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

by Thomas Chopard

### Abstract

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

### Introduction

### A Cycle of Violence

### Destruction

### Ethnic Cleansing

### Conclusion

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## Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

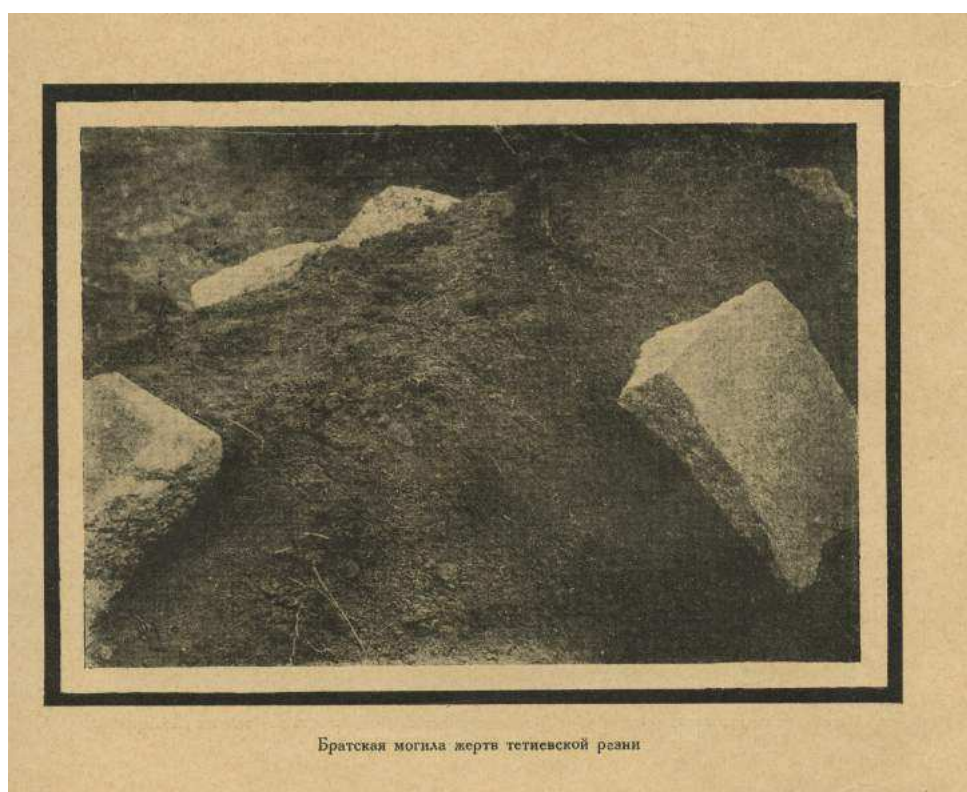


Fig. 1: Tetiev, Mass grave. In Z. S. Ostrovskii, *Evreiskie pogromy, 1918-1921*, (Moscow: Shkola i kniga 1926), 131. Courtesy of the Blavatnik Archive, New York.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### A Cycle of Violence

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ukraine were now being drowned and killed, and Petrovichi must not stand back.<sup>16</sup>

For the locals, pogroms served both as a way to advance their interests in the larger conflicts then sweeping across Ukraine – and as a means of reshaping the social makeup of their immediate vicinity. Local opportunism comes especially to the fore in the way residents attempted to harness the momentum of military campaigns in the smaller towns and villages. The nearly daily recurrence of anti-Jewish violence over an extended period of time in the course of the war was instrumental in completing some villages' ethnic cleansing, whereas endemic violence had forced only some of the Jews to flee. Thus "in the Borzna *uezd*, the wild orgy of the Volunteer Army went on unchecked [...] In the village of Prokhorov, of the 14 [Jews] remaining after the others fled... among them elderly people and children, 13 were brutally murdered, the surviving woman taken."<sup>17</sup> The village peasants' readiness to join in the extermination, and their active part in it once it had begun, are both emphasized in the *Evobkom* report; this is in marked contrast to nearby rural localities where only a small number of victims was documented. The same pattern went on record with the entry of Ukrainian nationalist troops into small towns and rural areas. Following the infamous Proskurov pogrom of February 1919, a survivor told a Red Cross representative:

When our village [the hamlet of Grinovets-Lesovye on the outskirts of Proskurov] heard about the massacre in Proskurov, young local peasants got going to wipe out the Jews of the area. They sent a delegation to the city. Three of them went to Proskurov, bringing back three armed Haidamaks. [...] They started to break into homes and to search for Jews.

<sup>18</sup>

Soldiers in uniform pillaged and beat the thirty-three Jews herded into the village square. Local peasants, demanding more than this, finally set about the mass execution themselves. "The murder of the detained Jews," the account states, "purportedly took place somewhere outside the village." As in Petrovichi, the older peasants refused to take part in the massacre, while the younger generation would accept no delay and clamored for immediate action. Remarkably, pressed to the limit, the peasants ultimately refused, *in extremis*, to exterminate their

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<sup>16</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, 96.

<sup>17</sup> YIVO, TA, 18284 verso (awkward syntax in the original has been modified).

<sup>18</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/237/18-180b, Proskurov pogrom victim testimony.

neighbors. The surviving account does not indicate just what made the locals recoil from putting their plan into action, but it is clear that the mass killing in Proskurov had served as a source of inspiration and encouragement for the entire episode. In the end, the entire Jewish population of Grinovets-Lesovye was expelled to Proskurov, where they were escorted by armed troops. En route, the expellees were again robbed and beaten by Haidamaks. Released the next morning, all were intent on never returning to their native village, which had thus completed its process of ethnic homogenization.

Whether perpetrated by troops or by local peasants, the pogroms all underscore the extreme vulnerability of the Jewish communities in these areas. Each of the exterminations taking place during the Civil War and in 1941 occurred in a setting of profound social and political instability, if not outright anomy. Despite the recurrent attempts to sovietize Ukraine, Tetiev in 1920 was still largely inaccessible to the Soviet authorities. As far as officials of the Ukrainian People's Republic were concerned, it had become intractable back in October 1919.<sup>19</sup> Coming in the wake of the events of 1919, the re-entrenchment of Soviet rule in early 1920 proved a failure. A report compiled by the Soviet cadre responsible for food supplies in the *uezd* of Tarashcha in March 1920, a few days prior to the outbreak of the exterminatory violence against the area's Jews, notes the weakness of "the organized State apparatus" and the fact that relations with the locals are limited to armed expeditions.<sup>20</sup> Another report notes the discontinuance of relations between the state and local peasantry after months of tensions and confrontation: "Of bread, they give none; of money, they want none."<sup>21</sup> The civil war and peasant insurrections confined activity by the authorities to the major cities of Ukraine. With intermittent displays of distrust, superficial accommodating gestures, and open resistance, the countryside was beyond state reach. In Tetiev as in other towns, the authorities were, for all intents and purposes, at the mercy of the insurgents. The commandant of the Tetiev militia, which was formed in early 1920, had participated in the December 1919 pogrom. In Germanovka, one of the leaders of the persecution against the Jews was, as we learn from his interrogation conducted by the Cheka, "the head of the Germanovka Revolutionary Committee

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<sup>19</sup> *Архів Української Народної Республіки Міністрство Внутрішніх Справ Справоздання Губерніальних Старост і Комісарів (1918-1920)*, (Київ: Інститут української археографії та джерелознавства ім. М. С. Грушевського, 2017), 144.

<sup>20</sup> YIVO, TA, 3899-3902, Food Supply Commission Controller's report on the Tarashcha *uezd* for the period February 14-March 11, 1920.

<sup>21</sup> YIVO, TA, 3921, Food Supply Committee for the Kiev region report on the Tarashcha *uezd*.

at Eastertime in 1919.”<sup>22</sup> This allowed the area’s peasants to go on pillaging and harassing the Jews with impunity:

There was no one in charge in the town. The thugs broke into peoples’ homes at night, robbing and pillaging. The Jews crouched hiding in their “mouse holes,” in attics, cellars, and all kinds of secret hideouts, listening in terror to the sound of the pillage and afraid to be caught sight of.<sup>23</sup>

The atmosphere of overall lawlessness and impunity was taken advantage of by more than one kind of group. In addition to the armed attackers carrying out the pogroms, non-fighting locals sprinted at the opportunity to extract money from the Jews. Following one “typical pogrom” – probably one perpetrated by the Ukrainian nationalists or the Whites in late 1919 – a survivor from Tetiev recounted how he, along with his mother, hid from the Cossacks in the bushes. A “peasant, who was working nearby, was ready to pick us up.” The mother had to bribe the man not to alert the soldiers nearby.<sup>24</sup> Opportunism was probably behind the peasant’s offer; otherwise, he was absorbed by his work. After multiple instances of pogroms and without any authority in the town, the Jews were particularly vulnerable, unprotected by any law, and easy to brutalize.

Prior to the time of the pogrom, the Tetiev vicinity – and more generally the Tarashcha *uezd* – had not been prominent in either their antisemitic or their anti-Soviet moods or activism. But in early 1920, with the expulsion of most Soviet officials and representatives and with the local population cut off from the rest of Ukraine, organized government of any kind effectively collapsed.<sup>25</sup> Anomy, armed violence, and rampant antisemitism prepared the ground for coordinated radical ethnic homogenization. Reports compiled by the People’s Commissariat for Food Supplies and the local branch of the Communist Party convey a sense of the sudden and brutal severance of ties between the Jews and the Christians in the area. This can be dated to 1920. The myth of Judeo-Bolshevism played a decisive role in this development. Fuelled by local rumors and accusations, it conveyed a threat facing all aspects of the peasants’ economic, social, political, religious, and cultural life. Judeo-Bolshevism was conceived of as culminating in an apocalypse of

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<sup>22</sup> YIVO, TA, 5398-5399.

<sup>23</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, (New York: Idgezkom, 1922), 14.

<sup>24</sup> *What I Remember: Clevelanders Recall the Shtetl*, (Cleveland: The Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland, 1985), 51.

<sup>25</sup> For reports on this, alongside YIVO, TA, 3921, see other reports by Food Supply Committees and the Party: YIVO, TA, 3922, 3936-3938.

“searches, arrests, requisitions,” and “death by starvation for the children” – to quote one Soviet report from among many on Tetiev and the Tarashcha *uezd*.<sup>26</sup> Anti-Jewish sentiment based on this way of thinking, was extremely common in Ukraine. Taken on its own, it would not have sufficed to provide the impetus for exterminating local Jews; even so, it does indicate a basic associative link: in the countryside, rejecting Soviet rule in many cases also meant rejecting – and ejecting or exterminating – the Jews.

An abrupt shift in attitudes resulted when tensions between the peasants and the Soviet State reached extreme levels and insurrectionist activity in Ukraine spiked. A similar upsurge in hostility occurred in the summer of 1919 when the Reds, the Whites, and the Ukrainians were all fighting each other in the vicinity of Kiev, and during the Soviet-Polish war of spring 1920, which saw the retreat of the Red Army. Amidst this power vacuum, some peasants seized the opportunity to get rid of a minority who, in their eyes, were the main supporters of the Soviet regime and of Bolshevism: the Jews. The peasants sought to prevent the return of the Reds no less than to avenge recent losses. The opportunity triggered a fatal reversal, and the trap snapped shut on the Jews still living in the area. The radical violence which took place in Germanovka between September 15-18, 1919, was the direct outcome. At the beginning of the month, local insurgents no longer sought to hasten the departure of persecuted Jews. Instead, brutalizing the Jews, they also prevented them from leaving the area, confining them to their houses, which they repeatedly attacked and pillaged. An unwritten sentence had been pronounced against the Jews. In Tetiev, constant attacks on the roads leading from the town kept most Jews from leaving, despite rumors of the upcoming pogrom. In Germanovka, some peasants spontaneously joined in the first pogroms, while others initially tried to shelter their Jewish neighbors.

But the bandits declared that those who defended the Jews would regret it. The threat had its intended effect: peasants henceforth refused to protect them [...] some peasants who had sheltered Jews were ransacked.<sup>27</sup>

The threat of armed reprisal for disobedience did more than encourage the peasants to attack and kill Jews; it also effectively eliminated the possibility of local non-Jews' opposition to the violence, or of any display on their part of solidarity with the victims.

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<sup>26</sup> YIVO, TA, 3899.

<sup>27</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, 260-261.

## Destruction

For the partisans who believed the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism, attacking the Jews became part of the struggle against the Soviet regime. In a symbolic move, the Tetiev pogrom began with the storming of the town's Soviet offices where the Red Army garrison commander had had his quarters. The commander was referred to as the “*zhids'* commandant” for his bold assurances about providing protection without discrimination for all, Jews and non-Jews alike.<sup>28</sup> In Germanovka, Aleksei Davidenko, one of the pogrom leaders, started by murdering young communists; his gang then joined forces “with his comrade, Ataman Diakov, [in] a grandiose pogrom in Germanovka and its vicinity in which he did not spare the elderly, women, or children.”<sup>29</sup> In terms of numbers, Soviet officials and members of the Bolshevik party made up only a small fraction of the total number of victims; violence against them was crucial in sparking a process which culminated in the destruction of the area's Jews.

Pogromist core mobilization proceeded against this background of bitter political struggle. In Tetiev, according to the Cheka, the core group was formed of nineteen men from hamlets and villages within a few kilometers' radius of the town. This core had no proper structure until February 1920, a few weeks before the organized exterminatory action.<sup>30</sup> In the course of the later investigation, local militia members Chaikovskii and Kuravskii were identified as the leaders, by both the accused and the victims. What singled these local insurgents – the vanguard of the final pogrom – out was their having fought as soldiers during the civil war. Besides comprising an active core of veterans habituated to the use of weapons, they were also a politicized group. For them, antisemitism was an extension – an integral element – of their ongoing political and military struggle.

As Eric Lohr and Oleg Budnitskii have convincingly shown, pogrom perpetrators after 1914 were typically soldiers of the First World War or the Russian Civil War.<sup>31</sup> The Civil War saw soldiers bring anti-Jewish violence back to the countryside.

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<sup>28</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, 28-29, 38.

<sup>29</sup> YIVO, TA, 5397.

<sup>30</sup> YIVO, TA, 5461.

<sup>31</sup> Oleg Budnitskii, “Shots in the Back: On the Origin of Anti-Jewish Pogroms of 1918–1921,” in *Jews in the East European Borderlands: Essays in Honor of John D. Klier*, eds. Eugene M. Avrutin and Harriet Murav, (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012), 187–201; Eric Lohr, “1915 and the War Pogrom Paradigm in the Russian Empire,” in *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*, eds. Jonathan Dekel-Chen et al., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 41-51.

Almost all local men had served as soldiers during the Great War or the Civil War, although wartime and civilian experiences overlapped after 1917, virtually disabling the distinction between civilians and fighting men. Wearing no uniforms, pogromists could be classed as civilians, yet the anti-Jewish violence they carried out was conducted in a disciplined and methodical military manner. The understanding of the meaning of “civilian” had become relative as neighbors easily switched from bystander to partisan or armed pogromist. Local insurgents, who made up the majority of the pogromists, felt threatened by the prospect of the return of Soviet rule to Ukraine. For them, a reestablishment of the Reds portended a rapid downward slide in social status, or even a possible risk to their lives. The insurgents belonged to local militias and municipal administrative offices, working under anti-Bolshevik authorities even if they did not necessarily share the views this implied. Taking part in armed anti-Bolshevik activism, they knew what the price of Soviet pacification would be. In fact, many were Red Army deserters.<sup>32</sup> A list of the thirty or so pogromists – “heroes,” in the language of the *Evobkom* – fighting in the Cherkassy vicinity includes these profiles. Side by side with the “bandits” who fought throughout the years of the Civil War were their relatives, village officials, and militiamen.<sup>33</sup> Although they united at a point late in the fighting, the leaders of the exterminations (this was a group consisting exclusively of men) all shared pre-existing links. When questioned by the police, Perevalov provided ten of the nineteen partisans’ names, suggesting that he was on personal terms with half the group. Upon identification by the Cheka, of the eighteen accused of belonging to the anti-Bolshevik insurrection ring around Germanovka, five names appear twice.<sup>34</sup> It would appear the pogromists joined as a group, or at least with the support of their families or social connections. This must not be taken as evidence of a well-established mobilization network: police interrogation records also indicate recently formed individual connections such as shared workspace, concomitant army desertion, or village committee work during the same time periods. In Tetiev, the local agricultural cooperative, which also served as a loan bank, seems to have been the future pogromists’ principal shared ground. The Cheka inquiry provides extensive information on this cooperative, apparently gathered in a failed attempt to link the organization to a larger network or to Ukrainian nationalist parties. In reality, however, the Tetiev cooperative was

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<sup>32</sup> YIVO, TA, 3879 verso, *Svodka* n°5 of the Information-Instruction Department of the KP(b)U Regional Committee for the Kiev *gubernia* for March 1-April 1, 1920; YIVO, TA, 5256 et 5407-5475 (collective files for the insurgents in the Tetiev vicinity).

<sup>33</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/159/1-10b, “Список некоторых ‘Героев’ из Черкасской-Чигиринском района.”

<sup>34</sup> YIVO, TA, 5386-5387 verso; similar example in 5529.

a typical post-1917 local initiative whose purpose was for peasants to work together, gather, debate and discuss ideas, politicize and organize.

As we have noted, young men tended to be much more radical than their elders. Thus, in the hamlet we have already mentioned near Proskurov, “the young local peasants demanded that the Jews be removed from the village.”<sup>35</sup> These instigators’ worldview was shaped by revolution, ongoing conflict, and war, which had become daily reality in the area since 1905. Their individual trajectories prior to 1919-20 are hard to reconstruct; in their depositions they state that they had been soldiers, without specifying where or in which regiments they had served. It thus becomes a moot question as to whether they had directly participated in World War I pogroms or deportations.<sup>36</sup> One thing is clear, however: from the front they had brought notions of military discipline and of how to conduct a military operation. The outbreak of violence and their wartime experiences did much more than merely accustom them to fighting and encourage them to resort to military pogrom tactics;<sup>37</sup> these developments were also fatal to traditional relations among groups and generations. “Younger” in the passage just quoted should be understood less in terms of age than social position: peasants of precarious social and economic standing were more inclined to seek an overhaul of the existing social order. They would have nothing to lose in an attempt at reshaping the social landscape; above all, they had fewer valuable economic ties to the Jews.

While a mere handful of instigators sufficed to incite a crowd of locals to violence, it took the organization of a core group of pogrom initiators to make a town exterminate all of its Jews. An additional, larger circle of pogromists would rapidly coalesce around this core. In Tetiev, the initiators made the rounds of nearby villages, bringing some 200 men together to form a larger band:

...they helped the bandits burn houses, killed those who remained, and loaded their carts with Jewish possessions. The local peasants did not stand back with indifference; they killed the Jews whose families they had agreed

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<sup>35</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/237/18-180b.

<sup>36</sup> For more on this genealogy of Civil War anti-Jewish violence, see the introduction to this volume and Eric Lohr, “The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportation, Hostages and Violence during World War I,” *Russian Review*, 60/3 (July 2001): 404-419; Oleg Budnitskii, *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), chap. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Eric Lohr, “1915 and the War Pogrom Paradigm in the Russian Empire,” in *Anti-Jewish Violence*, eds. Dekel-Chen et al., 41-51.



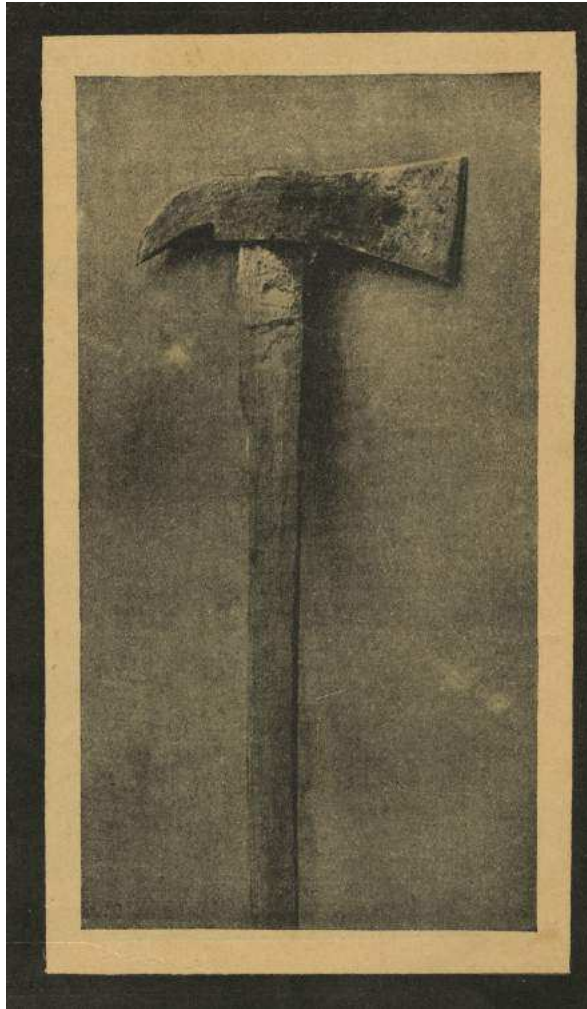
to hide. This is how the sailor Roga killed his partner Shualke Perlshteyn, along with his wife and two children, while they were hiding in his house. The same happened in many other peasant houses.<sup>38</sup>

The stage marking the shift to violence is crucial. The insurgents possessed firearms, while the peasants, who made up the larger group, used scythes, forks, axes and other rudimentary agricultural tools to massacre Jews.<sup>39</sup> The distinction between the “bandits” and the “peasant masses” which is articulated in victim testimony is less of a reference to the social or geographical origins of the perpetrators than to the type of violence perpetrated.

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<sup>38</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, 32-33.

<sup>39</sup> Alongside various testimonies, see the photograph of a pogromist's axe in З.С. Островский, *Еврейские погромы 1918-1921 гг.*, (Moscow, Издательство Акц. общество “Школа и книга,” 1926), 52.



*Fig. 2: Axe. In Z. S. Ostrovskii, Evreiskie pogromy, 1918-1921, (Moscow: Shkola i kniga 1926), 30. Courtesy of the Blavatnik Archive, New York.*

Neighbors' familiarity with each other's homes ensured that the attacks would be unsparing and thorough. A report by the Relief Committee for Pogrom Victims from a different town states that "Golub and his bloody bandits were from neighboring villages [...] they knew every inhabitant of the village well and [...] they manifested a rare level of cruelty" and exhaustiveness: "all the Jews were pillaged."<sup>40</sup> To anticipate pogroms, many Jews had set up hiding places in basements, attics, and backyards, but their long history of contact and association with their neighbors, and the knowledge with which this provided the non-Jews of their living spaces, made the Jews' efforts ineffective. There are abundant

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<sup>40</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/53/15, *Evobkom* Report on Pogroms in Stepantsy, May 26, 1920.

accounts of hunts which were both meticulous and all too simple. In Dubovo, the same familiarity on the part of the pogromists with the makeup of the local Jewish community dictated decisions about timing: for example, the execution of the Jewish blacksmiths of the village was put off until a later time because the blacksmiths would be needed during the harvest season shortly after the pogrom.<sup>41</sup>



Fig. 3: Bandits. In Z. S. Ostrovskii, *Evreiskie pogromy, 1918-1921*, (Moscow: *Shkola i kniga* 1926), 104. Courtesy of the Blavatnik Archive, New York.

Pogrom plans were underway for several days prior to the outbreak; rumors about the forthcoming violence spread while preparations for an anti-Soviet uprising were underway at the same time. Despite the advance planning, the level of violence unleashed during the pogrom seems to have been a spontaneous development. The massacre of an entire community was the result of spontaneous brutality continuing unchecked, rather than the expression of a conscious choice implemented through standardized killing procedures. An element of randomness also played a role in determining the outcome. Some victims managed to stay alive for a time by abandoning all their belongings to the pogromists. Several separate forms of violence combined spontaneously into one in Tetiev; the same happened in other cases, which had lower victim totals.

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<sup>41</sup> Рохл Фейгенберг, *Летопись мертвого города*, (Leningrad: Прибой, 1928).

Unlike most large-scale military pogroms, in which looting typically comprised the main objective and killing took place in response to real or imagined resistance, murdering Jews was the aim of these pogroms from the beginning. Open exhortation to extreme violence came very early on from one of the leaders, who urged pogromists “to massacre all Jews, young and old, from the two-year-old to the octogenarian; only this will ensure their repose.” As the pogrom began, he “made all those who heard him take an oath that they would not spare a single Jew.”<sup>42</sup> A Tetiev witness recounts the entry of the pogromists into a house where a dozen Jews were hiding:

I hid under a bed in an alcove. The bandits began firing at the house, screaming and yelling. Then they began hacking away with axes and scythes. I heard one bandit demanding money from my husband, who replied: “I do not have any money. I’ll give you my coat.” But the bandit wanted only money. Since my husband had none, the bandit hit him in the head with his scythe.<sup>43</sup>

The mass murder in Tetiev differs from other cases of extermination by its sheer magnitude. The town’s Jewish quarter went up in flames; the arson focused on the synagogue and other religious buildings. It served both as a weapon of destruction and as a symbol of re-founding. When the blaze began to threaten the non-Jewish neighborhood, onlookers contained it without much difficulty, as well as without attempting to extinguish it.<sup>44</sup> The pogromists prevented escapes by surrounding the burning buildings; a crowd of curious onlookers assembled, as well

In the synagogue, the attics were crowded with Jews hiding there. After surrounding the synagogue, the insurgents set it on fire and would not let anyone out. [...]

All those who had taken refuge in the synagogues were burned alive. Those who managed to escape the fire perished under the blows of sabre, rifle, shovels, and pitchforks. Little children were thrown into the air and

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<sup>42</sup> Léo Motzkin, *Les pogromes en Ukraine sous les gouvernements ukrainiens, 1917-1920*, (Paris: Comité des Délégations juives, 1927), Annexes, 100.

<sup>43</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, 46.

<sup>44</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, 34.

came crashing back down on the pavement, splashing blood and flesh on the bystanders.<sup>45</sup>

In the space of a few hours, the fire had claimed some 1500 lives. In the following few days, the effect of the flames made the remaining Jews' hiding places obvious; the victims, if they had not by then died of asphyxiation, were now in the hands of the pogromists.

The pogrom extended to everybody, of all ages, fleeing, alone, or in any condition whatsoever:

Mothers abandoned their children and ran in all directions. The children expired from hunger and cold. Aharon Kroyman and his wife were killed by the bandits. When the confusion began, their six-year old son ran away and lay under an overhang. He cried and pleaded, but to no avail. He cried until he died.<sup>46</sup>

Two further measures were added to make the extermination complete. Pogromists organized into squads to hunt down any Jews who had managed to flee the town. This required mounted patrols and a network of squads combing the surrounding countryside.<sup>47</sup> Isolated, terrorized, desperate for a way out, Jews attempted to elude capture for days on end. A nursing mother hiding in a barn could no longer produce milk; her infant died in her arms.<sup>48</sup> In addition, the systematic killing of children, an untypical pogrom tactic came to the fore as part of the overall plan. Little girls and young women were massacred unhesitatingly by armed men. No restrictions remained in effect. In Tetiev and elsewhere, children left without parents were killed on the spot. In Germanovka, in September 1919:

Dozens who had managed to escape, mostly children and adolescents, met another detachment, and were massacred in their turn.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Motzkin, *Les pogromes en Ukraine*, Annexes, 100.

<sup>46</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Motzkin, *Les pogromes en Ukraine*, Annexes, 100.

<sup>48</sup> Joann Rose Leonard, *The Soup Has Many Eyes: From Shtetl to Chicago – A Memoir of One Family's Journey through History*, (New York: Bantam, 2000), 41.

<sup>49</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, 261.

## Ethnic Cleansing

Extermination was the culmination of a more encompassing cycle of violence, an element within a broader scheme giving rise to the pogroms. In Germanovka, the extermination of the Jews was the result of a structured peasant uprising led by an ataman, Diakov; the Tetiev insurrection was less well organized. Exterminations fed into and were given their impetus by a spectrum of movements in Ukraine. Tetiev, Germanovka, Dubovo, Lebedin were not accidents or isolated tragic episodes. They were the extreme manifestations of an inchoate campaign of ethnic homogenization throughout the Ukrainian countryside which made the Jews its primary target. The campaign was occasionally made explicit, as in Volhynia, where on the pile of victims' bodies the pogromists placed a sign with the proclamation of a new law establishing that no Jew should settle in the city.<sup>50</sup>

In retrospect, an aim to expel Jews from the Ukrainian countryside can be pieced together; this echoes the reorganization of the countryside which was undertaken following the Revolution of 1917. The burning of the Tetiev synagogue casts the goals of the Ukrainian peasant revolutionaries in question in a new way. The desire to eliminate the Jews of Tetiev or Dubovo obviously does not exhaust the question of either the aims of Ukrainian nationalism or those of the revolutionary movement of 1917. Nor should the movement – relatively insignificant in terms of lasting impact but vigorous at the time – be disregarded, which emerged during the revolutionary years with the aim of excluding Jews from Ukrainian political, economic, and social life before seeking to exclude them physically from the land. At the same time, the official policy of the Ukrainian People's Republic incorporated the claim of integrating the Jews in the national re-founding of Ukraine.<sup>51</sup> In Volhynia, at the end of 1917, peasants petitioned for Jews to be expelled from revolutionary organizations, including the peasant and the local factory committees; this was a way to wrest authority from the Jews, as well as to take vengeance.<sup>52</sup> In 1919, peasant insurgents tried to demand from Jews “a formal

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<sup>50</sup> *Jewish Chronicle* 2653, 06/01/1920.

<sup>51</sup> It is important to note that the Jews were not the only group stigmatized: the Polish minority in Volhynia, like the German colonists in the South, were similarly denied equal access to local political and economic life, criticized for enjoying alleged privileges, and accused of resistance. The present article is concerned specifically with anti-Jewish violence, but an initial comparison and study of the tensions with the official policy of the UNR are undertaken in: Thomas Chopard, *La guerre aux civils. Les violences contre les populations juives d'Ukraine. Guerre totale, occupations, insurrections, pogroms*, (Paris: PhD Dissertation defended at the EHESS, 2015).

<sup>52</sup> YIVO, TA, 767, Letter to the General Secretariat of Agriculture, January 8, 1918.

statement to the effect that they were not interfering in politics in any way.”<sup>53</sup> Other pogromists put it this way:

Our unit is employing pedagogical methods. We are trying to teach the Jews to stay out of politics. We want to kill their desire for power in Ukraine, where it should rest only in the hands of Ukrainian people. So we give them a little bloodless lesson.<sup>54</sup>

In July 1917, several localities in the Ekaterinoslav *gubernia* passed a resolution forbidding Jews to own land; others attempted to forbid them to engage in some specific commercial transactions, allegedly to prevent speculation.<sup>55</sup>

The revolutionary period was, for many peasants, the time to assert their power in local institutions or to appropriate land. It was also a time of institutional collapse and dismantling. Insurrection leaders tended to prefer intervention in local politics and everyday practices to getting involved in national confrontations, keeping up an opportunistic dialogue with the major political forces from a distance.<sup>56</sup> Questioned on his political affiliations, Perevalov – the pogromist from Tetiev – claimed to be close to the Borotbist program, even if he distanced himself from the “high spheres of the State apparatus.”<sup>57</sup> Jews were partly excluded from this general movement of political and social re-appropriation. Soviet occupation aggravated the marginalization of Jews in that it fed into the Judeo-Bolshevik myth. An ataman “explained to the peasants that under Tsarism the Jews had exploited the peasants, but with the coming of the Bolsheviks it was even worse, since the Jews were now in power. It was therefore necessary to take everything from them and drive them out of the towns and villages.”<sup>58</sup>

The prospect of violence always loomed large in this scheme. The young Ukrainian Republic’s Ministry for Jewish Affairs was alarmed to read of

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<sup>53</sup> Elias Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919*, (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1921), 359.

<sup>54</sup> Budnitskii, *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920*, 248.

<sup>55</sup> *Рассвет* 3, 23/07/1917 and 12, 27/09/1917.

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Gilley, “Fighters for Ukrainian Independence? Imposture and Identity among Ukrainian Warlords, 1917-1922,” *Historical Research*, 90/247 (2017): 172–190; Thomas Chopard, “L’ère des atamans. Politique, guerre civile et insurrections paysannes en Ukraine (1917-1923),” *20&21. Revue d’histoire* 141 (January 2019): 55-68.

<sup>57</sup> YIVO, TA, 6897. The Borotbists were a branch of the Ukrainian Left Socialist-Revolutionary Party,

<sup>58</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, 206.

resolutions passed by the Sixth Assembly of Skomoroshki, in the *uezd* of Tarashcha, in early April 1918:

At their last meeting, the peasants of our village resolved that all Jewish families must leave the countryside immediately. They had decided to expel 15 Jewish families back in January. Of these 15 families, 7 had originally worked at the sugar factory. [...] At a meeting, the peasants said they had to expel all the *zhids* who had settled among them.<sup>59</sup>

At another meeting, “they decided to expel all Jews from villages,” a project thwarted only by the Austro-German occupation. The Civil War, especially during 1919-20, provided the opportunity to implement this in many areas. In small towns overrun by armed peasant units, unremitting terror turned the bare few survivors of entire Jewish communities into refugees.

A former resident of the village of Khomovka in the Radomysl vicinity describes the intensifying atmosphere of fear and expecting the worst.<sup>60</sup> A single Jewish family had lived in the village prior to the Revolution; it was joined by a family of Jewish refugees after the unleashing of mass pogroms. Living together with the refugees was at first simple and self-understood, until the anti-Bolshevik partisans’ first incursion of July 9, 1919, followed by another one two days later. The first armed group consisted of five men, the second of eight; between them, they managed to “steal all property and kill two” of the Jews. Another few days later, an ataman, operating together with the locals, requisitioned the few clothes still in the two Jewish families’ possession. Even so, the two desperate families appealed to the ataman for protection. “The ataman decided to wait until Saturday for the resolution of the *volost* assembly,” in which 24 villages were to take part to decide the Jews’ fate. The peasants formed an armed unit under the ataman’s supervision, bringing the menace to a new level; a pogrom was imminent. The surviving Jews understood that time was of essence. The witness concludes: “We left by a circuitous path to avoid running into the rebels... for Makarov, where many Jews had gone. The majority of the Jewish population had left the place.” This testimony was apparently collected a very short time after the events recounted; we may assume the surviving refugees continued on their way in the attempt to

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<sup>59</sup> YIVO, TA, 1262.

<sup>60</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/239/28-28об: “Хомовка. налеты 9 и 11 июля 1919 г.”



distance themselves from the area. In Khomovka, no pogrom actually took place; the locals' menacing preparations sufficed to chase the Jews away.<sup>61</sup>

In larger towns, expulsion was typically accompanied by large-scale pogroms. This was the case in Stavishch and Stepantsy, both located in the region south of Kiev, in 1920. The preceding year had seen multiple waves of violence at the hands of White and ataman-directed armed units wash over both communities. Pogroms of varying degrees of intensity followed, each time claiming victims without discrimination as to age or sex.<sup>62</sup> As in Tetiev, outright anti-Jewish violence took on the character of ethnic cleansing.<sup>63</sup> Unlike villages where fear and intimidation sufficed to drive the Jews out, these towns' insurgents carried out extensive operations of ethnic cleansing. A *Evobkom* report describes the events of November 1920 in Stepantsy, where Ataman Iary,

promulgated an order concerning the “total expulsion of the *zhids* from the town within a period of three days.” [...] All the Jews, young and old, dressed in rags, left on a frosty November day after hoisting the sickest on wagons. This sight was terrible. [...] They were fleeing [...]. Within a few hours, there were no Jews left in Stepantsy. The cemetery keeper alone refused to abandon his station.... But he did not long continue to behold the tombs where his...brothers rested.... Three days later, he was found dead [...]. Thus did what had been built over centuries collapse within a few hours. Two thousand five hundred people fled to Boguslav.<sup>64</sup>

A February 1921 Soviet report on population movements in the Kiev region states that “Stepantsy broke all records when, in one day, about 2,000 refugees [from Stepantsy] poured in,” following “a written order, signed by the leader of the bandits who had devastated Stepantsy, telling them to leave the town within three

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<sup>61</sup> For similar examples in the Kiev region, see: DAKO R-3050/1/49/58-64, Testimonies on pogroms in Ivankov; Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews*, 235-236; Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, 438-441. An overview of the situation by the JDC mentions several deserted localities after the Civil War: AJJDC, NY192132, 4/30/4/498, “Information regarding the population of the Kiev gubernia for 1917, 1920 and 1923.”

<sup>62</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/210/20; DAKO R-3050/1/53/15-15ob.

<sup>63</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/242/24-25, “Погромы, происходившие в период 1918-19- и 20 гг в Ставище.”

<sup>64</sup> DAKO R-3050/1/53/15ob.

days and threatening them with complete annihilation if they did not do so.”<sup>65</sup> According to the 1926 census, only 4 Jews remained in the vicinity of Kanev (the administrative region with which Stepantsy is affiliated); more than 23,000 were recorded as resident in Kanev *uezd* in 1897.

Anthropological research on mass violence in former Yugoslavia has highlighted mass operations accompanied by specific, pinpoint acts of cruelty of a highly symbolic kind which played a crucial role in ethnic homogenization.<sup>66</sup> The same pattern can be observed in Ukraine, where the violence served as performative enactment of Jewish infertility. It forced a rupture in traditions, transmission, and filiation. Pogromists sought to project the long-term aims of their campaign as a tangible reality: that the Jews should have no future in the Ukrainian countryside and in its small towns and villages, and that they may only find refuge in the large cities. Thus in July 1919 in Obodin, Podolia:

There were only three families of Jews living in town. One family, consisting of four people, did not succeed in fleeing and was entirely massacred. The wife was found with her breasts cut off; a baby of six months had its throat cut; and a child of six was also slashed to death.<sup>67</sup>

Mutilation of the bodies of women and children is reported in Tripolie, where insurgents also cut off Jewish women’s breasts or, by slashing pregnant women’s bellies, attacked the physical signs of maternity and, by extension, the possibility of continued Jewish existence.<sup>68</sup> In Gaisin, men led by Ataman Volynets left behind a woman impaled through the vagina.<sup>69</sup> Although not common, these atrocities are not isolated instances; they are only some of the extreme but recurrent attacks against the very possibility of life and an attempt to sterilize the Jews of Ukraine. Another indication that the instances of extermination must be understood in these terms is the typical joining together of systematic sexual

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<sup>65</sup> Miliakova, *Kniga Pogromov*, 451; confirmed by a report of the *Poalei Tzion* from October 1920 in which the same order is quoted: DAKO R-3050/1/53/16-160b. For a similar case in Stavishch, see the memorial book of the town: *Stavicht*, (New York: Aharon Weissman, 1961).

<sup>66</sup> Véronique Nahoum-Grappe, “Anthropologie de la violence extrême: le crime de profanation,” *Revue internationale des sciences sociales* 174/4 (2002): 601-609.

<sup>67</sup> Heifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews*, 392.

<sup>68</sup> Bernard Lecache, *Quand Israël meurt...Au pays des pogroms*, (Ressouvenances, 2010), 160-161; DAKO R-3050/1/53/15-160b, Reports on pogroms in Stepantsy.

<sup>69</sup> GARF 5881/2/312/30b-4, Testimony by Govoruchin on Ataman Volynets written in emigration.

violence with ethnic cleansing, despite the focus on total massacre. In Tetiev, the widespread carnage did not prevent mass rape. Thirty women and three men who had been hiding in one house were discovered close to the end of the pogrom. One of the women, who had already lost all her family, recounts how, after immediately shooting the three men, the insurgents “raped many of the women, then made us lie down in the mud and trampled us with their horses” before abandoning the victims.<sup>70</sup> Another survivor reports a near identical case.<sup>71</sup> In their objectives as in their practices, the exterminations share many features with other aspects of ethnic cleansing in Ukraine. These are the multiple faces of the anti-Jewish violence perpetrated during the Civil War in Ukraine.

## Conclusion

Aleksei Davidenko, a leader of the extermination of the Jewish community of Germanovka, did not even attempt to hide. Unlike Perevalov, who inadvertently came to be recognized in the Belaya Tserkov marketplace, Davidenko actually boasted of his exploits to his neighbors; he seems to have been proud of his role in the uprising in the vicinity of Kiev. The Cheka finally opened an investigation. The Kiev *gubernia* Cheka received several petitions from Germanovka Jews, pogrom refugees who had fled prior to the final extermination.<sup>72</sup> Part of what makes the exterminations exceptional for their time was this sort of response by survivors. Investigation by the authorities concluded swiftly in all cases with a death sentence.

The Soviet authorities’ swift and discreet action against those responsible for the exterminations of 1919-20 in Ukraine was part of the reason why these events sank into oblivion. Unlike the atamans and other armed leaders, whose anti-Bolshevik activism is publicly denounced in the press and propaganda, the actual pacification of the countryside and the preceding violence were given almost no publicity by Soviet authorities. Several Jewish communities across Ukraine had been annihilated or forcibly expelled, but historical memory has almost exclusively been concerned with the image of pogroms perpetrated by the great anti-Bolshevik armies. This ongoing silence notwithstanding, it is evident that attempts at ethnic

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<sup>70</sup> *Tetiever Hurbn*, 51.

<sup>71</sup> Leonard, *The Soup Has Many Eyes*, 52.

<sup>72</sup> YIVO, TA, 5373-5405, Investigation file of Aleksei Davidenko by the Kiev GubCheka.

cleansing were the most radical form assumed by anti-Jewish violence during the Civil War.

Perpetrated by former neighbors turned insurgents, these pogroms originated in the re-founding movement of the Ukrainian countryside, which had crystallized in the wake of the Revolution, putting into question the perpetuation of inherited social situations and relationships between national groups. Critical moments of the ensuing civil war offered the insurgents windows of opportunity. Though this movement was inchoate, it involved the beginnings of a program which was on occasion formulated explicitly and implemented by a fraction of the Ukrainian peasantry. Far from disappearing with the end of the civil war, this program of brutal Ukrainainization was periodically revived by the more radical among Ukrainian nationalists during the inter-war period.<sup>73</sup> Sporadic exterminations, organized expulsions and depopulation by means of terror continued to be part of the Ukrainian insurgents' operations during the Second World War.<sup>74</sup>

It should be noted, however, that attempts at ethnic cleansing during the Civil War remained localized. In 1920, there was no centralized policy of ethnic cleansing in Ukraine and no coherent political program of ethnic homogenization of Ukraine as a whole; a programmatic approach during the Civil War can only be discerned in retrospect. Groups who had undertaken to exterminate their neighbors did not export the initiative to nearby localities; while in some cases persecution of the Jews continued, the intensity level of the violence typically dropped following the systematic extermination. Eliminating, driving out, erasing entire communities remained a local occurrence. The pogromists formed a heterogeneous band which enlisted peasants, inciting them to take up arms; beyond these two groups at the core of the pogrom action, however, was a considerable section of the Christian population in solidarity with the pogromists. They took a share of the plunder, they were part of the arson in Tetiev, they denounced hidden Jews, or they simply remained spectators. Extermination involved a range of strategies and possibilities.

Ideology, exacerbated nationalism, and antisemitism were not the direct cause of the exterminations in Ukraine. The sense of national duty was not central to the exterminations. Pogroms most motivated ideologically were not the most violent

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<sup>73</sup> Marco Carynnyk, "Foes of Our Rebirth: Ukrainian Nationalist Discussions about Jews, 1929–1947," *Nationalities Papers* 39/3 (2011): 315–352.

<sup>74</sup> Jared McBride, "Peasants into Perpetrators: The OUN-UPA and the Ethnic Cleansing of Volhynia, 1943–1944," *Slavic Review* 75/3 (Fall 2016): 630–654.

or the deadliest. As Peter Kenez points out,<sup>75</sup> radical nationalism combined with military discipline led to mass-scale massacres, while Ataman Semosenko of the UNR Army in Proskurov spoke of the “national duty... to exterminate the *zhids*.” But proclaiming extermination did not always lead to extermination in practice. Nuance is crucial: while exterminations were supposed to kill all Jews, we know that during mass-scale massacres in Proskurov, in Felshtin (UNR Army units), in Cherkassy (Grigoriev) or in Fastov (White Army units), pogromists abandoned plunder in favor of methodical murder. In Cherkassy, for example, a killing site was set up by Grigoriev’s men, with machine guns and a pit; hundreds were shot within a few hours. However, survivors’ personal testimonies are rich in accounts of soldiers setting victims free.<sup>76</sup> Exhaustiveness in executing the project of annihilation was never the reality. The pogroms in Proskurov or Fastov cannot be conceptualized as the prototype of “Nazi-type *action*: missing were only the vans with carbon monoxide outlets,” to quote Richard Pipes.<sup>77</sup> Experience of the Great War and the Civil War, tradition and innovation in antisemitism were the preconditions, and shaped the violence. If recent local political experience – the as of then short-lived and conflicted experience of the Soviet regime in particular – was crucial as the extermination pogroms’ fount, strict ideology was not.

Davidenko conceded little during his interrogation.<sup>78</sup> While clearly identified and accused based on eyewitness descriptions, he claimed he was not on close terms with Ataman Diakov, who had led the extermination in Germanovka; Davidenko also insisted that he was not a bandit. He was a respectable peasant, “heading the Germanovka Revolutionary Committee at Eastertime in 1919.” One thing is certain, however: Davidenko admitted to having imposed a special tax exclusively on the Jews. This was a fair measure, he contended, since he had had to balance the peasants’ contribution to the Bolsheviks. Up to the time of his interrogation, the Jews had to pay for what the Reds had done.

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<sup>75</sup> Peter Kenez, “Pogroms and White Ideology in the Russian Civil War,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, eds. John D. Klier, Shlomo Lambroza, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 293-313; 309.

<sup>76</sup> See DAKO R-3050/1/237 for the Proskurov *protokoly*, and DAKO R-3050/1/54 for Cherkassy. For broader perspectives on the variety of mass killings, see: *Le massacre, objet d’histoire*, ed. David El Kenz, (Paris: Gallimard, 2005). I analyze different instances of massacre in my dissertation *La guerre aux civils*, 294-300. While quantitatively among the deadliest pogroms of the Civil War, they typically claimed the lives of some 15-20% of the local Jewish population.

<sup>77</sup> Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime, 1919-1924*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 109.

<sup>78</sup> YIVO, TA, 5398-5399.

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