

Community and Exclusion. Collective Violence in the Multiethnic (East) Central European Societies before and after the Holocaust (1848-1948)

Veranstalter: Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences and Prague Centre for Jewish Studies, Charles University, Faculty of Arts; Institute of History, Slovak Academy of Sciences; Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences; Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Datum, Ort: 25.09.2016–27.09.2016, Prague

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After almost precisely one year since the international conference „Beyond Defeat and Victory. Physical Violence and the Reconstitution of East-Central Europe, 1914-1923“ took place in Prague, the Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences, in collaboration with the Prague Centre for Jewish Studies at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University, organized another conference dedicated to interdisciplinary and comparative research on the phenomenon of violence. The goal of the conference „Community and Exclusion. Collective Violence in the Multiethnic (East) Central European Societies before and after the Holocaust (1848-1948),“ which was supported by the Visegrad Fund and held under the auspices of the Minister of the Czech Republic’s Government for Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Legislation, Jiří Dienstbier, was to advance the current research on collective violence against minorities in the era of Jewish emancipation and nation state building while the concept of „exclusionary violence“ served as the main referential point.¹ According to Werner Bergmann, Christhard Hoffmann, and Helmut Walser Smith, all forms of „exclusionary violence“ share a common notion of the minority group(s) as a collective threat, the asymmetry of power between the rioters and the victims, the rioters’ low level of organization, and the relative absence of state power in times of crisis. The aim of the conference was to question whether this

concept could serve as common ground for a large group of researchers, who work focused on acts of collective violence against various minority groups in different regions of (East) Central Europe.

In the first panel, „Anti-Jewish Violence in the 19th Century (and Beyond),“ two speakers followed long *durée* perspectives: while MILOSLAV SZABÓ (Bratislava) analysed anti-Jewish violence in Presburg/Pozsony/Bratislava, now the capitol of Slovakia, between 1848 and 1948, from an often neglected spatial perspective and emphasized the importance of the former „Jewish ghetto“ as an imaginary, but also real, place of exclusion, DANIEL VÉRI (Budapest) dealt with the transmission of the myth of ritual murder in folk songs at the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century in Hungary. Véri showed how folk songs as a specific form of knowledge provided the audience with relatively stable images of ritual murder, which were appropriated in different settings and under varying social circumstances: during anti-Jewish violence in Presburg in the 1880s, but even in Budapest in 1946. DARIUS STALIŪNAS (Vilnius) in his paper compared two cases of collective violence that took place in 19th century Lithuania. He stressed the differences between these cases: whereas Polish-Lithuanian church conflicts never extended beyond the church and were mutual, pattern of collective anti-Jewish violence spread across the inhabited areas. In the following discussion, questions were raised especially regarding the socioeconomic circumstances under which the anti-Jewish violence occurred and also the ways in which the representations of the target groups – Jewish minorities – were disseminated.

At the end of the first day, DAVID ENGEL (New York) questioned in his keynote lecture the ability of the research on anti-Jewish violence, including the concept of „exclusionary violence,“ to explain acts of collective violence against minorities in general. According to Engel, the period in (East) Central Europe was above all marked by a transition from im-

¹ Christhard Hoffmann / Werner Bergmann / Helmut Walser Smith, *Exclusionary violence: Antisemitic Riots in Modern German History*, Michigan 2002.

perial rule to nation state building, but this changing political context did not increase „the likelihood that Jews would fall victim to mob violence.“ The monopoly on violence, the nation state as an historical agent shaping the national interests, he stated, needs to be brought into special consideration.

The second keynote lecture of WERNER BERGMANN (Berlin), author of the concept of „exclusionary violence,“ in collaboration with Christhard Hoffmann and Helmut Walser Smith, at the beginning of the next day, offered a conceptual framework for elaborating cases of acts of collective anti-Jewish violence in Central Europe. Bergmann, who unfortunately could not attend the conference and so his paper was read by the organizers, connected these acts with the struggle to establish social hierarchies. Collective violence, according to him, functioned as a mode of „self-help“ for the perpetrators not solely during a power vacuum, but when the power of the state was well established, which the assaulted usually tried to invoke. Bergmann also paid attention to the frequently plainly posed distinctions between perpetrators and observers.

In the following panel, „After Violence,“ SŁAWOMIR KAPRALSKI (Cracow / Uppsala) dealt with the structural conditions of anti-Roma violence in (East) Central Europe. Kapralski stressed the discontinuities between premodern and modern patterns of anti-Roma violence. He named the premodern pattern „inclusionary violence“ and connected it with the assimilationist policy of the enlightened absolutist regime. On the other hand, he denoted the modern pattern as „exclusionary violence“ in which the Roma communities played the role of a so-called surrogate victim, a group that exposes the limits of enforcing the social order in modern industrial societies. As another distinctive feature of the modern pattern of anti-Roma violence, Kapralski mentioned the symbolic violence still present in current academic writings. MONIKA VRZGULOVÁ (Bratislava) then analyzed the narratives of liberation and homecoming after the end of the Second World War in the oral testimonies of Holocaust survivors and their former neighbours from Slovakia.

In the next panel dealing with anti-Jewish

violence during the Great War and its aftermath, MICHAL FRANKL (Prague) urged for the closer examination of the riots that occurred in Pilsen in Western Bohemia in 1917. He asked whether the concept of „exclusionary violence“ could be elaborated together with the concept of the „moral economy“ of the crowd evolved by E. P. Thompson in order to understand various aspects of the riots: hunger strikes and nationalist protests with an anti-Semitic component. According to Frankl, the concept of „moral economy,“ based on the argument of pre-modern, traditional patterns of the perpetrators' behavior, does not conform to the reality of the events in 1917 in the Bohemian lands because of the rapid societal changes that accompanied industrial modernization. EMILY R. GIOIELLI (Williamsburg/Virginia) then shifted the attention to events in another region during the aftermath of the First World War. Using an intersectional perspective, Gioielli analysed the role that gender, class, and citizenship status played in the responses of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC or JOINT), a relief organisation founded in 1914, to anti-Jewish violence in Hungary during World War I. She outlined the processes of negotiating relief between the Hungarian state authorities, which supported anti-Jewish violence, and also the perspective of the headquarters of this international relief organization. Afterwards, BÖDÖK GERGELY (Budapest) provided an overview of anti-Jewish violence in Hungary during the so-called Red and White Terror.

The following panel brought forth two analyses of the different cases of ethnic violence in (East) Central Europe in the interwar period. Firstly, PAVEL BALOUN (Prague) exposed the connection between the exception and the norm on the example of the anti-Roma violence that occurred in 1928 in Pobedim, a village in Western Slovakia. In his paper, Baloun showed how even in such an exceptional case in which Roma were the victims and key witnesses of the prosecution, the same discursive and non-discursive practices as in the case when they were the target of anti-gypsy measures were deployed by various historical actors, especially local police authorities and municipalities. He ar-

gued that newly established findings in criminology played a crucial role in constructing a „gypsy“ identity in contrast to the „decent citizens“ of the newly created Czechoslovak liberal nation state. NATALIA ALEKSIUN (New York) shed new light on the radicalisation of the anti-Semitic movement in interwar Poland, but also on a way of thinking about Jewish national identity in Poland. She examined verbal and physical assaults on Jewish women as these events were portrayed in the public discourse and in the narratives of the assaulted women on the one hand, and revealed how male Jewish communal leaders accounted for these events on the other. She concluded that Jewish women represented a threat to the existing status quo in occupational mobility and professionalization. In this way, she stated, acts of violence against Jewish female students led to the reclaimed homogeneity of the Polish nation and proved the attackers' commitment to the nationalist cause.

The last day of the conference started with the panel „Radicalization and Paramilitary Violence in Interwar Central Europe“. The role of the modern nation state in relation to the collective violence was the topic of GÁBOR EGRY's (Budapest) presentation. According to Egrý, acts of collective violence that replayed the revolution, the creation of the so-called Great Romania, became an intrinsic part of state rule in interwar Romania. Under these circumstances, the Jews represented a target group that had unifying effects among various perpetrators. ISTVAN PÁL ÁDÁM (Prague) portrayed the ways in which the paramilitary violence was used in interwar Hungary. In the first part of his paper, he depicted several acts of anti-Jewish violence committed by the Ragged Guard (Rongyos Gárda), a prominent Hungarian contemporary militia, in the aftermath of the First World War. The second half of his presentation was dedicated to the re-emergence of the Ragged Guard as a part of the Hungarian campaign against interwar Czechoslovakia. At the borders of Northern Hungary and Carpathian Ruthenia, the members of this paramilitary organization, financially supported by Hungarian state authorities, committed several assaults against local Jewish communities. The

role of the state became the main topic once again in JAROMÍR MRŇKA's () overview of acts of collective violence in the Bohemian lands during the decade between 1938 and 1948, times of radical political change in Czechoslovakia. Regarding this specific time period, he stated that acts of collective violence committed by non-state agents were rare. It was the various „specialists,“ such as paramilitary units, police forces, and army and resistance units connected to the local or central state authorities who were carrying out collective violence.

In the last panel, the research group by PÉTER ÁPOR (Budapest) that focused on anti-Jewish violence in East Central Europe, namely in various locations in Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania after the Holocaust presented their first results: Péter Ápor focused on Hungary in 1946, when several acts of collective violence occurred against local merchants and even against the returning victims of the Holocaust. Ápor's interpretation of those acts was based on a model of the „moral economy“ of the perpetrators who had certain notion of „law and order“ and pursued material goals (confiscating goods). According to him, the ability of the perpetrators to mobilise the symbols and the imagination of „hard physical labour“ played an important role. IVICA BUNOVÁ (Bratislava) and MICHALA LŔNČÍKOVÁ (Bratislava) then compared two different acts of post-war collective violence in Slovakia. They pointed out that both the social structure and popular culture were two contexts of crucial importance in explaining the local dynamics of collective violence. VALENTIN SÁNDALESCU (Bucharest) presented an ample survey of primary sources for acts of collective violence in Romania after the Second World War. He drew attention to the examples of the reactions of Romanian Jewish communities to the acts of collective violence in contemporary newspapers.

The conference was concluded by a roundtable whose members emphasised strong or so far missing features with regard to the research on exclusionary violence. The remarks addressed the role of the state in acts of collective violence. DAVID ENGEL (New York) appreciated that the papers presented during the whole conference revealed the

various layers of the state (local, central, administrative, police, army etc.). However, from his point of view, he observed a lack of a similar interest in the quickly changing ethos of the state transitions, not only from the imperial rule to the nation states, but also from nation states to the people's democracies after the Second World War. Peter Ápor pointed out that the expectations of the historical actors with regard to the role of the state within their respective communities were at the heart of the acts of collective violence. Michal Frankl suggested that the research should focus more thoroughly on borderlands, on border regions as spaces in between states and between different economic and social structures. Furthermore, Natália Aleksion highlighted four factors that should be taken more into consideration in future research: the varying intensity of the violence, the specificity of different local settings (scenarios), the role of local elites, and life after violence from the perspective of local historical actors. It seemed that the final words belonged to Sławomir Kaprański who posed himself a question: whether the scholars could, at the end of the day, grasp all the variables and even predict acts of violence in the future. He gave the audience a laconic answer that we should be simply aware that such acts could happen anytime and anywhere.

Thus, the conference was a great opportunity to rethink the close connection between violence and exclusion in a comparative mode – not only in the terms of regions or states, but especially in terms of the target groups (minorities). Many debates critically examined the usefulness and also limits of the concept of „exclusionary violence“ for (East) Central Europe and undoubtedly contributed to the evolving research – locally imbedded but at the same time elaborating comparative perspectives.

Conference Overview:

Welcome and Introduction

Pavel Sládek, Rudolf Kučera, Ines Koeltzsch (all Prague)

Panel I: Anti-Jewish Violence in the 19th Century (and Beyond)

Chair: Sławomir Kaprański (Cra-

cow/Uppsala)

Miloslav Szabó (Bratislava): *Topographies of Exclusion – Anti-Jewish Violence in Pressburg/Pozsony/Bratislava (1848-1948)*

Daniel Véri (Budapest): *Musical Patterns of Violence. The Long Shadow of the Tiszaeszlár Blood Libel*

Darius Staliūnas (Vilnius): *Anti-Jewish Pogroms and Polish-Lithuanian Conflicts on Language in Churches: A Comparison of two Cases of Collective Violence*

Keynote lecture I

Chair: Pavel Sládek (Prague)

David Engel (New York): *Thinking about Interethnic Violence in Historical Context*

Keynote lecture II

Werner Bergmann (Berlin): *„Out with the Jews!“ Exclusionary Violence in 19th Century Europe – Some Theoretical Considerations (read by Michal Frankl and Ines Koeltzsch)*

Panel II: After Violence

Chair: Kateřina Čápková (Prague)

Sławomir Kaprański (Cracow/Uppsala): *Exclusionary/Structural Anti-Roma Violence in (East) Central Europe and Its Post-Holocaust Consequences for Roma Communities*

Monika Vrzgulová (Bratislava): *Liberation and Return Home – Stories with a Happy End?*

Panel III: Anti-Jewish Violence during World War I and in the Aftermath

Chair: Rudolf Kučera (Prague)

Michal Frankl (Prague): *Moral Economy of Exclusionary Violence? Pilsen 1917*

Emily R. Gioielli (Williamsburg/Virginia): *„Brother Save Us!“: the JDC and anti-Jewish Violence in Post-World War I Hungary*

Bödök Gergely (Budapest): *Violence against Jews during the Hungarian Red and White Terror*

Panel IV: Ethnic Violence in Interwar Central Europe

Chair: Gábor Egry (Budapest)

Pavel Baloun (Prague): *Included through Exclusion: Discourses on „Gypsies“ in Interwar Czechoslovakia and the Case of Anti-Gypsy Violence in Pobeďim 1928*

Natalia Aleksion (New York): *Crossing the*

Line: Violence against Jewish Woman and the New Model of Anti-Semitism in Interwar Poland

Panel V: Radicalization and Paramilitary Violence in Interwar Central Europe

Chair: Michal Frankl, independent researcher
Prague

Gábor Egry (Budapest): Armed Peasants, Violent Intellectuals and Political Guards. Trajectories of Violence in a Failing Nation State, Romania 1918-1940

Istvan Pál Ádám (Prague): Anti-Jewish Episodes from the Life of a Hungarian Interwar Militia: the Rongyos Gárda

Jaromír Mrňka (Prague): Swept away by a Rage of the People. Public Acts of Collective Violence in the Czech Lands 1938-1948

Panel VI: Anti-Jewish Violence after the Holocaust

Chair: Natalia Aleksion (New York)

Péter Apor (Budapest): Workers, Jews, and Rites of Violence: Anti-Jewish Atrocities Against Jews in Provincial Hungary in 1946

Ivica Bumová / Michala Lônčíková (Bratislava): Anti-Jewish Violence in Slovakia in 1945. A Comparison

Valentin Săndulescu (Bucharest): „Like coals under ashes, ready to scorch the earth once more”: Notes Regarding Anti-Jewish Attitudes in Romania (1944-1947)

Roundtable

Chair: Ines Koeltzsch (Prague)

Natalia Aleksion / Péter Apor / David Engel / Michal Frankl / Sławomir Kapralski

Tagungsbericht *Community and Exclusion. Collective Violence in the Multiethnic (East) Central European Societies before and after the Holocaust (1848-1948)*. 25.09.2016–27.09.2016, Prague, in: H-Soz-Kult 30.11.2016.