

Anthropology of Transformation: From Europe to Asia and Back, edited by Juraj Buzalka and Agnieszka Pasieka

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Source / Izvornik: **Southeastern Europe, 2023, 47, 385 - 388**

Journal article, Published version

Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)

<https://doi.org/10.30965/18763332-47020011>

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:186:108213>

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2025-02-23**



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Juraj Buzalka and Agnieszka Pasięka, eds. *Anthropology of Transformation: From Europe to Asia and Back* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2022) www.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0282.

The edited volume *Anthropology of Transformation. From Europe to Asia and Back* is conceived as a conversation between Professor Chris Hahn, a prominent figure in the research of post-socialism in Eurasia and Director for over two decades at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Salle (Germany), and his former doctoral students, now established researchers. Each essay in the book critically engages with Professor Hahn's ideas, taking them as a starting point and developing them in the light of the author's own long-term ethnographic research. Using this conceptual format, the volume successfully presents the validity of a *longue-durée* approach to the post-socialist transformation. It addresses questions about the diverse spheres of social and religious life, the functioning of political and economic institutions, and civic activism in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the former Soviet Union. The concept of "transformation" that we find in the title thus refers to the complex socio-political changes and processes of identity formation in diverse Eurasian geographical regions (post-socialist countries) in the span of over 30 years.

Essays in the volume highlight and discuss important social issues, such as: how socialist modernity transformed religion in Estonia (Ładykowska) and wider in CEE and Central Asia (McBrien and Naumescu); how social conditions generate institutional and interpersonal trust or distrust in some cultural contexts of southern Italy and Slovakia (Torsello); what kind of social, economic and symbolic values people attach to their housing property in Croatia (Leutloff-Grandits); how can the concept of moral economy shed light on the everyday informal economy in Uzbekistan (Trevisani) and on unemployment in Eastern Germany (Ivanova); how is ethnic diversity embedded in economic relationships in Romania (Fosztó); who are agents/representatives of progressive nature in some populist movements in Slovakia (Buzalka); and to what extent is the perception of work central in agenda of the far-right youth movement in Poland (Pasięka). While the essays explore a variety of topics related to societal transformation, they are methodologically consistent in that they all rely on long-term participant observation and immersion in people's lives in the chosen community, which leads to a micro-level analysis of social processes from the socialist period to post-war years to the present day. Here we find the main strength of the volume: with its meticulous micro-analysis, it challenges the East-West divide and provides an alternative

model of modernity, a different perspective from the neoliberalist views often found in the literature on political and economic modernization.

For instance, in their essay *The "Post" in Perspective. Revisiting the Post-socialist Religious Question in Central Asia and Central and Eastern Europe*, Julie McBrien and Vlad Naumescu present the work of the research group "Religion and Civil society", grounded in the view "from below" which attended to the lived religion. Instead of asking how socialism repressed religion, they are asking how socialist modernity transformed religion while noting the simultaneous contention of post-socialist states as secular and as having a religious base for their national projects. Despite marked differences between regions in CEE and central Asia (due to the different pre-socialist modes of economic and political organization), the researchers found striking similarities across socialist space regarding the intertwining of religious, ethnic, and national belonging. Religious norms and values mingled and melded with socialist ones, and an unintended byproduct of the controlled religion under socialism was its stronger connection with ethnonational identity. Agata Ładykowska further elaborates on religion-related subjects in the essay "*We are Not Believers, we are Workers*": *The Synchrony of Work, Gender, and Religion in a Priestless Orthodox Community*. Ładykowska challenges Weberian argument about the emergence and spread of capitalism as strongly connected to Protestantism's stress on hard work and the premise that Orthodoxy has failed to develop political and economic conditions that allow the spreading of secular modernity. Based on ethnographic research in the Estonian region Prichud'e, the essay points to an underlying logic that compartmentalizes the spheres of economy and religion between gender and age groups and aims to maintain collective Orthodox identity under shifting political regimes and in the face of shifting visions of modernity.

Two essays in the volume approach post-socialist populism in CEE, bringing nuanced analysis and stressing its progressive elements: *Post-Peasant Progressivism. On Liberal Tendencies in the Slovak Countryside* (Juraj Buzalka) and *Swimming against the Tide. Right-wing Populism, Post-socialism and Beyond* (Agnieszka Pasięka). While writing about "post-peasant" (a term describing rural proletarians stripped of their material independence by collectivization) populism, Buzalka argues that in the post-socialist context Slovak village intelligentsia had a double role: a progressive one as a primary agent of popular emancipation and introduction of reforms to the village, and a populist one as an agent of romantic nationalism and reactionary populism. In a similar manner, Pasięka emphasizes the blurring of left/right distinction in the work

of a Polish far-right movement “Polish Labour” which consists in a big part of “left” components and anti-capitalist sentiments.

Rethinking established concepts, ideas, and truths is likewise a guiding line in the volume’s opening essay *Voiced versus Acted Trust. Managing Social Uncertainty in Rural Southern Italy and Central Europe*, in which the author Davide Torsello compares two regions (Slovakia and southern Italy) characterized by different social conditions, value orientations, and historical paths of institutional development. In scholarly literature, both regions have been previously described as societies characterized by the dominance of strong ties (relying on trust within close groups, i.e. interpersonal trust) over weak ties (relying on trust beyond strict group formations, i.e. institutional trust). Still, Torsello emphasizes how conditions of prolonged social uncertainty impose constant negotiation and reconceptualization of trust and distrust towards kin/persons or institutions. Trust and distrust are in both cases negotiable alternative solutions in everyday life to the constant need to reconfigure ideas of the changing social reality.

Reexamination of economic exchanges and notions of work is carried out in three essays in the volume, be it in relation to ethnic minorities (*Beyond Blue Eyes? Xenophobia on the Eastern Margins of the European Union*, László Fosztó), to the everyday informal economy (*The Moral Economy of Consensus and Informality in Uzbekistan*, Tommaso Trevisani), or to work as moral value (*The Moral Dimension of (Un)Employment*, Katerina Ivanova). Economic and symbolic dimensions of housing property in conditions of revived ethnonationalism in Croatia are examined in *Property Relations and Ethnic Conflict in Post-war Croatia* (Carolin Leutloff-Grandits). Namely, houses in the Knin region were after the war redistributed mostly on the basis of ethnonational criteria, and this destroyed the sense of community and socializing which reaches back to socialist and pre-socialist times. Leutloff-Grandits, therefore, argues against the conceptualization of property as only private ownership, and for the careful approach that includes specific forms of livelihood, social security, and emotional and symbolic values attached to it.

The last chapter (*Transoecania. Connecting the World beyond Eurasia*, Edyta Roszko) celebrates the volume’s acknowledgment of interactions and circulations that have historically connected Europe and Asia, though simultaneously proposes a new agenda in the search of an alternative global history, the one that would turn to the ocean instead of the Eurasian landmass in search for long-term exchanges. With this essay, the volume makes a full circle of

expanding key concepts in Professor Hahn's work, while simultaneously challenging established scholarly ideas about post-socialist realities.

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