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Review of Marcel Tomášek's doctoral dissertation, *Unlearned Social Change: A Study of Transitory Order*, written under the supervision of Doc. PhDr. Jiří Šubrt, CSc. at Department of Historical Sociology, Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague

The doctoral dissertation of Marcel Tomášek, *Unlearned Social Change: A Study of Transitory Order*, written under the supervision of Doc. PhDr. Jiří Šubrt, CSc. at Charles University is an interdisciplinary qualitative analysis of the processes of change of political and economic regime after 1989 in Eastern and Central Europe, with a special focus on the Czech Republic. Tomášek is particularly interested in the area of "gray zones" between politics and economy as a source of quasi-legal and corruption-generating activities, which accompanied the political transition to democracy and economic transformation towards free-market Western-like order in the Czech Republic. His analyses "touch" (p. 17) also many developments in the neighboring countries such as Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, or Romania, which serve as a background of comparative remarks concerning specific processes typical to the Czech Republic, but suggest at the same time possible extensions and more general potential of his study.

The dissertation consists of 3 main chapters, a foreword, and a conclusion. It is written in English language, it is 210 pages long, including appendices and a bibliography. The first chapter, "Theoretical and Methodological Introduction," contains an extensive theoretical and methodological outline, where the author presents a historical overview of the general topic of transition and introduces main categories and concepts which will serve him later as explanatory tools. He starts with an autoethnographic historical presentation of the conceptualizations of transitory order ("transition or transformation" debate) based

mainly on his former research projects and papers. He proposes his main research task as testing "this widely ingrained presupposition that the closing dot to the 'transition phase' was the Europeanization process as connected to the procedures associated with becoming an EU member" (p. 21). To "verify" (or shall we rather say "falsify"?) this presumption he divided his object of the study into two periods: "post-privatization/secondary privatization" (1995-2004) and "post-accession period" (2004-2013), with two distinctive "rupture" moments of 2004 EU accession and of 2013 collapse of Petr Nečas government due to corruption affair. He distinguishes four conceptual formations ("waves") for the understanding of social change in CEE: transition; transformation and path-dependency; premature consolidation, restoration, and state capture; varieties of capitalism. Marcel Tomášek refers to grounded theory as his method of research (p. 24), while distancing himself from a discourse analysis perspective, which is quite surprising, given his highly discursive object of study – press (p. 25).

The second part of the first chapter is focused on more general theoretical discussions concerning social dynamics in the context of CEE post'89 developments. Tomášek starts with an extensive review of the discussion between neo-Marxist and pluralist theories (Poulantzas, Miliband, Dahl) and systemic crisis theories (Offe, Habermas) and suggest possible applications of the discussion to understanding of "third wave," as he puts it, of conceptualization of social change, where "attention is paid to mechanisms of rent creation and the associated locking-in of vicious circles in the context given by unregulated overlap of the spheres of politics and economy" (p. 53). Further, he discusses the neoclassical approach in the economy against the background of the institutional approach and relates it to specific Czech discussions on the post-1989 economy. The chapter ends the review of the cultural or ethnographic approach to social change with a focus on CEE countries, where the candidate discusses such concepts as "transition from socialism to feudalism," "collective memory," "les lieux de mémoire," "trauma," etc.

The second chapter, "Beyond Privatization and Europeanization: The Czech Republic Case," presents the effects of empirical research conducted by the doctoral student, which was based on the study of two Czech weekly magazines *Respekt* and *Ekonom* in the years 1995-2013. The chapter is chronologically divided into two parts covering periods before and after the Czech Republic's accession to the EU, separated by the "political science note" concerning the genealogy of Euroscepticism within Czech political mainstream parties in this

period. The analysis of the first period is focused on "post-privatization" or "secondary privatization," revealing processes of taking advantage of public property by privileged individuals and "clans," using "voucher privatization" or quasi-legal practices such as asset stripping or "tunneling." Tomášek delivers concrete cases of this kind of malpractice in investment privatization funds, the banking sector, regional authorities, or enterprises. The study of the second period of post-accession or "Europeanization" focuses mainly on corruption-generating practices within the public sector, particularly "in the sphere of public administration and associated agencies and funds and state-owned enterprises" (p. 114) and illustrates it with concrete examples reaching even ministry level. Tomášek then proposes a category of "world for itself" as structures "reaching (sometimes quite far) beyond the simple continuity with the environment of state administration and beyond the visible politics," (p. 121) i.e. "influential economic groups in the foundation of economic happenings" or "supervisory and directorial boards and management of publicly owned enterprises" (p. 124), again providing many concrete examples of these activities. The chapter is concluded with examples of misappropriation of public funds related to managing EU funds and military contracts.

The third chapter, "Discussion: Institutions, Systemic Crisis, Culture?" is devoted to a discussion of the main categories introduced in the former chapters in light of the empirical data. Tomášek starts with a recapitulation of concepts introduced in the first chapter by overviewing discussions conducted in Czech social sciences concerning the understanding of processes of political, economic, and social changes after 1989. Surprisingly, on that occasion, he repeats many findings presented in the first chapter. Then Tomášek describes practices of "political clientelism" and "political corruption" within governing parties in the post-privatization period, concluding that the anti-corruption goals and ideas of breaking with "state-dominated, and consequently substantially corrupt establishment" lying behind the switch from state socialism to a free market system essentially failed due to "various occurrences in the course of the transition to a Euro-Atlantic-like free market economic order which essentially ruined this logically supposed linear progression of the process" (p. 175). This brings him to postulate that the classical terminology describing illegal or quasi-legal processes on the "gray zones" between politics and economy, referring to "clientelism" or "corruption" is not fully adequate in the CEE transitory context, for example, he notices that classical distinction public-private loses its clarity in transitory economies, "wherein

illegal and shadowy economic activities have rested very near to the fundamentals of the new socio-economic order and are constituted as an everyday practice" (p. 177).

In the last parts of the third chapter and the "Conclusion," Tomášek introduces the concept of "hybridity" or "hybrid system," referring to the specific, "paradoxical and contradictory combination" of some elements or "advantages" of state/real socialism and free market democracy as they appeared during the transitory period and tend to persist until today (pp. 186, 190) and the area of overlapping between economy and politics and its influence on the broader economic environment (p. 190).

The problem of the transition or transformation of 1989' in Central and Eastern Europe and its deformations, failures, and successes, is already well described and has been an object of extensive studies in many countries of the region as well as by many Western researchers, especially at the first decade of the 2000s. The originality of Tomášek's study lies first of all in his interdisciplinary approach, which brings together many distant topics from different fields of social sciences like the economy, sociology, political sciences, and history. This allows him to bring an original theoretical perspective based on the network of interdisciplinary analytical categories through which he looks at the intersection of different social, political, and economic processes launched by the post-1989 transformation/transition. In this context, the concept of "hybridity" postulated by Tomášek in its dual synchronic and diachronic meaning is particularly interesting. It is a pity that he did not elaborate more on the concept of hybridity theoretically, using for example postcolonial theory. Furthermore, retrospective or autoethnographic elements of his approach, which are based on the review of his long-term research on the topic of transition, starting from mid-90-ties, (see "Introduction") and the amount of literature and theories that he used for his study suggests that the scope and depth of his thesis go far beyond the traditional requirements of doctoral dissertations. Finally, the problem of "gray zones" between politics and economy is a relevant and significant topic of our times, especially in the context of Central Europe, where the consequences of never-ending transition are still present in our political and social life and still form in many dimensions the current political and economic situation. Tomášek's comprehensive study of quasi-legal and corruption-generating practices of the post 89's transition period in the Czech Republic generates a useful catalog of malfunctions of our political systems, becoming in this way a practical tool for policy-makers, critical social scientists, and (hopefully) politicians. I am also very much

convinced that many of Tomášek's remarks and observations could be applied in other countries of the region, certainly in Poland.

I must mention, however, also the weaker parts of Tomášek's dissertation. First of all, the language, style, and grammar of the text need serious editorial revision and proofreading. I am not sure where exactly the main problem lies, but it is either the synthetic and esoteric manner of Tomášek's writing or his English-writing skills which make the text hardly understandable. I am convinced that it would be advisable to publish the dissertation, but this would require a lot of editorial and clarificatory work on the part of the candidate. For example, in the first chapter, Tomášek uses excerpts from his previous papers and project proposals, but these parts of the text are not set in a special typeface (italics or quotation marks), which makes difficult to follow the author's argument. The author also uses many repetitions and quite often is not capable to explain clearly his intentions in particular parts of the text. For example, it is hard to understand how the debate between pluralist and systemic crisis theories in the first chapter, which is quite illuminating in itself, applies to the topic of his thesis. Similarly, his considerations on discursive fields and narratives of collective memories are hardly transferable to the topic of "gray zones" between politics and economy. It would also be helpful to put more attention to the methodological explanation of the research – it is not quite clear how the data were collected, when they were collected, and how "grounded theory" works in his research.

Having said that my concluding evaluation of Marcel Tomášek's dissertation is positive. I am convinced that Tomášek's extensive interdisciplinary background, the original conceptual network of his dissertation, and the relevance of his topic significantly contribute to the development of historical sociology. I recommend allowing Marcel Tomášek to proceed to further steps of the doctoral procedure.



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