

# Polish studies today and tomorrow

Conference, 22-23 September 2020

## BOOK OF DRAFT ABSTRACTS

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### Panel 1: Protecting human rights

**Agnieszka Kubal** (UCL SSEES)

#### **Who are the humans behind Human Rights in Poland?**

Poland, despite having joined the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) relatively recently, ranks fifth in terms of the number of cases submitted to the Strasbourg Court (ECtHR). Polish citizens are some of the most active applicants to the ECtHR, who successfully mobilize human rights within the structural conditions of 'democratic backsliding'. Who are the humans behind the Human Rights cases from Poland? The ECtHR judgments do not allow the reader to get to know the applicants. Their personal experiences are often reduced to a few words under the heading 'facts of the case' and are barely visible from under the piles of parties' submissions, legal arguments and descriptions of the domestic legal proceedings. Building on my past research on legal culture and legal consciousness, this paper pioneers a sociological approach to the study of human rights claims-making from Poland, and attempts to bring in the voices of the applicants to critically interrogate the knowledge production of the everyday experiences of human rights. As a point of departure, I rely on the case study of reproductive rights cases from Poland (*Tysic v Poland*, *R.R. v Poland* and *P. and S. v Poland*) to illustrate my points.

**Iwona Zielińska** (Akademia Pedagogiki Specjalnej im. M. Grzegorzewskiej, Warsaw) & **Michael Rasell** (University of Lincoln)

#### **'Supporting Polish victims of domestic abuse in the UK: practitioner perspectives'**

This paper reports the initial findings of a research project to investigate the barriers to accessing domestic abuse support faced by Polish people living in the UK. This project seeks to understand why UK domestic abuse services have a very low number of enquiries, referrals and use by Polish women despite approximately 831,000 Poles living in the country. Analysis of 19 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2019 with UK-based practitioners working with Polish residents in various fields (social work, schools, domestic abuse services, community workers) shows that relational, practical and emotional factors intertwine to reduce access to information and support. All these factors have specific features associated with the Polish migration experience and can be exacerbated by language barriers. As with all cases of domestic abuse, networks of friends and community are crucial in supporting Polish women to seek support. However, unsympathetic reactions from friends, relatives and wider community members will leave women isolated, ashamed and scared, especially if they mostly live and work in these same groups. Financial and administrative issues connected to migration status (e.g. valid passports, access to benefits, housing costs) also inform decisions about whether to leave abusive relationships. A final barrier relates to limited awareness and low trust of the UK legal framework and domestic abuse services, including fears that child protection services may take children into state care. The paper seeks to enhance academic knowledge of Polish family life and highlights that the domestic abuse faced by Polish women living in the UK has transnational dimensions. As practice implications, we draw attention to the role of workplaces and Polish community organisations in raising awareness of domestic abuse, distributing information and facilitating access to support.

## Panel 2: Young Poles abroad: Sweden and the UK

**Oksana Shmulyar Gréen, Charlotte Melander & Ingrid Höjer** (University of Gothenburg)

### **‘The role of the Catholic community in Sweden for young Polish migrants’ transition to adulthood’**

This paper draws on the research project *Transnational childhoods*, illuminating the experiences of children and young people from Poland and Romania who go through transnational transitions (Pustulka and Trabka 2019) when they move to Sweden. For migrant children in our study it entails multiple changes and shifts aligned with their life course, including the initial parental migration, children’s own migration and reunification with parents and transitions to adulthood in transnational-, translocal- and local spaces (Anthias, 2008). In this phase of life, young people are preoccupied in particular by identity-seeking and by creating new meaningful relationships. In the paper, we focus primarily on the experiences of young Polish migrants and analyse the interviews, build on network maps and life- lines. We examine what role the Catholic community in Sweden plays in relation to their identity building and the transitions to adulthood post-migration. Theoretically, we are inspired by the concept of lived religion, which focuses on the actual practices and relationships by which young people “make up their personal religious experience and expression “(McGuire 2008:2).

Conducting the analysis of the empirical data we apply this theoretical perspective in relation to three identified themes: 1) how young Poles talk about spirituality as an important component of their identity construction post-migration; 2) how the Catholic community becomes one of the main sources of building new relationships in Sweden; 3) how the places of worship and specifically significant religious leaders within the catholic community become important for the transition to adulthood and guidance in family relationships. The tentative results suggest that through faith and spiritual activities young migrants acquire resources to develop resilient responses to the challenges caused by migration. They gain social acceptance and belonging in the social sites, where communication in their native languages and a sense of familiarity help them to become vocal about their needs, rights and feelings.

**Olga Czeranowska, Izabela Grabowska, Agnieszka Trąbka & Iga Wermińska-Wiśnicka** (SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw)

### **‘Career paths of young Poles in the UK’**

In this paper we ask the following research questions: What types of young adult migrant from Poland in the UK can be distinguished? What are their career paths? What can we learn from their narratives not only about who they are but also about how they act on the labour market? We integrate both quantitative and qualitative data, which come from the UK Data Service - Annual Population Survey (APS) and primary in-depth interviews from our research project CEEYouth.

We briefly revisit the many existing typologies of post-accession migrants, from Poland and other Central and East European countries. We then describe five types of young migrant identified in the course of cluster analysis focused on their position on the British labour market and their education. We will further explain distinctions between these categories using qualitative data from the interviews, taking into account match between education and occupation, aspirations and previous professional experience.

### Panel 3: Transnational family ties across the centuries

**Oliver Zajac** (Institute of History, Slovak Academy of Sciences)

#### **'Family happiness over the national cause: Appeals of Polish émigrés for allowing their return from the Great Emigration'**

Adam Węglinski, born in Boby near Lublin, was eighteen years old when the November uprising in 1830 has started. As a young romantic he voluntarily joined the insurrectional army and fought against the Russians. Consequently, he was among six to seven thousand Poles who were forced to leave the territory of the Polish kingdom after the failure of the uprising and spent live in an emigration. Until this point of his story, Węglinski could be a stellar example of Polish patriot who risked his life and accepted the harsh conditions of emigration because he believed in the legitimacy of a future independent Polish state. However, this heroic narrative - constantly present in the majority of interpretations of the Great Polish Emigration as a whole - would not be true in his case. Quite the contrary, Węglinski belonged to the group of émigrés which has been almost completely omitted in the historical research yet. He was a representative of those, who did not hesitate to contact the foreign government (in his case it was Austrian government) and pleaded for a passport, which would allow him to return home. What was his main motive? Family. In the proposed paper I will present results of my preliminary empirical research of this neglected phenomenon along with the methodological approaches which I have used and also my plans for the future of this research, which just only begins right now.

**Marta Kempny** (Queens University Belfast)

#### **'Coronavirus: (Im)mobilites, transnational practices and the impact on Polish migrants in Northern Ireland'**

The proposed paper will examine the impact of coronavirus on Polish migrant communities in NI. Focussing on the findings of in-depth interviews with Polish migrants, it will consider to what extent the recent pandemic has affected the ways in which migrants maintain their links with their home country. The paper will draw on existing academic debates on transnationalism, emotions and mobilities. It will explore the increased use of online communications via internet and mobile technologies with family members back home. Following this, the paper will point to new modes of travelling. It will highlight the agency of some migrants who want to maintain close links with home, also looking at what role the physical location of Belfast and proximity of Irish border played in this process. It will also focus on emotional aspects involved in kin-work across borders. The paper will also examine other narratives of migrants who do not feel affected by the coronavirus in ways that they maintain links with their home country and relatives back home, showing how personal life histories affect people's transnational practices.

## Panel 4: Ethnic and racial hierarchies in Poland and the UK

**Gabriella Elgenius** (University of Gothenburg) & **Steve Garner** (University of Cardiff)

### **'Gatekeeping the nation: national identity claims and logics of entitlement, majority vs minority'**

The literature on nationalism has been dominated by top-down understandings of national identity or discourses of nationalism that fail to distinguish identity claims made from different positions of advantage and disadvantage. Our aim is to move beyond this by asking: how are racialised hierarchies and discourses of nationalism mutually constituted and with what discursive implications for nominally white groups? In doing so, we join two corpuses of scholarship, namely on nationalism and racism and bring two sets of fieldwork with two critical groups together: critical in the sense of being racialized as white and by demonstrating oppositional claims to belonging, that is, the self-identified white English majority and the self-identified Polish community or minority. The terminology used is to denote the unequal access to resources used to claim belonging and the differential positioning from which such claims are articulated. We analyze the nature and content of claim-making by majorities and minorities with a focus on how the contingent hierarchy of whiteness is negotiated for English identity, and how Polish migrants negotiate themselves into this hierarchy? We offer an analysis of grassroot logics of entitlement, deservedness and resentment in relation to claims made about national identity and belonging. These claims are taken to demonstrate 'majority' and 'minority' claim-making and the discursive strategies used in relation to nations and states. We argue that such claims and strategies cannot be separated from whiteness, that is, the normative privileges associated with 'being racialized as white'.

**Anne White** (UCL SSEES)

### **'Migrant and ethnic hierarchies in Poland: the case of Płock'**

My research project examines how three medium-sized Polish cities are experiencing Poland's 'migration transition'. Poland has recently become a country with net immigration, although many Polish people continue to migrate abroad. In this paper I discuss how and why different groups of migrants and local people conceptualise themselves and others, and what their discourses reveal about the construction of ethnic hierarchies in Poland. The paper presents findings from my first case study, Płock, where I conducted 48 interviews in 2019. It compares three groups: Ukrainian labour migrants; other foreign residents, married to Poles; and Polish return migrants and their close family members.

## Panel 5: Conflicting memories of Inter-War Poland and the Holocaust

**Paweł Duber** (independent researcher)

### **“Two coffins”: Nationalism, authoritarianism and politics of memory in contemporary Poland’**

The democratic present-day Polish republic owes the lion's share of its political legacy to largely nationalistic and authoritarian inheritance of two main political camps of highly unstable Second Republic of Poland of the interwar period. This burdensome legacy, enhanced by some contemporary developments and the dominant position of intelligentsia with the culture-driven elitist vision of its own role in politics, exerts the powerful influence on Polish society on the level of collective memory in the 21st century. It results in a transformation of the present political life towards more illiberal *modus operandi*. Therefore, the collective memory in Poland consists of a real threat to the fragile democracy, unable to cope with the burden of the national past, resulting in the rise of far-right attitudes in the society, apparently with the consent or even encouragement of the highest state authorities.

**Issy Sawkins** (University of Exeter)

### **‘Polish responses to Russian Holocaust memory of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Sobibór’**

This paper will assess the responses by Polish officials to the recent development of a specifically *Russian* Holocaust memory, one which emphasises Soviet heroism, the fascist leaning of former republics, and contemporary Russia’s supposedly tolerant, multicultural society. It will examine the ways in which this Russian narrative is often in tension with Poland’s own understanding of the Holocaust, and how Polish officials have combatted the presence of Russian Holocaust memory on Polish territory.

The first case-study for analysis is the disagreement about the Russian national exhibition at Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. This paper will focus on the contention regarding “matter-of-fact issues between the Russian party and the Museum” that resulted in no complete exhibition being held at the site for almost ten years.\* It will assess the reasons for the museum’s disapproval of the proposed Russian national exhibition’s narrative, and why the Polish narrative of the Holocaust could not accommodate the rhetoric proposed in the exhibition.

The paper will also examine the tension surrounding the memorialisation of the extermination camp, Sobibór. It will compare Polish domestic narratives of the revolt at the camp with the Russian state-financed film *Sobibor* (2018), which some argue was instrumentalised to diminish the role played by Poles in the revolt. It will assess Polish official responses to the film, and the reasons for which they believed that the film was used to dispute the Polish understanding of events at the camp.

“Martyrdom of the USSR nations during the Great Patriotic War in the years 1941-1945”, *Auschwitz-Birkenau*, 3 April 2007 <<http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/martyrdom-of-the-ussr-nations-during-the-great-patriotic-war-in-the-years-1941-1945,463.html>> [accessed 23 October 2019].

## Panel 6: Polish theatre and literature

**Kasia Lech** (Canterbury Christ Church University)

### **'Verse in Contemporary Polish Theatre: Between Traditions and Experimentations'**

While the twentieth-century English language theatre announced verse a dead language (Donoghue 1959: 13-14), classical verse dramas played a critical part on Polish stages. One only needs to recall Kazimierz Dejmek's *Dziady*, Andrzej Wajda's *Antyгона*, or Jerzy Jarocki's *Życie Snem*. With the fall of communism and the end of censorship came the renewed interest and investment in new playwriting. This was initially mainly in prose. However, in recent years the new generation of Polish writers rediscover verse as a theatrical language through which to engage with contemporary audiences. This paper surveys how a new generation of Polish theatre practitioners uses verse and hybrid forms in a wide selection of dramatic texts and theatrical performances that test the boundaries of verse drama and its traditions in Polish theatre. This new works mix verse with crude language, prose, Hip Hop, and opera to create a platform for individual and generational stories as well as responses to local and global politics. The writers discussed include Dorota Masłowska, Antonina Grzegorzewska, Bożena Keff, Julia Holewińska, Michał Telega, Mariusz Zaniwski, and Andrzej Błazewicz.

**Katarzyna Zechenter** (UCL SSEES)

### **'From "Poland's Genius" to the World as "a living, single entity:" World, Literature and Writer's Duty in Lectures of Polish Laureates of the Nobel Prize in Literature (1905-2019)'**

This paper focuses on major changes in the understanding of the meaning of literature, Poland and the world in Nobel Prize lectures by Polish Nobel prize winners from 1905 to 2019. It examines the Nobel lectures written by Polish laureates (Sienkiewicz, Reymont, Milosz, Szymborska and Tokarczuk) as a unique collective text replete with analysis of their *oeuvre* within a specific cultural and historical context as well as a text that, owing to its occasion, places the authors at the nexus of collective history, individual memory and the identity of a writer, while, at the same time, being "a philosophising performance." The paper argues that for Polish writers, the literature still represents a moral obligation towards the collective. At the same time, I argue, that in the post-modern world, literature becomes a way of inter-human communication promoting world's unity while transcending national and ethnic boundaries while emphasising the capacity for building new relations within the world that now includes other, non-human species.