

SUSSEX EUROPEAN INSTITUTE

INVISIBLE GRAMMARS OF RESISTANCE? POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITIES AFTER EAST- WEST MIGRATION

10 NOVEMBER 2023

11.00am: Introduction

F39 FREEMAN BUILDING,
SUSSEX UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

- **Aleks Lewicki**, *University of Sussex*
- **Polina Manolova**, *University of Duisburg-Essen*
- **Kristian Shaw**, *University of Lincoln*
- **Bojana Janković**, *Royal Conservatoire of Scotland*

11.30am - 1.30pm: 15 minute exploratory presentations & discussion

- **Vedrana Velickovic**: *'Where are they flocking from?': Representation of Eastern European Migration in Contemporary Literature and Culture*
- **Špela Drnovšek Zorko**: *Who are "Eastern Europeans"?*
- **Diana Damian Martin**: *Aesthetics of discontinuity and West-East imaginaries*

1.30pm - 2.30pm: Lunch

2.30pm - 5.00pm: 15 minute exploratory presentations & discussion

- **Piotr Goldstein**: *Resistance, Enacting Citizenship and Other (Invisible) Activisms: Reflections after six years of (visual) ethnography with migrants and ethnic minorities in Eastern and Western Europe*
- **Kuba Jablonowski**: *Rhythms of representation*
- **Magdalena Muszel and Grzegorz Piotrowski**: *Bridging Borders, Breaking Barriers: Gender Politics and Polish Migrant Activism in the UK*
- **Michał P. Garapich**: *Banal counter-nationalism, myth-making resistance and the far-right: An exploration of hidden transcripts of making sense of far-right ideologies*

6.00pm: dinner in Brighton

Invisible Grammars of Resistance?

Various countries in the west of Europe have become home to sizeable communities from the east of Europe. Most recently, working conditions in the Covid-19 pandemic and the displacement of Ukrainians following Russia's full-scale invasion have elicited politicised responses to long-standing east-west asymmetries within Europe and their legal manifestations. Yet, we have little systematic understanding of how people who circulate between or moved from the east of Europe to its west are politically active and which organisations or grassroots initiatives they join. This pilot project explores articulations of political struggles in two large destinations of east-west migration, Britain and Germany. It also traces political subjectivities and solidarities emerging from current political mobilisations. This requires understanding of how both, the past and the future, travel via grammars of political action.

Our research is funded by a British Academy seed corn grant within the 'Knowledge Frontiers Programme' (following the research team's participation in the British Academy and Humboldt Symposium on 'Mobilities').

This exploratory workshop marks the end of our pilot research and aims to bring together scholars together from various disciplinary backgrounds who are thinking about political struggles in and between the east and west of Europe. The exchange will be informal and offer an opportunity to discuss conceptual and methodological approaches, experiences and insights from the field, and identify research areas where gaps persist.



ABSTRACTS

‘Where are they flocking from?’: Representation of Eastern European Migration in Contemporary Literature and Culture

Dr Vedrana Velickovic, University of Brighton

In this paper I will reflect on my recent work on the representations of 'Eastern European migrants' in contemporary literature and culture. Examining their visible and audible presence in 21st-century Britain and Europe as builders, fruit pickers, nannies, and victims of sex trafficking, and ways of resisting the stereotypes, the paper outlines discussions of contemporary structures of Eastern European othering via an intersectional approach of post-colonialism and post-communism. Turning then to the work of Eastern European/Eastern European-British/minoritised writers, I show how their work offers important interventions into debates about Europe, migration, and postcommunisttransition to capitalism. By looking at the recent phenomenon of Eastern European migration to the UK following the enlargement of the EU in the 21st century - the arrival of Eastern Europeans and the increasing 'Brexodus' of their cheap labour since Brexit - I conclude by showing how literary representations offer us a useful reflection on the health of the nation - something is, indeed, rotten in Brexit Britain - as well as on unresolved legacies of empire that continue to underpin the post-Brexit political crises.

Who are “Eastern Europeans”?

Špela Drnovšek Zorko, Kobe University

The metaphor of “grammars” of resistance raises the question of terminology and language – and consequently, of translation. I am interested in how concepts central to political identification and mobilisation – concepts such as “migrants”, “racism”, or “Eastern European” – are understood and re-thought in the context of becoming resisting (or resistance-curious?) Eastern Europeans. In this brief talk I reflect on my years-long engagement with the narratives of migrants from the region in the UK (and more recently, Japan) to think about the “translation” of “Eastern Europeanness” as a prerequisite for mobilisation, as well as leading to potential fissures in imagined geographies and communities. Who are “we” as “Eastern Europeans”, how do we construct the idea of Eastern Europe as a site from which to speak while holding it at arm's length, and what do we risk in the process?

Aesthetics of discontinuity and West-East imaginaries

Diana Damian Martin, Royal School of Speech and Drama, University of London

My recent research has been concerned with a performance-led engagement with aesthetic circulations between ‘East’ and ‘West’ Europe, specifically looking at an anonymous Instagram account called Latifundiar, which superimposes urban scenes from Romanian towns and cities, with Western canonical art historical landscapes, as well as a digital photography project on balconies as sites of discontinuity by artist Dan Perjovschi. I am interested in the entanglement between the regulation and politics of migration between East and West, and the political and racial imaginaries that emerge in the circulation and transition of these images, bringing into dialogue postcolonial, postsocialist and decolonial articulations of belonging, aestheticization and neocoloniality.

Resistance, Enacting Citizenship and Other (Invisible) Activisms: Reflections after six years of (visual) ethnography with migrants and ethnic minorities in Eastern and Western Europe

Piotr Goldstein, DeZIM & ZOiS Berlin

Ethnic minority and migrant activism are typically assessed in the context of the engagement of migrants/ethnic minorities in their own minority/migrant institutions (religious, political, etc.), or organisations formally detached from these but still focusing on own-group advocacy and/or promotion of culture. This paper instead takes as its point of departure situations when migrants and members of ethnic minorities are involved in activism for non-minority causes. In such initiatives/groups (co-)run by ethnic minorities/migrants, the origin of members is not necessarily hidden but neither is it highlighted or considered relevant. Thus, it is only through ethnography that one can realise that Polish is lingua franca at many Vegan Picnics in Manchester, Hungarian within some of the largest cycling advocacy groups in northern Serbia and that Poland's Books-for-Prisons is coordinated by female Jewish activists. Still, since these initiatives are not concerned with minority/migrant issues but with those relevant to the entire local community, it is unlikely for them to be looked upon in studies and discussions concerned with 'minority/migrant activism' or minority-majority relations.

Using examples from six years of (visual) ethnography in the UK, Germany, Poland and Serbia, the proposed paper offers to explore how minorities and migrants perform their citizenship through sustained, although often invisible resistance and activism. Why do they engage in, or even initiate, endeavours spreading beyond the interests of their own community? What is the role of such engagement for their status among the host society? How dramatically do opportunities to engage vary between different migrant/minority groups? Finally, does studying this activism allow us a better understanding of ethnic minorities/migrants and of minority-majority relations?

Rhythms of representation

Kuba Jablonowski, University of Bristol

My intervention juxtaposes the theme of grammars of resistance with rhythms of representation. It contrasts disruptive and explicitly political enactments with routine but subtly political practices to show how, taken together, they articulate migrant agency. The contribution draws on my empirical research which explored different modes of political action that emerged off the back of free movement in Britain before and after Brexit. European citizenship directive endows free movers with many rights, but it also limits the right to democratic participation in the place of residence. How did free movers deal with that socio-political vulnerability during Brexit? Drawing on case study research in Bristol, a mid-size city in the South-West with a rich history of social movement activity and research, my intervention shows that iterative practices are no less politically transformative than disruptive enactments. This analysis works through ordinary rhythms of representation, punctuated by the practices of expatriate voting, advocating, case working, and organising, to reconstruct migrant politics as a strategic field of action. This field, where sociopolitical actors establish their presence in political life and hence iteratively transform it, cannot be fully analysed through the lens of agonism. Demands to inclusion confront the scandal of exclusion not only through direct challenges, but also through strategic positioning where individual, organised, and institutional actors interact up close and at distance, thus constantly seeking to play off stability against change to realise the promise of equality in the face of exclusion.

Bridging Borders, Breaking Barriers: Gender Politics and Polish Migrant Activism in the UK

Magdalena Muszel and Grzegorz Piotrowski, University of Gdańsk

In the ever-evolving landscape of migrant activism, the Polish migrant community in the UK offers an intriguing case study, elucidating complex intersections of social movement theory, politics, and global communication dynamics. This presentation will probe the concept of 'trans-migrants'—those maintaining influential ties with their native countries while residing abroad. As underscored by the Polish migrant situation, enhanced communication channels, coupled with socio-political shifts in Poland post-2015, amplify the resonance of their activism across Europe. Our analysis zeroes in on the burgeoning political activism of Polish migrants, particularly within the domain of women's and feminist movements. Given the ubiquity of gender discrimination, transnational solidarity has emerged as a unifying force. This sentiment, harmonized with the global upsurge in women's rights movements and the distinctive characteristics of current activism—marked by its intersectional and inclusive nature—paints a vibrant canvas of Polish migrant activism in the UK. Our research findings reveal an activism that, while rooted in the backdrop of Poland's controversial political landscape, also mirrors broader migrant challenges, especially in a post-Brexit world. This has spurred deeper political assimilation and engagement of Polish migrants in UK's political arena. The presentation will further elucidate the intriguing shift in transnational political remittances, tracing the migration from grassroots social movement activism to a cooperative, mainstream modus operandi. Leveraging pandemic-established networks, this shift has been instrumental in navigating legal challenges post-Brexit. While similarities exist between the feminist activism in the UK and Poland, the overseas context introduces unique strategies and alliances, highlighting the adaptability and resilience of migrant communities.

Banal counter-nationalism, myth-making resistance and the far-right: An exploration of hidden transcripts of making sense of far-right ideologies

Michał P. Garapich, London Metropolitan University

In my anthropological explorations of how migrants from Poland express their subjectivities and make sense of the world, I often applied James Scott's concepts of hidden transcripts or weapons of the weak used by people in complex unequal power relations (1992, 1985). I was particularly drawn to an unequal power relation between culturally and institutionally legitimized normative structures, or moral codes, and how people understand, apply, or resist them in everyday life. One example of such resistance involves myth-making and using the structuralist approach to myth as a "logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction" (Levi-Strauss 1968), I show how migrants deal with tensions stemming from the ritually imposed moral equation between national identity and ethics (Garapich 2016). Following this line of thinking, in this workshop, I'd like to present some data and interpretations from interviews and e-ethnography with members of extreme far-right Polish organizations operating in Britain (part of an ESRC-funded 3-year project looking into the issue). The guiding question that I will explore in the workshop is: Given the power and resonance of nationalism/ethnic exclusivism and the emotional grip of this "metaphorical kinship" (Eriksen 1993), how come groups on the far-right are not much more overwhelmingly popular, how come their multi-sensory messages mixing "land and the dead", nature and culture, biological determinism with radical Darwinian individualism aren't gaining more traction, popularity, and support? Setting aside the obvious mainstreaming of the far-right ideology and personnel, I would like to explore whether the role of the mundane, everyday discourse of banal reality, coupled with meta-language of humour isn't what acts as the hidden transcript of a reality check, functioning as a sober anti-ideological assessment of social praxis which may play a role in preventing the extreme far-right groups from uniting and creating a common, ideologically coherent message and political platform.