



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

Convenors: Prof. Michael Fleming, Prof. Mikołaj Kunicki 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.ac.uk/struktura-puno/zaklad-wspolczesnej-kultury-brytyjskiej-seminaria/>

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 the seminar will take place online, beginning at 6.30pm. Those wishing to participate should contact the convenor prior to each seminar: michael.fleming@puno.ac.uk

### Programme for the 2023/2024 academic year

11 October 2023      Prof. Michael Fleming (PUNO)  
**The Contemporary Relevance of the United Nations War Crimes Commission.**

The Bucha massacre and other Russian outrages in Ukraine has put the issue of war crimes firmly on the international agenda alongside a renewed focus on gaps in international law. This presentation considers how reflection on the work of the United Nations War Crimes Commission during the Second World War may provide insight into contemporary challenges of securing justice for victims. Jurists at UNWCC, which was founded in October 1943, considered a range of war crimes and made important contributions to thinking about other international crimes. The presentation pays attention to the Polish contribution to debates at the UNWCC as well at the London International Assembly and other fora.

**Michael Fleming** is a historian at The Polish University Abroad, London. His publications include *Communism, Nationalism and Ethnicity in Poland, 1944-1950* (2010), *Auschwitz, the Allies and Censorship of the Holocaust* (2014), (as editor) *Essays Commemorating Szmul Zygielbojm* (2018) and *In the Shadow of the Holocaust: Poland, the United Nations War Crimes Commission and the Search for Justice* (2022). He is a recipient of the Kulczycki Book Prize for Polish Studies, and the Aquila Polonica Prize.

16 January 2023      Hanna Reidler (University of Klagenfurt)  
**Journey into the Unknown. A Comparison of Deportations in the German and Soviet Occupation Zones of Poland 1939-1941**

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, deportations have once again become a subject of public interest. Especially in the course of the double occupation of Poland in 1939-1941, comprehensive deportation programmes were implemented in both the German and Soviet occupation zones. While the Soviets deported about 320,000 people to the interior of the USSR

in four deportation campaigns to be used as forced labour in forestry and collective farms, the Germans resettled about 450,000 people from the incorporated territories and deported them either to the *Generalgouvernement* or for Germanisation or forced labour in the *Altreich*. The deportations not only represented a break in the biographies of those affected, but also permanently changed Polish society. Comparisons of National Socialism and Stalinism usually consider the two systems as a whole. However, with the deportations in an almost identical area during the same period serving as a *tertium comparationis*, it becomes possible to undertake a more systematic comparison. While it is important to problematise the term totalitarianism as a very politically loaded concept in today's Poland, there are nevertheless parallels between the deportation programmes of the two regimes. The objective of this paper is to clearly highlight the differences on the one hand, but also to identify functional equivalents on the other. For this purpose, the *modus operandi*, the underlying legitimisation strategies as well as the conceptions of space that were present in both regimes and, in a further step, the effects on Polish society will be analysed. Beyond the concept of totalitarianism – can certain aspects that were specifically inherent to these two regimes be identified and can such features be found in other examples – such as that of Ukraine?

**Hannah Riedler** studied History and Slavic Studies at the University of Vienna. In April 2021, she started working as a project assistant at the University of Klagenfurt researching the double occupation of Poland in 1939-1941. Her research interests include the history of Poland, the comparison of dictatorships as well as the Holocaust. She has received several fellowships and grants for her research, including from the IfZ in Munich, the DHI in Warsaw, and Yad Vashem. She has presented the results of her research at international conferences and workshops - for example at the POLIN Museum in Warsaw and Yad Vashem.

21 February 2024 Prof. Adam Leszczyński (SWPS, Warsaw)

### **People's History of Poland: Methodology and Reception**

"People's History of Poland" sold more than 70,000 copies on the Polish market and sparked a lively debate about the presence of lower classes in historical consciousness in present day Poland. In my presentation, I will talk about the ideas behind my book and its reception.

**Adam Leszczyński** - historian, sociologist, journalist, associate professor at the SWPS University, member of the "Krytyka Polityczna" team and co-founder of OKO.press, a leading Polish online medium. He has published, among others, "People's History of Poland" (2020) and recently "Defenders of serfdom" (2023).

27 March 2024 Dr Paweł Duber (PUNO)

### **History of Poland 1918 - 2023. A history textbook for Polish Saturday schools.**

I am going to discuss the main conceptions of the textbook for Polish Saturday schools I am preparing. I set myself one main goal - to provide students with a textbook that will be a source of reliable knowledge about Poland's contemporary history, presented in a broader European perspective. I will take into account the AQA specification for the Polish language A-level exam. I intend to avoid the "heroic", one-sided narrative. Instead, I will show Polish history

from different perspectives, in all its complexity, and include the bottom–up (social history) approach. This book will also highlight the theme of Polish political and military emigration after 1939 and the role it played in Poland’s history. In this way, I will make students understand that even while living in Great Britain - or anywhere else in the world - they can successfully participate in the development of Polish cultural, social, and scientific life, as was the case of many prominent representatives of exile circles before them. Therefore, I would like this book to have its fully intended "side effect" of strengthening their double identity (Polish and British) and, consequently, the self-confidence and self-esteem of the students, as I want to show them that they can feel both Polish and British, without having to choose between the two identities.

**Pawel Duber** is a historian, graduated from the University of Silesia in Poland. He has worked in many cultural and academic institutions, including the University of Warsaw, the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, the Józef Piłsudski Museum and Nottingham Trent University. He is currently a lecturer at the Institute of European Culture of Polish University Abroad in London. He received his PhD in 2009, and the advanced PhD (habilitation) in 2015 from the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. His interests include the following research areas: the history of Poland, Central and Eastern Europe in the 20th century, Polish political and military emigration after 1939, the history of diplomacy and international relations, cultural diplomacy, diplomatic culture, and politics of memory. He is an author and co-author of several books and dozens of scholarly articles. He has recently submitted for publication a biography of Polish diplomat Titus Komarnicki and a book with a selection of my articles on Polish-Swiss relations in the 20th century.

17 April 2024

Dr Magdalena Zegarlińska (PUNO)

**Modern Polish cinema as the self-reflection on Polish national identity.**

*“In our clamorous times it’s much easier to acknowledge your faults, at least if they’re attractively packaged, than to recognize your own merits, since these are hidden deeper and you never quite believe in them yourself...” /W. Szymborska/*

Ronald Reagan once said: “Poland is not East or West. Poland is at the center of European civilization. It has contributed mightily to that civilization.” This famous quote draws our attention to the fact that Poland, through its tumultuous history, has grown to be the complex, modern, rapidly developing, culturally and economically, European state. At the same time, however, the Western World perceives us as a stronghold of tradition, conservative values, a country almost homogenous in terms of race, religion and beliefs.

In recent years, mostly owing to streaming platforms, such as Netflix or HBO Max, motion pictures featuring Poland and Poles, have become available and popularized among wider audience. Films such as: “Corpus Cristi”, “Forgotten Love”, “Cold War” or “Green Border”, to name only a few, have become recognized and appreciated as far as in the City of Angels and are beating the popularity records on Netflix. Why? Why now?

The following seminar will be devoted to the trends that we can observe in modern Polish cinema, regarding Polish identity in the world, the changes that occurred in Polish mentality and the self-reflection of Poles in the past two-three decades. How do Poles

understand and approach such current sociological issues as gender identity, ethnicity, migration and religious beliefs? Are we the same nation we were 20 or 30 years ago? How does modern Polish cinema correspond with the magnificent “new wave” cinematic creations of Wajda and Polanski? Do we currently witness the renaissance of Polishness in the world cinema?

In the seminar Dr Zegarlińska will attempt to answer the above questions and present a comprehensive study of modern tropes, topics and genres that have been defining Polish identity in the cinema in the past decades. Is that image the reflection of reality or merely its craftily manipulated interpretation?

**Magdalena Wanda Zegarlińska** is a published academic, translator and editor affiliated with PUNO. She received a doctorate from the University of Gdansk in 2014, specializing in modern British literature and auteur cinema. She is an experienced lecturer and English teacher, specializing in CLIL – teaching language as a cultural phenomenon; additionally working with SEN students with Autism spectrum. She is the organizer and participant of multiple international academic conferences, a translator and author of teaching curriculums for secondary and higher education students. She was formerly a lecturer at WSB University in Gdansk. Her academic interests include dream studies, psychology of crime and intertextuality.

15 May 2024

Professor Robert Hampson (Institute of English Studies, University of London)

### **Conrad and the Polish problem**

The talk will start with ‘The Shadow of 1863’: it will begin with Conrad’s parents, Apollo and Ewa Korzeniowski – their political activities in relation to Polish independence; the hopes they placed on their son, Konrad; and Apollo’s role in relation to the Central National Committee. It will consider Conrad’s sense of himself as a child growing up in the shadow of 1863 and also why he left Poland. The next section, ‘Emigration of the Talent’, will begin with Orzeszkowa’s 1899 criticism of Conrad and the charge of desertion. It will discuss Conrad’s work of reminiscence, *A Personal Record*, which he began in 1908, as a response to Orzeszkowa and to a more recent criticism (by Robert Lynd) that he was a man ‘without either country or language’. *A Personal Record* asserts the continuity of Conrad’s life as a sailor and as a writer, while also bringing Polish life and history into English literature. It displays Conrad’s commitment to Poland, but also his pessimistic sense of the prospects of Polish independence. The third section, ‘Autocracy and War’, will begin with Conrad’s response to the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) in the form of his 1904 essay ‘Autocracy and War’. It will consider how he subsequently takes on the role of a public intellectual in relation to ‘the Polish problem’ with ‘A Note on the Polish Problem’ (1916) and ‘The Crime of Partition’ (1918). The role of Józef Retinger will be considered here. The final section, ‘Poland Revisited’ will focus on Conrad’s 1914 visit to Poland and the essay he wrote of that title. It will consider his engagement with his father’s legacy and his own sense of complex, multiple loyalties.

**Robert Hampson FEA, FRSA** is a Research Fellow at the Institute for English Studies and Professor Emeritus at Royal Holloway, University of London. He is the author of three monographs: *Joseph Conrad: Betrayal and Identity*; *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Conrad's Malay Fiction*; and *Conrad's Secrets*, which won the Adam Gillon Award from the Joseph Conrad Society of America. He co-edited *Conrad and Theory* with Andrew Gibson, *Conrad and Language* with Katherine Isabel Baxter, and *The Reception of Joseph Conrad in Europe* with Véronique Pauly, and has recently published a critical biography, *Joseph Conrad*, with Reaktion Books. His latest book, *Joseph Conrad, From Cosmopolitanism to Transnational Activism* was published this year (2024) by Palgrave Macmillan. He is Chair of the Joseph Conrad Society (UK) and recipient of the Ian P. Watt Award for Excellence from the Joseph Conrad Society of America.

19 June 2024

Professor Havi Dreifuss (University of Tel Aviv)

**Facing the Unthinkable: Initial Responses of Polish Jews to the Mass Murder**

Polish Jews were confronted with news of the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" through various channels, eliciting diverse reactions. This lecture examines their initial responses to the systematic mass murder, with a particular focus on Orthodox communities, their leadership, and their modes of engagement. Drawing from an array of contemporary sources, our discussion will center on the horror, the efforts to respond, and the profound sense of powerlessness in the face of Nazi Germany's atrocities.

**Havi Dreifuss** is a historian of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe at the Department of Jewish History at Tel – Aviv University, heads the Institute for the History of Polish Jewry and Israel-Poland Relations (TAU), and The Center for Research on the Holocaust in Poland at The International Institute for Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem. Her research deals with various aspects of everyday life in the Holocaust, including: the relationship between Jews and Poles, religious life in light of the Holocaust, Jewish existence facing extermination.