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Study day

Collaborative autoethnography of vulnerability on post-soviet spaces

23 september 2024 in Charles University, Prague

EHESS-CERCEC-CEFRES-CHARLES UNIVERSITY-NEMTSOV
MASTER'S PROGRAM and BRĪVĀ UNIVERSITĀTE

Organizers

This study day will be organized by the Centre for Russian, Caucasian and Central European Studies as part of “Global EHESS” program in partnership with Charles University and Nemtsov master's program, Brīvā Universitāte (Free University in Riga, Svobodnij University) and French Research Center in Humanities and Social Sciences (CEFRES),

Accepted formats of participation

20 min. per participant + 20 min discussion

1. Free presentation within the framework of one of the proposed theoretical topics and the notion of vulnerability;
2. Autoethnographic story or methodological reasoning, presentation of an autoethnographic note or a series of notes, related to the experience of vulnerability in the context of the war or authoritarian regime;
3. Reasoning about the relationship between the autoethnography of vulnerability and artistic, activist, theater or other fields;
4. Collaborativity in reflexive ethnography, autoethnography, social science teaching and learning.

To participate send us your proposals for one of the sections (cf. bellow) in english before the 14th of July, with following information:

1. Title and the topic of your presentation;
2. Country and contact information;
3. Affiliated institution (if any);
4. Abstract approximately 250 words;

Abstract

The upheavals resulting from the war in Ukraine

Political processes in the post-Soviet space are marked by authoritarian aggravation in Russia and Belarus. After the mass protests in Belarus in 2020-2021, the country's citizens faced severe political persecution, with political opponents sentenced to several years in prison and tortured. Authoritarian tendencies in Russia have led to a war of aggression on Ukrainian territory since February 24, 2022.

This aggression, which has already lasted over two years, is accompanied by crimes against humanity and attacks on Ukraine's civic infrastructure, with catastrophic consequences ranging from genocide to ecocide (following the catastrophe at the Kakhovka dam). In parallel with the events of the war, the repression of the authoritarian regime worsened in Russia: repressions comparable to those in Belarus, the rise of propaganda, the open presence of private military groups, the regime of complete censorship with the banning of independent media, unprecedented changes to the education and artistic practices.

The judicial system is acting like a military regime, with people being sentenced to several years' imprisonment for expressing criticism of the war, and with the rise in cases of high treason, including among scientists. The drastic changes affect all levels of society, right down to the most intimate forms of commitment: with ideological cleavages within families, or cases of denunciation by colleagues or neighbors. These processes in the countries of the post-Soviet space have triggered a wave of migration, primarily from Ukraine, from the territories of Ukraine occupied by the Russian army, but also from Russia, whether they be Russian or Ukrainian citizens — one of the largest groups of peoples in the Russian Federation.

These catastrophic processes, creating ruptures in our very sense of self, of reality, of belonging, are a test for everyone. For researchers in the humanities and social sciences, this creates additional demands for reflexivity, to which we propose to respond through this study day on collaborative autoethnography of vulnerability.

Theoretical framework

The concept of vulnerability has become widely used in social sciences in the last thirty years (cf. Bankof, 2001; Brodiez-Dolino, 2016), has become an independent term in sociological research, and has led to a number of specialized articles and books (Butler, 2016; Garrau, 2018; Misztal, 2011; Naepels 2019). Thematically, this concept is close to the studies of “risk”, which became widespread in the 1990s-2000s (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1988), but whose public use began in the 1950s-1960s with the growth of fears about man-made “dangers” and technogenic disasters (see M. Douglas, who has also developed, since the 1960s, a cultural theory of “danger” cf. Douglas, 1986, 2013, 2020; Douglas & Calvez 1990; Douglas & Wildavsky, 1983). Some of the scholars put the notion of vulnerability in the center of their research perspectives in particular, in relation with the notion of autonomy (cf. Ricoeur, 1997; Garrau, 2018; Molinier et al., 2009) or with other concepts in the field of STS (Denis et al., 2016; Hommels et al., 2014; Martin et al., 2015; Mol et al., 2010; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011)

Contemporary work around “vulnerability” is complemented by a very rich and diverse approach to research on relations of inequality and mobilization, inspired by feminist approaches, the caring perspective and research on science and technology. Through a profound rethinking of the political, these works provide new insights both in political and moral philosophy (in particular revisiting J. Rawls's theory of justice, and, influenced by the work of L. Wittgenstein and P. Ricoeur, reconsidering the philosophical foundations of the social sciences — cf. Das, 2020; Laugier, 2015a, 2015b, 2016), in the methodology of empirical social research, and in the practice of living together.

In our study for empirical cases we will focus on the cultural zones of the post-Soviet space, although comparative aspects can be found in other authoritarian regimes, catastrophes, war zones or zones of extreme violence. Empirical examples can be extremely broad, ranging from cases of legal vulnerability, communicative vulnerability, social vulnerability due to relations of inequality, processes of exclusion, due to disability or mental illness, involvement in relations of care for others, up to vulnerabilities related to infrastructure and exposure to man-made or environmental hazards. The aim is not to provide exhaustive information on each topic, but to point to sources where participants can find support for their comparative, analytical and distancing approaches that serve to understand the experience of vulnerability related to war and authoritarian regimes but not to give a casuistic and essentialist explanation.

This study day will serve as methodological and reflexive exercise inspired by the postulates of French pragmatic sociology (“sociology of conventions and tests”, for an example of the intuition that inspires us, see Boltanski, 2012; Breviglieri, 2012; Lemieux, 2008, 2018; Thévenot L., 2014), and the autoethnographic method and self-reflection of the French tradition of reflexive ethnography (cf. Weber et Beaud, 2010).

Participants registration 9h-9h30

Conference opening 9h30-10h

Introduction by Francoise Daucé, Dmitriy Dubrovskiy, Daniela Kolenovská, Mateusz Chmurski (20 min)

Contextualisation and presentation of panels by Boris Melnichenko (10 min)

Panel 1

Facing Radical Tests: Positionality in Observing War and Prison (10h30-12h30)

Discussant: Ioana Cirstocea or Ota Konrád (to be confirmed)

Tatyana Dvornikova, independent researcher, journalist.

Configuring sociological vulnerabilities: from risks in observation to ethical dilemmas with reviewers. Tatyana will present her experience in developing, managing, and describing a sensitive field within the study of Russian prisons.

Valerii Miloserdov, independent researcher in Kyiv, Ukraine (pre-master level).

Joints, eyes and public services: the logic of (self)care during war

He would like to reflect on his emotional management and everyday care practices during the war. His participation will take place online.

Ishat Saetov, Research Fellow, CETOBaC, EHESS.

Turco-Muslim minorities in war states: My painful conversation with the "lost Ottomans" of Bulgaria before and during World War II

Lunch 12h30-14h

Panel 2

From Threads to Threats: Politicization Brought by War and Exile (14h-16h)

Discussant: Daniela Kolenovská (to be confirmed)

Alexandra Dunaeva, independent researcher, PhD in theater studies (Finland).

In between two nationalisms: thirty letters to my daughter

She will present her autoethnographic reflection about her vulnerability experience as a Russian migrant living in Finland and the reaction of her Russian-speaking environment and Finnish society to Russia's invasion of Ukraine through the lens of her notes from February 2022 to April 2024, addressed to her daughter. She will also refer to performative and theatrical texts that she has seen in Russia and Finland in this period of time.

Margarita Sergeeva, PhD-student in exile (Germany).

Taxonomy of Transgressions and Exile: An Autoethnographic Account

She is currently working on her thesis on life trajectories in post-Soviet Russia. At this conference, she will present her autoethnographic account of the experience of becoming an exile while already an emigrant, and discuss how this experience of transgression (changing one's status from a student abroad to an exile) can be used for our research on life trajectories and mobility in times of social change and exogenous shocks.

Vadim Syrovoy, PhD-student in exile in Serbia with double identity Ukrainian/Russian.

Where am I? Between Solidarity and Disunity in Serbia

Based on the digital autoethnography and interviews with friends and enthusiasts involved in various public and business initiatives in Serbia, he will reflect on his experience of exile in Serbia and political activism.

Coffee break 16h-16h15

Panel 3

(Re)searching Your Place: Exploring Personal Life and Hospitality in Exile (16h15-18h15)

Discussant: Françoise Daucé

Sergey Karpov, independent researcher and documentary photographer.

Using the method of documentary autoethnographic research he will present his thoughts on the experience of living in a camp for refugees.

Toma Stepanenko, independent researcher in exile in Georgia (pre-master level).

Am I the problem? Abusive relationships in the context of emigration.

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