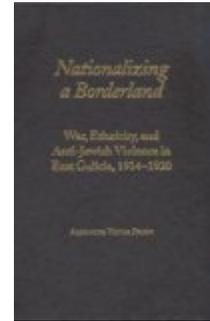


# H-Net Reviews

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Alexander Victor Prusin. *Nationalizing a Borderland: War, Ethnicity, and Anti-Jewish Violence in East Galicia, 1914-1920*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005. xiv + 181 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8173-1459-0.

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## The Resemblance of Russian and Polish Anti-Jewish Violence in Wartime East Galicia

Renewed interest in the complex web of Polish-Jewish relations in twentieth-century Eastern Europe was sparked by intense scholarly and public debates over Jan Gross's study of the mass murder of the Jewish community Jedwabne by their Gentile Polish neighbors in July 1941. Gross's work tapped into much broader controversies over Polish anti-Semitism and violence against the Jewish minority as well as Polish experiences during Tsarist rule and the later Nazi occupation.[1] Alexander V. Prusin's study of anti-Jewish violence speaks to these exchanges by shifting the focus to the period of the First World War and the immediate postwar years in East Galicia, a borderland between the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires. His book broadens the discussions by comparing the wartime anti-Jewish policies of the Russian occupational regime with postwar practices of the emerging Polish Republic officials. Moreover, the author sheds light on the role of Austrian administrators, ethnic Ukrainians in the region, and Soviet officials during the brief occupation of 1920. In so doing, Prusin also adds a regional study to a small but growing literature on anti-Jewish violence and the suffering of ethnic minorities during the First World War as well as its memorialization.[2]

Prusin's work draws on his doctoral dissertation *War and National Conflict in Eastern Galicia, 1914-1920: The Evolution of Modern Anti-Semitism*, completed in 2001 under the direction of the Polish historian Piotr Wrobel at the University of Toronto. This study sets out to analyze "the dynamics and mechanisms of the persecution

of Jews in wartime Eastern Galicia," to "reconstruct local dynamics of ethnic conflict," and to place them into their larger national contexts. Prusin argues that Russian and Polish civil administrators and military officials shared distinct similarities in their perception of East Galician Jewry as a "destructive" "inner enemy." The author maintains that these officials' actions greatly overlapped in their use of anti-Jewish propaganda campaigns, measures to remove Galician Jews from economic and social life, and physical violence (pp. x, xii).

In explaining these phenomena, Prusin downplays cultural approaches to the study of anti-Semitism and models of scapegoating, cultural codes, and conspiracy theories. Instead, he emphasizes the "context of a specific political, social, and economic situation" that was conducive to rising anti-Jewish violence. This context emerged during the six years of intense warfare in East Galicia and the breakdown of the Old Order in the former Austro-Hungarian province (pp. 114-115). Prusin stresses an inherent link between the violence against the East Galician Jews and the Russification and Polonization campaigns of the respective administrations, as well as their dissemination of anti-Semitic propaganda during times of collective fear and disorientation (pp. 37-8, 116). The study also portrays the perpetration of violence against better-off members of Jewish communities as an integral part of attempts to reverse the Gentile perpetrators' social status and secure their dominance.

In his analysis, Prusin is careful not to identify the

anti-Jewish violence of Russian and Polish troops as “genocidal” in proportion and as comparable to the Armenian genocide carried out by the military of the Ottoman Empire in 1915. He particularly points to the absence of “an ideological doctrine of extermination” and “a unified effort” of military and civil offices (p. 56). Prusin’s reading of the anti-Jewish violence in East Galicia seeks to support this point by conceptually distinguishing between “unauthorized or ‘wild’ violence” by mobs of soldiers and civilians and “‘authorized’ or institutional violence” by military and civil agencies of the state. The author shows, nonetheless, that these two forms of violence often intersected. Perpetrators of mob violence were indeed often convinced of the state’s “tacit approval” of their actions (pp. 81-82, xi).

Prusin’s study is largely organized along chronological lines. An introduction provides basic demographic information on East Galicia, especially its Jewish communities whose members comprised up to 13 percent of the total population prior to the First World War. The three chapters of part 1 deal with the Russian occupation of Galicia during the war. The following three chapters of part 2 investigate Polish-Jewish relations as well as the Polish conflicts with Ukrainian and Soviet forces between 1918 and 1920.

Chapter 1 discusses the Russian government’s anti-Jewish policies prior to the First World War. Prusin offers a portrait of the Russian military machine and the traditional anti-Semitism of the military leadership as well as rank and file soldiers. The author argues that the Russian military’s treatment of Jews differed from its actions against other minorities during the early war years. While there was no “preconceived plan,” Russian military leaders considered Jews as “a challenge to Russian rule” and began devising “long-range radical plans to handicap” the Jewish population (p. 23). In chapter 2, Prusin describes the anti-Jewish violence by Ukrainian and Polish Gentiles as well as Cossack formations of the Russian army after the collapse of the Austrian defenses in the fall of 1914. Despite the growing demands of the war against Austrian and German forces, Russian military leaders devoted significant attention to policies against the Galician Jews whom they regarded as supporters of the Central Powers. As part of larger Russification campaigns, Russian policymakers aimed at “leveling” the Galician Jews and turning them into citizens of the Russian Empire. This step would have enabled Russian officials to apply the anti-Jewish legislation and expropriation measures in the Empire to the local Jewish populations. Chapter 3 illuminates the radicalization of Russian anti-Jewish poli-

cies and practices. By December 1914, Russian policies of expulsion and deportation to larger East Galician towns and Siberia had become increasingly brutal and included all segments of the Galician-Jewish population. According to the author, the appropriation of the property of Galician Jews was one of the “principal objectives” of these policies and intersected with the military’s intention to “cleanse” areas close to the front of “unreliable minorities” (pp. 52, 49). The study shows that these policies and open pogroms by undisciplined troops only further escalated during the successful Austro-German offensive of mid-1915.

Part 2 of Prusin’s study turns to the conflicts between Polish Gentiles and Galician Jews. Chapter 4 shows how the relationship between the two populations worsened during the Austro-German wartime rule. *Nationalizing a Borderland* particularly highlights the role of the 1918 treaty of Brest-Litovsk that gave key territories of an envisioned Polish state to the new Ukrainian National Republic. The number of anti-Jewish riots rapidly increased as Poles turned against their Jewish neighbors for their alleged “complicity” with the Central Powers. Prusin characterizes the treaty as a “junction at which the ideological anti-Semitism of [Polish] politicians and the popular anti-Semitism of the masses coalesced into a powerful drive for national independence” (p. 72). Galician and Polish Jews appeared as an “alien” group that could not be assimilated. Prusin devotes chapter 5 exclusively to the Lwów pogrom of late November 1918 during which Polish soldiers and civilians killed about 150 Jews, torched synagogues, and destroyed more than 50 Jewish homes. The author attempts an “even-handed” treatment of the crimes. On the one hand, he identifies the “conduct of the [local] Polish command” that did not intervene, as the “main factor behind the violence” (p. 91). On the other hand, Prusin characterizes Jewish organizations as inflating the number of the pogrom’s victims. In the final chapter, the author analyzes the growing Galician-Jewish support for the new Ukrainian state which, in contrast to Polish authorities, promised national and equal civil rights to the Jewish population. Prusin shows how anti-Jewish violence by Polish troops accompanied the entire military campaign against the Ukrainian National Republic. The author ends the chapter with a survey of the suffering of Galician Jews during and after the brief Soviet occupation of mid-1920. A short period of Polish-Jewish cooperation against the Bolshevik invasion soon gave way to increasing Polish accusations of Jewish support for the Soviets and “Judeo-Communism” as well as murderous anti-Jewish campaigns by victorious Polish

and “White” Cossack troops (pp. 111-112).

*Nationalizing a Borderland* is based on a study of unpublished primary sources from Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian archives, including the Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe, the Derzhavnyi arkhiv L’vivs’koi oblasti, and the Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii. These sources include court records from the relatively few trials against perpetrators of anti-Jewish violence of the early postwar years. They also comprise correspondence between regional Russian administrators such as Governor-General George Bobrinskii and their superiors in the Tsarist Empire as well as announcements and addresses by Polish army units to the local population. In addition, the study scrutinized a series of Russian, Polish, Austrian, and Jewish newspapers and periodicals. Prusin also relies on these sources to explore the responses of East Galician Jews. The study does not employ materials on Galician-Jewish communities in Israeli archives.

Prusin succeeds in situating the violence against the East Galician Jews in its larger context of Russian anti-Jewish policies and Polish anti-Semitic practices across the reestablished Polish state. By consistently inserting examples from other regions such as Kovno and Kurland into his narrative on East Galicia, the author, however, weakens the character of his work as a distinct regional study and does not achieve the richly textured quality of other works of the same genre.[4] Moreover, Prusin too quickly brushes over the significance of sexual and gender relations and hierarchies. The author briefly points out that Russian and Polish perpetrators perceived all Jews as destructive, allegedly rendering age and sex difference irrelevant, and then dropped any reference to these questions. As studies by Holocaust historians have revealed, gender played a decisive role in shaping the responses by persecuted Jews and official anti-Jewish practices in prewar Nazi Germany and even wartime Eastern Europe.[5] Moreover, anti-Jewish violence itself has to be seen as profoundly gendered. Its execution was informed by distinct racial and gender hierarchies that enforced the violence and were themselves, in turn, strengthened by the brutality.

In the upsurge of anti-Jewish violence during six years of warfare, the destruction of the Old Order and processes of state building, the Jewish communities in the East Galicia lost more than 124,000 members to immigration, deportation, and murder. Prusin’s study succeeds in

capturing key “dynamics and mechanisms” of the anti-Jewish violence perpetrated by Russian and Polish forces and Ukrainian and Polish civilians. His work also sheds light on the local dimension of these complex ethnic conflicts. The circumstance that his study does not achieve the same level of detail and analytical complexity as other regional studies leaves an opening for further research that may also draw on new approaches in the growing field of borderland studies.[5]

#### Notes

[1]. See Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). On the controversies over the book see Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic, eds., *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004). On other facets of the debates on Polish-Jewish relations see Yisrael Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski, *Unequal Victims. Poles and Jews During World War Two* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1986); and Richard C. Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust. The Poles under German Occupation 1939-1944* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986).

[2]. See Panikos Panayi, *Minorities in Wartime. National and Racial Groupings in Europe, North America and Australia During the Two World Wars* (Oxford: Berg, 1993); John Klier and Shlomo Lambroza, eds. *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and David Engel, “Lwów, 1918: The Transmutation of a Symbol and its Legacy in the Holocaust,” in *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*, ed. Joshua D. Zimmerman (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. 32-46.

[3]. See, for instance, Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999).

[4]. Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, eds., *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust* (New York: Paragon House, 1993).

[5]. See for example the issues of *The Journal of Borderlands Studies* and *Borderlands E-Journal*.

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