Call for Papers for an Edited Volume
“Defining Soviet Antisemitism: Everyday Jewish Experiences in the USSR”

Edited by Paula Chan (All Souls College, University of Oxford) and Irina Rebrova (Center for Research on Antisemitism, Technical University, Berlin)

Antisemitism was a thread that ran through the entire fabric of the Soviet Union. During the interwar period, Bolshevik ideology condemned the persecution of Jews as an evil relic of Imperial Russian rule. Meanwhile, Westerners as prominent as Henry Ford accused the USSR of being a Jewish institution, and Adolf Hitler’s opposition to “Judeo-Bolshevism” drove his vision for a new order in Europe. Upon the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, local antisemitism collided with hostility toward Stalin’s regime, with catastrophic consequences for Jews on Soviet territory. After the end of World War II, the USSR was the first country to recognize the state of Israel. Yet in the years that followed, Soviet leaders embraced discrimination against Jews like never before, even as they insisted that the USSR remained a bastion of anti-antisemitism. Scholars have grappled with the contradictions that surround antisemitism in the Soviet context in different ways. Events such as the prosecution of members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the Doctor’s Plot have loomed especially large, as have sweeping statements on Soviet responses to what we now call the Holocaust. Much of the literature tends to take Soviet antisemitism for granted – when the victim is Jewish, the repression is antisemitic. Intellectual siloing of Jewish, Soviet, and post-Soviet national studies perpetuate existing gaps in knowledge.

This edited volume seeks to situate antisemitism within Soviet society and the Soviet system by defining its characteristics and showing how antisemitism intersected with repression of non-Jewish groups. To complicate the more established history of Soviet antisemitism from above, we wish to elucidate the everyday lives of ordinary Jews in different regions and eras of the USSR. What did it mean to be a Jew in the Soviet Union, a state which proclaimed the equality of all ethnicities as well as the formation of a superseding “Soviet people”? How did the lives of ordinary Jews change in the course of the rise and fall of the USSR? What kinds of strategies did Jews use to avoid official and grassroots antisemitism, and how did these tactics evolve over time? We invite contributions from scholars in history as well as political science, literary analysis, and related disciplines. We envision a volume that spans a variety of approaches, from empirically based case studies to methodological reflections and “state of the field” retrospectives. We especially welcome comparative assessments that articulate what was specifically “Soviet” about Soviet antisemitism. Relevant topics include (but are not limited to):
- “Judeo-Bolshevism” as perceived by Soviet Jewry and as well as in the political and international spheres;
- Jewish experiences in the crosshairs of the 1917 revolutions and subsequent civil wars;
- the consequences of prewar korenizatsiya policies for Soviet Jews;
- Soviet Jewish identities, both hidden and proclaimed;
- religious practices and methods of state control imposed on Jewish communities;
- everyday experiences of Holocaust survivors in the USSR;
- postwar “anti-cosmopolitan” campaigns in the context of the Zhdanovshchina and mass repressions in the western borderlands of the USSR;
- Soviet ideology and official statements on Israel and Zionism;
- gender and antisemitism in ordinary Soviet Jewish families;
- Zionism and the activities of underground Jewish organizations;
- “otkazniki” in the late Soviet period;
- antisemitism and Cold War experiences of ordinary Soviet Jews.

The deadline for proposals is July 1, 2024. Please send proposals and direct any questions to Paula Chan and Irina Rebrova at sovietantisem@gmail.com. Proposals should be submitted in English and include an abstract of the proposed article (up to 300 words) as well as a CV. Applicants will be notified by September 1, 2024, and papers will be due on April 1, 2025. Earlier submissions are welcome. The volume will be peer-reviewed. Each contribution should be approximately 8,000 words, including bibliography, footnotes, abstracts, and captions. We seek proposals from scholars at all career stages.

Paula Chan is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at All Souls College, University of Oxford (2023-2028). Her articles have appeared in the Journal of Contemporary History, the Journal of Illiberalism Studies, and Holocaust and Genocide Studies. She is currently preparing her first book manuscript, Eyes on the Ground: Soviet Investigations of the Nazi Occupation, and launching a second book project tentatively titled Jewish Choices in Soviet Riga, which focuses on survivors of Nazi and Soviet rule to analyze the consequences of regime upheaval for social cohesion.

Irina Rebrova is an Alfred Landecker Lecturer at the Center for Research on Antisemitism at Technical University, Berlin. In 2020 she published the monograph Re-constructing Grassroots Holocaust Memory: The Case of the North Caucasus. Since 2022 she has been a member of the board of the German non-profit association KONTAKTE-KOHTAKThI that promotes intercultural tolerance, education about history, and donations for the victims of the Nazi era in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia through international exchange. Her most recent project “Remember us…” dealt with the history and memory of people with disabilities who became Nazi victims in the occupied regions of Russia during the Second World War (http://nsvictims.ru/).