Summary

Remembrance as a Weapon for Political Manipulation

by David Gaunt and Tora Lane

Many contributions to this report on memory cultures in the Baltic and East European region reveal disturbing tendencies to control and politicize, at times even weaponizing how the past is to be remembered. Some articles show the great extent to which authoritarian and authoritarian-leaning governments actively intervene in how crucial parts of their country's history is to be written, taught, researched, remembered, commemorated or neglected and ignored. Other articles document the failure of governments to deal with restitution for past injustices, how they forbid access to important state archives, hinder the teaching of the history of contemporary events, withdraw funding for or close independent research institutions. While these manipulative tendencies are not new, the degree to which present-day East European politicians involve themselves in the memory of the past is a growing academic and civic concern as they contribute to undermining trust in scientific and humanities research and further polarizing society. In addition, the violent protests over election fraud in the Belarusian 2020 election show the collapse of dialogue between the government and civil society that, as Andrej Kotljarchuk reveals, through the use of seemingly innocent symbols such as flags, visualize deeply antipathetic politicized forms of remembrance of the history of that country's national symbols now playing out in the streets.

The Multi Catastrophic Past

The countries of Eastern Europe have experienced a series of horrific periods during the 20th century which most West European countries were spared. Harsh politicized debates rage in the East over which period or regime was more catastrophic, more unjust, more anti-national than the any others. In the Baltic states and Eastern borderlands of present-day Poland and western Ukraine there was the following succession occurred: first, a heavy-handed occupation 1939-41 by the Soviet Union with accompanying confiscation of property and wealth, arrests, destruction or deportation of elites. This was followed in 1941-45 by occupation by Nazi Germany accompanied by the near total extermination of the Jewish and Roma minorities, seducing the population to collude with the killings.

The third disaster was the destruction and population dislocation that was the consequence of the World War II battles between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany that were fought along the eastern front. Fourth, the long period of totalitarian communist rule under Soviet tutelage followed, with repression of human rights, persecution of dissidents and economic mismanagement. Finally, after the fall of the Soviet Empire in 1989-91 came a short period of tense scary excitement at the prospect of becoming like the "West" but quickly disintegrated into depressing social and economic shock-therapy with ensuing industrial collapse that some countries still suffer from, when coupled to bank failures, bankruptcies, inflation, devaluation, recession, ingrown patterns of corruption and misused tax revenue. In some countries, politicians rooted in the fallen communist regime were able to establish new parties and hold on to power, employing similar but milder methods of domination and cronyism while upholding the appearance of democracy. According to

Summary

Bulgarian political scientist Ivan Krastev, in the final analysis Eastern Europeans have become distrustful of democratic institutions and lost belief in both the market and the state, questioned the truthfulness of media and the legitimacy of authority.[1]

A cultural climate of confusion emerged in which there was reason to doubt state sponsored versions of history. But instead of putting a lid on the discourse on the past, it created a surfeit of rival historical memories competing for dominance in the public sphere. Solitary frozen or supressed memories, that were worshiped only as local truths or developed by political émigrés, directly challenged Soviet-era history teaching. A case in point is the Canadian-Ukrainian diaspora's commemoration in the 1980s of the 1932-33 famine, now known as *Holodomor* as well as its glorification of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists. Soviet historiography focuses solely on their collaboration with the Nazi occupation. The competition between memory warriors was never balanced and those who ruled could use the power and influence of government to let their version dominate in the form of various newly-created institutions for "national memory". At the same time the monopoly on recounting the past slipped out of the hands of professional historians and became a plaything of varieties of public discourse, media communications, entertainment, and politics, all of them clamouring for attention.

> A cultural climate of confusion emerged in which there was reason to doubt state sponsored versions of history.

This shift is well illustrated in the article on Poland included here by Joanna Beata Michlic. She identifies two post-Cold War phases in official treatment of the national past. The first phase that extended from 1989 to about 2010 she characterizes as "pluralistic" in which previously repressed "frozen memory" was invited into public discourse, sometimes for the very first time outside the circles of family and friends. This found the support of scholarly research into "the most purged, neglected and shameful memories of the national past, namely, the memories of the dark past concerning the attitudes [to] and treatment of Polish Jews and other ethnic and religious minorities such as the Lemkos by the majority." However, this pluralistic phase of retrieving repressed memory was followed by its complete opposite. Since 2010, and particularly since the right-wing PiS party took power in 2015 a rejection of pluralism has occurred. Michlic sees this as part of a "radical counter revolution" and official memory of the past is now driven by "narrow, ethno-nationalist visions of mono-cultural and mono-religious Poland and its values, symbols and traditions, manifested in a variety of forms ranging from the mild to extreme." The exclusion model of remembrance has not been able to wholly root out the pluralistic model of memorialization, resulting in overlapping "wars over history" including "bloody battlefields". For instance, there is on-going conflict between the PiS party and the European Solidarity Museum in Gdansk over how to represent the importance of the Round Table Agreement negotiations in 1989 between, among others, the leaders of labour union Solidarność with the communist government, that led to semi-free elections. The museum presents this as a heroic break-through even though the deal was not ideal, while PiS sees it as an abandonment of "Poland's conservative national values" and is particularly critical to the role of Lech Walęsa, the first freely-elected president 1990-1995. The government has been also critical of the representation of Polish-Jewish relations by the very successful POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw and refused, in the face of compact protests, to reinstate its founding director, Professor of History, Dariusz Stoła.

A very similar picture of the transition away from pluralistic to monolithic national conservative memory is drawn by János M. Rainer for Hungary. Here the watershed came in 2010 in the form of the electoral victory of the nationalist FIDESZ political party (the Hungarian Civic Alliance) led by Viktor Orbán. Although liberal from the start, this party changed radically to claim that all liberal or left-wing parties were inherently anti-national and served the interests of foreign powers. It began a coordinated campaign to rid Hungary of the "left-wing interpretation of history." In the Hungarian perspective, according to Rainer, the issue of how to remember the past was a matter of ideological importance only for "right-wing radical" politics, whereas the liberals and left-wing governments encouraged professional historical research and preserved academic freedom in the universities. But as trained historians de-ideologized, the public discourse on history re-ideologized. A series of inter-locking nationalistic

counter-institutions was established in 2013 to aggressively propagate the new brand of memory. They are: the Institute for Political Transformation Research and Archive, the Veritas Research Institute for History, the National Remembrance Committee, and the Institute for National Heritage. One prong in this attack was re-interpreting the consequences of the bloody 1956 uprising which FIDESZ preferred to see as a national insult created by communist politicians and shaped through Soviet foreign intervention, rather than the heroic revolt previously commemorated by the Hungarian left. As is well-known after years of harassment, beginning in 2017, the Central European University was forced to leave Hungary in 2019 and its founder, the philanthropist George Soros has been demonized in countless antisemitic political rants.

A different trajectory emerges in Yuliya Yurchuk's article on Ukraine but is has the same ending with governmental management and control over the remembrance of contemporary history. Ukrainian memory unfolds as a reaction to Soviet historiography and Russian aggression. In newly independent Ukraine and Lithuania, forms of remembrance that countered the Soviet narrative had been formed by a diaspora of politically-active refugees and a collective of non-government organizations, intellectuals, groups of former political prisoners, local activists and amateur historians. They emphasized the centrality of the *Holodomor* famine and accused the Soviet leadership of intentional genocide, and they glorified World War II armed resistance of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army.

At the time that it made its political breakthrough, the new Ukrainian narrative of anti-Soviet victimhood and resistance had very little support in historical research, but nevertheless all presidents since independence have promoted the memory of the *Holodomor* famine as a politically orchestrated disaster targeting particularly Ukraine.

The anti-Soviet and anti-Russian memory trend spiralled after 2014 after Russia occupied Crimea and launched a hybrid war in the Donbas region. From that moment on having the correct interpretation of history became a matter of national security. A package of "De-communization laws" passed the legislature. Among the laws was a prohibition on criticizing those warriors who fought for the "independence of Ukraine in the 20th century", which was particularly relevant for the nationalistic resistance groups. Professional historians of the Ukraine Institute of History supported the war effort by, among other things, forming the Likbez Historical Front. In 2016-18 this group published a series of volumes named "History Without Censorship". Yurchuk concludes "history becomes a weapon in the on-going war in Ukraine."

In contrast, the shift in the thrust of memory in Belarus took place after 1994 with the first election of Aliaksandr Lukashenka as president. Immediately after Belarus became independent in 1991 there was an important revival of the memory of its medieval greatness in the form of the sprawling Grand Duchy of Lithuania with its continual wars against Muscovy and its role in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which was famous for its religious tolerance and multi-ethnic social structure. However, with Lukashenka in power came a re-orientation towards rapprochement with Russia. This involved creating a positive image of the Soviet past which emphasized the centrality of the "Great Patriotic War" and portrayed all forms of nationalist freedom fighters as Nazi collaborators. The pro-Soviet trend, however, has been toned down even before Russia invaded and annexed Crimea. The government of Belarus has been stable until 2020 as an authoritarian police-state and, according to Aliaksei Lastouski, it practices an "exaggerated level of state control over the politics of memory". Also, in 2014 Russia enacted a Law to prevent the "rehabilitation of Nazism" (called the Yarovaya Act after its promoter) but which in reality criminalized any criticism of Soviet military activities during World War II.

Other recent cases of the direct intervention of East European politicians and governments in historical research or in public memorialization are recorded in the Network of Concerned Historians Annual Report of 2020. These include the efforts of Albanian parliamentarians to prevent the Institute for the Crimes of Communism, created in 2010, from investigating possible war crimes committed by communist guerrilla fighters during World War II.

A slightly similar situation evolved in Kosovo resulting in the Prime Minister dismissing his adviser historian Shkelzen Gashi who had maintained that some soldiers in the Kosovo Liberation Army had committed war crimes in the 1998-99 war. Parliamentarians introduced a law for the "Protection of the Kosovo Liberation Army War Values" that would prohibit any future criticism. In Belarus, before the present conflict between the people and the government, there were clashes over commemorating the *Dzien Voli* (Freedom Day) in March which is seen by the

opposition as the foundation of the first independent Belarusian State in 1918. Efforts to commemorate on March 25, 2018 were broken up by heavy-handed police.

Cultures of Victimization

Increasingly, appeals are made to governments and parliaments to recognize the historical traumas of groups, usually repressed or subjected minorities. The most well-known campaigns to gain official recognition of historical injustices concern genocide, slavery, colonization, and racial discrimination. Urgent and well-documented claims for recognition of the genocide of millions of Christians in the Ottoman Empire during World War I have been made by the Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks. The Republic of Turkey, that Empire's successor state, has denied this and countered by claiming that far greater numbers of Turks were killed during the same war. Activists pressure parliaments in other countries to defy Turkey and make statements recognizing the events specifically as "genocide". They put effort into mobilizing like-minded supporters and become dependent on the support of third parties, who are often not very informed about the events in question. Such political recognitions of Ottoman genocide have been made in a handful of countries, among them Sweden, and on the lower level in a range of federal and municipal agencies, always under the threat of Turkish retaliation. As Talin Suciyan's contribution shows, making compromises by using alternative formulations that avoid the term "genocide" prove unacceptable to the families of the victims and their organizations. Something similar can be seen in the case of Roma and Sinti (formerly called Gypsies) who demand that as victims of Nazi Germany repression and partial extermination, they be included under the term "Holocaust". This caused immediate and hitherto unresolved conflict with Jewish representatives who see the annihilation of Europe's Jews as completely unique, arguing that to include the Roma would dilute the power of the term.

> Increasingly, appeals are made to governments and parliaments to recognize the historical traumas.

Calls for third-party political instances to recognize the past victimization of a group is a relatively new phenomenon. Sociologists Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning speak of a "culture of victimization" that they found in university environments, but which has bearing on other forms of discourse on past traumas. They see transitions of moral responses from that of an "honour" culture in which a person who is wronged by another is expected to retaliate directly as in a feud, shoot-out or verbal challenge, into a culture of "dignity" in which wronged persons takes the position of ignoring the hurt, standing morally higher than the perpetrator. This transition finally results in a culture of "victimhood" in which victims do not or cannot retaliate or ignore but instead appeal to higher authority for redress.[2] It is possible to see this shift in the representation of the Holocaust in Israel. As Per Anders Rudling observes victimhood played little role in early memory, instead the heroic Jewish resistance of the Warsaw ghetto was central. Later and after the trial of Eichmann representation re-focused on victimhood in the extermination camps. One aspect of the argument within this final stage is emphasizing a position of innocence vis-vis the thoroughly evil perpetrators, which involves raising the status of victim into a moral virtue. Victimhood understood as virtue makes genocide into the worst imaginable of crimes, thus raising the stakes of the campaigns for political recognition as well as the vehemence of the denial. And the question is to what extent the powerful narrative of victimization has come to frame the relation to memory amongst certain groups. Florence Fröhlig in her essay explores how "forced memoralization", which does not recognize past suffering, can cause trauma, also for generations after, and yet how this shared victimhood serves as the denominator of their identity. Yet, when groups reclaim the right to speak out their memory, one can note a troubling tendency to make memory into a narrative for a group identity, characterized by "a competition for victimhood" that leads to "new abuses of memory".

In what would seem to be an application of Campbell and Manning's theory, Ukraine historical memory uses a mixture of the religion-inspired language of victimhood and the politics-inspired language of dignity. About one hundred persons died in the protests against the decision of Viktor Yanukovych to abandon an agreement with the European Union. The protests in Kyiv now go under the alternate terms Euromaidan, after the Maidan Nezalezhnosti square where much of the action too place, or more symbolically as the "Revolution of Dignity". Those who were killed are commemorated as martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the nation and memorial monuments ded-

icated to them bear the phrase: "Heroes of the Heavenly Hundred".

As Muriel Blaive underlines in "Codeword 'Criminal': Moral Remembrance in National Memory Politics", the discourse of victimization can also become a masked form of politicization with the purpose of "appropriating victimhood for political capital and discrediting the left." Institutions financed on the national level of the Czech state and the supra-national level of the European Union investigating into communist crimes have lobbied to promote a historical narrative of "moral remembrance". Many countries build up a national identity out of a geopolitical destiny to sacrifice themselves for the sake of European Civilization and Christianity. Poland and Serbia take pride in medieval monumental battles to stave off the advance of the Ottoman Empire further into Europe. Romanians also remember their country's centuries-long defence against Tatar invaders coming from the East.

Extreme Nationalism

In comparing the South Caucasusian countries Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, Thomas de Waal, finds that they are similar in developing extreme forms of ethnic nationalism. The Soviet system had encouraged intellectual nationalism since the 1960s as a way for regimes to counter the growing popular antipathy to the reality of communism as an ideology in practice. However, in the violent period just before and after the fall of the Soviet Union extreme and toxic nationalisms developed in all three countries. The explanation is that as communism with its discourse of cosmopolitanism collapsed a serious vacuum emerged and the sole available idea-based alternative able to fill the void was strong mythologized nationalism.

Each of the South Caucasian countries experienced traumatic events with scores of civilian victims as the Soviet Union fell apart. War broke out between Armenian and Azerbaijan with Azeri soldiers killing Armenians fleeing from the town of Sumgait in February 1988 and Armenians killed Azeris escaping from the town of Khojali in February 1992. The Georgians had their own catastrophe when Soviet police killed protesters in Tbilisi in April 1989. In de Waal's view it was natural to commemorate these events, however the way they were remembered perpetuated hatred between the countries, finally leading to renewed warfare between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2020. Official memorialization of these mass killings of persons who are often deemed sacred martyrs "re-enacts the trauma or perpetuates conflict rather than seeks to overcome it." This situation resembles that described by sociologists in the theory of cultural trauma – in which persons not directly involved in traumatic events are enculturated by their leaders into integrating the original trauma in their own identity. For this to happen a single unified narrative of catastrophe must be crystalized, and then taught in multiple ways to those inside the group and over generations.[3] The production of cultural trauma has been particularly noticeable in the cases of Armenian and Assyrian remembrance of the genocide to which their ancestors were victims during World War I in the Ottoman Empire. Attacks on the Armenian enclave of Nagorno Karabakh in 2020 sparked quick reactions equating Azerbaijan's Turkish-supported invasion as continuation of the Ottoman genocide with the intention of annihilating the Armenians as a nation.

Many East European states excel in dramatically re-enacting their bloody victimization and the heroic sacrifices of their inhabitants, but some countries do completely the opposite and neglect mention of the injustices of the past. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, until 2019, school children did not learn about the history of the Yugoslav wars. In Bulgaria the history of the communist regimes is not part of the curriculum, reports Evelina Kelbecheva. Lukashenka's government in Belarus prohibits the commemoration of the founding of the first Belarusian state in 1918. In Romania transitional justice has stalled, describes Lavinia Stan. In Lithuania, writes Violeta Davoliūtė, transitional justice had a focus on the crimes of the Soviet-regime and little attention was given to the murder of over ninety percent of Lithuania's Jewish population during the Holocaust. And in many countries the dossiers in the archives of the secret police are still kept from public investigation.

History is not the only component of national security, but the treatment of the past can involve feelings of insecurity in relation to others. In one of the first essays in this report, Barbara Törnquist-Plewa considers the question whether it is possible to uncover a regional politics of memory in the Central and Eastern European region. The content of this report answers this question by showing that there are many common features in the way the governments in this region control and manage the way the past can be remembered, with various forms of censorship, prohibitions, legal hinders, disrespect for scientific history, and confrontations with the past as remembered by neighboring countries. This pattern has

been with us for a long time, however there was a watershed after 2010. Extreme nationalist politics kidnapped remembrance to support the position of governments. It is possible to link this widespread phenomenon to the well-known fragility of nationalism in the Eastern European realm. In many countries, nationalism is a vague sentiment among the people that they, or most of them, belong to a collective and belong to a definite territory. They can take the name of the geographical area where they live or the language variant most of them speak. At the end of the 19th century Belarusians answered the question of their nationality with we are the "people from here". However, a national identity has several components. One is the collective group-feeling of mutual togetherness, but the other is the legitimation coming from neighboring "others" through recognizing their long-standing right to a certain territory. In several cases, described in this report, such external respect for nationalism of the neighbor is missing, leading to war and annexation, and in peaceful times to mutual suspicion and anxiety over possible future aggression.

The Desire and Consummation of Images of the Past

If there was a belief in the redemptive power of memory and the emancipatory role that cultural heritage could have, today, all over Europe, and in many other parts of the world, the fields of cultural memory and cultural heritage have taken a politicized, if not nationalist turn. The past has generally become a resource to be used for a renewal of national and other political myths, and it is explored as such by different actors, and not in the least by right-wing politicians all over Europe. And although the course in Eastern Europe, as this region report shows, is distinct, because the politicization of the past is so multi-layered and ripe with contested memory narratives, there, as elsewhere the past seems to be torn between a simple demonization and a nostalgic glorification of it in the general movement of what Zygmunt Bauman[4] calls *retrotopia*, to define the presence of a neoliberal utopian desire and consummation of images of the past. In her article on "communist visuality without communism", Irina Sandomirskaja shows how the past of communism has entered an ahistorical phantasm and "reactionary flight from history" in accordance with the neoliberal logic of retrotopia. And she goes on to ask if we not also in Communism as a cultural asset can find resources in the history of communist visuality to oppose the use of the past for consumerist pleasures or political purposes. An instance is the Russian-Ukrainian film director Sergei Loznitsa's use of left-over footage to create new films that help us "un-forget the inconvenient heritage of communist visuality", as Sandomirskaja writes. Thus, the article suggests that we cannot establish a new truth about the past, but that we need to retrieve the suppressed truth from its own erased pages, wounds and contestations, inquiring into this history as it were from its own blanks.

As this state of the region report has shown beyond doubts, the past of political history has become the object of political struggles over the past. In a strange reversal, it would seem that the significance attested by the communist regimes to the narratives of the past have resurged in the new contemporary nationalist narratives for the Baltic and East European countries. The history of national struggle has become a means of explaining the necessity of the demise of communism. But it's not only in countries where there are memories or histories of national resistance towards Soviet interventions that history is used as a means of explaining a triumphant or victimized historical narrative; but we can also see in Russian memory politics see how the communist past is used in a national discourse. This indicates the fact that history as well as politics have become confused in the appropriations of the past in ways that point to the confusion of political discourses and strategies both then and now. And one distinguishing feature among political parties in some countries in the former Soviet bloc is the relation to the past. Of course, one way out is to retrieve historical truth in its truth as political history, but we also need to scrutinize our need for retrotopia and contrast it with the need and lack of real visions of change that do not feed into empty discourses of empowerment, but can indeed "quicken our activity", as Nietzsche with Goethe demanded of all instructions, past, present and future.[5] ●

References

1 Ivan Krastev, *Democracy Disrupted: The Politics of Global Protest* (Princeton University Press 2014); Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes, *The Light That Failed: A Reckoning* (London: Penguin, 2019).

2 Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning, *The Rise of Victimhood Culture: Microaggressions, Safe Spaces and the New Culture Wars* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

3 Jeffrey C. Alexander, ed., *Cultural Trauma and Cultural Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

4 Zygmunt Bauman, *Retrotopia* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

5 The quote is from the opening of the English translation of Nietzsche's *On the Use and Abuse of History*, transl. by Adrian Collins (Edinburgh and London: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1957).

List of Authors

Muriel Blaive is Advisor to the Director, in Charge of Research and Methodology, Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (ÚSTR), Prague. She holds a PhD in History and Civilizations from the *Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales* (EHESS). She is a socio-political historian of postwar, communist, and post-communist Central Europe, in particular of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic.

Violeta Davoliūtė is Professor at Vilnius University Institute of International Relations and Political Science, and Senior Researcher at the Lithuanian Cultural Research Institute. She has been Visiting Professor at the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* and an Associate Research Scholar at Yale. She has also been a Senior Researcher at the Lithuanian Institute of Literature and Ethnography, where she worked on mass population displacements and deportations from Lithuania to the Soviet gulag.

David Gaunt is a Professor Emeritus of History at Södertörn University and the first Director of the Baltic and East European Graduate School, BEEGS. For many years has conducted research into what actually happened to the Christian population from 1915 to 1916 in southeastern Turkey, during what is called the Armenian, Assyrian/Syrian, and Pontic-Greek genocides. Inducted in 2011 into the Assembly Academia Europaea, Section of History and Archaeology.

Florence Fröhlig is Senior Lecturer in Ethnology at the School of Contemporary and Historical Studies and currently Director of Studies of the Baltic and East European Graduate School (BEEGS). Her dissertation in 2013 focused on the memory and mourning processes, counter-memories, working-through processes, resilience and the transmission of memories. Currently she is engaged in the research project Atomic Heritage Goes Critical.

Evelina Kelbecheva is a Professor at the Department of History and Civilizations at the American University in Bulgaria. Her major interest are in the field of myths and falsifications in history, Bulgarian cultural identity, ethnic identity and political action in post-cold war Europe. In 2013 she initiated a petition for the study of totalitarian regimes in secondary school, which received a lot of intention outside Bulgaria too.

Andrej Kotljarchuk is Senior researcher, Associate Professor, and Director of operations at the Institute of Contemporary History, Södertörn University. He is a leader of the ongoing research project "Memory Politics in Far-Right Europe: Celebrating Nazi Collaborationists in Post-1989 Belarus, Romania, Flanders and Denmark", supported by The Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies.

Tora Lane is currently working as a Research Leader at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies, CBEES, at Södertörn University and also a Project Researcher in the project Traces of Oblivion. Identity, Memory and Heritage in the Wake of a Nationalistic Turn, to which she contributes by studying traces of oblivion in post-soviet memory literature. In her research she has investigated aesthetic, philosophical and political issues of community, utopia and totality raised by Russian Modernism and the Russian Revolution.

Aliaksei Lastouski is Senior Lecturer of Sociology at Polotsk State University (Belarus) and Senior Research fellow at "Political Sphere" Institute (Vilnius – Minsk). He works on topics of national identity and historical memory in Belarus and Central-Eastern Europe.

Joanna Beata Michlic, is an Honorary Senior Research Associate at the Centre for Collective Violence, Holocaust and Genocide Studies at University College London (UCL). She is also a Senior Research Fellow at Weiss-Livnat International Centre for Holocaust Research and Education, University of Haifa. Her research focuses on social and cultural history of Poland and East European Jews, the Holocaust and its memory in Europe, and nationalism in Eastern Europe. She is particularly interested in areas relating to ethnic violence, gender, childhood, and individual and collective memories of traumatic and dark pasts, such as in the case of the Holocaust.

Janos Rainer, Professor of Contemporary History at Eszterházy Károly University (Eger, Hungary), formerly head of the 1956 Institute – Oral History Archive between 1999-2019. Before 1989 he published in samizdat on the reprisals after 1956. His field of expertise is Hungarian history after WWII, focusing on the 1956 revolution and the Kádár-period. His two-volume biography on Imre Nagy (1996-1999) was published in enshortened version in Polish (2003), Russian (2006), German (2006) and English (2009).

Per Anders Rudling is a Research Leader at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies, CBEES, at Södertörn University and an Associate Professor at the Department of History, Lund University. His research interests include nationalism, historical culture, and the instrumental use of history in the former Kresy Wschodnie. A primary focal point are memories of 20th century political violence and ideological history writing in the post-Soviet successor states and their overseas diasporas. Current research project on Ukrainian long-distance nationalism during the Cold War.

Irina Sandomirskaja is a Professor of Cultural Studies at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies, CBEES at Södertörn University. Holds a doctoral degree in theoretical linguistics. Her research interests are critical theory, memory and history, Russian 20th century cultural history, language literature, and film theory.

Lavinia Stan, holds a Jules Leger Research Chair and is a Professor at the Department of Political Science, St. Francis Xavier University. She is a Comparative Politics specialist, working on democracy and democratization – especially religion and politics, as well as transitional justice – in post-communist Europe. In her research on transitional justice, she is trying to explain why some new democracies are willing to deal with their recent past of human rights abuses, while others shy away from it.

Talin Suciyan is Associate Professor (Privatdozentin) of Turkish Studies at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. She is the author of the book *The Armenians in Modern Turkey: Post-Genocide Society, History and Politics* (I. B. Tauris, 2016). The book is the co-winner of Der Mugrdechian Outstanding Book Award of Society for Armenian Studies 2017. Its Turkish translation was published by Aras Publishing House (2018). The upcoming German translation of the book will be released by De Gruyter Verlag. In her habilitation thesis, her second book project, titled "Either save us from this misery or order our death"(Ya derdimize derman ya katlimize ferman): Tanzimat of the Provinces Suciyan examines extensively Archives of Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople in the mid 19th century.

Barbara Törnquist-Plewa is a Professor of Eastern and Central European Studies and head of the Centre for European Studies at Lund University in Sweden. Her main research interests are cultural memory, heritage, identity and nationalism in Eastern and Central Europe, but she has also published on Polish-Swedish cultural relations. She has participated in many international research projects and, most recently, she was the leader of the European research network "In Search for Transcultural Memory in Europe" (financed by the EU's COST-programme 2012-2016). Her international experience also includes visiting fellowships at universities in Berkeley (2003) and Stanford (2013). She is the editor and author of a number of books and articles in English, Swedish and Polish as well the editor-in-chief of *Slavica Lundensia* and board-member for *Baltic Worlds*.

Thomas de Waal is a journalist and a Senior Fellow with Carnegie Europe, specializing in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus region. He is the author of numerous publications about the region. The second edition of his book The Caucasus: An Introduction (Oxford University Press) was published in 2018. He is also the author of Great Catastrophe: Armenians and Turks in the Shadow of Genocide (Oxford University Press, 2015) and of the authoritative book on the Nagorny Karabakh conflict, Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War (NYU Press, second edition 2013).

Jenny Wüstenberg, Associate Professor of 20th century History at Nottingham Trent University. Her research interests include comparative politics and history; memory politics in Europe; civic activism, social movements, and democratization. Her research interests include memory activism, relational approaches to memory studies, and the remembrance of child separation policies from a comparative perspective. Her book Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany (Cambridge UP 2017) appeared in German translation in 2020. She is one of the founding Co-Presidents of the Memory Studies Association.

Yuliya Yurchuk is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Contemporary and Historical Studies at Södertörn University. Her main field of interest includes memory politics in East European countries, history of the WWII, history of churches and religion, nationalism, state- and nation-building, gender studies and women's history, postcolonial studies.