

Nov. 30, 18:00 (CET), zoom: Looking at the Evil: Fieldwork Research on the Ongoing and Past Violence, “Testimonies from the War” Research Seminar Series

Discussion published by Anna Wylegala on Monday, November 28, 2022

Please register at: publicrelations@ifispan.edu.pl to receive a zoom meeting link and participate in the seminar.

Warsaw, 30.11.2022, 18.00, CET, Zoom

Looking at the Evil: Fieldwork Research on the Ongoing and Past Violence “Testimonies from the War” Research Seminar Series

During her lecture at Vytautas Magnus University in Lithuania’s Kaunas, where she was awarded an honorary doctorate, Svetlana Alexievich, a Nobel-winning Belarussian writer, was asked by a student whether there was any leading topic that was common for all her literary works. After a while, she answered calmly: “I am looking at the evil”.

In a way, we do this in our research and documentation project “24.02.2022, 5 am: Testimonies from the War”. While this project is not limited to documenting war crimes, especially in Poland, a lot of our interviews concern refugee life after fleeing the war, violence remains an important topic. Ukrainian refugees talk about numerous instances of violence they witnessed and experienced when staying under Russian occupation, they also repeat stories they heard and read because they are still shocked by their brutality.

During our second “Testimonies from the War” research seminar we would like to focus on the way researchers and documentaries deal with their work on violence. How do we conduct interviews that discuss extreme violence with the victims, perpetrators or witnesses? Does this kind of interviewing demand specific skills from the researcher? Does it place additional responsibility on them? Does asking about ongoing violence differ from asking about genocide, ethnic cleansing, and other mass atrocities that happened many years or even decades ago? Is there anything that researchers working with the victims and bystanders of the ongoing conflict can learn from the researchers focused on the conflicts that already belong to the past?

The idea of this seminar is to bring together scholars with different field experience and involve them in discussion on research into the violence that is currently taking place in Ukraine. Thus, Anna Wylegala, coordinator of the “Testimonies from the War” project in Poland, will be joined by Erin Jessee, an oral historian with expertise on Rwanda, Renata Masna, a representative of Yahad-In Unum in Poland, and Daria Mattingly, a historian of the Holodomor.

More about the “Testimonies from the War” project:

<https://swiadectwawojny2022.org/en/>

More about the seminar's speakers:

Erin Jessee is a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Glasgow, where she works across the Gender History, Global History, and War Studies research clusters. She is an oral historian with particular expertise on Rwanda, and has written extensively about the ethical and methodological challenges that can arise in conducting qualitative research in atrocity-affected contexts. She is the author of *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda: The Politics of History* (2017), and has published articles in such notable journals as *Memory Studies*, *History in Africa*, *Medical History*, and *Oral History Review*. She also serves on the editorial teams for the *Oral History Review* and the Oxford University Press *Oral History* series.

Renata Masna is a representative of *Yahad-In Unum* in Poland, a French organization documenting the Holocaust by bullets in Central and Eastern Europe: recording video testimonies of witnesses and locating killing sites. The organization also leads projects dedicated to gathering testimonies about mass crimes in Guatemala, Iraq and Syria, Ukraine. Renata has participated in more than 30 research trips, mainly to Poland, as a team leader, interviewer and interpreter. Educated in Paris and Warsaw, she holds a degree in Linguistics. Her main research interests include microhistory of the Holocaust, memory studies, visual testimonies and oral history.

Daria Mattingly is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow and Affiliated Lecturer at the University of Cambridge, where she received her PhD in 2019. She is currently writing a book on the identifiable and memorial traces of the rank-and-file perpetrators of the 1932-33 famine in Ukraine, known as the Holodomor. Daria's research interests include perpetrator studies, the cultural history of the Soviet Union, with an emphasis on Ukraine. She is on the selection committee of the Danyliw Research Seminar on Contemporary Ukraine, University of Ottawa.

Anna Wylegała is a sociologist and Assistant Professor at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences. She has been conducting oral history and biographical interviews since 2005. She is the author of two monographs: *"Displaced Memories: Remembering and Forgetting in Post-War Poland and Ukraine"* (2019) and *"Był dwór, nie ma dworu. Reforma rolna w Polsce"* (2021), and co-editor (with Małgorzata Głowacka-Grajper) of *"The Burden of the Past: History and Identity in Contemporary Ukraine"* (2020). She is a coordinator of the "Testimonies from the War" project in Poland.

The seminar is organized by the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences, in partnership with the Mieroszewski Center and Polish Oral History Association.

International partners: Centre for Urban History of East Central Europe in Lviv, Center of Contemporary and Digital History at the University of Luxembourg, University of St Andrews.