. Slezkine calls Jews Mercurians, servants of Merkurii, the patron of travelers and traders.
[316] See Baron, Salo. *The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets,* New York, Macmillan, 1976, pp. 13-26, and Bartal, Israel. *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772-1881*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002, pp. 94-97.
[317] See Petrovsky-Shtern, Yohanan. *The Golden Age Shtetl: A New History of Jewish Life in East Europe*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2014, pp. 270-271.
[318] This Yiddish term is used to describe men who live on their wits, literally "men of air".
[319] Gitelman, Zvi and Ro'i, Yaacov (eds). *Revolution, Repression, and Revival*, pp. 78-79.

However, Bolsheviks could not change the popular attitude towards the Jews. The old anti-Semitism took a new layer. Anti-Semites among the Bolsheviks wandered around the province, unleashing menacing threats and violence. Courts did not defend the Jews even when they owned and cultivated the land. Jews were accused as exploiters and their property was forcibly taken and nationalized. This went against the policy of productivization and settlement of Jews on the land and encouraging of those who had the land. State functionaries relied on the banal image of Jews as capable of being merchants, shopkeepers, and peddlers, but not farmers. I consider reports from the Volyn region.

In 1923, the Jews of Brusyliv[320] (Vol'f Kushnir, Nokhum Khandros, Monsha Tsinberg, Yakov Noval'skii, Avram Kotliarenko, and Zelif Khandros) complained to Evobshestkom on the behavior of a person Tumanov, the Komkhoz executive (*zaveduyishii komkhozom*). Around 60 Jews of Brusyliv signed the complaint. Tumanov's three-months presence in Brusyliv made their lives unbearable:

> He is a big anti-Semite. He imposes great sufferings on the Jews who want to obtain a lease for a place to build dwelling for themselves, even in cases when they owned those places before the pogrom. He willingly gives areas that Jews used to occupy to kulaks who for a long time had houses elsewhere. In addition, he seeks ways to terminate the contracts that Jews have concluded before his arrival.[321]

The complainers returned to their birthplace to rebuild their houses with the "money from America," presumably from the Joint. "We ask you to release us from this *pogromnik*," concludes their letter to Evobshestkom. Tumanov's story is told in the letter. He came from Don, which is why the Jews described his behavior as "resembling former denikinets.[322]" Tumanov was imposing huge taxes for the houses the Jews were building, threatening them with another pogrom saying that "we need to repeat 1919 since Jews did not get enough of it."[323] Brusyliv's Jews managed to get rid of Tumanov. The case was so disturbing that their complaints reached Kyiv gubernial

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[320] Former Zdvyzh, a town in the eastern part of Zhytomir oblast'.
[321] TsDAVO, Fund 413, inv. 1, f. 2, p. 25.
[322] From the Denikin's Army. Anton Denikin was a leading general of the White Army. Soldiers under his command conducted numerous pogroms of Jews, most infamously in Fastov (today's Kyiv oblast').
[323] TsDAVO, Fund 413, inv. 1, f. 2, p. 25.

komkhoz and the gubernial control commission of the CP(b)U. Tumanov was removed from his position.

It was likely that Tumanov was not local and had no firm connections, which is why he was dismissed fast. If he had been a local, there is no guarantee that the local institutions would have stopped his behavior. It is striking that Tumanov, who worked for a Soviet institution, was not aware that his anti-Semitic rant was criminally liable under the new regime. Either he was an unrepentant anti-Semite who did not care for the new law or, more likely, he was deliberately saying what was on his mind believing that at the local level such actions would be acceptable. The case against Tumanov was also successful because the complaint against him was brought by the whole community of Brusyliv Jews. Bolsheviks' acts of anti-Semitism against individual Jews were likely to be disregarded.

Such was the fate of a 60-years old Jew from Snidkov, a town in Podol'sk gubernia, who was beaten for refusing to follow the orders of his chairman to collect a local tax. The report on the chairman's vengeance reads:

> On June 22, he called a 60-years old Jew to him and rushed at him as if he was a *desiatikhatnik*[324]. The chairman commanded the Jew to go around the small houses and collect the labor tax from the residents. The old Jew told him that he was not a *desiatikhatnik* and that he had no strength to deal with the matter. The chairman attacked, beat, and arrested him.[325]

Sometimes even the whole community of Jews was ignored and discriminated against. Jews from Tomashpil, a shtetl in Vinnytsia oblast', asked their comrades from the central committee to help them facilitate the organization of Committees of Poor Peasants

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[324] *Desiatikhatniks (piatikhatniks)* were specially appointed persons from local residents obliged to supervise their neighbors and regularly report on their suspicious activities to the relevant authorities in Ukraine in accordance with the VUTSIK's decision. The "Regulations on Desiatikhatniks" was a secret document approved on November 21st, 1923. In everyday speech, the word had a negative connotation.
[325] TsDAVO, Fund 413, inv. 1, f. 2, p. 180.

(Komnezam).[326] They commented on the difficulties to obtain this permission and the stereotypes embedded in the new institutions:

> We, Ukrainian citizens, ask you, with the hope that you will help us to carry out a useful cause. We, poor Jews, have been trying for the second year in the local soviet organs to get the permission for organizing Komeszam, in order to ease our plight. Unfortunately, we get the old tsarist answer "except for the Jews".[327]

A new wave of violence emerged in the shtetls when the returning Jews wanted to claim their property back in court. The Jews sometimes succeeded in that aim but more often the local officials would prolong the court cases indefinitely until they gave up on the claims. In the secret report by the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs in the Department of Natsmen of Zhytomir region it is said that there are "materials indicating the manifestation of open acts of anti-Semitism from the local population and the administration." Anti-Semitic acts, the report states, emerged with "the introduction of the institute of defendants of Jews in towns with the Jewish population, owing to the acts of banditry from this spring."[328]

Anti-Semitism in the land-rights disputes was a widespread institutional problem. Consider the case of Fastov Jews. Escaping the 1919 pogroms, Fastov Jews were forced to sell their land and houses to Ukrainian neighbors "for peanuts," as they put it. In March 1921, the Soviet state issued a decree according to which the purchase and sale of real estate during 1919-1921 was considered invalid, with the clause that the old owners should pay the new ones their expenses for maintenance of the property. The decree was welcomed by the Jewish population. Though the state guaranteed the Jews the right to retake their property, they faced numerous obstacles. The people's courts (*Narsudi*) sided with Ukrainians who demanded impossibly large payments, acknowledged

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[326] Komnezam was the body of Soviet power in the village of Ukraine in 1920-1933. The poor peasants' committees were part of an administrative mechanism created by the Bolsheviks in the form of temporary extraordinary organs with a wide lattitude. Sometimes they were engaged in distributing among the poor the confiscated masters' and surplus kulaks' land, supplies, livestock, grains, helping the poor to cultivate land and harvest.
[327] TsDAVO, Fund 413, inv. 1, f. 21, pp. 2-3.
[328] TsDAVO, Fund 413, Inv. 1, f. 2, p. 158.

the Jewish rights and then refused to issue a decision upon which they could retake their property, and sometimes deliberately ignored the restitution decree.[329]

A case in which the institutional abuse of the idea of Jewish productivization, enforcement of the stereotype of Jews as incapable of land cultivation, and siding with Ukrainians against Jews was striking was that against Gersh Fuks, a Jewish landowner and a director of private logging plant in the Zhytomir region.[330] The court process lasted for over a year, from 1923 to 1924. The Land Commission of Zhytomir okrug sued Fuks on the basis that he "himself does not cultivate the land (…) and has no connection to agricultural affairs," on the complaint of his former employee Leontii Pavlovskii. The nationalization of kulaks' land was a regular practice but there was an exception to it at the beginning of NEP. At least according to the law, landowners could keep their property if they could show that they were cultivating the land by themselves or with the help of their family, and with the help of wage workers only if they could not do it by themselves. Fuks faced the charge of being a capitalist who does not want to get his hands dirty. Local Jews and Ukrainians were the witnesses. Some said that Fuks did cultivate the land, others denied it. An employee of the Society for Handicraft and Agricultural Work among the Jews of Russia (ORT)[331], Ilia Kostinskii, was also a witness and stood for Fuks but the court disregarded his testimony. The matter of dispute was whether the land should remain in the hands of Fuks because he cultivated it too, or whether it should be nationalized because the wage workers did the job. Though the decision was first taken in favor of Fuks at the okrug court, he lost the case in the appeal process at the higher, gubernial, court. The cassation court rejected Fuks's appeal. The land was appropriated by the Village Fund of Glubochetski Land Society and the plant's buildings became state property. Fuks' property ended up being distributed to Ukrainian peasants in the kolkhozs.

Fuks's defender argued that the case was formed "on the national basis." The prosecutor did not deny it, replying only that Fuks obtained his land unlawfully because "during the tsarist

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[329] TsDAVO, Fund 413, inv. 1, f. 2, p. 197.
[330] TsDAVO, Fund 413, inv. 1, f. 12, pp. 2-8.
[331] ORT was a state organization aimed to assist the transformation of Jews into farmers and skilled industrial workers, in line with the idea of Jewish productivization. See Stampfer, Shaul. "ORT." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/ORT (accessed May 12th, 2018).

times his father took this land from Chinsheviks[332] and exploited peasants."[333] It seems likely that the case against Fuks was brought against him as a Jewish capitalist, not primarily as a capitalist. This is enforced by another prosecutor's complaint that the majority of his family lived in Moscow and engage in speculative trading,[334] which was a typical anti-Semitic trope. Speculation, then an illegal activity, was seen as a profession at which Jews excelled. The prosecutor continued that "the land of Fuks could not be considered a laboring household[335] because only three members of Fuks' family live in the village Krutoie, and only one of them, Moisei Fuks, cultivates the land."[336] Fuks, the prosecutor said, never moweded the grass or planted the garden, and was always ploughing the land "with workers' hands."[337] Moreover, the prosecutor argued, that even if the Fuks worked on the land, they were doing it "poorly" because they were previously found guilty of cultivating their land in Berdychiv in a way that "does not meet the requirement of rational farming" and that they "had people working instead of them (…) while they kept hands in their pockets."[338] Even if the Fuks were arch capitalists, the prosecutor's words are a stereotypical rant of Jewish disregard for agricultural affairs. Jews not only do not work on the land; they do not care to work on it. What is more, Fuks tried to justify himself in front of the court by providing documents showing that his family is recognized as a "labor element". The court dismissed it on the grounds that the documents were given to Fuks in 1920 when "the idea of labor element did not exist."[339] It is unlikely that the documents were forged. In the province, courts would dismiss a legal document when it does not fit its preconceived decision, even if it came from a higher instance. Playing with legal terms and the rules of the process were a common practice which Fuks faced on his skin.

The mentioned cases show that the idea of Jewish productivization did not find support in the province. Not only were Jews not able to restitute their property, but their efforts to be engaged

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[332] Chinsheviks were free peasants in the Russian Empire who rented land from their previous landowners.
[333] TsDAVO, Fund 413, inv. 1, f. 12, p. 5.
[334] TsDAVO, Fund 413, inv. 1, f. 12, p. 2.
[335] Laboring household (*trudovoe khoziaistvo*) was the anti-capitalist idea that the household does not need the wage labor to sustain itself, the household's principal aim not being to make profit. It was lauded as the economic solution for free peasants. Socialists appropriated the idea from the narodniks, in particular Alexander Chayanov who argued for laboring household as the "moral economics" alternative to capitalism.
[336] TsDAVO, Fund 413, inv. 1, f. 12, p. 2.
[337] Ibid.
[338] Ibid.
[339] TsDAVO, Fund 413, inv. 1, f. 12, p. 5.

in productive agricultural labor were met with suspicion and resistance. The laws which defended the property of Jews who returned to shtetls were ignored by the local courts and administration. Despite the official ban on anti-Semitism and the new approach which the state took towards its Jewish citizens, the Jews were helpless and vulnerable to old anti-Semitic stereotypes as incapable of agriculture and to the new stereotype where the Jewish farmer had to be a kulak, an exploiter of Ukrainians. Deprived of their property, provincial Jews found no justice in the early Soviet state.

4. The Anti-Pesach Campaign in the Shtetl

"The Revolution – we will say yes to it but are we to say no to the Sabbath?,"[340] asks Gedali, the protagonist of a self-titled short story of Isaac Babel. The reader gets exposed to Gedali's thoughts on how to reconcile the traditional Jewish lifestyle with the demands of the Revolution. Standing at the center of a bloody cauldron, or what remained from the shtetl torn apart by the Whites and the Reds at the peak of the Civil War, deliberations of Gedali, the old Jew, sound absurd. As the story ends, "Gedali, founder of an *impossible* International, has gone to the synagogue to pray".[341] The story of Gedali represents an uneasy faith of Jews under the Reds, and their need to reconcile the tradition with the Revolution.[342] Another dilemma which Babel addressed in the story is that of being something between an enemy of the Revolution and its friend. The dilemma intensified after the Civil War: is the observant Jew loyal to the Revolution its friend or its enemy?

The Jews spent the next decade pondering and fighting over this dilemma. Some were like Gedali and tried to come to peace with the Revolution while at the same time privately keeping observance. Others, diehard revolutionaries, broke up with the tradition completely, accusing the Gedali-like ones for double standards and calling them 'society parasites'. This was one of the challenges of Jewish integration in the new Soviet state – the need to reconcile their interests as

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[340] Babel, Isaac. *The Red Cavalry Stories*, in *The Complete Works of Isaac Babel*, ed. by Nathalie Babel, translated with notes by Peter Constantine. New York and London, W. W. Northon & Company, 2002, p. 228.
[341] Ibid.
[342] Babel's Gedali became a widespread image of a Jew facing Soviet power's modernity. The quandary of being a Jew and a Revolutionary had been addressed by a number of authors. See, for example, Sicher, Efraim. *Jews in Russian Literature After the October Revolution: Writers and Artists between Hope and Apostasy*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 71-112, Rieff, Philipp. *The Jew of Culture: Freud, Moses, and Modernity*, Vol. 3, ed. by Arnold M. Eisen and Gideon Lewis-Kraus. Virginia, University of Virginia Press, 2008, pp. 123-127, and Boyarin, Jonathan. *Storm from Paradise: The Politics of Jewish Memory*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1992, p. 100.

Jews in preserving the tradition while striving for Jewish progress and modernization. However, this division between the traditional shtetl Jews and the revolutionary Jews was not so visible in practice. Most Jews who embraced the Revolution were similar to Gedali. They believed that there was nothing wrong in keeping Shabbat at home and celebrating revolutionary holidays in public, except when the two overlapped. When that happened, the division between the tradition-inclined Jew and the staunch revolutionary Jew became visible.

Pesach celebration was one of those breaking points. In the anti-religious campaign, the fight over Pesach was the cornerstone of fighting Judaism from above. Ironically, revolutionaries who were fitted best to fight the 'superstitions of Pesach' were the ones who came from the shtetl, got traditional education in cheder, were familiar with the Jewish calendar, and had a deep knowledge of Judaism. However, the mainstream of mid-ranking revolutionaries who came from the shtetls were not firm believers in the anti-religious campaign. Their fight against Pesach was subtler. Such Jews did not merely aim to prohibit their fellow Jews from celebrating Pesach but tried to argue them over in their language and show them why it is improper to do so. Contrary to the higher-ranking anti-Semitic Bolsheviks and their fellow regional stalwarts, these Gedali-like Jews did not even have a firm intention to abolish the Pesach but to show their allegiance to the Party and, at the most, abolish religious authorities associated with it.

Among such Genadi-like Pesach fighters were Eliyahy Spivak[343], teacher and author of many Yiddish schoolbooks and the editor of *Ratnbildung*, and his colleague K. Khadoshevich[344]. In one of his frequent contributions to *Ratnbildung*, Khadoshevich writes:

> Here comes the Pesach and the mess from which rabbis, community leaders, elderly, and others make hay. What are we doing to fight this clerical mass? Nothing. Or almost nothing. From time to time, at the time of holidays, we send anti-rabbi to rabbi for anti-religious preaching. We send in a newspaper a couple of anti-religious articles and we think that, in this way, we will win. But in schools, young people do

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[343] See "Spivak, Eliyahy." In Kagan, Berl (ed.). *Leksikon fun yidish-shraybers*. New York, R. Ilman-Kohen, 1986, pp. 410-411, and Estraikh, Gennady. "Spivak, Elye." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Spivak_Elye (accessed April 27th, 2018).

[344] Unfortunately, we do not know much about Khadoshevich apart from that which comes from his writings. He also wrote for *Shtern* (*Star*), another prominent Yiddish newspaper. Khadoshevich had traditional Jewish education and a good secular education.

not receive anti-religious education. We need to start an active anti-religious activity. In this struggle, it is necessary for the teacher, who faces the younger generation every day, to lead everyone and to use natural science and social science as a base for that purpose. The teacher must analyze what is the true character of each holiday, especially Pesach. The pious ones and various other hypocrites are trying to influence the working people, the immature youth, and to represent Pesach as a feast of freedom.

What does this trifle mean that Jews were freed from the pharaoh's captivity? Why are the holidays of Paris Commune or the October Revolution worse than it? First of all, it needs to be explained that the entire history of the departure from Egypt is fictitious from the beginning to the end, that this is not a historical fact, but a legend. Jews were freed so that they can oppress the people of Canaan. And in the Feast of Pesach there is absolutely no motive of struggle – everything rests on the wonders of God. Anti-religious work should also be conducted outside the school's walls. It should be transferred to clubs and reading huts. Depending on the audience, there are different methods of agitation. We need to explain the absurdity of the traditions of Pesach.[345]

Khadoshevich here does not simply criticize the Jewish 'working masses' that fell under the religious propaganda of the rabbis. Nor is his declaration of an anti-Pesach campaign a common one. Khadoshevich's goal is much more ambitious. At first glance, his words can seem as those that violently fight religion and encourage his comrades to be more active and effective in their task to fight "the clerical mass." However, note that his speech is delivered to a knowledgeable audience, his Jewish comrades[346], who were as familiar with Judaism and education in cheder as was Khadoshevich himself. The essence of his plea is a typical socialist anti-rabbinical slander. Cleaned up from Bolshevik vocabulary—terms like 'struggle', 'base', 'the Paris Commune', 'the clerical mass', and alike—this text could be written by any socialist propagandist at the turn of the century, Bundist, Seymist, or any other. Besides, the disgust with which Khadoshevich describes

[345] Khadoshevich, K. "Anti-religiez propagande in dem shul." *Ratnbildung* no. 3, (1928), pp. 54-55.
[346] *Ratnbildung* was a Yiddish periodical issued for teachers of Soviet Jewish institutions.

the rabbis and other Jewish community leaders is familiar from the classical Yiddish literature, from which he probably inherited his rhetoric.

It seems that in denying the story of Pesach miracles, Khadoshevich does the opposite. He deliberately retells his fellows the whole symbolism of this holiday. What are such claims if not an instance of Soviet Aesopian language, a communication aimed to convey special meaning to an informed audience and escape censorship?[347] A closer look at Khadoshevich's description of the work of agitators in the shtetl reveals unusual comparison of the work of agitator with the work of anti-rabbi: "At the time of holidays," he writes, "we send anti-rabbi to rabbi for anti-religious preaching." In front of the Jewish readers of the journal, such a comparison had a comic effect. By describing the Jewish agitator as the anti-rabbi, Khadoshevich satirizes the aim of the anti-religious campaign and tries to justify his own work's futility: "What are we doing to fight this clerical mass? Nothing." Rather than as an effective propaganda article, Khadoshevich's critique of ineffective agitation reads like a warning to his generation that it is impossible to be both an observant Jew and a loyal Bolshevik. Khadoshevich's critique of religiousness in the shtetl is a critique of the Jew of the same background as his. He does not seem to have a great desire to get rid of Pesach. Khadoshevich's rhetoric resembles that of a member of Evsektsiia mostly bothered with challenging the power of religious authorities than with Judaism itself. It is not a rhetoric of a Jewish Bolshevik, convinced of the truth of his ideology.[348]

Many of Khadoshevich's younger comrades did not share his subtle rhetoric. Their hard-liner approach to combating Pesach did not stop at talking but involved violence from the very beginning.[349] There was, however, some space for negotiation about the ways of conducting the

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[347] See Sandomirskaja, Irina. "Aesopian Language: The Politics and Poetics of Naming the Unnamable." In Petrov, Petre and Ryazanova-Clarke, Lara (eds.). *The Vernacular Languages of Communism: Language, Ideology and Power in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*. New York, Routledge, 2015, p. 73. Sandomirskaja claims that the Soviet Aesopian language was used through circumlocution, euphemism, silence, self-censorship, and writing between the lines.

[348] This should not come as a surprise given that the attack on Pesach in *Ratnbildung* was often an attack on its class dimension. Rabbis were accused of using religion to enslave the workers. See Ro'i, Yakoov. "The Role of the Synagogue and Religion in the Jewish National Awakening," in Ro'i, Yaacov and Beker, Avi (eds.). *Jewish Culture and Identity in the Soviet Union*, New York: New York University Press, 1991, p. 130.

[349] For some such attacks on Judaism in *Ratnbuildung*, see Alukrainishe apikorsim-gezelshaft. "Vegn antireligiezer arbet in shul: Instruktsie vegn der organizirung un arbet fun di krejzlekh junge apikorsim." *Ratnbildung* no. 6-7, (1928), pp. 41-45, and Kantor, Y. "Di kultur-revolutsiie in der yiddisher svive." *Ratnbildung* no. 4, (1928), pp. 5-14. Shternshis also notes that such activists often fabricated the data from the sociological surveys about high levels of

anti-religious campaign within members of local Evsektsiia and other local Soviet organizations. Most negotiations and conflicts naturally arose in the educational sphere, where the question was whether the children should be allowed to celebrate Pesach or embrace the new Soviet holidays.

One such case occurred in the town of Berdychiv. From the 1st till the 15th of April 1923, schoolchildren, in particular those from the Soviet orphanages (*detskie doma*)[350], were supposed to go on two weeks' vacation. The vacation was cancelled because it overlapped with weeks of Pesach celebrations. Overlaps between the Jewish *yom-toyvim* and Soviet holidays were rather common. In such cases, religious celebrations were substituted with secular socialist festivities or with quasi-religious festivities like Red Pesach[351]. However, in the case of Berdychiv, members of the gubernial Department of Social Upbringing (Sotsvosp) decided to fight Pesach even when it did not overlap with any Soviet holiday, arguing that they were fighting 'superstitions'[352]. Some of them claimed that it is insufficient to send children for vacations or to substitute Pesach with Soviet holidays. What was needed was to be sure that the Jewish children were cut off from any opportunity to celebrate and even think about the Pesach. Their instructors read as follows:

> During Pesach, children from the orphanages should be provided with a similar, orphanage-like, social environment. Each orphanage should take actions according to its own capabilities. Children should not be allowed to visit their acquaintances. Everything should be conducted in a normal routine atmosphere.[353]

Other local institutions—Okrnarobraz (Regional Department of People's Education), Zhenotdel (Women's Department of the Communist Party), the Commission of Antireligious

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religiosity among the common folk in order to justify their repressions and to get more grants from the center. See Shternshis, Anna. *Soviet and Kosher*, pp. 35-36.

[350] *Rus*. lit. 'children houses'. Though some children living in these houses were not orphans, they were sent to such institutions because they provided them with free food and shelter, which their parents could not.

[351] Red Pesach fitted well in the Bolsheviks' idea of liberation of Jews from their tradition and the oppressive empire. The Revolution substituted the Messiah. On the Red Pesach and Red Seders see Shternshis, Anna. "Passover in the Soviet Union, 1917-1941", *East European Jewish Affairs* 31, no. 1 (2001), pp. 61-76, Konstantin, Anatole. *A Red Boyhood: Growing Up Under Stalin*. Columbia, MO, University of Missouri Press, 2008, pp. 226-227, Bemporad, Elissa. *Becoming Soviet Jews*, pp. 158-159.

[352] DAZO (Berdychiv archival branch), Fund P-208, inv. 1, f. 6, (1921-1923), p. 49.

[353] DAZO (Berdychiv archival branch), Fund P-208, inv. 1, f. 30, p. 18.

Propaganda—as well as the representatives of local orphanages and working schools, formed a Commission to debate whether the children should have the vacation.[354] The most engaging discussants were an activist Sokolsky, chief of County Department of Public Education (UONO), and an activist Zhidkoblinov, the representative of Okrnarobraz. Sokolsky and Zhidkoblikov were firm in their view that children should not be allowed to celebrate the Pesach. Zhidkoblinov was suggesting "the classes to be prolonged during the Passover holidays, that is, from the 1st until the 15th of April, and the Holiday of Welcoming Spring (*Prazdnik vstrechi vesni*) to commence from the 1st of April onwards."[355] Sokolsky's position was that "the whole meaning of the anti-religious anti-Pesach propaganda is lost if the spring break is planned from the 1st until the 15th of April."[356] After a long debate, the commission agreed to continue with the studies.

The reason behind the Commission's gathering remains unknown. Some members were much more open to the possibility of children having a leisure time during Pesach. We also do not know who Sokolsky and Zhidkovlinov were, whether they fought Pesach because they really believed in it, what motivated them to do it, and whether their words correspond to their actions. Two possibilities are plausible. Firstly, they might have been Jewish activists who wanted to do a performance for the higher authorities to ensure their loyalty and effectiveness of their work. If that were the case, they were careerist revolutionaries. Since many shtetl Jews who obtained both religious and secular educations and kept their connections with the traditional shtetl life became the members of Evsektsiia, they had to balance between the Communist Party and the local Jews searching for the best political solution for themselves. Secondly, Sokolsky and Zhidkovlinov might have been young secular Jewish revolutionaries who returned to the houses of their parents in order to create self-defense units in the shtetls and protect their people from pogroms.[357] These immature anti-traditional revolutionaries were forged in the events of the Revolution of 1905-

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[354] DAZO (Berdichiv archival branch), Fund P-208, inv. 1, f. 30, p. 19.
[355] Ibid.
[356] Ibid.
[357] See Shtakser, Irina. *The Making of Jewish Revolutionaries in the Pale of Settlement*, p. 2. Shtaekster argues that "revolutionary ideologies were instrumental in creating emotional change" in young Jewish minds, for whom ethnicity was equally important to ideology. On the Jewish party which created the new world for youth as an alternative to the Jewish traditional world, their homes, and the synagogue see Mendelsohn, Ezra. *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars,* p. 48. On young Jews who were eager to participate in anti-religious campaign see Weinberg, Robert. "Demonizing Judaism in the Soviet Union during the 1920s."

1907. They embraced the Bolshevik ideology because it gave them a new type of identity. They felt that they belonged to a revolutionary community, bond by a turbulent experience of Revolution. Jewish community usually accepted such revolutionaries because their aims were not to abolish the community but to reform it.

Regardless of whether Sokolsky and Zhidkovlinov were careerist or young activists, they fitted perfectly in the Bolsheviks' plan to have the local Jews conducting the anti-religious campaign against the other local Jews. The Bolsheviks' logic was to avoid any references to imperial politics which similarly oppressed Judaism. The participation of non-Jews was thoroughly circumvented since there was a danger of associating anti-Semitic actions with the previous oppressive Tsarist regime. From 1921-1922, the anti-religious campaign was the main concern of Evsektsiia. Evsektsiia opposed religion more than any other Jewish party and it was allowed to use any means to fight religion: from agitation and propaganda to feigned accession to the "demands of toiling masses" and sheer force.[358]

The Berdychiv case is a representative example of the work which activists of Evsektsiia were conducting in the shetls of Ukraine and Belarus.[359] The case proves that there was a space of negotiation between the local actors regarding religious affairs in the early 1920s and that many of Evsetktsiia's activists were pressed by the regime to show their loyalty and the effectiveness of their work. This might explain the reasons for their harshness (at least at the level of declarations and reports) towards the religion, especially towards the celebration of the most important Jewish holiday, Pesach.

Conclusion

Bolsheviks declared that their arrival to power meant that anti-Semitism would become a thing of the past. Apart from guaranteeing Jews the protection from anti-Semitism, the Soviet state aimed to "normalize" them by giving them equal rights with others, to "productivize" them by giving

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[358] Gitelman similarly states that the anti-religious actions were performed in majority of the cases exclusively "by Jews against other Jews". See Gitelman, Zvi. *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Union,* p. 298.
[359] For the Belarus case see, for example, Zeltser, Arkadii. *Evrei sovetskoi provintsii*, Sloin, Andrew. *The Jewish Revolution in Belorussia*, pp. 21-53, and Smilovitskii, Leonid. *Jewish Life in Belarus*.

them the land for cultivation, and to "liberate" them from the burdens of religion by imposing on them the celebration of secular holidays and by driving them out of the synagogue. Bolsheviks believed that a new way of life would necessitate a passing away of the shtetl life. Shtetl, synagogue, and Pesach were to become unknown words for the new generations of Jews, present only in the memories of their grandfathers.

The Bolsheviks' philo-Semitic promises were music to the ears of shtetl Jews. Unfortunately, protection from anti-Semitism remained at the level of declarations. Whether or not Bolsheviks ever meant to protect the Jews, the persistence of anti-Semitism was a reality of the post-war shtetl. Old anti-Semitic beliefs (Jews as exploiters of Ukrainians, enemies of Christians, corruptors of public morale) were merged in the popular imagination with the newly formed ones (the myth of Zhydocommuna, Jews as both capitalist and Bolshevik exploiters of peasants). After a series of pogroms, Jews had to reestablish their status and property in the shtetl. In striving for a new life, the Jews found no help from the Bolsheviks. At best, Bolsheviks remained silent at Jewish pleas. At worst, they themselves were the perpetrators.

The anti-Judaism campaign and the fight against Pesach were deliberately designed so that Jews were set against one another. Evsektsiia was to carry out the Bolsheviks' dirty work. Targeting the synagogue, Bolsheviks threatened the Jewish lifestyle, their education and culture. Substituting Pesach with secular holidays, Bolsheviks did not succeed in changing the traditional Jewish value system and identity but enforced a new "Marranism," where the Jews would present themselves as supporters of Bolshevism in public while secretly observing Judaism in private. Even when the Jews embraced the official ideology and decided to become farmers, the Bolsheviks obstructed or complicated their aspirations. Instead of serving as the instruments of justice, the Soviet courts in the province sided with popular prejudices against the Jews.

Chapter 4

Secular Culture in the Shtetl: Jews and Ukrainians in Search of Common Language

Introduction

This chapter discusses the coexistence of Yiddish and Ukrainian cultures during the nativization policy. Both had suffered under the strict system of imperial censorship and Russification. The Russian Empire regarded Jewish and Ukrainian cultures as backward and inferior to Russian culture. Moreover, Jews and Ukrainians themselves looked down on the cultures produced in their native languages. Owing to the traditional division between Hebrew as the language of religion and Yiddish as the language of everyday life, many Jews considered Yiddish as barbarized German and disparaged culture in Yiddish as unsophisticated. Many Ukrainians did not think much of the culture in Ukrainian either, as the things they associated with culture, such as theater and literature, were happening among the upper classes in Kyiv and other predominantly Russian-speaking big cities.

The nativization policy brought the hope of producing full-fledged cultures in Yiddish and Ukrainian. Jewish and Ukrainian artists looked favorably on the state's incentive to invest in minority cultures and the prospects for cooperation between the two were high. Though Bolsheviks typically affirmed breaking with the Russian culture as that of the "oppressor," they cared about minority cultures as a means of spreading socialism among the masses and believed that the cultures would become obsolete once the people understood and embraced socialism.

This chapter demonstrates that Jewish and Ukrainian cultural renewal was thwarted by the inability of artists to find a common language, both figuratively and literally. Jewish and Ukrainian cultural dialogue ended in antagonism rather than comradeship. Though shared projects existed, discord and frictions were more frequent. The culprit was often money. Disputes raged over scant resources for cultural projects. The problem was also structural. Many state institutions competed

for the authority to promote their vision of culture. It was also virtually impossible to create within a short period of time fine art in languages other than Russian given the lack of cadres who could work in other languages and the imperial legacy of attaching Russian to "high culture." Many Jews refused to dispense with Russian as the language of theater for Yiddish. For Ukrainians, that raised a distrust of Jews as the "agents of the old regime." The project of developing national cultures was stalled by conflicting ideas of what national culture should look like and in which language it should be implemented.

The chapter starts with an overview of Jewish and Ukrainian cultures in the late imperial period, analyzing their low status as the result of state discriminatory policies and self-belittlement. That sets the field for understanding the issues which Bolsheviks had to deal with. Turning to the nationality policy, I discuss the crafting of cultures in Yiddish and Ukrainian by focusing on the profiles of people who conducted cultural work in the province, showing that they were mostly young teachers with little education. It was them and not the professional artists who had the main say in defining what the new Yiddish and Ukrainian cultures should look like.

I then discuss the efforts of cultural cooperation between the Jews and Ukrainians using the example of joint cultural evenings and translations of classics of Yiddish and Ukrainian literature. This leads to the exploration of the strife between the two. I discuss disputes over finances, audience, and repertoire between amateur Yiddish and Ukrainian theaters, the former's attempts to preserve its autonomy by staging plays in Russian, and the political consequences of that decision.

In what follows, I use the term 'culture' in the Bolsheviks' preferred sense which focuses on literature, scholarship, and the arts.[360] I mention below the debates in the Soviet society on what culture is. Since theater was the most accessible art form in the province, which facilitated the development of Yiddish and Ukrainian literatures and fine arts but was also a point of discord between Jewish and Ukrainian cultural workers, I devote more space to it than to other arts.

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[360] See Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *The Cultural Front: Power and Struggle in Revolutionary Russia*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1992, pp. 1-2.

1. The Promise of Yiddish and Ukrainian Cultural Revival under the Reds

The formation of cultures in Yiddish and Ukrainian preceded the nativization policy with the new approach to reading and the new status of these languages in Jewish and Ukrainian societies in the 19th century. In the traditional East European Jewish society, reading was reserved for the study of sacred texts. Men had a religious duty to read Torah and memorize the words, even if they did not understand what they mean.[361] Hebrew was the language of serious literature and only an adaptation of sacred texts (*Tsene-rene*) and personal prayers (*tkhines*) for women were regularly published in Yiddish, the vernacular of the Jews who regarded it as a low-ranking language and labelled it *jargon*[362].[363] Although publication in Yiddish was allowed in the Russian Empire from the 1840s, it was subject to severe censorship. Only a minority of works of the Haskalah's (Jewish Enlightenment) Yiddish writers and dramatists, such as Israel Aksenfeld[364] and Solomon Ettinger[365], could pass the barriers of tsarist censors. Being critical of the traditional Jewish society and the imperial regime, they did not appeal to a wide Jewish audience.

The Jewish relationship with the written word changed over time, and with it the language, content, and format of publications. It became generally acceptable to write fiction in Yiddish and public libraries began to open, which changed the approach to leisure and challenged the traditional reading habits.[366] While secular literature in Hebrew was published as well, it targeted only the

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[361] Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire*, p. 68.

[362] The term was patronizing though not always pejorative. It was in use until 1910, when it got strictly pejorative meaning. See Estraikh, Gennady. *In Harness*, pp. 18-19.

[363] On the gendered reading in the traditional Jewish society, see Parush, Iris. *Reading Jewish Women: Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth-Century Eastern European Jewish Society*. Waltham, Brandeis University Press, 2004.

[364] Israel Aksenfeld (1787-1868), novelist and playwright, was born in Nemirov, western Ukraine, to a Hassidic family. A chief forerunner of modern Yiddish fiction, Aksenfeld became a maskil and a staunch opponent of Hassidism in his youth and worked in Odessa most of his life. Dominant themes of his plays are Yiddish folklore and the criticism of the tsarist regime. See Miron, Dan. "Aksenfeld, Yisroel." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2017. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Aksenfeld_Yisroel (accessed January 11th, 2019).

[365] Solomon Ettinger (1803-1856), poet and dramatist, was born in Warsaw and lived in Mariupol. His best known play, *Serkele*, published in 1861, is a comedy about a hypochondriac woman. The play was performed by students of Zhytomir rabbinical seminary in 1863, with the lead role of Avrom Goldfadn, the creator of modern Yiddish theater. See Dauber, Jeremy. "Ettinger, Shloyme." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Ettinger_Shloyme (accessed January 11th, 2019).

[366] See Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire*, Ch. 3.

Jews who had studied the sacred texts. Yiddish had a richer vocabulary for describing everyday life in the Pale of Settlement, and its readership was naturally wider. Yiddish was also the language in which the Jews could respond to depictions of themselves in classical Russian literature.[367] These factors engendered the formation of modern Yiddish literature, exemplified in the works of Isaac Leib Peretz[368], Mendele Mocher Sforim[369], and Scholem Aleichem[370], and the popular Yiddish theaters which traced their origin to *purimshpil*, the plays staged during the holiday of Purim.[371]

Despite the rise of Yiddish culture, marginalization of the Yiddish language in favor of Hebrew and Russian continued in the late imperial period. The most popular Yiddish literary weekly, *Kol Mevaser* (*The Herald*) was published in small circulation from 1862 to 1872 as a supplement to the Hebrew newspaper *Ha-Melits* (*The Advocate*).[372] At the turn of the century, publishing activity in Yiddish was very low in Kyiv.[373] Yiddish theaters were particularly

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[367] Glaser, Amelia M. *Jews and Ukrainians in Russia's Literary Borderlands: From the Shtetl Fair to the Petersburg Bookshop*. Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2012, p. 14f.

[368] Isaac Leib Peretz (1852-1915) was a writer, poet, playwright, and essayist from Zamość, Congress Poland. Named by his contemporaries "the father of modern Yiddish literature", Peretz is best-known for using modernist literary techniques to depict the pitiful state of shtetl Jews (*Bontshe the Sillent*, or *Bontshe Shvayg*, is perhaps his best known such story). A popularizer of Yiddish, Peretz published in it on various subjects and defended it as *the* Jewish national language at the Czernowitz Conference of 1908. See Wisse, Ruth R. "Peretz, Yitskhok Leybush." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Peretz_Yitskhok_Leybush (accessed January 11th, 2019).

[369] Sholem Yankev Abramovich, alias Mendele Mocher Sforim (1836-1917), was a realist and modernist prose writer and literary critic who wrote in Hebrew and Yiddish. Dubbed by Aleichem "the grandfather of Yiddish literature", Sforim was born in the Belarus town Kapyl and spent most of his life in Berdychiv, Zhytomir, and Odessa. The Soviets praised his satirical work, such as *The Tax* (*Di Takse*), which criticizes the corruption of Jewish community leaders. See Miron, Dan. "Abramovitsh, Sholem Yankev." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2017. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Abramovitsh_Sholem_Yankev (accessed January 11th, 2019).

[370] Sholem Aleichem (1859-1916), pen name (*Heb*. "peace be upon you") of Solomon Rabinovich, was a writer and playwright from Pereyaslav in the Kyiv region part of the Pale. Along with I. L. Peretz, Aleichem is considered the founding father of the Yiddish literary revival. His best-known work remains *Tevye the Dairyman*, whose content was discussed earlier. After the 1905 Revolution, Aleichem emigrated to the United States, where he was proclaimed "the Jewish Mark Twain". Despite his political alliance with the Yiddishists, Aleichem was also a supporter of Zionism. See Miron, Dan. "Sholem Aleichem." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2013. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Sholem_Aleichem (accessed January 11th, 2019).

[371] For an overview of classics of modern Yiddish fiction, see Frieden, Ken. *Classic Yiddish Fiction: Abramovitch, Sholem Aleichem, and Peretz*. New York, State University of New York Press, 1995. On purimshpil, see Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire*, pp. 166-168.

[372] Kotlerman, Boris. "Kol Mevaser." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Kol_Mevaser (accessed January 11th, 2019).

[373] Estraikh, Gennady. *In Harness*, p. 22.

threatened as the authorities feared performances more than publications. Plays staged in languages other than Russian had to be approved by local and central censors. The restrictions on popular theaters were harsher as they were frequented by the lower classes which the authorities distrusted.[374] Moreover, Yiddishists and Zionists fell under the watchful eye of the authorities who suppressed minority nationalisms as threats to the Empire's existence. Incitement of Russian as the language of "high culture" and belittlement of Yiddish were effective among the Jewish upper classes who preferred the Russian literature and theater and ridiculed melodramas and low comedies usually performed in Yiddish theaters.[375] Such a view of Yiddish culture had a base among most educated Jews in the province as well. The laypeople largely ignored the developments in Yiddish literature.[376]

The Russian Empire similarly denied the development of the Ukrainian culture and language. Though the authorities proclaimed Ukrainian a dialect of Russian (*malorossiiskoie narechiie*), they were actively suppressing it, not the least as a means of curtailing Ukrainian popular nationalism and the anti-imperial stance of its main proponents. In 1847, the Brotherhood of Saint Cyril and Methodius, a secret society defending Ukrainian national rights, the abolition of serfdom, and the transformation of the Russian Empire into a federation of liberal democratic Slavic republics with Kyiv as its center, was crushed and its prominent figures, Nikolay Kostomarov[377] and Taras Shevchenko[378], arrested. Though a decade later these figures resumed their public work and Ukrainian books and primers could be published, from the 1860s onwards the authorities responded with a heavier suppression of the Ukrainian language. The Valuev Circular (1863), the Ems Edict (1876) of Alexander II, and the Security Law (1881) of Alexander

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[374] Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire*, pp. 170-171.
[375] Ibid, p. 182.
[376] Estraikh, Gennady. *In Harness*, p. 25.
[377] Nikolay Kostomarov (1817-1885), historian and public figure, was born in Voronezh and taught at St. Vladimir University in Kyiv and St. Petersburg University. A close friend of Shevchenko, Kostomarov was a Pan-Slavist and Ukrainophile. He is best known for his essay "Two Russian Nationalities" (*Dve russkie narodnosti*), which argues that Ukrainians and Russians differ in character, the former being inclined towards liberty and individualism and the latter towards autocracy and collectivism.
[378] Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861) was a Ukrainian romantic poet, writer, artist, ethnographer, and public and political figure, whose works are regarded as the foundation of modern Ukrainian language and literature. Exiled for political activity and for mocking the Tsar and imperial court in his poems, Shevchenko is considered a towering figure in Ukrainian nationalist narrative. On his canonization as a national poet in the late 19th century, see Yekelchyk, Serhy. *Ukrainofily: Svit ukrains'kikh patriotiv drugoi polovini XIX stolittia*. Kyiv, K.I.C., 2010, Ch. 2.

III restricted the publications and importation of books and journals in Ukrainian (including those with religious content) and prohibited its usage in schools and other public institutions. The Minister of the Internal Affairs and the creator of the 1863 decree, Pyotr Valyev, notoriously wrote "the little Russian dialect has not, does not, and cannot exist."[379]

These bounds hindered the development of theater in Ukrainian. A play in Ukrainian was permitted to perform only if it took place on the same day as the Russian play and the latter was staged first. The depiction of middle- and upper-class characters was not permitted. As with Yiddish, the use of Ukrainian as a language of theater was limited to genres and it was prohibited to perform satire in Ukrainian. As an outcome of these restrictions, Ukrainian was widely perceived as a language of melodramas and folkloric pieces.[380]

Faced with official discrimination of their culture, Ukrainians, like Jews, found themselves split between two languages. Encouraged by Kotlyarevsky's *Eneida*[381], Ukrainian *Illyad* and the first work printed in Ukrainian in 1798, Shevchenko's *Kobzar*, a collection of poetry published in 1840 and prohibited by the Ems Edict, and other exemplary early modern literature in the Ukrainian language, a strand of Ukrainian intellectuals wrote to prove works of high aesthetic and intellectual value could be produced in Ukrainian. Though village vernacular and folk motives dominated their works, themes and ideas purported to be universal. Figures such as Lesya

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[379] The sentence appears in the Circular. Cited from Petrovsky-Shtern, Yohanan. *The Anti-Imperial Choice*, p. 24. On the position of Ukrainian language and culture in the late imperial period, see Remy, Johannes. "The Valuev Circular and Censorship of Ukrainian Publications in the Russian Empire (1863-1876): Intention and Practice." *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 49, no. 1/2 (2007), pp. 87-110, Hrytsak, Iaroslav. *Narys istorii Ukrainy: formuvannia modernoi ukrains'koi natsii XIX-XX stolittia*. Kyiv, Heneza, 1996.

[380] See Makaryk, Irena R. *Shakespeare in the Undiscovered Bourn: Les Kurbas, Ukrainian Modernism, and Early Soviet Cultural Politics*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2004, pp. 11-17.

[381] Ivan Kotliarevsky (1769-1838) was a pioneer of modern Ukrainian literature from Poltava. Besides *Eneida*, his most famous works are plays *Natalka Poltavka* and *Moskal-Charivnyk*, both love stories with folk elements.

Ukrainka[382], Ivan Franko[383], and Volodymyr Samiilenko[384], established the Ukrainian literary canon, running against the current of colonial narratives of Russian and Polish literatures, history, and ethnographic studies which tended to orientalize Ukraine as a wild frontier, an alien land of power-hungry and treacherous thugs (*mazepists*).[385] Nonetheless, the view of the Ukrainian language as inapt for "high culture" remained a dominant outlook among the populace. This was partly a consequence of another strand of Ukrainian intelligentsia's belief that Ukrainian cultural specificity should be attuned to imperial politics, and its ensuing activities. Following Gogol, many Ukrainian authors kept a double identity, writing about Ukrainian themes in the Russian language and politically siding with tsarist rule.[386]

The attitude reflected to the theater, where the masses enjoyed folk dramas in Ukrainian while a more literate audience was attracted to classical Russian and Western European repertoire (and Polish plays which could not be staged in Poland for political reasons). Though the association of Ukrainian theater with vaudeville and low comedies was contested with dramaturgic innovations of the troupes of Marko Kropyvnytsky[387], Mykola Sadovsky[388], and others, cultural

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[382] Larysa Kosach-Kvitka, alias Lesya Ukrainka, (1871-1913) was a poet, writer, playwright, essayist, translator, and anti-imperial, Marxist, and feminist political activist and advocate of Ukrainian national revival. Born in Novohrad-Volynskyi in Zhytomir region, Ukrainka was a polyglot and translator of *The Communist Manifesto* in Ukrainian. She is best known for her plays *The Noblewomen* (*Boiarnia*), a tragedy about a 17th century Ukrainian family, and *The Forest Song* (*Lisova pisnia*), an extravaganza drama based on Volynian myths and folklore.

[383] Ivan Franko (1856-1916) was a romantic, realist, and modernist poet, writer, literary critic, translator, ethnographer, and political activist, from Galicia. He was one of the founders of the Ukrainian Radical Party, which advocated non-Marxist socialism, the rights of peasants, secularism, and Ukrainian national identity. Despite his explicit criticism of Marx, Franko was appropriated by the Soviets as a proto-revolutionary figure. His allegorical poem *Kamenyar* (*The Quarryman*), about slaves breaking rocks with sledgehammers, was interpreted through the lenses of class struggle.

[384] Volodymyr Samiilenko (1864-1925) was a poet, dramatist, essayist, and translator. Samilenko is known for satirical poems on despotism and Ukrainian mentality. He translated Homer, Dante, Moliére, and other greats in Ukrainian.

[385] See Shkandrij, Myroslav. *Russia and Ukraine. Literature and Discourse of Empire from Napoleonic to Postcolonial Times*. Montreal and Kingston, McGill's-Queen University Press, 2001, pp. 6, 20, Chs. 3, 6.

[386] Ibid, pp. 30-34. On the fluctuating national commitments of Gogol and Ukrainian intelligentsia from the perspective of 'internal colonization', see Etkind, Alexander. *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience*. Cambridge, Polity Press, 2011, Ch. 1, and from the postcolonial perspective, see Bojanowska, Edyta M. *Nikolai Gogol: Between Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2007.

[387] Marko Kropyvnytsky (1840-1910) was an actor, stage director, playwright, and composer. His touring theater was the first Ukrainian professional theater troupe. Kropyvnytsky wrote more than forty plays and stage adaptations, of which comedies remain best known.

[388] Mykola Sadovsky (1856-1933) was a theater director, actor, and singer. During 1905-1906, he was a director of Ukrainska Besida Theater, the first professional Ukrainian touring theater, and in 1906 he organized the Sadovsky's Theater, the first Ukrainian resident theater, in Poltava, moving it to Kyiv the next year.

self-deprecation remained a trait of much of the Ukrainian upper classes. The 'Little Russian' identity was present among the wide population up until the First World War.[389]

When Bolsheviks took power in Ukraine, they found a hospitable atmosphere for the new cultural policy. The majority of Jewish artists were already integrated in the artistic section of the Kultur-Lige (the section was formed in 1919, a year after the Kultur-Lige's foundation in Kyiv). The Kultur-Lige was established during the UNR's government, supported by a coalition of Jewish socialist parties, Bundists, Fareynikte, Poale Zion, and Folkspartei, as a project of giving Jews non-territorial cultural autonomy. Its cultural policy was to fight Hebrew and traditionalism while creating secular culture in Yiddish, "the language of the Jewish folk masses", as stated in its founding charter.[390] The Kultur-Lige survived successions of governments of the Hetmanate, UNR, and Soviets, finding a common language with each. Though the Kultur-Lige was brought under the control of Evsektsiia in 1920 and four years later fully incorporated into Narkompros, its members remained politically multifarious and supported Bolsheviks out of interest, as a safeguard against pogroms and oppression, and out of fear, as their pro-democratic declarations raised the accusation of "class enmity." The Kultur-Lige was in conflict with branches of Evsektsiia, which frustrated the work of Jewish cultural and educational intuitions. However, as the Kultur-Lige network of institutions comprised schools, libraries, theaters, art studios, and publishing houses, Bolsheviks opted for a peaceful negotiation and transition of these facilities in their hands.[391]

The Bolshevik strategy concerning Ukrainian cultural institutions was similar. During Central Rada, Ukrainian intelligentsia promoted popularization of culture that is both nationally Ukrainian and aesthetically "high." The idea was to cleanse Ukrainian culture from philistinism and provincialism in an elitist manner. Ukrainian writer Mykola Khvylovi (1893-1933) created the

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[389] Kotenko, Anton, Martyniuk, Olha, and Miller, Alexei. "Maloross." In Miller, Alexei et al. (eds.). *Poniatia o Rossii: k istoricheskoi semantike imperskogo perioda*, Vol 2. Moscow, Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2012, pp. 392-443.
[390] "The Founding Tasks of the Kultur-Lige". In Rabinovitch, Simon (ed.). *Jews and Diaspora Nationalism: Writings on Jewish People in Europe and the United States*. Waltham, Brandeis University Press, 2012, p. 143. See also Rybakov, Mykhailo O. (ed.). *Pravda istorii*.
[391] See Shkandrij, Myroslav. "National Modernism in Post-Revolutionary Society: The Ukrainian Renaissance and Jewish Revival, 1917-1930." In Bartov, Omer and Weitz, Eric D. (eds.), *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman Borderlands*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2013, pp. 442-443, Kazovsky, Hillel. *Khudozhniki Kul'tur-Ligi*.

slogan "Get away from Moscow!" ("Het' vid Moskvy!"), arguing for the orientation of Ukrainian literature and theater away from the Russian model and towards the Western European model.[392] Such a cultural agenda was a cousin of the political ideology of Ukrainian national-communists (The Ukrainian Communist Party, or UKP, from 1920), who stressed the importance of the national question together with the communist one, and later aligned with Ukrainian Bolsheviks because of their political weakness and the latter's similar cultural politics during Skrypnyk's leadership.[393] Since many Bolsheviks in Ukraine took the nativization policy word for word, putting the national in front of the communist ideal, it was not difficult for them to win the support of Ukrainian leftist national radicals.

The legacy of oppressed cultures struggling for recognition fitted the Bolsheviks' desire to present themselves as saviors of those cultures while crafting them by their own measures. The idea of reviving national cultures included the promise of developing a modernist version of each of them. In the Jewish case, that was Yiddish secular and socialist culture at the expense of Hebrew and traditional religion-led culture.[394] In the ideological fervor, Moshe Litvakov wrote that, apart from Peretz, the canonical Yiddish fiction and its plots "from kitchen, story, and synagogue" must be dispensed with since "it serves bourgeois interest."[395]

However, when it came to implement the cultural policy, Bolsheviks faced difficulties. What they realized was that Russian was the language of a large part of upper classes and those who cared about the fine arts. Moreover, the modernist visions of national cultures were promising for urban environments but useless in the province, which had no contact with such art forms, no

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[392] On Khvylovi and the literary choice between East and West, see Shkandrij, Myroslav. *Modernists, Marxists, and the Nation: The Ukrainian Literary Discussion of the 1920s*. Edmonton, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1992.

[393] Mykola Skrypnyk (1872-1933) was the Head of the Ukrainian People's Commissariat and from 1927 to 1933 the People's Commissar of Education. Famous for his zealousness for cultural Ukrainization, Skrypnyk committed suicide when the policy was abandoned.

[394] The suppression of Hebrew went along with fighting Zionism. See Gilboa, Jehoshua A. *A Language Silenced: The Suppression of Hebrew Literature and Culture in the Soviet Union*. Vancouver, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982. On the choice of Yiddish as the language of Soviet Jewish culture, see Shneer, David. *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture: 1918-1930*, pp. 39-59.

[395] Cited in Krutikov, Mikhail. "What is Yiddish Literary Tradition? The Soviet Marxist Moshe Litvakov versus the American Modernist Mikhl Likht," *Prooftexts* 2 (2001), pp. 210, 213.

art academies or theaters of Kurbas[396]. In such conditions, the first problem that Bolsheviks faced was how to find vanguards of cultural Yiddishization and Ukrainization in the province.

2. "No Painters in Communism": Profiles of Cultural Workers in the Province

Despite their many disagreements on issues of culture, Bolsheviks agreed that culture has a purpose. Art for art's sake was seen as an empty maxim; art always serves some ideological goal and the question of its value is the question of which goal it serves. Bolsheviks claimed that, like education, the role of culture is to promote the people's, meaning socialist, cause. In his 1905 *Party Organization and Party Literature*, Lenin wrote:

> [F]or the socialist proletariat, literature cannot be a means of enriching individuals or groups: it cannot, in fact, be an individual undertaking, independent of the common cause of the proletariat. Down with non-partisan writers! Down with literary supermen! Literature must become *part* of the common cause of the proletariat, "a cog and a screw" of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically-conscious vanguard of the entire working class. Literature must become a component of organized, planned and integrated Social-Democratic Party work.[397]

This view destroys the difference between art and political agitation and, correspondingly, between an artist and a propagandist. A Soviet artist, just like a Soviet teacher, is precious for the society only to the extent that he is a good indoctrinator. Since people's enlightenment is to be delivered

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[396] Les Kurbas, alias Oleksandr-Zenon Stepanovych Kurbas (1887-1937), was the greatest Ukrainian theater and movie directors of the Soviet period. He was the forerunner of the avant-garde theater in the 1920s and is known as the founder of *Berezil* theater. On Kurbas and modernist theaters in Ukraine, see Makaryk, Irena. *Shakespeare in the Undiscovered Bourn*, Fowler, Mayhill C. *Beau Monde on Empire's Edge: State and Stage in Soviet Ukraine*. Toronto, Toronto University Press, 2017.

[397] Lenin, Vladimir I. "Party Organization and Party Literature." In *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 10, pp. 44-49. Retrieved from: https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/nov/13.htm. In 1932, Stalin will memorably term writers the "engineers of the human soul." See Westerman, Frank. *Engineers of the Soul: In the Footsteps of Stalin's Writers*. New York, Vintage, 2011, Fitzpatrick, Sheila (ed.) *Cultural Revolution in Russia*.

from the top by the so-called 'cultural workers' (*kul'trabotniki*), Bolsheviks faced the question of who these people would be, in terms of their class and education. To that question there were as many answers as there were influential Bolsheviks but two broad visions, one stemming from the creative intelligentsia, and another from the Party, crystalized already during the Revolution.

Within the intelligentsia, itself an ideologically diverse group, the voice of young radicals, the avant-gardists, became dominant and shaped much of the Soviet cultural discourse in the first part of the 1920s.[398] These artists spoke in favor of a distinct proletarian culture, as opposed to the cultures of the imperial elites and the urban middle classes (*meshchanstvo*). The proletarian culture was to be established with the help of the newest, iconoclastic, art forms and styles, and to steadily nudge the proletariat to engage, by its own forces, in cultural creation. Though known for the works of its futurist poets and suprematist and constructivist painters, designers, and architects, the avant-gardists had a bigger societal impact by inspiring a multitude of amateur cultural movements. Prolekult, the largest federation of independent local cultural societies which arose from this intellectual milieu, dictated the Soviet cultural life at the begging of the 1920s through a network of clubs, studios, and theaters.[399]

While the avant-gardists had the support of some high-ranking Party members (Proletkult was to be financed by Narkompros and it was viewed favorably by a more moderate Lunacharsky), the Central Committee's vision of cultural work was rather different. Prolekult's idea of spontaneously creating a distinct proletarian culture with the means of the avant-garde went against the belief of many high-ranking Bolsheviks that cultural agitation should focus on basic education, improving literacy, and developing good taste (*kul'turnost'*).[400] For Lenin, the avant-gardists'

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[398] Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *The Cultural Front*, pp. 3-5. On the avant-garde in its historical context, see Groys, Boris. *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*. London and New York, Verso, 2011, Ch. 1.

[399] On Proletkult, see Mally, Lynn. *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990, and Dobrenko, Evgeny. *Aesthetics of Alienation: Reassessment of Early Soviet Cultural Theories*. Evantson, Northwestern University Press, 2005, Ch. 2.

[400] See Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *Commissariat of Enlightenment*, Ch. 5, *The Cultural Front*, pp. 19-23. Though part of the conflict can be attributed to personal animosities between different factions of the Communist Party, in particular between Lenin and Alexander Bogdanov and his circle, the conflict was primarily one of the state's bureaucracy and a mass cultural organization seeking autonomy. See Mally, Lynn. *Culture of the Future*, pp. 37-45. On the theoretical disagreements between Lenin and Bogdanov, see Sochor, Zenovia A. *Revolution and Culture: The Bogdanov-Lenin Controversy*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988.

project was a waste of time, an "intellectual fantasy" devoid of a sense of reality and the needs of people for *a* culture, as opposed to none (*beskul'turnost'*).[401] Lenin's view was shaped by Marx and Engels who argued that the artistic talent of a few praised individuals is not a God-given ability but a result of the capitalist division of labor which distributes the artistic success unequally, rewarding the lucky few. "In a communist society," they wrote, "there are no painters but only people who engage in painting among other activities."[402] Bolsheviks took this to imply that while cultural workers must have some education, they certainly need not be members of an intellectual elite, hold a university degree, or be in touch with artistic innovations in the West. Preferably, a cultural worker should come from the people, have a steady job, and do cultural work and political agitation additionally.

While the two visions of culture clashed until the last years of the 1920s, when the Party's view prevailed, in the Ukrainian province it went without saying that cultural work should not be left to the elite. The province did not have its Mayakovsky or Kandinsky, and all major artistic figures were overtaken by cultural centers of the new state, Moscow and St. Petersburg, in the first few years after the Revolution. Gifted Jewish artists from the former Pale, such as Natan Altman[403] and David Shterenberg[404], found their careers outside Ukraine in a short time, attracted by the opportunity to work with Kazimir Malevich, Marc Chagall, Vadim Meller, and other giants of the avant-garde.[405]

Those engaged in cultural work in the province shared little with each other in terms of profession, education, and political affiliation, and were united by their impoverished background. Though some took it as an advantage to work in Zhytomir region, which had the second largest

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[401] See Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *The Cultural Front*, pp. 22-23, Dobrenko, Evgeny. *Aesthetics of Alienation*, pp. 22-23.
[402] Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich. "The German Ideology, Vol. 1." In *Marx Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 5. London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1932. Retrieved from: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch03l.htm.
[403] Natan Altman (1889-1970) was a cubist painter, sculptor, and scenic designer from Vinnytsia, known for his portrait of Anna Akhmatova. For many years he worked as a designer for the Moscow State Jewish Theater (GOSET), having replaced Chagall. During and after the Great Terror, he was mainly a book illustrator.
[404] David Shterenberg (1881-1948) was a painter and graphic from Zhytomir. Due to his acquaintance with Lunacharky, Shterenberg was assigned as the Head of the Narkompros' Department of Fine Arts in 1918-1920, and later taught at Vkhutemas, famous Moscow state art and technical school which bread major avant-garde artists and architects.
[405] Cf. Estraikh, Gennady. *In Harness*, p. 36.

department of the Kultur-Lige after Kyiv and was at the crossroads of different cultures and a popular place for traveling amateur theaters, most people became cultural workers out of life's necessities, struggling with hunger in times of war and its aftermath. From hundreds of Jews working in the Narodichi's Department of the Kultur-Lige in 1921, only one person, a teacher Isaak German, indicated that he was financially secure. German was also one of the oldest members, thirty-two years old.[406] The others were in their early and mid-twenties, and some were teenagers. For example, Basia Katsev, an artist, was eighteen. While Katsev was an independent artist, some of her age-fellows were students of art and other subjects. Being an ideal material for radical ideas, students were generally recruited by the Bolsheviks.[407] In addition, working for Narobraz's Sub-Department of Art meant being exempted from military service. The Red Army could draft cultural workers as soldiers proper (as it had its own cultural workers) only after they were fired from their positions.[408] It goes without saying that for many young men and women this was an important motivation to work for the state's cultural institutions.

However, many members of the Narodichi's Kultur-Lige's art section did not have art education, or for that matter any higher education. They were laymen, home schooled and working as manual laborers or in factories. Exemplifying are the cases of Iosif Rozenman, an oil mill worker and a scenic designer, and Iosif Gichanski, a shoemaker by profession and the Kultur-Lige's artist and a member of its revolutionary committee in his spare time.[409] Such mixture of professions was not unusual in the province and was encouraged, in line with the Party's ideal of a cultural worker as a man of the people.

A better background and job position corresponded to one's better education. The highest-ranking cultural workers were usually teachers and clerks. The border between a teacher and a cultural worker rarely existed in the province. Since both professions had the aim to agitate and since the province lacked skilled cadres, they usually came in package. Many teachers started their cultural activities in schools with drama sections. For example, four out of six teachers of the Fifth

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[406] DAZO, P-2196, inv. 1, f. 5, p. 23.
[407] See Shtakser, Inna. *The Making of Jewish Revolutionaries in the Pale of Settlement*, Ch. 2.
[408] Ibid, p. 16.
[409] DAZO, P-2196, inv. 1, f. 5, p. 23.

Chudniv Jewish School in 1921 were engaged in drama sections.[410] As we will see later, teachers were the main activists of cultural and musical evenings (*literaturno-muzikal'niie vechera*) which celebrated important figures of national cultures. Despite their job as teachers, these people were not necessarily more experienced than other cultural workers. Several teachers of the mentioned school said that in the prerevolutionary times they were "doing some teaching" (*uchitel'stvovanie*), meaning that they were lecturing on a non-permanent basis.[411]

With respect to their political views, Jewish cultural workers were diverse, though the majority of them were engaged in politics, usually in socialist and nationalist parties – Bund, Poale Zion, etc. As a rule, the more a Jew was assimilated, the more was he engaged in politics.[412] Not being a Bolshevik in the early 1920s did not mean the lack of ties to the government's payroll, as long as he was a socialist and kept his mouth shut. A Questionnaire of the Commission on Purge of Soviet Institutions[413], conducted for the Sub-Department of Arts of Volyn's Narobraz at the end of 1919, shows that most cultural workers either did not indicate their political affiliation or that they said that they shared the revolutionary ideals. For example, Petro Abramovich said that he "is not affiliated with any political party."[414] Abramovich would become the rector of the Zhytomir Pedagogical Institute (INO), the largest educational institution in the region, in the next year, during Central Rada's brief governance.[415] Since it is improbable that he could get such a position without at least sympathizing with parliamentary democracy and Ukrainian national independence which the Rada power professed, Ambramovich must have concealed his political convictions in front of the Soviet power. We can assume that the same thing was done by many of Narobraz's Jewish members who, like Iosif Veksman and Esfir' Vainblat, said that "they are not and have never been members of any political party."[416] Golda Maizenberg and Revekka Bilenko said that

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[410] DAZO, Fund P-143, inv. 1, f. 100, pp. 23-33.
[411] Ibid, p. 26.
[412] See Mendelsohn, Ezra. *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Tsarist Russia*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970, Introduction, pp. viii-ix.
[413] The 'purges' were regular reviews of Soviet institutions done by the state security organs in order to fire or reassign the "undesirable". They started from 1919 and typically included a commission questioning the staff and examining their biographies. Unlike the more known purges of the 1930s, the purges in the 1920s were not public and usually did not include violence.
[414] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 2, p. 120.
[415] I discuss INO and its place in Sovietization of provincial Jews in the fifth chapter.
[416] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 3, pp. 3-5.

they agree with the politics of the new power, and again it is likely that such words were the result of fear of being fired rather than of a sincere political conviction.[417]

Bolsheviks of course knew that many artists they were dealing with were not aligned to their cause but, in the absence of better cadres in the province, they did not have a choice other than to employ them. Bolsheviks realized that they could use members of the Kultur-Lige to do cultural work as they envisioned it. While their views on culture sometimes overlapped (for instance, both Bolsheviks and non-Marxist socialist Jews advanced Yiddish secular culture), the choice of some artists was more often purely pragmatic. The unsteady collaboration continued through the 1920s.

3. Attempts of Cultural Cooperation between Jews and Ukrainians

On the 10th of March 1921, the town of Chudniv in Zhytomir region welcomed a literary and musical evening dedicated to the memory of Taras Shevchenko. There was nothing extraordinary about the commemoration of Shevchenko's prophet-like figure, reinvented by the Soviets, who accepted him as a poet of the oppressed peasants.[418] Similar evenings were taking place in other towns and villages of Volyn and Podolia. The unusual thing was a visible presence of Jews and Poles who began to attend such evenings.[419] These celebrations signified the beginning of a period of experimentation in culture, in which Jewish and Ukrainian artists engaged in cross-cultural projects and expressed interest in each other's history and literature. These attempts to cooperate were motivated by the history of shared discrimination and the concrete political moment which allowed artistic freedom.

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[417] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 2, p. 166.
[418] During the Soviet period, the romantic nationalist side of Shevchenko's work was downplayed for its social and anti-Tsarist aspects. Shevchenko's depiction of peasant life and his fight for the abolition of serfdom were particularly stressed, and Shevchenko bore the title 'poet of the impoverished'. On the Soviet appropriation of Shevchenko, see Luckyj, George. "Shevchenko Studies One Century after the Poet's Death," *Slavic Review* 21, no. 4 (1962), pp. 722-735, Grabowicz, George. "Taras Shevchenko: The Making of the National Poet," *Revue des études slaves* 85, no. 3, (2014), pp. 421-439, Yekelchyk, Serhy. *Stalin's Empire of Memory: Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2004, Chs. 1 and 6. On a similar appropriation of Pushkin during Stalin, see Brooks Platt, Jonathan. *Greetings, Pushkin! Stalinist Cultural Politics and The Russian National Bard*. Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016.
[419] DAZO, Fund P-143, inv. 1, f. 21, p. 77.

The collaboration was present to the least extent in visual arts and in theater. As we have seen, the majority of Jewish artists arose from the artistic section of the Kultur-Lige. Despite their admiration for the revival of Ukrainian culture, they were concerned with their own projects, taking the opportunity of Jewish cultural autonomy. Though Zhytomir's Kultur-Lige was the biggest after Kyiv's, the cooperation between its Jewish and Ukrainian artists, if there was any, went into the oblivion. Cooperation between the artists was largely an urban phenomenon and tied to intellectual elites. For example, the celebrated Alexandra Ekster's[420] studio in the attic of her Kyiv apartment was a gathering place for the intellectual *crème de la crème*, painters, poets, writers, and others united by their class as much as their modernist yearnings. Some of Ekster's apprentices, such as Issachar Ber Ryback[421] and Boris Aronson[422], were interested in folk motives, which drew them near the likeminded Ukrainian artists, Heorhiy Narbut[423] and his circle. Artists illustrated books together, decorated theater stages, and designed actors' costumes. Another reason for collaboration was a shared desire to take part in the newest trends of the avant-garde art, from expressionism and cubism to surrealism and futurism. However, the collaboration was brief, exceptional, and restricted to the capital.[424] The same was true of collaboration in professional theater.[425] The

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[420] Alexandra Ekster (1882-1949) was an eclectic avant-garde painter and designer, a representative of cubo-futurism, suprematism and constructivism. Born in Białystok in the Grodno Governorate of the Russian Empire, Ekster spent most of her life in Kyiv, Moscow, and Paris, where she cooperated with artistic greats of her time, including Picasso, Braque, Malevich, Meller, and others.

[421] Issachar Ber Ryback (1897-1935) was a painter, graphic, and sculptor best known for his book illustrations, such as Leib Kvitko's poetry for children, and his cubist representation of shtetl life, especially in his lithographic album *My Destroyed Home*. His later works are done in the School of Paris-style expressionism.

[422] Boris Aronson (1898-1980) was a scenic designer and art historian, a representative of constructivism. Growing in a Kyiv Rabbinical family, Aronson founded the Jewish Art Museum in Kyiv in 1920. He emigrated to Berlin and then to New York in 1926, where he worked for Broadway for the rest of his life, receiving Tony Award six times.

[423] Heorhiy Narbut (1886-1920) was a graphic designer, illustrator, and one of the founders of the Ukrainian Academy of Arts and its rector. He is known for designing the coat of arms, banknotes, postage stamps, and charters inspired by folk motives for the UNR. The only Jewish member of Narbut's circle was Abraham Manievich (1881-1942), a painter known for his expressionist landscape paintings.

[424] Estraikh, Gennady. "The Yiddish Cultur-Lige." In Makaryk, Irene R. and Tkacz, Virlana (eds.). *Modernism in Kiev: Kyiv/Kyïv/Kiev/Kijów/Ḳieṿ: Jubilant Experimentation*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2015, pp. 199-202.

[425] Ironically, the desire of Ukrainian theater director and actor Les Kurbas to have a Jewish actor, Semen Semdor, play Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* was never fulfilled. The play did not get to be premiered since the Red Army overtook Kyiv in February 1919, resulting in the destruction of the theater's property. See Makaryk, Irena. *Shakespeare in the Undiscovered Bourn*, p. 205.

arrival of Bolsheviks, followed by the closure of the Kultur-Lige's central committee in 1920, marked a decline of cooperation between Jewish and Ukrainian artistic elites.

Those who stayed in the province were by and large second-rate artists, musicians, and actors, who were usually at the same time teachers and students of Ukrainian, Jewish, and Polish primary and secondary schools. The cultural communication between nationalities was reduced to musical and literary evenings organized by these people, such as the one devoted to Shevchenko mentioned earlier. Apart from their place in the nationality policy's project of developing national cultures and their clear propagandistic role in spreading socialism, these evenings had an important ethnographic purpose. They were stages for performing folk songs and dances recorded earlier in the villages in the state project to gather information about minorities living in the provinces, which included collecting everyday artifacts (parts of clothes, utensils, etc.) for museum purposes.[426] The Bolsheviks used such evenings as, as it were, "windows to the soul of the folk." They were places where the authorities sought firsthand experience of the Jews and other minorities so as to learn how to deal with them. In that respect, the Soviets were continuing the imperial practice of using ethnographic fieldwork for political purposes.[427]

The cultural evenings usually had three thematic units. The first one was communist, where songs such as *The Internationale* were performed at the beginning of the evening and sometimes repeated at its end. The second unit was devoted to folk songs and dances and the third to recitals of famous poems of national bards, such as Shevchenko. Cultural evenings with Ukrainian folklore and poets were dominant since Ukrainians were the majority in the province and since the Soviet power disproportionately funded Ukrainian cultural organizations, guided by the idea integral to the nativization policy of giving preferential treatment to the "titular nationality" of each republic – Ukrainians in the Ukrainian SSR.[428] Nevertheless, there were evenings dedicated to I. L. Peretz, Sholem Aleichem, Mendele Mocher Sforim and other Yiddish writers as part of the promotion of

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[426] Sometimes folk songs were recorded for the very first time on these evenings. An orchestra's conductor at one of them said that he had managed to record a Ukrainian peasant song *Oh, where are you going, my sweetheart?* (*Oi kudi ti idesh mii milen'kii*). See DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1. f. 1, p. 205.
[427] On the political nature of imperial and Soviet ethnographic expeditions, see Hirsch, Francine. *Empire of Nations*, Veidlinger, Jeffrey (ed.). *Going to the People: Jews and the Ethnographic Impulse*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2016.
[428] Martin, Terry. *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pp. 10, 25, 32.

Jewish culture. For example, the Chudniv Regional Department of Education allowed its Jewish primary and secondary school to use its theater for celebrating Peretz's oeuvre during the spring holidays of 1921.[429] Jewish manifestations would sometimes receive the support not only from the federal but the state levels as well. In 1927, Ekaterinburg's newspaper *Ural'skii Rabochii* described a state-wide celebration of the 10th anniversary of Sforim's death and the importance of his plays for Soviet art in all towns where Jews were the majority.[430]

A visible presence of Jewish and Polish audiences at Ukrainian cultural evenings was not matched by a similar presence of Ukrainians at cultural evenings of these minorities. As a majority backed by the state, Ukrainians naturally used the opportunity to impose their culture on Jews and Poles. Another reason for the lack of reciprocity was practical. Yiddish writers were less versatile than Ukrainian writers. While Jews could identify with the contents of poems of Ukrainian poets, whose motives were the oppression and tough life during the Tsarist times, Ukrainians could show interest in Yiddish writers but for them to identify with the shtetl life was too far of a stretch.

The pattern was the same in the case of presenters. The thin line between Ukrainians and Jews working together and the former exercising cultural dominance on the latter is noticeable in the fact that Jews frequently performed Ukrainian folk dances and recited poems in Ukrainian but that it was rare for the same to happen the other way around. On a cultural evening in Chudniv in 1921, students of a Jewish school sang Ukrainian folk songs *Water flows from a maple tree* (*Teche voda z-pid iavora*) and *No point in being sad* (*Iak maiu ia zhuritisia*). In Novochudnivs'ka school in Chudniv in the same year, Jewish children celebrated the anniversary of Shevchenko's death by performing Ukrainian peasant songs *Hey, Ukrainians* (*Gei Vkraiintsi*), *Oh, a girl walked along the river bank* (*Oi khodila divchina berizhkom*), *A man was ploughing along the road* (*Ta gorav cholovik vkrai dorogi*), and *Mountain on the other side* (*U toi bik gora*). Jewish children were reciting poetry with a strong Ukrainian national message, such as Shevchenko's *Cossacks' Fate* (*Kozats'ka dolia*), Lesya Ukrainka's *Mournful March* (*Zhalibnii marsh*), and Volodymyr Samiilenko's *Our Glorious Ukraine* (*Nasha Slavna Ukraiina*). At the opening of the second part of the evening and at its end, the children's choir performed the unofficial Ukrainian anthem, *Ukraine Has Not Yet Died* (*Shche ne vmerla Ukraina*).[431] Its lyrics were considered unacceptably

[429] DAZO, Fund P-143 (5185), inv. 1, f. 20, p. 117.
[430] TsDAVO, Fund 3332, inv. 1, f. 10, p. 5.
[431] DAZO, Fund P-143, inv. 1, f. 21, p. 18.

nationalistic for it to become the anthem of Ukrainian SSR with the republic's inception in the next year. Bolsheviks would soon forbid its public performance but the song's earlier performance is telling of the fact that acts in the spirit of cultural Sovietization started earlier than the promulgation of korenizatsiia and that they were very open in the expression of national pride.

The extent to which the Jews were voluntarily embracing Ukrainian culture is not known. We may suppose that they were seeking a common ground with Ukrainians by engaging with the culture of their closest neighbor who was still their largest Other. It is also plausible that they could relate to the words of Ukrainian poets speaking of tsarist oppression and of love for their common homeland. On the mentioned cultural evening in Chudniv, Jewish students recited Shevchenko's poems in Ukrainian, including *The Dream* (*Son*), *Testament* (*Zapovit*), *I Care Not if it's in Ukraine* (*Meni odnakovo, chi budu*), *Perebendia*, and others.[432] Each of these poems celebrates Ukrainian national specificity, longing for national liberation and justice in a typical romantic fashion. *The Dream* satirizes tsar Nicholas I, his wife Alexandra Feodorovna, the autocracy, and the nobility's morals. *Testament* describes Shevchenko's last wish to be buried in Ukraine and urges Ukrainians to fight for freedom, while picturesquely describing the Dnieper's landscape. One of Shevchenko's prison poems, *I Care Not if it's in Ukraine* expresses the poet's preference for the future of Ukraine over his own. *Perebendia* is an allegory of Ukrainian history through the sad story of Perebendia, a homeless blind kobzar (itinerate bard). It is not difficult to see how a Jewish student, born in a shtetl, remembering oppression by the same regime and cherishing hopes for freedom in the new state, could identify with themes of Shevchenko's poetry. Therefore, it would be unfair to describe these evenings as a deliberate project in cultural Ukrainization of Jews of the province.

Moreover, Ukrainians were sometimes sensitive to cultural distinctiveness of their Jewish colleagues. Jewish presenters were assigned to recite Ukrainian poems referring to Jewish history or culture. At the evening in Novochudnivs'ka school, a Jewish student recited Shevchenko's *Ossii* (*Hosea*), which takes the events and message of the Book of Hosea, one of the books of the Hebrew Bible describing God's agony and love towards people of Israel in times of its apostasy, to draw analogies with history and the fate of Ukrainians. The Book of Hosea and the personality of Hosea the prophet were well known to a Jew educated in cheder or Talmud-Torah. The event was genuinely multicultural, as the recital was followed by lectures on "Shevchenko's Life and

[432] DAZO, Fund P-143 (5185), inv. 1, f. 115, p. 77.

Oeuvre", first by a Ukrainian teacher Gerasimchyk in Ukrainian and then by a Jewish teacher Roitman in Yiddish. After the recital of Shevchenko's poems in Ukrainian by several Polish students, Jewish students Kats Zislia and Rakhil Kagan recited Shevchenko's poems in Yiddish.[433]

Yiddish translation of Ukrainian writers was a part of literary endeavors which, together with the cultural evenings, received state support in the 1920s in the aim of encouraging cultural production and exchange in national languages. Collections of Ukrainian poetry were released in Yiddish, and Jewish authors translated Shevchenko, Franko, Mykhailo Kotsiubynsky,[434] and other known Ukrainian writers, into Yiddish. Plans for publishing these works also existed. For example, in 1920, the Department of Narobraz of the Volyn region planned to publish Ukrainian translation of selected poems of four canonical Yiddish writers, Peretz, Aleichem, David Hofshteyn,[435] and Sholem Asch,[436] and to print each in a booklet form in several thousand copies. The series would include selected poems of Shevchenko, Franko, and Oleksandr Oles[437] as well. Works of Yiddish writers were listed under the section 'ingenious fiction in translation' (*originalnaia perevodnaia belletristika*), showing that the editors valued them highly or at least that they wanted to express that judgment publicly.[438] It is not clear whether this plan was realized and, if so, to what extent it was successful, but the state's intent to function as a bridge between the two cultures is undeniable.

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[433] DAZO, Fund P-143 (5185), inv. 1, f. 115, p. 78.

[434] Mykhailo Kotsiubynsky (1864-1913) was an impressionist and modernist prose writer, best known for his novellas *Fata Morgana*, about the social conflicts in the Ukrainian village, and *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (*Tini zabutykh predkiv*), about the lives of Hutsuls. An example of appreciation of Kotsiubynsky by Jewish authors in the 1920s is E. Fininberg's article in *Proletarishe Fon* no. 4 (1928), pp. 11-12. Valuing Kotsiubynsky for his realism and revolutionary democracy, Bolsheviks opened his museums in his birthplace Vinnytsia in 1927, and in Chernihiv in 1938. Several of Kotsiubynsky's novellas were turned into popular Soviet movies in the later decades.

[435] David Hofshtein (1889-1952) was a modernist poet and translator from Korotýšiv in Zhytomir region. Hofshtein welcomed the October Revolution and during 1922-1924 served as a co-editor of the Moscow Yiddish monthly *Der shtrom*. The collection of his poetry, *Sorrow* (*Troyer*), depicting Jewish pogroms during the Civil War, was illustrated by Chagall. Hofshtein's project of translating Shevchenko to Yiddish is discussed below.

[436] Sholem Asch (1880-1957) was a novelist, dramatist, and essayist from Kutno, Congress Poland. Ash's early work portrays traditional life of Eastern European Jewry and hardships of their history. His later work engages with bolder themes, especially *The God of Vengeance* (*Got fun nekome*), a controversial play about a Jewish brothel owner whose daughter engages in a lesbian relationship with one of the prostitutes.

[437] Oleksandr Oles, born Kandyba, (1878-1944) was a symbolist writer and poet, and father of a more notable poet and nationalist leader Oleh Olzhych (1907-1944). Oles emigrated after the October Revolution and lived in different cities of Central Europe, eventually settling and dying in Prague.

[438] Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 1, p.17.

Among the individual projects of translating Ukrainian poetry into Yiddish the most notable is that of Yiddish poet from Zhytomir region, David Hofshtein, who translated selected works of Shevchenko, Franko, and Ukrainka. Though the majority of Hofshtein's translations appeared in the 1930s, they are illustrative of engagements of Yiddish literary figures with Ukrainian culture as a means of reflection on their own culture already in the 1920s. Jewish relation to Shevchenko and reception of his work were more complex than those to Franko, who was seen among the Jews as a 'friend of Yiddish literature' for his interest in Jewish folklore and Yiddish translations.[439] Shevchenko's criticism of Russian chauvinism and tsarist autocracy were appealing to Jewish elites, who drew parallels with the experience of their own people,[440] but the anti-Semitic moments in his poetry were an obstacle to his acceptance among a wider Jewish readership. While the anti-Semitic and stereotypical character of Shevchenko's satirical descriptions of his Jewish characters (as greedy tavern-keepers, for example) and his occasional usage of the offensive term 'Zhid' for 'Jew', must be considered in their historical context,[441] for Hofshtein, who was not a Shevchenko scholar, they raised genuine problems of translation and commentary. The most controversial was *Haidamaki*, Shevchenko's poem immortalizing the Koliyivshchyna, a rebellion of Cossacks and peasants, the haidamakas, against the nobility, serfdom, and Poles in the Right-bank Ukraine part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The rebels were the culprits of the Massacre of Uman in 1768, in which tens of thousands of Jews, Catholics, and Uniates were slaughtered. In *Haidamaki*, the massacre receives ambivalent treatment, as Shevchenko switches from its detailed description to giving a moral commentary

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[439] Lesya Ukrainka's reception was similarly positive. See Estraikh, Gennady. The Yiddish Cultur-Lige. In Makaryk, Irene Rima and Tkacz, Virlana (eds.). *Modernism in Kiev*, p. 201. On Jewish themes in Franko's works, see Grabowitz, George. "Ivan Franko and the Literary Depiction of Jews. Parsing the Contexts." In Woldan, Alois and Terpitz, Olaf (eds.). *Ivan Franko und die jüdische Frage in Galizien*. Vienna, Vienna University Press, 2016, pp. 59-91. However, in his politics, Franko advocated restrictions for the Jews. See Hrytsak, Yaroslav. A Strange Case of Antisemitism: Ivan Franko and the Jewish Issue. In Bartov, Omer and Weitz, Eric D. (eds.), *Shatterzone of Empires*, pp. 228-242.

[440] Shevchenko's literary genius was highly regarded by Yiddish writers Abraham Reizen and Sholem Aleichem. Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Odessa's Zionist leader, emphasized the political legacy of Shevchenko for Ukrainian and Jewish national liberation. On Shevchenko's influence on Ukrainian national movements, Jewish intellectuals, and Ukrainian-Jewish artistic cooperation, see "Taras Shevchenko: Ukrainian Nationalism, Poetry and the Jews", Conference at *YIVO Institute of Jewish Research*, September 30th, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YvrVva2Or (accessed December 24th, 2018).

[441] Ibid. Recent scholarship stresses Shevchenko's altruistic acts to his Jewish neighbors and the fact that he changed the term 'Zhid' for 'Ievrei' in some of his works.

about its futility for the haidamakas' cause. Throughout the piece, Jews are portrayed as agents of Polish landowners and the rebels who murder them as Ukrainian national heroes. In spite of translating parts of *Haidamaki*, Hofshtein eventually decided to exclude it from the collection of the poet's works he translated. Hofshtein also minimized mentioning Jews in any way when that was possible and, when it was not, he softened the anti-Semitic 'Zhid' by translating it with a neutral Yiddish 'Yid'.[442]

However, Hofshtein's overall relation to Shevchenko is that of appreciation and, what is more, identification as a figure whose work tells as much about the Jewish history and fate as about Ukrainian. In his article on Shevchenko, Hofshtein writes that the poet "dedicated his multifaceted artistic talent in service of the struggle for freedom from oppression, a point from which he never diverged."[443] Hofshtein and his contemporaries took these words as a paragon of their role among the Jewish masses. As Amelia Glaser notes, Hofshtein's translations of Shevchenko "exemplify a creative appropriation of a neighboring culture in order to express contemporary concerns about Jewish culture."[444] Hofshein's, then, are not simple translations but personal expressions about the course of Jewish past, present, and future. The translations allowed Hofshtein to apprise his Jewish readers not only about the light and dark sides of their shared past with Ukrainians but about their national liberation and emancipation in the new state by following the steps of their most numerous neighbor.

4. Yiddish Theaters' Struggle for Survival and Conflicts over the Language of Culture

These hopes, despite their honesty, remained unfulfilled. The ideal of Jewish and Ukrainian artists working together in the province was compromised of conflicting interests and ideologies, and structural inadequacies. In this section, I discuss how Jewish cultural workers wrestled with the Soviet institutions in the early 1920s using the example of Yiddish theaters.

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[442] Glaser, Amelia M. "Jewish Alienation Through a Ukrainian Looking Glass: Dovid Hofshteyn's Translations of Taras Shevchenko," *Prooftexts* 36, 1-2, (2017), p. 100.
[443] Hofshteyn, D. "Taras Shevchenko." *Proletarische fon* no. 2, (March, 1928), pp. 13-14.
[444] Glaser, Amelia M. "Jewish Alienation Through a Ukrainian Looking Glass", p. 83ff.

At the end of August 1920, an amateur Jewish troupe in Chudniv made a plea to the Volyn's Department of Peoples' Education (Narobraz) to be given a hall for staging Jacob Gordin's *The Wild Man* (*Der vilder mensh*). Gordin (1853-1909), dubbed "the Jewish Ibsen," was considered at the turn of the century a major Jewish playwright for his realist innovations in the Yiddish theater. Given the popularity of his plays in Yiddish theaters across Europe, the choice of staging *The Wild Man* was not unusual, especially considering the play's message and content – an overt criticism of Jewish bourgeoisie through a story of a wealthy widowed merchant's family disintegration after bringing home a much younger wife, a cabaret singer and an actress. What was unusual is the troupe's reason to write to the local council of Narobraz, justifying their appeal by a desire to spend the revenue on building a monument to their fallen comrade and the play's leading actor, Sh. Khait, adding:

> Knowing Narobraz's decision that private clubs are not allowed to use the theater, we ask you to make an exception, since we have already staged the play two times with the participation of the mentioned comrade. Chudniv's public can verify its artistic quality.[445]

Narobraz agreed to provide the space for the performance under the conditions that a part of the revenue would be directed to the renovation of the hall and that the number of tickets sold would be fixed.[446] The story gives a glimpse to the state of amateur Yiddish theater in the province in the early years of the Soviet power. There is no specification about the circumstances in which Khait was killed—private enmities, the Civil War, pogroms—and it might as well be that he was alive or even that he did not exist. What is important is that the troupe appealled to the story of a murdered colleague asking for funding from a state institution at the time when independent amateur theaters were meant to be promoted by the state as important sites of cultural, educational, and political activities. Due to their direct connection to people (the actors and the audience were

[445] DAZO, Fund P-142 (5123), inv. 1, f. 10, pp. 1-2.
[446] Ibid, p. 3.

usually friends, neighbors, and relatives[447]), the unprivileged background of its actors, and the social dramas they staged, the amateur theaters were seen as important propagandistic tools in the hand of the state.[448]

Moreover, independent amateur theaters were the only Jewish theaters.[449] Though in other Soviet republics these Yiddish theaters were incorporated into state theaters by 1923,[450] in Ukraine they operated much longer, especially in the province. In 1925, executives of Narkompros wrote to Ukrainian regional authorities, including those of Volyn and Podolia, about the necessity of the Moscow State Jewish Theater's (GOSET) work in Ukraine because "there is not even a single Jewish theater in Ukraine."[451] What they meant is that no Jewish state theater existed; the existence of numerous amateur theaters is indisputable. Therefore, despite the state's goal to promote such theaters during the Civil War and in the first years of the NEP, the provincial reality was different. We can talk about the state promotion of Jewish theater only in the mid-1920s and only through GOSET, which was rather popular in the province. Indeed, it might have been more popular in the province than in Moscow or Kyiv because the provincial Jews could appreciate its repertoire more than by then largely assimilated city dwellers.[452] However, even GOSET encountered institutional struggles with Ukrainian authorities while in 1925 visiting Vinnytsia, Zhytomir, and Berdychiv,

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[447] In 1920, the Chudniv Yiddish theater complained to regional Narobraz on rising nepotism. DAZO, Fund P-142 (5123), inv. 1, f. 10, p. 20.
[448] See Mally, Lynn. *Revolutionary Acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet State, 1917-1938*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2000, Ch. 1.
[449] Apart from amateur Yiddish theaters, there were amateur Hebrew theaters, such as Habimah, which was established in Moscow in 1918, though its origins can be traced to independent theaters in Białstok, Vilna, and Warsaw at the turn of the century. Habimah functioned under the auspices of Moscow Art Theater. Since it performed before audiences who did not understand Hebrew, Habimah developed a unique modernist nonverbal theatrical language. Its existence was an object of political debates in the the high circles of the Party. Stalin defended it in 1920 and it was Evsektsiia which accused it of being "bourgeois" and "reactionary" and contributed to its closure in 1928. Habimah continued to work abroad, becoming the national theater of Yishuv in Palestine, and later of Israel. On the history of Habimah, see Ivanov, Vladislav. *Russkie sezony teatra "Gabima"*. Moscow, APT, 1999, and his "Habimah." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Habimah (accessed January 4th, 2019).
[450] Shternshis, Anna. *Soviet and Kosher*, p. 72.
[451] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 5, f. 113, p. 8.
[452] Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *The Moscow State Jewish Theater: Jewish Culture on the Soviet Stage*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006, p. 57, Shternshis, Anna. *Soviet and Kosher*, p. 72.

among other places. The authorities refused to provide accommodation for more than 70 actors, to give discounts on railways, and to wave taxes on the performances' revenue.[453]

In the winter of 1919, half a year before the Chudniv episode, the Yiddish theater in the province was in even worse condition as its very existence was under threat. Yiddish theaters were moving with the Red Army, staging several performances a day for the soldiers. Bolsheviks had to retreat from Zhytomir region and Narobraz decided to fire all Jewish troupes serving in its Department of Arts. The actors appealed to their importance in the revolutionary struggle and their popularity among the Jewish population, claiming that actors from the capital could not satisfy the demands of locals and that the Yiddish theater would pay itself off only if it could be allowed a few performances a week in one of two regional theaters. That they asked for a space in an institution reserved for theater performances shows that amateur Yiddish theaters were not just working in chaotic conditions but were themselves chaotic, self-made, and spontaneous organizations. These theaters were compelled to stage plays in local taverns, clubs, factories, schools, basements, or out in the open with little or no sets and scenery.[454] The actors' report ends with a cry for help for otherwise "the artists fired from the state service will fight for pieces of bread."[455]

Moreover, the authorities often showed gross carelessness towards actors and musicians of Yiddish theaters. An episode from 1920 in the town of Cherniakhov, in the north of Zhytomir region, illustrates this well. A senior instructor Gaidai reported to the executive of Narobraz that a group of young musicians from a choir[456] complained of striking negligence from state officials who failed to attend the performance and did not provide the conditions for its execution or a residence for its performers.[457] Gaidai writes that "nothing was prepared, musicians got soaked under the rain and slept in school, warming themselves with tea thanks to a local teacher, comrade

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[453] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 5, f. 113, pp. 8, 18.
[454] Mally, Lynn. *Revolutionary Acts*, p. 11, Shternshis, Anna. *Soviet and Kosher*, p. 73.
[455] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 3, p. 88.
[456] Beside actors, musicians were regular amateur theater personnel in the 1920s. See Fowler, Mayhill C. *Beau Monde on Empire's Edge*, pp. 47-48.
[457] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 1, p. 221.

Alexandrova." The performance eventually took place in the school, after which the musicians were assigned to sleep in houses of the locals who "did not very cordially greet them."[458]

There were other reasons for the destitute nature of the Yiddish theater, from conditions of war to nationalization of its property. As late as in 1928, the theater was in a dilemma regarding whether to spend money to acquire space for performances or to pay their large debts and their actors' high income taxes.[459] Moreover, theatres' already tight budgets were squeezed to the last kopek by their serving as fundraising agencies of state institutions. For example, on September 10th 1920, the Chudniv Jewish Society of Enlightenment staged a play to fundraise the local fire department. [460] Another source mentions a theater's fundraising activity for the police. [461] Ironically, the theater financed the state and not the other way around.

Besides financial difficulties, Yiddish theater had a problem of communication with state cultural institutions whose apparatuses in the early 1920s were not fully developed. In 1920, the Department of Arts of Narobraz in Zhytomir region reported that the only instruction they had about how to conduct cultural work was the Unified Labor School's statute with Lunacharsky's commentary, and that the communication with the All-Ukrainian Department of Arts in Kyiv was impossible because the Department was in the early stages of its formation.[462] In addition, Yiddish theaters were not the only Jewish organizations competing for theater space. Other cultural groups and political organizations used it for its activities. Even Zionists, such as Iugend Poalei Zion, the youth wing of the Jewish Communist Labor Party, the party that aligned and later merged with the RCP(b), got to use the Chudniv's theater in 1921 for a lecture on the tasks of Jewish communist youth.[463]

The most important institutional infighting in which Yiddish theaters found themselves was between parallel structures of cultural organizations and bureaucracies. Prolekult wanted to preserve its artistic autonomy but it financially depended on Narkompros, which in turn wanted to

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[458] Ibid.
[459] TSDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 6, f. 1376, p. 4.
[460] DAZO, Fund P-142 (5123), inv. 1, f. 10, p. 6.
[461] DAZO, Fund P-28, inv. 1, f. 18, p. 7.
[462] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 3, p. 104. A part of the Unified Labor School's polytechnic education was reserved to developing a sense of culture, where what is meant by 'culture' changed over time and Lunacharsky's own progression on the subject. See Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *Commissariat of Enlightenment*, Ch. 1.
[463] DAZO, Fund P-143, inv. 1, f. 20, p. 19.

impose central control and demanded coordination of Prolekult's network of local groups knowing that they enjoy popularity among the locals. Finally, as explained before, the conflicts were about different visions of the role of culture in the Soviet society.

In addition, parts of the state bureaucracy were in conflict with the Party since the cultural agitation was divided between Agitprop, the Party's division of propaganda (Agitprosvet being its local bodies), and Glavpolitprosvet, Narkompros' section of political education (Politprosvet being its local bodies).[464] This influenced the lives of artists in the province. For example, in 1919, higher authorities wrote to local Narobraz of Zhytomir, Ovruch, and Novohrad-Volynskyi, instructing their Politprosvet's sections of art propaganda to get rid of "parallelism", meaning the duplication of services by competing institutions.[465] It is likely that they referred to the conflict with the Party's bureaucracy. In fact, a year later, the Sub-Department of Art of Volynian Narobraz addressed the higher authorities on a connected note accusing Agitprosvet for taking its "outstanding actors and musicians" and "the best Russian troupe." The efforts to work together failed, Narobraz executives lamented, as Agitprosvet was endowed with a larger budget which allowed it to promise the artists better working conditions, timely payment of wages, food rations, and exemption from military service. The Volynian Sub-Department of Art was reduced to an art-bureau and its personnel to ten people.[466] While Narkompros' situation in the province would eventually improve, competitions with the Party over artists would remain the state's deep-seated problem.

Yiddish provincial theaters had to strive for recognition against amateur theaters of other nationalities, professional state theaters, agitprop theaters, and parallel and conflicting bureaucratic and political structures. Some Proletkult theaters existed even after 1921, when the organization was incorporated into Narkompros, with agitprop theaters inheriting some of its methods, such as direct connection with the people, throughout the decade. The situation was even more complicated by the fact that amateur theaters of different nationalities in the province were at times subjected to different state institutions and political and professional organizations. In 1920 in Zhytomir region, a Russian theater was under the jurisdiction of Pogub, Politprosvet Department

[464] Mally, Lynn. *Culture of the Future*, p. 196.
[465] DAZO, Fund, P-31, inv. 1, f. 1, p. 9.
[466] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 3, pp. 103-104.

of Gubernial Military Commissariat, a Ukrainian theater under regional Narobraz, and a Yiddish theater under Sovprof, the Council of Trade Unions.[467] The state of Yiddish theaters depended on the political footing of the institution to which they were accountable.

In such an institutional disarray, Yiddish theaters were surviving partly by adopting a popular format of the time. They performed the 'living newspaper' (*zhivaia gazeta*, *lebedike tsaytung*), an experimental form of agitprop theater, in which actors and Soviet officials read the newspapers and other factual information about current political events on stage. The living newspaper was well received among the locals, who used the opportunity to inquire about the implications of the new polices on their lives.[468] Given the spirit of the time, Yiddish theaters also staged theatrical trials for propaganda purposes. These mock trials tried to convince the audience of the guilt of the accused and the audience was sometimes invited to give its verdict. The accused could be not only a detested political figure or ideology but a traditional Jewish religious and social institution, such as synagogue, yeshiva, etc.[469]

The prevalence of these formats in the Ukrainian province remains an open question. Since Yiddish theaters did not receive much state funding and had little support from the Party or private organizations and individuals, it is not unreasonable to assume that the main incentive for their work was practical rather than political. Provincial theaters were less concerned with agitation and experimenting with new art forms and more with earning a living by competing for audience with other theaters. In the region's multicultural surrounding, virtually the only way to get the non-Jewish population to attend a Yiddish theater was for it to stage plays in Russian, the region's lingua franca. Such was the reasoning behind some amateur Yiddish theaters which day after day staged the Russian repertoire, often at the expense of Yiddish plays. For example, in 1920 in Chudniv, a Yiddish theater, staged in Russian: Leonid Andreyev's[470] *Fire Heals* (*Ignis sanat* or *Savva*), Osip Dymov's [471] *The Singer of his own Sadness* (*Pevec Svoei Pechali*), Pierre

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[467] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 1, p. 115.
[468] Shternshis, Anna. *Soviet and Kosher*, pp. 78-81.
[469] Ibid, p. 93f.
[470] Leonid Andreyev (1871-1919) was a Russian expressionist playwright and writer, best known in the West for his short stories *The Seven Who Were Hanged* (*Rasskaz o semi poveshennih*) and *The Red Laugh* (*Krasnii smeh*), and for his symbolist dramas.
[471] Osip Dymov (1878-1969), the pseudonym for Yosif Perelman, was a playwright and writer, brother of a Soviet popular science writer Yakov Perelman. Born in Białystok, Dymov lived most of his life in the United States were he

Zaccone's[472] *The Mansards of Paris* (*V Mansardah Parizha*), Lord Byron's *Cain* (*Kain*), and Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector* (*Revizor*).[473]

Plays in Russian language were a choice of Yiddish theaters also because they were popular among the provincial Jews. The tastes of these people were formed in the imperial custom which placed the value of the Russian theater over any other and, through state censorship and popular prejudice, belittled the Yiddish theater as suitable only for cheap entertainment. The ingeniousness of Aleichem, Peretz, Sforim and other classical Yiddish writers who brought refined taste to the Yiddish theater could not alter the popular impression that Russian plays were for the treatment of serious issues and Yiddish plays for sentimental love stories and farce overnight.[474] Then there were the problems of the enormity of the Russian classical repertoire and the matter of translating it into Yiddish. The Russian repertoire comprised hundreds if not thousands of plays, to which should be added an abundance of Western European plays by that time translated in Russian but not in Yiddish. Yiddish theaters could not rely only on Yiddish plays and to translate Russian plays into Yiddish was neither possible nor desirable, since the majority of Jews who frequented the theater knew Russian and were already accustomed to seeing the plays staged in the original.

The practice of staging Russian plays had an unintended subversive effect at the time of the nativization policy. In the eyes of Ukrainian authorities, staging Russian plays raised suspicion of anti-revolutionary activities. Performances in Russian were contentious not only because they obstructed the state's project to foster minority languages but its project to enable the new, Soviet, culture to put down roots in those languages. Amateur theaters worked at different urban environments and, for the Jews, they were the places of social cohesion at the time of the campaign

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made contributions to Yiddish theater. His melodrama *The Singer of his own Sadness* deals with the unrequited love of a young Jewish violinist. It was originally written in Russian and later translated in Yiddish, but the Chudniv theater staged the original version.

[472] Pierre Zaccone (1817-1895) was a French popular writer, known for his serialized novels. He was widely translated and read in Russia in the late 19th century.

[473] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 3, p. 124.

[474] See Veidlinger, Jeffrey. *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire*, pp. 181-182, Caplan, Debra. *Yiddish Empire*, pp. 20-23.

against synagogues.[475] Soviet culture could not be conveyed in Yiddish when a nominally Yiddish theater staged most of its plays in Russian. The same was true of the culture in Ukrainian.[476]

For that reason, some authorities started a severe implementation of the nativization policy. The language of state cultural institutions in Ukraine was to be Ukrainian, and all documents and policies concerning cultural activities were to be issued only in Ukrainian, as a directive of Volyn's Narobraz from 1920 makes it clear.[477] However, to get independent theaters to conform to this rule was much more difficult. An incident from Chudniv in the same year is indicative of the situation. The conflict occurred between Narobraz and a Russian troupe under its jurisdiction, consisting mostly of Jews and Ukrainians. Narobraz wanted the troupe to cease staging Russian plays and to split into Ukrainian and Yiddish troupes. It threatened to fire the artists and held them accountable for sabotaging the conversion. The artists complained of "chauvinism and forceful Ukrainization." The head of the troupe proposed to dissolve it altogether to which Narobraz replied with an offer of a pay raise provided that he restructured the troupe to perform in Ukrainian. The troupe's fate is unknown but Narobraz's strong language in the conclusion of its pronouncement gives a clue:

> Narobraz cannot go along with the tendencies of the troupe to become exclusively Russian. In the absence of Ukrainian and Jewish troupes, the Russian troupe is an unnecessary luxury in our town. It serves an insignificant number of Russians and mainly the Russified petty bourgeoisie (*meshchanstvo*) and the so called Chudniv aristocracy.[478]

Narobraz appeals here to the official understanding of the nativization policy according to which cultural rights should be granted to minorities in proportion to their presence in a given locality.[479] Since the majority of Chudniv's inhabitants were Jews and Ukrainians, a Russian troupe was a

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[475] Shternshis, Anna. *Soviet and Kosher*, pp. 70-71. As Veidlinger puts it, the Yiddish theater was "the temple of art with the actors as its priests". See his *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire*, p. 165.
[476] This not to say that a theater in Ukrainian would necessarily transmit the Soviet message. For example, Ukrainian writer and playwright Mykola Kulish and his colleagues understood the nativization policy as a platform for promoting the Ukrainian ethno-national culture devoid of Soviet content. See Fowler, Mayhill C. "Mikhail Bulgakov, Mykola Kulish, and Soviet Theater: How Internal Transnationalism Remade Center and Periphery," *Kritika: Exploration in Russian and Eurasian History* 16, no. 2 (2015), pp. 282-283.
[477] DAZO, Fund P-142, inv. 1, f. 10, p. 13.
[478] DAZO, Fund P-143 (5185), inv. 1, f. 115, p. 119.
[479] Pinkus, Benjamin. *The Jews of the Soviet Union*, p. 55, Martin, Terry. *The Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 100.

waste of resources. However, the real reason behind Narobraz's objection to the troupe is not economical, as seen from the last sentence. The authorities were visibly afraid of the popularity of the Russian troupe. They were aware that the theater remained a thing of the well off and educated, who they refer to with a derogatory *meshchanstvo*. In the eyes of Narobraz's executives, the people attending the Russian theater were not merely class enemies but imperial Russificationists, enemies of Ukrainian culture, which is why they are disdainfully described as "the so called" aristocracy.

Local theatres coerced to abandon the Russian language were unwilling and in many cases unable to do so. The Russian classics constituted a significant part of their repertoire. Translating Russian and Western European plays into Ukrainian or Yiddish and finding the actors to perform them required time and money. Disagreements and conflicts over the language of culture endured throughout the decade, stalling the nativization policy.

Conclusion

Jewish and Ukrainian cultures experienced an unprecedented development in the early 1920s, and the role of the nativization policy, which sponsored the cultures of nationalities oppressed by the tsarist regime, was pivotal in it. Bolsheviks recruited a diverse group of people as cultural workers, who worked as both teachers and actors. Against the history of mutual animosities, Ukrainians and Jews attempted to create common projects through cultural evenings, translations of each others' writers, etc. The shortage of cadres and their poor education hampered the flourishing of Soviet culture in the province. Resistance to restructuring the theater system in Ukrainian and Yiddish is but one among many examples. The reasons were the legacy of Russian and its perception in the popular imagination as the language of "high culture," parallelism of institutions regulating the cultural production, and purely practical problems, such as competition for audience, costly and time-consuming translation and staging of plays, etc.

On August 1st 1928, VUTSIK and Sovnarkom of USSR issued a decree on developing Ukrainian language and ensuring the equality of Russian and Ukrainian cultures in Ukraine. The decree states the factual situation and gives prescriptions on improving it. Russian prevailed as the language of educational and cultural institutions and the authorities blamed the weak development

of Ukrainian culture. Rather than recommending to curtail Russian, the authorities introduced the requirement for all public servants in Ukraine to master it, claiming that Ukrainian culture and language would gradually develop by "getting to known the highly developed Russian culture which has world importance."[480]

The astonishing optimism of these words and the reconciliatory tone in which the decree is written are telling of the officials' cynicism towards the nativization policy and perhaps even of their subversion of it. Having in mind the troubles of enforcing Ukrainian and Yiddish as languages of culture, one might wonder whether the cultural side of Ukrainization and Yiddishization policies took a footing in Ukraine before being officially replaced by the policy of open Russification in the mid-1930s. From what I have argued, the negative answer emerges as true.[481]

[480] DAZO, Fund P-166, inv. 8, f. 1.
[481] Cf. Pinkus, Benjamin. *The Jews of the Soviet Union*, p. 55, Martin, Terry. *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pp. 75-76, 98-99.

Chapter 5

The Zhytomir Pedagogical Institute (INO): A Case Study of Failed Sovietization

Introduction

This chapter presents a case study of Sovietization in Zhytomir region: The Zhytomir Pedagogical Institute (*Institut narodnogo obrazovaniia*, *Institut narodnoii osviti*, or The Institute of People's Education, henceforth INO). I examine INO as an independent universe, in its social, political, and economic respects, and as a representative case of the nativization policy in the province. Through the story of INO, I show which processes accompanied establishing the Soviet power in Zhytomir region, which agents were responsible for making the New Soviet Man, and how the population responded to the changes. I reach conclusions about Sovietization in the Ukrainian province more generally, arguing that INO is a paradigmatic case of failed nativization policy in some of its main aims. Though intended to foster national minority rights through quotas and other affirmative action measures and to transform all nationalities in the region into Soviet citizens, INO became a battlefield of conflicting ideologies, where each nationality boosted its own national project, often at the expense of others.

Zhytomir region, in which INO was located, was a place of conflicting nationalistic drives in the early 1920s. Russians wanted to keep the region as it was in the imperial times – with Russian schools, institutions, and culture. Ukrainians formed cultural organizations, Ukrainian-language schools, libraries, discussion clubs, and small publishing houses. Sporting organizations were also created to support a group identity. These drives were at times funded by money from Poland, intending to counter Russian irredentism. Part of the Polish community left the region due to the Polish-Soviet war. The Jewish community, formerly oppressed by the tsarist regime, found itself

under the new policy by which Bolsheviks intended to foster Ukrainization of institutions of the region. The Hassidic community, once sizable, emigrated in large numbers in response to pogroms and their desire to remain a closed and highly traditional group. Other Jews were faced with a dilemma: to stay under the Soviet rule where they had to trade their religious rights for their national rights or to emigrate to nearby Poland, where they could preserve their religious rights at the expense of living under state anti-Semitism. Many of the problems owing to conflicting claims of different ethnic groups in the Imperial era continued into the Soviet period.

Education was both the battlefield and the weapon in this conflict. Though one might find it unexpected because of its status as a periphery, Zhytomir region was rather a well-developed part of the Russian Empire, with education, well-financed and well-run, being heavily supported owing to the borderland status of the area. Evidence for this is the first men's gymnasium to open in the Russian Empire, the main building of which became INO, in 1793. Due to a strong and sizable Hassidic community, the region had one of the first state funded rabbinical schools. With the rise of nationalism in the 19th century, centers of Ukrainian culture, or Prosviti, were founded. Prosviti were laying the foundations for a distinct Ukrainian identity.[482] Yiddish schools appeared in the same context, first as an alterative to traditional Jewish education and then as a project of Jewish socialists. At the turn of the century, numerous schools (*uchilisha*) were functioning in the city, as well as other educational institutions, including schools for artists and nurses, and the craft-focused schools founded by locals.

The Bolshevik strategy in the region was to invest heavily in education to combat potential problems owing to the rise of nationalism. As shown in the second chapter, Bolsheviks used the established school infrastructure. Since old Jewish educational institutions were fully operational, financially stable, secular, and often socialist, Bolsheviks had an immediate interest in them when they came to power. Education in Yiddish was seen as advantageous. By giving the impression that they were allowing the Yiddish schools to continue to run on their own terms, Bolsheviks managed to find allies among the Jewish socialists and to slowly absorb the existing school system for their own ideological purpose, of course facing significant resistance from the locals.

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[482] Prosvita (*Ukr*. enlightenment) was a society created in the 19th century Ukrainian Galicia whose goal was to spread Ukrainian culture and education among the population. Its founders declared that the movement was created to counterbalance the anti-Ukrainian colonial and Russophilic trends in the Ukrainian society. See Mokritskii, Georgii. "Mokritskii pro Zhytomir legendi, istoriii, nashe vremia." *Zhyrnal Zhytomira*, http://zhzh.info/publ/4-1-0-935 (accessed March 26th, 2009).

This chapter describes the failure of Bolsheviks' efforts to disarm nationalistic drives by institutionalizing them in its educational system through employing local cadres. Though INO was designed as a Soviet institution where the nationalities of the region would adopt the message of socialism in their mother tongues, in reality it turned into the Tower of Babel, where everyone's opportunity to speak in their own language reaffirmed and strengthen their national aspirations. Socialism was a cover for Ukrainian and Jewish nationalists to continue with their old agendas.

I first provide an overview of the region and its importance as an educational center. I then discuss INO's aim and structure, and the teachers' demographics, with the emphasis on those who were of Jewish origin. I then describe INO's teachers and curricula and their role as instruments of Soviet power. At the end, I analyze the life of the students, focusing on methods INO used to transform them into loyal Soviet citizens.

1. INO in the Context of Zhytomir Region

INO was founded and functioned in the city of Zhytomir, the center of Zhytomir region, located 140 km west of Kyiv. Before the Revolution, Zhytomir was the capital of Volyn gubernia, which was renamed into Zhytomir region with the arrival of Bolsheviks.[483] The western part of the region was a contested territory between the Second Polish Republic and the Soviet Union, not only because of a significant Polish population but because the Piłsudski government counted the Eastern borderlands (*Kresy Wschodnie*, or *Kresy*) as inseparable parts of their country.[484] The most famous town in the region was Berdychiv, a Hassidic stronghold.

[483] Zhytomir was a part of Volyn gubernia of the Russian Empire in 1792-1917 (*gubernia* was divided into *uyezdi*, and uyezdi into *volosti*). In 1918, Zhytomir was temporary under both Central Rada and Bolsheviks. What constitutes Zhytomir region today is not fully equivalent with Volyn gubernia. Some parts of it, like Berdychiv, belonged to Kyiv gubernia (in 1921). Gubernias were liquidated in 1925 and changed into *okrugi* (regions) and *rayoni* (districts), though some okrugs were not the same size as gubernias. Zhytomir okrug was renamed Volyn okrug in 1926, with the city of Zhytomir remaining its center. See Lukin, Benyamin. "Zhytomyr." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2010. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Zhytomyr (accessed May 2nd, 2016).

[484] For more on *Kresy* in Polish national imagination, see Zarycki, Tomasz. *Ideologies of Eastness in Central and Eastern Europe*. New York, Routledge, 2014, Ch. 6.

I focus on Zhytomir region because most preserved documents about the Sovietization of provincial Jews concern regional centers: Zhytomir, Chudniv, and Narodichi.[485] Documents and studies about Radomysl, Baranovka, Berdychiv, and other shtetls and small towns are scarce.[486] But more importantly, I focus on Zhytomir because it was a cultural and educational center in the Pale of Settlement. Zhytomir was an important place of Jewish history, its surroundings being the birthplaces of Levi Yitzchok of Berdychiv,[487] Lev Shternberg,[488] Vasily Grossman,[489] and others. Zhytomir had almost 90 thousand inhabitants before the October Revolution.[490] It had the second largest department of the Kultur-Lige after Kyiv. In 1939, Zhytomir region comprised 26 shtetls, with 52000 Jewish residents or almost 42 percent of Jews in the region.[491] The provincial yet vibrant multicultural character of the city of Zhytomir is vividly described by Babel:

> A town that is white, not sleepy, yet battered and silent. … Traces of Polish culture. Women well dressed, white stockings. The Catholic Church. Bathe at Nuski in the Teterev, a horrible little river, old Jews in the bathing boxes with long, emaciated legs covered with gray hairs. Young Jews. Women are washing clothes in the Teterev.… The bazaar in Zhytomir, old cobbler, bluing, chalk, laces. The synagogue buildings, old architecture—how all this touches my soul.[492]

At the beginning of the 20th century, in Zhytomir region there were commercial, musical, craftsmen's, and women's schools, five gymnasiums, teachers and church seminaries, schools for artists and nurses, and dozens of other educational institutions.[493] During Central Rada of UNR

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[485] Chudniv is a town south west of Zhytomir, and Narodichi north east of it. Both towns are administrative centers. Despite being in relative distance from each other, these towns are situated from the approximate distance to the Pale of Settlement border and were mostly populated by Jews.
[486] An exception is Veidlinger's *In the Shadow of the Shtetl*. Entries on Zhytomir or Berdychiv in YIVO encyclopedia are based on memory books, a few Hebrew publications, and articles written by local historians.
[487] Levi Yitzchok (1740-1809) was a rabbi and Hassidic leader.
[488] Lev Shternberg (1861-1927) was a Russian imperial and Soviet ethnographer.
[489] Vasily Grossman (1905-1964) was a Soviet writer and war journalist.
[490] Mokritskii, Georgii. "Mokritskii pro Zhytomir legendi, istoriii, nashe vremia", p. 271.
[491] See Altshuler, Mordechai. *Soviet Jewry on the Eve of the Holocaust*, p. 43. Altshuler defines shtetl by its size and proportion of Jewish residents. Unfortunately, no reliable statistics on earlier years exist.
[492] Babel, Isaac. *1920 Diary*, in *The Complete Works of Isaac Babel*, p. 379.
[493] See *Istoriia mist i sil ukrainskoii RSR. Volynska oblast*. Kyiv, Golovna redaktsiia URE AN URSR, 1970, p. 271.

(1917-1921), these institutions were supervised by the Ministry of Jewish Affairs, which was in charge of cultural issues.[494] On the territory of UNR, there were 1192 high beginner schools, 1086 of which were financed by the state, and 106 of which relied on local sources, both private and public.[495] In 1919, Bolsheviks founded more than seventy schools in Zhytomir and many of them emerged from these pre-revolutionary educational institutions. High beginner courses and Jewish religious institutions were private and more financially stable, which made them more attractive to Bolsheviks. In 1920, all schools in Zhytomir were reorganized into united working schools with the aim of fitting the native language of the local population.[496] INO originated from one of the high beginner courses established after that reorganization, the zemski[497] courses. These two-year courses were devised to train the teachers for high beginner schools in the Russian Empire. Since they were not sufficient to satisfy the needs of teachers in Volyn gubernia, they were turned into the Teacher's Institute even before the establishment of the Soviet power.[498]

The succession of institutions testifies that Bolsheviks were not educational innovators but that they used and subsequently upgraded an already existing provincial educational structure. Though Bolsheviks were aware that they were not bringing anything new of substance, renaming the institution had a great symbolic power for them. It mattered to Bolsheviks that they declared that the school was the Soviet school. Moreover, as explained below, at the beginning of the 1920s the content of curricula was secondary to the institution itself. It was more important for students that they attended INO than that they attended the courses offered at INO. People who graduated from this institution knew that they graduated first and foremost from a Soviet institution.

The sources suggest that INO was opened in 1918 but this refers to INO's predecessors, one of the high beginner courses just mentioned.[499] Institutes of People's Education were officially introduced only the next year, upon the decision of the All-Russian Conference on Pedagogical Education. INO's main building was located in the center of Zhytomir, on Karl Marx Street 46,

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[494] Rabinovitch, Simon. *Jewish Rights, National Rites*, pp. 255-257.
[495] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 7.
[496] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 8. This policy started before the nativization policy was officially declared.
[497] *Zemstvo* was an institution of local government in the Russian Empire.
[498] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 8.
[499] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 7.

and it is the same building of today's Ivan Franko Pedagogical University.[500] Though INO was not an exclusively Jewish institution and Jews were only the second largest ethnicity in INO, I focus on it as an example of problems Bolsheviks faced in transforming Jews into loyal citizens of the new state for several reasons. INO was the biggest educational institution in the region,[501] in terms of its size and place in the educational hierarchy. Given that education was one of the main tools in Sovietization, INO illustrates it on a large scale. In addition, being an institution whose members perceived themselves and were perceived by others as loyal to the Soviet power, INO shows the intricacies of loyalty to the new regime in the province. Finally, INO was a prestigious institution which created a whole new generation of cadres expected to spread the Bolshevik ideology and to continue the transformation of generations to come.

2. INO's Aims and Structure

The main aim of INO was to train students to become teachers for the local schools of the region. It was expected that upon obtaining their degrees, the teachers would become professional cadres able to perform a variety of educational roles. INO's constitution states that the Institute "prepares workers in the fields of pre-school education, in class coordination (*klasnoe rukovodstvo*) at the united working school, and in extracurricular education."[502] Besides its educational role, INO had a crucial political role. It was an institution for Bolshevik indoctrination of the cadres, who were expected to be "sufficiently knowledgable of the structure of Soviet power"[503] upon graduation.

Though INO had an upper hand over many local schools in Volyn gubernia, west of Kyiv gubernia, and in a part of Podol'e gubernia, it did not have the supreme educational authority in Zhytomir.[504] It was supervised by the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment. In this respect,

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[500] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 156.
[501] The only larger institution of that kind in the Ukrainian SSR was Odessa's Institute of People's Education (OINO). For more on OINO, see Levchenko, V. V. *Istoriia Odes'kogo institutu narodnoi osviti (1920-1930 rr.): pozitivnii dosvid nevdalogo eksperimentu*. Odesa, TES, 2010.
[502] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 7, p. 18 (22). Narkompros approved INO's statute in Kharkiv on August 14th, 1920. The Educational Council of High Schools (Narada) devised INO's study program.
[503] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291 (microfilm).
[504] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 38.

INO's duty was to prepare and send reports from the Department of the Preparation of Cadres to the Commissariat on a regular basis (communication between these two institutions is a valuable source for discovering the perplexities of Sovietization in the region).

Another principal aim of INO was Ukrainization. The plan to teach in Ukrainian, however, was never realized. Russian, the language of the former empire, remained the main language of instruction.[505] One of INO's employees complained to the higher authorities that "the language of instruction at INO is supposed to be Ukrainian 'as a matter of norm', but three of our departments conduct their work in Russian."[506] Though the teachers used to say that it would be easy for them to switch to Ukrainian—the language which used to be dominant in the Volyn region—they were perfectly aware that Russian was there to stay at INO.[507] In 1920, 15 (out of 32) INO's teachers conducted their lectures in Ukrainian, and only one was teaching in Yiddish. Seven more promised to switch to Ukrainian at the beginning of 1921 as a result of efforts to enforce the native language policy.[508] Such promises were widespread and unsurprising, as it was clearly impossible to switch immediately from the language of administration to Ukrainian.[509] Disparity between the ideology and the practice of Ukrainization was undesirable but expected to those conducting it.

In terms of its structure, INO was a typical educational institution of its time. The academic year started in October.[510] In the beginning, INO consisted of one pre-school department and three regular school departments: nature and geography, physics and mathematics, and philology and humanities (*slovesno-istoricheskii*).[511] INO also contained empty departments (*vakuiuchi kafedri*), which did not have permanent teachers or facilities. Ironically, among these was the department of scientific socialism. The reason for it was that "it was impossible to find a teacher suitable to satisfy the needs of all students."[512] It is more likely that this refers to the lack of personnel with the relevant knowledge than to the special needs of students with regard to scientific socialism.

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[505] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291 (microfilm).
[506] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 15.
[507] Ibid, pp. 26-27.
[508] DAZO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 5.
[509] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 103.
[510] DAZO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 9.
[511] Ibid, p. 2.
[512] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 1057, p. 12, p. 169.

The data about the administrative personnel is limited. The official history of the Institute states that its founder was Petro Nikandrovich Abramovich, pedagogue and historian of Zhytomir region[513], followed by Mikola Andronikovich Mikhalovich, mathematics teacher, in December 1920.[514] However, the official history omits an important detail, that the two rectors were probably not successors but competitors for the same position. Mikhalovich was likely the head of INO in its founding years and Abramovich became the new head later, in October 1920.[515] Abramovich was appointed as the rector during the rule of Central Rada in Zhytomir. When Bolsheviks retook Zhytomir and INO, he resigned, probably because he thought that his associations with Central Rada would make Bolsheviks fire him anyway. However, once the situation stabilized, Abramovich recovered the rector's position. Since he was on the payroll of the Department of Enlightenment of National Minorities,[516] Moscow's role in the rehabilitation was undoubtedly crucial. The struggle between Abramovich and Mikhalovich (and perhaps others) continued during 1922-1923.[517] The positions of INO's rector and council were generally decided by elections in which administrative personnel and teachers had the right to vote, and even some administrative student positions were elective.

Two-year imperial gymnasium courses from which INO was developed were first turned into three-year pedagogical courses, and then transformed into the Institute. Apart from these, the bases for INO were Yiddish courses for teachers, the so-called Volodarsky courses (later known as Rabfak). For many years, two Ukrainian cultural institutions had their working spaces in the same building as INO: Prosvita, which had its drama studio, and Ivan Franko Cultural Society.[518] The Society was a kind of club with various sections, from political education, literature, grammar,

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[513] Most of Abramovich's works preserved in his personal archive are dedicated to the history of Jews in the region in the last quarter of the 18th century, containing information about the legal status of Jews, about relationship between magistrate and kagal, topography of Jewish praying houses, cemeteries, synagogues and praying schools. Abramovich also wrote about the pogroms of Jews in Zhytomir in 1919. The motivation for his interest in the Jewish community is unknown. DAZO, Fund P-3409, n.d.

[514] See the official webpage of Ivan Franko Pedagogical University, https://zu.edu.ua/if6.html.

[515] DAZO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 2.

[516] GARF, Fund 296, inv. 2, f. 29, p. 137.

[517] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 1, f. 403, p. 5. Rector's surname is not mentioned during these years. For Abramovich's short biography, see Kostritsia, M. Y. "Pershii rektor Volyns'kogo INO". In Kopiichenko, L. A, Samoluk, D. Y, and Timiraev, E. R (eds.). *Reabilitovani istorieiu. Zhytomirs'ka oblast'*, Vol. 2. Zhytomir, Polissia, 2008, pp. 81-82.

[518] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 7, p. 44 (25).

mathematics, drama, singing, and drawing, to music, publishing, arts, physical education, and land management (*hoziaistv*o).[519]

INO had two floors, consisting of classrooms and natural science laboratories. Students worked in 15 auditoriums and they also had the cabinets of chemistry and physics, library-reading room (*biblioteka-chital'nia*), and lectorium.[520] In the morning, INO was split between a seven-year Ukrainian school, located on the second floor, and the same seven-year Russian school, on the first. In the rest of the day, INO performed its main role, as a high-level training institution for teachers in different courses. In the evening, there were additional courses for those unable to attend the lectures during the day.[521] INO looked like a self-sufficient institution in other respects as well. It had its own fruit garden and owned land for cultivation (of 25 desiatin, app. 26 hectares, in 1920s). In this respect, INO followed the ideas of innovative pedagogy that each school should cultivate land and educate its students through work on the land. Within INO functioned a seven-year exemplary (*zrazkova*) school and an agricultural school was planned to be opened, though it is unclear whether the plan was realized, as the reports state the "chaotic conditions" of the Civil War in which the Institute was trapped.[522]

Those who applied for teaching positions at INO had to fill out a questionnaire, known as "the questionnaire on cleansing of the Soviet institutions,"[523] where they indicated their name and surname, age, nationality,[524] education, the pedagogic experience, party belonging, and gender.[525] Each teacher was given a number equivalent to their membership in the Teachers' Union.[526] The majority of teachers were Ukrainians (they sometimes referred to themselves as Malorussians), followed by Jews, Russians, and others. Jews were also the second most numerous nationality among the students, after Ukrainians. The third was Russians, and there was also a small number

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[519] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 143, TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 1057, p. 8.
[520] DAZO, Fund P-142, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 3.
[521] DAZO, Fund P-142, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 3.
[522] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 4.
[523] TsDAVO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 2.
[524] Understandably, there was much confusion with this category. Sometimes people indicated father's and mother's nationality but were unable to identify their own.
[525] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, pp. 158-159.
[526] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 2, f. 1. Teachers' Union was a trade union.

of other students (up to five) of Polish, German, and Czech decent.[527] The first generation of INO's teachers were locals with Orthodox educational background. Abramovich himself graduated from the Volyn Spiritual Seminary in Kremenets and St. Petersburg Spiritual Academy, bringing with him people of similar education.

With respect to class, teachers came from very diverse backgrounds, from poorly educated, impoverished, people to professional, well-off, imperial cadres, authors of textbooks with perfect language skills.[528] The majority of Ukrainian teachers were not appointed from the center but gathered as literate locals of modest, usually religious, backgrounds (as sons of village priests and local church figures). They were a valuable link between INO and the local communities, in which they were highly respected. However, since they tended to spread Ukrainian nationalism, Soviets perceived and accused them as agents of Petliura movement.[529] A minority of Ukrainian teachers came from better off backgrounds (for which they were later framed as kulaks), usually being the people who moved from the periphery to the center and, for that reason, had graduated from Russian gymnasiums.[530]

Most Jewish teachers came from merchant and peddler backgrounds (which were similarly put into the category of kulaks afterwards). Though the sources provide no demonstrable proof of a directly proportional relation between the teachers' experience and their nationality, they suggest that Jewish teachers were the most educated among INO's cadres. Jewish teachers taught subjects dealing with the Soviet ideology and the German language more often than anyone else. They also conducted their lectures in Russian and Yiddish, very rarely in Ukrainian.[531] Some Jewish teachers had university degrees. Lev Landa, a lecturer of historical materialism and Jewish literature (not an unusual combination in the 1920s) indicated in a questionnaire that he had graduated from a

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[527] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 143 a, p. 156.
[528] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 1. TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 3, f. 309.
[529] Recall that Jews and Ukrainians had different opinions of Bolsheviks. While Ukrainians fought for independence within the former Russian Empire, Jews searched for national-cultural autonomy within the Ukrainian state. So while it was not enough for Ukrainians to have the autonomy, for Jews it was already a major achievement to have the Ministry of the Jewish Affairs. Soon after, Jews were ready to accept the Bolshevik power on the condition that they would be able at least to maintain their cultural autonomy. This was not sufficient for accepting Bolsheviks in the case of Ukrainians. See Abramson, Henry. *A Prayer for the Government*, Ch. 1.
[530] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 1, 2, 3. Cf. Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet*, pp. 51-54.
[531] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 150.

university, though he did not stipulate from which one.[532] One of the most striking cases is that of a Jewish teacher Mykola Gurvich, who came to work at INO after graduating from the University of Philadelphia.

INO was devised to create the New Soviet Woman as well, and the presence of women was visible. At different times women constituted from 60 to 80 percent of listeners, which was not that surprising owing to the shortage of men in the overall population after the Civil War. There was also the ideology-inspired desire to improve the status of women. INO's political commissar reported that in 1922-1923 the Institute had 159 men and 83 women, in 1924, 187 men and 91 women, and in 1928, 181 men and 119 women.[533] Most attendants of Volodarsky courses were women (in 1923, there were 42 of them, in contrast with 15 men).[534] The director of Volodarsky courses was a Jewish woman, Eva Kaufman. Beside her, two younger Jewish women, Malka Birenberg and Leha Lubianskaya, worked as representatives of student committee (*studkom*) and the executive of Komsol cells (*zavyacheykoi*) during their studies. Educational opportunities did not immediately improve the position of women in the labor market. They earned much less than the men.[535]

INO proved itself to be the new home for children of the region, not only in terms of its educational authority but, functioning as a dormitory and even a shelter, as a place where children spent days and nights. Students had an option to live in INO's building or in student dormitories (*khata* in Ukrainian). Though being advertised as an institution that "provides its students with warmth and light, and the rest was on their own"[536], INO provided food to students, perhaps even free of charge. This was not a consequence of its educational enthusiasm but of sheer neediness of children, who lacked basic necessities in their homes and came from distant villages and small towns.[537] However, accommodation was a complicated issue, since INO and the army competed for rooms, resources, and students. The Institute had to leave its premises twice, in 1920 and 1921,

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[532] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, p. 150, p. 94, p. 180.
[533] Ibid.
[534] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 3, f. 282, p. 10.
[535] Ibid.
[536] Ibid, pp. 3-4.
[537] Ibid.

since there was not enough space to host both it and the Red Army.[538] The second time INO moved, it was "kicked out on the street, together with the property, and for a month no one was allowed to enter it, before it returned to its normal functioning." The personnel complained that "many things disappeared."[539] That some people stole the Institute's furniture and equipment is not surprising given its size, the lack of strict control of property at the time, and the general conditions of war. On the bright side, the students are reported to have had a huge desire for INO to get back to its original building and to continue working as usual.[540]

Despite INO being an institution that officially functioned independently of the Party, the authorities required it to have its own Party cell (*Komyacheyka*).[541] The transformation into Soviet citizens was supposed to happen inside of INO, with Party cells, and outside of it, with the Party's pre-selection of cadres. INO's statute states that "the Party provides [the Institute with] pedagogues and Communists and influences it through Komyacheyka."[542] INO had to report the number of its students who were members of the Komsomol Organization. In the lists of students and personnel, it had to indicate how many of its people will join these organizations in the upcoming year. It is important to emphasize that party membership was not necessary for attaining or preserving the job. Only a few of INO's members were members of the Party and until the mid-1920s these numbers did not significantly increase. Insofar as the work of a teacher did not require joining the Party, he or she would not voluntarily do so. INO's teachers preferred to keep low-profiles and to maintain their professional interests. In turn, it was clear for the authorities that everyone would not instantly become a Bolshevik. The distance from the centers mattered in terms of control of local party cells and institutions. The further an institution was from the centers, the less feasible it was to control it. Zhytomir was far away from Moscow, Kharkiv, or Kyiv. The state tolerated low party membership in INO also because it was slowly testing the new ideology, making teachers Soviet propagandists gradually, and because it was wary of possible resistance to the new measures. For teachers who taught historical materialism, joining the Party was a matter of time and a natural course of events. However, numerous other teachers who were not Party members were even more important for Bolsheviks, as their support was needed for the proper functioning

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[538] DAZO, Fund P-142, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 3-4.
[539] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 1057, p. 169, p. 9.
[540] Ibid.
[541] Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union*, pp. 25-29.
[542] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 38.

of the nationality policy. The pre-selection of cadres was feeble, intellectual resources were scarce, and during the harsh times of the Civil War the communication between the center and the periphery was low. INO had to rely on local cadres without the Party's approval.

3. INO's Teachers as Agents of Soviet Power

Despite Bolsheviks' intensive efforts to build pedagogical cadres, teachers in the early 1920s were by and large poorly educated.[543] INO was no different from other institutions in this respect. Not only did it lack trained personnel but it burdened its teachers with a multiplicity of tasks. The teachers were supposed to be cultural workers in the school and propagandists outside of it.[544] Since the state lacked people for a genuine division of labor between the professions, the job of a teacher almost invariably involved the job of the agitator. Officially, it was not sufficient that the teacher was politically active inside and outside the school; he had to prove his political activity by being an active member of the Party. For that reason, INO had a special party cell inside of its premises and it updated the list of the Party members among its staff and faculty. But as noted, these controls were mostly ineffective and most cadres avoided being members of the Party.

Some cadres, however, were better trained. These were mostly Jewish socialists who used to work in Yiddish schools and who were members of the Kultur-Lige.[545] Bolsheviks did not have another option but to negotiate with the local intelligentsia.[546] The collaboration was crucial during the deficit of skilled cadres. Bolsheviks had to abandon their ideology of not cooperating with the bourgeoisie and with what they called "alien elements to the regime."[547]

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[543] See Fitzpatrick, Sheila. *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union*, pp. 29-34, Altshuler, Mordechai. *Soviet Jewry on the Eve of the Holocaust*, pp. 103-106.
[544] On the multiple roles of Soviet educators see Shneer, David. *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture*, Introduction, Batsman, Maryna. *Crafting a Jewish School System for Soviet Ukraine*, pp. 50-51.
[545] Cf. Abramson, Henry. *A Prayer for the Government*, pp. 112-132.
[546] By intelligentsia, I mean educated people who had the power and were in charge of educational institutions. For a similar understanding of Soviet intelligentsia see Clark, Katherina. *The Image of the Intelligent in Soviet Prose Fiction, 1917-1932*, PhD dissertation, New Haven, Yale University, 1971.
[547] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, pp. 33-34.

Despite the fact that a majority of teachers who had to fill questionnaires about their pre-war occupation and political affiliation indicated that they had little or no interest in politics,[548] many were indirectly politically involved. As already mentioned, Jewish teachers were the main agents of Soviet power.[549] Many of them were involved in literacy campaigns. In the evenings, they gave courses to illiterate people, where they conducted propaganda. They usually gave lectures about the Komsomol organization in the Jewish working club or in the club of the Education of Workers (*Rabotpros*), which could have lasted until the midnight.[550] Active participation of listeners was required and discussions were encouraged. Teachers from the Pedagogical Council, together with Komyacheyka of the course (consisting on average of 28 students), conducted political education (*Politprosvet*). Once a week the teachers were required to have a discussion about "current political issues."[551] The importance of teachers' work and reliance on local cadres was emphasized in the following way: "(…) one should use for this purpose all democratic forces of local pedagogues and lectures, and prepare pedagogical apparatus so that it increases the work productivity of the pedagogues ready to sacrifice the rest of their free time on the preparation of teachers."[552]

Teachers were the contributors to the newspapers of the region, and they were the ones who spread the press among the population. In 1918, Jewish teachers reported about educational affairs in pedagogical journals such as *Shul un Lebn*[553] and *Pedagogisher Biuleten*,[554] and later in *Ratnbildung*. They usually wrote about the recent developments in reform pedagogy, study books, the conditions of the local Yiddish schools, and the outcomes of their propaganda work. Teachers often co-authored pieces in the newspaper *Jezhednedel'nik* (*Weekly*), published by the Department of the Affairs of the Commissariat of the People's Education in Moscow, where they covered more

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[548] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 3, f. 996, p. 11, 'Vipiska iz protokola zasedaniia kolegii agitpropa ot 19. 11. 24'.
[549] Cf. Ewing, Thomas. *The Teachers of Stalinism*, pp. 41-62, Pauly, Matthew. *Breaking the Tongue*, pp. 104-131, and Batsman, Maryna. *Crafting a Jewish School System for Soviet Ukraine*, pp. 29-31.
[550] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 3, f. 996, pp. 22-23.
[551] Ibid, p. 4.
[552] Ibid, p. 7.
[553] See Zeltser, Arkadi. "Soviet Yiddish-Language Schools."
[554] *Pedagogisher Biuleten* later became the successor of *Shul un Lebn*.

or less the same topics, with the exception of local affairs. INO had its own periodical (*naukovii chasopis*), connected to Kyiv Academy of Sciences.[555]

Teachers also organized lectures in workers' clubs and were responsible for celebrations of Soviet holidays. A group of INO's teachers organized evening literally lectures about old Hebrew literature, and gave a couple of speeches.[556] They organized several evenings for the workers, one in Kyiv House of Komsomol in Pechersk, and another in the Party School in Podol (Pechersk and Podol are Kyiv districts), propagating the ideas of a new workers' school among the masses.[557] INO's Jewish teachers organized extracurricular activities for students, such as collective sports manifestations and archeological excavations, and importantly, controlled students' attendance during Pesach and other religious holidays. However, Jewish teachers were allowed to celebrate anniversaries of Yiddish writers, such as Peretz, Gofshtejn, and others, who were still a part of the Soviet cannon in the 1920s.

There are several reasons why Jewish teachers were the main agitators. First, Jews were attracted by the new power because it granted them a set of liberties they did not enjoy before the Revolution.[558] Second, Jews were traditionally active in trade unions, which were naturally linked to the Party. Third, Bolsheviks often protected Jews from pogroms, which encouraged some Jews and pressured the others to reciprocate by becoming agitators.[559] Fourth, the nativization policy encouraged the enthusiasm of young Yiddishists, most of whom were socialists. Finally, there were reasons specific to INO. Jewish teachers relied on personal and professional connections, which stretched back to times of founding of the Kultur-Lige, whose biggest departments in Ukraine were in Kyiv and Zhytomir. Bolsheviks also succeeded in attracting Yiddish cultural workers across the Polish border.[560] They were coming to INO from Poland's Yiddish schools

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[555] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 1057, p.10, p. 169. This periodical was not released due to the lack of paper.
[556] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 3, f. 996, p. 12.
[557] Ibid.
[558] See also Ewing, Thomas. *The Teachers of Stalinism*, pp. 41-50.
[559] Bolsheviks made questionnaires to find out political orientation of the people. At the beginning, one could declare one's political indifference but soon teachers had to register themselves as members of the Party under the pressure of losing their jobs. The political pre-revolutionary heterogeneity switched to the allegiance with one Party (at least officially). See Budnitskii, Oleg. *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites*, pp. 34-68.
[560] Terry Martin calls this logic the 'Piedmont principle'. The principle was one of the defining aims of the nativization policy. See Martin, Terry. *The Affirmative Action Empire*, pp. 8-9.

because of Polish anti-Semitism and because the USSR was the only state which at that time sponsored Yiddish secular schools as a part of the official policy.[561]

It is interesting that despite the numerous hardships the teachers faced, such as low and delayed salaries (about which they constantly complained), they were enthusiastic about their jobs.[562] The main motivation of Jewish socialists at INO was the opportunity to teach in Yiddish. After all, they had no other option but to embrace the Bolshevik ideology, since other alternatives meant working illegally in underground institutions (like Zionists), losing their jobs in schools that were closed, or taking the risk to combine working in the Soviet institutions and illegal Jewish ones (in evenings or on weekends). Some Jewish teachers were former Bundists and other Jewish socialists, who at the time were suspicious of Yiddish, preferring to teach in Russian. Bolsheviks collaborated with them too, absorbing their achievements in reform pedagogy and the idea of introducing national languages in socialist upbringing.[563]

INO's teachers also complained that the money distribution within the institution was not transparent and that the corruption was widespread. One teacher protested that it is impossible to bring ethanol to INO's chemistry room because it would be immediately stolen, as had happened before with electric lamps.[564] The messy conditions with salaries, corruption, struggle for power and alike, created conditions for teachers to denounce each other to higher authorities. A teacher reported a situation to higher authorities in these words: "The cabinet of geography, as you know, is in the hands of the certain person (…) therefore, as soon as the work commences in the cabinet, it immediately comes to an end."[565] Teachers would sometimes denounce each other because of teaching in Russian and not in Ukrainian or Yiddish. Given that most Jewish teachers did not know Ukrainian, such denunciations would lead to their fast dismissal. This was not only due to personal

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[561] See Schulman, Elias. *A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union*, Ch. 1, Shneer, David. *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture*, pp. 14-30. While the declared policy was philo-Semitic, a systematic anti-Semitism was widespread, as argued in the previous chapter.
[562] TsDAVO, Fond 166, inv. 2, f. 291, pp. 33-34.
[563] Cf. Schulman, Elias. *A History of Jewish Education in the Soviet Union*, Chs. 1-2, Nishimura, Yuu. "On the Cultural Front: The Bund and the Yiddish Secular School Movement in Interwar Poland."
[564] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, pp. 4-5.
[565] Ibid.

animosities but teachers' nationalist political agendas, since removing the competitors meant more space for one's own national project.[566]

Out of fear or sheer cynicism, the reports about INO's problems were intertwined with antagonistically positive reports at the end of the year. "(…) It was an intensive academic year! Thank you very much, the members of the Council, and the technical personnel of INO!" one report reads.

4. INO's Curriculum as an Instrument of Sovietization

Though the teachers' work was indispensable for Sovietization, the curriculum was no less crucial. INO's facilities were very underdeveloped in the early 1920s. The quality of a course depended on a teacher's professional training more than on textbooks.[567] There are lists of study books which INO ordered from Germany but there is no evidence that they were used at its courses or schools. Study books were rather expensive at the time.[568] The efforts to bring the newest literature from abroad signified how important it was for the authorities to raise future generations with a new system of values.[569] At the same time, Bolsheviks advised the teachers to make a list of the most important books, for which they would give grain and sugar, and the less important ones, for which they would negotiate less valuable exchanges.[570]

Owing to the scarcity of literature, teachers were supposed to use their own notes. Efforts to print the notes often failed because of lack and expensiveness of paper and printing facilities in Zhytomir.[571] It is striking that this occurred in Zhytomir, which was one of the biggest publishing centers in Eastern Europe (together with Vilno). Teachers therefore used hand-written notes and were not able to share them with students. This meant that INO's teachers were flexible in what

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[566] Polish teachers in the region were especially denounced by their collegues for suspicion of Polish irredentism. In 1924, Polish Workers School in Zhytomir lacked cadres because most of its Polish teachers were in jail. See TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 4, f. 977, pp. 10-12.
[567] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, pp. 200-203.
[568] On the publishing industry at the period see Shneer, David. *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture*, pp. 88-134.
[569] Cf. Ewing, Thomas. *The Teachers of Stalinism*, pp. 41-50.
[570] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 156.
[571] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, pp. 200-201.

they were teaching and that the students' attendance was crucial for the process of learning. The teachers made efforts to keep the student attendance rate high, up to 80 percent.[572] That attendance rate should be taken lightly given that INO moved from its buildings in winter and that its courses were interrupted in the summer since Ukrainian students went to the fields to earn money for the winter.[573]

Course plans show that the four years were similar in the amount of language training and general courses. The only difference was that students of higher courses had more specific training in the methods of teaching.[574] There were also plans to get the students to practice teaching at the local schools, though the extent to which this plan was realized remains unknown. At the language training courses and the general courses, Jewish students were separated from the others, as they were taught Jewish literature and Yiddish.[575]

In 1921, courses were divided in five main categories: political education, natural sciences, languages, humanities, and reform pedagogy.[576] Political education involved ideologized courses such as The Soviet State, Marxism, Marxist knowledge (*marksoznavstvo*), proletarian revolution, proletarian building, historical materialism, the history of class struggle and ideology, historical sociology, science of patriotism (*rodinovedeniie*), etc.[577] There were also courses in biology (with emphasis on the theory of evolution), physics, astronomy, geography, and chemistry, as well as various language courses, of Russian, Ukrainian, Yiddish, and German. Students also learned the history of Ukraine, Ukrainian literature, Russian literature, international history, Russian history, Jewish literature, Jewish history, and had courses in philosophy and its history, psychology, and ethnography. Finally, courses that targeted professional training as pedagogues included teaching methods, history of pedagogical ideas and the newest tendencies in pedagogy, principles of labor school, methodics of various languages and natural sciences and, importantly, methodics of natural science in connection to science of patriotism (which will later become the history of the native

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[572] Ibid.
[573] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 2, f. 2.
[574] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, pp. 157-158.
[575] Ibid.
[576] Ibid.
[577] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 143.

land, *istoriia rodnogo kraia*).[578] Courses varied depending on the study year. However, two were mandatory: history of the scientific worldview and the history of law and state in connection with the Soviet Constitution.[579] With respect to the Jewish students, INO's council approved teaching of Jewish literature, Jewish history, and a course concerning the terminology of different sciences in Yiddish. This was the pioneer attempt of inventing the natural sciences terminology in Yiddish. However, one of the reports mentions that in 1920 this attempt was unsuccessful.[580]

The basis of Sovietization was the set of socio-historical subjects, with Marxist-Leninist subjects obviously having priority. Interestingly, the Appendix of circular letter of the Department of Preparations of Teachers strictly prohibits persons "alien to Soviet power" to teach such courses. This means that, officially, the majority of Jews could not teach them, as they were the descendants of merchants and peddlers, which were considered the exploiting classes.[581] However, Jews were regularly teaching political subjects, which is another proof of the difference between the professed ideology and the practical reality.

There were several highly debated issues regarding the school's curricula. The first was whether a future teacher should have so many subjects in four years of study at INO. Others were the proportion of general and specific subjects in the curriculum and the issue of poorly prepared graduates.[582] A teacher Doga wrote on the "great evil" of teachers' seminars, where many peasant children get attracted by education but at the end they do not become qualified school cadres.[583]

Though INO's teachers were advised to devote significant time to teaching methods and reform pedagogy, the proportion of these courses was almost four times less than humanitarian and political courses. The state considered in-depth knowledge of the new Soviet history and ideological training indispensable for the teacher. Political courses were assigned even for teachers of exact sciences.[584] Taking a look at tables of contents, study plans, lecturer's notes and study books of history and literature, it is easy to see that they were exclusively written from the Marxist

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[578] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 28, p. 143.
[579] TSDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 1, f. 401, p. 20 b.
[580] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 292, pp. 2-3.
[581] TSDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 1, f. 401, "Prilozheniie k circuliari podgotovki uchitelei", October 31st, 1918.
[582] TSDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 1, f. 401. Protokol n. 1, from May 27th, 1919.
[583] Ibid.
[584] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, pp. 145-150.

perspective. Ukrainian history, Jewish history, and the history of the Russian state, were written as dialectical successions from slavery to feudalism to capitalism to socialism.[585]

The history of Jewish people was probably the most revised subject, compared to how it used to be taught in the prerevolutionary times, when it was a part of religious upbringing. The Soviet version of Jewish history was mainly the history of Ashkenazi. The ancient Jewish religious history and its dependence on Jewish genealogy were omitted. A secular story of Jewish people struggling for liberty was the official view taught in schools.[586] Jewish students at INO were taught that since Jews were merchants and traders through their history, they were exploiters and "alien elements to the regime".[587] Jewish students listened about their ancestors and parents being evil and about Judaism being a harmful superstition of ancient times that kept poor Jewish masses oppressed by the richer Jews.[588]

Bolsheviks found it much easier to deal with Yiddish literature. They allowed the works of Sholem Ash, I. L. Perez, D. Gofshtejn, Mendele Moikher-Sforim, S. An-sky, Sholem-Aleichem, and other Yiddish authors.[589] Since these writers often portrayed the shtetl as underdeveloped and criticized the poverty in it, they appealed to Bolsheviks to illustrate the life of oppressed Jews who had fallen under the fear of superstitions. In less than a decade, Sholem-Aleichem would remain the only approved proletarian writer in Yiddish in the Soviet Union.[590]

Reform pedagogy, comprising one-fourth of INO's curricula, was an important educational tool in which collective upbringing played a significant role. Common walks, excursions, musical classes, and physical training were techniques borrowed from American and German educational institutions.[591] INO's students were having excursions in plants and factories in the region.[592] In 1921, a group of students went to a factory in Zhytomir to familiarize themselves with workers'

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[585] See Gitelman, Zvi. *A Century of Ambivalence*, pp. 88-115.
[586] Ibid. More precisely, this type of history started with secular Yiddish school. Bolsheviks made it comprehensive.
[587] DAZO, Fund P-142 (5123), inv. 1, f. 8, pp. 10-15.
[588] Ibid.
[589] Ibid.
[590] Shneer, David. *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture*, pp. 23-41, Lipset, Harry. *Jewish Schools in the Soviet Union, 1917-1941: An Aspect of Soviet Minorities Policy*. EdD dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1965, pp. 54-58.
[591] Ewing, Thomas. *The Teachers of Stalinism*, pp. 41-62, Pauly, Matthew. *Breaking the Tongue*, pp. 104-131.
[592] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 1, p. 18.

industrial life. As it was often the case, a group of students might have given a short lecture there. Collective work and research were commonly practiced. Students went together for archeological excavations, celebrated holidays together, participated in collective sport activities and collectively worked in nearby fields and forests.[593] An important aspect of reform pedagogy was devoted to children psychology, which among other things aimed to help the Jewish children who suffered from pogroms to recover but which was also used for propaganda purposes (psychological subjects were a part of teaching methods curricula).[594]

It was often the case that students were taught one thing and did another, especially when it comes to the prohibition on celebrating religious holidays. As an illustration, Jewish teachers of Marxism and proletarian revolution reported that they kept student attendance during religious holidays and that students attended the classes regularly but the majority of Jewish pedagogues appeared on the lists of teachers who were to be fired for attending synagogue services.[595] It is likely that their students were not as diligent as the reports suggest and that they were following their teachers in participating in religious life.

5. Transforming INO's Students into Soviet Citizens

INO's students were taught that the education they received was a consequence of their liberation by Bolsheviks: "unlike in the bourgeois school, where people are promised liberty through education, in the Soviet school, education comes through liberty."[596] The liberty, first and foremost, indicated liberty from traditional mores. The interwar generation of Jews was a transitional generation in the sense that it was the first to be Sovietized.[597] In the case of Jewish students, staying with their families meant maintaining Jewish traditions while attending the new school meant being educated in a radically different manner. Though the young people were tied

[593] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 1, p. 8.
[594] DAZO, Fund P-142 (5123), inv. 1, f. 8, pp. 32-34.
[595] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 3, pp. 32, 62.
[596] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 7.
[597] Cf. Shternshis, Anna. *Soviet and Kosher*, Introduction.

to their families, teachers took the responsibility to raise them "to speak Bolshevik."[598] The schools were to substitute the families as the location of upbringing.

INO was not only an institution designed to prepare future teachers but it was meant to be a politically and economically self-sufficient and self-sustaining universe. This character of INO was partially determined by ideological reasons, such as making a community out of its members and offering them equal access to education, and partially by the fact that a majority of its students were poor. Many of its students came from smaller towns and villages and were not able to sustain themselves. INO provided its students with a dormitory and sometimes gave them scholarships.[599] In those times, not offering students means of living meant that many of them would abandon the school for any paid job.

The priority in stipends was given to poorer students. The rule was that the students should not receive cash and that their meals were covered on account of it.[600] In 1922, INO reported the results of introducing tuition fees for some of its students. The reform divided students into three categories: exempt from payment, those on the waivers, and those who had to pay the full tuition of 80 golden rubles, an amount unaffordable to most students. Different unions helped the second category of students to pay their studies. Since INO received much less payment than expected, it complained that "there were no bourgeois elements among the students and that, therefore, many students had to abandon their studies because they were not able to afford to pay for it."[601] The biggest price of introducing the reform was paid by Bolsheviks themselves who failed in their goal of a universally accessible education.

INO was connected to other high teachers' courses in Kyiv and in the region, which gave its students an opportunity to travel to nearby localities to conduct practice in schools and to see their colleagues' life in similar institutions. It is very likely that INO was connected with the High Pedagogical Courses and Teachers' Institute in Kyiv and to the children's commune in Puscha-

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[598] See Kotkin, Stephen. *Magnetic Mountain*, pp. 198-238. How successfully they learned this 'language' and whether the language they learned was different from the language of the reports are important questions addressed below.
[599] DAZO, Fund P-31, inv. 1, f. 1, TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 3, f. 309, pp. 22-25.
[600] Ibid.
[601] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 3, f. 309, pp. 22-25.

Voditsa in Kyiv. Relations between these institutions were grounded not only in their institutional similarities but on the pre-Soviet connections between the Kultur-Liges of Kyiv and Zhytomir.[602]

A person could become an INO student after passing an informal colloquium (a job talk), which "in no case had a nature of a formal exam."[603] At the colloquium, INO did not inquire about the previous education of its prospective candidates, not even for their diploma. The only criterion was the candidate's knowledge of general education and "social and life position as a teacher of workers' school."[604] It was assumed that such qualities were necessary for a student to successfully learn the "basis of the production work" and to obtain "familiarity with the general subjects."[605] The most important criteria for a student were the ability to learn ideological language and to use it afterwards.[606] A representative of the Department of Peoples' Education, an institution which supervised INO and controlled its courses for their potential divergence from the law, was present during the jobs talks.[607]

Any person older than 17 could become an INO student, assuming that he or she passed the informal job-talk. Poor students were given a priority to enroll but they had to be the candidates of proletarian committees of poor people (*kombedi*).[608] INO sometimes hired students from other schools, including traditional religious schools. On one occasion in 1921, its instructors were sent to Narodichi, an administrative center north of Zhytomir, to choose 25 most skillful students of Talmud-Torah.[609] These students were likely taken only to fill the enrollment gap, since they were not the most suitable 'material' for embracing the Bolshevik ideology. The authorities were ready to turn a blind eye to accepting students most of whom they could not expect to become loyal to the Soviet power when the enrollment numbers were low.

Female and male students were distributed differently in INO's departments, owing to the smaller prevalence of women at the Institute in general and probably to the stereotype that women were not up for certain professions. While at the natural-geographical departments the percentage

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[602] Kazovsky, Hillel. "Kultur-lige."
[603] TSDAVO, inv. 2, f. 241, p. 20 (b).
[604] Ibid.
[605] TSDAVO, inv. 2, f. 242, pp. 12-13.
[606] For a similar example with workers see Kotkin, Stephen. *Magnetic Mountain*, pp. 198-238.
[607] DAZO, Fund 2196, inv. 1, f. 5, p. 6-7.
[608] Ibid.
[609] DAZO, Fund 2196, inv. 1, f. 5, p. 29.

of men and women was similar (28 boys and 24 girls), at the humanities department there were seven girls and 25 boys, and at the physical-mathematical department only two girls and 24 boys.[610]

Students had an obligatory leisure time at INO, which became regulated by the Party in the beginning of 1930s. The school aimed to ensure that "in between the lunch and the dinner students have free time, which they spend according to their needs."[611] Students spent a part of their free time at communal living houses. Twice a year they made statutes of students' dormitory which regulated their relationship within the community. Since the authorities reported the need to make a separate female dormitory,[612] female students probably lived in separate rooms before that.

INO's expected from its students to be actively engaged in their upbringing. Teachers were instructed to devote the second part of their lectures for "questions and answers." Feedback and active participation in discussions were encouraged, which was a part of reform pedagogy of the time. Students also participated in the common activities. They went for excavations of kurgans (tumuli), had tours to factories and plants, and were preparing for common celebrations and engaging in cultural activities.[613] Every April 10th, students organized evenings dedicated to the memory of I. L. Peretz who was presented as a "proletarian writer."[614] Students also performed charity concerts for children suffering from tuberculosis, orphans, etc.

The most important activities were common celebrations of revolutionary holidays. These were also the points where Sovietizing students coming from traditional backgrounds was the most strenuous. All schools in the city were affected by the anti-religious campaign starting from 1921 and INO was not an exception. Religious holidays were substituted by revolutionary analogues, such as the days of Overthrown of Autocracy (*sverzheniie samoderzhaviia*) and Paris Commune. Pesach celebration was replaced by May Day celebrations. Jewish students were supposed to take an active part in the anti-Pesach campaigns. Though INO reported to the authorities that at Jewish pedagogical courses students had classes and passed exams on the "days of Paskha and Troitsa,"[615]

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[610] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 1057, p. 169, p. 50.
[611] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 7.
[612] Ibid.
[613] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 1057, p. 9.
[614] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, pp. 2-3.
[615] Ibid, p. 2.

we have seen earlier that some Jewish teachers, and probably their students as well, violated the rule. In such cases, teachers usually appealed to the students' right to decide by a majority vote to celebrate religious holidays.[616] There are also lists of INO's students who were about to be kicked out in 1924 because of their "visits to the church."[617]

Students were also obliged to be members of one of the sections of Ivan Franko society at INO, and to be actively engaged in "exhibitions and performances for the proletariat," which were mandatory despite being extracurricular.[618] INO especially prepared for the anniversaries of the October Revolution. The performances celebrating the October Revolution were staged in a village house (*selbudinok*), supervised by the Gubernial Department of People's Education.[619] The reports euphorically describe students' excitement and involvement in celebrations and parades.[620] Rather than being evidence in support of their wholehearted acceptance of socialism, students' yearning for these events might signify their yearning for more leisure, since the preparation for the major celebrations meant taking time off from school. While some reports state that it was not a burden for students to combine their education with political work, others state that teachers and student members of the Party cell at INO were overloaded by "other work" and conducted the political work "poorly."[621] Both kind of claims are telling of the authorities' need to explain away the sacrifice of education for propaganda.

Despite the fraternal character of the student activities, the relationships between students themselves were not ideal. Animosity and resentment usually escalated on political lines, between the students who were Party members and those who were not.[622] It is likely that the latter group were by and large religiously inclinced students and that some of them were secretly members of other parties. INO was determined that, as an institution, it does not discriminate its students on the basis of party membership, though the teachers' preference for some students over others could not have been immune to their own political convictions.[623]

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[616] This was the case with Chudniv's Jewish school in 1921. DAZO, Fund P-143, inv. 1, f. 21, p. 66.
[617] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 1057, p. 169, p. 172. No such information comes together with the surnames of Jewish students but I assume that they were in a similar situation with respect to synagogue attendance.
[618] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 1057, p. 13.
[619] Ibid.
[620] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291, p. 7.
[621] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 291 (microfilm).
[622] Ibid.
[623] Ibid.

The way INO represented itself in relation to its students reveals much about its aspirations as a Soviet institution. Stressing its paternalistic role in guiding the lives of young men and women, INO aspired to combine the ideals of socialist communal upbringing and reform pedagogy. The visible contradictions in even its most positive reports suggest that its aspirations were far from reality.

Conclusion

All Soviet educational institutions in the interwar period were alike in how they ended but each of them was a misfortune in its own way. INO's closing in 1937 marked an end to Jewish cultural and educational work in Yiddish in the province.[624] Most local Jewish teachers and those attracted by the opportunity to work in Yiddish who came from Poland were purged during the Great Terror. Before they were killed, the Jewish teachers were usually accused of "bourgeois nationalism." The same was the fate of Ukrainian teachers and any other cadres representing the old regime. The first rector, Abramovich, was arrested by the NKVD in Kharkiv in 1931, being accused of being a bourgeois Ukrainian nationalist. His last years of life remain a mystery, though it is likely that he perished in the purges.[625] INO's finances were first cut down and its curricula was cleansed of elements of Jewish and Ukrainian culture.[626] The Institute was closed when the state no longer saw the need for the nativization policy and when it switched to forceful Russification and open anti-Semitism. INO's end was an unfortunate but unsurprising step in a series of events starting with the suicide of the founder of CP(b)U and proponent of cultural Ukrainization, Mykola Skrypnik, in 1933 and ending in Moscow trials from 1936-1938.

The story of INO is a sketch of Sovietization of the local Jewish population in the interwar Ukraine. I reached three major conclusions. First, Russian prevailed as the language of instruction and communication in INO and related institutions despite Ukrainians and Jews being the majority of the people attending INO and contrary to the official goal of the nativization policy to satisfy the nationalities' needs for education in Ukrainian and Yiddish. Second, the Institute's prestigious

[624] TsDAVO, Fund 166, inv. 2, f. 1160.
[625] Kostritsia, M. Y. "Pershii rektor Volyns'kogo INO," p. 82.
[626] Ibid.

character and its ideological flexibility showed that the Soviet power was willing to abandon its official program for the sake of closer engagement with the local population and that it opted for a more liberal approach, leaving the provincial institutions to deal with their problems in their own way. Third, despite the initial excitement of Jewish socialists to collaborate with Bolsheviks at INO, their relationship ended in disappointment. The Jews who were skilled to teach political subjects and who had decent education were the same "bourgeois enemies" whom INO eventually had to get rid of according to the Bolshevik ideology, and which in the end it did. Jewish socialists who became INO's teachers were not willing to give up on their Jewish identity – secular, Yiddish-speaking, and tolerant of religion. Similar to Ukrainian cadres, they used the Institute to pursue their national aims. INO was a place of competing nationalisms rather than a unifying institution where the message of socialism in the native languages would merge everyone into a Soviet people.

Conclusion

This dissertation argued that the Bolsheviks' project of transforming the Shtetl Jew into the New Soviet Man in the USSR's first decade was to a large extent unsuccessful. The focus of the study was the provincial Jews of Ukraine, from the regions of Zhytomir and Vinnytsa in the former Pale of Settlement, whom the authorities perceived as unassimilated and backward. Contrasting their Sovietization with that of the urbanized and Russian-speaking Jewry, the dissertation argued that the provincial Jews were the primary target of the nativization policy, which declared to alter their private and public lives by spreading the socialist message in their mother tongue, Yiddish, by contesting their religiously based mores, and by granting them minority rights and protecting them from institutional discrimination and their neighbors' anti-Semitism. The change was to come off through extensive reforms in education, religion, and culture, three principal domains of life in the shtetl. Though Bolsheviks were not the first to challenge the traditional shtetl life, as secularization and mass politics were swaying the East European Jewish society at the turn of the century, they were the first to openly and radically try to sever the ties between the synagogue and the Jew's education and culture.

The transformation did not go smoothly. The Soviet Jewish school in Yiddish emerged as a result of Bolsheviks' taking over the experience of Jewish socialists in providing the Jews with education in Yiddish and bringing them in touch with pedagogical innovations. The Yiddish school was not merely a substitution for provincial socialist schools in Yiddish, but it often replaced them, including the school itself and the teachers. This became a point of contention between the Jewish socialists within the Kultur-Lige's network and Evsektsiia's activists, assigned to impose the state's measures. The locals wanted to keep the old schools and had support from the communal structure (kehila) while Jewish Bolsheviks were perceived as intruders. Enjoying little financial and organizational support from the state, the new school had to compete for students with religious and other secular Jewish schools. Poor infrastructure, lack of finances, disputes with previous owners, suspicion from the locals, and the existence of alternative schools were among the reasons why the Soviet Yiddish school was weak and short-lived. In addition, most locals

wanted to give their children traditional education and then send them to a Soviet school but in a language other than Yiddish, hoping that Ukrainian and Russian schools would improve their career prospects.

Bolsheviks' educational shortcomings were even more striking at higher level institutions in the province, such as The Zhytomir Pedagogical Institute (INO), designed to prepare cadres of different nationalities for Soviet schools and provide them with stern socialist upbringing in their native languages. Instead, INO was a place where the ideological rigidity was bypassed or tailored to the local circumstances and where the Jewish and Ukrainian activists fostered their own national projects at the expense of socialism and comradeship. The legacy of Russian as the language of instruction created additional friction between INO's faculty willing to teach in Russian and those averse to it, the former by majority being the Jews and the latter Ukrainians.

Though elimination of anti-Semitism was one of the policies Bolsheviks proudly professed, motivated by the care of Jewish support for their cause and the desire to present themselves in the best light in comparison to the tsarist discriminatory regime, in the province they were ambivalent towards anti-Semitism and sometimes themselves the culprits. Not only Bolsheviks were reluctant to protect the Jews but they foreseeably created an institutional framework in which anti-Semitic acts could be done without impunity and even be encouraged. With the anti-Judaism campaign, which targeted synagogues, the most important places of religious, educational, and cultural lives of Jews, and major holidays such as Pesach, Bolsheviks were aware that they were not only attacking a religion but an ethnic community who could not see itself as one outside those social institutions. While anti-Semitism was officially punishable by law in the USSR, local activists abused the anti-religious and the collectivization campaigns to attack the Jews, who were framed qua "bourgeois elements" and in reality, qua Jews. The court verdict in which a Jewish family was stripped of their land because of the suspicion that Jews were able to cultivate a land is but one of many examples where the ideology of class enmity went hand in hand with the old prejudices to discriminate the Jews.

Recognizing the history of the belittlement of each other's cultures under the imperial regime as one's own, Jews and Ukrainians aspired to collaborate with each other in the cultural renewal in national languages fostered by the nationality policy. The collaboration gave rise to independent amateur theaters, joint musical evenings, art exhibitions, and translations of each other's literature. Though Yiddish and Ukrainian cultures flourished in the 1920s, they were short

of achieving the goal of "Soviet in form, national in content" cultures that Bolsheviks promised to deliver, mostly due to structural reasons. Apart from unskillfulness of cadres and their continual struggle to make ends meet, the major problem was the parallelism of Soviet cultural and bureaucratic institutions, whose opposing visions of culture, competition over workers, and mutual obstruction incapacitated provincial cultural institutions. The mutual distrust of some Jewish and Ukrainian cultural workers was evident in the theater, where the problem of keeping the Russian repertoire to attract a larger audience turned out political, with Ukrainians being keepers of the letter of the law and accusing the Jews of counterrevolutionary sabotage.

The dissertation examined a part of the history of Ukrainian provincial Jews, leaving aside important topics such as pogroms, hungers, the stories of Jews who left the province, etc. My conclusion is that Sovietization of the Jews was a strenuous process, in which Bolsheviks often behaved like tsarist officials and the Jews sought every opportunity to evade the innovations or combine them with their old customs. Further scholarly attention is invited to other aspects of Ukrainian provincial Jews, a neglected but inspiring community which preserved its traditional way of life until the Holocaust, when most of its members physically perished.

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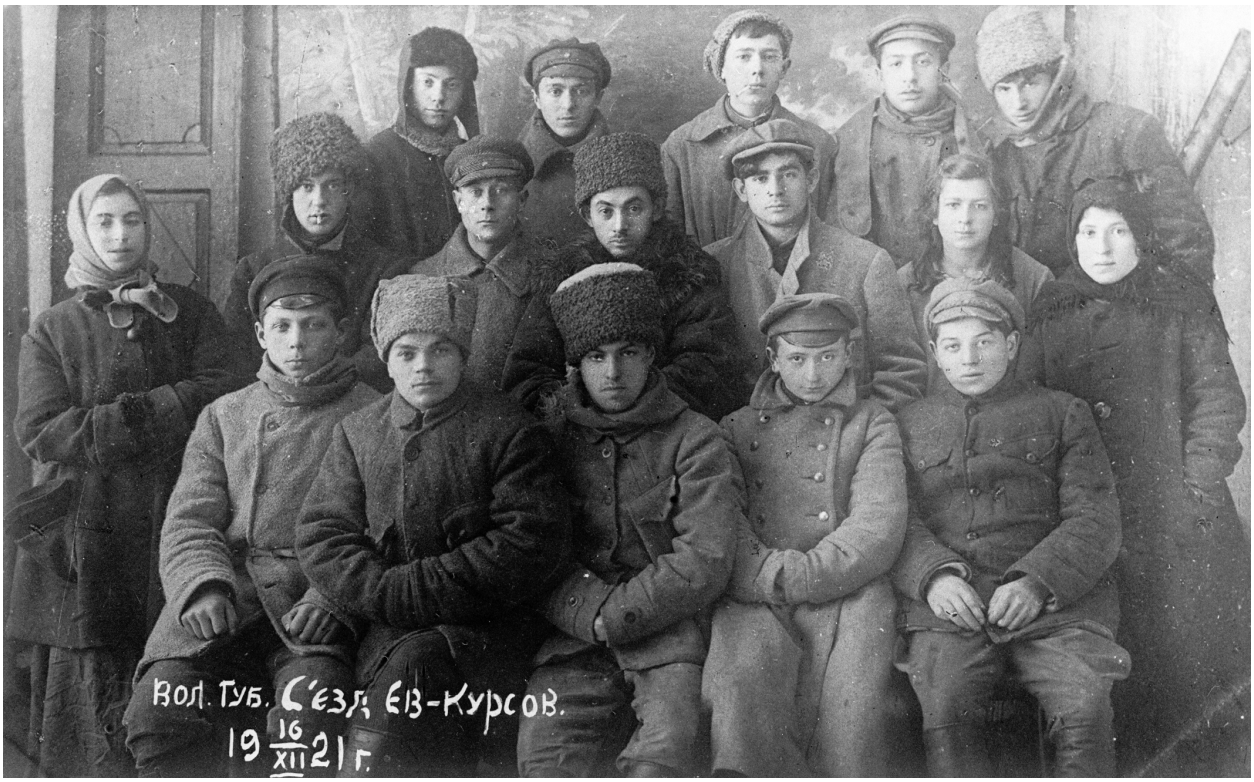
Illustrations

1. Talmud Torah in Zhytomir at the beginning of the 20th century. A religious school for boys of modest backgrounds, Talmud Torah worked half-legally in the 1920s and kept contacts with the Soviet power. In some towns in the province, Bolsheviks used Talmud Torah for its own purpose, recruiting its pupils for the new secular Yiddish school. (source: TsDKFFA)

2. Teachers and pupils of the Korets Talmud Torah, Novograd-Volinska povit of Volyn gubernia, before 1917. Bolshevik propaganda presented Jewish religious schools as uncivilized, unhygienic, places with violent teachers unconcerned for their pupils' physical development. Though far from ideal, these schools enjoyed wide support by the local population, even after their official banning in 1922. In reality, the new Yiddish school shared many bad features with the religious schools, including the use of corporal punishment as an educational tool. (source: TsDKFFA)



3. Volyn' gubernial conference of Jewish courses, December 16th, 1921. Bolsheviks believed that the value of education was instrumental, serving the goal of spreading socialism among the masses. Teachers were to become Party members and agitators of its cause. Though Jewish teachers in the province were rarely Party members, they agreed to the role of agitators taking the opportunity to promote any secular education. (source: TsDKFFA)

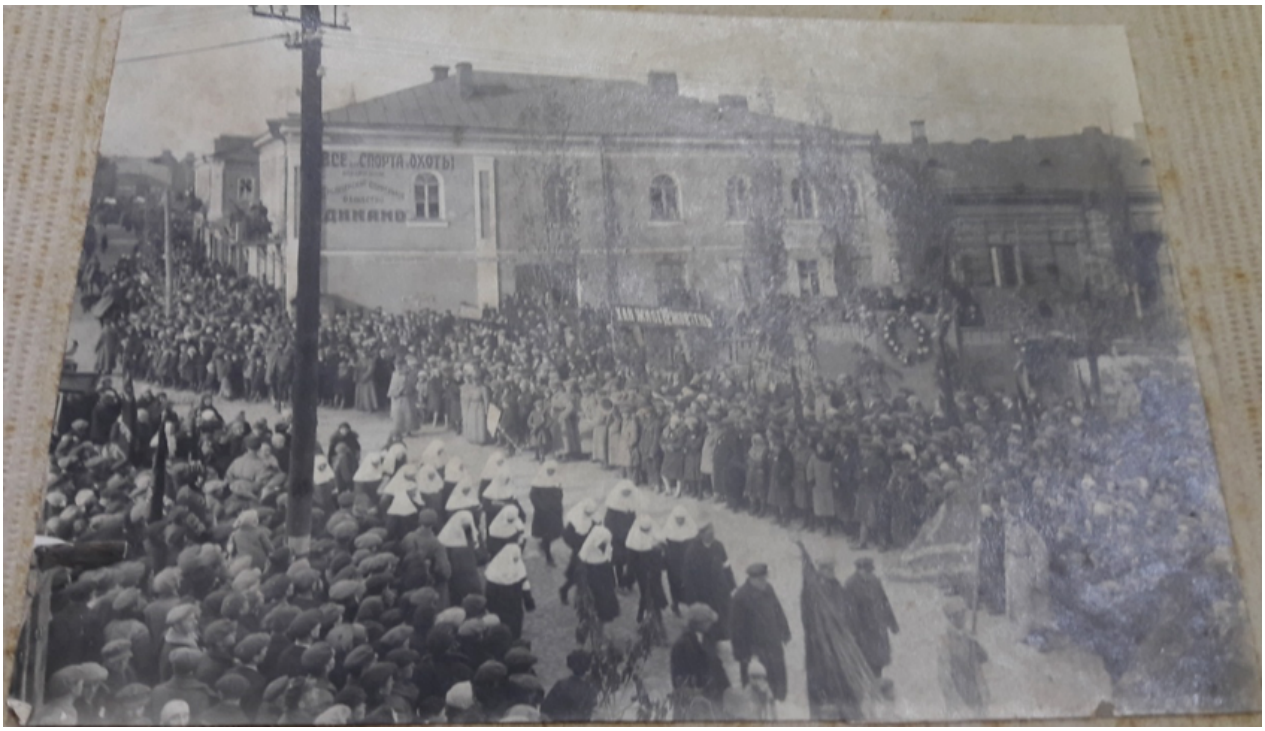
4. Members of high pedagogical courses later turned into pedagogical technicum, Zhytomir, 1922. All-Russian TSIK approved these courses in 1918 as a first step towards building the Unified Labor School, a system of primary and secondary education across the country. The courses were supposed to prepare the faculty, themselves socialists of various strands, for the new school. The school did not have a unified curriculum and it was up to the lecturers to invent and tailor it to the local context. (source: DAZO)

5. Participants of the 1st okrug meeting of workers of national minorities of Ukraine, Uman, December 20th-23rd, 1923. One of the professed aims of the nativization policy was to acknowledge the demands of national minorities for political presence in decision making bodies, education in national languages, and funding of national cultures. Bolsheviks' belief that these measures will decrease ethnic tensions turned out false as they exacerbated clashes over political representation, land rights, and finances. (source: TsDKFFA)

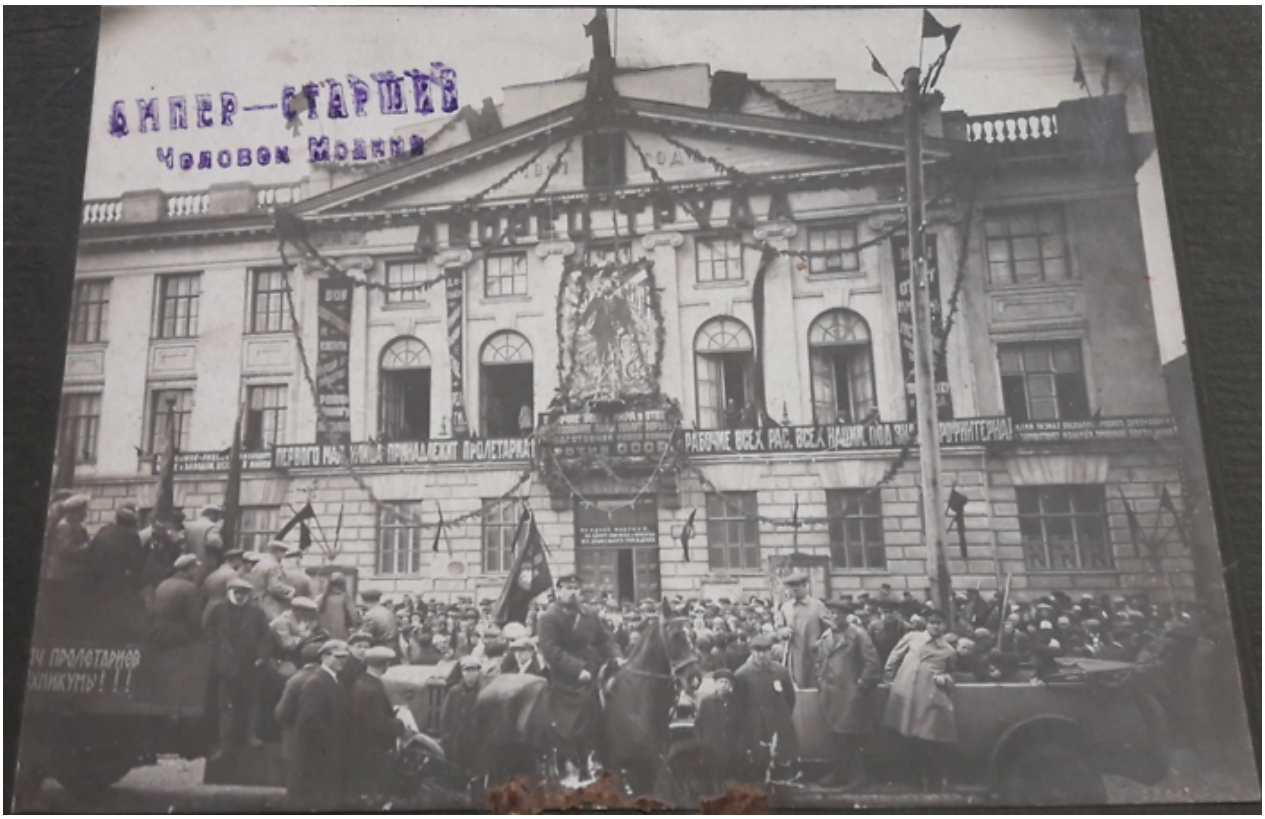
6. Participants of the 4th Conference of Members of the Jewish Union, Gaisyn, Vinnytsia gubernia, December 13th-15th, 1924. Jewish Unions were ideologically diverse gatherings which emerged in pre-revolutionary times, later to became platforms for legal activism of various socialists. Bundists comprised the major part of them. Since Bund enjoyed support among provincial Jews, Bolsheviks found it advantageous to collaborate with Bund and eventually incorporated its major part in the Communist Party. (source: TsDKFFA)

7. A group of children from the Jewish children town Letychiv, Proskurov's okrug, Vinnytsia region, 1925. Children towns were experimental educational settlements located in remote villages and usually functioning as self-sufficient units of Jewish agricultural colonies. Under the influence of Anton Makarenko's theories, these towns were devised to gather and educate orphans and street children. Another such town was built for the reeducation of juvenile delinquents in the village of Al'binivka in Zhytomir region. (source: TsDKFFA)

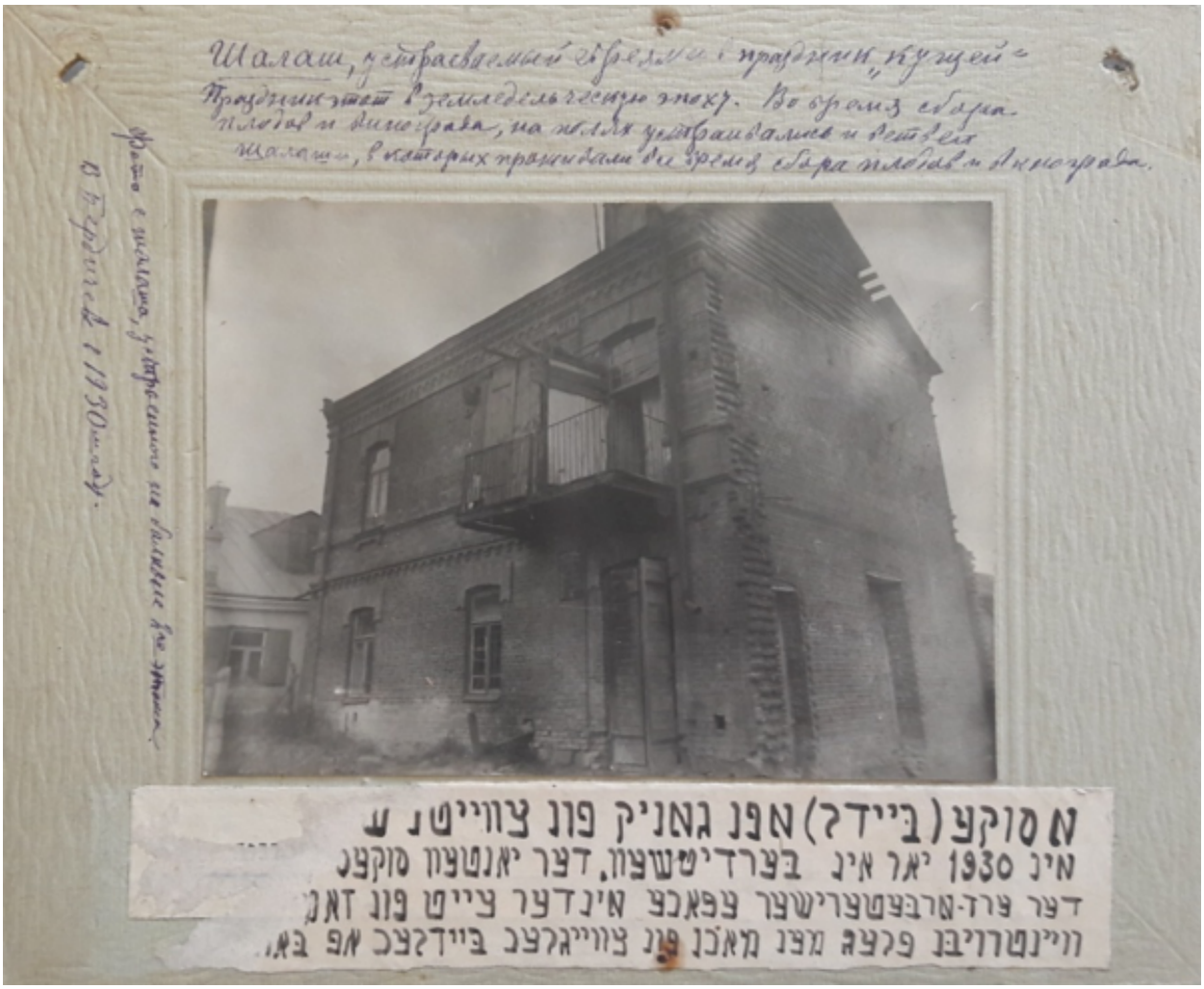
8. Participants of the 2nd Conference of Jewish Teachers of Berdychiv okrug, January 26th, 1926. The main problem which Bolsheviks faced in education was the poor training of school teachers. Since the most skilled cadres were Jewish socialists of the Kultur-Lige who used to work in pre-revolutionary Yiddish schools, Bolsheviks did not have much choice but to collaborate with them, despite their mutual hostilities. (source: ZKM)



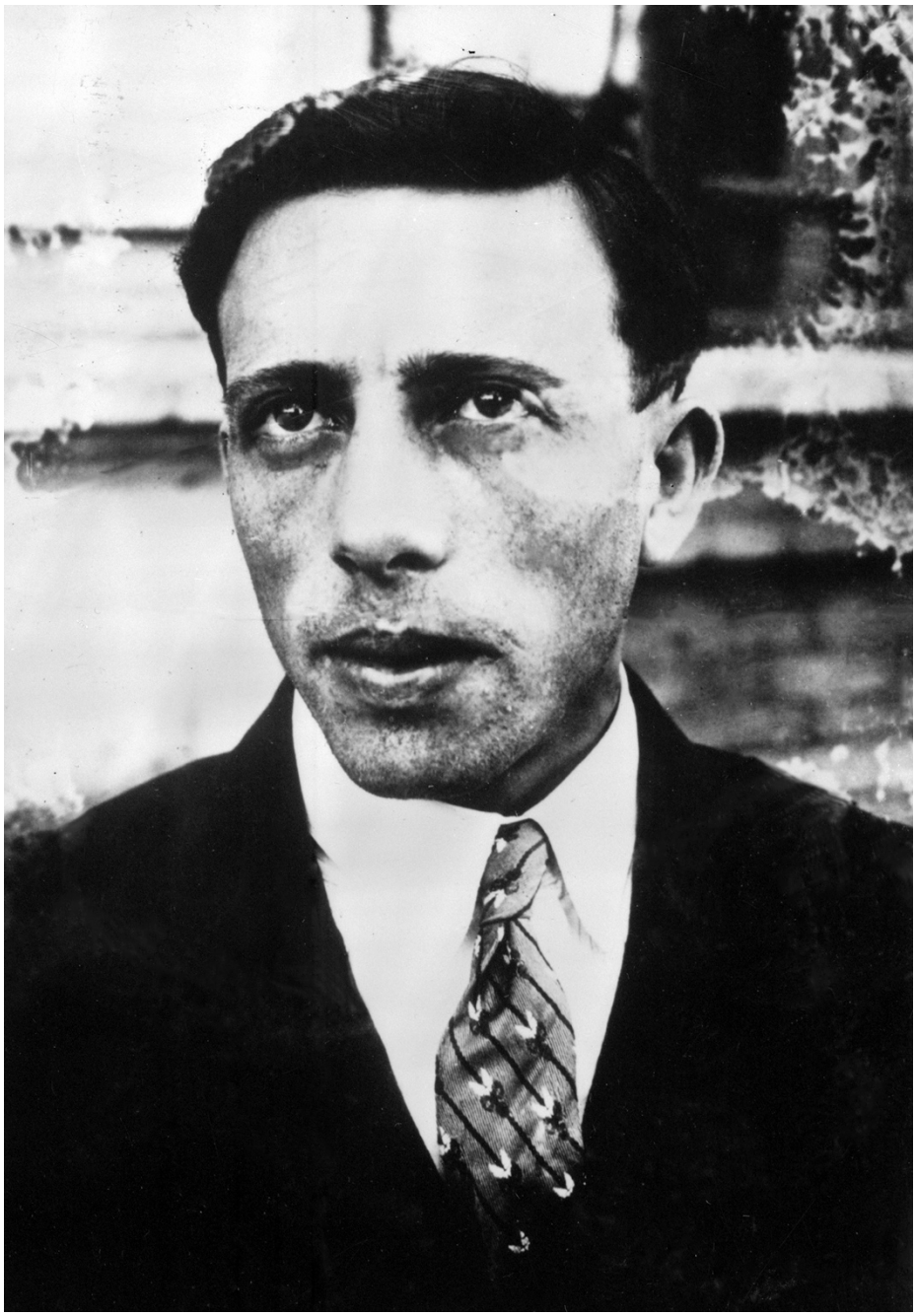
9. Berdychiv celebrates the 12th anniversary of the October Revolution, 1929. Understanding the social importance of holiday celebrations, Bolsheviks invented socialist holidays corresponding to major religious holidays. The parade of Carmelites under the Red flag is but one of many syncretic phenomena in the 1920s. One can only guess their motivations, but Bolsheviks' desire to get the support of the Polish minority and its conationals across the border by using the Catholic Church is not excluded. (source: ZKM)



10. Workers' Palace, Zhytomir, ca. 1930. Workers' Palaces, or Palaces of Culture, were a new type of buildings formed in the 1920s to serve as centers of social and cultural life of workers. They had halls for cinema, concerts, art exhibitions, sports and recreation, etc. and typically served as places for celebrating important holidays. Bolsheviks maintained that Workers' Palaces would bring political enlightenment and divert the people from crime and misconduct. (source: ZKM)



11. Hut (*sukkah*) arranged on the balcony of the second floor for celebrating the Jewish festival of Sukkot, Berdychiv, 1930. Jews usually ate, slept, and socialized inside the hut during the week-long Feast of Ingathering. That they planned to do so on a balcony of a private house at the height of the anti-religious campaign testifies to the fact that the suppression of Judaism in the province could be bypassed, especially if a Jew was positioned well socially. (source: ZKM)



12. Rubinstein, worker of Vinnytsia's Jewish Theater, Vinnytsia, 1935. For all the professed support by the new state, amateur Yiddish theaters, which formed the majority of Jewish theaters in the province, struggled for approval against conflicting bureaucratic and political institutions, state theaters, and better funded Ukrainian theaters. Jewish theater workers did side jobs to survive and for the majority theater work was not their main occupation. (source: TsDKFFA)

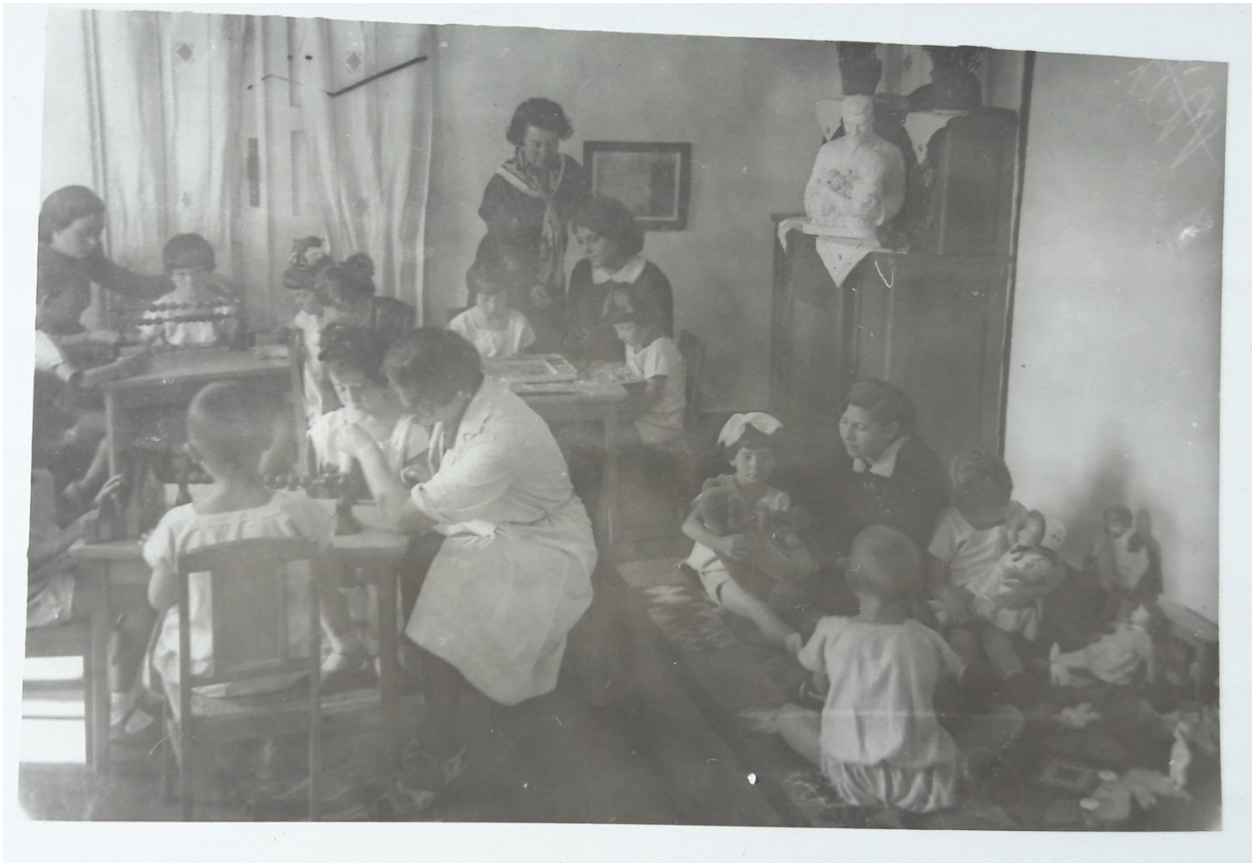
13. Kontara, director of Vasily Ellan-Blakitny Vinnytsia's Theater, Vinnytsia, 1935. Encouraged by the nativization policy's support for minority languages, Ukrainian theaters replaced the old Russian repertoire with plays in Ukrainian, unlike Yiddish theaters which preserved it for the sake of attracting an audience accustomed to plays in Russian. The language split turned into political and ethnic strives, whereby Ukrainian theater workers accused their Jewish collegues for counter-revolutionary subversion of the policy. (source: TsDKFFA)

14. Children of a nursery school, Rudnitskii district of Zhytomir oblast', 1937. Though Bolsheviks had an elaborate structure of pre-school education already in the 1920s, it was in the next decade that political propaganda permeated the daily lives of the youngest members of the society, as seen by these toddlers taught to fly the Red flag. (source: DAZO)

15. Geography class at a Jewish school guided by teacher Pik, Zhytomir, 1938. The special focus of geography classes in the 1920s was human and economic geography of localities and regions in which the study took place, which is why outdoor lessons were encouraged. The 1930s saw a change of direction to physical geography of the country and the extensive use of wall maps in teaching. (source: DAZO)

16. Laboratory work at a Jewish pedagogical school (*evpedshkola*), 1938. An inseparable part of the Bolshevik ideology was the idea that the study of natural sciences would drive the society towards atheism. Hence the emphasis on laboratory training in schools and the attempts to translate natural sciences terminology in Yiddish. (source: DAZO)

17. Practice classes at a Jewish pedagogical school guided by teacher Gorodetskii, 1938. Teachers' work was supervised by their academically higher ranked colleagues. The ideological control of the classroom was complete in the late 1930s. At this photograph, pupils with red Pioneer scarves around their necks attend a Yiddish language class. The left blackboard outlines the construction of suffixes while on the right one a pupil practices the learned, making an adjective from a noun – 'Bolshevik'. (source: DAZO)



18. Students of a Jewish pedagogical school on practice in kindergarten directed by teacher Kruglova, Zhytomir, 1938. Already in the 1920s, Bolsheviks viewed kindergartens as experiments in the project of withering away the family. In the next decade, the idea was taken further and pre-school children were considered as ideal revolutionaries who, under the watchful eye of comrade Stalin (or his bust), would learn to put the state first and family last. (source: DAZO)

19. Petro Nikandrovich Abramovich (1881-1937), INO's First Rector. Abramovich became the rector during the brief rule of Central Rada in 1920. Once the Bolsheviks took Zhytomir, he lost his position, later to recover it likely by the intervention from Moscow. After being arrested by the NKVD in 1931 for "Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism", Abramovich's fate is unknown, though predictable. (source: ZKM's exhibition)

20. Interior of the Museum of Atheism in the Catholic monastery of Discalced Carmelites (Upper monastery), Bedychiv, 1930-1940s, no later than 1941. The anti-Judaism campaign had a different impact than the anti-Christianity campaign. The former targeted not just a religion but a communal part of Jewish identity built on a network of educational, cultural, and social institutions in the synagogue. Unlike Christians, Jews attended their houses of pray and considered them sacred even after they had been turned into secular institutions. (source: ZKM)

21. Exterior of the Museum of Atheism in the Catholic monastery of Discalced Carmelites (Upper monastery), Bedychiv, 1930-1940s, no later than 1941. The anti-religious campaign was supposed to be the backbone of building the new, secular, Soviet man. Though Bolsheviks condemned anti-Semitism in principle, the anti-Judaism campaign provided a free ground for local anti-Semites to unleash violence against the Jews and to seize their property. (source: ZKM)