Trilateral Historical Research Project

Violence against Civilians on the Eastern Front of World War II
Contact

http://www.uni-heidelberg.de/fakultaeten/philosophie/zegk/sog/forschung/aktuelle_forschung.html

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About the Project

The project focuses on the crimes against civilians in the occupied and liberated territories of the Soviet Union, particular in Russia and Ukraine, during World War II. It involves scholars of Soviet History and World War II from the University of Heidelberg, the Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia), and the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Kiev, Ukraine). Next to seven experienced researchers also five Ph.D. students from the three countries are involved.

The study dwells upon recent developments in the historiography that include burgeoning studies of the local practices of German occupation, including the Holocaust in the East, and growing interest in the repressive actions of the Soviet regime during the war, as well as wartime Stalinism. The project emphasizes six major areas: 1) the study of experiences of civilians under specific German occupation regimes and the study of violence as particular method of rule; 2) a focus on local contexts of violence and correlation with the ideology and politics, including the decentralized violence of partisan units and different nationalist formations; 3) study of the Holocaust in conjunction with other major forms of violence; 4) study of violence in the Soviet home front areas as reaction to the German invasion; 5) study of violence as part of liberation practices by the Red Army and re-Sovietization; 6) study of local cultures of violence. The local contexts are analyzed within the framework the Nazi war of annihilation in the East and repressive policies of wartime Stalinism. The researchers utilize materials from newly opened Ukrainian former KGB archives, some of that are accessible for the first time since the fall of the Soviet Union.

Besides furthering a purely scholarly agenda, the project aims to bring groups of scholars of World War II and Stalinism from Russia, Ukraine and Germany into close interaction. This will strengthen cross-border cooperation and further a scholarly dialogue on a topic that remains highly politicized in post-Soviet space. The scholars involved want to prove the possibility of international scientific cooperation amidst the political turmoil and military conflict over Ukraine.
About the Program

The project is funded by the Volkswagenstiftung within the framework of the program “Trilateral Partnerships – Cooperation Projects between Scholars and Scientists from Ukraine, Russia and Germany”. This program provides funding to researchers from all disciplines, i.e. natural, life and engineering sciences as well as humanities and social sciences.

The program aims to strengthen cross-border cooperation between scholars, scientists, and academic institutions from Germany, Russia and Ukraine. All partners cooperate on equal terms in this project.

Between 1992 and 2007, the Volkswagen Foundation already supported cooperative projects between German and Eastern European / Russian scientists and scholars in a wide range of disciplines. As a reaction to the recent events in Ukraine, the Foundation decided to initiate a specific offer for trilateral scientific cooperation between the Eastern European conflicting parties and Germany.

Additional information about the program


Additional information about the Volkswagen Foundation

https://www.volkswagenstiftung.de/en.html
## Participants

### Senior Researchers

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### Junior Researchers and PhD-students

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<tr>
<td>Irina Gladcenko</td>
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<td>Tatyana Polishchuk</td>
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<td>Wolfgang Schneider</td>
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Oleg Budnitskii
Professor of History

Oleg Budnitskii serves as editor-in-chief of the Archive of Jewish History, and is on the editorial board of Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History, Rossiiskaia Istoriiia and East European Jewish Affairs. He is the recipient of various honors and awards, including an Ina Levine Invitational Fellowship from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, a Skirball Fellowship from the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Oxford University, a Fulbright Visiting Scholarship in the Department of History at Stanford University, a grant from the MacArthur Foundation, an IREX Visiting Scholar Fellowship at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace.

Studies and academic degrees:


1989: Candidate of Historical Sciences (Ph. D. in History), Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Institute of History of the USSR, Moscow.

1976: Diploma in History and English (M.A.), Rostov State Pedagogical Institute.

Positions held:

2010 to present – Professor, Department of History, and Director, Center for the History and Sociology of WWII, National Research University - Higher School of Economics

1998 - 2013 - Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Russian History, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow

1995 – 1998 - Professor, Head of the Department of Russian History, Rostov State Pedagogical University

1992-1994 – Research Fellow, Institute of Russian History, Russian Academy of Sciences, and Professor, Department of History, Jewish University in Moscow

1988 - 1992 - Senior Lecturer, then Associate Professor of History, Rostov State Pedagogical University

1982-1988 – Lecturer, Rostov State Pedagogical Institute

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Publications


“The Intelligentsia Meets the Enemy: Educated Soviet Officers in Defeated Germany, 1945,” Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History 10 (3) (Summer 2009), 629-682.
Oleg Budnitskii’s research project

Stalin’s repressive machinery during the initial stage of the war

Oleg Budnitskii’s research focuses on the functioning of Stalin’s repressive machinery during the initial stage of the war with Nazi Germany, 1941-42. The traditional method for “disciplining” society and the army was repression. Judging from the available sources, repression periodically reached the levels of 1937. The reaction of Stalin and company to the outbreak of the war was predictable: yet another “purge” of the country.

In Moscow, on the first day of the war (no later than seven in the morning!) a list was prepared containing 1,077 individuals to be placed under immediate arrest. At five o’clock on the evening of 22 June 1941 “according to information obtained by government agents... the active removal of counterrevolutionary elements” was already underway. On the very same day, one thousand prisoners were transferred from the NKVD prisons in Moscow oblast in order to make room for the new arrivals.

A wave of preemptive repression swept the entire country, carrying away “suspicious elements” in regions located thousands of miles from the theater of war. A report made by the court in Molotov (Perm’) oblast during the second half of 1941 claimed: “During peacetime, there was much more tolerance towards the freedom of people for whom we only have partial evidence of criminal activity. During wartime, the freedom of these elements cannot be tolerated. They have been arrested and tried.” From June to December of 1941, the Kirov regional court ordered the execution of 346 out of 716 people, or about 48.3% of those held for crimes against the state. During the last quarter of 1941, the courts of the RSFSR sentenced 41.5% of those charged with crimes against the state to death. NKVD reports from the second half of 1941 reveal new categories of criminals: “arrested and convicted were cowards and alarmists, deserters and soldiers with self-inflicted wounds, defeatists and disseminators of provocative rumors.” According to my calculations, the number of people convicted of “counterrevolutionary crimes” in the RSFSR during the second half of 1941 was 1.5 times higher than it was during the first half of the year. The percentage of those sentenced to death was 11.5 times higher.

This research is based mainly on the new materials derived from the various Russian archives.
Oleg Khlevniuk

Oleg Khlevniuk is leading research fellow at the International Center for the History and Sociology of World War II and its Consequences and Professor of History at the National Research University – Higher School of Economics, Moscow.

He authored numerous books on the history of Stalinism and Soviet Union that were translated in many languages. He also prepared documentary publications including correspondence of Soviet leaders, minutes of Politburo meetings and history of the GULAG. He has been involved in a number of collaborative international projects, and he is also member of the editorial boards of the journals Rossiiskaia Istoriia (Russian History), Cahiers du Monde russe, Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History, and Slavonica.

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Publications


Available also in Dutch, Italian, Polish, Czech and Estonian editions.
The Gulag at War. Crisis of forced labor system and its consequences

Forced labor is an essential foundation of any war economy. On the Eastern front, it gained a particularly brutal form. The symbol of forced labor in the Soviet Union was the economy of the Gulag.

The Soviet camp system during the war was in a crisis. This crisis is the main subject of the study. The crisis of the Gulag meant exhaustion of the possibilities for coercion, on which the Gulag economy operated in the prewar years.

The increased exploitation of prisoners and repression in the camps in connection with the outbreak of war led to the deterioration of physical condition of inmates and disorganization of the camp economy. It resulted in the significant rise in deaths of prisoners. Even according to official data it exceeded 1 million people (about 14% of camp population) during the war. More than that, the most healthy part of the prisoners were freed to be sent to the army. As a result, demographic composition of the prison population has changed significantly. As there were more weak prisoners and women less heavy physical work could be performed.

Having lost a significant part of the workforce, the leaders of the economy of the Gulag were forced to seek new ways to stimulate labor, to abandon certain extreme forms of terror and violence. These new tendencies started to emerge during the war years and peaked in the postwar years.

The objectives of the project are:

- to investigate the system of forced labor in the Gulag during the war as part of the problem of violence against civilian population;
- to consider the components of the crisis forced labor in the camp economy;
- to investigate official data on mortality in the camps;
- to assess the consequences of the crisis of the Gulag;
- to set new trends in the development of the economy of forced labor that began to emerge in response to the crisis of Gulag.
Liudmila Novikova

Liudmila Novikova is Associate Professor of History and Deputy Director of the International Center for the History and Sociology of World War II and Its Consequences at the National Research University – Higher School of Economics in Moscow. She received her higher education and PhD (candidacy degree) in History from Lomonosov Moscow State University. Before joining the Higher School of Economics in 2013, she taught history at Moscow State University and spent a year as Visiting Scholar at the University of Notre Dame, USA. She has published widely on the history of World War I, the Russian Revolution and the Civil War, in particular focusing on local contexts of revolution, counter-revolution and revolutionary violence. She has authored a book on the anti-Bolshevik movement in North Russia during the Civil War. She has also co-edited volumes on the history of Russian revolution in regional perspective and on the USSR during World War II. Currently, she is working on her new book-length project on the social and cultural history of the Soviet home-front city of Arkhangel’sk during World War II. She is also associate editor of the journal *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History.*

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Publications


Liudmila Novikova’s research project

**Labor Mobilizations in the War-Time Soviet Union**

Liudmila Novikova’s research focuses on labor mobilizations in the war-time Soviet Union. It reveals that these mobilizations were often brutal, inefficient and resulted in unnecessary waste of resources and loss of life. At the same time, it is argued that these mobilizations were not infrequently backed by genuine popular enthusiasm.

Labor mobilizations are examined on the example of Soviet Russia’s northern areas. In particular, the project explores children’s food expedition to Novaja Zemlia Archipelago in summer 1942. Over 180 school children, mostly aged 14 to 15 spent over two months on the Arctic Archipelago collecting eggs of wild birds and hunting birds to provide additional food supply to the hungry city of Arkhangel’sk. The story of this expedition was exemplary for many reasons. First of all, it demonstrates the total scope of labor mobilization in the war-time USSR when even school children were mobilized to help the country’s war effort and were sent on a dangerous mission to an uninhabited Arctic archipelago. Second, it reveals that the huge numbers of the mobilized did not aid the efficiency of the mobilization campaigns, as the results of the expedition fell far behind the initial expectations. While children suffered from harsh living conditions and attacks of dysentery, these sacrifices were largely unnecessary as the expedition procured only negligible amount of food. But also, this example demonstrates that mobilization campaigns could be backed by genuine popular enthusiasm. Many youth in Arkhangel’sk actually wanted to go to Novaja Zemlia to help the country’s war effort, to get food to themselves, to travel and see new lands, and to join the Soviet effort in conquering the Arctic nature, just as the “papanintsy” had tried to do a few years before.

Taken together, this project captures complex relationships between voluntary and involuntary labor in the war-time USSR. It reveals that war-time mobilizations should be analyzed in the context of the previous Soviet mobilization efforts of the 1930s when Soviet society got accustomed to deprivations and extreme violence of the state. At the same time, analyzing mobilization practices during the war, it shows how the state efforts, individual survival strategies, but also some genuine belief in the progressive nature of the Soviet state contributed to the Soviet victory in the war.
**Tanja Penter**

Tanja Penter is Professor of Eastern European History at Heidelberg University. She studied at the University of Cologne and received her PhD in History from this University. Tanja Penter has taught at the Ruhr-University of Bochum, the Humboldt-University of Berlin and the Helmut-Schmidt-University of Hamburg. Other professional appointments include a research project on reparations for former Nazi forced laborers and on forced labor in coal mining industries. Tanja Penter has been the Paul-Resnick postdoctoral fellow at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2004/2005. She is a member of both the German-Russian, as well as the German-Ukrainian Historical Commissions. She has published widely on the 1917 Russian Revolution, on the German Occupation of the Soviet Union with a special emphasis on forced labor, on the judicial prosecution of war crimes and collaboration in the Soviet Union after World War II and on the history of the Roma in the Tsarist Empire.

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**Publications**


_____, Dmytro Tytarenko: Opyt nacistskoj okkupacii v Donbasse: svidetel'stvujut očevidcy, (Die Erfahrung der nationalsozialistischen Besatzung im Donbass: ein oral history-Projekt mit Zeitzeugen), Donec'k 2013-


Tanja Penter’s research project

The Nazi murder of disabled and sick people in the occupied Soviet Union in WWII and its juridical reprocessing

In the context of the joint research project Tanja Penter studies the mass murder of disabled and sick people, which took place in the Soviet Union under German occupation as part of the Nazi-euthanasia program. At divers hospitals, sanatoria and so called colonies for disabled children in the occupied territories ten thousands of inmates were killed by German “Einsatzkommandos” by shooting, gas vans or by starvation and neglect.

Several selection processes came along with the murder of disabled and sick people: Often first the Jewish inmates were killed, second those who were not capable of work. In a final step the rest of the inmates were killed.

Only in few cases German perpetrators ever were convicted for these crimes in postwar war crimes trials in the GFR and the GDR. Many of these crimes and their general scale are still unknown to a broader German public until today. Inside the postwar Soviet Union the situation was different: here not seldom the nursing staff of these facilities, among them many women, was put on trial for complicity with the Germans in the crime. The Soviet trial materials in many ways present a fascinating historical ressource, which shows not only the daily horrors and practices of German war of annihilation, but also deals with the survival strategies, moral dilemma and scopes of action of the Soviet citizens. Not least it reveals to a certain extend problems of the Soviet treatment of disabled and sick people in the Stalinist 1930s. Until today these crimes and victims are rarely represented in the remembrance cultures of the successor states of the Soviet Union.
Roman Podkur

Roman Podkur senior Research Fellow, Institute of History of Ukraine National Academy of Science of Ukraine, Candidate of Historical Sciences (Ph.D. in History), executive secretary of the Main Editorial Board of the scientific and documentary series of books "Rehabilitated by history". He was Senior Research Fellow at State archive Vinnitsa’s region, Lector, Department of History, Vinnitsa’s Pedagogical University. Participated in international projects (Stanford university) about everyday life Vinnytsia region in the period of Nazi occupation, the activities of the political leadership 1938-1989. (Indiana university, Stanford university)

Publications


Roman Podkur's research project

Edited volume of archival documents: "Violence against the civilian population of Ukraine on the Eastern Front: Documents of the special services, 1941-1945"

In the current project prepares for publication documents on violence against the civilian population in 1941-1945, conducts a source study of documents of the Soviet special services that are used in the study.
Valeryi Vasylyev

Current employment:
Institute of History of Ukraine National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine
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01001 Kyiv, Ukraine

Professional experience:
2010-2017 - Head of Centre of Historical and Encyclopedic Research, Institute of History of Ukraine, Doctor of History

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Publications

In collaboration:

Articles:


Valery Vasylyev 's research project

**Edited volume of archival documents: "Violence against the civilian population of Ukraine on the Eastern Front: Documents of the special services, 1941-1945"**

In this project Valery Vasiliev participates in the preparation for the publication of the collection of documents "Violence against the civilian population of Ukraine on the Eastern Front: Documents of the special services, 1941-1945", and also writes an introductory article analyzing various forms of violence. In addition to the plunder of the population, mass executions of the population, the problems of the Holocaust, the destruction of mentally ill in psychiatric hospitals, and the killing of children are explored. A separate storyline is the analysis of Soviet violence in the territories liberated from the invaders.
Yanina Karpenkina

PhD-student

In 2014 I graduated from the historical department of Belarusian State University (Belarus, Minsk).

Nowadays I am an advanced postgraduate student at The National Research University Higher School of Economics (School of History) in Moscow. My dissertation topic is “The Jews of Western Belorussia in 1939-1941: The Challenge of Sovietization”.

While I was studying I have participated in a range of International conferences, workshops and forums. Among them are: The Workshop “New Directions in the Use of Oral Testimonies: Soviet Experiences of the Holocaust” at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, D.C., U.S.A. (August, 2016); The International workshop “The Holocaust in the Soviet Union” at The Moshe Mirilashvili Center for Research on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, Yad Vashem, Israel (September, 2016); The Eighth Session of the International Forum for Young Scholars on East European Jewry at the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences and NYU in Prague (July, 2017). In Summer 2016 I was working as a Summer Student Research Assistant at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, D.C., U.S.A. and so on.

Since 2016 I am a Research Assistant at The International Centre For the History and Sociology of World War II and Its Consequences (HSE, Moscow).

I am interested in the history of the USSR and the history of Soviet Jews (in particular, everyday life practices), the history of the Belarus under soviet rule.

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Publications

Articles


Yanina Karpenkina’s research project

The Soviet repression policy towards the population of Western Belorussia

My research is focused on the Soviet repression policy towards population of the Western Belorussia (as a part of the Eastern Poland) annexed by USSR in September 1939. Particularly, I am interested in the fate of the local Jewish population. However, since it is complicated and, moreover, unreasonable to separate history of the Jews from the other ethnics, my research also includes other ethnical groups living in the region – Poles and Byelorussians.

I am looking for the answers on the following questions: 1) Whether there were any specifics of the soviet repression policy towards the former polish residents? 2) How and to what extent the local ethnical groups were involved in the repressions? 3) How the soviet repression effected on the changes in the local society? In sum, my large aspiration is to reconstruct the soviet repression system and the according social conditions of the human life in the Western Belorussia in 1939-1941.

I use a diverse number of possible historical sources, which could be divided into two groups: 1) the document of the soviet government: 2) personal memoirs and testimonies.

The first group is stocked in the soviet archives. Thus, I have found some of the legislation materials of Soviet state towards Western Belorussia in the State archive of the Russian Federation (GARF, Moscow) and The Russian State Archive of The Socio-Political History (RSASPH, Moscow). Lots of significant soviet state documents were founded in the Republic of Belarus National Archive (NARB, Minsk). There is the Communist party’s fund (Ф. 4П), which contains some valuable NKVD reports.

Another group of my sources is memoirs and oral testimonies of the Western Byelorussian population, who were witnesses of the events took place in 1939-1941. By this time, I have already analyzed about 40 memoirs, written by the Jews came from that region. Most of them I found in the library and archives of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). Recently I have also analyzed some oral testimonies from the collection of the USHMM as well. I employed audio and video records of Byelorussians, Poles and Jews. Using all that account helps me to reconstruct some aspects of the life conditions under the soviet repression policy in Eastern Poland in 1939-1941.

I suppose to complete an article on that issue soon.
Artem Latyshev
PhD (2017)


Since 2017 work as a research assistant in the National Research University Higher School of Economics, the International Centre for the History and Sociology of World War II and Its Consequences.

Now work on different topics about a social history of soviet period, continue to research soviet POWs, NKVD filtration camps and soviet state security bodies.

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Publications

Articles


Artem Latyshev’s research project

The Red Army servicemen’s special checkup system by the state security bodies in 1941-1945

The author’s subject of research are soviet territories freed from enemy occupation. The main goal is to present a liberation as a long-time and complicated process, because an arrival of the Red army only starts a recession of violence. During the liberation and shortly after it civilians faced with new problems, connected with the beginning of they (re)integration into the soviet wartime society.

The author investigates peoples’ moods after the Red army arrival. Common sense often was a joy and relief, but also, as archival materials show, the people could have felt a fear of a possibility of an enemy return. Also a part of them had a huge self-identification crisis.

Other dangers for civilians were linked with the army as a neighbor: forced evictions, requisitions and other forms of violence, both officially sanctioned and unlawfully provided by individual servicemen. The research concentrates on the so-called core soviet/Russians territories, where national and cultural factors couldn’t have played a huge role. So, it’s reveals another «morale» excuses for unofficial acts of violence against freed population.

Also the author researches people’s moods shortly after an ending of communications with the army: attitude to a religion and church, a communist party, future of a socialism, collective farms. It is important to compare they beliefs and hopes on social changes with peoples’ positions on the same issues in a soviet rear. So, it will be more clear how the enemy occupation (and also the soviet liberation) have changed the civilians’ minds.

Another aim of this research is to show a role of soviet propaganda in the process of the reintegration freed civilians into the soviet society. It reproduced the image of death desert, where a few people could have survived, so, on the one hand, for the army the sense of the war became the liberation of these survivors, but on the other hand, the army’s prejudices against the less harmed regions and they residents have been predetermined. At the same time a propaganda on the occupied territories tried to convince people of all ages and genders to fight against enemy literally with the bare hands. After the liberation it led people to the sense of guilty, made them an easy object of a future ideological manipulations.

The last part of this research connects with the harsher form of political reintegration of common peoples, who, from the authorities’ point of view, weren’t traitors. Since November 1943 civilians were also directed to the network of so-called special/filtration NKVD camps was created at the end of 1942 for soviet servicemen freed from enemy captivity or encirclement during the Red Army offensive. For our understanding of the wartime reintegration it’s important to reveal a logic and ideological of this process.
Irina Makhalova
PhD-student

Irina Makhalova is a PhD student at the Higher School of Economics (Russia, Moscow). Her dissertation is devoted to the collaboration in the Crimea during the Second World War. Irina obtained her BA at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia) in 2014 with the dissertation on the Soviet propaganda during the Second World War. Then she moved to Germany where she had been working on the MA dissertation during 2 years at the Humboldt University (Berlin).

Irina is currently working at the International Center for History and Sociology of the Second World War and Its Consequences as a research assistant. She has been involved in different Center's projects on the social history of the Second World War. During last three years she participated in various international workshops (in Russia, Germany, Israel, Poland and Hungary) on the history of the Holocaust and memory about the Second World War.

Irina received grants from European and Russian institutions for conducting research for her dissertation: Deutsches Historisches Institut (Moscow), European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (Munich), Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), Oxford Russian Fund.

Her main research interests are social history of the Second World war; history of the Holocaust in the USSR, as well as in the Eastern Europe in general; memory about totalitarian regimes and their crimes.

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Publications

Articles


Collaboration in the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes in Crimea (1941-1944)

In frameworks of the project Irina is working on the question about violence toward civilian population in the Crimea during the Nazi occupation (1941-1944). One of the most controversial issue, related to this topic, is participation of collaborators in persecution and extermination of the Jewish population in the Crimea. For a long time, the Holocaust on the occupied Soviet territories has been remaining unexplored topic, because of inaccessibility of sources (the Russian archives remained closed until 1990s) and unwillingness of the Soviet government to distinguish the Jews as a special victim group of the Second World War. Until today, this topic is hard to investigate, and historians are obliged to gather small pieces of information from different archives.

On the peninsula, between 35 000 and 40 000 Jews were killed during the Second World War. Some monographs devoted to the history of the Crimea in this period regard the process of extermination and concentrate more on the activity of the Einsatzgruppe D, as well as on a special role of the Wehrmacht’s soldiers. Others consider exceptionally the collaborators among Crimean Tatars. Until today, the collaborators recruited from Russian and Ukrainian population have been overlooked by historians. In contrast to Ukraine and Belorussia where collaborators also assisted the Nazi occupants implementing different kinds of work, the Muslim factor played a crucial role in the Nazi occupation policy in the Crimea. Moreover, one of the Crimea’s features was presence on the peninsula of three different Jewish groups: Ashkenazi, Karaimy and Krymchaki. They were treated differently by the occupants, and the role of local population in their identification remains still unknown.

The collaborators supported the Nazi regime not only in solving the “Jewish question” but also in creating hard conditions for another groups of civilians (partisans, former communists, people suspected in helping partisans). They also helped to recruit Ostarabeiter for forced labor in Germany and worked as a guard in the biggest concentration camp in the Crimea “Krasnyi”. Forms of violence used by collaborators will be examined as well.

How did the collaborators of different nationalities behave toward the civilian population during the Nazi occupation? What was the difference between policy on Crimean rural and urban areas with regard to the Jews? Did the collaborators share antisemitism while persecuting the Jews? Did they help by recognition of the special Jewish groups? These and other questions are raised in Irina’s research in frameworks of the project.
Wolfgang Schneider

PhD-student (since 2016).

Graduated from the University of Heidelberg in 2016 (History/Slavonic Studies). Since 06/2016: PhD-student and research assistant for the trilateral research project “Violence Against Civilian Victims on the Eastern Front of World War II”. Academic advisor: Prof. Dr. Tanja Penter. Working title of the PhD-Dissertation: “Soviet Collaboration Trials against Jewish Defendants”

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Wolfgang Schneider’s research project

Soviet Collaboration Trials against Jewish Defendants

This PhD-dissertation explores the judicial treatment of Jewish defendants tried as Nazi collaborators in the contexts of Soviet Jewish policy and the development of the Soviet judicial system.

Between 1943 and 1954 alone some 500,000 Soviet citizens were tried for collaborating with Axis powers. The Soviets prosecuted different forms of cooperation with the occupying powers, not least participation in the Holocaust. Apart from other defendants like members of local militias, some Jews also found themselves in the dock accused of “treason of the motherland”. The latter defendants were mostly members of Jewish Councils or the Jewish police of different ghettos. Following Primo Levi, contemporary Holocaust studies place the actions of Jewish councils and similar agencies in a moral “Grey Zone”. As a result of this approach it is vital to suspend moral judgment of the council’s actions. Yet any analysis of the trials has to incorporate the witnesses’ perspective on the defendants. The witnesses, themselves mainly Holocaust survivors from the ghettos, did not refrain from passing judgement. The demand of suspending judgement of the Jewish councils cannot result in making witnesses’ accounts a taboo subject. These accounts are of immediate relevance for understanding the government’s actions, since winning (back) the loyalty of the local population was vital for the process of resovietization of formerly occupied territories and the attitudes of the local population had to be taken into account to achieve this goal. The trials are to be analyzed in the context of two major frameworks: Firstly, Soviet Jewish policy, for example the shift from supporting Jewish organizations like the Jewish Antifascist Committee during the war to the anti-Semitic policies of post-war Stalinism. Secondly, the Soviet judicial system and its changing degree of professionalization, its position in the hierarchy of state agencies and its role as a means of political repression.