Hope and (Im)mobility in the Pursuit of Change

Graduate Conference

Central European University
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

June 12th-13th, 2015, Budapest
People continuously contemplate motion – physical, social, spiritual or imaginary – even when they do not move, or all the more so if they feel stuck. What role does hope play in the pursuit of a better life? How do motion, emotion, and immobility enable or disable each other? Hope can be understood as a form of “cruel optimism” and a “cluster of promise”, but also as an antidote to cynicism and resignation in the face of the various contemporary instances of suffering and disenfranchisement. Whether as an aspiration to a better life, justice, and happiness, or as explanatory vocabulary generated by the belief in change, hope and the repertoire of alternative imaginaries that it summons, are often part and parcel of mobility and immobility alike.

At this conference, we endeavor to tease out the implications of this juncture, its historical and cultural genealogy, and the consequences that it has for the reproduction of social inequalities and difference, and how it is addressed by their actors and by researchers alike. To this end, we inquire beyond the structural conditions that prompt or limit people’s attempts to overcome geographic, social, or imaginary boundaries, and explore the moral and affective processes that motivate and in turn are shaped by these pursuits of change. Rather than tackling these approaches separately, either favoring emic or phenomenological accounts of what sets people into motion, or accounting for the systemic causations endured by neoliberal subjects, at this conference, we seek to overcome this analytical separation, and to pursue a relational analysis of hope and (im)mobilities.
# General Programme

**Venue:** Nador u. 9, Room 311

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## Friday June 12th

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“Health, Body and Soul” | **Stef Jansen**  
**Chair:** **Ana Chiritoiu** | **Milica Milic**  
Negotiating possibilities for medical treatment: Experiences of patients in post-socialist Serbia  
**Ljiljana Pantovic**  
Hope in the Blood – Umbilical cord blood storage as a health investment in Serbia  
**Igor Mikeshin**  
"Deny yourself totally!": Radical conversion in the rehabilitation ministry |
| 15.00-17.30 Panel Session 4  
“Materialities and Mobilities” | **Dan Rabinowitz**  
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“I’d Like to Buy a Small Train and Rent It”: (Im)mobility and Hope(lessness) in Post-Socialist Serbia  
**Cansu Civelek**  
Assumptions for the New Life among Women: Findings from an Urban Regeneration  
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**Malavika Binny**  
'Hoping Against Hope’ – The PRDS Movement and the creation of its discursive terrain; An exploration of a 'lower caste' movement in Kerala and its socio-cultural impacts (1890-1950 C.E) |
Polina Manolova  
CREES/POLSIS, School of Government and Society, University of Birmingham, UK  
Keywords: imagination, globalization, belonging, east/west, collective sense-making  
‘Why am I going to England? Because I hope for a better future’. Hopes and desires of the West as motivating Bulgarian migration to England.

A recent trend in anthropological studies is focused on studying an interconnected, globalized world in which fluidity and mobility are the norm and notions of place and borders lose their importance. In the same postmodernist line of thought we are witnessing an increasing focus on the imagination, as an individual quality, that enables people to live lives that match their fantasies. This often means leaving one’s home in a search for ‘greener pastures’. This paper offers a critical evaluation of such understandings, by looking at the role of the collective imagining of the West in Bulgarian migrations to England. In an attempt to overcome dichotomized explanations of migration that look at either structural forces or individual rational decision-making, this presentation focuses on the hopes and dreams which are parts of the migration project. These subjective hopes and dreams are usually embedded in wider cultural models of collective sense-making (Strauss, 2006). Such collectively shared imaginaries not only motivate movement but also construct a global worldview which is dichotomised into West and East, where the East is always inferior to the West. Bulgaria as part of the Balkans is conceived as a non-place, at the periphery of Europe, defined by stagnation and backwardness. In such a global order the West is the centre of attraction. By using different strategies people try to reach the West in order to stake their claim to a global belonging.

Robert Rydzewski  
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland/CEU, Hungary  
Keywords: entrepreneurship, migration, disenchantment, self-employment  
Immigrant entrepreneurship in Poland - a disenchantment of wage labour or hope for a better future?

Even though Poland is still considered to be a transit country for immigrants, the number of foreigners there has been constantly growing for the past years. Not only do they settle down and come to retain waged jobs, but they also establish businesses. Researchers noticed that self-employment rates amongst immigrants in Poland are the highest in the region. Nevertheless, if we go beyond dominant categories of analysis of immigrant labour activity and get rid of immigrant labels, we can observe that Poland has the highest rate of self-employment in Central Europe in general and one of the highest in the whole of Europe. Simultaneously, we witness in Poland a deterioration of wage labour conditions like short-term contracts, low wages and a collapse of labour unions. This phenomenon raises questions such as: what makes foreigners set up businesses in Poland? Is it a disenchantment with Polish labour market or convenient conditions for entrepreneurship? What do Polish and foreign entrepreneurs have in common? This paper tries to answer these questions by analysing a two year-long anthropological research of recent immigration in Poznan, a city in western Poland.
Sena Duygu Topcu  
**Koç University, Istanbul, Turkey**  
**Keywords:** home, mobilization, migrants, memory, Kurds, affect  
**Hope for a Home**

With the analysis of the fieldwork I conducted for my MA thesis, I will argue that taking the image of home in consideration would shed better light on our understanding of concepts of hope and mobility in the minds of migrants. This relation between home, hope and (im)mobility will be scrutinized through Syrian Kurds, who fled the recent conflict and who are now living in Bayramtepe, a suburban shanty neighborhood in Istanbul. Studying Kurds as stateless nation makes the home issue even more significant and complex in this context. In my fieldwork I have observed four possible strategies for a pursuit of change in the future: Kurdish refugees hope to (i) move back to their hometown, or (ii) start a new life in the canton of Rojava in West Kurdistan, or (iii) migrate to European cities, where there is already a major Kurdish diaspora, or (iv) continue to live in Bayramtepe. Although the economic and social capital of the refugees has a defining roles in choosing one of these possibilities, the affective dimension of their definition of a future/present/past home seems to be an essential feature of their hope in one of these strategies and therefore a driving force for their (im)mobility. Similarly, despite most of the interviewees’ strong attachment to their Kurdish identity on a discursive basis, the places where they want to go differ depending on the conception of home they have in their minds. Whether in memories of a lost home in Syria (celebrating Newroz in Syria, Qamishlo incidents of 2004, their citizenship status under the Baathist regime), or in disillusionment in the present home in Bayramtepe, or in hope for a future one in West Kurdistan or in Europe; their conception of home in the past, present, and future affect where they hope to move. In the end, it is hope what keeps the migrants going.

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**PANEL 2: Hope and Mobility - Functions of Class?**

Benjamin Ferschlí  
**University of Business and Economics Vienna, Austria**  
**Keywords:** theory, labor, ideology  
**To finally transcend: “Hope” as Ideological Dialectic in Historical and Contemporary Labor Organization**

In my paper I elaborate on historical and contemporary labor organization in relation to their ideological motivators, specifically “hope”. The latter serves as an interesting, and at first seemingly paradox, force within the change and foundation of labor organization. It will show, however, that an understandable dialectic can be identified. From ideological motivators, such as hope, the greater structure of social variables like gender, “race”, age and class can be deduced and their relation to work can be constructed. By comparing the legitimizing structures, or “ideologies”, of organizational forms of labor, not only can historical societies be better understood, but also the most recent developments in the capitalist mode of production. I will start my analysis with the early industrialization of the factory and end with late-modern project work in the company. A normative evaluation of the latter, and the organization of labor in the 21st century, demands a clear understanding of the former. My reconstruction will have to be limited to selected authors, but by selecting authentic representatives, it will be possible to point to all the building blocks of the

Barbora Černušáková
Department of Sociology, University of Manchester
Keywords: postsocialist, mobilization, ethnicity, class
Collective action of Roma in the Czech Republic: Revival of class?

Up until recently, the lives of the working class Roma living in the “deprived” neighbourhood of Přívoz in Ostrava, the Czech Republic, had been marked by political "invisibility" and neutralization (van Baar 2011). Roma, who have been particularly affected by the growing and (for many also) permanent unemployment, have been portrayed in academic scholarship and policy debates as “clients” of social policies and consequently also as subjects of policing and surveillance. However, in the course of the past few years, signs of political mobilization of the Roma in Ostrava emerged. They involved resistance of residents against an eviction from their homes in the summer of 2012, assemblies against far-right (racist) rallies in the Roma-inhabited streets in 2013 and activism of mothers against school segregation in 2014 and 2015. Within these collective actions the community members came up with specific hopes, aspirations and even demands – as citizens – vis-à-vis the capitalist state structures. I’m interested in responses to marginalization and exploitation. Drawing on the scholarship of post-socialist class formations (e.g. Kideckel, Ost, Eyal et al.) I examine the ”micro-foundations” of the class position(s) of Roma in a specific context of a de-industrialized city.

As of October 2015, I will map their experiences and class locations during a 10-month long ethnographic research in the neighbourhood. By the use of the method of participant observation, I will collect data on how are Roma workers’ interests shaped and formulated. In the context of Roma in Ostrava, this will include also those outside "regular employment". Inspired by the feminist standpoint theories (Yuval-Davis 2011), I aim to look into the ways of how racism and patriarchy structure the options of Roma in the "labour market" and how they structure class relations.

Alexandra Diaconescu
National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, Department of Sociology, Romania
Keywords: postsocialist, labor, social capital

The accepted explanation of unemployed adaptability towards the economic and social transition to capitalism, focuses on the implications of different types of capitals such as social relations, financial capital, economic, political and cultural resources (social capital theories). The empirical consequences of these theoretical reasoning is that unemployed people endowed with more human and financial capital will be able to achieve a larger number of goals such as finding a job, getting a higher position. Therefore they will be more likely to be successful in finding a job unlike the unemployed people with less capital. Likewise, the secondary hypothesis links efficiency of specific types of social capital with higher level of adaptability for the unemployed than other. Attempting to conceptualize the phenomenon of social capital, using the theories of classic authors (Bourdieu, Putman, Coleman), the present article tries to define and measure the level and dimension of social relationships that an
unemployed can mobilize to achieve a job. The empiric research consists in defining a successful trail of unemployed people in the process of transition to capitalism during the post communism de-industrialization. The social capital is the key concept in describing and influencing the unemployed trajectory. The sociological research will be held in the de-industrialized city Slatina, Olt County, Romania, starting with January 2015, targeting the unemployed in manufacturing aluminum – ALRO during post communism period 2000-2014. The instrument (interview and survey) will provide qualitative and quantitative results about the researched topic.

PANEL 3: Health, Body and Soul

Milica Milic
PhD in Anthropology, University of Minnesota, USA
Keywords: body, postsocialist, medicine, public/private health care
Negotiating possibilities for medical treatment: Experiences of patients in post-socialist Serbia

The history of socialism in Yugoslavia has been treated as a specific, extraordinary example of state power and practices of governmentality, distinct from other socialisms in the post-World War II Era. The numerous political transformations, have become a part of the everyday and a transition developed as a modus operandi for citizens of Serbia. This paper contributes to rethinking how this particular socialist history produces and shapes today’s understanding of state/citizens relationships, interdependence and their mutual expectations. Also, exploring the ways in which these relationships influence the self-making processes in the context of terminal illness diagnosis can significantly contribute to interpretation of exchanges between state and medical systems as the imagined and fetishized extension of the state authority in post socialist context. To address this, I suggest that the need to be protected and governed together with hopelessness and confusion after the fall of socialism speaks to the remnants of socialist regime and its residuals in today’s medical practices. This paper, based on fieldwork conducted during summer 2014 in Serbia, examines how vestiges of socialism influence the relationships between oncology patients and their doctors as they negotiate responsibility for care and for health.

The specific Yugoslav socialist governing practices produced anxiety and the sense of being observed and under surveillance, but also cultivated a sense of security and being protected. This internalized need for Panopticon, combined with the emergence of new, yet economically unavailable, medical treatment practices produces a specific form of anxiety and existential immobility. I want to show how the understanding that oncology patients have of the postsocialist Serbia is not shaped only by narratives and memory practices around the discourse of the socialist Serbia, but also through their immediate experiences of encountering the tropes of capitalism and the emergence of private clinics.
Ljiljana Pantovic  
*Graduate Student Department of Anthropology University of Pittsburgh*

**Keywords:** body, globalization, biobanking, biotechnology, parenting, blood

**Hope in the Blood – Umbilical cord blood storage as a health investment in Serbia**

Umbilical cord “biobanking” is a fairly recent phenomenon that first commenced in the United States in the early 1990s. It entails the storage of stem cells taken from post-birth umbilical cord blood, for either research or personal medical purposes. Private “biobanks” in the past two decades embraced the global market and have crossed national borders. A “biobank” can be geographically located in one country but its clientele is usually international. What is being offered to the consumer - the parent - is the technologies to store the cord blood of the child for a definite amount of time in the event that either the child or one of the family members develops an illness for which stem cells in the cord blood might become the basis of a cure. With biobanking, cord blood takes up a new role, that of a kind of biological insurance or investment for the future potential needs of the newborn (Waldby and Mitchell 2006).

My paper focuses on the narratives of (expecting) parents in Serbia who have or want to store cord blood in one of the private biobanks in Western Europe. I set out to explore whether the Serbian case of storing cord blood in international biobanks, through international mediators, globalizes not just the human tissue – stem cells - involved but concepts of “good parenting” and hope and investment in children’s health. I argue that cord blood storage could be considered a curious form of both mobility and immobility, as it is not the whole body but certain human tissue – stem cells - that travel across borders. Thus I ask: what geographies of hope become crucial when parents in Serbia choose their biobanks?

Igor Mikeshin  
*University of Helsinki, Finland/ University of Tartu, Estonia*

**Keywords:** religion, conversion, postsocialism, born-again christians, testimony

"Deny yourself totally!": Radical conversion in the rehabilitation ministry.

This paper scrutinizes the narrative and mechanism of conversion to Christianity in the Russian Baptist ministry for the addicted people called Good Samaritan. The ministry regards addiction as slavery of sin, rather than a medical problem. The only way to resist sin, thus, is coming to Christ.

Conversion in Good Samaritan is radical, for halfways or partial decisions whether to live with Christ or head towards perdition are not considered. One either accepts Christ's atonement sacrifice or not, and there could be no compromises. I will disclose the idea of the radical conversion as the only chance of salvation in three main concepts. Firstly, life before repentance is called a bygone life. This life does not necessarily imply substance abuse, prison terms, or sexual promiscuity. Yet the distinctive feature of such life is its earthly focus, while a repentant believer strives for God’s will in every aspect of his/her life.

The second concept is repentance, also known as born-again. Repentance is a turning point of the convert’s life, when one totally rejects sinful past, admits helplessness against sin, and totally surrenders his/her life to Christ. Even though a repentant Christian still commits sin, his/her life is directed towards God’s will.

The brightest representation of both concepts is given in the widely used life-story narrative called testimony. Testimony is a specific genre of oral depiction of one’s life in terms of perishing in sins and miraculous salvation after repentance. Testimonies in the rehabilitation ministry include all
kinds of colorful stories associated with sin: horrible crimes, long prison terms, ruined families, crippled health, homelessness, and so on.

I will disclose these three concepts and elaborate on the idea of radical conversion with the examples from my fieldwork in the rehabilitation ministry.

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**PANEL 4: Materialities and Mobilities**

**Ognjen Kojanic**  
*Graduate Student Department of Anthropology University of Pittsburgh*  
**Keywords:** postsocialism, labor, infrastructure  
**“I’d Like to Buy a Small Train and Rent It”: (Im)mobility and Hope(lessness) in Post-Socialist Serbia**

During the 1990s, the former Yugoslavia saw various kinds of movements: the more visible movement of armies and refugees, and on the other hand, the obscure movement of property into private hands. The aftermath of wars revealed the change of the political economies of independent successor states as an apparently irreversible process of property transformation from socialist self management to private ownership. The upper strata in Serbia returned to the pre-war possibilities for geographical mobility and opened new, often illicit, paths for social mobility. However, for most people, nostalgic stories about socialist Yugoslavia were all that was left of mobility. A new appreciation of the lost ability to move and advance was evident in the stories of my interlocutors, railway workers in a town in eastern Serbia. The Railways had played an important role in enabling the masses to be geographically and socially mobile in socialist Yugoslavia. Paradoxically, the policies of the railway company were detrimental for workers’ mobility in recent years: price hikes and reductions in the number of trains reduced passenger transport and the retrenchment strategy prevented advancement within the company. The material process of dilapidation due to the lack of investment in infrastructure thus went hand in hand with the social process of precarization of workers’ social reproduction. The profound criticism of the post-socialist present was saturated with a widely shared melancholy for the lost normalcy of socialism and the condemnation of “theft” in “immature capitalism”, sometimes balanced with the hope for a “proper capitalism”. Ethnographic attention to the layers of affective engagements with the lack of movement reveals the entrapment in the condition of being a worker resulting from the increasing differentiation of life chances and expectations in post-socialism.

**Cansu Civelek**  
*University of Vienna, Austria/ CEU, Hungary*  
**Keywords:** urban regeneration, gender, resettlement  
**Assumptions for the New Life among Women: Findings from an Urban Regeneration**

Being the first regeneration project of Eskişehir, Turkey the Karapınar Valley Urban Regeneration Project had a fast entry into the city’s agenda in 2011, which covers a 48 hectare zone of gecekondu – illegal settlements – with almost 800 single-story housing units. Through discourses of creating a “social and income diversity”, the project constructs luxury villas, a five star hotel, and commerce and shopping centers while forcing locals to move into new ten-story apartment buildings which will be given in return for monthly payments depending on the size and legality of their previous houses.
Although the majority of the entire population was significantly worried about the payments, among which there were some who decided to move elsewhere, imaginary assumptions about “new apartment life style” have been engendered. Based on an anthropological research, my paper will point out particularly young women’s ideas and hopes of “first time moving out of gecekondu and living in the apartment” which have been accented by becoming an “apartment lady”.

Willy Sier  
University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
Keywords: postsocialist, imagination, education  
Rural Students in Urban Higher Education: On the Road to Nowhere? Rural Household Strategies, Migration and Higher Education in Hubei Province, China  
This PhD-project is set in Wuhan, one of China’s most important hubs for higher education. It proposes that China’s internal migrant population increasingly consists of rural youth in pursuit of higher education, in addition to the better known rural-urban labour migrant population. Chinese society is known to be the least egalitarian society in the world, with an especially deep divide between urban and rural populations. Rural youth, and their families, pin their hopes on higher education in order to achieve social mobility. Yet, rural youths are faced with institutional barriers that limit their access to China’s top universities and channel them into private universities, often of questionable quality. They pay high tuition fees and acquire less prestigious degrees. Scholars and media report on high unemployment among rural graduates and refer to them as a most vulnerable group in contemporary Chinese society. This project investigates what motivates rural households to invest in urban higher education. It questions whether the rapid expansion of the Chinese education system made possible by ‘marketization’ of Chinese education created valuable opportunities for rural students that mitigate rural-urban inequality in Chinese society. Or, are rural-urban student migrants stuck on a road to nowhere, and do rural households further weaken their societal position by investing in private higher education? This project will equally focus on the students in Wuhan and their family members and peers in the rural villages. In the villages, the research focus will be on household motivations for investing in rural-urban student migration. It will consider China’s intense history of rural-urban labour migration, the state’s encouraging rhetoric concerning youth migration and education, and the bustling education industry that actively recruits students in the villages as factors that play into the formation of imaginations that lead to migration. In the cities, it will zoom in on students’ experiences in universities and the effect of rural students’ increased participation in higher education on their position in the urban environment. Theoretically, this project is connected to debates on household strategies, mobility, hope and imagination, and student migration. Fieldwork will be conducted between September 2015 and May 2016.

Malavika Binny  
Centre for Historical Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, India/ Leiden University, The Netherlands  
Keywords: mobilization, phenomenology, Dalit christians, social mobility, historical sociology  
'Hoping Against Hope' – The PRDS Movement and the creation of its discursive terrain; An exploration of a 'lower caste' movement in Kerala and its socio-cultural impacts (1890-1950C.E)  
The paper seeks to explore the socio-religious movement for upward mobility by 'dalit' in Kerala in South India called the PRDS (Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha) movement in the twilight years of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century combining a phenomenological
approach and Bourdieu's theory of embodied praxis. The distinctive feature of the movement was that it not only emerged from among one of the most oppressed communities in India, but that the movement created its own teleological discourse borrowing from Biblical imagery but juxtaposing it unto the social and cultural landscape of Kerala. While the PRDS movement has been read as a movement for the acquisition of social space, construction of a semiotic world to express dissent and dissonance to the existing social hierarchy which was a fundamental part of the movement has been left unexplored; the paper intends to investigate the creation of a 'new' religio-cultural discourse by the movement in which the idea of hope played a seminal function.

The theme of hope found a profound resonance in the course of the movement and was heavily loaded with multiple layers of social and semiotic meanings. Hope, for instance was understood as the hope of the emancipation of the 'slave-caste' from the hierarchical and discriminative caste system, but it was also hope in the form of redemption through the cleansing of sins and the hope for eternity which could be attained by stripping off the baggage of both the traditions of Christianity and Hinduism. Pokayil Yohannan (1878-1939 C.E.) who was the founder of the movement thus constructed a narrative which used the Christian apocalyptic imagery of the Messiah and rupture to project himself as the 'light of the Gentiles'. The paper shall attempt to analyse the movement which was aimed at and achieved considerable social mobility by probing its rich discursive terrain which manifest itself in the form of books, songs and the invention of a new liturgy and a ritual world which sought to redefine the identity of the 'lower caste' Christians through a re-configuration of both 'time and being' using the notion of hope as an apparatus of both caste mobilisation and identity creation. Archival material from the Kerala State Archives and the National Archives of India, oral interviews and hagiographies of Poikayil Yohannan will also be used for the purposes of the study.