

Keynote #1: **Mykola Riabchuk, Mapping a "Nowhere Nation": Imperial Knowledge and Challenges of Decolonization**

The paper draws on the concept of Imperial Knowledge as developed by Ewa Thompson in her eponymous book that extended, quite courageously, the tenets of Edward Said's "Orientalism" over the Russian Empire and its 19th-20th century literature. It is understood as a system of narratives developed by imperial ideologues (including cultural activists), whose main goal was not only glorification of the empire, its supposedly great, 'universal' culture and 'unique' historical role, but also depreciation, marginalization or sheer appropriation of cultures of subordinate nations, monopolization of a special entitlement to speak on their behalf and mediate between them and the world, thus silencing them and making completely invisible. That "knowledge", conceived in the 18th century, has been developed, institutionalized and disseminated globally as presumably 'scientific truth'. It was normalized and became therefore unquestionable; still worse, it completely excluded the alternative voices, in particular voices of subjugated nations, from the public debate as allegedly 'deviant' and 'nationalistic'. All this made the Imperial Knowledge a root cause of many eventual problems, including a centuries-long international misperception of Russia, ignorance of Ukraine, and disastrously wrong Western policies vis-à-vis both countries and the entirety of Eastern Europe. The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war, framed as an attempt at a neo-imperial conquest, makes the detailed deconstruction of Imperial Knowledge and its various ideological-cum-political metastases highly urgent and topical – as an intellectual part of a much broader decolonization agenda.