

## Memory, Migration and Populism: Central and Eastern Europe's post-imperial legacy and heritage

Venue: Vila Lanna, V Sadech 1, Prague, Czech Republic  
Date: 13th – 14th October 2022  
Organiser: Dept. of Mobility and Migration, Institute of Ethnology, CAS  
Co-Organiser: Memory and Populism Working Group, MSA

The rising support for populist movements is a global issue. In Europe alone, populist parties have steadily increased their support, entering most national parliaments across the continent. Yet, it is particularly in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) that populist sentiments have manifested most strongly. This rise has been accompanied by a drastic populist politicisation of how to interpret the past 'correctly'. Viktor Orbán's frequent reference to the Treaty of Trianon (arguably the most divisive historical memory for Hungarians in the 20th century) or Jaroslav Kaczenski's aggressive memory laws (threatening with persecution and imprisonment anyone who alludes to Polish participation in the extermination of Polish Jews) are just some of the most striking examples of how populism is highly concerned with constructing and using the past. Populism and memory politics are inextricably linked as constructing powerful myths that draw on the collective memory of an imagined past is a key element in the creation of political identities as well as in political legitimization.

Violent historical memories of forced migration appear to be particularly fertile grounds for political agendas. At the turn of the twentieth century, before the dissolution of the European empires, the region of Central and Eastern Europe was extremely heterogeneous in terms of its populations; yet in only one hundred years, successor nation-states such as Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic have become some of the most ethnically homogenous countries in the world. This demographic change is the consequence of a series of population transfers, forced displacements, and genocides which took place during the twentieth century.

The process of 'working through the past' barely took root in countries within Central and Eastern Europe. Throughout the socialist era, the troubling memories of forced displacements were heavily suppressed by the state-apparatus in each of the respective nations. Even today, remembering the vanished Others remains highly problematic on both national and local levels and thus becomes a silent memory that is present, but conspicuously absent as well. Populist movements, however, appear to be exceptionally capable of capitalising on this 'unprocessed', difficult past and its unsettling memories, as well as being able to mobilise people's old fears and resentments to support polarising political agendas.

### Programme I

Thursday 13th of October 2022 / Venue: Vila Lanna

9:00 – 9:20 Registration  
9:20 – 9:30 Opening of the Conference  
9:30 – 11:00 **First Panel**  
Chair: Kateřina Králová (Charles University)  
**Karolina Čwiek-Rogalska** (Polish Academy of Sciences)  
Memory-making and vampire hunting. Memorial strategies in Polish Recovered Territories after 1945  
**Lidia Zessin-Jurek** (Czech Academy of Sciences)  
"Poor Poles Look at the Border" — Holocaust memory as a resource against implication in refugee suffering  
**Adrien Beauduin** (Central European University)  
The Polish Far-Right and "Jewish Reparations": Canalizing Old Sentiments through New Issues  
11:00 – 11:30 Break  
11:30 – 12:40 **Second Panel**  
Chair: Nikola Balaš (Czech Academy of Sciences)  
**Valeria Korablyova** (Charles University)  
"Help yourself by helping us": Zelensky's transnational populism of hope as de-colonization of inter-imperiality  
**Michael Cole** (University of Tartu)  
Mariupol – "The times that were"  
12:40 – 14:00 Lunch Break  
14:00 – 15:30 **Third Panel**  
Chair: Barbara Törnquist-Plewa (Lund University)  
**Michal Frankl** (Czech Academy of Sciences)  
Historians and anti-refugee mobilisation in East Central Europe  
**Paolo Zucconi** (Leipzig University)  
Between Historical Legacies and Populism: The Complex Relationship of the Czech Republic with Putin's Russia  
**Andrzej Sadecki** (Charles University)  
The Trianon centenary: populist memory politics in Orbán's Hungary  
15:30 – 16:00 Break  
16:00 – 17:00 **Keynote**  
Chair: Pavel Horák (Czech Academy of Sciences)  
**Chris Hann** (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology)  
Antagonistic Hierarchies in History and the Pragmatics of Solidarity in the Present: New Amnesias in Polish-Ukrainian Relations  
17:30 – 19:00 Dinner (Buffet)

### Programme II

Friday 14th of October 2022 / Venue: Vila Lanna

08:50 – 09:00 Opening of the second day  
09:00 – 10:30 **Fourth Panel**  
Chair: Rose Smith (Charles University / University of Groningen)  
**Julia Leser** (Humboldt University Berlin)  
Understanding the impact of populist politics on museums: Findings from an explorative interview study in the UK, Poland and Germany  
**Pia Schramm** (Eberhard Karls University Tübingen)  
Populist claims on heritage on social media: Ethnographic case studies in the German context  
**Marlena Nikody** (Jagiellonian University Krakow)  
Mnemonic populism aimed at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum  
10:30 – 11:00 Break  
11:00 – 12:30 **Fifth Panel**  
Chair: Vanessa Tautter (University of Brighton / IFK Vienna)  
**David Farrell-Banks** (Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge)  
Museums, the far right, and ethical practice  
**Julia Giffert** (Eberhard Karls University Tübingen)  
Techniques of disturbing: How Wewelsburg memorial deals with right-wing visitors  
**Alice Millar** (University College London)  
Destabilising populist narratives around (im)migration: Ethnographic case studies in UK museums  
12:30 – 12:40 Closing remarks  
12:40 – 14:00 Farewell refreshments

Contact persons: On behalf of CAS, Johana Wyss, wyss@eu.cas.cz  
On behalf of MSA, Vanessa Tautter, V.Tautter@brighton.ac.uk  
Sabine Volk, sabine.volk@uj.edu.pl

### Abstracts

#### Keynote Lecture

#### Antagonistic Hierarchies in History and the Pragmatics of Solidarity in the Present: New Amnesias in Polish-Ukrainian Relations

**Chris Hann** (Emeritus Director, MPI for Social Anthropology, Fellow, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge)

Starting out with a review of the variation in Poland's historical relationships to its east Slav neighbours, this lecture will then concentrate on how mutual representations and stereotypes of Poles and Ukrainians have changed in recent generations. On both sides, what gets to be remembered and forgotten is determined from above by states, from below in myriad ways in realms where state control is never complete - and also by very practical considerations ranging from new geopolitical constellations to the everyday interaction enabled by voluntary labour migration.

#### Panel 1

#### Memory-making and vampire hunting. Memorial strategies in Polish Recovered Territories after 1945

**Karolina Čwiek-Rogalska** (Assistant Professor, Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences)

Although the issue of destroying and re-purposing German cemeteries in the "Recovered Territories", i.e. formerly German regions incorporated into Poland after 1945, is an open secret, the reasoning behind the legitimization of these actions remains understudied. Following the archival records concerning the particular case study of the sale and disposal of the German tombstones, unfolding between the national authorities, local governing bodies, and third parties in Central Pomerania, I demonstrate how these actions were justified and how the legal rules and mental images together resulted in allowing to treat the symbolic space of the cemetery as a reservoir of building material. To test the hypothesis that there was a more complex explanation than just a pragmatic need for scarce material, I embed this analysis within the monstrous interpretation, i.e. a method of understanding cultures through the monsters they bring forth. As such, it is an attempt toward a new understanding of the postwar Polish culture, manifesting the monsters it created, desired, and feared, which in turn helps me to enhance further understanding of the Central European experience of living in post-displacement regions.

#### "Poor Poles Look at the Border" — Holocaust memory as a resource against implication in refugee suffering

**Lidia Zessin-Jurek** (Postdoctoral Researcher, Masaryk Institute and Archives, Czech Academy of Sciences)

The blocking of refugees by border patrols in forests and fields along the Polish-Belarusian border in the summer of 2021 triggered a humanitarian crisis. The border overlaps in several places with the demarcation line that divided Polish territory between the Germans and the Soviets in 1939. Back then, mostly Jewish refugees were blocked in the open in exactly the same places. The return of this refugee situation to the same geography is known mainly to a handful of specialists in the history of Jewish migration. This said, comparisons of the situation of today's refugees to the wartime history of the Jews abound in public debate.

In my presentation, I will group together the arguments that have emerged in Polish discourse for the existence of similarities between the situation of Jews in Polish lands during the war and the situation of today's refugees there. The axis of the analogies seems to grow out of a belated trauma, triggered by the more general issue of Christian indifference to the wartime suffering of their Jewish neighbours. These references to Jewish history raise objections coming from many quarters. I will want to clarify this by addressing the recent debate among Holocaust historians and memory scholars on the limits of comparison. In my conclusion, I draw on Michael Rothberg's observation that memory is an important resource in the contemporary struggle against implication in injustice.

#### The Polish Far-Right and 'Jewish Reparations': Canalizing Old Sentiments through New Issues

**Adrien Beauduin** (PhD Candidate, Central European University, PhD Fellow at the French Research Center in Humanities and Social Sciences in Prague, CEFRES)

In 2019, when far-right political actors built the coalition party Konfederacja (Confederation), they jumped on the issue of 'Jewish reparations' brought up by the US government following the adoption of the Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act of 2017 by US American lawmakers. According to the far-right, the US government and 'Jewish organisations' are pressuring the national-conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party to hand over property formerly owned by Polish Jews and to pay reparations.

This act, known in Poland as Act 447, has been raised by far-right actors, and especially by Konfederacja, in order to mobilize support, including with a big demonstration ahead of the May 2019 European parliamentary elections (Kolczyński, 2020). Through this issue, Konfederacja politicians and activists have often revisited the past and resorted to old racist stereotypes, playing on nationalist and antisemitic sentiments (Pankowski, 2010). Based on an analysis of the party's communication as well as on twenty-four face-to-face interviews with rank and file party activists, I explore the endurance of historical narratives deployed by Konfederacja during the debate on Act 447.

I argue that the discursive mechanisms used by Konfederacja and its representatives mostly rely on a nationalist narrative of victimhood and betrayal that gives the far right the moral high ground and allows for the mobilization of powerful emotions. This mobilization challenges competing narratives that have arisen lately in Poland and have pointed out episodes of ethnic Poles participating in the Holocaust. Finally, I also inspect the dynamics of political competition fueling far-right mobilization around Act 447, arguing that the far right is using this issue to challenge the national-conservative PiS government on 'its' turf.

#### Panel 2

#### "Help yourself by helping us": Zelensky's transnational populism of hope as de-colonization of inter-imperiality

**Dr. Valeria Korablyova** (Assistant Professor, Department of Russian and Eastern European Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University)

The paper frames Zelensky's public speeches on the global arena in 2022 as a specific type of populism, while explicating how the imperial legacy plays out in the context. It is argued that the post-imperial condition in the region is best defined by the notion of inter-imperiality (Doyle 2020): having been peripheries of several empires with vague borders and identities, CEE states manoeuvre between various centres of power while resenting their dominance and – largely – indifference. However, Zelensky's political project goes beyond resentment and revenge. It is a decolonizing endeavour that attempts to discursively deconstruct multiple hierarchies of domination and derivative positionalities: by addressing global and regional power-holders from a seemingly equal position, he dismantles Ukraine's subalternity. Those rhetorical strategies present the extension / transnationalisation of the populist tropes initially imbued in his political project: unlike its Central European counterparts, it has been a "populism of hope" wired predominantly towards a desired future and aimed at political mobilization of positive emotions.

#### Mariupol – "The times that were"

**Michael Cole** (PhD Candidate, Institute of Government and Politics, University of Tartu)

I arrived in Mariupol not knowing what to expect. What I found was a vibrant city, growing confident in its own skin. Proudly Ukrainian but without the nationalism. Yet, from the tank-trapping tetrapods painted in patriotic colours and patterns, defiantly adorning the city (Gorbassova, 2019) and meaning "much more to us than just art" (Alina, 21, Mariupol), to the word 'refugees' scratched onto the walls of residential buildings indicating safe places to shelter from enemy shelling, the war was rarely out of sight, nor out of mind.

I interviewed local artists, students, and representatives of cultural organisations, and gathered visual and ethnographic materials to inform my work. I heard local teenage actors recount personal stories of their childhoods scarred by war in the play 'Alaska', and photographed Sasha Korban's mural of 'Milana' hugging her teddy bear, on 'Peace Avenue', visible for miles around. Two of many reminders in Mariupol that the true victims of war are so often the most innocent.

It was a Friday afternoon when I left Mariupol. An open book had been placed on the ground in front of the Donetsk Regional Drama Theatre. A literary festival was about to begin. I saw 'refugees' written on a wall at the train station and took a selfie. Now I find myself listening to the words of a Beatles song; "There are places I'll remember all my life, though some have changed (Lennon and McCartney, 1965)."

#### Panel 3

#### Historians and anti-refugee mobilisation in East Central Europe

**Michal Frankl** (Senior Researcher, Department for Modern Social and Cultural History, Masaryk Institute and Archives, Czech Academy of Sciences)

Starting from an analysis of the anti-migration public interventions of the respected Czech historian Jaroslav Pánek, this paper aims to open discussion about how history is used to substantiate anti-refugee and anti-migrant policy and emotion. Pánek's speeches and his 2015 book titled "European Migration Crisis" triggered a controversy which both testifies to polarisation in the community of historians and to the broader context of negative reactions to refugees in the Czech Republic and East Central Europe. The paper will trace Pánek's longer intellectual trajectory and the roots of his anti-migration positions in his earlier historical research. In post-communist East Central Europe, the study of current migration and refugee policies often takes the year 1989 and the dissolution of state socialist regimes as its point of departure, due to the opening of borders and the introduction of Western-style asylum laws and procedures. The historians' debate, however, makes it possible to excavate continuities (and changes) in how national and regional history can be mobilized to negate the transition from emigration to immigration societies.

#### Between Historical Legacies and Populism: The Complex Relationship of the Czech Republic with Putin's Russia

**Paolo Zucconi** (PhD Candidate, Graduate School of Global and Area Studies, Research Assistant, Institute for Social Cohesion, Leipzig University)

Contemporary Czech society is characterized by implicit and explicit historical legacies that - if diachronically analyzed - reveal a complex landscape in which the realms of culture (Post Pan-Slavism), history (memory of foreign occupations), identities (Czech, Slovak but not Czechoslovak) intersect with current politics (populism) and new affinities to Putin's Russia. The resurgence of Putin's Russia as an imperial power recently combined with the rise of populist movements influencing the determination of fundamental goals in Czech foreign policy and contributing to a new West-East oscillation. This paper analyses the affinities to Putin's Russia in the Czech Republic demonstrating that the Czech political elite is characterized by uncertainty with regard to the positioning of the country. Political leaders (e.g. Miloš Zeman) use a friendly rhetoric and of non-moralization of the Soviet past to depict Putin's Russia positively. Whereas historical events like the 1968 invasion of Prague are used to justify the positioning of the country in regard to security and geopolitical crisis in the region (i.e. the 2014 Ukrainian crisis and the Vrbětice incident)

#### The Trianon centenary: populist memory politics in Orbán's Hungary

**Andrzej Sadecki** (PhD Candidate, Department of Russians and East European Studies, Institute of International Studies, Charles University)

The paper explores the cultural factors contributing to the rise of populism. It argues that the populist actors do not simply adopt increasingly popular historical or nationalist discourses of the far-right. Instead, while drawing from them, they often repackaged these discourses into a more acceptable form to a wider audience, combining both radical and mainstream content. This results in an eclectic, at times contradictory discourse, often combining grievance with a sense of pride. The aim is to show a more nuanced picture of the instrumentalization of the past and the dialectic of top-down and bottom-up mechanism, as described in literature. The case of the treaty of Trianon is particularly instructive to examine how the difficult past is employed in the discourse of a populist incumbent party. It shows how the Fidesz party adopted and mainstreamed the discourses of the past earlier confined to radical politics and marginalized in the public domain. On the other hand, the case demonstrates how these discourses have been reworked and repackaged, according to the wider political interests of the incumbent party. The paper is based on the empirical research conducted during the centenary commemorations of the treaty.

#### Panel 4

#### Understanding the impact of populist politics on museums: Findings from an explorative interview study in the UK, Poland and Germany

**Julia Leser** (Postdoctoral Researcher, Centre for Anthropological Research on Museum and Heritage, Institute for European Ethnology, Humboldt University Berlin)

Abstract: All across Europe, right-wing populist politics are on the rise – with far-reaching impacts on politics and society. In our research project "Challenging Populist Truth-Making Europe (CHAPTER)", we are looking into the impacts of populist politics on the cultural sphere, and specifically on European museums and heritage sites. This presentation will provide an overview of the findings of an explorative interview study with museum staff working in the UK, Poland and Germany. We will introduce a practice approach to the study of populism, focusing on 'how populism works', and analysing the impacts of populist practices on European museums.

#### Populist claims on heritage on social media: Ethnographic case studies in the German context

**Pia Schramm** (PhD Candidate, Eberhard Karls University Tübingen)

Populist discourses increasingly challenge questions on heritage and memory culture all over Europe – cultural institutions such as museums and heritage sites are hence confronted with populist claims towards their work. Social media platforms enable also non-established populist actors to combat against such institutions. Based on a one-year anthropological fieldwork in Germany, my research concerns populist everyday online-practices of non-established Users engaging with museums and heritage sites on Facebook and YouTube. By looking into two case studies (on WWII and the former GDR), I describe the emotionally loaded micro-political practices by populist acting users that concern the representations and understandings of history, heritage and memory culture embodied within museums. Populist actors do not feel aligned with the tales of cultural institutions and claim the museums do not represent them as 'the people'. With criticizing the ways museums co-produce history and heritage, populists proclaim alternative readings and writings of history.

#### Mnemonic populism aimed at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum

**Marlena Nikody** (PhD Candidate, Doctoral School in the Humanities, Jagiellonian University Krakow)

This presentation outlines the results of the research on strategies of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum for dealing with mnemonic populism. 'Mnemonic populism', a term coined by Kornelia Kończal (2020), is understood as 'poll-driven, manifestly moralistic and above all anti-pluralist imaginings of the past'. The presentation characterises the populist narratives aimed at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and how museum professionals resist their influence.

#### Panel 5

#### Museums, the far right, and ethical practice

**David Farrell-Banks** (Research Associate, Ulster University, & Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge)

Abstract: The use of mythologised pasts is a powerful component of constructed group belonging, with its often reflected in numerous forms of populist discourse. The frequent use of the past by far right groups presents a challenge to museums. This paper discusses, firstly, the potential for museum displays to inadvertently reproduce narratives of exceptionalism and exclusion. This provides an imperative for research in areas of political discourse, for example, to feed into understandings of museum practice. This research, however, brings with it a set of ethical challenges that can be unfamiliar to museum or heritage studies. With an increasing challenging of accepted narratives within heritage discourse taking place, the attention of the far right, populist right and, at times, national governments has turned on museum staff and researchers. This brings challenges to researcher and participant safety within work that may appear comfortable and safe. Research which challenges colonial histories within museums, for example, is increasingly resulting in museum or heritage professionals becoming the focus of far right groups or government attention. This is particularly the case for staff from already marginalised groups. Through the course of this paper, I seek to consider our ethical response to this co-existent need for research which engages with far right and right wing populist uses of the past and the personal and professional impacts for researchers and museum staff that accompany that work.

#### Techniques of disturbing: How Wewelsburg memorial deals with right-wing visitors

**Julia Giffert** (PhD Candidate, Eberhard Karls University Tübingen)

Abstract: At Wewelsburg memorial and museum visitors learn about the terror and ideology of the national socialist SS. During World War II Heinrich Himmler wanted to rebuild the castle into a gigantic centre of power, i.e. by setting in a floor relief into a hall of the north tower which then became famous as the so called „black sun“. Even though Himmler's plans of conversion and expansion could not be completed, the Wewelsburg has turned into a proper pilgrimage place for right-wing extremists over the decades. In 2010 a new permanent exhibition has been opened trying not only to communicate history but also to disrupt what right-wing visitors are still searching for: atmosphere – not only but especially in context of the „black sun“. Based on my field research my talk will focus on how techniques like staging objects and organizing space are used to influence the visitors' perception.

#### Destabilising populist narratives around (im)migration: Ethnographic case studies in UK museums

**Alice Millar** (PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, University College London)

Abstract: Populist practices of exclusion, abuse and deceit have created various issues for museums and their staff including widespread emotions of exhaustion, fear and resignation. In the UK's recent history, populist rhetoric has centred (predominantly) around anti-immigration sentiments and hate. Drawing on case studies from several London-based museums that deal with migration directly and indirectly, this presentation will explore the ways that museums are affected by populist anti-immigration narratives and will provide insights into how they deal with these issues. Finally, I will present a summation of the key important practices for museums wishing to destabilise populism.