

### **Violence, Continuity and Change: Local Communities of Provincial Poland under German Occupation and in Its Immediate Aftermath**

This project examines lives of the communities of villages and towns during German occupation (1939-1945) and in its immediate aftermath. The study has two main scholarly objectives: 1) examining everyday life and norms functioning in the communities of villages and towns in German-occupied central Poland; 2) examining the role of post-war justice in the lives of these communities. The research covers the areas which during the Second World War formed the Radom District of the General Government (areas located today in voivodships: świętokrzyskie, mazowieckie, łódzkie and śląskie).

An insight into the matters in focus of this project is provided by documentation of trials of people accused of collaborating with the Nazis that took place in Polish courts immediately after the Second World War. The legal framework for these trials was provided by the Decree issued by the Polish Committee of National Liberation on August 31, 1944 (commonly known as: the August Decree or “sierpniówka,” hence: the “August trials”). The legal proceedings took place in Special Penal Courts, and after their liquidation in 1946 – in District Courts. With the exception of few trials of top Nazi war criminals that were used by the new Polish authorities for propaganda purposes, the majority of the August trials took place locally and electrified only local communities. The majority of these trials were also not political trials – with few exceptions though – these were handed over to military courts. In this project the analysis of court documents is combined with examination of other sources originating from the archival collections in Poland, the USA, Israel and the UK (among others: documentation of village communities, Home Army papers, letters, diaries and memoirs, as well as the local press). The project utilizes also new sources that have been so far inaccessible for researchers, but crucial for understanding of life in provincial Poland under German occupation and in its wake i.e. documents from the Church archives and Catholic seminaries (parish documentation, deans’ reports, reports from bishops’ visits, correspondence of the priests).

The everyday life in German-occupied provincial Poland has not been put under researchers’ scrutiny most recently and there is a need for a new research. In addition to that, the research of post-war trials has been so far very limited and pursued primarily by the Holocaust scholars. Their works focused almost exclusively on crimes committed against Jews and aimed at reconstructing facts. Whereas this project focuses on researching norms and social relations existing in the Polish society at the time the crimes were committed, as well as after the war – while the acts of retribution took place. My project questions neither the existing studies, nor the uniqueness of Jewish experience under the German occupation. Yet, it offers broadening of the research field, and it does so by analysing the phenomena that occurred simultaneously with the Holocaust and were often connected with it but have not been researched as such. Furthermore, by examining also the experience of the non-Jewish Poles, this project studies local communities in their complexity. Better understanding of lives in villages and towns under German occupation and in the times of post-war retribution not only broadens our knowledge of the Polish society, processes and changes within it, but also sheds light on more general mechanisms which manifest themselves also today, during protracted armed conflicts and in their aftermath.