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Alexander Friedman, Rainer Hudemann (Hg.), Diskriminiert – vernichtet – vergessen. Behinderte in der Sowjetunion, unter nationalsozialistischer Besatzung und im Ostblock 1917–1991, Stuttgart (Franz Steiner Verlag) 2016, 563 S., 2 s/w Abb. (Geschichte), ISBN 978-3-515-11266-6, EUR 84,00.

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This valuable collection of 36 essays, virtually all in German, covers many facets of Soviet and Nazi German policies toward Soviet mentally disabled, of some key Soviet medical institutions and personnel and of Soviet propaganda and public perceptions, including some aspects of the medical field and services in general under Soviet and German rule. The title of the volume may give a wrong impression because it does not mention that many contributions have a Belarusian focus, whereas the book contains actually little about Soviet policies after 1950 and next to nothing about the »Eastern Bloc«.

The core among the 19 authors is a group of six who conducted a research project on the fate of mentally disabled in Belarus under early Soviet and under Nazi rule: Alexander Friedman, Viktoria Latysheva, Vasili Matokh, Alexander Pesetzky, Elizaveta Slepovitch and Andrei Zamoiski. Each authored or co-authored up to seven chapters. Alexander Friedman chaired the group together with Rainer Hudemann. The point of departure was research on German mass murders of disabled people, but this fills only about one third of the book; the broad contextualization and forays into Soviet history are impressive. By necessity, this whole field cannot be completely covered, and though not everything is being tied together, the volume gains cohesion through the density of the material.

In terms of German violence against Soviet disabled (with contributions also about Russia, Ukraine and the Baltic area), the volume provides a much fuller picture than previous scholarship. The partial figures given suggest that the number of those killed across the German-occupied Soviet territories was higher than the usually cited 20 000. The unwillingness to supply these people with food played a major role. Nonetheless, it becomes also clear that, though the Germans systematically killed inmates of mental institutions, some inmates were released not killed, a few even with German consent, there were a few later hospitalized that were not murdered, and that there was occasional but no widespread murder of mentally disabled people living with their families (see chapters by Viktoria Latysheva and Vasili Matokh, pp. 423–428, 433–452). Some medical supplies for locals were in the occupier's interest, especially in order to contain epidemics and venereal diseases.

As for the Soviets, they allocated relatively small funds to the disabled, whose reputation suffered from being considered unproductive by Soviet state and society. Still, the psychiatric infrastructure in

Belarus was strongly expanded in the 1930s although some doctors and patients became victims of political persecution. After 1941, some medical doctors in Belarus and in the Baltic area cooperated with the Germans in starving and sometimes even killing their patients. The volume adds to our understanding of such interaction; see especially, but not only the contributions by Andrei Zamoiski and Björn Felder. (But Felder's assertion that there was »mass death of starvation in psychiatric institutions all over the Soviet Union« on the Soviet side [p. 338; my translation] is not backed up by his source, a study by Benjamin Zajicek.)

Most contributions are empirically strong and reflect a good level of scholarship, each resulting in a clear argument. In particular, the chapters by Vasili Matokh, three of which focus on pre-war Soviet and Belarusian policies and organizations, show empirical strength. Alexander Friedman and Andrei Zamoiski could also be mentioned in this respect. It has to be noted that most chapters draw from what is a substantial body of literature on the topic in Russian.

By contrast, the chapter by Boris Kovalev about the murder of mentally disabled people in Northwest Russia (pp. 373–384) is old style, highly descriptive, includes long quotations from the material (though some of it is interesting) and is largely based on the state of research of 1946. Clearly better than this, the short biographical studies included in the volume still appear somewhat less convincing than others due to a lack of clear conclusions (pp. 95–105, 107–123; authors Andrei Zamoiski and Johannes Wiggering/Andrei Zamoiski).

Most authors also provide proper information about any archival material that they cite. Only Anatolij Šarkov, Elizaveta Slepovitch and Dmytro Tytarenko practice the bad (post)Soviet habit of just referring to an archival call number without information about author, date, etc. as if abiding to the motto, if it's in the archive then it *must* be true.

Much in this volume is devoted to scientific history, policies, institutions and staff. The most rewarding aspects according to my impression, however, pertain to social history and the history of everyday life. This materializes in Viktoria Silwanowitsch's chapter on what the pro-Nazi Russian under German occupation actually reveals about health practices (pp. 275–293) and Viktoria Latysheva's sparse remarks about the fate of non-institutionalized mentally disabled (pp. 423–428). In her interview-based chapter on personal favouritism, corruption and nepotism in post-1945 Soviet medical practice, Elizaveta Slepovitch demonstrates that such networks and relations existed but, unfortunately, not how they were structured or functioned (pp. 297–308).

As a standard procedure, all contributions start out with a sketch of the topic, the state of research and the available sources. Perhaps there could have been even fuller results if a set of research questions (*Fragestellung*) would have been included. This way, it is mostly absent. The chapters by Dmytro Tytarenko on medical services and killings of sick people in Ukraine (pp. 355–372) and by Viktoria Silwanowitsch show what such a set of research questions is worth. Also, most contributions

remain within the confines of national history. In comparative perspective, one might add that, while Soviet supplies of disabled people after World War I were clearly insufficient in ways that appeared to some locals outrageous even at the time, the problem of the war disabled overwhelmed even economically much stronger states like Germany and Britain, as Deborah Cohen has shown. And while it may be correct that the Soviet authorities isolated patients in mental institutions in disadvantageous ways from the rest of society, the degree to which mentally disabled were hospitalized in the USSR at least before 1945 was markedly lower than in other European countries which means that, relatively speaking, more lived among the population than in other countries and one cannot talk flatly of low social integration.

Despite such criticisms and amendments, this is a very useful, competently written book that gives readers a sense of medical conditions in parts of the USSR before and during World War II and deserves attention beyond a few specialists.