

## CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF POST-SOCIALISM

### *Ethnographic Accounts and Anthropological Theories in and of East-Central Europe*

Autumn 2013

Masaryk University in Brno

This course gives an overview of the major themes and paradigms in the cultural anthropological research of late-state-socialist and post-socialist societies. Thus, it explores both the palette of various fields that have been seen as specific to the East-Central European region, as well as the important shifts of attention from one topic to another over the course of the past three decades. Although there will be references to state-socialist experiences on other continents, the main cultural-historical focus will remain on the European satellite states of the former Soviet Union.

The format of the course is a combination of lectures and thorough seminar discussions of the assigned readings. Students are encouraged to conduct a brief ethnographic research on cultural practices and write down the observations in a field diary, read both classic and innovative ethnographies as well as theoretical syntheses of the relevant literature, and be prepared to give concise yet in-depth presentations on them. The course meets five times this autumn on September 19, October 3, October 17, November 7, and November 21. As you can see below, the course has a schedule of 2+3+2+3+2 classes during the semester. On most occasions we will convene in seminar room U34.

September 19	14.00–15.30	What Is East-Central Europe? Political and Cultural Geographies
September 19	15.45–17.15	East-Central Europe as an Area of Anthropological Studies
October 3	14.00–15.30	What Was State Socialism? History and Conceptualizations
October 3	15.45–17.15	Political and Economic Theories of State Socialism and Their Critique
October 3	17.30–19.00	Theories and Histories of the Transition
October 17 *	16.00–17.30	Wild East: Global Capitalism in East-Central Europe
October 17 *	17.45–19.15	Privatization, Consumerism, and the Discourse on Normality
November 7	14.00–15.30	Trajectories of Social and Cultural Change after 1989
November 7	15.45–17.15	History and Identity in the Post-Socialist Context
November 7	17.30–19.00	Forms of Nationalism in East-Central Europe
November 21	14.00–15.30	Gender and Generation: Enduring Traditions of Exclusion
November 21	15.45–17.15	Discussion of the Students' Fieldwork Observations
December 19	12:00	<i>Final papers due</i>

The course grades will be based on written work and class participation. The in-class presentation of selected readings and active participation in the classroom discussions will account for 30 percent, completion of the brief research assignment on ethnographic observations for 30 percent, and submitting the final take-home essay for 40 percent of the grade. It is not allowed to miss more than one seminar session – sign up for the course only if you are able to be present during all classes. The assigned ethnographic observations shall be conducted before November 14 and their results are to be discussed during the class of November 21. Final essays shall be submitted by 12:00 noon on December 19 and the course grades will be in the Information System (IS) by December 27. Specific readings for the successive topics of the course will be available and accessible in an electronic form through the IS.

September 19, 2013

*Miklós Vörös*

miklos.voros@gmail.com (or 38322@mail.muni.cz)

## Course Evaluation

- *Active participation* in the class discussions plus the *presentation* – 30 percent.
- Completion of a *brief research assignment* (explanation follows) – 30 percent.
- *Final take-home essay* – 40 percent of the grade (explanation follows).
- Deadline for submitting the final paper is at noon on December 19, 2013.
- Grades will be in by December 27, 2013.

## Presentations

- Every student will give a *10 minute presentation* on one of the assigned readings – make your choice until the end of the class meeting today.
- Presentations should be produced also in a *one-sheet handout form*: the *front page* is for giving a summary of the main points and arguments, the *back page* is for telling quotes and summarizing the critical opinion of the presenter on the reading (you will receive the handout template with explanations by email).
- Send the handout in an *electronic format* to the instructor in the morning of the presentation, at the latest; *print out the handout* in a double-sided form (on two opposite pages of one sheet).

## Field Notes

- Make a *summary of your experience* with the culture of everyday life in Brno, which is based on a 'field diary' of free observations with the following possible (but not exclusive) foci of attention: (1) *economic transactions*, minor or elaborate; (2) *symbolic markers of class status*; (3) *interethnic relationships/communication and gendered practices*; or (4) *routinized, normalized use of time/space*.
- Ethnographic observations, in general, should (1) reflect on *personal experiences of displacement and rapport*, feelings of being excluded and included; (2) focus on *cultural practices in everyday life*; (3) include a strong *comparative perspective*; (4) seek to *develop well-grounded interpretations* and analyses; and (6) be written in a *narrative form* (not a literal diary but the summary of field observations).
- Emphasize the importance of understanding the native's point of view.
- Length: cca. 4 pages (8–10,000 characters in a Word \*.doc document).
- Deadline of submission: at 12:00 noon, November 14, 2013.

## Final Essay

- Discuss and analyze *continuities and discontinuities* between state socialism and post-socialism, with *empirical references* and *case studies* from at least three countries.
- Topics to choose from: (1) *problematization of East–West relationships*; (2) *transformation of the informal economy*; (3) *local consequences of privatization and their interpretation*; (4) *emergence of new cultural identities*; (5) *history, memory and remembering*; (6) *transformation of interethnic and/or gender relations*.
- The paper should have an anthropological perspective: *comparative* (identifying differences and similarities between the experiences in the three countries), *relativistic* (trying to understand phenomena and practices from the perspective of the local actors), *holistic* (situating practices and discourses in the context of the whole culture).
- Develop your analysis and interpretation also in light of the personal field observations and experiences collected: in other words, provide personal reflections on the literature reviewed.
- Length: cca. 8 pages (18–20,000 characters in Word \*.doc document).
- Deadline of submission: at 12:00 noon, December 19, 2013.

September 19, 2013

Miklós Vörös

miklos.voros@gmail.com (or 38322@mail.muni.cz)