Together, these chapters underscore the importance of historical and regional contexts as key to understanding how an emergent middle class might behave, or what their contribution might be to political change. Especially in the context of rapid globalization and the stress of increased global competition, new anxieties may undermine potential democratic impulses.

At the same time, these chapters suggest alternative possibilities: with global connections so accessible, could new, perhaps less predictable, political identities and social movements emerge? How will individuals in these emergent economies draw on newly acquired cultural capital to reconfigure political identities? What alliances might they seek? Above all, these chapters demonstrate the importance of the questions: however varied the answers, we are likely to be paying more attention to this emergent middle class in the future.

THE END OF COMMUNISM IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE THE LAST MIDDLE-CLASS REVOLUTION?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter offers a few stylized observations about the middle class and its role in the fall of communist regimes in East Central Europe. I claim that successive East European modernization projects during the 20th century (intrawar, communist, and postcommunist) were essentially middle-class "revolutions from above." They occurred in a backward region among late modernizers keenly aware of their peripheral position and were based on and carried out by the state. Both a product of the state and dependent on it, the middle class was the main actor and supporter of these modernization efforts. I also argue that the Solidarity movement in 1980/81 and the 1989 collapse of communism were the last successful middle-class revolutions. Hopes for another political rebellion against postcommunist authoritarianism may be misplaced, since the transformational potential of the East European middle class, produced by the peculiarities of communist rule, has been exhausted. Fast progressing modernization, segmentation, and fragmentation of identity of the postcommunist middle class brought about by the economic, cultural and political integration with the West undercut its mobilizational

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potential and its role as an agent of political transformations. The East European middle-class revolution against communist rule can offer four basic lessons. First, the middle class is a cultural and historical not economic phenomenon. Second, it is extremely rare for the middle class to become a collective actor, the class for itself. Third, the main competitors of middle-class identity are nationalism, ethnicity and religion. Finally, postmodernity with its fluidity, uncertainty, fractured identities, fragmented lifestyles, consumption patterns, and status configuration does not provide facilitating conditions for middle-class solidarity and mobilization, making it politically feeble.

This chapter is designed to offer a few stylized observations about the middle class and its role in the fall of communist regimes in East Central Europe. Some of my claims may be banal, misguided, or both, especially from the point of view of social science disciplines other than political science. Nevertheless, it may be useful to reexamine East and Central European experiences in order to question some entrenched interpretations and debates about class transformations in the region. While working-class nostalgia is on the rise and the "missing" middle-class debate is quickly receding, the question of what the structural underpinnings of both successful consolidations of democracy and authoritarian reversals in the region are is as important as ever.

My starting point based on Eyal, Szeleny, and Townsley (1998) work is that successive East European modernization projects during the 20th century (intrawar, communist, and postcommunist) were essentially middle-class "revolutions from above." They occurred in a backward region among late modernizers keenly aware of their peripheral position. As one would expect in cases of late development, such projects were based on and carried out by the state. Both a product of the state and dependent on it, the middle class was the main actor and supporter of these modernization efforts. I will also argue that the Solidarity movement in 1980/81 and the 1989 collapse of communism were the last successful middle-class revolutions. Hopes for another political rebellion against postcommunist authoritarianism may be misplaced, since the transformational potential of the East European middle class, produced by the peculiarities of communist rule, has been exhausted. Fast progressing modernization, segmentation, and fragmentation of identity of the postcommunist middle class brought about by the economic, cultural, and

political integration with the West undercut its mobilizational potential and its role as an agent of political transformations.

East Central Europe is a useful comparative case for other modernizing societies (especially in Latin American and Asia), since it has been an arena of recurring modernization attempts aimed at alleviating its status as the underdeveloped periphery of Western Europe. These efforts were framed in various ideological guises (nationalist, fascist, communist, third way, liberal) and often involved policies aimed at comprehensive transformations of social, political, cultural, and economic institutions, structures, and hierarchies in the region. Since these were economically backward and late developing states, the propagators of such modernization projects were distinctive coalitions of state actors, as well as segments of the traditional upper and newly emerging middle classes collectively described in the region as the *intelligentsia*. As national education systems gradually expanded the ranks of the learned classes and the process of state-building offered them new opportunities for employment, the role of the *intelligentsia* became more prominent not only inside the state apparatus but also in representative institutions (if they existed) as well as in society at large.

In their brilliant analysis, Eyal et al. (1998) showed that since the mid-19th century a specific East European middle class produced by, dependent on, and allied to the state (variously called *bildungsburgertum*, *intelligentsia*, intellectuals, or cultural bourgeoisie) was at the center of successive modernization efforts across the region. While political elites designed and implemented these projects and antithetical political ideologies legitimized their goals, successive transformation attempts over the last century or so can plausibly be seen as a series of middle-class revolutions driven by middle-class interests and aspirations. In each successive transformation the position of the middle class was strengthened and its role greatly expanded. Even during communist rule, "the educated elite [was] the most rapidly expanding part of the population for several decades" (Bauman, 1987, p. 181) and the main beneficiary of the communist policies.

As has often been noted, the middle class in Central and Eastern Europe was the product of a specific pattern of regional socioeconomic development (see, for example, Szucs, 1988; Chalasinski, 1946; Gella, 1988; Kocka, 1995; Balzer, 1996). While academic debates about the past and present nature of the middle class in Central and Eastern Europe continue, I assume that the German notion of *bildungsburgertum* or East European notion of *intelligentsia* captures the essence and peculiarity of the middle-class formation in the region. Essentially a culturally constructed and identity-based

social category, the *intelligentsia* inherited the ethos of the gentry with its disdain for the laboring classes and petty bourgeoisie. It constituted a cultural and intellectual milieu based on the attainment of higher education, professional skills, and social standing secured by mostly state (or church) employment. This identity was built on a shared system of norms and values, a kind of moral economy or ethics of duty that emphasized obligations to the community, nation, and cultural tradition. Being a member of the *intelligentsia* was thus often perceived as a calling, with the ensuing obligation of involvement in public service and adherence to higher moral standards. What distinguished the *intelligentsia* from the laboring classes was its social status, sense of mission, and appreciation for high culture. Taste, not wealth, was a sign of belonging.

This cultural milieu, epitomized by the educated middle classes, rapidly expanded after the introduction of mass education and the rise of independent states in the region after World War I. The *intelligentsia* was the ruling class of intrawar East Central Europe, the main agent of nation-building, and the main beneficiary of intrawar state-building and socio-economic transformations. While World War II and the imposition of communist regimes decimated the ranks of the prewar intelligentsia, the surviving segments of the middle class quickly joined the revolutionary transformations taking place after the war. Ranks of the postwar *intelligentsia*, moreover, were rapidly expanded by the newly educated groups produced by the communist higher education system and employed by the communist state. Consequently, the *intelligentsia* soon recovered its role as the dominant social class under the newly established communist systems (Konrad & Szelenyi, 1979).

The East European middle class has thus been a constant and influential political and social force in societies of the region from the mid-19th century to the present. After 1989, as Bauman (2006, pp. 213–215) noted, the East European "'*intelligentsia*' has entered the late-modern, liquid-modern or postmodern world carrying along memories of the now bygone *Sturm and Drang* era of modernity, nation- and state-building, with the unique role of prophets, pattern-setters, guides and teachers of the would-be nation and republic it assigned to its 'knowledge class'; memories that survived the years of storage in the communist refrigerator." At the same time, the middle class that was inherited from the communist period experienced rapid modernization, expansion, professionalization and what Mokrzycki (1993) called the "gentrification of the *intelligentsia*." As result, a new layer of *besitzburgertum* (the propertied middle class) was added to the already strong and expanding ranks of the *bildungsburgertum*.

It is ironic, therefore, that social scientists and commentators in the region largely agreed that the middle class was missing or exceedingly weak in East and Central European societies in the wake of communism's collapse. The great debate concerning the "absent" middle class took place in Central Europe in the early 1990s and more recently among the post-Soviet states.[1] Scholars have eagerly traced signs that a new middle class was emerging, utilizing social stratification research and public opinion polls. This frantic search reflects the classic normative belief in the beneficial functions of the middle class as a bulwark against extremism and tyranny, which dates back to Aristotle. In contemporary social sciences, the link between the middle class and democracy was elaborated by the modernization school (Lipset, 1959), historical sociology (Moore, 1966), and more recently it has been revived by economists studying globalization and the emergence of a global middle class (Economist, 2009). It has been claimed that only a large middle stratum, individualistic in outlook, economically independent, and profit maximizing in behavior can provide support and stability for newly established market economies and democracy.

While the connection between the middle class (or the bourgeoisie), market economies, and democracy has been well established, the belief in its transformational potential (so forcefully argued by Marx) and "natural" affinity for liberalism – which underlies so many arguments about the rise of a global middle class – may be misplaced. As Nikitin (2010) argues "expecting to stumble across the depositories of Russia's revolutionary and emancipatory energies amidst the ranks of boring, risk averse, status-obsessed, insecure, conformist, careerist, straight-laced businessman and upwardly mobile professionals would be like trying to catch a glimpse of Solzhenitsyn at the Politburo meeting." This critique of the Russian middle class is oddly reminiscent of the contempt for the petty bourgeoisie present in Marxist thought. Is the middle class under conditions of postmodernity just another version of the narrow-minded, sentimental, and conformist petty bourgeoisie of a bygone era, or should it be viewed as a real engine of economic and political transformation? Can it become a powerful political actor and advocate of democracy across the globe as it was in 1989 Eastern and Central Europe, or was the middle class produced by the communist system a historical anachronism and social oddity and its political role a historical exception?

EAST CENTRAL EUROPEAN MIDDLE CLASS UNDER STATE SOCIALISM AND BEYOND

The defining predicament of East Central Europe in the modern period was its peripheral economic position in the European division of labor, its social and cultural backwardness, and the fondness of its elites for Western ideas, goods, and institutions. As Rupnik (1999, p. 13) once put it, "the original paradox of Central European politics is the incongruity between its endorsement of Western civilization, political ideas and institutions and the reality of the area's social and economic development, as well as complexities of its ethnic puzzle." The problem of backwardness has been seen as the enduring constraint on social and economic development in Central and Eastern Europe and the source of its political problems by a wide range of scholars (Gerschenkron, 1992; Chirot, 1989; Janos, 1981, 1997, 2000). While Chirot (1989, p. 10) noted, "Eastern Europe was backward in many different ways ... [t]here were different degrees of backwardness, different political and class histories, and different cultural traditions," countries of the region had in common underdeveloped agrarian economies, weak urban centers, an anemic indigenous bourgeoisie, large ethnic minorities, and hostile neighbors. These shared problems set the conditions for the adoption of coercive, top-down, statist developmental strategies that endured throughout the 20th century. Statism, as Rothschild (1993, p. 21) emphasized, "is a trait of continuity from the interwar period to contemporary East Central Europe."

During the intrawar period, in all countries of the region state elites allied with various groups within society pursued vigorously a variety of modernization projects. The results of these efforts, however, were rather dismal. None of the major social, economic, and political problems (land reform, rural poverty, ethnic problems, industrial underdevelopment, unemployment, political polarization, etc.) were solved. Instead, radically protectionist economic policies, together with global economic difficulties in the 1920s and 1930s, contributed to persistent political and social tensions and conflicts (Kofman, 1997; Berend, 2001). With the exception of Czechoslovakia, these countries remained largely underdeveloped agrarian economies with low per capita income, widespread poverty, high unemployment, and an overpopulated countryside. At the same time, social conflicts and political polarization were intense and the overgrown modernizing states in the region were plagued by authoritarian temptations.

Summarizing the experiences of the intrawar period, Janos (2000) quipped that the more things changed the more they stayed the same.

Owing to its socioeconomic underdevelopment and its complex ethnic *bricolage*, the region had a distorted class structure (of course, by West European standards) with a miniscule working class, large peasantry, weak and ethnically divided bourgeoisie, and a decaying but still influential native nobility and landowning class. With the emergence of independent states in the early 20th century, mass education, nation-building, and the challenges of late development, a new ruling class ascended to power across the region. "This political ruling class was not, contrary to conventional assumptions, the bourgeoisie, which was quite weak and either dependent on state subsidies or else ethnically 'alien' and hence vulnerable. Rather it was the bureaucracy, which was allied with, and recruited from, the *intelligentsia*" (Rothschild, 1974, p. 17; see also Konrad & Szelenyi, 1979, p. 10). This new class, that Eyal et al. (1998, p. 60) call "the first *bildungsburgertum*," was a collective agent and the bearer of a normative project to modernize society and create modern nation-states. Its dominant role in the state apparatus and its capacity to shape political and economic outcomes illustrate the paradox of uneven or delayed modernization, where cultural modernization preceded economic and political modernization. As Bauman (1987, p. 168) noted, "the intellectual idiom as embraced in the East knew no division of labor between political and cultural leaders, between body politic and 'civil society,' between rights of the legislator and the duties of spiritual leadership."

Asymmetrical modernization, wherein cultural elites played a dominant role, was repeated in many different countries across the world not only during the intrawar period but also throughout the second half of the 20th century. These first intrawar modernization efforts were not successful in reshaping social structures of East Central Europe. The failure to modernize societies and to narrow the economic gap with Western Europe exacerbated social, ethnic, and political conflicts and ended with the replacement of formal democratic institutions with authoritarian ones everywhere except in Czechoslovakia. It was the state-dependent middle class that lent its support to the rising wave of authoritarianism and nationalism in the region before the outbreak of the Second World War.

The well-entrenched middle/ruling class of the intrawar period and its resources were destroyed (physically) during the Second World War by consecutive Nazi and Soviet occupations, the postwar wave of voluntary and forced migrations, as well as the political repression and policies of nationalization and *proletarianization* introduced by newly imposed

qcommunist regimes. New regimes not only leveled inherited differences in material wealth and thus the role of property and economic capital as a principle of social stratification, but they also destroyed traditional status distinctions and barriers, opening the floodgates to mass upward mobility during the postwar years. Opportunities for this vast cross-class mobility were generated by massive state-building process, industrialization, urbanization, and the expansion of an education system entrusted with the goal of producing a new socialist *intelligentsia*.

The real story of the postwar social transformations is paradoxically not very different from the one painted by official communist propaganda. It involved the destruction and marginalization of the former upper middle classes, both those representing the old *bildungsburgertum* (educated middle classes and professional civil servants) and private proprietors (*besitzburgertum*-bourgeoisie and landlords), and the formation of a new, functionally diversified socialist middle class comprised of educated workers and new *intelligentsia* employed by the party-states. This new rapidly growing social formation was produced by the mass education system, its values were shaped (unsuccessfully in the long run) by communist indoctrination, and its life chances were determined by state-guarantied employment, welfare provisions, and politically regulated patterns of mobility. Yet the members of this new socialist middle class did not epitomize en masse a new socialist "men." They inherited the ethos and values of the prewar modernizing *intelligentsia* with its ethics of duty and a hybrid system of beliefs combining statism, nationalism, and socialism and just embellished it with a smattering of communist ideology. According to Bauman (1987, p. 177), "in East-Central Europe there was a continuity of pastoral power and patronage of sorts linking the moral and economic leadership of the gentry through the spiritual leadership of the *intelligentsia* to the political domination of the Communist party. The elements of continuity were in no way minor and secondary; they related to quite central aspects of social structure and the deployment of power. It is these elements of continuity which account for the remarkably close relations between the ruling party and the *intelligentsia*." The new *intelligentsia* also preserved a belief in the centrality of education, meritocratic principles, reverence for state-subsidized high culture, and the significance of taste as a status marker.[2]

During the communist period, official East European sociologists described the social transformations and emerging patterns of stratification as the formation of a new class structure based on the decomposition of old status hierarchies, nonantagonistic relations among classes, low-income differentials, and homogenization of taste and patterns of consumption.

They, of course, glossed over new inequalities generated by the redistributive party-state, the privileges of the ruling elite, and the different life chances of workers, peasants, and members of the new socialist *intelligentsia* based on inequities in the educational system, urban/rural conditions, political constraints, and employment opportunities. They were also silent about communist power hierarchies and their impact on social stratification. On the other hand, independent and Western scholars often emphasized persistent or emerging inequalities and cleavages. They pointed to the role of political power and political capital as a principle of stratification, state redistribution, and the "second economy" in shaping class relations.[3] Contemporary researchers generally assume that the legacy of communist social transformations and patterns of stratification still powerfully shape individual attitudes, value hierarchies, preferences, and choices in societies of the region. Yet, in order to understand the role of the middle class (and the transformations it has undergone) in contemporary Central and Eastern Europe, we may need to search for deeper roots, continuities, and legacies extending well beyond the communist period.

Contrary to the hopes and efforts of communist regimes, the new state-produced "socialist" middle class gradually started to resemble the old middle class and reaffirmed many of the latter's core values and its dependence on state employment. Instead of proletarianization of the *bourgeoisie*, communism produced embourgeoisement of the proletariat, or at least its top ranks since the 1960s. The highly repressive, "heroic" period of social transformation ended in the mid-1950s with a profound economic and political crisis that shook the foundations of newly established regimes. It generated leadership changes and policy reversals in many countries. Highly repressive policies were replaced by partial accommodation with the help of "friendly repressions" (Lovas & Anderson, 1982–83). In the 1960s, "little stabilization" in Poland and "goulash communism" in Hungary were examples of various accommodation strategies pursued by post-Stalinist rulers to regain a modicum of legitimacy and to forestall any opposition to communist rule. New policies were based on the implicit promise to protect the decent living standards of the new socialist middle class and to cater to its consumption appetites (epitomized by a car and summer house ownership) in exchange for political passivity. Independent scholars in the region described this new reality as a "new social contract"(Liehm, 1975).

Thus, from the mid-1950s onward the new socialist middle class was able to advance (but not articulate) its interests and to wrestle some level of protection from the vagaries of communist policies. Its members expected some implicit guaranties that communist rulers would respect their needs

as consumers and their middle-class aspirations. A degree of liberalization, rising living standards, and opening to the West in the 1970s led members of the middle class to develop distinct consumer expectations and preferences. These preferences were shaped by hybridizing cultural traditions of the *intelligentsia* with diffused Western consumption models and rationalized by the normative idea of a "good," "normal," or "deserved" life. They included typical middle class concerns such as employment stability, economic security, rising income, educational opportunities, health care, and the freedom to consume and accumulate property. The middle class expected from its communist rulers the increasing availability of consumer goods and later access to foreign travel and leisure.

Post-Stalinist societies offered multiple formal and informal strategies of pursuing such goals. The scarcity of consumer goods and services produced by the inefficiencies of communist economies, however, posed an insurmountable obstacle to middle-class aspirations. Thus, one could argue that expanding consumer expectations, evolving patterns of middle-class consumption, and proliferating entitlements in the context of declining economic performance were at the core of the political legitimacy dilemmas faced by communist regimes. From the late 1970s onward, state-run economies were increasingly unable to effectively respond to these growing expectations and aspirations of their middle classes and to offer consumers an acceptable quantity and variety of goods and lifestyle choices. The economic system not merely distorted the available choices but denied them altogether, prompting critics to call it a "dictatorship over needs" (Feher, Heller, & Markus, 1983). Efforts to placate societies by importing foodstuffs and consumer goods from the West only made things worse. Limited availability of imported goods introduced visible inequalities in consumption that contradicted the egalitarian ethos and quickly became politicized. Imports also boosted consumption appetites by letting people discover the slick packaging, quality, and value of Western products. As efforts to improve the living standards of the population failed, members of the middle class took matters into their own hands by resorting to emigration, informal economic activities, and, in some cases, oppositional political strategies. Yet, hard political borders, lack of capital, and restricted mobility made informal strategies of correcting consumer market deficiencies very difficult to pursue, at least until the declining years of state socialism in the 1980s when East Europeans became global roving traders. As a result, disappointed and frustrated members of the new socialist middle class turned en masse against the communist system. It is symptomatic of this that the middle class' revolt began in the most developed, liberal, and

pragmatic communist regimes in the region: not political oppression but frustrated consumer aspirations fueled political mobilization.

The East European middle-class struggle against communism began with the post-Stalinist accommodation between the communist rulers and the new socialist *intelligentsia*, becoming politically salient through crises in Czechoslovakia and Poland in the 1960s and 1970s, erupting full force with the rise of the Solidarity movement in Poland, and culminating in the collapse of communist regimes in 1989–1991. This political trajectory bears clear marks of a middle-class revolution and may be described as the rebellion of an ascending middle class whose expectations were frustrated and blocked by a closed and inefficient political and economic system. The Polish crisis of 1980 is almost a perfect example of the classic Davies J-curve (1962) linking frustrated expectations with the occurrence of revolutions. This view of the rise of the Solidarity was initially articulated by Polish sociologists but then quickly forgotten. As Kurczewski (1982, p. 26) noted, "... in the summer of 1980 the struggle was taken up by a new middle class, consisting of people directly subordinated to the authorities in the institutions and factories run by those authorities, people who are more educated or have bigger earnings as compared with the truly proletarized social strata and classes. There is really something which might be called the social achievements of post-1945 Poland, namely a blurring of differences between white-collar and blue-collar workers. ... It was just the cultural and economic promotion of millions of working people which has resulted in the emergence of a new middle class, whose further promotion was blocked, on the one hand, by the close nature of the ruling class, and on the other, by the hampering of social development due to the incompetence of the rulers, that incompetence of their being linked to the essential features of the system as a whole. ... It was thus not a rebellion of people in despair but a revolution of those whose hopes remained unfulfilled." While there were no similar challenges to communist rule in other countries of the Soviet bloc, the "Polish disease" of an assertive and politically awakened middle class quickly spread to other communist countries.[4]

If one accepts that the end of communism is of middle-class making, this could explain many idiosyncratic and puzzling characteristics of this revolt, such as the absence of radicalism, fanaticism, and violence (with a few obvious exceptions like Yugoslavia or Chechnya) or the Chartist-like belief in the efficacy of democracy and in political participation as the remedy for economic injustice. It also may explain the absence of a revolutionary utopianism, aversion to experimentation, and the striving for political and economic normalcy epitomized by developed Western democracies (the

famous point about the revolution without new ideas[5]). Moreover, it is consistent with elite pacts and negotiated transitions and the dominant role of intellectual elites in post-1989 politics (*hundred cvancig professoren* in parliaments in the region). Relatively quick political demobilization and the orgy of consumption in the midst of the economic crisis that followed 1989 may be considered another illustration of the middle-class character of the revolt.

Some observers of East European transformations were puzzled by the fact that apparent working-class interests and theoretically inferred preferences were not present or surprisingly distorted in postcommunist transformations (trade unions supported liberal market reforms and privatization, workers demanded foreign capital takeover of their factories, and supported the flat tax and restrictions on the redistributive role of the state). Such preferences are not puzzling, however, if we accept the argument that the revolution was driven by the middle class pursuing its specific interests and aspirations. Accordingly, well-educated and well-paid workers in state-owned factories supporting liberal policies should be considered as bona fide members of the new middle class produced by the communist modernization project: consumption not production or ownership animated their preferences and perception of the reality.

What is striking about the rise of Solidarity trade union and the fall of communism is the absence of class conflict and ideological polarization along the left–right axis.[6] The discursive hegemony of the new middle class, with its ideological hybrid of nationalism, socialism, and liberalism, was almost complete and unchallenged. Kubik (1994b) was right when he argued that the Solidarity movement in Poland signified the transformation of the socialist middle class into a political class *in statu nascendi.* The cracks in middle-class solidarity and ideological consensus only began to emerge with the consolidation of political competition and the struggle for power in the post-1989 democratic environment. In short, the fall of communism could be described as a middle-class revolution, taking place within a closed political system and fueled by an inefficient state-run economy. It was brought about by the failure of the ruling elite to improve living standards and to create a socialist consumer society. Despite some political and economic liberalization and opportunities for enrichment in the second economy granted by communist regimes, these intrasystemic strategies for advancing the individual and collective interests of the new middle class were no longer sufficient, especially in the context of increasing information flows and declining travel restrictions. Moreover, the multiple failures of the regime created a situation in which the socialist middle class was able to forge class solidarity and to develop effective counterhegemonic political discourse (Kubik, 1994b).

The fall of communist regimes led to the second *bildungsburgertum*, described by Eyal et al. (1998) as another East Central European modernizing project, this time to "build capitalism without capitalists." After the 1989 upheaval, the state-produced and state-dependent cultural bourgeoisie, using the machinery of the state, moved to create market capitalism and with it a class of private proprietors (the real *besitzburgertum*). Through mass privatization and the elimination of restrictions on business activities, wealth and economic capital were restored as a powerful mechanism of social stratification. One unintended consequence of this effort has been the growing fragmentation and unraveling of middle-class solidarity. Consequently, a new and powerful cleavage between the old, state-dependent sector of the middle class and the new, emerging market-based sector of the middle class has appeared. The entry of foreign capital added another layer of divisions once emphasized by dependency theory. Moreover, the introduction of market reforms hit state-subsidized high culture hard, creating grievances and disillusionment among the upper echelons of the middle class (artists, intellectuals, and academics). This was not the only revolution that ate its own children, at least those of them who did not change fast enough.

The 1989 middle-class revolutions were not uniformly successful. Only some postcommunist countries were able to consolidate their newly established democratic systems and at the same time to introduce low-inequality, well-regulated market economies as well as to maintain extensive welfare states (Ekiert, Kubik, & Vachudowa, 2007). The nonsuccessful cases with their newly restored authoritarian political systems and oligarchic state capitalism are probably more important in thinking about the political repercussions of the middle-class expansion and its transformational potential in other parts of the world. One possible explanation of different outcomes unfolding in the former communist world may focus on the strength, autonomy, and capacity of the middle class. As one would expect, countries that did not have a strong, democratically minded middle class failed to build democracy. After all, it may be impossible to build democracy without democrats and to have a functioning market economy without private entrepreneurs and economic freedom. The middle-class revolution failed in countries that had almost exclusively a state-dependent, state service–oriented middle class, where linkages with the West and liberal political discourse were weak or absent and in countries where middle-class mobilization was channeled into ethnic and nationalistic mobilization.

The nature of postcommunist social transformations has been hotly debated. Some commentators emphasize emerging class differences, rising inequalities, and deepening social dislocations. They point to new, nonegalitarian patterns of stratification and growing differences in the level of inequalities emerging among formerly communist countries. One could argue, however, that while the workers and peasants paid a high price for the transformation everywhere (at least in the short or medium term), the middle class, by and large, can be considered the winner of the transition from communism to capitalism. By all accounts, the middle class of late communism (the socialist *bildungsburgertum*) made a successful transition to the postcommunist market environment. It still constitutes the core of public sector employment, but is better rewarded than under the old regime. Some segments of the old middle class underwent gentrification and moved to the ranks of new propertied middle class where they joined grassroot entrepreneurs operating formerly in the black and gray economy. The professionalized sector of the middle class, with its links to the global economy and foreign capital, also expanded with the emergence of new professions necessary for the infrastructure of a market economy (banking, insurance, consulting, finance, marketing, advertising, etc.). This expansion of the middle class can be illustrated by various empirical data on the labor market, as well as patterns of consumption and public preferences (Domanski, 2006). Depending on the trajectory of economic and political transformations, the relative strength and influence of the state-employed middle-class sector and the market-employed one can differ substantially. In new state capitalist autocracies in the region, over half of the postcommunist middle class is still employed by the state. The emergence of private proprietors has been uneven and hampered by the move to oligarchic state capitalism in many countries of the region. The size of this segment of the middle class in most advanced countries (new members of the EU) already approximates Western standards. The living standards and consumption patterns in these countries are also converging with those in more developed European economies. Thus, one could argue that the middle class clearly consolidated its victory in Central Europe. On the other hand, it is tempting to argue that the middle-class revolution failed in most of the countries that emerged from the former Soviet Union where exploding inequalities, a shrinking welfare state, and declining or stagnating living standards caused pauperization of large segments of the communist era middle class and limited the opportunities for its modernization, gentrification, and diversification.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM EAST EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE – A FEW ANALYTICAL OBSERVATIONS

Class analysis has been in decline for a couple of decades (Pakulski & Waters, 1996). In the East European context, except for some Marxist nostalgia, it has been virtually absent with scholars focusing on elite circulation (Szeleny, Wnuk-Lipinski, & Treiman, 1995; Pakulski, Kullberg, & Higley, 1996; Pakulski, 1998; Frentzel-Zagórska & Wasilewski, 2000). While social scientists bid farewell to the working class and elite studies offered some interesting insights into the nature and transformations of the commanding heights of contemporary societies, the only returning analytical theme of class analysis today centers on the middle class. Without doubt it is informed by the normative assumption that the middle class and democracy go together hand in hand and the belief that the bigger the former the stronger the latter. This may well be true, although the empirical evidence is not fully convincing and there have been worrying exceptions during the last 100 years (see Rogowski, 1977; Brustein, 1998). Nevertheless, with massive social and structural transformations unfolding across the world and especially in developing countries, these changes will have, without doubt, profound social, political, and economic consequences (Economist, 2009). Variously defined segments of society described as middle class are expanding everywhere.

Yet, it is not at all certain that these transformations will produce liberal political outcomes. A large and affluent middle class can easily coexist with authoritarian regimes and provide for their stability and durability on the condition that their material interests and consumer aspirations are, by and large, satisfied. As *Newsweek* recently noted (Foroohar & Margolis, 2010), "converging incomes are not yielding shared values. The emerging bourgeoisie is a patchwork of contradictions: clamorous but rarely confrontational politically, supporters of globalization yet highly nationalistic, proud of their nations' upward mobility yet insecure and fearful they will fall back, fiercely individualistic but reliant on government subsidies, and often socially conservative. Many of the aspiring elite seem willing to let the powers that be – whether authoritarian governments or elected ones – call the shots as long as they deliver the spoils of growth." In short, the transformational potential of the emerging middle class across the world is more apparent in the sphere of consumption than in the political sphere. We should not, however, forego the analytical insights class optics can offer.

The rise of the middle class in democratic and authoritarian contexts generates a number of fascinating questions and demands that society be brought back into social analysis in a systematic way, especially in political science and economics.

There are several important issues for research on the rise of the middle class that the East European cases highlight: First is the conceptual question of defining the middle class and understanding its nature and its evolution. Who is a member of the contemporary middle class? Are the markers of middle class position economic (income, wealth, property) or social and cultural (education, occupation, skills, ethos, identity, social practices, consumption patterns, etc.)? What is the relationship between the objective characteristics of class position (income, education, profession, etc.) and self-identification? Is the middle class just a statistical construct or social group capable of forging solidarity and acting together? Is it a national or transnational phenomenon, given the transnationalization of culture and consumption and economic globalization? What does membership mean for individual and collective identities and how does it shape individual interests, tastes, and preferences? Second is the issue of the size and sectoral composition of the middle class in different social and historical contexts and the specific normative orientations of these segments. What sectors of the middle class are dominant and important? Which ones are rising and declining? What defines the special position of specific sectors: Is it a type of capital, relations to the state or to the market, or relations to other actors? What are the relations and cleavages among middle-class sectors? What sectors tend to identify with nationalistic appeals and are receptive to authoritarian temptations? Third, is there a historical shift in the nature of the middle class, its function, and its potential to facilitate political, economic, and social transformations? Do the conditions of postmodernity alter the constitution and transformational potential of the middle class? What consequences will the emergence or expansion of the middle class have for society and politics in rapidly modernizing countries across the globe?

Defining the middle class has always been a contentious enterprise (Stearns, 1979). As Rona-Tas (1996, p. 42) noted, "in reality, the middle class is always a potpourri of social groups. ... The need for the middle class label arises precisely from the diversity of interests that this label can unify and cover up, while still excluding the undeserving. The middle class is always ill defined, with uncertain conceptual boundaries serving this unifying function." Really existing middle classes have different genealogies, are based on different structuring principles, and have complex divisions inside and dissimilar relations with other groups in society. Defining the

middle class in economistic terms is not a way out of complexity ar ambiguity. There are a number of major problems with commonly us economic definitions of the middle class. First, the economic markers class position are increasingly ambiguous and blurred (Pakulski & Wate 1996; Waters, 1997). It is, therefore, unsettling that the recent debate abo the rise of the global middle class uses a definition of classes based c artificial income ranges. Whether 12 to 50 or 2 to 13 dollars a day mak someone a member of the middle class is not a very insightful and effecti way of thinking about social class relations. Decontextualization of large- comparisons adds yet another layer of analytical difficulties and t potential for gross mislabeling. Moreover, classes defined as econom phenomena are merely statistical aggregates. Defining classes by incon range takes us back to the old Marxist problem of class as an aggrega (people occupying structurally similar position) and classes as groups (wi well-defined identities or interests and the capacity for collective action). W know quite well that aggregates do not act or have uniform preferenc but that only groups with specific identities do. Rona-Tas (199 p. 42) rightly pointed out, "all societies have a middle segment, but for society to have a middle class, it must have a large *social group* in t middle... being a member of the middle class is not just a social position; it an identity."

East European experience shows that classes as actors are groups th should be considered as "imagined communities" linked by identitie solidarities, value-based status hierarchies, lifestyle choices, and simil preferences. In today's fast-changing world such culturally constitute classes are more prone to fragmentation, and are increasingly flui diversified, and segmented. Since intra- and intergroup interactions an various reference points are constitutive phenomena in the formation c class identities, the fluidity of contemporary social and institutional contex (Bauman, 2000) undermines class boundaries and stability of cla preferences and identities. Accordingly, a simplistic (economistic) unde standing of the middle class (or classes) is misleading. Noneconomist approaches to social stratifications in the tradition of Weber, Bourdie Foucault, and others should be at the center of conceptual work (see, fo example, Waters, 1997; Outhwaite, 2007). From such a perspectiv relations, status hierarchies, power, prestige, and specific types of capit as stratification resources – as well as identities, discourses, genealogies, an contextual reference frames – are important building blocks of soci stratification and constitution of classes. While a reasonable amount c discretionary income is necessary to facilitate the emergence of the midd

class, it does not tell us much about its consumption patterns, tastes, cultural orientations, and identities, nor does it help us to understand political preferences and the behavior of its structurally defined members.

As Veblen (1992[1899]) once noted, it is not property that is the "most easily recognized evidence of a reputable degree of success." Income is socially invisible but consumption and taste are. Moreover, the expanding availability of credit, remittances, and labor migrations weakens the link between income, consumption, and taste and makes the specific level of income as measured in the national context highly misleading, if not irrelevant. This argument parallels the important contribution to understanding classes in contemporary societies offered by Waters and others (Pakulski & Waters, 1996; Waters, 1997). They argue that classes, as economic phenomena, have lost their salience and that politics is no longer class based in a conventional sense (i.e., derived from Marxist and narrowly defined Weberian traditions). Instead, as the old economic markers of differentiation lost their meaning and salience, new divisions have emerged based on lifestyle and consumption patterns, identities, and value-based status configurations. This new stratification engines generated various inequity structures, blurred class boundaries, fractured identities, and rapidly changing preferences and behavior (Bradley, 1996; Devine & Waters, 2004). Modern societies with complex, culturally shaped stratification are divided along fluid, shifting, and unpredictable cleavages and produce short-time preferences and commitments (Bauman, 2006). Understanding the relationship between social stratification, inequalities, preferences, and political outcomes is, therefore, more challenging and uncertain than before.

The really existing middle classes are complex, *bricolage*-like entities. They rarely become unified political actors as they did in the case of the Solidarity movement in Poland. The Solidarity movement was not, as it is often claimed, the first working-class revolution but rather it was the last middle-class revolution. Under the communist system the modernization of the *intelligentsia* was delayed, its anachronistic middle-class identity was preserved and reinforced through the educational system, and multiple divisions potentially affecting its solidarity and capacity for collective action were denied articulation and salience. At the same time, its aspirations were ignored and blocked. Communist regimes made the middle class a unified political actor and their proverbial "grave digger."

In the noncommunist context, middle-class identity and solidarity tend to be fragmented by existing hierarchies of status, power, and prestige, equivalence of various forms of capital as well as multidimensional inequities (including wealth, ethnicity, gender, and others). This is reinforced by the fact that

various segments of the middle class have separate, complex, and often uninterrupted genealogies. They reflect distinct modernization trajectories (professionals' groups), state-building processes (bureaucracies, state-dependent service providers), decline of traditional social orders (declasses nobility), urbanization (petite bourgeoisie), or globalization (clients of foreign capital and NGO networks) and keep alive the memories of past conflicts. Moreover, these various segments rely on different forms of capital (cultural, economic, social, political), exhibit different degrees of solidarity and predilection for specific ideological idioms, and tend to be internally stratified as well. Finally, they have different organizational vehicles designed to promote their interests and defend their identities. In short, the life of the middle class in a noncommunist context is fragmented, fluid, and contentious and burdened by past conflicts and ideological struggles. In contrast, the communists suppressed sectoral interest articulation and representation of the middle class, while preserving its generalized class identity based on the cultural ethos of the *intelligentsia*.

Following Kohli's (1997) idea of the "follower democracies," one may argue that contemporary middle classes in Eastern Europe and in the developing world in general are the "follower" middle classes. They are not the outcome of a contentious evolutionary process from below in the well-defined nation-state context but the product of state-driven modernization in the context of globalization. Thus, the underlying matrix of cleavages, conflicts, and incentives on the domestic level is quite different. As a result, their nature and role may be quite different than that of the celebrated generators of the market economy and liberal politics in the old, Anglo-Saxon democracies. The trajectory of their emergence and potential political orientation is perhaps more similar to the European continental pattern of late modernizers. These differences may be reduced to four factors. First, in many countries we witness the emergence of the middle class after democracy or under conditions of competitive authoritarianism. Second, this new middle class is emerging in the context of an established regulatory and redistributive state that often features a very extensive welfare institutions and policies. These two conditions diminish the need and incentives for political mobilization and distributive struggle, increase dependency on the state employment, and favor the dominance of state-imposed corporatist structures. Third, this middle class emerges in the context of a late mass consumption society with its pressures for individualization, centrality of lifestyle, and ensuing fluidity and fragmentation of interests and preferences. Finally, the "follower" middle class emerges in the context of global liberalization and increasing mobility of

labor and capital, and large migration flows offering other strategies to advance and protect individual interests of its members. The presence of multiple exit strategies changes the matrix of political incentives for individuals. One needs to examine carefully how these transformations of the political and economic context shape identities, preferences, orientations, and the political potential of the new middle class.

The link between the middle class and democracy is built on a long intellectual tradition. Contemporary pronouncements about the possible political orientation and role of the emerging middle classes in developing countries, however, are based on false analogies and wishful interpretations of European experiences. First, the new middle class is not the old or "imagined" bourgeoisie of the Communist Manifesto (a class of maximizing proprietors destined to transform social and political order). At best, the propertied bourgeoisie is today only a small segment of the middle class. The state-dependent professional civil servants, educated market-dependent professionals, and transnationally linked managers of firms and NGOs collectively described as "cultural bourgeoisie" are much more powerful and important. Moreover, in what Waters (1997, p. 33) calls post-class societies, cultural capital replaces land and economic capital as the most critical resource of social stratification. Cultural capital, signified by lifestyles and consumption patterns, provides the basis for social differentiation and for fragmented or fractured identities. One could argue that in such societies, interest calculus, political arithmetic, and normative imperatives of different segments of the middle class change in fundamental ways. The defense of private property vis-à-vis the territorial-entrenched predatory state is a very different process than defense of consumption vis-à-vis the incompetent state in the context of investment, income, and migration flows in the open global economic environment.

The last point I would like to make is about embeddedness and the transformative potential of the new middle class. All the factors mentioned above potentially create conditions that make the new middle class weakly rooted in the national political system. Political involvement to protect its interests, however, may not be essential anymore since its members have multiple exit options available. Moreover, the "right to consumption" can easily be granted without the protection of other fundamental rights, as East European communist regimes tried unsuccessfully to do. Transborder mobility makes national-level politics less important to these segments of the middle class that do not benefit directly from symbiotic relations with the state. At the same time, the segments of the middle class that are linked to global capital and advocacy networks are becoming increasingly

depoliticized. Their cooperation with the state is the condition for the preservation of these linkages and thus the protection of this segment of the middle class labor market. Thus, firms and NGOs tend to scale back political advocacy or change their practices of adherence to fundamental rights as the story of the relations between Western Internet providers and the Chinese government aptly illustrates. In short, the new middle class may not be destined to play the role that the old middle class played in European or American history or in communist Eastern Europe. Finally, increasing fragmentation of the new middle class based on individualizing lifestyles and consumption patterns, sectoral divisions, competing microidentities, multiple exit options, and increasing depoliticization of its important sectors makes its solidarity tenuous and its transformational potential questionable. Nationalism is clearly an available and utilized strategy to convert the middle class into a powerful political actor. But if this is the only option to recover the middle class' transformational potential, the fundamental contradiction between ethnic nationalism and liberal values may make the East European revolution at the end of the 20th century the last liberal revolution made by the middle class.

To summarize, there are four basic lessons the East European middle-class revolution can offer. First, the middle class is a cultural and historical not economic phenomenon. Second, it is extremely rare for the middle class to become a collective actor, the class for itself. Third, the main competitors of middle-class identity are nationalism, ethnicity and religion identities. Finally, postmodernity with its fluidity, uncertainty, fractured identities, fragmented lifestyles, consumption patterns, and status configuration does not provide facilitating conditions for middle-class solidarity and mobilization, making it politically feeble.

NOTES

1. The volume of writings on this issue, both scholarly and journalistic, is enormous. (See, for example, Mokrzycki, 1993, 1995; Domanski, 1994, 2006; Kurczewski, 1994; Rona-Tas, 1996; Wallace & Haerpfer, 1998; Barhatova, McMylor, & Mellor, 2003; Shankina, 2004.)

2. It is quite striking how stable, for example, prestige hierarchies of professions were in Poland over the last several decades (Sawiński & Domański, 1989; CBOS, 2009). Despite the fundamental social transformations experienced under the communist regime and after 1989, the signature professions of the *bildungsburgertum* (university professor, doctor, teacher, nurse, engineer, etc.) were always at the top of the rankings. After 1989, despite liberal reforms, glorification of market capitalism

by the media and the wealth generated in the private sector, professions connected to this domain (owner of a small enterprise, stock market trader, etc.) were generally held in low regard. Only politicians (party activists, members of local and national parliaments, and ministers in the government) were ranked lower.

3. The literature on these issues is vast. (See, for example, Connor, 1979; Lane, 1982; Szelenyi, 1978, 1982, 1988; Domanski, 1998, 1999, 2000; Heyns & Bialecki, 1993; Szelenyi & Aschaffenburg, 1993; Andorka, 1990; Slomczynski & Shabad, 1996.)

4. Obviously, there are competing interpretations of both the emergence of the Solidarity movement and collapse of communism. (See, for example, the special issue of *Theory and Society* (1994, pp. 23, 2); Kubik, 1994a, 1994b; Staniszkis, 1984; Laba, 1991; Ost, 1991; Kennedy, 1991; Bernhard, 1993; Cirtautas, 1997.)

5. Offe (1991, p. 30) called 1989 "a revolution without a historical model and a revolution without a revolutionary theory." (See also Habermas, 1990; Furet, 1999; Dawisha & Ganev, 2005.)

6. There is extensive literature about political cleavages and voting behavior of East Europeans. (See, for example, Lewis, Lomax, & Wightman, 1994; Toka, 1997; Kitschelt, Mansfeldová, Markowski, & Toka, 1999; Tucker, 2002; Wittenberg, 2006; Jasiewicz, 2007.)

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