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Postsocialist Longing for Security, or Appropriating Polanyi against Nostalgia

In recent years, Western Slavicists and their former-Soviet-bloc colleagues have developed the paradigm of nostalgia/ Ostalgie to explain the lingering popular attachments of many citizens to daily life and culture of state socialism. This section of our presentation will both question the explanatory power and political consequences of this model and account for these attachments in terms of the concept of security. In explaining “nostalgic” practices solely in terms of restorative/reflective impulses oriented towards the past and lumping them all together under one disagreeable label, this scholarly paradigm fails to contextualize them as a reaction, even if often a misguided one, to contemporary neoliberal economics and the derivative, second-hand culture it carries. Indeed, as Karl Polanyi would have argued, such practices represent precisely a popular reaction to the postsocialist disappearance of economic, social, and cultural security and the attacks of the unfettered free markets on the very fabric of society.