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### Ph.D. Thesis Review

Author : Marcel Tomášek Title : Unlearned Social Change: A Study of Transitory Order Charles University, Faculty of Humanities
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Marcel Tomášek has written a doctorate in the discipline of historical sociology, under the direction of doc. PhDr. Jiří Šubrt, CSc., entitled UNLEARNED SOCIAL CHANGE: A STUDY OF TRANSITORY ORDER. The character of this thesis is theoretical-analytical. The thesis is approximately 429,000 characters in length, not including the summary, appendices, and literature, that is approximately 238 standard pages. It is structured as follows:

A foreword, three parts, a conclusion, appendices as well as sources.

Appendix A concerns Grey Zones and Grey Phenomena in the period 1995 - 2004: list of emerged categories, Appendix B concerns the Period after Entering the EU - Characteristic Patterns and Practices (2004-2013): list of emerged categories. The sources, its dense list of ten pages of books and articles constituting the bibliography of the work.

The work has many references to literature, is rich in footnotes, in diagrams/tables. We can regret the absence of a list of these tables. The work fulfils all the formal requirements for a final thesis.

This PhD. Dissertation aims mainly to analyse the “dubious mechanisms and typical spheres of overlapping politics and economy”, putting it into relation with models defining the transitory order (p. 21). This transitory order is defined by the will to Europeanise politics and economy, that is a second aspect analysed and discussed in the work.

In that order, to verify those questions, the work is divided into two periods: 1995-2004, and 2004-2013 (p.21-22).

This is a crucial aspect, related directly with the definition of the transition itself: is it defined eschatologically by the project, is it defined as an intermediary period temporarily framed by two major historical turns. To say that in other words, by the real degree of achievement of a the modernisation process of the system, based on some western model of rules of law and market economy.

The research itself “consists of an analysis of the particular instances of happenings and problematic occurrences in intersecting spheres of politics and economy in the Czech Republic – stages in the development of various emerging and prevailing situations and incidents and their coming to the surface are distinguished and recognized” (p. 24). The method is thus “a qualitative one, using primarily the tool of qualitatively establishing the categories as provided by grounded theory” (p.24). Therefore, Marcel Tomášek is realising an open coding. As I understood, these problematic occurrences correspond to what we is called familiarly the economical corruption of the democratic logics of politics, and the corruption of the market rules by political logics.

The sources were based on the analysis of weekly periodicals: *Respekt* and *Ekonom* (p.24).

The general introduction, is counting 68 pages of the publication (that is much more standard pages). It means that it is a very extended introduction, including what is generally considered as a state of the art, and the theoretical aspects of the methodological part. In this part, the author deals with central concepts like Transition, Transformation, State Capture or Varieties of Capitalism. It shows a very clear will, not given by the grounded theory approach, to embrace the frame of the “transition” family theories, to take them seriously. This is clearly motivated by a strong belief that this frame is still valid to understand a specific situation, in a quite long term period of transformation: we are not dealing with the first years of transformation, but nearly with the quarter of a century. The narrative dimension, based on this 25 years of evolutions, belongs already to the collective memory construction. It is a source of understanding and a result of the transformation as well. This memory perspective, and in particular the politics of memory, seems to be so important in the construction, that one would enjoy to have more references to the literature, in order to precise the perspective.

The two next parts are devoted to the research: the case of Czech Republic.

In the second part, the author concentrate first on the Czech way of privatization, including a critical approach of the narrative construction of the transformation. The central player of this

unhealthy relationship, as I would call it, is Vaclav Klaus, through his Democratic Civic Party. The privatization proposed by this political force is a technic to bring some people becoming richer or well positioned, the counterpart being a financial support.

The period 1996-2003 and the period 2004-2013 shows that the scandals are not stopped at all by the entrance into the EU. He shows there a “post-privatization hybrid patterns of property management and entrepreneur practices along with the inquiry into the emergence of Euroscepticism and evolvement of other positions regarding European integration and EU in the Czech Republic the intention is to reveal the more complex nature of phenomena and various processes at play.” (p.98-99). Marcel Tomášek analyses there some process of deeuropianization of the domestic political and economic scene. The regular privatizations are ways to pursue this insane relationship between some ruling politicians and the economic sphere. All these help to the constitution of a powerful group of oligarchs, that built generally there incredible fortunes on the cost of the state and public money.

These oligarchs constitute networks with privileged relationship with some politicians. This gives them even the access to some Eurofunds.

In the third part, Marcel Tomášek is discussing the origins of the crisis in Czech Republic: institutional, systemic and cultural. The insane relationship between the economic and the political sphere, that were earlier conceived as traumatic (in the memory), or constituting an hybrid result, is prefiguring the governmental crisis in 2013 (p.162,163). The idea of crisis is as well used to describe the protests against the politization of the public TV in 2000 (p.165, 168), to analyse the beginning to the whole second decade of the new millennium (p. 166, 187?), the begin of a crisis in 2008 (p. 181), a global crisis in the second half of the first decade of the new millennium (p.191). Here the reader would enjoy, in order to avoid confusion, a systematic definition of what is a crisis, what is the relationship between hybridity, trauma and crisis (if crisis is used in the same sense in each case).

Marcel Tomášek discusses the major Czech authors, and some international, that reflected on this topic. The research based on this modelizing the structures based on the news-related scandals is a base to discuss their interpretations, but as well to use their analyzes as a completion of the verstehen process. The explanations are clientelism, hybridity, and cultural specificity.

The work is very rich and documented. The author thinks by himself, and tries to catch a complicated and very current topic. The work is passionate and exciting. It embraces a very large number of primary sources and theories. Maybe a more selective number of concepts and

theories used would help to better understand the described phenomenon. This multiplicity of ideas is confusing sometimes.

The explanations of Marcel Tomášek are, all in one, very structuralist. I regret as well that the grounded theory, and the case studies were not bringing him to go more in the direction of a theory of the praxis, that is not a cultural, structural or systemic one. Overall, and despite some of the issues indicated above, the thesis is a welcome contribution to debates on the transformations process. As we miss to have synthesis for longer period of transformations, it is a serious attempt to achieve it, what I can only appreciate.

**I conclude by stating that I recommend this thesis for a successful defence.**

I propose, as a topic for discussions during the defence, two questions:

As a part of the thesis was consecrated to the relationship between those insane relations and the anti-EU political tendencies, a question came to my mind: are these anti-EU tendencies of these state-capturing entrepreneurs a way to defend the political party/parties that protect their interests, or can we see, in the origins of this kind of economic nationalism, the defence of their individual positions of relative dominance on the national market, as it was the case, according to Olson (1982, 1987), basing himself on methodological individualism?

My second question concerns the question of the praxis vs the cultural explanation. The praxis is the process of constitution of actions, basing on contradictory logics from various cultural phenomenon (culture is here not understood as a superstructure), material reasons, antithetic interests, and give diversified results. Behind the plurality of scandals, cannot we read the transformation as a place of emergence of practices, concerning only a small part of the population? Isn't the scandal a prove that a large cultural explanation is not functional here?

Nicolas Masłowski,

Warsaw, the 28 of November 2022