

ETHNOGRAPHERS OF CLASS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Bucharest, 28-29th September 2017

Venue: National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Expozitiei Blvd, no 30A, ground floor.

ORGANISERS

Department of Sociology, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA)¹ Bucharest & The Romanian Society for Social and Cultural Anthropology (SASC)

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Krisztina Fehérváry (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)

Thinking about class through teeth: political economy and the ethnography of the body

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PROGRAMME

28 SEPTEMBER 2017

REGISTRATION (ROOM P03 GROUND FLOOR) 09:30 – 10:00
OPENING REMARKS 10.00 – 10.30

PANEL 1: 10:30 – 11:30 (ROOM P04 GROUND FLOOR)

KATARZYNA DĘBSKA (UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW)

Family (hi)story as an asset or a burden? Ways of referring to the past by representatives of Polish middle class

ANDREI VLĂDUCU (RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST)

Avoiding the homeless in a social welfare institution

LEYLA SAFTA-ZECHERIA (CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY)

Seeking social rights with clinical means

11:30 – 11:45 (ROOM P03 GROUND FLOOR)

Coffee break

PANEL 2: 11:45– 13:15 (ROOM P04 GROUND FLOOR)

ȘTEFAN LIPAN (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

#oamenifrumoși (beautifulhumans) and middle classness in Romania

ELENA TRIFAN (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

The better version of yourself: Personal development discourses and practices in contemporary Bucharest

CRĂIȚA CURTEANU (CENTRAL EUROPE UNIVERSITY, BUDAPEST)

Becoming part of the middle class in Romania: a story of car consumption

MARIA CRISTACHE (JUSTUS LIEBIG UNIVERSITY)

Values and temporalities of the middle class in postsocialist Romania

13:15 – 14:15 (CAFETERIA, MEZZANINE FLOOR)

Lunch Break

PANEL 3: 14:15 – 16:00 (ROOM P04 GROUND FLOOR)

MAGDA SZCZEŚNIAK (UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW)

Norms of visibility. Visual fantasies of middle-classness in Poland during the post-socialist transition

ANDREEA BERECHET (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

Middle-class fantasies/Dreaming of the middle-class

RALUCA NAGY (UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX), ANDREI MIHAIL (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF
POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST), MĂDĂLINA MUSCĂ
(UNIVERSITÉ LYON 2)

My capital rocks!

MAGDALENA CRĂCIUN (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

Sartorial manifestoes and class distinction in Bucharest

ALEXANDRA DINCĂ (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

Visual self-representations of the middle-class families in Bucharest

16:00- 16:15 (ROOM P03 GROUND FLOOR)

Coffee Break

PANEL 4: 16:15 - 17:15 (ROOM P04 GROUND FLOOR)

CIPRIAN TUDOR (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

Middle-classness, QuePasa? Fantasies of belonging in a Bucharest bar

LIVIU CHELCEA (UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST)

Water gifts in restaurants in the United States

NORBERT PETROVICI (BABES-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY)

Consuming the city: coffee shops and class in the city of Cluj

17:15 - 18.00 (7TH FLOOR, HALLWAY)

LAUNCH: PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION

Middle-class life in Bucharest by Alexandra Dincă (National University of Political Studies and Public Administration Bucharest)

18:00 - 19:00 (ROOM P03 GROUND FLOOR)

KEYNOTE SPEECH: KRISZTINA FEHÉRVÁRY (UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, ANN ARBOR)

Thinking about class through teeth: political economy and the ethnography of the body

10:30 – 11.30 (ROOM P03 GROUND FLOOR)

DOCUMENTARY SCREENING (COURTESY OF ONE WORLD ROMANIA LA SCOALA)

Aici, adica acolo / Here, I mean there (dir. Laura Căpățână Juller 2012, 48')

PANEL 5: 11:30 – 13:00 (ROOM P04 GROUND FLOOR)

BOGDAN IANCU (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

"Apartments with a view" and picket fences (rom: case pe pământ): middle class material projects and housing aspirations in Bucharest

CĂTĂLIN BERESCU

Desperate, but cute. An introduction to the „Tiny House” movement

MONICA STROE (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

Foodies in Bucharest: taste, authenticity and class

MARIA EMANOVSKAYA (INSTITUT NATIONAL DES LANGUES ET CIVILISATIONS ORIENTALES, PARIS)

Food consumption in contemporary Russia: eating your way to middle-class?

13:00 – 14:00 (CAFETERIA, MEZZANINE FLOOR)

Lunch Break

PANEL 6: 14:00 – 15:45 (ROOM P04 GROUND FLOOR)

ALIN SAVU (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

Extracurriculars and the fragility of the Romanian middle class

CĂLIN COTOI (UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST)

Communism and the emergence of the discourse on social classes in fin-de-siècle Romania

RĂZVAN PAPASIMA (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

From start-up to class up. Constructing a new middle class in post-socialist Romania

FLORIN POENARU (CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY, BUDAPEST)

Is petite bourgeoisie a class? Does it even exist?

JEREMY MORRIS (AARHUS UNIVERSITY)

An agenda for research directions in class and work in the postsocialist world

15:45 – 16:00 (ROOM P03 GROUND FLOOR)

Coffee Break

16:00 – 17:30 (ROOM P04 GROUND FLOOR)

ROUNDTABLE: ANTHROPOLOGY OF CLASS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE – CURRENT STATE OF THE ART AND FURTHER DIRECTIONS

Convenor: Alina-Sandra Cucu (re:work fellow at IGG Work and Human Life Cycle in Global History, Humboldt University, Berlin)

KATARZYNA DĘBSKA (UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW)

Family (hi)story as an asset or a burden? Ways of referring to the past by representatives of Polish middle class

Family (hi)story as it is remembered and transferred through generations may be an asset in terms of social and cultural capital – if it is a story of success and glory that individuals are proud of. On the other hand, it may be perceived as a burden – if an individual recognizes it as embarrassing. An example of the latter is that peasant origin of many representatives of Polish middle class is often hidden and blurred. In contrast there are individuals who are able to overcome class domination and present their family (hi)story as a part of a broader social and economic history – not as a story of individual success or failure. In my presentation I will present examples and strategies of using the family (hi)story by representatives of Polish middle class in creating one's biographical narration. My presentation is based on analysis of interviews (biographical and in-depth ones) and literature.

ANDREI VLĂDUCU (RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST)

Avoiding the homeless in a social welfare institution

This research examines a new form of Foucauldian technology observed in the interaction between the street-level bureaucrats from a social welfare institution and the homeless people in neoliberal/post socialist Romania. Using ethnographic results, I advance the concept of “avoiding technologies” - a series of practices used by social workers to deal with homeless people. These technologies are manifested through several processes, including the design of the legibility process or the manner in which the social workers' personal knowledge is used towards avoiding the homeless. The sources of these technologies can be found at the intersection between the official workings of the institution and the social workers' discretion. The result is an institution that functions using a double coordinate (formally-informally). Formally, it has an obligation to deal with homeless problems, while informally it tries to avoid them by making the homeless invisible. This results in a whole group of persons (homeless people who usually are the recipients of welfare programs) being absent from the state's radar.

LEYLA SAFTA-ZECHERIA (CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY)

Seeking social rights with clinical means

The present paper looks at two instances of the mental health system in Romania, where subsistence is sought with clinical means leading to on the one side the securing of one's livelihood and the freedom from the productivist regime of neoliberal Romania and on the other hand the un-freedom of reproducing oppressive logics that lead to one's subordination and potential confinement. Based on one year of ethnographic fieldwork in and around previous and existing psychiatric hospitals and centers for recovery and rehabilitation, interviews and informal conversations with patients, inmates and staff, as well as archival research and media analysis, the present paper looks at the way in which clinical categories have and are being subverted to ensure subsistence and the oppressive logics that this process implies in an open clinical, as well as an asylum-like setting.

ȘTEFAN LIPAN (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

#oamenifrumoși (beautifulhumans) and middle classness in Romania

This presentation focuses on specialists and volunteers who organise charitable acts and events for „children in need” (they are institutionalised children in Bucharest in the case of the ethnographic research the paper draws upon). They self-identify as „beautiful humans” and define what they do as being „terrific things”. They consider the „children in need” to be a dependent vulnerable category that „deserves” to be taken care of. The assumption, often made explicit by these specialists and volunteers, is that this type of care is altruistic. In

other words, nothing is expected in return for these acts and events and for the material and immaterial gifts they make possible. The presentation argues that this form of care is not exactly altruistic, that something is given in return. The charitable acts and events bring their contribution to the formation of the middle class in a particular way. Through this work, the middle class consolidates its positioning as „the moral middle” of the society. Charitable acts and events enable their organisers as well as observers to avoid using the notion of class in their reflections upon this kind of work and the larger society. Moreover, by calling themselves „beautiful humans”, they avoid identifying themselves in class terms. In this context the adjective „beautiful” has ethical rather than aesthetic connotations. Although they structurally belong to the middle class, these people identify themselves in ethical rather than class terms. They emphasise their desire and capacity to do good and rarely, if ever, publicly discuss their engagement in charitable acts and events as something that their privileged position allows them to do.

ELENA TRIFAN (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

The paper analyzes the evolution of the phenomenon of personal development in Bucharest over a period of six years and comments upon its causes and its consequences on a personal and social level. Personal development is an instrument by which citizens are governed in advanced capitalism (Rimke 2000, Rose 1996, etc.). Personal development has become an important goal in the construction of the new subjectivities of the middle classes. The meaning the mantra „You are the most important person in your life!” aims to convey is “You are the only person in charge of your life”. According to personal development discourses, the individual is the only one who can interfere with his/her own existence. It opposes blaming other entities (e.g., system, friends) for success or failure or building expectations that other entities will provide solution for one’s problems. Furthermore, personal development purports to provide tools through which individuals can overcome their problems and achieve their goals. These tools are built mainly on the concept of personal transformation, which covers a comprehensive range of potential practices, from changing social or professional relationships to changing language, emotions and thoughts.

CRĂIȚA CURTEANU (CENTRAL EUROPE UNIVERSITY, BUDAPEST)

Becoming part of the middle class in Romania: a story of car consumption

Becoming middle class is a trip that starts in a borrowed car and ends in an SUV. Car ownership among SUV owners is a story of gradually learning how to be a worthy member of the middle class. Drawing on interviews conducted during February and March 2013, I argue that SUV ownership tells a story of middle class making among Romanian small entrepreneurs. My interviewees speak of the cars they owned in a way that mirror their life paths: each of the newer and better cars they gradually bought is equivalent to one step up towards their current state of prosperity. And the purchase of each car was calculated in ways that were supposed to reflect their class mobility at each respective point. Employing Goffman’s (1961) concept of “moral careers”, I show how the car ownership trajectories rendered by the SUV owners I interviewed illustrate the process of learning and adaptation to standards inspired by their aspirational picture of how Western Europeans live. Becoming a legitimate SUV owners entails drawing the boundaries between who “worthy” and “unworthy” to own an SUV, and is defined through a series of contrasts such as the ones between proper and improper SUV use, as well as moral and immoral strategies of spending money.

MARIA CRISTACHE (GRADUATE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF CULTURE, JUSTUS LIEBIG UNIVERSITY, GIESSEN)

Values and Temporalities of the Middle Class in Postsocialist Romania

The changing characteristics and practices of the middle class in Central and Eastern Europe are often reflected in postsocialist studies of consumption and material culture. The purpose of this paper is to look at changes in middle class consumption practices and in discourses related to temporality in postsocialist Romania. I raise the question of how analyzing processes of valuation of domestic objects and the temporality of the domestic space helps understand the changing middle class identification in postsocialism. I follow the

trajectory of porcelain and crystal objects produced and acquired during socialism, focusing on how the value of these objects has been assessed by the middle class throughout the decades and on the interaction between this type of material culture and discourses and practices related to time. These observations point to a transformation of the middle class from a group engaged in "civilized consumption" that endlessly extended the life of their household objects into a category that relates to the domestic space via notions of functionality and time saving strategies indicating an aspiration to a "Western" standard of living.

MAGDA SZCZEŚNIAK (INSTITUTE OF POLISH CULTURE, UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW)

Norms of Visibility. Visual Fantasies of Middle-classness in Poland during the Post-Socialist Transition

The post-socialist transition in Poland is marked by a discursive domination of the middle class—hailed as the crucial actor in the process of transitioning from a centrally planned economy to the free market. Simultaneously, despite its ascendancy in the public debate and popular culture, the middle class was more a class in the making than a group with a stable identity, goals and interests. As this presentation will argue, a crucial tool used in the process of constituting and producing a “mature,” Western-style middle class were images and new visual genres which proliferated in the post-1989 public sphere. Images and visual codes allowed the budding middle class to communicate their status, recognize other members of this new social group and distinguish middle class members from the working classes. The presentation will analyse both images from the new "capitalist realist" visual genres (promoting the rise of individualism and other middle class values) as well as visual mechanisms of distinction, which served to separate the “truly modern” members of the middle class from those who have failed to absorb the dominant codes of "middle-classness".

ANDREEA BERECHET (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

Middle-class fantasies/Dreaming of the middle-class

The thesis I am bringing forth today/tonight deals with the different ways in which such fantasies have been shaped by tv programmes in the last two decades. I am particularly going to focus on highly rated tv entertainment shows, talent shows, as well as reality shows which I worked on. More specifically, I am relying on my two-decade experience (from 1993 to 2015) as a TV producer and researcher with the main private TV station, ProTv). I am going to combine this research with a cinematographic analysis/review focusing on Radu Jude's film: *The Happiest Girl In The World* (2009). Its plot centers round a teenage girl who travels to Bucharest with her parents to claim the prize she won on a soft drink promotion: a feature in a TV commercial. The problem though, is that the Romanian middle class does not quite exist as such yet, however, it has always been packaged by the media as a status goal that could be easily reached by ordinary people. In this context, talent shows provide a quick run up the social ladder, the main purpose being to find the right candidates who usually need to find themselves on a lower socio-economic level, low enough so that the final transformation can be revealed as truly dramatic.

RALUCA NAGY (UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX), ANDREI MIHAIL (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST), MĂDĂLINA MUSCĂ (UNIVERSITÉ LYON 2)

My Capital Rocks!

Looking at the Romanian reality TV show “Bravo, ai stil!” (“My Style Rocks!”, 2016-), this paper shows how personal style can be a pretext for unlimited possibilities of consumption by intensifying the continuous transformation of the self into a subject of success. By defining the current interpretation of ‘good style’, the show is an overview of Romanian society and its adjustment to the values of an emergent prosperous class. During the show, the dynamic of identification with this ‘nouveau middle’ class translates into what a young stylish woman should not be. This neoliberal process of continuous improvement highlights the personal success or failure in an agency context. Style, even though essential, is far from being the only criteria being judged in the show; the main premise of the show is, in reality, “My Capital Rocks!”: the conjuncture of

economic and cultural capital in building the contestants' style represents the ideal and desirable situation, appreciated by both the jury and the public.

MAGDALENA CRĂCIUN (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

Sartorial manifestoes and class distinction in Bucharest

This presentation draws upon conversations about wardrobes that I had in Bucharest with women who identify themselves as belonging to the middle class. More precisely, it focuses on the commonalities between these different relationships to garments and, furthermore, on what these commonalities reveal about the conceptualisation and materialisation of the „middle” as well as the formulation and expression of intra- and inter-class distinctions through clothing. My interlocutors prefer quality to quantity and natural to man-made fibres. They like to combine ordinary pieces with not-so-ordinary items, in terms of price, fabric and style. Nevertheless, they create outfits that are not dull or ostentatious, and that do not have the impoverished look of the lower class, the standard look of the corporate middle class, or the flamboyant look of the upper class. They are thrifty shoppers and search for shopping opportunities in a variety of spaces, from clothing manufacturing shops, outlets and second hand shops to malls and designers' boutiques. However, their thriftiness is not only a financial practice, but also an ethical choice, from whom they as well as others can benefit (e.g. being a smart consumer who understands the value of clothes; supporting local designers; avoiding the fast fashion clothes because they are the products of a polluting and exploitative industry; or considering the consumption of second hand clothes an environmentally responsible practice). The presentation brings thus to the foreground the aesthetico-ethical „middle” that these women strive to construct and inhabit, materially and ideationally.

ALEXANDRA DINCĂ (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

Visual self-representation of the middle-class families in Bucharest

The paper explores the means of visual self-representation of the Romanian middle-class through photography and its uses. Working as a commercial and family photographer for the middle and upper-middle class in the last six years I have observed, through semi-structured interviews, informal conversations and visual tools, the ways of self-representation and preferences of families with children. These families choose to hire a professional photographer to portray them, and guide her in doing so, their motivation involving arguments such as “quality memories”, “improving appearance on social media”, and “providing our children with the kind of visual history we never had”.

CIPRIAN TUDOR (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

Middle-classness, QuePasa? Fantasies of belonging in a Bucharest bar

My presentation highlights the intersection between the lifestyle/cultural/musical consumption of a Bucharest micro-community, and the political and economic self-identification of this very community as part of the middle class. The group of people I am referring to has coalesced around an alt-rock bar in the center of Bucharest, drawing together, for some 12 years, a number of people who absorbed the anarchic and/or leftist message of alternative rock music, while carrying on with their lives of young and middle aged professionals (as photographers, graphic designers, advertising professionals, musicians, businessmen) and dreaming of belonging or professing to belong to the nascent Romanian middle class. The meeting between a liberal individualism and the passion for a rock music, which was critical of the established system, has witnessed the emergence of an oxymoronic micro-community, yet one that is extremely relevant for the genesis of a new Romanian middle class imaginary after the year 2000. The result of over ten years of participatory observation, my thesis is that this micro-community has unexpectedly combined the fantasy of middle-classness with a rebellion against the established system, which was often predicated upon an anti-middle-class cultural

consumption and lifestyle. My research suggests that we can identify a social sub-species among the Romanian urban population, consisting of people who are vocally opposing the capitalist and consumerist society, and yet, who fit right in – both socially and economically – the neoliberal and corporatist order that became part of Romanian society after the EU accession.

LIVIU CHELCEA (UNIVERSITY OF BUHAREST)

Water gifts in restaurants in the United States

Most restaurants in the US practice some form of water hospitality – giving out for free tap water to their patrons. Although this may seem a trivial issue, there are enough arguments to believe that the issue is, in fact, anything but trivial. Richard Wilk, an anthropologist who wrote extensively on bottled water, claimed that ‘the whole complex issue of the role of the state in modern capitalism is contained in every bottle of water.’ Why not, then, see each jug of water handed out in restaurants as condensing complex cultural, political, economic, and labor issues? Tap water gifts speak to a number of key issues in anthropology such as exchange, hospitality, and purity and pollution. Such mundane behavior is also relevant to some major issues in urban studies and urban political ecology: urban commons, the right to the city, and infrastructures.

NORBERT PETROVICI (BABES-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY)

Consuming the city: coffee shops and class in the city of Cluj

Coffee shops have been a ubiquitous presence in Central and Eastern European spaces for more than a century, and in the last decades we witness a real explosion of their presence in major urban centres. Cluj is no exception to this trend, in the last three decades the cafes become the main type of consumption place across the city. Any pubs, bodegas, or popular classes leisure places slowly disappeared from the city centre, and, in fact, are disappearing from the whole city. Cluj has become in the last two decades a command and control centre for a outsource manufacturing and a destination for business process outsourcing, regional service coordination, and knowledge process outsourcing. A new stratum of well off employees appeared with a taste for the city centre. The paper follows the history of cafes and pubs in Cluj in the last 30 years, from the perspective of the labour histories of their users.

BOGDAN IANCU (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

“Apartments with a view” and picket fences (rom: “case pe pământ”): material projects and housing aspirations of the middle class in Bucharest

As in other major Eastern European cities, Bucharest is experiencing a diffusion of gated communities of various degrees of permeability. Among the effects of this evolution are the privatization of public spaces, large-scale social segregation, generating specific geographies, sites of stark new social contrasts (Bodnar 2007, Hirt 2012). The middle-class pioneers of these privatopias and ecotopias (Harvey 2000) have recently diminished their privileged class status due to the densification of housing through the influx of lower-middle-class residents that put pressure on collective infrastructures and bring with them behaviors considered undesirable. At the same time, the will for autonomy and proximity to nature have also translated into specific middle-class' housing aspirations, e.g., owning a detached family house with picket fences (Romanian: "casăpepământ") either in Bucharest's old working-class neighbourhoods or in the city's (mostly rural) outskirts. Employing ethnographic data, the goal of this paper is to examine how socialist-era flats along with post-socialist gated communities and houses with picket fences have become pillars - as "respectable material standards" (Patico 2008) - of middle-class' identities and aspirations. I will also discuss situations when aspirations conflict with reality by looking at cases when the new owners realize that their houses are located in areas with an extremely poor infrastructure and/or that the costs of utilities are much higher than initially advertised and/or that easy access to (good) kindergartens and schools is severely limited or other unpredictable dead-ends.

CĂTĂLIN BERESCU

Desperate, but cute. An introduction to the „Tiny House” movement

We are all Americans nowadays, more or less, except for those who are not at all, and who are definitely not middle-class. But if you are middle class anywhere in the world your standards and strategies have a lot in common with the American dream, at least in what regards housing. As hugely contentious this hypothesis might sound and as hard it looks to gather evidence for it, it should be of interest to take a look at a particular alternative to the typical suburban mansion that gained a lot of traction in recent years: the Tiny House movement. In short, this is a housing solution that requires a household to downsize to an (usually) mobile home that has in between 12m²-40m². Taking a glimpse into the future of housing is only possible through individual histories that I collected during my recent research in the US.

MONICA STROE (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

Foodies in Bucharest: taste, authenticity and class

The current research aims to investigate the role of food as a material boundary of class. I seek to describe a segment of Bucharest's middle class who engages with food in a manifest relation of self-representation and for whom food consumption doubles as a form of knowledge acquisition and creative leisure. My research interest is centred on how taste is shaped in the case of the foodie segment of the middle class and on the local geography of spaces of consumption that cater for these tastes. The presentation zooms in on the processes of appropriation of lower class tastes and practices in contemporary Bucharest – rustic repertoires, street-food, fast-food, peripheral venues, rough textures, cooking from scratch, informal trade and even foraging – in an attempt to shape a foodie consumer portfolio informed by aspirations to minimalism and authenticity.

MARIA EMANOVSKAYA (INSTITUT NATIONAL DES LANGUES ET CIVILISATIONS ORIENTALES/UNIVERSITY OF TOURS, L'EQUIPE ALIMENTATION (LEA))

Food Consumption in Contemporary Russia: Eating Your Way to Middle-Class?

Food consumption is a part of everyday life having seen multiple changes since the fall of the Soviet Union. One of the latest evolutions is the rise of popular interest in gastronomy, which also happens to be a place where class formation is vigorously renegotiated. Thus, our paper analyses three food related conflicts widely discussed in the media. The first one deals with the ways vegetarianism is presented either as a progressive or as a dangerous way of eating depending on whether the magazine is oriented towards middle-class readers or not. The second describes a conflict about use of urban space in a posh restaurant district, a common problem for a lot of cities but treated in particularly violent terms in Moscow. The last one analyses how a TV show exploiting the persistent lack of trust in food safety is turned to a class based conflict. Finally, we question the positive image of middle-classness in contemporary Russia.

ALIN SAVU (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

Extracurriculars and the fragility of the Romanian middle class

Investment in an 'education with an edge' in the form of extracurriculars is a recent phenomenon in urban post-socialist Romania. Despite the considerable range of offerings, they are priced rather prohibitively. Nevertheless, parents make efforts to send their children to extracurricular courses and activities from an early age, and have high expectations regarding their benefits for the adults-to-be. The intensity with which this phenomenon is being pursued challenges the common understanding of investment in extracurriculars as a typical strategy of middle-class reproduction. In a post-socialist society, where the middle class is both a politically idealised category at the societal level and an aspirational category at the individual level, this investment is meant to enable the concomitant production and reproduction of middle classness. An ethnographic investigation of its lived experience from the peculiar angle of children's participation in

extracurriculars throws light on the ongoing process of class formation under post-socialist neoliberal conditions of possibility, and taps into a sense of the fragility of class positioning.

CĂLIN COTOI (UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST)

Communism and the emergence of the discourse on social classes in fin-de-siècle Romania

After the defeat of the 1848 revolution, the exiled revolutionaries created a discourse that represented them as well versed in the themes of (left wing) social progress but unwilling to endorse a real social revolution in their homelands. As they returned from exile and become part of the liberal political elite a discursive “empty slot of communism” was created that balanced the promises of social progress on which the project of social modernity was based: social classes and their conflicts were not part of this. The local discourse on social classes emerged only when another group of émigrés, coming from the revolutionary underground of Russia, moved in Romania after 1874 and tried to really occupy the discursive place of “communism”. Social classes and the alleged proletarian condition of the peasantry became part of an attempted dialogue with the national and liberal project.

RĂZVAN PAPASIMA (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION BUCHAREST)

From Start-Up to Class Up. Constructing a new middle class in post-socialist Romania

The capitalist accumulation system is based on the idea that the market is rewarding those who correctly identify its needs. It is for this reason that the entrepreneurship and start-up businesses have turned in the recent years from buzz-words to state policies, with the aim to create a middle class that generates prosperity and economic stability. At an individual level, these policies are built on the idea that risk is a condition for achieving personal success, turning it into a knowledge *dispositif* (Foucault 1977). According to Eder (1992), the class can be seen as an empirical category of people at risk. In this article, I show how policies based values such as *self-help* and personal effort have the role of contributing to the continuous building and reproduction of a middle class and at the same time how they are functioning as a legitimation of capitalism and a reaffirmation of its openness as a socio-economic system.

FLORIN POENARU (CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY, BUDAPEST)

Is petite bourgeoisie a class? Does it even exist?

The paper explores historically and analytically the concept of petite bourgeoisie and makes a case for a reloaded version of it as being useful to account for contemporary class configurations in Romania and beyond. The concept has been highly contested and even dismissed both within and outside Marxist traditions. Poulantzas reconstruction of a “new petite bourgeoisie” was explicitly politically charged in order to account for the relationship with fascism both in the interwar period and later in Greece during the military dictatorship. Bourdieu’s use of the term had none of these dimensions and functioned instead as a contradistinction to the established and recognizable bourgeoisie. Relying on this double legacy, more recently CihanTugal developed the concept of a “new new petite bourgeoisie” represented the backbone of the global wave of protests following the 2008 meltdown. These protests, Tugal argues, represented the not only the expression of a class ethos and crisis but its very articulation. A similar case can be made about the Romanian protests of the last half a decade (2012-2017), which the paper indeed does. However, what remains crucially at stake in the debate is the nature of the petite bourgeoisie itself? Is it a class in itself? Does it really exist? How does it relate to the more generally accepted notion, though no less contested, category of the middle class? My argument is double. First, I suggest that what characterizes the petite bourgeoisie is precisely its contradictory and shifting relationship with labor and capital. Secondly, at a more general level, I propose that the way capitalism functions today (that is in the last half a century) leads to the ever creation and expansion of the petite bourgeoisie. Inevitably, the paper engages a wider debate about class both as a theoretical category and as a social reality and points to ways in which anthropology of class is essential for grasping social realities.

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An agenda for research directions in class and work in the postsocialist world

This paper reviews the scholarly treatment of work and class in post-socialist states. It traces how the class discourses under socialism led to a relative lack of meaningful working-class studies in the post-socialist academy. It offers as an agenda for future research three points of departure: 1) greater confrontation of the one-sided discourse on class in these societies and the academy itself (a class blindness of research). 2) The value in studying postsocialist societies both comparatively to Global North and South, and as an intermediate positioning for worker exploitation and responses in global capitalism. 3) To achieve the first two agenda items a more grounded methodological approach proceeding from the lived experience of class and work is proposed.