



ERC Synergy Grant Project Leviathan, Horizon 2020; GA 854503

**INSTITUTE OF ETHNOLOGY AND FOLKLORE STUDIES WITH ETHNOGRAPHIC
MUSEUM – BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES**

TEMPORARY SCIENTIFIC UNIT ‘MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY’

in the framework of the ERC Synergy Grant Project “Taming the European Leviathan:
The Legacy of Post-War Medicine and the Common Good”

[H2020 ERC-2019-SyG; GA ID: 854503] and

the seminar “The European Leviathan – Medical Anthropology”

INVITATION

Seminar 39:

ASSOC. PROF. KRISTINA POPOVA

Department “Medical Anthropology”, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies
with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

**POLITICS OF BREATHING: SILICOSIS AT THE INTERSECTION
OF INDUSTRIAL, MEDICAL, AND POLITICAL HISTORY IN THE 1950S**

26 March 2026

14.00 – 16.00, hall 204, “Moskovska” street 6A and online

Annotation: Silicosis is one of the characteristic diseases of industrial society, resulting from increasing energy demands and the expansion of fossil fuel extraction, particularly strong in the first decades following the end of the Second World War. The disease develops as a severe pulmonary condition that claimed the lives of thousands of individuals (predominantly men, most of whom were miners), progressively impairing and ultimately rendering respiration impossible. Countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain pursued strategies to address silicosis, while simultaneously seeking to protect the economic interests associated with energy production. These efforts involved a wide range of actors, including politicians, economic administrators, trade union representatives, scientists, physicians, and other medical personnel.

This presentation aims to examine the directions of the struggle against silicosis from a comparative perspective, with particular emphasis on the Bulgarian case. The analysis is based primarily on documents produced by the Bulgarian Commission for the Fight against Silicosis, established in



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1953 following the model of the corresponding commission in the USSR. Some visual documents are also used. The paper presents the health surveys and investigations organized by the Commission of working conditions among miners in mining enterprises, and publications about silicosis, mapping the efforts to establish an institutional and medical regulation and infrastructure for the detection and treatment of the disease. It also highlights the obstacles and challenges encountered by the Commission, stemming from the political situation in border regions and from the operation of the joint Bulgarian–Soviet enterprise GORUBSO (Mining-Ore Bulgarian-Soviet Society), established in 1947, responsible for the exploitation of mining deposits in Bulgaria, especially in the Rhodope mountain region.



Source: Weekly Newsreel No. 425, 1952, “Beli Bryag” Mine

Link for online participation:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87919997307?pwd=aE8xPVdp5e7XYavbc0sXtzEjVeQCkt.1>

Meeting ID: 879 1999 7307

Passcode: 006162

*If you wish to find out more about the activities of
the Leviathan project team, visit the following websites:*

<https://leviathan-europe.eu>

<https://medicalanthropologybg.com>