Jew-Hatred and Anti-Jewish Violence in the Former Lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the Long Nineteenth Century

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One can find many examples of how growing anti-Jewish sentiments or anti-Semitic propaganda triggered anti-Jewish pogroms (e.g., Father Stojałowski's activities in West Galicia and the pogroms of 1898).[1] Yet increasingly in scholarly literature attempts have been made to distinguish between conflicts and the outbreaks of violence, seeing such outbreaks as not primarily the result of a conflict but rather as themselves a specific type of conflict—"as a form of social or political action in [their] own right."[2] As Rogers Brubaker and David D. Laitin have pointed out, there is a lack of

> strong evidence showing that higher levels of conflict (measured independently of violence) lead to higher levels of violence. Even where violence is clearly rooted in pre-existing conflict, it should not be treated as a natural, self-explanatory outgrowth of such conflict, something that

1 On this see Daniel Unowsky, "'The Jews Want to Kill Us!': Imagining Anti-Jewish Violence as Self-defense during the 1898 riots in Western Galicia," unpublished in the possession of the author.

2 Rogers Brubaker and David D. Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 425.

> occurs automatically when the conflict reaches a certain intensity, a certain "temperature."[3]

In this essay, I analyze three regions of the former Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth that in the "long nineteenth century" exhibited quite strong anti-Semitism but which experienced only a very small number of pogroms. I will examine the Kingdom of Poland, East Galicia, and Lithuania,[4] where anti-Semitic ideology gained strength in late imperial period; however, at the same time the number of anti-Jewish pogroms was very small compared to other regions with a significant Jewish minority (e.g., West Galicia[5] and other parts of the Jewish Pale of Settlement).[6] I first present a short outline about anti-Semitism in each case, and then discuss the number of pogroms and their dynamics in these territories. In the final section, I confront current historical literature and offer an explanation.

Anti-Semitism was quite strong in all three regions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the Kingdom of Poland, the journalist Jan Jeleński was the first to call himself an "anti-Semite" and seek to "defend" Polish society from Jewish "exploitation" and the "infection" of Polish culture.[7] While in 1863 many Poles saw Jews as allies, at the turn of the century an increasing number of Polish political groups began to regard Jews as an alien and very often not a friendly part of the society. As Theodore R. Weeks points out, "By the eve of World War I, aside from the socialists and the aristocratic conservatives ('realists'), Polish society had nearly entirely turned its back on the idea of integrating Jews into the Polish nation."[8] Many factors influenced this deteriorating situation: modernization and especially urbanization increased friction between Jews and Christians in the cities; the "Litvak invasion" was

3 Ibid., 426.

4 Lithuania is understood in this case as Vilnius, Kaunas, and Suwałki provinces in Late Imperial Russia.

5 More than four hundred pogroms took place in West Galicia in 1898.

6 Existing studies assert that during the 1905 Revolution between six hundred and seven hundred pogroms took place in the Romanov Empire; see Shlomo Lambroza, "The Pogrom Movement in Tsarist Russia, 1903–06" (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 1981), 117.

7 Maciej Moszyński, "'A Quarter of a Century of Struggle' of the Rola Weekly: 'The Great Alliance against the Jews," in *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, no. 3, July 2012, www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=297.

8 Theodor R. Weeks, "Russians, Jews, and Poles: Russification and Antisemitism 1881–1914," in *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, no. 3, July 2012, www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=308.

perceived as a threat to Polish culture and language as Jews coming from the Pale of Settlement were seen as agents of Russification; a growing national consciousness among Jews and new political phenomena (Zionism and the Bund) clearly showed Jewish unwillingness to integrate into the Polish society; the 1912 elections to the Russian State Duma in Warsaw saw Jewish electors supporting the socialist candidate Eugeniusz Jagiełło, who promised to support equal rights for Jews; and, finally, an anti-Semitic press initiated the policy of anti-Jewish boycott that lasted until the First World War. According to Weeks, a major reason for the worsening interethnic situation was Polish statelessness and the policy of Russification: Polish society felt endangered and the Jewish willingness to push their own agenda was perceived as an enemy act.[9]

In the late nineteenth century, anti-Semitism was also strong within the Lithuanian national movement. Animosity toward Jews was motivated mainly by economic reasons, and to a lesser degree by religious, cultural, and political factors. The palette of economic anti-Semitism can be divided into several categories: Jews as exploiters of Lithuanians; Jews as dishonest in trade; and the need for Lithuanians to engage in trade and crafts themselves and to advance their economic interests by boycotting Jewish stores and to buy only from "their own kind."[10] Blood libels also occurred in Lithuania from time to time, and this superstition was also supported by some periodicals; Jews were accused of spreading Russian culture in Lithuania. Catholic-oriented publications featured another claim typical of the anti-Semitic discourse then popular in Europe: that Jews aimed to control the world or already almost did so. However, starting from 1900, anti-Semitic texts decreased very significantly in the Lithuanian press which was partly related to a pragmatic calculation: Lithuanians needed allies in their struggle against their main enemies—Poles and Russians.[11] Nonetheless, anti-Jewish attitudes were still present in a latent form among the grassroots support for liberal trends. Anti-Jewish moods were also strong among Poles in Lithuania. Very similar arguments were put forward by Polish National Democrats in Lithuania to those in their propaganda elsewhere in the Polish lands. *Gazeta Codzienna* (The daily newspaper)

9 Ibid.

10 D. Staliūnas, "Lithuanian Antisemitism in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 25: *Jews in the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania since 1772* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013): 135–49.

11 For more on Jewish–Lithuanian political cooperation, see *Pragmatic Alliance: Jewish–Lithuanian Political Cooperation at the Beginning of the 20th Century*, ed. Vladas Sirutavičius and Darius Staliūnas (Budapest: Central University Press, 2011).

thus asserted that all the problems in France were connected with the fact that power in that country had been seized by Jews and Masons. Some Polish publications accused Jews of spreading Russian culture in the region: "The old concept of the 'capitalist Jew' is giving way to that of the 'russifying Jew.'"[12] Even Bishop Edward von der Ropp of Vilna (Vilnius) did not hide his antipathy toward the Jews. One of his pastoral letters revealed his prejudice against Jews to his flock clearly: one should be on guard against their trickery, but not harm them physically. Thus, the collective image of Jews in von der Ropp's rhetoric was clearly negative:

> Jews also dwell among us. These unfortunates do not know Christ and devote little time to God and eternity, although internally they pray often, but only profit and money are most important to them. Therefore they often harm us and deceive us and in recent times they have been inviting us to join in sedition and disturbances.[13]

A similar dynamic was found in East Galicia. John Paul Himka has observed that Ukrainian nationalism in the second half of the nineteenth century had a distinctly anti-Jewish component, and that animosity was motivated by economic and political factors. But in the early twentieth century the Ukrainian national movement changed, when the influence of Russophiles diminished. Now it was dominated by liberal democratic and socialist ideas. Yet, as in the Lithuania, there were groupings that were anti-Semitic.[14]

Despite these anti-Semitic trends, there were very few pogroms in all three areas under discussion. Answers to the question of whether there were pogroms in a particular region, and if so, how many, depend very much on what expressions of collective violence we define as pogroms. Here I rely on the definition of the German sociologist Werner Bergmann that a pogrom is a one-sided and non-governmental form of social control, a form of "self-help" by a group that occurs when no remedy from the state against the threat which

12 St. Staniszewski, "My i Żydzi" [We and the Jews], *Tygodnik Suwalski* 12 (1907): 5.

13 "List pasterski," *Dziennik Wileński* 35 (1906), 1.

14 John-Paul Himka, "Ukrainian-Jewish Antagonism in the Galician Countryside during the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Ukrainian-Jewish Relations in Historical Perspective*, ed. Peter J. Potichnyi and Howard Aster (Edmonton Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1988), 111–58; John-Paul Himka, "Dimensions of a Triangle: Polish-Ukrainian-Jewish Relations in Austrian Galicia," *Polin* 12: *Focusing on Galicia: Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians 1772–1918*, ed. Israel Bartal and Antony Polonsky (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1999): 25–48.

another ethnic group poses can be expected. The pogrom is different from other forms of control, such as lynching, terrorism and vigilantism, in that the participants in a pogrom hold the entire out-group responsible and therefore act against the group as a whole, and also in that it usually displays a low degree of organization.[15]

This definition allows us to discern common features between expressions of violence which at first sight appear to be different, such as the 1881–82 and 1903–6 pogroms in the Russian Empire. While the former were directed mostly against Jewish property, the anti-Jewish violence at the beginning of the twentieth century, according to some historians, already showed features of genocide and are similar what Donald Horowitz has called "deadly ethnic riots."[16] I consider that Bergmann's stress on the feeling of being abandoned by the government also fits examples of violence against Jews in many such cases in Central and Eastern Europe; in other words, pogroms often erupted here when a portion of Christian society felt it had been hurt by Jews in some way and that the authorities were unwilling to do anything about this. Furthermore, I consider, like Bergmann, that violence committed by the authorities belongs to quite a different category. Finally, this definition distinguishes between a pogrom as violence against a whole group and other expressions of violence. I supplement Bergmann's definition by adding dimensions of time, scope, and space in order to distinguish between small-scale conflicts between individuals and pogroms. Although historians have stressed on several occasions that pogroms were not an everyday phenomenon, in Lithuania, as in neighboring lands, small-scale conflicts between Jews and Christians, such as clashes between young people on market days, quite frequently erupted into violence. For this reason, we must distinguish clearly between such everyday conflicts and larger-scale violence. In this article, I define as pogroms acts of violence against another group which last for at least a few hours (although time spans are difficult to determine unless they are specified in historical sources) with at least a few dozen participants, where violence takes place in a place of mass

15 Werner Bergmann, "Ethnic Riots in Situations of Loss of Control: Revolution, Civil War, and Regime Change as Opportunity Structures for Anti-Jewish Violence in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Europe," in *Control of Violence: Historical and International Perspectives on Violence in Modern Societies*, ed. Wilhelm Heitmeyer, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, Stefan Malthaner, and Andrea Kirschner (New York: Springer, 2011), 488.

16 Donald L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

assembly (such as at a market square) or spreads within a certain inhabited area.

Using this definition, there were approximately ten pogroms in Lithuania from the early 1880s until the First World War. The most important reason for collective anti-Jewish violence in Lithuania was religious Judeophobia. The blood libel was an important trigger for mass collective anti-Jewish violence in Lithuanian shtetls. The fact that no pogrom took place in a large city was one factor protecting Lithuanian Jews from larger outbreaks of ethnic violence. Usually most of the perpetrators or members of the crowd watching the pogrom were peasants from local villages who had come to town for a religious holy day, a Sunday, or a market day. In the evening, they had to go home, to work on their farms. Thus, anti-Jewish violence in small towns lacked the conditions to continue for several days; usually, it lasted for a few hours.[17]

In Eastern Galicia under Austrian rule, as in Lithuania, there were very few pogroms. Historians mention only a few, mostly in 1898 in Tłuste, Barsztyn, Borszczow, and Przemyśl. However, even during these outbursts those responsible were not the local Ruthenians but "Mazurians," that is, immigrant Catholic workers from Western Galicia (i.e., Poles). Jewish property was ravaged and attempts were made to steal as much of it as possible, while in cases of violence against persons we see no attempts to kill Jews.[18] In other words, these riots remind us more of the 1881–82 pogroms in the Russian Empire than those of 1903–6. There were smaller cases of collective violence or at least increases in tension in other periods. Often fights, where opponents divided along ethno-confessional lines, developed in towns that had sprung up as a result of the development of the oil extraction business. Particular panic arose in Jewish communities in 1903 when news reached Eastern Galicia of the Kishinev pogrom; and rumors began to spread in this region too that accounts were about to be settled with Jews.[19]

17 For more on pogroms in Lithuania, see Darius Staliūnas, *Enemies for a Day: Antisemitism and Anti-Jewish Violence in Lithuanian under the Tsars* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015).

18 Tim Buchen, *Antisemitismus in Galizien. Agitation, Gewalt und Politik gegen Juden in der Habsburgermonarchie um 1900* [Antisemitism in Galicia. Agitation, violence and anti-Jewish politics in the Habsburg Monarchy in 1900] (Berlin: Metropol, 2012).

19 Buchen, *Antisemitismus in Galizien*, 190–91, 330. On the "Boryslav wars," when first an anti-Jewish pogrom, and then an act of vengeance, in which approximately three thousand Jews participated, took place, see Alison Fleig Frank, *Oil Empire: Visions of Prosperity in Austrian Galicia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 128–30.

In an article written in 1907, and published in 1910, Itzhak Grünbaum counted up to six pogroms that had occurred in the Kingdom of Poland, but his own description of events already showed very clearly that at least some of these incidents could not qualify as pogroms.[20] Recently, this topic was analyzed in volume 27 of *Polin* by Artur Markowski, who argued that there were ten pogroms in total in the Kingdom of Poland (not counting the one in Siedlce in 1906)—two of them were in ethnic Lithuanian areas (Suwałki province).[21] Of the other eight incidents, only in four cases (Kalisz 1878, Warsaw 1881, Gąbin 1882, and Częstochowa 1902) did anti-Jewish violence reach the level of a pogrom; the other cases reflected day-to-day violence, which I would claim happened quite often and was not recorded in written sources.

The number of pogroms in all three regions was thus very small compared to many parts of the Jewish Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire or West Galicia. One may raise the question whether it is appropriate to look for reasons why something (in this case, anti-Jewish pogroms) did not happen. I believe this is a legitimate question for at least two reasons. First, in other cases, as mentioned at the beginning of this essay, one can see a clear link between anti-Semitic ideology and mass anti-Jewish violence. Second, pogroms were taking place in neighboring regions of the territories under discussion, and in some cases members of the same ethnic group were quite actively involved in anti-Jewish violence (as in Ukraine in the 1880s and during the 1905 revolution).

This is not the first time such a question has been raised. Historians offer several explanations for the low level of anti-Jewish violence in Eastern Galicia. Himka asserts that the reason lies in the politicization of the Ukrainian–Jewish conflict. In other words, the Ukrainian national movement impressed upon the peasantry, which formed its base, the idea that civilized means should be used to fight the Jews, namely, that the movement should set up educational and commercial institutions and boycott Jewish trade. Himka suggests that this

20 I. Grünbaum, *Die Pogrome in Polen, Die Judenpogrome in Russland. Herausgegeben im Auftrag des Zionistischen Hilfsfonds in London von der zur Erforschung der Pogrome Eingesetzten Kommission* [The pogroms in Poland. The anti-Jewish pogroms in Russia. Published under the auspices of the Zionist Assistance Fund in London on the basis of the research of the commission to investigate the pogroms] (Cologne, 1910), 134–86.

21 Artur Markowski, "Anti-Jewish Pogroms in the Kingdom of Poland," in *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 27: *Jews in the Kingdom of Poland, 1815–1918,* ed. Glenn Dynner, Antony Polonsky, and Marcin Wodziński (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2015), 219–55.

propaganda was effective. Tim Buchen, for his part, stresses the significance of the fact that Jews were numerically dominant in Eastern Galician towns and cities, while the Christian segment of urban and rural society was split along confessional lines (city dwellers were mostly Latin Rite Catholics, while rural communities were mostly Eastern Rite Uniates). As a result, Jews in Eastern Galicia answered violence with violence much more often. In other words, they felt much more confident than their coreligionists in Western Galicia, where Latin Rite Catholicism dominated in both towns and villages.[22]

In the case of the Kingdom of Poland, Grünbaum suggests that there were two reasons behind the small number of pogroms: the "higher" culture of Poles as compared to Russians, and the fact that Poles were fighting against the imperial government so they did not need additional enemies inside the kingdom.[23] A similar argument was recently formulated by Artur Markowski, who stated that "at least up to the autumn of 1905—there was a spirit uniting Poles and Jews in their common struggle against the tsarist empire."[24] Markowski also formulated some other arguments, namely, that the small number of pogroms could be explained by the efforts of local officials who did their best to prevent pogroms. In addition, in contrast to the 1880s, in 1905 "[some] powerful Jewish political groups, capable of standing up to the pogroms not just ideologically, but also politically and physically, had made an appearance in the political arena and social structures."[25]

It is difficult to take seriously Grünbaum's argument about Polish cultural superiority that prevented Poles from "bestial" attacks against Jews. The 1919 pogrom in Vilnius and other places showed the falsity of such reasoning. Markowski's argument about the role of the government is also questionable. One might challenge this explanation because tsarist officials in the Congress Kingdom took the same measures as their counterparts in the Pale of Settlement. The argument about the role of the imperial government would be even more questionable in the case of Lithuania and Belarus, where there were brutal pogroms in Grodno province (including the notorious Białystok pogrom in 1906), whereas almost none happened in Vilnius province, while both of these provinces were under the rule of the

22 Buchen, *Antisemitismus in Galizien*, 191.
23 Grünbaum, *Die Pogrome in Polen*, 135, 186.
24 Markowski, "Anti-Jewish Pogroms," 254–55.
25 Ibid.

same governor-general. Indeed, if we go further and compare the actions of the local governments in Ukraine, Belarus, or Lithuania we see that tsarist officials took, if not the same, then very similar measures everywhere with very different outcomes.[26] Certainly, from the perspective of the imperial capital, these regions had a similar (or even higher) geopolitical importance as the Kingdom of Poland.

The argument about the impact of Jewish political groups is also problematic since these groups were quite powerful in many provinces of the Jewish Pale of Settlement, but pogroms occurred there, while some historians claim that the activity of some Jewish self-defense groups led even to more violence.[27] Yet the emergence of strong Jewish political groups was important in another aspect: Lithuanians, like Ruthenians (Ukrainians) in East Galicia, needed allies in their struggle against their main enemy—the Poles—so, at times, they formed a pragmatic alliance with Jewish political groups.[28] This led to a decline of anti-Semitic agitation which seems to be one reason why there were so few pogroms in these areas.

The second argument, presented by Grünbaum, is worth considering, although I think it should be slightly corrected. There were certainly Polish as well as Lithuanian political groups that saw Jews as their allies, but there were also Polish political trends which were openly hostile to the Jews. I would rather formulate this argument in a somewhat different manner: the numerically dominant national groups in the three areas under discussion—Poles, Lithuanians, and Ukrainias/Ruthenians—did not feel that they were masters; they were not yet strong enough to achieve national emancipation and

26 Theodore R. Weeks, "Pasakojimas apie tris miestus: požiūris į 1881 m. pogromus Kijeve, Varšuvoje bei Vilniuje" [The story of three cities: an approach to 1881 Pogroms in Kiev, Warsaw and Vilnius] in *Kai ksenofobija virsta prievarta. Lietuvių ir žydų santykių dinamika XIX a.—XX a. Pirmoje pusėje* [When xenophobia turns into violence. Dynamics of Lithuanian-Jewish relations in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. century. Part 1], ed. Vladas Sirutavičius and Darius Staliūnas (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas Leidykla, 2005), 25–50.

27 Stefan Wiese, "Jewish Self-Defense and Black Hundreds in Zhitomir. A Case Study on the Pogroms of 1905 in Tsarist Russia," in *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, no. 3 (July 2012), www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=304.

28 Joshua Shanes and Yohanan Petrovsky Shtern, "An Unlikely Alliance: The 1907 Ukrainian–Jewish Electoral Coalition." *Nations and Nationalism* 15, no. 3 (2009): 483–505; *Pragmatic Alliance: Jewish-Lithuanian Political Cooperation at the Beginning of the 20th Century*, ed. Vladas Sirutavičius and Darius Staliūnas (Budapest, 2011).

therefore they preferred other methods in their struggle with Jews. At same time, neither Poles nor Lithuanians had anything to gain by defending the tsarist regime while a large number of the pogroms during the 1905 revolution sought to punish "Jewish revolutionaries." This was not a goal supported by many Lithuanians and even by many Poles. These factors are probably the reasons for the relative absence of pogroms in these three areas, in spite of the strong hostility in all of them to Jews.