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European Journal of Social Theory 2009 12: 321

DOI: 10.1177/1368431009337349

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At the End of the Post-Communist Transformation? Normalization or Imagining Utopia?

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Abstract

This article reviews the implications of the collapse of Communism in Europe for some themes in recent social theory. It was often assumed that 1989 was part of a global process of normalization and routinization of social life that had been left behind earlier utopian hopes. Nothing that utopia is open to various interpretations, including utopias of the everyday, this article suggests, first that there were utopian dimensions to 1989, and, second, that these hopes continue to influence contemporary social and political developments. The continuing role of substantive utopian expectations is illustrated with reference to the politics of lustration in Poland and the rise of nationalist parties in Hungary. This analysis is placed in the context of the already apparent impact of the global economic crisis in post-communist countries. It concludes that the unevenness and diversity of the post-1989 world elude overly generalized attempts at theorization and demand more nuanced analyses.

Key words

■ crisis ■ Hungary ■ Poland ■ post-communism ■ social theory ■ utopias

Revolutions of 1989 and Sociology

The Revolutions of 1989 transformed the political, intellectual and economic character of the world, yet there has been sparse sociological reflection on their implications for sociology itself or for theories of social transformation. Indeed, no sooner had the walls fallen than a process of normalization and ‘business as usual’ was underway in much social analysis. Sociological theory rather busied itself with the various post-Marxist ‘turns’ that were underway, notably the global, cultural and postmodern ones, into which the post-communist phenomenon was often uneasily inserted (Ray, 1997). Two related themes of the responses to 1989 were ‘return’ and ‘normalization’, and the idea that central Europe was

re-joining the path from which it had been diverted in 1948 was taken literally by some writers such as Szelenyi and Szelenyi (1991) who claimed:

astonishingly, as the curtain was raised, the audience was confronted with a still life: the 'act' that was interrupted forty years ago with the transition to socialism seemed to have resumed, as if nothing had happened in between.

It might have looked like this at the time but of course the 'in between' was to be crucial in the subsequent process of transformation.

Indeed, many commentators have announced the transition to be over, and it was hoped that the democratization process would be replicated elsewhere, notably in Iraq. However, as Priban (2002) argued, procedural democracy lacks substantive visions and practices – a definition of 'humanity', which can be provided by extra-legal norms. This reprise of Weber's problem of disenchantment in formal systems of legitimation might perhaps account for the appearance of spaces in which actors seek ultimate and, in a sense, utopian justifications of the Good. At any rate, at the end of the second decade after 1989 we seem to be witnessing the emergence of many of the issues it was widely thought would appear in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of Communism. This was already the picture that was emerging during the early 2000s but in the wake of the global financial crisis, the situation becomes both more complex and less stable. Past and present appear in complex dynamic tension with the collapse of the neo-liberal discourse that provided the framework for much of the early post-communist transition combined with the return of 'socialist' talk of nationalization and state regulation in the former West. At the same time, a process of global realignment is taking place within post-communist countries, populist movements reappearing in central Europe with the possibility of a return of violent disturbances, renewed lustration, along with memory politics and settling of scores with the former communist system. In many countries (such as Romania, Poland and Slovakia), mass movements played an important role in the aftermath of 1989 and then subsided in a process of apparent normalization. Why should these issues re-appear after a delay of nearly two decades? Further, although the end of Communism signalled for many the consolidation of globalization under a liberal hegemony, the 1989 pattern of regime change appears to have been exceptional and actually part of the emergence of an increasingly differentiated and uncertain world system. To address these developments, sociology needs a renewed comparative grasp of specific processes and their local effects rather than over-generalized concepts such as global civil society, cosmopolitan democracy, liquid modernity, or second modernity.

The events of 1989 had a paradoxical impact on European society and social theory. The Fall of the Wall became iconic of the promise of a borderless world, or at least continent, and did point to the subsequent enlargement of the EU to 27 member states, a prospect that would have appeared utopian even in the mid-1980s. Yet despite ideas of a 'rectifying revolution', normalization and re-joining Europe that were current at the time, the process of European enlargement has been fraught and increasingly contested. Indeed, despite premature

announcements of the end of the nation state, issues of national sovereignty and the pace and nature of European integration have been posed repeatedly, especially in the new member states. These issues have arisen in the former West too – the failed EU Constitution referenda in France and the Netherlands and rejection of the Lisbon Agreement in Ireland illustrate that some citizens distrust post-89 Europe. Indeed, for Edgar Morin, the outcome is that ‘Europe is an uncertain nation, born of confusion, with vague borders, a shifting geometry and subject to slippage, breaks and metamorphosis’ (Morin, 2002: 126).

As Outhwaite and Ray (2005) argue, post-communist Europe is one of convergence and divergence in which national frames of meaning and the construction of social memories are crucial to the pattern of unfolding events. We further argue that unevenness and increasing social differentiation create complexly unpredictable outcomes and run counter to the idea of globalization creating an increasingly homogenous and integrated world. On the contrary, uneven globalism generates a world of increasing difference and potential conflict despite the superficial commonality created by globally dominant commercial brands and styles. Because somewhere has McDonald’s and MTV and takes Amex does not mean it is the same as everywhere else. Rather, the diversity of emergent forms of capitalism and private property in post-communist countries can be related to particular local configurations of ownership and legal rights. Where property and other rights-based forms of institutional life have been weak (as in Russia), capitalism will tend to be organized through informal clientelism rather than through open and fluid systems. This kind of institutional diversity can only be explained with reference to particular national contexts and trajectories, which is a theme developed here. I argue that over-generalized abstractions of putative social processes such as democratization, modernization or individualization will have less grasp of the particular processes of post-communist identity formation than a detailed comparative understanding of the complexity and difference working through post-communist Europe. This is explored particularly with reference to contrasting utopian moments arising from 1989.

Revolutions of Recuperation?

The anticommunist revolutions have been described as the death of utopia and bring fresh denunciations of a concept that already had few friends (Kumar, 2001: 179). They were described as ‘self-limiting’ in that they eschewed central control of power or any *pouvoir constituant*, and opposed radical revolution (Arato, 1991). Their organization was diffuse, they offered no utopian vision of the future, and at times claimed to develop an ‘anti-political politics’ (Konrad, 1984). Offe (1991) lamented the ‘a-theoretical character’ of the changes, which, unlike the classical revolutions of modernity, followed no historical model nor were informed by a revolutionary theory. There was some relationship between the notion of self-limitation and the post-modern character of denial and critique of grand narratives found in dissident ideas. For Priban (2002), the experiences of eastern

Europe were not marginal but were rather central to the dilemmas of modernity – in particular, the tension he identifies between legality and legitimacy in which the latter requires extralegal considerations. Dissent has ‘exceptional political value within a democratic rule of law’ (p. 162) because liberal political orders are bereft of alternative visions and dissidents can act as a creative force generating such alternatives. They are champions of ‘freedom of conversation’ that harkens back to a search for identity and authenticity (p. 211). Dissident calls for ‘antipolitics’ and ‘nonpolitical politics’ clearly express the external character of political dissent and its transgression of the totalitarian political system. Priban recognizes that, following 1989, the political authority of dissidents in post-communist societies did not materialize as particular politics, programmes, and ideologies. Indeed, political dissent cannot and should not establish a normative framework of social morality and political justice because its orientation is primarily negative – to warn against political normalization.

The positive affirmation of utopia in socialism has been replaced then by the negative function of critique. Again, in Bauman’s separation of ‘heavy’ and ‘liquid’ modernity (Bauman, 2001), socialism’s goal of the rational reconstruction of society is decidedly ‘heavy’ – so what had previously been the ‘counter-culture’ of capitalist modernity had after 1989 lost its meaning. Even so, it is possible that especially in times of enhanced uncertainty there will be efforts to mobilize affective attachments to ideas of substantive good that trade on hopes released in the 1989 revolutions.

Much of the discussion of post-communism as ‘the end of utopia’ was probably prompted by the sense that the revolutionary ruptures associated with previous utopian thought have generally led to chaos and authoritarianism (Alexander, 2001). This does not necessarily mean though that there were no utopian dimensions to ideas and expectations circulating around the decline of Communism and the revolutionary period 1989–90. Indeed, rather than regard the 1989 revolutions as non- or anti-utopian, they might prompt some rethinking about the nature of utopian thought. What Kumar describes as the ‘heightened sense of social possibilities’ (1991: 97) could describe the revolutionary period of 1989 along with the expression of a desire for a better way of life (Levitas, 1990: 8). To begin with, there were ideas about future self-managed decentralized networks extrapolated from those that had arisen (especially in Poland and Hungary) parallel to the state socialist system and in this sense were what Levitas (1990: 168) calls ‘possible extrapolations of the present’. In late Communism, power shifted to some extent from a vertical axis between ministries and enterprises to reciprocal horizontal obligations between enterprises. This was mirrored by multiple networks of mutual reciprocity as shortages resulting from the redistributive mechanisms were partially filled through informal networks, and by symbiotic exchanges between the informal sector and the state, based on patrimonial protection through mutual security and political corruption (Fehér, 1982: 66). This society of informal networks was seen by many dissidents as the nucleus of a post-communist social order based on informality, reciprocity and networks rather than big capitalism (e.g., Szalai, 1992).

Ideas of self-management were expressed in a number of ways – some arising from the syndicalist tradition in Poland and elsewhere that was for a time part of the Solidarity programme (Wolnicki, 1989); others derived from concepts of workers' proprietary rights under the socialist system – such as the 1981 Polish Workers' Self-Government Act and the 1984 Hungarian Law on Enterprise Councils. In some places, such as Hungary, Enterprise Councils were heavily involved in the privatization process and according to Panków (1993: 134), this represented an 'enfranchisement' of skilled workers and specialists. In the course of the privatization process, however, there was a rapid shift of power from workers councils to centralized management and Panków (p. 139) found that the position of enterprise managers in the new power structures was strengthened while workers' legal entitlements were neglected.

For Ruth Levitas (1990: 165), utopia contradicts bourgeois common sense and facilitates a 'leap out of the kingdom of necessity into an imagined kingdom of freedom', but this could also be said of images of the transition from Communism to consumer capitalism in which the West was offered as a nirvana. Conflicting visions of a post-communist future were at play here and the very idea of a transition to capitalism and democracy deployed a market utopianism and triple mantra of privatization, marketization and democratization, along with dismantling state controls and developing a culture of individualism. The fate of early moves towards self-managed capitalism which was largely engulfed by 'western' models of corporate governance reflects the dominance of a different utopia – of convergence with the West and, for central Europe at any rate, the hope of EU membership.

In an important study of reflections of the revolutions among some participants, Henri Vogt (2005: 260) says, '[It is] indeed a useful endeavour to think about the transformation from Communism to democracy and a market economy through the lens of utopia'. People imagined utopian alternatives from the present – freedom of movement, open futures, collective identity and lifestyle choices. But these forms of utopian desire were very different from the projects of total social reconstruction they were rejecting. Alexander (2001) regards utopian thinking as 'a normatively desirable model of a fundamentally different social order that is held to be regulative for both social thinking and social action'. However, these can no longer be totalizing since in specialized and differentiated modern societies, compartmentalized value spheres are informed by distinctive visions of utopia. This does not mean that 'utopia retreats' but it does mean that the totalizing versions of critical-left thinking need to change. Alexander suggests that in ideas such as 'information society', 'leisure society' and postmodernity, there are 'visions to utopian hopes' – they are utopian because they are set apart from mundane life as it currently exists. For Gardiner (2006), the essential element of utopian expectation is not hope but desire – imagining a state of being in which problems presently confronted are removed or resolved. Thus the everyday can be full of multiple utopian possibilities especially when, as with the Fall of the Wall, there was a radical defamiliarization of the reified everyday. This idea resonates with what Habermas saw as one of the central tendencies of

contemporary societies – a shift in the locus of potential critical action from traditional politics to the grammar of everyday life. He said:

The utopian idea of a society based on social labour has lost its persuasive power . . . because that utopia has lost its point of reference in reality: the power of abstract labour to create structure and give form to society. (Habermas, 1989: 53)

Social movements are then formed at the interface between the lifeworld and the system and address issues of the grammar of forms of life – the negotiation and formation of identities – rather than utopian schemes of social reconstruction.

However, I would add here two caveats. First, one major source of utopias of the everyday are what Simon (1999) calls ‘adtopias’, in which beautiful people are living for their own pleasure in a just and happy society, where poverty, suffering and hate do not exist but the beautiful people consume compulsively. Although few people work, there are more than enough goods and services to satisfy their needs and people consume these products constantly and compulsively. Like the classical utopias, adtopias portray situations where suffering and injustice do not exist, and the population escapes the evils of outside society. There are plenty of examples of these in post-communist commercial culture, yet post-communist advertising reveals other dimensions too. Morris (2005) claims that in Russia advertisers have mined positive psychocultural associations of Sovietness in their advertising during a period of social upheaval activating consumers’ feelings of nostalgia, patriotism, and pride – for example, in the Iava cigarette adverts that deploy ‘ironic nostalgic’ images of the Soviet space exploration. But no cultural form is ever reproduced in the same way with identical meaning to the original modality. The social meaning of such adverts derives in part from the particular cultural conditions of post-communism in which vistas of consumption represented a departure from earlier shortages and conformity. Further adverts with local references (as opposed to global branding) sometimes ironically riff on communist imagery such as Coca-Cola adverts that deploy images of heroic workers waving red flags – allusions that would have little resonance outside post-communist societies.

Second, all utopian desires – even more attenuated ones – will inevitably be disappointed, always ‘not yet fulfilled’ because of the awkward recalcitrance of the social to refuse to bend to our will. In the aftermath we may be left with a nostalgic note or obsessive sense of guilt devoid of political immediacy. Their lack of fulfilment creates a continual potential tension in post-communism of ‘not yet’ which provides a potential resource for social movement mobilization. Vogt (2005) argues, through interviews with students and intellectuals in central Europe who participated in these events, that for many the post-communist world brought unemployment, social polarization, infrastructural collapse and social atomization. The literature on the transition, he argues, has paid too little attention to the fate of people who suffered as a result of system change (Vogt, 2005: 179). After 1989, there was ambivalence between systems and uncertainty in a society increasingly founded on individualism, self-direction and self-expression. Similarly, Adam Michnik (2001) says:

We thought that our revolution . . . in the name of freedom and normalcy, will be not only velvet and bloodless but also free from . . . superstition. But the collapse of communism brought ethnic chauvinism, bloody wars and religious intolerance . . . their legacy has been (in different measure) radicalism of revenge (seeking out 'former communists'), nostalgia for the past in the face of corruption and uncertainty, and crass commercialism.

This might be an exaggeration. But the disappointment might also reflect the way in which the most intense expressions of solidarity and collective effervescence, such as the rush of mobilization in 1989, are ephemeral and followed by normalization and demobilization (e.g., Collins, 2004).

Optimism, Pessimism and Normalization

For some commentators the transition is now over and a new normality has been established such that the term post-communist 'is now useless' (King, 2000). So when is a transition over? According to Sasse (2005):

Ultimately . . . the question 'when is transition over?' is a question about the stability of the new democracy and its potential for backsliding. [When] . . . democracy is successfully consolidated when there is no significant domain of power or actors challenging the state from outside the democratic structures, and when a strong majority accepts the legitimacy of the new democracy. When there is little or no potential for reversion to authoritarianism, then, we should say the transition to democracy is over.

For much of post-communist Europe, these conditions might appear to have been met although we should keep in mind that for all of us the recent past is hardest to know and understand (Judt, 2008). It has been said that had Max Weber lived through the end of Communism he would not have written about it for at least 10 years and then in not less than 1000 pages. Similarly, when asked his opinion of the French Revolution, the Chinese leader Zou-En-Lai (allegedly) answered that it was too early to tell (Okey, 2004: 157). Much of what many of us were writing in the aftermath of the collapse was premature and did not have the perspective of distance to evaluate the significance of these changes. In the immediate aftermath of the transformation, reactions ranged widely between optimism and pessimism. On one hand, there was Habermasian optimism about a new European communicative civil society, Fukuyama's end of history (1992), Thomas Friedman's (2000) vision of a balance between globalization and tradition and much talk of a global civil society. On the other hand, there was Samuel Huntington's pessimism matched by Mestrovic (1994) and Robert Kaplan (1994). Kaplan, for example, wrote of 'the coming anarchy, a jagged-glass pattern of city-states, shanty-states, nebulous and anarchic regionalisms'. But the emerging reality in the 1990s suggested that post-communism fulfilled neither utopian nor dystopian visions but was settling to a (perhaps rather dull) normality, an aspiration matched by many voices in the former Communist world that said 'enough of experiments; we want to return to normality'. The apparent stability

achieved by many post-communist countries especially in central Europe, combined with accession to the EU, supported the perception that the transformation was over, equilibrium and stability had been achieved. The apocalyptic warnings of Mestrovic (1994), for example, that Yugoslavia represented the future for the post-communist region as a whole, seemed to have been completely off the mark.

Not only this but the rapid and largely peaceful regime change in Eastern Europe was to be a model for the democratization elsewhere, especially in the Middle East. Indeed, Fukuyama's re-evaluation of his earlier position here is interesting – he argues that 'The impact of the rapid collapse of Communism in 1989 skewed the thinking about the nature of dictatorships . . . [and] made a wrong analogy between Eastern Europe and what would happen in the Middle East' (Fukuyama, 2006). We might recall that in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq the media were looking for images of statues being pulled down in an imitation of the collapse of Communism. At the same time, paradoxically, the image of the end of Communism has entered the language of dictatorships such as Iran which is exemplified by the detention of Haleh Esfandiari for 110 days in 2007 with other academics who were accused of planning a 'Velvet Revolution' (Khalaii, 2007).

But there has not yet been normalization or stability and issues of social memory, national identity and settling accounts with the past are still subject to what Adorno called *verarbeiten* – coming to terms with the past. This is hardly surprising in view of the dramatically novel situation of post-communism – where one system with global pretensions is dismantled in order to allow the construction of what for seventy or so years had been its global competitor. There is further a play of nostalgic-utopianism that locates the good object in the past and yet projected forward into future-oriented utopianism. Both can be the basis for critique of the present and for political mobilization against the post-communist settlement. Thus the fall-out from failed expectations always offered the potential for nostalgia movements – both of the Right – invoking a lost national idyll prior to Communism or indeed modernity, and of the Left – for a return to the ideals of the former regime. This potential increases with the global economic crisis that will have a marked effect on the transitional economies. This is partly because rapidly rising foreign investment has been opening current-account deficits – Latvia's, for example, peaked at 26% of GDP in the third quarter of 2008. In Hungary, consumers took advantage of global capital markets to raise mortgages in foreign currencies and now find payments are rising steeply as the Forint falls. It is also because East European central banks and governments are unlikely to muster the financial power currently being deployed in the big economies of the West (*The Economist*, 2008).

Conjuring up Spirits of the Past

Two decades are insufficient time to work through memories of past hopes and divisions. Until recently there was a consensus that the Cold War was over. But we might not be able to make such assumptions any longer amid talk of a 'new Cold War' (Lucas, 2008). Dockrill (2005) says that the hopes for a more peaceful

world and better government that initially followed the end of the Cold War failed to materialize especially post-9/11. Some commentators argue that the USA became distracted by the war on terror and 'took its eye off the real competitor' for global dominance, which was Russia. According to this view, the institutional, financial, infrastructural and social collapse of the former Soviet Union further lulled the USA into regarding themselves as the only superpower in town (Cohen, 2006). In 1999, Russia began to recover, even though it remains in serious depression, and under Putin began to challenge US hegemony and re-assert power over eastern Europe. At the same time, the 1998 crisis prompted a turn from economic and cultural openness to economic and political nationalism and a utopian-nostalgic valorization of a mythic past that retains utopian distance from the present (Morris, 2005). One could argue, however, that along with the war on terror, the USA and Russia were continuing to compete and consolidate post-communist alliances. The USA maintained competition with Russia, which is illustrated by its plans to deploy a missile shield in central Europe. At the same time, while Putin committed Russia to avoiding a foreign policy hostile to the West (Sakwa, 2004: 207ff.) he asserted an autonomous role and influence in international relations through, for example, the G8, Russia's regional energy policy and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization which aims to become regional bloc to counter US hegemony. One consequence of this national self-assertion was the gas crisis at the end of 2008 when Russia accused the Ukraine of illegally siphoning gas, and Gazprom shut off all supplies to Europe through the Ukraine, which prompted charges from the EU of using consumers as pawns of national rivalry (Unian News Agency, 2008). Prior to these events, in the London newspaper, *The Observer* of 30 June 2007, Jason Burke wrote of 'Europe shivering in the new Cold War' in which 'tensions are rising . . . as the Russian giant flexes its muscles again in the old territories of the Soviet empire'. But despite references to how 'conflicts of the past are throwing a shadow over hopes for the future', this is not a simple 'revival' of the Cold War. Rather, it but represents the formation of new post-communist regional alliances and tensions. In retrospect, the Russian debt default of 1998 along with the Asian crisis of 1997 and the collapse of Argentina in late 2000 were portents of the current global crisis. Russian belligerence over gas is also a symptom of its reliance on energy exports when demand abroad is falling along with industrial production. This is not simply a reversion to the Cold War, and the lapse into old frames of meaning illustrates the rhetorical force of such memories and yet again how, as Marx suggested, the spirits of the past are anxiously conjured up to present the new scene of world history in time-honoured guise and borrowed language (Marx, 1997: 300) A feature of the novelty of the present is the way the language of the past is invoked to make sense of it.

Polish *Lustracja*

Not only is there now talk of a 'new Cold War' but in the former communist world it seems that the spectre of settling of scores and working with the past

that many feared would arise in the immediate aftermath of the collapse are returning. How to come to terms with the past has been a central issue for post-communist culture and politics. One example of this was the government of Poland under the 'terrible twins' – Lech and Jaroslaw Kaczynski, President and Prime Minister respectively. The right-populist government of Jaroslaw Kaczynski's party Prawo I Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) with coalition parties Liga Polskich Rodzin (League of Polish Families) and Samoobrona (Self-Defence) ruled between 2006 and 2008 when they were heavily defeated by the centre-right Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform) although Jaroslaw's identical twin, Lech Kaczynski remains President in 2009.

The issue of dealing with the past is complex partly because of the double memory repression – of the communist period but also of the preceding period of German occupation. This creates a complex nexus of memory work in which the official narrative is an essentially utopian construction that 'true' (Catholic) Poland was witness to but not collaborator with either Nazi or Communist atrocities. The first Prime Minister of post-communist Poland, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, argued that a 'thick line' (*gruba kreska*) should be drawn under the past and the actions in the past not re-examined in part because secret police files could not be trusted. But with the convergence of political parties over many economic issues, the debate about the communist past and its legacies entered ever more on the public agenda. Moreover, with economic hardships experienced by many people, *lustracja* (lustration – exposing those who collaborated with the communist regime) became the main terrain of conflict (Misztal, 1999). The PiS government presented itself as the party of 'real Poles' and invoked the authentic Catholic nation combating hidden interests and foreigners creating divisions and threats. These echoed the myth of the *Zydokomuna* ('Jewish Communist') invoked by Polish nationalists for whom Communism was a foreign system imposed by Jewish collaborators. Under the slogan 'Anyone born before 1972 is suspect', the Law and Justice Party instigated a Lustration Law (2007) which required everyone in authority (including academics, journalists and state company executives) born before 1972 to declare to the Institute of National Remembrance whether they had cooperated with the communists. A false statement risks prosecution and a positive one 10 years exclusion from public office. According to Piotr Sztompka, the PiS dismantled democratic institutions, ruled through denunciation and provocation, and 'violated the sense of historical continuity . . . and identity . . . of biographies of many decent people' who during the People's Poland era were not agents, collaborators or traitors. The attempt to universally settle accounts with the past, he suggests, created panic and fear among anyone in positions of responsibility (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 16 October 2007). Yet the PiS Government was able to harness support for its 'moral revolution' through the Church and especially Father Rydzyk's *Radio Maryja*, the daily source of conspiracy theories and anti-Semitic propaganda with a largely elderly and rural audience of around 2m per day. Since the defeat of the Kaczynski Government, the Law remains in force but without systematic enforcement, thereby taking on an arbitrary character and permitting the use of 'denunciation' (as in the communist period) as a means of settling personal scores, removing opponents, and so forth.

The attempt to restore the original pure nation through lustration represents the mobilization of one utopian vision of Polish society. Naturally there are other and indeed more self-reflective cultural moments – such as the films of Andrzej Wajda, which interrogate issues of historical guilt and responsibility. His *Katyn* (2007) is, on the one hand, an account of the Katyn massacre of 1940, in which more than 14,000 Polish prisoners-of-war were murdered by the NKVD, a crime that was then attributed to the Nazis. However, Wajda ends the film by showing how rapidly many people adjusted to the ideological demands of the new regime after 1948 and publicly articulated the Soviet account. The suicide of a surviving officer in the face of such denials suggests that the choice was between adjustment or death – thus also blurring clear lines between purity and collaboration. Again, the extensive revival of Jewish and Yiddish music and culture in Poland – for example, in the annual Kraków Festival of Jewish Culture – invokes a different utopia of Poland as a plural and multicultural society (see, for example, Grimwood, 2007; and Ray, forthcoming).

Hungary and Historical Memory

For 15 years, along with other states in the Visegrad group, Hungary appeared to have made a stable transition to democracy and market liberalism. Recently, however, especially with the violent demonstrations in 2006 coinciding with the fortieth anniversary of the 1956 uprising, political fractures have been opened, which one commentator says ‘regressed to a level characteristic not of Europe but of Ukraine and Georgia’ (von Ahn, 2007). The Right (from the centrist FIDESZ to the far-right Hatvannégy vármegye (‘64 Counties Movement’) and Jobbik call into question the post-communist institutional settlement and regard EU membership as subordination to foreign rule. They are an irredentist nationalist movement that aims to recreate the historical territory of Hungary’s ‘64 counties’, including Transylvania. Again supporters often have little access to education, are unskilled, among the 30% permanently unemployed who are susceptible to promises of community and belonging. These supporters regard 1989 as having failed to deliver far-reaching political change and, for one FIDESZ commentator, Hungary is in a state of ‘cold civil war’ with ‘divided cultures of memory’, for example, over 1956. He argues that the post-communist settlement was a flawed institutional design creating immobility arising from a transfer of power that entrenched the interests of the reform communists and the liberal-left, creating an ‘extraordinarily deep cleavage’ (Schöpflin, 2007). These fractures open up ‘battles for the post-socialist symbolic order’ that threaten to turn the system into a party-political project (von Ahn, 2007).

These unresolved tensions have been exacerbated by the economic crisis. Early in 2009, industrial output in Hungary fell to the levels of 16 years ago, during the post-communist recession, and the government embarked on an austerity programme. The crisis will increase the appeal of nationalist sentiments, and in 2009, Jobbik has been capitalizing on rising anti-Roma sentiments that have ‘real political force’ across many parties and organizations as the economic crisis is accompanied by rising crime and increasing attacks on Roma communities.

According to the Budapest Analyses (2009), Jobbik will not only take votes from the centre-right FIDEZ but many former MSZP voters might switch support to Jobbik too. Following a wider pattern across Europe, many former Communist workers' districts have become strongholds of anti-immigrant parties. The 'Gypsy issue' is likely to be the second most important campaign topic after the economy in the 2010 elections and the MSZP could lose heavily on this especially since Prime Minister Gyurcsany has made the fight against racism the most important element in his political profile. This strategy is already weakening as in some places MSZP supporters are also joining the wave of anti-Roma sentiment – such as the socialist Mayor of Miskoc in Borsod county who supported a police chief who attributed local crime to 'perpetrators of Gypsy origin'. The end of the long global post-communist boom that has enabled central European countries to experience rapid growth will be manifest in expressions of *ressentiment* that draw upon the frustrated expectations of everyday utopias, while invoking myths of the true nation restored to its pre-communist glory. Again these movements represent potential deployments of utopian imagery within a field of contestation of memory and identity.

Implications for Sociology

What might we learn from this? The emerging global order is contingent – there is no necessary reason to imagine that globalization has become an unstoppable force even though it is considerably more embedded in everyday life, cultures, institutions, capital, etc. than earlier phases of globalization such as that of the late nineteenth century. Much sociology during the past two decades has assumed that certain putative social changes were irrevocable and required a new theoretical approach. Thus a central debate over globalization has been over the future of the nation state – whether it has been hollowed out and undermined by the twin forces of localism and globalism, or, on the contrary, is surviving or indeed strengthened as an agent of globalization. Theorists such as Beck, Urry and Giddens took the former position largely for granted while others argued that the nation state itself is an agent of globalization (Berger and Dore, 1996) and some see it surviving but in altered form (e.g., Held et al., 2000; Kobrin, 2003). Although this debate has in some ways become tired, it is core to understanding the trajectory of social transformation. One of the central contradictions in the global order is that between the economic logic towards frictionless movement (of capital and commodities) as opposed to territorially and socially embedded skills, resources, cultural systems and political institutions (see, for example, Jessop, 2000). The state then becomes the area of contestation between globalizing and de-globalizing imperatives, and actors in turn deploy rhetoric, images and concepts of the good or authentic society that both re-enchant the disenchanting realm of procedural politics and draw upon multiple utopian visions of the past and future.

The tension between economic liberalism and locally embedded values and politics has been a crucial issue in post-communist countries and this is often

fought out over relationships to the EU. This is perhaps why in many countries entry to the EU has been followed by the rise of populist anti-globalism, in particular, opposition to values of individuality and personal freedom – an example of this is the sometimes violent hostility to gay rights and Gay Pride in Poland and Latvia in 2005 and 2006. Political globalization proceeds more slowly and uncertainly than economic globalization and viewing globalization as combined and uneven development opens up ways of analysing these complexities. Globalization does not create homogeneity or integration but more often increased differentiation and potential for regional conflicts.

The current economic crisis, in which the post-communist countries might be particularly vulnerable, combines with already present inequalities in wealth and income (see Outhwaite and Ray, 2005: 25–41). This has cultural as well as economic dimensions. While class and inequality have lost the central place within sociological analysis that they once had, we have been witnessing a new process of social class formation in entirely unprecedented conditions. The particular combinations of post-socialist class formation combined with multiple over-determined modes of integration into several global institutions have generated multiple local effects and conflicts. But cultural as well as material issues are important and bear again on the idea of failed utopia. It is not a matter simply of looking at changes in income distribution, measured, say, by the Gini coefficient, which has risen variably in different post-communist countries, but of considering the ideological and value context within which structural changes are given local meaning and are contested. The real effect of inequality needs to be judged against perceptions both of the extent and social acceptability of inequality – so that a Gini coefficient that is still average by Western European standards might appear unacceptably high in a society with more egalitarian social values. For example, in Hungary, the Gini Coefficient rose from 0.25 in 1987 to 0.32 in 2003, which is roughly typical of Western Europe (Max Planck Gesellschaft, 2006) but in one survey 93% agreed that ‘Differences in income in your country are too large’ (Redmond et al., 2002). Further, if the new regimes are regarded as corrupt, or in indeed, more so than the communist system, then this too will further contribute to reduced commitment to the legitimacy of the system (e.g., Krastev, 2002). This creates further grounds for the mobilization of *ressentiments* of unfulfilled utopias.

The effects of the social transformations set in train by the end of Communism are only just beginning to work their way through national and international levels. In terms of any judgement of the long-term cultural and structural consequences, it is almost certainly ‘too early to tell’. The European Union attempts to develop an extensive institutional and regulatory framework across states that previously had little shared cultural memory or identity (Guéhenno, 1996). This may offer the prospect of an end of national separateness and the potential for a new cosmopolitan memory that transcends national boundaries (Beck, 2006; Levy and Sznajder, 2002). But, as the above comments on Poland and Hungary suggest, Beck’s utopia of cosmopolitan democracy will encounter the contested ways in which cultural memory gets inserted into cohesive national

narratives. This should encourage caution in the development of sociological generalizations about current trends and their theoretical significance. Some of the dominant ideas within recent sociology, in particular, concepts such as cosmopolitan democracy, liquid modernity, reflexive modernization/individualization and second modernity, have been ill-equipped to grasp the complexity of increasing differentiation in the global system, *at least insofar as they are understood as describing a necessary process from which there is no viable way of turning back*. This in turn suggests that sociology itself needs to develop a conceptual framework sufficiently nuanced to delineate levels of difference within economic, political, and value systems and the ways in which the politics of social transformation responds to contradictory logics of economic fluidity and political embeddedness.

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