



POLSKI UNIWERSYTET NA OBCZYŻNIE
THE POLISH UNIVERSITY ABROAD
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Twentieth Century Polish History Seminar

Convenors: Prof. Michael Fleming and Dr Wojciech Rappak

The seminar series on twentieth century Polish history was initiated at PUNO in 2013. It provides a forum for scholars and the wider public to engage with new historical scholarship. Scholars from a range of British and Polish universities have presented research in progress and discussed their recent publications. Details of previous seminars can be found at <https://puno.edu.pl/xx-polish-history-seminar/>

The seminar is open to the public and is especially useful for students reading MA or PhD degrees in history or cognate disciplines. The seminar is conducted in English. This academic year, due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the seminar will take place online. Those wishing to participate should contact the convenor prior to each seminar: fleming_m11@hotmail.com

Programme for the 2020/2021 academic year

2 December 2020 Dr Lukasz Krzyzanowski (Polish Academy of Sciences)
Ghost Citizens: Jewish Return to a Postwar City

Dr Lukasz Krzyzanowski introduces his book *Ghost Citizens: Jewish Return to a Postwar City*, published in 2020 by Harvard University Press. *Ghost Citizens* recounts the story of the largely forgotten group of Holocaust survivors who returned to their hometowns in Poland in the wake of the Nazi genocide. Focusing on Radom, an industrial city about sixty miles south of Warsaw, he tells the story of what happened throughout provincial Poland as returnees faced new ordeals along with massive political, social, and legal change in a country within the Soviet zone of influence. *Ghost Citizens* examines the daily struggles of numerous Jewish survivors returning home. The book tells the story of fear, loneliness, and violence but also of Holocaust survivors' agency and resilience.

Lukasz Krzyzanowski is Assistant Professor at the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw. He was a postdoctoral researcher at the Free University of Berlin and has held research fellowships at the University of Oxford and Yad Vashem.

24 March 2021 Dr Wojciech Rappak (PUNO/UCL)
Shoah and the origins of the Karski story.

Many people believe that it was the interview shown in Lanzmann's *Shoah* that made Karski famous. His moving eyewitness account of the Warsaw ghetto and his meetings with Jewish resistance leaders have had a huge impact on viewers of the nine-hour film masterpiece on the Holocaust. The film was released in 1985 but the interview took place in 1978, Lanzmann and his team ended up with over 200 hours of footage which took nearly six years to edit. The Karski interview took four hours and it was edited down to just over 40 minutes. It is this editing which launched the Karski legend. But editing relies on omission, on change of sequence, on creating something which reflects decisions made by the filmmaker. Having seen

the interview, Karski praised Lanzmann but said that this was not the interview he gave in 1978.

In the late 1990s Lanzmann sold the film material omitted in *Shoah* to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum where archivists have spent nearly 20 years ensuring that the original 16mm film and its associated audio tapes are preserved, catalogued and, in most cases, digitised. And made available online. We thus have the outtakes of the Karski interview as well as a full transcript. We can thus examine what was omitted and how the interview was sequenced.

In this seminar, we will look briefly at two examples of this. In the opening scene, Karski is shown to be deeply reluctant to talk about his wartime experience, he sobs and walks away, returning later, fully composed. We can identify this moment in the actual interview by examining the transcript. It occurs about twenty minutes into the interview. Another example is Karski's account of his clandestine visit to the Bełżec death camp. For a number of reasons, Holocaust historians have shown that he could not have been in Bełżec but in some other place. But the reference to Bełżec meant that Lanzmann omitted that part of the interview on historical grounds.

There is evidence to show that Karski knew that he was not in Bełżec but in a transit camp nearby. Why did he mention it in the interview? Later historians suggested that he was in Izbica Lubelska. In the seminar, we try to unravel this puzzling aspect of the Karski story.

Wojciech Rappak was born in Gdańsk and studied philosophy and history in Canada, Warsaw, Paris and London. He has a doctorate from the University of London for research into the foundations of logic and the early philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. He is also a Reader in history in the Institute of European Culture at the London-based Polish University Abroad (PUNO). He is currently completing a post-doctoral history research project at University College London (UCL) on Jan Karski. Dr Rappak's research examines the archival evidence on Karski's role within the Polish wartime state, focusing especially on the relative importance of the Jewish tragedy to Karski's wartime mission. Dr Rappak has published and presented papers (in both Polish and English) on Jan Karski at conferences and seminars in London, Chicago, Jerusalem and in Poland.

28 April 2021

Janina Struk (freelance writer, lecturer, photographer)

An Auschwitz Photographer: The tales of SS Ernst Hofmann.

A few years ago, I was contacted by a young woman in the USA who introduced herself as the great-granddaughter of Ernst Hofmann, an SS photographer at Auschwitz-Birkenau responsible for taking photographs in the well-known Auschwitz Album that shows the arrival and selection of Jews at Birkenau in the summer of 1944.

The young woman was writing on behalf of her grandfather who had discovered an album of caricature drawings made at Auschwitz among the possessions of his late mother. On the cover was his father, who he had been led to believe had been a Luftwaffe pilot killed during the war.

The album, made in November 1944 after more than a million Jews had been murdered in the gas chambers, testifies to a macabre mood of frivolity in the camp. The caricature drawings that depict some of the most powerful and notorious SS men at Auschwitz, along with their girlfriends, are accompanied by boyish satirical captions.

I will show pages of the album, explain how it was discovered and its impact on the family concerned. I will also discuss its historical significance in the context of the two other

photo albums compiled at Auschwitz in 1944: the Auschwitz Album, and Karl Höcker's photo album and what we can learn about the perpetrators.

The caricature album has not yet been made public, nor information about it published.

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Janina Struk is a freelance writer, lecturer, photographer and author of *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of the Evidence* (IB Tauris, 2004) and *Private Pictures: Soldiers' Inside View of War* (IB Tauris, 2011). She is currently writing a book about how photography was used as a form of resistance in Nazi occupied Europe.

19 May 2021

Marius Gudonis (Collegium Civitas, Warsaw)

Characteristics of Polish Public Discourse on the Holocaust, 1944-1999

Polish society emerged from over five years of devastating occupation deeply traumatised: a fifth of the pre-war population lost their lives, often in the cruellest of circumstances. This was also the land where the Nazis perpetrated the Holocaust, resulting, amongst others in the extermination of 90% of the Polish-Jewish community, portending both the end of a unique Yiddish civilisation and almost a millennium of dynamic Polish-Jewish coexistence. How did Poles speak about the Holocaust after the Second World War? This presentation aims to provide an overview of the various aspects of Polish public discourse on the Holocaust and wartime Polish-Jewish relations during the communist period and the first decade of independence. It will reveal that some aspects persisted throughout the five decades concerned (e.g. Polonocentrism, generalisation of Polish good behaviour), while others (e.g. Marxist ideology, narrative silence) gradually disappeared.

Marius Gudonis is a sociologist and doctoral researcher at Collegium Civitas in Warsaw, specializing in contemporary Ashkenazi and Polish history, post-truth rhetoric, as well as the sociology of genocide denial. His publications include "Particularizing the Universal: New Polish Jewish Identities and a New Framework of Analysis" (New Jewish Identities, CEU Press, 2003) and "Constructing Jewish Identity in Post-Communist Poland", EEJA, 2001). In addition to his academic pursuits, he has, amongst others, worked as a UNESCO project manager for the Management of Social Transformations programme, a TEFL/ESP language instructor at Paris Descartes University, and a history communications consultant for the Warsaw Rising Museum. He is the recipient of an award from the World Association of Home Army Soldiers for his contribution to the Patriotic Communication Game that seeks to disseminate history of the Home Army to a younger audience. He has translated, amongst others, the late Władysław Bartoszewski's *O Żegocie: relacja poufna sprzed pół wieku* (Żegota: A Confidential Report from Half a Century Ago). Recently he has coedited with Benjamin T. Jones, *History in a Post-Truth World: Theory and Praxis* (Routledge, 2021)

2 June 2021

Michael Fleming (PUNO)

Poland and the Search for Justice, 1939-1948.

This paper outlines how German atrocities were brought to the attention of allies during the Second World War and the way in which the Polish Government in Exile, and later the Polish Government in Warsaw, sought to ensure that those responsible were brought to justice. The paper considers Polish contributions to the development of international law during the Second

World War. It is shown that through its interventions, the Polish Government in Exile, along with other ‘minor’ allies, played an important role in the development of a regime of post-war international justice.

Michael Fleming is a historian at The Polish University Abroad, London. His publications include *Communism, Nationalism and Ethnicity in Poland, 1944-1950* (2010) and *Auschwitz, the Allies and Censorship of the Holocaust* (2014) www.cambridge.org/9781107633667

23 June 2021

Dr Joanna Rzepa (University of Essex)

The Modernist Heresy and its Polish Legacy: Marian Zdziechowski, Stanisław Brzozowski and Czesław Miłosz

On 8 September 1907, Pope Pius X issued the encyclical [*Pascendi Dominici Gregis*](#) that condemned modernism as ‘the synthesis of all heresies’. It targeted the work of modernist theologians such as Alfred Loisy in France, Romolo Murri in Italy, and Friedrich von Hügel and George Tyrrell in England, who challenged the basic tenets of neo-scholasticism (also known as neo-Thomism) promoted by the Vatican. After the publication of *Pascendi*, many modernist theologians were censured and subsequently excommunicated from the Catholic Church. Theological modernism, however, spread across Europe, finding sympathisers among the clergy, philosophers, and religious intellectuals. It drew on the writings of contemporary philosophers, such as Henri Bergson and William James, and found inspiration in the thought of John Henry Newman, whom many considered a proto-modernist thinker. The paper examines the wide-ranging impact of the modernist controversy on the philosophy, politics, and culture of early-twentieth-century Europe.

While Polish church historians have long maintained that theological modernism did not have any significant influence on religious thought in Poland, this paper challenges that view. It shows that the philosophers Marian Zdziechowski and Stanisław Brzozowski were part of the transnational network of modernist thinkers who rejected neo-scholasticism and aimed to develop a new way of thinking about religion and modernity. Their works had a formative impact on Czesław Miłosz, whose prose writings explored the interface between religion and politics in interwar Poland (which included the official endorsement of neo-Thomism by National Democracy). The paper will consider Miłosz’s essays on religion, culture, and politics to re-evaluate the legacy of the modernist controversy in Poland.

Dr Joanna Rzepa is a lecturer in the Department of Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies at the University of Essex. Prior to joining Essex, she held the post of Thomas Brown Assistant Professor at Trinity College Dublin, and taught at the University of Warwick. She is the author of the monograph [*Modernism and Theology: Rainer Maria Rilke, T. S. Eliot, Czesław Miłosz*](#) (Palgrave 2021), and her articles have appeared in *Modernism/modernity*, *Comparative Critical Studies*, and *Translation Studies*. Her research interests include twentieth-century literature, cultural and intellectual history, Holocaust writing, and literary translation.