

“VWI invites the Institute of Culture Studies and Theatre History (IKT)”

Wednesday, 13 November 2019, 3.00 pm
 1010 Vienna, Rabensteig 3, 3rd Floor

Paula OPPERMANN

Violence as Communication? Latvian Fascists’ Attacks on Jews in the 1930s



In the last decades, scholarly research on Second World War and the Holocaust has turned towards Eastern Europe. However, it often tends to neglect the political developments in this region preceding the German occupation. Lacking knowledge about the political context in these countries, such studies present the local population as passive objects of German ambitions rather than as active subjects. The Latvian fascist party Pērkonkrusts (Thunder Cross), however, is a notable exception: When Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, various local agents sought to use the situation for their own agenda, which they had already developed long before the war. Pērkonkrusts was founded in 1932 (initially as Ugunskrusts/Fire Cross) with the aim of establishing an authoritarian, homogenous state of Latvians defined by racist criteria. Their propaganda attacked Germans and Jews in particular. But while Pērkonkrusts condemned the lasting economic dominance of Baltic Germans in Latvia,

they denounced Jews as a biological threat towards the Latvian people that should disappear. From the very beginning, they frequently expressed their racist antisemitism as unprovoked, physical violence. This presentation examines how Pērkonkrusts’ attacks not only threatened Latvian Jewish citizens, but also communicated their agenda to non-Jews and brought anti-Jewish violence into everyday life. It illustrates how Pērkonkrusts’ combination of physical violence and propaganda fostered not only the exclusion and dehumanisation of the Jews, but also the disintegration of Latvian society as a whole, paving the way for genocide.

Commented by Maximilian BECKER

Paula Oppermann studied History and Baltic Languages at the University of Greifswald, and Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Uppsala University and has worked in research and educational institutions such as the Wiener Library (London) and the Topography of Terror Foundation (Berlin). Since 2017, she has been a PhD student at the University of Glasgow, where she investigates the history of the Latvian fascist Party Pērkonkrusts (Thunder Cross), focussing on its antisemitism in the 1930s and how its ideology influenced its members’ behaviour during and after Second World War.

Maximilian Becker received a doctorate from the University of Munich and currently holds a Lise Meitner position at the IKT. 2014–2015 Research Fellow at the VWI, 2017–2019 research associate at the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich. His most important publications are: *Mitstreiter im Volkstumskampf. Deutsche Justiz in den eingegliederten Ostgebieten 1939-1945* (= Quellen und Darstellungen zur Zeitgeschichte, Bd. 101), München 2014 (awarded with Richard-Schmid-Preis für herausragende Leistungen auf dem Gebiet der Juristischen Zeitgeschichte); „Keine Waffen für unsere Henker!“ Ehemalige Verfolgte des NS-Regimes und die westdeutsche Wiederbewaffnung, in: Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte 66 (2018)1, 87-116.

Mit der Teilnahme an dieser Veranstaltung stimmen Sie der Veröffentlichung von Fotos, Video- und Audioaufzeichnungen zu, die im Rahmen der Veranstaltungen entstehen.

Please register at anmeldung@vwi.ac.at by latest 12 November, 12.00 am and bring your ID.