

# Pogroms of Jews in the Polish Lands in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries Holocaust and After-War Years (1939–1946)

## Summary

In this fourth volume of studies prepared under the project *Pogromy. Przemoc kolektywna wobec Żydów na ziemiach polskich w XIX–XX wieku i jej wpływ na relacje polsko-żydowskie. Historia. Pamięć. Tożsamość* [Pogroms. Collective Violence against Jews in the Polish Lands in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries and its Influence on Polish-Jewish Relations. History, Memory, Identity] several periods of pogrom violence were separated. The first one is the time after outbreak of the Second World War, and before Third Reich's attack on the Soviet Union. The second, definitely the most bloody, includes dramatic events in the former Polish Eastern Borderlands in summer of 1941. The third period is connected with pogrom violence after liberation of Poland from the Nazi occupation. The authors of texts looked at the problem of pogroms in different contexts, and they differ in their opinions and approach to sources.

In the first article Krzysztof Buchowski describes pogrom in Vilnius by Polish hit squads on 31 October 1939, when the Russians were withdrawing from the city and Lithuanian administration was settling there. In this specific political situation the Poles could, for a while, attack the Jews independently, repeating violence patterns from the Second Polish Republic. In a way against chronology we could call this pogrom the last pogrom of the Sanation Poland.

The next pogrom described in this volume was already clearly inspired by the Germans. Pogrom incidents, which began in Warsaw on 22 March 1940, on Good Friday, were soon used as justification for building the ghetto wall in Warsaw. For eight days groups of Poles attacked the Jewish passers-by, shops, and institutions. Originality of Katarzyna Person's text consists in analysing this event from the perspective of Jewish witnesses.

The first in the group of texts on pogroms from summer of 1941 is the article of the American researcher Jeffrey Kopstein. He studied the pogrom, which was comparable to Jedwabne pogrom as far as the number of victims is concerned, but it had been committed earlier. The Poles killed from 300 to 400 Jews in Szczuczyn. Seeking an answer to the question about the reasons of the pogroms committed in summer 1941, the author mentions, among other things, extraordinary impact that the Polish national movement had in this town and in that area in the mid-war period.

The subsequent crime analysed in the book is the pogrom in Grajewo. The Israeli researcher Sara Bender described in her text the murder committed mainly by the Poles. For four weeks they abused hundreds of Jews locked in Grajewo synagogue, torturing and murdering them. There were very few Germans in the town at that time.

In the next study Krzysztof Persak compares pogroms in Jedwabne and Radziłów. The author points out similarity of the scenarios of events, because pogroms in both towns were

model examples of implementation of Reinhard Heydrich's directives regarding German inspiration of pogroms, which would be effected by the locals.

Panorama of pogroms in summer of 1941 is completed by two texts focused on other regions of Eastern Borderlands – Polesie and Eastern Galicia. Grzegorz Berendt described pogrom events in Polesie. As he proves in his text, in this region – unlike in the former Białystok province – in summer of 1941 there were no pogroms resulting in hundreds of casualties, but in at least dozen towns and villages the local inhabitants committed collective crimes, and in several of them from about a dozen to several dozen Jews were murdered.

When in summer of 1941 the Soviet rule in Eastern Galicia fell due to the German offensive, the grass-root political initiative, also with respect to anti-Semitic activation of the masses, was effected first of all by the Ukrainian nationalist movement. The nationalist groups of Ukrainians are to a large extent responsible for the first wave of anti-Jewish crimes at that time, although those from the Polish social margin joined them. Kai Struve's analysis of one of such pogroms – in Boryslaw – closes the war part of the presented volume.

The first big and widely commented post-war pogrom took place in Cracow on 11 August 1945. It resulted in one casualty and five heavily wounded people. The circumstances of this incident – its course, information on perpetrators and reaction of state administration – are presented in detail by Julian Kwiek. Anna Cichopek-Gajraj tries to compare pogrom in Cracow with the one in Topoľčany in Slovakia, because of their temporal proximity. Similarities (and differences) between these two events are multi-layered and, therefore, facilitate definition of the reasons of anti-Jewish violence in the post-war Poland and Slovakia. The current state of knowledge on Kielce pogrom is presented in the article by Bożena Szaynok, who is one of the best known researchers of this crime.

In the following texts reactions of different political groups and public opinion sectors to anti-Jewish attacks are presented. August Grabski characterized the attitude of armed anti-communist underground, the so called disavowed soldiers, to Jews; it manifested itself not only in anti-Jewish propaganda but also in numerous crimes. Piotr Kendziorek presented the position of the Left toward pogroms in Cracow and Kielce, referring first of all to materials published in the press of PPR [Polish Workers' Party] and PPS [Polish Socialist Party], and confronted with texts published in the leftist cultural press (“Odrodzenie”, “Kuznica”) after Kielce pogrom.

Attitude of the biggest opposition party, PSL [Polish Popular Party], toward pogrom is the subject of analysis by Romuald Turkowski. The author contraposed the propaganda theses of communists and socialists about PSL's links with anti-Semitic oriented circles to the sources produced by this party: official statements of its leaders, legal press, and the internal bulletin of the party. This study is complemented by the second text by Romuald Turkowski on attitudes of rural and small-town inhabitants – high percent of which supported PSL – toward the wave of anti-Jewish violence in Poland in the years 1945–1946.

Besides texts presenting views and attitudes of Polish public opinion, the volume also contains reactions of French press to the phenomenon of Polish anti-Semitism. Audrey Kichelewski reviewed a large spectrum of publications, starting with the press of different political camps, through Polonia press, to the publications in Yiddish of Polish Jews in France in the period 1945–1946.

The impact of Kielce pogrom on the Polish Jewish community was subject to a thorough analysis. In her text on activity of the Special Commission of Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce [Central Committee of Jews in Poland] in the years 1946–1947 Alina Cała showed the enormous effort of Jews to build (in alliance with Polish communists) the system of own self-defence. Paweł Wiczorek presented disorganisation of Jewish communities in the Lower Silesia region, from where the masses of frightened Jews began to leave Poland after Kielce pogrom to suffer

further life of misery in refugee camps in Germany, Austria and Italy. The impact of Kielce pogrom on demography and settlement structure of Jews is subject of Andrzej Rykała's text presenting these problems in geographic approach. The same author also described processes taking place in the Jewish economic life as a result of anti-Semitic terror. Obviously, Kielce crime was the subject of hot political debates among Polish Jews, in which the major involved parties were the Zionist camp and supporters of reconstruction of the Jewish community in Poland. These problems were presented by Paweł Wieczorek, who showed what it looked like in the Polish-language Jewish press, and by Katarzyna Person, who discussed reactions of Jews from Poland staying in DP camps in Germany to Kielce pogrom.

Several texts deal with the possible ways of interpretation of Kielce crime. In historical context the literary output to date on pogroms and post-war violence against Jews in the years 1944–1947 and interpretations contained therein are described by Bożena Szaynok. The book also contains new proposals of interpreting Kielce pogrom. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir presents the vision of anti-Jewish violence as an attempt to restore the hitherto norms shaken in the optics of dominating group which feared the advance of the group traditionally subordinated and persecuted. In an analysis of post-war anti-Semitic violence in Poland she uses the output of North American researchers on Afro-Americans' status in the history of USA, for example, with respect to events in Springfield in 1908. Łukasz Krzyżanowski and Marcin Zaremba use the theory of moral panic in the version presented by sociologists Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda to analyse the situation of a child in the post-war Poland and the impact of the prevailing social atmosphere on the acts of collective violence against Jews. The study by Andrzej Rykała and Anna Wosiak is a very original attempt of interpretation of 69 pogroms in Poland in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries with the use of technique of political geographer. It enabled them to find many new explanations of the genesis and course of pogroms.

The last part of the volume contains texts on memory about pogrom violence. Piotr Forecki analysed the journalist discussion on pogroms in the Polish press after 1989, and focused on the rhetoric of secondary anti-Semitism. Michał Majewski shows how political changes and progress in research influenced the picture of pogroms in Podlasie presented in the works published after 1989 with support of local governments. And István Pál Ádám dealt with defining differences in commemorating victims of anti-Semitism in Hungary and Poland, referring to the examples of Kunmadaras and Kielce.

Translated by Elżbieta Petrajtis-O'Neill