

On Thinking, Crafting and Claiming the Future(s)

Future-symposium



February 12–13th, 2018
University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

Venue: Lecture hall 5, 3rd fl.
Address: Fabianinkatu 33, University Main building



The symposium will attend to how people make claims on the future through various forms of expectations, hopes, interventions, perceived constraints, and power of imagination. It will ask how to deal with what does not yet exist? Our invited speakers will present their work on thinking the future in relation to time, subjectivity, gender, environment, materiality, notions of doubt, selfdenial, failure and success. Diverse theoretical and ethnographic insights from Latin America, North and East Europe, and Melanesia are brought to this event in order to escape classical regional interpretations and open up new ways of theorising the notion of future.

The keynote speaker is Professor Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov from the Higher School of Economics, St. Petersburg.

The symposium is organised by dr Pirjo Kriistina Virtanen and dr Maja Petrović-Šteger. The event is open for students, staff and general public and free of charge.

PROGRAMME

Monday, February 12th 2018

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 16:00–16:10 | Welcome and introductory words by Pirjo K. Virtanen |
| 16:10–16:40 | Cesar Giraldo Herrera (University of Oxford): <i>Emerging infectious diseases and local primary health: devolving science involving development.</i> |
| 16:40–17:10 | Laura Siragusa (University of Helsinki): <i>The future is not (only) in humans' hands: Environment's, territorial masters', 'wild/domestic' animals' authority over Vepsian ways of speaking.</i> |
| 17:10–17:40 | Patricia Scalco (University of Helsinki): <i>(Un)desirable futures: an approach to youth and sexual moralities in Istanbul</i> |
| 17:40–18:15 | General discussion |

Tuesday, February 13th 2018

- 9:00–9:10 Welcome and introductory words by Maja Petrović-Šteger
- 9:10–10:15 Keynote by Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (Higher School of Economics, St. Petersburg):
Future and temporal multiplicity: a brief anthropology of time.
- 10:15–10:30 Coffee
- 10:30–11:00 Maja Petrović-Šteger (Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts): *Time works for us! Projecting hope and future in Serbia.*
- 11:00–11:30 Timo Kaartinen (University of Helsinki): *Waterfalls, oil palms, and the imagery of future landscapes.*
- 11:30–12:00 Borut Telban (Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts): *'Wait!': Crafting the future in Papua New Guinea.*
- 12:00–12:30 Nataša Gregorič Bon (Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts): *Paving the future in contemporary Albania.*
- 12:30–13:00 General discussion
- 13:00–14:15 Lunch
- 14:15–14:45 Pirjo Kristiina Virtanen (University of Helsinki): *Future is here: Living well through mutual exchanges in Brazilian Amazonia.*
- 14:45–15:15 Inkeri Aula (University of Eastern Finland): *Temporal reorientations of Afro-Brazilian quilombo heritage: a method of hope.*
- 15:15–15:45 Eleonora Lundell (University of Helsinki): *Making of futures in Southeast Brazilian Umbanda.*
- 15:45–16:15 Jane Guyer (Johns Hopkins University): *Metaphors for "Pushing Onward", towards 2020 (with 20/20 vision?)*
- 16:15–16:30 Coffee
- 16:30–17:00 General discussion and closing thoughts.

Contact:

Dr Pirjo Kristiina Virtanen, pirjo.virtanen@helsinki.fi, Tel: 00358 294140020

Dr Maja Petrović-Šteger, majapetrovicsteger@gmail.com, Tel: 00386 41 258 119

Abstracts:

Monday 12th February

Cesar Giraldo Herrera (University of Oxford): *Emerging infectious diseases and local primary health: devolving science involving development*

In the earliest contacts, European explorers described behiques and zemes, i.e. Taino (Amerindian) shamans and the beings with which they interacted. These shamans were portrayed as botanists, medics, diviners, or quacks, who like the magi of the antiquity employed their medical prowess to fool people into believing they could foresee the future. Arguably, medicine in its different forms and diverse traditions is constantly seeking to manipulate the future. To foresee (prognose) and modify the future of ill bodies, and to determine which (prophylactic) measures or behaviours can prevent healthy bodies from becoming ill. Frequently as well, medicine has become entangled with power politics. Moreover, I will argue that in many ways their understanding of these entities was closer to the views of contemporary microbial ecology. I will further suggest, that some of these myths referred specifically to the causal agents of treponemal diseases. However, when we analyse these early accounts we also realize that there was at play a different understanding of causality. Unlike the Christians, Amerindians did not subsume all nature to a Universal law given by God, but rather acknowledged a multiplicity of human and non-human agencies and subjectivities at play. In so doing they acknowledged that temporality could be far from lineal and straightforward, the future, the present and the past were entangled in particular ways, which may be described by the complex narratives of myths. At this point, when some in the medical community are warning about the global threat posed by emergent infectious diseases it might be useful to consider those multiple narratives and the futures they may offer. Given that many of those pathogens with which shamans dealt are likely to be the same that are now finding their into the globalized world.

Laura Siragusa (University of Helsinki): *The future is not (only) in humans' hands: Environment's, territorial masters', 'wild/domestic' animals' authority over Vepsian ways of speaking*

If the wish is to entirely control the future, guarantee its security and sustainable practices, we may well better think of it: the future is not (only) in humans' hands! This claim emerges from observing how Vepsian villagers in Northwestern Russia engage with other-than-human beings, be they territorial masters, 'wild/domestic' animals, and the environment itself. This paper shows how Vepsian ways of speaking, such as *puheged* (enchantments), and the nominal *translative case/linneb+noun* for predictions, reveal a relationship with the environment and the future, which humans accept to only partly control.

Veps share the rural territory in which they have been traditionally living with territorial masters and other non-human animals. Employing the folkloric genre of *puheged* (enchantments) as a way to negotiate with the territorial masters the return of lost people/cattle in the forest, the place where to build a house, and how to cure from snake bites, the villagers can hope for a positive outcome in the future. Yet, it is the territorial masters with whom the villagers engage verbally which provide the end result.

Odd behaviors displayed by both 'wild' and 'domestic' animals have equal authority over Vepsian ways of speaking about the future, when they employ the *nominal translative case* or *linneb+noun*. Indeed, Veps observe the animals' odd behavior, open to its future materialization, and express its expected outcome verbally. Similarly, an odd event in the surrounding environment can be regarded as an omen carrying a message for the future. Veps are able to interpret the oddity only after its future materialization. Omens and their verbal manifestation display that Veps open to future possibilities yet admitting limited control over them. I argue that such verbal practices reveal a relationally co-constructed space and its future development, which humans accept to be only partly in control of.

Patricia Scalco (University of Helsinki): *(Un)desirable futures: an approach to youth and sexual moralities in Istanbul*

In Turkey premarital sex, particularly in the case of women, remains a significant taboo. Grounded on 13 months of fieldwork conducted in Istanbul, the paper explores women's perceptions of (un)desirable 'futures' and how they shape, constrain or encourage their decision towards challenging sexual moralities that discourage premarital sex. The paper suggests that women's premarital sexual experience may stand as a powerful frontier between a familiar 'before', an unknown, and potentially troubled 'after'. In exploring these themes, the paper will tentatively engage with the notion of 'crossroads', a term often associated with an ambiguity and stakes associated with 'location', but which, I suggest, can also be productive for illuminating an ambiguity and stakes involved in temporal frontiers between 'before/past' and 'after/future'.

Tuesday 13th February

KEYNOTE

Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (HSE St Petersburg): *Future and temporal multiplicity: a brief anthropology of time*

A rapidly growing body of the anthropological work on the future has been recently invigorated by a focus on temporal multiplicity. Indeed, ethnographic inquiry no longer proceeds by assuming either a universal singularity of time or its cultural singularity within a given society as an isolated unit — for example, the Nuer or Balinese time. Conflicting visions of the future has become a useful means to acknowledge and explore composite and hierarchical temporal assemblages of empire or nation, state socialism, or global capitalism as well as those of the market, governance, consumption, reproduction, work, politics, *etc.*, as intrinsic multiplicities. Nancy Munn's acute observation that time is "divisible" not just by culture or concepts but by "action systems" or "systems of movement," each of which "produce[s] . . . its own time" (Munn 1983: 280) is applicable to futurity.

But this in turn implies that we are at a point when such multiplicity and complexity is hardly in need of another confirmation. The issue, rather, is where we go from here. Multiplicity and

complexity are good questions, but they are poor answers if they come (as they so often do) without qualification as to how a given multiplicity is organized and what we can tell in addition to acknowledging that “X is complex and multiple.” In this paper, multiplicity is not a destination where an argument finally arrives but a point of departure. I argue that, once acknowledged, multiplicity of futurity and time immediately prompts questions about the composition of this multiplicity: what exactly is it, how is it structured, and in particular how different notions of the future that are in it are interrelated. In this paper I outline relations of “change” and “exchange” as ways to understand such a multiplicity. I do so by drawing on examples of state socialism and market capitalism as alternative futurities that were articulated differently in the wake and at the end of Soviet socialist modernity. My cases in point will be Lenin’s interactions with American businessman Armand Hammer in the early 1920s and episodes of biography of a Siberian Evenki hunter, nicknamed “Lenin” who improvised postsocialism in the economic and political uncertainties of post-Soviet transition.

Maja Petrović-Šteger (Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts): *Time works for us! Projecting hope and future in Serbia*

The paper offers an anthropological perspective on certain visionary and future-oriented projects and practices in contemporary Serbia. It does so by unpacking the notions of perceived creativity, freedom and constraints in the context of economically and politically depressed state. By looking at social and organizational strategies of a range of visionaries and social entrepreneurs the paper will explore the value of imagination practices in precarious contexts. Visionaries and social entrepreneurs in this paper stand for people who actively and innovatively respond to the notion that the time they live in requires an immediate, real and pragmatic restructuring of people's political, social and economic ways of living. With a specific interest in the narratives underwriting the temporality of their expectations, aspirations and frustrations, the paper seeks to comprehend how/whether such social entrepreneurial and visionary initiatives influence people’s practical and emotional investments and notions of time. The intention is to address both subjects' feelings of uncertainty over where they stand, as well as their plans to command their present and their futures in given ways. The paper will thus reflect on the temporal experiences and mechanisms of planning and deferral, hope, doubt and imagination.

Timo Kaartinen (University of Helsinki): *Waterfalls, oil palms, and the imagery of future landscapes*

Oil-palm estates have transformed the landscapes of the Indonesian Borneo, or Kalimantan, in the space of just one decade. Industrial estates have expanded in parallel with other tree-cropping projects that aim at intensifying land-use and mitigating climate change. My research in this area from 2012 to present has focused on the local reception of the parallel global agendas of transforming the tropics through industrial agriculture and nature conservation. Both have been practiced in Borneo for decades; what is new about the development since 2004 is the extraordinary scale on which they are expected to change the physical environment. In this paper, I argue that the people of Kalimantan incorporate these expectations to concrete, built sites that contain the imagined uniformity of future landscapes. They respond to

cartographic and satellite imagery and the sight of engineered agricultural production sites by creating environments in which universal coordinates of space are translated into living substances and concrete forms of the earth. In doing so, they are striking a balance between an abstract, Cartesian layout of space and the material sense in which places and landscapes consist of soil and plants growing in it. This raises the question whether future for them is defined by state-promoted economic development or by the temporalities of work practices, environmental processes, and living beings. In addressing this question, I reflect the difference between approaches that stress the deterritorializing effects of knowledge about the landscape (for instance, maps, agricultural technologies, and inventories of natural species) and those that emphasize situated interactions and practices that evolve when people, plants, and objects congregate in new ways.

Borut Telban (Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts): *'Wait!': Crafting the future in Papua New Guinea*

Perceived not simply as a passivity dependent on external events but rather as an active modality of being, waiting is pervasive in almost every aspect of life in Papua New Guinea. In rural areas, whether cooking an evening meal, building a house, hunting of game or organizing the most complex rituals (including the Christian ones), waiting is inseparable from every mode of intersubjective reality, practice and process. While examining how social relationships and society as a whole look like from the perspective of waiting, I will first, focus on waiting as a dynamic enterprise, and second, explore how waiting shapes people's general feeling that they themselves are creators of their own future.

Nataša Gregorič Bon (Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts): *Paving the future in contemporary Albania*

The paper focuses on certain social entrepreneurs in contemporary Albania, who relate to their individual and national future(s) by mobilising and transforming that what is taken as a 'conventional' Albanian mindset (Albanian *mentaliteti*). The paper asks what is *mentaliteti* and how it relates to the entrepreneurial subjectivities, their strategies and plans? In addressing these questions, the author will explore a range of meanings attached to the notions of future and to the notion of *mentaliteti* and explain why these particular entrepreneurs (self-declared 'dreamers' and 'inspirers') conceive Albanian mindset as the main obstacle in planning their futures. By doing so, the presentation will look at the dynamic relationship that notions of the family and kinship have for conceptions of the past, the present and the future. What is it that visionary strategists in contemporary Albania would like to mobilise and what to transform? What pasts seem to be spilling over their present(s) and what presents(s) are holding back their future(s)? Through examining the concept of *mentaliteti* the paper attempts to provide an anthropological understanding of the various temporal implications that seem to be engendered in the notions of the kinship, family and in the processes of planning.

Pirjo Kristiina Virtanen (University of Helsinki): *Future is here: Living well through mutual exchanges in Brazilian Amazonia.*

This paper explores how, for the Apurinã of Brazilian Amazonia, the future takes place in the present. Taking a linguistic perspective on ethnography produced with Apurinã research collaborators in the rainforest environment of the Central Purus River, Brazil, I examine the evidentiality of foreknowledge of future events as well as its epistemic modality. The case shows how humans' capabilities to know are closely related to those of non-human beings, contributing to Apurinãs' ability to know the future. The sounds and dreams of non-humans, events, or people are signs of a future that is already happening. This view contrasts not only with a linear view of temporality, but also with the idea of considering the future empty or uncertain, as long as the relationality between certain entities, particularly the entanglements between humans and different life forms, are maintained in a productive state, as that is a precondition of Apurinã biopolitics and good life.

Inkeri Aula (University of Eastern Finland): *Temporal reorientations of Afro-Brazilian quilombo heritage: a method of hope*

In times of global distress, how can one sustain hope both in social research and in society? Local community traditions may reorient action and knowledge through hope, as in the case of contemporary endeavors to reconceptualize Afro-Brazilian community heritage of the *quilombos*. In Brazil, 'quilombo' historically refers to maroon territories, that were occupied by Africans and their descendants resisting slavery. Besides rural Afro-Brazilian communities' land and identity struggles, 'quilombismo' is a movement that encompasses formerly undervalued African and black ancestry more widely.

I present here what I call *contemporary quilombismo* through two communities in Bahia, Brazil. These new constructions are founded on Afro-Brazilian historical inheritance, which they connect with influences from differing alternative movements such as pan-Africanism, anarchism and permaculture. Their quilombist ideals become transnationally shared also through the practice of the fight-game-art of Capoeira Angola. Traditional quilombo territories are involved in a constant struggle over their land rights. These *quilombola* movements may regard the contemporary quilombist movements and communities with tension, for not necessarily recognizing the centrality of the land question for the traditional quilombos. I analyse the contemporary quilombismo through an anthropological 'method of hope,' elaborated by H. Miyazaki (2004), as a temporal reorientation of knowledge based on Afro-Brazilian heritage. Thus conceived, 'hope' transforms the prevalent past-bound and oversimplifying understanding of the quilombos towards their prospective existence for the future. Reviewing the quilombo notion aims to demonstrate how, despite social and political adversities, hope can reorient both knowledge and action in contemporary settings.

Eleonora Lundell (University of Helsinki): *Making of Futures in Southeast Brazilian Umbanda*

In this paper I will discuss how my research interlocutors, the *umbandistas*, relate with future. I will especially look at 'spiritual work' (trabalho espiritual) – the central category of ritual

events in Southeast Brazilian umbanda – through the contextual notions of subjectivity, materiality and time. I will claim that, aiming at life transformation in terms of health, social and economic issues, ‘spiritual work’ could be described as a technology of producing futures *par excellence*. This technology is based on specific contextual understanding on epistemological division between the material and the spiritual dimensions in all things. This dualism does not, however, correspond with the Christian or Cartesian dualisms (for ex. matter-spirit, sacred-profane, subject-object), but in fact challenges them in many ways. I will propose that an ontographic view on ‘spiritual work’ may open up new (de-colonial) perspectives for thinking and theorizing the future-making in Brazil.

Jane Guyer (Johns Hopkins University): *Metaphors for “Pushing Onward”, towards 2020 (with 20/20 vision?)*

My contribution to this very important sharing of ideas and cases reflects my thinking for some other presentations I will be giving this year. What concepts, sayings and life-referents from our collective archive do the people draw on to “make sense” of the “here and now” as “tempus fugit” (time flies) at a new speed and in new directions? And what do we, “craftspeople” of the intellectual tools for exploration, do with them? I will draw on my own searches, and on some of the concepts that arise in the abstracts to the papers: emergence, masters of processes, multiplicity, the place of “hope” in the “making” of futures, and possibly others.
