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Transition, Tradition, and Nostalgia; Postsocialist Transformations in a Comparative Framework

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A B S T R A C T

The concepts of transition and tradition have not been the object of much original theoretical work in recent Anglophone socio-cultural anthropology. The term transition has been applied loosely to the demise of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and their replacement by market economies and more pluralist forms of government. However, these objectives have proved elusive and most anthropologists therefore speak of open-ended »transformation processes« rather than a linear shift to capitalist democracy. Use of the concept of tradition has been much influenced by the work of historians on the »invention of tradition«. This paper explores how societies, in particular elite groups, construct different types of tradition in the wake of historical caesurae. Paying particular attention to the concept of nostalgia, it compares perceptions of the past in Britain, where social change has been largely gradual, with those in empires and states which experienced sharp political discontinuities in the twentieth century. To explain and understand nostalgia for socialism in large sections of the population in many postsocialist states, it is necessary to investigate not only economic and social mobility and related material factors but also factors pertaining to identity, especially collective identities.

Key words: *Britain, East Germany, heritage, identity, modernism, nostalgia, post-socialism, revolution, socialism, tradition*

Introduction

I welcome the opportunity which this conference provides to discuss how the familiar terms transition and tradition are used by specialists in very different fields of anthropology from that in which I myself work. As a social anthropologist (or, in an older vocabulary, ethnologist) who specialized in Eastern Europe when the region was still socialist, after 1990 I was inevitably drawn into the multidisciplinary debates of »transitology«. However, it is by no means straightforward to relate »the transition from communism« to transitions such as that in nutrition, addressed in other papers at this meeting. Since the collapse of the Soviet bloc, many Eastern European countries have experienced decline in significant sectors of health care; for some groups mortality figures have increased, at least temporarily. These patterns may be directly related to the transition that has concerned me in recent decades as a social anthropologist, but it is not obvious how they can be mapped on to the big transitions studied by colleagues in epidemiology and biogenetics.

Let me begin by noting that all three words in my title are common in contemporary English, with related forms in many other European languages. However, each can be used in a baffling variety of ways, even within the same language and within the same or closely related academic communities. It may be relatively easy for demographers to speak of demographic transition because there is a wide measure of consensus concerning the studied phenomena and the criteria to be applied; but even in this context I hear colleagues advising that it may be preferable to speak of a plurality of »transitions«. I suspect there is less agreement concerning criteria when archaeologists discuss the transition from the (upper) Palaeolithic, or when historians investigate the transition from feudalism to capitalism (to take two examples that have generated controversy in the past). The concept of transition is especially problematic in social anthropology, which has, for almost a century, been dominated by ethnographic methods. If what counts as evidence is determined primarily by fieldwork (»participant observation«), it might be supposed that these researchers have no need at all of a concept which presupposes diachrony. In practice, few of us limit ourselves to pure

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synchrony. In my own department at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology we have had a strong focus on postsocialist change, which entails the earlier referent: socialism. However, social and cultural anthropologists have generally criticised the term »transition« in this context, which they interpret as implying a specific known destination, that of capitalist market society[1]. Instead, through their ethnographic studies they have documented many examples of turbulent change, sometimes »transformation«, while generally emphasizing fuzziness and the uncertainty of outcomes. They have also drawn attention to continuities accompanying visible manifestations of rupture. Socio-cultural anthropologists have rarely documented a smooth transition to capitalism. This has put us at odds with mainstream representatives of larger disciplines such as economics and political science who, even if they too are interested in variation and »path dependency«, are more confident than we tend to be in applying general models of systemic change. More generally, anthropologists with diachronic interests have the same gut suspicion of »transition« which many historians feel when they come to periodize the past: transition is a weasel word, because every historical epoch is necessarily transitional in one sense or another.

Although we rarely argue for stasis or stagnation, many of the facets of social life that socio-cultural anthropologists specialise in, such as kinship, change only slowly when compared with the more dramatic caesurae in politics and economics. This is where *tradition* kicks in. Until recently, it was taken for granted that traditions by definition evolve gradually, organically so to speak, as the archetypal products of the *Volksgeist*. Many national scholarly traditions (note the word again) in European anthropology and ethnology have been infused with this spirit. The origins of these academic disciplines can be dated quite precisely to a certain »transition« in social organization, in the direction of industrial economies and nation-states. In recent decades, at least in Germany, all this has changed once again. In the era of Europeanization, the old *Volkskunde* has given way to a comparative *europäische Ethnologie*, a highly reflexive discipline with an epistemology little different from that of *Völkerkunde*, thus rendering the old distinction between these two branches of socio-cultural anthropology anachronistic. It seems to me that nowadays we sometimes fall into the opposite trap and, following the impact of Hobsbawm and Ranger[2], assume that everything which people present to us as tradition must be of recent invention, and therefore inauthentic if not completely spurious. Certainly we need to be aware that something important changes at the point when people start to become self-conscious about practices which had previously evolved with more spontaneity, before experts came along to codify costumes, songs and dances, and put them on the stage to represent communities, regions, and even nations. In Anatolia, for example, this transformation came in the twentieth century when a secular nation-state called Turkey replaced the Ottoman Empire. Its leaders even invented a new Turkish-sounding word for tradition, *gelenek*, though most people continued to use the Arabic-derived *örp-adet*, usually translated as custom[3]. Perhaps local communities were never altogether free of external interventions, but the impact of the outside world has undoubtedly increased, and continues to do so as the internet revolution follows those of radio and television. Some aspects of habitual behaviour may nonetheless display resilience to change, or they may change as a result of endogenous processes, »from within« rather than from without. However, the commodification of custom and traditions confronts almost all Europeans nowadays, be it museum artefacts, the everyday symbols of »banal nationalism«, or simply the products on the shelves at the local supermarket.

Nostalgia, my third term in this paper, has tight links to both tradition and transition. If we define nostalgia as the experience of a yearning for the past, at the social level it is presumably contingent on social change. We might expect such yearning to be greater if the change has been considerable, i.e. if some sort of radical transition has taken place. We might expect such nostalgia to manifest itself in a heightened interest in traditions of all kinds, to counter the sense of dislocation and rupture entailed by the transition. In this way, nostalgia would contribute to the formation of a conservative collective memory. But what about societies in which it is hard to specify precise moments of radical transition? Is nostalgia less significant in countries where changes in the domains of politics and economics are gradual and piecemeal? What happens when a »modernist« regime explicitly combats nostalgia and seeks to orient the population to a utopian future? If the futurist regime collapses, are people liable to fall back into the patterns of a collective memory preceding that regime? Or might four decades of socialist rule be sufficient to make large sections of the population nostalgic for an age in which nostalgia was strictly forbidden?

Numerous socio-cultural anthropologists have studied the discursive politics surrounding the specific term nostalgia (elements of irony, parody and commodification are especially prominent in Eastern Germany), but that is not the goal of this paper. I shall not elaborate a general model of nostalgia, nor even a partial typology. Instead I approach the conference theme of transition and tradition through comparisons limited to a few European empires and states that have been intensively studied by other social scientists. I begin by exploring the term nostalgia in a little more detail and contextualising the recent inflation in its use. I then reflect on the nature of collective nostalgia in Britain, an »old country« which has experienced no major political convulsions in recent centuries. In the third section I discuss two cases of imperial devolution, first the transition of Turkey, with one dramatic caesura in the twentieth century, and then that of Russia, with two. The fourth section extends the comparative analysis of postsocialist transformations and puts forward a hypothesis to account for at least some of the variation we find in individual and collective nostal-

gia for socialism more than two decades after its demise in Eastern Europe. In this section and in the Conclusion I argue that to explain postsocialist nostalgia we must, in addition to documenting the material »winners« and »losers« of the transition, also pay careful attention to a range of factors pertaining to collective identities.

Nostalgia

Unlike the Latin derivations transition and tradition, nostalgia is »pseudo-Greek, or nostalgically Greek«[4]. It was coined in 1688 by a Swiss doctor to refer to the distress which followed from being cut off, even by a short distance, from one's home(land). The term's semantic trajectory need not concern us here. Some postmodern theorizing harks back to the connotations of *algos* with pain and suffering. Boym refers to »the disease of an afflicted imagination« and »hypochondria« of the heart, while emphasizing that nostalgia was a »democratic« condition experienced by increasing numbers of displaced persons, rather than the individual melancholy of an elite. However, the pleasurable, even romantic associations of *nostos* with home and past emotional belonging seem stronger in contemporary everyday usage. Let us begin at the level of the individual. As I understand the term, nostalgia refers to basically positive emotions felt when looking back on a period of one's life which is over and which, in most cases, cannot possibly be recaptured. I take it for granted that in all societies there is considerable variation in the extent to which individuals experience such yearnings. Some of our friends and colleagues seem to enjoy reminiscing from an early age, when we might suppose that they really cannot have much to reminisce about. Others are consistently future-oriented, and long after their retirement they show no inclination to mull over their achievements (or failures) in earlier decades. We might cautiously suppose that the propensity of individuals to reflect on the past, including the possibility of nostalgic desire for it, will in all human societies increase over the life-course. However, nostalgia is more than just a consciousness of ageing and sensations of *memento mori*. Some external conditions affecting a person's life must be palpably different from what prevails in the present: for example, migration has led her to a new land, or social mobility has led him to new milieu, and whether or not they have become materially better off as a result of these transitions, those who have made such transitions may be prone to pangs of nostalgia for earlier ways of life.

Between the universal propensity and individual variation, anthropologists and historians have drawn attention to *collective* patterns in the ways societies conceptualize time and order experiences within it. The connections between individual and collective nostalgia may be tenuous. It is hard to imagine that the era of the Gulag camps could ever become a focus of collective nostalgia in Russia, but it is conceivable that some individual survivors experienced lyrical moments that they somehow miss in their later lives. In a further step, between the individual and the primary macro-collectivity (which in recent times has often been the nation) it will usually be important to distinguish particular sub-groups as key agents in the production of the collective memory. For example, shamans or other ritual agents were probably crucial in shaping the temporalities of the Palaeolithic through myth. This role was taken over by literate priests and clerks in the great agrarian empires, though mythical narratives transmitted orally remained extremely important. Nowadays we may hypothesize that history teachers and school text books are important, but other modes of transmission have by no means disappeared.

Both as a mass and an individual phenomenon, nostalgia – the practice itself and not just the word – seems to be very much a phenomenon of post-agrarian society, in which humans live longer and their mobility rates (both geographical and social) have greatly increased. The ethnologists who studied the »cold« societies of hunter-gatherers and tribal horticulturalists did not report significant levels of nostalgia or any similar temporality (although they themselves might express lyrical nostalgia for the disappearing »savage« worlds they documented; see Lévi-Strauss 1955[5]). Where the external conditions were basically unchanging, the precondition for nostalgia was missing: the berries or yams of one's childhood do not taste much different from the berries and yams of today. Quite a lot of work on egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies has indicated an emphatic presentism, consistent with an absence of storage technologies and investment possibilities. Even where investment becomes important in the economy, basic experiences of time in agrarian society are more likely to be cyclical, at least for most of the population. These perceptions are supplemented by cosmologies, some of which hold that the past was due to recur anyway, while some offer the promise of future salvation in another world.

By contrast, the »hot« societies of the industrial era are radically different. When time is conceived as linear, following the scientific revolution and the rise of factory work (no longer dependent on the seasons), the scope for nostalgia increases dramatically[4]. Nostalgia is therefore a pendant of our general paradigm of modernity, strongly associated with the growth of large cities. Because it is a sentimental disposition, it is better captured by creative writers or Cultural Studies scholars than by number-crunching social scientists. It enters a new stage with the decline of Fordist production systems and their associated »grand narratives«. This new stage is marked by the consolidation of neoliberal consumerism and the heritage industries. Svetlana Boym, a Professor of Comparative Literature, is more concerned more with aesthetics than with the social sciences, let alone medicine. Her conception of »restorative« nostalgia implies that an unwelcome transition has occurred, and that the damage it caused must be made good or cured. The term has become ubiquitous, often introduced in the same breath as »modernity« or »late capitalism« or »globalization«, with references to scholars such as Arjun Appadurai, Jean Baudrillard or Walter Benjamin. For example, for cul-

tural anthropologist Kathleen Stewart[6] nostalgia was a generic cultural practice, central to the *Zeitgeist* even before the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

However, there is no doubting that the fall of the Berlin Wall unleashed further penchants for nostalgia, previously rigorously suppressed in that particular variant of industrial modernity. This is one strong source of inspiration for Svetlana Boym herself, who is not afraid to broach the political dimensions of »post-communist memory« in Russia and Eastern Europe. As the transition from one-party rule and planned economies failed to bring the expected »blooming landscapes« (as promised to East Germans by German Chancellor Helmut Kohl in 1990), there has been an outpouring of academic works and journalistic commentaries on postsocialist nostalgia. In Germany, *Nostalgie* for socialism tends to be an ascriptive term applied by West Germans pejoratively to those former citizens of the German Democratic Republic who view some features of their old society in a positive light. The prominence of the term in the public sphere, e.g. in the naming of retro bars or the marketing of popular culture, has made it more difficult to assess what people really think and share in more intimate spheres. This is one instance of a more general problem concerning the relationship between personal memories and the efforts of other bodies, usually the state, to shape a collective memory following a radical transition. The editors of a recent collection suggest that »post-communist nostalgia« does not deserve its bad press[7]. This term is a crude misnomer, argues Zsuzsa Gille[8], because in practice people do not generalise about the entirety of their experiences before the transition. Rather, they look back selectively and, when certain elements are positively evaluated, cultivate nostalgia as a form of social critique in circumstances in which political channels to express their discontent do not work effectively. According to Gille, »the very existence of nostalgia symbolizes the evasion of talking about the past in the public sphere and in political terms«. I shall return to the complexity of postsocialist nostalgia below. First I want to broaden the framework by considering some contrasting cases.

Britain: No Institutional Watersheds since 1688

I have never conducted research in the country in which I was born, grew up, studied and worked for most of my life. Moving to Germany some fifteen years ago has intensified my perception of the remarkable historical continuities of my own *Heimatland*. I confess that I do occasionally experience light forms of nostalgia for the country that I continue to visit regularly, but in this section I shall address the phenomenon at the collective level. Even without having personal roots to distort the picture, it is tempting to »naturalise« modern British history, in other words to assume that what the academic experts call social or collective memory, which elsewhere we know to be soft and almost infinitely malleable, coincides in this case with something hard and objective called History. The danger to which we were alerted by George Orwell, that most English of writers, of the past being rewritten to suit the needs of the present, may be a reality in most countries of the world, but Arthur Bryant's »Protestant island« has been happily immune to major convulsions since the seventeenth century. We might therefore imagine that in the case of Britain the complex links between the subjective memories of persons and the unfolding narrative of the nation are unusually free of external manipulation.

Closer inspection undermines the image of a charmed island. Social memory turns out to be just as rich and differentiated in gradualist Britain as in those cases where new governments have repudiated their predecessors and, following the transition, set about instilling their own visions of the past on more or less truculent populations. It is possible even in Britain to identify turning points and hence transitions. In the twentieth century, two world wars had a massive impact on the victorious powers, and not only on the losers. If I were Irish, I might feel that the history of my country began afresh less than a hundred years ago. Of course, the northern part of that island has continued to suffer traumatic violence. But in other parts of the Celtic fringe the violence subsided in the very distant past. A path of liberal democratization has been followed more or less consistently in all parts of the main island for some two centuries. This change has been painfully slow: the social class background of the leaders of the present coalition government in London is the best evidence for the enduring conservatism and solidity of British society.

What does this imply for memory and nostalgia? Radicals will dispute any suggestion that the processes of social memory are »natural«. They are likely to point to the systematic instrumentalization of symbols, notably the symbols of royalty. The monarchy has moved closer to the people in the age of what Tom Nairn[9] calls »Windsordom«, but it continues to sustain domination: what other conclusion can be drawn from the fact that so many subjects report having dreams about the Queen stopping by for a cup of tea? The mass media clearly have the power to shape people's memories of the years through which they lived, be it the hardship of the war or the emancipatory music and fashions of the 1960s. Through costume dramas such as *Pride and Prejudice* as well as blockbuster documentaries such as Niall Ferguson's portrayal of *Empire,* television also has a massive impact on perceptions of the more distant past. The tone is basically celebratory. As early as 1985, Patrick Wright[10] drew attention to the impact of the neo-conservative policies of the Thatcher governments on our constructions and commemorations of the past. These tendencies surely have deeper roots, but processes of »heritagization« seem to have intensified since the 1980s, such that the *National Trust* itself now looks quaintly old-fashioned.

Nostalgia has flourished in connection with tourism, a major sector of the economy. Where I come from in South Wales, visitors can journey down the coal shaft of »Big Pit« and gain insight into the brutal working condi-

tions of close-knit mining communities. Until recently, many of the tour guides at Blaenavon were former miners, but that authenticity has now been lost. Unemployment rates are very high throughout what used to be an industrial region, with predictable consequences in terms of child poverty and other indicators of social distress. Yet emotions of nostalgia are cultivated at such heritage sites, even where capitalist exploitation and class conflict are recurring themes in the official narratives. The recent commemoration of the life and work of Charles Dickens (born in 1812) is further testimony to Britain's remarkable capacity to sanitize its history. Postmodernist marketing techniques and global tourism work to consolidate Whig narratives of history. Membership of a European Community (Union) and the opening of labour markets have played their part in promoting the search for what is peculiarly British, or English. These trends are reinforced by an array of institutions, from the school history curriculum to citizenship tests, and by events such as royal weddings and the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games.

However, Patrick Wright was careful not to present the British as the dupes of a dominant ideology. Socio-cultural anthropologists are expected to dig deeper into subjectivities and processes glossed nowadays in terms of *agency*, including socialization. Much of this knowledge transmission takes place informally, among friends and inside families. Some informal communication takes place inside formal state institutions. I can still recall my school geography teacher (Mr Cook) pointing to a new wall map of Africa in the mid-1960s, with its multi-coloured independent states, but telling us in the same breath with evident pride that until very recently the colour pink had prevailed in a continuous thick stripe between Cairo and Cape Town. Many of his pupils collected postage stamps and knew this much about the British Empire already. By this time the winds of change had blown almost all of the colonies away, but the Beatles, »swinging London« and winning the World Cup were smoothing the transition to a new British society. Today the 1960s, in turn, have long been mythologised. The combination of the Olympics, 200 years of Dickens, 60 for the sovereign's jubilee and 50 since the Rolling Stones played their first gig is ensuring that 2012 is a bumper year for a British speciality, the effortless commodification and internalization of a permanent nostalgia encompassing our entire social lives, empowering or disabling depending on one's point of view, but in any case *branding* the British of today in their old country.

Empires which Crashed

Other states which entered the twentieth century as major imperial powers had very different experiences from that of the British. One instructive contrast is the violent emergence of the Turkish Republic from the Ottoman Empire, which had been in gradual decline for centuries and finally collapsed in the wake of the First World War. With the establishment of the Republic in 1922, the army officer Mustafa Kemal (who later adopted the name Atatürk) set out to expunge as much as he could of the old empire and its society. He moved the capital, abolished the Caliphate and instituted strict control over religion by organs of the secular state. He rewrote history to suit the ideological needs of the new nationalism, and made the rupture even more complete by reforming the language and writing it in a new script. Many of those literate in the old script never mastered the new one. We may suppose high levels of nostalgia in such groups, though such sentiments had to be confined to the private sphere. However, overall literacy increased dramatically in the following generations, as Anatolian rural society was modernized and industrialized. Healthcare also improved. We may suppose that few of these villagers were nostalgic for the high child mortality rates of the past.

This case, then, exemplifies rupture. However, some of the social anthropological contributions have tended to detect continuities over an extended process of transition. Paul Stirling, who went to Anatolia as a student of Evans-Pritchard in 1949, found that the dramatic changes legislated by Atatürk in his new capital city were only just beginning to transform life and customs in the villages in the 1950s[11]. Later ethnographers emphasized the resilience of traditional political hierarchies[12] and of religious practices[13]. Stirling himself went back to Turkey again and again, revisiting the village of his original fieldwork and following its families as labour migrants to the major cities of Turkey and also to Germany. He emphasized the enormity of the changes which took place in these decades, eventually describing them as a »cognitive« transformation, since the amount and diversity of the information processed by each individual were so different from what had characterised Anatolian villagers in the past[14]. Paul Stirling assessed this transition positively, but others have taken a less sanguine view, pointing out that it is possible to retain and reproduce much of the mentality of the village when living in the Cologne, Kreuzberg or »parallel societies« elsewhere in Germany. These are complex issues: it would be facile to attribute the rise of fundamentalism and honour killings among Turks and Kurds in contemporary Germany to nostalgia for the purity of rural Anatolia[15].

Atatürk's state proved fragile and between 1960 and 1980 its core institutions could only be protected by a series of military interventions. Since 1980, however, a gradualist reform process has seen the rise of a moderate Islamism, increasingly infused with Turkish nationalism[16]. This has opened new spaces for nostalgia, in particular for the Ottoman institutions swept away so abruptly in the 1920s. For example, some members of the Istanbul intelligentsia have rediscovered the cosmopolitan heritage of their city, which they may or may not theorize in terms of Western liberal multiculturalism. Although they are secular or Muslim, they make pilgrimages to Orthodox Christian sites such as the monastery of St. George on Princes Island, partly as a way of differentiating themselves from the mass of new immigrants from

Anatolia, disqualified from partaking in the imperial traditions of the metropolis[17].

However, the rise to power of the moderate Islamists has also brought about another, quite different form of nostalgia. Nostalgia for »the modern«[18] refers to the sense of loss now experienced by those large sections of the population who came, in the course of some three generations, to valorise the secular republic, and who now feel threatened as its key institutions are increasingly called into question by the forces of Islamism and global neoliberalism. The cultural anthropologist Esra Özyürek documents how the old elites have begun commemorating their golden age in the 1930s. They collect memorabilia of Atatürk privately, in the intimacy of their homes, because this is where the legitimacy of power is now based, rather than in the strong state tradition which the Kemalists took over from the Ottomans. It is hard to predict how the ensuing tensions will play out. Perhaps the best one can hope for is that Turkey will continue its gradualist path, such that its citizens will be able to indulge in both forms of nostalgia, for Atatürk and for the great Sultans, and eventually somehow incorporate them into a single encompassing collective narrative analogous to that of Britain. With the centenary of the founding of Atatürk's republic only a decade away, a synthesis is urgently needed.

The end of the First World War also brought the demise of other multicultural empires in Europe. Nowadays Habsburg nostalgia is as ripe for commercial exploitation in the Galician centres of Cracow (Southern Poland) and L'viv (Western Ukraine) as it has long been inside the Ring at the old imperial capital. Nostalgia is rather more problematic in the other, junior half of the so-called dual monarchy. Even so, the architecture of central Budapest betrays its development as an imperial capital before the First World War. Some contemporary Hungarians prefer to look back nostalgically to this era, when they played second fiddle to Vienna under Habsburg rule, because their nation had more power and even more dignity in that imperial formation than it had in the »mutilated« states which followed it, first capitalist, then socialist, and now capitalist again.

In Russia, the third great imperial power of Eastern Europe at the start of the century, the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917. Here, too, as under Atatürk, the initial visions were militantly futurist, but the Soviet commitment to federalism was a major difference. Russian nationalism was stifled not so much by the internationalist rhetoric of Marxism as by the need to control and develop a vast periphery. Compared to Kemalist Turkey, in the USSR a much higher price in terms of human suffering was paid for social transformation, above all during the decade of collectivization and the purges. The Second World War, known to Russians the Great Patriotic War, brought a respite and even a certain rapprochement with the principal surviving institution of the ancient regime, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). This did not last long. We do not know much about the persistence of religion and an associated nostalgia in the cracks of the system, inside families and »underground«, in the last decades of Soviet socialism. The next significant rapprochement with the ROC did not come until the age of *perestroika*, when the millennium of eastern Christianity in 1988 coincided with the beginning of the end of the USSR. Throughout the Soviet decades the full force of the state-controlled media and ritual cycle was deployed in service of the state's version of the past. Spaces were eventually opened to commemorate the heroism of those who built socialism and put the first man into space, as well as those who defeated Hitler. But public signs of nostalgia for the pre-revolutionary era were problematic to the end.

The changes which occurred in Russia in the 1990s are broadly similar to those which have occurred in Turkey since 1983 – they were simply very much more abrupt, both in politics and in economics. Divested of the autonomous republics, Russians were now free to indulge their own nationalism. They did so, as in Turkey, in a tight alliance with the dominant religion. The ROC revived its historic mission as the »third Rome« and many ex-Communists from President Putin downwards discovered their religious identities. Throughout the land, politicians invited priests to join them for the celebration of public rituals. Private businessmen invited priests to bless their new enterprises and, in place of the Soviet works outing, they now organized pilgrimages for their workforce[19]. As in Turkey, the dominant religion is seeping into public education, typically in the guise of »Orthodox culture«[20].

Just as some Turkish citizens are nostalgic for the modernity of Kemalism, so Russia's postsocialist transformation has generated nostalgia for the modernity of socialism, both for the early years when nostalgia was precluded by militant future-oriented temporality and for the later consolidation and relaxation which took place under Leonid Brezhnev. The disruption caused by the sudden shift to a market economy in the 1990s condemned millions to poverty and insecurity. Yet nostalgia is not experienced only by the economic »losers« of the transition. Tobias Köllner found that some of those who, according to most objective criteria, should be classified as »winners« of the transformation, nonetheless experienced a sense of loss and a related nostalgia for the security they had enjoyed in their former socialist places of work. Conversely, some »losers« did *not* experience such sentiments, e.g. if they had in the meantime found their way to God or to a newly meaningful national identity. By no means all victims of postsocialist transformation in terms of what we might call their »class position« vote consistently for the successor to the old Communist Party.

A Comparative Approach to Postsocialist Nostalgia

With these points from Russia in mind, throughout contemporary Eastern Europe we can broach the dynamics of multiple nostalgias, both for socialism and for what

preceded it. Todorova and Gille (2010) stress that nostalgia does not take the form of a totalizing package, since individual subjects are in practice able to differentiate elements they miss and value highly from those which they detested then and still detest now. This is surely true. And yet in my experience many do, at least in some situations, volunteer blanket opinions. They often phrase them in terms of values.[I] For some, the value system of socialism was incompatible with their view of what makes a healthy society. But for many others the core values of socialism remain attractive, and they may appear even more attractive from the very different vantage point people have today, deep in neoliberal economic recession. This does not mean that they have forgotten all the negative aspects, from queuing up to obtain groceries to the application of political criteria in the allocation of jobs; but even quite gross abuses can be retrospectively rationalized as imperfections in the implementation of attractive ideals, whereas today's market society seems to many to be altogether devoid of moral values.

Of course, each country (and sometimes separate regions within countries) has its own peculiarities. Some Germans may prefer to look back to their own days as a glorious imperial power rather than to the Weimar Republic (monuments commemorating Bismarck remain prominent in many parts of the country). As noted, some Hungarians find it easier to experience nostalgia for the Habsburg Empire than for either the inter-war state of Admiral Horthy or the »goulash socialism« of János Kádár. However, for the purposes of this paper I shall concentrate on the transition from socialism to post-socialism. Acknowledging that Economic (»class«) factors must play a major role in predisposing some people to experience nostalgia for socialism, my argument is that nostalgia is also shaped by what I term identity factors and changes in the polity. Specifically, where a socialist federal state was split up, it might be anticipated that disillusionment can be assuaged through new modalities of national manipulation, and hence nostalgia levels reduced. By contrast, where a socialist state disappeared altogether, we can predict that nostalgia for socialism is likely to be high.

The *Deutsche Demokratische Republik* (DDR) is the only case we have of a socialist state which disappeared. According to the rhetoric of reunification (*Wiedervereinigung*), there never was more than one German *Vaterland*. The restoration of congruence between political and cultural boundaries should therefore have been welcomed by all Germans, in just the same way as in the cases of the Slovaks, Slovenes and the others. However, the »flowering landscapes« did not materialise. East German industry was annihilated by the strong capitalism of the West, resulting in high levels of unemployment and the large-scale exodus of skilled workers to the West. In the public sector, including academic and scientific fields, most senior staff were purged to make way for West Germans. It was sufficient to have been a member of the old Communist Party (usually a precondition for high office under the *ancien régime*) to be disqualified for office under the new regime. All this distinguished the transformation of East Germany from that of every other state in the region. The emergence of the category »*Ossi*« and its deployment by both eastern and western Germans led serious academic analysts to suggest that the former now qualified as an ethnic group, according to the standard criteria used in defining such a group[21,22]. Whereas in Russia and elsewhere the collapse of socialism transformed titular minority nationalities into new nation-states, in this case an overwhelming *majority* (the Sorbs were the only recognized minority in the DDR) became a stigmatized *minority* in the new amalgam.

Some aspects of the resulting *(N)ostalgie* for the days when eastern German matters were determined by eastern Germans, as well as symbols such as the Trabant and the *Ampelmännchen*, have become well known internationally through the success of films such as *Goodbye Lenin* and *Sonnenallée*.[II] Thanks to *The Life of Others* and a phenomenal output of STASI-related literature, everyone is also aware of the repugnant practices that made the DDR one of the most repressive of all socialist regimes. (It was, for example, for many years afraid to allow its citizens freedom of travel eastwards to »unreliable« Poland, let alone westwards.) We need to bear in mind that virtually all these representations of the former East, the playful as well as the diabolical, have been controlled by West Germans, as Paul Cooke[23] has neatly elaborated with the help of postcolonial theory. The trivialization of socialism through the selling of kitsch souvenirs to tourists at Checkpoint Charlie reflects the unified market society which has replaced the Wall. It is not surprising that many young people in the East react negatively to the hype of *Ostalgie* and emphasize what they have in common with all Germans of their generation. They reject the designations *Ossi* and *Wessi*[24]. Yet we know from anthropological investigations undertaken after the *Wende* that many older East Germans do look back with nostalgia for the lost sociality of their brigades[25]. In the harsh climate of the *Hartz Vier* labour market regulations, many yearn for the range of social supports formerly provided by their enterprises[26,27]. Supermarkets in the east still find it profitable to reserve shelves for *Ostprodukte*, usually brands dating to the socialist era, which have acquired the aura of regional tradition and which people prefer to the new international competitors.

Nostalgia may help individuals to cope, either alone or in groups of people who share life histories. In Eastern Germany it can hardly be therapeutic or »curative« (in

(I) I thank Pavao Rudan for drawing my attention to the importance of the value system, in the discussion which followed my presentation of an earlier version of this paper at the Hvar conference.

(II) For analysis of these films see Berdahl 2010[28], Boyer 2011[29], Cooke 2005, Dale 2006[30], Hann 2008.

the terminology of Svetlana Boym) because in the public sphere there *is* no healing process to speak of. East Germans voted for unification but were then disadvantaged by its economic and social consequences. For those who lost their jobs, the decline in material conditions could be a decline in absolute terms. Recent figures indicate that the economic gap between east and west is growing, two decades after unification; both wages and pensions in the east remain significantly below western levels. For others, whether or not they use the *Ossi-Wessi* dichotomy, it is more accurate to speak of a new sense of relative deprivation vis-à-vis West Germans. A combination of material and immaterial factors leads some East Germans to cultivate an ambivalent nostalgia, which is more likely to manifest itself in the consumption of *Ostprodukte* than in support for hardline factions within the former communist party. As Daphne Berdahl (2010) recognized very early, this *(N)ostalgie* seldom reflected a sincere wish to restore the encompassing world of »actually existing socialism«. It was rather an expression of resentment at the extent to which not only jobs but also vast swathes of everyday popular culture (including sport, of which citizens of the German Democratic Republic had previously had good reason to be proud) were now dominated by West Germans. People reacted negatively to denigration in the mass media, where *Ost* was equated with a mentality of shabby complaining and state dependence, as well as the material culture of two-stroke engines and *Plattenbau* apartments. No wonder, then, that such devaluation led millions to recall the positive elements in their life-histories. Some of these elements only added fuel to the deprecation of the *Wessis*. While *Ossis* recalled the freedoms they enjoyed in certain privileged niches, such as the Kleingarten (allotment), *Wessis* pontificated that such niches were hardly a substitute for democracy and a free civil society; and so the *Mauer in den Köpfen* came to outlive the material wall which divided Berlin for nearly three decades.[III]

Of course, *Ossis* also pointed to female participation in the labour force and the availability of excellent childcare facilities as positive features of their lost society. Here they touched a sensitive theme for many *Wessis,* who had to concede that in some fields at least the citizens of the former DDR had good reason to mourn the passing of a system that, by the usual Western criteria, was more modern than the one imposed in its place. Some have welcomed the revival of religion in the public sphere and church schools, just like the supporters of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey. But others are nostalgic for the decades of a modernity that was unambiguously secular and deplore the waste of public money in rebuilding churches destroyed under socialism.

The opposite case to that of the disappearance of the German Democratic Republic is the socialist federal state which gave rise to multiple independent sovereign states. Here I can draw neither on fieldwork nor on years of residence to support my analysis; nor am I familiar with very much of the specialist literature. But it seems *a priori* plausible to suggest that even those not strongly committed to the new station-state for purely patriotic reasons will be obliged to focus energies on reconstructing the political landscape and securing their place within it. Such people will be too busy to wallow in nostalgia for the *ancien régime*. My impression is that some of the factors I noted above for Russia are also relevant to the cases of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Widespread disillusionment with the socio-economic consequences of the collapse of the socialist order is at least in some measure mitigated by national independence. However, it also needs to be born in mind that some citizens of the today's Russian Federation may feel pangs of nostalgia for the socialist imperial formation they have lost. Similar sentiments may not be unknown in Serbia, clearly the most powerful of the Yugoslav republics albeit not the most prosperous[32].

Of course the three cases differ greatly. Czechoslovakia's »velvet divorce« could hardly contrast more strongly with the extreme violence and large-scale loss of life experienced in the Western Balkans. This violence has contributed to the phenomenon of »Yugo-nostalgia«. A sense of Yugoslav identity appears to have been gaining ground in the later decades of socialism, cemented especially among the young by unified sports teams and common experiences in the army[33]. The legacy of the violence of the 1990s is not obvious: for some, an interpretation in terms of sacrifice for the national cause, possibly more common among the men who wielded the weapons, may tend to diminish nostalgia for the earlier constraints of federation. For others, the same violence may engender nostalgia for the peace and relative security which prevailed previously. Women in particular may look back more positively on an era in which childcare provision and their prospects of employment were better than the options available today. In short, we can expect Yugo-nostalgia to vary according to gender as well as age and occupational group. Due to the peculiarities of self-management and much greater regional heterogeneity, accentuated from 1974 onwards by constitutional changes, non-aligned Yugoslavia became ever less like the more balanced federalism administered from Prague. Yugoslavia did not collectivize agriculture, a point of fundamental significance for millions. Unlike Poland, which also opted to avoid the modernization of its agricultural sector, Yugoslavia allowed millions of its citizens free access to the labour markets of West Germany and other western countries. In spite of these and many other differences, this variant of federalist socialism still had much in common with the single-party régimes of neighbouring states and therefore has to be integrated into the comparative framework.

[III] For a trenchant analysis of how »liberal« East German elites contributed to the processes of West German domination, see Boyer 2011: 20-2. He sees the German case as illustrating a more general »allochronization« of Eastern Europe by Western Europeans who have lost their global imperial dominance, but cannot accept upstarts in their backyard. For a quite different perspective from a native, see Gallinat 2009[31].

Conclusion

Like the term »revolution«, which I have examined recently in another context[34], the term »transition« has been called upon for a great variety of tasks in different academic traditions. I do not dispute its usefulness to demographers or epidemiologists, if they can agree on rigorous specifications. However, in large social science literatures, such as those on »the transition to market economy« or »democracy transition«, transition seems to be a weasel word, in urgent need of more precision. To the extent that political events impose their visible, self-evident ruptures, persons and groups may develop emotions and opinions towards what was left behind. In the case of socialism, this means an entire social order: the political changes reached promptly and profoundly to penetrate the domestic sphere, e.g. through cuts in child care provision. High levels of nostalgia are to be expected at various levels: the individual, families, social groups of many kinds, and even entire nations. But is nostalgia itself another weasel word, which confuses more than it illuminates?

My basic assumption is that collectivities, like individuals, have histories. To impose order on their continuous movement through time, some form of periodization is necessary, just as individuals create order when constructing their biographies. In the history of societies, neither stagnation nor revolutionary transformation is ever a realistic descriptor (though some academic historians have fantasised about the former, and the latter is projected by utopian visionaries of many kinds). These collective entities are defined by memories, which are socially formed. Nostalgia needs to be investigated in this broad context. The interdisciplinary literature suggests that we need to pay attention to very general processes of modernization: yearning for a halcyon past is likely to intensify when social change is rapid, when utopias are frequently reformulated and futures become increasingly uncertain. People who feel nostalgia may or may not *really* wish to retrieve what they present as idyll. Generally this is impossible, because the transition to something new is irreversible. It follows that their sentiments must be understood as commentary on the *present*, and even as a form of resistance to the prevailing order, with implications for *future* alternatives. In the case of the transition from socialism, we need to be alert to high levels of commercial and political manipulation of the discourse of nostalgia, mainly by Western elites but with the significant connivance of local elites who have their own good reasons for despising the »backwardness« of their countrymen.

Nostalgia may be more conspicuous where social change has been »punctuated« by major political upheaval, but similar past-oriented emotions occur and are liable to manipulation in countries where change is more gradualist. I began this paper by comparing the case of Britain's imperial decline with cases of sudden, not to say cataclysmic change in Turkey and Russia. Attempting to eliminate nostalgia through utopian futurism and repression of alternative narratives of the past may be counterproductive: they may result in the persistence over generations of strong, even virulent strains of nostalgia where state power fails to penetrate, in the private sphere. This does not mean that subjectively experienced nostalgia in the more liberal society is formed naturally, in some ideal sphere free of constraint.

It is further instructive to make comparisons in a second phase, long after the original caesura of political transition. Turkey exemplifies a gradualist counterrevolution, in comparison with the more radical rupture that brought about the end of the Soviet Union. Neither of these cases was framed as a restoration. The restorations and revolutions of seventeenth century England also need careful scrutiny: rhetorical claims may have far-reaching effects, but the fit with material, institutional change is never straightforward.

In the final section, I probed different experiences of postsocialist nostalgia in Eastern Europe. Some countries have aspired to the ideals of restoration, e.g. Hungary, where the official narratives emphasize the crown of King (Saint) Stephen and a glorious past, while in my own experiences there is a good deal of nostalgia in many sections of the population for the often undignified but pragmatic and generally rather successful compromises of »market socialism«. I advanced a simple framework to suggest how, in accounting for patterns of nostalgia, economistic models of winners and losers rooted in »class« factors need to be modified by changes in the polity and factors pertaining to ethnicity and nation, or in the most general formulation »identity«. Some loser or victim groups which might look rather similar on paper in East Germany and, say, the Czech Republic, may turn out to diverge considerably when it comes to actual patterns of yearning for (particular elements of) the socialist past. The case of former Yugoslavia is complicated by violence and warfare, which were strongly coloured (but perhaps not ultimately determined) by pre-existing identity-based conflicts. Generalising, one can suggest that the disposition to nostalgia for (some elements of) socialism is not reducible to either the economic performance, or the political nastiness of the particular regime, or the extent of manipulation of discourse by the new hegemonic power. Identity factors also matter. Nor is this a simple matter of ethnic or national identity. In the case of East Germany, the derogatory term *Ossi* emerged as a novel regional identity, at least at the level of discourse, following the elimination of the state, coupled with a deterioration of material conditions, sometimes in absolute as well as relative terms. Elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the fragmentation of federal states into national entities probably tended to diminish the propensity to nostalgia in many (not necessarily all) social groups, although the incidence of violence and economic dislocation must also be taken into account.

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TRANZICIJA, TRADICIJA I NOSTALGIJA; POSTSOCIJALISTIČKE TRANSFORMACIJE U POREDBENOM OKVIRU

SAŽETAK

Koncepti tranzicije i tradicije nisu bili česta tema originalnih teoretskih radova u recentnoj anglofonoj sociokulturnoj antropologiji. Pojam tranzicije primjenjivao se uglavnom vrlo neodređeno i odnosio prvenstveno na socijalističke režime istočne Europe i njihovu zamjenu tržišnim ekonomijama i pluralističkim oblicima vlasti. No pokazalo se da je pojam tranzicije suviše kompleksan i varljiv pa većina antropologa danas radije govori o „transformacijskim procesima« nego o lineranom prijelazu na kapitalističku demokraciju. Rad povjesničara na „izmišljanju tradicije« imao je velik utjecaj na korištenje pojma tranzicija. Ovaj rad istražuje kako društva, a posebno njezini elitni slojevi, stvaraju razne tipove tranzicija. Obračajući posebnu pažnju konceptu nostalgije, rad uspoređuje percepciju povijesti u Velikoj Britaniji, gdje su se društvene promjene odvijale relativno postepeno, s onom u državama koje su proživjele velike političke prevrate u dvadesetom stoljeću. Kako bismo mogli što bolje objasniti nostalgiju za socijalizmom koja postoji u velikom dijelu mnogih postsocijalističkih društava, potrebno je istražiti ne samo ekonomsku i društvenu mobilnost i srodne materijalne faktore, već i faktore kao što su identitet, osobno i kolektivno.