KIŠINEV OR LINKUVA? RUMORS AND THREATS AGAINST JEWS IN LITHUANIA IN 1903

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Abstract:

*Over Easter 1903, a large-scale anti-Jewish riot in Kišinev, capital of the Russian governorate of Bessarabia, left dozens of Jews dead and hundreds injured, thus leading to a massive wave of emigration. A product of social discontent and anti-Semitic agitation, the riots of Kišinev became notoriously famous as the onset of a wave of pogroms of hitherto unprecedented brutality, which only subsided after the end of the Russian Revolution of 1905/06. This article analyzes the incidents by emphasizing cultural transfers between Kišinev and Lithuania, using the *histoire croisée* approach in order to provide for the different ethnic, social and political backgrounds and motivations of the actors. It also compares the disturbances in the rural north of Lithuania and in the Bessarabian industrial city of Kišinev in order to contextualize anti-Jewish violence in Lithuania on the larger scale of the Russian pogroms. When Lithuanian Jews were sometimes threatened to be killed “as in Kišinev” and at other times to be treated “as in Linkuva”, the significance of analyzing cultural transfer while keeping the regional context in mind becomes apparent.*

Rezumat:

*În perioada Paștelui anului 1903, o revoltă antievreiască la scară largă izbucnită la Chișinău, capitala guberniei rusești Basarabia, lăsa în urma sa zeci de evrei morți și sute de răniți, ceea ce a condus la un val masiv de emigrare. Rezultat al nemulțumirilor sociale și al agitațiilor antisemite, revolta de la Chișinău a devenit foarte cunoscută ca marcând debutul unui val de pogromuri, de o brutalitate fără precedent până în acel moment, care s-a diminuat abia după încheierea Revoluției Ruse din 1905-1906. Articolul de față abordează incidentele prin studierea transferurilor culturale dintre Chișinău și Lituania, utilizând metodele *histoire croisée* în scopul de a oferi explicații pentru diferențele ce apar în ceea ce privește mediile etnice, sociale și politice și motivațiile actorilor. Acesta compară, de asemenea, tulburările din partea rurală de nord a Lituaniei și din orașul industrial basarabean Chișinău, în scopul de a contextualiza violența anti-evreiască din Lituania la scara mai largă a pogromurilor rusești. Atunci când evreii lituanieni au fost, uneori, amenințați că vor fi uciși „ca la Chișinău” și în alte momente că vor tratați „ca în Linkuva”, semnificația analizei transferurilor culturale, păstrând în același timp în minte contextul regional, devine evidentă.*

Keywords: rumors, anti-Semitism, pogroms, mass-media, Linkuva, Kišinev

I. Introduction

Lithuania, which was part of the Russian Empire in 1903, was a region that was relatively free of anti-Jewish violence during the first (1881-82) and second (1903-06) pogrom waves that struck mainly the area that today is Ukraine. However, in 1900, a series of anti-Jewish disturbances broke out in the north of Kovno governorate, which forms roughly two thirds of what today is Lithuania. One centre of the disturbances was the volost of Linkuva. Three years later, in 1903, a pogrom of hitherto unknown dimensions broke out in Kišinev (today the capital of Moldova), creating an atmosphere of anxiety among Jews in the whole Russian Empire. Besides analyzing rumors and threats linked to these two cases of anti-Jewish violence, this short study aims to compare the disturbances in the rural north of Lithuania and in the Bessarabian industrial city of Kišinev in order to contextualize anti-Jewish violence in Lithuania on the larger scale of the Russian pogroms.

The functioning of rumors in history has attracted considerable research interest over the last years.¹ While for a long time rumors were treated merely as a linguistic phenomenon, scholars more recently emphasized rather the consequences of rumors than their linguistic characteristics. To quote media scientist Terry Ann Knopf: "The point is not simply that we are all so susceptible to rumor – that we are willing to listen to, formulate and circulate unverified reports – but that we are frequently willing to *act* on the basis of rumor."² It is necessary to take all levels of rumors into account and thus to interpret them both as speech acts and as objects of conceptual history.³ This approach ensures that the actor is taken as much into account as are the place and time of utterance. Another level that needs to be borne in mind is that the utterance of a rumor is not an act of an individual person. Rather, a rumor is coined by its dynamics of

¹ Cf. e.g. the studies of: Florian Altenhöner, *Kommunikation und Kontrolle. Gerüchte und städtische Öffentlichkeit in Berlin und London 1914/1918* (München: Oldenbourg, 2008); Lars-Broder Keil, Sven Felix Kellerhoff, *Gerüchte machen Geschichte. Folgenreiche Falschmeldungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2006); Jürgen Brokoff et al. (eds.), *Die Kommunikation der Gerüchte* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008); Nicholas Stargardt, "Rumors of Revenge in the Second World War", in *Alltag, Erfahrung, Eigensinn. Historisch-anthropologische Erkundungen*, eds. Belinda Davis et al. (Frankfurt am Main, 2008), 373-388.

² Terry Ann Knopf, *Rumors, Race, and Riots*, 2nd edition (New Brunswick, 2009), 8.

³ Iain Hampsher-Monk, "Speech Acts, Languages or Conceptual History?," in *History of Concepts. Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Iain Hampsher-Monk et al. (Amsterdam, 1998), 37-50, here 47-50.

spreading, proliferating and changing. The definition of rumors in this study will thus be that of “collective actions [...], which consist of cognitive and communicative elements and come into being, when people in undefined and problematic situations try to achieve a meaningful interpretation of this situation by pooling their intellectual capabilities”⁴.

Linguistically speaking, rumors are coined by their frequent use of metonymy. Metonyms are highly suitable for the conveyance of polysemy, or ambiguities. This will be illustrated by the use of two toponyms as threats against Jews in Lithuania in the year 1903: Linkuva and Kišinev. Both toponyms metonymically signified incidents of anti-Jewish violence. Linkuva did not signify the town of Linkuva, but rather the rural area surrounding it – the Linkuva volost (*Linkovskaja volost'*). Anti-Jewish violence had been perpetrated there three years earlier, albeit on a considerably lower scale. To threaten Jews, Russian officials or Lithuanian peasants did not need to say: “The Jews be subjected to a pogrom”, but rather, speaking metonymically, that “it will be as in Kišinev / Linkuva”.

II. Anti-Jewish disturbances in Linkuva in summer 1900

Starting on June 4th 1900, a wave of violence against Jews shattered the northern districts of Kovno governorate (Šavli and Ponevėž).⁵ The disturbances, which seem to have been triggered by a ritual murder allegation that later turned out to having been made up by a girl to explain her absence from work, started in the shtetl of Vaškai (by that time Konstantinovo), but soon the volost of Linkuva became the centre of the violence. Most of the disturbances took place on market days and Christian holidays, a trait typical for anti-Jewish riots in the Russian Empire in general.⁶ It was also on a Sunday, 18 June 1900, that peasants destroyed and looted Jewish property in the village of Girbutkiai, located in the volost of Linkuva. Police measures proved to be ineffective as shows the case of a lower policeman, the *desjackij*⁷ Jonas Spalgenas. Ordered into the volost in order to prevent anti-Jewish riots, Spalgenas himself took off his police badge and actively participated in the riots.⁸

⁴ Altenhöner, 6.

⁵ For details, see the study of: Vilma Žaltauskaitė, “Smurtas prieš žydus Šiaurės Lietuvoje 1900 metais. Įvykiai ir interpretacijos”, in *Kai ksenofobija virsta prievarta. Lietuvių ir žydų santykių dinamika XIX a. – XX a. pirmojoje pusėje*, eds. Vladas Sirutavičius, Darius Staliūnas (Vilnius, 2005), 79-98.

⁶ For a detailed description of the pogroms of 1881 see: John Klier, *Russians, Jews and the Pogroms of 1881-1882* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 26-43.

⁷ A policeman elected by peasant households.

⁸ Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas = LVIA, f. 446, ap. 7, b. 460, l. 4-5.

On 30 June, there was another case of anti-Jewish violence in Linkuva volost. In the village of Pamūšis, a crowd of ten to 20 peasants had armed themselves with sticks and, in the late evening, attacked a Jew, beating him and injuring him severely. Another Jew named Guber, together with his mother, rushed to help the injured person, but they were also heavily beaten. Guber died a couple of days later as a result of his injuries. Following the fight, the peasants smashed all the windows of a Jewish house and of the prayer house.⁹

Although the anti-Jewish disturbances in the Linkuva volost and in northern Lithuania bore a distinctly rural character and were not part of the pogrom waves that shattered the Russian Empire in 1881-82 and 1903-06, they were in many ways similar to the large-scale pogroms in the south-western part of the Empire. Rumors played a significant role. Peasants in all northern Lithuania said that the empress had issued an order to drive all Jews out of Russia. Moreover, rumors said that there would be an award of one rouble for each killed Jew and four roubles for each killed rabbi.¹⁰ Rumors about Jews ridiculing the Catholic faith were spread and updated regularly. In Linkuva, peasants claimed to have seen a Jewish child, which had tied a Christian crucifix to a thread and, swinging it around, excruciated it.¹¹ The police had difficulties in stopping rumors of impending pogroms on the basis of a purported official command to beat Jews. When on 6 July a peasant in Užventis (Šavli district) called upon the Christians of the town to kill Jews “the way they slaughter Christian children”, he was immediately arrested, and a unit of 150 Cossacks was sent to Linkuva volost to maintain order, as a Christian holiday and a market day were coming up.¹² Whereas only a few days earlier peasants in Vaškai had actively (but unsuccessfully) resisted soldiers who wanted to stop them from committing acts of violence against Jews¹³, the presence of Cossacks succeeded in stopping the violence in Linkuva volost.

That the disturbances in volost were neither geographically nor chronologically isolated exemplifies the case of Lithuanian-language leaflets which were found in the volost one year later in summer 1901. The leaflets, which were found attached to telegraph poles in the villages of Steigviliai, Gataučiai, Puodžiūniai, Diržiai and Pikčiūniai, all of which were situated along the road leading northwards from Linkuva, most likely were of revolutionary content. However, according to a Lithuanian newspaper,

⁹ Ibid., I. 9

¹⁰ *Ūkininkas* 10 (1900), S. 145.

¹¹ *Ūkininkas* 4 (1901), S. 27.

¹² LVIA, f. 378, pol., ap. 208 (1900), b. 24, l. 11.

¹³ Ibid., I. 10.

with a large number of illiterates among the rural population, interpretations of the leaflets were manifold: "One of the youngsters laughed, another one made fun of it, a third one was scared and left [...]. The older ones condemned the leaflets [...]. Many read them, but few understood them [...]. There was uproar among the women of Skaruliai and Diržiai [...]. 'My God!... Let us hope it is not the Day of Judgment' – some pious men said."¹⁴ According to the newspaper, many Lithuanians of the volost thought that the Jews had put up the leaflets in order to discredit the Lithuanians, thus taking revenge for the riots of summer 1900: "'The work of Jews' – a few dozen of men uttered, and there were some among them who, upon reading, understood that the Jews would have to be beaten."¹⁵ A peasant from Skaruliai claimed to have seen a man in black clothes putting up the leaflets. The newspaper added that the authorities had encouraged the peasants in their belief. A district policeman (*policejskij urjadnik*) of Linkuva had allegedly ordered men to guard the leaflets so that they would not be torn down. When peasants asked him why he did so, he answered: "Don't you boys want to beat the Jews again this year?"¹⁶

III. Kišinev and pogrom rumors in Lithuania in 1903

On 19 April 1903, anti-Jewish riots broke out in Kišinev, capital of the Russian governorate of Bessarabia, in the course of which Jewish men, women and children alike were chased through the streets and beaten. Dozens of Jews were killed. Rumors had developed that the government was responsible for the riots.¹⁷ As news of the pogrom spread throughout the Empire, panic arose among the Jews. Looking in retrospective, this fear was well-founded, as the Kišinev pogrom marked the beginning of what is often referred to as the second Russian pogrom wave, which had its high point during the Revolution of 1905 and came to an end only in 1906, when Tsarist authority was re-established throughout the Empire.

It was the high degree of violence against people which distinguished the Kišinev pogrom from the pogroms of the first wave. In 1881-82, violence had been directed mainly against symbolically-charged Jewish property, and cases of *pogromščiki* shot by policemen or soldiers were much more frequent than the number of death victims among the

¹⁴ *Varpas* 9 (1901), S. 102.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Shlomo Lambroza, "The pogroms of 1903-1906", in *Pogroms. Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, eds. John D. Klier, Shlomo Lambroza (New York et al., 1992), 195-247, here 200.

Jews.¹⁸ This was different in Kišinev, where the riots took on the shape of a massacre, thus coining the concept of the “pogrom” much more than any earlier ones. According to Shlomo Lambroza, the pogrom was “caused by three converging factors: instigation by a local anti-Semitic newspaper, *Bessarabec*; irresponsibility, dereliction and mismanagement by local officials (especially by the governor and the chief of police); deep-seated anti-Semitic feelings among the non-Jewish population of Kishinev.”¹⁹ However, the occasion used by the anti-Semitic newspaper *Bessarabec* to fuel the pogrom atmosphere was a traditional one. The death of a young boy shortly before Passover led to a ritual-murder allegation. On Easter Sunday, which at the same time was the last day of Passover, the pogrom broke out, with at first Jewish homes and shops being target by the rioters. After Jewish self-defense started protecting property by force, the violence turned lethal, and after two days, 47 Jews were dead, 424 injured and 700 houses burnt. Cases of rape, torture and mutilation were reported.²⁰

Owing to the events of 1900 and the unusually violent course of events in Kišinev, the authorities in Lithuania were in a state of alarm.²¹ At the beginning of May, a leaflet, signed by the “Social Democratic Committee of Kovno” appeared in Lithuania, which blamed the government for the outbreak of a pogrom of hitherto unseen brutality in Kišinev.²² While this allegation has been proven to be false, the government can at least be blamed for letting such rumors spread. The administration itself had launched several different versions of the pogrom, trivialized it and put the blame on the Jews.²³ The governor of Kovno, Emmanuil Aleksandrovič Vataci, was concerned about the high degree of sympathies the Lithuanian Jews exhibited towards the victims of Kišinev in form of a

¹⁸ Klier, 41 ff.

¹⁹ Lambroza, 196.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 200.

²¹ Dmitrii Elyashevich has shown that the censors were particularly eager to get hold of leaflets which assumed an active involvement of the government in the pogroms. Dmitrii Elyashevich, “A Note on the Jewish Press and Censorship during the First Russian Revolution”, in *The Revolution of 1905 and Russia's Jews*, eds. Stefani Hoffmann, Ezra Mendelsohn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 49-54, here 51.

²² LVIA, f. 378, Političeskij otdel, ap. 1903, b. 52, l. 11. This claim has been refuted. The role of the police, however, was ambiguous. Some policemen tried to protect Jews, others stood by and watched, others sided with the pogromists. It is doubtful, whether the police would have been able to stop the pogrom at all, as 350 policemen faced a mob of 1.500 to 2.000 people and, moreover, had been ordered by the governor of Bessarabia to mainly protect the factories and warehouses. Additionally, the police force lacked clear orders from the chief of the police on how to cope with the pogromists. Lambroza, 201 and 205.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 206. Edward H. Judge, *Easter in Kishinev. Anatomy of a Pogrom* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1992), 76 ff.

period of mourning. Particularly the fact that it was unclear, how long this period would last, aroused Vataci's suspicions.²⁴ The Lithuanian Jews collected considerable sums of money to help their suffering brethren, organized mourning prayers and displayed increasing hostility towards the Russian government, which they blamed for the outbreak of lethal violence in Bessarabia. Particularly the government's downplaying of the events as "simple street unrest linked with manifestations of religious intolerance" served to shape a "current mood among Jews that is not unlike particular moods of oppositional coloring"²⁵, Vataci reported to the governor general in Vil'na, Petr Svjatopolk-Mirskij, on 6 May 1903.²⁶

Soon Vataci himself witnessed that the mood among Lithuanians in the Kovno governorate was getting ever tenser. On 10 May, an incident occurred on the pontoon bridge which linked the old town of Kaunas with the town of Aleksotas across the river Nemunas. The bridge keeper had told Jews, who were taking a stroll across the bridge, not to lean against the railing of the bridge. An argument sprang up, which "turned into a fight"²⁷. Sailors rushed to the aid of the bridge keeper and the Jews, the number of whom had increased to around 500 people, began, according to the police report, to throw stones at the Christians. Ultimately, the rural sergeant (*pristav*) managed to disperse the crowd without anyone injured. Vataci ordered the set-up of a police post at the bridge.

As in 1900, the governor put special emphasis on the observation of rumors – this time, however, mainly of rumors that developed among Jews. According to investigations, there was a rumor among the Jews of Kaunas that pogroms would take place in Lithuania in the month of May. Vataci thus ordered the police of the Kovno governorate to prevent any tensions or outbreaks of violence between Jews and Christians.²⁸ In this context, the *pristav* of Vilnius reported of a high display of determination among Jews to strike back in the case of anti-Jewish violence – even beyond their own shtetls. On 25 May, the *pristav* of Vilnius had encountered a crowd of more than 500 Jews who claimed that they intended to go to close-by Vilejka (today in Belarus) in order to help their brethren, as there had been rumors

²⁴ LVIA, f. 378, Političeskij otdel, ap. 1903, b. 52, l. 1; l. 9.

²⁵ Ibid., l. 2.

²⁶ Vataci and Svjatopolk-Mirskii were close friends. Even during Svjatopolk-Mirskii's term in office as minister of interior affairs, Vataci, who at that time was leading the ministry's department of general affairs, remained his closest confidant. V. A. Gurko, *Features and Figures of the Past* (Palo Alto, 1939), 326.

²⁷ LVIA, f. 378, Političeskij otdel, ap. 1903, b. 52, l. 8.

²⁸ Ibid., l. 1.

of impending anti-Jewish riots. The *pristav* arrested the ringleaders and dispersed the crowd with the aid of mounted policemen.²⁹

Rumors about impending anti-Jewish riots once again emerged mainly in the north of Kovno governorate. Vataci attributed such rumors among Jews to the “mistrustful element”³⁰ that was inherent in the reactions of the Jews towards any news from and about Kišinev. After rumors of impending anti-Jewish riots on the market days on 3 and 4 May emerged among Jews in Žagarė, the police chief (*ispravnik*) of Šavli district was ordered with his policemen into the shtetl to investigate the degree of truth in the rumors and to suppress any unrest. The *ispravnik* reported that he had not noticed any indication of tensions between the two groups: „There is a peaceful mood among Christians towards the Jews. We may therefore assume that the Jews of Žagarė, alert because of the general fear, have conceived these threats on the part of the Christians themselves.”³¹ On the 3 May, the *ispravnik* of Rossieny district noticed a chalk inscription in Lithuanian on a Jewish house in the shtetl of Kaltinėnai, which said: “After a month, there will not be a single Jew here anymore, just as they have been slaughtered by the Orthodox.”³² In this case, the *ispravnik* again reported that he had not been able to detect any hostilities among the Christian population and no signs of anti-Jewish propaganda in the environs.

Sources indicate that there were more rumors about impending anti-Jewish riots. In Švėkšna (Rossieny district), a “pogrom atmosphere” had emerged, which could only be ended by the whole police force of the *volost'* and the help of a military unit.³³ In Šėta (Vil'komir district), rumors were spread „that on 29 June, a pogrom will break out”³⁴. Only the rabbi, who wrote a plea to the governor, managed to prevent the outbreak of riots at the last moment.

The rumors in Šėta and the plea to governor Vataci coincide exactly with a small-scale outbreak of violence in the district town of Šiauliai (district Šavli), and it is highly probable that Lithuanian peasants and Jews alike had observed the incident in Šiauliai closely. On the evening of the 22 June, three drunken Lithuanians started a fight in the shop of a Jewish cobbler. In the course of the fight, the two Jewish apprentices injured one of the attackers with a knife. The Lithuanians ran into the streets, screaming

²⁹ Ibid., I. 3.

³⁰ Ibid., I. 7.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Berl Kagan, *Yidishe Shtet, Shtetlekh und Dorfishes Yishuvim in Lite* (New York, 1990), S. 616.

³⁴ Ibid., S. 603 f.

"The Jews are slaughtering the Christians!"³⁵, thereby alluding to the myth of ritual murder, which was commonplace in Lithuania.³⁶ According to the *ispravnik*, a "large crowd of drunken Christians rushed to the site of the scene", screaming: "We must kill the Jews!" The apprentices on their part called Jewish inhabitants for help. "The agitation of the Christian crowd against the Jews was mounting and was on the verge of breaking out into a fight"³⁷, the *ispravnik* reported. Soon, his assistant arrived, isolated the ringleaders and managed to disperse the crowd. This, however, could not prevent rumors from spreading. The Christian population "was in a worrying state"³⁸. The *ispravnik* thus informed the governor in order to announce the potential demand for military troops. The three Lithuanians remained exempt from punishment; the Jewish apprentices, however, were arrested as a result of the knife injury.

Rumors about the incident spread in the surrounding areas and were quickly updated and sensationalized. Vataci reported to Svjatopolk-Mirskij that peasants in the villages surrounding the district town were saying that the Jews of Šiauliai had killed Christians, and revenge would be taken in return on the approaching Sunday, 29 June. On 27 June, a Jewish deputation called on the governor, asking him to protect the Jewish community of Šiauliai of "serious anti-Jewish unrest". Vataci came to the conclusion that "under these circumstances, a large crowd of peasants visiting the church mass on 29 June could trigger open unrest". He thus ordered a group of one hundred Cossacks into Šiauliai for Sunday morning. Moreover, he ordered a prohibition for the sale of alcohol for two days, in order to "prevent a flooding of the town with drunkards [...], as it happens so often on church holidays". Additionally, he got into contact with the bishop of Žemaitija, Mečislovas Paliulionis, asking him to encourage the priests to prevent the Christians from any violent acts against Jews and to warn them that "in the case of any signs of such violence, these will be met with military force".³⁹ It seems that the strong military presence managed to prevent riots against Jews. The rumors, however, did not cease immediately. In the surrounding areas, the Lithuanian, who had received only minor injuries, was considered to be dead. Ultimately, the *ispravnik* arrested peasants who spread such rumors. Both Jews were released from custody after they agreed to pay

³⁵ LVIA, f. 378, Političeskij otdel, ap. 1903, b. 32, l. 54.

³⁶ Vladas Sirutavičius, „Kaip prietara tampa prievarta. Kaltinimai žydams vartojant krikščionių kraują. Kelių atvejų Lietuvoje analizė“, in Sirutavičius, Staliūnas, 2005, 99-116.

³⁷ LVIA, f. 378, Političeskij otdel, ap. 1903, b. 32, l. 54.

³⁸ Ibid., l. 55.

³⁹ Ibid., l. 61.

compensation for the inflicted injury. Vataci kept the Cossacks in Šiauliai until 14 July, a market-fair day, and then withdrew them.⁴⁰

Although the measures of the local police officials and of the governor – a strong military presence and arrests in the case of the spreading of rumors – were basically the same as they had been in summer 1900, the whole situation differed significantly. On the one hand, the shock of Kišinev led to a wave of solidarity among Lithuanian Jews, who were increasingly inclined to counter anti-Jewish riots by force – even beyond the borders of their own shtetl. On the other hand, Lithuanian Jews in 1903 were particularly sensitive towards anti-Jewish rumors and reported them immediately to the authorities. The officials seem to have taken such reports seriously. In cases when they assessed rumors to be unfounded or at least “harmless”, riots did in fact not occur. In Šiauliai, the quick and determined intervention of governor Vataci helped prevent riots. Moreover, in 1903 there were no cases of peasants’ disobedience towards policemen or soldiers as was the case in 1900, when peasants resisted soldiers and lower police officials sided with the angry crowd.

IV. Kišinev or Linkuva? Threats, rumors and their meanings

Rumors underwent considerable dynamics under the impression of the Kišinev pogrom. This becomes evident in the case of an auction that took place in Baravykiai, a village close to the district town Ukmergė (Vil’komir district). The sale by auction of landed property, which was executed on 2 May 1903 by the *pristav*, was attended by approximately 20 Jews from Ukmergė. The *pristav* believed he had noticed a tacit agreement among the Jews and declared this to be illegal. This led to an argument, in the course of which the *pristav* allegedly said: “You are making a fuss as you did in Kišinev.” According to the police report, the outraged Jews answered: “So you want to beat us the way they beat our brethren in Kišinev!” Rumors about this incident spread to Ukmergė, where the *pristav* now was supposed to have said: “You need to be treated the same way as the Jews in Kišinev.”⁴¹

On 8 June, in the shtetl Troškūnai (Vil’komir district), approximately 80 kilometers from Linkuva, two peasants spread rumors according to which Jews were to be killed on 13 June, the day of the parish festival. In this case, no reference to Kišinev was made, but to the riots of 1900 in Northern Lithuania. A peasant said: “It will be as it was in Linkuva.” Anonymous letters with threats against Jews turned up, and on

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ LVIA, f. 378, Političeskij otdel, ap. 1903, b. 52, l. 7.

11 June, a peasant threatened a Jewish saleswoman, from whom he had borrowed money: "Why return the money to you, it would be all the same, on 13 June you will all be slaughtered." The threat of a repetition of the anti-Jewish disturbances of 1900 seemed to have worried the Jewish community to no small extent, and they reported these incidents to a *policejskij urjadnik*, who in turn reported – although he himself had also received a letter announcing riots against Jews – that he had not noticed "any rumors or agitation" among the population and commended the priest who had called on the Lithuanian village elders to prevent the peasants from inflicting violence upon the Jews.⁴²

However, the Russian administration took rumors and threats very seriously, and stopping them from proliferating was considered to be the most effective measure to prevent an outbreak of anti-Jewish riots. The language and concepts used by the Russian administration shows that in general it was inclined to prevent pogroms such as those in Kišinev from happening. The riots against Jews in Linkuva volost in summer 1900 were referred to as "anti-Jewish disturbances" (*antievrejskie besporjadki*). In orders, police officials were told to prevent "violence" (*nasilie*); by preventing rumors from spreading, officials tried to mitigate "agitation" (*vozbuzhdenie*) among the peasantry. In 1903, despite the absence of large-scale riots in Lithuania, the experiences of Kišinev introduced the term *pogrom* into correspondences between officials in Lithuania, and thus marked the phenomenon that was to be prevented at all costs. Highly counterproductive, on the other hand, were the mild verdicts for the pogrom perpetrators in Kišinev, which served as an encouragement and as a "license to kill"⁴³ for pogrom perpetrators during the Revolution of 1905/06. Verdicts on pogrom perpetrators were closely observed and reported on by Lithuanian newspapers.⁴⁴

Differences between the pogrom in Kišinev and the disturbances in Linkuva volost are vast and numerous. Firstly, in 1903, Kišinev was a large city of around 100,000 inhabitants, nearly half of which were Jewish. Moreover, the Bessarabian capital had become an industrial centre within merely two decades, a development that had contributed to a massive transformation and population growth, and, as a result, to the development

⁴² Ibid., I. 8.

⁴³ Helmut Walser Smith, „From Play to Act. Anti-Jewish Violence in German and European History during the Long Nineteenth Century“, in id. *The Continuities of German History. Nation, Religion, and Race across the Long Nineteenth Century* (New York, 2008), 115-166, here 154.

⁴⁴ For the case of the Bialystok pogrom (1906) see: *Viltis* No. 66, 12 March 1908, p. 4; for the case of the Simferopol pogrom (1905) see: *Viltis* No. 131, 22 August 1908, p. 4.

of an urban proletariat and considerable social problems.⁴⁵ Linkuva volost, on the other hand, was a rural area, with an administrative centre, the shtetl Linkuva, that had merely 2,000 inhabitants at the turn of the century (more than 60% of which were Jews)⁴⁶ and a couple of small villages surrounding it. In this sense, Linkuva volost may serve as a miniature representation of Lithuania. The only urban centers in Lithuania, Kaunas and Vilnius, were trade cities without any major industries and did not witness any large-scale pogroms before World War I. Anti-Jewish violence in Lithuania thus much more resembled the riots in the villages of the South East of the Russian Empire, that broke out in 1881-82 in wave forms around the pogrom-ridden urban centers, with violence mainly directed against shops and taverns.⁴⁷ Due to its proximity to the seaport of Riga, northern Lithuania, where Linkuva was located, was an economically comparatively advanced region, including the negative effects of the development of a large group of agricultural workers and poor, landless peasants, but the lack of newspapers⁴⁸ and of political organizations made large-scale anti-Semitic agitation and the spreading of anti-Semitic rumors through mass media⁴⁹ such as the Kišinev newspaper *Bessarabec*, virtually impossible.

Taking into account “that rumors construct a communicative space of those things possible, in which wishes, fears and expectations unfold”⁵⁰, the phrase that “it will be as it was in Linkuva”, expressing no rational wishes but aiming only at the unfolding of fear on the part of the Jews, constituted a threat. The reason why mentioning the Linkuva disturbances, despite their much smaller scale of violence when compared to the Kišinev pogrom, which seems to have been a very effective threat, is rooted in the different reactions of the Jews towards violence when comparing 1900 to 1903. The tragedy of Kišinev, according to Albert S. Lindemann, represented “the height of paradox” as “a pogrom [...] marking a rise in Jewish combativeness”⁵¹. In Kišinev, Jewish inhabitants had themselves

⁴⁵ Albert S. Lindemann, *Esau's Tears. Modern Anti-Semitism and the Rise of the Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 291 f.

⁴⁶ Ja. M. Šul'man, *Goroda i ljudi evrejskoj diasporoj v Vostočnoj Evrope do načala XX veka. Litva. Panevežis, Rassejnjaj, Ukmerge, Švenčjonis, Šjauljaj i Žagare* (Moscow: Paralleli, 2005), 18.

⁴⁷ Klier, 25.

⁴⁸ The print of Lithuanian-language newspapers in Latin letters was prohibited until 1904.

⁴⁹ Florian Altenhöner emphasizes the significance of mass media in creating and spreading rumors: “Mass media stimulate rumors [...]. Mass media motivate rumors: to a large part, rumors refer to conditions and phenomena which the recipient knows exclusively through mass media.” Altenhöner, 8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 316.

⁵¹ Lindemann, 291.

resorted to physical force to defend their houses and lives. This served to escalate the situation; however, on the other hand, it clearly signified the determination of the Jews to actively defend themselves.⁵² In Linkuva volost in summer 1900, the Jews had been taken by surprise by the riots and had shown very little signs of self-defense.⁵³ For the Lithuanian Jews, because of its sheer brutality and its geographical distance, the Kišinev pogrom on the one hand posed a requisite to actively defend themselves, and on the other, must have seemed considerably more abstract than the rural disturbances around Linkuva only three years earlier – a place with comparable characteristics as Kišinev simply did not exist in Lithuania.

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⁵² Lambroza, 209.

⁵³ In Lithuania, the first attempts at organised self-defence took place during the Revolution of 1905-06, particularly in the run-up to the elections of the Second Duma. Cf. Klaus Richter, „Bereitet euch zum Selbstschutz vor“. Die Reaktion der Litwaken auf Gewalt und rechtliche Diskriminierung in den litauischen Gouvernements (1881-1914), in *Einspruch und Abwehr. Die Reaktion des europäischen Judentums auf die Entstehung des Antisemitismus (1879-1914)*, ed. Ulrich Wyrwa (Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verlag, 2010), 313-336, here 322 f.

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