Beat the Jews, Save...Ukraine: Antisemitic Violence and Ukrainian State-Building Projects, 1918-1920

by Christopher Gilley

Abstract

This article examines the responsibility of the Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR), its leaders Symon Petliura and Volodymyr Vynnychenko, and the Ukrainian nationalist movement in general for pogroms during the civil war in Ukraine. It criticizes attempts to disavow UNR accountability by blaming the worst excesses on independent warlords only loosely affiliated to the UNR. The paper argues that the warlords drew on the same well of myths and stereotypes as the civilian and military arms of the Ukrainian state. The warlords, like many UNR officials, believed that Jews were a hostile force in cahoots with the Bolsheviks. The piece also looks at UNR attempts to avert or punish the violence, while also stressing the limits of these efforts. Although UNR leaders Petliura and Vynnychenko did not order the pogroms, their willingness to see the excesses as a product of the Jews' lack of loyalty to the UNR hampered attempts to prevent or punish the violence. The article describes a complex system of relationships wherein different UNR representatives on the ground clashed, sometimes using force of arms, over the question of pogroms.

Introduction

The Military and Civil Authorities of the UNR

UNR Leaders: Symon Petliura and Volodymyr Vynnychenko

Nationally Conscious Ukrainians outside the UNR: The *Otamans*

Conclusion

Introduction

> *The honor of Simon Petliura is our honor, the honor of the entire nation. Our duty is to defend his great memory against all calumnies. Oleksandr Shulhyn, Foreign Minister of the Ukrainian People's Republic in exile.*[1]

Local decisions sometimes provoke international controversy. On October 14, 2017, the recently created Day of the Defender of Ukraine, the municipal government of the West-Central Ukrainian city Vinnytsia unveiled a statue to Symon Petliura. On the face of it, Petliura was not a surprising choice of object of veneration on the day proclaimed in commemoration of Ukrainian soldiers: he had been military commander and then head of the Ukrainian People's Republic (*Ukraïns'ka narodna respublika*, hereafter UNR), the aspiring state that had become the focus of nationally conscious Ukrainians' desires for independence in late 1918. Vinnytsia had briefly been the capital of the UNR from May to June 1920, and the statue was intended to become the cornerstone of a planned Museum of the Temporary Capital of Ukraine. Yet for many Jews in Ukraine and the rest of the world, Petliura's name will always be associated with the pogroms of the Russian Civil War. Between 1917 and 1920, the most conservative estimates indicate that soldiers under his command killed 16,700 Jews, more than half of all those murdered in Ukraine during the same period[2]; there is good reason to see these figures as unrealistically low.[3] In addition to those murdered, thousands more Jews were beaten up, mutilated, raped, or robbed of almost everything they owned. Many blamed Petliura, the head of the Ukrainian state and army, for this mass violence; in 1926, Sholom Schwarzbard, a Jewish anarchist who had fought in the civil war, shot the Ukrainian leader dead in Paris, where both were living in exile, in revenge for the pogroms. In an infamous trial that became more concerned with Petliura's culpability for the pogroms than Schwarzbard's guilt, the court acquitted Petliura's killer as having committed a crime of passion. More than 90 years later, the unveiling of the Petliura statue caused understandable consternation among Jews both in Ukraine and abroad. Placement of the statue in

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[1] Quoted in Saul S. Friedman, *Pogromchik: The Assassination of Simon Petlura,* (New York: Hart Publishing Company, 1976), 71.

[2] Nokhem Gergel, "The Pogroms in the Ukraine in 1918–21," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Science* 6 (1951): 246.

[3] Oleg V. Budnitskii, *Rossiiskie evrei mezhdu krasnymi i belymi,* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2006), 276.

Ierusalymka, Vinnytsia's historical Jewish quarter, further rubbed salt in the wounds.[4]

The move in Vinnytsia followed a two-and-a-half-year campaign whereby the Ukrainian state had intensively promoted 20th-century Ukrainian nationalist heroes. In May 2015, the Ukrainian parliament passed a package of laws regulating historical memory. One of these, entitled "On the Legal Status and Honoring of the Memory of Fighters for the Independence of Ukraine in the 20th Century," lists a group of organizations whose members it designates "fighters for Ukrainian statehood in the 20th century." The list includes the UNR. The new law prohibits insults to the independence fighters' memory or the memory of their cause, Ukrainian independence.[5] The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the ensuing war in Eastern Ukraine provide a clear context for the adoption of the acts: the confrontation with Russia has made attractive the promotion of a Ukrainian national identity that rejects the Russian language and Soviet past and venerates militant anti-Communist nationalists, even those who collaborated with the Nazis and participated in the Holocaust. However, attempts to prescribe such veneration by law predate the current war, as seen in the proposal by Viktor Iushchenko, Ukrainian president 2005--2010, to make two of the most notorious Second World War nationalists Heroes of Ukraine.[6] The controversy over Ukrainian history policy centered initially on the commemoration of Ukrainian nationalists active in the 1940s. More recently, the centenary of the Russian Revolution and subsequent civil war has made figures from this period receive more attention. The statue to Petliura is one example of this.[7]

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[4] For a discussion, see Mykhailo Gaukhman, "Pytannia Symona Peltiury. Ch. 1: suchasnyi rezonans i natsional'ni pozytsiï," *historians.in.ua*, November 26, 1917, at: http://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/en/avtorska-kolonka/2333-mikhajlo-gaukhman-pitannya-simona-petlyuri-ch-1-suchasnij-rezonans-i-natsionalni-pozitsiji/. (accessed on August 7, 2019).

[5] See the official website of the Verkhovna rada at: https://rada.gov.ua/en (accessed August 14, 2019).

[6] For a discussion of the various positions, see *Strasti za Banderoriu*, eds. Tarik Cyril Amar, Ihor Balyns'kyi, Iaroslav Hrytsak, (Kyiv: Hrani-T, 2007).

[7] Another instance is the commemoration of the fallen in the Battle of Kruty and the attempts to relate the events of that clash to the present; see *"Bii za maibutnie Ukraïny: 29 sichnia – Den' pam'iati polehllykh u boiu pid Krutamy*," available at: http://www.memory.gov.ua/news/bii-za-maibutne-ukraini-29-sichnya-den-pam-yati-poleglikh-u-boyu-pid-krutami. (accessed on August 7, 2019).

Yet, for all the contemporary urgency over the issue, the debate about Ukrainian responsibility for the pogroms of the civil war goes back a century. The discussion first centered on Symon Petliura's personal culpability for the violence; his death at Schwarzbard's hands only strengthened this. As the quotation from Oleksandr Shulhyn at the beginning of this essay indicates, Petliura had become a symbol of the UNR, which represented the cause of Ukrainian independence for many nationally conscious Ukrainians. Unsurprisingly, Petliura's most vocal defenders have been historians who identify with the legacy of the UNR. For them, condemning Petliura means judging the whole nation. Thus, numerous historians in the Ukrainian diaspora sought to defend Petliura against the charge of antisemitism: Taras Hunczak, to take one example, portrayed Petliura as a Judeophile who supported Jewish national-personal autonomy and, in difficult circumstances, tried to punish his soldiers who were guilty of violence against Jews.[8] Approaches of this kind have become popular in Ukraine since Ukrainian independence in 1991. Thus Volodymyr Serhiichuk blames the violence on the numerous bands of peasant insurgents that roamed Ukraine during the years of the Russian Civil War.[9] At the same time, several of these historians have sought to explain the antisemitic violence by pointing to the supposedly considerable role Jews played in the Bolshevik party and rejection of Ukrainian statehood.[10] In doing so, they echo the justifications voiced by the pogromists themselves. Serhiichuk even repeats uncritically the common antisemitic tropes disseminated by pogromists, such as the claim that Jews shot retreating Ukrainian soldiers in the back.[11] Such historians seem to disavow the pogroms in one breath and justify them in the next.

The historiography critical of Petliura grew out of the very first attempts to document the atrocities: during the Russian Civil War, a group of moderate Zionists around Elias Tcherikower gathered a great archive of materials on the pogroms, now held at YIVO; they also wrote the earliest studies of the violence in the 1920s and 1930s.[12] Since then, a number of specialists in Jewish history have

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[8] Taras Hunczak, "A Reappraisal of Symon Petliura and Ukrainian-Jewish Relations, 1917–1921," *Jewish Social Studies* 31/3 (1969): 163-183.

[9] Volodymyr Serhiichuk, *Symon Petliura i ievreistvo*, (Kyiv: PP Serhiichuk M.I., 2006), 23.

[10] Hunczak, "Reappraisal," 171-172; Serhiichuk, *Symon Petliura*, 41-43.

[11] Serhiichuk, *Symon Petliura*, 47.

[12] See Henry Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government: Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times, 1917–1920*, (Cambridge, Mass.: HURI 1999), 176, and Joshua M. Karlip, "Between Martyrology and Historiography: Elias Tcherikower and the Making of a Pogrom Historian," *East European Jewish Affairs* 38/3 (2008): 257-280; 264-267.

used the Tcherikower archive and many other survivor testimonies to write accounts that bring home the horrors inflicted upon Ukraine's Jewish population by regular UNR troops, peasant partisans, the White Volunteer Army, Polish soldiers, and Red Army men.[13] Some – for example, Zosa Szajkowski – have not only questioned Petliura's commitment to fighting the pogromists, but also claimed that he gave orders that made one of the worst UNR pogroms, which claimed at least 1,500 lives in Proskuriv, possible.[14] However, these accounts do not have at their disposal the sources to prove such a direct link. For example, Saul Friedman uses the Tcherikower archive, but it is not always evident what document he is quoting. Thus, when he provides an antisemitic quotation from Petliura, it is unclear whether the passage is from a text Petliura wrote himself, a statement reported by someone close to Petliura who might have been in a position to hear him speak, or a line attributed to Petliura by pogrom survivors who had never met him. Both Szaijkowski and Friedman quote a telegram Petliura supposedly sent to Otaman Semesenko, giving the commander a free hand in Proskuriv[15]; however, no such document has been shown to exist. Friedman's reference to a file in the Tcherikower archive is false.[16]

The two best studies of the issue – by Henry Abramson[17] and Serhii Yekelchyk[18] – have a sound archival foundation, drawing, respectively, on the Tcherikower collection and the Ukrainian archives opened after 1991. Abramson seeks a compromise between Petliura's defenders and his critics. He argues that Petliura and the UNR government issued declarations that reduced the number of pogroms. However, crucially, the UNR failed to take a stand against the pogromists between January and April 1919, the period of the most brutal massacres. Petliura may not bear the responsibility of agency for the pogroms, but

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[13] Lars Fischer, "The Pogromshchina and the Directory: A New Historical Synthesis?," *Revolutionary Russia* 16/2 (2003): 47-93; Id., "Whither *Pogromshchina* – Historiographical Synthesis or Deconstruction?," *East European Jewish Affairs 38/3* (2003): 303-320; Friedman, *Pogromchik*; Victoria Khiterer, *Jewish Pogroms in Kiev during the Russian Civil War 1918–1920*, (Lewiston and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2015); Zosa Szajkowski, "'A Reappraisal of Symon Petliura and Ukrainian Jewish Relations, 1917–1921': A Rebuttal," *Jewish Social Studies* 31/3 (1969): 184-213.

[14] Szajkowski, "Reappraisal"

[15] Friedman, *Pogromchik*, 160, Szaijkowski, "Reappraisal" 194.

[16] On the document see Abramson, *Prayer*, 137, 211–212.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] Serhii Iekelchyk, "Trahichna storinka Ukraïns'koï revoliutsii: Symon Petliura ta Ievreis'ki pogrom v Ukraini (1917-1920)," in *Symon Petliura ta ukraïns'ka natsional'na revoliutsiia*, ed. Vasyl Mykhal'chuk, (Kyiv: Rada, 1995), 165-217.

as head of the army must be held accountable for them.[19] Yekelchyk has also found numerous documents that testify to the UNR leadership's desire to fight pogroms: declarations condemning the violence, attempts to protect the Jewish population, and initiatives releasing funds to help pogrom victims. But, apart from a handful of cases, he has found no documentary evidence of the successful prosecution of pogromists by the Special Commission set up to investigate the pogroms. In addition, much of the evidence for the punishment of pogromists comes from memoirs – i.e., sources written after the events which they describe took place, with the intention of exculpating either the author or the UNR in general.[20] Indeed, archival materials not accessible when Yekelchyk wrote his piece indicate that some of the pogromists mentioned in his memoir sources as examples of punished pogromists had not in fact even been accused of perpetrating pogroms.[21] Arguably, Yekelchyk provides more evidence of the UNR leadership's good intentions than of their efficacy in combatting the pogroms.[22]

Something which both the critical and the defensive accounts share in common is that they purport to be addressing Petliura's guilt or innocence, yet at the same time cite the actions and measures of the UNR overall; the question of one leader's culpability thus becomes elided with that of the responsibility of the entire state. My own past contribution to the debate put aside the question of Petliura's individual role, examining instead the actions – and the inaction – of the UNR military and civil establishment as a whole. Using documents of the UNR's Ministry of Jewish Affairs and other UNR documents collected by the Ukrainian émigré committee which had been created to defend Petliura's memory at the Schwarzbard trial, I argued that pogroms committed by UNR troops were not, in fact, a government-steered campaign of ethnic cleansing. Rather, they were a product of the widespread belief among many Ukrainian soldiers, politicians, and

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[19] Abramson, *Prayer*, 109 ff.

[20] Iekelchyk, "*Trahichna*," 191-194.

[21] Christopher Gilley, "Beyond Petliura: The Ukrainian National Movement and the 1919 Pogroms," *East European Jewish Affairs* 47/1 (2017): 45-61; 54-55.

[22] Since then, Yekelchyk, one of the most astute historians of modern Ukraine, has argued that emphasizing Petliura's guilt is problematic; see Sehry Yekelchyk, "The Reality of the Otamanshchyna: Pogroms of 1919 and Their Long Historial Shadow. What Exactly Happened in Kyiv on Auggust 31, 1919?" (paper presented at the Center for Urban History of East and Central Europe for the Summer School "Jewish History and the Multiethnic Past: Discussions and Approaches to the Study of Society, Culture and Heritage in East Central Europe," Lviv, Ukraine, August 4, 2014, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWAa3j-9TSM&t=2441s. (accessed on August 7, 2019).

officials that Jews as a group were opposed to Ukrainian statehood; this belief was often expressed in the form of the canard of Judeo-Bolshevism. At least some officials in the Ukrainian state apparatus understood the pogroms as both a humanitarian crime and a danger to Ukrainian statehood. However, they could not or would not undertake effective measures to end the violence or punish the perpetrators. Indeed, some of those appointed to prosecute the pogromists apparently shared the very prejudices which had originally motivated the pogroms.[23]

Thus, we can discuss the question of Petliura's responsibility for the pogroms separately from that of the UNR. We can also distinguish between the UNR's culpability and that of the Ukrainian national movement overall. At the time, there were numerous groups in the former Russian Empire claiming to represent the Ukrainian national cause; the UNR was but the largest and longest lived. The People's Republic had been created by the first body to claim to represent the Ukrainian people, the *Tsentral'na Rada* (Central Council). The Republic was initially defined as an autonomous part of Russia in late 1917; later, following the Bolshevik invasion of Ukrainian-speaking lands, it was proclaimed an independent state. The Soviet attack caused the UNR to appeal to the Central Powers for aid against the Bolsheviks. In April 1918, the German government, frustrated by Ukraine's socialist-leaning government, replaced the *Tsentral'na Rada* with the Ukrainian State, also known as the *Hetmanate,* after the Cossack title taken by its leader, the former tsarist general Hetman Pavlo Skoropads'kyi. Hetman Skoropads'kyi's regime was destined to fall once Germany could no longer support it. Petliura and other UNR politicians led a rising against Skoropads'kyi to recreate the People's Republic in December 1918. One month earlier, the end of the Habsburg Monarchy had allowed Ukrainians in the province of Eastern Galicia to proclaim their independence in the West Ukrainian People's Republic (*Zakhidna Ukraïns'ka narodna respublika*, hereafter ZUNR). The UNR and the ZUNR signed an act of union in January 1919, but relations between them remained tense. They fought against both the Red and the White armies throughout 1919, but without success.[24]

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[23] Gilley, "Beyond Petliura," 45–61.

[24] The best overview is Georgiy Kasianov, "Ukraine between Revolution, Independence, and Foreign Dominance," in *The Emergence of Ukraine: Self-Determination, Occupation, and War in Ukraine, 1917–1922*, ed. Wolfram Dornik, (Edmonton, Alberta: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2015), 76–131.

The Bolsheviks created Ukrainian Soviet Republics led by the Communist Party of Ukraine (the Bolshevik *Komunistychna partiia Ukraïny [bil'shovyk]*) on three occasions during the Russian Civil War; all three were nominally independent of the Russian state. This form of Ukrainian statehood was ultimately to prevail: in November 1920, the Bolsheviks expelled Petliura's regular forces, and in late 1921 they repulsed the last UNR raid on Soviet Ukrainian territory. Most Ukrainian nationalists rejected the Soviet Ukrainian state, justifiably seeing it as a cover-up for the reality of rule from Moscow. However, some others, not unreasonably from the perspective of the time, believed this would prove a genuinely Ukrainian state.[25]

In addition, the Ukrainian landscape was pockmarked with numerous warlords who shifted their allegiances between the major warring parties or fought on their own account, initiating rural uprisings against the powers when these tried to impose their rule on different villages. Most had a peasant background, had served in the Great War, and, in many cases, had been village teachers. They led bands of peasant partisans with a small hard core of permanent insurgents; during the rebellions, they called upon local peasants to support them. When the revolts met with serious opposition, the peasants would return to their fields, while the partisans would go underground or relocate to less dangerous areas – so as to rise again when the time was right. Most warlords preferred to operate near their home villages, but they often found themselves fighting in different parts of the country in order to remain active. Many called themselves *otamans*, a designation for Zaporozhian Cossack leaders, whom Ukrainian nationalists had long hailed as the bearers of the Ukrainian national idea in the early modern period. By stylizing themselves after these figures in the Ukrainian nationalist pantheon and by making declarations which set out their own idiosyncratic view of Ukraine's future, they arguably became yet another current of Ukrainian nationalism, in addition to the UNR, with which they often came into conflict, openly rebelling or siding with the Bolsheviks against it. But they also fought alongside the UNR against the Bolsheviks and the Whites, or else in order to create their own, short-lived republics. Beneath the principal clashes among aspiring states and governments of this period, we find in Ukraine myriad local civil wars between neighboring villages and commanders. The *otamans* played a key role in the way these unfolded.

[25] Christopher Gilley, *The "Change of Signposts" in the Ukrainian Emigration. A Contribution to the History of Sovietophilism in the 1920s*, (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2009).

One of the best known among these independent commanders was the anarchist strongman Nestor Makhno. However, the ranks of the warlords also included some of the most notorious pogromists of the period, such as Nykyfor Hryhor'iev, Danylo Terpylo (aka *Otaman* Zelenyi), and Il'ko Struk. Those trying to defend Petliura and the UNR from the charge of committing or permitting the period's pogroms have often sought to shift the blame onto these commanders. These independent operatives' antisemitic violence and their relationship to the UNR require further study in order for us to understand the connection between the broader Ukrainian national movement and the pogroms.[26]

This article will therefore address three separate questions that in the past have been elided into one: it will seek to assess the responsibility, incurred through either actions or inaction, for the antisemitic violence 1918-1920, of (1) UNR civil and military authorities, (2) UNR leaders, including not only Symon Petliura, but also Volodymyr Vynnchenko, and (3) the Ukrainian national movement overall. Each of these is addressed in a separate section of the present article. The third section will pay particular attention to the *otamans*, their relationship to the UNR, and their ways of expressing Ukrainian national sentiment. The article will draw on secondary literature, documents from Ukrainian archives, and published collections of primary sources, above all the *Kniga pogromov*[27] and *Pohromy v Ukraïni*.[28] The editor of the latter is Volodymr Serhiichuk, who clearly selected the documents to support his own view in favor of Petliura's innocence. In addition, seeking to prove that the Jews themselves had provoked the pogroms by

[26] Recent years have seen an increasing number of Western studies of the *otamans*; see, for example: Thomas Chopard, *Le Martyre de Kiev*, (Paris: Vendémaire, 2015), 70–98; Christopher Gilley, "Fighters for Ukrainian Independence? Imposture and Identity among Ukrainian Warlords, 1917-1922" *Historical Research* 90/247 (2017): 172–190; Felix Schnell, *Räume des Schreckens. Gewalt und Gruppenmilitanz in der Ukraine 1905-1933*, (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2012), 246–280; Serhy Yekelchyk, "Bands of Nation Builders? Insurgency and Ideology in the Ukrainian Civil War," in *War in Peace. Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*, eds. Robert Gerwarth, John Horne, (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2012), 107-125. There are mounds of Ukrainian works on the subject, with much of the research being of questionable quality. For a recent study by some of the more respectable scholars, see Volodymyr Lobodaiev, *Viina z derzhavoiu chy za derzhavu? Selians'kyi povstans'kyi rukh v Ukraïni 1917–1921 rokiv*, (Kharkiv: Klub simeinoho dozvillia, 2017).

[27] *Kniga pogromov. Pogromy na Ukraine, v Belorussii I evropeiskoi chasti Rossii v period Grazhdanskoi voiny. 1918–1922 gg.: Sbornik dokumentov*, eds. Lidia B. Miliakova et al., (Moscow: Rosspen, 2008).

[28] *Pohromy v Ukraïni: 1914-1920. Shtuchnykh stereotypiv do hirkoi pravdy, prykhovuvanoï v radiansk'kykh arkhivakh*, ed. Volodymyr Serhiichuk, (Kyiv: Vydavnytstvo imeni Oleny Telihy, 1999).

their actions, Serhiichuk also included many documents that reveal the antisemitic attitudes of members of UNR civil and military institutions.

Most of the documents studied in this article were indeed created by the pogrom perpetrators or those with nominal authority over them: proclamations by units that committed pogroms, minutes of UNR meetings convened to discuss the pogroms, later Ukrainian accounts of the pogroms, and investigations by UNR authorities of the antisemitic violence. This has the disadvantage of leaving out the voices of the victims, without which it is impossible to achieve an adequate understanding of what happened.[29] This short article does not aspire to be a comprehensive account, however. Rather, by studying the pogroms through the prism of the perpetrators' own words, the piece aims to demonstrate how a critical reading of the perpetrators' statements can reveal their guilt: in their denials or condemnations of the antisemitic massacres, many pogromists voiced the very prejudices that had led to pogroms in the first place.

The Military and Civil Authorities of the UNR

Antisemitism and anti-Jewish violence were not official UNR policies. The two main parties that staffed UNR governments were the Ukrainian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (*Ukraïns'ka sotsiial-demokratychna robotycha partiia*) and the Ukrainian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries (*Ukraïns'ka partiia sotsialistiv revoliutsioneriv*), both of them nationally conscious socialists and – at least in theory – supporters of minority rights. In November 1917, the *Tsentral'na Rada* proclaimed national autonomy for the Russian, Polish, and Jewish minorities in Ukraine, guaranteeing "their own self-government in all matters of their national life"[30]; when the UNR came to power again at the end of 1918, it reaffirmed this.[31] Faced with a wave of pogroms committed by their own troops, the socialists in government discussed responses that might put an end to the violence, issued declarations condemning it, and set up a special investigatory commission to bring those responsible to account.[32] They did not only do so for ideological or humanitarian reasons: discussions in the Cabinet of Ministers also

[29] For a brilliant and pioneering examination of the pogroms through the perspective of the victims, see Irina Atashkevich, *Gendered Violence: Jewish Women in the Pogroms of 1917 to 1921*, (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2018).

[30] Quoted in Abramson, *Prayer*, 60.

[31] *Ibid.*, 91.

[32] Gilley, "Beyond Petliura," 50-51.

reveal that they were worried about the UNR's image abroad.[33] In addition, army commanders must have realized that pogroms went hand in hand with a decline in military discipline. However, the repetitive and recurrent nature of these discussions held by the UNR Cabinet of Ministers is indicative of the politicians' inability to keep their troops under control: the Minister of Jewish Affairs would report the latest atrocity to the cabinet, which would condemn the violence, call for severe punishment of the perpetrators, and declare the creation of an investigatory commission. Between January and August 1919, this pattern repeated itself again and again.[34]

The root cause of the persistent outbreaks of violence was the belief, widespread among UNR soldiers, that the Jews were enemies of Ukrainian statehood. Numerous UNR units issued declarations stating this. They forced the Jewish residents of settlements under UNR control to pay contributions as a punishment for supposed Jewish disloyalty. Even in internal UNR documents, the idea of Jewish hostility to the UNR was a commonplace.[35] Often soldiers expressed the canard of Judeo-Bolshevism: while leaflets that employed this trope talked of Jews being overrepresented in the Bolshevik party and Soviet state agencies, the basis of this prejudice was an underlying belief in the basic affinity between Judaism and Bolshevism.[36] But when the UNR was fighting an enemy other than the Bolsheviks, many Ukrainians adapted the narrative of Jewish betrayal to the new situation. Thus, some UNR units published leaflets identifying Jews as supporters of both the Imperial German Army and the Russian Volunteer Army. Of course, the canard of Judeo-Bolshevism was widespread among members of both those forces, too; the latter, in particular, was responsible for pogroms that in their bloodthirstiness almost equaled the ones perpetrated by UNR troops. This only underlines how little the stereotypes of Judeo-Bolshevism and Jewish betrayal had to do with Jews' actual behavior during the civil war.[37]

The memoirs of one Ukrainian counterintelligence agent, K. Lysiuk, reveal how, in practice, these prejudices led to pogroms. Lysiuk had been detached to the commandant of the town of Proskuriv. He was present during the pogrom perpetrated there by UNR commander Semesenko on February 15, 1919, which

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[33] *Pohromy v Ukraïny*, 340-341.

[34] *Ibid.*, 187, 194-195, 268, 271, 275, 308, 309, 311-312, 342-243.

[35] Gilley, "Beyond Petliura," 48-50.

[36] Ulrich Herbeck, *Das Feindbild von "jüdischen Bolschewiken." Zur Geschichte des russischen Antisemitismus vor und während der Russischen Revolution*, (Berlin: Metropol, 2009).

[37] Gilley, "Beyond Petliura," 50.

claimed some 1,500 lives and was probably the worst single episode of antisemitic violence committed by UNR troops.[38] Lysiuk wrote his memoirs in a very different setting in the 1960s. The work accordingly pays lip service to the norm of condemning the pogroms, denies the UNR's involvement, and claims that the Ukrainian government supported the Jews and punished the perpetrators, Yet at the very same time, Lysiuk suggests that the Jews provoked the pogroms by shooting retreating Ukrainians in the back (a very common canard among those who had served in the Tsar's army)[39] and opposing Ukrainian statehood.[40] Moreover, there are clear inconsistencies between his statements and other sources: Lysiuk claims that the commandant did not know of the violence until after it had happened,[41] while Red Cross reports identify the same commandant as one of the chief perpetrators.[42] As Lysiuk was under the commandant's authority, this question had direct bearing on his own level of culpability. Therefore, while his account is constructed so as to exculpate both himself personally and the government he served, Lysiuk's memoirs reveal the mentality that led to the pogroms.

Lysiuk describes how in January he received information that the Bolsheviks were organizing an uprising in Proskuriv. The Bolshevik agents sent to stir up trouble were reportedly Jews, so he set out to find them in "Jewish circles." He claims to have been familiar with these, and to have trailed the movements of the agents round the Jewish communities in Proskuriv and the surrounding villages. He could not find the agents, but he reported to Semesenko and the Proskuriv commandant at the end of the month that there was an "excited atmosphere" among local Jews. A "good Jewish friend" of his (who died in the pogrom, making his existence or testimony unverifiable after the event) told Lysiuk that the agents were in Proskuriv and awaiting weapons to start a rising, for which they were mobilizing support. In the last days of January and beginning of February, there were reports of shots being fired, for which the Jews received the blame. The situation became increasingly tense, and Semesenko issued an infamous declaration warning the Jews, whom he described as hated by all people, that they were not to misbehave. Patrols supposedly found arms in Jewish homes.

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[38] *Pohromy v Ukrany*, 206.

[39] Oleg Budnitskii, "Shots in the Back: On the Origin of Anti-Jewish Pogroms of 1918–1921," in *Jews in the East European Borderlands: Essays in Honor of John D. Klier*, eds. Eugene M. Avrutin, Harriet Murav, (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012), 187-201; 196-199.

[40] *Pohromy v Ukaïny*, 208.

[41] *Ibid.*, 465-466.

[42] *Kniga pogromov*, 48 ff.

According to Lysiak, in response to the discovery, Semesenko ordered his men to kill only those Jews taking part in the rising; children were to remain unharmed. No other account suggests that Semesenko or his troops exercised any such restraint; indeed, while Lysiuk claims that the pogrom claimed 200 to 300 victims' lives, most other reports, including that by the UNR's own investigatory commission,[43] give much higher figures. The killing stopped only when Galician troops arrived in the town.[44] Lysiuk's account, which reads like an extended exercise in victim blaming, demonstrates how the common assumption that Jews opposed the UNR led to the search for traitors among the Jewish community and then, in turn, to the mass collective punishment of Jews during the pogrom.

At times, the civil authorities of the UNR also displayed these prejudices, even while they were proclaiming the need for friendship between Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians. For example, the UNR Information Bureau made the following declaration during the rising against Skoropads'kyi:

> [...] So far as the Jewish people is concerned, the Ukrainian people calls upon it immediately to establish friendly relations with the Ukrainian people.
>
> As for the Jewish bourgeoisie, the hostile attitude it has taken up towards the Ukrainian State is regrettable and no good can come of it. The Ukrainian people at present has some friends, but it does not fear foes.
>
> *Each Will Receive According to His Merit*
>
> It is desirable that the Jewish people declare without delay or equivocation that it means to go hand in hand with the Ukrainian people, as the Jews in Galicia have done.
>
> There are many persons who, while availing themselves of the hospitality of the Ukrainian people, and of the protection and benevolence of the Ukrainian State, yet cherish sinister designs against it, and are plotting its ruin. These elements will be the first to perish if they do not stop their

[43] Report for the Special Commission of Inquiry for the Investigation of Anti-Jewish Pogroms, November 15, 1919, f. 1123 0 1 spr. 1 ark. 10-13 (Kyiv, Central State Archives of Supreme Bodies of Power and Government of Ukraine, hereafter TsDAVO).

[44] *Pohromy v Ukraïni*, 202-208.

> perfidious activity. They had better quit Ukrainian territory voluntarily, and the sooner, the better.[45]

While the proclamation openly refers only to the hostility of the Jewish bourgeoisie, it assigns the onus to the Jewish community as a whole to establish friendly relations with and declare its loyalty to the Ukrainian nation. The persons engaging in perfidious activity and harboring sinister designs against the Ukrainian state are not openly identified as Jews. However, coming after the demand for a Jewish declaration of allegiance and grouped under the subtitle "Each Will Receive According to His Merit," the death warrant is difficult to read as anything but a thinly veiled threat against Ukraine's Jews should they fail to provide the UNR with sufficient support. This document shows most clearly how some in the UNR found no inconsistency between the desire for a multi-ethnic Ukraine and promises of collective punishment against the Jews should they not demonstrate the required loyalty to the Ukrainian state.

This was not the first time that civilian representatives of the UNR expressed skepticism about the loyalty of non-Ukrainian minorities. In April 1917, *Nova rada*, the paper of Ukrainian centrists, published a speech by a UPSR member describing national minorities as the greatest enemy of Ukrainian autonomy.[46] As the pogroms intensified, however, the UNR press increasingly sought to cast the Jews as loyal citizens of the Ukrainian state. Thus, in June 1919, the UNR army periodical published an article reminding its soldiers that Jews were citizens of the UNR, too; not all were Bolsheviks, many supported the Ukrainian state, and one could only build the Ukrainian state with Jewish help.[47] Nevertheless, even in this semitophile statement, the issue continued to revolve about the question of Jewish loyalty; the piece implicitly viewed the Jews as a homogenous block, whose safety as a whole depended upon the actions of its individual members.

Such attitudes hindered the attempt to punish pogrom perpetrators. Even though the UNR Cabinet of Ministers had specifically identified dissemination of

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[45] Quoted in Committee of the Jewish Delegations, *The Pogroms in the Ukraine under the Ukrainian Governments (1917–1920). Historical Survey with Documents and Photographs,* (London: J. Bale & Danielsson, 1927), 129-130.

[46] *Ukraïns'kyi natsional'no vyzvol'nyi rukh. Berezen'-lystopad 1917 roku. Dokumenty i materialy* (Kyiv: Olena Teliha, 2003), 155.

[47] "Kozakovi 3-ho Haidamats'koho polku Ivanovi S. pro pohromy," *Ukraïns'kyi kozak*, No. 3, June 8, 1919, 3.

antisemitic propaganda as a cause of the pogroms,[48] the Ministry of Justice dragged its feet in investigating the anti-Jewish leaflets passed on to it by the Minister of Jewish Affairs. The Ministry of Justice described the leaflets, many of which portrayed the Bolsheviks as a Jewish enemy, as passionate expressions of the "lively, patriotic mood of our army." It accused the Ministry of Jewish Affairs of wanting to "take under its wing all Jews, even if they are Bolsheviks and even the Trotsky-Bronshteins."[49] The Ministry of Justice seems to have found the identification of Jew and Bolshevik so self-evident that it could not see how leaflets endorsing this characterization could contribute to violent attacks on Jews in general. Indeed, for all the creation of a special investigatory commission to bring UNR pogromists to justice, this body apparently punished only a handful of the guilty. While the UNR did imprison and investigate some of the worst perpetrators, the charge against them was not that of antisemitic violence but of failing to obey orders. Many were set free; the most notorious, Semesenko, was accused only of desertion, spent much of 1919 imprisoned, and escaped in November of that year. War conditions also made investigating pogroms difficult: sometimes investigators could not travel to the sites of the violence because these were no longer under UNR control.[50] Nevertheless, the will to prosecute the guilty was often lacking, too.

Perhaps, however, the opinions and actions of those on the ground determined the outcome of the violence more than the views in the central government. Some local UNR representatives did oppose the pogroms (whether for pragmatic or humanitarian reasons), creating a constant tussle between would be pogromists and those trying to stop them. In Proskuriv, one set of Ukrainian troops put an end to another's violence against Jews; a Ukrainian Social Democrat, Trofim Verkhola, had already risked his life trying to stop the violence and have the perpetrators punished.[51] As in Proskuriv, the available documents often mention "Galicians" as the most vigilant Ukrainian opponents of pogroms. These were soldiers from the Ukrainian-speaking parts of the former Habsburg Monarchy who had been captured and interned by Russia during the Great War. Following their release after the fall of the Romanov dynasty, they formed their own military units to support the attempts to create a Ukrainian state; they were often considered the most disciplined of all UNR troops. They did commit some

[48] *Pohromy v Ukraïni*, 308.

[49] Quoted in Gilley, "Beyond Petliura," 52-53.

[50] *Ibid.*, 53-55.

[51] *Kniga pogromov*, 55-58, 63-64.

pogroms, but these comprised only 3% of the total perpetrated by soldiers affiliated with the UNR.[52]

At the same time, officers and soldiers on the ground resisted authorities' attempts to punish pogromists. Thus, the UNR State Inspector of the Volhynian Army Group reported that in June 1919 he had tried to arrest some Galician scouts accused of stealing Jewish property. Their officer, however, refused to acknowledge the Inspector's authority and ordered the troops to turn their guns on him. The Inspector was able to pacify them with a speech on how shameful their theft was for the Ukrainian state. Nevertheless, when the Inspector produced his papers, the soldiers still would not respect his authority. Only the timely arrival of a field police unit allowed him to take the perpetrators into custody. However, the scouts' commander, promising that there would be no more such incidents, requested that the Inspector set them free, which the Inspector did. The Inspector then turned to the head of the UNR's Galician forces with the request that he try the scouts in court and take measures to prevent further incidents.[53] Clearly, resistance by Ukrainian officers made combatting pogroms very difficult.

Sometimes, such resistance even caused armed clashes between different groups of UNR soldiers. In May 1919, Kovan'ko, then UNR commandant of Rovno, evacuated the town in anticipation of a Bolshevik advance. He handed power over to the town council, who formed their own guard to ensure the smooth transition of power. Shortly thereafter, a UNR armored train, the *Strelets*, arrived in Rovno. Its crew were convinced that Bolsheviks were planning an armed rising in the town; they detained a detachment of the town guard, believing them to be conspirators. The situation degenerated into a pogrom. Troops from the train went from house to house, taking money and property from local Jews. Hearing of this, Commandant Kovan'ko, at the time in Dubno, returned to Rovno. At first, the pogromists took flight in their train, but then decided to take revenge, attack the town, and arrest the commandant – whose guard beat them off. The *Strelets* left the town, as did Kovan'ko, when Bolshevik forces drew closer.[54] The appeals addressed by some Jewish communities to the central UNR authorities with the plea that certain Ukrainian commandants or commanders remain in their localities suggest that the Jews did think of some UNR representatives as protectors.[55]

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[52] Abramson, *Prayer*, 117.

[53] *Pohromy v Ukraïny*, 465-466.

[54] *Kniga pogromov*, 153-155.

[55] See, for example, *Pohromy v Ukraïny*, 355.

We thus find a broad range of attitudes toward Jews and antisemitic violence in the ranks of the UNR. There were those who, for pragmatic, ideological, or humanitarian reasons, opposed the pogroms and sought to stop them and bring their perpetrators to justice. However, these attempts often failed. Acceptance of the claim that Ukraine's Jews were bitter opponents of Ukrainian statehood was widespread among both the UNR's civil and military officials. The behavior of many Ukrainian soldiers suggests that they had managed to convince themselves that by beating Jews, they would be saving Ukraine. Even some supporters of a multi-ethnic Ukraine saw no contradiction between the principle of multi-ethnicity and threats of collective punishment for the Jews if any of them were not sufficiently loyal. As the next section will show, the two most important figures in the UNR, Symon Petliura and Volodymyr Vynnychenko, made statements in keeping with this attitude.

UNR Leaders: Symon Petliura and Volodymyr Vynnychenko

In the charged atmosphere of the Schwarzbard trial, several witnesses claimed to have heard conversations directly implicating Petliura in the anti-Jewish violence.[56] These accounts are impossible to verify. Most damning, however, are the several reports that Petliura visited Zhytomyr on March 23, 1919 – that is, while a pogrom was in full swing – and that he did not interfere with the violence.[57] We know that on that date he sent a telegram to various military and civil offices of the UNR, describing his arrival in Zhytomyr after the town's liberation from the Bolsheviks. The "pillaging, banditry, brutality, and shamelessness" with which the Bolsheviks had ruled Ukraine had, it stated, turned the Ukrainian people against "these new pillaging Muscovites and Jews."[58] At the very least, it seems that while in a city where UNR troops were in the process of committing atrocities against Jews, Petliura was willing to echo the pogromists' claims that the violence was their means of opposing the Bolsheviks.

However, there are also documents that indicate that Petliura was not a supporter of pogroms. Some of his critics have claimed that he did not issue any orders against pogroms until August 1919 and that such orders that he did give were only

[56] Friedman, *Pogromchik*, 157-158.

[57] *Kniga pogromov*, 91; "Pogroms in the Ukraine," 205.

[58] *Kniga pogromov*, 85.

intended to improve the UNR's image abroad.[59] This is not entirely correct. Serhii Yelekhcyk has found a condemnation of the pogroms by Petliura from November 1917. In the same month, Petliura met with some Jewish leaders and promised to combat antisemitic violence.[60] In addition, in January 1919, Petliura sent a telegram to the commandant of the Myrgorod station in central Ukraine. Responding to reports of robberies and excesses against the local Jewish population, Petliura ordered the commandant to investigate and take measures.[61] In June 1919, Petliura wrote to a commander in the rear about a Ukrainian soldier who had been spreading antisemitic propaganda among UNR troops; the leader of the Directory called for the soldier to be shot.[62] In 1919, Petliura signed five resolutions assigning funds to help pogrom victims[63]

Yet Petliura continued to tie opposition to pogroms to Jews' loyalty to the UNR. In July 1919, he met with a delegation of Jewish leaders, to whom he promised to take measures against UNR troops that called for or perpetrated pogroms. At the same time, he reminded his interlocutors that the Jews of Galicia had supported the Ukrainians against the Poles and received the locals' gratitude for this. The reference to Galician Jews comes across as both setting up an example for the delegation to emulate and a suggestion that their standing in Ukraine depended upon their demonstration of loyalty. While promising to make UNR insurgents respect the Jews, he also asked that the delegation undertake to influence their community to continue opposing the Bolsheviks. He suggested that they turn to Jews in Rumania to get the UNR army the ammunition it needed.[64]

Volodymr Vynnychenko was Petliura's harshest Ukrainian critic. The two had both been Ukrainian Social Democrats; in late 1918, they had together led the UNR rising against Skoropads'kyi. Vynnchenko headed the UNR until February 1919, when he was forced to give up this leadership position as a precondition for cooperation between the UNR and the Entente. Vynnychenko's leftism had created a rift with the more centrist UNR leaders and made an alliance with the Western Great Powers impossible. In his memoirs, Vynnychenko reports that Petliura defended pogrom perpetrators and said that the Jews had deserved their

[59] Friedman, *Pogromchik*, 251; Khiterer, *Jewish Pogroms*, 33.
[60] Iekelchyk, "Trahichna," 169-170.
[61] *Pohromy v Ukraïni*, 198.
[62] *Ibid.*, 310-311.
[63] Iekelchyk, "Trahichna," 196-197.
[64] *Pohromy v Ukraïny*, 316-317.

fate.[65] Clearly, as a party and government colleague, Vynnychenko had the opportunity to hear Petliura's private opinions. Yet, given the bad blood between the two men and Vynnychenko's active campaign after 1919 to portray Petliura in the worst possible light, one must accept his evidence with a grain of salt.
Moreover, Vynnychenko, whose period of heading the UNR coincided with the first wave of UNR pogroms during the rising against Skoropads'kyi, did not have an exemplary record of opposing pogroms himself. True enough, he issued a condemnation of antisemitic violence in January 1919. In this statement he claimed that the supporters of Skoropads'kyi and the Bolsheviks had instigated the UNR troops to violence to "stain the fair name" of the UNR army. He declared that measures had already been taken against these agents provocateurs and called upon the UNR army to combat them. At the same time, he called upon "the whole of democratic Jewry to fight energetically those individual Bolshevik-anarchist members of the Jewish nation who behave as enemies of the working people of the Ukraine and the state." "These elements," he vituperated, "[...] enable the Hetman's men and their provocateurs to carry on a demagogic agitation against the mass of Jewry which is non-Bolshevik." The result, he asserted, was "grave misunderstandings" between Ukrainian and Jewish democrats.[66] Despite the statement that most Jews were not Bolsheviks, many Jewish leaders found this declaration quite inadequate: it sought to shift blame for the crimes of UNR troops onto their opponents and even, to a certain extent, onto the Jews themselves. At a meeting they had with Vynnychenko during the same month, Jewish leaders voiced vigorous opposition to Vynnychenko's proclamation.[67]

Thus, each of these two leaders of the UNR displayed the ambivalence characteristic of the UNR as a whole. The two were not open supporters of pogroms. They both issued declarations condemning the antisemitic violence, calling for punishment of the perpetrators and measures to prevent future atrocities. However, they tied the question of Jewish safety from excesses to that of the Jewish community's demonstrated loyalty to the UNR. This meant that they were often willing to see reports of pogroms as evidence of Jewish provocation against the UNR army, either by Jews trying to bring the UNR into disrepute or by Jewish Bolsheviks. Alongside the reservations voiced by many other UNR officials, these attitudes contributed to making the attempts to combat pogroms extremely tentative.

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[65] Vynnychenko, *Vidrodzhennia natsii*, Vol. III (Kyiv and Vienna: Nova Doba, 1920; repr. Kyiv: Politvydav Ukrainy, 1990), 187-188.
[66] *Pogroms in the Ukraine*, 169-170.
[67] *Pohromy v Ukraïny*, 185.

Nationally Conscious Ukrainians outside the UNR: The *Otamans*

Historians seeking to defend the memory of the UNR from criticism have often tried to assign blame for the pogroms to the *otamans*, independent commanders who shifted their allegiances between the major warring parties during the civil war. It thus becomes important to examine the role the *otamans* played in the course of the war. The *otaman* most associated with antisemitic violence was Hryhor'irev, a former captain in the Imperial Russian Army, who commanded a band active primarily in southern Ukraine. In Kyiv province, two of the most active warlord perpetrators of pogroms were Danylo Terpylo (aka *Otaman* Zelenyi) and Il'ko Struk. Both were former village teachers who had served in the Great War; they commanded insurgent bands in their home regions to the south and north of the city of Kyiv, respectively.

These and other warlords shaped the outcome of the civil war in Ukraine. At the end of 1918, they had risen against Skoropads'kyi and helped the UNR to power; Hryhor'iev, Zelenyi and Struk had all formally recognized Petliura's authority. However, after war broke out between the UNR and the Bolsheviks, Hryhor'iev switched his allegiance to the Red Army; Zelenyi withdrew his support from the UNR, retreating to his home village and maintaining friendly neutrality toward the Bolsheviks. Only a few months later, Zelenyi, Struk and other commanders in Kyiv Province initiated two risings against the Bolsheviks, in spring and then summer 1919; in May, Hryhor'iev revolted, too. The Kyiv *otamans* nominally fought to bring a group of leftist Social Democrats to power, while Hryhor'iev sought to make himself ruler of all Ukraine. These attempts failed (and Hryhor'iev was killed after an unsuccessful attempt to ally with Makhno), but they also weakened the Bolsheviks sufficiently to enable the White breakthrough into Ukraine in summer 1919. The remaining *otamans* now turned against the Whites; some (like Struk and Zelenyi, the latter dying in battle against the Whites) allied with the UNR, others with the Bolsheviks. But each one often operated quite independently of any other authority. By undermining the Whites, these warlords aided the Bolshevik reconquest of Ukraine in autumn 1919. This in turn led to a new war between the UNR and the Bolsheviks. Many insurgents now switched their allegiance to the UNR; the Bolsheviks sought to incorporate those remaining under their command into their regular forces. UNR partisans (including Struk) continued to oppose the Bolsheviks even after the regular UNR forces were forced to leave the country. These operatives' strength was now considerably reduced;

they could no longer threaten to overthrow the government. But they did undermine efforts to build the Soviet state, by means of attacks on factories, trains, and requisitioning parties, among others.[68]

During this time, Hryhor'iev, Zelenyi, and Struk at the head of their men all committed terrible pogroms. Hryhor'iev's bands were responsible for some of the most brutal antisemitic violence between 1918 and 1920: they perpetrated 52 pogroms, in which 3,471 Jews died, meaning on average each pogrom claimed 67 Jewish lives, compared to the average total of 38 dead in each of those ascribable to the UNR. Zelenyi and Struk initiated similar numbers of pogroms.[69] Many smaller Jewish communities were subject to repeated attacks; those who survived took refuge in the larger cities, meaning that the *otamans* had completely eradicated the Jewish presence in some parts of the countryside. Consequently, two historians have suggested that the *otamans*[70] and peasant partisans[71] in effect instigated ethnic cleansing *avant la lettre*.

Given this history of inconstancy and violence, the *otamans* have, unsurprisingly, an ambiguous place in the nationally engaged historiography. Among the Ukrainian diaspora, many of whose members sought to preserve the memory of the UNR, they were often viewed as bandits who undermined the UNR with their willful independence, rapaciousness, and violence.[72] Some writers in contemporary Ukraine continue to follow this approach.[73] However, since 1991, a new trend has emerged, which views these insurgents as unwavering supporters of Ukrainian independence and an expression of the Ukrainian national character. Roman Koval' is particularly prominent among these romanticizing revisionists. He is the founder of the Kholodnyi Iar historical club, named after the wooded area which became a famous camp for a band of *otamans*. The club is a veritable cottage industry producing monographs on the *otamans* and republishing their

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[68] Christopher Gilley, "The Ukrainian Anti-Bolshevik Risings of Spring and Summer 1919: Intellectual History in a Space of Violence," *Revolutionary Russia* 27/2 (2014): 109-131.

[69] Abramson, *Prayer*, 116-117.

[70] Chopard, *Le Martyre*, 91.

[71] Dimitri Tolkatsch, "Lokale Ordnungsentwürfe am Übergang vom Russischen Reich zur Sowjetmacht: Bauernaufstände und Dorfrepubliken in der Ukraine, 1917-1921," in *Akteure der Neuordnung. Ostmitteleuropa und das Erbe der Imperien, 1917–1924*, eds. Tim Buchen, Frank Grelka, (Berlin: Epubli, 2017), 93-111; 108.

[72] M. Bohachevsky-Chomiak, "The directory of the Ukrainian National Republic," in *The Ukraine, 1917-1921,* ed. Taras Hunczak, (Cambridge, Mass.: HURI, 1977), 82-103; 87.

[73] Valerii Soldatenko, *U vyri revoliutsii i hromadians'koi viiny (aktual'ni aspekty vyvchennia 1917-1920 rr. Ukraini)*, (Kyiv: Svitohliad, 2012), 130-134.

memoirs, often with "improvements" by the editor. Koval's stated aim is to venerate the *otamans* as the true Ukrainian heroes of the period and examples for future generations to follow.[74] While many professional Ukrainian historians view Koval's work critically,[75] this conception of the *otamans* as bearers of national consciousness and fighters for independence has made its way into Ukrainian law. Among those defined as "fighters for Ukrainian independence" are the "insurgent, partisan detachments active on the territory of Ukraine in the years 1917-1930, the aim of whose activity was the struggle for the attainment, defense, or revival of the independence of Ukraine."[76] The law gives three examples of village "republics" created by the *otamans* and peasant insurgents, but beyond that does not specify who exactly among the many irregular forces active in Ukraine during this period are to be understood as "fighters for Ukrainian independence." Because the *otamans* regularly switched allegiances, it is not always clear who was struggling to attain, defend, or revive Ukraine's independence.

Moreover, fostering the positive image of the *otamans* and their rule by Ukraine's official memory creates an obvious problem in connection with attempts to shift the blame for the pogroms away from the UNR. For example, in its guidelines for schools and universities on how to commemorate the centenary of the Ukrainian Revolution (later published as an article on BBC Ukraine),[77] the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (*Ukraïns'kyi Instytut Natsional'noï Pam'iati* – UINP), the body responsible for Ukraine's official memory policy, claims that the UNR had genuine and broad support among peasant insurgents. The guidelines point to backing given to the government by *otamans* such as Struk. The UINP goes on to try to dispel the alleged "myth" that the UNR was responsible for the pogroms on the basis of – inter alia – the claim that "The majority of pogroms ascribed to Ukrainian national forces were perpetrated by autonomous detachments of peasant insurgents that regularly changed their political orientation and did not follow the orders of the Ukrainian government."[78] Thus, in the new nationalist narrative, the peasant insurgents

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[74] See, for example, the inscription in Roman Koval', *Povernennia otamaniv haidamats'koho kraiu*, (Kyiv: Diokor, 2001), 2. Koval' has published or edited well over 40 works on the topic.

[75] Mykhailo Koval'chuk, *Bez peremozhtsiv. Povstans'kyi rukh v Ukraini proty bilogvards'kykh viis'k generala A. Denikina (cherven' 1919 r. – liutyi 1920 r.)*, (Kyiv: Stylos 2012), 249-250.

[76] See the official website of the *Verkhovna rada* at: https://rada.gov.ua/en (accessed August 14, 2019).

[77] See http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-39216782/ (accessed August 14, 2019)

[78] See http://www.memory.gov.ua/methodicmaterial/metodichni-rekomendatsii-do-100-richchya-ukrainskoi-revolyutsii-1917-1921-rokiv/ (accessed August 14, 2019).

and the *otamans* are loyal when this is politically convenient and disloyal when it is not. It is particularly striking that the account stresses Struk's allegiance to the UNR; he was one of the most notorious perpetrators of antisemitic violence during the civil war in Ukraine.
Thus, there is little dispute that many *otamans* perpetrated pogroms. The debate centers rather on the political and military relationship between the *otamans* and the UNR, on the one hand, and the connection between the nationalist ideology to which the *otamans* expressed allegiance and their antisemitic violence, on the other. In an attempt to counter the romanticizing portrayal of these commanders by some nationalist historians, some scholars have sought to dispel the view that the *otamans* were motivated by nationalist sentiment.[79] However, many of the earlier attempts to question the *otamans*' sense of national identity seemed to be based on the assumption that Ukrainian national consciousness entailed unswerving loyalty to the UNR, and on the desire to exonerate the Ukrainian government from blame for the independent commanders' violence.

Yet, considered from another perspective, the *otamans* were engaged in their own Ukrainian state-building projects. The self-designation of *otaman* is an indication that the independent commanders saw themselves as part of the Ukrainian tradition of the *Zaporozhian* Cossacks, whom all Ukrainian nationalists saw as their early modern forebears. Many chose *noms de guerre* that evoked the Cossacks of history and legend. A good number dressed so as to evoke the early modern warriors: they sported shaved heads with topknots, long moustaches, fur hats with a cloth tail, broad sashes and guardless daggers. Some established camps in locations associated with the Cossacks. This had practical as well as symbolic reasons: natural features that had been easily defensible in 1648 or 1768 were similarly unassailable in 1919. The appeal to the Cossack past gave the insurgents a lot in common with the (from their perspective) "real" Ukrainian nationalists among the intelligentsia who staffed the Ukrainian governments. These latter, too, used Cossack terms for their civil authorities, decrees, and military ranks, and evoked the Cossack past with similar theatrical displays. Thus, the *otamans* and the Ukrainian intelligentsia drew from the same well of myths and symbols.[80]

Many *otamans* maintained only an inconstant loyalty to the UNR, but their own state-building efforts were avowedly Ukrainian. As mentioned above, Struk and Zelenyi formed an alliance with the left-wing Ukrainian Social Democrats to create

[79] Yekelchyk, "Bands," 121.
[80] Gilley, "Fighters for Independence?," 185-188.

a Ukrainian soviet state independent both of the Bolsheviks, whom they condemned for abusing the power of the soviets, and of the UNR.[81] Zelenyi's leaflets ended with the appeals "Long live the Independent Ukrainian Socialist Republic!" and "Long live the peasant, workers' and soldiers' power of soviets!"[82] When he declared himself ruler of all Ukraine, Hryhor'iev called upon the people of Ukraine to rise up and create their own partisan units and local offices of administration; these they were to subordinate to Hryhor'iev's staff.[83] In effect, he was telling Ukrainians to take power into their own hands and then pass it on to him. As with the Kyiv *otamans*, Hryhor'iev envisioned the soviet as the basic unit of local power. This might sound too ephemeral to dignify with the term state-building *project*. Yet, however short-lived (the rising only had a mass character for a couple of weeks), this was an attempt to create an independent Ukrainian state.

Antisemitism and pogroms were inherent to these *otaman* state-building projects. Like the many regular UNR units, the *otamans* often perceived their enemy as both Jewish and Bolshevik. Insurgent leaders never missed the opportunity to claim (falsely!) that a Jew, Khristiian Rakovskii, headed the Soviet Ukrainian government. [84] Struk's pamphlets described Bolshevik rule as a "Jewish-Muscovite regime."[85] A song from the civil war celebrating the feats of Zelenyi's troops and titled "Otaman Zelenyi's Army Is So Strong" described the Bolshevik government as "Little Jews" who "dictated the law to our glorious Ukraine."[86] Consequently, for Zelenyi, the Jewish population as a whole were suspicious. In his orders issued after taking Rzhyshchev in June 1919, the *otaman* told the city's inhabitants that all the Jews had run away. He described this act (which, if his claim was true, was most likely an attempt to escape an expected pogrom) as a provocation by the Jews. He ordered Jews not to flee. All members of the Jewish population that supported Rakovskii's government were to give up their weapons by 4.30 pm. Those failing to do so would be shot.[87]

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[81] Gilley, "Anti-Bolshevik Risings," 111-116.

[82] See the leaflets: Braty-seliane, f. 1, o 18, spr. 63, ark. 12, Central State Archives of Public Organizations of Ukraine (hereafter, TsDAHO), Kyiv, Ukraine and Do trudovoho selianstva ta robitnykiv f. 1, o 18, spr. 63, ark. 13, TsDAHO.

[83] See: Hryhor'iev's Universal, f. 57, o 2, spr. 398, ark. 2, TsDAHO and Order No. 2, f. 5, o 1, spr. 265, ark. 31-34, TsDAHO.

[84] See Zelenyi's Leaflet, Braty-seliane!, f. 1, o 18, spr. 63, ark. 12, TsDAHO and Hryor'iev's leaflet, Seliane rabochie i krasnoarmeitsy, June 11, 1919, f. 5, o 1, spr. 264, ark. 116-8, TsDAHO.

[85] See his proclamation to the Peasants of Kyiv, f. 1 o 18 spr. 63 ark. 1, TsDAHO.

[86] Iaka syl'na armiia otamana Zelenoho, f. 1, o 18, spr. 63, ark. 30, TsDAHO.

[87] Order No.1 to the Garrison of Rzhyshchev, 30 June1919, f. 1, o 18, spr. 63, ark. 10, TsDAHO.

Hryhor'iev's first declaration of the aims of his rising explicitly condemned pogroms and called for the punishment of those responsible for them. Yet, in the very same text, one finds antisemitic canards: Hryhor'iev describes Bolshevik Chekists and commissars as coming from Moscow and "the land where Christ was crucified." He thus combines the traditional antisemitic myth of Jewish deicide with the modern one of Judeo-Bolshevism.[88] He also makes the claim that Jews dominate the Bolshevik establishment overall. This, as he states, is the cause of the pogroms, meaning the Jews are themselves responsible for the violence against them. In one leaflet written at the end of his rising, Hryhor'iev denies that his troops had committed pogroms, but then writes:

> I turn to the Jews and loudly declare to the entire world that the pogroms and slaughter of Jews are the fault of the Jews themselves who have crawled by any means into the [Bolshevik] leadership and Cheka.
> Comrade Jews. You know very well that in Ukraine you only make up five or six percent, but the Cheka and commissars are 99 percent Jewish. And, here it is, your 99 percent of the Cheka Jews have led you to pogroms. This is how the people deals with the Jewish commissar; for this reason it beats up Jews.

The same leaflet threatens further anti-Jewish violence: if the Jews fighting against Hryhor'iev do not lay down their arms within the week, they will be beaten and their property and homes will be destroyed.[89] Throughout his rising, Hryhor'iev denied responsibility for the pogroms in one breath and justified them in the next: he claimed that the agents of antisemitic violence were the people themselves, avenging themselves on the Jews for oppressing Ukraine.

Thus, many *otamans* explicitly tied their fight against a perceived Bolshevik Jewish oppressor to their attempts to create their own Ukrainian state. This shows how widespread the belief was in the canards of Jewish betrayal and Judeo-Bolshevism among nationally conscious Ukrainians. The *otamans* often connected this opposition to the supposedly Jewish Bolsheviks to advocating the soviets as a form

[88] See the leaflet: Universal, f. 57, o 2, spr. 398, ark. 2, TsDAHO. For more on Hryhor'iev's declaration of aims and condemnation of pogromists, see his Order No. 2, May 20, 1920, f. 5, o 1, spr. 265, ark. 34, TsDAHO.

[89] See the leaflet, Seliane rabochie i krasnoarmeitsy, June 11, 1919, f. 5, o 1, spr. 264, ark. 116-8, TsDAHO.

of government independent of the Bolsheviks. They portrayed the "Russian-Jewish" Bolsheviks as perverters of the *soviet* principle. The combination of left-wing slogans and antisemitism was not unique to the Ukrainian *otamans*; one often finds supporters of soviet power or the Bolsheviks using antisemitic stereotypes to defame their political opponents.[90] Nevertheless, this section has shown that they went to great lengths to underline their *Ukrainian* understanding of the soviet project.

Lastly, as mentioned above, many *otamans*, including both Struk and Zelenyi, returned to the UNR fold after summer 1919. The UNR heralded such people as heroes. For example, *Otaman* Sokolovs'kyi had fought alongside Struk and Zelenyi during the spring and summer risings in Kyiv province against the Bolsheviks, but after their failure rejoined the UNR. He was also responsible for some 35 pogroms.[91] In summer 1919, the Bolsheviks killed him. The official newspaper of the Ukrainian government, *Trudova hromada,* praised him as an "honorable warrior for Land and Liberty, the defender of peasant rights." It announced a memorial to celebrate his life.[92] Symon Petliura signed an order granting his widow a pension in recognition of his "great services to Ukraine."[93] Many *otamans* operated largely independently of the UNR command, even when they formally acknowledged the Ukrainian government; others regularly switched their allegiances to opponents of the UNR. But the attempt by nationalist historians to draw a sharp dividing line between the UNR and the insurgents (when they become politically inconvenient) stands in stark contrast to the UNR's willingness to embrace these men when it needed their military support. Indeed, the insurgents' use of antisemitic slogans alongside statements of support for the UNR only strengthens the impression of the connection between the two. One of Struk's proclamations, for example, ends with the call, "Death to the Jews and the Communists! Glory to Ukraine! Glory to Petliura!"[94]

The UNR lacked local control over Hryhor'iev, Zelenyi, Struk, and other *otamans*. The independent warlords were responsible for their own violence.

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[90] See Brendan McGeever, "The Bolsheviks and Antisemitism," *Jacobin*, June 22, 2017, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/06/russian-revolution-antisemitism-pogroms-reactionary-workers/ (accessed August 14, 2019).

[91] Abramson, *Prayer*, 117.

[92] Quoted in Friedman, *Pogromchik*, 274.

[93] Resolution of the Council of People's Ministers, October 12, 1919, f. 1078 o 2 spr. 19 ark. 7, TsDAVO.

[94] See the leaflet: To the Peasants of Kyiv Province, f. 1 o 18 spr. 63 ark. 33, TsDAO.

Commanders such as Hryhor'iev were engaged in their own state-building projects, typically short-lived and often hostile to those of the UNR. But these were emphatically *Ukrainian* projects, albeit often with a *soviet* coloring. The *otamans*' combination of antisemitic violence and Ukrainian national consciousness shows that undertakings based on the two were quite common during the civil war. When the *otamans* abandoned their independent projects and returned to the UNR fold, Petliura hardly gained any more control over their day-to-day activity. However, through this cooperation, the UNR made possible the *otamans*' combination of antisemitic and pro-UNR slogans. The attempts to distinguish the UNR from the warlords entirely tell us more about the desire after 1921 to whitewash the Ukrainian government's record than the actual relations between the two at the time.

Conclusion

Ukrainian antisemitic violence was a product not of UNR policy but of military indiscipline. The *otamans* were military indiscipline personified and, consequently, were often the worst pogromists. Yet the perpetrators of pogroms connected their attacks on Jews to Ukrainian state-building efforts: they saw the Jews as inherently hostile to Ukrainian statehood and presented violence against them as a means of defending Ukraine against its enemies. This was true both of regular UNR troops and irregular bands led by the *otamans*: we cannot exonerate the "good" Ukrainian regulars by blaming the "bad" peasant partisans. Certainly, there were soldiers and civilians in the Ukrainian national movement who opposed pogroms; the government issued proclamations, created investigatory commissions, and released funds to victims. Disciplined Ukrainian units ended outbreaks perpetrated by their comrades, sometimes using force of arms. However, there were also members of the UNR's civil authorities, including the two leaders of the UNR, Symon Petliura and Volodymyr Vynnychenko, who, to different degrees, tied the question of Jewish safety to Jewish loyalty. This placed limits upon attempts to fight pogroms. Indeed, the extent of the antisemitic violence suggests that the pogromists were too many and too strong and their opponents too few, too ineffective, or too hesitant to protect Ukraine's Jewish population. While this assessment does not support all the charges brought by scholars such as Szajkowski and Friedman, it does indicate that many of the figures glorified by Ukrainian legislation on history policy were perpetrators of violence and expressed prejudices that are inconvenient to today's politics of memory in Ukraine.

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