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Strangers and Sojourners:

The Politics of Jewish Belonging in Lithuania,

1914-1940

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

Requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

In History

by

Michael Phillips Casper

2019

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Strangers and Sojourners:

The Politics of Jewish Belonging in Lithuania,

1914-1940

by

Michael Phillips Casper

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor David N. Myers, Chair

This dissertation investigates how Lithuanian Jews positioned themselves vis-à-vis Lithuanians and the Lithuanian state in the era of democratic nation building and, after a military coup d'état in 1926, under an authoritarian regime. Across these dramatically different interwar political contexts, Lithuanian Jews honed different strategies to advance the idea that they belonged to Lithuania, leaning on historical, political, cultural and even linguistic evidence. At the same time, they negotiated a contradictory public discourse about them that held that Jews were integral to, and yet conditional participants in, the Lithuanian national project. I argue that, at its core, Lithuanian Jewish belonging consisted of two parts: the Russian Jewish liberal tradition and a deep-seated sense of localness, if not indigeneity. These traditions sometimes worked in tandem but were often in tension.

I trace the arc of Lithuanian Jewish political self-fashioning by looking closely at sources including the Yiddish and Lithuanian daily press, memoirs, literary production and public celebrations. I begin by looking at a group of Jewish cultural activists who, from the 1910s to 1920s, made significant inroads with Lithuanian intellectuals to advance the cause of Jewish indigeneity in a multiethnic Lithuania. In the early years of statehood, democratism, rights and the system of cultural autonomy for minorities were important vehicles for Jewish integration, and yet they were contested concepts within the Jewish community, which was fractured between Jewish parties including, most significantly for this dissertation, Zionists and Folkists. To that end, I analyze debates between party spokespeople, especially Jacob Robinson and Yudl Mark, including an exchange over the meaning of the Yiddish term *doikayt*, or "hereness." I follow how Jewish supporters of democratic rights reformulated their ideas and positions under Antanas Smetona's authoritarian government, which required Jews to present as unified and loyal, despite rising anti-Semitism among the Lithuanian middle class. By the 1930s, some Lithuanian Jews came to support Smetona's project and the Jewish place in it, while others continued to demand the rights they were promised in the wake of World War I. Finally, I look at the phenomenon of the Jewish study of Roma and the Romani language, which I argue was a way for Jews to demonstrate their relative rootedness.

The dissertation of Michael Phillips Casper is approved.

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Finally, several important historians of Lithuanian Jewry passed away while I was working on this project. I am indebted to the work of Solomonas Atamukas (1918-2014), Ezra Mendelsohn (1940-2015), Leonidas Donskis (1962-2016) and Dov Levin (1925-2016).

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"'Principled Diasporism': Folkists, Zionists and the Meaning of *Doikayt*," *Simon Dubnow*

Institute Yearbook 17 (2018)

Introduction

In April 1940, nine weeks before the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, the Lithuanian-language

Jewish periodical, *Apžvalga* ("The Review") published a report about a celebration of Lithuanian

Independence Day in South Africa.[1] The author, twenty-seven-year-old immigrant Aron

Misheiker – later known, during his career as a newspaper editor, by the name Ronnie – recalled

a visit, about a year prior, from Lithuanian General Vladas "Nagius" Nagevičius. To mark the

occasion of the visit from a leading interwar Lithuanian political figure, a group of Lithuanian

Jews in South Africa, along with a few ethnic Lithuanians, had organized a Lithuanian cultural

association. "Pessimists, who are also not lacking under the African sun, argued that the

organization will fall apart as soon as the general leaves," Misheiker wrote. But still in existence

by Lithuania's Independence Day, on February 16, the group planned an event at the opulent

Langham Hotel in Johannesburg to celebrate Lithuania's 1918 declaration of independence as a

republic.

At the event, Misheiker reported with apparent amusement, the hall of the aristocratic

hotel filled with the sound of the earthy Lithuanian language, although he recorded that the

crowd was about 90% Jewish. (There was a total of about 50 ethnic Lithuanians in all of South

Africa, he estimated.) From the head table, which was decorated in the Lithuanian national

colors of green, red and mustard yellow, the "purebred" Lithuanian head of the organization

delivered the first speech, followed by a man identified as Lithuanian consul to South Africa and

Southern Rhodesia, C.R. MacGillivray, who read aloud a telegram from General Nagius. Several

Jewish speakers followed. First, a lawyer named Aronovski, the head of the organizing

committee and special adviser to the Lithuanian Consulate, gave a well-received overview of

Lithuanian history in Lithuanian and English, speaking of the historical extent of Lithuania from

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[1] A. Mišeikeris, "Vasario 16 d. Johanisburge," *Apžvalga* 11 (219), April 10, 1940, 3.

the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and of contemporary Lithuania's tolerance for all citizens, regardless of race or faith. Next spoke Dr. Yitzhak Ip, a cultural activist from Kaunas. Ip had been in South Africa for a month, where he was welcomed by Jewish and Lithuanian cultural groups, the latter of which appreciated his ability to deliver talks in Lithuanian. At the Independence Day celebration, Ip spoke favorably about the return of Vilnius to Lithuania, concluding with the words, "Long live Lithuania! Love live Lithuanian-Jewish brotherhood!"

But the pièce de résistance of the event was not the political spectacle, per se, but the celebration of culture. After attendees sang the Lithuanian and British national anthems, a group of Lithuanian women, dressed in the traditional costume of colorful embroidered linen, performed a whirling Lithuanian folkdance called a *suktinis*, a sort of do-si-do or square dance, in which couples spin each other around. In need of some partners, the Jewish men joined in. Misheiker wrote in his newspaper report, "It's a pity that you Jews in Lithuania couldn't see how African Jews danced a *suktinis* with real Lithuanian women under the hot African sun…"

This reportage encapsulates some of the key political and cultural tensions that animated interwar Lithuanian Jewish life. Towards the end of the interwar period, when this episode took place, Jews like Misheiker, who had grown up in independent Lithuania, were not only fluent in the Lithuanian language but also familiar with the history, culture and customs of the Lithuanians and of the only country they knew. At the same time, Jews had undergone a gradual process of exclusion from a concept of Lithuanianness, promoted by the government, which, over the course of the interwar era, increasingly came to refer, de facto, only to ethnic Lithuanians. From the safe distance of Johannesburg, and in the context of a highly orchestrated public spectacle, Lithuanian Jews could participate freely in expressions of national pride. And yet, at the same time, they had to acknowledge, as Misheiker did, that this performance of Lithuanianness was somehow unnatural, unexpected, and perhaps even transgressive.

The Stakes of Lithuanian Jewish History

This dissertation investigates how Lithuanian Jews understood, and advocated for, their place in Lithuania in the dynamic and turbulent first decades of the twentieth century. Politically, this was a journey from the dissolution of the Russian Empire and subsequent emergence of Lithuanian statehood in the 1910s, through the democratic experiment of the early 1920s, into a period of authoritarian presidency whose autocratic features amplified over the course of the 1930s. Socially, Jewish integration and cultural efflorescence deepened, even as patterns of social exclusion and anti-Semitism increased. Across these dramatically different interwar political contexts, Lithuanian Jews honed different strategies to advance the idea that they belonged to Lithuania, leaning on historical, political, cultural and even linguistic evidence. At the same time, they negotiated a contradictory public discourse about them that held that Jews were integral to, and yet conditional participants in, the Lithuanian national project. The unique history of Lithuanian Jewry over hundreds of years, up to and including the interwar period, made the Republic of Lithuania a site of intense, urgent and influential discussions about the goals of Jewish political movements – especially Zionism and Folkism – in the diaspora, the limits of Jewish national identity and the very future of the Jews in Eastern Europe.

And yet, as I show, the Lithuanian case was more complicated than, as it has been portrayed, simply a failed experiment in Jewish autonomy, a footnote in the history of diaspora nationalism or what one historian has called the "booby prize" in a competition to secure Jewish rights in fledgling nation states. By looking closely at political debates carried out in the press and parliament, memoirs, personal papers of men and women of culture, and a variety of other

sources in Yiddish, Lithuanian, Hebrew and other languages, I argue that interwar Lithuanian Jewish self-fashioning had an exceptional inner logic that relied on two traditions: political aspirations inherited from turn-of-the-century Russian Jewish liberal thinkers and also a deeply ingrained local mode of Lithuanian Jewish belonging. These strands of thought sometimes worked in tandem and were sometimes at odds. On the one hand, many political activists, inhabited by the spirit of 1905, and its public debates over Jewish rights, traveled from Russia to Lithuania to participate in various functions of the new state including Jewish schools, newspapers, political parties or the offices of autonomy. Among them were Folkists, Zionists and Social Democrats who were similiarly steeped in the thought of Simon Dubnow, who held that Jews should be considered a native people of Europe and maintain autonomous control over communal affairs within a broader democratic society. On the other hand, Lithuanian Jews had their own particular, long and peaceful history in a place with a surprisingly stable regional identity. It was a place in which Jews already had a purchase on belonging, a condition well-known in the Eastern European Jewish imaginary through the figure of the Litvak. The local identity sometimes took precedent over that of an imagined international Jewish collective, and vice versa. At the root of the discourse of Jewish belonging in interwar Lithuania was the tension between the romanticism of Jewish nationalism, Lithuanian patriotism and place-based identity formation and more pragmatic and regimented self-definitions relying on legal bases such as citizenship, minority rights and democratic ideals. This dissertation highlights points of contact and tension between some of these seemingly opposed ways of being: Jewishness and Lithuanianness, Folkism and Zionism, patriotism and nationalism, stranger and sojourner.

While interwar Lithuania provided a stage – small in Europe but large in the Jewish world – to experiment in Jewish national culture, the stage was anything but stable. In an era of shifting borders, uneven legislation, rising anti-Semitism and autocracy, Lithuanian Jews were

presented with a series of existential challenges that required different theories of belonging. This often entailed looking to the blurred boundaries of Jewish ethnic, national, political and cultural identity in Lithuania. As local Jewish politics became ever more entrenched and polarized, many Jews' political and cultural activism shared the premise that Jews are indigenous to Lithuania. Among the most striking manifestations of the belief in local Jewish rootedness was the political philosophy of *doikayt*, or "hereness" in Yiddish, put forward by adherents of Simon Dubnow's Folkspartey in their polemics with Lithuanian Zionists.

The deep entrenchment of Jewish life in Lithuania, and Lithuanian Jews' vibrant politics and culture, challenge a historiographic tradition that has seen Lithuanian Jewish history as inevitably creeping toward the Holocaust. While there is no doubt that Lithuania had its share of political disappointments and anti-Semitism, I try here to resist "backshadowing," or writing teleologically, and seek instead to frame events, as much as possible, in their immediate historical context.[2] Indeed, in famously writing against the "lachrymose" conception of Jewish history, in his 1928 essay, "Ghetto and Emancipation," Salo Baron referred specifically to the political context of interwar Eastern Europe. In the concluding paragraph of his essay, Baron argued, "Autonomy as well as equality must be given its place in the modern state […] Surely it is time to break with the lachrymose theory of pre-Revolutionary woe, and to adopt a view more in accord with historic truth."[3] Baron meant that as the political situation worsened in Eastern Europe, Jews needed more than ever those medieval structures such as communal autonomy, even – or especially, in an era of emancipation – structures that had been dismissed as negative

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[2] On "backshadowing," see Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

[3] Salo Baron, "Ghetto and Emancipation," in *The Menorah Treasury: Harvest of Half a Century*, ed. Leo W. Schwartz (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1964), 63.

and backwards. My close study of Jews in the authoritarian period in Lithuania shows that, rather than collapse, Jewish leaders actively and creatively managed Jews' position in society.

In some ways, Lithuania is positioned where history and historiography intersect. As a prime example of revivified autonomism and Jewish minority politics in a democratic state where Jews have lived for centuries, Lithuania was a closely watched experiment in the 1920s. Not only Baron, but also historians such as Jacob Schatzy and Simon Dubnow – the latter of whom was active, and intermittently present in, interwar Lithuania – looked to the young republic as both a subject of contemporary study and also the culmination of centuries of Jewish political evolution. This created a sort of feedback loop of influence: figures like Dubnow and Baron based their political proclamations and programs on the history that they were then writing, which was in turn based on their observations of contemporaneous events around them. This extended to the outlines of autonomy, language politics, notions of neo-medievalism and the Jewish community. Scott Ury has noted and problematized the persistence of the idea of the Jewish community in Jewish historiography by identifying a "vicious circle of Jewish communal history" stemming from the influence of historian-collectors such as Dubnow and Schatzky.[4]

This is not a communal history. To write one would require a synoptic social-historical analysis of the dozens of Lithuanian Jewish religious, cultural and political movements in all of their varieties, their internecine conflicts and their positioning within the *kehilla* over pressing communal issues of the day, such as taxation and school funding.[5] Nor do I emphasize those

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[4] Scott Ury, "Lost and Found? Jewish Historians, Jewish History, and the Narrativization of Order in East European Cities, *AJS Review* 41:1 (April 2017): 28.

[5] Some scholars have attempted to write Lithuanian Jewish history from such a perspective. See especially Masha Greenbaum, *The Jews of Lithuania: A History of a Remarkable Community, 1316-1945* (Jerusalem: Geffen, 1995), Dov Levin, *The Litvaks: A Short History of the Jews of Lithuania* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2000) and Solomonas Atamukas, *Lietuvos žydų kelias: nuo XIV amžiaus iki XX amžiaus pabaigos* (Vilnius: Alma littera, 2007).

particular features of Lithuanian Jewry – for example, the breadth of its Zionist movement, or the massive scale of destruction during the Holocaust – that have, quite rightly, drawn previous scholars' attention, although these features factor into my study. Rather, my dissertation is a cultural and intellectual history of Jewish belonging and of Jewish political positioning in interwar Lithuania, tracing the arc of Jewish engagement with Lithuanians and the Lithuanian state in its democratic and illiberal iterations. I investigate what Daniel Heller and Nira Yuval-Davis have separately called, with reference to the context of Jews in interwar Europe, "the politics of belonging," or the intertwining complex of modes of engagement that make up an identity.[6] At the same time, I write what could be called a cultural history of politics. By looking at sources such as the Jewish press (in particular the daily Yiddish daily newspapers), records of public celebrations and literary production, I try to capture how Jews, especially leaders of Jewish political parties, responded to the Lithuanian government, its policies and its representatives. This is not necessarily politics in the sense of elections and governance – although this dissertation covers that, too – but, more accurately, the complex of evolving positions that Jews staked out in, and for, the Lithuanian context. In the Lithuanian case, against the backdrop of great political instability, vehicles for belonging included the Lithuanian language and local history; democracy, republicanism and autonomy; Jewish political parties; centrism and state power; patriotism and nationalism; the study of local ethnic groups, including Belarusians and Roma; and citizenship, rights discourse and Jewish internationalism. In each case, Lithuanian Jews drew sources of inspiration and guidance from their country's Lithuania's particular political history, multiethnic character and geographic location.

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[6] Daniel Kupfert Heller, *Jabotinsky's Children: Polish Jews and the Rise of Right-Wing Zionism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 133 and Nira Yuval-Davis, *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations* (London: Sage, 2011), vi.

Constructing *Lite* and *Lietuva*

While Lithuania is in many ways peripheral to European history and geography, it is precisely

Lithuania's geographically peripheral position – transitional between Russia and Poland, Slavic

lands and Prussia, and even between East and West Slavic languages – that made the area central

to Jewish history. Indeed, Shlomo Avineri has argued that the origins of secular Zionist

Hebraism, the important precursor to political Zionism, "are found in ethnically mixed Lithuania

and later in Galicia."[7] Ezra Mendelsohn more pointedly emphasized "the connection between

modern Jewish nationalism and the region of Lithuania," calling Lithuania "the very heartland of

modern Jewish nationalism" itself.[8] Yet the significance of Lithuania in Jewish history extends

back to the Middle Ages. Jews have a long, peaceful and legally sanctioned presence in

Lithuania dating to at least the early fourteenth century; by the early modern period, the Polish-

Lithuanian Commonwealth contained "the largest Jewish community in the world."[9] Lithuanian

Jews were not only numerous but also globally influential in the spheres of Jewish religion,

culture and politics at the key junctures of modernization. The particular Lithuanian context gave

rise to significant figures such as the Vilna Gaon (1720-1797), Solomon Maimon (1783-1800),

Yisroel Salanter (1810-1883) and Pauline Wengeroff (1833-1916), among many others,

including innumerable rabbinic leaders, labor activists, Yiddish writers and Zionist thinkers.

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[7] Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1981), 12.

[8] Ezra Mendelsohn, *On Modern Jewish Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 41, 43.

[9] Gershon David Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 21.

In the nineteenth century, Lithuania was the birthplace of such hallmark modern Jewish institutions as the yeshiva, the *kollel* and the most widely used printed Talmud; the Jewish labor movement; and Jewish nationalism. At a time of rapid Russification of Jewish communities in other parts of the Russian Empire, Lithuania emerged as a center of Yiddishism and Hebraism. It is significant that Lithuanian Jewishness was spread their unique culture across the globe by figures such as Jacob Joseph (1840-1902), Chief Rabbi of New York City's Orthodox congregations and founder of the first yeshiva on the Lower East Side of Manhattan; Rav Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of Palestine; and Jewish political and communal leaders of all stripes in South Africa, such as Joe Slovo (1926-1995). Chabad, a Hasidic movement with roots in Lithuania, and steeped in Lithuanian tradition, presents its worldview in hundreds of cities as the authentic form of Judaism.

In the Jewish imaginary, the borders of Lithuania – or *Lite* in Yiddish – roughly coincide with those of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and where the distinctive Lithuanian Yiddish dialect is spoken. Lithuanian nationalists in the early twentieth century also envisioned their future state – known in Lithuanian as *Lietuva* – as coterminous with the borders of the Grand Duchy. At the same time, the Lithuanian national movement that cohered at the turn of the century did not have one programmatic view of Lithuanian identity based on language, ethnicity, geography or shared history, although many of its iterations did synthesize these concepts. Rather, as I show, there was room for Jewish inclusion in an idea of Lithuanianness in the geographically, linguistically and politically interstitial space of Lithuania, even as the definitions of a Jewish and a Lithuanian "people" – the Yiddish *folk* and Lithuanian *tauta*, respectively – solidified in the 1930s. As Jacob Robinson wrote in 1928, in the midst of this shift, "The builders of the Lithuanian state [melukhe] [called] for a national-personal view of the state [medine] as a state of Lithuanians (not as a Lithuanian state), a view which has remained among the Lithuanian national movement,

which was a popular movement (in the time when the state was a territorial organization)."[10] In this dissertation, I look at how the Jewish sense of belonging to a Lithuanian polity was applied to the politics of the democratic period in Lithuania and, from the end of 1926 onward, in the authoritarian context.

On top of this highly local tradition, in the early twentieth century, Lithuania was arguably the place where the great Russian-Jewish liberalizing experiment played out. Plans for Jewish participation in a future democratic Russia, so hotly debated at the turn of the century, were curtailed after the Bolshevik Revolution. After World War I, when a number of Central and Eastern European states were mandated to extend a system of autonomy to national minorities, Lithuania was "the only state recognized at Versailles to attempt, at least at first, a genuine experiment with Jewish autonomy."[11] Poland's promising experiment with autonomy in the 1910s came to an end shortly after World War I, while in Ukraine, autonomy lasted until 1920.[12] Debates between Folkists and Zionists – over the use of Yiddish versus Hebrew in Jewish gymnasiums, the utility of autonomy in the diaspora and the significance of Palestine – that were begun in Petersburg meetings and newspapers picked up again, often with the same interlocutors, in Lithuania. The country absorbed figures who had been active in the Russian Dumas, such as Leon Bramson and Julius Brutzkus, as well as younger activists who had cut their teeth in Petersburg, including Nokhem Shtif, Yudl Mark and Esther Eliashiv. Even Simon Dubnow

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[10] Jacob Robinson, "Dergraykhungen, mapoles – un vos vayter?," *Idishe shtime* 2528 (41), February 16, 1928, 7, 15.

[11] Simon Rabinovitch, *Jewish Rights, National Rites: Nationalism and Autonomy in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 264.

[12] On Poland, see Marcos Silber, *Le'umiyut shonah, ezrahut shavah!* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2014). On Ukraine, see Jonathan Frankel, "The Dilemmas of Jewish National Autonomism: The Case of Ukraine, 1917-1920," in *Ukrainian-Jewish Relations in Historical Perspective*, eds. Howard Aster and Peter J. Potichnyj (Edmonton: CIUS Press, 1990).

himself moved, if only briefly, to Lithuania, where he cast a long shadow on local Jewish politics. In some instances, Lithuania was the birthplace of these figures while, for others, it was simply where a visa could get them out of Soviet Russia. Yet in all cases, Lithuania featured as a significant experiment in nationalism given the outsized role that Lithuanian Jewry had played in Jewish history.

One of the clearest examples of how Jews in interwar Lithuania negotiated the highly local and international demands on them is in the debate, conducted in the Yiddish papers of Kaunas in 1926, over the meaning and application of the term, *doikayt*, which means "hereness" in Yiddish. In this dissertation I demonstrate that *doikayt*, a touchstone concept of diasporic Jewish political thought, stemmed from the Lithuanian context and not, as is mistakenly assumed in the literature, from that of the Bund. In fact, *doikayt* arguably could only have emerged from Lithuania, where 1) there were prominent Folkists and General Zionists, for both of whom a concept of *klal Yisroel*, or an imagined Jewish collective, were central and 2) there existed a system of autonomy. While Bundists viewed the world through the lens of class struggle and the improvement of the lives of Jewish workers internationally, Folkists and Zionists faced the pressing intellectual problem of how square their investment in a system of autonomy in the diaspora nation state of Lithuania with their concept of an international Jewish body – and, for Zionists, the additional problem of maintaining an ultimate goal of securing a future Jewish home in Palestine. The year 1926, as I show, was a critical juncture in Lithuanian (and European) political history that put pressure on Folkists such as Yudl Mark and Zionists such as Jacob Robinson – who led the debate over *doikayt* – to more clearly articulate their positions on Jewish belonging in Lithuania, the nature of diaspora Jewish politics and the place of Jews in Eastern European nation states. Restoring the discourse of *doikayt* to the Lithuanian context thus

complicates the historiographic map of Eastern European Jewish politics that has sought to explain *doikayt* by looking at only at Russia and Poland.

The Lithuanian Context

This dissertation also maps Jewish history onto the political history of Lithuania. Amid regional chaos in the final months of World War I, leaders of the Lithuanian national movement, who had been operating under the auspices of the Taryba, or Lithuanian National Council, declared independence in February 1918. Although Vilnius was the first capital of Lithuania, it was captured by the Soviets in January 1919, after which the city traded hands between the Red Army and Polish forces during the Russian-Polish border wars. Vilnius and the surrounding region were finally occupied by General Lucjan Żeligowski's army, which designated the territory the Republic Central Lithuania until it was formally incorporated into Poland in 1922. In the meantime, the Lithuanian government retreated to its "temporary capital" of Kaunas, where a Constituent Assembly had been elected in 1920 to draft a constitution, which was legalized two years later.

The interwar period saw three democratically elected parliaments (1922, 1923, 1926) led by coalitions of parties who oversaw unven implementation of sweeping legislation such as land reform. In addition to dealing with a lack of diplomatic relations, and a closed border, with neighboring Poland, the coastal region was administered by the League of Nations until 1923, when the Lithuanian army staged a revolt that resulted in its transfer, along with a large number of Baltic Germans, to Lithuania. In the midst of these events, a Ministry of Jewish Affairs attempted to oversee the implementation of Jewish autonomy locally, which entailed establishing and funding schools, organizing and disbursing taxes among other activities. While these Jewish

governmental institutions were largely stripped of their budgets by the Christian Democrat-led government by 1925, the government elected into power in May 1926, a coalition of Social Democrats and Peasant Populists, spoke openly about the need to restore Jewish autonomy as guaranteed in the constitution.

In December 1926, the Lithuanian military entered the parliament while it was in session, arrested a number of political leaders and installed philosophy professor Antanas Smetona (1874-1944) as president – a position Smetona would hold until the Soviet Occupation in 1940. Lithuania's transition from democracy to authoritarianism shared many features with other ethnic nationalist "little dictatorships" that emerged across Europe at the time.[13] Lithuania's coup was contemporaneous with the putsch led in Poland by Marshal Józef Piłsudski, but almost a decade ahead of those that brought about autocracies in neighboring Latvia and Estonia. Smetona disbanded the parliament, filled the government with members of his own ethnic nationalist party (and members of his own family), oversaw the production of two new constitutions that concentrated power in his hands and cultivated an autocratic position that asked Jews to trust in him alone. Concomitantly, institutions from the police to the university became increasingly corrupt and nepotistic, often at the expense of Jewish inclusion. While all political parties save Smetona's Nationalist Union were banned in 1935, politics on the street remained prismatic. The 1930s saw an increase in nationwide strikes, the rise of a state-sanctioned anti-Jewish business association and the right-wing radicalization of institutions such as the army and sporting clubs. Within the Lithuanian Jewish world, activists of Zionist and Folkist persuasion sought to direct communal politics while at the same time maintain a unified face for the Lithuanian public, if only to defend themselves against accusations of Jewish Bolshevism. In the 1930s, Lithuanian

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[13] Antony Polonsky, *The Little Dictatorships: The History of Eastern Europe since 1918* (London-Boston: Routledge, 1975). See also Ivan Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 300-302.

Jews were presented with the paradoxical demands to be more Lithuanian and yet also acknowledge, at every turn, their fundamental difference.

One of the results of the authoritarian context, for Jews, was the revival of what appeared to some observers to be a medieval dynamic not unlike the "royal alliance." Salo Baron outlined the contours of the royal alliance in his *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, in which he proposed that the relationship entailed a vertical relationship with authority, typically in exchange for loyalty and some service, alongside Jewish communal autonomy.[14] In some ways, Lithuanian Jewish leaders had already formed a "royal alliance" with the government through the Jews' formally recognized communal autonomy and *shtadlan*-esque Ministry of Jewish Affairs. In "Ghetto and Emancipation," Baron noted the "modified medievalism" of Jewish politics in post-World War I Eastern Europe. "The establishment of national Jewish minorities in Eastern Europe has done much to reverse former animosity to ghetto ideas of Jewish self-government," he wrote, singling out the system of autonomy that operated "not without success."[15] Yet Baron observed that the conditions of autocracy exaggerated the power dynamic between Jews and their governments:

> Growing dissatisfaction with democracy and parliamentarianism has brought about a movement back to a modified medievalism. This is a medievalism on a higher plane, perhaps, but a medievalism just the same, of organization, standardization, and regulation.[16]

Baron's tentative, yet positive, assessment of medievalism in modern Jewish politics bore out in Lithuania, where a discourse persisted of beneficent medieval Grand Duke Vytautas the Great

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[14] On Baron on the royal alliance, see Lois Dubin "Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, the Royal Alliance, and Jewish Political Theory," *Jewish History* 28 (2014): 51-81.

[15] Baron, "Ghetto and Emancipation," 62, 63.

[16] Ibid., 63.

and his warm, but conditional, relationship to local Jews. As early as 1922, Nokhem Shtif observed, "outwardly, autonomy is an organic part of the state; internally – a ghetto, a protection *against* the state."[17] In the absence of autonomy, after 1925, and the onset of authoritarianism, from the end of 1926, Lithuanian Jews developed new ways to maintain these internal and external boundaries and protections, and often harkened back to the secure position of Jews in medieval Lithuania.

In 1984, in an essay that built on the themes of his book, *Zakhor*, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi asked a pointed question about the ways that Jews retrieve usable aspects of their history. "What was the relation," he asked, "among Jews, between memory and hope, or, if you will, between their sense of the past and hope for the future? The Jewish people, even so-called ordinary Jews, had access to a vast and unique reservoir of the past. Its channels were certainly not through historical works, nor merely through Bible and Talmud."[18] Scholars have also more recently sought to expand our understanding of the nature of Jews' relationship to place and space, in particular the production of Jewish space.[19] For Lithuanian Jews, one of the primary vehicles of self-fashioning was the extolment of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (13th century to 1795), especially its strong, early and earnest legal protections of Jews; the Duchy's multiethnic character; and a purported lack of anti-Semitism and pogroms. While Lithuania reflected many of the sweeping changes in Polish and Russian Jewish life in the modern period, it maintained a surprisingly stable regional identity that gave its Jewish residents a special place in the broader

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[17] Nokhem Shtif, "Haynt un lakhrayes-hayomim," *Nais* no 47 (143), February 24, 1922, 3.

[18] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "Toward a History of Jewish Hope," in *The Faith of Fallen Jews: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi and the Writing of Jewish History*, ed. David N. Myers and Alexander Kaye (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2014), 312-313.

[19] See especially Anna Lipphardt, Julia Brauch and Alexandra Nocke, "Exploring Jewish Space: An Approach," in *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place*, eds. Lipphardt, Brauch, and Nocke (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 1-26.

Eastern European Jewish imaginary. For Lithuanian Jews in the early twentieth century, the unique historical, geographic and legal conditions of their past also presented an opportunity to envision their future in a Republic of Lithuania, the contours of which were taking shape. This was a process that only intensified in the interwar period, in what fits Eric Hobsbawm definition of a ritualistic "attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past."[20]

Strangers and Sojourners

In the Book of Genesis, after the death of Sarah, Abraham argues with the Canaanites over his right to purchase land in order to bury his wife. Although the Canaanites offer burial plots to Abraham free of charge, Abraham seeks to rightfully acquire the land, and as part of his appeal he describes himself this way: "I am a stranger and a sojourner [ger ve-toshav] with you."[21] Variations of the Hebrew term for "stranger and sojourner," *ger ve-toshav*, also occur in the Hebrew Bible with reference to those who travel with the Israelites (Leviticus 25:6), and to refer to the relationship of the Israelites to the physical world (Leviticus 25:23, Psalms 39:13). The phrase presaged the later Halakhic use of the term *ger* as "convert to Judaism" and the modern Hebrew *ger toshav*, which means "resident alien." But the earlier Biblical usage, in the context of Abraham among the Canaanites in Genesis, gave rise to a trope, among theorists of Jewish nationalism in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, to describe Jews' position among other peoples in emerging nations. The word *toshav*, also *toyshev* in Yiddish, came to acquire the sense of "resident" or "inhabitant" of a place, and thus, as an ancillary, the sense of rightful inhabitants, or inhabitants worthy of rights accorded to locals. Simon Dubnow expressed

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[20] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Canto, 2010), 1.

[21] Genesis 23:4.

this sentiment succinctly when he argued, in a 1907 "Letter" originally published in 1898, "The Jews are entitled to demand for themselves the rights of long-established inhabitants of Europe."[22]

The meaning and extent of *toshav*, for Jews in the Lithuanian context, is exemplified by several usages from the early twentieth century. In 1914, Uriah Katzenelenbogen (1885-1980), a leader of the movement that advocated for a vision of a multiethnic Lithuanian state inclusive of Jews, wrote that Jews had for a long time "felt like inhabitants [toyshovim] here, and were established here."[23] Jews living in the heart of Lithuania, he concluded, "therefore remain an inhabitant [toyshev] here."[24] Uriah's brother, Shaul, writing in the same publication, argued that, in the fourteenth century, Jews "were given rights not out of pity or because of their money, but because they were longtime inhabitants [toyshovim]."[25] In 1919, Eliyohu-Yankev Goldshmit (1882-1941), a writer and ideological fellow-traveler with the Katzenelenbogen brothers, took up the theme. He wrote, "The final word is that in Lithuania we are not foreigners, we are people who are at home here, inhabitants [toyshovim], we've put down deep roots here, we have accumulated here a colossal amount of national wealth and religious sanctuaries which will never be forgotten as long as the golden chain of Jewish history continues its twists!"[26]

The trope persisted in the discourse of Jewish belonging throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In a speech dating to the end of the interwar period, Jacob Robinson (1889-1977), a leading voice of Jewish communal and political ideals during the decades of Lithuanian independence,

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[22] Simon Dubnow, "The Jews as a Spiritual (Cultural-Historical) Nationality in the Midst of Political Nations (Second Letter)," in *Nationalism and History: Essays on Old and New Judaism*, ed. Koppel Pinson (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1958), 107-108.

[23] Uriah Katzenelenbogen, "Unzer inteligents," in *Lite* (1914), 39-40.

[24] Ibid., 41.

[25] Shaul Katzenelenbogen, "Lite un der yidisher geshikhte," in *Lite* (1914), 7.

[26] Eliyohu-Yankev Goldshmit, "Dos zamlbukh 'Lite,'" in *Lite* (1919), 7.

outlined five "Foundational Theses of the Jewish National Doctrine in Lithuania." The first of these was "the historical thesis":

> The Jews in Lithuania are an autochthonous, and not colonial, element. Here we are not emigrants or colonists but well-established inhabitants [ayngezesene toyshovim] who came here hundreds of years ago, and came not as banished refugees who sought a place [mokem] of asylum, but as invited guests who were originally promised rights and privileges.
> The significance of this thesis from the Jewish standpoint is clear: we are not guests [orkhim] who are here today and tomorrow can be driven back out, [but are] as autochthonous as other autochthonous elements.[27]

Here Robinsons's defense of the Jewish place in Lithuania incorporates another Biblical concept, the "place [makom] whither he may flee" (*mokem* in Yiddish).[28] Indeed, the concept of the *ger ve-toshav* occurs in conjunction with the term "cities of refuge" in Numbers 35:15, in which God declares "six cities shall be a refuge, both for the children of Israel, and for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them." This question of whether Jews are native or foreign to Lithuania has also had an afterlife in the historiography. Gershon David Hundert, weighing Jews' large demographic numbers and geographic concentration, has questioned whether Jews in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and particularly its eastern Lithuanian areas, should be considered a historical minority at all.[29] By contrast, Darius Staliūnas has argued, "Jews were the group most alien to any part of Lithuanian society (the gentry, peasantry, nationally-minded Lithuanians or Poles and so forth) [because] they could be identified easily and there was a strong belief in their communal solidarity."[30] In the wake of the First World War, amidst what Robinson would later

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[27] Jacob Robinson, "Di naye lage un di nonste ufgabe" [1939 or 1940], YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (henceforth YIVO), RG 2, F 1646, 74831 (1).

[28] Exodus 21:13.

[29] Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania*, 21-25.

[30] Darius Staliūnas, *Enemies for a Day: Antisemitism and Anti-Jewish Violence in Lithuania under the Tsars* (Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2015), 254.

describe as "the new alignment of majorities and minorities," this question took on a new sense of urgency and, with that sense of urgency, a new set of approaches.[31]

Chapter Outlines

My first chapter, "'A "People" within the Jewish People': The Lithuanian Jew as Native, 1914-1922," investigates the history of the idea of Jewish belonging in multiethnic Lithuania and its implications for the development of a Jewish Lithuanian patriotism. In particular, I look at how some Jewish thinkers imagined their place in Lithuania, reaching not only back to the historic medieval Grand Duchy as a reference point but also across contemporary political, linguistic and geographic boundaries to other ethnic groups as they existed on the ground in the 1910s and 1920s. I focus on the journal *Lite*, published in 1914, 1919 and 1922, and the circle of Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals who produced it as a multi-volume manifesto of Lithuanian Jewish belonging. This circle of thinkers argued that Jews should be considered an autochthonous people in Eastern Europe in general, and in Lithuania in particular, and understood their journal to provide a template of interethnic compatriotism in a future democratic republic. I trace this idea to a number of sources, including the political thought of Simon Dubnow, Polish Freemasonry and Social Democracy, and I interrogate the meaning of such a concept in the Lithuanian context. In doing so, I show how, to make their claim of rootedness, Lithuanian Jews experimented with associating themselves with various local ethnic groups, including the *krajowec*, or Polish elite from Lithuania; the *tutejszy*, or speaker of a mixed Polish-Belarusian dialect; and the Lithuanian.

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[31] Jacob Robinson, et al. *Were the Minority Treaties a Failure?* (New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1943), 261.

In my second chapter, "Jewish Reconstruction: Autonomy and Its Discontents, 1921-1925," I look closely at the discourse over the outlines, purpose and significance of Jewish autonomy during the years in which it was implemented in Lithuania. Many Lithuanians, Lithuanian Jews and Jews from around the world imagined that autonomy would be an expedient way to manage Jews' transition to citizenship and also their communal needs. Far from being a panacea, autonomy only exacerbated preexisting political tensions within the Jewish community. This chapter is not a history of Lithuanian autonomy itself, nor a case study based on documents produced by institutions of autonomy. Rather, I look at how autonomy functioned in a broader discourse of Jewish belonging at a critical time in the formation of the republic, and as part of the political fracturing of the Jewish community.

Although the rightwing Christian Democratic government had largely dismantled Jewish autonomy by 1925, elections in the spring of 1926 brought to power a coalition of the Christian Democrats' opponents – the Peasant Populists and Social Democrats – who ushered in an era of hope, and even plans, for the reinstatement of autonomy. A military coup d'état in December 1926, justified in part by the perceived rise of Jewish Communist elements, snuffed out any such expectations. My third chapter, "From Bulota's Cap to Smetona's Pen: Lithuanian Jewry and the 1926 Coup D'État," looks closely at how Jews responded to political events during the watershed year of 1926, which saw three different governments and the transition from democracy to an authoritarian regime. In this chapter I trace how Jewish political leaders, especially Folkist Yudl Mark and General Zionist Jacob Robinson, articulated the high stakes of Jewish autonomy during the short-lived government elected in 1926, and how these concerns were soon dwarfed by the erosion of not only autonomy, but also of some of the most fundamental institutions of democracy, such as the constitution, the parliament, and the freedom of the press.

While the Nationalist Union took power overnight, the erosion of democracy occurred over a number of years. My fourth chapter, "'Forget Versailles': Between Rights and Privileges in the Illiberal State, 1927-1931," explores how Lithuanian Jews variously responded to, interpreted, and accommodated the Smetona regime during its first five years – years during which Smetona dissolved the parliament, pushed through a new constitution, and facilitated his own reelection. Against the backdrop of Smetona's increasingly authoritarian political program, I look closely at how Jews participated in public celebrations and declarations of patriotism, such as the 1928 holiday of Lithuania's tenth anniversary of independence and the 1930 celebrations of medieval Grand Duke Vytautas the Great. These moments provided occasions for Lithuanian Jews to review their stances on assimilation, rights, and citizenship. I argue that the Nationalist Union shifted the meaning of the trope of the Grand Duchy away from one that memorialized the polity's multiethnic character and Jews' long history in Lithuania towards one that emphasized Jews' conditional existence in Lithuania thanks to Vytautas's benevolent charter – a version that comported better with the Nationalists' vision of order. I argue that, while the ruling Nationalist Union party promoted the primacy of ethnic Lithuanianness, Jews continued to be officially included in a version of a Lithuanian national idea, and also managed to find a place to express their sense of belonging to the state, or, one might say, of performing Lithuanian identity.

My final chapter, "A Kingdom in Crisis, 1932-1940," investigates how Jews navigated their paradoxical situation in the 1930s in which they became ever more comfortable in Lithuanian language and culture and yet were increasingly excluded from the national idea. In the face of numerous political crises at home and abroad in the 1930s, and a deepening economic recession and rising popular anti-Semitism, Lithuanian Jews articulated their Lithuanianness and Jewishness in new ways. This chapter explores the complex dynamics of Lithuanian-Jewish belonging in the 1930s by investigating several key flashpoints and Jewish responses. In the

1930s, the ideologically fractious Jewish community increasingly organized across political lines, for example to turn Lithuania into a haven for German Jews, or through investing in a museum of Lithuanian Jewish history. I also investigate what I argue is the result of Jews' paradoxical fluency in Lithuanian culture and exclusion from it: a noted interest among Jews in the Roma, an even more rootless and disenfranchised people, the pseudo-scientific study of whom aligned Jews more closely with the interests of the Lithuanian ruling class. The example of Jewish interest in the Roma and their language shows how Lithuanian Jews internalized elements of local Lithuanian nationalist discourse of peoplehood, and Indo-European linguistics, and were able to use them for their own purposes. The case of Izidorius Kisinas, a major Jewish supporter of Smetona and a noted Romologist, demonstrates both the discourses of nationalism and ethnicity were intertwined.

The history of the Jews in interwar Lithuania is in many ways the history of a multifarious process of integration whose scope and emphases changed over time, and was variously expressed through notions of localness, democratism, patriotism, nationalism and ethnicity. While Lithuanian Jews were the politically, economically and culturally diverse, their organization into Zionist, Folkist and religious parties was only one way to mediate the transition from Russian Empire to Lithuanian statehood. Jewish politics extended far beyond the ballot box, even in the democratic period, to questions of language, intergroup compatriotism and Jewish internationalism. These were not mere theoretical exercises for Lithuanian Jews. They were pressing, and even urgent, local concerns that forced Lithuanian Jewish political and cultural leaders to take positions on Jewish identity that reveal some of the inner workings, along with the strengths and weaknesses, of the Russian-Jewish Jewish political culture they inherited.

Chapter One:
"A 'People' within the Jewish People": The Lithuanian Jew as Native, 1914-1922

In 2001, a group of scientists claimed to have identified Lithuanian Jewish genetic markers that could be traced to a medieval population bottleneck. "The most recent common ancestor of the mutation-bearing chromosomes would date to the 14th century," the scientists wrote in a paper. "This corresponds with the [legal] founding of the Jewish community of Lithuania."[32] The notion that Lithuanian Jews are biologically distinct from their coreligionists with roots in other areas may seem farfetched today. But it would have been well received by Lithuanian Jews in the early twentieth century, who argued, at almost every opportunity, that their group constituted a fundamentally different Jewish type. The distinct Lithuanian Yiddish dialect, political history, cultural traits and geography had indeed made the Lithuanian Jew, or Litvak, a longstanding internally Jewish category and helped set Lithuania apart, in the Jewish imaginary, from both Hasidic and Western European milieus. The stereotype of the Lithuanian Jew's paradoxical mix of studiousness, worldliness and social stoicism – such that, in the words of one observer, "one could find a Litvak engrossed in the study of the talmud, but with his head uncovered and a cigaret in his mouth" – were well-worn tropes of folklore and literature, and associated with movements as various as intellectualism in France, yeshiva culture in the United States, and both mercantilism and socialism in South Africa.[33] But by the twentieth century, claims of

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[32] Ronen Durst, et al., "Recent Origin and Spread of a Common Lithuanian Mutation G197del LDLR, Causing Familial Hypercholesterolemia: Positive Selection Is Not Always Necessary to Account for Disease Incidence among Ashkenazi Jews," *American Journal of Human Genetics* 68, no. 5 (2001): 1172.

[33] For the quote, see M.M., "Profile: The Litvak," in *Bleter fun yidish lite*, ed. Yakov Rabinovitch (Tel Aviv: Ha-menorah, 1974), 31. Original spelling. For the associations, see for example, respectively,

Lithuanian-Jewish distinctiveness had taken on an ethnographic cast. One writer would describe "the Tribe of Litvaks" [*sheyvet litvakes* and *sheyvet Lite*], arguing, "Litvaks are truly a 'people' within the Jewish people, i.e., a different clearly defined Jewish tribe."[34]

Perhaps most remarkably, twentieth-century observers of Lithuanian Jewry commonly made claims not only of the group's distinctiveness but also of its indigeneity. This claim typically revolved around the notion that Jews were one native group among several in Lithuania, pointing to legal, social, historical and linguistic evidence. In 1919, Eliyohu-Yankev Goldshmit wrote:

> Here is the only land in Europe where the Jew feels he's at his own home equally as much as his neighbors, where his personal and national ego did not become as morally humbled as in Poland, for example. The Jew has truly fallen in love with the *land*, its forests and fields, its rivers and its very air. The climate of the land, its history, and the character of the people whose name the land takes, have made their mark on him, and turned him into a different type of Jew, who sharply differentiates himself from Jews of other lands, even from Poland and Ukraine – the "Litvak."[35]

Lithuanian Jewish political activist Yudl Mark (1897-1975) remembered the profound affect hearing the Lithuanian Yiddish dialect had on him when he arrived in the town of Ukmergė from Russia, in the fall of 1920: "I recalled the words of the Biblical woman who asked nothing of the Prophet Elisha because she didn't need anything from him since: she lived among her own

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Judith Friedlander, *Vilna on the Seine: Jewish Intellectuals in France since 1968* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Shimon Yosef Meller, *The Brisker Rav: The Life and Times of Maran HaGaon HaRav Yitzhok Ze'ev HaLevi Soloveitchik*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem-New York: Feldheim, 2007); Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Plumes: Ostrich Feathers, Jews, and a Lost World of Global Commerce* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) and Alan Wieder, *Ruth First and Joe Slovo in the War Against Apartheid* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2013).

[34] See Aaron Steinberg, "Der sheyvet litvakes" in *Lite* vol. 1, ed. Mendl Sudarsky, Uriah Katzenelenbogen and I. Kisin [Yekusiel Garnitsky] (New York: Jewish-Lithuanian Cultural Society, 1951), 406.

[35] A. Y. Goldshmit, "Dos zamlbukh 'Lite,'" in *Lite* (Vilnius: Kletzkin, 1919), 4-5.

people. And I felt: I am living among my people."[36] In 1943, Yiddish journalist Zachariah

Shuster, who was from northeastern Poland and spent the early 1920s in Kaunas, penned an

article entitled, "What Lithuania Means to Me." Now living in New York, Shuster wrote, "It is

hard for me to think about the Lithuanian Jew as a *golus-yid*," or Diaspora Jew. "If *golus* means

internal dejection, brokenness, an unending pursuit of adaptation, a permanent unsureness, I

didn't sense that in Lithuania, in any event not in such a measure that would make the air heavy.

The Lithuanian Jew possessed a natural pride, an even keel, a consciousness that he belongs here

and he has to belong."[37] While these statements may be clouded by romanticism and nostalgia,

they represent a typical narrative of Lithuanian-Jewish self-fashioning from the early twentieth

century.

This chapter investigates the history of the idea of Jewish belonging in multiethnic

Lithuania and its implications for the development of a Jewish Lithuanian national idea. In

particular, I look at how some Jewish thinkers imagined their place in a multiethnic Lithuania,

reaching not only to the past Grand Duchy but also across political, linguistic and geographic

boundaries to other ethnic groups as they existed on the ground in the 1910s and 1920s. Salo

Baron famously proposed that anti-Jewish sentiment was weaker in multiethnic environments:

"The degree of that resentment depended on the ethnic composition of the majority. If a state

embraced a number of ethnic groups, the 'alien' character of the Jews was much less

pronounced."[38] This dynamic has been observed in a multitude of contexts and historical

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[36] Yudl Mark, "Unzer litvisher yidish," in *Lite* (1951), 431.

[37] Zachariah Shuster, "Vos Lite meynt far mir," *Litvisher Yid* (New York) no. 1, June 1943, 9.

[38] Salo W. Baron, "Changing Patterns of Antisemitism: A Survey," *Jewish Social Studies* 38, no. 1 (Winter, 1976): 15.

epochs.[39] In the Lithuanian case, Darius Staliūnas has argued that, among Poles, Lithuanians and Russians in early-twentieth-century Lithuania, "mutually competing nationalism reduced antipathy towards Jews […] Thus in Lithuanian nationalism, except perhaps for the clerical variety, Jews were low in the 'hierarchy of enemies.' In fact, they were potential allies in the battle with the most important opponents: the Poles and Russians/Russia."[40]

I argue that in Lithuania, in the early twentieth century, Jewish intellectuals experimented with developing relationships with a variety of local ethno-political positions that were, in different ways, "good to think" for Jews looking to assert claims to localness.[41] I focus here on three local types: the *krajowec*, or member of the culturally Polish elite in Lithuania who identified with the borderland; the *tutejszy*, or resident of the Slavic borderlands who identified as neither Polish nor Belarusian; and the Lithuanian. In the wake of Lithuania's attainment of statehood, in 1918, this latter category, the Lithuanian, begged for the most sustained engagement. The relationship between Lithuanians and Jews evolved in its emphases and complexity, even as Jewish and Lithunaian figures sought to retrofit the historical Lithuania into the parameters of the nation state. And yet Lithuanians were not simply, as popularly held by Jews and non-Jews, rooted and unchanging in the land and natural environment where they lived, but, as we shall see, they were the very model for such a people, and thus embodied the ideals of Lithuanian Jews in search of a native land.

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[39] See for example Michael Hoberman, *How Strange It Seems: The Cultural Life of Jews in Small-Town New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 159-160.

[40] Staliūnas, 81-82. See also 77.

[41] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 89.

Historical Formation

Jews have a long and legally sanctioned presence in Lithuania dating to the medieval Grand
Duchy of Lithuania, which formed in the thirteenth century after the consolidation of Lithuanian
tribes.[42] Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas (1275-1341) invited Jews to settle in Vilnius in
1328.[43] Sixty years later, Grand Duke Vytautas the Great (c. 1350-1430) issued charters that
extended broad rights, privileges and protections to the Jews who were already living in Grodno,
followed by charters that secured rights for Jews in other locales in the Grand Duchy. The 1388
charter, which was modeled in part on the 1264 charter to the Jews of Kalisz, offered extensive
protections to Jews.[44] The charter outlined laws that governed economic activity but also
guaranteed Jews freedom of worship and protection against violence and the possibility of false
charges in court. The document's first article stated that a Christian can only bring a charge
against a Jew along with another Christian and Jew; another protection was the so-called "double
reward," which guaranteed extra recompense to any Jew who suffered injury at the hands of
Christians.[45] Historians of Lithuanian Jewry typically emphasize the Jews' long history in the
region and point to the 1388-1389 charters of Vytautas as a defining feature of Lithuanian Jewish

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[42] On the formation of the Grand Duchy, see S. C. Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending: A pagan empire within
east-central Europe, 1295-1345* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[43] On Jews in the Grand Duchy, see, most recently, Anna Michałowska-Mycielska, *The Council of
Lithuanian Jews, 1623-1764* (Warsaw: Dialog, 2016), 16-18. See also Jurgita Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė,
Žydai Lietuvos Didžiojoje Kunigaikštystėje: sambūvio aspektai (Vilnius: Žara, 2009) and Šiaučiūnaitė-
Verbickienė, "The Social and Legal Status of Jews in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and its Influence on
the Status of Tatars and Karaites," *Central Europe* 8:2 (2010): 68-85.

[44] For an English translation of the charter, see *Privilegiya evreyam Vitautasa Velikogo 1388 goda*, ed.
Stanislovas Lazutka, et al. (Moscow: Jewish University in Moscow, 1993), 83-91.

[45] Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė, "The Social and Legal Status of Jews," 72.

life.[46] As Simon Dubnow wrote, "In these enactments the Lithuanian ruler exhibits, like Casimir,

an enlightened solicitude for a peaceful relationship between Jews and Christians and for the

inner welfare of the Jewish communities. Under the laws enacted by Vitovt the Jews of Lithuania

formed a class of free citizens, standing under the immediate protection of the Grand Duke and

his local administration. They lived in independent communities, enjoying autonomy in their

internal affairs as far as religion and property are concerned."[47] Dubnow went on the list other

areas in which Jews prospered, noting that "The law guaranteed to the Jews inviolability of

person and property, liberty of religion, the right of free transit, the free pursuit of commerce and

trace, on equal terms with the Christians […] Accordingly the position of the Jews was more

favorable in Lithuania than in Poland."[48]

    Jews were not only legally but also culturally integrated into the Grand Duchy. In a study

of Jewish use of East Slavic dialects in the late Middle Ages, Alexander Kulik has provided

extensive evidence of, in the Grand Duchy, "cultural processes, where Jews and Slavs may have

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[46] For this trope in general histories of the Jews of Lithuania see Mark Wischnitzer, "Di geshikhte fun yidn in Lite fun mitlelter biz der ershter velt-milkhome," in *Lite* (1951), 43-88; Masha Greenbaum, *The Jews of Lithuania: A History of a Remarkable Community, 1316-1945* (Jerusalem: Geffen, 1995); Dov Levin, *The Litvaks: A Short History of the Jews of Lithuania* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2000); Solomonas Atamukas, *Lietuvos žydų kelias: nuo XIV amžiaus iki XX amžiaus pabaigos* (Vilnius: Alma littera, 2007); Henri Minczeles, Yves Plasseraud and Suzanne Pourchier, eds., *Les litvaks: L'héritage universel d'un monde juif disparu* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008); Larisa Lempertienė and Jurgita Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė, eds., *Žydai Lietuvoje: Istorija, kultūra, paveldas* (Vilnius: Paknis, 2009); Dovid Katz, *Lithuanian Jewish Culture* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010); Vladas Sirutavičius, Darius Staliūnas and Jurgita Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė, eds., *Lietuvos žydai: Istorinė studija*, (Vilnius: Baltos Lankos, 2012).

[47] Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, vol. 1, trans. Israel Friedlaender (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1916), 59-60.

[48] Ibid., 60. For a more recent comparison of autonomy in Lithuania and Poland, see Judith Kalik, *Scepter of Judah: The Jewish Autonomy in the Eighteenth-Century Crown Poland* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), Chapters 1-2.

shared a grounding not only in terms of geographic territory, legal administration, interethnic politics and interconfessional polemics; they may have also literally had a *language in common*."[49] Alexander Beider, in the most comprehensive investigation to date into the linguistic history of Ashkenazi Jewry, has concurred, recently arguing, "It is reasonable to suggest that during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a portion of the Jewish population of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in their everyday lives spoke a Slavic language related to Belarusian and Ukrainian."[50] Later, as Jews began to migrate to the Grand Duchy from points west, they brought with them their Yiddish language and Ashkenazi rabbinical traditions which came to predominate in Lithuania.

Jews were banished from the Grand Duchy in 1495 for reasons that are still debated by scholars; eight years later, they were allowed to return, with additional rights to buy and own land.[51] The Union of Lublin, which formed the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569, abolished Jewish land rights but saw a massive expansion of Jewish influence on daily life, in particular in small towns. It is hard to overestimate the scale of the Jewish population in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The most recent demographic research estimates that half of the urban population was Jewish, and over seventy percent of the land's Jews were concentrated in the eastern part of the country, where they came to consist of the majority group in many towns and cities.[52] Despite the newly formalized political union between Lithuania and Poland,

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[49] Alexander Kulik, "Jews and the Language of Eastern Slavs," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 104:1 (Winter 2014): 106. Emphasis in orginal.

[50] Alexander Beider, *Origins of Yiddish Dialects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 436. See also Kulik, "Jews and the Language of Eastern Slavs," 110.

[51] Anna Michałowska-Mycielska, *The Council of Lithuanian Jews, 1623-1764* (Warsaw: Dialog, 2016), 14-15.

[52] Gershon David Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 21-25.

Jews in Lithuanian lands continued to develop according to their own path. As Adam Teller has argued, "This was largely because the two states had slightly different social structures and legal traditions, and the Lithuanian economy was less developed"; in addition, Jewish settlement on estates was slower in Lithuania compared to the newly acquired Ukrainian areas of eastern Poland.[53] These political and legal differences fueled Lithuanian Jewish cultural distinctiveness. By the sixteenth century, "Lithuania, the northeastern region of the Polish Commonwealth, began to play a more conspicuous part in the cultural life of Eastern European Jewry."[54] Perhaps the single greatest social and political achievement of Lithuanian Jewry in the early modern period was the formation of the *Va'ad Lita*, or Council of Lithuania, at the end of the sixteenth century. Although Lithuanian Jewish communities participated in the Council of Four Lands, the Jewish governing body in Poland which oversaw taxation and many other communal issues, Lithuanian representatives broke away as early as 1590 to handle their own affairs. The Council of Lithuania operated continuously for one hundred fifty years, or until 1764.[55]

The Partitions of Poland (1772, 1793, 1795), in particular the final partition of 1795, put most Lithuanian Jews in the Russian Empire. Concentrated in Vilna, Kovno, Grodno and Minsk gubernias, also known as the Northwest Provinces, the acquisition of former Polish territory increased the number of Jewish subjects in Russia ten times over.[56] The Russian government

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[53] Adam Teller, *Money, Power, and Influence in Eighteenth-Century Lithuania: The Jews on the Radziwiłł Estates* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 10.

[54] Moses Shulvass, *Jewish Culture in Eastern Europe* (New York: KTAV, 1975), 75. See also Moshe Rosman, "Innovative Tradition: Jewish Culture in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth," in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. David Biale (New York: Schocken, 2002), 519-570

[55] See Michałowska-Mycielska's recent monograph, *The Council of Lithuanian Jews*. See also Mark Wishnitzer, "Der Vad Lite, zayn struktur un di role zayne in dem gezelshaftlekhn lebn fun di litvishe yidn," in *Lite* (1951), 163-191.

[56] Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, vol. 1, 39-187 and Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia, Volume 1: 1350-1881* (Oxford and Portland, OR: Littman Library, 2008).

embarked on sweeping social engineering and economic projects, one of the first of which was the demarcation of the Pale of Jewish Settlement, which largely prevented Jews from moving freely outside of the westernmost gubernias of the Empire. In the Northwest Provinces, "for the most part the political and social structure inherited from Poland-Lithuania was left untouched."[57] At the same time, the Russian government sought to mold and control Jewish social, economic and religious activity. It appointed state-sanctioned rabbis, established Jewish schools, and enacted sometimes contradictory legislation regarding Jews' privileges and access.[58] As Kenneth Moss has outlined, "Mass urbanization and rapid, if uneven, secularization were accompanied both by the formation of a new market-driven Yiddish mass culture and by ever-accelerating linguistic and cultural assimilation to the Russian (and, in some areas, Polish) regional metropoles."[59] Mediating between these points of orientation, the activities of local maskilim helped establish Lithuania as a center of the Haskalah.[60]

As the social structures of Hasidism began to fill the absence of de jure communal leadership in parts of the Russian Empire in the late eighteenth century, a Lithuanian rabbinic authority known as the Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) pushed back against pietistic innovation. Hasidism made some significant, although under-appreciated, in-roads among Lithuanian Jews,

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[57] Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia, Volume 1*, 336.

[58] See Salo Baron, *The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 1-188, Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 1-20, ChaeRan Freeze and Jay Harris, "Introduction," in *Everyday Jewish Life in Imperial Russia: Select Documents, 1772-1914*, eds. Freeze and Harris (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2013), 1-58.

[59] Kenneth Moss, "Arnold in Aysheshok, Schiller in Shnipishok: Imperatives of 'Culture' in East European Jewish Nationalism and Socialism," *The Journal of Modern History* 81:3 (September 2009): 544. See also Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2006).

[60] Jacob Shatzky, *Kultur-geshikhte fun der haskole in lite* (Buenos Aires: Central Organization of Polish Jews in Argentina, 1950).

especially in Belarusian-speaking areas (known in Yiddish as *raysn*).[61] But the Gaon's positions

set in motion the foundation of yet another innovative religious movement, that of the

Misnagdim, The Gaon's study-centered intellectual heirs established modern *kollels* and

yeshivas throughout Lithuania to promote their study-centered pedagogy. Many of these

institutions gained worldwide fame, such as the yeshivas of Volozhin (1803), Mir (1814), Slonim

(1815), Telsh (1870) and Slobodka (1882).[62] The Gaon's followers included his commentary in

the first printed edition of the Talmud, known as the "Vilna Shas" (1880-1886), establishing the

worldwide reputation of Lithuania as a haven of orthodoxy.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Lithuanian area of Russia was buttressed by two

major urban centers: Kovno, or Kaunas, in the west, and Vilna, or Vilnius, in the east. Kovno

empitomized the Lithuanian intertwining of Enlightenment and tradition, such that Ezra

Mendelsohn could write of the city's "working class 'Haskalah,'" while the leading rabbi,

Elchanon Spektor was known as "the great liberal, who sought to unite all segments of the

Jewish community, religious and non-religious alike."[63] Kovno's conspicuous location on the

Nieman river, which formed the border with East Prussia, made it a nexus of trade and

smuggling, and therefore also for the spread of German culture into the Russian Empire. As

memoirist Pauline Wengeroff remembered on moving to the city in the 1860s, "Though the

Jewish tradition remained intact in the small Lithuanian towns, in Kovno the enlightenment was

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[61] On Hasidism, see Wolf Zeev Rabinowitsch, *Lithuanian Hasidism* (New York: Schocken, 1971). On the Gaon, see, most recently, Immanuel Etkes, *The Gaon of Vilna: The Man and His Image* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) and Eliyahu Stern, *The Genius: Elijah of Vilna and the Making of Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

[62] Shaul Stampfer, *Lithuanian Yeshivas of the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2012).

[63] Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*: *The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Tsarist Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 36-37 and *Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Spektor: Life and Letters* (INFO), 63-64. Kovner Zalkind Hurwitz, whose essay, *Apologie des juifs*, won a prize from the Metz Royal Society of Arts and Sciences in 1789.

in full swing. In progressive Jewish homes [. . .] the deviation from tradition was great."[64] This translated into an environment receptive to the progressive trends which only accelerated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Native of Kovno Avraham Mapu (1808-1867), the author of what many consider to be the first Hebrew novel, was a cultural leader in the city, which named a lending library and a street after him. And in a region known for its many rigorous institutions of Talmudic learning, the Slobodka Yeshiva, founded in 1881 in an outlying neighborhood, became "one of the most influential of its time."[65] The Slobodka yeshiva was the final product of decades of investment in institutions to advance the musar method of Talmud study articulated by Rabbi Yisroel Salanter (1810-1883), who made his home in Kovno from 1848-1857.

Like Vilna, Kovno was a capital of radical Jewish politics. The largely Jewish local Bristle Workers' Union, founded in 1898, which agitated for the first successful strike for an eight-hour work day in Russia, was called by socialist leader Vladimir Medem "the 'smetene' [cream of the crop] of our movement."[66] The city hosted the Bund's Third Congress in 1899 and anarchist thinker Emma Goldman (1869-1940) and her activist partner, Alexander Berkman (1870-1936), both Kovno natives, idolized the political radicals they encountered in their youths.[67] In liberal politics, the 1909 Kovno Conference, at which Jewish leaders from across the Pale of Settlement gathered to discuss the modernization and secularization of the Jewish community structure in Russia, strengthened "the process of the national democratization of the

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[64] Pauline Wengeroff, "Memoirs of a Grandmother," in *The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe*, ed. Lucy Dawidowicz (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 164.

[65] Stampfer, *Lithuanian Yeshivas*, 255.

[66] Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, 72-73.

[67] See Paul Avrich and Karen Avirch, *Sasha and Emma: The Anarchist Odyssey of Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 16.

Jewish political sphere."[68] The conference, at which several future leaders of the interwar Lithuanian Jewish community were present, was held in Kovno because of the local governor had good relations with the Jewish community.[69]

Vilna, meanwhile, had become a major center not only of Jewish religious learning and publishing but also of political activism.[70] But the city's location at the borders of Lithuanian-, Belarusian- and Polish-speaking areas had a profound impact on the direction its political culture would take. Joshua Zimmerman has argued that the Polish Socialist Party only began to recognize Jews as a distinct nationality after sending Jewish PPS leader Feliks Sachs (1869-1935) to Vilna in 1902 to shore up Jewish party support there. While publishing a Yiddish paper in Vilna, Sachs began to refer to Jews as a nationality and to Poland and Lithuania as separate political entities with possibly distinct futures. He wrote back to the party headquarters in London, "People here regard Lithuania on the same footing as Poland and recognize the complete equality of all *nationalities* – Poles, Lithuanians, Belarusians, and *Jews*."[71] Lithuanian Jews, he wrote, "possess a Lithuanian patriotism"; he added, "if you were here, you would understand and even feel this 'spirit.'" Indeed just a year earlier, in 1901, the "General Workers Bund in Poland and Russia" added "and Lithuania" to its territorial definition, reflecting, in

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[68] Simon Rabinovitch, *Jewish Rights, National Rites: Nationalism and Autonomy in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 141.

[69] Christoph Gassenschmidt, *Jewish Liberal Politics in Tsarist Russia, 1900-14: The Modernization of Russian Jewry* (London: Macmillian Press, 1995), 186 n. 49. On the conference itself, see 85-93 and G[regory] A[ronson], "Di Kovner baratung fun yor 1909," in *Lite* (1951), 219-222.

[70] For general Jewish histories of the city, see Israel Cohen, *Vilna* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1943); Leyzer Ran, ed., *Yerusholayim de-Lite*, 3 vols. (New York: Vilner Albom Komitet, 1974) and Henri Minczeles, *Vilna, Wilno, Vilnius: La Jérusalem de Lituanie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1993).

[71] As quoted in Joshua Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews, and the Politics of Nationality: The Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in Late Tsarist Russia, 1892-1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 170-171.

Zimmerman's words, "a changing regional perception."[72] Jonathan Frankel has argued that access to the Lithuanian dialect of Yiddish helped spread Social Democracy among Litvaks more than Polish or Ukrainian Jews.[73] And this recognition went both ways. Kazys Grinius (1866-1950), who served as Lithuania's prime minister (1920-1922) and president (1926), and a member of the Lithuanian Peasant Populist Party, noted in his memoirs the role of the Bund in shaping Lithuanian politics in the prestate period. He wrote, "Lithuanians learned from the Jews" whom they "have lived alongside for more than 500 years."[74]

The revolution of 1905 and subsequent liberalizing projects, such as the Dumas, saw more opportunities for direct political coordination between Lithuanians and Jews. The ban on Lithuanian publishing, decreed by Tsar Alexander II in the wake of the January Uprising of 1863, had the effect of strengthening the Lithuanians' national awakening, which was full-blown by the time the ban was lifted in 1905. Leon Bramson (1869-1941) was elected to the 1906 Duma to represent Lithuania, where he made important allegiances. Another Jewish representative at the 1906 Duma was future Lithuanian Minister of Jewish Affairs Shimshen Rosenbaum (1859-1934).[75] While these allegiances between Jews and Lithuanians were, to some extent, self-serving for both groups, they established a precedent for political cooperation that would color Lithuanian political discourse for decades. Two-time interwar Lithuanian president Antanas Smetona wrote, "If it weren't for Lithuanian-Jewish collaboration in the Duma elections

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[72] Ibid., 123.

[73] Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 203.

[74] Kazys Grinius, *Atsiminimai ir mintys*, vol. II (Tübingen: Patria, 1962), 118-120, 145-147.

[75] On Bramson's political activities, see Grigori Aronson, "Leonti Bramson un di Peterburger politik," in *Lite* vol. 2, ed. Ch. Leikowicz (Tel Aviv: Peretz, 1965), 787-796. On Rosenbaum, see for example Eglė Bendikaitė, "Intermediary between Worlds: Shimshon Rosenbaum: Lawyer, Zionist, Politician," *Osteuropa* 8-10 (2008): 171-178.

of 1905-1907, Lithuanian peasants wouldn't have secured one of their elected representatives."[76]

By 1912, the Vilna-based newspaper, *Ha-zman* announced, "We will not be traitors to our

brothers in misery – the Lithuanians."[77] Shlomo Avineri has argued that the origins of secular

Zionist Hebraism "are found in ethnically mixed Lithuania and later in Galicia […] Secularized,

modern Jews began to ask for the origins of their culture, for the roots of their history; to extol

the glories of Jerusalem; to ask whether they should not look into their own past just as members

of other groups were doing."[78] Indeed, Bramson and Rosenbaum were both Zionists who looked

to the Jewish national movement as a way to strengthen Jewish rights claims in Europe, in line

with the rising popularity of Zionism in the region more generally. In 1903, Theodor Herzl

visited Lithuania, where "he was shown a tumultuous welcome with hundreds lining the streets

of Vilna as his carriage passed in the middle of the night."[79] But at the same time that Lithuanian

Zionists popularized their vision of Jewish nationhood, and the Bund made its case for labor as a

basis for Jewish existence, another lesser-known Jewish political movement, Folkism, sought to

solve the problem of the Jewish place in Eastern Europe in terms that overlapped with these

other movements, albeit with a very different inflection.

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[76] As quoted in Solomonas Atamukas, *Lietuvos žydų kelias: nuo XIV amžiaus iki XX amžiaus pabaigos* (Vilnius: Alma littera, 2007), 115.

[77] As quoted in Vladimir Levin, "Lithuanians in Jewish Politics," 92.

[78] Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1981), 12.

[79] Steven Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet: Ahad Ha'am and the Origins of Zionism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 209.

Dubnow, Place and Peoplehood

The idea that Jews are not foreigners in Lithuania – and if they are, they were long ago welcomed – was infused in the thought of Jewish cultural activists in early-twentieth-century Lithuania and later permeated interwar Lithuanian Jewish culture. It found a home among Jewish and Lithuanian political thinkers who were working through the relationships between Jews and Lithuanians, and Jews and new Lithuanian state. In a typical expression of such beliefs dating to 1926, Jacob Robinson, a General Zionist representative to the Third Seimas (parliament), "stressed that from the moment the Jews received equal political and civil rights, they became residents of the region and [thus] shared responsibility for 'bad land reform and creating bad schools, and here there are no Jewish and non-Jewish domains.'"[80]

One of the primary intellectual fathers of such an idea was Simon Dubnow, who laid the theoretical foundation for Jewish indigeneity in Eastern Europe. After a three-year-long stay in Vilna, Dubnow moved to Petersburg in 1903 to participate in the Russian-Jewish umbrella of activism known as the Federation for Equal Rights.[81] Then, in December 1906, he founded a political party, the Folkspartey, to advance his vision for Jewish life in a future democratic Russia.[82] The founding was in response to Russian Zionists' adoption, at the November Helsingfors Conference, of a program of *Gegenswartsarbeit* – work in the present – which added to these Zionists' goal of settlement in Palestine the additional and more immediate objective of

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[80] See "Robinzonas Jakobas (Robinzon Jakob)," in *Didysis Lietuvos parlamentarų biografinis žodynas*, vol. 3, eds. Aivas Ragauskas and Mindaugas Tamošaitis (Vilnius: Vilniaus pedagoginio universiteto leidykla, 2007), 444.

[81] Viktor E. Kelner, *Simon Dubnow: Eine Biografie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 608.

[82] See Simon Rabinovitch, *Jewish Rights, National Rites: Nationalism and Autonomy in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

organizing material and communal resources in "the Galuth," or Diaspora (*golus*, in Yiddish), in the ultimate service of eventual emigration.[83]

When Zionists defected from the Federation at the Helsingfors Conference it "dealt the first blow," in Dubnow's words, to the Federation's dissolution.[84] Adding insult to injury, these Zionists had borrowed wholesale from the proto-Folkists their vision of a Jewish national assembly, an elected communal council and cultural autonomy, promoting instead what Simon Rabinovitch has described as the Zionists' own "reiteration of Dubnow's conception of autonomy" in anticipation of the immanent creation of a Dubnowian party.[85] As anti-Zionists, Democrats and others scrambled to form their own breakaway parties in advance of the upcoming second Duma, Dubnow gathered like-minded individuals to help him form a party in his own image. "Our political program was based on the principles of the Russian Constitutional Democratic Party (its left wing)," Dubnow remembered, "whereas the Jewish national program was an extension of the Federation's, dwelling specifically on the institutionalization of autonomy through self-governing local and federated community councils."[86] Dubnow envisioned a centrist party that promoted secularized iterations of traditional community structures and robust education in Yiddish, or what Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson have aptly described as "a synthesis of tradition and modernity under Jewish nationalist auspices."[87]

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[83] See text of the statement in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 555.

[84] Simon Dubnow, "Jewish Rights between Red and Black," in *The Golden Tradition*, 469.

[85] Rabinovitch, *Jewish Rights, National* Rites, 105.

[86] Ibid. Parenthetical note in original.

[87] Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson "Emancipation and the Liberal Offer," in *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship*, ed. Birnbaum and Katznelson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 22.

The modern concept of giving national minorities autonomous control over their affairs can be traced to the thought of Austro-Marxist Karl Renner (1870-1950) and, to a lesser extent, Otto Bauer (1881-1938). Renner, in his capacity as a Social Democrat, advocated for autonomous rights for non-territorial national minorities, who should be defined, he believed, in the first instance, by language. As a jurist, Renner was particularly concerned with how the legal guarantees of these rights would be met in a future democratic Austria. Renner directly influenced the Bund, which adopted national-cultural autonomy into its program in 1903.[88] Bauer advocated for autonomous and equal citizenship among peoples in an Austrian "state of nationalities," which some Bundists, such as Vladimir Medem, also took up in the service of their cause.[89] David Myers has shown how the concepts of sovereignty and autonomy were in tension for Folkists, Zionists and Bundists in the early twentieth century as the parties clamored for a stake in the era's "crowded marketplace of ideas."[90]

Part of the problem for Dubnow and his acolytes was that, after the Helsingfors Conference, Zionism and Folkism were difficult to distinguish. Both camps wanted Jewish autonomy in the Diaspora, maintenance of communal structures and group unity, equal rights in emerging nation states, and clarity on the language question. Folkists were not against Jewish settlement in Palestine or even the creation of a Jewish state, but rather opposed to the prioritization of Palestinism and, more generally, the Zionist monopoly on Jewish culture, language politics and fund-raising for the future. Russian Zionists at Helsingfors even

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[88] Roni Gechtman, "Conceptualizing National-Cutural Autonomy: From the Austro-Marxists to the Jewish Labor Bund," *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 4 (2005): 33.

[89] Ibid., 43.

[90] David N. Myers, "Rethinking Sovereignty and Autonomy: New Currents in the History of Jewish Nationalism," *Transversal* 13 (2015): 45, 47.

emphasized the importance of cooperating with other minorities, in particular with Lithuanians.[91]

Thus, at Helsingfors, when someone suggested similarities between Folkism and

Gegenwartsarbeit Zionism, Jabotinsky retorted, "We will often have to quarrel and to fight with

the *Folkspartei* – not with their slogans, but with their interpretations of these slogans."[92]

Dubnow helped draft a formal program for the Folkspartey, published in early 1907,

which outlined a plan for Jewish communal self-administration in a democratic society.

Although his thinking about Jewish cultural-nationalism predated this tumultuous period,

Dubnow's manifesto for the Folkspartey should be understood as a product of this later surge of

Russian liberalism and national self-determination, when, "for the first time, the latent tension

between the historian and the ideologist in Dubnow became painfully manifest."[93] Despite the

fractious political context of his party's origins, Dubnow maintained a holistic, and what he saw

as pragmatic, approach to Jewish political representation. The Folkist party itself, Dubnow

proposed in the party manifesto, would be the "nucleus of the organized nation" – all Jews were

welcome in its ranks.[94] In the first issue of the party's paper, in 1918, he wrote, "The fiery

followers [khsidim] of the Zionist party call our school of thought 'golus-nationalism.' We

accept this as a *badge of honor*. Yes, we are nationalists of the nine tenths of the Jewish people

which will always remain outside of the Land of Israel, and also of that tenth part that might

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[91] Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, vol. II, 407.

[92] As quoted in Joseph Schechtman, *The Life and Times of Vladimir Jabotinsky: Rebel and Statesman* (Silver Spring: Eshel Books, 1986), 116.

[93] Jonathan Frankel, "S. M. Dubnow: Historian and Ideologist," in Sophie Dubnow-Erlich, *The Life and Work of S.M. Dubnow: Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish History*, ed. Jeffrey Shandler (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University press, 1991), 18.

[94] Simon Rabinovitch, *Jewish Rights, National Rites: Nationalism and Autonomy in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 118.

have the possibility to settle in our old land. But if you want to remain only in support of Palestine-nationalism and leave the *golus* out of the minyan, you have no minyan."[95]

For Dubnow, the transnational status of Jews only heightened the extent to which the Jews should be seen as a *Kulturnation*. In his view, Jews were not a stagnant, unchanging people but had evolved into a higher order of classification. He wrote in 1912, "In the beginning [the Jews were] a tribal creation, one of the tribes of the East . . . A nomadic people develops into a nation."[96] To Dubnow, this evolution was natural and historically bound, and, in his phenomenological approach, Jewishness resulted from the meeting of thetwo trajectories of history and nature. "The whole complex of ideas called Judaism," he argued, "must be considered a product of the organic growth of the nation and of its adaptation to wholly unique and distinctly characteristic historical conditions of life."[97] Dubnow adopted from Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), among other thinkers, the concept that a people is a unified cultural and ethnic entity with an indestructible "spirit" that transcends time and place.[98] MORE

At the same time, an integral component to Dubnow's commitment to the diaspora and national-cultural autonomy was the advancement of a theory that Jews have the same claim not just to rights but to indigeneity as their neighbors in Europe. In one of his 1907 "letters" originally published in 1898, Dubnow argued, "The Jews are entitled to demand for themselves

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[95] Simon Dubnow, "Der nayer mabl" [Part II], *Yidishe folksblat* (Petersburg), no. 1–2, January 20, 1918, 12-13.

[96] As cited in Roni Gechtman, "Creating a Historical Narrative for a Spiritual Nation: Simon Dubnow and the Politics of the Jewish Past," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 22:2 (2011): 107.

[97] Simon Dubnow, "The Sociological View of Jewish History," in *Nationalism and History. Essays on Old and New Judaism*, ed. Koppel Pinson (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1958), 353.

[98] See Verena Dohrn, "Bundistische und folkistische Konzeptionen der Kulturnation – inspiriert von Johann Gottfried Herder," in *Hebräische Poesie und jüdischer Volksgeist: Die Wirkungsgeschichte von Johann Gottfried Herder im Judentum Mittel- und Osteuropas*, ed. Christoph Schulte (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2003), 170 and Gechtman, "Creating a Historical Narrative," 103.

the rights of long-established inhabitants of Europe."[99] As Robert M. Seltzer has written, "Despite not being a majority in any particular territory, Dubnow insisted that the Jews were one of the native peoples of Europe."[100] Dubnow wrote in his *Letters* (1907):

> The view that the Jews, deprived of their ancient homeland in Asia Minor, have no moral or legal right to European territory is so widespread that is used not only by anti-Semites, but unfortunately also by imprudent political Zionist agitators in their propaganda . . . Yet there is no more dangerous and likewise no more anti-historical error than the view that the Jews are strangers and foreigners in Europe. History tells us that the Jews are ancient inhabitants of Europe, that they established themselves in Europe even before the growth of civilization and the consolidation of Christianity there.[101]

Dubnow was clear that Jews' condition of being spread throughout various areas did not preclude their claim of localness or "detract from their right to be called native Europeans. Europe has been the home of the majority of the Jewish people for two thousand years [. . .] Here, as Roman colonists, we witnessed the growth of Christian civilization. Here we developed our own spiritual and economic civilization whose influence extended also to our Christian neighbors."[102] While Dubnow sought to embed Jews into a Russian historical context, his intellectual heirs in Poland, Lithuania and elsewhere extended this line of thinking into Russia's post-World War I successor states. Thus Noah Prylucki, who would become the leader of the Folkspartey in Poland, expressed something similar in his 1906 pamphlet, "Nationalism and Democracy." There, Kalman Weiser noted, "Prylucki considers the Jews autochtonous inhabitants of Poland who can neither be expelled nor successfully assimilated. Their culturally

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[99] Simon Dubnow, "The Jews as a Spiritual (Cultural-Historical) Nationality in the Midst of Political Nations (Second Letter)," in *Nationalism and History: Essays on Old and New Judaism*, ed. Koppel Pinson (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1958), 107-108.

[100] Robert M. Seltzer, *Simon Dubnow's "New Judaism": Diaspora Nationalism and the World History of the Jews* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 173.

[101] As cited in ibid., 174.

[102] Ibid.

distinct, centuries-old presence in the land entitles them to the same rights for 'national development' as the Poles."[103] Similar notions were taken up by Jewish activists in Lithuania as they sought to secure a legal and popular place for Jews in the emerging Lithuanian political landscape.

Uriah Katzenelenbogen, the *Kresy* and *Krajowcy*

In the Lithuanian context, the idea that Jews participate in a multiethnic culture of minorities whose sum is greater than its parts was promoted by no Jewish figure more so than Uriah Katzenelenbogen (1885-1980). Katzenelenbogen was a native of Vilnius who learned the Lithuanian language and became a sympathizer to the Lithuanian national and cultural movement before 1904, when the Russian government still enforced a ban on publishing in the Lithuanian language. As a Bundist, in those years, he encountered the Lithuanian national movement as one that endured familiar government repression, and he would join Lithuanian cultural activists for their underground meetings in the woods, hiding from the police.[104] Katzenelenbogen would later become influential in the interwar Lithuanian iteration of the Folkspartey, contributing to its journals, connecting intellectuals across parties and ethnic groups, and serving as party secretary and board-member.[105] But he led a departure from

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[103] Kalman Weiser, *Jewish People, Yiddish Nation: Noah Prylucki and the Folkists in Poland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 54.

[104] See Uriah Katzenelenbogen, *The Daina: An Anthology of Lithuanian and Latvian Folk-songs* (Chicago: Lithuanian News Publishing Co., 1935), 17 n. 38 and Uriah Katzenelenbogen, "Mayn ershte nesiye iber Zamet," in *Lite* (1951), 1228.

[105] "Declaration" (1926) in Folkspartey papers, LCVA, F 70, ap. 4, vnt. 274, 6; and "Report" (1928), LCVAF 70, ap. 4, vnt. 274, 8. On Katzenelenbogen's role in *Nais*, the interwar Folkist organ, see Yudl

Dubnow by placing the essence of Lithuanian Jewry in a territory rather than in a transnational *Kulturnation*.

While Lithuania experienced the sweeping social, economic and cultural transformations of nineteenth-century Russia, especially in its cities and towns, there was a remarkable persistence of the popular notion of Lithuanian difference rooted in its past as a Polish borderland. The Polish borderlands, or *kresy*, were roughly those outlying and easternmost areas of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that had been in the Grand Duchy, and later formed the Russian Vilna, Grodno and Minsk gubernias and parts of western Ukraine. The term *kresy* was used in the Polish-speaking world to refer to this place in relation to Warsaw and other central Polish cities of culture and politics. In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the *kresy* had functioned almost like a colony of the nobility.[106] Polish nobles in Lithuania, many of whom claimed Lithuanian roots, owned large estates that were often managed by Jews, and whose land was worked by the local Belarusian and Lithuanian peasantry. While the *kresy* contained a large number of Polish speakers, the area was especially diverse, with not only a large Jewish population but also Muslim Tatar communities, among others.[107] Once considered a cultural backwater, the *kresy* gained special place in the highly Romantic and revanchist iteration of Polish nationalism that erupted in the nineteenth century.

Before the emergence of modern national linguistic categories in the region – a process that was strengthened by Russia's intention to dismantle Polish rule after the uprising of 1863 –

Mark, "Yidishe periodishe oysgabes in lite," in *Zamlbukh lekoved dem tsvey hundert un fuftsikstn yoyvl fun der yidisher prese, 1686-1936*, ed. Jacob Shatsky (New York: YIVO, 1937), 268.

[106] Tomas Zarycki, *Ideologies of Eastness in Central and Eastern Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), Chapter 6.

[107] On Jewish-Muslim relations in the *kresy*, see Holly Robertson Huffnagle, "'Peaceful Coexistence?': Jewish and Muslim Neighbors on the Eve of the Holocaust," *East European Jewish Affairs* 45:1 (2015): 42-64.

many locals viewed themselves as "Lithuanians" whose territory roughly coincided with that of the former Grand Duchy.[108] This regional identity was reinforced by the writings of prominent figures such as nineteenth-century poet, Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), who was notably sympathetic to Lithuania's Jews. Mickiewicz, who was born in Novogrudek, a city today in northern Belarus, was an anti-imperialist patriot who cultivated a romantic vision of the Grand Duchy and the role of Jews and Lithuanians in making it unique. The late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century heirs to this tradition, in Polish-speaking elite circles in the *kresy*, were known as *krajowcy*, and Vilna was one of their intellectual centers. Even in an era of heightened Polish nationalism, a distinct local identity persisted among *krajowcy*, whose loyalty was to the borderland itself.[109]

As national movements gained steam, especially after the 1905 revolution, some families with mixed Polish-Belarusian-Lithuanian backgrounds split along chosen national lines. In one famous example, Gabriel Narutowicz became the first president of Poland while his brother, Stanislovas, signed the Lithuanian Declaration of Independence and served in that country's government.[110] Oskar Miłosz (1877-1939), born in what is today Belarus to a Polish noble father and Jewish mother, identified as "Lithuanian," represented Lithuanian national interests at the League of Nations, and published translations of Lithuanian folksongs. In the case of Lithuanian writer Marija Ivanauskaitė-Lastauskienė, who published under the penname Lazdynų Pelėda ("Owl of the Hazlenut Trees"), cultural production, one observer has noted, "began in Polish and

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[108] See, e.g., Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 32-35, 49-50; Serhiy Bilensky, *Romantic Nationalism in Eastern Europe: Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian Political Imaginations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 119-120; and Darius Staliūnas, "Introduction," in *Spatial Concepts of Lithuania in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Staliūnas (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 3.

[109] Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*, 54.

[110] Ibid., 70.

ended in Lithuanian."[111] In the midst of this process, the *krajowcy* mediated national demands. What underpinned the *krajowcy* identity was "a local, territory-based, superethnic, or transnational ideology; a political idea, a patriotism of sorts, based upon the historical legacy of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania."[112] He further observes, "The heterogeneity of the region was integral to the realization of the [krajowcy] project."

Among the main vehicles for this romantic political revival were *krajowcy* journals and Masonic lodges, and Katzenelenbogen actively participated in both. Katzenelenbogen belonged to an elite Masonic lodge called "Litwa," of which he was, for years, the only Jewish member.[113] This lodge, which was founded in Vilna in 1910, included Belarusian, Polish and Lithuanian members who actively supported the creation of a federated Lithuanian state of ethnic minorities modeled on the medieval Grand Duchy (or at least commonly held conceptions of it).[114] Proposals for the creation of a multiethnic federated state modeled on the Grand Duchy were put forward as early as 1905, at the Geneva Conference, where the Polish and Belarusian Socialists signed a joint statement indicating Jews' support, too.[115] Despite Lithuanian nationalists' eventual extrication from such a proposal, such ideas persisted into the twentieth century, especially among *krajowcy* and their intellectual heirs.[116] In what may be a reference to "Litwa," Katzenelenbogen once wrote that he knew of a secret circle of "independent" [umparteyishe] Jewish, Belarusian, Polish and Lithuanian intellectuals that would meet every two weeks in

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[111] http://www.xxiamzius.lt/numeriai/2010/05/19/atmi_02.html

[112] Per Anders Rudling, *The Rise and Fall of Belarusian Nationalism, 1906-1931* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), 45.

[113] Simonas Bieliackinas also joined the lodge.

[114] See Rimantas Miknys, "Masonerijos kuluaruose," *Darbai ir dienos* (2004.40)

[115] Olga Mastianica, "Between Ethnographic Belarus and the Reestablishment of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: How Belarusian Nationalism Created Its 'National Territory' at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century," in *Spatial Concepts of Lithuania*, 300-305.

[116] Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*, 55.

Vilnius, before World War I, to discuss "the national rights of all four peoples in a liberated Russia."[117] Members of "Litwa" also held more open, but still "semi-secret," salons to advance the *krajowcy* agenda with a "multi-ethnic character and democratic atmosphere."[118] As late as 1915, the "Litwa" lodge published a proclamation for the re-establishment of the Grand Duchy.

Litwa was led by Mykolas Römeris (1880-1945), a Polish-Lithuanian lawyer and intellectual who, along with other like-minded Lithuanian and Belarusian political activists, would contribute special dispatches to *Lite* and, later, to the interwar Lithuanian Folkspartey journal, *Nais*.[119] An expert on Constituional Law, Römeris would become a member of the Lithuanian Supreme Court in 1921 and professor and rector of the University of Lithuania. But in the early twentieth century he was a Polish-Lithuanian patriot in the Mickiewicz mold and known as a leading theorist and activist among *krajowcy* regionalists. His 1908 book, *Lithuania: A Study of the Rebirth of the Lithuanian Nation*, extolled the ancientness of the Lithuanian folksong, or *daina*, and the growth of the Lithuanian cultural movement into a liberal political movement within Russia.[120] He posited that Lithuanians, Belarusians and Poles shared an ethnogenesis that other groups – "first of all Jews, who are settled towns and cities in great numbers," Russians, Germans, and others – did not assimilate to "ethnographically."[121] Nonetheless, he considered these peoples to be integral to the Lithuanian regional identity. In his

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[117] Uriah Katzenelenbogen, "Litvakes," in *Lite* (1951), 385. See also Tomas Balkelis, *The Making of Modern Lithuania* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 57 and 141 n. 42.

[118] Balkelis, *The Making of Modern Lithuania*, 57.

[119] See Römeris, "Di peylishe oybershikht in Lite un Raysn," *Nais* no. 40, October 6, 1921, 2 and Römeris, *Dienoraštis:1921 m. lapkričio 8-oji – 1922 m. birželio 15-oji*, ed. Rimantas Miknys (Vilnius: Versus Aureus, 2013), 65 (journal entry for 13 December, 1921).

[120] *Lietuva* (Lith. Trans, 2006), 20-22.

[121] Ibid., 16-17.

diaries, Römeris frequently noted that "Litwa" discussed Jewish issues at their meetings.[122] When the society regrouped in Kaunas, in 1921, after the Vilnius region was incoroporated into Poland, Katzenelenbogen became, Römeris remembered, "the first Jewish member."[123]

Römeris wrote in his autobiography that Katzenelenbogen and his Jewish supporters "no longer saw Lithuania as a Russian province, as an organic part of it, as the gateway to the gubernias of the 'Northwest Region'" but envisioned a federated state that would come about through political solidarity with other peoples.[124] "In 1913-1914 there appeared a new current among the Vilnius Jews. Its adherents in Vilnius were young Jewish democrats or populist-leaning actors," including Katzenelenbogen.

> They were determined to spread this sense and this consciousness among Jewish intellectuals and everyday people and sought to establish a stable form for this expression of solidarity. They were concerned with establishing a permanent organized community of the area's various nationalities, or at least of progressive currents. For these people Lithuania was truly their homeland, and Vilnius – not a city in a Russian province but Lithuania's capital. They learned the area's languages, not excluding Lithuanian, which was hard for the Jews of Vilnius to master.[125]

Römeris then suggested that such an alliance may have emerged as early as 1906, with the Lithuanian-Jewish block in Kaunas put figures such as Leon Bramson (1869-1941), whose was elected to represent Kovno gubernia at the First Russian Duma in 1906, and remained at the forefront of Lithuanian state-building.[126] As Mindaugas Kvietkauskas has observed,

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[122] See Römeris, *Dienoraštis*, throughout.

[123] Römeris, *Dienoraštis*, 12.

[124] Mykolas Römeris, "Autobiografija," ed. Mindaugas Maksimaitis, in *Lietuvių Atgimimo Istorijos Studijos 13: Mykolo Römerio 120-osioms metinėms* (Vilnius: Saulabrolis, 1996), 224.

[125] Ibid.

[126] On Bramson in the Duma see Vladimir Levin, "Lithuanians in Jewish Politics of the Late Imperial Period," in *A Pragmatic Alliance*: *Jewish-Lithuanian Political Cooperation at the Beginning of the 20th*

Katzenelenbogen, Römeris and their colleagues were "critical of their own, and of other ethnic groups' nationalist ideologies before any one of them dominated [and] saw a common goal in a democratic, multiethnic, integrated Lithuanian society on the principle of equal citizenship."[127] The *krajowcy* movement would have far-reaching influence on Polish, Lithuanian and Belarusian politics. Even interwar Polish president Józef Piłsudski (1867-1935), born near Švenčionys, in the heart of the *kresy* near Vilnius, and today on the Lithunian-Belarusian border, and was remembered as having attended a meeting of the "Litwa" circle.[128] Yet the *krajowcy* were just one of several local identities that Jews experimented with in the early twentieth century.

The *Tutejszy* and Transethnic Localness

An analogous phenomenon to the Lithuanian *krajowcy*, who were presented with an opportunity to choose their national affiliation, was the existence of a local group of people that appeared to fall through the cracks after the eruption of national movements. This group was known as the *tutejszy*, which means "those from here" in Polish and Belarusian, and their national indeterminacy was in large part due to their geographic position in that same area inhabited by speakers of Polish, Belarusian and Lithuanian. One of the most notable features of the *tutejszy*

Century, eds. Vladas Sirutavičius and Darius Staliūnas, (Budapest-New York: Central European Press, 2011), 90.

[127] Mindaugas Kvietkauskas, "Mykolo Biržiškos publicistika XX a. pradžios Vilniaus spaudoje: intelektualo biografijos bruožai," *Knygotyra* 46 (2006): 232.

[128] On the region's border's, see Björn Wiemer, "Zur Verbindung dialektologischer, soziolinguistischer und typologischer Methoden in der Sprachkontaktforschung: Das Beispiel slavischer und litauischer Varietäten in Nordostpolen, Litauen und Weißrussland," *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 48 (2003): 218. On Piłsudski and "Litwa," see Balkelis, *The Making of Modern Lithuania*, 57.

was that they spoke a transitional dialect between Polish and Belarusian – and between East and

West Slavic dialects – with some lexical, grammatical and semantic borrowings from

Lithuanian.[129] In one scholar's definition, *tutejszy* were "those people inhabiting the swampy

forest area along the eastern borderlands who lacked any defined sense of national or ethnic

identity."[130] Another observer, writing in 1942, noted, "The word 'tutejszy' means, literally, 'of

or belonging to this place,' and its use in the upper Kresy to describe nationality is widespread.

This means that, over and above the religious and racial differences which cut families and

villages asunder, there exists at the same time a deep loyalty to the place which unites all in a

common 'nationality.'"[131] "Tutejszy" was an option on the Polish census of 1931, and it was an

identity apparently shared between peasantry and even some of the Polonized elite in the

region.[132] For some observers, the *tutejszy* embodied the historical union of Lithuanian and

Belarusian areas. Czesław Miłosz, himself a neo-*krajowec* and nephew of the aforementioned

Oskar, once wrote, "The language of juridical documents in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was a

dialect destined never to reach full maturity, although later the Byelorussians began calling it

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[129] See Björn Wiemer, "Dialect and language contacts on the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the 15th century until 1939," in *Aspects of Multilingualism in European Language History*, ed. Kurt Braunmüller, et al. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2003), 107; Norman Davies, *Vanished Kingdoms: The History of Half-Forgotten Europe* (New York: Viking, 2011), 298; and Rolandas Kregždys, "Lietuvių kalbos polonizmų ir gudizmų segregacijos ypatumai Lietuvos ir Baltarusijos pasienio areale," in *Tarp Vilniaus ir Minsko: Lietuvos-Baltarusijos pasienio istorinis kultūrinis paveldas*, ed. Basia Nikiforova (Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, 2014), 254-256.

[130] Edward D. Wynot, Jr., *The Polish Orthodox Church in the Twentieth Century and Beyond: Prisoner of History* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2015), 49 n. 14.

[131] Arthur P. Coleman, "The Lithuanian-White Russian Folk of the Upper Nieman," *Journal of Central European Affairs* 1:4 (January 1942): 403.

[132] Jerzy Kochanowski, "Gathering Poles into Poland: Forced Migration from Poland's Former Eastern Territories," in *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948*, ed. Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 136 and Coleman, "The Lithuanian-White Russian Folk," 43.

their tongue. Fated, somewhat like Provençal, to give way before mightier neighbors, the dialect languished under pressure from Polish and Latin (the language of the legal profession) on the west and from Russian on the east."[133] In an era of intensified national movements, the tutejszy were "nationally indeferent."[134]

Critically, Katzenelenbogen attempted to locate the origins of Lithuanian Jews in the very ethnic, linguistic and regional milieu of the *tutejszy*. He wrote:

> The area the Litvak stems from became unclear. Around Švenčionys, for example, and elsewhere, peasants themselves didn't know whether they were Lithuanians or Belarusians. In the same family, it used to be that other groups, Poles and Russians, would be present, too. Usually, in this region, people would answer the question, "Who are you?" with "Tutejszy" (locals [hige]).[135]

Here, Katzenelenbogen imagined a time and place where Jews had more commonalities than differences with their neighbors. Given the entrenched religious differences among local groups – and the exclusion of Jews, in models such as Römeris's, from a shared ethnic stock – language became a key vehicle for making the case for a shared local culture. Katzenelenbogen used the *tutejszy* as a way to conjure up the linguistic sharing of the Grand Duchy, when Jews and their neighbors spoke a common language. In this way, his approach was similar to that of socialist Yiddishists in Soviet Minsk, including Nokhem Shtif (1879-1933) and Max Erik (1898-1937), who championed a theory about the origins of Yiddish literature that pointed to a theoretical

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[133] Czesław Miłosz, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 22. See also 67.

[134] Grigory Ioffe, "Culture Wars, Soul-Searching, and Belarusian Identity," *East European Politics and Societies* 21:2 (2007): 351.

[135] Katzenelenbogen, "Litvakes," 313.

medieval time and place where Jewish and German troubadors would have spoken the same language.[136]

In a 1922 short story published in Yiddish, Lithuanian and Russian versions, Katzenelenbogen meditated on this theme at length by spinning an allegory of the region's ethnic dynamics. In the story, called "Three," he presented a Lithuanian, a Belarusian and a Jew who live in the same village on the Neris River.[137] One half of the village speaks Belarusian, one half speaks Lithuanian, and the Jewish character lives between them. When they all meet at the river, the "three representatives of their people [folks-zin]" greet each other with smiles and praise each other's languages.[138] First, the Belarusian and Lithuanian ask thir Jewish neighbor to speak Yiddish: "Speak … let us hear your language … You brought your language with you from the German banks of the Rhine with a teary cry … Then, when the black Jesuits and the bloody Crusaders drove you back … threw your brothers and sisters in the waters of the Rhine …"[139] They continue: "This is your language … No one speaks your language any longer by the banks of the Rhine … The original people [urshringlekhe] tossed it to you anew." Then the Jew asks to hear his neighbors' beautiful languages, which he appreciates for their connection to nature. Here, Katenelenbogen symbolically places the Lithuanian Jew in directly in between the Belarusian and Lithuanian ethnic groups on the Neris River, in what must be the eastern Lithuanian borderlands. The people speak different European languages but come together from

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[136] See Robert Adler Peckerar, "The Allure of Germanness in Modern Ashkenazi Literature: 1833-1933," PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2009, 94.

[137] For the Yiddish version, see Uriah Katzenelenbogen, "Dray," in *Lite*, ed. Katzenelenbogen (Kaunas: Likht, 1922), 75-82. For the Lithuanian, see Urias Katzenelenbogenas, *Vilniečio balsas* (Lithuania, 1922), 31-35. On the Russian, see Vladimir Levin and Darius Staliūnas, "Lite on the Jewish Mental Maps," in *Spatial Concepts of Lithuania in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Staliūnas (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 357 n. 181.

[138] For a different interpretation, see Levin and Staliūnas, "Lite on the Jewish Mental Maps," 357-358.

[139] Katzenelenbogen, "Dray," 79. Ellipses in original.

a position of mutual respect for their differences and histories. In her introduction to the

Lithuanian-language edition of a collection in which this story appears, Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-

Bitė gave Katzenelenbogen her full endorsement "as a great advocate of the increasing

brotherhood of nations."[140]

Katzenelenbogen sounded a similar note in 1924, in an article he wrote for *Lietuvos*

žinios, the Peasant Populist newspaper, that responded to the common charge that too many Jews

speak Russian.[141] "Look at the stretch of land from Vilnius to Grodno," he implored readers.

"Are there not a few Polonized Lithuanians?" Katzenelenbogen argued that Jews and

Lithuanians were thus alike in their attachment to the high-status literary cultures of Polish and

Russian. He went on to make a telling observation on nationalism. "Only one's own national

[tautinė] intelligentsia can defeat one's own," he wrote, "and this has been done to us Jews, to

Lithuanians and to other peoples. And if the national feeling that we, both Jews and Lithuanians,

believe in is true […] then the national intelligentsia will win for us Jews and for you

Lithuanians, and return brothers wandering in the orchard" – and here he used the same

Lithuanian word, *sodas*, as the place in his Lithuanian story of three nations meeting – "of a

foreign culture."

Language was a recurring theme in the construction of Jewish place in the context of the

tutejszy region, following in the history of uses of linguistic theory to advocate for Jewish

autochthony in Eastern Europe.[142] In the 1914 edition of *Lite*, Vatslav Lastouski, a leading

Belarusian cultural activist, wrote, "Among our Jewish neighbors can be found many people who

understand our language, mostly the residents of villages and small towns" with whom

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[140] Urias Katzenelenbogenas, *Vilniečio balsas* (Lithuania, 1922), v. See also 31-35.

[141] Urias Kacenelenbogenas, "Būsim teisingi," *Lietuvos žinios* no. 230, October 11, 1924, 1-2.

[142] On this history, see Kulik, "Jews and the Language of Eastern Slavs," 106-107.

Belarusians have good relations.[143] Lastouski was the publisher of *Nasha Niva*, the Vilna-based

Belarusian newspaper, and he was married to Lithuanian writer Marija Ivanauskaitė-

Lastauskienė ("Lazdynų Pelėda"), and who herself published a story in the 1914 *Lite*. Lastouski

noted, in his essay, "In the local Jewish folksongs here are a lot of White Russian [i.e.,

Belarusian] words and, from the other side, in our language many Yiddish words have also been

naturalized [ayngebirgert gevorn]."[144] Taking up the theme, in his introduction to the 1919

edition of *Lite*, co-editor Eliyohu-Yankev Goldshmit expounded on how Jews and non-Jews in

Lithuania shared customs and beliefs, highlighting local multilingual and macaronic

folksongs.[145] He emphasized that a large number of Hebrew and Yiddish words can be found in

Belarusian, Belarusian words in Yiddish, and a similar case for Lithuanian.[146] Belarusian folk

sayings, Goldshmit argued, "beg the question of whether they are Yiddish or '*raysish*'

(Belarusian)," adding that "there are beautiful folksongs in a mixed Hebrew-Yiddish-Belarusian

language."

Born in Krustpils (Yid. Kraytsburg), today in southern Latvia, Goldshmit was a Vilna-

based Bundist and Yiddish writer who would later become head of the An-sky Ethnographic

Museum in Vilna.[147] For figures such as Katzenelenbogen and Goldshmit, the mixing of

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[143] V[atslav] Lastovski, "Etlekhe verter," *Lite* (1914), 47.

[144] Ibid., 48.

[145] Goldshmit, "Dos zamlbukh 'Lite,'" *Lite* (1919), 3-4.

[146] In fact, linguists have demonstrated that, by the early twentieth century, there were extensive lexical borrowings between Yiddish and Lithuanian. See for example Chackelis Lemchenas, *Lietuvių kalbos įtaka lietuvos žydų tarmei* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1970); Khatskl Lemkhen, "Di hashpoe fun litvish afn yidishn dialekt in Lite," *Oksforder yidish* 3 (1995): 6-130; and Izidorius Kisinas, "Lietuvių žodžiai įeinantieji žydų (אידיש) kalbon," Lithuanian Academy of Sciences Vrublevskis Library (LMAVB), F 166 [n.d.].

[147] Y[itzhok] Kh[arla]sh, "Eliyohu-Yankev Goldshmit," in *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur*, vol. 2 (New York: Congress for Jewish Culture, 1958), 100-102. On this later stage in Goldshmit's life, and his tragic fate – killed alongside Folkist Noah Prilucki – see "Vilniečių reikalu," *Apžvalga* 11 (219), April

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language, territory and ethnic groups was central to defining Lithuanian Jewishness. In 1919, Goldshmit wrote, "In *Raysn* (Belarusia) the Lithuanians mixed (out) and assimilated with the Belarusians, such that they are regarded as one people […] The Lithuanians and the Belarusians themselves called the whole Lithuanian-Belarusian [*raysish*] territory in general 'Lithuania' or 'Lithuanian-Belarusian region' and only in certain cases they defined Lithuania differently and Belarusia differently. And the Jews, too, always bundled Lithuania and *Raysn* into something united together, and understood under the term 'Lithuania' the entire Lithuanian-speaking Lithuania and all *Raysn* up to Smolensk and Chernihov gubernia."[148] Goldshmit noted that the integration of Lithuanians and Belarusians was practically total. "In truth," he wrote, "Lithuania and *Raysn* and the Lithuanians and the Belarusians, over the course of many centuries in close proximity, have been so bound together and even intermixed that we don't know where Lithuania ends and *Raysn* begins. Even today, he added, "the Lithuanian-Belarusian territory is a uniquely integral union that does not allow for division by clever borders such that no one will be unhappy."

In 1919, Goldshmit picked up the thread again, noting "a theory that the population of Smolensk gubernia descends from a confluence of Lithuanians and Slavs."[149] At the same time, he wrote, "In many places, not only in Minsk, Mogilev, and Smolensk gubernias, but also in Grodno, Vitebsk and Vilna gubernias, masses of Lithuanians mixed with Belarusians and took on a Slavic character – but the kernel of the people remained and preserved its national purity."[150] Despite the claims about the mixed nature of Lithuanians and Belarusians, the

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10, 1940, 2 and David Fishman, *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 142.

[148] Y. Goldshmit, "Di yidn inem groysfirshtntum Lite," *Lite* (1919), 16-17.

[149] A. Goldshmit, "Lite un di litviner (Some Geography and Ethnography)," *Lite* (1914), 22.

[150] Ibid., 25.

Belarusian national movement that championed some of these themes was, by 1919, much

weaker than its Lithuanian counterpart. It was also more geographically more nebulous in

definition (although its leaders sought out – and counted among its adherents – Jews such as

Zmitrok Biadula, né Shmuel Plavnik).[151] As Andrew Sloin has observed, "Belorussia was

perpetually betwixt."[152] At the same time, a Lithuanian national movement that prioritized the

the particular history of Lithuanian-speaking Lithuanians gained steam. This latter movement

presented an opportunity to appreciate a concrete and narrowly defined people – the opposite of

the trope of the *tutejszy* and yet one that also compelled some of these same theorists of Jewish

belonging.

The Allure of Lithuanianness

The study of Lithuanian culture, in particular its language and folksongs, has a prestigious

history that is embedded into the very architecture of romantic nationalism. The Lithuanian

language, along with Latvian and the extinct Prussian language, form the Baltic branch of the

Indo-European family. Lithuanian is notable for preserving ancient Indo-European lexical and

grammatical features, making it a topic of study and speculation from the birth of philology to

the present day. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars and other observers were

drawn to the archaisms of the Lithuanian language and the perceived primitivism of its people,

whose late conversion to Christianity (finalized in the 15th century) suggested a timeless and

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[151] See for example Darius Staliūnas, *Enemies for a Day: Antisemitism and Anti-Jewish Violence in Lithuania under the Tsars* (Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2015), 76.

[152] Andrew Sloin, *The Jewish Revolution in Belorussia: Economy, Race, and Bolshevik Power* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2017), 7.

unchanging quality to their culture. Katzenelenbogen's attitude toward Lithuanian is consistent

with this discourse and should be seen as an extension of it. Indeed, in one of his studies of the

Lithuanian folksong, Katzenelenbogen cites eighteenth-century Prussian pastor Philipp Ruhig,

who admired what he called the "uncultivated" quality of both the Lithuanian language and its

people.[153]

In the mid-eighteenth century, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) wrote, in an essay

about a Lithuanian grammar, "At the end of the preface about this language I came across a

rarity that amused me to no end. A few Lithuanian *dainos*, or little songs […] What naïve wit!

What lovely simplicity!"[154] Herder, the father of romantic linguistic nationalism, solidified this

triangulation of language, song and naïveté with his prominent placement of four examples of

Lithuanian *dainos* at the beginning of his influential 1778 collection of folksongs. For Herder, an

East Prussian who preferred to cross Lithuania Minor from his hometown to the university in

Königsberg by carriage, the Lithuanians were perhaps the most immediate and accessible of the

small peoples about whom he generalizes in his theory of linguistic nationhood. This theory

holds, in Romanticist fashion, that the people of Eastern Europe are exemplary as they are, rather

than good candidates for improvement, as Enlighteners would have it. Another work to lend

authority to the special place of Lithuanian in the construction of European national-linguistic

origins was by a fellow East Prussian, Immanuel Kant. In his preface to a Lithuanian-German

dictionary in the year 1800 – the last of his works to be published during his lifetime – Kant

extolled the "peculiar character, as well as the purity of the language."[155]

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[153] Uriah Katzenelenbogen, *Daynes: Litvishe un letishe folkslider* (Toronto: [Self-published?], 1930), 12-13.

[154] As quoted in Guntis Šmidchens, "Herder and Lithuanian Folksongs," *Lituanus* 56:1 (Spring 2010): 56.

[155] As quoted in J. D. Miniger, "'Nachschrift eines Freundes'": Kant, Lithuania, and the Praxis of Enlightenment," *Studies in East European Thought* 57:1 (March 2005): 1-4.

Maurice Olender has outlined how the comparison between Semites and Indo-Europeans – and both by extension and sometimes as a premise, Jews and Europeans – was a significant excercise in the process of the development of romantic nationalism. Herder's study of Sanskrit and other ancient Indo-European languages inspired his demotion of Hebrew from its former place as what was considered the most ancient language and perfect language to a new status as just one of many.[156] Herder saw the Hebrews as "the quintessential Volk" and understood "Scripture as a kind of national folklore" of the people.[157] But unlike the ancient Israelites, for Herder, "the ancestors of Aryan civilization were portrayed as heralds of progress, looking forward to a bright future for the Christian West and the modern world."[158] Olender also considers the example of Ernst Renan (1823-1892), the French philosopher and historian who believed that "behind each word root lurks 'a hidden god.'"[159] And yet Renan sought to separate modern-day Jews from any claim to a noble Biblical heritage when famously posited, in an 1883 lecture titled "Judaism as Race and Religion," that Jews are descended from converted Turkic Khazars.[160]

French thinkers following in Renan's footsteps sought to place the study of Lithuanian at the center of a larger project on the origins of European identity while maintaining that Lithuanian possessed an almost ineffable quality. Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), the eminent Swiss theoretical linguist, devoted much attention to Lithuanian. After studying the language at the University of Leipzig, Saussure spent two weeks doing fieldwork in Lithuania in

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[156] Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Aryans and Semites: A Match Made in Heaven* (New York: Other Press, 2002), 31-36.

[157] Ibid., 37, 40.

[158] Ibid., 36.

[159] Ibid., 64.

[160] For the definitive account of the debunked theory of Jewish Khazar origins, see Shaul Stampfer, "Did the Khazars Convert to Judaism?," *Jewish Social Studies* 19:3 (Spring-Summer 2013): 1-72.

1880. He wrote in his journal during the expedition, "There is in effect no foreign observer capable of discovering Lithuanian accentuation: one can, after being informed about it, control it, rectify it [but] one cannot carry the first axe into this virgin forest without having been born Lithuanian."[161] Saussure's student, Antoine Meillet (1866-1936), who taught Indo-European historical linguistics at the Collège de France, is widely quoted as having stated, "Anyone wishing to hear how the Indo-Europeans spoke should come and listen to a Lithuanian peasant."[162]

Lithuanian intellectuals themselves appropriated these ideas from European scholarship and, quite understandably, strongly endorsed and promulgated them at home. A 1907 memorandum to the Russian government, initiated by Jonas Basanavičius, a leading Lithuanian political and cultural activist, declared: "The Lithuanian nation [tauta] – the oldest Aryan nation – retaining until today the oldest form of the Indo-European language, lives in an area which, also currently called Lithuania, is its territory. Scientific research has shown that when Lithuanians first arrived to this area, no one lived there [sic]."[163] Lithuanians were of course not unique among emerging nations in the early twentieth century to makes claims to, and frequently highlight, their ancientness and former glory – claims that were frequently related to revanchist territorial aspirations. To give just one example among many, Romanian nationalists claimed to descend from a romantic mix of Dacian and Roman warriors.[164] In the Lithuanian case, the concept of ethnic purity came to permeat the discourse on the national populace in the early

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[161] As quoted in John E. Joseph, "Why Lithuanian Accentuation Mattered to Saussure," *Language and History* 52:2 (November 2009): 186.

[162] Perhaps an elaboration of sentences found in his book, *Les langues dans l'europe nouvelle* (Paris: Payot, 1918), 37-38.

[163] In *Vilniaus žinios*, November 22, 1907, as cited in Römeris, *Autobiografija*, 247-248.

[164] George W. White, *Nationalism and Territory: Constructing Group Identity in Southeastern Europe* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 125-128.

twentieth century. Remarkably, and somewhat counterintuitively, Jewish thinkers such as

Katzenelenbogen and Goldshmit were drawn to this discourse, adopting and adapting it for their

own purposes.

Katzenelenbogen has written in several places of his impressive first encounter with

Lithuanians, as a sixteen-year-old, when he heard the Lithuanian language for the first time. The

moment occurred as he watched Lithuanian peasants shuffling on their knees, probably along the

Stations of the Cross in the northern part of the city. "It seemed to me that the singing, like a

lament, was carried from the woods, from peasant earth," he remembered, before trying to come

to terms with differences between Jews and Lithuanians who share the same territory. "Our

ecstasy of faith is a different one – between four walls, in *shul* […] However, my imagination

spun a panorama of Lithuanian villages, mixed with Jewish *shtetlekh* and taverns." Elsewhere,

Katzenelenbogen would return to this theme of the disjuncture between Lithuanian and Jewish

engagement with their natural surrounding, writing, "While the Jew's sorrow can still be heard in

every house, behind the ghetto wall, the Lithuanian's lonesome 'daina' secretly rings out in the

hidden village and forest [. . .] We [Jews] haven't had a natural environment [natur-svive]. We

have been stuck in a spiritual desert."[165] Katzenelenbogen called on Jews to not only engage with

Lithuanian culture but also to engage with the world like Lithuanians do, in what he saw as a

more direct and holistic experience of place.

Thus began Katzenelenbogen's transformation into a late-stage Jewish *narodnik*, in line

with the Russian movement of the 1870s in which young intellectuals upheld Russian folk

traditions as authentic and worthy of imitation. Like other *narodniki*, Katzenelenbogen became

both an ardent collector of bibliographic material on Lithuanian folk culture and also valorized

manual labor. He moved from Vilnius to Biržai and, later, Panevėžys, smaller cities deeper in the

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[165] Uriah Katzenelenbogen, "Lite un unzer literature," *Lite* (1922), 8.

ethnic Lithuanian heartland, over one hundred kilometers away from the interwar capital of

Kaunas. Most significantly, he would collect, translate and interpret Lithuanian folksongs for a

Jewish audience. In this way, Katzenelenbogen followed Sh. Ansky, the writer and *Lite*

contributor whose "going to the people" of the 1880s led ultimately to introspection about the

intersection of Jewish folk behaviors and liberal politics.[166] By the late nineteenth century, it was

common for Jews in small towns to know Lithuanian and be familiar with Lithuanian culture.

One memoirist wrote of his grandmother, "I remember something else that was very

characteristic of her and other such Jewish Lithuanian women. She brought together the Jews

and the village, the gentile world. She spoke Lithuanian fluently […] Such Jewish women were

the salt of the earth, and there were many of them in my shtetl [Pumpėnai], just as in the other

shtetlakh."[167] But as a resident of Vilnius, a cosmopolitan center which had a tiny Lithuanian

population, Katzenelenbogen encountered Lithuanians with significant romantic and cultural

distance, and his approach their culture, at least in the earliest years of his engagement with it,

reflects this.

For Katzenelenbogen and other Folkists of the region, the Lithuanian language and its

popular vehicle, the folksong, had specific connotations they sought to appropriate for their

Folkist message. By the 1910s, Yiddish writers such as I. Kisin and Moyshe Kulbak would

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[166] On Ansky as a *narodnik* see Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2-10. On Jewish ethnographic distance and relation to place see Deutsch, "Thrice Born; or, between Two Worlds: Reflexivity and Performance in An-sky's Jewish Ethnographic Expedition and Beyond," in *Going to the People: Jews and the Ethnographic Impulse*, ed. Jeffrey Veidlinger (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2016), 36-37. See also Ansky, "Khatos neyurim," *Lite* (1919), 63-71.

[167] Benjamin Bialostotsky, "A Shtetl Woman," as quoted in *The Jews: A History*, ed. John Efron, et al. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson-Prentice Hall, 2009), 295.

publish Yiddish versions of Lithuanian folklore, even incorporating Lithuanian words.[168] Enraptured by the "songs of a race that is in despair, but which refuses to die," Katzenelenbogen was inspired to study the Lithuanian folksong, or *daina* (pl. *dainos*). In this way, he was drawn to the widely perceived archaic quality of Lithuanian language and culture, and he translated many of them into Yiddish, seeing Lithuanians – along with Herder and other theorists of romantic nationalism – as the very model of an ancient and rooted people. Katzenelebogen thus contributed to an intellectual tradition of comparison between Semites and Indo-Europeans in which Jews are understood to be the quintessential type of the former linguistic group, and Lithuanians the quintessential type of the latter. He was given to similar hyperbole, for example when he wrote, "Lithuanian has been preserved in a condition close to the accepted form of Indo-European (the primitive language from which all Aryan languages originated) [. . .] Philologists concluded that Lithuanian was an offspring of Sanskrit, but now it is clear that Lithuanian is the older."[169] Among a certain set of scholars and thinkers, the Lithuanians were not only, as Katzenelenbogen suggests, rooted and unchanging in the land and natural environment where they lived, but they were the very model for such a people, and thus embodied the ideals of Jews who wanted to assert their claim to localness.[170] Language was a key lynchpin of this association. Indeed, one observer noted that it was specifically through his "mastery of language" that Katzenelebogen "succeeded in revealing for Yiddish literature the

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[168] See I. Kisin, "A litvishe legend," *Di tsukunft* (New York), vol. XXII, no. 7, July [?], 1917, 417. N.B. I Kisin (1886-1950), né Yekusiel Garnitsky, is not to be confused with Yitzhak Kisin (1904-1958), whom I discuss in Chapter 5.

[169] Katzenelenbogen, *The Daina*, 3.

[170] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 89.

soul of two peoples, among whom segments of our [Jewish] people have lived for hundreds of years."[171]

Lite, A Journal for Jewish Regionalists

In his diaries, Mykolas Römeris remembered a publishing endeavor by his Jewish interlocultors:

> This Jewish group had begun to publish a periodical in Yiddish (jargon), which spread the political idea of regional independence provided knowledge of the region's other national movements and activities. (To cooperate, spokesmen of other nationalities were invited so that they could inform the Jewish public, in original articles, about themselves and also contribute to the introduction of efforts at political coordination). The rising war interrupted this work.[172]

The publication Römeris referred to was *Lite*, a journal which, as he correctly suggested, promoted a multiethnic regional identity and unified cultural alliance among Social Democratic leaders of the Lithuanian and Belarusian national movements, the *krajowcy*, and their Jewish supporters. *Lite* should be seen as part of a complex of journals with similar outlooks that appeared in Lithuania in the early twentieth century, including the Russian *Nash Krai* ("Our Region"), edited by Katzenelenbogen, the Belarusian *Nasha Niva* ("Our Field"), edited by Vatslav Lastouski and *Gazeta Wileńska*, the Polish-language journal of the *krajowcy* published and edited by Römeris.[173] *Lite* was published by Katzenelenbogen and Goldshmit in 1914, and resumed for two more issues between 1919 and 1922.[174] In 1922, Nokhem Shtif wrote, "Here in

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[171] H.M. Caiserman-Wital, *Yidishe dikhter in Kanade* (Montreal: Nuansn, 1934), 152.

[172] Römeris, "Autobiografija," 224-225.

[173] On *Nash Kray*, Darius Staliūnas, "Rusų kalba kaip lietuvių ir žydų komunikacijos priemonė: laikraštis *Naš kraj*," in *Apibusis pažinimas*,

[174] The volume dated 1919 may have been published in December 1918. See Eliyohu-Yankev Goldshmit, "Di idishe prese in Vilne in di yorn 1914-1922," in *Vilne: a zamlbukh gevidmet der shtot Vilne*, ed. Ephim

Vilna, Jewish intellectuals who are preoccupied in their dreams about culture and language, made their way to their Lithuanian neighbor: 'We must, we can understand each other, it is certain that we shall truly comprehend each other even more.' And in those dark days, on the eve of the world war, a hand was outstretched to that neighbor here: Uriah Katzenelenbogen put out his first peace offering, 'Lite.'"[175] In 1936, Folkist Yudl Mark would present his memory of *Lite* in the same breath as one of the only pre-World War II usages of the term *doikayt*: "The purpose of these collections was to bring about a cultural closeness between Jews and Lithuanians, to familiarize Jews with productions of Lithuanian literature and with the ideas of the various communal views of the Lithuanians, to instill in Jews themselves more connectedness to Lithuania and call for a principle standpoint of *doikayt* as a response to the Zionist *dortikayt*."[176] He added, "In these collections, localness and Lithuanianness were an organic phenomenon, not an abstract principled position of autonomists from everywhere else." Goldshmit exemplified this sensibility when he wrote, in 1919, "The final word is that in Lithuania we are not foreigners, we are *heymishe mentchn* [people who are at home] here, inhabitants [toyshovim], we've put down deep roots here, we have accumulated here a colossal amount of national wealth and religious sanctuaries which will never be forgotten as long as the golden chain of Jewish history continues its twists!"[177]

Jeshurin (New York: Workmen's Circle, 1935), 353. N.B. Katzenelenbogen and other Lithuanian Folkists revived the journal in New York in 1951; a subsequent volume, under different editorship, was published in Tel Aviv in 1965.

[175] Bal-Dimyen, "Vilne un Lite," *Lite* (1922), 43.

[176] Yudl Mark, "Yidishe periodishe oysgabes in Lite," in *Zamlbukh lekoved dem tsvey hundert un fuftsikstn yoyvl fun der yidisher prese, 1686-1936*, ed. Jacob Shatzki (New York: YIVO, 1937), 291. The chapter is dated September 1936. For another positive interwar assessment of *Lite* and Katzenelenbogen's work, see S. B[rau]dė, "Žydai apie Lietuvą," *Lietuvis* 210, September 21, 1927, 2.

[177] Goldshmit, "Dos zamlbukh 'Lite,'" 7.

A few scholars have noted *Lite* in passing; one historian argued the journal "adopted a clear pro-Lithuanian attitude."[178] But a close reading of the journal's mission, context and evolution over eight years and several issues reveals that it offered a number of positions vis-à-vis regional politics and identity. Although the Lithuanian national movement had undergone a process of linguistic purification and largely extracted itself from any movement towards a future state of shared Lithuanian-Belarusian rule, the 1914 edition of *Lite* represents one of the clearest and most mature articulations of the region's prewar ideals, and subsequent issues chart its accommodation to the new political reality on the ground.[179]

The first volume of the journal, spelled ideosyncratically ליטאַ, was published in Vilnius in January 1914 by the prestigious Kletzkin publishing house. It opened with a note of approbation by Nathan Birnbaum, who stated, "The Lithuanian nuance is so strong and so important in the Eastern [European] Jewish world that it is worthy of, and requires, that one engage with it differently."[180] In 1914 Katzenelenbogen also put out seven issues of what amounted to a Russian-language version of *Lite*, called *Nash Krai*, or "Our Region." Published in Panevėžys, *Nash Krai* contained articles on the multiethnic character of Lithuania.[181] *Lite*

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[178] Mordechai Zalkin, "Lithuanian Jewry and the Lithuanian National Movement," in *A Pragmatic Alliance*, 36. See also Solomonas Atamukas, *Lietuvos žydų kelias: nuo XIV amžiaus iki XX amžiaus pabaigos* (Vilnius: Alma littera, 2007), 166; Jurgita Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė, "Žydų ir lietuvių abipusio pažinimo ir kultūrinio bendradarbiavimo atspirtys tarpukario Lietuvoje: priemonės ir rezultatai," in *Abipusis pažinimas: lietuvių ir žydų kultūriniai saitai*, ed. Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė (Vilnius: Vilnius University Press, 2010), 21-23; Darius Staliūnas, "Rusų kalba kaip lietuvių ir žydų komunikacijos priemonė: laikraštis *Naš kraj*," in *Apibusis pažinimas*, 174-176; Levin and Staliūnas, "*Lite* on the Jewish Mental Maps," 354-356; and Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė, "Translations and self-representation: literature as a tool for a mutual Jewish Lithuanian acquaintance," *Jewish Culture and History* 18:2 (2017): 193.

[179] See Balkelis, *The Making of Modern Lithuania*, 57, 101.

[180] Preface, *Lite* (1914), 3-4.

[181] On this publication, see Goldshmit, "Dos zamlbukh 'Lite,'" 10. See also Darius Staliūnas, "Rusų kalba kaip lietuvių ir žydų komunikacijos priemonė: laikraštis *Naš kraj*," in *Apibusis pažinimas: lietuvių ir žydų*

strongly endorsed the idea that Jews, who were extended privileges by Grand Duke Vytautas in 1388, have enjoyed centuries of harmony in Lithuania and are brothers in the struggle, with Lithuanians, against imperialist oppression. Writers in the journal attempted to find points of shared interest. *Lite* was received well by the Jewish, Lithuanian and Belarusian press – including, in the Belarusian *Nasha Niva,* in an article signed "Tutejszy" – but not by Polish reviewers.[182] Its contents included pieces on Belarusian-Jewish relations by leaders of the Belarusian national movement, including Zmitrok Biadula, romantic poems about Lithuania by Yiddish writers such as Dovid Einhorn, and translations of Lithuanian literature. But three essays, which outline the core program of the journal, stand out.

Uriah Katzenelenbogen's brother, Shaul, set the tone for the journal in an introductory essay titled, "Lithuania and Jewish History," in which he argued that Lithuanian-Jewish parity predated religious difference and transcended ethnic boundaries. "Jews have lived in Lithuania for hundreds of years, since the Lithuanians were still pagans, without even a written language," he wrote.[183] "The Lithuanians were heathens – and good heathens. Historians of the Middle Ages paint them as people with a tolerant, democratic character." Jews, he continued, "were given rights [zokhyes] not out of pity or because of their money, but because they were longtime inhabitants [toyshovim]" and lived as "free citizens."[184] Shaul Katzenelenbogen further sought to establish a firm connection to Lithuania not only through historic rights but also to the very land itself. "The Jews who lived in Lithuania heard, for hundreds of years, the rushing of branches in

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kultūriniai saitai, ed. Jurgita Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė (Vilnius: Lithuanian Historical Institute, 2010), 176-181.

[182] Šarūnas Liekis, *A State within a State? Jewish Autonomy in Lithuania, 1918-1925* (Vilnius: Versus Aureus, 2003), 41-42 and Levin and Staliūnas, "*Lite* on the Jewish Mental Maps," 356.

[183] Shaul Katzenelenbogen, "Lite un der yidisher geshikhte," *Lite* (1914), 7.

[184] Ibid., 7, 9.

the old-growth forests of a land free and full of secrets – and the knightly galloping of the Crusaders never disturbed the holy spirit of the forests."[185]

Goldshmit, the coeditor, contributed the second article, titled, "Lithuania and the Lithuanians (Some Geography and Ethnography)," which continued this theme by both romanticizing and historicizing Lithuanian Jewry. This article sought to intertwine Lithuanians' and Jews' history while playing down the peoples' differences. "'Lita' is a historical name of the land whose size and meaning have always changed," he wrote, "and one shouldn't conflate it with the contemporary, real Lita, which is peopled by Lithuanians vis-à-vis descendence and language."[186] Goldshmit here emphasized the indeterminate nature of the definition of Lithuania and argued that the Republic of Lithuania, which prioritized ethnic Lithuanianness, was only one claimant to the deeper legacy of the place. That place, for Goldshmit, as for Katzenelenbogen and others, was an ancient landscape, traces of which could still be found and made relevant. He wrote, "In the Białowieża old-growth forest, among ancient birches, still live entire herds of almost wild bison (a type of ancient buffalo), ancestors of a vanished animal kingdom."[187]

"But who are they, these Lithuanians?" Goldshmit asked. In response to his own question, Goldshmit outlined the Lithuanians' origins in Asia as a unique non-Slavic people.[188] "Of all the European langauges, the Lithuanian language is closest to ancient Sanskrit [and] stems directly from the Sanskrit language."[189] Goldshmit then quotes Russian folklorist Alexander Hilferding (1831-1872), who rhapsodized about the purity of the rural Lithuanian: "'The contemporary language of the Lithuanian peasant is in many respects much more ancient

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[185] Ibid., 9.

[186] A. Goldshmit, "Lite un di litviner (Some Geography and Ethnography)," *Lite* (1914), 13.

[187] Ibid., 20.

[188] Ibid., 21-22.

[189] Ibid., 26.

and original than either the language of the oldest European monument, or the language of

Homer. Just as the European bison [zubr] in the Lithuanian forests is the only representative of

the prehistoric European animal kingdom, so, too, is the Lithuanian language the only surviving

descendant [sheyres-hapleyte] of prehistoric Sanskrit.'"[190] Here Goldshmit, wittingly or not,

echoed earlier Western European romantic accounts of Lithuania as an untouched and ancient

Eastern space. Larry Wolff noted about a late-eighteenth-century English traveler's rapturous

account of the Lithuanian forests, "the bison suggested a possibility of a natural history of

Eastern Europe, with rare species surviving at the extremities of the continent."[191]

This same traveler quoted by Wolff also noted the large and dense population of Eastern

European Jews, "who seem to have fixed their headquarters in the Grand Duchy."[192] Uriah

Katzenelenbogen, in his own essay in *Lite*, sought to place Jews more directly in this imagined

landscape. The fathers and grandfathers of the intelligentsia, he wrote, "felt like inhabitants

[toyshovim] here, and firmly established here," and the intelligentsia carries on in the same

vein.[193] Living in the heart of Lithuania, he writes, "one does still remain here an inhabitant

[toyshev]."[194] All over the "local region" [hige gegnt], Lithuanian and Belarusian intelligentsia

are increasingly using and publishing in their respective mother tongues, noted Katzenelenbogen.

As for the Jewish intelligentsia, "Our intellectual searches for his birthplace, Lithuania, in an

encyclopedic dictionary, but he finds there outdated information and a lot of contradictions."[195]

The average Jewish writer knows three or four languages, Katzenelenbogen noted, but can't

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[190] Ibid., 27.

[191] Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 28.

[192] Ibid.

[193] Uriah Katzenelenbogen, "Unzer inteligents," *Lite* (1914), 39-40.

[194] Ibid., 41.

[195] Ibid., 43.

write in Lithuanian or Belarusian.[196] In a synopis of the general motives of the first issue of *Lite* published in 1919, Goldshmit repeated Katzenelenbogen's gripes. Goldshmit called on locals to learn each other's languages and perpetuate such cultural contact. "Carrying the name Jew proudly, you should get to know, and happily live with, the neighbors with whom your fate is historically bound," he admonished. Then, in what might have been a a reference to Russian and German culture, or even Zionism, Golshmit wrote, "Be Jews, develop your own national culture and don't assimilate our land with foreign languages and foreign cultures. Then we will build our happy future for everyone! This is the idea of the journal, *Lite*."[197]

The 1919 edition of *Lite*, from now on spelled ליטע, was edited by Goldshmit and published in Kaunas. The war had taken its toll on the regionalist movement in general, and also on its adherents on a more personal level. Katzenelenbogen remembered, "Unfortunately, my own library of Baltica, especially Lituanica, was left behind when at short notice I left Lithuania in 1915. When I returned, I found that it had disappeared during the German occupation."[198] Like its predecessor, the second issue of *Lite* took an expansive view of the concept and geography of Lithuania, containing works by selection of Ansky's memoirs, a personal narrative by Peysekh Markus of wartime displacement, and a poem called "Lithuania," by Grodno Yiddish poet Leyb Naydus, in which Naydus uses the Lithuanian word for buckwheat.[199] But published in early 1919, or 5679 according to the title page, the journal also responded to new political reality by including content directed at the young Republic of Lithuania.

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[196] Ibid., 44.

[197] Goldshmit, "Dos zamlbukh 'Lite,'" *Lite* (1919), 12-13.

[198] Uriah Katzenelenbogen, *The Daina*, xii.

[199] Leyb Naydus, "Lite," *Lite* (1919), 39. On Naydus's relationship to Lithuania see Jordan Finkin, *Exile as Home: The Cosmopolitan Poetics of Leyb Naydus* (Pittsburgh: Hebrew Union College Press & University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017).

In a sort of inversion of Ansky's anthropologization of Jews following his study of Russian ethnic culture, writers for *Lite* attributed to Lithuanians what they saw as admirable qualities associated with Jewish ethnic cuture – or, at the very least, they relied on Jewish ethnographic terminology to describe Lithuanians. In an article on the origins of the Jews in Lithuania, Goldshmit provided an overview of the racial makeup of the Lithuanians, arguing that they originated in the lower Russian plains before the Germans and Slavs. "Two thousand years before Ch[rist] the Lithuanians lived under the Himalayan mountains on the banks of the Indus (in Asia – the cradle of man), and pushed by some unknown but strong enemy, they, over the course of many centuries, wandered in dense and difficult waves from there to Europe through the Caucasus, through the steppes of the Don and through contemporary Russia Minor, where they finally stayed and – pushed further from southern Europe through Scythians, Huns, Avars, Bulgarians and finally Slavs – they" took root in Lithuania.[200]

Goldshmit's framing of this history in another article in the same journal shows that he saw this ancient history in the Himalayas as a way to bring Jews and Lithuanians closer together. In his overview of the contemporary Lithuanian press, at the end of the journal, Goldshmit noted, "The Lithuanian people is old, almost older than all European people, and its inner natural culture, which found its expression in a terribly great Oral Torah [toyre shebalpe], in an oral folk literature which counts tens and tens of thousands of folk songs (*dainos*), stories, legends, sayings, expressions, aphorisms and riddles."[201] Here Goldshmit, who would later be named head of the Ansky museum in Vilnius, paraphrases Ansky's formulation, from the introduction to his 1914 Ethnographic Program, of an "Oral Torah, which consists of folktales and legends,

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[200] Goldshmit, "Di yidn inem groysfirshtntum Lite," 15-16.

[201] Goldshmit, "Di litvishe prese un di litvishe parteyen," *Lite* (1919), 92.

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parables and aphorisms, songs and melodies, customs, traditions, beliefs, and so on."[202]

Elsewhere in the same journal, Goldshmit noted the shared "*minhogim* and beliefs" between

Jews and non-Jews of Lithuania, while Shaul Katzenelenbogen described the Lithuanian

language and "*minhogim*."[203] While the Yiddish word *minhogim* may arguably refer to

"customs" in a general sense, it is typically used to describe those Jewish religious practices that

fall outside of Halakha and often have associations with Jewish regional or ethnic subgroups. By

using terms such as "minhogim" and "Oral Torah" to describe Lithuanians' cultural practices,

Goldshmit and Katzenelenbogen try to find common ground with Lithuanians on the level of

folk culture.

By 1922, when the third volume of *Lite* was published in Kaunas, Uriah

Katzenelenbogen and other activists had turned their attention to causes directly related to

minority politics in the Republic of Lithuania. New, more pragmatic concerns were added to the

perennial romantic ones. In Kaunas, Katzenelenbogen had become an early supporter of the

circle that published *Nais*, the journal of the Lithuanian Folkspartey, where he continued to

advocate for Jewish rights in Lithuania.[204] In August 1922, he wrote in its pages, "We Jews, torn

apart by parties, by the combustion of our languages [sphrakhn-tseshprungenhayt], economically

ruined, must nonetheless carry on our own shoulders the rights of all national minorities in

Lithuania."[205] Katzenelenbogen also contributed articles on various Jewish topics to Lithuanian

newspapers such as *Lietuvos žinios* ("News of Lithuania") and *Lietuvis* ("The Lithuanian"). He

moved to Panevėžys, a city in north-central Lithuania where he became a part of a multiethnic

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[202] As translated by, and cited in, Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent*, 102. See also 34-36.

[203] Goldshmit, "Dos zamlbukh 'Lite,'" 3-4 and Shaul Katzenelenbogen, "Lite un der yidisher geshikhte," *Lite* (1919), 7.

[204] Uriah Katzenelenbogen, "Fun unzer literarishe vinkl in Lite," *Der Oyfkum* (New York) vol. 2, no. 5 (May 1927), 27.

[205] Uriah Katzenelenbogen, "Unzer avtonomye in seym," *Nais* no. 132, August 6, 1922, 2.

circle of Lithuanian patriots. One of his new interlocutors was Lithuanian writer and stateswoman, Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė, who would write the introduction to a collection of Lithuanian translations of his short stories.[206] Petkevičaitė-Bitė represented the Liaudininkai, or Peasant Populists, in parliament, and was a major public figure – for example, the only woman to be featured on an interwar postage stamp. Another of Katzenelenbogen's associates was Šeliumelis Lopatta (1904-1923), a Karaite poet who was born in Trakai and lived in Panevėžys. In an article written in honor of the poet, after his tragic death at age twenty-one, Katzenelenbogen wrote, "I personally remember with what zeal he spoke about Vytautas's capital, Trakai. How sad he was when Trakai, together with Vilnius, were banished from Lithuania. He, like all Karaites, was deeply convinced that only in a Lithuania with Vilnius as its capital could Vytautas's Trakai be reborn, and with that bring new life to Lithuania's Karaites."[207]

The 1922 edition of *Lite* was printed in Panevėžys and channeled the romantic regionalist energy of earlier editions into more urgent political questions. Since 1919, similar works had been published, such as Yosef Beker's Yiddish-language *Lithuania and the Lithuanians*.[208] Perhaps due to this new, national orientation, the cover of the third volume of *Lite* announces itself as the "first collection." Katzenelenbogen, the editor, declared in a note to readers that he hoped to put out the journal once a month and called on those "from current Lithuania and also from those areas that are presently cut off from Lithuania," in addition to Lithuanian Jews in the United States, to send materials such as *pinkasim*, memoirs and clippings.[209] The volume contained essays by Lithuanian and Belarusian writers who addressed the dynamic, but quickly

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[206] See Gabrielė Petkevičaitė-Bitė, *Laiškai* (Vilnius: Vaga, 1968), 321-322.

[207] Urias Kacenelenbogenas, "Skaudi karaimams auka," *Lietuvos žinios* no. 240, October 26, 1923, 1.

[208] Y[osef] B[eker], *Lite un di litviner* (Vilnius: B. Tsienson and Co., 1920).

[209] Uriah Katzenelenbogen, untitled note to readers, *Lite* (1922), 103-104.

solidifying, political situation on the ground. Pieces such as one on "the Polonized Lithuanian szlachta," by writer Zigmantas Žemaitis, still appeared. But Peasant Populist Petras Ruseckas provided a special report to *Lite* on the activities of the first sitting of parliament, of which he was a member; and Vatslav Lastouski, now prime minister of the Belarusian People's Republic, wrote an article on the Belarusian national movement that included the complete text, albeit in a footnote, of the September 1921 resolution of the Belarusian national political conference on its Jewish program.[210]

The volume opened with an essay by Katzenelenbogen titled, "Lithuania and Our Literature" that tried to imagine a place for Jews in the Republic of Lithuania. [211] "We, Lithuanian Jews, are returning to our community [kibets]. And we hope to win here a spiritual little place secured with rights. Here we do not just want to become citizens in a political sense [politish zikh aynbirgeren], but also spiritual ones. Possessing a unique […] healthy environment in the liberated independent Lithuania, we hope our Jewish-spiritual hunger will here be sated."[212] In Lithuania, Katzenelenbogen hoped, Jews "will secure for us here our culture and uniqueness more than all paper laws and parliamentary speeches."[213] He was forward-looking, rather than dwelling on past, even medieval, declarations of Jewish rights in Lithuania. "Our cornerstones will also look out from the newly blossomed Lithuanian culture…We will not gaze at centuries-old gravestones but at eternally living cultural memorials. Lithuanian Jewry will eternalize yet new pages in the treasury of world Jewish spirit."

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[210] V[atslav] Lastouski, "Vaysrusland," *Lite* (1922), 69-76, n. 2-3.
Lastauski edited the Belarusian journals *Nasha Niva*, in Vilnius, from 1909-1915, and *Kryvich*, in Kaunas, from 1923-1927.

[211] Uriah Katzenelenbogen, "Lite un unzer literature," *Lite* (1922), 5-24. For Russian-language drafts of this essay, see Lithuanian Academy of Sciences Vrublevskis Library (LMAVB), F 96, vnt. 115, pp. 1-30

[212] Katzenelenbogen, "Lite un unzer literature," 23.

[213] Ibid., 24.

One of the most significant ideological infusions to the journal and its mission was from writers who sojourned in Kaunas on their way west from Soviet Moscow and Kiev.[214] Cultural activists Ben-Adir, the penname of Avrom Rozin (1878-1942) and Bal-Dimyen, the penname of Nokhem Shtif, along with theater critic Aleksander Mukdoyni (1878-1958), brought a fresh perspective to the journal, sometimes with more critical conclusions than local writers. Ben-Adir noted the great steps forward in cultural and economic progress in Lithuania but called the Lithuanians' desire to assimilate Jews "an absurd utopia."[215] The Lithuanians, he argued, had spent too long focused only on their own narrow goals and needs, and could no longer accommodate an inclusive national vision. Shtif presented a much more sanguine take. In an essay entitled, "Vilna and Lithuania," he waxed romantic about the city and its Gothic, winding ghetto streets. He also commented on how "both peoples, Lithuanians and Jews, were tied up and bound together in history under the yoke of the Radziwiłłs and Muravievs," i.e. the Polish and Russian nobility, respectively.[216] "Here in Vilna," he wrote, "we saw the heavy yoke that the silent, proud Lithuanian people endured, we watched the bitter struggle for the Lithuanian language in the Catholic Church against Polish priests, and we, who have suffered and burned so much for our language, saw in the Lithuanians here a brother in sorrow [akh le-tsore], and they grew even closer and dearer to us."[217] He added, "Here is a *home* for peoples: Lithuanians, Jews, White Russians, Poles, whom history set next door to each other, so they could live together and together celebrate, beautify their shared home."[218]

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[214] For more on this phenomenon, see Chapter 2.

[215] Ben-Adir, "Tsu der yidisher natsionaler avtonomye in Lite," *Lite* (1922), 26.

[216] Bal-Dimyen, "Vilne un Lite," *Lite* (1922), 46.

[217] Ibid., 42.

[218] Ibid. Emphasis in original.

Uriah Katzenelenbogen, Yankev Goldshmit and others in the circle of *Lite* helped set out a vision for a Jewish place in a democratic Lithuanian state. They did so by framing their Lithuanian Jewishiness in ethnic, geographic and historical terms. As the possibility of a Lithuanian republic became more real over the course of the 1910s, this project was a key way to not only imagine – sometimes playfully, sometimes seriously – Jews as integral to Lithuania, but also to create the very social architecture in which citizenship would be enshrined.

Chapter Two:
Jewish Reconstruction: Autonomy and Its Discontents, 1921-1925

In his 1935 classic work of revisionist history, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*, W.E.B. Du Bois set out to reclaim the black agency and optimism of an era whose historiographic tradition had come to see post-Civil War Reconstruction – in particular the so-called Radical Reconstruction of 1867-1877 – as a failure.[219] Reconstruction was the era during which systems were implemented to facilitate the social and economic integration of African Americans into free society while also addressing the broader reintegration of southern states into the Union. African Americans received citizenship along with constitutional and legal guarantees of newly acquired rights under the auspices of reconfigured state governments. Ambitious institutions such as the Freedmen's Bureau sought to put heady ideals into practice as African Americans transitioned from slaves to citizens. Du Bois's book, commonly known as *Black Reconstruction*, challenged the common notion that Reconstruction failed as a project to uplift and integrate southern Blacks due to their own deficient abilities to exercise their rights correctly (among other reasons). Historians' negative appraisal of Reconstruction had even been used to justify the proposed reduction of African Americans' rights. By contrast, in Du Bois's 700-plus-page opus – first presented in skeletal form as a paper

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[219] On the historiography of Reconstruction, see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), xix-xxv; Claire Parfait, "Reconstruction Reconsidered: A Historiography of Reconstruction, from the Late Nineteenth Century to the 1960s," *Études anglaises* 62:4 (2009): 440-454; and Douglas E. Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America's Most Progressive Era* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 13-18.

at the December 1909 meeting of the American Historical Association, in New York –

Reconstruction was a hopeful era imbued with idealism for interracial democracy.[220]

The early years of democracy in independent Lithuania, of which autonomy was a part,

may be seen as a form of Jewish Reconstruction. These years, roughly 1918-1926, saw the

development, expansion and eventual contraction of a system of autonomy for minorities,

including Jews. Any comparison of these Black and Jewish Reconstructions must hasten to note

the major difference that most Blacks had been personal property of plantation owners up until

Reconstruction, a past less comparable to the Jews in Eastern Europe than to the Russian serfs,

freed in 1861, or the Roma in Romania, manumitted from 1855-1856. And yet a few useful

comparisons, as a historiographic exercise, are worth noting. Lithuanian Jews transitioned from

subjecthood, under the Russian Empire, to citizenship under the constitutional guarantee of

newly acquired rights. This occurred under newly formed governments – small nation-states in

the League of Nations rather than southern states in a national union – which responded to the

rights regimes in different ways according to local factors. Like the Freedmen's Bureau, the

Ministry of Jewish Affairs in Lithuania oversaw the establishment and management of Jewish

schools, credit unions and other institutions intended to uplift Jews' standing. While

opportunistic "carpetbaggers" from the northern United States traveled to the South after the

conclusion of the Civil War, Jews and non-Jews traveled to Lithuania in the interwar period with

various political and economic motives. Lithuanian Social Democrats, like the "scalawags," or

southern whites who supported the northern war effort – gave their support for Jewish

Reconstruction but were ultimately pushed out of office. As Šarūnas Liekis has noted, "The

Lithuanian Republic was a revisionist state which did not agree with the outcome of the military

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[220] On the 1909 paper, see David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 383-384.

and political struggle" of the First World War, promoting irredentist aims.[221] It may be no surprise, therefore, that by the late 1920s, a Lithuanian paramilitary organization that terrorized Jews had developed the reputation of the "Lithuanian Ku Klux Klan."[222]

The possibility of legal Jewish autonomy in a future Lithuanian state had been under discussion since the German occupation during World War I, and was mandated at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, to which Lithuania sent Jewish representatives.[223] Jewish autonomy was recognized by the Lithuanian provisional government of 1919-1921, which created a Ministry of Jewish Affairs and set the groundwork for the establishment of a Jewish National Council. While Lithuania was one of several states that set out to accommodate the cultural autonomy of their minorities, the Lithuanian system received better support and had a wider reach. According to the one census conducted in interwar Lithuania, in 1923, Jews made up 7.23% of the country, and a much larger percentage of towns and cities.[224] Lithuania was, "unlike Poland and Rumania, was not juridically bound by the minorities treaties to grant their Jewish population minority rights. The Baltic states made their declarations of their own free

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[221] Šarūnas Liekis, *1939: The Year that Changed Everything in Lithuania's History* (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2010), 22.

[222] "'Iron Wolf' is Replica of Ku Klux Klan in Lithuania," *Jewish Daily Bulletin* vol. VII, no. 1266, January 14, 1929, 2. See also Vytautas Petronis, "Guarding the honor of the nation and the prosperity of the state: National Defense of Lithuania 'Iron Wolf' (1928-1930)," in *Journal of Baltic Studies* 49:2 (2018): 14.

[223] See Šarūnas Liekis, "Lithuanians and Jews in 1914-1918: Motives for Political Cooperation," *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 21 (2012): 115-132; Christopher Barthel, "The Cultivation of *Deutschtum* in Occupied Lithuania during the First World War," in *World War I and Propaganda*, ed. Troy Paddock (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 222-246; and Mark Levene, "Nationalism and Its Alternatives in the International Arena: The Jewish Question at Paris, 1919," *Journal of Contemporary History* 28:3 (July 1993): 511-531.

[224] Saulius Kaubrys, *National Minorities in Lithuania: An Outline* (Vilnius: Vaga, 2002), 50.

will."[225] According to Simon Rabinovitch, "Independent Lithuania was the only state recognized at Versailles to attempt, at least at first, a genuine experiment with Jewish autonomy."[226] The Lithuanian policy towards autonomy for minorities was outlined in article 73 of the 1922 Lithuanian Constitution. Poland's promising experiment with autonomy in the 1910s came to an end shortly after World War I, while in Ukraine, autonomy lasted until 1920.[227] While autonomy persisted in Latvia and Estonia – in fact, it officially lasted longest in Estonia – these countries had much smaller Jewish populations than Lithuania. According to the "Goldilocks Principle," Lithuania's Jewish population was large enough, the country small enough, and the regional identity strong enough, that autonomy could flourish there, briefly but intensely.

The study of diaspora nationalism in general, and of interwar Jewish autonomy in particular, has been marked by a historiography of "failure" reminiscent of the interpretations of Reconstruction in the American south to which Du Bois responded.[228] In this interpretation, the limited scope of autonomous institutions in Eastern European nation states can be explained by pointing to the defective nature of Jews' positions themselves, and Jews' expectations, in

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[225] Max Laserson, "The Jewish Minorities in the Baltic Countries," *Jewish Social Studies* 3:3 (July 1941): 274-275.

[226] Simon Rabinovitch, *Jewish Rights, National Rites*, 264. See also Samuel Gringauz [Grinhoyz], "Jewish National Autonomy in Lithuania (1918-1925)," *Jewish Social Studies* 14:3 (July 1952): 230.

[227] On Poland, see Marcos Silber, *Le'umiyut shonah, ezrahut shavah!* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2014). On Ukraine, see Jonathan Frankel, "The Dilemmas of Jewish National Autonomism: The Case of Ukraine, 1917-1920," in *Ukrainian-Jewish Relations in Historical Perspective*, eds. Howard Aster and Peter J. Potichnyj (Edmonton: CIUS Press, 1990).

[228] Some historians have noted both theoretical similarities between Du Bois's positions and those of Eastern European Jewish thinkers, and also the actual shared histories of activism for Blacks in the American South and Eastern European Jews. For two recent pointed comparisons, see Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent: Life and Death in the Russian Pale of Settlement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 10 and Steven Zipperstein, *Pogrom: Kishinev and the Tilt of History* (New York: Liveright, 2018), 188-203.

addition to pointing, more constructively, to the entrenched prejudices of local ruling majorities.

In *On Modern Jewish Politics* – in a chapter titled, "Success?," and a subsection called, "Futility" – Ezra Mendelsohn wrote, "Nothing would be easier than to chronicle the many failures of the three schools of interwar Jewish politics in their efforts to impose their visions of the Jewish future on Jewish society and on the world [. . .] Diaspora nationalism, championed by the Bund and the Folkists and supported, for tactical reasons, by East European Zionists, was a definite flop."[229] In the Baltic States, he added, Jews' plans for working with local governments were "grandiose," arguing, "In a region characterized from the beginning by integral, intolerant nationalism, and in the 1930s by the rapid decline of democracy, such schemes were doomed to failure."[230] In Mendelsohn's view, Zionists "tactical," rather than full-throated, endorsement of autonomy, excempts them from having failed as well.

Some scholars have resisted teleological "backshadowing" by describing various interwar diaspora nationalisms as a "lost Atlantis" of Jewish politics, or "the roads not taken."[231] Other scholars have seen in diaspora nationalism and something like ethnic pluralism *avant la lettre*. One recent study of the early Bund claimed to identify "an historical predecessor to modern multiculturalism that arose in the multi-ethnic context of the Russian empire."[232] The author argued, "The Bund called for state recognitions of the right to the free development of ethno-cultural identity, and in so doing developed the first modern concept of ethnic pluralism on the

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[229] Ezra Mendelsohn, *On Modern Jewish Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 115.

[230] Ibid.

[231] See Michael Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); David N. Myers, "Rethinking Sovereignty and Autonomy," 48; and Noam Pianko*, Zionism and the Roads Not Taken: Rawidowicz, Kaplan, Kohn* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2010).

[232] Gertrud Pickhan, "*Yiddishkayt* and class consciousness: the Bund and its minority concept," *East European Jewish Affairs* 39:2 (2009): 249.

basis of a collective cultural autonomy of minorities, which strikingly resembles current theories of multiculturalism."[233] Šarūnas Liekis has pushed back against such characterizations, suggesting, "Perhaps this notion arises because we value tolerance today, and so we wish to see our past as having been tolerant, too."[234]

Yet a significant amount of scholarship on interwar Eastern European Jewish politics has built on Mendelsohn's work and subsumed his narrative of autonomy's failure unquestioningly. Thus, without further elaboration, Joshua Shanes has noted "the ultimate failure of Diaspora nationalists to achieve lasting Jewish cultural or political autonomy," while Simon Rabinovitch highlights "the political failures of diaspora nationalism in the East."[235] Joshua Karlip wrote that "the dream of Jewish national autonomy in Lithuania collapsed."[236] Jonathan Frankel, more than others, situates the history of Jewish autonomy in the context of the broader erosion of democracy in the region. Writing about autonomy in both Lithuania and Ukraine, he argued, "For this, as for all the experiments in democratic government, the circumstances turned out to be disastrously unpropitious" once the "realities long hidden behind abstract slogans" were revealed.[237] Antony Polonsky concluded, "The reason for the collapse of the autonomous experiment is clear. The two sides had unrealistic expectations of each other […] There were

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[233] Ibid., 259.

[234] Liekis, "Lithuanians and Jews," 117.

[235] Joshua Shanes, "Yiddish and Diaspora Nationalism," *Monatshefte* 90:2 (1998): 178 and Simon Rabinovitch, "Diaspora, Nation, and Messiah: An Introductory Essay," in *Jews and Diaspora Nationalism: Writings on Jewish Peoplehood in Europe and the United states*, ed. Rabinovitch (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2012), xxxii. See also Rabinovitch, *Jews and Diaspora Nationalism*, 126.

[236] Joshua Karlip, "In the Days of Haman: Simon Dubnow and His Disciples at the Eve of WWII," *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 4 (2005), 534.

[237] Jonathan Frankel, "The Dilemmas of Jewish National Autonomism: The Case of Ukraine, 1917-1920," in *Ukrainian-Jewish Relations in Historical Perspective*, eds. Howard Aster and Peter J. Potichnyj (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Canadian Studies Press, 1990), 263.

other reasons for the failure of the experiment. It fell prey to the Lithuanian party conflict, and the degree of consensus necessary for its success was absent in the Jewish community. It may be, too, that there is an inherent contradiction between the basic principles of a liberal state and the guaranteeing of group rights."[238] Building on this latter observation, Polonsky proposed in another essay that the fate of autonomy should be understood in a broader historical scope: "The failure of the attempt to establish Jewish autonomy in Lithuania, where there was considerable goodwill on both sides at the outset, should lead to serious reflection. So too should the involvement of a significant number of Lithuanians, previously regarded by many Jews as not particularly prone to anti-Semitism, in the Nazi anti-Jewish genocide."[239]

The technics of autonomy in Lithuania has been described in detail by scholars and former participants.[240] While the establishment of government institutions that worked for the Jewish community was a source of fascination and pride, one of the more striking outcomes of the years of autonomy was the extensive public debates, among Jewish, about the nature of the Jewish place in Lithuania. These discussions were carried out in newspapers, at public events, and in correspondence. For Eric Foner, the historian of Reconstruction, "Black participation in Southern public life after 1867 was the most radical development of the Reconstruction years, a massive experiment in interracial democracy without precedent in the history of this or any other

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[238] Antony Polonsky, "Introduction," in Dov Levin, "Jewish Autonomy in Inter-War Lithuania: An Interview with Yudl Mark," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 14 (2001): 195.

[239] Antony Polonsky, "The New Jewish Politics and Its Discontents," in *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2003), 52-53.

[240] See especially Yosef Berger, "Di yidishe natsionale oytonomye in der zelbstshtendiker Lite (1919-1939)," in *Lite* (1951), 232-242; Samuel Gringauz, "Jewish National Autonomy in Lithuania (1918–1925)," *Jewish Social Studies* 14:3 (July 1952): 225-246; and Šarūnas Liekis, *A State within a State? Jewish Autonomy in Lithuania, 1918–1925* (Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2003).

country that abolished slavery in the nineteenth century."[241] In Lithuania, such Jewish

participation in the democratic project may also be seen as a significant, and under-studied,

extension of Jewish Reconstruction, not confined to the voting booth and parliamentary debates,

but a unfolding on a daily basis on the "Jewish street."

"Not a National State But a State of Nationalities"

Amid regional chaos in the final months of World War I, leaders of the Lithuanian national

movement, who had been operating under the auspices of the Taryba, or Lithuanian National

Council, declared independence in February 1918. Jews around the world took note of

Lithuania's independence. Supporters of autonomy saw a culmination of decades of political

activism in Russia; advocates for minority rights saw Lithuania as a model to integrate Eastern

Jewry into Western Europe; and organizations such as the Joint Distribution Committee and the

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society closely monitored the country's economic situation. Orthodox

Jews, including many from Germany, saw Lithuania as the Ashkenazi religious heartland in need

of protection, while some Zionists saw Lithuania as a testing ground for experiments in Jewish

statecraft. In the first decades of the twentieth century, then, Lithuanian Jews were under

pressure to both preserve centuries-old characteristics and undergo sweeping and experimental

changes. German Jews, many of whom had recently had memorable encounters with *Ostjuden*

during the war, were especially keen to the potential of this very Jewish, and seemingly idyllic,

land. One observer wrote, "No economic and cultural surface friction, or economic or cultural

opposition, exists at all between Jews and Lithuanians; racial mania and religious intolerance

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[241] Foner, *Reconstruction*, xxv.

never plagued the hearty, untouched peasantry."[242] Another writer asked, "Who are the Litvaks?" in a four-part series in *Neue Jüdische Monatsheft*, in 1918, in which he laid out the unique qualities of Lithuanian Jewry.[243]

Many Jewish observers were interested in assessing economic conditions and legal standing of Lithuanian Jewry. According to a fall 1918 report by a Stockholm representative of the *Comité des délégations juives* – a watchdog group that reported to the Peace Conference and was led by early Zionist activist Leo Motzkin (1867-1933) – "'Lithuania' is a complicated idea and it has its special Jewish aspects. Like all the other States separated from Russia Lithuania (however her frontiers may afterwards be defined) is not a national state but a state of nationalities."[244] After making this passing reference to Otto Bauer, the report went on:

> But the complication goes still further – there is no definite national majority in the country which would also form the absolute majority of the population in the country. Along with the Lithuanians, there live in Lithuania Poles, Jews and White Russians (not to speak about the very small number of Great Russians and Germans who politically are of no importance). There importance of the Polish and Jewish minorities in Lithuania is largely increased owing to the part they play in the economic and social life of the country.[245]

Benzion Kogan visited Kaunas for the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) in September 1919 and wrote a bleak report called, "The Situation of the Jews in Lithuania." He wrote, "When you consider the whole situation of the Jews in Lithuania, you draw the following conclusions: the Jews' economic foundation changed completely during the war [...] The German occupying

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[242] Leo Rosenberg, "Die Juden in Litauen," *Neue Jüdische Monatshefte*, Year II, vol. 17, June 10, 1918, 390. See also Rosenberg, *Die Juden in Litauen: Geschichte, Bevölkerung und Wirtschaft* (Berlin: Verlag der Neuen Jüdischen Monatsheft, 1918).

[243] Otto von Zwiedineck, "Die Litwaki," *Neue Jüdische Monatsheft* 14 (April 1918): 319-327.

[244] Lucien Wolf Papers, YIVO, RG 348, F161a, "The Jewish Question in Lithuania and the Coming Treaty of Peace," September 17, 1918, 21054.

[245] Ibid.

power and now the Lithuanian government have monopolized the most important commodities [.

. .]"[246] The JDC had struggled to send aid through the proper diplomatic channels to Jews in

Lithuania during the German occupation and was eager to help. Chiara Tessaris has noted that

"The JDC happened to be one of the very few international organisations with a clear

understanding of the real Lithuanian political situation, which is remarkable when one considers

that when the Paris Peace Conference started in January 1919 international public opinion knew

very little about it, and even less about the Lithuanian cause for independence, and was

constantly influenced by Polish and Russian views on this Baltic country."[247]

Jewish rights in general, and a system of cultural autonomy in particular, captivated

diplomats such as Lucien Wolf, who, by 1920, "assumed almost complete control over the Jews'

minority diplomacy."[248] Wolf served as a British representative to the Paris Peace Conference

and, as a firm critic of Zionism, had a "nemesis" in the *Comité*, whose leaders, such as Leo

Motzkin, would soon devote their efforts to the Zionist cause more directly.[249] Although highly

partisan on the home front, Minister of Jewish Affairs Max Soloveitchik emphasized the

establishment of "schools in which Yiddish or Hebrew are the media of instruction" while at the

same trumpeting Jewish participation in the national cause.[250] In a 1920 interview with the

Jewish Chronicle of London, he declared, "You ask me what Lithuania has done for the Jews. I

prefer to put the question in a different way. The Lithuanian Jews have co-operated cordially

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[246] YIVO, RG 348, F161a, "Die Lage der Juden in Litauen," 21070-21071 (11-12).

[247] Chiara Tessaris, "The war relief work of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Poland and Lithuania, 1915–18," *East European Jewish Affairs* 40, no. 2 (August 2010): 140.

[248] Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 283.

[249] Ibid.

[250] "Lithuania and the Jews," *Jewish Chronicle* (London), October 15, 1920.

with other classes of the population in the fight for Lithuanian independence, and the Jewish question as such has not arisen."[251]

Jews began to travel to Lithuania in waves after the war, following encouraging reports by journalists, *Feldrabbiner* and others who helped establish German-language schools for Jews in Kaunas and other Lithuanian towns. These mostly German Jews regarded Lithuania as a distant cousin in need of Enlightenment and aid and, at the same time, as an admirable bastion of authenticity and tradition. German Jewish army chaplains had established soup kitchens, schools, and other institutions in Lithuania. Dr. Rabbi Leopold Rosenak, of Bremen, even facilitated the reopening of the Slobodka Yeshiva in January 1916.[252] Indeed, one Lithuanian Jewish leader once said, "I am sure that if it had not been for the [Germans] Joseph Carlebach and Rabbi Dr. Rosenak, we would have lost the Yeshiva of Slobodka and all other yeshivas."[253]

Many travelers were young men from Germany and the United States seeking out traditional knowledge in the famous yeshivas within the Republic of Lithuania, such as Slobodka, Telzh and Ponovezh, in the cities of Kaunas, Telšiai and Panevėžys, "where they supped at the fount of 'authentic Jewish learning,'" in the words of Steven Aschheim.[254] The German student became such a fixture of the yeshiva in this era that Lithuanian Yiddish writer Chaim Grade included such a character in his novel, *Tsemakh Atlas* (translated into English as

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[251] Ibid.

[252] See *Programm der Jeschiwah 'Knesseth Jissroel' in Wiliampol-Slobodka bei Kowno* (Kaunas: Druckerei des Oberfehlshabers Ost, 1916), 1-19.

[253] R. Reuben Grodzowsky, as quoted in R. Naphtali Carlebach, *Joseph Carlebach and His Generation: Biography of the late Chief Rabbi of Altona and Hamburg* (New York: The Joseph Carlebach Memorial Foundation: 1959), 86. For more on Carlebach and Rosenak in Kovno, see Tracey Hayes Norrell, "Shattered Communities: Soldiers, Rabbis, and the *Ostjuden* under German Occupation, 1915-1918," PhD Dissertation, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2010, 139-144.

[254] Steven A. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 211.

The Yeshiva). Other young German Jews came not to learn but to teach, including Kaethe

Hollaender, one of Gershom Scholem's good friends, who taught at a Jewish high school in

Lithuania before ultimately moving to Palestine.[255] German Jews also worked in Lithuanian

government institutions, and not only of Jewish autonomy. Dr. Leo Deutschlander, of Berlin,

worked for the Ministry of Education. Viennese activist Nathan Birnbaum, sent as an emissary of

the Agudah to Kaunas in early autumn 1919, epitomized the desires of some elements of these

travelers when he declared, "I will not leave Lithuania until I have made all Lithuanian Jews

religious!"[256]

Although Vilnius was the first capital of Lithuania, it was captured by the Soviets in

January 1919, after which the city traded hands between the Red Army and Polish forces during

the Russian-Polish border wars. Vilnius and the surrounding region were finally occupied by

General Lucjan Żeligowski's army, which designated the territory the Republic Central

Lithuania until it was formally incorporated into Poland in 1922, and exhibited a favorable

attitude towards the area's Jews.[257] In the meantime, the Lithuanian government retreated to its

"temporary capital" of Kaunas, where Jewish political activists began to congregate in hopes of

advancing Jewish rights and culture through the democratic process.

The early 1920s have been called the "golden" age" of Jewish autonomy in

Lithuania.[258] The government oversaw the legalization of a nationwide network of Jewish

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[255] Pierre Bouretz, *Witnesses for the Future: Philosophy and Messianism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 247.

[256] Jess Olson, *Nathan Birnbaum and Jewish Modernity: Architect of Zionism, Yiddishism, and Orthodoxy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 269. Birnbaum left, unsuccessful, after a few months. See also "Vegn a redn fun Dr. Birnboym in Kovne," *Dos Vokhnblat*, January 2, 1920.

[257] Theodore Weeks, "Between Poland and Lithuania: Jews and the Vilnius Question, 1918-1925," in *A Pragmatic Alliance*, 216.

[258] E.g., Mendl Sudarsky, "Yidn in der umophengiker lite," in *Lite* (1951), 135.

communities which reported, through local representatives, to a central office of the Ministry of Jewish Affairs. Representatives sought the Ministry's help over issues such as securing funding and mediating disputes. Communal representatives also met at a series of annual public congresses in Kaunas to debate everything from taxation to fundraising to the role of political ideology in their communities. A Jewish National Council, formed in 1920, monitored the efficacy of autonomous institutions.[259] At the same time, the Lithuanian intelligentsia was hopeful that, beyond autonomy, Jews in positions of power would gravitate towards a purely Lithuanian cultural position. In 1922, Mykolas Biržiška, signatory of the 1918 Lithuanian Declaration of Independence, noted with pride, in his introduction to Hirsh Rutenberg's monograph on Lithuanian writer and "prophet of Lithuanian revival" Simonas Daukantas, that Rutenberg was "the first Jew who is not only interested in our struggle for a national movement (we have more of them) [...] It shows that the public outlook of Lithuanian Jewish society is increasingly Lithuanianizing, and it will not be too difficult for its intelligentsia to familiarize itself more, get closer to, and support not only our state but our national effort."[260] But Šarūnas Liekis has argued that autonomy "became the modus vivendi, even the alpha and omega, for cooperation between the pro-independence Lithuanian movement and the Jewish politicians in the Lithuanian territories of the former tsarist empire."[261]

Leo Motzkin, as representative of the World Zionist Organization, telegraphed to the Jewish National Assembly in 1922, "Fifteen million Jews are watching your experiment in the struggle for national rights."[262] Dubnow acknowledged the significance of Jewish autonomy in Lithuania by sending a letter to the National Assembly in 1923 comparing the body to the

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[259] *Der yidisher national-rat in Lite: barikht vegn zayn tetikayt 1920-1922* (Kaunas: Darbas, 1922).

[260] G. Rutenbergas, *Simanas Daukantas: Lietuvių atgimimo pranašas* (Kaunas: [?], 1922), 3.

[261] Šarūnas Liekis, "Lithuanians and Jews in 1914-1918," 115.

[262] See Polonsky, "The New Jewish Politics," 46 and Gringauz, "Jewish National Autonomy," 236.

historical Council of Four Lands, the Jewish political entity in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.[263] Lithuania, he declared, with its promising political situation for the Jews after World War I, was like the "ark after the flood." Some Jews who traveled to the young republic reported an Edenic state of affairs. Tsivyon, the pen name of Ben-Tsion Hoffman, visiting Lithuania from the United States, highlighted its democratic ideals when he wrote, "Lithuania, what a country! An ideal democracy with equality, freedom and brotherhood and Jews lived there as in the Garden of Eden, as in a true *Eretz-Yisroel*."[264] Hoffman added:

> In my good Bundist years I dreamed so much about Jewish cultural-national autonomy. And here was a country where the Jews received such autonomy, so how does one not travel to see it? . . . As the first modern Jewish cultural, national autonomy and one had to see how it looked.[265]

For writers from the Soviet Union, such as Aleksander Mukdoyni, democratic Kaunas was simply "a Garden of Eden."[266] Kalman Zingman, a literary light of Kaunas who founded the Berlin-Kovno Press, based in both eponymous cities, returned to Kaunas because of what he termed to be the "Edenic" possibilities of Jewish cultural life in Lithuania.[267] Jakub Wygodski, a Minister of Jewish Affairs, wrote in his memoirs, "Kovno Lithuania was a paradise in

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[263] As quoted in L. Shimoni, "Di natsionale farzamlung in Lite," in *Lite* (1951), 253.

[264] Tsivyon, "Mayne tsvey bazukhn in der litvisher melukhe," in *Lite* (1951), 1294-1295. For another later Jewish American traveler's account, see A. A. Sacks, *An Excursion to Lithuania* (New York: Hudson Bay Press, 1934).

[265] Ibid.

[266] Mukdoni, "A yor in der litvisher melukhe," in *Lite* (1951), 1077.

[267] See Gennady Estraikh, "Utopias and Cities of Kalman Zingman, an Uprooted Yiddishist Dreamer," *East European Jewish Affairs*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2006): 31-42 and Kenneth Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution*, Chapter 2.

comparison with Vilna Lithuania."[268] Minister Soloveitchik even predicted, "Lithuania is the creative source of future forms of Jewish living."[269] And yet the structure and goals of autonomy would be contested among Lithuanian Jews.

Folkists and "Jewish Democracy"

On the evening of July 19, 1921 a group of twenty Jewish writers and intellectuals gathered in Kaunas to discuss an intervention into the literary and political culture of the young Lithuanian republic. The meeting brought together figures of diverse origins, a number of whom had come to the Lithuanian capital from the Soviet Union after the tumultuous nation-building experiments and Russian civil war of the previous years. Some of those present arrived in Kaunas from Moscow, such as theater critic Aleksander Mukdoyni and journalist Yitzhak Leyzerovitch; others were local Lithuanian Jewish writers, such as Peysekh Markus; the Switzerland-based folklorist Immanuel Olsvanger, best known for his collection of Jewish humor, *Röyte Pomerantzen*, first published in 1921, was also present. But the core of the group consisted of Yiddish writers and political activists who had decamped to Kaunas from Soviet Kiev. Nokhem Shtif, Kalman Zingman, Jacob Lestchinsky, Dovid Bergelson, Leyb Kvitko, Zelig Kalmanovitch and Ben Adir had already honed their skills as a well-defined "group" of cultural collaborators in Kiev who sought, in 1920, after the pogroms of 1919 – at least initially – to move en masse to the United States.[270] The hastily scrawled minutes of the meeting, which are found in YIVO's archive, show

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[268] As quoted in Mendelsohn, *On Modern Jewish Politics*, 221-222.

[269] Gringauz, "Jewish National Autonomy," 237.

[270] See letters signed by those mentioned above, along with Eliashiv, Elias Tcherikower, Jacob Latzki-Bartholdi, et al., republished in "Briv fun Bal-Dimyen, Bal-Makhshoves, Dovid Bergelson, un Dr. Chaim Spivak," *Yidishe kultur* 7, issue 1 (January 1945): 55-57.

how this group came together over shared values of Jewish autonomy and democratism, along with strong support for the use of Yiddish, and tried to apply them to their current situation in Kaunas. At the meeting, they debated the political and social outlook of their circle and discussed the role of Jewish languages in the service of their cause. These figures, and others who would soon join them, pulled together various ideological strands of Jewish thought and transformed them, through action, into the emergent movement of Lithuanian Folkism, an essential component to the Jewish Kulturkampf of the interwar period.

Debate over the nature of the goals of the meeting, and, by extension, of Yiddish culture in Lithuania and, indeed, around the globe, was vigorous from the outset. Isidor Eliashiv, the Hebrew and Yiddish writer from Kaunas better known as Bal-Makhshoves, presided over the meeting.[271] At age 48, he was already the éminence grise of Lithuanian Jewish letters, and on this day he called for the formation of a committee, including Bergelson, Leyzerovitch, and others, to organize the present writers into an official organization. After this announcement, Shtif immediately interjected: "First we simply need to take a vote on 1) what is the purpose of the organization 2) who can become a member of the organization 3) its main activities 4) vote on the member dues."[272] Journalist Yoel Slonim then asked, "Are we bearers of culture [kultur-tregers] or are we each man for himself?" Lestchinsky said that the group "first and foremost needs professional goals," after which Eliashiv called for drawing up some statutes to register the group, and expand on the statutes later. Lestchinsky retorted, "What would you write in a temporary statute?"[273] After arguing over whether the group would have professional or cultural goals, Bergelson spoke up, saying, "We can't talk of a purely professional organization. We must help to develop culture, to lift culture. In the current moment, when it's very necessary to create

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[271] YIVO RG2, F1570, 70971-70977. Below I cite the document's pagination.

[272] Ibid., 2-3.

[273] Ibid., 3.

a corner of Yiddish culture, you can't speak only of professional goals." After a vote, the group

adopted a name that reflected its purpose: "The Organization of Jewish Journalists and Writers

from Lithuania Pursuing Professional-Cultural Goals."[274]

Soon Shtif raised the question again of who could join, prompting a debate about

whether those writing in Yiddish and Hebrew would be on equal footing in membership. "What

does Yiddish literature mean?" asked Y. Feinberg.[275] Leyzerovitch, perhaps the only active

Zionist present, declared, "We are not Yiddishists and not Hebraists [. . .] This is not a question

for us, it's only a question for the street – Yiddish represents the <u>street</u>, Hebrew not everyone."[276]

Mukdoyni said, "I'm with Feinberg. Here there is simply a majority of Yiddishists – or we also

don't exclude Hebrew writers." Dovid Cohen proposed a vote on two possibilities: that the

organization would represent all writers who use the Jewish letters, and that all of the

organization's public appearances would be conducted in Yiddish. Both votes passed.

Eliashiv then called for the publication of a collection of art and writing by the group.

"The collection will also have a political value," he said, "showing Lithuanians our attitude

towards the fight for autonomy." He added that half of the proceeds could go to "general

Lithuanian goals" and half towards the organization. Mukdoyni and Shtif pushed to create an

editorial board for the collection which, in Shtif's words, would be "dedicated to Lithuania"

[gevidmet Lite]. Zingman, who was originally from Kaunas, thought it would need "not only

those writers passing through, but also locals [ortike]."[277] The group was sensitive to how they

would be perceived by the Lithuanian public. Rosenbaum told the group that in the "upper

Lithuanian echelons" people say Jews speak mostly Russian and therefore contribute to the

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[274] Ibid., 3-4.

[275] Ibid., 4.

[276] Ibid., 5.

[277] Ibid., 6-7.

Russification of Lithuania. He said "it is important that the organization of writers and journalists put out a call to the Jewish community to not speak Russian" in public.

Yashe Rosenbaum, a poet, made the meeting's final comment, telling the group, "The Lithuanian poet [Liudas] Gira came to us" and asked for an article on Yiddish literature for a Lithuanian journal." Gira was a Social Democratic Lithuanian writer who was known to attend the Yiddish theater and maintained ties to Jewish cultural figures in Kaunas. Indeed, the first issue of *Nais*, the newspaper that the group would put out in August 1921, a month after this meeting, would contain the first installment of a series by Gira on Lithuanian literature, just below a story by Bergelson. Gira wrote in that essay, "The editors of *Nais* arrived at the good idea to familiarize their readers with the life of the Lithuanian people, with their culture, and especially with their literature, which reflects the best of its folkways, its ideas and its social aspirations."[278]

Whether or not the group achieved some its loftier goals to define Yiddish culture in Western Europe, one of the immediate outcomes of the meeting was the founding of *Nais*, which became the organ of the Lithuanian Folkspartey. *Nais* was spearheaded by Mukdoyni and Shtif, with close collaboration by Kalmanovitch, Ben Adir, and others, to spread their particular political and social messages. Folkism had been envisioned by Dubnow and his followers as a "big tent" party that prioritized highly local issues. *Nais*, according to its masthead, declared itself to be "independent and democratic" [umparteyishe-demokratishe], and formulated a variety of Lithuanian Jewish politics that – sometimes rightly, sometimes self-righteously – criticized state political actors, including Jews, to uphold democratic principles. It emerged in 1921 at a critical and uncertain period in Lithuanian political history: the capital had recently retreated from Vilnius to Kaunas as part of an ongoing border dispute with Poland that was under

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[278] Liudas Gira, "Di litvishe literatur," *Nais* no. 1, August 19, 1921, 3.

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discussion at the League of Nations, and the constitution, which some hoped would contain special provisions for minority rights, was still being written. On top of this, the coalescence of Zionist clout on the stage of international diplomacy presented challenges to the goals and efficacy of minority rights legislation in new European states such as Lithuania. The *Nais* circle sought to insert itself into the internally Jewish debates about the nature of Jewish life in Europe, and Jewish communal relations with the Lithuanian government – in so doing, it made a bête noire out of the General Zionist daily newspaper, *Di idishe shtime*.

Aleksander Mukdoyni (1878-1958), né Kappel, was *Nais*'s first editor. He was a noted theater critic from the Minsk region who, after spending almost a decade in Western Europe, had earned a doctorate in labor law in 1909 from the University of Bern. In Russian political circles he had a reputation for having a "this-worldly" [eylem ha-ze-nik] mentality, and he associated with a cadre who "focused their energies on bettering this world through institution-building."[279] Mukdoyni arrived in Kaunas with other Jewish writers and intellectuals who had befriended Jurgis Baltrušaitis, a Lithuanian who wrote primarily in Russian and who, as president of the Russian Union of Writers, had made good friends among the Russian Jewish literati. When Baltrušaitis was made the Lithuanian ambassador to Moscow, in 1920, he became a source of visas to writers looking to leaving the Soviet Union. Most were headed to Berlin, but the Yiddish writers' sojourn in Lithuania served as a formative transition from theoretical to practical Jewish democratic activism. Mukdoyni remembered thinking, upon arriving in Kaunas and hearing about the Jewish National Council and Minister of Jewish Affairs, "I'm travelling to a Jewish state, almost."[280]

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[279] Jeffrey Veidlinger, *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 1-4.

[280] Aleksander Mukdoyni, "A yor in der litvisher melukhe," in *Lite* (1951), 1076.

Mukdoyni was not alone in having this first impression of Jewish politics in the Republic of Lithuania. Ben-Tsion Hoffman, whose penname was Tsivyon, visited Lithuania from the United States in 1921 and remembered, "Of all the countries I had decided to visit on my trip, Lithuania, the Land of Israel in the diaspora, as people tried to name it, was one of the most important, almost as important as Land of Israel itself […] In my good Bundist years I dreamed so much about Jewish cultural-national autonomy. And here was a country where the Jews received such autonomy, so how does one not travel to see it? As the first modern Jewish cultural, national autonomy one had to see how it looked."[281] For Hoffman, like the Folkists, the allure of Lithuania was not only its prominent place in Jewish memory but also its newly implemented regime of "democracy with equality, freedom and brotherhood […] Jews lived there as in the Garden of Eden." Upon arriving in Kaunas, Hoffman visited the offices of the institutions of autonomy, which he found impressive. But he was surprised that autonomy was "under the control of the Zionist party," writing in a memoir of the trip: "The Zionist party, whose whole theory was of a renouncement of work in the 'golus,' could see no more in Jewish autonomy in Lithuania than preparatory work for Palestine," especially through Hebrew-language school system.[282]

Like Hoffman, Mukdoyni was disappointed by the Zionist cast of Lithuanian autonomy. Mukdoyni found Kaunas to be a typical provincial city with a "Misnagdic hoo-ha."[283] But, unlike Moscow, there was no food shortage, and with a small stipend provided to him and other members of the budding "writers' colony," he bought new clothes and spent long days strolling the streets and arguing with peers in cafes. He drank with old friends, such as Shtif, and made new acquaintances among the Zionist leadership, such as Minister of Jewish Affairs Max

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[281] Tsivyon, "Mayne tsvey bazukhn in der litvisher melukhe," in *Lite* (1951), 1294-1295.

[282] Ibid., 1296.

[283] Mukdoyni, "A yor in der litvisher melukhe," 1082.

Soloveitchik (later Menahem Solieli), *Di idishe shtime* correspondent Leyzerovitch, also known as Isidor Lazar, and head of the Jewish National Council, Shimshen Rosenbaum.[284] It was in this period, he remembered, that he engaged in a long and passionate conversation with Rosenbaum about autonomy and found that, although Rosenbaum had traveled with the Lithuanian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, he was pessimistic about autonomy's prospects in Lithuania. "The skepticism was based on incredible farsightedness but also in a Zionist Weltanschauung," Mukdoyni wrote.[285]

Despite attempts from international entities to shape the terms of Lithuanian-Jewishness at this time, two parties had emerged – Folkists and Zionists – which claimed to speak for all Jews and pinned their future on the Lithuanian present. The newly arrived Yiddish writers were uninterested in Zionist cultural activities in Kaunas, but rather "wanted to get to know the Lithuanians, their culture and their literary and basic artistic aspirations." It was out of a combination of intellectual frustration and refugee boredom that *Nais* was born. Mukdoyni remembered: "One day I was stopped in the street by Yashe Rosenbaum, a young man from Vilnius, a half poet and whole cultural activist, who said to me with the utmost frankness, 'Why do we want to hang around here like we don't matter, let's put out a newspaper.'"[286] Mukdoyni was inspired by Rosenbaum's enthusiasm and threw himself into the work of publishing a non-Zionist paper.

The newspaper's humble name, *Nais* – "the News" – belied its intellectual nature. (Yudl Mark, a *Nais* editor, would later recall it as a "newspaper that was too rich and too fat for the

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[284] Ibid., 1076-1077, 1079.

[285] Ibid., 1079.

[286] Ibid., 1086.

small Jewish community of Lithuania to digest such a luxurious dish.")[287] *Nais* took a two-pronged approach to Lithuanian Jewish affairs, highlighting both local conditions and also championing the lofty ideals of democratism. In this way, the first issues of *Nais* pick up where the 1919 *Lite* left off. Kalmanovitch published an essay in the first issue titled, "Coming Home," in which he gushed over the romantic place Lithuanian shtetls have for the Lithuanian Jewish diaspora, even in such far-flung locales as New York. Kalmanovitch described the Lithuanians this way: "Side by side with the Jewish community [eyde yidn] lives a silent, honest, hardworking people [. . .] With this people, the true master [balebos] of the country, Jews live in true friendship, working for one another, bound together in practical life as only neighbors can be."[288] Uriah Katzenelenbogen contributed his trademark take on folksy Litvak life within the paper's first couple of weeks, adding to the sense that *Nais* might hold a sanguine view of Lithuania Jewish history and social issues.[289]

But *Nais* also put its more expressly political stance front and center, showing that its editors felt the state of affairs was far from perfect. The first issue demanded to know, in a front-page editorial, "Where is Jewish democracy?" and "Where is this people's democracy?"[290] Essays criticized local Zionists' cozy relationship with organizations such as Keren Hayesod and

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[287] Yudl Mark, "Yidishe periodishe oysgabes in lite," in *Zamlbukh lekoved dem tsvey hundert un fuftsikstn yoyvl fun der yidisher prese, 1686-1936*, ed. Jacob Shatsky (New York: YIVO, 1937), 268. See also Rafael Chasman, "Ha-sifrut ve-ha-itonot ha-yehudit ba-lita" in *Yahadut Lita* vol. 2 (Tel Aviv, 1972), 249-250, 256.

[288] Zelig Kalmanovitsch, "Az m'kumt aheym," *Nais* no. 1, August 19, 1921, 4.

[289] See also Uriah Katzenelenbogen, "Fun unzer literarishe vinkl in Lite," *Der Oyfkum* (New York) vol. 2, no. 5, May 1927, 27.

[290] "Vu iz di idishe demokratye?," *Nais* no. 1, August 19, 1921, 1.

the Joint and demanded more attention to calls for the availability of education in Yiddish. An ad proclaimed, "*Nais* is the only democratic newspaper in Lithuania."[291]

The Folkspartey that coalesced in Kaunas shortly after Lithuanian independence brought together independent activists who because of the disruptions of the war, and the direction that Soviet politics had gone, had become detached from the political movements to which they had dedicated decades of activism, including, Bundism, socialism, the Russian Democratic Folkspartey, and left Zionism. The new arrivals in Kaunas were drawn as much by the possibilities for Yiddish culture as they were for Jewish autonomy. Lestchinsky, for example, while being a territorialist, had long argued for the concept of a strong personal autonomy. Gennady Estraikh has summarized his views: "Citizens are entitled to become members of the Jewish (and for that matter any other national) communal structure, which has a representation in all decision-making and executive institutions of the state. The community is secular (albeit it also takes care of its religious minority) and is governed by a democratically elected national parliament. It controls predominantly the cultural domain of national life – the educational network, publishing, libraries, theaters, and museums – which secures the preservation and further development of the nation."[292] Zingman was also a firm believer in Jewish autonomy who theorized an "Edenic" autonomous state in his fiction.[293] In Lithuania he found an

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[291] *Nais* no. 7, August 29, 1921, 1.

[292] Gennady Estraikh, "Jacob Lestschinsky: A Yiddishist Dreamer and Social Scientist," *Science in Context* 20-22 (2007): 221.

[293] For more on *Di Vispe* and Zingman, see Z. Feygin, "Notitsn fun a Vispenik" *Vispe* Year II (October-December 1923), 38-41. See also Gennady Estraikh, "Utopias and Cities of Kalman Zingman, an Uprooted Yiddishist Dreamer" *East European Jewish Affairs* 36:1 (2006); Kenneth Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), Chapter 2; and Akvilė Grigoravičiūtė, "Jidiš literatūra tarpukario Lietuvoje (1918-1940): savasties paieškos," *Colloquia* 29 (2012) and "Yiddish Literary Life in Interwar Kaunas," *Jewish History Quarterly* 4 (2014).

opportunity to spearhead communal projects, such as the literary group and journal, *Di Vispe*, which rejected the "fetishism of the 'I'" in favor of the collective.[294]

The Folkspartey also included a strong contingent of activists who were originally from Lithuania, including Mendl and Alte Sudarsky, Esther Eliashiv – Bal-Makhshoves's sister – and Oyzer Finkelstein, who returned there from studies or work abroad, or military service in Russia, to help build autonomy in a Folkist key at home. Folkists hoped that this system would be written into the Lithuanian constitution and put into practice with state support. Mendl and Alte Sudarsky, a couple whose Kaunas home on Ožeškienė Street would become a salon for cultural activists, were among those who joined the Folkist ranks after the foundation had been laid.[295] On her first day after arriving in Kaunas in the summer of 1921, future Lithuanian Folkist leader Alte Sudarsky, a longtime Folkist who spent the teens in Petersburg and Harbin, saw a flyer announcing a meeting of the Folkspartey. She went to the meeting on Tatar Street and found Shtif, Kalmanovitch, Mukdoyni, Ben Adir, Finkelstein, and others, and was swept up in their movement. "Jews then needed to help the Lithuanians build up an independent state," she remembered about this heady period, "and put meat on the bones of Jewish autonomy."[296]

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[294] Goda Volbikaitė, "Jidišakalbių literatūrinių sambūrių savikūra tarpukario Kaune: *Vispe* ir *Mir Aleyn*," *Darbai ir Dienos* 57 (2012): 77.

[295] See Mendl Ladski, "Dr. Mendl Sudarski," in *Lite* (1965) and Yankev Oleiski, "Dr. Mendl Sudarski," in *Yahadut Lita* vol. 2.

[296] Alte Arsh-Sudarski, "Er hot gezayet kultur: etlekhe zikhroynes-verter vegn Dr. Aleksander Mukdoyni," *Heymish* (Tel-Aviv), Year 3, no. 30, December 5, 1958 and Rubin Rubinstein, "Alte Sudarsky," in *Lite* (1965), 49-52.

Here or There?

Among the Lithuanian Jews who returned home to engage in Jewish politics was Yudl Mark.

Mark, who grew up in Palanga, on the Baltic Sea, had gone to Petersburg at the end of 1915 to

study Yiddish with a group of Folkists living at Rizhsky Prospekt 220: Shmuel Niger, Yisroel

Efroikin, Kalmanovitch, and Shtif.[297] In 1916 Mark attended an OPE "tsuzamenfor," where he

heard debates between Diasporists and Zionists about the future prospects of Eastern European

Jews, and met Dubnow, whom he began to see as the "rebbe" of Folkism who needed followers

to carry out his ideals.[298] Like Finkelstein, who would become the Lithuanian Folkists' elder

statesman and representative in parliament, Mark moved from Petersburg to Kaunas in the

summer of 1918.[299] In Kaunas, Mark was instrumental in creating the Folkspartey and *Nais* and

he engaged, over the course of the early 1920s, in increasingly bitter polemics with local Zionist

political activists. By the early 1920s, Mark was already on the frontlines of the language

debate, having waged a battle against the disestablishment of his Yiddish gymnasium in

Ukmergė by authorities who wanted to create a Hebrew-language school there. Mark had

founded his school in 1920, before the implementation of government-sponsored Hebrew-

language schools. An observer remembered that when the government "created an extensive

network of Hebrew and Zionist schools across the country, Ukmergė was the *only* city that

secured a Yiddish gymnasium, a school where the language of instruction was not only Yiddish,

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[297] Transcript of Yudl Mark interview with Gershon Winer, 8.

[298] Ibid., 9-12, 35.

[299] Eglė Bendikaitė, "Finkelšteinas Ozeris," in *Lietuvos Steigiamojo Seimo (1920-1922 Metų) Narių Biografinis Žodynas*, vol. II, 140-142

but which was actively anti-Zionist in spirit."[300] (A Hebrew gymnasium would be founded in

1922.) While Dubnow was in town, he would court the great historian every Shabbos, visiting

Kaunas from Ukmergė to go on long walks with him.[301] In his glowing biography of Dubnow

Mark wrote that he heard Dubnow say repeatedly on these walks that he wanted to stay in

Lithuania. "For us Folkists," Mark remembered thinking, "it would be a powerful win."[302]

In a 1972 interview with historian Dov Levin, Yudl Mark claimed, "In *Nais* these terms

were coined which later extended to other countries – *doikayt* [hereness] and *dortikayt*

[thereness]."[303] Levin asked, with evident surprise, "It all came from *Nais*?" Mark explained:

> "All from Lithuania. I will tell you how it came about. [Aleksander] Mukdoyni was the
> editor of *Nais*, Shtif was a contributor, Kalmanovitch was a contributor, there were other
> contributors, and they kept saying how good it was and how fair everything was in
> Ukraine, and that in Lithuania things were not as they ought to be. At that time there was
> a columnist at the *Di idishe shtime* named [Y. A.] Leyzerovitch. Leyzerovitch wrote a
> feature article, "We the Tarabeynishkers" – at home in Tarabeynishok. Tarabeynishok
> was a kind of tiny shtetl, and he called the Folkists "the Tarabeynishkers." So I wrote:
> "Not true, the Folkists are those who are linked with Lithuania, come from Lithuania;
> they live in harmony with their Lithuanian leaders. We are the *doike* [those from here]
> and the others are the *dortike* [those from there]."[304]

Levin countered, "But they became very well-known terms." Mark replied, "*Doike*, *dortike* –

because the Bundists in Poland absorbed them." Mark added that Max Soloveitchik, the Zionist

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[300] Tuvia Liebowitz-Arieli, "Ha-gimnasiyah ha-ivri 'Or' b-Vilkomir," in *Yahadut Lita* vol. 2, 152.
Emphasis in original.

[301] Yudl Mark, Zikhroynes fun Yudl Mark (1972) transcription, unpaginated [183-184].

[302] Yudl Mark, *Simon Dubnow* (New York: Education Committee of the Workmen's Circle, 1962), 77.

[303] Dov Levin, "Jewish Autonomy in Inter-War Lithuania. An Interview with Yudl Mark," in *Polin:
Studies in Polish Jewry* 14 (2001), 209. I correct this English translation for accuracy and clarity. For a
published partial transcript of the Yiddish original, see Dov Levin, "Intervyu mit Yudl Mark vegn
yidisher politik in Lite, 1919–1923," in *YIVO bleter*, New Series, vol. 2 (1994): 162. For this passage in
the full transcript, see ICJ, file no. (12) 254 (17 October, 1972), 29-30.

[304] Levin, "Jewish Autonomy in Inter-War Lithuania," 209.

Minister of Jewish Affairs, "wanted to exploit his *doikayt* for *dortikayt*," indicating that Soloveitchik intended to leverage Lithuanian government resources towards supporting projects that fostered statist Zionism. In another interview recorded by Mark's daughter, Riva, Mark similarly stated that the terms "*di dortike*, *di doike*, *dortikayt* and *doikayt*" emerged from a feud between his paper and *Di idishe shtime*, and he claimed to have popularized them himself. "*Di dortike* and *dortikayt* was Zionism," Mark told his daughter, "and *di doike* and *doikayt*, that's non-Zionism, let's say."[305] Mark also once told Gershon Weiner, "The most important thing about Folkism was not abstract ideas but serving the people as it exists, as it is here, and to have in mind its current interests."[306]

Yitzhak Leyzerovitch (1883-1927), also known as Isidor Lazar, was a journalist who lived in Kaunas from 1920-1922 and did engage in polemics with Folkists centered around a fictional place called Tarabeynishok.[307] While there is no apparent reference to *doikayt* in the Tarabeynishok exchanges, their timing, in May of 1922, is significant: Mark associated the origins of *doikayt* with a period in which Zionists and Folkists were heatedly debating the practical and theoretical outlines of autonomy under the watchful gaze of Dubnow himself, who arrived in Kaunas that month and was considering accepting an invitation to serve as Chair in Jewish History at the University of Lithuania. In the Spring of 1922, when representatives to the Lithuanian Constituent Assembly, the precursor to the parliament, were writing the constitution, autonomy's future was unclear. The government had appointed Soloveitchik to the position of Minister of Jewish Affairs, and the ministry's leadership roles filled up with other Zionists.

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[305] Zikhroynes fun Yudl Mark, 1972, unpaginated [183 f.] I thank Leyzer Burko for sharing his transcription of this interview with me.

[306] Interview with Gershon Weiner, 3. Emphasis in original transcript.

[307] See for example, Hoykh politik, in: Nais no. 206 (109), 7 May 1922, 2; Der Tarabeynishker, Kleyner feuilleton. Mayn psevdonim, in: Nais no. 210 (113), 22 May 1922, 3 and Memini. Gedeynkt!, in: Di idishe shtime no. 114 (813), 23 May 1922, 3.

Discussions of the constitution's chapter on national minorities began on April 5, 1922 and considered a proposal, put forth by the Jewish ministry, to include articles specifically related to Jewish legal autonomy.[308] Just five days later, Soloveitchik resigned "when it became evident [to him] that the constitutional amendments proposed by the Jewish faction were not going to pass."[309] Although Soloveitchik would continue to serve as Minister "without portfolio" until end of 1922, he became increasingly partisan in his politics, in particular over the autonomous Jewish school system, for which he and other Zionists envisioned Hebrew schools. Around the same time, of course, in a closely watched process, the League of Nations was preparing to confirm a Mandate for Palestine.

While the Tarabeynishok episode showed how petty the infighting among Jewish political camps could be, the Folkists continued to level the serious grievance that the Zionists in control of autonomy had made the Jewish autonomous schools a network of Hebrew schools: Yavneh, for religious pupils, and Tarbut for Zionists. Mark at this time was head of the Yiddish high school in Vilkomir, one the only Yiddish schools in Lithuania in the early 1920s. Because it existed in Vilkomir before the nationwide implementation of the school network, the head of the education section of the Ministry of Jewish Affairs, Dr. Berger, sought to close Mark's school and open one affiliated with Tarbut.[310] Although Dov Levin has argued that the Jewish Ministry and National Council "avoided getting embroiled in the 'Language War,' which was being

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[308] Liekis, *A State within a State?*, 153. See also Danutė Blažytė-Baužienė, Krikščionių demokratų ir liaudininkų koalicijos žlugimas [The collapse of the coalition of Christian Democrats and Populists], in: Česlovas Laurinavicius (ed.), Lietuvos istorija [History of Lithuania], vol. X, part I. Nepriklausomybė 1918–1940 [Independence], Vilnius 2014, 491–494.

[309] Liekis, *A State within a State?*, 181. See also Vladas Krivickas, The Coup D'Etat of 1926 in Lithuania, PhD Dissertation, Columbia University 1971, 107 f.

[310] "Mayse Vilkomir," *Nais* no. 136, August 10, 1922, 3; "Vilkomirer skandal" in *Nais* no. 137, August 11, 1922, 5.

fought out in Lithuanian Jewish society between those who favored Yiddish and those who felt that Hebrew should be the Jews' national language," in fact the Minister of Jewish Affairs, the education attaché and others actively sought to implement their political agenda through this issue.[311] Shtif put forth a number of arguments against this in *Nais*, arguing that it violated the Lithuanian constitution, which guaranteed education for minorities in their mother tongue; citing pedagogical theory that instruction is most effective in the student's mother tongue; and wondering if the Lithuanian government would allow Poles to open a school system that used Latin. Even Shmuel Niger weighed in from New York, complaining, "In the 'National Council,' the Jewish Ministry and the whole affair of the Jewish National autonomy are in the hands of the Zionists [. . .] Along come the Zionists, who are opponents of the *golus* on principle, and become the tone-setters?"[312]

Although Shtif was from Volynia, he took to the task of building Folkism and national autonomy in Lithuania with gusto, even writing repeatedly, with sympathy, about the particular history of the Lithuanians and their linguistic and cultural oppression under the Czar.[313] But at the same time that the Folkists pushed a message of unity with Lithuanians, they attacked the Zionist establishment that was directing the institutions of autonomy, and Shtif here led the charge as well. In January 1922 he brought to the pages of *Nais* a rhetorical dichotomy of diaspora and Palestine that pitted here [do] against there [dort, dortn] and which would play a role in a defining clash of Zionism and Folkism a few years down the road. Here, Shtif lamented the lack of fanfare at the establishment of Yiddish studies in the Advanced Courses in Kaunas –

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[311] Dov Levin, *The Litvaks: A Short History of the Jews of Lithuania* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2000), 147.

[312] "Golus-arbet II," *Nais* no. 127, July 30, 1922, 2.

[313] See for example *Yidn un yidish* (Warsaw, 1920), 89 and "Vilne un Lite" in *Lite* (Kaunas, 1922)

the precursor to the University of Lithuania – where a little over 29% of students were Jewish.[314] At the same time, Shtif had watched a parade in Kaunas in honor of the planned Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He compared "higher education 'here' [do] and 'there' [dortn], claiming that Zionists are interested in investing in secular institutions only in the Holy Land while making a mistaken alliance with the religious Akhdes party in Lithuania. "For 'there' [dortn], in Dreamland – enthusiasm and substance; for here [hi], for the home – ordinariness and spirituality."[315] Zionists, he argued, are interested in building "only for 'there,' for 'their' objective, and here for the godforsaken 'golus' they become mere men of spirituality." Zionists, argued Shtif, who was religious and Sabbath-observant, are interested in building "only for 'there,' for 'their' objective, and here for the godforsaken 'golus' they become mere men of spirituality." In another article, he introduced into Lithuanian Folkism a particular phrase to describe Zionist dual loyalty: double bookkeeping. Autonomy in the hands of Zionists meant, "outwardly – autonomy is an organic part of the state; internally – a ghetto, a protection *against* the state, against its possible personal demands."[316]

In 1918, in the Petersburg *Folksblat*, the Russian Folkspartey's organ, Shtif argued, "Ukraine, which recognized the rights of the Jewish people to national autonomy, which has in its government a Jewish national minister, has demonstrated that we have something to show for ourselves here."[317] In *Jews and Yiddish*, published in Warsaw in 1920, Shtif again employed this theme at length. "Now another argument has been put forth against Yiddish, and of course an arch-nationalistic one: Yiddish came to Jews in 'golus' and, just as the 'golus' can have no

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[314] Audronė Janužytė, "Historians as Nation State-Builders: The Formation of Lithuanian University, 1904-1922." PhD Dissertation, University of Tampere, 2005, 206. On these courses, see 198-212.

[315] Nokhem Shtif, "Rukhnies. Vegn di yidishe hoykhkursn in Kovne," *Nais* no. 26 (122), January 30, 1922, 2.

[316] Nokhem Shtif, "Haynt un lakhrayes-hayomim," *Nais* no. 47 (143), February 24, 1922, 3.

[317] Nokhem Shtif, "Vaysrusland," *Folksblat* (Petersburg), Nos. 1-2, January 20, 1918, 9.

survival, Yiddish will of course become null and void. And just as one needs to free oneself from the 'golus', one also needs to free oneself from the 'golus-language' (i.e., Yiddish)."[318] Shtif then mimicked the voice of the Zionists: "There, on the hills of Zion, we will renew our old prophet-language, just as in days of old, and here in 'golus,' it doesn't matter [. . .] *We need to sacrifice Jewish children here in 'golus' for the sake of the dream of the Holy Land. For the sake of the dream of an old-new Hebrew people that shall one day be restored in the Land of Israel!*"[319]

In fact Shtif, like Dubnow, was not against the creation of a Jewish state. The Folkspartey was the culmination of Shtif's long career of political activism that began with an early flirtation with Zionism, after which he cofounded the Vozrozhdenie group, with Ben Adir and Moshe Silberfarb, in 1903, and the Democratic Folkspartey, with Efroikin and Latzky-Bartholdi, in 1917. Vozrozhdenie had "advanced the long-term goal of resettlement in a Jewish territory [while] their short-term solution to the Jewish problem was to promote Jewish cultural autonomy and the creation of a Jewish parliament within Russia."[320] Silberfarb remembered that the issue of presentism was at the fore of Vozrozhdenie's 1908 general meeting: "The conference started to untangle the knot of psychological and logical contradictions that was wrapped around the question of 'work in the diaspora' [golus-arbet]. The majority of the conference thoroughly questioned the whole story of contempt for the diaspora, pointing out that, for the working masses, great and important life's work remains right in the 'miserable diaspora.'"[321] Silberfarb

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[318] Shtif, *Yidn un yidish*, 22.

[319] Ibid., 58.

[320] Barry Trachtenberg, *The Revolutionary Roots of Modern Yiddish, 1903-1917* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 38. See also Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 279-280.

[321] M. Silberfarb, "Di grupe 'Vozrozhdenie' (vi zi iz antshtanen un zikh antviklt)," in *Gazamlte shriftn* vol. 2 (Warsaw-Paris: Silberfarb Fund Press, 1937), 85-86.

wrote that they resolved that Jews should "fight for national rights in the countries where they live in large numbers."

In May of 1922, at the 18th session of the League of Nations in Geneva – to which Leyzerovitch was a correspondent for *Di idishe shtime* – Lithuania made a declaration of Jews' rights to cultural autonomy, protection to not work on the Sabbath and education in their mother tongue. This latter issue became a sticking point in debates between Zionists, and Folkists, who focused on the fact that Hebrew was not Lithuanian Jews' mother tongue. After arriving in Kaunas, Dubnow tried to remain above the fray, at least at first. At a reception for him at the Mapu Library, Dubnow called himself a Lithuanian Jew who was returning home and happy to build the country.[322] But fighting between Folkists and Zionists in their respective newspapers, which had been going on, he remembered in his memoir, since he had arrived in Lithuania, apparently crossed a line. "I happened to put all my energy into peace between the warring parties," he wrote in the memoir, so he authored an article addressing "the party conflict over autonomy and language."[323] Dubnow would write in his memoir that, while in Lithuania, "[I] put all my energy into peace between the warring parties," specifically over "the party conflict over autonomy and language."[324] While sick in bed, in Kaunas, Dubnow wrote an open letter to the Folkists, saying it wasn't "*bashert*," or meant to be, for him to get in the middle of political arguments, wishing only that they "organize a healthy and strong basis for a Folkspartey in

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[322] See Dubnow memoirs op. cit. and Atamukas, *Lietuvos žydų kelias*, 137

[323] *Dos bukh fun mayn lebn* vol. 3, 17, 343. See also *Kniga zhizni*, 485-486 and Verena Dohrn, "State and Minorities: The First Lithuanian Republic and S. M. Dubnow's Concept of Cultural Autonomy," in *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews*, ed. Nikžentaitis, et al. (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2004), 164.

[324] Simon Dubnow, *Dos bukh fun mayn lebn: zikhroynes un reyoynes*, vol. 3 (New York-Buenos Aires: All Jewish Culture Congress, 1963), 17, 343. See also Dubnow, *Kniga zhizni*, 485-486 and Verena Dohrn, "State and Minorities: The First Lithuanian Republic and S. M. Dubnow's Concept of Cultural Autonomy," in *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews*, 164.

Lithuania, create that political center, which should serve as cement between the best ideas of right and left, and not allow for a terrible war among parties."[325] Dubnow had arrived in Kaunas in May and was considering accepting an invitation to serve as Chair in Jewish History at the University of Lithuania. Since his arrival he had tactfully balanced the competing attention for him and his blessing on local political affairs. Dubnow was greeted at the train station by the Zionist leadership – Soloveitchik, Julius Brutzkus and Rosenbaum, the president of the Jewish National Council –along with a group of Jewish scouts who accompanied the professor to his hotel, where they proceeded to sing "Hatikva."[326] At the same time, the Folkists vied for Dubnow's endorsement. Shtif and Kalmanovitch, after all, were Dubnow's Yiddish translators.

The political fights that had perturbed the visiting éminence grise of autonomism gave rise to a discourse over "here" and "there" that paved the way for *doikayt*. It was Shtif who brought out the here-there dichotomy in *Nais* in 1922. A cofounder of the Vozrozhdenie group, in 1903, and the Democratic Folkspartey, in 1917, Shtif arrived in Kaunas in 1921 after serving for a year in the Ukrainian government and quickly joined the ranks of *Nais*. Despite his roots in Ukrainian Volynia, Shtif took to the task of building Folkism and national autonomy in Lithuania with gusto, even writing, on more than one occasion, with sympathy about the particular history of the Lithuanians and their linguistic and cultural oppression under the Czar.[327] Shtif had in fact deployed the here-there rhetorical maneuver as early as 1910, in a long article published under his penname, Bal-Dimyen, in the Vilna review *Folk un land*. In this article, "Zionism and the National Idea," Shtif repeatedly used phrases such as "here in *golus*"

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[325] "A briv fun Simon Dubnow," *Nais* [date illegible], letter dated May 16, 1922.

[326] Verena Dohrn, "State and Minorities: The First Lithuanian Republic and S. M. Dubnow's Concept of Cultural Autonomy" in *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews*, eds. Alvydas Nikžentaitis, Stefan Schreiner and Darius Staliūnas (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2004), 163.

[327] See for example Shtif, *Yidn un yidish*, 89 and Shtif, "Vilne un Lite," in *Lite* (1922).

while referring to Zion as "there," and argued for greater investment in the diaspora.[328] In 1920 he would lament Hebrew instruction's "sacrifice [of] Jewish children here in 'golus' for the sake of the dream of the Holy Land."[329]

The first occasion in which Shtif used "here" and "there" in this way in Lithuania was in January of 1922, in an article in which he lamented the lack of fanfare at the establishment of Yiddish courses at the University of Lithuania, while noting that he had watched a parade in Kaunas in honor of the planned Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He compared "higher education 'here' [do] and 'there' [dortn]," claiming that Zionists are interested in investing in secular institutions only in the Holy Land while making a mistaken alliance with the religious Akhdes party in Lithuania. "For 'there' [dortn], in Dreamland – enthusiasm and substance; for here [hi], for the home – ordinariness and spirituality."[330] Shtif, who was religious and Sabbath-observant, argued that Zionists are interested in building "only for 'there,' for 'their' objective, and here for the godforsaken 'golus' they become mere men of spirituality." In another article, he introduced a phrase to describe Zionist dual loyalty that would recur in the context of *doikayt*: double bookkeeping. Autonomy in the hands of Zionists meant, "outwardly – autonomy as an organic part of the state; internally – a ghetto, a protection *against* the state, against its possible personal demands."[331]

In May, Shtif returned to the here-there theme and expanded on it in the first installment of a series called, "On Forgotten Things: Zionism and 'Golus'-Politics," published under his given name in *Nais*. Shtif argued that Zionists build institutions in the diaspora only to see if they

[328] Nokhem Shtif, "Der tsienizm un der natsionaler ideya," in *Folk un land* (Vilna, 1910). A manuscript version of this essay dated 26 April 1910 can be found in Shtif's papers, YIVO, RG 57, Box 1, F 3022.

[329] Nokhem Shtif, *Yidn un Yidish*, 58.

[330] Nokhem Shtif "Rukhnies: vegn di yidishe hoykhkursn in Kovne," *Nais* no. 26 (122), January 30, 1922, 2.

[331] Nokhem Shtif, "Haynt un lakhrayes-hayomim," *Nais* no. 47 (143), February 24, 1922, 3.

will work in the Holy Land. "So let's say outright about Zionism, too: the better it gets for the Jewish class in 'golus,' the more Jews will desire Zion and the more possibilities they will have to achieve such a thing, no longer needing, in the Zionist conception, to insert 'here' and 'there' ['do' un 'dort'] ('golus' and Zion) instead of the socialist 'now' and 'later'; two words change – no more."[332] Shtif broke this dichotomy down further:

> "Either my home is here [do], where generations have worked and struggled. Where Jews have built houses and led regular lives. So therefore I'm staying; I will refine and beautify this home together with other peoples, here we will raise generations and renew our life, every class of Jews in its own way.
> Here is our fortress and our hope.
> Or my home is there [dort], in the land of dreams; here I am a stranger, a superfluous person, or a citizen on condition; here I stand where the least wind can knock me down; [. . .] So what is there to speak of, of a struggle in *golus*, for better or worse, especially after such state-building as national autonomy, whose fundamental essence is rooted in the thought that this is for generations to come and for the country [land] and that this country is my home and my future?"[333]

Shtif thought that Lithuanian Zionists, including the politicians appointed to government ministries, did not wholeheartedly believe in autonomy, and that they even secretly would be happy if it came to an end: "If autonomy fails, the loyal Zionist won't know if he should lament the defeat or celebrate a victory, because when push comes to shove there is actually a bit of consolation to see that Zionism is actually right, and that the 'golus' has nothing left to give, even as a formality." Shtif referred to the "psychological contradiction" whereby Zionism "has its head in 'golus' and its heart in a distant land" as "keeping two sets of books of the soul [doplte neshome-bukhalterye] in its *golus*-program." There was a kernel of truth to Shtif's assertion. Yitzhak Gruenbaum (1879-1970), one of the theoreticians of *Gegenwartsarbeit*

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[332] Nokhem Shtif, "Vegn fargesene zakhn: tsienizm un 'golus'-politik," part I, *Nais* no. 208 (111), May 19, 1922, 3.

[333] Ibid.

Zionism, wrote in his memoir, "When Soloveitchik was asked why he was willing to abandon Lithuania [in 1923], he answered that his work building up Jewish cultural autonomy in Lithuania was finished and he now he wants dedicate his energy to building up Eretz Yisroel, to the realization of Zionism."[334] Yosef Berger, the head of the Jewish school system under autonomy, would recall, after the war, "We Zionists always considered Eretz-Yisroel to be the only land where the Jew had a secured future, and national autonomy in the diaspora countries was for us not the end goal but a temporary, intermediate goal. We knew that autonomy in the diaspora was a patch on a torn shoe."[335]

Mark also took up the here-there pairing in 1922, in a book-length treatise arguing for a unified and apolitical school system. He took particular issue with what he saw as Zionist indoctrination in the Hebraist schools, which Mark understood to be the de facto outcome of the "Synthetic Zionism" proposed at Helsingfors.[336] He wrote:

> "Autonomy is contradictory to Zionism. If you build here – it means you can still build in *golus*. It's not as desolate and barren as you make it out to be. 'Synthetic Zionism! We're building here for there!' Just as, for religious Jews, this world is an antechamber to the next, the real world, so is autonomy a traveler's inn [akhsanye] or a way-post on the road to Zion."[337]

Mark argued in the same book that most Tarbut supporters don't expect to Hebraize the diaspora, but rather, in his expression, cultivate fruits for export. "First of all," he wrote, "from where is it deduced that *ad maiorem gloriam* of Hebrew not here, but far, far away, in that holy land, Yiddish must be exterminated here, in the sinful *golus*?"[338] The Zionist school, according to

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[334] Yitzhak Gruenbaum, *Fun mayn dor* (Tel Aviv: Makor, 1959), 370-371.

[335] Berger, "Di idishe natsionale oytonomye," 231.

[336] On "synthetic Zionism" see Gringauz, "Jewish National Autonomy," 228.

[337] Yudl Mark, *Aynhaytlikhe folk-shul* (Kaunas-Šiauliai: Likht, 1922), 9. See also 92.

[338] Ibid., 68.

Mark, was too utopian and not connected to the realities of Lithuanian Jewish life. "A school is not an artistic orangery," he wrote, "it is a natural garden, with natural air."[339] Mark had already cited the word *akhsanye*, or traveler's inn, which Jacob Robinson used in the title of his book on Hebrew schools. Then, in a comment that anticipated his future public debate with Robinson, Mark added, "How piquant it is that the representative of Tarbut ideas, Dr. Robinson, at the last general meeting of Jewish communities here in Lithuania, thoroughly endorsed this long-antiquated view point. And the foundational thought of his whole *torah* was (as far as the newspaper report can be understood) that the school needs to withdraw from life…"

Mark also appeared conflicted in his attitude towards Zionism. On the one hand, like Shtif and Dubnow, he made it clear at this time that he was not against Jewish settlement in Palestine per se, even after the Mandate for Palestine was confirmed by the League of Nations that July. "A diaspora nationalist cannot be on principle hatefully set against a Jewish settlement in Palestine," Mark argued in July 1922. "He says only that this settlement has no greater worth to him than a Jewish settlement anywhere else."[340] To Mark, the existence of systems of autonomy in Lithuania, however imperfect, gave the country a special place in global Jewish politics: "After the inclusion of national autonomy in the Lithuanian constitution, the Jewish people possess two organized communities: Lithuania and Palestine." At the same time, he continued to hammer away at the here-there rhetoric that saw Zionist control of autonomy as a fundamental contradiction. He wrote an article called "Autonomy without Autonomists" at the end of July in which he phrased the Zionist position this way: "We must move away to our own land in order to remain a people. Here [do . . .] we build on sand. But in order to build a city of refuge [ir miklat] for ourselves, we need to organize the people. We need to learn a little Hebrew,

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[339] Ibid., 78.

[340] Yudl Mark, "Golus natsyonalizm un der mandat" *Nais*, [July 1922].

too, and get accustomed to statehood [medineshaftlekhkayt]. We only need to build something

here in order to properly prepare the people for the happy there [dortn]."[341]

The early 1920s saw increasing Jewish engagement with Lithuanian language and

culture and in the political process – about 55,000 Jews voted in elections for the first Seimas in

November of 1922, which resulted in the creation of a Jewish bloc in parliament.[342] But

institutions of autonomous experienced growing pains. In protest against the failure to create

religious schools under the auspices of the Jewish Ministry, Akhdes, the religious party, resigned

from the Jewish National Council and boycotted communal elections in February of 1923.

Mukdoyni, the editor of *Nais*, would later muse that Soloveitchik was not a good politician but

"too good of a Zionist, and that was fatal, perhaps, for Jewish autonomy, which he

personified."[343] After Soloveitchik's resignation, and an unpopular attempt to replace him, the

Ministry of Jewish Affairs was dismantled in June of 1923. The following month, Yiddish- and

Polish-language signage was officially banned, creating an ominous mood on the Jewish

street.[344] The Jewish National Council met for the last time in September of 1924, following

leader Shimshen Rosenbaum's resignation. (Two of the autonomous institutions, the school

system and Jewish *Folksbank*, remained operational, and a Jewish faction still caucused in the

Seimas.) Shtif, for his part, had given up on the promise of "folks-demokratye" and had left

Lithuania later in 1922. "It is clear," he wrote in December of that year, "that Jewish Lithuania is

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[341] Yudl Mark, "Avtonomye on avtonomistn," *Nais* no. 123, June 25, 1922, 2.

[342] On Jews' engagement with the Lithuanian language, see for example Anna Verschik, "The Lithuanian-Language Jewish Periodicals *Mūsų garsas* (1924-1925) and *Apžvalga* (1935-1940): A Sociolinguistic Evolution," in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 25 (2012), 295-296.

[343] Aleksander Mukdoyni, "A yor in der litvisher melukhe," in *Lite* (1951), 1078.

[344] Mendl Sudarsky, "Yidn in umophengiker Lite," in *Lite* (1951), 142-143.

in a regime of *Zionist occupation*."[345] But in 1926, under rapidly changing political conditions, autonomy appeared to be a possibility again, although one whose structure and goals would be no less debated.

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[345] Bal-Dimyen, "Di natsionale avtonomye un di idishe parteyen," *Dos naye lebn* (New York), Year 1, vol. 3 (December 1922), 29. Emphasis in original.

Chapter Three:
From Bulota's Cap to Smetona's Pen: Lithuanian Jewry and the 1926 Coup D'état

On the morning of Sunday June 13, 1926, a train carrying Nokhem Shtif from Berlin to Kiev stopped in Kaunas. His friends and former Folkspartey colleagues were waiting for him at the station, and when Shtif disembarked during the short visit, they greeted him with some fanfare and presented him with an inscribed book in colorful wrapping paper. Before the train took off again, Shtif spoke passionately to his friends about the cultural work for Yiddish underway in the Soviet Union, where he was soon to take a position as lecturer in Jewish history and literature at the university in Kiev, directing them to write about it in the newspapers.[346]

A few hours later, a workers' demonstration erupted in the center of the Lithuanian capital. The previous day, over seventy political prisoners who had sat in jail for three years were acquitted of charges of anti-state activity after a month-long trial. The prisoners were members of a political group called the *darbininkų kuopa*, or "Workers' Collective," which ran leftist candidates in local and national elections.[347] The exoneration of the *kuopininkai*, or "Collectivists," would be used by the newly elected government to justify an Amnesty Act, in July, that freed political prisoners; the exoneration was also framed as part of a broader commitment to democratic principles, along with abolishing press censorship and martial law, the latter of which had been officially in place since 1919. Upon being released from the gates of the "Yellow Prison" on Kęstutis Street, on the last day of the trial, a dozen *kuopininkai* leaders were greeted by a cheering crowd that ushered them through the city, eventually convening at the

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[346] See "Nokhem Shtif (Bal Dimyen) durkhgeforn Kovne," *Kovner tog* no. 37, June 15, 1926, 3 and "N. Shtif," *Nais* no 4 (316), June 18, 1926, 3.

[347] For a recent study of this group see Vaidas Grinčalaitis, "'Darbininkų kuopos' – demokratijos išbandymas Lietuvoje 1922–1926 m." MA thesis, Vytautas Magnus University (Kaunas), 2016.

People's House, where the freed men sat on a dais in the packed hall for a long afternoon of speeches in favor of the liberalizing direction of the new government.[348]

Emboldened by the release of the *kuopininkai*, demonstrators again marched through Kaunas on Sunday June 13, this time behind several red banners.[349] By some accounts, there were as many as three thousand participants. After gathering in front of City Hall, the crowd burst into the building's main meeting room, interrupting a conference of Social Democrats and calling for everyone to come to the streets. The meeting cleared. Once outside, protesters were confronted by police, who tried, unsuccessfully, to disperse the growing crowd. While police became entangled with some of the demonstrators, several of the freed prisoners jumped onto a City Hall balcony to rile up the people below.[350]

Then, hoisting a flag emblazoned with the words, "Long Live the Lithuanian Socialist Republic," demonstrators marched down Vilnius Street, past the Presidential Palace, and into the

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[348] For accounts of the events of June 12, see "Neleistini ekscesai," *Lietuva* no. 129 (2218), June 14 1926, 1; "Pirmieji revoliucijos simptomai," *Rytas* 129 (721) June 13, 1926, 1; "'Arbeter-grupe' fray-geshprokhn," *Kovner tog* (no 36), June 14, 1926, 1; "Paliuosuotųjų kuopininkų sutikimas," *Kuopininkų byla*, June 13(?) 1926, 1, in Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, UDK 329.15 (474.5); Ignas Gaška, *Kovų augintiniai* (Vilnius: 1968), 178-182. The speeches given that day were reprinted in *Kuopininkų byla*, 1-4.

[349] For the events of this day I synthesize a number of sources, including: B., "Nokh der bafrayung," *Kovner tog* no. 36 (June 14, 1926), 3; "Neleistini ekscesai"; "Komunistų demonstracija Kaune," *Rytas* 130 (720), June 15, 1926, 1; Grinčalaitis, "'Darbininkų kuopos,'" 56; "Di zuntikdike manifestatsiye," *Kovner tog* no. 37 (June 15, 1926), 3; Gaška, *Kovų augintiniai*, 182-183; *Lietuvos TSR istorija* v. III, ed. A. Gaigalaitė, et al. (Vilnius: Mintis, 1965), 175-176; and Michael Kohrs, *Die Litauische Nationale Union: Porträt einer (Staats-) Partei: Die Litauische Nationale Union (LTS) und ihre Bedeutung für das autoritäre Regime der Zwischenkriegszeit in Litauen 1924 bus 1940* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012), 115-116.

[350] Four of the freed men went to Panevėžys that day, where they were greeted by supporters at the train station with similar songs, marches, and police intimidation. See "In Lite: Ponevezh," *Kovner tog* no. 38 (June 16, 1926), 4.

New Town singing worker's songs such as the Polish "Warszawianka." Mounted police tried to cut off the protesters at Laisvės Alėja, the city's main boulevard. A crowd including numerous soldiers and Christian Democrats had gathered to watch. As the marchers began to sing the "Internationale," some of the demonstrators ran past the onlookers, demanding they remove their caps; if they did not remove their caps, onlookers were told, their caps would be knocked off. General Jonas Jurgis Bulota, a seventy-one-year-old veteran of the Lithuanian war of independence, was in the crowd, and his cap was widely reported to have been knocked off his head.

When General Bulota's cap flew off it set in motion a series of events that would upend the Lithuanian political order. The dishonoring of General Bulota became a sensation in the Lithuanian press, and one of the military's justifications for the coup d'état that it would orchestrate at the end of the year. The *kuopininkai* rally has been called "the first signal" of the country's political trouble, and reports about General Bulota "did much to precipitate deep feelings of hostility toward the government on the part of the army officers."[351] President Kazys Grinius would later write that General Bulota told him that, while he was indeed hassled by demonstrators, his cap was not knocked off; Mykolas Krupavičius, a priest and leading Christian Democratic member of parliament, also recalled that, according his memory of the event and another "trusted source," there was no such incident involving General Bulota's cap.[352] But in the eyes of the Lithuanian press, and segments of the public, proof of a leftist threat in Lithuania was evident in the July 13 rally, and the crux of the rally was the public humiliation of a general.

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[351] See Adolfas Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona and His Lithuania* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 154 and Vladas Krivickas, "The Coup D'Etat of 1926 in Lithuania," PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1970, 187 n. 1. On low military morale, see also Robert A. Vitas, *Civil-Military Relations in Lithuania under President Antanas Smetona 1926-1940* (Chicago: Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, 2004), 30-31.

[352] See Grinčalaitis, "'Darbininkų kuopos,'" 56 and "1926 metų gruodžio 17-toji," *Draugas* (Chicago) no. 300, 1956, as cited in Krivickas, "The Coup D'Etat," 187.

The day after the demonstration, the front page of *Lietuva*, the Lithuanian government's official daily newspaper, announced, "We express compassion for the innocent victims of the uncouth mob, first and foremost for our senior soldier and awakener of our nation, General Bulota."[353]

But in an expanded account of the June 13 rally published later in the same issue of *Lietuva*, and in other reportage in the Lithuanian press, the day's events were given a Jewish cast. Those waiting by the prison for the release of the *kuopininkai* were, according to *Lietuva*, "mostly Jews with bouquets."[354] Although a number of political prisoners were released that day, the article only mentioned one by name – the Jewish prisoner, Josifas Kalenda, and it also identified him as Jewish. "Some of them then jumped from the window of the City Hall meeting room to the balcony," the article reported. "The Jew Kalenda also jumped out and began to shout in a full voice against the government, calling them executioners, murderers and other names. Most of the Jewish mob shouted 'Hoorah!,' 'Down with the police!,' etc." *Lietuva* noted that demonstrators carried three red flags with Yiddish writing, and one with Russian, and Kalenda addressed "all 'brother-workers'" in Yiddish and Lithuanian. Kalenda, a native of Mažeikiai, in the far northwestern part of the country, had previously run on the *darbininkų kuopa* ticket in 1922, and would often be publicly identified as Jewish.[355]

The incident with General Bulota's cap was given the same treatment in the press. "The crowd was at least two-thirds Jews," *Lietuva* wrote, "mostly young Yids and Jewesses, students […] While demonstrating they shouted to people [in Russian]: *snimat shapki*, take off your cap,

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[353] "Leistini ekscesai," *Lietuva* no. 129 (2218), June 14 1926, 1.

[354] "Kuopininkų viešas pasirodymas Kaune," ibid., 1.

[355] See for example undated (1926?) poster in Arkadijus Bliuminas, *Žydų frakcija Lietuvos seimuose, 1920-1927 m.* (Vilnius: 2003), plates 9-10. For more on Kalenda (1893-1962), see "Kalenda, Joselis" in *Tarybų Lietuvos enciklopedija* v. 2 (Vilnius: 1986), 182 and I. Gaška, *Kovų augintinai* (Vilnius: Vaga, 1965), 45. See text of untitled speech by "Comrade Kalenda" in *Kuopininkų byla* (Kaunas: June 1926), 2-3. He also wrote under the nom de guerre, Kampis.

and to police they shouted to give back their red banners." As the gang confronted one man and demanded that he remove his cap, the man replied, "For whom? For the Jews?" The gang hit him in the face, but he escaped. Jewish women also fought, the paper stated. Demonstrators then "attacked General Bulota, the elderly laborer for the nation respected by every Lithuanian. They demanded he remove his cap. He didn't even understand how you could demand a serviceman to remove his cap. The hooligans then jostled him, knocked off his cap and went on with their spree."

The weekly journal of the national Rifleman's Union, *Trimitas*, went even further. A few days after the march, it reported about "anti-statist elements" on its front page: "Mostly Jews, leading the freed political prisoners from court, singing the Bolshevik 'Internationale' in Russian; hassling bystanders, demanding they take off their caps in front of the hooligan gang."[356] An article inside the issue elaborated on the events, saying political prisoners were met, at their release, by "Jewish gangs" and that on the second day of demonstrations, it was "the same *kuopininkai* and similar types to them, almost all Jews," who gathered at City Hall.[357] Along the march route, "Yids and Jewesses ran past the gathered citizens, hysterically screaming, '*Snimai furashku*' [Rus: Take off your cap!] and knocked them from people's heads. Hats were even taken from soldiers. Many of the hooligans said it in such a way that their teeth even clattered. Most of these excesses were undertaken by the Jewish Athletic Club and students from the Yiddish gymnasium."[358] (Other papers reported representatives of the Jewish sports club, Jėga ("Strength.")[359]

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[356] *Trimitas* no. 23, June 17, 1926, 1.

[357] In "Įvairios žinios," ibid., 735.

[358] Ibid., 736.

[359] See "Komunistų demonstracija Kaune," *Rytas* 130 (720), June 15, 1926, 1.

The message was not lost on *Trimitas* readers. The following issue ran a statement from a detachment of the Fourth Rifleman's Brigade that read:

> Having learned that, with the release from prison of *kuopininkai*-Communists, and that during the events of June 13 of this year, they insulted the veteran of our national revival [tautos atgimimo], the elderly General Bulota, it means that, for him, in the name of sympathy, we ask the government to take measures so that similar incidents do not degrade the name of our nation [tauta] again.[360]

Darbininkas, the newspaper published by the Federation of Labor, called the rally "the first appearance of Bolshevik revolution in Kaunas."[361] After mentioning the Bulota incident early in its coverage, *Darbininkas* claimed that not only were most participants Jews, but also "standing by houses and on balconies, Jewish faces beamed with unusual reverence […] Those Jews who expressed this joy, i.e., the Bolsheviks, slowed traffic and cars, creating a traffic jam, and hit in the head Lithuanians who did not remove their caps."

This event had ramifications well beyond the Kaunas's Laisvės Alėja. It activated both the far right and left, and catalyzed the army to orchestrate a coup d'état, in December 1926, which would put in place a regime that would hold power until just before the Soviet occupation in June 1940. In the summer of 1926, the outgoing American consul in Kaunas, Harry Carlson, made the assessment that, "There are not enough radicals and reds in all Lithuania to cause serious trouble."[362] Indeed, historian Alfonsas Eidintas has noted, "The anti-Bolshevik character of the coup was very much stressed to the Lithuanian public, although no evidence of a real threat to Lithuania from the Soviet Union or local Communists at that time has ever come to

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[360] *Trimitas* no. 24, June 24, 1926, 763.

[361] "Pirmieji bolševikiškos revoliucijos apsireiškimai Kaune," *Darbininkas* no 25 (357) June 20, 1926, 1.

[362] As quoted in Alfred Erich Senn, "Introduction," in *Lithuania in the 1920s: A Diplomat's Diary*, ed. Alfred Erich Senn (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2009), 6.

light."[363] The significance of the *kuopininkai* rally, and in particular the popular account of the insult to General Bulota, is that it exposed a deep anxiety about the weakness of state power, and had as much to do with the potential for a Bolshevik-inspired threat as it did with the perception of upsetting an internally Lithuanian power dynamic, and Jews' role within it. Lithuanian Jews of all political persuasions, as I will show, strongly favored the government that officially began work the day after the *kuopininkai* rally. That government sought better relations with national minorities and planned to reinstate the system of autonomy, opening up a window of hope unseen since the late 1910s, while at the same time setting off electric debates among Jewish party leaders about how autonomy should function. But these reassessments, in the summer and fall of 1926, were made in the context of increasing social and political polarization in Lithuania and throughout Central and Eastern Europe. By the end of the year, Jewish leaders were scrambling to make sense of the erosion of not only autonomy, but the most fundamental institutions of democracy, such as the constitution and the parliament.

Despite the obvious anti-Semitic overtones to the reporting on the incident in *Lietuva*, *Trimitas* and other journals, and the power of these events to lead to an undemocratic regime change, Jews were not singled out as enemies by the government that rode to power in the wake of such public unrest.[364] On the contrary, the new government announced, on circulars distributed throughout Kaunas the day after the coup d'état, that Jews were allies par excellence: "The only minority group which is loyal and which can be worked with are Jews. Jews are asked

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[363] Adolfas Eidintas, "The Nation Creates its State" in *Lithuania in European Politics: The Years of the First Republic, 1918-1940*, ed. Eidintas, et al. (New York: St. Martin's, 1997), 219 n. 37.

[364] On the Judeo-Bolshevik myth in Lithuania, see Saulius Sužiedėlis, "The Historical Sources for Antisemitism in Lithuania and Jewish-Lithuanian Relations during the 1930s" in *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews*, 131; Robert van Voren, *Undigested Past: The Holocaust in Lithuania*, 51 and following and, more recently, Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2015), 63-64.

to remain calm and have trust in the new government."[365] In fact, Antanas Smetona, who would be sworn in as president a few days after the December 1926 coup, had maintained an approving, if limited, stance on Lithuanian Jewry since the early days of the republic, writing in 1922, for example, that Lithuanians should "organize ourselves just as the Jews are organized."[366] Smetona, and his party, the Nationalist Union, developed a relationship with the Jewish community based around the desire for political stability but also demands for loyalty that evoked a medieval dynamic.

This chapter will explore how Lithuanian Jews negotiated the contradictory public discourse about them – both as anti-statist threat and as integral, if not model, national minority – in the watershed year of 1926. The political changes of this year set the stage for the dissolution of parliament, in April 1927, and the rewriting of the constitution in a way that codified the dictatorship, in May 1928. I plot Jewish politics along the local context of polarized rallies and two regime changes, gauging Jewish reactions and responses to the new, and very different, governments. Smetona's government replaced the rhetoric about Jewish inclusion in a multiethnic national project – which was frequently made with reference to the medieval charter that legalized Jewish settlement in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – with a rhetoric that emphasized the conditional nature of the Jewish place in Lithuania. I argue that Lithuanian Jews had to reformulate their relationship to the state several times, and in several ways, in 1926. Nokhem Shtif's brief appearance in Kaunas the day of the *kuopininkai* rally was a coincidence. But it highlights how, while he moved on to yet another future utopian state experiment, most

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[365] As paraphrased in "Vendung tsu yidn – yidn darfn zayn ruik," *Di idishe shtime* no. 288 (2177/8), December 18, 1926), 2.

[366] A[ntanas]. Sm[etona], "Valstybė ir kultūrinė tautos autonomija," *Tėvynės balsas* no. 69, May 14, 1922, 1.

Lithuanian Jews had no such luxury and were forced to rapidly adjust to the political life in the place in which they lived.

Elections!

In the spring of 1926, Lithuania and its larger and more powerful neighbor, Poland, appeared to be on divergent political paths. Marshal Józef Piłsudski, the first Chief of State of Poland's Second Republic, from 1918 to 1922, emerged from political retirement to lead a military coup d'état over three bloody days, May 12-14, 1926, against the rightwing government.[367] In a seeming clash of political positions, Piłsudski was a Socialist, nationalist and romantic in the Mickiewicz model who sought to restore honor to Poland after a series of weak parliaments. Piłsudski had personal roots in the Polish *krejsy* borderlands – his heart is buried in Vilnius next to his mother – and he held grand and near-millenarian ideas about Poland's duty to continue the legacy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, including respect for its multiethnic character. In some Jewish circles Piłsudski drew strong support.[368] To advance his cause, Piłsudski rewrote the constitution a few months after the May coup d'état, and assumed the presidency in the fall.[369] Poland's political turn was an early indicator of a broader movement of illiberal, anti-

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[367] On the regime change, see for example Eva Plach, *The Clash of Moral Nations: Cultural Politics in Piłsudski's Poland, 1926-1935* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), 1-8.

[368] On Jewish support for Piłsudski and his Sanacja government, see for example Daniel Heller, *Jabotinsky's Children: Polish Jews and the Rise of Right-Wing Zionism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 8-9 and 56-58.

[369] See Joshua Zimmerman, "Józef Piłsudski and the 'Jewish Question,'" *East European Jewish Affairs* vol 28, issue 1 (1998): 87-107 and Antony Polonsky, "Piłsudski and Parliament," PhD dissertation, Oxford, 1968.

parliamentary authoritarianism that would sweep the smaller nations of Central, Southern and Eastern Europe in the ensuing decade.[370]

As Poland appeared to be devolving into civil war in the days following Piłsudksi's coup, Lithuanians, by contrast, gathered on May 15 to celebrate the sixth anniversary of the founding of the Constituent Assembly, the first iteration of the country's parliament. In Kaunas, on that day, houses and balconies were decorated with state flags by morning, as crowds gathered to watch a parade that was led – in a remarkable display of the democratic transition of power – by the outgoing president, Christian Democrat Aleksandras Stulginskis.[371] Lithuania had held its third parliamentary election from May 8 to 9, and voted in a government led by a majority coalition of pro-democracy Peasant Populists, represented by new president Kazys Grinius, and Social Democrats, the party of the new prime minister, Mykolas Sleževičius.[372]

The Peasant Populists, or *liaudininkai*, had campaigned on the separation of church and state and on governmental guidance by the Constitution, in rhetoric directed against the Christian Democrats.[373] Public discontent with the previous Christian Democrat-led Seimas had grown as the economy shrank and international relations stalled or worsened. The final straw in the public perception of the ineffectuality of the Christian Democrats had come on April 4, 1926, when Pope Pius XI issued the papal bull, *Lituanorum gente*. This decree established, for the first time, a Lithuanian Catholic Church province separate from Poland, with its center in Kaunas. But the borders of the Church province matched those of the republic, excluding the Vilnius region. The

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[370] Ivan Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 300-302.

[371] B-z, "Der 15-ter may in Kovne," *Kovner tog* no. 14 (May 17, 1926), 3 and B-z, "Af di Kovner gasn," Ibid.

[372] See Danutė Blažytė-Baužienė, "III Seimas ir kairiųjų valdymas" in *Lietuvos istorija*, vol. X, book I, 523-536.

[373] Ibid., 525.

de facto Church recognition of Poland's claims to Vilnius were demoralizing to many Lithuanians and blame was duly place on the leading party, which had negotiated with the Church.[374] In addition, Peasant Populists supported revoking the Sunday Rest Law of 1924, which prohibited work on Sundays and had a disproportionately negative affect on Jewish merchants and businesspeople.

Jews roundly, and even giddily, celebrated the newly elected government and its leaders. After the elections, the Jewish bloc in Parliament issued an appeal for funding, signed by "the Zionist Organization," the Folkspartey and a number of professional groups, that stated, "The entire Jewish population received the news with celebration about the triumph of democracy in the elections of May 8-9. Everyone feels that now the time has come when we can annul all unfair laws that were passed during the leadership of the Christian Democrat reaction (such as the Sunday Rest Law) and turn the Christian Democratic bloc into a destroyed national organization."[375] The positive political developments changed the cultural and social mood. "New winds began to blow on the Jewish street," remembered Yosef Gar, a Folkist writer, about this time.[376] Reuben Rubinstein, an editor of *Di idishe shtime*, would write a rapturous essay on president Grinius's sixtieth birthday, later in the year, called "Our Blessing," in which he proclaimed the president a "Friend of the Jews [with] a broad heart and an open eye [who] sees in the Lithuanian Jews loyal neighbors and fellow citizens of the Lithuanian peasants, who for hundreds of years have lived and suffered as one."[377] In fact, Grinius said as much in his memoirs, in which he noted the role of the Bund in shaping Lithuanian politics in the pre-state

[374] See Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turescu, *Church, State, and Democracy in Expanding Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 103 and Krivickas, "The Coup D'etat," 172-173.

[375] YIVO, RG 2, Box 1, F 23, 1135.

[376] Yosef Gar, "Di Kovner togblat 'Folksblat'" in *Lite*, vol. 2, ed. Ch. Leikowicz (Tel Aviv: Peretz, 1965), 423.

[377] Reuben Rubinstein, "Unzer brokhe," *Yidishe Shtime* no. 2177, 2.

period: "Lithuanians learned from the Jews," whom they "have lived alongside for more than 500 years," Grinius wrote.[378] Yudl Mark would remember, "1926 was our best year [at the Vilkomir gymnasium] because a left Lithuanian coalition returned to power, the coalition of Lithuanian Populists [litvishe folkistn] and Lithuanian Social Democrats [...] The president [Grinius] was a doctor of medicine and an all-around good person [...] The prime minister was Sleževičius, a lawyer who was a good friend."[379] Elsewhere, Mark called this period, "the short era of a real democratic government in the country."[380]

The promise of the restoration of Jewish autonomy, as mandated in the Lithuanian constitution, held the greatest appeal to Jewish intellectuals. On May 18, 1926, *Di idishe shtime* published a jubilee edition in honor of its 2000th issue. In that issue, in an exclusive interview with the newspaper, Zigmas Toliušis, the leader of the *liaudininkai* bloc in the Seimas, told journalist Yisroel Zhofer: "Regarding to the minority question in general, I think the question is not so hard for a true democratic order, when all citizens are equal before the law. Regarding specific minority rights, our program is clear. We hold to the belief that minorities must receive the autonomy that was guaranteed to them in the constitution."[381] Sleževičius would declare on June 26, in one of the Seimas's first sittings, that the new government would "devote all its efforts to guarantee the implementation of articles 73 and 74 of the constitution," i.e., those on the laws of autonomy, adding that "the government will pay special attention to education and questions of culture in general, taking into consideration the demands and needs of national

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[378] Kazys Grinius, *Atsiminimai ir mintys* vol. II (Tübingen: Patria, 1962), 118-120, 145-147.

[379] "Zikhroynes fun Yudl Mark," recorded by Rievele Mark (1972), unpaginated (186-187).

[380] YIVO RG 540, F 382, Yudl Mark Papers, "Di yidishe folkspartey in Lite," n.d., 11.

[381] Y[isroel]. Zhofer, "Vos rekhenen tsu ton liaudininkes," *Di yidishe shtime* (113) 2000, May 18 1926, 3. Zhofer, né Joffe, spoke Lithuanian well and had served as an officer in the Lithuanian army from 1919-1922.

minorities" and specifically the Jews' "cultural affairs."[382] The government, in other words,

appeared prepared to act on its promise of the restoration of Jewish autonomy as part of its

broader project of constitutional orthodoxy.

When the parliament opened on June 2, Oyzer Finkelstein, as the oldest member of the

Seimas, at age sixty-two, was invited to give the opening address. (This honor was apparently

misinterpreted by the Christian Democratic newspaper, *Rytas*, as giving preference to the Jewish

bloc.)[383] Finkelstein, a Folkist, had hoped for a left-leaning, rather than right-leaning,

government, keeping in mind the possibility than a left-leaning government would reinstate

autonomy, and he used his speech to emphasize the central importance, to the parliament and

Lithuanian political identity in general, of governing by the constitution and turning it into a

living document.[384] "It has already been four years since the Constituent Assembly left us its Ten

Commandments, its scripture – the state constitution," he said in his speech. Finkelstein then

likened the state to the design of a building. "There are many structures of political life that the

Third Seimas must, while interpreting the constitution, fill with living content. The constitution

is only the façade of the state structure. The regular meeting of parliaments is the interior

decoration of that same building, so all citizens can live with the same ease, with the same

comfort." The gathering together of "our lands," especially, "our capital, Vilnius" – a comment

that brought applause – will constitute the further adornments of the building in Finkelstein's

extended metaphor. "My deepest wish for the Third Seimas," he concluded, "is that it should

find in itself the necessary strength, the necessary exertion of all efforts, of all living efforts, to

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[382] Krivickas, "The Coup D'Etat," 183. See also Krivickas, Chapter 3 and Saulius Kaubrys, *National Minorities in Lithuania: An Outline* (Vilnius: Vaga, 2002), 63-64. See 1922 Lithuanian Constitution, Section 7, Paragraphs 73-74.

[383] "'Yidish-sotsialistishe regirung' zogt *Rytas*," *Kovner tog* (no 36), June 14, 1926, 3.

[384] "Vos dervartn fun nayem seym Lite biklal un yidn bifrat?" *Kovner tog* no. 1 Apr. 30, 1926, 2.

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set our state once and for all on the path of culture and progress."[385] In the days after his speech, Finkelstein and Sleževičius sat down with a reporter from *Segodnia*, a Russian-language newspaper based in Riga, and Finkelstein returned to some of the themes he had addressed before parliament. "First of all," he told the reporter, "we need to destroy all the old, and then we will have to start constructing the new edifice of a modern, legal, democratic state."[386]

The Third Seimas soon began to initiate democratic reforms. On June 7 it began the process of lifting martial law, which would be completed less than a month later. On June 12th the Peasant Populists put forward a number of far-reaching proposals: abolishing the death penalty; lifting press censorship; support for the freedom of public assembly; and reduction of the salaries of the several ministers and the president himself.[387] It was in this moment of liberalization that the *kuopininkai* took to the streets for their June rally in support of political prisoners. Grinius watched the June 13 demonstration on Laisvės Alėja through Sleževičius's window.[388] While he was wary of the protesters, the new government listened to the people: amnesty for political prisoners would be officially granted July 12.[389]

Jews responded to the new governmental activities not only with hope for the lifting of draconian laws, but also with reconsiderations of the Jewish place in Lithuanian society. At the end of June Grinius delivered a speech in the city of Šiauliai in which he declared, "I am the

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[385] See Yiddish and Lithuanian texts of speech in *Tsum ondenk Oyzer Finkelstein* (Vilkaviškis: Progres, 1938), 220-221 and Lithuanian section, 6, respectively.

[386] As quoted in "Seimo didžiuma rengiasi viską griauti," *Darbininkas* 25 (357), June 20, 1926, 3. *Segodnia*'s Kaunas correspondent was Evgeny Shklyar. On Shklyar, see Maxim Shrayer, *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature*, 442.

[387] Blažytė-Baužienė, "III Seimas," 532.

[388] Grinius's memoirs, as cited by Adolfas Eidintas, *Lietuvos respublikos prezidentai* (Kaunas: Šviesa, 1991), 88.

[389] Krivickas, "The Coup D'Etat," 189-190.

president not only of Lithuanians but also of Jews."[390] Renewed conversations about the implementation of Jewish autonomy prompted discussions about Jews' relationship to the Lithuanian majority, to the state, and to the future of the Jews in Eastern Europe. In May 1926 Jacob Robinson was elected to the Seimas, for the second time, on the Zionist ticket. Shortly after the election, he wrote a searching article in *Di idishe shtime*, for which he then served as a coeditor, on the future of diaspora Zionism.[391] Taking on a triumphant tone, Robinson made a case for the success of *Gegenwartsarbeit* Zionism, and Zionists' approach, above others', to the European political context. "Isn't it natural," he asked rhetorically, "that *davke* Zionists, as consequential supporters of a *national ideal*, in its reading, on a *territorial basis*, have been able to show the maximum understanding of the newly founded *national states*, have seen in them a natural success for a right to self-determination, and have followed the development of the young national state with compassion and sympathy?"[392] Robinson compared Jews and Lithuanians as examples of people who balanced the demands of religious and national identity. Zionism, Robinson argued, represented all Jews and supported a "general Jewish [klal-Yisroel] solidarity." He asked, "Can we split hairs and say, 'From here to there, Zionist – from there and beyond, citizen'? [Mi-kan ve-ad kan, tsienist – fun dan un vayter, birger] No, that's not necessary, because they are one and the same: we carry our Zionist impulses with us in our general work as citizens." Robinson concluded his essay with a remark on Jewish communal unity: "Minority rights, in the deepest sense of the term, means the right to spiritual belonging to all other ethnic groups [folks-zin] in the whole world. Is that not Zionism? This is what Herzl said: 'Wir sind ein

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[390] Yisroel Zhofer, "Af der oysshtelung in Shavl," *Di idishe shtime* 2035, [late June or early July] 1926, 7.

[391] On his parliamentary activities see Eglė Bendikaitė, "Robinzonas Jakobas (Robinzon Jakob)" in *Didysis Lietuvos parlamentarų biografinis žodynas 3* (Vilnius: VPU Press, 2007), 443-445.

[392] Jacob Robinson, "Tsienizm un land-politik" in *Di idishe shtime* 113 (2000), May 18, 1926, 13. Emphases in original.

Volk, *ein* Volk…'"[393] Max Soloveitchik, the former Minister of Jewish Affairs now living in

Berlin, echoed Robinson's argument for Jewish unity in his own contribution to the same issue

(while calling out the Orthodox Akhdes [Unity] party for resigning from the Jewish National

Council). *Di idishe shtime*, Soloveitchik wrote, had, since its founding, proceeded with "one

important belief – the inner unity of the Jewish community. Except for a very small group of

people who had the world 'Akhdes' on their lips, all Lithuanian Jewry has been, throughout the

duration of the entire difficult struggle, one bloc, one will, one unity."[394]

Yudl Mark, Jacob Robinson and "Hereness" in Context

But Jewish unity, it turned out, would remain an elusive concept. While Zionists felt able to rest

on their laurels, Folkists had their own reasons to celebrate the new government and sought a

place at the table. *Nais*, the Folkist organ, resumed publication in May after a two-and-a-half-

year hiatus. The government formally recognized and, in Mark's words, "legalized," a Folkist

Yidishe bildungsgezelshaft, or Yiddish/Jewish Education Committee, which would serve as a

new central organization for the scattered and underrepresented Yiddish-language schools across

Lithuania. At the first Cultural Conference of the *Yidishe bildungsgezelshaft*, held in Kaunas in

June, Dr. Esther Eliashev delivered the plenary speech in which she criticized the previous

approach to "Hebraize the whole Jewish reality of the *golus*, as the Zionists do."[395] Over the

course of the summer and fall, Folkist leaders went on the offensive to establish their particular

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[393] Ibid. "We are a people, *one* people." Emphasis in original. See also Theodor Herzl, *Der Judenstaat* (1896), Ch. 1

[394] Dr. M[ax]. Soloveitchik, "Tsvey toyznt teg," *Di idishe shtime*, Ibid.

[395] As cited in Eliyohu Shulman, "Di yidish-veltlekhe shuln in Lite" in *Lite* (1965), 334.

ideological positon while also seeking rapprochement with the Zionist elite. In July, Uriah Katzenelenbogen penned an article called "The First Step" in which he argued that the debate over the use of Hebrew and Yiddish in schools had been solved in 1923, at the national Jewish assembly, where it was decided that schools in which the instruction is in one language would teach the other as a second language.[396] "We hope for the survival of Jewish national autonomy in Lithuania," he wrote. "So – we bite our lip and forget about the future music, that, even in such a small community as we are, here in Lithuania, we could unite together our poor little cultural activity, destroy the blindly party-oriented small-mindedness [vinkldikayt] and create a national communal will." Esther Eliashiv measured "the distance that has opened up between Folkism and Zionism" in another essay. "Where is the *mekhitse* [religious partition, esp. between men and women] between the two fundamentally nationalist movements from which some strive to guarantee the Jewish people the possibility of an independent, free and harmonious development?," she asked.[397] While she respected Zionism's origins in the fight against anti-Semitism and assimilation, she outlined two primary problems with Zionism. The first was that Zionists replicated the nationalism of anti-Jewish aggressors and could not "free themselves of the mistakes that Zionism itself argues against."[398] The second, in her view, was Zionists' lack of faith in the culture, history and language of the Jewish diaspora – integral aspects of Jewish peoplehood that Folkists sought to uplift.[399]

By 1926 Yudl Mark was vice-chairman of the Folkspartey, one of the two editors of the revived iteration of *Nais*, and an increasingly outspoken critic of the Zionist approach to Jewish

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[396] Uriah Katzenelenbogen, "Der ershter trit," *Nais* 6 (318) July 2, 1926, 5.

[397] Dr. Esther Eliashiv, "Der tsienizm un der folksizm," *Nais* 11 (323), September 8, 1926, 5-6.

[398] Ibid., 5.

[399] Ibid., 6.

affairs.[400] In mid-July 1926, he took to the pages of *Nais* to outline the Folkist vision of autonomy under the new Lithuanian government in contrast to Robinson's picture of Lithuanian Jews struggling between religious and national identity, Robinson's theory of Jewish relations to Lithuanian statehood, and the dream of statehood in Palestine. In an article called, "State and Autonomy," Mark demonstrated that the language question would not be overlooked. He proposed two foundational principles for national autonomy: secularism and education in the mother tongue. Mark translated his frustration with the Ministry of Education into a call for stronger, and expressly non-Zionist, autonomism. He wrote, "We, *Folkists*, hold fast to the idea of autonomy. We, *golusists*, believe that autonomy is the only possible form of statehood [medineshaftlekhkayt]. We, *democrats*, will never renounce following the majority [akharey rabim lekhatos] in the field of state affairs, even if the majority is provisionally and incidentally against us."[401]

Mark expanded on his foundational principles for successful autonomy about a week later, in the first installment of a series entitled, "When is a Robust National Autonomy Possible?" Mark answered the question posed in the article's title with a multipoint program of preconditions: "1) a large amount of *secularization* [*farveltlikhung*] of Jewish life; 2) a strengthening of feelings of *doikayt* [doikayt-gefiln], *principled diasporism* [goluszim]; 3) the *elimination of the language question*; 4) the carrying out of *democratic revolution* in Jewish daily life [*af der idisher gas*]."[402] Mark's definition of *doikayt*, in this context, as "principled

[400] On his position in the party see "Statement" to leaders of Kaunas city and county, dated April 1, 1926, in Folkspartey papers, LCVA, fund 70, no. 4, sec. 274, 6. On *Nais*, see Mark, "Yidishe peryodishe oysgabes in Lite," in *Zamlbukh lekoved dem tsvey hundert un fuftsikstn yoyvl fun der yidisher prese, 1686-1936*, ed. Jacob Shatsky (New York: YIVO, 1937), 278.

[401] Yudl Mark, "Medine un avtonomye," *Nais* no. 7, August 16, 1926, 4-7. See also Exodus 23:2.

[402] Mark, "Medine un avtonomye," 4. See also Exodus 23:2. See also "Ven iz meglekh gezunte natsionale avtonomye?," *Nais* no. 9, August/September [?] 1926, 4–6 and "Ven iz meglekh gezunte natsionale

diasporism" shows that he acknowledged Lithuanian Zionists' diasporism while criticizing their

lack of commit to the diaspora as a fundamental and guiding concept. Mark added to his

explication of *doikayt*, the second precondition, in a subsection of the article titled,

"Diasporism," in which he argued, following Shtif, that Zionists see autonomy in Lithuania

primarily as practice for Jewish political autonomy in Palestine. Autonomy only works, Mark

wrote, when you believe in diasporism wholeheartedly: "In Zionist ideology, i.e., in the ideology

of the majority of the well-to-do, autonomy is a palliative solution, a sort of entryway to the

parlor of Eretz Yisroel, or a foreign inn [akhsanye]" – and here Mark used the word that

Robinson chose to describe his Hebrew educational project in the title of his 1921 pedagogical

treatise.[403] "In Zionist hands," according to Mark, "autonomy becomes a means for non-local

[nit-hige] goals." He explained:

> Autonomy needs to affix the Jew in his present time [haynt], in the place where he lives.
> It is necessary that autonomy be based on the idea that this country [land] is *ours*, that
> *here* we are *at home* [heymishe], and that we can, and we must, live in brotherhood with
> the rest of our neighbors. And as beautifully as the Zionist heads of Jewish communities,
> and Zionist leaders and ministers, go on about autonomy, they say, with their Zionist
> agitation, that one Eretz-Yisroel-Jew is worth ten of ours, and that building in the *golus* is
> like building on sand.[404]

Mark then juxtaposed *doikayt* against what Folkists saw as Zionists' dual loyalty. "Besides their

non-*doikayt*," he wrote, "the foundation of autonomy is undermined by the Zionists' nationalist

exclusivity [oysgeshlosnkayt], their [. . .] double bookkeeping with an outward appearance but

internal concerns, the ideological inheritance of the ghetto."

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avtonomye?," *Nais* no. 10 (322), September 8, 1926, 3-4. Clippings from *Nais* no. 9 are found in the

Jacob and Nehemiah Robinson Papers, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

[403] Yudl Mark, "Ven iz meglekh gezunte natsionale avtonomye?," *Nais* no. 8 (320), July 30, 1926, 9.

[404] Ibid.

Mark then leveled the accusation that control of the institutions of autonomy by men of one political persuasion made autonomy fundamentally undemocratic. "Just as it's not republican to have a parliament in a republic in which the majority is disposed to monarchy, so, too, is it not in line with autonomy to have a Jewish community and a National Council where Zionists – the opponents of steadfast, autonomous, productive life in the diaspora – set the tone. This is why our autonomy in Lithuania has been such a runt." Folkist contributors to *Nais*, including Nokhem Shtif, had been making these claims since 1921. But now, with a new government sympathetic to the Folkist cause, Mark's seemed to demand a swift and pointed rebuttal. Robinson, one of the leading general Zionists to have remained in Lithuania after the departures of Soloveitchik, Rosenbaum, Julius Brutzkus, and others, took on the task.

In some ways, Robinson was the perfect person to respond to Mark's criticism of autonomy and Jewish-Lithuanian relations. Like Mark, he was a Litvak, an autonomist and a pedagogue. In addition to running the Hebrew gymnasium in the small town of Virbalis, from May 1919 until his election to the Seimas in August 1922, Robinson was co-director of the Tarbut teachers seminar from 1925 to 1926 and considered "one of the builders of Hebrew gymnasiums in Lithuania."[405] In 1921, Robinson wrote of the Virbalis school's goal of "Hebraization of the younger generation's thoughts" and the marginalization of Yiddish to cure the "disease of polyglotism."[406] Indeed, Robinson once said about Virbalis, "It was a little crazy – at home Russian was spoken, at gymnasium, Hebrew. And the town spoke Yiddish."[407] In 1921, the same year Mark published the first Yiddish school grammar, for use at his Yiddish

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[405] L. Shimoni, "Tsu der geshikhte fun linke 'Poele-Tsien' in Lite" in *Lite* (1965), 130.

[406] As cited in Omry Kaplan-Feuereisen, "At the Service of the Jewish Nation: Jacob Robinson and International Law," *Osteuropa* 8-10 (2008): 162.

[407] Interview with Dov Levin (?), Avraham Harman Institute, (45-56), part 2, 1. For more on Virbalis Hebrew gymnasium, see part 1, 11-13.

gymnasium, Robinson published a treatise on the importance of Hebrew-language instruction in his own gymnasium.[408]

Robinson began a sprawling, seven-part response to Mark on September 16 shortly after returning from the second European Congress of National Minorities, in Geneva. While Robinson's pedagogical differences with Mark were in the background, his response was more immediately informed by this conference, where majority-minority relations, national cultural autonomy and other related issues were discussed in broadly theoretical and comparative terms by minority rights activists from across the continent. Robinson had attended the first European Congress of National Minorities in Geneva, in October 1925, and had argued then, in his keynote address, that autonomy would allow minorities to "develop their national individuality."[409] But the 1926 conference, with the very different political context at home in Lithuania, Robinson placed his emphasis on the importance of the role of state institutions in securing autonomy, saying that there were "two ways to save national development: political administration or personal administration of the national minority."[410] As the leader of the minorities' bloc in parliament and a leader of the Zionist newspaper and school system, Robinson may have been implying that, in Lithuania, only he could save the development of the Jewish people. But while Robinson made reference to Lithuania in his talk, he looked beyond it: "It is my job to find a general legal order of the question of autonomy," he said, "a legal order that will suit the world

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[408] See Mark, *Shul-gramatik in bayshpil un ufgabes* (Kaunas: Likht, 1921) and Robinson, *Akhsanya shel Torah: duah shel ha-gimnasyon ha-ivri be-Virbalen* (Berlin-Virbalis: [?], 1922). These schools were, for a time, two of only eight regional gymnasiums in Lithuania and therefore represent a quarter of such institutions in Lithuania. See Masha Greenbaum, *The Jews of Lithuania* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 1995), 265.

[409] As cited in James Loeffler, "'The Famous Trinity of 1917': Zionist Internationalism in Historical Perspective," in *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 15 (2016): 225.

[410] See the text republished as "Hivtacht ha-hitpatchot ha-tarbutit shel 'ami ha-m[i]'ut," *Netivot* (Kaunas) Tishrei, 5687 (Sept-Oct, 1926), 17-22.

and its states." Robinson pursued this practical approach to autonomy despite conference

delegates' inability to agree on the meaning of autonomy itself. In a summary of the conference

he wrote for *Di idishe shtime*, Robinson noted:

> In the discussion about autonomy it became apparent that, in views of the essential nature of autonomy, there are principle differences of a purely theoretical nature. One section of the Jewish delegates argued the opinion that the essential nature of autonomy lay in the origin of every regime. It can, however, delegate some of its sovereignty to other bodies and, within its territory, also to nationalities. The other standpoint was that, as no organ of national autonomy can have an army or police, nothing can be established from autonomy, in the true sense of the word, since even radical supporters of its secularization […] are against separating from the competence of organs of Jewish autonomy and religious thought.[411]

And yet Robinson's practical experience with institutions of autonomy in Lithuania earned him

the spot of keynote speaker at no fewer than three minorities' congresses, where he literally had

the final word on the subject.[412]

While Robinson was advocating for his vision of Lithuanian Jewish autonomy as an

example to the world, on the home front, Yudl Mark was publicly making the case for a more

Folkist autonomism. Indeed, Mark once noted, with some tongue-in-cheek self-deprecation, that

he used to spread "my Folkist and Yiddishist propaganda in writing and even more by word of

mouth."[413] An advertisement for a September 11 lecture by Mark called, "Yiddish Schools and

Autonomy" outlined the lecture's "theses," which provide a revealing look into Mark's thinking

about autonomy:

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[411] Jacob Robinson, "[Illegible] afn minderhaytn-kongres in Zheneve," *Di yidishe shtime* 203 (2093), September 8, 1926, 6. See also Robinson, "Erev dem minderhaytn-kongres," *Yidishe shtime* 199 (2089) August 30, 1926, 4.

[412] For a contemporary legal view of autonomy from a Lithuanian perspective, see Mykolas Römeris, *Reprezentacija ir mandatas*. *Lietuvos Universiteto Teisų Fakulteto Darbai*, Vol. III, Books 1-2 (Kaunas: Valstybės Spaustuvė, 1926).

[413] Yudl Mark, "Fun an ander kukvinkl" in *Seyfer Reuben Rubinstein*, ed. Avraham Lis (Tel Aviv: Shamgar, 1971), 22.

Where does the idea of autonomy come from? The historical origin in Dubnow. The Austrian S[ocial] D[emocrat] Springer [pseud. Karl Renner], 'Bund,' Zhitlowski. Autonomy in the Middle Ages and now. Is autonomy a privilege? Autonomy, secularism and mother tongue.

When is the guarantee of autonomy possible? Autonomy and 'Tarbut,' the bloc between Zionists and 'Akhdes.' The National Assembly and the betrayal of the autonomy-majority. Who is guilty of destroying autonomy? Democracy and autonomy.

Why do we need Yiddish schools? The left and the struggle for Yiddish schools. The autonomists and the Yiddish schools. The accusation in 'informing.' Lithuanian democracy in Yiddish. The case of the lecturer. What will happen with autonomy? The future of the Jewish schools.[414]

Thus, upon returning to Lithuania, Robinson directly and publicly contested Mark's understanding of how autonomy had functioned, and how it ought to function in Lithuania. He began with an introductory article on September 16 – shortly after Mark's articles were published in *Nais* – in which he argued that an "abyss" lay between the Folkspartey of Dubnow in Russia and Noah Prylucki's Folkspartey in Poland, writing that he didn't even understand what the Lithuanian Folkists' position was.[415] Robinson's next article showed that he in fact closely considered Mark's multipart proposals.[416] But before it could be published, Mark quickly responded to Robinson's first piece, two days later, in *Nais*. In this intervention, entitled, "The Social Side of Folkism," Mark historicized the Lithuanian Folkspartey and argued that while Zionism was the ethos of the Jewish bourgeoisie, Folkism represented the progressive Jewish petite bourgeoisie as well as the working class.[417]

Robinson's critiqued "these 'theoreticians'" from *Nais* who claimed that Zionism is incompatible with autonomy, writing that it was "necessarily" Zionists who served as heads of

[414] Yudl Mark, "Yidishe shul un avtonomye," *Nais* 11 (323), September 8, 1926, 13.

[415] E.B. [Jacob Robinson], "Di folkistishe atake I," *Di idishe shtime*, September 16, 1926, 2. On the Folkspartey in Poland, see Kalman Weiser, *Jewish People, Yiddish Nation: Noah Prylucki and the Folkists in Poland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

[416] E.B. [Jacob Robinson], "Di folkistishe atake II," *Di idishe shtime*, September 20, 1926, 2.

[417] Yudl Mark, "Di sotsiale zayt fun folkizm," *Nais* no. 12 (324), September 22, 1926, 3.

the institutions of autonomy from the first days of the republic.[418] Robinson wrote that "even the

initiator" of such a negative view of Zionism had later forsworn it, pointing to a 1925 article by

Maxim Vinaver entitled, "The Outstretched Hand."[419] (Vinaver, who would die in October 1926,

was neither Folkist nor socialist.) After making this point, Robinson turned to Mark's claim that

Zionists do not advocate enough that Jews should feel at home in Lithuania. "When a community

[kibets] declares: Here is where I was born, I feel like I was formed on this very soil, there is no

force in the world that can tear me away from there, I will die here, then one can speak of" a

connection to place.[420] During the world war, he argued, various peoples defended their territory

from their enemies; now, in peacetime, this feeling remains in a hidden state. "What is relevant

in this regard," wrote Robinson, "[is] we know that today, when practically no distance exists, or

at the very least, when you can travel the longest distances in the shortest amount of time, when

peoples and their members are politically, economically and culturally so closely bound

together," the connection of a group to a place is a lot weaker. By claiming a group's attachment

to a place would be weaker in multiethnic areas such as Lithuania, whose recent history of

nationalist territorial activism heightened ethnic divisions, Robinson was prefiguring part of the

answer to the question posed by his postwar treatise, *Were the Minorities Treaties a Failure?*,

namely, "The mere existence of the minority provisions served the cause of peace in the

immediate post-war period when passions were rampant and fresh hatreds were kindled in the

new alignment of majorities and minorities."[421]

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[418] E.B. [Jacob Robinson], "Di folkistishe atake VI," *Di idishe shtime*, September 29, 1926, 2.

[419] Maxim Vinaver, "Golos ne-sionista" in *Svershenie*, ed. M. Gindes (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1925).
The essay, written in Paris in May 1924, ends with the line, "If you need it, our hand is outstretched."

[420] E.B. [Jacob Robinson], "Di folkistishe atake VI," *Di idishe shtime*, September 29, 1926, 2.

[421] Robinson, et al., *Were the Minority Treaties a Failure?* (New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1943),
261. For an important history of this book and how Robinson's views evolved during its production, see
Matthew Frank, *Making Minorities History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 176-178.

Robinson emphasized Jews' international character. "The superficiality [oyberflekhlekhkayt] of the Folkist philosophy becomes clearer when we consider their attitude towards the *klal-Yisroel problem*." For Robinson, not understanding the *klal-Yisroel* problem – the goal of an idealized Jewish communal unity, identity and mutual support – is "not perceiving the *minority problematic* in general, whereas the essence [mehus] of this problematic lay in two questions: first, in strengthening the attitude of the national minority to the national majority and, secondly, in strengthening the attitude of the national minority to *its* national majority." He used the case of the Lithuanian Polish minority as a way to think through how statist Zionism and *klal-Yisroel* conceptions factor into Jews' relationship to the Lithuanian state. "Dayeinu," he wrote, "for example, if the Polish minority problem in Lithuania consisted of strengthening the attitude towards the Lithuanian state and towards the Polish nation [natsiyon]. In the majority of cases the second problem expresses itself in the attitude to another state, to the national motherland. Staying with the same example, it means: the attitude of the Polish minority to the Polish government, in which the majority of the Polish nation lives and where Polish cultural life is formed. Naturally, we strive to *depoliticize* these attitudes and be left only to a pure national-spiritual domain [gebit]." Robinson brought up, as yet another example, the phenomenon of Russian and German Jews fighting against each other during the First World War. In other words, he recognized the problem of minorities' "dual loyalty" and saw, as a possible solution, framing Jewish identity as a fundamentally "national-spiritual" essence.

In a follow-up to his series of responses to Mark, Robinson wrote one final commentary that opened with these questions: "What do the Folkists want from us? That we say that we don't have any relatives beyond Yanishok and Virbalen [Joniškis and Virbalis]? That the borders of the Jewish nation [natsyon] stop right at the border posts of the state? That there's no such thing as a Jewish people, as something unified, that there are 'hyphenated Jews': Polish Jews,

Lithuanian Jews, German Jews [yidn-poliakn, yidn-litviner, yidn-daytchn], etc.?"[422] Robinson added that he thought Folkists "don't even like the *klal-Yisroel* in Lithuania, and they get angry at Zionists, objecting that they stand for *klal-Yisroel* politics." Robinson made one final attempt to show what he saw as the contradiction of agitating for a feeling of attachment to Lithuania among Lithuanian Jews. "As Mr. Mark does not announce his Lithuanian feelings, I have a basis for thinking that he would feel better with a Polish, or even a Romanian or a German Jew, than with the *kaimietis*" – and here he used the Lithuanian word for "villager" or "countryman" – "from the Ukmergė area," where Mark lived.

Robinson then brought his attention back to the problem of the language of education. He faulted Folkists for expecting to establish a thoroughly Yiddish-language-based school system. Ever the comparativist, Robinson pointed out that Jews weren't the only minority to use the "national language," rather than the mother tongue, in school. He cited Swiss Germans' education in High German and how, for other European minorities that use distinct dialects, school systems the state language. "If the Danish government were to have 'Folkist' advisors, it would force the 'North Schleswig Germans' to learn Danish in schools, but it is loyal to its minorities like no other state in Europe. And if you ask them how they want to build their schools, the North Schleswig Germans say that they want *German* schools. What does Denmark do?" They send some teachers to Kiel University to study German language and literature to better serve them. "It's futile to look for apples on a pear tree," Robinson wrote, "and sociological conditions in a party program."

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[422] Jacob Robinson, "Di folkistishe atake VII," *Di idishe shtime*, September 30, 1926, 11.

The New Nationalists

While the Mark-Robinson exchange was winding down, in early October, the Lithuanian Nationalist Union held a two-day conference in Kaunas at which it raised the volume of its nationalist rhetoric against Lithuanian Poles.[423] The Nationalist Union, a political party whose members were known as *tautininkai*, or Nationalists, had been founded in 1924 as the result of the merging of the rightwing National Progress Party and the Lithuanian Farmers' Union. Although the Nationalist Union gained few seats in the 1926 election, its leaders would alter the course of Lithuanian history and, by extension, the lives of hundreds of thousands of Jews. More than other Lithuanian political parties, the Nationalist Union, and the trajectory of the Lithuanian state, would be closely associated with the personalities and political ideologies of its co-founders and leaders, Antanas Smetona and Augustinas Voldemaras.

Antanas Smetona was born in 1874 and became a leading intellectual and activist of the Lithuanian national movement at a young age. A dapper man with a Van Dyke beard and an affinity for top hats, he studied law in St. Petersburg, where he became involved in circles of Lithuanian students who agitated for Lithuanian cultural expression, especially through underground publishing and book smuggling. He settled in Vilnius but, having not completed his studies and therefore not being qualified to work or teach in the field of law, he focused on publishing and activism for the Lithuanian national cause.[424] By 1917 he would serve as head of the Taryba, or Lithuanian National Council, that would draft the Declaration of Independence, and present it in February of 1918. The Taryba elected Smetona as Lithuania's first president in June 1919, a role he would serve in for one year. During the years 1920-1924, Smetona directed

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[423] "Tautininkų S[ąjun]gos rezolucijos d[ė]l lenkų mokyklų," *Rytas*, October 6, 1926, 2.

[424] Alfred Erich Senn, *Lithuania 1940: Revolution from Above* (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2007), 30.

his energy into developing his political philosophy through writing and publishing, in particular in journals he founded, such as *Lietuvos aidas* ("Lithuania's Echo").[425] In 1922 he began to teach philosophy at the University of Lithuania, in Kaunas, and his engagement with ancient Greek thought was an important component to the development of his political philosophy. Smetona translated Plato into Lithuanian, the first sample of which, "The Apology," was published in 1925.[426] Although he was ensconced at the university, Smetona maintained a high public profile. "Smetona the Future President of Lithuania?" asked an article in *Kovner tog* during the May elections in 1926.[427]

Augustinas Voldemaras was nine years younger than Smetona and first met the elder Lithuanian political activist in St. Petersburg, in 1901. Voldemaras received a doctorate in History and Philosophy and became a member of the Lithuanian Taryba, which appointed him to the position of prime minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, in which capacity he led Lithuania's delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. By 1923, Voldemaras had left the government, and, like Smetona, turned his energy towards academia and publishing, in particular a newspaper he founded called *Tėvynės balsas*, or, "Voice of the Fatherland." Although Voldemaras was a fierce critic of the parliamentary system, he ran for election to the Seimas on the Nationalist Union ticket, and won a seat, in 1926. While Smetona was a reserved man, Voldemaras had a reputation for his pugnacious and vulgar personality. In the summer of 1926, Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas, a priest and poet who was Voldemaras's colleague at the university, would write, "Voldemaras is becoming so brutal that is becoming difficult just to meet with him

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[425] On Smetona's publishing activities in the 1920s see Liudas Truska, *Antanas Smetona ir jo laikai* (1996), 124-130.

[426] "Platono apologija. Sokrato gynimasis teisme." *Humanitarinių mokslų fakulteto raštai. Commentationes ordinis philologorum*. Lib. I (1925).

[427] Doren, "Smetona der tsukunftiker president fun Lite?" *Kovner tog* no 8, May 10, 1926, 2

[…] Even his friends say he will swallow the *Tautininkai* […] V. hangs on Smetona with both arms – calls him Uncle Moses and himself his Aaron."[428] Harry Carlson, the former American consul in Lithuania, wrote about Voldemaras at the end of 1926, "He is brilliant in many respects, he is a good orator and writer but is inclined to towards demagoguism. He has played an important role in Smetona's life and it is rather unfortunate for Smetona that he is so closely connected with a man of the type of Voldemaras."[429]

While there was apparently no discussion of an overthrow of the government at the early October Nationalist Union conference – or perhaps because of this fact – the circle associated with Voldemaras, and to his right, began to spread the idea that month, both in private meetings and public statements.[430] October saw the debut of a newspaper called *Tautos valia*, or "Will of the Nation," an openly anti-democratic and anti-Semitic weekly that advocated for the abolition of parliament in favor of a strong fascist leader.[431] In addition, writes historian Vytautas Petronis, that fall, as part of fierce opposition to the Grinius-Sleževičius government, "the Christian Democratic bloc underwent rapid radicalization."[432] By the summer of 1926, leaders of the Christian Democrats already openly expressed far-right, anti-democratic views, for example when Mykolas Krupavičius, a leader of the party, declared, in speeches before parliament, his

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[428] Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona and his Lithuania*, 179-180.

[429] As quoted in Senn, "Introduction" in *Lithuania in the 1920s*, 7.

[430] On private comments, see Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona and His Lithuania*, 156.

[431] For more on this paper, see Ibid., 187; Gediminas Rudis, "1926 m. gruodžio 17-osios perversmas" in *Lietuvos Istorija* vol. X, part I, 553-554; and Mindaugas Tamošaitis and Artūras Svarauskas, *Nuo Kazio Griniaus iki Antanto Smetonos: Valdžios ir opozicijos santykiai Lietuvoje 1926-1940 metais* (Vilnius: Gimtasis Žodis, 2014), 182.
See also *Lietuvių tautos valia* (1927), a related one-time publication, in Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania 32(474.5)(054).

[432] Vytautas Petronis, "The Emergence of the Lithuanian Radical Right Movement, 1922-1927," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 46:1 (2015): 87.

affection for Fascism, and called Steponas Kairys, the non-Jewish co-chairman of the Seimas, the "rabbi of Marxism."[433] In September, Prime Minister Sleževičius signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union.[434] While the *tautininkai* in fact officially supported this treaty, because it stipulated Soviet recognition of Lithuania's right to Vilnius, there was widespread discontent over the perception of closer relations to the Soviet Union.[435] By the time the treaty was ratified, in November, anti-government rhetoric had been channeled into action, and many of the officers who would become involved in plotting the coup were Christian Democrats.[436] *Tautos valia* spoke for this new strain of ultra-nationalist thought, which placed blame for Lithuania's economic and political woes on Jews, Poles, and leftists. In the words of Lithuanian political scientist Raimundas Lopata, *Tautos valia* "began to till the ideological soil for the coup."[437]

The increasingly heated ultra-nationalist rhetoric propagandized by *Tautos valia* fueled anti-government protests, meetings and marches. While much of the newspaper's hatred was directed towards Poles and Communists, Jews were frequent targets of the far right, especially at the university, where large numbers of Jews had enrolled. As Vladas Krivickas has noted, "The détente with ethnic minorities prompted the rise of fear for the Lithuanian character of the state."[438] A flashpoint of the growing rightwing movement in the country was a confrontational rally in Kaunas, in November of 1926. On Sunday, November 21, *Tautos valia* and *Rytas*, the

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[433] See Krivickas, "The Coup D'Etat," 193.

[434] See text of the treaty and related documents in Bronis Kaslas, *La Lithuanie et la seconde guerre mondiale* (Maissoneuve et Larose: Paris, 1981), 60-66.

[435] Senn, *Lithuania 1940*, 33.

[436] Vytautas Petronis, "The Emergence," 87.

[437] Raimundas Lopata, *Autoritarinis režimas tarpukario Lietuvoje: Aplinkybės, legitimumas, koncepcija* (Vilnius: A. Varnas, 1998), 79.

[438] Krivickas, "The Coup D'Etat," 250.

newspaper of the Christian Democratic Party, convened an afternoon meeting, to air their anti-government politics, at the People's House – the same meeting place of the June banquet in honor of freed *kuopininkai* political prisoners.[439] About six hundred people showed up, including a number of students. When attendees left the meeting, at quarter to four o'clock, they formed rows of about eight to ten people and proceeded to march to the War Museum, singing nationalistic songs. Soon, on Lukšis Street, they were confronted by the police, who told them not to move forward. The crowd began to beat the police and their horses with clubs. The marchers then proceeded down Laisvės Alėja to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where they chanted, "Give us [Vincas] Čepinskis and [Vladas] Požėla!," referring to the Ministers of Education and Domestic Affairs, respectively. Marchers hurled insults at the police and burst through the doors of the War Museum. When police drove them out, the crowd continued on to university, where it dispersed in the early evening. Thirteen people were arrested. According to one report, shouts of "Bravo, police! Down with the fascists!" could be heard from the onlookers who gathered to watch the arrests.[440]

The day after the protest, *Di idishe shtime* noted the demonstration was "against the Communist movement and Polonization in the country."[441] But it soon became clear that Jews held a special place in the radical rightwing turn of public protest. In December, a wave of protests against Jewish medical students dissecting non-Jewish cadavers, which had spread throughout medical schools in Poland, from Warsaw to Wilno, made its way to the university in

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[439] See reporting, for example, in "Lapkričio mėn. 21 dienos įvykiai faktų šviesoje," *Lietuva* no. 268 (2357), November 26, 1926, 1.

[440] M. R[abinovi]tch, "Protest-miting un demonstratsiye in Kovne," *Di idishe shtime* no. 166 (2156), November 23, 1926, 7.

[441] "Hayntike demonstratsiyes farbotn," *Di idishe shtime* no 265 (2155), November 22, 1926, 1.

Kaunas.[442] On December 9 and 15, Lithuanian medical students aggressively confronted Jewish students in the dissection laboratory and demanded they provide their own Jewish cadavers.[443] While Jews made up 27% of students across the university, the highest percentage of Jews in any one department was in the medical school, at 45.7% of the total, while Lithuanians made up less than 50% of medical students.[444]

With rightwing radicalization evident at the university, the press, and in the upper echelons of some leading political parties, the final, and decisive, card to fall was the army. Officers were already demoralized by the humiliation of General Bulota, in June. The arrest, on December 11, of Vincas Grigaliūnas-Glovackis, the publisher of *Tautos valia*, and of Povilas Plechavičius, a decorated army major, inspired some officers to move forward with a plot to overthrow the government. A group called the Secret Officers Union was already operating in tandem with *Tautos valia*. Grigaliūnas-Glovackis, according to historian Alfonsas Eidintas, had been in charge of propaganda for the officers; the day after Grigaliūnas-Glovackis's arrest, *Tautos valia* published a rumor about a Communist plot, and declared, "our parliamentary system is worthless [and] must be replaced as fast as possible."[445] But increasingly, rumors circulated not about a Bolshevik overthrow of the government, but one led by the army. The

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[442] See for example A. Goldberg, "Vi nemt men fort yidishe meysim far yidishe studentn," *Der tog* (New York) December 17, 1926. For an analysis of this phenomenon see Natalia Aleksiun, "Jewish Students and Christian Corpses in Interwar Poland: Playing with the Language of Blood Libel," *Jewish History* 25: 3-4 (December 2012).

[443] "Meysim-intsident in universitet," *Di yidishe shtime* 287 (2117) December 17, 1926, 1. For analysis of the event, see Dangiras Mačiulis, "'Žydų lavonų klausimas' Lietuvos Universitete 1926-1927 Metais," *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis* 2002/2 (2004).

[444] See Mačiulis, "'Žydų lavonų klausimas,'" 163.

[445] Raimundas Lopata, *Authoritarian Regime in Interwar Lithuania*, 34 n. 2; Krivickas, "The Coup D'Etat," 223-225; Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona and His Lithuania*, 156.

Secret Officers Union was loyal to, but not run by, Smetona and Voldemaras. Its motto was, "Protect, Liberate, Unite, Purge."[446]

The Coup D'État

President Grinius's sixtieth birthday was December 17 and there were plans for a grand parade in his honor that day. The issue of *Di idishe shtime* dated December 16 included a large section dedicated to Grinius, including a glowing article by Chatzkel Lemchen, an educator and leading Jewish linguist of the Lithuanian language, along with a tribute by Reuben Rubinstein, one of the newspaper's editors. Rubinstein's article was called "Our Blessing," and highlighted Grinius's oft-quoted statement, "I am the president not only of Lithuanians but also of Jews." Rubinstein signed off, "Long live Grinius the President! Long live Grinius the friend of humanity!"[447] But the tanks and military personnel that had converged on Kaunas under the pretext of a parade were in fact present to aid in the overthrow of the government.[448] On December 16, while the Seimas was in a late-night session debating the government's budget, high-ranking military officers converged on Smetona's apartment to hatch the plan. Rumors of a coup had circulated for days. At 11pm, Prime Minister Sleževičius received a call warning of a possible coup, then went to bed. By that time, Voldemaras had already left parliament for Smetona's apartment, where the gathered generals asked Smetona to become president. Officers freed Grigaliūnas-

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[446] Petronis, "The Emergence," 87.

[447] "Unzer brokhe," *Yidishe Shtime* no. 2177, 2.

[448] For the events of the coup d'état, I synthesize "Di gesheyenishen in Kovne," *Yidishe shtime* 288 (2178), December 17, 1926, 1; "Vi azoy iz es geshen?," in *Yidishe shtime* no 288 (2178), December 18, 1926, 1; "Protim fun historisher nakht," *Yidishe shtime* no 290 (2180), December 20, 1926, 3; Gediminas Rudis, "1926 m. gruodžio 17-osios perversmas" in *Lietuvos Istorija* vol. X, part I, 556-559; Krivickas, "The Coup D'Etat," 226-232; Michael Kohrs, *Die Litauische Nationale Union*, 113-130; and Petronis, "The Emergence," 86-87.

Glovackis and Plechavičius from prison; the former was put in charge of a military commandant of Kaunas, while the latter went to President Grinius's house to force him to resign.[449]

Officers and military detachments, led by Plechavičius, spread throughout the capital, taking over the post office – a critical site of communication lines – and proceeded to parliament. Around 3:30 in the morning soldiers entered the parliament's meeting chamber and shouted for everyone to disperse. Steponas Kairys, the chairman of the session, engaged in a short exchange with an officer, as preserved in the stenographic records of the Seimas:

> Kairys: Excuse me, but in whose name are you issuing orders?
> Officer: In the name of the dictator!
> Kairys: What dictator?
> Officer: That is for us to know![450]

Officers gave members of the Seimas two or three minutes to leave, and Kairys was put under arrest.[451] Soldiers surrounded the parliament building and stood waiting in the snow. Overpowered, members of the Seimas ended their session. While President Grinius was arrested but later released, Sleževičius was arrested and held, along with all members of his cabinet, at military general headquarters until the next evening, when they were forced to resign. Upon being apprehended, Minister of Internal Affairs Požela reportedly handed his revolver to the soldier and said, "An end to it all!"

On the morning of the 17th, the American Consul in Lithuania, Robert Heingartner, went to work in a cutaway suit in anticipation of a grand birthday party. When he received news that

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[449] Krivickas, "The Coup D'Etat," 229.

[450] As cited in Ibid., 231. I made a slight edit to Krivickas's English phrasing for clarity. *Di yidishe shtime*, which had a correspondent in the parliament at the time, reported slightly different wording to some of this exchange. See "Vi azoy iz es geshen?," *Yidishe shtime* no 288 (2178) December 18, 1926, 1.

[451] Krivickas, "The Coup D'Etat," 231, cites two minutes; three minutes cited in "Protim fun historisher nakht," in *Yidishe shtime* 290 (2180), December 20, 1926, 3.

Grinius and most members of parliament were under arrest, he turned back to his office and ordered the Lithuanian flag taken down.[452] At 8am, police entered all newspaper editorial offices and publishing houses, instructing them not to publish anything, thus initiating a new period of press censorship. The temporary military regime set a curfew from 11pm to 5am and reinstated martial law, and would soon invite members of the national Rifleman's Union to come to Kaunas to maintain order. On the streets, there was calm but confusion about what had happened, as a rumor spread that Smetona would take over as president. Soldiers marched to and fro through the capital. "A sad turn to Dr. Grinius's birthday party," Heingartner wrote in his journal.

On the 17th, the army announced that because "the current Seimas and government sold our Fatherland to Bolsheviks and foreign nationals" the Lithuanian army "has decided to temporarily take power into its hands, across the country, in order to more quickly deliver this very power into the hands of true Lithuanian sons."[453] But an announcement posted throughout the capital by the coup's initiators, according to *Di idishe shtime*, gave a brief justification for the overthrow: "the Bolshevik threat in the country and that which the current regime has supported also for […] groups, such as the Germans, who turn their attention towards Berlin, and the Poles, towards Warsaw. The only minority group which is loyal and which can be worked with are Jews. Jews are asked to remain calm and to have trust in the new government."[454] These different messages, in which Jews are either grouped with other non-Lithuanians or singled out as having a unique relationship to the state, would come to typify the Nationalist regime and become a major point of social and political tension, especially as the Nationalist government collapsed the meanings of ethnic Lithuanian and Lithuanian citizen, and ethnic nation, or *tauta*, with political

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[452] Heingartner, *Lithuania in the* 1920s, 75-77.

[453] Republished in "Di gesheyenishen in Kovne," *Yidishe shtime* 288 (2178), December 17, 1926, 1.

[454] As paraphrased in "Vendung tsu yidn – yidn darfn zayn ruik," *Di idishe shtime* no 288 (2177/8), December 18, 1926, 2.

nation, *valstybė*. In a public letter dated the 17th, Plechavičius wrote Smetona to ask him to "become leader of the nation as state president."[455]

Grinius was kept under watch in the presidential palace until Friday evening. Various generals, including General Bulota, tried to convince Grinius to rescind power. After Voldemaras promised not to violate the constitution, which, as Vladas Krivickas pointed out in his study of the coup, had of course already been violated, Grinius was brought to military headquarters and signed a letter, citing the threat of Bolshevism to Lithuanian freedom and independence, accepting the resignation of Sleževičius and his replacement by Voldemaras.[456] Smetona's statement accepting Grinius's resignation sanctioned ethnic nationalism as official state discourse, and even collapsed state and nation into one concept that he referred to with one pronoun. Smetona's statement read, in part: "Lithuania has found itself at a crossroads which was clear to the whole nation [visai tautai] but, unfortunately, not to the government […] Mine, like that of every Lithuanian, is the sacred duty to defend the Lithuanian State and Nation during this tragic year of *her* life."[457] Voldemaras would tell *Rytas* a few days later, "Regarding the positions that concern the government, [the government] is clear: the government must implement a state-national politics [valstybiškai-tautišką politiką] and create a Lithuanian national state [lietuvišką tautišką valstybę]."[458]

On the 19th, a rump session of the parliament met to vote on whether or not Smetona should become president. Only select members were invited, and only rightwing members were present, with a few notable exceptions. A few days earlier, *Di idishe shtime* had reported, "We

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[455] In Yiddish, "berosh ha-natsiye als melukhe-firer"

[456] See text republished in "Vi azoy H[er] Smetona iz gevorn melukhe-shef," in *Yidishe shtime* 2178, 2.

[457] "Lietuvos Karžygiai!", *Rytas* 285 (877), December 18, 1926, 1. See also flyer dated December 17, 1926 in National Archive of Lithuania 342.511(474.5), 323.27(474.5). My emphasis.

[458] "Minist. Pirmininkas prof. Voldemaras ap[i]e vyriausybės uždavinius," *Rytas* 289 (881) December 23, 1926, 1.

have learned from trusted sources that government intends to lead negotiations with the Jewish and German [parliamentary] blocs about supporting the new cabinet. The case is, if both blocs support the cabinet of Mr. Voldemaras, the cabinet will have an absolute majority of 44 against 41 votes."[459] But these negotiations may have gone on up to the last minute. When the session opened at noon, on the 19th, parliament members waited two hours before the head of parliament, Justinas Staugaitis, appeared with Jacob Robinson and two Baltic Germans.[460] Three members of the Polish bloc were also present at the session. According to the constitution Smetona needed a total majority, but he announced that the vote would be legal because it required only a relative majority. When the vote was cast to elect Smetona president, 38 votes were in favor and two were blank, while two members abstained. A few hours later, Smetona addressed the army: "So now I stand again before you. For the few years I had strayed from you, I felt united with one with you, I had one idea. Today we begin to write a new page of the history of the Fatherland. Today we begin a new life."[461]

For days, reporters from *Di idishe shtime* had scrambled to collect reliable information and address the coup d'état, visiting various government offices and ministries to identify updates. One typical exchange took place at the office of the political police:

"Are you a reporter? What paper do you write for?"
"For *Di idishe shtime*."
"What do you want to know?"
"What changes have come about in your institution?"[462]

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[459] "Unterhandlungen fun meyutim-fraktsiyes," *Yidishe shtime* no 287 (2178), December 17, 1926, 2.

[460] See "H[er] A. Smetona oysgeveylt als melukhe-prezident," *Di idishe shtime* 2181, 2 and "Nepaprastas Seimo posėdis," *Lietuva* no 296 (2375), December 20, 1926, 1.

[461] "Respublikos Prezidento p. A. Smetonos kalba į kariuomenę, pasakyta Vyr. Štabe 1926 m. XII-19 d. 17 v.," *Lietuva* no 288 (2377), December 22, 1926, 1.

[462] G.V., "Vos tut zikh in der politisher politsey?," *Di idishe shtime* no 290 (2180), December 20, 1926, 3.

The day after the coup, the paper's editorial offices had been shut down but managed to receive written permission from Grigaliūnas-Glovackis, of *Tautos valia*, to publish the issue it had prepared.[463] *Di idishe shtime* even published a helpful guide for its readers called, "Who is the New State President Antanas Smetona."[464] On the morning of the 18th Yisroel Zhofer met with Voldemaras, after the first sitting of the new cabinet, in a conversation "special to *Di idishe shtime*." Zhofer wrote, "My first question was, '[What is] the goal of the new government?'" Voldemaras replied, "Our only task at the moment is to legalize the situation that has been created, we cannot allow any indeterminacy, we cannot allow the circumstances to carry an anti-societal character."[465] The old government, said the new prime minister, was "flirting with Bolshevism" while "the principle of the new regime is lawfulness."

Robinson had been an outspoken advocate on the importance of democratic institutions and principles. In November, on the eve of a vote over the Sunday Rest Law, which disproportionately affected Jewish businesses, Robinson wrote, "Equality before the law and freedom of conscience – these are the two main bases of the modern state. And the Sunday Rest Law is in frightening conflict with both of them."[466] Pointing out the disjuncture between the application, in Lithuania, of the declaration of minority rights of May 12, 1922, and the Lithuanian Constitution of August 1, 1922, Robinson suggested in that article that Lithuania should have one overarching law, like Austria, that covers minority rights. "But as long as there isn't one," he wrote, "we cannot be silent, and today, on the eve of the new act of law, we must

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[463] "Di gesheyenishen in Kovne," *Di idishe shtime* 288 (2178), December 17, 1926, 1.

[464] "Ver iz der nayer melukhe-prezident Antanas Smetona," *Di idishe shtime* 2181, December 21, 1926, 2.

[465] Y[isroel]. Zh[ofer], "Premyer-minister prof. Voldemaras vegn di gesheyenishn," *Di idishe shtime* 288 (2178), December 18 1926, 6.

[466] J[acob] Robinson, "Zuntik-ru un minderhaytn-rekht," *Di idishe shtime* no 261 (2151), November 17, 1926, 2. Emphasis in original.

point to the special defender of the constitution – the Seimas – so it does not violate the constitution."

Now, with coup d'état having violated the constitution and the new government seeming poised to do so again, Robinson had to reckon with the loss of the institutional integrity and constitutionality of the government. On Christmas Eve, a week after the coup, he called Heingartner and told him that he thought Smetona's government would not hold new elections. The new government, Robinson predicted, would be afraid of being voted out of power. Heingartner remembered about the call, "Mr. Robinson's party and the other minority parties will not enter into opposition to the government in the Sejm [Seimas] because they fear that a dictatorship would be declared if the Sejm proves unruly."[467] A few days later Robinson publicized his position in a wide-ranging interview with Zhofer entitled, "The New Situation in Lithuania and the Jews."[468] Robinson said that "up till now" – i.e., ten days after the coup d'état – "there have been no attempts, on the part of the government, to make contact with the minorities [sic]." Zhofer asked, "What is especially relevant for us Jews?" Robinson replied with an optimistic profile of Voldemaras. "We know that the current prime minister is the author of the famous minorities declaration in Paris," Robinson said. "We also know that in his first appearance in the current parliament he sang the praises of the Jewish minority in Lithuania. The question to the prime minister of 1927 will adhere to the same line as the prime minister of 1920 and member of parliament of 1926 – the future will tell." But then, apparently referring to the minority blocs in the Seimas, Robinson said, "What I have found useful and expedient [are] the attempts to constitutionalize the coup d'état and I have therefore maintained that our group also

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[467] Heingartner, *Lithuania in the 1920s*, 81-82.

[468] Y[isroel]. Zh[ofer], "Der nayer matsev in Lite un di yidn," *Di idishe shtime* no 296 (2196), December 27, 1926, 2.

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must not distance itself from this task." Thus Robinson seemed to endorse Voldemaras's plan to quickly legalize the regime change ex-post-facto.

Robinson tried to justify his position several ways. On "the interests of the Jewish community in the country," he argued, "the circumstances at the moment are such that it would produce a false meaning, if no Jew comes to the [parliamentary] sitting." Robinson also made a revealing admission about the general reaction among Jews to the new regime:

> From the looks of the Jews, one could actually come to the conclusion that the entire Jewish community in Lithuania stands, in principle, in opposition. Naturally, one cannot conduct a survey on that question today. But there is no doubt that, at least in the current moment, there are certain well-established segments among the Jewish population which are not inclined, in principle, to be opposed to the situation that has been created, and which want to wait and see what the new circumstances will bring. It is therefore necessary, in this demonstrative moment, to underscore that this has also happened.

But there was no need to wait and see about some changes. Protection to the Jews was extended by the government in exchange not only for loyalty but for a renouncement of leftism, for which Jews had borne the brunt of public blame. A few days after the coup, Yisroel Zhofer asked Interior Minister, Ignas Musteikis, how long martial law would last. "Only until every threat on the part of the leftist groups disappears and life returns to normal," Musteikis said.[469] The Judeo-Bolshevik accusation ceased with the regime change and its promise to the Jewish community. *Lietuva*, the official state paper, reported about "Jewish Communists" in every shtetl, writing, "Their plan for a coup d'état was very precisely worked out, and if they had succeeded in turning it into a reality, a lot of blood would have flowed."[470] In the wake of the coup, around 250 were reported arrested for having some role in leftist anti-government activity, over 100 of whom were Jews.

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[469] Zhofer, "Vos zogt ineren-minster vegn aktuele ineren-inyonim?," *Di idishe shtime* no 93 (2183) December 23, 1926, 1.

[470] As quoted in "Arestn vern fargezetst," *Di idishe shtime* no. 293 (2183), December 23, 1926, 7.

Reverberations

The December 16 putsch is often described as a "bloodless coup" because no shots were fired during the overthrow of the government. But the revolution brought about by the Nationalists and the army in fact contained within it a reign of terror. Hundreds of arrests were made in the wake of the coup, primarily of persons accused of being associated with leftist or Communist groups, but also political opponents, such as Juozapas Daigilis, the editor of *Lietuva*. On Christmas Eve, the new regime asserted its strength by sentencing to death, after a short military tribunal, four men convicted of belonging to Communist groups that incited against the army and independent Lithuania.[471] Known as the case of the "Four Communards," the trial in fact involved six men – the other two were sentenced to prison. Of the six, two were Jewish, and one was Baltic German. Rafael Charny, known in the press as Rapolas Čarnas, a twenty-six-year-old baker and member of the central committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party, was sentenced to death, along with three others, with the additional charge of belonging to a terrorist group that plotted to seize power. At the tribunal, the foursome reportedly admitted to being part of a plot to overthrow the government and declared that they were "without religion." Hirsh-Fayvl Abramovitch, aged thirty-two and from Panevėžys, was sentenced to life in prison, along with a Lithuanian who received an eight-year sentence, for knowing about the plot. After the sentencing, the men were given pen and paper to write a request for pardon. They wrote a note addressed to the state president asking that their trial be moved to a regional court. Charney was shot, along with the three others, at five in the morning on December 27. After the trial, *Di idishe*

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[471] See M. R[abinovi]tch, "Farmishpet tsum toyt fir perzon[en]," *Di idishe shtime* no 297 (2187), December 27, 1926, 1 and G. Vol[kov]ski, "Feld-gerikht iber seks bashuldikte," Ibid., 7.

shtime ran a guide for its readers, showing how quickly people had to adapt to the new political situation, called, "What is a Military Tribunal?"[472]

On the last day of 1926 parliament met to vote on a national budget. Before the session, Robinson sat down with Voldemaras to discuss the status of minority rights under the new regime.[473] Voldemaras stated that his approach to minority rights as prime minister would be the same as it had been as a journalist, and as an author of the minorities declaration in Paris, namely, "that minority rights in Lithuania need to become regulated in a legal way," *Di idishe shtime* related. "His stand concerning minority rights will not change even if the minorities blocs vote against the budget." Minutes later, the Seimas convened to vote, and Robinson and other minorities voted against the proposed budget. When it was Robinson's turn to speak, he said, "The Jewish bloc does not find it possible to vote for the budget inasmuch as the future political line of the state is still officially unknown. On the other hand, however, taking into account the interests of state credit, that one cannot leave the country without a budget, we will *refrain* from voting for the budget."[474] The minorities, Social Democrats, Peasant Populists voted against the budget with a total of 31 votes; Christian Democrats, the Farmers' Union, Farmers' Party, Nationalists and Labor Party collected 35 votes in favor, and passed the budget. That same day, the government gazette announced that the martial law imposed by the military on the day of the coup was legalized throughout the country. Constitutional rights were suspended. The general

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[472] "Vos iz azoyns feld-gerikht," *Di idishe shtime* no 297 (2187), December 27, 1926, 7.

[473] See "Premyer-minister vegn meyutim-rekht," *Di idishe shtime* no 2 (2192), December 3, 1927, 7. See also "Regirungs-deklaratsiye in seym" in Ibid. For Robinson's later summary of interwar Lithuania's use of language laws and cultural autonomy vis-à-vis minority rights, see Robinson, *Were the Minorities Treaties a Failure?*, 208 and 228-231.

[474] "Ongenumen melukhe-byudzhet afn 1927 yor," *D iidishe shtime* no 2 (2192), December 3, 1927, 3. Emphasis in original.

secretary of the Fascist Party in Italy sent Smetona greetings, writing, "We regard Lithuania as the second young power to stand up in the rows against destructive tendencies."[475]

Historians have tended to understand the Lithuanian coup d'état as emanating from the rightward turn in populist national politics across Europe in the 1920s, and sharing, along with small nations such as Greece and other Balkan states, a similar reliance on military rule, law and order, fascism-inspired displays of power and state-run cooperatives to enhance the standing of a particular ethnic group.[476] In some ways, Smetona's takeover was most similar to the "presidential dictatorships" that came into power in similar fashion, in the Baltic States of Latvia and Estonia, much later, in 1934; in other ways, Smetona's rule was closer to Piłsudski's 1926 coup, and the "conservative-authoritarian regimes" of Central Europe, such as in Hungary and Austria.[477]

Much of the historiography of the coup has broken down along national lines. In assessing the political conditions of 1926, Lithuanian and Lithuanian-American historians have tended to accept the justifications of the coup's initiators. Thus Vladas Krivickas wrote, "An examination of the coup and its antecedents leads to the conclusion that democracy was not viable in Independent Lithuania of the 1920s" and the democratic government "lost reasons for its existence."[478] More recently, Robert Vitas has argued, "The elections to the third Seimas in

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[475] See "Vos hert zikh in Lite," *Di idishe shtime* 2811, 7.

[476] Ivan Berend, *Decades of Crisis*, 300-302.

[477] Ivan Berend, *Decades of Crisis*, 302 and Daunis Auers, *Comparative Politics and Government of the Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the 21st Century* (New York-Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 23. On Latvia, see Valters Ščerbinskis, "Leaders, Divided Society and Crisis. The Coup d'Etat of 1934 in Latvia, its Causes and Consequences," in *Forgotten Pages in Baltic History: Diversity and Inclusion*, ed. Martyn Housden and David J. Smith (Amsterdam-New York: Ropodi, 2004) and Jordan Kuck, "The Dictator Without a Uniform: Karlis Ulmanis, Agrarian Nationalism, Transnational Fascism, and Interwar Latvia," PhD dissertation, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2014, 240-243.

[478] Krivickas, "The Coup D'Etat," 250, 240-241.

May 1926 strained Lithuania's democracy to the breaking point. Those who wished to

circumvent democratic procedural arrangements were quite willing to use the situation to their

advantage; the Nationalists succeeded. People can not learn democracy overnight."[479] Česlovas

Laurinavičius wrote that the 1926 government of Populists and Social Democrats had lifted

martial law and initiated "democratic reforms with the utopian view that democratic structures

would function on their own like a machine […] Paradoxically the coup of December 17 1926

did offer certain hopes at home and abroad, because the National Party returned [sic] to power

and theirs had been the model to a great extent for restoring the Lithuanian state."[480] At the same

time, Jewish historians and other bearers of interwar Lithuanian Jewish memory have regarded

Smetona's ascent to power as a "semi-fascist," "fascist – or half-fascist," and "a half- – and

maybe an entirely – fascist coup."[481] By contrast, Izidorius Kisinas, one of Smetona's greatest

Jewish supporters, would deemphasize the fascistic tendencies of the coup in his Yiddish-

language biography of Smetona:

> The state then convulsed in a high fever of communal-political passion. The Seimas
> parties were powerless to control this situation; on the other hand, there was an incredible
> tendency to install an openly fascist regime. And Mr. Smetona, as president, searched for
> his own path. He held that the regime of the Seimas period had great problems; but on the
> other hand, he denied the import of a model of a foreign political regime, not wanting to
> blindly copy foreign ideas. The president declared many times that he wants to stabilize

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[479] Vitas, *Civil-Military Relations*, 42.

[480] "Lithuanian General Aspects of Domestic Policy 1918-1940" in *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews*, 112-113.

[481] Yisroel Segal, "Ha-teatron ha-yehudi b-Lita" in *Yahadut Lita* vol. 2, 275; Yudl Mark, "Di yidishe folkspartey in Lite," 4; and Mendl Sudarski, "Yidn in umophengiker lite" in *Lite* (1951), 148-149. See also Sh. Goldschmidt, "Der reysh galusa fun litvishn yidntum," in *Seyfer Ruben Rubinstein*, 79. The Soviet tradition of historiography also referred to the coup d'état as fascist, e.g. in *Lietuvos TSR istorija*, vol. III. On the historiography of the coup see also Kohrs, *Die Litauische Nationale Union*, 113-115.

the economic situation and raise the cultural level of the people – and through these, at the same time, find the appropriate form for the direction of the Lithuanian state.[482]

The memory of the role of Voldemaras in the regime change colors all of these observations. After being pushed out of the government in 1929, Voldemaras would form a fascistic youth movement called Geležinis Vilkas, or Iron Wolf.

The coup also deepened the divide that had emerged between Folkists and Zionists. Yosef Gar, the Folkist who had said that "New winds began to blow on the Jewish street" after the May elections, wrote that, in the wake of the coup d'état, "All hell broke loose [tut zikh khoyshekh] on the Jewish street. Those now in power [i.e., the *tautininkai*] supported the Agudah circles and tolerated the bourgeois Zionist elements. All other Jewish communal groups were not allowed to lift their heads."[483] Indeed, on December 22, just a few days after the coup d'état, Smetona met with Sulim Vulf, a leading Zionist and the head of the Kaunas City Council.[484] Vulf, also known as Sulimas Vulfas, was a former member of parliament and, of the numerous notable figures whom Smetona gave an audience to that week, apparently the only Jewish one. In the 1930s, Vulf would note that Jewish community leaders and politicians, who were mostly, if not all Zionists, had access to Smetona. "In the end," Vulf wrote, "interests in the life of the state in all areas of state-building – through the cabinet of ministers and the Seimas – went all the time to the president's house, where the head of the democratic state [sic] was always easily accessible, always wanted to know and hear from people who were immediately interested."[485] Mendl Sudarski, the Folkist leader, remembered that the coup era of heightened anti-Semitism, worsening Lithuanian-Jewish relations and the removal of Jews from positions of social and

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[482] *Antanas Smetona: der litvisher melukhe-prezident* (Kaunas, 1932), unpaginated [29].

[483] Gar, "Di Kovner togblat," 424.

[484] "Vizitai Respublikos Prezidentui," *Lietuva* no. 290 (2379), December 27, 1926, 1.

[485] Sulimas Vulfas, "Antanas Smetona ir žydai," in *Antanas Smetona*, ed. M. Bregšteinas (Kaunas: Jewish Soldiers' Union, 1934), 5.

economic power.[486] Yudl Mark remembered, "The coup of December 1926 created a crisis in the whole activity of the Folkspartey. From then on we concentrated around local work in the limited city administration; even more around concrete work in the areas of economic aid, the activities of ORT, OZE, and the work of the *bildungsgezelshaft*, which was founded" under the Grinius-Sleževičius regime.[487] Three weeks after the coup, Uriah Katzenelenbogen walked into the American consul's office with a stack of Yiddish newspapers and requested a journalist visa to the United States.[488]

By July of 1927, Smetona's journeys to Lithuanian shtetls to meet with Jewish community leaders were well underway. Late that month, in the coastal town of Palanga, when the official welcome delegation sang the Lithuanian national anthem at Smetona's arrival, a rabbi who performed in this group left his hat on. Apparently mistaking the rabbi's hat for a sign of disrespect, the chief of police ran up and knocked the hat off of the rabbi's head. The president "expressed sorrow, regret, and sympathy" to the rabbi.[489] Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas, a political writer who traveled with the president, later wrote in *Lietuvis*, a Nationalist Union newspaper, that the Ministry of Internal Affairs would discipline the police chief.

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[486] Sudarski, "Yidn in umophengiker Lite," 148-149.

[487] Mark, "Di yidishe folkspartey in Lite," 11.

[488] Heingartner, *Lithuania in the 1920s*, 92.

[489] "Del incident Palangoje," *Lietuvis* no. 160, July 21, 1927, 1. See also Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona and His Lithuania*, 189.

Chapter Four
"Forget Versailles": Between Rights and Privileges in the Illiberal State, 1927-1931

On June 25, 1928 president Antanas Smetona visited Švėkšna, a small town in the far west of

Lithuania, over two hundred kilometers from the capital, Kaunas. The president was there to

inaugurate a new gymnasium but the visit was notable for the highly orchestrated display of

political pageantry that welcomed him to town. A video recorded by a Lithuanian American

traveler that day shows the president, hatless, leaving his automobile with his wife and an

entourage of generals and assistants, a large crowd looking on.[490] One part of the crowd in the

market square stood off to the side, between a store and the large stone synagogue recently

constructed after the old wooden one had burned down. This group was arranged under a large

banner that read "Welcome" in Lithuanian and "Bruchim Haboim," which means "welcome" in

Yiddish, and this latter phrase appeared in both Hebrew letters and in transliteration. The sign

continued in Lithuanian: "We the Jewish residents of Švėkšna greet the 'Tautos vadas' [leader of

the nation], President of the Lithuanian State, And Your Excellency's respected attendants,

Wishing next time you come here from Vilnius." A large Star of David topped the banner, and

below some people held up a wedding canopy. Before heading to the steps of the school,

Smetona walked directly to the Jewish group, as he typically did on such visits. He exchanged

some words with community leaders – usually this included the town's rabbi – and at a set table

he dipped challah bread in salt and took a bite. Photographs taken that day show that the

president was then led along with the wedding canopy and a bearded man holding a Torah scroll

before heading to the center of the market square, where the main celebration proceeded with

Catholic priests swinging censers, and other ceremonies.

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[490] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BxoY0HOZR0&t=376s

What is the meaning of such a display? How should this performance of loyalty, or even symbolic marriage, to a dictator – just one month after he issued a new constitution concentrating power in his hands – be understood in light of the preceding decade of dedicated Jewish democratic activism? In this chapter I explore how Lithuanian Jews responded to, interpreted, and accommodated the Smetona regime during its first five years – years during which Smetona dissolved the parliament, issued a new constitution, and reelected himself. Against the backdrop of Smetona's increasingly authoritarian political program, I look closely at how Jews participated in public celebrations and declarations of patriotism, such as the 1928 holiday of Lithuania's tenth anniversary of independence, and the 1930 celebrations of medieval Grand Duke Vytautas the Great, when, one historian has noted, "the country as a whole was involved in a sort of pseudo-religious veneration of its national hero."[491] These moments provided occasions for Lithuanian Jews to review their stances on assimilation, rights, and citizenship.

Over the course of the late 1920s, the Nationalist Union shifted the meaning of the trope of the Grand Duchy away from one that emphasized the polity's multiethnic character and Jews' long history in the region towards one that emphasized Jews' conditional existence in Lithuania thanks to Vytautas's benevolent charter, a version that comported better with the Nationalists' vision of order. I argue that, despite the ruling Nationalist Union party's promotion of an idea of the primacy of ethnic Lithuanianness, Jews continued to be officially included in a version of a Lithuanian national idea, and also managed to find a place to express their sense of belonging to the state, or, one might say, of performing Lithuanian identity.

Jewish responses to the dismantling of Lithuanian democracy included criticism, complacency, and nostalgia for the early interwar republic and its ideals. There were grave

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[491] Giedrė Mickūnaitė, *Making a Great Ruler: Grand Duke Vytautas of Lithuani*a (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006), 2.

consequences to the process of what has been called, in reference to the Jews in other parts of interwar Central and Eastern Europe, "de-emancipation."[492] Unlike the legal de-emancipation of German Jewry in the 1930s, Lithuanian Jews, who had already been stripped of their access to some of their constitutionally mandated forms of autonomy, were erased from the vision of a multiethnic Lithuania they, and worldwide observers, had been enticed by in the 1910s. As Adi Gordon has recently noted, "In the Jewish European context, the term 'postliberal' also signifies a generational shift in the expectations for Jewish integration away from the hope for a harmonious integration facilitated by greater civil equality for Jews."[493] It is in this context that we see how Antanas Smetona himself became "a symbol of the state" itself, and thus, increasingly, a focal point of Jewish national identity.[494] It was a new political dynamic that its supporters and detractors commonly compared to a monarchy.

Philosopher King

In the weeks following the December 1926 coup d'état, Antanas Smetona appeared to settle comfortably into his newfound position of power. In January of 1927, his Nationalist Union party began to publish a weekly journal to advance its ideology. *Tautininkų balsas*, or "Voice of the Nationalists," was published by Jadvyga Tūbelienė, Smetona's sister-in-law, and the wife of Juozas Tūbelis, an important advisor to Smetona who would be made Minister of Finance in

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[492] Guy Miron, *The Waning of Emancipation: Jewish History, Memory, and the Rise of Fascism in Germany, France, and Hungary* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 57.

[493] Adi Gordon, *Toward Nationalism's End: An Intellectual Biography of Hans Kohn* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2017), 260 n. 10.

[494] Alfonsas Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona and His Lithuania: From the National Liberation Movement to an Authoritarian Regime (1893-1940)* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 234.

May and later serve as Smetona's prime minister, from 1929-1938. "We are celebrating," an editorial about the president proclaimed on the front page of the first issue, "because his word is right and his heart burns with love of the fatherland."[495] That same month, leaders of various political parties formed a so-called "Committee of Eight" to cooperate with the new regime; Mykolas Krupavičius, a Christian Democrat representative to the committee, even proposed merging his party with the Nationalist Union.[496]

But outside of elite political circles, criticism of the new government was spreading among the left and right, and Smetona became more vocal about his pessimism with the parliamentary process that included these dissenting views. Leftist political emigres initiated a year of publishing broadsides denouncing the "Smetona-Voldemaras-Plechavičius dictatorship," writing, for example, "Those who took power in their own hands with guns on December 16 are the only enemies of Lithuanian independence."[497] The far-right journal *Tautos valia*, meanwhile, was disappointed that Lithuania was not turning toward fascism, and its leaders began to agitate for a rightwing counter-coup.[498]

In early February, when the American consul in Kaunas met with President Smetona over tea, cigarettes and liqueur, Smetona "looked tired and worried," the consul noted in his diary.[499] Smetona used the occasion to justify his coup d'état, and, in the process, presented a revealing picture of his political vision. The consul, Robert Heingartner, remembered:

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[495] "Lietuvos Prezidentas Antanas Smetona," *Tautininkų balsas* no. 1, January 13, 1927, 1.

[496] Artūras Svarauskas, "Kunigo M. Krupavičiaus opozicinė veikla valstybinei valdžiai (1927-1940 m.)," *Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademijos metraštis* 27 (2005): 500-501.

[497] *Lietuvos politinių emigrantų žodis* Nr. 1 (December 4, 1927) in Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania 321.6(474.5). Plechavičius was a general who helped orchestrate the 1926 coup d'état.

[498] Česlovas Laurinavičius, "Virtinė išpuolių prieš režimą," in *Lietuvos Istorija* vol. X, book I, ed. Danutė Blažytė-Baužienė, et al. (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2013), 579.

[499] Heingartner, *Lithuania in the* 1920s, 107.

The President said that most countries are making experiments in democracy now and he drew attention to Mussolini's ideas as compared with those of the leaders in Soviet Russia. Each country, he said, must develop its own democracy according to the temperament of its people. Continuing on this subject he remarked that the Lithuanian people, who were suppressed for so long, have no experience in government so that they are not fitted for the same democracy as, for instance, the English in whose country parliamentary government had its origin. The Lithuanian government is also experimenting in an appropriate democracy for the people, he said, but it will take a long time to educate them for self-government. The idea of his government is to adopt the American system which gives more power to the President. He expressed his admiration for the American Constitution which, as he remarked, has been in operation for over 150 years [sic] with only a few amendments [sic].[500]

Smetona's remarks that day, if Heingartner's memory can be trusted, expose some of his ideology's incoherence but nonetheless provide early indicators of the direction in which he would take the country. Smetona envisioned a highly powerful executive who could rely on an ancient and unchanging legal charter to serve an ignorant population that cannot govern itself. In his remarks to Heingartner, Smetona also revealed the overlap, in his thinking, between a nation and one defining ethnic group. Ethnic groups, moreover, have distinct national traits and corresponding ideal forms of governance, presenting the obvious question of how one would govern in multiethnic Lithuania. The same month as this meeting, Smetona appointed Leon Bramson honorary Consul of Lithuania to Palestine.[501] At the end of February, Voldemaras would read a declaration in the parliament that raised the question of changing the constitution in order to formally strengthen the president's executive power and make his position totally independent of the parliament.[502]

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[500] Ibid., 107-108.

[501] Eglė Bendikaitė, "Intermediary between Worlds: Shimshon Rosenbaum: Lawyer, Zionist, Politician," *Osteuropa* 8-10 (2008): 178.

[502] Gediminas Rudis, "Demokratinio parlamentarizmo likvidavimas," in *Lietuvos Istorija* vol. X, book I, ed. Danutė Blažytė-Baužienė, et al. (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2013), 560.

Some of these views may be less surprising when contextualized alongside Smetona's translation of Plato's "Crito," which he would publish in 1927. Smetona was closely linked to the philosophy of Plato during his lifetime. He not only taught courses on Plato at the University of Lithuania but also discoursed on the ancient Greek philosopher to dinner party guests and kept copies of Plato's works on his bedside table.[503] On Smetona's sixtieth birthday, in 1934, Yisroel Zhofer would proudly announce Smetona's status as a philosopher.[504] The "Crito" features a dialogue between Crito and Socrates, one day before the latter's execution. Crito tries to convince Socrates to escape prison, and therefore death, but Socrates is loyal to the laws of Athens: to break one, he claims, in a famous formulation, would undermine all the others. Socrates declares his loyalty to the "well-governed" city-state in which he was born and raised, putting inherent trust in its legal decisions. Socrates' apparent commitment to follow even unjust laws made by the court of Athens has provoked extensive debate over whether Socrates here endorses a form of authoritarianism.[505] Whether one believes Socrates held this view or not, what is relevant here is that the "Crito" supports an idea of citizenship based on loyalty to laws made by an elect few, and Smetona's name on the first page of his translation of the "Crito" gives the text his imprimatur. To solidify this connection, Smetona translates the Greek word *polis*, or city state, here referring specifically to Athens, by using various Lithuanian words for "country,"

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[503] See Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona and His Lithuania*, 121, 225 and Senn, *Lithuania 1940*, 30.

[504] J. L. Žoferis, "Smetona – lietuviškasis Masarikas," in *Antanas Smetona*, ed. M. Bregšteinas (Kaunas: Jewish Soldiers' Union, 1934), 10.

[505] See for example John R. Wallach, *Platonic Political Art: A Study of Critical Reason and Democracy* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001). For an argument against the authoritarian interpretation, see Sandra Berges, *Plato on Virtue and the Law* (London: Continuum, 2009).

including "šalis" and "kraštas" – but notably not "valstybė," or "nation-state" – suggesting the possibility of an extension of the idea to the national context.[506]

By spring of 1927, the growing opposition to the Nationalist Union seized on the dangers of the vagueness of Smetona's policies. Left-leaning Lithuanian newspapers in Latvia, Polish Vilnius, and the United States openly expressed their dismay with what appeared to be a dictatorship forming in their homeland. Amid rumors of the Nationalist Union's plans to strengthen Smetona's powers at the expense of the Seimas, a group of Populists and Social Democrats were also said to plot a potential counter coup. On April 4, at a regional gathering of the Peasant Populist party, a member of parliament named Juozas Pajaujis was abruptly arrested and accused of having led the anti-government fomentation. In response, Vincas Čepinskis, a physician and chemist who served as a Social Democrat in parliament, authored a book-length essay entitled, *Democracy and Dictatorship*. In the essay, dated April 10, 1927, Čepinskis seized on Smetona's political pretensions, writing, "Plato asked citizens to take into their own hands the creation, management and planning of economic, social and political life, in a word, demanded that citizens themselves would manage, independently and self-consciously, all aspects of their life, taking their destiny into their own hands."[507] Democracy, Čepinskis stated, was the culmination of a centuries-long struggle against feudal lords and kings, with the United States being exemplary.[508]

Two days after Čepinskis penned his defense of democracy, members of parliament issued a forceful condemnation of Pajaujis's arrest. In a long and dramatic session that focused on the Pajaujis case, Voldemaras finally declared Pajaujis guilty and told the lawmakers,

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[506] "Kritonas," in *Humanitarinių mokslų fakulteto raštai: commentationes ordinis philologorum*, Lib. II (1927), 11.

[507] Vincas Čepinskis, *Demokratija ir diktatūra* (Šiauliai: Kultūros švietimo draugija, 1927), 3.

[508] Ibid., 22-23.

"Reliance on the constitution is also not legal because our constitution is only a declarative, and therefore beyond that are special laws."[509] A half-hour break was called, during which deputies who waited in the hallways became convinced that that day's session would be the last.[510] When the break was over, the session could not begin because the bloc of minorities, including Jews, Baltic Germans and Poles, was still outside, debating their position.[511] When they entered, late, they reportedly made a bad impression on the cabinet.[512] Once the session resumed, representatives of various factions nearly unified in explaining their reasons for having lost confidence in the government. The minorities bloc stated, "From the standpoint of making appropriate conclusions within the limits of the laws, while taking into account the question of confidence, we declare that, insofar as the government will not accord with the constitution and decisions of the parliament, *we will vote no confidence*."[513] A general vote was taken, and the majority of the Seimas, including three Jews, gave votes of no confidence. After another short break, the speaker of the parliament, Aleksandras Stulginskis, received a letter from Smetona that read, "Relying on the constitution, the Seimas is dissolved." An announcement promised that new parliamentary elections would be held in sixty days. The day after the Seimas was dismissed, Zhofer had a brief exchange with Voldemaras in his office.

> "Mr. Prime Minister, the parliament was dissolved. What will happen next?"
> [Speaking in German] "The world becomes old and new again!"
> "When will new parliamentary elections occur?"
> "We will see."[514]

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[509] "Melukhe-prezident funandergelozn dem Seym," *Di idishe shtime* 87 (2277), April 13, 1927, 1.

[510] Ibid.

[511] Yisroel Zhofer, "Di letste shoen fun dritn Seym," *Di idishe shtime* 88 (2278), April 14, 1927, 2.

[512] Ibid.

[513] Ibid.

[514] Zhofer, "Seym funanderlozn – un vos vayter?," *Di idishe shtime* 88 (2278), April 14, 1927, 1.

Reuben Rubinstein, one of the editors of *Di idishe shtime*, along with Jacob Robinson, Yitzhak Leyzerovitch and M. Kleinman, wrote that "In the end, all the parties are looking at new elections with fear and suspicion, like an unsure swimmer looks at the water. But you want to close your eyes and leap: maybe you can swim."[515] Kaunas was soon put under a military curfew.[516] Elections for a new parliament would never materialize. "Seimas Elections Should Have Been the 12th of This Month," an article would announce flatly in the back pages of a June issue of *Di idishe shtime*.[517]

Lucy Dawidowicz would later observe about this episode in Lithuanian history, "The parliament ceased to function. There was no one of whom to demand an accounting."[518] Yet a close reading of the Yiddish press in this period of transition reveals an array of Jewish responses to the dismantling of democracy. Indeed, *Di idishe shtime* journalist Yisroel Zhofer had a direct line to Voldemaras himself, and frequently confronted him with pressing questions and problems. Shortly after the dissolution of parliament, Rubinstein publicly countered Voldemaras on what the prime minister had called the "declarative" nature of the constitution. "Is the constitution a constitution, i.e., the *foundational law* of the state, or a *declaration* which can be interpreted?," he asked.[519] The next day, in an essay entitled, "Rights and Tactics," Rubinstein noted that the principle of extending equal rights to Jews was upheld by "international tractates, in declarations and constitutions. Today, it is a *shame* to say openly that a segment of citizens which adheres to a confessional or national group, *needs* to limited in their rights."[520] He went on

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[515] Reuben Rubinstein, "Der Seym un di parteyen," *Di idishe shtime* 88 (2278), April 14, 1927, 2.

[516] G. V., "Kovner komandant vegn der ordnung," *Di idishe shtime* no 88 (2227), April 14, 1927, 7.

[517] "12-tn d[em] kh[oydesh] hobn gezolt zayn Seym-valn," *Di idishe shtime* 134 (2324), June 15, 1927, 7.

[518] Lucy Dawidowicz, "Jewish Politics: Under Despotism and Dictatorship," in *The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 76.

[519] Reuben Rubinstein, "Der shtroykhl-shteyn," *Di idishe shtime* 89 (2279), April 15, 1927, 2.

[520] Reuben Rubinstein, "Rekht un taktik," *Di idishe shtime* 90 (2880), April 16, 1927. 2.

to quote Paragraph 10 of the 1922 Lithuanian constitution, which stated that all Lithuanian citizens, men and women, are equal before the law, and that their "privileges" cannot be diminished on account of their heritage, belief or nationality.

In May, the journalist Yisroel Zhofer sat down with Voldmaras for what *Di idishe shtime* called "a friendly conversation" about recent events.[521] Voldemaras assured Zhofer that the political situation in Lithuania had stabilized. "On the surface," he said, "from a bird's eye view, it can actually seem like the government is isolated, that it has no popular movement behind it. But in truth it isn't so. The decisions and opinions of the central committees of certain parties don't hear the requisite echo, or any agreement at all, among the general public, the majority of which remains politically independent." Voldemaras told Zhofer that he thought minorities played the role of swing vote in parliament, voting with the left or right when the majority would. "The minorities cannot play such a role because they did not create the contemporary independent Lithuania." He elaborated:

> In truth, I have openly declared more than once that *the Jews*, who were the first to include themselves in the work of rebuilding Lithuania, were a certain exception. But the Jews did this more because of the destruction in Russia than out of love for an independent Lithuania. The Jews aren't really strongly interested in that. I will reiterate here that you can't dismiss the Jews. But we have to take the case at face value – in the rows of the first [military] volunteers who fought to the end for Lithuania's independence *we did not see any Jews*, and therefore one can't really demand that they go lay their head for Lithuania.[522]

Jewish involvement in the Lithuanian national movement at the turn of the century, and later the Lithuanian military, has been extensively detailed.[523] Yet to Voldemaras, Jews had not earned

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[521] Y[israel] Zhofer, "Premyer-minister vegn aktuele politishe inyonim," *Di idishe shtime* 121 (2311), May 27, 1927, 2.

[522] Ibid. Emphasis in original.

[523] See *A Pragmatic Alliance: Jewish-Lithuanian Political Cooperation at the Beginning of the 20th Century*, eds. Vladas Sirutavičius and Darius Staliūnas (Budapest-New York: CEU Press, 2011).

their political power. Then, in a telling example of an evolving relationship between the government and the Jews, Voldemaras highlighted how Jews had recently welcomed Smetona in Panevėžys, demonstrating Jews' enthusiasm for Smetona's travels and in general. He offered an anecdote about how a local Jew in Panevėžys offered to cut the wall of his house to allow for a dais to be built to accommodate the president. "In the provinces, [Smetona] is received with sympathy through all strata of urban and small-town populations," he wrote, and this anecdote "demonstrates the popularity and respect that people feel towards the president also among non-Lithuanians."[524] Such events in which Jews interacted directly with Smetona and demonstrated supererogatory support would become ever more common as the authoritarian regime's policies developed in inverse correlation to the people's will.

The King Travels

In late spring of 1927, as uncertainty about the dismissal of the Seimas spread, Smetona began regular tours through the Lithuanian countryside to commune with Lithuanians directly and promote unity under his leadership. One Lithuanian historian has likened the trips to a public relations campaign to undermine the opposition.[525] The press, at the time, referred to these events as a "going to the people," and they did function as an important line of defense of the president's authority after the coup d'état. They also presented a new and reinterpreted national myth that sometimes directly, and other times indirectly, suggested a new idea of how Jews should relate to the Lithuanian state. In particular, the organization of these events, and Smetona's speeches during them, signaled a shift towards portraying Jews as primarily a

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[524] Y[isroel] Zhofer, "Premyer-minister vegn aktuele politishe inyonim," *Di idishe shtime* 121 (2311), May 27, 1927, 2. Emphasis in original.

[525] Rudis, "Demokratinio parlamentarizmo likvidavimas," 563.

corporate entity with privileges rather than rights, and also as publicly held to a different standard than their Lithuanian compatriots. Indeed, establishing and maintaining a public position on Lithuanian Jewry was one of the central components to Smetona's travels. Jews, after all, made up significant segments of the populations – if not the majorities – of many of the market towns the president visited, and the perception of Jewish loyalty to Smetona would undermine causes of both right and left opposition to the Nationalist Union.[526] Records of Smetona's travels are good sources of Jewish – and general – political behavior in the interwar period, in particular during the years of authoritarianism, when press censorship and political repression were enforced. Moreover, these journeys were widely viewed as successful instruments of political ideology. Even Voldemaras, Smetona's prime minister and eventual political adversary, would refer to these travels as Smetona's "great work."[527]

After a few trips to the countryside in spring, Smetona went on longer journeys throughout Lithuania in the summer of 1927, first through the northwestern historical region known as Samogitia, or Žemaitija, and later through the northeast, or Aukštaitija. Smetona traveled in the company of generals and close advisors and, in addition, the priest Juozas Tumas, who wrote under the penname Vaižgantas, and Vincas Grigaliūnas, also known as Glovackis, the publisher of the antidemocratic journal, *Tautos valia* ("The [Ethnic] Nation's Path"). Vaižgantas wrote a serialized travelogue for *Lietuvis* ("The Lithuanian") whose installments sometimes ran so long they took up almost the entire newspaper.[528] He described in detail the ceremonies that welcomed Smetona in small towns, and even how Smetona was waylaid between towns by

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[526] According to the 1923 census, for example, the population of Švėkšna, whose documented Jewish settlement dates to the seventeenth century, was about 1,300 people, of whom 39% were Jews.

[527] As quoted in Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona and His Lithuania*, 212.

[528] See Vaižgantas [Juozas Tumas], "J. E. Valstybės Prezidentas Žemaičiuose," *Lietuvis* no. 157, July 18, 1927, 2; Vaižgantas, "J. E. Valstybės Prezidentas Žemaičiuose (II)," *Lietuvis* no. 158, July 19, 1927, 2; Vaižgantas, "J. E. Valstybės Prezidentas Žemaičiuose (III)," *Lietuvis* no. 162, July 23, 1927, 1.

Lithuanian villagers plying the president with homemade beer and cheese, which the president would gamely accept.

In almost every town he visited, Smetona paid special attention to the local Jews. Jews, of course, made up a significant portion of the town's residents, although Lithuanian villagers from the countryside filled the marketplace on occasions of Smetona's visit. Sometimes, Smetona would visit the Jewish hospital; while in Varniai, Dusetos and other towns, he visited the synagogue.[529] In Darbėnai, the rabbi gave Smetona a blessing, saying, "All of us have a common ideal – independent Lithuania. But our joy is not enough: we have been robbed of Vilnius, where the Grand Duchy was. But we do not stop hoping, we are determined to go to battle and win, because God is on our side."[530] In Skuodas, a Jewish representative said, "Watching how you lead the state, we trust impartially and bless you in the name of God."[531] On a visit to the Jewish gymnasium in Marijampolė, students presented Smetona with a handmade gift and made this statement: "Dear Leader of our Fatherland! … We are happy today that we can welcome you to our school with the spirit of the creation of our Fatherland. … Be a picture of diligence for us."[532] Smetona was also treated to orchestrated displays by Zionist youth groups, scouts and sports organizations, such as Maccabi. In his travelogues, Vaižgantas noted that Smetona was often greeted by performances by the Riflemen's Union and the Lithuanian Physical Education League, but that the grandest performances were by Maccabi, whose enthusiastic coordinated

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[529] "J. E. p. Respublikos Prezidentas Dusetose," *Panevėžio balsas*, September 8, 1927, 1. That summer, and again in 1938, Jews in Šeduva also greeted the traveling Bishop of Panevėžys "enthusiastically," with songs and decorated gates. See Koresp., "Iš J. E. Panevėžio Vyskupo rudeninio maršruto," *Panevėžio balsas*, September 8, 1927, 1 and Kaubrys, "Lietuvos žydų lojalumo raiška," 116.

[530] Vaižgantas, "J. E. Valstybės Prezidentas Žemaičiuose (VI)," *Lietuvis* no. 166, July 28, 1927, 1.

[531] Ibid., 2.

[532] Reprinted in "Pasveikinas p. Valstybės Prezidentui, žydų gimnazijos Marijampolėj mokinės perskaitytas," *Lietuvis* 118, May 30, 1927, 3.

bicycle and foot work "sometimes overwhelmed guests for three hours. They made a warm impression and put smiles on faces just like the ethnic Lithuanian [tautiškomoji] youth and riflemen."[533]

In the town of Šeduva, a group of representatives from the municipality and representatives of the Jewish community waited at one in the morning to greet the president upon his arrival.[534] The former group presented Smetona with bread and salt, the latter with cakes. Afterwards, while still at the train station, the president spoke with his greeters. *Lietuva* ("Lithuania") reported, "the rabbi and other elderly Jews asked the president for mutual recognition, approval of communal work with one another. You saw in their faces some of that ancient Jewish type when they would ask their own rabbi questions." In 1934, the rabbi of Šeduva wrote, "Seven years ago we had the honor to see State President Antanas Smetona in our town. The president very graciously greeted our delegation; he asked about our life; he was interested in every detail with such sincerity that it simply thrilled us."[535]

Historians including Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson have explicated the significance of rituals and ritualization for national movements. Amitai Etzioni has argued that holidays and rituals "reaffirm communal bonds (although they may reaffirm some bonds at the same time that they undermine others)."[536] To help further interpret the public spectacles Šeduva, Švėkšna and other shtetls, I rely on a structurally similar example from another era of history, the festive traditions in Spain from the 14th century to the 17th century. Late medieval Spain may

[533] Vaižgantas, "J. E. Valstybės Prezidentas Žemaičiuose (IV)," *Lietuvis* no. 163, July 25, 1927, 1.
[534] "R. Prezidento atsilankymas Panevėžyj," *Lietuva* 117 (2500), May 25, 1927, 1. See also "R. Prezidento atsilankymas Panevėžyj," *Lietuva* 118 (2501), May 27, 1927, 2.
[535] M. Ginkinas, "Valstybės Prezidentas Šeduvoj," in *Antanas Smetona*, ed. M. Bregšteinas (Kaunas: Jewish Soldiers' Union, 1934), 15.
[536] Amitai Etzioni, "Holidays and Rituals: Neglected Seedbeds of Virtue," in *We Are What We Celebrate: Understanding Holidays and Rituals*, ed. Etzioni and Jared Bloom (New York: NYU Press, 2004), 7.

seem as distant a context in Europe as one can get from twentieth-century Lithuania – although *Lietuvis*, the Nationalist Union newspaper, did serialize a translation of the 1554 novel *Lazarillo de Tormes* in spring of 1927.[537] But the example directly useful in thinking through and theorizing Smetona's travels and other celebrations during his presidency, including celebrations of the tenth anniversary of Lithuanian independence, in February of 1928; the 500th anniversary of the death of Grand Duke Vytautas, in 1930; Smetona's sixtieth birthday, in 1934; and twenty years of independence, in 1938.

Teofilo Ruiz has proposed a "typology" of the "meaning of festivals": festivals are "carefully plotted and highly scripted events" and "tightly controlled and carefully managed cultural artifacts. As performances dictated by tradition and created for complex social and political reasons." He argues that "the structures of regal power, as well as the challenges to that power, were deeply embedded in festive traditions and celebratory rituals."[538] The rulers, local political and religious figures and others repeatedly performed their roles "for the benefit each other and of the people whom they sought to instruct and bind to their service." Ruiz proposes two major categories of festival: calendrical and non-calendrical, and argues, "The most significant events in the [non-calendrical] category were royal entries and/or princely visits."[539] Royal entries – scheduled visits of a monarch to a town – were "ritualized performances of power" that "reiterat[ed] certain motifs" while "forcefully reminding [viewers] of the separation between social groups and the distance between one order and another."[540]

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[537] "Lazarillo iš Tormeso," trans. P. Gaučys, May-June, e.g., *Lietuvis* no. 120, June 1 1927, 2.

[538] Teofilo Ruiz, *A King Travels: Festive Traditions in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 35.

[539] Ibid., 48.

[540] Ibid., 71.

Taking a cue from Ruiz, I suggest that official visits by President Smetona to small towns in Lithuania proceeded along similar lines. Smetona's arrivals were highly anticipated events during which he and his entourage of military, political and religious advisors were greeted by representatives of the local government along with leaders of the Jewish community, exposing the stratification of various towns' social groups. Jews were included in celebrations, even as the first stop on the visit, but kept apart or marked as different in other ways. For example, in Švėkšna and elsewhere, Smetona was greeted by large numbers of local Lithuanians wearing the traditional national costume of embroidered linen shirts and dresses.[541] Photographs from the Švėkšna celebration show Jews wearing contemporary styles, with women dressed like flappers, in dropped-waist dresses, and men appearing in sharp suits and fedoras, reflecting the different demands on Jews and Lithuanians to present themselves to the state's highest authority. Jews did not participate, through fashion, in the idea of a Lithuanian "nation" promoted by Smetona's party. At the same time, they did not present as small-town Jews – on the contrary, with the exception of the rabbis, the preferred form of dress was highly cosmopolitan, in fact conforming to the Nationalists' expectation that Jews be productive economic citizens. Ruiz also argues, "The choice of the spaces in which festivals took place was never arbitrary."[542] In Švėkšna, Jews stood by the synagogue, a structure with visible Hebrew lettering and symbolism – in this case a Star of David, repeated on the banner. In medieval Spain, the Jewish and Muslim greeted the monarch holding their most valuable religious objects. In Švėkšna and other Lithuanian towns, Jews greeted the president with the Torah scroll, a Kiddush cup, a chupa, and other religious symbols. Jewish political affiliations, as Zionists, Folkists, Yiddishists, or Social Democrats,

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[541] On the interwar veneration of peasant culture, see Rimvydas Šilbajoris, "Bending the Mind in a Free Country. Lithuania between the Wars," in *The Ethnic Dimension in Politics and Culture in the Baltic Countries*, 1920-1945, ed. Baiba Metuzale-Kangere (Stockholm: Södertörns högskola, 2004), 156.

[542] Ruiz, *A King Travels*, 64.

were erased by the new group identity marked by a religious, or quasi-religious, cast, signifying a re-religification of Lithuanian Jewry that comported with the new quasi-medieval demands of the regime. It was a way to publicly present the Jewish community as unified and non-Communist.

Smetona's speeches were critical events in the festivities surrounding his visits to Lithuanian towns. In Širvintos, east of Kaunas on what was then the border with Poland, Smetona arrived with an entourage that included General Jonas Jurgis Bulota, whose cap had allegedly been knocked off by a Jewish protester the previous year. They were greeted with speeches by members of the Riflemen's Union and the Nationalist Union, the head of the county, and Jewish representatives, all of them mentioning the return of Vilnius to Lithuania.[543] After a stopping by the church, Smetona visited the synagogue, where the rabbi again expressed his hope that next time Smetona arrives it should be from Vilnius. According to one account, Smetona replied to the Jews' speeches. "He said that the Jews of Širvintos had been loyal to Lithuania in times of danger, that these deeds were connected to the great determination of the Jewish community, that Jews always had common cause with the whole Lithuanian nation [tauta], and that the guest of honor was received with great respect in the sanctuary. While leaving, he gave his regards and best wishes to the Jewish people [tauta]."[544] As he exited, members of Maccabi sang the "national hymn" by the synagogue doors, although it is unclear whether they sang the Lithuanian national hymn or Hatikva.

One of the main themes directed towards Jews by Smetona during these events was the demand for Jewish loyalty. Writing about the interwar period in Slovakia, Rebekah Klein-

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[543] "J.E. Respublikos Prezidentas Širvintose," *Tautininkų balsas* 33, August 25, 1927, 2.
[544] Ibid.

Pejšová has argued that Jewish "identity arises from the loyalty relationship with the state."[545] Saulius Kaubrys has proposed three types of loyalty that Jews professed in interwar Lithuania: routine, situational and demonstrative.[546] Former president Kazys Grinius had famously stated, in a speech in the city of Šiauliai, in the summer of 1926, "I am the president not only of Lithuanians but also of Jews."[547] By contrast, Smetona's speeches added caveats to the state's relationship with Jews. In fact, Jewish loyalty had been an important trope from the first day of the Nationalist Union government, when the coup initiators' had stated, "The only minority group that is loyal and can be worked with are the Jews," telling the Jews "to have trust in the new regime."[548] In one speech Smetona gave in the summer of 1927, he made a remark which Vaižgantas, covering the event for *Lietuvis*, set apart typographically and with a Lithuanian word that means "aside." Smetona said, "Jews everywhere have unanimously felt, unanimously expressed, their loyalty, all have wanted us to get Vilnius back, etc. They have a clear, common directive and take pride in it. This is of great interest."[549] But elsewhere Smetona made it clear that he felt he needed to remind Jews to be loyal. At another official visit to a small town, the president reportedly said, referring to the Jews, "Lithuanians have always been, and are, tolerant. The state [valstybė] only has to demand loyalty to its mission, its jewel of Vilnius."[550] Smetona went on to complicate the very notion of Lithuanian nationhood moments later, after listening to

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[545] *Mapping Jewish Loyalties in Interwar Slovakia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 3.

[546] Saulius Kaubrys, "Lietuvos žydų lojalumo raiška: apsisprendimo variacijos 1918-1940 metais," in *Abipusis pažinimas: lietuvių ir žydų kultūriniai saitai*, ed. Jurgita Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė (Vilnius: Vilnius University Press, 2010).

[547] Yisroel Zhofer, "Af der oysshtelung in Shavl," *Di idishe shtime* 2035, [late June or early July] 1926, 7.

[548] As paraphrased in "Vendung tsu yidn – yidn darfn zayn ruik," *Di idishe shtime* no 288 (2177/8), December 18, 1926, 2.

[549] Vaižgantas, "J. E. Valstybės Prezidentas Žemaičiuose (V)," *Lietuvis* no. 165, July 27, 1927, 3. - ?

[550] "R. Prezidento atsilankymas Panevėžyj," *Lietuva*, 119 (2502), May 28, 1927, 2. See also "R. Prezidento atsilankymas Panevėžyj," *Lietuva*, 117 (2500), May 25, 1927, 1.

a speech in Polish. Smetona told the crowd: "I am glad that all speakers of Lithuanian and Polish have a Lithuanian heart. But today we are no longer a united people [tauta]. We still have misunderstandings which will have to be smoothed out in the future. I love all Lithuania regardless of nationalities [tautybių]...Today we are at a crossroads: whether we are going on the path of fragmentation or unity. I believe in our people's unity [savo tautos vienybė]."[551] For Smetona, Poles were still assimilable to Lithuanianness, while Jews' national trajectory was parallel.

In July of 1927, in Kretinga, a small town near the Baltic coast, Smetona delivered one of his most widely quoted speeches on Jews' relationship to the Lithuanian state. Upon arriving in Kretinga, Smetona was greeted by members of the Jewish community, after which he continued on to visit a monastery and deliver some remarks on religion.[552] Then Smetona turned to the topic of the Jews' support for the return of Vilnius.

> Yes, Vilnius is ours and will be ours, we trust in our army. There, in Vilnius, our Vytautas is buried, the holy Lady of the Gates of Dawn is there. But to go there we have to have a clear conscience, as if to Jerusalem, without religious differences. Vytautas gave a lot of freedom to the Jews, he said, whoever works, has to have freedom to work. And we do not now dismiss freedoms for the Jews. We only demand that, while freely working on their cultural activity, they have with us a common state [valstybė] and its affairs committed in their hearts, and not their own state. If they demand legal power, then we would demand a conscience that reflects the affairs of the state. The sooner they do, the more good will they will receive, and not need to rely on papers that have a reminder that Jewish legal guarantees are in Paris.[553]

Smetona went on to ask the Jews to make "sacrifices" in the name of national unity. "The Lithuanians long ago were good leaders," he said. "They were able to align their own affairs with those of other peoples, many of whom were to be found in that great state [the Grand Duchy].

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[551] "J.E. Respublikos Prezidentas Širvintose," *Tautininkų balsas* 33, August 25, 1927, 2-3.

[552] Vaižgantas, "J. E. Valstybės Prezidentas Žemaičiuose (V)," *Lietuvis* no. 165, July 27, 1927, 1-3.

[553] Ibid. The Lady of the Gates of Dawn is a painting that was canonically crowned that month.

From that, [the minorities] expected good results and power. If that were also understood by *our* non-Lithuanians, who will help align their ideas with ours, they will find happiness and they will give us happiness."[554]

This speech was widely reported in the Jewish press, from Warsaw to New York, as the public recognized Smetona's words to indicate a shift in Lithuanian policy towards minorities in general, and Jews in particular. Many observers were especially disturbed by Smetona's dismissal of the Paris Declaration. The Paris Declaration of 1919, as a result of the diplomatic efforts of Augustinas Voldemaras and Shimshon Rosenbaum, stated that Lithuanian Jews would have full political and national rights, rights of citizenship, rights to participate in governmental institutions, a Ministry of Jewish Affairs, proportional representation, rights to use their language in the public sphere, protection from not working on Saturdays, and cultural autonomy, all to be outlined in the Constitution.[555] *Di idishe shtime* reprinted the text of Smetona's speech in full, adding commentary such as a question mark in parentheses after the word "directives."[556] A few days after the speech, Jacob Robinson appeared to address Smetona's remarks in an article about the Zurich Conference on minority rights, which was then underway. Robinson wrote of the Peace Treaty signed at Versailles, and the Paris Declaration: "These treaties are the Magna Carta for our rights, judicially speaking, our only legal title [rekhts-titl] which we can invoke in the country and outside, defending ourselves against threatening assaults."[557] That month Robinson would write, in his introduction to his book-length bibliography of "the minority problem," that "it is not necessary to mention, at this juncture, how incredibly topical the nationalities problem

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[554] Ibid. See also "Litvisher melukhe-prezident vegn yidn in Lite," *Moment* (Warsaw), August 5, 1927, 3.

[555] Eglė Bendikaitė, "Žydai," in *Lietuvos istorija* vol. X, book II, ed. Bendikaitė, et al. (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2015), 126.

[556] "Prezident Smetona vegn yidn in Lite," *Di idishe shtime* 172 (2362), July 29, 1927, 7.

[557] "Yidishe rekht," [?] no. 4633, August 19, 1927, [?]. In Jacob and Nehemiah Robinson Papers, US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Series 3.

is in Europe today."[558] The Jewish Telegraphic Agency summarized Smetona's message succinctly in its coverage: "Forget Versailles, Jews are Advised by Smetona, Lithuanian President."[559]

Reuben Rubinstein emerged as one of the most passionate critics of Smetona's speech. He had recently returned to Kaunas from the Zurich Conference and already published a rebuke of *Lietuva*, the official government newspaper, for suggesting Jews are disloyal to Lithuania. Rubinstein noted about the Zurich sessions: "*Loyalty* to the state – that was the underlying thread that wove through all speeches, introductions and resolutions."[560] Then, in an article entitled, "Compassion or Rights?" Rubinstein addressed Smetona's accusations delicately but directly, first outlining the arduous "path to rights," arguing, "modern Jewish politics can only follow and serve that path."[561] Turning to Smetona's words in Kretinga, Rubinstein wrote:

> That's why it sounded strange to our ears when a person of great authority recently said in a speech directed to Lithuanian Jews that "We are not denying the Jews their freedom, only saying that you don't have to rely on papers that say Jewish rights have been guaranteed in the Paris declaration."
> We believe that this is one and the same. The Paris declaration without protection for minority rights speaks exactly only about *freedom*, about the free possibilities for advancement for Jews. And therefore there is nothing to be afraid of when someone occasionally mentions these 'papers.' So pick your poison [mi-ma nafshukh]: the freedom which is guaranteed in these documents is *not* obstructed, and then simply taken away when we mention them, or the freedom is *indeed* obstructed, and then it's a real mitzvah to mention them![562]

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[558] Jacob Robinson, "Vorwort," in *Das Minoritätenproblem und seine Literatur*, ed. Robinson (Berlin and Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1928), 5. Introduction dated August 1927.

[559] "Forget Versailles, Jews are Advised by Smetona, Lithuanian President," *Jewish Daily Bulletin* vol. IV, no. 838, August 14, 1927, 3.

[560] Reuben Rubinstein, "Minderhaytn kongres un loyalitet," *Di idishe shtime* 176 2366, August 3, 1927, 2.

[561] Reuben Rubinstein, "Khesed oder rekht?," *Di idishe shtime* 179 (2369), August 5, 1927, 2. Emphases in original.

[562] Ibid.

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Rubinstein was pointing out a contradiction in Smetona's view of minority rights. Lithuania – in fact Smetona's prime minister, Augustinas Voldemaras – had signed the minorities treaty, meaning the country had an obligation to honor all sorts of protections and "freedoms." Now that minority rights were in question, with the erosion of democratic institutions in Lithuania, where were Jews to look to secure their rights? To international bodies or to local authority? Rubinstein hastened to add, "Jews are always loyal to the state. They are ever ready with their whole heart." Lithuanian Jews would have many more opportunities to demonstrate their loyalty to Lithuania in the months ahead.

"Lithuania, Our Fatherland"

On February 16, 1928, Lithuania celebrated a decade since twenty political activists signed the republic's Declaration of Independence in an opulent meeting room on Castle Street in Vilnius. Preparations for nationwide celebrations had been in the works for months but, three days before the holiday, Kaunas finally buzzed with anticipation: the streets were cleaned, and flags and portraits of Smetona, Jonas Basanavičius and other leaders of the national cause were hung from buildings.[563] In the capital, the main festivities included a parade and speeches by Smetona, including one in which he retold the story of the Lithuanians' will to independence and glory.[564] It was an occasion for Lithuanians to celebrate their arrival as a nation among nations as a result of decades of determined activism. For Jews, the celebration proved more complicated, especially in light of a year of Nationalist Union rule during which Voldemaras had publicly dismissed Jews' role in the national movement. The independence anniversary celebration became an occasion for Jews to revisit their Lithuanian history. Jews could both demonstrate loyalty, as those in power now demanded it, while at the same time reflecting on their

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[563] "Af Kovner gasn," *Di idishe shtime* 42 (2529), February 17, 1928, 7.

[564] See "Tsum folk!," *Di idishe shtime* 41 (2528), February 16, 1928, 8.

relationship to institutions of democracy and government within the confines of national celebration. In particular, Lithuanian Jews espoused a nostalgia for the democratic hope and inclusiveness of 1918. Like Ottoman Jews, who planned a celebration in 1892 of the 400th anniversary of the Jews' arrival in Ottoman lands, Lithuanian Jews created a space, within this and other national holidays, to celebrate their own history as part of the broader history of their political home.[565]

A committee made up of members of Ezra and Adat Yisrael, coordinating with rabbis, organized independence day celebrations in Kaunas and throughout the country and made sure that Jews participated in the main festivities in Kaunas.[566] At the main celebrations in the center of the city, a troop of Jewish soldiers sang the Lithuanian national hymn – Vincas Kudirka's 1898 poem which opens with the words, "Lithuania, our Fatherland" – and Hatikva, and the chief rabbi of the Lithuanian army, Samuelis Sniegas, read aloud the names of around fifty Jewish soldiers who had died in the war of independence.[567] Jews "from Laivės Street to Slobodka," Rafael Khasman reported, celebrated the day.[568] At the Children's House, Jacob Robinson and others delivered rousing speeches and the "hymn" was sung in Hebrew. Around the country, Jews participated in their towns festivities by braving the cold weather and hoisting patriotic banners in Lithuanian, Yiddish and Hebrew. Local Jewish politicians in turn sent their

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[565] Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), Chapter 2.

[566] "Žydų komiteto prie 'Ezro' draugijos daromieji ruošimai vasario 16 d. švęsti," *Rytas* 38 (1218), February 15, 1928, 2.

[567] M. R., "Di idishe soldatn," *Di idishe shtime* 42 (2529), February 17, 1928, 7 and "Yontof fun umophengikayt," *Di idishe shtime* 42 (2529), February 17, 1928, 7.

[568] R. Kh. [Rafael Khasman?], "* * *," *Di idishe shtime* 2529 (42), February 17, 1928, 7.

wishes to Lithuanian politicians, and Voldemaras said he was personally pleased to receive Shimshon Rosenbaum's wishes.[569]

While Jews made the requisite calls for the future return of Vilnius, they also used the memory of 1918 as a way to review the promises Lithuanian politicians made to the Jews vis-à-vis autonomy and minority rights ten years prior. Max Soloveitchik, the former Minister of Jewish Affairs who had left Lithuania in 1923, sent Robinson a note from Berlin: "On this happy day I am with all those for whom an autonomously organized Jewishness [yidishkayt] in the free and happy Lithuanian state [melukhe] has always been and remained a bright star."[570] As G. Volkovski wrote in the newspaper, "Ten years of Lithuanian independence. Before my eyes appear pictures of the beautiful time when Jewish communal life was organized in state-sponsored forms, when the Jewish National Council and the Jewish Ministry lived. How far and how near that time is!"[571] The Jewish community of Ukmergė (Yid: Vilkomir), where Yudl Mark was headmaster of a high school, issued this statement:

> The Vilkomir people's committee [folks-farzamlung], in the name of the Jewish community in Vilkomir, greets you, Mr. President, on the 10th anniversary of Lithuanian independence. We, Jews, who have been tied to Lithuania for 700 years, assure you that we will also, in the future, fight side by side together with the general best sons of Lithuania for the independence and freedom of the country. We hope that Lithuania, which was the cradle of Jewish autonomy, will also in the future be the country where Jews will enjoy a full national autonomy in accordance with the beautiful traditions of the Lithuanian people.[572]

In the town of Rokiškis, the three synagogues on the main street were painted the three colors of the Lithuanian flag.

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[569] Yisroel Zhofer, "Premyer-minister vegn aktuele politishe fragn," *Di idishe shtime* 2532 (45), February 22, 1928, 2.

[570] "Opklangen fun der umophengikayts-fayerungen," *Di idishe shtime* 2530 (43), February 20, 1928, 7.

[571] G. Volkovski, "Fun nonte tsaytn," *Di idishe shtime* 110 (2597), May 15, 1928, 3.

[572] "16 februar in provints," *Di idishe shtime* 2530 (43), February 20, 1928, 7.

On the front page of *Di yidishe shtime*, Reuben Rubinstein sounded a tone entirely different from his earlier criticism of Smetona. Just days before the holiday, Rubinstein had made the holiday kosher by detailing his excitement on "*erev* February 16."[573] Now, on the day of the anniversary, he wrote, "Today all of Lithuania gets dressed up in holiday clothes, wrapped in a *tallis* of three-colored flags, lifting the air with forceful cries of 'Valio!' [Lith: Forward!], and songs about rise and rebirth. Today all of Lithuania raises its voice in the blessing that the soul feels with shudders of joy and joie de vivre: *shehekheyanu vikiyamanu*!"[574] While a piece by Leyb Garfunkel, a lawyer and Zionist political activist, noted that the Declaration of Independence had no Jewish signers, and that there were no Jewish members of the original Taryba, the newspaper was filled with patriotic content, such as translations into Yiddish and Hebrew of the Lithuanian national hymn, Yiddish-language poems dedicated to Lithuania and a Yiddish translation, by Eliyohu Shulman, of a Lithuanian story by writer Jonas Biliūnas (1879-1907).[575]

The newspaper also published a Yiddish translation of the February 16, 1918 Lithuanian Declaration of Independence itself, including signatures. But surrounding it, like a Talmudic commentary, was an article by Jacob Robinson entitled, "Achievements, Defeats – And What's Next?," a searching and even scathing overview of the Jewish place in the first ten years of the republic.[576] Robinson outlined four ways that Jewish life in Lithuania is different than other countries in Eastern Europe. "The <u>first and most important of all of the differences lies in that the</u> <u>Jews were included as a part of the creation and organization of the state in a greater</u>

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[573] Reuben Rubinstein, "Erev februar 16,"

[574] Reuben Rubinstein, "Tsen yor," *Di idishe shtime* 41 (2528), February 16, 1928, 1.

[575] "In shayn fun fargangenhayt," *Di idishe shtime* 41 (2528), February 16, 1928, 11.

[576] Jacob Robinson, "Dergraykhungen, mapoles – un vos vayter?," *Di idishe shtime* 2528 (41), February 16, 1928, 7, 15. Emphases in original here and below.

concentration. The Lithuanian state is a result of two important political factors: the revival-project of the Lithuanian nation [natsye] and the specific political conjuncture (war, fall of Russia, Bolshevism, Versailles) when the Lithuanian-Jewish entente began already in prewar times, and which found its expression in shared attendance at the elections in the Russian Duma." In the first years of the independence, Robinson wrote, Jews were included in Lithuanian state-building process at home, in western European venues and in Moscow. "It is therefore no wonder," he wrote, "that the political activity of Lithuanian Jewry aroused great sympathy with the young state on the part of the influence of wealthy Jewish circles outside of Lithuania."

The second reason Lithuania was different than other states, according to Robinson, was that while in other states the first years of independence were difficult, in Lithuania it was the "opposite." He cited the Ministry of Jewish Affairs, the *kehilla* organizations, the Jewish National Council, the Jewish *tsuzamenforn*, or nationwide general meetings, the autonomy programs in the constitution, the declaration of minority rights, among other reasons. The third way that Lithuania was set apart was in economics. Robinson argued, "The builders of the Lithuanian state [melukhe], in calling for a national-personal view of the state [medine] as a state of Lithuanians (not as a Lithuanian state), a view which has remained among the Lithuanian national movement, which was a popular movement (in the time when the state was a territorial organization), prepared, from the first days […] that the Lithuanians would be *also economically* the *leading* national group [natsye]."

The fourth way that distinguishes Jewish life in Lithuania from that in other countries, according to Robinson, "is, to put it negatively, the factual *mistake of assimilation*. Positively: *a strong national outlook*. Of course certain non-ideological or purely practical forms of expression of assimilation are not totally dead." Here Robinson cited the German school in

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Kaunas as a site that allowed the Jewish bourgeoisie "a certain way to denationalize." However, alluding to the historically low-prestige status of the Lithuanian language and culture, he suggested, "Assimilation with Lithuanian culture is not possible for us because assimilation has always been tied to a social and cultural upward mobility. But for us this is not the case. The evil inclination to assimilate is simply not there."" Robinson credited the "liberalism of the state" with supporting the Hebrew-language school system but found drawbacks there, too: "the overproduction of half-educated people and even people with degrees," a "reaction" against the prewar lack of investment in Jewish education.[577] Rather than celebrate the decade of independence, the member of parliament almost dismissed it. "Ten years in the life of a people that measures its history in thousands of years is not a large period," he wrote. But Robinson ended on a somewhat more optimistic, or at least forward-looking, note. "It is certainly hard to draw the contours of the future development of Jewish life in Lithuania," he wrote, but that it is possible "within certain constraints."

The discomfort that Lithuanian Zionists felt about assimilation in Lithuania was raised again in 1928 when Nachman Shapiro, the son of the Chief Rabbi of Kaunas and a lecturer in Semitic Languages at the University of Lithuania, published a Lithuanian-language monograph on early Hebrew novelist Abraham Mapu. The book's title, *Kaunasite A. Mapu: His Life and Work*, shows how the author sought to emphasize the Lithuanianness of the nineteenth-century writer, who was born in the Kaunas neighborhood of Slobodka and lived most of his life in the city. Shapiro, an avowed Zionist, opened his introduction to the book with an overview of Mapu's life, but Shapiro soon veers into a more general commentary on Jewish life in contemporary Lithuania, in which he wrote of "the two diametric poles of modern Jewish life: towards a national Zionist one, and towards an antinationalist assimilationist one" and wrote of

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[577] Ibid., 15.

"two possibilities: either the nation will regain its lost homeland, or it will blend in with other nations – in both cases, the extermination […] of diaspora life."[578]

Robinson, for his part, later in 1928, would try to directly shape the contours of the Lithuanian Jewish future by forming a Society for Lithuanian and Jewish Cultural Understanding with Leyb Garfunkel and three leading Lithuanian intellectuals. The Lithuanians included two signatories of the 1918 Declaration of Independence, Mykolas Biržiška, now a professor, and Jonas Vileišis, now mayor of Kaunas, and popular writer Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius. These five sought, among other tasks, "to uplift, through radio, newspapers, books, etc., what brings these two together, and struggle against everything that obstructs becoming closer."[579]

Antanas the First

Despite publicly praising Lithuania's emergence as a democratic entity, Smetona quickly led the country in a different direction and oversaw the production of a new constitution. For the Nationalist Union leadership, a new constitution solved two problems at once: it retroactively created a legal basis for the regime's previously unconstitutional actions and protected future Nationalist rule. On May 11, the High Council Tribunal passed a resolution that, in the absence of a Seimas, governing power belongs to the president and a new constitution would be adopted.[580] The timing was intentional. May 15 was already a national holiday in Lithuania celebrating the establishment of the Constituent Assembly, the first iteration of the parliament. A

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[578] N[achmanas] Šapira, "Įvadas," in Šapira, *Kaunietis A. Mapu: jo gyvenimas ir kūryba* (Kaunas: Spaudos Fondas, 1928), 8.

[579] Lithuanian Central State Archive (LCVA), F. 402, ap. 4, b. 578, p. 2.

[580] Rudis, "Demokratinio parlamentarizmo likvidavimas," 564-565.

military parade marched through Kaunas that day and, as in February, Jews joined in the celebrations.

On the occasion, Grigori Volf, a member of the central committee of the Jewish Folksbank, gave a speech on the radio in the name of the United Jewish Anniversary Committee. After saying a few words in Hebrew, he launched into a Yiddish-language speech in which he said, "We, Jews who have lived for hundreds of years in Lithuania, bound closely together with the Lithuanian people, but developing and protecting our national spirit, have always felt your joy and pain, and have waited for that great day when the chains that bind the Lithuanian land would be broken, i.e. the day of its political freedom."[581] But Volf went on to distinguish "two types of freedom." The first type is "the greatest joy of every people: the ability to live how it alone understands and requires national needs" that stem from ancient traditions. The second form of freedom, according to Volf, is the "freedom of citizens in the country's body proper. The right of every citizen in properly determined, sovereign and social borders." While Volf here referred to Lithuanians' political and national freedom, his phrasing may also suggest a broader separation of these freedoms within his and other Jews' thinking about how Jews relate to the Lithuanian state. These vaguely defined freedoms are ones that Jews would have been able to have in Lithuania without the legal or constitutional rights commonly associated with freedom in modern states.

The writer Volkovski used the May 15 holiday to reflect on how Jewish politicians influenced the phrasing of the terms of Lithuanian nationhood in the 1922 constitution.

> *Lietuvos tauta* – the nation of Lithuania. In fact there was no such term in the Lithuanian language. The Lithuanian people is called: *lietuvių tauta* [the nation of the Lithuanians]. When one wants to speak of the population of all of the whole country, one has to say *Lietuvos gyventojai* – the Lithuanian population (residents), or: *Lietuvos tautos* – the Lithuanian nations [the nations of Lithuania]. *Tauta* means a nation in an ethnographic

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[581] "Yidishe rede durkh radyo," *Di idishe shtime* 111 (2598), May 15, 1928, 2.

and not a geographic sense. The term *Lietuvos tauta* was created as a result of a *political* compromise and it did not appear at first it in a literary work but in the introduction to the Lithuanian constitution.[582]

In a revealing anecdote, Volkovski explained that, when the constitution was being written by the Constituent Assembly, Max Soloveitchik went around to people who knew Lithuanian well to confirm that the term in the draft of the constitution indeed referred to the Lithuanian people alone. The Jewish deputies requested the use of the more inclusive term meaning "the nations of Lithuania," which, according to Volkovski, prompted a "long philosophical *pilpul*" resulting in the creation of a new term both sides were happy with: "the nation of Lithuania."[583] But rather than honor the democratic ideals of May 15, 1918, the new constitution ratified that day concentrated power in the hands of the president, lengthened the president's terms, and created a system of indirect election. While Section 7, Paragraph 74, stated, "National minority citizens, who form a significant part of the citizenry, have the legal right, within limits, to autonomously manage their national cultural affairs," the constitution opened with a line that reverted to an older understanding of Lithuanians' place in the state. "The Lithuanian state is an independent democratic republic. The sovereign state government belongs to the people [tauta]," using the word that implicitly refers to ethnic Lithuanians. Only a few days after the new constitution was ratified, Jacob Robinson publicly looked to other forms of national representation, admonishing his readers to "Buy a shekel!" which he called "the Zionist passport."[584]

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[582] G. Volkovski, "Fun nonte tsaytn," *Di idishe shtime* 110 (2597), May 15, 1928, 3. Emphases in original.

[583] See also Eglė Bendikaitė, "From a certain desire or real need: the contexts of Jewish acculturation in Lithuania after the failure of national autonomy in 1925-1940," *Jewish Culture and History* 18:2 (2017): 173.

[584] "Der shekel," *Di idishe shtime* 113 (2600), May 18, 1928, 3.

The day after the new constitution was ratified, *Lietuvos aidas*, a paper founded by Smetona in 1917 and which replaced *Lietuvis*, in 1928, as the organ of the Nationalist Union, declared in an approving front-page editorial: "Lithuania through the 13th, 14th, and 15th centuries grew to become the most powerful state on the European continent because the strong, well-organized central government of the Grand Dukes had enough power to maintain the state's independence and the nation's freedom."[585] Not long after, Smetona announced in a speech that the new constitution would facilitate Lithuania's reclamation of Vilnius and allow the country to expand its borders.[586] The Social Democratic exile journal *Pirmyn!* ("Forward!"), published in Vilnius, editorialized that same day that Smetona had always thought of Lithuania as his own personal "royal estate," citing Smetona's support for the coronation of Prince Wilhelm von Urach as Lithuanian monarch, Mindaugas II, in 1918.[587] In 1931, Voldemaras would write: "In 1928 there were already proclamations distributed that the army should proclaim Smetona King of Lithuania. I ordered all such proclamations destroyed."[588] Yet this royal comparison did not go away. Zigmas Angarietis, a leading Lithuanian Communist, writing in 1928, mockingly called Smetona "Antanas the First," and suggested that Smetona's wife and trusted advisor, Sofija Smetonienė-Chodakauskaitė, "wants to be queen."[589] Lithuanian Chief Rabbi, Ber Shapiro,

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[585] "Po gegužės 15," *Lietuvos aidas*, no. 85 (299) May 16, 1928, 1.

[586] "Rede fun litvishn president vegn Wilno," *Moment* (Warsaw) no. 1241, May 30, 1928, 1.

[587] "Gegužės penktioliktoji" *Pirmyn!* No 10 (17) May 20, 1928, 1.

[588] As cited in Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona and His Lithuania*, 212. I have edited this passage for clarity and accuracy.

[589] K. Kalnėnas [Zigmas Angarietis], *"Tautos vadas" A. Smetona, jo sėbrai ir darbai* (Kaunas: Vyriausias Komitetas kovai prieš fašizmą, 1928), 37, 42.

would compare Smetona to King Solomon.[590] Smetona's opponents on the right referred to him as "King of the Jews."[591]

Smetona and Voldemaras, as I show in Chapter Three, had very different personalities and political outlooks, which would contribute to uncertainty at the highest levels of the Lithuanian government. For much of 1927, the inner circle of Nationalists negotiated these differences, with some high-ranking military officers falling in line with Voldemaras's fascist leanings rather than Smetona's more moderate approach.[592] That year, as Smetona traveled the countryside presenting himself as a singular ruler and pseudo-monarch, two army officers secretly formed an organization to advance Voldemaras's more populist ideology. The organization was named Geležinis Vilkas, or "The Iron Wolf," after a legend that such a creature appeared to Grand Duke Gediminas (1274-1341) in a dream and instructed him to found the city of Vilnius. The Iron Wolf would describe itself as the product of a struggle within Nationalist ideology between the old guard of "pro-democracy" Nationalists, represented by Smetona, and the new order attracted to fascism.[593] The group was first officially registered, in January of 1928, as an organization promoting sports and discipline, and by spring of 1929 it had fully emerged from the underground and infiltrated the army and the Rifleman's Union, and gained exclusive rights to physical training in public schools.[594] Followers of Voldemaras published a journal, *Tautos kelias*, or "Path of the [Ethnic] Nation." By June of 1929 the organization

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[590] Vyr. Rab. B. Šapira, "Žodis jubiliejiaus proga," in *Antanas Smetona*, ed. M. Bregšteinas (Kaunas: Jewish Soldiers' Union, 1934), 4.

[591] Truska, "A. Smetonos valdžios politika," 69 and Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona and His Lithuania*, 294.

[592] See Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona and His Lithuania*, 196.

[593] Raimundas Lopata, *Autoritarinis režimas tarpukario Lietuvoje: Aplinkybės, legitimumas, koncepcija* (Vilnius: A. Varnas, 1998), 93.

[594] Vytautas Petronis, "Guarding the honor of the nation and the prosperity of the state: National Defense of Lithuania 'Iron Wolf' (1928-1930)," in *Journal of Baltic Studies* 49:2 (2018): 7-10.

boasted five thousand young members who were armed, trained and immersed in a fascistic iteration of Lithuanian nationalism.[595] In 1929 the organization began to take on overtly anti-Jewish positions and participate in spontaneous violent actions against Jews, especially in small towns.[596] In January of that year the Iron Wolf had already developed an international reputation as the "Lithuanian Ku Klux Klan."[597]

In April of 1929, Dr. Wolfgang von Weisl, an Austrian leader of the Revisionist Zionist movement, visited Kaunas with his wife. On his visit, von Weisl sat down with a reporter from *Diena* ("The Day"), a Kaunas daily newspaper, who asked him a number of questions, including, "How does the Jewish situation in Lithuania appear seen from afar?" and "What are your opinions about parliamentarianism and dictatorship?"[598] Von Weisl's answers show how a well-informed observer of Jewish affairs with a rightwing Zionist outlook tried to understand the loss of both democracy and a Jewish political ally. "The emergence of the Republic of Lithuania was welcomed very joyously by Jews of various areas," he told *Diena*. "They saw here the possibility of liberation from an ancient yoke, and began to build their free life. People were optimistic about the first Lithuanian governments," he said, citing the Minister of Jewish Affairs and other Jewish institutions. He continued:

> There is one reason why the public Jewish opinion of a foreign country warmly greeted the December 17, 1926 coup. For the Jews, Voldemaras's famous desire for strong cooperation with the Jews was widely known. Unfortunately, other activities, or other reasons, have not yet allowed the Minister of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania closer to the concerns of Jewish people […] Dictatorship is a temporary phenomenon. Every

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[595] Ibid., 14.

[596] Ibid., 13.

[597] Ibid., 14; "'Iron Wolf' is Replica of Ku Klux Klan in Lithuania," *Jewish Daily Bulletin* vol. VII, no. 1266, January 14, 1929, 2.

[598] "Pasikalbėjimas su d[akta]ru Wolfgangu v. Weisl," *Diena* (no. 17, year 1), Kaunas, April 26, 1929, 3.

person with strong will and great aptitude to certain circumstances has the opportunity to play a leading role in the life of the state, to bring it out of a difficult situation.[599]

The following month, as Voldemaras, his family and members of his inner circle were entering a theater to hear a performance of music by composer Alexander Glazunov, gunshots rang out. The prime minister's aide-de-camp, a lieutenant, fell dead, while his nephew, also an officer, was injured.[600] Almost immediately, the Iron Wolf initiated a "'state of war' protocol" that heightened political and ethnic tension across the country.[601]

Slobodka Pogrom

The increasingly well-organized Lithuanian far right made its presence felt in 1929. That summer, a bulletin published by the Lithuanian Communist Party declared August 1 a "Red Day" and called for a general strike against fascism and the Lithuanian dictatorship in all of Kaunas's factories and workshops.[602] On the chosen day, workers hoisting red banners demonstrated at two factories in the neighborhood of Šančiai, or Shantz, which sits in a bend in the Nemunas river southeast of the city center. The sites were the Tilka chocolate factory, and a foundry still known by the name of Šmidtas (Smith), although it had been bought in 1922 by one of the signers of the 1918 Lithuanian Declaration of Independence, Christian Democrat Jonas Vailokaitis. Some Lithuanian workers at the factories ran out to fight the protesters and hold

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[599] Ibid.

[600] "Vakar kėsinosi nužudyti ministerį pirmininkį," *Lietuvos aidas* 102 (586), May 7, 1929, 1.

[601] Petronis, "Guarding the honor," 14.

[602] See various articles in "Raudonoji diena" (1929), Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, 329(474.5)(054).

them until the arrival of the police, who would arrest about fifty demonstrators. While Ugnė Andrijauskaitė has shown that Lithuanians were well represented in workers' actions and "people's universities" in Slobodka and other locales in the late 1920s, the Lithuanian press reported that participants were "almost all Jews."[603] Indeed, many observers drew parallels between this protest and the rallies in June of 1926 that precipitated the coup d'état. A writer in *Trimitas*, the publication of the National Rifleman's Union, noted, "This time, however, these outbursts could have negative consequences for Lithuanian-Jewish relations."[604]

The day after the demonstration, rumors circulated that a pogrom was being organized against Jews in the neighborhood Lithuanians called Slabada or Vilijampolė, and known affectionately by Jews as Slobodka.[605] Located on the opposite side of Kaunas from Šančiai, across the Neris River northwest of the city's Old Town, Slobodka was not only a Jewish neighborhood but also the site of the world-famous Slobodka Yeshiva, whose rigorous Talmudic and *musar* curriculum, year-round study, system of two *roshei yeshiva*, and generous funding by German Jews made it one of the most competitive and elite Jewish seminaries in Europe, if not the world.[606] While other leading Lithuanian yeshivas, such as Telz, Kelem, and Ponovezh, operated in the provincial towns of Telšiai, Kelmė and Panevėžys, Slobodka was in Lithuania's capital and thus a highly visible pillar of the national Jewish culture and the object of fascination for Jews from Germany, the United States, and elsewhere. As political journalist Mark Turkov

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[603] Ugnė Marija Andrijauskaitė, "Darbininkų švietimo bandymai Kaune XX a. 3-4 dešimtmečiuose: liaudies universitetai ir vakariniai kursai bei gimnazijos suaugusiesiems," *Kauno istorijos metraštis* 15 (2015). For the press, see for example Cvs. [Vincas Kemežys?], "Pažymėtini įvykiai," *Trimitas* 32, August 8, 1929, 537; "'Raudonoji diena' Lietuvoje," *Lietuvos aidas* no. 175 (659), August 5, 1929, 1; and "Iš visur ir apie viską," *Darbininkas* no. 18, August 11, 1929, 4.

[604] A. Cvs. "Pažymėtini įvykiai," *Trimitas* 32, August 8, 1929, 537.

[605] Ibid.

[606] Shaul Stampfer, *Lithuanian Yeshivas*, 255-256, 264-269.

wrote, on a visit from Warsaw in 1928, "When one is in Kovne, it is impossible not to visit the old Slobodka Yeshiva."[607] Nonetheless, the venerable institution remained a world apart. The yeshiva's founder, Rabbi Nosson Tsvi Finkel (1849-1927), also known as the Alter of Slobodka, once said that the bridge from the Old Town to their suburb was intended to bring people from the city into Slobodka, and not the other way around.[608]

Violence did break out on the streets of Slobodka in the wake of the anti-fascist protests. Several historians have noted the pogroms in passing, and details of the August 2 events vary.[609] According to police depositions, three young Jews walking home from a movie theater, close to midnight, were harassed in the street by some unknown, armed Lithuanians, instigating a brawl, and bystanders' phone calls to the police couldn't get through.[610] Jewish volunteer firefighters came out in uniform to keep order, but the unrest spread until twenty-seven Jews were injured,

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[607] Mark Turkov, "In der regirung fun Lite," *Moment* (Warsaw) 133, June 10, 1928, 5.

[608] Rivkah Blau, *Learn Torah, Love Torah, Live Torah: Harav Mordechai Pinchas Teitz* (Brooklyn: KTAV, 2001), 22.

[609] The most through account can be found in Vladas Sirutavičius, "Antisemitism in Inter-war Lithuania: An Analysis of Two Cases," in Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, ed., *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 21 (Berlin: Metropol, 2012), 143-148. See also Vygantas Vareikis, "Anti-Semitism in Lithuania (Second Half of 19th – First Half of 20th c.)," in *The Preconditions for the Holocaust: Anti-Semitism in Lithuania*, ed. Liudas Truska, et al. (Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2004), 155; Liudas Truska, "A. Smetonos valdžios politika žydų atžvilgiu (1927-1940)," *Istorija* (2004): 71; Saulius Sužiedėlis, "Historical Sources for Antisemitism in Lithuania" in *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews*, ed. Alvydas Nikžentaitis, et al. (New York: Rodopi-Brill, 2004), 132-133; Vladas Sirutavičius and Darius Staliūnas, "Was Lithuania a Pogrom-Free Zone? (1881-1940)," in *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European Jewish History*, ed. Jonathan Dekel-Chen, et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 146-147; Vladas Sirutavičius, "Antisemitizmo proveržiai," in *Lietuvos žydai: istorinė studija*, ed. Sirutavičius, et al. (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2012), 410; Petronis, "Guarding the honor," 16. For the longer history of pogroms in Lithuania see Darius Staliūnas, *Enemies for a Day: Antisemitism and Anti-Jewish Violence in Lithuania under the Tsars* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2015), Chapter 4.

[610] LCVA, F. 394, Ap.15, B. 138, p. 273. See also "Slobodka Pogromists Tell Court They Were Attacked By Jews," *Jewish Daily Bulletin* vol. XIII, no. 125, May 27, 1932, 2-3.

including some women and an elderly functionary of the Slobodka *chevra kadisha*. Jews contended that when police finally arrived, they did not stop the attacks. Most sources agree that among the Lithuanians were members of the Rifleman's Union, and blame was quickly extended to the Iron Wolf.[611] Historians Vytautas Petronis and Vladas Sirutavičius have suggested that the Riflemen involved were likely also members of the Iron Wolf.[612] The day after the violence, three Jews went to the assistant head of the county and reported that unknown Riflemen were involved in an anti-Semitic attack.[613] Representatives from *Di idishe shtime* also called on Voldemaras and Antanas Žmuidzinavičius, the head of the Rifleman's Union who was from the same small town as Jacob Robinson, and they listened to the Jews' concerns.[614]

Denials from the police and other government officials were swift. One police officer reported, "In my opinion, the Jews demonstrated because, as I heard from some anonymous Slobodka residents, the son of some rabbi was arrested while demonstrating on August 1 against the current government."[615] *Trimitas*, for its part, mounted a spirited defense, claiming that "such excesses, from the Lithuanian side, against Jews, were not done."[616] At the end of August, *Trimitas* asked if the Riflemen were anti-Semites and concluded that they were not, noting that there were Jewish members in their ranks.[617] But it was Voldemaras's denial of a pogrom, in both the international and local press, that was the greatest blow to Jews' confidence in the

[611] "New Lithuanian Gov't Disbands Pogrom Group," *Jewish Daily Bulletin* vol. IV, no. 1477, September 27, 1929, P?

[612] Petronis, "Guarding the honor," 16 and Sirutavičius, "Antisemitism in Inter-war Lithuania," 146-147.

[613] LCVA, F. 394, Ap.15, B. 138, p. 274. See also p. 276.

[614] A., "Informirt premyer vegn Slobodker gesheyenishn," *Di idishe shtime* 189 (2969), August 5, 1929, 7; B.K., "Žydų pogromas Slabadoj," *Pirmyn!* no. 17 (48), August 15, 1929, 14; Pilietis [Citizen], "Dar dėl žydų pogromo Slabadoj," *Pirmyn!* no. 18 (49), September 1, 1929, 10.

[615] LCVA, F. 394, Ap.15, B. 138, p. 281.

[616] A. Cvs. "Pažymėtini įvykiai," *Trimitas* 32, August 8, 1929, 537.

[617] V., "Ar šauliai yra antisemitai?," *Trimitas* 35, September 29, 1929, 583 [front page].

regime to protect them. Voldemaras told the Jewish representatives who came to him, "Attacks occurred, in truth, but not in the form of a pogrom."[618] The Jewish Telegraphic Agency described the Lithuanian Jews' frustration: "Professor Voldemaras had always claimed in public and private to be a friend of the Jews, and consequently the Jewish population was astounded that there should be anti-Jewish excesses under his regime. A short while before the excesses, Professor Voldemaras had given a dinner in honour of Mr. Nahum Sokolov, who was then in Lithuania, and he had expressed in his speech his sympathy with the Jews of Lithuania."[619] Adding urgency to the matter, later the same month as the pogrom, Arabs in Hebron initiated what is known as the Hebron Massacre, during which dozens of local Jews were killed including twenty-four members of the Hebron Yeshiva – a branch of the Slobodka Yeshiva founded in 1924 by members of the community looking to escape conscription into the Lithuanian army. But the prime minister told *Trimitas*, "On the events in Slobodka there were all sorts of rumors. It was even said that Jews attacked Jews. What really happened there is something that has yet been clarified […] Of course, there won't be any speeches about Jewish pogroms" at the upcoming session of the League of Nations.[620] The Lithuanian Legation at Paris, headed by Voldemaras, later claimed that Jewish Communists broke their own windows.[621] Even Tumas-Vaižganatas later wrote, "Voldemaras directed the nationalist youth to conflict with minorities and afterwards repudiated them. In addition, he promised these extremists positions and

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[618] "Premyer Prof. Voldemaras vegn di gesheyenishn in Slobodke," *Di idishe shtime* 202 (2990), August 30, 1929, 7.

[619] "Slobodka 1929 Pogrom: Trial of Participants Opened in Kovno," *Daily News Bulletin* vol. XIII, no. 122, May 24, 1932, 8.

[620] V. A., "Ministerio pirm. Pasikalbėjimas su žurnalistais," *Trimitas* 36, October 5, 1929, 601 [front page].

[621] "Lithuanian Legation in Paris Denies Anti-Jewish Excesses Occurred in Kaunas," *Jewish Daily Bulletin* vol. VI, no. 1442, August 16, 1929, 1, 4.

protection."[622] While Voldemaras was out of the country at the meeting of the League of Nations, in September, Smetona removed him from office. The next day, a correspondent from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency talked to Voldemaras. "I am no longer at the wheel, he said me. Don't be surprised if the Slobodka affair does not reach the courts, and the guilty people go unpunished."[623]

Vytautas Redivivus

One of the most far-reaching projects that the Smetona government pursued to galvanize the nation in the late 1920s and early 1930s was the creation of a nationwide celebration of the 500th anniversary of the death of Grand Duke Vytautas the Great (1350-1430). Planning the holiday brought months of widespread discussions of an idealized Lithuanian Grand Duchy into the public discourse. In books and other texts published in 1930, the Arabic numerals for the year were replaced with the phrase, "The Year of Vytautas the Great." The University of Lithuania was renamed Vytautas the Great University, Grunwald Street in Kaunas was renamed Vytautas Street, hundreds of newborn Lithuanian boys were named Vytautas and statues honoring the Grand Duke were ordered to be erected in every city and town across the country. The image of Vytautas appeared on postage stamps and currency, sometimes alongside Smetona's likeness, and an icon depicting Vytautas was carried on a pilgrimage throughout the country. But this nationwide celebration of a romanticized Grand Duke matched the Nationalists' own vision of contemporary Lithuania, helping to shift the discourse about the Grand Duchy from one that emphasized the Grand Duchy's multiethnic character to one that prioritized Lithuanians' place in

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[622] As quoted in See Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona and His Lithuania*, 197.

[623] "Slobodka 1929 Pogrom," *Daily News Bulletin*, 8. A trial of seventeen attackers would begin in 1932.

the medieval polity. This meant that Jews had to reimagine their own place in the national idea vis-à-vis Grand Duke Vytautas and his 1388-1389 charters that had served as touchstones of Lithuanian Jewishness for decades. As Dangiras Mačiulis has observed about the 1930 celebrations, "The authoritarian government understood that carefully selected ideals can excellently help justify the regime and validate its existence."[624]

Planning for the national celebration began in November of 1928, when priest Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas, at a meeting at the Riflemen's Union hall in Kaunas, created a festival committee and declared, "All Lithuanians, wherever you are, are one nation [tauta]."[625] Although Vytautas died on October 27, 1430, the new holiday was planned for September 8, 1930, the 500th anniversary of the day on which the grand duke was to be crowned by Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund, only to have the ceremony postponed.[626] The committee outlined plans to erect statues of Vytautas and to organize regional committees which would help plan local celebrations throughout the year. On Independence Day, in February of 1930, Smetona issued a proclamation in which he argued that Lithuanians today are the continuation of the residents of the Grand Duchy. He declared, "Half of a millennium has separated us from the epoch of Vytautas the Great. A huge amount of time, and an even bigger difference in the conditions in which our [ethnic] nation has to live. At that time, it was in the struggle to receive wealth from the large territory it had acquired, now it tries to find wealth in its small territory alone."

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[624] Dangiras Mačiulis, "Vytauto Didžiojo metų (1930) kampanijos prasmė," *Lituanistika* 2 (41), 2001: 56.

[625] Vida Girininkienė, "Vytautas nori matyti savo Lietuv(ą)," *Literatūra ir menas* 32 (3533), September 2015.

[626] Giedrė Mickūnaitė, *Making a Great Ruler*, 70-72. On the formation of the Grand Duchy, see S. C. Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending: A pagan empire within east-central Europe, 1295-1345* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). On Jews in the Grand Duchy, see Jurgita Šiaučiunaitė-Verbickienė, *Žydai Lietuvos Didžiojoje Kunigaikštystėje: sambūvio aspektai* (Vilnius: Žara, 2009).

For Jews, the Year of Vytautas the Great was, like the independence anniversary celebrations two years prior, an opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to the current regime and, at the same, reiterate the Jews' longstanding place in Lithuanian society. Through these celebrations, Lithuanians and Jews reminded each other of their mutual reliance and history of peaceful coexistence. Jews were not the only minorities to make such overtures. A letter from representatives of the Belarusian community in Lithuania to the holiday's central planning committee outlined ways for Belarusians to celebrate, and claimed a place in "the empire which was historically known by the name 'Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Belarusians and Samogitians.'"[627] The board of the rabbinical union decided in 1930 that in all synagogues, during the annual celebrations, rabbis would give speeches about Vytautas.[628] A sculptor named Mordechai Farbman made the Vytautas statue in the town of Salakas. The history and memory of Vytautas was celebrated at Jewish concerts and publications. But the most visible Jewish celebrations of Vytautas were performed publically across the country.

On February 14, 1930, a group of former Folkists – now advancing their ideology through the Jewish Education Committee – returned to publishing with the first issue of a daily newspaper, *Der Folksblat*, seeking to fill the need to report news from a non-Zionist perspective, as Yudl mark would note a few years later.[629] The newspaper debuted just in time for the Independence Day holiday – an annual holiday within a holiday year – which was celebrated in the second issue by Oyzer Finkelstein, the former Folkist representative in parliament. Finkelstein used the opportunity to emphasize the historically multiethnic nature of the Grand

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[627] LCVA F. 1640, ap. 1, b. 181, pp. 24-27. Letter of 5 January, 1929.

[628] Saulius Kaubrys, "Lietuvos žydų lojalumo raiška: apsisprendimo variacijos 1918-1940 metais," in *Abipusis pažinimas*, 106-107.

[629] Yudl Mark, "Yidishe periodishe oysgabes in lite," in *Zamlbukh lekoved dem tsvey hundert un fuftsikstn yoyvl fun der yidisher prese, 1686-1936*, ed. Jacob Shatsky (New York: YIVO, 1937), 257.

Duchy, even among its leadership. He wrote, "The moral and historical justification of the independent existence of every people lies before all, and deeper than all, in its consciousness of rights [rekhtbavustzayn], in its will to independence, in its not understanding why a stranger from the outside should dictate a kind of influence over its transformation. And in that not-understanding, why a Lithuanian from [small town] Čekiškė, or a Jew from [small city] Jonava, needs to die in the name of the Romanov dynasty."[630]

Finkelstein remembered attending a meeting of the Lithuanian Taryba at the end of May or beginning of June, 1917. It was a "white night" in Petersburg, and he strolled with a Lithuanian down Nevsky Prospect till dawn, talking "about the transformation of our homeland [land]." He wrote, "February 16 is the day when the new Lithuanian history began. It made an arduous international journey from Brest-Litovsk through Versailles to Moscow; but it has remained the day that the Lithuanian nation [natsye] proclaimed its will to an independent political life." In deference to the Vytautas celebrations, Finkelstein also harkened to the time of the Grand Dukes. "The historic traditions of the Lithuanian-Belarusian Duchy live in the depth of consciousness of all peoples that live in the territory of the Duchy, and feel that the free development of their economy and culture lay on the path of political truth that leads them through Vilna and Grodne to a viable government [melukhe]."

In February of 1929, a neighborhood planning committee met to initiate plans for a celebration of Vytautas in Slobodka. The Slobodka pogrom was not the only recent memory of police violence in the neighborhood that would have to be overcome. On the last day of April, 1930, just before May Day celebrations, police seized a storefront from one Chena Chaim that

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[630] Oyzer Finkelstein, "Der 16-ter februar," *Folksblat* no 2, February 17, 1930, 4.

they said was used as a library, print shop and meeting place of Communists.[631] In addition to Communist literature, police found three red flags and about one hundred meters of white ribbon lettering, and arrested a Lithuanian, Jonas Apokas, and two Jewish women, Mina Berelovičaitė and Chana Stražaitė. This was just one episode among widespread repression of leftists under Smetona.[632]

As a Jewish neighborhood that also became a lightning rod of manifestations of the left and right, and one whose festivities would feature Smetona himself, Slobodka is a good case to look at how Jews encountered this national holiday. Jews were intimately involved in the planning and execution of the festivities in Kaunas. The protocols of the neighborhood planning committee quoted a widely cited statement by Voldemaras, dated January 22, 1929, and added a revealing gloss. "'<u>Vytautas</u>,' in the words of our prime minister Prof. A. Voldemaras, '<u>is not an empty word but a living historical force</u> and we feel that Vytautas's unfinished work awaits, that the new devotees of the Lithuanian people are in the future, and later enter that work. And we keep those people with living force, and we believe that with their help we will succeed in securing the destiny of Lithuanian independence.' Therefore we invite everyone, without maintaining differences of ethnicity, religion or politics, to contribute to this work."[633]

The head of the Slobodka chapter of the planning committee was one Notel Lipschitz, the vice-head was named Chaim Joels, and at least six Jews held other positions, including secretary.[634] They proposed "to invite the entire community, without regard for ethnicity or

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[631] "Suimtas komunistų partijos literatūros sandėlis ir biblioteka Vilijampolėje," *Lietuvos aidas* 97 (878), April 20, 1930, 1.

[632] Šilbajoris, "Bending the Mind," 159-161.

[633] LCVA F. 1640, ap. 1, b. 51, p. 23. Emphasis in original.

[634] LCVA F. 1640, ap. 1, b. 51, pp. 1, 41.

religion."[635] Nonetheless, the Jewish community was not unified – a dispute over who would become the neighborhood rabbi had dragged on for a year – and a memorandum from "Jewish residents of Vilijampolė," signed by 38 men, claimed that "only one Jewish group" from Slobodka was represented on the committee, and therefore requested that S. Eilštein, be added.[636] The main celebration in Slobodka was on February 16 at the Saulė gymnasium. According to the program, Jews and non-Jews would begin the day at their houses of worship and then continue on to the gymnasium for songs and speeches.[637] After Smetona's speech, a number of Jewish speakers presented, including Rabbi Yosef Zusmanovitch of the Slobodka Yeshiva, also known as "the Yerushalmi," who greeted the Vytautas holiday planning committee, and Rabbi Rabbi Z. Osorski.[638] After a meal, music and the hora were planned into the night.

On Sunday September 7, the city's main celebration included a parade to the war museum, a speech by Smetona' brother-in-law, Tūbelis, the laying of a cross on the Vytautas memorial, and a play about the life of Vytautas at the state theater. On the 8th, the day of the holiday, Zionist youth groups marched, Smetona gave a speech, and the editors of all of the Kaunas newspapers, including several from the Jewish newspapers, attended an event with the president.[639] At a gathering in the People's House, Y. Livshin delivered a discourse on Vytautas and his privileges to the Jews, and later that day, Jews gathered at the Jewish Theater for a concert, where the stage was decorated with the Lithuanian flag and pictures of Vytautas and Smetona.[640] When Shimshon Rosenbaum entered the hall, he was treated to a standing ovation.

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[635] LCVA F. 1640, ap. 1, b. 51, p. 41b.

[636] LCVA F. 1640, ap. 1, b. 51, p. 40.

[637] LCVA F. 1640, ap. 1, b. 51, p. 75.

[638] LCVA F. 1640, ap. 1, b. 51, p. 42; LCVA F. 1640, ap. 1, b. 51, p. 48a-b.

[639] "Impozante Vytavt-fayerungen in Kovne," *Folksblat* no 171, September 10, 1930, 5.

[640] "Kontsert tsu Vytavts in yidishn teater," *Folksblat* no 171, September 10, 1930, 6.

Jews also gathered for an event at the large choral synagogue in the center of Kaunas, where

Chief Rabbi Avraham Dov-Ber "Ber" Šapira delivered a sermon. He said:

> It is beautiful when a slave is freed, it is more beautiful when a people [tauta] is freed, but it is most beautiful when a freed nation has a beautiful past, has heroes in its history, has an example for the present. Such an example Lithuania has in the great hero, Vytautas the Great. Vytautas was able to assess the significance of other peoples for the welfare of the land. His relations with Jews are well known. The history of Lithuania's ascendance shows us that a people which believes and fights is able to free itself. We, Jews, citizens of Lithuania, we wish our homeland's luck and freedom and let the country follow Vytautas's well-worn paths, paths of creation, building and tolerance.[641]

He went on, as recorded in a different newspaper:

> We are liberated three ways today – as men, citizens, and Jews. Lithuanian independence, like the liberation of a people in general, awakens feelings of joy for all men. As citizens, we are pleased because we, too, benefit from freedom.
> As Jews we need to be free because free Lithuania sincerely promised us autonomy and our affairs. Liberated Lithuania is not in the category of the *eved ki yimlokh* ["servant when he reigneth"]. Because what is liberated is a people with a great history, with a great *yikhes*, a people which produced such great men as Vytautas the Great. We want to hope that the current rulers [moshlim] will not renounce the beautiful tradition and will keep the promise of that which was sincerely promised at the League of Nations.
> England, that great, powerful state [melukhe] gave us formal promises. And if she broke her word today and fooled us, we wouldn't be allowed to be desperate because *the strength of Israel will not lie*, when all is said and done our ideals will comes true.[642]

While Rabbi Shapiro here deployed the term "servant when he reigneth" to underscore his point

that the Lithuanians were not despotic, he nonetheless, in the same breath, raised the question of

whether the Lithuanian government can be trusted to "keep the promise" it made on the world

stage, at the League of Nations, to accord Jews certain rights. Using Lithuanian leaders' own

favorite comparison, to the glorious medieval Grand Duchy, against them, Rabbi Shapiro

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[641] "Iškilmingos pamaldos su kalbomis žydų sinagoguose," *Lietuvos aidas* no. 204 (985), September 9, 1930, 5.

[642] "Impozante Vytavt-fayerungen in Kovne," *Folksblat* no 171, September 10, 1930, 5. For his Biblical references, see Proverbs 30:22 and 1 Samuel 15:29. See also David N. Myers, *Between Jew and Arab: The Lost Voice of Simon Rawidowicz* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2008), 102.

suggested that Jews look beyond this new constitution to a still-binding agreement vis-à-vis democratic rights. This slippage between local rights and international rights was typical of how Jews gently but persistently negotiated their rights in the Lithuania state throughout the interwar period.

By contrast, a writer named Verzhbovits penned a two-part series on "The Jewish Privileges of Vytautas the Great," in which he concluded, "As always, the Jews are the barometer of political and economic complications. The more sensitive the response to them, the greater Lithuania moves with a quicker tempo towards ruin. The harder the Jewish struggle for rights becomes in Lithuania. The honeymoon of Vytautas's privileges are over. The fires burned out quickly, the blossoms withered…"[643]

At the end of November, Smetona gave a speech whose title was given as, "To the [Ethnic] Nation," in which he announced, "The objectives of December 17 have yet to be reached."[644] On December 11, after riding in a car from the presidential palace to the Hall of Justice along road lined with military personnel holding sabers, Smetona gave another speech in which he delivered vague platitudes about the "national path" of the *tauta* – that is, ethnic Lithuanians.[645] A few days later, on the fifth anniversary of the coup d'état, representatives chosen by Smetona's party unanimously elected Smetona to a new seven-year term, the length of the presidency as determined by the 1928 constitution. Simon Dubnow and others had

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[643] Dr. L. Verzhbovits, "Di idishe privilegyes fun Vytavt dem groysn [Part III]," *Folksblat* no 171, September 10, 1930, 4. See also Verzhbovits, "Di idishe privilegyes fun Vytavt dem groysn [Part I]," *Folksblat* no 169, September 5, 1930, 4; Verzhbovits, "Di idishe privilegyes fun Vytavt dem groysn [Part II]," *Folksblat* no 170, September 8, 1930, 4.

[644] See for example "Į tautą," *Trimitas* 49, December 3, 1931, 962. Speech delivered 24 November, Kaunas.

[645] See "Deklaratsye fun prezident Smetona," *Folksblat* no 286 (545), December 14, 1931, 2; "Respublikos prezidento kalba," *Trimitas* 51, December 17, 1931, 1001-1003.

envisioned the multiethnic Republic of Lithuania, and its system of autonomy, to be a revival of a late-medieval form of Lithuanian Jewish politics. But with Voldemaras under house arrest in the countryside, the Iron Wolf banned, full Nationalist Union control of the government and Jewish relations carefully maintained through public festivals and select representatives with direct access to the ruler, Smetona, in unforeseen ways, had allowed for the emergence of a neo-medieval dynamic.

Chapter Five
A Kingdom in Crisis, 1932-1940

By the 1930s, Lithuania's origin story of benevolent Grand Duke Vytautas the Great's support of a multiethnic state had been coopted by Antanas Smetona and his Nationalist Union party, which emphasized the singular, centralized power of the late medieval government. The old myth had positioned Jews as one of many longtime inhabitants of Lithuania and had therefore been useful to Jews looking for a foothold in the new Republic of Lithuania. But Lithuanian Jews continued to find ways to integrate themselves into a Lithuanian national idea. This was made easier over the course of the 1930s as Jews became increasingly acculturated to Lithuanian customs, history and language and, indeed, life under authoritarianism. A new generation of Lithuanian Jews learned Lithuanian in schools – including in a Lithuanian-language Jewish school founded in Kaunas in 1933 – reportedly spoke it among themselves in the streets, and were familiar with Lithuanian cultural, literary and national traditions. As neighboring Germany turned towards fascism, Jews felt increasingly at home in Lithuania. *Apžvalga* ("The Review"), the most successful Lithuanian-language Jewish journal, which was published by the Jewish Soldiers' Union from 1935 to 1940, would even describe itself as "the newspaper of localness" or "of indigeneity" [čionykštiškumo laikraštis]."[646]

At the same time, in the 1930s, newspapers, academics, and institutions of power in Lithuania began to articulate "discrimination against Jews along clearly racial lines."[647] Notions

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[646] L. Kopelevičius, "'Apžvalga' – čionykštiškumo laikraštis," *Apžvalga* 25 (144), July 1, 1938, 2.

[647] Dov Levin, *The Litvaks: A Short History of the Jews in Lithuania* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem: 2000), 182. For a critique of Levin on this point, see Šarūnas Liekis, "Lithuanians and Jews in 1914-1918: Motives for Political Cooperation," *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 21 (2012): 117 n. 4.

of Lithuanians' racial purity were propagated by local eugenicists.[648] This new racialization of

Jewish otherness dovetailed with an uptick in economic anti-Semitism. The suggestion of one

Jewish observer, who predicted in 1924, "The better we learn Lithuanian, the more anti-

Semitism there will be," seemed to come true.[649] One result of these developments was that, in

the absence of a robust system of Jewish autonomy and, after 1935, in a single-party

government, the politically fractured Jews of Lithuania coalesced as a corporate entity. Many

Lithuanian Zionists' commitment to preparing for eventual settlement in Palestine deepened

during this time, and Lithuanian Jews of Folkist persuasion continued to triangulate their identity

between local culture, democratism, and the Yiddish language. But in the face of numerous

political crises at home and abroad in the 1930s, and a deepening economic recession and rising

popular anti-Semitism, Lithuanian Jews articulated their Lithuanianness and Jewishness in new

ways.

This chapter explores the complex dynamics of Lithuanian-Jewish belonging in the 1930s

by investigating several key flashpoints and Jewish responses that reflect how the ideologically

fractious Jewish community organized across political lines to face the Lithuanian public in

unity. This entailed presenting Lithuania as a haven for German Jews, investing in a museum of

Lithuanian Jewish history and forming new committees to serve as conduits to the goverment. I

also investigate what I argue is the result of Jews' paradoxical fluency in Lithuanian culture and

exclusion from it: a noted interest among Jews in the Roma, an even more rootless and

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[648] Björn M. Felder and Arūnas Germanavičius, "Eugenics against State and Church: Juozas Blažys (1890-1939), Eugenics, Abortion and Psychiatry in Interwar Lithuania 1918-1940," in *Baltic Eugenics: Bio-Politics, Race and Nation in Interwar Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania 1918-1940*, ed. Felder and Paul J. Weindling (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2013).

[649] Talkūnas, "Ar esama pas mus antisemitizmo?," *Mūsų garsas* 1 (3), March 5, 1924, 2. On this passage see also Anna Verschik, "The Lithuanian-Language Jewish Periodicals *Mūsų garsas* (1924-1925) and *Apžvalga* (1935-1940): A Sociolinguistic Evolution," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 25 (2012): 299.

disenfranchised people, the pseudo-scientific study of whom aligned Jews more closely with the interests of the Lithuanian ruling class. The example of Jewish interest in the Roma and their language shows how Lithuanian Jews internalized elements of local Lithuanian nationalist discourse of peoplehood, and Indo-European linguistics, and were able to use them for their own purposes. The case of Izidorius Kisinas, a major Jewish supporter of Smetona and a noted Romologist, demonstrates both the discourses of nationalism and ethnicity were intertwined.

The Returns of Folkism

In the spring of 1931 and winter of 1932-1933, the Yiddish writer Daniel Charney visited Kaunas. Charney, the brother of both literary critic Shmuel Niger and political activist Baruch Vladeck, had strong Folkist sympathies, and his latter visit was on behalf of the Dubnow Fund, which was raising money to support the production of its encyclopedia. He remembered about his latter trip that there were "two houses in Kaunas, a sort of 'Beys Shamai' and a 'Beys Hillel,'" referring to two major schools of rabbinic debate recorded in the Mishnah.[650] "The 'Beys Shamai' was the traveler's inn for the stringent ones, for the *golus*-negators, for the Zionists, and it was led by the editor Reuben Rubinstein, who put out *Di idishe shtime*. The 'Beys Hillel' was the traveler's inn for the so called *golus*-romanticists, for the Folkists and Yiddishists, and it was led by the editor Mendl Sudarski, who put out the *Folksblat*."[651] Charney, like other contemporary observers, remembered a robust debate between Folkists and Zionists in Lithuania in the 1930s, spurred on in large part by the revival of a Folkist newspaper, the *Folksblat*. The *Folksblat*, one of its editors, Yudl Mark, would recall, was "officially politically

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[650] Daniel Charney, "In Kovner Lite in 1933," in *Lite* (1951), 1323-1328.

[651] Ibid., 1324.

independent [umparteyish] but factually Folkist."[652] In terms of its content, contributors, outlook

and advocacy, *Folksblat* carried on the tradition of anti-Zionist agitation developed in the 1920s.

As Mark wrote in 1933 to Alexander Mukdoini, the theater critic and founder of *Nais*, by that

time living in New York, "Our 'Folksblat' is a continuation and a reincarnation of your

'Nais.'"[653] Or, in the words of Folkist writer Yosef Gar, "Nais, which one could rightfully

consider to be the 'mama,' the foremother of Folksblat."[654]

But unlike *Nais*, *Folksblat* brought into its orbit members of the left Poelei-Tsien, along

with some merchants, intelligentsia and other independent-minded thinkers.[655] As Mendl

Sudarski put it, in an introduction to lectures by Charney and Niger, "In *Folksblat* we have every

possibility to fight against that fantasy of burning shame which holds that our life here, in situ

[do, afn ort], is a temporary misfortune. We have called on the Jewish masses to sober up, to see

the actual reality and begin the fight for a more beautiful life here in situ."[656] In other words,

erstwhile Folkists and their sympathizers in Lithuania, in the absence of a party structure,

continued to publicly debate Zionists over the ultimate future for Jews in Eastern Europe in

general, and in Lithuania in particular. *Folksblat* emerged from a place of disappointment. The

first issue contained a fiery essay by Oyzer Finkelstein titled, "The Illusions are Torn," a

damning take on the social, political and economic situation of Lithuanian Jews. He wrote:

> We appear in the world in a difficult time for our community [kibets].
> Where are you, the old illusions about arranging a happy cultural life here
> together, shoulder-to-shoulder with that people, freed from Russian despotism, with
> which we have lived for more than seven hundred years?

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[652] Yudl Mark, "Di idishe Folkspartey in Lite," 11.

[653] YIVO, RG 227, Box 4, F 45, letter of 4 May, 1933. See also Yudl Mark, "'Nais' un 'Folksblat,'"
Folksblat no. 1, February 14, 1930, 9.

[654] Yosef Gar, "Di Kovner togblat 'Folksblat,'" in *Lite* (1965), 422.

[655] Ibid., 426.

[656] "Baratung fun yidish-veltlekhe kultur-tuer," *Folksblat* 81 (340), April 7, 1931, 4.

Where are you, the dreams to build up here in Lithuania our life on the foundation of our own culture?[657]

While the Zionist press is primarily concerned with party politics and "the land it dreams about," *Folksblat*, Finkelstein announced, would speak for "those who put down their roots *here*. Who want to create human conditions for existence *here* […]"[658]

The *Folksblat* debuted just in time for Independence Day in February 1930. Cofounded by Dr. Matisyohu Soloveitchik – a brother of Max Soloveitchik, the former Minister of Jewish Affairs, who had emigrated – the newspaper filled a gap in the publishing landscape. Mark would explain a few years later, "Because the daily press was 'cornered' by the Zionists, all non-Zionists felt uncomfortable every day when they had to pick up a paper."[659] While the outlook was Folkist, according to Mark, the *Folksblat* was "a newspaper for Yiddish and Yiddish schools, and for every type of local work. *Folksblat* is anti-Zionist and, as much as it can be, is anti-right [wing]." It featured physician Mendl Sudarski in a regular column on health, Esther Eliashev, Ph.D., behind a column on literature, and lawyer Oyzer Finkelstein as author of a column on legal affairs. Like *Nais*, the *Folksblat* promoted an optimistic overview of relations between Lithuanians and Jews, an attempt, according to Esther Eliashiv, to "actually bring them closer together."[660] The editors trumpeted that, unlike other local Jewish outlets, *Folksblat* "will

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[657] Oyzer Finkelstein, "Di iluzyes zaynen tserunen," *Folksblat* no. 1, February 14, 1930, 3. Emphases in original.

[658] Ibid. See also Oyzer Finkelstein, "Parteyishkayt un umparteyishkayt," *Folksblat* no. 1, February 14, 1930, 8.

[659] Yudl Mark, "Yidishe periodishe oysgabes in lite," in *Zamlbukh lekoved dem tsvey hundert un fuftsikstn yoyvl fun der yidisher prese, 1686-1936*, ed. Jacob Shatsky (New York: YIVO, 1937), 257. See also 258-261.

[660] Esther Eliashiv, "Tsvishn litvishe berg un toln: forvort," *Folksblat* no. 1, February 14, 1930, 7.

have a real Lithuanian color."[661] A two-part poem in the first issue by Yankev Gotlib called

"Home Poems," dedicated to Daniel Charney and evocative of Adam Mickiewicz's 1834 epic,

Pan Tadeusz, is a paean to "the fields of my quiet homeland Lithuania."[662] Just a few pages later,

Yudl Mark declared, "*Today is a holiday* for Jewish democracy in Lithuania."[663] A few months

after *Folksblat* debuted, Simon Dubnow wrote Mendl Sundarski and Oyzer Finkelstein to say

that that he was "strongly taken" with their new publishing endeavor.[664]

In addition to the *Folksblat*, former Folkist activists poured their energy into both well-

established and newly created organizational ventures that supported their goals. Despite the

successful revival of a Folkist, or crypto-Folkist, press, political activity in a Folkist key was

decidedly diffuse under Smetona. "In the 1930s it is perhaps more correct to speak about the

activity of Yiddishists, Folkists or democratically-oriented, rather than party-affiliated, elements

than the Folkspartey," wrote Mark.[665] In the absence of a party structure, Folkists channeled their

energy into other institutions, such as ORT, the Commerce Gymnazium in Kaunas, the

Historical-Ethnographic Society and the group called Lovers of Knowledge. Lovers of

Knowledge, cofounded by Zelig Kalmanovitch, boasted an enormous lending library that rivaled

the more Hebrew-oriented Mapu Library.[666] The Commerce Gymnazium in Kaunas, led by

Oyzer Finkelstein, taught in Yiddish and saw itself as a bastion of Yiddish culture in

Lithuania.[667] After Finkelstein's untimely death in 1932, Esther Eliashiv, Alte Sudarski and other

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[661] *Folksblat* Editors, "Tsu unzer lezer!," *Folksblat* no. 1, February 14, 1930, 2.

[662] Yankev Gotlib, "Heym-lider," *Folksblat* no. 1, February 14, 1930, 4.

[663] Mark, "'Nais' un 'Folksblat,'" 9. Emphasis in original.

[664] YIVO … letter of 16 June, 1930, p. 78165

[665] Mark, "Di idishe Folkspartey in Lite," 11.

[666] Akvilė Grigoravičiūtė, "Yiddish literary life in interwar Kaunas," *Jewish History Quarterly* 4 (2014): 698.

[667] *Tsen yor yidishe komerts-gimnazye in Kaunas, 1926-1936* (Kaunas: [?], 1936).

younger Folkists took on even greater leadership roles. In a 1935 almanac published by the Kaunas branch of ORT, Matisyohu Soloveitchik noted, in his introduction, that ORT had a "trans-party" [iberparteyish] outlook.[668] While "a large part of the course-takers of agricultural-economic education in [Jewish farms] Ungarinė and Kalinava belonged, and belong, to various Zionist associations," he wrote, "the institution of ORT holds only this one goal, namely: to prepare our youth for a productive life, and therefore the ORT is not interested in the political or party position of those whom it helps." One Yiddishist argued at the time that while Jewish agricultural work was more prominent in the past than the present, Zionists were overly focused on the future. "Not everyone can live for the tomorrow. One must also see the today. Not everyone will be able, and not all will need, to emigrate. People in Lithuania will struggle to remain here. It is in our interests to diversify, as much as possible, our economic structure, to create it in a whole mosaic of possibilities, find new positions for the Jewish here."[669]

Place of Refuge

Yet for all of the persistent ideological differences that defined Jewish public life in Lithuania, over the course of the 1930s Lithuanian Jews became more unified than ever in other respects. One way that Lithuanian Jews demonstrated their collective power was through expressions of solidarity with German Jews, whose deteriorating social and legal standing Lithuanian Jews followed from afar in horror. In the 1910s and 1920s, German Jews had looked to Lithuania as a distant cousin in need of enlightenment and aid. German Jews worked in Lithuanian government

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[668] Dr. M[atisyohu] Soloveitchik, "Vi veynik durkhgelebt – vi fil ibergelebt!," in *Tsum oyfkum durkh arbet: ORT almanakh* (Kaunas: ORT, 1935), 4.

[669] L. Verzhbovitch, "Yidn af erd in Lietuva," in *Tsum oyfkum durkh arbet*, 25-26.

institutions such as the Ministry of Education, taught in Jewish schools, and attended yeshivas, "where they supped at the fount of 'authentic Jewish learning.'"[670] Indeed, one Lithuanian Jewish leader once said, "I am sure that if it had not been for the [Germans] Joseph Carlebach and Rabbi Dr. Rosenak, we would have lost the Yeshiva of Slobodka and all other yeshivas."[671] But with the rise of Hitler, the power dynamic shifted dramatically.

In April 1933, Lithuanian Jews, like Jews and their allies around the world, coordinated a mass action to protest the Nazi government's boycott of Jewish stores and businesses. In the remarkable nationwide Lithuanian protest, at the appointed time of six o'clock on the evening of April 7, just days after the Nazi boycott began, Jewish stores in Kaunas and other cities and towns closed in unison as protestors filled the streets.[672] In the central part of the capital, popular restaurants, stores and movie theaters participated in the surprise action, which commenced with no warning. Newspapers reported that 10,000 people from all neighborhoods and walks of life braved the chill and rain to attend the general meeting at the stately Choral Synagogue, where the crowd quickly filled the building and spilled into the adjacent courtyard and streets.[673] The protest was coordinated across the country, with thousands of Jews closing stores and filling the streets in regional cities such as Šiauliai, and small towns including Vilkaviškis and Skuodas.[674]

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[670] Steven A. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 211.

[671] R. Reuben Grodzowsky, as quoted in R. Naphtali Carlebach, *Joseph Carlebach and His Generation: Biography of the late Chief Rabbi of Altona and Hamburg* (New York: The Joseph Carlebach Memorial Foundation: 1959), 86.

[672] "Kauno žydai protestavo," *Dienos naujienos* no. 79, April 6, 1933, 1.

[673] Z. Leybush, "Kauner yidn protestirn kegn radifes af yidn in Daytchland," *Di idishe shtime* 81 (4073), April 6, 1933, 7.

[674] "Protest-khvalye in provints kegn radifes af yidn in Daytchland," *Di idishe shtime* 82 (4074), April 7, 1933, 9; and "Protest-tog in Shavl," "Protest-rezolutsye fun Kretinger kehile," and "Protest-tog in Keydan," *Folksblat* 77 (935), April 6, 1933, 2.

At the Choral Synagogue in Kaunas, Oyzer Finkelstein opened the meeting by noting the imperative to stop work and the success of the protest. "Our only strength is our unity," he said, "the responsibility that ties all Jews in the whole world. This is a great strength."[675] He added, "We Lithuanian Jews have not been silent." Rubin Rubinstein, in his speech, made the point that the protest was not against Germans in general but against supporters of Hitler. One of the rally's final speakers was Yudl Mark, who was at the time the editor of the *Folksblat*.[676] Sounding another note of unity, he declared, "Jews! Brothers! Before anything else, let's understand and soak in the greatness of this moment." Mark said, "We are fighting against […] rightlessness and terrible insults." The rally produced a resolution, which reads as follows:

> We, Jews from Lithuania, who were driven from our homes by the Tsarist power 18 years ago over the false accusation over supporting Germany, the enemy at the time – *we feel now with a distinct sorrow the Nazis' disgusting, false accusation that world Jewry has allegedly taken control of Germany* […]
>   Lithuanian Jewry, as an organic part of world Jewry, suffers and bruises together with our humiliated brothers in Germany, and strongly and seriously expresses the most urgent protest against that which, with one fell swoop, robbed Jews in Germany of their struggle, over many years, to obtain rights as equal citizens; against that which has declared them to be abandoned to bands of pogromists; against that which drives them to starvation; against those who humiliate and spit on the Jew.
>   Even though the German Jews, who find themselves in a medieval inquisitional prison, have not asked for help, even if they, spit upon and disoriented, turn against our protest, we send over our expression of sympathy and our word of encouragement.

"Oh, this is the spring of sun and blood," declared local writer Yankev Gotlib in a poem called "Spring 1933," published a few days after the protest in the *Folksblat*.[677]

This mass action of 1933 was only the beginning of many efforts by Lithuanian Jews to aid German Jews. One of the first attempts to expand the protest was led by Yudl Mark and his

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[675] Texts of speeches can be found in "Nekhtike protest-tog durkhgegangen zeyer ayndrukful," *Folksblat* 77 (935), April 6, 1933, 1. See also Leybush, "Kauner yidn protestirn," 9.

[676] On Mark's tenure at the *Folksblat*, see Mark, "Yidishe periodishe oysgabes," 258.

[677] Yankev Gotlib, "Friling 1933," *Folksblat* 78 (936), April 7, 1933, 3.

circle. In a long article published shortly after the protest, Mark called for a boycott of German businesses, German publications and movie theaters that play German films.[678] He questioned whether Jews should continue to send their children to the German gymnasium, even if the school was not known for cultivating nationalist sentiment. Later in life, Yudl Mark would remember about the Folkists, "One of the last true party acts was […] in 1933 after Hitler's coming to power, with all our power to stimulate the boycott campaign against Hitler's Germany, despite interferences on the part of the Lithuanian government and on the part of some of the merchant class."[679] Several more attempts to help German Jews followed in 1933. Rubinstein helped form a Society to Aid German Jews to raise awareness about the German Jews' "condition."[680] ORT in Germany sent about thirty students, lawyers and professionals to Kaunas to work in a metal workshop, and more followed until the department set up a separate ORT technical school.[681] A Zionist kibbutz for German Jews was founded in Vilkaviškis, followed a year later by one in Kaunas.[682] ORT also established agricultural colonies for German Jews in 1934 in Ungurinė, near Marijampolė, and Kalinava, outside of Kaunas.[683] Lithuanian Jews sought to provide German Jews not only with a safe haven from fascism but also with a new home.

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[678] Yudl Mark, "Vegn frages vos zaynen bay alemen af der tsung," *Folksblat* 78 (936), April 7, 1933, 3.

[679] Yudl Mark, "Di idishe Folkspartey in Lite," 11.

[680] LCVA, F 402, ap. 4, b. 715, p. 2.

[681] Alexander Ivanov, "From a Russian-Jewish Philanthropic Organization to the 'Glorious Institute of World Jewry': Activities of the World ORT Union in the 1920s-1940s," in *The Russian Jewish Diaspora and European Culture, 1917-1937*, eds. Jörg Schulte, Olga Tabachnikova and Peter Wagstaff (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 410.

[682] Sara Shner-Neshamit, *Hayu halutsim be-Lita: Sipurah shel tnu'ah, 1916-1941* (Tel Aviv: Ghetto Fighters' House, 1982/3), 130-131.

[683] Jacob Oleiski, "'ORT' in Lite," in *Lite* (1965), 282 and Ivanov, "From a Russian-Jewish Philanthropic Organization," 410. See also ortinlithuania.ort.org

Smetona – "The Lithuanian Masaryk"

While Nazism was making its political ascent in Germany, its momentum in Lithuania, especially among Baltic Germans near the coast, was halted by the Lithuanian government. In February 1934, Lithuania passed a law making it punishable to insult Lithuanian state symbols. Almost immediately, the government began to arrest hundreds of pro-Nazi activists, especially in Klaipėda, where they had been operating in secret because of a March 1933 ban on the Nazi party.[684] Klaipėda, known in German and Yiddish as Memel, is a Baltic port city that had a sizable population of German speakers. The Memel region was administered by the League of Nations from 1918 to 1923, when the Lithuanian army staged a revolt that resulted in its transfer to Lithuania; now the Nazi regime in Germany, which extended to the East Prussian border with Lithuania, sought to undermine Lithuanian sovereignty by supporting the local Nazi movement. The closely followed trial of these Lithuanian German supporters of Nazism would begin in July. In response, Germany, Lithuania's largest trading partner, imposed a trade embargo on its smaller neighbor, which relied on Germany to purchase its geese, butter and other products.[685]

While Smetona's animosity to Nazism deepened, other Lithuanian activists on the far-right were increasingly inspired by Hitler.[686] In 1933, while living in exile in Paris, Voldemaras

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[684] Alfonsas Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona and His Lithuania: From the National Liberation Movement to an Authoritarian Regime (1893-1940)* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 301.

[685] Saulius Kaubrys and Mindaugas Tamošaitis, *Lietuvos vokiečiai tarp dviejų pasaulinių karų: Metmenys tapatybės istorijai* (Vilnius: Gimtasis Žodis, 2013), 98-101.

[686] On the relationship between the Nationalist Union and Nazi ideology, and some of Smetona's views on Hitler, see Kohrs, *Die Litauische Nationale Union*, 274-300 and Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona and His Lithuania*, 302.

published the book, *Lithuania and Its Problems*, outlining in detail the ways in which Lithuanian history informed the country's current affairs.[687] A group of Voldemaras loyalists coalesced around the disgraced former prime minister. Called *voldemarininkai*, this faction included high-ranking generals, ministers and army personnel who thought Smetona was a weak leader both domestically and in international affairs. Unlike Smetona, who held up Mussolini's government as a model, these *voldemarininkai* looked to German ethnic nationalism. Under the direction of Voldemaras, who had returned to Lithuania, they orchestrated a coup d'état to oust the Lithuanian president.

In the early hours of June 7, 1934, Voldemaras's insurrectionist group directed the Kaunas garrison of the Lithuanian army to surround key institutions in the capital, where military vehicles had already been secretly mobilized for a putsch.[688] Petras Kubiliūnas, the army's general chief of staff, then visited Smetona to demand that he discontinue repressions of the *voldemarininkai* and install as Minister of Defense Kazys Škirpa, a former general whom Smetona had dismissed for not supporting his own 1926 coup. (Six years later, in 1940 Škirpa would found the Nazi-aligned Lithuanian Activist Front in Berlin.) But the "surprisingly poorly organized coconspirators," in the words of historian Gediminas Rudis, could not persuade the president to meet any demands.[689] Voldemaras was flown into Kaunas from the city of Zarasai, in far northeastern Lithuania, but it was too late. The generals backed down from their demands;

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[687] Augustinas Voldemaras, *La Lithuanie et ses problèmes: Tome 1: Lithuanie et Allemagne* (Paris: Mercure Universel, 1933). For citations, see Lithuanian translation collected in *Profesorius Augustinas Voldemaras: Raštai: 100 metų gimimo sukakčiai paminėti*, ed. Morkus Šimkus (Chicago: Lietuvos Atgimimo Sąjūdis, 1983).

[688] Kohrs, *Die Litauische Nationale Union*, 187-190 and Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona and His Lithuania*, 341-345.

[689] Gediminas Rudis, "Virtinė išpuolių prieš režimą," in *Lietuvos Istorija* vol. X, book I, ed. Danutė Blažytė-Baužienė, et al. (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2013), 580.

Voldemaras was arrested, and a military tribunal sentenced Voldemaras to twelve years in prison, first in Marijampolė and then Utena. (He would serve under four years.)[690]

By the time of Smetona's sixtieth birthday, on August 10, Jewish support for the president's apparent, and relative, centrism and moderation had deepened. Smetona's birthday was greeted with widespread public celebrations and special publications.[691] Lithuanian Jews joined in these expressions of patriotism and commitment to the president, perhaps in a supererogatory way. The Jewish Soldier's Union, which had been founded in 1933, published two volumes in Smetona's honor. In one publication, the organization's leader, Moyshe Bregshtein, or Moisiejus Bregšteinas, stated in his introductory section: "former soldiers of the Jewish faith highly respect H[is] E[xcellency] President of the Republic A. Smetona, remembering that Independence was won under his lead and now under his lead the country [kraštas] heads towards a beautiful future."[692] In one essay that shows how far Jews had come in their political alignment, Yisroel Zhofer, the journalist from *Di idishe shtime*, praised Smetona's leadership and the sophistication of his thought.[693]

> Most interesting to us Jews are those thoughts of the Head of State which concern the Jewish minority in Lithuania. These birthday thoughts are especially significant **now**, where some young people want to add some foreign element to national ideas. 'What is the nation *in toto*?,' asked the president in one of his speeches in 1931. 'It is said that the objective attribute of a nationality is language. However, that is wrong. In England, where everyone speaks English, the Scot does not agree with being English, and the

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[690] Morkus Šimkus, "Augustinas Voldemaras," in *Profesorius Augustinas Voldemaras: Raštai: 100 metų gimimo sukakčiai paminėti*, ed. Šimkus (Chicago: Lietuvos Atgimimo Sąjūdis, 1983), xiv-xv.

[691] See for example "Visa lietuvių tauta mini didžias sukaktuves," *Trimitas* 36, August 6, 1934, 705-706 [1-2].

[692] "J.E. Respublikos Prezidentas A. Smetona ir žydų karių, dalyvavusių Lietuvos Nepriklausomybės atvadavime, Sąjūnga," in *Antanas Smetona*, ed. M. Bregšteinas (Kaunas: Jewish Soldiers' Union, 1934), 2.

[693] J. L. Žoferis, "Smetona – lietuviškasis Masarikas," 10.

German-speaking Swiss does not feel German, etc. Jews do not have their own territory, but they have an ancient culture, their own traditions. Consequently, territory does not form the basis of the concept of a nation.'[694]

Here Zhofer interprets Smetona's effective dismissal of Jews from the Lithuanian national idea in a positive way. "I understand the Zionists," Zhofer went on. "I understand their desire to create their own state. At the same time, I see that these Jews are loyal citizens of the states where they live. Lithuanian Americans have two homelands. In a correct state, various nationalities can live. Minorities have to be first, above all, loyal to the state. There have to be good relations between minorities and majorities."

One of the more telling features of this publication is the repeated comparison between Smetona and Tomáš Masaryk, the president of Czechoslovakia from 1918-1935 who was so revered by Czech Jews for his stance against anti-Semitism and general embrace of assimilated Czechoslovak Jewry that a Jewish "Tegemania" – after Masaryks's initials, T.G. – was full-blown and widely recognized by the early 1920s.[695] Three contributors to the Smetona jubilee volume, including Rubin Rubinstein and Yisroel Zhofer, used their essays to compare Smetona to Masaryk.[696] Zhofer even explicitly called Smetona "the Lithuanian Masaryk," writing, "This is a great rarity: only in the two states of Lithuania and Czechoslovakia can we find such people, who embody both the Head of State and Leader of the Nation [Tautos Vadas], thinker and politician, philosopher and diplomat."[697]

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[694] Ibid. Emphasis in original.

[695] Martin Wein, *A History of Czechs and Jews: A Slavic Jerusalem* (London-New York: Routledge, 2015), 50-55.

[696] R. Rubinšteinas, "Jo gyvenimo idealas," 3; Inž[inierius]. J. Roginskis, "Antanas Smetona ir Lietuvos gerbūvis," 7; and J. L. Žoferis, "Smetona – lietuviškasis Masarikas," 10.

[697] Žoferis, "Smetona – lietuviškasis Masarikas," 10.

This is a somewhat surprising comparison given the major differences between the Lithuanian case and the Czech one. Czechoslovakia had a large community of Jews who spoke Czech as their native language, while Lithuania likely had few Jews who spoke Lithuanian as their mother tongue circa 1934. And while Zionism was popular among Lithuanian Jews, it was "more troubling for Czech-national Jews" than even anti-Semitism: Hillel Kieval has argued, "Zionist efforts to organize Czechoslovak Jewry along national lines and to promote Jewish national interests in the new state threatened the integrationist programme of the Czech-Jewish movement."[698] Indeed, Masaryk's singular status has been a defining characteristic for comparative historians who have studied him. Ivan Berend has identified Masaryk as "a unique national leader in Central and Eastern Europe"; Ezra Mendelsohn argued, "In his grasp of this [moral] dimension of Jewish nationalism, as opposed to its more easily understood aspect of fleeing from persecution, Masaryk was unique among the great nationalists of Eastern Europe"; Anthony Polonsky referred to "the Czechoslovak exception."[699] Compared with Smetona, an expansive literature exists on Masaryk's relationship and attitude to the Jews.[700] But both states were multiethnic and had minorities who spoke the languages of hostile neighbors, a context in which Jews' patriotism could stand out. The embodiment of the state in one ruler made it easy

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[698] Kieval article 315-316.

[699] Ivan T. Berend, *History Derailed: Central and Eastern Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 263; Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1987), 147; Antony Polonsky, *The Little Dictatorships: The History of Eastern Europe since 1918* (London-Boston: Routledge, 1975), Chapter 6.

[700] See for example, B. Pollak, *Thomas G. Masaryk and the Jews: A Collection of Essays with 13 Illustrations and Facsimiles* (New York: [Self-published?], 1941); Hillel Kieval, "Masaryk and Czech Jewry: The Ambiguities of Friendship," in *T.G. Masaryk (1850-1937), Volume 1: Thinker and Politician*, ed. Stanley B. Winters (London: Macmillan, 1991); Kieval, *Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), Chapter 9; and Miloš Pojar, *T.G. Masaryk and the Jewish Question* (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2018).

for Jews in Czechoslovakia and Lithuania to demonstrate loyalty. Just as, on Masaryk's birthday in 1934, a Jewish newspaper in Bratislava compared him to the Biblical Joshua, on Smetona's birthday, the chief rabbi of Kaunas would compare the president to King Solomon.[701]

A second 1934 almanac entitled *The Shield* published by the Jewish Soldiers' Union, also edited by Bregshtein, includes, as its frontispiece, a photographic portrait of Smetona above a facsimile of a handwritten note signed by the president. The message reads: "It is very good to be in, and rely on, an organization of men who are handy with weapons out of loyalty to their native land, without losing their health and without fear of losing their lives."[702] Even Vincas Grigaliūnas-Glovackis, the former publisher of rightwing and sometimes anti-Semitic newspaper, *Tautos valia* contributed an essay to this volume on the heroism of Jewish weapons smugglers.[703] In 1934, Smetona's Yiddish-language biographer, general bibliographer, and perhaps greatest Jewish supporter, Izidorius Kisinas – né Yitzhak Kisin – compiled a nearly seven-hundred-page encyclopedic compendium of Smetona's writings from 1887 to 1934. In his introduction, Kisinas wrote, "I already began this work in 1928 […], but living in the countryside, and unable to access a library, and only having a random assortment of journals and newspapers, I could work on it quite slowly."[704] The birthday jubilee gave Kisinas an opportunity to finish the work. One month after Smetona's birthday, Lithuania signed a treaty with Latvia and Estonia to increase their strength and unity, especially in the face of increasing

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[701] Wein, *A History of Czechs and Jews*, 51 and Vyr. Rab. B. Šapira, "Žodis jubiliejiaus proga," in *Antanas Smetona*, ed. M. Bregšteinas (Kaunas: Jewish Soldiers' Union, 1934), 4.

[702] M. Bregšteinas, ed. *Skydas* (Kaunas: Jewish Soldiers' Union, 1934), 1.

[703] Ats[argos] gen[erolas Vincas] Grigaliūnas-Glovackis, "'Ginklanešiai,'" in *Skydas*, 24.

[704] Izidorius Kisinas, "Autoriaus Prakalba," in *Antano Smetonos bibliografija ir bio-bibliografija,* ed., Kisinas (Klaipėda: Rytas, 1935), xxvii.

hostility from Nazi Germany.[705] Formalized at the League of Nations in Geneva, the treaty ushered in the so-called Baltic Entente, a program of mutual assistance which would last until 1940 and which, after its signing, helped to buttress the feeling of security that Jews sought in their country of citizenship.

"Our Homeland Has Been, and Will Be, Here"

Over the course of the 1930s, Jews engaged with Lithuanian culture on nearly every level. In architecture, as Jolita Kančienė has noted in her research, "Jewish builders – engineers, architects and builders – left a striking footprint on Kaunas architecture, which was built and designed professionally and with originality."[706] Danielius Dolskis, a Russian-Jewish singer who moved to Kaunas in 1929, learned Lithuanian and began to sing original compositions in the capital's most popular clubs, such as Metropolis. His tunes such as "Palangos jūroj" (In the Sea by Palanga) and "Lietuvaitė" (Lithuanian Girl), were standards in the capital's jazz bands and their recordings became national hits. In literature, sports, the arts and the battlefield, Lithuanian Jews productively made a space for themselves in a way that demonstrated both their Jewishness and their Lithuanianness.

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[705] See Algimantas Kasparavičius, "Lietuva, Baltijos Antantė ir Rytų Pakto idėja 1934-1935 metais: idėjų ir politinių procesų sąveikos," in Arūnas Vyšniauskas, ed., *Lietuvos valstybingumo branda ir trapumas, 1918-1940 m.* (Vilnius: Vilnius University Press, 2015).

[706] Jolita Kančienė, "Žydų indėlis į Kauno tarpukario architektūrą," in Alfredas Jomantas, ed. *Žydų kultūros paveldas Lietuvoje* (Vilnius: Savastis, 2005), 104.

Between 1936 and 1938 the Jewish Soldiers' Union had 43 departments and more or less 2,300 members.[707] But its greatest achievement may have been its journal, *Apžvalga*, a Lithuanian-language publication that eloquently and rigorously explicated the most pressing issues of Lithuanian Jewry in the second half of the 1930s. *Trimitas*, the Riflemen's Union journal, regularly published anti-Jewish content, despite its occasional claims that its Jewish membership precluded it from being anti-Semitic.[708] *Apžvalga* presented an opportunity for Jews to, inter alia, counter rising anti-Semitism in a language accessible to the broader public. Previous scholarship on *Apžvalga* has focused on the journal's language politics, including arguments for the use of Lithuanian among Jews and its support for translation projects.[709] Anna Verschick has argued, "We should take a cautious approach and not claim that the outspoken patriotic position of *Apžvalga* is the consequence of pressure to be loyal."[710] A closer look at the organizational principles at work in *Apžvalga*'s creation shows that, while its patriotism was apparently earnest, the journal was founded with a Lithuanian readership in mind, and its primary goal was to combat rising anti-Semitism.

In 1934, the Central Administration of the Union of Jewish Military Personnel Participants in Lithuania's Liberation published a booklet entitled, *Why Do We Need to Have a Jewish Newspaper in Lithuanian?* This otherwise unsigned publication opened with a rather typical homage to the long Jewish presence in Lithuania. "For hundreds of years Jews have lived

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[707] Atamukas, *Lietuvos žydų kelias*, 176.

[708] Eglė Bendikaitė, "[...] Smetonos įtaka [...] yra mums garantija," in *Lietuvos istorija* vol. X, book II, 138 n. 214.

[709] See especially Anna Verschik, "The Lithuanian-Language Jewish Periodicals *Mūsų garsas* (1924-1925) and *Apžvalga* (1935-1940): A Sociolinguistic Evolution," in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry 25* (2012): 301-303 and Jurgita Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė, "Translations and self-representation: literature as a tool for a mutual Jewish Lithuanian acquaintance," *Jewish Culture and History* 18:2 (2017): 194.

[710] Verschik, "The Lithuanian-Language Jewish Periodicals," 301.

in Lithuania in friendship with the Lithuanians. Already in the year 1388 the Lithuanian Grand Duke Vytautas the Great, being interested in the economic development of his land, gave the Jews various privileges […] In Lithuania they developed trade and handicrafts, thereby strengthening the well-being of the land."[711] Jews, the war veteran authors stated, "found a common language with the Lithuanians and led a restrained line of Lithuanian-Jewish entente." After arguing that Jews helped build up Lithuania's economy and diplomacy in the early postwar period, the booklet noted, "The last couple of years, new winds – until now unknown in Lithuania – began to blow. A small group of irresponsible people, led by personal calculations and ambitions, began to spur capital by leading an attack against Jews. In a short time, this group grew to a strong organization that began an incidental fight against Jews that started to proceed methodically and with a heightened intensity."[712]

These Jewish war veterans believed that a Jewish newspaper in Lithuanian could serve as "a bridge of understanding" between Jews and Lithuanians in the wake of an "anti-Jewish wave" since Hitler came to power (while noting that they had no illusions that it would solve "the Jewish problem in Lithuania.")[713] The newspaper, as they envisioned it, would polemicize the emboldened anti-Semitic press.[714] "The main task of the newspaper must be to lead a project of awareness and familiarize the Lithuanian with his neighbor – the Jew," especially by popularizing and demystifying Lithuanian-Jewish traditions, history, and culture. "Through such systematic and well-produced explications by proper specialists in various areas (historians, economists, etc.) who we intend to attract as contributors of the newspaper, what we will achieve

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[711] YIVO RG 2, F 1635, 74406r, *Farvos darfn mir hobn a yidishe tsaytung in litvish?* (Kaunas: Pažanga, [1934]), 1.

[712] Ibid., 74406v (2).

[713] Ibid., 74407v (3).

[714] Ibid., 74407r (4).

is that the Lithuanians will know more about the Jews and will cease to look at them as people from another world."

This project was perhaps best distilled in the writer L. Kopelevitch's formulation, about *Apžvalga*, that it is "the newspaper of localnesss" or "of indigeneity" [čionykšiškumo laikraštis].[715] Updating the classic trope about Jews' longtime presence in Lithuania, Kopelevitch wrote, "It has been centuries already that Jews have lived close to the Lithuanian people [tauta]. Together they lived through good years and bad. Years in which common cause in shared national affairs were settled, connecting them, cementing their interests. [But] It needs to be said that even if the majority of the nation [tauta] lives close to us, our life is, to some extent, a mystery to it." He noted that "the moderate Lithuanian" is unfamiliar with Jewish culture. Kopelevitch advocated for a two-pronged approach to addressing the problems of the day: increase knowledge of Jewish culture among Lithuanians and call on "the Jewish citizen" to more publicly align with Lithuanian national causes. "By joining Lithuanian and Jewish communities together," he wrote with patriotic flair, "we wish to further festive activities for the benefit of Lithuanian Jews and our homeland." Another issue of *Apžvalga* declared, "Our homeland is, and will always be, here."[716] The very first issue of *Apžvalga* included a front-page article by Mykolas Römeris, the former *krajowec* and enthusiast for reinstating the Grand Duchy, on the topic of Lithuanian-Jewish relations.[717]

Lithuania's robust Jewish literary culture in the 1930s extended beyond the newspapers, including not only Yiddish and Hebrew publications but also Lithuanian literature produced by Jews and numerous translation projects that brought Lithuanian literature into Jewish languages, and vice versa. Up until the early 1930s, Yiddish literature from Lithuania had been a somewhat

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[715] L. Kopelevičius, "'Apžvalga' – čionykštiškumo laikraštis," *Apžvalga* 25 (144), July 1, 1938, 2.

[716] Atamukas, *Lietuvos žydų kelias*, 176.

[717] "Prof. Roemeris apie žydų lietuvių santykius," *Apžvalga* 1, June 16, 1935, 1.

diffuse and partisan enterprise that struggled to distinguish itself from other national Yiddish literatures.[718] Now, writers organized around almanac-style one-time publications that foregrounded their connection to Lithuania.[719] These included, for example, Eliezer Heyman, a prolific Yiddish writer whose style was "characterized by existential landscapes of man and Lithuania, philotopia – 'love of place,' let's say – or in peasant speech, 'earthiness' [žemininkiška]."[720] From 1934 to 1935 Simonas Bieliackinas, a Jewish lawyer and law professor, published several works of fiction in Lithuanian, including short story collections *Žmonės ir likimas* ("People and Fate") and *Įnoringieji* ("Caprices"), and the novel, *Smukimų keliu* ("The Path of Decadence"), which narrates from the perspective of a woman.[721] Jews regularly contributed original poetry to *Apžvalga* in the late 1930s, demonstrating their facility with the Lithuanian language and Lithuanian culture.

"Lithuania for Lithuanians"

A Jewish observer of the national scene in 1924, writing in Lithuanian, suggested, "The better we learn Lithuanian, the more anti-Semitism there will be" – a prediction which seemed to come true.[722] Indeed, ten years later, as Jewish engagement with the Lithuanian language became more commonplace, Lithuania saw a notable upswing in public expressions anti-Semitism. While Smetona repressed the Hitler-inspired fascist movement in Lithuania, his own Mussolini-inspired

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[718] For an overview see Yankev Gotlib, "Yunge yidishe literature in Lite," *Shlyakhn* (Kaunas), 1932, 45-48.

[719] Grigoravičiūtė, "Yiddish literary life," 699-700.

[720] Mindaugas Kvietkauskas, "Modernioji Lietuvos Jidiš Literatūra," in *Žydai Lietuvoje: Istorija, kultūra, paveldas*, ed. Larisa Lempertienė and Jurgita Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė (Vilnius: Paknis, 2009), 236.

[721] On Bieliackinas see for example, Avraham Tory, *Terumat yehudim mi-Lita le-vinyan ha-arets u-medinat Yisrael* (Tel Aviv: Ihud akadema'im yots'e Lita, 1988), 64-65.

[722] Talkūnas, "Ar esama pas mus antisemitizmo?," 2.

movement of Nationalists expanded in popularity. 1933 saw the debut of the journal, *Akademikas*, published by the Kaunas University Nationalist Union student group, Neo-Lithuania, also known as Naujoji Lietuva. *Akademikas* published, among other content, explications of fascist ideology, texts by Mussolini, paeans to the 1926 coup d'état, and sundry broadsides to buttress the far-right elements of the Nationalist Union as it shaped a new generation of Lithuanian patriots. One aspect of this rightward movement was the marginalization – in ethnic, economic and legal terms – of non-Lithuanians, especially Jews. Anthropologist Jonas Balys was one of the journal's leading ideologues who helped shape the ideology of the *tautininkai* (Nationalists) towards a focus on the ethnic Lithuanian *tauta* (ethnic nation). "Most of us are bad *tautininkai* (taking this word in a broad sense)," he wrote in *Akademikas* in 1934, "not because we don't understand the definitions of definitions, the meanings of meanings, or the significances of significances, but because we are not familiar with our own people and our territory, we do not know what is Lithuanian, we do not know what differentiates us from other peoples."[723]

One of the most significant developments in interwar Lithuania vis-à-vis the Jews was the rise of the Verslas ("Business") movement. Verslas began in 1931/2 as a movement to enlarge the Lithuanian middle class.[724] The Lithuanian government had sponsored cooperatives such as Lietūkis (fowl, eggs, etc.) and Pienocentras (milk) since the early 1920s as places where Lithuanians could trade with each other.[725] By the mid-1930s, Lithuanian cooperatives had expanded into traditional Jewish industries such as flax. In 1934, the government concentrated

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[723] Dr. Jonas Balys, "Lietuvių tautotyros reikalu," *Akademika* 16 (31), November 1, 1934, 354.

[724] For some general literature on Verslas, see for example, Lestchinsky, "Di ekonomishe lage," 901-903; Eglė Bendikaitė, "Žydai," in *Lietuvos istorija: Nepriklausomybė (1918-140 m.)*, vol. X, part II, 140-142; Atamukas, *Lietuvos žydų kelias*, 193-194.

[725] Lestchinsky, "Di ekonomishe lage," 888-889.

60% of sugar sales, 70% of salt, and 60% of cement in the hands of the Lietūkis cooperative.[726]

Verslas became the mouthpiece for this expansion, which was framed as a reduction of the

"foreign" influence of Baltic Germans, Jews and others on the Lithuanian economy. Eventually,

this project soon took on overtly anti-Semitic overtones.

The idea that the merchant Jew is an exploiter of Lithuanian farmers and workers has a

long history in Lithuania, and, in print, can be traced to first Lithuanian newspaper, *Aušra*.

Published at the turn of the century, *Aušra* encouraged Lithuanians to shop from each other,

rather than from Jews.[727] Yet as Lithuanian political consciousness developed, Darius Staliūnas

has argued, "In the nationalist stream of ideology, there was no clearly expressed anti-Jewish

economic nationalism."[728] The 1920s and 1930s presented very different circumstances. Mass

urbanization of Lithuanians and unprecedented access to education in the Lithuanian language

facilitated the rise of a Lithuanian middle class in towns and cities across the country. "With the

birth of this class," Jacob Lestchinsky maintained, "organized, active and dynamic anti-Semitism

in Lithuania was also born."[729] Rooted in neither Catholic Church-based anti-Judaism nor racial

anti-Semitism, Verslas was a thoroughly bourgeois, urban movement of the new Lithuanian

middle class which, tellingly, expressed its anti-Semitism most explicitly through a trade

publication, *Verslininkas* ("Businessman").[730] The mottos of the Verslas movement were

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[726] Tsvi Port, "Di idishe kredit-kooperatsye in Lite," in *Lite* (1965), 265.

[727] Staliūnas, *Enemies for a Day*, 70-72. See also Klaus Richter, "Antisemitismus und die litauische
Intelligenzija (1900-1914)," *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 21 (2012): 89-114.

[728] Staliūnas, *Enemies for a Day*, 75.

[729] Lestchinsky, "Di ekonomishe lage," 901.

[730] Saulius Sužiedėlis, "The Historical Sources for Antisemitism in Lithuania and Jewish-Lithuanian
Relations during the 1930s," in *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews*, ed. Alvydas Nikžentaitis, Stefan
Schreiner and Darius Staliūnas (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2004), 126-128.

"Enough with being enslaved by others!" and "Lietuva lietuviams," or, "Lithuania for Lithuanians."[731]

Leaders of the Jewish Soldiers' Union turned this latter, popular slogan back on those who used it. In a speech to members, J. Goldberg, the union's leader, declared, "The slogan 'Lithuania only for Lithuanians' is not Lithuanian nationalism. It is a foreign, racist, pithy saying that reeks of kerosene. Its purpose is to coerce Jews to renounce their rights."[732] The government abetted the marginalization of Jewish businesses by enacting laws, in 1932, that prohibited the use of all languages besides Lithuanian in business dealings, among other measures targeted at Jewish cooperatives.[733] President Smetona's tendency to prevaricate on the topic of anti-Semitism gave room for these anti-social ideas to thrive. In 1934, for example, Smetona said, "After all, Jews since ancient times have avoided mixing in among themselves foreign blood, however we do not call them racists. Germans, who for a long time happily assimilated Jews, suddenly shut them out and strongly try to get rid of the influence of Semites, like in various times: *they are racists*."[734]

At the same time that Lithuanian business interests gained a foothold in the country's overwhelmingly agrarian economy, mass strikes broke out in the countryside. Piecemeal restructuring of important segments of the economy into cooperatives, the persistent global economic depression and German economic sanctions as a result of the Smetona government's repression of Klaipėda's Nazis slowed the Lithuanian economy. The drop in prices of agricultural products was acutely felt by farmers, who, pushed to the brink, organized strikes

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[731] Liudas Truska, *Lietuva ir žydai nuo XIX a. pabaigos iki 1941 m. birželio* (Vilnius: Vilnius Pedagogical University Press, 2005), 148.

[732] "Sąjūngos pirm. Adv. J. Goldbergo kalba," *Apžvalga* 14 (40), April 12, 1936, 2.

[733] Port, "Di idishe kredit-kooperatsye," 262-263.

[734] Speech given at the State Theater during Humanism Week, April 19, 1934. As collected in Antanas Smetona, *Pasakyta parašyta* (Kaunas: Pažanga, 1935), 103.

beginning in the summer and fall of 1935. These strikes, which began in the Suvalkija region of the country's southwest and spread from there, included boycotts of buyers' cooperatives, roadblocks and violent denouncements of the government. Smetona responded by arresting, court-martialing and even sentencing to death leaders of the strikes.[735] Despite government repressions, the Lithuanian peasantry, in the face of declining profits, continued their mass strikes until 1937.[736] It was a tense climate that would only intensify over the next few years.

"Dubnow is no 'Dubnowist'"

In the midst of heightening politic tensions, Jewish leaders of various stripes sought a modicum of unity in their support for Jewish ethnography, and public history and Simon Dubnow. On May 28, 1935, Dubnow, age seventy-four, returned to Kaunas after a thirteen-year absence. Two years earlier he had moved from Berlin to Riga, where he had already weathered a military coup d'état, the ascent of an ultranationalist Latvian government and the death of his wife, Ida. During this time, Dubnow had directed much of his energy away from history writing and political activism and towards crafting and publishing his memoirs. Autonomism was by now an outmoded goal for Jewish life. In his contribution to the entry on "Autonomy" in the 1934 General Yiddish Encyclopedia, Dubnow wrote, "The new principle of 'protection for national minorities,' which

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[735] Sigita Černevičiūtė, "Mirties bausmės taikymo praktika: 1935-1936 m. Suvalkijos ūkininkų streikas," *Istorija* 92 (2013-14): 22-31.

[736] On the strikes, see for example Kohrs, *Die Litauische Nationale Union*, 190-200 and Eidintas 221-223.

developed after the World War, also set aside the problem of Jewish autonomy on a new international basis."[737]

The occasion for Dubnow's visit was the tenth anniversary of Kaunas's Jewish Ethnographic-Historical Society, which was to be named in the professor's honor. (In fact, the society incorporated in 1922, with Zelig Kalmanovitch on the leadership committee.)[738] In 1908, in Petersburg, Dubnow had cofounded the first Jewish Ethnographic-Historical Society, which was the culmination of Dubnow's "vision to construct a historical narrative of Jewish life in Eastern Europe from the bottom up."[739] In many ways, the Lithuanian iteration of this society was supra-political and functioned well in its publishing, museology, and other ventures because of the cooperation of Jews of various political allegiances. In May 1930, Zionist Rubin Rubinstein, Folkist Mendl Sudarski and others filed to add statutes to the society.[740] The statutes outlined, rather diplomatically, that the area in which the society operates is "all Lithuania" and its purpose was: "a) To explore all Jewish historical and ethnographic areas b) discuss questions of historical and ethnographic theory c) collect scientific materials, documents, photographs, books, etc."[741] A pamphlet published by the society expanded on its motivations: "Jews have lived in Lithuania for centuries. Here they built settlements and cities, created material and spiritual property, cultivated a unique style and way of life. Time destroys memory of the past, the historiography and ethnography strives to preserve the traces of life from the past, the

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[737] Sh[imen] Dubnow, "Oytonomye in der yidisher geshikhte," in *Algemeyne entsiklopedye* vol. 1 (Paris: Dubnow-fond, 1934), 239.

[738] LCVA, F 402, ap. 4, b. 230, p. 1.

[739] Jeffrey Veidlinger, "Introduction," in *Going to the People: Jews and the Ethnographic Impulse*, ed. Veidlinger (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2016), 6.

[740] LCVA, F 402, ap. 4, b. 597, pp. 1-2.

[741] Ibid., p. 3.

ancientness, which has wholly remained from past generations."[742] The establishment of a

museum dedicated to the history and culture of Lithuanian Jews was a milestone in the

presentation of a historically unified, and ethnically defined, Jewish community. The museum

presented a holistic vision of Lithuanian Jewry, and scores of items, including photographs,

publications, maps, and everyday objects, and featured a corner dedicated to Rabbi Elchanan

Spektor (1817-1896) in which a visitor could view the former Chief Rabbi of Kaunas's personal

chair, Sabbath candlesticks, and oil lamp.[743] Alte Sudarsky remembered that Dubnow's "visit

strongly encouraged the work" of the museum.[744]

Dubnow was welcomed with fanfare and series of articles rehearsed his life and work in

extensive detail.[745] In 1922, when Dubnow visited Kaunas, he had told a politically diverse

Jewish audience at the Mapu Library that he was "himself a Lithuanian Jew" for whom Kaunas

had had certain enchantment since he was a child, and that the Republic of Lithuania to emerge

after the First World War was like the ark after the Biblical flood.[746] Now, *Apžvalga* announced,

"It is noteworthy that Professor Dubnow has remained till now a Lithuanian citizen."[747] But like

Dubnow's 1922 visit to Kaunas, this 1935 trip became a platform for Zionists and Folkists to air

grievances about their views on the nature of Jewish existence in the diaspora. In early June,

Dubnow wrote a letter to the editor of *Di idishe shtime*, imploring Lithuanian Jews to assist the

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[742] *Lomir shafn yidshn muzey un arkhiv in Lite!* (Kaunas: Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Society, 1938), 1.

[743] "Sąrašas" [n.d.], Izidorius Kisinas Papers, LMA, F 264, vnt. 1408, ll. 1-7; and "Kronika," *Rytas* 122 (3197), May 29, 1935, 2. On Rabbi Spektor, see *Lomir shafn yidshn muzey*, 13 and "Sąrašas," 6.

[744] Alte Arsh-Sudarsky, "Unzer kultur-gezelshaftlekhe tetikayt," in *Lite* (1965), 482.

[745] See for example "Der lebn-veg fun Sh. Dubnow," *Di idishe shtime* 120 (5072), May 28, 1935, 3; Dr. Ts[emakh] Feldshteyn, "Simon Dubnow (Tsu zayn kumen in Lite)," *Di idishe shtime* 123 (5075), May 31, 1935, 6; and Hirsh Melamed, "Simon Dubnow," *Di idishe shtime* 128 (5080), June 6, 1935, 13.

[746] "Der fayerlekhe kaboles-ponim far Prof. Sh. Dubnow," *Di idishe shtime* 98 (797), May 4, 1922, 3.

[747] "S. Dubnow," *Apžvalga* no. 2, June 23, 1935, 4.

ailing Vilnius Central Education Committee, an important hub of secular, Yiddishist activity in the former Lithuanian capital.[748] Perhaps sensing Dubnow move away from public support of Zionism, Rubin Rubinstein sought to claim Dubnow's legacy for his Zionist camp.

In an article articles titled, "Our Great Guest," printed under a large banner at the top of the page proclaiming, "Prof. Dubnow in Lithuania," Rubinstein wrote with deep admiration for Lithuania's guest of honor.[749] But it was a bittersweet occasion to reflect on how autonomy unfolded in Lithuania. "We Lithuanian Jews, more than most, carried out Dubnow's dream in a real-life marvelous experiment," he wrote. "But he is surely not to blame – we are – that another *golus*-illusion was torn apart." Rubinstein noted that all Jewish parties borrowed from Dubnow's ideas, and "the Zionist 'Gegenwarts-program' absorbed much of his theoretical underpinnings and practical proposals." But it was the Folkists, for Rubinstein, who had damningly misinterpreted Dubnow:

> The Folkists, who want to trace their spiritual genealogy from Dubnow, are, it is understood, far, far away from him. Dubnow is governed by a love of Zion – they get enthusiastic about the age of Zion. Dubnow presents himself as a good neighbor of Zionism, values and respects the great work of building up the Land of Israel, loves and writes in Hebrew, not allowing much the Jewish mother tongue [i.e., Yiddish] in *golus*. Those who present themselves as his followers hate, and have blinders against, Zionism, spit on the Hebrew cultural movement and try to undertake, according to their terrible ideas, the work of building up [a movement].

Rubinstein turned the Folkists' championing of Dubnow back on them. He continued: "No, Dubnow is no 'Dubnowist.' He is no Dubnowist in a *falsified* sense of the word. Today he belongs to the Jewish people. He himself is an integral part of our national treasure. His last autobiographical book, *The Book of My Life*, shows us Dubnow the *synthesizer*, Dubnow the

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[748] "Prof. Sh. Dubnows vendung tsu der idisher gezelshaft in Lite," *Di idishe shtime* 127 (5079), June 5, 1935, 7.

[749] Reuben Rubinstein, "Unzer groyser gast," *Di idishe shtime* 120 (5072), May 28, 1935, 3.

'pan-Jewish' Jew [dem alyidishn yidn], who suffers from all the problems of Jewish life and expressions." Now, upon Dubnow's visit to Kaunas, Rubinstein declared, "We will greet him heartily in a celebration like a rebbe."

The following week, Rubinstein published another exploration of "Dubnowism" called "On the Path towards an Ideal," after Dubnow had spoken to the Jewish community. Rubinstein opened the essay by asking, "What are the paths of Jewish politics today? What are the means of the struggle and support for, and of, Jewish rights?"[750] He outlined the situation Jews found themselves in today, with the rise of Hitler, racism, and economic attacks on Jews. Where once the question was spiritual, now the concern was physical harm. Rubinstein proposed that the reigning question was "Whither?" and remarked, "We hoped to hear a clear answer to this question from Professor Simon Dubnow, from him, the historian who looks around at our dark days from atop the tower of centuries." Here, Rubinstein saw an opportunity to use the Folkists as his foil. "'They,' the 'Dubnowists,' Folkists, Yiddishists […] have sought more than anyone [an answer to this question]. Their faith has recently weakened. The reality crashes over their heads pitifully. Those laws are now destroyed that they welcomed on *their* Mount Sinai with fear and trembling/enthusiasm, and called 'Diaspora Nationalism,' and [said] that it should be the only prescription for the general rescue for Jews and Jewishness." Folkists' Yiddishism, he said, "do not answer, and cannot answer, the fundamental problems of Jewish life." Rubinstein pointed to Dubnow's "*pro-Palestinism*" and wrote that building up the Land of Israel is now the only answer to the question of the direction of Jewish politics.

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[750] Reuben Rubinstein, "Afn veg tsum ideyal," *Di idishe shtime* 128 (5080), June 6, 1935, 3.

"Went to See the Gypsy"

As Lithuanian Jews turned ever more passionately to Zionism, Lithuanian patriotism, Yiddishism, socialism and religious orthodoxy in response to their racialization and acculturation, another complex expression of local Jewish identity emerged. In the 1930s, some Lithuanian Jews showed a heightened interest among Jews in the Roma, perhaps Lithuania's most economically, politically and socially disenfranchised minority.[751] While these Jewish Romaphiles inherited the Orientalist view of Roma as an eternally wandering, unchanging people, they sought to move beyond the common literary and popular tropes about Roma and truly understand Romani and Roma history and culture. The interest in Roma was a way to express Jewish rootedness in Lithuania through the juxtaposition of Jews' relatively more integrated status with that of Roma – through the racialization and othering of Roma, and through engagement with Romani, the Indo-European Roma language, the study of which demonstrated Jews' facility with the Indo-European linguistics so dear to the Lithuanian elite. For Izidorius Kisinas, one of the primary Jewish – and general – expositors of Roma culture in interwar Lithuania, engagement with the Roma can be understood as a crucial part of his personal journey toward becoming Lithuanian.

The earliest record of a Roma presence in Poland dates to 1401, while the earliest in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is from 1533.[752] In Lithuania, laws favored settled, rather than

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[751] In this chapter I refer to the Roma as such but translate prewar usages of the words *čigonas* and *tsigayner* as "Gypsy."

[752] For recent overviews of Roma history and historiography in Lithuania, see Agneška Avin and Anna Pilarczyk-Palaitis, "Romowie na Litwie: Przeszłość, Teraźniejszość, Perspektywy," *Studia Romologica* 9

itinerant, Roma who worked on Polish estates, such as in the town of Mir, where Józef

Marcinkiewicz, known as "King of the Lithuanian Gypsies," received a letter of protection from

Karol Radziwiłł in 1778.[753] Lech Mróz has noted, "The presence of Gypsies among servants

testifies to the fact that they were a regular element of the ethnic mosaic of the Grand Duchy, and

were not treated as some sort of outlandish and suspicious strangers or vagrants, but rather as a

stable community possessing certain skills, mainly related to horse-trading."[754] At the same time,

"in public opinion, the Roma were placed on par with Jews and Tatars, who had a negative

image."[755] While records show that various groups of Vlach, Hungarian and Polish Roma

migrated to the Grand Duchy over the course of the seventeenth century, by the twentieth

century Lithuanian Roma largely spoke a variety of the Northeastern dialect of Romani that is

notable for its borrowings from, and longstanding social contact with, Polish (while some urban

Roma, including the family of storied Vilnius-born actor I.I. Rom-Lebedev, spoke Russian).[756]

Research on Jewish-Roma interaction is limited, and has tended to focus on these groups'

shared history as entertainers or as victims of Nazism.[757] Indeed, Roma scholar Ian Hancock has

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(2016): 185-200 and Aušra Simoniukštytė, "Seredžiaus romai," in *Seredžius*, ed. Vida Girininkienė
(Vilnius: Versmė, 2003), 861-863.

[753] Lech Mróz, *Roma-Gypsy Presence in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 15th-18th Centuries*
(Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2015), 278. N.B. the Mir Yeshiva was founded
in 1814/5.

[754] Ibid., 52.

[755] Jurgita Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė, "The Social and Legal Status of Jews in the Grand Duchy of
Lithuania and its Influence on the Status of Tatars and Karaites," *Central Europe* 8:2 (2010): 77-78.

[756] Ibid., 178, 181; Anton Tenser, "Grammatical Description of the Lithuanian Romani Dialect," PhD
Dissertation, University of Manchester, 2004, 1; Vida Beinortienė, *Romų kalba* (Panevėžys: Panevėžio
vaikų dienos užimtumo centras, 2011); Brigid O'Keefe, *New Soviet Gypsies: Nationality, Performance,
and Selfhood in the Early Soviet Union* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 29-30.

[757] On performance, see for example Walter Zev Feldman, *Klezmer: Music, History and Memory* (Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 2016) and O'Keefe, *New Soviet Gypsies*, 217, 221. On the Holocaust, see Anton

written, "Only Jews can come close to understanding the impact the Porrajmos [Rom: Holocaust] has had on the Romani population, and I venture to think that only Romanies can come close, on an emotional level, to understanding the Jewish tragedy."[758] (While data on Roma demographics vary, according to one estimate, about 200 Roma, or 20% of the total Roma population, were killed during the Holocaust in Lithuania, compared with around 200,000 Jews, or 95% of the total Jewish population.)[759] Jewish writers in the early twentieth century took up the trope of the wandering Gypsy that became popular across Europe beginning in the eighteenth century. For those writing in the historic territory of the Grand Duchy, such as Leyb Neydus, this trope served as part of a broader project to romanticize the untamed and provincial character of the Polish-Lithuanian borderlands. Lithuanian Yiddish poetry, such as Naidus's 1912 poem, "The Gypsy," and Mordechai Orlin's 1921 collection, *Lite* (Lithuania), idealized the "wild" nature of their native region's Roma.[760]

By the interwar years, whose one census, in 1923, recorded only 284 Roma, many Roma were in fact concentrated in towns and cities such as Seredžius and Panevėžys. And yet the broad

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Weiss-Wendt, ed., *The Nazi Genocide of the Roma: Reassessment and Commemoration* (New York: Berghahn, 2013) and János Bársony and Ágnes Daróczi, eds., *Pharrajimos: The Fate of the Roma during the Holocaust* (New York: IDEBATE, 2008).

[758] Ian Hancock, *Danger! Educated Gypsy: Selected Essays*, ed. Daleep Karanth (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2010), 257.

[759] On Roma in Lithuania during the Holocaust see especially Vytautas Toleikis, "Lithuanian Roma during the Years of the Nazi Occupation," in *Murders of Prisoners of War and of Civilian Population in Lithuania, 1941-1944*, ed. Christoph Dieckmann (Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2005), 269-278; Anton Weiss-Wendt, *Murder without Hatred: Estonians and the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 147-148; and Vida Beinortienė and Daiva Tumasonytė, *Panevėžio romų kančių keliai 1941-1945 m.* (Panevėžys: Kalba-Knyga-Kūryba, 2016).

[760] Leyb Naidus, "Tsigayner," in *Litvishe arabeskn* (Warsaw: Rekord, 1924); Mordechai Orlin, *Lite* (New York: Farlag Kultur, 1921), 5-6. On Roma as an artistic trope, see Anna G. Piotrowska, *Gypsy Music in European Culture: From the Late Eighteenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries* (Lebanon, N.H.: Northeastern University Press, 2013), 1.

reach of minority rights into Lithuania did not extend to the Roma community, despite rights advocates' recognizance of the Roma presence. In fact, Yudl Mark used the Lithuanian Roma as a foil against Jewish claims of the right to communal autonomy. In the same 1926 essay in which he evoked the term *doikayt* as a watchword for Lithuanian Jews' local rootedness and as a "precondition" for autonomy, Mark argued, "Only a significant community, one more-or-less settled in a place [*af an ort*] can do something with autonomy."[761] He outlined his ideal of "the cultural and economic class [*memed*] of the autonomous community":

> It demands a minimum of culture. Gypsies, for example, have nothing to do with autonomy. It demands a minimum level of economic health. Plain poor folk [hoyle dalfonem] and Ebionites cannot afford the luxury of autonomy. And conversely, there [in the Land of Israel] where there's no more-or-less affluent mass of Jewish people [folksmase], where Jews occupy their place [ort] only among the supreme ten thousand, there autonomy is also a superfluous thing. In short, there are a lot of conditions, the protection of which make autonomy possible.[762]

Folkists were highly conscious of, and valued, Lithuania's multiethnic character, exploring not only Belarusian-Jewish interactions but also supporting the Karaites.[763] But even for these panoptic activists of 1920s, Roma fell outside of their area of interest, as they fought assiduously for Jews to gain a foothold in Lithuanian politics and society.

This Jewish approach to Roma would change in the 1930s. One of the most important Jewish interpreters of Roma culture was Izidorius Kisinas. Born Yitzhak Kisin in Panevėžys in 1904, Kisinas was a philologist, writer, teacher and bibliographer who researched, wrote and

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[761] Yudl Mark, "Ven iz meglekh gezunte natsionale avtonomye?," *Nais* no. 8 (320), July 30, 1926, 8.

[762] Ibid.

[763] See for example Urias Kacenelenbogenas, "Skaudi karaimams auka," *Lietuvos žinios* no. 24, October 26, 1923, 1.

translated Lithuanian, Yiddish and Hebrew.[764] In 1924, after graduating from the Hebrew

Gymnasium in Vilkomir, the same town where Yudl Mark ran the Yiddish Gymnasium, Kisinas

entered the university in Kaunas, where he studied under prominent philologists Juozas

Balčikonas and Jonas Jablonskis, while finishing his studies in history. A photograph taken in

1929 shows Kisinas by the side of the elderly Jablonskis, who was a public figure and regarded

as one of the leaders of the Lithuanian national movement[765] *Di idishe shtime* once described

Kisinas as "one of the best and most diligent pupils" of "his rebbe," Dr. Jablonskis.[766] While still

a student, in 1927, Kisinas prepared to publish an anthology of Lithuanian literature translated

into Hebrew.[767] That same year he published a series in *Di idishe shtime* titled, "Jews and the

Lithuanian Language," calling on Jews to follow the lead of several well-known Jewish political

figures and learn Lithuanian – an article that garnered some positive attention in the Lithuanian

press.[768] At the same time that he engaged with these general Jewish concerns, Kisinas ascended

a ladder among Lithuanian cultural elites, working for law professor Vaclovas Biržiška and his

brother, Mykolas, the political activist and signatory of Lithuania's 1918 Declaration of

Independence. In 1928, he began to research his encyclopedic tome of Smetona's writings.[769]

These relationships and connections among the Lithuanian cultural, academic and nationalist

[764] He is not to be confused with I. Kisin, the nom-de-plume of Yekusiel Garnitsky (1886-1950), one of
the coeditors of *Lite* (1951).

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https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/record/2024906/photography_ProvidedCHO_Maironio_lietuvi__liter
at_ros_muziejus_LIMIS_130000000750454.html.

[766] Editor's introduction, Yitzhak Kisin, "Profesor Jonas Jablonskis," *Di idishe shtime* 52 (3144),
February 28, 1930, 3. See also manuscript of this essay in Kisinas's papers, Lithuanian Academy of
Sciences Vrublevskis Library (LMAVB), F 166, vnt. 40, ll. 1-6.

[767] Mž, "Kaunas," *Lietuvos žinios* 185 (2504), August 19, 1927, 3. See also Kisinas, *Antologyah shel ha-
sifrut ha-lita'it* (1931/2).

[768] Braudė, "Žydų spauda," *Lietuvis* no. 250, November 8, 1927, 2.

[769] Kisinas, "Autoriaus Prakalba," xxvii.

elite would help him land a job, in 1935, as bibliographer at the library of Vytautas Magnus University.

Even as Kisinas became ever more embedded in Lithuanian intellectual and professional circles, he maintained deep ties to Jewish cultural institutions and figures. He taught the Lithuanian language at Jewish Gymnasiums in Jurbarkas (1927), Ukmergė (1928-1930), and Vilkaviškis (1930-1934).[770] Kisinas had relationships to both Yiddishist-Folkist circles and Hebraist-Zionists. In the spring of 1927, Kisinas taught a course on the "history of Lithuania with special attention to the history of the Jews in Lithuania" and a Lithuanian language, three days per week, for the Folkist-run *folks-universitet*.[771] His history class, advertised in a Yiddish-language brochure that feature quotes from Pascal and Kant on the front page, included these themes:

> The origins of the Lithuanians. The economic path through Lithuania and the appearance of Jews in Lithuania. The view of a Lithuanian state. The Jews to the time of Gediminas. The Polish influence. Vytautas. Privileges for Jews and their role in economic life of the land. The Union of Lublin. The expulsion of the Jews from Lithuania and their invitation to return. The decline of the Jewish economic situation and the partition of Lithuania. The Lithuanians and Jews under the government of the Russians. The creation of the modern independent Lithuania and the participation of the Jews in it. The new Lithuanian state. The economic and cultural situation in the country.[772]

In the 1920s, he completed numerous translations of Yiddish literature into Lithuanian, including works by Avram Reisen and Natan Griblat.[773] In 1932, Kisinas finally published his collection of Hebrew-language translations of contemporary Lithuanian literature, a project that put him in

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[770] Vilnius University Archive, V-1648, Izidorius Kisinas, "Autobiografija," [unpaginated].

[771] *Di folks-universitet* no. 1, April 1927, 3-4.

[772] Ibid.

[773] See, e.g., LMAVB, F 166, vnt. 31, l. 1-2 and F 166, vnt. 27, l. 1-4.

touch with prominent Zionists such as Jacob Robinson, Rubin Rubinstein, and Chaim Nachman Shapiro, and Lithuanian writers such as Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius and Liudas Gira.

Kisinas's engagement with the Roma should be seen broadly in the context of his multilingual activism. Like linguistically-minded Jewish cultural activists before him, Kisinas showed an interest in the Karaites and in Sanskrit etymology, and he had excellent facility in German, Russian and other languages.[774] His interest in the Roma apparently began at a young age. Kisinas once wrote, "Already when I began my first semester of university studies, I was encouraged by Dr. Docent Mr. Alfred Senn to explore in greater detail the language of the Lithuanian Gypsies, which I already knew."[775] According to one source, Kisinas began meeting with Roma as a young man, and even spent two summers with Roma in Hungary.[776] He also recounted how he repeatedly visited a Roma settlement near Panevėžys, where a Roma woman taught him songs; he wrote, "I saw with my own eyes how Gypsies dug up a peasant's dead pig (it was not far from Marijampolė), cooked and then ate it."[777] Kisinas embedded himself, or at least attempted to embed himself, in various Roma communities. "From my own experience," he once wrote, "I can say that it is not easy to befriend a Gypsy."[778] By 1926, at the age of 22, he was already immersed in his more systematic academic study of Roma and Romani, writing to researchers in other countries in search of more information.[779]

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[774] On Karaites, see Izidorius Kisinas, "Karaimy," in LMAVB, F 166, vnt. 31, l. 1r-2v, [n.d.]. On Sanskrit, see for example LMAVB, F 166, vnt. 7, ll. 1r-10r.

[775] LMAVB, F 166, vnt. 29, l. 3, Izidorius Kisinas, "Ueber die Zigeuner in Litauen," Vilkmergė [Vilkomir/Ukmergė], n.d.

[776] Eugenijus Simonas Kisinas, *We Are the Kisinas* (Vilnius: [Self-published], 2018), 202, 213. See also Eugenijus Simonas Kisinas, *Mes – Kisinai: Panevėžio Kisinų pėdsakais* (Vilnius: [Self-published], 2017).

[777] Izidorius Kisinas, "Die Zigeuner Litauens," [n.d.], LMAVB, F 166, vnt. 29, ll. 5r, 7r.

[778] Kisinas, "Die Zigeuner Litauens," 5r.

[779] LMAVB, F 166, vnt. 52, l. 1, letter of 22 September, 1926.

At the university, Kisinas produced an original but contradictory paper on the Lithuanian Roma.[780] On the one hand, Kisinas perpetuated stereotypes about Roma. "The Gypsies are almost all of a very low cultural level," he wrote, "and they remained the same wild people they have been for hundreds of years."[781] On the other hand, Kisinas was given to thoughtful considerations of the status of Roma. He mused:

> Many believe that Gypsies are thieves and swindlers who will cheat everyone and pick their pockets. But the Gypsies have a different conception of morals, an explanation for which you have to look at their nomadic life. Wandering from place to place, from territory to territory, and always finding themselves under foreign people, Gypsies cannot and will not mix with others, so everything is foreign to them: language […] and customs. Because of this, people would like to arrest, not tolerate and even persecute Gypsies.[782]

Kisinas expanded on his thesis in an article, "The Nature and Culture of Lithuania's Gypsies," published in the National Riflemen's Union journal, *Trimitas*.[783] He opened the essay, which would be republished in book form a year later, with a newly added lurid and generalized description of Roma people's physical features.[784] "Lithuanian Gypsies are of medium height, have good figures, [are] slender, agile, with round faces, lips the color of ripe cherries, glossy black eyes and white, healthy teeth. It is not uncommon in Lithuania to also find Gypsies with white faces and light hair, the product of mixed-blood parents." Given Smetona's increasingly common invocation of "blood" as a marked of ethnic belonging, it is not surprising that Kisinas, a devotee of the president, would gravitate to such rhetoric in his own work.

Kisinas represents one of the more extreme Jewish encounters with Lithuanian nationalism, and his work must be seen in light of his personal and political evolution. Numerous

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[780] See several versions of this work, variously titled "Ueber die Zigeuner in Litauen" and "Die Zigeuner Litauens," LMAVB, F 166, vnt. 29, ll. 1-14v.

[781] LMAVB, F 166, vnt. 29, l. 1.

[782] LMAVB, F 166, vnt. 29, l, 7v.

[783] Izidorius Kisinas, "Lietuvos čigonų būdas ir kultūra," *Trimitas* no. 11 (March 12, 1936): 261-263.

[784] Antanas Salys and Izidorius Kisinas, *Čigonai* (Kaunas: [?], 1936).

Jewish philologists in Lithuania were, like Kisinas, interested in local borrowings among Lithuanian, Yiddish and other languages. These included figures such as Yudl Mark and Chatzkl Lemchen (Chackelis Lemchenas), who taught Lithuanian in Jewish high schools; Lemchen, like Kisinas, loved the Lithuanian language and was also a star student of Jonas Jablonskis at the university in Kaunas.[785] What set Kisinas apart from these other figures was his overt support for Smetona and the Nationalist Union and, most remarkably, his November 1935 conversion to Catholicism.[786]

Kisinas himself explained that, growing up, he had always felt Lithuanian; he was close to his nurse and believed that he may have even been switched at birth.[787] The highly unusual decision to convert, along with the idea of being switched at birth, demonstrate how closely aligned Lithuanian citizenship had become, by 1935, with ethnic Lithuanian Christians, especially Catholics. While the *Trimitas* article was published after Kisinas's conversion, it was the culmination of years of Kisinas's study of the Roma as a Jew and, I argue, a key step on the way to becoming Lithuanian and distancing himself marginalized ethnic minorities. Despite his conversion, survival of the Holocaust as a Christian and burial in Rasos Catholic Cemetery in Vilnius, Kisinas's Jewishness was one of his defining features during his lifetime, and even after. He was limited in his ability to work during the war because the authorities were aware of his

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[785] See "Uncle Chatzkel," dir. Rod Freedman, Film Australia, 2000.

[786] Eugenijus Simonas Kisinas, *We Are the Kisinas*, 206-207. See also Elena Keidošiūtė, "Katalikiškos misijos ir žydų konversijos Lietuvoje: reiškinių transformacijos XIX a. – XX a. pirmoje pusėje," PhD Dissertation, Vilnius University, 2015.

[787] LMAVB, F 166, vnt. 31, l. 3-4 [n.d.].

Jewishness, and his profile is included in a recent Lithuanian-language collection, *Famous Lithuanian Jews*.[788]

Another key expositor of the Jewish-Roma dynamic in Lithuania was Dovid Globus. Born in Vilnius, Globus attended the Mefitsei-Haskalah high school, which was founded and sponsored by the Society for the Dissemination of Culture among Jews, a nineteenth-century project to uplift and enlighten Russian Jews, and where Jewish Lithuanist Eliyohu-Yankev Goldshmit was a teacher.[789] After moving to Lithuania, he studied linguistics at the university. In 1923, he coauthored a Lithuanian-Yiddish dictionary with fellow student Stasys Dabušis, who had served as Jablonskis's personal secretary and who would go on to become an eminent linguist in his own right.[790] Globus's interest in languages, like Kisinas's, included a fascination with Lithuanian and Lithuanians' folk traditions. He published Yiddish translations of Lithuanian legends – part of a longer work on "the customs [minhogim] of the Lithuanians" – and described Lithuanians, in a review of a Russian-language collection of Lithuanian folksongs, as "An ancient people [urfolk]" and "a primitive type," describing Roma people's physical features.[791] In addition to his reviews and translations, Globus worked on the editorial board of the *Folksblat*, where Yosef Gar remembered him as a "capable wordsmith" [feyiker pen-mentch] who oversaw the humor section.[792]

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[788] Per memoirs of Juozas Rimantas, as quoted in Violeta Černiauskaitė, "Bibliologijos katedros 1940-1943 metų veiklos dokumentai," *Knygotyra* 39 (2002): 138. See also Aušra Pačkauskienė and Vytautas Toleikis, *Garsūs lietuvos žydai* (Vilnius: Europos namai, 2008).

[789] M. Minkov, *Yoyvl-heft fun der yingl shul Mifitsei-Haskole* (Vilnius: [?], 1936), 52-53.

[790] Dabušis, St[asys] and D[ovid] G[lobus]. *Lietuviškai-žydiškai žodynas* (Kaunas: Kultūra, 1923).

[791] Dovid Globus, "Litvishe legendes" [part III], *Di idishe shtime* 203 (29910), August 30, 1929, 4. See also Globus, "Dos litvishe folk-maysele," *Folksblat* 88 (347), April 17, 1931, 7.

[792] Gar, "Di Kovner togtsaytung 'Folksblat,'" 429.

In 1932, Globus published several translations of Romani poetry into Yiddish in a Warsaw literary journal. Globus was not the only Yiddish writer in Lithuania to attempt to address the Roma from a Jewish perspective. Leyzer Ran, based in Vilnius, made extensive plans for a Yiddish-language collection on Jewish writings on the Roma.[793] Poet Itsik Manger published a selection of Yiddish translations of Romani folksongs in 1936, both in a Warsaw Bundist newspaper and, under Globus's editorship, in *Folksblat*. Manger represented a step along the path away from age-old tropes about the Roma. In his introduction to his translations, mused, "For this poet, the gypsy is more than a quaint figure [...] He is a symbol of being free, free from all societal fetters." He asked, "But who is the Gypsy in reality? What does he think, feel and dream?"[794]

Unlike Manger and most other translators and interpreters of Roma folksongs, Globus translated from Romani directly into Yiddish, and not from Russian, Polish or another intermediary language. The editors of the paper that published Globus provided an introduction, which rehashed some generic tropes about the Roma: "For many hundreds of years wild bands of people, brown-skinned, with beautifully racial [rasike], Oriental faces, which remind one of the faces of Indians, have wandered throughout Europe. They're called Gypsies. No force in the world can force these people into a sedentary life. They speak many languages [i.e., dialects], most of them mixed up with the languages of the land where the Gypsies wander."[795] While the Gypsies' folksongs are well known, the editor wrote, their poetry is a "*terra incognito*, an unknown country," a situation rectified by Globus:

[793] Harvard University Special Collections, Leyzer Ran Collection, Box 20 (RNC 20). L. Ran, "Materials for anthology on gypsies."

[794] Itsik Manger, "Dos tsigaynerishe folkslid," *Naye folkstsaytung* (Warsaw), September 4, 1936 and *Folksblat* 213 (1942), September 16, 1936, 8-9. Reprinted in Manger, *Shriftn un proze* (Tel Aviv: Peretz Farlag, 1980), 300-305.

[795] Dovid Globus, "Tsigayner-lider," *Vokhnshrift far literatur, kunst un kultur* 32 (81), August 4, 1932, 4.

A young Yiddish writer from Lithuania, Dovid Globus, a student at Kaunas University, specializes in understanding [kentnish] the Romani language. As of now, he has mastered four such languages [i.e., dialects]. He collected a small collection of Gypsy poetry and translated them from the original language [urshprakh] into Yiddish. We are pleased to published these poems, although the translator has not mastered the poetic form very well. He is therefore, in Yiddish literature, quite understandably, a unique person, who has mastered Gypsy languages and made these translations precisely from the inaccessible original.[796]

The songs that Globus translated, including "Gypsy Night," "Fire Song," "Dance and Ride Song," highlight subjects that of the traditional Roma lifestyle. The editors emphasized that Globus has access to the original language, but that the original remains, at the same time, ineffable.

A Jewish writer who interpreted Lithuania's Roma for a Yiddish-language audience in a more original way was Shimshen Kahan (1905-1941). Kahan was a native of Vilnius who graduated from his home city's Real Gymnasium in 1925 and just a few years later helped cofound the Yung Vilne literary group. Like Globus, Kisinas and others, Kahan was drawn to the more obscure linguistic corners of Eastern Europe: for example, he was prepared to publish a study of Yiddish-language thieves' cant.[797] While Kahan was very much a product of the Polish-inflected Jewish literary scene in Polish Vilnius, his engagement with Roma was with Roma qua "Lithuanian Gypsies." In 1932 Kahan had already published a long poem called "Lithuanian Gypsies" in the New York literary journal, *Di tsukunft* about "poor Lithuanian Gypsies/ from around Trakai, Ružiškės, Valkeninkai."[798] Like Dovid Globus, Kahan attempted to portray how Roma are in reality, beyond the romantic stereotypes. "Refined people sing Gypsy romances/

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[796] Ibid.

[797] See L[eyzer] R[an], "Shimshen Kahan," in *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literature*, vol. 8 (New York: Congress for Jewish Culture, 1981), 25.

[798] Shimshen Kahan, "Litvishe tsigayner," *Di tsukunft* (New York) no. 8, vol. xxxvii, August 1932, 474.

about Gypsy love, poems and cognac./ They haven't seen how your eyes glance/ when you produce from the burlap sack/ a simple, stiff herring – a 'holiak.'"

Kahan sympathizes with the Roma's economic plight and political disenfranchisement. In "Lithuanian Gypsies," he writes, "The Jew, the Belarusian – they are forged together now,/ and if a battle breaks out, they're not alone./ Only you, Gypsies from Lithuania,/ people treat like a dog bone./ You weep and no one hears the sound." Kahan's engagement with Roma is also notable for his relatively more direct comparisons between Roma and Jews and the history of their interactions. In "Lithuanian Gypsies," he tells a harrowing story of how his grandfather, an innkeeper in the small town of Raudonka, raped a Roma woman. Speaking directly to the Roma, Kahan writes, "When one of your girls would show up lost at his place/ he would quickly drag her to the barn, on top of the hay,/ and stop her screams with his black beard."

> Only also the eternal, bloody-hot desire
> Time comes to you and goes away
> Together with the body named Fayve.
> But the seed that you sowed remains alive,
> Spread across the land.
>
> And more than once I was moved
> When I saw a Gypsy kid
> With the same sky-blue eyes
> My grandfather Fayve had,
> With the same unsettled intensity.

While Kisinas imagines fair-skinned Roma to be the product of mixing between Roma and non-Jewish locals, Kahan here insinuates that blue eyes among Lithuanian Roma is attributable to Jewish roots. Kahan writes that he has only "the consolation that the Gypsies are given some land 'deep in Russia,'" and that "There'll come a time when Gypsies will become/ Connected with the peoples of the Earth/ […] Connected like the Gypsy and his horse." Kahan sympathizes with the Roma but acknowledges his distance from them. "For them I'm just a brave kid/ Who

speaks Romani like a forest-child." He concludes, "Poor Lithuanian Gypsies/ From around Trakai, Ružiškės, Valkeninkai/ My old dream swims past/ […] The dream of a Gypsy republic!"

In the 1930s, Kahan published translations from Romani the Vilnius Yiddish newspaper *Unzer tog* and was prepared to publish more in a book.[799] In 1936 he published two more Romani folksongs: one that is apparently a traditional, and a song attributed to Czech-Roma cultural activist Alexander Germano, who published multiple collections of Romani poetry in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s.[800] An article accompanying the translations, signed only "Y," outlined both the romantic appeal of Romani for this Jewish audience: "The Gypsy language stems directly from Sanksrit (the *loshn-koydesh* of the Hindus)."[801] The author then mafe an argument for language as a way for Jews to connect with Roma. In his introductory paragraphs, he provided a "Romani chrestomathy" of a few transliterated lines, so that the reader could hear what the language sounds like, before making his pointed comparison:

> You don't need to think that those who scoff at a language are, by doing so, diminishing the significance of the language itself. Those people care about the language very little. They care about the essence of the people that speaks in that language. For those who hate Jews, for example, Yiddish is a 'bigos' [stew] of various foreign words. Those who think Gypsies are not human – for them Romani is mix of words. But there is not just one world everywhere.[802]

In the 1920s, Jewish cultural figures seeking a foothold in Lithuanian society looked to Lithuanians' purportedly ancient, unchanging language with its ancient Indo-European roots. By the 1930s, as a public discourse about Jews' essentially "nomad" or "Eastern" status began form,

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[799] See for example *Unzer tog* no. 173, July 28, 1939. In Ran Collection, Box 20 (RNC 20) and

[800] Shimshen Kahan, "Tsigayner-lider," *Di vokh* (Vilnius), May, 1 1936, 5. In Ran Collection, Box 20 (RNC 20).

[801] Y., "Tsigayner," *Di vokh* (Vilnius), May, 1 1936, 5. In Ran Collection, Box 20 (RNC 20).

[802] Ibid., 5.

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Jewish study of the Roma and Romani language provided a new opportunity for Jews to make claims of localness.[803] Ironically, as with the study of Lithuanian, it was through the study of a language with ancient, and purportedly unchanging, Indo-European roots.

Last Days of the Republic

The late 1930s in Lithuania were defined by rapidly unfolding events in a dynamic political context. In 1935 Smetona issued a new law on the press which increased the pressure on news outlets to conform to local censors.[804] That same year, Smetona banned all political parties except his Nationalist Union. And yet, in February 1936, a group of far right Catholic intellectuals, including philosophy professor Antanas Maceina, published a declaration entitled, "Towards the Creation of an Organic State," which opposed Smetona from the right in support of an even more authoritarian and ethnic-nationalist government.[805] (Five years later, some of these ideas would be incorporated into the manifesto, co-authored by Maceina, of the fascist Lithuanian Activist Front.) In April 1936, the government initiated a dummy Seimas. Every seat of this rump parliament, which met for the first time in the fall of that year, was held by representatives of the Nationalist Union or its youth movement. Once formed, the 1936 parliament proceeded to write and legalize a new constitution which would give Smetona even

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[803] On racial anti-Semitism in Lithuania in the 1930s, see Vygantas Vareikis, "Anti-Semitism in Lithuania," in *The Preconditions for the Holocaust: Anti-Semitism in Lithuania (Second Half of the 19th Century-June 1941)*, eds. Liudas Truska and Vygantas Vareikis (Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2004), 158-164.

[804] See Gediminas Rudis, "Policinės valstybės bruožai," in *Lietuvos istorija*, 577.

[805] Originally published in *Naujoji Romuva* no. 8, February 23, 1936, 169-175. Republished in *Lietuva, kurios nebuvo: pilnutinės demokratijos svarstymai ir vertinimai*, ed. Kęstutis Girnius, Algimantas Jankauskas and Lautynas Peluritis (Vilnius: Vilnius University Press, 2016), 79-91.

more dictatorial powers and which excluded the word "democratic" from its text. In October, the leaders of the army, Generals Stasys Raštikis and Jonas Černius, submitted a report to Smetona warning that Jews were overrepresented in local Communist organizations, adding, "Something is wrong with the Jewish community."[806] The new constitution was ratified in February 1938 and went into effect a few months later; at the end of 1938, Smetona faciliateted the re-election of himself as president.

Lithuanian Jews responded to these events by organizing around new social institutions such as committees, Jewish-Lithuanian societies, and literary organizations. In *Toyern* ("Gateways"), a 1937 Yiddish literary anthology published in Kaunas, Ari Glazman announced the publication purpose this way:

> By putting out the collection *Toyern*, we make another attempt to forge closer contact between Jewish literary production in Lithuania and readers – between literature and society.
> In the chaotic situation of our societal life the authorial word can make an important contribution for necessary positive change [shine-letoyve]."[807]

The literary journal *Shtraln* ("Rays"), founded in 1938, took this imperative a step further. On January 28, 1939, *Shtraln* co-organized an evening of Jewish-Lithuanian interaction with the Lithuanian youth movement, Jaunimas ("Youth"). According to *Shtraln*, "The evening inspired, spiritually invigorated and lifted the spirits and faith of people who were till now sure that the world had already ended and that there was no corner left in the world not eaten up by the poison of ethnic hatred in general and anti-Semitism in particular."[808] The editors noted, "We live in a time when racial enmity and ethnic hatred gather and storm from various sides […] In Lithuania

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[806] As quoted in Eidintas, *Antanas Smetona and His Lithuania*, 346.

[807] A[ri] G[lazman], "Toyern," *Toyern* (Kaunas: Yoelevitch, 1937), 68.

[808] "Di yidishe yugnt un di yidish-litvishe kultur-dernenterung," *Shtraln* 4 (16), February 15, 1939, 1.

we also begin to see the seeds of wild grass and proud flesh on the Lithuanian earth […] The evening was a reminder that the youth which has grown up in independent Lithuanian trembles before that which people want to force upon them." The editors declared it necessary to join Lithuanians on one path forward. "We need to seek and find collaborative work with the Lithuanian youth in various areas. It is, must be, and will tied closely to us!"[809] In another editorial, the writers at *Shtraln* weighed in on their ambivalent feelings about belonging in Lithuania. "We would not be being truthful if we were to say that we are completely satisfied with our situation both as Jews and as citizens of the country, and that we don't aspire to something better in this regard. But precisely because of this, we are obligated now to stand arm-in-arm with those who we always want to be free citizens of the country with full rights, we must mobilize now all of our powers and fight for the country's freedom."[810]

At the same time, a conflict was occurring at the *Folksblat*, which was published by the Jewish Education Committee. In 1937, Communists seeking to control the newspaper infiltrated the Committee and, by persuading "careerist elements" – in the words of Yosef Gar, the newspaper's administrator at the time – came to form a majority.[811] They were then able to install a new editor, Verblovski, initiating a fight with the longstanding editorial collective, headed by Mendl Sudarski, which culminated in April 1938, when Communist newcomers broke down the door of the publishing house and stole the linotype.[812] As Helene Chatzkels wrote Yudl Mark shortly after the change of leadership, "The collective is no longer in charge of the newspaper."[813] This "coup," which precipitated the Sudarskis' departure for New York, was

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[809] Ibid., 2.

[810] "Di yidishe yugnt un Lites umophengikayt," *Shtraln* 8 (20), April 20, 1939, 1-2.

[811] Yosef Gar, "Di kovner togtsaytung 'Folksblat,'" in *Lite* (1965), 434-435.

[812] Ibid., 436.

[813] YIVO RG 540, Box 6, F 99, letter of 26 June, 1938, 2.

orchestrated by Henrik Ziman.[814] Ziman, also known as Genrikas Zimanas, was a writer who published translations of Yiddish literature into Lithuanian, and Lithuanian literature into Yiddish, and was integrated into the Lithuanian Communist Party to such an extent that he would later be made editor of *Tiesa*, the Lithuanian version of *Pravda*.

In March 1938, Nazi Germany delivered a memorandum to Lithuania demanding that the Lithuania cease its repression of Nazi activists in the coastal Klaipėda region.[815] The Lithuanian government declined to respond, in what historian Algimantas Kasparavičius has referred to, in the context of general Lithuanian foreign policy from 1938-1939, as "the illusions of neutrality."[816] Finally, on the first of November, in response to increasing international and domestic pressure, the Lithuanian government suspended its anti-Nazi censorship and martial law. Lithuanian Jews reacted with outrage. "There is little doubt that the date of November 1, 1938 is a crisis date in the history of Lithuanian-Jewish relations," declared Jacob Robinson.[817] Robinson pointed out two examples of what he claimed showed "that the state has finally oriented itself on a sharply anti-Jewish course. These are: 1) The speech of prime minister [Vladas] Mironas in parliament on December 22, 1938 and 2) the New Year's blessings of *Verslas* in the first volume of 1939."[818] These texts were both published in *Verslas*, and while neither specifically mentioned Jews, they both used a common double-speak to refer to the desire to minimize the number of Jews in commerce, and the hope that it would happen in the coming year. Yet Jewish community representatives also recognized that state press censorship prohibited explicit expressions of anti-Semitism to such an extent that "the word 'Jew' has

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[814] Ibid., 438

[815] Kohrs, *Die Litauische Nationale Union*, 321-322. See also Šarūnas Liekis, *1939: The Year that Changed Everything in Lithuania's History* (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2010), 60-61.

[816] Algimantas Kasparavičius, *Lietuva 1938-1939 m.: Neutraliteto iliuzijos* (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2010).

[817] YIVO, RG 2, F 1646, "Di naye lage un di nonste oyfgabe" [1939 or 1940], 74834 (4).

[818] Ibid., 6.

almost disappeared from [the Lithuanian press]. Even in the latest issue of *Verslas* the word 'Jew' is almost not mentioned."[819]

The year 1939 marked a turning point in Lithuanian and Jewish history with what seemed like a rapid acceleration of events.[820] Indeed, Lithuanian historians have recently dedicated several entire monographs to parsing the events of just the final months of the interwar republic.[821] In March 1939, Nazi Germany annexed the Klaipėda region on Lithuania's coast after Lithuania accepted an ultimatum to which it had little choice but to assent. Although Great Britain and other powers were obligated by treaty to defend the Lithuanian territory, no action was taken: no one wanted to start a second world war. The day after the official transfer of territory, Hitler himself traveled by boat to Klaipėda, where he was welcomed with a parade. Jewish refugees began to flood from Klaipėda into Lithuania.[822] Germany and Lithuania agreed to a non-aggression pact but that summer the foreign ministers of Germany and the Soviet Union signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which outlined the incorporation, at least initially, of Lithuania into the Nazi Reich. General Černius would replace Mironas as prime minister in March 1939, introducing non-Nationalist Union members into the government cabinet, and preserving a modicum of democratic standards.

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[819] YIVO, RG 2, F 1647, "Kurtser barikht 5 iber di yidishe lage in Lite far der tsayt fun 20/7 biz dem 18/8 1939," 74848 (7).

[820] For a good overview of events in English, see "Baltic Countries*," The American Jewish Yearbook* 42 (1940/1941): 386-395. See also primary sources collected in *La Lithuanie et la seconde guerre mondiale: recueil des documents*, ed. Bronis Kaslas [Bronius Kazlauskas] (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1981), 78-153.

[821] See especially Kasparavičius, *Lietuva 1938-1939 m.*, Liekis, *1939*, and Senn, *Lithuania 1940*. See also Yosef Gar, *Azey iz es geshen in Lite: tsu der geshikhte fun der sovetisher memshole* (Tel Aviv: Ha-menorah, 1965), 9-70.

[822] Tsvi Barak, "Pliti Polin ba-Lita be-shanim 1939-1941," in *Yahadut Lita* vol. 1, 353.

At the 1939 World's Fair in New York City, the Lithuanian pavilion largely celebrated ethnic Lithuanian folk culture but did include a few mentions of the country's Jews. It presented a map of Lithuania in its informational brochure which noted that Vytautas "gave asylum to the persecuted Jews of Western Europe" and marked, on a national map of sites of interest, the grand wooden synagogues in Jarburkas and Vilkaviškis.[823] But back at home, Lithuanian Jews scrambled to maintain their security. In March, a group of Jewish activists convened to form a committee to speak for Lithuanian Jewry as a whole. "15 years have passed since the [Jewish] National Council was destroyed," they announced in May 1939. "From that point on we have not had an expert who can represent the interests of Lithuanian Jewry. Various committees used to appear 'ad hoc,' but there has been no regular, permanent working committee."[824] The new committee, its press release noted, was not founded through the normal method of selection of members – "We could not wait for democratic elections," they explained. "We are only an extra-political committee whose objective is to secure the conditions of the existence of the Jewish community [kibets] in Lithuania."

One of the most momentous events in Lithuanian history circa 1939 was the reincorporation into Lithuania of Vilnius and its surrounding region. Throughout the interwar period, the loss of, and hope for future reclaiming of, Vilnius was a pillar of interwar patriotism, and one which Jews and Lithuanians shared equally. "Mes be Vilniaus nenurimsim," or, "We will not rest without Vilnius," became a rallying cry in public venues such as speeches, newspapers and banners. Historians have written extensively on the subject of the

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[823] New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York World's Fair 1939-1940 Incorporated Records, MssColl 2233, Box 1849, F 1, *Lithuania* (Lithuania: [?]), 8, 16-17.

[824] YIVO, RG 2, F 1648, "Barikht vegn der itsiker idisher lage opgegebn far a konferents fun klal-tuer dem 7-tn mai 1939," 74873-74888 (1-16).

reincorporation of the Vilnius region into Lithuania and what it meant for the country's Jews.[825] What is relevant to note here is the rapidity of the transfer of power, which resulted in an unstable government and an unknown future for the country as a whole, and its Jews in particular. In September, following the Nazi invasion of Poland, the Soviet Union occupied a large portion of eastern Poland, including the Vilnius region. The Polish army engaged in a short battle with the Red Army over Vilnius. Then, in October, Lithuania and the Soviet Union signed a treaty that transferred much of the Vilnius region to Lithuania in exchange for the presence of Soviet troops on several military bases within Lithuania.

All Lithuanian newspapers, including Jewish ones, published rapturous accounts of the reclaimed capital. *Apžvalga* republished Nachman Šapira's Lithuanian translation of Moyshe Kulbak's Yiddish poem, "Vilnius," and ran a missive "To the Jewish Public," signed by nearly every Jewish organization, proclaiming "Lithuanian Jews' eternal solidarity with the historic ideals of the Lithuanian ethnic nation [tauta]" and reaffirming Vilnius as the "spiritual center" of Lithuanian Jewry.[826] According to the report of a member of the security police who entered Vilnius with the army, "Jews of the Zionist rightwing persuasion […] participated willingly and were happy with our army. The other Jews did not express any enthusiasm."[827] A slew of publications, including two Lithuanian-Yiddish phrasebooks and a new Lithuanian-Yiddish

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[825] See for example Shmuel Grinhoyz [Gringauz], "Dos letste yor fun idishn kiyum in Lite," in *Lite* (1951), 153-155; Mendl Sudarsky, "Lite un ir kamf far Vilne," in *Lite* (1951), 295-302; Atamukas, *Lietuvos žydų kelias*, 203-212; and Liekis, *1939*, 170-172, 256-271. See also Theodore Weeks, "Between Poland and Lithuania: Jews and the Vilnius Question, 1918-1925," in *A Pragmatic Alliance*, 207-227.

[826] "Į žydų visuomenę," *Apžvalga* 35 (200), October 15, 1939, 2.

[827] As quoted in Liekis, *1939*, 264.

dictionary, soon appeared, seeking to familiarize the Polish Jews of Vilnius with Lithuanian history and language.[828]

Despite the enthusiasm of some Lithuanian Jews for the recovery of Vilnius, for most local Jews, the first six month of 1940 in Lithuania were marked by turmoil and uncertainty. Perhaps most disconcertingly, there was as spike in incidents and expressions of public anti-Semitism among among Poles in Vilnius as well as in in Kaunas and other Lithuanian areas.[829] In February 1940, two days after Independence Day, Jacob Robinson gave a speech, presented at a meeting of Jewish community activists, in which he reviewed the previous nine months of Lithuanian history. "On February 16, 1918 the Lithuanian Declaration of Independence was published," he said in his opening comment. "We, Jews, are closely connected to the realization of this declaration and with creating Lithuanian independence."[830] But Robinson went on to warn against Lithuanian "provincialism" and "naïve Judeocentrism" in shaping one's outlook of truly world-historic events.[831] Reviewing the past year in Lithuanian Jewish history, Robinson divided the time period into two parts: from May 7 1939 to September 1 1939, and from September 1 until the present. While Poland would be the first country to be occupied by Germany, in September 1939, Klaipėda was the first territory of any kind to be annexed by Nazi aggressors, and thus Lithuanian Jews were in a unique position of having had their territory already partially invaded by Nazi Germany. Robinson suggested that the common interwar demand for the return of Vilnius was simply rhetorical and not a realistic revanchist plan. "The Vilna Question was for Lithuania, the whole time, a principled one – a historical one. Vilnius was a vestige of former

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[828] See for example St. Yitzhak Yankelovitz, Kh. Počivaitė and S. Kacergis, *Shlisl tsu der litvisher shprakh un yidish-litvisher tashn-verterbukh* (Kaunas: Kagan, 1940).

[829] Liekis, *1939*, 254-264.

[830] YIVO, RG 2, F 1648, "Fortrog," 74889 (1).

[831] Ibid., 3.

Lithuania. The wish of many years to take back Vilnius is tied to the wish to create a bridge between the former, historical Lithuania and the current, modern Lithuania."[832] In the Lithuania that includes the Vilnius region, Lithuanians only make up 65% of the population, he noted, a significant decrease from the Kaunas Republic. He wondered, "What will be the function of Vilnius in a Jewish-Lithuanian *Convivencia* [tsuzamenlebn]?"[833] Robinson suggested that such an arrangement would only be successful if Jews can have a role in state-building.

On 2 May 1940, shortly before leaving Lithuania for good, and just weeks before the Soviet occupation, Jacob Robinson gave a press conference in the Lithuanian OZE Hall in his capacity as leader of the local and foreign Jewish press. That spring, Nazi Germany had invaded Norway, and the Soviet Union had occupied Finland and positioned a Southern Front on the border of Romanian Bessarabia, on the Black Sea. When taking stock of these developments, Robinson relied on vocabulary from his debate with Yudl Mark, nearly fourteen years prior, about the very question of the Jewish future in Europe. Robinson opened with these words:

> It is not easy, in light of events that have shocked the world – and which are occurring in the north and are gearing up in the south – to engage with a subject such as our situation in Lithuania. There exists an opinion that our fate will be decided "there." I don't deny it. But it would be a mistake to renounce the territorial milieu with which we grew up. From that side, we proceed from the standpoint that a human being cannot wait for miracles that will come from "there." We acknowledge this dependence, but we do not have to neglect the "here" on account of "there." We have to make sense of events that are reflected here.[834]

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[832] Ibid., 10.

[833] Ibid., 11.

[834] YIVO, RG 2, F 1648, "Kitser fun fortrog fun Dr. Y. Robinzon gehaltn oyf a prese-konferents far forshteyer fun der higer un oyslendisher prese in zal fun 'OZE,'" 74854 (2).

In 1926, Robinson had criticized Mark for his position of relying on the "here." Now, with Mark already living in New York, Robinson appeared to acknowledge the primacy of the local context in Jewish affairs.

On June 13, Lithuania celebrated president Smetona's name day on the Christian calendar.[835] But the emperor wore no clothes. The following day, the Soviet Union issued an ultimatum to Lithuania demanding the formation of a new government and allowing for more Soviet troops to enter the country. The Lithuanian leadership was left with few options, and little time to decide among them. It accepted the ultimatum the day after it was issued, and hours later Soviet troops began to arrive. Shortly after midnight that day, in the early hours of June 15, Smetona removed his socks and shoes and waded across the Liepona River into East Prussia, delivering no message to his citizens, nor, for that matter, to his beloved *tauta*. Meanwhile, his cabinet members, left behind, transferred power to a pro-Soviet Lithuanian journalist. With that, Lithuanian Jewish entered an entirely new, and definitive, phase.

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[835] See, e.g., "Garbės šiaulio Antano Smetonos vardo diena," *Trimitas* 24 (1017), June 13, 1940, 577-579.

Conclusion

At the very end of October and in early November 1940, Kazys Škirpa founded the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF) in Berlin. Škirpa was a former general, dismissed by Smetona in 1926 for not supporting the putsch; later, Škirpa's role as a member of Voldemaras's insurrectionist inner circle compelled Smetona to send him into diplomatic exile in Germany. LAF synthesized strands of thought from the Voldemarists, the Iron Wolf, rightwing Catholic intellectuals and Nazism into its program for a liberated Lithuania in the event of a German invasion and Soviet retreat. In spring of 1941, as such a scenario appeared more likely, LAF issued a multipoint manifesto that included several anti-Semitic proclamations, including the following: "The ancient law of asylum granted by Vytautas the Great to the Jews in Lithuania is totally and finally revoked."[836]

The call to rescind Jews' fourteenth-century legal rights would seem to have been superfluous given that other points of the LAF program demanded the expulsion of the Jews from Lithuania. And yet leaders of this fascistic Lithuanian movement, who would soon gain control over Lithuania and the fate of its Jews, felt compelled to comment on charters from half a millennium prior. The call to revoke Vytautas's charter appeared not only in this LAF call to arms but also in a foundational statement produced by the LAF leadership, and it was evoked by LAF leader Leonas Prapuolenis in his radio address, given in Kaunas on the morning of June 23, 1941, which announced the liberation of Lithuania – a section of his address that the late

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[836] See facsimile of the proclamation reprinted in *The Preconditions for the Holocaust: Anti-Semitism in Lithuania (Second Half of the 19th Century-June 1941)*, eds. Liudas Truska and Vygantas Vareikis (Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2004), 269.

Lithuanian-Jewish philosopher Leonidas Donskis called "worthy of Goebbels."[837] Bronys Raila, a LAF ideologue who died in Los Angeles in 1997, wrote in spring of 1941, among other anti-Semitic proclamations, "Already in the times of Vytautas the Great, those world-travelers were allowed to settle in Lithuania, everywhere, in order to contribute to the development of commerce. But the Jews, like everywhere, when among us, [engaged] in their scams, deceit and haggling which outpaced their welcome by miles."[838]

What is the meaning of these rhetorical gestures? I argue that, besides evincing a type of Lithuanian Gothic sensibility, the desire to annul the Jews' longtime rights to live peacefully in Lithuania shows how deeply embedded the charters were in the consciousness of interwar Lithuanians. The Lithuanian far right may also have felt threatened by Jews' legal standing as outlined in the widely known charter. In order to fulfill their vision of a Lithuania without Jews, which had almost no historical basis, the Lithuanian leaders in 1941 had to break all tangible ties with history. In other words, Vytautas's charters of 1388-9 were not only still a meaningful category, but they still carried some weight. In order to understand how the Lithuanian Holocaust was abetted by the Lithuanian leadership from 1941-1944, one has to understand how the LAF positioned Lithuanian Jews, in its cosmology, from an interwar perspective.

"The Servant When He Reigneth"

Before World War II was even over, Jacob Robinson reflected on the effectiveness of the interwar rights regime, posing the question in the title of his coauthored study, *Were the*

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[837] See facsimile in *The Preconditions for the Holocaust*, 310; and Leonidas Donskis, "Heroes by Default," *The Baltic Times* (Riga), June 26, 2012.

[838] See facsimile of the essay in *The Preconditions for the Holocaust*, 290. See also *Holokausto išvakarėse: dokumentų rinkinys 1940-1941 metai*, ed. Aleksandr Diukov (Vilnius: Gairės, 2014), 213-266.

Minorities Treaties a Failure? There, Robinson concluded that the treaties had at the very least successfully staved off another war in the immediate aftermath of War War I.[839] But as James Loeffler has pointed out, Robinson argued that "any failure lay not in the novel laws themselves but in the collapse of European democracy."[840] Like Loeffler, I seek to situate the question of autonomy within Lithuanian Jewish politics more broadly, including the abrupt arrival, and gradual amplification, of authoritarianism. In the first years of Lithuanian independence, after 1918, as Jews became citizens of a country that privileged a previously low-prestige language and peasant culture, Jews looked the system of autonomy for minorities as a way to facilitate integration into a national project; as autonomy was dismantled, Jews looked to institutions of democracy, such as citizenship, parliament and the constitution, as pillars of Lithuanian Jewish belonging. When democracy in Lithuania came to end, with the December 1926 coup d'état that installed Antanas Smetona as president, Jewish leaders such as Robinson initially hoped that Smetona's presidency could be retroactively legalized. As Smetona rewrote the constitution, suppressed opposition (from both the right and the left), and filled the government with members of his own ethnic nationalist party (and members of his own family), he cultivated an autocratic position that asked Jews to trust in him alone. While one historian has argued that "the eradication of Jewish autonomy was the second wave of Jewish emancipation in Lithuania," after the first emancipation following World War I, it did not become easier, from the mid-1920s on, for Jews to express their political voice as individuals, as one might expect with an emancipation.[841] On the contrary, Jews were increasingly excluded from the political process. As other Lithuanian parties were subsumed into Smetona's Nationalist Union party, and later, in

[839] Robinson, et al., *Were the Minorities Treaties a Failure?*, 261.

[840] James Loeffler, *Rooted Cosmopolitans: Jews and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 93.

[841] Liekis, *A State within a State?*, 212.

1935, banned altogether, Jews and other Lithuanian citizens were left with few legal alternatives to Smetona, as chauvinist as his movement was.

After the war, Jacob Lestchinsky (1876-1966), the noted sociologist who spent some of the 1920s in Kaunas, outlined a key question of interwar Lithuanian politics: "Did national freedom lift the spirit of the small nation and make it [more] human, more kind-hearted, more tolerant to the various national minorities? Or, on the contrary, did national freedom make the Lithuanian people go crazy, and intoxicate its spirit, and make it more chauvinist and aggressive to neighboring minorities who live on the borders of Lithuania?"[842] To describe this dynamic, political commentators during the interwar period sometimes made reference to the Biblical concept of the "servant when he reigneth," or the propensity for the powerless to become despotic once in power.[843] The phrase, as David Myers has noted, was commonly evoked in Zionist discourse in the first half of the twentieth century by the likes of Ahad Ha'am, Simon Rawidowicz and others, with reference to the potential for formerly disenfranchised Jews in the Land of Israel to abuse those who once ruled, be it in the context of a Jewish settler community in Ottoman Palestine or after 1948.[844] In Lithuania, Jews evoked this concept during a nationwide celebration of the 500th year of the death of Grand Duke Vytautas, whose 1388 charter to the Jews extended rights and privileges to the Jews. That year, the Chief Rabbi of Kaunas, Avraham Shapiro, declared in a speech at the stately Choral Synagogue:

> As Jews we must be free because free Lithuania sincerely promised us autonomy and our affairs. Liberated Lithuania is not in the category of the *eved ki yimlokh* ["servant when he reigneth"]. Because who is liberated is a people with a great history, with a great *yikhes* [prestigious lineage], a people which produced such great men as Vytautas the Great. We want to hope that the current rulers [moshlim] will not renounce that beautiful

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[842] Jacob Lestchinksy, "Di ekonomishe lage fun di yidn in Lite (1919-1939)," in *Lite* (1951), 827.

[843] Proverbs 30:22.

[844] David N. Myers, *Between Jew and Arab: The Lost Voice of Simon Rawidowicz* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2008), 99. See also 103.

tradition and will keep the promise of that which was sincerely promised at the League of Nations.[845]

While Rabbi Shapiro here deployed the term "servant when he reigneth" to underscore his point that the Lithuanians were *not* despotic, he nonetheless, in the same breath, raised the question of whether the Lithuanian government can be trusted to "keep the promise" it made on the world stage, at the League of Nations, to accord Jews certain rights. By 1930, all that was left of the earlier institutions of Jewish autonomy were the *Folksbank* and the school system, and Lithuania was now governed by a 1928 constitution that had concentrated power in Smetona's hands. Using Lithuanians' own favorite comparison, to the glorious medieval Grand Duchy, against them, Rabbi Shapiro suggested that Jews look beyond this new constitution to a still-binding agreement vis-à-vis democratic rights. This statement is typical of how Jews delicately but persistently negotiated their position in the Lithuania state throughout the interwar period, and especially under the authoritarian regime.

There is no direct line between the interwar authoritarian government and the Holocaust. World War II, the Soviet occupation, the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union and the genocide of almost all Lithuanian Jews presented significant ruptures in the history of Lithuanian Jewry. And yet Lithuanian fascism was in many ways the product of the interwar period. The intellectual and political leaders of the Provisional Government of Lithuanian (1941) and related organizations formulated their views and aims over decades of opposition to Smetona and his policies, including, if not especially, his attitudes towards Jews. Understanding the Jewish position in the interwar Lithuanian state is one important facet to understanding how the Holocaust could have proceeded as it did. After the war, Jacob Robinson stated, "Lithuanian Jews do not blame a whole people collectively for the guilt of many individuals. They and they alone are responsible

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[845] "Impozante Vytavt-fayerungen in Kovne," *Folksblat* no. 171, September 10, 1930, 5.

for the crimes they committed. But the question remains: why so many, and why the attempts by others to defend and cover up these crimes?"[846] It is my hope that this dissertation will provide some new context and perspective for answering Robinson's still unanswered questions.

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[846] As quoted in Masha Greenbaum, *The Jews of Lithuania*, 377 n. 200.

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