

Understanding Resistance in Europe's East: public lecture series

Trinity College Dublin, February - April 2025

This series of 10 lectures was inspired by the ongoing multidisciplinary research of the *Trinity Centre for Resistance Studies*, established in 2021 to provide an intellectual response to the growth of populism and authoritarianism across the globe. 'Resistance' is a concept which is global in its geographical scope, but which is realised in a variety of ways, from the social to the individual. We may recognise 'resistance' variously as 'political opposition', 'cultural opposition', 'resilience', 'protest', 'non-conformism' or 'dissent'.

The recorded lectures are available on youtube:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQG7_feMlxDeDUpaZChauA7SZDPBO-168

The lecture series examined how 'resistance' has manifested itself in the eastern part of the European continent – a region closely associated with dissent and political protest in the popular mind. Indeed, the image of the 'dissident' in popular culture owes much to the overt stances against authoritarianism and totalitarianism which first came to the surface in the former Soviet bloc, behind the 'Iron Curtain', notably after the death of Stalin.

In the first lecture **Graeme Murdoch** (#1) drew on both the cultural history of Central Europe and his own experiences of Timisoara in the late 1980s to situate Europe's east for us as a laboratory for the study of resistance in the modern period, so deeply did it experience the twin totalitarian terrors of fascism and communism. **Tanya Lokot** (#2) described the nature of grassroots resistance in today's Ukraine, where networked citizens use social media tools to assert agency in their fight against an irredentist Russia. **Dimitar Kambourov** (#3) highlighted the unusual case of how in late Communist Bulgaria both dissident culture and establishment culture found themselves using the same platforms. The existence of this unified canon, tolerated and accepted by the authorities, he argued, goes some way to explaining the smooth nature of the political transition to a post-Communist Bulgaria.

Jana Fischerová (#4) showed how protest in Communist Czechoslovakia is best construed as a lived expression of the concept of truth and personal authenticity as manifested in Czech culture from the time of Jan Hus to Vaclav Havel. **Jacqueline Hayden** (#5) provided a front seat view of her meetings with Polish opposition and communist leaders from the 1980s – from Lech Walesa to Wojciech Jaruzelski – and how the round table talks between government and opposition leaders represented an authentic alternative to bloody unrest in late Communist Poland. **Balázs Apor** (#6) used audio and video examples of Hungarian underground rock, rap and punk from the 1980s

to the present day to show how popular music served as a catalyst for the expression of oppositional sentiment in the Hungarian political context. He demonstrated the uncanny recurrence under Viktor Orbán of the same kind of risqué song lyrics and even the same performers who been part of the soundtrack of the Hungarian People's Republic in the 1980s.

Conor Daly (#7) spoke about three 'dissidents' whom he had got to know in the Soviet Union of the early 1980s, whose humorous and humane life philosophies were grounded in a desire not to repay lawlessness in the same coin, and in a consciousness or naïve trust that the human rights principles of the Helsinki accords could always be relied on to protect them. **Krzysztof Rowiński** (#8) showed us how Polish performance artists a generation apart – Ewa Partum and Liliana Zeic – in their conscious 'non-belonging' illustrate a striking continuity in the strategies used by Polish women to deal with oppression, whether the source of that oppression be religious or secular or both. **Ewa Majewska** (#9) used the concept of 'counterpublics' to talk about the exclusion and discrimination faced by Polish women active in political and cultural opposition during the 1980s – from the Catholic Church on the one hand and from the Solidarity movement on the other.

In the final round table session (#10) **Balázs Apor**, **Molly Pucci** and **Piotr Wciślik** took stock of some of the common threads which had emerged over the lecture series. The discussion was moderated by **Conor Daly**.

The series was part-funded by the TCD Faculty Events Fund (FAHSS) and the Visiting Professorship and Fellowships Benefactions Fund.

We wish to acknowledge the excellent support of the DU Eastern European Society, DU Ukrainian Society and DU History Society in promoting and moderating these events.

Series organisers: Balázs Apor, Conor Daly, Krzysztof Rowiński