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# Post-Post-Transition Theories: Walking on Multiple Paths

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## Key Words

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## Abstract

This article reviews recent ethnographic works on the former Soviet Union, Eastern and Central Europe, and Mongolia that explore the experiences of people enduring drastic transformations following the collapse of socialism in 1990 and the consequent implementation of a neoliberal “shock therapy.” The anthropologists working on postsocialist societies have shown that transition theories are inherently faulty and their implementation often had damaging results. The current condition is not a period of transition or “bridge” between socialism and capitalism. Instead individuals’ activities, memory, social networks, and culturally specific values lead to uncertainty as a state of dynamic being. This article argues that uncertainty is a complex conceptual space that offers further opportunities to step away from the evolutionary mode of thinking and to develop theories of multiple ways of being.

## INTRODUCTION

The term post-post-transition theories refers to the growing body of anthropological knowledge about the outcomes of the collapse of socialism and the subsequent implementation of neoliberal policies in the 1990s. I use this term in reviewing recent works on the former Soviet Union, Eastern and Central Europe, and Mongolia that reveal the experiences of drastic changes by a variety of actors. The cultures and people in these areas had little in common throughout their separate presocialist histories. Even though the outcomes of socialist and neoliberal policies imposed on them vary, some common experiences allow us to ask similar questions in these areas.

During socialism these countries shared a theory of social evolutionism based on the ideas of Morgan ([1877] 2000), Marx (1973), and Engels (1989) and directed their resources to building socialism and then communism as the highest stage of human civilization. As Hirsch (2005) has shown, the Soviet Union adopted evolutionism at the outset of the twentieth century to disprove German biological determinism—a theory of higher and lower races that placed Russia in a position inferior to the Europeans. Much of the politics of the Soviet Union throughout the twentieth century was directed at expediting their mobility through the unitary path of evolution and arriving at the same final stage as the Europeans. Social evolutionism can be defined as a belief in the power of progress and modernity, a framework for conceptualizing society and history, and a doctrine for legitimizing power and structuring everyday life. The end of socialism was an epistemic, as well as a social and economic, crisis.

Ironically, the end of Marxist-Leninist evolutionism was also the beginning of the transition theories, another version of evolutionism that operates on the assumption that all societies are parts of a global developmental continuum based on a free-enterprise-driven global economy. The practitioners of the transition theory—the neoliberal economists—hold that

the road from totalitarianism to capitalism runs through a rupture known as “shock therapy”—a rapid demolition of state enterprises and support systems (Tökés 2000). My engagement with evolutionism in this article is through this specific modern version: the transition theories of neoliberalism. Rooted in evolutionism’s previous problematic legacies such as the Enlightenment and Eurocentrism, transition theories mimic a notion of a single modernity as an objective stage of a unilinear history at which all societies arrive at some point through a complete break with the past. Through a reading of select ethnographies of postsocialism, I present the multiplicity of experiences and unprecedented outcomes against the assumption of transition theories’ uniformity and certainty. In the process of writing, my engagement with these theories has necessarily also become a moral one. As the ethnographic accounts suggest, the neoliberal policies failed because of the assumption that market rules worked the same everywhere. That assumption was not based on ignorance, however, but on a contemptuous belief that cultural identities, values, and systems are obstacles to progress and that they need to be swept away by the transnational forces of modernization (Tökés 2000). It became clear to me, however, that the cultural differences that the transitologists had dismissed eventually engulfed the transition.

I explore the anthropologists’ deconstruction of transition by showing how different aspects of cultures influence market capitalism thus creating unexpected outcomes. My focus is on the unpredictable as the hallmark of the ethnographies of postsocialism from which I derive some theoretical points about post-post-transition theories. In the first part, I focus on anthropologists’ tracking of the metamorphoses of market elements as they shift into new sociocultural landscapes. Second, I explore the diversity of gender systems and their unpredictable influence on social changes and also show how a gendered approach affords deeper insights into the trickiest puzzles of postsocialism. I conclude the article by briefly presenting the developments in the studies of culture

through specific themes that are directly relevant to evolutionism, such as the notion of “culture,” and the transition of memory and history from the realm of the state to a more contested public space. I argue that the interdisciplinary character of postsocialism studies allowed anthropologists to develop insights that contributed to wider anthropological theory and that postsocialist places are increasingly seeing the current situation as a part of a given culture and society with its own dynamics, as opposed to something that is in transition to a version of the contemporary Euro-American world.

Before discussing the ethnographic accounts, it is useful to sort out some of the terminology and frameworks. First, by focusing on the vast area composed of the former Soviet Union, Eastern and Central Europe, and Mongolia, I create a conceptual space to destabilize the problematic division of the area into Asia and Europe. Challenging the boundaries of an established area is also one way to engage with the theory of social evolutionism, as it often has justified colonialism. Marxist theory and the notion of culture as a criterion for placing people on an evolutionary ladder helped to legitimate colonial and semicolonial projects, often under the rubrics of modernizing and civilizing the supposedly less cultured societies. Such projects also contributed to the delineation of geographical regions, which became associated with specific characteristics, assigned by the more “developed” West. Postsocialism does not correspond to a specific study area and is not limited to its institutionalized form as discussed by Hann (1993a), nor is it owned by one—especially with the growing number of studies on postsocialisms on the African continent, as well as in China, South-East Asia, and Latin America among other places—but is claimed as a conceptual space for developing theoretical insights.

The term transition has been debated by a number of anthropologists because it signals evolutionary progress that will arrive at a predetermined destination. In addressing the theories that have developed in response to the

notion of transition, I use a double loop in the title post-post-transition. It highlights the complexity of the issue on several levels. Empirically, it shows the multidimensionality of the experiences of the people going through the simultaneous collapse of socialism and the hastily imposed neoliberal changes. The enduring nature of the experiences shows that there is no tangible line between the so-called transition and the so-called expected destination, thus the title begins to deconstruct the transition theories. On the theoretical side, the anthropological critique of interdisciplinary transition theories has led to a rethinking of mainstream anthropological theories as well. This kind of revision is discussed in the section on gender where its placement in a new context demanded reassessment of previous theories. Therefore, the double loop of post-post-transition moves us beyond predetermined ideas of transition to much more nuanced and unexpected newly emerging practices and ideas. The term has an ironic connotation as well: It gestures at the failures of most theories of transition, which incorporate the idea of a “pregiven future,” in the form of “textbook capitalism” Burawoy & Verdery (1999). They note that among economists and social scientists who employ different transition theories, the neoliberal economists were convinced that the two grand narratives of modernity, socialism and neoliberal capitalism, must be bridged by “shock therapy,” an almost overnight demolition of the socialist state enterprises and support systems. The transition did not lead to the promised world of capitalism. Thus post-post-transition theories are based on the exploration of the experiences of the peoples who accommodate, resist, interpret, and shape their lives in relation to, and despite, the failed transitions brought upon them.

### **THE METAMORPHOSES OF TRANSITION AND UNPREDICTABILITY**

The disintegration of socialism affected all aspects of society, but shock therapy—the rapid

dismantling of state enterprises and disorganized privatization—made the changes in the economic sphere much more visible than other aspects of change. Burawoy & Verdery (1999) in their edited volume *Uncertain Transition* were the first to theorize the changes from an anthropological perspective and respond to neoclassical, neoliberal, institutional theories, evolutionary economists, and sociologists. Burawoy & Verdery argue that the post-socialist transition is not a single prescribed road to an objective phase of Western-style capitalism. It is an uncertain process that leads to innovation when new rights and rules enmesh with old values and interests. The authors argue that the after-effects of shock therapy were often the reincarnations of the very socialist practices that the economists tried to demolish. Many people acted exactly counter to the calculations of the market economists: Privatization was rejected, the market was avoided, and the demolition of the old caused resistance and reinvention of socialist practices in new forms.

Decollectivization in Transylvania (Verdery 1999), for instance, led to the creation of a new association that replaced the demolished collective. Although it was supposed to operate like a capitalist firm to generate revenue for a private ownership, because of the villagers' moral attachments to their assets, private ownership failed in favor of a collective one. Such manifestations of the past in the present (Haney 1999, Zbierski-Salameh 1999) are not nostalgia but a part of a system that works best for some people and they deliberately choose it. But things that seem to be from the past, such as barter relations, have proliferated not as legacies of the past but as outcomes of the monetization of the economy following shock therapy (Woodruff 1999). This is similar to the development of barter owing to the structural failures and the corresponding mistrust and fear discussed by Humphrey elsewhere (2002b). These are only a few examples of the unpredictability of economic life under new conditions. Verdery & Burawoy demonstrated that economy does not operate only through rules, but is influenced also by memories, re-

lationships, and historically grounded cultural values.

This kind of theorization against the “therapists” was possible mainly owing to anthropological knowledge about socialism. A few, nonetheless powerful, works (Gellner 1980, Hann 1985, Humphrey 1983, Kligman 1988, Verdery 1983) had shown that socialism was wrought with contradictions, discrepancies, and competing realities behind what seemed to be a rigid totalitarian system. Below I describe what happens when complex, but also morally specific contexts are met with some specific ideas and tools that are supposed to produce definite outcomes.

In the introduction to a collection of her essays, Humphrey (2002a) highlights the fact that concepts such as market, trading, democracy, and global economy come from Euro-American traditions and that they are often taken for granted in those places. When these concepts are transplanted to new contexts, Humphrey finds that they work in bizarrely different ways, often because they receive different (and constantly changing) moral and cultural evaluations. For example, trading goods in the market—a straightforward activity in the Euro-American world—provokes ambivalent reactions in the postsocialist world. Throughout socialism, trade has been considered an immoral activity, a way of making profit without labor. As a result, the contradictions between material interests and socio-moral ones provoke feelings of shame, pride, guilt, collectivity (Heyat 2002, Kaneff 2002, Pine 2002, Watts 2002), and acute discomfort (Konstantinov 1996, Konstantinov et al. 1998, Patico 2005).

In her seminal article “Traders, ‘Disorder’ and Citizenship Regimes in Provincial Russia,” Humphrey (2002b) also traces how the negative attitude toward traders escalated animosity in the city and perpetuated the organization of mafia. Humphrey tracks and weaves together the development of these events. The disintegration of the socialist distributive system opened up spaces for traders to take over the function of providing goods in a Russian provincial town. But the traders were suspicious

outsiders who traveled across borders, often several of them in a single trip. They were regarded as parasites in contrast to the workers who produced goods. Trading was often linked with criminal activities associated with mafias and gangs, which alarmed the townspeople who were heavily dependent on the goods provided by the traders. The local government created rules and document requirements to regulate the traders' mobility and carried out crackdowns on shops and businesses. Not only did this visible violence perpetuate the local hostility toward the traders, but it also led to groupings of traders across borders, enhancing their kinship and professional networks. Traders' networks were increasingly transformed to become more like the very mafia and gangs that the locals feared because trading, which in a Euro-American context does not provoke strong emotional and moral reactions, was wrought with negative connotations in the postsocialist world.

Ambiguities surrounded other aspects of the market such as business elites (Humphrey 2002a); ordinary people did not know what to think about them. During the period of inflation and fluctuation, the value, function, and cultural meanings of money became ambiguous (Humphrey 1995; Lemon 1998; Pesmen 1995, 1996, 2000; Ries 2002). In response, goods (Ledeneva 2006), including some as disturbing as home-brewed alcohol, became accepted as currency (Rogers 2005). Even the seemingly positive changes such as privatization of property, especially land, and decollectivization—topics that received much attention (Alexander 2004; Creed 1995; Hann 1993b,c; Kideckel 1995; Lampland 2002; Sneath 2004; Verdery 1994)—provoked dubious reactions. Hann (2006) elaborates on peasants' critical reactions to the outcomes of privatization. Verdery (2003) thoroughly critiques economic theories of privatization, including rational choice, neoliberalism, and neoinstitutionalism. The expectations of privatization were not feasible in practical terms because of the discrepancies in cultural and social understandings of value between socialism and cap-

italism. Property ownership did not automatically lead to development as expected by the transitologists. It was a mistake, Verdery argues, to place the burden of cost-benefit on people who hardly had the resources to bear the costs. Socialism valued relations of reciprocity and obligation. Privatization threatened to undermine these relations through an emphasis on individual advantage and gain. Instead of expected improvement, privatization, at least in the Transylvanian village, brought demodernization and polarization and aggravated the sense of insecurity and economic anxiety.

## **SURVIVING TRANSITION AND THE MARKET**

The same notions of reciprocity, collectivity, and networking, which are juxtaposed to the neoliberal market economy, helped individuals create alternative forms of security during the collapse of the official economy and when the new one cast them aside. Caldwell (2004) explores how, by developing "strategic intimacy" (p. 130) through friendship, holiday celebrations, and interactions in the soup kitchen, Muscovites created a sense of social security. For Muscovites, hunger meant the scarcity of social networks rather than scarcity of food. Help, support, and gift-giving were non-monetary everyday economic transactions that constitute a part of the economy. Many anthropologists (Bruun & Odgaard 1996; Creed 1998; Hann 2006; Humphrey 2002a; Nazpary 2000; Sneath 1999, 2004) reported different survival strategies. Whereas rural Siberians diversified their herd composition and size (Metzo 2003), Bulgarians engaged in trader-tourism to create social stability, to avoid duties, and to maintain flexible identities (Konstantinov 1996).

With the flow of goods and services, the consumption and production of particular brands shaped, questioned, and structured ethnic, national (Rausing 2002), and class identities, and even spatialized one's belonging to imaginative geographies (Manning & Uplisashvili 2007). Much of a population's consumption then is viewed as a tool for transforming and

developing new subjectivities. Yet the scholarship has also shown that people possess cunning strategies to survive without transforming themselves and without changing their previously developed values and ways of life. In Moscow and Poland, Western-style goods, services, and enterprises are appropriated in such a powerful way that the boundary between globalization and localization becomes irrelevant. Not only the French fry (Caldwell 2004), but even industrial enterprises are domesticated. Dunn (2004) explores the process of domesticating a Polish factory by a U.S. enterprise. It is ironic that the U.S. enterprise's attempt to transform Polish workers into post-Fordian flexible capitalist staff often looked more like the opposite: Polish factory workers domesticated Gerber (the U.S. factory) through strategies that they retained from socialism, such as personalizing their work relationships, values, and work space.

As discussed above, transition theories are inherently faulty; postsocialist moral and value systems, when merged with Western ideas, create unpredictable outcomes; and neoliberal principles do not suit the population's moral landscape. By no means has this review thus far addressed the full complexity and range of themes in the literature on postsocialist economy, but the overall direction seems clear. Anthropology's strength comes from talking to people rather than assuming what is best for them, following the life of communities for an extended time through various periods and events. But anthropologists also tend to seek out the marginalized, impoverished, and oppressed, thus exposing the damaging results of the careless policies promoted by neoliberal economists.

Anthropologists critique Western theories of transition, property relations, and policies that economists, sociologists, and political scientists assume are right for a population. They do so by exploring the lives of the people and revealing the metamorphoses of the concepts of the market economy, thus exposing the immateriality behind the assumptions made by other disciplines. Instead of looking for one predeter-

mined path and a single destination, the state of uncertainty and constant change anthropologists uncover offers a chance to explore the multiple paths that ordinary people follow to survive the unexpected changes and maneuver through the opaque and shifting landscapes of the new socioeconomic formations.

## THE GENDER OF POST-POST-TRANSITION

Although a number of scholars (Bloch 2004; Gal & Kligman 2000a,b; Humphrey 1998; True 2003) have highlighted the fact that men and women have experienced postsocialist transformations in vastly different ways, until recently, gendered analyses have been sparse in the major works on economy, identity, and politics. Fortunately, recent studies have demonstrated that gender has been enmeshed in all aspects of ongoing socioeconomic microprocesses. Because gender is a process and has numerous variations even within one culture, an awareness of gender completely defies the idea of a unified transition. Below, I explore some of this diversity of gender in relation to the dynamics of the past and the present and larger global powers. Then, with two ethnographic examples (Bloch 2004, True 2003) I show how gender provides a necessary lens for comprehending the chaotic and uncertain changes in nuanced ways that might otherwise get overlooked.

### A Multiplicity of Gender Systems

Several edited volumes based on the collaboration between Eastern and Euro-American gender and women studies groups have been published since the 1990s. One of the first joint ventures linking women from postsocialist Eastern Europe and Western feminists resulted in an edited volume by Funk & Mueller (1993), *Gender Politics and Post-Communism*. It consists of articles written by Eastern European feminists on a variety of issues including women's oppression under socialism, notions of emancipation, and the problems of combining motherhood duties and work pressures. Each article is

methodologically different, reflecting the individual author's scholarly background, personal voice, and political and moral engagements. It is a substantial contribution to the theories of post-post-transition in a number of ways.

These Eastern European scholars challenge the idea of a transition as a unified process that started in the early 1990s. They do so by giving a detailed account of the transformations in gender relations and women's positions throughout all stages of socialism, not just after its collapse. Several diagnostic articles also lay out theories about the failures of socialist feminism. Therefore, by presenting the achievements and the failures of women's struggles for emancipation and equality throughout their recent history, these scholars defy any notion of "transition" as an objective unilinear process with definitive beginnings and endings. Instead, they show that gender politics are uncertain, constantly in flux, incomplete, shifting, and embedded in the historical and political landscape of a particular community or country. Finally, Duhacek's (1993) compelling contribution to the volume explains the failures of women's movements throughout history. Some argue that women's movements constantly failed because they had been attempts at inclusion in linear time only as a part of the history of civilization, but not as autonomous beings in their own rights. The first-generation feminists called for equal rights on the basis that women were rational beings like men. The socialist women demanded equal rights as fighters in a class struggle and as workers of the state. In both cases women demanded equal rights not as human beings in their own right, but because of their potential contributions to movements and causes championed by men. Whether arguing for equality in terms of rationality or class struggle, women did not seek to claim autonomous spaces for themselves, but in a space paved by men and by using the language of the male-dominated discourse. As a collaboration between American and Eastern European feminists, the volume makes a step toward bridging the dichotomy of Us versus Them and loosening the boundaries of the world's hierarchical

division into area studies. Fostering an equality of learning and sharing by the two groups, the collection breaks down the offensive borders of "post-Soviet" and "Western" anthropology (a move also suggested by Balzer 1995a, Rethman 1997, and Verdery 1991).

The collection shows a great discrepancy between Eastern European and Western scholars' constructions of gender, values, women's issues, and feminisms. With more emphasis on the sameness between men and women, Western feminism tends to be irrelevant and distant from the concerns and interests of Eastern European women, who emphasize the differences between men and women and do not consider having attributes of femininity and receiving help from men to be a sign of weakness. Even when the Eastern European women try to collaborate and address common issues and problems, differences and barriers in the discourse between the two groups of women inevitably emerge. The two groups discover notable barriers to understanding each other, as well as misconceptions and biases against each other. Even the collection itself shows, therefore, that there is no one gender, and no one single feminism, that would "fit" into one transition.

The dynamic relationship between gender systems and larger structures of power and domination has been explored by Gal & Kligman in their two books (2000a,b), which were produced as collaborative efforts by Eastern European, British, and U.S. scholars. Their goal was to explore how notions of gender are dynamically transformed by nationalist politics, ethnic violence, and the state and to analyze how transition is redefining gender relations and the notions of masculinity and femininity. Because of the fluidity and unpredictability of the way gender affects social processes, the current transformations after socialism do not conform to one predetermined path, but instead take many. The authors show how gender is always influenced by politics such as in abortion law, while politics are also shaped through debates on abortion because the latter are used by electoral candidates as tools for

gaining advantage in their campaigns. Reproductive politics affect other spheres of women's life, including work, career, and their relationships with men. Gal and Kligman demonstrate their argument by analyzing the dynamic discrepancies among rhetoric, practices, and women's subjectivities. For example, they trace how, despite socialist state rhetoric's proclamation of women's emancipation, the pronatal policy, on the contrary, had perpetuated the oppression of women. Reproduction has been one of the core analyses in relation to nationalism, especially in Romania. During Ceausescu's regime in Romania, the reproductive capacity of women was utilized for building the body of the nation (Kligman 1998, Verdery 1996). These gender studies are, as in most places, dominated by studies of women. A male crisis has been noted by anthropologists such as Bloch (2004) and True (2003) but has not been pursued in depth.

These explorations of gender systems demonstrate that diversity destabilizes the possibility of an easy transition. Especially once the East and Central European feminists presented their questions, problems, and assumptions, it became clear that the problems of women in one country can be considered emancipation in another, and what some women consider a nuisance may not bother women in other places (or these problems have been interpreted as something else). We cannot yet answer the question, "Transition from what to what?"

## Gender Deep

Recent scholarship that examines individuals' subjective experiences through the lens of gender has shed light on the aspects that go beyond the expectations of transition theorists and which otherwise would have remained unexplored. For instance in her ethnography of the residential schools of a far eastern Russian town, Bloch (2004) asks why, despite the brutality of the Soviet system, most people still want to reinstate it. Why is resistance to the state not automatic? I emphasize these questions because other anthropologists have asked

similar questions (e.g., Adams 1999). Bloch's answer stems from her exploration of the gendered politics of residential schooling and labor. She was especially puzzled by particularly strong attachments to Soviet cultural practices among older Evenki women. The Soviets' consistent efforts to emancipate women made them take an active part in building the state. Women were the subjects of transformation more so than men were. Both the residential schools and the specific arrangements of economic production saved women from the tyranny of patriarchy. The state organized reindeer herding and established nomadic camps (brigades). Herding was made into men's work, whereas most women resided in the sedentary center to work in clerical, administrative, service, factory, and cultural jobs. As a result, women were schooled longer and better educated and were considered more cultured, and so they were able to partake in the structures of power. Bloch further explored the range of perspectives regarding the Soviet system among different generations, ranging from nostalgia to accommodation, ambivalence, disapproval, resistance, and maneuvering. Each perspective loosely corresponds to an aspect of the state's power that had more impact on particular individuals' lives. For instance, for the elder Evenkis, the Soviet system was remembered against the backdrop of colonialism by Imperial Russia. The inconsistencies and porosity of state power that impeded work in the community actually allowed intellectuals to partake in activities to strengthen the system, such as designing the school curriculum. Therefore, contrary to the idea that intellectuals were opposed to the state, Bloch's research shows that intellectuals participated in state building. In the recent era of incipient market capitalism, marginalized and impoverished women depended on the school system for resources. But some younger female entrepreneurs who were able to get by without any support resisted the school as a site of creating socialist dependency, and these are the women who felt that school was a place for disciplining and limiting their personal freedom. It is particularly through a gendered approach,



then, that Bloch went beyond the dichotomy of power and resistance to locate more subtle and multiple forms through which individuals related to the system.

Aside from the repercussions of socialism, ethnographies have shown that gender is also influenced by globalization, Western-style consumerism, advertising, media, Euro-American and international feminisms, and civil society. True (2003) gave a sustained critique of neoliberalism, Marxism, and institutionalism; these theories all overlook the gendered aspects of transitions and base their analyses on formal political and economic institutions. True was also critical of feminists who have cast women as victims of the market. She offered a gendered but dialectical approach in which women are agents, able to use their resources to accommodate the changes but without necessarily undergoing drastic subjective transformations. She argues that this can occur because in some cases, the Eastern European women are more educated than the feminists from Euro-America. The former have a history of emancipation and participation in labor. They are equipped to work and think about other cultures' impacts on them, and in this way, they are not victims of globalization but can modify and appropriate globalization to suit their interests and needs. A clever example is the Czech transformation of *Cosmopolitan*. The Czech editors of the magazine, a former women's magazine, are much more feminist than their U.S. headquarters. Instead of producing a U.S.-style magazine aimed at fashioning consumers, the Czech version *Cosmopolitan* deviates from the American themes and publishes material that alerts women about issues of sexual harassment, violence, human trafficking, health and the importance of electoral political systems as opposed to promoting consumption. In this way, it is Czech women who have transformed *Cosmopolitan*, not the other way—the intended way—around.

This example illustrates the way the values and principles from socialism were able to appropriate, shape, and modify the allegedly more modern and progressive Western ideas and approaches. By exploring the active modifi-

cation of the Czech *Cosmopolitan* by Eastern European women, True (2003) emphasizes their empowerment instead of victimization. While one may agree with True (2003) that emphasizing women's suffering as a result of the shock therapy casts them as helpless victims, such portrayal may still be necessary for neoliberal policy-makers to realize the failures of their work.

So far the theoretical concerns of gender studies are neatly related to the state political economy, the chaos and uncertainty of the market, and the reformulation of the notions of femininity and masculinity in the market era. As new rules of the economy, consumption practices, and work demands had been transforming daily lives and structures, women became depicted as new subjects as well. Most notably, women's activities after socialism challenge some taken-for-granted notions about women's empowerment versus marginalization. Consider Russian nightclub entertainers abroad—are they victims of trafficking or entrepreneurs? Bloch (2003) explored the question by conducting an in-depth study of women's backgrounds, education, their relationship with their bosses, and the ways in which they spent their money. Unlike the stereotypical night club dancers who come from uneducated and impoverished backgrounds, these women were mostly university educated. But after socialism, which provided jobs mostly in public service, these women had few opportunities to find satisfying jobs at home. As international night club dancers, they earned enough to support their families back home. Together they felt superior to their bosses who were uneducated and uncouth and who did not speak foreign languages. Instead of feeling oppressed and victimized, these women found travel overseas and audiences exciting and empowering.

Despite such research that offers fresh insights, overall, gender-based analyses have been slow to take off. Scholarship in the 1990s was based mostly on edited volumes that were born from the international conferences that seek to determine future goals, bridging regional, theoretical, and other gaps to foster collaborative

research. Some ethnographies (and ethnographically informed works) (Bloch 2003, 2004; Dunn 2004; Einhorn 2003; Ghodsee 2005; Rethman 2001; Ries 1997) have been published since the late 1990s. Scholars who are outside of anthropology have adopted ethnographic methods of long-term fieldwork along with interviews.

## SITES OF CULTURE

As much as the post-post-transition theories have considered the uncertain transformations in political economy, they have also attended to changes in culture in the broadest sense. The collapse of socialism was an epistemic crisis that challenged the evolutionary scheme of thought. Thus culture is officially no longer an ideological weapon controlled by the state nor is it a measurement of sophistication and refinement, although such functions remain in practice in these societies overall. What, then, do the anthropological studies of cultures look like during a time of uncertainty, rapid transformation, economic anxiety, and instability?

The enormous diversity of themes and issues addressed by anthropologists defies any generalizing frameworks. Instead of addressing geographic divisions and corresponding themes, I find that building conversations around themes corresponds to this review's aim to destabilize the taken-for-granted divisions of the world. Therefore, I structure the following brief discussion around the themes of violence, memory, resistance, and identity.

State violence and its memories have been manifested as neurasthenia (Skultans 1998), as ghosts and spirits (Buyandelgeriyn 2007, Jones 1994, Vitebsky 2005), and as fantastic images such as blue elephants (Humphrey 2003). Culturally specific, metaphorical, and removed from actual events, these manifestations of memory encompassed a sense of ambivalence toward the past, the pain, and the sense of powerlessness against the state that controls memory. They speak to studies of the politics of memory, such as the debates on settling accounts (Borneman 1997), the politics of an un-

wanted past (Schoeberlein 2004), and the ways the current Mongolian state controls the public life of memory (Kaplonski 2002). Studies of more recent violence in former Yugoslavia address different issues. Here, knowledge about death is not metaphorical or distanced, but very specific and tangible: People want to identify the bodies of their dead relatives, see their clothes, and visit the places of death (Hayden 1994, Wagner 2008). As Wagner shows, even the results of DNA testing are contested by the family members of the dead when emotions and memories become part of the knowledge-seeking process. Tishkov's account (2004) on war in Chechnya reveals how the influence of the larger powers has been transformed into the routinization of killing and the erasure of humility among recruits and armed civilians. In her study of the Chernobyl catastrophe, Petryna (2002) provides insight from a medical anthropologist by showing how health or absence of it structures individuals in the matrix of power and citizenry.

Related to violence, the politics of rewriting history, acquiring knowledge, and reconfiguring identity have concerned many anthropologists (Bloch 2000, 2001; Bloch & Kendall 2004; Borneman 2004; Boyer 2005; Empson 2007; Grant 1995; Ssorin-Chaikov 2003). Kaplonski's (2004) study of social memory in Mongolia in the midst of shifting and controversial identity formation demonstrated that memory is based on the identities of historical heroes rather than on spaces or places. This was true especially during the time of democratization and when new elites competed for power.

Some intriguing research has emerged on the cultural politics that had flourished in unofficial arenas during socialism, outside of the realm of the state. In such areas, the "ethical and aesthetic complexities" took a multitude of "creative, imaginative, and often paradoxical cultural forms" (Yurchak 2006, p. 9). The "evocative transcripts" that could be interpreted in multiple ways (Humphrey 1994), hidden rituals (Balzer 1992, 1995a; Vitebsky 1995, 2005), ironies, anecdotes, small-scale poems, and the uncanny (Yurchak 2006),

politicized, and subversive art (Erjavec & Jay 2003) all constituted counterculture and a cynical critique of negative developments at the outset of the changes in the 1990s that were cast as moral (Ries 2002). The cultural developments among the colonized people of the former Russian Empire differ from those among the people from the European part of Russia. The colonial past of the former is embedded in ambiguous resistance to the Soviet past, which is mediated through rituals, folk medicine, and attitudes toward the state (Balzer 1996, 1999, 2001, 2005; Bloch 2001; Rethman 2001). Sabloff (2001) argued that Mongolia has its own concept of democracy from its distant history. Grant (2005) took up a study of the dominant group. He has shown how Russian colonial settlers reinterpreted their colonial presence in the Caucasus—not as colonizers, but as prisoners—a Russian antidote to colonial sentiments.

The ongoing events of a social, political, and geopolitical nature in various parts of the post-socialist world have directed the studies of culture toward ethnic and nationalist politics, identity formation, state building, religious revival, and conversion. Therefore, the politics of nationalism, ethnicity, and identity (Bulag 1998, Goluboff 2003, Lemon 2000) are about dynamic contestation with other identities and respond to others' prejudices, biases, and stereotypes. The creation of new spaces, borders, and political formations, as well as demolitions of previously existing ones, led to the emergence of the sites of identity politics where culture is used, created, borrowed, or ignored (Abramson 2000, Adams 2005, Berdahl 1999, Bilaniuk 2005, Pelkmans 2006).

Several additional themes taken up by anthropologists include globalization and the penetration of Western-style consumption, which also overlap with gender studies (Berdahl et al. 2000, Urban 2004). Some fruitful scholarship exploring religious politics, conversions, and contestations has begun to emerge (Rasanayagam 2006a,b; Wanner 2007). New and exciting studies include the transformation of the public sphere through film in Poland (Fischer 2003); the politics of emo-

tions in response to the dissatisfaction of the failed promises of "transition" (Hann 2006); the new political- and media-generated spaces of the color-coded "rose revolution" in Georgia (Manning 2007); transformations of the post-socialist city [emergence of homeless, anomie, migrants, and the change of the urban landscape (Alexander et al. 2007)], and informal practices of election campaigns, corruption, shadow economy, double accountancy, and other illegal and semilegal activities in Russia (Ledeneva 2006).

Anthropologists are skilled in deconstructing generalizations, stereotypes, and searches for universal laws. Such skills have been well employed in taking apart transition theories by exploring the specifics of cultural identities. The attack on evolutionary theories and their variants is not new in anthropology. But a number of new aspects are worthy of revisiting in a brief summary. First, in the process of deconstructing "transition," anthropologists have represented political economy as consisting of micropolitics that are uncertain and unpredictable. They have emphasized the fact that individuals' participation, resistance, memory, nostalgia, ways of life, networks, and communities are integral parts of the politico-economic changes. Although this is well understood by anthropologists, it is insufficiently considered by other disciplines.

Second, the vast majority of research shows that the market economy in non-Western contexts operates much more on the basis of the rules of local cultures, kinship, and community rather than the rules in force in Western contexts. Instead of the expected homogenizing of local cultures, the market economy has called into greater prominence the diversity of cultures that were less visible before. Moreover, the new impositions of neoliberalism have created new culturally specific relationships, languages, and practices that have come to be considered traditional.

Third, in this review I emphasize gender as one major component of the post-post-transition theories. This is because gender as a concept and as an analytical tool has offered

new insights and findings. A newly established bridge between Western and Eastern European feminists fosters an understanding of each others' differences rather than subsuming them under one theoretical canon. This in turn helps to obliterate the unequal power relations between West and East. The gendered approach once again has demonstrated its relevance by explaining the issues that emerged anew after socialism, such as the situatedness of resistance and women's empowerment in the marginalized and stereotyped space of night clubs.

Fourth, although culture cannot be separated from the political economy and gender, in this review, "culture" is used specifically in relation to the practices that have emerged as consequences of the state's collapse. Because the state

is no longer the sole owner of culture, the literature encompasses numerous themes and questions from consumption practices to the transformation of city life and election campaigns. In my attempt to address the issues related directly to the postsocialist state, I emphasize violence and memories, rewriting of history, and unofficial practices during both socialist and neoliberal regimes because the new practices are directly related to and shaped by the repercussions of the socialist state, including the emotional and moral spheres. This brings us back to the question of uncertainty. The past is evoked to serve the uncertain present. Uncertainty helps us revisit our preconceived notions and find an opportunity to understand the diversity of practices from a new angle.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author is not aware of any biases that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

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