

## 13th GENEALOGIES OF MEMORY

*Pandemics, famines and industrial disasters of the 20th and 21st centuries*

### ABSTRACTS

22. November 2023, Day 1: Epidemics

#### **Keynote Lecture:**

Dora Vargha: *Epidemic Times after the End: a History*

#### **PANEL: Inconvenient to Remember? Spanish Flu and Past Epidemics in Central and Eastern Europe.**

Łukasz Skoczylas: *The Leper House in Poznań. Between Oblivion and Tourist Attraction*

My speech will focus on contemporary interpretations of a leper house in Poznań, Poland. The building from the mid-18th century is the last remnant of an extensive hospital complex, the origins of which probably date back to the 12th century. Today, the facility located close to the city centre is used as a crisis intervention unit and its function related to helping the sick is mostly forgotten. The presentation will be devoted to the social reception of the building as a carrier of memory of a disease that has long been absent as a threat to public health in Poland. At the same time, this condition is associated with many social taboos related to religion and sexuality.

My contribution will focus on the contemporary use of the building in question as a carrier of memory in narratives about the city's past. I will present information on how it is described in guidebooks, in popular books on the history of the city, and during tourist trips.

Chris Zajner: *The Impact of Public Health and Medical Theory on the Societal Response to the 1889 Russian Flu*

The 1889 Russian (also called 'Asian') flu epidemic can be described as one of the first modern pandemics. It has been traditionally perceived as a precursor of the 1918 Spanish flu, but recently even an example of a pandemic coronavirus rather than an influenza virus (Berche, 2022; Brüssow & Brüssow, 2021). Nonetheless, prior to this period infectious diseases were limited due to relatively limited human mobility. The development of extensive railroad networks prior to and during this period facilitated the previously unprecedented movement of goods and people around the world. It additionally facilitated the process of shrinking the barriers between the countryside and major metropolises. While the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in lockdown measures nearly worldwide and prompted widespread social, economic, and cultural disruptions, the Russian flu was not accompanied by such drastic changes. In this

article, I argue that the reasons for the low historical consciousness of this epidemic was a result of the limited societal means to act upon it. The lack of effective public health measures combined with the absence of the general knowledge of the disease, relegated it to a merely statistical existence in the press and offices in charge of public health. As a result, the 1889 Russian flu pandemic – though significant in terms of its mortality and economic impact – was quickly forgotten by the general public, and remains a lost lesson from history. As the first worldwide influenza epidemic, the Russian flu – in terms of how society reacted to it compared to subsequent epidemics - highlights the scientific and cultural process by which the former categories are formed, as well as their historical contingency.

Łukasz Mieszkowski: *Virus and Lice. The Overshadowing of the Memory of Spanish Flu in Poland.*

My paper examines the role of the Spanish flu in Polish collective memory, tracing its prolonged oblivion over the 20th century up to the revival of memory in the early second decade of the 21st century. The process of forgetting is charted chronologically through examples of cultural representations of the epidemic in contemporary works of fiction and quasi-religious ceremonies to a modern-day feature film. While the absence of archival records is explained, the comparative case of the policies through which the newly-independent Polish state combatted a contemporary typhus epidemic is discussed as a possible explanation for the suppressing of the memory of influenza. Overall, the image of the establishment of the Polish state in official propaganda could not accommodate the mishandling of the influenza epidemic crisis in the wider context of an almost complete sanitary and civilisational collapse. In the context of such a history of forgetting, the recent prominence of the 'Spanish' flu in Polish cultural and social memory a century after the events may not prove to last in the long term as a newly-found interest inspired by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rohini Dasgupta: *Rediscovering the Spanish Flu: Rethinking Collective Memory and the Impact of Social Amnesia*

While the primary effects of the Spanish flu were physical, it is worth exploring its potential influence on memory. The staggering loss of life left lasting psychological and emotional scars on those who lived through it. Studies have shown that traumatic events can affect memory formation and retrieval processes, potentially leading to long-term cognitive changes. While existing scholarly literature suggests that the Spanish flu, despite its devastating impact, has been largely forgotten in collective memory, my article challenges that notion. Drawing upon the intricate ways in which the past persists in the present and specifically focusing on differentiation between the two aspects, remembrance and knowledge as the fundamental feature of collective memory, this study aims to shed comprehensive light on the collective memory of the 1918 pandemic. This analysis

acknowledges the role of the COVID-19 pandemic as a stimulant for recalling and commemorating the Spanish flu. It also suggests that the perceived social amnesia associated with the Spanish flu arises from a failure to recognise its profound influence on the sphere of knowledge. This article highlights the necessity of acknowledging the distinctiveness and significance of the knowledge aspect when evaluating collective memory, while uncovering the dynamics and potential interconnections shared by these two dimensions.

### **PANEL: Modern Epidemics - Between Trauma and Denial**

Małgorzata Sugiera: *Imagined into Being: The Birth of the Modern Contagion Revisited*

‘What is usually called Western modernity is a very complex set of phenomena in which dominant and subaltern perspectives coexist and constitute rival modernities,’ writes Boaventura de Sousa Santos in his *Epistemologies of the South* (2014). He is convinced that to secure a (better) future we have to imagine anew our pasts which have been suppressed, silenced or marginalised by the monoculture of the Moderns in Europe. To these pasts belongs the specific entanglement of nationalism, heteropatriarchy and contagious diseases of the turn of the 20th century, monopolised by epidemiological discourses. How to imagine the entanglement anew, the paper demonstrates by looking closely at two recent historical novels: Orhan Pamuk’s *Nights of Plagues* (2021) and Olga Tokarczuk’s *Empuzjon* (2022).

In *Nights of Plague*, a contemporary historian revisits the 1901 outbreak of bubonic plague on Mingheria, a fictional Mediterranean island, an outpost of the Ottoman Empire. She draws on various contradictory sources, but mainly on letters of the period, written by a certain Princess Pakize, wife of an epidemiologist, sent by the Sultan to control the contagion. Set in a well-known European health-resort Görbersdorf in the Sudeten Mountains in 1913, *Empuzjon* unfolds bringing around patients suffering from pulmonary diseases, in Tokarczuk’s novel predominantly male patients from the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Despite the authentic location, the novel is written in critical dialogue with Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*, and narrated by and from the perspective of mysterious ‘we’, voices of ‘nameless dwellers of walls, floors, and ceilings’. As the title implies (*Empusa* is a shape-shifting female being in Greek mythology), this perspective could be identified with a feminine perspective. Thus, both novels not only rewrite the chosen contagion cases as herstories. They also locate the action on the multi-ethnic and multi-religious fringes of collapsing empires to narrate the modern contagion in a clearly subversive, counter-hegemonic perspective.

Slavica Srbinovska: *Understanding the Trauma of Disease through the Film 'Variola vera' by Goran Marković*

In my study I have focused on the threat of an epidemic of the *Variola vera* (smallpox) disease in the former Yugoslavia, presented in the film under the same title *Variola Vera* (1982) by Goran Marković. The intersection of the politics of society in the era of socialist Yugoslavia

and the reactions of actors, patients, and medical staff in a hospital in Belgrade when the disease is discovered show the complex context in the specific historical period that, through the film, updates the theme of the individual and collective trauma today. The drama of the events of the threat of an epidemic and the collective and individual reactions are the experience through which we understand and interpret the present. The film is an update on the detection problems, hiding the disease, keeping silent and acting under the influence of society's policies.

The politics of commemoration in this film relies on research on public discourse that discusses the past and its impact on the present. My study dealing with the contemporary perspectives of the past through the prism of the present primarily asks what memory is. According to Richard Terdiman, memory makes the past present.

What does it mean to create the present through the prism of the past? Memory refers to the past and takes place in the present. At the same time, it implies 'work' with action and interventions. Memory is a symbolic representation embedded in social activity (Alon Confino / Peter Fritzsche). Memory means confronting many trauma-related interventions of social actors from the past. Researching memory combines concerns related to history, representation and politics that motivate our work on recent traumas from diseases. Without separating either from history or presentation, memory connects the individual, shaped and experienced side of the past with the collective, social and constructed side of our ties to the past. Individual and collective versions of the past are linked to the identity or the problems of who we were and who we are today. This contribution explores the relationship of memory to the identity of actors in circumstances of epidemic threat.

Dorota Sosnowska: *'Not entirely aware'. Remembering HIV/AIDS in Contemporary Polish Art*

In my speech, I would like to analyse the way HIV/AIDS epidemic is remembered and represented in Karol Radziszewski's work (AIDS) and Michał Borczuch's performance (Untitled (Together again)). Both artists are from the generation that experienced the HIV/AIDS crisis 'not made entirely aware' (Radziszewski, 2019) of its meanings, learning about it through television, pop culture and grown-ups talking. As such, it is mixed up with different feelings, imaginary scenarios, fantasies but also with the observation of changing reality going through the process of the so-called political transition. Returning to those experiences from today's perspective both artists construct what I would call 'transitional images' – encapsulating the experience of transition but also, like in Donald Winnicott's 'transitional objects' materialising the effects of attachment and loss in the process of growing up. The notion of 'transitional images' proposed by Katarzyna Bojarska in the context of Wilhelm Sasnal's work (Bojarska, 2020) is 'pointing towards new possibilities in finding ways out of both discursive, political and pedagogical impasses in collective memory in Poland'. My aim is to ask if the art works referring to the children's memory of HIV/AIDS epidemic hold the same potential for collective memory

of Polish political transition. Additionally, I argue that from this perspective the inseparability of HIV/AIDS epidemic and Polish transition can be clearly seen what would undermine the common conviction that the epidemic has not really been experienced in Poland. The importance of this change in thinking becomes evident when to take under consideration the experience of people described in *HIV-storie, Żywe polityki HIV AIDS w Polsce* (2022), which appears not as marginal but central to the collectively lived-through (crisis of) transition.

Katarzyna Szarla: *'...but Together with Our Dead'. The Complexities of Polish HIV/AIDS Memory*

How is it actually with this AIDS in Poland? – this bold question was asked in *Replika* in an article about Polish AIDS Victims ('Polskie ofiary AIDS', *Replika*, 1 June 2021). The article is a call for regaining the memory of Polish HIV/AIDS victims, a need expressed several times in recent years. Taking into consideration the activities commemorating people who died in the West, with the AIDS Memorial among them, the deafening silence on this subject in the Poland, as was rightly noted, is puzzling. Indeed, where is the memory of the Polish victims of this disease – both famous and private ones? The aim of this presentation is to look into an ambivalent Polish HIV/AIDS memory. At the beginning of the HIV epidemic, Poland, like other Eastern Bloc countries, remained partially isolated from the HIV crisis in the West. The 1990s, however, brought radical political, economic and cultural societal changes, which deeply marked the history of HIV epidemic in post-socialist countries. Firstly, I will look into the specificity of the HIV epidemic in Poland and outline the possible reasons of the repression of the AIDS story.

Then, I will focus on the remembrance of the dead as an (un)present narrative about local HIV story. The sources I investigate include the oral history interviews, memories, notes and artistic practices (research platform 'Polskie EIDS' by Szymon Adamczak, among others).

Ewelina Szpak: *Modern Lepers or Forgotten Patients. The conspiracy of Silence Surrounding the Cancer Sufferers in Postwar Poland.*

In 1984, Teresa Turuk-Nowakowa, a Krakow-based psychologist caring for the mental health of oncology patients, said that 'When the word "cancer" is uttered, people start to whisper'. A decade earlier, a Polish publicist, preparing a report on oncology education, unique on the publishing market at the time, described the tabooisation of cancer in Poland as a 'conspiracy of silence'. Clearly reflected in these and many other accounts of the time, the tension surrounding the problem of cancer, which was growing in terms of morbidity and mortality, was obviously not unique to Poland and was also observed in other European countries up to the 1960s.

The aim of my presentation is to show the causes and consequences of the conspiracy of silence surrounding cancer. In Poland, it has been prevalent much longer than in Western

countries and has resulted, on the one hand, in the social exclusion, avoidance and sometimes even abandonment of cancer patients and, on the other hand, in the consolidation of their image in the social memory as hopeless cases unambiguously condemned to death.

In showing the reasons for the long duration of the tabooisation of cancer, I point out the role of social perceptions and grassroots knowledge about these diseases (the belief that they are contagious or that the patient is morally culpable as the main cause), as well as the role of the political and cultural context of post-war Poland at the time.

### **PANEL: Narrating Covid-19**

Krzysztof Wasilewski: *Conspiracy theories, Covid-19 Pandemics, and the Construction of Alternative Collective Memories*

Conspiracy theories have always been interested in pandemics. Rejecting official and expert explanations, they have provided their own answers to the origins, scope, and effects of such events (Prooijen, Douglas, 2017). While until recently conspiracy theories were limited to some alternative media outlets, such as printed leaflets and marginal radio shows, with the ascent of the online social platforms they have gained almost unrestricted access to publics around the world (Wasilewski, 2023). Statistics have proved that websites and social media profiles associated with conspiracy theories have been an important source on COVID-19 for many internet users, feeding them with false information and, as such, constructing alternative collective memories (Mangiulli et al., 2022). The paper will aim to analyse how most popular online news sites associated with conspiracy theories are constructing contemporary memory discourse on the origins, scope and effects of COVID-19 in the years 2020–2022. Another goal of the paper will be to evaluate how such alternative collective memories impact social and political cohesion. In order to do so, the paper will use quantitative and qualitative methods, supported by data analysis software.

Liat Steir-Livny: *Traumatic Past in the Present: Covid-19 and Holocaust Memory in Israeli Media*

Just like pandemics, wars or floods, crises can be conceptualised as ‘Cosmology Episodes’ (Weick, 1993), taking into account the disruptive character they have on participants’ cognitive structures, or worldviews. These episodes usually encompass a ‘collapse of sensemaking’ as well as communicative attempts to remake meaning. With our paper, we seek to explore this process from two different perspectives – sociology and literary studies – as well as with an empirical regard on two different pandemics: the medieval plague and COVID19. We can show how the experience of the two pandemics as Cosmology Episodes interlace into the collective memory and result in long-term changes of cognitive structures.

Focusing on COVID19 and from an organisational sociology’s point of view, we can show how organisations learn to utilise their remaking-of-meaning processes to cope with

subsequent events such as the effects of the Ukrainian war. Also in literary studies, narration is considered to be an act of meaning-making in which recipients participate, and so it is not surprising which works were rediscovered during the COVID-19 pandemic: Camus' *La Peste* was recommended reading by Thea Dorn during the first lockdown and was staged by Theater Freiburg the following year in a new adaptation by Mahin Sadri and Amir Reza Koohestani. Boccaccio's *Il Decamerone* could come up with a more conciliatory ending than the one sketched in Camus' parable, which, however, offers a highly impressive description of plague-ridden Florence in its introduction that can suddenly be read unexpectedly up-to-date; Boccaccio also wrote as a contemporary observer after the great wave of the plague that subsided in 1348. Starting from this, we want to broaden our view historically: What ways of meaning-making were employed in mid-14th century Europe, and to what extent do they differ or coincide with those of today?

Joanna Szewczyk: *Between Spanish Flu and Sars-CoV-2. Pandemiographies towards Polish Collective Memory and Mechanisms of Forgetting*

The subject of the article is the narrativisations of the pandemic SARS-CoV-2 in the first months of 2020. The author proposes the category of pandemiography – narratives written from the 'inside' of the the pandemic experience.

Pandemiographies are looking for a narrative formula that allows the reality affected by an infectious disease to be described and taming of the an unknown threat. The author analyses the pandemic diaries of the 'strange spring' of 2020 and wonders why references to Polish collective memory are important in them. She also analyses the analogies between the pandemic SARS-CoV-2 and the Second World War, martial law in Poland and the Chernobyl disaster, which are present in pandemic diaries. These events offer crisis survival strategies, yet references to them in pandemic narratives are ineffective.

The author draws attention to the Spanish flu pandemic, which is not assimilated by Polish collective memory being supplanted by the heroic narratives about regaining independence in 1918. The starting point for this analysis is the Ivan Krastev and Laura Spinney's theory. According to Krastev, the great epidemics, unlike wars and revolutions, do not leave lasting traces in memory and their victims are not commemorated.

The article poses questions about difficulties with the representations of the inconclusive and anti-final pandemic, as well as the narrative and cultural patterns adequate to it.

The author analyses selected pandemic diaries and historical reportage by Łukasz Mieszkowski and concludes that mechanisms of forgetting prevent the establishment of a pandemic imaginary community.

Marta Karkowska: *'How do we create future memories?' The Experience and Memory of the Covid-19 Pandemics in Poland*

In the study of collective memory, researchers are most often concerned with the perception of the past: questions of recalling, remembering, but also forgetting or tabooing events, persons, phenomena or experiences. Much less often do they have the opportunity to trace the processes and mechanisms of memory formation and shaping, especially the experiencing of and remembering events or phenomena that only in the future may become important elements of both individual and collective memory.

Referring to selected theoretical concepts (e.g. J.K. Olick; A. Assmann; A. Erll), I will focus on issues related to the formation of memory of the coronavirus pandemic in Poland. My presentation will focus on individual narratives about the pandemic year after year. This will be the starting point for tracing how individuals reported on the pandemic (in particular periods), what they focused on, and how they narrated their observations, personal experiences or emotions. It will also be important for me to understand the basis and determinants of these narrations as well as their changes. I hope this will help to show how the vision of the pandemic was formed and evolves, and what mechanisms accompany this processes.

The analyses will be based on about 150 in-depth qualitative interviews conducted in 2020, 2021 and 2022 with the same 50 interviewees, who were of different age, in different life situation (independent adults up to 35 years old, parents living with children, seniors aged 65 and above) and living in different parts of Poland: villages, small cities and regional capitals.

Wiebke Lisner: *Lessons Learned – Or how to Deal with New Emerging Potential Disastrous Pandemics as Downside of Globalization since the 1990s?*

When the SARS-COV-2 pandemic began in 2020, many in the media asked in consternation how we could have stumbled into it so unprepared. But had European societies really been unprepared for a pandemic? Already in the 1990s, for health experts the question was not whether there would be a global outbreak of disease in the near future. This was beyond doubt. The real question was, when, where, and which pathogens would trigger it. Following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, globalisation intensified and accelerated. In 1995, border controls were abolished in the EU as a result of the Schengen Agreement. This had led to ever-greater mobility of goods and people, but also of pathogens. In a globalised world, travel routes and people - and thus potentially infected bodies - were almost impossible to control. Fears of infectious diseases spreading unchecked replaced the Cold War fears of a nuclear catastrophe. It seemed obvious that the global threat of pathogens required a global response and a global security strategy. The WHO called for a modern concept of global health, which not just reacted to diseases but prepared societies for infectious diseases. States were asked to install systems to monitor pathogens and prepare for future pandemics to prevent



the worst potentially catastrophic effects. The concept of epidemic prevention, prioritised since the beginning of the 20th century, was therefore supplemented by that of preparedness (Andrew Lakoff). How did Germany as a national example implemented pandemic planning? What experiences did health experts draw on and what preparations were made at the EU level? In 2009, the previously hypothetical assumption of a pandemic became more concrete with H1N1 (swine flu). How did those experiences change pandemic planning?

23. November 2023, Day 2: Famines

**Keynote Lecture:**

Margu rite Corporaal: *Heritages of Hunger in Europe. The Past and Present Politics of Embodying Disaster*

**PANEL: Remembering Holodomor**

Tetiana Perga: *Surviving the Ukrainian Famine of 1932-1933: Unconventional Food Sources in Memories*

The famine that occurred in Ukraine between 1932 and 1933 was a devastating period characterised by widespread starvation. To endure the severe food scarcity, many individuals resorted to consuming various types of waste, resources of flora and fauna, discovering unexpected sources of sustenance in most unlikely places. My report delves into the survival strategies employed by the famine-stricken population manifested in using these resources.

We intend to demonstrate this within the background of the operations of Ukrainian waste collection companies, which faced a great increase in collecting different waste including bones, horns, hooves, hair, skins, as well as dogs, cats, hamsters, hares, and other animals etc., whose skins were either exported or employed as raw materials for the leather industry. During the famine these resources were important source of food for many people. In this context, we will present the methods employed by these companies and reveal their understanding of the factors contributing to their inability to meet their plans in the years 1932–1933.

In the report, we plan to show what place in the memory of the survivors of the Holodomor of 1932–1933 was occupied by these sources of food, as well as the ways in which waste was collected in rural areas by responsible institutions. The report is based on an analysis of the memories of Holodomor eyewitnesses and archival documents of waste collection companies in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Wiktorija Kudela -Świ tek: *Feminization of the Ukrainian Famine in the Holodomor Culture of Memory*

My conference paper examines the social and political function of female representations of the Holodomor in the Ukrainian culture of memory against the background of other European famine remembrance cultures (Irish in the 19th century and Bengal in the 1940s). Referring to Margaret Kelleher's book (*Feminisation of Famine*), I want to look at the repetitive images of females (women as mothers with children or young girls) that are numerous in visual representations of the Great Famine of 1932–33 in the context of other

famine cultures of memory. Are the Ukrainian visual art images of the Holodomor unique or not? Perhaps female images are the most affective and therefore are used in cultures of memory to commemorate the 'great traumas' of Europe, regardless of the historical and cultural context of the commemorating societies.

Elżbieta Ostrowska: *Transnational perspective on Holodomor in Agnieszka Holland's Mr. Jones (2019)*

In the planned paper I will discuss Agnieszka Holland's transnational coproduction *Mr. Jones* (2019) that depicts the Holodomor with an emphasis on its politics of representation. Based on the real story, it presents Gareth Jones, a Welsh journalist, who in the 1930s travelled to the Soviet Union three times and reported the Holodomor to the Western world, the famine that killed, by today's estimates, between three and five million Ukrainians. His reports were denounced by the American journalist Walter Duranty in *The New York Times* (1933), which significantly affected the Welshman's credibility. I identify the protagonist as a 'cross-border' hero in two ways, in that he travels from the West to the East not only geographically, but also mentally when he disengages from the Western politics of appeasement towards Soviet power and empathetically acknowledges the Soviet atrocities committed on the Ukrainians.

However, I will argue that making the Welsh journalist a protagonist eventually resulted in adopting the 'Western look on the Ukrainian experience of the Holodomor. To develop my argument, I will present an in-depth analysis of a scene of cannibalism that is, as an American historian Timothy Snyder notes, a taboo in the field of Ukrainian cultural production. Subjected to the test of 'historical truth', Jones mobilises the outside/inside look at the region of Eastern Europe. On the one hand, Holland incorporates the experience of the Holodomor to the European collective memory, but at the same time the film exoticises it and thus perpetuates the myth of the Otherness of Eastern Europe. I will argue that Jones presents the Holodomor from the perspective of the Western centre rather than the Eastern periphery and, thus, I will propose to consider them as producing what I call a 'post-communist exoticism'.

Amber Brittain-Hale: *The Holodomor and the Emergence of Contemporary Narratives: Investigating Russian Colonialism and Historical Acknowledgments*

This study examines the Holodomor, a man-made famine in 1930s Ukraine caused by Soviet policies, and its connection to Russian colonialism. Focusing on Western denial and subsequent acknowledgment of the Holodomor, it investigates the role of the Russo-Ukrainian War in facilitating this recognition and shaping contemporary commentary. Additionally, the study explores the impact of online social networks in promoting narratives that acknowledge the Holodomor as a consequence of Russian colonialism.

Drawing on a comparative analysis of public history and online platforms, the study uncovers the complex interplay between crisis events, Western denialism, and collective memory. Extensive archival research and data collection from diverse sources, including official documents, media coverage, and online platforms, inform the in-depth analysis. The findings highlight the significant influence of Russian colonialism on the Holodomor, challenging prevailing denials in the West and fostering narratives that recognise the deliberate nature of the famine.

By broadening our understanding of the Holodomor within the context of Russian colonialism, this research sheds light on the dynamics of historical acknowledgments and narratives shaped by crisis events. It underscores the role of online social networks in disseminating narratives that attribute the Holodomor to Soviet policies and Russian colonisation. The study's implications extend beyond this specific event, offering insights into historical denial, collective memory, and the transformative potential of crises.

Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper comprehension of the Holodomor and its recognition as a famine resulting from Soviet policies and Russian colonialism. The findings highlight the importance of confronting denialism and acknowledging the influence of colonialism on historical events. Furthermore, the study emphasises the significance of online platforms in promoting alternative narratives that challenge historical denials and foster a more nuanced understanding of the Holodomor.

### **PANEL: Narratives of Wartime Famines - Between Individual and Collective Memory**

Alexandra Preitschopf: *Preserved Witness, Forgotten Memory? The Great Famine of 1921/22 in the Writings of Russian Émigrés*

'As early as the end of June, 1921, the streets and squares of Kazan (...) were packed with the starving crowd. (...) Starving people were literally lying everywhere with their children and their sick nearest: they could be shot but not removed. (...) After a while, some of them died in the same places, on the street. (...) A human corpse (...) became a familiar sight and it no longer frightened anyone.'

This quote is extracted from a personal letter addressed to Pavel Milyukov, a Russian politician who lived in exile in Paris from 1920 onwards. He preserved this distressing testimony in his book *Russia Today and Tomorrow* (1922), which dedicates an extensive chapter to the great famine of 1921/1922 in Russia and Ukraine. Among others, this humanitarian catastrophe primarily affected the Volga and Ural River regions, resulting in the loss of five to eight million lives. Apart from Milyukov, numerous other notable Russian (anti-Bolshevik) émigrés informed the Western European reading public about the famine through their writings (e. g. newspaper articles, political pamphlets, essays, and novels). Simultaneously, they utilised this opportunity to emphasise the broader grievances of the early Soviet regime. Despite their diverse political and social backgrounds (ranging from the aristocracy to bourgeois liberals like Milyukov, Mensheviks, social revolutionaries, and disillusioned communists), they all shared a common

rejection of Bolshevik policies. However, even though they significantly contributed to the discourse on the Soviet Union during the interwar period, their publications have largely been forgotten today.

Given this situation, the proposed paper aims to examine their writings in more detail. Specifically, it will explore how and why different Russian émigré writers recalled the plight of their compatriots and, in particular, how they preserved memories of the famine. Furthermore, it will investigate how we can approach these testimonies in the present day.

Michał Kopczyński: *Human Body Memory, Individual Memory and Collective Memory. The Case of Famines during the Great War and the Second World War*

Wartime famines and the general deterioration of living standards caused by war have always left their mark on the bodies of the individuals and populations. One can identify the scars of war by analysing the changes in people's height and body mass. In order to compare the impact of the Great War and the Second World War on the Polish population, we will analyse data at the top age cohorts who experienced wars in their childhood and adolescence.

In the next step of our analysis, we ask questions about the contemporary Polish collective memory of the Great War and the Second World War. In conclusion, we indicate that the memory of the famine during the former - which was much harsher than the famine during the latter - faded with each generation that experienced it. In the case of the Second World War, Polish collective memory preserved primarily martyrological recollections, i.e. terror and armed resistance. Thanks to popular culture, the figure of the food smuggler was elevated to the rank of a resistance fighter, and in this indirect way the memory of famine was preserved for posterity.

Bhagyashri Vyasaramacharya: *Framing Memory: Tracing Shifts in Memorability of the Bengal Famine 1943*

My paper examines the memorability of famines, specifically focusing on its shift from being unmemorable to memorable. With specific reference to the memories of the Bengal famine that took place during the Second World War, and caused 3 million deaths, this paper aims to trace its shifting memorability. Though popularised as a man-made famine, that of 1943 remains obscure, dissociated, and mostly forgotten in national and historical narratives. Defined as an 'extreme and general scarcity of food', famine ('famine n.') has been causing casualties for centuries. Yet, they remain largely forgotten, excluded, and attract less attention. As a historian, Lizzie Collingham remarks that 'It is the quiet and unobtrusive nature of death by starvation which explains why many of those who died of hunger during the Second World War are largely forgotten today' (1).

Famines were usually included within the 'natural calamities' context: flooding, drought, and harvest failure, to name a few (Devereaux, 270). Further, assessed within Food

Availability Decline (FAD), the unavailability of food leading to hunger, starvation and famines. However, the connotation of famine changed when the Nobel Prize laureate and economist Amartya Sen introduced 'exchange entitlement' in his 1981 landmark publication *Poverty and Famine* (3). This methodology re-assessed famines within the context of socio-economic factors, arising not out of shortage of food but the inability to afford it. This change of the 'framework' from analysing famines within the context of natural calamities to socio-economic factors enhanced the memorability of famines and the discourse of re-analysing them spiralled (see Devereaux, 2001). To trace these shifts in memorability, this paper aims to pursue how memories in famine situations – where several lives, families, generations, and communities perish, can be remembered and made memorable again through the concept of framing theory, drawing upon communications studies.

### **PANEL: Hunger and Food Shortages - Collective Memory of Survival Strategies**

Iryna Skubii: *Beyond 'Soviet Modernity': Famines Ecology, Environment, and Survival in Ukraine*

Famine does not emerge in a vacuum. It takes place in an environment, either rural or urban, which becomes an integral space of human survival. During the famines in Ukraine, forests, fields, rivers, and dumpsters became spaces where vital food could be located. Yet, when the famines were evoked by draughts, as it was with most historical famines, nature was a cause of formidable obstacles for one's survival. During the famine of 1932–1933, the weather was not the reason for mass starvation, but the dire situation forced people to bitterly acknowledge their dependence on natural resources. Since the non-human dimensions are usually placed at the periphery of scholarship, this human-nature connection is often overlooked and neglected. By focusing on the environmental landscapes of survival and exploring the interwoven connections between nature, human society and the state, this study will demonstrate the history of famine as a symbiosis of the human and the environmental. As the Stalinist famines exposed, the human-nature connections were still essential, given the importance of the environmental resources for survival. Looking at the personal testimonies and memories about the Soviet famines and focusing on famine ecology, environment and human survival practices, this presentation will illustrate the challenges of the 'modernity', when due to the extreme conditions of survival during the Soviet famines of 1921–1923, 1932–1933 (The Holodomor), and 1946–1947 people were forced to reverse to traditional consumption practices and explore the surrounding environment in search of food and natural resources. Bringing the environmental turn into the studies on Soviet famines in Ukrainian history will enrich our understanding of human-nature connections during extreme crises. This study will widen collaboration within Eastern European, Soviet, Ukrainian and environmental and famine researchers and situate the field in a broader geographical and temporal focus.

Rūta Matimaitytė: *'The fight against typhus: the duty of the entire Soviet society'. The Case of East Prussian Wolf Children and Russian Speaking in Soviet Lithuania*

In the context of Lithuanian historiography, the spread and prevention of contagious diseases after the Second World War remains a relatively little-studied issue. In the post-war period, the increase in the incidence of typhus was related to the growth in the number of immigrants entering Soviet Lithuania. In the second half of 1944, as immigration from Belarus increased, a higher incidence of typhus was recorded there. In the post-war years, due to the increase in the illegal flow of hunger-struck children from the Soviet Union and East Prussia, the situation eventually became hard to control. There was a direct connection between the problem of typhus and the East Prussian German- and Russian-speaking immigrant children. The Soviet bureaucratic apparatus envisaged to solve the issue of illegal immigration by applying measures to suppress the spread of typhus.

Using documents from the Soviet Socialist Republic's Ministry of Health, it is revealed how the Soviet administration viewed and attempted to control the issue of typhus and hunger. The reasons and motives behind their hiding in Lithuania are analysed by employing the interview method and surveying over 50 former wolf children and Russian-speaking individuals who arrived in Lithuania driven by hunger. The main similarities and differences between the arriving children from East Prussia (wolf children) and Russian speakers in the case of Soviet Lithuania are presented. Although both of these memories were considered repressed during the Soviet era, I show why specifically the memory of wolf children became significant testimonies of hunger after 1990.

Liliana Sirbu: *The Different Sides of Social Memory about Rationing Food in Ceausescu's Regime and Psychological Effects on Population*

Communism was the expression of Soviet domination in the Romanian territory, which created unforgettable trauma, using all abusive measures imaginable to have near absolute control over the population. Integrated into the larger context of most severe restrictions, resulting in such consequences as a famine, lack of heating and blackouts - President Ceausescu regime's rationing food measure was operational from 1980 until 1989, when the regime fell.

In my paper, I intend to point out how different categories of citizens have different narratives based on social memory about the very same reality. These collective memories can be about facts or their interpretations and in this way we could even explain the nostalgia about Ceausescu's epoch, although there will be others with ongoing trauma responses to it.

Even if the demagogic communist discourse for rationing food was formulated as a good one - like the road to hell was paved with good intentions: to pay off Romania's external debt, results were negative for most people. The famine during Ceausescu's regime was a collective experience but does not include everyone, so we could distinguish three categories of people from the criteria of how they face this reality. The winners were highly privileged

communist officials from the nomenklatura, who had full access to everything, but the rest of the population is divided in two categories: ones that developed adaptative behaviours to get goods underhand, usually living in cities, and village populations, the most affected by this phenomenon.

What is the psychological part of it? When present in a large period of time in a person's life, poverty creates a certain structure of personality. Effects are still visible in the characters of the last two categories, 30 years after the Revolution, and is one of the reasons that explain maybe why society is so divided and that I intend to analyse in my paper.

Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz: *Remembering the Famine? Food shortages, Food Rationing in Private Narratives of the Crisis of the 1980s. in Poland*

In the proposed paper, I would like to examine how the collective memory of the famine of the Second World War and the experience of extreme food shortages influenced the way in which individuals constructed their narratives of the crisis of the 1980s.

My contribution is based on an analysis of personal documents, such as diaries, memoirs and private letters written by ordinary people, mostly in manuscript form found in archival collections. Even if born after 1945, their authors referred to the traumatic memory of the war when writing about food shortages and the introduction of food rationing in 1981.

I argue that the collective memory of the wartime famine provided them with the narrative patterns to describe the current experience of deprivation of an elementary sense of security, and in this way helped them to understand the current crisis and place it in the continuum of Polish history.

The experience of war famine was not silenced or forgotten after 1945. According to Marcin Zaremba, the fear of starvation constituted one of the most important collective emotions in post-1945 Poland. It had a double potential. On the one hand, it influenced state food policy and the public debate on food security. Food abundance became one of the most important elements of the communist promise of a good life. At the same time, the collective memory of food shortages and the threat of starvation were used in the counter-discourses that were developed in times of crisis and turmoil.



24. November 2023, Day 3: Natural And Man-Made Catastrophes

**PANEL: 'Slow violence' and Memory of Industrial Catastrophes**

Mateusz Chaberski: *Lead Sedimentations. Re-Membering Extractivist Slow Violence in the (Post)Socialist Anthropocene*

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, in Polish literature we have witnessed a growing interest in the historical event known as the epidemic of lead poisoning. In 1975, the paediatrician Jolanta Wadowska-Król diagnosed symptoms of the disease in a rapidly growing number of children from Szopienice – a poor working-class neighbourhood of Katowice at the heart of the industrial region of Upper Silesia. The toxic element was most likely absorbed by the juvenile bodies through soil, air and water polluted by local non-ferrous metal steelworks, one of the largest manufacturers of copper and brass utilities in the then Polish People's Republic. Thus, any attempt to identify the source of the disease and treat it potentially threatened the dominant state narrative of the bright socialist modernity.

This paper analyses and juxtaposes three recently published semi-fictional narratives of the epidemic of lead poisoning: Michał Jędryka's *Ołowiane dzieci. Zapomniana epidemia* [Leaden Children. A Forgotten Epidemic] (2020), Marta Fox's *Moja ołowianko, klęknij na kolanko* [My Leaden Lady, Kneel Down] (2021) and Magdalena Majcher's *Doktórka z Familoków* [A Doctor from Familoki (a particular Silesian type of the miner's multi-family house)] to unravel different modes of re-membering slow violence (Nixon). For the narratives in question are less about the epidemic itself than about its long-term spatio-temporal effects that sediment in bodies and environments. Drawing on contemporary environmental humanities (Fowkes and Fowkes, Tomczok) and the geological turn in the (post)humanities (Povinelli, Yusoff), the paper critically reflects on the specificity of extractivist slow violence in the (post)socialist context of Upper Silesia.

Marta Tomczok, Paweł Tomczok: *Hermeneutics of Life in a Continuous Industrial Catastrophe. The Case of the Upper Silesian Coal Basin*

The Upper Silesian Coal Basin (the eastern part of the Upper Silesia and the Dąbrowa Górnicza Coalmining Centre) from the beginning of the 19th century became the site of successive stages of industrialisation. The greatest waves of industrialisation - from the last decades of the 19th century and from the second half of the 20th century - led to a multi-faceted, slow, though gigantic catastrophe: urban, social and ecological. And the development of industry meant that workers lived in increasingly worse conditions - in overcrowded workers' housing estates separated by growing industrial waste dumps, in a space where nothing living could find a safe place for itself. However, in the area of the industrial disaster, life went on all the time. In the paper, we would like to trace the oral history of the inhabitants of industrial areas who try to justify living in conditions that threaten their health and lives. An

example that we would like to analyse in more detail will be allotment gardens located in areas adjacent to coking plants, steelworks, mines and industrial waste dumps. Despite the proximity of industrial plants that pollute the air, land and water, for many residents the garden was a place of rest, safety and enjoying nature - but the awareness of the ecological threat has not been completely repressed. In the memories of the surveyed people there are, for example, statements that the tomatoes growing right next to the coking plant had to be washed of dust before eating. In such memories, we would like to find ways of dealing with the situation of living in the areas of an industrial disaster that lasted for many decades.

In the paper, we will also use the ecological reflection of architects, urban planners and reporters of the Polish People's Republic, as well as photographic documentation.

Ivan Posylnyi: *'The Whole Industrial Inferno': the Donbas Industrial Disasters in the Postcolonial Perspective*

For over 160 years, Donbas has been known for its industrial power. On the one hand, the coal production allowed the Soviet propaganda machinery to construct the myth of the prosperous and glorious region of miners. On the other, the emergence of 280 coal mines, together with countless supplementary plants and factories, changed the landscape of Donbas to industrial, bringing to the region a series of technogenic catastrophes of different scale, and therefore causing drastic environmental changes. In this paper, I explore the discourses of collective memory about the industrial disasters in Donbas in the three periods: Soviet, post-Soviet and after the 2014 Russian invasion. In the first section of the paper, I present the strategies of tabooing the unwanted narratives about Donbas by the Soviet propaganda, illustrating it, in particular, with the 1977 photobook, meant to be a certain guide about Donbas for Soviet citizens. The second part focuses on the neglect of the Donbas environmental issues in the post-Soviet Ukraine, where I aim to discuss why the public narratives of the Donbas industrial disasters have changed so little since Soviet times. The final section of my paper takes a closer look at the public discourse of the industrial catastrophes of Donbas in the post-2014 Ukraine. In particular, I analyse the attempts of artistic expression on the theme in contemporary Ukrainian cinematography using the example of Valentyn Vasyanovych's *Atlantis* (2019), as well as explore the related non-fiction literature of recent years.

Irina Morozova: *The Tengiz Catastrophe of 1985-1986 in the Mists of Perestroika Reform*

Famine does not emerge in a vacuum. It takes place in an environment, either rural or urban, that becomes an integral space of human survival. During the famines in Ukraine, forests, fields, rivers, and dumpsters became spaces where vital food could be found. Yet, when the famines were evoked by draughts, as it was with most historical famines, nature was a cause of formidable obstacles for one's survival. In the famine of 1932-1933, the weather was not the reason for mass starvation, but the dire situation forced people to bitterly acknowledge their

dependence on natural resources. Since the non-human dimensions are usually placed at the periphery of scholarship, this human-nature connection is often overlooked and neglected. By focusing on the environmental landscapes of survival and exploring the interwoven connections between nature, human society and the state, this study will demonstrate the history of famine as a symbiosis of human and environmental aspects. As the Stalinist famines exposed, the human-nature connections were still essential, given the importance of the environmental resources for survival. Looking at the personal testimonies and memories about the Soviet famines and focusing on famine ecology, the environment and human survival practices, this presentation will illustrate the challenges of the 'modernity', when due to the extreme conditions of survival during the Soviet famines of 1921–1923, 1932–1933 (the Holodomor) and 1946–1947 people were forced to reverse to traditional consumption practices and explore the surrounding environment in search of food and natural resources. Bringing the environmental turn into the studies on Soviet famines in Ukrainian history will enrich our understanding of human-nature connections during extreme crises. This research will widen collaboration within Eastern European, Soviet, Ukrainian and environmental and famine studies, as well as place the research field in broader geographical and temporal perspectives.

Mateusz Borowski: *Forgetting Accursed Share. Violent Obsolescence of Electronic Junkyards*

The plans for the greening of Europe, proposed in the face of the ongoing environmental emergency, involve, among other things, the creation of ecological communities with the aim of reducing carbon footprint and enable urbanism independent of institutional constraints. However, these neoliberal initiatives rely on the obliteration of the waste created by technological infrastructure, responsible for the growing amounts of electronic waste, one of the manifestations of the current environmental crisis. This kind of waste, accumulated in mega-junkyards in the Global South, where it is burnt and recycled for precious metals, continues the neocolonial extraction of human and natural resources. What is more, the recently postulated initiatives in East European countries to establish local e-waste dumps as a profitable business clearly points to the absence of the memory of the calamities that it produced in the former colonial countries.

The present paper approaches this problem in the framework of the practices of what Peter C. Little calls 'violent obsolescence', a set of strategies of not only producing short-lived technology, but also wiping out the traces of the catastrophes it provokes when it turns into junk. I approach the e-junkyards as the 'accursed share' (Yusoff 2017) of the memory of neo-colonial extractivism that has to be actively forgotten in order to keep up the myth of ecological and sustainable Europe. I take a closer look at how these memories are suppressed in the plans of sustainable European housing development, for example Alemere Oosterworld in the Netherlands. I confront these plans for greening Europe with the look from without, via a cinematic speculative fantasy *Neptune Frost* (2021) which imagines the significance of

restoring the memory of environmental damage in e-waste junkyards as a path to a more liveable future.

## **PANEL: Discourses on Nuclear, Global and Environmental Crises**

Ardak Orakbayeva: *What the Former Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site is Silent about?*

After the Second World War, the USSR began to actively increase its nuclear potential. The first and one of the largest nuclear test sites was located in the north-east of Kazakhstan, 130 kilometres from the city of Semey (formerly Semipalatinsk). The Semipalatinsk nuclear test site operated from 1949 to 1991. More than 400 atmospheric and underground nuclear tests were carried out there. The total power of nuclear charges was 2,500 times higher than the power of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. If the explosion of the reactor at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant was a terrible disaster, although still a one-time one, then the population of the regions of Kazakhstan adjacent to the landfill was irradiated for several decades in a row. Semipalatinsk is the only nuclear test site in the world where people lived. It became a vivid evidence of how the Soviet authorities did not care about the life and health of the people. Back then, Moscow imposed strict censorship on media coverage or discussion of the consequences of nuclear explosions, but today it is necessary to talk openly about the problem. These tests have caused enormous damage to the health of the population and the environment of Kazakhstan. The former nuclear test site in Semipalatinsk continues to pose a danger: the activity of plutonium radiation is evenly reduced by half every 24 thousand years, and only in a million years will the radiation earth levels of the Semipalatinsk test site be equal to natural. People still live on the territory of the landfill and are even engaged in agriculture, which has no precedent in the world. There is no clear programme of rehabilitation of the population, as there is no talk of resettlement, either.

Alexandra Pulvermacher: *The Chernobyl Disaster: Individual Memories of People Directly Affected*

This April marked the 37th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, which is remembered on several levels: global as part of the Cold War; European, for instance in the context of the anti-nuclear movement that emerged particularly in France and Germany; political, where Chernobyl became the 'nail in the coffin of the Soviet Union', and last but not least on individual.

The nuclear power plant was built in the 1970s about 140 km northwest of Kyiv in the sparsely populated Pripyat region, where it represented a symbol of modernisation and progress. On 26 April 1986, as a result of an uncontrolled chain reaction during a test run, a complete core meltdown occurred in unit 4, as well as several explosions that destroyed the reactor. This was the biggest accident in a nuclear power plant to date; nevertheless, it was completely played down by the Politburo in Moscow. The public was neither informed nor

evacuated in time, and tens of thousands of liquidators were exposed to extremely high radiation without adequate protection. The Soviet leadership thus accepted the serious illness and death of thousands of Soviet people.

Based mainly on interviews, the paper focuses on the individual memories of people directly affected in the area around Chernobyl. The following questions arise: How did the liquidators and their families, medical staff, the local urban and rural population later remember the first weeks and months after the accident? How did they cope with the traumas triggered by the chaotic mass evacuations as well as sickness and death of countless people close to them? How did memories change over time?

Inna Häkkinen: *Envisioning Tierratrauma within Resilience Studies: Reframing the Chernobyl in Nuclear Fiction for Young Adults*

Studying the narrative toolkit of conceptualising the change of nuclear narratives of the post-Chernobyl discourse from 'survival' to 'hope' and 'resilience' within energy storytelling ties up with profiling 'tierratrauma' (Albrecht 2017) in nuclear fictional writings, which helps distinguish the literary dimensions of conceptualising 'nuclear power' for weakening the 'survival' rhetoric of the experienced communities and strengthen the 'resilience/healing' motifs as a result of critical thinking on the energy dependence agenda.

My presentation intends to frame the literary imaginaries of 'tierratrauma' (together with 'eutierria' and 'solastalgia', Albrecht 2017) in depicting a narrative switch from the physical / spiritual survival to 'hope / resilience' within framing the parameters of nuke-related 'tierratrauma' experience, which the Chernobyl experienced community has been through. Such perspective facilitates a discussion on the parameters of 'literary Chernobyl' (Hundorova 2014) within communicating the transformations of the value paradigm of the nuclear disaster-experienced society. Researching 'tierratrauma' in the context of fictionalising a switch to sustainable living (mainly, agricultural/gardening techniques within the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone and beyond) of the 'nuke trauma' experienced communities under the ecocritical perspectives reveals the socio-cultural parameters of narrating the nuclear history of Eastern Europe and beyond through the narrative toolkit of emoting physical/spiritual survival where narrating 'tierratrauma' can be regarded as a shift from experiencing eco-trauma (Morton 2016) towards framing permaculture ethics within its focus on ethical principles of creating sustainable ways of living (Harland 2013), regarded as an act of resilience in the context of fictionalising a nuclear disaster and its aftermath.

The ways of emoting the Chernobyl post-nuclear traumatic survival/hope/resilience with the focus on 'tierratrauma' as a background for a further framing of energy ethics in Chernobyl fictional writings are studied here through the perspective of intermedial ecocriticism (Bruhn, 2020), emphasising the personalisation and emotionalisation of scientific knowledge via different media types and environmental hermeneutics (van Buren 1995; Drenthen 2017), 'examining the role of interpretation in 'human-environment' relations'

(Drenthen 2017), which together allow clarifying the ways of narrating 'tierratrauma' within translating the nuclear past, i.e. the Chernobyl disaster.

My presentation intends to introduce the literary dimensions of 'tierratrauma' in the context of switching from survival to hope and resilience in narrating the Chernobyl-related issues in such nuclear fictional writing for young adults as Andrea White's *Radiant Girl* (2008) (US), Anna Blankman's *The Blackbird Girls* (2020) (US), Kateryna Mikhalistyna's *The Flowers near the Fourth* (2022) (original: Катерина Міхаліцина «Квіти біля четвертого») (Ukraine), or Johanna Aulen's *Chernobyl Dogs* (2022) (original: Johanna Aulen 'Tšernobylin Koirat') (Finland). The presentation aims to demonstrate how the focus on the literary imaginaries of 'tierratrauma' in fictionalising the nuclear past of Eastern Europe helps reveal the narrative toolkit of transmitting knowledge on 'nuclear' hope/resilience within the contemporary Chernobyl storytelling for further communicating the nuclear present and framing the imagined nuclear future.

Jakub Wojsyk: *International Penalization of Ecocide: Environmentalism Activism and Critique of Mainstream Genocide Studies*

This article delves into the intricate relationship between ecocide and genocide, shedding light on the often-neglected ecological dimensions of mass atrocities. Focusing on industrial disasters and their environmental repercussions, the article analyses the ecocide-genocide nexus. Drawing upon case studies from different regions, including Mexico, Peru, Germany, and Central and Eastern Europe, the article examines specific instances of industrial disasters, such as wind energy turbines, mines, and large-scale extraction activities. These disasters have resulted in severe environmental degradation, posing significant threats to local ecosystems, communities, and public health. By exploring the interplay between ecocide and genocide, the article critically reflects on the proposed international penalisation of ecocide as a legal framework to address large-scale environmental destruction. My contribution examines the challenges and prospects associated with incorporating ecocide into the existing legal framework and discusses its potential as a tool for preventing and addressing environmental crimes committed in the pursuit of industrial development. Moreover, the article highlights the environmentalist critique of mainstream genocide studies, which traditionally focus on human suffering and neglect of the ecological dimensions of violence. In the article, I argue that a comprehensive understanding of mass atrocities necessitates an interdisciplinary approach that integrates environmental perspectives alongside human rights and social justice considerations. The article also examines the practices of tabooing and censorship surrounding industrial disasters, particularly within popular democracies. It further explores the ways in which political regimes, such as communist governments, have suppressed information and hindered public discussions about environmental threats, impeding environmental activism and the pursuit of justice. In conclusion, the article emphasises the urgency of addressing the ecocide-genocide nexus, recognizing the interconnectedness of environmental destruction

and mass violence. It underscores the importance of integrating environmental concerns into genocide studies, promoting environmental activism and fostering international cooperation to prevent future industrial disasters and safeguard the rights of the affected communities.

## **ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION: Between Trauma, Memory and Forgetting - Nuclear, Environmental and Human-Induced Disasters in the 20th and 21st Centuries**

### **PANEL: Cultural Memory and Natural Disasters**

Naum Trajanovski: *Imagining the City of Solidarity: The Cultural Memory of the 1963 Skopje Earthquake and the Post-Earthquake Urban Reconstruction*

On the early morning of 26 June 1963, an earthquake struck the Macedonian capital of Skopje, destroying more than two-thirds of the urban fabric and killing 1,070 locals. The politically non-aligned Yugoslav government immediately issued a call for help for its third-largest city and the erstwhile southernmost federal capital. It was initially picked up by the Yugoslav republics and followed by more than 80 states and many international organisations – an episode of human solidarity which many contemporaries depicted as unprecedented. In this context, the role of the United Nations appeared to be crucial for the fate of the city: in October 1963, the UN passed a resolution to support the Yugoslav government in the post-earthquake reconstruction of Skopje, getting a team of prominent international experts on board for its ‘Skopje project’. The urban reconstruction under the auspices of the UN’s Special Fund hence facilitated the Yugoslav and Macedonian authorities’ decision to reimagine the Macedonian capital as a ‘City of Solidarity’ – a symbol of the cross-bloc cooperation in the midst of the Cold War – and an ‘Open City’ – open to domestic and intra-federal migrations.

Drawing upon the ‘sociology of events’ and the literature of critical disaster studies, I view natural disasters as certain ‘impact events’ that shatter not only the material but also the symbolic worlds we inhabit. Moreover, their modality is being constantly renegotiated within the public domain, with commemorative ceremonies being among the most common platforms for these discursive negotiations. This process of performing, preserving and institutionalising symbols in the public domain impacts, as well, the cultural identity of a community. To illustrate this point of the societal after-effects of a natural disaster, I will analyse the cultural memory of the 1963 Skopje earthquake and the post-earthquake buildout by reconstructing a set of annual commemorative activities (from 1964 to 2022). I will argue that a cultural memory discourse helps revealing the struggle to establish a dominant public narrative over a natural disaster and its immediate aftermath, but also the major proponents, entrepreneurs and agents of certain relevant discourses.

Gretchen Abuso: *Disaster Memories in the Global South: Visual Evidence of Typhoon Washi in the Philippines*

Most research on disaster prevention and mitigation focuses on resilient infrastructures, safe housing locations, legal measures, hazard mapping, and the like. There is very little exploration on how society remembers and learns from its past. In my paper, I propose disaster memory as essential in the study of disaster risk reduction, presenting a case from the Global South.

This paper presents the visual evidence of how a city bears the memory of a natural disaster in its physical spaces, built-up environments and abandoned spaces. The tropical storm Washi, with its local name Sendong, swept through my hometown Cagayan de Oro in Southern Philippines on December 2011. It killed more than a thousand individuals and destroyed billions in property prices. Washi is considered one of the deadliest natural disasters in Philippine history and made headlines around the world that time. A decade since Washi happened, much of the evidence of the disaster is barely visible and the city has changed, both physically and politically. My contribution presents the visual evidence of Washi in the current physical landscape of the communities it ravaged more than a decade ago.

In the presentation, I also discuss how patronage dynamics, a characteristic of local politics in the Philippines, was responsible for the thousands of deaths, qualifying the tragedy as man-made. In most cases, when natural disasters hit, the focus of coverage usually centres on capital cities like Manila, Bangkok or Jakarta. Therefore, in this paper, I present a post-disaster scenario in a second-tier city in Southeast Asia as a case study of how natural disasters are remembered in the Global South. I examine and propose how disaster memorials and abandoned communities can become forms of disaster memories that enforce public remembrance.

Hans Gutbrod: *The 2015 Tbilisi Zoo Flooding: Exploring the Ethics of Political Commemoration*

The 2015 Tbilisi Zoo Flooding is a poignant case of a major recent disaster: a large flash-flood, major political failures, wolves and tigers roaming the city streets, a huge volunteer effort, and now a recollection that ranges from humorous to deep sadness over the loss of life. My paper will examine its commemoration.

The flooding of the Tbilisi Zoo on June 13, 2015 resulted in more than 20 deaths, the loss of numerous beloved zoo animals and widespread destruction of infrastructure. Drawing upon the Ethics of Political Commemoration, this paper will analyse how the Tbilisi Zoo Flooding is remembered. It explores how memory remains fragmentary, usually leaving out the major political failures that were involved in some of the loss of life; the temporary commemoration of Zurab Muzashvili who heroically saved seven lives before perishing; the ongoing legacy of significant public mobilisation, which helped and at the same time reduced the legitimacy of



the government; the emphasis on more redeeming and humorous remembrance, such as the sculpture of the hippopotamus Begi, or of the penguin that swam all the way to Azerbaijan. Various Wikipedia entries will also be examined, to compare differences in how the disaster is represented.

The humorous and solemn ways of remembrance somewhat sidestep accountability. A more factually focused remembrance would highlight aspects of state incompetence and brutality that the government has sought to play down – with the result that politicians who resigned soon after the flooding eventually returned to power, to head up a divisive government again characterised by a mix of incompetence and brutality. By applying the Ethics of Political Commemoration, there will be a structured framework now for considering how the Tbilisi Flooding is remembered.

### Erol Gülüm: *A Future Catastrophe in Retrospect: Mnemonic Imagination of the 'Expected Istanbul Earthquake' on Social Media*

The 17 August 1999 Marmara earthquake (also known as the August 17 or '99 earthquake) has had a profound impact on the Turkish memory culture for a long time. More importantly, it has also begun to shape Turkish collective future thoughts, following systematic post-earthquake research that revealed significant tectonic plate movements, seismic tension, and ruptures of adjacent segments of the North Anatolian Fault. Parsons et al. (2000), who conducted primary research on the effects of the Marmara earthquake on future seismic hazards and events, found, 'a 62 +/- 15% probability of strong shaking during the next 30 years and 32 +/- 12% during the next decade'. Later, Parsons (2004) recalculated the probability of the expected earthquake, stating that 'the moment magnitude > 7 earthquake in the Sea of Marmara near Istanbul has a 35–70% likelihood of occurring in the next 30 years'. Subsequent research also has repeatedly confirmed that an earthquake with a magnitude of approximately 7.5 is likely to occur in the Marmara Region, including Istanbul (Erdik et al., 2003; Şengör et al., 2005; Erdik, 2013; Murru et al., 2016; Bohnhoff et al., 2016; Kayaalp and Arslan, 2021). Shortly after the relation between the past and future earthquakes was revealed, the traumatic memories of the Marmara earthquake and the catastrophic imaginings of the expected Istanbul earthquake began to interact in various narrative posts shared by users on the Turkish social media platform Ekşi Sözlük. The topic page titled 'beklenen büyük İstanbul depremi' [the expected Istanbul earthquake] activated on 28 February 2000, and currently with around 8,000 posts [as of 12 July 2023], primarily consists of catastrophic scenarios for the expected earthquake posted by thousands of Ekşi Sözlük users. The interplay between the past earthquake and the expected one in these scenarios stands out as a distinctive case of how memory frames the prediction, simulation, and planning of future imagined or real events, highlighting the transformative power of memory and its prospective rather than retroactive acts. The case in question thus demonstrates a phenomenon of the complex, dynamic, interactive, and reciprocal interactions between collective memory and collective future

thinking within a given social (media) framework. Analysing the scenarios of the expected Istanbul earthquake on social media by drawing on interdisciplinary approaches to memory, imagination, future thinking and digital media, as well as adopting a 'digital ethnographic perspective' and conducting a 'thematic narrative analysis', the paper aims to broaden perspectives on the memory-imagination nexus by exploring the ways in which our common future thinking draws on the aspects of collective memory and creates affective realities within a digital media ecology.

Piotr Juskiewicz: *The Idea of the Collapse of Civilisation and Global Catastrophe in the European Discourse of the 19th and 20th Centuries and its Impact on the Cultural Memory of Europe*

My text presents the key points of the discussion on the impending end of European civilisation and a global catastrophe, which would combine human-induced and human-independent causes. This discussion has its roots as early as the dawn of European civilisation, but it accelerates considerably in the second half of the 19th century, with the biologisation of the factors considered crucial in the gradual decay of civilisation, related to the nature of which the progressive degeneration of the human race was allegedly linked.

Alongside the evolutionary theory, the biological perspective of civilisational decline was then fed by racial theories and eugenic projects. Other important moments in this discussion were the critique of civilisation, based on Nietzschean philosophy and developed on the eve of and during the First World War, as the main cause of Europe's spiritual exhaustion, and then the Frankfurt School's thought, combining Marxist ideas with those of Freud, which saw capitalism, responsible for the objectification of culture and the alienation of the individual, as the main threat to humanity. Finally, the ecological movement, which had been intensifying since the 1960s, developed a kind of synthesis of the Nietzschean, Heideggerian and Freudian inspirations expressed in the conviction that modern civilisation as a human creation fundamentally collides with the self-regulating ecological mechanism of the Earth, also depriving humans of a direct connection with the vital energy of the rest of the natural world.

This long-standing discussion with its shifting emphases turned out to be an extremely important cultural force that to a great extent shaped many of the leading works of modern European culture and art, which were on the one hand an expression of the conviction of the inevitability of an impending catastrophe and civilisational annihilation, and on the other the result of a feverish search for ways and means to avert it.