

The main objective of my research is to analyze the phenomenon of common crime in Krakow over the period 1918-1945 with particular focus on the situation of Jews and the continuity of that phenomenon, its local specificity and determining factors: the dynamic of crisis of the Second Polish Republic period, war and occupation, and the Holocaust – taking into account stereotypical images of criminals and criminal groups (e.g. their social origin, nationality, ethnicity, education, predisposition to crime and cruelty), as well as relationships between Poles and Jews and among different groups within the Jewish community itself, and possible religious or social conflicts inside the criminal underground. Were these groups anti-Semitic? Was the enmity towards Jews marginal, or, on the contrary, rather frequent?

I shall attempt to reconstruct the measures undertaken by law enforcement authorities (State Police, the Gestapo, Polish Criminal Police, the Kripo) over that period. I will also try to answer the question concerning differences and similarities in the criminal activity during the Second Polish Republic and the German occupation in Krakow, especially in the case of criminals of Jewish origin. Criminals cut deals with both Polish and German authorities, either collaborating, intimidating, or bribing them. They were their informers, secret agents, surveilled by the Gestapo, and some of them continued their activities bordering on crime or situating themselves completely outside the law. Which factors determined their behavior – in particular in the Krakow ghetto or on the ‘Aryan side’? And most of all, what were their fates during the war and their relationships with the prewar criminal underground?

My research shall also cover the definition and categorization of terms ‘criminal’ and ‘criminal activity’ based on the Criminal Code (the one from 1932 and previous regulations and legal models dating back to the Galicia period), as well as analyses of archival documents. What is important when reconstructing the history of the criminal underworld, is to determine who the criminals were, what were their backgrounds, and what they ‘specialized’ in – especially those of Jewish origin? Did something change between 1918 and the war, and if so, to what extent? What were the groups active during the Second Republic like, and what was the nature of those that operated during the occupation? Which aspects of the criminal underground are subject to change, and which are not? Was religion a factor in all of this? What were the interrelations between the Polish and Jewish criminal underground? All of that will be analyzed with reference to the ‘criminal jargon’ using Yiddishisms.

Common crime is a complex phenomenon that affects all social and religious groups. Destabilization reinforces and consolidates criminal groups, and leads to blurring of boundaries between impunity and crime in the eyes of the general public. The criminals’ activity continued despite systemic changes; they adapted to the circumstances. Economic, social, political, legal and administrative chaos led to an increase in crime rate. Criminal statistics showed an increase in the number of crimes committed in Krakow since the period of the Second Republic (e.g. theft, burglary, robbery, illicit trade, etc.). The State Police surveilled national and religious minorities (Germans, Ukrainians, Jews) and political movements (e.g. associated with communists) as potential criminals. Those materials were later used by the Gestapo to recruit new agents and informers, as well as the Polish Criminal Police during their investigations. Among the perpetrators of those ‘common’ crimes were both persons known to the pre-war law enforcement authorities and those who had had no criminal record whatsoever. Similar situation applied to organized criminal groups, such as Polish-Jewish gangs of thieves or smugglers, as well as individual criminals of Jewish origin. Those networks were based not only personal and business contacts, but also on family connections. A new category of criminals were *szmalcowniks* – people who blackmailed Jews and Poles who gave them shelter. Were they part of the prewar criminal underworld? Did the *szmalcowniks* from the Krakow criminal underground blackmail Jews who had belonged to their organizations after 1941 and 1943? Or did they only denounce Jews from outside those groups?

The scientific basis of the project will be provided by an interdisciplinary combination of methods derived from the following fields: history, criminology and, to a lesser degree, social studies. Use of methodologies of those disciplines requires reference to methodological development of auxiliary sciences of history and research on lexis and semantics (criminal jargon), taking into account other fields, such as biographical studies, studies on periodicals, oral history, collaboration, anthropological study of deviance, and the abovementioned linguistic anthropology.