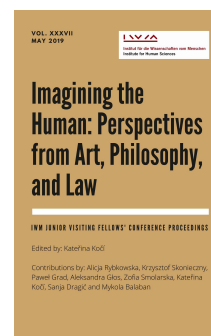


Two Weeks of Interconnected Violence in Lviv Prison Massacres, Anti-Jewish Pogroms and Murder of Polish Professors on June 22th – July 4th, 1941

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Introduction

The history of Lviv in wartime has been intensively studied, especially since the collapse of communism when the large Soviet archival collections became available to historians. Christopher Mick provides a first-class account of the city history in 1914-1945. The city is discussed also in the more general studies of the Soviet occupation of the Western Ukraine by Jan Gross, and of Nazi destruction of Galician Jews by Dieter Pohl.[1] John-Paul Himka describes and analyzes in details the story of the anti-Jewish pogroms of June 30, 1941, while Polish and Ukrainian scholars focus on the NKVD massacre of the (mostly but not exclusively) Ukrainian prisoners and the Nazi execution of Polish professors.[2] The Lviv war experience is also present in two influential syntheses of mass violence by Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands* and *Black Earth*.

In the present study, the micro-history perspective permits an analysis of the tragic history in the smallest details and it offers a unique opportunity to reveal the dynamics and logic of violence. Generally speaking, studies about the military history of this space and era focus selectively on one wave of violence ignoring the others. More specifically, quite often they take a “national turn”, like Ukrainian historians focus on murder of Ukrainian prisoners and Polish historians study the execution of Polish professors. In one way or another, they produce “closed national narratives”. These kinds of studies also often reveal a tendency to a monofactorial explanation of the mass violence that took place in Lviv in the summer of 1941. Instead of treating these events separately, I see (and study) them as entangled waves of the same process, which is the mass violence that was triggered by the war but encompassed by the civilian population.

Incidents in Lviv during the First two Weeks of the German-Soviet War

A short but very intensive period of mass violence occurred in the city of Lviv (Lwów/Lemberg) during the first two weeks of the Nazi-Soviet war from June 22 to July 4, 1941. It started with mass executions of prisoners by the NKVD, withdrawal of Soviet troops from the city, followed by the large-scale anti-Jewish pogroms, and ended up with the execution of Polish professors on July 4, 1941.

These events were followed by further waves of violence, the largest of which were the extermination of the Jewish population and Soviet prisoners of war under the Nazis and a mass expulsion of Poles under Soviets. There were also previous examples of mass violence in the city, like the large anti-Jewish pogrom executed by the Polish army in November 1918, and the mass arrests and deportations during the Soviet occupation of the city in 1939-1941. Still, the events of June 21-July 4, 1941 triggered processes that turned Lviv into (using Christian Gerlach's term) an 'extremely violent society' and led to the final destruction of the polyethnic (Polish-Jewish-Ukrainian) and multicultural social fabric of the city.

On June 22nd, 1941, soon after the first bombs exploded in the city center of Lviv, the evacuation of the population began. Around 6:00pm, the NKVD started to shoot prisoners. On June 23, Vsevolod Merkulov, the head of the People's Commissariat for the State Security, issued order number 2445/M for the urgent consideration of all prisoners in jails and distribution of those subjected to deportation to the concentration camps in the Gulag, and the execution of all those who were left.[3] However, the posthaste advance of the Wehrmacht in Lviv region did not leave a chance for the NKVD officials to evacuate the prisoners. The shootings took place in three Lviv prisons located in the city center that accommodated, at that time, mostly Ukrainians accused under article 54 of the USSR Criminal Code – counter-revolutionary activities – authorized by Lviv region prosecutor Kharitonov. In the meantime, Ukrainian nationalists started fighting with Soviet troops considering it to be a part of the national anti-Bolshevik uprising. During the night of June 24, the fighters of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists tried to take control over Lviv's prisons and other important points, using the panic of Soviet administration. After liquidation of the rebellion by using tanks of General Vlasov's Red Army 4th Mechanized Corps, near 4000 citizens – mostly Ukrainians – were imprisoned. [4]

The next day, curfew order and mobilization were introduced with the parallel evacuation of the administration and important institutions. On June 26, important figures that held moderate positions in the Lviv interethnic political environment were killed by the Soviet Secret Police. Among those shot was a Polish general Julian Kolmer, a Zionist and senator of the Second Polish Republic Michał Ringel, and a member of the Polish Parliament from the Ukrainian National Democratic Alliance Myhailo Strutynskyj. Historian Bogdan Musial estimates the amount of executed prisoners in Lviv jails as about four thousand.[5]

During the night of June 28th, the Red Army left the city. The next evening, the local population set the shops and Jewish-owned buildings on Sykstuska Street near the Opera Theatre on fire. Around 6 pm, the Lonskoho Prison was opened, shops set on fire and the first cases of beating and killing of the Jewish residents took place.

On the 30th of June around 4 am, the 'Nachtigall' Battalion – formed from among the Ukrainian nationalists – took St. George's hill, the City Hall, and other key places. However, in a couple of hours, all these places were occupied by the Wehrmacht forces. Early in the morning, the leaders of the Organization of the Ukrainian Nationalists under Stepan Bandera – Jaroslav Stetsko, Lev Rebet, and Jaroslav Starukh – arrived in the city. Later in the evening was proclaimed the Declaration of Ukrainian Independence. In collaboration with the German military authority, the Ukrainian nationalists formed a city police. Massive anti-Jewish pogroms and killings took place in the newly opened NKVD prisons as well as in surrounding streets and neighbourhoods.

At 5:00 am, July 1, Einsatzgruppe (EG) B – a special mobile unit formed from SS and Gestapo personnel – marshalled its troops in the city center and started arresting and murdering Jews. According to estimates by Holocaust researchers, during the first two days of July, 4000 Jews were killed and executed.

On the 2nd of July, another special police group under the command of Brigadenführer SS Karl Eberhard Schöngarth came from Krakow. During the next night of July (the 3rd to 4th), 27 Lviv professors and members of their families – mostly Poles – were arrested and shot near the Polytechnic University campus.

Interpretation of the Incidents & Some Concluding Remarks

The density of these violent events in such a short period as well as their small geographic scale limited to the city center of Lviv can be perceived as unprecedented. The spatial understanding of these events is especially important. According to various analyses, memories and witnesses' accounts reveal very often only partial stories mostly because of their focus on a given part of the city.

A comprehensive research of events allows us to distinguish the following basic features of the interconnectedness of the waves of mass violence in Lviv. Among them are space, time and multifactoriality that underpin the violent events in the city. Space is a specific element since violence occurred in a relatively small area in the central part of the city. Time indicates that violence occurred in the short interval between the retreat of the Soviet army from Lviv and capturing the city by the Wehrmacht. Multifactorial causes of each of the three acts of mass violence can be clearly traced as distinguishing feature of the three mass violence waves.

The first wave – the so-called prison massacre – occurred from the 24th till the 27th of June. On three occasions, prison guards started to panic and tried to escape the city. Meanwhile, prisoners made an attempt to escape from Brygitykya prison. At the same time, the NKVD deputy chief of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic issued an order to kill just political prisoners, the presumed 5th column in the war with the Nazis.

During the second wave – the wave of the Jewish pogroms and killings – the local citizens widely accepted the idea of Jewish Bolshevism. Parts of the anti-Soviet Ukrainian population and the newly-formed police were ready to expel the Jews from their homes in the Lviv Jewish neighborhoods. The mass violence became already a norm in the city since the previous days; Jews were forced to carry out bodies of those killed in the prisons to publicly demonstrate their connections with the Soviet violence.

The third wave of violence which involved the murder of Polish professors was carried out as a plan to demolish Polish elites in the General Government. Criminal conspiracy was undertaken by the SD officers (among whom was Pieter Menten) with an aim to seize valuable property and art objects.

Common reasons for each wave of violence show the interconnection of massive violence in Lviv on June 22 – July 4, 1941. We define three main common reasons:

First, it was the inability of the city community to oppose the violence caused by internal and external factors due to the absence of solidarity among the three national communities. This was enhanced by the isolation of the national communities during the interwar period. The final separation of communities and the domination of hostility appear during the two years of Soviet rule. The additional factor was the physical destruction, imprisonment, and discreditation of the city community leaders. Among this kind of community leaders were traditionally counted the centrist press, lawyers, and judges.

Second, the war and its development in Lviv before capture by the Wehrmacht created an atmosphere of extreme tension in the urban space demonstrating examples of violence as quick problem solvers. It is a good example of Christian Gerlach's concept of an extremely violent society.

Third, researching the events that took place in Lviv during these two weeks, we can observe the advantage of external violence factors over internal. The overwhelming majority of acts of violence were inspired, organized or defused by the state and its structures – in the case of Lviv – the USSR and the Third Reich. The anti-Jewish pogrom was the 'only' situation when the local people were also ready to join the violence. The 'double occupation' of the two outer totalitarian states is their practice of ensuring domination over the territory and manipulation of national communities.
