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***Pogromy Żydów na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku*. Tom 1: *Literatura i sztuka*, red. Sławomir Buryła, 462 pp.; Tom 2: *Studia przypadków (do 1939 roku)*, red. Kamil Kijek, Artur Markowski, Konrad Zieliński, 470 pp.; Tom 3: *Historiografia, polityka, recepcja społeczna (do 1939 roku)*, red. Kamil Kijek, Artur Markowski, Konrad Zieliński, 425 pp.; Tom 4: *Holokaust i powojnie (1939–1946)*, red. August Grabski, 671 pp.; Instytut Historii im. Tadeusza Manteuffla Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Instytut Historyczny Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski, Uniwersytet Wrocławski, Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN, Warsaw 2018–2019.**

"There ha[s] never been any pogrom at all, or even serious riots, in Poland." Such was the categorical claim of one of Poland's leading historians, Franciszek Bujak, in 1919. The claim was addressed to the Paris Peace Conference, which was about to decide Poland's political future. Bujak feared that that future was being called into question because "some people" among Poland's enemies had seized maliciously upon a set of minor "vexatious events" in Galicia—falsely "described by the press as enormous Jewish pogroms"—as "proof . . . that the Poles are incapable and unworthy of an independent State." As a prominent spokesman for the cause of Polish independence, Bujak sought to set the record straight. In reality, he argued, "all that occurred" in Galicia "were comparatively insignificant riots, which would often break out very suddenly." To his mind, such modest incidents, "brought about by . . . 4½ years of warfare . . ., a lack of the most necessary articles . . ., a terrible speculation in trade and . . . the rapid decline in the value of money," hardly merited the label "pogroms." Pogroms, he insisted, were "systematically organized massacres and robberies carried out with the aid of an indifferent attitude, or even of a co-ordinate action of the police authorities." They were thus a Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian phenomenon only, foreign to Poland altogether.[1]

[1] Franciszek Bujak, *The Jewish Question in Poland* (Paris, 1919), 31–34.

Bujak's statement surely offers one of the clearest illustrations of the observation by Sławomir Buryła that opens this four-volume, 2000-page set of scholarly studies about "Jewish pogroms in the Polish lands during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries": "The problem of pogroms has never been solely an object of historical, sociological, or political scientific analyses. It has always been an active component of notions concerning national identity, self-identification . . ., guilt, responsibility, [and] . . . settling accounts with the past" (1:7). It is one of the set's many merits (as of the four-year research project that produced it—"Pogroms: Collective Violence against Jews in the Polish Lands during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries and its Influence upon Polish-Jewish Relations," directed by Artur Markowski at the Institute of History at Warsaw University, with assistance from Sławomir Buryła and August Grabski) that it offers extended insight into the complex interplay between scholarly research and the public discussions that often surround it.

The first volume, entitled "Literature and Art," presents eighteen articles that, taken together, demonstrate clearly how the periodic attacks upon Jews that punctuated the history of Poland between 1881 and 1946 cut to the heart of how Poles and Jews have understood not only the relations between them but the collective character of their own and the other group. That those understandings have exerted a heavy, at times even a decisive influence upon scholarly output is manifest in the twenty articles of volume 3, entitled "Historiography, Politics, Communal Reception (to 1939)." Read together, these pieces show that over the years historians—whose work, according to Buryła, is "generally assumed to put the lie to . . . myths" (1:7)—have employed the term "pogrom" with nearly as much elasticity as have the most prominent purveyors of myth for purposes of mass mobilization, including churches, governments, political parties, the press, and social welfare organizations. That elasticity has prompted the editors of this volume (Kamil Kijek, Artur Markowski, and Konrad Zieliński) to conclude that "the category of 'pogrom' is not altogether useful as a comprehensive description of very different instances of collective anti-Jewish violence . . . [or as a vehicle] for understanding tragic attacks on Jews that have occurred in different historical contexts." To their mind, use of the word stands to tell more about the individuals and groups who use it than about the events for which it has served as a label: it "becomes a useful tool for talking about changes in the social world of the people who participate in these attacks, witness them, or are conscious of their occurrence" (3:12–13).

Yet only half of the four-volume set is concerned with meta-history or with *Begriffsgeschichte*. The other half, consisting of twenty one articles in volume 2—"Case Studies (to 1939)," edited by Kamil Kijek, Artur Markowski, and Konrad Zieliński—and twenty eight pieces in volume 4—"Holocaust and Postwar (1939–1946)," edited by August Grabski—investigates certain of those "very different instances of collective anti-Jewish violence" that, according to the editors of volumes 2 and 3, cannot be usefully aggregated for analytical purposes. Still, the set uses "pogrom" to designate all of those instances together, and most of the individual articles employ the word to refer to the specific events they describe and analyze. Does this terminological choice reveal anything substantial about the scholars who have made it?

In her article, "*Nihil novi*? The Historiography of the Pogroms of 1921–1939," Natalia Aleksiun answers affirmatively: descriptions of "the scale, character and genesis of collective violence directed against Jews often reflect not only the interests of researchers and their methodological capabilities, but also their position on the place of the Jewish population in the [Polish] community and its vision of the reborn state" (3:93). Surveying "Post-1989 Polish Historiography on Pogroms and Postwar Violence against Jews," Bożena Szaynok offers a similar assessment: "It is still emotions, and not the merits of the arguments, that drive, at least to some extent, the statements of some of the participants" in the debate over the situation of Jews in Poland after 1944 (4:526). Yet from the large data set constituted by the contributions to the four volumes, there appears to be a sizable group of scholars who make a conscious effort to eschew the affective potential of their research in favor of descriptive precision. Some present precision as a value in itself, others as essential for determining the conditions under which certain social groups are liable to feel the threat or the reality of violence. These scholars would no doubt accept Marcos Silber's assessment that the past three decades have witnessed a serious attempt "to overcome the climate of political bias that prevailed during the interwar period in discussions of the 1918–1920 pogroms" (3:85), and they would surely identify with that endeavor.

The texts of the articles offer no unequivocal basis for doubting that self-representation. They do, however, give pause to wonder, when viewed side-by-side, how the term "pogrom" fosters the precision the authors seek. Hardly any two authors appear to understand precisely the same thing by the term. Some follow (arbitrarily, it seems) a definition from

a standard reference book, but, as several pieces show, those definitions are disparate and often incommensurable with one another. Others construct their own definition, hoping that it will prove, in Daniel Grinberg's words, "satisfactory from both a logical and an empirical perspective" (3:15). Yet, as Grinberg himself notes correctly, "We can debate the universal typology of a pogrom, but no real, historical event of this type can be ascribed to its character as a model" (3:16). Indeed, none of the authors claims the possibility of inferring particular features of any single event from its classification as a "pogrom." Nevertheless, neither authors nor editors appear to believe it possible to discuss such events without the word. Why?

For some, a justification lies in the sources on which they base their descriptions. According to this argument, if those sources characterize an event as a "pogrom," historians must surely do so as well. But the volumes include descriptions and analyses of several events (in Warsaw in 1805, Gdańsk in 1819 and 1821, and Kalisz in 1878) that contemporaries did not term "pogroms," because they occurred before the term came into widespread usage. The decision to incorporate these cases also controverts another justification encountered in several articles: that common terminology is vital for meaningful comparisons. In the event, though, not only do the volumes tacitly declare that events without the label merit comparison with events that bear it, but one of the collection's most thought-provoking pieces, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir's essay, "The Pogrom as an Act of Social Control: Springfield 1908 – Poland 1945–1946," makes insightful use of an episode beyond both the linguistic and the geographical pales of the project to illuminate events that occurred within them. Although many of the authors appear to concur with the editors' doubts about the usefulness of the term, few offer even a passing effort to explain why they employ it nonetheless.

One article that addresses the question more than in passing, albeit still obliquely, is Anna Magdzińska's "Chojnice 1900: Anti-Jewish Incidents or a Pogrom?". The author insists that although "what happened in Chojnice in 1900 . . . were acts of violence against Jews on the largest scale . . ., they did not reach the level of a pogrom *stricto sensu*" (2:176)—at least by the definition in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, according to which a pogrom must include "destruction, looting of property, murder, and rape" (2:159). In her reconstruction, the events in Chojnice involved only destruction of property, placing them in a separate category from contemporaneous events in Russia, which were far more brutal. "Hence," she observes,

"describing them as a 'pogrom' could . . . depreciate the significance of events . . . in the Russian Empire and in . . . the Second Polish Republic" that claimed Jewish lives (2:177).

Leave aside that rape and murder occurred in but a few locations during the so-called Southern Storms of 1881–1882. More significant is that the author justifies the analytical separation of Chojnice 1900 from, say, Pereyaslav 1881 not by the greater usefulness of two distinct categories over a single one for pursuing a research question, but by the ability of separation to generate an evaluation the author regards morally more desirable.

Here, perhaps, lies the key to understanding the stubborn persistence of "pogrom" as an analytical concept. As Magdzińska properly notes, since 1881 the word has acquired a highly negative valence in the West. To label an event a "pogrom" is thus to condemn it, whereas to speak of a "riot," a "disturbance," or even an act of "communal violence" smacks of euphemism, even of apologetics. If so, then more than descriptive precision is at stake.

But what if precision is ill served by so elastic a concept? Sadly, the 2000 pages of sophisticated empirical studies and analysis in the four volumes do not engage this question. Space does not permit explication of how scholars might productively do so, but until they do, the editors' complaints about the term's lack of usefulness will remain unproductive.[2]

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[2] In an article of mine that several authors cited, I sketched a possible approach. See David Engel, "What's in a Pogrom? European Jews in the Age of Violence," in Jonathan Dekel-Chen et al. (eds.), *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History* (Bloomington, 2011), 19–37. Contrary to some authors' claims, I did *not* define a "pogrom" or its essential characteristics. See the explicit statement to the contrary on p. 24.