S: I. M. O. N.
SHOAH: INTERVENTION. METHODS. DOCUMENTATION.
Vol. 10 | 2023 | No.3
WIENER WIESENTHAL INSTITUT FÜR HOLOCAUST-STUDIEN (VWI)

Kamil Kijek

Jewish 'Shtadlan' in Communist Poland?

A Microstudy of the Historical Continuation and Paradoxes of Jewish Communal Subjectivity

Abstract

This article is a microhistorical study of the activity of Commissar for the Productivisation of the Jewish Population that took place in the Jewish community of Reichenbach/Dzierżoniów in the years 1946–1947. By studying the activity of communist Jewish Commissar, Simcha Intrator, in the very unique milieu of Dzierżoniów (town in former German territories of which half of the population consisted of Polish Jews in the summer of 1946) – this article shows the role of prewar continuations in post-Holocaust Polish Jewish life. As I claim, in the specific social and cultural climate of Dzierżoniów, Simcha Intator, nominated to help to mould the Jewish community according to the communist model, acted against the prerogatives of his institutions, strengthening non-communist, pluralistic elements of local Jewish life. Thus, this article is a microhistorical study of the role of continuation of older norms and traditions in the post-war socio-political subjectivity of the Polish Jewish community.

Introduction

Studies on the history of the Jewish community in early post-war communist Poland are defined mainly by the perspective of the aftermath of the Holocaust. Concentrating on problems of post-war Polish antisemitism and anti-Jewish violence, they definitely show that the main Jewish response towards them, whether individual or collective, was emigration.[1] Thus, one of the central problems of early post-Holocaust Polish Jewish history is the problem of *Bricha*, Jewish illegal flight out of Poland that was to various extents organised. This problem is of course connected with the activity of the Zionist movement in the years from 1945 to 1950, which was not only legal but also the decisively most popular political movement among Polish Jews.[2] In the shadow of these two mainstream directions of research are studies on Jewish institutions in the early post-war period. Some researchers, turning their attention to the political pluralism represented by the Central Committee of Polish

1 David Engel, "Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1944–1946," *Yad Vashem Studies* 26, (1998), 43–85; Andrzej Żbikowski, "Morderstwa popełniane na Żydach w pierwszych latach po wojnie", in *Następstwa Zagłady Żydów: Polska 1944–2010*, eds. Feliks Tych and Monika Adamczyk Garbowska (Lublin: UMCS, ŻIH, 2012), 71–94; Anna Cichopek-Gajraj, *Beyond Violence. Jewish Survivors in Poland and Slovakia, 1944–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 114–117, 122–126, 130–134, 138–145; Jan T. Gross *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

2 Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah. The Organized Escape of the Jewish Survivors of Eastern Europe, 1944–1948* (New York: Random House, 1970), 113–151, 206–240, 287–290; David Engel, *Bein shichrur lebricha: Nitzolei hashoah bepolin vehamaavak al hanhagtam, 1944–1946* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1996); Natalia Aleksiun, *Dokąd dalej? Ruch syjonistyczny w Polsce (1944–1950)* (Warsaw: ŻIH, 2002).

ARTICLE https://doi.org/10.23777/sn.0323 | www.vwi.ac.at

Jews (*Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce*, CKŻP) and the wide political, social, and cultural scope of its activity, have even written about "autonomy" as one of the central features of Jewish life in Poland in the years from 1945 to 1950.[3]

There is no doubt that, besides the enormous strength of post-war antisemitism in Poland and the physical and psychological trauma of the remaining Polish Jews, their life in the first years after the war was simultaneously characterised by a unique recovery and a pluralism of institutions and political, social, and cultural life. Nevertheless, it was not "autonomy" in any modern sense. Contrary to the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century postulates of Jewish nationalists fighting for the recognition of Jewish autonomy in East Central Europe, the CKŻP or any other post-war institutions were not grounded in the legal structure of the post-war Polish state.[4] In addition, in every aspect of its politics, the CKŻP fully succumbed to the politics of the Polish state and its sole existence was totally dependent on that.

One of the most spectacular examples of this dependence of the Jewish Community on the communist regime is the activity of the Commissariat for the Productivisation of the Jewish Population (*Komisariat dla Spraw Produktywizacji Ludności Żydowskiej*). This state institution was created to change not only the social but also the cultural and political profile of the Polish Jewish community.[5] The commissariat can thus be treated as one of the central elements of communist state politics towards the Jews, aiming at moulding them according to the Soviet model, the so-called communist "red assimilation". The case study presented in this article, by closely looking into the commissariat's activity in one of the centres of Jewish life in early post-Holocaust Poland, will show that things actually turned out differently. The sole presence of an institution such as the commissariat and the context in which it was created clearly negates the thesis of the alleged limited "autonomy" of the Jewish community in early post-war Poland. Nevertheless, at the same time, this case study of the commissariat's activity reveals that, despite the lack of any official, institutional autonomy, Polish Jewish life at that time was characterised by a considerable degree of political and communal subjectivity. Officially, this community was totally dependent on the politics of a communist-dominated state. Unofficially, due to existing pluralism, strong transnational connections, and financing from the West (the United States, Israel/Palestine, and other places from the other side of the Iron Curtain), Jewish institutions and individual Polish Jews could sometimes pursue successful actions outside of the control or even against the will of the state.

3 August Grabski, *Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce (1944–1950). Historia polityczna* (Warszawa: ŻIH, 2015); Hanna Shlomi, *Osefet mechkarim le toldot shearit ha plita ha yehudim be Polin 1944–1950* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2001); August Grabski and Albert Stankowski, "Życie religijne społeczności żydowskiej", in *Następstwa Zagłady Żydów: Polska 1944–2010*, eds. Feliks Tych and Monika Adamczyk Garbowska (Lublin: UMCS, ŻIH, 2012), 215–244. The opinion that Polish Jewish institutional life in the first years of post-war Poland could be characterised as a form of national "autonomy" is held by August Grabski. See Grabski, *Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce (1944–1950)*.

4 For the ideas and ramifications of the never-implemented Jewish national autonomy in Poland, see Ezra Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland: The Formative years, 1915–1926* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 32–34, 61–67, 79–80, 91–110, 213–222; Joshua Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Joshua M. Karlip, *The Tragedy of a Generation: The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism in Eastern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 24–205; Jolanta Żyndul, *Państwo w państwie: autonomia narodowo-kulturalna w Europie środkowowschodniej w XX wieku* (Warsaw: DiG, 2000); Marcos Silber "'One of Them' as 'One of Us': Jewish Demands for National Autonomy as a Means to Achieve Civic Equality during the First World War", *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 34 (2022): 321–344.

5 Piotr Kendziorek, *Program i praktyka produktywizacji Żydów Polskich w działalności CKŻP* (Warsaw: ŻIH, 2016), 99–106.

As this case study will show, such actions characterised the activities of the Jewish communist, Simcha Intrator, who was placed at the head of the County Commissariat for the Productivisation of the Jewish Population in Poland in the Lower Silesian town of Dzierżoniów. In a special milieu, due to the social and cultural strength of its local Jewish community, Intrator and his commissariat's activity did not limit but rather strengthened the community's subjectivity and independence from the state. As I will claim, that happened mainly due the important social fact that Jewish life in Dzierżoniow (as well as in a few other places in Poland at the time, such as Łódź, Wrocław, or smaller towns like Wałbrzych or Szczecin) was characterised by some degree of continuation of pre-Holocaust norms, values, and ways of life. This continuation blocked the transformation of Polish Jews according to the communist, Soviet Union-inspired model. In places like Dzierżoniów, as is shown by the activities of Intrator and the local commissariat, these elements of continuation could even decisively change the actions of state institutions that were created in order to confront such elements. These elements were religious and traditional beliefs, symbols, and everyday life, as well as a strong ethno-religious identity and pride grounded in Yiddish language and culture, Zionism, or modern Jewish transnationalism. As such, this article seeks to study the aftermath of the Holocaust from a longer historical perspective, which links the post-war period with previous periods of Jewish history in East Central Europe, showing the importance not only of the Holocaust rupture but also a continuation in post-1945 Polish Jewish life.

In the first part of this article, I will briefly present the specific environment of post-war Lower Silesia, a formerly German region that was annexed by Poland in 1945 and in which more than half of the Polish Holocaust survivors were concentrated. One of the main centres of Jewish life in this area was the town of Dzierżoniów, to which this study is devoted. The article will then follow with the characteristics of the Commissariat for the Productivisation of the Jewish Population in Poland, the context of its creation and its official goals. The two main sections of the text will concentrate on the activities of Simcha Intrator as he headed the county branch of the commissariat in Dzierżoniów. As I will show, his activity – contrary to the goals of the institutions that he represented and of the communist party, the Polish Workers' Party, of which he was a faithful and devoted member – strengthened the pluralism of Jewish life and its relative subjectivity and independence from the communist state. In fact, Intrator's activities in Dzierżoniów were characterised by the elements of pre-modern *shatdlanut*, that is intercessorship and the defence of the Jewish community and its representatives against some of the decisions and acts of the institutions of non-Jewish power. As such, his activity revealed the elements of continuation between pre-Holocaust and post-war Polish Jewish life.

Lower Silesia as a Unique Centre of the Jewish Community in the First Post-Holocaust Years

It is estimated that around 60,000 Polish Jews survived in Poland under German occupation.[6] Most of these people came out from their hideouts in forests, from partisan groups, or from safe houses, or they survived with false identities or so-called "Aryan papers". They very quickly became aware that they had not only lost most of their families and social milieus, but also their houses and other property. Facing the strong en-

6 Audrey Kichelewski, *Ocalali. Żydzi polscy po Zagładzie* (Warsaw: ŻIH, 2021), 28.

mity of the Polish population, they tried to leave Poland. At least 150,000 Polish Jews left the country between the second half of 1944 and the end of 1946. This constant outflow was somewhat balanced by the repatriation of Polish Jews from the Soviet Union, both from its new western parts (that until 1939 were part of Poland) and from its interior, where most Polish Jews had survived the Holocaust. In the largest wave of this repatriation, between February and July 1946 around 140,000 Jews came to Poland.[7]

Most of these people, around 90,000, were directed to Lower Silesia, a part of Western Poland recently annexed from Germany. Here, they joined the pioneering Polish Jewish community that had been formed in May 1945 from the freed inmates of the local Nazi concentration camps.[8] Especially in the years from 1946 to 1949, the Lower Silesian Jewish community was unique not only in Poland but in the whole of East Central Europe: it was characterised by a uniquely high demographical and social density. In a few towns of the region, Jews encompassed from 20 per cent to even 50 per cent of the total population. They were catered to not only by Jewish committees and their various agencies, forming educational, healthcare, social, and cultural systems, but also by religious congregations, Zionist, and other transnational Jewish organisations. In Lower Silesia, contrary to so many places in Central Poland, Jews felt safer and did not hide their national or national-religious identity. It was there, paradoxically on new, former German territories and not in historical places of Eastern European Jewish civilisation, that after the Holocaust tens of thousands of Polish Jews managed to not only reconstruct their lives, but also to continue some prewar ways of life.

In this respect, an exceptional role was played by the Jewish community of the formerly German Reichenbach im Eulengebirge, renamed Rychbach and then, finally, Dzierżoniów. In the summer of 1946, there were around 12,000 Jews in the town, forming half of its total population. Even after the emigration panic that followed the Kielce pogrom of 4 July 1946, an effect of which was that 90,000 Jews would leave Poland in the next few months, Dzierżoniów retained its Jewish population with the latter's unique, demographical, social, cultural and institutional structure. In June 1947, there were still more than 6,000 Jews in town, so at least 25 per cent of total population.[9] This unique and very much unexpected community in post-Holocaust Poland drew the attention of many figures in the Western Jewish world. Peysakh Novick, one of the leading American Jewish communist intellectuals who had visited the town in the summer of 1946 (already after Kielce pogrom), was thoroughly impressed with what he had seen:

> Rychbach has a compact Jewish neighbourhood, where until late at night one can hear Yiddish songs, where Yiddish theatre plays and where Jewish culture has grown its roots. The town has a network of Jewish schools, cultural centres, libraries, concert halls, drama circles, social institutions. There is a network of Jewish cooperatives (…) A piece of Jewish life from the old Poland, healthy Jewish life, was resurrected in Lower Silesia.[10]

7 Albert Stankowski, "Nowe spojrzenie na statystyki dotyczące emigracji Żydów z Polski po 1944 roku", in *Studia z dziejów Żydów w Polsce po 1945 r.*, eds. Grzegorz Berendt, August Grabski, and Albert Stankowski (Warsaw: ŻIH, 2010), 108–111.

8 Bożena Szaynok *Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku 1945–1950* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2000), 26–32, 44–53.

9 Kamil Kijek "A New Life?: The Pre-Holocaust Past and Post-Holocaust Present in the Life of Jewish Community of Dzierżoniów, Lower Silesia, 1945–50", in *Jewish Lives under Communism: New Perspectives*, eds. Katerina Capkova and Kamil Kijek (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2022), 15–34; Bezalel Lavi, "The Community Which 'Sat on Suticases' (Dzierżoniów)", *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 262, no. 2 (2017): 245–271.

10 Pesach Novick, *Eyrope tsvishn milchome un sholem: Rayze bilder, batrachtungen* (New York: Ikof Ferlag, 1948), 110–111.

Similar enthusiasm was expressed by Shmuel Leo Wohl, an envoy of the Joint Distribution Committee and president of the Warsaw Jewish *landsmanshaft* (hometown society of Jewish emigrants), whose views on post-war Poland, the future of Polish Jews there and on Cold War politics were very different to those represented by Novick. Nevertheless, visiting Dzierżoniów at the same time, Wohl was no less impressed than Novick:

> The town is quite small, so Jews are seen everywhere. It has a nice synagogue, a Jewish house of culture with a sign in Yiddish. There are a lot of Jewish shops, factories, and there are numerous cooperatives (…) In Rychbach, one sees older Jews with beards, women in wigs. You can see Jews walking to shul in talit under their clothes. There is heder for pious Jewish children and a modern school for the other.[11]

It is clear that, in the spring and summer of 1946, when Novick, Wohl and many other Western Jews and non-Jewish press correspondents visited Dzierżoniów, its Jewish community was characterised by a considerable socio-political pluralism that could not be characterised as full communist domination, assimilation, or full subjugation to the ruling state regime.[12] This small Lower Silesian town was a centre of activity for various Zionist parties and organisations, and it had both religious and secular Yiddish and Hebrew schools, as well as religious congregations – all catering to the needs of thousands of Jews. The Commissariat for the Productivisation of the Jewish Population that was established in Dzierżoniów following the Kielce pogrom and was active there, as in many other places in Poland, between the autumn of 1946 and summer of 1947, would change this situation. It was active in the so-called period of the "stabilisation" of Polish Jewish life (that followed after the post-Kielce-pogrom emigration wave), during a time when the communist party had finally established its power and control over the Polish state, and Jewish communists had the same amount of domination and control over the Jewish community, starting from the CKŻP and its regional branches.[13] As will be revealed below, in the late months of 1946 and in 1947, this communist domination did not break the pluralism and subjectivity of Jewish life all over Poland. Moreover, the Jewish community in this period was able to leave a mark and reshape the activities of state institutions.

The Commissariat for the Productivisation of the Jewish Population — its Creation and the Political Context of its Activity

The Commissariat for the Productivisation of the Jewish Population was created by a special resolution of the Polish government on 25 July 1946. The main reason for its creation was the Kielce pogrom, specifically the "explanations" of its roots lying in the alleged "unproductivity" of the Polish Jewish population. From the one side, the Polish communists and their allies attributed the organisation of the pogrom to the anti-communist opposition in the country and to Polish émigré circles in London. From the other, according to many important communist party members, Jews themselves were also partially guilty for the violence directed against them. The fact that many Polish Jews at that time did not have a stable occupation or were active on

11 Shmuel Leo Wohl, *Mein reise kein Varshe* (New York: [self-published], 1947), 55–56.

12 For more on these and the recollections of other Western Jewish visitors from Dzierżoniów and Lower Silesia, see Kamil Kijek, "Only Ashes? Jewish Visitors to the New Poland in 1946 and the Future of Polish Jewry", *Journal of Modern European History* 20, no.1 (2022): 111–126.

13 Grabski, *Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce (1944–1950)*, 127–158, 168–171.

the black market was supposed to provoke anti-Jewish stances.[14] Indeed, very high unemployment among the Jews, caused by the incapability of many survivors or the unwillingness of others who were preparing for emigration to take low-paid factory and other state-promoted jobs, was a fact. According to the Zionist weekly *Opinia* (Opinion), in January 1946, only 29 per cent of the adult Jews in Poland were working.[15] The situation was no different in September 1947, when the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) reported this figure to be only 33 per cent.[16] The commissariat's goal was to change that and decisively increase the employment of the Jews, mainly in state industry and the cooperative sector.

The commissariat was responding directly to the Polish prime minister: thus, it was totally independent from any Polish Jewish institutions.[17] Contrary to the appointments of some other government officials responsible for Jewish affairs in Poland, the tasks of the commissariat as well as the nomination of its chair, Major Ignacy Wrzos, were not subject to consultation with the CKŻP or members of Jewish Faction of the communist party.[18] It was a clear sign of the distrust and dissatisfaction of the Polish authorities stemming from how the CKŻP had handled the question of Jewish unemployment, "productivisation", and the communist programme of changing the Jewish occupational structure in a new, socialist Poland. The political structure of the most important and the biggest Lower Silesian branch of the commissariat clearly manifested the fact that the institution reflected the recently established communist domination in all dimensions of Polish post-war life. Twenty-one of its forty-one employees were members of the communist party, four were members of peasant and socialist parties allied to the communist one, and there was not even one member of the opposition Polish People's Party (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*).[19]

From the very beginning of his activity as the commissariat's chair, Ignacy Wrzos was publicly voicing his dissatisfaction with the economic activities of Jewish committees, disciplining their members and enforcing their close cooperation with the new institution. This also included Zionists. That kind of policy was met with disappointment and distrust (although this could not be voiced publicly) even by members of the Jewish Faction of the communist party. One of them, Hersh Smolar, in his memoirs, considered the establishment of the commissariat, its very name and the fact that it was chaired by a non-Jew, as a manifestation of the distrust of Polish communists towards their Jewish colleagues and their activities on the so-called "Jewish

14 On its roots, the pogrom itself, and the discourse surrounding it, see Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod klątwą. Społeczny portret pogrom kieleckiego*, vol. 1–2 (Warsaw: Czarna Owca, 2018).

15 *Opinia*, 10 July 1946, 10.

16 Piotr Kendziorek, *Program i praktyka produktywizacji* …, 81–82.

17 Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (APWr), 311 Urząd Wojewódzki we Wrocławiu (UWW), VI/694, k. 2–3; APWr, 311 UWW, VI/698, k. 96; APWr, 311 UWW, VI/707, k. 207.

18 According to Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, a reason for the creation of the commissariat directly after the Kielce pogrom was the communist plan to canalise the popular stereotype of Jews as "capitalist bloodsuckers". In this way, the communists wanted to signal that they were fighting "Jewish speculation" and that, against the popular stereotype, they did not "support the Jews". In this way, the communists clearly manifested that they attributed part of the guilt for the outbreak of the Kielce pogrom to the Jews themselves. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Okrzyki Pogromowe. Szkice z antropologii historycznej Polski lat 1939–1946* (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2012), 116, 137. According to Peter Apor, the context of the pogroms in Kunmadras on 22 May 1946 and in Miskolc on 30 July and 1 August 1946 was similar, as was the communist politics towards them in Hungary. Both of them happened during intensive campaigns against the black market, during which both communists and anti-communists accused Jews of a disproportionate participation in that. As in Kielce, in Hungary the symbol of a "capitalist bloodsucker" merged with the accusation of Jews using Christian blood for ritual purposes. Peter Apor, "Backyard Revolution: Mass Violence, Anti-Semitism, and Political Transformation in Post-WWII Hungary", lecture at the University of Vienna, 10 May 2022.

19 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/707, k. 811, 843–844.

street". According to Smolar, the new institution was to strengthen centralist state control over the Jewish community, and as such it threatened the sole existence of Jewish committees.[20] It is also important to add that the work of the commissariat among Polish Jews and its help in finding employment in state industry. The financing of the Jewish cooperative and agricultural sector was supposed to diminish the great role played in them so far by Western Jewish institutions and their philanthropic activities among Polish Jews.

The Lower Silesian branch of the commissariat was established in Wrocław on 10 August 1946. Its Dzierżoniów County branch began its work on 20 September. Until February 1947, it was directed by communist party member Simcha Intrator, who was then replaced by his party colleague, Artur Halbershtadt.[21] Both of them were Jewish which, as we will see further on, had a crucial meaning for the work of the commissariat branch in Dzierżoniów and for its relation with the commissariat's headquarters in Warsaw. The most important goals of the commissariat's branches all over Poland were: assisting the employment of Jews in all branches of the Polish economy; establishing Jewish agricultural farms, artisan workshops, and cooperatives; and monitoring and analysing changes in the Jewish occupational structure.[22] The creation of a commissariat branch in Dzierżoniów was a breakthrough event in the life of the local Jewish community. From the very beginning of its activity, it played a crucial role in local economic, social, and even political life. The new institution duplicated the tasks so far performed by local Jewish Committee. The Dzierżoniów commissariat branch, contrary to the local Jewish Committee, had considerable political power stemming from the fact that it was a part of the centralised, state structure. This was manifested also by the fact that the Dzierżoniów branch of the commissariat's headquarters was located in the building of the state county office in the centre of the town.[23] Nevertheless, as it turned out, the work of the Dzierżoniów branch was very different from what was assumed by the Polish communists in Warsaw and the commissariat's chair Wrzos, and feared by Jewish communists such as Smolar.

Faithful Communist and Commissar — Simcha Intrator's Work as County Commissar for the Productivisation of the Jewish Population

One of the central tasks entrusted to Simcha Intrator was the "productivisation" of the local Jewish population by directing its representatives towards "productive jobs". The Polish authorities were well aware that antisemitism was one of the main obstacles to Jewish employment in state industry and other sectors of the economy. The managers and workers of Polish state factories often refused to work with Jews. The same kind of ill will was manifested by local government authorities, as it was by Polish merchants and artisans towards the Jewish presence in the commercial and artisanal sectors. In what was certainly a legacy of interwar Poland, Jews were often treated as harmful, unwanted competition.[24]

20 Hersz Smolar, *Oyf di letzter pozicye mi de letzter hofnung* (Tel Aviv: I.L. Peretz Ferlag, 1982), 52, 70–72.
21 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/694, k. 2, 12, 14; APWR, 311 UWW, VI/707, k. 131, 618.
22 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/698, k. 12.
23 APWr, 331 UWW, VI/698, k. 71.
24 Emanuel Melzer, *No Way Out: The Politics of Polish Jewry, 1935–1939* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1997), 39–52 ; Yisrael Gutman, "Polish Antisemitism between the Wars: An Overview", in *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, eds. Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, Jehuda Reinhartz, and Chone Schmeruk (Waltham, MA: University Press of New England, 1989), 102–103.

This could be clearly seen in Dzierżoniów and in other places of Lower Silesia. A significant manifestation of such anti-Jewish attitudes took place in July 1946, when the regional Chamber of Crafts cancelled work permits for Jewish artisans who in the first half of the same year had returned from the Soviet Union. Now they had to go through costly and time-consuming professional exams. It seemed that this problem was solved by the intervention of the Lower Silesian Jewish Committee at the Provincial Government (*Urząd Wojewódzki*). Jewish artisans returning from the Soviet interior, of whom 95 per cent had during the war lost documents confirming their professional qualifications, could gain temporary permits by presenting witness who attested to the fact that the Jews had been employed as artisans before 1939. In this way, they could work in their profession until their professional exam.[25]

As was soon revealed, this solution and agreement made on the regional level did not help Jewish artisans in Dzierżoniów, where their economic activity met the staunch resistance of their Polish colleagues, local professional associations, and municipal institutions. The local Craft Guild had refused to grant work permits to Jewish artisans to which they were entitled by law and the above-mentioned regulations of the regional government. In October 1947, on the request of Intrator, the Craft Guild received a letter from Warsaw written by the chair of the Commissariat for the Productivisation, Major Wrzos, requesting the Craft Guild to stop this illegal practice.[26] Again, it did not solve the problem, as in December 1946 the Craft Guild found another way of blocking Jews in taking artisan jobs. Now it cancelled the professional practical exams that some of the Jewish artisans had already successfully passed, in this way stopping them from taking the final, theoretical exam.[27] The same practice took place also on a higher, regional level. In the same month, the Lower Silesian Chamber of Crafts received thirty professional exam applications from Dzierżoniów's Jewish artisans, but it refused to organise exams.[28]

In the first months of his work, most of the interventions of Simcha Intrator in various local municipal or state offices and professional associations were at the bequest of Jewish artisans who were discriminated against or illegally barred from conducting their profession.[29] One of these cases was that of Felvel Perelman, a shoemaker who was repatriated to Dzierżoniów from the Soviet Union. In February 1947, despite all the commissariat's interventions and having witnesses who asserted he had thirty years of professional practice, Dzierżoniów's Chamber of Crafts refused him a work permit. A massive amount of similar cases made Intrator not only petition various authorities but also write articles about anti-Jewish discrimination for the Lower Silesian regional press.[30]

It is important to underline that, in his struggle to resist anti-Jewish discrimination, Intrator had to confront not only semi-autonomous professional unions, but also local government representatives. One such case was that of the Warsaw Ghetto survivor Leon Tenenbaum, who settled in Dzierżoniów already in the summer of 1945 and, with his Warsaw friend, Yeshaya Haberman, leased a formerly German-owned mechanical workshop. The new lessees had not only renovated the workshop, which had been thoroughly destroyed by Red Army soldiers, but equipped it and developed its production, achieving great commercial success. In autumn 1947, their

25 APWr, 415 WKŻ DS, 5, k. 89, 91; APWr, 311 UWW, VI/714, k. 146.
26 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/698, k. 37.
27 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/698, k. 63.
28 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/698, k. 229.
29 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/698, k. 46, 116–131.
30 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/697, k. 41; APWr, 311 UWW, VI/698, k. 149–151.

workshop employed five workers. At this point, the prosperous business attracted the attention of the state county office (*starostwo powiatowe*), who decided not only to confiscate it without any compensation and add it to the network of Dzierżoniów municipality enterprises, but also requested from Tenenbaum and Haberman nine per cent of the financial turnover of their business. Intrator fought for the business to be leased back to the Jewish businessman.[31] In another case, he had to confront the director of Dzierżoniów's Liquidation Office (the institution dealing with property left or taken from the deported German population). Even though artisans were entitled to buy needed furniture from the office for lower, state fixed-prices, the director not only refused that to Jewish artisans, but also "many times behaved brutally, throwing various undemocratic courses".[32] In the official language of the day, these "undemocratic courses" were of course anti-Semitic slurs.

Antisemitism and the problems of Jewish artisans played a very important part in Intrator's work in the Dzierżoniów branch of the commissariat. But from the point of view of his Lower Silesian and Warsaw superiors, the most important dimension of his work was his engagement with and help for the cooperative sector. After the state industry, Polish authorities considered cooperatives to be the second most important sphere of the national economy. It was especially important in the post-German, so-called "Recovered Territories", as it was mainly the cooperatives that were responsible for taking over formerly German-owned workshops and other business and for providing employment for new Polish and Jewish settlers. In the transitional period from 1945 to 1948, the Polish economy had a mixed character. State industry and central planning were functioning alongside the large cooperative sector and private commerce. For socialists who joined the coalition government, and even for some less orthodox communists, this was the desirable model of state economy that should be a stable feature of post-war Poland. For die-hard communists, it was just a temporary solution before moving on to "real socialism" and bringing the Polish economy closer to the Soviet model.[33]

The Jewish cooperative sector in Poland was very willingly supported by Western, especially American, Jewish philanthropic institutions. Cooperatives – much more than state factories in which Jews were also massively employed – created intimate social spaces in which Jews could be close to one another, speak Yiddish, and reconstruct their religious, ethnonational culture. This was the main reason why they attracted such attention of Western donors. Cooperatives were especially close to the hearts of former Polish Bundists, now running the New York Jewish Labor Committee (JLC), who at the same time expressed a considerable level of distrust towards communist models for maximising Jewish employment in state industry because they thought that it reminded them too much of the analogous Soviet model. Already in February 1946, the CKŻP obtained the permission of the Polish Ministry of Commerce for raw materials that were bought by the JLC in the United States and were to be shipped to Poland for Jewish cooperatives.[34] Overall, the cooperatives re-

31 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/698, k. 9; APWr, 311 UWW, VI/714, k. 101; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Oral History Branch, Interview with Nelly Cessana, part 1, RG-50.477.0211; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Oral History Branch, Interview with Nelly Cessana, part 2, RG-50.477.0222.

32 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/714, k. 146.

33 Krystyna Kersten, *Narodziny systemu władzy. Polska 1943–1948* (Lublin: [s.n.], 1989), 139–148, 287–291; Padraic Kenney, *Budowanie Polski Ludowej. Robotnicy a komuniści 1945–1950* (Warsaw: WAB, 2015), 215–231. For a general study of the Jewish cooperative sector in early post-war Poland, see Michał Grynberg, *Żydowska spółdzielczość pracy w Polsce w latach 1945–1949* (Warsaw: PWN, 1986).

34 NYU Taminent Library (NYUTL), Jewish Labor Committee Archives (JLCA), WAG 25.001 – Box 35, Folder 8, CKŻP letter to Yaakov Pat, 26 February 1946.

ceived 40 per cent (100,000 USD) of the total help (250,000 USD) that had been given by the JLC to the Polish Jewish community in 1946.[35] There was tremendous help given to the Polish Jewish economy, especially to the cooperative sector, also by the JDC. Just between January and September 1946, it gave 15 million Polish zlotys (around 100,000 USD) to the CKŻP to support the "productivisation" of the Jewish population in Poland, and another ten million zlotys (around 75,000 USD) to buy and renovate equipment for Jewish cooperatives and workshops.[36]

Already in April 1946, there were ten Jewish cooperatives in Dzierżoniów County.[37] In May, due to the Jewish community's rapid growth following the great repatriation wave from the Soviet Union, this number rose to seventeen.[38] Cooperatives were crucial for providing fresh Jewish newcomers with employment, ensuring that the chaotic repatriation of tens of thousands of people during the few short months would not end in a material and humanitarian catastrophe. That is why, already in July 1946, there were 77 Jewish cooperatives in Lower Silesia employing 1,850 people. The next month, these figures rose to 83 and 1,826 respectively. In September, they dropped to 69 institutions and 1,163 employees, due to the departure of tens of thousands of Jews from Lower Silesia, but after the emigration stopped, they grew again. In December 1946, 74 Lower Silesian Jewish cooperatives employed 1,673 people. One quarter of them was concentrated in Dzierżoniów County.[39] In September 1946, five new Jewish cooperatives were opened there, in November one more, and in December an additional two. Cooperatives from Dzierżoniów largely satisfied the local hunger for consumer goods and services that so characteristic of all socialist economies, producing shoes, clothes, food, furniture, and metalware, and providing the local population with services such as hairdressing or photography.[40]

Although the authorities had clearly communicated to the Lower Jewish Silesian Committee that the state industry's employment of Jewish repatriates should be a priority, and the Jewish institution wholeheartedly followed the line of this official policy, its Dzierżoniów branch was praised for its "special achievements" in developing the cooperative sector.[41] During the "year of stabilisation" in 1947, cooperatives established themselves as the backbone of the Jewish economy in Lower Silesia. In 1947, 70 per cent of all of the cooperatives active in Lower Silesia were Jewish ones.[42] Dzierżoniów was one of the centres of the postwar Polish Jewish cooperative movement.

35 NYUTL, JLCA, WAG 25.001 – Box 35, Folder 7, JLC budget plan for help to the Polish Jewish community for the year 1946.

36 Anna Sommer Schneider, *Sze'erit hapleta. Ocaleni z Zagłady. Działalność American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee w Polsce w latach 1945–1989* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2014), 93.

37 APWr, WKŻ DS, 5, k. 40.

38 Tel Aviv University Diaspora Research Center Archives, P-70 A.A. Berman Bequest, 141, list of Jewish cooperatives in Lower Silesia working under the auspices of the Regional Jewish Committee (the list has no date but information in it clearly suggests that it was created in May 1946).

39 APWr, 311 UWW IV/726, k. 207; Yaacov Egit, *Tzu a nay Leben (tsvay yor yiddisher yishev in Nidershlezye)* (Wrocław: Nidershlezye, 1947), 49.

40 APWr, 415 WKŻ DS, 9, k. 23, 63, 85; YIVO Archives (YA), RG 116 Poland 3, Folder 2, Yiddish language manuscript „Fun noch di milchome", 7; Egit, *Tzu a nay …*, 48, 50; Kibbutz Lohamei Getaot Archives (LGA), Folder 04236-4, "The Rescue Committee of Jewish Agency of Palestine Bulletin" (November 1946), 5.

41 APWr, 415 Wojewódzki Komitet Żydowski na Dolnym Śląsku (WKŻ DS.), 5, k. 47. To accommodate both things – that is, government pressure for the development of state heavy industry and Jewish employment in it, on the one hand, and the development of an autonomous Jewish cooperative sector on the other – the Dzierżoniów County Jewish Committee took special care in developing metal cooperatives, which were mini factories producing tools and machines for local state factories. In Dzierżoniów, there were two special cooperatives of this kind, which in 1946 and 1947 experienced dynamic growth, APWr, 311 UWW, IV/694, k. 127, 131; APWr, 331 UWW, VI/697, k. 83–84; APWr, 331 UWW, VI/698, k. 5.

42 Egit, *Tzu a nay …*, 48.

An anonymous JDC envoy, in his report from Poland in the summer of 1947, underlined the extreme popularity of the cooperative sector among the Lower Silesian Jews. There were many reasons for its popularity. The most important were economic and cultural ones. In places like Dzierżoniów, with such a dense, well-organised Jewish population which in many ways recreated its pre-Holocaust ways of life, cooperatives often served as a cover for private, capitalist initiatives. This was to a large extent a continuation of prewar Jewish "lower-middle-class" and artisans' ways of life and economic upkeep. Contrary to private business, Jewish peddlers and artisans who were officially employed in cooperatives could conceal their simultaneous free market work from communist officials and the taxation and other authorities. Cooperative workers, while producing some of their goods and services officially, could also covertly do the same and sell them on the free market for much higher prices, thus drastically increasing their individual income. Even without that, official earnings in cooperatives were two to three times higher than in state factories. In addition, contrary to factory work, being in a cooperative meant being in a very Jewish environment, working among Jews, speaking Yiddish, and not being subjugated to the rather tense Jewish-Christian relations and the antisemitism present in other work environments at the time. All of this created a situation in which Jewish cooperatives, despite their various material problems, had a big group of motivated and engaged employees, which could not be said for the state employment sector. These employees were better organised, more productive, and delivered many needed, basic goods to the local market. All of that made Jewish cooperatives popular also among Christian Poles.[43] The popularity of Jewish cooperatives in Dzierżoniów's labour market is well illustrated by data from October 1947 on the employment of Jewish youth aged from fourteen to eighteen. Of these people who were working, 141 out of 290 of them had found employment in cooperatives or artisan workshops. These jobs were much popular than the state factory work promoted by the communists.[44]

Still, the Jewish cooperatives' widespread popularity among the Jewish population, state authorities, and Jewish Committees, as well as Western philanthropic interest and investment in them, did not meant that the cooperatives developed smoothly and unproblematically. This, like all other sectors of the economy in the new Poland, had to deal with the hardships of the early post-war situation and the chaotic conditions of Lower Silesia. It was a new territory not yet well integrated with rest of the state and that had exchanged the majority of its population, and whose problems were only augmented by socialist central planning. That is why Dzierżoniów's County Commissariat for the Productivisation of the Jewish Population had to help local Jewish cooperatives from the very beginning of its work. In the last months of 1946, the main problem of the local cooperative sector was the enormous lack of raw materials needed for its production. These were supposed to be secured by the state and to be bought in state institutions, but they were largely unavailable. In this situation, and against the policy of the state, Dzierżoniów's Jewish cooperatives often bought raw materials on the free market.[45] This had another consequence: to buy raw materials, tools, and machines, the cooperatives were in constant need of cash. To get that, the cooperatives needed credit that they were not receiving from the state banks.[46] As a result of this situation, and stemming also from

43 YA, RG 116 Poland 3, Folder 2, Yiddish language manuscript "Fun noch di milchome", 3.
44 APWr, 331 UWW, VI/694, k. 140.
45 APWr, 311 UWW, IV/697, k. 3-4; APWr, 331 UWW, VI/698, k. 2.
46 APWr, 311 UWW, IV/697, k. 4. This thirst for credit could not be quenched even by the Jewish "Productivisation Bank", which was established in March 1946 by the Central Jewish Committee with crucial financial help

the fact that the cooperatives had been started from scratch by Holocaust survivors or returnees from the Soviet Union, most of whom had lost all of their economic assets during the war, many of the Jewish cooperatives had very large liabilities. Their debts were often a few times larger than their shared capital. For example, already in October 1946, a Jewish lingerie and stocking cooperative in Dzierżonów had 700,000 zlotys of debt, owing 500,000 zlotys to the Regional Jewish Committee and 200,000 zlotys to one of the government banks.[47] In November 1946, a Jewish shoemaking cooperative from the neighbouring town of Pieszyce had 10,000 zlotys of shared capital and 25,000 zlotys of debt to the Regional Jewish Committee. Its twin cooperative in Dzierżoniów, which disposed of 198,000 zlotys of capital, at the same time had debts worth 1.6 million zlotys.[48]

From the first days in his post as the county commissar, Simcha Intrator had to deal with all of these problems of the Jewish cooperatives, struggling to fulfil their various needs and fighting economic and other problems. In December 1946, Dzierżoniów's Jewish furrier cooperative was on the brink of ruin due to a permanent lack of raw materials. It was helped by Intrator, who tried to provide it with furs, intervening with both the Lower Silesian Jewish Committee (which was distributing material help from international Jewish philanthropic institutions) and the regional government that was responsible for the state distribution of raw materials to local economic institutions.[49] In January 1947, Jewish cooperatives in Dzierżoniów County turned to Intrator for assistance in organising large credits, each between 500,000 and one million zlotys.[50] In the same month, the commissariat also provided crucial machines and workshop buildings, for bristle-making and carpenter cooperatives respectively.[51]

A lack of credit, of raw materials, and of machines – all of these were material hardships faced by the Jewish cooperative sector and which stemmed from the chaos of the post-German territories, mass migration, and the creation of a new economic system. In addition, in the case of Jewish cooperatives – as we have already seen in the cases of the individual Jewish artisans – bureaucratic chaos and the other faults of the planned economy were often intertwined with anti-Semitic attitudes. Local authorities were often openly hostile to visible, economically strong Jewish communities in their area. That is why the Regional Jewish Committee had to document and send to Warsaw the complaints against various representatives of Dzierżoniów's local authorities who refused – against the law and state economic interest – to lease an unused, neglected industrial building which it planned to hand over to cooperatives.[52] An example of this kind of malevolence on the part of the local administration and to the detriment of Jewish cooperatives is the case of the Szczeciniarz bristle-making cooperative, one of the most dynamic and successful cooperatives in the area. Its rapid growth was stopped and its further functioning threatened when, at the beginning of 1947, its main client, the county administration, made a large order. When the order was ready, the county administration refused to take it and

from the JDC. Between March and December 1946, the bank gave, in the form of cheap credit, 22 million zlotys to Jewish cooperatives, individual craftspersons, and representatives of free professions. Nevertheless, this help was far from sufficient. Egit, *Tzu a nay*, 52. In Dzierżoniów, Jewish cooperatives could also receive credit from the Productivisation Department of the local Jewish Committee, APWr, WKŻ DS, 9, k. 23.

47 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/721, k. 23.

48 APWr, 311 UWW, IV/721, k. 45, 47, 65.

49 APWr, 331 UWW, VI/698, k. 64.

50 APWr, 311 UWW, IV/698, k. 109–112, 138–139.

51 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/698, k. 221.

52 APWr, 415 WKŻ DS, 5, k. 89.

pay for it. The cooperative had to be saved with loans from regional and county Jewish Committees.[53]

This kind of stance of the local state administration put the local commissariat and its director in an awkward, problematic position that was originally not intended by the creators of the institution. As was planned in the summer of 1946, the commissariat was a special state institution that was meant to support other state institutions in their communist policies regarding the Jews, and at the same time "correct" the policies of the Jewish Committee. The scale of local antisemitism, present also on all levels of the local communist party and state administration, combined with the social climate of Dzierżoniów, with its strong, diversified but socially, culturally, and demographically "dense" Jewish community, took Intrator on a path on which he was mainly not fighting with the "pathologies" inside the Jewish community, according to the original rationale of the commissariat, but with "pathologies" outside of it. At the very beginning of his work, in November 1946, Simcha Intrator had to confront the Dzierżoniów country office which, under a false legal pretext, tried to block the opening of the furrier cooperative.[54] At the same time, with his colleagues from the Wrocław headquarters of the Lower Silesian branch of the commissariat, he had to confront the country and regional Provisioning and Trade Department that had illegally refused to grant provision cards to the workers of Dzierżoniów County's Jewish cooperatives and employees of the ORT (the most important Western Jewish philanthropic institution that was solely concentrated on the socio-economic aspect of Jewish life and which was very active in the Dzierżoniów area at the time). The same cards were without any problem given to workers and members of Polish cooperatives.[55] This problem returned a month later, when the county office found a new pretext for not giving provision cards to Jewish cooperatives. This time they were to be given only to the establishments that sold 75 per cent of their production to the state institution, under prices fixed by the state. The curious fact was that, at the time, the state did not establish these kinds of prices for most of the services or products created by cooperatives in the Dzierżoniów area.[56]

At the same time, we cannot forget that Intrator's main allegiance, even greater than that stemming from his capacity as state official, was to the communist party, of which he was a member. At this time, at the end of 1946 and in 1947, the Polish Workers' Party was already achieving full domination not only in state institutions, but also in other dimensions of Polish life, including Jewish institutions. In Lower Silesia, the regional Jewish Committee was directed with the iron hand of an important communist activist, Yaakov Egit. In Dzierżoniów, the county Jewish Committee was controlled by another communist, Józef Orlin, who after the summer of 1946 finally succeeded in marginalising Zionist opposition. The same communist domination characterised the regional Commissariat for the Productivisation of the Jewish Population, which was directed by another member of the Polish Workers' Party, Zygmunt Gersin. He and his subordinate Intrator were working under the strict directives of their party, which in July 1946 ordered all its members who were active in the cooperative sector to fight against private commerce (legal at that time) and prevent any covert private economic initiatives taking place under the cover of cooperative economic activity, such as double bookkeeping, illegal production, and the illegal

53 APWr, 415 WKŻ DS, k. 101.
54 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/721, k. 104; APWr, 311 UWW, VI/698, k. 11.
55 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/698, k. 23; APWr, 311 UWW, IV/721, k. 67.
56 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/721, k. 163.

selling on the free market of the cooperative-produced goods.[57] Of course, another goal of the Jewish communists was to take control over most of the Jewish cooperatives. This goal was already largely achieved in June 1946 when, as was estimated by Ha Shomer Ha Tzair, one of most important Zionist organisations (it was both a political party and a youth movement), already 80 per cent of the Jewish cooperative sector was outside the control of the Zionist movement, and most of it was directed by communists.[58] In this situation, typical for a communist regime, of blurred boundaries between the party and the state, it was a natural thing for Simcha Intrator, in his capacity as county commissar (officially being a state and not a party institution), to organise in January 1947 a conference of the directors of Jewish Cooperatives, inviting only those who were members of the communist party. One of the goals of the conference was to mobilise the directors to fight all illegal economic activity in their cooperatives.[59] Intrator was also doing the same himself. In December 1946, during the first regional conference of Jewish cooperatives, Intrator accused one of Dzierżoniów's shoemaking cooperatives of speculation, selling their illegal production on the free market at inflated prices. What is symptomatic is that, for Intrator to exert pressure on the cooperative, it was natural to search for support not in other state institutions but in the local cell of the communist party.[60]

From Commissar to *shatdlan*? Simcha Intrator as Jewish Intercessor

All of these examples build a true picture of the work of Intrator as a faithful and dutiful communist, who had well understood the philosophy and ideology of his party. This ideology, among many other things, assumed its superiority over structures of the state, and the superiority of the role of a member of the Polish Workers' Party over that of a state official, so the dependence of the latter on the former. Intrator's very consequent, engaged interventions against representatives of the local state and municipal administrations regarding their antisemitism or behaviour marked by anti-Jewish discrimination should thus be interpreted as a well-performed duty.[61] The communists were to fight antisemitism, and one of the goals of the commissariat that was openly declared during its creation was to confront the anti-Jewish stances of local administrations and populations which would impede the policy of the "productivisation" of the Jewish population in Poland. Intrator had staunchly supported Jewish employment in state factories and the development of the cooperative sector, and he fought all the potential and real "capitalist fraught" inside the latter. At the same time, however, his activity was characterised by something else, namely his ethno-national feeling of duty towards all of the Jewish population. This feeling and the possibilities of fulfilling it were only strengthened by the unique milieu of the Dzierżoniów area that Intrator worked in, and where Jews were living in the thousands, where the communists like him were a minority, and where non-communist

57 APWr, 311 UWW, IV/726, k. 63–64.

58 Yaad Yaari Archives, 1–2, Ha Szomer Ha Cair be Polin achraei Milchemet ha dam ha shniya, Folder 55 (4), letter from the Main Board of Polish Ha Shomer ha Tzair to the leadership of the Ha Shomer ha Tzair world movement in kibbutz Merhavia, 5 July 1947.

59 APWr, 331 UWW, VI/697, k. 38.

60 APWr, 311 UWW, IV/698, k. 60–61, 80–81.

61 Fighting antisemitism in the ranks of the state and local administration was not declared as one of the commissariat's goals during its creation in the summer of 1946. However, Major Wrzos did declare this to be one of the tasks of his institution at the end of October 1946, when he took part in the national conference of Jewish Committees in Kraków. Smolar *Oyf di letzter* …, 72.

norms, values, and symbols – most of them having their deep roots in a centuries-long past – were still vividly present and exerted their impact on every aspect of life. It seems that the ethno-religious identity and solidarity that was revealed in many of Intrator's activities in time drew the attention and ire of his chief supervisor from Warsaw, the head of the commissariat, Major Wrzos.

Intrator, as a communist, was obliged to treat private merchant activities with at least distrust. In 1947, private commerce was still allowed by the communists, but it was looked upon with great suspicion, as a necessary evil. The communists strove to limit the role of private commerce at the expense of cooperative and state commercial institutions. Nevertheless, Intrator, as the Commissar for Productivisation, defended and supported private Jewish artisans and merchants no less than members of the cooperative sector. Even more so, he felt obliged to help Zionists, the main rivals of communists on the "Jewish Street", or orthodox Jews, including religious functionaries. When, in January 1947, the regional office tried to take a blacksmith's workshop from Dzierżoniów's Poalei Zion kibbutz, this takeover was stopped due to Intrator's intervention.[62] He also helped a fresh immigrant from Palestine, who was a tailor, to get a sewing machine that enabled the latter to work. One of Intrator's greatest achievements was helping the local branch of the ORT to take over a former German farm and create from it a model farm that attracted Jewish agricultural trainees from all over Poland. At the same time, Intrator also helped one of Dzierżoniów's Jewish flymen, who worked as a private entrepreneur, to reduce the amount of tax and the high concession payment that was requested by the local authorities. [63]

As it was in the case of cooperatives, in the case of the private Jewish sector, Intrator was not only bravely confronting the local state and municipal authorities and professional elites, but he was also not shying away from accusing them of anti-semitism when he thought that that was the case. And this was a serious allegation. This happened in the case of Judah Tennebaum, who was running a haberdashery retail shop in Dzierżoniów, and to whom the Local Crafts Chamber, without giving any official reason, refused to grant a permit that would entitle him to buy his merchandise from state factories.[64] In his October 1946 monthly report, Intrator took the side of all of the Jewish merchants in his area, and underlined the "anti-Jewish stance" of the local tax office.[65] In another case, Intrator defended the Jewish inhabitants of Dzierżoniów from the arbitrary decisions of local "citizens' militia" (the official name of the police in the communist state).[66]

Perhaps the most interesting case which says a great deal about Polish-Jewish relations in early post-war Poland was that of a *shoyhet* (Jewish ritual butcher) from Bielawa, a town neighbouring Dzierżoniów. This case reveals the persistence not only of medieval, old anti-Jewish superstitions, but also the fact that some Polish, communist state officials were even able to use a law from the pre-1939 Polish state that was officially condemned by the communists to support these superstitions and to discriminate against the Jews. On 18 November 1946, the militia arrested the *shoyhet* of Bielawa's orthodox Jewish community. The legal basis of his arrest was the infamous 1937 anti-Jewish law which seriously limited Jewish ritual animal slaugh-

62 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/698, k. 221.
63 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/698, k. 45–46.
64 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/698, k. 19.
65 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/698, k. 78.
66 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/698, k. 44.

ter.[67] The arrest was made by the militia at the request of the Wrocław regional Veterinary Office. Intrator had at first intervened with the Dzierżoniów County office. When this did not bring the expected results, he went to the county office of the Security Police: his intervention was successful and the *shoyhet* was set free.[68]

This part of how Intrator understood and performed his duty as the county commissar was at odds with the philosophy of the institution that employed him. As stated earlier, one of its main goals was to strengthen the state's control over the Jewish community. This goal was an expression of the partial distrust of and discontent with the work done on the "Jewish street" by Jewish Committees (including their communist members). County commissariats were meant to fight the anti-Jewish prejudice of members of the local administration, strengthen the employment of the Jews in particular branches of the economy, and also to weaken all the elements of Jewish life that stood in the way of Polish Jewish citizens' road to socialism. The help that Intrator gave to Zionist or religious functionaries, as well as to Jewish merchants, transcended his official tasks. In fact, what was ultimately at odds with the philosophy of the communist party, the communist-dominated state, and the Commissariat for the Productivisation of the Jewish Population of Poland, was that Simcha Intrator played the role of intercessor of the whole of the Jewish community in his area. The way in which he did that had some elements of the old Eastern European tradition of Jewish mediation and intercessorship, the *shtadlanut*. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this position was held by Jews due to their various individual, social, cultural, or financial capital, having special relations with non-Jewish authorities and being intercessors for their communities. According to Scott Ury:

> The *shatdlan* was expect to pose a wealth of knowledge concerning the customs, language, and balance of power in the non-Jewish world (…) he was also required to be a respected, well-known individual who would be welcomed by the relevant powers (…) the *shatdlan* was to combine all of these qualities as he bravely represented the Jewish community before the ruling bodies, skilfully circumvented ruling disasters and intervened to rescue the Jewish community from imminent danger.[69]

Intrator had acted according to the traditional norm of *klal Israel* (the whole people of Israel), that is, acting for all of the Jewish communities and all of its individual members in need, regardless of internal differences due to stances and views. What was superior was the ethno-religious loyalty to the group.

In Intrator's work as a commissar in Dzierżoniów, this "Jewish commitment" clashed with his communist and state one. He was rather defending members of his community than acting to strengthen state control over it and the community's radical transformation. We do not know a lot about Simcha Intrator. From his personal file stored in the archival documentation of the Lower Silesian branch of the commissariat, we know that during his work in Dzierżoniów he was a young, twenty-seven-year-old man. He had a wife but no children.[70] It is very plausible that, as a Jewish teenager in the 1930s, and like many other members of his generation, he already held radical, leftist political views, albeit not necessarily communist ones. Like all of his other Jewish peers at the time, he strongly felt antisemitism and anti-Jewish discrimination, especially in education and on the labour market, which was a general charac-

67 Melzer, *No Way Out …*, 81–94.
68 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/714, k. 117; APWr, 311 UWW, VI/698, k. 10.
69 Scott Ury, "The Shtadlan of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: Noble Advocate or Unbridled Opportunist?", *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 15 (2002): 276.
70 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/707, k. 631.

teristic of the Jewish experience in interwar Poland.[71] The Second World War started when he was aged nineteen. Like over one million Jews living in Eastern Poland, he found himself living under Soviet occupation. Like many young Jews from lower social classes with experiences of structural discrimination in interwar Poland, Intrator used opportunities created by the new Soviet reality, pursuing higher, university education. Until 1941 and the German invasion of the Soviet Union, he had managed to finish two years of historical studies in a pedagogical institute (the exact place was not indicated in his personal file). We do not have any information about his party belonging at the time or how he survived the rest of war but, most probably, as in the cases of most of the surviving Jews, it happened deep in the interior of the Soviet Union. Intrator became a member of the Polish Workers' Party in 1946, after his return to Poland. The fact that he was not a stereotypical communist who renounced his Jewish identity over a communist and Polish one, but that he knew Yiddish and was an adherent of the *Nusekh Poyln* ideology, that he combined a Jewish national and Yiddish cultural identity with communism, is indicated not only by his behaviour in Dzierżoniów, but also by what happened later.[72] His work not only for the sake of communism, but also his devotion to Yiddish Jewish national culture in Poland, was noticed by none other than Yaacov Egit, who in the years from 1945 to 1950 was the head of the Jewish Regional Committee. After his move to Wrocław, Intrator made a fast, spectacular career, advancing to become secretary of this institution, and holding this position until it was dissolved by the government in 1950.[73]

Before that, in 1946 and 1947, Intrator's tenure as Dzierżoniów County's commissar was highly prized by his Lower Silesian supervisor, Zygmunt Gersin. When the commissariat was liquidated in the summer of 1947, Gersin sent to Warsaw an evaluation of all forty-one of his subordinates. Intrator was placed first in the report, as one of six Lower Silesian commissariat employees who excelled in their work. The report underlined his organisational skills, "above average level of work", and "great skills and tact in dealing with people".[74] That was very important especially in the context of that what which had occurred half a year before, in December 1946, only three months after Intrator's work as Dzierżoniów's commissar. At that time, he was fired from his position, but he returned to it only a few days after. On the basis of existing documentation, we can only speculate how he returned and who helped him to do so. But we know for sure why he was fired. This happened under the order of the leading Polish commissar, Major Wrzos. In his sharp instruction sent to Intrator's Wrocław superior, Zygmunt Gersin, Wrzos wrote:

> Against my clear recommendation, in hiring proposals that I have recently received [from Regional Commissariats], I am not finding former state officials, but random candidates, and even worse, of Jewish nationality (…) I have nothing against hiring Jews as office assistants or physical workers, but I absolutely cannot agree on hiring them in administrative positions, as county or regional Commissars, even if these are the best candidates.

71 Kenneth B. Moss, *An Unchosen People: Jewish Political Reckoning in Interwar Poland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021); Kamil Kijek, *Dzieci modernizmu: świadomość, kultura i socjalizacja polityczna młodzieży żydowskiej w II Rzeczypospolitej* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2017).

72 For the ramifications of the *Nusekh Poyln* ideology, see Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikov, *A Citizen of Yiddishland: Dovid Sfard and the Jewish Communist Milieu in Poland* (Berlin: Peter Langm, 2020); August Grabski and Martyna Rusiniak, "Żydowscy komuniści po Holokauście wobec języków polskiego żydostwa", in *Nusech Pojln. Studia z dziejów kultury jidysz w powojennej Polsce*, ed. Magdalena Ruta (Budapest and Kraków: Austeria, 2008), 53–64.

73 Jacob Egit, *Grand Illusion* (Toronto: Lugus, 1991), 75.

74 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/694, k. 14; APWr, 311 UWW, VI/707, k. 618.

Wrzos then continued that every appointment to this kind of position that concerned a person of Jewish nationality required his special permission. The reason for this obvious national discrimination was the fact that Jews in this position could be "biased in their work".[75] This instruction was the reason why Intrator was fired. His *shtadlan* way of performing his duties in Dzierżoniów was openly at odds with the views of Wrzos and other Polish communists. They simply did not believe that Jews could really "productivise" themselves and get rid of "unsocialist" traditions and ways of life. There is also no doubt that Intrator, upon returning to his position after a few days, continued exactly what he was doing before, defending and acting in the interest of all of the Jews in his area, thus manifesting his ethno-national identity and solidarity. He finally left his position, voluntarily, at the end of February 1947, justifying his decision with the opportunity to finish his university education in Wrocław.[76] His replacement, Artur Halbersztad, was also Jewish.[77] That means that it was not Intrator's nationality but the way that he had expressed it as commissar that brought the ire of Major Wrzos.

Conclusion: Continuation and Jewish Subjectivity in Early Post-Holocaust Poland

Simcha Intrator's short tenure as County Commissar for the Productivisation of the Jewish Population, against the will of the creators of this institution, did not weaken but strengthened Jewish subjectivity in the Dzierżoniów area. The reasons for this probably lay in the personal views of Intrator and his own identity. However, it seems that the most crucial factor was the direct surroundings of Intrator's activity, the Dzierżoniów milieu, one of the few of those kind that existed in early post-war Lower Silesia. It was this milieu that allowed Intrator to translate his personal identity into public activity. This activity encompassed staunch support for pluralistic Jewish life in the area, from the cooperative sector to small, individual commerce, religious activity, and Zionist institutions.

Existence of this kind of pluralistic, rich Jewish life in Dzierżoniów was characterised by the continuation of elements of pre-war socio-cultural traditions in post-Holocaust reality.[78] This continuation had an important political meaning. Its centrality limited the implementation of the Soviet model of relations between the communist state and the Jewish community, whereby the former was controlling all the aspects of life of the latter and deprived the latter of its subjectivity.[79] The case of Intrator's activity shows how a dense network of social institutions, personal ties, norms, and values could divert the real function of a communist state institution to

75 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/707, k. 162.
76 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/707, k. 621.
77 APWr, 311 UWW, VI/707, k. 560.
78 Kijek, "'A New Life?'".
79 The same thing happened in the Soviet Union itself. In former shtetls of the former tsarist Pale of Settlement, as well as in some cities with a compact, significant Jewish population, as in Minsk, before 1939 as well as after 1945, elements of the continuation of pre-revolutionary ways of life impeded the transformation of the local Jewish population into a completely Soviet model. Elissa Bemporad, *Becoming Soviet Jews: The Bolshevik Experiment in Minsk* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013); *Shtetl XXI viek. Poleviye isledovaniya*, eds. Valery Dimshitz, Alexander Lvov, and Alla Sokolova (St. Petersburg: Isdatielstvo Evreyskogo Univiersitieta v Sankt-Petersburgie, 2008); Valery Dymshitz, "On the Borders of Legality: Connections between Traditional Culture and the Informal Economy in Jewish Life in the Soviet Provinces", *Jewish Lives under Communism* …, 54–70; Anna Kushkova, "An Essay on the Jewish Ethnic Economy: The Case of Belz, Moldova", *European Jewish Affairs* 43, no.1 (2013): 77–100.

serve other goals than the one planned by the institution's creators. The microhistorical example of Simcha Intrator's work in Dzierżoniów attests to a similar phenomenon that has recently been masterfully analysed by Andrew Kornbluth in relation to the early post-war legal system in Poland. Despite all the efforts of the communists to subjugate the Polish judiciary, the social ties, traditions, norms, and values sustained by the Polish lawyers trained in the interwar era stood in the way of its full subjugation (which also meant that they were reluctant to prosecute the crimes which ethnic Poles committed against their Jewish neighbours during the Holocaust).[80] Despite the magnitude of the Second World War and the Holocaust's destruction, not only ethnic Poles, but also Polish Jews, retained something of their prewar past that gave them some degree of subjectivity in the communist present. This included not only political pluralism, a strong presence of Zionism, and religious life but, as this case study shows – and in specific milieus like Dzierżoniów, which were characterised by a special institutional and demographical density of Jewish life – a prewar Jewish past with its norms and values, which could influence the activities even of state communist institutions such as the Commissariat for the Productivisation of the Jewish Population.

Acknowledgement

The research conducted for this article was supported by the Narodowe Centrum Nauki (grant number 2018/31/B/HS3/00228 — "Ostatnie polskie sztetl? Społeczność żydowska Dzierżoniowa, świat żydowski, zimna wojna i komunizm (1945–1950)"), the Gerda Henkel Stiftung, and the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies.

80 Andrew Kornbluth, *The August Trials: The Holocaust and Postwar Justice in Poland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021).

Bibliography

Aleksiun, Natalia. *Dokąd dalej? Ruch syjonistyczny w Polsce (1944–1950)*. Warsaw: ŻIH, 2002.

Bauer, Yehuda. *Flight and Rescue: Brichah. The Organized Escape of the Jewish Survivors of Eastern Europe, 1944–1948*. New York: Random House, 1970.

Bemporad, Elissa. *Becoming Soviet Jews: The Bolshevik Experiment in Minsk*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013.

Cichopek-Gajraj, Anna. *Beyond Violence. Jewish Survivors in Poland and Slovakia, 1944–1948*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Dymshitz, Valery. "On the Borders of Legality: Connections between Traditional Culture and the Informal Economy in Jewish Life in the Soviet Provinces." In *Jewish Lives under Communism: New Perspectives*, edited by Katerina Capkova and Kamil Kijek, 54-70. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2022.

Egit, Jacob. *Grand Illusion*. Toronto: Lugus, 1991.

Egit, Yaacov. *Tzu a nay Leben (tsvay yor yiddisher yishev in Nidershlezye)*. Wrocław: Nidershlezye, 1947.

Engel, David. *Bein shichrur lebricha: Nitzolei hashoah bepolin vehamaavak al hanhagtam, 1944–1946*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1996.

Engel, David. "Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1944–1946." *Yad Vashem Studies* 26, (1998): 43–85.

Grabski, August. *Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce (1944–1950). Historia polityczna*. Warszawa: ŻIH, 2015.

Grabski, August and Albert Stankowski, "Życie religijne społeczności żydowskiej." In *Następstwa Zagłady Żydów: Polska 1944–2010*, edited by Feliks Tych and Monika Adamczyk Garbowska, 215–244. Lublin: UMCS, ŻIH, 2012.

Grabski, August and Martyna Rusiniak, "Żydowscy komuniści po Holokauście wobec języków polskiego żydostwa." In *Nusech Pojln. Studia z dziejów kultury jidysz w powojennej Polsce*, edited by Magdalena Ruta, 53–64. Budapest and Kraków: Austeria, 2008.

Grynberg, Michał. *Żydowska spółdzielczość pracy w Polsce w latach 1945–1949*. Warsaw: PWN, 1986.

Gross, Jan T. *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Gutman, Yisrael. "Polish Antisemitism between the Wars: An Overview." In *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, edited by Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, Jehuda Reinhartz, and Chone Schmeruk, 97–108. Waltham, MA: University Press of New England, 1989.

Karlip, Joshua M. *The Tragedy of a Generation: The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism in Eastern Europe*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kendziorek, Piotr. *Program i praktyka produktywizacji Żydów Polskich w działalności CKŻP*. Warsaw: ŻIH, 2016.

Kenney, Padraic. *Budowanie Polski Ludowej. Robotnicy a komuniści 1945–1950*. Warsaw: WAB, 2015.

Kersten, Krystyna. *Narodziny systemu władzy. Polska 1943–1948*. Lublin: [samisdat], 1989.

Kichelewski, Audrey. *Ocalali. Żydzi polscy po Zagładzie*. Warsaw: ŻIH, 2021.

Kijek, Kamil. "A New Life?: The Pre-Holocaust Past and Post-Holocaust Present in the Life of Jewish Community of Dzierżoniów, Lower Silesia, 1945–50." In *Jewish Lives under Communism: New Perspectives*, edited by Katerina Capkova and Kamil Kijek, 15–34. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2022.

Kijek, Kamil. *Dzieci modernizmu: świadomość, kultura i socjalizacja polityczna młodzieży żydowskiej w II Rzeczypospolitej*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2017.

Kijek, Kamil. "Only Ashes? Jewish Visitors to the New Poland in 1946 and the Future of Polish Jewry", *Journal of Modern European History*, 20.1 (2022): 111–126.

Kornbluth, Andrew. *The August Trials: The Holocaust and Postwar Justice in Poland*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021.

Kushkova, Anna. "An Essay on the Jewish Ethnic Economy: The Case of Belz, Moldova", *European Jewish Affairs* 43.1 (2013): 77–100.

Lavi, Bezalel, "The Community Which 'Sat on Suticases' (Dzierżoniów)", *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów*, 262.2 (2017): 245–271.

Melzer, Emanuel. *No Way Out: The Politics of Polish Jewry, 1935–1939* . Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1997.

Mendelsohn, Ezra. *Zionism in Poland: The Formative Years, 1915–1926*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

Moss, Kenneth B. *An Unchosen People: Jewish Political Reckoning in Interwar Poland*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021.

Nalewajko-Kulikov, Joanna. *A Citizen of Yiddishland: Dovid Sfard and the Jewish Communist Milieu in Poland*. Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020.

Novick, Pesach. *Eyrope tsvishn milchome un sholem: Rayze bilder, batrachtungen*. New York: Ikof Ferlag, 1948.

Silber, Marcos. "One of Them' as 'One of Us': Jewish Demands for National Autonomy as a Means to Achieve Civic Equality during the First World War", *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 34 (2022): 321–344.

Shanes, Joshua. *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Shlomi, Hanna. *Osefet mechkarim le toldot shearit ha plita ha yehudim be Polin 1944–1950*. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2001.

Shtetl XXI viek. Poleviye isledovaniya, edited by Valery Dimshitz, Alexander Lvov and Alla Sokolova. St. Petersburg: Isdatielstvo Evreyskogo Univiersitieta v Sankt-Petersburgie, 2008.

Smolar, Hersh. *Oyf di letzter pozicye mi de letzter hofnung*. Tel Aviv: I.L. Peretz Ferlag, 1982.

Sommer Schneider, Anna. *Sze'erit hapleta. Ocaleni z Zagłady. Działalność American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee w Polsce w latach 1945–1989*. Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2014.

Stankowski, Albert. "Nowe spojrzenie na statystyki dotyczące emigracji Żydów z Polski po 1944 roku." In *Studia z dziejów Żydów w Polsce po 1945 r.*, edited by Grzegorz Berendt, August Grabski and Albert Stankowski, 103–151. Warsaw: ŻIH, 2010.

Szaynok, Bożena. *Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku 1945–1950*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2000.

Tokarska-Bakir, Joanna. *Okrzyki Pogromowe. Szkice z antropologii historycznej Polski lat 1939–1946*. Wołowiec: Czarne, 2012.

Tokarska-Bakir, Joanna. *Pod klątwą. Społeczny portret pogrom kieleckiego*, vol. 1–2. Warsaw: Czarna Owca, 2018.

Ury, Scott. "The Shtadlan of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: Noble Advocate or Unbridled Opportunist?", *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 15 (2002): 267–299.

Wohl, Shmuel Leo. *Mein reise kein Varshe*. New York: [self-published], 1947.

Żbikowski, Andrzej."Morderstwa popełniane na Żydach w pierwszych latach po wojnie." In *Następstwa Zagłady Żydów: Polska 1944–2010*, edited by Feliks Tych and Monika Adamczyk Garbowska, 71–94. Lublin: UMCS, ŻIH, 2012.

Żyndul, Jolanta. *Państwo w państwie: autonomia narodowo-kulturalna w Europie środkowowschodniej w XX wieku*. Warsaw: DiG, 2000.

Kamil Kijek is an Assistant Professor at the Jewish Studies Department, University of Wrocław, Poland. He was a Prins Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for Jewish History in New York, and a Sosland Family Fellow at the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. Between March and August 2022 he was a Gerda Henkel Research Fellow at the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies. His research interest include Central-East European Jewish History at the end of the XIX and in the XX century as well as social and cultural theory. In 2018, he received an international prize for his book *Dzieci Modernizmu* granted by the Leonid Nevzlin Research Center for Russian and East-European Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for the best publication on the topic of Jews and Illiberal Regimes in Eastern Europe after 1917.
Email: kamil.kijek@uwr.edu.pl

Quotation: Kamil Kijek, Jewish 'Shtadlan' in Communist Poland? A Microstudy of the Historical Continuation and Paradoxes of Jewish Communal Subjectivity, in S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods. Documentation. 10 (2023) 3, 4–25.

https://doi.org/10.23777/sn.0323/art_kkij01

S:I.M.O.N.– Shoah: Intervention. Methods. DocumentatiON. is the semi-annual open access e-journal of the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI) in English and German.

ISSN 2408-9192 | 10 (2023) 3 | https://doi.org/10.23777/sn.0323