

Michael D. Kennedy: Cultural Formations of Post-Communism: Emancipation, Transition, Nation and War

Blokker, Paul

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Rezension / review

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Blokker, P. (2005). Michael D. Kennedy: Cultural Formations of Post-Communism: Emancipation, Transition, Nation and War. *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, 41(3), 515-519. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-55440>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Deposit-Lizenz (Keine Weiterverbreitung - keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Gewährt wird ein nicht exklusives, nicht übertragbares, persönliches und beschränktes Recht auf Nutzung dieses Dokuments. Dieses Dokument ist ausschließlich für den persönlichen, nicht-kommerziellen Gebrauch bestimmt. Auf sämtlichen Kopien dieses Dokuments müssen alle Urheberrechtshinweise und sonstigen Hinweise auf gesetzlichen Schutz beibehalten werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht in irgendeiner Weise abändern, noch dürfen Sie dieses Dokument für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

Terms of use:

This document is made available under Deposit Licence (No Redistribution - no modifications). We grant a non-exclusive, non-transferable, individual and limited right to using this document. This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use. All of the copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public.

By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.

very small and ministers often also hold a parliamentary mandate). Here Ștefan questions how much these substitutes differ from MPs given that in the elections they are placed by the party at a less eligible position on the party lists and inquires into whether they are viewed somehow as second-class MPs. What he concludes from his observations is that the substitutes are people with briefer political experience, they are somewhat younger than MPs, and they have less of an influence in the party or in their constituency, and he finds that only few of them later reach the peak of the party hierarchy.

Another topic that is usually studied in most analyses of parliaments is parliamentary mobility, crossing the floor from one party to another. This inter-party mobility was relatively common in the post-communist countries in the early 1990s and then gradually declined, and in this Romania was no different. It is a pity that the author did not devote more attention to a specifying the shifts between political parties in terms of the parties' positions on the political spectrum or to details on shifts between or even within political camps defined otherwise. Readers unfamiliar with the Romanian political scene would certainly welcome greater insight into what has occurred there. Ștefan's examination of parliamentary mobility even includes shifts from one constituency to another or from one parliamentary chamber to another. The notion of the move from one constituency to another as a type of parliamentary mobility is certainly interesting, and it may be based on the fact that, according to the author, there are two separate types of political career in Romania – local careers and national careers. There are few politicians who are capable of crossing the boundaries between these levels and it occurs only exceptionally.

In the final chapter the author looks at the recruitment pattern of ministers, prime ministers and presidential candidates, the relationship between a minister and the political party, the influence position in the party hierarchy has on managing to secure a

top position in the executive and on being named a minister. Here he presents a number of specific examples, but he is working with a limited amount of data here and he is therefore cautious in his conclusions.

In the concluding chapter of the book the author attempts to reveal general and party-specific patterns of recruitment on the example of relevant political parties, and he concludes that the actual contribution of individual parties to the general pattern of recruitment varies. On the basis of empirical findings he is also able to formulate a conclusion about the party-specific pattern of recruitment as being the outcome of many years of internal party practices. At this point one might regret that the author limited himself to Romanian data, because it is cannot be determined whether this is actually something specific to particular Romanian political parties or a specificity of particular party families. In order to make such conclusions, however, the necessary international comparison is lacking.

The book represents a significant contribution to the knowledge about Romanian post-communist elites and it fills in the blank spot Romania previously represented on the map of research into this issue in post-communist Europe. But the book offers more than this. The author warrants praise for his solid theoretical interpretation of the issue, his good knowledge of the subject, and his ability to identify key problems and to grasp them empirically.

Zdenka Mansfeldová

Michael D. Kennedy: *Cultural Formations of Post-Communism: Emancipation, Transition, Nation and War*

Minneapolis and London 2002: University of Minnesota Press, 369 pp.

That transition studies is still a valid and vibrant field is evident from the recent appearance of a number of interesting studies

in sociology, political science, and cultural studies, studies which not only make us understand that the transition from authoritarian, centrally planned systems to – what by most experts is believed to result in – democratic and capitalist societies has proved to be much more intricate than assumed in the early 1990s, but which also indicate a more significant diversity in these trajectories than originally accounted for. In particular with regard to diversity in transition, but also in terms of its intricacies Michael Kennedy's *Cultural Formations of Post-Communism: Emancipation, Transition, Nation and War* is an original and rich contribution, even if it does not fully live up to its self-imposed standard of elaborating a critical theory of transition and enhancing its emancipatory potential.

In the book, Kennedy seeks to critically confront the change in global culture after 1989, that is, the virtual disappearance of a counterculture to capitalism, and its consequences for the imagination of social change in Eastern Europe. Even if he sees 'transition culture' as hegemonic and dominating the understanding of transition from the plan to the market and from dictatorship to democracy, he holds that the emancipatory potentials of transition are not exhausted by transition culture. He defines transition culture as 'a mobilizing culture organized around certain logical and normative oppositions, valuations of expertise, and interpretations of history that provides a basic framework through which actors undertake strategic action to realize their needs and wishes' (p. 9). In this, Kennedy's proposal for a 'critical transition culture' seeks to achieve a deepening of the emancipatory potential of transition. Kennedy notes that the direction of social change that has been captured in the concept of 'transition' is a highly specific and, in important ways, a-historical, reading of social change. If 1989 was about the emancipation of Eastern Europe from the heteronomy of Soviet imperialism and the ubiquitous dictatorship of communist rule, the revolutions of 1989 should be understood as veritable national liberations,

even if these moments of emancipation were quickly captured by 'transition culture'. The almost exclusive focus of the latter on the creation of market economies (and democratic pluralism as its side-effect) meant a closure of the emancipatory moment. It also meant the effective exclusion of forms of nationalism (in particular, the radical nationalisms that emerged in former Yugoslavia) and socialist legacies from, or their portrayal as detrimental to, the narrative of transition culture.

Kennedy's innovation to understand the discursive formation that dominates the post-1989 understandings of social change as a cultural formation is significant in a number of ways. Transition as a cultural formation conveys its constructed, and therefore also its restricted, understanding of social change in post-communist Europe. This analytical move, therefore, historicises transition culture (articulating particular positions and understandings, against other possible imaginations of the post-communist future) and explicates the particular context in which it arises. Furthermore, it underlines that transition culture is something shared by many (policy-makers, advisers and experts, the academic community), while its ultimate understanding can differ significantly from one social actor to the other. Understanding the discursive formation of transition as a cultural formation reveals its uniqueness and one-sidedness and how it functions as a set of meanings and understandings towards the world, but also ultimately its multi-interpretability and therefore its surplus of meaning. Kennedy sets out to devise a critical sociology of transition that seeks 'to fix the object of [its] inquiry with [its] research, and to enhance capacities to understand the rules and resources that influence capacities to intervene in the world, or in scholarship' (p. 16). He constructs such a critical theory by explicitly engaging some of the most important statements in transition studies, and by revealing their inability to transcend their ultimately affirmative stance towards transition

culture, thereby reproducing the hegemony of (a particular kind of) liberalism in the theory and practice of transition. Critical contributions to the transition debate in the form of institutionalism (Kennedy reviews, among others, those of Bunce, Elster, Offe, and Preuss, and Stark and Bruszt) have acknowledged the normative closure of transition culture, and have moved away from the teleological premises of mainstream transition theory by underlining the dynamics rather than the destination of transition (p. 21). They have further inserted a sensitivity to historical legacies and diversity in transition trajectories. However, as Kennedy shows, they ultimately do not deviate from the mainstream consensus that the transition is about 'to figure out how capitalism and/or democracy can be built' (p. 22). In this they focus exclusively on the 'designers' of the post-communist transition. From the more extraneous position of marxists, the positive qualities of 'designer capitalism' are more radically questioned, while other, less well-off actors than the designers enter the analysis. However, marxists tend to miss the idiosyncracies of post-communist social change as they include the transition in a general tale of capitalism, thereby sticking to their own normative agenda. A fully critical and historical account of the transition would, therefore, need to learn from both the historical sensitivity of the institutionalist approaches and the critical insights of the marxists. In order to bring out the constructed nature of the transition and to challenge the understanding of it as a 'necessary course' (p. 35), Kennedy proposes to confront the contingency of transition by focusing on the eventfulness and alternativeness immanent in transition itself. Throughout the book, he confronts a number of sites – the Polish and Hungarian Round Table negotiations, poverty, cultural encounters between international and local managers, nationalism, loss, and war – to draw out the eventfulness and contingency of transition and to explicate transition culture's blind spots.

Kennedy holds that 1989 is normally discussed and analysed from *within* transition culture. It is not so much the genesis and construction of the framework within which transition is perceived that is the object of analysis, but rather the negotiations and pacts that led to the dismantling of socialism and the inauguration of the transition as a natural alternative and pathway for the future. Kennedy proposes to move away from the specific attention to negotiating elites and offers instead a broader historical account of the construction of civil society in Poland and Hungary, as an alternative, and much more contingent and eventual narrative of 1989. He argues that, even if the civil societies of Hungary and Poland were highly diverse (the former purely intellectual, the latter consisting of intellectuals embedded in an enormous mass movement), the outcome of their struggles went into a similar direction, while they managed to avoid (violent) conflict (Poland).

Instead of the huge promise of emancipation and freedom, as pursued by those that sought to reconstruct civil society, the primary focus of transition culture is the making of the market. Transition culture points at the solution of societal problems at the market to the detriment of the state, at the firm as organisational unit, and at entrepreneurs as the most dynamic actors in civil society, able to diffuse transition culture throughout society at large. Even if transition culture endorses pluralism and independence in civil society, its focus is ultimately on those actors that reproduce the West and not on a plurality of actors and opinions per se. Transition culture focuses on the most successful cases of transition (Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Estonia) and portrays these cases as examples of good governance for the remainder of the transition countries. Different starting positions and highly diverse historical trajectories are then relegated to a marginal position in the analysis and institutional design of post-communist societies. Kennedy shows this convincingly by means

of a semiotic analysis of two reports of highly involved but mostly extraneous actors in the transition, the World Bank and the UNDP, in which the World Bank strongly equates good governance with policies that reflect its advices and its portrayal of Western institutional orders (market-making), thereby minimising societal diversity and ignoring different legacies, while the UNDP's focus is on poverty and the social losses that the transition brought about. The latter's recipe for steered social change might resemble quite some elements of the World Bank program, without however echoing its determinism and evolutionary understanding of the transition.

In a similar way, Kennedy argues against a simplistic, one-sided view of the cultural encounters between American business advisers and East European managers. Kennedy acknowledges the impact of a universal, hegemonic transition culture, which cannot, however, work fully without the active collaboration of local managers. Kennedy regards these encounters therefore as struggles over forms of competence, that is, the mastering of an objective and universally valid business language that is presumed to work in any context, and a knowledge of local habits, mentality, and traditions, which is necessary to penetrate any local market in the first place. Kennedy here importantly underlines the momentum of resistance and empowerment that exists within this context of the transposition of a seemingly placeless knowledge of business practices, and its necessary grounding in a local context to be effective. Local culture can be both an obstruction to transition but also its vehicle and catalyst.

Indeed, transition is not only about the market, but also about a 'new subjectivity around freedom and responsibility' (p. 150), thus it is as much about the creation of independent institutions as about as fundamental cultural transformation. If transition is about emancipation, then surely transition culture's emphasis on the universal benefits

of the market is a particular reading of emancipation. At the same time, though, transition culture situates the effectuation of emancipation through the market explicitly in a national context: "[a]lthough the practice of transition culture might minimize the significance of national difference in the fusion of horizons within the multinational firm, the structure of transition culture remains founded on the organization of national differences" (p. 152). Transition culture not only proposes the direction of change, but also seeks to mobilize society around its goals (p. 161). The invocation of the nation may however take different shapes in different places (p. 151). Nationalism is not merely an obstacle to transition coming about, as normally claimed by transition culture, it is itself deeply entangled in the transition (p. 151).

Nevertheless, transition is not only about emancipation, freedom, and new opportunities, but also substantially about loss. The opportunities that transition culture offers in terms of marketisation and political participation have clearly varied meanings across the post-communist region. Where initial conditions allowed for a relatively rapid redirection of trade patterns and economic activities, transition culture made more sense than in those regions that have of old been peripheral to major economic centres. In the latter case, transition culture can easily be perceived as undermining newly recovered independence and sovereignty.

Kennedy's book is most original when he confronts the peaceful narrative of transition with the occurrence of war. Kennedy suggests to read the violent break-up of Yugoslavia and the subsequent civil wars from *within* the framework of transition culture. In mainstream transition studies, these wars have been safely ignored while ex-Yugoslavia has been treated between parentheses, that is, as an alternative, pathological path breaking with communism, but leading to a violent and ultra-nationalist future through the re-emergence of anachronistic ethnic nationalism, rather than to the radiant future promised by

transition culture. Kennedy introduces differing views of the Yugoslav wars, in which the responsibility is either attributed to the nationalism of the Serbs or to the international community for either its instigation of nationalism and secession or its inertia. By explicitly linking transition with nationalism, Kennedy makes a convincing case for how the Yugoslav violent trajectory should be understood as part of the transition story, rather than being completely externalised. The importance of the national framework for transition culture, exemplified by constitutional nationalism, could be seen as at the heart of the Yugoslav wars, therefore involving transition culture more than has been admitted.

Kennedy's attempt in the book has been to devise a *critical* transition culture, rather than a transcendence of transition culture altogether, one which goes beyond narrating the success story of the winners of transition by explicitly including inequality and poverty, loss, and the fragility and contingency of peace, and multiple forms of freedom. In this, he emphasises the fact that an emancipatory potential exists in any of the post-communist societies, thereby criticising the allegedly universalistic and disembedded/placeless foundations of transition culture. Here, he points to the differing but overlapping roles nationalism, socialism and liberalism have played in the transition's making and the way in which transition culture has been *de facto* embedded in different contexts. Kennedy's quest for a critical transition theory is necessary and courageous. However, even if important elements for a critical and inclusive approach have been outlined, the rather diverse nature of the cases studied and the methodologies used, as well as the rather inconclusive statements in the conclusions, make that a critical transition culture remains in itself rather sketchy and unfinished. For those sympathetic to Kennedy's approach the book likely provides a strong stimulus for further research and theorisation. However, for sceptics (which one would expect to be the greater

part of mainstream transition studies), the eventual theory-building that is offered might prove to be too thin.

Paul Blokker

Parliamentary Research at the Institute of Sociology AS CR

Lubomír Brokl (ed.): *Deputies, Senators and the Integration of the Czech Republic into the European Union*. Workshop Proceedings. Prague 2001: Institute of Sociology, 72 pp.

Zdenka Mansfeldová (ed.): *The Relationship of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate*. Workshop Proceedings. Prague 2001: Institute of Sociology, 42 pp.

Lukáš Linek – Petra Šalamounová (eds.): *The Parliament of the Czech Republic, 1993–1998: Factbook*. Prague 2001: Institute of Sociology, 95 pp.

MPs, senators, and the Parliament of the Czech Republic have long been the object of research for researchers at the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. Studies have been centred on the results of large questionnaire surveys, which were conducted in 1993, 1996, 1998 and 2000, and the research findings have usually been presented at workshops and conferences, in the academic press, or as independent publications. This review looks at three publications written by researchers at the Institute of Sociology AS CR, which were published in quick succession during 2001.

The first two books are volumes that contain the proceedings from workshops of the same name that were organised on the premises of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. These publications are based mostly on research that was conducted in 2000, and each book has been published as a bilingual Czech-English edition.

In the introduction to *Deputies, Senators and the Integration of the Czech Republic into the European Union*, Lubomír Brokl reflects