



## Bourdieu and Postcommunist Class Formation

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### Abstract

This article suggests that Bourdieu's model of class, framed in terms of cultural capital and habitus, is particularly valuable in understanding the restoration of capitalism under postcommunist conditions. Following the analyses of Széleányi and his collaborators, it is suggested that post-communist managerialism is still strikingly more pronounced than in the West. This and the notion of habitus in particular are perhaps the main elements of Bourdieu's thinking on which we can draw in theorizing postcommunist transition.

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### Keywords: Bourdieu, Class, Postcommunism

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### Introduction<sup>[1]</sup>

**1.1** One of the perennial themes in the philosophy of social science is the difficulty of experimentation in the social sciences. There are of course exceptions: artificially simplified (and often banal) experiments in some areas of social psychology; econometric modelling or perhaps, more interestingly, Garfinkel's disruptive 'breaching' experiments. The relative neglect by social scientists of the postcommunist transitions is therefore something of a surprise. The Marxist-Leninist project, arising out and putting into a kind of practice what Engels (1882) had called 'the development of socialism from utopia to science' was itself an experiment.<sup>[2]</sup> Moreover, 'scientific socialism' in its stalinised form gave rise to a kind of applied social science of 'scientific communism' which survived until the end in the university curricula of, for example, the Soviet Union and East Germany. The end of the communist experiment gave rise to another: the ongoing process of postcommunist transition.<sup>[3]</sup>

**1.2** The rather rapid collapse of the communist order in most of the world and the process of post-communist development are surely among the most valuable resources available to contemporary social science and it is odd, to say the least, that their study has tended to be confined to the backwaters of specialist area studies or 'transitology'.<sup>[4]</sup> Moreover, since sociology since its inception has always been centrally concerned with the origins and development of capitalism, the reconstruction of capitalism in a relatively advanced part of the world, as opposed to its *emergence* in less developed countries, might also be expected to have attracted more attention from students of 'comparative capitalisms'.

**1.3** Bourdieu did not, so far as I am aware, write much about this part of the world. The exception which proves the rule is a short lecture given in East Berlin on October 25th, 1989, and reprinted under the title 'The "Soviet" Variant and Political Capital', in *Practical Reason* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), pp. 14-18. Here he raises the question whether, in a system which officially and to a large extent in practice outlaws economic capital, 'the relative weight of cultural capital...is proportionally increased' (p.16). He goes on to address the issue of the conflict between the nomenklatura, with its political capital, and the bearers of 'academic capital'.<sup>[5]</sup>

**1.4** However, as the Czech sociologist Petr Mateju (2002-3: 380) writes, postcommunism 'has been an ideal laboratory for testing Bourdieu's hypotheses regarding the role of various forms of capital and their conversions in the reproduction of inequality and in shaping life-success'. Bourdieu's model of social stratification, which lays especial importance on 'cultural' or 'symbolic' capital, has been, with good reason, one of the principal frameworks for sociological theories of postcommunism.<sup>[6]</sup> It can indeed be shown to

be of particular relevance to the post-communist world, in which, as Georges Mink (2004: 462) puts it, 'individuals have to get by in a system which they did not know how to read from the start'. This is a system in which foreign contacts, languages and so on may be more important for individual life-chances than economic resources or formal qualifications derived from the communist period. More broadly, it can be argued that the cultural capital of technocrats and managers is, or at least has been, one of the main driving principles behind the postcommunist economies and one of the defining characteristics of their stratification systems. This article explores some of these issues.

## Prologue: Classes in Communism<sup>[7]</sup>

**2.1** Accounts of 'communist' or 'state socialist' societies can be roughly categorised according to whether they endorsed the Marxist assertion that class conflicts are central to all (or at least all developed capitalist) societies and whether, if so, they made the same claim about socialist societies. Official accounts of Soviet-type societies were tied to the orthodox view that there had been a history of this kind but it was now over. With minor variations, to do with the distinct status of collective farmers and intellectuals, these societies portrayed themselves as essentially classless or on the way to classlessness, and characterised by harmonious and cooperative, rather than conflictual, relations between their component strata.

**2.2** Western Marxists with Trotskyist or Maoist leanings, however critical they were of Soviet-type societies, often argued that the nomenklatura elite was not a fully-fledged (state) bourgeoisie and that the 'degeneration' of these 'workers' states' could be remedied by a merely political as distinct from a social revolution. Other western theorists, such as Frank Parkin (1971) and Anthony Giddens (1973), along with some more unofficial accounts from writers based in or emigrated from state socialist societies (Djilas 1966, Ossowski 1963, Konrád & Szelényi 1979, Bahro 1977, Voslensky 1984) identified class antagonisms similar to, and/or different in various ways from, those in capitalist societies. Parkin and Giddens were particularly interested in potential conflicts between Party officials and the technical intelligentsia, while Konrád & Szelényi argued that communism was in any case in large part the work of a previously formed intelligentsia alienated from capitalism.

**2.3** As things turned out, the regimes collapsed in a series of essentially political revolutions whose paradigmatic form had been outlined by Theda Skocpol in her analysis of the (themselves very different) French, Russian and Chinese revolutions. Skocpol stressed the importance of state collapse in revolutionary processes as well as the more familiar challenge posed by the revolutionary masses outside. As Skocpol's analysis would lead one to expect, the origins of the revolutions and the revolutionaries were very diverse, with East German emigration, for example, benefiting from and in turn contributing to changes in Hungary. The metaphor of implosion has been much used to describe the state crises of 1989, and with good reason. The regimes sometimes threatened to use their massive military and police power if challenged,<sup>[8]</sup> but they never quite did, choosing instead to slide into the dustbin of history. In class terms, the most striking characteristic of the anticommunist opposition movements was that they transcended both class differences and differences of political orientation, bringing together these diverse forces in a single-issue movement to get rid of 'them'<sup>[9]</sup>.

## Classes in Postcommunism

**3.1** Marx's class theory is of course grounded in his theory of modes of production, and in thinking about the relevance of Marxist class theory or postmarxist theories such as Bourdieu's to postcommunism we need first to ask whether there is a distinctive postcommunist form of production. Marx wrote in the *Grundrisse* of 'forms which precede capitalist production', and perhaps we can identify at least a family resemblance between 'forms which (also) come *after* state socialist production'. More speculatively still, perhaps Marx and Max Weber's analyses of the emergence of capitalism in early modern Europe might help us to understand late twentieth and early twenty-first century capitalism in the post-communist world.

**3.2** Even in the West, of course there are clear differences between forms of capitalism. Michel Albert (1991) drew the now classic contrast between the US (and British) model, short-termist both in its pursuit of profit and its employment practices, and a 'Rhineland' or 'Rhenish' West European (and Japanese) model, more consensual and long-term (and, to its critics, sluggish) in its approach. Post-communist capitalism might have been expected to opt for the Rhine model. To the extent that it did not – an approach exemplified by the then Czech prime minister, now President, Vaclav Klaus' famous remark rejecting the 'social market economy' in favour of the market economy *tout court* - this can perhaps be explained by a pendulum effect of full-hearted rejection of the old regime, and partly by the dominant neoliberal and globalizing orthodoxy.<sup>[10]</sup>

**3.3** How might a postcommunist capitalism be expected to differ from western models? These economies had often very substantial productive resources but lacked markets and market-related institutions such as stock exchanges, commercial banks and structures of commercial law. They also lacked a bourgeoisie. Opinions differ of course on whether this latter lack is an important one and whether it is likely to persist. Managerialists will tend to argue that managers are managers, whether they are notionally responsible to individual capitalists, to collectivities of shareholders, to state ministries and/or Party officials or, for that matter, to criminal organisations.<sup>[11]</sup> If Western capitalism has become increasingly managerial, as has been argued since the middle of the twentieth century, the East can start (or re-start) that way and stay that way.

**3.4** But even if a bourgeoisie is functionally dispensable in a modern capitalist economy, students of social structure will still want to know whether one is developing or not, and this will determine, or at least affect, other aspects of societal development. Along with the decollectivisation of agriculture and the emergence

of a petty bourgeoisie, this (where it is happening) is the third major social structural transformation of postcommunism.<sup>[12]</sup>

**3.5** A 'modern' industrial bourgeoisie can develop in various ways. One path is via the conversion of agricultural property, as evidenced in early modern England and as described by Barrington Moore (1966); the subtitle of Moore's classic book, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, is: 'lord and peasant in the making of the modern world'. Another is via the gradual expansion of existing artisanal and/or merchant activity; a third is by syphoning off resources made available by positions held in a state or church hierarchy. In post-communist transition, the third of these has rightly attracted the most attention, under the slogan, which seems to have been invented in Poland, of nomenklatura privatisation (Ray, 1995: 452-7; Stark and Bruszt, 1998). In a (for the beneficiaries) ideal scenario, existing state managers were able to reconfigure themselves as shareholders in newly privatised enterprises, in what in the West would be called a management buy-out but was here often more of a handout. Even where, as in Russia, there was officially a more egalitarian distribution of shares, they were often bought up by existing management or local magnates.<sup>[13]</sup>

**3.6** As in Western privatisations, there was a structurally in-built uncertainty as to what enterprises were 'worth', and why: a massive industrial plant might turn out to be unsaleable, or another valued for its site rather than its plant; many an East German or eastern European supermarket has been built on the ruins of a factory. Soviet and Eastern European firms, with their traditions of vertical integration and self-sourcing of many of their needs, were well placed to shift their activities in creative ways; the name of an enterprise ceased to be much of a guide to what it actually produced. There were of course parallels in the West as, for example tobacco and utility firms diversified their activities, but the Eastern variant displayed, as so often, a characteristically different degree of intensity, or in some cases desperation (Grabher and Stark, 1997: v). Often, of course, nomenklatura privatisation has taken an explicitly criminal form, as in the Bulgarian example mentioned above (n. 11).

**3.7** But capitalism as it has developed under post-communist conditions does seem to have some characteristic features in terms of the kinds of resources that are mobilised and the ways in which this is done. David Stark's concept of recombinant property (Stark, 1993, Stark, 1997) is one of the most helpful. Following the Hungarian situation and its analysis in the late 1980s, Stark had already pointed to 'hybrid mixtures of public ownership and private initiative' (1997:37), and the post 1989 transition in Hungary and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, and the more subterranean transition in China, showed that 'property transformation can occur without conventional privatisation... [but also]...that property transformation does not necessarily clarify property rights'.

**3.8** More broadly, the Polish sociologist Jadwiga Staniszkis (1999) has outlined a model of 'political capitalism', which she also grounds in the blurred property relations that marked the final stages of state socialism in many of the more advanced economies of the bloc.<sup>[14]</sup> But this also, Staniszkis points out, parallels processes described by Marx and Max Weber in the early stages of European capitalism, in particular the 'divided ownership' characteristic of late feudalism, "when the king, vassal peasant cooperative and direct users made claim to the same object (e.g., a piece of earth)" and a mercantilist policy 'in which the state, in promoting the new economic mechanism, tried to use it for its own ends (stabilize the system, increase the pool of goods and services and in this manner satisfy needs which could not be satisfied by the state sector alone and decrease political pressure on changing the system' (Staniszkis, 1999: 71). In the communist case, the 'transfer from mercantilism to real political capitalism ...[occurs]... where the actors of the enfranchising nomenclature...began at the same time to use their position in the mercantilist structures to promote their own ends (1992:72). This led to 'a point of no return accelerating the end of communism' (1992:73) and what she calls a 'managerial revolution' at the level of 'organised political capital', which itself becomes increasingly distinct from and antagonistic to small and medium private capital (80-81).

It seems that not only the beginnings of the market economy were based on the combination of competition, cooperation, political redistribution and status-regulated interconnections. Similar characteristics appear also in organized mature capitalism with symptoms of state capitalism. The characteristic feature of capitalism that emerges from communism is the parallel existence of the early forms (when market rules are not universal, but aimed at the maintaining of the privileged position of one particular set of actors from the old regime, and when personal interconnections are a substitute for the still non-existent institutional market structure) and the presence of mature forms of organized capitalism. (82-3)

**3.9** As with the original development of European capitalism, some societies pass fairly slowly through the early stages while others start later and skip them (cf. Staniszkis, 1999: 131). In a familiar rule of thumb, the further one goes East or South from the North Atlantic, the less economic relations correspond to an ideal-type of mature capitalism, and the more they are 'embedded' in other social networks of personal acquaintanceship, political patronage and so on. Any bourgeoisie here is likely to be a parasitic, *rentier* class rather than an entrepreneurial one (cf. Eyal et al, 1998: 171-3).

**3.10** It should be clear that any emergent capitalist class in post-communist societies is going to be a rather different animal from that found in the West<sup>[15]</sup>. One should note, first, that what counts as capital or a productive resource is extremely unpredictable, and secondly that ownership and control of such resources are bound up with complex processes of justification and social valorization. As well as capital in the conventional economic sense, then, we should also be thinking of Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and social capital and the related concept of social capital developed by James Coleman, Robert Putnam (1993) and others. (On these, see Kolankiewicz 1996; Fine, 2001; Grix, 2001).

## Social and Cultural Capital

**4.1** To cut a long story short, whereas Putnam's analyses of Italy and the US tend to treat social capital as a public good, and something which unproblematically conduces to social development,<sup>[16]</sup> Bourdieu's focus is closer to Marx in looking at the way in which these forms of capital and the ways in which they are used by their bearers reinforce social inequalities and antagonisms between classes. Bourdieu (1983) distinguished three forms of capital: economic, cultural and social. His concept of cultural capital has some analogies with the economic notion of human capital but this, Bourdieu argued, pays insufficient attention to the detailed structures in which such forms of capital are deployed and to informal educational resources in the family and elsewhere, which largely determine the rate of return of educational investments. 'The structure of the field, i.e., the unequal distribution of capital, is the source of the specific effects of capital...' (p. 49). Thus, for example, in the post-communist context, the ability to speak or teach English may be a positional good of some importance in virtue of its rarity.<sup>[17]</sup> Social capital Bourdieu defines as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition...' (51). And in a sentence designed to illustrate the shift to ostensibly more meritocratic forms of social selection in Western societies but which also has considerable relevance to the post-communist context, Bourdieu wrote: '...the more the official transmission of capital is prevented or hindered, the more the effects of the clandestine circulation of capital in the form of cultural capital become determinant in the reproduction of the social structure' (p.55).<sup>[18]</sup>

**4.2** In the USSR and Eastern Europe, of course, there was officially no capital until the later stages of the communist period, and even then only in parts of the bloc. Although people often held substantial stocks of cash, the more useful resources were foreign currency and informal connections, which provided access to scarce goods.<sup>[19]</sup>

**4.3** To revert to the example cited earlier, an ability to speak foreign languages, acquired in special schools or through service in the tourist industry, security apparatus etc., may be far more marketable than formal educational qualifications, and personal connections may carry more weight than ownership or control of formal economic or material resources. An ironical expression of this is the practice, quite common for a time in Russia, in which people got together, set a money value on their collective expertise and asked banks to match this with loan capital. Once again, processes of this kind display in a somewhat crude and exaggerated form something which was by no means unknown in Western capitalism during the dot-com mania at the beginning of the twenty-first century. More optimistically, social capital can be viewed in a way which owes more to Putnam (1993) than to Bourdieu, as a collective resource rather than part of a competitive game. The point of course is that it is always both.

## Bourdieu goes East

**5.1** An approach which owes much to Bourdieu is taken in one of the most important analyses of East central Europe, that by Eyal, Szelényi and Townsley (1998). In this book, the authors continue a line of argument which Szelényi had first developed in the mid-1970s, that 'in the industrially backward agrarian societies of Eastern Europe the intelligentsia, organized into a government-bureaucratic ruling class, has taken the lead in modernization, replacing a weak bourgeoisie incapable of breaking with feudalism' (Konrád and Szelényi, 1979:10). Thus despite the persecution of independent intellectuals, from which Konrád and Szelényi themselves suffered, and the broader tensions between technically qualified members of the elite and the central authorities which erupted from time to time in the 1950s and 1960s and helped to undermine the regimes, the intelligentsia could be seen, they argued, as the dominant class in state socialist societies.

**5.2** Szelényi (1990) suggested that the process to which they and others (notably Ludz 1970) had drawn attention of the 'intellectualization of the bureaucracy' had explained the weakness of the regimes in resisting pressures for reform, and the fact that they often even embraced these initiatives. But the intelligentsia had not yet succeeded, contrary to some Trotskyist analyses, in constituting itself as a fully-fledged bourgeoisie. It was left holding the capitalist baby which, whether its birth was premature or overdue, certainly needed intensive care. Thus in opposition to theories of political capitalism and nomenklatura privatization which, they concede, may better fit the situation in Poland and the former Soviet Union, Eyal, Szelényi and Townsley suggest that there was a considerable change of ownership and control from the old nomenklatura and that the new managerial elites of east central Europe are defined more by their possession of cultural capital than by economic capital (diverted from the state and/or accumulated in the old 'second', grey or informal sector) or by social capital taking the form of 'old' social networks derived from nomenklatura positions. (New networks, based on membership of the opposition movements or on post-communist NGOs or educational institutions, are a different matter.)

**5.3** To look in detail at the empirical support for a model of this kind as opposed to one of political capitalism would involve a much more regionally and sectorally differentiated approach,<sup>[20]</sup> related to the broader discussion of elite continuity (Higley and Lengyel 2000). One can however see in the critical responses to Eyal, Szelényi and Townsley an interesting tension between a Bourdieu-influenced model and a more orthodox Marxist one. Michael Burawoy, who has conducted some of the most fundamental research on communist and post-communist industry (Burawoy and Lukács 1992; Burawoy and Kratov 1993), brings this out, in an important review symposium on the book in the *American Journal of Sociology*. Burawoy (2001) points to the differences between an approach which focusses on the strategies of class members, in this case of an elite class, and a Marxist class analysis, which he favours, grounded in antagonistic relations tied to conflicts at the point of production. The authors of the book reply, reasonably enough, that there is little evidence of action on the part of a 'demobilized' working class.<sup>[21]</sup>

**5.4** Stratification patterns in communist and post-communist societies, too, may seem more open to Weberian, Dahrendorfian or Bourdieusian models than to a simple opposition between exploiters and exploited grounded in the social relations of production. Weber's model of 'classes, status groups and parties' as phenomena of the distribution of *power* may seem particularly relevant in a context where, as a recent discussion of Russia argues, the relation to state power has been the principal source of privilege:

Overall the shift from czarist to socialist planned economic and now to capitalist market economic power structures did not much affect the extraordinary importance of *authoritatively distributed privileges* as a central basic principle for unequal positions in the Russian social order' (Hölscher and Dittrich (1999), section 4.2.).

### **Habitus and habits of the heart**

**6.1** This conflict of approaches leads however to a further place at which the analytical axis shifts in a sense from Marx/Bourdieu to Max Weber/Bourdieu. Post-communist entrepreneurs and managers, like those elsewhere, must have to some varying but never insignificant degree a belief that what they are doing makes sense, has some point or value. State socialism was of course characterised by low levels of this belief, despite often fatuous official attempts to sustain it.<sup>[22]</sup> The shock years of post-communist transition often dealt a further blow to it, as previously valued goods lost their markets overnight to the benefit of sometimes inferior but chic Western imports. 'But', say Eyal, Szelényi and Townsley (1996: 181) of the corporatist privatisation strategy which was followed,

...if we are to understand why...[late state-socialist managers]... opted for capitalism from above, it is impossible to separate analytically or empirically their self-interest from their commitment to professional ethics. They acted as responsible managers in the best interests of their firms and their employees. They searched for ways to preserve the companies they had worked in for years, and to protect their employees' jobs. These were 'their' firms – not because they owned them or intended to acquire ownership in them, but because they worked in them, because they managed them.

**6.2** As in the early years of European capitalism, certain sorts of motivation may require external sources of support; Weber believed this had been provided in some parts of Europe by ascetic protestantism. In post-communist Europe, as in the developing countries, there was no substantive doctrine of this kind, but that may not be the point. It has been argued with some plausibility that what counted in, for example, the Japanese embrace of Western capitalism at the end of the nineteenth century was the shock effect of the opening up of the country and its rigid traditions to the outside world, leading to a reorientation of traditional attitudes in a modernizing direction (Bendix, 1971). Something of this kind may have been at work in post-communist Europe in the nineteen-nineties, driven by normative conceptions of what is 'Western', 'modern', 'European' or just 'normal'. Alternatively, one can simply argue, following Weber, that modern capitalist practices have become essentially self-justifying, requiring no further legitimation from an external source. As Weber said of the Protestant economic ethic: '...victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its support no longer' (Weber, 1905: 181-2).

**6.3** This is not the place to systematically examine the substantial amounts of evidence for both the *Bildungsbürgertum* (intellectual bourgeois) and the political capitalism hypotheses. Both are explicitly presented as analyses of transition to an essentially open future. As Eyal et al (1998: 186) put it,

The social structure of Central European societies is still in flux. From this point of view the most important issue pending is whether a domestic propertied *grande bourgeoisie* which could challenge the hegemony of the current power bloc will emerge and, if it does, on what basis it will exercise power and which actors will comprise it. We believe that the answers to these questions will depend on the balance of social forces and the contingent outcomes of their social struggles.<sup>[23]</sup>

**6.4** There are of course substantial differences between states and regions. It would have been unthinkable, for example, to write about 'socialist entrepreneurs' in Czechoslovakia in the 1980s in the way Szelényi could do about rural producers in Hungary. The rise of small and medium-sized businesses in the early 90s in the Czech Republic was welcomed as 'impressive' (Benacek, 1997), while a Hungarian commentator in the same volume was suggesting that the corresponding sector there was 'becoming over-populated and over-fragmented' (Gábor, 1997: 158) and talking about the need for 'birth control' (p. 170). Patterns of ownership are also diverse across the region, with banks, investment companies, and holding companies like the German Treuhandanstalt and its successor playing very different roles in different countries.

**6.5** The authors of a study of new entrepreneurs conclude that 'the creation in eastern Germany of a *class* of new entrepreneurs who will provide a social basis for capitalism still has a long way to go' (Koch and Thomas, 1997). This may of course not be the right way to phrase such questions, to the extent that Russian and Eastern European capitalism is owned and even managed by foreigners. (In Germany, of course, the 'Wessis' (Westerners) are not even officially or identifiably foreign.) Hungary was in the forefront of this process, though comparing their 1993 data with a 1996 survey Eyal et al (1998: 154) note 'a massive increase in the proportion of firms reporting ownership by domestic individuals'. Nevertheless, the globalisation and/or Europeanisation of Eastern European capitalism means that discussion of class relations necessarily takes on an international dimension which is more familiar in development studies than in the class analysis of advanced industrial societies (cf Ray 2002: 135). EU enlargement has undoubtedly given a further push to the Europeanisation and globalisation of managerial elites, though the pace of such changes may not be particularly fast (Koch and Thomas, 1997; Outhwaite 2006a; 2007).

**6.6** Once again we must note the Marxist-Trotskyist 'law' of uneven and combined development, as this relates to differential growth of sectors, geographical processes, classes and regions at the global, regional national, sub-national and local levels. Theories of path-dependency, according to which past developments constrain current options (Hausner et al, 1995; Stark and Bruszt, 1998) were one way of capturing these diversities, and it is no accident that they have been particularly prominent in studies of postcommunism.

## **Forms of Knowledge and Habitus**

**7.1** I referred earlier to a brief mention by Eyal et al of the differentiated habitus to be found in postcommunist societies.

For example, there is the habitus formed by climbing the socialist ladder. This is the apparatchik mentality which knows how to manipulate party organization and how to use ideological slogans. There is the habitus of the reform communists – especially the technocrats – who think they know how to get things done... There is also the habitus of the pre-communist middle class...[and]...the habitus of the dissident intelligentsia, which is comprised in the mix of New Left compassion toward the poor and the oppressed and a neophyte commitment to the most doctrinaire of neoliberal ideas.

**7.2** This is a promising basis on which to begin an analysis of the ways in which different forms of knowledge and practice become reconfigured in the post-communist context. Very substantial numbers of people have had not just to change jobs but to fundamentally reshape their identities and careers. The shake-out has been well documented, but there is scope for a finer-grained analysis, perhaps based initially on individual life-histories, of strategies of self-re-fashioning. The most interesting cases are perhaps those where the job description remains roughly the same but the content is transformed. Politicians might be as good a place as any to begin. At a seminar I attended in the 1990s the speaker passed round photographs of smartly suited leaders of the reconfigured Hungarian Socialist Party. 'New Labour!', we chorused. There was more to this than the tailoring: Timothy Garton Ash (2000: 8) suggested that in the 1990 election East German politicians consciously imitated the habitus of their western counterparts whom they had seen on TV. This became indeed a structural feature of postcommunist politics more generally. As he wrote in 1995,

To be sure, the business of democratic politics differs from that of communist politics. But there are people slightly lower down the communist hierarchy who very rapidly adapt to the rather different techniques of acquiring and exercising power in a modern television democracy. You may not be able to teach an old dog new tricks, but the young dogs learn them in no time. After all, they joined the party in the 1970s not because they believed in communism but because they were interested in making a career. And in the real politics of power rather than the intellectual and moral 'anti-politics' of dissidence. (2000: 227)

**7.3** The German case is particularly interesting because the GDR party structure mirrored in part that of the Federal Republic. As well as the leading party, the SED, formed of a forced marriage of socialists and communists, there was, as noted earlier, a cluster of so-called 'block parties' corresponding to the West German CDU, FDP (LDPD – liberals) and even old nationalists (NPD/NDPD). This ceased to be a joke at the moment of reunification, when there was a prospect of individual and collective sideways mobility into the party landscape of the enlarged Federal Republic (Thumfart, 2002: 218-288). The Eastern CDU elite, for example, became a mixture of five groups: the (now marginalized) old senior elite, younger people from the old CDU or DBD moving into leading positions, a 'transformation elite', itself divided between those who wanted to link old and new members and those who thought the old party should be dissolved, a fourth group of people from the anticommunist opposition movements and, finally, a 'transfer elite' from the West moving into posts from Minister-President of three of the new states downwards. Not surprisingly, these different groups did not build a particularly happy family (Thumfart, 221-2).<sup>[24]</sup>

## **Beyond Class?**

**8.1** What then are the implications of all this for class theory? A rather different approach which owes an often unacknowledged debt to Bourdieu can be pushed in a more radically culturalist direction. Malcolm Waters and others, in an extremely creative series of contributions, have developed a historical model of class societies which culminates in their supersession. Their model is based on three categories. First, a classical model of what they call 'economic class society', in which economically based classes with strong subcultures conflict within the framework of 'a weak or liberal state' (Waters, 1997: 30). Second, an 'organized-class society', in which classes are incorporated in political and other structures into a stronger state dominated by a political-bureaucratic elite. Their formal political and institutional representation in a sense compensates for their internal differentiation and the decline of strong occupational subcultures.

Social classes take on a new lease of life despite market fragmentation and a progressing division of labour. The political –organizational superstructures of class, trade unions and political parties take over the dominant social-structuring role. (Waters, 1997: 32)

**8.2** Finally, in an emergent postclass or 'status-conventional' society 'stratification is sourced in the cultural sphere. The strata are lifestyle and/or value-based status configurations' (Waters, 1997: 33). Intellectual property, mobile and fluid, tends to displace land and capital as the basis of social differentiation. Politics ceases to be class-based and identity, life-style and issues politics become more important than the large blocs of left and right. Post-class societies remain differentiated, unequal and conflictual, but along shifting and unpredictable lines. These three typical patterns could respectively be

roughly identified, in Western Europe, with a short nineteenth century beginning in the 1840s, a social democratic/welfare state twentieth century petering out in the 1980s and a post-welfarist 'third way'<sup>[25]</sup> twenty-first century just beginning.

**8.3** Whatever one thinks of this overall conception, the model of organized-class society strongly recalls the world of state socialism. The coexistence of the nomenklatura elite with the officially defined and celebrated working class, its alliance with the collective peasantry and the political parties fabricated to represent different classes and/or tolerated ideological currents such as liberalism, Christianity or nationalism, fill out the picture of an organized-class society par excellence. It is perhaps even one in which, as Pakulski and Waters (1996: 45) themselves argued, 'political ranking displaced class division'. The short-term volatility of post-communist politics, its failure to settle into what had been, though was arguably ceasing to be, the left-right-divided and class-based Western European pattern of the earlier part of the twentieth century,<sup>[26]</sup> can be explained by the removal of these organising structures.

**8.4** At the same time, however, as discussed below, post-communist electorates remain more egalitarian in their attitudes than Western Europeans, to a degree more closely related than in the West to the actual levels of inequality in their societies (Delhey, 2001; see also Ferge, 1998; Mink, 2002: 522-7). The traditional expression of egalitarian attitudes, in Europe and to some extent elsewhere, has been social democratic politics, but the scissor effect in the post-communist countries of the local demise of socialist/communist political and economic policies and the general reorientation of Western social democracy into third way or 'new' politics has perhaps prevented what would otherwise have been a natural development. Overall, the effects of social structure on political preferences are not, or not yet, at all significant in postcommunist Europe (see, for example, Rose et al, 1998: 138-40). However this situation changes in the coming decades, with EU Enlargement again focusing attention on the issue of who sits where, in which supranational groupings, in the enlarged European Parliament, the post-communist party landscape is of particular interest to students of class or post-class politics (Evans, 1996).

### **Individualised Class Positions?**

**9.1** A third analytical approach, developed by Ulrich Beck, offers a further perspective on these issues: less classical than the postmarxist Bourdieusianism of Eyal, Szelenyi and Townsley, and less postmodern/culturalist than that of Waters et al. Beck, in an article of 1983, presented an early version of a model of individualization which he has subsequently developed in a number of other works. Even if objective inequalities or class structures 'have remained relatively unchanged',

The attachment of people to a 'social class' (in Max Weber's sense) has nevertheless become weaker. It now has much less influence on their actions. They develop ways of life that tend to become individualized. For the sake of economic survival, individuals are now compelled to make themselves the center of their own life plans and conduct. (Beck, 1987: 342)

**9.2** Under these conditions, social mobility becomes seen as an individual matter; 'social crises appear as individual crises' (350-1). The question with which Beck ends his article, that of the possible forms of collective action which might unite these individual subjects, is one to which Bourdieu's later practical and theoretical work aimed to respond (Bourdieu, 1998; 2002). Beck was concerned primarily with western industrial societies, but his analysis is also clearly of great relevance to the postcommunist east. Classes and class positions are forming, though not classes für-sich or as political actors. Resentment of class inequalities does not seem to be confined to nostalgic socialists – especially if one looks to the obscene wealth of some of the 'new Russians'. The fact that no post-communist proletariat has developed into a class for itself (even where, as in Poland in 1993 and 1995, there was something of a communist backlash) does not mean that class politics is dead or that East Central Europe has overtaken the West on the way to an American future. Survey evidence suggests a majority perception in east central Europe that there are 'strong' or 'very strong' conflicts between managers and workers and that income differentials are 'too great', and a relation between the perception of conflict and objective inequality as measured by Gini coefficient (Delhey, 2001: 203-5). And although many managers may seem themselves as managing enterprises under difficult conditions for the public good, this is not necessarily how their efforts will be perceived.

**9.3** Subjective representations of the class structure also display an interesting contrast, remarkably stable through the 1990s, between East and West. Eastern German respondents offered a sharply pyramidal model with a tiny upper stratum, while Westerners discerned a 'spinning-top' model with much larger upper and middle strata, the latter outnumbering the working class by 2 to 1.

**9.4** How far one can detect a shift to a more lifestyle-based pattern of consumption and social differentiation is still somewhat unclear. It has however formed a major emphasis of recent German work on Germany itself (Geissler 2000, Hradil 2001; 2002) and on Russia (Hölscher and Dittrich, 1999). The model of social milieus, based on value orientations and lifestyles, was developed by the market and electoral research institute Sinus in the 1980s and taken up by a number of social scientists in the 1990s. In a comparison drawn in 2000, Sinus identified two specifically 'Eastern' milieus, a conservative bourgeois-humanist one oriented to old protestant virtues, and a 'GDR-rooted' one, encompassing dismissed or retired members of the former East German elites whose attitudes remain strongly distinct from those of West Germans. Other Eastern milieus (such as left-intellectual, career-oriented, and traditional worker/peasant) were characterised as 'converging' with corresponding milieus in the West. A more recent survey by Sinus itself (2007) still identifies nearly four million or 6 percent of 'GDR-nostalgics' in the 'traditional' (left-hand) side of their model. These are defined as having lost out from the transition, 'clinging on to Prussian virtues and old socialist conceptions of justice and solidarity' [table:

## Theorising Postcommunism

**10.1** Is there a postcommunist condition in more than the trivial sense that some parts of Europe and Asia were ruled by communist regimes, and that most countries in the rest of the world had to orient themselves to this reality and now no longer do? Will being post-communist one day mean no more than being post-Habsburg, marked by some architectural and cultural residues? It is clear that postcommunism in 2007 means something very different from what it meant in 1990.<sup>[27]</sup> Yet what makes the link for the former communist countries is a continuing 'transition culture', as Michael Kennedy (2002: 9; 10) has labelled it:

'...a mobilizing culture organized around certain logical and normative oppositions, valuations of expertise, and interpretations of history that provides a basic framework through which actors undertake strategic action to realize their needs and wishes... Transition culture does not only live...in the halls of transitology, one of the culture's principal academic ex[pressions]. It also lives in everyday life when, for instance, a self-identified entrepreneur in Eastern Europe accuses his employee of having a socialist mind-set.'<sup>[28]</sup>

**10.2** It would be against the spirit of Bourdieu's sociology to suggest that his approach has the magic key to understanding postcommunism. It is clear however that theories of managerialism, originating in the early years of the USSR and often referring to it as well as to Western capitalism, clearly acquire a further dimension with the analyses of Széleányi and his collaborators (see Eyal 2003). Whether or not one follows their 'Bildungsbürgertum' analysis all the way, it is clear that state socialist systems were essentially administered by semi-professionalised cadres (Balla, 1972) and that post-communist managerialism is still strikingly more pronounced than in the West. This and the notion of habitus are perhaps the main elements of Bourdieu's thinking on which we can draw in theorizing postcommunist transition.<sup>[29]</sup> But using these elements only reinforces the senses that we have lost one of the few theorists with the ability to mount a more ambitious and over-arching theory of this, one of the fundamental social changes of the turn of this millennium.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to Larry Ray for comments on an earlier draft of this article, and for permission to use some material from our joint book. Also to Jacqueline O'Reilly and to the three anonymous reviewers for this journal.

<sup>2</sup>'Du passé, faisons table rase', as the Internationale has it.

<sup>3</sup>There is a growing tendency to see the postcommunist transition period as over, but I think this is misleading, even in the rather exceptional German case.

<sup>4</sup>This is true, I think, even in Germany, where a sizeable part of the country had experienced over forty years of state socialist rule. (Grix 2002)

<sup>5</sup>Bourdieu and James Coleman also published an article by György Konrád and Iván Széleányi (1990), two major contributors to this field and on whom Bourdieu was a substantial influence, as discussed in more detail below.

<sup>6</sup>As Georges Mink (2004: 446-9) points out, the reverse is the case with Alain Touraine's social movement approach, which had led to a major study in 1980 of Solidarnosc and inspired subsequent studies in Poland. After 1989, however, in the words, cited by Mink (p.461), of a Polish sociologist, Aldona Jawlowska, working in this paradigm, '...the search for actors constructing a conception of a new modernity in the unions, catholic groups and intellectual elites...proved fruitless...The French sociologists expected to find projects for a new social order coming from actors who were [in fact] leaving the scene.'<sup>7</sup> (my translation of Mink's).

<sup>7</sup>I am using the terms communism and postcommunism, as Larry Ray and I did in our recent book, on which I have partly drawn here (Outhwaite and Ray 2005), to refer to the Marxist-Leninist regimes and their aftermath, respectively. The regimes of course described themselves as socialist and on the way to the higher stage of communism, to be achieved in an increasingly indefinite future. Some commentators thus prefer to speak of (state) socialism and postsocialism, though the latter term invites confusion with the ideological mutation of western social democracy.

<sup>8</sup>The East German regime, with characteristic *délicatesse*, announced that it could if necessary repeat the Tien-an-Men Square massacre of June 1989 on the Alexanderplatz. Bronislaw Geremek (in Dahrendorf, Furet, Geremek 1993: 43) recalls negotiating for *Solidarity* with a leading party official who said that the only thing which divided the two sides was 'the agricultural question...who buries whom'. On 1989, see Kumar 2001.

<sup>9</sup>A term that was used as a book title by Teresa Toranska (1987).

<sup>10</sup>The extension of the 'varieties of capitalism' literature to postcommunist Europe is relatively recent. It was pioneered in the West by Bernard Chavance (1999), Ramine Motamed-Nejad (1999) and colleagues.



See also Bohle 1999 and, more recently, Lane and Myant 2006.

<sup>11</sup>For an example of large-scale criminality in postcommunism, see Outhwaite and Ray 2005: 80-85. Scandals such as the Bulgarian one described there are perhaps more common the further east one goes, but they are by no means confined to the East and South of Europe. (In the Transparency International index of perceived corruption (Transparency International 2005: [www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org)), which admittedly refers more to low-level bribery, Bulgaria appears around the middle of a scale of 159 states (the others excluded for reasons of inadequate data), and slightly less corrupt than Croatia, Poland and Romania. It is in the nature of processes of criminalisation and decriminalisation like the Bulgarian case that they are hard to estimate, but we should note that it is not just money that can be laundered, but also economic and other elites and entire branches of economic enterprise. It is easy to distinguish analytically between a virtuous spiral of decriminalisation of previously criminal activities and personnel, as can be traced in the history of the United States and other advanced capitalist countries, and a downward spiral of increasing criminalisation. What is less easy is to judge the relative importance of the two components of this double helix and the overall trend. For Central and Eastern Europe (with the exception of parts of former Yugoslavia) we might be optimistic, whereas for Russia and most of the former Soviet Union the picture is a good deal less clear.

<sup>12</sup>There were of course important differences within the communist bloc in Europe. Poland had substantially private agriculture and a sizeable private sector, as did Hungary. Czechoslovakia, by contrast, had neither. There are also substantial differences in the transitional period. Some post-communist economies were immediately thrown open to external investment (GDR, Hungary); others presented very considerable obstacles to it (most of Russia). In some, privatisation was not much more than a slogan; in others it described a major revolutionary process. The internal differentiation of the former bloc, to some extent papered over during the communist period, became a major theme as soon as the dust of 1989 had settled. The Visegrad group of Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, arising from a meeting in early 1991, already grounded its original programme of cooperation by stressing the similarity between the (then) three relatively advanced countries and by implication their distinctness from the rest of the former bloc (Declaration of Feb 1991). The EU enlargement of May 2004 of course reinforced these differences.

<sup>13</sup>According to the authors of a ten year retrospective report (World Bank 2002: 72-3), 'Navigating between continued state ownership with eroding control rights and a transfer to ineffective private owners with an inadequate institutional framework is possibly one of the most difficult challenges confronting policymakers in charge of privatization.'

<sup>14</sup>Many of these processes were well under way before 1989. Tarkovski (1994) documents some Polish cases.

<sup>15</sup>This is not of course to deny the very substantial differences between western societies (For a good discussion, see Bottomore and Brym, 1989).

<sup>16</sup>Putnam's work has been enormously influential in discussions of/in postcommunist Europe. (See, in particular, Kolankiewicz, 1996.) One recent example among many is a study by Badescu and Sum (2005) comparing social capital in Transylvania with that in the rest of Romania. Transylvanians score higher on measures of social capital and certain aspects of social trust. For a more substantial discussion of Romania, see Stoica 2004 and Parvu 2005.

<sup>17</sup>Szelényi and Kostello (1998: 317) describe the Hungarian case towards the end of the socialist period. 'A unique class emerged among the children of Communist foreign service bureaucrats. Many attended schools or colleges in the West, where they gained valuable language skills and were socialized into Western ways of business and social life. Many of these children established important interpersonal networks, became the earliest "liberals", were the most dedicated pro-capitalists. Some became compradores, professionals who helped foreign companies to invest in these countries after the fall of communism, in this way serving as "bridges" between foreign business and the domestic economy.'

<sup>18</sup>This is of course the same argument which he made in the East Berlin lecture cited in the introduction.

<sup>19</sup>Janos Kenedi's *Do it Yourself* (1981) is a hilarious account of his eye-opening experiences when he decided to build himself a house in the Hungary of the 1970s.

<sup>20</sup>King (2001) is an exceptionally useful study of Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, with some shrewd evaluations of the diversity of evidence for these theoretical models. He suggests that the aggregate differences between these countries can be best explained by differences in organization and legitimation in the late communist period (see in particular pp.113-5).

<sup>21</sup>They had emphasised (p.18) that the book 'focuses on the top of the social hierarchies...on...intra-class or ...inter-elite struggles. This does not imply that inter-class conflicts will not be of vital importance in shaping the characters of these societies. Rather, it is to say that in this historical conjuncture, where old class and elite constellations are dissolving, and new classes are not yet formed, looking at these inter-elite struggles is theoretically and historically justified.'

<sup>22</sup>It was not however wholly absent or ineffective; see Guldemann, 1984.

<sup>23</sup>They go on (p.189) to differentiate various kinds of habitus: apparatchik, technocrat, and ex-dissident intelligentsia (see below). See also Martin 2002: 834. For an interesting discussion of post-1945 and post-1989 reconstruction in Germany, based on the idea of imitation, see Jacoby 2000.

<sup>24</sup>The SED reshaped itself into the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism). Garton Ash (2002: 145) quotes a conservative politician saying nastily that this was like the Nazi NSDAP renaming itself the PDSAN – and getting seats in Parliament.

<sup>25</sup>This is of course the term popularised in the UK by Blair and Giddens, imitated in Germany under the slogan of the 'neue Mitte' and often known in France under the pejorative term of 'pensée unique' (see Touraine, 1999/2001).

<sup>26</sup>The left-right division is of course independent of one of class polarisation, though in practice they often tend to overlap.

<sup>27</sup>And it will undoubtedly mean something very different in 2020, if the term continues to be current. My guess is that it probably will; as Mink (2002:531) puts it, post-communist societies are still 'en train de se faire'.

<sup>28</sup>For Kennedy, whose study can be set alongside Staniszkis' (1999) as a particularly creative and thoughtful contribution to an overall theory of postcommunism, Bourdieu operates not just as a source of specific theoretical approaches, but as a guide in a broader sense, animated by the inspiration 'to name those things which are repressed in order to enable a wider public to reflect on their meanings' (Kennedy, 2002: 279; cf Bourdieu 1990: 149).

<sup>29</sup>On habitus, see Luc Boltanski, 'Usages Faibles, Usages Forts de L'Habitus', in Pierre Encrevé and Rose-Marie Lagrave (eds), *Travailler Avec Bourdieu* (Paris: Flammarion 2003, pp. 153-161. The work of Boltanski, Thévenot and Chiapello and other recent French sociological analyses of capitalism would be important for a further development of the theme of this article.

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