



# American Institute for Southeast European Studies

**AISEES**

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## **AISEES NEWSLETTER Fall 2020**

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### **Welcome to the fall newsletter of the American Institute for Southeast European Studies!**

AISEES is a fairly new research center, organized in 2016 to encourage cultural and intellectual exchanges between scholars and students in North America and their counterparts in the southeastern European countries of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia. Southeastern Europe is a region that has traditionally not received much attention from American universities and cultural organizations, but those of us who have lived and worked there know what a fascinating part of the world this is and how many opportunities there are for research and cultural connections between North America and our southeastern European counterparts. AISEES is committed to advancing such connections and we are delighted to report on several promising activities undertaken since the AISEES newsletter of spring 2020.

Like everyone and everything, AISEES has had to adjust to the restrictions imposed by the corona virus epidemic, and we send our heartfelt sympathy to those whose lives have been affected by the pandemic. However, we continue to move forward to build stronger programs in the future. The second AISEES Fellowship competition is now completed, with fellowships awarded to three promising young scholars (for more on this, see below). Because of current travel restrictions due to the pandemic, the 2020-21 Fellows will have an extra six months to complete their work. AISEES will make similar adjustments for individuals from southeastern Europe who apply to the AISEES Travel Grant program.

### **Fellowship and grant competitions**

The second year of the AISEES Fellowship Program attracted an impressive number of high quality proposals, and the AISEES Fellowships

Committee had to make difficult decisions. We are pleased to announce this year's AISEES Fellows: Cameron Mailhot of Cornell University, whose topic is "The International Determinants of Political Trust in Contemporary Kosovo"; Marina Mandrikova of Temple University, working on "Crime and Punishment: Images of Sinners and the Power of the Visual in Byzantine and Slavic Monumental Painting"; and Suzana Vuljevic of Columbia University, whose topic is "Modernism on the Margins: A Transnational Fellowship of Southeast Europe's Women Intellectuals, 1923-1939". You can read more about their projects below. Congratulations to all three Fellowship winners!

AISEES will hold the next Fellowship competition in spring 2021, and we strongly encourage all eligible candidates to apply. Both this year's and last year's fellowship projects help show the range of subject matter, chronology, and geographical breadth in research connected with southeastern Europe that AISEES hopes to encourage.

The AISEES Travel Grant competition for 2019-2020 also attracted a strong pool of applicants, and we were able to support the conference attendance of three applicants, Kamen Boyadziev (Bulgaria), attending the Annual Meetings of the Society for American Archaeology in Austin, Texas, and Jovana Djorovic (Serbia) and Zala Pavsic (Slovenia), attending the Association for Slavic, East European, & Eurasian Studies Convention. AISEES will continue its support of travel grants for advanced students and junior faculty members in southeastern Europe to participate in a scholarly conference in western Europe and North America. We recognize that international travel is difficult under the current circumstances, and so this year's grants can be used to cover registration fees and other expenses connected with a virtual conference. We all look forward to the time when we can meet again in person in an international conference forum.

## AISEES affiliate projects

## Membership Drive

AISEES is excited to move forward with the planned collaboration with the Balkan Heritage Foundation. The Foundation supports a wide range of programs in archaeological field work, site conservation, and heritage preservation in several countries in southeastern Europe, and AISEES is proud to sponsor a scholarship that will enable an American student to participate in one of the BHF programs. (For more information, see <https://balkanheritage.org>). Because of the pandemic, all BHF programs have been postponed to summer 2021, and AISEES will continue to offer its scholarship to a BHF program next year. Information will be posted on our website, [aisees.org](https://aisees.org), when it is available.

AISEES is working together with another affiliate institution, the North of Byzantium (NoB) workgroup. The NoB initiative is composed of scholars and students whose special interests lie in the culture of southeastern Europe between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries. The group's geographical focus coincides closely with the interests of AISEES and their activities help spotlight the history and art of the medieval and early modern periods in southeastern Europe. We look forward to collaborating with our NoB colleagues on various activities in the future. For more information, please see the report on their activities below.

### Meet the AISEES Board of Directors

This month we are introducing Victor Petrov. Victor joined the AISEES Board of Directors in 2017. He was born in Bulgaria, educated in the UK and the US, and is now an Assistant Professor of modern European history at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. With a strong background in both southeastern Europe and the US, Victor is well positioned to represent both the US and the southeastern European interests of AISEES.

My connection to the region starts very prosaically: I was born there, and in some ways, I guess I have never left. I spent my childhood in the seaside city of Varna, Bulgaria, which was a beautiful place to grow up even in the turbulent, post-communist

Last year AISEES held its first outreach event to enroll new members and we are happy to report encouraging results. As of fall 2020 AISEES has five institutional members, all well-known American universities, and several individual members. A list of AISEES members can be found on our website, <https://aisees.org/about/aisees-members/>. We thank all of you for your support and your trust in our new research center. Member contributions play an important role in helping to underwrite AISEES programs and assist the Institute in its efforts to provide support for fellowships, travel grants, and overseas research activities. Institutional members are especially important since they will support the efforts of AISEES to become a member of the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC). AISEES plans to launch a new membership drive in fall 2020 and we hope that all those with an interest in southeastern Europe, both individual and institutional, will want to join our efforts. The membership fee is fairly modest and the rewards are considerable. For more information on how to become a member of AISEES, please visit <https://aisees.org/membership/>. With your help, AISEES can continue to grow and expand its programs to advance research and cultural exchanges with fellow scholars and students in southeastern Europe.

1990s. My parents have a lot to answer for in terms of my interests in the region's history and culture, as many childhood vacations entailed getting up at ungodly hours in order to visit this or that castle, peak, or National Revival town somewhere in the Bulgarian mountains. Ever since, I have been fascinated with the region's history, geography, and food (for understandable reasons).

Since the age of 12, I have not been a permanent resident of the region as my family became part of the mass exodus of economic migrants and the brain drain that countries like Bulgaria experienced. Growing up and going to school and then university in the United Kingdom was a formative experience, not least in sharpening some of the contours of my Bulgarian identity as I came to understand myself as a citizen of two

countries and two cultures. Parallels and contrasts abounded, but I always returned to a country that was still home to much of my family and many friends. By the time I reached graduate school, it seemed almost inevitable that my historical studies would zoom back into the region.

My doctoral work and current career grew out as much out of the stories I heard as it did out of those childhood visits to castles. Working on the socialist period and the growth of the computer industry in communist Bulgaria was fueled by many familial stories of what ‘life was like’, ‘what we achieved’ and ‘what we didn’t’. I became interested in the myths and narratives people tell themselves about their youth and past, including about Bulgaria as a country that lost its achievements. Also, I became keenly aware that the region’s history is tied to so many global stories, and can tell them through very interesting prisms, even in periods when it was supposedly grey, orthodox, and locked up behind the Iron Curtain.

It has been over 30 years since the end of the Cold War divides in the region, and it is as fully part of global trends as it has always been. I believe its stories – historical, geographic, cultural, social, political – are a continued inspiration and treasure trove for those who want to explain how local societies react to but also co-opt the grand narratives and changes of our time. Every time I return to Bulgaria and its neighbors, their layers of history – from the Neolithic settlements to the brutalist communist monuments – remind me that the work we do at AISEES is key to bringing more and more scholars in touch with this amazing part of the world.

## **The North of Byzantium initiative**

NoB and AISEES will collaborate in two events originally planned for 2020 and now postponed to 2022: a lecture by Prof. Ivan Drpić at Dumbarton Oaks and a sponsored session at the International Medieval Congress, Leeds.

Ivan Drpić (Associate Professor, University of Pennsylvania) will deliver the first NoB Lecture on his current research on gilding in Serbian painting. The lecture is titled “The Gold of Banjska”. The lecture is rescheduled for March 24, 2022. Following the lecture, there will be a reception to encourage conversations among the audience members. This event is co-sponsored by Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, a leading institution in the study of Byzantium.

The NoB session at the International Medieval Congress, Leeds on the topic “*Women and Artistic Production Beyond the Borders of Byzantium*” will be resubmitted for the 2022 conference as a double-session. The speakers’ contributions will focus on the key roles women played in the transfer of artistic and cultural knowledge, the development of local artistic styles, as well as in the establishment of diplomatic relations and the transformation of identities and ideologies. In efforts to gain new perspectives on the nature of cultural contact and transfer, as well as on visual production in late medieval Eastern Europe as a result of the direct involvement of women, either as patrons, artists, mediators, and/or recipients, this session aims to focus on case studies that examine individual female figures from all walks of life (royal courts, noble families, monastic communities, etc.). The CFP will be recirculated in the coming months.

To learn more about NoB, please see their web site, <https://www.northofbyzantium.org> You can subscribe to the NoB newsletter to receive future news and updates.

## Meet the 2020 AISEES Fellows

**Marina Mandrikova** (PhD candidate, Art History, Temple University). Dissertation: *Crime and Punishment: Images of Sinners and the Power of the Visual in Byzantine and Slavic Monumental Painting*

I came to the USA as an international Ph.D. student to study at the Department of Art History at the Tyler School of Art and Architecture, Temple University, under the guidance of Professor Elizabeth S. Bolman. Before that, I lived in Russia where I earned her MA degrees in World Art History and International Relations at St. Petersburg State University. I specialize in Byzantine, Post-Byzantine, and Old Slavic visual culture. My research focuses on the materiality and functions of monumental paintings and icons in their original and current settings with the application of interdisciplinary approaches and a diversity of methodological frameworks. I am also passionate about cultural heritage preservation and issues of conservation of medieval icons and monumental paintings.



My dissertation is entitled *Crime and Punishment: Images of Sinners and the Power of the Visual in Byzantine and Slavic Monumental Painting*. It focuses on images of the damned in monumental painting between the eleventh and seventeenth centuries found in Orthodox churches of the present-day countries of Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Romania, Russia, and Ukraine. By exploring original visual evidence and archival and secondary legal sources from multiple regions, this study considers the apparent perception of these marginal members of society by their government, local communities, church authorities, patrons, and artists. Ultimately, my dissertation will offer a disturbing visual record of how Orthodox Christian communities navigated the concepts of good versus evil, responded to the contemporary social issues and translated tragic events of the Last Judgment into pictorial form in rural, monastic, and urban settlements throughout the Byzantine and Slavic spheres of power.



I am thrilled to become the AISEES Graduate Fellow for 2020-2021. Support from AISEES will enable me to conduct fieldwork and archival research in Bulgaria, Serbia, and North Macedonia.

**Suzana Vuljevic** (PhD candidate, Columbia University). Dissertation: *The Crisis of Spirit: Pan-Balkan Idealism, Transnational Cultural-Diplomatic Networks and Intellectual Cooperation in Interwar Southeast Europe, 1930-1941*

Suzana Vuljevic is a historian of modern Europe who specializes in Balkan cultural and intellectual history. In her dissertation, “The Crisis of Spirit: Pan-Balkan Idealism, Transnational Cultural-Diplomatic Networks and Intellectual Cooperation in Interwar Southeast Europe, 1930-1941,” she traces a transnational network of liberal intellectuals who coalesced around cultural and political inflections of pan-Balkanism.



Her research focuses on the nexus between culture and politics, cultural internationalism, peripheral modernisms, and ideas of European and Mediterranean unity. Her new work will seek to integrate women writers and thinkers of the region into the intellectual history of Southeast Europe through an examination of the interwar women’s movement. Suzana holds a Ph.D. in History and Comparative Literature from Columbia University and a B.A. in History and Comparative Literature from the University of Michigan. She is an emerging literary translator of Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, Serbian and Albanian. Her translations of selections of Ervina Halili’s prize-winning collection of poetry titled “Amulet,” have appeared in *Balkan Poetry Today*. She has translated the work of Ljubomir Micić (1895-1971), founder of Zenithism, an avant-garde movement unique to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. These translations are forthcoming in an anthology of Zenithism.

**Cameron Mailhot** (PhD Candidate, Department of Government, Cornell University). Dissertation: *The International Determinants of Political Trust in Contemporary Kosovo*

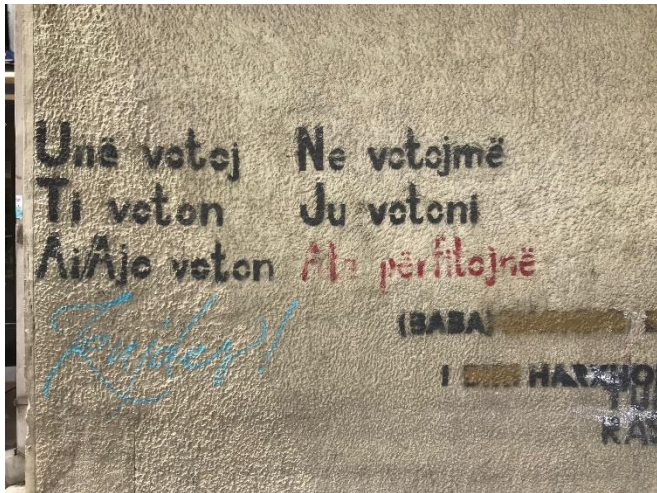
I am a PhD Candidate in the Department of Government at Cornell University, where I study the role of the international community in rebuilding post-conflict countries. My dissertation project seeks to understand how international missions to post-conflict societies contribute to these countries’ long-term development—more specifically, to the emergence and strengthening of political and social trust. While I incorporate findings from around the world, my primary focus is on the Balkans and, more specifically, contemporary Kosovo.



Trust in political leaders, public institutions, and other social groups is a critical component of open, democratic societies. While it is difficult to maintain in any context, it is acutely elusive following periods of repression and armed conflict. At the same time, post-conflict countries often lack the capacity and resources to overcome this deficit, further exacerbating the problem.

The international community—whether through the European Union, NATO, the United Nations or another body—has increasingly deployed missions to these countries in the hopes that they may mitigate this problem and be able to improve the conditions of democratic governance. However, success is not a given and relies on much more than simply going through the motions.

I come from a small mining community in northern Minnesota that is home to many second- and third-generation immigrants from Southeastern Europe—mainly, Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia. This has shaped my research interests profoundly: while the theme of my studies apply to every post-conflict country around the globe, I have been drawn for quite some time to studying further the events that unfolded during and immediately following the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. My dissertation leverages this interest to examine the relationship that the EU, NATO, and UN’s missions in Kosovo have forged with Kosovars over the years and to study the effect that this relationship has had on the political and social landscape of the country.



**Graffiti in City Center of Prishtina, Kosovo.**

*Translation: I vote // you (informal) vote // he/she votes // we vote // you (formal) vote // **they profit***

Explaining this relationship is necessary if we are to understand better why and how political and social trust has remained stagnant in a country with more than a generation worth of international stewardship and billions of dollars in international aid. Admittedly, answering these questions effectively is more easily said than done and has

required me to work from many different angles. Relationships are dynamic, and the work of missions are never static across time or space. Consequently, I have focused my research on mapping sentiment and trust over the years, across social groups, and throughout the country. I have traveled to Kosovo three times in the past two years, which has allowed me the chance to begin analyzing the country’s newspaper archives and to conduct longform interviews in order to understand how members of the public and political elite’s relationship towards their public institutions and each other varies and the role that missions play in this equation. In doing so, I have teamed up with local civil society organizations and spoken candidly with politicians and citizens in Mitrovica, Prishtina, Prizren, and I have made many wonderful friendships along the way.



**Graffiti in Dardania Neighborhood of Prishtina, Kosovo, referring to the European Union’s 12-Year-Old Rule of Law Mission in the country**

With the support of AISEES, I will be able to return to Kosovo in the spring of 2021 to finish the interviews; archival work; and, ultimately, this chapter of my research in the region.

## AISEES Announcements

### AISEES 2021-22 Fellowship

AISEES offers 3 *fellowships for US graduate students and early postdoctoral scholars in the United States* to support research in Southeast Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia). The 2021-22 AISEES Fellows will be awarded up to \$3000 each. Projects in all fields in the social sciences, humanities and related disciplines are eligible. The deadline is April 1, 2021. Please see our website for details: <https://aisees.org/graduate-postdoctoral-fellowships/>

### AISEES 2021 Travel Grant Program

Beginning in 2021, we will invite applications for the AISEES Travel Grant Program twice a year, with deadlines on March 31 and September 30. The travel grants are for the travel expenses of advanced students or scholars living in and traveling from southeastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia) to present original research at a professional conference or symposium of international importance within the domains of the Humanities and Social Sciences. The conference/symposium must take place outside the scholar's country of residence and must be of international importance (for example, European Association of Archaeology, ASEES, American Anthropological Association, Byzantine Studies Association). The travel grant may be used for a one-time or recurring conferences/symposia hosted by a university or an academic institute.

### AISEES Summer 2021 Scholarship with the Balkan Heritage Foundation

AISEES is pleased to announce that we will partner with the Balkan Heritage Foundation, <https://balkanheritage.org/>, to offer a scholarship of 1800 euros to enable a student based at an American university to participate in a program sponsored by the Foundation. The scholarship can be applied to any of the BHF programs of excavation or

conservation in southeastern Europe. Details will be announced soon on the Balkan Heritage Foundation web site, <https://www.bhfieldschool.org/>.

### AISEES Call for Membership

As a young organization, AISEES is actively developing its basis of members, both individual and institutional. Members help AISEES to create opportunities for advanced research and cultural studies. Our fellowship and grant programs develop new knowledge and foster the next generation of scholars and teachers. The support of members also enables the staff to develop innovative programs that spotlight the rich histories and cultural heritage of the region. For information on becoming a member of AISEES, please contact Dr. Eric De Sena at [aiseesorg@gmail.com](mailto:aiseesorg@gmail.com) or visit our membership webpage: <https://aisees.org/membership/>

#### Benefits of Membership

- Opportunity to apply for AISEES Fellowships and Grants
- Networking opportunities with hundreds of scholars
- Advice on travel and professional contacts
- Announcements of relevant conferences and public events

#### Membership categories:

- **Institutional Members** Annual fee \$250.00
  - **Individual Members** Regular members | Annual fee \$50.00 or Student members\* | Annual fee \$25.00
- \*Proof of student status required*