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**“*Traverse of the Moribunds*”: the journeys of invalid ex-prisoners, released from the Gulag forced-labour camps, 1930-1953**

Abstract:

When writing about transportation in the GULAG, a vast system of forced-labour institutions in the Stalinist Soviet Union, historians and memoirists habitually evoke iconic images of so-called ‘etapirovanie’. This term denoted massive, regular, and frequently deadly transfers of prisoners to and between the myriad penal localities of the Soviet Union. This talk, however, zooms in on another type of journey that the scholarship has almost completely elided- the return of severely ill ex-inmates from their places of incarceration between 1930 and 1953.

I contend that this idiosyncratic and understudied human ‘backflow’ out of the Stalinist penitentiaries into broader society, particularly massive during the catastrophic years 1942-1944, is equally important as the far better-known relocation of prisoners within these penitentiaries. Each episode of ex-cons’ conveyance, directly correlates with the reliability of the mortality statistics of the locality from which the invalids originally departed. Fatalities inevitably continued to occur during travels across the vast territories of the Soviet polity. Looking into the mass death of prisoners after release, during their journeys back from the camps, reveals an entirely new facet of human suffering, previously submerged by the official and sanitized statistics of mass releases from the camps. It helps to reassess the data, critically fabricated by camp authorities, and account for overlooked victims of the system, improving our understanding of its human cost.

Bio:

MIKHAIL NAKONECHNYI received his PhD from the University of Oxford in 2020 and is now Postdoctoral Researcher at the Aleksanteri Institute, Finnish Centre of Russian and Eastern European Studies, University of Helsinki. His work has been published in *Kritika*, *Cahiers du monde russe*, *Journal of History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, and *Rethinking the Gulag: Identities, Sources, Legacies*, ed. Alan Barenberg and Emily D. Johnson (Indiana University Press, 2022). His principal research interest is the comparative history of prison health care and medicine. Currently, he is working on the five-year project GULAGECHOES, funded by the European Research Council (ERC), about constructing ethnic identities in the Soviet Gulag and post-Soviet prison systems.