

Wednesday // June 15

OPENING ROUNDTABLE: History & Democracy (organized by Michal Kopeček)

In the conference's opening roundtable, we would like to discuss the recent developments in history and memory politics and the broader political and cultural dimensions of critical historical, legal and social science research of and in the region. Admittedly, "History and Democracy" is a comprehensive and ambiguous title that can be conceived from many angles. Given the purpose of the opening panel, we will follow three broadly defined topics covering the issue over the last thirty-plus years in the region: history and civic democratic education after 1989; politics of memory; the influence of the current Russian war against Ukraine on our historical consciousness.

Thursday // June 16

PANEL: Cultures of Defeat (organized by Maciej Górny)

In 2003, a popular history book by Wolfgang Schivelbusch was published under the title *The Culture of Defeat*. The German historian compared Confederate, French and German myths and trauma following wars lost in 1865, 1871, and 1918. Since that moment what initially served as a metaphor has been steadily acquiring shape as a research concept applied to various cases throughout the world: from the Ancient Near East to the Ottoman Empire to – most prominently – First World War studies. What it precisely means, however, can best be judged from the context rather than from a theory or a methodology as the latter remains largely absent from said research. Two elements stand out as common to all cultures of defeat. First, they denote post-war periods of social and political instability, plagued by violence. Second, they also refer to cultures of memory of armed conflicts and how those memories assume a certain cultural character and political instrumentalization postbellum.

The panelists set themselves two major tasks. Drawing on their own research, they will demonstrate how this relatively new research perspective evolves in distinct historical and cultural contexts. Beyond that, they will also try to identify shared elements that give the metaphor coherence while also marking out limits of its productivity. Are we looking at the rise of a relevant scholarly innovation, one that combines social and cultural history with nationalism and military history; or is this merely a passing academic fashion?

PANEL: What Was Dissent and What Came Next? (organized by Daniela Koleva)

The title is obviously inspired by K. Verdery's influential book on Romanian socialism, but the idea is to apply transnational lens to the construction of dissent and 'the dissident' as cultural actor, even if / when the focus is on one country case. D. Koleva will discuss the role of the 'gaze', i.e. recognition, P. Wciślik - if and how 'the gaze' can be self-orientalising (still to be decided), while F. Laczó & T. Scheibner will take a broader look at the legacy of dissent in their joint paper.

PANEL: Transnational Fascism in Eastern Europe (organized by Raul Cârstocea)

This panel will focus on the interactions, connections, and networks established by fascist movements and regimes in Eastern Europe. Such a transnational approach to East European native fascist movements is meant to go beyond the attempts of the Italian and the German regimes to 'export' their respective models or expand their influence in the region. To do so, we will focus on the agency of local actors in initiating and/or engaging in international contacts with similar organisations, within the region and outside it. Additionally, we will examine the ways in which fascist movements in Eastern Europe imagined a future European or global order of fascist making and their position within it.

ROUNDTABLE: “The Winds of Change”: Cold War Cultural Encounters Go Global (organized by Radina Vučetić)

PANEL: Continuity and Rupture: Rethinking Aftermath Studies in Holocaust History (organized by Natalia Aleksion)

PANEL: Performing History in the Public Sphere (organized by Juliane Tomann)

Performance and performativity have become key concepts not only in history but also in the subdiscipline of public history. Performativity describes the production of knowledge within a bodily process where meaning comes into being by evoking, acting, playing, or staging past events. Borrowing from performance studies theory, action, experience and emotion have become central terms within the performative turn. The panel examines how historical knowledge is performed in public space and focuses on the specific conditions of performative knowledge production, which is never a top-down process but always a negotiation between performers, audiences, atmospheres and objects.

PANEL: Grappling with the Holocaust in Stalin’s Soviet Union (organized by Diana Dumitru)

This panel will seek to illuminate how the postwar Stalinist society dealt with the issue of Jewish destruction in Europe and inside the Soviet Union. By focusing on the actions of Jewish community and individuals, as well as the Soviet official media coverage of the topic, the panel’s authors will challenge the widely circulated myth about the “policy of silence and denial” of the Holocaust inside the Soviet Union both during the war and after.

PANEL: Fictions and Spies in the Cold War (organized by Joshua Sanborn)

One of the signal features of the Cold War was the increased public attention to spy services and the simultaneous increased popularity of spy fiction. Moreover, there was significant overlap between “real” espionage and the literary sort on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Catriona Kelly will look at the fuzzy line between reality and invention in the consciously constructed narratives about the famous life of agent Konon Molodyi. Joshua Sanborn examines a novel and movie written by the former head of the KGB’s Second Main Directorate (Oleg Gribanov) to see how the KGB used “copaganda” to burnish its image in the Brezhnev era. Joe Weisberg will comment from his perspective as a creator of spy fiction (The Americans)

Friday // June 17

PANEL: State Socialist Contributions to International Law During the Cold War (organized by Raluca Grosescu)

This panel examines the overlooked contributions of state socialist countries of Central Eastern Europe to the development of international law after 1945. It analyses how state socialist experts and governments proposed, negotiated, or opposed various international conventions, and how they interacted with Western and Global South counterparts in the construction and struggle over the global international law order. The panel moves beyond the Western-centric outlook of international law historiography by focusing on socialist Central Eastern Europe and its formative role in criminalizing apartheid, outlawing the destruction of cultural heritage during armed conflicts, and constructing health as a human right. The panel also expands current Cold War studies by highlighting the decisive impact of Central Eastern European governments and experts on the evolution of the UN-system.

Key words: international law, state socialism, apartheid, health, heritage.

PANEL: Facing and Forcing the Neoliberal Turn: Cities in Central Eastern Europe in Long Systemic Change - 1970 to 2000 (organized by Matěj Spurný)

The crisis of modernist approaches to urban space and socialist housing policies can be traced back to the end of 1960s in most countries of East Central Europe. Less clear remained (at least in the 1970s and 80s) the answer to the question, what actually had to replace the centralized planning of cities in the spirit of high modernity. This panel aims to trace the dynamics of new approaches to urban space and housing policies in the last twenty years of state socialism and during the first decade after 1989 in some of the major cities of CEE (particularly Budapest, Bratislava and Prague) from the complementary perspectives of urban history, architectural history, history of urban planning or urban geography.

ROUNDTABLE: Historizing Abortion, Understanding Cold War Biopower (organized by Agnieszka Kościańska & Agata Ignaciuk)

In the last few years, we have witnessed the global backlash against women's reproductive rights as well the rise of sexual and gender conservatism, which, despite the pandemic, provoked thousands to protest, demonstrating that issues such as abortion are central to how we envision the state. In the East Central European context, restrictions on reproductive rights are often perceived within the global public debate as connected to backwardness or underdevelopment. However, on the Soviet-influenced side of the Iron Curtain, abortion outside of medical or criminal indications was legalised earlier than in the West. The key difference in the legalisation processes in East and West was the origin of the demand for legal abortion.

In many Western countries, social movements such as the feminist movement as well as the engaged medical profession and family planning and population control activists played a key role in stimulating abortion law reforms from the bottom-up. In East Central Europe, on the other hand, the legal change initiated in 1955 in the Soviet Union was a State-driven, top-down endeavour. The intensity of the abortion law reforms across the region – and actual access to abortion services – differed considerably between countries and within each country. Nevertheless, in the decades that followed, abortion was consolidated as a relevant family planning resource in East Central Europe, a phenomenon some demographers interpreted as “abortion culture” (Stloukal 1999). This hypothesis meant the preference of women for pregnancy termination rather than prevention, often interpreted as a consequence of the lack of access to modern contraception.

Recent historiography has begun to further nuance this narrative by exploring the active stigmatisation in which communist states wrapped legal abortion (Randall 2011). Others have examined regional differences and changes in abortion policies (Kligman 1998; Ghodsee 2012; Drezgić 2016; Nakachi 2021) and practices (Hilevych 2015), and the role of new technologies in shaping the delivery of abortion services (Dudová 2012; Bogdan 2018). This roundtable brings together major experts working on gender, sexuality, and reproduction in East Central Europe. Its aim is to situate the role of abortion during the Cold War and historize contemporary abortion debates, showing how they acquired their current central status. It will address the following questions: What are the current implications of abortion's strong relationship to countries' and the region's communist past? How is this past used in current abortion debates? How useful is the notion of “rights” applied to East Central Europe and Soviet abortion history? How does the study of the history of abortion and abortion debates help us understand today's backlash against women's rights?

PANEL: Building, Working, and Dreaming in East Central Europe: Anthropological-Historical Views on Affective State Creation (organized by Tomasz Rakowski & Piotr Filipkowski)

In this panel we would like to discuss these parts of social history of Central and Eastern Europe that emerged in times of late socialism and were related to shared affects that came along with experiences of building together, working together, hoping, dreaming and making ‘the good’ in socialist, and also in postsocialist states. Drawing from theoretical frameworks of ‘affective state’ creations, developed initially by Begona Aretxaga, and later eg. by Madeleine Reeves and Mateusz Laszczkowski, we would like to focus on understanding the affective and, in a way, ‘visceral’ way of building together and working together in socialist Europe, roughly since the 70s, until late postsocialist era. Speakers may refer to diverse possible sources eg. collections of official complaints/praises sent to central authorities, memoirs, diaries, as well as eg. informal practices related to building and obtaining building permits etc. In particular we would like to pay attention to enthusiastic building,

undertaking socialist 'social deeds' and common works, technical/occupational education, worker-peasants experiences, or any other expressions of 'affective state' creations/affective citizenship.

ROUNDTABLE: Intellectual History in East Central Europe: Falling Between the National and the Global? (organized by Balázs Trencsényi)

This roundtable seeks to critically reassess the trends and achievements of the last two decades in the field of intellectual history and the history of political thought in the region. It intends to take stock of the transformation of perspectives triggered by the intensive transnational collaboration of scholars within the region and also beyond it, facilitated by various schemes of cooperation, but also the epistemic, institutional and political challenges posed by historiographical frames that are less sensitive to historical meso-regions, be it the revived national grand-narratives (and counter-cans) or the attempts to transcend the meso-regional frame toward global history. While these challenges catalysed considerable institutional and methodological tensions, rather than depicting this interplay as a historiographical bellum omnium contra omnes, our aim with this panel is also to identify common sensitivities and put the interplay of national, regional, and global frames into a longer perspective of historiographical self-reflection.

ROUNDTABLE: Scales, Stories, Narratives: The Potential of a New Narrative of Eastern and Southeast European History (organized by Gábor Egry)

One visible trend in the research on Eastern and Southeastern European history is the tendency to challenge dominant national or regional narratives with the help of methodological means and innovation. The changing of the perspective (looking for individual agency, favoring bottom-up instead of top-down, developing case studies of localities or regions, seeking out voiceless groups and their members etc.) and the scale is a frequent tool of these scholars often explicitly used with the aim of circumventing, subverting or challenging historical narratives of the (nation)state and a region of anti-imperial nationalisms. To a certain extent approaches like everyday ethnicity, national indifference, imperial (or post-imperial) biography, new imperial history – just to name a few – all rely on a shift of scale.

Deconstruction and critical analysis, however, is not identical with an alternative. Even if one rejects the necessity to produce „great narratives”, historiography is hard to imagine without the narrative structure of historical works. Furthermore, leaving these, often pointed, analyses alone, without connecting or framing them creates an implicit epistemological gap as the scope of the knowledge and arguments derived from this type of research is always uncertain and limited. While social history – a traditional alternative to nation-centered narratives – attempts to resolve this issue with analyzing structural and long-term issues, the methodological shift affects its explanatory potential too.

It seems, that to go beyond a mere criticism of the traditional historical narratives, practitioners of these new approach must think about how they can extend the scope of their research both in terms of what are the limits of these approaches in explaining more general, often structural phenomena (for example ethnicity, the state, social divisions) and how they can craft new narratives for the region from these building blocks. What they really offer, how much they are really innovative and to what extent complementary of the traditional narratives and each other? What can be the subjects and units of analyses that makes a connection and framing possible? What is a change of scale or an entangled history in research and in narrating history? How can a narrative that satisfies the criteria of historiography and incorporates the larger regions(s) be built?

CLOSING ROUNDTABLE: East Central Europe – to be Continued (organized by Joachim von Puttkamer)

The concluding roundtable discussion is designed to sum up some of the impressions from the conference and to transform them into challenges for further research, and to the Imre Kertész Kolleg in particular.