

**“WE ARE GLAD THAT THE GERMANS ARE WITH US AND NOT OUR
“DEAREST AND FAVORITE” GOVERNMENT”: THE HOLOCAUST
AND COLLABORATION IN THE SOUTH OF RUSSIA, 1941–1944**

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Abstract

My thesis contributes to the field of the Holocaust and Genocide Studies by asking for the motives of collaborators to participate in the Nazi atrocities of 1941-1944 in the Soviet Union, and particularly in the understudied southern region of Russia. This thesis seeks to demonstrate that the Holocaust in these ethnically diverse areas was distinct in several respects from the mass murders perpetrated in Eastern Europe. This study also examines the subject of collaboration on various levels: not only in the massacres themselves, but also in the military and in daily life under the occupation. The primary sources for this study are interviews with local witnesses that were conducted in the 1990–2000s and were mostly not used before by historians.

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Admittedly, most of the Germans are good, humane, and understanding. But now there is the war, front, any ideologies and god knows what else. It turns out that good people do such things that one would strangle them with bare hands. However, we are glad that the Germans are with us and not our “dearest and favorite” government.

Lidia Osipova, *Dnevnik kollaborantki* [The Diary of a collaborationist], in “*Svershilos’ Prishli nemtsy!*” *Ideinyi kollaboratsionizm v period Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny*, ed. Oleg Budnitskii (Moscow, 2012), 95.

Introduction

Many Soviet citizens had high expectations of the German occupation. They believed that the German soldiers would overthrow the communist government and eventually liberate them from the hated Bolsheviks. The shameful retreat of the Red Army in 1941 assured many civilians that the Soviet state would lose the war. The Poliakov family was one of those who had such aspirations.¹ Olimpiada Poliakova’s diary became the source which inspired me to write this thesis. Her diary was written between the years 1941 and 1944; first in Pushkin, the Leningrad region, and since 1943 – in Riga, where Poliakova worked as a journalist for an anti-Soviet newspaper. After the war, she, fearing persecutions from the Soviet government, changed her name to Lidia Osipova. This diary provides an extensive description of life in the extreme conditions of war, and moreover, it conveys the sentiments which became wide-spread among ordinary Soviet citizens under the occupation. However, sympathy for the Germans did not always lead to collaboration and especially participation in mass murders of Jews. This research will find what convictions guided civilians to take part in Nazi atrocities.

¹ For further details see: Lidia Osipova, *Dnevnik kollaborantki* [The Diary of a collaborationist], in “*Svershilos’ Prishli nemtsy!*” *Ideinyi kollaboratsionizm v period Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny*, ed. Oleg Budnitskii (Moscow, 2012), 18–19.

This thesis is devoted to collaboration during the Holocaust in the southern Soviet territories, namely the Crimea and the North Caucasus. In existing literature on the German occupation in Ukraine, Belarus, Baltic States and Bessarabia, collaboration is often explained by ethno-national conflict; therefore, I chose this under-researched region which was extremely diversified in terms of ethnicity. This thesis belongs to the field of the Holocaust Studies and Jewish Studies. The framework of this thesis is between the years 1941 to 1944, from the occupation of Crimea in 1941 to the complete liberation of the region in 1944. The topic of collaboration in the Soviet Union is often ignored by scholars and, as a result, is poorly investigated. The current thesis represents a new research area that attracted historians quite recently due to the emergence of new sources. Since the 1990s, the Soviet archives became accessible for scholars. Then, in the 2000s, the testimonies of the Soviet Holocaust survivors and witnesses began to be actively collected by European, American, and Israeli archives. The novelty of this thesis is that it is the first attempt to analyze the phenomenon of collaboration that took place in southern Russia during the Holocaust. Neither Western nor Russian publications did so far cover this topic.

In addition, this thesis will explore the specific features of the Holocaust in these territories and will reveal the changes in the relations between the Jews and non-Jewish population in the pre-occupation period as well as under the occupation. In this way, such an analysis will make it possible to answer the following questions: what were the relations between the local non-Jewish population and perpetrators? How did the other ethnic groups relate to the Jews before the war and how did the war influence these Jewish-non-Jewish relations?

As the sources reveal, the Holocaust in the south of Russia has specific features and thus it represents a unique case for the Holocaust and Genocide studies. First, the ethnic composition of

this region was very diverse: it was populated by Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Secondly, there were some specific Jewish religious communities, like Mountain Jews, Krymchaks, and Crimean Karaites; the occupants separated them from the rest of the Jews and treated them specifically. Thirdly, the overwhelming majority of Jewish victims were refugees. At the beginning of the war many Jews were evacuated from the western outskirts of the Soviet Union to the southern territories and exceeded the number of local Jews.

The major aim of the thesis is to analyze the reasons for the support for the Nazi regime in the south of Russia by the locals. These reasons are expected to be of an economic, political, and personal character. The hypothesis is that different ethnic groups of Crimea and the North Caucasus had discrete motives to become collaborators.

There are several key concepts which are important for my research. As this thesis is devoted to the destruction of the Jews, it is important to consider some trends in the historiography on the Holocaust. Collaboration is one of the central concepts for this thesis which became a controversial issue in recent research. Jan Tomasz Gross, a prominent Polish historian of Jewish origin, was the first scholar who drew attention to the problem of collaboration in the Holocaust.² Throughout the monograph, he emphasizes that the Poles were actively involved in the massacres of Jews which took place in Poland in 1941. This book became the starting point in the discussion of collaboration and provoked intense debates in Poland and abroad. The most recent book on collaboration is especially vital for the current thesis because its author, Diana Dumitru, analyzes the connection between official policies and antisemitism at grassroots level. Dumitru concludes that the local population in Bessarabia was eager to participate in persecutions of the Jews whereas

² Jan Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

the Soviet citizens in Transnistria were not inclined to anti-Jewish violence.³ The current thesis will challenge this idea and provide a more nuanced approach.

Apart from the phenomenon of collaboration and the extent of involvement of the local population in the Holocaust, there are other disputes existing in Holocaust studies. For instance, the research outcomes produced by the school of functionalism and intentionalism are important for this thesis as well. Overall, the debates between functionalists and intentionalists were about the origins of the Holocaust. Intentionalists claimed that Hitler was the only responsible figure for taking the decision about the destruction of European Jews. In contrast, functionalists believed that decision-making in Nazi Germany was a bottom-up process and the Nazi authorities did not have a plan for the elimination of all European Jews. Somewhere in the middle there is a famous historian Ian Kershaw whose approach combines elements of both intentionalism and functionalism.⁴ This balanced approach will enable me to explain whether the Nazi politics in the given territories had a chaotic pattern or it was initiated from top to bottom.

In addition, concerning the essence of the Holocaust, social history argues whether the Holocaust is a unique event in a human history which is completely disconnected from the pre-war social conditions. Dan Michman, analyzing the historiography of the Holocaust, claims that most of historians, starting from Lucy Dawidowicz, find the Holocaust unique because of its enormity but not due to its casual process.⁵ In other words, the Holocaust should be (and in recent

³ Diana Dumitru, *The State, Anti-Semitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 5.

⁴ Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London: Arnold, 1989).

⁵ Dan Michman, "The Holocaust in the Eyes of Historians: The problem of Conceptualization, Periodization, and Explanation," *Modern Judaism* 15, no. 3 (October 1995), 256.

research it usually is) perceived as a part of a larger pattern of the European historical development; the roots and premises of the Holocaust lay in pre-war antisemitism and scapegoating.

In a similar vein, I believe that the events which took place in southern Russia during the WWII are rooted in the historical context. Therefore, the meaning of space is especially emphasized in this thesis. In the case of the Caucasus and Crimea, the outskirts of the Romanoff empire were the territories full of tensions and controversies due to their history and the process of their transition from the Ottoman to the Russian Empire. The Caucasus was annexed as a result of the colonization campaign of the 19th century. At that point, the Russian officials faced the problem of the assimilation of Caucasian peoples into Russian culture. This was extremely problematic and challenging for the Russian authorities as these ethnic groups were of Muslim faith. The Russian policy towards these newly acquired subjects was inconsistent; integration and toleration of the Muslims was often followed by suppression and violence. Despite the efforts of the Russian government to stabilize the southern outskirts of the empire, the south of Russia remained a precarious and unstable region.⁶ The Russian periphery is defined by Alfred Rieber as a “shatter-zone” – the “ill-defined, unstable, underpopulated and contested frontiers”, which are inhabited by “a complex mix of ethnic groups, religions and cultures”.⁷ This definition fully corresponds with the case of southern Russia. Considering the historical background of this region, I will analyze the interethnic conflicts which occurred during the Second World War in the southern Russian frontier.

⁶ Alfred Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands: From the Rise of the Early Modern Empires to the End of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 394.

⁷ Rieber, *The Struggle*, 208–209.

Timothy Snyder's concept of "bloodlands" with a few remarks can be also applied in the case of southern Russia. According to Snyder, the "bloodlands" were the territories which were under the repressive regimes of Stalin and Hitler.⁸ These were the areas where the actual murders of civilians through shooting and starvation took place. The Holocaust on this soil was not industrial but rather personal and primitive; the distance between a perpetrator, who pulls the trigger, and a victim was minimal. Moreover, in the case of south Russia, there were neither death factories nor gas chambers. The most common method of killing was mass shooting; thus, killing operations were not time-consuming and did not require special equipment and preparation. However, regardless of the means of murders, the fact remains – Hitler's regime eliminated the entire Jewish communities of southern Russia and starved to death communists and Soviet prisoners of war. Similarly, most of devoted leaders of the opposition in the Caucasus were persecuted by the Tsarist authorities and the entire religious groups were forcibly resettled. Therefore, one can refer to southern Russia as "bloodlands" – the territories where different repressive systems overlapped.

The literature on the ethnicities in the Soviet Union is also important for my thesis. As it was already mentioned, the North Caucasus and Crimea were ethnically diverse areas. Thus, the literature on ethnicities in the Soviet Union is especially relevant for this thesis. This topic became popular among the scholars during the last years of the USSR, when nationalistic movements broke out in the Soviet state, and after its collapse in 1991. Some widely-cited works have been written about Soviet policies towards ethnic minorities and the process of their inclusion into the Soviet state. Among them there is a large monograph by Terry Martin. He defines the Soviet Union as the "affirmative action empire", whose policy, despite terror campaigns of the 1930s, contributed

⁸ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York, 2010), xi.

to the transformation of ethnic groups into solid entities with their own language and territory.⁹ Francine Hirsch, another prominent historian of the nationalities in the Soviet state, defines this process as the “state-sponsored evolutionism”, which aimed to achieve certain long-run goals.¹⁰ At the first stages of the nationalities’ building process, Soviet officials understood that some ethnicities had been primarily more backward than others. Thus, in the 1920s, minority groups benefited to the detriment of the majorities. Therefore, the roots of tensions and ethnic conflicts can be found in this dichotomy of the Soviet policy.

The literature which is devoted to the elimination of the Jews in the south of Russia and in the Soviet Union in general will be included in the present thesis. To begin with, the research which particularly tackles the issue of collaboration is an article by Mordechai Altshuler.¹¹ It is also devoted to the peculiarities which were typical for the Holocaust in the Soviet territories. Among them were the annihilation of the Jews shortly after the start of the occupation and the absence of the Jewish unitedness before as well as during the war. The author analyzes the Holocaust from the perspective of the Nazis, gentiles and the Jews. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the events. This study is particularly relevant as it examines the motives of the collaborators and bystanders. Apart from that, it includes a section on the actions which were conducted by Einsatzgruppen in all occupied Soviet territories.

One of the books which fully describes the life and the conditions under the occupation is the book of the Russian historian Ilya Altman, one of the founders of the first Russian research

⁹ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Cornell University Press, 2001), 16–17.

¹⁰ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Cornell University Press, 2005), 8.

¹¹ Mordechai Altshuler, “The Unique Features of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union,” in *Jews and Jewish life in Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. Yaacov Ro’i (Ilford, Essex: Frank Cass, 1995), 171–188.

and educational center “Holocaust” in 1992.¹² Relying on the sources from the Russian State Archive, it illustrates the features characterizing the occupation in different regions of the USSR, including the southern territories. This book – structured like an encyclopedia – is a valuable starting point for researchers. In a similar vein, the former director of Yad Vashem and the participant in WWII on the side of the USSR, Yitzhak Arad, writes about the Holocaust. He dedicated his book to the very detailed description of the elimination process which took place in the Soviet territories.¹³ It would be difficult to pinpoint any single theory for these books: Soviet literature tends to be descriptive and it barely can be situated in the framework of Western historiography.

The German historian Andrej Angrick concentrates on the Einsatzgruppe D, which functioned on the large territories from Romania to the Russian North Caucasus and the Crimea. In his book, Angrick is trying to obtain a complete picture of this murder unit’s actions by analyzing the methods of its work, its structure and representatives¹⁴. As the author’s purpose is to examine the Einsatzgruppen, the major source of this work are the reports of these units. In this research, a strong emphasis is made on the role of personality in a certain Einsatzgruppe. However, this monograph was criticized for the lack of analysis of the relations between the perpetrators and collaborators and, as Angrick uses the German sources exclusively, for illustrating the Soviet citizens only from the point of view of the Nazis.

A very detailed work about the plight of the Jews under the occupation belongs to the Israeli historian Kiril Feferman. His monograph can be related to the spatial turn in historiography

¹² Ilya Altman, *Zhertvy nenavisti: Kholokost v SSSR, 1941–1945* [*The victims of hatred: The Holocaust in the USSR, 1941 – 1945*] (Moscow: Fond “Kovcheg”, 2002).

¹³ Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009).

¹⁴ Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord: Die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion, 1941–1943* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003).

because the author focuses on the certain space and proves that it represents the unique case in the history of the Holocaust. Besides, he examines the Nazi policy towards different Jewish groups, such as Karaites, Mountain Jews, Krymchaks, and Ashkenazi Jews in the south of the USSR and Nazis' methods of mass murders. Feferman also demonstrates the change of life conditions before and during the war, as well the process of evacuation into the southern territories. Some attention is paid on the reactions of the locals on the Holocaust, but this question takes the second place in this monograph. Moreover, the ambiguity of the Nazi policy toward the mixed couples and their children is illustrated, but the logic of perpetrators' actions toward them remains unrevealed in this research.¹⁵ The sources which his work is based on are mostly the oral testimonies from the Yad Vashem Archive. To a lesser extent he relies on the documents of the Extraordinary State Commission that are preserved in the Russian State Archive and the German sources, namely the reports of Einsatzgruppe D. Feferman's work became the first monograph that illuminated the unique case of the Holocaust in the southern territories.

Christina Winkler, taking Rostov-on-Don as an example, shows the importance of documents of all kinds: German reports, Soviet Extraordinary State Commission and testimonies.¹⁶ She reconstructs the mass murder of the Jews in Rostov. This is a comprehensive research covering all the available sources for this distinct city. However, it is limited by the case of Rostov, while small towns and numerous villages remain unstudied.

The major primary sources for my thesis are the testimonies of the Holocaust witnesses from the local population in Crimea and the North Caucasus. They are recorded in Russian and to

¹⁵ Kiril Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2016).

¹⁶ Christina Winkler, "Rostov-on-Don: A Little-Known Chapter of the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 105-130.

a lesser extent in Ukrainian by a collective of workers of Yahad-In Unum Archive in Paris. The mission of this archive is to preserve the memory about mass-murders through shooting which were conducted by the mobile killing units, Einsatzgruppen, in Eastern Europe during WWII. This archive was established in 2004 by Father Patrick Desbois. Nowadays he is a famous researcher of the Holocaust and the president of Yahad-In Unum. Apart from this, I rely on the testimonies of the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, which are available online through the CEU library. The testimonies are important for my thesis because they enable me to look at the Holocaust in the given territories from the perspective of the ordinary people. Testimonies also help to get a deep insight into the complexity of the relations between the occupants and locals during the Holocaust in the chosen region. Besides, the private sources enable me to define the reasons that made local inhabitants to become collaborators. In addition, these sources demonstrate what kind of work collaborators conducted.

In addition, the papers of the Soviet Extraordinary Commission (ChGK) will be used in this thesis as well. The number of documents issued by the Soviet Commission is large: for example, a folder on one locality can contain over thousand pages. To begin with the process of collecting the materials by the Commission, it is important to mention that the data was collected by Provincial Commissions from each province in the territories which were occupied during the WWII. They were under control of the Commission in Moscow and sent their data there in a great hurry, because ChGK started its work immediately at the war period. One should be considerate while working with these documents because some inaccuracies, especially in numbers, occurred as a result of this rush. Moreover, as these sources are the product of the Soviet bureaucratic apparatus, the usage of a specific language of the communist party is characteristic for them.

However, despite these peculiarities, the documents of the Soviet State Commission are one of the most detailed sources of the Holocaust on Soviet soil.

This thesis will illustrate different aspects of the occupation regime in the southern provinces of the USSR. The first chapter will provide detailed information concerning the evacuation of the Jewish people from the western regions to the southern ones. This chapter will also describe the life of the Soviet citizens before the war. Moreover, the relations between the Jews and other ethnic groups before and at the early beginning of 1941 will be illustrated. The second chapter will include the analysis of the occupation regime in the south of the USSR and its specific features. The third chapter will be devoted to the attitude of the occupants towards mixed marriages and specific religious and ethnic communities – Mountain Jews, Crimean Karaites, and Krymchaks. The fourth chapter will illustrate how the non-Jewish inhabitants started to relate to the Jews under the occupation. Moreover, this chapter will reveal to what extent the local population of non-Jewish origin supported the perpetrators; whether their loyalty to the occupants depended on the territory where these people lived, their political views or some private reasons. Finally, the fifth chapter is fully devoted to the reactions of the Soviet government on the Holocaust and its representation in Soviet press, films, and literature.

Chapter 1. Southern Russia on the eve of the Nazi occupation: impact of evacuation on the relations between Jews and non-Jews

This chapter aims to analyze the evacuation to the North Caucasus in detail. It will demonstrate the motives for evacuation and the processes of evacuation. This chapter will also reveal why some families decided to stay under the occupation and did not try to escape. Moreover, this chapter will bring an insight about the evacuation which influenced the further development of events during the Holocaust. Comprehensive analysis of evacuation allows us to understand what influence it had on the relations between Jews and non-Jews and on the Holocaust in general. The sources this chapter is mainly based on are the oral testimonies of Holocaust survivors and witnesses. The hypothesis is that the effect of evacuation was detrimental in terms of the survival of the Jews during the Holocaust.

The evacuation of populations from Crimea, Ukraine, Belorussia, Moldova and Leningrad into the North Caucasus began immediately after the Nazi invasion on June 22, 1941. It was launched by the Soviet state. First, industry and workers had to be evacuated, then orphanages and hospitals, and only afterwards ordinary citizens. Evacuees were treated equally at their places of refuge, irrespective of the fact where they arrived from and if they were evacuated by the state or came by themselves.¹⁷ Ethnicity was not a decisive factor for evacuation, and no priority was given to Jews. However, the number of Jews among the evacuees was higher than that of Russians or Ukrainians.¹⁸ To measure the exact number of the refugees seems impossible because many

¹⁷ Vadim Dubson, "Toward a Central Database of Evacuated Soviet Jews' Names, for the study of the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet territories," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 1 (2012): 95.

¹⁸ Kiril Feferman, "A Soviet Humanitarian Action: Centre, Periphery and the Evacuation of Refugees to the North Caucasus, 1941-1942," *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 5 (2009): 813-831.

families arrived in the region by themselves and were not registered upon arrival. The statistical data is incomplete and scattered. The only available statistics were held in Krasnodar. According to this research, 218,000 refugees, 73 per cent of them Jews, were accommodated by October 1, 1941.¹⁹ Comparing this number with the size of the Krasnodar Jewish community in 1939, which numbered only 7,600 people,²⁰ one can see the magnitude of the evacuation into the region. Evacuees probably outnumbered local Jews in the North Caucasus by a ratio of 20 : 1.

Regarding the social composition, most of those who came as a result of evacuation were old people and women with children.²¹ This specific composition of the wartime Jewish population in the south of Russia had important consequences for its possible reaction to persecution. For instance, in southern Russia, there was no organized Jewish resistance because youth, the main source for any underground movement, was practically absent from the region.²² Overall, evacuation brought more diversity into an already multi-ethnic region and had a great impact on the Holocaust in the south of Russia.

1.1. Relations between Jews and non-Jews before the war

The question whether antisemitism was widespread among ordinary Soviet citizens remains controversial, particularly in the ethnically diverse southern region. Islam alongside with Christianity and Judaism were present in these areas. The North Caucasus was populated by indigenous Caucasian peoples (Dagestanis, Chechens, Ingush, Kabarda and Adyges), Mountain

¹⁹ Kiril Feferman, "Jewish refugees and evacuees under Soviet rule and German occupation: The North Caucasus," in *Revolution, repression, and revival: The Soviet Jewish experience*, ed. Zvi Gitelman and Yaacov Ro'i (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 160.

²⁰ Feferman, "Jewish refugees," 157.

²¹ Irina Rebrova, "Evakuatsiia evreev na Severnyi Kavkaz: Motivatsiia i puti sledovaniia" [Evacuation of the Jews to the North Caucasus: Motivation and itinerary], in *Trudy po evreiskoi istorii i kul'ture: Materialy XXII Mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii po iudaike* (Moscow, 2016), 109.

²² Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 375.

Jews and other ethnic groups.²³ In the Crimea, Tatars constituted the majority of the population. There was also a noticeable presence of Krymchaks (indigenous people who practiced Judaism but had their own Krymchak language). Both areas had Russians, Ukrainians, Roma, Armenians and Karaites. The Ashkenazi Jews mostly migrated to this region in the 1920-30s. By the beginning of the war, they lived in big cities and were quite assimilated. Outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence were not characteristic for this region before the war.

The major conflict which took place in the southern borderlines was between the officials and Muslims. It rooted deeply in the Tsarist colonization of the North Caucasus and oppression of the indigenous peoples. The relations were tense during the Soviet period as well: since the late 1920s, the Soviet government, being strongly anti-religious, organized numerous attacks on Islamic practices. Mullahs were accused of bribery and immorality and were also charged as “parasites of society”.²⁴ Many mosques were shut down and religious rituals became outlawed. Although the war period was the time of some alleviations in the state policy concerning religion, the loyalty of Muslim minorities to the Soviet state remained questionable.

In daily life, as witnesses of the Holocaust claim, different ethnicities lived peacefully with each other before the war. Some of them acknowledge that they did not even know the origins [*natsional'nost'*] of their neighbors, and the notion of ethnicity did not exist in their minds.²⁵ Others admit that the ethnic composition was diverse and they had friends of different

²³ Alexandre Bennigsen and Chantal Lemerrier-Quelquejay, *Islam in the Soviet Union*, trans. Geoffrey Wheeler and Hubert Evans (New York, 1967), 4.

²⁴ Bennigsen and Lemerrier-Quelquejay, *Islam in the Soviet Union*, 151.

²⁵ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 1666UK, 08:48;
Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 703R, 11:19.

backgrounds. Many witnesses had Jewish and Karaïm friends at school.²⁶ Moreover, intercultural connections seem to be very strong in the southern Soviet territories:

At that time, I remember how it was in my childhood. Tatars celebrate Eid al-Fitr and we celebrate with them, they bring sweets. Jews celebrate their Easter, Pesach, and we too. We have Easter and color eggs; the entire school is in colorful eggshells... We were good friends.²⁷

Although the language of daily communication was Russian, people were free to speak local vernaculars with the members of their respective ethnic group. The language of instruction at schools was Russian as well. The witness from Eupatoria, Crimea, recalls that Jewish children did not even know Yiddish, because the Jews spoke Ukrainian at their homes.²⁸ Concerning religion, even though it was prohibited in the Soviet state, people continued their religious practices. For instance, in the village Iaroslavskaia of the Krasnodar region, Christians had a splendidly beautiful Orthodox church before the war. During the war, churches were destroyed or used as warehouses, and thus Christians started to gather at homes and pray together.²⁹ The Jewish population was mostly religious as well. The witness from Eupatoria recalls that once she saw a Jewish neighbor praying at his home:

Yaacov Buch [the neighbor] was very religious. Once I saw how he was praying. He covered himself with a white cloth with black strips and had a box on his head and arms. I asked later what he was doing. He said that he was praying.³⁰

²⁶ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 1686UK, 11:34; Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 526R, 06:55.

²⁷ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 1699UK, 28:33.

²⁸ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 1699UK, 26:16.

²⁹ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 739R, 37:16.

³⁰ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 1699UK, 27:11.

Despite differences in culture and religion, the relations of Jews and non-Jews could be characterized as peaceful coexistence. Neighbors helped each other in daily life with housework and often were friends. Jews worked as school teachers of different subjects, but most often of foreign languages or maths.³¹ With the beginning of the war, these amicable and mutually beneficial relations between the neighbors worsened due to a massive evacuation into the region and the hardships of the war. The exacerbation of the interethnic tensions occurred when the Soviet authorities lost control over the territory of the North Caucasus and could not maintain order in the region any longer.

1.2. Evacuation to the North Caucasus: motives and factors for refusal to be evacuated

There was a variety of reasons why inhabitants of the western Soviet border regions chose to be evacuated. One of the motives Jews had to evacuate the periphery of the Soviet Union was the awareness of the Nazi policies toward them. A witness from the village Rodnikovskoe, Stavropol region, recalls that the radio informed Soviet citizens about the elimination of the Jews.³² However, most witnesses claim that Jews knew about mass murders through their relatives who found themselves under occupation but managed to flee. For instance, a Jewish survivor from Kerch, Rivekka Barash, remembers that everyone in the city knew that the Germans would arrive soon, and all the city inhabitants understood what policy the occupants would conduct in relation to the Jews. The relatives of Rivekka's grandmother fled from Feodosia, Crimea, and told her family about the mass murders of the Jews.³³ Even though most Jews were aware of the fate which

³¹ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 576R, 26:04;
Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 1699UK, 09:26.

³² Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 529R, 27:09.

³³ USC Shoah Foundation Archive / Testimony of Rivekka Barash, tape 4, 3:46.

awaited them under the occupation, some families did not trust this information. For example, the family of a Jewish survivor, Valentina Korsakina, born Anna Salnik, considered the Germans as civilized people of high culture:

My family did not believe that the Germans shoot the Jews, although there were some rumors about it. We thought that it was propaganda. During the First World War, my father was in captivity in Austria and people treated him very well. He lived there for a year.³⁴

Even after the encounter with the Germans, Jews still did not believe that the Nazi policies would in fact touch them. For instance, Rostov was occupied for the first time in November 1941 and was liberated after two weeks. Although the Jews gained the experience of living under the German occupation, they refused to be evacuated after the liberation of the city.³⁵ During this short-term takeover, the Nazis murdered people of different origins and thus their intentions about the Jewish population remained unclear for the majority of Rostov Jews. In addition, the belief that Rostov would not be occupied again was strong among its inhabitants.

Flight was dictated not only by awareness of the Nazi policies toward the Jews, but also by constant bombardment. This reason was common for all the population, regardless of the ethnicity. For instance, an article concerning bombardments and further evacuation was published in the Soviet newspaper *Bolshevik*. The main characters of the story, written in the first person of a girl named Varia, were allegedly Russian, although the ethnicity of evacuees was not pointed out. Apparently, this story was borne out of real events. It tells about the family which was composed

³⁴ USC Shoah Foundation Archive / Testimony of Valentina Korsakina, tape 1, 22:33.

³⁵ Kiril Feferman, "To flee or not to flee: The conflicting messages of Soviet wartime propaganda and the Holocaust, 1941," *Cahiers du monde russe* 56, no.2/3 (April-September 2015): 521.

of a mother and two children, whose father was murdered during the war. They evacuated Poltava, the city in Ukraine, because of constant bombardment:

The war came to us. The Nazis began to drop the bombs. At first, I was not afraid of bombs and Yuri [Varia's brother] was not afraid either. He always wanted to see how a bomb explodes. However, my mother was frightened. When the alarm rang, she started to shake, grabbed Yuri and sneaked into the hideout (*shchel'*). Then Yuri began to shake as well. He became especially scared when the bomb exploded near our house.³⁶

There were several reasons why many families refused to be evacuated though they would have had the possibility. One of them was the wide-spread disbelief in the reports that Nazis conducted mass-murders of the Jews. Besides, most Jewish families decided to stay because they would not abandon their old and disabled relatives. To leave one's family members behind under the occupation was not typical for Jews. Apart from family ties, poverty was another factor which prevented many Jews from evacuation.

Mountain Jews, in particular, rarely evacuated the region because they usually lacked financial resources.³⁷ Moreover, they, along with Karaites and Krymchaks, expected that the Nazis would treat them differently. In the interview with a mountain Jewess, Ashurova, she acknowledged that her family helped an Ashkenazi relative to flee, but the rest of the family members stayed under the occupation.³⁸ The policy of Nazis toward the Mountain Jews was in fact special but it was formed with time. Nazis met Mountain Jews for the first time in August 1942, in the villages Bogdanovka and Mezhinskaia of the Stavropol region.³⁹ The occupants did not assume that this region was populated by Mountain Jews and at that time they did not have a

³⁶ Ardov, "Rasskaz Vari" [The Story of Varia], *Bolshevik* 4 (January 5, 1943), p.2.

³⁷ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 294.

³⁸ The interview with Ashurova in *Iskhod gorskikh evreev: razrushenie garmonii mirov* (Nalchik, 2000), 90.

³⁹ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 297–299.

distinct policy toward them. Therefore, 850 Mountain and Ashkenazi Jews of above-mentioned villages were shot to death. However, by the end of 1942, Nazi authorities revealed that Mountain Jews belonged to the Tat people who originated from Iran.⁴⁰ Thereafter, they were not persecuted during the Holocaust and thus did not evacuate *en masse*.

The process of evacuation was arduous for most of evacuees. Many people were evacuated in freight wagons. The wave of evacuees was tremendous and these wagons were usually overfilled. A witness from Gorskaia Balka, Stavropol region, who was evacuated with his family as a child, recalls that they had to wait three days for departure.⁴¹ Initially they got into the train to Omsk, but they got off on the station Tikhoretskaia because they did not have any relatives in Siberia. Therefore, this family decided to return to Mineralnye Vody as they had family members there. However, at that time Taganrog and Rostov were already occupied and wagons with injured soldiers went from these cities. There were almost no trains back to the region and no free seats in the trains. Therefore, it was impossible to get tickets. However, the commander of the station in Tikhoretskaia found tickets for them. There is another revealing example of help coming from strangers on the train station. Undoubtedly, this help was not a disinterested act:

In Vladislavovka, we could not get into the train. Everyone was climbing but my mother and I were tiny. A *muzhik* came to my mum and said that if you give me something, we will push you into the train. Mum agreed. In two or three days it happened. These *muzhiks* jumped, grabbed us and pushed our bags onto the platform.⁴²

Those people who decided to be evacuated on their own faced severe difficulties, as in the above-mentioned cases. Additionally, leaving a work position without a permit and fleeing by

⁴⁰ Kiril Feferman, "Nazi Germany and the Mountain Jews: Was there a Policy?," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 21, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 107.

⁴¹ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 548R, part 1, 08:38.

⁴² USC Shoah Foundation Archive/ Testimony of Elena Al'ianaki, tape 2, 14:30.

oneself was considered as a crime and could perhaps have caused serious consequences.⁴³ However, the evacuation movement which was organized by the Soviet government was problematic as well. At first, factories had to be evacuated. They were followed by workers and their superiors. Party members also had a privilege to be evacuated first. Then other governmental institutions, such as schools, orphanages and hospitals could be transported. In the case of the Leningrad orphanage, it is clear that governmental evacuation was poorly organized and was conducted in a rush:

Children of approximately six and eight years of age, accompanied by two or three nannies and one teacher, went to the south-east of the region. We were driving for a very long time, then stopped. It was ten and a half more kilometers to the station. After two hours of walk we became very tired and sat on both sides of the road. Soon a car arrived with a commander transporting boxes of bullets. The argument between him and the women was very hot. However, they won. We were on time for the last train. The train was in fact the last one because it was already September 7 or 10 [1941].⁴⁴

Overall, the process of evacuation was chaotic and created a certain hierarchy among those who could leave, with industrial workers and party members having a priority. Ordinary Soviet citizens were evacuated at the last moment when the front line was already very close. Therefore, their evacuation was conducted in a very limited time. Once a town had fallen to the Germans, no more evacuation of inhabitants was possible, and the Red Army used the last trains to transport its injured and fallen soldiers.

⁴³ Feferman, "To flee or not to flee," 519.

⁴⁴ Center and Fond "Holocaust" Archive/ Slavin, *Memuary [The memoirs]*, 5/1, pp. 3–4.

1.3. The local policy towards Jewish newcomers: the catalyst for antisemitic sentiments

Evacuation alongside with dire living conditions of the war period became a source for interethnic conflicts in the region. The policy of the local Soviet administration had a provocative character and led to the intensification of antisemitism. The local authorities imposed all expenses concerning the evacuees on the residents. Therefore, all refugees, including the Jews, were accommodated in the houses of local citizens and ate at their houses as well. No houses and canteens for refugees were constructed, apparently because of the lack of financial support from the Soviet government. As the witness from the village Gorskaia Balka of Stavropol region noticed, “if not in every house then in every second house there were evacuated [Jewish] people”.⁴⁵ Kiril Feferman claims that this triggered the outbreak of antisemitic sentiments in the region.⁴⁶ Being financially in charge of the refugees was especially difficult for the locals due to the shortages of the war.

Under the occupation, the plight of Jewish refugees became even worse. First, the chances of evacuated Jews to get help from locals were minimal because as newcomers they usually did not have a broad network of connections.⁴⁷ Secondly, the Nazi propaganda took evacuation as its main theme. This propaganda was fruitful because the influx of Jewish evacuees was noticeable, especially in comparison with the virtual absence of Jews from the region before 1941.⁴⁸ Local newspapers claimed that the evacuation of Jews was conducted at the expense of the Soviet war effort and that the Jews were settled in the areas from where other peoples were deported before

⁴⁵ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 548R, part 1, 54:47.

⁴⁶ Feferman, “A Soviet Humanitarian Action,” 829.

⁴⁷ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 347–348.

⁴⁸ Feferman, “Jewish refugees,” 166.

the war. Therefore, the Jewish newcomers found themselves in insecure situation upon arrival and were often subjected to persecutions by local citizens.

Summing up, the evacuation of civilians was of a spontaneous nature, even though in most cases it was organized by the government. The Soviet state only evacuated ordinary citizens at a moment when the Nazi takeover was imminent. The Soviet state did not rescue its citizens out of humanitarian reasons but had the pragmatic intention to use the evacuees as working force: those refugees who initially stayed in the urban areas were often forced to move to the rural settlements because agricultural workers were urgently required in the region.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the Soviet authorities assured the relative wellbeing of the refugees upon arrival, i.e. their resettlement in the houses of locals and their employment. This policy simultaneously provoked antisemitism and therefore, soon after the Soviet government lost control over the North Caucasus, the Jews found themselves in a vulnerable position.⁵⁰ Under the occupation, the behavior of non-Jews towards the Jews became hostile due to the Nazi propaganda and the worsening conditions of the war.

⁴⁹ Feferman, "A Soviet Humanitarian Action," 823.

⁵⁰ Timothy Snyder links the Holocaust to the disappearance of the state as well. For further details see: Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as history and warning* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015), 107.

Chapter 2. Nazi occupation and the Holocaust in the North Caucasus and the Crimea

The present chapter is devoted to the specific features of the Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus. One of the peculiarities of the southern region was that the pace of the elimination process was intense and within a short period the entire Jewish communities were destroyed. The Germans set enormous tasks. For example, when Simferopol was occupied on November 1, 1941, they decided to eliminate the Jewish population by Christmas of the same year.⁵¹ Simferopol had one of the largest Jewish communities in the Crimea, which numbered over 14,000 people. In a month after the registration, the Jews were obliged to come to the assembly point with food for eight days. More than 12,000 Jews came to the gathering site and were taken 10 kilometers out of the city, where they were shot to death near the anti-tank trench. Those who did not present themselves at the assembly point were caught and executed individually.

By the spring of 1942, almost the entire remaining Jewish population of the Crimean Peninsula, namely 40,000 Jews, including Krymchaks, was murdered.⁵² Within half a year, in the North Caucasus, between 65,230 and 77,150 Jews were eliminated.⁵³ Thus, all the strengths of the occupants were aimed to destroy the entire Jewish population of the Crimea in the shortest possible time. This chapter will analyze the process of annihilation of the Jewish population and reveal the peculiarities of the Holocaust in the south of Russia.

⁵¹ Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 204.

⁵² Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 211.

⁵³ Altman, *Zhertvy nenavisti*, 286.

2.1. Assistance of the Jewish Councils in the registration and assembly of the Jews

The Nazis were unfamiliar with the region; therefore, upon arrival, they sought for locals who would assist them. This assistance was especially useful during the registration of the Jews. It was a procedure that allowed Nazis to become aware of all Jewish citizens in the occupied territories. In the south of Russia, due to the short-term occupation, the Jews were registered immediately after Nazis' arrival with the help of the Jewish Councils. The Jewish Councils, also known as *Judenräte*, were established by the Einsatzgruppe D only in large cities of the North Caucasus and the Crimea, whose population exceeded 500 people.⁵⁴ They usually consisted of up to six prominent local Jewish men and were chaired by the headman called *starosta*. The members of Jewish Councils had no privilege and were executed in the same way as the rest of the Jewish population, especially if the Nazi orders were not implemented by them. Therefore, the assistance of *Judenräte* cannot be considered as the act of collaboration. However, there is a debate on this topic in historiography.⁵⁵

One of the duties of the Jewish Councils was the registration of the Jews. On July 23, 1942, Rostov-on-Don was captured by the Nazis for the second time. The first takeover of the city happened between November and December 1941 and lasted only for two weeks. Within the first short-span occupation, no Jewish Council was established. However, the same day the second occupation began, the order for all the Jewish inhabitants to register was issued. On August 2, the

⁵⁴ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 152.

⁵⁵ This discussion was started by Hanna Arendt. In the book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, originally published in 1963, she claims that without the assistance of Jewish Councils, the Nazis would not successfully implement their anti-Jewish measures and organize the elimination of the European Jewry. Further research contests this statement. The main argument of scholars is that *Judenrat* was established by the occupants and its members did not have any single choice; overall, the activity of *Judenräte* did not influence the outcome of the Holocaust. For further details see: Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi occupation* (New York: MacMillan, 1972); Piotr Wróbel, "Hitler's helpers? The *Judenräte* controversy," in *Lessons and Legacies: Reflections of Religion, Justice, Sexuality, and Genocide*, ed. Larry Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 152–160.

“Jewish Council of Elders” was formed. On August 9, its head, Dr. Laurie, signed the “Appeal to the Jewish population”. According to this document, those who had Jewish ethnicity [*natsional’nost’*] stated in ID cards had to register. Moreover, those who “belonged to the Jewish people” and the offspring of mixed couples had to register as well.⁵⁶ The registration was conducted with the help of the Jews who were chosen by the Nazis to be the members of *Judenrat*. Their duties were to document personal data of the Jews of Rostov: their given and family names, patronymic, date of birth, ethnicity, occupation and home address.

In a similar vein, the registration of the Krasnodar Jews occurred right after the beginning of the occupation on August 9, 1942. The same way as in Rostov, it was conducted with the help of the Jewish Council. In Krasnodar, this council was headed by a respected Jew, Naum Vilik, who ensured the Jews that obedience to the Nazi orders would guarantee them safety.⁵⁷ It is clear that *Judenrat* was a tool to make the registration smooth, as Jews trusted the community leaders who were elected as the members of Jewish Councils.

The pretexts for the Jewish registration were different. For instance, in August 1942, with the beginning of the occupation of Armavir, the Jewish population had to be registered, allegedly in order to be resettled to the sparsely populated areas. In Novorossiysk, in October 1942, a complete registration was organized to improve the living conditions, to give the Jews an opportunity to be employed and get involved into commerce.⁵⁸ The Jews never sabotaged the registration as they regarded relocation as another step in the Nazi policy, but not elimination.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Dokladnaya zapiska o zverstvakh i zlodeyaniyakh nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov v Rostove v period ego okkupatsii [A position paper about the atrocities of German-Fascist invaders in Rostov under the occupation], State Rostov Archive, P3613/6/2 / Center and Fond “Holocaust” Archive, 5/1, pp. 3–4.

⁵⁷ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 354.

⁵⁸ Act of a regional commission on Novorossiysk, GA RF, P7021, 16, 10, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 360.

Besides, many Jews were simply frightened and thus could not circumvent Nazi orders. Moreover, they were assured by the Jewish Councils that the resettlement has no danger.

Except registration, *Judenrat* had other functions. For example, it demanded Jewish valuables which were then delivered to the Germans.⁶⁰ In addition, the Jews had to attend at the Jewish Council every day and from there they were sent to physical labor.⁶¹ Therefore, *Judenräte* had great significance during different stages of the Nazi occupation, from the registration of Jews to their elimination.

In a few days or some weeks after the registration, the Jews were assigned to come to the assembly points. In Rostov, on August 11, 1942, the Jews had to come to the certain sites of the city to be relocated. They were obliged to take keys, money, valuables and three-days provisions of food. The reason given for resettlement was “the intensification of violence toward the Jewish population”.⁶² Allegedly for better protection, the Jews had to move to other sites. The perpetrators took all personal belongings from the gathered Jews. Afterwards, cargo trucks arrived and the Nazis put the Jews inside them forcefully. Those who resisted or merely could not climb up fast were violently forced: “when doctor Ingal Moisei Markovich barely got into the vehicle and wanted to look out of it, a German soldier hit him with his fist so heavily that Ingal’s cap blew off”.⁶³ The gathering was conducted in every city in a similar manner with this violent scenario. Therefore, Jewish Councils did the following functions: they had to ensure the registration of the Jews, organize forced labor and bring Jewish property to the Gestapo office.

⁶⁰ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 617.

⁶¹ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 129.

⁶² Dokladnaia zapiska, p. 3.

⁶³ Dokladnaia zapiska, p. 3.

2.2. Intensity of mass killings of the Jews

In the Crimea and the North Caucasus, Jewish population was eliminated very fast through shooting or gassing. This was one of the peculiarities of the Holocaust in southern Russia. The case of Rostov-on-Don is revealing in this sense. In the morning of August 11, 1942, around three weeks after the beginning of the second occupation, the Rostov Jews had to gather at the meeting sites which were stated in the “Appeal to the Jewish population”. After that, the Jews were encircled by guards of locals and put in the trucks which went to the western outskirts of Rostov, to the village Vtoraya Zmeyovka.⁶⁴ On the eve of the arrival of the Jews from all the districts of Rostov, the SS-men and local policemen had dug thirteen pits there. The locals had to leave this place and not to return until two days would have passed. The Jews from all Rostov city districts were moved to this site. Right after they came out of the trucks, the members of Sonderkommando 10a of the Einsatzgruppe D forced them to undress to underwear and stand in front of the pits where all of them were shot to death with automatic machine guns. A Red Army soldier of Jewish origin named Dadashev wrote about this execution site in a letter to his family:

I am happy but only horrific traces of Nazi atrocities poison the joy of victory. They destroyed everything. In the Zoological garden, there are 14 thousand of the shot Rostov Jews. I saw it and clenched fists in hatred. Women and children, children, children...⁶⁵

Overall, three mass graves were found by the Soviets when they investigated the Nazi crimes in Rostov.⁶⁶ The first grave was in Zmievskaia Balka, near an abandoned quarry, where approximately 15,000 Jews were buried. The second site was found near the Botanical garden, around 500 meters northeast of the village Zmeyovka. Around 10,000 Jewish men, women and

⁶⁴ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 563.

⁶⁵ The letter by Dadashev from February 18, 1943, in *Sokhrani moi pis'ma: Sbornik pisem i dnevnikov evreev perioda Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny*, ed. Ilya Altman (Moscow: Center and Fond “Holocaust”, 2013), 203.

⁶⁶ Winkler, “Rostov-on-Don 1942,” 112.

children were buried there. The third mass grave with 2,000 corpses was discovered south of the village at the western border of the Botanical garden.

The process of elimination of urban Jews varied in different areas. However, there was a certain general pattern. First, the Jews had to be registered. They usually did not sabotage the registration, mainly because they trusted the members of the Jewish Councils who assisted the registration and assembly. After that the Jews came to the gathering point, which could be any public building, and from there they were transported to the killing sites. The process of elimination took a few days as maximum and within this short time almost the entire Jewish population was murdered. SS-men, local policemen, and sometimes the German army were involved in the mass murders. Allegedly, the occupants aimed to finish the murders of Jews as soon as possible because the Soviet troops were close. Therefore, the duration of the killing operations was extremely limited and the murders were conducted at an intense pace.

2.3. Usage of forced labor: the establishment of ghettos

The establishment of short-lived ghettos was another peculiarity of the Holocaust in the region. Nazis used forced labor of the Jews on a regular basis. In order to ease the task of gathering Jews for work, they established ghettos. However, these ghettos differed from those in Poland. The ghettos in Poland were organized to segregate the Jews from the non-Jews and exploit them economically. By contrast, in Ukraine the Jews were not supposed to survive for long in the ghettos.⁶⁷ Thus, they were deprived from basic services and lived in unbearable conditions. In Ukraine, like in the Crimea and the Caucasus, the formation and liquidation of ghettos was rapid and there was no *Judenrat* in the ghettos; although in Ukraine there were Jewish elders which had

⁶⁷ Wendy Lower, "Facilitating Genocide: Nazi Ghettoization Practices in Occupied Ukraine, 1941–1942," in *Life in the Ghettos during the Holocaust*, ed. Eric J. Sterling (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 142.

little authority.⁶⁸ In general, ghettos in southern Russia can be placed into the same category as those in other occupied Soviet territories; however, there is a number of further uncommon features. First, these ghettos were not sealed off. Secondly, they had no economy and alimentation for the inmates. Thirdly, the Jewish prisoners were usually not involved in productive labor. The only full-fledged ghetto in the Crimea was organized in Yalta.⁶⁹ This ghetto was surrounded by barbed-wire and guarded by a Russian (or Jewish) policeman. The Jews were strictly prohibited to leave the ghetto walls after a certain time. The inmates were obliged to work the whole day, producing garment for the Germans. The Romanian soldiers were in charge of this ghetto and perhaps therefore many prisoners survived.⁷⁰ Yalta's ghetto was liberated by the Soviet troops which took the territory of the city in December 1941; most former inmates fled to the inner Soviet territories.

During a short time, forced labor was actively used by the Nazis in the North Caucasus as well. For example, in Zheleznovodsk, the Jewish population was concentrated in a ghetto which was a former shack, where they were used as forced laborers before being shot. They had to chop wood, clean the streets, carry the items which were stolen by the Nazis. The Jews were forced to work despite declining health conditions. As bystander Gavrilova witnessed:

Doctor Kogan had a meeting with me in a dispensary. She has suffered from rheumatism and her joints were swollen. The dispensary gave her a certificate that she cannot work as a manual laborer. However, this certificate was not considered and doctor Kogan was sent to the physical labor. Doctor Kogan and her husband were not able to endure the humiliation: they injected morphine and hung themselves.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Lower, "Facilitating Genocide," 141.

⁶⁹ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 155.

⁷⁰ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 158.

⁷¹ Witness evidence of Gavrilova, GA RF, P7021/17/6, p. 25.

In Kislovodsk, there was a place where 150 Jews were located in a former school building. These were Jews evacuated from the Crimea. First, they moved to Kavkazskaya station and then to Bekeshevskaya village where they faced the Nazis. From this village they were transported to Kislovodsk and locked in the local school.⁷² Throughout three weeks, the occupants used their forced labor and did not provide them with food supplies, although some family members had permission to go out of the school and seek for subsistence.⁷³ In Pyatigorsk, even though the Jews were not relocated in a separate building, they were taken from their home to perform forced labors for the Nazis. In order to distinguish Jews from non-Jews, a week after the occupation started, the Jews were ordered to wear armbands with the star of David. In the rural areas there were ghettos established as well. For example, a ghetto was formed in the Migulinskii district of Rostov region. In the village Meshkovskaya, the Jews were locked in a house without doors and windows. The German army issued an order that anyone who takes a Jew home, would be executed.⁷⁴ This ghetto was liquidated in three weeks and the reason claimed for it was the spread of diseases.

In Essentuki, during August 1942, the occupants used forced labor of the local and evacuated Jews. In total, 500 people were kept in the school building for one month and a half. As Ilya Altman claims, it was the only ghetto that was established in the North Caucasus.⁷⁵ However, the Jews of Essentuki were not involved in productive labor, like those in Yalta, but did hard and senseless physical work. No Jewish Council functioned there and no services were provided to the Jews. In the morning of September 10, they were transported to the glass factory and shot to death. The Jews from other regions were transported there and murdered as well. Overall, the

⁷² Testimony of Bakaeva, GA RF, P7021/17/5, p. 74.

⁷³ Kiril Feferman, "The Food Factor as a Possible Catalyst for Holocaust-Related Decisions: The Crimea and the North Caucasus," *War in History* 15 (1) (2008): 81, 90.

⁷⁴ Act on Morozovsk, GA RF, P7021/40/8, p. 9.

⁷⁵ Altman, *Zhertvy nenavisti*, 273.

ghettoization process was quite specific in the south of Russia and apparently had a purpose to eliminate the Jewish population through starvation and the spread of infections.

2.4. Characteristics of the Nazi policies in the Crimea and the North Caucasus

Summing up, the process of annihilation of the Jews had a very fast pace but at the same time it was quite well-organized. It typically started with the registration of the Jews. The pretexts for the registration were the creation of better conditions for living and working. After the registration, the Jews were eliminated over a few days. The common methods of annihilation were shooting and gassing, namely using gas vans. Mass murders were conducted either right after the gathering or were delayed for a short time. The imprisonment could last only for a few days and the Jews were kept without water and food. In case of using forced labor, the duration increased up to a month and thus in the localities where the number of the Jews exceeded 100 people, ghettos were established.⁷⁶ As the Nazis were the only ones responsible for maintaining the ghettos, they were not interested in keeping the Jews alive for a long time; thus, they deprived the prisoners from alimentation and basic medical care. Therefore, the retention of Jews in these ghettos became one of the methods of elimination.

⁷⁶ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 216.

Chapter 3. Who is a Jew? Identifying Jews during the Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus

This chapter analyzes whether the Nazi policy toward the Jews of the Crimea and the North Caucasus was of a chaotic nature, i.e. if there was a defined guidance whom and on what grounds to persecute. In this chapter, I examine the Nazi policies towards mixed couples and specific Jewish communities of the Crimea and the North Caucasus. This chapter reveals some inconsistencies which occurred in the Nazi policy.

3.1. The Nazi policies towards mixed couples and children of mixed origin

Mixed marriages were a common practice in the ethnically diverse southern region of Russia. For example, before the war, around 30 per cent of all couples were intermarried in the Crimea.⁷⁷ The Nazi policies towards mixed couples were not clearly elaborated. During the Holocaust, some members of mixed couples could survive, whereas others were murdered. Sometimes a mixed marriage could rescue the whole family. In the Stavropol region, a significant number of professors and doctors were murdered. However, some scientists survived because they were in a mixed marriage. For example, a professor at Stavropol University, Skublevskii, had a Jewish wife and therefore their family was in safety. The reason for that was the Nazi order that proclaimed: “if a husband is Russian and his wife is Jewish, they are not subject to persecution”.⁷⁸

Even though Jewish members of mixed marriages had to be registered, they were usually not executed.⁷⁹ However, it varied in different areas. Perhaps, the decision also depended on gender of a Jewish partner. As above-mentioned case demonstrated, families where a wife was Jewish

⁷⁷ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 164.

⁷⁸ Transcript of the interview with Professor Nikiforovskii, Institute of Russian History Archive at Russian Academy of Science, VI/23/5, p. 4.

⁷⁹ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 165; Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 617.

were not persecuted. In contrast, if a husband was Jewish, he and his children were destroyed. Sometimes, his non-Jewish wife was murdered as well.⁸⁰ One woman, married to a Jewish man, testified:

I went to the head of police on September 2, in order not to attend [the assembly point]. He asked, if I have children. I said that I do not, although I have a five years-old child. Therefore, I survived, as Russian, and kept a child under my surname.⁸¹

As this case demonstrates, non-Jewish female partners could survive, whereas their Jewish husbands and children were often executed. This can be explained through a peculiar image of Jews in Nazi propaganda. Nazis' caricature was usually of a distorted Jewish man. Jewesses were not demonized; in contrast, in public consciousness they remained charming and intriguing.⁸² Moreover, in the 1930s, the Nazi jurists tried to judge differently the unions between a non-Jewish man and a Jewish woman.⁸³

Overall, the Nazi policy towards the mixed couples was ambiguous. The lack of clear guidance and the shortage of time made the Nazi policies very chaotic. This ambiguity increased the role of people who gained some power under the occupation, in other words, the collaborators. The fate of the Jews and even their non-Jewish partners often depended on a collaborator's decision.

3.2. Nazi policies towards different indigenous groups of Jewish origin

The south of Russia was largely populated by different Jewish groups. For instance, in the Crimea, Krymchaks and Karaites were a noticeable minority. In the North Caucasus, there was a

⁸⁰ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 166.

⁸¹ The application by Brailovskaya, GA RF, P7021/17/10, p. 23.

⁸² Marion Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish life in Nazi Germany* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 35–36.

⁸³ Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 176.

significant number of Mountain Jews. Nazi policy towards these ethnic and religious groups was quite ambiguous because the Germans began to research them in detail only after they occupied the southern Russian lands. Therefore, due to the Nazis' hesitation, some of these indigenous peoples survived. However, others were destroyed as Jews.

3.2.1. Nazi approach to the Krymchaks

Krymchaks have a long history in the Crimea. They emerged there between fourth and ninth centuries and primarily were Jewish. However, they often intermarried to women of the Khazar ruling dynasty (7-11th centuries) and thus lost their Jewishness because in Judaism it is transmitted on the maternal line.⁸⁴ Krymchaks spoke Turkic language, which is called "Chagatai" and is close to Crimean-Tatar; however, its alphabet is based on the Old-Yiddish writing.⁸⁵ At the same time, Krymchaks practiced Judaism and Hebrew was their language of religion. With Russia's annexation of the Crimea in 1783, the Russian authorities conducted a repressive politics towards indigenous peoples of the Crimea, especially Muslims. Krymchaks suffered along with the Jews under the Russian rule as well: for instance, they were forcibly drafted in the Russian army for 25 years. Thus, the Russian government planned to make them assimilated into Russian culture and adopt the Russian faith. In Stalinist period, Krymchaks' religious practices were banned and their religious leaders were persecuted. On the eve of the WWII, Krymchaks were quite assimilated and often intermarried with Ashkenazi Jews and Tatars.⁸⁶ In the rural areas, they became kolkhozniks, although traditionally they mostly worked in petty crafts.

When Nazis occupied the Crimean Peninsula, they faced the problem of decision-making regarding Krymchaks. Even though Nazis had some ideas about specific Jewish groups of the

⁸⁴ Kazimierz Banek, "The Krymchaks: An Ethnic and Religious Group," *Anthropos* 109, no. 1 (2014): 237.

⁸⁵ Banek, "The Krymchaks," 238.

⁸⁶ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 281.

region, their theories suffered from gaps and inconsistencies. With the beginning of the occupation, the Germans organized a research campaign to identify to what extent Krymchaks relate to Ashkenazi Jews and Judaism. This scrutiny was a part of the *Ostforschung* or research on Eastern Europe and was conducted by such institutes as *Auslandsinstitute*, *Institut für Grenz- und Auslandstudien* and the *Wansee Institut*.⁸⁷ The final decision on this issue was taken in Berlin.⁸⁸ After the investigation, it was decided that Krymchaks are the Jews who immigrated from Italy to the Crimea approximately 400 years ago.⁸⁹ Besides, Krymchaks, along with Ashkenazi Jews, were rabbinic Jews, i.e. they recognized the authority of Talmud.⁹⁰ In addition, Krymchaks were found only in the Crimea.⁹¹ This relatively small community did not have any strategic value for the Nazis. Therefore, almost the entire Krymchak community was destroyed.

3.2.2. Nazi policies towards Karaites

Crimean Karaites were another large ancient group in the Crimea. The emergence of Karaites on the Crimean Peninsula was first documented in the 13th century, when the Crimea was under the rule of the Golden Horde.⁹² The ancestors of Crimean Karaites are supposed to be from Constantinople and Istanbul. Their language is close to Crimean Tatar and differs from the dialects which Karaim in other places spoke.⁹³ Karaites, along with Krymchaks, practiced Judaism (however, in the Karaim interpretation) and their spoken language was Turkic. Nonetheless, the Nazi authorities took different decisions regarding these two groups.

⁸⁷ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 259.

⁸⁸ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 493.

⁸⁹ "Work in Yevpatoria/Crimea, in particular the fight against partisans, December 5, 1941," in *The Einsatzgruppen reports: selections from the dispatches of the Nazi Death Squads' against the Jews, July 1941–January 1943*, ed. Yitzhak Arad, Shmuel Krakowski, Shmuel Spector (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989), 250.

⁹⁰ Feferman, "Nazi Germany and the Mountain Jews," 100.

⁹¹ "Jews in Crimea, May 22, 1942," in *The Einsatzgruppen reports*, 345.

⁹² Kevin Alan Brook, "The genetics of Crimean Karaites," *Journal of Black Sea Studies* 42 (2014): 70.

⁹³ Brook, "The genetics of Crimean Karaites," 71.

To begin with, Nazi notions about Karaites primarily were quite ambiguous and fluctuated over time. Therefore, after the occupation of the Crimea, when Nazis faced the largest Karaim community in Europe, the case of Crimean Karaites was examined by Nazi scientists in detail. The decision of the Nazis mainly depended on the official position of the Russian Tsarist government, which treated Karaites separately from the Jews.⁹⁴ Based on the research undertaken on the Karaites, an SS “scientist”, Alfred Karasek, made a report with the final observations on the problem. His paper was based on the sources from Crimean libraries. He hired two local researchers to conduct this examination and both proved that Karaites have nothing in common with Jews. The reasons for that were clearly of a humanitarian nature; in addition, one of these scientists was married to a Karaim woman.⁹⁵ In any case, Crimean Karaites were considered non-Jewish but of Mongol origin and thus were exempted from extermination.⁹⁶ Most of them survived the Holocaust in the Crimea as it was proved that they are not Jews ethnically. However, as modern genetic research demonstrates, Crimean Karaites have originated from ancient Israelites and are in fact Jewish.⁹⁷

As Kiril Feferman claims, there may have been pragmatic reasons for these moderate policies towards Karaites. First, Karaim community was largely supported in occupied France. Their main defenders were Russian emigrants and the Orthodox Church. Therefore, Hitler, planning an attack on the Soviet Union, wanted to seek the support of influential Russian circles from abroad.⁹⁸ Another argument seems even more important. In the eyes of the Germans, Crimean

⁹⁴ Kiril Feferman, “Nazi Germany and the Karaites in 1938 – 1944: between racial theory and *Realpolitik*,” *The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 39, no. 2 (March 3, 2011): 280.

⁹⁵ Feferman, “Nazi Germany and the Karaites,” 283.

⁹⁶ “Work in Yevpatoria/Crimea, in particular the fight against partisans, December 5, 1941,” in *The Einsatzgruppen reports*, 250.

⁹⁷ Brook, “The genetics of Crimean Karaites,” 82.

⁹⁸ Feferman, “Nazi Germany and the Karaites,” 287.

Karaites and Tatars were the enemies of the Soviet regime and thus the occupants could rely on them in their fight with Bolshevism.⁹⁹ A large Karaim community in the Crimea, which exceeded 5,000 people, was especially important in this sense. In contrast, a small Karaim community in the North Caucasus was destroyed, perhaps because it has no strategic value for the Germans.

3.2.3. The fate of the Mountain Jews under the occupation

The North Caucasus was historically populated by the Mountain Jews. The traces of their history lead to Derbent, the ancient city in the Caucasus and its administrative and cultural center. In the seventh and eighth centuries, the Jews lived in the territories where the conflict between the Arabs and the Khazars took place.¹⁰⁰ The Khazar rulers were tolerant towards the Jews and the elite even adopted Judaism. In contrast, in the areas run by the Arabs, Jews suffered from persecutions and were forced to convert to Islam. Many became crypto-Jews whereas many died as martyrs. The Khazar-Arab rule was followed by the series of military conflicts: in 14th century, Mongols strove to get control over the Caucasus and then the Ottoman Empire and the Persian Kingdom fought for the region. As a result, the Jews, primarily living in the coastal areas and foothills, escaped into isolated mountain villages to hide from the horrors of the warfare. The conquest of the Caucasus by the Russian Empire brought long-awaited peace for the Jews.¹⁰¹ The Tsarist authorities did not suppress them in terms of religious practices and traditional rituals; the Jewish youth got a chance to study in Lithuania and settle in Russia (under the condition of the service in the Russian army). The ideas popular among the Russian Jews became wide-spread in the villages of Mountain Jews. Thus, Zionism became influential in the region and the Mountain

⁹⁹ Feferman, "Nazi Germany and the Karaites," 288.

¹⁰⁰ Mordechai Altshuler, "A History of the Mountain Jews," in *Mountain Jews; Customs and Daily Life in the Caucasus*, ed. Liya Mikdash-Shamailov (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 2002), 17.

¹⁰¹ Altshuler, "A History of the Mountain Jews," 18–19.

Jews were among the pioneers who settled in Palestine. The Tsarist government knew very little about the indigenous peoples of the Caucasus and thus, it aimed to gain some information on them.

Therefore, the first thorough notion about the Mountain Jews was made in the research conducted by the Tsarist ethnographers, Chernyi and Anisimov, in 1825. The Mountain Jews appeared there under the name *dzhukhur*, which means “another faith”.¹⁰² In these ethnographic reports, they were shown to be very different from indigenous Caucasian peoples and Ashkenazi Jews. Chernyi, a European Jew himself, lived for quite a long time in the villages with Mountain Jews and explored their traditions. He analyzed their language, which was the mixture of Farsi, Tat, and ancient Hebrew.¹⁰³ In his description, Mountain Jews were presented as oriental and backward people, who simultaneously were the brethren of the European Jews.

Under the Soviet rule, the governmental policy towards Mountain Jews underwent some changes. Even though in the early years of the Soviet state the Mountain Jews could maintain their customs, language, and religious practices, during the 1930s the Soviet authorities began to erase the connection between Mountain Jews and Ashkenazim. It was officially declared that Mountain Jews are the ancestors of the Iranian nation, the Tats.¹⁰⁴ However, this policy did not have a strong influence on the decision-making process regarding the Mountain Jews under the Nazi occupation of the region.

Before the takeover of the North Caucasus, Nazis knew very little about Mountain Jews. They had doubts about the language spoken by this group and its origin. The Germans obtained no information of how the Tsarist authorities treated Mountain Jews.¹⁰⁵ Their notion about this

¹⁰² Sascha Goluboff, “Are they Jews or Asians? A Cautionary Tale about Mountain Jewish Ethnography,” *Slavic Review* 63, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 117.

¹⁰³ Goluboff, “Are they Jews or Asians?,” 120.

¹⁰⁴ Altshuler, “A History of the Mountain Jews,” 21.

¹⁰⁵ Feferman, “Nazi Germany and the Mountain Jews,” 103.

community was very limited. Nonetheless, they considered them exclusively as Jews and were certain about it. The first encounter of the Nazis with the Mountain Jews happened in the Crimea, in March 1942, and ended with the murder of the Jews. Their murder was mentioned only in a local report which was not sent to Germany.¹⁰⁶ Thus, it is clear that at that moment no official decision regarding Mountain Jews was taken yet. Later in the North Caucasus, Sonderkommando 10b of Einsatzgruppe D faced Mountain Jews, living in the rural areas. All of them were murdered, although no guidance was received from Berlin. In general, Nazi attitude towards them was no different from that towards Ashkenazi Jews. However, there were some exceptions, for instance, for Nalchik Mountain Jews, who were not executed. It seems that Einsatzgruppe did not send reports concerning Mountain Jews to Berlin and the Nazi government was not interested in the issue of this ethnic group.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, Nazi policy towards Mountain Jews was apparently never defined and the members of Einsatzgruppe D were the only responsible for decision-making process in the case of Mountain Jews.

Despite the overall smooth implementation of anti-Jewish measures in the Crimea and the North Caucasus, there were some inconsistencies in Nazi policy. The guidance about whom to persecute was not clearly established and, thus, in some localities, mixed couples survived, meanwhile in other cities it did not occur. The same ambiguity led to mass killings of ethnic minorities of Jewish ancestry, unless they could bring any profit to the Nazis. Overall, Nazi politics in the Crimea and the North Caucasus can be characterized as quite-well elaborated with some inconsistencies regarding specific ethnic groups and mixed marriages. Even though these incoherent decisions may seem insignificant in the context of general well-coordinated process of

¹⁰⁶ Feferman, "Nazi Germany and the Mountain Jews," 104.

¹⁰⁷ Feferman, "Nazi Germany and the Mountain Jews," 105–106.

the elimination of the Jews, they costed many human lives and resulted in the destruction of the entire communities of the North Caucasus and the Crimea.

Chapter 4. Civilian behavior towards Jews during the Holocaust

This chapter will concentrate on the relations between Jews and non-Jews during the war. In order to avoid a limited approach, it will illustrate not only collaborators but also those who helped Jews and saved them from death. This chapter aims to reveal why ordinary people rescued Jews. It also examines the phenomenon of collaboration in detail and regards all factors which could have triggered ordinary Soviet citizens to become collaborators. Concerning this topic, the German sources usually tend to exaggerate the extent of collaboration whereas the Russian sources mitigate it holding to the idea of the unity of the nations. In some cases, becoming a collaborator meant to fight for national independence and revival. The other reasons for collaboration were of political and financial nature. By contrast, I suppose that helping the Jews was usually the issue of a personal matter and was a clear-cut act of humanity.

4.1. “The Righteous Among the Nations” in the south of Russia

Overall, the relations of gentiles and Jews cannot be considered as anti-Semitic before the war. As many witnesses recall, people of different origins lived peacefully together. The occupation influenced this situation in a negative way. It is clear that the influx of Jews into the region in 1941 made the living conditions worse because the families of evacuees were put in the houses of locals and many people had to live together in a very limited space. Under the occupation, hiding Jews could have led to the execution of the whole family of the rescuer. However, many Soviet citizens rescued Jews despite the fear of severe punishment.

For instance, the family of a witness from Teberda, in the region of Karachay-Cherkessia, hid their Jewish neighbor Simon Borisovich in the attic.¹⁰⁸ He was shot near the river but was only injured and fell into the water. By the evening, he came to his friends and they gave him a shelter. The story of a Jewish boy, Ivan Bortnikov, who was evacuated with his mother and siblings from Kishinev is revealing as well.¹⁰⁹ On their way, this family was captured by the Nazis and shot to death. However, Ivan survived and with the help of the local Kalmyks came to the town Arzguir in the Krasnodar region. The rumors about Ivan's Jewishness spread fast in a small town and he was taken to the Gestapo with the rest of the Jews. However, the family Palaguta saved Ivan from death and raised him afterwards. This family was awarded with the title of "Righteous among the Nations" postmortem.

As most evidence proves, usually those people who helped Jews knew them personally. Some were also eager to rescue Jewish children despite the threat of execution. Besides, there were acts of help towards complete strangers of Jewish origin. The rescuers of Jews received the title of "Righteous among the Nations" after the war. Their acts might correspond with certain criteria elaborated by Yad Vashem.¹¹⁰ First, those who rescued many or one Jewish person had to be fully conscious about risking their freedom and life. Besides, they did not have any financial interests and did not receive any profit from saving Jews. In addition, a rescue operation may not have caused physical harm to Jews or other nationalities. Therefore, people who were honored as "Righteous among the Nations" may have acted only out of humanitarian observations. In the south of Russia, as many primary sources reflect, civilians rescued Jews, risking their own lives.

¹⁰⁸ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 703R, 30:58.

¹⁰⁹ Karnaukh, "Istoriia odnogo spaseniia" [The story of one rescue] / Center and Fond "Holocaust" Archive, 5/1, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Mordechai Paldiel, "The Righteous among the Nations at Yad Vashem," *The Journal of Holocaust Education* 7, no. 1–2 (1998), 46–47.

4.2. Collaboration during the Holocaust – motives, functions and the fate of collaborators

4.2.1 Involvement of local policemen in the Nazi atrocities

The reasons for support of the Nazis varied and were often interwoven with each other. Among them could be economic motives, sympathy with the Nazi regime, hatred of the Soviet authority and nationalistic sentiments.¹¹¹ Besides, personal and economic reasons should not be excluded from this spectrum. Most of the testimonies prove that those who allied with the Nazis were of different origins, but all of them were persecuted by the Soviet state or were merely disappointed with the Soviet authority. For example, one witness from the family of the communist party member in Elista, Kalmykia, recalled that the local policeman Barbakov Pyotr Kuzmich forced communists to work because “before the war he was not prominent and thus he took this job”.¹¹² The witnesses who were interviewed by the crew of Yahad-In Unum usually describe collaborators as family men under the age of 40 who had been working at kolkhoz before the war. Collaborators were sometimes taken from Ukraine, but they were also recruited from locals.¹¹³ As collaborators, in most cases, they were dressed in dark-green Nazi-like uniforms, had a white arm badge and were armed with German guns or their own rifles. Sometimes they did not have the uniform and wore civil clothes. Their opposition to the regime can be considered as one of the reasons for collaboration, namely a political motive.

Collaborators had several functions. Nazis needed collaborators for assisting in registration of the Jews and guarding the killing operations. Besides, they used collaborators for propaganda

¹¹¹ Mordechai Altshuler, “The unique features of the Holocaust,” 177;

¹¹² Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 519R, 25:17.

¹¹³ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 475.

purposes.¹¹⁴ For the Nazis, it would have been difficult to identify the Jews without the help of local citizens who knew every family in a town or village. Therefore, the German authorities organized local police upon their arrival. This gave people collaborating with the occupants a limitless power. As the witness from Mineralnye Vody, Stavropol region, mentions: “The Germans did not do it [arrests]. They did not know the language. They gave assignments to the policemen and they sniffed out who was less pleasing for them”.¹¹⁵ Another witness from Eupatoria, Crimea, testifies: “They [the Germans] shot communists and those who were pointed, everybody, indiscriminately”.¹¹⁶ In general, policemen could point at any of their enemies. As policemen knew the addresses of the Jews, they made the lists of potential victims and went to their apartments with the Nazis.¹¹⁷ Except policemen, other villagers could extradite the Jews and get a remuneration for that. The amount of this reward was up to 100 Reichsmarks;¹¹⁸ thus it is undoubted that some locals were eager to collaborate with the Nazis in hunting down the Jews.

The size of rural localities was small and there was a relatively small number of Jews. Therefore, an active participation of collaborators in the process of identifying and gathering the Jews made the registration process unnecessary. For example, Andrei Porokhin was chosen as a headman in Maikopskaya, the Krasnodar region, during the demonstration conducted by the German commandant. He betrayed two Jewish families evacuated from Ukraine.¹¹⁹ In Otradnaya, the gathering of 65 Jews was also conducted with the assistance of collaborators.¹²⁰ The Jews were

¹¹⁴ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 392.

¹¹⁵ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 576R, part 1, 51:28.

¹¹⁶ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 1699UK, 19:37.

¹¹⁷ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 268U, 04:44;

Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 525R, 36:28;

Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 526R, 20:21.

¹¹⁸ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 396.

¹¹⁹ Act on Maikop, GA RF, P7021/16/4, p. 1.

¹²⁰ Protocol of the interview with Kulinkin, GA RF, P7021/16/7, p. 35.

locked at the local village club for more than one month. However, they could come out for harvesting with a permission from the commandant. Collaborators helped the Nazis to maintain forced labor. The witness Ivan Kulinkin testified: “I often heard this order from the head of the commune, Gerasimenko: force them, the kikes, to do the hardest work. They are at our hands now, do not feel sorry for them”.¹²¹ Also in Crimean villages, collaborators helped the Nazis to single out the Jews. The role of local collaborators was especially important there because there were many Jewish kolkhozes. The total number of rural Jews was as high as 17,000 people.¹²² Village heads usually delivered the list of Jews to the occupants as they knew everyone in the village. During the first months of the occupation, a large rural Jewish community of Crimea was destroyed. Therefore, the participation of local collaborators in identifying the Jews, especially in the rural areas, was significant.

After the Jews were identified, a point of gathering was announced by Nazis. It could be a central square or a railway station. The Jews were promised that they would be relocated or taken to work. However, the Germans put the Jews in trucks and taken outside the city to be shot to death. Collaborators helped put the Jews into the vehicles. Sometimes the Jews were forced to go to the killing site by feet. In these cases, collaborators followed the column of the Jewish victims.¹²³ Moreover, collaborators buried the victims who were shot in the pits and guarded the killing sites: “Young Tatars guarded the pits. They [the Jews] were buried improperly, later one could see human remains. Germans would not sniff this cadaveric smell.”¹²⁴ In other words, collaborators were involved in surveillance. Additionally, they did some “dirty” jobs concerning the corpses of

¹²¹ Protocol of the interview with Kulinkin, p. 35.

¹²² Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 208.

¹²³ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 526R, 34:20;
Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 548R, part 2, 45:08.

¹²⁴ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 1673UK, 59:32.

the Jews, such as pulling them out of the gas vans and burying them. However, they did not participate in the actual killings, which were carried out exclusively by the Germans.¹²⁵ As the witness Kulinkin reported:

Gendarmerie blocked off the Jews and no one could come out. Former Soviet citizens who turned out to be the betrayers of the Homeland guarded them... People were put into a cargo truck. These executioners did not feel that these were people in front of them. The Germans filled up the truck and moved the people to the killing site... The vehicle returned in about three hours. By the evening, the blood-stained Germans came back to the village. They took the best Jewish belongings and left the village.¹²⁶

Even though the local citizens who supported the Nazis were very hostile toward the Jews, the murder of the Jews was excluded from the range of their functions. Therefore, the functions of collaborators were limited to pointing at the Jews and the organization of Jewish gathering.

However, the involvement of local policemen into the killing operations grew in 1942. Those Jews who were not gassed to death in gas vans were killed by collaborators and dropped into the pits.¹²⁷ Besides, they beat the teeth of the corpses of the Jewish victims.¹²⁸ There also were cases of individual acts of violence. For instance, a policeman in Mineralnye Vody, Aleksandr Gusarov, pulled his Jewish teacher of German on the street and shot her.¹²⁹ Some witnesses claim that policemen who were recruited from locals became even more cruel than the Nazis.¹³⁰ Most of the evidence proves that many collaborators wanted some revenge for their suffering under the Soviet government. Collaborators became more defiant by 1942 because with time they could

¹²⁵ Feferman, *The Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 393.

¹²⁶ Protocol of the interview with Kulinkin, p. 35.

¹²⁷ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 1707UK, 52:58.

¹²⁸ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 1673UK, 01:02:45.

¹²⁹ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 576R, part 1, 26:04.

¹³⁰ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 1699UK, 01:06:59;
Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 1686UK, 32:28.

successfully adapt to their roles.¹³¹ Moreover, they felt desperate because they already understood that the Nazi occupation would not last long. The Soviet troops would sooner or later take over the southern territories and collaborators would be prosecuted as the enemies of the state. Thus, some of collaborators joined the Nazis on their way to Germany, but were taken as prisoners by the Soviet soldiers.

4.2.2. Collaborators in the ranks of the German army

As it was mentioned above, Nazis tended to rely on those people who suffered under the Soviet government. Therefore, in the USSR, they often sought for help among ethnic or religious minorities. The southern region was not an exception. The relations between local Caucasians and the Soviet government were tense before the war.¹³² The Caucasians organized uprisings that were violently suppressed by the Soviet state. The Nazis knew about these negative sentiments towards the Soviet authority that were wide-spread among indigenous Muslim peoples in the Crimea and Caucasus. Thus, they found Muslims, such as Tatars and Caucasian peoples, more willing to collaborate. The Nazis promised to liberate them from the Soviet yoke.

On the initiative of the German field marshal Fedor von Bock, national units of indigenous peoples were formed in the occupied territories. Among them were the Turkistan legion, consisting of Tajiks, Tatars, Turkmen, Kazakhs and Uzbeks; the Caucasian legion, comprising Azerbaijanis, Ingush, Dagestanis; the Armenian and Georgian legions.¹³³ Right after the beginning of the occupation, Tatar community leaders officially agreed to collaborate for the liberation of the

¹³¹ Wendy Lower, *Hitler's Furies. German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields* (Boston–New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 141;

Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 77.

¹³² Feferman, "Nazi Germany and the Mountain Jews," 100.

¹³³ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 467.

Crimea from the Soviets. They even wrote a letter to Hitler where they expressed their wiliness to collaborate:

Your Majesty Mr. Hitler! Please allow to send to you our warm greetings and many thanks for the liberation of Crimean Tatars who suffered under the Jewish-communist authority [...] We, Crimean Tatars, are ready to fight together with the German army on any front. Nowadays partisans, Jewish commissars, communists, and commanders who lost the chance to flee Crimea are in the Crimean forests. In order to liquidate the Guerilla groups faster, we, as good connoisseurs of roads and the paths of Crimean forests, kindly ask you to create divisions from former “Kulaks”, who were groaning under the Jewish-communist yoke for 20 years, at the German command. We assure you that in the shortest possible time the partisans of Crimea will be eliminated up to the very last man.¹³⁴

Many Tatar units were formed of POWs, especially in the eastern part of the Crimea in proximity to the front line. For instance, during the operation ‘Zeppelin’ in January 1942,¹³⁵ a division of 9,255 Tatar prisoners of war was organized.¹³⁶ A potential collaborator had to be in good health condition and under the age 28 (since 1942 – under the age 35).¹³⁷ The leitmotiv in German propaganda was that Tatars and Germans were the nations that had a similar mission – to make their enslaved people free.

Lack of knowledge can be a minor but still important factor for collaboration. There is no evidence that the occupants informed local policemen of their duties, which was also true for the perpetrators, except the highest command level. Therefore, young and inexperienced men were often involved in helping the Nazis: “[Nazis] formed SD [Nazi Security Service] from young

¹³⁴ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 446–447.

¹³⁵ Operation ‘Zeppelin’ was a German project to use Soviet prisoners of war for espionage work in the Soviet rear.

¹³⁶ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 477.

¹³⁷ Natalia Doronina, “Natsistskaia propaganda na okkupirovannykh territoriiakh Stavropol’ia i Kubani v 1942–1943 gg.: tseli, osobennosti, krakh” [Nazi propaganda in the occupied territories of Stavropol and Kuban in 1942–1943: the goals, peculiarities, and fall] (PhD diss., Stavropol State University, 2005), 145–146.

Tatars...Boys! To carry a rifle was interesting but to kill people with it was something they did not think about...Old Tatars did not approve it.”¹³⁸ Besides curiosity and lack of awareness, collaborators had limited time to think because the Nazis organized local police immediately after their arrival. The surprise effect is an important factor, explaining why ordinary men became perpetrators.¹³⁹ It is also applicable to the case of Soviet citizens who turned into collaborators.

Apart from ideological motives, there was a significant financial motivation to join the Nazi army. The financial support for the volunteers depended on the rank of the soldier. The payments varied from 30 to 42 Reichsmarks (up to 525 rubles),¹⁴⁰ which was high according to the Soviet standards. For instance, the salary of the Red Army soldiers was significantly lower.¹⁴¹ Food supply and accommodation were free for collaborators. Even though the Germans were in fact on the top of the hierarchy in the army, the practical meaning of this superiority was insignificant. The privilege of German soldiers was that they were housed separately from non-Germans. Familiarity between them was strictly prohibited. Nonetheless, disciplinary measures were equal for the Germans and non-German volunteers.¹⁴² Therefore, the conditions in the army and the perks of being a collaborator were appealing for the ethnic groups of the Caucasus and Crimea.

In a similar vein, in the North Caucasus, the Nazis recruited Cossacks to serve in the German army. Cossacks were oppressed under Bolshevism and thus were quite reliable for the Germans. Their suffering began in the 1920–1930s, during the repressive campaign of Decossakization or *Raskazachivaniye*. This was the policy implemented by the Bolsheviks which aimed to destroy the

¹³⁸ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 1673UK, 29:06.

¹³⁹ Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 71.

¹⁴⁰ Doronina, “Natsistskaia propaganda,” 148.

¹⁴¹ For example, see: Letter by Salman Kagan from December 11, 1941, in *Sokhrani moi pis'ma: Sbornik pisem i dnevnikov evreev perioda Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny*, ed. by Ilya Altman (Moscow: Center and Fond “Holocaust”, 2016), 117.

¹⁴² Doronina, “Natsistskaia propaganda,” 148.

Cossacks as a separate cultural and political entity.¹⁴³ As a consequence, the Cossacks were very hostile to the Soviet regime. The occupants were aware of this and began to re-establish Cossack traditions to earn their trust soon after the beginning of the occupation. Therefore, the Cossack veterans of the First World War were allowed to wear their pre-revolutionary uniform and awards, which had been banned by the Soviet state. Moreover, the title of *Ataman*, a commander of Cossack armies, was restored.¹⁴⁴ *Ataman* was responsible for the accoutrements of the Cossack drafts.

The Nazis were primarily quite suspicious toward other nationalities except Tatars for quite a long time. This attitude changed in March 1942 because the Nazis desperately needed more soldiers in their armies.¹⁴⁵ Already in September 1942, the Nazis started to form Cossack units within the German army. In the Cossack divisions, it was possible to recover the latest position in the Tsarist or White army.¹⁴⁶ Soon after 1942, the Krasnodar Cossack division participated in the battle with the Red Army. The families of the participants gained a reward of 500 rubles, one hectare of land per each person, and two horses for one household.¹⁴⁷ The main reason for the Cossacks to fight alongside with the Nazis was the hope for the liberation of Kuban and Don from Soviet rule and the revival of Cossack autonomy.

Those who had collaborated with the occupants were sentenced for ten years of strict regime colony. The massive deportations of collaborators began after the end of the war. The

¹⁴³ Boris Kovalev, "Uchastie kollaboratsionistov v repressiiakh protiv evreiskogo naseleniia i voennoplennykh na Yuge Rossii" [The participation of collaborators in repressions against the Jewish population and prisoners of war in the South of Russia], in *Istoriia Kholokosta na Severnom Kavkaze i sud'by evreiskoi intelligentsia v gody Vtoroi mirovoi voyny: Materialy 7 Mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii "Uroki Kholokosta i sovremennaiia Rossiia*, ed. Kiril Feferman (Moscow: Center and Fond "Holocaust", 2013), 58.

¹⁴⁴ Doronina, "Natsistskaia propaganda," 153.

¹⁴⁵ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 483.

¹⁴⁶ Doronina, "Nazi propaganda," 153.

¹⁴⁷ Kovalev, "Uchastie kollaboratsionistov," 59.

indigenous peoples of the Caucasus and the Crimea were accused as traitors of the Soviet regime and thus were resettled for forced labor. In October 1943, the entire Karachai Autonomous Oblast was abolished and its territory was divided between the Stavropol region, Georgia, and the Krasnodar region. Out of 75,763 Karachais living in the Karachai Oblast before the Nazi occupation, 69,267 were transported to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.¹⁴⁸ A similar fate awaited Chechen and Ingush, who were deported to Kazakhstan *en masse*. The territories which were primarily populated by them were given for settlement to Ossetians and Russians. On May 18, 1944, a large deportation of 180,014 Crimean Tatars was launched.¹⁴⁹ Their destinations were Uzbekistan, the Urals, and the Asian part of Russia. Almost no Tatars were left in the Crimea. The Soviet government destroyed centuries-old history through these mass-scale deportations of entire ethnic groups. Moreover, during these forced transportations, many people perished from unbearable conditions and diseases. Some witnesses claim that collaborators escaped the trial, changed places of residence and hid under new names.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, it is undoubted that the majority of them were prosecuted with the full force of law.

Summing up, anti-Jewish sentiments were more common for people who were persecuted by the Soviet state. Jews were usually associated with the hated Soviet government. The main reason for collaboration in the southern region was political frustration and sympathy with the Nazis. In this sense, the cases of the North Caucasus and the Crimea are similar because both areas were populated by ethnic minorities that were oppressed under Tsarist and Soviet rule, namely Muslims of the North Caucasus, Cossacks, and Crimean Tatars. Therefore, the Nazis largely relied

¹⁴⁸ Pavel Polian, *Against their will: The history and geography of forced migrations in the USSR* (Central European University Press, 2004), 140–142.

¹⁴⁹ Polian, *Against their will*, 152.

¹⁵⁰ Yahad-In Unum Archive/ Testimony YIU 739R, 01:30:18.

on the ethnic minorities and even organized national units as a part of the Wehrmacht. The collaboration of ethnic minorities and the Germans in the region was almost total. Their motives for the support of the Nazi regime were of nationalistic and political nature. Crimean Tatars along with Caucasian peoples fought for the liberation of their national territories and revival of their nations which were culturally suppressed by the Soviet government. As a rule, these peoples had a long history of conflicts with the Russian authorities whose roots can be found in the 19th century. During the war, they could assist the Nazis in anti-Jewish measures which was a part of their fight against the Soviet supremacy in the region. However, being a soldier in the ranks of the German army did not always mean to be involved in the massacres of Jews.

In the south of Russia, only Rostov-on-Don had the Ashkenazi Jewish community before the Bolshevik Revolution, but in most localities, there were no Jews at all. Mountain Jews lived separately from the rest of the population and there were almost no interactions between them and non-Jews. However, the war evoked prejudices about Judeo-Communism. In the aftermath of the retreat of the Red Army, many civilians of different backgrounds believed that the Soviet soldiers would never return and the Soviet rule could be over. This was a fertile soil for the rise of anti-Soviet sentiments which were wide-spread not only among ethnic minorities but also the representatives of the titular nation. Collaborators, chosen from Russians and Ukrainians, actively participated in the hunting down the Jews, their gathering and surveillance. During the war, some people became collaborators due to political and nationalistic reasons, whereas others helped Jews and saved them from death. Meanwhile the “Righteous among the Nations” had disinterested motives for rescuing Jews, collaborators acted out of nationalistic interests and fight to achieve political and social justice.

Chapter 5. The Soviet state: the official response on the Holocaust

This chapter will study the Soviet official discourse concerning the elimination of Jews during the war. It will enable us to see if antisemitism existed at the governmental level and was characteristic for the Soviet political course. Therefore, this chapter is largely based on Soviet mass media. The secondary literature that investigates the tendencies in the Soviet press is vital for this chapter because it provides the context in which newspaper articles were created. This will allow us to understand some fluctuations and inconsistencies in the representation of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union.

5.1. De-Judaization of the Holocaust at the governmental level

There is an opinion among scholars that antisemitism was wide-spread in the Soviet Union, especially among Russians and Ukrainians.¹⁵¹ However, a decisive voice in opinion-making process belonged to the Soviet government. The Soviet politics concerning the Jewish minority depended on many circumstances and fluctuated over time. It was beneficial for ethnic minorities, including Jews, in the early years of the existence of the Soviet state. In the 1920s, the solution was to promote the national culture of those nations that had been oppressed in the Russian empire, which meant every nation except the Russians. Jews were especially enthusiastic about the Soviet authority because they had been one of the most oppressed ethnic groups in Tsarist Russia.

¹⁵¹ For further details see: Frank Gruner, "Did anti-Jewish violence exist in the Soviet Union? – Anti-Semitism and collective violence in the USSR during the war and post war years," *Journal of Genocide Research* 11(2–3) (June–September 2009): 355–379;

John-Paul Himka, "The Lviv pogrom of 1941: the Germans, Ukrainian Nationalists, and the Carnival Crowd," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 53, no. 24 (June–September–December 2011): 209–243.

Therefore, during the first decade, the Soviet government contributed to the development of its ethnic minorities, including the Russian Jews.

A radical change in politics happened because of the Second World War. In 1939, when Nazis and Soviets signed a treaty of non-aggression, all attempts to integrate the Jews were abandoned and the purges of Jews from the Soviet elite began. The war years were the time when Russian chauvinism and antisemitism flourished. In 1943, two Jewish activists, Fefer and Mikhoels, offered the Soviet authorities to establish a Jewish Republic in the Crimea.¹⁵² The Soviet government rejected this idea and considered it as nationalistic. The attempt of Jewish institutions to collect material about the elimination of the European Jews was considered as the act of nationalism as well.

Therefore, the Holocaust was not discussed in the press. In Molotov's note of January 6, 1942, the elimination of the Jews was tackled, but this issue remained silenced and ignored in the following notes.¹⁵³ In December 1942, the allies of the anti-Hitler coalition adopted a declaration on the elimination of the European Jewry by the Hitler authorities. They pledged to ensure the retribution for the crimes against the Jews. The Soviets, signing this declaration as well, gave a comment on this document two days later in the Soviet press. The focus on the murders of the Jews was here avoided.

¹⁵² Joshua Rubenstein, "Night of the Murdered Poets," in *Stalin's Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish anti-Fascist Committee*, ed. Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir P. Naumov, trans. Laura Esther Wolfson (Yale University Press, 2001), 57.

¹⁵³ "Nota Narodnogo Komissara Inostrannykh del tovarishcha Molotova o povsemestnykh grabezakh, razorenii naseleniia i chuduvishchnykh zverstvakh germanskikh vlastei na zakhvachennykh imi Sovetskikh territoriakh" [The note of the People's Commissar of Interior, comrade Molotov, about the widespread looting, the devastation of the people and horrific atrocities of the German authorities in the occupied Soviet territories] in *Zlodeiania, grabezhi i nasiliia nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov* (Leningrad, 1942), 9–28. Translation mine.

The above-mentioned Soviet comment stated: “The Nazis implement a horrific plan to annihilate the majority of the civil citizens in the occupied territories: innocent people of different origins, social status, faith and age”.¹⁵⁴ It is clear that the Soviet authorities silenced the murder of the Jewish population in press and official discourse. Moreover, among the 27 reports of the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission published during the war, only one openly described the annihilation of the Soviet Jews. In the 1950s, a Russian historian living in America, Solomon Schwarz, claimed that denouncing Nazi anti-Jewish actions would have facilitated Hitler’s propaganda against “Judeo-Bolshevism” on Soviet soil.¹⁵⁵ The reasons for ignoring the Holocaust at the governmental level and the inability to prevent it in the USSR are still unrevealed, as the Russian KGB archives are closed until now. However, it is undoubted that the absence of the Holocaust from the Soviet sources fully corresponded to Soviet policy. After the war, the Soviet political discourse became extremely Russian-centered and one can say chauvinistic; there was no space for ethnic minorities to maintain their interests in politics and mass media.

5.2. The Soviet investigation of Nazi crimes

Even though the Soviet state conducted a policy of silence concerning mass murders of its citizens of Jewish origin, at the same time it contributed to the creation of a significant source on the Holocaust, namely the documents of the Extraordinary State Commission (ChGK). This Commission was formed by the Council of People’s Commissars on 2 November 1942 and was tasked to investigate the damage caused to the USSR property during the WWII and the murders of Soviet citizens as well. Nonetheless, it did not have a purpose to document the murders of the Jews. The premises of the establishment of the ChGK lead to 1941, when the executive officer of

¹⁵⁴ Solomon Schwarz, *Antisemitizm v Sovetskom Soyuze* [Antisemitism in the Soviet Union] (New York: The publisher of the name of Chekhov, 1952), 183.

¹⁵⁵ Schwarz, *Antisemitizm v Sovetskom Soyuze*, 185.

TASS and the member of Soviet Information Bureau Iakov Khavinson sent a letter to the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Party, Shcherbakov, about the organization of “a public committee”, following the European standards of crime investigation.¹⁵⁶ However, his request was denied.

During the following summer, the problem of formation of any investigating commission was raised at a global level. As a result, in October 1942, Great Britain and the allied forces made an agreement about the cooperation in Nazi crimes investigations and the establishment of the United Nations War Crimes Commission.¹⁵⁷ Hence, the USSR could not stay behind and had to follow the Western law tradition. The documents of the Soviet Commission were presented during the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials. Moreover, the first public courts on the Nazis took place during the war in Kiev, Kharkov, Minsk, Smolensk, and Krasnodar, and the prosecutions were relied to the documents of the Commission.

The Soviet Commission had the widest possible work scope. Approximately 32 thousand witnesses participated in ascertaining Nazi crimes in the USSR, more than seven million people helped directly to collect the data, and in total the Commission considered more than 54,000 acts and more than 250,000 protocols.¹⁵⁸ Although the scale of the work that had been done was impressive, the Soviet citizens had almost no access to their own testimonies: from 1943 to 1945 only 27 reports of ChGK were published in the press. Therefore, ordinary Soviet citizens, though many had been participating in the work of the Commission, did not have access to its materials.

¹⁵⁶ Marina Sorokina, “People and Procedures: Toward the History of the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the USSR,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 16.

¹⁵⁷ Sorokina, “People and Procedures,” 15.

¹⁵⁸ Sorokina, “People and Procedures,” 5.

It is clear that the Soviet Extraordinary Commission collected important data about the Holocaust, even though the documentation of the elimination of the Jews was not its primary purpose. The papers of the Commission were not devoted to mass murders of the Jews but they intended to shed light on the crimes committed against all Soviet citizens, including the Jews. Therefore, although the ethnicity of the victims was not highlighted by the local authorities, there is still an extensive body of sources on the elimination of Soviet Jews. The documents of the Commission are based on the testimonies of those Soviet citizens who saw the crimes and even knew the murdered people. Through their stories, usually quite straightforward, it is possible to gain detailed and comprehensive insight of the Holocaust on Soviet soil.

5.3. The Holocaust in the war-period press

5.3.1. The silence on the Holocaust in the Soviet press

The elimination of Jews was a controversial topic for the Soviet official discourse. On the eve of the war, the Soviet propaganda was in turmoil and had no direct instructions on how to represent the murder of the Jews. Therefore, newspaper reports usually silenced the subject but from time to time news penetrated the Soviet periodicals.¹⁵⁹ These fluctuations depended on political concerns of the authorities and war circumstances. The absence of direct guidelines on what to write and what to omit also left some space for journalists and editors.

Some newspapers mention the use of gas vans in the entire Krasnodar region. However, the ethnicity of the victims that died in these trucks was not stated. On the contrary, it was explicitly claimed that the Nazis murdered Soviet citizens irrespective of their nationality:

Any citizen risked ending up at the paws of the German executioners: a housewife going to the market, a child peacefully playing in the street, an artisan making his business in the

¹⁵⁹ Feferman, "To flee or not to flee," 522–523.

workshop. People were captured and thrown into the gas vehicles on any occasion and without any reason.¹⁶⁰

The reason why these “peaceful citizens” including children were murdered was that “Nazis were obsessed with beastly anger in relation to the Soviet people, its culture and everything Russian”.¹⁶¹ In a similar vein, in the newspaper *Stavropol'skaia Pravda*, the process of murder in a gas van was described in great detail but without pointing out who were the victims:

“The bakery” is moved closer to the door of the Gestapo. In the corridor, females and children are screaming loudly. Rakhim [the Gestapo worker in Pyatigorsk] undresses and pushes them into a car. 30-35 people are squeezed in there. Then the door of “the bakery” is closed. New officers take out the watch and look under the car. The driver starts a small engine located behind the back. The victims, suffocating with gas of the engine, hit the walls of the car and scratch the iron with their fingernails. The car is shaking from convulsions of thirty human bodies. Afterwards, the yelling becomes more muffled, replaced by moaning and wheezing. Eventually, all is quiet. The driver cuts the engine. “Kaputt! Baked!” The officers look at the watch.

- Only seven minutes.
- Great!
- Humane.¹⁶²

Apparently, the Soviet authorities aimed to provoke the readers of this article to take revenge for the horrific murders of their fellow citizens. Therefore, it was inopportune to emphasize that the murdered civilians were Jewish.

¹⁶⁰ “Beshennye volki” [Rabid Wolves] in *Krasnaia Zvezda* 165 (July 15, 1943).

¹⁶¹ *Pravda* 70 (March 13, 1943).

¹⁶² Egorov, “Gitlerovskaya Pekarnya” [Hitler’s Bakery] in *Stavropol'skaya Pravda* 44 (February 24, 1943).

Nevertheless, the press allusively hinted at the mass murder of the Jews. For example, Mamontov, the chairman of Krasnodar regional commission for ascertaining and investigating crimes perpetrated by the Nazis, reported:

In Novorossiysk, the Fascist bastards did not have time to build mechanized “death factories”, as they did in other places, but they did complete their plan of the people’s elimination. Here there were no furnaces as in Maidanek, but Hitler’s cannibals torched and killed the Soviet citizens whom they caught. In the act of the commission for ascertaining and investigating Nazi atrocities in Novorossiysk, it is written that during the murdering of 425 Soviet citizens, the well-known gas vans were used.¹⁶³

The reference to Maidanek hints to the fact that the people murdered in Novorossiysk were Jewish. However, perhaps Soviet citizens did not associate Maidanek with the annihilation of the Jews.

Although the majority of the articles silenced the Holocaust, there were some rare explicit reports about the destruction of the Jews. The article *The Brown Datura* by Alexei Tolstoy, a member of the ChGK, may serve as an example. He wrote it after visiting the North Caucasus. In this article the ethnicity of the victims was stated and the murders in Mineralnye Vody, Pyatigorsk, and Stavropol were described in detail¹⁶⁴. However, the initiative of Alexei Tolstoy to shed light on the Holocaust was not shared by other journalists. Even though on September 2, 1942, a ChGK report openly discussing the murders of the Jews was published, a few days later the Jews were again turned into “Soviet citizens”.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Mamontov, “Iamy na deviatom kilometre” [Pits on the 9th kilometer] in *Sovetskaya Kuban’* (January 13, 1945).

¹⁶⁴ Alexei Tolstoi, “Korichnevyyi Durman” [The Brown Datura] in *Izvestiya* 183 (August 5, 1943).

¹⁶⁵ For details see “Chudovishchnye zlodeianiia fashistskikh merzavtsev v Minvodakh” [Horrific atrocities of Fascist bastards in Minvody] in *Stavropol’skaya Pravda* (September 2, 1943); “Ubiitsy,” [The murderers] in *Stavropol’skaya Pravda* (September 9, 1943).

5.3.2. The justification for mass murders in the German press

The German propaganda press in the occupied territories deserves special attention. It had the purpose to create a negative image of Jews among the non-Jewish readers of propaganda newspapers. There were periodicals in German, Russian and Tatar under the occupation in the Crimea. The Crimea had been under Soviet rule longer than western Ukraine or the Baltic lands. Therefore, the Crimean opposition was destroyed by the beginning of the war, and its leaders were sent to GULAG. Those people who could organize any nationalistic activity, for instance, a publication, were absent from the Crimea.¹⁶⁶ In this sense, the Ukrainian press differed from the press in the Crimea. The newspapers which were published in the Crimea under the occupation were in fact German: their content usually emanated from the Berlin office of propaganda.¹⁶⁷ In a similar way, the occupant press existed in the North Caucasus. During the first days of the occupation, the Nazis spread propaganda leaflets among the local population, but later they began to publish brochures, appeals, and newspapers; one of the largest periodicals was the propagandist *Kuban*.¹⁶⁸ The articles were usually written by local journalists, but they were subordinated to the occupants' orders. These anti-Semitic publications were part of the Nazi propaganda campaign in the occupied territories. In the Crimea they were mostly based on the equation of Jews and communism. As a rule, the Jews were dehumanized in the press and illustrated as committed communists who enslaved the rest of the population under their yoke. The impact of Nazi propaganda on the local citizens remains under-researched. However, in any case it is reasonable

¹⁶⁶ Mikhail Tyaglyy, "The Role of Antisemitic Doctrine in German Propaganda in the Crimea," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18, no. 3 (Winter 2004): 444.

¹⁶⁷ Tyaglyy, "The Role of Antisemitic Doctrine," 434.

¹⁶⁸ Doronina, "Natsistskaia propaganda," 149, 154.

to assume that the German press encouraged anti-Soviet sentiments and may have influenced potential collaborators.

5.4. The explicit representation of the Holocaust in the literature and films

Even though the mass murders of Jews were a controversial topic for the Soviet press, it was quite extensively represented in Soviet literature. Probably, the most significant work was conducted by Ilia Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossmann, the editors of *The Black Book*.¹⁶⁹ The idea of this source was initiated by Albert Einstein, and Americans along with Soviets, namely the members of the Anti-Fascist Committee, worked on collecting data about the Holocaust on Soviet soil and in Poland. Although in America *The Black Book* was published in 1946, in the USSR the journalists were accused of cooperation with the Americans and of incorrect representation of war events. The infamous attack on the Jewish activists began right after the war in the framework of *zhdanovshchina*, a nationalistic campaign initiated by the Secretary for Ideology Andrei Zhdanov. As a result, the script of *The Black Book* was confiscated in the late 1940s and the book was published only in 1993 with the help of Ehrenburg's daughter. This is a vital source for researchers because it constitutes one of the first attempts to document the Holocaust and contains information about all occupied Soviet territories. This source consists of journalist articles, letters and memories; thus, it covers the Holocaust from different perspectives.

Besides *The Black Book*, Vasily Grossman wrote other important works on the Holocaust. Grossman was especially interested in shedding light on the genocide of the Soviet Jews. His own mother had perished in Ukraine under the Nazi occupation.¹⁷⁰ His personal tragedy was reflected

¹⁶⁹ *The Black Book*, ed. Vasily Grossman and Ilia Ehrenburg (Moscow: ACT CORPUS, 2015).

¹⁷⁰ John Garrard, "Vasilii Grossman and the Holocaust on the Soviet Soil," in *Jews and Jewish life in Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (Ilford, Essex: Frank Cass, 1995), 213.

in the famous essays ‘The Old School Teacher’, published in the Soviet newspaper *Znamia*, and ‘Ukraine without Jews’, which first appeared in the Soviet Jewish periodical *Eynikeyt*. Both works were published in 1943. Grossman was a war correspondent and saw the war devastation with his own eyes. Moreover, he had a chance to talk to people who lived under the occupation. Therefore, these essays are based on the oral testimonies and personal stories of people who witnessed the Holocaust in Ukraine. However, Grossman added some elements of fiction and used poetic and rhetoric devices to make these stories even more acute.¹⁷¹ Even though they were published under wartime censorship, Grossman managed to highlight that during the Nazi occupation the Jews were singled out from the rest of the Soviet population to be murdered. His activity was under strict control of the Soviet government, and his sincerity could have cost Grossman his life, but the death of Stalin saved him from prison.

The Soviet cinematography, as well as literature, struggled to find its means to illustrate the horrors of the war. There were two major dilemmas. Highlighting the elimination of the Jews could have been perceived as weakening the grief of other peoples of the Soviet Union. Besides, it risked bringing out the participation of local collaborators in mass murders. The disclosure of collaboration would undermine the heroism of the Russian soldiers and civilians. The Holocaust was therefore de-Judaized and framed into Soviet propaganda showing how communism had won over other ideologies. The first Soviet movie made about the Nazi persecution of the Jews, *Professor Mamlock*, is a revealing example of this approach. A few years before the Great Patriotic War, in 1938, it appeared in the Soviet Union. It was based on a story of a German doctor of Jewish origin who was persecuted by the Nazis in the 1930s. In the USSR, the group of filmmakers adapted this plot to Soviet realities and thus *Professor Mamlock* became a Soviet anti-Fascist

¹⁷¹ Zsuzsa Hetényi, “Facts and fiction in Vasily Grossman’s prose,” *Jewish Studies at the CEU* 8 (2011-2016), 204.

movie fully devoted to communist resistance against the Nazis.¹⁷² In the original version, Mamlock committed suicide. In the Soviet adaptation, he was saved by a Bulgarian communist but later died heroically as a committed communist.¹⁷³ Although it was the first movie which clearly demonstrated the Nazi policies toward the Jews, it also mitigated the uniqueness of the persecution. The main purpose for the filmmakers was to highlight the power of the communist party and its superiority over Fascism.

The tendency to silence the main victims of Nazi persecutions was characteristic for the south of Russia as well. In the case of Rostov, Soviet film makers and journalists made a documentary right after the first occupation of the city in 1941. In this film the names of the Jewish victims are not stated, even though some stories about the death of Jewish individuals are mentioned.¹⁷⁴ Thus, the fact that the Rostov Jews were the main target for elimination is camouflaged. However, this documentary about Rostov openly showed the scenes of Nazi atrocities whereas Western movies avoided showing the victims of Nazism. There were some reasons for such an approach. The liberation of Rostov was one of the first victories of the Red Army and the film about Rostov was aimed to enhance the resistance against Nazism. Therefore, the victims were depicted as Soviet without emphasizing their ethnic origins.¹⁷⁵ It is noteworthy that in 1943, after the final liberation of Rostov, filmmakers did not make any single documentary.

¹⁷² Jeremy Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust: Soviet cinema and the genocide of the Jews, 1938–1946* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 21.

¹⁷³ Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 26.

¹⁷⁴ Jeremy Hicks, “Znachenie sovetskikh dokumental’nykh fil’mov o natsistskikh prestupleniiakh: primer Rostova” [The importance of Soviet documentary films about the Nazi crimes: the case of Rostov], in *Istoriia Kholokosta na Severnom Kavkaze i sud’by evreiskoi intelligentsia v gody Vtoroi mirovoi voyny: Materialy 7 Mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii “Uroki Kholokosta I sovremennaia Rossiia*, ed. Kiril Feferman (Moscow: Center and Fond “Holocaust”, 2013), 121.

¹⁷⁵ Hicks, “Znachenie sovetskikh dokumental’nykh fil’mov,” 122.

Therefore, mass shootings of Jews in Zmievskaja Balka and in other sites of the city are not reflected in the Soviet cinematography.

Despite the general tendency of de-Judaization of the Holocaust in Soviet films, some filmmakers illustrated the destruction of Soviet Jews quite explicitly without focusing on the party theme. For instance, in 1944, a Soviet filmmaker and later a war correspondent, Mark Donskoi, began to work on his film *The Unvanquished*. It illustrates the story of a Ukrainian village and its inhabitants under the occupation. The plight of the Jews during the war is one of the important elements of the movie's plot. In his film, Mark Donskoi shows Jews with six-pointed stars on their shorts going to the killing spot. Moreover, the story of a Jewish girl that was hidden in a Ukrainian house takes a significant place in the scenario. Even though this film highlighted the Jewish tragedy, it was not banned and even became very popular in the Soviet Union and abroad. In Moscow it was screened in eleven cinemas and in Kiev it was shown in four cinemas.¹⁷⁶ However, just in a few months, critical reviews on Donskoi's film were published and it eventually disappeared from the screens. The critics, avoiding anti-Semitic discourse, focused on the passivity of the Jewish victims and the lack of heroism.¹⁷⁷ In any case, Soviet citizens had a chance to see the film which was heavily focused on the Holocaust and did not lessen the Jewish tragedy.

Summing up, the Soviet policy concerning the Holocaust was ambiguous. On the one side, the Soviet state was fighting against Nazism and signed the declaration, along with European states, on the elimination of European Jews. On the other side, the Holocaust was silenced until the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is clear that there were serious contradictions in the representation of the Holocaust in the USSR. Apparently, there were no direct guidelines regarding

¹⁷⁶ Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 152.

¹⁷⁷ Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*, 153.

this issue. However, in conditions of *zhdanovshchina* it was clear to the authorities and artists themselves that explicit representation of the Jewish tragedy could have caused serious consequences and even imprisonment. Although the topic of the annihilation of Jews was usually avoided in the press, some mentions about the Holocaust and even quite explicit images of it emerged in Soviet newspapers, films, and literature nonetheless. Through them ordinary citizens could get insight of the genocide. Besides, many civilians knew about mass murders of Soviet Jews through rumors and even saw killing actions with their own eyes. Moreover, they actively participated in the process of documenting the Nazi atrocities and often spoke quite openly about the murdered Jews. Therefore, the Soviet state, regardless of all its efforts, was not able to hide the horrific truth.

Conclusion

I believe that the south of Russia deserves special attention as a multinational area with a long history of conflicts and thus, an extremely controversial case for investigation. Collaboration in Russia during WWII is far from being a popular research topic. Little is known about the participation of Russians in collaboration with the Nazis. Some literature has been written about the involvement of Muslims; however, this problem is also still understudied. In the light of the recent events in Poland, where statements about the participation of the Poles in the Holocaust became criminalized, this thesis is especially timely.

The primary purpose of this thesis was to find the reasons for becoming a collaborator in southern Russia during the Holocaust. It also aimed to illustrate the Holocaust in this region in detail and reveal its peculiarities. An extensive source base enabled me to portray collaborators – their backgrounds, motivations, and beliefs. Apart from this, my thesis provided a broad picture of events by analyzing the Soviet official discourse regarding the genocide of Jews in the Soviet Union.

The main outcome of my research is that nationalistic motives were the key motivation for the Muslims and the Cossacks. Both groups suffered under the communists and were eager to take revenge, even by supporting the Nazis. In turn, the Germans actively sought for collaboration with ethnic and religious minority groups. Thus, the relations between the occupants and minorities were mutually beneficial. The ranks of collaborators were simultaneously comprised from other nationalities whose members were persecuted by the communist regime. However, the national divisions within the German army were formed exclusively from indigenous peoples of the Crimea and the Caucasus.

The ethnic background of collaborators cannot explain fully the readiness to cooperate with the Nazis. There were other factors which triggered collaboration, such as age, financial motives, personal convictions and political views. In each case, personal experience and circumstances need to be considered. There was no targeted recruitment of locals for assistance in the Holocaust, but local collaborators of various military and civil units often assumed subaltern functions in the massacres of the Jews. The functions of collaborators were limited by the Nazis to hunting down the Jews, their gathering and surveillance – collaborators did not take part in actual killing operations.

Regarding the command structure among the German perpetrators and their local helpers, the present thesis raised other significant singularities of the Holocaust in the Crimea and the North Caucasus. To begin with, despite the fact that the mass murders of Jews were coordinated from the first stage to the last one, it is difficult to find a coherent policy in some events. As I proved in the third chapter, the case of southern Russia should be explained by a mixture of intentionalist and functionalist approaches; in other words, apparently most of the orders were given by the top authorities while other issues were decided at grassroots level by the local officials of lower ranks and SS-men. However, one needs to bear in mind that this thesis is mainly based on Russian material and that a more detailed study of German primary sources may lead to different conclusions with respect to some of the questions raised.

Another specific feature of the Holocaust in the south of Russia is the process of ghetto maintenance. The ghettos in the region were quite different from those in Europe and even from those in occupied Ukraine. First, in the south of Russia, no *Judenrat* was established to govern the ghetto. In the case of Ukraine, it was not organized as well; however, there were Jewish elders who maintained survival in ghettos. Secondly, the ghettoized Jews of the Crimea and the North

Caucasus were not involved in any productive labor, like construction works or harvesting, and mainly were forced to perform senseless work. Taking all the peculiarities into consideration, one should also remember that these ghettos were liquidated rapidly, in many cases due to the massive death of the inmates as a consequence of infections and malnourishing. Therefore, it is clear that the ghettoization process itself had other purposes in the North Caucasus and the Crimea, rather than economical exploitation of Jews. It would be essential for subsequent research to discuss a definition for these sites. Perhaps, future scholars would be able to specify it and elaborate on the problem of ghettoization and ghetto maintenance in southern Russia.

The results of my research prove that there is much else to be done. As I concluded in the fifth chapter, in Soviet mass media the Holocaust was represented as a Soviet tragedy rather than exclusively Jewish. However, there were no strict directives about the representation of the Holocaust and thus rare reports about the Jewish victims emerged in Soviet press, literature, and cinematography. One of the conclusions that should be extended in further research is the perception of the Soviet mass media reports by the Soviet citizens. The examination of their reactions and interpretations of Soviet sources would complement the research of the image of the Holocaust in the Soviet state. Another desideratum for future examination is to conduct a quantitative research. I faced a lack of statistical data but I suppose that the opening of new archival sources will allow us to establish a more solid data-base on the Crimea and the North Caucasus. I attempted to describe the situation in the region before and during the occupation by bringing to light some personal stories and putting them into the conceptual framework of my thesis. I hope that it will serve as a valuable starting point for other researchers who are brave enough to investigate this matter, which is controversial in contemporary Russia's context and may even be called a taboo topic.

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