

WILLIAM W. HAGEN
University of California, Davis (*emeritus*)
ORCID: 0000-0003-1563-835X

Interpreting the History of Pogroms in Poland: Are “Causes” Actually “Contexts” and — If So — For What?

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Polish historiography on pogroms has recently taken giant steps forward. Gone is their attribution, which once seemed so self-evidently true of the Russian-ruled partition zone, to the tsarist authorities and their antisemitic followers in the Black Hundreds. Indisputable now is their provocation in interwar Poland, especially in the 1930s, by rightist nationalists in the National Democratic and fascist-leaning camps. That during and immediately after World War II many Jews died by Polish hands, whether those of individuals or crowds, is conceded as a tragic reality. Interpretation and explanation focus, not on whether such violence occurred, or whether it was — in demonstrable instances — perpetrated by Poles, but rather on *why* it occurred — in short, on its causes (*przyczyny*) and the meanings radiating from them.

This essay begins by examining the causal explanations for pogrom violence offered in two empirically valuable and interpretively pathbreaking recent Polish-language works: Kamil Kijek, Artur Markowski, Konrad Zieliński, eds., *Pogroms Against Jews in the Polish Lands in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Vol. 2: Case Studies (to 1939)*¹ and Artur Markowski, *Anti-Jewish Violence and Social Imaginings. The Białystok Pogrom of 1906*.² It turns then to exposition of a social-psychological and popular-cultural analysis I have advanced on the basis of new archival research. It holds that pogrom violence, manifested though it may be in plunder or justified on political grounds, springs from deeper wells — indeed, from the socio-cultural unconscious — and often expresses itself in *group enactment* of unpremeditated but, to the perpetrators, deeply meaningful *scripts or scenarios*.³

¹ *Pogromy* 2019.

² MARKOWSKI 2018.

³ HAGEN 2018. The archival and other primary-source documentation cited in the pages below also figures, among much other evidence, in the book. The text framing it here is for the most part newly composed, as are, in their entirety, this article’s observations on Polish-language historiography.

Pogroms did not invariably entail Jewish *death*, but it often occurred, even — as in 1906 Białystok — in “bestial” form, claiming 80 victims alongside 9 Christians.⁴ In Częstochowa (1919) a victim “was beaten so long on the market square by hooligans with crow-bars and axes that he fell unconscious, his brains spilling from his head.”⁵ No one was ever surprised to learn that, in an anti-Jewish riot, death and severe injury accompanied tumultuous plunder.

The editors of *Pogromy Żydów II* wrote of the 1920 Polish-Soviet war that “the widely circulating ‘Jewish-Bolshevik’ stereotype, pro-Bolshevik sympathies, and the behavior of part of the Jewish population...caused (*stały się przyczynę*) the pogroms and wartime crimes” (p. 13). The 1918 Mielec pogrom revealed, among other dynamics, the cash-poor villagers’ resentment of Jewish merchants, who “became the object of hatred and in consequence — of pogroms.” The villagers thirsted for “revenge.” The breakdown of state power led them to believe they were free to plunder. In the end, “the local peasantry’s greed and sense of impunity, together with the local authorities’ aversion to acting in the Jews’ defense and their fear of the insurrectionary villagers, were the cause (*stały się przyczynę*) of the pogrom.”⁶

The Warsaw pogrom of 1881, long ascribed to Russian provocation, appears now as an outburst of resentment and frustration among Polish Christians over the pains of socio-economic modernization.⁷ Of anti-Jewish violence in the Lithuanian-Polish borderland Dariusz Staliūnas found that “Christians thought themselves wronged: they believed the authorities wouldn’t take their side, and sometimes they simply wanted to put the Jews back in their place.”⁸

Hatred is frequently assigned causal force. In the conclusion to a study of the Grodno pogrom of June 1935, it figures causally three times.⁹ But is “hatred” an *impenetrable black box*? Does it irresistibly launch violence — or is it violence’s alibi?¹⁰ The bloody 1919 Częstochowa events found seemingly accurate diagnosis by Henry Morgenthau during his mission investigating anti-Jewish violence in Poland: rumors of hostile Jewish arms stockpiling, economic misery, but above all, in the American’s words, “they were caused (*spowodowane*) by antisemitic prejudices reinforced by the conviction that the Jewish inhabitants were hostile to Polish statehood.”¹¹ Yet what, exactly, is the causal relationship between “prejudice” and bloodshed?

In Polish Christian students’ brutal 1931 attack at Wilno University on Jewish fellow-students, one of the antisemites’ demands was that Jewish medical stu-

⁴ MARKOWSKI 2018, pp. 421, 455. Hereafter page numbers of this book are given in parentheses in the text above.

⁵ PASZKOWSKI 2019, p. 267.

⁶ ZIELIŃSKI 2019, pp. 239–240.

⁷ MARKOWSKI 2019, pp. 67–85.

⁸ STALIŪNAS 2019, pp. 100–101: „czasami zwyczajnie pragnęli Żydów ‘ustawić.’”

⁹ ZAMOISKI 2019, pp. 389.

¹⁰ See PETERSEN 1999.

¹¹ PASZKOWSKI 2019, pp. 277.

dents dissect “Jewish corpses” only. Natalia Aleksiu assigns this macabre issue an “instrumental character,” that is, as a tactic to achieve the university’s “dejudaization.” But its symbolic weight was enormous, considering its evocation of “Christian blood” and “corpses” allegedly desecrated by Jewish hands. Instrumentality, as Max Weber argued, serves ends which, however self-interested, are ultimately *conceived in value-terms*. The Wilno students sought *removal of the Jewish presence*. How can the “causes” of that effort be adequately grasped?¹²

In the 1935 social revolt in Odrzywół, Kamil Kijek found “redemptive” (*odkupicielski*) antisemitism at work. The villagers’ economic misery, deep-rooted “aversion toward Jews,” and antagonism toward state authority — brought to a boil by the radical rightist Stronnictwo Narodowe’s party propaganda — generated “a panic invoking a local form of ‘moral economy’ in service of a social technology of violence.”

The presence of Jews in the provincial economic and social landscape of villages and small towns was perceived as a disturbance of the natural order, as moral evil, injustice, which must be ended. Violence toward Jews, and attacks on the state forbidding that violence, now became a restoration of moral order. They did not undermine the sanctions of morality, but just the opposite — they were a necessary act of righteousness.¹³

The concept of “moral economy” has been familiar in social-science literature since its fruitful deployment by the prominent Marx-influenced British historian Edward P. Thompson.¹⁴ It first found application to the study of Polish pogroms in 2005, where it signified an imagined world in which — in pogromists’ minds — Jewish misdeeds were dissolving accustomed social hierarchies and economic relationships, whose restoration required forcible punishment of Jews.¹⁵ But while, as Kijek’s work also shows, moral-economy theory may usefully conceptualize the justificatory socio-cultural *context* for ethnic violence, it cannot serve as its fundamental *explanation* or *cause*.

Artur Markowski’s valuable book on the 1906 Białystok pogrom locates its causes in frustrated “social aspirations,” both among Jewish majority and Christian minority, and in the “legal and economic inequalities” among them, “which may bring about (*przyczyniać się do*) escalation of collective aggression” (p. 463). Stated differently, “an important cause” (*ważna przyczyna*) of the violence were the “aspirations to modernization of Jewish society...and the effort to block them among the city’s non-Jewish inhabitants.” Justifying the Christians’ opposition were “antisemitic fantasies,” combining to form the “image of the ‘evil Jew’” (pp. 22, 246).¹⁶ In 1877, rumors had pre-

¹² ALEKSIUN 2019, p. 368.

¹³ KIJEK 2019, p. 398.

¹⁴ THOMPSON 1991, pp. 185–351.

¹⁵ HAGEN 2005. See also BERMAN et al. 2016, p. 246 and *passim*.

¹⁶ Or again: “The social factors I point to as the cause of collective aggression, and thus of their potential to generate pogroms, could be mobilized by these fantasies” (KIJEK 2019, p. 258).

dicted Christian murder on Yom Kippur of the city's Jews (p. 246). In 1906, the streets told again of impending "slaughter of the Jews" (*rzezi Żydów*) and, during the pogrom, talk circulated of Jewish-perpetrated atrocities — gouging out of eyes, cutting off of breasts. These were among the 1906 violence's "most essential causes" (p. 288).

Markowski also builds on moral economy theory. The obstacles to advancement Christian commoners encountered in the "modernization process could cause frustration to arise and the need for the Thompsonian compensation known as *moral economy*. The pogrom then authorized the physical elimination and 'teaching of lessons' to Jewish men and women workers seeking improvement of their situation." (p. 298; cf. also p. 246).

Christian perpetrators imagined themselves to possess a "'natural' and 'inborn' right" to regulate the moral economy encompassing both themselves and the subordinate Jews. Of pogroms in general, Markowski concludes — granting to ideological antisemitism a greater role than his argumentation otherwise assigns — that "they are to be located within a system of social imaginings constructed in a space definable as modern antisemitism" (p. 432). Of the violence itself, Markowski finds it "typical of the popular mode of communication" (p. 432; cf. p. 463).

Markowski gives the leading Polish-language assimilationist journal *Izraelita* the last word: it symbolized the Białystok pogrom as Talmudic tomes — that is, Jews — burned at the Spanish Inquisition's stake "for the pleasure of the mob of Marranos and heretics" — that is, of Christians, pejoratively named. A more bitter image of the Polish-Jewish relationship in the pre-1914 years is hard to conceive. In conjuring it, Markowski seems to signal the *genocidal implications* of the modern pogrom.

The recent Polish scholarship briefly appraised here is a sophisticated, cutting-edge synthesis of pogroms' political-ideological and social-cultural dynamics. But those factors identified as "causes" of pogroms — economic misery, blamed on Jewish merchants and capitalists; Jewish separatism, leftism — real or imagined — and other ideological differences; Christian anxieties over blocked or reversed social mobility; false charges of Jewish armed aggression; instrumental advantages to Christian political movements of anti-Jewish agitation; "hatred" — do not, in themselves, explain pogromists' resort to physical violence or murder, whose exercise was, as everyone knew, punishable by law. Appeal to the civil, military, and religious authorities against perceived Jewish crimes was law's dictate.

I propose that a deeper justification for popular anti-Jewish violence was necessary: the conviction that Christians were *free* to physically abuse or even kill Jews if they believed it was *righteous* and *necessary* to do so, so as to defend Christianity, restore the moral economy, or defend against mortal threats Jews might be thought to be aiming at Christians. In short: the *deepest cause* of pogrom violence was the conviction that, if the Christian authorities would not act against perceived Jewish wrongdoing, the common folk were justified in doing so. Jews were, *at any time*, subject to punishment, even by death, for *any deed or misdeed*, real or imagined, they might be charged with in the popular mind. Antisemitic propaganda might encourage

such punishment, but only if the common people were persuaded in their own minds of its necessity would they carry it out, even *against* the cautions of the antisemitic press, or of the church, or other higher authorities.

Specific complaints against Jews, or general conditions of Christian misery or discontent, could not be *causes* of pogroms. They could only form the *context* in which the deep-seated, irrational, and largely *unconscious belief* was translated into brutal practice that punishment of Jews was necessary and righteous. To view the matter otherwise risks accepting the idea that, for example, *since* economic misery prevailed, or *since* support for Bolshevism was detectable among Jews, pogrom violence was *therefore understandable*, and if not — in retrospect — *justifiable*, then at any rate *to be expected*.

Given a fitting *context* and a culturally sanctioned *pretext*, demotic or grass-roots, extra-legal Christian violence might — in the Christian mind, *understandably* — strike Jews at any moment. Such was the actual condition of Polish Jews, as they themselves well knew, to the extent that *raison d'état* or Christian authority — both unpredictable, sometimes weak and often fickle powers — did not shield them.

ANTI-JEWISH VIOLENCE INTERPRETED AS “VISITATIONS OF THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS”

Real-historical contexts set the stage for — or enable — pogroms, but that which happens in their actual course, and the challenge of its interpretation (without which the empirical record is but a chronology), leads to the depths of social psychology. The focus of these pages falls on *symbolically charged violence*, illustrated by vivid and mostly never before published sources supporting a new understanding of anti-Jewish violence in early twentieth-century Poland. The empirical setting comprises 279 anti-Jewish riots and pogroms perpetrated at Polish Christian hands, particularly from 1917, as the partitioning empires began to collapse, to the end of 1920, following the conclusion of that year's Polish-Soviet War. These assaults entailed a death toll as low, by some contemporary reckonings, as 400 and as high, by others, as 572. Jewish losses in these years rose catastrophically farther east, in the zone of the Russian Revolution and Civil War. In Ukraine, they are widely believed to have reached the level of 25–50,000, if not more. The Jewish death toll on Polish-inhabited soil rose as the 1920 war front moved eastward, certainly by several hundreds if not many more.¹⁷

¹⁷ HAGEN 2018, p. 512. This book, based on archival research in Poland, Austria, Israel, and New York City, takes account of the Polish-language and other pre-2018 literature on pogroms, both in the historically Polish-ruled lands and elsewhere. See the bibliography, pp. 518–535. Works that developed this approach to anti-Jewish violence (apart from the above-cited article, HAGEN 2005, include: HAGEN 1996, pp. 351–381; HAGEN 2001, pp. 1–30; HAGEN 2002, pp. 466–475). For up-to-date and insightful analysis of World War I and its aftermath in east-central Europe: BÖHLER 2018; BORODZIEJ, GÓRNY 2018.

The collective violence Polish Christians — that is, a small minority among them — inflicted on Jews in the years 1918–1920 frequently assumed theatricalized and other symbolical, metaphorically expressive forms. This structured violence dramatized Polish Christian popular culture's widespread illusions and delusions, anxieties and fears about the Jewish presence. There is authoritative anthropological and sociological literature devoted to demonstrating similar claims regarding cultures other than Poland's. In the United States, lynchings of African-Americans sometimes possessed a strongly ritualized, quasi-religious form. In pre-Columbian Mexico, ritualized violence reached one of world history's peaks.¹⁸

Historiography and the social sciences in the West, including Poland, are too much the captive of rational-actor theory, which explains social behavior and history as outcomes of the actions of individuals consciously and deliberately pursuing their self-conceived rational interests. It is essential, however, to explore those dimensions of life and history, both at the micro- and the macro-level, that are plainly irrational, driven by unconsciously or subconsciously held fears and desires. In the western, historically Christian world, antisemitism is, arguably, the oldest and deepest irrational anxiety, antecedent to more modern obsessions concerning people of color.

The great problem of human life, greater than the struggle for justice or equality, is violence. If it did not exist as a behavioral choice, people would have to accept their cultural differences, the disparities in their moral universes, without recourse to physical conflict and bloodshed. They would have to compromise over scarce resources. But violence is a weapon always at the ready.

THE PRIMACY OF ANTISEMITIC IDEOLOGY?

In October 1919, an article in liberal-assimilationist German Jewry's principal journal, very likely from prominent Galician journalist Benjamin Segal's pen, sounded a wistful note of disappointment over the crisis in the Polish-Jewish relationship:

Among Poles pogrom is something artificially introduced, something suggested from outside, grounded neither in their tradition nor their mentality. From the beginning of the Russian pogrom-era, which coincided with German antisemitism's rise and was causally related to it, Poles successfully fought against both [of these anti-Jewish tendencies] until Pan-Polish National Democracy grew strong. But just as foreign plants sometimes thrive better than native ones, so too has the pogrom in Poland assumed more despicable, coarser, and meaner forms than elsewhere: beard-ripping, abuse and harassment are viler and more malicious than actual pogrom, and have a more embittering and long-lasting effect than plundering and bloodshed [...]. If Jews in Poland, and especially eastern Galicia, where in the towns they were the Polish cause's main pillars, can be massacred, and indeed

¹⁸ Exemplary are PATTERSON 1999, and CLENDINNEN 2014.

by Poles, who always condemned pogroms, then there is obviously now nothing morally objectionable about pogroms, and they no longer besmirch the honor of a civilized nation awakening to freedom. The Lemberg [Lwów] pogrom demonstrated to the world that under certain conditions a pogrom can be very welcome.¹⁹

In short, it was, in Segal's view, *ideological antisemitism*, imported from abroad and weaponized by aggressive middle- and upper-class Polish National Democrats (Endeks) with the effect of priming the "dark masses" for anti-Jewish violence, that accounted for the pogroms. Yet it was not only murderous violence — which exploded especially in military pogroms in the Polish-Russian borderlands — that agonized the Polish scene of 1917–1920. More pervasive was "righteous plunder" with accompanying random murder.²⁰ Above all, the violence was socially and culturally structured so as to enact public dramas conveying imperious messages about the Polish-Jewish relationship.

THE UNIQUENESS OF POLISH JEWRY

The vast majority of European and American Jews descend from the lands of historic Poland, that is, from the territorially far-flung pre-1772 Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Most Holocaust victims were east European speakers of Yiddish and/or a local Christian-majority language, mostly descendants of the pre-modern Jewish population inhabiting then-Polish-ruled lands. Only following the partitions of Poland in 1772–1795 did Russia acquire a significant Jewish population, which it tried to confine within the old Polish borders (thus creating the discriminatory Pale of Settlement — an internal ethnic wall). Austrian Jewry's largest settlement was in formerly Polish-ruled Galicia. Migration in the nineteenth century from partitioned Poland greatly swelled premodern Germany's comparatively small though significant Jewish presence. Yet, even in 1933, Germany's Jewish population counted only about one-sixth of interwar Poland's, not to mention the several millions living in the Soviet Union, also descended from old Poland, though rapidly undergoing linguistic russification. The Romanian and Hungarian Jewish populations also burgeoned in the nineteenth century through immigration from historically Polish lands.

Polish-speaking Christians lived in a world in which the Jewish population was a *far more massive presence than anywhere else in the western world*. Over the centuries, elaborate modes and codes of coexistence had emerged, in which Jews were "intimate [or sacred] strangers."²¹ In the nineteenth century, Polish

¹⁹ *Im deutschen Reich*, 1920, 11 (November 1920), pp. 340–346.

²⁰ On property-theft during anti-Jewish riots (alongside other important themes), see: BUCHEN 2012; UNOWSKY 2018.

²¹ See, *inter alia*: HERTZ 1988; CAŁA 1995, pp. 117, 130, 142ff., 184, 221 and *passim*; TOKARSKA-BAKIR 2008.

nationalism grew strong, seeking restoration of a Polish state in which Christian Poles would be, as many dreamed, “masters in their own house.” Yet, because Poland’s towns held very large Jewish populations, where commerce, finance, and many artisan trades rested significantly or even almost exclusively in Jewish hands — as did commercial functions in the countryside, including tavernkeeping and moneylending — the Jewish presence was uniquely constitutive of social and economic reality. Popular culture accepted the Jews as immutable features of the Polish landscape, and assigned to them both malevolent and benevolent power. That they might be removed, or otherwise vanish, was, in sober daylight, a chimerical thought. At most, judeophobes before World War I imagined a reduction of their numbers through emigration.²²

With war’s outbreak in 1914, the prospect of Polish independent statehood grew tantalizingly near, assuming the Central Powers’ eventual defeat and even that of Russia too, which seemed likely as revolutionary tremors shook that vast empire. Yet the war proved to be an excruciating bloodbath for ordinary soldiers and an abyss of hunger, disease, and death for civilians. When in 1918–1919 a new Polish state arose out of the rubble of the Russian, Austrian, and German empires, it was wracked by poverty, anarchy, and crime. Ideologically opposed political elites and their followers fought over control of the new state. A national army needed to be patched together from numerous armed formations emerging from World War I. In 1920, the Soviet Army invaded the new Poland, hoping to shatter the emergent Polish state and march on to Berlin and Paris. A desperate Polish-Soviet war broke out, accompanied by widespread anti-Jewish violence, both soldierly and civilian.

THE INTERPRETATION OF ANTISEMITISM

There are two principal explanations of modern antisemitism. One emphasizes the *clash of interests* — economic competition, or opposition to Jewish presence in political or social movements found objectionable in antisemitic eyes. People commonly understand such clashes to be “rational,” given that groups in society have differing interests which are — or seem, from the antisemites’ viewpoint — to be justifiable, and even morally righteous.

The other approach highlights *ideological antisemitism*, born of the premodern tradition of religious anti-Judaism and precapitalist objections to Jewish commercial and financial enterprise. The presumption is that, as Heinrich Heine memorably said, “thought precedes action as lightning precedes thunder,” so that saturation of ordinary people’s minds by the trickle-down effect of ideas crafted among the Christian intelligentsia eventually legitimized anti-Jewish violence in the popular mind.

²² For further analysis and extensive bibliography, see HAGEN 2018, “Introduction: Culture and Psychology of the Polish-Jewish Relationship,” pp. 1–49.

Combining these widespread ideas yields the conclusion, still hegemonic in the scholarly literature, that *anti-Jewish interests gave (and may still give) rise to antisemitic ideology, leading finally, in extremity, to anti-Jewish violence.*

Yet when judeophobia explodes in cruel violence, ethnic cleansing, or mass murder, the argument from “rational interest” collapses. What can reasonably be considered rational about obsession-fueled murder and mayhem? And when the details of judeophobic propaganda are examined closely, the profusion in it of fantasies, superstitions, and nightmarish imaginings, often having to do with sexual violations or physical murder, signal the existence of a hydra-headed syndrome of fear, anxiety, and paranoia. Indeed, antisemitism is, at bottom, a manifestation of magical thinking and a massive paranoia that has accompanied Christian societies for many long centuries, in some forms even from the birth of the religion of Jesus.

Thus, to understand anti-Jewish *violence* at the hands of Christians, as opposed to Christian *resentment* of Jewish rivals in economy or politics, it is necessary to understand the culture and social psychology of the perpetrators.

A central point of my analysis is that in the judeophobic idea-world, that which prevails at the grass-roots level is “*folk anti-Judaism* or *folk antisemitism.*” And while scholarship has traditionally focused on anti-Jewish theologies, ideologies and self-proclaimed sciences — what I call, borrowing from theoretician of nationalist ideology Benedict Anderson, “*print antisemitism*” — such intellectualizations, when put under the microscope, reveal themselves to be, essentially, folk-cultural ideas of judeophobia dressed up rhetorically (and “modernized”) to appeal to the educated classes.²³

My research has uncovered virtually *no evidence that grass-roots violence was unleashed to fulfill political-ideological programs of antisemitism.* Leading antisemitic voices and parties sometimes denounced the violence, as did — though with major equivocations — the Catholic clergy, itself soaked in the cultural milieu of folk-antisemitism (as for example in its longstanding defense of ritual murder panics).

It is more important to understand deep-rooted, largely unreflected-on, religiously sanctioned popular “folk-antisemitism” than it is to write — endlessly, as library shelves will testify — of the antisemitism of the intellectuals (*who were themselves recycling fears and anxieties absorbed from popular culture more than inventing antisemitism itself*).

READING FOLK ANTISEMITISM

Scholarship and public opinion have long favored the idea that violence was “unleashed” or “triggered” by antisemitic leadership groups acting top-down on “benighted and manipulated masses.” Yet, paradoxically, serious research has proven

²³ ANDERSON 1991.

these claims groundless in practically all cases. It remains to be empirically demonstrated that riots and pogroms were stealthily and premeditatedly directed by civilian authorities, even — in the Russian Empire — by the much-hated secret police. Conservative-monarchical authorities generally opposed popular anti-Jewish violence, partly because it often threatened to spill over into attack on Christian elites — especially gentry landlords and oppressive officialdom.²⁴

When violence occurs, it is the grass-roots, demotic perpetrators themselves whose motives and mentality must be understood, whatever Christian elites may have felt about the Jewish presence. This poses a problem of psychological or psychoanalytical explanation. Historians have typically viewed this challenge with skepticism, largely for fear that the theoretical tail — one's choice of psychological theory — will wag the empirical dog, *i.e.*, predetermine the resultant explanation.

My approach distinguishes between *instrumental* and *expressive* violence, that is, between violence applied to attain a practical, pragmatic end — *e.g.*, to rob a bank, to fend off an aggressor — and violence that expresses propositions about the world — *e.g.*, that certain people have violated social-cultural norms and must be ritually punished. Actually, looking more closely, one generally finds that acts of instrumental violence are commonly represented as *righteous*, even when they injure or kill its victims. The bank robber or spouse-murderer, when asked, will likely explain why his crime was morally justifiable.²⁵

The wellsprings of expressive violence lie in the depths of the “cultural unconscious.” Here are lodged understandings of the world, and fears and anxieties accompanying them, that are absorbed in society through acculturation, such that acting on them does not entail reflection or justification, whether in Max Weber's terms of instrumental rationality or value rationality. Such a matrix of what people take to be commonsensical and necessary action figures in other discourses as “culture” or “ideology.”²⁶

Finally, and most revealingly, it is necessary to look at the empirical record of popular, grass-roots collective violence — as historians of medieval and early modern Europe pioneeringly did — while posing the question: what stories did the violence tell, what mythic scenarios did it enact? In the lands of Poland, from

²⁴ KLIER 2014; WEINBERG 2014; WIESE 2016; ZIPPERSTEIN 2019.

A worthy recent book highlighting top-down instigation of anti-Jewish violence by military authorities is GAUDEN 2019. It illuminates with new evidence from Ukrainian archives the Polish armed forces' and local Polish nationalist politicians' culpability in the extremely destructive Lwów pogrom's outbreak and prolonged duration. It does not aim to interpret in social-psychological and cultural terms the pogrom-perpetrators' violent actions. Gauden's attention to the Jewish presence is confined to upper-class assimilationists, while Orthodox religious Jews and Zionists — also leftists — go unnoticed. In short, the socio-cultural setting in which plebeian soldiers assaulted civilian Jews, and the soldiers' own motives and rationales for doing so, are left unaddressed.

²⁵ See, *e.g.*, FISKE, RAI, 2015.

²⁶ See, with extensive bibliography: HAGEN 2018, “Theoretical Footnote: Ethnic Violence in Social Science and Historiography,” pp. 50–58.

1914 to 1920, hundreds of anti-Jewish tumults, riots, and pogroms broke out. Looking into this vast archive of factuality, what messages can the historian, uncommitted to any particular theory of psychology, read out of the riots? This is the historian's freedom, and the historian's opportunity to deepen knowledge of human psychology, not by *importing* psychologists' theories, but by *exporting* one's own findings about subconscious or unreflected-upon behavior of the perpetrators of collective violence — in this case, ethnic violence.

As for causality: it is not, as naïve positivists may have thought, a discoverable “mechanism” or perceptually ascertainable link between events. In historiography, as in historically contextualized — or perhaps all — science, causality is *inferred*, even when dealing with the seemingly most evident cause-effect sequences of human behavior. It is better to think, with Richard Rorty, of “offering reasons for things,” rather than to imagine putative singular and essentialized causes.²⁷

SYMBOLICAL COMBATING OF “JEWISH POWER”

Anti-Jewish violence in the 1914–1920 years in the historically Polish lands expressed a powerful drive to escape from a deep sense of subordination to or dependency on “Jewish power.” In the words of peasant author Jan Słomka (1912), Polish society, having overthrown *pańszczyzna*, or subordination to the historic ruling class of the nobility, faced the challenge of escaping what he called *żydowszczyzna* — “Jewish domination” — and later, after 1917, to escape the seeming threat of *żydokomuna* or “Jewish communism” as well.²⁸ But how? Not by murder, let alone mass murder, but by breaking or exorcising — whether by collective Christian political action or street-level force — of Jewish power, whether material and tangible or mystical and magical.

Force was rudely physical, trained on Jewish property, which in most anti-Jewish riots or pogroms suffered selective or comprehensive plunder. Its justification lay in charges of war-profiteering, black marketeering, and — more vaguely — in the belief, especially among Christian villagers, that Jewish wealth was in reality their own, that it was farm enterprise's surplus appropriated without exertion of labor by Jewish hands from the hardworking peasantry. A village's or shtetl's Jews were “its Jews,” and what they possessed could be repossessed.²⁹

Physical violence in these years was largely, but not entirely, the work of armed men, and increasingly — as Polish-Soviet warfare intensified — of soldiers. In the Polish-Russian borderlands (*kresy*), military violence against Jewish settlements assumed an atrocious character absent from anti-Jewish rioting in Poland's ethnographic heartland. The archives document borderland violence on all sides

²⁷ Cf. HAGEN 2007, pp. 1–32.

²⁸ SŁOMKA 1929; also at www.linux.net.pl/~wkotwica/slomka/slomka.html, pp. 88–89, 98, and *passim*. On the peasant-lord relationship in historic Poland: HAGEN 1998, pp. 145–189.

²⁹ See BUCHEN 2012.

of the eastern front — perpetrated by Polish, Russian, Ukrainian armies, and also by rogue armed bands. While soldiers permitted themselves violent behavior — notably, raping of Jewish women, which was absent or rare in civilian-perpetrated riots — they were, as individuals, sons mostly of Polish villages and small towns, imbued with that landscape's demotic culture, including its folk antisemitism. In October 1920, Polish Army Intelligence confidentially reported to high government circles that "antisemitism represents the soldier's most characteristic trait."³⁰

BEARD-CUTTING

As Benjamin Segal and other observers suggested, one of symbolical violence's most pervasive manifestations was beard-cutting, nearly always performed by soldiers or other armed men pretending to represent and exercise social and even state authority. Accompanying it commonly were various forms of desecration of Jews and Judaism, aimed at robbing them of their claims to legitimacy and dignity, and of their widely feared magical power.

Obviously, to rob a pious Jewish merchant it was not necessary to cut his beard. And, as the Zionist Club of Jewish Parliamentary Deputies reported to the Council of Ministers in August 1920:

It is curious that civil and military authorities announce on every possible occasion that they harbor greatest confidence in the Jewish Orthodox population, having no reproaches against them. Yet it is precisely the Orthodox who suffer most from every sort of excess and other persecution: their beards are shorn, they are beaten on the street, in the railway stations and train cars.³¹

The procedure frequently had a markedly theatrical or carnivalesque, comic, or burlesque quality. In Nowy Dwór, soldiers dragged Goldman, seventy, into the street "and began amid crowd's hoots and whistling to cut his beard. Thanks to intervention by priest and army command, towards whom the crowd was mightily rude, the priest was able to get the old man to the convent."³²

³⁰ "Antysemityzm stanowi najbardziej charakterystyczny rys żołnierza." CAW, Sekcja VII: Oddział II Sztabu Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych za lata 1918–1921, sygn. I.300.76. Komunikat Informacyjny, no. 60 (127), z dnia 10 października 1920. Sprawy wojskowe.

³¹ "ciekawą jest rzeczą, że władze cywilne i wojskowe przy każdej nadającej się sposobności oświadczają, iż do warstw ortodoksyjnych ludności żydowskiej odnoszą się z największym zaufaniem, nie mając im nic do zarzucenia, — tem nie mniej właśnie te warstwy ortodoksyjne najwięcej cierpią od wszelkiego rodzaju eksesów i innych prześladowań: ortodoksom obcina się brody, ortodoksów bije się na ulicach, dworcach kolejowych i w pociągach." AAN, PRM, no. 21431/20, f. 835 (August 25, 1920).

³² "i zaczęli wśród hukania i gwizdania tłumu odciąć mu brodę. Dzięki interwencji księdza i komendanta wojskowego, wobec których tłum był bardzo szorstki, ksiądz zdołał doprowadzić go do konwentu." CAW, File no. I.123.1.321: E (May 21, 1919).

In a Warsaw train Abram Dziubalowski scuffled with attackers, who “stabbed me in the hands with pins and bayonet, cut off my beard with knife and scissors, ordering me, as is usual, to shout ‘long live Wielkopolska! May the rabbi croak!’” One then tried “to force on me a piece of pork sausage and tore up my mouth.”³³ Across Mazovia, it was claimed, “all Jews’ beards were cut off.” Finding no more bearded victims, soldiers “wounded Herc Guński’s clean cheeks so that the doctor had to operate to stitch up his skin, saving him from dying.” Here antisemitic soldiers’ tonsorial zeal led them to remove imagined beards, as if to insist that shaven Jews still wore one.³⁴

In Suchowola, Rabbi Lewandersztein was summoned to the town square, where cavalrymen waited. “An officer ordered a soldier in presence of his unit and local crowd to cut off my beard. The officer then ordered that a mirror be given to me and that I view myself, and he asked me if without a beard I could still be a rabbi.” Here beard-cutting explicitly desacralized, demystified, and emasculated Judaism as a religion.³⁵

Beard-cutting, especially when beards were half-removed, was also cruel creation of — for Christian eyes — butts of laughter. In another light, beard-cutting simulated mock conversion of pious Jews into disempowered, banal figures blending into everyday Polish Christian life — or their elimination as a disquieting mass of outsiders to it. Beard-cutting resembled *symbolic slaughter* of religious Jews, akin to the West Galician “Judas Fest,” a four-day pre-Easter custom of beating and burning Jewish effigies. At the same time, soldiers were redistributing Jews’ allegedly ill-gotten gains among joyous Christian poor (keeping better booty for themselves). Their civilian followers, and they themselves, laughed uproariously at elderly Jews’ misery. Often they tried, though usually failed, to demolish synagogues and rabbis’ house. They proclaimed, through their victims’ mouths, the rabbi’s death. On the fringes of their self-styled “pranks” (*wybryki*) hovered specters of rape and murder.

Why was this brutal spectacle necessary? Jews’ symbolic removal from Christian life fulfilled deeply satisfying fantasies: bloody eradication of Jewish theological dissent, whose existence relativized and cast doubt on Christianity itself; and “expropriators” expropriation,” overturning of commerce’s perceived masters, price gougers and black marketeers. Their humbling opened to the Christian poor a dreamland of material plenty without prices, medieval peasants’ “Land of Cockaigne,” the Germans’ *Schlaraffenland*.

³³ “po dłuższym szamotaniu się [...] kłuł mi w ręce szpiłkami i bagnetem [,] obcieli mi brodę nożem i nożyczkami, kazali mi krzyczeć jak zwykle: ‘Niech żyje Wielkopolska! niech zdechnie rabin!’ [Jeden] chciał mi koniecznie wepchnąć kawałek świnińskiej kiełbasy i wytarł mi nią całe usta.” AAN, PRM, no. 21431/20, f. 404 (July 26, 1920).

³⁴ “Wszystkim żydom poobcinano brody; [...] zranili policzek i podbrodek Herca Guńskiego, tak że lekarz smuszony był dokonać nad nim operacji zszycia skóry, ocalając go w ten sposób od śmierci.” AAN, PRM, no. 21431/20, f. 187 (August 29, 1920).

³⁵ “Oficer zawezwał jednego żołnierza i w obecności swego oddziału i tłumów zebranej ludności kazał mi obciąć brodę. Następnie ów oficer kazał mi dać lusterko, przejrzeć się i zapytał, czy z obciętą brodą będę jeszcze mógł pozostać rabinem.” AAN, PRM, no. 21431/20, f. 274–275 (September 9, 1920).

Arthur Goodhart, adjutant to Henry Morgenthau on his 1919 mission, wrote that in Cześćochowa they encountered Haller troops, who, “drilled by French officers, seem more efficient and better disciplined than the regular Polish Legionaries.” Yet they had “begun the beard-cuttings.” An officer explained to him that “as these soldiers came from foreign countries (France, United States, Imperial Germany) the Jewish kaftans and beards were more noticed by them than by the native Poles, who had become accustomed to them.” Another officer said that his men, disgusted by Jews’ appearance, “did not want to hand over the cities they had captured for Poland to people like the Jews, who talked a different language and dressed differently. Also, they believed that all the Bolsheviks were Jews.”³⁶

These scenarios were commonly the work of Poles from the West — pre-1914 emigrants to France, Belgium, America — and from Poznan (Wielkopolska), Germany’s piece of old Poland, where Polish society had modernized itself while ruthlessly rejecting brotherhood with the long-settled local Jews, who mostly took sides with (liberal) Germans or emigrated westward.³⁷ Western Hallerites may have known nothing of their never-before-seen Russian Polish *patrie* or of Galicia, but evidently it shocked them in their psychological depths far more to encounter there the “eastern caftan Jew” than the westernized, Polonized Zionist or Jewish assimilationist. The traditionalist Jews’ presence was humiliation to them, proof of Polish backwardness and inferiority. Removal of “medieval Jewry” would fit Poland to stride into bright modernity, cleansed of historic blemishes.

It is tempting to think that perpetrators of anti-Jewish violence were stung by their realization that the larger part of Polish Jewry was indifferent to the appeal of linguistic and cultural assimilation into Polish life. Certainly beard-cutting was brutal eradication of a major symbol of Jewish identity. Did it, among its other significations, represent some sort of forcible assimilation? That religious Jews might prefer their sub-cultural isolation and self-sanctified segregation from Christian society offered no support to Polish nationalists unsure of the world’s respect for their cause. Poles were aware also that Jews were not, when controversy stormed, above temptation to point out weaknesses in Christian society, one of which — from the abstemious Jewish viewpoint — was seductive vodka.

FEAR OF JEWISH MAGIC

The Jews were, in Alina Cała’s words, “sacred strangers” among Christian Poles. People respected Jewish piety, even if they also mocked ritual practices. The magical powers of Hasidic tsadiks or “wonder rabbis” inspired admiration. Christians were not loathe to consult them over their own concerns. Few wished to provoke

³⁶ GOODHART 1920, pp. 117–18, 141.

³⁷ HAGEN 1980.

Jewish curses, widely considered prepotent. Disturbing synagogues or desecrating Jewish cemeteries could bring “illness, sudden death, or loss of good fortune in life, inheritable by future generations.” There was, further, the ritual murder threat. In her field research in eastern Poland, Cała found the “vitality and popularity” of late twentieth-century belief in Jewish use of Christian blood in various rituals “astonishing.” She highlighted periods of danger or breakdown in things’ normal course as the moment when blood-libel beliefs, otherwise “frozen” in culture, might explode in pogrom flames, channeling pent-up Christian fears into violence.³⁸ Yet, in the 1917–1920 upheavals, my research found the ritual murder charge raised but three times, and without ensuing success. More pressing in those years were other anxieties about “Jewish domination.”

Fear of Jewish magic radiates from the 1920 arrest in Płock of enigmatic tsadik Chaim Szapiro, accused of communicating by a system of signs and signals with the invading Russians. Striking was the reluctance, or virtual refusal, of the local Jewish intelligentsia to defend Szapiro, who was summarily judged and immediately shot. Magically grounded Judeophobia revealed itself too in Volhynian Ukrainian anti-Jewish violence, in which pitiless reflections are perceptible of Christian motifs — judgments against deicidal unbelievers, suffering along the *via dolorosa*, earthly stagings of hellish torments.³⁹

DESECRATION OF TORAH SCROLLS

In twentieth-century Sandomierz, Christians’ sense of Jewish religious practice’s uncanniness emerged in belief that the Torah scroll in its richly embroidered cover would, in the course of synagogue worship, turn into a “golden calf.”⁴⁰ In the November 1918 Lwów pogrom, an eyewitness reported that “at the Great Synagogue I saw legionnaires hacking at the Torah roll with sabers” — sublimated human slaughter — “while Christian women wore the Projches [Torah cabinet veil — today’s *parochet*] on their heads.” At the progressive temple, “the officers led the action, playing clowns with Prochet on their heads.” Here Christians seemingly mimicked Hasidic dancing with Torah rolls.⁴¹

An unusually revealing incident occurred in 1920 in the eastern borderlands. Polish soldiers had ordered Symcha Jabkowicz, twenty-seven, to drive cattle. On his return, other soldiers seized and robbed him, marching him then with other Jews along the road. He later testified that “not only did soldiers beat us, but also villagers passing by,” some with their own belts. Civilians brought “torn and dirty Torah rolls, [which soldiers] ordered me and my comrade-sufferers to tear up and then read

³⁸ CAŁA 1995, pp. 130, 142ff., 187–189, 222.

³⁹ HAGEN 2018, chs. 9–10, *passim*.

⁴⁰ TOKARSKA-BAKIR 2008, pp. 456–457; cf. also 461, 470, 506–507, 595.

⁴¹ BENDOW 1919, pp. 42, 146 (protocol 114).

the text on the little pieces.” This was mocking parody of Jewish religious study, incomprehensible to Christian outsiders. A woman wanted to give him and a boy who had been beaten water, “but soldiers [like Jesus’s Roman tormentors] forbade it.” “One of the [Christian] boy spectators said I looked like Trotsky, so they tore hair from my head.” They were forced “to spit in each other’s faces, and slug each other,” acting as their own scourgers. This and similar acts made mockery of Jewish solidarity — it too feared by Judeophobes.⁴²

DANCE

Common to pogroms were scenes such as that in Lwów on December 26, 1918, in which, led by a corporal, “legionnaires seized whiskered Jews, tugging them by their beards into Ziółkiewska Lane barracks where, to the rabble’s delight, they were made to dance.” Poles knew that dancing figured in Hasidic and other Jewish ritual.⁴³ In Ukrainian Horodenko, “music played as the Cossacks danced before the burning homes, and where a Jew, having remained inside, tried to save himself, he was thrown into the fire to the mocking laughter of the Ruthenian population in attendance. A nameless refugee sought to rescue a Torah scroll from a burning prayer house but was forced back into the flames.” These deaths are imaginable as consignment, both of Jews and their religion, to hellfire, the domain of fiends vividly inhabiting many Christian minds. In Ukrainian Dibova, an eyewitness remembered of Petlura soldier/bandits: “when they had killed all the Jews, 400 men, and taken everything away, they drank and became intoxicated and danced in the middle of the street.”⁴⁴

ENSLAVEMENT

It was an aspect of Polish Christians’ paranoia to imagine their complete subjection to Jewish domination, as fictionalized in Julian Niemcewicz’s 1817 novel, “The Year 3333, or an Incredible Dream,” in which future Warsaw would bear the mockingly anti-Jewish name of Moszkopolis. In 1918, the powerful National Democratic Party’s newspaper, *Gazeta Warszawska*, wrote of “World Jewry” as a “pluto-theocratic national government, operating from hiding through the aid of organizations

⁴² “Po drodze katowali nas nietylko żołnierze, ale i przechodzący włościanie [...]. Włościanie przynieśli żołnierzom zwitki Tory podartej i zbrudzonej [...] kazali mnie doszczętnie ją podrzeć, a drobne kawałki odczytywać, jak również i wszystkim moim współtowarzyszom niedoli.” AAN, PRM, no. 21431/20, f. 210 (ca. September 8–9, 1920).

⁴³ BENDOW 1919, p. 116.

⁴⁴ ÖStA, AVA, Staatsarchiv des Innern und der Justiz. Ministerium des Innern. Präsidiale 1848–1918: Galizien. Sign. 22. Fsz. 2117, No. 14416 (April 3, 1916).

of Masonic type driving consciously toward realization of the Jewish nation's messianic ideals," above all, "rule of the world," a goal plainly announced in Old Testament passages.

Polish antisemitism had long obsessed over imperialist menace seemingly posed by Judaism and its followers. Biblical passages the newspaper cited from the Book of Isaiah betrayed deep but unacknowledged anxieties over enslavement, forcible submission, and prostration — fears not surprising in a land emerging from political captivity, nor in a land in which successful Jews could seem a superior people, in relation to whom sadomasochistic impulses might well arise. Anti-Judaic paranoia also pilloried Talmudic writings, mysterious and fearful in their Hebrew inaccessibility and foreignness, for allegedly sanctioning exploitation of non-Jews' "blood and sweat."⁴⁵

An especially striking instance appeared in the shtetl Kolbiel, dominated by one of the grand Zamoyski family's country estates. There the army requisitioned some two hundred Jews for compulsory labor, while "peasant onlookers enjoyed the cost-free spectacle, splitting their sides with laughter." Jews were made especially to clean up the Zamoyski residence as fitting lodgings for the mounted company billeted there. "Soldiers, when they have to transport the tiniest object, call Jews and order them to do the work for them." Arje Mendel Manhaimer, president of the Distribution Committee, "a generally respected man, aged 52," was seized and "forced to clean the latrines with bare hands."

It was an act rich in Christian symbolism when a soldier summoned an 38-year-old Jew "and commanded him to wash his feet." Communal official Mojzeson urged the commanding officer to halt worker raids. "If Jews are white Negroes, obliged to be at knightly lords' beck and call," let there be summons for specified numbers, whom Mojzeson would then supply. Another Jewish notable complained that no Christians were taken for compulsory labor, "for the Christians, as some say, are 'blessed' [święci], or as others say, 'they're so busy, they have no time; the Jews are idlers.'" ⁴⁶ It was one of many cases of Rabelaisian reversal that resentful Christians imposed on the "idle" Jews.

⁴⁵ JEDNACZ 1918. Biblical citations from Isaiah: "Strangers will come forward to feed your flocks, foreigners be your ploughmen and vinedressers" (61.5); "You will feed on the wealth of nations, you will supplant them in their glory" (61.6); "Kings will be your foster-fathers and their princesses, your foster-mothers. They will fall prostrate before you, faces to the ground, and lick the dust at your feet" (49.23); "For the nation and kingdom that will not serve you will perish, and the nations will be utterly destroyed" (60.12); "You will suck the milk of nations, you will suck the wealth of kings" (60.16).

⁴⁶ "chłopi przyjeźdni cały czas stali i bawili się tym bezpłatnym widowiskiem, śmiejąc się do rozpuku;" "Żołnierze, gdy mają przenieść najdrobniejszy przedmiot, wołają żydów i każą im pracować za siebie;" "i kazano mu gołemi rękami czyścić ustępy;" "gdy pewien żołnierz chciał umyć sobie nogi, zawołał 38-letniego Szmula Icka Granatowa i kazał sobie nogi umyć;" "Przedstawiciel gminny Berel Mojzeson 'zwrócił się do oficera [...] z uwagą, aby na przyszłość zaprzestął polowania tego: Jeśli już żydzi są tymi białymi murzynami, obowiązani być na każde zawołanie panów rycerzy, niech z wieczora przyśle pan oficer zapotrzebowanie na piśmie;" "bo chrześcijanie, jak mówią jedni, — są

DEMONSTRATIONS OF JEWISH WEAKNESS

This too enacted Christian wish-fulfillment, as in the many cases of compulsory labor services when Jews were mockingly commanded to lift impossible loads. Or, as in Zambrów, where soldiers roused from homes and synagogue all Jewish men, some 150, and ordered them to race an automobile, which drove very fast. Whoever could not keep pace was beaten. Poles stood around, watching this spectacle and laughing. This theatricalization with modern stage setting followed on similar torment Polish soldiery had imposed at first withdrawal: “They dragged Jews regardless of age from dwellings and [Sabbath] synagogue and harnessed them to an automobile. When they couldn’t move it, they were beaten with thick cudgels. A major driving through put a stop to this spectacle. Panic broke out. Jews denounced soldiers to him. In the uproar the crowd dispersed.”⁴⁷

Here again is the tendency of anti-Jewish crowd violence, having broken free of political authorities’ top-down control, to crystallize into stylized, metaphorical dramas — in this case, demonstrations of Jews’ weakness in confrontation with modern technology. Perhaps their tormentors were unreflectively gratified to see that, armed with it, they could break Jews’ strength and become their masters.

HARSH PUNISHMENT OF JEWISH SELF-ARMING

As the knowledgeable Galician journalist Józef Tenenbaum wrote, the “main legend that never fell silent and like a thousand-headed hydra, though once slain, came back to life,” condemned Jews for firing on Poles.⁴⁸ This widely documented and well-known charge epitomized the deep-seated insistence in Polish popular culture that Jews remain passive, powerless, and defenseless — reflecting a similar pattern in the segregationist US south, where black self-defense provoked lynchings. This was, seemingly, a condition Christian popular culture imposed on Jewish life to balance or neutralize the power, both material and magical, Jews were believed to wield in Poles’ midst. Projection of Christians’ armed aggression was also in play.

‘święci’, lub jak mówią drudzy, są ‘tak zajęci, że czasu nie mają, że żydzi próżnują.’” AAN, PRM, no. 21431/20, f. 163 (September 9, 1920), f. 688 (August 22, 1920), f. 1033–1036 (September 12, 1920); CAW, sygn. I.301.8.771, file 10 (September 12, 1920).

⁴⁷ “ostatniej soboty o 10 zrana dwa automobile z żołnierzami przyjechali na rynek. Żołnierze wyciągneli z mieszkań i z synagogi wszystkich mężczyzn, około 150 osób i kazali im ścigać automobile, które jechały bardzo prędko. Kto nie mógł tak szybko biec, tego katowali. Naokoło stali polacy, przypatrywali się temu widowisku i śmieli się.” AAN, PRM, no. 21431/20, f. 145 (September 8, 1920), f. 271 (September 23, 1920).

⁴⁸ BENDOW 1919, pp. 101–102.

DEMANDS ON IMAGINED JEWISH ABUNDANCE

While Jewish merchants manned Galicia's mercantile trenches, and so necessarily found themselves in possession of food and other vital consumer goods, the pogromists' conviction that Jewish dealers could, if they but willed it, lower prices or bring out hidden stocks for sale signaled an irrational belief, often exhibited, that Jewish possessions were vast but out of sight. They could be a cornucopia of essential goods if only they were wrenched from hostile hands and brought out into Christian daylight. This was a Judeophobic fairy-tale, more deeply rooted than believers knew.⁴⁹

On the Polish army's 1920 arrival in a Volhynian town, officers ordered all Jews from their houses, "and [the soldiers] began immediately to seek out food and ate everything they found," later plundering other goods. Civil authorities and gendarmes disappeared. That evening soldiers ordered supper for two hundred. Instead, they were persuaded, with difficulty, to come in small numbers to individual Jews' dwellings. "They commanded that various dishes be brought to them, like roasted chicken, etc., and when they were told it was impossible, they beat the Jews, saying there 'must be everything'".⁵⁰

MOCK-JUDICIALIZED PUNISHMENT AND RITUALIZED MASS RETRIBUTION

In Counter-Reformation Poland, Catholic clergy organized court sessions (*rugi sądowe*) in which sinners, self-announced or unmasked by righteous neighbors, were indicted and punished before communal eyes.⁵¹ Reminiscent of them, and of such hoary military practices as gauntlet-running, were events in the north-eastern Mazovian towns of Wyszaków and Pułtusk, brutally punishing Jews for alleged pro-communism. In fact, at the 1920 war's end, Jewish communists tended to retreat with the Red Army, so that retribution fell overwhelmingly on non-communist Jews. The Zionist bureau recorded especially brutal eyewitness-accounts from Wyszaków.

⁴⁹ Before the November 1918 Lwów pogrom, Tenenbaum reported, "a Polish city functionary consoled those assembled before a shop: 'a few days' patience, people [*Kinder*]. As soon as we get to Kraków Square we'll take everything from the Jews and the poor children of Christ will have all in abundance.'" BENDOW 1919, p. 31.

⁵⁰ "i żołnierze zaczęli poszukać jedzenia i zjedli wszystko, co znaleźli;" "Możesz wyobrazić sobie panik w naszym mieście;" "Przed wieczorem kazali naszykować sobie kolację na 200 osób. Ledwie zdołano ich uprosić, aby się zgodzili po kilku pójść do jednego żyda. Kazali sobie robić różne przysmaki, jak pieczone kury itp., a kiedy im odpowiedziano, gdyż tego nie było, bili, mówiąc, że wszystko musi być." AAN, PRM, no. 21431/20, f. 236 (June 28, 1920).

⁵¹ A Ukrainian instance imitated the judgment of Christ, directed against local Jews by pogromist bandits, who asked the Christian townspeople how the Jewish survivors of a bloody pogrom should be punished — whether murdered, or only banished to the open road, as the jury-mob finally decided. JDC, AR 19/21, 233, Seidman's testimony, f. 84–92 (n.d.).

As I entered town, I saw how Jews were being led, entirely disrobed. There were 400–500. They took them to a shed, where soldiers placed them individually on a table and asked local Christians if they had any reproaches against the Jew in question. (The table was covered in blood.) If any Christian raised a charge — and someone always did — they beat the Jews horribly, soldiers and civilians. They beat the unfortunates until they fainted. Jews with beards were separated out and their beards were burnt. Jews without beards were whipped with knouts. Among these were many Zionists, alongside others who took no part in politics. They're all locked in the shed, denied food. If wives try bringing it, they are pitilessly beaten. Jews are not allowed to leave town, so that they won't report the atrocities. Dozens of Jews are to be shot. They parade the disrobed Jews through town from time to time, beating them all.⁵²

THREATS OF SLAUGHTER AND MASS MURDER

The fantasy of “de-Judaizing Poland” (*odżydzenie Polski*) doubtless gripped many minds. In the aftermath of anti-Jewish rioting in industrial Siersza, two Jews found “death decrees” in their mail. Sent by a self-designated “Bolshevik Government Supreme Council,” they stated: “we command that after five days no Jewish person shall inhabit Przytkowskie land. Otherwise, all will be slaughtered [*wyrznięte*].”⁵³ In Galician Miechów, Helena Ples was seen by Szmul Miebelski and others as she “held a knife in hand and criminally summoned the mob, crying ‘let’s slaughter Jews.’” Attorney Korczak was seen “calling for plunder from his balcony. He cried:

⁵² “Już zdaleka słycać było rozpaczliwe krzyki. Gdy wkroczyłem do miasta, ujrzałem, jak prowadzono żydów, zupełnie rozebranych, a było ich 400–500. Wzięto tych żydów do szopy, gdzie pojedynczo żołnierze stawiali ich na stół i zapytywali miejscowych chrześcijan, czy mają jakąś pretencję do danego żyda / Stół cały jest krwią zalany / Jeżeli który chrześcijanin twierdził, że ma / a było to z każdym / żyda bito okrutnie, bili żołnierze i cywilni. Katowali nieszczęśliwych tak długo, dopóki się padli zemdleni. Żydów, mających brody, ustawili w oddzielną grupę i zapalano im brody. Żydów, nie mających bród, katowano nahajkami. Wśród tych żydów było dużo sjonistów i wogóle ludzi, którzy się wtrącali się wcale do spraw politycznych [...]. Żydów nie wypuszczają z miast, aby nie opowiadali o tych okrucieństwach, które się tam dzieją. Dziesiątki żydów mają być rozstrzelane. Rozebranych żydów prowadzą od czasu do czasu po mieście, gdzie ich wszyscy biją; ubrania im przynieść nie pozwalają.” AAN, PRM, 21431/20, f. 188 (undated)

⁵³ “Rozkazywamy, że po pięciu dni żadna osoba żydowska może mieszkać na ziemi Przytkowskiej. W przeciwnym wypadku wszystkie będą wyrznięte.” “Wiadomości o pogromach” 1918; “Dalsze wiadomości” 1918. In Kolbuszowa, in the midst of a spring 1919 social revolt by forest-dwelling armed bands, drunken plunderers announced, following a bloody anti-Jewish pogrom, that “they would come the next day to slaughter the lords, officials, and bourgeois. This threat I heard a few times.” (“Odgrązali się, że na drugi dzień tj. w środę przyjdą znów aby wyrznać Panów, urzędników i Mieszczan. Tą groźbę słycałem kilkakrotnie. Również widziałem bestyalskie znęcanie się nad żydami, było nas kilku widzów lecz z powodu groźnej podstawy tłumu wobec nas gdyśmy chcieli im pomódz, pomocy tej musieliśmy zaniechać.” AAN, PRM, 5990/21, f. 167–169 (May 11, 1919).

‘slaughter the Jews while there’s time!’ To him, “plunder” and “slaughter” were, seemingly, equivalent or interchangeable terms. An anonymous pogrom announcer sent a letter heavy with repressed aggression to Koplowicz, market-square resident: “I warn the Jews, because it won’t be long in this month, indeed, until they’re going to beat you again. They’re going to rob you a little, so tell everybody. Don’t reveal this. Give the signal to all Jews and watch out, because they’re going to slaughter you and the women and children.”⁵⁴

During the largest of military-instigated pogroms, in 1918 Lwów, an obscure populist grouping styling itself the “Red Guard” penned threatening ultimatums to the city’s Jews:

You may take nothing with you. You have caused the present universal misfortune [*Weltunglück*]. By New Year’s Lwów must be free of Jews. Your baggage may consist of only a small package. In all of East and West Galicia blood boils for revenge for the long years of the Christian population’s exploitation. A pogrom against the Jews must result, come what may. Let all the burghers, merchants, lawyers and doctors go buy land in Palestine.⁵⁵

Such casual threats were legion.⁵⁶

Rape rarely figures in reports of anti-Jewish violence in the Polish ethnographic homeland, but it was commonplace on the eastern war-front in 1920, not so much — as far as documentation suggests — among Polish soldiers as among the brutal

⁵⁴ “Szmul Miebeliski widział jak [Helena Ples] trzymała nóż w rękę i wzywała tłum do zbrodni, wołając: ‘chodźmy Żydów zarżynać’ [...]. Pan Assenti, urzędnik aprowizacyjny widział [adwokata Korczaka] nawołującego ze swego balkonu do rozboju. Wołał: ‘Rżnąć Żydów póki czas.’” [...] “Panie Koplowicz! Ostrzegam Żydów, bo niedługo w tym miesiącu ano mają was znowu bić. Taki mają trochę i kraść was, niech pan da znać wszystkim. Nie wydajcie się. Znać dajcie wszystkim Żydom i pilnujcie się, bo mają rżnąć was kobiety i dzieci.” CZA, Z3/181: 5.5.19; 11.5.19.

⁵⁵ BENDOW 1919, pp. 122–123. The second warning letter: “the Red Guard Committee demands you leave Lwów free of Jews by New Year’s. And all your grand gentlemen can travel with you to Palestine. Leave! All your assets will be devoted to rebuilding Galicia, for without your millions, without your Kaiser with his Jewish mistresses, no such misfortune as now prevails would have come into the world.”

⁵⁶ E.g., train-rider Zelcer, attempting to telephone ahead for arrest of thieves, heard from station-master Łępicki: “For Jews there are no gendarmes, there are no laws for them, you all need to be slaughtered [*wyrżnąć*]” (“Lecz pomocnik zawiadowcy stacji Łępicki nie pozwolił telefonować, krzycząc: ‘Dla żydów niema żandarmów, niema dla nich praw, trzeba was wszystkich wyrżnąć!’”). AAN, PRM, no. 21431/20, f. 396: 21.7.20. Balcia Rosenberg saw soldiers call out in her Warsaw train car, “where are those Jews? We have to butcher them (*zarżnąć*).” AAN, PRM, no. 21431/20, f. 396–404 (July 21–26, 1920). Cf. CAW, Oddział II, no. I.300.76.166, doc.1 (December 3, 1920). There was, too, frequent, perhaps systematic targeting by pogromists of Jewish kosher slaughterers and butchers, muscular men wielding the sharpest of knives, which pogromists sometimes turned against them and their families. GAUDEN 2019, pp. 133, 336, 370 offers further threats of mass slaughter. On Jewish butchers: KOPCIEWSKI 2019, pp. 244–45.

independent war-bands, mostly anti-Bolshevik, coursing across the borderlands and behind the eastern front. The despoliation of women and children is a metaphor for pollution, desecration, and genocide. The taboo-breaking it entails initiates perpetrators into brotherhoods of murderous misogyny, freeing them for worse things. Sexuality transmutes into sadism in service of ethnic exorcism.

Another glimpse of murderous menace hanging in the air, as little as people may have consciously felt or perceived it, appears in a public proclamation written in the name of no less a personage than General Władysław Sikorski. He was commander of the regular army's central front and thus defender of Warsaw and hero of the "Vistula miracle" — and later the iconic embodiment during World War II of pro-Western Poland. As the Russians retreated in August and September 1920, this announcement was drawn up:

Polish People! [*Ludu Polski!*]

Bolshevik Muscovite bands under Jewish commissars' command dared to cross the glorious Polish Republic's border. Worse still — they stood before beloved Warsaw's walls and threatened our capital. Polish People! The Polish soldier's patience ran out. Under my command the army, in a fury, attacked the accursed Bolshevik hordes and routed their hostile bands. The enemy retreated in panic. Some of them were cut off and now roam the forests. Villagers, a new harvest awaits you. Sharpen your scythes, your pitchforks, your axes and pursue the enemy. Let the accursed Bolshevik bands and their Jewish commissars feel the strength of your arm on their necks, the sharpness of your scythes, pitchforks, and axes. Spare only those who willingly lay down their arms and deliver them to military command.

(Signed) Sikorski, General and Commander⁵⁷

Origin and impact, if actually publicized, of this exhortation to the peasantry to commit far-ranging murder with farm tools remain to be determined, but it illustrates the highest army leadership's conjuring with the "Jewish Bolshevik" obsession.

⁵⁷ "Ludu Polski! Bolszewickie bandy moskiewskie pod dowództwem żydowskich komisarzy ośmieliły się wkrócić w granice Najjaśniejszej Rzeczypospolitej polskiej. Mało tego — stanęły pod murami ukochanej Warszawy i zagrażały naszej stolicy. Ludu polski! Cierpliwość żołnierza polskiego wyczerpała się. Wojska stojące pod moim dowództwem z wściekłością uderzyły na przekłete hordy bolszewików i rozbiły wraże bandy. Wróg rozpoczął paniczny odwrót. Część tych band została odcięta i obecnie włóczy się po lasach. Ludu włościański, nowe żniwa czeka na cię. Naostrz kosi, naostrz widły i siekiery i dalej na wroga. Niech poczują przekłete bandy bolszewickie i żydowscy komisarze na swoich karkach moc twego ramienia, ostrze twych kos, widel i siekier. Oszczędzaj tylko tych, którzy dobrowolnie złożą oręż i odstawiaj ich do komend wojskowych."

[Podpis:] Sikorski, General i Dowódca." AAN, PRM no. 21431/20, f. 357a (undated).

CONCLUSION

The exemplary incidents these pages have presented — only a few among a multitude — reveal the surfacing and brutal enactment of deep-rooted, unreflected-on imaginings about the Jewish presence and how its supposed powerful menaces might be exorcised. What made the Jewish presence so dangerous? At bottom, in Tokarska-Bakir's telling, following Vladimir Propp's interpretation of popular myth, it was the Jewish role in social-cultural life as the embodiment of Christianity's principal supernatural *antagonista*. This is a profoundly irrational phenomenon embedded in Christian societies, and not only in Poland. Why does it persist? Who would not wish it wholly banished?

Looking beyond this study's time-frame to World War II: the German occupation and genocide against the Jews greatly worsened the anxieties and fears Poles, in varying degrees, felt about the Jews in their midst, above all as symbolical but also seemingly actual harbingers of mass-scale social death. This I argued in above-cited reflections on Jan Gross's *Neighbors*, and figures also in Tokarska-Bakir's study of the 1945 Kielce pogrom. She emphasized too, as did Marcin Zaremba in his pathbreaking social-psychological interpretation of Polish society in the 1944–1947 years, widespread postwar fears of surviving Jews' preying upon Christian children for blood transfusions and other mythical forms of physical regeneration, and of Jewish "domination" of Christian Poles through the emerging (allegedly) "Judeo-Communist" Polish People's Republic.⁵⁸

Today, "Jewish anti-Polonism" is still widely feared, as was evident in the 2018 parliamentary debates on legislation against charges — in fact, rarely raised in scholarly or responsible political discourse — of collective Polish Holocaust complicity.⁵⁹ Polish opponents of "Jewish power" believe that such charges weaken their country's ability to stand proudly on the world stage as a successful, post-communist country, and to maintain its self-image as a martyred society.

One may wonder how tragedy-ridden Polish judeophobia compares with Nazi antisemitism and genocide. It is, I suggest, the difference between fear and resentment, on the Polish side, and imperious contempt and hatred, on the Nazi side. In Germany, elimination of the Jewish presence opened the path, in the Nazi mind, to racial and social-cultural health and strength, enabling the German *Volk*, as paladin of "Aryanism," to fulfill its world-historical, world-conquering mission. The Jewish presence was seen as a set of heavy biological and cultural chains on otherwise masterful German strength and power. In Poland, antisemites suffered fears of "Jewish domination" — of "*żydowszczyzna*" — and fought to overcome it, often through symbolical, but also, occasionally, visceral violence.

⁵⁸ HAGEN 2005; TOKARSKA-BAKIR 2018, on which see my review HAGEN 2019; ZAREMBA 2012.

⁵⁹ "Zrealizowany porządek dzienny 57. posiedzenia sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w dniach 25, 26 stycznia 2018 r.," at <http://www.sejm.gov.pl/sejm8.nsf/PorzadekObrad.xsp?documentId=E4D923E21B0D399FC125819C002C2DE8> (consulted: September 3, 2020).

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Summary

The article focuses on the causes of pogrom violence in the historically Polish lands. The author examines explanations offered in authoritative Polish-language historiography, finding that those factors understood to have “caused” pogroms — antisemitic ideology, social conflict, religious prejudice, ideological fears — figure as contexts in which pogrom perpetrators enact their violence. The author argues that these contexts justify in perpetrators’ minds violence that springs from the unconscious or unreflected-on conviction that, when Jewish behaviour violates the prevailing demotic “moral economy,” it is justifiable for ordinary people to “punish” Jews, irrespective of what civil or religious precepts say. This belief springs from mythical concepts of Jews as possessed of supernatural, sometimes harmful powers. The article draws on the author’s publications to illustrate how anti-Jewish violence commonly assumed symbolic form, enacting dramas illustrating social-psychological scenarios of which pogromists were generally unaware, but which historians can read from the violence itself.

