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by José Neves*

Jochen Hellbeck is particularly interested in autobiographical accounts and people's self-understanding in historical perspective. He is a Russian specialist by background and a Distinguished Professor of History at Rutgers University in the United States. His book *Revolution on My Mind. Writing a Diary under Stalin* was published by Harvard in 2009 and explores personal diaries written in the Soviet Union under Stalin, addressing the paradox of self-expression in an overtly repressive political system. More recently he has explored in comparative and transnational ways how the Soviet, German, and British states mobilised their citizens to fight the World War II. *Stalingrad – The City that Defeated the III Reich* was first published in Germany in 2015 and it is the first western study to probe the meaning of the Battle of Stalingrad for the Soviet soldiers and civilians who defended the city, in that key moment of World War II. This conversation is divided in three parts. The first

* José Neves (jneves@fcsh.unl.pt). Instituto de História Contemporânea, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade NOVA de Lisboa / IN2PAST – Laboratório Associado para a Investigação e Inovação em Património, Artes, Sustentabilidade e Território, Av. Berna 26C, 1069-061, Lisboa, Portugal.

one mainly deals with the research done by Hellbeck in the context of the book *Revolution in My Mind*. The second part considers the work related to the book *Stalingrad*. And the third part focus mainly on Jochen´s current book project.

José Neves (JN): How did you become interested in the history of the USSR?

Jochen Hellbeck (JH): There is a specific time and specific place that brought me to the study of the Soviet Union. I´m West German by background. My father worked as a West German diplomat, and he transferred from Paris to East Berlin in the early 1980s. And I was a kid then and that is how I became exposed to the Eastern Bloc for the first time in my life. I actually straddled both the Western and Eastern worlds, crossing through the Berlin Wall on a daily basis. We lived as diplomats in East Berlin, but I went to school and later to university in West Berlin. When Perestroika happened, it filled me – and millions of other Germans and Europeans – with enormous enthusiasm. This was the ground for my entering Soviet studies. I did not have a pre-existing political affiliation that brought me to the study of the Soviet Union. Neither did I sympathize with the Communist Party, nor was I ardently anti-Soviet. It was mostly curiosity about a very different world that opened up in front of eyes that took me in.

JN: And after your graduation, when you started thinking about your post graduate studies and research, was that the moment when you specifically decided that the Soviet Union would become your main topic?

JH: At the time I was not thinking of becoming a historian. My goal was to join the foreign service. And so I wanted to become a Russian or a Soviet hat as it were. I also realised that my English was pretty

deficient at the time. I was more French-leaning, and we had lived in France, and so I took advantage of a direct exchange scholarship to go to study at Indiana University for a year. The university was wonderful, but southern Indiana was a shock. I managed to get into the Ph.D. program at Columbia University in New York. Looking back, there were many contingent factors along that made me become a historian. Columbia was the most important factor, for it was there that I joined an extremely strong cohort of Russian and Soviet historians, all of them fellow graduate students who are now leading professors in the field: Peter Holquist at the University of Pennsylvania, Igal Halfin at Tel Aviv University, Yanni Kotsonis at NYU, Amir Weiner at Stanford, and many more. This forcefield had a strong shaping effect.

Analysing Soviet Diaries

JN: And what about your specific interest in diaries, as a kind of a material or source?

JH: Again, a chance discovery. I was interested at the time in rural to urban migration processes and had just scoured some archives in Moscow, where I was visiting for a long summer in 1990, and I just walked into a newly created archive that I never heard of before, it was called the Peoples Archive. I told the archival workers of my interest in this theme, and they pulled from their shelf a box filled with diary notebooks; it had been deposited there just a few months before. This happened to be the diary of Stepan Podlubny, a seventeen-year-old boy from Vinnytsia, in Ukraine. Podlubny was Ukrainian-speaking, and he used his diary to master two new languages: the Russian literary language and the Soviet political language. Podlubny's problem, one that he concealed from the world and revealed only to the diary was that he was the son of a kulak peasant and that during collectivization his father had been deported as a "class enemy." Stepan and his mother fled to Moscow where they lived a life in disguise. He acted like a model

proletarian worker. The diary of course mesmerized me. My first reading of it was a decidedly liberal one: the diary as a vessel of a private identity in contradistinction to the public sphere, to the interests of the state. I approached Podlubny's diary like a historian, rather than a literary scholar, seeing in it a reflection of an individual's "true" thoughts in opposition to his to outward public attitudes.

JN: So I guess that topics such as the performative dimension of language and the context of the linguistic turn played a role in this, somehow...

JH: Absolutely! 1990 was when I came from Indiana to Columbia, just having discovered the diary. And Columbia was a hotbed of the linguistic turn, with a whole informal working group on Foucault and post-structuralism that decisively shaped my views of the source material. I became more attuned to the political context of the Soviet Revolution. In March 1917, just as the revolution in Russia had started, Maxim Gorky made a famous declaration, saying, that "the new structure of our political life demands a new structure of the soul". The project of creating interiority was thus really a political project of the day. The central challenge that Gorky and other revolutionaries grappled with was how to create a new type of person who would create the new civilization. This question became very important for many of us at Columbia.

JN: So the diaries worked a little bit as a kind of observatory or a kind of a tool or even a dispositive of this new structure of the soul.

JH: Absolutely. But perhaps this is also bringing a liberal lens to the problem in so far as liberal scholarship stresses the diary as the unfettered domain of an autonomous subject. What I came to realize after many years of studying Podlubny's diary, and the diaries of many other

Soviet people that I subsequently found, is that in a socialist setting the diary may not have played as central a role. It clearly served as construction site of the Soviet soul, but it´s certainly not the only or the most important construction site. The elaboration of a Soviet subjectivity was to happen clearly in schools and at workplaces, in the Red Army and other institutions. And what you find when you look at diaries written by ordinary Soviet people – in as far as they were not professional writers who keep diaries for professional reasons –, if you are looking at ordinary people, their diaries materialize and assume a concreteness and real tangible forms in times of personal crisis: it is when these people feel cast out from the collective that they take up the writing of diaries. The diary is to resolve this urgent question of where they stand vis-à-vis the collective. So I think it is maybe a mistake to privilege the diary as if it had an epistemological standing that was unique in Soviet society. Clearly there are wonderful diaries that flesh out processes of rationalizing Soviet ideology, of aligning the individual vis-à-vis that ideology, that other sources do not show with such concreteness. But nonetheless, we need to understand that the diary itself was not the central training ground that the Soviet state conceived of to produce this new subjectivity. We should not forget that the private journal in Soviet eyes was tainted with bourgeois subjectivity. It could not be fully controlled and that is why state authorities treated it with great ambivalence.

JN: So, in your book, you mention that the hypothesis you were elaborating somehow positioned you against much of the historiography of the Stalinist period, namely against the relevance of State power in the period, and also the use of the concept of totalitarianism, right?

JH: Yes. At the risk of simplifying, there were two dominant schools of thought at the time, and I located my work between their poles (as did Igal Halfin with whom I pursued much of this work together at the time). There was a totalitarian school that foregrounded the workings

of ideology, in the absence of any kind of social agency. Individuals were supposedly brainwashed, or they retreated into a position of hidden resistance against the State. Hence the enormous interest proponents of totalitarian theory hold in the diary: it must be the place of hidden resistance. Consider Winston Smith in George Orwell's *1984*. The first line in his secret diary is a message defying the Big Brother State. Nikolai Rubashov in Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* is brainwashed at first, but as his thinking clears up, his diary too become a vessel of autonomous thought. Responding to the totalitarian school, a cohort of social historians who called themselves revisionists foregrounded social agency and social mobility as key markers of the Stalin period. Curiously, this school did not conceptualize ideology any way. The individuals in their studies are driven by a notion of "self-interest" – material gain and prestige, supposedly – that is not theorized or situated in the context of dominant values of the time. The challenge I saw was how to bring ideology back into the picture while linking it up with agency.

JN: Ok. But in your book you also point out one reference that is outside this two schools, or these two traditions, which is Stephen Kotkin´s book the *Magnetic Mountain*. And you both identify and distance yourself from his work. Can you explain us this double move?

JH: Stephen Kotkin´s *Magnetic Mountain. Stalinism as a Civilization* (1995) was a huge intervention, and it remains a monumental work. To conceive of Stalinism not as primarily a system of mass murder, but as a civilization is daring. Kotkin moreover locates the Soviet revolution within a European-wide frame, and he points to the welfare state as a central aspect of the Stalinist civilization. The one term from Kotkin's book that has become instantly famous is the notion of "speaking Bolshevik". For Kotkin, to master the Bolshevik discourse, to know what is expected of you, is essential to the functioning of Stalinism as a civilization. The book very skilfully parses the rules of the game that determine success or failure in this society. My one problem with the

book is that it lays out a compelling framework, while also remaining ambivalent about its functioning. There are places in the book where "speaking Bolshevik" appears to hold merely instrumental value, while in other places Kotkin is very careful to chisel out Stalinism as a mental universe. So the question remains unresolved whether people merely adopted the rules of the game in their outward behaviour, but in fact retained hidden reservoirs of individuality that did not conform to their outward behaviour. While working on this book, Kotkin had no access to personal diaries, and I assume that he dealt with a layer of unknowability that led him to hypothesize the presence of layers of interiority that his work with public records just couldn´t access.

Facing Stalingrad

JN: Let's talk about your work on the Second World War, starting with the book *Stalingrad.* So, if you could also just tell us how the idea of the book emerged...

JH: I had for a long time wanted to study the Second World War as an encounter between Soviet and German subjectivities. I initially thought about this more in terms of a history of ideas, entangling, say, Ernst Jünger conception of the stormtrooper in the trenches with Gorky's ideas on the socialist personality, such kind of lineages. But this proved too disembodied for my taste. At one point I had a conversation with Omer Bartov, and he just said: "Why don´t you do Stalingrad?" And the idea was born. Stalingrad as a prolonged cultural encounter in what would become the defining battle of the Second World War. I started doing the very same thing I had started earlier: I looked for diaries. While looking for first-person accounts of the battle, Russian colleagues who knew about my interest in diaries, informed me about a huge collection of interview transcripts from the war that were being stored in the archive of the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and were awaiting their historian. My jaw dropped when

I first saw these transcripts. They were written out stenographic accounts of prolonged interviews with Red Army defenders of Stalingrad, and they were so rich and variegated, an unbelievable body of sources. I found out about the terms of their creation: the interviews were the brainchild of Soviet Jewish historian Isaak Mintz, who was a veteran of the Russian Civil War. Mints also happened to be an assistant to Maxim Gorky at one point, and Gorky's influence on the interview project is palpable. During the 1930s Mints curated an oral history project about the Civil War. When Germany invaded in 1941, he essentially redirected his entire staff to collect documents about the new war. In some ways, Ukrainian historians today have also instantly reverted all available resources to study Russia's invasion, and to amass a body of documents that will service scholarly work after the war. That is exactly what Mintz did. He began in late 1941, focusing on the defence of Moscow. Then the project became bigger and bigger, covering more and more areas of the Soviet war effort. In December 1942 Mints sent a small group of historians, just two historians and two stenographers, to cover the battle of Stalingrad, this was before the battle was over. They came back in early January, before the Red Army started the final rout of the German forces and came back for a second trip just after the battle had concluded. The historians produced a total of more than 200 interviews with participants of the battle. Mostly soldiers, but also some civilians. I quickly realized that this project was so vast it had to become a stand-alone publication. This is how *Stalingrad*, the book, appeared, which is mostly about the Soviet side, Soviet understandings of the battle. The book edition also seeks to do justice to the documentary ethos of Mints and his co-workers. I call what they practiced "revolutionary documentarism" – a form of chronicling the revolution that involved the observing scholar-intellectual as a participating operative. The task is not just to record reality but to also shape it in the act of recording. This is how I read the questions that the commission members brought to the soldiers whom they interviewed. The interviews clearly pursued the goal of moulding the consciousness of their interviewees, they did performative work. Interestingly, this is the

only project I know of in the entire history of the Second World War, by any warfaring country, that privileges the first-person account. Not only privileges, but also preserves the first-person interview. The US Army collected so called "after action reviews," interviews with a group of soldiers after they had been in combat. Historian and journalist SLA Marshall introduced this oral history technique for the US Army. Marshall wanted to know how many soldiers used their guns and actually shot from their guns, so as to enhance the military performance of men in combat. On the basis of the interviews, he produced third-person accounts of the debriefing. He did not preserve the scraps of paper which noted what soldiers actually said in response to his questions. What's so interesting in the Soviet context is that the first-person, the subjective position of the individual soldier, is the point of both origin and destination of the interview project. This once more speaks to the voluntarist, interior dimension of the Soviet revolution, which has fascinated me all along. There emerges an ark extending from 1917, via the Civil War and the 1930s to the Second World War. The Soviet soldiers in Stalingrad were conditioned into battle in ways that are reminiscent of how Kotkin discusses the conditioning of industrial workers in *Magnetic Mountain*.

JN: Has your research helped clarify, for instance, the debate on the motivations of Soviet soldiers in Stalingrad and World War II? There is the debate about how constrained or self-motivated they were. And were their motivations patriotic, nationalist, or more ideological, in the sense of anti-Nazi or anti-fascist? Or both together?

JH: The first thing to note is that these interviews were produced in a moment of victory – the first decisive victory over the Germans. The successful counteroffensive near Moscow in December 1941 was important, but the destruction of German weapons and German soldiers at Stalingrad had no precedent. The interview records this moment of victory and pride. And this overall mood conceivably allows for some of

the interviewed officers and soldiers to talk about deficiencies and problems on their side (most of them safely banished to the past). Soldiers in fact often criticized the military leadership, even though no one ever criticized Stalin. The overall mood in early 1943 is very different from the summer and fall of 1941, when the Red Army had great morale problems. In fact, virtually the whole generation of soldiers who fought in 1941 would be wiped out by the end of the year. So, we are talking about a new Red Army at Stalingrad. A Red Army with a surprisingly strong shaping presence of the communist, not in the sense of dispensing short reads of Marxism-Leninism, but in the sense of grooming soldiers into communists based on how they perform against the Germans. Take Vasily Zaytsev, the famed sniper. He, too, spoke with the historians from the Mints commission. Zaytsev relates how officials asked him to join the Communist Party after hearing of his first exploits as a sniper. I have no right to join the party, he says. I don't even know the party history. You have every right to join the party, the official responds: you have killed 48 Germans. It was this fighting and killing record that recommended Zaytsev as a communist, not his knowledge of the scholastics of Marxism-Leninism. Over the course of the war, the Communist Party increasingly attunes itself to the situation on the battleground. And soldiers flock into the party, so that by the end of the war most party members are actually soldiers and the Red Army is a predominantly communist entity, if you add to the number of party members also those soldiers who were enrolled in the Communist Youth League.

JN: Can you talk a bit about the website you've created, *Facing Stalingrad*? In this website you include not only Soviet memories of the battle, but also German memories. These interviews that you have done, did you record them in audio or on film? The website shows photos in addition to transcripts. What's the reason for this option?

JH: Contingencies, I guess. Full disclosure, the project could be called: "Please share your diary with me." The reason that brought me to the

doorsteps of the veterans was that I needed more written first-person accounts from the battle, and I was hoping to talk with the veterans and gain access to their personal archives. I also happened to be friends with a fantastic photographer, Emma Dodge Hanson from Saratoga Springs. Emma pays her rent by working as a wedding photographer. It's good income, but artistically not satisfying. So, she plans one *pro bono* project per year to do something else. She heard about my interest in Stalingrad, and we decided on a spur, "we are going to do this together, we are going to visit German and Soviet veterans of the battle". The initial idea was that she would photograph the veterans why I would focus on the archive side. But as we met the first veterans, we realized that for the portraits to light up I needed to converse with the veterans and help to make the past come alive. I pretty much posed the questions and worked out the methodology on the go. Emma took hundreds of photos. These photos themselves can be mounted into a film, that's how many photos there are. We received wonderful help for the project. On the German side, we were helped by the production team that created what I think is the best Stalingrad film to date – a three-part documentary *Stalingrad: Attack, In the Cauldron, Annihilation* (2002). They shared with me their database of veterans and I just called them on the phone. On the Soviet side, veterans' organizations provided me with many phone numbers. The rapport with the Soviet veterans was very easy. They invited Emma and me to their homes, treated us like royalty, and talked and talked. When I called the German veterans, they were often distrustful: "Who is speaking? Who are you?" This was because of the relatively recent exhibition about the Crimes of the German Army, the *Wehrmacht*, that had travelled all through Germany. It was maybe the most formative exhibition of the last 30 years, which has shaped millions of Germans. And put the veterans on guard, because they feel unduly vilified and cast as war criminals, on account of that exhibition. As a rule it took much longer to get the German veterans to open up. These inequal conditions of access also became reflected in the transcripts of the interviews.

Third part

JN: Let's move on to your current book project. You have a title already?

JH: The working title is "A War Like No Other". This is a book that, in a way, goes back to the *Historikerstreit*, the debate of historians in Germany, that was started in the mid-1980s, which saw this provocation by Ernst Nolte, well known for his work on fascism, that the Soviet terror encapsulated in the Gulag was prior to Nazi terror and progenitor to Auschwitz. Nolte claimed that the violent excesses threatened by the Bolsheviks since the 1917 Revolution spurred into action Nazism as a kind of collective defence of the German and European bourgeoisie. This was what he called the European Civil War, from 1917 to 1945. My book operates on the same terrain, but in ways critical of Nolte and also his unacknowledged grandson, Timothy Snyder, who is very careful not to reference Nolte anywhere in his own work. But *Bloodlands* shares the anti-communist thrust of *The European Civil War*; like Nolte, Snyder sees communist violence as primal, taking right-wing propaganda at its word, which concealed its own aggressiveness by casting itself as a defence of order against "Bolshevik chaos." One aim of my work is exposing the annihilatory thrust of anticommunism throughout the 20th century – against the Soviet project, and later against the memory of the Soviet project. What the Nazis were doing in the 1920s to the mid-1940s almost seamlessly carries over into the post-war, Cold War era. The Soviet Union in my view is the elephant in the room in the Second World War. It's the central arena where Nazi mass violence actually forms, formed as it was against Communism and against Soviet Jews as the perceived most dangerous of all communists. I view the Nazi-occupied areas of the Soviet Union as Ground Zero of what we usually refer to as the Holocaust (except that the Western concept of the Holocaust makes hardly any allowances for communist victims of Nazis). From 1941, after the invasion of the Soviet Union,

from this centre, the annihilatory project fans out, further West, to engulf the Jews of Germany, France, and other parts of Europe. To give an example, the yellow star in Germany was introduced as a mandatory marking in September 1941, three months after the beginning of the German invasion of the Soviet Union. When you read the commentaries about the decree in the Nazi press, they talk about all the gruesome discoveries that German soldiers made in the Soviet Union, when they entered the Western borderlands and saw all the bodies of the political opponents of the Soviet state, the nationalist insurgents in Western Ukraine or in Lithuania. These nationalist insurgents, the Nazis proclaimed, were killed by the Jewish-led Soviet secret police. There was thus an intimate relationship between Bolshevism and German Jews that surfaced in 1941 and served as the justification for the deportation and mass murder of Germany and Western European Jews in just the same ways Germans had begun their campaign to annihilate all Soviet Jews. I talk about the "Bolshevisation" of the Jews in Europe. Prior to Germany's attack on the Soviet Union, Jews in Germany were conceived of as a racial alien, but not a political enemy. This political hatred was reserved for Soviet communism, and it was extended to all Jews of Europe after the invasion.

My book also follows how communists, and particularly Soviet communists, responded to Nazi anti-Bolshevism. My central Soviet protagonist is Ilya Ehrenburg. Ehrenburg conceptualizes the fight against German fascism as early as in the mid-1930s. He conducts his first interviews with fascist soldiers in Spain in 1936. Many more such interviews would follow starting in 1941. Like Isaak Mints, Ehrenburg treasures the documentary form. After the beginning of the German invasion, he publishes document-saturated exposés of German fascism on a nearly daily basis: German letters, diaries, or military orders found on the battlefield. Many historians view Ehrenburg as a shrill Stalinist propagandist, few scholars have paid attention to his work as a documentarist. Ehrenburg's archive in the Russian State Archive for Literature and the Arts abounds with such documents. They were essential for his understanding of Germans and of fascism.

I have had some friendly polemical debates with liberal Russian historians from Russia, who say: "Yes, Ehrenburg is an interesting figure, but the documentary stuff in his editorials is all made up. This is propaganda. You have to understand, he created these people." One of Ehrenburg's editorials is devoted to the diary of a German field gendarmerie policeman (an organization equivalent to the Gestapo) by the name of Friedrich Schmidt. Schmidt was stationed in southern Ukraine, near Melitopol, where over the frozen Taganrog Bay, on a daily basis, young partisans were coming over the ice to commit acts of sabotage. Schmidt routinely arrested these young fighters, many of them girls from the Communist Youth movement, and he discusses in his diary the hard work of flogging these partisans. He talks about his admiration for these devoted young communists. And he talks about the beautiful sunset in Melitopol, and his indigestion, brought about by the torture he has to inflict. Then he switches to the subject of French cognac. The diary, as presented by Ehrenburg, is filled with clichés about the cruel and sentimental German, and some scholars basically sniff, "this is made up". Except that the original diary is in the FSB archive, in German, and notes on it reveal how it came into Ehrenburg's hands. After a raid that kills Schmidt, political officers in Ukraine send the diary to secret police headquarters in Moscow, following instructions to deliver all "trophy material" to the NKVD. Secret police chief Abakumov added a note on the cover of the diary: "Comrade Ehrenburg might find this useful." Ehrenburg gets the diary the next day, and one day later Ehrenburg's 2300-word piece is published in the Red Army's daily newspaper. This gives an idea of how quick the turnaround is. I cannot prove for every single editorial written by Ehrenburg, that the documentary material on which it is built is genuine. These documents have not been preserved. But Ehrenburg complained time and again when Soviet officials presented German documents in altered form. There is no need to alter German documents, he would say – they speak for themselves.

JN: There is number of overlaps going on here... You have someone who is producing memory and archival documents identify him as kind

of a proto-historian. Simultaneously, someone who works in-between journalism and literature, but also as a kind of press officer for the army. But there is also a juridical context, right? That will play a role in Nuremberg...

JH: Absolutely. And in all those aspects, Ehrenburg plays a pivotal role. Ehrenburg essentially redirected the lenses of Soviet people early in the wartime, from class to nation. He taught them not to look at ordinary German soldiers as comrades, but as Germans who had been poisoned by Nazism. Ehrenburg diagnoses especially among young Germans (the soldiers he kept interviewing) a broad deformation of society brought about by Nazism. Some people say, "Ehrenburg is a racist, he racializes the Germans". I think the problem is more complicated. In his editorials, Ehrenburg is very careful to show voices from different units – not only the SS, but also the Field Gendermarie, ordinary Wehrmacht soldiers. In some sense he does the work that the exhibition about the Crimes of the German Army, which I mentioned earlier, would take on only in the 1990s, with a delay of 50 years. Ehrenburg also includes German housewives and other civilians in his shattering diagnosis, to reveal the comprehensive deformation in German society, especially vis-à-vis Soviet people. And I think his diagnosis is compelling. Even Germany's war in Poland did not match the war against the Soviet Union in its comprehensive cruelty. In Poland, multiple German officers objected to the work of the SS death squads, complaining that it contravened international legal norms and conventions. There is virtually no German officer or soldier, no would say the same who vis-à-vis Bolshevism. And so I see a collective forsaking of conscience vis-à-vis that enemy in the East. That is, for me, the defining aspect of this war, as opposed to any other war.

JN: We will now open the floor to anyone who wants to make a question.

Ricardo Noronha: Good afternoon. How does the tension between the racial understanding of humankind, amongst the Nazi ideologues, and this anticommunism worked? I was under the impression that Bolshevism was read as Jews commanding over Slavs and that was the main problem there. But you seem to bring a more complex reading of the matter. I would like to understand a little bit more how that racialization and anticommunism are put into tension. The second question is how did this work during the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact? Because it was an old hatred, anti-Bolshevism was this foundational thing, and also anti-Fascism was also a foundational thing, but apparently during these two years they actually made a lot of compliments on the other side, if I understood correctly, and Stalin was of course very sceptical that the Germans actually wanted to invade. The third question is about Ehrenburg. I had always read Ehrenburg's phrase "go and rape the German women" as a true thing, whereas here you apparently state that it's not, it was a manipulation. So, I'm curious about it, how did that work? How did he react to it? A last question, the Wehrmacht and the SS, themselves, always singled out among the Slavs particular people who were more Aryan. Was that genuine? Or was it just an instrumental approach to having auxiliaries, namely in Ukraine, or in Croatia, or in Bosnia. The Muslim population in the Caucasus and in Crimea. How genuine was it?

JH: Those are excellent questions, thank you. Difficult questions too. The racial understanding of Nazis and how they racialized the enemy. As you pointed out, I think you are right, essentially the understanding in 1941, or all the way from the 1930s to 1941, is that Soviet Union is effectively run by Jews. The argument would go: You know, Stalin may not be Jewish, but Kaganovich is Jewish. This was a staple of Nazi propaganda during the Nuremberg party congresses, where they reminded their followers about what was at stake and provided seemingly exact statistics: "NKVD, 98% Jewish", "Foreign Ministry, 95% Jewish", and so on. It was axiomatic in the Nazi German understanding that the commissar in the Red Army was a Jew. Essentially, the decisive agency

in the Soviet Union is Jewish agency. That's an axiom in Nazi thinking. And Slavs, or Russians, are considered a docile inferior race doing their master's bidding. But there are also interesting shifts in this thinking. By the battle of Stalingrad, in October 1942, an SS paper no longer writes about Soviet resistance in this mould. The paper no longer distinguishes between the Jewish commissar and the dull Slavic soldier: so many commissars had been shot by the Germans, but the Red Army did not stop fighting. The problem must therefore lie elsewhere. And so it is the Bolshevik soldier who is now deemed extremely dangerous, on account of his inferiority. His presumed inferiority precludes the Bolshevik soldier from actually cherishing life and culture. But it also means that he will fight to his death, precisely because he has no appreciation for life. The Germans by contrast cherish life and that's why they have built up a civilization. But they are also fragile in their humanity vis-à-vis the "subhuman" Bolshevik creature.

Hitler never conceived of Jews as subhumans, he described them as strong and diabolical. Other Germans however called Jews subhuman; so Nazi thinking on this subject is quite inconsistent. But Slavs were clearly conceived as subhuman across the board, including the Eastern workers who were brought to Germany by the millions. The racialization, actually, especially to people diagnosed as "Russians," as opposed to, say, Ukrainians. A good example is Himmler's Posen speech of October 1943. The speech is often cited, but most scholars focus only on the passage in which Himmler swears his SS audience into silence about their mass murder of Jews. This is about 1/10 of the speech. Himmler's speech is a very long and starts with a moment of silence for a Waffen SS general, who had earlier served as chief inspector of the German concentration camps. He was killed in an airplane accident in Kharkov, and there is a minute of silence for this general. And then Himmler begins his rambling speech which keeps coming back to the Russian problem. Russians, he says, are extremely deceptive by nature, you always have to look a Russian firmly in the eye, because he is like an animal. He will attack you from behind as soon as you turn your back on him. Himmler talks about General Vlasov and calls

crazy the idea of a Russian Liberation Army. Vlasov should never be allowed to recruit Russians. Russians are pigs. In the concluding part of his speech, Himmler predicts that Germany will have to engage with this Russian Asiatic force for the foreseeable future, the next 200 or 300 years. These skirmishes against Asiatic Russian will be the decisive battleground for the hardening of the German race. And so the enemy is no longer principally Jews, in Himmler's dictum, because the Jews have been killed. The enemy is now hundreds of millions of Slavs, especially Russians. Over the course of the war, we thus observe a gradual shift in tonality from Judeo-Bolshevism to Russian Bolshevism. This does not mean that everyone espouses this shift. Hitler, in his last writings remains faithful to the idea of the Judeo-Bolshevik enemy. But you can see that the diagnosis about who is fighting on account of what is a diagnosis that takes into view, more and more, the Russianness of Bolshevism, instead of its Jewish identity.

The Pact is an awkward interlude. My analysis focuses on the deeper level interconnections between the 1930s and the period of the war, on the German as well as on the Soviet side. In Germany, the Nuremberg party rallies of the 1930s play an important role: millions of Nazi followers attended them. Starting in 1935, and four consecutive years, Nazi leaders at the party rally singled out Bolshevism as the greatest menace – "World enemy nº 1", they called it. In Nuremberg, the Nazis also staged "anti-Bolshevik exhibitions" which toured dozens of cities and drew in millions of more Germans. As soon as Germany invades the Soviet Union in 1941, more such visual displays inciting hatred against Jewish Bolshevism are rolled out. The perhaps best known one is the Berlin exhibition, "The Soviet Paradise". The exhibition planners brought a decapitated Lenin statue from Minsk, they brought plaster from some official buildings in Minsk, and they also claimed they recreated primitive earth-dwellings in which supposedly ordinary Soviet people dwelled, to expose the "paradise of workers and peasants" as a living hell. All this was put on display in the centre of Berlin, to show the working of Bolshevism in practice. The centrepiece of this exhibition was a supposedly authentic NKVD prison cell in

which, the exhibition guide noted, NKVD officers killed their unsuspecting prisoners, administering a shot in the nape of the neck. The exhibition organizers referred to the artefact as the "Shot-in-the-nape-cell" (*Genickschusszelle*). This Berlin exhibit ran in May and June 1942. But already in fall 1941, acting on their own, SS guards in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin came up with a contraption to kill suspected Soviet commissars who were being brought to Sachsenhausen by the thousands in fall 1941. The SS devised a killing form where the unsuspecting Soviet prisoners were brought into a room, supposedly for a medical examination. They had to stand against a ruler that measured their height. There were holes in the wall behind the ruler through which a killer hiding in the room behind could follow the scene and shoot the prisoner in the nape of the neck. It's a gruesome episode, and one that shows how the lethal workings of the Nazi German imaginary of Bolshevism which is fed by the Nuremberg rallies, anti-Bolshevik exhibits, and other forms of propaganda and becomes an unquestioned reality for many soldiers on the ground. "This is how Bolshevism kills," they say. "We are merely engaged in revenge killing We are going to do that in exactly the same fashion." Similarly, for the Soviet side, I investigate the social imaginary of the Germans, of "German-fascists," and of Soviets as antifascists, as a living and creative force. This becomes a particularly important theme when the Red Army enters Germany in 1944 and 1945.

Ehrenburg, how he responded? He responded to that German accusation, which he read about in the interrogations of captured German soldiers. He responded in his typical way: by writing another editorial. Ehrenburg's editorials were his ammunition. They had lethal power.

On the question of Nazi pragmatism vs. ideological convictions regarding race. My contention is that race was an unquestioned entity at the time, and there was way of avoiding it. Even Nazis who advocated for enlisting Indian troops, or Turkmens, had to justify this proposition in racial terms. The real issue is that Nazis disagreed about the "nature" and "merits" of different "races." Alfred Rosenberg harboured certain sympathies toward Ukrainians as opposed to Russians. Erich

Koch, Reichskommissar in Ukraine, thought and acted very differently. There were Nazis who thought that the Vlasov army was a good idea. But they were overruled by Hitler and Himmler who could not envision fighting shoulder to shoulder with "Asiatic" Russians.

Yuri Slezkine (YS): Thank you for your presentation. How do you think the diaries compare to the public letters that Sheila Fitzpatrick studied in the end of the 1990s? They also express problems, griefs, and also confessions, and opinions. As a source, how do you compare both of these sources?

JH: Can you give me an example of a letter that you have in mind? I'm blanking right now about which letters you are referring to.

YS: There were a lot of letters that the Soviet citizens wrote to the Soviet officials.

JH: Petitions, grievances.

YS: Yes, but also self-accusations, not in a Christian way of confession, but a confession that they thought they were doing something counterrevolutionary or something that they didn't like about their neighbours, accusations.

JH: Right. I think they are related documents. The diary is not interpersonal, so there is a different source of communication that opens up in a letter. Of course, the letter is addressed explicitly to institutions of power, there is a political vector that is not as immediately in play in a diary, necessarily. But they should be compared, by all means. I think the broader field of enunciating yourself and of stating your subject position should be studied as a broader context for locating where the diary fits in there. I have studied a few cases where someone kept

a diary and also left behind a body of correspondence with a friend. Malte Griesse and Anatoly Pinsky have performed similar studies. This constellation reveals how the correspondence does work that is related to the diary, but in interpersonal ways: it monitors the mental and political development of both correspondents. So, I would not necessarily conceive of a diary and letters as standing in contradistinction to one another.

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