

The Ghosts of the Past: 20 years after the Fall of Communism in Europe.

Abstract:

Twenty years after the fall of Communism in Europe, it has occurred that the post-Soviet countries have not achieved an even stage of democratic development and have shown to have been too diverse and historically independent to follow one path to consolidation. This volume questions the premises of transitology, homogeneity, and path dependency theory and proposes an insight into the texture of continuities and discontinuities within particular contexts of the given countries (Russia, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Ukraine, Poland and others), which quite often collide with each other and with the Western democratic values thus putting a concept of the harmonious dialogue or a definite democratic solution for Europe into doubt. Moreover, this volume challenges a totalitarian frame of meta-narratives, such as Communism and Capitalism, with their inherent dialectics, and instead it attributes positivity to the fragmentation and infinitely irreconcilable condition of any subject of history. The measure of development that implies the Western type democracy as the definite objective is also criticised against the post-Enlightenment heritage of the humanist ideals which today cannot be regarded as universal any more.

Keywords: post-structuralism, post-transitology, difference, antagonism, subjectivity, continuity, discontinuity, history.

According to the transition theory, the communist countries came out of the Soviet system at the beginning of the 1990's 'delayed' in relation to the democratic achievements identified in the West. But such a delayed relation between Eastern and Western Europe can only be judged through a comparison which lies at the core of transitology: there is a goal at the end of the road which signifies a democratic capitalist state to which all European countries should aspire while all investment undertaken by those countries should be aimed at meeting that goal. However, as Guillermo O'Donnell notices, the measure of distance from democratic consolidation can, in fact, be obstructive to the development of those countries since it traps them in a 'dependent variable' and takes their attention from an 'unsatisfactory present' towards a promise of still 'unfulfilled possibilities' (O'Donnell, 2007:5). Twenty years after the fall of Communism in Europe it is very clear that Capitalist democracy has not been fully achieved in the post-Soviet region while the trajectory of changes across particular states has been more varied and more unpredictable than it was imagined by Western scholars. The 'ghosts of Communism' are still playing their roles in political and economic processes in those countries, and they may be not as scary as transitologists depict them.

Transition scholarship favour homogenous paradigms according to which: "East and Central European societies are best regarded as places where virtually everyone, save a tiny political elite, belongs to the same sociologically faceless and nondescript assemblage" (Fuller 2000:587). In recourse to this idealistic view the authors in this volume argue that internal differences between post-Soviet countries, their contrasting political and cultural contexts, and the changing landscape of powers which those contexts provoke create a complex historical system of relations impossible to be analysed on the same ontological level. Through seven analytical arguments engaging with different political and historical circumstances before and

after the fall of Communism this volume shows that there is no one road to democracy for all post-Communist countries, while generalizing their diverse historical and social entanglements in one pot of homogenous experience results in a reductionist view of the past and a totalitarian approach to the present.

The authors in this volume suggest that the gap between post-Communist countries and the conditions of consolidation determined by the West requires its own study, but not necessarily based on the theory of transition which implies lack as the main determinant of the change, but rather on the theory of antagonisms between existing continuities and discontinuities which stimulate an endless change and 'inharmonious heterogeneity'. The gap between the current reality and illusory future, which have contributed to the 'complex of inferiority' in the East, so acutely depicted in the motivations of migrants moving from the post-Communist countries to the West after 2004 (Rabikowska 2009, Garapich et al 2007), cannot be bridged and this is not because Eastern Europe is not capable of achieving democracy, but due to a traditional understanding of democracy which offers one picture of consolidation and imposes one type of imitative development measured by the means transplanted from the West. This volume recognizes this impossibility as a positive challenge and criticises the theory of transition and its illusory assumptions derived from bipolar politics and post-Enlightenment philosophy.

The original idea of progressing to a better democratic future goes back to seventeenth-century humanist ideals of economic efficiency, rationalism, development, civilising mission, and universal modernisation. The secular, anthropocentric legacy of the Enlightenment, which underpinned the success of colonisation in the following centuries, has been defined by Teodor Shanin as follows:

a powerful and supra-theory that ordered and interpreted everything within the life of humanity – past, present and future. The core of the concept, and its derivations and the images attached to it, have been overwhelmingly simple and straightforward. With a few temporary deviations, all societies are advancing naturally and consistently ‘up’. On a route from poverty, barbarism, despotism and ignorance to riches, civilisation, democracy and rationality, the highest expression of which is science. This is also irreversible from an endless diversity of particularities, wasteful of human energies and economic resources, to a world unified and simplified into the most rational arrangement (Shanin1997:65).

From this perspective a vision of transition to be achieved by post-Communist countries presupposes a move to the neo-liberal market and most of all to the consolidation of democracy (O’Donnell 2007). In this volume, however, the authors agree that liberal democracy does not solve all problems of history and does not reconcile easily the ambitions of the West towards pluralism, liberalism, equality, collectivism and individualism. Although the liberal democratic philosophy signifies freedom and independence, it cannot be equalised today with the Jacobean values which demanded an objective sight of history that is no longer available. As Jeremy Gilbert puts it: “it is a myth of liberal democracy that its two principles co-exist naturally: that liberalism and democracy somehow imply each other” (Gilbert 2007:45). Twenty years after the fall of Communism in Europe the question of what kind of democracy should post-Communist countries aspire to is still open. Social changes in the East and economic hardship experienced lately in the West have shown undoubtedly that the idea of a homogenous collective or a liberal society is a mythical project. The fall of the Iron Curtain has proven the provisionality and fragility of ideological meta-narratives and should be taken as a lesson and a starting point to a critique of Capitalism too. The effects which the world had to face after the fall of the Iron Curtain have spread across all countries regardless of their position on the ‘transitional ladder’, revealing “the hollowness of the whole corpus of the state” (Kothari 2003:146). As William

Outhwaite and Larry Ray point out, the fall of Communism also has special implications for social theory, and this is not only in the discussion about modernity and postmodernity or the encompassing processes of globalisation, but more specifically, in our looking into “the way homogeneity and particularity will play themselves out in a world of increasing integration *and* diversity” (Outhwaite and Ray 2005:19).

This volume adds to these discussions with arguments representing different theoretical points of view and different areas of social and political studies, yet as a whole all papers lean towards a poststructuralist vision of history which challenges the positivist trust in objectivity and totality. Socio-political analyses by Holmes, Ziolo, Miazhevich and Gayoso, which engage with the issues of crime, democratic elections, business management and international relations respectively, map out the cross-roads between the local and the Western, the past and the present where history and politics happen with the contingent effects. The two critical debates on the deterministic role of theory in post-Communist Studies offer a poststructuralist perspective of interpretation of history: by introducing the categories of political imaginary and subjectivity, Zherebkin in his argument rejects the teleological and elite-oriented perspective on democratization and social change and instead focuses on explaining the practices of collective resistance to hierarchy and the dominant power. By employing Lacanian psychoanalysis to a study of public health policies in Russia, Fotaki unveils the utopian character of both Capitalism and Communism. And finally, in her semiotic analysis of Polish films, Mazierska deconstructs the totalizing meaning of national myths to show that they do not carry an objective picture of history. The authors move away from path dependency research, but they all acknowledge the relationship between a Communist past and Capitalistic present, seen in this volume in both a diachronic and a synchronic dimension. The ‘ghosts of the past’ are not considered in terms of

an obstacle to be overcome on the way to democracy, but rather in wider terms, as it is understood as an ontological correspondence which breaks into the present in a discontinuous way. The authors do not deal with analysing the past or explaining the causes of the fall of communism, which has been done so many times in specialist works (see, for example, Lane 1996; Maier 1997; Szelényi and Szelényi 1994, Møller 2009), but instead they concentrate on current examples from different spheres of life, from political, economic, social to cultural, which they link with their complex histories in order to view the system of powers which limit the operations of democratic values in those areas. In that sense history is seen as now and then, determining each other and changing each other. Neither past nor present is attributed a “mirroring effect” which reflects the other. The authors challenge a dichotomous question critically proposed by Jadwiga Staniszkis, whether it is correct to measure the crystallisation of democracy either by “the pace of moving toward the model of Western democracy and economy or the degree of moving away from the classical model of real socialism” (Staniszkis 1991:181), and argue that such measures do not facilitate the analysis of social changes. Whether it is a direction “from” or a direction “after”, it justifies transition as historical necessity in the name of the real. Such approach, as Fotaki and Zherebkin indicate, defeats the juncture of discontinuity and continuity by placing it in a field of ethnocentric and technocratic understanding of social change, which reduces concrete to abstract and plurality of differences to contingency. In this volume, “the ghosts of the past” are incorporated into the debate over the direction of the social change as much as antagonisms and resistance are considered in a critique of the adaptation model.

In response to the normalization of the universal forms of power in the transition discourse, Galina Miazhevich proposes a “holistic” research of business behavior in post-

Communist countries (Estonia and Belarus), which is to reveal the reciprocal influence of the local business culture on the expatriated Western models of management in a constantly moving circle. In her temporal-spatial analysis of synchronism between the “importing” and “exporting” of values, she applies a model of intercultural dialogue developed by Lotman (1990), which recognizes the dynamics of the breakthrough between continuity and discontinuity. Miazhevich’s argument provides a new insight into the meaning of the history of two post-Soviet countries, Estonia and Belarus, whose diverse cultural and political origins were suppressed for decades by the Soviet reign, but not to disappear completely to the level of homogeneity as many critics claim. Miazhevich questions the very typical reaction of post-communist businesses, which today we frame within path dependency research, of adapting uncritically everything that came from the West (in this case models of management) onto the local ground without considering their economic or social inadequacy. However, twenty years later, this process reveals a complex condition of hybridization, which challenges the theory of both glocalistion and divergence. Through a detailed structuralist analysis of oral narratives from local entrepreneurs Miazhevich explains this paradoxical ‘clash’ of values and indicates that the absorption of culture models can never be without reciprocal affect leading to the transformation of both sides. In that sense absorption or adaptation is not a peaceful process but a struggle of powers which cannot be balanced. The resistance of the male orientated industry in both Estonia and Belarus towards feminist culture imported from the West, already leaking into the professional structures of the local management, is one of many examples of antagonistic reciprocity at work. This oxymoronic reciprocity, identified by Laclau and Mouffe (2001) as the effect of the hegemonic struggle, is rarely emphasized in post-communist studies which tend to see post-Soviet cultures as a passive receiver of democratic models. However, as it has been observed within the EU

region after the 2004-extension, hostile reactions of some post-Soviet countries towards European liberal models of democracy are more and more frequent, and do not promise harmonious reconciliation in the foreseeable future (see, for example, Murko et.al.). Interestingly, using Lotman's four-staged method of a temporal and spatial observation of the exchanges between cultural codes, Miazhevich concludes that the last stage of the exchange between the East and the West, when the former impacts the latter, has not yet been crystalised in Estonia and even less in Belarus. From the transitiological perspective, this reinforces the concept of the 'delay' of those countries and confirms the lack of their own power to influence the receiving culture, yet the Lotmanian model enables us to see this process as a constant loop with new effects at each historical turn. From that angle the lack of an Eastern European mark on the Western business culture may be as illusory as the immediate influence of the West on local business. Only from a wider, holistic perspective we can observe and appreciate the dynamism of exchange which may never be completed.

If we accept that the process of completion or consolidation is an open one, we put the problem of political identity of post-Communist countries in a different light. Identity becomes an open project while its impossibility to be fully constituted turns into the formulation of its determination. Thus a failure of identity to achieve its completeness proves to be a necessary condition in the process of open-ended democratic articulation. The problem whether this irreducible condition of democracy is recognised as a motivating or an obstructive factor delineates the two poles of the debate on universality versus particularity, so current in political and social theory today, which also resonates in this volume. Despite embracing the openness and dialogue, the perspective of 'hybridisation of norms' proposed by Miazhevich does not split completely from transitology and consolidation, since it points at a future goal to be captured in

the universal standards of capitalistic democracy where the “clash” of values is understood in the Habermasian sense as a challenge to achieve harmony. On the other hand, Zherebkin’s paper reveals that Georgia and Ukraine did not produce democratic ‘rules of the game’ and at the same time managed to give birth to hegemonic resistance denying the universalism of development (of which liberal revolution would be a fruit), instead showing that resistance is the cause and effect of the constant lack of harmony which cannot be filled.

In the papers by Fotaki and Zherebkin we can see the influence of the poststructuralist philosophy of Laclau, Žižek and Butler who define the negative condition of all political articulation as universal. What is meant by “negativity” is an essential requirement of any political struggle in which “the contestatory process determines forms of universality which are brought into a productive and ultimately irresolvable conflict with each other” (Butler, Laclau, Žižek 2000:3). Fotaki and Zherebkin put forward an interventionist proposition of rejecting the power of the Cartesian subject over social relations and moving towards the poststructuralist approach aligned with the critique of totalitarianism. Both researchers agree that it is not possible to maintain the conception of subjectivity as totality anymore, and consequently the ontological difference between the subject and the world cannot be regarded in separation from the ontic level where they become constituted. Therefore, they argue that a return to the ontological level of political explanation is important to de-essentialize the status of the subject/object dichotomy in transition studies and to account for a constitution of collective political agency, particularly in a post-Communist context.

In contrast to the Habermasian understanding of pre-established universality conceived of predictable determination, Zherebkin discovers universality in the unpredictable historically

and illogical socially resistance of people in Georgia and Ukraine, standing together against their governments during Colour Revolutions (Georgia's Rose Revolution in 2003 and Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2004). In his analysis, Zherebkin looks into carnivalesque motivations for mass mobilization and identifies new national identity formations in the outburst of the collective agency of the 'colour revolutionaries'. He rejects the teleology of transition within those post-Soviet countries in favour of revealing the historical simultaneity of the structure-agency's working towards the mobilization of political subjectivities and in consequence towards social change. Zherebkin argues that the positivist approach, still dominating in research, has restricted the scope of the analysis of the 'colour revolutions' to the domain of the institutionalized paradigms of social change, while the question of formation of collective national identities in the region have been generally left aside. His problematising argument highlights the concern about the original communist ideals, such as the resistance of hierarchy and the dominant power. From his discussion of the meaning of unity during the carnivalesque revolt in Ukraine, an unspoken question arises: is solidarity of the people in those sudden bloodless rebellions a symptom of the rebirth of collective communist ideas in their most humane sense? That nationally-orientated and patriotic collectivism, which did not contemplate differences of class, ethnicity, gender, or status, shows the detour from traditional liberal revolution. With its overwhelming articulation of national unity, that outburst of political awareness and hope reminds one of the Marxist *socialist* ideal of self-determination by individual choice, and as such it surprised not only the Western world but most of the countries in the post-communist region, which very rarely have shown resistance in a unified form after 1991.

Recognising the productive meaning of negativity underlying political contestation is also Fotaki's aim. In her paper on public health policy development in the Soviet Union and Soviet

Russia, she employs psychoanalysis to show that democratic projects should not be deluded by totalitarian ambitions such as social harmony, rationalism, utilitarianism and integration. In her opposition to totalitarian theories, she follows the work of Cornelius Castoriadis, a philosopher and psychoanalyst, who developed a highly original conception of history as an imaginary creation originating in the crossroads of ‘psychical monad’ (individual psyche) and society (Castoriadis, 1987/2005), which he called social imaginary. By applying psychoanalysis Mariana Fotaki shows that neither of the “utopian” system: capitalism and communism are capable to offer a fulfillment of expectations and desires which people seek in them. She argues that fantasy produces illusory motivations for political projects and thus should be considered as their constitutive element. Through her analysis of public policies she demonstrates that fantasy can take a perilous form when applied on a mass (universal) scale, like in social utilitarianism under communism or in the ethical logic of a free market under capitalism. In the unfulfilled conflict of a struggling psyche, or, in Freud’s words, of a ruptured subject torn between reality and fantasy, Fotaki sees a metaphor of the social and political contradictions from which the utopian systems suffer. The failure of the Russian health care system (after two historical transformations: from pre-industrialism to socialism and then from socialism to free market) reveals the “disowned subjectivity” of the contested government and public institutions which are expected to provide “sublimated” care, especially in the areas where disease and dying cause unresolved anxieties. However, in its attempts to apply regulations to safeguard some essential competitive conditions when market elements are implemented, the Russian government also tries to achieve distributional outcomes that may be desired by the society. In this way the state health care system under capitalism always contributes to inequalities and discrepancies between both groups: patients and stakeholders and renders its own position ambiguous. Fotaki attracts

out attention to the fact that the Russian state regulates corruption within the health care system, which is not free in practice. It provides the illusion of free care to everyone, yet in doing so it condones the unethical practice of paying for public services ‘under the table’, which Fotaki defines as “state sponsored violence”. Alongside the effect of the exclusion of those people who cannot afford paying for “free” services, this system “turns out to be no less tyrannical and no less totalitarian in its intent than the legacy of the communist ideology it opposes” (Fotaki).

Through their interventionist analyses, Fotaki and Zherebkin invite the reader to suspend the linear positivist thinking about progress and consolidation and instead they offer a study of the limits of historical applicability in which such concepts are expressed. Zherebkin proposes a critical review of the postulates of the ‘transition paradigm’ which he considers to be responsible for the separation between the ‘transitologists’ and Postcommunist studies (former ‘Sovietologists’). He sees, like Fotaki, the emancipatory potential in acknowledging the futility of any master signifiers in organizing ideological projects. Their understanding of universality lies in the acceptance of antagonism (ergo negativity) as being a condition of any progress or action, and what follows the irrecuperable fragmentation of the self.

The unpredictability of historical change and the contingency of political systems, which such critiques bring to light may be in some ways threatening to notions of identity and historical continuity. The changing forms of Russia’s role in the post-Soviet region can be received as a threat to the clarity of the democratic project and to the dialectics of the relations between Eastern Europe and the West. Carmen A. Gayoso provides examples from Russia’s history and from its latest relations with other post-Soviet states, which show that there is no obvious prescription to Russia’s behavior while some of its political strategies are more rhetorical than

substantiated. In her response to the crude dichotomy between anarchy and hierarchy, strongly rooted in political science, Gayoso argues that Russia's current role in the region does not have sharp boundaries and varies in form and in thickness. Although there are enduring factors in Russian foreign policy, especially in the four research areas: stabilising borders, economic interest, unification of fellow Slavs and fluctuating alliances, it is possible to discern that they do not account for conjunctural determinants of the political profile Russia adapts in different situations. To enable a discussion of the intensities of hierarchy, Gayoso introduces a poststructuralist and post-dyadic interpretation of the international system hereby regarded as 'fluid' and changeable. In that sense Gayoso meets with Fotaki and Zherebkin in their criticism of the totality of identity and historical determinism. The dynamic and "fluid" relations which Russia has with other countries in the region and with the West reveal grey areas in dialectically conceived political projects, such as independent states, hegemonies, and empires, and consequently undermine the concept of typologisation. Gayoso rejects a utopian view of state relationships which guarantee the continuity of the state identity and systemic predictability. By critiquing Tsarist imperialism, socialist legacy and the current conflicts between Russia and post-Soviet republics, Gayoso repudiates the totality of Russia's imperialist identity and reveals relational tensions between continuity and discontinuity at various levels within the past and the present. In recourse to the mobility of the post-Cold War anti-polar effect, the external politics aimed at Russia's neighbours exposes the myth of a "natural" or historically-intrinsic friend or foe, which in fact changes every time when security implications or systemic developments fluctuate in the region to stipulate certain reactions. Following "a fluid anarchy-hierarchy" spectrum of political identities created by Adam Watson (1990; 1992), Gayoso argues that empires, like pure independent states cannot exist in their absolute form whilst political

articulation can only take place in “grey areas” where entities are apprehended in an interactive process that dissolves boundaries.

As expressed by Gayoso, Zhrebkin, Fotaki and Miazhevich, the unending process of identification puts into question the possibility of consolidation yet it reveals the constant displacement of qualities that take over from one another in a series of relays. Karolina Ziolo contributes to this stand with her analysis of continuities and discontinuities within Polish politics in the first decade after the fall of Communism in 1989 within which the leaders of the pro-communist party came to power in the second (1995) and third (2000) democratic election. Their victory is interpreted by Ziolo as the effect of unsettlement and reshuffling of powers at that time, but also in terms of the conscious strategy to reinstate the European heritage and access the EU. The link with a pre-war and pre-communist past, when Poland was a capitalist country strengthening its political and economic position in the heart of Europe, was evoked for political purposes by the left party, the Democratic Left Alliance, which launched and finalized fruitfully the accession plans in 2004, thus catapulting Poland directly onto a plane of equal partnership with other states in the EU. Having constituted the alliance of the leftist forces in the country, at the same time the SLD party proved a very strong association with the European communist legacy, such as the Second International and other pro-socialist contemporary movements in the West. This continuity with communist history was openly manifested in the Party’s manifestoes and concretised in participation of the same individuals who played active roles on the political scene during the Soviet reign, namely, among others: Aleksander Kwaśniewski, Leszek Miller, and Józef Oleksy. In her paper Ziolo puts this interesting juxtaposition of continuity and discontinuity under critique to suggest that the success of the Left so soon after the fall of Communism in Poland owed as much to the politicians’ conscious

strategy of linking with a European past as to the contingent interjection of circumstances which helped them to win. Considering that their successful election followed the first democratic election won by Lech Wałęsa and the original Solidarity movement, it was a surprisingly short period during which the political landscape was completely refurbished with a pro-Communist party to dominate for the next ten years. In fact it surprised even the main players themselves whose apprehensive statements Ziolo quotes in her paper. Ziolo's analysis of the original documents issued between 1990 and 2001 by the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SdRP) and the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) highlights the ambiguity of the role of a founding election on the trajectory of the state to democracy. If the initial reaction after the fall of Communism of the electorate in Poland was towards the trade unionists, the Church and rightist traditions of democracy, which merged in the process of building up the resistant movement, the second and third turnout was evidently opposite, showing the inclination towards the "ghosts of the past" which seemed to have lost their political currency by then. In her explication of that peculiar ideological gambit, Ziolo refers to the social and cultural conditions of that time, which were changing at a different pace than the formal state-led strategies. Although both planes do overlap, it is difficult to define a degree of nostalgia, disappointment, or confusion among the population which blurred a vision of the democratic project heralded from two opposite poles by the competing parties. Like in many other post-Communist countries it is also difficult to state which election was really a founding one, the first one or the two that followed, and what criteria should be applied in assessing their meaning in the further implementation of democracy. According to M. Stephen Fish (1998) it would be the three main relationships between the consequences of that election and 1. the density of societal organization, 2. concentration of power in constitution, and 3. the scale of economic reform

which determine the democratic path. However, what Fish and other influential authors (for example, Diamond and Plattner 2002, Bunce 2003; Ekiert and Hanson 2003) take into account in their diagnosis of the transition from communist rule is mainly the post-1989 condition of the country while the pre-fall circumstances are largely omitted. The reasons behind the succession of the pro-Communist alliance which became a vanguard of the progressive international pro-EU policy in Poland have to be analysed firstly in the retrospective to the fall and secondly in parallel to the changing situation in the country. Throughout its political reign, the Democratic Left Alliance was drawing upon different historical traditions, in 1993, for example its members defined themselves as the heirs of the PPS [Polish Socialist Party], established in the nineteenth century, but simultaneously Leszek Miller (the chairman of SLD from 1999 to 2004 and prime minister of Poland from 2001 to 2004) saw the Party's roots in the "democratic and pluralistic Europe, which created some level of protection from the right wing autocracy, which existed in Polish politics from the beginning of a transformation period". Ziolo interprets this ideological flexibility in terms of a continuous search for the identity of the first post-1989 left coalition, "which wanted to be regarded as a legitimate social democratic European party, not just a post-Communist formation" (Ziolo), which, however, could not find a long-term prospect to its identification and eventually could not respond to the criteria of the democratic progress mentioned above. Ziolo challenges progression theory by highlighting the inefficiency of the victorious Left once the EU accession was completed. The political impasse of the leftist coalition (SdRP and SLD) and a strategic void after 2004 left the party unattractive to their loyal audience who were then waiting for internal reforms which the coalition did not know how to tackle. Her paper also confirmed the precariousness of the results of the initial election which should be seen "within the context of the developing situation" (Gill 2002:23). As Graeme Gill put it: "[T]he elections did not independently restructure the political situation. Rather, what they did was to embed in

the political system the changing balance of political forces that was already underway in each country” (Gill 2002:23).

Within post-Communist Studies it has been agreed that on the way to democracy the initial stage is always most dramatic and involves living in chaos, uncertainty, political upheaval and rapid changes, which need time to be appeased and structured. In that sense by arguing that the characteristic feature of the new democracy is its instability and unpredictability, Ziolo’s paper articulates this overarching view recognised by all the authors in this volume as the main effect of the collapse of the Communist rule. However, Holmes’ detailed argument also shows that twenty years after the departure point for development, the reverse logic of the falling amplitude is difficult to sustain in the post-Soviet region. The internal cultural differences, new political and economic solutions imposed from the outside, ethnic acrimony, historical conflicts reopened in the present, and daily confrontations with the new Western order do produce unpredictable conflicts and contribute to the increase of crime, organised crime, and corruption. On the other hand, there is also some evidence that those countries which have joined the EU have managed to combat depressive corruption ratios to a greater extent than those which have not. This fact can be regarded as a proof of the positive influence of the EU’s control and an increasing stabilisation of democratic policies in those countries, yet Holmes also acknowledges that the statistical finding on which this evidence is based is very irregular and hardly consistent from year to year. A pool of information the statistical offices can offer is not highly reliable and final conclusions must be speculative. This is mainly due to the discrepancies between the methods each country applies and the lack of consistency in implementing common research across the post-Communist region. Holmes’ argument also shows how difficult the co-operation between the post-communist countries is to achieve and how different their engagement with the

European common laws launched to track crime across Europe is from one country to another. Despite certain similarity of attitude imbued by ‘the ghosts of the past’ and the unwillingness of the post-Soviet population to report to the police, the interpretation and the application of anti-crime strategies differs substantially even among government structures. When depicting the figures of the falling crime rates among CEE countries, Holmes expresses some dose of optimism which he associates with the slow pace to consolidation. Yet a significant value of his argument lies in the exhaustive analysis of fragmented data which demarcate the limits of the picture drawn at the end. Holmes acknowledges the contradictions, inaccuracies and gaps in the evidence he provides and does state at the end: “it is difficult to discern a general pattern across the post-communist world” (Holmes).

Holmes’ widely ranging methodology, deploying statistics, history, economy and politics enables us to pose a question about the influence of theory on reality. Following the Khunian logic of the impact of applied theory on research results, we could assume that if the evidence provided speaks in favour of some CEE countries, those countries in the future will be more apt to achieve democracy, while those which are defined below the line of democratic consolidation will be more likely to stay there. Therefore producing and securing reliable data would be of utmost importance if speculations are to be avoided. Yet it is still possible to imagine that certain attempts at determining conclusions about those countries play the role of the determinant and thus constrain those countries from breaking the schema of predictable (non)development. That is also what Fotaki and Zherebkin try to imply in their rejection of methodological objectivism. As we have learnt from the post-structuralist research paving its way in the field of post-Communist Studies there are different angles to this assumption, which attract with its awareness of the limits of theory on one hand and discourages with its conceptual

defencelessness on the other one. In this volume the stress is put on the former rather than the latter, which results in a self-reflective understanding of social change, as well as a contextual revision of historical narrative.

The problem of diverse interpretations of historical accounts, which all authors have to face, is critically analysed by Ewa Mazierska who questions the objectivity of the national myths of Polish martial law and the Solidarity movement. In her textual study of Polish films produced between the 1960's and 2007, Mazierska emphasizes the importance of insight into the historical narratives before the collapse of Communism to see "them as they were then, not as they are today" (Mazierska). Her take on continuity and discontinuity refers to representation which she regards as a (mis)interpretation of reality, in this case, comparable with a propagandist filtering of "truth" for ideological purposes. While adopting this culturalist position inspired by the semiotic school, Mazierska deploys myths in a historical context. The films she discusses response to the historical changes of those times and she is interested how that historical frame determines them and why the results of that determination are so different. The fact that historical "truth" is interpreted or manipulated by different directors in a subjective way does not mean that their narratives can be interpreted beyond history. Although their articulations of the same historical events are inconsistent from one film to another and even contradictory, Mazierska sees in that collision a promising attempt at struggling with the grand myths of the Polish nation, such as patriotism, martyrology, Catholicism, unity of workers, which dominated Polish film until martial law, and also a struggle with meta-narratives in a cinematic sense, mainly mastered by Andrzej Wajda and Kazimierz Kutz. Mazierska identifies these inner antagonisms within Polish cinema along the lines of the divide between the modernist and postmodernist style of cinematic representation.

Postmodernist perspective (in fact developing in parallel to the modernist one) favouring pastiche, comedy, and travesty, proves vulnerability of the history of Solidarity and martial law to manipulation and mythologisation. In films directed by Wionczek, Chęćinski, Tym and Munk history is conceived of many different and equally valid narratives which herald the multitude of memories and witnesses to emerge after 1989. Today, colliding interpretations of grand narratives of resistance, martial law, Solidarity and the Round Table participate in cultural circle and constitute political discourses on both the left and right side. To the disappointment of many, the grandiosity of the past in postmodernist film has undergone a cinematic disenchantment and unveiled the ordinariness and ugliness of mythical times. The low and pragmatic motivations of the resistance leaders, fortuitous actions and incidental decisions have been presented in those films as contingent contributors to social and political change, while the validity of the testimony has been diluted in the flow of fragmented and incoherent memories which question objectivity and disavow claims for truth. Mazierska argues that this postmodernist representation of history in Polish cinema is a bridge to the wider context of post-1989 reality within which irreconcilable narratives, or as she says, “a series of juxtaposing, clashing and synthesizing” accounts have become the only source of knowledge and objectivity.

Interestingly, Mazierska admits that there is one interweaving type of continuity across both the modernist and postmodernist cinema, namely gender discrimination, surviving the fall of Communism without significant revision. The roles of women represented in the discussed films have been enclosed within the same prototype of the nurse, mother or lover who hardly ever actively participate in historical change, but instead sacrifice proudly for the sake of the fighting men (for other cultural representation of these prototypes see, for example, Rabikowska 2003). This traditional patriarchal picture of gender roles has been perpetuated in Poland

throughout its pre-Soviet and its contemporary history (Titkow and Domański 1995; Janion 2006). In that sense Polish culture shows a similarity and continuity with the antifeminist culture of Estonia and Belarus, which Miazhevich critiqued in this volume in her analysis of Estonian and Belarusian business. As some historical and social studies indicate (Nikolic-Ristanovic 2002; Szymańczak, 1995; Watson 1993), this prejudice is very characteristic of post-Soviet countries, but it has to be researched in a much broader context than Communism or Capitalism.

The authors in this volume have tried to show that the relationship between the Communist past and the Capitalist present is not as synergetic and straightforward as would appear in transitology. The multifaceted condition of the post-Soviet countries and the complex nature of democracy *per se* distort the linearity of transition from a negative-closed to positive-open society and render the concept of politicization based on this logic susceptible. In the opinion of the Harvard economist, Bruce Scott, Capitalism does not need to imply democracy, and in fact the free market can even extinguish it, while the social differences can inspire a completely different route which may defy democracy in its known form (Scott 2001). It is quite obvious today that the objective benefit of liberal democracy implies essentiality, which reduces diverse subjects to manifestations of a unified position. However, the opposing interests manifested within each country, creativity of humans as political beings, and changing international relations do not allow the utopia of objective assessment to win without the poignant effects of exclusion and totalisation, observed in the political and social environments, such as those analysed by Gayoso, Miazhevich, Ziolo, and Holmes. As Fotaki and Zherebkin indicated above, these effects refer to both Capitalism and Communism equally. In both systems, being underpinned by idealist post-Enlightenment orthodoxies, such as Marx's and Hegel's, history, society and social agents come from the same essence "which operates as their principle

of unification” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001:21). Although it is quite illogical to argue that the dialectical premises of Western democracy: pluralism and collectivism can be harmonised in the same political system (Canovan 2004), this is exactly what grants its supremacy exercised in the name of advanced civilization, human nature, and progress - the ideals identified in this volume as illusory in their totalizing promise. By imposing their mythical significance on post-Communist countries, they emphasise the gap between Eastern and Western Europe which cannot be bridged, leaving those countries ‘delayed’ regardless of their constant changing. As long as the meaning of history is considered “to be the realization of civilization, that is of the form of Western European man” (Vatimo 1992:3), the non-Western countries do not have a chance to satisfy the ideals of democracy on all expected levels. The authors of this volume are aware of historicity and the contingency of this presumption, as much as of the limits of their own theories, therefore they rely on interpretation, which do not dismantle history into particular developmental stages which they then would define against the same ‘modernist project of liberation’, but which present history through a continuous process of disruptions and disjunctions of which they are active agents themselves. This results in the demise of critical subjectivity and its practical efficacy (undermining a Marxian theory of praxis) that precludes an understanding of the differential and plural nature of society and political relations. In total, this volume reinterprets the neokantian distinction between objectivity and ‘real life’ in favour of the more synthetic methods combining synchronic and diachronic observations from particular case studies. It also detours from the Kantian concept of a universal, preconstituted subject, playing a discursive part in the transition theory, where it stands as the signified of ‘the underdeveloped’ or ‘the delayed’, and points our attention to the fact that transition was not conceived as a

cultural process, but rather as a system of universally applicable technical and pragmatic interventions pushing the post-Soviet countries into the homogenous paradigm.

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