The Moment between Occupation and Freedom: Forms of Collective Violence at the End of World War II in the Czech Lands

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SUMMARY

The paper focuses on the violent interactions that occurred in the Czech lands at the end of World War II. By analyzing the structure, forms and causes of acts of collective violence, the author attempts to answer to what extent they were the result of either spontaneous popular anger or targeted state policies. This study is a response to the conventional thesis of Czech historiography about the so-called "wild expulsions," which has misleadingly stated that, from the immediate post-war days until long into the summer of 1945, spontaneous acts of violence were persisting, for which, however, the Czechoslovak state did not bear responsibility. Unlike most previous studies, therefore, it focuses not only on the period following the liberation of Czechoslovakia, but also in more detail on the links between the waning Nazi terror, the final war operations and the outrageous post-war retaliation. Based on concrete cases of the anti-Nazi uprising and post-war Czech cleansing from Germans, the author uncovers specific actors, their mutual interactions in groups and conditions that allowed the escalation of mass atrocities. He proves that spontaneous acts of violence were associated with transitional rituals and brutalization and occurred only for a limited time of a few post-war days. Thus, at the end of the war, collective violence remained an integral part of state policy in both Nazi and Czechoslovakian rule. These two regimes relied heavily on violence specialists to exercise their power and limited the space for manifestations of spontaneous popular anger. The author stresses that the main factor influencing the dynamics of violence were two simultaneous but uneven processes: the Nazi system of government was collapsing, while the Czechoslovak state power was being restored.

KEYWORDS: violence, World War II, Czechoslovakia, Prague, expulsion of Germans

The forced expulsion of Germans from the Czech lands after World War II, despite its initial controversy, or perhaps because of it, has since the 1990s become one of the best explored topics of the contemporary Czech history. In a conversation between Czech and German historiography, an interpretation has been established that separated "wild expulsions" from an "organized phase of forced resettlement." The use of the adjective "wild" or "spontaneous" for the whole period from spring to summer 1945 gave the false impression that spontaneous acts of violence persisted throughout that time.[1] The idea of an unorganized phase of post-war violence in the form of unrestrained retribution and wild displacements caused by long-lasting chaos was then challenged by Tomáš Staněk and Adrian Portmann in their studies of "organized wild expulsions."[2] By studying the negotiations at the highest state level and the resulting decisions, they proved already more than 15 years ago that the representatives of the Czechoslovak government consciously used the "wild expulsions" as a tool of targeted ethnic cleansing even before the decision at the Potsdam Conference on the orderly removal of the German population was made on 2 August 1945. Although the debate has been quite silent since, a number of questions remained unanswered. In particular, how did the central decisions influence the form of ethnic cleansing and how did they manifest in specific cases?

Historiography has indeed accepted the relativization of the expulsion's spontaneity, but only as a simple fact, without further exploring the social practice of collective violence.[3] If the expulsion continues to receive attention in contemporary research, it is, for example, as the origin of trauma in national memory cultures.[4] In either Czech or international historiography, there has been no analysis done of the context of individual cases at the level of social practice. To render the social practice, I find it crucial to explain the relations between the decisions of state policy representatives, their executors and specific cases. I asked a similar question while working on my dissertation,

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1 Detlef Brandes: Der Weg zur Vertreibung 1938–1945: Pläne und Entscheidungen zum "Transfer" der Deutschen aus der Tschechoslowakei und aus Polen, München 2001, pp. 411–419.

2 Adrian von Arburg, Tomáš Staněk: Organizované divoké odsuny? Úloha ústředních orgánů při provádění "evakuace" německého obyvatelstva (květen až září 1945) [Organized Wild Expulsions? The Role of Central Authorities in the "Evacuation" of the German Population (from May to September 1945)], parts I–III, in: Soudobé dějiny (2005), 3/4, pp. 465–533; ibidem (2006), 1/2, pp. 13–49; ibidem (2006), 3/4, pp. 321–376.

3 Ray M. Douglas: Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War, New Haven 2012.

4 Václav Smyčka: Das Gedächtnis der Vertreibung: Interkulturelle Perspektiven auf deutsche und tschechische Gegenwartsliteratur und Erinnerungskulturen, Bielefeld 2019.

which I published in a revised Czech book form in 2019.[5] Although no definitive answer can be given, this article is my attempt to answer in more detail to what extent the acts of violence were the result of either spontaneous popular anger or targeted state policies.[6] Nevertheless, I am aware that the dynamics of violence are largely dependent on specific actors and situational conditions. Therefore, unlike most previous studies, I am focusing on analyzing the structure, causes and, at the same time, typifying the forms of acts of collective violence; and not only in the period following the liberation of Czechoslovakia as usual, but as part and parcel of a more broadly conceived end of the war. In this longer-term historical process, the events of the last months before the collapse of the Nazi rule were closely linked to the first weeks and months of the restoration of Czechoslovak statehood. So, the core of the whole interpretation is the connection between the waning Nazi terror, the final war operations and the burgeoning post-war retribution.

In addition to the decisions of central institutions and the orders of top state officials, which were thoroughly investigated in earlier research, I am analyzing the specific situational forces impacting the decisions of actual executors of violence, drawing attention back to the limits and patterns of their behavior in the social practice of violence. My aim is to capture the structure of acts of collective violence in the Czech lands as a specific space of experience by elaborating a detailed topography, depicting the transformations of violent interactions in space and time. By analyzing specific cases, I attempt to identify the main groups of actors, the decision-making lines and place-specific factors. By uncovering the mechanisms, conditions and decision-makers, I link concrete acts of collective violence with intentional state policy, thus revealing a completely new context between the violence at the end of the war and the post-war expulsion. The results of this analysis of collective violence in the Czech lands creates a hitherto missing basis for comparison with the developments at the end of World War II in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe and possibly also in other parts of Europe.

Typology and Topography of Collective Violence

The research model is based on the concept of collective violence by American historian and sociologist Charles Tilly, who defines an act of collective

5 This article is partly based on materials collected during the archival research for my doctoral study. I also present here general findings published earlier in JAROMÍR MRŇKA: Limity lidskosti: Politika a sociální praxe kolektivního násilí v českých zemích 1944–1946 [Limits of Humanity: Politics and Social Practice of Collective Violence in the Czech Lands 1944–1946], Praha 2019.

6 The paper was funded by Charles University Centre of Excellence project no. UNCE/HUM/009, Centre for the Transdisciplinary Research of Violence, Trauma and Justice, at the Institute of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic.

violence as an action in which at least two persons coordinate and directly physically harm other persons or things (including forced detention or restriction of movement).[7] I also adopt Tilly's typology, based on the ratio between the significance of physical damage and the degree of coordination of the actors. Based on this, I am creating a macro-social topography of collective violence that captures the transformation of violent acts in time and space. For a more detailed analysis of the dynamics of specific violent situations, I use Randall Collins' micro-social approaches for face-to-face combat in public space and Philip Zimbardo's findings for cases of specialized spaces.[8] In addition to the social practice of direct violence in the above sense, I also examine structural violence as an expression of state policy restricting the rights or worsening living conditions of certain social groups, which may result in physical hardship or death.[9] This analytical dimension distinguishes my work from previous research. Although I use similar sources to my predecessors, such as situation reports, investigative reports, and eyewitness testimonies, I study them to capture and explain crucial factors for escalation of violence in specific situations.[10]

I analyze macro-social dynamics of collective violence in the Czech lands in the given period by means of a topography of collective violence, which I have compiled by quantitative typological evaluation of violent acts from three data sets based on the work of Tomáš Staněk and Jiří Padevět. Padevět's books are historical guides, the main purpose of which is to document victims and memory sites of violence. Although his work contains a number of methodological errors and is rather popularizing, Padevět has gathered an extensive overview of violent acts. On the other hand, Staňek's book is a scientific study documenting cases of post-war violence that the Czechoslovak state began investigating already before 1948. It complements appropriately Padevět's work on post-war violence, in which he unfortunately mostly omits cases of expulsion.[11] However, unlike these two authors, who focus mainly on

7 CHARLES TILLY: The Politics of Collective Violence, New York 2003, p. 3.

8 RANDALL COLLINS: Violence: A Micro-sociological Theory, Princeton 2008; PHILIP ZIMBARDO: The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil, New York 2007.

9 JOHAN GALTUNG: Gewalt, Krieg und deren Nachwirkungen, in: IDEM: Der Preis der Modernisierung: Struktur und Kultur im Weltsystem, Wien 1997, pp. 170–212.

10 Although I focus mainly on the factors of escalation, I do not deny that the factors limiting violence have a comparable analytical value. However, because the main subject of my analysis is violence itself, I pay only limited attention to restraints of violence. MAX BERGHOLZ: Violence as a Generative Force: Identity, Nationalism, and Memory in a Balkan Community, Ithaca—London 2016, p. 197.

11 JIŘÍ PADEVĚT: Krvavé finale: Jaro 1945 v českých zemích [Bloody Final: Spring 1945 in the Czech Lands], Praha 2015; IDEM: Krvavé léto 1945: Poválečné násilí v českých zemích [The Bloody Summer of 1945: Post-war Violence in the Czech Lands], Praha 2016. TOMÁŠ STANĚK: Poválečné "excesy" v českých zemích v roce 1945 a jejich vy-

making an almost exhaustive list of all violent acts and their detailed description, I have decided to evaluate cases of collective violence quantitatively. On the basis of this quantitative topography, I am trying to determine the main tendencies of the dynamics of various types of collective violence in its geographic spread from place to place, emphasizing the factors of escalation or, on the contrary, its mitigation, its further prolongation or fading. Furthermore, I identify the main areas in which collective violence of a certain type prevailed—in terms of form, constellation of actors or situational forces in place. On top of that, I connect the macro-social picture of collective violence with a more detailed micro-social analysis of specific cases and situational forces acting in them.

The area of the *Reichsgau* Sudetenland and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, i.e. the historical territory of the Czech lands, was flooded by a wave of unprecedented brutality at the end of World War II. During the war years, the inhabitants of the former Czech part of the interwar Czechoslovakia lived behind the front and were not directly affected by the fighting. Terror and repression were similar to other parts of Nazi-dominated Europe, but they remained spared of the devastating progress of the extermination war taking place in the East.[12] But this changed dramatically the year before the end of the war, when the front was inexorably approaching, and the Nazi government began to collapse. The disintegration of the Nazi rule meant a transition from an organized extermination to an extermination chaos. During this time, violent interactions began to emerge in the public space, and although they had various causes and forms, they were happening more or less concurrently.

On the one hand, the violence specialists of the collapsing Nazi rule began to cross the hitherto valid limits for repressive measures. Specialized Nazi troops brought experience from the eastern territories, which allowed them to mercilessly kill all potential enemies. In the first months of 1945, these included both prisoners and POWs in death marches and transports, as well as partisans and the population helping them, persecuted by the Nazi security forces during search operations. The civilian population became the target of the slaughter, especially during the anti-Nazi uprising, which broke out almost at the last minute in early May 1945 as the last desperate act of resistance.[13] On the other hand, after the collapse of Nazi rule, similar means were also used by members of the armed forces of the reviving Czechoslovak

šetřování [Post-war Excesses in the Czech Lands in the Year 1945 and Their Investigation], Praha 2005.

12 MARY HEINEMANN: Czechoslovakia: The State that failed, New Haven 2009; ANDREA ORZOFF: Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe 1914–1948, Oxford 2009; VOJTĚCH MASTNÝ: The Czechs under Nazi Rule: The Failure of National Resistance, 1939–1942, New York 1971; DETLEF BRANDES: Die Tschechen unter deutschem Protektorat, München—Wien 1969, 1975.

13 CHAD BRYANT: Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism, Cambridge 2007: STANISLAV KOKOŠKA: Praha v květnu 1945: Historie jednoho povstání [Prague in May 1945: History of an Uprising], Praha 2005.

state, which excluded from its protection all potential Nazi helpers, who were put on a par with ethnic Germans. The result was a wave of ethnic cleansing associated with widespread internment, executions and expulsion.[14]

The experience of Nazi violence undoubtedly provoked a reaction and played an important role in the decision-making of the representatives of the Czechoslovak state and its armed forces on how to proceed after the war. Although it is not possible to accurately reconstruct the mechanism of the transfer of this experience yet, I can at least partially identify its most important actors. Orders and laws issued by highest representatives of the Czechoslovak state were significantly influenced by the experience of occupation terror documented in the reports of the domestic anti-Nazi resistance. At the same time, it can be stated with certainty that perpetrators of the most brutal postwar violence against the German civilian population demonstrably had previous direct experience with the type of violence that Charles Tilly describes as campaigns of annihilation.[15] Initially part of the war of annihilation in the East, these practices spread to the Czech lands at the end of the war and became the predominant type of violence in the ethnic cleansing of ethnic Germans in the few months after the end of the war. As I show below, we can assume that the partisans operating in the eastern part of the Czech lands had experience with the advance of specialized anti-partisan commandos (Kommandos zur besonderen Verwendung), that members of the Prague Revolutionary Guards witnessed massacres of civilians committed by Waffen-SS battle groups (Kampfgruppen) in suppressing the uprising, and that soldiers deployed in Postoloprty had fought on the Eastern Front.

The ability of the Nazis to exercise power had been diminishing even before its system of government in the Reichsgau Sudetenland and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia ultimately collapsed. According to Tilly's classification, a non-democratic regime with high governmental capacity gradually became a non-democratic regime with low governmental capacity, characterized by a very high level of violence caused by reduced control but persistent high coordination of violent acts with great damage. The political regime of the so-called Third Czechoslovak Republic did not have a completely liberal democratic character even after the establishment of its administrative organization. It could be considered as a transitional type between a non-democratic and a democratic regime with high governmental capacity, whose level of violence would normally fluctuate between medium and low.[16] The new Czechoslovak regime was establishing unevenly in the midst of war turmoil; from early April 1945, the Czech and Moravian municipalities were

14 KEITH LOWE: Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II, London 2012; BENJAMIN FROMMER: National Cleansing: Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Postwar Czechoslovakia, Cambridge 2005; PHILIPP THER, ANA SILJAK: Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944–1948, Lanham 2001.

15 TILLY (as in footnote 7), pp. 102–104.

16 Ibidem, pp. 12–16, 50–52.

coming under the control of the Allied troops, and later on, the "May Czech Uprising" broke out. The emerging institutions of the reviving Czechoslovak state in the form of revolutionary national committees often had only a very limited opportunity to assert their decision-making authority, and thus to potentially prevent collective violence; often they even became its executors. Hence, the transitional nature of this period between the two political regimes, or between the war and peace arrangements, played a significant role in increasing the potential proportion and intensity of violence in certain social situations.[17] Yet spontaneous violence associated with popular vengeance only occurred in the few days immediately following the symbolic 8 May 1945.

Uprising, Collapse and Violent Rituals

In the second half of April 1945, an increasing part of the pre-war Czech lands was becoming the scene of war operations, in which the Nazi and Allied armed forces fought against each other, and into which the civilian population was drawn. Since the beginning of the uprising against the Nazi power in May 1945, insurgents, armed and trained to a varying degree, were part of the murderous struggles. These were, apart from members of former Czechoslovak or Protectorate armed forces, such as police or army men, mainly civilians of different ages. Except for on-site military service, the insurgents had no special combat training, unlike the members of the Wehrmacht with experience of front-line combat, or specialized Nazi combat units, who regarded the insurgents as partisans. They considered them as enemy forces operating behind the front. Consequently, the countermeasures applied did not differ much from the previously mentioned operations against the partisans; in fact, these two were indistinguishable—at least in form. The initial superiority of the Nazi violence specialists made the insurgents a target of organized campaigns of annihilation, including their supporters and other unarmed fellow citizens.

Under the increasing pressure of the advancing front and the collapsing Nazi regime, violent operations against the insurgents and other violent acts of retreating armed forces lost any coordination. From the entry of the first Allied troops into the former territory of interwar Czechoslovakia on 11 April 1945 to the ultimate ceasefire on 12 May 1945, the violence lost all limits. The outbreak of the uprising dragged into the mass murders of the final phase of the war the civilian population, too, whose increasing resistance redirected the Nazi campaigns of annihilation towards civilian targets. These occurred in the areas along the front, which shifted from Moravia through the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands to the environs of Prague, where the violence of the Waffen-SS units as the dominant force culminated between 7 and 8 May.

[17] Ibidem, p. 52.

An antagonistic scheme was created, allowing for a simultaneous development of violence after 5 May 1945: the crimes of the final phase of the war directed against the enemies of the Reich after the collapse of the Nazi administration and the retreat of the Reich's armed forces coalesced with spontaneous violence against the civilian German population and organized executions on both sides. In the vast majority of these interactions, the main actors were the armed forces of the Third Reich as the violence specialists, the Allied armies, hostile to the Nazis, and various paramilitaries. Behind the chaos of the front, in which the Nazi structural violence crumbled, violent transition rituals first emerged in the early days, most often involving a mob, in physical assaults of true or symbolic enemies—representatives of defeated Nazism, true and perceived traitors, or just the Germans in general. Along with these more or less spontaneous and disorganized acts of collective violence, organized structural violence targeted at similar groups in the form of mass executions, internment and expulsion appeared from the very first days, accompanied by various opportunistic acts of violence, such as: rape, murder, looting, and theft.

When the anti-Nazi uprising broke out in the Czech lands on 1 May 1945, the territory was one of the last armed bastions of the collapsing Greater German Reich. 62 divisions of the Wehrmacht with a total strength of about 900,000 soldiers were deployed there, with a considerable number of tanks and aircraft.[18] However, the unexpectedly rapid advance of the Red Army in the Czech lands prevented the Nazi troops from carrying out destructive retreat measures in full.[19] By 4 May 1945, the uprising had broken out in many places in Central and Eastern Bohemia and Eastern Moravia, where, in response to reports of the approaching Allied troops and the end of the war, people organized public manifestations and strikes, growing into armed resistance or direct support of partisan combat actions.[20] The commander of the largest army group "Center," General Field Marshal Ferdinand Schörner, expected a longer-term defense of the Bohemian-Moravian territory and responded to the deteriorating situation by ordering an uncompromising advance on 2 May 1945: "In the current situation, every means of preventing the outbreak of the uprising movement is right. We must show no weakness

18 OLDŘICH SLÁDEK: Spálená země [Scorched Earth], Praha 1980, p. 254; VÁCLAV KURAL, ZDENĚK ŠTĚPÁNEK: České národní povstání v květnu 1945 [The Czech National Uprising in May 1945], Praha 2008, pp. 56–59.

19 OLDŘICH SLÁDEK: Ve znamení smrtihlava: Nacistický protipartyzánský aparát v letech 1944–1945 [In the Name of Death's Head: The Nazi Anti-Partisan Apparatus 1944–1945], Praha 1990, pp. 349–350; IDEM, Spálená (as in footnote 18), pp. 54–55, 197–198, 253–257.

20 KURAL/ŠTĚPÁNEK (as in footnote 18), pp. 111–119; KOKOŠKA (as in footnote 13), pp. 107–108. For a more detailed account including typology, see STANISLAV ZÁMEČNÍK: Český odboj a národní povstání v květnu 1945 [Czech Resistance and the National Uprising in May 1945], Praha 2006, pp. 78–81.

now. Take merciless action against any riots. Destroy anyone involved."[21] Thereafter, there were cases in which the insurgents, who had been used to calm disarmament, were suddenly confronted with a unit whose commander acted in accordance with this order and used all available means to temporarily restore authority. Cases of brutal intervention against the insurgents occurred, for example, along the escape routes in the area of the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands, where many, specialized, heavily armed units were moving at that time. If the commanders assessed the risks of an outbreak of an uprising as too high to move their troops, they made efforts to temporarily quash it by exemplary executions along the escape routes.[22]

The resistance of the Prague citizens, which had manifested itself in a number of ways, including the tearing down of German inscriptions on 4 May 1945, grew into an armed uprising the following day. From the evening of 5 May 1945, the Czech National Council took control over the combat actions, which had initially been improvised, as well as the headquarters of the uprising with the code name "Bartoš" headed by General Karel Kutlvašr.[23] The outbreak of the uprising in Prague provoked an immediate strong response in other areas of the Czech lands, where it signaled the start of an open struggle with the Nazi power. Outside of the vicinity of Prague and larger cities, the uprising broke out primarily in large domains of the partisan units.[24] In Prague itself, the insurgents initially gained superiority over the deployed SS forces and Order Police, but already in the afternoon the surprised Nazis managed to draw up a plan to suppress the riots. The weakened Reich troops inside the city were to be limited to necessary defense only, with the main initiative taken by battle groups fighting their way into the city from four sides.[25]

Their advancement in the territory of Prague was blocked by barricades and unexpectedly strong resistance of the insurgents, and was from the start

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21 Český odboj na sklonku války ve světle nacistických dokumentů [Czech Resistance towards the End of the War in the Light of Nazi Documents], Praha 1970, pp. 214–215.

22 Přípis OV SNB v Kolíně na ONV v Kolíně ze dne 24.11.1947 [Letter of the District Headquarters of National Security Forces in Kolín to the District Council in Kolín from 1947-24-11], in: Národní archiv České republiky (NA) [National Archives of the Czech Republic], coll[ection] 1075/5 MV-L, sign[ature] C6178/1, Zvěrstva nacistů v zemi České [Nazi Atrocities in the Land of Bohemia], box 24. Cf. SLÁDEK, Ve znamení (as in footnote 19), p. 351.

23 Karel Kutlvašr (1895–1961) entered the Czechoslovak Legions during World War I in Russia; between the wars, he served in the Czechoslovak Army, attaining the rank of general in the 1920's; in World War II, he was a member of the resistance organization "Defense of the Nation;" after the Communist takeover in 1948, he was retired, degraded and sentenced to life for treason in a show trial; he was granted amnesty and released only in 1960. KOKOŠKA (as in footnote 13), pp. 113–127.

24 For a detailed description see KURAL/ŠTĚPÁNEK (as in footnote 18), pp. 139–172.

25 KOKOŠKA (as in footnote 13), pp. 71, 128–130, 256; KURAL/ŠTĚPÁNEK (as in footnote 18), pp. 130–131.

supported by extensive campaigns of annihilation and opportunistic violence against the civilian population. The main actors of the final battles of World War II were violence specialists, who were confronted by inadequately trained and armed or even completely defenseless opponents (civilians, POWs, prisoners and others). As a result of prolonged confrontational tensions, the soldiers were in a state of altered sensory perception, which, once prolonged, brought their battle fury to the brink of madness, as a result of which they tried to break through enemy defenses at all costs.[26] When, with confronting a weak enemy, the attack suddenly became easy, the tension reached its peak and the rage turned into a frantic slaughter. Their emotional excitement persisted in this state; the rhythmic repetition of the shooting brought a sense of satisfaction, and the slaughter often grew into collective entertainment.[27]

A similar situation occurred in the southern part of Prague, where, on the afternoon of 6 May 1945, a strong insurgent defense halted the advancement of the Waffen-SS battle group "Wallenstein." Young soldiers in training under the command of SS-*Standartenführer* Wolfgang Jörchel began to massacre residents and other civilians in hiding as they were searching houses. When they entered one of the cellars that evening, the following ensued according to survivor testimonies: "Without any notice, they began to shoot the hiding residents. The SS men used dum-dum bullets, as was later medically proven. [Marie] Lenoch, a German national, who was heavily pregnant, knelt in a shelter in front of the SS men and begged them to spare her as a German. But the SS men murdered her and her two children too. When none of the shot people were moving, the SS men began to shout: 'Auf, auf,' whereupon 14-year-old Věra Hájková, who remained unharmed because she fell before the shooting, stood up and was immediately shot down by SS men." When the soldiers finished searching and looting the flats in Úsobská Street no. 255, where they killed 37 people, they moved on. In house no. 264, they executed 22 more people in the courtyard, mainly women and children. That extreme situational forces were in effect is further demonstrated by the fact that the soldiers buttstroked the face of a slightly wounded boy, Milan Procházka, who was just ten years old, killing him on the spot, although he begged for mercy.[28]

The situation of unstoppable violence, in which there was overuse of force and other atrocities, allowed both the mass murder of hostages and civilians, as well as destruction and looting.[29] Frustration from the uprising, which saw

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26 COLLINS (as in footnote 8), pp. 80–82, 85.

27 Ibidem, pp. 83, 89, 92–93.

28 Vyšetřující zpráva Policejního ředitelství v Praze ze dne 16.06.1945 [Investigation Report of the Police Headquarters in Prague from 1945-06-16], in: NA, coll. 1075/5 MV-L, sign. C6178/1, box 24, pp. 6–7. Memorial to the victims placed in Obětí 6. května Street no. 553/2, Prague 4.

29 COLLINS (as in footnote 8), pp. 93–99.

the attackers no longer distinguish between military and civilian targets, together with the awareness of the unstoppable advancement of the Soviet troops compounded the stress, leading to a climax of furious atrocities, which —in Prague alone—had hundreds of victims in the last days of war. The total number of deaths usually stated is between 2,700 (the original estimate) and 3,700 (including surrounding areas), of which about 236 were civilians, including women and children, while the number of injured is estimated at between 3,000 and 3,500.[30]

Behind the front lines of advancing Allied troops and the spreading anti-Nazi uprising, the first cases of violence against Germans, traitors (alleged or actual) and collaborators appeared. In the last days before the outbreak of the anti-Nazi uprising, the first spontaneous acts of popular retribution occurred in the liberated territory of South, Central and Southeast Moravia, in which assembled crowds forced the local authorities into executing certain individuals or lynched them themselves. Already at that time, the Red Army soldiers, members of various paramilitary groups and self-proclaimed security authorities were committing opportunistic violence like theft, rape or physical assault and abuse. Although such violence occurred under various conditions, already at this point, the vast majority of victims were the most vulnerable internees. Even before the official end of the war, there had been violence against Germans in the liberated territories, for example in South Moravia and its metropolis Brno, and in Western and Southern Bohemia.[31]

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30 Adrian von Arburg, Tomáš Staněk (eds.): Vysídlení Němců a proměny českého pohraničí 1945–1951: Dokumenty z českých archive. Díl II, svazek 1: duben–srpen/září 1945, "Divoký odsun" a počátky osídlování [The Displacement of Germans and the Transformation of the Czech Borderlands 1945–1951: Documents from Czech Archives. Volume II, Part 1: April–August/September 1945, "Wild Expulsion" and the Beginnings of New Settlement], Středokluky 2011, p. 28.

31 For instance, Oblastní úřadovna Státní bezpečnosti (OÚ StB) v Brně [Regional Office of the State Security Service in Brno], Vyšetřující zpráva ze dne 27.08.1947 [Investigation Report from 1947-08-27], č. j. [no.] 304/47 taj., in: Archiv bezpečnostních složek (ABS) [Security Services Archive], Prague, coll. A2/1, Sekretariát ministra vnitra (ministra národní bezpečnosti) [Secretariat of the Minister of the Interior (Minister of National Security)], coll. A2/1, i[nventory] n[umber] 1765, Události v porevoluční době 1945–1947 [Post-revolutionary Events 1945–1947], box 57, f[olio] 326; Zpráva Oblastní kriminální úřadovny v Českých Budějovicích ve věci porevolučních událostí ze dne 08.09.1947 [Report of the Regional Office of the Criminal Police in České Budějovice Considering Events after the Revolution from 1947-09-08], ibidem, f. 950; Výslechový protokol Krajského soudu v Klatovech se členy SVS Klatovy ze dne 25.06.1947 [Investigation Report of the District Court in Klatovy from 1947-06-25], ibidem, f. 82; Zpráva Okresní kriminální úřadovny v Domažlicích ve věci porevolučních událostí ze dne 30.08.1947 [Report of the District Office of the Criminal Police in Domažlice Considering Events after the Revolution from 1947-08-30], ibidem, f. 955; Zpráva Oblastní kriminální úřadovny Opava ve věci porevolučních událostí ze dne 04.10.1947 [Report of the Regional Office of the Criminal Police in Opava Considering Events after the Revolution from 1947-10-04], ibidem, box 58, f. 957. For

However, it was again Prague that saw the most dramatic escalation; here, the insurgents began committing violent acts against the civilian population from 5 May 1945, searching for weapons in the households. Between 5 and 7 May, in the areas controlled and defended by the insurgents in Vršovice, Královské Vinohrady, the New Town, Smíchov, the Lesser Town, the Old Town and later also in Holešovice, Germans were detained by insurgent patrolmen during street checks and occupation of essential institutions. In addition to the insurgents, only the Czech militia and fire patrols were on the streets, while Germans were forced to remain in blackout flats. From 6 May, they were gathered in bomb shelters, cellars and sometimes in detention camps (officially called "concentration camps" at this time), which had been provisionally established mainly in schools, gyms and fields, or they were individually taken to police stations.[32]

After the fighting ceased and the Nazi units retreated on 9 May, the Revolutionary Guards and security forces became heavily involved in the renewed search for Germans, operating also outside the inner-city center (in Dejvice, for example). Germans, some marked with different symbols painted with tar or white paint on their body or clothes, were driven out of their dwellings onto the streets, where they were forced to clean up the war debris.[33] Violent crowds gathered around spontaneously to bully them, while also seeking Czech traitors and collaborators. An audience would quickly form around the violent acts, encouraging the main actors to commit more brutalities, and many of them soon became tormentors themselves. Armed officers rather encouraged the violence and intervened against it only when the act escalated into public execution.[34]

In the first days, however, the new, post-liberation order was more often established in situations in which young armed Czech men faced defenseless German women, elderly and children. Particularly brutal scenes took place in

other cases not mentioned above, see STANĚK, Poválečné (as in footnote 11), pp. 219–222, 225, 294–295.

32 Evidence of Rudolf Kulich, in: Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv München (BHSA), Sudetendeutsches Archiv (SdA), collection Erlebnis- und Vertreibungsberichte (EVB), no. 170, f. 1; evidence of Marie Würkner, ibidem, no. 340, f. 1; evidence of Maria Baier, ibidem, no. 392, f. 1; evidence of Johanna Dreszler-Lendecke, ibidem, no. 452, p. 1; evidence of Maria Bohutinsky, ibidem, no. 528, f. 1, evidence of Hans-Georg Zametzky, ibidem, no. 581, p. 1; evidence of Friedrich Töpper's wife, ibidem, no. 627, f. 1, no. 628, f. 1, no. 666, f. 1; evidence of R. Keup, ibidem, no. 738, p. 1; evidence of Maximilian Klinger, ibidem, no. 740, f. 1, no. 834, f. 1.

33 Evidence of Rudolf Jörka, ibidem, no. 453, p. 1; evidence of Anna Seidel, ibidem, no. 716, f. 1; evidence of Maria Kühn, ibidem, no. 778, p. 1; evidence of Alfred Rochel, ibidem, no. 810, f. 1.

34 Druhá světová válka [Second World War], book VIII, from 1945-01-09 to 1956-08-19, in: Archiv hlavního města Prahy [Archives of the City of Prague], coll. 1440 Berger Vojtěch, no. 51, book 45, p. 154; further cf. evidence of Marie Baier, in: BHSA, SdA, EVB, no. 392, f. 1; evidence of Hans-Georg Zametzky, ibidem, no. 581, p. 2.

the center of the city, where there was a bigger concentration of German inhabitants. Wenceslas Square and today's streets Na Poříčí, Na Příkopech, Vodičkova or Vinohradská were the places of public lynching. Improvised detention camps had existed or were established in most of these places. The detained women were also forced to clear heavy objects from the barricades. To list more examples, in some cases, they were made walk barefoot and sometimes crawl on all fours through streets full of broken glass and debris from the battles. Some had their hair cut off and stuffed into their mouths, or had raw sewage poured over them.[35]

> "In the first revolutionary days, I witnessed the burning of a German man and woman […] The man was a German soldier, a member of Volkssturm, not the SS, judging from his uniform. He was chased around the Powder Tower, then beaten and, still alive, hanged by his feet from a pole in the Republic Square, a small fire made under his head, letting him roast slowly. Then, people tore his body apart and spat on it. I could not intervene because I would have been beaten myself."[36]

Just as German books, portraits of Adolf Hitler and other symbols of the Nazi regime had been burnt during the uprising, the hated uniforms were set alight as effigies of the defeated Nazism and their wearers with them. From the known cases it seems that no one took into consideration whether they were indeed members of the Gestapo or the SS, against whom, as the main executors of the Nazi brutalities, the retaliation should have logically been aimed. The members of the Wehrmacht and Hitlerjugend, or NSDAP officials were burnt to death in symbolic, prominent and busy places—such as Republic Square or the wider area around Wenceslas Square. Spontaneous violent acts of lynching and public executions were triggered by a wide variety of impulses, such as a gathering of Germans or an escorting of alleged Nazis, or it was directly linked to previous or ongoing fights and the related brutality.[37]

In the days immediately following 9 May 1945, there was a chaotic anarchy, with a lack of even rough general regulations, and the initiative was taken directly in concrete situations by individual civilians or members of various armed forces with no unified and conceptual command. Under these

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35 Letter of P. Pitter to F. Klátil, undated, in: Národní pedagogické muzeum a knihovna [National Pedagogical Museum and Library], Archiv Přemysla Pittera [Archives of Přemysl Pitter], box 15. PAVEL KOSATÍK: Sám proti zlu: Život Přemysla Pittra (1895–1976) [Alone against the Evil: The Life of Přemysl Pitter], Praha—Litomyšl, p. 190; PŘEMYSL PITTER: Nad vřavou nenávisti: Vzpomínky a svědectví Přemysla Pittera a Olgy Fierzové [Above the Turmoil of Hatred: Memoirs and Testimonies of Přemysl Pitter and Olga Fierzová], ed. by MILENA ŠIMSOVÁ and JAN ŠTĚPÁN, Praha 1996, pp. 56–57.

36 KOSATÍK (as in footnote 35), p. 189.

37 More in TOMÁŠ STANĚK: Perzekuce 1945: Perzekuce tzv. státně nespolehlivého obyvatelstva v českých zemích (mimo tábory a věznice) v květnu–srpnu 1945 [Persecution of the So-called State-unreliable Population in the Czech Lands (Excluding Camps and Prisons) in May–August 1945], Praha 1996, pp. 70–71. There are more mentions, references and evidence on p. 202, note 53.

circumstances, violence framed by, committed by and targeted at the collective became a socially accepted norm of action across society. Representatives and members of the Nazi power, the persons identified as their helpers and the German population expelled from their homes became the target of various spontaneous acts of violence on the street as a result of a greater shift in the limits of permissible action. The subsequent organized executions, which, unlike lynching, happened outside the city center, continued as the German population was gathered and interned. In this wave of violence, hundreds of people were killed; according to sober estimates, between 5 and 9 May 1945, just in today's area of Prague, their number exceeded a thousand German nationals.[38]

In the first two weeks of May, murder campaigns in the form of mass executions became by far the most widespread type of collective violence carried out by paramilitary organizations—in Prague, these were mainly the Revolutionary Guards; in other areas, various guerrilla or revolutionary armed units and the Red Army. Although the driving forces of the executions were indeed mainly various paramilitary units, on some days, the Red Army was involved with comparable intensity. Revolutionary Guards and organizationally similar units appeared mainly in Prague and Central Bohemia, and only rarely in a wider range of Northern and Southern Bohemia. In the rest of Bohemia, there were various paramilitary groups of revolutionary militants; in Eastern Bohemia, the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands, Northern and Central Moravia, there were partisans.[39]

Post-war Cleansing

The power vacuum that arose after the collapse of the Nazi rule was only slowly filled by the institutions of the reviving Czechoslovak state, whose sovereignty was first enforced locally by law enforcement authorities—especially the military. In areas where public administration had taken the shape of revolutionary national committees already at the time of the anti-Nazi insurrection, it was these authorities that took over the exercise of state power. In power centers of national importance, such as Brno or Prague, this happened immediately after the end of the war; in large towns of the former Protectorate, then, only in the second half of May 1945. The situation developed quite differently in the secluded areas of the former Sudetenland, whose reintegration under the Czechoslovak government was given as a strategic task to the military and various paramilitary organizations—especially Revolutionary Guards and partisans.

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38 ARBURG/STANĚK, Vysídlení II, 1 (as in footnote 30), pp. 30–32; STANĚK, Poválečné (as in footnote 11), pp. 196–197; STANĚK, Perzekuce (as in footnote 37), pp. 72–73.

39 STANĚK, Poválečné (as in footnote 11); PADEVĚT, Krvavé finále (as in footnote 11).

Partisan areas in the Protectorate territory formed ahead of the advancing front in early May 1945 in Western Moravia and Eastern Bohemia, where prevailing units were controlled from the Soviet Union, with an average size of 100 members. From the start of 1945, the approaching front and the development of partisan activities in this area created conditions similar to those in the partisan areas of the Eastern Front, where specialized Nazi anti-partisan commandos had operated since 1942. The partisans lived in close symbiosis with the local communities. That is why the Nazi special commandos, after their arrival in the Czech lands, focused on the destruction of partisan bases and, during search operations from the spring of 1945, they began to kill off entire villages. The partisans adopted this Nazi strategy and applied it in post-war cleansing operations, which was an important specificity of the violence in partisan areas.[40]

In May and June 1945, the most striking category of collective violence, in terms of Tilly's typology, were the campaigns of annihilation, in which one of the sides used its superiority to completely destroy the enemy.[41] In line with the preceding May Revolution, mass executions prevailed throughout. From 13 to 27 May 1945, the degree of collective violence decreased after the first wave culminated with executions on 12 May. Yet, more and more daily executions occurred with many dozens of victims. The wave of executions again rose at the turn of May and June 1945. At that time, the executions were already concentrated in a clearly distinguishable area of the Czech borderlands, or more precisely, the territory of the former Sudetenland, where simultaneous internment and expulsion of the German population continued until August 1945. The structure of collective violence already at that time reflected the organized state policy of ethnic cleansing, the main actors of which again were violence specialists. In North-western, Northern and North-eastern Bohemia, these were regular military units, and in Southern and Eastern Bohemia, in the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands and in most parts of Moravia, they comprised paramilitary units, mostly partisans.[42]

Regardless of local administration, the armed units took over the role of the dominant power factor in most of the borderlands. In many places, this situation lasted well into the late summer of 1945, and the establishment of district and local administrative commissions did not change anything about it. Similarly, the nature of collective violence, structures of which were formed in close connection with the state power and its concrete executors, was also changing unevenly. In the Czech lands, different phases of national cleansing occurred simultaneously in individual localities and specific areas. The goal of the organized violence was to consolidate the state territory and

40 JOSEF SERINEK, JAN TESAŘ: Česká cikánská rapsodie. III. svazek: Mapy, tabulky, diagramy—partyzáni na Vysočině [Czech Gypsy Rhapsody. Vol. III: Maps, Tables, Diagrams—Partisans in the Bohemian-Moravian Highlands], Praha 2016, pp. 8–15.

41 TILLY (as in footnote 7), pp. 14, 110.

42 STANĚK, Poválečné (as in footnote 11).

sovereign power over it by eliminating all potential enemies—whether by their physical destruction, internment or expulsion. During these clean-up operations, various groups of violence specialists conquered the borderland (or German-populated) area. In contrast to the limitless violence of the end of the war, in the period immediately following, until the summer of 1945, purgatory violence began taking shape as an expression of the organized policy of collective violence of the Czechoslovak state.

The decisive role was played by the armed forces, which were to reoccupy the borderlands, still seen in the first post-war weeks as a more or less hostile territory—a territory that needed to be conquered. About two weeks after the end of the war, the first orders were given to occupy and clear the area of the remnants of Wehrmacht and other armed forces of the NS-State; the orders also included instructions for seizing German property and pushing the Germans behind the border. In the following period until the end of May 1945, the armed forces moved outside the center and to the border, where the commanders proceeded fully with the intentions of an ongoing war and suspended local government. Before the Czechoslovak army, however, it was partisan units in Southern and Eastern Bohemia that began to "clear" the borderlands. Until the end of May, perhaps the most extensive displacement operations were taking place in these areas, during which a number of typical elements of "partisan" violence appeared. The assembling of the German population with the aim of expelling them was preceded by improvised people's courts, which included various sorts of bullying to amuse soldiers and the audience, followed by public executions. Violent transitional rituals were combined with state-sponsored national cleansing, which allowed for a continued escalation of mass atrocities, extermination campaigns, and the spread of opportunistic violence.

The partisans did not experience any major turning point that would have clearly separated the time of war from what we perceive today as a post-war period—their combat deployment was an ongoing war conflict. Immediately after the Red Army passed, they began to disarm the remaining enemy units, and within a few weeks they received orders to carry out clean-up operations against the civilian population too. Thus, after the disintegration of clear battle lines, the partisans found themselves in a situation similar to that of members of the Nazi special forces in the fight against scattered partisan units. The distinction between armed and unarmed enemies became blurred, and the partisans also immediately began to couple the systematic combing of the area with the use of brutal methods: looting, hurried interrogations, and the extermination of civilians. The best-known events of that kind include the action of members of the freely affiliated brigade "Brodecký" from the partisan union "Václavík" under the command of Josef Hýbl in Lanškroun, East Bohemia.[43]

[43] Josef Hýbl (1911–1953) was a lieutenant of the Czechoslovak army between the wars, member of the anti-Nazi resistance from 1939 and, later in the war, commander of a

On 17 May 1945, in the early hours, the partisan company from Těchonín led by Hýbl arrived in Lanškroun. All major roads to the town were occupied and, before nine o'clock, a thorough search of individual houses was launched in order to find hidden weapons, while German men were assembled in the local square in a brutal way. A witness Hermine Schwab described the well-planned procedure as follows: "Early in the morning, all access roads to the town were closed; everyone within reach was taken in without exception, and at once abused with rifle butts, lashes, bullwhips, batons and other kinds of whips."[44] Regardless of existing orders, the partisans gathered almost all men in Lanškroun, including the young and the elderly. Apparently, they only excluded women and children.[45] Until about eleven o'clock in the morning, German groups of various sizes from different parts of the town were brought to the main square of Lanškroun, where individuals were subjected to inspections and lined up with their hands up.[46]

The guards were whiling away their time at the assembly point by bullying people who had already been searched, making them perform various exercises or shout chants. They beat them randomly for lowering their hands or for no reason. The guards also used a water tank of the anti-aircraft defense in the square for their amusement, forcing some to bathe in it and then drowning them. Eventually, those who collapsed with exhaustion or torture were also thrown into the tank. The partisans kept firing around them, and those captured in the water tank were probably not spared. The scene with the water tank holds an important place in the multilayered memories of the events in Lanškroun, so it was probably associated with a number of shocking brutalities.[47] In the early afternoon, the ritual part of the cleansing of the city began. Some of those gathered were forced to parade in the adjacent streets, and a few were coerced to carry portraits of Hitler ceremoniously in their hands. Later in the afternoon, the "People's Court" began its hearing in the square. It sentenced the cursorily convicted Nazis to a brutal beating or an execution by

partisan brigade in Eastern Bohemia. After the war, he was promoted to staff captain, but after the Communist takeover he was placed in reserve in 1949. He died suddenly under unexplained circumstances in 1953. EMIL TROJAN, MARTIN VAŇOUREK: Tak přísahali: Partyzánský odboj v českém pohraničí v letech 1939–1945 [So They Swore: Partisan Resistance in the Czech Borderlands in the Years 1939–1945], Mohelnice 2010, pp. 360–361.

44 Evidence of Hermine Schwab, in: BHSA, SdA, EVB, no. 291, f. 2.

45 Cf. document no. 106, in: ARBURG/STANĚK, Vysídlení II, 1 (as in footnote 30), pp. 369–373.

46 For further information, see EMIL TROJAN: Tak přísahali [So They Swore], Ústí nad Orlicí 2001, p. 259; STANĚK, Poválečné (as in footnote 11), p. 190.

47 Evidence of Josef Meixner (1947-05-09), in: BHSA, SdA, EVB, no. 211, f. 1; evidence of Else Rotter (1946-01-15), ibidem, no. 663, f. 1; Bericht Nr. 18, Julius Friedel, 1952-02-22, in: WILHELM TURNWALD (ed.): Dokumente zur Austreibung der Sudetendeutschen, München 1951, pp. 55–56.

shooting, depending on the seriousness of the offence. In Lanškroun alone, at least 27 people fell victim to the executions.[48]

Superior commanders of the regular army complained about disobedience of orders and the poor discipline of the partisans. From today's point of view, we can identify that during their raids, the partisans were subject to strong situational forces such as moral disengagement and diffused responsibility.[49] However, the direct commanders of the partisan units did not take any measures against the loss of moral restraints and feeling of irresponsibility of their subordinates, because the leadership was primarily interested in ethnic cleansing of the border area in all haste. Under these circumstances, if the partisans happened to be in places where the representatives of the local revolutionary government did not speak out clearly against violence, or where they even fuelled the violence, the cleansing operations escalated very quickly into massacres.[50] One week after the events in Lanškroun, a revolutionary tribunal was instigated, followed by the extrajudicial execution of 14 people by a partisan unit, at the time carrying out a large-scale forced displacement of the local, ethnically indifferent population in South-Eastern Bohemia, under the command of Colonel Vladimír Hobza[51]. The locals, who settled the war accounts, played a key role in this execution, even though the escalation of violence could have been stopped, as evidenced by the case from the nearby village of Rapšach, where only one day later the local gendarmerie officer prevented the partisans from carrying out the execution of 26 alleged Nazis.[52]

These events from the end of May 1945 already combined specific elements of partisan violence (suspension of local government, strong theatri-

48 STANĚK, Poválečné (as in footnote 11), p. 191. Cf. TROJAN (as in footnote 46), p. 259.

49 Výpis ze situačního hlášení jednotek 1. čs. armády z 29.05.1945 [Extract from the Situation Report of the Units of the 1st Czechoslovakian Army of 1945-05-29], in: Vojenský historický archiv [Military Historical Archive], coll. VO1, box 1, i. n. 6, no. 0507/taj.[-45]. Cf. ZIMBARDO (as in footnote 8), pp. 307–311.

50 Cf. the factors of killing restraint in BERGHOLZ (as in footnote 10), p. 196.

51 Vladimír Hobza (*1892) was an officer of the Czechoslovak Legions in Russia during World War I. In the interwar period, he served in the Czechoslovak Army and reached the rank of cavalry colonel. After his retirement during the Nazi occupation, he was called back to active duty by the command of the Czech Anti-Nazi Uprising of May 1945. In January 1947, he was again retired for alcoholism and other disciplinary offenses in the rank of brigadier general. JÁN MLYNÁRIK: Tragédie Vitorazska 1945–1953: Poprava v Tušti [Tragedy of the Weitra Lands 1945–1953: Execution in Tušť], Třeboň 2005, pp. 175–179.

52 OÚ Stb v Českých Budějovicích na ZÚ StB v Praze ve věci Tušť, obec v okrese Třeboň, národnostní a všeobecná situace, šetření ze dne 16.11.1947 [Report of the District Office of State Security in České Budějovice to the Land Office of State Security in Prague in the case of Tušť, Municipality in the District of Třeboň, National and General Situation, Investigation of 1947-11-16], in: ABS, coll. A2/1, i. n. 1765, box 58, f. 147. ARBURG/STANĚK, Vysídlení II, 1 (as in footnote 30), pp. 396–397. STANĚK, Poválečné (as in footnote 11), pp. 217–218.

cality of forms and affectivity of actions) with more organized forms of state purification policy. They indicated a transition to the forced displacement of the German population using violence specialists. The impetus for the launch of a large-scale organized expulsion of the Germans was the order of the commander of the 1st Military District, General Karel Klapálek, from 5 June 1945. The day after, at a meeting of Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš with the General Staff, Klapálek became a model for the ensuing action in the border area in general.[53] Although top state officials used German massacres in international diplomatic negotiations only as a threat, they must have been well aware of the already ongoing brutal action of the Czechoslovak army, to which they themselves invited the soldiers.

On 26 May 1945, the commander of the 1st Army Corps Division, General Oldrich Španiel, sent advanced units of the 1st Czechoslovak Division to the town of Postoloprty, North Bohemia, to secure an area for the establishment of a headquarters. Already back then, he emphasized that "as few Germans as possible should cross the border, because those who cross the border will be our enemies and the only good German is a dead German."[54] Indeed, at least 763 of those who fell victim to the actions of three army groups in Postoloprty before 6 June 1945 were exhumed in a 1947 investigation. Historians, however, have estimated the number of victims of the entire massacre at two or even three thousand.[55] Although the brutality in Postoloprty is still mostly classified as spontaneous violence of the so-called wild expulsions[56], it had in fact nothing to do with it. On the contrary, it was undoubtedly one of the

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53 Karel Klapálek (1894–1983) joined the Czechoslovak Legion during World War I in Russia, continuing his army career between the wars. Under the Protectorate, he was a member of the resistance; he fled in 1940 and fought in the Czechoslovak Exile Army alongside the British in Africa and then alongside the 1st Army Corps in the Soviet Union. After the war, he continued his career in the army and participated in the Communist takeover; he was discharged in the early 1950s and charged and imprisoned in 1952. He was released in 1956, upon intervention of Soviet Marshalls Georgii Zhukov and Ivan Konev. Czechoslovak president Ludvík Svoboda vindicated him in 1968. PAVEL HRABICA, ZDENĚK HRABICA: Zapomenutý generál Karel Klapálek [The Forgotten General Karel Klapálek], Praha 2006.

54 Zápis o jednání vyšetřovací komise ÚNS na místě samém v Žatci [Record of the Session of the Investigation Committee of the Constituent National Assembly in situ], výpověď Jana Čubky z 31.07.1947 [Testimony of Jan Čubka from 1947-07-31], in: ABS, coll. A2/1, i. n. 1765, box 57, p. 29, f. 754.

55 Přípis ZV SNB v Praze na MV ČSR ze dne 02.10.1947 [Letter of the Land Headquarters of the National Security Forces in Prague to the Ministry of the Interior in Prague from 1947-10-02], in: ABS, coll. A14: Zemské velitelství SNB Praha [Land Headquarters of the National Security Forces in Prague], i. n. 578, no. 225 taj./47, Porevoluční události [Events after the Revolution of 1945]; STANĚK, Poválečné (as in footnote 11), p. 119.

56 ARBURG/STANĚK, Vysídlení (as in footnote 30), díl II., svazek 3: Akty hromadného násilí v roce 1945 a jejich vyšetřování [Volume II, Part 3: Acts of Collective Violence in the Year 1945 and their Investigation], Středokluky 2010, p. 20.

largest post-war mass executions in the Czech lands, ever to be carried out by a regular army.

After their arrival in Postoloprty at the end of May 1945, the commanders of the security and intelligence groups decided to carry out an order to secure the area. The soldiers, together with local police, surrounded the town and began house searches, gathering all the locals in the square and then interning men aged 14 to 65 separately from women, children and the elderly. After a cursory interrogation, the soldiers immediately executed all actual or alleged Nazis.[57] The Postoloprty units proceeded in a similar way at the beginning of June 1945 during a raid in the nearby town of Žatec, from which all adult men were also taken to the barracks in Postoloprty.[58] The main wave of mass executions of the Žatec citizens took place between 4 and 6 June 1945, when the soldiers began to send foot marches of the remaining survivors to the labor camps at lignite mines and a factory for the production of synthetic gasoline in Záluží near Most.[59]

The assembling and forcible movement of the Germans was characteristic of extreme brutality; in addition to organized executions, the guards, made up of ordinary soldiers, resorted to bullying, torture and arbitrary murdering of prisoners. Apart from coercing the Germans into obedience on departure or during the march, the poorly trained and often drunken guards whiled away time by torturing prisoners during long night duties.[60]

The guards kept the captured Germans hungry and thirsty for several days, and after daily bullying, they crammed them at night into dirty and smelly horse stables, where they had no hope of peace or rest. Hungry, dirty, and exhausted prisoners living in the barn lost all the attributes of humanity and turned into rather annoying "insects" in the eyes of guards. They no longer saw them as human beings. On endless nights, when horrible wailing of tortured people alternated with a lack of air, the guards suddenly opened the gates and randomly picked their victims. One of the survivors described the night of 4-5 June 1945 as follows: "Pitch-dark, suddenly headlights that shine in our faces to dazzle us and the first volleys from submachine guns into the

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57 Zápis o jednání vyšetřovací komise ÚNS [Record of the Session of the Investigation Committee of the Constituent National Assembly], Výpověď B. Marka [Testimony of B. Marek], in: ABS, coll. A2/1, i. n. 1765, box 57, p. 11, f. 736; Výpověď J. Čubky [Testimony of J. Čubka], ibidem, p. 28, f. 753; Výpověď V. Černého [Testimony of V. Černý], ibidem, p. 31, f. 756; Výpověď J. Zíchy [Testimony of J. Zícha], ibidem, p. 17, f. 742; Konfrontace B. Marka s O. Pelcem [Confrontation of B. Marek with O. Pelc], ibidem, pp. 45–46, f. 770–771.

58 Evidence of Fritz Schuldes, in: BHSA, SdA, EVB, no. 463, p. 1; evidence of Anton Seider, ibidem, no. 464, p. 1; evidence of Mrs./Mr. Emmerling, ibidem, no. 465, p. 1.

59 ARBURG/STANĚK, Vysídlení II, 3 (as in footnote 56), p. 234; evidence of Mrs./Mr. Emmerling, in: BHSA, SdA, EVB, no. 465, pp. 3–4.

60 Evidence of Mrs./Mr. Feiler, in: BHSA, SdA, EVB, no. 458, p. 2; evidence of Anton Seider, ibidem, no. 464, p. 3; evidence of Mrs./Mr. Emmerling, ibidem, no. 465, p. 3–4.

compressed crowd. Calls for help and wailing from those affected, then deathly silence. Suddenly the henchmen came into the barracks and without an aim or plan grabbed men and boys by the hair and dragged them out into the yard and there they were shot. I can't say how many there were. After about an hour the same diabolical hunt with the headlights and submachine guns. There was only one wish in us: if only day would come soon."[61]

As in other similar cases, the dehumanization of victims had a powerful triggering effect in escalating torture. In addition, the guards felt fully empowered to torture and murder the prisoners because their commanders ordered them to maintain order "at all costs" in a situation in which no one cared about potential victims. In such a situation, the fact that someone had ordered the murder was less important than the fact that no one had clearly banned it.[62]

The responsibility for the large-scale killing of the Germans during the occupation of the border rested not only on the soldiers, but also on their commanders.[63] From direct superiors to the highest authorities, no one forbade the arbitrary killing of civilians when executing the orders, although they were well aware that their subordinates had the experience of fighting on the Eastern Front. During the parliamentary inquiry into the massacre of Postoloprty in 1947, all three local commanders paradoxically used the reference to the frontline experience of their subordinate soldiers to relieve themselves of responsibility for extrajudicial mass killings. Even General Klapálek employed a similar strategy:

> "If there were any individual failures, then we must consider that soldiers are ordinary people who in this case had gone through the hell of the front and, for the most part, had lost their brothers, sisters, fathers, wives, children and grandparents due to the cruelty of the Germans. It was the Postoloprty unit, composed for the most part of Volhynian Czechs, who had lost their relatives in the USSR and experienced German atrocities on their own skin, so no one can be surprised that these soldiers acted harshly against the Germans; that is from the military and human point of view easy to understand."[64]

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61 Evidence of Mrs./Mr. Feiler, ibidem, no. 458, p. 2.

62 Cf. ZIMBARDO (as in footnote 8), p. 438: "I believe that a system consists of those agents and agencies whose power and values create or modify the rules of and expectations for 'approved behaviors' within its sphere of influence. In one sense, the system is more than the sum of its parts and of its leaders, who also fall under its powerful influences. In another sense, however, the individuals who play key roles in creating a system that engages in illegal, immoral, and unethical conduct should be held accountable despite the situational pressures on them."

63 BERGHOLZ (as in footnote 10), p. 198, mentions the presence of commanders and their decisions as a key factor in the restraint of violence.

64 Protokol vyšetřující komise ÚNS sepsaný s armádním generálem Karlem Klapálkem dne 09.08.1947 [Report of the Investigation Committee of the Constituent National Assembly with General Karel Klapálek from 1947-08-09], in: ABS, coll. A2/1, i. n. 1765, box 57, p. 3, f. 151; Výpověď J. Zíchy [Testimony of J. Zícha], ibidem, p. 23,

However, these commanders were only looking for excuses for the fact that the highest military officials themselves had formulated rules of tough action against Germans, allowing their killing.[65]

Based on the examples mentioned above, it can be concluded that the most egregious cases of violence against the German population in the form of mass murders did not take place in the Czech lands in the immediate post-war period, but mostly after a noticeable interval and until June 1945. At that time, it was no longer a matter of spontaneous acts of violence; the state, with its military units as violence specialists, entered as an active agent. It was thus a full manifestation of an organized state policy of collective violence.

Conclusion

Simultaneously in May 1945, there were acts of collective violence that arose from various conditions. The politics of collective violence was influenced by at least two simultaneous but uneven processes. The Nazi government was collapsing, while the Czechoslovak state power was being restored. The first week after the official end of the fighting marked the definitive collapse of the Nazi rule, while the Czechoslovak power was just beginning to restore its proper institutions. In addition to a short-term superiority of various spontaneously formed paramilitary units, this condition allowed for the rise of transitional rituals as patterns maintained in folk culture, which led to the emergence of spontaneous acts of violence. An organized state power was restored very quickly in large cities such as Prague or Brno, while in peripheral and borderland areas the power vacuum persisted, sometimes long into the summer of 1945. As a result, there was still a large space for opportunism, which in some places allowed for direct acts of violence until the spring of 1946. In addition to ritualized transitional violence, there were notable campaigns of annihilation, which were carried out again mainly by violence specialists.

For a very limited time in the final phase of the war, an extermination war came from the eastern territories along with the Reich's armed forces. The cleansing violence that followed was to some extent reminiscent of the campaigns of annihilation that took place in ethnically mixed territories on the fringes of frontline combats in the East (e.g. Volhynia). The overall situation in the Czech lands after the end of the war with a broad zone of opportunism, in which a number of individual acts of violence took place in parallel with collective violence, resembled to some extent the unstable period of the so-

f. 746; Výpověď J. Čubky [Testimony of J. Čubka], ibidem, p. 29, f. 754; Výpověď V. Černého [Testimony of V. Černý], ibidem, p. 32, f. 757.

65 In the case of partisan and military raids after the end of the war in the Czech lands, we can clearly identify the effects of all socio-psychological factors supporting the escalation of violence (conformity, obedience, deindividuation, dehumanization, moral disengagement, and the evil of inaction). Cf. ZIMBARDO (as in footnote 8), pp. 21, 212–213, 228, 273–275, 350–353, 425.

called "great fear" in 1944–1947 in Poland.[66] At the end of World War II, the Czech lands were given the war experience of the eastern territories, which partly influenced the nature of the subsequent settlement with "Germans, traitors and collaborators." Existing forms of violence associated with transitional rituals were very close to similar acts in, for instance, Belgium or France. In Belgium, the main trigger for the expulsion and executions was the collapse of local government. Similarly to the Czech case, in the French post-war cleansing, according to current research, the key initiative was taken by the government in exile and individual resistance groups.[67] In the Czech lands, the significant difference did not lie in the involvement of the partisans and the army, whose actions would, in themselves, significantly delay the calming down of the situation. The peculiar thing here was the involvement of these armed forces in extensive ethnic cleansing, due to which the post-war violence in the Czech lands was longer and more brutal than in Western Europe. Campaigns of annihilation and forced evictions lasted there until the autumn of 1945, and especially in the borderlands, opportunistic violence was common until the beginning of the so-called "organized expulsion" in the winter of 1945/46.

The presented analysis of collective violence confirms the key role of the state in the escalation of mass atrocities. Referring to concrete cases, I have highlighted that the situational conditions and decisions of specific actors were equally important, thus downplaying the thesis about an all-embracing role of the state policy. Moreover, I have proven the fundamental role of the state and its violence specialists also in the period immediately following 8 May 1945, in which the existing historiography understood spontaneous popular anger as the main agent. Carnivalesque violence associated with transitional rituals did occur, but only for a surprisingly limited period of a few post-war days. After that, the spontaneously formed crowds as actors of collective violence disappeared, and although the level of collective violence remained high in the following weeks, its main executors were, again, violence specialists. Having evaluated these findings, I have concluded that collective violence at the end of the war remained an integral part of the state policy throughout the whole period. Despite all the differences between the Nazi and post-war Czechoslovak rule mentioned above, i.e. collapsing extreme right-wing leader-dictatorship and emerging restricted liberal democ-

66 GRZEGORZ HRYCIUK: Polen aus Wolhynien und Ostgalizien: Ermordung und Flucht, in: DETLEF BRANDES, HOLM SUNDHAUSSEN et al. (eds.): Lexikon der Vertreibungen: Deportation, Zwangsaussiedlung und ethnische Säuberung im Europa des 20. Jahrhundert, Wien 2010, pp. 529–532; MARCIN ZAREMBA: Die große Angst: Polen 1944–1947. Leben im Ausnahmezustand, Paderborn 2016, pp. 423–499.

67 MARTIN CORNWAY: The Sorrows of Belgium: Liberation and Political Reconstruction, 1944–1947, Oxford 2012, pp. 146–148. Cf. FRANÇOIS ROUQUET, FABRICE VIRGILI: Les Françaises, les Français et l'épuration: 1940 à nos jour [The French, the French and the Purification: 1940 to the Present Day], Paris 2018.

racy, both regimes relied heavily on violence specialists to exercise their power and limited the space for manifestations of spontaneous popular anger.

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