

Call for Papers

(Re)Considering Violence: New Configurations of History, Memory, and the Present in Belarusian and Neighbouring Societies

Conference in Berlin, November 9-11, 2023

The mass protests against the Belarusian authoritarian regime and the subsequent and ongoing wave of repression, as well as the Russian assault on Ukraine have triggered a re-evaluation of history and a reconceptualization of historical memory in the region.

The reconfiguration of the relationship between state and society, including the widespread use of physical violence and warfare against civilians, and the radicalization of historical revisionism call for our attention, reflection, and open and candid conversation.

Our conference provides an opportunity to discuss the historical roots of repressive regimes and the use of violence by states, communities, or individuals in the region as a whole. The goal is to offer a space for exploring new analytical approaches and for developing productive forms of exchange and collaboration between scholars and activists from various countries and societies.

Russia's war against Ukraine, legitimized with a distorted historical account that follows a Soviet framework and is accompanied by aggressive political mobilization within Russia, is disturbing due to Russia's massive destruction of public infrastructure and a cynical attitude towards the civilian population. The number of displaced persons and refugees is larger than that resulting from any war or crisis in Europe since the end of World War II, including the number of refugees who entered the European Union during the several crises of the 2010s.

The 2020 mass protests in Belarus and the authoritarian violence in the aftermath have driven a significant part of Belarus' civil society into emigration and exile. The Belarusian diaspora community in Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Georgia, and other countries is actively striving to continue at least some of the work of the many displaced grassroots and non-profit initiatives. Within the country, political, legal, and police forces try to destroy the infrastructure of civil engagement and align Belarus' domestic and foreign policy with Russia. The development of a more diversified historical memory has come to a halt. The authoritarian Belarusian regime has become an active participant of Russia's military aggression toward Ukraine.

The image of the past is being transformed not only in Belarus, Ukraine and Russia, but also in other countries of the region that are affected by the current events. As a result of violence and war, we observe a drastic change of the political status quo and the rupture of many previously existing connections and networks within the region. (New) Lines of separation

emerge and create new problems that require us to evaluate not only the possibility of a non-authoritarian future for several countries, but new ways to interpret the past and the present as well.

During the conference, we plan to discuss the following questions:

Is there a continuum of violence?

In our attempts to explain and understand the present, we often draw parallels to events in the past. But: Does our understanding of the Soviet past and the use of state and political violence in the 20th century provide a useful foundation for analysing the current authoritarian regimes of the region including Belarus? Do the frameworks of “imperial history” and “postcolonialism” offer useful tools to explain new and recent forms of militarization, military expansion, and warfare?

Does the contemporary moment facilitate new reflections on the 20th century as a period of extreme violence?

From a political perspective, the analysis of genocides and their significance has acquired new urgency, notably due to Russia’s war on Ukraine that includes genocidal violence. At the same time, authoritarian and right-wing governments in several countries of the region instrumentalize and abuse the concept of genocide and the legacies of World War II to pursue claims against one another and to challenge the post-World War II geopolitical order. To what extent do the legacies of Stalinism and Nazism impact the perception of current events? How do representations of the past and present change in light of the current trends and developments?

What are the challenges of memory work in the region?

Alongside the need to secure and safeguard archives in Belarus and Ukraine, scholars are facing new obstacles in conducting research including oral history interviews under extreme conditions. How can we document present traumatic events and experiences, considering especially the role of digital technologies? At the same time, we can observe a clear crisis of critical studies of historical memory in the countries governed by familiar and newly emerging authoritarian regimes. Can the models of commemoration and documenting historical trauma that were institutionalized between the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s serve to describe and analyse current experiences?

Which new everyday cultural, political, or other practices that result from the experience of violence and war can we observe in the region?

How can scholars document the changes of the everyday life of individuals and groups that experience authoritarian and wartime violence and that are in a constant crisis? How can we archive the experience of refugees and displaced persons? Which forms of adaption can we

observe in different societies? What are the effects of forced emigration and exile of large numbers of historians and their struggle to integrate in new academic landscapes and scholarly networks?

The conference will offer a platform to discuss these and other questions, with the overarching goal to reflect on the role of the current situation for the necessity and creation of new historical narratives in the region.

We welcome contributions by scholars from all disciplines, and we encourage submissions focusing on additional questions and problems related to the overall theme of the conference but which are not listed above.

The conference will be conducted in Belarusian and English.

Accommodation and meals during the conference will be provided. Travel expenses can be reimbursed after consultation with the organizers.

Please send a title and short abstract of your paper (max. 200 words), information about your institutional affiliation and status, and a short note on the language you will be presenting in to: belarus.forum@dgo-online.org

Deadline for submissions is May 31, 2023. Acceptance notices and invitations will be circulated in July 2023.

Conference Organizing Committee: Felix Ackermann, Alesja Belanovich-Petz, Aliaksei Bratachkin, Iryna Kashtalian, Iryna Ramanava und Anika Walke

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In cooperation with:

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The Forum for Historical Belarus Research is a project of the German Association for East European Studies (DGO) and a platform for the presentation of current questions and research desiderata on Belarusian history in its transnational relations.

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