

## FUTURES FULL OF PROMISE, FUTURES OF DESPAIR. CONTRASTING TEMPORALITIES IN THE LIFE NARRATIVES OF YOUNG CZECHS

**HALDIS HAUKANES**

*Haldis Haukanes, Department of Health Promotion and Development, University of Bergen, P.O.Box 7080, 5020 Bergen, Norway; e-mail: haldis.haukanes@uib.no*

On the backdrop of increasing anxieties about the state of the world and its future found among by scholars and grassroots alike, this article explores young people's narratives of the future, paying particular attention to dominant temporal structures through which the young people frame their expectations and imagine their lives to come. The article builds on research with young Czechs in three different regions of the country, carried out in the years 2007–2009 and 2014–2016. In addition it incorporates elements from my former work on post-socialist transformations in rural Czech Republic. Drawing on anthropological debates about time, agency and social change, and on recent scholarship on nostalgia, I argue for the necessity of a diversified understanding of temporality when analysing narrations of both lived lives and future visions; linear and reproductive temporalities appear to co-exist with conceptions of time as accelerated, incoherent and unpredictable. Further, I argue that time or temporality is not just something which people are subject to; it also involves agency. This implies that well-established temporal frameworks can be used to narrate expectations for the future, or that different temporal frameworks can be strategically combined to manage both the present and the future.

*Key words:* youth, the Czech Republic, temporalities, narratives, future, nostalgia

### INTRODUCTION

In today's world, among scholars and grassroots alike, there is an increasing sense of anxiety about the future, about social reproduction and human life itself, leading many to the conclusion that the temporal order is changing. From high modernity's future optimism and linear conception of time, via notions of 'risk society' and 'biographical uncertainty', scholars currently discuss what is seen as a breakdown of the past-present-future continuum in societies worldwide, commonly linked to the spread of neoliberalism and its 'flexible' forms of consumption and labour, but also to climate change and environmental degradation. In the words of Jane Guyer, from her much cited paper on *Prophecy and the near future* 'time has gone from being represented as

a lineal past-present-future continuum to being seen as punctuated and fragmented, oscillating between “fantasy futurism” and “enforced presentism” (Guyer, 2007: 410). Thomas H. Eriksen, in a similar vein, argues that fragmentation and acceleration are key characteristics of today’s temporal order. Intensified processes of globalisation generate contradictory and sometimes violent processes of change ‘being complex in such a way as to be ungovernable, volatile and replete with unintended consequences’ (Eriksen, 2016: 471). Eriksen proposes the metaphor of *overheating* to coin these changes ‘the kind of speed that will eventually lead a car engine to grind to a halt’ (ibid: 470). The optimism of post war high modernity has disappeared. So too have the promises of linear progress inherent in socialist visions of the world, and the enthusiasm following state socialism’s demise in the East and East Central Europe. Again in the words of Eriksen: ‘The old recipes for societal improvements, whether socialist, liberal or conservative have lost their lustre’ (ibid: 470).

Drawing mainly on my current research with young Czechs, but also incorporating some insights from my former work on post-socialist transformations in rural South Bohemia and South Moravia (Haukanes, 1999, 2004), this article explores issues of temporality, biography and social change, with particular focus on young people’s narrative strategies for imagining the future. The question is: To what extent does the above outlined temporal order of fragmentation and acceleration, and the anxiety over the future that it entails, resonate with main structures and themes through which young people frame their experiences and present their visions of the future?

Exploring dominant modes of narration as well as sentiments communicated, the article shows that highly differing temporalities are exposed in the narratives of the young, ranging from anxiety-ridden accounts of situations out of control to optimistic and straight forward stories evoking a notion of the future as both plannable and comfortable. Following Moroşanu and Ringle in their discussion of *time tricking* (Moroşanu and Ringle, 2016: 18, see also Ringle, 2016), I argue that time or temporality is not just something which people are subject to; it also involves agency. When reflecting on the future people may use well-established temporal frameworks to narrate their expectations, or they may invoke more idiosyncratic frameworks to bring hopes alive and keep fears at bay. Moreover, through what Laura Bear has called ‘acts of time labour’ – i.e. the work people do to mediate ‘conflictual social rhythms, representations, and non-human time’ (Bear, 2014: 20), several temporal frameworks may be strategically combined to manage both the present and the future.

Before I move on to the analysis of the narratives themselves, I will present some brief reflections on post-socialist anthropology of memory, biography and historical transformation, focusing in particular on the concept of nostalgia and its application to analyses of processes of social change.

## MEMORY, NOSTALGIA AND THE FUTURE

A rich body of knowledge on memory and history has come out of post-socialist anthropology of East and East Central Europe, developed in dialogue with and as part of the wider ‘memory boom’ (Berliner, 2005) in anthropology from the 1990’s onwards. Contributions have been made to anthropological debates on memory, biography and totalitarianism (Niethammer, 1992; Passerini, 1992; Watson, 1994; Yurchak, 2006), personal biography and the state (Borneman, 1992), and the role of narratives in

reconstructing life after terror (Skultans, 1998), to mention some key areas which have been under scrutiny. The reasons for this blossoming are manifold; very importantly, as David Berliner has argued, the demise of the socialist regimes coincided with a post-modernist turn in social history where ‘totalizing aspects’ of historical discourse were strongly criticised releasing an enormous interest in the field of memory and lived history (Berliner, 2005: 199; see also Haukanes and Trnka, 2013).

Topics explored during the first 10–15 years after 1989 included memory under totalitarianism (Niethammer, 1992; Passerini, 1992; Skultans, 1998), the challenges of self-narration in the face of rapidly transforming social orders and metanarratives (Lass, 1994; Haukanes, 2006); possible disconnections between new post-socialist ‘official truths’ and personal experiences (Haukanes, 2006; Pine, 2002); and ways that local accounts resisted being absorbed into a dominant narrative framework (Pine et al., 2004; Richardson, 2004; Watson, 1994).

A more recent trend in post-socialist memory studies is manifested in debates around the concept of nostalgia (Berdahl, 2010; Boym, 2001; Todorova and Gille, 2010). As Angé and Berliner note in their recent volume *Anthropology and Nostalgia*, nostalgia has become a hot topic for social anthropology in general and for the anthropology of post-socialism in particular. ‘As much as the Holocaust has become a paradigm for research in memory studies, works on nostalgia are paradigmatically “Eastern European”’ (Angé and Berliner, 2015: 1). The phenomenon has been analysed as people’s mourning of the more predictable and stable conditions of life under communism; mourning for something lost which cannot be returned (Creed, 2010; Haukanes and Trnka, 2013). Anthropologists of nostalgia, both in Eastern Europe and beyond, have attempted to distinguish between different kinds of nostalgia, one of the most cited ones being Svetlana Boym’s distinction between *restorative nostalgia* – reconstructions of a lost home – and *reflective nostalgia* – a longing for the longing itself (Boym, 2001). Another useful distinction is one coined by David Berliner (2015), who separates between *endo-nostalgia* – ‘nostalgia of the past one has lived personally’ – and *exo-nostalgia* – nostalgia which is not attached to personal experiences, but which still triggers strong emotions (ibid.: 25). Many scholars have also pointed to the political dimension of nostalgia. As much as reflecting a yearning for the past, nostalgia can be read as a socio-political and moral critique of the present (Berdahl, 2009; Boyer, 2010), a critique which also often suggests roads to alternative futures (Boyer, 2010; Creed, 2010; Horáková, 2015; Rabikowska, 2013). As this literature has shown, expressions of nostalgia in biographical narratives, or more broadly, in memories of things forever gone, may be crucial junctures where the past and the future meet, and thus a key source to understand temporality and social change.

Proceeding to my research on young Czechs and the future, I will examine the temporal strategies young people employ to narrate and anticipate what is to come, and the agency they display in dealing with complex realities and disparate ‘social rhythms and representations’ (Bear, 2014: 20). I will pay particular attention to the structuring and sequencing of the accounts, and thereby try to develop an understanding of their overarching temporal orientation or logic. I will further explore emerging cultural themes around which the narratives are organised, and the embedded sense of the future they entail, be it optimism, fear or indifference. Inspired by current anthropological debates on nostalgia and social transformation, I will also examine ways that references to the past are incorporated in the narratives, and what these references to the past can tell us about young people’s concerns for the future.

## THE STUDY

My research with young people in the Czech Republic started out as part of a larger comparative project on gendered identities, belonging and future imaginations,<sup>1</sup> carried out in the Czech Republic, Norway and Tunisia (see Heggli et al., 2013). The Czech part of this research took place among young people aged 14–15 in two villages in South Moravia, and in the small town Jablonec nad Nisou in North Bohemia.<sup>2</sup> Fieldwork was carried out in 2007 and 2008, with a revisit to the localities in 2013. In 2014 a follow-up study was prepared for the Czech Republic only, where the main intention was to further explore issues researched in the first project, but among older youth and in a different region of the country. Fieldwork was carried out among young people aged 17–18 living in and around a small town in Orlicko district in North Bohemia. The fieldwork in Orlicko took place in the autumn 2014 and spring 2015, with a brief follow up visit in March 2016. With the exception of the revisits to South Moravia and Jablonec in 2013, all encounters with the youth took place in a school setting; the youngest I met as 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders in elementary school, while the Orlicko youth were students of a vocational school and a gymnasium. The research followed approximately the same strategy in all settings; during an initial visit to the schools the students wrote me essays on the topic of *My future*.<sup>3</sup> My second visit took place approximately six months later, when I did interviews groups of youth and/or with individuals.

The main bulk of the empirical material presented in this article stems from the Orlicko research with students in upper secondary schools, but parallels will be drawn and references made to my research with younger students in South Moravia and Jablonec. The localities in which I have worked are of course quite different in terms of geographical location, size, urban vs. rural features etc., all of which impact the daily life of young people. On one end of the scale is Jablonec nad Nisou, with its 45000 inhabitants, which offers a number of alternatives for young people both when it comes to secondary education and leisure activities to participate in. On the other end of the scale we find the two South Moravian villages, rural in nature where no secondary education is offered on site, and where local traditions and religion still play a role in social life. However, in terms of generating conditions of choice for young people, all localities, including the Orlicko small town,<sup>4</sup> still share some features which make them appear as rather average, ‘non-exceptional’ places when it comes to opportunities for young people. All of them find themselves around the national average when it comes to unemployment rates. Employment opportunities for young people exist although commuting on a daily basis is often deemed necessary and sometimes it may be difficult

---

1 *Growing up Global? A comparative study of belonging, gendered identities and imagined futures in the Czech Republic, Norway and Tunisia.*

2 My research experience in the Czech Republic goes back to 1990, when I embarked on a study of post-communist transformation processes in the South Bohemian countryside, a project which was later expanded to include also rural South Moravia (see Haukanes, 1999 and 2004).

3 The students were given a list of keywords over topics which we suggested they include in the essays (education, work, family, travel and place of living; in Orlicko also future of humanity/the world).

4 The Orlicko region was originally chosen because it was, in regional studies’ literature, considered to be more marginal than the others (Vajdova et al., 2011). However, the particular locality that I came to work in was not really marginal, at least not as concerns and unemployment rates, local facilities etc. What was lacking and recognized as a problem, was good employment opportunities for people with higher education.

to find permanent/stable jobs (see also Haukanes, 2013a and 2013b). None of the sites appear as the most 'central' locality in their region, but they are not peripheral either, and a bigger city is within 30-60 minutes of reach to all of them. None of them have institutions of tertiary education but such institutions are within relatively easy reach, and distance to learning site does not emerge as a significant problem for those who wish to continue their education without moving too far away. These similarities may be part of the reason why the narratives of my study participants appear to share many features across the localities, which again make them highly comparable.

## NARRATIVES OF PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

The first and very striking temporal orientation emerging in the youth's narratives is one of linearity; of orderly and gradual progress. Among some this orientation is expressed as a belief in the betterment of society in general, i.e. for the future of the world, where modernization and ever more sophisticated technologies are pointed to as likely developments.

*In general I believe that the world in 20 years will be more modern, a number of new inventions and discoveries will appear. So due to that we will be able to explore much wider areas of the universe and discover planets on which there may be life. (Girl, gymnasium)*

Gradual progress through rational inventions is not predominant when the young people discuss the future of humanity or society in general; as will be discussed below their visions for our globe are rather bleak. However, when they present their visions for their own lives, linearity and progress are major devices structuring their accounts. Many envision their future lives as a straight forward line where education is followed by entry into a stable job, and after this job is obtained a spouse can be sought and a family established. These straight forward trajectories, held in an optimistic tone, are totally predominant among the youngest cohorts, i.e. the 14-15 years old ones (see Haukanes, 2013a), but are also abundantly present among the older youth, in particular those who are in vocational school.

*After my final exams I would like to go to another school so that I would get a better paid job. I would like to become a teacher at a vocational school. My further studies would be directed towards the pedagogical school in Litomyšl..... I like working with people and I am a social kind of person, therefore I believe that I would not at all like to be locked up somewhere in a factory. When I have completed all the schools I would like to live for a while with my parents. But after some time I would like to move to a flat before I find a boyfriend. After that I would move with my husband to a one family house. I would like to have a beautiful, big house in which I will live with my husband and my two children and of course also some kind of pet. (Girl, vocational school).*

*After I complete my current studies and graduate I would like to find a job. Like I guess every human being I would like to find a job which I will enjoy and which will make me happy... ..I have spent 14 years at school [.....] and would not like any further studies; I believe that I would not be able to continue [studying]. For a year I have this amazing*

girlfriend, I'm so happy with her and I love her very much. Even if there are sometimes problems between us they are always sorted out and everything is fine again. We spend time together every day. I believe that we will stick together and that it will last. It is likely that we first will move into a flat, where we will pay rent. It is a small, municipal flat. Later on, when we will have more money, we would like to move to a family house or to an older farm. Both of us would like to live in a village, close to nature. (Boy, vocational school)

This optimistic and straight forward way of narrating the future of course stands in great contrast to the punctuated and fragmented temporality appearing in the earlier mentioned anthropological diagnosis of our time. It also contrasts other research on youth and biography in Europe which describes discourses of uncertainty and unpredictability among the young, and narratives of blurred rather than linear status passages (Du-Boise Raymond, 1998; Leccardi, 1999; Leccardi and Rupusini, 2006). As I have shown elsewhere, based on my research with the youngest cohort, the structuring and periodization of the young people's accounts show similarities with autobiographical narratives I collected during my research in rural South Bohemia and South Moravia in the early 1990's with people who grew up under the First Republic (Haukanes, 2013a). Both groups – the young of today and the elderly of the 1990's – to a large degree adhere to the linear model of the *normal biography* of industrial modernity when narrating their lives. This means that they describe their life course as unfolding along a line, clearly periodized, where youth is seen as a the (relatively short) period demarcated for education and learning, adulthood as the time when permanent and stable employment is found and when own family is established, and old age as the period of retirement. Status passages in life are seen as steps along this line (Haukanes, 2013b).

The *normal biography* does thus not seem to have disappeared as a life script for young people of today in spite of the huge transformations that have taken place in Czech society the last 25–30 years; rather it seems to have been transmitted across generations. Explanations for the persistent viability of the normal biography and its concomitant optimism are manifold. Firstly, it is not completely detached from what young people *experience* as normal; it is still quite common for Czech youth to seek short vocational training rather than pursuing tertiary education, or, as in the first of the above mentioned cases, to pass through vocational training before entering higher education (see also Heggli et al., 2013). The idea of starting adult working life early appears as a clear and desirable option for many, although quite a few of the older youth from Orlicko mention that they will work for some years before establishing a family, both to build up material resources and to enjoy 'young adult life' life without too many obligations. Secondly, the Czech Republic in general, and the localities of my study in particular, have not experienced mass unemployment and great economic decline the last two decades. In contrast to the situation in many countries in Southern and Eastern Europe, where young people experience extreme levels of unemployment and/or job precarity (see for example Abbot et al., 2010; Glytsos, 2009; Horvath, 2008; Leccardi and Rusupini, 2006), unemployment numbers in the Czech Republic have been kept relatively low while real wages have been increasing since the late 1990's.<sup>5</sup> This of course contributes to the fact that it is possible for Czech youth to envision the

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/czech-republic/wage-growth> and <https://data.oecd.org/unemp/unemployment-rate.htm#indicator-chart>.

future as plannable. Finally, the normal biography, with its linearity and predictable status passages is a cultural model which is good to think with. It provides a *technology of the imagination* (Sneath and Holdbrad, 2009) which is simple and easy to employ; particularly so when the future it speaks to is still some distance away, as is the case of the participants of my study, especially the youngest ones.

## NARRATIVES OF HOME AND BELONGING

Turning the attention from the structure of the narratives to the more specific wishes and dreams they encompass, we find certain themes which are articulated with particular strength. One of them is the dream of family house, often emerging as the 'end station' in the narrative – the arrival point of the journey towards adulthood. Connected to this are preferences with regard to place to live. Here the patterns show some variation; there are some who express a wish to leave their home town for better opportunities, for more fun and adventure. This attitude is particularly evident among the gymnasium students in Orlicko, many of whom plan to leave town for further studies. However, quite a few of the young people in all localities express a wish to remain local or at least to live in a small town or village (see also Haukanes, 2013b). In all groups of participants the wish to live in a small place is very often articulated through romantic spatial representations, describing the beauty of nature and simultaneously idealizing small town or village life.

*In the future I would like to have a family house, not a big one but of smaller size, close to nature somewhere in the countryside with a big garden. If this is not possible, living in a block of flats would also be possible, close to nature, in a small town. In that case I would like to have a cottage in the mountains, where I would spend sunny summers. For sure I would not want, and I hope that I will not, live in a big town. I am more fond of the countryside, nature, fresh air and quiet environments. I like small towns, where people are closer to one another, the small town is cosy, and has family friendly environment and mainly it is close to nature. (Boy, gymnasium)*

Good relations with family or friends are also mentioned as core motives for staying; for the South Moravian village youth local socializing more broadly, and the ability to enjoy local community life is also appreciated. As mentioned above I did my first research among the young South Moravians in 2007/2008, but returned 5 years later to meet again with some of the participants in one of the two villages where I initially worked. This particular village, the biggest of the two and within commuting distance of Brno, is a municipality which has been quite successful in obtaining resources for community development, and which offers a number of activities for young people to get involved in. This includes sports activities, local organisations, and old traditions and feasts connected to the cycle of the year, such as the raising of (one of) the tallest May poles in the whole country. Meeting the youth again, now aged 19–20, I was surprised to find that very few of them had moved out and apparently did not have any plans to do so. Discussing the matter with them they repeated their preference for nature, fresh air and calmness of the rural area as reasons for staying in their home village. In addition they also strongly stressed the value of local traditions in which many of them participate, and which make them feel at home and also proud of their home place.

Another important theme articulated in the narratives is that of partnership and family life. Having a nuclear family of one's own is almost universally desired among the youth of both cohorts. As indicated above, the family is often envisioned inside the house which is spacious and placed in nature:

*I would like to get married and have two children. For sure I would not like to stay without a wife. I would prefer that the oldest child to be a girl and the youngest a boy. They should both be doing sports - the son should play football and the girl do gymnastics or athletics. Further I would like to have a dog, a cat and live in a not-too-big house, but also not too small. It should be surrounded by a garden. In the garden I would like to have a mini-playground for football with artificial grass, a swimming-pool of at least 10 meters long and pergola with a grill where we could spend summer evenings [.....] Each child should have their own bedroom. Have at least two bathrooms, one on every floor. (Boy, vocational school)*

Gender family arrangements are mostly imagined through a traditional lens. The majority of students, both male and female, imagine their future family to be a two-income one where both wife and husband will have paid jobs. However, girls are clearly more ready than boys to adjust their career to the needs of the future family. The gendered division of roles and tasks in the family is often also described as one where the wife will have the main responsibility for the domestic sphere. Talking about his ideal partner, a male gymnasium student for example spoke about the qualities that he is looking for in a future wife:

*Well, tolerant, mainly very tolerant. Beautiful. Kind. Hmmm, communicative, very communicative. What else? Who would respect me, who would support me in all my doings and who would be a good cook. Who would do the cleaning and tidying up, all these household chores. As my roommate said once when I was in a hospital: "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach" meaning that what a women cooks has to be tasty. And also that she should be a good mother as far as children are concerned. And that she is not moody, annoying. This is the only important thing, the ideal thing.*

Not all boys are as 'traditionalistic' as this one; many boys in both cohorts express a willingness to help their partners with domestic work, particularly with the cooking. Girls on their side clearly wish to have a partner who actively takes part in family life and does his part of the housework. An underlying norm of the female as the main responsible for the house and the male as the main - although not only - provider, nevertheless manifests itself in various ways. Particularly when it comes to care for small children, the division of labour is envisioned to be organised strictly along gender lines with the mother as the main and most competent carer.<sup>6</sup>

Contained within the narratives of 'a natural successful life course' we thus not only find a linear temporality of gradual progress and achievement, but also a temporality where *reproduction* lies at the core; of community life and social relations, and of gendered patterns of work and family roles.

---

6 For further elaborations of gender relations and imaginations of future family life, see Haukanes and Heggli, 2016 and Haukanes and Hašková, in preparation.

## NARRATIVES OF DECAY, DESTRUCTION AND FEAR

As discussed above, hope and optimism are clearly present in young people's narratives of their personal futures. Some anxieties are expressed in relation to finishing school and finding a job, but they are in no sense dominating the narratives. Quite the contrary; when asked directly many say that they do not fear unemployment and show confidence that they will be able to make a living in the future.

A very different picture emerges in response to the question of how they imagine the future in general, i.e. that of humanity and the globe (an issue discussed first and foremost with the older cohort, i.e. the Orlicko youth). We find that their visions for the world are manifested in an anxious and problem-ridden language, pointing to a co-existing but very different temporal orientation from the ones sketched above. Looking more in detail into the themes elaborated in their narratives, we find a number of different worries articulated.

One of the most frequently occurring issues of concern in the essays, which is also repeated in strong words during interviews, is the fear of war. A couple of the boys connect this fear directly to their own possible participation in warfare, or, as in the case below, their resistance to fight:

*Well, I in general am afraid of war, I am strongly anti-war,.....I would not participate in warfare, I would not go there, not even if I had to pay the price of imprisonment would I go to fight. (Boy, gymnasium)*

Quite a few point at specific ongoing conflicts that generate fear in them:

*I fear [that there will be] a third world war, I fear this a lot, because I don't know, when I see how it is there in the East ... in Russia, Ukraine, over there, it does not look good. (Girl, gymnasium).*

*Well, for the time being I fear that a war will break out, you know the way things are, with Russia and Ukraine, I'm rather scared that something will break out somewhere. (Girl, gymnasium)*

Others evoke geopolitics from the era of the cold war, while simultaneously reflecting on what they see as problems at home.

*I believe that there will be a third World War between America and Russia, perhaps they will use nuclear weapons and the whole of Europe will be contaminated with radiation. I also believe that the Czech government is worthless and the president even worse. They should remove him from the government. I also believe that there will be a civil war between Czech and Roma people. And in the end will we have dictatorship in the Czech Republic. (Girl, vocational school)*

It is evident that many of the young people's worries are related to ongoing political debates and current urgent issues, hence the comments made on the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict which started in 2014 and which was highly present in Czech national news throughout 2014 and 2015. In 2014 there were few who connected their fears of war and violence to Islamism. Meeting the students again during a brief visit in

spring of 2016 this issue had become a hot one; and in many cases connected to immigration.

*With regard to the last point - the future of the world, I'm becoming more and more of a pessimist. I believe that our children are awaiting first and foremost fear of terrorism, radical Islamists and things like that. (Girl, gymnasium)*

*In today's world there is a huge problem with Islam, there is a war going on in those countries which forces the inhabitants to emigrate to Europe and which leads to risks of terrorist attacks, if it doesn't stop, this will become a big problem for Europe. (Boy, gymnasium)*

*In 2014 I wrote that I am afraid of war. Today I am afraid of war with Islam, as it is spreading quickly and there are different attacks across Europe. In my view it is difficult to solve the situation and precautions should have been taken earlier. (Girl, gymnasium)*

Many criticise the political leadership of the country, indirectly, as in the latter case, or directly, as in the comments above on made about the president.<sup>7</sup> Another recurrent topic in the young people's narratives is a concern about deteriorating relations between human beings. This concern was something that I also encountered in the Czech villages in the early 1990's. 'Times are bad; people don't believe that changes will come'. 'It will perhaps get better, but not in my time', were phrases I heard again and again (Haukanes, 1999). Connected to these complaints, I also found a lot of what we could call nostalgia present, in particular with regards to how relations between people were developing. A few took pre-socialist times as their main point of reference, and argued that it was socialism which had destroyed relations between people. Others made comparisons between different places and argued that 'elsewhere' (for example their native village) relations between people were much better than 'here'. Many of those who talked about deteriorating relations had the fall of communism as their main reference point, and argued that the new situation had led to increased envy and hatred among people. *The relations between people are bad*, a young female employee at the cooperative farm said for example. *After November (i.e. after the velvet revolution) they all said that now people will become so nice to one another but that is not true. They all just envy each other...* In 1995, when I interviewed the mayor and deputy mayor in the South Bohemian village they immediately started to complain about deteriorating social relations. *People are more jealous and envy one another; they lie more and talk more behind each other's backs* one of them said, explaining the increased tensions with increasing socio-economic differences among people (see Haukanes, 1999).

25 years later in my work with the Orlicko youth, I encountered very similar statements about bad relationships and negative qualities of people. Here expressed by a girl from the vocational school:

---

<sup>7</sup> Negative comments on politicians are abundant, but those directed towards the president emerged in particular in many of the essays I collected in late November 2014, right after the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the velvet revolution. This was probably related to the fact that the president at that time had had some unfortunate appearances in the media in support of Russia's actions in Ukraine, for which he was strongly criticised and which made people show him "red cards" during the celebration of the anniversary.

*The future of the world, I don't see it as very bright. .... People behave more and more horribly towards one another. Everyone envies something in somebody, and people are mean towards each other, totally disgusting!!! It is only getting worse and will not become better again. Which is really sad but this is how it is. I'm not very optimistic so I don't see a good future for the world.*

In my analysis of the statements about deteriorating human relations in the 1990's, I came to see them first and foremost as people's ways of reflecting on unpleasant changes experienced in the first years after communism, *endo-nostalgia* in Berliner's terms, i.e. related to specific changes occurring in one's own life. I also found that they contained a rather standardized critique of modernity as such, expressing nostalgia for a simpler and more "communal" kind of life. The latter could also be seen to apply to the young people of my current study. Many of them stress the negative impact of technology on human relations, focusing on recent technological inventions:

*When I see how everything moves quickly forward! Electronics, science... I cannot at all imagine how it will be in ten years! For sure we will live in a really modern world, with a lot of contrivances. I am a bit afraid that due to those possibilities human relations will be completely destroyed. I believe that the generation following us will have plenty of modern things and will not be concerned with other people. They will only know them from the screen of computers. And that is a sad thought. (Girl, gymnasium)*

*Already our time is mad - all over you find electronics, small children play on the computer instead of being outside, at the age of five they have smart phones, people don't talk to each other anymore but sit next to one another and write to somebody else on their phones. In practice we lose contact with people. We don't know how to talk together. ....The worst thing is that I myself know that I am addicted to the electronics and I cannot imagine that I should limit the use of it, or not use it at all. I believe that the world will end like this, people will sit at home, play games on all kinds of machines, they will not do the shopping, they will not even clean or do housework, because machines will do everything for us. I do hope that neither I nor my children or grandchildren will live to see that. (Girl, gymnasium)*

As discussed introductory-wise, global warming and climate change form an important basis for the arguments about fundamental temporal change and breakdown of the past-present-future continuum. Among my young study participants environmental concerns are mentioned by some when describing the future of the world:

*Concerning the world's future I don't have many ideas, but I hope that we pull ourselves together and start doing something with our way of living, which destroys the environment and strains our country a lot. We should start thinking about our children and the coming generations, who will have to live here when we are not here anymore. I fear that it will not move towards the better, because technology is moving rapidly ahead and at some point in time this development needs to stop and what will follow after that I cannot even imagine (Girl, vocational school)*

Probing this issue during interviews, I found that few expressed worries related to global warming and climate change. When asked directly many dismissed the issue as unimportant or not falling within their interests or concerns. In their essays a few describe the “end of the world” in rather apocalyptic terms, though, echoing popular culture and films such as “The day after tomorrow” and “The survivalist”. The following extract, written by one of the male gymnasium students, presents a rather grim vision for the world:

*Humanity has been heading towards its end already for a long time .....Battles over the last drop of oil, attempts to appropriate pieces of land on an overpopulated planet, increasing racial hate; all of this will, together with other causes, lead to a total collapse. There will be nothing left but wilderness.....Intellect will become a word not needed anymore, a memory buried in dust. Everything will be left at the mercy of brute force, thanks to which it will be possible to survive. States as we know them will disappear. They will dissolve into dust.*

Introductory-wise I posed the question of whether a temporality of acceleration and fragmentation could be found in young Czechs narratives about the future. These latter accounts show that it clearly does. Incorporating a notion of the future as both dangerous, scattered and unpredictable, they show a clear resonance with the ‘overheating paradigm’ although differing in their specific concerns. While climate change, neoliberal economic developments and accelerated growth are at the forefront of scientists’ worried predictions, warfare close to home, bad politics, and loss of community appear as the most urgent issues among the youth.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

From these bleak and sad prospects, let me now return to my initial questions about temporal strategies, senses of the future and (nostalgic) references to the past in the narratives of the young, and indicate some implications of my findings for the understanding of temporal complexity and the ‘labour of time’ (Bear, 2014: 6) that the young people are involved in when imagining their personal future and that of humanity. Looking firstly at the rhythm and periodization of young people’s narratives of their personal futures, we find that they to a large extent are dominated by a *linear temporality*, which can be seen to echo former generations’ life scripts describing a standard trajectory towards adulthood where the end station is the nuclear family in a nice house. The enormous distance notwithstanding – economically, politically and education-wise – between today’s society and the society in which their grandparents lived, the young people are still able to evoke the normal biography of industrial modernity as a script for narrating their future lives. I also find that the linear and optimistic narratives encompass a *temporality of reproduction*, relating to notions of belonging and home, and to gendered roles and identities. This illustrates Moroşanu and Ringel’s point that old and well-established temporal frameworks can well be used to narrate new situations (ibid.: 18), and, I would argue, be used actively to create order and some kind of control over what lies ahead. Although replicative both in form and content, these personal narratives are not backward-looking or nostalgic in the sense that they mourn the past, or show a desire to make things *more like what they used to be*. Rather they reflect a wish to remain ‘normal’, work-wise, gender-wise and

other, while continuing along the track of gradual increase in living standard that a majority of people in the Czech Republic have experienced during the last 20 years.

When it comes to the rather pessimistic visions the young people have for humanity and the world, the situation is different. It is evident that the images of destroyed landscapes, countries torn by war, bad politics and deteriorating human relations are mirrored against the bygone; an idealized past where peaceful relations predominated, where technology was simple and community among people was maintained by face-to-face interaction rather than through 'screens of computers'. In contrast to the nostalgia I met in Czech villages in the 1990's, the young people's mourning of the past is less *endo*-nostalgic in the sense that it refers to a specific past which they themselves have lived and lost. Rather, it represents 'discourses about loss which is detached from the direct experience of losing something personal' (Berliner, 2015: 21), but which still causes pain and worry. Following Berdahl (2009), Creed (2010) and other theorists of nostalgia I also see contours of a critique of the politics of the present in the young people's nostalgic claims; 'why is nothing done to change the way we are heading'?

As argued above these narratives of destruction and decay resonate well with the more *dystopian temporality* emerging in current social science debates on time and the future. What is very striking is the lack of connection between this dystopian temporality and the linear and optimistic temporality through which the young imagine their own personal futures. This brings me back to the question of temporality and agency, and the claim the people are not only subject to time but are also able to invoke different temporal frameworks for different purposes. The 'labour of time' that the young people of my study are involved in is not so much about reconciling 'disparate rhythms and representations of time', but rather about keeping different temporalities apart. This act of separation enables them to protect their imagined personal futures from fear and chaos; recognizing humanity's challenges as immense and horrible but still keeping them at bay.

## REFERENCES

- Abbot, P., Wallace, C., Mascauteanu, M, Sarpsfor, R. (2010). Concept of Citizenship, Social and System Integration among young People in Post-Soviet Moldova. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13(5), 581-96.
- Angé, O., Berliner, D. (2015). Introduction. In: O. Angé, D. Berliner, *Anthropology and Nostalgia*, New York: Berghahn books, pp. 1-16.
- Bear, L. (2014). Doubt, conflict, mediation: the anthropology of modern time, *JRAI* 20(S1), 3-30.
- Berdahl, D. (2009). *On the social life of post-socialism: Memory, consumption, Germany*. Edited by Matti Bunzl. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Berliner, D. (2015). Are anthropologists nostalgists? In: O. Angé, D. Berliner, *Anthropology and Nostalgia*, New York: Berghahn books, pp. 17-34.
- Berliner, D. (2005). The abuses of memory: Reflections on the memory boom in anthropology. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 78(1), 197-211.
- Borneman, J. (1992). *Belonging in the two Berlins: Kin, state, nation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Boyer, D. (2010). From Algos to autonomous: Nostalgic Eastern Europe as post-imperial mania. In: M. Todorova, Zs. Gille (Eds.), *Post-communist nostalgia*, New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 17-28.

- Creed, G. (2010). Strange bedfellows: Socialist nostalgia and neo-liberalism in Bulgaria. In: M. Todorova, Zs. Gille (Eds.), *Post-communist nostalgia*, New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 29-45.
- Du Boise-Reymond, M. (1998). "I don't want to commit myself": Young people's life concepts. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 1(1), 63-79.
- Eriksen, T. H. (2016). Overheating. The world since 1991. *History and Anthropology*, 27(5), 469-487.
- Glytsos, N. (2009). Theoretical Considerations and Empirical Evidence on Brain Drain Grounding the Review of Albanians and Bulgarian's Experience. *International Migration*, 48(3), 107-130.
- Guyer, J. (2007). Prophecy and the near future: Thoughts on macroeconomic, evangelical, and punctuated time. *American Ethnologist*, 34(3), 409-421.
- Haukanes, H. (1999). *Grand Dramas - Ordinary Lives. State, Locality and Person in Post-Communist Czech Society*. Thesis for the degree of Dr. polit, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen, Norway.
- Haukanes, H. (2004). *Velké dramata, běžné životy. Postkomunistické zkušenosti na českém venkově*. (Grand Dramas - ordinary lives. Post-communist experiences in the Czech countryside). Prague: Sociologické nakladatelství SLON.
- Haukanes, H. (2006). Telling lives. Autobiography and history after socialism. In: T. McCajor Hall, R. Read (Eds.), *Changes in the heart of Europe: Recent ethnographies of Czechs, Slovaks, Roma, and Sorbs*. Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, pp. 279-294.
- Haukanes, H. (2013a.). Precarious Lives: Narratives of Hope, Loss and "Normality" among Different Generations of Czechs. *Focaal. Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, 66, 47-57.
- Haukanes, H. (2013b). Belonging, mobility and the future: representations of space in the Life narratives of young rural Czechs. *Young. Nordic Journal of Youth Research*, 21(2), 93-210.
- Haukanes, H., Trnka, S. (2013). Memory, imagination, and belonging across generations: Perspectives from post-socialist Europe and beyond *Focaal. Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, 66, 3-13.
- Haukanes, H., Heggli G. (2016). Care and career in the life scripts of young people - cases from the Czech Republic and Norway. *NORA - Nordic Journal of feminist research*, 24(3), 165-180.
- Haukanes, H., Hašková, H. (n.d.) "It is the mother for the child". Gendered imaginations of family life and parenthood among Czech youth (in preparation).
- Heggli G., Haukanes, H., Tjomslund, M. (2013). Fearing the Future? Young people envisioning their working lives in the Czech Republic, Norway and Tunisia. *Journal of youth studies*, 16(7), 916-931.
- Horáková, H. (2015). Ethnography of post-socialist rural change: Social memory, modernity, local empowerment and internal displacement. In: H. Červinková, M. Buchovski, Z. Uherek (Eds.), *Rethinking ethnography in Central Europe*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 195-216.
- Horvath, I. (2008). The Culture of Migration of Rural Romanian Youth, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34(5), 771-786.
- Lass, A. (1994). From memory to history. The events of November 17 dis/membered. In: R. Watson (Ed.), *Memory, history and opposition under state socialism*, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, pp. 87-104.
- Leccardi, C. (1999). Time, young people and the future. *Young*, 7(3), 3-18.
- Leccardi, C. (2006). Facing uncertainty: Temporality and biographies in the New Century. In: C. Leccardi, E. Rupusini (Eds.), *A new youth? Young people, generations and family life*, Hampshire and Burlington: Ashgate, pp. 104-125.
- Moroşanu, R., Ringel, F. (2016). Time tricking. A general introduction. *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, 34(1), 17-21.
- Niethammer, L. (1992). Where were you on 17 June. A niche in memory. In: L. Passerini (Ed.), *Memory and totalitarianism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Passerini, L. (1992) (Ed). *Memory and totalitarianism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pine, F. (2002). Retreat to the household? Gendered domains in post-socialist Poland. In: Chris M. Hann (Ed.), *Post-socialism. Ideals, ideologies and practices in Eurasia*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 95-113.
- Pine F., Kaneff, D., Haukanes, H. (2004). In-

- roduction. In: F. Pine, D. Kaneff, H. Haukanes (Eds.), *Religion, politics and memory. The past meets the present in contemporary Europe*, Münster: Lit Verlag, pp. 1-29.
- Rabikowska, M. (2013). The everyday of memory on the ruins of the post-communist future: Performative nostalgia, Perception and narrating identity. In: M. Rabikowska (Ed.), *The everyday of memory: Between communism and post-communism*. Oxford, GBR: Peter Lang, pp. 214-266.
- Ringle, F. (2016). Can time be tricked? A theoretical introduction. *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, 35(1), 22-31.
- Richardson, T. (2004). Disciplining the past in post-Soviet Ukraine: Memory and history in schools and families. In: F. Pine, D. Kaneff, H. Haukanes (Eds.), *Religion, politics and memory. The past meets the present in contemporary Europe*, Münster: Lit Verlag, pp. 109-132.
- Skultans, V. (1998). *The testimony of lives: Narrative and memory in post-Soviet Latvia*. London: Routledge.
- Sneath, D., Holbraad, M., Pedersen, M. A. (2009). Technologies of the imagination: An introduction. *Ethnos*, 74(1), 5-30.
- Todorova, M., Gille, Zs. (Eds.) (2010). *Post-communist nostalgia*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Vajdová, Z., Čermák, D., Stachová J. (2011). *Spolupráce - rozvojová strategie Orlicka*. Sociologický Ústav AV ČR.
- Wanner, C. (1998). *Burden of dreams: History and identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine*. Pennsylvania: Penn State Press.
- Watson, R. (Ed.) (1994). *Memory, history and opposition under state socialism*, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, pp. 87-104.
- Yurchak, A. (2005). *Everything was forever, until it was no more: The last Soviet generation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

HALDIS HAUKANES - holds a PhD in Social anthropology from the University of Bergen, Norway and is currently a professor at Department of Health Promotion and Development, University of Bergen, where she heads the international Master's programme in Global Development, Theory and Practice. Haukanes has done anthropological research in the Czech Republic for 25 years, researching among others post-communist transformations in Czech villages. She is also involved in gender-related research in Sub-Saharan Africa.