

## CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATES!

### FALL EVENTS

#### 7 October 2025

Especially for Students Lecture  
Speaker: Jack Trompetter, Holocaust  
child survivor

#### 27 October 2025

The Fall of Nagorno-Karabakh /  
Artsakh and its Global Consequences  
Speaker: Anna Ohanyan (Stonehill  
College)

#### 3 November 2025

Film Screening: **My Sweet Land**

#### 6 November 2025

Albert M. Tapper Annual Lecture:  
Holocaust Studies from the Outside  
In - Art and Relational Thinking in  
Times of Crisis  
Speaker: Sarah Casteel (Carleton  
University)

#### 7-9 November 2025

Lessons and Legacies of the  
Holocaust: Inaugural Emerging  
Scholars Conference and Fifth  
Strassler Center Graduate  
Conference

#### 12 November 2025

Early Recordings of Armenian Classics  
Speaker: Ara Dinkjian

For more information about these  
events, please visit the [Strassler  
Center Events Page](#).



Dr. de Leeuw with his advisor, Dr. Deborah Dwork and Dr. Grudic with her advisor,  
Dr. Thomas Kühne.

### MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

While we always hate to see them go, we are so proud of our 2025 Ph.D. recipients! In spring and summer this year, four of them concluded and defended their dissertations and graduated. The following pages inform about their outstanding dissertations.

Their achievements would not be possible without the support of their advisors and dissertation committee members, center staff, faculty, fellow graduate students, and the many generous donors who funded their studies at the Strassler Center. We are deeply grateful to all of them.

In the past months, another four doctoral students passed their comprehensive exams, defended their prospectus, and are embarking in dissertation research in North America, Africa, and Europe. Most recently, the Strassler Center community was delighted to welcome two new doctoral students Ara Daglian and Onwe Refine Uchechi.



The Agnes Manoogian Hausrath Memorial Fund Fellow, **Ara Daglian**, received his Masters of Arts from the University of Washington in 2023.

Daglian researches the experiences of anxiety, hope, and change within the Armenian-American community following the Armenian Genocide. By employing a comparative approach with other victimized groups, they hope their research will help scholars better understand how genocide permanently alters the identity of a people. Beyond their primary research topics, Ara is interested in Armenian queer and food histories.

**Onwe Refine Uchechi**, holder of the Scheidt Doctoral Fellowship in Genocide Studies, grew up in the northern part of Nigeria in which she was subject to recurring conflicts. Those early experiences shaped her academic and professional trajectory, sparking a deep interest in understanding the impacts of conflict, particularly on gender dynamics and displaced populations.

Refine earned a bachelor's degree in History from the University of Abuja and a master's degree in History and International Studies from the Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna. At the Strassler Center, her research is driven by the evolving gender roles during conflict and the pressing issues of sexual and gender-based violence, particularly as perpetrated by the Boko Haram insurgency against women and girls in northeastern Nigeria.





In March 2025, Daan de Leeuw successfully defended his dissertation, *The Geography of Slave Labor: Dutch Jews and the Third Reich, 1942-1945*. Supervised by Professor Debórah Dwork, de Leeuw examines the movement of Jewish slave laborers through the concentration camp system, a central feature of the Holocaust. He investigates how Dutch Jewish slave laborers experienced these frequent relocations, and he analyzes their plight as prisoners in the Third Reich incarceration sites. Tracking individuals through time and space reveals a multitude of pathways and exposes the disintegration of prisoner groups. While deportees on the same train arrived together at a site, they were soon dispersed through ongoing selections and displacements. Liminal moments in a victim's camp odyssey, shifts from one site to another, had a tremendous impact. In an environment ruled by terror and prisoners frequently on the move, however, ties with fellow inmates were critically important. At the same time, the abhorrent camp conditions triggered animosity and violence among inmates. *The Geography of Slave Labor* sheds light on the role of luck, chance, and fortuitous circumstances in prisoners' lives and survival. These factors shaped Jewish slave laborers' ordeals across camp contexts: during selections, in relations between inmates, in connections with displacements, and in interactions with guards.

Upon completing his doctoral degree, de Leeuw took on a postdoctoral research position at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in the Netherlands. He collaborates in a team project, "The Holocaust in 'the Provinces': Local Dynamics in the Nazi-Occupied Netherlands (1925-1950)," probing how the anti-Jewish persecution unfolded in the Dutch provinces. In addition to this new research, de Leeuw will work towards publishing his dissertation as a book.



Dr. Hana Green's dissertation, *"Whatever happens, never reveal to anyone that you're Jewish": Identity Passing as a Jewish Response to Persecution during the Nazi Period, 1933-1945*, supervised by Professor Thomas Kühne, examines the phenomenon of Jews passing as "Aryan" to escape Nazi persecution across Central Europe. Distinct from "hiding," "passing" refers to the practice wherein an individual disguises their Jewish identity by adopting a non-Jewish identity or concealing elements of their Jewishness, enabling them to function as a gentile or "Aryan." Incorporating a broad and integrated source base of both archival and published material, including ego documents in German, Yiddish, English, and Hebrew, the dissertation traces the various ways Jewish women and men developed strategies to escape persecution and murder through disguise. It scrutinizes the scale, migratory nature, and diversity of passing narratives and "passing practices" in the struggle for survival. Since Jewish women often had a greater chance of passing, she also investigates gender identity, family relationships, the dangers of sexual exploitation, and other gender-specific experiences. The project inspires new thinking about Jewish agency in the gray zones of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust—resistance understood as the seemingly 'small' yet, under the conditions of Nazi terror, vital efforts to survive.

Immediately after defending her dissertation in August, Dr. Green assumed the inaugural Rose Mibab and Carl Goldberg Postdoctoral Fellowship in Holocaust Studies at the College of Charleston. During her postdoctoral fellowship, Green will teach undergraduate courses in Holocaust and Jewish history, facilitate the development of a new oral history program focused on the descendants of Holocaust survivors, revise her dissertation manuscript, and begin a new research project. <https://holocaustcenter.charleston.edu/about/>



In July, Emil Kjerte defended his doctoral dissertation “Ustaša Guards at Jasenovac: Moral Transformation, Social Interaction, and Gender Norms,” supervised by Professor Thomas Kühne. Zeroing in on a relatively unknown Holocaust site, the dissertation explores the Jasenovac concentration camp complex, the largest camp facility in the Independent State of Croatia, which was led by the fascist, Nazi-allied Ustaša regime. Kjerte’s research brought him to several archives in Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, where he reviewed court records from perpetrator interrogation statements and survivor testimonies recorded in the course of postwar judicial proceedings in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia against former guards stationed at the Jasenovac camp complex. The resulting dissertation provides insight into the backgrounds of the guard personnel, the biographical pathways that led them to the camp complex, the dynamics of the violence they perpetrated, as well as their interactions with local civilians and family members. Kjerte shows that most of the guards were not ideological zealots when they arrived at Jasenovac but gradually transformed as they imbibed a new moral framework through participation in violence—one that broke decisively with the universalism of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the principles of equality that emerged from the Enlightenment.

Keeping the focus on the Holocaust and genocide in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, Kjerte is currently involved in the project “Mapping the Holocaust in the Independent State of Croatia” at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Rijeka, Croatia. Primarily sponsored by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, the project centers on a website that contains historical documents and survivor testimonies relevant to the history of the Holocaust in the Independent State of Croatia.



Dr. Sandra Grudic's dissertation, supervised by Professor Thomas Kühne, is a micro-historical study that examines the motives and dynamics of neighborhood violence in Bosanski Novi/Novi Grad during the 1990s war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through a local lens of analysis, it interrogates how close interpersonal interethnic relations between neighbors played out during the war and why many fractured so abruptly. As such, this micro-history is focused on the process through which the perpetrators themselves, and their relationships with the members of the targeted groups, changed, resulting in gradual demobilization of interethnic solidarity between neighbors. In Bosanski Novi/Novi Grad, as long as Serb and non-Serb neighbors were able to continue their regular patterns of interacting—at work, as neighbors, or socializing—friendly and solidary behaviors extended to all individuals regardless of ethnicity. However, mandatory and enforced social separation through curfews and cutting off the phone lines for most non-Serbs in Bosanski Novi that followed the initial violence, forced interruption of regular face-to-face contact leading to psychological distancing and a loss of shared goals, which, over time, lead to a near complete loss of interethnic solidarity.

Dr. Grudic is currently employed with the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University in the role of Education Outreach Administrator. In this role, she leads K–14 educator workshops, develops curricula, and lectures on European history.

<https://daviscenter.fas.harvard.edu/about/people/sandra-grudic>

## GRADUATE STUDENT NEWS

**It was a busy Spring and Summer 2025 at the Center! Four of our students passed their comprehensive exams and defended their dissertation prospectuses.**



**Nadia Cross** with members of her committee Dr. Thomas Kühne and her primary advisor Dr. Frances Tanzer. Her other committee members include Dr. Sultan Doughan (Goldsmiths, University of London) and Dr. Omer Bartov (Brown University). Her dissertation entitled: "Never Forget, Never Again: Holocaust Memory in the United States Post-9/11" will study the history of Holocaust education in the United States, the Americanization of the Holocaust, and the transformations of Holocaust memory in the post-9/11 period. Through her research, she hopes to better understand how Americans have interpreted the Holocaust both in the past and the present.

**Nathan Lucky** with committee members from l to r: Dr. Elizabeth Imber, Dr. James Loeffler (John Hopkins University), Nathan Lucky, Dr. Heidi Tworek (University of British Columbia), and his primary advisor Dr. Frances Tanzer. His project, "Information Borderlands: Jewish News Networks during the Holocaust, 1933-1950" explores how the Jewish Telegraph Agency (JTA) used their news agency and its more than 150 employees in bureaus around the world to spy on the Nazis and resist fascism on a global scale. Lucky analyzes the intertwined histories of news and espionage, the connections between the press and the Holocaust, and the vulnerability of diasporic networks.



**MK Speth** with committee members from left to right: Dr. Ken MacLean, Dr. Nicole Fox (California State University, Sacramento), Dr. David Mwambari (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium), MK Speth, and her primary advisor Dr. Elyse Semerdjian. Her dissertation project, “Genocide, Guides, & Gorillas: Narrating the Past and (Re)Imagining the Future in Post-Genocide Rwanda’s Tourism Spaces” researches the intersection between genocide, tourism, and transitional justice. Her dissertation project focuses on Rwanda and the ways in which tourism serves as a space in which state-produced discourses around conflict/reconciliation, neo-colonial imaginaries of Otherness, and personal trauma narratives converge. She aims to understand the ways that illegible sites of power relations inherent to tourism relate to and influence extensive and ongoing transitional justice efforts, including nation-building, reconciliation, peacebuilding and both societal and personal healing.



Over the summer, **Nicole Toedtli** passed her comprehensive exams and presented her dissertation prospectus. Her committee members included her primary advisor Dr. Thomas Kühne, Dr. Ken MacLean, Dr. Erin Jesse (University of Glasgow, Scotland) and Dr. Aliza Luft (University of California, Los Angeles). Her dissertation project, “Role-Shifting in the Holocaust and the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda” is a comparative study that examines actors who move between being a victim, perpetrator, bystander, and rescuer in the context of the Holocaust and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda to understand how, when, and why actors in genocide engage in role-shifting. Examining the shared and divergent patterns emerging from this comparison will identify the underlying mechanisms of role-shifting. It will also examine the consequences of the fluidity of categories and role-shifting for our broader understanding of genocides.

## UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT NEWS



Congratulations to the Center's Henry Hoey-Wasow, who graduated in the spring with a major in History and concentrations in Jewish Studies and Genocide and Human Rights. In April, Henry was notified of his acceptance to the Warren Fellowship for future educators, hosted by the Holocaust Museum Houston, from May 18-23, 2025.

The Warren Fellowship's main objective is designed to help educators in the social studies field learn more about the necessary historical and pedagogical tools for teaching future students about the Holocaust. Henry's advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Imber, was not surprised by his achievement "I'm delighted that Henry has been selected for a Warren Fellowship. Henry has done outstanding academic work in his major and concentrations here at Clark. And what is more, his commitment to studying the past is animated by a deep sense of service and vocation. That is a rare thing."

With a highly competitive selection process, one has to be truly outstanding to be selected. Hoey-Wasow was one of only 18 preservice educators selected.

"I was incredibly honored to attend the Warren Fellowship. I was able to gain a well-rounded perspective on the teaching methodologies employed in holocaust education, as well as more knowledge about the mechanisms of the Holocaust itself."

## EVENT REPORTS

### Gender and War in the Middle East: A Conversation on Current Events 25 February 2025

A good crowd was on hand to participate in an important discussion about Gender and War in the Middle East: A Conversation on Current Events with Clark professors Elyse Semerdjian, Ora Szekely, and Cynthia Enloe.



l to r: Dr. Semerdjian, Dr. Szekely, and Dr. Enloe



Dr. Braccio with Dr. Tanzer and Ph.D. student Alina Bojic.

### Strassler Center Spring 2025 Colloquium 11 March and 9 April 2025

Dr. Nathan Braccio, Assistant Professor of History at Clark, was the first presenter at the Center's spring colloquium series, organized by Professor Frances Tanzer. He talked about his forthcoming book, "Murder and Identity in Colonial New England." Second-year PhD student, Alina Bojic, provided the commentary. Our second speaker, Natalia Gutkowski, from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, presented their work "Un/settling Times for Border Control: A Porous Political Ecology of Date Plantations in the Jordan Valley." Second-year PhD student Gabrielle Higgins provided the commentary.

### Excavating Women's Testimony of the Armenian Genocide 3 April 2025

In her inaugural lecture, Kaloosdian Mugar Chair Dr. Elyse Semerdjian, shared her translations of some of the earliest Armenian women's accounts of the weaponizing of sexual violence during the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1919. She also discussed the challenges in locating everyday Armenian women's genocide experience within traditional archival sources. Semerdjian also introduced her concept of "embodied archives" highlighting how wounds and tattoo inscriptions are yet another form of genocide testimony.





l to r: Thomas Kühne, Glenn Dynner, Elizabeth Anthony, Joanna Sliwa, and Michael Geheran

### **Older Jews and the Holocaust Symposium 28 April 2025**

A project dedicated to uncovering the often-overlooked experiences of elderly Jews during and after the Holocaust was the subject of a critical symposium, convened by Strasser Center Director Dr. Thomas Kühne. While many older Jews were tragically murdered, some survived and rebuilt their lives. The workshop highlighted the resilience of their prewar lives through the horrors of Nazi persecution and into the postwar period. It examined how they coped with trauma and how families, communities, and organizations responded to their unique needs. Three prominent alumni of our Ph.D. program served as panelists: Joanna Sliwa, Historian, Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany; Elizabeth Anthony, Director, Visiting Scholar Programs, Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, USHMM; and Michael Geheran, Deputy Director, Resnick Center for Holocaust & Genocide Studies, United States Military Academy at West Point. They were joined by discussant Glenn Dynner, now Berkowitz Professor of Jewish History at the University of Virginia. Our current graduate students, most of who work on the Holocaust, enjoyed meeting Professor Dynner and our three alumni. They were excited about the opportunity to learn about how they managed to establish their extraordinarily successful careers.



Donors provide critically important support for the Strassler Center's rich Holocaust and Genocide Studies curriculum and unique doctoral programs. Their investments have been key to building a program universally recognized for its superior academic achievement. Annual gifts help the Center fund public events, undergraduate and graduate research, and ongoing operations. Endowments established by major contributions have fostered swift and robust growth.

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