

WORKSHOP: The Ways forward: Intersections of Post-Socialist and Post-Conflict Societies

Chairs: Laura Assmuth, University of Helsinki, Laura Huttunen and Ulla Vuorela, University of Tampere

Discussant: Stef Jansen

Societies undergoing profound changes are discussed under the headings ‘post-socialist’, ‘post-conflict’, and also ‘post-colonial’. In this workshop we will discuss the ways in which these terms help us understand the social and cultural processes taking place in societies named as such, and what could be learned from juxtaposing various empirical cases from different countries/ locations. Papers in this workshop could address some of the following questions: How do people living in those localities comprehend the ongoing changes? What kinds of ‘ways forward’ do they see, both on personal and on collective level? What are the ways in which the depictions of future are gendered? What is the significance of generation in these formulations? What is the place of ‘hope’ for local people? We invite everybody interested in these questions to participate in our workshop.

ABSTRACTS:

1.

Anitta Kynsilehto

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”For me, colonialism is over” Biographical insights into post-socialist and post-conflict situation in the context of post-coloniality

Through one biographical interview with a migrant Algerian woman living in the city of Marseilles, Southern France, this paper engages with questions concerning (post)socialist condition in Algeria, (post)conflict contexts of both Algerian war for independence (1954–1962) and the Algerian civil war in the 1990s, as well as the contemporary post-colonial condition as experienced by migrant women in the ex-colonising country. Rather than confirming insights in especially Anglophone literature on postcolonialism, the interviewee “speaks back” to many of these claims, thus opening a space for new questions and contextualizations. Inspired by the notion of intersectionality, the paper asks further, how these perspectives get placed in generational and classed maps of migration, as well as within concurrent camps of secular and Islamic feminism.

2.

Brendan Humphreys

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Where History meets Myth: the Kosovo Cycle, Towards a Structural Reading

The Battle of Kosovo of 1389 allows for multiple readings; as a factual historical event, as a Christian parable, as a non-Christian myth, and even as an alleged blueprint for war and genocide. The cult of the battle – of which almost no historical documentation

exists – has been for centuries passed down through the collection of poems, the Kosovo Cycle. These poems constitute a powerful and durable national narrative, which had been influential for centuries and remains so to this day.

Humphreys' cross-disciplinary paper first puts the Kosovo cult into historical and political perspective. He then applies Lévi-Strauss' theories of mythology to the cycle and argues that not only does this reading penetrate to the deepest, non-Christian themes of the Cycle, but also seems to validate some of Lévi-Strauss' most creative generalisations about mythology.

3.

Anna Matyska

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Post-1989 change in Poland: view from the transnational social space

The collapse of socialism in Poland has profoundly restructured the lives of those who lived under the socialist regime, and it is their lives which are the subject of most of the post-socialist studies. However it has also intimately affected the life-worlds of those who experienced the changes mostly from afar, namely the Polish transnational migrants. The political, economic and socio-cultural “transformation” in Poland forced the migrants, especially those who left Poland before or right at the turn of political transition, to rethink their sense of self, the nature of their social relationship(s) across and within the national borders, their cultural belonging and the attitude towards the newly emerging capitalist and democratic Polish nation-state. The uncertainty of “moral” norms and what it means to be Polish, that permeated the everyday lives of the non-migrants, was arguably even more acute for the migrants themselves, whose ideas about (of) “difference” and “sameness” with the receiving “natives”, crucial for their politics of identity and a possible sense of moral superiority, had to be brought to question. At the same time, changes in Poland offered the migrants space for the renegotiation of their power relations with the local populations, as much as those who stayed behind gained the possibility to renegotiate their relationships with the migrants themselves. The paper deals specifically with those processes as they take place across Poland and Finland.

4.

Laura Assmuth

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Asymmetries of gender and generation on a post-Soviet borderland

The paper aims to show how the intertwined perspectives of gender and generation can shed light empirically on the analysis of borders and life in the borderlands. It does so by presenting an ethnographic case study from an Eastern European area where the state borders are relatively recent outcomes of political, economic and social changes brought about by the end of state socialism. My studies at the post-Soviet borderlands between Russia, Estonia and Latvia have focused on everyday practices and ideals connected with new state borders. I have observed local men and women of different generations in their practices of border crossing, cross-border trade and shopping and other

transnational activities; and I have asked all these people how the new border affects their lives and what they think of it.

The paper discusses new kinds of asymmetries that have developed in this Baltic border area in the years following the break-up of the Soviet Union. Some asymmetries clearly traceable to the Soviet period persist, while new kinds of dividing lines have emerged between individuals and groups of people. Border-related activities are deeply gendered: women's activities are most certainly different from those of men, whether we look at employment, trade, smuggling, shopping, cross-border social networks, religious activities, almost anything that people do in a border area. Borders also mean very different things to people of different age groups, as will become evident from the interview and essay materials. Gendered and generation-related changes are evident not only in the everyday practices of the borderland residents but also in the ways they understand and experience the border and the social realities on the other side of it. I argue that the nature of face-to face encounters across the border has changed fundamentally, and this has had wide-ranging implications for perceptions about the neighbouring peoples and also for relations between the neighbouring states.

5.

Laura Huttunen

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Genealogical memory and imagined futures in post-war Bosnian diaspora

The raising ethno-nationalism in collapsing Yugoslavia and the violent war in Bosnia (1992-1995) politicized ethnic belonging in the area. The pre-war Yugoslavian realities were, however, characterized by downplaying ethno-national differences and fluid negotiations of actual lived relationships. In post war Bosnian diaspora, there are different ways of remembering one's family history in pre-war times. Some family connections across ethno-national boundaries are remembered and narrated, while others are forgotten and silenced. These practices of remembering and narrating are connected to different ways of envisioning the future of the new state of Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as imagining one's own future within the diasporic space. In some cases, kinship relations are translated into ethnic idioms and re-interpreted in the current political climate, while at other times genealogical memory is used to question current discourses of ethnicity. My contribution here is based on my multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork with diaspora Bosnians who engage in active transnational relations between Finland and Bosnia.