

## Antisemitism, “Economic Emancipation” and the Lithuanian Co-operative Movement before World War I

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### Abstract:

*The idea of having to liberate the Christian peasants from the harmful economic and moral influence of Jewish merchants was an essential element of the political agenda of both the secular intelligentsia and the Catholic clergy. Activists of both political camps started founding cooperative shops, which were seen as the most promising tool to “emancipate” the peasants and the founding of which became legally possible after a streak of reforms shortly before the Russian Revolution of 1905/06. The article thus poses the questions of what role antisemitism played in the cooperatives, what tasks these cooperatives were supposed to fulfill and whether they were a success or not. The article comes to the conclusion that after the Revolution, there was a significant dissent between the two groups mentioned: While priests argued that cooperatives needed to be antisemitic in order to be successful, the liberal intelligentsia countered that antisemitism deterred cooperative shops from being economically successful. Both groups, however, celebrated the founding of such shops as a means for Lithuanians to gain foot in the Jewish dominated towns.*

### 1. Introduction

“Would it not be good if Lithuanians lived in the cities and in the towns, Lithuanians in the villages, Lithuanians on the estates; artisans, manufacturers and merchants, if they all were Lithuanians, and if everywhere only the Lithuanian language resounded.”<sup>1</sup> The author, a Lithuanian priest, complained bitterly about the marginalization of the Lithuanian peasantry. For both the secular intelligentsia and the clergy at the turn of the century, Lithuanian history since the Union of Lublin 1569, but particularly since the Partitions of Poland in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, represented a history of losses on all levels. Firstly, Lithuania had lost its statehood to Russia, secondly, Lithuanian culture was found to be on the verge of disappearance due to what was perceived as a long process of systematic polonization, and thirdly, the Lithuanians were perceived to have been socially and economically not only marginalized, but to be firmly in the grip of Jewish merchants. The “economic emancipation” of the Lithuanian peasants thus became an essential pillar both for Lithuanian nationalism and for the social efforts of the clergy.

This article will analyze the debate on “economic emancipation” as well as the attempts to implement these policies. After an introduction into the general

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<sup>1</sup> *Tėvynės sargas*, 1 (1904): 67.

historical context, two phases of the debate will be distinguished. Firstly, the discussion of the “economic emancipation” in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century will be analyzed. The second part will deal with the continuation of the debate under fundamentally different circumstances, that is, with the onset of the co-operative movement. Here, I will concentrate on disagreements between the intelligentsia and the Catholic movement, thus discussing the following questions: 1. What was the role of antisemitism in the debate of “economic emancipation” and in the co-operative movement? 2. What tasks did the intelligentsia and the clergy assign to the consumer co-operatives? 3. In how far can we speak of a success or a failure of the consumer co-operatives?

The emergence of the Lithuanian co-operative movement was made possible by two waves of reform (the first in 1897 and the second in 1904), preceding the outbreak of the 1905 revolution and aiming especially at facilitating the formation of associations. According to Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, the motivation for founding associations in the Russian Empire was mainly fed by “doubts regarding the legitimacy of the autocratic regime,” thus giving them a significant role in the development of a civil society.<sup>2</sup> Where local self-administration existed only on a low level – rural units of self-administration, the *zemstva*, were never introduced in Lithuania – civil society drew “its operational strength and attractiveness in comparison to other socio-political conceptions and formations not least from different forms of social self-organization”<sup>3</sup>. The definition of civil society, which has proven feasible for the Russian Empire, will be that of Joseph Bradley: civil society “may be briefly defined as the network of human relationships and institutions outside the direct control of the state that structure individual actions and allow private persons, unconnected by personal attachments, to manage their affairs.”<sup>4</sup>

For the analysis of co-operative movements and their relationship to the Jewry, two approaches may be distinguished: one that focuses on the role of nationalism in the movements, and one that rather emphasizes the discovery of the peasantry as a political factor. Torsten Lorenz observed a symbiosis of co-operatives and national movements in Eastern Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which became so inextricably close that it came to be regarded as “natural” after World War I.<sup>5</sup> His typology is closely linked to Miroslav Hroch’s model

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<sup>2</sup> Stefan-Ludwig Hofmann, *Geselligkeit und Demokratie. Vereine und zivile Gesellschaft im transnationalen Vergleich 1750-1914*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 103 f.

<sup>3</sup> Kirsten Bönker, *Jenseits der Metropolen. Öffentlichkeit und Lokalpolitik im Gouvernement Saratov (1890 – 1914)*, (Cologne: Böhlau, 2010), 337. For support of Bönker’s claim see also, Lutz Häfner, *Gesellschaft als lokale Veranstaltung. Die Wolgastädte Kazan’ und Saratov (1870 – 1914)*, (Köln: Böhlau, 2004); Alexis Hofmeister, *Selbstorganisation und Bürgerlichkeit. Jüdisches Vereinswesen in Odessa um 1900*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Bradley, *Voluntary associations in Tsarist Russia. Science, patriotism, and civil society*, (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Torsten Lorenz, introduction to *Cooperatives in ethnic conflicts. Eastern Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century*, ed. Torsten Lorenz, (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2006), 17.

of the development of national movements.<sup>6</sup> Lorenz distinguishes a “transitional phase,” in which co-operatives recruit members rather on the basis of their professional and social belonging than on the basis of nationality. Subsequently, with the rise of the intelligentsia, in the “segregational phase,” the national idea gains in importance – a process which may be slowed down by government intervention, as in the case of the Russian Empire, where the lack of a legal framework impeded the formation of co-operatives before the Revolution of 1905/06. The third phase of “initial mobilization,” which is coined by the causal relationship of capitalist permeation and the expansion of agricultural enterprises, is followed by a fourth and final phase – the “phase of continuing mobilization and state intervention”, which marks the transition to the economic nationalism of the interwar period.<sup>7</sup> With reference to agrarian circles in the Habsburg crownland of Galicia and co-operatives in the national movements in the Baltic governorates, Lorenz states that “anti-Semitism was a significant element of co-operative propaganda in Eastern Europe.”<sup>8</sup>

In his study of antisemitism and co-operatives in the Kurhessen region in the German Empire, David Peal has analyzed co-operatives as “alternative means of combatting usury as it was understood in the German countryside in the late nineteenth century”. Like the activists of “political anti-Semitism”, Raiffeisen co-operativists had found usury to be the main culprit for the economic plight of the Kurhessen peasantry. Usury discourse and co-operative movement came to function as a link between antisemitism and anti-capitalism. Raiffeisen co-operative activists had warned not to equate usurers and Jews; for anti-Semites, however, “freedom of usury” (*Wucherfreiheit*) became the “surrogate for the emancipation from the Jews.”<sup>10</sup> For a transnational contextualization of the Lithuanian co-operative movement, this approach needs to be taken into account as well – despite the obvious differences between Lithuania and the German Empire, of which the level of sociality as a result of democratization and the legal emancipation of the German Jews are merely the most striking ones.

To analyze the debate of “economic emancipation” and the co-operative movement in Lithuania, the nature of the sphere of daily interactions between Lithuanians and Jews in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century needs to be taken

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<sup>6</sup> Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe. A Comparative Analysis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> Lorenz, “Cooperatives in ethnic conflicts,” 20-24. See also, *Wirtschaftsnationalismus als Entwicklungsstrategie ostmitteleuropäischer Eliten. Die böhmischen Länder und die Tschechoslowakei in vergleichender Perspektive.*, ed. Eduard Kubů and Helga Schultz, (Prag and Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Lorenz, “Cooperatives in ethnic conflicts,” 11.

<sup>9</sup> David Peal, “Antisemitism by Other Means? The Rural Cooperative Movement in Late Nineteenth-Century Germany,” *Hostages of Modernization. Studies on Modern Antisemitism 1879 – 1933/39*, ed. Herbert A. Strauss, (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 128-149, 128.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

into account, as it had been fundamentally altered by Russian social and nationality politics compared to the times of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The power of the nobility had been significantly weakened, the serfs had been emancipated. Industrialization and urbanization had found their ways into Lithuania, although to a significantly weaker degree than in other parts of the Russian Empire. Sporadically, people of Lithuanian peasant origin had taken up professions in the towns and cities and enjoyed university education in Warsaw, St. Petersburg, Moscow or even abroad. However, compared to the rest of the Empire, the Lithuanian nobility still owned relatively large land properties, and peasants had received relatively small ones.<sup>11</sup> The result was the creation of dependent small farmers and of poor farmers without any land at all. Furthermore, as a result of the Polish uprising and the subsequent repressive measures against Poles and Catholic priests and the lack of presence of the Russian nobility, *zemstva* were never introduced in Lithuania.<sup>12</sup>

For the Lithuanian Jews, after a promising start<sup>13</sup>, the division of Poland meant being deprived of fundamental rights and privileges, which resulted in impoverishment and demographic shifts. The wide-spread supposition that “unproductive” Jews were harming “productive” peasants, which had been prevalent in Poland-Lithuania already, became state policy and found its most extreme manifestation in the creation of the Pale of Settlement, which included Lithuania and out of the borders of which Jews were not allowed to settle.

In Lithuania, Jews accounted for around 14% of the entire population, but for nearly 50% of the urban population and in some towns for more than 80%. The majority of them consisted of petty merchants and artisans. The Lithuanians, in contrast, accounted for around 96% of the rural population.<sup>14</sup> Lithuanian farmers and Jews thus came into contact mainly to do trade. Jewish

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<sup>11</sup> Prior to World War I, 45% of all land in the governorate of Kovno and 48% in the governorate of Vil'na were still owned by the nobility. In the governorate of Suwałki, which belonged to Vistula Land, the share was significantly lower, with 23,8% of all land owned by the nobility. Pranė Dundulienė, *Žemdirbystė Lietuvoje. Nuo seniausių laikų iki 1917 metų*, (Vilnius: Valstybinė politinė ir mokslinė literatūros leidykla, 1963).

<sup>12</sup> Andreas Kappeler, *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich. Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall*, (München: Beck, 1992), 209; Theodore R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia. Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914*, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 132.

<sup>13</sup> Alexei Miller states that particularly the period following the first partition of Poland (1772-1790), after the Russian Empire had gained territories with a relatively small Jewish population, “demonstrated the tendency on the part of the authorities toward emancipation and integration of the relatively scarce Jewish subjects of the empire,” and Jews could “consider their situation in the Russian Empire as decisively advantageous compared to the situation in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in its late stages.” Alexei Miller, “The Romanov Empire and the Jews,” *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism. Essays in the Methodology of Historical Research*, ed. Alexei Miller, (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2008), 93-136, here 98.

<sup>14</sup> *Die Nationalitäten des Russischen Reiches in der Volkszählung von 1897*, vol. B, eds. Henning Bauer, Andreas Kappeler, Brigitte Roth (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1991), 69-76, 156, 197.

peddlers frequently visited farmsteads and estates to sell items for everyday use and thus became firmly established figures in Lithuanian village culture.<sup>15</sup> The more conflict-prone encounter was when Lithuanian peasants came to the *shtetls* to sell agricultural products and buy tools, fertilizer, alcohol etc. Furthermore, peasants would flood the towns on Sundays and on church holidays, as this was where the parish churches were located. On such days, the majority situation was diametrically shifted. Brawls frequently arose on the marketplace when both sides accused each other of fraud, which often resulted in injuries and smashed market stands.<sup>16</sup> The marketplace was thus not only the main zone of contact between Lithuanians and Jews, but also the main zone of conflict. At the same time it was influenced by multiple other factors, particularly when a visit to the market square was preceded by the attendance of a church mass and/or the consumption of alcohol in a Jewish inn. While market days were not *per se* prone to conflict, they could instill fear in the Jewish population of the *shtetls* as it was faced with a large and sometimes volatile crowd of peasants, while the peasants felt they were in a foreign environment, the rules of which they could not fully understand. In the case of anti-Jewish riots, market stands and Jewish shops were most likely to be attacked first and foremost. Even in the case of a ritual-murder accusation – which still happened frequently in Lithuania at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century –, it was not the synagogue that was attacked in the first place, but shops and other economic facilities.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. The debate on “economic emancipation” (1883-1904)

Members of the intelligentsia, although they only half-heartedly rejected such physical conflicts, advocated a different way of coping with what they perceived to be a total dependence on Jewish traders. “If a small Jewish shop is being smashed from time to time, then this will not bring our people their own shops, then our people will not manage to shake off the Jews”<sup>18</sup>, the liberal newspaper “The Farmer” (*Ūkininkas*) wrote in 1900. Starting with the newspaper “Dawn” (*Ausra*), it was, however, particularly its successor “The Bell” (*Varpas*), which started advocating an “economic emancipation” of the

<sup>15</sup> Gerhard Bauer/Manfred Klein, *Das Alte Litauen. Dörfliches Leben zwischen 1861 und 1914*, (Köln: Böhlau, 1998), 278 ff. For a detailed literary depiction of a Jewish peddler see Šatrijos Ragana’s autobiographical novel “On the Old Estate.” Marija Pečkauskaitė (Šatrijos ragana), “Sename dvare (1922),” *Raštai*, vol. 1, ed. Marija Pečkauskaitė (Šatrijos ragana), (Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2006), 237-423, 272 and ff.

<sup>16</sup> Yaffa Eliach, *There once was a World. A 900-year Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eiszbysbok*, (Philadelphia: Little, Brown & Co, 1998), 324.

<sup>17</sup> Vilma Žaltauskaitė, “Smurtas prieš žydus Šiaurės Lietuvoje 1900 metais. Įvykiai ir interpretacijos,” *Kai ksenofobija virsta prievarta. Lietuvių ir žydų santykių dinamika XIX a. – XX a. pirmojoje pusėje*, ed. Vladas Sirutavičius/Darius Staliūnas, (Vilnius: Lietuvos Istorijos Institutas Leidykla, 2005), 79-98, 86.

<sup>18</sup> *Ūkininkas*, 10, 1900, 146.

Lithuanians from the Jews. According to its editors, the aim of emancipation could only be reached by the creation of a Lithuanian merchant class in order to complete the socially “unfinished” Lithuanian nation. At first, this debate was dominated by sons of wealthier peasants, who had studied in Warsaw, where they had come into contact with positivism and “organic work.”<sup>19</sup> The concept of “organic work” had been developed after the Polish uprising of 1863 and aimed at strengthening the nation through education and organization of the people. In Poland, it had from the first moment on included demands that the Jews be economically superseded.<sup>20</sup> This also became one of the main postulations of the Lithuanian national movement, the others being the dissociation from Polish culture and, later on, the struggle against the Russian administration. In 1889, Jonas Beržanskis wrote in a programmatic article:

“The Lithuanian is sinking into poverty, but the Shlomo is growing and growing [...]. Can our people not do the same as the Jew [...]? After all, the Lithuanian can weigh, transport and sell his crops himself [...]. Who needs these middlemen, who needs these foreigners [...]? The Lithuanians need to achieve what the Jews, Russians and others have achieved already. This means that the Lithuanians will need to think, wake up, open their eyes and blossom [...]. We lack courage! Is this not strange? We look at trade as if it were something wrongful.”<sup>21</sup>

The members of the intelligentsia were not the first who wanted to organize the peasants against the Lithuanian Jews. Already in the 1860s, priests under the helm of the bishop of Samogitia had launched a strong temperance movement, which had managed to organize a significant number of Christian peasants for a longer period of time, using the dense network of Catholic parishes.<sup>22</sup> The liberal and secular intelligentsia, being numerically weak and eager to leave the countryside to move into the larger cities, found it more difficult to develop a concept of how to keep in contact with the rural population. While they claimed the leadership of the “Lithuanian awakening”, they bluntly admitted that realistically the priests, who resided in the

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<sup>19</sup> On the development of the notion of “organic work” cf. Tibor Iván Berend, *History Derailed. Central and Eastern Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 99-102.

<sup>20</sup> In 1888, Vincas Kudirka and Lithuanian fellow students founded the “Lithuanian Association” (*Lietuvos draugija*) in Warsaw, which advocated the “a) dissemination of knowledge on the improvement of agriculture [...]; b) advancement of artisanship; c) expansion into trade.” Juozas Gabrys, “Biografija,” *Raštai*, vol. 1, ed. Vincas Kudirka, (Tilsit: O. v. Mauderodės spaustuvė, 1909), 21 ff.

<sup>21</sup> *Varpas* 7 (1889): 97-99.

<sup>22</sup> See Antanas Alekna, *Žemaičių Vyskupas Motiejus Valančius.*, (Klaipėda: Spauda “Lituanijos,” 1922), 200; Saulius A. Girnius, “Bishop Motiejus Valančius. A Man for all Seasons.,” *Lituanus* 22, 2 (1976): 5-28, here 19; Vytautas Merkys, *Motiejus Valančius. Tarp katalikiškojo universalizmo ir tautiškuo.*, (Vilnius: Mintis, 1999), 334 ff.

countryside, “can achieve a lot more, as they have the largest influence on the people.”<sup>23</sup> At the same time, they warned that “the intelligentsia must not become too detached”<sup>24</sup> from the peasantry.

The motivations of the priests to organize the peasants economically were much less homogenous. Some considered it a traditional task of the parish to help illiterate and uneducated peasants with economic issues. Some – but far from all of them – preached religious prejudices and were eager to limit the influence of Jewish traders.<sup>25</sup> A large number of priests also pursued a concept of “Lithuanianness” not unlike that of the intelligentsia and co-operated with them to a high extent.<sup>26</sup> Many priests also followed the call of the 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which urged priests to get involved in modern social issues. While, the stance of the liberal intelligentsia changed after the turn of the century as a result of pre-revolutionary tensions and its focus shifted from the Jews as enemies towards the Russian administration, part of the clergy remained stout regarding the question of “economic emancipation,” which increasingly became congruent with the “Jewish question.” “Wherever there are no Christian tradespeople and artisans, you have to bring them there,” wrote the priest Kazimieras Pakalniškis, of whom contemporaries said that he had downright “declared war on the Jews,”<sup>27</sup> and added: “Those who love God will help to save our people and our fatherland from the Jews.”<sup>28</sup>

However, Christian shops set up by Lithuanian peasants in most places proved unsuccessful and many closed down after a short time. Lithuanian nationalists thus had started advocating the formation of consumer co-operatives early on. These, they hoped, could provide the appropriate funds and organizational standards necessary to compete with Jewish traders. However, co-operatives, as associations in general,<sup>29</sup> were difficult to found in Lithuania as the Russian

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<sup>23</sup> *Vilniaus žinios*, 8<sup>th</sup> of March, 1905.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> The priest Juozas Šnapštys (see also part 3 of this article), for instance, was arrested by the tsarist authorities for preaching hatred against “people of other confessions.” Edita Škirkaitė, “Kunigas Juozas Šnapštys-Margalis. Gyvenimas ir veikla,” *Lietuvių katalikų mokslo metraštis* 21 (2002): 407-430, 417 ff.

<sup>26</sup> A particularly prominent example for this movement is the priest Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas, who co-operated in some cases with the liberals, but particularly after the Revolution of 1905/06 with the Christian Democrats. For his biography see Aleksandras Merkelis, *Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas*, (Vilnius: Vaga, 1989).

<sup>27</sup> Raimondas Vėbra, *Lietuvos katalikų dvasininkija ir visuomeninis judėjimas.*, (Vilnius: Mintis, 1968), 185. In his newspaper „Review of the Samogitians and of Lithuania,” Pakalniškis described the Lithuanian Jews as “a lousy breed [...] that stuffs our miserable fatherland like an old mushroom.” *Žemaičių ir Lietuvos apžvalga*, 17, 1891, 129-130.

<sup>28</sup> *Žemaičių ir Lietuvos apžvalga*, 17, 1891, 129-130.

<sup>29</sup> The affiliation of co-operatives to associations in general is also evident on the conceptual level. In Russian, consumer co-operatives were called *obščestva potrebitelėj* („consumers’ association“) and accordingly in Lithuanian *vartotojų draugijos*. The latter is a literal translation from Russian. However, whereas the Russian term *obščestvo* can also mean “society,” the

administration suspected them of being hotbeds for socialism. Thus, the few co-operatives in Lithuania were almost exclusively led by the nobility.<sup>30</sup> 1897 witnessed the introduction of a new charter for consumer co-operatives of the Rochdale type, which led to the creation of a handful of co-operatives by Catholic priests.<sup>31</sup> However, their shares turned out to be much too expensive for peasants to join. This changed with the introduction of a new law on small loans introduced in summer 1904.<sup>32</sup>

### 3. The consumer co-operative movement (1904-1915)

Now, peasants could finally apply for the creation of consumer co-operatives themselves. In the second half of 1904 alone, the governor of Kovno received around 30 applications. Over the next four years, the number of peasant applicants increased steadily while the share of the nobility decreased, until in 1908, consumer co-operatives were almost exclusively founded by Lithuanian peasants,<sup>33</sup> which made the consumer co-operatives the – religiously and socially – most homogenous co-operational associations in Lithuania. On an empire-wide scale, however, the Lithuanian movement was rather weak.<sup>34</sup> In 1912, 81 consumer co-operatives operated in Kovno governorate while in Vil'na governorate there were only 22 and in Suwałki governorate – which had a different legislation on associations as a result of its belonging to Vistula Land – merely seven.<sup>35</sup>

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Lithuanian *draugija* has a narrower meaning. Regarding their affiliation to associations, both the Lithuanian and the Russian terms differ fundamentally from the German *Genossenschaften*.

<sup>30</sup> Vytautas Žeimantas/Vytautas Vaitkus, *Lietuvos vartotojų kooperacijos. Nuo pirmųjų žingsnių iki 2000 metų*, (Vilnius: Informacijos ir leidybos centras, 2000), 17.

<sup>31</sup> Petras Šalčius, *Raštai. Lietuvos prekybos istorija*, (Vilnius: Leidykla Margi Raštai, 1998), 182 f.

<sup>32</sup> Vincent Barnett, *The Revolutionary Russian Economy 1890-1940. Ideas, debates and alternatives*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 37; I. V. Bubnov, *The Co-operative Movement in Russia, its History, Significance and Character* (Manchester: Co-operative printing Society, 1917), 53.

<sup>33</sup> The share of charter members of consumer co-operatives identifying themselves as Lithuanians or Samogitians rose from 79% in 1905 to 95% in 1908. This calculation was made on the basis of consumer-co-operative charters included in the files of the Vil'na governor general. See Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas (LVIA) f. 378, Bendrasis skyrius, ap. 1905; ap. 1906; ap. 1907; ap. 1908.

<sup>34</sup> At the beginning of World War I, 3.000 consumer co-operatives operated in the Russian Empire, 600 of them in Kiev governorate alone. *Bendrija 9-14 (1912): 175-179; Pirmasis Lietuvos vartotojų draugijų kalendorius 1915 metais*, (Kaunas, Josvainių Vartotojų Draugijos Valdyba, 1915), 90.

<sup>35</sup> Algimantas Miškinis, *Lietuvos urbanistikos paveldas ir jo vertybės. Užnemunės miestai ir miesteliai*, (Vilnius: Savastis, 1999), 220; A. K. Kubilius, *Vartotojų Kooperacijos Bendrovė*, Kaunas 1928, 13. The low density of consumer co-operatives in Vil'na governorate is confirmed by the annually published Vilnius Calendar. See e. g. *Vilniaus kalendorius 1909 metais*, (Vilnius, Juozapas Zavadskis, 1908), 75; *Vilniaus kalendorius 1910 metais*, (Vilnius, Juozapas Zavadskis, 1909), 106 f.



Apart from the introduction of the new law on small-loans, the year 1904 was also a pivotal year for the co-operative movement as it witnessed the abolishment of the ban on Latin-letter publications, which preceded the onset of the Revolution only by a few weeks. The loosening of state control in the revolutionary months allowed for a relatively free press. Thus, the wave of foundations of consumer co-operatives was accompanied by an intensive debate on the issue of “economic emancipation” in the press, which culminated in a series of articles written by a Lithuanian priest called Juozas Šnapštys, who argued that to solve the question of “economic emancipation” entailed solving the “Jewish question,” and that the instrument to achieve this was the consumer co-operative:

“Just as the Jews are sucking us dry with their unity, our people need to unite in order to shake off these leeches. To achieve this, we need to convey the idea of unity to the people. Let us found consumer co-operatives, let us support Christian traders, then we can defend ourselves against this surge without guns, so we may crawl into their pockets – and these are spacious!”<sup>36</sup>

The artisan and Christian Democrat Antanas Staugaitis endorsed Šnapštys’s position and defended him against liberal allegations of antisemitism. To establish consumer co-operatives, Staugaitis argued, it was absolutely necessary to agitate against Jews: “How are consumer co-operatives to form, how Christian merchants to appear, how the idea of unity to be established if we are prohibited to warn against the evil deeds of the Jews?”<sup>37</sup> Moreover, referring to the antisemitic Russian newspaper “Banner” (*Znamja*) and the Polish journal “The Plough” (*Rola*), Staugaitis advocated the establishment of “at least one antisemitic newspaper,” in which Lithuanians should “boldly write about the Jews.”<sup>38</sup>

In this debate and in most of those to follow, Catholic priests resorted to a particularly anti-Jewish rhetoric. At the same time, priests were the most committed to founding new co-operatives, which in some regions became an integral institution of the parish. Half of all consumer co-operatives of Kovno governorate in 1906 were headed by priests.<sup>39</sup> The nationalistic newspaper “Hope” (*Viltis*) stated in 1910 that “in the end, priests are in charge of all consumer co-operatives”<sup>40</sup>, which was an exaggeration, but nonetheless illustrates the important role of priests in the movement. In 1908, Pakalniškis reflected on the high involvement of priests in the co-operative movement and came to the conclusion that without the management of the priests, the consumer co-operatives would soon fall prey to Jewish merchants:

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<sup>36</sup> *Lietuvų laikraštis* 34 (1905): 481.

<sup>37</sup> *Lietuvų laikraštis* 44-45 (1905): 643.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* The antisemitic newspaper proposed by Staugaitis was never established.

<sup>39</sup> *Kauno kalendorius 1907 metams*, Kaunas 1906, 77.

<sup>40</sup> *Viltis*, 25<sup>th</sup> of July, 1910, p. 1.

“The parish priest needs to travel to this parish today and to another tomorrow, and the co-operative is left behind... without a management [...]. If the chief clerk is an educated man, business of the association will go well, but if he is not, these matters will not be completed, and business will get worse and eventually disband. Already, the Jews have begun to predict ‘kapores’<sup>41</sup> for the co-operatives.”<sup>42</sup>

Liberals, on the other hand, frequently accused the Catholic movement of using antisemitic agitation in the debate on economic emancipation in order to increase its influence on the rural population. One of the most committed Lithuanian liberal co-operatists, Domas Šidlauskas, criticized that the rhetoric regarding co-operatives had “adopted an antisemitic, nationalistic colouring”<sup>43</sup>. This diverted the co-operatives from their intended use, which should be the economic empowerment of the peasantry. On the other hand, Šidlauskas criticized that the liberals, “who did not even want to get too close to the peasants” had neglected co-operative work while the priests were “not qualified” for it as a result of their anti-Jewish stance.<sup>44</sup> At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the liberal argument had thus changed diametrically: Whereas their mouthpiece – the newspaper *Varpas* – had stipulated that co-operatives should be a tool to achieve “economic emancipation” from the Jews, liberals now argued that the centrality of anti-Jewish agitation was leading towards the downfall of the movement. The culprits, argued Petras Klimas<sup>45</sup>, were the priests, who had begun “to play with the national, sometimes with the religious sentiments of the people (not even to mention the antisemitic ones)” – the Lithuanian co-operatives thus “had from the outset been built on an antisemitic footing”<sup>46</sup>.

The failure of the consumer co-operative movement became apparent all too quickly. It soon became clear that for each newly opened shop, another shop somewhere else closed down. This was mostly attributed to the fact that the Russian administration prohibited the creation of a co-operative federation, which could have carried out wholesale operations.<sup>47</sup> However, the immediate faults were rather to be found on the micro level. Revenues stagnated; small shops could hardly offer any more goods than herrings, makhorka, sugar, salt

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<sup>41</sup> A Yiddish word meaning “broken.”

<sup>42</sup> *Vienybė* 4 (1908): 51.

<sup>43</sup> *Lietuvos ūkininkas* 39 (1907): 581 f.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Petras Klimas, by that time a student at Moscow University, later became Minister of Foreign Affairs in the interwar Republic of Lithuania.

<sup>46</sup> *Lietuvos žinios*, 14<sup>th</sup> of July 1910, 2-3.

<sup>47</sup> Due to the lack of a federation, Lithuanian consumer co-operatives remained reliant on Jewish wholesalers. The same deficit has been observed in the case of the Habsburg Crownland of Galicia. Sławomir Tokarski, *Ethnic Conflict and Economic Development: Jews in Galician Agriculture 1868–1914*, (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo “Trio,” 2003), 167.

and petrol.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, their charters forbade them to sell on credit.<sup>49</sup> Customers frequently complained about horrible shopping conditions, unskilled clerks and the sloppy way the goods were presented in the shop<sup>50</sup>, while liberal co-operatists criticized on the one hand the heavy drinking and the negligence with which peasants operated the shops<sup>51</sup>, and on the other hand the general “ignorance” of the peasant customers, which precluded them from seeing the value of having “Lithuanian” shops of their own.<sup>52</sup>

This “ignorance,” however, was rather a symptom of the economic failure of the co-operative shops. Consumer co-operatives simply had very little to offer to Christian peasants. Nationalists and Catholics had considered the assumingly superstitious and religious peasantry a fruitful soil for their agitation. Lithuanian folk culture indeed had a long tradition of stereotypes of the cunning Jewish usurer, and popular plays, stories and songs which depict the misdoings of Jews in the economic sphere existed in abundance in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century – but at the same time, the word “Jew” and “trader” for peasants was and had always been almost synonymic.<sup>53</sup> A trader who was not a Jew was nearly inconceivable, and thus the Jewish shop remained the store of choice.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, peasants were rational beings and could not be persuaded to refrain from buying at Jewish shops just because they were run by Jews – and more so if the Lithuanian Christian shop was not even cheaper.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, the reluctance of Lithuanian peasants to work as clerks was not only a lack of education, but also a result of the enduring traditional belief that the only proper and “moral” work for a Christian Lithuanian was working the soil.

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<sup>48</sup> *Lietuvos žinios*, 11th of January, 1911, 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Lietuvių laikraštis* 12 (1905): 154.

<sup>50</sup> *Lietuvos žinios*, 8<sup>th</sup> of December, 1910, 1-2.

<sup>51</sup> *Vienybė* 35 (1910): 539.

<sup>52</sup> This was not a distinctly Lithuanian phenomenon. European co-operatists regularly accused peasants of being too “ignorant,” too “stubborn” or too “intimidated” to cherish the high value of co-operatives. Giovanni Federico, *Feeding the World. An Economic History of Agriculture 1800–2000*, (Princeton N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 136. In a gross misinterpretation of the peasants’ world, the Catholic Lithuanian newspaper *Šaltinis* wrote in 1907, that for the peasants the co-operative needed to be “the family, for the well-being of which its members dedicate all their hearts [...]. Sometimes one needs to have the courage to say openly if there is something bad going on in the management of the association or if there is misconduct among its members.” *Šaltinis* 24 (1907): 370 f.

<sup>53</sup> On stereotypes in Lithuanian folk culture see Laima Anglickienė, *Kitataučių įvaizdis Lietuvių folklore*, (Vilnius: Versus Aureus, 2006).

<sup>54</sup> Kai Struve has made similar observations regarding the case of the Habsburg crownland of Galicia. Kai Struve, “Peasant Emancipation and National Integration. Agrarian Circles, Village Reading Rooms, and Cooperatives in Galicia,” *Cooperatives in Ethnic Conflicts. Eastern Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, ed. Torsten Lorenz, (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2006), 229-250, here 244 f.

<sup>55</sup> See *Šaltinis* 30 (1907): 467 f.

#### 4. National and Christian space in Jewish shtetls

The success of the Lithuanian consumer co-operatives was perceived to be rather in the symbolic sphere, as Lithuanian shops were founded in the centers of the shtetls, thus occupying prestigious buildings as spots in a larger space that was generally perceived to be alien and Jewish. The nationalist newspaper “Hope” (*Viltis*) celebrated such acquisitions more than actual economic success, as for instance in the case of a consumer co-operative in Papilė (Telšė district): „In the year 1907, a beautiful and large consumer co-operative was founded in the middle of the city [...]. Upon seeing this, the Jewish grocers were wild with anger and envy.”<sup>56</sup> A consumer co-operative in Pandėlys was opened at a “very nice place, in the centre of the marketplaces, separated from the Jews”<sup>57</sup>. Upon seeing this, “the Jews were merely standing by and swore horribly as they saw the people flocking to the shop”<sup>58</sup>. Particularly the appropriation of masoned buildings was deemed a drawing level with the Jews, as buildings made of stone were formerly almost exclusively occupied by the larger Jewish shops<sup>59</sup>, as the newspaper *Artojas* noticed in 1910: “It is clear that every merchant wants to become rich, which is why in our country the Jews own the stone houses in the towns [...]. All this wealth they have gained by trade.”<sup>60</sup>

While nationalistic and Catholic visions blended regarding many issues, this interpretation of the establishment of shops as a setting up of “Lithuanian islands” in a larger “Jewish space” – the shtetl – may be contrasted with a different interpretation, which put equally little emphasis on economic matters. The centers of most Lithuanian towns were almost exclusively inhabited by Jews, while Lithuanian peasants populated the outskirts. The church thus represented the only “Catholic” site in the centers, and was encircled by buildings such as the synagogue, the shulhoyf, the Jewish bathhouse and several Jewish shops. Christian shops were thus perceived to be appropriate tools to expand the “Christian space” around the church. In Pašvitinys (Ponevež district), a newspaper wrote, Jewish merchants were disturbing the Catholic mass on Sundays. “Nowhere in Lithuania do we find another [Jewish] community that is so tightly thronged next to the church as in Pašvitinys” – a problem that was alleviated by the opening of a consumer co-operative store.<sup>61</sup> In the little town Pandėlys (Novoaleksandrovska district), “a stone church was erected at a rather bad place: The churchyard is walled in on three sides, on the fourth, however, a shabby house is standing, which hosts three more Jewish

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<sup>56</sup> *Vienybė* 45 (1912): 710-712.

<sup>57</sup> *Viltis*, January 3, 1914, 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Viltis*, March 22, 1914, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Lijana Laužikaitė, “Lietuvos miestelių prekybos pastatai,” *Žydų kultūros paveldas Lietuvoje*, ed. Alfredas Jomantas (Vilnius: Savastis, 2005), 157-164, here 160.

<sup>60</sup> *Artojas*, 13 (1910): 199.

<sup>61</sup> *Vilniaus žinios*, August 7, 1905, 3.

shops.”<sup>62</sup> The opening of a consumer co-operative in 1914 in “a beautiful place, right in the middle of a market, and separated from the Jews”<sup>63</sup> was thus enthusiastically celebrated. However, arguments for the creation of a “Lithuanian” space in the shtetl centers or of a “Christian” space around the church were not brought forward exclusively by members of either the Catholic activists or of the intelligentsia, but were often used interchangeably. As co-operatives tried to establish themselves in the towns, they met with competition by Jewish merchants, who tried to prevent new shops from opening. This was not explicitly directed towards Christians, but also against new Jewish competitors.<sup>64</sup> Lithuanian-language newspapers, however, perceived this competitive behavior as being directed exclusively against the Lithuanians, which led to a significant overestimation of solidarity among Jews. When the local priest tried to open a consumer co-operative in Garliava (Mariampol district) in 1904, a newspaper reported that the Rabbi of Kovno had forbidden the Jewish landlord to rent out his house to a goy.<sup>65</sup> Among the Lithuanian Jews, measures against the new competitors were discussed, but on a relatively low scale. The Vilnius-based Hebrew-language newspaper *Ha-Zman* wrote in 1910: “Can we obliterate the co-operative shops? We need to answer in the negative. But as we cannot obliterate them, we still have the opportunity to weaken them. Wholesalers, who are selling goods to co-operative shops, must stop granting them loans.”<sup>66</sup> However, *Ha-Zman* did not broach the issue of a growing economic competition, but rather of the “hatred” that certain co-operatives displayed against Jews.

While some Lithuanian activists, to whom the logic of capitalism was still alien, perceived the refusal to rent out houses to co-operatives already as a hostile and immoral act<sup>67</sup>, Jews were moreover often accused of physically sabotaging the Lithuanians’ efforts to appropriate space in the shtetls and thus of inhibiting the “economic emancipation” itself. The most frequent allegation was that Jews used arson to rid themselves of their new competitors. This was a serious allegation, as conflagrations were frequent due to the domination of wood as construction material and could deprive families and whole communities of their livelihood over years. The theme of “Jewish revenge” was a familiar one and had already been propagated by early Lithuanian newspapers such as *Ausėja*, which described the fate of a Lithuanian shop owner at the hands of the Jews in drastic words:

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<sup>62</sup> *Vilniaus žinios*, July 8, 1905, 3.

<sup>63</sup> *Viltis*, January 3, 1914, 3.

<sup>64</sup> Eliach, “*There once was a world*,” 270.

<sup>65</sup> *Šaltinis* 9 (1907): 136.

<sup>66</sup> As cited in *Litva* 1 (1911).

<sup>67</sup> In the case of the famous Lithuanian nationalist Vincas Kudirka, the refusal of the Jews of Šakiai to rent out a flat to him had provoked him to pen a series of deeply antisemitic articles in his journal *Varpas* in 1890/91.

“The blackbeards were blind with rage. But that was not enough. One night, with the town in a deep slumber, we hear a noise from the street. Everybody is running outside: The hut of our merchant is ablaze! Barely did he survive, his tuft scorched, as the door had been barricaded by the sons of Israel [...]. It is arduous for the Lithuanian to wrest the trade from the blackbeards’ dirty claws – try, and you and all your belongings will go up in flames.”<sup>68</sup>

In 1905, the liberal newspaper *Vilniaus žinios* accused the Jews of Pašvitinys (Ponevež district) of trying to exact revenge upon the new consumer co-operative: “It is not good that the Jews think this way. If the Lithuanians let them live so close by without feeling any anger towards them, then they should try to get along with us as good as possible.”<sup>69</sup> In 1914, the Jews of Alsėdžiai (Telšė district) were blamed for smashed windows of the consumer co-operative: “People say that this was the work of the Jews, because the Jewish language was heard [...]. Now people are afraid that the Jews might shoot or do other things”<sup>70</sup>. After the outbreak of World War I, the Jews of Vilkaviškis (Wyłkowiszki district) were accused of having bribed German soldiers into destroying the Lithuanian co-operative shops and warehouses.<sup>71</sup>

## 5. Summary

The movement scored a victory in 1915, when the Russian administration finally lifted the ban on the creation of a co-operative federation.<sup>72</sup> This triumph, however, was short-lived as the chaos of World War I led to the rapid decline of Christian co-operative shops. Of formerly 150 shops, only a handful survived the war. However, the co-operative movement was still highly significant – firstly as an expression of civil society in the process of consolidation and secondly (and in this study more importantly) because of its effect on Lithuanian-Jewish relations. Although the economic effects of the new competitors on Jewish traders were only marginal, Lithuanian Jews apparently felt threatened by the hostile rhetoric used particularly by the priests. Moreover, in the course of the debate on “economic emancipation” of 1905, voices were raised that called for an antisemitic movement in Lithuania modeled after the Polish example, where calls for boycott of Jewish shops was a central strategy of the anti-Semites.

To summarize what has been said, I deem it plausible to say that antisemitism in Lithuania prior to World War I manifested itself primarily in the debate on

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<sup>68</sup> *Ausra*, 7-8, 1885, 233 f.

<sup>69</sup> *Vilniaus žinios*, 7<sup>th</sup> of August, 1905, 3.

<sup>70</sup> *Viltis*, 13<sup>th</sup> of February, 1914.

<sup>71</sup> *Kauno kalendorius 1915 metams*, (Kaunas, Švento Kazimiero Draugija, 1914), p. 76.

<sup>72</sup> Antanas Svetikas, *Lietuvos vartotojų kooperacijos valdymas rinkos sąlygomis*, (Vilnius, Vilniaus Pedagoginis Universitetas, 2002), 12.

“economic emancipation” and in the attempts at its implementation – in spite of its ultimate failure. I base this statement on the following arguments. 1. The economic sphere was the main sphere of interaction between Jews and Lithuanians. This meant that conflicts between these two groups were most likely to arise in this sphere (and on its topological manifestation – the shtetl’s marketplace). Economic arguments were most often used in antisemitic rhetoric in Lithuania. 2. The vast dominance of Lithuanians in agriculture and of Jews in trade was a social and economic reality. Nationalists and Catholic activists made this issue a central point of their agenda. The consumer co-operative movement had an organizational, modern character, and at its centre stood the calls for supersession of the Jews in the economic sphere. 3. Mobilization of the peasants for the co-operatives failed. Most consumer co-operatives hardly registered any economic growth, many closed down after a short time. Peasants were reluctant to buy in co-operative shops due to bad shopping conditions and long traditions of buying at Jewish stores. This indicates that arguments that it was necessary to complete the Lithuanian peasant nation with a middle class bore only limited relevance for Christian peasants. 4. Openings of new consumer co-operative shops were celebrated by co-operativists of the intelligentsia and of the Catholics alike. The opening was much less interpreted in economic terms, but rather as a successful appropriation of “Lithuanian” or “Christian” space in the shtetls dominated by Jews. 5. In spite of the failure of the consumer co-operative movement, the anti-Jewish semantics and arguments established within the debate became immensely influential after World War I, when economic nationalism flourished in Lithuania. Calls to “buy from your own people” drew from a repertoire which had already been established before 1914, as did the postulation that the Jews were ultimately to blame for the wrongs the Lithuanians had to suffer, as they used their economic superiority to wield power over the peasants. This becomes evident once we look at the rhetoric of the fascist antisemitic combat league “Iron Wolf” (*Geležinis vilkas*), which declared in 1929: “We encourage Lithuanian society to support the consumer co-operatives, we need to make clear that it is about time to get rid of Jewish intermediary trade and of Jewish usury once and for all.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Gediminas Rudis, *Antisemitinės tendencijos voldemarininkų judėjime 1928-1940*, m. Report from 2007.

<[http://www.komisija.lt/Files/www.komisija.lt/File/2000\\_seminaras\\_apie\\_antisemitizma/G.Rudzio\\_pranesimas.doc](http://www.komisija.lt/Files/www.komisija.lt/File/2000_seminaras_apie_antisemitizma/G.Rudzio_pranesimas.doc)>, accessed on June 6, 2011.

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