Conference Entry Form

Name *  
László Koppány Csáji

Job Title *  
social and cultural anthropologist, ethnographer

Company or Organization’s Name and country *  
University of Pécs (PTE), Department of Ethnography and European Ethnology

Short bio
1991–1996 BA, MA – lawyer (social philosophy and international law) degree at ELTE University (Budapest), Faculty of Law, 1996–1999 Chamber of Attorney (Budapest), attorney of law (equivalent of PhD)
Main field of research: NRM, neo-pagan movements, community studies, ethnicity, cultural construction of social groups, subcultures, online ethnography, ethnology of religions Member of the SIEF (Ethnology of Religion Working Group), Hungarian Ethnographical Society, Hungarian Anthropological Society, Association of Hungarian Writers Fieldworks: Romania, Hungary, Serbia, Pakistan, and shorter fieldworks in Nepal, India, Japan and Russia, Indonesia

Email *  
csaji.koppany@gmail.com

Proposal Title *  
Prophet on Fire. The practice of firewalking in a current Christian fundamentalist NRM organized by a vernacular prophet in the Carpathian basin

Abstract (500 words). Abstracts will be published on the webpage before the conference. *
In the last decade I have conducted anthropological fieldwork among new religious movements – Christian fundamentalist groups and neo-pagan movements – in the Carpathian basin. In this paper I analyze the practice of firewalking (walking on red coals) of a Christian Pentecostal Awakening group (“the Shines”), which was established by a vernacular prophet in 2008, in Romania. The movement has members from Serbia, Romania, Hungary and Austria. My fieldwork – based mainly on participant observation, multi-sited ethnography, interviews and online ethnography – among this NRM started in 2010, and in the last five and a half years I followed the dynamic cultural and social construction process of the group.
The firewalking practice was an emblematic feature of the movement between 2010 and 2012, but later it was stopped – as the prophet interpreted – “by the Holy Spirit”. The “firewalking” was never a homogenously accepted phenomena in the movement. Some members kept distance from it, but others concerned it as one of the main evangelization technique. They tried to construct an own form of firewalking ritual, with using different sources (elements of other similar rites), and their own creativity as well.
I contextualize this practice, with giving a typology of various firewalking practices in the world, finding parallels to the phenomena. I stress that there is no “firewalking” as a world-wide phenomena, as only the form (walking on red, hot coals or stones) are similar, but the cultural–constructions’ cognitive contents are very variable: who walks on fire, motivations, the role of specialists, what are the meaning of the firewalks for the participants, narratives about why it is working without burning the skin etc.? My paper gives not only a typology finding the similarities and differences of firewalking rites, but also unfold the process of cultural construction in a particular NRM. I use the method of the discourse analysis (with a “from below” aspect of studying the discourses suitable for anthropological study). This gives me a ground to recognize the heterogeneity of attitudes, meanings and changing of attitudes of the members. The community’s discourse space is not isolated: the members’ personal discourse horizons contains overlapping
spheres of discourses (such as in their working place, family, local network etc.). The frame of this complex field of discourses helps us understanding the fluently changing contents of the narratives, values and attitudes within the group, and at last the sudden disappearing of this firewalking practice in 2013.

I realized that only a small part of the members changed their attitude towards the firewalking, and most of them kept their positive relation. The experiences, and the feedbacks from the outside world has changed the orientation, and not their personal feelings about firewalks. Their orientation has turned from each–other to the social environment. After the disappearance of the firewalking practice, the group’s orientation has been changed again, which caused a positive, nostalgic aura around the “once practiced” firewalks. The façade of the group has showed three different characteristics in these years, even if the members’ opinion about this ritual changed only slightly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session type</th>
<th>• Presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Short panel description**

**Additional Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Created</th>
<th>11 Apr 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>10:29:16 PM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

46.139.89.39  
IP Address

PUBLIC