

“Paper Nation” Jews as a Religion, Minority, and Nation in Bureaucratic Discourse and Praxis in Russian Imperial and Post-Imperial States

Vassili Schedrin 

Queen's University, Kingston, Canada
Email: vassili.schedrin@queensu.ca

Abstract

This article compares late Imperial Russia (1850-1917) and its successor states — post-revolutionary independent Ukraine (1918-1919) and early Soviet Russia and the USSR (1918-1923) — focusing on the conception and implementation of state policy toward the Jews. It argues that Russian Imperial, Ukrainian nationalist and Soviet socialist policies treated the Jews essentially as a distinct ethno-confessional or ethnic collective entitled to state protection and group rights, thus anticipating (in Imperial Russia) and de-facto realizing (in independent Ukraine and Soviet Russia) the rights of minorities stipulated in the 1919 Paris Peace Treaty and implemented by the Versailles system in interwar Europe. The article shows how by establishing and maintaining separate Jewish institutions (sophisticated state apparatuses staffed by qualified, dedicated Jewish bureaucrats), the states developed and even promoted a collective Jewish identity and collective Jewish rights, starting with state protection and official recognition of Judaism and the Jewish way of life in the late Russian empire, to state-sponsored Jewish national and cultural autonomy in the Ukrainian National Republic, to official recognition as a Soviet nationality, and territorial and semi-political autonomy in the USSR.

Keywords: Jews; Russia; Ukraine; nationality; minority

Rabbinical knowledge of the meaning and spirit of the Jewish religion is the cornerstone of strengthening Jewish national foundations and universal Russian [Imperial] principles among Jews.

—Grigorii Bronnikovskii (Department of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Faiths, Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs) (RGIA 4, 11).

The kahal was the apotheosis of Jewish nation building ... an example of wide autonomy ... that should make us proud ... because only civilized peoples, endowed with original spirit and capable of organizing their lives on their own terms, can appreciate and use political and social autonomy.

—Simon Dubnow (Dubnow 1891, 54).

To identify a nation only by its national character is to uproot it, turning it into some invisible self-sufficient force ... what kind of nation, for example, is the Jewish nation, which is by no means united and will never act together? ... Not for such paper nations does social-democracy make its national program. It can only take into account actual nations, those that act and move, and deserve consideration.

—Joseph Stalin (Stalin 1954).

Introduction

In March 1910, the director of the Department of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Faiths of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, Aleksei Kharuzin, addressed 42 Jewish delegates at the opening of the Rabbinic Congress held by the Ministry in St. Petersburg. Kharuzin greeted delegates representing the entire spectrum of Jewish religious and communal life in the empire, including representatives of Hasidic and traditional Orthodox Jews, Jews from the Pale of Settlement, the Vistula provinces (that is, Congress Poland), and members of the acculturated Jewish intelligentsia and economic elite from the Imperial capital. Welcoming the congress, Kharuzin recognized, in positive terms, both the Jewish diversity and the general religious and ethnic diversity of the Imperial populations. Although non-Christians and non-Russians (who made up over half the total Russian population in the 1910s) were officially called “aliens” (*inorodtsy*), Kharuzin described them as the “crew” of the Imperial “dreadnought” (RGIA 7, 1–39 ob.; Slocum 1998). This “crew” was essentially united by loyalty to the throne and dedicated to the operation of the empire, metaphorically presented as the mightiest ship in the navy at the time. Dreadnought was not only the mightiest but also the biggest ship. Therefore, Kharuzin pointed out, it had enough space to accommodate everyone. When on duty, the crew was supposed to work together, and when off duty, every crew member (a metaphor for an ethno-confessional group) was entitled to private living quarters, “returning to their very own private cabins,” as Kharuzin put it (RGIA 7, 1–39 ob.).

In 1924 — fourteen years, one world war, two revolutions, and a civil war later — Iosif Vareikis, the Bolshevik party official then in charge of the implementation of policy on nationalities in Soviet Central Asia, published an account of his work. Vareikis described the USSR as a large communal apartment in which “national state units, the various republics and autonomous provinces” represented “separate rooms.” This metaphor of the USSR as a communal apartment became the title of a ground-breaking article by Yuri Slezkine, in which he argued that the Soviet regime reinforced the old and introduced new partitions within the multinational population of the USSR, and celebrated separateness along with unity (Vareikis and Zelenskii 1924, 59; Slezkine 1994, 415).

In the bureaucratic-metaphorical language of Kharuzin and Vareikis, I seek, in this article, to analyze what happened to the Jews from 1910 to 1924: how did they settle into the Imperial dreadnought cabins and resettle into the separate rooms of the Soviet communal apartment?

This article compares late Imperial Russia (1850 to 1917) and its successor states — post-revolutionary independent Ukraine (1918 to 1919) and early Soviet Russia and the USSR (1918 to 1923) — focusing on the conception and implementation of state policy toward the Jews. I argue that Russian Imperial, Ukrainian nationalist and Soviet socialist policies approached the Jews — referred to as “the Jewish population,” “Jewish community,” or “Jewish nationality” — essentially as a distinct ethno-confessional or ethnic collective entitled to state protection and group rights, thus anticipating (in Imperial Russia) and de-facto realizing (in independent Ukraine and Soviet Russia) the rights of minorities stipulated in the 1919 Paris Peace Treaty and implemented by the Versailles system in interwar Europe. Notwithstanding utopian political goals (such as Tsar Nicholas I’s desire for the wholesale conversion of Russian Jews to Orthodox Christianity or Lenin’s desire to dissolve the “chimeric” bourgeois Jewish nation), the policymakers in all three settings never seriously considered the assimilation of the Jews. Instead, they took a particularistic approach. By establishing and maintaining separate Jewish institutions, the states attempted to develop and promote a collective Jewish identity and collective Jewish rights, starting with state protection and official recognition of Judaism and the Jewish way of life in the late Russian empire, to state-sponsored Jewish national and cultural autonomy in the Ukrainian National Republic, to official recognition as a Soviet nationality, territorial and semi-political autonomy in the USSR. In addition, in all three settings, the states established sophisticated state apparatuses for the creation and implementation of such policies — imperial, nationalist, or socialist — concerning Jews, staffed by qualified, dedicated Jewish bureaucrats responsible for engaging the Jewish populations in asserting, making, and remaking their collective and ultimately national identity.

Jewish bureaucracy: parallels and perpendiculars

My goal in this article is to establish the relationship between the different political and ideological attitudes of the governments of imperial and post-imperial states towards minorities and corresponding variations in the institutional structure of the modern state. More specifically, I show how different state policies concerning the Jewish minority were realized by similar—structurally and functionally — state institutions of Jewish bureaucracy. The Russian Empire with its Pale of Settlement, government rabbis (*kazennye ravviny*), and expert Jews (*uchenye evrei*) became history. Jews gained civil rights in all post-imperial states. However, those states continued to rely on a separate Jewish bureaucracy — an institution that various political regimes found useful and even necessary.

The purpose of this article is not to examine in detail specific state policies towards Jews and the outcomes of those policies, nor the reactions of Jews and non-Jewish societies to these policies. Instead, I focus on the context, motivations, intentions, and approaches of states with respect to their Jewish minorities, and on institution-building. I show how they have attempted to “put on paper” the Jewish minority and define its current and future place in the state, and to outline the parameters of a Jewish collective identity that implied simultaneous belonging to a country/state and a minority within it. Thus, such groups as “subjects of the Tsar of Judaic confession,” “Ukrainian Jews,” and “Soviet citizens of Jewish nationality” not only emerged “on paper” but also materialized by means of bureaucratic institutions and procedures.

In all three cases discussed in this article, the Jewish bureaucracy was a part of the state apparatus. However, in addition to many parallels in the role, structure, and functions of Jewish bureaucracy in the Russian Empire, the Ukrainian National Republic (UNR,) and the USSR, there were as many perpendiculars, due to the differences in the contexts in which states and their Jewish bureaucracies operated. One such difference was in the hierarchical status and the extent of the actual power of the Jewish bureaucracy. Thus, in democratic conditions (the UNR), the head of the Jewish ministry was part of the government as an equal political player, and the ministry’s apparatus was based on the infrastructure of the Jewish national-cultural autonomy’s democratic bodies — *kehiles*. In authoritarian conditions (the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union), Jewish bureaucrats did not have real power but had the status of government experts or advisors. In this context, Jewish bureaucratic institutions responsible for support of government policymaking and implementation were part of the general state (the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the Russian Empire) or party (Jewish sections of the Communist party in the USSR) apparatus.

In the relatively tolerant political climate of the late Russian Empire and the democratic UNR, Jewish political parties and public organizations that operated outside the Jewish bureaucracy played a major role in Jewish life. In the USSR, Jewish organizations and parties were liquidated and banned (just like all non-Soviet and non-Communist parties and organizations in the country were liquidated and banned in general). A handful of underground political, cultural, and religious groups which continued to exist, often illegally, hardly made an impact on the lives of the majority of the Soviet Jews. In the UNR, Jewish political parties were represented in the Rada, the Ukrainian parliament, and the institutes of Jewish civil society — communities and organizations — were represented and sometimes funded by the Ministry for Jewish Affairs. Hence, Ukrainian Jews in the UNR were a legitimate collective body, whose interests at the state level were articulated and lobbied by Jewish politicians and negotiated by Jewish bureaucracy. In late Imperial Russia, only limited representation of Jewish interests was allowed and carried out by self-appointed spokesmen from the Russian Jewish economic elite (Nathans 2002, 38–44) and, after 1903, by Jewish politicians in the State Duma, the Russian parliament. However, the government continued to pay the most attention to the official voice of representatives of the Jewish bureaucracy (members of the Rabbinical Commission, expert Jews, and government rabbis), whose expertise the government trusted and used in policymaking (Schedrin 2016, 203). Moreover, in the USSR, Jewish bureaucrats were the voice of the regime itself. *Evseksiias* did not represent the Jews. They imposed political and

ideological conformism among Jews and persecuted any kind of non-state-sanctioned group solidarity among Jews as anti-Soviet.

States created institutions of Jewish bureaucracy that were both permanent (Jewish national-cultural autonomy was enshrined in the foundational documents of the UNR) and temporary (that is, to accomplish certain political goals: expert Jews were in charge of the “rapprochement of the Jews with the rest of the subjects” of the Russian Empire, and the *Evseksii* were responsible for carrying out the “revolution in the Jewish street”). However, over time, while permanent institutions disappeared (the Ukrainian Ministry for Jewish Affairs became history along with the UNR itself), temporary institutions took on a life of their own. The more Jews acculturated and converged with non-Jews in the Russian Empire, the more new issues of Jewish life in Russia emerged, and the more work became available to Jewish bureaucrats — expert Jews and the Rabbinical Commission (Freeze 2002, 247, 248, 252, 260; Lederhendler 1989, 113). In the USSR, after the liquidation of Jewish bureaucratic institutions (*Evseksii*), the Jewish Autonomous Region continued to exist. It was a nominal, bureaucratic symbol of the status of Soviet Jews, that is, that Jews were not a “paper nation” and that the Soviet regime had successfully realized its vision of a Jewish collectivity.

The cases considered in the article are based on comprehensive, well-documented studies of relationships between the states and the Jews in independent Ukraine, by Henry Abramson (1999), and in the USSR, by Zvi Gitelman (1972), and my own archival research on Jewish bureaucracy in late Imperial Russia. Before examining the cases, I would like to contextualize them in the following comparative survey of imperial and post-imperial policies towards the Jews in the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg empires and their successor states, with particular attention to Soviet Russia.

Particularism, nationalism, internationalism, bureaucracy, and the Jews

In 19th-century Western Europe, most modern states legally emancipated the Jews. European governments vigorously pursued the civil regeneration of their Jewish populations, seeking a transformation of the wretched medieval Jew into a full member of the non-Jewish nation and a citizen of the state. By contrast, in Eastern and Southeastern Europe — tsarist Russia and Ottoman Turkey — the empires, which at the turn of the 20th century were home to around 6 million Jews (approximately 70% of the total European Jewish population), never fully emancipated their Jews in the Western European sense. Both the Russian and Ottoman governments sought to create order within the Jewish population rather than their civil improvement and assimilation. Both empires considered the Jews to be collective entities, quasi-medieval corporate bodies legally framed as members of tolerated religious communities among other officially recognized alien (that is, non-Russian Orthodox in Russia and non-Muslim in Turkey) faiths. In the Ottoman Empire, such communities (*millets*), including Jews, were entitled to a considerable degree of administrative and legal autonomy, while in Imperial Russia most of the officially recognized alien ethno-confessional populations (*priznavaemye ispovedaniia*) were subject to the centralized control of the state. The common feature of both systems — Ottoman *millets* and Russian *priznavaemye ispovedaniia* — was, paradoxically, that they maintained particularism along ethno-religious lines and collective identities while, at the same time, fostering a uniform loyalty to the Imperial state through shared values of the religiously diverse populations. The particularistic approach of the Russian Imperial authorities was criticized by both liberals for the lack of full legal inclusion of non-Russians into Imperial society and by nationalist conservatives for too much inclusion of non-Russians without being fully Russified. However, the Russian Imperial state consistently and quite successfully used this particularistic approach in order to maintain peace, avoid conflict, and contain revolution (Crews 2006, 22–24).

The non-Russian populations of the Russian Empire were often divided by territorial borders as well as religious ones. Uniate (Greek-Catholic) Christians were found mainly in the Ukrainian provinces of Volhyn and Podolia; Protestants — in the Baltic provinces of Lifland and Estland;

Muslims — in the Volga region, Crimea, and Central Asia; Buddhists eastern Siberia. Russian Jews lived mainly in the Western Region (*Zapadnyi Krai*), the vast borderland region comprised of provinces taken over by Russia from Sweden and the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth (the contemporary Baltic States, Belarus, and Ukraine) and Ottoman Turkey (contemporary Crimea and Moldova). Since the last decade of the 18th century, the Russian tsars promulgated several decrees designed to contain Jews in these areas, designated as the Pale of Jewish Settlement (*Cherta evreiskoi osedlosti*). The Pale was instituted as an ad hoc measure to contain and eventually alleviate the conflict between local tradition and new Russian law, institutions, and policies. However, by tying Jews down to a fixed territory, the Pale also fixed Jewish cultural particularism. In 1891, Nikolai Gradovskii, the Russian bureaucrat in charge of Jewish affairs, wrote, “The Jews were fixed by the authorities in the places of their residence ... [this measure effectively divided the country] into two parts, very different in ethnographic, economic, and administrative aspects: Russia with Jews and Russia without Jews” (Gradovskii 1891, 18–19). In 1903, Vladimir Lenin, leader of the Russian social democrats, still struggled with the Jewish particularism that was threatening to tear apart the social-democratic movement. Lenin sarcastically complained, “All that remains for the Bundists [Jewish social democrats] is to develop the theory of a separate Russian-Jewish nation, whose language is Yiddish and whose territory is the Pale of Settlement” (Lenin 2).

Moreover, the ethno-religious and territorial particularism of non-Russians in the Russian empire existed “on paper” in the state apparatus for the “administration of spiritual affairs” (*upravlenie dukhovnymi delami*) of non-Orthodox and non-Christian subjects of the Tsar. This apparatus included hierarchical bureaucratic structures staffed by state-certified and, eventually, state-trained clergy such as mullahs, lamas, and rabbis. Thus, the state-sponsored confessionalization of heterogeneous populations yielded a dense network of bureaucratic and policing institutions, which ruled “on paper,” that is, through bureaucratic procedures, enhancing the power of the Imperial state (Crews 2006, 354–355; Schedrin 2016, 5–6). In both the Russian and Ottoman empires, the bureaucratic institutions of the millet and *priznavaemye ispovedaniia* systems helped to categorize Imperial subjects as members of religious communities, instill them with loyalty and collectively engage them in affairs of state. In the late 19th-century, more liberal setting of the Austrian-Hungarian empire, the government increasingly adopted a particularistic approach to ethno-confessional groups by creating separate organs of governance. Officials and institutions in a sort of national autonomy under the Habsburg crown facilitated the engagement of those groups in the creation and implementation of Imperial policy (Cohen 2013, 104, 109). Farther west, in democratic and pluralistic mid-nineteenth-century France, the collective national consciousness of French Jews emerged “from paper,” that is, from the bureaucratic consistorial system. The French Jewish consistories, originally established by Napoleon in order to fuse together Jews and Frenchmen, were essentially a separate Jewish institution, and thus eventually and paradoxically created a unique sense of unity and purpose among French Jews, who developed a certain cohesion in French Jewish life (Rodrigue 1990, 19).

In the age of emerging nationalisms, especially after the 1878 Congress of Berlin that introduced the concept of minorities and their collective national rights, “paper” institutions were increasingly replaced by separate geographical territories as the *raison d’être* of modern nations. Empires were now seen as the anachronistic and illegitimate “oppressors” or “prisons” of nations (Reynolds 2011, 17). In the 1880s, the Zionist movement started looking for a national-territorial answer to the Jewish question. However, in the eyes of many Jewish and especially non-Jewish Western European and local observers, Russian and Ottoman Jews were deprived mainly of individual and civil, rather than collective and national rights. Instead of national territory, statehood, or autonomy, they should be granted the right to become proper Russians and Ottomans — in other words, to assimilate. Nationalists and socialists in Turkey and Russia believed that Jews were essentially anti-imperial and cosmopolitan. On the eve of the First World War, some members of the Committee of Union and Progress, the Young Turks party, identified Russia’s Jews, “known for their anti-tsarist sentiment,” as natural allies (Reynolds 2011, 84, 85). After the 1917 October Revolution in Russia,

Maxim Gorky, the Russian writer and supporter of the Bolshevik Party, wrote that “Granting civil rights to Jews is one of the greatest accomplishments of our revolution ... [actually] the Jews were fighting for the political liberation of Russia [with] much more honor and energy than many Russian people” (Gorky 1971-1918).

During the revolution of 1905-1907, the Russian Yiddish press was full of expressions of faith in the viability of a multi-ethnic and democratic Russia (Stein 2004, 85–122). However, a decade later, Simon Dubnow, the founding father of Russian Jewish historiography and ideologue of Jewish autonomist politics, claimed that revolutions (especially the Bolshevik one), nationalist awakening, and the shattering of empires in Europe after World War I had deprived Jews of collective rights while placing collective responsibility on them for the catastrophic end of the old world order. In 1919, Dubnow wrote, “With his tactless remark about the leading role of the Jews in (the Bolshevik) revolution, Gorky did us a disservice: wanting to stimulate the Reds’ sympathy for the Jews, he actually provoked the Whites, who perpetrated pogroms and murdered Jews as an act of vengeance on the Bolsheviks” (Dubnow 2004, 431). At the turn of the 20th century in Ottoman Turkey, Christian and Jewish millets depended on the Empire’s will and capacity for reform. In fact, the structures of the Jewish millet were consolidated during the 19th-century reform process and their function as representatives of autonomous community rights was strengthened (Hartmann 2013, 172–177; Rodrigue 1990, 119–120). While in Russia, many Jews tended to support the dismantling of Imperial structures; Ottoman Jews, in general, feared Imperial disintegration. A certain segment of Habsburg Jewry also shared this fear in the decades preceding the First World War, when the growing radicalism and antisemitism of nationalist parties reinforced many Jews’ loyalties to the liberal Austrian Imperial state as a bulwark of their rights (Stein 2004, 85–122; Reynolds 2011, 62–63).

After the First World War, the newly established European nation-states, which, by and large, replaced the collapsed empires, had to renegotiate their relationships with ethnic or ethno-confessional groups, including Jews, that did not belong to the titular nation. These new nation-states, striving for homogeneity and loyalty, had to confront their ethnically diverse populations, inherited from the empires, with constant demands for accommodation. In order to resolve this tension, the Paris Peace Conference created a “paper” solution, stipulating the conception of minority protection, entrenched in Versailles and other peace treaties and enshrined in the national constitutions. In 1925, an international bureaucratic institution, the Congress of European Nationalities in Geneva, was established to safeguard the collective rights of minorities (Diner 2013, 62, 67). If the ultimate goal of the Versailles system was to contain military conflict and maintain international peace, the goal of the minority protection system was to contain social and ethnic conflict and maintain intranational peace. Therefore, the new world order was to be based on unity for peace, or, in the words of Dubnow, the Versailles treaties would create an “international league for peace.” In reality, however, in March 1919, just three months before the signing of the Versailles Peace Treaty, according to Dubnow in Petrograd, “The international league for peace that we are dreaming of is now challenged by a newly emergent league for war — civil, class war. Recently, in Moscow, the Third International was founded” (Dubnow 2004, 423).

The Third International, also known as the Communist International (Comintern), was an international communist organization for the coordination of a global communist revolution. Originally proposed by Vladimir Lenin in December 1918 as an international federation of communist parties, the Comintern was actually established in March 1919 as a centralized bureaucratic organ of the Bolshevik party that formed, financed, and controlled Communist parties in other countries (Vatlin 2009, 8–10). The ultimate goal of the Comintern was to destroy the old imperialist world order by means of class war waged by the oppressed proletariat and national self-determination proclaimed by the oppressed colonial peoples. This global revolution would result in the creation of a new world order based on proletarian internationalism: the reunification of old and new nations liberated from capitalist and colonial oppression as a “world union of Soviet republics” (Vatlin 2009, 40). Hence, in the Comintern’s heyday, 1919 to 1923, both its activity and the

Bolshevik government's foreign policy tended to transcend recognized international borders and diplomatic protocols. Russian communists and Bolshevik-sponsored international activists tried to fulfil the Comintern program by "overthrowing the Versailles system" abroad in Germany, Poland, Hungary, Estonia, Bulgaria, and other countries (Vatlin 2009, 137–138; Reynolds 2011, 253–254). The Comintern also tried to reach beyond Europe. According to Lenin, "The fate of [W]estern civilization now depends in great measure on engaging the toiling masses of the Orient in political activity." In September 1920, the Comintern sponsored in Baku the First Congress of the Peoples of the East, which adopted a program of national self-determination. However, Bolsheviks took great care not to push their communist program in the East too hard, because, in the words of Georgii Chicherin, the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, "The [forced] Sovietization of the East will become an occupation [of the former colonies] ... this is why we should focus on national liberation only" (Vatlin 2009, 143; Reynolds 2011, 258–259).

In the West, the Bolsheviks acted with much less hesitation, helping to establish ephemeral Soviet republics in Eastern Europe. Paradoxically for Lenin and other communist leaders, the newly independent countries such as Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia realized the right of self-determination but did not join the global revolution. In the end, most of these countries became sovereign states that rejected communist ideology, joined the League of Nations, an embodiment of the Versailles system antithetical to the Comintern, and effectively prevented the spread of Bolshevism further west. After the end of the Russian Civil War in 1921, the Bolshevik regime focused on implementing national self-determination policy within Soviet Russia. Symbolically, Russian Marxists adapted their internationalist credo to the new reality by changing it from "The proletariat has no homeland" to "The homeland of the world proletariat is the USSR" (Vatlin 2009, 14, 137). The USSR embraced ethnic pluralism by creating institutions that supported and promoted ethnic particularism. Like the tsarist regime of the Russian empire, the Soviet regime of the USSR was reluctant to recognize the individual rights of its citizens, but consistently promoted the group rights of its constituent nationalities, including non-territorial minorities such as Jews, in order to guarantee their loyalty (Reynolds 2011, 260–261, 267; Slezkine 1994, 415).

The following cases will show how the empire, the post-imperial nation-state, and the multinational union of federated states conceived of and implemented the group rights of Jews on paper and in practice through bureaucratic Jewish institutions.

The Empire's expert Jews

In the 1850s, Jewish bureaucracy emerged as the principal institutional base for Imperial Jewish policy. Russian Jewish bureaucrats, *uchenye evrei* (expert Jews), helped shape state policies as well as, ultimately, a distinctively Russian Jewish modernity. Labelled by Eli Lederhendler as "modernity without emancipation or assimilation," it was driven by bureaucratization, the universal method of ordering the empire (Lederhendler 1992). Relying on the support and insight of the Jewish bureaucratic corps, the government achieved a substantial degree of conformity of Russian Jews to the imperial standard through their bureaucratic integration into the established social, judicial, and confessional structures of the state.

In 1875, the governor of Bessarabiia, Nikolai Shebeko, sought the approval of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs to eliminate the office of *uchenyi evrei* (expert Jew), which he considered a useless and irrelevant position within his chancellery. The governor's opinion provoked strong criticism from a senior Ministry official, Fedor Girs, a veteran Russian bureaucrat in the field of religious administration of Imperial minorities. In his memorandum to the director of the Ministry's Department of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Faiths, Count Emanuel Sievers, Girs called Shebeko's decision uninformed and counter-productive. He wrote: "I was in charge of the chancellery of the governor-general [of Novorossiia and Bessarabiia] for nine years, so I can verify that expert Jews are very useful not only for the development of measures related to Jews but also as a liaison between the Jewish and the Christian population in cases of mutual misunderstanding and

open conflict. The influence of the expert Jews was particularly strong due to the fact that they did not break with the faith of their ancestors and maintained close ties with their traditional milieu. Thank God, during those nine years, [their intervention resolved] in this manner all complaints and conflicts arising between the two sides, which otherwise could have easily escalated into bloody carnage.” Girs continued, “the ability to make use of the institution [of expert Jews] provided by the law belongs entirely to the governor’s office. Governor Shebeko would be deeply wrong if he tried to approach the Jews directly through his chancellery and [Russian] officials” (RGIA 6, 114–115).

This testimony brings to the fore the figure of the Russian Jewish bureaucrat — the *uchenyi evrei* (expert Jew). The main contribution of expert Jews was in the sphere of policymaking and implementation. Unlike *shtadlanim*, traditional Jewish lobbyists, expert Jews did not represent Jews in affairs of state, but represented the Russian state in Jewish affairs. From 1850 to 1917, the office of expert Jew was an indispensable feature of every provincial chancellery in the Pale of Settlement and of the central offices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in St. Petersburg. Expert Jews were appointed by the administration of 17 Russian provinces (by every governor and governor-general in the Pale of Settlement), by two city administrations (of the city governors of Odessa and Nikolaev), and by the central offices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (at the Department of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Faiths). Within seven decades, a total of 48 expert Jews were appointed to these 20 bureaucratic positions (Schedrin 2016, 62–69).

Expert Jews helped the Russian government conceive and implement a distinctive scheme to modernize Russian Jewry. In contrast to Western Europe, Jewish modernity was shaped by legal emancipation and civil regeneration, and Russian Jewish modernity was shaped by the establishment of strong bureaucratic ties between the Jews and the empire. In particular, Russia brought the country’s Jews into modernity through legal integration into Imperial society by reconciling general Imperial law, special laws for Jews, and Jewish religious law. Expert Jews rationalized, negotiated, and carried out this reconciliation.

In 1848, the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ Secret Regulation and Instruction to provincial governors in the Pale of Settlement broadly defined the bureaucratic scope of expert Jews, a newly established office within the governors’ chancelleries, as the “religious affairs of the Jews, excluding censorship of Jewish religious and other literature.” According to the Regulation, the governors would exert the moral influence of expert Jews “to correct contemporary Jewish misrepresentations of the original teachings of the Old Testament,” and to alleviate the incongruity between Jewish religious law and Imperial legislation. Expert Jews would aid the administration in overcoming so-called Jewish fanaticism, believed to be the major obstacle to rapprochement between the Jews and other subjects of the empire. The Secret Regulation identified this fanaticism as a two-fold religious and social impediment to the integration of the Jews. Religious fanaticism included the general anti-Christian thrust of Judaism and its messianic aspect, which prevented Jews from turning to a “solid settled way of life” while still in exile. Jewish social fanaticism included subversive patterns of social behavior based on their atavistic medieval legacies, such as false testimony in general courts, concealment from the police investigation, evasion of proper civil registration, and early marriage (RGIA 5, 159–160).

In practice, the provincial governors and central departments of the Ministry of Internal Affairs gave expert Jews a wide array of commissions from 1850 to 1917. Analysis of these commissions shows that, while in the mid-19th-century, the government sought the gradual eradication of Jewish tradition, by the end of the century the government compromised on this approach to Judaism in return for support among traditional Jews to sustain conservative domestic policy, aimed at the containment of radicalism and revolution.

In 1854, on the order of Pavel Ignat’ev, governor-general of the Vitebsk, Mogilev, and Smolensk provinces, expert Jew Moisei Berlin compiled a memorandum on ritual prayers by moonlight, *kiddush levana*. Berlin explained the origins of this ritual and pointed out “obscene” (*nepristoinye*) phrases incorporated within the liturgy. Apparently, these “obscene” (that is, subversive) phrases showed the general messianic undertones of this ritual. Berlin’s memorandum classified *kiddush*

levana as a manifestation of Jewish fanaticism, since their messianic hopes, “preventing them from obtaining [a] permanent settlement,” was explicitly qualified as “religious fanaticism” by the “Secret Regulation” (RGIA 3, 68 ob.).

In 1909, Moisei Kreps, an expert Jew at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, strongly recommended that his superiors reject an application for registration of the reform Jewish congregation in St. Petersburg, filed by Dr. Naum Pereferkovich. The expert Jew pointed out the radical spirit of the reformist initiative, which was based on the rejection of the “sacred and essential tenets accepted by the rest of religious Jews since it does not accept the authority of Talmudic discourse,” and concluded that this reformist congregation clearly represented a dangerous “sect, separated from mainstream Judaism.” As a result, the authorities denied the reform congregation’s official registration. However, while suppressing the reform initiative, the authorities officially registered six new orthodox Jewish congregations in the 1900s in St. Petersburg alone. So, whereas in the 1850s the official missions of expert Jew Berlin targeted Jewish religious fanaticism as the main obstacle to the social integration of the Jews, by the 1900s the official mission of expert Jew Kreps safeguarded the “sacred and essential tenets,” formerly defined as Jewish fanaticism (RGIA 2, 95–100 ob.).

There was a different view, articulated by Iakov Brafman, a Russian Jewish convert, who in the 1870s served a brief term as an expert Jew at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In his infamous “Kniga Kagala” (Book of the Kahal) (Vilna, 1869), Brafman, in the words of one Russian official, had “exposed the real plague of Jewish ways” — the kahal, a Jewish community council, the main organ of medieval autonomy abolished by the Russian government in 1844. Brafman argued that in reality, the kahal did not cease to exist but had developed into a “secret autonomous Jewish, international republic based on the teachings of the Talmud” (Brafman 1869, 26). In his view, this subversive political entity hindered Jewish loyalty to the empire, and official Jewish policy had completely missed the target by engaging in a desperate fight against the mythical religious fanaticism of the Jews (RGIA 1, 39; Zipperstein 1985, 115, 179). In the end, Brafman’s views did not affect Imperial policy, but they influenced and were adopted by Russian and international antisemitic thinkers and politicians (Schedrin 2018, 73–74).

At the same time, the kahal was rediscovered by pioneering Russian Jewish historians such as Sergei Bershadskii. Bershadskii singled out the institution of the kahal as the locus of Jewish political and social life in Eastern Europe from the Middle Ages to early modernity and identified the communal autonomy embodied by the kahal as the foundation of Jewish historical continuity (Bershadskii 1883; Soifer 1975). Historians cum political thinkers, such as Simon Dubnow, reclaimed the kahal as the cornerstone to building a Jewish national future.

Dubnow the historian is inseparable from Dubnow the politician, according to Viktor Kelner (2017; Gechtman 2011). Dubnow’s political thought was based on his study of the history of the Jews in Russia. In his historiography, Dubnow argued that the institution of the kahal represented the “apotheosis of Jewish nation building ... an example of wide autonomy ... that should make us proud ... because only civilized peoples, endowed with original spirit and capable of organizing their life on their own terms, could appreciate and use political and social autonomy.” For Dubnow, the kahal was a socio-political institution that “used the full force of its power to protect Jewish interests and the limited human rights of Jews, either purchased for money or granted by the authorities” (Dubnow 1891, 54).

Dubnow the historian did not idealize the kahal, arguing that in the first half of the 19th century, the policy of the Russian authorities “destroyed the essential integrity of the kahal, thus this organ aimed at serving society was turned into an organ of domination, oppressing [society] by means of brutal police power” (Dubnow 1913). However, the political upheavals in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century prompted Dubnow the politician to revisit the kahal as an archetypical institution of national-cultural autonomy and national self-determination (Diner 2013, 64–65). In his opinion, the time had come to acknowledge “the inalienable historical right to organize internal social life [of the Jews], to develop our national culture, to create institutions in accordance with our needs and with the needs of our time” (Dubnow 1913). In short, Dubnow believed that it was their common

form of national existence and common socio-political organization — the diaspora and the kahal — that made the Jews a distinct modern nation like other nations.

Ukraine's Ministry for Jewish Affairs

After the fall of the tsarist regime in March 1917, one of the first decrees of the Russian Provisional Government was to abolish all legal restrictions pertaining to former Imperial minorities, thus effectively emancipating the Russian Jews. This decree made Jews equal citizens in the new democratic Russia by giving them universal individual rights but, at the same time, depriving them of the particularistic collective rights and group identity which were enshrined in the now obsolete Imperial structure. The UNR, one of the first nation-states to emerge on the former Imperial periphery, had to deal with the problem of its own minorities from the outset (Bartow and Weitz 2013, 10; Cohen 2013, 117). Therefore, Ukrainian policymakers thought twice before dismantling the Imperial particularistic approach to ethno-confessional groups along with Imperial legislation and institutions.

The UNR granted its minorities the status of the republic's constituent nationalities as well as group rights. In order to maintain these rights, the government created a host of Jewish bureaucratic institutions, reminiscent of the Imperial structures for *priznavaemye ispovedaniia*, infused with the ideology of national-cultural autonomy developed by the Austrian Marxists Karl Renner and Otto Bauer (Diner 2013, 67). This combination allowed for more than minority protection — there was actual representation of Jewish interests in affairs of state, while the former Imperial Russian Jewish bureaucracy had represented the state in Jewish affairs (Schedrin 2016, 6). This newly established Ukrainian Jewish bureaucracy created opportunities for the practical realization of Dubnow's ideas on the political potential of a reconceptualized kahal. In late 1918, Israel Efroykin, a leader of the *Folkspartei*, the People's Party founded by Dubnow for the promotion of Jewish national and cultural autonomy, moved from Petrograd to Kyiv in order to realize the *Folkspartei*'s program.

From November 1917 to November 1918, Jewish political parties were entitled to full political representation in the Rada, the national legislature of the independent Ukrainian Republic. In addition, official Ukrainian Jewish policy rested upon the principles of national-cultural autonomy, which was granted to three major non-Ukrainian nationalities — Russians, Poles, and Jews. The elected governing bodies of the local Jewish communities, *kehiles*, formed the organizational structure of Jewish national autonomy (Abramson 1999, 58). In order to supervise and coordinate the “creation of new forms of Jewish national life in Ukraine,” the government established a bureaucratic agency, the Secretariat (later, the Ministry) for Jewish Affairs and appointed Moshe Zilberfarb, jurist and socialist politician, as its head (Abramson 1999, 54–58). Three deputy ministers, reporting to Zilberfarb, were principals of three departments of the ministry: the departments of education, communal administration, and general affairs. The Ministry's staff had 125 officials, all of them working in the central offices in Kyiv, since the Ministry had no provincial offices (Abramson 1999, 58–59, 68–70). The Ukrainian Ministry for Jewish Affairs had two basic functions: to organize Jewish national life (primarily in the sphere of education) and to promote harmony among the nationalities of the Ukrainian Republic.

The Ministry's mandate was largely shaped by the institutional vacuum resulting from the dissolution of the Imperial Jewish bureaucracy. Under the old regime, Jews were entitled to Imperial citizenship as adherents of an officially recognized religion. Government rabbis registered and kept a record of the Jewish population, while expert Jews aided top and provincial-level Russian bureaucrats in the making and implementing of state policies regarding the Jews. The Ukrainian Ministry for Jewish Affairs now had to develop the infrastructure of Jewish autonomy in Ukraine almost from scratch, while addressing the immediate pressing issues of Ukrainian Jews on an everyday basis (Abramson 1999, 69). Jews viewed the Ministry as a kind of Jewish institution; however, they did not quite understand what it was or its purpose. Ukrainian Jews, according to Henry Abramson, considered the Ministry an agency for *shtadlanut*, traditional lobbying of Jewish

interests, in the Ukrainian government. Contrary to these expectations, the Ukrainian government considered the Ministry first and foremost as a bureaucratic arm of the state in Jewish affairs. Consequently, the Ministry's authority was limited only to matters directly related to Jewish autonomy. The Ministry was also expected to carry out its work by bureaucratic means, such as cooperation and coordination with other government agencies, and the creation of new bureaucratic institutions in response to arising political issues. All issues were to be communicated and resolved through appropriate bureaucratic channels, such as official correspondence and executive orders (Abramson 1999, 70–72).

Hence, during its short term, in response to such issues as local obstruction of Jewish economic activity and residence rights, and the unavailability of an official telephone response line in Yiddish as promised by the government, the Ministry for Jewish Affairs contacted the pertinent departments of executive power — the Minister of Post and Telegraph, the Kyiv Provincial Commissar, and the army command — on behalf of the petitioners. In addition, the Ministry coordinated the import of kosher flour for baking Passover matzos and authorized Jewish shopkeepers to open their stores on Sundays and Christian holidays (Abramson 1999, 70–71). However, the Ministry's bureaucratic methods proved ineffective in the face of a much larger and more complex issue — the frightening wave of anti-Jewish violence that swept Ukraine between 1918 and 1919. In full compliance with its bureaucratic mandate, the Ministry kept faith in the government's promise to provide adequate protection for the Jews. Even when the government's impotence became all too evident, the Ministry was reluctant to lend support to grassroots Jewish initiatives at self-defense, fearing that it smacked of separatism and disloyalty and would compromise harmony between Jews and the state. When, under pressure from the rest of the Ukrainian government, the Ministry officially recognized the Jewish self-defense units, it was too late to make any difference (Abramson 1999, 78, 81, 83, 85, 90).

The Ukrainian Ministry for Jewish Affairs was soon dismantled, along with the national government, upon the loss of Ukrainian independence. Since this agency was short-lived and did not yet reach full institutional and political consolidation, one cannot assess the results of its work. However, its historical significance was quite obvious even to contemporaries. Deeply suspicious of genuine Jewish support of the Ukrainian alliance with the Central Powers, members of the right-wing Ukrainian Socialist-Independist Party demanded that the entire Ministry for Jewish Affairs be abandoned as “a penalty for the bad conduct [that is, disloyalty] of national minorities” (Abramson 1999, 88). In addition to the bureaucratic maintenance of state-sponsored Jewish national autonomy in Ukraine, the Ministry for Jewish Affairs was a symbol of the new political status of Ukrainian Jews. Emancipated by the independent Ukrainian state, Jews were entitled to their own bureaucratic institution, which wielded considerable authority as part of the Ukrainian national government. Another Jewish institution was trying to seize the authority of the Ministry while the Russian Bolshevik government was seizing power in Ukraine. When the Red Army took Kyiv in 1920, *Evseksiia*, the Jewish section of the Bolshevik party, raided the office of the Ukrainian Ministry for Jewish Affairs and confiscated its files, hoping to take charge of propagandizing the Jews (Abramson 1999, 86).

In the end, Efroykin, who left for Ukraine in 1918, had to return to Soviet Russia, disillusioned. On March 11, 1919, Dubnow wrote in his diary, “Efroykin, our essential Folkspartei activist, visited me [in Petrograd]. He had just returned from Kyiv, where he had gone to work several months ago. He survived the fall of the Hetmanate and then [the] Directory and had to run for his life after Ukraine was taken by Bolsheviks. The Ukrainian pogrom atmosphere, in his words, was stifling and worse than the despotism of the communists. However, the latter [was] able to curb judeophobic excesses ... [it's a pity] because of [all efforts spent] on developing an extensive apparatus for [Jewish] political and cultural work. Half a year ago people were running there [that is, to Ukraine]; now they are running back to hungry, freezing Petrograd” (Dubnow 2004, 424).

The Soviet Jewish Commissariat and the Party's Jewish sections

In actuality, many Jewish political and nationalist activists from Ukraine moved to Moscow between 1919 and 1920 rather than to Petrograd. In Moscow, where the Bolshevik government had moved from Petrograd in 1918, it started building its own policies and institutions to accommodate former Imperial minorities based on Marxist theoretical solutions to the national, including Jewish, question.

Karl Marx classified Jews as a “chimerical nationality.” He rejected the view of Bruno Bauer, his former mentor and friend, that Jews were essentially defined by Judaism, their religion, and fundamentally opposed Christianity and Christians. In order to solve the Jewish question — that is, to integrate Jews into non-Jewish societies — Bauer proposed removing the religious opposition by, first, “emancipation from religion” — the secularization of Christian host societies and, second, emancipation of the Jews, who would also shed their religious identity. Marx believed that the Jewish question was not religious but social. In his view, Jews were not a religious group but a medium of the “egoistic spirit” of capitalism that pervaded modern societies. As Marx put it, “the practical Jewish spirit has become the practical spirit of the Christian nations.” Marx argued that abolishing that spirit would “humanize” the Jews, thus actually emancipating them and all of humanity. In sum, Marx, unlike imperial and nationalist policymakers, considered the Jews neither a religion, nor a nation, but the embodiment of a socioeconomic paradigm, essentially doomed in the historical perspective when “the Jew will have become impossible” (Marx 1844).

Vladimir Lenin, who realized Marxist theory in his practical work of bringing about the Russian revolution and building the Soviet state, approached the Jewish question more pragmatically and in the context of his own social-democratic political theory of nationality. On the one hand, Lenin's general theory of “proletarian internationalism” supported the national liberation and self-determination of oppressed nations. On the other hand, it rejected the particularistic goals and interests of liberated nations as “bourgeois nationalism.” In Lenin's words, “Bourgeois nationalism and proletarian internationalism are the irreconcilably inimical slogans of two [opposite] class camps, expressing two policies, two outlooks on the national question... Marxists should unconditionally support the struggle for national liberation. This task is negative [that is, aimed at destroying the world of oppression]. Proletarian support of nationalism must stop there and go no further because, at the next stage, the bourgeoisie starts the positive work of the consolidation of nationalism. Struggle against any kind of national oppression — absolutely yes. Struggle for any kind of national development and national culture in general — absolutely no.” Hence, Bolshevik policy on nationalities was based on Lenin's principle: “Struggle against national oppression and for national equality, for internationalism, against all forms of bourgeois nationalism” (Lenin 1). Unlike Marx, Lenin denied the Jews any special role in history, except for being a vanguard of assimilation in Russia. In Lenin's words, “The process of assimilation [of oppressed nations] is the greatest historical progress that breaks rigid caste barriers between nations in backward countries like Russia.” Lenin fiercely opposed Jewish nationalism and any kind of Jewish particularism (especially within the social-democratic movement), arguing that the idea of a Jewish nation promoted by Zionists was “false and essentially reactionary” and was “in conflict with the interests of the Jewish proletariat.” However, like Marx, Lenin classified Jews as a non-nationality that had ceased to “exist as a [normal] nation, unthinkable without a territory of its own” (Lenin 2).

Joseph Stalin's conceptualization of Marxist theory on nationalities, including Jews, was most relevant to the actual Bolshevik nationality policies implemented in the USSR. Stalin's ideas were inspired by Lenin's approach, and framed as a response to Otto Bauer's theory of national-cultural autonomy for non-territorial nations. For Stalin, the main enemy of proletarian internationalism was not bourgeois nationalism but the bourgeoisie itself, which used national sentiments to pursue its class goals. Therefore, the defeat and elimination of the bourgeoisie through class war would effectively eliminate all things bourgeois, including bourgeois nationalism. Viewing bourgeois nationalism as a transient historical phenomenon, Stalin, at the same time, saw the existence of

nations as a historical constant, and therefore he took great care to define them. Stalin's definition, enshrined in the official communist ideology of the Soviet state, included two requisite elements: all true nations must have a collective national character and a national territory. Hence, like Lenin and Marx, Stalin singled out the Jews as an example of a non-nation. Stalin wrote, "One could imagine [a group of] people having a collective national character, but it does not mean that they constitute a nation if they are not connected by [the] economy, if they live on different territories, speak different languages, etc. Such, for example, are the Jews ... who do not constitute, in our opinion, one cohesive nation." The "national character" that makes a collective identity, was real and mattered for Stalin, but territory was still a crucial factor in the making of a nation. He contended, "To identify a nation only by its national character is to uproot it, turning it into some invisible self-sufficient force ... what kind of nation, for example, is the Jewish nation, which is by no means united and will never act together? ... Not for such paper nations does social-democracy make its national program. It could only take into account actual nations, those which act and move, and deserve consideration" (Stalin 1954).

From 1919 to 1923, based on these theoretical foundations, the Soviet regime was able to build a bureaucratized infrastructure that embodied its own understanding of minority rights, including the principle of equality and sovereignty of all nations, as well as a strictly territorial definition of autonomy, and a policy of state-sponsored strengthening of national collective identities (Slezkine 1994, 416–417; Martin 2000, 165–168). In 1919, the 8th Bolshevik Party Congress approved the principle of national self-determination for minorities within Soviet Russia, thus officially recognizing the primacy of ethnicity, that is, the struggle for national self-liberation, over class in non-Russian areas. In 1921, the 10th Bolshevik Party Congress adopted the policy of institutionalized ethnicity, that is, government-sponsored state-building to overcome the economic and cultural backwardness of minorities, which led to a proliferation of ethnic bureaucracies in the following years. In 1923, the 12th Bolshevik Party Congress introduced a policy of indigenization (*korenizatsiia*) to promote local ethnic cadres and create new Soviet national elites. Like the Tsarist Empire that made general policies for all Imperial subjects but delegated authority in "spiritual," that is, religious affairs, to confessional bureaucracies, the Bolshevik party and the Soviet government in the USSR centralized essential state functions and left non-essential cultural and linguistic issues to ethnic autonomies (Slezkine 1994, 422–427).

The bureaucratic agencies of the state and Communist party that implemented official policy on national minorities in Soviet Russia included the commissariats for national affairs of Poles, Latvians, Muslims, and others created within the Bolshevik government. There was obviously a need for some sort of special government agency to deal with Jewish needs and, at the same time, bring the Bolshevik message to the Jews in a language they would understand (Gitelman 1972, 119). When, in 1922, the Soviet government set up the State Committee for the Agricultural Settlement of Jewish Workers (KomZET) in order to deal with unemployment among Jews, one KomZET official emphasized that the Jewish population "required a special approach" and hence a "separate institution." Ironically, fellow Soviet bureaucrats referred to the veteran, high-ranking Bolshevik who was appointed chairman of the KomZET, Petr Smidovich, as an *uchenyi evrei* (expert Jew) (Bugai 1993, 176).

By January 1918, Jewish institutions were created within both the state and party apparatuses. A Commissariat for Jewish National Affairs (Evmom) was formed as a section of the People's Commissariat for Nationality Affairs. Unlike the other nationality commissariats, Evmom was designated as "temporary." In the fall of 1918, Jewish Sections (Evsseksii) were established within the Bolshevik party. Both agencies were headed by Semen Dimanshtein (an ordained rabbi turned communist). As the party organ Evsseksiia increased in strength, the government organ Evmom declined and was ultimately replaced by a single "special instructor for Jewish affairs," who advised the government on the integration of Jews into the Soviet infrastructure of the local administration and courts. By June 1919, the locus of power and responsibility had shifted to the Evsseksiia (Gitelman 1972, 243–246).

Similar to the Ukrainian Ministry for Jewish Affairs, the Evseksiia aimed at developing new forms of Jewish national life under the new regime. However, similar to the situation of the Russian empire, these new forms in the political context of Soviet Russia were defined and shaped not by Jews but by the government, that is, by the Communist party and its leadership. The ultimate goal of the Evseksiia was set by the Party as the reconstruction of Jewish national life on a secular socialist basis. The Evseksiia, therefore, helped complete the disintegrative as well as the integrative phases of official Soviet Jewish policy, including the revolution among Jews and the destruction of the old order from 1918 to 1923, the creation and maintenance of a secular socialist Jewish culture from 1924 to 1925, and the attempted improvement of the economic condition of shtetl Jews through industrialization and agricultural colonization from 1924 to 1926 (Gitelman 1972, 13, 321, 379).

The political and administrative functions of the Evseksiia with regard to the Jewish population paralleled the functions of the Party as a whole with regard to the general population. According to Semen Dimanshtein, the Evseksiia was “not a separate party but part of the Communist [P]arty, consisting of Jewish workers. Being internationalists, we do not set ourselves special nationalist tasks but purely class proletarian ones” (Agurskii 1928, 22). Evseksiia policies were implemented by a network of provincial offices, staffed by a considerable army of bureaucrats and lay members, such as the Evseksiia in the Vitebsk province, with a staff of thirty people. The provincial Evseksii were fully integrated within the Communist Party and the Soviet government apparatus and had the same status as departments within provincial party committees.

The task of the Evseksii was to publish Communist literature in Yiddish; create Yiddish Communist clubs, Party schools and libraries; and to recruit Jewish members for the Party. Evseksii were conceived of as propaganda agencies with no responsibility for independent policy formulation. However, the Evseksii were also supposed to devise the means of implementation of policies and, in some cases, were even allowed to exercise autonomous judgment and discretion in matters of Jewish political and social life. Thus, from 1920 to 1922, while the Party set the overall goals and priorities in its effort to break down the traditional sources of authority among Jews, it allowed Jewish communists an impressive amount of leeway in determining the tactics and pace of the battle against the old order (Gitelman 1972, 297–298, 317).

In 1920, the Evseksiia took control of the resources, institutions, and operations of the Kultur-Lige, the largest network of Yiddish educational and cultural organizations created in 1918 in independent Ukraine. As a result, the Kultur-Lige was Sovietized and stripped of its “nationalistic” character. In 1924, it was dissolved; all its institutions were incorporated into the Soviet state apparatus — the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros). From 1921 to 1922, the Hebrew language, the Zionist movement, and the Jewish religion became Evseksiia’s next targets. Because they were essentially antithetical to Communism and the Evseksiia program, they could not be subverted and transformed but had to be confronted and assaulted directly. The Evseksiia waged war on Hebrew, Zionism, and Judaism by means of propaganda and brute force. The Second Evseksii Conference resolved to close all Hebrew schools, especially Zionist-oriented ones. During the anti-religious campaign, hundreds of synagogues were closed and nationalized, converted into workers’ clubs, schools, and other institutions operated by the Evseksiia. Jewish communists saw their struggle against other Jews as class warfare against the ideology of an enemy class, bourgeois Zionism, and against the Jewish religion as a means of political oppression of the Jewish working class (Gitelman 1972, 273–277, 297–298, 317).

Zvi Gitelman (1972) argued that, since, according to Lenin, assimilation was the only solution to the Jewish question, the Evseksii could be nothing more than a temporary apparatus designed to bring communism to the Jews in their own language. It would have to be dismantled once the linguistic barriers had been overcome and the total integration of the Jewish population achieved. From the very beginning, the Party saw the Evseksiia as a temporary organ, designed to destroy the old Jewish life and integrate the Jewish people into Soviet society. The closer the Evseksiia came to achieving its goals, the less it was needed.

However, using Stalin's metaphor of Jews as a "paper nation," I contend that the Evseksiia helped erase the old ethno-confessional collective Jewish identity and redraw a new ethnic one along the lines of Marxist national theory (Soviet Jewish culture in the Yiddish language). The Evseksiia allowed the Jews to emerge from paper as one of the legitimate Soviet nationalities. In the end, Soviet Jews acquired the requisite territorial autonomy after the state matched them with land (in the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s, in Crimea and Southern Ukraine, there were 5 Jewish national districts, 107 Jewish village Soviets, and 213 Jewish collective farms), leading to, eventually, a designated national territory (in Birobidzhan in 1934), transforming the Jews from a "paper nation" to a nation.

The transformation of Soviet Jews into a real nation according to Stalin's definition, provided them, at least on paper, with new opportunities unheard of in Imperial Russia: unrestricted social mobility, protection from any discrimination, and limited celebration of the officially sanctioned manifestations of national culture. However, it did not save them from the Great Terror of the 1930s, when many Jewish and non-Jewish members of the Soviet elite were executed for alleged disloyalty to the regime. Nor did it save them from the state-sponsored Stalin-inspired antisemitic campaigns from 1948 to 1953, which targeted large elite and non-elite segments of Soviet Jewry as subversive. Likewise, the Versailles institutes of minority protection did not save the Jews of Central and Eastern European countries from antisemitic persecution in the late 1930s and the Holocaust in the 1940s.

Conclusion

In the 1840s, the Russian Empire instituted Jewish bureaucracy as a mechanism for creating and implementing official Jewish policy by using the Jewish political and social elites integrated within Russian officialdom. Initially, Jewish bureaucrats, charged with the religious affairs of the Jews, were supposed to identify and help the government eradicate the sources of "fanaticism," that is, Jewish religious, cultural, and social self-isolation, which prevented their modernization and integration into the social and legal structures of the Empire. Paradoxically, by the turn of the 20th century, the Imperial Jewish bureaucracy evolved into an institution that safeguarded the particularistic religious values of Judaism and the traditional Jewish way of life, which came to be seen as a means of retaining minority loyalty to the empire. As a loyal ethno-confessional minority, Russian Jews were collectively entitled to their own private cabin in the Imperial dreadnought.

After the 1917 revolution, the institution of Jewish bureaucracy was not thrown out with the ancien régime. In fact, it outlasted the empire and was reincarnated in the diverse political conditions of the newly independent states that emerged during the interwar period. From the 1910s to the 1930s, the governments of Soviet Russia and independent Ukraine established central and local Jewish bureaucracies that played an active role in dealing with the Jewish question inherited from the Russian Imperial government. Whatever principles guided the official Jewish policies of these new national governments — from national-cultural autonomy to Marxist proletarian internationalism — their policies were dependent on the institution of Jewish bureaucracy and its personnel.

Predating the Versailles system with its built-in minority protection mechanisms, both the UNR and Soviet Russia regarded Jews as a collective body, termed "the Jewish community" or "Jewish population." Jewish bureaucratic agencies helped post-Imperial Ukraine and Russia identify and classify their Jews, based on religious and/or ethnic criteria, as a distinct collective — a minority or nationality — entitled to collective rights such as state protection and non-territorial or territorial autonomy. The specially created Jewish bureaucratic agencies within the Ukrainian and Soviet governments were not mere political tools, they symbolized, represented, and maintained Jewish collective rights.

In this context, Soviet Russia paradoxically stood out as both a remnant of imperial tradition and a vanguard of revolutionary innovation. The Soviets applied the tried-and-tested methods and

institutes of Jewish bureaucracy to Russian Jews, in order to redefine their Jewishness and to remake them into a full-fledged Soviet nationality, a legitimate tenant of a semi-private room in the Soviet communal apartment.

References

- Abramson, Henry. 1999. *A Prayer for the Government: Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times, 1917-1920*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Agurskii, Samuil. 1928. *Di yidishe komisariatn un di yidishe komunistishe sektsyes (protokoln, rezolyutsyes un dokumentn)*, 1918-1921. Minsk.
- Bartov, Omer, and Eric D. Weitz. 2013. "Introduction: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands." In *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, edited by Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, 1–20. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bershadskii, Sergei. 1883. *Litovskie evrei: Istoriia ikh iuridicheskogo i obshchestvennogo polozheniia v Litve ot Vitovta do Liublinskoi Unii*. St. Petersburg: Tip. M.M. Stasiulevicha.
- Brafman, Iakov. 1869. *Kniga kagala: Materialy dlia izucheniia evreiskogo byta*. Vilna: Vilenskoe Gubernskoe Pravlenie.
- Bugai, N.F. 1993. "1920-1930e gody: Pereseleniia i deportatsii evreiskogo naseleniia v SSSR." *Otechestvennaia istoriia* 4: 175–185.
- Cohen, Gary B. 2013. "Our Laws, Our Taxes, and Our Administration: Citizenship in Imperial Austria." In *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, edited by Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, 103–121. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Crews, Robert D. 2006. *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Diner, Dan. 2013. "Between Empire and Nation State: Outline for a European Contemporary History of the Jews, 1750-1950." In *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, edited by Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, 61–79. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Dubnow, Simon. 1891. *Ob izuchenii istorii russkikh evreev i ob uchrezhdenii rusско-evreiskogo istoricheskogo obshchestva*. St. Petersburg: A.E. Landay.
- Dubnow, Simon. 1913. "Problema obshchiny v noveishei istorii evreistva." *Vestnik Evreiskoi Obshchiny* 1: 10.
- Dubnow, Simon. 2004. *Kniga zhizni: Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia. Materialy k istorii moego vremeni*. Moscow-Jerusalem: Gesharim.
- Freeze, ChaeRan. 2002. *Jewish Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, Brandeis University Press.
- Gechtman, Roni. 2011. "Creating a Historical Narrative for a Spiritual Nation: Simon Dubnow and the Politics of the Jewish Past." *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association/Revue de la Société Historique du Canada* 22 (2): 98–124.
- Gitelman, Zvi Y. 1972. *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917-1930*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Gorky, Maxim. 1971-1918. *Nesvoevremennye mysli: Zametki o revoliutsii i kul'ture*. Petrograd: Kul'tura i Svoboda.
- Gradovskii, Nikolai. 1891. *Otnoshenie k evreiam v drevnei i sovremennoi Rusi*. St. Petersburg: Tipo-litografiia A.E. Landau.
- Hartmann, Elke. 2013. "The Central State in the Borderlands: Ottoman Eastern Anatolia in the Late Nineteenth Century." In *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, edited by Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, 172–190. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Kelner, Viktor. 2017. Ot istorii k politike. K voprosu o genezise i evoliutsii politicheskikh vzgliadov S. Dubnova. <http://ldn-knigi.lib.ru/JUDAICA/Dubn-Wzgljad.htm>. (Accessed April 15, 2017.)
- Lederhendler, Eli. 1989. *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics: Political Tradition and Political Reconstruction in the Jewish Community of Tsarist Russia*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lederhendler, Eli. 1992. "Modernity without Emancipation or Assimilation? The Case of Russian Jewry." In *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, edited by Jonathan Frankel and Steven Zipperstein, 325–343. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lenin, Vladimir (Lenin 1). 1958-1966. "Kriticheskie zametki po natsional'nomu voprosu." In Lenin, V.I. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*. Vol. 24, 113–150. Moscow.
- Lenin, Vladimir (Lenin 2). 1958-1966. "Polozhenie Bunda v partii." In Lenin, V.I. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*. Vol. 8, 66–76. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury.
- Martin, Terry. 2000. "Modernization or Neo-traditionalism? Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism." In *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices*, edited by David Hoffmann and Yanni Kotsonis, 161–182. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Marx, Karl. 1844. On the Jewish Question. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/>. (Accessed on January 15, 2021.)

- Nathans, Benjamin. 2002. *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Reynolds, Michael A. 2011. *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908-1918*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rodrigue, Aron. 1990. *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance israélite universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA 1), f. 821, op. 8, d. 152.
- Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA 2), f. 821, op. 8, d. 331.
- Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA 3), f. 821, op. 8, d. 397.
- Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA 4), f. 821, op. 8, d. 473.
- Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA 5), f. 821, op. 8, d. 456.
- Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA 6), f. 821, op. 150, d. 362.
- Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA 7), f. 821, op. 150, d. 393.
- Schedrin, Vassili. 2016. *Jewish Souls, Bureaucratic Minds: Jewish Bureaucracy and Policymaking in Late Imperial Russia, 1850-1917*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Schedrin, Vassili. 2018. "The Russian Jewish Question, Asked and Answered: Virtual Polemics Between Moisei Berlin and Yakov Brafman in the 1860s," *Wroclaw Theological Review* 26 (1): 73–84.
- Slezkine, Yuri. 1994. "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism." *Slavic Review* 2: 414–452.
- Slocum, John W. 1998. "Who, and When, Were the Inorodtsy? The Evolution of the Category of 'Aliens' in Imperial Russia." *Russian Review* 57: 173–190.
- Soifer, Paul. 1975. "The Bespectacled Cossack: S.A. Bershadskii (1850-1896) and the Development of Russo-Jewish Historiography." Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University.
- Stalin, Joseph. 1954. "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros." In Stalin, I.V. *Sochineniia*. Vol. 2, 299–366. Moscow.
- Stein, Sarah Abrevaya. 2004. *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Vareikis, I.M., and I.A. Zelenskii. 1924. *Natsional'no-gosudarstvennoe razmezhevanie Srednei Azii*. Tashkent: Sredne-Aziatskoe gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo.
- Vatlin, Aleksandr. 2009. *Komintern: Idei, resheniia, sud'by*. Moscow: ROSSPEN.
- Zipperstein, Steven. 1985. *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

Cite this article: Schedrin, Vassili. 2025. "Paper Nation' Jews as a Religion, Minority, and Nation in Bureaucratic Discourse and Praxis in Russian Imperial and Post-Imperial States". *Nationalities Papers*: 1–17, doi:10.1017/nps.2025.8