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JEFFREY S. KOPSTEIN, JASON WITTENBERG, *INTIMATE VIOLENCE. ANTI-JEWISH POGROMS ON THE EVE OF THE HOLOCAUST*, CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS, ITHACA, LONDON 2018, PP. 173, ISBN: 1501715275

The book discussed here is undoubtedly one of the most important books in recent years to concern the wave of anti-Jewish pogroms that swept across the eastern Polish borderlands in the summer of 1941. In many respects, it can also be considered the best study of the matter out of all the numerous publications that have been written since the emergence of Jan Tomasz Gross's book *Neighbors.*[1] The best-known works by Polish authors include the books by Marek Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Żydzi w zaborze sowieckim. Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej pod okupacją sowiecką (1939–1941)* [Poles and Jews in the Soviet Partition. Polish--Jewish Relations in the North-Eastern Territories of the Second Polish Republic under Soviet Occupation (1939–1941)] (Warsaw 2001); Andrzej Żbikowski's *U genezy Jedwabnego. Żydzi na Kresach Północno-Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej wrzesień 1939 – lipiec* 1941 [On the Genesis of Jedwabne. Jews in the North-Eastern

[1] J.T. Gross, *Sąsiedzi: Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (2000), published in English as *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (2001).

Borderlands of the Second Polish Republic, September 1939 – July 1941] (Warsaw 2006); Marek J. Chodakiewicz's *Mord w Jedwabnem 10 lipca 1941. Prolog. Przebieg. Pokłosie* [Murder in Jedwabne, 10 July 1941. Prologue. Course. Aftermath] (Warsaw 2012), and Witold Mędykowski's *W cieniu gigantów. Pogromy 1941 r. w byłej sowieckiej strefie okupacyjnej* [In the Shadow of the Giants. The 1941 Pogroms in the former Soviet Occupation Zone] (Warsaw 2012). Of authors from outside Poland, Timothy Snyder refers to this issue in his book *Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (2011), and the subject is dealt with directly in the 2004 joint publication edited by Antony Polonsky and Joanna Michlic entitled *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton 2004). The authors of the work under discussion here have admitted themselves that they were directly inspired by the stormy and heated discussion which flared up after the appearance of Gross's book.[2]

However, unlike the historians who have dealt with this issue so far, they view the problem from a much broader perspective. They are interested in placing the events in a multidimensional context, so they refer to the period before the outbreak of World War II, and look at matters not only from the historical point of view, but also in the light of theories of inter-group and inter-ethnic violence. Therefore, they are interested not only in the contexts of Polish-Jewish relations or the Second World War. As they wrote after the publication of *Neighbors*: "It gave us an unexpected opportunity to combine two important scientific directions that have never been properly integrated: the vast body of socio-scientific literature on inter-social violence, and a new generation of historiography concerning the Holocaust, which locates this violence in specific communities and their different contexts". (p. ix). The work which they drew upon most when researching this subject was Hubert M. Blalock's book *Toward a Theory of Minority-Group Relations* (New York, 1967), devoted to the theory of 'political threat', which takes as the basis for its analysis the relationship between the black and white populations of the United States. From the authors' point of view, the people who have distinguished themselves most in the field of discussion about

[2] Interest in the anti-Jewish pogroms has not waned, at least in Poland, as evidenced by last year's four-volume edition, which aspires to a comprehensive (though not exhaustive) presentation of the subject of pogroms in Poland in the 19th and 20th centuries. The fourth volume of *Pogromy Żydów na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, vol. 4: *Holokaust i Powojnie (1939–1946)*, ed. A. Grabski, Warszawa 2019, is devoted to the period of World War II.

the 1941 pogroms are Doris Bergen, John Connelly, Sol Goldberg, Anna Sternshis, and the aforementioned Antony Polonsky and Timothy Snyder.

It is worth emphasising that the book's authors are respected researchers in the scientific world. They both hold professorships and work at the same faculty (political science) of the University of California. However, the project could not have been carried out without the financial support provided by the following institutions: the National Science Foundation, the National Council for East European and Eurasian Research, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the University of Toronto, the University of Wisconsin--Madison, the University of California at Berkeley and the University of California at Irvine.

The book consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 ('Why do neighbours kill neighbours?') is a summary of what to expect in the rest of the publication, and offers an explanation of the reasons why the book's particular structure was adopted. Chapter 2 ('Ethnic policy in the borderland regions') will be of interest for the lay reader, but is somewhat too basic for the professional historian; it is an analysis of the situation in the *Kresy*, with a historical overview of ethnic relations from the turn of the twentieth century to 1941. In the third chapter ('Measuring fear and violence'), we find an overview of the research methods the authors use, as well as analyses of a range of original data from the 1921 and 1931 censuses, the results of the 1922 and 1928 parliamentary elections, and of sources concerning the pogroms, mainly from participants in the events, and from people who experienced the course of events at first hand. Information was collected from the lowest-level administrative units (*gminy*, communes) – a total of over 2000 larger and smaller towns. The authors' hypotheses were tested by a large number of statistical analyses based on differences in medians, non-parametric models and ecological inference. In chapters 4 and 5 ('Beyond Jedwabne' and 'Ukrainian Galicia and Volhynia') the authors test their arguments against the example of two regions of the eastern borderlands: the northern, where the Polish population dominated (Białystok and Polesie provinces) and the southern, where Ukrainians dominated (the Volhynia, Lwów, Stanisławów and Tarnopol provinces). Chapter 6 applies the same techniques to regions beyond the borders of the Second Polish Republic – in Lithuania, Romania and Greece, as well as India and the US. The seventh and final chapter ('Domestic violence and ethnic

diversity') tests the results of this work in relation to the broader discussion of intra-ethnic violence. At the end of the book, in addition to the bibliography and index, there is an appendix ('Pogroms in the Eastern Borderlands, summer 1941') which takes the form of a list of places where pogroms took place (along with references to the reports that speak of them). The local nomenclature, as long as it does not already have firm roots in English-language literature (such as 'Warsaw'), is given in Polish, even if there are German, Jewish or Ukrainian equivalents.

As mentioned in relation to chapter three, the authors focus not only on well--known and already published sources, but also on those which have been forgotten or perhaps unnoticed in the context of the anti-Jewish pogroms. This primarily concerns the statistical data from the 1922 and 1928 parliamentary elections, as well as data from the censuses carried out in 1921 and 1931. These data were published in the interwar period through the effort of the Central Statistical Office, thanks to which they have remained relatively easily available. Even a special query in the archives is not necessary. Although the authors do use archival materials, these are only of an auxiliary nature.[3]

The book's main argument is that all the previous attempts to explain the pogroms of summer 1941 have been incorrect. Three theories enjoy the most popularity: 1) the attacks were revenge for the Jews' collaboration with the Soviets; 2) the inherent, centuries-old anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism of the Christian populations (mainly Poles and Ukrainians) among whom the Jews lived; 3) the opportunity to steal Jewish movable and immovable property, thus it is an economic root cause. According to the authors, the reasons for this wave of over two hundred anti-Jewish pogroms should rather be located in the ethnic demography and political relations of the interwar period. What happened from the start of the war until summer 1941 only exacerbated the previous problems, gave them direction, and released

[3] These are the following: Archiwum Akt Nowych (Central Archives of Modern Records [AAN]), Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego (Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute [AŻIH]), Державний архів Львівської області (State Archive of the Lviv oblast [DALO]), Государственный Архив Российской Федерации (State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow, [GARF]), Галузевий Державний Архів Служби Безпеки України (Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine, Kyiv [HAD-SBU]), the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives (USHMM, Washington DC), Yad VaShem (YVS, Jerusalem), and the Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO, New York).

the desire to immediately achieve goals which could have been achieved even before 1939.

The authors provide many arguments refuting the previous attempts to explain the phenomenon of the pogroms, and it is difficult to dispute their claims. Regarding the theme of revenge on the Jewish population for their collaboration with the Soviets, they claim that this kind of explanation (promoted by writers including Bogdan Musiał[4] and Marek Wierzbicki, the latter of whom gives these events a primarily anti-Soviet tone) cannot be proven scientifically. At best, one can say that the Jews welcomed the arrival of the Soviets with a certain goodwill, but not that they collaborated with them. This goodwill was natural considering that Communism, at least in theory, was the only option which offered Jews equal rights. This was something they had lacked in the Second Polish Republic, and the other national minorities competing with the Poles for power (such as the Ukrainians) had not promised them such rights. And so it proved. The installation of Soviet power meant that Jews were allowed to hold positions that they could not practically have occupied under Polish rule. However, since they generally occupied lower positions in the Soviet hierarchy, they were more visible to the general population; this was in addition to their initial goodwill towards the new government, which gave the impression of Jewish 'collaboration'. Moreover, it was a case of choosing the lesser evil for the Jews, because news of how Germany was proceeding was becoming more widespread. Moreover, the claim that Jews collaborated with the Soviet regime contradicts historians' knowledge of how the individual nationalities were represented in the new apparatus of power. For example, data from the Białystok region shows that in 1940 Jews constituted only 2 per cent of the members of the rural communes' ruling bodies, 9 per cent of Communist youth organisations, 5.4 per cent of 'government candidates' and 4 per cent of the Communist party cadres (p. 6). Considering Jews made up 12 per cent of the total population of the region, it is clear that not only were they under-represented in the apparatus of Soviet power in proportion to their numbers, but they turned out to be severely limited in this respect.

[4] B. Musiał, 'The Pogrom in Jedwabne: Critical Remarks about Jan T. Gross's *Neighbours*', in *The Neighbors Respond. The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland*, ed. A. Polonsky and J.B. Michlic, Princeton University Press 2004, pp. 304–43.

It is also interesting that pogroms took place more often in places where pre-war support for Communism was weak compared to those areas where support was relatively high. This was because the most important and largest groups supporting Communism did not come from the Jews, but the Belarusian and Ukrainian populations. In places where Communist slogans were more popular, pro-pogrom sentiments were less likely to develop.

According to the authors, the thesis that the Christian population's anti-Semitism was the main cause of the pogroms is equally wrong. To this end, they ask: how was it possible that only 9 per cent of localities suffered from pogroms, and over 90 per cent did not? For if anti-Semitism and Jew-hatred were as widespread as reported in the literature, then the waves of such incidents should have diffused much more widely around the country. In principle, pogroms should have happened everywhere, but this was not the case. According to them, there is only one answer: the anti-Semitism of the Second Polish Republic has been exaggerated in the historical literature. Despite the pogroms in Poland during the partitions and in two further waves (1918–20 and in the 1930s), despite the economic boycott and the 'ghetto benches', the situation of the Jews in Poland was not as bad as presented. Small Jewish trade survived, and Jews were still predominant in this area in 1938; large--scale Jewish trade continued to flourish, and the II RP's civic freedom resulted in a lush political and cultural life and the operation of a large number of social organisations. The foundations of the Jewish self-government also survived; there was also an extensive network of Jewish education, as well as press in Yiddish, Hebrew and Polish. Moreover, some Polish parties (such as the PPS[5] and the BBWR[6]) promoted harmonious Polish-Jewish coexistence, and many Poles sympathised with the Jews, or were at least immune to anti-Semitic propaganda. As a result, anti-Semitism of itself was too weak to have triggered the bloody events of 1941.

According to the authors, the third most frequently cited cause of pogroms given in the literature – the so-called economic cause, according to which the desire to steal property and take over the economic posts previously held by Jews – was the main motivation for aggressive actions. But, they argue, had this been the case, then the pogroms should primarily have been expected in those places where the economic

[5] Polish Socialist Party.

[6] Nonpartisan Bloc for Cooperation with the Government.

difference between Jews and non-Jews favoured the former most prominently. However, once again, this proves not to have been true. This difference was measured *inter alia* on the basis of the number of jointly-sponsored Jewish cooperatives that granted interest-free loans to the poorest Jewish entrepreneurs (mainly small traders). It turns out that pogroms took place much more often where such cooperatives existed, that is, in towns where the Jewish entrepreneurs were relatively poor. Meanwhile, in places where there was no need for such cooperatives, and the Jews had a clearer economic advantage over the Christian population, pogroms were relatively less frequent. The lack of data means that it remains unclear why the plunder of Jewish property evidently played a lesser role in causing pogroms in the northern part of the *Kresy*, i.e. where the Polish population predominated. On the other hand, in the southern part, where the Ukrainian population predominated, the desire to steal is a much clearer motive for acts of violence.

In the authors' opinion, the real causes of the wave of pogroms discussed here can only be explained by the theory of 'political threat' mentioned above. Briefly, this says that where a minority begins to be perceived as threatening the dominance of the majority, the majority initiates actions to prevent it from losing its dominant position. According to Kopstein and Wittenberg, a similar situation occurred in the Second Polish Republic, and pogroms took place where the non-Jews perceived the Jews as a threat to their privileged position. The factors which reduced the risk of a pogrom in individual localities were: a) the popularity of those Polish political parties that promoted harmonious coexistence between the various ethnic groups – the more popular they were, the greater the risk of a pogrom, due to the growing sense of threat among that part of the nationalist majority that rejected harmonious co-existence with the Jews; b) the demography of the Jewish population – the greater its per centage, the greater the likelihood of a pogrom, for the same reasons as given in the previous section; c) the degree to which Jews aspired to achieve communal equality with the Poles and Ukrainians – the greater the pressure to obtain the same rights in practice that the Christians had, the greater the possibility of physical aggression and pogrom.

Another of the research tools the authors used involved dividing the borderland towns inhabited jointly by Jews and Christians into those where pogroms took place and those where they did not, in order to investigate the differences

between them during the pre-war period; it turned out that they found quite a few such differences.

One of them was strong Jewish support for their own national political parties, especially the Zionists, in the places where pogroms later took place. Following the 'political threat' theory, the authors point to the fact that Zionism in Poland did not primarily revolve around a policy of emigration, but rather of ethnic pride and assertiveness. This was a signal to Poles and Ukrainians that the Jews had their own national policy and would not join the others' national projects. Zionism, at least as a neutral separation from the Poles, was not perceived very positively, even by the Polish left; for the right, meanwhile, it was seen as creating 'a state within a state'.[7] It came as a shock to Polish public opinion when the national minorities, who had won only 3.2 per cent of the vote in the 1919 elections, took 20 per cent of seats in the Sejm in 1922 thanks to the National Minorities Bloc (created at the initiative of Jewish communities). In this way the Jews, although they themselves had no territorial aspirations in relation to the Polish state, appeared to be supporting the irredentist claims of the Germans, Ukrainians and Belarusians, whether they liked it or not. In the *Kresy*, as much as half of all votes went to the Bloc. Its success in 1922 brought Poles to believe that the national minorities, mainly the Jews, were disloyal and could not be assimilated; this was especially true in north-eastern Poland, where the influence of Izaak Grünbaum was dominant. The effect was that even where only small numbers of Jews lived, the Poles blamed them for the minorities' electoral success. In turn, the Polish and Jewish left-wing parties were weak in the *Kresy*; neither the Bund nor the PPS had any substantial human resources there. The situation worsened when the Polish community responded to the National Minority Bloc with the so-called Lanckorona Pact (May 1923), which called for the total Polonisation of administrative, educational and religious institutions. In 1925 the Zionists in Galicia decided to negotiate and conclude the so-called Settlement, which in turn resulted in accusations from the Ukrainians that they were betraying their common interests.

This political situation translated into anti-Jewish violence in 1941. The data cited by the authors shows that the pogroms took place in places where the National

[7] This was described by Jolanta Żyndul in her book *Państwo w państwie? Autonomia narodowo-kulturalna w Europie Środkowowschodniej w XX wieku*, Warszawa 2000.

Minority Bloc (in the case of the Jews, this meant the Zionists) had much stronger support than in other places (22 to 1); it can also be seen that in pogrom centres the Jewish population had generally more nationalist attitudes than in others (51 to 39). The same can be said about the Christian populations: for example, the Poles were also much more nationalist in those places (39 to 24) (p. 67).

The authors provide detailed, very interesting data regarding the aforementioned demographic issues and their translation into the risk of a pogrom. Using the example of the Ukrainian population, they show that most often pogroms did not take place where there were very few Ukrainians (below a certain average), but they did occur where Ukrainian populations were in the majority, but not large enough to be sure of their advantage. For if the ethnic group committing the pogrom was too small in per centage terms, then for at least some of several possible reasons (such as lack of public support) it was unable to launch an attack. On the other hand, if it represented a clear majority, it did not feel the need to attack the minority, as its dominant position was *per se* guaranteed. An examination of the demographic situation in pogrom towns shows that the average per centage of Ukrainians there was 43 per cent, while in towns where pogroms did not take place the figure reached 77 per cent. The opposite process can be observed with regard to the Jewish population. On the territory of present-day Ukraine, the average number of Jews in towns where pogroms took place was 565, while in the others it was far smaller: only 43 people. This is clear, among other places, in Volhynia, where the borderland pogroms were the most frequent (22 per cent). In the so-called pogrom towns Jews and Ukrainians predominated, and the Poles were the least numerous. At the same time, probably also due to being minorities, Poles protected Jews from their persecutors. For example, this was the situation in the village of Draganówka, which as a whole community defended the Jews.

The case of Jedwabne shows the importance of the above factors, i.e. the political divisions and the demographic issue. Jews predominated in this town; they were strongly ethnically oriented and mainly voted for the Zionists (76 per cent). The Polish minority, which gave 63 per cent of its votes to the National Democratic Party (ND, *endecja*), was similarly oriented. This shows that no matter how brutal the Soviet occupation was, the Jews and Poles had already been deeply politically divided for many years before the war. Moreover, Jedwabne was also distinguished

by the fact that it did not have a Belarusian minority; this put the Poles and Jews in a situation of direct ethnic rivalry. The average situation in the Białystok region was different, and this was why Jedwabne was so different from the rest of the voivodeship (see Table 4.1, p. 65).

The depth of the political divisions which already existed in the interwar period is also shown by the example of the city of Białystok, which must have had some impact on the surrounding towns, and at the same time prepared the ground for the strong beliefs about Jewish collaboration with the Soviets after the fall of the Polish state. The city hosted the most numerous Jewish community in the region, which numbered around 50,000 people. This group was strongly divided on whether the city should continue to be part of Poland. Not only was the first Jewish newspaper (*Golos Bialegostoka*), which appeared in this city just after World War I, published in Russian, but it also openly questioned Białystok's Polish nature; it called for a plebiscite and a vote to join Soviet Russia. This situation lasted until 1939. The authors explain the Polish population's failure to commit a pogrom in Białystok in terms of the fact that the Germans did so immediately after capturing the city.

Political reasons can also explain the exceptional brutality of the pogrom in Lviv. This had little to do with Ukrainian anti-Semitism. After all, if the perpetrators' targets depended on the negative emotions of the Ukrainian population, the pogrom should first have affected the local Poles, as they were much more hated. However, the violence was directed against the Jews only because the Ukrainians wanted to please the Germans immediately after the former's proclamation of Ukrainian statehood, which the Germans did not accept anyway. It can also be seen that in general, pogroms took place much more often in places where there had already been a fierce political struggle, especially between Poles and Ukrainians.

Similar processes were visible outside the borders of the Second Polish Republic. Lithuania is a good example of how political fears led to bloody pogroms. The situation was similar in Romania, where Romanians were the attackers in Bessarabia, as were the Ukrainians in Bukovina. An analogy can even be observed in Greece, where the Athenian Jews, who did not fight for their rights, did not experience violence; whereas the Jews of Thessaloniki, who were more ethnically oriented and pro-Zionist, did. The authors find the same patterns in nineteenth--century Germany, where pogroms came in response to the assimilation, and above

all the emancipation, of the Jews. Only Russia appears slightly different, because unlike the Polish lands, the state authorities were behind the pogroms there.

Most of the reviews published after the publication of this book appreciated the broad perspective which the researchers adopted and their contribution to the historiography of the Second World War, ethnic conflicts, and above all the Holocaust. Volha Charnysh saw the work as "an original and well-crafted study of the interethnic competition on the eve of the Holocaust", which "advances our understanding of the microfoundations of the ethnic conflict, and challenges existing explanations of the violence against Jews in twentieth-century Eastern Europe" (*Perspectives on Politics* 2018, vol. 4, no. 16, p. 1210). Shawn M. Ragin was of a similar opinion, stating: "It is original, the sources are carefully analysed, and the conclusions are convincing" (*German Studies Review* 2019, vol. 42, no. 2, pp. 394–96). Joshua Zimmerman was also in no doubt that in this case we are dealing with "a uniquely valuable scholarly work that makes a major contribution to our understanding of Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War" (*Slavic Review* 2019, vol. 78, no. 3, pp. 830–32). However, Kamil Kijek interpreted the content of Kopstein & Wittenberg's book completely differently ('Konieczny kierunek i ślepy zaułek w badaniach nad zagładą Żydów na terenach dawnej Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej', *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 2019, vol. 15, pp. 735–53). He levels a very long list of accusations at the authors, including the lack of a reliable research programme, basing their theses on metrics which are easy to measure and prove, of ignoring the realities of the Second Polish Republic, and even of academic hubris. However, such accusations are difficult to take seriously. For example, Kijek claims that while stating the existence of a relationship between pre-war Jewish policy and pogroms during the war, Kopstein and Wittenberg accused the Jewish population of being 'guilty' of the murders committed in the summer of 1941, while nothing of the kind was written in the book discussed here. The authors were as far as possible from adopting such a position; all they did was to assess, with the cold eye of the scientist, the importance of various factors in the outbreak of aggression and the motivations of those who committed the murders. Another, less serious accusation against the authors was that they focused on the attitudes of the Jewish population. According to Kijek this is unacceptable, and the focus should have been placed on considering the perpetrators, not the victims. However, it was not

explained why it is impossible to study both. More of Kijek's individual charges are likewise ineffective. For example, the book says that most of the ideologues of the Polish nationalist camp came from the middle class and for this reason, throughout the interwar period, "their group did not manage to penetrate provincial circles with its programme" (p. 739). This is untrue. The original only says that the most important Polish anti-Semites came from the middle class, and that they failed to successfully infect the rural population with their programme during the interwar period, as evidenced by the fact that most peasants had a positive attitude towards Jewish traders, who were cheaper than Polish traders, although this did not mean that they automatically felt any great love for them (p. 10). It is also untrue that the authors presented the 1936 parliamentary proposal to limit Jewish ritual slaughter as an idea put forward by the National Democratic Party; in fact, it was put forward by Janina Prystorowa, a member of the government camp, which Kijek calls a "gross error" (p. 749). There is nothing like this in the text. Nowhere did the authors write that the National Democratic Party submitted the draft of any such law. They simply state: "The tone was further reinforced by National Democratic members of the Sejm who called for outlawing Jewish butchers practicing kosher slaughter" (p. 40). The calls and campaigning by Democratic Party MPs to ban Jewish ritual butchers in no way contradicts the fact that it was the BBWR deputy Prystorowa who submitted the motion. This then is not a 'gross error', but two separate issues.

In concluding the discussion of the above book, it should be recognised that it may prove very useful for those historians in Poland and around the world who are studying Polish-Jewish relations and the history of the Holocaust to absorb its content and take on at least some of its authors' research methods. We should hope that everyone will be able to undertake an equally precise and reliable approach to historical research. At the same time, it is essential not to succumb to emotions and weigh all the arguments *sine ira et studio*. This will be good for everyone – not only for historical truth, but also for historical researchers.