



*The Pogroms of the Russian Civil War at 100:  
New Trends, New Sources*  
edited by *Elissa Bemporad, Thomas Chopard*

Issue n. 15, August 2019

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#### QUEST. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History

Journal of Fondazione CDEC

ISSN: 2037-741X

via Eupili 8, 20145 Milano Italy

Reg. Trib. Milano n. 403 del 18/09/2009

P. IVA: 12559570150

tel. 003902316338

fax 00390233602728

[www.quest-cdecjournal.it](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it)

[mail@quest-cdecjournal.it](mailto:mail@quest-cdecjournal.it)

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## The Pogroms of the Russian Civil War at 100: New Trends, New Sources

### Introduction

*edited by* Elissa Bemporad, Thomas Chopard

On June 16, 1919, following a violent pogrom during the night, a medical team was dispatched to the shtetl of Kitaigorod (Kytaihorod), in the Podolia region in Ukraine. The team set up a makeshift infirmary to provide relief and medical treatment for victims. It also collected information about the unfolding of events during the preceding night and recorded the numbers of casualties. To assess the real extent of damage, injuries, and loss of life, the medical team inspected the homes of the shtetl's inhabitants, most of whom were too traumatized to venture outside. The team noted the shattered glass in the windows and the broken doors of the buildings, which had been emptied of everything, even of the least valuable things. There were no samovars left – all had been looted – and therefore no water could be boiled to use in tending the wounded. “Traces of bullets are seen on the walls and ceilings of many homes. But most importantly,” wrote one of the medical team's members, “there is blood everywhere... Kitaigorod is literally covered in blood. There is clotted blood on the pavements, on the walls, on the street...”<sup>1</sup>

In the official report he sent to the nearby larger Jewish community of Kamenets-Podolsk (Kamianets-Podilskyi), the same writer emphasized how uncommon what he had witnessed was. His report cites the high proportion of casualties; he notes the fact that the number of the dead exceeded that of the wounded; and he remarks upon the unusual brutality of the pogrom, in which families had been massacred in their entirety and children killed before their parents' eyes. The report concludes with these words: “We have reached the tragic conclusion that the carnage in Kitaigorod is unparalleled, even in the history of anti-Jewish pogroms.”<sup>2</sup>

But the events in Kitaigorod actually constituted only one of the thousands of pogroms that overwhelmed the Jewish population of the hundreds of towns and cities of the former Tsarist Empire, all as part of an unprecedented wave of violence

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<sup>1</sup> YIVO Archives, Tcherikower Collection, RG 80, folder 360, p. 32863 (Memorandum about the pogrom in Kitaigorod, June 19, 1919). According to the report, 72 of the approximately 400 shtetl residents had been murdered during the pogrom. Unlike the outcome of most outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the number of the murdered surpassed the number of the wounded.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32864-5.

against civilians unleashed during the Russian Civil War (1917-1921).<sup>3</sup> Because of their death toll, their intentional focus on killing and annihilation, their degree of destruction, and their scope of sexual violence, in their extent and impact the pogroms of the Russian Civil War are overshadowed only by the Holocaust.<sup>4</sup> Like the writer from the medical team in Kitaigorod, victims of the violence also perceived the stark difference between earlier instances of anti-Jewish outbreaks and the pogroms of the civil war. In order to convey their experience and the intensity of violence, witness accounts in Yiddish preferred the term *khurbn*, or “destruction.”<sup>5</sup> In the Russian-language accounts, the terms “slaughter” (*reznia*) and “blood bath” (*krovavaia bania*) came to replace “pogrom.” Some victims tried to find a standard of comparison for the events by comparing the violence to the Armenian genocide of 1915.<sup>6</sup> The historian Elias Tcherikower, who devoted most of his life to the meticulous collection of witness accounts and documents about the pogroms of the civil war, referred to the violence as one of the worst catastrophes in Russian Jewish history.<sup>7</sup>

The Russian Civil War was a chaotic and ruthless conflict among a spectrum of more or less organized, more or less well defined troops and armies striving to gain political and territorial control after the downfall of the Tsar and following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. The Red Army fought in the name of Bolshevik rule, and faced the White movement, a coalition of anti-communist forces trying to take over post-

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<sup>3</sup> More than 1,200 pogroms took place in more than 800 localities in lands of the former Russian Empire. 80 percent of these took place in Ukraine. See *Kniga pogromov. Pogromy na Ukraine, v Belorussii i evropeiskoi chasti Rossii v period grazhdanskoi voiny 1918-1922 gg. Sbornik dokumentov*, ed. L. B. Miliakova, (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2007), XXVIII.

<sup>4</sup> On mass rape during the civil war pogroms, see Irina Astashkevich, *Gendered Violence: Jewish Women in the Pogroms of 1917 to 1921*, (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> A vast memorial literature emerged following the pogroms of the civil war; in narrating the destruction of entire communities, most memorial books used the term *khurbn*. See, for example, *Tetiever khurbn*, (New York: Idgezkorn, 1922); *Khurbn Proskurov; Tsum ondenken fun di heylike neshomes vos zaynen umgekumen in der shrekleker shkhite vos iz ongefirt gevoren durkh di haydamakes*, (New York: Proskurover Relief Association, 1924); *Felshtin*, (New York: First Felshtener Progressive Benevolent Association, 1937). On the memorial compilations and their impact on Jewish responses to persecution after 1945, see David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> Elissa Bemporad, *Legacy of Blood: Jews, Pogroms, and Ritual Murder in the Lands of the Soviets*, Introduction, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019). While the term “genocide” had not yet been coined, information about the extermination of the Armenian population in the collapsing Ottoman Empire during World War I was widely accessible.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, *In der tkufe fun revolutsye: memuar, materyaln, dokumentn*, ed. Elias Tcherikower, (Berlin: Yiddishe literarische farlag, 1924), 1.

Revolutionary Russia.<sup>8</sup> Led by Symon Petliura, president of the Directory of the Ukrainian People's Republic, Ukrainian troops also faced the Bolsheviks in a harsh struggle for independence after the fall of the Russian Empire in 1917. After taking control of Western Ukraine on behalf of the Second Polish Republic, Polish troops also clashed with the Red Army as they continued to press eastward in what came to be known as the Polish-Soviet War. The other competing factions in the civil war included a very diverse group of peasant bands that proliferated, especially in Ukraine, but also in Belorussia and Central Russia. Among these, the so-called Green Army dissociated itself from the ideology of the other combatants, but remained staunch in resisting the Red Army's grain requisition policies to feed its troops; while the anarchist bands led by Nestor Makhno, having initially cooperated with local communist forces, eventually refused Soviet authority. In Ukraine, countless smaller insurrections led by so-called "atamans" continued to undermine the newly established Bolshevik authority well into the early 1920s. In the whirlwind of violent takeovers, the former Jewish Pale of Settlement, where the overwhelming majority of the Jews of the Russian Empire had lived up until the Revolutions of 1917, became one enlarged battlefield.

Each group involved in the civil war resorted to anti-Jewish violence, but each was spurred on by different impulses and aims. Some soldiers and peasants engaged in violence against Jewish communities because they were drawn by the allure of plunder and extortion. Others perpetrated pogroms based on ideological convictions, to punish the Jews for alleged crimes, including the Jews' supposed endorsement of communism and support for the Soviet cause. Still others identified the Jews as the great and insidiously powerful opposition to the success of the Ukrainian or the Polish national cause. While 1919 was the year when it reached its peak, anti-Jewish violence became a common feature of the fighting throughout the civil war, from 1917 through the early 1920s.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> On the various trends in the White movement, see Liudmila Novikova, *An Anti-Bolshevik Alternative: The White Movement and the Civil War in the Russian North*, transl. Seth Bernstein, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2018); Jonathan D. Smele, *Civil War in Siberia: The Anti-Bolshevik Government of Admiral Kolchak, 1918-1920*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia*, (Washington DC: New Academia Publishing, 2004 [1971-77]), 2 vols. For a survey of the different sides and battlefields, see Jonathan D. Smele, *The 'Russian' Civil Wars, 1916-1926: Ten Years That Shook the World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> On pogroms in 1917-18, see Vladimir P. Buldakov, "Freedom, Shortages, Violence: The Origins of the 'Revolutionary Anti-Jewish Pogrom' in Russia, 1917-1918," in *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*, eds. Jonathan Dekel-Chen, David Gaunt, Nathan M. Meier, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 74-91. On anti-Jewish violence during the civil war, see

The brutality of the civil war grew largely out of the experience of World War I. But in the former Russian Empire the civil war surpassed the world conflict in its intensity of destruction, numbers of casualties, and total unraveling of any existing social order.<sup>10</sup> This, in turn, triggered a domino effect of epidemics, famine, and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. As a result, Ukraine – one of the worst epicenters of mass violence involving intra-ethnic clashes and paramilitary conflict subsequent to the unraveling of the Russian Empire – experienced a general loss reaching a total of 18 percent of its population: more than 5 of the 30 million people living in Ukraine in 1914 perished or went missing during the 1914-1922 continuum of violence; as many as 2.3 million were killed or displaced during the civil war alone.<sup>11</sup> Caught amid the ongoing desperate and ruthless warfare and fighting, the Jewish population of the disputed territories proved an easy and defenseless target of the violence. According to the Jewish demographer Jacob Lestschinsky, between 1914 and 1921, 600,000 Jews died in the former Russian Empire, resulting in a 12 percent loss of the former Empire’s Jewish population overall.<sup>12</sup>

While the differences between earlier waves of anti-Jewish violence and the violence of the civil war were both obvious and staggering for the multiple sides involved, the pogroms of 1917-1921 also built on a blueprint that had crystallized gradually over

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Oleg Budnitskii, *Russian Jews Between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> On contemporary accounts of the violence and casualties, see State Archives of Kiev Oblast (DAKO), f. R-3050, Kiev Aid Committee to Help Victims of Pogroms, op. 1, d. 266, ll. 4-5, “On pogrom casualties,”; and DAKO, f. R-3050, op. 1, d. 162, ll. 3-9, “Summary report written at the end of summer 1919 by the Committee to Aid Victims of Pogroms for the Russian Red Cross in Kiev.” See also the many examples and summaries presented by the Jewish Delegations at the Paris Peace Conference in their publication, *Bulletin du Comité des Délégations Juives auprès de la Conférence de la Paix*, in particular the “Memorandum on the extermination of the Jews in Ukraine,” which was published in French on January 6, 1921, no. 18, and was also submitted to the League of Nations. For later surveys, see Nahum Gergel, “The Pogroms in the Ukraine in 1918-21,” *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science*, VI (1951): 237-252; and Z. S. Ostrovskii, *Evreiskie pogromy, 1918-1921*, (Moscow: Shkola i kniga, 1926), 61.

<sup>11</sup> Boris Uralnis, *Wars and Population*, (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, [1960] 2003), 217; George O. Liber, “Ukraine, Total Wars, and the Dialectics of Integration and Fragmentation, 1914-1953,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 34/1-4 (2015/2016): 142-143.

<sup>12</sup> Jacob Lestschinsky, *Crisis, Catastrophe and Survival: A Jewish Balance Sheet, 1914-1948*, (New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs of the World Jewish Congress, 1948), 11. As a comparison: France and Germany lost a total of some 4.3 percent of their population during World War I. The Ottoman Empire, by contrast, reached a death rate of 14 percent – a figure comparable to the toll later exacted by the anti-Jewish violence in the former Tsars’ lands – due primarily to the focused and systematic extermination of the Armenian minority.

time: ethnic riots against Jews had become highly ritualized confrontations in which perpetrators and victims alike shared some pre-existing knowledge of behaviors and roles to play. Quite besides elements of spontaneity, the pogroms of the civil war were also the product of an established culture of anti-Jewish violence. Unlike Tcherikower, in writing about the pogroms, the dean of Russian Jewish history, Simon Dubnow, focused on reiteration and continuity rather than rupture. In his historical assessment of the events, he linked the pogroms of the civil war to previous waves of anti-Jewish violence that had hit Ukraine, specifically to the massacres of Jews perpetrated by Bohdan Khmelnytsky and Ivan Gonta in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, respectively, and thus inscribed 1919 into a centuries-long single stream of Jewish martyrdom.<sup>13</sup>

The first chapter in the history of the pogroms of the long nineteenth century harks back to 1821, when anti-Jewish violence reached the shores of the Black Sea, hitting the multi-ethnic port of Odessa. Most of the pogroms in the course of the next century came as part of one of two distinct waves, in which the violence assumed the nature of a mass movement: the first one followed the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, on March 1, 1881; the second one grew out of the unrest in connection with the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) and the first Russian Revolution (1905).<sup>14</sup> If in its original meaning the term “pogrom” had been used to mean an outbreak or attack against any ethnic or religious minority, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century it had essentially become a synonym for anti-Jewish violence.<sup>15</sup> These waves of anti-Jewish violence were not, as has often been mistakenly argued, instigated by Tsarist authorities against the Jewish minority to divert growing popular discontent from

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<sup>13</sup> See the foreword by Simon Dubnow to Elias Tcherikower, *Antisemitizm i pogromy na Ukraine, 1917-1918 gg.*, (Berlin, Ostjüdisches Historisches Archiv, 1923), 9. In his research, Tcherikower tends to emphasize the absolute unprecedentedness of the civil war pogroms.

<sup>14</sup> On pogroms during the Tsarist era, see *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, eds. John Doyle Klier, Shlomo Lambroza, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); *Anti-Jewish Violence*, eds. Dekel-Chen, Gaunt, Meier; John Doyle Klier, *Russian, Jews and the Pogroms of 1881-1882*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Michael Aronson, *Troubled Waters: The Origins of the 1881 Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990); Edward Judge, *Easter in Kishinev: Anatomy of a Pogrom*, (New York: New York University Press, 1993); Steven J. Zipperstein, *Pogrom: Kishinev and the Tilt of History*, (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018); Robert Weinberg, *The Revolution of 1905 in Odessa: Blood on the Steps*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> David Engel, “What’s in a Pogrom? European Jews in the Age of Violence,” in *Anti-Jewish Violence*, eds. Dekel-Chen, Gaunt, Meier, 19-37; Sam Johnson, *Pogroms, Peasants, Jews: Britain and Eastern Europe’s “Jewish Question,” 1867-1925*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

targeting the government.<sup>16</sup> The pogroms rather grew out of a mesh of political instability and conflict, and typically constituted a popular response to social tensions, economic crisis, and religious resentment among different groups. In the words of the historian John Klier, all these outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence belonged to the same “pogrom paradigm,” which combined the fixed assumptions that Russian officials and publicists had developed in response to the outbreaks – including accusations of Jewish exploitation, religious intolerance, and the desperately low cultural level of the “dark masses” – with widespread negligence and corruption typical of the forces charged with maintaining law and order.<sup>17</sup>

From the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, the deadly brutality of the anti-Jewish violence intensified: while the approximately 250 pogroms that took place during 1881-1882 resulted in a couple dozen fatalities, the following wave of nearly 700 pogroms, by stark contrast, produced more than 3,000 victims.<sup>18</sup> Between October 18-22, 1905, Russians, Ukrainians, and Greeks killed over 400 Jews in Odessa alone.<sup>19</sup> Pogroms also fanned out geographically: initially concentrated on the shores of the Black Sea, with time they spread to the southwestern provinces of the Empire, radiating outward from a center in present-day Ukraine and reaching areas in what is today Moldova, Belarus, Poland, and Russia.

The Jewish response to the violence consisted of a number of different elements and varied by locality: it included the creation of armed self-defense units, supported by Jewish political movements that came into being in the late nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Individuals, Jewish communities, and organizations initiated a frantic effort to collect data and first-hand accounts of the violence. Powerful literary texts appeared, amid the international outcry voiced in the press and explicit condemnation by politicians.<sup>21</sup> The Hebrew poet Chaim Nachman Bialik immortalized the 1903

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<sup>16</sup> See also Hans Rogger, *Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

<sup>17</sup> John Doyle Klier, “The Pogrom Paradigm in Russian History,” in *Pogroms*, eds. Klier, Lambroza, 13-38.

<sup>18</sup> Shlomo Lambroza, “The Pogroms of 1903-1906,” in *Pogroms*, eds. Klier, Lambroza, 195-247.

<sup>19</sup> Alongside Robert Weinberg, *The Revolution of 1905 in Odessa*, see Robert Weinberg, “The Pogrom of 1905 in Odessa: A Case Study,” in *Pogroms*, eds. Klier, Lambroza, 248-289.

<sup>20</sup> See *Sefer ha-gevurah: antologiah historit-sifrutit*, ed. Israel Halpern, (Tel Aviv: Am oved, 1977). For the most comprehensive study of Jewish self-defense and fighting units formation in the twentieth century, see Mihaly Kalman, *Hero Shtetls: Jewish Armed Self-Defense from the Pale to Palestine, 1917-1970*, (PhD Dissertation, Harvard University, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Zipperstein, *Pogrom: Kishinev and the Tilt of History*; Philip Schoenberg, “The American Reaction to the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903,” in *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 63/3 (March 1974): 262-283.

Kishinev pogrom and its 49 victims in his “In the City of Slaughter,” a landmark poetic work which would be read as a call for revenge and the active assertion of the Jewish right to a secure existence by generations of young Jews to come.

The history of modern ethnic violence consists of entangled layers of continuities and ruptures. As Eric Lohr has shown, World War I represented a turning point in pogrom history.<sup>22</sup> Combining with long since classic and familiar anti-Jewish stereotypes, new ones were readily hatched during the war. The military authorities of the Imperial Army took measures to make it clear that they doubted Jewish allegiance to the Russian cause. Largely concentrated in the warzone, Jews were suspected of sabotaging the war effort by spying for the enemy – read, Germany in particular, due to the closeness of Yiddish and German – as well as engaging in speculation and corrupting soldiers’ morale. Further encouraged by the prevalent sense of distrust, a common attitude towards minority groups in times of war and turmoil, the Russian military high command promulgated draconian anti-Jewish measures: hundreds of thousands of Jews were expelled from their areas of residence and deported as members of an – overwhelmingly fictitious – enemy group to preserve essential interests of the state.<sup>23</sup>

More often than not, the deportations were accompanied by violence: with the acquiescence of their superiors, soldiers murdered, raped, and systematically plundered the deportees they were supposed to escort to their new assigned dwelling zones. Following this lead, pogroms thus often turned into organized military operations in the years following the Great War.<sup>24</sup> It was poorly armed mobs, made up largely of civilians, that perpetrated the violence in 1903-5; in 1919, by contrast, the perpetrators were trained soldiers, proceeding with a high degree of discipline and

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<sup>22</sup> Eric Lohr, “1915 and the War Pogrom Paradigm in the Russian Empire,” in *Anti-Jewish Violence*, Dekel-Chen, Gaunt and Meier, 41-51; and 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.

<sup>23</sup> Eric Lohr, “The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportation, Hostages and Violence during World War I,” *Russian Review* 60/3 (July 2001): 404-419; Semion Goldin, “Deportation of Jews by the Russian Military Command, 1914–1915,” *Jews in Eastern Europe* 41/1 (2000): 40–73.

<sup>24</sup> Other minorities were targeted with violence for similar reasons, notably the Poles in northwestern Ukraine and the Mennonites in southern Ukraine. Further research on the parallels and differences is still needed. For a first step in this direction, see Thomas Chopard, *La guerre aux civils. Les violences contre les populations juives d’Ukraine (1917-1924). Guerre totale, occupations, insurrections, pogroms*, (PhD Dissertation, EHESS, 2015). On violence against the Mennonites, see Sean Patterson, *Makhno and Memory: Anarchist and Mennonite Narratives of Ukraine’s Civil War, 1917-1921*, (Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, to be published in 2020).

organization, often as part of nation-wide political programs, far unlike the locally originated turmoil and unrest typical of the Tsarist era. In addition to the soldiers, even when civilians joined in the anti-Jewish attacks, they often replicated military organized violence tactics in the process. Drawing in 1922 upon the documents collected by the Red Cross, the Russian writer Sergei Gusev-Orenburgskii described a typical pogrom from the civil war period in this way:

Armed men storm through a city or town, scatter through the streets, divide up in groups and break into Jewish homes, kill without distinction of age or sex, brutally rape the women and then murder them, extort money [...]. Then each group proceeds to a second house, then a third, and so on, until there is absolutely nothing left to take. During the pogrom perpetrated on July 15-19 in Pereyaslav by Zeleny, the bandits made incursions into every house 20 to 30 times a day. In the end, they even took away the windows and the bricks... Both the murdered and the survivors were left undressed, often in their underwear, and sometimes naked.<sup>25</sup>

Marked by looting, mass rape, and indiscriminate killing, these military pogroms were often carried out to advance ethnic cleansing of an area of its Jewish population. In some areas, the systematic violence unleashed against the Jews led to the Jews' near total disappearance, a practice that warrants historians' classifying these pogroms within the framework of genocidal violence.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Sergei Gusev-Orenburgskii, *Bagrovaia kniga. Pogromy 1919-20 gg. na Ukraine*, (Kharbin: DEKOPO, 1922), 15. Danylo Terpylo, better known as Ataman Zeleny, was one of the chief peasant insurrection leaders in the Kiev region in 1919, and perpetrated dozens of pogroms. He forged a brief alliance with the UNR in order to fight the Soviet forces, but quickly reestablished his autonomy. He died fighting against the White army in late 1919.

<sup>26</sup> Bemporad, *Legacy of Blood*, chapter 1.



Fig. 1: Local Jews display a makeshift stretcher with the skulls of victims of the Fastov pogrom at the memorial procession to commemorate the pogrom. The banner in Yiddish reads: "In memory of those killed during the pogrom, September 1919, in Fastov." In Z. S. Ostrovskii, *Evreiskie pogromy, 1918-1921*, (Moscow: Shkola i kniga 1926), 30. Courtesy of the Blavatnik Archive, New York.

One of the controversial issues surrounding the history and the preservation of the memory of the pogroms of the civil war is the thorny question of numbers. Because of the enormous population movements that World War I set in process, it is extremely difficult to retrace the precise impact that the violence had on the demographics of each city and town and thus determine exact casualties figures. The first attempt to establish and record the number of victims took place at the time of the violence itself, when, in August 1919, the Jewish Public Committee to Aid Jewish Pogrom Victims (better known as the *Evobkom* or *Evobshchestkom*) determined that 30,500 Jews had lost their lives up to the time of the count.<sup>27</sup> Almost a decade later, the Jewish rights activist and sociologist Nahum Gergel used his work experience providing victim relief and his studies of pogrom statistics to argue that the total number of victims fluctuated between 50,000 and 60,000.<sup>28</sup> The

<sup>27</sup> On the different initiatives to help victims of wars and pogroms in Eastern Europe, Michael Beizer, *Relief in Time of Need: Russian Jewry and the Joint, 1914-24*, (Bloomington: Slavica, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> Nahum Gergel, "The Pogroms in the Ukraine in 1918-21," 249. This number was recently picked up by the Historical Encyclopedia of Ukraine: "Evrei v Ukraini," in *Entsiklopedya istoriyi Ukrainy*, vol. 3, (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, 2005), 80.

demographer Jacob Lestschinsky disputed this number, estimating that at least 75,000 Jews had been murdered in pogroms in the course of the civil war.<sup>29</sup>

In mid-1922, the Genoa Conference, an international diplomatic gathering convened to discuss post-World War I economic reconstruction of Central and Eastern Europe, took place, with Soviet officials offering their own version of the civil war pogrom numbers, which they had put together in the hope of being granted extra financial compensation for the victims of war. The People's Commissariat for Nationalities and the Jewish Section of the Communist Party concluded that the anti-Jewish violence had produced between 100,000 and 125,000 fatalities, 150,000 people permanently incapacitated as a result of sustained injuries, 200,000 orphans, and 100,000 widows.<sup>30</sup> Some accounts by Soviet demographers placed the number of fatalities as high as 300,000.<sup>31</sup> Everyone agreed that the violence had created catastrophic health and sanitary conditions for victims and their communities alike; epidemics, typhus in particular, may have been the cause of no fewer deaths than the pogroms proper had been.<sup>32</sup> Combining direct and indirect casualties, approximately 10 percent of the Jewish population in Ukraine perished as a result of the pogroms; in the Kiev region, likely the most ravaged in the violence, 117 communities, or 145,874 people, had been affected by the pogroms, a figure accounting for one third of the total Jewish population in the area.<sup>33</sup> The Russian Red Cross Committee to Aid Victims of Pogroms, working in close relationship with the *Evobkom*, estimated that between 1917 and 1920, one million Jews in Ukraine had suffered from pogroms and their consequences.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Jacob Lestschinsky, *La situation économique des juifs depuis la guerre mondiale (Europe Orientale et Centrale)*, (Paris: Rousseau et Cie, 1934), 48.

<sup>30</sup> DAKO, f. R-3050, op. 1, d. 266, ll. 4-5, "On pogrom casualties," is the source used by Soviet officials to provide numbers at the Genoa Conference. See Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov*, 817-819. The Russian Red Cross Committee to Aid Victims of Pogroms in Ukraine estimated the number of casualties to be between 70,000 and 100,000; see DAKO, f. R-3050, op. 1, d. 162, l. 7. Goldstein, former president of the *Evobkom*, used the high estimate of 100,000 casualties during the Schwarzbard trial in Paris in 1927; see Henry Torrès, *Le Procès des pogromes. Plaidoirie suivie de témoignages, 1927*, (Paris: les éditions de France, 1928), 85.

<sup>31</sup> See Yuri Larin, *Evrei i antisemitizm v SSSR*, (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1929), 55.

<sup>32</sup> Data provided by Jacob Lestschinsky indicates that 100,000 Jews died in epidemics, primarily typhus. In 1928, Lestschinsky noted that 18.8% of the Jewish population living in former war zones were still praying for deliverance. See Lestschinsky, *La situation économique des juifs depuis la guerre mondiale*, 47, 49.

<sup>33</sup> DAKO, f. R-3050, op. 2, d. 4, l. 1, "Report on the activity of the Kiev region section of the *Evobkom*."

<sup>34</sup> DAKO, f. R-3050, op. 1, d. 162, ll. 7-70b. These numbers were also used by the Jewish Section of the People's Commissariat for Nationalities. Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov*, 807-808, 817-819.

While Ukraine remained the epicenter of the anti-Jewish violence after 1917, pogroms also spread to other regions. The battle for the borderlands, led by the Polish army, was marked by violent pogroms in Lemberg (Lviv today) in 1918 and in Wilno (Vilnius today) in 1920.<sup>35</sup> Belorussia was also deeply affected by the pogroms perpetrated by Polish armies and by the insurrection of their ally, Stanislaw Bulak-Balakhowicz; according to a *Evobkom* report, by the end of 1920, 350,000 people had been hurt by anti-Jewish violence, while at least 196 pogroms in 179 localities may have claimed as many as 25,000 lives.<sup>36</sup>

An international uproar resonated over these revelations. On September 8, 1919, *The New York Times* ominously warned the world that “127,000 Jews have been killed and 6,000,000 are in peril.”<sup>37</sup> Many Jewish intellectuals and writers chronicled the anti-Jewish violence they had themselves experienced, or analyzed the eyewitness accounts they had collected from survivors.<sup>38</sup> Numerous recorded testimonies of the events, memoirs, and documents were published in the Soviet Union, France, and the United States. Like earlier pogroms, accounts of the anti-Jewish violence of the civil war reached the international diplomatic arena. At the Paris Peace Conference, convened to enable the victorious Allied Powers to dictate the peace terms to the Central Powers after their defeat in World War I, information about the civil war pogroms was presented and recorded.<sup>39</sup>

Yet despite all this, the civil war pogroms have largely been forgotten today. How can this be accounted for? To begin with, when the Jewish Delegations at the Paris Peace Conference drew the attention of the world to the fate of Ukrainian Jews – the communities who had suffered the most – France, England, and the United States

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<sup>35</sup> William W. Hagen, *Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1914-1920*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>36</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, XIII, 607-609; Z. S. Ostrovskii, *Evreiskie pogromy*, 61.

<sup>37</sup> *New York Times*, September 8, 1919, 6.

<sup>38</sup> Elias Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919*, (New York: Seltzer, 1921); Id., *Mirovaia reaktsia i evreiskie pogromy*, vol.1, Poland, (Kharkov: Gosizdat., 1925); Id., *Mirovaia reaktsia i evreiskie pogromy*, vol.2, Ukraina, (Kharkov: Gosizdat., 1926); Sergei Gusev-Orenburgskii, *Bagrovaia kniga*; Nokhem Shtif, *Pogromy na Ukraine (Period dobrovolcheskoi armii)*, (Berlin: Wostok, 1922); Tcherikower, *Antisemitizm I pogromy na Ukraine 1917-1918*; Id., *Di ukrainer pogromen in yor 1919*, (New York: YIVO, 1965); Z. S. Ostrovskii, *Evreiskie pogromy 1918-1921rr*; Léo Motzkin, *Les pogromes en Ukraine sous les gouvernements ukrainiens, 1917-1920*, (Paris: Comité des Délégations juives, 1927); Yosif Shekhtman, *Pogromy Dobrovolcheskoi armii na Ukraine*, (Berlin: Ostjudisches Historisches Archiv, 1932); and Oleg V. Budnitskii, “Jews, Pogroms, and the White Movement: A Historiographical Critique,” *Kritika* 2/4 (2001): 1–23.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Chopard, “L’écho des persécutions. Les minorités nationales, la Conférence de la Paix et les guerres civiles à l’Est de l’Europe (1919-1920),” *Relations Internationales*, 175/3 (2018): 79-92.

responded by focusing their attention and concern almost exclusively on their new allies in Eastern Europe, namely, Poland and, to a lesser extent, Romania. The pogroms in Ukraine were relegated to a position of lesser urgency and significance in the ensuing political debates, their memory and history obfuscated in favor of developments in Poland and minority treaties negotiations.<sup>40</sup>

The Soviet politics of memory also played a key role in overshadowing the history of the pogroms of the Russian Civil War. The pogroms by their very nature represented a doctrinal problem for the Bolsheviks, resisting as they inevitably did the attempt to explain the violence through a Marxist lens. To be sure, a gamut of social classes were part of the perpetration of the violence, including the workers. The pogroms also targeted Jews of all classes, including the workers. As a result, for an extended period and especially throughout the 1930s, the need to account for the events in a satisfactory manner made the Bolsheviks tend to universalize the pogrom victims, crafting an official narrative that pitted a blurred group of the Revolution's suffering and persecuted supporters against the bourgeois counterrevolution shown in a wholesale lump. The memory of the civil war pogroms was further downplayed in favor of the ideologically less problematic pogroms dating from the pre-Revolutionary years, which the Soviets had little trouble casting as violence orchestrated against the Jews by the Tsarist regime, a system of rule branded a priori evil.<sup>41</sup> Finally, the violence which set off the genocide of European Jewry some twenty years later – and which also had its key coordinates in Ukraine – facilitated the erasure of the pogroms of the civil war from official and mass memory.

The essays included in this special issue of *Quest* thus comprise an important contribution to the study of a largely overlooked chapter in the history of modern ethnic violence. They shed new light on the complexities of the Russian Civil War pogroms and on the responses which the pogroms elicited. These included a massive humanitarian undertaking to bring aid to the victims. As Polly Zavadviker argues, this endeavor first took shape in the midst of the crises of World War I and continued during the civil war. It often intersected with political activism and gave rise to a fierce impulse to chronicle and document the catastrophe. The tactics and strategies that Jewish aid workers developed to respond to the political chaos and the mass violence of the civil war took their inspiration from developments in the pre-Revolutionary Jewish public organizational sphere.

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> On Soviet politics of memory in connection with the pogroms of the civil war, see Bemporad, *Legacy of Blood*, particularly chapters 3 and 5.

A stunning array of cultural productions encompassing the visual arts and works of literature emerged following the pogroms of the civil war. One example of this is the powerful painting by Manuil Shechtman (1900-1941), a Ukrainian-born artist who himself survived the violence of the pogroms and attempted to make sense of his experience through art. The 1929 painting reproduced on the cover of this special issue, entitled *Refugees*, depicts Jews fleeing the pogroms. The painting was kept on display at the Jewish Museum of Odessa until World War II, and is now held at the National Art Museum of Ukraine, in Kyiv.

Yiddish writers tried to make sense of the pogroms in their own ways through literature. One of the most widely read literary responses to the violence of 1919 in Ukraine was by the Soviet Yiddish writer Itsik Kipnis, who chronicled the events of the civil war in the shtetl of Slovechno. In her article, Harriet Murav offers a nuanced close reading of the work of Kipnis, putting it in conversation with other forms of witness literature. Kipnis himself had witnessed and survived the violence, and in his account included the actual names of both victims and perpetrators. By doing so, he not only blurred the lines between factual document and creative writing, but also conveyed the emotional complexity created by the brutal subversion in neighborly relations that took place during the civil war. Through her analysis of Kipnis' work, Murav invites the reader to resist a simplistic understanding of the events of the civil war through the commonly expected polarity of Jewish victimhood and non-Jewish perpetrators.

An understudied chapter in the evolution of cultural response to anti-Jewish violence is in films, including documentary works. Valérie Pozner's essay in the present volume explores the ways in which the pogrom theme was treated both in fictional and non-fictional cinematographic productions. The first documentary films about the anti-Jewish violence appeared during the civil war, thanks to the initiative of the *Evobkom*. Alongside the numerous photos of victims, effects of destruction, and pogromists, a brief film was shot in Cherkassy in 1919 shortly after the pogrom perpetrated in the area by a Grigoriev-led band. During the 1920s, however, anti-Jewish violence in general and civil war pogroms in particular were gradually demoted and eventually disappeared from Soviet screens. With the exception of one movie, which was produced in Ukraine and released in 1929 and which clearly depicted a pogrom-making use of former victims and perpetrators as actors, the Soviets refused to sanction ethnic violence in the movie theaters of the USSR.

The marked radicalization of anti-Jewish violence instigated by the civil war was not the product of ongoing military conflict alone. As Christopher Gilley shows in his article, antisemitism was an inherent ideology promoted by the leadership of the Ukrainian People's Republic army and played a key role in the violence. Analyzing a range of contemporary documents, including orders, proclamations, and reports, as well as memoirs, Gilley concludes that Ukrainian troops perpetrated pogroms because they believed that Jews were hostile to their state-building efforts. In other words, the unprecedented fierceness and lethality of the violence of the civil war pogroms, neither anecdotal nor unintended, were an inherent part of the struggle for independence launched by the UNR Army.

Thomas Chopard studies the radicalization of the anti-Jewish violence of the civil war by focusing on a series of case studies. He analyzes the process of the complete extermination of a number of Jewish communities in Ukraine, which was entirely brought about through the participation of neighbors. While these exterminations were not representative of the violence of the civil war overall, comprising a limited number of instances instead, they nonetheless illustrate the extent to which antisemitic ideology had infiltrated Ukrainian society: with the brutality of war and revolution forming a daily backdrop, young anti-Bolshevik insurgents managed to mobilize the non-Jewish population, reshape the politics of the countryside, and promote ethnic cleansing.

Brendan McGeever explores the ambivalence with which Soviet authorities responded to manifestations of antisemitism and dealt with the wave of anti-Jewish violence of 1919. In his article, McGeever draws on Communist Party archives to demonstrate how solidly established, strong, and self-understood antisemitism was within the Red Army in 1919 in every single province across Ukraine. By focusing on the Grigoriev uprising against Soviet military control, McGeever shows the extent to which Bolshevik revolutionary discourse brought together antisemitic notions and racialized stereotypes, thus paving the way to anti-Jewish violence.

Many of the complexities of the pogroms of the civil war still deserve close attention and further research. It is the hope of the editors of this special issue of *Quest* that scholars will pursue the study of anti-Jewish violence of 1917-1921, thus enhancing our understanding of the Holocaust, of the ambivalent interplay between ruptures and continuities in modern ethnic violence, of the politics of the memory of violence in different geopolitical contexts, of the ways in which violence can sway the emotions and behavior of neighbors, of the role that mass rape plays in ethnic violence, and of

how the utter chaos of conflict and turmoil can muddle the ethnic and gender identity of the perpetrator.<sup>42</sup>

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**Thomas Chopard** is a postdoctoral researcher at the French National Center for Scientific Research and part of the ERC-funded program “Lubartworld”; he has recently concluded his term as a research fellow at the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies. He holds a PhD from the EHESS (Paris, France) where he in 2015 defended a doctoral thesis on anti-Jewish violence in Ukraine between 1917-1924. Also in 2015, he published *Le Martyre de Kiev: 1919. L'Ukraine en révolution entre terreur soviétique, nationalisme et antisémitisme*, (Paris, Vendémiaire). His research focuses on anti-Jewish violence and, most recently, on Jewish migrations from Central and Eastern Europe during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>42</sup> More than in previous waves of pogroms, women and Jews took part in the violence. For some archival evidence on Jews who were active participants in the anti-Jewish attacks, see, for example, DAKO, f. 3050, op. 1, d. 128, l. 34 (“Zakliuchenie po delu n. 5159”), with evidence concerning a Jewish bandit in a shtetl in Cherkassy who killed the daughter of one of the shtetl's residents and helped kill a young Jewish member of the local self-defense unit. On Russian and Ukrainian women as perpetrators, see Bemporad, *Legacy of Blood*.

*Elissa Bemporad, Thomas Chopard*

**Keywords:** Pogroms, Anti-Jewish Violence, Civil War, Genocidal Violence, World War I, Memory

**How to quote this article:**

Elissa Bemporad, Thomas Chopard, "Introduction," in *The Pogroms of the Russian Civil War at 100: New Trends, New Sources*, eds. Elissa Bemporad, Thomas Chopard, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, n. 15 August 2019  
*url:* [www.quest-cdecjournal.it//index.php?issue=15](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it//index.php?issue=15)

## Contending with Horror: Jewish Aid Work in the Russian Civil War Pogroms

*by Polly Zavadvker*

### Abstract

*This article explores the subject of Jewish aid work in the former Russian Empire during the Russian Civil War. It considers responses of Jews to the civil war pogroms in the context of Russia's "continuum of crisis," or nearly eight continuous years of military conflict and political instability from 1914 to 1921. It argues that Jewish aid organizations during the Russian Civil War relied on people, institutions, and practices established by their predecessors during the First World War. Jewish aid workers during the Russian Civil War looked to their immediate past as they developed tactics and strategies to navigate a period of political chaos and mass violence. This history demonstrates several continuities within the Jewish public organizational sphere across the revolutionary divide. It shows that Jewish aid workers' ability to adapt ideas and institutions that had originated before the October Revolution enabled them to assist communities caught up in subsequent wartime and revolutionary upheavals.*

### Introduction

**Foundations: Jewish Aid Work in Russia during the Great War, 1914-1917**

**As Good as Forgotten? Jewish Aid Work in a Year of Revolutions**

**On the Eve of Catastrophe: Jewish Aid Work in 1918**

**United by Necessity: The Jewish Central Aid Committee in Kiev**

**From Red Cross to Red Star: Jewish Aid Work under Bolshevik Rule**

**Between Whites and Reds**

**Epilogue**

## Conclusion

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## Introduction

Not since the seventeenth-century rebellion led by Bogdan Khmel'nitskii, had the Jews of Eastern Europe experienced suffering on a scale comparable to what occurred in the years immediately following the Russian Revolution of October 1917. During the nearly four years of the Russian Civil War, attacks on minority populations, including Poles, Mennonites, and especially Jews, became an almost daily occurrence. The Jewish communities of Ukraine and Belorussia suffered a particularly shocking fate, with most of the pogroms committed by Ukrainian forces and the anti-Bolshevik Volunteer Army. Anti-Jewish violence reached a peak in 1919, concentrated in Ukrainian territories west of the Dnieper River. Hardly a single Jewish community was spared as troops advanced and retreated across the region, indiscriminately butchering, raping, and torturing Jews, and plundering and torching their homes and neighborhoods.

Nokhem Gergel was among those who witnessed these atrocities. A Jewish aid worker and political leader in Ukraine at the time, he helped to compile documentary materials about the pogroms. Gergel pored over the findings for years afterwards; in a study published in 1928, he concluded that some 50,000 Jews had been killed in Ukraine from 1917 to 1921 – a figure that dwarfed the number of murder victims during earlier waves of anti-Jewish pogroms in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russia.<sup>1</sup> But numbers alone fail to capture the true extent of the devastation, for the pogrom's perpetrators left a staggering trail of human suffering in their wake: thousands of children without parents; thousands of raped women; dozens of towns burned to the ground, the majority of whose residents suddenly became homeless refugees – and this still accounted for only a fraction of the destruction. Not until the Second World

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For their very insightful comments and critique, I am grateful to Laurie Bernstein, Jaclyn Granick, Lisa Kirschenbaum, Adele Lindenmeyr, Barbara Norton, Anike Walke, and Robert Weinberg. I also want to express my thanks to the anonymous reviewer who commented on this article for *Quest*.

<sup>1</sup> Nahum Gergel, "Di Pogromen in Ukraine 1918-1921," *Shriftn far ekonomik un statistic 1* (1928); the English translation of this article appeared more than twenty years later, as Nahum Gergel, "The Pogroms in Ukraine in 1918-21," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 6 (1951): 237-252.

War would the Jews of Eastern Europe suffer a calamity comparable in its destruction to that of the Russian Civil War pogroms.

A little-known but remarkable aspect of this tragic history is that Jewish relief workers, including Gergel himself, arrived in the aftermath of the pogroms to assist the survivors. They worked to distribute clothing, treat wounds, clean up damaged properties, care for orphans, organize shelters, bury the dead, and much more. These aid workers came on behalf of a coordinated effort led by Jewish organizations and community activists in the regions ravaged by fighting and marauding to assist pogrom victims.

There are understandable reasons as to why Jewish aid work in these years has remained an understudied subject. It is only recently that the growth of scholarly and public interest in the Russian Civil War pogroms has helped to shed light on this dark and neglected chapter of Jewish and Ukrainian history. Earlier studies that laid the groundwork for the present wave of research had other concerns: they sought to explain the historical context in which the pogroms emerged, identify their origins and perpetrators, and reveal their devastating impact on the victims.<sup>2</sup> Their concerns were wholly reasonable given the devastating nature of the events that the authors sought to explain and document. By contrast, the subject of how Jews responded to the pogroms has been considered to a much lesser extent. It is true that some scholars have explored various strategies of Jewish resistance to pogroms in early twentieth-century Russia—most notably self-defense, political lobbying, and efforts to document the pogroms. However, little is known about the ways that Jews employed relief work and self-help as responses to anti-Jewish violence during these years.<sup>3</sup> Important and recent

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<sup>2</sup> These studies include Peter Kenez, “Pogroms and White Ideology in the Russian Civil War,” *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, eds. John D. Klier, Shlomo Lambroza, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 293–313; Vladimir P. Buldakov, “Freedom, Shortages, Violence: The Origins of the ‘Revolutionary Anti-Jewish Pogrom’ in Russia, 1917–1918,” *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*, eds. Jonathan Dekel-Chen, David Gaunt, Natan M. Meir, Israel Bartal, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 74–91; Oleg Budnitskii, *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920*, trans. Timothy J. Portice, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); and most recently, Irina Astashkevich, *Gendered Violence: Jewish Women in the Pogroms of 1917–1921*, (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> On Jewish political responses to pogroms from 1903-1920 see Vladimir Levin, “Preventing Pogroms: Patterns in Jewish Politics in Early Twentieth-Century Russia,” *Anti-Jewish Violence*, 95-110. Notable studies of pogrom documentation include Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe*, (New York: Oxford University

studies by Michael Beizer and Jaclyn Granick have shown that American Jews effectively mobilized international networks to aid East European Jewry during the pogrom years.<sup>4</sup> Here I closely examine humanitarian campaigns led by the Jews of the former Russian Empire themselves.

Casting a spotlight on aid work allows for a new angle on the pogroms, one that enables an understanding of the response by Jewish leaders and organizations at the time. This study of aid work underscores that at a time of catastrophic violence and victimization, Jews in the erstwhile tsarist empire undone by revolutionary upheaval continued to seek ways to exercise agency and influence over their lives through organized activism. This study is thus an attempt to challenge the regnant historiography of East European Jewry, or, to quote Jonathan Dekel-Chen, to balance our knowledge of “what was done to Jews from outside forces” during the Russian Civil War with what “Jews...themselves did in their daily lives and how they maneuvered within the often treacherous waters of late Imperial Russia and the early Soviet Union.”<sup>5</sup> While recognizing the profoundly disturbing impact of anti-Jewish violence in this historical moment, my focus here is to provide a closer look at the daily, though less dramatic concerns that occupied Jewish activists—the work of building institutions and serving the community at a time of acute need.

This study considers Jewish aid work not only during the years of the Russian Civil War but more broadly in the context of Russia’s “continuum of crisis,” or nearly eight continuous years of intense military conflict and political instability from 1914 to 1921.<sup>6</sup> Such an approach is particularly relevant to understanding the

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Press, 2012), chapter 1; Alexandra Garbarini, “Power in Truth Telling: Jewish Testimonial Strategies before the Shoah,” *Kinship, Community, and Self: Essays in Honor of David Warren Sabean*, eds. Jason Coy, Benjamin Marschke, Jared Poley, Claudia Verhoeven, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 170–184. On Jewish self-defense during pogroms, see Robert Weinberg, *The Revolution of 1905 in Odessa: Blood on the Steps*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), chapter 7; Inna Shtakser, *The Making of Jewish Revolutionaries in the Pale of Settlement: Community and Identity during the Russian Revolution and its Immediate Aftermath, 1905-07*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), chaps. 3-5.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Beizer, *Relief in Time of Need: Russian Jewry and the Joint, 1914-1924*, (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2015); Jaclyn Granick, “Humanitarian Responses to Jewish Suffering Abroad by American Jewish Organizations, 1914-1929” (PhD. Thesis, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Dekel-Chen, “Defusing the Ethnic Bomb: Resolving Local Conflict through Philanthropy in the Interwar USSR,” *Anti-Jewish Violence, 186-203*; 186.

<sup>6</sup> Studies that locate the 1917 revolutions within Russia’s first total war experience include Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia’s Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921*,

Jewish experience of war and revolution. Oleg Budnitskii's work, to take one example, has demonstrated links between anti-Jewish violence perpetrated by the Russian Army during the First World War and the Civil War pogroms.<sup>7</sup> In the present study I, too, consider Jewish responses to the pogroms in connection with pre-revolutionary developments. I will argue that Jewish aid organizations during the Russian Civil War relied on people, institutions, and practices established by their predecessors during the First World War. This study will demonstrate specific ways in which Jewish aid workers during the Civil War looked to their immediate past as they developed tactics and strategies to navigate a period of political chaos and increasing anti-Jewish violence. If we trace the development of Jewish aid work across the continuum of crisis, we can, in fact, identify numerous continuities within the Jewish public organizational sphere across the revolutionary divide. Aid workers' ability to adapt ideas and institutions that had emerged in Russian civil society on the eve of the Revolution enabled them to provide daily, ongoing support to communities caught up in subsequent wartime and revolutionary upheavals.

This study draws upon numerous personal accounts written by aid workers and political leaders, most of which were published in the years following the pogroms, in Russian and Yiddish.<sup>8</sup> In these accounts, former activists focused primarily on chronicling what they had witnessed firsthand; beyond this, they also endeavored to explain the origins of the pogroms and the political setting in which they unfolded. In some accounts, the actions of the authors are relegated to the margins of the histories they relate, mentioning their roles – as relief workers, for example – only in passing and with minimal details. It is as if the writers' memories of providing relief – the ordinary, daily, even mundane work of distributing food, finding housing, caring for children, and so forth – became eclipsed by the shocking violence and suffering they witnessed. At the same time, these aid workers recognized and reflected upon the historical significance of the events in which they actively intervened. Thus Yitzhak Giterman, whose story as

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(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens during World War I*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Joshua A. Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); and most recently Laura Engelstein, *Russia in Flames: War, Revolution, Civil War, 1914–1922*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Budnitskii, *Russian Jews*, 225–240.

<sup>8</sup> As examples, see references to twelve accounts published in the 1920s and early 1930s by some of the aid workers we will meet in these pages, in Gergel, "The Pogroms in Ukraine," 237 note 2.

an aid worker we will follow in the pages to come, wrote in an autobiographical essay published in 1931 that the significance of what the Jews of Russia experienced from 1914 to 1921 had yet to be fully grasped by his contemporaries. “Future generations,” he instructed, “will have to contend with the horror we endured in 1919.”<sup>9</sup> Giterman provides clues about the overall significance of his message, which lie buried in his account; many of those who worked alongside him wrote in the same manner. These clues must be disengaged from their narrative surroundings, and together with the aid workers themselves, deciphered in the social context of their times. It is also important to read these accounts with a critical eye for the authors’ own biases and agendas, whether institutional, political, or personal. I have tried wherever possible to corroborate their claims and descriptions with information drawn from contemporary Jewish newspapers in Russian and Yiddish, as well as records of Jewish organizations, including charters, protocols, and correspondence now preserved in archival collections.



*Fig. 1: Yitzhak Giterman*

<https://onegszabat.org/en/biographies/>

Our discussion of Jewish aid work begins with the Petrograd-based Jewish Committee for Aid to War Victims (known as the EKOPO, according to its Russian acronym). The Petrograd Jewish Aid Committee’s activities have been surveyed in various scholarly works; the present study identifies it as a predecessor and model for Jewish aid organizations operative during the Russian

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<sup>9</sup> Yitzhak Giterman, “Avtobioger,” in *Oyf di khurves fun milkhomes un mehumes: Pinkes fun gegent komitet “Yekopo” in Vilne (1919–1931)*, ed. Moyshe Shalit (Vilna:EKOPO, 1931), cols. 842–865; 862.

Civil War.<sup>10</sup> We will trace the ways in which EKOPO workers continued to be active in the field, bringing with them the strategies and principles they acquired during the First World War as they moved across various parts of the former Russian Empire, and continued their work well into the early years of the Soviet regime. We begin with the EKOPO's founding during the First World War and the center of its efforts in Petrograd. We then follow the organization and its workers during the February and October Revolutions of 1917, as the EKOPO developed new tactics and strategies in order to continue assisting civilians in a situation of ongoing war and impending collapse of political authority. Our focus then shifts geographically to revolutionary Ukraine, where Jewish aid workers and organizations concentrated their efforts from 1917 until the early 1920s. The region changed hands no fewer than seven times during this period as various armies advanced and retreated, among them Reds and Whites, as well as Ukrainian, Polish, and German forces. Jewish organizations continued to provide relief without interruption throughout these years, building central and local institutions to support civilian populations at a time of increasing violence and anarchy. Still active when the Bolsheviks consolidated their rule in Ukraine in 1920, these pre-revolutionary Jewish aid organizations and their veteran staff were absorbed into the first state-authorized Jewish organization of Soviet times, known as the *Evobkom*, which operated until 1924. The article concludes with a

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<sup>10</sup> Two pioneering essays on the EKOPO are Il'ia Trotskii, "Samodeiatel'nost' i samopomoshch' Russkogo evreistva," in *Kniga o Russkom Evreistve ot 1860-kh godov do revoliutsii 1917 g.*, (New York: Soiuz Russkikh Evreev, 1960), 471–497; and Mera Sverdlova, "Ha-vaad ha-yehudi le-'ezrat nifga'ei ha-milhamah (EKOPO) be-Russia, 1914-1916," *Yahadut zemanenu* 4 (1987): 269–288. More recent studies include Steven J. Zipperstein, "The Politics of Relief: The Transformation of Russian Jewish Communal Life during the First World War," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry IV: Jews and the European Crisis*, ed. Jonathan Frankel, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 22–40; M. A. Sverdlova, "EKOPO ve-hasiyu'a le-nifga'ei ha-milhamah be-mers-oktober 1917," *Shvut* 13 (1998): 19–30; Peter Gattrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); A. S. Tumanova, "Evreiskie obshchestvennye organizatsii v gody Pervoi mirovoi voiny, na primere Tambovskoi gubernii," in *Mirovoi krizis 1914–1920 godov i sud'ba vostochnoevropenskogo evreistva*, eds. Oleg V. Budnitskii et al., (Moscow: Rosspen, 2005), 124–142; Yevgeniya Pevzner, "Jewish Committee for the Relief of War Victims (1914–1921)," *Pinkas* 1 (2006): 114–142; Joshua Karlip, *The Tragedy of a Generation: The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), chapter 2; Simon Rabinovich, *Jewish Rights, National Rites: Nationalism and Autonomy in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), chapter 5; Beizer, *Relief in Time of Need*, chapter 1; and my own "Fighting 'On Our Own Territory': The Rescue and Representation of Jews in Russia during World War I," *Russia's Home Front in War and Revolution, 1914–22, Book 2: The Experience of War and Revolution*, eds. Adele Lindenmeyr, Christopher Read, Peter Waldron, (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2016), 79–105.

discussion of three aid workers' individual trajectories as public activists during the interwar years. Some of the aid workers active during the years of the Russian Civil War years later left the Soviet Union and some stayed, but none of them abandoned their identities as community activists. That so many of them helped to lead, and in some cases, to establish new Jewish public institutions suggests the extent to which the experience of the pogroms and the response to them shaped a generation of East European Jews.

### **Foundations: Jewish Aid Work in Russia during the Great War, 1914-1917**

The Petrograd Jewish Committee to Aid War Victims (EKOPO) experienced meteoric growth during the First World War. Founded in August 1914, the organization expanded in unexpected ways over nearly four years of war to become the largest federated Jewish organization in Russian history, and one of the most active civic associations among Russia's many national minorities. By the end of Russia's participation in the war, the EKOPO had aided more than 238,000 Jews through nearly 170 local committees, providing for essential, daily needs such as shelter; money for bread, train fare and heating fuel; and assistance with long-term resettlement needs including job training, schools for children, adult courses in Russian language, and legal advice.<sup>11</sup> Its reach extended throughout the Empire: the historic heartland of Russian Jewry in the Pale of Settlement, as well as Habsburg Galicia, which Russia occupied twice during the war. The EKOPO's aid workers also followed nearly 100,000 Jews who resettled in Russian territories which had been opened to Jews by imperial decree after August 1915. New communities of nearly 9,000 Jews sprang up in the cities of Penza and Tambov, among others; thousands more alighted in cities along the Volga River such as Saratov, while others ended their journeys much further east, in the cities of Omsk, Tomsk, and Irkutsk in Siberia.<sup>12</sup>

The EKOPO's emergence as the preeminent Jewish public institution in Russia resulted from multiple factors. First, we might consider what kind of workers the organization attracted to its ranks, and the types of ideas and strategies they introduced into the practice of Jewish aid work. Secondly, it is important to identify the relationships that the EKOPO established with external bodies, most

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<sup>11</sup> These statistics appeared in the EKOPO's newspaper *Delo pomoshchi* 1-2 (January 20, 1917), 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-14, 65-66. On the case of Jewish wartime aid work in the city of Tambov, see Tumanova, "Evreiskie obshchestvennye organizatsii."

notably the state and international philanthropies, both of which together provided the bulk of its funding.

The EKOPO was founded at a meeting of August 18, 1914, held by members of the Petrograd Choral Synagogue's Governing Board. Its initial organizing committee consisted of thirty-seven members of Petrograd's Jewish elite, including members of the Duma, the city's rabbis, and other notable figures. The well-known lawyer and political activist G. B. Sliozberg served as director; the banker M. A. Varshavskii, president of the Petrograd Jewish community, was the first chairman. The following month, the group received authorization from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to operate as an independent organization and opened ten regional committees for the purpose of local fundraising.<sup>13</sup>

The EKOPO's founding members had a limited goal: to provide mutual aid to families of Jewish reservists. By late 1914, however, it had become clear that significant-sized civilian populations in the Pale of Settlement needed emergency aid as well. These consisted of two groups in particular: tens of thousands of refugees who had fled in search of safety from war zones; and Jews whom the Russian Army had forcibly deported from front zones, based on the largely unfounded suspicion that Jews spied on behalf of the Germans. In spring 1915, the Russian Army initiated a systematic policy of deporting expellees, resulting in the expulsion of as many as 300,000 Jews to the Russian interior.<sup>14</sup> The EKOPO's agenda therefore evolved throughout the war. While it initially focused on providing emergency aid such as clothing, transportation, shelter, and food, by late 1915 the organization had begun to provide resettlement services, including job training, schooling, and legal aid.

As the needs of recipients and range of its services expanded over the first two years of the war, so did the EKOPO's organizational structure and staff. Jewish community charity had been traditionally operated from within synagogues, and distributed at the private discretion of rabbis or small circles composed of elite benefactors. In the decades before the war, however, several Jewish public organizations had sought to distance themselves from such religiously-affiliated forms of giving; instead, they attempted to emulate Russia's growing number of secular private associations and civic organizations. To that end, they

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<sup>13</sup> *Otchet Tsentral'nogo Evreiskogo Komiteta pomoshchi zhertvam voiny s nachala deiatel'nosti, Avgust 1914 goda po 30-e Iunia 1917 goda* (Petrograd, 1918), 8-9 (hence *Otchet EKOPO*).

<sup>14</sup> Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire*, 137-150.

appropriated concepts and methods of “rational” or “scientific” charity: they founded chartered organizations that held regular meetings, were open to dues-paying members, conducted public fundraising campaigns, operated on fixed budgets, and made their activities transparent and accountable to the public through periodic publications.<sup>15</sup>

During the war, the EKOPO delegated much of its work “in the field” to three leading Jewish public organizations that fit this mold. The oldest and most venerable of them was the OPE (Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among Russian Jews). Founded in 1863, the OPE pioneered the concept of modern Jewish schools that combined secular and religious education. The second oldest, founded in the 1880s, was the ORT (Society for the Promotion of Agriculture and Artisanry among Russian Jews), which oversaw labor training, job bureaus, subsidized workshops, and savings and loan societies. The youngest of the three, the OZE (Society for the Protection of the Health of the Jewish Population, founded 1912), ran stationary and mobile clinics and children’s centers.

These three organizations had their central offices in Petrograd but operated through networks of local branches across the Pale of Settlement. During the war, they came under the EKOPO “umbrella,” as it were, becoming connected to a Central Committee in Petrograd from which they received their funding and organizational guidance. Parallel divisions were established using the same model outside Petrograd as well, including in Moscow, Kiev and Vilna. The Moscow committee called itself the Jewish Aid Society (EVOPO). In Kiev, the organization was known as the Kiev Society for Aid to Jews (KOPE). In 1916, the Kiev and Moscow committees formally united with the Petrograd EKOPO, from which they received substantial funds.<sup>16</sup>

Each aid committee, whether based in Petrograd, Moscow, Kiev or elsewhere, operated according to a “center and provinces” model: the central office employed and coordinated the work of dozens of aid workers, known as authorized emissaries, or agents, who traveled and served the surrounding provinces. The EKOPO’s employment of emissaries reflected a key principle of

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<sup>15</sup> On Russian civic associations before and during the war, two important works are Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty Is Not a Vice: Charity, Society, and the State in Imperial Russia*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Joseph Bradley, *Associations in Tsarist Russia: Science, Patriotism and Civil Society*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> *Otchet EKOPO*, 7–8.

scientific philanthropy: that aid organizations should investigate the needs of their applicants so as then to create a rational plan of aid.<sup>17</sup> In Jewish communities that already operated their own mutual aid societies, EKOPO emissaries helped to organize and fund local initiatives; in other locations, they established and directed the work of entirely new committees. The EKOPO's ability to function as it did depended in large part on its traveling emissaries, who served as links in an organizational network that spanned the length of the empire. The emissaries helped to coordinate services amongst the three partner organizations, communicated real-time information and counsel from the field to the central decision-making bodies, and not least, enabled the distribution of aid directly to recipients on the ground.

The EKOPO practiced innovative and rational strategies not only by attempting to unify and centralize Jewish aid work, but also by attracting new kinds of public activists to serve in its offices and as emissaries in the field. The new activists tended to be young, and their ideals often combined traditional Jewish values and radical politics, as well as the intelligentsia's belief that the educated person should apply their profession to fight for basic human rights and justice on behalf of the poor.<sup>18</sup> The new workers came to community activism from across party lines as liberals, socialists, and Zionists. In spite of ideological differences, they shared the belief that aid work among Jews was both a moral obligation and an opportunity of national and political significance, a means to modernize Jewish community life and ameliorate the various underlying conditions that caused widespread poverty. Thus, the ORT introduced labor programs with the goal of making the Jewish working population less inclined to engage in petty trade and more "productive," while the OPE promoted modern Jewish schools in the hopes of educating Jews who would be equally familiar with Russian culture and with their familial Jewish heritage.<sup>19</sup>

Many of the aid workers who joined the EKOPO emerged from similar political, educational, and cultural backgrounds. Nokhem Gergel, for example, was born in 1887 in the shtetl Rotmistrivka in Ukraine and raised in a traditional Jewish home. While studying for a law degree in Kiev, he became a fervent proponent of

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<sup>17</sup> I believe the EKOPO's leaders looked to the Russian "guardianship" (*popechitel'stvo*) as a model. These were charities that employed local agents to investigate the needs of the poor. See Lindenmeyr, *Poverty Is Not a Vice*, chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>18</sup> "Delo ustroeniia," *Delo pomoshchi* 12 (November 20, 1916), 1-4.

<sup>19</sup> See for example Gennady Estraiikh, "Changing Ideologies of Artisanal 'Productivisation': ORT in Late Imperial Russia," *East European Jewish Affairs* 39/1 (2009): 3-18.

Yiddish culture and joined the OPE, where he advocated for the introduction of Yiddish-language education in secular Jewish schools. He also became involved in Jewish national politics as a member of the Socialist Zionist party. Gergel moved to Petrograd in his late twenties, and in 1914, volunteered for the EKOPO shortly after the war began. In 1915-16 he aided Jewish refugees in the Kielce, Vilna, and Minsk regions as a traveling aid worker. The EKOPO's board then elected Gergel to serve on its Central Committee – a gesture that indicates the degree to which his abilities as an aid worker were respected and valued. He remained on the Central Committee until the end of the war, and served as its secretary for a time.<sup>20</sup>

Nokhem Shtif followed a trajectory similar to that of Gergel. Born in 1879 in Rovno, Shtif spent his youth in Kiev studying law. He wrote for both the Yiddish and the Russian press, and experimented with Jewish socialism and Zionism. Soon after the war began, he moved his family to Petrograd from Vilna, where he had previously worked for the Yiddish publishing house Kletskin. He joined the EKOPO in the first months of the war, first as a traveling agent in Kovno and Chelm provinces, and later as a secretary at the EKOPO central office, where he managed the organization's correspondence and edited its two bi-monthly relief work newspapers in Russian, *Pomoshch* (Aid) and *Delo pomoshchi* (Aid Work).<sup>21</sup>



Fig. 2: Nokhem Shtif  
([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shtif\\_Nabum.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shtif_Nabum.jpg))

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<sup>20</sup> “Gergel,” in *Oyf di khurves*, 732–733. On the OPE’s Yiddish-language proponents at the turn of the century, see Brian Horowitz, *Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment in Late Imperial Russia*, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2009), 8, 12, chapter 10.

<sup>21</sup> Nokhem Shtif, “Oytobiografye fun Nokhem Shtif,” *Yivo bleter* V/ 3-5 (March-May 1933): 195-225, here 198-199; “Nokhem Shtif,” in *Leksikon fun yidishe shraiber in Ratn-farband*, ed. Chaim Beider, (New York: Congress of Jewish Culture, 2011), 384.

Jewish aid workers in other parts of Russia shared backgrounds which had much in common with Gergel and Shtif. In 1915, 29-year-old Eliyahu Gumener was sent by the EKOPO as an emissary to Podolia and Ekaterinoslav provinces of Ukraine (a post he kept until 1920). Born near Kovno, he had studied law, affiliated with the Socialist Zionists for a time, and contributed to both the Russian and the Yiddish press.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Yitzhak Giterman combined a passion for secular Jewish culture with community organizing. Born in 1889, he rebelled against his Hasidic upbringing after moving to Kiev as a young man, going on to acquire a European education and take part in the exciting projects of new Yiddish literary circles. In 1915, at the age of 26, he began to work for the Kiev Aid Society (KOPE) as an emissary in Volynia province, where he helped thousands of Jews who had been expelled from occupied Galicia into the Russian interior.<sup>23</sup> Like Gumener, he remained active in the same region until 1920. During years of wartime aid work, both Gumener and Giterman helped to build centralized institutions and networks that provided direct aid across large territories to tens of thousands of refugees. The values that propelled them into relief work, as well as the practical skills they gained during the war years, shaped their work in later years.

Young Jewish aid workers may have supplied the EKOPO with talent and spirited dedication to civic service, but its social status and power as an organization derived almost entirely from its connections to the state. Because the Russian government relied on the country's public sphere to aid refugees during the war, the Ministry of the Interior designated the EKOPO to conduct relief among the Empire's Jewish population in August 1915. From the Special Conference on Refugees within that Ministry, the EKOPO received 17 out of 31 million rubles of its income.<sup>24</sup> In Sliozberg's role as director, he became

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<sup>22</sup> Elijah Gumener, *A kapitl Ukrayne (Tsvey yor in Podolye)*, (Vilna: Farlag Sh. Shreberk, 1921). For biographical information, see "Eliyahu Gumener," in *Leksikon fun der yidisher literatur, prese un filologye*, ed. Zalmen Reyzen, (Vilna: Farlag B. Kletskin, 1928), 551–552. Gumener is also listed as one of the EKOPO's plenipotentiaries in *Otchet EKOPO*, 53.

<sup>23</sup> Giterman, "Avtobioger," 842–850. See also Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Rediscovering a Hidden Archive from the Warsaw Ghetto*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2009 [2007]), 95–97.

<sup>24</sup> The Russian government allocated nearly 500,000 rubles in 1915; 5,879,000 rubles in 1916; and 10,800,000 rubles in 1917. *Otchet EKOPO*, 13.

recognized as the de facto representative of Jewish interests, appearing regularly before state authorities to advocate for the organization's needs, and by extension, those of the Jewish population. As we will see, Jewish aid work organizations that succeeded the EKOPO after 1917 would aspire to regain the influential status – and state funding – that it had been granted during the World War.

In its capacity as the official provider for Jewish welfare in Russia, the EKOPO was also able to establish ties with international Jewish philanthropies in Europe and North America. Nearly a quarter of its budget came from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (the Joint, or JDC) in New York, founded in November 1914 for the purpose of collecting and distributing funds to Jewish war victims abroad.<sup>25</sup> After the February and October Revolutions this partnership between Russian and American Jewry proved highly consequential for the EKOPO and its successors, for whom the Joint's support became a lifeline.

### **As Good as Forgotten? Jewish Aid Work in a Year of Revolutions**

“The February Revolution caught the EKOPO at a time of intense activity,” recalled its director G. B. Sliozberg.<sup>26</sup> By early 1917, the organization's reach extended across the entire Empire, serving nearly 250,000 Jewish refugees in some 2,000 locations that spanned from occupied Galicia to Siberia. The needs of Jewish civilians remained particularly acute in Galicia and Bukovina, territories that Russia occupied a second time after the Brusilov Offensive in summer 1916. There, “even in the death throes of the tsarist regime,” as one baffled aid worker wrote, the Russian Army and recently installed civilian authorities continued to expel Jews.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Jaclyn Granick, “Waging Relief: The Politics and Logistics of American Jewish War Relief in Europe and the Near East (1914-1918),” *First World War Studies* 5/1 (2014): 55-68; 57.

<sup>26</sup> G. B. Sliozberg, *Dela minuvshikh dnei: zapiski russkago evreia*, Vol. 3, (Paris: Pascal, 1933-1934), 368.

<sup>27</sup> “*Otchet o deiatel'nosti Kievskogo obshchestva dlia okazaniia pomoshchi evreiskomu naseleniiu, postradavshemu ot voennykh deistvii, 1918 g.*,” Russian State Historical Archive, St. Petersburg (*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv*; hence RGIA), f. 1546, op. 1, ed. kh. 190, ll. 1-6, here 3.

Russian Jews euphorically welcomed the change in government after the Tsar's abdication on March 2, 1917. The enactment of civic emancipation also stoked many Jewish activists' ambitions to pursue rights of political and cultural autonomy for the Jews as a national minority. The EKOPO's leaders seemed poised to take on a central role in such a project: the organization had acquired status and recognition, one that capably represented Jewish interests before the Russian government and directly served the people with its network of health care, education, and emergency relief services across the Empire.<sup>28</sup> Its network of centralized and local committees provided a ready-made institutional infrastructure for Jewish national autonomy in Russia.

As exciting new prospects emerged for the EKOPO, its staff maintained the ongoing, daily work of coordinating and funding aid work throughout Russia. Jewish relief organizations believed that the refugee crisis might soon abate, even if the country remained indefinitely embroiled in war. The Provisional Government, formed by liberal and socialist politicians in the State Duma, had already taken steps to forbid any further expulsions of civilians from zones of military importance. In one of its first acts, the new government granted amnesty to all Russian citizens who had been forcibly displaced from their homes because of wartime administrative decrees. Among the millions of refugees were hundreds of thousands of Jews who could now make their way home, no longer as refugees but as citizens who possessed rights of free movement and residence.

It was also widely assumed that the provisional government would increase funding for organizations that helped refugees. The selection of Prince G. E. L'vov as Prime Minister in the new government would have certainly supported such expectations. As the leader of the Zemstvo Union for a decade before the war, L'vov had strongly advocated for the expansion of Russia's burgeoning civil society; during the war years, he transformed the Union into the Empire's largest provider of health, education, and emergency aid to the military and civilians.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> "Outline of the History of the Ekopo, since its foundation, in August 1914 (to the end of 1919)," December 14, 1920. Archives of the Joint Distribution Committee, New York, AR 1919–1921/4/36/1/253.4/1–31, here 31. Russian Jewish activists debated how to establish effective institutions of national autonomy at a series of conferences held in spring 1917. It is telling that the EKOPO sent several representatives to take part in the proceedings. At these conferences, the idea of the All-Russian Jewish Congress was discussed; the Congress later met in June 1918. Simon Rabinovitch notes that twice as many public organizations as political parties took part in planning the All-Russian Jewish Congress (*Jewish Rights, National Rites*, 224).

<sup>29</sup> On L'vov's wartime efforts see Thomas Earl Porter with Lawrence W. Lerner, *Prince George E. L'vov: The Zemstvo, Civil Society, and Liberalism in Late Imperial Russia*. (Lanham, MD:

These promising signs notwithstanding, government funding for refugees gradually shrank, even as the price of food skyrocketed. By summer 1917, the EKOPO's quarterly allocation from the government had been delayed; L'vov himself resigned after just four months in office, in favor of his Minister of War, A. F. Kerenskii. Refugees did not rank very high among the new Provisional Government's problems, – which included the need to enact fundamental political reforms, quell mass strikes and disturbances, and maintain the country's part in a war against the German, Habsburg, and Ottoman armies. As one Jewish aid worker conceded at the time, “relief work is a very modest task compared to the enormous problems that now face Russia,” even if “hundreds of thousands of war victims...are still suffering and demand our tireless attention and aid.”<sup>30</sup>

Jewish refugees did indeed remain in dire need. The EKOPO's statistics chief, G. Prussakov, estimated that some two thirds of the registered refugees' existence depended almost entirely on subsistence allowances from the government (*paiki*); these were issued as monthly monetary payments calculated according to the prices of food.<sup>31</sup> Recipients of the monthly subsidies included women with young children, widows, the elderly, the sick, and the disabled – people categorized as dependent or unable to work. To account for inflation, the Provisional Government had increased the *payok* from 6.5 rubles to 7.5 rubles per person in early 1917. However, Prussakov calculated that average food and housing expenses amounted to no less than 13 rubles per person per month, and these costs continued to rise steadily throughout 1917.<sup>32</sup>

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Lexington Books, 2017) , 169-204; on the wartime work of the Union of Towns and Zemstvos, a useful overview can be found in William Gleason, “The All-Russian Union of Zemstvos and World War I,” in *The Zemstvo in Russia: An Experiment in Local Self-Government*, eds. Terence Emmons, Wayne S. Vucinich, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 365-382.

<sup>30</sup> “*Novyi poriadok i delo pomoshchi*,” *Delo pomoshchi* 5–6 (March 25, 1917), 3; on the status of Jewish aid work in early 1917, see also Sverdlova, “*EKOPO ve-hasiyu'a le-nifga'ei ha-milhamah*,” 20-21; Beizer, *Relief in Time of Need*, 35-36.

<sup>31</sup> In Russia, soldiers' wives and children had the right to state assistance in the form of *paiki* according to a pre-war law of June 25, 1912. See Liudmila Bulgakova, “The Phenomenon of the Liberated Soldier's Wife,” in *Russia's Home Front in War and Revolution, Volume 2*, ed. Adele Lindenmeyr, (Waldron and Read), 301-326; 301.

<sup>32</sup> G. Prussakov, “Sostav i rasselenie bezhentsev i vyselentsev-evreev,” *Delo pomoshchi* 1-2 (January 20, 1917), 18–20; see also Trotskii, “*Samodeiatel'nost' i samopomoshch*,” 497. Prussakov's estimate allowed for about 9 rubles for food and 4 rubles for housing per month, though he noted that costs varied between front zones and the interior. Moreover, he had made these estimates in January 1917, before inflation grew rapidly in the wake of the February Revolution.

Like many other civic organizations in wartime Russia, such as the Union of Zemstvos, the EKOPO helped its recipients by supplying the difference between their *paiki* and the minimal cost of living. But once the EKOPO had lost its own source of state funding, it had to look to other kinds of income to supplement the growing costs of food and housing. It spent accumulated reserves; it also looked to small, but regular private donations from Russian Jewry, even though in 1917 these shrank to a fraction – nearly by 18 times – of what they had been on average over the previous two years.<sup>33</sup> The EKOPO's greatest source of support, however, came from its overseas partner in New York, the Joint, which sent nearly \$450,000 in monthly installments (over five million rubles) from March to December 1917.<sup>34</sup>

In the attempt to minimize expenses, the EKOPO Central Committee in Petrograd cut its staff and began to close local aid committees. Nokhem Shtif lost his job in September 1917, when the EKOPO could no longer afford to print *Delo pomoshchi* (Aid Work), the bi-weekly newspaper that he had edited for the previous year.<sup>35</sup> It was a bad sign, he wrote, that even the Jewish press took little notice of the paper's closure – and an indication of the more fundamental problem, that the widely shared spirit of voluntarism seemed to have vanished. Perhaps, he wrote Shtif, this was even a sign that “the refugees had been as good as forgotten by Jewish society.”<sup>36</sup> Although frustration understandably led him to exaggerate, his comments are indicative of the dramatic shift then occurring in Russian Jewish society.

Shtif needed to address problems of his own, as well. Scarce food and intense surveillance of non-Bolsheviks made life in Petrograd increasingly unbearable. He held out for nearly a year; then, as he wrote, “hunger finally struck my family,” and in late 1918, they left in search of better living conditions.<sup>37</sup> He joined numerous other aid workers who had fled the city. Some set out for Moscow, the country's new capital and an emerging center of Jewish culture as a

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<sup>33</sup> Sverdlova, “EKOPO ve-ha-siyu'a le-nifga'ei ha-milhamah,” 21.

<sup>34</sup> *Orchet EKOPO*, 12; Granick, “Humanitarian Responses to Jewish Suffering Abroad,” 90-91.

<sup>35</sup> “*Di hilfärbeyt*,” *Hilf* no. 1-2 (1919), 15. Shtif was likely the author of this article (he also edited *Hilf*), in which he recounted important events in Jewish aid work before the October Revolution.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Nokhem Shtif, “*Oytobiografye fun Nokhem Shtif*,” *Yivo bleter* V, nos. 3-5 (March-May 1933), 198-200.

result of wartime displacement.<sup>38</sup> Still others opted for Kiev. This was the case of Shtif's colleague at the EKOPO, Nokhem Gergel, who had made the move earlier in 1918.<sup>39</sup> Resettling in Kiev made sense for several reasons. Perhaps for some aid workers, moving to Ukraine represented a kind of homecoming: as noted above, Shtif hailed from Rovno, and Gergel from Rakhmistrovka (in Volynia and Kiev provinces, respectively). Moreover, the right-bank and central regions of Ukraine remained active war zones; having spent years as relief workers "in the field," both Shtif and Gergel could expect their skills to be useful in these areas. But undoubtedly the decisive factor that drew Jewish activists to Ukraine at this time was their hope of developing independent forms of Jewish cultural and political life. With longtime centers of Jewish cultural life in Warsaw and Vilna still under German occupation, the climate in revolutionary Kiev, by contrast, seemed to offer a wholly plausible setting for realizing such aspirations.<sup>40</sup>

Emboldened by the February Revolution, Ukrainians began their own experiment with national independence in spring 1917 by setting up a socialist-dominated parliament (Rada) that recognized the Provisional Government. Of crucial significance for Jews, in June 1917, the Ukrainian Rada offered rights of self-determination to the region's three largest national minorities – the Poles, the Russians, and the Jews – and established three separate offices tasked with building institutions of self-governance among these respective groups. In January 1918, the Rada formally declared independence from Russia's new Bolshevik government and proclaimed itself the Ukrainian National Republic. Shortly thereafter, the Ukrainian government passed the Law of National-Personal Autonomy, which for Jews meant recognition of Yiddish as a national language and state funding for Jewish institutions under the authority of a Jewish Ministry within the government. The tasks of the Jewish Ministry – the first political office of its kind in history, as Henry Abramson observes – consisted of "preparing legislation to develop the infrastructure of Jewish autonomy in Ukraine, and dealing with requests for assistance from the public."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Kenneth B. Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 35-38.

<sup>39</sup> "N. Gergel," *Oyf di khurves*, 732-735.

<sup>40</sup> Moss, *Jewish Renaissance*, 52-54.

<sup>41</sup> Henry Abramson, *Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times: A Prayer for the Government*, revised edition 2018 ([Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999]), 112. The Jewish Ministry began with the status of a Vice-Secretariat and only in January 1918, following the passage of the

It is striking that many of the Jewish Ministry's staff had spent the preceding years working for the EKOPO and its partner organizations. The UNR's first Minister of Jewish Affairs, Dr. Moyshe Zilberfarb, had worked during the war as an inspector of savings and loan cooperatives for the Jewish Colonization Society (EKO).<sup>42</sup> His colleagues at the Ministry included Isai Khurgin of the Petrograd ORT of the war years and Yakov Lestschinsky, who since 1914 had worked for the ORT in Ukraine, collecting data about the economic status of Jewish refugees and setting up employment bureaus.<sup>43</sup> Khurgin was named Zilberfarb's deputy (head of the Department of General Affairs), a position that subsequently went to Nokhem Gergel and later to Lestschinsky.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Avrom Strashun had helped to found dozens of refugee schools for the OPE during the war; after moving to Kiev, he became the head of the Jewish Ministry's Department of Education.<sup>45</sup>

The direct path leading from wartime aid work to revolutionary national politics was not followed only among Jews after 1917. A parallel transition was made by Armenian, Latvian, Ukrainian, and other national activists in post-revolutionary Russia. Peter Gatrell explains that their move from public service to political leadership made complete sense, given that "administrative practice within the national organizations [during the World War] gave them ready-made institutions, trained personnel, and direct experience of rule."<sup>46</sup>

Despite the number of public activists that served in the Jewish Ministry's ranks, that office seems not to have provided any direct funding for Jewish aid work in 1917. The public organizations for labor (ORT), health (OZE) and education (OPE) and their umbrella organization, the Kiev Society for Aid to Jews (KOPE), apparently worked independently of the Jewish Ministry. Moreover, as we will see below, Zilberfarb expressed little awareness of – or concern for – the

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Law of National-Personal Autonomy, was elevated to the status of a government ministry. The term "Jewish Ministry" is used consistently throughout this essay to avoid confusion.

<sup>42</sup> "M. Zilberfarb," *Oyf di khurves*, 745-746.

<sup>43</sup> *Oyf di khurves*, 773-775; Gennady Estraiikh, "Jacob Lestschinsky: A Yiddishist Dreamer and Social Scientist," *Science in Context* 20 (2007): 215-37.

<sup>44</sup> Moyshe Zilberfarb, *Dos yidische ministerium un di yidische avtonomie in ukraine* (Kiev: *Yidisher folksfarlag*, 1919), 42-43.

<sup>45</sup> E. Tcherikower, *Antisemitizm i pogromy na Ukraine 1917-1918 gg. (k istorii Ukrainsko-Evreiskikh otnoshenii)* (Berlin: *Izd. "Ostjüdisches Historisches Archiv,"* 1923), 66-67; Abramson, *Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times*, 57-68.

<sup>46</sup> Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*, 195.

challenges that faced Jewish relief organizations in Ukraine at the time, most importantly, growing welfare needs and dwindling resources.

In the course of 1917, the Kiev Aid Society (KOPE) assisted nearly 8,000 registered Jewish refugees within central Ukraine, as well as within Russian-occupied Galicia and Bukovina. Of that number, nearly 31,500 refugees were to be found in the provinces of Kiev, Volynia, Podolia, and Chernigov, while the majority – about 50,000 – were in Galicia.<sup>47</sup> The KOPE's emissaries in the field included long-time aid workers who had been there from the start of the war. In eastern Galicia, Dr. F. E. Lander, a military doctor and former OPE activist from Petrograd, had been stationed with his regiment since his arrival in late 1914. For years he had been discretely aiding local Jewish communities, beyond his daily duties at a military hospital in Tarnopol. He continued to work remotely for the KOPE throughout 1917 to set up local aid committees and allocate money. He also traveled by car to distribute food, fuel, shoes, and money for medical care and education to those most in need in towns such as Zholkiew and Tarnopol.<sup>48</sup>

Lander's partner, S. Gomel'skii, had also worked in Galicia and Podolia province since 1914. Both men crossed paths with the legendary folklorist and writer S. An-sky, who visited the region twice on behalf of the Petrograd EKOPO, first in early 1915 and again in January 1917. Upon his arrival in the area for the second time, Ansky found the two men still working "with great devotion" on providing aid, as he wrote; he estimated that the milk, bread, and eggs they distributed over the years "saved hundreds, even thousands, of people from starvation."<sup>49</sup>

In Volynia province, Giterman continued to work as the KOPE's representative with about 19,000 registered refugees. He shuttled between local committees in Lutsk and Zhitomir, while also coordinating services with the OZE and ORT to

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<sup>47</sup> RGIA f. 1546, op. 1, ed. kh. 190, ll. 1-3.

<sup>48</sup> S. Iu. Gomel'skii, "V okkupirovannoi Galitsii i Bukovine," *Delo pomoshchi* 12 (November 20, 1916), 6-12, here 11; on Lander's pre-war work with the OPE as an "educational inspector," see Horowitz, *Jewish Philanthropy*, 153-154.

<sup>49</sup> An-sky's 1917 return to Galicia is described in the fourth volume of his Yiddish war memoir, *Khurbn Galitsye*, translated by Joachim Neugroschel as S. Ansky, *The Enemy at His Pleasure: A Journey through the Jewish Pale of Settlement during World War I* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), quoted here 224-225; on Lander and Gomel'skii, see also 79-83, 135-140, 224-226, 240-244. An-sky described his encounters with Lander and Gomel'skii in 1915; see his diary entries of January 23 and February 27, 1915, in *The 1915 Diary of S. An-sky: A Russian-Jewish Writer at the Eastern Front*, trans. Polly Zavadiivker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

run homeless shelters, medical clinics, and schools and to distribute food and supplies.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, in Podolia province, Eliyahu Gumener remained in the role he had first taken on in 1915 as an emissary for the EKOPO. In addition to providing food and shelter, he worked with returning Jewish refugees and local populations to appraise property lost in the war and apply to regional commissions with their claims. Gumener estimated that the claims of some 2,000 people in Podolia province alone totaled about four million rubles.<sup>51</sup>

The population of homeless Jews in Ukrainian territory grew steadily throughout 1917. In summer 1917, the Russian Army's disastrous Kerensky Offensive in Galicia prompted a flood of human displacement into the Russian interior. A number of months earlier, the government had ordered the repatriation of all Galician deportees, including nearly 10,000 Jews.<sup>52</sup> As An-sky wrote, this news delighted the refugees at first, but they "soon experienced a bitter disappointment." Aid workers attested to the struggles that most were caught up in after coming home. Gomel'skii observed refugees returning to Podolia province: they had spent years in exile and returned empty handed, with no money for food. He saw people who had walked barefoot over long distances, focused on the sole goal of return.<sup>53</sup>

More problems ensued once the refugees arrived at their destinations. In the town of Satanov, returning deportees found their homes stripped of doors, windows, and ovens. To make matters worse, their Ukrainian neighbors, including a few who had occupied the "abandoned" homes, regarded the returning Jews as "dangerous competitors." Other Jews found their homes occupied by military authorities. In response, some Jews simply left without attempting to reclaim their properties.<sup>54</sup> An-sky wrote that the homeless crammed into every least space they could find, including synagogues and study houses, barns and stables.<sup>55</sup> Gomel'skii also described homeless families sleeping on the streets, others in earthen pits covered by sheets. Traditional family life appeared to be breaking down; in one town, he observed evidence of child

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<sup>50</sup> RGIA f. 1546, op. 1, ed. kh. 190, ll. 1, 4; Giterman, "Avtobioger," 860.

<sup>51</sup> E. Gumener, "Vegen di hizkes fun der milkhome," *Hilf* nos. 1-2 (1919), 27-30.

<sup>52</sup> Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*, 179.

<sup>53</sup> S. Iu. Gomel'skii, "V okkupirovannoi Galitsii," 7.

<sup>54</sup> "Di hilfərbeyt," 18; "Fun podolier gubernie," *Hilf* 1-2 (1919), 43.

<sup>55</sup> An-sky, *The Enemy at His Pleasure*, 231.

prostitution on the street as he watched a twelve-year-old boy serve as the “broker” between the “young ladies and gents.”<sup>56</sup>

The Kiev Aid Society lost significant sources of income in 1917, including what the Petrograd EKOPO had supplied throughout the years of Russia’s participation in the Great War. In response, the organization spent down 3.48 million rubles from its reserves in 1917, nearly the same amount it had spent over the preceding three years. In September, the organization cut subsidies to nearly half of its regional committees, eliciting angry protests from desperate recipients.<sup>57</sup> The OZE’s ambulatory clinics, the OPE’s schools, and the KOPE’s food stations continued to function throughout the region, but now at a fraction of their former capacity.

When Zilberfarb later reflected on Jewish aid organizations in Ukraine in late 1917, he described them as once vibrant and powerful bodies that had become shadows of their former selves. Having aided the Jewish masses so effectively during the Great War, they seemed to have suddenly given up and retreated when more difficult times had set in. He characterized the change in harsh terms: The old relic, which was known before the Revolution as the *kehillah* (the community governing board), had entirely decayed; the younger institutions – the local sections of OPE, OZE, KOPE, ORT, and others – had retired somewhere in a corner and emitted no signs of life. There was no one left to whom to turn with even an inquiry or questionnaire.<sup>58</sup>

It is important to keep in mind that as Minister of Jewish Affairs, Zilberfarb dealt with the practical challenges of trying to build institutions of Jewish autonomy at local levels. He could no longer look to the defunct *kehillah* to gather information about the needs and characteristics of local populations; nor, as he wrote, could he rely on the “younger,” more recently founded public organizations, that had apparently expired without hope for revival. That Zilberfarb portrayed the Kiev Aid Society and its workers as having somehow

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<sup>56</sup> “*Otchet o deiatel’nosti Kievskogo obshchestva*,” RGIA f. 1546, op. 1, ed. kh. 190, l. 2; Gomel’skii, “*V okkupirovannoi Galitsii*,” 7, 11. In his memoir, An-sky claims to have heard the story from Gomel’skii, but he may have also read it in *Delo pomoshchi* (*The Enemy at His Pleasure*, 236).

<sup>57</sup> RGIA f. 1546, op. 1, ed. kh. 190, l. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Zilberfarb, *Dos idishe ministerium*, 29-30 (translation adapted from Moses Silberfarb [Zilberfarb], *The Jewish Ministry and Jewish National Autonomy in Ukraine*, trans. David H. Lincoln [New York: Aleph Press, 1993], 42).

willingly “retired somewhere in a corner” suggests his lack of knowledge about the basic issues with which they were faced. Zilberfarb also neglected to mention the dedicated Jewish aid workers, such as Giterman and Gumener, who *had* remained committed to their posts and whose experience and skills allowed them to carry on aid work both then and in subsequent years.

### **On the Eve of Catastrophe: Jewish Aid Work in 1918**

The October 1917 Bolshevik coup in Petrograd halted all sources of government funding for public organizations. The legality of public organizations such as the EKOPO came into question, and the new laws that separated church and state provided a framework that allowed the government to dissolve any Jewish organizations. Yet the Petrograd EKOPO did not undergo this fate. In February 1918, it came under government supervision when the Jewish Commissariat within the People’s Commissariat for Nationality Affairs (known as the Evkom) assumed control of its finances and operations.<sup>59</sup> Sliozberg recalled, with characteristic understatement, that the EKOPO and its partners managed to “continue their work amidst great difficulties, and without funds.”<sup>60</sup> He did not exaggerate the latter point: soon after the decree of December 27, 1917, concerning the nationalization of banks, the EKOPO’s assets of nearly 3 million rubles in the Azov-Don Bank vanished.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, transfers of overseas funds from the Joint Distribution Committee had become impossible by that time.<sup>62</sup> Thus, within months of the October Revolution, the EKOPO lost more than 80% of its former income.

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<sup>59</sup> In an ironic turn of events in Vitebsk, the local Evkom division simply shut down the EKOPO committee in September 1918 and began running the old-age home, thus becoming a provider of that same type of “ethnically partisan welfare” against which it had railed with ideological fierceness, as Beizer (39) points out. See Arkadii Zel’tser, *Evrei sovetskoi provintsii: Vitebsk i mestechki 1917–1941* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006), 48-49.

<sup>60</sup> H. Sliosberg [G. B. Sliozberg], “Memorandum on the EKOPO, of Petrograd,” July 20, 1920, JDC NY AR 1919-1921, Item ID 232748, p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> The EKOPO remained solvent in 1918 by borrowing nearly 2.74 million rubles from the Zionist Organization of Russia (ZOR). The ZOR raised 15-20 million rubles in donations following the Balfour Declaration in November 1917 and wanted to salvage the funds by moving them out of Soviet Russian borders. The ZOR’s loans to the EKOPO were later repaid in London in hard currency supplied by the Joint Distribution Committee. Sliozberg describes this scheme in *Dela minuvshikh dnei*, 3:369-375.

<sup>62</sup> Granick, “Humanitarian Responses to Jewish Suffering Abroad,” 90-93; Beizer, *Relief in Time of Need*, 38-41.

The EKOPO's leaders weighed the prospect of closing their doors during the first half of 1918, but then made a strategic decision. In June of the same year, the Petrograd EKOPO formally united with the Moscow Jewish Society for Aid to War Victims (the EVOPO).<sup>63</sup> The unification made sense for numerous reasons: it allowed the two organizations to pool their scarce resources and continue to operate in a centralized fashion. No less importantly, the move provided the Petrograd Committee with proximity to the country's new seat of power. The Petrograd office continued to operate informally well into the late 1920s, but the Moscow branch became the headquarters for all official business.

Meanwhile, in Ukraine, new challenges had arisen for Jewish relief organizations. Homelessness among refugees remained an urgent and growing concern. One of the Kiev Aid Society's correspondents reported seeing thousands of families living near railroad stations in train cars and earthen pits, repeating – but on a growing scale – the predicament of homeless families as recorded by An-sky and Gomel'skii during WWI. The dire situation reminded Gergel of the catastrophic military expulsions he had witnessed in 1915. In his view, the earlier episode appeared as “nothing compared to what is happening now.”<sup>64</sup> Even more devastating was a swelling wave of anti-Jewish violence in Ukraine that had started following the October Revolution. Contemporary observers such as E. Tcherikower referred to the outbreaks as pogroms, which he defined in this case as spontaneous riots perpetrated by hungry, demobilized soldiers in the Ukrainian and Red Armies, as well as by peasants. The violence most often targeted Jewish property rather than persons, but occasionally led to beatings and the humiliation of Jews.<sup>65</sup> The violence and frequency of these riots grew throughout 1918.

In early 1918, the Jewish Ministry and the Kiev Aid Society (KOPE) worked together to respond to the violence. Nokhem Gergel undoubtedly played a key role in forging links between the two agencies, working as he did for both of them simultaneously, as General Secretary for the Kiev Aid Society and as

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<sup>63</sup> Sliosberg, “Memorandum on the EKOPO,” p. 7.

<sup>64</sup> N. Gergel, “*Di hilfərbeyt un melukkeh-mitlen*,” *Hilf* 1-2 (1919), 22.

<sup>65</sup> Tcherikower., *Antisemitizm*, 53-54, 105-106; Abramson, *Ukrainians and Jews*, 79. Following Tcherikower, Irina Astashkevich has described this as the “first wave” of pogroms that preceded three additional waves of increasingly murderous violence against Jews in late 1918, in “The Pogroms in Ukraine in 1917-1920: An Alternate Universe,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 2013), 4.

Director of General Affairs in the Jewish Ministry.<sup>66</sup> Gergel advocated strongly for the cause of relief work before the Ukrainian government's Ministry of Internal Affairs, making it a point to keep the Ministry informed about developments among the Jewish population. In March 1918, these efforts met with some success, securing modest funds for aid to Jewish victims of the pogroms.<sup>67</sup>

Gergel's attempts to obtain government support for Jewish aid work were disrupted in April 1918, when German troops arrived in Kiev and installed the right-wing Ukrainian Pavlo Skoropads'kyi in power, to rule according to German imperial interests.<sup>68</sup> The fate of Jewish relief work during the months of the "Hetmanate-Ukrainian" regime is difficult to reconstruct with certainty. Skoropads'kyi's regime formally abolished rights of national autonomy, leading to the dissolution of the Jewish Ministry and the prohibition against public meetings or business conducted by organizations. However, the extent to which the government actually enforced these rules is unclear. Kenneth Moss, for example, has suggested that "local autonomy, relative cultural freedom, and relatively livable political and economic conditions" persisted in Ukraine even under Skoropads'kyi.<sup>69</sup> Information from the Kiev Aid Society's records and aid workers' personal accounts supports the view that Jewish public organizations continued to function quietly throughout 1918. Thus, despite the official ban on private fundraising, the Kiev Aid Society conducted a donation drive, one that produced significant yields – enough to fund nearly one half of the budgets of its local aid committees in 1918.<sup>70</sup> At an October 1918 meeting in Kiev, the Kiev Aid Society attempted to coordinate aid work according to the "center and provinces" model used earlier during the Great War. The KOPE's leaders also maintained regular contact with the Petrograd EKOPO, to whom they reported regularly about economic conditions in Ukraine and about those of pogrom victims in particular. This contact culminated in a visit to Kiev, in summer 1918, by the EKOPO's long-time Petrograd leaders Leonty Bramson, Meir Kreinin,

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<sup>66</sup> "N. Gergel," *Oyf di khurves*, 734. Gergel's unpublished handwritten Yiddish monograph, now in the YIVO Tcherikower Archive, sheds much light on the period of Skoropads'kyi's rule.

<sup>67</sup> Gergel, "*Di hilfärbeyt*," 25-28, here 27-28; *Kniga pogromov. Pogromy na Ukraine, v Belorussii i evropeiskoi chasti Rossii v period Grazhdanskoj voiny. 1918-1922 gg.: Sbornik dokumentov*, ed. L. B. Miliakova (Moscow: Rosspen, 2007), 11.

<sup>68</sup> Paul R. Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine: The Land and Its Peoples*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 518-520; Abramson, *Ukrainians and Jews*, 88-102.

<sup>69</sup> Moss, *Jewish Renaissance*, 52.

<sup>70</sup> RGIA f. 1546, op. 1, ed. kh. 190, l. 4.

and Aleksandr Zalkind, who hand-delivered and dispatched money for aid work.<sup>71</sup>

Despite these important efforts, Gergel lamented that by late 1918 Jewish aid work had been reduced to a fraction of its former extent.<sup>72</sup> The KOPE still ran a few meal stations that served kosher food in larger cities, but its presence had virtually disappeared in the smaller towns and shtetls. The Society for the Health of Jews (OZE) in Ukraine, too, had been reduced to a staff of just two paid workers who together ran all the children's shelters in twelve cities, including Kiev, Zhitomir, Berdichev, and Ekaterinoslav.<sup>73</sup> Even more troubling, Jewish public organizations simply lacked the capacity to address the sporadic, but increasingly frequent pogroms in 1918 that left hundreds of Jews as victims of property damage, theft, beatings, and even murder and rape. It is telling that the KOPE received requests for weapons, rather than financial aid. In a letter of December 14, 1917, for example, one S. Vertgeim of Dubno appealed to the KOPE to send weapons so Jews in the town might preempt an anticipated pogrom or defend themselves, if necessary. "Tomorrow is shrouded in the shadow of uncertainty," he wrote.<sup>74</sup> Neither Kiev's Jewish aid organizations nor the political establishment was prepared for the magnitude of what was soon to come.

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<sup>71</sup> Beizer, *Relief in Time of Need*, 41, 43.

<sup>72</sup> Gergel, "Di hilfärbeyt," 23-24, 28.

<sup>73</sup> "O deiatel'nosti Ukrainkogo komiteta, 1918 g.," RGIA f. 1546, op. 1, ed. kh. 195, l. 1.

<sup>74</sup> "K sobytiiam v Dubno (Volyn)," December 14, 1917, in Tcherikower, *Antisemitizm*, 197-198.

### United by Necessity: The Jewish Central Aid Committee in Kiev

Jewish political life remained riven by conflict despite the urgent need for a response to the rise in anti-Jewish violence in Ukraine. In December 1918, following the end of the Great War and German withdrawal from Ukraine, the Ukrainian National Republican government, now known as the Directory, reclaimed Kiev, and Jews regained their two representative institutions. The Ministry of Jewish Affairs reopened, now with Avrom Revutsky, a Labor Zionist, as the new minister. The Nationality Council also resumed its work as a popularly elected pre-parliamentary advisory body. Dominated by Zionists, the Nationality Council vied for authority with – and only reluctantly recognized the authority of – Revutsky’s left-wing Ministry. The lack of consensus between the two groups proved to be of fateful consequence for Jewish relief work in 1919.<sup>75</sup>

Despite the conflict between the Zionists and the socialists, Gergel expressed confidence that the Jewish Ministry would reliably fund the Kiev Aid Society and its partner organizations. Unfortunately, the Directory held Kiev for less than two months, and its tenure was as brief as it was tumultuous. By late December, anti-Jewish violence had erupted on various fronts of the Civil War. The Red Army rapidly approached Kiev in December and January, sending the Ukrainian Army, under Semion Petlyura’s authority, into a hasty retreat. As Ukrainian troops relinquished territory in central Ukraine, they carried out brutal attacks on Jews, killing dozens in the Volynian towns of Ovruch, Berdichev, Zhitomir, and others. Gergel estimated that 85 pogroms took place in those two months alone. Like the earlier, first wave of pogroms, these violent outbursts involved theft and property damage, but with this significant difference: according to Irina Astashkevich,

the outbursts of violence carried out by Petlyura’s army and armed groups of people under the command of the military chieftains of various allegiances were characterized by a high intensity of violence, mass rape and murder and a high level of criminality.<sup>76</sup>

The eruption of intense violence caught Kiev’s Jewish aid organizations in a precarious position, just as they had begun to align themselves with the latest

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<sup>75</sup> Abramson, *Ukrainians and Jews*, 143.

<sup>76</sup> Gergel, “The Pogroms in Ukraine,” 240; Astashkevich, “The Pogroms in Ukraine,” 4.

regime in power. Gergel remained a key figure during the crucial weeks of reorganization in December and January, working in a dual role within the Jewish Ministry and the Kiev Aid Society. His priority was to establish funding for Jewish aid organizations on what he called “a proper government foundation,” that is, from the Directory government. It is telling that Gergel looked back to the Petrograd EKOPO as a precedent. He recalled that in spring 1915 its leaders had lobbied the tsarist Ministry of the Interior and received substantial funds to aid Jewish refugees. The Directory had recently founded a Department of Refugees within its own Ministry of the Interior, and Gergel argued that the Kiev Aid Society should appeal to that body for funds, which it promptly did. Initial attempts to secure government funding yielded disappointing results, however. In December 1918, when the KOPE requested allocations to offset expenditures incurred earlier in the year, the Department of Refugees agreed to cover only 15% of the needed budget.<sup>77</sup>

The effort to secure Directory funding for pogrom victims required more than just appeals; it took a concerted political campaign at the highest levels. The Nationality Council and the Jewish Ministry responded with a combination of internal lobbying and external propaganda, designed to bring about public exposure of the Directory’s allegedly negligible response to the pogroms. The immediate trigger had been the government’s statement of January 10, in which the authorities denounced the pogroms and their perpetrators but also exhorted the Jews to curb their “sympathies” for Bolshevism; the government was thus openly blaming the victims for their misfortunes. The Jewish Nationality Council emphatically condemned the statement, accusing the government not only of having failed to protect its Jewish citizens from deadly antisemitic violence, but also of repeating the same canards that had initially incited the perpetrators. The Council demanded that the Directory take immediate steps to enforce law and order; conduct investigations of the pogroms with the goal of identifying and punishing the perpetrators; organize security forces in local communities to preempt future attacks; and lastly, distribute funds for pogrom relief directly to Jewish public aid organizations.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Gergel, “*Di hilfärbeyt*,” 25-27. Another article that appeared in the same edition of *Hilf* included a transcription of discussions that the EKOPO leaders had held with tsarist ministers in May 1915: “*A nitfärefentlikher dokument vegen der hilfärbeyt*,” 59-68.

<sup>78</sup> Memorandum, January 1919 [day of month not given]. CAHJP P10a/I/2/28/p.1; Abramson, *Ukrainians and Jews*, 81-83.

At a meeting of cabinet ministers on January 15, Revutsky firmly restated these demands. “I demanded that the government provide aid for the victims,” he wrote, “and force the civilian administrations to take complete responsibility for all acts of violence in their [respective] regions.” His request met with a positive reply. A few days after the January 15 meeting, the cabinet agreed to supply five million rubles in state funding (about \$400,000) to the Jewish Ministry to distribute as aid to victims of Zhitomir, Berdichev, and Ovruch pogroms.<sup>79</sup>

Revutsky now had to allocate the funds, and here he faced a problem. “The problem was not to decide what form the aid should take or how to distribute it,” he explained, “but rather, which establishment should have control of it.”<sup>80</sup> He referred to the rivalry between the Ministry of Jewish Affairs (led by socialists, including himself) and the Nationality Council (led by Zionists), whose members refused to recognize Revutsky’s authority. Each group vied for a portion of the five-million-ruble pie, hoping to distribute the aid under its own name, thereby enlisting allies for their respective parties. While they bickered about their mutually exclusive interests, the underfunded KOPE and its partners remained compromised in their ability to provide any practical help to pogrom victims.

Revutsky sought to defuse the conflict by making the transfer of government funds conditional upon the creation of a united, central, and representative Jewish aid committee. Thus in the second half of January, members of the Jewish Ministry and Nationality Council put aside their narrow interests and sponsored the formation of a Jewish Central Committee to Aid Pogrom Victims.<sup>81</sup> It would include representatives from all political parties and public aid organizations, thus unifying Kiev’s disparate Jewish political and cultural organizations into a coordinated, public service body.

The Central Aid Committee was registered in Kiev on February 3, 1919. Its charter laid out a comprehensive mission to provide six categories of aid to Jewish pogrom victims: 1) donation of warm clothing, food, and money; 2) help in

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<sup>79</sup> A. Revutsky, *In di shvere teg oyf Ukrayne: Zikhroynes fun a yidishn ministr* (Berlin: Yidisher Literarisher Farlag, 1924), 183, 184.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* The founding of the Central Committee (known in Russian as *Tsentral'nyi evreiskii komitet pomoshchi postradavshim ot pogromov*) is also described in Gumener’s memoirs, *A kapitl Ukrayne*, 76. I am grateful to Michael Nutkiewicz for sharing a draft of his translation in progress of this section of Gumener’s memoir.

acquiring education, work or labor retraining; 3) provision of medical care and funded hospital stays; 4) care of orphans or children of disabled parents in shelters, including education and job training; 5) collection and editing of facts about Jews who suffered from pogroms; and 6) defense before government institutions and courts of the interests of Jews who had suffered in the pogroms.

To implement these plans, the Central Committee expected to establish or revive local branches through its plenipotentiaries. In addition, the Committee received authorization directly to administer institutions such as soup kitchens and tearooms, low cost housing, shelters, and orphanages, as well as schools, labor and legal bureaus, and medical clinics.<sup>82</sup> Given the divisiveness that characterized so much of Jewish political life in those revolutionary times, the formation of the Central Aid Committee represented a remarkable act of unification across party lines. The Committee's charter allowed each Jewish organization and political party in the city to elect two delegates to sit on the Committee's board for one-year terms, regardless of the group's size. In addition, its triad of official languages – Yiddish, Russian and Ukrainian – enabled pragmatic and ideological inclusivity for its various constituents.<sup>83</sup> That it attracted nearly all of Kiev's Jewish intelligentsia from across the political spectrum was a testament to its representative structure.

The Kiev Aid Society, with Gergel still at the helm, played a prominent role within the new Central Aid Committee. In one of his first acts on the Committee, he led a delegation that devised a plan with Revutsky to distribute government aid in Zhitomir and Berdichev. Shortly thereafter, the Jewish Ministry transferred 1.5 million rubles (roughly \$100,000) to the newly constituted Central Aid Committee for that purpose.<sup>84</sup> One aid worker decried this meager sum as “a single drop in a sea of need,” but the funds actually provided a badly needed influx of cash to aid workers in the field.<sup>85</sup>

As noted, many of the aid workers brought years of experience from the front zones of World War I. In fact, veteran aid workers filled the Central Aid Committee's ranks. The committee continued the strategy of employing

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<sup>82</sup> *Ustav Tsentral'nago Evreiskago komiteta pomoshchi postradavshim ot pogromov* (Kiev, 1919), 1-2, 5.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 6.

<sup>84</sup> Revutsky, *In di shvere teg*, 196. These were to be the only funds that the Jewish Ministry received from the UNR government.

<sup>85</sup> “Di pogrom-khvalye,” *Hilf* no. 1-2 (1919), 26.

traveling aid workers; these commuted between the Kiev headquarters and the provinces. The committee also continued to rely on stationary aid workers, who had developed knowledge of local conditions and populations.<sup>86</sup> Giterman had continued working for the KOPE in Volynia province without interruption since 1915. Gumener had also remained at his post, serving Jews in Ekaterinoslav and Podolia provinces.<sup>87</sup> Among the Committee's leaders, too, were several battle-tested public activists. The Kiev lawyer and former ORT leader, S. B. Ratner, was elected as chairman, and Dr. F. E. Lander became secretary.<sup>88</sup> Gergel, Lestschinsky, and Shtif all joined the board, as well.<sup>89</sup>

Revutsky recalled that the “united relief committee began to work with significant energy.”<sup>90</sup> It revived the EKOPO's strategies for rational philanthropy. In one of its first moves, the Central Aid Committee revived the aid work newspapers that the EKOPO had published in Petrograd under Nokhem Shtif's editorship from 1915 to 1917: *Pomoshch* (Aid) and *Delo pomoshchi* (Aid Work). In Kiev, the new committee tapped Shtif to edit its Yiddish-language newspaper, *Hilf* (Aid). In the first edition, printed in February 1919, Shtif described *Hilf* as an heir to *Delo pomoshchi*. Much like its Russian-language predecessor, the paper's aim was “to make clear to the entire Jewish world what is being done and what needs to be done for war victims.”<sup>91</sup> The language suggested a broader category of potential aid recipients than only victims of the recent pogroms to include victims of the preceding years of military conflict, as well.

The newspaper provided the Central Aid Committee with a mouthpiece to address the public. Even so, the Committee's leaders recognized that winning the local population over to their cause would not be easy. The spirit of voluntarism that had been prevalent in 1915 had withered, and many who had supported public organizations in the past with service or donations no longer had the capacity or the will to provide the same support. Nonetheless, aid workers

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<sup>86</sup> *Kniga pogromov*, xviii.

<sup>87</sup> Y. Giterman, “*Avtobioger*,” 850, 861. Gumener's service is detailed in a report to the EKOPO, “*Doneseniia upolnomochennogo komiteta Gumenera o polozhenii vyselentsev i bezhenstev Ekaterinoslavskoi i Podol'skoi gubernii, 1915–1916gg.*,” RGIA f. 1546, op. 1, ed. kh. 59, ll. 1–63.

<sup>88</sup> Tcherikower, *Antisemitizm*, 1, 8.

<sup>89</sup> *Kniga pogromov. Pogromy na Ukraine, v Belorussii i evropeiskoi chasti Rossii v period Grazhdanskoi voiny. 1918–1922 gg.: Sbornik dokumentov*, ed. L. B. Miliakova (Moscow: Rosspen, 2007), xviii–xx.

<sup>90</sup> Revutsky, *In di shvere teg*, 197.

<sup>91</sup> “*Di hilfarbeyt*,” 15.

remained defiant in the bid to rouse the people's sympathies. As one worker wrote in a report of December 1918, "we must create an extensive campaign and shatter this deaf wall of inertia, as well as the population's indifference to aid work."<sup>92</sup> To that end, the Central Aid Committee circulated emotional appeals in the press and through its local aid committees. One of these described the recent pogroms as part of a long history of Jewish suffering, and exhorted its readers to prioritize collective needs above their own personal struggles:

However much our personal affairs and concerns may burden us in these difficult times, however much our nerves have been dulled and our conscience numbed to all of the horrors we have endured, the entire Jewish population will rise for pogrom relief work as one being. We are bound to it by the tragedy of thousands of years of Jewish history; we are called to it by the centuries-old solidarity of the Jewish people.<sup>93</sup>

The appeal further asked the local population to undertake practical measures: to create a network of volunteers who could "organize all of Kiev's Jewish population for relief work with pogrom victims." The plan was outlined as follows:

Each building in which Jews live must have its own official representative who will serve as a direct contact with the Committee. The Committee will communicate through such representatives with Jewish residents, in those instances when it needs to rely on the support of the whole Jewish population in order to conduct aid work with pogrom victims. Thus, the immediate task for the entire Jewish population is to hold meetings of Jewish residents in any building where Jews live, and to elect a representative to the Kiev [Central Aid] Committee for that building.<sup>94</sup>

We do not know how many people volunteered to serve as representatives, but the archives do contain copies of a form distributed by the Committee that asked for elected building representatives to submit their names and addresses for the

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<sup>92</sup> "Plan organizatsii reguliarnykh finansovykh sborov po vsei Ukrainy v pol'zu evreev zhertv voiny, 1918 g.," RGIA f. 1546, op. 1, ed. kh. 196, l. 3.

<sup>93</sup> "Obrashchenie Tsentral'nogo komiteta (TsK) pomoshchi postradavshim ot pogromov k evreiskomu naseleniiu g. Kieva ob organizatsii pomoshchi," n.d. (probably in or after January 1919), in *Kniga pogromov*, 45-46.

<sup>94</sup> "Obrashchenie Tsentral'nogo komiteta," 46.

Committee's own records.<sup>95</sup> If the Central Aid Committee deemed it important to gather records of building representatives, as this document suggests, it is possible that the Committee relied on them to interface with the local population and conduct work at a grassroots level.

The efforts to organize support among Kiev's Jewish population proved effective, particularly in raising funds. Gumener estimated that in the first half of 1919 the Central Aid Committee managed to collect nearly 400,000 rubles in private donations (about \$25,000).<sup>96</sup> The sums went toward local emergency aid in pogrom-stricken towns, including food, clothing, and medical care.

Yet just as the Central Aid Committee began to build an infrastructure for pogrom relief, they were confronted with the prospect of yet another regime change. Moreover, by February 1919, the support for the Ukrainian republican experiment had nearly vanished among Jewish activists of all political parties.<sup>97</sup> In a statement issued that month, the Nationality Council accused the Ukrainian national army and its leaders of "the crime of non-intervention during the Jewish pogroms that were perpetrated before their eyes."<sup>98</sup> Expressing sentiments very close to these, Revutsky resigned his post as Minister of Jewish Affairs in late January.<sup>99</sup> He questioned the very premise that aid work served Jewish interests as long as the Ukrainian government remained in power. He conceded that while humanitarian aid remained a moral imperative, its limits had to be recognized: relief was an "ex post facto" action, he wrote, that could neither preempt future attacks on Jews nor address the underlying political conditions that enabled large-scale anti-Jewish violence. The assumption that aid work could serve Jewish interests was as illogical as the belief, in his view, that "measles could be cured by

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<sup>95</sup> The questionnaire was used by later Jewish relief organizations, including the Evobkom. It is preserved in that organization's archive (copy at the archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; original TsDAVO f. 2497, op. 1, d. 11, l. 21).

<sup>96</sup> Gumener, *A kapitl Ukrayne*, 76.

<sup>97</sup> As noted above, the Jewish Ministry had already begun to lose the confidence of many Jews and members of the Nationality Council in early 1918 (Abramson, *Ukrainians and Jews*, 85).

<sup>98</sup> "The last attempt (The visit of members of the Jewish National Secretariat to Professor Mezietch [Kost' Matsievych], the Ukrainian Minister for Foreign Affairs)," February 28, 1919. CAHJP P10a/I/2/23/4-5.

<sup>99</sup> Simon Rabinovitch, "Jewish-Ukrainian-Soviet Relations during the Civil War and the Second Thoughts of a Minister for Jewish Affairs," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 17:3 (2017), 343. In his memoirs (*In di shvere teg*, 197), Revutsky explains he resigned in protest of the government's failure to denounce or prevent the pogroms; however, Rabinovitch contends that Revutsky resigned solely because his fellow Labor Zionists opposed the alliance that the Directory had concluded with the Entente powers.

applying ointment to the individual blisters.”<sup>100</sup> To deal with mass violence, the root cause and not merely the symptoms had to be addressed. Before all else, the people needed a state that could protect its citizens’ lives.

Like his fellow Labor Zionists, Revutsky believed that the prospect of a Soviet state offered the most promising alternative to Jews; at the very least, he could claim that the Bolsheviks had confronted and actively sought to counter antisemitism in their propaganda campaigns.<sup>101</sup> He left Kiev on January 29, retreating along with the rest of the Directory government to a temporary capital at Kamenets-Podol’sk. He encouraged his colleagues who stayed to work faithfully for the Bolsheviks, whose forces entered the city on February 2, 1919.

### **From Red Cross to Red Star: Jewish Aid Work under Bolshevik Rule**

The Red Army’s southward advance on Ukraine brought the front lines of the Civil War to the heart of Ukraine and its large, historic Jewish communities. A veritable “pogrom wave,” as contemporary observers called it, followed in the wake of a shifting front between the Ukrainian and Red Armies. Gergel estimated that no less than 178 anti-Jewish massacres took place in Kiev, Podolia, and Volynia provinces from February to April 1919. The worst atrocities struck the towns of Proskurov, Felshtin, Zhitomir, and Fastov.<sup>102</sup> They left a trail of thousands of murdered and wounded people, raped women, widows, and orphans in desperate need. Homelessness, already a problem for thousands of war refugees, grew rampant. In the town of Boguslav, for example, some two out of three families became homeless after their homes were burned, demolished, or requisitioned during pogroms.<sup>103</sup>

Even under Bolshevik authority, the Central Aid Committee in Kiev continued to operate, “being as effective as was possible in that difficult time,” as Revutsky wrote.<sup>104</sup> Familiar faces populated its ranks and familiar strategies guided its

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<sup>100</sup> Revutsky, *In di shvere teg*, 197.

<sup>101</sup> The Bolsheviks’ own response to antisemitism owed a great deal to the agency of the Jews themselves, as shown by Brendan McGeever, “Revolution and Antisemitism: The Bolsheviks in 1917,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 51:3-4, 235-252.

<sup>102</sup> Gergel, “The Pogroms in the Ukraine,” 240; Elias Heifetz [Kheifets], *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919* (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1921), 27-44.

<sup>103</sup> Abramson, *Ukrainians and Jews*, 119.

<sup>104</sup> Revutsky, *In di shvere teg*, 197.

work. The tireless Dr. Lander went on as the committee's secretary, and Gergel continued to lead the Kiev Aid Society. When the new Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republican government founded its Jewish Commissariat, or Evkom, the Commissar chosen to lead it was none other than Isai Khurgin.

Lander quickly established ties between the Central Committee and Evkom. He submitted numerous appeals on behalf of the former, mainly requesting permission for the movement of relief workers to deliver aid across shifting front lines. On February 20, Lander wrote to ask for permission for three aid workers to travel to Poltava and Volynia provinces to distribute clothing and essential supplies to pogrom victims.<sup>105</sup> He received a positive reply to this and similar inquiries. It seems highly likely that Khurgin's position as the Evkom Commissar improved the Central Aid Committee's ability to carry on relief work during the early months of Bolshevik rule in Ukraine.<sup>106</sup>

Khurgin's tolerance notwithstanding, it was widely understood that the Central Committee's days were numbered. For one, its identity as an independent and ethnically partisan welfare organization disqualified its existence on purely ideological grounds. Moreover, the Soviet government simply refused even to identify pogrom victims as a separate category – that is, as victims of violence perpetrated against Jews insofar as they were Jews. Instead, the Bolsheviks categorized civilians who had suffered fighting during the Civil War, including Jews, Mennonites, and others, as “victims of the Counterrevolution.” This category of people was entitled to public aid from the People's Commissariat of Social Welfare (Narkomsobes), which operated a division called “Aid for Victims of the Counterrevolution” (Pomzhekhov) and within that, a constituent section for aid for pogrom victims. The Pomzhekhov established local branches in Kiev province where pogroms had occurred, including the towns of Uman, Berdichev, Fastov, and Lipovets. It ran institutions for children and the disabled, distributed food, and helped those who could work to find jobs. However, the Pomzhekhov had the capacity – or the will – to provide help for only a quarter of those who had applied for aid.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> TsDAVO f. 3304, op. 1, ed. kh. 19, ll. 7–8; Heifetz [Kheifets], *The Slaughter of the Jews*, i-ii. One of the three was Arnold Gillerson, a well-known lawyer.

<sup>106</sup> TsDAVO f. 3304, op. 1, ed. kh. 20, l. 24, 26.

<sup>107</sup> Beizer, *Relief in Time of Need*, 97. From August to December 1920, the Gubsobes helped 2,332 of its 8,028 aid applicants.

Notably, while the Soviet government claimed that the Pomzhekhor rendered the Jewish Central Aid Committee superfluous, it made an exception for the OZE, which continued to provide medical care for Jewish adults, children, and infants, including numerous pogrom victims. Indeed, throughout 1919, the Commissariats of Health and Education delegated the OZE to treat diseases and wounds among pogrom victims. The OZE appears to have been the most active of all pre-revolutionary Jewish organizations in a number of devastated cities, including Smela, Cherkassy, Berdichev, Uman, Zhitomir, Kiev, and Vinnytsia, where it ran sanatoriums, orphanages, schools, and pasteurized milk stations. Records that detail its work in 1919 document the staggering numbers of those in need of medical attention: OZE staff treated nearly 70,000 children; operated 42 ambulatory and field clinics; and ran sixteen stationary hospitals, equipped with a total of 470 beds.<sup>108</sup>

The impetus to close the Central Aid Committee seems to have come from left-wing Jews organized within the Communist Party as the “Evseksiia,” or “Jewish Section,” which determined that aid to “victims of the Counterrevolution” should be overseen by the state and party, not distributed at the discretion of pre-revolutionary Jewish organizations which the Central Aid Committee represented. Hence, in May 1919, the Central Aid Committee was declared a “semi-legal” organization; the government seized its assets and fired part of the staff.<sup>109</sup> Gumener lamented that this happened during a litany of deadly attacks: 148 in the month of May alone. Thus, “as Jewish blood flowed,” he wrote, “the only institution that at least somewhat helped pogrom victims closed down.”<sup>110</sup>

Yet the Central Committee outlived its official closure in various ways. The Soviet government faced the same quandary that had led the tsarist regime in 1915 to delegate Jewish aid work to the Petrograd EKOPO. As we have seen, government agencies such as the Pomzhekhor could meet only a fraction of the real need; the Commissariats of Health and Education had also been overwhelmed, among other problems, by the sudden appearance of millions of homeless children after the Revolution.<sup>111</sup> It is also possible that government

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<sup>108</sup> TsDAVO f. 2497, op. 1, d. 9, ll. 3, 7-9, 16.

<sup>109</sup> *Kniga pogromov*, xix.

<sup>110</sup> Gumener, *A kapitl Ukrayne*, 77.

<sup>111</sup> Alan M. Ball, *And Now My Soul Is Hardened: Abandoned Children in Soviet Russia, 1918-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 2. Red Cross officials in Ukraine estimated that 54 orphanages in Ukraine were responsible for 30,000 children, or an average of 556 children per orphanage.

agencies lacked workers who spoke Yiddish or could understand the particular cultural needs of Jews. For example, Gumener expressed dismay after meeting the young Russian appointed to lead the Pomzhekkhor in Kiev. When Gumener informed him of the dire needs among Jewish civilians, the young man “had absolutely no idea of how to go about [aid] work, nor... knew anything about the Jewish population.”<sup>112</sup>

The Soviet government then alighted upon a compromise. In May 1919, it authorized a politically neutral body, the newly formed Soviet Red Cross, to form a Kiev-based “pogrom division.” A vast operation, the Soviet Red Cross operated nearly 400 divisions throughout the former empire.<sup>113</sup> The new pogrom division went by various names, including the “Kiev Pogrom Relief Committee” and the “All-Ukrainian Committee for Pogrom Victims.”<sup>114</sup> To serve as the new division’s Chairman, the Red Cross tapped Il’ia Kheifets, a highly accomplished thirty-four-year-old scholar of criminal law and professor at Moscow University. Kheifets arrived in Kiev in May or June 1919.<sup>115</sup>

The new Red Cross pogrom division recruited its staff almost exclusively from among aid workers at the now defunct Central Aid Committee.<sup>116</sup> Kheifets worked closely with veteran members such as Gergel, Lander, and Giterman, who continued much of the work they had done for the Central Committee.<sup>117</sup> Red Cross workers traveled across devastated territories in summer 1919, trying to help survivors. Gumener spent the summer in Podolia province and described immense needs and staggering shortages, along with his own limited ability to provide aid. Numerous Jewish shelters had recently closed down in Litin, Orinin, and Vinnitsa. Homeless Jews packed the municipal shelters to avoid sleeping on the streets. He described the sight of children wandering alone outside, begging

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<sup>112</sup> Gumener, *A kapitl Ukrayne*, 77.

<sup>113</sup> The Bolsheviks de-authorized the pre-revolutionary Russian Red Cross and replaced it with the Soviet Red Cross in 1918. See Susan Grant, “From War to Peace: Russian Nurses, 1917-1922,” in *Russia’s Home Front in War and Revolution, Book 2*, eds. Lindenmeyr, Waldron, Read, 251-270, here 260-262.

<sup>114</sup> Gumener, *A kapitl Ukrayne*, 77.

<sup>115</sup> Kheifets’s background is discussed in a report for the Jewish People’s Relief Committee in the US: “Hundred Thousand Orphans are Facing Starvation in Ukraina if No Immediate Relief Will Come from America Says Professor Cheifetz,” n.d. (late 1919), Papers of the Jewish People’s Relief Committee - Widener Library at Harvard University (hence JPRC-WLH), vol. 6: seq. 206-207.

<sup>116</sup> Tcherikower, *Antisemitizm*, 2.

<sup>117</sup> *Kniga pogromov*, xxiii; Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews*, iii; “Gergel,” in *Oyf di khurves*, 734.

for handouts. A single children's home in Proskurov had kept its doors open using money that it had received earlier from the Jewish Ministry. Meanwhile, Gumener bitterly recalled that the Evseksiia, which had millions of rubles at its disposal, refused – out of ideological rigidity – to fund the one organization whose workers could put this money to real use.<sup>118</sup>

Yitzhak Giterman continued to shuttle between the cities of Zhitomir and Berdichev in summer 1919. Within roughly three weeks, he helped to open several children's shelters, including an orphanage for children whose parents had been killed during pogroms. Like other aid workers in the field, he faced danger every day as he traveled roads where fellow Jews were regularly robbed and sometimes murdered. He only narrowly escaped a similar fate at the hands of an armed gang that encircled his train, and was saved by the arrival of Red Army soldiers. Giterman recalled that his father had forbidden him to work, but his mother had convinced him otherwise. "We must provide for children other than just our own," she told his father, and rendered the final word: "every one of the pogrom orphans must be rescued."<sup>119</sup>

Throughout summer 1919, the Red Cross pogrom division also continued and expanded one of the Central Aid Committee's key projects, to document the plight of victims. Prior to closing in spring 1919, the Central Aid Committee had partnered with the Kiev Yiddish publishing house Folksfarlag to found an "Editorial Collegium" tasked with collecting and publishing primary sources and data about the pogroms.<sup>120</sup> E. Tcherikower was chosen to direct the Collegium. His work consisted of carrying out its daily functions as well as coordinating the larger, long-term project of issuing a series of research monographs and documentary volumes about the pogroms.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Gumener, *A kapitl Ukrayne*, 79-80. Gumener writes that "the Proskurov community initially did not want to take this money from the Ukrainian regime, which they held responsible for Proskurov's great tragedy, but later they agreed" (80).

<sup>119</sup> Giterman, "Avtobioger," 862.

<sup>120</sup> On the Folksfarlag, see Moss, *Jewish Renaissance*, 54-55. On the Editorial Collegium, see *Kniga pogromov*, xviii-xix. Its full title was "Editorial Collegium for the Collection and Investigation of Materials Relating to the Pogroms in Ukraine."

<sup>121</sup> E. Tcherikower, *Antisemitizm*, 1-2. Tcherikower was a natural choice as Chairman, having managed large-scale publishing projects in the past and demonstrated his will and ability to work across party lines in the interest of collective goals. Originally from the central Ukrainian province of Poltava, he had moved to St. Petersburg in 1905, where he became known among the Jewish intelligentsia as an editor, socialist agitator, and author of an important history of the OPE. After

Several veteran aid workers were part of the Editorial Collegium, including Gergel, Lestschinsky, and Shtif. Enlisting aid workers to gather materials about the pogroms was a natural outgrowth of their ongoing travels to investigate the needs of victims. To capture their stories, aid workers for the Red Cross used questionnaires supplied by the Editorial Collegium. In the course of the summer, they interviewed thousands of people, including 15,000-20,000 refugees in Kiev province alone.<sup>122</sup> Aid work and pogrom documentation thus became intertwined endeavors. Shtif recognized this when he reflected upon the voluminous body of materials that the Editorial Collegium had gathered. In the testimony contents, he wrote, “one can hear [the voice of] the victims, but not the perpetrators.”<sup>123</sup>

The Red Cross pogrom division made effective use of these documentary materials. Kheifets included them in reports that he sent to the EKOPO in Moscow and Petrograd; the latter drew upon this information as they debated how best to aid impoverished Jews in Ukraine.<sup>124</sup> Kheifets, a talented and prolific chronicler in his own right, penned an important historical and documentary account in parallel Yiddish and English versions. Published in 1921 in New York, these two volumes advanced fundraising in North America for Jewish pogrom victims during the first half of the 1920s.<sup>125</sup>

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moving to Kiev in summer 1917, he became Chairman of the Zionist-dominated Nationality Council. See Karlip, *The Tragedy of a Generation*, 159-168.

<sup>122</sup> An “Information Bureau” in Kiev then sorted and checked the testimonies against one another. *Kniga pogromov*, xxii, xviii.

<sup>123</sup> Z. Zsaikovsky, “*Di geshikhte fun dem itstikn bukh*,” in Elias Tcherikower, *Di Ukrainer pogromen in yor 1919* (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1965), 335-336. The reference is from Shtif’s work *Pogromy na Ukraine (Period Dobrovol’cheskoi Armii)* (Berlin, “Vostok,” 1922).

<sup>124</sup> Sliozberg reported about the Ukrainian pogroms using information he had received from the Red Cross at the EKOPO meeting of November 1, 1919. RGIA f. 1546, op. 1, ed. kh. 204, l. 4. The Red Cross pogrom division’s materials also reached the American Jewish Congress, which published a 71-page pamphlet based on what it had received: American Jewish Congress, *The Massacres and Other Atrocities Committed Against the Jews in Southern Russia: A Record Including Official Reports, Sworn Statements and Other Documentary Proof*, ed. Israel Goldberg (New York: American Jewish Congress in cooperation with the Committee on Protest against the Massacres of Jews in Ukraina and Other Lands, 1920).

<sup>125</sup> Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews* (op. cit.); published in Yiddish translation the same year as E. Kheifets, *Pogrom geshikhte (1919–1920), band 1: Di Ukrainishe shekhitah in 1919* (New York: Arbeter ring bibliotek, 1921).

## Between Whites and Reds

The occupation of Ukraine from July to December 1919 by the White or Volunteer Army created a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented proportions.<sup>126</sup> Troops under the command of former imperial officer Anton Denikin seized major cities on the left bank of the Dnieper, including Kharkov, Poltava, and Ekaterinoslav.<sup>127</sup> His forces, consisting of fiercely anti-Bolshevik and antisemitic Cossacks, peasants, and former imperial officers, left a trail of blood and terror in their wake. As before, aid workers witnessed the pogroms. An OZE worker in the town of Balashev was there when the Volunteer Army entered it on July 1, and wrote that the unit's commanding officer had ordered his troops to kill 65 Jews on the spot.<sup>128</sup> The Volunteer Army carried out an estimated 362 pogroms from July to September alone.<sup>129</sup> Nokhem Shtif describes these pogroms as a "final, annihilating blow to numerous communities, many of which had already endured pogroms earlier in 1919."<sup>130</sup> The three main perpetrators of the Volunteer Army pogroms – former Russian Army officers, peasants, and Cossacks – not only caused suffering on an unprecedented scale, but also irreparably destroyed the basis for Jewish life in many parts of Ukraine. Volunteer forces looted and burned synagogues, hospitals, almshouses, public schools, credit associations and workers' cooperatives – places that had provided refuge and vital welfare services in a time of extreme need. In Belaia Tserkov, the troops turned the Talmud Torah into a horse stable; in the shtetl of Rossov, Cossack troops tore apart the office of the local Jewish credit cooperative, wrecking the desks, tables, cabinets, desks, and archive.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Early accounts include M. Mozin, *V krovavom chadu: K istorii Dobrovol'chskoi pogromshchiny* (Kiev E.S.D.R.P., 1920); S. I. Gusev-Orenburgskii, *Kniga o evreiskikh pogromakh na Ukraine v 1919 g.* (Petrograd, 1921); N. I. Shtif, *Pogromy na Ukraine (Period Dobrovol'cheskoi Armii)* (Berlin: "Vostok," 1922); V. Latski-Bertoldi, *Gzeyras Denikin* (Berlin, 1922); I. B. Shekhtman, *Pogromy Dobrovol'cheskoi armii na Ukraine (K istorii antisemitizma na Ukraine v 1919–1920 gg.)* (Berlin: Ostjudisches Historisches Archiv, 1932). Scholarly accounts include Kenez, "Pogroms and White Ideology."

<sup>127</sup> Magosci, *History of Ukraine*, 532.

<sup>128</sup> The description was published in the ORT Bulletin as "Pogromy v Balasheve (Soobshchenie upolnomochennykh 'OZE)," *Biulleten ORT* no. 3, Petrograd, December 1919; cited from Shekhtman, *Pogromy Dobrovol'cheskoi armii*, 42.

<sup>129</sup> Heifetz, *The Slaughter*, 51; Gergel, "The Pogroms in the Ukraine," 241.

<sup>130</sup> Shtif, *Pogromy na Ukraine*, 31–32.

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

Jewish aid workers in Kiev also faced grave threats to their personal safety from the Volunteer Army, whose soldiers robbed or abducted Red Cross workers based on the assumption that they carried money or would be ransomed if held hostage. Between August and October 1919, Volunteer troops in Kiev killed two members of the Red Cross pogrom division and robbed ten. The two murdered men included a clerk named D. K. Gartglias and I. G. Buchich, an accountant. Soldiers abducted Buchich one night at 3:00 am as he was leaving the Red Cross building on the busy Theater Square Boulevard, held him hostage, and demanded 30,000 rubles from the Kiev Jewish community. The community managed to procure 17,000 rubles with great difficulty; after taking the money, the soldiers refused to return Buchich until the balance was produced. Murdered Buchich's body was later found in a remote part of the city. The Red Cross secretary, M. I. Levenson, was robbed on the street of his shoes, coat, money, and watch. In November, Gergel barely escaped alive after being robbed on the street.<sup>132</sup> On another occasion, soldiers raided a Red Cross storage facility, robbing it of supplies earmarked for pogrom victims.<sup>133</sup>



*Fig. 3: The interior of the offices of the Central Committee for Aid to Jewish Pogrom Victims after being vandalized by members of the Volunteer Army, October or November 1919, Kiev. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research RG 80-89 f. 54591*

<sup>132</sup> "K istorii Komiteta (otdela) pomoshchi postradavshim ot pogromov Rossiiskovo obshchestva Krasnogo Kresta," n.d. (not later than March 1920) in *Kniga pogromov*, 290.

<sup>133</sup> Shekhtman, *Pogromy Dobrovol'cheskoi armii*, 69.

It seems remarkable, in light of the Volunteer Army's perpetration of pogroms, that Jewish aid organizations believed that Denikin would follow his imperial predecessors and provide funding for civilian war victims. As Yosef Shekhtman, a Zionist leader of the Nationality Council, argued at the time, "it is the state's responsibility to provide aid to civilians who have been victimized by violence and destruction in the present civil war."<sup>134</sup> The belief that Denikin had an obligation to provide financial aid to Jewish pogrom victims may seem wholly misguided in hindsight, given that his own troops were responsible for the atrocities. The request appears more plausible, however, if we consider that Jewish activists in 1919 could vividly recall that the imperial government had given 17 million rubles to the EKOPO just a few years earlier. Shekhtman's statement also makes clear an underlying assumption on the part of the Jewish activists: that Denikin was the leader of a regime, as well as of one capable of funding aid work. In reality, however, Denikin was not the head of an established state, but the leader of a transient and highly disorganized military operation. Furthermore, given the virulent antisemitism of so many of his troops and officers, whose loyalty to him was always implicitly in question, aiding Jewish war victims was not a practical imperative on Denikin's agenda. It is unsurprising, then, that the Volunteer Army High Command rejected appeals for funding from Jewish aid organizations in September and again in October.<sup>135</sup>

The Red Cross pogrom division did manage to secure funds from the White military administration in Kiev, which the Volunteer Army held from August 31 to December 16. In September, delegates from the Red Cross pogrom division presented the governor, General N. Bredov, with a detailed report about the condition of Jewish pogrom victims and requested funds for relief. In response, they were offered a loan of one million rubles. "It was a drop in the bucket," wrote Shekhtman: this sum of money would have been spent in a month's time in a place like Fastov, which had by then been devastated multiple times. When the Red Cross appealed a second time for an additional 1.5 million rubles, Bredov agreed, but stipulated that they would first have to repay the initial loan of one million, thus "giving with one hand and taking away with the other." The

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>135</sup> Denikin never established an administrative apparatus to govern the country; instead, he created three military governorships, based in the cities of Kiev, Kharkov, and Kherson. Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1919-1920: The Defeat of the Whites* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 155-160.

authorities intended to send a clear message, in Shekhtman's view, that they saw pogrom relief as a "purely internal and private matter for the Jews themselves."<sup>136</sup>

Recognizing that the future of Jewish relief work in Ukraine now depended on American Jewish philanthropy, Kheifets left his embattled colleagues in summer 1919 to undertake a fundraising mission to North America. With the help of the socialist-led People's Relief Committee in New York, he traveled the cities of the eastern seaboard and Canada in late 1919 in a campaign to raise funds for pogrom victims, his primary goal being to establish a resettlement program for some 150,000 Jewish refugee orphans in Canada and the United States.<sup>137</sup>

By early 1920, the Red Army had retaken Kiev and finally managed to oust the murderous Volunteer Army from Ukraine. On June 11, 1920, Kheifets, still in New York, received a telegram with momentous news: in Moscow, the Soviet government had authorized the formation of a new unified aid committee for Jewish pogrom relief – an American-Soviet-Jewish partnership, negotiations for which had been in the works for months. The Red Cross pogrom division would be incorporated into a new organization under the auspices of the People's Commissariat of Social Welfare (Narkomsobes) and thus continue its work under state oversight. Funding and supplies would come primarily from the Joint Distribution Committee in New York.<sup>138</sup>

Thus, the first Soviet Jewish public organization – the Jewish Public Committee to Aid Jewish Pogrom Victims – was registered in July 1920 in Moscow. Known in Russian as the Evobkom and as Yidgezkom in Yiddish, it brought a total of sixteen different groups together in its presidium.<sup>139</sup> The represented bodies

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<sup>136</sup> Shekhtman, *Pogromy Dobrovol'cheskoi armii*, 69-70.

<sup>137</sup> *Di yidishe yesomim fun di milkhome gelitene lands (oyfruf)*. JPRC-WLH, vol. 6: seq. 11-14. Kheifetz gave numerous speeches before Jewish communities, wrote articles for the Yiddish press, and requested audiences with powerful figures in American Jewish politics, including Louis Marshall and Felix Warburg. Responding to appeals published in the Yiddish press, American Jewish families from states including Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Michigan sent in letters in which they offered to adopt children. The People's Relief Committee assisted Kheifets with contacting prospective adoptive families, interviewing them, and completing the required paperwork for adoption.

<sup>138</sup> Telegram to Cheifetz, People's Relief Committee, June 11, 1920. JPRC-WLH, vol. 6: seq. 123.

<sup>139</sup> In Russian, *Evreiskogo obshchestvennogo komiteta pomoshchi evreiam, postradavshim ot pogromov*. The Evobkom's history has been the subject of these essays: Mordechai Altshuler, "Havaad hatziburi hayehudi leezrat nifgaei hapogromim," *Shvut* 9 (1983): 16-34; Iu. Lifshits, "Evreiskaia blagotvoritel'nost' na Ukraine v pervye gody Sovetskoi vlasti (Deiatel'nost'

included seven Jewish socialist parties and three government agencies, whose presence dominated the committee. The Joint Distribution Committee in New York, which provided about three-quarters of all funding and supplies, demanded that the four veteran “national” organizations be included – the EKOPO, ORT, OZE, and Kultur-Lige. Each organization received seats on the Evobkom presidium and all four provided services in their respective realms of expertise. These organizations and their workers were known quantities to the JDC; more importantly, they brought irreplaceable expertise and experience. Giterman served on the presidium and continued to work in Ukrainian provinces that had suffered the worst of the pogroms. His longtime colleagues Lander, Shtif, Gergel, and Lestschinsky joined the Evobkom, as well.<sup>140</sup> Predictably, their presence irked the Jewish Communists, who remained intransigent in their opposition to the principle of distinctly Jewish welfare and had worked hard to eliminate these vestigial remnants of pre-revolutionary Jewish nationalism. Even so, aid to pogrom victims in Ukraine could finally recommence on the basis of the “proper government foundations” that Nokhem Gergel had been seeking since late 1918.

Thus in the first years of Bolshevik rule, Jewish aid work was absorbed by a public-governmental network within the Evobkom, which oversaw local branches in Kharkov, Kiev, and Odessa. By 1922, the Ukrainian division was aiding nearly 131,000 children from Ukraine through orphanages, boarding schools, and famine relief. To be sure, Hebrew, Zionism, prayer, and all religious rituals had been banned from the children’s institutions. Michael Beizer writes that “Jewish Communists were by no means prepared to relinquish control over the children’s minds.” On the other hand, the Evobkom’s institutions ensured that the children were physically safe and received at least some of their education in Yiddish.<sup>141</sup>

The ideological conditions that the Soviet government and Communist Party imposed on Jewish aid work through the Evobkom made the EKOPO formally withdraw from its ranks in February 1921. One by one, EKOPO veteran activists resigned and left the country, with Giterman, Shtif, Gergel, and Gumener

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Vseukrainskogo Evreiskogo obshchestvennogo komiteta pomoshchi evreiam, postradavshim ot pogromov),” in *Evreiskaia blagotvoritel’nost’ na territorii byvshego SSSR. Stranitsy istorii*, eds. D. El’iashevich, B. Khaller (St. Petersburg: Petersburg Jewish University and Institute for Social Workers, 1998), 123–148; Beizer, *Relief in Time of Need*, ch. 4.

<sup>140</sup> Giterman, “*Avtobioger*,” 864.

<sup>141</sup> Beizer, *Relief in Time of Need*, quote on 124; see also 129, 198.

among them.<sup>142</sup> By May 1924, the Evobkom itself had become a target of NKVD surveillance and arrests. Soon thereafter, the organization was closed down. In accordance with its founding charter, all of its assets were transferred to the Commissariats of Health, Education, and Social Welfare.<sup>143</sup>

## Epilogue

Emigration only temporarily disrupted Jewish aid workers in their commitment to the cultural and material well-being of East European Jewry. Some of them had spent a decade or more of their lives conducting relief in wartime. Their postwar trajectories testify to the lasting impact of those experiences.

Nokhem Gergel left Kiev in February 1921; by December of that year, he had resettled in Berlin. His longtime colleague Nokhem Shtif had left Kiev in 1920, and after an itinerant period landed in Berlin as well, in March 1922.<sup>144</sup> The two worked closely with the immense body of materials they had helped to collect for the Editorial Collegium during the pogroms; a significant portion of these materials had been covertly smuggled to Berlin.<sup>145</sup> Based on these sources, Shtif and Gergel each authored some of the earliest studies of the pogroms. In 1922, Shtif published a Russian-language study of Volunteer Army pogroms, and a Yiddish version followed a year later.<sup>146</sup> Gergel, with whose work we opened this essay, published a statistical survey of the Civil War pogroms in a Yiddish-language social science journal in 1928.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Giterman, “*Avtobioger*,” 864; “Shtif,” in *Leksikon*, ed. Beider, 384; “Gumener,” in *Leksikon*, ed. Reyzen, 552.

<sup>143</sup> Even after the EKOPO’s withdrawal in 1921, the Evobkom retained as its staff members physicians such as F. E. Lander and Boris Eisurovich. Lifshits, “*Evreiskaia blagotvoritel’nost’ na Ukraine*,” 144-146.

<sup>144</sup> “Shtif,” in *Leksikon*, ed. Beider, 384; Shtif, “*Oytobiografye*,” 200.

<sup>145</sup> The Berlin archive became known as the *Mizrakh-yidisher historisher arkhiv* (later the Tcherikower Archive at YIVO in New York). The other part of the archive was transferred to Moscow on the orders of the Soviet government, and served as the basis for numerous pamphlets that the Jewish Section in the Commissariat of Nationalities sponsored in the early 1920s. See, for example, *Materialy ob antievreiskikh pogromakh*, vol. 1: *Pogromy v Belorussii*, ed. Zakharii Mindlin (Moscow: *Evotdel Narodnogo Komissariata po delam natsional’nostei*, 1922).

<sup>146</sup> Shtif, *Pogromy na Ukraine*, idem., *Pogromen in Ukrayne: Di tsayt fun der frayviliger armey* (Berlin: Farlag “Vostok,” 1923).

<sup>147</sup> Gergel, “*Di pogromen*.” Gergel also penned a lengthy monograph, unpublished to date, about the history of the Jewish Ministry during the period of Skoropadsky’s rule.

Both Gergel and Shtif went on as energetic institution builders and public servants. Throughout the 1920s, Gergel worked at the Berlin office of the OZE (Society for Jewish Health) and the ORT (Society for Labor Aid); in 1926, the JDC appointed him its “expert on Russian Jewish affairs.” Both men also strongly advocated for the creation of an institute devoted to Yiddish-language scholarship; this was realized in 1926 as the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. In 1929, Gergel was elected to the central YIVO board in Vilna.<sup>148</sup> Shtif opted to return to Kiev in 1926, having been “lured by the unprecedented scale of state-sponsored Jewish cultural development in the Soviet Union,” as Gennady Estraiikh writes. Shtif became a central figure at the city’s Institute for Jewish Proletarian Culture at the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, and a prolific author in the field of Soviet Yiddish language planning and philology.<sup>149</sup>

Yitzhak Giterman also contributed actively to East European culture and community building throughout the interwar and Second World War years. By 1921, he had relocated to Warsaw, having left Ukraine after nearly seven years as an aid worker.<sup>150</sup> He arrived in Poland “with a well-deserved reputation as someone who combined courage, organizing abilities, and deep Jewish loyalties. Above all, he came to Poland as a natural leader,” writes Samuel Kassow.<sup>151</sup> Recognizing these strengths and abilities, in 1926, the JDC appointed Giterman to manage its operations in Poland. In this capacity, Giterman mentored a younger generation of leaders, among them Emmanuel Ringelblum, together with whom he worked to boost morale and a spirit of self-reliance among Polish Jews in years of rapidly declining material conditions and growing Polish antisemitism. Giterman’s ethos to community organizing unmistakably drew from roots that stretched back to 1915 and his time at the Galician front: “if one measure wasn’t working, then one had to try another – and above all, one had to keep trying.” While other workers debated the merits of various “grand political

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<sup>148</sup> Gergel’s biography is recounted in detail in an obituary after his untimely death as a result of a heart attack in 1931: Nakhmen Meyzel, “*Oyfn frishn kever fun Nokhem Gergel*,” *Literarishe bleter* (Warsaw) no. 48 (27 November 1931), 1-2.

<sup>149</sup> Cited from Gennady Estraiikh, “Nokhem Shtif,” in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (retrieved November 19, 2018, from [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Shtif\\_Nokhem](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Shtif_Nokhem)).

Shtif’s part in Soviet Yiddish language planning is further described in Gennady Estraiikh, *Soviet Yiddish: Language Planning and Linguistic Development* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 68-72; David Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture: 1918-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 74-77, 86.

<sup>150</sup> Giterman, “*Avtobioger*,” 865.

<sup>151</sup> Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History*, 97.

solutions,” Giterman remained focused on people’s everyday struggles: “humdrum, prosaic measures, half-steps that might make a small difference.”<sup>152</sup>

## Conclusion

We now return full circle to Giterman’s statement in his 1931 autobiography that future generations would have to contend with the horrors of 1919. He could not have imagined just how far in the future that reckoning would take place, let alone envision the next war that would erupt a mere eight years later in his own lifetime. As we observe the centennial of the 1919 pogroms this year, his account indeed enables us to contend with his generation’s travails in that time of total war, revolution, and mass violence. His account reveals something else, too: not only *what* Jews endured in those years, but also *how* they endured. As I have argued, this question becomes clearer if we direct our gaze beyond the watershed year of 1917. Doing so allows us to locate the origins of Jewish aid work in late Imperial Russian civil society and then to observe the continuities that Jewish organizations displayed in their approach to public assistance throughout Russia’s years of crisis during 1914-1921. It requires, too, that we look at figures who have remained hitherto marginal in our understanding of this catastrophic history, and recognize the importance of their work – the “humdrum, prosaic measures” of feeding and sheltering people; the same measures that could mean the difference between death and survival. Regimes in Russia came and went, and came again; armies advanced and retreated, unrelenting in their anarchic brutalization of civilian populations. Through it all, people like Giterman kept on trying to make a small difference by setting up temporary shelters, stations for pasteurized milk, or handing out shoes or train fare for families trying to flee the scene of a pogrom.

It is hoped that future research will provide more answers to some of the questions that have eluded this study. One burning issue to be addressed, I believe, is the gendered aspect of Jewish relief work during Russia’s continuum of crisis. During my research I could not find any autobiographical accounts written by women aid workers comparable to those that I have relied upon here; furthermore, the men whose chronicles form the basis of this study are almost entirely silent on the subject of their women colleagues. It is impossible, however, that women were totally absent from the enterprise of Jewish aid work

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

overall. Indeed, most of the core aspects of wartime aid work, such as caring for children, providing clothing, and serving food have typically fallen to women throughout history. Descriptions of Jewish women who worked for public organizations as traveling aid workers, physicians, and fundraisers do – infrequently – appear in the Jewish press of the time; similarly, photographs of various EKOPO and Evobkom institutions during the First World War and early 1920s depict women as nurses, teachers, and caretakers. What makes women’s contributions challenging to reconstruct is likely that which makes aid work itself an often overlooked topic, both in contemporary accounts and in subsequent historiography: the horrors of the atrocities became engraved in collective memory while the ordinary, daily struggles were quickly forgotten.

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**Keywords:** Humanitarian Aid Work, Russian Civil War, Jews, Civil Society, Pogroms

**How to quote this article:**

Polly Zavadiivker, “*Contending with Horror: Jewish Aid Work in the Russian Civil War Pogroms*,” in *The Pogroms of the Russian Civil War at 100: New Trends, New Sources*, eds. Elissa Bemporad, Thomas Chopard, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, n. 15 August 2019  
*url:* [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=409](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=409)

Archive of Violence: Neighbors, Strangers, and Creatures  
in Itzik Kipnis's *Months and Days*

by Harriet Murav

**Abstract**

*Itzik Kipnis's 1926 Yiddish novel, Months and Days: A Chronicle (Khadoshim un teg: A khronik) offers one of the most important accounts of the pogroms of 1919 by focusing on the events that took place in the shtetl of Slovechno (at the time, Volhynia province). This paper argues that Kipnis's apparently naïve testimony offers important insights into the documentation and experience of violence, and in addition, opens a window in the conceptualization of violence. The key term is the Hebrew and Yiddish word hefker, which Kipnis uses to describe how he feels on the first night of the Slovechno pogrom. The word means "ownerless property" and "abandoned object." I suggest that this term has broader ramifications for the particular forms of violence characteristic of this period, and the strange transformations to which both perpetrators and victims were subject. Moreover, the term hefker shares important parallels with current theorizations of violence, especially as formulated by Agamben and further developed by Eric Santner.*

**Introduction**

**The Problem of Context**

**The Literature of Testimony and the Literature of Fact**

**Documentary Indeterminacy**

**The Strangeness of Pogrom Time**

**Neighbors**

**Abandonment, *Hefker*, and Creaturely Life**

**The Strangeness of Neighborly Care**

## Conclusion

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*Two thousand days passed since then—two  
thousand days and two thousand nights.  
Days like polished brass disks shining in the  
sun; and nights, like sated deer stock-still for  
hours. Or maybe the opposite: days, like  
foreheads bruised and broken; and nights, like  
cups of oleum tipped onto animal skins,  
poisonous sulfuric acid that flows, burns, and  
brings death.  
In any case, the first thousand days and nights  
were like that.  
And before then, it was summer. Summer with  
blossoming days like poppies in June. I had just  
gotten married.<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

This passage opens Itsik Kipnis's<sup>2</sup> 1926 Yiddish novel, *Months and Days: A Chronicle* (*Khadoshim un teg: A khronik*). The novel offers one of the most

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<sup>1</sup> Itsik Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, (Kiev: Kultur-Lige, 1926), 11. All references are to this edition, and unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own. For more on Kipnis, see Harriet Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train: Jewish Literature in Post-Revolutionary Russia*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 248–258.

<sup>2</sup> Itsik Kipnis was born in Slovechno, Ukraine in 1896. He worked as a leather tanner until the Leather Workers Union sent him to Kiev to study in 1920. *Months and Days* was the first work for which Kipnis received significant critical attention; he was widely known as a children's author in Yiddish and Russian translation. Kipnis returned to the theme of the pogrom in Slovechno and its consequences in later work, including *Untervegns* (On the road); after World War II, he wrote a fictionalized memoir about his native shtetl (*Mayn shtetele Slovechno*), and short stories about Babi Yar and postwar Jewish life in Kiev. His praise of the Jewish star as an object of pride and the general anti-Jewish turn in the Soviet Union led to his arrest in 1949. His interrogators, it should be noted, also brought up the allegedly "nationalistic" qualities of *Months and Days* as another mark against him. Kipnis spent seven years in the gulag, and was rehabilitated in 1956. He died in Kiev in 1974. I base my account on Mordechai Altshuler, "Itsik Kipnis: The 'White Crow' of Soviet Yiddish Literature," *Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe* 52/53 (2004): 68–167. Another discussion of *Months and Days* can be found in Mikhail Krutikov, "Rediscovering the Shtetl as a New Reality," in *The Shtetl: New Evaluations*, ed. Steven T. Katz

important accounts of the pogroms of 1919 by focusing on the events that took place in the shtetl of Slovechno (at the time, Volhynia province); Slovechno is 162 miles northwest of Kiev. Kipnis uses a unit of time that does not appear in any calendar: “a thousand days.” He proposes two scenarios to describe his experience, one of utter stillness and the other of violent injury. The aftermath of the pogrom was nightmarish, painful, and, ultimately as lethal as the acid that “brings death.” The choice of poisons is not accidental. Kipnis had worked as a tanner, and sulfuric acid was used in the processing of animal hides. The substance that is an instrument of manufacture appears here as an instrument of death, and metaphor for a particular quality of time. Before the bizarre, unrecognizable time, it was summer, a familiar, pleasant season, made even pleasanter by the fact of the author’s recent marriage. As the passage suggests, the novel “Chronicles” violence and desire by intertwining two incommensurable stories: the author’s honeymoon, and the pogrom in Slovechno. Kipnis’s mother-in-law and two of her children were killed in the pogrom, his first wife Buzi, pregnant at the time, later died of typhus, after giving birth to their daughter. Kipnis names the names of Jewish victims and non-Jewish perpetrators, lamenting the first and calling for revenge against the second. Yet, in a postscript to the novel, he comments on the “strangeness” of seeing orphaned children – victims of pogrom violence and its retribution – eating together at feeding stations. “It was a bit strange for the grown-ups to contemplate this. Indeed, even very strange.”<sup>3</sup>

In the preface to the 1926 edition of *Months and Days* the Soviet and Jewish literary critic Isaac Nusinov called Kipnis’s work a “rare testament (*eydes*) to the tragedy of 1919.” The term “*eydes*” refers both to the witness and the testimony the witness provides. Kipnis’s use of language, narrative structure, imagery, and his choice of a seemingly simple, conversational style for his literary testimony makes the experience of violence, and even, care in the midst of violence, strange and unrecognizable for his readers. Making a phenomenon strange, “defamiliarizing” it, to use the language of Russian formalism, is not merely an artistic technique, but additionally, an intervention in thought, a way of changing how we think about the phenomenon under question. This paper argues that Kipnis’s apparently naïve testimony offers important insights into the documentation and experience of violence, and in addition, opens a window

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(New York: New York University Press, 2007), 211–232. For more on Kipnis, see Harriet Murav, *Music from a Speeding Train: Jewish Literature in Post-Revolutionary Russia*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 248–258.

<sup>3</sup> “*Kumt oys di eltere abisl modne ontsukukn azelkhe. Shoyn afile gor modne.*” Kipnis, 8 and 150.

in the conceptualization of violence. The key term is the Hebrew and Yiddish word “*hefker*,” which Kipnis uses to describe how he feels on the first night of the Slovechno pogrom. The word means “ownerless property” and “abandonment.” I suggest that this term has broader ramifications for the particular forms of violence characteristic of this period, and the strange transformations to which both perpetrators and victims were subject. Moreover, the term *hefker* shares important parallels with current theorizations of violence. I begin with the historical context and the documentary impulse that characterized Kipnis’s literary milieu. I then turn to the specific dynamics of the violence in Slovechno in 1919. The final sections of the paper explore the concept of *hefker* and its relation to the violence of abandonment.

### The problem of context

Approximately 150,000 Jews were killed during the Russian Civil War. Some regions saw the complete decimation of their Jewish populations. Warring state and non-state armies, gangs, and individuals perpetrated violence in the aftermath of World War I and the political and social collapse that it caused, which one historian has termed “shatterzone of empires.”<sup>4</sup> The rapid succession of five different governments in Ukraine from 1917 to 1919 created an environment where lawlessness flourished. These contextual factors are part of the explanation for the anti-Jewish violence in Ukraine. World War I is particularly important. The anti-Jewish sentiments and policies of the tsarist army that deported thousands of Jews paved the way for the brutality in the same region in the years immediately following.<sup>5</sup> The period 1918-1921 is but one phase of the “continuum of conflict” that began in World War I and continued through World War II.<sup>6</sup> The larger environment of violence as Peter Holquist puts it, “the practices of total war” conducted internally and externally by the Bolsheviks, including not only military combat, but also, the forced appropriation of material goods and summary executions conducted by different

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<sup>4</sup> I take this language from *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, eds. Omer Bartov, Eric D. Weitz, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Oleg Budnitskii, *Rossiiskie evrei mezhdru krasnymit i belymi*, (Moscow: Rosspen, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia’s Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

branches of the new government as it struggled to establish power.<sup>7</sup> The mistaken perception that Jews were necessarily Bolshevik, anti-Bolshevik sentiment, the desire for land, the availability of weapons, and the “prolonged absence of a central authority in Ukraine” were among the most important factors leading to the pogroms.<sup>8</sup>

Too much emphasis on context, however, might lead to the unintended consequence of making the pogroms appear inevitable, part of the landscape. Artistic literature such as Kipnis’s and personal testimonies show the particular factors that led to violence in specific cases. The pogrom in Slovechno was the work of neighbors. Jan Gross and other scholars have written about neighborly, or, intimate violence, in relation to the Holocaust, but this topic has not received the same attention with regard to the pogroms of the Russian Civil War.<sup>9</sup> Some individuals took part in neighborly violence or did not; they felt angry, humiliated, deprived, sought revenge, or, surprising themselves and others, they offered care in the ongoing force-field of violence. The breaks in the continuum of violence are particularly important, and Kipnis’s text offers several instances in which violence could have taken place, but did not, because care was offered instead. Literary work of the pogrom period expresses the complexity and contradictory emotions that contributed both to neighborly violence and its mitigation. I am particularly interested in what makes these events strange, unpredictable, and lacking in rationale to the actors who performed them and to those who study and try to make sense of the violence.

### **The Literature of Testimony and the Literature of Fact**

The Holocaust has given rise to a vast body of theoretical literature about testimony and memory. Scholars working on the Gulag, in African-American studies, and other disciplines have raised important questions, for example,

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<sup>7</sup> The civil war became the training ground for the perpetrators of Stalin’s Terror. Lynn Viola, “The Question of the Perpetrator in Soviet History,” *Slavic Review* 72, no. 1 (2013): 1–23.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government: Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times, 1917-1920*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Distributed by Harvard University Press for the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute and Center for Jewish Studies, Harvard University, 1999), 109–139.

<sup>9</sup> See Jan Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Jeffrey S. Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg, *Intimate Violence: Anti-Jewish Pogroms on the Eve of the Holocaust*, (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2018).

about testimony's political force, objecting to the overly abstract discussions that have prevailed in the scholarship. The Holocaust nonetheless remains paradigmatic for academic discussions of testimony.<sup>10</sup> The accumulated weight of philosophical interventions on the topic of witnessing and testimony, authored by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Giorgio Agamben, among others has produced a witness who embodies loss and trauma, and the lack constitutive of subjectivity in the modern era, and the crisis of representation characteristic of the postwar era.<sup>11</sup> The best witnesses cannot speak, and thus the witness who does "must speak solely in the name of the incapacity to speak."<sup>12</sup>

The aesthetic and political context of the 1920s, in both Russian and Yiddish, offer an alternative to these notions of witnessing and documentation. The circumstances that prompted philosophers, historians, and literary scholars to posit a crisis of representation after World War II did not dominate the post-revolutionary milieu in Russia. Russian-language proponents of the "literature of fact," or, "factographers," who included Jews and non-Jews--argued for an activist approach to literature and for the importance of genres not previously understood as belles-lettres. Newspaper reporting, memoirs, diaries, and travelogues were no longer considered peripheral genres, but as forerunners of an entire new type of literature, oriented to the fact and immediate, ongoing reality. While prerevolutionary authors could only imagine a better world, the early Soviet state sent writers to construction sites and agricultural settlements to document and thus promote the production of the new, better, socialist world as it was being constructed. Whether the facts being reported were positive or negative, reporting them meant attentiveness to what was changing in the new revolutionary society, and thus, charting how the present showed the future.

In addition to factography, the impulse toward documentation and the production of documentary art in Kipnis's literary environment also sprang from

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<sup>10</sup> For a study of Gulag testimony, see Leona Toker, "Toward a Poetics of Documentary Prose--From the Perspective of Gulag Testimonies," *Poetics Today* 18/2 (Summer 1997): 187-222. A discussion of the attempts of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian literary authors to serve as witnesses in their own trials, and to provide literary testimony in the court cases of their time, see Harriet Murav, *Russia's Legal Fictions*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> I am relying on the overview and argument of Michal Givoni, "Witnessing/Testimony," *Mafte'akh*, 2 (Winter 2011): 147-169.

<sup>12</sup> For Agamben, the best witness is the Muselman of the death camp, reduced to "bare life," the condition of mere biological existence that makes political life possible. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* cited by Givoni, 157.

another source. From the late nineteenth century on, Russian-Jewish intellectuals called for the writing of Jewish ethnography and history in the face of imminent change. Shimon An-sky's ethnographic expeditions in the Pale of Settlement before World War I and his subsequent accounts of the deportation and devastation of Jewish communities during the war are prominent examples.<sup>13</sup> The documentation of Jewish communal catastrophe was a key feature of the new secular historiographical self-consciousness of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup> Artistic literature also played an important role in documentation. Commissioned by Shimon Dubnov and others to document the 1903 Kishinev pogrom, the Hebrew poet Khayim Nakhman Bialik instead wrote a stunning poem of lament and accusation—against Jewish passivity in the face of violence.<sup>15</sup> Jewish literary writers responding to the violence of the Russian Civil War were also responding to Bialik's *In the City of Slaughter*. Kipnis, for example, speaks of his terrible feeling of shame and disgrace (*kharpe*), which also plays a prominent role in Bialik's poem, even though Kipnis, unlike the Jews whom Bialik accuses, articulates his fervent desire for revenge, and narrates how it was satisfied.<sup>16</sup>

In the midst and aftermath of the pogroms half a dozen Jewish organizations launched a massive relief effort, in so doing, creating a vast archival record, including first person accounts, reports, statistics, financial records,

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<sup>13</sup> For discussions of An-sky, see Gabriella Safran, *Wandering Soul: The Dybbuk's Creator, S. An-Sky*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010); Eugune M. Avrutin et al., *Photographing the Jewish Nation: Pictures from S. An-Sky's Ethnographic Expeditions*, (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2009). For a comparative discussion of An-sky, Babel, and Vasilii Grossman, see Polly Zavadivker, "Blood and Ink: Russian and Soviet Jewish Chroniclers of Catastrophe from World War I to World War II," UC Santa Cruz, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/48x3j58s>.

<sup>14</sup> Laura Jockusch, "Chroniclers of Catastrophe: History Writing as a Jewish Response to Persecution Before and After the Holocaust," in *Holocaust Historiography in Context: Emergence, Challenges, Polemics, and Achievements*, eds. David Bankier, Dan Michman, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 135–166; Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record!: Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> For an account of the Kishinev pogrom and the worldwide response to it, see Steven J. Zipperstein, *Pogrom: Kishinev and the Tilt of History*, (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018). For another discussion, see Nakhmen Mayzel, "Itsik Kipnis," in *Untervegn un andere dertseylungen*, (New York: IKUF, 1960), 13–14. See also David Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 84–106.

<sup>16</sup> Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 137.

correspondence, and photographs.<sup>17</sup> The new Soviet government prosecuted some perpetrators and documented these proceedings. The Jewish aid organizations, however, were disbanded in the mid-1920s, and the Soviets withdrew the archival record from public access. A plan for a multi-volume study of the pogroms was cut short, producing only two published works.<sup>18</sup> The loss of documentation means that literary texts such as Kipnis's are all the more important.

The call to document events and the sense of obligation that it created was a distinct feature of the literary milieu in both the Yiddish and Russian-speaking worlds in the 1920s. The literature of fact and the Jewish documentary impulse converged in the production of Kipnis's novel-chronicle. Kipnis wrote *Months and Days* in all likelihood as a response to a specific request that he provide an account of the events that he had seen in Slovechno. On September 16, 1921, the Information and Statistical Division of the Jewish Public Committee for Assisting Pogrom Victims (*Evobshchestkom*) considered a proposal from the eminent Yiddish poet David Hofshiteyn to employ literary artists to document the pogroms in Ukraine.<sup>19</sup> Hofshiteyn had written his own monumental poem cycle *Grief (Troyer)*—illustrated by Marc Chagall—in 1922 in response to the pogroms. He suggested that Jewish authors return to their native shtetls to gather information about the pogroms “in the form of a chronicle, which should contain not only the factual side of the pogroms,” but also, a description; “the chronicles could be composed in the form of diaries or memoirs.” In the milieu in which Hofshiteyn and Kipnis were writing, poetic language, memoir, and information went hand in hand. While other members of the executive committee doubted the feasibility of the proposal, in writing *Months and Days*, especially in the choice of the subtitle “a chronicle,” it is reasonable to assume that Kipnis, Hofshiteyn's protégé, was fulfilling his mentor's request. Indeed,

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<sup>17</sup> These included, for example, the Kiev District Commission of the Jewish Public Committee for Relief to Victims of Pogroms (1918-1924), DAKO, FR-3050 and the All-Ukrainian Public Committee for Relief to Victims of Pogroms, TSDAVO, F2497. Some materials were used as evidence on behalf of Shlomo Schwartzbard, who confessed to murdering Symon Petliura and was acquitted by a French jury. See David Engel, *The Assassination of Symon Petliura and the Trial of Scholem Schwartzbard 1926-1927: A Selection of Documents*, (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Joseph B. Schechtman and Cherikover, *Istoriia pogromnogo dvizheniia na Ukraine 1917-1921*, (Berlin: Ostjudisches Historisches Archiv, 1923); Elyohu Cherikover, *Di Ukrainer pogromen in yor 1919*, (New York : Yidisher Vısnshafılekher Instııtut--Yıyo, 1965).

<sup>19</sup> DAKO, f. 3050, op. 1, d. 123. “Protocol zasedaniia informatsio-statisticheskogo otdela Evobshchestkom from 9/16/1921. Accessed at the University of Illinois Library.

Kipnis’s phrase “brass disks shining in the sun” (*tatsn antkegn der zun*) is a poetic homage to Hofshiteyn’s *Grief*. Hofshiteyn describes the blinding glare of day as “the sun dances with a thousand burning disks.”<sup>20</sup>

### Documentary Indeterminacy

Kipnis’s narrative straddles the border between fact and fiction. It is a boundary text that frays the distinction between the two genres. On the one side, Kipnis uses factual information. Literary convention, in both Russian and Yiddish, avoids the names of places and people, using initials or fictitious toponyms instead. In contrast, Kipnis names real-life victims and perpetrators in *Months and Days*. The same names appear in the archival sources. For example, the name Dovid Freynk comes up in an episode in Kipnis’s work. His widow sings a dirge for him. In the Kiev District Commission list of Jewish victims for Ovruch and Slovechno in 1919, the same individual is listed in Russian as “David Evseevich Freink,” age 28, occupation, tailor.<sup>21</sup> Kipnis blames the eruption of violence in his native shtetl on his neighbor Marko Lukhtan, the chief of police, and an individual named Kosenko, in addition to peasants from the town and the surrounding region. The names Lukhtan and Kosenko with the variant Kosinko appear in both the archival documents and in *Months and Days*.<sup>22</sup> Kipnis describes Lukhtan, who was a veteran of World War I, as a “liar, a gypsy, and a beggar.”<sup>23</sup> According to the eye-witness account of Itsko-Mordakovich Pashkovskii, who worked in the forest in the area surrounding Slovechno, “Lukhtan” was a nickname, Marko’s real last name was “Detskii.”<sup>24</sup> Kipnis also refers to an unfamiliar “couple” walking around the shtetl taking notes, seeking information about the age of the inhabitants, and in so doing documents the documentary process as it unfolds in his own town.

The strong compulsion to name names and give other documentary information evident in Kipnis and other authors and pogrom investigators, however, was also

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<sup>20</sup> “Mit toyznt tatsn heyse tantst di zun.” David Hofshiteyn, *Troyer*, (Kiev: Kultur-Lige, 1922), viii.

<sup>21</sup> DAKO, f. 3050, op. 1, d. 225. Accessed at the University of Illinois Library.

<sup>22</sup> Testimony from L. Kaplan, in “Kievskaiia raionnaia komissia evreiskogo obshchestvennogo komiteta po okazaniiu pomoshchi postradavshim ot pogromov,” DAKO, f. 3050, op.1, d. 225, ll. 17-ob.

<sup>23</sup> Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 41.

<sup>24</sup> TsDAVO, f. 2497, op. 3, d. 154, “Pokazanie Itsko-Mordakovich Pashkovskii.”

accompanied by a sense of anxiety about the accuracy and integrity of the information they provided. Kipnis probes this question in his own way, using open-endedness, shifting perspective, multiple time frames, and a changing emotional and stylistic register to explore the boundary where dates and names lose their specificity and meaning. His reliance on certain documentary strategies does not mean that his text is exhaustive, complete, or impartial.<sup>25</sup> The biblical cadences and violent imagery of the opening passage, as I have already discussed, push the text beyond a simple narrative of the facts. In the aftermath of the pogrom, daytime feels like “bruised foreheads” and nighttime, like cups of sulfuric acid. As I will show, the testimony and the terror, the facts and the poetry pull against each other in *Months and Days*. The ambiguities and tension among them creates the unique texture of the novel/chronicle.

### The Strangeness of Pogrom Time

Dates and times are key elements of testimony. The pogrom began on a Tuesday, as Kipnis notes, the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz, when the walls of Jerusalem were breached, one of the events leading to the sacking of the Second Temple. The 17<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz is a minor fast day in the Jewish calendar. “Tuesday” is one of the days of terror that the title of the work, *Months and Days*—indicates.<sup>26</sup> Kipnis, according to his own self-description in *Months and Days* was not a particularly observant Jew; nonetheless, he evokes the traditional Jewish historiographical mentality that sees ongoing reality in light of biblical history. Kipnis seeks to add the utterly unique days of the pogrom in Slovechno in July 1919 to the recurring cycle of ritual observance of Jewish national catastrophe.

In the context of the concern with dates and anniversaries that Kipnis develops in *Months and Days*, a startling question appears in the penultimate chapter:

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<sup>25</sup> As was typical for accounts of the time, Kipnis is reticent about rape. He strongly hints that his young sister-in-law was raped, but does not provide details. A study of rape during the pogroms can be found in Astashkevich, Irina, *Gendered Violence: Jewish Women in the Pogroms of 1917-1921*, (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2018). For a discussion of documentary strategies in literature, see Ilya Kukulín, “Documentalist Strategies in Contemporary Russian Poetry,” trans. Josephine von Zitzewitz, *The Russian Review*, 4 (2010): 585-614. One of the strategies that Kukulín identifies, parataxis, the juxtaposition of contradictory elements, is also characteristic of the love story/pogrom chronicle of *Months and Days*.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of the significance of “days” in the work, see Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 183–185.

“Does anyone know what day it is?”<sup>27</sup> It is as if the reading audience is also asked the question; the “anyone” could be anyone reading the novel. No addressee is specified. No speaker is identified as the source of the question; there are no quotation marks or any other punctuation that delimit who the speaker is. The simplicity of the question belies the profound disorientation that created it in the first place as well as the disorientation it causes in the experience of reading. The loss of an ordered sense of time is a consequence of the violence of the pogrom. Kipnis goes on to say that there was “no day in the week that had the color or the name” as the day of the pogrom in Slovechno, echoing again the “days” of terror in the title. The question about the calendar echoes the opening passage and reopens the problem of the loss of the ordered sense of time. This question and others like it would seem to challenge the veracity of Kipnis’s account and the accompanying demand that readers believe him. To put it differently, if he didn’t know what day it was, how can we be so sure about details that he provides, for example, that refugees sheltered in Avrom-Ber’s house? Uncertainty about one set of facts could easily contaminate certainty about other facts. Kipnis’s strategy of direct address makes a demand on his readers’ faith in him in ways that undermine his credibility as someone in control of the facts. Kipnis’s unit of time is a fiction from an impossible, mad calendar that only exists in his poetic universe, outside the boundaries of normal, conventional time. In Hebrew, “no-man’s land” is *sheteh hefker*. Pogrom time is no-man’s time, *hefker* time.

Later in the novel, the narrator expresses his inability to distinguish the living from the dead; he can’t believe that those who have been “tormented are really dead and those who are speaking are alive”:

On whom does the mark of the scythe lie? Look and find out. Because now one hour by night or one gibe by day can do what a hundred round years cannot erase or rinse off. Just look at our living together with the dead.<sup>28</sup>

The phrase “look and find out” (“*kuk un darken*”) is reminiscent of the Talmudic phrase “come and see,” but introduces an important disparity between Kipnis and Talmud scholars. In the Talmud, “come and see” generally introduces an interpretation offered by a scholar, but here, in contrast, there is no clarification, what we are invited to contemplate boggles the imagination.

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<sup>27</sup> Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 133.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

Deciphering and interpreting the marks or traces left by the scythe on the bodies of the dead and possibly the living is a reading practice for which there is no rabbinic commentary. An hour of pogrom time leaves incalculable harm on the bodies and psyches of victims. To enter the *hefker* condition of exposure to violence leaves traces that cannot be undone. The horrifying loss of the separation between the living and the dead is one of the transformations wrought by abandonment to utter lawlessness. Kipnis changes the “marks left by the scythe,” the physical and psychological scars of the exposure to violence—into marks left on paper, the words of his text. Far from offering restoration, the narrative that he produced disorients, unsettles, and accuses his readers.

### Neighbors

Jan Gross’s argument about the unique circumstances of particular episodes of violence, in other words, their “situational dynamics” provides a point of departure for understanding the neighborly violence that took place in Slovechno. From Kipnis’s perspective in *Months and Days*, the Russian revolution of 1917, and the subsequent regime change in Kiev had little meaning except for the violence these events unleashed. He asks: “Who doesn’t know that in Russia it’s been a year since the great revolution? Of course we know. But no revolution occurred in the places where we lived.”<sup>29</sup> The reports in the Kiev District Commission Archive and Kipnis’s novel both describe common economic conditions shared by Jews and non-Jews in Slovechno. There were approximately 1475 inhabitants in Slovechno in 1919, out of which 905 were Jews. As Isaac Goldberg, age 23, put it in his testimony about the events in Slovechno, “the Jews worked just like the peasants; they walked bent over, and were tattered and oppressed.”<sup>30</sup> Although this is a Jewish perspective, Goldberg’s characterization makes it less likely that economic inequality and resentment about alleged Jewish wealth were prime factors in the killing of Jews in Slovechno. The town included a mill, several tanneries, a slaughterhouse, a church, and two Jewish cemeteries. Kipnis’s mother-in-law, whose husband was in the U.S., provided for herself and her children by selling crockery to peasants in the neighboring villages, including Behun (Begun). Jews from Slovechno and

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<sup>29</sup> “*Ver veyst es nit, az in Rusland iz shoyen a yor nokh der groyser revolutsye? Avade veysn mir. Ober in undzere mekoymes gufe zaynen nokh keyne shum revolutsyes nit forgekumen.*” *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>30</sup> Elias Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in Ukraine in 1919*, (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1921), 369.

peasants from the surrounding area knew one another. In Slovechno proper, Jews and non-Jews lived in close proximity, except for the center of the town, where there was a greater concentration of Jewish families.

Jews and non-Jews, according to the sources, lived together peacefully. Peasants brought Jews potatoes, flour, honey, a calf and Jews provided processed animal hides, coats, and boots.<sup>31</sup> Kipnis's father, a tanner, had Jewish and non-Jewish customers; during the pogrom in 1919, Kipnis reports, one of his non-Jewish customers was anxious that his hide would be taken during the looting. Before the violence of July 1919, to use Kipnis's words, there was every indication that Jews and non-Jews "would live well together until the Messiah came."<sup>32</sup>

They did not do so, however. As I mentioned earlier, Kipnis held his neighbor Marko Lukhtan responsible for the outbreak of violence. Relations between the Kipnis and Lukhtan families were uneasy at best, even though Lukhtan, according to Kipnis, used to look the other way when Jewish children took cherries from his trees. When Marko returned from military service one Friday night, the door of the Kipnis's parents' house was open, and the sunset was visible through the trees in the Lukhtan garden. This is one of the few images of neighborly harmony in the entire text. The non-Jewish cherry trees provide the backdrop for the onset of the Jewish Sabbath. To herald Marko's arrival, Kipnis's youngest sibling ran to tell Marko's wife that he had come back from the war. He brought candy for all the children, including the Jewish ones. But Kipnis's mother did not accept the gift. As if to compensate for her refusal, she gave Marko some freshly baked cookies with cinnamon, a Sabbath treat.

According to first person accounts in the Kiev District Commission Archive, Kosenko, another pogromist named by Kipnis, was a young man of the age of nineteen or twenty. He was literate and worked for a time as a clerk for the Food Board. In the period before July 1919, he had no definite occupation, but then joined the local police, and, together, with the police chief, began an anti-Jewish agitation campaign in nearby villages and settlements. The main points of his speeches were that Jews were going to seize churches and transform them into synagogues, force peasants to register marriage, births, and divorces with rabbis, and also, that Jews hoarded manufactured goods, particularly, salt, in order to

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<sup>31</sup> Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 52.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

fleece peasants.<sup>33</sup> Kosenko was telling the peasants that the Jews were going to take over and impose their way of life on them.

Rumors about an outbreak of anti-Jewish violence prompted Jews to seek assurance and protection from Lukhtan, as chief of police. The testimony of pogrom survivor Goldberg suggests, however, that Lukhtan had made a prior arrangement with a group of “bandits” to storm the town on his signal. Another Slovechno resident, Pashkovskii, also testified that he heard the cry “Begin!” (*Nachinai!*) around 2:30 in the morning of July 15, 1919.<sup>34</sup> Kosenko’s agitational speeches, and the evidence given by Goldberg and Pashkovskii show that the violence in Slovechno was not the result of a spontaneous explosion of emotion, but instead, the product of careful planning and preparation.

In *Months and Days*, Kipnis reports that he his wife went to sleep in their clothes. The sound of shooting woke him, and the couple fled through the garden. The next day they learned that one Jew was severely beaten, another killed, and that shops and houses were ransacked. Kipnis remarks with bitter irony, “each family celebrated the holiday their own way.”<sup>35</sup> The killing and destruction continued for two more days. Kipnis writes, “All our streets were crisscrossed with filaments of dread.”<sup>36</sup> One eyewitness reported 68 killed and 45 wounded in Slovechno; other reports give slightly different numbers, “more than 60” killed and more than a hundred wounded.<sup>37</sup>

Kipnis accuses his non-Jewish neighbors of carrying out violence. He poses the rhetorical question: “And you, goyim, my faithful neighbors, did you at least wash the blood from your scythes and your knives?”<sup>38</sup> However, not all the interactions among Jewish and non-Jewish neighbors before and during the pogrom were violent. Pashkovskii says that a fellow worker, a non-Jew, warned him that he had heard of impending anti-Jewish violence from the peasants in the area. The archival record provides examples in which members of the same

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<sup>33</sup> Testimony from L. Kaplan, in “*Kievskaiia raionnaia komissiiia evreiskogo obshchestvennogo komiteta po okazaniiu pomoshchi postradavshim ot pogromov*,” DAKO, f. 3050, op.1, d. 225, ll. 17-ob.

<sup>34</sup> TsDAVO, f. 2497, op. 3, d. 154, “Pokazanie Itsko-Mordakovich Pashkovskii.”

<sup>35</sup> Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 89.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>37</sup> L. B. Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov: Pogromy na Ukraine, v Belorussii, i evropeiskoi chasti Rossii v period grazhdanskoi voiny 1918-1922 gg.* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2007), 179.

<sup>38</sup> Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 138.

family treated Jews differently. Even though Kosenko perpetuated violence against Jews, his mother attempted to intervene and care for Jewish victims. Khana Avrom-Berova Gozman, age 45, another resident of Slovechno, testified that her children were severely wounded during the pogrom. A peasant sheltered and fed them, and Kosenko's mother washed the children's wounds and warned Gozman and her family to flee as quickly as possible.<sup>39</sup> *Months and Days* also provides an example of neighborly care between Jews and non-Jews, as well as the failure of Jewish neighbors to take care of each other, as I will show.

### Abandonment, *Hefker*, and Creaturely Life

After the pogrom began, it was difficult to figure out where to sleep. Kipnis comments on the experience of having to flee his home: “Then we were like creatures, which at nightfall were abandoned and utterly helpless.”<sup>40</sup> Indeed, one of the testimonies about the pogrom in Slovechno reports that after the violence had stopped, abandoned Jewish livestock that had been released from their enclosures wandered freely throughout the town. Abandoned creatures, both human and animal, were part of the pogrom landscape and the larger landscape of civil war violence. The key term in Kipnis's characterization of his own condition is *hefker*. *Hefker* is used in every day speech in Yiddish to refer to neglect and abandonment, and also, lawless, dissolute, and licentious behavior, as well as political anarchy. In the preparations for the Passover holiday, during which leavened food are forbidden, householders disavow ownership of any leavened products remaining after the cleaning of their homes by proclaiming them to be unknown to them and “*hefker* like the dust of the earth.”<sup>41</sup> While Yiddish authors used the term to signal their artistic freedom from constraints of the past, Kipnis and other Yiddish authors, including, for example, David Bergelson, Uri Tsvi Grinberg, and Itsik Manger—also used this term in relation to pogroms in Ukraine and the larger situation of Jews in the interwar period in Europe generally.<sup>42</sup> *Hefker* in this context refers to people thrust outside the law,

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<sup>39</sup> Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in Ukraine in 1919*, 380.

<sup>40</sup> “*Itst zaynen mir geglikhn tsu bashefenishn, vos inavnt vern zey ingantsn hefker un hilfloz*” in Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 92. It is not an accident that Sholem Aleichem's short story about a severely disabled girl, “Bashefenish,” was published in the year of the Kishinev pogrom, 1903.

<sup>41</sup> Shimon D. Eider, *Halachos of Pesach*, (Lakewood, N. J.: Feldheim Publishers, 1998), 107.

<sup>42</sup> For *hefker* used aesthetically, see Naomi Brenner, “Milgroym, Rimon and Interwar Jewish Bilingualism,” *Journal of Jewish Identities*, 7/1 (January 2014): 23–48. For Bergelson, see Harriet

“like the dust of the earth,” exposed to violence that is carried out with impunity, for which there is no restitution. As literary scholar Efrat Gal-Ed puts it, the “experience of being *hefker* destroyed all confidence in the possibility of belonging” leading to the persistent sense of “being excluded from any system of law and abandoned to arbitrary power.”<sup>43</sup>

Scholars interested in theorizing violence and its relation to the foundations of political life, most notably Giorgio Agamben, have argued that abandonment as a form of violence is constitutive of political order. I introduce Agamben here, because his concept of abandonment and the Jewish understanding of the condition of *hefker* reveal certain common traits.<sup>44</sup> Agamben argues that political life is built around the ongoing production of bare life, mere killable flesh. Whereas Foucault showed that modern forms of power produce the subject as the recipient of care, for Agamben, sovereign power produces and depends on the production of bare life. Foucault argues biopower arises in the political transition from the power of the sovereign to the sovereignty of the people, and the modern administrative state. Agamben brings together the legal and “biopolitical” dimensions of power to argue that the “production of the biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power.”<sup>45</sup> The sovereign determines the state of exception, the suspension of the normal juridical order for some part of the population, although the possibility of the loss of protections and the exercise of sheer power over mere biological life is ever present in the ordinary life of ordinary citizens, who are but temporarily clothed in rights, norms, limits, and entitlements. The temporary clothing fell away during the Russian Civil War.

To undergo the process of abandonment means to be “open to all,” available without limit, stripped of all social recognition, legal protection, and vulnerable to the naked operation of power, or, in a nutshell, *hefker*. The argument may be

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Murav, *David Bergelson’s Strange New World: Untimeliness and Futurity*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2019), 189–190 and 214–215. Grinberg plays on the multiple meanings of *hefker* in the work he did for his journal *Albatros*. See, for example, Uri Tsvi Grinberg, “Proklamirung,” *Albatros* 1/1 (1922): 3–4.

<sup>43</sup> Efrat Gal-Ed, “Yiddishland: A Promise of Belonging,” in *Twentieth-Century Yiddish Culture in Its European Context*, (Dusseldorf: Dusseldorf University Press, 2015), 12.

<sup>44</sup> For Agamben and *hefker*, see Noam Leshem, “Spaces of Abandonment: Genealogies, Lives and Critical Horizons,” *Environment and Planning D-Society & Space* 35/4 (August 2017): 620–636.

<sup>45</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Meridian: Crossing Identities, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 6.

raised that abandonment in Agamben’s sense is something that a state does, but there was no stable state authority in 1919 in Ukraine. Where there was no law and no tsar, anybody could be tsar for a day, so to speak, and perpetrators created the trappings of their short-lived authority. Kosenko invented a title for himself: the “Commissar of the Slovechno Insurgent Army” (*Komissar Povstancheskikh voisk Slovechanskoi volosti*). Instead of state authority, there were multiply contested forms of temporary rule, animated by multiple forms of antagonism, sometimes ideological, sometimes having to do with the resentment of rural inhabitants against city-dwellers. Groups, or, even, individuals took power for a limited time, and conducted their rule by means of violence. Violence in Ukraine, including pogrom violence, was less coherent than the violence of abandonment carried out by governments.

I return to the passage that I quoted above: “We were like creatures, which at nightfall were abandoned and utterly helpless.”<sup>46</sup> Note first the term “creatures” (*bashefenishn*), that is, not merely animals, but creatures who have suffered a particular fate. Abandonment, whether simply neglect, or the heightened abandonment to sheer power without legal protection—brings about changes in human behavior. Eric Santner, a scholar of German literature, has characterized the changes wrought by abandonment as the emergence of “creaturely life.”<sup>47</sup> Even though the human beings who inhabit creaturely roles appear to more closely resemble animals, the shifts they have undergone are not the product of nature. They are the product of specific historical and political circumstances. To bear the characteristics of creaturely life means to have been exposed to the violence of unlimited power, at the boundary between law and non-law. Inhabiting this boundary corresponds to the *hefker* condition.

Santner modifies Agamben’s notion of bare life. As I discussed earlier, Agamben argues that the abandonment of certain parts of the population and their transformation into mere killable flesh is the necessary substratum of political life. Santner’s intervention is to introduce the notion of excitability into the concept of bare life. Exposure to sheer power means the enhanced capacity for excitation, a kind of skinlessness with regard to the external world. It is significant that the Jewish concept of *hefker* also includes the idea of excitation, or, provocation to licentiousness.

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<sup>46</sup> “*Itst zaynen mir geglikhn tsu bashefenishn, vos inavnt vern zey ingantsn hefker un hilflos.*” Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: A khronik*, 92.

<sup>47</sup> Eric L. Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

This usage of the term *hefker* appears in rabbinic literature in discussions about sexual behavior and promiscuity. Individuals could “make free with themselves,” or, in other words, behave with abandon, an example of which could include a woman offering herself in marriage to a man. In key instances in rabbinic literature when the term *hefker* and words etymologically related to it are used in relation to human beings, and not merely objects, the question of female sexuality is at the heart of the discussion.<sup>48</sup> The various matters the rabbis consider center on cases of sexual assault against freed slave women, for which there was no penalty, and analogously, sexual assault against women who were still enslaved. Thus free men were not eager to marry women who had formerly been slaves, because as such, they resembled “ownerless property,” in other words, anyone could do what they liked to women in this category. In another instance, the rabbis urged that a woman who was half slave and half free should be manumitted entirely so that people around her would not treat her like ownerless property, in other words, licentiously. Their concern was less for the woman herself and more for the morals of the community. The term *hefker* describes a boundary condition defining the limit between those who enjoy protections over their bodily integrity and those who do not, in other words, those whose bodies are mere material for the power and pleasure that others take from them. The legal and structural ambiguity generated the moral ambiguity. Being positioned on the threshold between the right to protection and the lack of such rights somehow was understood to excite wayward desires. Abandonment as a legal condition, as in the case of the freed slave woman, and even in the case of the slave woman, against whom sexual assault could be carried out with impunity is transformed into willing self-abandonment with regard to moral behavior. The person whose legal status is ambiguous, or, who ambiguates certain categories in the law, is presumed to behave in a *hefker* manner and to provoke others to do so.

The condition of heightened excitability and *hefker* wantonness emerges in Kipnis’s description of the first month of his marriage. This is the atmosphere in the room he and his new wife shared:

I had just gotten married and lived in our room, a room for a newly wedded couple. Why not? After all, we were a married couple, she and I.

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<sup>48</sup> I am relying on Gail Labovitz, “More Slave Women, More Lewdness: Freedom and Honor in Rabbinic Female Sexuality,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 28/2 (Fall 2012): 69–87.

Anyone who entered our room would be overwhelmed by the tipsy fragrance of early spring. It would make you drunk, if you inhaled it with an open heart, your blood would tingle all the way down to your little finger... Every speck of air was bound up with us both ... Every hands breath of space was not hers and not mine separately—but bound up with the both of us ...with our shameful, polished wooden beds; the homey curtains on the windows; the enameled blue water jug with big handles ... We were in everything and everything was in us... [ellipsis added]<sup>49</sup>

Kipnis modifies his first name in the novel, calling himself “Ayzik.” Everything Ayzik and Buzi touch and all the objects that surround them are permeated with their passion. The erotics of the scene work through the principles of displacement and metonymy.<sup>50</sup> They are at the center of the metonymic chain that links their desire to the space of their room, the curtains on the windows, the enameled jug, and especially, the “shameful” beds. Ayzik and Buzi are ecstatic, “beside themselves,” in a constant state of intensified and contagious pleasure. Their passion electrifies the very air they breathe.

In *Months and Days* the excitability of creaturely life takes several other forms, in addition to the passionate love scene I have just described. Kipnis’s text provides key episodes that show how the loss of stable and clear-cut boundaries, the condition of being *hefker* activates the already available potential for excitation, leading to violent transformation and uncanny metamorphosis. The central motif linking the various episodes has to do with the fraying distinction between humans, animals, and other forms of life that are indeterminate. I have already discussed Kipnis’s use of the phrase “abandoned creatures” to describe how he felt on the first night of the pogrom, but there are other important instances as well, found in his descriptions of both Jews and non-Jews.

The first day after the killings Ayzik and his wife encounter the widow of Dovid Freynk, the furrier, as she wanders through the streets singing a dirge for her husband, killed in the neighboring village of Behun together with his mother and younger brother. As Kipnis notes, she wasn’t singing, but “muttering like a

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<sup>49</sup> Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 11.

<sup>50</sup> In the poetics of pleasure deferral and metonymic transfer heighten the erotic effect. See for example, Susan Rubin Suleiman, “Pornography, Transgression, and the Avant-Garde: Bataille’s Story of the Eye,” in *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy K. Miller, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 117–136.

golem” (“*zi premlt nor azoy vi a golem*”).<sup>51</sup> Seven stanzas of the dirge she sings appear in the text, beginning with the line, “Of course, you all know Dovid” (“*Avade kent ir ale Dovidn*”). It goes on to describe his beauty, the widow’s love for him, and how she begged her husband’s killers to kill her too.<sup>52</sup> She wants to follow him in death, but doesn’t know what to do with their child. The sudden appearance of this woman maddened in grief terrifies Ayzik and especially Buzi. His “blood runs cold” and he worries that the widow will recognize him and demand his help. Kipnis’s description of the widow amounts to a portrait of uncanny undeadness, including wandering, muttering, the repetition of the same words over and over, and the comparison to a golem, which can mean simply that she seemed like a fool, someone without intellect, but also refers to the legendary creature made of clay animated by day and dead by night.

Ayzik and Buzi react to the sight and sound of the widow without empathy. Instead, their response is fear. Ayzik wants to speak to her but fails to do so; he turns away to take his wife home. The widow is also an “ownerless creature,” abandoned by her fellow Jews. Kipnis’s account does not provide any further information about the widow; the very lack of information accentuates the sudden strange appearance of the wandering widow, and adds to the strangeness of the scene and the stark refusal of her neighbors—Jewish neighbors—to help her. Her accusation against her husband’s murderers is thus also an accusation against her Jewish and non-Jewish neighbors, about whom she says, “Of course *you* all know Dovid Freynk” [emphasis added].

Kipnis’s description of his non-Jewish neighbors similarly emphasizes the theme of excitability and uncanny metamorphosis. These neighbors knew the Jews, but prevented them from leaving Slovechno. They were familiar, but had changed: “*heymishe goyim, nor zey zaynen megulgl gevorn.*” As I discussed earlier, the neighbors had listened to the provocative speeches of the individual named Kosenko, who told them that the Jews were going to take power in the town. Kipnis’s language contains the term “*megulgl gevorn.*” There are many other words in Yiddish for transformation or change, and therefore the choice of “*megulgl,*” is significant. The Hebrew word “*gilgul*” refers to the transmigration of the soul, a Jewish mystical concept. The human soul that had not attained perfection during its lifetime would have to enter the bodies of other creatures, for another chance to fulfill the commandments.

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<sup>51</sup> Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 107.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

In works of Yiddish literature with which Kipnis was familiar, “*megulgl gevorn*” could simply mean “to turn up unexpectedly,” or, it could suggest transmigration. Sholem Aleichem’s *The Penknife* offers an example. In the story, the child-hero wonders why a non-observant Jew doesn’t suffer punishment from God for his failure to observe the commandments. The boy’s teacher explains that the Jew, who is German, has become a German as a form of punishment, that he is a “transmigrated soul,” (“*megulgl gevorn*”), “and might later appear as a wolf, a cow, a horse, or even a duck.”<sup>53</sup> Even though Sholem Aleichem’s use of the term “transmigrated soul” is comic and Kipnis’s is frightening, both passages show that the term has to do with a state of unexpected change, a boundary condition, where the definition of being human becomes uncertain, and the line separating humans from other animals grows unclear.<sup>54</sup>

In *Months and Days*, the question of who was a human and who was an animal was one of the forms in which antagonism between Jews and non-Jews was expressed. Who was responsible for turning the other into an animal? During one of the nights of the pogrom Kipnis’s family shelter in a close-by village; his father knows someone there, and their wagon is allowed into this man’s courtyard for a time. An old woman, not Jewish, appears from one of the houses. Her appearance is strange. She is half naked, wearing only “a canvas shirt and two aprons, one in front and one in back—this is her dress.” She is agitated, crying and lamenting that she was fated to see the day when such things should go on as taking other people’s property, referring to the looting of Jewish homes, and wonders whether World War I played a role: “did the damn war so corrupt the people?” (“*hot es di farsholtene milkhome azoy tselozn dos folk?*”). The old woman goes on to say that the Jews are also guilty, because they “hid” salt: “There’s nothing worse than food without salt! Even a cow won’t take a drink of water unless you give it salt. What other proof do you need? Even a cow!”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Sholem Aleichem, *Some Laughter, Some Tears: Tales from the Old and the New*, trans. Curt Leviant, (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1968), 116–117. For the Yiddish, see Sholem Aleichem, *Ale verk fun Sholem Aleichem*, vol. 1 (New York: Sholem-Aleichem Folksfond, 1918), 15.

<sup>54</sup> For an argument about the importance of violence in “The Penknife,” see Litvak, Olga, “In the Evil Kingdom of Things: Sholem-Aleichem and the Writing of Everyday Life in Jewish Literature,” in *Jews in the East European Borderlands: Essays in Honor of John D. Kiler*, eds. Eugene M. Avrutin, Harriet Murav, (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012), 83–105.

<sup>55</sup> Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 97.

Other passages in Kipnis's narrative suggest that he concurs with the old woman about the salt problem. "Everything was upside down at the market," Kipnis goes on to say. Peasants would exchange a wagonload of wood for "a bit of salt," which was frequently adulterated with chalk, flour, saccharine, paint, or dye.<sup>56</sup> The non-Jews turned the Jews into "*hefker* creatures," but the Jews treated non-Jews worse than animals, by refusing to sell them salt. The fact that Kipnis includes the story of the old woman, as well as his own commentary suggests his interest in probing both sides of the question.

### **The Strangeness of Neighborly Care**

The episode of the strange old woman has an unlikely outcome. Even though she attempted to justify the non-Jews' anger at the Jews, she returned to her house and brought out baked potatoes for the child-refugees in the courtyard. This miniature story within the larger narrative could have ended very differently; it could have become the prelude to more violence. The outcome, however, confounds expectations. Instead of a final statement or act of anger, the woman feeds the Jewish children. The woman herself and her action are strange in the sense of breaking with expectations that the larger narrative sets up, that is, violence that leads to more violence. Whether this episode took place or not, what it suggests is that the continuum of violence was not necessarily a continuum, violence did not penetrate every speck of available social space. The old woman – who accused her own people of corruption, blamed the war and the Jews, but still gave Jewish children her own food – is strange to begin with, because of her costume, and her behavior is strange, because she interrupts the continuum. Providing food in and of itself does not necessarily restore ordinary social relations, because the manner in which it is given can be yet another expression of power. The restoration of social recognition depends on some evidence of an acknowledgment of the common humanity and vulnerability of the provider and those she feeds. In this episode, the old woman's strangeness, expressed in her emotional display and her nakedness show evidence of mutual susceptibility and vulnerability. The heightened exposure to the power of others, thrust forward during conditions of public violence, is always part of daily life, and in the case of the half-naked strange old woman, all the more so.

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 67–68.

For most of his text Kipnis expresses his own desire for revenge. He wonders at one point, for example, when Jews will go out and murder *shiksés* (non-Jewish women), and it is highly likely that his dream of revenge also included other forms of violence against non-Jewish women. It bothers him that non-Jewish children (whom he describes with the derogatory term “*shkotsim*”) are, as he says, treading on the bodies of his dead.<sup>57</sup> The novel’s postscript includes a few episodes of retributive violence. Jews also played the role of kings for a day. Kipnis reports that nine local non-Jews plus three others were taken by wagon to Ovruch, where they were killed. Chinese soldiers were given alcohol to drink and told to shoot the men, and they complied.<sup>58</sup> The 1930 Russian translation of the novel omits these details, in all likelihood because of the extremely negative portrait of the ethnic Chinese, for whom, the narrator says, shooting these men meant nothing.<sup>59</sup> Marko Lukhtan, Kipnis’s neighbor, managed to hide at first, but was later discovered. He was taken outside the town limits and shot in broad daylight, together with his brother and brother-in-law; their bodies were brought back in a wagon. Unlike other episodes in *Months and Days*, Kipnis does not name who did the shooting. The shootings of non-Jews by Jews also shows the larger context, the force-field of violence, in which humans are stripped of social recognition, and the intimate relation between sovereign power and creaturely life emerges all the more starkly. The number of murdered victims in Slovechno that I gave earlier does not include non-Jews killed by or at the behest of Jews.

## Conclusion

I return to the postscript:

Marko had murdered Jews and Jews murdered Marko. And the orphaned children came running with their bowls to the kitchen. They didn’t think about anything. They only lifted their eyes and mouths to

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>58</sup> A significant number of Chinese nationals took part in the civil war. In addition to internationalists, who joined the Bolshevik cause, out of work Chinese migrant workers received salaries from the Bolsheviks if they fought in the Red Army. See Mikhail Akulov, “War Without Fronts: Atamans and Commissars in Ukraine, 1917-1919” (PhD. Dissertation, Harvard, 2013), 100–101.

<sup>59</sup> For a discussion of Chinese participants in the Red Army, see Benton, Gregor, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism: Forgotten Histories, 1917-1945*, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 23–25.

their food. For the grownups it was a strange sight to see, a very strange sight.<sup>60</sup>

The strangeness of the scene requires explanation. In the midst of ongoing violence, time, space and human beings lose their ordinary qualities. The distinction between life and death vanished, as the living struggled to stay alive by hiding among the dead and pretending to be dead—as one child survivor of the pogrom reports having done. The fundamental categories of experience, having collapsed, lead to an epistemological crisis. To quote Kipnis, “Tuesday was a day, and we, it seemed were human beings.”<sup>61</sup> The affirmation of the day of the week and Kipnis’s self-affirmation as a human being suggests that his experience of the pogrom had led him to doubt both the calendar, and the status of both Jews and non-Jews as human beings. They had all undergone a strange metamorphosis, a transmigration that led them to the boundary separating humans and animals and the living and the dead. The act of eating appears strange; Kipnis’s description emphasizes its animality; the children don’t think, their mouths are “*piskelekh*,” little snouts. In this scene the perpetrator/victim distinction is erased, which emphasizes the common vulnerability of human beings in the aftermath of violent conflict. What is strange in the scene is the same thing that is strange about the bizarre old woman in the courtyard: when unthinkable neighborly violence is taking place, neighborly care is also unthinkable, “strange.” When violence unmakes the world, remaking it requires another adjustment, a shift in what we expect.

By examining a work at the boundary between chronicle and fiction in the aesthetic context of factography and the theoretical context of abandonment, the *hefker* condition, and “creaturely life,” this study attempts to make a contribution to what I call the “archive of violence.” Prolonged, extreme, and intimate violence thrusts human beings out of the structures and ordering of their lives, including time, space, and the recognition of their common vulnerability to the power of others. Even though Kipnis uses the term *hefker* only in relation to his fellow-Jews, a close examination of his text suggests that the term may also be applied to his non-Jewish neighbors. *Months and Days* shows the human capacity to be provoked, excited to violence, or, as in the case of the strange old woman, to transform anger and frustration into the desire to offer care.

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<sup>60</sup> Kipnis, *Khadoshim un teg: a khronik*, 150.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

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**Key words:** Violence, Pogrom, Abandonment, Neighbors, Literature, Yiddish

**How to quote this article:**

Harriet Murav, "Archive of violence: neighbors, strangers, and creatures in Itsik Kipnis's *Months and days*," in *The Pogroms of the Russian Civil War at 100: New Trends, New Sources*, eds. Elissa Bemporad, Thomas Chopard, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, n. 15 August 2019  
*url: [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=410](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=410)*

**Pogroms on Screen:**

**Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Anti-Jewish Violence and the Limits of Representation**

*by Valérie Pozner*

**Abstract**

*Despite strong objections against showing scenes of violence on cinema screens, some filmic productions mentioned or even included episodes of pogroms perpetrated during the Tsarist era or the Russian Civil War. Produced between 1913 and 1929, these movies tried to denounce or prevent such violence. Few have been preserved until today, and the ones still surviving are little known. Some were produced under prohibition prior to the Revolutions of 1917. Others appeared during campaigns against antisemitism (close to 1919 and in the late 1920s) and constitute the main focus of this article. Archival evidence allows a detailed study of the reactions of the censors – divergent between Ukraine and Russia – and the critical acclaim which the movies received.*

**Introduction**

**First Images of Pogroms on Imperial Screens: a Conscious Transgression**

**Information or Pedagogy: Two Productions from the Russian Civil War**

**Representation of Pogroms in Cinema during the 1920s**

***Five Brides*: The Pogrom in a Time of Melodrama – New Version**

**Conclusion**

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**Introduction**

The memory of anti-Jewish violence has always been a source of inspiration for Jewish artists. Evoking the crimes, their description, their denunciation, their

lamentation would unfold in poems, stories, plays, paintings, drawings, sculpture of various kinds, with degrees of directness of the references ranging from the very explicit to the most allusive.<sup>1</sup> A latecomer among the art forms, the cinema endorsed this aim of perpetuating memory. However, its immediate portrayal of the lived world proved a natural catalyst in leading to debates about the appropriateness of showing violence on screen: the idea of a “criminogenic cinema” that encourages its viewers to reproduce the actions seen has been a leitmotif since the initial appearance of the animated image in various countries.<sup>2</sup>

In the Russian Empire, Jews were subject to persecution periodically accompanied by the unleashing of extreme violence, particularly in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – and until the downfall of the Tsarist regime. The issue of how to represent this violence was made particularly acute by the position assumed by the authorities, who would typically gloss over the abuses, or even pass over them in silence entirely. The Revolution’s aftermath and the radical changes in the status of the Jews, which it had spelled out, were followed by decisive shifts in the way the cinematographic medium treated Jewish history; it now became possible to evoke anti-Jewish violence on screen. The case of the attacks dating from the Russian Civil War after the Bolsheviks’ coming to power, raised the question in a new way. In the present article we analyze the film productions bearing on this development; by limiting our study to the first decade of Soviet cinema, we will zero in on a period of time in immediate proximity to the perpetration of the violence. The present study will be placed in a triple context: that of the image of the Russian Civil War in general as created on Soviet screens, and this image’s evolution; that of the image of pogroms and anti-Jewish violence in films produced before the Revolution; and that of the image of the same anti-Jewish violence during the years following the period the present study considers. Finally, contrasting the cinematographic with the way in which anti-Jewish

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<sup>1</sup> The field most studied is probably literature. See especially: David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). The author also mentions a number of works in the visual arts.

<sup>2</sup> For a panorama on these debates, see: Lee Grieveson, “Cinema Studies and the Conduct of Conduct,” in *Inventing Film Studies*, eds. Lee Grieveson, Haidee Wasson, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008). See also the introduction to Roxane Hamery, *Ténèbres empoisonnés : cinéma, jeunesse et délinquance de la Libération aux années 1960*, (Paris : AFRHC, 2018). In Russia, these approaches were theorized by Samuil Lifshitz, author of a 1927 book on traumas suffered by children and how they were purportedly treated by hypnosis (*Gipnoanaliz infantilnykh travm u isterikov*). In his answer to an investigation launched by *Sovetskii ekran* on effects of violence on screen (n° 32, 1927, 6), Lifshitz argued that violence could cause sadistic reactions or a state of depression.

violence was treated by other media will enable an appreciation of the specificities of the language of film. We will thus focus on a history of representation, rather than one of memory strictly speaking, even if memory was in fact being targeted by the filmmakers we discuss, as well as was emergent among the public (in at least some of the cases). However, we will not limit ourselves to analyzing images; we will also focus on the effect which they produced. While it is still difficult to evaluate reception by the general public, contemporary reactions of the various censors and professional critics offer an indication of how these films were understood and promoted, or, conversely, of how they were denounced and sometimes even banned in a shifting political and social context, which also depended, as we will see, on the location where the films were screened.

The collection of materials studied in this article includes a number of films preserved in their entirety. Many others are incomplete reels, sometimes cut off by censorship, sometimes difficult to access and available only in Gosfilmofond or other archives of Russia and others of the former Soviet Republics. The primary sources and documents which might help shed further light upon them are most of the time extremely limited: elements of censorship files, in cases when such files were actually kept (such as release authorizations or minutes of meetings of various commissions ruling on the films), along with some press articles and advertisements. To this we have added information about unpreserved movies, as well as script projects never turned into works for the screen.<sup>3</sup>

In cinematic representations of the civil war, Soviet cinemagoers were typically treated to images of cavalry boldly charging. Indeed, the dominant genre representing this historical period is the adventure film, led to prominence after the success of the serial *Krasnie diavoliata* (*Red Young Devils*, Ivan Perestiani,

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<sup>3</sup> This documentation was collected as part of the *Kinojudaica* research program: *Kinojudaica. Les représentations des Juifs dans le cinéma de Russie et d'Union soviétique des années 1910 aux années 1980*, eds. Valérie Pozner, Natacha Laurent, (Paris-Toulouse: La Cinémathèque de Toulouse/ Nouveau monde éditions, 2012), some documents have been published in the catalog of the retrospective of the same name (La Cinémathèque de Toulouse, 2009) This work is also based on the work of my predecessors: Jim Hoberman, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1991), Miron Chernenko, *Krasnaja zvezda, zheltaja zvezda*, (Vinnica: Globus-press, 2003); Tat'jana Derevjanko, Jurij Morozov, *Evrejskie kinematografisty v Ukraine*, (Kyiv: 2004); Vladimir Mislavskij, *Evrejskaja tema v kinematografе rossijskoj imperii, SSSR, Rossii, SNG i Baltii (1909-2009) Fil'mo-biograficheskij spravocnik*, (Kharkov: Skorpion P-LTD, 2013).

1923) produced by Goskinprom in Georgia. Cavalcade imagery is a hallmark of a great many films, the most famous of which are *Chapaev* (G. and S. Vassiliev, 1934) and *Shchors* (Alexander Dovjenco, 1939).<sup>4</sup> The adventure genre resurfaced as late as the 1960s with *Neulovimye mstiteli* (*The Elusive Avengers*, Edmond Keosajan, 1968), a remake of *Red Young Devils*. In some cases, the use of equestrian fighter imagery went beyond application in adventure films pure and simple: melodrama mixes in to achieve an ideological purpose or to register particular sensitivity for the psychological; occasionally, scenarios emphasizing the political vacillations or divisions among the protagonists are stamped with extensive use of the same type of imagery, as well. Members of the same family, fathers and sons, siblings with opposite fates, married couples or lovers, as in *The 41<sup>st</sup>* (Jakov Protazanov, 1927), and even professional collectives (the traveling circus in *2 Bouldi 2* by Lev Koulechov, 1929, or in *Posledniy attraktsion* by Olga Preobrazhenskaja and Ivan Pravov, 1929), are divided by their allegiance to or against the Reds.<sup>5</sup>

This made films depicting the suffering of civilians, and of Jewish civilians in particular, rare in movies produced in the 1920s. When excesses committed by Red Army soldiers are dramatized – especially the armed extortions and looting – it is made clear that the perpetrators are recent recruits and politically dubious elements. Moreover, their actions are usually shown as directed against bankers or wealthy (Jewish) merchants; they are therefore to be basically understood as restoring a form of social justice (*Benja Krik*, Vladimir Vil'ner, 1926).<sup>6</sup> But most of the time, violence shown in these movies is committed against the soldiers of the Red Army or their proven supporters by the Whites (*Buhta smerti*, Abram Room, 1926), occasionally by atamans (*Tripol'skaja tragedija*, Alexander Anoshchenko, 1926; *Veter*, Lev Sheffer, Czeslaw Sabinski, 1926), or, more rarely, by Makhno troops (*Surovyje dni*, Alexander Shtrizhak, 1933). The violence is always graphically represented. The perpetrators are particularly sadistic and bestial, and the sophisticated forms of torture they resort to are shown in atrocious detail. In the discussion that these films provoked, both cinema

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<sup>4</sup> Very representative of this trend, although quite confidential is Igor Savchenko, *Duma pro kazaka Golotu*, 1937.

<sup>5</sup> Denise Youngblood, *Soviet War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), and the chapter on “The Civil War as Entertainment and as Art,” 20-29.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed analysis of this film, see: Oleg Budnickij, “La construction d’Odessa comme ‘mère du crime’ ou comment Moïse Vinnitski est devenu Benia Krik,” in *Kinojudaica*, eds. Pozner, Laurent, 411-439.

professionals and politicians spoke out against “blood on the screen.”<sup>7</sup> There was no consensus on this, however; Budennyj, for one, argued that “the naturalistic representation of blood, murders, and other horrors, was perfectly admissible and even necessary, if it managed to emphasize the revolutionary idea of the film.” Even so, he admitted that the line between a “naturalistic presentation” and an “ostensible exhibition” was difficult to draw.

By the 1930s, the Russian Civil War had been assigned a central role in the founding myth of the Soviet State; ever greater attention was being lavished upon it by means of the cinematic medium.<sup>8</sup> Several films focus on heroes with a plebeian background, at times inspired by historical figures (*Chapaev* and *Shchors*) and purely fictional at others (*Podrugy*, Leo Arnshtam, 1935; *My iz Kronstadta*, Efim Dzigan, 1936; *Vsadniki*, Igor Savchenko, 1939).<sup>9</sup> Scenarios increasingly emphasized the importance of the role played by the political leaders of the emerging Soviet state, while their enemies are typically represented as enjoying support from abroad (provided by the Poles, the English, the French or the Germans, depending on the time and the place of action).<sup>10</sup> The growing schematization of both narrative and character types, as well as the total disappearance in the 1930s of attempts to represent the political diversity which marked the period before the triumph of the Bolsheviks,<sup>11</sup> and the reduction of

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<sup>7</sup> See A. German, “Tripol’skaja tragedija,” *Kino* 15 (1926): 3, and especially important: “Krov’ na èkrane,” *Sovetskij èkran* 32 (August 9, 1927): 4-6. Alongside Budennyj, we find opinions put forth by N. Semashlo, scenario writers such as Asseev and Shklovski, and filmmakers such as Pudovkin, Tarich, and Vertov.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society: From the Revolution to the Death of Stalin*, (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 147.

<sup>9</sup> These movies are discussed in Youngblood, *Soviet War Films*, 37-53.

<sup>10</sup> *Snajper*, (S. Timoshenko, 1932) for the French. *Tommi*, (Ja. Protazanov, 1931); *Baltijcy*, (A. Fajncimmer, 1937); *God devjatnadcaty*, (I. Trauberg, 1939); *Razgrom Judenicha*, (P. Petrov-Bytov, 1941) for the British. *Izmennik rodiny*, (I. Mutanov, 1933); *Mit’ka Leljuk*, (A. Masljukov, M. Maevskaja, 1938); *Odinnadcatoe ijulja*, (Ju. Tarich, 1938); *Ognennye gody*, (V. Korsh-Sablin, 1939) for the Poles. *Poslednij port*, (A. Kordjum, 1934); *Sovershennoletie*, (B. Shrejber, 1935); *Vyborgskaja storona*, (G. Kozincev, L. Trauberg, 1939); *Staraja krepost’*, (M. Bilinskij, 1938); *Vsadniki*, (I. Savchenko, 1939); *Shel soldat s fronta*, (V. Legoshin, 1939) for the Germans. *Volochevskie dni*, (G. et S. Vasil’ev, 1937); *Sluchaj na polustanke*, (O. Sergeev, S. Jakushev, 1939) for the Japanese. Emphasis on the particular provenance of the foreign intervention is, unsurprisingly, a function of the political agenda at the time the movie was produced.

<sup>11</sup> Thus, in the 1920s it was still permissible to bring up – but only in a negative light – other political parties, such as the Socialist-Revolutionaries or the Zionists, by contrast with the 1930s. This shift in recent political history as represented on screen led to a simplification in the imaging of the various parties involved.

national or ethnic differences to strict social divisions, spelled out the complete obliteration of the singularity of the Jewish experience during the Russian Civil War. Only one narrative was now legitimate, which cast workers and poor peasants as taking the side of the Reds while the bourgeois and the big landlords supported their enemies. Finally, as Denise Youngblood argues, with war movies as a genre emerging in the 1930s, the key protagonists in these productions are fighters, while civilian experience is reduced to providing the backdrop for the fighters' exploits.

This explains why the works discussed in the following pages are extremely few in number. The few fictional elements with an explicit reference to pogroms committed during the years of the Russian Civil War appeared as part of campaigns launched against antisemitism either during the civil war itself or subsequently in the late 1920s.<sup>12</sup> They were all subject to orders that the pogroms represented on screen must not be attributable to the Reds; Red action was to be represented as nothing other than irreproachable. Vis-a-vis the Soviet audience, the purpose is therefore to deflect possible charges of responsibility for any abuses by assigning all blame to the enemies of the new regime.

There are two additional reasons for the scantiness of material available for our study: the first is the work of active censorship, while the second is a result of the loss of filmic sources.<sup>13</sup> The extent of the cuts imposed by censors' committees can sometimes be appreciated based on surviving documentation. Whether implicit or openly expressed, the prohibition against representations of physical degradation on screen is a considerable obstacle to any evoking of the pogroms. Prior to the Revolution, quite besides the widespread disapproval of portrayals of violence, the reality was that to mention the pogroms meant to question the imperial order of things. After 1917, as we shall see, the reasons given for the

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<sup>12</sup> See my chapter, "Le cinéma contre l'antisémitisme" about films on Jewish themes in connection with the 1927-32 campaign against antisemitism in *Kinojudaica*, eds. Pozner, Laurent, 131-174.

<sup>13</sup> Internationally produced movies dating from the silent cinema period have, on the whole, been poorly preserved. Soviet works have been particularly sweepingly affected: during the 1920s, only a few active enthusiasts were able to preserve reels. The first official measures concerning fiction movies were enacted in the second half of the 1930s, but often remained unenforced. Production for the period between 1917-1923 (peak of the crisis for the cinema) remained at about 15%. For the year 1918, there is only one film incompletely preserved of the 6 listed; for 1919, out of 57 titles, 7 are more or less well preserved, and 3 others very partially; the rest have disappeared. For 1920, out of the 29 referenced titles, 26 are lost to us. The situation improved in later years, but the proportion of films lost is still between one-half and two-thirds of the total recorded as made.

prohibition against bringing up the pogroms remained, in essence, the same as during the years before the Bolshevik takeover.

We purpose here to study the various strategies resorted to in order to circumvent such obstacles, in chronological order from the 1910s to the end of the 1920s. Analyzing the way in which pogroms were represented in a few pre-Revolutionary films will form a prerequisite for this, as these works had a formative impact on both professional moviemakers and the movie going public. During the revolutionary period, filmmaking was supposed to serve a pedagogical purpose: the goal was not only to denounce anti-Revolutionary violence, but also to justify the Soviet policy of integrating the Jews into the new social order. Ten years later, filmic reminders of the abuses committed between 1918 and 1920 were assessed as educational tools within a context shaped by a resurgence of antisemitism.

### **First Images of Pogroms on Imperial Screens: a Conscious Transgression**

Among the many issues impacting the life of Jews in the Russian Empire from 1910 onwards,<sup>14</sup> violence perpetrated against civilians is only rarely taken up as a cinematographic focus, since making a choice of this kind ran the risk of having the film banned from screens or even destroyed. There was no explicit rule defining pogroms as taboo topics, and censorship, then in local hands, was very inconsistently exercised; its norms varied considerably from one region to another. Nevertheless, it was made clear that police authorities would look with disfavor upon any open representation of the abuses, which had elicited no intervention on behalf of the victims; in fact, the abuses were occasionally given the authorities' approval. *Vu iz emes?* ("Where is the truth?"), a movie directed by Simon Mintus in Riga in 1913, forms a striking exception to this general pattern. Based on a play by the prolific and popular author Abraham Shomer, the film is a melodrama with a plot directly addressing the fate of Russian Jews.

A young Jewish female student is spotted by policemen, who order her to leave Riga as per the laws restricting Jews' right to reside in the larger imperial cities. To circumvent this, the young woman registers as a prostitute. Falsely accused of theft, she is next sent to prison. There, in her cell, she rummages through her

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<sup>14</sup> For a general overview, cf. "Cinéma et judéité dans les frontières de l'empire russe entre 1910 et 1918," in *Kinojudaica*, eds. Pozner, Laurent, 23-77.

series of obsessive mental associations. A scene from her childhood, an idyllic flashback, comes first: as a little girl, she receives a gift from her father and goes out with for a walk with the maid. At the end of this first vision, the heroine is once again in her cell. The camera follows her as she collapses on her bed, burying her head in a pillow.





*Fig. 1-2: "Vu iz emes?", Simon Mintus, 1913 (Gosfilmofond)*

She next seems brutally pulled up erect, as if by an inner force, to face the camera, a picture of fright: a new vision, this time nightmarish, again takes the viewer to the young woman's past. We return to the cozy family apartment, the mother, the maid, and the child, all frightened and hiding in a corner of the living room while the father rushes to the door. He is pushed aside by two men wearing boots and workmen's caps and armed with clubs. They burst into the apartment, followed by more intruders who rudely seize whatever strikes their fancy; lighting upon a bottle of liquor, they unceremoniously drink up. A cushion is thrown on the floor, and the mother is forced down upon it by one of the men. The father attempts to intervene, but is beaten and collapses. The vision ends with a superimposition that gradually focuses on a close-up of the young heroine's face in the grip of terror. As the vision fades, chaos continues to reign in the apartment where her father is being searched, while another assailant throws furniture around. The traumatic scene dates back to the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, in which the young woman lost her parents; the reminiscence ends as she collapses onto the floor of her cell.





Fig. 3-4-5: “Vu iz emes?”, Simon Mintus, 1913 (Gosfilmofond)

As the film progresses, the police realize that a mistake has been made: the real culprits are identified, and the commissioner gives the order to release the heroine, to the delight of her fiancé, also a young Jewish student. But the trauma she has gone through proves too much for the young woman; succumbing to her nightmares, she dies shortly after being set free. In an exceptional manner, this film centers on the pogrom as the central event which determines the fate of the heroine: neither the rule of law, ultimately triumphant, nor love can affect the trauma or its aftermath.

According to Yuri Tsivian, a historian of the cinema who collected parallel material on the same work in the 1990s, the film publisher was reported to have presented the authorities with a carefully edited version of the movie’s most daring scenes.<sup>15</sup> The film had apparently had some success; it went through a

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<sup>15</sup> Yuri Tsivian, “Censure Bans on Religious Subjects in Russian Films,” in *Une invention du diable? Cinéma des premiers temps et religion*, eds. Roland Cosandey, André Gaudreault, Tom Gunning, (Lausanne: Presses de l’Université/Payot, 1992), 72, 80, note 3.

remake the same year in Odessa, which unfortunately has not been preserved.<sup>16</sup> Most important, it seems to have created a model and a precedent. Indeed, the viewer cannot but be struck by the similarity between it and the pogrom scene in *V ikh krovi my ne povinny* (*We Are Not Guilty of Shedding Their Blood*), directed by Mikhail Bonch-Tomashevskij after the February Revolution of 1917. Here, too, we see men wearing boots and armed with clubs breaking into a bourgeois interior and attacking the inhabitants. In Bonch-Tomashevskij's work, the victim is the heroine, Sima, a revolutionary. The political dimension, absent in the film of 1913, is central to the movie by Bonch-Tomashevskij which hovers, in terms of genre, between political indoctrination and melodrama. At an early point in the plot, the revolutionary hesitates between two suitors, a Zionist and a Democrat. The film is an adaptation of the play *Evrei* (*The Jews*) written by Evgenij Chirikov in 1904 in response to the Kishinev pogrom; the play was immediately banned by censors. The Revolution of February 1917 made film adaptations possible. Unlike the incarcerated heroine of *Vu iz emes?*, Sima is not passive: her family manages to escape, but she remains, in opposition to the attackers. She not only faces the pogromists ransacking the house, but shoots at them before turning her revolver on herself. Her two suitors are reconciled to each other and promise to fight against the Black Hundreds. The heroine starts out as a victim, to turn into an active protagonist who offers resistance to the violence; she prefers to kill herself rather than submit. But it is the struggle against antisemitism that becomes the key among intensifying political tensions, a layout about to change drastically. The film is typical of the period between February 1917-late 1919. The removal of all restrictions against the Jews of the Russian Empire opened the way to abundant cinematographic creations depicting the disrupted lives, humiliation, extortion, and false accusations suffered by the Jews. At least two of the new works place the pogroms of the beginning of the century at the center of their stories.

Despite their paucity, cinematic representations of pogroms dating from the imperial era had a powerful impact, providing a major reference point for years to come, even though the number of victims caused by the events which they describe was considerably lower than during the civil war years.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Tragedija evrejskoj kursistki*, (Miron Grossman, 1913). The two bands have similar footage length, approximately 1200 linear meters each.

<sup>17</sup> The subject matter of a number of unpreserved films is unknown, but some surviving titles are extremely suggestive: *Obezdolennyj*; *Doch gonimogo naroda*, and others. Alongside films mentioning or depicting the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, one work centers on the Beilis Affair and two focus on the fate of the Jewish Cantonists – Jewish children forcibly recruited into the

### Information or Pedagogy: Two Productions from the Russian Civil War

Innumerable obstacles stood in the way of the two reels of 1919-1920 and their portrayal of ongoing pogroms; their filming and preservation was an achievement against near impossible odds. The first is a documentary edited in Berlin; the second, a work of historical fiction by Ermoliev Studio, was commissioned by the Moscow Film Committee. The former is very explicit in its treatment of its subject; the latter merely evokes a pogrom scene, possibly the outcome of undocumented censorship or other interference of which we at present know nothing for certain.

The documentary, titled *Les pogroms juifs en Ukraine 1919-1920*, is a trilogy, of which the first two parts repeat, with some variations, the same images we are already familiar with from other works; it is accompanied by French and then English subtitles. A series of stills and recordings convey the monstrous aftermath of pogroms in various localities in Ukraine: destroyed stores and homes, streets filled with debris, scattered papers, pieces and shards of broken things; disfigured corpses, bodies which relatives have difficulty recognizing, in the cemetery, having been excavated from the bottom of the river or wells where they had been thrown; ransacked synagogues, desecrated Torah scrolls; the violence breaks out anew in every screen. The effect is intentional: the work clearly aims to shock. The headings, generally more detailed in English than in French, specify the places, the dates, the numbers of victims, and, often, the perpetrators. The images form a sequence so as to span the territory of Ukraine (including both small towns and larger cities), as well as the spectrum of types of victims: eminent representatives of the community, famous rabbis, wealthy merchants, renowned intellectuals – along with anonymous figures, especially children, teenagers, and elderly men. Remarkably, the fate of women remains invisible: all documented cases show figures of men. Identified pogromists hail from each of the many sides involved in the Russian Civil War, with the notable exception of the Bolsheviks: all organized armed forces – those of the UNR, the Poles, and the Whites; the best-known insurgents, including Struk, Zelenyj, and Grigoriev; and unnamed groups lumped together as “insurgent peasants.” The third and the shortest part of the trilogy shows survivors receiving treatment at makeshift relief centers.

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Tsarist army. For more, see the filmography documented in *Kinojudaica*, 485-488 (fictions produced in 1917) and V. Mislavskij, *Evrejskaia tema v kinematografе Rossiiskoi imperii, SSSR, Rossii, SNG i Baltii (1909-2009)*, 85-97.





Fig. 6-7-8: “Les pogromes juifs en Ukraine, 1919-1920, 1927,” Russian State Film and Photo Archive at Krasnogorsk (RGAKFD), film 13964

Archival evidence indicates that the photographs (as well as probably shots of scenes) included in the documentary were provided by the Kiev Aid Committee to Assist Victims of Pogroms (Kiev *Evobkom*), whose Information Department not only collected written testimonies, but also promoted visual documentation.<sup>18</sup> The editing, according to the opening credits, was done by the Historical Archives of Ukrainian Jews in Berlin. The Ostjüdisches Historisches Archiv must be meant, coordinated by Elias Tcherikower, historian, writer, and journalist, himself a native of Ukraine. Tcherikower systematically collected testimony and documents on pogroms from 1919, building upon the work of several relief associations, such as the *Evobkom*. From 1920 onwards, with Bolshevik rule extended to Ukraine following a series of military successes, the

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<sup>18</sup> See the different reports and minutes of photographic and filmic documentation gathered in State Archives of Kiev Oblast (DAKO), fond R-3050, opis 1, spr. 87. Although the objectives and designated tasks mentioned in the different documents are broad, the actual production seems limited in retrospect; it may have been lost.

*Evobkom* began to operate under the auspices of the recently created Soviet relief organization stationed in Moscow and having a pan-Ukrainian regional base. Part of Tcherikower's collection was secretly transferred to Berlin when with many of the *Evobkom* relief workers opted for exile. Even so, limited collaboration between the two committees continued.<sup>19</sup> This explains why none of the violence documented in the film is traceable to the Reds. The documentary's preservation in RGAKFD, the Russian state movie archives, is further evidence of cooperation between Berlin and Moscow. The documentary was probably meant to raise awareness on an international level, perhaps among politicians in the United States, the United Kingdom, and France (and possibly elsewhere), as well as to raise funds for victim relief. However, the montage may also have been assembled later, for use in the defense of Samuel (Sholem) Schwartzbard, the murderer of Petliura, whose trial opened in October 1927 in Paris; the documents for the defense were, in fact, provided by Tcherikower. If true, this would explain the French-language headings.<sup>20</sup>

Very different from this is *Tovarishch Abram* (*Comrade Abram*, Alexander Razumnyi, 1919), an "agitation film" (*agitfilm*) produced as part of a campaign against antisemitism.<sup>21</sup> Like most of the works dating from this period of scarcity, the movie is brief (less than twenty minutes) and the story, extremely simple, targets an uneducated public probably made up of Red Army soldiers. The didactic aim is twofold: to demonstrate, by means of concrete example, the senselessness of anti-Jewish prejudice, and to arouse feelings of compassion and admiration. The hero is a Jewish man, a victim of violence rescued by a Red

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<sup>19</sup> On the various aid committees, see Lidia Miliakova and Irina Ziuzina, "Le travail d'enquête des organisations juives sur les pogroms d'Ukraine, de Biélorussie et de Russie soviétique pendant la guerre civile (1918-1922)," *Le Mouvement Social* 222 (2008): 61-80, and Polly Zavadvker's contribution in this issue.

<sup>20</sup> Given the Soviet contribution to the public campaign against Petliura, this would also explain why Soviet authorities kept a copy of this film.

<sup>21</sup> It was apparently not the only work produced with this aim: for example, *Bortsi za svetloe tsarstvo III internatsionala* was produced in the same year (1919) by Boris Svetlov for a contest organized by the Pan-Russian Film Committee (VFKO). Its topic is "the fight against reactionary propaganda of national hatred and for the explanation of the counter-revolutionary nature of antisemitism." Unfortunately, the film has not been preserved and we still have only scanty notes as to its content. See the hypotheses published by Miron Chernenko in *Krasnaja zvezda, zheltaja zvezda*, 12-13. For the Soviet struggle against antisemitism, especially in the Red Army, see Brendan McGeever, "Bolshevik Responses to Antisemitism during the Civil War: Spatiality, Temporality, Agency," in *Russia's Home Front in War and Revolution, 1914-1922: Book 4. The Struggle for the State*, eds. Christopher Read, Adele Lindenmeyr, Peter Waldron, (Bloomington: Slavica, 2018) and his forthcoming book on the same topic.

officer. The Jew ultimately integrates into the new society created by the Revolution thanks to that, unlike Tsarist times, he now enjoys the trust of the authorities, and also because pro-Soviet citizens sympathize with his suffering and offer him their material and moral support.

The film begins during the First World War, showing the effects of antisemitic propaganda circulated by the reactionary press. *Novoe vremia*, a contemporary periodical, flashes its updates: Jews are suspected of collaboration with the enemy; some are arrested. One Egorov, a soldier, injured in a skirmish on the outskirts of a town, crawls to the nearest house, where he is ushered in and taken care of by Abram and his family. After he recovers, the Russian Egorov comes upon a leaflet accusing Jews of treason. He crumples the paper into a ball to throw it away. A meeting of the Black Hundreds proceeds on screen as if to shed light on the origins of the antisemitic propaganda. A lacuna in the narrative follows due to the incompleteness of the preserved copy (kept at Gosfilmofond). We next see Abram stealing away from a bivouac in the woods. We find out that he has been victimized (he is "one of the persecuted"). He manages to reach the railway station where he unexpectedly meets Egorov, whom he tells that his family has been annihilated during a pogrom. The pro-Bolshevik soldier convinces him to join him on the train. Once in Moscow, he helps Abram find a place to live and a job. Shortly thereafter, the young Jew addresses fellow factory workers with a summons to enlist in the Red Army. He soon finds himself at the head of a volunteer battalion. Despite being underequipped, his unit routs the Whites, taking some of them prisoner. Abram is held up as an example. The film ends with a military parade showing off volunteers become disciplined soldiers, united around their Jewish leader.<sup>22</sup>

The film is punctuated with some explicit pronouncements: "I've suffered double, as a worker and as a Jew," and, further, "They've killed my family! I will never give up." All this achieves a reduction of the principal message to a few simple statements for the viewer to internalize. Even so, some ambiguity remains.

To begin with, the condition of the film reel does not permit dating the pogrom with any degree of precision: did the anti-Jewish violence it refers to take place during the First World War or during the Russian Civil War? It is also impossible

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<sup>22</sup> In abstracts written by Miron Chernenko and on the Gosfilmofond website, Abram's rise takes place on the eve and during the October Revolution. The revolutionary underworld is thus cast as providing the wherewithal for his ascent, without any obvious connection to the Bolsheviks.

to ascertain whether the original version of the movie actually included explicit pogrom episodes, or whether it was the original intent of the author to make an elision. Censorship indisputably accounts for the fate of many works in later years, but in the case of this movie director, who was active prior to 1917, it is clear that he had fully internalized the message concerning images of physical violence.

Besides questions raised by the lacunae in the story, which remain indeterminate as to whether they were voluntarily made or imposed, *Comrade Abram* is thoroughly typical of the ambiguity inherent in the Soviet campaign. Though it is undertaken to eradicate antisemitism in the army and among civilians and addresses primarily the working classes, the campaign can never criticize actions committed by those whom it addresses. The antisemites are always the others; in the case of this movie, they are the Whites, the representatives and supporters of the *ancien régime*, the former Black Hundreds in accord with a definition to be adhered to in later years: antisemitism is the counter-revolution.

The way pogroms were treated on screen was informed, both explicitly and not, by several factors; primary among these were the locus of production (within or without the Tsarist Empire's bounds, in the new Soviet State then taking shape), and the target audience. Given the current state of the sources, it is very difficult to assess the circulation and impact of the two films. The lack of a list of original headings makes it impossible to detail the pogrom cited in *Comrade Abram*. The preserved version is probably from a screening copy, after some parts had been cut. Cuts could well have been made to prevent the spread of toxic ideas. This consideration often played a decisive role in the work of the censors during the 1920s.

The impact which the political context of the anti-pogroms campaign had upon films such as *Comrade Abram* is obvious. But this does not mean that the makers of these films had been directly solicited by the authorities. In addition to the urgency of preserving testimony or preventing crime, more opportunistic considerations may have played a role for some of the filmmakers. *Die Gezeichneten* (Karl Theodor Dreyer, 1921-22), centering on anti-Jewish violence on the eve of 1905, and another, more laconically titled work, *Pogrom*, are examples. *Das Geheimnis des Beilis Prozesses* (G. Fredall – pseudonym used by

Alfred Halm – 1919) went through distribution in the USSR under the title *Pogrom*.<sup>23</sup> The existence of a potential audience may be the explanation.

### Representation of Pogroms in Cinema during the 1920s

The initial drive to elide Red-perpetrated pogroms metamorphoses gradually into glorifying the Russian Civil War; mention of Jewish suffering endured simply insofar as the victims were Jews becomes impossible. *Tripilska tragediia* (Alexander Anoshchenko, 1926), inspired by real events, recounts the last hours of a group of young Red partisans murdered along with Red Army soldiers by a band of Ataman Zeleny's (Danilo Terpilo). What the film fails to indicate is the antisemitic aim of the massacre.<sup>24</sup> Any hint about pogroms is confined to the dramatization of events which took place either during the First World War or, more frequently, earlier in the first years of the century.

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<sup>23</sup> See N. Egorova, “Katalog nemeckih nemyh fil'mov, byvshih v sovetskom prokate,” *Kino i vremja*, 4 (1965): 445. Typically cryptic, this filmography unfortunately provides no archival reference. Nor are any dates, circulation data, or numbers of copies given.

<sup>24</sup> There were definitely cases of members of the Komsomol being shot for being communists; however, the Jewish and Communist soldiers of the Red Army detachment who fought alongside them suffered the same fate. A pogrom was also perpetrated in continuation of the massacre. The significance of the omission of this Jewish dimension of the tragedy of Tripol'e must not be downplayed. For an overview of this episode, see Thomas Chopard, *Le Martyre de Kiev – 1919. L'Ukraine en révolution entre terreur soviétique, nationalisme et antisémitisme*, (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2015), 75-80.



Fig. 9: Poster for "Tripilska Tragediia," Oleksandr Dovzhenko National Center (Kyiv)

A project which never advanced beyond the planning stages was part of Eisenstein's work on what would eventually become *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). The essential question was clearly this: how to dramatize the turmoil in 1905

Odessa without bringing up the attendant pogrom? In the original script, the seventh act was in its entirety devoted to the devastation wreaked by the pogrom. The director had prepared a cut-out of 65 shots, which, in a style reminiscent of the Grand Guignol, featured, in terrifying detail, scenes of rape and massacres of Jewish refugees in synagogue or theatre buildings which are ultimately torched. Some of the details aimed to produce shock: one sequence showed a stabbing of a victim who lies on a bed and whose blood seeps through the mattress, dripping on the children in hiding under it. Later, a funeral procession is attacked by the Black Hundreds and scatters in panic. As part of the commotion, a coffin was supposed to yawn open, spewing out the body onto the ground. As we know, however, the director ultimately narrowed his focus to the single episode of the sailors' rebellion; ideas about ways to evoke the pogrom remained among the many unrealized projects of the author.<sup>25</sup>

It is difficult to know which of these visual concoctions were meant to provoke disgust and fear in the audience, and what belongs to the genre of the Grand Guignol, but may not have been possible to film as such. At about the same time, Eisenstein denounced his colleague Abram Room's penchant for the pathological in his first film, *Gonka za samogonkoi* (*The Warlord's Run*, 1925).<sup>26</sup> One year later, Room was criticized for overly graphic torture sequences in his *Buhta smerti* (*Bay of Death*, 1926), and had to exculpate his work in writing.<sup>27</sup> In literature, several contemporary writers resorted to crude portrayals of anti-Jewish violence. However, following David Roskies, we should note that preference for this particular kind of bloody, macabre, grotesque excess remained limited. No film seems to have opted to work in this direction.

One filmic work, unfortunately not preserved, which centers on the pogrom is *Mabl* (Evgenij Ivanov-Barkov, 1927), based on a story by Sholem Aleikhem. Some of the exteriors were filmed in Vinnitsa in Ukraine. The shooting of the pogrom sequence, in the summer of 1926, provoked further violence when the

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<sup>25</sup> The Russian text is accessible at the end of Miron Chernenko's lines at: <http://jhist.org/russ/russoo6.htm>, Eisenstein refers to the Grand Guignol in his Sergei M. Eisenstein, *Notes for a General History of Cinema*, eds. Naum Kleiman, Antonio Somaini, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 173-174.

<sup>26</sup> Eisenstein wrote about a "neurosis... that made him find pleasure in what was gross." The text remained unpublished and was edited and introduced by Mikhail Jampol'skij, "Luch i Samogonka (*Opyt opredelenija ideologičeskoj nesostojatel'nosti v oblasti tehniki i formy*)," *Kinovedčeskie zapiski*, n° 43, 35-65.

<sup>27</sup> Abram Room, "Moi kinoubezhdenija," *Sovetskij èkran* 8 (1926): 5.

Cossacks on set, who had been recruited for the purpose, without plan or rehearsal, rushed to beat up the Slav extras in Jewish costume. The region's pogroms of less than 10 years previously had evidently left their mark, and the work had trouble passing censorship. It was reworked several times before being found satisfactory. For example, only poor Jews were to be targeted by the Black Hundreds, while bourgeois families were to be spared, a requirement which resulted in a number of cuts. In a similar vein, the movie was to demonstrate class solidarity, so that any help granted to the victims had to originate with Russian or Ukrainian workers.<sup>28</sup> Finally, the pogrom scene had to be made significantly shorter because, according to the censor, the film was otherwise "likely to arouse anti-Jewish reactions in some of the population."

What bothered the censors seemed ultimately a contradiction: on the one hand, the Jewish dimension was overly prominent (specific gesturing, transcription of Yiddish speech in the intertitles, overly obvious "Jewish physiognomies" in the units mobilized for self-defense); yet, on the other hand, the film allegedly failed to make the spectator feel that "Jews had died for the Revolution." The required alterations listed number in the dozens: views of the shtetl and scenes of Jewish life were to be "interspersed with others, showing the revolutionary movement sweeping across Russia," in order not to "create the impression that the Revolution of 1905 [was] mainly the work of Jews." It was also preferable to make it clear that Tsarist police had come to the aid of the pogromists, and more along the same lines. This diversity of censors' opinions can be chalked up to their sheer numbers: the film was assessed by an enlarged commission comprised, in addition to the principal directory committee (*Glavrepertkom*, the head censorship organization charged with issues of the cinema), of members of the Head Committee for Political Enlightenment (*Glavpolitprosvet*) of the People's Commissariat for Education, the OGPU, and the Jewish Section of the Party Central Committee (*Evseksiia*), all in the presence of the filmmaking studio reps. Hence the wealth of feedback reflected in the archival documents: from a "clearly antisemitic film to be permanently banned," to "a few modifications [will be] sufficient to enable distribution for the film, which has already cost 260,000 rubles." Proceeding laboriously in steps, the film was gradually transformed to suit these multiple requirements; it finally came out on screens in April 1927.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See the file concerning the film, kept at Gosfilmofond, 2-1-492. According to the documents, the film had to deal with censorship on six occasions between March 1926 and February 1927.

<sup>29</sup> One of the documents kept in the file advocates for a first limited release in Moscow and Leningrad, as a test on a better educated public of its potentially harmful effects. But we do not know if this was indeed done, or what came of these tests.

However, stages of the editing process were not documented, making it impossible in retrospect to detail the cuts and additions made in the course of the nearly 12-month-long re-working.

Contrary to what these initial difficulties may suggest, the film received extensive coverage in the press, the media's attention buoyed by the fact that actors of the renowned Habima played the main characters. Critical opinion, however, was divided: while *Sovetskij ekran* praised the director's tact in scenes of violence, *Pravda* regretted that the kaleidoscopic effect of the scenario precluded a holistic understanding of the events.<sup>30</sup> Given the many cuts made and the film's success, the director, who had been forced to eliminate multiple scenes from the overly complex scenario, was confident he could create a second film based on the material remaining.<sup>31</sup> Most likely thanks to the fact that it was never permitted a public screening, this work has in fact reached us intact. The title, *Protiv voli otsov* (*Against the Will of the Fathers*), directs attention to the family as the setting of the central conflict: between the revolutionary young generation and the parents. Two fathers belonging to the older generation, one choosing assimilation, the other upholding tradition, balance out the youth. As in *Mabl*, a pogrom strikes, but, unlike *Mabl*, no one is spared. The simple folk and the two bourgeois in the area – the traditionalist merchant and the assimilated pharmacist – share the same fate. This is one reason, but not the only one, why this second film was banned.<sup>32</sup>

The pogrom sequence – unseen, let us emphasize, by any spectator at the time – is thoroughly striking. It is divided into several micro-scenes intertwined by parallel editing to suggest the simultaneity of the violence in several places in the town. Men wielding clubs attack stores and storages on the ground floor of a large building; others attack a woman (who is shown lying on her back, suggesting public rape). Elsewhere a gang of young pogromists try to drown

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<sup>30</sup> Andrej Sobol', "Otvuk bylyh bur'. *Mabl*," *Sovetskij ekran* 22 (June 1, 1926): 4. Hrisanf Hersonskij, "Mabl," *Pravda*, 19 April 1927, 3. The long article published in *Sovetskij ekran* in June 1926 suggests that the release had been planned for a much earlier date and that the film had been presented to the press internally (by the studio). It should be noted that the magazine had previously covered the shooting and subsequently disseminated advertising inserts (see No. 6, 1926, cover of No. 7, 1927 and double page in No. 15, 1927).

<sup>31</sup> We can also suppose that the directors of the studio originated this initiative, in order to secure some profits. In any case, this is a plausible hypothesis, considering the views expressed by Ilia Trainin, head of the studio, at the time of presenting *Mabl* to the censors.

<sup>32</sup> As mentioned in censorship documents, *Ibid.* See also the retrospective's catalogue *Kinojudica*, published by the Cinémathèque de Toulouse in 2009, 36-37.

several people at once. Finally, the pharmacist – smartly dressed and dignified-looking – is singled out in the street and mocked (including by very young children), harassed, forced to undress, and eventually abandoned in his shirt and underwear. By contrast with censors' demands about *Mabl*, this time there were no insistent requirements about including Tsarist police who support the pogromists, nor about Russians helping the Jewish victims. The entire Jewish community was targeted without class distinction.





*Fig. 10-11-12: "Protiv voli otsov," Evgeni Ivanov-Barkov, 1926 (Gosfilmofond)*

The stipulation that only the poor suffer from the pogrom, while the rich take advantage of protection by the police, is, unlike these earlier movies, respected in *Glaza, kotorye videli* (Eyes That Have Seen, Vladimir Vil'ner, 1928), a Ukrainian film originally titled *Motele the Idealist*. In this work, a contrast is from the outset focused on between the fates of two Jewish families of the imperial era: the rich family exploits the other and forces its daughter into marriage. The declaration of war in 1914 serves to deepen family cleavages: the son of the bourgeois family is exempted from military service and his father succeeds in doing business with the military, while the poor family is expelled from the territories close to the front, its property is stolen, and the family members are finally killed in a pogrom. The film passed Ukrainian censorship without any major difficulty, but met with some misgivings among the critics concerned about the wealth of clichés and the exaggerated melodrama.<sup>33</sup> Russian censorship, unlike the Ukrainian, demanded the suppression of several scenes, especially the pogrom sequence, and “all those that could make the Jews pass for victims.”<sup>34</sup> The film came out a year later in the RSFSR and was criticized for “nationalism” and the absence of any sense of class solidarity between Jews and non-Jews.<sup>35</sup> But once again, no copy seems to have survived and the historical references in the pogrom scenes in the original version (before the cuts) remain a puzzle.

It has been observed that, while the issue of anti-Jewish violence disappeared from the news in the first half of the 1920s, it returned to prominence with the launch of the campaign against antisemitism later in the decade.<sup>36</sup> Very few films dared refer to current events making the headlines at the time (assassinations, assaults, humiliations). Filmmakers preferred to take on pogroms from the early years of the century, on the eve of the First World War, avoiding any overlap with the chronology of the Soviet State, which now dated, retrospectively, from

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<sup>33</sup> *Večer radio* (Kharkiv), December 15, 1928. The author praised, in particular, the actors Julija Solnceva (as Motele's sister) and Iosif Mindlin (as Motele) and the variety of sentiments they were able to convey in original ways (sweetness, strength, humor, the tragic, and more).

<sup>34</sup> See the file concerning the film, kept at Gosfilmofond 2-I-272.

<sup>35</sup> “*Glaza, kotorye videli*,” *Kino i zhizn*, 2 (1929). The critic A. Palej in *Krasnaja zvezda* (24 December 1929) was less virulent and focused his criticism on the title, which he branded “absurd and pretentious, without any connection to the topic.” The title was actually confirmed by the censorship in the RSFSR.

<sup>36</sup> Ljudmila Gatakova, “*Antisemit est kontrrevoliutsioner? Sovshchanie o virabotke mer po borbe s antisemitizmom pri Agitprope CK VKP (b)*,” *Arhiv evreiskoi istorii* 4 (2007): 147-188; and “*Disput ob antisemitizme (Moskva, dekabr 1926 g.)*,” *Arhiv evreiskoi istorii*, 5 (2009): 202-246.

the aftermath of October 1917. Even so, censorship was not content with violence displayed on the screen, particularly in the RSFSR. If not targeting the working class as a whole, pogroms on screen would have at least to target the oppressed while sparing the rich. Cinematographic focus on the singularity of the fate of the Jews met with a mixed response: some censors, sensitive to widespread antisemitic sentiment, feared the perverse effect of such images; others branded the depicting of Jews as victims as “nationalist.” Suppressing scenes of anti-Jewish violence was accordingly called for; memory of the pogroms was to be erased.

### ***Five Brides: The Pogrom in a Time of Melodrama – New Version***

Against the backdrop of this overall dearth of material, *Piat nevest (Five Brides)*, made in 1929 in Odessa by the Ukrainian studio VUFKU, forms a remarkable exception: not only is violence against the Jews during the Russian Civil War the key concern, but the pogrom is also at the center of the film’s action. The scene of anxious waiting as the violence is about to break out takes up an entire reel, an approximate 10 of the movie’s 60-minute total; unfortunately, this is also incompletely preserved. Others of the pogrom scenes show abuse, threats, intimidation, and humiliation. The exteriors were filmed in a shtetl in southern Russia, where the director enlisted locals for enhanced realism – a widespread practice – in addition to the few well-known actors with assigned roles.<sup>37</sup> The story is a perfectly conventional melodrama. It has something of the fairy tale about it: terrifying at first, but with a miraculous ending. The part played by a mysterious character, a kind of Jewish God’s fool in the town, with an unknowable power over the unfolding of events, intensifies the sense of the supernatural. The tension between documentary aspirations and fiction is made further poignant by a cinematography marked by expressionism with its angles, framing, and contrasts. The work as a whole surprises with its mix of heterogeneous elements and unusual mood.

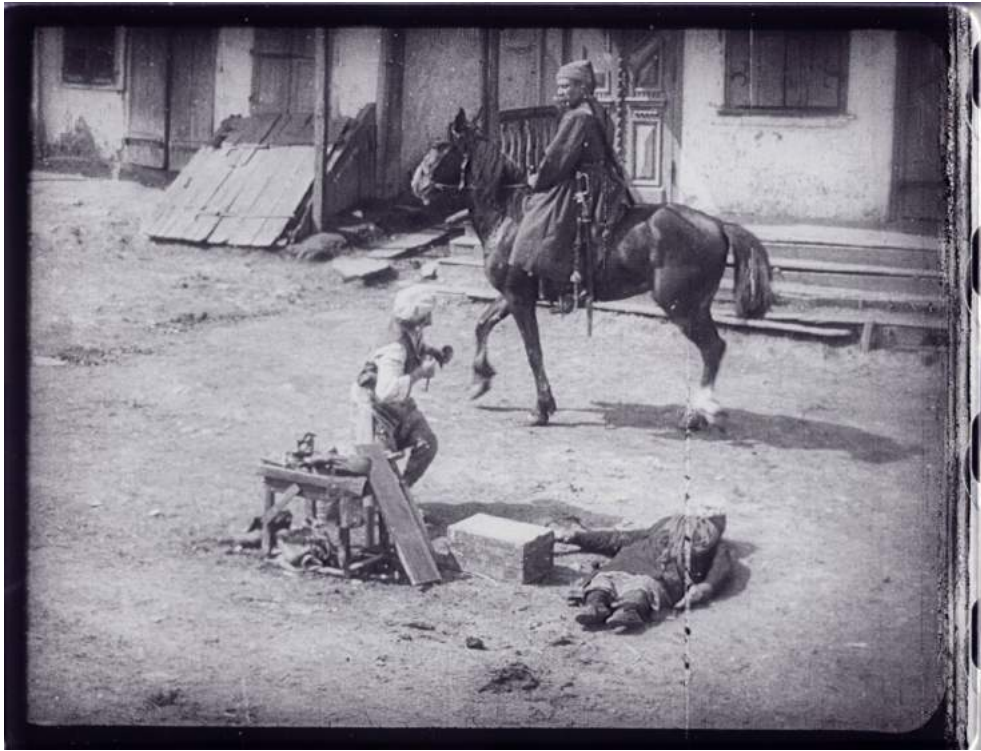
A shtetl is threatened by a band of insurgents supporting Petliura. The wealthiest of the townsfolk flee, evacuating their families and property, while the young people who are left behind try to arm themselves and seek out the “Red partisans.” A well-to-do Jew advises them against this, telling them to listen to the *rebbe* instead. He dwells on the danger in reaching out to the Reds; the

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<sup>37</sup> Especially Amvrosij Buchma (with several earlier Jewish roles to his credit) and Tamara Adelejm.

synagogue and religion are the only possible source of protection. In the street, an old woman brings a meal to her son who, lacking a shoemaker's shop, works outdoors. She sits in front of him, watching him eat, while a man warns of the imminent arrival of the Petliurists. Two cavalymen ride into the main street. Their faces appear in close-ups: Cossack moustaches and shaved heads with topknots, followed by the pacific face of the old woman as she sits knitting. She smiles at one of the Cossacks, then stops knitting, stands up, and tightens her headscarf in front of the camera. The following shot frames the Cossack's heel spurring the horse. The camera then seems to move backwards and finishes by narrowing its frame to the woman's knitting as it rolls in the dust. The son stands up, a laconic question conveying his sense of horror and revolt: "For what?" The Cossack gallops off, the picture of a threat against the entire shtetl. The locals panic, and the camera captures the confusion as if itself caught in the chaos. Only the young pro-Reds remain, while the shoemaker stands motionless beside his trampled mother's body.





*Fig. 13-14: "Piat nevest," Aleksandr Solovev, 1929 (Gosfilmofond)*

This powerful opening scene and the choice of framing and camera movements make the spectator identify with the victims, the frenetic camera mirroring the confusion of bodies. The rest of the film is marked by anguished waiting cut in multiple planes, diagonally or with high-angle shots, showing people alone or in small groups holed up in empty houses, attics, and huts. The sequence accomplishes a shift from the spatial continuity of outdoor scenes at the beginning to the unresolved fragmentation of dark interiors. The process is very effective in the way it transmits the sense of loss of the mainstays of life and the collapse of all that is familiar and reliable. A brief scene shows an old blind woman abandoned by her children when she proves unable to run for shelter. She faces the camera, her arms outstretched, begging not to be abandoned. There is no follow up detailing the old woman's fate, but also no grounds for harboring idyllic illusion.

The film's main character, Leiser (played by Amvrosij Buchma), a traditional long-bearded Jew, seeks to protect his daughter (Tamara Adelgeim); he seems to wield some authority in the community.



Fig. 15: *Piat nevest*, Aleksandr Solovev, 1929 (Gosfilmofond)

The Cossacks communicate to him their chief's demand: 5 virgins are to be handed over if the shtetl wants to be spared. After a long hesitation, the community finally agrees. The film then loses itself in heated debates over which young women are to be given up, the reactions of their parents (especially Leiser, whose daughter is to lead the group), and preparations for their departure. A young man wants to rebel, but is silenced by three rich Jews who advocate submissiveness: they choke him under their prayer shawls. The second murder of the movie is thus committed by the Jews themselves. The unmooring of the shtetl's values and, more generally, the collapse of a community confronted with the threat of violence is in perfect conformity with the Marxist scheme. This order of proceeding may well have been inspired by works of literature.<sup>38</sup> The scene of the meal in the ceremonies hall, in which the ataman and four of his

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<sup>38</sup> A noticeable parallel emerges with novels and short stories written by David Bergelson and Peretz Markish about the Russian Civil War and the pogroms; see D. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 122-125.

henchmen are brought together with the five young women decked out in bride's dress triggers wild camera sequences as the Cossacks give in to the effect of their drink. ("Their heads are turning," in a literal sense). Fortunately, a group of young people has managed to alert the Red partisans, who launch an operation to save the shtetl. The end, which most likely included the Reds' intervention and some fighting scenes, has been lost. The last surviving image shows the saviors arriving on galloping horses.

The film seems to have seamlessly passed censorship in Ukraine. A mixed review in the press complained that it fails to explain the social roots of antisemitism, falling into the trap of unrelieved sentimentality, as well as that the portrayal of the pogromists is too much of a caricature. The author of the review argued that the action overwhelms the analysis, with the most significant result being that part of the audience would be contented with a dose of strong emotion and proceed to go home on "an empty head." The film would thus fail in its role as part of the campaign against antisemitism. The review also noted the paradoxical effect of a poorly crafted scenario: on the one hand, prayer is shown to be bootless, and Leiser clearly becomes convinced that "God does not exist"; yet on the other hand, the partisans arrive at the very moment when this is made manifest, thus providing vibrant proof to the contrary.<sup>39</sup>

Problems arose at the RSFSR censorship committee meeting. A first series of reworkings was apparently ordered, but the archives only preserve minutes of the deliberations which took place after the second showing to the censorship committee.<sup>40</sup> Chief objections concerned the total absence of the Party and the Red Army (the partisans intervening only in the closing scenes like a *deus ex machina*); the fact that the shtetl is entirely inhabited by Jews, and the meager attention devoted to class conflict; the fact that the community gathers inside the synagogue; and, last but not least, the "erotic" element. The screenwriter and the director were called in to exculpate themselves. They explained that they had intentionally avoided showing the pogrom in progress: "We were told: no physical horror on the screen." We are given to understand that it was this requirement that had led them to develop the implausible plot of the five hostages. The authors also attempted to defend themselves against the charge of political feebleness: the division between the rich and the poor was made obvious, as was the complicity of the rich and religious authority, which made

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<sup>39</sup> V. Harchenko, "Pjat narechennyh," *Kino-gazeta*, Kiev, June 20, 1930, 6.

<sup>40</sup> This further development is based on the file held in Gosfilmofond (2-1-775).

them accept compromises; the poor youth, by contrast, sided spontaneously with the Reds. Finally, they explained that the synagogue was, in addition to its purely religious function, the place of meeting for the Jews as a community and that Leiser was not a rabbi, contrary to impressions the censorship committee had based solely on his long beard and broad-brimmed hat. All this notwithstanding, the authors had to come up with an alternative version, shortening several scenes and adding captions to others to prevent misleading interpretation of the kind undesirable from the censors' point of view. In the new version, Leiser, an authority in the shtetl, supporter of the youth, and father of one of the five brides, becomes a malicious character, under the sway of the authority of the rabbi and the community's wealthy: he is now cast as "socially hostile," as per the demand of the censorship commission. The film was detained in Moscow through late November 1930.

Only then were premiere screenings organized for the press, culminating a few days later in a ban on the film. An article co-signed by seven worker correspondents demanded its immediate withdrawal; the same demand was promptly echoed by two film critics.<sup>41</sup> The most sensitive point was the plight of the young women given up as the price for saving the shtetl: this served only to "distract the proletarian audience from the immediate objectives of class struggle." It had also obviously been dictated by the clear intention of "inciting erotic emotions, thus proving extremely harmful," the critics asserted. Other critics argued that "instead of fighting antisemitism," the film cultivates "an antisemitic state of mind."

These objections, published after the release of the film, give expression to the same thinking that, intentionally or not, also motivated the censors, shaping the way pogroms were represented on screen. As we have noted, the need to recast ethnic-cultural differences as social class distinctions in order to promote class solidarity, along with the must of casting the Red Army – and the Party – in the role of saviors leading the struggle against antisemitism, accounted for the direction moviemaking took. We might also note the explicit prohibition against showing violence on screen.

The sum total of all these contradictions made *Five Brides* the only film produced in the USSR to put Russian Civil War pogroms at the heart of its plot.

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<sup>41</sup> "Sabotage on the ideological front," claims one critic in *Kino* (Moscow), n°65-66, 27 November 1930: 2; see also L. Vaks, E. Erusa, "Oktrytoe pismo Feliksu Konu" in the same periodical.

Clearly enough, openly violent scenes were discarded; thus, the dead body of the old woman is only shown using a long shot. Prior to this, the close-up of her knitting is both a synecdoche and a symbol of the pogrom overall; it also avoids any open display of physical degradation. Similar tactfulness comes to the fore later on: the camera spins, leaving the audience to guess about the violence or the rape of the young women prior to the arrival of the famous “Red partisans” on the scene. To the best of my knowledge, this is also the only film that dramatizes, however indirectly, on screen the staggeringly widespread occurrence of rape during the Russian Civil War. Remarkable, too, is the attention devoted to scenes of panic, confusion, anguish, and civilian distress. This is no triviality in Soviet cinema, especially insofar as these images, in a move uncharacteristic of the period, imply no stigmatization. By contrast, figures of the frightened bourgeois fleeing the arrival of the Reds or hiding behind doors and windows in their posh homes are a *topos* of Russian Civil War moviemaking.

*Five Brides* was far from a sweeping success. This may be attributed to the need to fulfill a double injunction: to satisfy the requirements of the campaign against antisemitism, but without falling into the didacticism of obvious and explicit propaganda. VUFKU’s commercial orientation probably dictated the choice of subject and the melodramatic genre. Despite the mix and the unresolved tensions, the criticism voiced at the time that the film fostered antisemitism – the pretext for this being that the film develops an erotic dimension by tracing the lusting gazes the Cossacks direct toward young women – seems today very exaggerated. The position of the authors on this was unequivocal, made obvious by the clear empathizing of the camera with the victims as it translates their experience through its movements and oblique frames. The film is one of the rare attempts of the period to combine the achievements of the avant-garde in cinematography with a social concern extending beyond a narrow political program. At the same time, and speaking up in defense against their Muscovite censors’ objections, the authors respect the version of history dictated from above in the late 1920s: the shtetl’s Jewish bourgeois murder the young man who tries to intervene to save young women from pogromists; a complicity is clearly indicated between the two groups.

## Conclusion

Pre-1917 Russian cinema and Soviet cinema are alike in that both retain a marginal memory of pogroms; the anti-Jewish traces of the Russian Civil War are

even less evident. The filmmaking rather celebrates the most glorious episodes of a history presented with ever growing insistence in the mode of an epic saga. Pogroms against the Jews are relegated to a remote period to avoid any synchronization with the history of the revolutionary movement and the birth of the Soviet State. The only film to center its action on the pogroms was ultimately not distributed in the RSFSR, and its only surviving copy, incomplete, is the version released in Ukraine; this, incidentally, probably makes it closest to the original. For many years, the subject disappeared from screens. In the mid-1960s, Alexander Askoldov's attempt to adapt "In the City of Berdichev," a 1934 story by Vassili Grossman set during the Russian Civil War, led him to shift the plot's anti-Jewish violence to a different period: that of the Holocaust, a topic which had recently circulated in the news but was entirely taboo for cinematic representation. Askoldov's film was banned. Among the leading criticisms, the filmmaker was charged with connecting antisemitism and the origins of the Revolution.<sup>42</sup> Apart from the couplet ditty by Buba Kastorskij,<sup>43</sup> a cabaret artist in the *Elusive Avengers*, which was released in 1967, it was only after the end of the Soviet era that this subject regained legitimacy. The song by Kastorskii (words by Emil Radov, performed by Boris Sichin) enjoyed remarkable popularity. However, the performance was by a comic artist (comic, at least, on stage), and the tragic import of the subject was not seized upon by the public.

We should not for all that imagine an audience of cinemagoers and critics unanimous in their unquestioning acceptance of these avoidances, injunctions, cuts, and rewrites. A number of reports went so far as to note the sense of lacunae in the works. One critic was surprised that *Motele the Idealist* (released in Russia with the title *Eyes That Have Seen*) does not include a pogrom scene even though the subject is extensively discussed at the beginning of the movie.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> For the interdiction against *The Commissar* (Alexander Askoldov, 1967), see the documents collected by V. Fomin in *Polka. Dokumenty, svidetelstva, vospominaniia*, (Moscow: *Nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut kinoiskusstva*, 1992).

<sup>43</sup> Но я не плачу, никогда не плачу,  
Есть у меня другие интересы.  
И я шучу — я не могу иначе,  
Да потому, что родом из Одессы.  
Мой старший брат, чудака невероятный,  
Перед расстрелом пел такой куплет:  
«Ой, мама, мамочка, роди меня обратно», —  
Но был погром, и мамы год как нет.

<sup>44</sup> "Novaja filma ob imperialisticheskoi voine Glaza, kotorye videli," *Krasnaia zvezda*, December 24, 1929.

Another critic saw the Jewish bourgeois and Tsarist officers as utter caricature: “the bourgeois are obligatorily ugly, frightful, constantly gorging themselves. Officers rise and fall into decay. The falsity of such an interpretation is particularly striking in a film that is otherwise relatively subtle and ambitious.”<sup>45</sup>

All in all, pogrom scenes remained marginal. If, in the 1910s, they were an obvious transgression, after the Revolution they were confined to a very few films in total. From 1917 on, it became appropriate to decry violence against the Jews, but uncovered distance still separated denunciation from actual depiction. There were several reasons for this: first, the representation of physical degradation was widely regarded as inconvenient. For example, Nikolaj Semashko, the People’s Commissar for Health, spoke out against “blood on the screen” and against any cinematographic depiction of violent acts.<sup>46</sup> In addition, at a time made difficult by the revival of antisemitism, there was a special fear of spreading wrong ideas among uneducated audiences. These fears made the censors shorten or even cut pogrom scenes out entirely. Finally, in accord with the doxa which defined class differences as taking precedence over “national” distinctions, it was difficult – particularly on screen, and thus addressing larger audiences – to show that Jews had been attacked simply as Jews, whatever their social background. The story had to be adapted *a posteriori*: either by adding solidary Russians, or by showing that only the poor Jews had been victims of antisemitism. Finally, it was better to evoke a bygone past, and to portray action set in the context of the repression of the revolutionary movement before 1917. Arguably, a canvas of this kind could hardly help in preventing the spread of antisemitism, of which Soviet Jewish workers and craftsmen were still the victims in the 1920s.

The cinematographic medium is distinguished from literature and works for the theater written in the USSR, especially in Yiddish, insofar as both these latter were intended for a more immediately concerned public. Both literature and theater seem to have been less of a concern for the censors. The evocation of pogroms, especially those of the Russian Civil War, seems to have met with no solid obstacles. Besides, raw as some of the literary descriptions are, it can be argued that their suggestive potential was judged less powerful than that of the visual on screen.

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<sup>45</sup> *Radio vecher* (Kharkov, December 15, 1928).

<sup>46</sup> In his article “Blood on the screen” (“*Krov na ekrane*,” *Sovetskii ekran*, 32, August 9, 1927: 5), his main argument is that such nervous excitation is typical of Western cinema and what the blasé bourgeois spectator needed, and that as a consequence there was no room for it in Soviet cinema.

In cinematography, Ukrainian censorship appears to have been much more permissive than censors in the RSFSR. Because the references were obvious and the events in question much more prominent in people's minds in Ukraine, evoking them was likely thought of as less problematic. In addition to the differences in geography, the censors were never a unanimous entity or a monolithic armed extension of a homogeneous system. The documents we have studied actually show the opposite to have been the case. In fact, censors (at least those in the RSFSR) on several occasions summoned outside experts to judge films. The OGPU was most probably called in because of their expertise in issues in the news: it was the OGPU that had first drawn attention to the resurgence of antisemitic outbreaks. Presumably, members of the OGPU were considered to be more familiar with the popular state of mind than simple censors or producers. They were the ones to raise the question about the dangerousness of certain visual images. Parallel to this, experts from the Jewish Section of the Central Committee were thoroughly knowledgeable about the history of the Jews of Eastern Europe and were thus chosen to provide political guidance most fitting for the Jewish mindset. It should come as no surprise that the views espoused by these different bodies' members were dissimilar, as were the responses of the viewers: between impassivity and expressive overflow, between incomprehension and painful memory were a gamut of emotions that the historian continues to struggle to document. The cinema as a product of mass culture would soon aim to teach both the Jewish and the non-Jewish public to "see reality through Soviet glasses,"<sup>47</sup> meaning a reality much more appealing than the one accessed by Yiddish and Hebrew readers through literary works or memory. The screen had now been mobilized to show the successful integration of Jews into Soviet society and the magnificent opportunities this provided them with for climbing the social ladder and leading the most fulfilled kind of life.

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<sup>47</sup> Anna Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher: Jewish Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 182.

Moscow, 2018). Valerie Pozner is the author of numerous publications in French, English, Russian, and German on the political, economic, and institutional aspects of Soviet cinema and its esthetics. She is also the translator and editor in French of theoretical works by Viktor Shklovsky, the Russian Formalists, Lev Kuleshov, and Ilya Ehrenburg.

**Keywords:** Soviet film history, Russian-Jewish Cinema, Film Censorship, Visual Representation of Pogroms, *Comrade Abram*

**How to quote this article:**

Valérie Pozner, “Pogroms on Screen: Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Anti-Jewish Violence and the Limits of Representation”, in *The Pogroms of the Russian Civil War at 100: New Trends, New Sources*, eds. Elissa Bemporad, Thomas Chopard, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, n. 15 August 2019  
*url:* [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=416](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=416)

**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**

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## 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.<sup>1</sup>*

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 (*Ukrains'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<sup>2</sup>; there is good reason to see these figures as unrealistically low.<sup>3</sup> 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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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Saul S. Friedman, *Pogromchik: The Assassination of Simon Petlura*, (New York: Hart Publishing Company, 1976), 71.

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

<sup>3</sup> Oleg V. Budnitskii, *Rossiiskie evrei mezhdru krasnymi i belymi*, (Moscow: Rosspen, 2006), 276.

Ierusalymka, Vinnytsia’s historical Jewish quarter, further rubbed salt in the wounds.<sup>4</sup>

The move in Vinnytsia followed a two-and-a-half-year campaign whereby the Ukrainian state had intensively promoted 20<sup>th</sup>-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 20<sup>th</sup> century.” The list includes the UNR. The new law prohibits insults to the independence fighters’ memory or the memory of their cause, Ukrainian independence.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion, see Mykhailo Gaukhman, “Pytannia Symona Peltiury. Ch. 1: suchasnyi rezonans i natsional’ni pozytsii,” *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).

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

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the various positions, see *Strasti za Banderoruu*, eds. Tarik Cyril Amar, Ihor Balyns’kyi, Iaroslav Hrytsak, (Kyiv: Hrani-T, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> 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 polehlykh u boiu pid Krutamy*,” available at: <http://www.memory.gov.ua/news/bii-za-maibutne-ukraini-29-sichnya-den-pam-yati-poleglykh-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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> Since then, a number of specialists in Jewish history have

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

<sup>9</sup> Volodymyr Serhiichuk, *Symon Petliura i ievreistvo*, (Kyiv: PP Serhiichuk M.I., 2006), 23.

<sup>10</sup> Hunczak, "Reappraisal," 171–172; Serhiichuk, *Symon Petliura*, 41–43.

<sup>11</sup> Serhiichuk, *Symon Petliura*, 47.

<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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 Szajkowski and Friedman quote a telegram Petliura supposedly sent to Otaman Semesenko, giving the commander a free hand in Proskuriv<sup>15</sup>; however, no such document has been shown to exist. Friedman's reference to a file in the Tcherikower archive is false.<sup>16</sup>

The two best studies of the issue – by Henry Abramson<sup>17</sup> and Serhii Yekelchuk<sup>18</sup> – 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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<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> Szajkowski, "Reappraisal"

<sup>15</sup> Friedman, *Pogromchik*, 160, Szajkowski, "Reappraisal" 194.

<sup>16</sup> On the document see Abramson, *Prayer*, 137, 211-212.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Serhii Iekelchuk, "Trahichna storinka Ukraïns'koï revoliutsii: Symon Petliura ta Ievreis'ki pogrom v Ukraïni (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.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> Arguably, Yekelchyk provides more evidence of the UNR leadership's good intentions than of their efficacy in combatting the pogroms.<sup>22</sup>

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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<sup>19</sup> Abramson, *Prayer*, 109 ff.

<sup>20</sup> Iekelchyk, “*Trahichna*,” 191-194.

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

<sup>22</sup> 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=IWAaj-j9TSM&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.<sup>23</sup>

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.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Gilley, "Beyond Petliura," 45–61.

<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

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.

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<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

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*<sup>27</sup> and *Pohromy v Ukraïni*.<sup>28</sup> The editor of the latter is Volodymyr 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

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<sup>26</sup> 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 Yekelchuk, “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).

<sup>27</sup> *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).

<sup>28</sup> *Pohromy v Ukraïni: 1914-1920. Shtuchnykh stereotypiv do hirkoi pravdy, prykhovuvanoi 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.<sup>29</sup> 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 (*Ukrains'ka sotsiial-demokratychna robotychna partiia*) and the Ukrainian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries (*Ukrains'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”<sup>30</sup>; when the UNR came to power again at the end of 1918, it reaffirmed this.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> They did not only do so for ideological or humanitarian reasons: discussions in the Cabinet of Ministers also

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<sup>29</sup> 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).

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Abramson, *Prayer*, 60.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>32</sup> Gilley, “Beyond Petliura,” 50-51.

reveal that they were worried about the UNR's image abroad.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup>

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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

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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<sup>33</sup> *Pohromy v Ukraïny*, 340-341.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 187, 194-195, 268, 271, 275, 308, 309, 311-312, 342-243.

<sup>35</sup> Gilley, "Beyond Petliura," 48-50.

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

<sup>37</sup> Gilley, "Beyond Petliura," 50.

claimed some 1,500 lives and was probably the worst single episode of antisemitic violence committed by UNR troops.<sup>38</sup> 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)<sup>39</sup> and opposing Ukrainian statehood.<sup>40</sup> 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,<sup>41</sup> while Red Cross reports identify the same commandant as one of the chief perpetrators.<sup>42</sup> 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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<sup>38</sup> *Pohromy v Ukrany*, 206.

<sup>39</sup> 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.

<sup>40</sup> *Pohromy v Ukraïny*, 208.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 465-466.

<sup>42</sup> *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,<sup>43</sup> give much higher figures. The killing stopped only when Galician troops arrived in the town.<sup>44</sup> 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

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

<sup>44</sup> *Pohromy v Ukraïni*, 202-208.

perfidious activity. They had better quit Ukrainian territory voluntarily, and the sooner, the better.<sup>45</sup>

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.<sup>46</sup> 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.<sup>47</sup> 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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<sup>45</sup> 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.

<sup>46</sup> *Ukraïns’kyi natsional’no vyzvol’nyi rukh. Berezen’-lystopad 1917 roku. Dokumenty i materialy* (Kyiv: Olena Teliha, 2003), 155.

<sup>47</sup> “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,<sup>48</sup> 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-Bronshsteins.”<sup>49</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup> 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

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<sup>48</sup> *Pohromy v Ukraïni*, 308.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Gilley, “Beyond Petliura,” 52-53.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-55.

<sup>51</sup> *Kniga pogromov*, 55-58, 63-64.

pogroms, but these comprised only 3% of the total perpetrated by soldiers affiliated with the UNR.<sup>52</sup>

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.<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Abramson, *Prayer*, 117.

<sup>53</sup> *Pohromy v Ukraïny*, 465-466.

<sup>54</sup> *Kniga pogromov*, 153-155.

<sup>55</sup> 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.<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup> 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.”<sup>58</sup> 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

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<sup>56</sup> Friedman, *Pogromchik*, 157-158.

<sup>57</sup> *Kniga pogromov*, 91; “Pogroms in the Ukraine,” 205.

<sup>58</sup> *Kniga pogromov*, 85.

intended to improve the UNR's image abroad.<sup>59</sup> 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.<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup> In 1919, Petliura signed five resolutions assigning funds to help pogrom victims<sup>63</sup>

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.<sup>64</sup>

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. Vynnychenko 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

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<sup>59</sup> Friedman, *Pogromchik*, 251; Khiterer, *Jewish Pogroms*, 33.

<sup>60</sup> Iekelchyk, "Trahichna," 169-170.

<sup>61</sup> *Pohromy v Ukraïni*, 198.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 310-311.

<sup>63</sup> Iekelchyk, "Trahichna," 196-197.

<sup>64</sup> *Pohromy v Ukraïni*, 316-317.

fate.<sup>65</sup> 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.<sup>66</sup> 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.<sup>67</sup>

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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<sup>65</sup> Vynnychenko, *Vidrodzhennia natsii*, Vol. III (Kyiv and Vienna: Nova Doba, 1920; repr. Kyiv: Polityvydav Ukrainy, 1990), 187-188.

<sup>66</sup> *Pogroms in the Ukraine*, 169-170.

<sup>67</sup> *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'iev, 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.<sup>68</sup>

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.<sup>69</sup> 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*<sup>70</sup> and peasant partisans<sup>71</sup> 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.<sup>72</sup> Some writers in contemporary Ukraine continue to follow this approach.<sup>73</sup> 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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<sup>68</sup> 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.

<sup>69</sup> Abramson, *Prayer*, 116-117.

<sup>70</sup> Chopard, *Le Martyre*, 91.

<sup>71</sup> 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.

<sup>72</sup> 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.

<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup> While many professional Ukrainian historians view Koval’s work critically,<sup>75</sup> 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.”<sup>76</sup> 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),<sup>77</sup> the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (*Ukrains’kyi Instytut Natsional’noi 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.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, in the new nationalist narrative, the peasant insurgents

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<sup>74</sup> 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.

<sup>75</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>78</sup> See <http://www.memory.gov.ua/methodicmaterial/metodichni-rekomendatsii-do-100-richchya-ukrainskoi-revolutsii-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.<sup>79</sup> 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.<sup>80</sup>

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

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<sup>79</sup> Yekelchuk, "Bands," 121.

<sup>80</sup> 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.<sup>81</sup> 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!"<sup>82</sup> 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.<sup>83</sup> 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.<sup>84</sup> Struk's pamphlets described Bolshevik rule as a "Jewish-Muscovite regime."<sup>85</sup> 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."<sup>86</sup> Consequently, for Zelenyi, the Jewish population as a whole were suspicious. In his orders issued after taking Rzhyshev 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.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Gilley, "Anti-Bolshevik Risings," III-116.

<sup>82</sup> 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.

<sup>83</sup> 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.

<sup>84</sup> 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.

<sup>85</sup> See his proclamation to the Peasants of Kyiv, f. 1 o 18 spr. 63 ark. 1, TsDAHO.

<sup>86</sup> Iaka syl'na armiiia otamana Zelenoho, f. 1, o 18, spr. 63, ark. 30, TsDAHO.

<sup>87</sup> Order No.1 to the Garrison of Rzhyshev, 30 June 1919, 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.<sup>88</sup> 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.<sup>89</sup> 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

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<sup>88</sup> 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.

<sup>89</sup> 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.<sup>90</sup> 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.<sup>91</sup> 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.<sup>92</sup> Symon Petliura signed an order granting his widow a pension in recognition of his “great services to Ukraine.”<sup>93</sup> 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!”<sup>94</sup>

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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<sup>90</sup> 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).

<sup>91</sup> Abramson, *Prayer*, 117.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Friedman, *Pogromchik*, 274.

<sup>93</sup> Resolution of the Council of People’s Ministers, October 12, 1919, f. 1078 o 2 spr. 19 ark. 7, TsDAVO.

<sup>94</sup> 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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**Keywords:** Pogroms, Ukrainian Nationalism, Civil War, Canard of Judeo-Bolshevism, History Policy

**How to quote this article:**

Christopher Gilley, "*Beat the Jews, Save...Ukraine: Antisemitic Violence and Ukrainian State Building Projects 1918-1920*," in *The Pogroms of the Russian Civil War at 100: New Trends, New Sources*, eds. Elissa Bemporad, Thomas Chopard, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, n. 15 August 2019  
*url:* [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=411](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=411)

## Ukrainian Neighbors: Pogroms and Extermination in Ukraine 1919-1920

by Thomas Chopard

### Abstract

*This article focuses on the cases of extermination of entire Jewish communities during the civil war in Ukraine. The author concludes that while anti-Bolshevik armies carried out mass-scale massacres, the most radical pogroms were perpetrated by neighbors: local non-Jews against their Jewish neighbors, foreshadowing the pogroms of summer 1941. The article emphasizes two critical aspects of these exterminations: the way a small group of young radical anti-Bolshevik insurgents would mobilize the Christian population as a whole; and the recent experiences of revolution, civil war, and brutal Soviet occupation, which together comprised the local context leading to the exterminations. These extreme cases of anti-Jewish violence are put in the broader context of ethnic cleansings perpetrated in various ways by neighbors and anti-Bolshevik partisans during the civil war in Ukraine.*

### Introduction

### A Cycle of Violence

### Destruction

### Ethnic Cleansing

### Conclusion

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## Introduction

On June 27, 1920, the local police, or “militia,” was called in when a disturbance broke out in the marketplace in Belaya Tserkov in Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> Two pogrom survivors, Iel Gershman and Lev Volf, had recognized a “bandit from the town of Tetiev”; the ensuing commotion led to the arrest of Vasili Perevalov, identified as a participant in the anti-Bolshevik insurrection around Tetiev. The militia opened an investigation.<sup>2</sup> In the course of this, the two survivors related how they had managed to escape by hiding in an attic, from where they witnessed the now apprehended Perevalov taking part in the murder of their families and the plundering of their home. The investigation subsequently conducted by the authorities was concerned less with prosecuting a pogromist than with punishing an anti-Bolshevik partisan from the area of Tetiev, a town in the region to the south of Kiev. The documents preserved as part of the case file trace the process whereby different Soviet institutions were set in motion to confirm the guilt of the alleged perpetrator. Inquiries, interrogations, and indictments followed, initiated by the Belaya Tserkov militia and then taken up by the *uezd* Revolutionary Committee, the local municipal authority, and finally the Kiev *gubernia* Cheka. The Cheka, for its part, collected testimony from the Tetiev cooperatives union, the *Kombed*, and the Party. Some statements insisted on the primacy of the anti-Soviet – while others stressed the antisemitic – aims of the insurgents. As far as the Soviet institutions were concerned, pogrom victims served a specific purpose: their testimony provided the framework for the project of identifying anti-Bolshevik insurgents then in hiding among the populace. What has reached us of the testimony of the victims is both preserved and shaped – and thus camouflaged – by these institutional objectives; the victims’ voices are

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This work was supported by a postdoctoral fellowship in Jewish studies, granted by the Institute of Historical Research, University of London. I am very grateful to the IHR for welcoming me and for helping me make this research possible.

<sup>1</sup> This article draws primarily on Russian-language sources; it correspondingly makes extensive use of the Russian form of local place names, thus reflecting the mark left by centuries of Russian rule on the history – and the map – of Ukraine.

<sup>2</sup> YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Tcherikower Archives (RG 80-89), 5456-5457 (now YIVO, TA, 5456-5457), Note from the militia of Belaya Tserkov, in the Kiev *gubernia* Cheka investigation records pertaining to insurgents in the Tetiev vicinity. (The Tcherikower Archives contain documents collected by the pan-Ukrainian Relief Committee for Pogrom Victims (*Evobkom*). The *Evobkom* partnered with the Soviet authorities for a time to provide victim relief and to identify pogromists. Occasionally supplying documents to the authorities, *Evobkom* at times also received documentation on the pogroms, as was the case with these Cheka files. Cheka files kept in the Tcherikower Archives thus pertain to pogromist cases only.)

muffled by the judicial process. A brief note penned by the Tetiev Communist Party Committee chairman conveys a sense of the magnitude of the destruction that ravaged the town: the accused “took part in ongoing counterrevolutionary insurrections against the Soviet regime, leading to the loss of property and the murder of Soviet officials and the Jewish population. During one pogrom, five thousand men, women, and children were slaughtered.”<sup>3</sup>

With the estimated number of victims as high as 5,000, although documented sources suggest that the actual number was closer to 4,500, the Tetiev pogrom of March 1920 is thus the deadliest outbreak of anti-Jewish violence to have taken place during the civil war which followed the 1917 revolution in the former Russian Empire. The case of Tetiev is exceptional, even for this period, which also saw history’s bloodiest anti-Jewish persecution prior to the Holocaust. Tetiev’s Jewish quarter was burned in its entirety, including the synagogue and houses of worship and study, where hundreds of people had sought refuge. Some 23,000 Jews had been recorded as residing in the *rayon*, or vicinity, of Tetiev as per the imperial census of 1897; only 242 Jewish residents were documented in 1926. With no Jews found in a town of 10,000 where the Jewish population had previously been estimated at 6,000, a Joint Distribution Committee report sums up the Tetiev situation in this way: “locality ruined.”<sup>4</sup> The March 1920 pogrom thus reaches far beyond the notional extent of a large-scale massacre; it marks the extermination of Tetiev’s entire Jewish population.

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<sup>3</sup> YIVO, TA, 5442.

<sup>4</sup> Archives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, New York 1921-1932, 4/30/4/498 (now AJJDC, NY192132, 4/30/4/498), “Information regarding the population of the Kiev gubernia for 1917, 1920 and 1923.”

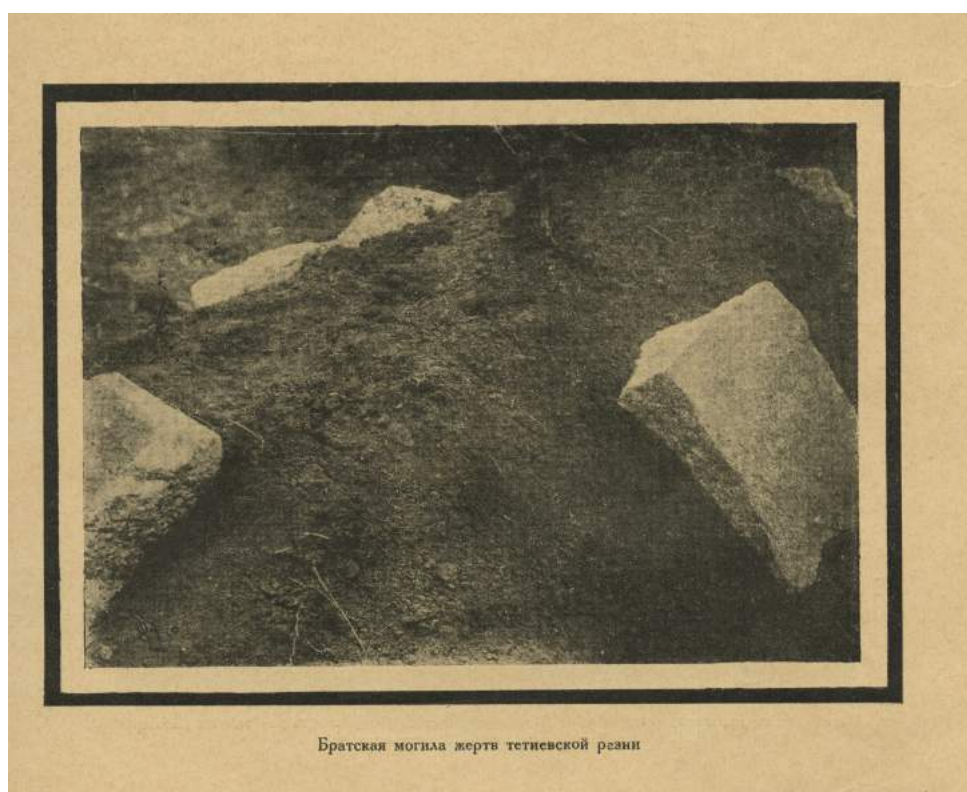


Fig. 1: Tetiev, Mass grave. In Z. S. Ostrovskii, *Evreiskie pogromy, 1918-1921*, (Moscow: Shkola i kniga 1926), 131. Courtesy of the Blavatnik Archive, New York.

In the case of other towns, a similar distinction needs to be drawn between violence aimed at extermination and pogroms: this is less a reflection of the number of victims the outbreaks claimed than of the radical nature of their base objectives. Premeditated and systematic in their approach, organized attacks and mass killings went beyond actively persecuting a minority population: their aim was total extermination, or putting an end to the life of every single Jew insofar as the individual was Jewish. Cases of outbreaks of this kind were sometimes lost track of in the chaos of the Russian Civil War and anti-Jewish violence in Ukraine, the records detailing them inserted among the swathes of documentation which aid committees were producing in the drawn-out attempt to provide essential victim relief. The predicament of the town of Lebedin is a case in point, where sixty resident families were documented in 1919, with virtually all of their able-bodied workers employed at the local sugar refinery. The testimony of a sole witness to the pogrom survives. The final and decisive pogrom took place following several disparate outbreaks of violence, which had already induced many

of the Jewish residents to leave the town. According to the surviving account, the exterminatory finale began simultaneously at the refinery and in the town square on the May 5, 1919:

...the pogrom had been organized not by Grigoriev's gangs, but by unidentified local bandits incited by the Lebedin intelligentsia.

On Monday morning, bandits burst into the refinery, driving out all Jewish workers, whose places were immediately taken by Christians. Shooting began in the market square in the city center, leaving 24 Jews dead. There were also instances of torture and atrocities. [...] There is not a single Jew in Lebedin today. [Former] Jewish homes stand perfectly vacant. Some have been torched.<sup>5</sup>

Small towns of a few dozen to a few hundred Jewish residents fell victim to coordinated attacks by peasants from nearby areas. A representative from the Relief Committee for Pogrom Victims elaborates on this in his report. While according to documentary evidence, Grigoriev affiliates were the initiators of the violence in the region, systematic extermination was in large part the work of local peasants. This essential point bears stressing: extermination was systematically perpetrated by erstwhile neighbors who had turned against the Jewish population in their own localities.

In *Neighbors*, Jan Gross details the July 10, 1941, extermination of the Jews of the Polish town of Jedwabne. The study has sparked a radical shift in perspective on popular and local participation in anti-Jewish violence.<sup>6</sup> Less widely discussed, but no less ground-breaking, is the growing body of research on the critical period between 1939-41 in Eastern Europe. Outbreaks of violence by the locals against the Jews occurred in all regions which had been annexed by the Soviet Union, and then occupied by Nazi Germany and its allies; no area formed an exception. Wendy Lower's work on Western Ukraine and Vladimir Solonari's on the Ukrainian regions of Bukovina and Bessarabia, which had been annexed by Romania, have traced the unfolding of events in a number of localities, where the same finale as in Jedwabne – total destruction – followed.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> State Archives of the Kiev Oblast, fond 3050, Relief Committee for Pogrom Victims, opus 1, spr. 213, ark. 14 (now DAKO R-3050/1/213/14).

<sup>6</sup> Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Vladimir Solonari, "Patterns of Violence. The Local Population and the Mass Murder of Jews in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, July-August 1941," *Kritika*, 8/4 (fall 2007): 749-787; Wendy

As such, the phenomenon of anti-Jewish violence aimed at the complete eradication of communities was not new in the years immediately preceding the beginning of WWII. As has already been mentioned, 1919-20 had seen similarly comprehensive annihilation of entire Jewish communities take place in Ukraine in the course of the Civil War. The period 1919-20 as well as the year 1941 were times marked by high levels of political instability, which provided the immediate momentum for the antisemitic focus of the violence. As noted, in 1941, pogroms spread across lands which had been annexed by the Soviet Union as per the terms of the German-Soviet pact. Earlier, during the Civil War, with military defeats becoming a constant of daily life and vast territories changing hands frequently, the Christian populace seized the occasion granted by years of political instability to undermine the very existence of the Jewish minority. Relationships among long-time neighbors who had, with varying degrees of stability, coexisted in mutual proximity for centuries, maintaining their distinctness from each other in essential aspects of religion and lifestyle and remaining mutually dependent in others, were abrogated without warning.

In *Neighbors*, Gross traces in vivid detail the way one “half of the population of a small Eastern European town murdered the other half;”<sup>8</sup> an issue left unaddressed is exactly what may have sparked this off. While the pogromists’ motives are generally (but not definitively) taken to be of the familiar age-old antisemitic kind, many questions remain; especially unclear are the causes which made entire groups rise up to wreak irreversible destruction upon the Jews in their midst, and the unanimity and speed with which they did so.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, in the present study I will work to shift the focus from the attacks mounted to achieve total annihilation to the process which had led to the sudden and fundamental change in attitude, putting an end to centuries of coexistence. I will discuss Tetiev in some detail, as well as consider at some length the September 1919 Germanovka pogrom, which resulted in the obliteration of the 250 Jews remaining in this small town near Kiev until that time. In many ways, the plight of Germanovka is reminiscent of other exterminations in Ukraine during the Civil War, which target small rural communities. After tracing the process which culminated in exterminatory violence against the Jews, I will consider the manner in which the systematic

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Lower, “Pogroms, Mob Violence and Genocide in Western Ukraine, Summer 1941: Varied Histories, Explanation and Comparisons,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 13/3 (2011): 217-246; Jeffrey S. Kopstein, Jason Wittenberg, *Intimate Violence. Anti-Jewish Pogroms on the Eve of the Holocaust*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Gross, *Neighbors*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> This question has been addressed in a special issue of *Slavic Review* 61/3 (fall 2002).

attacks formed part of a larger movement of ethnic re-founding. This was spearheaded by the peasant insurrections then spreading across Ukraine; in many cases, the movement aimed to terrorize or expel Jews from the Ukrainian countryside. Outstanding in its brutality, the sweep of exterminatory violence also appears to have been an extreme manifestation of an incipient campaign of ethnic cleansing.<sup>10</sup>

### A Cycle of Violence

The exterminatory pogroms of 1919-20 did not commence *ex nihilo*. They are better conceptualized as the culmination of a more encompassing cycle of violence initially triggered by military developments in the field along with the tensions which these developments had aggravated. On each occasion, the extermination was preceded by pogroms of varying intensity in the areas in question. The first of a series of pogroms in the same area might be read as a warning addressed to the Jewish population. In Germanovka, the region's peasant insurgents operating under Ataman Zelenyi harassed local Jews beginning in the spring of 1919. Germanovka's 800 Jewish residents were the victims of several pogroms; the initial outbreak in the spring was limited to brutalizing and robbing 42 Jews, before the first mass killing took place at the beginning of August, ordered and directed by Ataman Diakov, a Germanovka native.<sup>11</sup> On August 5, Diakov's insurgents murdered 114 Jews, looting their property; the victims had all previously lived side by side with the perpetrators.<sup>12</sup> More violence followed on August 28:

They went from home to home, brandishing their sabres and slicing people through without distinction: men, women, even young children.

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<sup>10</sup> The term "ethnic cleansing" was coined in reference to the process of mass deportation and murder carried out in contested territories in former Yugoslavia. Ethnic cleansing is defined by the UN as "a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas." The term has been used retrospectively in the social sciences since the 1990s with the objective of reconsidering approaches to mass violence. See, for example: Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/167/94 and DAKO R-3050/1/210/65.

<sup>12</sup> YIVO, TA, 21363.

Many were decapitated. The massacre went on for four days. Between 120 and 150 people were left dead. Some Jewish homes were burned.<sup>13</sup>

130 names appear in a list of the murdered.<sup>14</sup> Yet however violent, the Germanovka massacre does not stand out from among the hundreds of other anti-Jewish attacks perpetrated in Ukraine. A non-negligible aim of the continued harassment and inordinate brutality was to hasten the departure of the Jews remaining alive, thus securing the insurgents' hold over territory they would sporadically seize control of in the course of the Civil War. Pogroms became increasingly violent and bloody; survivors had the opportunity to hasten away, abandoning whatever was left of their property. Events appeared to be orchestrated as if to make each pogrom and manifestation of anti-Jewish violence sound out a warning; a clear message was being conveyed, increasingly insistent.

In Tetiev as elsewhere, anti-Bolshevik White and Ukrainian nationalist army units instigated a *crescendo* of violence.<sup>15</sup> A prerequisite for this was ensuring the locals' active involvement in large-scale "military pogroms," to use Eric Lohr's term. "Bandits" from the countryside joined military men in uniform in attacking the Jews, thus entangling the broad persecution carried out by anti-Bolshevik armies with local issues. Pogroms of considerable magnitude provided an opportunity for peasants eager to get rid of "their" Jews without needing to shoulder responsibility for the violence. When army units entered a town or a rural settlement, the question of the fate of local Jews' fate would occasionally be raised explicitly in the local assembly, as was the case in Petrovichi, near Chernobyl, north of Kiev:

The older peasants, who had often been in Jewish homes and had grown up side by side with Jews, said that the village should not take such a sin upon itself. They advised simply expelling the Jews from the village; let their fate overtake them at a distance, out of the peasants' sight. But the younger peasants insisted that now was a time of opportunity, that there was no hesitating nor allowing the Jews to escape. Jews throughout

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<sup>13</sup> Л.Б. Милякова, *Книга погромов. Погромы на Украине, в Белоруссии и европейской части России в период Гражданской войны, 1918-1922 гг. Сборник документов*, (Moscow, РОССПЭН, 2006) (now Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*), 260.

<sup>14</sup> YIVO, TA, 23275-23278.

<sup>15</sup> Report on the pogroms perpetrated in Tetiev in November and December 1919, transmitted by the *Poalei Tzion*, DAKO R-3050/1/245/204.

Ukraine were now being drowned and killed, and Petrovichi must not stand back.<sup>16</sup>

For the locals, pogroms served both as a way to advance their interests in the larger conflicts then sweeping across Ukraine – and as a means of reshaping the social makeup of their immediate vicinity. Local opportunism comes especially to the fore in the way residents attempted to harness the momentum of military campaigns in the smaller towns and villages. The nearly daily recurrence of anti-Jewish violence over an extended period of time in the course of the war was instrumental in completing some villages’ ethnic cleansing, whereas endemic violence had forced only some of the Jews to flee. Thus “in the Borzna *uezd*, the wild orgy of the Volunteer Army went on unchecked [...] In the village of Prokhorov, of the 14 [Jews] remaining after the others fled... among them elderly people and children, 13 were brutally murdered, the surviving woman taken.”<sup>17</sup> The village peasants’ readiness to join in the extermination, and their active part in it once it had begun, are both emphasized in the *Evobkom* report; this is in marked contrast to nearby rural localities where only a small number of victims was documented. The same pattern went on record with the entry of Ukrainian nationalist troops into small towns and rural areas. Following the infamous Proskurov pogrom of February 1919, a survivor told a Red Cross representative:

When our village [the hamlet of Grinovets-Lesovye on the outskirts of Proskurov] heard about the massacre in Proskurov, young local peasants got going to wipe out the Jews of the area. They sent a delegation to the city. Three of them went to Proskurov, bringing back three armed Haidamaks. [...] They started to break into homes and to search for Jews.

<sup>18</sup>

Soldiers in uniform pillaged and beat the thirty-three Jews herded into the village square. Local peasants, demanding more than this, finally set about the mass execution themselves. “The murder of the detained Jews,” the account states, “purportedly took place somewhere outside the village.” As in Petrovichi, the older peasants refused to take part in the massacre, while the younger generation would accept no delay and clamored for immediate action. Remarkably, pressed to the limit, the peasants ultimately refused, *in extremis*, to exterminate their

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<sup>16</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, 96.

<sup>17</sup> YIVO, TA, 18284 verso (awkward syntax in the original has been modified).

<sup>18</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/237/18-18ob, Proskurov pogrom victim testimony.

neighbors. The surviving account does not indicate just what made the locals recoil from putting their plan into action, but it is clear that the mass killing in Proskurov had served as a source of inspiration and encouragement for the entire episode. In the end, the entire Jewish population of Grinovets-Lesovye was expelled to Proskurov, where they were escorted by armed troops. En route, the expellees were again robbed and beaten by Haidamaks. Released the next morning, all were intent on never returning to their native village, which had thus completed its process of ethnic homogenization.

Whether perpetrated by troops or by local peasants, the pogroms all underscore the extreme vulnerability of the Jewish communities in these areas. Each of the exterminations taking place during the Civil War and in 1941 occurred in a setting of profound social and political instability, if not outright anomy. Despite the recurrent attempts to sovietize Ukraine, Tetiev in 1920 was still largely inaccessible to the Soviet authorities. As far as officials of the Ukrainian People's Republic were concerned, it had become intractable back in October 1919.<sup>19</sup> Coming in the wake of the events of 1919, the re-entrenchment of Soviet rule in early 1920 proved a failure. A report compiled by the Soviet cadre responsible for food supplies in the *uezd* of Tarashcha in March 1920, a few days prior to the outbreak of the exterminatory violence against the area's Jews, notes the weakness of "the organized State apparatus" and the fact that relations with the locals are limited to armed expeditions.<sup>20</sup> Another report notes the discontinuance of relations between the state and local peasantry after months of tensions and confrontation: "Of bread, they give none; of money, they want none."<sup>21</sup> The civil war and peasant insurrections confined activity by the authorities to the major cities of Ukraine. With intermittent displays of distrust, superficial accommodating gestures, and open resistance, the countryside was beyond state reach. In Tetiev as in other towns, the authorities were, for all intents and purposes, at the mercy of the insurgents. The commandant of the Tetiev militia, which was formed in early 1920, had participated in the December 1919 pogrom. In Germanovka, one of the leaders of the persecution against the Jews was, as we learn from his interrogation conducted by the Cheka, "the head of the Germanovka Revolutionary Committee

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<sup>19</sup> *Архів Української Народної Республіки Міністрство Внутрішніх Справ Справоздання Губерніальних Старост і Комісарів (1918-1920)*, (Київ: Інститут української археографії та джерелознавства ім. М. С. Грушевського, 2017), 144.

<sup>20</sup> YIVO, TA, 3899-3902, Food Supply Commission Controller's report on the Tarashcha *uezd* for the period February 14-March 11, 1920.

<sup>21</sup> YIVO, TA, 3921, Food Supply Committee for the Kiev region report on the Tarashcha *uezd*.

at Eastertime in 1919.”<sup>22</sup> This allowed the area’s peasants to go on pillaging and harassing the Jews with impunity:

There was no one in charge in the town. The thugs broke into peoples’ homes at night, robbing and pillaging. The Jews crouched hiding in their “mouse holes,” in attics, cellars, and all kinds of secret hideouts, listening in terror to the sound of the pillage and afraid to be caught sight of.<sup>23</sup>

The atmosphere of overall lawlessness and impunity was taken advantage of by more than one kind of group. In addition to the armed attackers carrying out the pogroms, non-fighting locals sprinted at the opportunity to extract money from the Jews. Following one “typical pogrom” – probably one perpetrated by the Ukrainian nationalists or the Whites in late 1919 – a survivor from Tetiev recounted how he, along with his mother, hid from the Cossacks in the bushes. A “peasant, who was working nearby, was ready to pick us up.” The mother had to bribe the man not to alert the soldiers nearby.<sup>24</sup> Opportunism was probably behind the peasant’s offer; otherwise, he was absorbed by his work. After multiple instances of pogroms and without any authority in the town, the Jews were particularly vulnerable, unprotected by any law, and easy to brutalize.

Prior to the time of the pogrom, the Tetiev vicinity – and more generally the Tarashcha *uezd* – had not been prominent in either their antisemitic or their anti-Soviet moods or activism. But in early 1920, with the expulsion of most Soviet officials and representatives and with the local population cut off from the rest of Ukraine, organized government of any kind effectively collapsed.<sup>25</sup> Anomy, armed violence, and rampant antisemitism prepared the ground for coordinated radical ethnic homogenization. Reports compiled by the People’s Commissariat for Food Supplies and the local branch of the Communist Party convey a sense of the sudden and brutal severance of ties between the Jews and the Christians in the area. This can be dated to 1920. The myth of Judeo-Bolshevism played a decisive role in this development. Fuelled by local rumors and accusations, it conveyed a threat facing all aspects of the peasants’ economic, social, political, religious, and cultural life. Judeo-Bolshevism was conceived of as culminating in an apocalypse of

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<sup>22</sup> YIVO, TA, 5398-5399.

<sup>23</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, (New York: Idgezkom, 1922), 14.

<sup>24</sup> *What I Remember: Clevelanders Recall the Shtetl*, (Cleveland: The Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland, 1985), 51.

<sup>25</sup> For reports on this, alongside YIVO, TA, 3921, see other reports by Food Supply Committees and the Party: YIVO, TA, 3922, 3936-3938.

“searches, arrests, requisitions,” and “death by starvation for the children” – to quote one Soviet report from among many on Tetiev and the Tarashcha *uezd*.<sup>26</sup> Anti-Jewish sentiment based on this way of thinking, was extremely common in Ukraine. Taken on its own, it would not have sufficed to provide the impetus for exterminating local Jews; even so, it does indicate a basic associative link: in the countryside, rejecting Soviet rule in many cases also meant rejecting – and ejecting or exterminating – the Jews.

An abrupt shift in attitudes resulted when tensions between the peasants and the Soviet State reached extreme levels and insurrectionist activity in Ukraine spiked. A similar upsurge in hostility occurred in the summer of 1919 when the Reds, the Whites, and the Ukrainians were all fighting each other in the vicinity of Kiev, and during the Soviet-Polish war of spring 1920, which saw the retreat of the Red Army. Amidst this power vacuum, some peasants seized the opportunity to get rid of a minority who, in their eyes, were the main supporters of the Soviet regime and of Bolshevism: the Jews. The peasants sought to prevent the return of the Reds no less than to avenge recent losses. The opportunity triggered a fatal reversal, and the trap snapped shut on the Jews still living in the area. The radical violence which took place in Germanovka between September 15-18, 1919, was the direct outcome. At the beginning of the month, local insurgents no longer sought to hasten the departure of persecuted Jews. Instead, brutalizing the Jews, they also prevented them from leaving the area, confining them to their houses, which they repeatedly attacked and pillaged. An unwritten sentence had been pronounced against the Jews. In Tetiev, constant attacks on the roads leading from the town kept most Jews from leaving, despite rumors of the upcoming pogrom. In Germanovka, some peasants spontaneously joined in the first pogroms, while others initially tried to shelter their Jewish neighbors.

But the bandits declared that those who defended the Jews would regret it. The threat had its intended effect: peasants henceforth refused to protect them [...] some peasants who had sheltered Jews were ransacked.<sup>27</sup>

The threat of armed reprisal for disobedience did more than encourage the peasants to attack and kill Jews; it also effectively eliminated the possibility of local non-Jews' opposition to the violence, or of any display on their part of solidarity with the victims.

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<sup>26</sup> YIVO, TA, 3899.

<sup>27</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, 260-261.

## Destruction

For the partisans who believed the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism, attacking the Jews became part of the struggle against the Soviet regime. In a symbolic move, the Tetiev pogrom began with the storming of the town's Soviet offices where the Red Army garrison commander had had his quarters. The commander was referred to as the “*zhids'* commandant” for his bold assurances about providing protection without discrimination for all, Jews and non-Jews alike.<sup>28</sup> In Germanovka, Aleksei Davidenko, one of the pogrom leaders, started by murdering young communists; his gang then joined forces “with his comrade, Ataman Diakov, [in] a grandiose pogrom in Germanovka and its vicinity in which he did not spare the elderly, women, or children.”<sup>29</sup> In terms of numbers, Soviet officials and members of the Bolshevik party made up only a small fraction of the total number of victims; violence against them was crucial in sparking a process which culminated in the destruction of the area's Jews.

Pogromist core mobilization proceeded against this background of bitter political struggle. In Tetiev, according to the Cheka, the core group was formed of nineteen men from hamlets and villages within a few kilometers' radius of the town. This core had no proper structure until February 1920, a few weeks before the organized exterminatory action.<sup>30</sup> In the course of the later investigation, local militia members Chaikovskii and Kuravskii were identified as the leaders, by both the accused and the victims. What singled these local insurgents – the vanguard of the final pogrom – out was their having fought as soldiers during the civil war. Besides comprising an active core of veterans habituated to the use of weapons, they were also a politicized group. For them, antisemitism was an extension – an integral element – of their ongoing political and military struggle.

As Eric Lohr and Oleg Budnitskii have convincingly shown, pogrom perpetrators after 1914 were typically soldiers of the First World War or the Russian Civil War.<sup>31</sup> The Civil War saw soldiers bring anti-Jewish violence back to the countryside.

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<sup>28</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, 28-29, 38.

<sup>29</sup> YIVO, TA, 5397.

<sup>30</sup> YIVO, TA, 5461.

<sup>31</sup> 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 and Harriet Murav, (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012), 187–201; Eric Lohr, “1915 and the War Pogrom Paradigm in the Russian Empire,” in *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*, eds. Jonathan Dekel-Chen et al., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 41-51.

Almost all local men had served as soldiers during the Great War or the Civil War, although wartime and civilian experiences overlapped after 1917, virtually disabling the distinction between civilians and fighting men. Wearing no uniforms, pogromists could be classed as civilians, yet the anti-Jewish violence they carried out was conducted in a disciplined and methodical military manner. The understanding of the meaning of “civilian” had become relative as neighbors easily switched from bystander to partisan or armed pogromist. Local insurgents, who made up the majority of the pogromists, felt threatened by the prospect of the return of Soviet rule to Ukraine. For them, a reestablishment of the Reds portended a rapid downward slide in social status, or even a possible risk to their lives. The insurgents belonged to local militias and municipal administrative offices, working under anti-Bolshevik authorities even if they did not necessarily share the views this implied. Taking part in armed anti-Bolshevik activism, they knew what the price of Soviet pacification would be. In fact, many were Red Army deserters.<sup>32</sup> A list of the thirty or so pogromists – “heroes,” in the language of the *Evobkom* – fighting in the Cherkassy vicinity includes these profiles. Side by side with the “bandits” who fought throughout the years of the Civil War were their relatives, village officials, and militiamen.<sup>33</sup> Although they united at a point late in the fighting, the leaders of the exterminations (this was a group consisting exclusively of men) all shared pre-existing links. When questioned by the police, Perevalov provided ten of the nineteen partisans’ names, suggesting that he was on personal terms with half the group. Upon identification by the Cheka, of the eighteen accused of belonging to the anti-Bolshevik insurrection ring around Germanovka, five names appear twice.<sup>34</sup> It would appear the pogromists joined as a group, or at least with the support of their families or social connections. This must not be taken as evidence of a well-established mobilization network: police interrogation records also indicate recently formed individual connections such as shared workspace, concomitant army desertion, or village committee work during the same time periods. In Tetiev, the local agricultural cooperative, which also served as a loan bank, seems to have been the future pogromists’ principal shared ground. The Cheka inquiry provides extensive information on this cooperative, apparently gathered in a failed attempt to link the organization to a larger network or to Ukrainian nationalist parties. In reality, however, the Tetiev cooperative was

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<sup>32</sup> YIVO, TA, 3879 verso, *Svodka* n°5 of the Information-Instruction Department of the KP(b)U Regional Committee for the Kiev *gubernia* for March 1-April 1, 1920; YIVO, TA, 5256 et 5407-5475 (collective files for the insurgents in the Tetiev vicinity).

<sup>33</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/159/1-10b, “Список некоторых ‘Героев’ из Черкасской-Чигиринском района.”

<sup>34</sup> YIVO, TA, 5386-5387 verso; similar example in 5529.

a typical post-1917 local initiative whose purpose was for peasants to work together, gather, debate and discuss ideas, politicize and organize.

As we have noted, young men tended to be much more radical than their elders. Thus, in the hamlet we have already mentioned near Proskurov, “the young local peasants demanded that the Jews be removed from the village.”<sup>35</sup> These instigators’ worldview was shaped by revolution, ongoing conflict, and war, which had become daily reality in the area since 1905. Their individual trajectories prior to 1919-20 are hard to reconstruct; in their depositions they state that they had been soldiers, without specifying where or in which regiments they had served. It thus becomes a moot question as to whether they had directly participated in World War I pogroms or deportations.<sup>36</sup> One thing is clear, however: from the front they had brought notions of military discipline and of how to conduct a military operation. The outbreak of violence and their wartime experiences did much more than merely accustom them to fighting and encourage them to resort to military pogrom tactics;<sup>37</sup> these developments were also fatal to traditional relations among groups and generations. “Younger” in the passage just quoted should be understood less in terms of age than social position: peasants of precarious social and economic standing were more inclined to seek an overhaul of the existing social order. They would have nothing to lose in an attempt at reshaping the social landscape; above all, they had fewer valuable economic ties to the Jews.

While a mere handful of instigators sufficed to incite a crowd of locals to violence, it took the organization of a core group of pogrom initiators to make a town exterminate all of its Jews. An additional, larger circle of pogromists would rapidly coalesce around this core. In Tetiev, the initiators made the rounds of nearby villages, bringing some 200 men together to form a larger band:

...they helped the bandits burn houses, killed those who remained, and loaded their carts with Jewish possessions. The local peasants did not stand back with indifference; they killed the Jews whose families they had agreed

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<sup>35</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/237/18-180b.

<sup>36</sup> For more on this genealogy of Civil War anti-Jewish violence, see the introduction to this volume and Eric Lohr, “The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportation, Hostages and Violence during World War I,” *Russian Review*, 60/3 (July 2001): 404-419; Oleg Budnitskii, *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), chap. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Eric Lohr, “1915 and the War Pogrom Paradigm in the Russian Empire,” in *Anti-Jewish Violence*, eds. Dekel-Chen et al., 41-51.

to hide. This is how the sailor Roga killed his partner Shualke Perlshteyn, along with his wife and two children, while they were hiding in his house. The same happened in many other peasant houses.<sup>38</sup>

The stage marking the shift to violence is crucial. The insurgents possessed firearms, while the peasants, who made up the larger group, used scythes, forks, axes and other rudimentary agricultural tools to massacre Jews.<sup>39</sup> The distinction between the “bandits” and the “peasant masses” which is articulated in victim testimony is less of a reference to the social or geographical origins of the perpetrators than to the type of violence perpetrated.

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<sup>38</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, 32-33.

<sup>39</sup> Alongside various testimonies, see the photograph of a pogromist's axe in З.С. Островский, *Еврейские погромы 1918-1921 гг.*, (Moscow, Издательство Акц. общество “Школа и книга,” 1926), 52.



*Fig. 2: Axe. In Z. S. Ostrovskii, Evreiskie pogromy, 1918-1921, (Moscow: Shkola i kniga 1926), 30. Courtesy of the Blavatnik Archive, New York.*

Neighbors' familiarity with each other's homes ensured that the attacks would be unsparing and thorough. A report by the Relief Committee for Pogrom Victims from a different town states that "Golub and his bloody bandits were from neighboring villages [...] they knew every inhabitant of the village well and [...] they manifested a rare level of cruelty" and exhaustiveness: "all the Jews were pillaged."<sup>40</sup> To anticipate pogroms, many Jews had set up hiding places in basements, attics, and backyards, but their long history of contact and association with their neighbors, and the knowledge with which this provided the non-Jews of their living spaces, made the Jews' efforts ineffective. There are abundant

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<sup>40</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/53/15, *Evobkom* Report on Pogroms in Stepantsy, May 26, 1920.

accounts of hunts which were both meticulous and all too simple. In Dubovo, the same familiarity on the part of the pogromists with the makeup of the local Jewish community dictated decisions about timing: for example, the execution of the Jewish blacksmiths of the village was put off until a later time because the blacksmiths would be needed during the harvest season shortly after the pogrom.<sup>41</sup>



Fig. 3: Bandits. In Z. S. Ostrovskii, *Evreiskie pogromy, 1918-1921*, (Moscow: *Shkola i kniga* 1926), 104. Courtesy of the Blavatnik Archive, New York.

Pogrom plans were underway for several days prior to the outbreak; rumors about the forthcoming violence spread while preparations for an anti-Soviet uprising were underway at the same time. Despite the advance planning, the level of violence unleashed during the pogrom seems to have been a spontaneous development. The massacre of an entire community was the result of spontaneous brutality continuing unchecked, rather than the expression of a conscious choice implemented through standardized killing procedures. An element of randomness also played a role in determining the outcome. Some victims managed to stay alive for a time by abandoning all their belongings to the pogromists. Several separate forms of violence combined spontaneously into one in Tetiev; the same happened in other cases, which had lower victim totals.

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<sup>41</sup> Рохл Фейгенберг, *Летопись мертвого города*, (Leningrad: Прибой, 1928).

Unlike most large-scale military pogroms, in which looting typically comprised the main objective and killing took place in response to real or imagined resistance, murdering Jews was the aim of these pogroms from the beginning. Open exhortation to extreme violence came very early on from one of the leaders, who urged pogromists “to massacre all Jews, young and old, from the two-year-old to the octogenarian; only this will ensure their repose.” As the pogrom began, he “made all those who heard him take an oath that they would not spare a single Jew.”<sup>42</sup> A Tetiev witness recounts the entry of the pogromists into a house where a dozen Jews were hiding:

I hid under a bed in an alcove. The bandits began firing at the house, screaming and yelling. Then they began hacking away with axes and scythes. I heard one bandit demanding money from my husband, who replied: “I do not have any money. I’ll give you my coat.” But the bandit wanted only money. Since my husband had none, the bandit hit him in the head with his scythe.<sup>43</sup>

The mass murder in Tetiev differs from other cases of extermination by its sheer magnitude. The town’s Jewish quarter went up in flames; the arson focused on the synagogue and other religious buildings. It served both as a weapon of destruction and as a symbol of re-founding. When the blaze began to threaten the non-Jewish neighborhood, onlookers contained it without much difficulty, as well as without attempting to extinguish it.<sup>44</sup> The pogromists prevented escapes by surrounding the burning buildings; a crowd of curious onlookers assembled, as well

In the synagogue, the attics were crowded with Jews hiding there. After surrounding the synagogue, the insurgents set it on fire and would not let anyone out. [...]

All those who had taken refuge in the synagogues were burned alive. Those who managed to escape the fire perished under the blows of sabre, rifle, shovels, and pitchforks. Little children were thrown into the air and

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<sup>42</sup> Léo Motzkin, *Les pogromes en Ukraine sous les gouvernements ukrainiens, 1917-1920*, (Paris: Comité des Délégations juives, 1927), Annexes, 100.

<sup>43</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, 46.

<sup>44</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, 34.

came crashing back down on the pavement, splashing blood and flesh on the bystanders.<sup>45</sup>

In the space of a few hours, the fire had claimed some 1500 lives. In the following few days, the effect of the flames made the remaining Jews' hiding places obvious; the victims, if they had not by then died of asphyxiation, were now in the hands of the pogromists.

The pogrom extended to everybody, of all ages, fleeing, alone, or in any condition whatsoever:

Mothers abandoned their children and ran in all directions. The children expired from hunger and cold. Aharon Kroyman and his wife were killed by the bandits. When the confusion began, their six-year old son ran away and lay under an overhang. He cried and pleaded, but to no avail. He cried until he died.<sup>46</sup>

Two further measures were added to make the extermination complete. Pogromists organized into squads to hunt down any Jews who had managed to flee the town. This required mounted patrols and a network of squads combing the surrounding countryside.<sup>47</sup> Isolated, terrorized, desperate for a way out, Jews attempted to elude capture for days on end. A nursing mother hiding in a barn could no longer produce milk; her infant died in her arms.<sup>48</sup> In addition, the systematic killing of children, an untypical pogrom tactic came to the fore as part of the overall plan. Little girls and young women were massacred unhesitatingly by armed men. No restrictions remained in effect. In Tetiev and elsewhere, children left without parents were killed on the spot. In Germanovka, in September 1919:

Dozens who had managed to escape, mostly children and adolescents, met another detachment, and were massacred in their turn.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Motzkin, *Les pogromes en Ukraine*, Annexes, 100.

<sup>46</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Motzkin, *Les pogromes en Ukraine*, Annexes, 100.

<sup>48</sup> Joann Rose Leonard, *The Soup Has Many Eyes: From Shtetl to Chicago – A Memoir of One Family's Journey through History*, (New York: Bantam, 2000), 41.

<sup>49</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, 261.

## Ethnic Cleansing

Extermination was the culmination of a more encompassing cycle of violence, an element within a broader scheme giving rise to the pogroms. In Germanovka, the extermination of the Jews was the result of a structured peasant uprising led by an ataman, Diakov; the Tetiev insurrection was less well organized. Exterminations fed into and were given their impetus by a spectrum of movements in Ukraine. Tetiev, Germanovka, Dubovo, Lebedin were not accidents or isolated tragic episodes. They were the extreme manifestations of an inchoate campaign of ethnic homogenization throughout the Ukrainian countryside which made the Jews its primary target. The campaign was occasionally made explicit, as in Volhynia, where on the pile of victims' bodies the pogromists placed a sign with the proclamation of a new law establishing that no Jew should settle in the city.<sup>50</sup>

In retrospect, an aim to expel Jews from the Ukrainian countryside can be pieced together; this echoes the reorganization of the countryside which was undertaken following the Revolution of 1917. The burning of the Tetiev synagogue casts the goals of the Ukrainian peasant revolutionaries in question in a new way. The desire to eliminate the Jews of Tetiev or Dubovo obviously does not exhaust the question of either the aims of Ukrainian nationalism or those of the revolutionary movement of 1917. Nor should the movement – relatively insignificant in terms of lasting impact but vigorous at the time – be disregarded, which emerged during the revolutionary years with the aim of excluding Jews from Ukrainian political, economic, and social life before seeking to exclude them physically from the land. At the same time, the official policy of the Ukrainian People's Republic incorporated the claim of integrating the Jews in the national re-founding of Ukraine.<sup>51</sup> In Volhynia, at the end of 1917, peasants petitioned for Jews to be expelled from revolutionary organizations, including the peasant and the local factory committees; this was a way to wrest authority from the Jews, as well as to take vengeance.<sup>52</sup> In 1919, peasant insurgents tried to demand from Jews “a formal

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<sup>50</sup> *Jewish Chronicle* 2653, 06/01/1920.

<sup>51</sup> It is important to note that the Jews were not the only group stigmatized: the Polish minority in Volhynia, like the German colonists in the South, were similarly denied equal access to local political and economic life, criticized for enjoying alleged privileges, and accused of resistance. The present article is concerned specifically with anti-Jewish violence, but an initial comparison and study of the tensions with the official policy of the UNR are undertaken in: Thomas Chopard, *La guerre aux civils. Les violences contre les populations juives d'Ukraine. Guerre totale, occupations, insurrections, pogroms*, (Paris: PhD Dissertation defended at the EHESS, 2015).

<sup>52</sup> YIVO, TA, 767, Letter to the General Secretariat of Agriculture, January 8, 1918.

statement to the effect that they were not interfering in politics in any way.”<sup>53</sup> Other pogromists put it this way:

Our unit is employing pedagogical methods. We are trying to teach the Jews to stay out of politics. We want to kill their desire for power in Ukraine, where it should rest only in the hands of Ukrainian people. So we give them a little bloodless lesson.<sup>54</sup>

In July 1917, several localities in the Ekaterinoslav *gubernia* passed a resolution forbidding Jews to own land; others attempted to forbid them to engage in some specific commercial transactions, allegedly to prevent speculation.<sup>55</sup>

The revolutionary period was, for many peasants, the time to assert their power in local institutions or to appropriate land. It was also a time of institutional collapse and dismantling. Insurrection leaders tended to prefer intervention in local politics and everyday practices to getting involved in national confrontations, keeping up an opportunistic dialogue with the major political forces from a distance.<sup>56</sup> Questioned on his political affiliations, Perevalov – the pogromist from Tetiev – claimed to be close to the Borotbist program, even if he distanced himself from the “high spheres of the State apparatus.”<sup>57</sup> Jews were partly excluded from this general movement of political and social re-appropriation. Soviet occupation aggravated the marginalization of Jews in that it fed into the Judeo-Bolshevik myth. An ataman “explained to the peasants that under Tsarism the Jews had exploited the peasants, but with the coming of the Bolsheviks it was even worse, since the Jews were now in power. It was therefore necessary to take everything from them and drive them out of the towns and villages.”<sup>58</sup>

The prospect of violence always loomed large in this scheme. The young Ukrainian Republic’s Ministry for Jewish Affairs was alarmed to read of

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<sup>53</sup> Elias Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919*, (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1921), 359.

<sup>54</sup> Budnitskii, *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920*, 248.

<sup>55</sup> *Рассвет* 3, 23/07/1917 and 12, 27/09/1917.

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Gilley, “Fighters for Ukrainian Independence? Imposture and Identity among Ukrainian Warlords, 1917-1922,” *Historical Research*, 90/247 (2017): 172–190; Thomas Chopard, “L’ère des atamans. Politique, guerre civile et insurrections paysannes en Ukraine (1917-1923),” *20&21. Revue d’histoire* 141 (January 2019): 55-68.

<sup>57</sup> YIVO, TA, 6897. The Borotbists were a branch of the Ukrainian Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party,

<sup>58</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, 206.

resolutions passed by the Sixth Assembly of Skomoroshki, in the *uezd* of Tarashcha, in early April 1918:

At their last meeting, the peasants of our village resolved that all Jewish families must leave the countryside immediately. They had decided to expel 15 Jewish families back in January. Of these 15 families, 7 had originally worked at the sugar factory. [...] At a meeting, the peasants said they had to expel all the *zhids* who had settled among them.<sup>59</sup>

At another meeting, “they decided to expel all Jews from villages,” a project thwarted only by the Austro-German occupation. The Civil War, especially during 1919-20, provided the opportunity to implement this in many areas. In small towns overrun by armed peasant units, unremitting terror turned the bare few survivors of entire Jewish communities into refugees.

A former resident of the village of Khomovka in the Radomysl vicinity describes the intensifying atmosphere of fear and expecting the worst.<sup>60</sup> A single Jewish family had lived in the village prior to the Revolution; it was joined by a family of Jewish refugees after the unleashing of mass pogroms. Living together with the refugees was at first simple and self-understood, until the anti-Bolshevik partisans’ first incursion of July 9, 1919, followed by another one two days later. The first armed group consisted of five men, the second of eight; between them, they managed to “steal all property and kill two” of the Jews. Another few days later, an ataman, operating together with the locals, requisitioned the few clothes still in the two Jewish families’ possession. Even so, the two desperate families appealed to the ataman for protection. “The ataman decided to wait until Saturday for the resolution of the *volost* assembly,” in which 24 villages were to take part to decide the Jews’ fate. The peasants formed an armed unit under the ataman’s supervision, bringing the menace to a new level; a pogrom was imminent. The surviving Jews understood that time was of essence. The witness concludes: “We left by a circuitous path to avoid running into the rebels... for Makarov, where many Jews had gone. The majority of the Jewish population had left the place.” This testimony was apparently collected a very short time after the events recounted; we may assume the surviving refugees continued on their way in the attempt to

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<sup>59</sup> YIVO, TA, 1262.

<sup>60</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/239/28-28об: “Хомовка. налеты 9 и 11 июля 1919 г.”

distance themselves from the area. In Khomovka, no pogrom actually took place; the locals' menacing preparations sufficed to chase the Jews away.<sup>61</sup>

In larger towns, expulsion was typically accompanied by large-scale pogroms. This was the case in Stavishch and Stepantsy, both located in the region south of Kiev, in 1920. The preceding year had seen multiple waves of violence at the hands of White and ataman-directed armed units wash over both communities. Pogroms of varying degrees of intensity followed, each time claiming victims without discrimination as to age or sex.<sup>62</sup> As in Tetiev, outright anti-Jewish violence took on the character of ethnic cleansing.<sup>63</sup> Unlike villages where fear and intimidation sufficed to drive the Jews out, these towns' insurgents carried out extensive operations of ethnic cleansing. A *Evobkom* report describes the events of November 1920 in Stepantsy, where Ataman Iary,

promulgated an order concerning the “total expulsion of the *zhids* from the town within a period of three days.” [...] All the Jews, young and old, dressed in rags, left on a frosty November day after hoisting the sickest on wagons. This sight was terrible. [...] They were fleeing [...]. Within a few hours, there were no Jews left in Stepantsy. The cemetery keeper alone refused to abandon his station.... But he did not long continue to behold the tombs where his...brothers rested.... Three days later, he was found dead [...]. Thus did what had been built over centuries collapse within a few hours. Two thousand five hundred people fled to Boguslav.<sup>64</sup>

A February 1921 Soviet report on population movements in the Kiev region states that “Stepantsy broke all records when, in one day, about 2,000 refugees [from Stepantsy] poured in,” following “a written order, signed by the leader of the bandits who had devastated Stepantsy, telling them to leave the town within three

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<sup>61</sup> For similar examples in the Kiev region, see: DAKO R-3050/1/49/58-64, Testimonies on pogroms in Ivankov; Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews*, 235-236; Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, 438-441. An overview of the situation by the JDC mentions several deserted localities after the Civil War: AJJDC, NY192132, 4/30/4/498, “Information regarding the population of the Kiev gubernia for 1917, 1920 and 1923.”

<sup>62</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/210/20; DAKO R-3050/1/53/15-15ob.

<sup>63</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/242/24-25, “Погромы, происходившие в период 1918-19- и 20 гг в Ставище.”

<sup>64</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/53/15ob.

days and threatening them with complete annihilation if they did not do so.”<sup>65</sup> According to the 1926 census, only 4 Jews remained in the vicinity of Kanev (the administrative region with which Stepantsy is affiliated); more than 23,000 were recorded as resident in Kanev *uezd* in 1897.

Anthropological research on mass violence in former Yugoslavia has highlighted mass operations accompanied by specific, pinpoint acts of cruelty of a highly symbolic kind which played a crucial role in ethnic homogenization.<sup>66</sup> The same pattern can be observed in Ukraine, where the violence served as performative enactment of Jewish infertility. It forced a rupture in traditions, transmission, and filiation. Pogromists sought to project the long-term aims of their campaign as a tangible reality: that the Jews should have no future in the Ukrainian countryside and in its small towns and villages, and that they may only find refuge in the large cities. Thus in July 1919 in Obodin, Podolia:

There were only three families of Jews living in town. One family, consisting of four people, did not succeed in fleeing and was entirely massacred. The wife was found with her breasts cut off; a baby of six months had its throat cut; and a child of six was also slashed to death.<sup>67</sup>

Mutilation of the bodies of women and children is reported in Tripolie, where insurgents also cut off Jewish women’s breasts or, by slashing pregnant women’s bellies, attacked the physical signs of maternity and, by extension, the possibility of continued Jewish existence.<sup>68</sup> In Gaisin, men led by Ataman Volynets left behind a woman impaled through the vagina.<sup>69</sup> Although not common, these atrocities are not isolated instances; they are only some of the extreme but recurrent attacks against the very possibility of life and an attempt to sterilize the Jews of Ukraine. Another indication that the instances of extermination must be understood in these terms is the typical joining together of systematic sexual

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<sup>65</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, 451; confirmed by a report of the *Poalei Tzion* from October 1920 in which the same order is quoted: DAKO R-3050/1/53/16-160b. For a similar case in Stavishch, see the memorial book of the town: *Stavicht*, (New York: Aharon Weissman, 1961).

<sup>66</sup> Véronique Nahoum-Grappe, “Anthropologie de la violence extrême: le crime de profanation,” *Revue internationale des sciences sociales* 174/4 (2002): 601-609.

<sup>67</sup> Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews*, 392.

<sup>68</sup> Bernard Lecache, *Quand Israël meurt...Au pays des pogroms*, (Ressouvenances, 2010), 160-161; DAKO R-3050/1/53/15-160b, Reports on pogroms in Stepantsy.

<sup>69</sup> GARF 5881/2/312/30b-4, Testimony by Govoruchin on Ataman Volynets written in emigration.

violence with ethnic cleansing, despite the focus on total massacre. In Tetiev, the widespread carnage did not prevent mass rape. Thirty women and three men who had been hiding in one house were discovered close to the end of the pogrom. One of the women, who had already lost all her family, recounts how, after immediately shooting the three men, the insurgents “raped many of the women, then made us lie down in the mud and trampled us with their horses” before abandoning the victims.<sup>70</sup> Another survivor reports a near identical case.<sup>71</sup> In their objectives as in their practices, the exterminations share many features with other aspects of ethnic cleansing in Ukraine. These are the multiple faces of the anti-Jewish violence perpetrated during the Civil War in Ukraine.

## Conclusion

Aleksei Davidenko, a leader of the extermination of the Jewish community of Germanovka, did not even attempt to hide. Unlike Perevalov, who inadvertently came to be recognized in the Belaya Tserkov marketplace, Davidenko actually boasted of his exploits to his neighbors; he seems to have been proud of his role in the uprising in the vicinity of Kiev. The Cheka finally opened an investigation. The Kiev *gubernia* Cheka received several petitions from Germanovka Jews, pogrom refugees who had fled prior to the final extermination.<sup>72</sup> Part of what makes the exterminations exceptional for their time was this sort of response by survivors. Investigation by the authorities concluded swiftly in all cases with a death sentence.

The Soviet authorities’ swift and discreet action against those responsible for the exterminations of 1919-20 in Ukraine was part of the reason why these events sank into oblivion. Unlike the atamans and other armed leaders, whose anti-Bolshevik activism is publicly denounced in the press and propaganda, the actual pacification of the countryside and the preceding violence were given almost no publicity by Soviet authorities. Several Jewish communities across Ukraine had been annihilated or forcibly expelled, but historical memory has almost exclusively been concerned with the image of pogroms perpetrated by the great anti-Bolshevik armies. This ongoing silence notwithstanding, it is evident that attempts at ethnic

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<sup>70</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, 51.

<sup>71</sup> Leonard, *The Soup Has Many Eyes*, 52.

<sup>72</sup> YIVO, TA, 5373-5405, Investigation file of Aleksei Davidenko by the Kiev GubCheka.

cleansing were the most radical form assumed by anti-Jewish violence during the Civil War.

Perpetrated by former neighbors turned insurgents, these pogroms originated in the re-founding movement of the Ukrainian countryside, which had crystallized in the wake of the Revolution, putting into question the perpetuation of inherited social situations and relationships between national groups. Critical moments of the ensuing civil war offered the insurgents windows of opportunity. Though this movement was inchoate, it involved the beginnings of a program which was on occasion formulated explicitly and implemented by a fraction of the Ukrainian peasantry. Far from disappearing with the end of the civil war, this program of brutal Ukrainainization was periodically revived by the more radical among Ukrainian nationalists during the inter-war period.<sup>73</sup> Sporadic exterminations, organized expulsions and depopulation by means of terror continued to be part of the Ukrainian insurgents' operations during the Second World War.<sup>74</sup>

It should be noted, however, that attempts at ethnic cleansing during the Civil War remained localized. In 1920, there was no centralized policy of ethnic cleansing in Ukraine and no coherent political program of ethnic homogenization of Ukraine as a whole; a programmatic approach during the Civil War can only be discerned in retrospect. Groups who had undertaken to exterminate their neighbors did not export the initiative to nearby localities; while in some cases persecution of the Jews continued, the intensity level of the violence typically dropped following the systematic extermination. Eliminating, driving out, erasing entire communities remained a local occurrence. The pogromists formed a heterogeneous band which enlisted peasants, inciting them to take up arms; beyond these two groups at the core of the pogrom action, however, was a considerable section of the Christian population in solidarity with the pogromists. They took a share of the plunder, they were part of the arson in Tetiev, they denounced hidden Jews, or they simply remained spectators. Extermination involved a range of strategies and possibilities.

Ideology, exacerbated nationalism, and antisemitism were not the direct cause of the exterminations in Ukraine. The sense of national duty was not central to the exterminations. Pogroms most motivated ideologically were not the most violent

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<sup>73</sup> Marco Carynnyk, "Foes of Our Rebirth: Ukrainian Nationalist Discussions about Jews, 1929–1947," *Nationalities Papers* 39/3 (2011): 315–352.

<sup>74</sup> Jared McBride, "Peasants into Perpetrators: The OUN-UPA and the Ethnic Cleansing of Volhynia, 1943–1944," *Slavic Review* 75/3 (Fall 2016): 630–654.

or the deadliest. As Peter Kenez points out,<sup>75</sup> radical nationalism combined with military discipline led to mass-scale massacres, while Ataman Semosenko of the UNR Army in Proskurov spoke of the “national duty... to exterminate the *zhids*.” But proclaiming extermination did not always lead to extermination in practice. Nuance is crucial: while exterminations were supposed to kill all Jews, we know that during mass-scale massacres in Proskurov, in Felshtin (UNR Army units), in Cherkassy (Grigoriev) or in Fastov (White Army units), pogromists abandoned plunder in favor of methodical murder. In Cherkassy, for example, a killing site was set up by Grigoriev’s men, with machine guns and a pit; hundreds were shot within a few hours. However, survivors’ personal testimonies are rich in accounts of soldiers setting victims free.<sup>76</sup> Exhaustiveness in executing the project of annihilation was never the reality. The pogroms in Proskurov or Fastov cannot be conceptualized as the prototype of “Nazi-type *action*: missing were only the vans with carbon monoxide outlets,” to quote Richard Pipes.<sup>77</sup> Experience of the Great War and the Civil War, tradition and innovation in antisemitism were the preconditions, and shaped the violence. If recent local political experience – the as of then short-lived and conflicted experience of the Soviet regime in particular – was crucial as the extermination pogroms’ fount, strict ideology was not.

Davidenko conceded little during his interrogation.<sup>78</sup> While clearly identified and accused based on eyewitness descriptions, he claimed he was not on close terms with Ataman Diakov, who had led the extermination in Germanovka; Davidenko also insisted that he was not a bandit. He was a respectable peasant, “heading the Germanovka Revolutionary Committee at Eastertime in 1919.” One thing is certain, however: Davidenko admitted to having imposed a special tax exclusively on the Jews. This was a fair measure, he contended, since he had had to balance the peasants’ contribution to the Bolsheviks. Up to the time of his interrogation, the Jews had to pay for what the Reds had done.

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<sup>75</sup> Peter Kenez, “Pogroms and White Ideology in the Russian Civil War,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, eds. John D. Klier, Shlomo Lambroza, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 293-313; 309.

<sup>76</sup> See DAKO R-3050/1/237 for the Proskurov *protokoly*, and DAKO R-3050/1/54 for Cherkassy. For broader perspectives on the variety of mass killings, see: *Le massacre, objet d’histoire*, ed. David El Kenz, (Paris: Gallimard, 2005). I analyze different instances of massacre in my dissertation *La guerre aux civils*, 294-300. While quantitatively among the deadliest pogroms of the Civil War, they typically claimed the lives of some 15-20% of the local Jewish population.

<sup>77</sup> Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime, 1919-1924*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 109.

<sup>78</sup> YIVO, TA, 5398-5399.

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**Key words:** Pogrom, Extermination, Ethnic cleansing, Anti-Bolshevik insurrections, Ukraine

**How to quote this article:**

Thomas Chopard, “*Ukrainian Neighbors: Pogroms and Extermination in Ukraine 1919-1920*,” in *The Pogroms of the Russian Civil War at 100: New Trends, New Sources*, eds. Elissa Bemporad, Thomas Chopard, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, n. 15 August 2019  
*url:* [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=416](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=416)

## Ukrainian Neighbors: Pogroms and Extermination in Ukraine 1919-1920

by Thomas Chopard

### Abstract

*This article focuses on the cases of extermination of entire Jewish communities during the civil war in Ukraine. The author concludes that while anti-Bolshevik armies carried out mass-scale massacres, the most radical pogroms were perpetrated by neighbors: local non-Jews against their Jewish neighbors, foreshadowing the pogroms of summer 1941. The article emphasizes two critical aspects of these exterminations: the way a small group of young radical anti-Bolshevik insurgents would mobilize the Christian population as a whole; and the recent experiences of revolution, civil war, and brutal Soviet occupation, which together comprised the local context leading to the exterminations. These extreme cases of anti-Jewish violence are put in the broader context of ethnic cleansings perpetrated in various ways by neighbors and anti-Bolshevik partisans during the civil war in Ukraine.*

### Introduction

### A Cycle of Violence

### Destruction

### Ethnic Cleansing

### Conclusion

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## Introduction

On June 27, 1920, the local police, or “militia,” was called in when a disturbance broke out in the marketplace in Belaya Tserkov in Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> Two pogrom survivors, Iel Gershman and Lev Volf, had recognized a “bandit from the town of Tetiev”; the ensuing commotion led to the arrest of Vasili Perevalov, identified as a participant in the anti-Bolshevik insurrection around Tetiev. The militia opened an investigation.<sup>2</sup> In the course of this, the two survivors related how they had managed to escape by hiding in an attic, from where they witnessed the now apprehended Perevalov taking part in the murder of their families and the plundering of their home. The investigation subsequently conducted by the authorities was concerned less with prosecuting a pogromist than with punishing an anti-Bolshevik partisan from the area of Tetiev, a town in the region to the south of Kiev. The documents preserved as part of the case file trace the process whereby different Soviet institutions were set in motion to confirm the guilt of the alleged perpetrator. Inquiries, interrogations, and indictments followed, initiated by the Belaya Tserkov militia and then taken up by the *uezd* Revolutionary Committee, the local municipal authority, and finally the Kiev *gubernia* Cheka. The Cheka, for its part, collected testimony from the Tetiev cooperatives union, the *Kombed*, and the Party. Some statements insisted on the primacy of the anti-Soviet – while others stressed the antisemitic – aims of the insurgents. As far as the Soviet institutions were concerned, pogrom victims served a specific purpose: their testimony provided the framework for the project of identifying anti-Bolshevik insurgents then in hiding among the populace. What has reached us of the testimony of the victims is both preserved and shaped – and thus camouflaged – by these institutional objectives; the victims’ voices are

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This work was supported by a postdoctoral fellowship in Jewish studies, granted by the Institute of Historical Research, University of London. I am very grateful to the IHR for welcoming me and for helping me make this research possible.

<sup>1</sup> This article draws primarily on Russian-language sources; it correspondingly makes extensive use of the Russian form of local place names, thus reflecting the mark left by centuries of Russian rule on the history – and the map – of Ukraine.

<sup>2</sup> YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Tcherikower Archives (RG 80-89), 5456-5457 (now YIVO, TA, 5456-5457), Note from the militia of Belaya Tserkov, in the Kiev *gubernia* Cheka investigation records pertaining to insurgents in the Tetiev vicinity. (The Tcherikower Archives contain documents collected by the pan-Ukrainian Relief Committee for Pogrom Victims (*Evobkom*). The *Evobkom* partnered with the Soviet authorities for a time to provide victim relief and to identify pogromists. Occasionally supplying documents to the authorities, *Evobkom* at times also received documentation on the pogroms, as was the case with these Cheka files. Cheka files kept in the Tcherikower Archives thus pertain to pogromist cases only.)

muffled by the judicial process. A brief note penned by the Tetiev Communist Party Committee chairman conveys a sense of the magnitude of the destruction that ravaged the town: the accused “took part in ongoing counterrevolutionary insurrections against the Soviet regime, leading to the loss of property and the murder of Soviet officials and the Jewish population. During one pogrom, five thousand men, women, and children were slaughtered.”<sup>3</sup>

With the estimated number of victims as high as 5,000, although documented sources suggest that the actual number was closer to 4,500, the Tetiev pogrom of March 1920 is thus the deadliest outbreak of anti-Jewish violence to have taken place during the civil war which followed the 1917 revolution in the former Russian Empire. The case of Tetiev is exceptional, even for this period, which also saw history’s bloodiest anti-Jewish persecution prior to the Holocaust. Tetiev’s Jewish quarter was burned in its entirety, including the synagogue and houses of worship and study, where hundreds of people had sought refuge. Some 23,000 Jews had been recorded as residing in the *rayon*, or vicinity, of Tetiev as per the imperial census of 1897; only 242 Jewish residents were documented in 1926. With no Jews found in a town of 10,000 where the Jewish population had previously been estimated at 6,000, a Joint Distribution Committee report sums up the Tetiev situation in this way: “locality ruined.”<sup>4</sup> The March 1920 pogrom thus reaches far beyond the notional extent of a large-scale massacre; it marks the extermination of Tetiev’s entire Jewish population.

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<sup>3</sup> YIVO, TA, 5442.

<sup>4</sup> Archives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, New York 1921-1932, 4/30/4/498 (now AJJDC, NY192132, 4/30/4/498), “Information regarding the population of the Kiev gubernia for 1917, 1920 and 1923.”

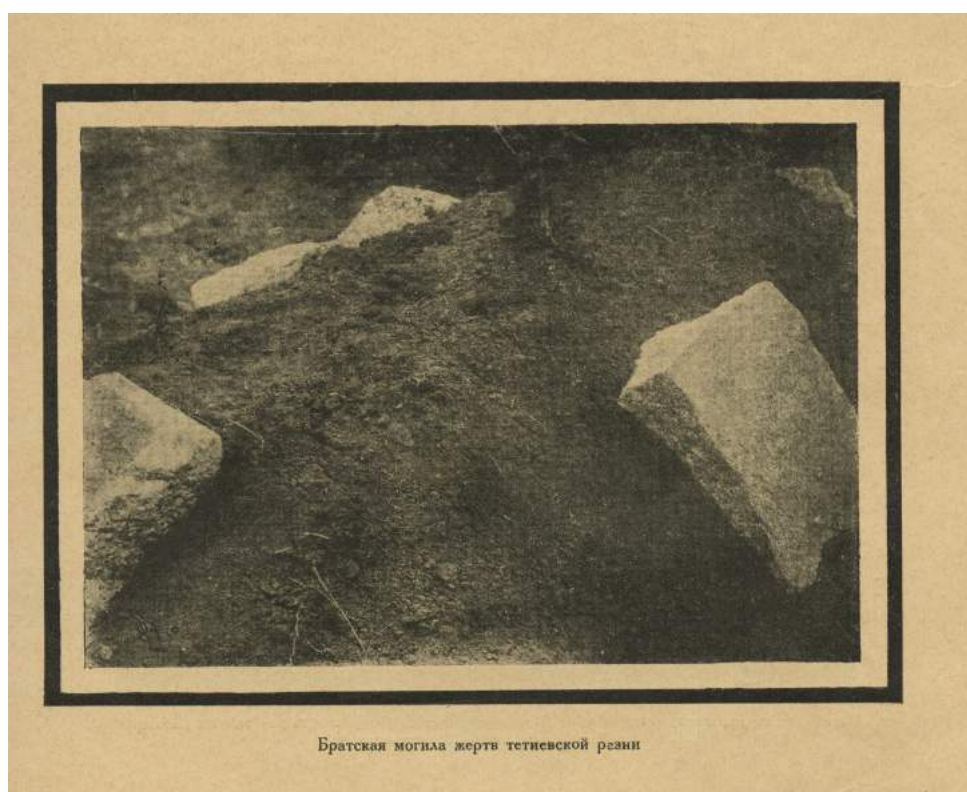


Fig. 1: Tetiev, Mass grave. In Z. S. Ostrovskii, *Evreiskie pogromy, 1918-1921*, (Moscow: Shkola i kniga 1926), 131. Courtesy of the Blavatnik Archive, New York.

In the case of other towns, a similar distinction needs to be drawn between violence aimed at extermination and pogroms: this is less a reflection of the number of victims the outbreaks claimed than of the radical nature of their base objectives. Premeditated and systematic in their approach, organized attacks and mass killings went beyond actively persecuting a minority population: their aim was total extermination, or putting an end to the life of every single Jew insofar as the individual was Jewish. Cases of outbreaks of this kind were sometimes lost track of in the chaos of the Russian Civil War and anti-Jewish violence in Ukraine, the records detailing them inserted among the swathes of documentation which aid committees were producing in the drawn-out attempt to provide essential victim relief. The predicament of the town of Lebedin is a case in point, where sixty resident families were documented in 1919, with virtually all of their able-bodied workers employed at the local sugar refinery. The testimony of a sole witness to the pogrom survives. The final and decisive pogrom took place following several disparate outbreaks of violence, which had already induced many

of the Jewish residents to leave the town. According to the surviving account, the exterminatory finale began simultaneously at the refinery and in the town square on the May 5, 1919:

...the pogrom had been organized not by Grigoriev's gangs, but by unidentified local bandits incited by the Lebedin intelligentsia.

On Monday morning, bandits burst into the refinery, driving out all Jewish workers, whose places were immediately taken by Christians. Shooting began in the market square in the city center, leaving 24 Jews dead. There were also instances of torture and atrocities. [...] There is not a single Jew in Lebedin today. [Former] Jewish homes stand perfectly vacant. Some have been torched.<sup>5</sup>

Small towns of a few dozen to a few hundred Jewish residents fell victim to coordinated attacks by peasants from nearby areas. A representative from the Relief Committee for Pogrom Victims elaborates on this in his report. While according to documentary evidence, Grigoriev affiliates were the initiators of the violence in the region, systematic extermination was in large part the work of local peasants. This essential point bears stressing: extermination was systematically perpetrated by erstwhile neighbors who had turned against the Jewish population in their own localities.

In *Neighbors*, Jan Gross details the July 10, 1941, extermination of the Jews of the Polish town of Jedwabne. The study has sparked a radical shift in perspective on popular and local participation in anti-Jewish violence.<sup>6</sup> Less widely discussed, but no less ground-breaking, is the growing body of research on the critical period between 1939-41 in Eastern Europe. Outbreaks of violence by the locals against the Jews occurred in all regions which had been annexed by the Soviet Union, and then occupied by Nazi Germany and its allies; no area formed an exception. Wendy Lower's work on Western Ukraine and Vladimir Solonari's on the Ukrainian regions of Bukovina and Bessarabia, which had been annexed by Romania, have traced the unfolding of events in a number of localities, where the same finale as in Jedwabne – total destruction – followed.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> State Archives of the Kiev Oblast, fond 3050, Relief Committee for Pogrom Victims, opus 1, spr. 213, ark. 14 (now DAKO R-3050/1/213/14).

<sup>6</sup> Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Vladimir Solonari, "Patterns of Violence. The Local Population and the Mass Murder of Jews in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, July-August 1941," *Kritika*, 8/4 (fall 2007): 749-787; Wendy

As such, the phenomenon of anti-Jewish violence aimed at the complete eradication of communities was not new in the years immediately preceding the beginning of WWII. As has already been mentioned, 1919-20 had seen similarly comprehensive annihilation of entire Jewish communities take place in Ukraine in the course of the Civil War. The period 1919-20 as well as the year 1941 were times marked by high levels of political instability, which provided the immediate momentum for the antisemitic focus of the violence. As noted, in 1941, pogroms spread across lands which had been annexed by the Soviet Union as per the terms of the German-Soviet pact. Earlier, during the Civil War, with military defeats becoming a constant of daily life and vast territories changing hands frequently, the Christian populace seized the occasion granted by years of political instability to undermine the very existence of the Jewish minority. Relationships among long-time neighbors who had, with varying degrees of stability, coexisted in mutual proximity for centuries, maintaining their distinctness from each other in essential aspects of religion and lifestyle and remaining mutually dependent in others, were abrogated without warning.

In *Neighbors*, Gross traces in vivid detail the way one “half of the population of a small Eastern European town murdered the other half;”<sup>8</sup> an issue left unaddressed is exactly what may have sparked this off. While the pogromists’ motives are generally (but not definitively) taken to be of the familiar age-old antisemitic kind, many questions remain; especially unclear are the causes which made entire groups rise up to wreak irreversible destruction upon the Jews in their midst, and the unanimity and speed with which they did so.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, in the present study I will work to shift the focus from the attacks mounted to achieve total annihilation to the process which had led to the sudden and fundamental change in attitude, putting an end to centuries of coexistence. I will discuss Tetiev in some detail, as well as consider at some length the September 1919 Germanovka pogrom, which resulted in the obliteration of the 250 Jews remaining in this small town near Kiev until that time. In many ways, the plight of Germanovka is reminiscent of other exterminations in Ukraine during the Civil War, which target small rural communities. After tracing the process which culminated in exterminatory violence against the Jews, I will consider the manner in which the systematic

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Lower, “Pogroms, Mob Violence and Genocide in Western Ukraine, Summer 1941: Varied Histories, Explanation and Comparisons,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 13/3 (2011): 217-246; Jeffrey S. Kopstein, Jason Wittenberg, *Intimate Violence. Anti-Jewish Pogroms on the Eve of the Holocaust*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Gross, *Neighbors*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> This question has been addressed in a special issue of *Slavic Review* 61/3 (fall 2002).

attacks formed part of a larger movement of ethnic re-founding. This was spearheaded by the peasant insurrections then spreading across Ukraine; in many cases, the movement aimed to terrorize or expel Jews from the Ukrainian countryside. Outstanding in its brutality, the sweep of exterminatory violence also appears to have been an extreme manifestation of an incipient campaign of ethnic cleansing.<sup>10</sup>

### A Cycle of Violence

The exterminatory pogroms of 1919-20 did not commence *ex nihilo*. They are better conceptualized as the culmination of a more encompassing cycle of violence initially triggered by military developments in the field along with the tensions which these developments had aggravated. On each occasion, the extermination was preceded by pogroms of varying intensity in the areas in question. The first of a series of pogroms in the same area might be read as a warning addressed to the Jewish population. In Germanovka, the region's peasant insurgents operating under Ataman Zelenyi harassed local Jews beginning in the spring of 1919. Germanovka's 800 Jewish residents were the victims of several pogroms; the initial outbreak in the spring was limited to brutalizing and robbing 42 Jews, before the first mass killing took place at the beginning of August, ordered and directed by Ataman Diakov, a Germanovka native.<sup>11</sup> On August 5, Diakov's insurgents murdered 114 Jews, looting their property; the victims had all previously lived side by side with the perpetrators.<sup>12</sup> More violence followed on August 28:

They went from home to home, brandishing their sabres and slicing people through without distinction: men, women, even young children.

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<sup>10</sup> The term "ethnic cleansing" was coined in reference to the process of mass deportation and murder carried out in contested territories in former Yugoslavia. Ethnic cleansing is defined by the UN as "a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas." The term has been used retrospectively in the social sciences since the 1990s with the objective of reconsidering approaches to mass violence. See, for example: Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/167/94 and DAKO R-3050/1/210/65.

<sup>12</sup> YIVO, TA, 21363.

Many were decapitated. The massacre went on for four days. Between 120 and 150 people were left dead. Some Jewish homes were burned.<sup>13</sup>

130 names appear in a list of the murdered.<sup>14</sup> Yet however violent, the Germanovka massacre does not stand out from among the hundreds of other anti-Jewish attacks perpetrated in Ukraine. A non-negligible aim of the continued harassment and inordinate brutality was to hasten the departure of the Jews remaining alive, thus securing the insurgents' hold over territory they would sporadically seize control of in the course of the Civil War. Pogroms became increasingly violent and bloody; survivors had the opportunity to hasten away, abandoning whatever was left of their property. Events appeared to be orchestrated as if to make each pogrom and manifestation of anti-Jewish violence sound out a warning; a clear message was being conveyed, increasingly insistent.

In Tetiev as elsewhere, anti-Bolshevik White and Ukrainian nationalist army units instigated a *crescendo* of violence.<sup>15</sup> A prerequisite for this was ensuring the locals' active involvement in large-scale "military pogroms," to use Eric Lohr's term. "Bandits" from the countryside joined military men in uniform in attacking the Jews, thus entangling the broad persecution carried out by anti-Bolshevik armies with local issues. Pogroms of considerable magnitude provided an opportunity for peasants eager to get rid of "their" Jews without needing to shoulder responsibility for the violence. When army units entered a town or a rural settlement, the question of the fate of local Jews' fate would occasionally be raised explicitly in the local assembly, as was the case in Petrovichi, near Chernobyl, north of Kiev:

The older peasants, who had often been in Jewish homes and had grown up side by side with Jews, said that the village should not take such a sin upon itself. They advised simply expelling the Jews from the village; let their fate overtake them at a distance, out of the peasants' sight. But the younger peasants insisted that now was a time of opportunity, that there was no hesitating nor allowing the Jews to escape. Jews throughout

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<sup>13</sup> Л.Б. Милякова, *Книга погромов. Погромы на Украине, в Белоруссии и европейской части России в период Гражданской войны, 1918-1922 гг. Сборник документов*, (Moscow, РОССПЭН, 2006) (now Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*), 260.

<sup>14</sup> YIVO, TA, 23275-23278.

<sup>15</sup> Report on the pogroms perpetrated in Tetiev in November and December 1919, transmitted by the *Poalei Tzion*, DAKO R-3050/1/245/204.

Ukraine were now being drowned and killed, and Petrovichi must not stand back.<sup>16</sup>

For the locals, pogroms served both as a way to advance their interests in the larger conflicts then sweeping across Ukraine – and as a means of reshaping the social makeup of their immediate vicinity. Local opportunism comes especially to the fore in the way residents attempted to harness the momentum of military campaigns in the smaller towns and villages. The nearly daily recurrence of anti-Jewish violence over an extended period of time in the course of the war was instrumental in completing some villages’ ethnic cleansing, whereas endemic violence had forced only some of the Jews to flee. Thus “in the Borzna *uezd*, the wild orgy of the Volunteer Army went on unchecked [...] In the village of Prokhorov, of the 14 [Jews] remaining after the others fled... among them elderly people and children, 13 were brutally murdered, the surviving woman taken.”<sup>17</sup> The village peasants’ readiness to join in the extermination, and their active part in it once it had begun, are both emphasized in the *Evobkom* report; this is in marked contrast to nearby rural localities where only a small number of victims was documented. The same pattern went on record with the entry of Ukrainian nationalist troops into small towns and rural areas. Following the infamous Proskurov pogrom of February 1919, a survivor told a Red Cross representative:

When our village [the hamlet of Grinovets-Lesovye on the outskirts of Proskurov] heard about the massacre in Proskurov, young local peasants got going to wipe out the Jews of the area. They sent a delegation to the city. Three of them went to Proskurov, bringing back three armed Haidamaks. [...] They started to break into homes and to search for Jews.

<sup>18</sup>

Soldiers in uniform pillaged and beat the thirty-three Jews herded into the village square. Local peasants, demanding more than this, finally set about the mass execution themselves. “The murder of the detained Jews,” the account states, “purportedly took place somewhere outside the village.” As in Petrovichi, the older peasants refused to take part in the massacre, while the younger generation would accept no delay and clamored for immediate action. Remarkably, pressed to the limit, the peasants ultimately refused, *in extremis*, to exterminate their

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<sup>16</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, 96.

<sup>17</sup> YIVO, TA, 18284 verso (awkward syntax in the original has been modified).

<sup>18</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/237/18-18ob, Proskurov pogrom victim testimony.

neighbors. The surviving account does not indicate just what made the locals recoil from putting their plan into action, but it is clear that the mass killing in Proskurov had served as a source of inspiration and encouragement for the entire episode. In the end, the entire Jewish population of Grinovets-Lesovye was expelled to Proskurov, where they were escorted by armed troops. En route, the expellees were again robbed and beaten by Haidamaks. Released the next morning, all were intent on never returning to their native village, which had thus completed its process of ethnic homogenization.

Whether perpetrated by troops or by local peasants, the pogroms all underscore the extreme vulnerability of the Jewish communities in these areas. Each of the exterminations taking place during the Civil War and in 1941 occurred in a setting of profound social and political instability, if not outright anomy. Despite the recurrent attempts to sovietize Ukraine, Tetiev in 1920 was still largely inaccessible to the Soviet authorities. As far as officials of the Ukrainian People's Republic were concerned, it had become intractable back in October 1919.<sup>19</sup> Coming in the wake of the events of 1919, the re-entrenchment of Soviet rule in early 1920 proved a failure. A report compiled by the Soviet cadre responsible for food supplies in the *uezd* of Tarashcha in March 1920, a few days prior to the outbreak of the exterminatory violence against the area's Jews, notes the weakness of "the organized State apparatus" and the fact that relations with the locals are limited to armed expeditions.<sup>20</sup> Another report notes the discontinuance of relations between the state and local peasantry after months of tensions and confrontation: "Of bread, they give none; of money, they want none."<sup>21</sup> The civil war and peasant insurrections confined activity by the authorities to the major cities of Ukraine. With intermittent displays of distrust, superficial accommodating gestures, and open resistance, the countryside was beyond state reach. In Tetiev as in other towns, the authorities were, for all intents and purposes, at the mercy of the insurgents. The commandant of the Tetiev militia, which was formed in early 1920, had participated in the December 1919 pogrom. In Germanovka, one of the leaders of the persecution against the Jews was, as we learn from his interrogation conducted by the Cheka, "the head of the Germanovka Revolutionary Committee

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<sup>19</sup> *Архів Української Народної Республіки Міністрство Внутрішніх Справ Справоздання Губерніальних Старост і Комісарів (1918-1920)*, (Київ: Інститут української археографії та джерелознавства ім. М. С. Грушевського, 2017), 144.

<sup>20</sup> YIVO, TA, 3899-3902, Food Supply Commission Controller's report on the Tarashcha *uezd* for the period February 14-March 11, 1920.

<sup>21</sup> YIVO, TA, 3921, Food Supply Committee for the Kiev region report on the Tarashcha *uezd*.

at Eastertime in 1919.”<sup>22</sup> This allowed the area’s peasants to go on pillaging and harassing the Jews with impunity:

There was no one in charge in the town. The thugs broke into peoples’ homes at night, robbing and pillaging. The Jews crouched hiding in their “mouse holes,” in attics, cellars, and all kinds of secret hideouts, listening in terror to the sound of the pillage and afraid to be caught sight of.<sup>23</sup>

The atmosphere of overall lawlessness and impunity was taken advantage of by more than one kind of group. In addition to the armed attackers carrying out the pogroms, non-fighting locals sprinted at the opportunity to extract money from the Jews. Following one “typical pogrom” – probably one perpetrated by the Ukrainian nationalists or the Whites in late 1919 – a survivor from Tetiev recounted how he, along with his mother, hid from the Cossacks in the bushes. A “peasant, who was working nearby, was ready to pick us up.” The mother had to bribe the man not to alert the soldiers nearby.<sup>24</sup> Opportunism was probably behind the peasant’s offer; otherwise, he was absorbed by his work. After multiple instances of pogroms and without any authority in the town, the Jews were particularly vulnerable, unprotected by any law, and easy to brutalize.

Prior to the time of the pogrom, the Tetiev vicinity – and more generally the Tarashcha *uezd* – had not been prominent in either their antisemitic or their anti-Soviet moods or activism. But in early 1920, with the expulsion of most Soviet officials and representatives and with the local population cut off from the rest of Ukraine, organized government of any kind effectively collapsed.<sup>25</sup> Anomy, armed violence, and rampant antisemitism prepared the ground for coordinated radical ethnic homogenization. Reports compiled by the People’s Commissariat for Food Supplies and the local branch of the Communist Party convey a sense of the sudden and brutal severance of ties between the Jews and the Christians in the area. This can be dated to 1920. The myth of Judeo-Bolshevism played a decisive role in this development. Fuelled by local rumors and accusations, it conveyed a threat facing all aspects of the peasants’ economic, social, political, religious, and cultural life. Judeo-Bolshevism was conceived of as culminating in an apocalypse of

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<sup>22</sup> YIVO, TA, 5398-5399.

<sup>23</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, (New York: Idgezkom, 1922), 14.

<sup>24</sup> *What I Remember: Clevelanders Recall the Shtetl*, (Cleveland: The Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland, 1985), 51.

<sup>25</sup> For reports on this, alongside YIVO, TA, 3921, see other reports by Food Supply Committees and the Party: YIVO, TA, 3922, 3936-3938.

“searches, arrests, requisitions,” and “death by starvation for the children” – to quote one Soviet report from among many on Tetiev and the Tarashcha *uezd*.<sup>26</sup> Anti-Jewish sentiment based on this way of thinking, was extremely common in Ukraine. Taken on its own, it would not have sufficed to provide the impetus for exterminating local Jews; even so, it does indicate a basic associative link: in the countryside, rejecting Soviet rule in many cases also meant rejecting – and ejecting or exterminating – the Jews.

An abrupt shift in attitudes resulted when tensions between the peasants and the Soviet State reached extreme levels and insurrectionist activity in Ukraine spiked. A similar upsurge in hostility occurred in the summer of 1919 when the Reds, the Whites, and the Ukrainians were all fighting each other in the vicinity of Kiev, and during the Soviet-Polish war of spring 1920, which saw the retreat of the Red Army. Amidst this power vacuum, some peasants seized the opportunity to get rid of a minority who, in their eyes, were the main supporters of the Soviet regime and of Bolshevism: the Jews. The peasants sought to prevent the return of the Reds no less than to avenge recent losses. The opportunity triggered a fatal reversal, and the trap snapped shut on the Jews still living in the area. The radical violence which took place in Germanovka between September 15-18, 1919, was the direct outcome. At the beginning of the month, local insurgents no longer sought to hasten the departure of persecuted Jews. Instead, brutalizing the Jews, they also prevented them from leaving the area, confining them to their houses, which they repeatedly attacked and pillaged. An unwritten sentence had been pronounced against the Jews. In Tetiev, constant attacks on the roads leading from the town kept most Jews from leaving, despite rumors of the upcoming pogrom. In Germanovka, some peasants spontaneously joined in the first pogroms, while others initially tried to shelter their Jewish neighbors.

But the bandits declared that those who defended the Jews would regret it. The threat had its intended effect: peasants henceforth refused to protect them [...] some peasants who had sheltered Jews were ransacked.<sup>27</sup>

The threat of armed reprisal for disobedience did more than encourage the peasants to attack and kill Jews; it also effectively eliminated the possibility of local non-Jews' opposition to the violence, or of any display on their part of solidarity with the victims.

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<sup>26</sup> YIVO, TA, 3899.

<sup>27</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, 260-261.

## Destruction

For the partisans who believed the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism, attacking the Jews became part of the struggle against the Soviet regime. In a symbolic move, the Tetiev pogrom began with the storming of the town's Soviet offices where the Red Army garrison commander had had his quarters. The commander was referred to as the “*zhids'* commandant” for his bold assurances about providing protection without discrimination for all, Jews and non-Jews alike.<sup>28</sup> In Germanovka, Aleksei Davidenko, one of the pogrom leaders, started by murdering young communists; his gang then joined forces “with his comrade, Ataman Diakov, [in] a grandiose pogrom in Germanovka and its vicinity in which he did not spare the elderly, women, or children.”<sup>29</sup> In terms of numbers, Soviet officials and members of the Bolshevik party made up only a small fraction of the total number of victims; violence against them was crucial in sparking a process which culminated in the destruction of the area's Jews.

Pogromist core mobilization proceeded against this background of bitter political struggle. In Tetiev, according to the Cheka, the core group was formed of nineteen men from hamlets and villages within a few kilometers' radius of the town. This core had no proper structure until February 1920, a few weeks before the organized exterminatory action.<sup>30</sup> In the course of the later investigation, local militia members Chaikovskii and Kuravskii were identified as the leaders, by both the accused and the victims. What singled these local insurgents – the vanguard of the final pogrom – out was their having fought as soldiers during the civil war. Besides comprising an active core of veterans habituated to the use of weapons, they were also a politicized group. For them, antisemitism was an extension – an integral element – of their ongoing political and military struggle.

As Eric Lohr and Oleg Budnitskii have convincingly shown, pogrom perpetrators after 1914 were typically soldiers of the First World War or the Russian Civil War.<sup>31</sup> The Civil War saw soldiers bring anti-Jewish violence back to the countryside.

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<sup>28</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, 28-29, 38.

<sup>29</sup> YIVO, TA, 5397.

<sup>30</sup> YIVO, TA, 5461.

<sup>31</sup> 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 and Harriet Murav, (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012), 187–201; Eric Lohr, “1915 and the War Pogrom Paradigm in the Russian Empire,” in *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*, eds. Jonathan Dekel-Chen et al., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 41-51.

Almost all local men had served as soldiers during the Great War or the Civil War, although wartime and civilian experiences overlapped after 1917, virtually disabling the distinction between civilians and fighting men. Wearing no uniforms, pogromists could be classed as civilians, yet the anti-Jewish violence they carried out was conducted in a disciplined and methodical military manner. The understanding of the meaning of “civilian” had become relative as neighbors easily switched from bystander to partisan or armed pogromist. Local insurgents, who made up the majority of the pogromists, felt threatened by the prospect of the return of Soviet rule to Ukraine. For them, a reestablishment of the Reds portended a rapid downward slide in social status, or even a possible risk to their lives. The insurgents belonged to local militias and municipal administrative offices, working under anti-Bolshevik authorities even if they did not necessarily share the views this implied. Taking part in armed anti-Bolshevik activism, they knew what the price of Soviet pacification would be. In fact, many were Red Army deserters.<sup>32</sup> A list of the thirty or so pogromists – “heroes,” in the language of the *Evobkom* – fighting in the Cherkassy vicinity includes these profiles. Side by side with the “bandits” who fought throughout the years of the Civil War were their relatives, village officials, and militiamen.<sup>33</sup> Although they united at a point late in the fighting, the leaders of the exterminations (this was a group consisting exclusively of men) all shared pre-existing links. When questioned by the police, Perevalov provided ten of the nineteen partisans’ names, suggesting that he was on personal terms with half the group. Upon identification by the Cheka, of the eighteen accused of belonging to the anti-Bolshevik insurrection ring around Germanovka, five names appear twice.<sup>34</sup> It would appear the pogromists joined as a group, or at least with the support of their families or social connections. This must not be taken as evidence of a well-established mobilization network: police interrogation records also indicate recently formed individual connections such as shared workspace, concomitant army desertion, or village committee work during the same time periods. In Tetiev, the local agricultural cooperative, which also served as a loan bank, seems to have been the future pogromists’ principal shared ground. The Cheka inquiry provides extensive information on this cooperative, apparently gathered in a failed attempt to link the organization to a larger network or to Ukrainian nationalist parties. In reality, however, the Tetiev cooperative was

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<sup>32</sup> YIVO, TA, 3879 verso, *Svodka* n°5 of the Information-Instruction Department of the KP(b)U Regional Committee for the Kiev *gubernia* for March 1-April 1, 1920; YIVO, TA, 5256 et 5407-5475 (collective files for the insurgents in the Tetiev vicinity).

<sup>33</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/159/1-10b, “Список некоторых ‘Героев’ из Черкасской-Чигиринском района.”

<sup>34</sup> YIVO, TA, 5386-5387 verso; similar example in 5529.

a typical post-1917 local initiative whose purpose was for peasants to work together, gather, debate and discuss ideas, politicize and organize.

As we have noted, young men tended to be much more radical than their elders. Thus, in the hamlet we have already mentioned near Proskurov, “the young local peasants demanded that the Jews be removed from the village.”<sup>35</sup> These instigators’ worldview was shaped by revolution, ongoing conflict, and war, which had become daily reality in the area since 1905. Their individual trajectories prior to 1919-20 are hard to reconstruct; in their depositions they state that they had been soldiers, without specifying where or in which regiments they had served. It thus becomes a moot question as to whether they had directly participated in World War I pogroms or deportations.<sup>36</sup> One thing is clear, however: from the front they had brought notions of military discipline and of how to conduct a military operation. The outbreak of violence and their wartime experiences did much more than merely accustom them to fighting and encourage them to resort to military pogrom tactics;<sup>37</sup> these developments were also fatal to traditional relations among groups and generations. “Younger” in the passage just quoted should be understood less in terms of age than social position: peasants of precarious social and economic standing were more inclined to seek an overhaul of the existing social order. They would have nothing to lose in an attempt at reshaping the social landscape; above all, they had fewer valuable economic ties to the Jews.

While a mere handful of instigators sufficed to incite a crowd of locals to violence, it took the organization of a core group of pogrom initiators to make a town exterminate all of its Jews. An additional, larger circle of pogromists would rapidly coalesce around this core. In Tetiev, the initiators made the rounds of nearby villages, bringing some 200 men together to form a larger band:

...they helped the bandits burn houses, killed those who remained, and loaded their carts with Jewish possessions. The local peasants did not stand back with indifference; they killed the Jews whose families they had agreed

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<sup>35</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/237/18-180b.

<sup>36</sup> For more on this genealogy of Civil War anti-Jewish violence, see the introduction to this volume and Eric Lohr, “The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportation, Hostages and Violence during World War I,” *Russian Review*, 60/3 (July 2001): 404-419; Oleg Budnitskii, *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), chap. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Eric Lohr, “1915 and the War Pogrom Paradigm in the Russian Empire,” in *Anti-Jewish Violence*, eds. Dekel-Chen et al., 41-51.

to hide. This is how the sailor Roga killed his partner Shualke Perlshteyn, along with his wife and two children, while they were hiding in his house. The same happened in many other peasant houses.<sup>38</sup>

The stage marking the shift to violence is crucial. The insurgents possessed firearms, while the peasants, who made up the larger group, used scythes, forks, axes and other rudimentary agricultural tools to massacre Jews.<sup>39</sup> The distinction between the “bandits” and the “peasant masses” which is articulated in victim testimony is less of a reference to the social or geographical origins of the perpetrators than to the type of violence perpetrated.

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<sup>38</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, 32-33.

<sup>39</sup> Alongside various testimonies, see the photograph of a pogromist's axe in З.С. Островский, *Еврейские погромы 1918-1921 гг.*, (Moscow, Издательство Акц. общество “Школа и книга,” 1926), 52.



*Fig. 2: Axe. In Z. S. Ostrovskii, Evreiskie pogromy, 1918-1921, (Moscow: Shkola i kniga 1926), 30. Courtesy of the Blavatnik Archive, New York.*

Neighbors' familiarity with each other's homes ensured that the attacks would be unsparing and thorough. A report by the Relief Committee for Pogrom Victims from a different town states that "Golub and his bloody bandits were from neighboring villages [...] they knew every inhabitant of the village well and [...] they manifested a rare level of cruelty" and exhaustiveness: "all the Jews were pillaged."<sup>40</sup> To anticipate pogroms, many Jews had set up hiding places in basements, attics, and backyards, but their long history of contact and association with their neighbors, and the knowledge with which this provided the non-Jews of their living spaces, made the Jews' efforts ineffective. There are abundant

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<sup>40</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/53/15, *Evobkom* Report on Pogroms in Stepantsy, May 26, 1920.

accounts of hunts which were both meticulous and all too simple. In Dubovo, the same familiarity on the part of the pogromists with the makeup of the local Jewish community dictated decisions about timing: for example, the execution of the Jewish blacksmiths of the village was put off until a later time because the blacksmiths would be needed during the harvest season shortly after the pogrom.<sup>41</sup>



Fig. 3: Bandits. In Z. S. Ostrovskii, *Evreiskie pogromy, 1918-1921*, (Moscow: *Shkola i kniga* 1926), 104. Courtesy of the Blavatnik Archive, New York.

Pogrom plans were underway for several days prior to the outbreak; rumors about the forthcoming violence spread while preparations for an anti-Soviet uprising were underway at the same time. Despite the advance planning, the level of violence unleashed during the pogrom seems to have been a spontaneous development. The massacre of an entire community was the result of spontaneous brutality continuing unchecked, rather than the expression of a conscious choice implemented through standardized killing procedures. An element of randomness also played a role in determining the outcome. Some victims managed to stay alive for a time by abandoning all their belongings to the pogromists. Several separate forms of violence combined spontaneously into one in Tetiev; the same happened in other cases, which had lower victim totals.

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<sup>41</sup> Рохл Фейгенберг, *Летопись мертвого города*, (Leningrad: Прибой, 1928).

Unlike most large-scale military pogroms, in which looting typically comprised the main objective and killing took place in response to real or imagined resistance, murdering Jews was the aim of these pogroms from the beginning. Open exhortation to extreme violence came very early on from one of the leaders, who urged pogromists “to massacre all Jews, young and old, from the two-year-old to the octogenarian; only this will ensure their repose.” As the pogrom began, he “made all those who heard him take an oath that they would not spare a single Jew.”<sup>42</sup> A Tetiev witness recounts the entry of the pogromists into a house where a dozen Jews were hiding:

I hid under a bed in an alcove. The bandits began firing at the house, screaming and yelling. Then they began hacking away with axes and scythes. I heard one bandit demanding money from my husband, who replied: “I do not have any money. I’ll give you my coat.” But the bandit wanted only money. Since my husband had none, the bandit hit him in the head with his scythe.<sup>43</sup>

The mass murder in Tetiev differs from other cases of extermination by its sheer magnitude. The town’s Jewish quarter went up in flames; the arson focused on the synagogue and other religious buildings. It served both as a weapon of destruction and as a symbol of re-founding. When the blaze began to threaten the non-Jewish neighborhood, onlookers contained it without much difficulty, as well as without attempting to extinguish it.<sup>44</sup> The pogromists prevented escapes by surrounding the burning buildings; a crowd of curious onlookers assembled, as well

In the synagogue, the attics were crowded with Jews hiding there. After surrounding the synagogue, the insurgents set it on fire and would not let anyone out. [...]

All those who had taken refuge in the synagogues were burned alive. Those who managed to escape the fire perished under the blows of sabre, rifle, shovels, and pitchforks. Little children were thrown into the air and

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<sup>42</sup> Léo Motzkin, *Les pogromes en Ukraine sous les gouvernements ukrainiens, 1917-1920*, (Paris: Comité des Délégations juives, 1927), Annexes, 100.

<sup>43</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, 46.

<sup>44</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, 34.

came crashing back down on the pavement, splashing blood and flesh on the bystanders.<sup>45</sup>

In the space of a few hours, the fire had claimed some 1500 lives. In the following few days, the effect of the flames made the remaining Jews' hiding places obvious; the victims, if they had not by then died of asphyxiation, were now in the hands of the pogromists.

The pogrom extended to everybody, of all ages, fleeing, alone, or in any condition whatsoever:

Mothers abandoned their children and ran in all directions. The children expired from hunger and cold. Aharon Kroyman and his wife were killed by the bandits. When the confusion began, their six-year old son ran away and lay under an overhang. He cried and pleaded, but to no avail. He cried until he died.<sup>46</sup>

Two further measures were added to make the extermination complete. Pogromists organized into squads to hunt down any Jews who had managed to flee the town. This required mounted patrols and a network of squads combing the surrounding countryside.<sup>47</sup> Isolated, terrorized, desperate for a way out, Jews attempted to elude capture for days on end. A nursing mother hiding in a barn could no longer produce milk; her infant died in her arms.<sup>48</sup> In addition, the systematic killing of children, an untypical pogrom tactic came to the fore as part of the overall plan. Little girls and young women were massacred unhesitatingly by armed men. No restrictions remained in effect. In Tetiev and elsewhere, children left without parents were killed on the spot. In Germanovka, in September 1919:

Dozens who had managed to escape, mostly children and adolescents, met another detachment, and were massacred in their turn.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Motzkin, *Les pogromes en Ukraine*, Annexes, 100.

<sup>46</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Motzkin, *Les pogromes en Ukraine*, Annexes, 100.

<sup>48</sup> Joann Rose Leonard, *The Soup Has Many Eyes: From Shtetl to Chicago – A Memoir of One Family's Journey through History*, (New York: Bantam, 2000), 41.

<sup>49</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, 261.

## Ethnic Cleansing

Extermination was the culmination of a more encompassing cycle of violence, an element within a broader scheme giving rise to the pogroms. In Germanovka, the extermination of the Jews was the result of a structured peasant uprising led by an ataman, Diakov; the Tetiev insurrection was less well organized. Exterminations fed into and were given their impetus by a spectrum of movements in Ukraine. Tetiev, Germanovka, Dubovo, Lebedin were not accidents or isolated tragic episodes. They were the extreme manifestations of an inchoate campaign of ethnic homogenization throughout the Ukrainian countryside which made the Jews its primary target. The campaign was occasionally made explicit, as in Volhynia, where on the pile of victims' bodies the pogromists placed a sign with the proclamation of a new law establishing that no Jew should settle in the city.<sup>50</sup>

In retrospect, an aim to expel Jews from the Ukrainian countryside can be pieced together; this echoes the reorganization of the countryside which was undertaken following the Revolution of 1917. The burning of the Tetiev synagogue casts the goals of the Ukrainian peasant revolutionaries in question in a new way. The desire to eliminate the Jews of Tetiev or Dubovo obviously does not exhaust the question of either the aims of Ukrainian nationalism or those of the revolutionary movement of 1917. Nor should the movement – relatively insignificant in terms of lasting impact but vigorous at the time – be disregarded, which emerged during the revolutionary years with the aim of excluding Jews from Ukrainian political, economic, and social life before seeking to exclude them physically from the land. At the same time, the official policy of the Ukrainian People's Republic incorporated the claim of integrating the Jews in the national re-founding of Ukraine.<sup>51</sup> In Volhynia, at the end of 1917, peasants petitioned for Jews to be expelled from revolutionary organizations, including the peasant and the local factory committees; this was a way to wrest authority from the Jews, as well as to take vengeance.<sup>52</sup> In 1919, peasant insurgents tried to demand from Jews “a formal

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<sup>50</sup> *Jewish Chronicle* 2653, 06/01/1920.

<sup>51</sup> It is important to note that the Jews were not the only group stigmatized: the Polish minority in Volhynia, like the German colonists in the South, were similarly denied equal access to local political and economic life, criticized for enjoying alleged privileges, and accused of resistance. The present article is concerned specifically with anti-Jewish violence, but an initial comparison and study of the tensions with the official policy of the UNR are undertaken in: Thomas Chopard, *La guerre aux civils. Les violences contre les populations juives d'Ukraine. Guerre totale, occupations, insurrections, pogroms*, (Paris: PhD Dissertation defended at the EHESS, 2015).

<sup>52</sup> YIVO, TA, 767, Letter to the General Secretariat of Agriculture, January 8, 1918.

statement to the effect that they were not interfering in politics in any way.”<sup>53</sup> Other pogromists put it this way:

Our unit is employing pedagogical methods. We are trying to teach the Jews to stay out of politics. We want to kill their desire for power in Ukraine, where it should rest only in the hands of Ukrainian people. So we give them a little bloodless lesson.<sup>54</sup>

In July 1917, several localities in the Ekaterinoslav *gubernia* passed a resolution forbidding Jews to own land; others attempted to forbid them to engage in some specific commercial transactions, allegedly to prevent speculation.<sup>55</sup>

The revolutionary period was, for many peasants, the time to assert their power in local institutions or to appropriate land. It was also a time of institutional collapse and dismantling. Insurrection leaders tended to prefer intervention in local politics and everyday practices to getting involved in national confrontations, keeping up an opportunistic dialogue with the major political forces from a distance.<sup>56</sup> Questioned on his political affiliations, Perevalov – the pogromist from Tetiev – claimed to be close to the Borotbist program, even if he distanced himself from the “high spheres of the State apparatus.”<sup>57</sup> Jews were partly excluded from this general movement of political and social re-appropriation. Soviet occupation aggravated the marginalization of Jews in that it fed into the Judeo-Bolshevik myth. An ataman “explained to the peasants that under Tsarism the Jews had exploited the peasants, but with the coming of the Bolsheviks it was even worse, since the Jews were now in power. It was therefore necessary to take everything from them and drive them out of the towns and villages.”<sup>58</sup>

The prospect of violence always loomed large in this scheme. The young Ukrainian Republic’s Ministry for Jewish Affairs was alarmed to read of

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<sup>53</sup> Elias Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919*, (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1921), 359.

<sup>54</sup> Budnitskii, *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920*, 248.

<sup>55</sup> *Рассвет* 3, 23/07/1917 and 12, 27/09/1917.

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Gilley, “Fighters for Ukrainian Independence? Imposture and Identity among Ukrainian Warlords, 1917-1922,” *Historical Research*, 90/247 (2017): 172–190; Thomas Chopard, “L’ère des atamans. Politique, guerre civile et insurrections paysannes en Ukraine (1917-1923),” *20&21. Revue d’histoire* 141 (January 2019): 55-68.

<sup>57</sup> YIVO, TA, 6897. The Borotbists were a branch of the Ukrainian Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party,

<sup>58</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, 206.

resolutions passed by the Sixth Assembly of Skomoroshki, in the *uezd* of Tarashcha, in early April 1918:

At their last meeting, the peasants of our village resolved that all Jewish families must leave the countryside immediately. They had decided to expel 15 Jewish families back in January. Of these 15 families, 7 had originally worked at the sugar factory. [...] At a meeting, the peasants said they had to expel all the *zhids* who had settled among them.<sup>59</sup>

At another meeting, “they decided to expel all Jews from villages,” a project thwarted only by the Austro-German occupation. The Civil War, especially during 1919-20, provided the opportunity to implement this in many areas. In small towns overrun by armed peasant units, unremitting terror turned the bare few survivors of entire Jewish communities into refugees.

A former resident of the village of Khomovka in the Radomysl vicinity describes the intensifying atmosphere of fear and expecting the worst.<sup>60</sup> A single Jewish family had lived in the village prior to the Revolution; it was joined by a family of Jewish refugees after the unleashing of mass pogroms. Living together with the refugees was at first simple and self-understood, until the anti-Bolshevik partisans’ first incursion of July 9, 1919, followed by another one two days later. The first armed group consisted of five men, the second of eight; between them, they managed to “steal all property and kill two” of the Jews. Another few days later, an ataman, operating together with the locals, requisitioned the few clothes still in the two Jewish families’ possession. Even so, the two desperate families appealed to the ataman for protection. “The ataman decided to wait until Saturday for the resolution of the *volost* assembly,” in which 24 villages were to take part to decide the Jews’ fate. The peasants formed an armed unit under the ataman’s supervision, bringing the menace to a new level; a pogrom was imminent. The surviving Jews understood that time was of essence. The witness concludes: “We left by a circuitous path to avoid running into the rebels... for Makarov, where many Jews had gone. The majority of the Jewish population had left the place.” This testimony was apparently collected a very short time after the events recounted; we may assume the surviving refugees continued on their way in the attempt to

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<sup>59</sup> YIVO, TA, 1262.

<sup>60</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/239/28-28об: “Хомовка. налеты 9 и 11 июля 1919 г.”

distance themselves from the area. In Khomovka, no pogrom actually took place; the locals' menacing preparations sufficed to chase the Jews away.<sup>61</sup>

In larger towns, expulsion was typically accompanied by large-scale pogroms. This was the case in Stavishch and Stepantsy, both located in the region south of Kiev, in 1920. The preceding year had seen multiple waves of violence at the hands of White and ataman-directed armed units wash over both communities. Pogroms of varying degrees of intensity followed, each time claiming victims without discrimination as to age or sex.<sup>62</sup> As in Tetiev, outright anti-Jewish violence took on the character of ethnic cleansing.<sup>63</sup> Unlike villages where fear and intimidation sufficed to drive the Jews out, these towns' insurgents carried out extensive operations of ethnic cleansing. A *Evobkom* report describes the events of November 1920 in Stepantsy, where Ataman Iary,

promulgated an order concerning the “total expulsion of the *zhids* from the town within a period of three days.” [...] All the Jews, young and old, dressed in rags, left on a frosty November day after hoisting the sickest on wagons. This sight was terrible. [...] They were fleeing [...]. Within a few hours, there were no Jews left in Stepantsy. The cemetery keeper alone refused to abandon his station.... But he did not long continue to behold the tombs where his...brothers rested.... Three days later, he was found dead [...]. Thus did what had been built over centuries collapse within a few hours. Two thousand five hundred people fled to Boguslav.<sup>64</sup>

A February 1921 Soviet report on population movements in the Kiev region states that “Stepantsy broke all records when, in one day, about 2,000 refugees [from Stepantsy] poured in,” following “a written order, signed by the leader of the bandits who had devastated Stepantsy, telling them to leave the town within three

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<sup>61</sup> For similar examples in the Kiev region, see: DAKO R-3050/1/49/58-64, Testimonies on pogroms in Ivankov; Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews*, 235-236; Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, 438-441. An overview of the situation by the JDC mentions several deserted localities after the Civil War: AJJDC, NY192132, 4/30/4/498, “Information regarding the population of the Kiev gubernia for 1917, 1920 and 1923.”

<sup>62</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/210/20; DAKO R-3050/1/53/15-15ob.

<sup>63</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/242/24-25, “Погромы, происходившие в период 1918-19- и 20 гг в Ставище.”

<sup>64</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/53/15ob.

days and threatening them with complete annihilation if they did not do so.”<sup>65</sup> According to the 1926 census, only 4 Jews remained in the vicinity of Kanev (the administrative region with which Stepantsy is affiliated); more than 23,000 were recorded as resident in Kanev *uezd* in 1897.

Anthropological research on mass violence in former Yugoslavia has highlighted mass operations accompanied by specific, pinpoint acts of cruelty of a highly symbolic kind which played a crucial role in ethnic homogenization.<sup>66</sup> The same pattern can be observed in Ukraine, where the violence served as performative enactment of Jewish infertility. It forced a rupture in traditions, transmission, and filiation. Pogromists sought to project the long-term aims of their campaign as a tangible reality: that the Jews should have no future in the Ukrainian countryside and in its small towns and villages, and that they may only find refuge in the large cities. Thus in July 1919 in Obodin, Podolia:

There were only three families of Jews living in town. One family, consisting of four people, did not succeed in fleeing and was entirely massacred. The wife was found with her breasts cut off; a baby of six months had its throat cut; and a child of six was also slashed to death.<sup>67</sup>

Mutilation of the bodies of women and children is reported in Tripolie, where insurgents also cut off Jewish women’s breasts or, by slashing pregnant women’s bellies, attacked the physical signs of maternity and, by extension, the possibility of continued Jewish existence.<sup>68</sup> In Gaisin, men led by Ataman Volynets left behind a woman impaled through the vagina.<sup>69</sup> Although not common, these atrocities are not isolated instances; they are only some of the extreme but recurrent attacks against the very possibility of life and an attempt to sterilize the Jews of Ukraine. Another indication that the instances of extermination must be understood in these terms is the typical joining together of systematic sexual

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<sup>65</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, 451; confirmed by a report of the *Poalei Tzion* from October 1920 in which the same order is quoted: DAKO R-3050/1/53/16-160b. For a similar case in Stavishch, see the memorial book of the town: *Stavicht*, (New York: Aharon Weissman, 1961).

<sup>66</sup> Véronique Nahoum-Grappe, “Anthropologie de la violence extrême: le crime de profanation,” *Revue internationale des sciences sociales* 174/4 (2002): 601-609.

<sup>67</sup> Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews*, 392.

<sup>68</sup> Bernard Lecache, *Quand Israël meurt...Au pays des pogroms*, (Ressouvenances, 2010), 160-161; DAKO R-3050/1/53/15-160b, Reports on pogroms in Stepantsy.

<sup>69</sup> GARF 5881/2/312/30b-4, Testimony by Govoruchin on Ataman Volynets written in emigration.

violence with ethnic cleansing, despite the focus on total massacre. In Tetiev, the widespread carnage did not prevent mass rape. Thirty women and three men who had been hiding in one house were discovered close to the end of the pogrom. One of the women, who had already lost all her family, recounts how, after immediately shooting the three men, the insurgents “raped many of the women, then made us lie down in the mud and trampled us with their horses” before abandoning the victims.<sup>70</sup> Another survivor reports a near identical case.<sup>71</sup> In their objectives as in their practices, the exterminations share many features with other aspects of ethnic cleansing in Ukraine. These are the multiple faces of the anti-Jewish violence perpetrated during the Civil War in Ukraine.

## Conclusion

Aleksei Davidenko, a leader of the extermination of the Jewish community of Germanovka, did not even attempt to hide. Unlike Perevalov, who inadvertently came to be recognized in the Belaya Tserkov marketplace, Davidenko actually boasted of his exploits to his neighbors; he seems to have been proud of his role in the uprising in the vicinity of Kiev. The Cheka finally opened an investigation. The Kiev *gubernia* Cheka received several petitions from Germanovka Jews, pogrom refugees who had fled prior to the final extermination.<sup>72</sup> Part of what makes the exterminations exceptional for their time was this sort of response by survivors. Investigation by the authorities concluded swiftly in all cases with a death sentence.

The Soviet authorities’ swift and discreet action against those responsible for the exterminations of 1919-20 in Ukraine was part of the reason why these events sank into oblivion. Unlike the atamans and other armed leaders, whose anti-Bolshevik activism is publicly denounced in the press and propaganda, the actual pacification of the countryside and the preceding violence were given almost no publicity by Soviet authorities. Several Jewish communities across Ukraine had been annihilated or forcibly expelled, but historical memory has almost exclusively been concerned with the image of pogroms perpetrated by the great anti-Bolshevik armies. This ongoing silence notwithstanding, it is evident that attempts at ethnic

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<sup>70</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, 51.

<sup>71</sup> Leonard, *The Soup Has Many Eyes*, 52.

<sup>72</sup> YIVO, TA, 5373-5405, Investigation file of Aleksei Davidenko by the Kiev GubCheka.

cleansing were the most radical form assumed by anti-Jewish violence during the Civil War.

Perpetrated by former neighbors turned insurgents, these pogroms originated in the re-founding movement of the Ukrainian countryside, which had crystallized in the wake of the Revolution, putting into question the perpetuation of inherited social situations and relationships between national groups. Critical moments of the ensuing civil war offered the insurgents windows of opportunity. Though this movement was inchoate, it involved the beginnings of a program which was on occasion formulated explicitly and implemented by a fraction of the Ukrainian peasantry. Far from disappearing with the end of the civil war, this program of brutal Ukrainainization was periodically revived by the more radical among Ukrainian nationalists during the inter-war period.<sup>73</sup> Sporadic exterminations, organized expulsions and depopulation by means of terror continued to be part of the Ukrainian insurgents' operations during the Second World War.<sup>74</sup>

It should be noted, however, that attempts at ethnic cleansing during the Civil War remained localized. In 1920, there was no centralized policy of ethnic cleansing in Ukraine and no coherent political program of ethnic homogenization of Ukraine as a whole; a programmatic approach during the Civil War can only be discerned in retrospect. Groups who had undertaken to exterminate their neighbors did not export the initiative to nearby localities; while in some cases persecution of the Jews continued, the intensity level of the violence typically dropped following the systematic extermination. Eliminating, driving out, erasing entire communities remained a local occurrence. The pogromists formed a heterogeneous band which enlisted peasants, inciting them to take up arms; beyond these two groups at the core of the pogrom action, however, was a considerable section of the Christian population in solidarity with the pogromists. They took a share of the plunder, they were part of the arson in Tetiev, they denounced hidden Jews, or they simply remained spectators. Extermination involved a range of strategies and possibilities.

Ideology, exacerbated nationalism, and antisemitism were not the direct cause of the exterminations in Ukraine. The sense of national duty was not central to the exterminations. Pogroms most motivated ideologically were not the most violent

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<sup>73</sup> Marco Carynnyk, "Foes of Our Rebirth: Ukrainian Nationalist Discussions about Jews, 1929–1947," *Nationalities Papers* 39/3 (2011): 315–352.

<sup>74</sup> Jared McBride, "Peasants into Perpetrators: The OUN-UPA and the Ethnic Cleansing of Volhynia, 1943–1944," *Slavic Review* 75/3 (Fall 2016): 630–654.

or the deadliest. As Peter Kenez points out,<sup>75</sup> radical nationalism combined with military discipline led to mass-scale massacres, while Ataman Semosenko of the UNR Army in Proskurov spoke of the “national duty... to exterminate the *zhids*.” But proclaiming extermination did not always lead to extermination in practice. Nuance is crucial: while exterminations were supposed to kill all Jews, we know that during mass-scale massacres in Proskurov, in Felshtin (UNR Army units), in Cherkassy (Grigoriev) or in Fastov (White Army units), pogromists abandoned plunder in favor of methodical murder. In Cherkassy, for example, a killing site was set up by Grigoriev’s men, with machine guns and a pit; hundreds were shot within a few hours. However, survivors’ personal testimonies are rich in accounts of soldiers setting victims free.<sup>76</sup> Exhaustiveness in executing the project of annihilation was never the reality. The pogroms in Proskurov or Fastov cannot be conceptualized as the prototype of “Nazi-type *action*: missing were only the vans with carbon monoxide outlets,” to quote Richard Pipes.<sup>77</sup> Experience of the Great War and the Civil War, tradition and innovation in antisemitism were the preconditions, and shaped the violence. If recent local political experience – the as of then short-lived and conflicted experience of the Soviet regime in particular – was crucial as the extermination pogroms’ fount, strict ideology was not.

Davidenko conceded little during his interrogation.<sup>78</sup> While clearly identified and accused based on eyewitness descriptions, he claimed he was not on close terms with Ataman Diakov, who had led the extermination in Germanovka; Davidenko also insisted that he was not a bandit. He was a respectable peasant, “heading the Germanovka Revolutionary Committee at Eastertime in 1919.” One thing is certain, however: Davidenko admitted to having imposed a special tax exclusively on the Jews. This was a fair measure, he contended, since he had had to balance the peasants’ contribution to the Bolsheviks. Up to the time of his interrogation, the Jews had to pay for what the Reds had done.

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<sup>75</sup> Peter Kenez, “Pogroms and White Ideology in the Russian Civil War,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, eds. John D. Klier, Shlomo Lambroza, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 293-313; 309.

<sup>76</sup> See DAKO R-3050/1/237 for the Proskurov *protokoly*, and DAKO R-3050/1/54 for Cherkassy. For broader perspectives on the variety of mass killings, see: *Le massacre, objet d’histoire*, ed. David El Kenz, (Paris: Gallimard, 2005). I analyze different instances of massacre in my dissertation *La guerre aux civils*, 294-300. While quantitatively among the deadliest pogroms of the Civil War, they typically claimed the lives of some 15-20% of the local Jewish population.

<sup>77</sup> Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime, 1919-1924*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 109.

<sup>78</sup> YIVO, TA, 5398-5399.

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**Key words:** Pogrom, Extermination, Ethnic cleansing, Anti-Bolshevik insurrections, Ukraine

**How to quote this article:**

Thomas Chopard, “*Ukrainian Neighbors: Pogroms and Extermination in Ukraine 1919-1920*,” in *The Pogroms of the Russian Civil War at 100: New Trends, New Sources*, eds. Elissa Bemporad, Thomas Chopard, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, n. 15 August 2019  
*url:* [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=416](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=416)

## **Red Antisemitism: Anti-Jewish Violence and Revolutionary Politics in Ukraine, 1919**

*by Brendan McGeever*

### **Abstract**

*When the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917, they announced the overthrow of a world scarred by exploitation and domination. In the very moment of revolution, these sentiments were put to the test as antisemitic pogroms swept across the former Pale of Jewish Settlement. The pogroms reached a devastating peak in the year 1919, marking the most violent chapter in pre-Holocaust modern Jewish history. A century of scholarship has conclusively shown that most of the atrocities were perpetrated by forces hostile to the Revolution. But antisemitism was not the preserve of the counterrevolution: it manifested across the political divide, finding traction among the revolutionary left, as well.*

*This article examines the nature and extent of antisemitism in the Red Army and more generally the Bolshevik movement in Ukraine in the spring and summer of 1919. In bringing together internal Bolshevik security reports, memoirs, newspapers, and Party and governmental communications, the article shows that revolution and antisemitism could be overlapping as well as competing worldviews. It does so by offering an analytical framing of Red Army antisemitism: drawing on works in Critical Theory, it brings into view the importance of class relations, and uncovers the complex ways in which antisemitism could find expression in revolutionary politics.*

### **Introduction**

#### **Ukraine on the Eve of the 1919 Pogroms**

**“Down with the Communists, long live Soviet Rule!”**

#### **The Elements of Red Army Antisemitism in Ukraine in 1919**

#### **The *Grigor’evshchina* of May 1919**

#### **The Confluence of Antisemitism and Revolutionary Politics in Ukraine**

Elisavetgrad, May 1919

Uman', May-July 1919

The *Grigor'evshchina* in the Spring and Summer of 1919

Beyond Grigor'ev: Antisemitism in the Red Army and Party in 1919

Antisemitism in the Red Army: Towards an Understanding

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### Introduction

The Russian Revolution of 1917 promised a world free not only of class exploitation, but of gendered and racialized forms of domination, as well. In the very moment of revolution, however, this vision was put to the test as mass outbreaks of antisemitic violence spread across the former Pale of Jewish Settlement. The pogroms posed fundamental questions of the Bolshevik project, and revealed the nature and extent of antisemitism among sections of the working class and peasantry. Even more troubling for the Party leadership was the depth of antisemitism in Soviet institutions at the local level, and in particular, within the Red Army.



Fig. 1: "The distribution of Jewish pogroms according to their organisers." Poster produced by the Jewish Social Committee for the Relief of Victims of Pogroms (Evobshchestkom) for an exhibition on pogroms in Moscow in 1923 (Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research).

A century of literature on the Russian Civil War pogroms has demonstrated that the arc of anti-Jewish violence peaked in the year 1919, and that most of the atrocities were carried out by forces hostile to the Revolution.<sup>1</sup> What remains less

<sup>1</sup> On the Russian Civil War pogroms, see: N. I. Shtif, *Pogromy na Ukraine (period dobrovol'cheskoi armii)*, (Berlin: Wostok, 1922); Elias Tcherikower, *Istoriia pogromnogo dvizheniia na Ukraine 1917-1921*, (Berlin: Ostjüdisches Historisches Archiv, 1923); Id., *Di ukrainer pogromen in yor 1919*, (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1965); Joseph B. Shechtman, *Pogromy dobrovol'cheskoi armii na Ukraine (k istorii antisemitizma na Ukraine v 1919-1920 gg.)*, (Berlin: Ostjüdisches Historisches Archiv, 1932); Nahum Gergel, "The Pogroms in the Ukraine in 1918-1921," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 6 (1951): 237-251; Peter Kenez, "Pogroms and White Ideology in the Russian Civil War," in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, eds. John D. Klier, Shlomo Lambroza, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Oleg V. Budnitskii, "Jews, Pogroms, and the White Movement: A Historiographical Critique," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2/4 (2001): 1-23; Id., *Rossiiskie evrei mezhdru krasnymi i belymi, 1917-1920*, (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2005); Lidia Borisovna Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov: pogromy na Ukraine, v Belorussii i evropeiskoi chasti Rossii v period grazhdanskoi voiny 1918-1922 gg. Sbornik dokumentov*, (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008); *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*, eds. Johathan Dekel-Chen et al. (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2011); Vladimir Prokhorovich

well known, however, is the extent of antisemitism in the Red Army during this period. In his classic study, Gergel calculated that the Red Army was responsible for 8.6% of the civil war pogroms, while the Petliura and Denikin armies were culpable for 40% and 17.2%, respectively.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the Red Army was the *least* prone to anti-Jewish violence of all the military forces in the civil war. Important though these statistics are, however, they do not capture the traction antisemitism often found among Red Army units during this period, including among those that did not participate in the pogroms.

That antisemitism could be found in the Red Army during the Russian Civil War should come as no surprise. In his classic collection of short stories, *Red Cavalry*, published in the early 1930s in the Soviet Union, Isaac Babel famously captured the ferocity of anti-Jewish violence perpetrated by the Red Army during the Soviet-Polish War of 1919-1921. Most memorable is his character Gedali, who, faced with violence coming from all sides, poses the haunting question: “who is to tell which is the Revolution and which the counterrevolution?”<sup>3</sup> Despite the international popularity of Babel’s writings, however, Red Army pogroms have remained relatively under-examined in the literature on the Russian Revolution and subsequent civil war.

Recent studies by Russian historians Oleg Budnitskii and Vladimir Buldakov have gone some way to addressing this oversight.<sup>4</sup> This article builds on these works in three ways. First, it gives a deeper, more granular account of pogromist violence and antisemitic sentiment within the Red Army in Ukraine than has been available to date. It does so by bringing together internal Bolshevik security reports (*svodki*),<sup>5</sup> memoirs, newspapers, and internal Party and governmental

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Buldakov, *Khaos i etnos: etnicheskie konflikty v Rossii, 1917-1918 gg. Usloviia vzniknoveniia, khronika, kommentarii, analiz*, (Moskva: Novyi khronograf, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Gergel, “The Pogroms in the Ukraine in 1918-1921,” 248.

<sup>3</sup> Isaac Babel, *Red Cavalry*, transl. Peter Constantine, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 65.

<sup>4</sup> Oleg V. Budnitskii, “The Reds and the Jews, or the Comrades in the Arms of the Military Reporter Liutov,” in *The Enigma of Isaac Babel. Biography, History, Context.*, ed. G. Freidin, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 118-121; Id., *Rossiiskie evrei mezhdru krasnymi i belymi*; Buldakov, *Khaos i etnos*; Id., “Freedom, Shortages, Violence: The Origins of the ‘Revolutionary Anti-Jewish Pogrom’ in Russia, 1917-1918,” in *Anti-Jewish Violence*, eds. Dekel-Chen et al, 74-94.

<sup>5</sup> Since the opening of the former Soviet archives, there has been fruitful debate about the limitations of internal Party, government, and Cheka/NKVD reports (*svodki*), which ostensibly provide insight into the “moods” of the Soviet population. These discussions have largely

communications to offer a comprehensive account of the nature and extent of antisemitism in the Red Army and the Bolshevik movement in Ukraine overall. Second, in examining antisemitism in the context of the spring and summer of 1919 – the deadliest period of antisemitic violence during the civil war – the article provides an empirically driven analysis of a crucial chapter in the history of pre-Holocaust Eastern European Jewish history. Third, it offers an analytical framing of Red Army antisemitism by drawing on the works of Critical Theory. This attentiveness to theory brings into view the importance of class and class relations in antisemitic representations of Jewishness - a hitherto overlooked dimension of the civil war pogroms. In doing so, the article uncovers complex ways in which antisemitism could overlap with and find expression through revolutionary politics.

### Ukraine on the Eve of the 1919 Pogroms

To understand how antisemitism found traction within the Bolsheviks' social base in Ukraine in 1919, it will be useful to offer a sketch of the Ukrainian social

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focused on the use of such sources for the Stalin era; this article, in contrast, relies extensively on *svodki* from the earlier, civil war period. Nevertheless, the limitations of these documents need to be noted. As critics have pointed out, these reports reveal less about popular opinions than they do about Soviet government perceptions of them. To mitigate this tension, Lesley Rimmel suggests garnering as broad a range of *svodki* as possible, including examples from both “peripheral” and central regions. To an extent, this article achieves this by examining *svodki* in each and every province of Ukraine for the year 1919. These reports were carried out every two to three days throughout the year by Bolsheviks on the ground, and they cover both rural and urban regions of the country. Nevertheless, to make inferences about the extent of antisemitism based purely on, say, Red Army *svodki* is problematic, not least because these sources tend to chart sudden sharp increases in antisemitism, not the longer-term patterning of such sentiments. To balance this, the article also draws on newspaper sources and memoirs to broaden the analysis. On the usage of *svodki* in Soviet history, see Terry D. Martin, “*Obzory OGPU i sovetskie istoriki*,” in “*Sovershenno Sekretno*”: *Lubianka - Stalinu o polozhenii v strane (1922-1934 gg.) Tom 1 Chast' 1*, (Moscow: Institut Rossiiskoi Istorii Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk, 2001); Lesley A. Rimmel, “Svodki and Popular Opinion in Stalinist Leningrad,” *Cahiers Du Monde Russe: Russie, Empire Russe, Union Soviétique, États Indépendants* 40/1 (1999): 217-234; Peter Holquist, “Letter,” *Slavic Review* 55/3 (1996): 719; Tracy McDonald, *Face to the Village: The Riazan Countryside Under Soviet Rule, 1921-1930*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934-1941*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Timothy Johnston, *Being Soviet: Identity, Rumour, and Everyday Life Under Stalin 1939-1953*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), xliv–xlvi.

formation during the revolutionary period.<sup>6</sup> Ukraine in 1919 was a society markedly polarized by class and ethnicity. In urban regions, the working class was overwhelmingly comprised of Ukraine's minority ethnic populations - above all, Russians and Jews.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, those sections of the working class which were ethnically Ukrainian tended to be politically and culturally oriented to Russia.<sup>8</sup> In sharp contrast, the vast rural regions were overwhelmingly Ukrainian.<sup>9</sup> The first Soviet census of 1926 captured it well: while Ukrainians constituted 80 percent of the total population of Ukraine, they represented a mere 4 percent of the industrial working class. At the same time, they totaled 91 percent of the peasantry, and according to some historians, the corresponding figure may have been as high as 97 percent in 1917.<sup>10</sup> Those who were Ukrainian by ethnicity thus frequently found themselves to be minorities in the major cities, and in no case did they ever constitute the majority of the urban population.<sup>11</sup> These dynamics had significant implications for class relations. Nationality, ethnicity, and class frequently manifested as interlocking experiences; consequently, relations between urban traders and peasants were intersectional in character: they were simultaneously processes of class *and* identity formation. In Ukrainian peasant popular culture, the "city man" represented a ruthless profiteer, an oppressor of the poor Ukrainian toiler. The crisis of the revolutionary period frequently provided the foil for these representations to come to the fore, particularly when the breakdown of exchange channels left peasants without vital manufactured goods such as boots, cloth, nails, and ploughs.<sup>12</sup> In Ukraine, the national

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<sup>6</sup> The term "social base" is used in this article to refer not only to Party members, but also more broadly to those components of society on which the Bolsheviks depended to secure power in Ukraine. Significantly, this included Red Army soldiers, many of whom were not Party members. In a context of all out Civil War in 1919, Bolshevik power in Ukraine, wherever it existed, was largely a militarized form of statecraft.

<sup>7</sup> Jurij Borys, *The Sovietization of Ukraine, 1917-1923: The Communist Doctrine and Practice of National Self-Determination*, (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1980), 70-71.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923, Vol. 1*, (London: Penguin Books, 1950); Liliana Riga, *The Bolsheviks and the Russian Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Leon Trotsky, *Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution, Vol. 3*, (London: Sphere Books, 1967), 46.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government. Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times, 1917-1920*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1999), 16.

<sup>11</sup> Borys, *The Sovietization of Ukraine*, 64-67.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur E. Adams, *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine: Second Campaign, 1918-1919*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 10.

question was keenly felt at the point of production, and in particular, in the realm of distribution and exchange.<sup>13</sup>

**“Down with the Communists, long live Soviet Rule!”**

This had profound political consequences. Writing in early June 1919, the Bolshevik Nikolai Podvoiskii admitted that the Party’s only real semblance of governmental power was in the capital cities of Kharkiv, Ekaterinoslav, Poltava, and Chernihiv;<sup>14</sup> all industrial regions located in the east and northeast of the country, heavily populated by so-called “non-Ukrainians.” These contradictions found expression in popular representations of Bolshevik rule, which, in the eyes of many Ukrainians, was “foreign” and “urban.”<sup>15</sup> In the popular Ukrainian imaginary, “the Communist” was a construct defined by the intersections of class, ethnicity, and place: Communists were urban dwellers, non-Ukrainians who stood aloof from peasant life; they were “Russian oppressors” and, above all, “speculating Jews.”<sup>16</sup>

These representations were taken up in revolutionary politics, particularly among sections of the radicalized Ukrainian peasantry, which in 1919 began to mobilize around the slogans “We Are for Bolshevik Rule But without Communists!” and “Down with the Communists, Long Live Soviet Rule!” This emergent form of revolutionary subjectivity was closely connected to the politics of antisemitism. Internal Bolshevik security reports show that across Ukraine in mid-1919, sections of the peasantry and other social classes were deeply attached

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher Ford, “The Crossroads of the European Revolution: Ukrainian Social-Democrats and Communists (Independentists), the Ukrainian Revolution and Soviet Hungary 1917-1920,” *Critique* 38/4 (2010): 573. As the Bolshevik N. Podvoiskii admitted in early August 1919, “the distinction between the city and the countryside in Ukraine strongly exacerbated national oppression,” YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (hereafter YIVO) RG80 Folder 48, 3852.

<sup>14</sup> *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii* (Hereafter RGASPI) f.71 o.35 d.691 l.2. Or, as the Bundist Moïshe Rafes put it, the only “genuinely revolutionary proletarian elements in Ukraine were to be found in the mass of the proletariat of national minorities - Russians and Jews.” Borys, *The Sovietization of Ukraine*, 385.

<sup>15</sup> In its propaganda the Party tried to overcome the popular perception of the Bolsheviks as “non-Ukrainian:” *Tsentral’nyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Hromads’kykh Ob’iednan’ Ukrainy* (hereafter TsDAHO) f.57 o.2 d.342 l.139

<sup>16</sup> See, for, example RGASPI f.17 o.6 d.369 l.112-113, 248.

to the pernicious Jew-Communist conflation.<sup>17</sup> The fight for the popular conception of “Soviet rule” often became associated with a fight against “Jewish communism.”<sup>18</sup> In Poltava in late April, for example, peasants shouted “down with the Yids, down with this Moscow Communist government, long live Soviet rule!”<sup>19</sup> The spring and summer of 1919 would reveal just how entrenched these sentiments had become, including within the Bolsheviks’ own social base.

### The Elements of Red Army Antisemitism in Ukraine in 1919

The principal agent of Red Army antisemitism in Ukraine in early 1919 was the partisan peasant soldier, mobilized by the Bolsheviks on the basis of a radical anti-bourgeois political project. This mobilization was crucial for the Bolshevik victory in Ukraine: according to Red Army Commander Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, the Reds started out in late 1918 with some 7-8,000 troops, and by mid-February 1919 that number had risen sharply to over 46,000. This included at least 5,000 troops who had transferred directly from the Ukrainian Army to the Soviet Army. Even more substantial were the numbers of peasant militias (at least 14,000), who now aligned themselves to ad-hoc Red partisan units.<sup>20</sup> However, this was anything but a regular standing army. Writing in June 1919, Bolshevik leader Nikolai Podvoiskii claimed that an astonishing 90 percent of Soviet troops stationed in Ukraine were in fact composed of partisan and insurgent units.<sup>21</sup> These nominally “Soviet,” ad-hoc Red Army units, overwhelmingly peasant by composition, tended to operate with little recourse to external control.<sup>22</sup> They gave the Bolshevik leadership little cause to be

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<sup>17</sup> TsDAHO f.1 o.20. d.35 l.11-12; *Tsentral’nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv vyshchykh orhaniv vladny ta upravlinnia Ukrainy* (hereafter TsDAVO) f.5 o.1 d.17 l.72.

<sup>18</sup> For the most comprehensive work to date on the overlap between left Ukrainian nationalism and antisemitism in 1919, see Christopher Gilley, “The Ukrainian Anti-Bolshevik Risings of Spring and Summer 1919: Intellectual History in a Space of Violence,” *Revolutionary Russia* 27/2 (2014): 120; Id., “*Otamanshchyna?*: The Self-Formation of Ukrainian and Russian Warlords at the Beginning of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries,” *Ab Imperio* 2015, 3 (2015): 83-84; Id., “Fighters for Ukrainian Independence? Imposture and Identity among Ukrainian Warlords, 1917-22,” *Historical Research* 90/247 (2017): 183-184.

<sup>19</sup> TsDAVO f.5 o.1 d.17 l.64

<sup>20</sup> Vladimir Aleksandrovič Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine. Tom 3* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe voennoe izdatel’stvo, 1932), 166-167. See also RGASPI f.71 o.35 d.507 l.79-82.

<sup>21</sup> RGASPI f.71 o.35 d.691 l.3

<sup>22</sup> RGASPI f.71 o.35 d.507 l.79-82 On the peasant composition of the Red partisan units, see Borys, *The Sovietization of Ukraine, 1917-1923*, 201.

confident of their allegiance.<sup>23</sup> The centralization of the Red Army, so vigorously called for by Lenin and Stalin in 1919, was simply impossible in Ukraine.<sup>24</sup>

In these circumstances, the Bolshevik leadership in Ukraine was heavily dependent on more reliable forces such as the International Division, a multi-ethnic regiment composed of Jewish self-defense units and Chinese, Hungarian, Austrian, and German workers.<sup>25</sup> Regiments of this kind often played a crucial role in putting down pogroms carried out by partisan Soviet units. However, from February onwards, Red Army Commander Antonov-Ovseenko repeatedly lost his most reliable troops as the Party center in Moscow ordered Red units to be sent from the Ukrainian front to fight on the southern and eastern fronts, where Admiral Kolchak was making westward gains on the Bolsheviks. The Ukrainian Bolsheviks were therefore forced to accelerate the formation of new partisan units and Red Guard detachments.<sup>26</sup> Such was the scramble for troops that Antonov-Ovseenko was in no position to check and screen those who volunteered for the Reds. If partisans simply declared that they would fight for the Reds or that they would defeat the “bourgeois enemy,” they were accepted.<sup>27</sup> In contrast to the first Bolshevik government of 1917-1918 in Ukraine, which had relied predominantly on Russian Red Guards, this second Bolshevik campaign to secure power drew almost exclusively on a Ukrainian peasant social base.<sup>28</sup> As

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<sup>23</sup> Elias Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919*, (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1921), 89-90; Adams, *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine*, 133.

<sup>24</sup> Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919*, 89-90; Adams, *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine*, 133. See also RGASPI f.17 o.109 d.43 l.16-190b. On Lenin's and Stalin's call to centralize the Red Army, see S. M. Korolivskii, N. K. Kolensnik, and I. K. Rybalka, *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine 1918-1920, Tom vtoroi*, (Kiev: Izdatel'stvo naukova duma, 1967), 1.

<sup>25</sup> See Adams, *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine*, 147-148; Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879-1921*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 428.

<sup>26</sup> Adams, *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine*, 147-148; Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, 428 and 439.

<sup>27</sup> Adams, *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine*, 148.

<sup>28</sup> Borys, *The Sovietization of Ukraine*, 194 and 201. This is captured in the memoirs of Zatonskii, a leading figure in the Soviet government in Ukraine: “[In 1919] we submitted to elements of the peasantry who, although very much sympathetic to Bolshevism, were nonetheless very suspicious, to say the least, of Communism. The peasant partisan enthusiastically interpreted our battle slogans during the period of the overthrow of the old regime, and saw us as willing allies in his fight against the landlords. But having won that fight, the partisan wanted one further thing: he wanted to be rid of everything foreign [*chuzhdoe*] and imposed [*nanosnoe*] (urban) so that he might finally be the master of his own land...[Previously] the Bolsheviks had said ‘arm yourself, beat the landlord and seize his land!’ The Communists now say ‘give the state your bread, subject yourselves to discipline...give us your weapons’...it is no surprise that...they turned against us with almost the same ferocity with which they had risen up against the *Hetman* and *Petliura*.” V. P. Zatonskii, “*Vodovorot (iz proshlogo)*,” in *Etapy bol'shogo puti. Vospominaniia o*

Podvoiskii noted in August 1919, “Bolshevism” in Ukraine had taken the form of agrarian *partizanstvo*, not the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>29</sup> As its ranks swelled, the Red Army was approaching the size required to consolidate power in Ukraine. The political and ideological foundations of this army’s base, however, were deeply contentious.

The consequences of this soon became apparent. As early as February 1919, internal Bolshevik reports began to note the depth of antisemitism in various units and divisions of the Red Army.<sup>30</sup> By early April, reports indicated that Red Army divisions in Ukraine were composed of troops formerly attached to the army of the Ukrainian Directory. Needless to say, such divisions were plagued by antisemitism.<sup>31</sup> On April 5, Podvoiskii gave a stark assessment of the situation facing the Bolsheviks: “we have, to our own detriment, absorbed not only counterrevolutionaries, not only White Guard scum, but even more so the masses of poor peasants [*bedniakov*]... who, having been mobilized previously by the counterrevolution, have fled that camp and now joined ours.”<sup>32</sup> In sum, antisemitism had its basis in the overwhelmingly partisan composition of the Red Army in Ukraine; the worldview of the Bolsheviks’ social base contrasted sharply with that of the Party leadership.<sup>33</sup>

Throughout March and April, the fragility of Soviet rule was cruelly exposed as various Red Army units rose up against the Bolsheviks. Ostensibly under the control of Red Army Commander Antonov-Ovseenko, these rebel units were, in actuality, loyal to their charismatic, independently minded leaders: *otamany*, self-styled warlords, who frequently changed sides in the civil war.<sup>34</sup> According to the head of the Ukrainian Soviet government, Khristian Rakovskii, between April 1 and May 1, at least 93 uprisings occurred within the ranks of the Soviet Ukrainian

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*grazhdanskoi voine*, ed. V. D. Polikarpov, (Moskva: Voennoe izdatel'stvo ministerstva oborony SSSR, 1963), 155. I thank Dimitri Tolkatsch for bringing this source to my attention.

<sup>29</sup> YIVO RG80 folder 48, 3851.

<sup>30</sup> TsDAVO f.5 o.1 d.17 l.23-230b

<sup>31</sup> For example, see the following report on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Red Army Division: TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.35 l.5-6. For more on the composition of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, see Korolivskii, Kolensnik and Rybalka, *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine 1918-1920. Tom pervyi, kniga pervaiia*, (Kiev: Izdatel'stvo naukova дума, 1967), 22.

<sup>32</sup> RGASPI f.71 o.35 d.507 l.80

<sup>33</sup> RGASPI f.272 o.1 d.81 l.65

<sup>34</sup> The name given to commanders of these partisan units - *otamany* - was a reference to Zaporozhian Cossack leaders from the Early Modern period, who were seen by Ukrainian nationalists as the true bearers of the Ukrainian national idea. See Gilley, “Otamanshchyna?”

Army.<sup>35</sup> As they attacked buildings where soviets convened and shot Cheka agents, these rebels called for a “soviet rule” in its populist sense, that is, local self-government without communes, without grain requisitioning, without “Communists” and, above all, without “Jews.” The uprisings revealed the extraordinary confluence between radical politics, Ukrainian nationalism, and antisemitism. Most threatening of all was the *Grigor’evshchina* of May 1919, the rebellion of Red Army units under the control of Nikifor Grigor’ev.<sup>36</sup>

### The *Grigor’evshchina* of May 1919

A former officer in the Tsarist army during the First World War, Nikifor Grigor’ev initially sided with the German-backed Skoropads’kyi regime, before forming an alliance with the Ukrainian nationalist Petliura in 1918, when he commanded a number of partisan units in the south of Ukraine. In February 1919, however, Grigor’ev joined forces with the Bolsheviks, a defection which crucially opened up the front to the Red Army. At a time when the most reliable Soviet armies were being taken out of Ukraine and sent to the eastern and southern fronts, Grigor’ev provided the vital military resources needed to secure the key cities and regions in the Ukrainian south. His newly constituted 1<sup>st</sup> Transdneprian Red Army Division was huge, and comprised of some 13-16,000

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<sup>35</sup> Adams, *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine*, 233.

<sup>36</sup> Grigor’ev was but one of several military leaders who sided with the Bolsheviks during the civil war in Ukraine. One of the most notorious cases of this kind is the Ukrainian anarchist Nester Makhno. The question of antisemitism among Makhno’s troops is contested in the literature. Some, such as Aleksandr Shubin, argue that Makhno’s army was free of antisemitism, and wherever it did arise (and the cases were few and far between, argues Shubin), Makhno took strong measures against the perpetrators of violence. See Aleksandr Shubin, “The Makhnovist Movement and the National Question in the Ukraine, 1917-1921,” in *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1970-1940. The Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism and Social Revolution*, (London: Brill, 2010). However, in March 1935, the Jewish historian and chronicler of pogroms Elias Tcherikower wrote in a private correspondence: “There cannot be the slightest doubt that he [Makhno] is implicated in a series of pogroms. I have enough substantiated evidence in my archive to show that his men were exactly the same sort of bandits as all the others. Whether they perpetrated the pogroms with his permission or on their own initiative is difficult to say; either way – he is responsible...In some cases, he sternly punished his men for individual pogrom-excesses. In many cases, however, no punishment was meted out for pogroms... For me it suffices to know that the ordinary Jew in Ukraine consistently held Makhno for a pogromist and that the fear of Makhno was immense.” Tcherikower, *Di ukrainer pogromen in yor 1919*, 348. I thank Lars Fischer for bringing this quote to my attention.

soldiers, many of whom described themselves as “Bolshevik.”<sup>37</sup> Their “Bolshevism,” however, differed markedly from the politics of Lenin and Trotsky: in Grigor’ev’s army, socialism meant defending peasant aims and supporting direct self-government at the local level; in other words, the popular peasant conception of “soviet rule,” with all its contradictory forms of consciousness.<sup>38</sup>

On April 6, just as the short-lived Bavarian Soviet Republic was established in Munich, Grigor’ev proved his worth by taking Odessa from the occupying French and Greek armies. Rakovskii, the head of the Ukrainian Soviet government, could scarcely contain his delight: “Of all the glorious victories with which the Red Army has covered itself...the taking of Odessa has the greatest, worldwide significance... Long live the Red Army of Ukraine! Long live Red Odessa!”<sup>39</sup> Yet the “Red Army” that captured Odessa was far from a communist army, and “Red Odessa” was far from “Bolshevik.” In actuality, the Bolshevik leadership in Ukraine was gambling the future of the Revolution on a partisan and highly contentious social base.<sup>40</sup>

The following week, Bolshevik intelligence reports began noting that soldiers in Grigor’ev’s 6<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army were openly shouting slogans such as “Long live soviet rule! Down with the Communists! All Communists are Yids!”<sup>41</sup> Although

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<sup>37</sup> In his memoirs, Antonov-Ovseenko (1933, 131) put the figure at 13,000, whereas Zatonskii (1963, 157) suggests it was nearer 16,000. On May 12, 1919, in a telegram to the Ukrainian Sovnarkom, Antonov-Ovseenko estimated the number at 15,000. See Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine, Tom 4*, 131; Zatonskii, “Vodovorot (iz proshlogo),” 157; *Direktivy komandovaniia frontov Krasnoi Armii, 1917-1922. Sbornik dokumentov*, Vol. 2, ed. T. F. Kariaeva and N. N. Azovtsev, (Moscow: Voennoe Izdatel’stvo Ministerstva Oborony SSSR, 1971), 202. Grigor’ev’s unit would soon be further expanded and renamed the 6<sup>th</sup> Soviet Ukrainian Rifle Division.

<sup>38</sup> Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919*, 89-90; Adams, *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine*, 165. For information on the composition of Grigor’ev’s units, see TsDAHO f.57 o.2 d.342 l.98.

<sup>39</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine, Tom 3*, 249-250.

<sup>40</sup> Adams, *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine*, 201. For a Menshevik take on Bolshevik rule in Odessa following the capture of the city by Grigor’ev’s troops, see Vladimir N. Brovkin, *Dear Comrades: Menshevik Reports on the Bolshevik Revolution and the Civil War*, (Stanford: Hoover Press, 1991), 167-170.

<sup>41</sup> Bolshevik reports from mid-April detailing the extent of antisemitism within Grigor’ev’s units are discussed in Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine. Tom 4*, 75-80. See also TsDAVO f.5. o.1 d.17 l.55. Some reports sounded the alarm bell as far back as late March. A briefing by a political inspector for the Commissariat of Military Affairs on March 29, for

these reports were all sent to the Bolshevik Central Committee, the Party leadership continued to depend on Grigor'ev in the hope “that his military strength might be put to use,” as Commander of the Ukrainian Soviet Army, Antonov-Ovseenko, put it.<sup>42</sup> As late as May 2, 1919, Antonov-Ovseenko dispatched a confidential memorandum to the Soviet government, advising it to maintain close cooperation with Grigor'ev, even praising him as “a local man” who has “always stood up against the oppressors of the peasantry.” While acknowledging Grigor'ev's unpredictability, Antonov-Ovseenko asserted: “it should be quite possible to keep him under control.”<sup>43</sup>



Fig. 2: Grigor'ev and Antonov-Ovseenko, Znamianka, April 1919

[https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Григорьев,\\_Никифор\\_Александрович#/media/Файл:Grigoryev\\_\(green\\_insurgents\).jpg](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Григорьев,_Никифор_Александрович#/media/Файл:Grigoryev_(green_insurgents).jpg)

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example, noted that among Grigor'ev's troops there was no political work being carried out and antisemitism was rampant Korolivskii, Kolensnik and Rybalka, *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine 1918-1920. Tom pervyi, kniga vtoraiia*. (Kiev: Izdatel'stvo naukova дума, 1967), 278 and 332.

<sup>42</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine. Tom 4*, 79.

<sup>43</sup> *The Russian Civil War: Documents from the Soviet Archives*, eds. V. P. Butt et al., (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 85.

The gamble backfired. No sooner had the memorandum been sent, than a wave of ferocious antisemitic violence rushed forth from the ranks of Grigor'ev's army. Buoyed by his recent victories, Grigor'ev now turned against the Soviet government, initiating the deadliest of all the civil war pogroms. In just eighteen days, his units, formerly attached to the Red Army and now in open revolt, carried out at least fifty-two pogroms, in which over 3,400 Jews were murdered.<sup>44</sup> Although accounting for only a fraction of the total number of Jews killed in 1919, these massacres were distinguished by having the highest fatality rate of all the pogroms perpetrated during the Russian Civil War.<sup>45</sup>

Despite a flurry of Party and central Soviet government decrees ordering Grigor'ev's troops to be shot on the spot,<sup>46</sup> the apparatuses of Soviet power in Ukraine were in no position to enforce these orders, given their lack of effective centralization and inability to rely on local forces. The seriousness of the situation came into view when one of the most dependable Soviet regiments, the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment of Red Cossacks, was pulled out of Kyiv and sent to fight against Grigor'ev at Kremenchuk. *En route*, it attacked Cheka units and started a pogrom in Lubny with the slogan "Death to the Yids and Communists."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Grigor'ev's troops carried out pogroms in Zlatopol (May 2-5); Znamenka (May 3); Lebedyn (May 5); Gorodishche (May 11-12; Zolotonosha, (May 12); Rotmistrivka (May 13-14); Matusovo (May 13-14); Belozerie (May 14-15); Smila (May 14-15); Elisavetgrad (May 15-17); Novomyrhorod (May 17); Cherkasy (May 16-21); Raihorod (May 20); Oleksandriia (May 22); Chyhyryn (May 25); Oleksandrivka (May 15-18); Stepanivka (May 18) and Semonivka (May 18-19). See Harvard University Library (hereafter HUL) f.3050 o.1 d.162 l.4 See also Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919*, 70; Sergei Ivanovich Gusev-Orenburgskii, *Kniga o evreiskikh pogromakh na ukraine v 1919 g. Sostavlena po ofitsial'nym dokumentam, dokladam s mest i oprasam postradavshikh*, (St. Peterburg-Berlin: Izdatel'stvo Z. I. Grzhebina, 1921), 10.; Id., *Bagrovaia kniga. Pogromy 1919-1920 gg. na Ukraine*, (New York: Ladoga, 1983), 7. Other reports estimate the total number of Jews murdered in the *Grigor'evshchina* at 6,000. See RGASPI f.272 o.1 d.81 l.92.

<sup>45</sup> Gergel, "The Pogroms in the Ukraine in 1918-1921," 250.

<sup>46</sup> RGASPI f.71 o.35 d.500 l.38; TsDAHO f.57 o.2 d.305 l.39, 45-46; TsDAHO f.57 o.2 d.342 l.85-86; Korolivskii, Kolensnik, and Rybalka, *Grazhdanskaia voina na Ukraine 1918-1920. Tom pervyi, kniga pervaiia*, 33 and 48. For an appeal by the Odessa Bolsheviks against the Grigor'ev pogroms, see *Documents of Soviet History. Volume 1. The Triumph of Bolshevism, 1917-1921*, ed. Rex A. Wade, (New York: Academic International Press, 1991), 384-385.

<sup>47</sup> TsDAVO f.5 o.1 d.19 l.5

### The Confluence of Antisemitism and Revolutionary Politics in Ukraine

What the *Grigor'evshchina* revealed was the startling extent to which Bolshevik revolutionary discourse could overlap with antisemitic representations of Jewishness, and with devastating consequences. To give an illustration: on March 29, on the eve of his advance into Odessa, Grigor'ev issued a telegram to all Volunteer Army soldiers to “throw your generals into the sea, raise the Red Flag, put down your weapons and in place of ‘God Save the Tsar,’ come with us peacefully and sing ‘Arise, Arise, Working People’” [the opening lines of the chorus to the Russian version of *The Worker's Marseillaise*].<sup>48</sup> Just six weeks later, however, in a dramatic declaration of war against the Soviet state, Grigor'ev issued his defining statement, known as the *Universal*:

Ukrainian people!...The political speculators have deceived you and, with clever methods, have taken advantage of your trustfulness. In place of land and freedom they have subjected you to the commune, to the Cheka, and to the commissars, those gluttonous Muscovites from the land where they crucified Christ.... Holy Toiler! Man of God! Look at your calloused hands and look around! Injustice! You are the Tsar of the land...but who governs you? All those who desire the blood of the people.... Down with the political speculators! ... Long live the power of the soviets of the people of Ukraine!<sup>49</sup>

As part of a more general attack on a range of “exploiters” of the peasants, Grigor'ev was expressing a non-referential antisemitism. “The Jews” were not explicitly identified, but the key signifiers of an antisemitic discourse were all in place: the Ukrainians had been “deceived” by a more “clever” people; the specter of the “bloodsucker” was invoked; the “honest” workers with “calloused hands” are ruled by “Christ killers” and *speculators*. Here we see the signification of a well-worn antisemitic conception of “labor.” In contrast to the “non-productive” Jew, stands the “real” toiler: the Ukrainian peasant, who, unlike “the Jew,” is engaged in “concrete,” “productive labor,” and holds an “organic” relation to the land and the nation.<sup>50</sup> Later in the same declaration, Grigor'ev demanded the formation of new soviets based effectively on the notorious

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<sup>48</sup> Adams, *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine*, 190.

<sup>49</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine. Tom 4*, 203-204.

<sup>50</sup> Moishe Postone, “Antisemitism and National Socialism: Notes on the German Reaction to ‘Holocaust,’” *New German Critique*, 19 (January 1, 1980): 97-115.

*numerus clausus* quota system<sup>51</sup>: 80% of seats in the soviets were to be reserved for ethnic Ukrainians, and Jews were to be allocated no more than 5%. This is but one illustration of the explosive capacity for revolutionary discourse and populist anti-bourgeois sentiment in 1919 Ukraine to be expressed through antisemitism.

Later, towards the end of his uprising in late May 1919, Grigor'ev's antisemitism came into full view as he openly attacked what he called the "Yid" Soviet government. Yet his antisemitism remained wedded to a left populist discourse. In a series of leaflets addressed to Red Army soldiers, workers, and peasants, Grigor'ev proclaimed in one breath "Long live world socialist revolution, long live the International," while in another he called on his troops to attack Bolshevik commissars, 99% of whom, he claimed, were "Yids."<sup>52</sup>

Grigor'ev's rebellion provides an illustration of how lines of demarcation between revolutionary and counterrevolutionary, so clear in Bolshevik propaganda, could, in actuality, be fluid and porous. Radicalized peasants and workers moved between these categories. Grigor'ev was, in part, drawing upon the same experiential triggers that the Bolsheviks themselves had mobilized earlier in the year – class injuries, the desire for local control, left-populist resentment. What is more, Grigor'ev was recruiting from the very social base that the Bolsheviks had mobilized to come to power in the first place. In other words, antisemitism provided a nexus that enabled people to move between the seemingly antithetical categories of revolution and counterrevolution. The following two case studies in Elisavetgrad and Uman' provide a vivid illustration of this.

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<sup>51</sup> The *numerus clausus* was a quota system introduced in Tsarist Russia between 1882 and 1887, which set entry levels for Jews in education and various professions at 5-10%. Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 262-267.

<sup>52</sup> TsDAHO f.5 o.1 d.265 l.1341, 1346-1347. In one document, Grigor'ev denounces the "people's provocateurs Rakovskii, Rafes, and Bronshtein-Trotsky," whose rule has led "eighty percent of the laboring peasants of the land of Ukraine to fall into the hands of a few little Yids (*zhidki*) and political speculators" TsDAHO f.5 o.1 d.265 l.1349. I thank Dimitri Tolkatsch for bringing these documents to my attention. Grigor'ev's leaflets around this time are also discussed in Gilley, "The Ukrainian Anti-Bolshevik Risings of Spring and Summer 1919," 121, and in Gilley's contribution to this Issue.

**Elisavetgrad, May 1919**

During May 15-18, one of the most ferocious pogroms of the spring and summer of 1919 took place in Elisavetgrad (present day Kropyvnytskyi), a city located in central Ukraine in the north of Kherson province. Surrounded by a large peasant population, the city was home to the Elvorti agricultural equipment factory, which in 1917 employed more than 7,000 workers.<sup>53</sup> In March 1919, the local Soviet state apparatuses were controlled largely by Left Socialist Revolutionaries (Left SRs) who, according to Bolshevik internal reports, frequently accused the Soviet government of being “a government of Yids.” However, such sentiments were hardly restricted to the Left SRs: the same reports note that the head of the local *ispolkom* – a Bolshevik named Ul’ianov<sup>54</sup> – campaigned for Jews to be removed from local government and replaced by Orthodox Christians.<sup>55</sup> The dynamic in the soviet did not fare much better: throughout February and March, there were speeches repeatedly demanding that the Jews be expelled from the soviet or pogroms would ensue.<sup>56</sup> In one particular session of the soviet, seventeen of its representatives debated for four-and-a-half hours whether or not to “beat the Jews” before finally resolving to vote in the negative.<sup>57</sup> Evidently, antisemitism was strongly pronounced in Elisavetgrad *before* the arrival of Grigor’ev’s troops.

In mid-April, 3,000 of Grigor’ev’s partisans arrived in Elisavetgrad;<sup>58</sup> by May 10, they had succeeded in dissolving the local Soviet government. Grigor’ev’s aforementioned *Universal* to the “Ukrainian people,” which depicted the Bolsheviks as “Christ killers,” was now plastered around the town. In a desperate attempt to hang on to power, a Soviet division of sailors from Odessa was sent to Elisavetgrad. Although they succeeded initially, when Grigor’ev’s troops

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<sup>53</sup> <http://www.chervonazirka.com/index.php?part=static&cname=about> Accessed June 24, 2019.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Ul’ianov’ was apparently expelled from the Russian Communist Party in early 1919, but made his way back into Party work by moving to Elisavetgrad. TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.91 l.25

<sup>55</sup> TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.35 l.1

<sup>56</sup> O.K.K., *Gody bor’by. Sbornik materialov po istorii revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia na zinov’evshchine*, (Zinov’evsk: Okruzhnaia oktiabr’skaia komissiia, 1927), 78.

<sup>57</sup> Zvi Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917-1930*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 165.

<sup>58</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine. Tom 4*, 78. Grigor’ev’s unit was composed almost exclusively of peasants from the Kherson region. See HUL f.3050 o.1 d.130 l.1.

returned on May 15, many defected. Later that day, the very same Red sailors participated in a vicious pogrom in which at least 1,526 Jews were murdered.<sup>59</sup>

On the morning of the pogrom, a committee of trade unionists, metalworkers, and members of the local Peasant Congress tried to put a stop to the massacre by forming armed detachments. The working class, however, was divided on the issue. On May 20, the local social democratic newspaper *Nasha Zhizn'* (*Our Life*) reported that the pogrom had in fact been carried out not only by Grigor'ev units and Red sailors, but also by workers.<sup>60</sup> Internal Bolshevik reports also indicate that those Communists who continued to fight against Grigor'ev (the majority of who were Jewish) were rounded up and shot by workers from the local Elvorti factory, the same factory from which the Bolsheviks had drawn their support throughout the preceding months.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, local (non-Jewish) members of the Party who had stayed after the arrival of Grigor'ev's units *also* took part in the pogrom.<sup>62</sup>

As is clear, antisemitism was a problem that crossed the military and political divide in Elisavetgrad. As one local Communist admitted in a frank telegram written in late June, "the entire work of Elisavetgrad Soviet institutions... including the Communists, is fundamentally compromised."<sup>63</sup>

### Uman', May-July 1919

Even more shocking were the events that unfolded during the struggle for power in Uman', a mid-sized town in central Ukraine in what was then Kyiv province (now Cherkasy oblast'). Its population in 1919 was around 60-65,000, the majority of whom were Jewish (approximately 35,000), with Russians and Ukrainians together making up 22,000.<sup>64</sup> Soviet power was established in Uman'

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<sup>59</sup> HUL f.3035 o.1 d.130 l.1; TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.91 l.25. See also Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919*, 244-245; Evgeniia B. Bosh, *God Bor'by: bor'ba za vlast' na Ukraine s aprelia 1917 g. do nemnetskoi okkupatsii*, (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1925), 89. The figure of 1526 is from a report by the Russian Red Cross: HUL f.3050 o.1 d.162 l.8. Other reports, however, put the number at 3,000: RGASPI f.71 o.35 d.486 l.412-413.

<sup>60</sup> HUL f.3050 o.1 d.130 l.33. One report even claimed that up to 75% of the pogromists were workers. HUL f.3050 o.1 d.130 l.12ob.

<sup>61</sup> TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.91 l.25.

<sup>62</sup> TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.91 l.25

<sup>63</sup> TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.91 l.25ob

<sup>64</sup> Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919*, 316.

on the evening of March 11, when partisan units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Ukrainian Soviet Regiment pushed out the Directory army. Almost immediately, the same Soviet units engaged in an extensive pogrom, which was only brought to an end by the arrival of a second Soviet detachment.<sup>65</sup> Following a brief occupation of the city by Ukrainian Cossack insurgents, who were no friends of the Jews,<sup>66</sup> the pogrom-prone 8<sup>th</sup> Soviet Regiment again took the city on March 22. Antisemitism was not restricted to the Red Army, but was present in local Soviet state institutions as well. Within the Executive Committee, for example, Left SRs succeeded in expelling Jews from office. They did so by making the now familiar charge that true “soviet rule” had been taken out of the hands of the “toilers” and sabotaged by “strangers” and “foreigners;” in other words, by the *Jews*. At about the same time, an antisemitic campaign was also initiated by the local Ukrainian and Russian population in Uman’, who accused the Bolshevik “Yids” of closing down Orthodox churches.<sup>67</sup>

This was the background to the arrival of Grigor’ev’s troops on May 12. The political field in Uman’ was one in which ostensibly pro-Bolshevik Red soldiers carried out pogroms; pro-soviet Left SRs successfully campaigned for the expulsion of Jews from the Executive Committee; and sections of the local population waged a populist campaign against the “Yid Soviet rule.” Antisemitism traversed the political divide in Uman’ in 1919.

When Grigor’ev’s insurgents arrived and deposed the local Soviet government, they initiated a ferociously violent pogrom in which at least 300 Jews were murdered.<sup>68</sup> In some cases, well known Soviet officials joined Grigor’ev’s troops in carrying out the assault.<sup>69</sup> The pogrom was finally brought to an end on the

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<sup>65</sup> I have been unable to determine which Soviet Regiment this was.

<sup>66</sup> According to a report of the Russian Red Cross, the Cossacks had murdered 300 Jews in the town of Teplyk. On arrival, they threatened to do the same in Uman’, but were apparently persuaded not to upon payment of contributions in kind in the shape of shoes and clothing, as well as money. Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov*, 129.

<sup>67</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov*, 118-119; Gusevi-Orenburgskii, *Bagrovaia kniga. Pogromy 1919-1920 gg. na Ukraine*, 83-85.

<sup>68</sup> P. F. Kurinnyi, *Uman’ ta umanhany ochyma P. F. Kurinnogo (z osobystiyh shchodennikiv za 1918-1929 rr.)*, (Uman’: Uman’skyi kraieznavchyi mysei, 2014), 208. I thank Dimitri Tolkatsch and Igor Opatskiy for bringing this source to my attention. Reports compiled by the Russian Red Cross in Ukraine detail entire families being massacred and tortured, with hands, feet, ears, noses and women’s breasts cut off. See Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov*, 122.

<sup>69</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov*, 124.

morning of May 22 by the arrival of the 7<sup>th</sup> Soviet Regiment.<sup>70</sup> However, just three days later, the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment was pulled out of Uman' by the central authorities to put down uprisings in the surrounding provinces, and in its place returned the dreaded 8<sup>th</sup> Soviet Ukrainian Regiment, the same unit responsible for the pogrom in March.<sup>71</sup> With its return came a new wave of pogromist violence every bit as brutal as the first. Reports by the Russian Red Cross in Ukraine<sup>72</sup> give details of armed Red soldiers stopping civilians on the street to ask "are you a Yid?" Those who did not answer convincingly were mercilessly beaten.<sup>73</sup> Jews who dared appear in public to go to synagogue had to run a gauntlet of soldiers from the 8<sup>th</sup> Soviet Army, who would stand outside shouting "who is your god?"<sup>74</sup>

The situation in Uman' is illustrative not only of the extent of antisemitic violence within sections of the Red Army, but also of the inability of the Soviet government to stop it, even when there was a desire to do so at the local level. As the pogrom raged from May 22 on, local Communist Party cells tried to fight the 8<sup>th</sup> Soviet Regiment, and several orders making pogroms punishable by death were issued. While local Bolsheviks did succeed in ensuring that ten Red Army pogromists were shot by firing squads, they were unable to halt the violence. Despite repeated appeals by Bolsheviks to the central authorities in Kyiv that the 8th Regiment be immediately dissolved, relieved of its duties, and replaced by another, *non-antisemitic* unit, there were no such forces at the state's disposal. Consequently, the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment remained in Uman' throughout the month of June.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps most controversially, according to reports by the Russian Red

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<sup>70</sup> According to the Ukrainian Left SR newspaper *Bor'ba*, Soviet troops did not arrive in Uman' until May 23 RGASPI f.71 o.35 d.486 l.217-219. However, a memoir from a local Uman' lawyer suggests the Red Army arrived at 9 o'clock on the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup>. See Kurinnyi, *Uman' ta umanhany ochyma*, 205.

<sup>71</sup> This was an enlarged 8th Regiment now totaling some 2,100 troops RGASPI f.71 o.35 d.498 l.167ob. The Regiment just two weeks earlier had carried out a pogrom in Haisyn, a town in central Ukraine. Committee of the Jewish Delegations. *The Pogroms in the Ukraine under the Ukrainian Governments (1917-1920). Historical Survey with Documents and Photographs*. (London: John Bale, Sons and Danielsson, Ltd., 1927), 228, 232.

<sup>72</sup> The Russian Red Cross was legalized by the Ukrainian Soviet government in 1919 and was allowed to exist until 1921. See Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov*, 849. In mid-late 1919, it carried out extensive investigations into pogroms and collected testimonies by survivors and witnesses. See, for example, the files in TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.126.

<sup>73</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov*, 126. See also Kurinnyi, *Uman' ta umanhany ochyma*, 209.

<sup>74</sup> Jeffrey Veidlinger, *Pogrom: The Origins of the European Genocide of the Jews*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2020), 282.

<sup>75</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov*, 127.

Cross, the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment was *intentionally* kept in Uman' by the Bolshevik leadership because it had proven itself more than capable of maintaining “soviet rule” by fending off various rebel movements throughout late May and June.<sup>76</sup> In six weeks of violence, the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment killed approximately 150 Jews.<sup>77</sup> To be clear: in the spring and early summer of 1919, the Bolsheviks were kept in power in Uman' by and through militarized antisemitism embodied by the 8<sup>th</sup> Soviet Regiment.

Finally, on July 3, the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment was replaced by the First Ukrainian Soviet Cavalry under the command of Fedor Gribenko.<sup>78</sup> However, this force proved to be just as antisemitic as its predecessor: upon arrival, Soviet cavalrymen robbed and attacked Jewish neighborhoods while declaring that they were there to fight “the Yids and the Communists.” It was only with the arrival of the multi-ethnic “International 4<sup>th</sup> Soviet Regiment” on July 5 that two months of anti-Jewish violence at the hands of the Soviet military were finally brought to an end. The International 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment was composed of Jewish self-defense groups, as well as Chinese, Hungarian, German, and Russian workers.<sup>79</sup> More pogroms would follow in Uman' in late July, but these would be carried out by anti-Bolshevik peasant insurgents. This time, the new Soviet government, backed by the International 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment, took an unconditional stance in opposition to the violence.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi voennyi arkhiv* (Hereafter RGVA), f.103 o.1 d.49 l.355-356. I wish to thank Dimitri Tolkatsch for bringing this source to my attention. See also Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov*, 127; Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919*, 87-88.

<sup>77</sup> Veidlinger, *Pogrom: The Origins of the European Genocide of the Jews*, 282.

<sup>78</sup> For more on Gribenko, see Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov*, 850; Zatonskii, “Vodovorot (iz proshlogo),” 160.

<sup>79</sup> When the International 4<sup>th</sup> Division arrived in Uman', the pogrom-prone First Soviet Cavalry was sent to Poltava. See Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov*, 118-130. Other sources give the date of the arrival of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division as July 8. See Kurinnyi, *Uman' ta umanhany ochyma*, 223. Often, the International 4<sup>th</sup> Division proved the most reliable Soviet unit in Ukraine and the one most capable of confronting anti-Jewish violence in the Red Army. On the Division, see Kelly Johnson, “Sholem Schwarzbard: Biography of a Jewish Assassin,” (PhD Dissertation, Harvard University, 2012), 111-112.

<sup>80</sup> University of Glasgow, Russian Revolutionary Literature Collection, Reel 47, Document 1162.

### The *Grigor'evshchina* in the Spring and Summer of 1919

These were not isolated incidents. In Cherkasy, a city 190 kilometers northeast of Uman' on the River Dnieper, a substantial section of local Bolsheviks openly interpreted the struggle against the bourgeoisie as one against "Jewish speculators."<sup>81</sup> When Grigor'ev's troops arrived there on May 10, a call was immediately issued for self-defense units to be formed within the trade unions. However, local "Christian" workers refused, leaving 100-200 Jews to defend themselves (all were reportedly killed).<sup>82</sup> The pogrom by Grigor'ev's troops in Cherkasy commenced on May 16 and lasted for five days. In the ensuing violence, some 617 Jews were murdered.<sup>83</sup> Reports stated that "Christian" workers in the trade unions' soviet either took part in the violence or were indifferent to it<sup>84</sup>. When local Bolshevik leaders tried to mobilize their Red Army division to put down the violence, copies of Grigor'ev's *Universal* were found circulating among the soldiers waiting to depart. When they were ordered to fight, sections of the Red Army refused, and declared their intention to side instead with Grigor'ev. When asked why they had defected, they stated their agreement with the *Universal*.<sup>85</sup> Although a Red Army regiment *did* eventually put up a fight against Grigor'ev's troops, testimonies by local Red soldiers reveal how those who defected to Grigor'ev did so on the grounds that Christian "brothers" should unite to fight the "Communist Yids."<sup>86</sup>

Similar developments occurred in the town of Zolotonosha, in Poltava province, where the Bogunskii regiment of the Red Army was stationed.<sup>87</sup> The regiment was utterly pervaded with antisemitism, and had perpetrated pogroms back in February.<sup>88</sup> In mid-April, prior to their arrival in Zolotonosha, Bogunskii soldiers apparently tore off the Red stars on their uniform, shouting "this is a Yid star!" The regiment's antisemitism was further underlined with the arrival of Grigor'ev's troops on May 12, which saw Bogunskii soldiers defect *en masse* and

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<sup>81</sup> Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919*, 251.

<sup>82</sup> HUL f.3050 o.1 d.162 l.17ob. For more on Jewish self-defence units in Cherkasy, see RGASPI f.272 o.1 d.81 l.90-91

<sup>83</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov*, 351.

<sup>84</sup> Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919*, 257.

<sup>85</sup> Gilley, "The Ukrainian Anti-Bolshevik Risings of Spring and Summer 1919," 114.

<sup>86</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov*, 140-141; Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919*, 268-269. For more on the aftermath of the Cherkasy pogrom, see Johnson, "Sholem Schwarzbard," 111-13.

<sup>87</sup> On the composition of the Bogunskii regiment, see Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov*, 856.

<sup>88</sup> See *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (Hereafter GARF) f.1318 o.1 d.426 l.5-5ob.

help carry out a pogrom under the slogan “Down with Jewish rule!” When asked by a local Bolshevik why they had deserted the Red Army, Bogunskii soldiers answered: “because they [Grigor’ev’s troops] stand for Soviet Rule, but they also kill the Yids and Communists.”<sup>89</sup>

### Beyond Grigor’ev: Antisemitism in the Red Army and Party in 1919

The *Grigor’evshchina* was an expression of a much deeper problem of antisemitism within the apparatuses of Bolshevik authority at the local level in Ukraine in 1919. Intelligence reports sent to the Party Central Committee in April and May make clear that antisemitism was embedded within the Red Army across the *whole* of Ukraine, including many of those regiments and brigades that did *not* carry out pogroms.<sup>90</sup> Although the wave of pogromist violence subsided after May,<sup>91</sup> reports from June and July show that antisemitism continued to be a profound problem within the Red Army and local Bolshevik and Soviet institutions.<sup>92</sup> The situation was so grave in some regions that Bolshevik agitators simply could not go near the Red Army for fear that they would be shot on the spot as “Yid speculators.”<sup>93</sup> Typical of such reports was an inspection carried out into the Ukrainian Soviet 1<sup>st</sup> Army in early June, which concluded that “political work among the troops is entirely impossible” owing to antisemitism, which is so “strongly developed... pogroms have become a regular occurrence” (*obychnoe iavlenie*).<sup>94</sup> Bolsheviks who wished to disseminate propaganda against antisemitism faced equally challenging circumstances in many rural regions. In Lityn (Podolia province) and Fastiv (Kyiv province), the

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<sup>89</sup> TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.35 l.116, 121-123; f.5 o.1 d.17 l.55; TsDAVO f.5 o.1 d.17 l.61; HUL f.3050 o.1 d.162 l.40b; RGASPI f.272 o.1 d.81 l.65. See also Gusev-Orenburgskii, *Bagrovaia kniga. Pogromy 1919-1920 gg. na Ukraine*, 9; Gilley, “The Ukrainian Anti-Bolshevik Risings of Spring and Summer 1919,” 114.

<sup>90</sup> Security reports for the months of April and May show that antisemitism found traction in Red Army units all across Ukraine, from the regions of the north such as the Volyn oblast’, Konotop, and Berdychiv; to Bila Tserkva, Poltava, Vasylykiv, Oleksandriia, Koziatyn, and Kryvyi Rih in central Ukraine; and from Konstantingrad (present day Krasnohrad) and Donetsk in the east, to Ochakiv and Kherson in the south and Koziatyn in the west. See the reports held in TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.35 l.40-42, 126-128, 156-158; f.1 o.20 d.41 l.2-12, 25; f.57 o.2 d.283 l.19-21; and RGASPI f.17 o.6 d.369 l.109-111; f.71 o.35 d.507 l.363-394.

<sup>91</sup> HUL f.3050 o.1 d.162 l.40b-6

<sup>92</sup> RGASPI f.71 o.35 d.507 l.363-394; f.71 o.35 d.489 l.251-292; TsDAVO f.5 o.1 d.20 l.6-30

<sup>93</sup> TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.35 l.95, 146-148; f.5 o.1 d.17 l.23-23ob

<sup>94</sup> TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.35 l.95

local Party had virtually no contact with the peasant population, which on more than one occasion rose up against the regime with the slogan “We are the Bolsheviks, beat up the Yids!”<sup>95</sup> The disjuncture between the Party leadership and rural communities was often considerable: one report from the Pustovoity village, in the Vinnytsia province, revealed that local peasants had no information about what Soviet rule was; nor did they know which party was in power in Moscow. They were, however, convinced that the Bolsheviks were all “Yids.”<sup>96</sup>

Similar difficulties appeared within the Party itself. In Fastiv, for example, a report noted that of the twenty-two Communists in the local Party organization in mid-June, only two were actual card-carrying members, the rest being antisemitic “Petliura agitators.” Membership, so the report indicated, was being coordinated through inter-personal friendship groups, and the antisemites in the Party could not be arrested such was their dominance.<sup>97</sup> Again, it is important to note that these were not isolated cases.<sup>98</sup> In some regions, antisemitism had become so pervasive that local Party and soviet organizations had split into opposing camps. In Lipovets (Kyiv province), for example, the soviet was composed of sixty Communist Bundists, twenty Mensheviks, and twenty Bolsheviks. The principal divide, however, was *not* a party one: according to a local Party report written in mid-May, the soviet was split along ethnic lines, with the Jewish and Russian groups effectively operating as separate, opposing camps.<sup>99</sup> In Ovruch (Zhytomyr region), the local Communist organization was similarly divided between a non-Jewish group which “openly tried to start pogroms” and a Jewish group composed of “honest workers.” The report concluded by demanding that the Central Committee immediately replace the antisemitic individuals with “real Communists.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.35 l.78-81,162

<sup>96</sup> RGASPI f.71 o.35 d.489 l.118

<sup>97</sup> TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.35 l.142-143

<sup>98</sup> See, for example, the following reports sent to the Party Central Committee in June 1919: TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.35 l.118-119,127-128,139-141; TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.41 l.19 and RGASPI f.71 o.35 d.507 l.374. As an article about pogroms and counterrevolutionary sentiment in the Kharkiv Bolshevik daily *Kommunar* put it: “the great hindrance and deficiency of our [Party] work derives from the complete absence of conscious party workers in the provinces” *Kommunar* 57 (71) p.1. 29/5/1919.

<sup>99</sup> TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.35 l.86-87

<sup>100</sup> TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.35 l.78-81. Similar cases were reported in Fastiv: TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.35 l.142-143

Yet the central authorities were simply in no position to effect such changes. Illustrative of this is the fact that on May 30, just a few days after the *Grigor'evshchina*, a meeting of the Cheka and Soviet government leadership declared that responsibility for dealing with local outbreaks of “counterrevolution” rested at the local level, in soviet institutions such as the Executive Committees.<sup>101</sup> However, these were *precisely* the bodies that were at times complicit in antisemitic violence during the spring and summer of 1919. The central authorities often tried to send “honest Communists” to the provinces, to ensure some stability. However, in some cases, things did not work out as planned: in Pavlohrad (a town in Ekaterinoslav Governorate), the “Communist” sent by the Party center, a man named “Panov,” turned out to be an antisemite.<sup>102</sup> This, again, was not an isolated case.<sup>103</sup> Such was the separation between the center and the periphery, that Bolshevik leaders were simply unable to check the composition of Party organizations at the local level; as such, these institutions were often staffed by antisemites over whom the leadership had little control.<sup>104</sup> All of this led the Central Bureau of the Jewish Sections of the Communist Party (the Evseksiia) to conclude in late 1919 that Jewish workers were “*often the only source of local resistance*” to Red Army pogroms and anti-Soviet uprisings in mid-1919.<sup>105</sup>

### **Antisemitism in the Red Army: Towards an Understanding**

Faced with this unprecedented explosion of anti-Jewish violence, Bolshevik leaders tried to initiate an extensive campaign against antisemitism in the summer of 1919.<sup>106</sup> Yet they faced great difficulties in doing so, since many within

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<sup>101</sup> TsDAVO f.2 o.1 d.25 l.72

<sup>102</sup> TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.35 l.24

<sup>103</sup> Reports by the Information Bureau of the Ukrainian Commissariat for Military Affairs make it clear that in Vasil'kov (Kyiv), the “Communists” sent from the center to put a stop to peasant uprisings were themselves interpolated by antisemitism. RGVA f.25860 o.1 d.148 l.81ob. I thank Dimitri Tolkatsch for bringing this source to my attention.

<sup>104</sup> TsDAHO f.1 o.20 d.35 l.40-42,118-119; f.57 o.2 d.342 l.30-33. A report by the Poalei Zion in June 1919 (sent to Lenin) complained that several Red Army units responsible for carrying out pogroms had yet to be disbanded. Similarly, it warned that “openly counterrevolutionary bandits” continued to occupy key positions in local apparatuses of the Soviet government. RGASPI f.272 o.1 d.141 l.18-19.

<sup>105</sup> RGASPI f.445 o.1 d.1 l.78. Emphasis original.

<sup>106</sup> See Brendan McGeever, *Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

the Bolsheviks' social base in Ukraine saw no contradiction between fighting for "soviet rule" and against "Jewish exploiters." All too frequently, the revolutionary visions conjured up by radicalized peasants in Ukraine overlapped and combined with antisemitism.

Critical Theory can help us to understand why. In Ukraine in 1919, a key feature of antisemitism was the representation of "the Jew" as a holder of power, a bearer of a "foreign" and distinctively exploitative class position. As late theorist Moishe Postone once noted, in moments of crisis antisemitism "can appear to be anti-hegemonic." Its particular danger for socialists and anti-capitalists, he argued, lies in its unique configuration "as a fetishized form of oppositional consciousness, [as] the expression of a movement of the little people against an intangible, global form of domination."<sup>107</sup> In 1919, popular interpretations of "Bolshevism" proved to be susceptible to precisely this dynamic. Many radicalized peasants and workers in Ukraine fought for a populist conception of Soviet authority, a power of "the people" (*narod*), of the "laboring people" (*trudiashchiesia*), against the capitalists, the speculators, the exploiters. These were standard categories of revolutionary Bolshevism, and as far as Bolshevik leaders were concerned, they were precisely the kinds of concepts that were best equipped to cut through racialized discourse and show the way towards a true class consciousness.

However, in the Ukrainian revolutionary conjuncture, class and ethnic categories could not be easily separated. Indeed, the terms "Ukrainian" and "Jew" simultaneously bore both class *and* ethnic overdeterminations. "Ukrainians" were "true" and "honest" "toilers" who put their hands to "productive" labor. "The Jew," in addition to being a "Communist," was a "non-laborer," a "speculator." In other words, the categories Bolshevik leaders deployed in their class analysis – "bourgeois," "toiler," "the people," "exploiter," and "exploited" – were, on the ground, understood in profoundly complex and racialized ways.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Moishe Postone, "History and Helplessness: Mass Mobilization and Contemporary Forms of Anticapitalism," *Public Culture* 18/1 (2006): 99.

<sup>108</sup> The place of "speculation" or petty trade in popular conceptions of Jewishness has been addressed in Andrew Sloin's pioneering work on Bolshevik rule in Belorussia. For Sloin, the Soviet state's designation of "speculation" as a criminal (not to mention "counterrevolutionary") activity coincided and often overlapped with the widespread antisemitic identification of "speculation" as a defining feature of Jewishness. There was a "tendency inherent in the Soviet project," writes Sloin, "to conflate Jewish economic practices with the workings of "merchant capital" and problematically impute to Jewish actors a certain agency over basic economic functions." See Andrew Sloin, "Speculators, Swindlers and Other Jews: Regulating Trade in Revolutionary White Russia," *East European Jewish Affairs* 40/2 (2010): 112.

Revolutionary class discourse was taken up in social struggles that were shaped not only by class antagonisms, but also by the politicization of ethnicity, antisemitism especially. It was in this context that slogans such as “Smash the Yids, long live Soviet rule!” gained such traction.

The mobilization of the Ukrainian peasantry around an anti-bourgeois populist politics had brought the Bolsheviks to power in Ukraine in early 1919. By the spring and summer, however, that same social base turned against the regime in an unprecedented wave of anti-Jewish violence. Red Army antisemitism was not confined to 1919, but would resurface in the Soviet-Polish war in the summer of 1920 and in different locales in 1921, as well.<sup>109</sup> When the Bolshevik leadership responded to antisemitism during the Russian Revolution, therefore, their confrontation was with an antisemitism that had become entrenched within sections of the Party’s support base.<sup>110</sup> Ukraine in 1919 would show, with devastating consequences, the extent to which class could become racialized, and radical ideas be taken up on the ground in ways over which the Party leadership had little control. This explosive overlap between class politics and antisemitic representations of Jewishness proved to be the Party’s biggest challenge. Although Red Army antisemitism culminated in just a fraction of the civil war pogroms, it posed the most serious test of the Bolshevik promise to build a world free of exploitation and domination.

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<sup>109</sup> RGASPI f.17 o.109 d.73 l.60-60ob; GARF f.R-339 o.1 d.424 l.119-119ob. See also On a Red Army pogrom carried out by the 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment in Bohuslav in 1921, see YIVO RG80 38 3474. On antisemitism within 12<sup>th</sup> Division of the Red Army in the summer of 1920, see YIVO RG80 39, 3519.

<sup>110</sup> For an extended discussion, see McGeever, *Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution*.

**Keywords:** Revolution, Pogroms, Antisemitism, Ukraine, Critical Theory

**How to quote this article:**

Brendan McGeever, "Red Antisemitism: Anti-Jewish Violence and Revolutionary Politics in Ukraine, 1919," in *The Pogroms of the Russian Civil War at 100: New Trends, New Sources*, eds. Elissa Bemporad, Thomas Chopard, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, n. 15 August 2019  
*url:* [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/)

James Renton, Ben Gidley (Eds.), *Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe. A Shared Story?*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 311.

by Arturo Marzano

The main aim of this edited volume is to shed light on the relationship between antisemitism and Islamophobia, by highlighting similarities and differences in the ways in which Jews and Muslims have been feared, perceived as enemies, and persecuted for more than a thousand years in Europe. The book is composed of ten chapters, each of which concentrates on a particular element connecting these two phenomena; together, the collected essays fan out diachronically to trace the evolution of European conceptions of Jews and Muslims from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, thus posing the question, to what extent a “shared story” (p. 15) may have taken shape during this period.

Two chapters deal with the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. In the first, Andrew Jotischky addresses the treatment of Jews and Muslims in the Crusader states. Both groups were objects of violence during the First Crusade: Jews were attacked within Europe, and Muslims outside Europe’s borders. Based on his study of pilgrimage accounts from the Holy Land, beginning with the writing of Jacques de Vitry, Bishop of Acre, in the early 1220s, Jotischky argues that Jews and Muslims were both conceptualized within a single ethnographic framework which derived religious beliefs and practices from ethnic origins: both groups were thought of in the same way, as “occupying a marginal territory between the fully realised humanity of the Church and animals” (p. 37). According to Jotischky, this conceptual scheme signifies an important stage in the elaboration of more systematic and clearly defined antisemitism and Islamophobia.

In the second essay concerned with the same period, François Soyer analyzes the conspiracy theory of medical murder in the early modern Iberian Peninsula. The same notion continued to be fostered well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the Nazi weekly *Der Stürmer* accusing Jewish doctors of experimenting – with fatal outcomes – on their Christian patients in Germany, while the infamous “Doctors’ Plot” of 1952-53 in the USSR led to a wave of arrests which stopped only with Stalin’s death. Soyer highlights the shared elements in the history of Jewish and Muslim forced converts to Catholicism (referred to as *judeoconversos* and *moriscos*, respectively), emphasizing at the same time that their experiences were not “identical” (p. 67). His detailed analysis of two forged letters, allegedly written by the Jews of Toledo to the Jews of Constantinople at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century,

allows Soyer to reconstruct some conspiracy charges current at the time, according to which *judeoconversos* who had maintained their faith in secret tried to kill Christians while pretending to be serving as their doctors. Claims of a medical cabal by *moriscos* were also current, but much less widespread or nuanced: they were coined using formulas borrowed from the anti-Jewish tradition as models, and were never as pervasively circulated as the allegations of a Jewish conspiracy.

Two chapters should be singled out from among the ones dealing with the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In one, James Renton focuses on the development of the notion of “Semites” (p. 99); the term had become the leading Western expression for the traditional Christian view of Judaism and Islam as in some way linked together. Singling out Ernest Renan’s part in developing the notion of the Semite as a racialized category defined in opposition to the Aryan, Renton elaborates on the way this label was deployed to Orientalize European Jews and thus enable a view of them as a body alien and foreign to the European whole. While the term encompasses both Jews and Arabs, Renton explains, only Jews were subject to political antisemitism: this was due to their location within Europe, on the one hand, and to the image associated with them in Christian European politico-theology, which did not target Muslims in the same way, on the other. Renton is very convincing in demonstrating that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of the Semite moved from an intellectual field to a political one, since the British government believed that Semites could be a significant political player in shaping the Middle East after the end of the First World War. It was Mark Sykes in particular, the Middle East adviser who had negotiated the famous Sykes-Picot Agreements with the former French consul-general in Beirut, François Picot, who thought that a revival of the Jewish and Arab nations and of a Semitic bond between them might serve the British Empire’s interests in the Middle East. Renton discusses attempts made by the Zionist and Arab leadership to satisfy London by adopting the political notion of Semite during 1918-1919 – the best known of these was the January 1919 agreement between Prince Faysal, who would later become Emir of Iraq, and Chaim Weizmann, who would eventually serve as the first President of the State of Israel – but that arrangement could not survive the reality on the ground in post-Ottoman Palestine. The “End of the Semites,” as Renton titles his essay, was evident in the mid-1930s, when a Commission sent by London to study the causes of the outbreak of the Arab Palestinian uprising suggested partitioning Palestine as there was “no common ground” between Jews and Arabs (p. 125).

In the second chapter devoted to the 19-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Marko Attila Hoare focuses on the Balkans: he analyzes the way in which non-Christian minorities, i.e., Muslims and Jews, were perceived and depicted by the Christian majority, from the Greeks in the 1820s to the Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats in the 1920-40s, noting that in Bosnia-Herzegovina Muslims were not a minority. Hoare's excellent essay reconstructs similarities and differences in the "violence and chauvinism against Jews and Muslims" (p. 165), underlining the existence of a common framework – Jews and Muslims were treated as ethnic aliens, not simply as a religious community – that varied according to political circumstances.

Finally, two chapters deal with more contemporary events. Sander L. Gilman reconstructs the debate concerning infant male circumcision in Great Britain and Germany at the end of the 1990s and in the 2010s and states that, despite the obvious differences between Jews in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Muslims today, the Jewish experience of the relationship between integration and identity might be a model case for Muslims. Unfortunately, Gilman only touches upon a crucial issue, the increasingly widespread perception of Muslims as "an 'unassimilable' minority," while "exactly the same things have been said [...] about Jews for two hundred years" (p. 157). A deeper analysis of this 'shift' – nowadays Muslims, not Jews, are considered a minority incapable of being integrated – would have added value to the entire volume, as it would have enabled a better understanding of the connection between antisemitism and Islamophobia. In another chapter, Daniel Gordon deals with the "entangled histories" (p. 220) of four French anti-racist movements, specifically the *Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples*, the *Ligue des droits de l'homme*, the *Ligue internationale contre le racisme et l'antisémitisme* and *SOS racisme*. In particular, this well researched study reconstructs the controversy that arose among these groups in 2004 concerning the relevance of antisemitism and Islamophobia in connection with public demonstrations against racism. Gordon argues that both are relevant realities in modern France and are inter-connected. He underlines that the antisemitism-Islamophobia link was already evident in 1961, when the Parisian police repression of an Algerian demonstration was compared – despite obvious differences – to wartime brutality against Jews. Gordon is not merely interested in underlining the connections between the two; he also believes that the struggle against the two types of prejudice should not be "considered as zero-sum games" (p. 245), but should be united into one.

In conclusion, this is an important book, as it tackles a complex and politically sensitive issue in a serious, researched and balanced way. Its only shortcoming, to

*Arturo Marzano*

my mind, is the absence of a cultural chapter to address shared linguistic and iconographic stereotypes characteristic of both antisemitism and Islamophobia, along with interactions between the two and their mutual influence. Nonetheless, any scholar researching these two phenomena is certain to benefit from this informative volume and its contents.

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**How to quote this article:**

Arturo Marzano, Review of *Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe. A Shared Story?*, eds. James Renton, Ben Gidley in *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, n. 15 August 2019

*url:* [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/reviews.php?id=137](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/reviews.php?id=137)

Yifat Gutman, *Memory Activism. Reimagining the Past for the Future of Israel-Palestine*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2017), pp. 186.

by Tamar Katriel

Yifat Gutman's book, which identifies "memory activism" as a distinctive brand of non-state sponsored memory work that challenges mainstream Israeli memory culture, is a major contribution to the study of collective memory in Israel. It introduces marginalized voices into the more familiar landscape of memory projects sponsored by the state and explores their relationship with mainstream memory culture. The book also makes a significant contribution to the study of activism in Israel (and elsewhere) by demarcating the field of memory as a cultural arena in which ideological struggles are enacted and negotiated through locally inflected cultural forms that promote particular counter-memories.

The case that Gutman has chosen to focus on in studying memory activism is indeed the most politically charged example of a collective memory struggle in Israel today – the memory of the events of 1948. Israeli Jews remember these events as the War of Independence with its national and military triumphs; for Palestinians they mark the Nakba, the catastrophe, i.e., the flight and expulsion of some 750,000 Palestinians from the Israeli State, the decimation of Palestinian society, and the creation of what is known as "the refugee problem" that is at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to this day. While the Jewish Israeli version of the events of 1948 has become enshrined in state-sponsored commemorations, school curricula and museum displays, the memory of the Nakba has been deliberately evaded in mainstream Israeli-Jewish memory as well as in school curricula designed for Palestinian citizens of Israel. The term "Nakba," which was unfamiliar to most Israeli Jews until the 2000s, became a part of the lingua franca in Israel following concerted efforts by the Jewish establishment to battle the Palestinian narrative by outlawing its commemoration through legislation that is commonly referred to as "the Nakba law." This was passed in 2011 after a long process of negotiated revisions extensively covered by the media.

As Gutman's book amply illustrates, memory activist groups, whose work is largely done "under the radar," have contributed in significant ways to the

production of oppositional knowledge<sup>1</sup> in an attempt to incorporate the memory of the Nakba into both Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli society. The book follows the logic and practice of three such activist initiatives: the first, *Zochrot* [Remember, feminine plural inflection], addresses Jewish audiences (to advance awareness of the Nakba in Hebrew, as per the organization's slogan); the second, *Autobiography of a City*, addresses both Palestinians and Jews who are involved in Nakba-connected issues, such as in its aftermath in the history of Jaffa; and the third is the youth movement *Baladna* that addresses Palestinian youth.

The study was conducted through a close ethnographic reading of fieldwork materials that focused on these groups' practices and rhetoric. It involved in situ observations, an analysis of public documents, and performances and interviews with activists. The analysis focuses on the ways in which these various groups sought to familiarize their target audiences with the Nakba as a story of unrecognized and unrequited displacement, suffering, and loss. It also contextualizes these groups' activist work by addressing the public debates surrounding the establishment of the Nakba law that called to withdraw public support from any organization commemorating the Nakba, such as schools and cultural institutions. Gutman argues that in the hostile public environment of an ongoing conflict, the commemoration of the Nakba as a counter-memory that produces oppositional knowledge in the hope of leading to recognition and to the assumption of responsibility has not worked as it has in the case of post-conflict model of Truth and Reconciliation committees in other places. The availability of knowledge about the Nakba has not led to recognition; it has given rise to defensive measures of de-legitimization in both social and legal terms despite the activist groups' persuasive efforts, to the delineation and analysis of which the bulk of the book is dedicated. The case of Nakba memory in Israel thus calls for a further interrogation of this widespread model of social reconciliation processes.

The first group Gutman discusses, *Zochrot*, epitomizes two major points the book elaborates: 1) the border-crossing nature of memory activism in the Israeli context – the fact that at one of the highest points of the conflict, the early 2000s (known as “the Second Intifada”), when buses were exploding in Israeli cities and Israel reconquered cities of the West Bank, the organization designed to promote the memory of the Nakba was founded by Israeli Jews; 2) the use these activists made

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick G. Coy, Lynne M. Woehrlé, Gregory M. Maney, “A Typology of Oppositional Knowledge: Democracy and the U.S. Peace Movement,” *Sociological Research Online* 13/4 (2008), <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/13/4/3.html> (accessed July 23, 2018).

of mnemonic practices adapted from mainstream Israeli culture as persuasive tools – guided tours and the archive of testimonies.

The starting point for Israeli Jews' engagement with the commemoration of the Palestinian Nakba is an act of recognition – recognizing the existence and validity of an alternative narrative; the public promotion of this narrative by Jews is an act of defiance *vis-à-vis* mainstream Israeli society as this border-crossing is generally interpreted as a turning away from the Israeli Jewish national narrative to the point of questioning the legitimacy of the Israeli state. *Zochrot*'s project seeks to unsettle this defensive stance, validating the Palestinian narrative by providing factual accounts of Palestinian life in pre-'48 Palestine and the events of '48 and its aftermath. The alternative these accounts present is not only a matter of giving voice to Palestinian Nakba stories, but also a matter of insisting on their relevance to Israeli Jews and on the points in which the Israeli and Palestinian narratives intertwine and may even collapse into one another.

This border crossing, which Jewish activists have embraced in collaboration with Palestinians, is not easy for Jewish audiences who have grown up with the official version of the state's founding, in which the Palestinian displacement is consistently ignored. Given the long-standing tradition of touring the Land of Israel as a Zionist practice, or "conquering the land with one's feet," as the Hebrew turn of phrase goes,<sup>2</sup> the use of tours to sites of destroyed Palestinian villages as a mnemonic practice makes good sense. By appropriating the tour as a cultural form, Jewish Israelis get a glimpse of the vanished reality of Palestinian villages through direct contact with the remnants, much as they do in visiting archeological sites. They also get a chance to experience their own and the Palestinians' shared attachment to the land while being intimately exposed to the nostalgic stories and deep feelings of embodied presence exuded by the (typically elderly) Palestinian witnesses' accounts that accompany the tour groups in sites the Palestinians once called home. This type of experiential learning, which is so much part of Zionist education, is harnessed in service of an empathetic reading of Palestinian memory. It encapsulates both a refusal to negate the other's memory and an opening for the recognition that the Palestinian and Jewish Israeli past are indeed intertwined in ways that recognize the victim-victimizer binary and the responsibility it entails for the dark side of history, as well as in ways that unravel

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<sup>2</sup> Tamar Katriel, "Touring the Land: Trips and Hiking as Secular Pilgrimages in Israeli Culture," *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review* 1-2/17 (1995): 6-13.

it in stories of a shared past that speaks to the possibility of a place-centered shared memory.<sup>3</sup>

The testimonial component of this activism is central to establishing the validity of the Palestinian narrative by providing a great deal of factual information included in the tour guiding, in photography exhibitions, in documentary films, in curricular materials developed for the teaching of the Nakba to school-age students, in detailed mappings of destroyed villages, as well as in richly documented booklets about individual villages that are given out to tour participants on site. As Gutman stresses, all these make up a dynamic evidentiary edifice that is made available to the public through tours, public events, and lectures and online. It draws on the testimonial culture that flourishes in Israel, mainly (but not only) as associated with the memory of the Holocaust. This move of cultural appropriation is a creative one, adapting the well-entrenched strategies of touring and witnessing and giving them new forms – e.g., the embedded texture of on-site witnessing, or putting up signs with the former Arabic names of destroyed villages or city streets along the tour route and thereby re-inscribing the landscape with its forgotten past, a momentary symbolic gesture that usually culminates in the removal of these signs by opponents within minutes or hours.

The second mnemonic initiative, *Autobiography of the City*, was founded in 2000 by a group of Jewish Israeli and Palestinian artists to address the memories of residents of the so-called “mixed” Jewish-Arab city of Jaffa of life before and during the war in 1948, following which the city space and the composition of the population dramatically changed. Gutman describes this project as “a memory-activism group that uses visual, creative, and technological knowledge for the production of high-quality video-recorded testimonies and a smartly accessible online archive” (p. 45). The virtual archive of testimonies thus constructed is informed by survivor testimonial practices that characterize contemporary, globalized cultures of memory and by traditional Palestinian storytelling practices. Though made available to non-Palestinian audiences as well, and forming the basis of a unique digital archive that tells stories unavailable elsewhere, the hybrid, “glocalized” idiom of narration serves primarily the goal of building a local Palestinian community of memory in Jaffa. In sensitively analyzing the processes through which this counter-archive is constructed, Gutman brings out its dual

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<sup>3</sup> Marcelo Svirsky and Ronnen Ben-Arie, *From Shared Life to Co-Resistance in Historic Palestine*, (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

commitment: to the hegemonic practice of testimony and to its radical manipulation that draws on the authority of the witness.

The third group whose memory work Gutman addresses attends to practices and debates within Palestinian society regarding the question of who will shape the memory of the Nakba and of Palestinian identity. Gutman addresses this internal mnemonic struggle by focusing on the story of *Baladna* [Our Homeland, in Arabic], an all-Palestinian youth association, and the ways in which it adapts Zionist commemorative practices. Founded in 1999 and officially registered two years later, this group's goal is to empower Palestinian youth and prepare them for leadership positions in their communities. Learning about their own history, which is not taught in Palestinian formal education programs in Israel, is considered to be the best way of enhancing Palestinians' communal identity. The story of the Nakba is clearly central to this history and to Palestinian collective identity. It is recounted during tours to the sites of destroyed villages, where the young visitors listen to their elders' testimonies of life before and during the war of 1948. In this case, the appropriation of the hegemonic cultural forms of touring and giving testimony is not a matter of embodied border crossing as it is in the case of *Zochrot*, as discussed earlier, but a matter of claiming voice and identity as a form of cultural empowerment in a wider context that is hostile to the story of the Palestinian Nakba. The narrative's suppression in public discourse and absence from formal schooling make the expressive and mnemonic possibilities created within informal, locally sponsored educational settings all the more important.

Gutman's nuanced ethnographic account of each of these case studies is rich with insights about the dynamics of activists' mnemonic interventions, taking into consideration not only the identities of the producers of activist messages but also of their intended and actual receivers. The author moves elegantly from detailed discussions of observed pedagogical interactions to macro-level considerations of the larger socio-cultural context in which they are embedded, including the legal and social struggles involved. She raises significant questions about the role of knowledge in processes of national reconciliation, using the case of Nakba memory in Israeli society as a way to open up discussion about the symbolic forms through which memory is shaped and their persuasive potential; the tension-filled relations between culture and politics; and the politics of legitimacy in working both within and beyond one's cultural borderlines. Memory activism, its practices, platforms and tenuous accomplishments, emerge from the pages of this innovative book as a crucial field of transformative social and political action, broadening our view of Israeli collective memory well beyond its usual scope.

*Tamar Katriel*

While Gutman is well aware of the limitations of the struggle she documents and analyzes, her focus on memory activism nevertheless engages a politics of hope, which is made explicit in a slogan currently circulated by another activist project of the many that dot the Israeli landscape (*Omdim B'yahad* [Standing Together]): “where there’s struggle there’s hope.”

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**How to quote this article:**

Tamar Katriel, Review of *Memory Activism. Reimagining the Past for the Future of Israel-Palestine*, by Yifat Gutman in *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, n. 15

August 2019

*url:* [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/reviews.php?id=138](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/reviews.php?id=138)

Alan Mintz, *Ancestral Tales: Reading the Buczacz Stories of S. Y. Agnon*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), pp. 440.

by Dario Miccoli

Of the many writers that make up the modern Hebrew literary canon, Shmuel Yosef Agnon is one of the best-known – as well as the most enigmatic. Born Shmuel Yosef Czaczkes in 1887 in the Galician town of Buczacz, at the time under Habsburg rule, he emigrated to Palestine in 1908, settling there definitively in the early 1920s, when he also assumed the pen name of Agnon. His works, from *shtetl* novels such as *Sippur pashut* (*A Simple Story*, 1935) to *Tmol shilshom* (*Only Yesterday*, 1945), in which he narrates the epic of the Second Aliyah, and his many Kafkaesque short stories, have made Agnon one of the greatest Hebrew writers – in fact, one of the greatest Jewish writers – of the twentieth century. Agnon is also the only Israeli to date to have won the Nobel Prize in Literature, a distinction he was awarded in 1966.

Drawing on his profound knowledge of Agnon’s oeuvre and of Jewish literature, Alan Mintz has written a masterful study of *‘Ir u-melo’ah* (*A City in Its Fullness*, 1973), Agnon’s posthumously published final *magnum opus*. Mintz passed away a short time prior to the appearance of his *Ancestral Tales* in print.

A collection of some one hundred and forty short stories about Agnon’s hometown of Buczacz, *‘Ir u-melo’ah* was written during the years beginning in the mid-1950s – or even earlier – and up to the time of Agnon’s death. The volume saw posthumous publication thanks to the editorial work of Agnon’s daughter, Emunah. Similar to *‘Ir u-melo’ah* as an extraordinary Baedeker leading the reader on a tour of Buczacz, *Ancestral Tales* navigates the complexity of Agnon’s book. As Mintz notes, Agnon’s desire is not to write about Buczacz *per se*, but rather to build the city again after its destruction in the Holocaust – the ultimate catastrophe following the manifold societal and cultural shifts within the Jewish world in which the writer was born. Agnon’s almost impossible task is “to fashion memories of life beyond the range of memory” (p. 3). To do this, he invents an imaginary narrator: a *pinkas* [chronicler] who recounts the history of Buczacz from the mid-seventeenth century, from the massacres of the Khmelnytsky Revolt of 1648 up to the emancipation of Galicia’s Jews in the mid-nineteenth century. The *pinkas* thus focuses on the golden age of Buczacz, leaving aside both the First World War and the Holocaust.

*‘Ir u-melo’ah*, Mintz rightly explains, stands as the opposite of the *yizker bikher* [commemorative books] compiled in the aftermath of the Second World War by Jewish survivors from vanished European Jewish communities. It is also far from the post-Holocaust literature of the 1950s and 1960s. This might be related to the tendency, which persevered in Hebrew literature into the 1960s, not to write about the Holocaust, as Mintz himself observes in *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*.<sup>1</sup> But more than that, it is perhaps an attempt by Agnon to talk in a mediated manner about “the last calamity” (p. 50), going backward to the moment when Buczacz was Buczacz – as the novelist used to say – and its streets pullulated with rabbis, Jewish shopkeepers and *yeshivah* students.

The eight chapters of *Ancestral Tales* focus on a number of themes and characters, so as to give the reader an idea of the richness of Agnon’s book: the first describes what Mintz calls “the grand tour of Buczacz” (p. 29) with its Jewish institutions and spaces; the second discusses Agnon’s invention of the *pinkas*. The third and fourth chapters address the theme of *torah ve-‘avodah* [study and worship] and its protagonists: from the *hazzanim* to the rabbis. The following three chapters take a more historical turn, looking at those stories of *‘Ir u-melo’ah* that have to do with the interaction between Jews and Poles, and with the societal changes that the enlightened absolutism of the Habsburg Empire provoked. The eighth – and last – chapter concentrates on the theme of redemption, which constitutes yet another crucial aspect of Agnon’s poetics.

*Ancestral Tales* is certain to be of interest first and foremost to Agnon fans and those familiar with his work. But going beyond this, Mintz takes *‘Ir u-melo’ah* as a point of departure for a broader discussion of the meanings of Jewishness and Jewish historical thinking: from the connection between history and literature, through the intertwined meanings of catastrophe and redemption, to the possibility of bringing a departed world back to (literary) life. To do this, in his book Agnon “heeds the call to build a city in its fullness” and “does so on his own terms [...] camouflag[ing] his modernism to immerse himself in the premodern world” (p. 394), transforming the readers “into honorary or virtual Buczaczers” (p. 396). The greatness of *‘Ir u-melo’ah* lies in the fact that it constructs another city, a Buczacz that only Agnon knew, one that metonymically stands for an entire lost *Yiddishkeit*. Here, Mintz seems to agree with Shaked’s idea of Agnon as “revolutionary traditionalist” and a writer who combines past and present, *lashon*

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

*qodesh* [sacred tongue] and *sfat hol* [mundane speech].<sup>2</sup> *‘Ir u-melo’ah* can thus be read as an “act of *tikkun*” (p. 251): an attempt to write a different kind of Jewish history.

In this connection, Mintz recalls a much-cited passage from Agnon’s short story *Hush ha-reah* (“Sense of Smell,” 1937), where the author confesses to be writing out of a sense of grief for the destroyed Temple, “like one exiled from his father’s palace who makes himself a little hut and sits there telling the glory of his father’s house” (p. 29). Agnon, in other words, cannot detach himself from tradition and its magical aura; he reinscribes it within the modern world in which he lives: Jerusalem, the *Yishuv* and then the State of Israel. His characters are fictional and real at the same time, and if his stories focus on historical events – such as the First Partition of Poland of 1772 – they always contain wholly absurd elements, too. It is by means of all this, Mintz argues, that the writer succeeds in constructing a cycle of stories that shows the beauty and the banality of Buczacz, always cherishing the feelings of “nostalgia and nightmare” for the diasporic world he left in his youth.<sup>3</sup>

As the protagonist of *Ha-siman* [*The Sign*] – the largely autobiographical story which, according to Emunah Agnon’s editorial comment, was supposed to conclude *‘Ir u-melo’ah* but which Mintz interprets as the entry point to the book as a whole – contends: “if my town has been expunged from the world, its name survives in the sign made for it by the poet in his poem” (Agnon cited by Mintz, p. 5). *Ha-siman*’s protagonist is referring to a *piyut* by the medieval poet Shlomo Ibn Gabirol, whose alphabetic acrostic forms the word “Buczacz”; the same could be said of Agnon’s book. If by writing *‘Ir u-melo’ah*, Agnon wanted to take his readers on a historical and literary voyage to Buczacz, then *Ancestral Tales* invites us to go back to Agnon – an author that, as the Israeli novelist Ruby Namdar admits, “is more respected than actually read.”<sup>4</sup> This is due to Agnon’s difficult writing style and the simplistic understanding of this writer as a religious *Ostjuden* coming from a vanished world that bears little relevance to the world of today. As Mintz’s work demonstrates, nothing could be more wrong.

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<sup>2</sup> Gershon Shaked, *Shmuel Yosef Agnon: A Revolutionary Traditionalist*, (New York: New York University Press, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Arnold J. Band, *Nostalgia and Nightmare: A Study in the Fiction of S. Y. Agnon*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

<sup>4</sup> Ruby Namdar, “On Agnonizing in English,” *Jewish Review of Books* (Summer 2017), available at: <https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/2658/on-agnonizing-in-english/>.

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**How to quote this article:**

Dario Miccoli, Review of *Ancestral Tales: Reading the Buczacz Stories of S. Y. Agnon*, by Alan Mintz in *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, n. 15 August 2019  
*url*: [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/reviews.php?id=139](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/reviews.php?id=139)

Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams. European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews, and the Ottoman Twentieth Century*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. 240.

by Alyssa Reiman

In *Extraterritorial Dreams: European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews, and the Ottoman Twentieth Century*, Sarah Abrevaya Stein considers the complexity of modern European citizenship through the lens of Ottoman Jewish protégés, “legal misfits” who defied systematic categorization. In the early twentieth century, Jews inherited, claimed, ignored, or lost their protected status as a result of the migrations, wars, border changes, and shifts in political regimes that accompanied the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and the turmoil of World War I. In turn, European powers and those in their employ were compelled to reconsider centuries-old relationships of protection and the value or vulnerabilities they represented. Through stories that span Paris to Alexandria to Shanghai, Stein reconstructs the experiences of and debates over extraterritoriality in the early twentieth century, demonstrating that “citizenship [was] a spectrum” rather than a well-defined individual identity (p. 9).

Stein integrates European history with the history of the Mediterranean, complementing a growing body of historical research on citizenship and legal pluralism in the Mediterranean. Through consular and police records, community archives, family collections, and newspaper articles, Stein shows how legal categories such as protégé, citizen, subject, and foreign national were unclear and unstable. Even as passport regimes solidified in the twentieth century, discrepancies were rampant between legal definitions and the ways they took shape in local interactions and daily life.

As Stein points out, extraterritoriality was “a layered matter that was always in the process of accruing sediment from the various social, legal, and political contexts” (p. 100). The practical meaning of protected status was negotiated by European powers as they tried to wield influence in the Mediterranean; by ordinary people as they went about their everyday lives; and by local officials and consuls as they administered changing national policies based on their own personal judgement or inclination. In tracing transnational stories of Ottoman Jewish protégés, Stein emphasizes the extent to which protection was a local affair; local officials or consuls, some of them themselves Ottoman Jews, could turn protection into citizenship or strip it away entirely.

One of Stein's central arguments is that the history of Jewish citizenship must be pursued beyond the context of Jewish emancipation. Stein contends that focusing on Jews in the Mediterranean and their extraterritoriality illuminates the difference between citizenship as something to be granted to Jewish individuals by states and the "subtle degrees of belonging an individual could occupy" (p. 9). Ottoman Jewish protégés could claim a range of papers and positions in their daily lives in the Mediterranean and in Europe – their legal identities were amorphous and flexible.

Protected status was a dynamic entity shaped by perception and perspective. Ottoman Jews who sought or wished to retain protection could strategically explore local opportunities and interactions, exploit legal loopholes, or invoke creative origin stories that connected them to historic Sephardi communities in Bayonne in France or Livorno in Italy. However, just as Jews could parlay protégé status into citizenship, economic advantages, or a measure of physical security, their protected status could also expire, be revoked, be ignored, or disappear altogether. And while seeking out or making use of protégé status was often strategically advantageous, it could also possess value of a purely emotional kind; some Ottoman-born Jews chose to hold on to foreign protected status even when it was no longer practical, or even dangerous.

Stein mines her sources for the voices of ordinary men and women as they negotiated their legal, economic, and social prospects. In doing so, she seeks to uncover the agency of the individual in the history of modern citizenship. She pays close attention to how gender and class shaped the possibilities and limits of protégé status; Jewish women were often dependent on their husbands or fathers for their legal status, while those who were wealthy could use their identification with a certain economic class to assert legal claims or affiliations. Even so, there was no one single experience of extraterritoriality, as Stein illustrates through stories of individuals such as Esther Algrante, who was able to register on her own as a Portuguese protégé after divorcing her husband, and Amélie Nahon, who was born in Haifa, worked as a teacher for the Alliance Israélite Universelle, registered as a French protégé based on her family's origins in Algeria, held Ottoman legal papers, and found herself a refugee in Egypt during World War I.

The breadth of Stein's research, which encompasses sources from twenty-one archives in seven countries, is truly impressive. Each chapter shifts geographically and chronologically to examine a specific episode in the breaking apart or

reconfiguring of protected status in the early twentieth century. The first chapter is set in Salonica during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), as Portugal sought to extend protégé status to Jews in order to expand its commercial and cultural foothold in the Mediterranean and as Jews debated the uncertain value of this protection during the tumultuous transition from Ottoman to Greek rule. The second chapter addresses the expulsion of Jews holding European papers from Ottoman Palestine and Syria during the First World War, and the ways both states and refugees wrangled over what “protection” entailed during wartime. Chapter 3 takes up a new legal category created by the British and the French for Ottoman-born Jews during World War I even as there was less space for the legal incoherence of protection in European national policies. Stein’s fourth chapter studies the litany of court cases that followed the death of Silas Aaron Haroon, a Baghdad-born, British-protected subject in Shanghai, and the quest for legal clarity over what it meant to be a protected person in the British Empire. The volume’s four chapters are bracketed by an introduction and conclusion that capture the multivalent implications of extraterritoriality. The introduction discusses recent decisions by the Spanish and Portuguese governments to grant citizenship to Jewish descendants of those expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in the fifteenth century, while the conclusion elaborates on the dangers of extraterritoriality as the system closed in on many Ottoman Jews during World War II.

In her study of the experiences of Jewish protégés, Stein mentions, but does not develop the itineraries and claims made by non-Jewish protégés in the Mediterranean Basin and in Europe. However, this certainly does not take away from the remarkable achievements of *Extraterritorial Dreams*, which offers a rich, well-researched, and multi-dimensional examination of extraterritoriality. In weaving together state policies, local decisions, family journeys, and individual jockeying, Stein captures the ways amorphous legal identities presented both opportunities and dangers, extraterritorial dreams and extraterritorial nightmares. *Extraterritorial Dreams* is an important contribution to Jewish, European, and Mediterranean history, exploring a dizzying range of individual experiences and illuminating the complexity of belonging, foreignness, and citizenship in the modern world.

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**How to quote this article:**

Alyssa Reiman, Review of *Extraterritorial Dreams. European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews, and the Ottoman Twentieth Century*, by Sarah Abrevaya Stein in *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, n. 15 August 2019  
*url:* [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/reviews.php?id=140](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/reviews.php?id=140)

Michal Kravel-Tovi, *When the State Winks. The Performance of Jewish Conversion in Israel*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 315.

by Avihu Shoshana

One of social science's leading – and most complex – tasks is to question the habitual, expose the phenomenologically obvious, and isolate the events, life dynamics," and "essential" positions which have come to seem natural. This last is crucial because the transformation of an object, subjectivity, event, or mentality into what is "natural" dramatically enables the kind of control that establishes – and maintains – the most stable of personal and social orders. Carrying out their mission requires of social scientists extraordinary intellectual acumen and research ability. In her thoroughly documented, mesmerizingly well-researched *When the State Winks: The Performance of Jewish Conversion in Israel*, anthropologist Michal Kravel-Tovi invites the reader to a dazzling intellectual tour.

*When the State Winks* is a book to be read, taught, its hidden knowledge disseminated in all areas of our personal, academic, and public life. This is a masterpiece to recommend to all those concerned about research into political states and the related concepts of governmentality and biopolitics. The sharp deconstruction of the *bulldozer* concept of "the state" asks for a special mention in this connection; see the book's p. 38. Among key issues delved into are public policy, bureaucracy, religious conversion, construction of subjectivity, the study of complex everyday interactions, and the study of dramaturgy. Moreover, this book, integrating intellectual endeavor and poetic creation in an exceptional manner, also offers spectacular quality writing about ethnography that every student and researcher of anthropology – as well as all other disciplines related to ethnography – should be exposed to.

The book sets out to trace governmental and subjective dynamics pertaining to the domain of religious conversion to Judaism (*giur*) in Israel. (On the textual sources for the traditional Jewish understanding of conversion, including the special term for a convert to Judaism- (*ger*) in Hebrew- etymologically traceable to the word for "sojourner" – see pp. 22-5.) Macro-institutional and micro-everyday analysis is performed by studying social interactions and the phenomenology of religious conversion accessible through biographical interviews. In the author's own words, the study examines the state as an

“assemblage of agents, mechanisms, institutions, ideologies, and discourses under which auspices conversion policy takes place” (p. 38).

Examining the state sub specie these groupings of distinct kinds of human constructs takes on significance in light of the view of conversion to Judaism as a “national mission” and a “national problem” which creates “national anxiety” and “bureaucratic confusion” in the State of Israel conceived of as the “Jewish State;” the setup operates in the absence of religion-state separation. The national mission has been especially troublesome for the State of Israel in the wake of the massive influx of immigrants from the Former Soviet Union since the late 1980s, including a high percentage of those labeled “non-Jewish immigrants.” The coinage “non-Jewish immigrants,” as Kravel-Tovi makes clear throughout her book, spells out confusion for classificatory schemes, undermines the logic of bureaucracy, and necessitates massive overhaul in defining state-bureaucratic boundaries.

Against this background, it should not seem surprising that the State of Israel has institutionalized and expanded its involvement in Jewish religious conversion, particularly since the mass waves of immigration of the late 1980s. In this way, conversion becomes a public-political project having many sites, manifestations, dynamics, complexity, branches and ramifications, involvement in politics of belonging, and recognition and inclusion – as well as exclusion. Kravel-Tovi’s ethnographic work captures these exceptionally well, thus occupying a place of its own among other important studies of religious conversion in Israel,<sup>1</sup> of bureaucracy,<sup>2</sup> and of the state.<sup>3</sup>

To achieve a multi-faceted understanding of the processes intertwined in Jewish religious conversion in Israel today, Kravel-Tovi delves into different areas: anthropology of the state, governmentality and biopolitics, religious conversion, dramaturgy, and subjectivity, as well as research work in pedagogy, bureaucracy, and ritualism, resorting to a variety of research tools. Her study undertakes an

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<sup>1</sup> Don Seeman, *One People, One Blood: Ethiopian-Israelis and the Return to Judaism*, (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Akhil Gupta, *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Don Handelman, *Nationalism and the Israeli State: Bureaucratic Logic in Public Events*, (Oxford: Berg, 2004); Michael Herzfeld, *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Taussig, *The Magic of the State*, (New York: Routledge, 1997).

ethnographic journey: two conversion institutes; ethnography of the pedagogical arena in conversion schools where candidates prepare for the process; ethnography in rabbinic courts where dramaturgic interactions unfold to probe “sincerity,” performance, and getting passing evaluation as a Jew by state and religious conversion agents; ethnography in ritual baths where conversion candidates are required to undergo immersion (*tvilah*); ethnography at conferences on religious conversion; in-depth interviews and analysis of life stories of converts at the end of the conversion process (“narratives of conversion”); in-depth interviews with state agents, including rabbinic judges, conversion teachers, and bureaucrats; and a documentary analysis to access the vibrant public discourse about conversion in Israel today as reflected in government documents, media articles, interviews with religious leaders, and scholarly publications.

This abundant grounding in theory and documented instances has led Kravel-Tovi to the essential inductive metaphor that compellingly captures the dynamics of her research: *winking* as the figure for the relations characteristic of the conversion proceedings in Israel. Apt metaphors, especially those inductively derived, are more than a rhetorical tool to produce movement from one sphere of meaning to another; they also construct a specific personal reflexivity – which develops into a subjectivity – by “taking on the role of the other,” as symbolic interactionism suggests.<sup>4</sup> The wink metaphor contributes in a unique way to the study of a number of crucial concerns today. It advances the study of the state, particularly in the complex sense – or in the sense intimated by the rift in spelling between the capital S and the small case s, as Kravel-Tovi’s suggests; see her pp. 38-39 for more on this. Going beyond this, it also furthers the study of everyday interactions and manifestations of latent power. The metaphor resonates – or winks – with James Scott’s *seeing* concept,<sup>5</sup> which the title of his book, *Seeing Like a State*, invokes. Scott emphasizes the panoptic power (à la Foucault) of state practices, which makes reality calculable and society legible. Kravel-Tovi’s softer metaphor gestures toward the flexibility and the nuanced gradations that accompany the power relations between the state and its subjects. (On the connections and the disjuncture between winking and seeing, see the book’s epilogue, *Winking Like a State*, particularly pp. 245-6.)

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<sup>4</sup> Avihu Shoshana, “Metaphors, Self and Reeducation,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 29/2 (2016): 164-185.

<sup>5</sup> James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

Kravel-Tovi's study reveals a fragile interdependence between the two principal participants in the conversion process: the state conversion agents and the conversion candidates. The relationship hinges on a complex interplay of cooperation, weakness, and power of each of the sides. Both conduct exchanges and extend consideration to the other in order to achieve the objective of conversion. Converts to Judaism are granted the identity of "Jew"; in a country with no separation between religion and state, this identity is critical to managing everyday life: births, marriages, burials, and material benefits, as well as the important psychological-social resource of a sense of belonging. The conversion of "non-Jewish immigrants" not only assists the state in restoring the order of bureaucracy, thus eliminating classificatory chaos, but also helps cope with the "demographic threat" – the fear of losing the Jewish majority due to Arab population growth. The wink metaphor casts the project of conversion as an effort dictated by dramaturgic principles.

The thick winking metaphor – thick in Gertzian terms – empowers the main argument of Kravel-Tovi's research: the conversion proceedings is a national, biopolitical, and bureaucratic manipulation of belonging. The project's very existence is conditioned by the mutual dramaturgic performance of conversion agents and converts. The fact that most of the converts are women from the Former Soviet Union distinguishes the biopolitical dimension, in Foucaultian terms<sup>6</sup> making the female body and fertility significant in connection with management of populations. In Israel, this is central to the maintenance of the Jewish character of the Israeli State.

The three sections dealing with dramaturgy in the conversion schools and courts as the candidates prepare for "real," "sincere," and "authentic" performance are a breathtaking ethnographic masterpiece. These sections offer a rare behind the scenes view, à la Erving Goffman, of what Kravel-Tovi rightly calls the "rite of passing." The text follows a journey of metamorphosis, from the awkwardness of the introductory conversion lessons, through practice bearing upon attire and embodiment, scripting of the biography, enacting the performance in the presence of rabbinic judges, the immersion ceremony, and finally hearing the transformative words "you are now a Jew" (p. 197). Kravel-Tovi's scholarly and poetic skill is spectacular here as she captures and conveys the excitement crowned with joy when a candidate's transformation is ultimately achieved.

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<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley, (New York: Pantheon, 1976).

Between the prologue, followed by a theoretical introduction, and the epilogue, the book is made up of six parts. The introductory chapter painstakingly interweaves the theoretical underpinnings of the study, identifying its three areas of discussion: religious conversion and the conversion to Judaism in particular; biopolitics and anthropology of the state; and dramaturgy and the study of passing.

The second chapter, “The Conversion Mission,” consists of two sections, presenting the historical-socio-political background which makes conversion a national mission under conditions labeled as a “crisis” and “state of emergency” (p. 66). This mission transpires against the backdrop of several paradoxes attaching to the notion of “non-Jewish immigrants” and the biopolitics of belonging.

An enlightening moment from backstage is directly conveyed when a rabbinic judge is quoted as musing in this way about the conversion mission: “Usually, people invite me to speak about conversion. Several weeks ago, I was invited to speak about fertility. At first, I had no idea what to talk about. But later, I thought to myself, ‘Oh well, what’s the difference really? In both cases we are devoted to making as many Jews as possible” (p. 78).

The chapter deliberates on how “conversion becomes a moral debt of the State.” (p. 90). Its second section, titled “State Workers,” elaborates on the role of religious Zionism in the state-run conversion process in Israel. The religious movement activates the link between religion and nationalism, and the religious, secular, and traditional elements of the modern Israeli State, leading up to the burning question, “Who are we?” (p. 93) and then on to the question that founds the existence of the State of Israel: “Who is a Jew?”

The book’s second part, “The Conversion Performance,” develops the dramaturgical ethnographies – dubbed “dramaturgical discipline,” (p. 129) – which underpin the conversion project in Israel. The opening section of this, “Legible Sign,” identifies cues taught in conversion prep classes to facilitate credibility in a rabbinic court. Conversion prep lessons include simulation, training, rehearsals, and role play focused on dress code, modest demeanor, and appropriate ways to hold daily ritual objects such as a prayer book. Requisite rhetoric is coached: students learn to avoid tentative answers, such as “*mishtadlim*” (“trying”) or “to the best of my ability:” “that’s not good” (p. 146).

Instead, confidence should be the hallmark of responses about religious practice. Correct self-presentation is critical. Teachers recommend that converts secure the support of possible attestors: maintaining contact with a *gabbai* (“sexton, a person who assists in running the synagogue services,” p. 139) will ensure that a host family vouches for one’s observance of the Sabbath. References and witnesses of one’s involvement in ritual and tradition can help by writing letters of recommendation.

The following section, “Dramaturgical Entanglements,” proceeds to the sessions held in rabbinic courts. Rabbinic judges are allotted thirty to sixty minutes to decide whether a candidate is credible and thus deserving of being accepted as a convert to Judaism. The “thin encounter” (p. 162) demonstrates the judges’ awareness of their limitations and uncertainties, their suspicions, and their quest for knowledge so as to decipher legible dramaturgical signs. (“Tell me, how can I know if someone is ready for conversion in one hour?” p. 165.) Decision making about a candidate’s sincerity in Jewish observance relies largely on the same clues that are used by teachers in conversion classes (“Tell me how you do *Havdalah*” [ceremony of separation between the end of the Sabbath and the beginning of the new week], p. 171.) The chapter highlights a number of cases in which rabbinic judges were not impressed by the candidate’s performance (see pp. 181-92).

The third section, “Biographical Scripts,” considers yet another element of a successful performance: the autobiographical letters that candidates for conversion must write and that rabbinic judges read aloud to the court (“You are the letter”). We read how conversion candidates learn to “script their stories” (p. 205) and even rehearse them as part of the winking relations that characterize the Jewish conversion project. The study traces “good stories” which are the “more coherent and ‘passable’ schemes” (p. 205). Prospective converts learn techniques to prevent their narratives from becoming “too pompous” or “overly exaggerated.” Good stories are ones that contain a “Jewish past”: “Stress the fact that your father is Jewish”; “Say that you attended a Jewish Agency day camp”; “Mention your job in the army; that will impress them” (p. 212). Above all, good stories “had to portray conversion as a formative moment in their biographies, a process of becoming something new” (p. 213).

In summing up an overview, *When the State Winks* is a book mesmerizing in its intellectual scope as well as its documentary thoroughness. It is a creative work with surprises to stir a researcher’s imagination, thus enabling a new

understanding not only of religious conversion, but especially of the everyday relations between the state and those undergoing the processes it requires in order for an individual to become a state subject. In Foucault’s language,<sup>7</sup> these are technologies of governance and technologies of the self. The winking invoked in the title involves dramaturgy which both sides – the state and the people – willingly take part in. This is built up of fragile relationships based on suspicion and trust, annoyance and compassion, disciplined visibility and turning a blind eye, and national and personal interests which both sides acknowledge and which come to the fore in Kravel-Tovi’s revelations from behind the scenes. Yet the primary sense of the process is in response to the human search for existential and state-bureaucratic escape routes. *When the State Winks* is a re-reading of all that we know about the political state, religious conversion, bureaucracy, Judaism, national identity, and subjectivity.

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**How to quote this article:**

Avihu Shoshana, Review of *When the State Winks. The Performance of Jewish Conversion in Israel*, by Michal Kravel-Tovi in *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, n. 15 August 2019

url: [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/reviews.php?id=141](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/reviews.php?id=141)

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<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Technologies of the Self. A seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 16-49.

*Da Primo Levi alla generazione dei «salvati». Incursioni critiche nella letteratura italiana della Shoah dal dopoguerra ai giorni nostri, Atti del convegno internazionale sulla letteratura italiana della Shoah. Zurigo, 10-11 maggio 2016, ed. Sibilla Destefani, (Firenze: Giuntina, 2017), pp. 179.*

*by Martina Mengoni*

This collection of essays comes as the result of a conference held at University of Zurich in May 2016. As the editor Destefani states in the preface, it is characterized by a great variety of approaches and topics. The book has been divided into three parts: i. the first contains new reading proposals of Primo Levi's work, explored in the essays by Giovanni Miglianti, Nunzio La Fauci, Niccolò Scaffai, and Francesco Della Costa; ii. the second part moves to a wider literary representation of the Holocaust: the poetic and narrative self-confronting the dramatic experience, with essays by Marta Baiardi, Enrico Mattioda and Tommaso Pepe; iii. in the third and last part the focus is on post-memory, that is narrating the Shoah from the perspective of the generations that didn't experience it (with essays by Stefania Lucamante, Hanna Serkowska, and Andrea Rondini).

This review will first follow the topic of each essay, to find intersections with the other; then will discuss the main new ideas that the book proposes.

The first part opens with an essay by Giovanni Miglianti discussing the point of view of Levi as an anthropologist. Levi can be considered a "participant observer," in the ethnographic sense, since, his writing is the medium that transforms observation into interpretation. The specific point of view embraced by Levi can be collocated between extrangement and "*spaesamento*" (something near "disorientation," but with the additional meaning of having lost the typical acquaintance with your own hometown landscape), in the tradition of the "forced-journey" that put together authors such as Dante, Coleridge, Marco Polo, Conrad, all in Levi's pantheon. Being a "participant observer" of a "forced journey" is an oxymoric condition: and, as Mengaldo pointed out and as Miglianti reminds us, the oxymoron is one of the privileged rhetoric devices used by Levi, especially in *Se questo è un uomo*. The idea of "estrangement" as a fundamental Levian perspective is also one of the main focuses of Scaffai's essay. Scaffai's starting point is that Levi always wavers between the uniqueness of Lager as historical phenomenon and the universality of violence. Following this assumption, his main thesis is that Levi's sci-fi short stories, rather than being classified as allegories of Auschwitz, should be considered representations of the

estrangement and the overturning that the deported man experienced. Scaffai distinguishes between the stories in which Levi uses «estrangement» - the ones in which he depicts himself as a character – and “alienation” - the ones in which he is only a narrator. In his dystopian stories, Levi often chooses to explore the point of view of the monster, rather than the one of the victim: this choice avoids stereotypes and banalizations.

On the contrary, Francesco Della Costa suggests that the allegory should be considered the main tool that Levi uses in order to establish a connection between chemistry and alchemy in *The Periodic Table*. Allegoric devices have their roots also in the cabbalistic tradition; Della Costa sees in the convergence between that tradition and the alchemic one a way to understand Levi's *Weltanschauung*. A typical example is Levi's fascination for the Golem, as an allegory of re-creation and re-foundation of men through matter manipulation.

La Fauci's essay is less connected with the rest. He focuses on the choice of the title *Se questo è un uomo*: its intrinsic universalism and its specific meaning inside the Italian linguistic system, better understood in comparison with its different translations in English, German, French. La Fauci explores all the differences between the balanced *I sommersi e i salvati*, Levi's first title choice, and the one that the publishing house chose, *Se questo è uomo*, apparently “*sbilenca e bisognevole integrazione*,” but in fact a question demanding the reader an answer, rhetoric at the first glance, complex and problematic in its true essence.

The second part of the book is dedicated more generically to autobiographical and poetic writing about Auschwitz and the Shoah – and yet, as expected, Primo Levi remains the main term of comparison. One of the decisive points that these essays share is the shift between juridical testimony and literary representation, which is explored both theoretically and textually by Mattioda and Baiardi. Starting from the assumption that testimony is always partial and subjected to a continuous re-elaboration, Mattioda claims that the value of a literary text as a form of transmission lies precisely in its partiality, in its specific choices rather than in the urgency of addressing facts. Mattioda proves his point in analyzing Levi's additions to 1958 edition of *Se questo è un uomo*: memorable descriptions of characters (Emilia and Alberto among all) built with many literary implicit and explicit references. The mythopoeic possibilities of literary work connected to the Auschwitz experience need to be explored and analyzed, since they concur to build knowledge and make that experience more understandable. From a similar perspective, Marta Baiardi discusses the limits of the autobiographical self in the

work of Liana Millu. She finds a contrast between biographical elements and facts as she discovered them in archive research and Millu's representation of them: an example is the tragic death of Millu's mother when she was four years old. That event destroyed Millu's family, and still Millu mentions it very few times, leaving it as an implicit turning point. However, more than assessing theoretical conclusions about the short circuit between factual data and literary representation, Baiardi is interested in analyzing the main problems of being Millu's biographer, with a lack of archives from one side, and a significant amount of autobiographical pages on the other.

In the third and last essay, Tommaso Pepe reflects about the possibility of mythopoeic function of Auschwitz poetry, connecting the work of Primo Levi with the one of Salvatore Quasimodo, Vittorio Sereni and Edith Bruck. In Quasimodo, Pepe finds an evident opposition between idyllic Italy and violent Germany, that tends to remove Italian complicities and responsibilities from the tragedy of racial laws and deportations, and in doing it, Pepe claims, he in fact monumentalizes a collective memory. On the contrary, Sereni is moved by an anti-rhetorical search and re-discover of the roots and profound paths of individual and singular memory. Levi and Bruck, both novelist and poets, share a certain use of poetic language as a different expression of memory, a *mémoire profonde* rather than a *mémoire externe*. In all cases, memory is re-created as a myth; a process that should be explored in many other Italian poets.

In the third part of the book, the essays deal with the representability of Auschwitz in what has been called the post-memory. Lucamante and Serkowska's essays converge in putting at the center of the analysis female writings: Elsa Morante and Helena Janeczek novels. Starting from combining the theoretical perspectives of Carlo Ginzburg, Pierre Vidal-Naquet and Jean François Lyotard, Lucamante looks for the specificity of female voices in the *middle voice* of Holocaust literature, and finds it in the "*compartecipazione*" ("sharing" from within) to the representation of the Holocaust. Lucamante suggests that Morante herself wrote *La storia* in order to give voice to the "*intestimoniati*," the "drowned," the people that can't speak for themselves, as Primo Levi call them in the chapter "*La vergogna*" of *I sommersi e i salvati*; among these "*intestimoniati*" there is Morante herself, a woman with Jewish origins, evacuated during 1943, displaced and disoriented, and yet still devoted to her city. A similar perspective is embraced by Serkowska, that adds to the idea of female writing as "*compartecipazione*" the one of tracing the roots of a family, of a tradition, "presentified," that is continuously

re-activated in the present of the narration; a typical strategy used by Helena Janeczek in *Lezioni di tenebra*.

Finally, Andrea Rondini analyses Carlo Greppi's novel *Non restare indietro*, about his experience with secondary school students visiting Auschwitz. In the puzzle of quotations from movies, tv shows, books, graphic novels that characterizes Greppi's novel, Rondini finds a "polyphonic, post-bachtinian.. hybridized and confused" presence of the Shoah, in which the aim is to build a moral alphabet founded on "*immedesimazione*" (identification), or "*identità proiettiva*" (projecting identity), that is mainly based on emotions. For Rondini, this experience poses new questions about "the relationship between Auschwitz narration, media and public," using different and complementary media genres.

Even if the essays of this collection are highly heterogenous, not always convergent, different for methods and perspectives, they globally relaunch some crucial questions about the representability of the Shoah. Firstly: what is the *unicum* of literary writing in shaping the memory of Auschwitz? What is the specific contribution of mythopoeia in making a story memorable, and what is at stake if that story is the collective story of deportation and extermination? what is the relationship between that creation of myths and historiography? These questions are of course long term ones; they have been posed before with more theoretical rigor. This book not only tries to apply them to textual analysis, but project them on contemporary narrative, that is the Shoah narrative of writers that didn't experience it. How are these novels changing paradigms? How this kind of writings are dealing with the myth of memory? Even the chapters about Primo Levi, in reflecting about his narrative devices – allegory, estrangement, alienation, oxymoron -, make us wonder how these devices could change and redefine themselves in new generations of novelists that don't want to leave that experience behind. And the only regret is that this collection could have explored more that kind of narratives, still maintaining Levi (among others) as a term of comparison.

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**How to quote this article:**

Martina Mengoni, Review of *Da Primo Levi alla generazione dei «salvati». Incursioni critiche nella letteratura italiana della Shoah dal dopoguerra ai giorni nostri*, *Atti del convegno internazionale sulla letteratura italiana della Shoah*. Zurigo, 10-11 maggio 2016,

ed. Sibilla Destefani in *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, n. 15 August 2019  
*url:* [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/reviews.php?id=142](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/reviews.php?id=142)

**Shira Klein, *Italy's Jews from Emancipation to Fascism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 369.**

*by Gadi Luzzatto Voghera*

Students of the history of the Jews in Italy in the modern period must come to terms with a number of unjustified yet frequently made assumptions. Not easily accountable for as to their origin, these assumptions lie at the source of narratives which have become dominant in historiography. The same narratives also tend to thwart research efforts to shed unprejudiced light on the complex and richly articulated experience of the Jewish minority in the Peninsula without subscribing to a deterministic historical bias. The idea, in itself of extremely questionable merit, is commonly accepted that in Italy antisemitic attitudes were a marginal phenomenon, especially by comparison with other European countries such as France, Germany, or Austria, to say nothing of Eastern Europe. Moreover, the conviction is widespread – without being actually borne out by any documentary evidence – that fascist Italy adopted anti-Jewish legislation only under pressure from its Nazi ally, and that the Italian regime's persecution of the Jews was not harsh. It is typically – and erroneously – maintained in this connection that Italians overall did not approve of the anti-Jewish measures enacted by the fascist government and often took active steps to oppose them. Historians working in the field are well aware of how daunting a task it is to undercut such widespread beliefs. Whether the focus is on personal or local events, or on the project of creating, as has now been done by Shira Klein, a collective fresco to span modern Italian Jewish history in the long term – over a hundred years in this case, from 1848 to the years following the Second World War – the challenge is enormous.

*Italy's Jews from Emancipation to Fascism* by Shira Klein, based on a series of interviews and extensive study of documents kept in state archives, is structured in eight chapters preceded by an overall introduction and concluded by a final recapitulating chapter. A large apparatus of notes and a very rich bibliography complete the work.

Klein develops a programmatic approach to her topic, unfurling an ambitious and wide-ranging agenda before her readers. This begins by extending the chronological scope of her work, devoting the book's first two chapters to the nineteenth century and to the process of Jewish emancipation and integration – both as communities and as individuals – into the pre- and post-unification

Italian society. These decades in the mid-1800s, Klein argues, are the key to understanding the near-unanimous support which Italy's Jews gave to two very clear and in some ways mutually contrasting dynamics. One was the process of their intensive Italianization, which would later lead the Jews of Italy to mistake the oppressive and dangerous portent of the fascist regime's coming to power in the 1900s for a benign indication of growing Italian nationalism. The other was the re-elaboration – an apparently self-contradictory one, as per the interpretive framework proposed by Klein – of new models of Jewish identity. The emergence of these new identity models, as Klein sees it, calls into question the view that emancipation marked the beginning of a rapid process of Italian Jewish assimilation, thus indicating a no less rapid departure from Jewish religious tradition and cultural roots. Klein's title only partly captures the intent of the book, which is made explicit from the beginning of her text: to use documentary analysis to challenge the myth of the so called *bravo italiano*, demonstrating how the image of the selflessly brave and committed Italian national type distorts historical reality. The author also purposes to investigate how Italian Jews have strongly contributed to the construction of the myth, telling a story of peaceful cohabitation while the reality was much more complex and problematic.

Klein's work is a courageous and insightful project, which however comes in conflict with a number of current important concerns. I begin with the book's predecessors: earlier studies of the history of the Jews in Italy in the modern period have all devoted considerable attention to the age of emancipation, proceeding thence to a discussion of the years of fascist rule and its persecution of the Jews. The historian Renzo De Felice is the original author and proponent of the concept of *bravo italiano* in connection with the persecution of the Jews in Italy. By contrast, Michele Sarfatti in his work emphasizes the long history of antisemitism in modern Italy. Tracing its evolution, he effectively counteracts the view that in Italy anti-Jewish persecution was imposed by Germany and practiced only incidentally or perfunctorily. Other scholars in recent decades have similarly seen twentieth-century developments as an outgrowth of the dynamics of nineteenth-century Jewish emancipation.

Another problem arises in connection with the claim, consistently repeated by the author (especially in chapters three and four, which focus on the years of fascist rule and persecution) that “most Jews accepted Fascism from the time it came to power in 1922 until the late 1930s.” The question of minority acceptance, acquiescence, or rejection of a political regime is a matter asking for consideration independently of prefabricated historiographical hypotheses, especially ones

based on distorted general ideas about Italians' attitudes to fascism. In the case of the Jews, the complex social, cultural, and political predicament of the small Italian community does not seem to have been accorded the attention it deserves. The behavior and the attitudes of elites risk overshadowing the truth by being extrapolated from and extended to the entire community. As George L. Mosse conclusively demonstrated more than forty years ago, fascism served as the leading means of nationalization for the Italian masses. This forms a fundamental chapter in the historiography of modern Italy – one that cannot be passed over in silence by any author grappling with the period. Taking stock of the nationalization enabled by fascism is indispensable in order to achieve an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of the endorsement of fascism by many members of the Jewish bourgeoisie. At the same time, this is far from saying that most Jews – or Italians, for that matter – subscribed to the fascist version of the Risorgimento or took on Italian identity as this appeared beginning in 1922.

A third problematic issue is bound up with the underestimation of the involvement of the Jewish bourgeoisie in anti-fascist and a-fascist movements emerging in Italy since the end of the First World War. This is particularly significant, given the extent of Italian Jewish participation in anti-fascist activism. The Jewish involvement was the opposite of marginal or scarce; witness the rich archive preserved by the CDEC Foundation. This is accessible at: <http://digital-library.cdec.it/cdec-web/storico/detail/IT-CDEC-ST0002-000001/antifascisti-e-partigiani-ebrei-italia-1922-1945.html>. The archive contains hundreds of names. True enough, many of these were partisans whose anti-fascist affiliation was made clear only after 1938, but there were also many others – whose existence remains unacknowledged in Klein's volume – who were directly exposed during the earlier years of the regime. Among some of the best known are four of the 18 university professors who in 1931 refused to pledge allegiance to the fascist government: Vito Volterra, Fabio Luzzatto, Giorgio Levi Della Vida, and Giorgio Errera. Umberto Terracini, Eugenio Colorni, Giuseppe Emanuele Modigliani, and many others are similarly left unmentioned by the author. Mention also needs to be made of the intensive Zionist propaganda which, primarily through the pages of the popular weekly *Israël*,<sup>1</sup> created a novel space for cultural and political encounter. The freedom which this afforded for thought left an indelible mark upon Italian Jewish identity as it was being constructed during these decades.

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<sup>1</sup> Accessible online at: <http://digital-library.cdec.it/cdec-web/biblioteca/rivista-israel.html>

The book's chapters five through eight comprise a new section which offers important insights pertaining to the rebirth of Jewish communities in Italy after the Second World War. The period has formed a new focus of scholarly research in recent years, especially at the local level; this explains in part why the collection of primary sources available to the historian today is still incomplete. The chapter on Italian Jewish refugees in the United States and in Palestine under the British Mandate puts forth noteworthy suggestions, as do the pages covering Italy during the immediate post-war period and the activity of the American Joint Distribution Committee.

The volume closes with a chapter on the construction of the myth of the *bravo italiano* in the thinking of those whom the author identifies as “the” Italian Jews. This is an elaborate reiteration of Klein's essential thesis grounding the entire research project. It proffers to the English reader an image of the Jews of the Peninsula as substantially nationalist – and thus supportive of fascism – and unassimilated. Rather than Italianized, the Jews are supposedly bearers of a new Jewish identity (evidence of which is nonetheless hard to find in Klein's book). They are also infatuated with their Italian affiliation, even in the post-war period, to such an extent that they are unable to take cognizance of the misbegotten notion underlying the reassuring and cozy mental construct referred to as the *bravo italiano*.

Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, CDEC, Milan

**How to quote this article:**

Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, Review of *Italy's Jews from Emancipation to Fascism*, by Shira Klein in *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, n. 15 August 2019  
*url*: [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/reviews.php?id=143](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/reviews.php?id=143)

David Biale, David Assaf, Benjamin Brown, Uriel Gellman, Samuel C. Heilman, Moshe Rosman, Gadi Sagiv, Marcin Wodziński, *Hasidism. A New History*, with an afterword by Arthur Green, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), pp. x+875.

by Ira Robinson

By any standard, *Hasidism. A New History* is a huge undertaking. Physically, it contains nearly 900 pages and weighs over two kilograms, making it somewhat awkward to handle. Chronologically, it covers a daunting 250 years of Hasidic religion, sociology, and history on a world scale, requiring expertise in multiple languages and academic disciplines. Organizationally, it is the product of a complex editorial process involving some nine collaborators and years of preparation. The result is a landmark scholarly perspective on the Hasidic phenomenon from its earliest appearance to the present. The book represents both a state of the art report on past and current research on Hasidism as well as a standard for future exploration in this field.

Hasidism has been an important factor in Judaism and Jewish history for approximately 250 years, and a quarter of a millennium is certainly enough chronology to begin to relate to the movement in its “longue durée.” In *Hasidism. A New History* the Hasidic movement, essentially for the first time, receives a scholarly perspective depicting that “longue durée.” We find in it important perspectives on significant continuities as well as change. Hasidic communities today are the product of a history of often strained relationships with non-Hasidic Jewish communities as well as governments and their agencies. Hasidism was controversial in its eighteenth century origins, and it remains the subject of controversy today for many of the same reasons. These controversies can be attributed in large part to the special communal structure of the Hasidim, which differed in important ways from that of non-Hasidic Jewish communities. As well, Hasidism simply did not and does not “fit in” well with the normative expectations of its multiple surrounding societies, Jewish and non-Jewish. This volume certainly deals with tensions between Hasidic and non-Hasidic Jews, which in the 18th and 19th centuries resulted in overt clashes, whereas in other eras such conflict evolved into symbiotic relationships and often mutual understanding. The book also analyzes how Hasidic communities have been targeted by governmental bodies in the past 250 years as an integral part of these governments’ attempts to modernize their societies educationally and economically. Hasidism’s longevity and continuing influence despite all the

controversies surrounding it, and despite both Jewish and governmental opposition to its leadership, its social organization, its educational policies, and, indeed, nearly every aspect of its distinctive way of life, make it worthy of note. Hasidism's vigorous and visible presence in the contemporary Jewish world despite its nearly complete destruction in its native Eastern European setting during the twentieth century certainly merits the serious scholarly consideration it receives in this volume.

*Hasidism. A New History* is a tour de force in the style of twenty-first century scholarship, in which narrow scholarly specialization is more and more the norm. In the previous century, such an all-encompassing work might have been conceived and written by individual scholars like Simon Dubnow or Salo Wittmayer Baron, both of whom, working essentially singlehanded, created histories of the Jews in multiple volumes. However contemporary scholarship tends to prefer presenting large and complex subjects like Hasidism by bringing to bear the collective expertise of a team of scholars. Thus *Hasidism. A New History* is the result of a collaboration of prominent scholars from North America, Israel, and Europe, all of whom have written extensively on various aspects of Hasidism with the exception of David Biale, whose distinguished publication history includes a leading role in a similar major collaborative scholarly effort, *Cultures of the Jews. A New History* (2002), that created a similarly massive volume attempting to depict Jewish cultures through the ages.

The attentive reader of this volume will receive important perspectives on the history, sociology, and theologies of Jews who defined themselves and were defined by others as Hasidic, representing the latest scholarly perspectives in these areas. The reader will also find important material on how outsiders to Hasidism, particularly but not exclusively Jews, have reacted to Hasidism, both negatively and positively. In particular, the volume deals with non-Hasidim who have from time to time appropriated elements of the Hasidic ethos in their own constructions of meaning. Finally, the careful reader will learn a lot about the history of scholarship on the Hasidic phenomenon: which scholars paid attention to Hasidism, what did they consider to be of significance in Hasidism, what factors did they ignore in their studies, and why. This issue is most important for us to consider because it is evident that the volume's narrative closely follows the scholarship in the various areas studied, and patently scholarship on Hasidism has been very uneven. Broadly speaking, the period of Hasidism's origins (up to circa 1815) has had a great deal of scholarly attention paid to it, whereas the post-1815 era, a period that Dubnow referred to as one of "decline," has been the subject of

considerably less scholarly attention. We thus find in the preface to the book an admission by the authors that there is much that we don't know, and that, particularly, Hasidism in the late nineteenth century is “poorly understood” (p. ix).

One of the areas that calls for a deeper analysis than the one given in this volume is the relationship of Hasidism to women. It is certainly true that, historically speaking, Hasidic rebbes publicly interacted primarily with males, and often barred females from their immediate presence. Insofar as the experience of the Hasidic court was designed specifically for males, it is certainly true that women were not considered to be Hasidim in the same way as men (p. 743). On the other hand, women were never completely absent from the Hasidic court and some women, particularly the rebbe's wife [*rebbitsin*], her daughters, and female servants, were permanent fixtures of the Hasidic courts. Indeed at times *rebbitsins* exercised considerable power, particularly in times of interregnum or dynastic conflict, as this volume amply testifies. More recently, the founding of Hasidic schools for girls has meant that women have become identified as “Hasidic” institutionally and not simply through their families. They thus have to be included, however reluctantly, on the part of the male Hasidic leadership, as part of their domain.

The economics of Hasidism is another area that needs deeper analysis than that given in this volume. One of the great continuities of Hasidic history has been complaints from outside the community of economic exploitation on the part of Hasidic spiritual leaders of their followers, and neglect of their work on the part of ordinary Hasidim. While the volume pays some concentrated attention to the economics of contemporary Hasidic communities (p. 762), more needs to be done with respect to the economic symbiosis between Hasidim and their surrounding Jewish communities. For example, Hasidic-owned stores selling kosher food or Judaica, would often not be economically viable without the patronage of members of the larger Jewish community interested in the products offered in such stores.

The most important element in the creation of this first major attempt at a comprehensive history of the Hasidic movement from its origins to the present is that it will serve as a challenge to researchers. Collectively the authors of this volume have given us their best understanding of the Hasidic movement. It is now up to the community of scholars dealing with Hasidism in its multiple

*Ira Robinson*

manifestations to refute, refine, and improve on the many valuable perspectives presented in this volume if they can.

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**How to quote this article:**

Ira Robinson, Review of *Hasidism. A New History*, by David Biale, David Assaf, Benjamin Brown, Uriel Gellman, Samuel C. Heilman, Moshe Rosman, Gadi Sagiv, Marcin Wodziński in *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, n. 15 August 2019  
*url:* [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/reviews.php?id=144](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/reviews.php?id=144)

**Sunaina Maira, *Boycott! The Academy and Justice for Palestine*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), pp. 184.**

*by Jacob Eriksson*

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, or BDS, has rapidly become a new staple in the global discourse on Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Sunaina Maira’s book tells the story of the birth and the growth of the academic boycott movement in the USA, charting its development across multiple different scholarly associations. It places BDS within a history of boycott movements, such as the classic South African case but also within the Palestinian struggle against the British during the Mandate period, and draws parallels to different US campaigns such as the civil rights movement and indigenous rights movements in the US. It is interesting to read the reflections of members of the movement, garnered through interviews, and the narrative of the founding of the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (USACBI) is highly readable (even if the acronyms of the many associations are sometimes difficult to keep track of). The penultimate chapter charts the backlash against the BDS movement, while the final chapter examines the broader relationship between BDS and resistance to the “neo-liberal university.”

Maira distinguishes between the academic, cultural, and economic boycott of Israel, but the reasons for the academic boycott specifically would be helpful to discuss in further detail. The case for the academic boycott appears to be one of broader solidarity based on Palestinian requests rather than an argument for the effectiveness or necessity of this particular type of boycott. She quotes Omar Barghouti, co-founder of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), who argues that “Israel’s academic institutions have, after all, been one of the pillars of Israel’s regime of oppression, playing a major role in planning, implementing, justifying, and whitewashing Israel’s crimes against the Palestinian people” (p. 87). This is also echoed in USACBI’s mission statement (pp. 8-10). However, this claim would be strengthened by providing examples of how this has been done, particularly the planning and implementing claims which are less immediately obvious than, say, academic contributions to Israeli narratives of the conflict and its history.

The relationship between the university as an institution funded by the state and the policies of that state is not linear, but complex. University faculty tend to represent more liberal strands of society, and one can argue that this is also true of

Israel. A law professor at Bar Ilan University was castigated by his Faculty Dean for expressing sympathy with all victims on both sides of the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza in 2014.<sup>1</sup> The Coordinating Council of the University Faculty Associations in Israel responded to the exchange by arguing that freedom of expression and the right to protest needed to be respected.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Israeli academia has a long, rich tradition of criticizing the policies of the state, and the so-called “New Historians” have done a great deal to question the traditional nationalist narratives. Maira is critical of those who argue that an academic boycott would target a progressive community. She makes clear that the boycott is of academic institutions rather than individuals, which is important when evaluating accusations of anti-Semitism, but the role of the institutions needs further clarification to make the case convincing.

Maira also focuses on the connection between the US government and the governance structures of US universities, and how power is exerted upon the academic community. This argument would be significantly strengthened by providing evidence of this beyond the statements of certain academic associations or individuals involved in them. The chapter entitled “Backlash” sheds light on the relationship between the Israel lobby, think tanks, and anti-BDS activism, for example when considering the issue of “lawfare” and civil rights cases, which is illustrative. The case of Steven Salaita considered in the final chapter is also indicative, but a deeper examination of the context, the actions taken by different actors involved, and how exactly the institutional establishment worked against Salaita and others would be helpful. More broadly, the nature of government and university influence, and how it manifests itself in practice, could be more clearly explained. Is there a difference between private and state universities in this regard? These structures and relationships may be obvious to scholars within the US academy with experience of it, but not necessarily to a more international readership.

Using the words of a fellow boycott organizer, Maira argues that the boycott is a tool, not the end goal. The question remains, what exactly is that end goal, and how does it relate to the question of the one-state or two-state solutions, which

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<sup>1</sup> “Bar-Ilan University Rebukes Professor for Expressing Concern for Both Palestinian and Israeli Victims,” *The Association for Civil Rights in Israel*, July 31, 2014, <https://law.acri.org.il/en/2014/07/31/bar-ilan-gaza/>

<sup>2</sup> Aron Donzis, “Academic rebuked for expressing sympathy for Gaza victims,” *The Times of Israel*, July 30, 2014, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/academic-rebuked-for-expressing-sympathy-for-gaza-victims/>.

the movement argues it is agnostic about? Reflection on this portion of the debate, that BDS is tantamount to calling for the end of the state of Israel, would be interesting to elicit, particularly as she acknowledges the right to self-determination as a crucial collective right but argues that Zionism is racism.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever your view on BDS, this thought-provoking book is likely to animate you. Those sympathetic to the movement will love it, and consider it an important contribution to its literature. Those against it will hate it, and describe it as further evidence of radical (leftist) invective against the state of Israel. Whether or not it will convince those who are not part of the boycott movement to join it is another question entirely.

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**How to quote this article:**

*Jacob Eriksson, Review of *Boycott! The Academy and Justice for Palestine*, by Sunaina Maira in *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, n. 15 August 2019  
url: [www.quest-cdecjournal.it/reviews.php?id=145](http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/reviews.php?id=145)*

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<sup>3</sup> See p. 115 for the articulation of self-determination as a collective right, and p. 116 for discussion of Zionism as racism.