

Csángó Unchained? Contested Nationalism and the Negotiation of Ethnic Identities in the Hungarian Dance House Revival

Kirsty Kay, University of Glasgow

Wednesday, April 25, 2018

2:30 pm – 4:00 pm

Mackintosh-Corry Hall, Room B313

About the Lecture: In the early 1970s, a group of young university students in Budapest began to rediscover the folk music and dance culture of the Hungarian minorities living in neighbouring Romania. As a form of seemingly apolitical youth entertainment to the Communist authorities, *táncház* (dance houses) gained rapid popularity across the city. The original revivalists took the often risky journey to Romania to learn from the Hungarian-speaking communities, who maintained a strong ethnocultural identity in spite of the repression they experienced as a result of Ceaușescu's assimilationist policies. The revivalists returned to Budapest with not only a collection of living folk traditions, but also a nascent national consciousness that contributed to wider political resistance movements building against state socialism in the 1970s and 1980s. Since the fall of Communism, the *táncház* movement has become internationally recognised and commercially successful, becoming an institutionalised means through which to connect the cultural lives of Hungarians with the ethnic Hungarian communities living outside their state borders.

This presentation will explore how the *táncház* revival facilitates an everyday experience of national identity formation for Hungarians that reflects its political reality of a kin state with external ethnic minority groups. Through a case study of the Csángó, an ethnic minority on the borders of historic Hungary and Romania, it is possible to evaluate the liminal spaces of group identity formation as a nationalising process. Opposing top-down studies of nationalism that look only at institutionalised forms of identity in their symbolic or political configurations, it is necessary to evaluate how those who participate in the Csángó *táncház* build a community of practice that reinscribes a contested minority identity onto the urban, modern landscape of Budapest, highlighting the negotiation of Hungarian nationalism in its territorial, historical, and political contexts.



About the Speaker: Kirsty Kay is a PhD candidate at the University of Glasgow and a member of the 'Statehood, Nationhood and Identity' research group in the Department of Central and East European Studies. She completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Edinburgh, before working and studying in Hungary and Poland, completing her Masters' degree in European Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Her research interests include memory and placemaking within everyday nationalism, minorities in Central and Eastern Europe, and critical ethnography.

