

## Conference Mobilizing and Weaponizing

# Mobilizing and Weaponizing Memories of Soviet Repressions - Conference



## How are Soviet repressions remembered, contested, and instrumentalized today?

Time: 29-31 October, 2025

Location: Library of the University of Warsaw, 60 Dobra St. (room 316), Warsaw, Poland

This conference seeks to explore diverse vernacular articulations of Soviet repression memory, both in the former Soviet republics and in countries that once lay within the Soviet sphere of influence. A central focus will be on how local memories have interacted with broader frameworks—ex. the “cosmopolitan” memory of the Gulag, shaped by the Memorial Society—and how Russia’s war against Ukraine is disrupting or reshaping that legacy. The conference will also address the role of a wide array of actors—governments, civil society, religious institutions, and grassroots movements—in shaping, preserving, or contesting these memories, and how these processes play out across a spectrum of political and ideological contexts. We will examine how memories of Soviet repressions are being transformed and mobilized in contemporary processes of decolonization and disengagement from Russian influence, as well as how they have been instrumentalized in political and cultural battles, underscoring their potent role in ongoing struggles over history, identity, and geopolitical alignment.

The conference has evolved from the project [“Memories of Soviet Repressions in Post-Multi-Colonial Post-Soviet Spaces”](#) [1], hosted by the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Warsaw.

Keynote Speaker



***Continuity and Change in  
Remembrance of the Soviet Past: The Case of Lithuania: 10:30-12:00  
on October 29, 2025***

**Violeta Davoliūtė** is Senior Researcher w Lithuanian Institute of History, Professor at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University and Project Leader of Facing the Past: Public History for a Stronger Europe (Horizon Europe, 2022-2025). She has published extensively on the topics of population displacement and Soviet nationalities policy, historical trauma, identity, the politics of memory and nationalism in the aftermath of WWII in the Baltics and Europe. She is a co-editor of the CEU Press book series Memory, Heritage and Public History in Central and Eastern Europe.

Program

**Preliminary Conference Program**

**DAY 1: October 29, 2025**

**9:30 – 10:00** | Participant Registration

**10:00 – 10:30** | Welcoming Speeches – **Zuzanna Bogumiń**, Principal Investigator of the project *Memory of Soviet Repressions in Post-Multi-Colonial Post-Soviet Spaces*,

**10:30 – 12:00** | **Keynote Speech: Violeta Davoliūtė** (Lithuanian Institute of History), *Continuity and Change in Remembrance of the Soviet Past: The Case of Lithuania*

**12:00 – 12:30** | Coffee Break

**12:30 – 14:30 | Panel Session 1 *Gulag Memories, Gulag Heritage from Diverse Perspectives***

Moderator: **Ihab Saloul** (University of Amsterdam)

- **Tomas Sniegon** (Lund University) *Irradiated Memory of the “Czechoslovak Gulag”*
- **Vladislav Staf** (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Sorbonne Université) *Memorialization of Dalstroy and Sevvostlag Heritage at the Russian Northeast (Kolyma and Chukotka) 2020-2025: Projects, Conflicts, and Transformations after February 2022*
- **Margaret Comer** (University of Warsaw) *The Intersection of Gulag Heritage and Heritage of WWII in Kazakhstan, May 2025*
- **Gavin Slade and Katherine Erdman** (Nazarbayev University) *Central Asia's Gulag: Mapping and Managing Penal Heritage in Kazakhstan*

**14:30 – 15:30 | Lunch**

**15:30 – 17:30 | Panel Session 2 *Protest and the Impact of Soviet Memories on Current Politics***

Moderator: **Ivan Peshkov** (University of Adam Mickiewicz)

- **Ketevan Gurchiani** (Ilia State University) *From Victims to Allies: The Political Afterlives of Stalinist Repression in Georgian Protests*
- **Shugyla Kilybayeva** (Al-Farabi Kazakh National University) *Zheltoksan and Qandy Qantar: Protest, Repression, and the Struggle for Memory in Kazakhstan*
- **Aneta Strzemżalska** (Independent Researcher) *Between Subversion and Statecraft: Jazz, Memory, and National Ideology in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan*
- **Ekaterina Korableva** (Concordia University) *On Standing in a Line: Memory and Political Performance in Contemporary Russia*

**18.00 - 20.00 | SPECIAL EVENT: ‘Reading of Names’** at ks. Twardowski Square. This is a memorial event organized by Memorial Poland and the History Meeting House to remember Victims of Political Repressions

**19:00 | Dinner**

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**DAY 2: October 30, 2025**

**9:30 – 11:30 | Panel Session 3 *Contested Memories of Soviet and State Socialist Repressions in Literature***

Moderator: **Florence Fröhlig** (Södertörn University)

- **Iryna Tarku** (University of Giessen) *Remediation of Silenced Memories of Soviet Terror in Contemporary Ukrainian War Literature*
- **Domenico Scagliusi** (Eur'Orbem (Sorbonne University/CNRS)) *Reclaiming the Memory of Soviet Repressions in Contemporary Belarus: The Example of Sasha Filipenko's Russian-Language Novel, Red Crosses*
- **Juliane Prade-Weiss** (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich) *“They're like us, only different” (Sou jako my, ale nejsou jako my): Past and Present Complicity*
- **Claudia Macey-Dare** (Charles University) *“Za komunizmus bolo lepšie”: Petite Histoire and Contested Memories of Socialist Repression in Příhody Tuláka po Slovensku*

**11:30 – 12:00 | Coffee Break**

**12:00 – 14:00 | Plenary session: *Ethics, Forgetting, and the Politics of Memory: Researching Soviet Repressions in the 21st Century***

**Alexander Etkind** (Central European University), **Andrea Gullotta** (University of Palermo), **Luba Jurgenson**

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(Sorbonne University), **Eneken Laanes** (Tallin University), **Barbara Törnquist-Plewa** (Lund University)

Moderator: **Zuzanna Bogumi?** (University of Warsaw)

**14:00 – 15:00** | Lunch

**15:00 – 17:00** | **Panel Session 4 *Memories of Soviet Repressions in Contemporary Culture***

Moderator: **Melanie Hussinger** (Helmut Schmidt University Hamburg)

- **Tyler Kirk** (University of Alaska Fairbanks) *Monumental Landscapes: Soviet Repression and the Production of Space in Gulag Returnees' Art*
- **Alina Legeyda** (Newcastle University) *Cinematic Re-Perspectivization of Stalinist Repressions (1980s-Present): Soviet and Post-Soviet (Ukrainian and Russian) Perspective*
- **Anna Pazio and Magdalena Lejman** (University of Warsaw) *Reimagining Remembrance: The Sybir Memorial Run as Embodied Memory in a Post-Witness Era*
  
- **Mariam Manjgaladze** (Ilia State University) *Goals under Occupation: Dinamo Tbilisi, Identity and Memory in the Late Soviet Space*

**17:00 – 17:30** | Coffee Break

**18:00 – 20:00** | **SPECIAL EVENT: Film Screening in the History Meeting House**

Moderator: **Zuzanna Bogumi?**

- **Julia Simonchuk**, *Testimony of CHAIKA-II* (2025), *Background* (2025)
- **Äsel Kadyrhanova**, *All the Dreams We Dream* (2021)
- **Ülo Pikkov**, *Body Memory* (2011)
- **Maria Kapajeva**, *The enforced memory* (2022)

**20:00** | Gala dinner at the History Meeting House

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## **DAY 3: October 31, 2025**

**10.00 – 11:30** | **Panel Session 5 *Mobilizing Memories of Soviet Repressions in Contemporary Ukraine***

Moderator: **Dagmara Moskwa** (Institute of Political Sciences PAS)

- **Tatiana Vagramenko** (University College Cork) *When Does the “Soviet” End? Endangered Memory and Religious Minorities in Wartime Ukraine*
- **Darja Lukjanenko** (Jan Evangelista Purkyn? University in Ústí nad Labem) *How to Make Rockets Disappear: Decolonizing Memory in Dnipro*
- **Galia Chimiak** (Polish Academy of Sciences) *“We don’t want to have another Soviet Union”: Americans of Central and East European Descent Assisting Ukraine Following Russia’s Full-Scale Aggression*

**11:30 – 12:00** | Coffee Break

**12:00 - 14:00** | **Panel Session 6 *Minority Memories of Soviet Repression in Contemporary Europe***

Moderator: [Iwona Kaliszewska](#) [2] (University of Warsaw)

- **Nino Aivazishvili-Gehne** (FHAB / IOS Regensburg) *Which Language “Sounds” Better? The War in Ukraine and the Language Use among Spätaussiedler in Germany*
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- **Raili Nugin** (Tallinn University) *Mnemonic Practices and Collective Memory: Bridging or Dividing Communities?*
- **Alexander Makhov** (IFiS PAN) *Memory of Soviet Repression among Wartime Migrants from Russia*
- **Kristina Šliavaitė** (Lithuanian Center for Social Sciences) *“We Do Not Have to Explain Our Situation to You”: Soviet Repressions and Colonization as Promoting Understanding and Uniting Lithuanians and Ukrainians in the Narratives of Forcibly Displaced Ukrainians in Lithuania*

14:00 – 15:00 | Lunch

15:00 – 17:00 | Panel Session 7 *Mutability of Memories of Soviet Repressions*

Moderator: **Joanna Wasiluk** (University of Warsaw)

- **Ulla Savolainen** (University of Helsinki) *Between Recognition and Ignorance: Mutable Memorability of Stalinist Repressions of Ingrian Finns in Finland*
- **Tamar Karaia** (Tbilisi State University) *Framing the Soviet Past: The “Occupation” Narrative in Contemporary Georgia*
- **Laura Mafizzoli** (Czech Academy of Sciences) *Between Revelation and Concealment: Negotiating the Past and Making the City of Tbilisi, Georgia*
- **Marko Raat** (Tallinn University) *‘Escalation’ with an Uncomfortable Memory?*

17:00 – 17:15 | Stretch Break

17:15 – 17:30 | Closing Remarks

Events

## Reading of Names: October 29, 2025 / Jan Twardowski Square

On the eve of the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Political Repressions, the Memorial Organization continues the tradition of reading the names of the victims of political repression. This practice began in 2007 in Moscow where people would gather in front of the Solovetsky Stone — erected by Memorial in 1990, opposite the headquarters of the security services (formerly the NKVD, later the KGB, and now the FSB) - to read aloud the names of the victims along with their date of death or disappearance. This very simple and solemn act often took many hours, which alone served as a powerful reminder of the vast scale of the repression.

In 2022, for political reasons, the Memorial Organization was dissolved in Russia, but its work — including the practice of "reading the names" — is carried on by Memorial societies in other countries, including Poland. We encourage you to join this event organized by Memorial Poland and the History Meeting House, even if only for a moment. Reading the Names will take place **between 18:00 and 20:00 at ks.Jan Twardowski Square**, in the vicinity of the main campus of the University of Warsaw.

## Film screening: October 30, 2025 / History Meeting House,



**OPEN FILM SCREENING**

**JULIA SIMONCHUK,  
TESTIMONY OF CHAIKA-  
II (2025)  
BACKGROUND (2025)**

**ÄSEL KADYRKHANOVA,  
ALL THE DREAMS WE  
DREAM (2021)**

**ÜLO PIKKOV,  
BODY MEMORY (2011)**

**MARIA KAPAJEVA,  
THE ENFORCED MEMORY  
(2022)**

**MODERATOR:  
ZUZANNA BOGUMIŁ**

HISTORY MEETING HOUSE (DSH)  
KAROWA 20, WARSAW

**OCTOBER 30, 2025  
18:00-20:00**

The event is part of an academic conference,  
taking place on 29-31 October, 2025  
Library of the University of Warsaw (BUW), room 316

**mobilizing and weaponizing**

**memories of Soviet repressions**

Julia Simonchuk

Äsel Kadyrkhanova

Ülo Pikkov

Maria Kapajeva

Karowa 20 (Warsaw, Poland)

## Julia Simonchuk

Julia-Anna Simonchuk grew up in Kyiv, Ukraine and has been a Londoner for six years now. She graduated from BA Fine Art course at CSM and is currently finishing a Fine Art MA at the Slade. She is working with sculpture, collage, installation, printmaking, socially-engaging projects and currently she is predominantly focusing on moving image. Among Julia's thematic interests are questions of power, ideology, memorialisation, presence and absence, hauntology, social dancing and time.

### *Testimony of CHAIKA-II (2025)*

In the short film 'Testimony of Chaika-II', the protagonist is an old photo camera, which is granted subjectivity and a voice. The camera is an artifact from a collection of Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights in Vilnius, Lithuania (former KGB and Gestapo headquarters). Chaika-II is talking about what it saw but couldn't capture and is reflecting on the uses of technology, nature of documentary photography, as well as agency and complicity.

### *Background (2025)*

'Backgrounds' is a response to the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights (former KGB headquarters and detention centre) in Vilnius. This work is an attempt to address emotionally charged stories and histories through the language of the abstract.

The cells and corridors have typical institutional walls – divided into two colour sections. When encountered from up close, the area where one colour meets another can look like austere and deserted fields. The palimpsests of earth are preserving the evidence of violence and so are the layers of paint on the walls (repainted about 20 times to cover blood and inscriptions).

## **Äsel Kadyrkanova**

Äsel Kadyrkanova is a visual artist and researcher, currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis. Her artistic practice spans drawing, textile, video and animation. Her research interests include autoethnography, visual storytelling, affect and haptic visuality. Her work addresses postcolonial hauntings, the burdens of silenced histories and unmourned personal losses.

### *All the Dreams We Dream (2021)*

*All the Deams we Dream* is a hand-drawn animation film that discusses the (non-) memory of the Kazakh famine, 1930 - 1933. Caused by the Soviet policies of collectivisation, the famine was an event of such extremity that it shattered the very foundations of Kazakh nomadic society, making it easier to Sovietise the region. Throughout the film, the focus remains on the subtle boundary between animal and human and between human and non-human. As it explores the relationship between image, sound and text, it aims to construct a counter-narrative or a space for resistance to the dominant ideological narratives of the Soviet cultural production it references.

## **Ülo Pikkov**

Ülo Pikkov is an internationally renowned filmmaker, producer and film scholar. He is the manager and producer for documentary and animation films in Silmiviburlane. He studied animation at the Turku Arts Academy in Finland and since 1996 has directed several award-winning animation films. He has published articles on film and written fiction books for children and adults. In 2005 he graduated from the Institute of Law in University of Tartu, focusing on the media and author's rights.

### *Body Memory (2011)*

Our bodies remember more than we can expect and imagine; our bodies also remember the sorrow and pain of our predecessors. Our bodies sustain the stories of our parents and grandparents as well as they ancestors. But how far back is it possible to go in body memory?

## **Maria Kapajeva**

Maria Kapajeva is an artist who works between the UK and Estonia, while exhibiting her works internationally. Through her artistic practice, Kapajeva looks at the identity and gender questions of peoples being in-between or in-transition, often bringing peripheral stories to the visible centre. Kapajeva practice is multidisciplinary: she works with found and vernacular photographic images, video installations, textile and embroidery and participatory practices.

### *The enforced memory (2022)*

The video is artist's personal reaction on the events of August 2022, which took place in Estonia, in Narva, her home town. Since the war in Ukraine escalated, the removal of Soviet monuments in Estonia became intensively debated topic. The tank monument in Narva became a stumbling block between the views of different communities within the country. It has especially become symbolic and problematic because it stood right at the border with Russia, on a riverbank of Narva river, facing Estonia. This video is artist first attempt to express a personal take on the events and the war, happening at this moment in Ukraine.

### Pre-conference Masterclasses

This one-day intensive masterclass is designed for master's and doctoral students and it aims to foster collective reflection on the shape and future direction of research on Soviet repressions. Students will present their work before peers and faculty, receiving detailed feedback from experts.

**Date: October 28, 2025**

**Venue: Faculty of Culture and Arts, Krakowskie Przedmie?cie 26/28, room 108**

#### **9.45 – Registration and Welcoming Speeches**

#### **10.00 – 12.00 – Panel Session 1 *Intersecting Circles of Memory Discourse: From Parliament to the Art Gallery***

*Moderator: Margaret Comer* (University of Warsaw)

- **Zolzaya Nyamdorj** (National University of Mongolia) *How were Soviet/Russian Political Repressions Experienced in Mongolia, and How Are They Remembered in Contemporary Mongolian Society?*
- **Nino Natroshvili** (Eötvös Loránd University) *Between Nostalgia and Nationalism: Contested Memories of the Soviet Past in Post-Socialist Georgia*
- **Meeri Siukonen** (University of Helsinki) *Intergenerational Memories of Soviet Terror of Finns*
- **Karina Belik** (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin) *Artistic Reflections on the Memory of Soviet Repressions among Russia's Subalterns*

#### **12.00 – 13.00 – Lunch**

#### **13.00 – 15.00 – Panel Session 2 *The Politics of Memory: Uses of Heritage and Archives***

*Moderator: Tomas Sniegón* (Lund University)

- **Damian Zych** (University of Warsaw) *"Historical Sources Testify": Russian Online Archival Releases and the Contestation of Polish World War II Memory*
- **Makpal Davletyarova** (Istanbul University) *Soviet Repressions and Official Memory in Kazakhstan: Framing the Past to Legitimize the Present*
- **Laura Innocenti** (Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz) *Exiled Russian Memory Activists Remembering the Soviet Repression*
- **Hera Shokohi** (University of Bonn) *The Rebels and the Repressed: Defining Kazakh(stani) Identity in Memory Sites of Political Repression*

#### **15.00 – 15.30 – Coffee Break**

#### **15.30 – 17.00 Panel Session 3 – *Heritage and Memory of Soviet-Era Industry and Ecological Impact***

*Moderator: Florence Fröhlig* (Södertörn University)

- **Balthazar Gras** (London School of Economics and Political Science) *Ecologies of Autonomy: Ukraine's Territorial Resistance and Resilience in the Past and Present*
- **Mukhtar Amanbaiuly** (University of Tsukuba) *Generational Shifts in Memory: The Semipalatinsk Nuclear Testing Site in Local Perception*
- **Omar Gordeziani** (Ilia State University) *Engineer-Mechanics of the Kutaisi Auto Factory: Social Status and Professional Identity in the Context of Post-Soviet Transformation*

Organizers

#### **Conference Convenors**

Zuzanna Bogumi?, PhD (Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, UW)

Margaret Comer, PhD (Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, UW)

#### **Conference Secretary**

Anna Pazio, MA

**Conference Committee**

Magdalena Lejman, PhD  
Alexander Makhov, MA  
Maciej Towalewski

**Academic Council of the conference**

Ketevan Gurchiani, Prof. (Ilia State University, Georgia)  
[Iwona Kaliszewska](#) [2], PhD. (Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, UW)  
Shugyla Kilybayeva, PhD. ( Al-Farabi Kazakh National University)  
Raili Nugin, PhD. (Tallinn University, Estonia)  
Andriy Fert, PhD. (Kyiv School of Economics, Ukraine)

**Conference language:** English

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WARSAW CENTRE  
FOR GLOBAL HISTORY



**Faculty of History**  
University of Warsaw



**Center for Research  
on Social Memory**





Ministerstwo Nauki  
i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

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[Więcej](#) [3]

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#### Links

[1] <https://etnologia.uw.edu.pl/soviet-memories>

[2] <https://www.etnologia.uw.edu.pl/instytut/ludzie/pracownicy/iwona-kaliszewska>

[3] <https://etnologia.uw.edu.pl/instytut/badania/granty/mobilizing-and-weaponizing>