Acknowledgements

In 2013 I moved to Germany to begin a new period of my life, both professional and private. Already holding a Russian doctorate [kandidat nauk] in History, I decided to conduct a PhD project in a European country. I was fortunate to join the amazing community of the Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung (ZfA) at the Technische Universität Berlin, and to be supervised by its magnificent director Stefanie Schüler-Springorum. We had become acquainted several years before, during a conference on female experiences of World War II at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw. Over the past several years, this initial acquaintance has evolved into a very fruitful collaboration. After I had already begun my doctoral project, and after much persistence, I was happy to be taken on by my second supervisor, Dieter Pohl. It was important to me to have the insights of a specialist in Soviet Holocaust history, with both knowledge of Russian and experience conducting research in the North Caucasus. I am thankful to both supervisors for their invaluable comments and advice, their support and trust.

Many colleagues in Russia, Germany, Israel, the United States, Ukraine, and other countries shared their thoughts with me and gave me valuable feedback on my work in progress. All of them willingly answered my emails and messages, talked at length over the Internet, met in cafes to “discuss things over a cup of coffee,” and commented on drafts of my chapters. I hope each one of you, my dear friends and colleagues, will recognise in these words my gratitude for your help during these past several years. I do not dare to name you all here, because the list would be too long and I would not want to leave anybody out. This is why, while thanking each of you personally, I will mention only a few names here. The incredible Galina Orlova brought me to the idea of applying Foucault’s dispositif theory to Holocaust memory. This proved to be the best lens through which to reconstruct the life of Holocaust memory in a region not noted for its Jewish history, and to reveal the visible and hidden practices of remembrance of Holocaust victims throughout the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Galina’s ideas and interpretations inspired me to set about on a very ambitious task of observing the variety of networks through which Jews, as one of the Nazi victim groups in the North Caucasus, are remembered (or not). I had very fruitful discussions with Arkadi Zeltser, who commented on my chapter on monuments as he was writing his own book about Jewish Holocaust memorials in the Soviet Union. Leonid Terushkin provided me with thematic and pedagogical literature in Russian on teaching about the Holocaust, as well as new materials that he receives from Jews all over the world as Head of the Russian Research and Educational Holocaust Center Archive. Andrej Umansky, who wrote a PhD thesis
on the history of the Holocaust in South Russia, became not only a friend but also a trusted colleague, who had the answer to all my historical doubts. I am pleased to acknowledge that within the very close circle of the researcher’s world such like minds can come together without rivalry.

Research would not have been possible without travel to the North Caucasus. Between 2013 and 2016 I spent several months in each region, working in local archives, museums, and libraries; visiting monuments and memorial complexes devoted to “peaceful Soviet citizens” or Jews as victims of the Holocaust; conducting interviews with Holocaust survivors, members of local Jewish communities, history teachers at secondary schools, artists, local historians, and activists. In every single case, I met genuine interest in my topic and willingness to share with me their knowledge and sources. Collecting evidence for my research also took me to Moscow, then to Israel, Germany, and the United States. These acquaintanceships in the region and all over the world with people who have subsequently become good friends have been the most pleasant part of my project. Again, while not forgetting anyone – they can all be found in this book – I would like to single out a few: Irina Svetlichnaya, a history teacher at Ust-Labinsk’s Gymnasium No. 5, provided me with teaching materials and shared her own experience in Holocaust education. Anatolii Karnaukh, a local historian from the village of Arzgir in Stavropol Krai, personifies the image of the altruistic researcher of the wartime and Holocaust history of his own village and region. Aleksandr Okhtov became my personal guide to the history of the rescuing of children from Leningrad by the villagers in Beslenei aul, in today’s Republic of Karachay-Cherkessia. Efim Fainer, Mikhail Potapov, Tatyana Yakubovskaya, Yakov Frenkel’, Dmitrii Bekker, local Jewish community leaders in the North Caucasus, shared their experiences, their achievements and failures in their attempts to preserve Holocaust memory. Yurii Teitelbaum gave me access to his personal archive, which he had collected as a leader of the Jewish community in Krasnodar and which he took with him when he moved to Israel. Aleksandr Kozhin provided me with unique documents pertaining to the lawsuit over a Holocaust memorial in Rostov-on-Don, which alongside my interview with him helped me to unravel the issues at stake in the case. I spent so many fascinating hours talking with Holocaust survivors and their second-generation relatives. At first, I felt shy when they invited me to share a meal with them after the interview, but then it became a tradition, closing the circle of the traumatic past and bringing us back to the present. It was a unique opportunity to be able to identify so fully with the experiences of survivors, as happened, for example, with Yakov Krut and Evelina Ekonomidi.
All my research trips were made possible by innumerable scholarships and travel grants which I was privileged to receive. A stipend granted by the ZfA at the beginning of my doctoral research enabled me to spend this first year learning German and reading scholarly literature. My background in the Russian academic world had not yet equipped me to conduct research in the European scientific tradition. A lack of English-language literature in Russian provincial libraries, access to international databases, and knowledge of foreign languages, long teaching hours at the university and little time for research are among the main obstacles facing provincial Russian scholars. At the same time, the continued use of Soviet terminology and the predominance of out-of-date methods, especially those applied to the study of World War II, hinder a renewal of the field in Russia. This is why I was so happy in this new setting to read new books, attend seminars, workshops, conferences, and summer schools, and devote time to self-development and professional growth. In 2014 I took up a scholarly residency at the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute and the Brandeis-Genesis Institute (HBI-BGI) at Brandeis University, Massachusetts. During that stay I visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) for the first time. The incredible variety of sources available and their ease of access to researchers and the general public impressed me and simplified my archival research. I have subsequently been able to spend several weeks almost every year at the USHMM – and also at Yad Vashem in Israel – participating in thematic summer schools devoted to studying the Holocaust in the Soviet Union. Perhaps most affirming of the value of my research, and certainly a personal high point, was being honoured with a fellowship at the Claims Conference Kagan Fellowship in Advanced Shoah Studies during the 2015–2017 academic years. This prestigious fellowship gave me the opportunity to discuss my thesis with colleagues, prominent scholars, and young researchers. I learnt about the doctoral work of another fellow, Maris Rowe-McCulloch, who also became a friend.

My research trips to the North Caucasus were supported by Sefer, a Russian center for researchers sponsored by the Genesis Philanthropy Group. The opportunity to participate and present at their annual conferences and winter schools on Jewish studies since 2015, as well as to make a research trip to Yad Vashem in 2016 as a fellow of the Eshnav Program, furnished me with new knowledge and sources, and led to important discussions with colleagues, and of course to new friends. Thanks to webinars offered by Sefer, I learnt enough Yiddish to read and understand articles in the Soviet media.

Having used interviews of the University of South California Shoah Foundation (USCSF) and having spent the best part of academic year 2014–2015 listening to and transcribing interviews with Holocaust survivors, I was very happy to benefit from a month-long scholarship in 2017 from the
USCSF Center for Advanced Genocide Research and to have access to videos of training seminars for interviewers in Moscow and Kyiv in the mid-1990s. I managed to find several former interviewers and they kindly agreed to respond to my survey, which I prepared together with Mikhail Tyaglyy, whose manner of conducting interviews inspired me greatly. All these sources helped me better to understand the context, characteristics, and uniqueness of these interviews with survivors of the Holocaust on Soviet soil conducted after the fall of the Soviet Union.

As a fellow of the Zentrum für Holocaust-Studien at the Institut für Zeitgeschichte (IfZ) in 2016 I continued my archival work at the institute and in the state archive and libraries of Munich, benefiting also from the eyes of colleagues who inspired me to look at my thesis from a new perspective. Participation in a number of summer schools brought me many new ideas and friends, with whom I continue to work on new projects and ideas. This is the most wonderful thing that participating in scholarly activities can afford. My last scholarship, a STIBET Degree Completion Grant (funded by the German Academic Exchange Service, DAAD) came from my home university, TU Berlin. It feels very symbolic to close the circle, returning to the starting point but now at a completely new level.

It has taken me almost one-and-a-half years to submit my thesis for publication. I took this time to gain distance from my arguments, and to compare them with the outcomes of my exhibition project dealing with the history and memory of another Nazi victim group – people with disabilities – under the German occupation of the North Caucasus. During this time, Holt Meyer and I discussed many of the particularities of my case study, which resulted in my decision to submit my manuscript to the Spatiotemporality book series. I would like to express my gratitude to the ZfA and the Erfurt University research group Erfurter RaumZeit Forschung (ERZ – Spatio-Temporal Studies Erfurt) for financially supporting for this publication. I was happy to reunite with my old friend Tristam Barrett, who edited the final text and gave me valuable feedback. Many friends, former fellow students, colleagues, and finally my own students in Russia encouraged me to take on this project. My new friends and colleagues in Berlin, with whom I shared an office at the ZfA or attended a variety of academic events, including book presentations, thematic exhibitions (Tatiana Manykina, in particular) expressed their support throughout this journey.

I address my deepest thanks, though, to my relatives and family – my mother, father, brother – and of course Denis: without your crazy idea back in 2012 this project would never have happened. You all know me well and I am so glad of your support over these past years, alleviating my doubts, and giving
me the energy to go forward. I love you deeply, although I do not often say it directly to each of you.

I am submitting this manuscript to the publisher at a time of “social distancing,” when all of us need to stay at home and isolate ourselves from each other. In these days we understand the value of personal relations, love, support, and community. Many Holocaust survivors were able to survive only because of such individual support. In the 21st century we face another catastrophe, but I hope it will make us more sensitive, attentive to each other, and thankful. And that this book will find its reader in the new world. Be healthy.

Belin, 31 March 2020