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MEMORY AND POPULISM FROM THE MARGINS

Conference 2024

1–4 December 2024

Vila Lanna, V Sadech 1

160 00, Prague 6

Czech Republic

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Schedule of Events

Sunday, Dec. 1

- 17:30** Welcome drinks and open buffet for arriving participants
- 18:00** Jiří Woitsch – Welcome address from the Director of the Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences (CAS)
- 18:10** Johana Wyss' opening remarks, introduction of the team and advisory board members

Monday, Dec. 2

9:00 – 10:40 Panel 1: Belonging at the margins

Chair: Johana Wyss

Discussant: Ger Duijzings

- **Csaba Zahorán** – Periphery in the spotlight: The interethnic issues of Szeklerland since 1989
- **Karina Hoření** – The Sudeten card: How and why inhabitants of post-displacement Czech borderlands are depicted as prone to populism
- **Aleksandra Szymczyk** – Navigating complex heritage: Memory politics and populist appeal in a small town in northern Poland

11:00 – 12:40 Panel 2: Urban contestations

Chair: Ioana Brunet

Discussant: Agnieszka Pasięka

- **Gruia Badescu** – Remaking the cityscape: Imperial duress and regionalist populism in post-Habsburg urban space
- **Graziela Ares** – Removing sediments of time and reshaping collective memories: The case of Kossuth Lajos Square in Budapest since 2011
- **Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk** – Belgrade waterfront or how to sell fog: Visual tactics of populism in contemporary Serbia

12:40 Group photo

12:50 – 14:00 Conference lunch

14:00 – 15:30 Keynote I by Pamela Ballinger

Istria and the borders of populism: from frontier fascism to anti-nationalist populism

Discussant: Jeremy Walton

15:30 – 18:30 Christmas markets / Individual programme

18:30 – 20:30 Conference dinner at Café Platýz, Národní 37, Prague 1



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Tuesday, Dec. 3

9:00 – 10:40 Panel 3: Re-assembling legacies

Chair: Diána Vonnák
Discussant: Pamela Ballinger

- **Julia Gilfert** – Julia Gilfert – Political tectonics: How the far right is affecting German memorial work
- **Michal Korhel** – A „Lapidarium“-fashion? Building monuments to former German inhabitants in West Pomerania
- **Ger Duijzings** – Populism, war and genocide at the Drina river: Towards an anthropology of dark emotions

11:00 – 12:40 Panel 4: EU-ropeans?

Chair: Astrea Nikolovska
Discussant: Petra Guasti

- **Ilana Hartikainen/Zea Szebeni/Kinga Połynczuk-Alenius** – Founding myths no more: The populist memory politics of pseudohistory and mythologization in CEE
- **Ivan Nikolovski** – ‘No one should teach Macedonians what Europe is’ Macedonian opinion makers’ Europeanization of memory and identity narratives amid Bulgaria-North Macedonia dispute over the past
- **Éva Mihalovics** – The dog, the backyard, and the mission impossible. Ontological tasks of and problems with Central Asian shepherd dogs in contemporary Hungary

12:40 – 14:00 Conference Lunch

14:00 – 15:40 Panel 5: Transmissions of memory

Chair: Diána Vonnák
Discussant: Joseph Grim Feinberg

- **Karolina Ćwiek-Rogalska** – Every day, I root for Putin to lose. How the second generation of settlers to the Polish Recovered Territories connects historical experience to contemporary politics
- **Nicolette Makovicky** – Populist jouissance and popular silences in contemporary Slovakia
- **Jeremy Walton** – Between nationalizing assemblage and postimperial heterotopia: Postempire in military museums

16:00 – 17:30 Keynote II by Agnieszka Pasieka

Coherent incoherence: morality and memory in youth far-right activism
Discussant: Johana Wyss

18:00 – 20:00 Conference Dinner at the Venue



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Wednesday, Dec. 4

9:00 – 10:10 Panel 6: Inequalities reproduced

Chair: Franz Graf
Discussant: Nicolette Makovicky

- **Jitka Králová** – The reproduction of socio-economic and political hierarchies via specific imaginings of peripheral regions: case study from one of Czech Republic's deindustrializing towns
- **Till Hilmar** – “Economic memories” and the far-right's discourse on climate change

10:30 – 11:40 Panel 7: Into the mainstream

Chair: Laura Mafizzoli
Discussant: Karolina Ćwiek-Rogalska

- **Liridona Sijarina** – Shifting realities, shifting ideologies Vetëvendosje's ideology between Ethno-nationalism, anti-establishment and neoliberalism
- **Jonáš Suchánek** – Exploring the geographies of the populist radical right in Czechia

12:00 – 12:30 Closing remarks – Petra Guasti

12:30 Farewell refreshments and goodbye



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Abstracts

Periphery in the spotlight: The interethnic issues of Szeklerland since 1989

Csaba Zahorán

Although peripheral and border regions are generally marginalised not only geographically but also socially, economically etc., they sometimes acquire special symbolic significance. Either by actors from the periphery claiming to renew the centre in the name of common sense or authenticity, or by turning some of the local issues into national problems. This is also true for the region located in the very centre of Romania, the Hungarian-majority Szeklerland (*Székelyföld*), which is closely linked not only to Romania but also to Hungary through the Hungarian community. The region, which has been part of Romania since the end of WW1, is still considered a kind of Hungarian 'external borderland', a terrain of transsovereign Hungarian nation-building, while from the Romanian capital it is often considered an 'internal borderland'. It is a well-documented phenomenon that the importance of symbols is highlighted in the border areas, and the symbols of cultural belonging and identity are concretised here. Szeklerland is the site of two competing right-wing populisms, symbolising both authentic voices and common sense, and the threat to internal national unity. Thus, this marginal region serves as a space for radical populist political actors in Romania and Hungary to build or reinforce their nationalist image through the symbolic conflicts and issues generated there. In my presentation, I seek to answer the questions of how the various issues in Szeklerland have influenced the political life of Romania and Hungary since 1989, how populist actors have been able to forge symbolic capital in the region and how this has affected local Hungarian–Romanian coexistence. I will review the activities of various populist political organisations and actors since 1989, showing how the symbolic conflicts of a marginal region reinforce and validate the populist discourses of the centre.

The Sudeten card. How and why inhabitants of post-displacement Czech borderlands are depicted as prone to populism

Karina Hoření

A single sentence decided it. The one that brought out the Sudeten card, commented the Czech media on Miloš Zeman's victory in the Czech presidential elections of 2013, and similar assessments have been repeated since then after every election in which populist candidates have gained support in the regions from which Czech (or Sudeten) Germans were displaced after 1945. In my paper, I will critically analyze the assumption of a link between support for populism and the experience of living in post-displacement Czech borderlands. Through an analysis of mainstream newspapers from the last decade, I will show how the image of the inhabitants of the post-displacement areas in the Czech Republic consolidates as those with a lack of identity and therefore tending to support populist parties. Using examples from my ethnographic research in northern Bohemia, I will show how local people (dis)accept this image and how they frame their lives in the region and their political choices. Analyzing electoral results, I will show the limits of linking displacement, resettlement, and support for illiberal candidates that overlook other reasons for these political choices in structurally disadvantaged regions.

Navigating complex heritage: Memory politics and populist appeal in a small town in northern Poland

Aleksandra Szymczyk

This paper examines the interplay between collective memory, local identity, and populist politics in a small town and surrounding rural areas in northern Poland. Drawing on 13 months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2022–23, I analyse how the town's complex historical legacy—having been part of various political entities throughout the centuries—is navigated in public commemorations and political discourse. While Poland's eastern and southern regions have traditionally been associated with right-wing populism, the Law and Justice (PiS) party has made significant inroads in this northern, peripheral area. I argue that the town's location in a historical borderland has resulted in a layered local identity, where residents proudly identify as "Krzyżacy" (descendants of the Teutonic Knights) while certain aspects of the town's past are erased from the local iconosphere. Through an examination of commemorative practices, local monuments, and political rituals, I demonstrate how some local actors selectively and reluctantly engage with the region's Prussian, German and Jewish heritage. This selective



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memory work often aligns with PiS's national-level strategies that seek to discredit political opponents by highlighting their German ancestry or associations.

The paper explores how these memory politics play out in a peripheral setting, where local concerns intersect with questions of identity and belonging. By focusing on a region often overlooked in studies of Polish populism, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how historical narratives are mobilised for political purposes in small-town contexts in northern Poland. It reveals the tensions between local understandings of identity and broader nationalist discourses, highlighting the complex ways in which peripheral regions engage with and sometimes challenge centrally promoted narratives of Polish identity and history.

Remaking the cityscape: Imperial duress and regionalist populism in post-Habsburg urban space

Gruia Bădescu

This paper discusses how spatial markers play an important role in fixating narratives about the past that help shape a regionalist populist memory regime. As such, the paper shows how populism functions not only at the level of the nation-state but also at that of regions by focusing on regional actors who use the legacy of empire as manifested in the built environment to mobilize narratives. By focusing on imperial nostalgia and imperial duress, it shows how the legacies of the Habsburg empire are used to create the imaginary of a dignified and superior Central Europe while marginalizing both the histories of ethnic diversity of the past and the power hierarchies that the empire imposed. It discusses two urban settings in regions that have changed borders in the 20th century: Alba Iulia, a Transylvanian city important in both the Hungarian and Romanian national narratives, and Rijeka, a city in Kvarner, a North Adriatic borderland under an array of shifting sovereignties and major population changes in the twentieth century. In Alba Iulia, the paper examines the reconfiguration of its Habsburg era citadel as a process opposing a nationalist project with a regionalist one that is heavily reliant on a perception of the Habsburgs as a civilizing factor. A particular form of regionalist populism is shaped, in which the people—the Transylvanian community—are opposed to the national elites in Bucharest (obfuscating that they also represent Transylvania). Moreover, this also creates a hierarchy of the people between a civilized Central European population and a backward, corrupt Balkan one, thus echoing Balkanist and nesting Orientalist tropes. In Rijeka, the decision to reinstate the Habsburg eagle on the city's clock tower does not contrast with a Central European imaginary of Croatia's capital city but functions to erase both the Italian past and the socialist past. By fixating this identity, the act obfuscates the complex demographic history, as well as the revolutionary acts of the past, using the empire as a silencing and "normalizing" factor in a city of both expulsions and a leftist imaginary. As such, the special role of Rijeka in imperial history as Hungary's port selectively builds on one aspect of the region's specificity while erasing other key elements. The paper shows how these cityscape remakings communicate regionalist populist memory regimes that embody hierarchies, exclusions, as well as contradictions.

Removing sediments of time and reshaping collective memories: The case of Kossuth Lajos Square in Budapest since 2011

Graziela Ares

Since 2011, the political community represented by the political super majority in Hungary has intervened in the symbolic and material landscape of Kossuth Lajos Square in Budapest. The reconfiguration put in place by the government led by Viktor Orbán aimed to restore the square to its image prior to the German invasion in 1944. This eclipse of memories has brought a representation of the cultural nation, to the geographical site of political power and republic, which shapes collective memory and its future. But how does the disruption of sediments of time from the square relate to an adjacent and partial interpretation of the past delimited by the constitutional identity enacted in 2011? The concept of sediments of time as defined by the German historian Reinhart Koselleck is used in my analysis of the renovation of Kossuth Square to combine contemporaneity and non-contemporaneity, space and time, and historical with natural time. This framework also served to problematize the impact of the square's renovation on the historical experiences of future generations. I intend to analyze the monuments of National Unity [also called Trianon or National Solidarity memorial], symbolic grave of the Revolution of 1956 and Imre Nagy to demonstrate that such changes affect the present historical experience of post-1944 events and delineate the possibilities of individuals and collectives to build their consciousness about the past. Associating the biography with the semiology of the monuments, I observed the material and geospatial changes of these three objects to interpret the symbolic changes and



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the construction of representations of an idealized past by the current political majority. In addition to the literature review, I relied on photos and publications in official channels and media, as well as excerpts from the Hungarian Fundamental Law to understand the objects within the present political and cultural context.

Belgrade waterfront or how to sell fog: Visual tactics of populism in contemporary Serbia

Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk

The Belgrade Waterfront initiative (“Beograd na vodi”) was launched in 2012. It proposed the construction of an ultra-modern settlement in the neglected district of Serbia’s capital city. The project was conceived at a high governmental level, with key political figures involved. This new settlement was announced as the area in accordance with the principles of sustainable development and as a new public space friendly to citizens. Public consultations on this matter were never held. The city’s residents were presented with a non-negotiable comprehensive investment plan covering 177 ha, over half of which is office and retail space, but also 6,000 luxury apartments, five-star hotels, skyscrapers and a vast shopping center.

The megalomaniacal project was not only supposed to provide new organization for this part of the city but also represented an investment of a propagandistic nature, proving the greatness and effectiveness of the authorities. The image that served as a tool of propaganda was an impressive scale model of the investment, which made the project visually appealing to those desiring aesthetic and modern impulses, as well as the experience of an urban utopia.

The purpose of my presentation is to analyze the images of the scale model of “Belgrade Waterfront” as a tool of populist communication by the Serbian authorities. I intend to demonstrate that both the model and the images accompanying the investment’s realization, which conceal the construction site, are part of a populist strategy. They promise prosperity, create an illusion of accessibility, and a sense of shared space. Interestingly, they are devoid of any references to the past of this place. In this sense, populist images become a futuristic illusion disconnected from the past or present reality.

Political tectonics: How the far-right is affecting German memorial work

Julia Gilfert

Built in 1936 by concentration camp prisoners near the city of Oranienburg, Sachsenhausen concentration camp was one of the biggest concentration camps in Nazi Germany. Till 1945 more than 200.000 people would have been prisoned there, tens of thousands of them died. Today Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum is one of Germany’s most important memorials, visited by half a million people each year. Initially hard-won by Holocaust survivors, the existence and pedagogical work of German concentration camp memorials seemed kind of self-evident for quite a long time, as democratic values were experienced as deeply rooted in German society. But during the last decade this seemingly solid ground has been destabilized since far-right party AfD has been gaining political power-especially in the eastern German states. Right-wing extremism is no longer a marginalized phenomenon, it has been normalized step by step. Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum is directly affected by this societal postponement. Being part of Brandenburg Memorials Foundation, the memorial’s work is financed by and closely connected to the state of Brandenburg and the federal government. But in the last municipal elections in June 2024 the AfD became strongest party in Oranienburg, and the same can be expected for the upcoming state elections. Based on the research I’ve been conducting for my dissertation project, my talk will focus on the following questions: How do the memorial’s employees experience this not only threatening but in fact already happening postponements of political power and societal discourse? What are the institution’s strategies against current and expected far-right exertions of influence? And how can the experiences of the memorial’s complex historical development help to stabilize its role in a destabilized surrounding?

A „Lapidarium“-fashion? Building monuments to former German inhabitants in West Pomerania

Michał Korhel

A “lapidarium” is a place where stone monuments or their parts are displayed. In the recent years in West Pomerania in north-western Poland a relatively large number of such lapidaria has been created. They are made of particular stone monuments – the remnants of German tombstones. The region of West Pomerania belongs to the so-called ‘Recovered Territories’



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that were formerly German and after WWII incorporated into the newly established Polish state. Almost instantaneously their so-called de-Germanization and re-Polonization began. Along with the removal of German traces the propagation of the historical Polishness of that particular region was a significant part of this process. Consequently, the old German cemeteries were destroyed and the tombstones recycled in various ways. The German history and heritage of the region became marginalized. However, the newly built lapidaria – monuments to former German inhabitants bring them back to light. Is it a short time fashion-like phenomenon or a stable development? How does it go along with the new historical narrative created for this region after WWII? During my ethnographical field work in the discussed region, I interviewed various memory actors involved in the creation process of the mentioned monuments such as members of local communities, church or historical societies. Based on the collected material in the proposed paper I attempt to shed light on the question how the memory of the previous German population is nowadays being incorporated in the new Polish local identities.

Populism, war and genocide at the Drina River: towards an anthropology of dark emotions

Ger Duijzings

This paper will provide a micro-historical analysis of developments in and around Srebrenica, a town located close to the Drina River that forms the (international) border between Bosnia and Serbia. The focus will be on the developments during the 1980s and first half of the 1990s, culminating in the Srebrenica genocide (1995). In analysing the rise of populism (amongst the Serbs in Serbia and Bosnia), it goes beyond the common focus on collective memories and ethno-nationalist myths, drawing attention to the role of emotions. It will distinguish between, 'negative' emotions, such as grief and fear, which constitute a state of passive suffering, and toxic 'dark emotions', which constitute an invitation, often collectively framed, to undo the humiliating status of real or perceived victimhood, justifying acts of revenge and retribution. The paper will specifically reflect on the relevance of the town's geographical border location, and the contested nature of borders and border regimes.

Founding myths no more: The populist memory politics of pseudohistory and mythologization in CEE

Ilana Hartikainen, Zea Szebeni, Kinga Połynczuk-Alenius

Memory studies has long recognized that the sources of collective memory go far beyond lived experience and objective fact. Scholars of cultural memory have long explored the potency of cultural objects like films and literature in forming shared mnemonic structures, and myth and memory are deeply entwined within the national consciousness in societies across the globe. Even so, research has only just begun into the interplay between memory and other types of discursively constructed narratives, particularly in terms of how political actors deploy them for mobilization. Specifically, we focus on pseudohistory, mythologizations, and conspiracy theories. This paper aims to differentiate these discursive constructs on a theoretical level, discussing how they relate to and differ from other narrative elements that feed into collective memory. We argue that the power of these narratives lies not just in their content, but in their affective dimensions – the way they offer a sense of belonging and pride in one's origins, even if their actual nostalgic resonance may vary. By asserting a glorious past and explaining where a nation or people come from, these narratives can provide a form of emotional anchoring and identity affirmation. It will explore how they function on a (counter-) hegemonic level, and how they can serve to mobilize political groups with (counter-) hegemonic aims, like populist parties. It will rely on three 'founding myths' from Central Eastern Europe as illustrative cases: the Great Lechia story from Poland, Turanism from Hungary, and the Czech 'manuscripts'. Through these, we aim to tease apart the interwoven threads of myth, mythologization, pseudohistory, and conspiracy theories and discuss how they shape political narratives and offer a particularly salient brand of memory politics for populist politicians.

'No One Should Teach Macedonians What Europe Is': Macedonian Opinion Makers' Europeanization of Memory and Identity Narratives Amid Bulgaria-North Macedonia Dispute Over the Past

Ivan Nikolovski

This paper seeks to understand how Macedonian opinion makers Europeanize the country's memory and national identity narratives by justifying their (EU)ropeanness amid the Bulgaro-Macedonian memory wars over World War II and the socialist Yugoslav legacy, as well as North Macedonia's accession process to the European Union. Moreover, it aims to uncover how



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opinion makers' justifications-cum-Europeanizations affect the EU's anti-totalitarian memory politics and the associated debates on European identity. In answering these questions, the paper takes a post-structuralist approach to Europeanization. It builds on the memory politics theory, the discursive approach to memory politics, the mythscape theory, and the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA)'s theories on identity formation. With this framework in place, the paper engages in argumentation analysis of opinion pieces, approaching claim-making as a discursive strategy of identity construction, focusing on the macro-strategy of *justification*. The analysis of 32 opinion pieces from the period between September 2019 and March 2023 reveals that most Macedonian opinion makers resorted to all micro-strategies of justification by Europeanizing the memory and identity narratives related to the country's antifascist but also Yugoslav legacy, including the figure of Yugoslavia's lifelong President Josip Broz Tito. While the Europeanization of North Macedonia's 'antifascist' legacy invoked Yugoslav and therefore Macedonian partisans' participation on the side of the Allied Powers during WWII, the Europeanization of the Yugoslav legacy, for instance, relied on Yugoslavia's openness to the West, free travel in the EEC, and Tito's international reputation. Moreover, some opinion makers engaged in a different kind of Europeanization where Yugoslavia was constructed as (EU)rope's alternative (or the other 'Europe'), building upon its internationalist policy, support of anticolonialism, and non-alignment.

The dog, the Backyard, and the Mission Impossible. Ontological Tasks of and Problems with Central Asian Shepherd Dogs in contemporary Hungary

Eva Mihalovics

The dog, the Backyard, and the Mission Impossible. Ontological Tasks of and Problems with Central Asian Shepherd Dogs in contemporary Hungary. Using Blaser's notion on the political ontological conflict¹ as a springboard, this presentation's argument is twofold. First I claim that in many instances, nationalist and/or extreme right-wing sentiments coming from Hungarian citizens can be interpreted as manifestations of ontological resentment or frustration regarding the country's and its people's western or eastern belonging. (Thus, I approach the east-and-west issue as a substantial, ontological one.) Second, that choosing the east as an 'ontoepistemic home' or vantage point comes with consequences for certain non-humans around Hungarian nationalists – for instance livestock guarding dogs, like the Central Asian Shepherd. During my field work in the northeastern rural borderlands of Hungary I encountered the 'ontological mission impossible' of these dogs kept in Hungarian backyards and burdened with the task of materialising nomadic pastoral worlds in contemporary Hungarian (rural) realities. By many Hungarian nationalists, these dogs are conceived as extremely strong, loyal working livestock guarding dogs, with the capability of autonomous decision making. In my interpretation, they are supposed not only to symbolise Hungarians non-European belonging, but through their presence, somehow conjure the other elements of the 'pastoral assemblage' (threat of predators, flocks and herds, big pastures, etc.) into contemporary Hungary and making that Central Asian belonging real. In their original environment, in the imagined, once or partially still real pastoral worlds, this appraised autonomous decision making many times meant and means killing – either to protect flocks or herds and humans belonging to the dogs' family or sometimes the animals fending for themselves (meaning hunting). But making autonomous decisions about life and death in Hungarian backyards appear to be a mission impossible for these dogs...

Every day, I root for Putin to lose. How the second generation of settlers to the Polish Recovered Territories connects historical experience to contemporary Politics

Karolina Ćwiek-Rogalska

As Chancellor Scholz's visit to Poland in July 2024 brought disappointing news regarding Germany's policy toward individuals marked by Nazi atrocities during World War II, it once again made the contemporary policy enters my ethnographic fieldwork in Central Pomerania—a region that forms part of the Recovered Territories of Poland (formerly German lands acquired by Poland in 1945). Beyond this policy development, there are other contemporary political motifs that featured prominently in my research. To exemplify this, in my presentation, I focus on the second generation of settlers—those born on-site to parents with migratory backgrounds. Specifically, I explore how contemporary policies are reflected in the stories they tell about their parents' war and early post-war experiences with both Germans and Soviets. The historical processes are frequently linked by my interlocutors with contemporary events, such as the quarrel over reparations from Germany or Russia's invasion of Ukraine. My study aims to explore how my ethnographic partners engage with contemporary politics, drawing connections between their parents' war and resettlement experiences and current geopolitical issues. The material at the centre of this



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presentation comes from rare glimpses—often off the record and captured in fieldnotes—when my interlocutors shift from recounting their family history to expressing their thoughts. By examining their narratives, I aim to shed light on the complex interplay between personal histories and broader sociopolitical contexts. My study reveals that the second-generation grapples with a dual legacy: the historical trauma of displacement and the challenges posed by current geopolitical realities. Unexpected parallels emerge between postwar resettlement experiences and Russia's actions in Ukraine, highlighting the ongoing relevance of past events. This insight is supported by second-hand experiences—from their parents' stories and media sources. By amplifying the voices of the second generation, I contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex history of post-displacement regions.

Populist jouissance and popular silences in contemporary Slovakia

Nicolette Makovicky

In this paper, I want to reflect on the possibilities and limits of speech in the context of increasing political polarization and growing authoritarianism, considering the way that people navigate relationships with friends and family with radically different world views. I reflect on how these strategies articulated ongoing public discussions about civility and vulgarity in Slovak political discourse in the long run-up to the general elections in September 2023, and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Drawing on recent work on populism in the field of anthropology, I explore the contrast between the 'loud' discussions of ideological and moral fault lines amongst politicians and the public figures, and the 'quiet' strategies which people take up in order to continue to live alongside friends and families with whom they disagree profoundly in matters of ethics and politics. My interest is driven by a desire to understand what happens when people feel they have little choice but to police their words to maintain social relationships or give up communicating with certain others completely.

The reproduction of socio-economic and political hierarchies via specific imaginings of peripheral regions: case study from one of Czech Republic's deindustrializing towns

Jitka Králová

In the Czech Republic, poverty and social inequality have clear spatial dimensions. Following the capitalist transition, the economic restructuring and uneven development have left certain regions behind. In those spaces, inhabitants have since the transition been experiencing dwindling public infrastructure, declining living standards and an upsurge of various poverty industries. In the broader liberal discourse (in both media and politics), those regions have continued to be portrayed as problematic zones, responsible for most of the country's socio-economic and political ills. Politically speaking, such 'regions' have been increasingly discussed in relation to the so-called populist threat. In various analyses of electoral results, they are clearly marked apart from the metropolitan areas in terms of their 'troublesome' voting preferences. Time after time, voters from the regions are portrayed as lacking political agency and sophistication, as they are seen to be making their political choices based on affect and institutional dependencies which have been carried through from the socialist past into the present. My contribution is based on my ongoing ethnographic fieldwork among debtors living in one of such de-industrializing regions in the Czech Republic. I want to consider the effects that the widely held negative perceptions of the region have on the identity formation, the lived reality and politics of its inhabitants. Thinking through concepts of abandonment and economic hardship as experienced by my interlocutors, I want to discuss how the reproduction of socio-economic and political hierarchies is aided by specific imaginings of 'regions' and their features.

Shifting realities, shifting ideologies Vetëvendosje's ideology between ethno-nationalism, anti-establishment and neoliberalism

Liridona Sijarina

In 2021, Lëvizja Vetëvendosje! (Self-Determination Movement) won the national elections, becoming the biggest political force for the third time in a row and the first party to secure half of the seats in the parliament since Kosova gained its independence. Built upon a history of anti-establishment, Vetëvendosje! represents an interesting case study for examining how ethno-nationalism and decolonialism intersect with anti-establishment sentiments. For the purposes of this conference, I



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will analyze the populist traits of Vetëvendosje!, which has transitioned from being an anti-establishment, ethno-nationalist, and leftist movement to a political party now embracing the neoliberal regime it once accused and resisted. The presentation will explore the key elements of Vetëvendosje's populism and how its transition from a political movement to a registered political party has affected its ideological positioning. Employing Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992; 1995; 2003) of public documents produced by Vetëvendosje!, I will examine its ideological shift toward the center by exploring how the coloniality of international influence, neoliberalism, and populism shape political parties in Kosovë. The paper's approach, influenced by Brubaker (2017), views populism as a discursive and stylistic repertoire aiming to mobilize political power in the name of the people, emphasizing the framing of "the people" in political discourse and the morally charged division within them. Populists assert representing the neglected majority against elites in a vertical manner and often incorporate ethno-nationalism to demarcate in and out-groups based on ethnicity (Brubaker, 2017; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). Hochschild (2016) adds that populism not only advocates resource redistribution but also emphasizes honor, respect, and recognition. Further, the paper draws on Weyland's (1999) discussion on neoliberal populism, whose features include the distribution of resources among the poor without taxing the rich and a shared anti-status quo sentiment.

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