

Distortion of History and Competitive Victimhood

A Seminar under the auspices of the Department of History, Presidency University, Kolkata with presentations by Natalie Sineaeva-Pankowska and Professor Rafal Pankowski

Thursday, 15 February 2024, 2 pm

A K Basak Auditorium

ABSTRACTS

Holocaust Denial in Eastern Europe: The Case of Moldova and Romania

By Natalie Sineaeva-Pankowska

Moldova is an Eastern European country where the Shoah has often been silenced, denied, and distorted. The post-Soviet nation has faced the challenge of dealing with the past and its impact on national identity. The proposed presentation focuses on Holocaust denial and distortion and its interconnectedness with national identity-building processes. Genocide denial is an instrument of an extremist agenda of pan-Romanian nationalists in Moldova. The phenomenon of Holocaust distortion in Moldova is strongly connected with a similar phenomenon in Romania, but parallels can also be seen with the wider international phenomenon of Holocaust denial.

The methodological approach used in the study is the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Discourse-History Approach, applied to the primary sources: public and academic discourses, political statements, etc. The Holocaust memory discourse in post-Soviet Moldova is complicated by the country's complex history, its background, and, as a consequence, the complexity of the (post-Communist) Moldovan national identity. Nevertheless, in both Moldova and Romania today the distorters and negationists are increasingly opposed by civil society, the Jewish and Romani communities, intellectuals, and artists.

The meaning of 'NEVER AGAIN' as a Universal Message in the Post-Holocaust Era: Confronting Competitive Victimhood while building Bridges across Cultures

By Professor Rafal Pankowski

The motto of NEVER AGAIN must not stop with the commemoration of past atrocities, but it has to be a living commitment. For example, the 'NEVER AGAIN' Association is an independent civil society organization founded in Warsaw in 1996. It has campaigned against racism, antisemitism, and xenophobia, for peace, intercultural dialogue and human rights across the world.

The major objectives of the 'NEVER AGAIN' Association include: breaking the silence and raising awareness of the problem of racism and xenophobia; building a broad and inclusive movement against racism and discrimination, for respect, inclusivity and diversity; eliminating or marginalizing racist, xenophobic and antisemitic tendencies in various spheres of life. The 'NEVER AGAIN' Association has organized activities in solidarity with refugees from Ukraine and other countries. Moreover, 'NEVER AGAIN' has participated in important initiatives to commemorate the Holocaust and to confront genocide denial in Europe and in South- and Southeast Asia.

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILES

Natalia Sineaeva-Pankowska is a Holocaust scholar and educator, her PhD research deals with Holocaust distortion and denial in Moldova. Born in Moldova and a citizen of Poland, she has extensive experience in the field of memorialisation and dealing with the past in Eastern Europe as well as Southeast Asia. Her recent experience includes work at the 'NEVER AGAIN' Association and the POLIN Museum of the History of the Polish Jews in Warsaw, Poland, as well as cooperation with the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and other museums and sites of memory. In 2018, she was a European Holocaust Research Infrastructure Fellow at the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Bucharest, Romania and Rotary Peace Fellow at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand. She is a Rotary Positive Peace Activator. She has written for academic and non-academic publications including 'The Holocaust. Studies and Materials' of the Polish Center for Holocaust Research, 'Midrasz', 'Słowo Żydowskie/Dos Jidisze Wort' (Poland), 'Kyiv Post' (Ukraine), and 'Evrejskaya Gazeta' (Germany).

Rafal Pankowski is a Professor at the Institute of Sociology of Collegium Civitas in Warsaw, Poland. Pankowski received his MA in Political Science from the University of Warsaw. He also studied at the University of Oxford as an undergraduate. Prof. Pankowski received his PhD and Habilitation in Sociology of Culture from the University of Warsaw, Institute of Applied Social Sciences. He has published widely on racism, nationalism, populism, xenophobia and other issues including the books *Neo-Fascism in Western Europe: A Study in Ideology* (Polish Academy of Sciences, 1998), *Racism and Popular Culture* (Trio, 2006), and *The Populist Radical Right in Poland: The Patriots* (Routledge, 2010).

Prof. Pankowski was a visiting professor at the Centre for European Studies of Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, and at the International Buddhist Studies College of Mahachulalongkonrajavidyalaya University, Ayutthaya, Thailand. He is a co-founder of the 'Never Again' Association. He is also a member of the International Association of Genocide Scholars.

Tentative Programme Schedule

- 02:05 pm: Welcome Address by Professor Mridu Rai/Dr Oyndrila Sarkar, representing the departmental seminar committee (5 minutes)
- 02:05 pm: "*Holocaust Denial in Eastern Europe: The Case of Moldova and Romania*" by Natalie Sineaeva-Pankowska (25 minutes)

- 02:30 pm: "*The meaning of 'NEVER AGAIN' as a Universal Message in the Post-Holocaust Era: Confronting Competitive Victimhood while building Bridges across Cultures*" by Dr. Rafal Pankowski (25 minutes)
- 02:55 pm: Q&A (30 minutes)
- 03:25 pm: Vote of Thanks (5 minutes)