

Call for Papers



**CENTER FOR POSTCOLONIAL
AND POST-TOTALITARIAN STUDIES**

and

**INSTITUTE OF SLAVIC STUDIES, INSTITUTE OF GERMAN
PHILOLOGY, DEPARTMENT OF JEWISH STUDIES
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WROCŁAW**

invites to an
international academic conference

Escape from freedom?

Post-totalitarian Europe 75 years after the end of World War II

Literature – Culture – Society - History”

The conference will take place on

17-18 SEPTEMBER 2020

at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Wrocław

Strategic partners:

Historical Institute and Institute of International Studies of the
University of Wrocław, Wrocław City Office

It is difficult not to agree with the view that “we live in times in which two kinds of dangers are present: the fear of freedom and an absolutisation of freedom. On the one hand, we fear freedom as it demands courage, facing the truth, independent thought, creative effort and responsibility. On the other hand, it is in fact an absolutisation of freedom. Freedom is not the aim in itself. It is not an absolute, a freedom to do whatever, to sever ties, as in the democracy described by Plato. In a «democratic country the notion of freedom reverberates everywhere. Fathers fear sons, while the sons want freedom and don’t fear the parents. Teachers fear students and try to please them, and young people mirror the older and take no notice of the teachers». Plato adds: «in general wherever you go you see a lot of freedom of this kind» [*Republic VIII*, Warszawa 1990]. In order to have freedom you need to be mature. Democracy in thoughtless, indiscriminate societies devoid of civic virtue can turn into its own antithesis. It is important to be free. But it is the content of the freedom that is crucial” (Tadeusz Gadacz).

The year 2020 marks the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II and is a good opportunity to reflect upon the issue of freedom in post-totalitarian countries of the European continent; we’d like to track the evolutionary paths and try to answer key identity-creative questions for our geo-region, which include the notion and specificity of the processes, phenomena and mechanisms of emancipation of European culture(s) and societies from the legacy of World War II and especially its post-Jalta consequences which left the countries and nations of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe under the Soviet control. This is why the conference organisers would like to focus on the past 30 years of systemic transformation which has reoriented the countries of the former eastern bloc towards immanently democratic values in terms of politics, economy, culture and not the least identity. Due to the transformation process that have been taking place, the inhabitants of the post-communist part of Europe have redefined their attitude towards culture, both their own and their neighbours. However, the scale and intensity of the redefinition has been different in each country of the former USSR. Importantly, redefinitions have been applied to contemporary culture but also to the legacy of the past including the tragic history of World War II. As part of the latter process, not only the praiseworthy elements have been explored but also those which the communist regimes sealed in confidential archives and the official non-memory of them wrecked the society of these nations leading to the destruction of its contemporary life – individually and as a collective. Pro-democratic breakthroughs in 1989-1991 indubitably opened up the path towards leaving communism but not the memory of it, with its totalitarian

experience whose legacy lurks in the (individual and collective) biographies of the generations in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

In the light of the above, the question is whether the freedom regained in 1989 (marked by such events as the Solidarność movement in Poland, the fall of the Berlin wall, colour revolutions in USSR satellite countries or even the fall of USSR itself and the war in former Yugoslavia) have contributed to a deepening of the awareness of post-communist Europe on the issues of the complex truth about their identity and a necessity to cautiously formulate definitive solutions in terms of values constituting the truth. In this vein of thought, another key question is whether and how the mechanisms and processes of the “great change” influenced the understanding of the mere category of freedom by the inhabitants of post-communist regions. It would also be interesting to analyse how the transformation period of former real socialism countries shaped the awareness of western societies and their reaction to the cultural changes.

The search for the answers to these issues should include global tendencies and phenomena which entered the societies and cultures of the former Eastern bloc as the iron curtain fell. Also the hitherto unseen acceleration of global changes at the turn of the 21st century had a significant impact on the issue at hand; the changes marked by three civilisational revolutions: political, economic and communicative, and the aftermath of these revolutions in a form of a series of events that have led to a situation in which the issue of freedom has again become a central and global topic - similarly as 75 years ago when the world began a new era of modern history after World War II, in which hopes and ideas of “freedom” were born. The 21st century events include the terrorist attack of 9.11.2001 on World Trade Center, the expansion of the European Union by including countries of the former communist block, the economic crisis of 2007, war in the Middle East and refugees in Europe, an increase of cultural polarisation, military conflicts on the borders of the western world, the fall of the liberal democracy hegemony or the climate crisis. The destructive nature of these events unleashed worldwide frustration and fears about the future whose vision, perceived more and more apocalyptically, has been the basis of authoritarian, populist and nationalist tendencies which are still on the rise. Is it a sign of the fact that instead of an individual evolution towards being free, the post-totalitarian human chooses an escape from freedom in the Frommian sense?

An unmistakable turning point in thinking about freedom and the symbiotically connected safety and threats, prosperity and poverty, was the attack on WTC which dramatically changed the understanding of the notions of friend - enemy. Global military

conflicts have gained daily coverage in the news ever since. Also literature which (similarly to other texts on culture) has developed a new kind of poetics that is adapted to the new character of war, asymmetric forms of military conflicts, post-heroic societies of post-totalitarian Europe and emigration waves. An important element of the topic of the conference is the novel attitude towards the engagement in political affairs of writers and other artists of the 21st century culture in global problems and the intellectual post- and decolonial debate, in defining the line between “the other” and “our”, victim and aggressor. In this context, it is important to pose a question about the future and the present identity debate that is held inside the post-communist countries and their societies. How much do the dominant historiographic and identity discourses, political projects and forms of collective memory (or those fighting for dominance) reproduce the discourse forms that were also present before 1989 or 1991 independently of the anticommunist declarations and how much do they actually break with these forms? To what extent are they continued, to what extent do they dominate, to what extent is the change or deconstruction applied to great national quantifiers in the debates on history and contemporaneity, to what extent is history still treated as a tool for national (or national-ethnic) defence of identity? Are historical discourses and the collective memory still ethnocentric, colonising, defined by internal and external collective enemies and “others”, and how much have they evolved towards greater pluralism and inclusion?

One of the main aims of the conference is the attempt to show how literature and cultures, which serve i.a. self-observation of societies, influence the impact social areas and the reality of the experienced irritation. We assume that Niklas Luhmann was right when he claimed that social systems are constantly renewed, they evolve also in the context of confrontation with cultural irritation and disturbances. It is the use of the category of “disturbance” (precursors: Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, 1949; Erhard Schüttpelz, 2002; then: Lars Koch, Christer Petersen, Joseph Vogl, 2011; Carsten Gansel, Paweł Zimniak 2012) for intellectual studies of discourse in literary studies, cultures studies, media studies and film studies that can turn out to be particularly productive when applied to the category of freedom. Thus, it is worth investigating whether texts of culture can be ascribed both an aesthetic value and a political and social value due to which they become spokesmen for people’s affairs, issues of humanism, owing to which the voice of engaged artists and intellectuals can have a considerable impact on the development of societies. It is known that crucial breakthroughs such as wars, exiles, displacements, poverty and violence or other crises in which the issue of freedom becomes a priority conveyed through intellectual, social and political debates provoke collective normalising processes and introduce strategies that

allow to adapt to current conditions (Jürgen Link). Hence, the conference organisers would like to assume a comprehensive attitude towards the topics so they recommend that the texts for analyses be approached on two levels, that is a level of the aesthetic and symbolic value - characters, topics, motifs - and the level of influence in societies that is based on the debates that the text generate, the opinions of the authors themselves and their political stand. By applying this strategy it will be easier to decide on the kind of traces that are left in texts from the past 75 years (especially focusing on the 30 year transformation period), what is the poetics, narrations and discourses in this period and what means do the writers use to express their political and social engagement revolving around the notion of freedom.

The conference organisers are aware of the fact that the description of these issues is incomplete. However, it is not meant as a comprehensive analysis of such a multifaceted phenomenon as the notion of freedom in post-totalitarian countries of post-war Europe definitely is. We do hope that the areas of research mentioned in this description may become a source of inspiration for a fruitful debate and exchange of viewpoints in the areas of literary studies, culture studies, media studies, film studies, history, philosophy, sociology and anthropology of culture or social psychology.

We are also planning to host a discussion panel entitled „*Action is a responsibility to one's own freedom*”.

Languages of conference: Polish, English, and German.

Conference fee: PLN 400/EUR 75 (does not include hotel accommodation; information on available accommodation and on the number of bank account for payment of conference fee will be sent along with the information on accepted entry).

Entries: please send topics and abstracts (200-300 words) of previously unpublished papers, with keywords and a biographical note (maximum 80 words) until **25 April 2020**.

Information on accepted papers will be announced on **5 May 2020**.

Please send entries to the following email address: freedom.uwr2020@gmail.com

Following the conference, we plan the publication of the presented essays in a well-rated publishing house from the list of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

Scientific heads of conference:

prof. UWr dr hab. Agnieszka Matusiak and prof. UWr dr hab. Monika Wolting

Members of the conference organising committee:

dr hab. Joanna Lisek, , prof. UW r dr hab. Joanna Wojdon, prof. UW r dr hab. Grzegorz Hryciuk,
prof. UW r dr hab. Łarysa Leszczenko, dr Gordana Đurđev-Małkiewicz, dr Kamil Kijek

Conference secretary:

dr Joanna Banachowicz, mgr Olga Kowalczyk, mgr Kamila Sroślak