

THURSDAY SOCIOLOGICAL SEMINARS

2/6/2022, 16:00
room 207, Jilská 1, Praha 1

VIOLA TEISENHOFFER

Re-enchanting the present through history. Ritual uses of the “pre-Christian” past in contemporary pagan revival in Hungary

In Hungary, contemporary pagan revival, a protean movement inspired by romantic nationalism and ethnogenetic theories, is emblematic of the emergence of new religious forms since the 1990ies. Persons engaged in (re)creating pre-Christian Magyar beliefs and practices creatively adapt historiographic and folkloric sources to craft narratives and practices that allow them to act in the spirit of the nomad ancestors they claim to descend from which, in turn, afford them a spiritual sense of national belonging. In general, there is a common agreement in this milieu that official historiography is fallacious, and that present-day Hungarians descend directly from Attila's Huns as well as from the Scythes. As my ongoing ethnographic research conducted in two Neopagan circles in Budapest shows, despite this seeming accord, the leaders of this movement convey different, sometimes even conflicting representations of this ancient past and offer different means for their followers to access it. Relying on recent ethnographic data, this presentation will attempt to make sense of this diversification by examining the ways in which Pagan leaders presentify the past in their practices and how these affect their followers. On the one hand, I will consider the sources they mobilize in their discourses and practices in their relationship to their lifepaths. On the other hand, I will analyze the form of their rituals and of the contexts in which they transmit their knowledge. By doing so, I wish to argue that the variety of approaches to reconstructing the past correspond to distinct historical experiences which, in turn, generate different ritual forms.

Viola Teisenhoffer holds a PhD degree in anthropology from Université Paris Nanterre. She is currently a research fellow in the ERC CZ “Re-enchantment of Central-Eastern Europe” hosted by the Institute of Sociological Studies at Charles University. She is also a lecturer for the seminars “Anthropology of religion” and “Fieldwork techniques” at the Cultural Anthropology MA program of Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest. Her research interests include ceremonial devices, ritual experiences, and identity constructions in Neopaganism and in contemporary spiritualities in general.

The seminar will take place in English in person in the meeting room, there is no need to register in advance.