

Soviet National Autonomy in the 1920s: The Dilemmas of Ukraine's Jewish Population

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Abstract

This article examines the Soviet system of territorial autonomy by studying its impact on the Jewish population of Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s. While the new Soviet state created national republics, districts, and village councils for its non-Russian nationalities, Ukraine's Jewish population was faced with a dilemma: Ukrainian Jews lived predominantly in cities, but urban space could not be claimed for Jewish territorial autonomy because the Soviet government hoped that peasant immigration would produce a Ukrainian working class. Without an autonomous status, many Jews felt threatened by the increasing influx of Ukrainians and the spread of Ukrainian-language institutions. Offered as a consolation prize, the Soviet Yiddishization initiative failed to cater to the needs of many Jews who preferred the Russian language as a means for social mobility. Attempts to resettle urban Jews in compact agricultural colonies suitable for territorial autonomy never reached the necessary scale. In conclusion, this article argues that the incompatibility of Soviet territorial autonomy with Ukrainian Jewish needs anticipated the Soviet state's inability to accommodate the increasingly urban, heterogeneous, transnational, multilingual, and mobile society that emerged in the postwar Soviet Union.

Keywords: Soviet Union; Ukraine; interwar; language policy; minority rights

Introduction

During the first decade of its existence, the Soviet Union engaged in the most painstaking experiment in national territorial autonomy to date. When the Bolsheviks assumed power in Russia in 1917, they were confronted with separatist movements and calls for national autonomy. Unwilling to relinquish the Communist Party's claim to a cultural monopoly, however, Bolshevik leaders such as Vladimir Lenin and Josef Stalin rejected Austro-Marxist ideas of non-territorial (or extraterritorial), cultural autonomy. Instead, the Soviet state created thousands of autonomous territories at various administrative levels, ranging from Union republics to village councils, to accommodate its non-Russian nationalities. Within these territories, all spheres of public life were to be staffed with titular nationals and shift to the respective national language, a process known as *korenizatsiia*, or indigenization. By far the most sophisticated approach to the problem of national minorities in interwar Europe, the resulting federalist system would structure the Soviet Union until its end (Slezkine 1994; Martin 2001).

This article explores the impact of the Soviet system of territorial autonomy on the Jewish population of Ukraine as an illustration of the policy's problems and ramifications. By far the most populous and economically powerful non-Russian republic, Soviet Ukraine was at the forefront of

the Soviet venture into national autonomy, both in terms of its implementation and the resulting conflicts. According to the 1926 census, Ukraine was also home to more than one and a half million Jews. Seemingly united by the Yiddish language and more than a century of Tsarist discrimination, the 2.6 million Jewish citizens of the Soviet Union were considered a national minority. They were, in fact, the largest ethnic group without a republic of their own at that time. In the decades before the October Revolution, Jewish intellectuals and political organizations in Tsarist Russia had hotly debated the question of national autonomy (Mendelsohn 1993; Rabinovitch 2014). Most Jewish socialist parties came to endorse various concepts of non-territorial, cultural autonomy, which placed them in direct opposition to the Bolsheviks within the revolutionary movement and would eventually complicate Soviet outreach to the Jewish population after 1917.

The Soviet Union was not the only state in interwar Eastern Europe to provide national autonomy for its Jewish citizens. Newly independent Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia all offered variants of Jewish non-territorial, cultural autonomy. However, their significance for the situation of Jews in Soviet Ukraine should not be overestimated. First, these provisions were either soon revoked, never fully realized, or, in Estonia, concerned only a few thousand Jews (Kuzmany 2020, 334–337).¹ Second, their influence on Ukraine's Jewish population was likely overshadowed by less accommodating government policies toward the larger and geographically closer Jewish communities of Poland and Romania (Mendelsohn 1983, 34–37, 195–200). Finally, the early Soviet approach to national autonomy was more informed by pre-war debates among European socialists than by contemporary practices in neighboring bourgeois states. If anything, countries such as Poland and Estonia adapted their handling of national minorities in response to real or imagined threats emanating from the Soviet Union (Hasselblatt 1996, 42–43; Rudling 2015, 273).

The experiences of Ukraine's Jewish population offer a unique perspective on Soviet nationalities policy in the 1920s. Scholars such as Terry Martin (1999), Arne Haugen (2003, 165–210), Kate Brown (2004, 18–51), Francine Hirsch (2005, 151–155), and Paul Bergne (2007, 100–134) have examined the unintended consequences of Soviet territorial autonomy in a variety of settings, analyzing how its implementation spawned conflicts at various political levels and undermined the local stability of the regime. To a large extent, these problems can often be traced back to issues of resources and distribution—funding, land, infrastructure, jobs, and state capacity—that took the shape of ethnic tension because of this policy. When it comes to the Jewish population of Ukraine, however, the situation was more complicated. This article argues that the Soviet territorialization of nationality was fundamentally incompatible with Jewish needs and trajectories in Ukraine. For the predominantly urban Jewish population, territorial autonomy proved largely unattainable. Without their own autonomous status, Jews were particularly disadvantaged by the Ukrainization of state and society. At the same time, tacit extraterritorial autonomy in the form of Soviet Yiddish language institutions was rejected by many urban Jews who embraced the Russian language as a means of social mobility. In conclusion, this article suggests that the Soviet failure to account for Ukraine's Jewish population anticipated the inability to accommodate the increasingly urban, heterogeneous, transnational, multilingual, and mobile society that emerged in the Soviet Union in the 1960s and 1970s.

Territorial Autonomy and the Problem of Jewish Urbanization

When Ukrainization picked up its pace in the mid-1920s, it raised concerns about the situation of the national minorities living in Ukraine. The Ukrainization program pursued by the government in Kharkiv, the capital of Soviet Ukraine until 1934, envisaged two main goals: raising the share of ethnic Ukrainians and adopting the Ukrainian language in public institutions and organizations, including in the Party-state apparatus. Proficiency in Ukrainian became mandatory for state employees, Ukrainian schools and print blossomed, and the number of ethnic Ukrainians at universities, in trade unions, in the Communist Party, and in various administrative and elected positions surged within a few years (Kommunisticheskaia akademiia 1930, 138, 177, 208–209, 230–233, 288–293; Panchuk 1994, 106–109; Martin 2001, 84–87). These accomplishments repeatedly

drew criticism from Soviet politicians in Moscow and representatives of national minorities in Ukraine, partially nurtured by a deep suspicion of Ukrainian nationalism, partially motivated by genuine concern for minority rights (Liber 1992, 153–156; Martin 2001, 36–39). Of a population of 29 million, approximately 5.8 million citizens of Soviet Ukraine were not ethnic Ukrainians. The largest minorities were Russians and Jews, followed by Poles and Germans (TsSU SSSR 1929a, 8–11). In principle, the Ukrainian leadership and its critics agreed that all citizens should be allowed to use their native languages in communication with Soviet authorities and send their children to native-language schools. Kharkiv repeatedly reaffirmed its commitment to protecting these rights of the national minorities. In practice, however, this issue often boiled down to a matter of priorities and was frequently decided by local authorities with limited resources at their disposal.

The Ukrainian government responded to criticism of its Ukrainization policy by establishing national districts, settlement, and village councils in places where a particular nationality constituted a local majority. These national territories were supposed to soften the impact of Ukrainization on national minorities as local authorities were to use the respective national language and to be staffed with titular nationals. As a result, many members of national minorities indeed came to identify the autonomous territories created for them as their own (Martin 1999). The Ukrainian government lowered the numerical thresholds for national districts and village councils from 25,000 to 10,000 and from 1,000 to 500, respectively, in August 1924. Over the following years, the government's Central Commission for the National Minorities (TsKNM) set up hundreds of national territories scattered all over the republic (Martin 2001, 33–38; Brown 2004, 31; Iakubova 2006, 202–207). By 1929, 26 national districts, 109 national settlement councils, and 1088 national village councils had been established.² As a result, the term national minority became increasingly subjective and depended on the level of reference: for example, an ethnic Ukrainian living in the territory of a German village council was a minority at the local level, a majority at the republican level, and a minority again at the Union level. Effectively, the Ukrainian state ultimately sought to ensure that every citizen lived in a territory of their respective nationality (Martin 2001, 47).

While this pyramid model of national territories was presented as the solution to the National Question and soon adopted in other republics, it had its obvious limitations. Specifically, it could not be applied to urban areas. Most cities in Ukraine had only a small Ukrainian population share and were predominantly Russian-speaking, but the Bolsheviks expected that peasant immigration would produce a Ukrainian urban working class and intelligentsia: “You cannot go against history,” Stalin had famously declared at the 10th Party Congress in 1921. “It is clear that even though the Russian element is still dominant in Ukrainian cities, over time these cities will inevitably become Ukrainianized” (Institut Marksa-Engel'sa 1933, 217). Interference with this natural process was feared to disrupt the connection between city and village, between the Party and the peasantry. For this reason, the cities had to remain free from national councils working in languages other than Ukrainian (TsKNM 1927, 9–10, 13–14, 163–164). Even the establishment of national sections at city councils for the purpose of serving minorities was controversial (VUTsIK 1925, 91; TsKNM 1927, 167). As a result of this fundamental problem, the Ukrainian government effectively resorted to a tacit form of extraterritorial autonomy and set up numerous minority-language schools, newspapers, theaters, and even courts in the cities. Without the protection provided by territorial autonomy, however, it was a constant struggle for resources and influence to establish and maintain these institutions.

The Jewish population of Soviet Ukraine was particularly affected by the fact that national territorial autonomy was unattainable in cities. More than any other national group in the republic, Ukrainian Jews were predominantly urban: in 1926, almost 80% lived in cities; across all nationalities, this figure barely reached 20% on average. Three out of four Jews were native speakers of Yiddish, whereas the share of Jewish native speakers of Ukrainian was lower than 1% (TsSU SSSR 1929a, 8–15). To serve the Jewish population in their native language, more than 150 Jewish national councils were established by the end of the decade, 68 of them in settlements, the others in villages.³ At least in theory, these councils did their paperwork in Yiddish. The settlement councils

(Russian *poselkovye sovety*, Ukrainian *selyshchni rady*) seem to have been a concession to Ukrainian Jews in particular to account for predominantly Jewish Shtetlach, as no other minority was given settlement councils before 1928 (Iakubova 2006, 215).⁴ Despite these efforts, however, the proportion of Ukrainian Jews living in the jurisdiction of Jewish national councils remained significantly lower than that of all other national minorities of comparable size. In 1926, the Ukrainian government calculated that only one out of four Ukrainian Jews living in the countryside was served by a Jewish national council (VUTsIK 1926, 193). For the entire Jewish population, this figure was as low as 13% (TsKNM 1927, 28).

A large majority of Ukrainian Jews thus lived outside of Jewish national territories and was, therefore, exposed to the consequences of Ukrainization. Their right to be served by Yiddish-language institutions was often disregarded. In Kyiv, for example, local authorities downplayed the demand for Yiddish schools by basing their calculations on the Jewish population share in the entire Kyiv governorate instead of in the city only: in Kyiv proper, Jews and Ukrainians each accounted for approximately 30% of the population at that time, whereas in the governorate, the number of Ukrainians was almost eight times as high as that of the Jewish population (S"ezd sovetov 1925, 279–280; TsSU USSR 1925, 119–120, 124–125; TsSU SSSR 1929b, 25–26). In Zinov'ivs'k, the 1926 census questionnaires had not been provided in Yiddish: as a result, the number of Jews requiring Yiddish schools had been understated. In Pros'kuriv, only two Yiddish schools existed by 1927, although several local conferences had asked for more because half of the city's population was Jewish (TsKNM 1927, 63, 65). Yiddish schools also reported pressure from the People's Commissariat of Education to conduct their paperwork in Ukrainian or to use only teachers proficient in Ukrainian (TsKNM 1927, 71).⁵ Sometimes even bilingualism was not tolerated: a Yiddish kindergarten in Kyiv was fined by authorities because its signboards included both Ukrainian and Yiddish rather than Ukrainian only.⁶

In practice, Jewish citizens often had to use languages other than Yiddish to communicate with Soviet authorities. The Uman' office of the Central Commission of the National Minorities received around 400 complaints in Yiddish in a year, the overwhelming majority of which had nothing to do with national issues: the problem was simply that whenever Jews tried to address the appropriate authorities in Yiddish, they were told to write their submissions in an "understandable language", that is in Russian or Ukrainian (TsKNM 1927, 41, 52). By the end of the decade, 70,000 Jews were living in Dnipropetrovs'k, but all state institutions had signs asking visitors to address employees in Ukrainian only, and there were no literacy schools (*likpunkty* in Russian) offering Yiddish courses. Both the Jewish militia and the Jewish court that were supposed to work in Yiddish existed on paper only (TsKNM 1930, 42, 50). Although almost 100,000 Jews lived in Kharkiv by 1930, the city council refused to provide election mailers in languages other than Ukrainian and Russian (TsKNM 1930, 48). Again in Kyiv, the city council worked in Ukrainian only—instead of Russian, Yiddish, and Ukrainian—which forced the Russian and Jewish population to adapt. This was particularly absurd in neighbourhoods like the Podil quarter, which was geographically separated from the upper city and almost exclusively inhabited by Jews (Larin 1927, 66–67).

The city of Odesa appears to have been a particularly stark case of excessive Ukrainization, the practice of compelling non-Ukrainians to use the Ukrainian language in schools and official paperwork. Approximately 153,000 Jews lived here in 1926, along with 162,000 Russians and 73,000 Ukrainians, up from 12,000 or 3% of the population six years earlier (TsSU USSR 1923, 40–41; TsSU SSSR 1929c, 27–28). As late as 1927, the local Party apparatus wrote Ukrainian but spoke Russian; even in the countryside of the Odesa region, where the Ukrainian population share was higher than in the city, more than one-third of the teachers at Ukrainian schools did not know Ukrainian.⁷ At the same time, complaints about Ukrainization abounded. In one case, an entire school was shifted to Ukrainian-language instruction, although only 3 out of 410 students were ethnic Ukrainians. A factory trade union committee with 90% Jewish members shifted its paperwork to Ukrainian and prohibited the use of Yiddish. Urban legends about excesses began to spread, for example about cleaning staff who, under threat of dismissal, were forced to prove their

Ukrainian proficiency by writing an essay about the 1905 revolution.⁸ At a public lecture in January 1926, a local official received the following angry note from the audience:

For you more than anyone it should be clear that the overwhelming majority of the population in Odesa and the Odesa district is Russian and Jewish. Why do you childishy behave as if it isn't? The comprehensive Ukrainization of a majority non-Ukrainian population is a violent action, typical of bourgeois colonial policy. You want to force all the non-Ukrainians, against their will, into the Ukrainian culture and language. The current line will lead to the artificial assimilation of the Russian and Jewish population with the privileged Ukrainian nation. How does this relate to the Party's nationalities policy? It doesn't—it's a sham. Why do you fool yourself by saying that the people of the Odesa district are burning with passion for the Ukrainian language? [...] You should at last open your eyes and stop stifling the freedom of language in Ukraine. How long will the Ukrainian Central Committee undertake forced Ukrainization and what will this lead to? (Martin 2001, 95–96).

Local misgivings about excessive Ukrainization like this eventually reached central Ukrainian authorities. As a result, Kharkiv repeatedly reprimanded the Odesa city council for ignoring the needs of the national minorities, for example by issuing announcements in Ukrainian only. In early 1927, the Odesa Party committee admitted that local officials had initially tried to force Jewish workers to learn Ukrainian (VUTsIK 1925, 15).⁹

In addition to the violation of minority language rights, the Ukrainization policy also aggravated the economic problems of Ukraine's Jewish population. During the Civil War, many Ukrainian Jews had sought refuge from murderous pogroms in larger cities. Once violence abated, another wave of immigration followed, this time mostly consisting of ethnic Ukrainian peasants looking for employment (Veidlinger 2013, 38). Almost all cities saw a rapid increase in the Ukrainian population share: a marginal group at the beginning of the decade, Ukrainians constituted majorities in many cities by 1926 (see Table 1). To the Jewish population, the immigration of Ukrainian peasants constituted additional competition for jobs. Before virtually disappearing in the wake of the 1930s industrialization, unemployment was a serious social problem in the Soviet Union, especially in those parts of the country disproportionately affected by wartime destruction. All else being equal, Jews should have had good prospects on the job market, as they had a higher literacy rate than all other national groups (TsSU SSSR 1929a, 8–15). Under the conditions of Ukrainization, however, Ukrainians had better chances; in fact, the 1926 census data suggest that the steep increase in Ukrainians was partially at the expense of people who previously identified with a different nationality, which implies that a Ukrainian identity was increasingly considered advantageous. The laws on language appear to have offered a pretext not to hire Jews. Factories recruited their workers from among Ukrainian peasants, not Jewish artisans (Veidlinger 2013, 66). While unemployment among urban Ukrainians amounted to 4.7% and was thus disproportionately low, more than 11% of Jews living in cities were unemployed, which was the highest rate of all nationalities. In effect, almost one in three unemployed was Jewish (Gosplan SSSR 1930, 3–9).

In the Jewish Shtetlach, the situation was even more difficult. Many Jewish township communities had been devastated by pogrom violence and war communism (Kalinin and Smidovich, 1927, 27, 40; Pinkus 1988, 84–85, 92). Without national autonomy, the misery of the Shtetlach received little attention: the Ukrainian state apparatus was preoccupied with drawing ethnic Ukrainian peasants into Soviet society. In 1925, an internal report of the Ukrainian Central Committee warned that the campaign 'Face Towards the Village' (*litsom k selu*) had "in most cases led [...] to an even greater deterioration of the already unhealthy attitude of local Party and state authorities toward the Shtetl."¹⁰ At the other end, Jewish Party officials reported that the Shtetl population turned away from the Soviet government in disappointment.¹¹ Especially in the regions closest to the western border, poverty was staggering. Reports from these Shtetlach cited employment numbers among Jewish adolescents to illustrate the "catastrophic and hopeless" situation: 29% in Rashkov, 28% in

Table 1. Ukrainian and Jewish Population in Select Cities, 1920–1926

City	Year	Population	Ukrainians (%)	Jews (%)
Kharkiv	1920	269,924	21.3	20.6
	1923	321,615	37.9	20.2
	1926	417,342	38.4	19.4
Kyiv	1920	366,396	14.3	31.9
	1923	400,608	25.4	32.1
	1926	513,637	42.2	27.3
Odesa	1920	427,831	2.9	44.4
	1923	316,762	6.6	41.1
	1926	420,862	17.5	36.4
Berdychiv	1920	41,495	9.5	71.8
	1923	43,574	15.4	64.9
	1926	55,613	26.4	54.3
Dnipropetrivs'k	1920	162,965	4.7	44.8
	1923	129,421	16.0	38.8
	1926	232,925	36.0	26.6
Kremenchuk	1920	61,884	29.6	60.8
	1923	54,976	35.7	53.8
	1926	58,832	40.6	49.2
Zinov'ivs'k	1920	77,129	21.9	41.2
	1923	50,287	20.9	37.5
	1926	66,467	44.5	27.6

Source: Compiled on the basis of TsSU USSR 1923, 34–45; TsSU USSR 1925, 112–131; TsSU SSSR 1929b, 17, 27–28, 289–290, 310–311; TsSU SSSR 1929c, 13–14, 27–28, 248–249.

Valehatsulovo, 37% in Dobosary, 40% in Romanov, 19% in Pulin, 32% in Vynohrad (Larin 1929, 157; Kiper 1930, 61–62). Other Party officials dispatched to the western border regions sent back desperate requests for a Jewish national council in every Shtetl to alleviate the situation.¹² According to Iakubova (2006, 216), the creation of Jewish national councils was indeed the most effective measure to tackle the economic problems of the Shtetlach.

When Soviet authorities in Kharkiv attempted to address this issue systematically, their efforts were met with passivity and inertia in lower branches of the administration. In the spring of 1926, the Ukrainian Politburo, the Council of People's Commissars, and the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee all called for greater efforts to integrate the Shtetl population into the economy (Kiper 1930, 94–96).¹³ One year later, the Orgburo reminded all regional Party committees of these resolutions.¹⁴ In reality, however, little changed. In June 1928, a Central Committee conference about the situation of Ukraine's Jewish population came to the conclusion that these calls had been all but ignored.¹⁵ The regional Party committees of Artemivs'k and Dnipropetrovs'k argued that their regions already had too many unemployed adolescents and, therefore, could not take up additional unemployed youth. The Staline committee categorically asked the government to

quit attempts to resettle unemployed Jews. The committees of Kharkiv and Poltava responded in a similar manner.¹⁶ When the Ukrainian Komsomol inquired into the outcome of a similar resolution of the Ukrainian Economic Council to integrate 1,000 Jewish youth into heavy industry, it found that a total of 27 teenagers had been employed in the Staline and Kharkiv districts. Again, the critical situation on the local job market was cited as an excuse.¹⁷ Jewish Party officials dismissed these reasons as pretexts and accused the respective authorities of giving in to popular antisemitism.¹⁸

In addition to staggering unemployment, there is evidence that the Shtetl population was financially exploited by local authorities. Despite repeated complaints by the Communist Party's Jewish section (the *Evseksiia*), Jewish Shtetl artisans had to pay higher taxes than their Ukrainian counterparts in the villages. What is more, there was evidence that local financial authorities systematically robbed the Shtetlach: officials confiscated goods that were vital for subsistence, wrongly assessed property, and imposed financial penalties on a whim. When the Ukrainian Central Control Commission (TsKK) looked into some of these complaints in the fall of 1925, it found that local branches of the People's Commissariat of Finance were partly financed by these semi-legal informal earnings.¹⁹ According to the head of the Ukrainian *Evseksiia*, incidents like these ceased when the local administration was turned into a Jewish national council (Kiper 1930, 67–72).

Ukrainian Jews were also disproportionately disenfranchised as *lishentsy* (Gitelman 2001, 92–93; Pinkus 1988, 93). This was a broad category of people considered potentially opposed to the Soviet regime, including clergymen, former private merchants, anybody who had hired labor for their personal profit, and people without regular employment. Being a *lishenets* meant losing voting rights, claims to certain benefits, as well as eligibility for Party membership and positions in the state administration. In other words, it meant being a second-class citizen (Kuchenbecker 2000, 61; Estraikh 2004, 200). During the election campaign of 1925/26, more than two thirds of all *lishentsy* in Ukrainian cities and more than 80% in small towns were Jewish (TsSU USSR 1926, 2–3, 16–17). Numbers seem to have fluctuated and vary depending on the source, but evidence suggests that the situation somewhat improved toward the end of the decade. Still, somewhere between one fourth and one third of the Jewish working population remained disenfranchised, a figure that surpassed the average across all nationalities by an order of magnitude (TsKNM 1930, 30; Kiper 1930, 73; Kantor 1934, 36–37; Kagedan 1994, 75). To some extent, this was a reflection of the socioeconomic situation of the Jewish population, but it was exacerbated by the common association of economic crime with Jews in the early Soviet period. This was partially a product of old stereotypes, but also engineered by Bolshevik propaganda designed to construct a new, socially acceptable Jewish identity (Sloin 2010, 104–106, 112; Veidlinger 2013, 43). Indeed, Jewish Party officials were well aware of the antisemitic undertones of this policy. In early 1924, the Ukrainian *Evseksiia* leadership complained that “to this day, both Party and state officials in most cases did not change their attitude that the Jewish population is predominantly petty bourgeois and [consists of] speculators.”²⁰ At a meeting hosted by the Ukrainian Central Committee in June 1928, All-Union *Evseksiia* chairman Aleksandr Chemerisskii condemned the excessive disenfranchisement of Jews in Ukraine, calling it “the most disgusting agitation for antisemitism.”²¹

Both Jews and Ukrainians interpreted the ongoing displacement of Jews by Ukrainians in many spheres of society, individually and as a group, through the experience of antisemitism. More than 100,000 Ukrainian Jews had been murdered in a wave of pogroms sweeping war-ridden Ukraine in 1919–1921.²² These recent events could not but influence Jewish-Ukrainian relations in the early Soviet period and shape the perception of Ukrainization on both sides. When Jewish officials complained to Kharkiv about local violations of Jewish national rights, they often accused the lower Party and state apparatus in the province of outright antisemitism.²³ The head of the Ukrainian *Evseksiia* went as far as to suggest that Ukrainization “plays a significant role in the current surge of antisemitism” because it seemed like a “systematic displacement [*mekhanicheskoe vytesnenie*] of Jews.”²⁴ Ukrainian officials protested against interpretations like these: “even the tiniest

insensitivity [*malesen'ka nechulist'*] is now considered antisemitism,” a Party delegate complained in 1928.²⁵ But Ukrainians, too, seemed to associate Ukrainization with anti-Jewish violence. When Jewish workers were dismissed under a pretext and replaced by Ukrainians, the latter gloated over this “Jewish pogrom”.²⁶ Even Volodymyr Zaton'skyi, one of the main architects of Ukrainization, quipped about the wartime excesses in one of his reports to the Ukrainian Central Committee plenum:

In 1924, 24% [of the Komsomol plenum] were Jewish, now you can see that a pogrom has taken place (*laughter in the audience*). If you sum it up, only 13% are left now. Comrades, it's not my fault that it is like this—it's a fact. (*Voice from the audience: "That's not a pogrom, but promotion of Ukrainian activists"*)—Yes, that is true, I am merely joking.²⁷

It seems doubtful that Zaton'skyi's Jewish comrades got the joke. Indeed, in the mid-1920s, local dispatches from Shtetlach warned that Zionist groups successfully capitalized on the growing frustration with Ukrainization, denouncing the policy as “a special way to displace Jews from the state apparatus.”²⁸ Their leaflets sharply criticized the lack of Jewish national autonomy in Ukraine, the use of Russian and Ukrainian instead of Yiddish in organizations frequented by Jews, and the high unemployment among Jews.²⁹ On the face of it, many Zionist demands seemed to be principally in line with the Soviet nationalities policy and were, therefore, particularly stinging:

Why do all small nationalities have their autonomy, and three million Jews do not? Why is there no Jewish council in Kyiv, a city with 150,000 Jews? Why are there no Jewish Shtetl councils, no district councils? Why is there no Jewish Council of People's Commissars, no Central Executive Committee?³⁰

Another leaflet simply concluded that “the nationalities policy of the Communist Party, having partially liberated the oppressed nationalities of the former Russia, completely bypassed the Jews.”³¹ Statements like these underscored how many Ukrainian Jews felt about Ukrainization and the relative lack of national autonomy they enjoyed, especially when comparing their situation to that of other national minorities.

The Failure of Agricultural Resettlement

The apparent obstacles to the creation of autonomous territories for Ukraine's Jewish population echoed earlier Jewish reservations about territorial autonomy. In contrast to this concept, ideas of extraterritorial, cultural autonomy had become increasingly widespread among Jewish intellectuals and political organizations in the final decades of Tsarist Russia (Rabinovitch 2014). But if the problem with territorial autonomy for Ukrainian Jews in the early Soviet Union was their predominantly urban character, why not move the Jewish population to the countryside? In the early 1920s, this idea indeed became popular with many Jewish activists. By resettling impoverished, unemployed Jews from the Shtetlach in agricultural colonies along the Black Sea littoral, Jewish Party officials and Soviet authorities hoped to turn them into productive members of the new Soviet society and possibly create the preconditions for large-scale Jewish territorial autonomy (Bragin and Kol'tsov 1924; Gol'de 1925). With financial aid from Western charitable organizations, such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, organized resettlement to southern Ukraine and northern Crimea began in 1924. In November 1926, Soviet head of state Mikhail Kalinin appeared to endorse Jewish settlement and territorial autonomy as a way to prevent assimilation and preserve the Jewish nation, which generated additional enthusiasm (Gitelman 1972, 405–425). Indeed, in March 1927, the first Jewish national district was established in the Kherson region. Named Kalinindorf in honor of Kalinin, the district had a population of 18,000, 15,000 of whom were Jewish (Merezhin 1927, 3–24). “These people are actual peasants,” a European

visitor marveled at the settlers. “If they did not speak Yiddish, you would not guess that they are Jews” (Heller [1931] 1933, 293). Two more Jewish districts were set up in Ukraine in 1929 and 1930 and another two were established in Crimea over the following years (Kuchenbecker 2000, 94; Dekel-Chen 2005, 64).

Despite this ostensible success, the Jewish resettlement campaign never reached its intended scale and involved only a fraction of Ukraine’s Jewish population. From its inception, the project faced strong political opposition in Ukraine and Crimea. When the Politburo in Moscow prepared the institutional framework and goals in early 1924, it dropped the idea of a Jewish autonomous republic in Ukraine over fears of antisemitic reactions. Over the following years, Ukrainian and Crimean government authorities tried to stall the resettlement process by delaying the allocation of land and hampering the work of the involved organizations (Mintz 1995a, 144–145, 1995b; Dekel-Chen 2005, 46). In the summer of 1927, the Ukrainian government adopted drastic restrictions on Jewish settlement and refused to allocate additional land for new settlers, publicly arguing that the preferential treatment of Jewish settlers as well as their continued “speculation” and use of hired labor had aroused envy among the Ukrainian population (Shlikhter 1927). This coincided with and accelerated preparations in Moscow to shift Jewish settlement to Birobidzhan, a small frontier strip in the Far East bordering China, against the will of most settlement activists. Soviet propaganda adopted Zionist slogans to praise Birobidzhan as a Soviet Jewish national homeland—“if you will it, it shall be no legend” (Gitelman 1972, 433)—but its remoteness and inhospitable conditions, as well as the simultaneous onset of Stalin’s rapid industrialization program, resulted in a failure to attract significant numbers of Jewish settlers. When Birobidzhan was declared a Jewish autonomous region in 1934, it had a population of around 50,000, only 15% of which were Jewish (Gitelman 1972, 431–439; Abramsky 1978; Pinkus 1988, 73–76; Weinberg 1995; Kuchenbecker 2000, 125). In southern Ukraine, the number of Jewish settlers peaked at around 45,000 in 1928 and declined over the following years.³² Overall, Jewish agricultural resettlement never got the necessary traction to solve the “Jewish Question” through territorial autonomy in the Soviet Union.

The Dilemmas of Soviet Yiddishization

With territorial autonomy proving by and large unattainable, extraterritorial solutions to serve Ukraine’s Jewish population in their native language were as urgent as ever. The need for Yiddish institutions was further exacerbated by the fact that the designated national language was seen as the greatest common denominator of the Soviet Jewish nation: after all, what else could be taken for truly Jewish? Obviously, the Jewish religion itself was out of the question (Gitelman 1972, 327, 338–339; Shneer 2003, 386–387).³³ To build a Soviet Jewish nation, then, was to create a Yiddish-speaking world. Recent research has highlighted the dynamism of the nascent Soviet Jewish intelligentsia and demonstrated the widespread appeal of the new Soviet Jewish identity created in the interwar period (Shneer 2004; Kuzmany 2005; Shternshis 2006; Bemporad 2013). Indeed, the achievements of the Soviet Yiddishization campaign in Ukraine read impressive on paper: By 1930, there existed four Ukrainian Yiddish newspapers and another six journals, more than 50 higher education institutions with tuition in Yiddish, including 33 professional schools and two technical colleges, 520 Yiddish primary and secondary schools with 82,000 pupils, 12 Yiddish theaters, 46 Yiddish courts, and a State Jewish Museum in Odesa (TsKNM 1930, 60, 70; Derzhplan USRR 1930a, 7–9; Derzhplan USRR 1931, 42–43; Kantor 1934, 180–181; Gitelman 1972, 364–365).³⁴ To some extent, these ostensible successes compensated the Jewish population of Ukraine for the socioeconomic and political detriments brought about by Ukrainization (Altshuler [1983] 2010, 298–299).

However, not all Ukrainian Jews were happy to send their children to Yiddish schools, subscribe to the Central Committee’s Yiddish daily *Der shtern*, or attend Yiddish-language vocational training in the evening. After the revolutions of 1917 abolished legal discriminations against Jews, the interwar period witnessed an increasing integration of the Jewish population into their non-

Jewish, predominantly Russian-speaking, urban environment. In search of social advancement, Jews were continuously migrating from Shtetlach to regional cities and from these provincial centers to the large industrial areas of Kyiv, Kharkiv, the Donbas region, and, ultimately, Moscow and Leningrad. From 1926 to 1939, the number of Jews living in the Russian republic (RSFSR) increased from 23% to approximately one-third of all Soviet Jews; Moscow's Jewish population alone skyrocketed from 28,000 in 1920 to 130,000 in 1926 and 400,000 in 1939. Increasing levels of Jewish integration also manifested itself in a rise in intermarriages: while in the mid-1920s around 5% of Ukrainian and Belorussian Jews (and more than 20% of the Jews in the RSFSR) married non-Jews, their overall number increased to approximately one-third in the 1930s (Larin 1929, 60; *Kommunisticheskaia akademiia* 1930, 41; Simon 1986, 80–81, 140; Pinkus 1988, 91; Gitelman 2001, 109–111).

Perhaps inevitably, the Jewish quest for social mobility was often accompanied by a turn to the Russian language. For many Jews, Yiddish stood for the economic hardship and oppression of the Shtetlach that they wanted to leave behind (Gitelman 2001, 89, 93). Between 1926 and 1939, the share of Soviet Jews who considered Russian their first language increased from one quarter to 55% (Gitelman 2001, 109). In Ukrainian cities, 70% of the Jewish population indicated that they were native speakers of Yiddish in 1926 (TsSU SSSR 1929a, 11–15). However, even Jews who were more fluent in Yiddish than in Russian preferred literacy courses in Russian (Shternshis 2006, 48). Moreover, the share of Yiddish native speakers varied significantly across the republic: generally speaking, adoption of Russian as a first language was particularly strong in the large cities and industrial centers, while numbers of Yiddish native speakers were highest in places such as Zhytomir, Berdychiv, or Vinnytsia in Right-Bank Ukraine, the old areas of Jewish settlement and poorest part of the republic, as Table 2 shows. The table reveals two more points about Ukraine's Jewish population that illustrate the relationship between social mobility and language. First, the higher the share of Russian native speakers, the higher the share of the literate population. Second, of those literate, more people could in general read and write in Russian than in Yiddish: specifically, the higher the share of the literate population, the higher the share of those who were literate in Russian and the lower the share of those who were literate in Yiddish.

However, linguistic assimilation posed an ideological and practical problem to the Communist Party in the 1920s (Martin 2001, 32). In deliberate opposition to the previous Tsarist regime, early

Table 2. Native Language and Literacy of the Jewish Population in Select Cities, 1926

City	Native Language (%)		Literacy		
	Yiddish	Russian	Literate Population (%)	Of Which Is Literate in	
				Yiddish (%)	Russian (%)
Kharkiv	40.7	57.4	81.7	36.0	95.0
Kyiv	58.6	39.9	78.3	56.6	93.4
Odesa	54.0	45.4	75.5	29.3	94.6
Dnipropetrivs'k	48.6	50.8	75.6	28.1	93.2
Staline	37.3	61.9	77.1	36.2	95.0
Zhytomir	85.8	12.8	67.2	77.8	86.6
Berdychiv	94.5	6.7	60.6	78.9	88.8
Vinnytsia	85.3	13.1	67.7	59.3	86.2

Source: Compiled on the basis of TsSU SSSR 1929a 77, 89, 92; TsSU 1929b, 17, 20–21, 27, 45–46, 52, 54, 310–311, 316, 320; TsSU SSSR 1929c, 27–28, 43, 46, 248, 257–259, 350, 354–356.

Soviet nationalities policy was based on the tacit premise that assimilation was forced, never voluntary, and that it was a symptom of insufficient attention to national needs. In addition, the indigenization policy produced bureaucratic structures that were interested in preserving the national constituencies they represented. Stalin had famously argued in 1913 that language makes a nation: would the nation disappear, then, if it were to stop speaking its language? (Stalin 1946, 296; Connor 1984, 275–277) By the mid-1920s, this was a nightmare to many communists, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. The TsKNM chairman even cautioned against Jews moving from Shtetlach to larger cities lest they succumb to linguistic assimilation.³⁵ People who “did not know their native language” were regularly labeled “backward” by Soviet officials (TsKNM 1927, 68; Slezkine 1994, 428). In Odesa, for example, Jewish Komsomol members were reprimanded by a local newspaper for their poor command of Yiddish:

In the Komsomol cell, the overwhelming majority of the members are Jewish, but they can neither read, nor write in Yiddish, not at all, and they even speak it badly. The activists of the cell don't know their own native language. All the work is conducted in Russian (Larin 1926, 51).

In practice, the question of which language Ukraine's Jewish population should use was negotiated primarily through the language politics of primary education. Throughout the 1920s, the share of Jewish pupils who were taught in Yiddish-language schools remained lower than that of almost all other national minorities enrolled at their respective national-language school (TsKNM 1927, 38).³⁶ Within the Jewish student body, a comparison of different school types yields a pronounced urban-rural gap that further underscores the socioeconomic trend away from the Yiddish language. While four-year schools predominated in the countryside and in smaller townships, where formal education was more difficult to provide, seven-year schools were more common in larger cities. In January 1927, 65% of Jewish pupils at four-year schools were taught in Yiddish, but only 30% of those at seven-year schools. At Russian-language seven-year schools, a quarter of the students was Jewish (TsSU USRR 1928, 33). Among Jewish fifth- through seventh-graders alone, only 25% received instruction in Yiddish, compared with 38% enrolled at Russian-language schools and 36% taught in Ukrainian (Derzhplan USRR 1930b, 200).

Even Jewish parents who considered Yiddish their native language and spoke Yiddish at home preferred to send their children to Russian- or Ukrainian-language schools. This was in part due to the fierce anti-religious propaganda taught at schools: some parents feared that their children would be directed against Jewish religious traditions in particular at Yiddish schools, whereas at other schools, education was at least opposed to religion in general. Moreover, Yiddish schools often turned out to be worse-equipped with facilities and materials than other schools; their teachers were also said to be not as well prepared. Although the Jewish communities in the hinterland of Right-Bank Ukraine were strongholds of the Yiddish language, Soviet Yiddish schools often failed to take roots there because they were rejected by local elites experienced in organizing alternative means of education that bypassed the state (Batsman 2019, 63–72). However, the primary cause of Jewish parents refusing to send their children to Yiddish schools remained the fact that proficiency in Russian and to a lesser extent in Ukrainian was considered necessary to find employment and to obtain further professional training (Gitelman 1972, 335–350; Pinkus 1988, 108; Veidlinger 2013, 87–91). According to a critic, Ukrainian Jews understood

*Perfectly well that you cannot go far with Yiddish only—[not] in the economy, let alone in the sciences. Because it is impossible to set up, say, Yiddish institutions of higher education of all kinds like they exist in Russian or Ukrainian [...] for the Jews due to their small numbers, it goes without saying that the forced Yiddishization of Jewish children means to cut off the Jewish workers from the possibility to use institutions of higher education [...] side by side with the Ukrainian and Russian population (Larin 1926, 52–53).*³⁷

The desires of these parents often clashed with government policy as Soviet authorities principally sought to ensure that all children were taught in their native language. While Jewish Party activists debated whether parental preferences should be taken into account, some parents prohibited their children from speaking Yiddish in public lest they be sent to Yiddish schools. In many places, special commissions were established to examine the language proficiency of Jewish children upon school enrolment, and stories about their attempts to trick children into speaking Yiddish or admitting that they spoke Yiddish at home abounded. According to one of these narratives, for example, the commission would interview children entirely in Russian or even Ukrainian to lull them into a false sense of security, only to eventually dismiss them in Yiddish and see how they reacted.³⁸ During the period of school enrolment in 1925, the Ukrainian government received many complaints from Jewish parents whose children were forced to attend a Yiddish school or whose school had been turned into a Yiddish school. Once the term started, a Yiddish school in Kyiv had to send away 15 children who turned out not to speak Yiddish at all.³⁹ Much to the astonishment of Soviet officials dealing with this matter, there were cases where Jewish parents indeed preferred not only Russian, but even Ukrainian to Yiddish schools (TsKNM 1927, 78–79, 101).

In fact, the trend toward assimilation among Soviet Jews was also reflected in their trajectories within the Communist Party. Most Jewish ‘Old Bolsheviks’ and the majority of the new generation of members did not identify as Jews. When they joined the Party, they did so to leave their old world behind (Pinkus 1988, 57; Slezkine 2004, 152, 169). As a result, the Bolsheviks struggled to find Jewish communists who were willing to work on the Jewish street among their fellow Jews, which in turn hampered the Bolshevik outreach to the Jewish population. Throughout the 1920s, the *Evseksiia* counted no more than 1,500 activists, a rather small number for 2.6 million Soviet Jews (Kuzmany 2005, 253). “Most Jewish communists try to evade Jewish work,” a report complained, “they don’t read the Jewish communist press, they have a negative attitude toward attending political education courses [*politgramota*] in Yiddish and so on.”⁴⁰ Compared with other nationalities, the Soviet apparatus was much longer forced to draw on Jewish activists who had been socialized in other parties: the *Evseksiia* leadership consisted almost entirely of former members of the Jewish Labor Bund, or Bundists (Gitelman 1972, 390; Abramsky 1978, 66; Pinkus 1988, 77; Smith 1999, 115–116). There were, so to speak, two different types of Jewish Party members:

Jewish communists [*evreiskie kommunisty*] are not those communists who hold executive positions [...]—they are already Jewish by origin only—but those Jew-Communists [*evrei-kommunisty*] who live among the Jewish masses [...] (Kalinin 1927, 31).

In Ukraine, Lazar Kaganovich was probably the most prominent example of a communist in an executive position who was a Jew “by origin only.” One of Stalin’s closest aides in his later career, he was appointed First Secretary of the Communist Party’s Ukrainian branch in April 1925 to keep Ukraine in line in the succession struggle following Lenin’s death (Rees 2012, 61–63). Had he committed his life to Jewish Party work, he would never have made it to the topmost echelons of Bolshevik power. For *evrei-kommunisty*, advancement within the Party was limited: even the *Evseksiia* was technically just a subsection of the Communist Party’s departments for agitation and propaganda.

However, Kaganovich’s tenure in Ukraine illustrates not only the prospects of Jewish assimilation, but also its limits set by the process of Ukrainization. Kaganovich was an ardent supporter of the Soviet indigenization policy, and his arrival in Kharkiv marked the beginning of its most comprehensive and thorough phase (Mace 1983, 95; Liber 1992, 109; Martin 2001, 84–87; Borisenok 2021, 259). Despite his commitment to Ukrainization, however, Kaganovich faced strong resistance from some Ukrainian communists (Rees 2012, 62, 78).⁴¹ The fact that he was not Ukrainian made him vulnerable to attacks: during the so-called Shumsky Affair, an intense debate on the proper pace of Ukrainization, government members accused him of not having an

“organic relationship” to Ukraine (Martin 2001, 217, 220).⁴² Ironically, Kaganovich had been born in the former Kiev Governorate; after his return to Ukraine as First Secretary, he made it a point to learn Ukrainian so as to set a good example (Mace 1983, 95). None of this helped. Kaganovich was eventually called back to Moscow in 1928, the bridges between him and his Ukrainian colleagues being burnt (Rees 2012, 78–80; Borisenok 2021, 223–226). With the Soviet program of territorial autonomy reaching its apogee, even complete assimilation would not free Ukraine’s Jews from their Jewish origins.

Conclusion

What do the dilemmas of Ukraine’s Jewish Population tell us about territorial autonomy in the Soviet Union? Scholars who have previously examined the manifold territorial arrangements developed in the 1920s with regards to other national groups have identified many deficiencies: the establishment of national village and district councils led to clashes over land rights, the delimitation of national republics resulted in political conflict, and centrally assigned national categories did not match the self-identification of populations on the ground (Martin 1999; Haugen 2003; Brown 2004; Hirsch 2005; Bergne 2007). However, unlike most of the problems described in these works, the grievances of the Jewish population of Ukraine could not be addressed by a more generous land allotment, border arbitration decided in their favor, or a better understanding of local identities. Because of their high degree of urbanization, heterogeneity, dispersion, and multilingualism, the Soviet concept of territorial autonomy as such was incompatible with the needs and experiences of Ukrainian Jews. The example of Ukraine’s Jewish population thus not only highlights the fundamental problems of early Soviet nationalities policy that affected all national groups, but also provides insights into the broader development of Soviet territorial autonomy beyond the 1920s.

It is well known that the Soviet indigenization policy lost its momentum with the onset of the rapid industrialization of the Soviet Union at the end of the decade. Deadlines to master national languages were postponed indefinitely or simply discarded tacitly. The frenzy for local national councils petered out and almost all of those already established were disbanded by the end of the 1930s (Simon 1986, 45, 56, 62–63, 81, 167–168; Martin 2001, 123–124; Iakubova 2006, 219, 231–232). All-Union counterparts to the republican People’s Commissariats of Agriculture, Interior Affairs, and Justice were created between 1929 and 1936, bringing these former strongholds of autonomy under central control. Many of the new national elites were targeted and eventually murdered in the waves of mass repressions of the 1930s (Martin 1998). In 1938, an unionwide law established Russian as a mandatory subject at schools; from 1958 on, parents were allowed to decide between a native- and a Russian-language education for their children (Blitstein 2001; Smith 2017). In Ukraine, the once powerful Politburo commission on Ukrainization established by Kaganovich never reconvened after 1928 (Martin 2001, 119). The number of Yiddish schools in Ukraine seems to have peaked in 1931 and decreased from then on (Veidlinger 2013, 87). Perhaps the most subtle indicator of the National Question’s rapid decline in importance is the fact that the rich flow of statistical data on nationalities issues that this study has often drawn on simply dried up at the turn of the decade (Mashikhin and Simchera 1975). Tellingly, the 1931 urban population census in Ukraine did not even ask for nationality as a category (*Upravlinnia narodn’o-hospodar’skoho obliku USRR 1933*).

However, these established narratives of centralization, linguistic Russification, repression, and decline from the 1930s onward easily overshadow the obvious fact that the fundamental premise of Soviet nationalities policy, namely the territorialization of nationality, remained virtually unchanged through 1991. Jeremy Smith (2019) recently argued that there simply was no nationalities policy in the Soviet Union after the 1920s. Whether one goes this far or not, it is clear that the Soviet handling of the National Question indeed remained within the discursive confines of what Charles Maier (2000, 823) aptly labeled the “long era of territoriality,” the

century extending roughly from the 1860s to the 1970s. In the Soviet case, this included a system of national autonomous territories, most notably 15 Union republics by 1936, a primordial understanding of nationality, manifest in the fixation of nationality in the internal passports introduced in 1932, and the persistent preferential treatment of titular nationals within “their” respective territories. In fact, the Soviet link between a nation and its territory usually became most apparent when it was broken: the deportation of national groups in the wake of the Second World War and their subsequent desire to return to their homes is a well-known example (Conquest 1970; Nekrich 1978). The impact of economic development and labor migration after the Second World War is a more subtle, less studied, and perhaps even more important case, as recent calls for a “transnational turn” of Soviet nationality studies have rightly pointed out (Siegelbaum and Moch 2016; Florin and Zeller 2018). While nationwide industrialization and socioeconomic modernization changed the composition of local communities (Kotov 2001, 83–88), the political regulation of nationality did not adapt. In times of stagnation and dwindling resources during the 1980s, this easily sparked national tensions (McAuley 1986; Guth 2018). But the Soviet territorialization of nationality was already outdated long before: “The current structure and division of Union republics according to national characteristics has outgrown itself,” a citizen from Almaty in Kazakhstan observed in 1962:

Several dozen nationalities reside in Kazakhstan. The Kazakhs here constitute 25% of the total. But the republic is Kazakh. One might pose the question, ‘Why not the Uyghur republic or the Dungan republic?’ Should we really create certain privileges for particular nationalities when all these nationalities work in a united family? Should we really artificially create abnormalities in their relations and [thereby] do great damage to the economy? (Nathans 2011, 177)⁴³

This obsolescence of national autonomy in the postwar Soviet Union was preceded by its incompatibility with Jewish interests in Ukraine in the 1920s. Drawing on Zygmunt Bauman’s distinction between consecutive “solid” (normative, absolute) and “liquid” (ambivalent, open-ended) phases of twentieth-century modernity, Marina Mogilner (2018, 32) argues that early Soviet Jewishness was too “liquid” to succeed as a territorial or cultural identity within the framework of the “solid” interwar nationalities policy. In other words, it was ahead of its time. More radically still, Yuri Slezkine (2004, 1) summarizes 20th-century modernization as the process of “everyone becoming more urban, mobile, literate [...] in other words, becoming Jewish.” This is of course a reductive, deliberately provocative statement, but in the context of the Ukrainian Jewish dilemmas outlined in this article and Soviet postwar socioeconomic developments, it offers a simple conclusion: that the Soviet inability to adequately serve the Jewish population of Ukraine anticipated the fundamental incompatibility of Soviet territorial autonomy with the increasingly urban, heterogeneous, transnational, and multilingual “society on the move” (Sahadeo 2019, 198) that emerged under Stalin’s successors Khrushchev and Brezhnev. As in other spheres of society, Soviet visions of modernity represented the avant-garde of nationalities policy in the interwar period but failed to keep pace with developments in the second half of the century (Kotkin 2001, 161–164).

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Disclosures. None.

Notes

- 1 For a discussion of the Swedish minority in Estonia in the interwar period and its attitude toward territorial and non-territorial autonomy, see Mart Kuldkepp's contribution in this special issue.
- 2 GARF, f. R3316, op. 23, d. 1354, l. 103, *Dinamika rosta natsional'nykh sel'skikh i poselkovykh sovetov i raionov v USSR*, 1930.
- 3 *Ibid.* A comprehensive list and map of these councils can be found in Panchuk, Koval'chuk, and Chirko 1996, 42–51.
- 4 They were not, however, proper town or city councils, as suggested by Martin 2001, 40.
- 5 TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2002, l. 14, Protokol ch. 1 zasidannia ahytprop narady pry APV TsK, 19.12.1925.
- 6 TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2247, l. 114, Stenogramma zasedaniia Komissii Politbiuro TsK KP(b) U po Ukrainizatsii, 23.12.1926.
- 7 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 67, d. 395, l. 35, Dokladnaia zapiska o sostoianii i rabote Odesskoi partiinoi organizatsii, 12.02.1927.
- 8 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 67, d. 395, ll. 96–97, 106, Doklad tov. Ptuchi ob Odesskoi organizatsii, 12.02.1927.
- 9 RGASPI f. 17, op. 85, d. 256, l. 13ob, Rezoliutsiia Politbiuro TsK KP(b)U po dokladu Sekretaria Odesskogo okruzhkoma KP(b)U "O sostoianii Odesskoi organizatsii", 22.01.1927; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 67, d. 395, l. 36, Dokladnaia zapiska o sostoianii i rabote Odesskoi partiinoi organizatsii, 12.02.1927.
- 10 TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2002, l. 46, Rabota sredi evreiskogo naseleniia, 1925.
- 11 GARF, f. R7541, op. 1, d. 1097, l. 56, Stenogramma soveshchaniia pri TsK KP(b)U ob ekonomicheskom sostoianii mestecek i o meropriiatiakh po uluchsheniiu polozheniia evreiskoi bednoty, 23.06.1928.
- 12 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 67, d. 391, l. 28, Tsentral'nomu Komitetu VKP(b). Doklad Otvetinstruktora TsK Bergasinova. Ob obsledovanii i instruktirovanii Kamianets-Podol'skoi partorganizatsii, 26.01.1926.
- 13 TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 6, d. 104, l. 17, O meropriiatiakh po uluchsheniiu polozheniia evreiskikh trudiashchikhsia mass, 15.01.1926. Given that most Shtetlach were located in the west and thus far away from Ukraine's main industrial regions in the east, the Nationalities Council in Moscow suggested that future factories should be built closer to Jewish settlement areas, see Kiper 1930, 60, 103.
- 14 TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2495, l. 2, Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK KP(b)U o blizhaishchikh zadachakh raboty sredi natsmen, 1927.
- 15 GARF, f. R7541, op. 1, d. 1097, ll. 114–115, Rezoliutsiia soveshchaniia pri TsK KP(b)U po voprosu ob ekonomicheskom sostoianii mestecek i o meropriiatiakh po uluchsheniiu ekonomicheskogo polozheniia evreiskoi mestechkovoi bednoty, 25.06.1928.
- 16 GARF, f. R7541, op. 1, d. 1097, ll. 10–13, Stenogramma soveshchaniia pri TsK KP(b)U ob ekonomicheskom sostoianii mestecek i o meropriiatiakh po uluchsheniiu polozheniia evreiskoi bednoty, 23.06.1928.
- 17 TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2745, l. 16, O vovlechenii evreiskoi molodezhi mestecek v promyshlennost', 1928.
- 18 GARF, f. R7541, op. 1, d. 1097, l. 89, Stenogramma soveshchaniia pri TsK KP(b)U ob ekonomicheskom sostoianii mestecek i o meropriiatiakh po uluchsheniiu polozheniia evreiskoi bednoty, 23.06.1928.
- 19 RGASPI, f. 445, op. 1, d. 179, ll. 41, 43, 1925; RGASPI, f. 445, op. 1, d. 179, l. 70, Proekt postanovlenii po dokladu Glavbiuro evseksii po TsK KP(b)U, October 1925; TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2019, ll. 74, 76, O rabote sredi evreiskogo naseleniia, 1925; TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2019, l. 116, Vysnovky po obsliduvanniu ievreis'kykh mistechok, 20.10.1925; TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2246, l. 47, Dokladnaia zapiska ob antisemitizme, 1926; GARF, f. R7541, op. 1, d. 1097,

- l. 18, Stenogramma soveshchaniia pri TsK KP(b)U ob ekonomicheskom sostoianii mestecek i o meropriiatiiakh po uluchsheniiu polozheniia evreiskoi bednoty, 23.06.1928.
- 20 RGASPI, f. 445, op. 1, d. 126, l. 26, V TsK KP(b)U, 05.03.1924.
- 21 GARF, f. R7541, op. 1, d. 1097, l. 70, Stenogramma soveshchaniia pri TsK KP(b)U ob ekonomicheskom sostoianii mestecek i o meropriiatiiakh po uluchsheniiu polozheniia evreiskoi bednoty, 23.06.1928.
- 22 The number of casualties is still subject to scholarly debate. Estimates range from 100,000 to 200,000 killed in Ukraine, see Veidlinger 2013, 34, 319–320; Estraiikh 2004, 197; Dekel-Chen 2005, 222–23; Bemporad 2019, 7.
- 23 RGASPI, f. 445, op. 1, d. 126, l. 25, V TsK KP(b)U, 05.03.1924; TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2019, l. 121, Vysnovky po obsliduvanniu ievreis'kykh mistechok, 20.10.1925; TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2019, l. 72, O rabote sredi evreiskogo naseleniia, 1925.
- 24 TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2246, l. 48, Dokladnaia zapiska ob antisemitizme, 1926.
- 25 GARF, f. R7541, op. 1, d. 1097, l. 64, Stenogramma soveshchaniia pri TsK KP(b)U ob ekonomicheskom sostoianii mestecek i o meropriiatiiakh po uluchsheniiu polozheniia evreiskoi bednoty, 23.06.1928.
- 26 TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2689, ll. 28–29, V Narkom RKI. Kopia TsK KP(b)U I Evnatsmenu pri VUTsIK-e, 16.11.1928.
- 27 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 26, d. 1, l. 123ob, Stenograficheskii otchet plenuma TsK KP(b)U, 01.06.1926.
- 28 TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2007, l. 74, Obzor sionistskogo dvizheniia na Ukraine, 1925.
- 29 Ibid., l. 79; TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2007, l. 166, Vsem evreiskim pioneram, 1925; TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2689, l. 32, K delegatam Kul'ts'ezda; TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2007, ll. 151–152, Nakaz k vyboram v sovet rabochikh, krest'ianskikh i krasnoarmeiskikh deputatov, 1925.
- 30 TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2007, l. 159, Evreiskii rabochii, 20.12.1925.
- 31 TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2007, l. 155, Evreiskie trudiashchiesia i trudovaia molodezh', 1925.
- 32 See Kantor 1929, 12–13; Kantor 1934, 134–35; GARF, f. R7541, op. 1, d. 629, l. 1, Doklad Ukrainskogo komzeta o khode pereseleniia trudiashchikh evreev na Ukraine, 17.09.1933.
- 33 Non-Ashkenazi Jewish communities were to be served in what were considered to be their respective native languages, a task even more complicated than the creation of Soviet Yiddish, see Shneer 2004, 52–55. Accordingly, the 1926 census included five distinct Jewish populations: European Jews, Crimean Jews, Mountain Jews, Georgian Jews, and Central Asian Jews. See Hirsch 2005, 132–33.
- 34 GARF, f. R3316, op. 23, d. 1354, l. 5, Vedomost' dvizheniia tyrazhei periodizdaniia Tsentrizdata, 1930.
- 35 GARF, f. R3316, op. 20, d. 153, l. 129, Doklad tov. A. I. Butsenko na zasedanii Prezidiuma Soveta Natsionalnostei, 24.06.1927.
- 36 TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2688, l. 8, Natsional'nyi sklad uchniv u shkolakh sotsvychu ta ochoplennia ditei natsion. shkolamy na 1926/1927 r., 1927; GARF, f. R3316, op. 23, d. 1354, l. 134ob, Kratkie itogi obsledovaniia sostoianii raboty sredi nemtsev i drugikh natsional'nykh men'shinstv USSR, 20.02.1930.
- 37 The lack of Yiddish secondary or tertiary education was indeed a common cause for complaints: see TsDAVOU, f. 413, op. 1, d. 263, l. 11, Otchet komissii natsmen Kievskogo okrispolkoma o rabote za vremia s 1-go oktiabria 1926 g. po 1-e aprelia 1927 g., 26.04.1927.
- 38 This story is reported almost identically in TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2247, ll. 95, 99–100, Stenogramma zasedaniia Komissii Politbiuro TsK KP(b)U po Ukrainizatsii, 23.12.1926 and TsKNM 1927, 14 as well as told by a woman from Odesa interviewed for Shternshis 2006, 16–17. On the debates within the *Evseksiia*, see Gitelman 1972, 341–44.
- 39 TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2247, l. 99, Stenogramma zasedaniia Komissii Politbiuro TsK KP(b)U po Ukrainizatsii, 23.12.1926; TsDAVOU, f. 413, op. 1, d. 40, l. 40, Protokol no. 53 zasedaniia TsKNM, 09.09.1925.
- 40 TsDAHOU, f. 1, op. 20, d. 2007, l. 75, Obzor sionistskogo dvizheniia na Ukraine, 1925.

- 41 Among other things, Rees 2012, 78, and Borisenok 2021, 223, note that Vlas Chubar' and Grigorii Petrovskii asked Stalin to remove Kaganovich from Ukraine during the 15th Party Congress in December 1927. In response, Stalin allegedly accused them of antisemitism. However, the only source for this conversation is Medvedev 1983, 118. Kaganovich himself does not mention antisemitism in the Ukrainian leadership in his memoirs and in his conversation with journalist Feliks Chuev, see Kaganovich 1996; Chuev 1992. At the same time, he is remarkably ambiguous about Stalin's alleged antisemitism, see Chuev 1992, 127–128.
- 42 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 33, d. 552, ll. 108–111, Zakrytaia chast' zasedaniia plenuma TsK KP(b)U. Stenograficheskii otchet, 06.06.1926; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 26, d. 1, l. 147, Stenograficheskii otchet plenuma TsK KP(b)U, 01.06.1926. Before 1953, the Central Committees of the Union republics were usually not headed by a representative of the titular nationality.
- 43 This letter was one of approximately 3,000 submissions solicited by a commission tasked with preparing a new Soviet constitution, an ultimately unrealized project.

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Archives

- GARF State Archive of the Russian Federation (Moscow, Russia)
- RGASPI Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (Moscow, Russia)
- TsDAHOU Central State Archive of Public Organizations of Ukraine (Kyiv, Ukraine)
- TsDAVOU Central State Archive of Supreme Bodies of Power and Government of Ukraine (Kyiv, Ukraine)