

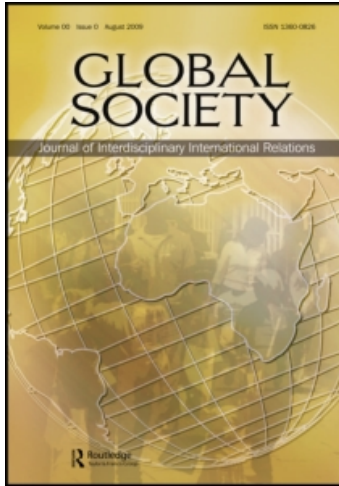
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Is there a Global Postsocialist Condition?

ZSUZSA GILLE

This paper argues for a relational perspective in the social sciences that sees the former Second World as connected to both the former First and Third Worlds. Rather than the mono-directionality, especially between the First and Second Worlds, assumed by many modernisation and globalisation approaches, this article suggests that these “worlds” have been mutually constitutive. Making globalisation, postcolonial and postsocialist studies speak to each other, the article places postsocialism in a new global context. Relationality has consequences not only for how we see the ontology but also the political possibilities of the postsocialist global. As such, this article develops a constructive critique of Nancy Fraser’s concept of the postsocialist condition by demonstrating how class and identity politics have been strategically fused in the region during and after state socialism, relying primarily on research in Hungary. Empirically the article argues that the interaction of state socialist and postsocialist histories with new Western projects of the politics of recognition—such as cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, global civil society, and postnationalism—had the effect of impoverishing national public discourses, which led to undemocratic results in Eastern Europe, and created a favourable atmosphere for the extreme right wing.

The Global Causes of 1989

The collapse of state socialism in Europe 20 years ago has been interpreted in multiple ways. The diagnosed causes range from the hypertrophy of central planning and ensuing hard currency indebtedness to ecological degradation, but in general there has been an agreement that the West played a major role. This was as true for Republicans in the United States (“Tear down this wall, Mr. Gorbachev!”),¹ crediting the US hardball stance in the arms race, as it was for leftists hailing the Western European peace movement.² While I lament that the scholarship documenting the role of internal opposition will probably never

* The author is indebted to Martha Lampland, Michael Rothberg, Richard S. Esbenshade and anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on earlier versions of this text. The author would also like to thank the International Research and Exchanges Board and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for their support for the research on which this text is based.

1. Then-US president Ronald Reagan made this demand in West Berlin in 1987.

2. Daniel Singer, “1989: The End of Communism?”, in George N. Katsiaficas (ed.), *After the Fall: 1989 and the Future of Freedom* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 11–19. Notable exceptions are Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), and Krisztián Ungváry and Gábor Tabajdi, *Elhallgatott múlt: A pártállam és a béliügy* [Silenced Past: The Party-state and the Department of Internal Affairs] (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet and

match the West's self-congratulatory narratives in its volume and evidence, the aim of this article is not to deny any external influence in 1989 but rather to analyse the dialectic between this global context on the one hand and Eastern European social structures, political subjectivities, and history on the other. I will advance a view that allows us to recognise evidence for the mutual constitution of Western and Eastern histories. I will then use this relational perspective to throw a critical light on contemporary theories of the so-called postsocialist condition,³ demonstrating how class and identity politics have been strategically fused in the region during and after state socialism, primarily relying on my research in Hungary. Finally, I will conclude by pointing to the unintended consequences of Western projects of cosmopolitanism, global civil society, and postnationalism.

While external influences on the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe have been universally acknowledged, the actual theoretical interpretations of this collapse have diverged. There has always been an implicit comparison in theoretical conceptualisations and in the political evaluations of existing socialism. Whether this comparison was between state socialism as it existed and capitalism as an ideal type, or between state socialism as it existed and capitalism as it existed,⁴ these implicit comparisons equally informed scholars' understanding of how and why state socialism collapsed and where the future global position of Eastern Europe lay.

Scholars who argued that socialism was part and parcel of the capitalist world system tended to dispute the very idea of any postsocialist transition, because the countries of former socialism had been, were, and would remain within a world-system that has existed for several centuries, or even up to 5,000 years. Andre Gunder Frank, for example, rejects not only the primacy but also the utility of the notion of mode of production, and thus provides a global-level explanation for the collapse of the socialist order:⁵

It is simply not correct, therefore, to suppose or claim that Eastern Europe or even the Soviet Union were in a separate "system," one that led to their downfall. On the contrary, what led to their collapse was participation in the same world economic system as everyone else. Nor did they have any other choice!⁶

Gunder Frank locates the cause of the ruin of socialism in the world economic crisis, to which the West responded with accelerated economic integration and the increasing transfer of the adjustment costs resulting from the crisis, while the East reacted by marketisation. In his prediction, Eastern Europe would be

Corvina, 2008), which recognise the role of Eastern European peace and other independent activists going back to the early 1980s.

3. Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London and New York: Verso, 2003); Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).

4. Alec Nove, *The Soviet Economic System* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980), calls this the comparison of muddle with model.

5. Andre Gunder Frank, "Nothing New in the East: No New World Order", *Social Justice*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1992), pp. 34–61; *idem*, "Transitional Ideological Modes: Feudalism, Capitalism, Socialism", *Critique of Anthropology*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1991), pp. 171–188.

6. *Idem*, "Nothing New in the East", *op. cit.*, p. 42.

“Third Worldized”, which he suspects to be the real goal of Western “expert advice”.⁷ Even Immanuel Wallerstein, who has acknowledged the existence of multiple world-systems and holds on to the concept of a capitalist mode of production, agrees that what in the utopian moments of 1989 looked to be the road leading Eastern Europe to the “wealth and power of the West” was to lead them to the “harsher realities of South America or worse”.⁸ The problem with such predictions, as is usually the case for world-systems approaches, is their neglect of the internal diversity of societies. It could be argued, for example, that many Eastern European countries contain within themselves internal cores, peripheries and semi-peripheries.

József Böröcz theorises the significance of the collapse of state socialism in a way consistent with a world-systems approach, arguing that “it signal[ed] the end of semi-peripheral state socialism as a macro-societal project”.⁹ For him, however, this did not mean that local, national or regional history and institutions would be inconsequential for the actual path these countries would take out of state socialism, or for the nature of the nascent economic and political order. The transition would take place in the context of already-existing forms of coping with the property vacuum characteristic of centrally planned economies, and thus it was inevitable that de-statisation (privatisation and takeovers by Western capital) would also acquire an informal character. The processes underlying these efforts are aptly captured in his concept of social capitalism: a form of capitalism that was to be constructed with social capital rather than economic capital.¹⁰

Scholars outside the world-system tradition have also felt the need for bringing socialist and postsocialist studies in conversation with other area studies, mostly with Latin America. Anthropologists and sociologists have tended to frame this comparison with the development or postdevelopment literature, while political scientists have viewed postsocialist societies as yet another case for testing their democratisation theories. The former group has tended to focus on class analysis while also recognising the role of the world market and supranational institutions. An excellent early example is Carole Nagengast’s ethnographic study that demonstrated that Polish agriculture had remained proto-capitalist under state socialism and, after 1989, was back on a capitalist path of underdevelopment.¹¹ Adam Przeworski, comparing transitions to market and democracy in Latin America with those in Eastern Europe, declares that the two places might not, in fact, be all that different, and that the latter would soon find itself in the South both in

7. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

8. Giovanni Arrighi, Terence K. Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein, “1989: The Continuation of 1968”, in Katsiaficas, *op. cit.*, pp. 35–51 (p. 43).

9. József Böröcz, “Dual Dependency and Property Vacuum: Social Change on the State Socialist Semiperiphery”, *Theory & Society*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (1992), pp. 77–104 (p. 97).

10. *Idem*, “Simulating the Great Transformation: Property Change under Prolonged Informality in Hungary”, *Archives européennes de sociologie/Europäisches Archiv für Soziologie/European Archives for Sociology*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (1993), pp. 81–107. This is different from Jadwiga Staniszkis’s concept of political capitalism, which is a hybrid social construct, the function of which is to redeploy the production factors from the old (state) to the new (private) sector. This process is initiated and administered by the party-state, which seats its nomenklatura into the new managerial positions of private firms, and clandestinely allocates funds and subsidies from state enterprises to private ones. Political capitalism, then, constitutes the second wave of primitive accumulation in Eastern Europe. Jadwiga Staniszkis, “Political Capitalism’ in Poland”, *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1991), pp. 127–141.

11. Carole Nagengast, *Reluctant Socialists, Rural Entrepreneurs: Class, Culture, and the Polish State* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991).

the political and the economic sense of the analogy; and even its geographical proximity to Western Europe could not save it from this outcome.¹²

Many East Europeanists, however, perhaps in part motivated by a fear of a devaluation of their area studies expertise, have questioned the validity of cross-national comparisons of democratisations in the former Second and Third Worlds, and have argued not simply for local specificity but also for the lasting significance of the socialist past.¹³ Some of them have mobilised and made different uses of the concept of “path dependence” not only in their—often quite fierce—debates with the comparativist transitologists but also with Western economic advisors, treating Eastern Europe as a *tabula rasa* on which one simply needed to inscribe new institutions and property relations for them to become functional.¹⁴ Others, finding even the path dependence concept too constraining, have used ethnographic case studies to illuminate the dynamics between external and internal actors as well as newly emergent local–global connections.¹⁵

Another path for theorising the global context of the collapse of state socialism has been to draw parallels between it and the transition from a Fordist–Keynesian capitalism to post-Fordism. Katherine Verdery and Elizabeth Dunn argues that the shift in the world capitalist economy to what David Harvey and others call a flexible accumulation regime doomed central planning.¹⁶ Arguably, the Fordist–Keynesian regime of Western capitalism and socialist planning were both dominated by the mass production and mass consumption of relatively uniform products, and both rested on the triumvirate of big state, big labour and big capital (or in the socialist case, big monopolistic state enterprises). That is, it was not the inner workings and hypertrophy of central planning¹⁷ that doomed the state socialist regimes but the fact that this economic system, as long as it was not hermetically sealed from the West, could be no match for the new “leaner and meaner” flexible-accumulation regime.

12. Adam Przeworski, “The ‘East’ Becomes the ‘South’? The ‘Autumn of the People’ and the Future of Eastern Europe”, *Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (1991), pp. 20–24.

13. Valerie Bunce, “Should Transitologists be Grounded?”, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (1995), pp. 111–127; *idem*, “Ten Years after 1989: What Have we Learned?”, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (1999), pp. 756–793; David Stark, “The Great Transformation? Social Change in Eastern Europe”, *Contemporary Sociology*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1992), pp. 299–304.

14. David Stark, “Path Dependence and Privatization Strategies in East Central Europe”, *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1992), pp. 17–54.

15. Instead of listing the many studies I will just recognise two of the most influential anthologies following this path: Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery, *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); C.M. Hann (ed.), *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia* (London: Routledge, 2002).

16. Katherine Verdery, “Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (2009), pp. 6–34; *idem*, “Whither Postsocialism?”, in Hann, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–28; *idem*, *What was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Elizabeth C. Dunn, *Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

17. Hillel Tickin, *Origins of the Crisis in the USSR: Essays on the Political Economy of a Disintegrating System* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1992); see also János Kornai, “The Affinity between Ownership Forms and Coordination Mechanisms: The Common Experience of Reform in Socialist Countries”, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (1990), pp. 131–147; *idem*, “Surgery for Stabilization (an extract from *The Road to a Free Economy: Shifting from a Socialist System: The Example of Hungary*)”, *New Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 117 (1990), pp. 84–89.

This analogy already anticipates the conceptualisation of the collapse of state socialism as a necessary corollary of globalisation. Some have proceeded from a definition of globalisation as increased communication and connectivity across the globe, arguing that the central, top-heavy control of society just could not cope with new media technologies that not only allowed state socialist citizens access to uncensored news but also circulated Western consumerist images to ever wider and allegedly ever more tempted audiences. Manuel Castells's network society thesis¹⁸ and the emergent scholarship on global civil society¹⁹ all make references to this possible connection.

A sociologically more precise understanding of globalisation was also adaptable to the postsocialist transition. To the extent that central planning showed remarkable similarities to the development project—though more with its import-substitution model than its export-oriented one—theorists of neoliberal capitalism could easily explain the collapse of communism with the shift to what Philip McMichael has called the globalisation project: the hegemony of supranational institutions, the rule of finance over economic policies, and, in general, the project of producing for niches in the world market rather than catching up with the West.²⁰

In these scenarios, structure, especially a structure located at the supranational or global level, was prioritised over agency. A cautious opening towards agency is signalled by those interpretations that emphasised the key role that environmental movements played in the collapse of communism.²¹ Some saw this role not in the context of global civil society nor transnational advocacy networks, as above, but rather in a global shift towards reflexive modernity, risk society, and ecological modernisation. Looming large in these narratives is the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe of 1986 that shook people's trust in their governments' ability to protect them,²² which subsequently ushered in a new form of modernity

18. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society. The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*, Vol. I (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

19. Ronnie D. Lipschutz, with Judith Mayer, *Global Civil Society and Global Environmental Governance* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996); Mary Kaldor, *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003); Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

20. Philip McMichael, "Globalization: Myths and Realities", *Rural Sociology*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (1996), pp. 25–55. This comparison between central planning and the development project was informed by earlier debates on the applicability of modernisation theory to Eastern Europe, and on whether state socialism constituted a particular variety of modernity or a pre-modern social formation. Rudolf Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe* (London: New Left Books, 1978); Ferenc Fehér, Ágnes Heller and György Márkus, *Dictatorship over Needs* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983); Antonio Carlo, "The Socio-economic Nature of the USSR", *Telos*, No. 21 (1974), pp. 2–86; Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Social Regime in Russia", *Telos*, No. 38 (1978/79), pp. 32–47.

21. Krista Harper, *Wild Capitalism: Environmental Activists and Post-Socialist Political Ecology in Hungary* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2006); Michael Redclift, "Turning Nightmares into Dreams: The Green Movement in Eastern Europe", *The Ecologist*, Vol. 19, No. 5 (1989), pp. 177–183; Joan DeBardeleben (ed.), *To Breathe Free: Eastern Europe's Environmental Crisis* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Lipschutz, *op. cit.*; Katrina Z.S. Schwartz, *Nature and National Identity after Communism: Globalizing the Ethnoscape* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 2006); Zsuzsa Gille, *From the Cult of Waste to the Trash Heap of History: The Politics of Waste in Socialist and Postsocialist Hungary* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007); Anna Vári and Pál Tamás (eds.), *Environment and Democratic Transition: Policy and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe* (Boston, MA: Springer, 1993); Andrew Tickle and Ian Welsh (eds.), *Environment and Society in Eastern Europe* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998).

22. Harper, *op. cit.*

that Ulrich Beck has labelled reflexive modernity and risk society.²³ Reflexive modernity refers to an increased questioning and existential angst about whether scientific and technological progress aiming at the total domination of nature is good, possible, and worth the ecological risks. The Hungarian Danube movement and the Lithuanian struggle against the Ignalina nuclear reactor were among a dozen smaller or larger environmental movements that, according to most observers, masked and channelled a much more general and pervasive rejection of the regime. Some of these movements in fact quickly gained a nationalist colour, leading to their designation as econationalist movements.²⁴ A potential disagreement with a characterisation of these movements as only using green ideas to relatively safely criticise the regime—the “nature as proxy” paradigm—need not stop us from acknowledging a unique synergy between environmental claims and the collapse of 1989.²⁵

Finally, a handful of observers have argued that dissidents, opposition, and “weapons of the weak”-type resistance in the 1980s exhibited signs of postmodernist politics. Late socialist anti-establishment civic initiatives, ranging from semi-subsistence farming through entrepreneurialism all the way to outright intellectual dissent, seem to have been characterised by fragmentation, a highly local character, and by their rejection of grand narratives. Kenney’s concept of the “carnival of revolution” also highlights the multi-vocality of late socialist opposition movements and the strategic use of irony and spectacle.²⁶ While I hail these scholars’ acknowledgement of Eastern European agency in the collapse of state socialism, on a closer reading many of these movements or social non-movements²⁷ show indebtedness to, rather than divorce from, the Enlightenment, not only because of their firm belief in one Truth (Václav Havel’s concept of living in truth²⁸ is paradigmatic in this regard) and the power and liberatory potential of Reason (so evident in calls for a greater role for science whether in ecology or in economic management) but also because their ethical politics still rested on a unified liberal subject whose prime objective in life was self-improvement and

23. Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (trans. Mark Ritter) (London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: Sage, 1992); Leonardas Rinkevicius, “Public Risk Perceptions in a ‘Double-risk’ Society: The Case of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant in Lithuania”, *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2000), pp. 279–289; Oleg N. Yanitsky, “Sustainability and Risk: The Case of Russia”, *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2000), pp. 265–277.

24. Jane Dawson, *Eco-nationalism: Anti-nuclear Activism and National Identity in Russia, Lithuania, and Ukraine* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Inaki Barcena, Pedro Ibarra and Mario Zubiaga, “The Evolution of the Relationship between Ecologism and Nationalism”, in Michael Redclift and Graham Woodgate (eds.), *The International Handbook of Environmental Sociology* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1997), pp. 300–318.

25. Zsuzsa Gille, “From Nature as Proxy to Nature as Actor”, Introduction to thematic cluster “Nature, Culture and Power”, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (2009), pp. 1–9. A different analogy between environmentally induced regime collapse and Western society–nature relations is made by those who adopt the ecological modernisation thesis to Eastern Europe. Leonardas Rinkevicius, “Ecological Modernisation as Cultural Politics: Transformations of the Civic Environmental Activism in Lithuania”, in Arthur P.J. Mol and David A. Sonnenfeld (eds.), *Ecological Modernisation around the World: Perspectives and Critical Debates* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2000); Gille, *From the Cult of Waste to the Trash Heap of History*, *op. cit.*

26. Kenney, *op. cit.*

27. Asef Bayat, “Activism and Social Development in the Middle East”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2002), pp. 1–28.

28. Václav Havel, “The Power of the Powerless”, in Václav Havel, *Living in Truth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), pp. 41–63.

authenticity (see below). Postmodernist politics, therefore, may be a misnomer for 1989.

While, by and large, these various global economic, social, and cultural contexts have been acknowledged in the scholarship, the question of whether Eastern European socialism and its collapse might also be constitutive of that global context was not even entertained, with a couple of recent exceptions. The arrow between *the global* and Eastern Europe remained unidirectional—always from the West or the global as cause to Eastern Europe as effect. Let me present, in a much-abbreviated fashion, what research questions turning the arrow in the opposite direction might yield. The effect of an existing socialist camp on the emergence and the endurance of Western European welfare states has been widely acknowledged, but there is more research to be done. Going back to the resemblance of central planning to Keynesian–Fordism, did post-Fordism cause the collapse of state socialism,²⁹ or did the increasing economic troubles of socialist planning precipitate the abandonment of Keynesianism?³⁰ Verdery mentions a few other fascinating connections, such as the link between state socialism and apartheid in South Africa,³¹ and Johanna Bockman and Gil Eyal advance the interesting argument that neoliberalism was developed and tested *in vivo* in Eastern Europe, Bockman subsequently going so far as to argue that neoliberalism had leftist roots.³²

If we were also to extend the inquiry to former and present colonies and empires, the following pressing questions are still awaiting answers:

- (a) What was the role of the West (including Western leftists) in maintaining Soviet colonialism?³³
- (b) What was the role of the Soviet Union in maintaining Western neocolonial ties?
- (c) What was the effect of the Soviet Revolution of 1917 on anti-colonial struggles and postcolonial theorising?³⁴
- (d) What old internal colonies survive and what new ones are being created in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, and what confluence of Russian and Western interests legitimise internal colonialism (e.g. in Chechnya)?
- (e) What are the continuities between Soviet and Western colonialisms?

29. Verdery, *What was Socialism, and What Comes Next?*, *op. cit.*

30. *Idem*, “Whither Postsocialism?”, *op. cit.*

31. *Ibid.*; *idem*, “Thinking between the Posts”, *op. cit.*

32. Johanna Bockman and Gil Eyal, “Eastern Europe as a Laboratory for Economic Knowledge: The Transnational Roots of Neoliberalism”, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 108, No. 2 (2002), pp. 310–352; Bockman, “The Origins of Neoliberalism between Soviet Socialism and Western Capitalism: ‘A Galaxy without Borders’”, *Theory & Society*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (2007), pp. 343–371. In a somewhat different fashion, Lynne Haney shows how Hungarian sociologists with dissident sympathies under state socialism critiqued welfare provisions because they reinforced existing inequalities, and how these very same statistics and arguments were then used by the World Bank to call for the elimination of the social safety net altogether. Lynne Allison Haney, *Inventing the Needy: Gender and the Politics of Welfare in Hungary* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

33. Kārlis Račevskis, “Toward a Postcolonial Perspective on the Baltic States”, in Violeta Kelertas (ed.), *Baltic Postcolonialism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 165–186.

34. Walter Mignolo, “(Post)Occidentalism, (Post)Coloniality, and (Post)Subaltern Rationality”, in Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (eds.), *The Pre-occupation of Postcolonial Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), pp. 86–118.

- (f) Did the October Revolution of 1917 precipitate anti-colonial struggles and postcolonial mentalities? Or did the collapse of European colonies precipitate the fall of Soviet rule?

A different and rather promising approach to treating Western capitalism and Eastern European state socialism has been the work of area scholars in the social studies of science and technology field. When focusing on actual practices of power, including the adoption of certain technologies, macroeconomic planning and microeconomic management (of which Taylorism received the most attention) there appears to be not only more continuity between capitalism and socialism within one country over time but also more dialogue and borrowing among experts across the Iron Curtain.³⁵

In my mind, settling on any one of these cause–effect relations or on any particular directionality is less important, for the time being, than recognising that these complex ties deserve to be studied. I place great emphasis on demonstrating such relationality not because I prefer pictures of totality or views from above to partial pictures or pictures from below. Quite the opposite: showing the actual links between East and West will help us de-centre and particularise the West in our scholarship as well as in our political work.³⁶ This in turn will allow more nuanced views of East and West, treated so far as monolithic entities, and will render views from the margins more significant both socially and theoretically.

The Global Political Implications of 1989

Let me now turn my attention to one inspiring attempt at incorporating the collapse of state socialism into a global political context. Analogously to the common wisdom that neoliberalism was simultaneously a cause of socialism's demise and a "highly recommended" path out of it, there has also been a wide consensus that class-based politics is even less defensible now that it failed in the Soviet Union and its satellite countries. This claim has appeared in many forms and with varying degrees of sophistication, and there is little to be gained from summarising or analysing them here. For my purposes, most promising are those attempts that try to rescue some form of progressive politics but also face, rather than wish away, the challenges posed by the linguistic or cultural turn in social theory, including postcolonial studies.

Within a few years of the collapse of state socialism American political philosopher Nancy Fraser argued for a new kind of politics, one that is postsocialist.³⁷ Following Iris Young and Charles Taylor, who had both made an appeal for the politics of recognition and a move away from the traditional leftist politics of (re)distribution, she called for a politics that would integrate the two.³⁸ An ideal typical politics of (re)distribution is class politics—it seeks to provide justice by

35. Martha Lampland, *The Object of Labor: Commodification in Socialist Hungary* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995); *idem*, "Planning Economies: Science, Expertise, and the Transition to Socialism in Hungary (1920–1956)" (n.d.) (manuscript).

36. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

37. Fraser, *op. cit.*

38. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

allocating a greater slice of the pie, so to speak, which may require economic restructuring. In contrast, the politics of recognition is status based, and to the extent that it demands eliminating discrimination based on racial, ethnic, gender and religious identity and sexual orientation it constitutes, in essence, identity politics. Assuming a clear-cut and somewhat crude distinction, the former entails material solutions, while the latter calls for cultural, symbolic, and legal ones. There is wide agreement that claims-making in Western democracies has shifted towards the politics of recognition; nevertheless, scholars disagree whether this is a liberatory change or whether it is essentially conservative. Another terrain of the polemic is partly definitional and partly about the operationalisation of the dichotomy. The types of differences that need recognising and the agency “doing” the recognising have also been questioned. There is neither space nor need to review these debates here; instead, I wish to shift attention to the status of postsocialist Eastern Europe vis-à-vis this claimed shift, an issue that has so far eluded the polemicists. I have reason to do this, not because the former Second World was left out of this discussion—that is the default blind spot when scholars argue about epochal shifts—but because Fraser drew Eastern Europe into this discussion explicitly, if rather cursorily.³⁹

Fraser’s attempt at defining the postsocialist condition has not simply placed the end of existing socialism in a global context, but allowed the latter to subsume the former. A conclusion she may not have intended but that one might easily draw is that there is no need to understand what of this new global was constituted by the former Second World, nor—a much milder project—to understand what this new global condition looked like from the perspective of postsocialist Europe. Fraser’s claim that there is a postsocialist condition assumes that state socialism in Eastern Europe instituted a politics of (re)distribution. The analogy mentioned above between central planning—described by East Europeanist social scientists as dominated by a redistributive state (Konrád and Szelényi)⁴⁰ and Keynesian welfare capitalism based on Fordist mass production—clearly informs much of her argument. While she sharply analyses what about post-Fordism and globalisation elevated the politics of recognition—she calls these developments reification, displacement and misframing—she provides no corresponding analysis of the end of state socialism in Eastern Europe. That is, we are left with the assumption, but not the evidence, that this shift holds for postsocialist societies as well. The distributionist political agenda traditionally associated with leftist class politics that seemed to have done its work under Keynesian–Fordist conditions is now discredited not only due to well-known reasons in the West but also because of the shortcomings and dictatorial tendencies of state socialism in the East. Therefore, she argues, what we need is a postsocialist politics that can respond to the challenges of this global postsocialist condition. In my view, however, this claim is based on an oversimplification. While Fraser recognises that class politics also has roots in and consequences for a politics of recognition, nodding to E.P. Thompson, this lesson is forgotten in a denuded understanding of actually existing socialism as being all about distribution.

39. See especially Fraser, “Postcommunist Democratic Socialism?”, in Katsiaficas, *op. cit.*, pp. 200–202.

40. György Konrád and Iván Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979); Fehér, Heller and Márkus, *op. cit.*

If we incorporate empirical research on Eastern Europe, as well as the political philosophies of dissident intellectuals in the 1980s, we will see that applied socialism had a strong identity politics component, and that when the regimes collapsed in Eastern Europe, politics failed just as much as the politics of (re)distribution did. Unless we understand how the two had already been fused once in the name of a leftist political vision, and admit, therefore, that the postsocialist condition is not simply about a shift from class to identity politics, we are bound to repeat the mistakes of former leftist agendas.

Just as we cannot categorically characterise existing socialism as a politics of redistribution, neither can we say that postsocialist Eastern Europe has placed the politics of distribution in the background. The shift, I will argue, is not from a politics of distribution to a politics of recognition, but rather to new patterns of and new agency behind fusing the two. In what follows I will first analyse the ways in which these two paradigms of justice have been alloyed before and after 1989.

Applied Socialism as Identity Politics

Let me start by demonstrating that a politics of recognition did operate in state socialism, and in quite consequential ways. First, the party had its official politics of recognition, and ethnic politics was not its only or even most important terrain. It manifested itself in the creation of *Homo Sovieticus*, and the elevation of previously oppressed identities (worker) and exclusion of certain others. It was not only the formerly ruling social groups that were deprived of their ability to exist or exist as citizens with equal rights; after all, along with the aristocracy and bourgeoisie, peasants, intellectuals, minorities, and women were also excluded from the public realm to varying degrees. Verdery claims that the dehumanisation of class-alien constituted “class racism”.⁴¹ This is significant because it forces us to admit that even if these countries were ethnically and religiously homogeneous—that is, even if there had been no need for a distinct communist ethnic politics in socialist countries—the very nature of communist class politics still depended on identity politics, though a rather curious and unprecedented one. The types of differences and similarities that structured this official identity politics certainly changed over time and varied spatially as well, but the fact that in order for the party to retain hegemony it needed to create and sustain some differences and overlook others is well documented in our area studies literature.

Lay or oppositional claims-making also operated on the basis of identity much more than on the basis of distribution. In fact, demands for larger shares of the pie were anathema because of the official expropriation of any and all arguments about economic inequalities, so that asking for higher wages or better provisions from one’s employer or the municipal government had to be couched not in terms of class or economic contribution but in terms of status (motherhood, proletarian origins, etc.) or political loyalty (membership in various official organisations).

Central European dissident intellectuals themselves carried the politics of recognition to new philosophical heights. Interestingly, their version was much closer to the Taylorian concept of recognition, with its strong connotations of authenticity and personal ethics. The ethical nature of their visions transcended claiming one’s moral superiority to an oppressive regime, and extended to an

41. Verdery, “Thinking between the Posts”, *op. cit.*

individual position of strength. The Hungarian György Konrád, the Pole Adam Michnik, and the Czech Václav Havel agreed that a key feature of this personal politics was refraining from imposing one's political views on society, especially if that involved violence.⁴² With particular emphasis, Konrád and Michnik insisted on not wanting to overtake the state.

Solidarity [the Polish independent trade union] never had a vision of an ideal society. It wants to live and let live ... it is unlike the thinking of those who strive to attain doctrinal goals. The ethics of Solidarity, with its consistent rejection of the use of force, has a lot in common with the idea of nonviolence as espoused by Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. But it is not an ethic representative of pacifist movements ... Solidarity activists consciously reject doctrinal consistency at any price ... For me, Solidarity was never an instrument in the struggle for power.⁴³

Konrád similarly argued, in 1984, "our task is not to seize state power, but gradually to limit, diffuse and demystify it".⁴⁴ Furthermore, to the extent that the medium of politics is power, while the medium of anti-politics is scepticism, a true political alternative is critical of ideology and should steer clear away from imposed social visions. This politics of recognition, rather than advancing ethnic or religious identities, was based on one's humanity and fundamental right to live in truth, as Havel calls it.⁴⁵

From the hindsight of 20 years, we can see both the advantages and disadvantages of this self-limiting position. On the upside, the regime changes in which these intellectuals played crucial roles occurred with minimal or no bloodshed.⁴⁶ On the downside, the reluctance to provide ideological prescriptions or social models meant that eventually others with more political and managerial skills and ambitions, and mostly with fewer scruples, assumed leadership positions. Going even deeper, in a most elegant argument, Eyal demonstrates, to the analogy of Weber's spirit of capitalism, that this anti-politics had an elective affinity with the asceticism of monetarism—a key principle of neoliberal reforms.⁴⁷

Politics of Recognition and Regime Change

It is not only the socialist-era politics of recognition that we need to pay attention to if we want to have a full appreciation of the postsocialist condition, but post-1989 politics as well. What happened after the regime change was nominally complete was not the continuation or implementation of living in truth or anti-politics but rather the shepherding of these efforts towards predetermined

42. Havel, *op. cit.*

43. Adam Michnik, "Letter from the Gdansk Prison" (trans. Jerzy B. Warman), *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 32, No. 12 (18 July 1985), available: <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/5402>>.

44. György Konrád, *Antipolitics: An Essay* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984).

45. Havel, *op. cit.*

46. Depending on how one sees the relationship between regime change and ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, this claim can be disputed and is indeed the subject of fierce debates. While I cannot go into them, below I will attend briefly to the political challenge that the Yugoslav wars presented for the West.

47. Gil Eyal, "Anti-politics and the Spirit of Capitalism: Dissidents, Monetarists, and the Czech Transition to Capitalism", *Theory & Society*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 49–93.

forms of politics, including Western forms of identity politics. Two discrepancies deserve our attention in particular. One is the value placed on political participation, and the other is the “thinness” of legitimate identities.

On the 20th anniversary of Imre Nagy’s reburial⁴⁸ (16 June 2009) a group of progressive-liberal intellectuals revisited the roundtable that negotiated the transition out of one-party rule in Hungary, with the purpose of evaluating the success of the regime change. One item up for discussion was a newly produced documentary on young Hungarians’ knowledge, or lack thereof, of the regime change.⁴⁹ The results were, in a way, predictable. Though some photos of the hallmark events of 1989 were recognised, their implications were often unfamiliar to the 20-somethings, all university students. Furthermore, as most of them reported, these events were not discussed by their respective families, neither at the time nor since then. While most in the audience demonstrated the intended emotional reaction, namely they gasped in horror at the students’ ignorance and indifference, a couple of former participants in the roundtable dissented. “For me the success of the regime change is best expressed by the fact that these youth neither know nor care much about the actual events of 1989”, said Iván Pető, who represented the dissident intellectuals’ party, the Alliance of Free Democrats, back then. Because the roundtable and the various institutional and symbolic steps ended communism and paved the way for a new political and economic regime, there is no need for the next generation to rehearse, memorise, and regurgitate in textbook fashion who did what when and where, as was expected of one under communism. For him, it is the very normality, the ability to lead lives without constantly having to refer to politics and to reference 1989 that is the true sign of a successful regime change.

Indeed, how could we forget Havel’s words, who, after all, had been the hallmark of political activism both before and after 1989: “My dream is to live in a small boring European country.”⁵⁰ The female heroine in Milan Kundera’s *Unbearable Lightness of Being* goes even further, and expresses an actual disgust with mass demonstrations, even when those take place in the West and even when she agrees with their political substance.⁵¹

This is not to say that these intellectuals are satisfied with how things turned out. Nevertheless, that they all craved normality is clear from even their current recollections of those times. The dissident elite was not the only one longing for normality: so were laypeople, as demonstrated by many anthropological and sociological studies. While normality as a powerful trope referred to a variety of inspirations, it would be wrong to reduce its meaning solely to an end to shortages. Under state socialism, society found itself in a constant state of mobilisation. The total mobilisation of the citizenry did not end with Stalinism, under

48. Imre Nagy (1896–1958) was the Prime Minister during the 1956 Hungarian anti-Stalinist revolution. After the defeat of the revolution, he was imprisoned and executed. His reburial in 1989 was the key symbolic event signalling the end of the communist regime.

49. The director, Judit Kopper, was inspired by a similar documentary made about young Chinese people’s understanding of the Tiananmen Square events, also after 20 years. The title of the documentary is “Én és a rendszerváltás” [The Regime Change and Me].

50. Quoted in Edward Lucas, “From Havel to Habermas”, *The Economist* (27 November 2008), available: <http://www.economist.com/world/europe/displaystory.cfm?story_id=12675031> (accessed 29 June 2009).

51. Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (trans. Michael H. Heim) (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).

which it meant the veritable state of readiness, never wavering vigilance, and imposed activism. In the so-called soft decades of the dictatorship people still lived over-politicised lives, in the sense that one always had to be ready to politically account for one's activities, tastes, and ideas, and to decipher political meaning in others' behaviour as well. In this sense the state socialist mode of domination operated with a Foucauldian concept of the confessional, and thus perverted identity politics. When even basic day-to-day functioning required great effort, whether due to shortages or red tape, individuals found the political demands made on them draining. This had the effect of over-valourising everyday peace and quiet, routine and calculability—in sum normality.

Normality primarily meant living without politics (that is, ideology), and not having to worry about being politically correct in the sense of being faithful to the official dogma. The desire to regain a space that is apolitical, where modes of being, other than the political, are possible—the mode that in the West is allocated to the private sphere—was overwhelming. This desire was partially fulfilled through establishing “corners of freedom” which required an exceptional reserve of creative energy.⁵² The artistic, peace, environmental and human rights movements of late socialism, for which the term *civic initiatives* may be too lofty, proved attractive not only—and for some, not even primarily—because of their political substance but because of the alternative ways of life and new forms of sociality they made possible. Some of these movements practised grassroots or base community democracy, and decision making operated on consensus, in marked contrast to the so-called democratic centralist principle of party decision making, and also transcending the Western liberal equation of political participation with elections. Padraic Kenney demonstrates convincingly that it was these efforts that first laid down the foundations for democratic practices, without whose cultural know-how the 1989 events would have failed.⁵³ In this light, the judgement of Jürgen Habermas—who has, after all, been a key proponent of consensus-based deliberations and of freedom for the lifeworld—that the revolutions of 1989 were marked by a “total lack of ideas that are either innovative or orientated towards the future” betrays a profound ignorance, a dogmatic definition of deliberative democracy, and/or an unwillingness to admit the liberatory—if not revolutionary—potential of this Eastern European politics of recognition.⁵⁴

Postsocialist Politics of Recognition

Nancy Fraser and others on the left, though in a less judgemental way, have also argued that 1989 was a missed opportunity for a new progressive politics. Absent in some of their analyses is the role the West played in “taming” the agents of 1989 and shepherding them in from the streets to the ever cosier offices of NGOs.⁵⁵ The

52. Douglas R. Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom: Russian Nature Protection from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988); see also Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever, Until it was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

53. Kenney, *op. cit.*

54. Jürgen Habermas, “What Does Socialism Mean Today? The Rectifying Revolution and the Need for New Thinking on the Left”, *New Left Review*, No. 183 (1990), p. 5; Habermas criticises the general agenda of the politics of recognition in his critique of Charles Taylor in Habermas, “Struggles for Recognition in Constitutional States”, *European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1993), pp. 128–155.

55. On this process see Lipschutz, *op. cit.*; Sarah E. Mendelson and John K. Glenn, *The Power and Limits of NGOs: A Critical Look at Building Democracy in Eastern Europe and Eurasia* (New York: Columbia

most powerful influence in professionalising politics came from the US State Department⁵⁶ and the European Community (now European Union). While Habermas may occasionally find the EU wanting, it is not far-fetched to see his agenda, namely the creation of a European public sphere, already taken on by that supranational organisation. When Europhiles respond to Eurosceptics in postsocialist countries that the EU is simply a framework, an empty institutional shell, and it is by participating in it that they can fill it with substance and mould it to serve their needs, what is being affirmed is exactly Habermas's conviction that what we need is procedural normativity (as opposed to a substantive one). I need not go into a critique of this position; many have demonstrated how substantive, including cultural, criteria seep into procedural norms. What I will turn to, instead, is how postsocialist citizens tend to view this prerogative of participation.

Building on postcolonial critiques of participatory development, I propose that there is indeed a certain "tyranny" in participation in postsocialist Eastern Europe as well.⁵⁷ First, the obligatory *political correctness* has eerie echoes of the communist past for most Eastern Europeans.⁵⁸ Second, participation has a very high material cost (time, education, money), so it will seem quite empty to many. Third, as we will see in the case of multiculturalism below, it is clear that postsocialist citizens are expected to catch up not with Western European practices but with Western European ideals. After all, Western Europe did not achieve unprecedented wealth and build up its democratic institutions through such participatory projects, nor is the EU currently operated by participatory ideals, as EU citizens' enduring experience of a "democratic deficit" suggests. This participatory model in Eastern Europe has unintended undemocratic consequences. Steven Sampson has described postsocialist societies that are "developed" through NGO-run and EU-funded projects as "project societies".⁵⁹ His diagnosis is the rapid and irreversible bifurcation of society into professionals paid at Western levels and accountable to Western funders on the one hand, and a public that neither understands the logic of projects nor cares for their goals, far removed from their everyday concerns.⁶⁰ Ultimately the latter is left without its own, one might say, organic intellectuals, who could represent it in international circles. We can already see how the extreme right wing fills the vacuum resulting from this "decapitation of society" with emotional and symbolic politics (see below).

University Press, 2002); Janine R. Wedel, *Collision and Collusion: The Strange Case of Western Aid to Eastern Europe 1989–1998* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); Christiane Olivo, *Creating a Democratic Civil Society in Eastern Germany: The Case of the Citizen Movements and Alliance 90* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

56. Lipschutz, *op. cit.*

57. See Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (eds.), *Participation: The New Tyranny?* (London: Zed Books, 2001); Ilan Kapoor, "Participatory Development, Complicity and Desire", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 8 (2005), pp. 1203–1220.

58. The author collective Chicago Cultural Studies Group (1992) recognised how diametrically opposed Eastern anti-politics and US cultural studies were: the former sought to depoliticise civil society, while the latter sought to politicise it. Chicago Cultural Studies Group, "Critical Multiculturalism", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (1992), pp. 530–555.

59. Steven Sampson, "Beyond Transition: Rethinking Elite Configurations in the Balkans", in Hann, *op. cit.*, pp. 297–316.

60. Sampson's analysis of the new structuration of the postsocialist elite is much more nuanced than I make it out to be.

I would add another important characteristic of this participatory prerogative. Participatory development in the Global South and EU-led democratisation and marketisation in the former Second World share a rootedness in a performative concept of power. The idea behind participatory models is that by making non-Westerners participate; by devising projects, as so many homework assignments for them; in sum, by making them act as if they were already (ideal) Western, they will eventually become democratic and postnationalist, and embrace liberal multiculturalism.⁶¹ Habermas's defence of the NATO bombing of Serbia betrays this belief in the performative operation of Western hegemony. "According to this Western interpretation the Kosovo war could turn into a leap from the classical conception of international law for sovereign states towards the cosmopolitan law of a world civil society." That is, though we have not yet achieved a cosmopolitan global civil society "that would protect any state citizen against the arbitrary actions of their own governments", we can wish it into existence by acting as if it already existed.⁶² In reality, however, because the current international space is still made up of nation-states, and some quite a bit more powerful than others, "militaristic pacifism"⁶³ ends up reinforcing the East's victimhood vis-à-vis the West, and reproducing a kind of geopolitical politics of recognition that is not exactly conducive to a cosmopolitan or postnational global public. Bruno Latour's warning is even stronger: Beck's cosmopolitan politics

begins where it should, eventually (very eventually), end. It is possible—and from a Western (from my point Burgundian) point of view, desirable—that, in the distant future, we come to live within a common world defined as naturalism defines it. But to behave as if the settlement were already in place and as though it requires no negotiation to achieve it is a sure trigger to further warfare.⁶⁴

In sum, the EU's democratisation project as make-believe cosmopolitanism and postnationalism represents a major divergence from late socialist alternative politics in two senses. First, rather than normality (a non-political existence) it demands and valorises political participation (of course on Western terms only); and, second, because of its strong performative aspect, it creates the impression that, far from valorising authenticity, one has to pretend to be someone else in order to be accepted as a legitimate participant.

The other key distinction between late socialist alternative identity politics and current Western politics of recognition is the thinness of identity, to use Craig

61. The EU accomplishes things, whether in building civil society, rural development or environmental remediation, by discrete projects, and as long as most of the movement in these fields is fuelled by EU programmes and funds, rather than internal ones, the fact that socialist countries are now EU members does not change their project society nature.

62. Jürgen Habermas, "Bestiality and Humanity: A War on the Border between Law and Morality [Bestialität und Humanität] (trans. Franz Solms-Laubach), *Die Zeit*, Vol. 54, No. 18 (29 April 1999), pp. 1–8, available: <<http://www.theglobalsite.ac.uk/press/011habermas.htm>> (accessed 10 July 2009).

63. Ulrich Beck, quoted by Slavoj Žižek, "Against the Double Blackmail", available: <<http://www.lacan.com/kosovo.htm>> (n.d.) (accessed 10 July 2009).

64. Bruno Latour, "Which Cosmos, Which Cosmopolitics? Comments on the Peace Terms of Ulrich Beck", *Common Knowledge*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2004), pp. 450–462 (458).

Calhoun's term.⁶⁵ Thin identities are those that are the most malleable, most subject to deliberation, least rooted in the past, and tend to form in relation to formal processes rather than in relation to some deeply felt and practised substance. In contrast, thick identities, though not necessarily rooted in the past only, express the felt, lived, embodied experience of belonging to a collective, nationalism being a key example.⁶⁶ Habermas, other proponents of cosmopolitanism and postnationalism,⁶⁷ as well as the official EU credo all advocate not an abandonment of a politics of recognition but a shift of the basis of identification to thin identities, forged around agreed-upon procedural norms and abstract principles. The most spectacular case of the discord between the two is the former Yugoslavia. A key conflict in post-war Bosnia has been between locals repeatedly voting for "nationalist" politicians and homogeneous administrative territories on the one hand, and the "International Community" on the other, whose protectorate promotes a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state forcing people to live side by side with members of ethnic groups that had been their deadly enemies not long before.⁶⁸ This demand for Eastern Europe to become multicultural and post-national and to admit that nationality and ethnicity are fluid and malleable, thus not worth shedding blood about, has not only failed to increase the West's popularity but may also have arguably reproduced, as a backlash, the exact identity politics that the EU and most Western public intellectuals find so backward and dangerous. Will Kymlicka warns that denying demands based on thick identities with the expectation and explanation that they would eventually "wither away" under the weight of liberalism actually may provide further justifications for essentialist and exclusivist identity politics. He is (2000) also one of the few sober voices that argues that Eastern Europe is not actually lagging behind the West in its politicisation of ethnonational identities, since the latter also has not lived up to its declared multicultural ideals,⁶⁹ and this discrepancy between Western "talk" and Western "walk" solidifies impressions of Western hypocrisy.

Recent Integration of the Politics of Distribution and Recognition

The EU

From the foregoing discussion one may draw the wrong conclusion about the EU as simply in the business of identity politics. We might forget that participation, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism and postnationalism constitute merely the cultural, symbolic terrain of a Europe-wide redistributive programme. Western

65. Craig Calhoun, "Constitutional Patriotism and the Public Sphere: Interests, Identity, and Solidarity in the Integration of Europe", *International Journal of Politics, Culture & Society*, No. 18 (2005), pp. 257–280; *idem*, "Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere", *Public Culture*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2002), pp. 147–171.

66. Of course, local identities can be just as thick, but since that scale is not at stake in this debate I will ignore it in this article.

67. Kaldor, *op. cit.*; Ulrich Beck, "The Truth of Others", *Common Knowledge*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2004), pp. 450–462; *idem*, *The Cosmopolitan Vision* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).

68. Robert M. Hayden, "Intolerant Sovereignties and 'Multi-multi' Protectorates: Competition over Religious Sites and (In)tolerance in the Balkans", in Hann, *op. cit.*, pp. 159–179.

69. Will Kymlicka, "Nation-building and Minority Rights: Comparing East and West", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2000), pp. 183–212. See also, among others, Maria Todorova, "The Trap of Backwardness: Modernity, Temporality, and the Study of Eastern European Nationalism", *Slavic Review*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (2005), pp. 140–164; Hayden, *op. cit.*

European member states' traditional commitment to welfare capitalism and the EU's collective policies, especially those aiming at reducing regional inequalities, are consistent with a politics of (re)distribution. On the other hand, the main economic objective of the Union has always been the smooth functioning of a common market that in turn has manifested itself, since 1989, as trade liberalisation and privatisation in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, neoliberal agendas have also been gaining ground because of external pressures, in part due to increased competition on the world market and in part due to WTO (and US) calls to deregulate.

Let me demonstrate how these two goals are intended to be reconciled in the specific case of EU agricultural policy, and what the role of a politics of recognition is in managing the ensuing conflicts. I am focusing on food and farmers because theirs has been the most contentious and most consequential terrain for the formation of new social imaginaries⁷⁰ that inform claims made both in a geopolitical politics of (re)distribution and of recognition. Within the EU, under conditions of neoliberal globalisation based on the primacy of free trade, only limited protections may be carved out from market pressures, and most only on the grounds of protecting one's national or cultural existence now perceived as in danger. When traditional food products started facing increasing competition from cheap imports or mass-produced low-quality replicas in the 1980s and 1990s, such as Bordeaux wine or Parmesan cheese, the EU passed a series of protective regulations. The legal regimes of "protected designations of origin" (PDO) and "protected geographical indications" (PGI) reserve the use of these quasi-brand names to products that are certifiably from that particular geographic origin and/or produced according to strictly defined rules, and embodying regional cultural know-how and traditions, as is the case with the label "Traditional Specialty Guaranteed" (TSG). In most cases the geographical origin refers to a region or a town, but almost never to a nation or nation-state.

It is not just that these policy tools reify and commodify certain cultures, but that they operate with the same thin concept of culture that Habermas and most cosmopolitan civil society advocates see preferable. While it may seem like a benevolent humanitarian gesture to shield local and regional food manufacturers from the global race to the bottom, the tangible effects of these policies have so far tended to reinforce existing inequalities between Western European and Eastern European farmers. One, a relatively minor problem, is that small countries, such as Hungary, find themselves at a disadvantage in a policy framework that demotes national and promotes regional or local food cultures. While regions of Italy, such as Parma, or of France, such as Bordeaux, will be familiar especially to the European consumer, Szeged, as the home of a particular variety of paprika of Szeged, will be obscure. European consumers are much more likely to recognise *Hungarian* paprika than *Szeged* paprika. The nation-state cannot, however, be the unit in these designations, not only because this would appear to give unfair advantage to one member state over another but also because any step that might recognise a national-level culture, tradition or identity would seem to be too thick, and thus dangerous, as I argued above.⁷¹

70. Taylor, *op. cit.*

71. This causes problems even in the case of Tokaji wine, where the protection accrues to a region that does enjoy a brand-name-like recognition. For the traditional Tokaj producers, the greatest concern is that Tokaji had always referred to a Hungarian product, but since Tokaj as a geographical location

My greater concern with such designations is that they operate in tandem with a whole series of quality, hygiene, environmental and animal treatment standards, so that it is not enough for a product to be certifiably embodying a regional tradition in order to be recognised, but it has to be produced in accordance with an increasing list of rules and regulations. This too has the effect of diluting an embodied thick identity to identification with procedures and formal norms. Furthermore, because few farmers in Eastern Europe can afford to observe such standards, this set of procedural norms again gives advantage to industrialised mass food production, which in turn leaves small producers at the mercy of a handful of integrators and Western supermarket chains. When we add to this the fact that this system of designations and protections affects only a minuscule part of the market, and in the rest the dynamics of race to the bottom operate, we can see even more clearly the whitewashing effect of EU identity politics. The message is that in order to be successful you can remain Hungarian, but the reality is that that Hungarianness is now acknowledged as valuable only on the terms of Western-designed standards and in a highly commodified fashion. This is a process that Wilk, in another context, refers to as the transition from local to global structures of difference.⁷² The EU's seeming concern with preserving cultural identity and the pursuing of a cosmopolitan global civil society masks the structural inequalities thus reinforced.

In sum, the massive redistribution of assets in Eastern Europe and the reallocation of access to the world market between 1989 and the present—a politics of distribution—has been accomplished with the help of a unique politics of recognition. It is not interests or social groups that seem to be in need of protection but thin and non-national identities. For this reason I agree with Latour, for whom the key question for a progressive agenda is not whether one should pursue particularism or universalism, that is whether to be attached to or detached from one's cultural or ethnic background, but how to differentiate between good and bad attachments.⁷³

The Hungarian Extreme Right

Cosmopolitanists and EU officials clearly count nationalism among the "bad attachments", as seen in the foregoing discussion. The strengthening of the right and especially the extreme right in Hungary seems to confirm Fraser's diagnosis of a shift from the politics of distribution to one of recognition. Indeed, slogans such as "Hungary belongs to Hungarians", which won the Jobbik, an extreme right-wing party, three seats in the European Parliament in June 2009, do echo an essentialist and exclusivist identity politics.

I would argue, however, that the Hungarian right gained its strength not just by appealing to nationalist sentiments but by engaging in a politics of (re)distribution. If one actually asks which end of the political spectrum in postsocialist

actually reaches across the national boundaries, Slovakian vineyards in that region may (since 2007) also market their products as Tokaji, now enjoying PDO status.

72. Richard Wilk, "Learning to be Local in Belize: Global Systems of Common Difference", in Daniel Miller (ed.), *Worlds Apart: Modernity through the Prism of the Local* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 110–133.

73. Latour, *op. cit.* Fraser solves this question by arguing that if a lack of or misrecognition of a difference prevents its holder from participation then it is worthy of recognition. Fraser, *Justice Interruptus*; Fraser and Honneth, *op. cit.*

Hungary argues more consistently against privatisation and trade liberalisation and in general criticises neoliberalism, the answer is undoubtedly the right wing. The following list of demands by the Jobbik would surely gain the support of any anti-neoliberal globalisation activist and any traditional socialist politician, just by replacing “Hungarian” with “local”:

- (1) “Hungarian agricultural land must remain in Hungarian ownership—even after 2011.⁷⁴ Starting in 2011 we would have to compete for Hungarian lands with the citizens of countries whose national income is five times more than Hungary’s. This must be called colonization.”
- (2) “Hungarian farmers must receive the same subsidies from the EU as their Western competitors—not starting in 2013 but immediately.”
- (3) “Hungarian markets must be protected from the dumping of huge amounts of foreign food.”
- (4) “Instead of large-scale industrialized agriculture that emerged from the privatized cooperatives and now are owned by urban ‘businessmen,’ both the Hungarian state and the European Union must support human-paced farms that sustain Hungarian families and preserve villages.”⁷⁵

This clearly is not your free-market-loving, World Bank-hugging, state-hating US Republican style of right-wing politics. This is a rather radical call for redistribution and economic restructuring in the interest of the losers of neoliberal globalisation. It is a politics of distribution.

The reason for the extreme right engaging in such politics is to be searched for in a dynamic, relational view of East and West. First, as I have shown above, the EU renders issues of redistribution in terms of recognition of cultural differences, thus disguising structural inequalities as difference. This rhetorical move encourages political actors to also phrase their economic demands in terms of identity rather than in terms of material needs. Yet, second, these identities must be sufficiently *thin*, that is malleable and reducible to an adherence to certain procedural norms. Converting class demands into politically correct, thin, cultural claims, however, requires a specific know-how and years of immersion in project society. Those who cannot speak this language find their identities shunned as renegade and anti-European, and thus will find themselves excluded from the European public sphere that is allegedly based on the active participation of all citizens.

It has been widely acknowledged that neoliberal globalisation destabilises national and local economies, thus increasing the appeal of nationalist ideologies.⁷⁶ What has not been recognised is that the very discursive tools that aim at giving voice to the excluded exclusively through a cosmopolitan public sphere also destabilise national communities as discursive communities. Calling for transcending the nation when that provides the key, if not the only, interpretive framework for most amounts to silencing them and it also gives credence to the

74. According to the conditionalities of Hungary’s accession to the EU, foreigners should be allowed to buy agricultural land from 2011.

75. Krisztina Morvai, “Morvai Krisztina levele a magyar gazdákhoz” [Krisztina Morvai’s Letter to the Hungarian Farmers], available: <http://www.jobbik.hu/rovatok/publicisztika/morvai_krisztina_levele_a_gazdakhoz> (accessed 10 July 2009).

76. Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein, *op. cit.*, p. 45; but see also Kaldor, *op. cit.*; Fraser and Honneth, *op. cit.*

extreme right's argument that the nation is under attack. The dialectic of the neo-liberal politics of (re)distribution and this new type of global politics of recognition creates a new sense of exclusion, a sense, as the representative of the Jobbik says, that we are "Palestinians in our own country."

David Ost, in his book on the postsocialist history of Polish Solidarity, demonstrates how this dynamic plays out on the domestic political scene.⁷⁷ After 1989, class politics, including Solidarity's independent unionism, was forced into the illiberal camp, which in this specific case was all the easier to do because Solidarity relied on a unique Catholic identity politics as well as on a strong working-class identification. Nothing radicalises identity politics, and in this case, nothing mobilises exclusivist nationalism, more than the threat of marginalisation, especially at a time when one has so much to lose by being excluded.

Conclusion

It seems to me that it would have been better to allow a national discursive community to develop right after the collapse of state socialism and let it thrive first, before it was forced into the straitjacket of yet another alien and thus exclusionary "wooden language".⁷⁸ Unfortunately, this forcing happened very quickly in order to facilitate EU accession. The national arena does not lose its significance as the primary space for airing grievances and developing a newly free political language, even with today's highly globalised mediascapes.⁷⁹ I would call attention here to an analogy between postcolonial and postsocialist subject positions. As Stuart Hall argues, in the first stage of postcolonial politics, the *post* is primarily synonymous with *anti*, valorising the *other* side of the coloniser/colonised dichotomy.⁸⁰ Just as the recovery of "authentic" or pre-colonial identities is the necessary essentialist move that all postcolonial subjects must adopt in what we may call a Gramscian war of position, so must postsocialist citizens reach back to thick identities in order to finally become political subjects. As Anke Pinkert says eloquently,

there is no way in which people can act, speak, create, come out from the margins and talk, or begin to reflect on their own experience unless they come from somewhere, unless they come from some history, unless they inherit certain cultural traditions. And in that sense, the past is not only a position from which to speak, but it is also an absolutely necessary resource in one's efforts to say something.⁸¹

Many of us in the area studies scholarship have pointed out—and this was also a recurring theme on the mentioned anniversary of the Hungarian regime change—that there was never a public discussion about the most fundamental questions

77. David Ost, *The Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

78. This is Alexai Yurchak's term for Soviet officialese. Yurchak, *op. cit.*

79. Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy", *Public Culture*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1990), pp. 1–24.

80. Stuart Hall, "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity", in Anthony D. King (ed.), *Culture, Globalization and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity* (Binghamton, NY: SUNY at Binghamton Press, 1991), pp. 19–40.

81. Anke Pinkert, "Postcolonial Legacies: The Rhetoric of Race in the East/West German National Identity Debate of the Late 1990s", *M/MLA*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2002), pp. 13–33 (p. 24).

of the transition. Who decided that everything should be privatised? No one among the original participants of the 1989 roundtable negotiations was able to recall a debate on what type of ownership should dominate. Who read, understood, and discussed the conditionalities of Hungary's EU accession? No one, since the several hundred-page document was not even made available—though not particularly accessible—to the public until two weeks before the referendum. The image one formulates from these findings is not primarily one of an indifferent public but of a public that had no information, no resources, and no locally understandable language to participate in a still emergent public sphere, and thus could not effectively represent its interests at the supranational level. I agree with Fraser that 1989 was a missed opportunity. But it was not a missed opportunity for the left only and not even primarily. It was a missed opportunity for developing “indigenous” public spheres, the sprouts of which had already appeared in the 1980s.

Fraser's concept of a postsocialist condition therefore must be corrected on two points. First, the “actually postsocialist” region of this postsocialist global has not witnessed a shift to a politics of recognition but rather a shift to a new hegemonic synergy between class and identity politics in which the latter is now also expected to be based on thin identities.

Second, when Fraser says “I had not adequately reckoned with the authoritarian structures and ethnochauvinist traditions that have impeded liberal efforts to democratise the region at least since the French Revolution”,⁸² she wrongly assumes that the rise of exclusivist nationalism is, as she calls it, a “historic burden”. That is, of course, the logical outcome of a view that sees Eastern Europe in isolation from the West. If, in contrast, we see Eastern Europe as being in a dialectic relationship with the West, as I have tried to do in this contribution, we can see that these right-wing tendencies are newly generated in part by a perceived mistreatment by the West and operate with new fusions of class and identity politics.

Fraser's more recent thinking on justice, especially justice in a transnational context, actually helps us in understanding this political realm in more nuanced terms already.⁸³ Arguing that parity of participation cannot be achieved only by decreasing economic inequality nor by cultural recognition, she adds representation as a third axis to the dual conception of justice so far discussed—that of distribution and recognition. This tripartite framework might be very helpful in explaining how the current EU-level politics of recognition places Hungarian farmers at a disadvantage in the realm of representation, to reiterate, by allowing participation on Western terms and based on thin identities only, and how this in turn leads to a new fusion of politics of recognition and distribution on the extreme right. Alas, substantively, Fraser shares too much of Habermas's postnationalist agenda in as much as she insists that this new justice definition is necessary in order to transcend the Westphalian political imaginary. Interestingly, while she allows for an exception for the former colonies, where the national had never been inclusive, the former Second World is subsumed under the First with regards to its experiences with the nation-state as a space of representation.

82. Fraser, “Postcommunist Democratic Socialism?”, p. 200.

83. *Idem*, “Reframing Justice in a Globalizing World”, *New Left Review*, Vol. 36 (November–December 2005), pp. 69–88.

The “how” of justice, that is, the institutional-political mechanisms by which demands for recognition and greater economic equality are represented, is certainly consequential for justice. In postsocialist Europe it was exactly this “how”—the premature replacement of the national scale of representation with that of a trans- or supranational one—that has proved so detrimental in struggles both for recognition and for economic redistribution. It is time we start incorporating the former Second World into how we think about transnational justice.