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by Andreas Glaeser

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tember 12 introduces several concepts worthy of other scholars' attention and study. Moreover, Smithsimon has laid the groundwork and provided a compelling set of justifications for subsequent studies of elite enclaves, as well as for other ethnographies that devote serious methodological and analytic attention to public space.

Political Epistemics: The Secret Police, the Opposition, and the End of East German Socialism. By Andreas Glaeser. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. Pp. xxxiv+606. \$35.00.

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Political Epistemics is an ambitious doorstep of a book, a study of the chain of events and contexts that led to the downfall of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Unlike most other available sociological accounts, Glaeser's concentrates on the cultural conditions of an enduring faith in socialism and the East German party state prior to 1989, and on how and why this cultural edifice began to crack and crumble, and eventually imploded. However, Glaeser has written two books in one, and uses the case of the fall of the GDR to develop a theory of social change, intersubjectivity, and reciprocal validation that tackles some of the most fundamental processes of social life. As such, this book is of broad theoretical significance and should be of interest to many social scientists who do not share Glaeser's passion for the decline of Eastern European socialism.

The main empirical foci of the book are former agents of the Stasi (the GDR's secret police) and the dissidents whom the Stasi was charged with surveilling and controlling. Drawing on a massive store of original interviews, new archival material, media accounts, and other sources, Glaeser helps us understand how these two groups came to develop their world-views (e.g., for the Stasis, why surveillance was needed and morally justified), how their environments corroborated their understandings, and how these understandings changed in the face of social developments in the GDR and beyond. His account is remarkable in its thoroughness, attention to detail, and scholarly quality and can be admired from several vantage points.

The book is organized into five sections and 11 chapters. Part 1 provides a history of the GDR and the Stasi and describes the theoretical premises of historical materialism and the Leninist doctrine of the party that were the building blocks of GDR society. The book connects to these premises the inability of party leaders to recognize and address mounting economic and social problems in the 1980s. Glaeser explains how, given the centralized party structure and scientific materialism, change could only come from the top, and how all criticisms (even internal ones) were viewed as

a bourgeois diversion, punishable by marginalization, and leading inevitably to the demise of the system.

Part 2 is the more theoretically ambitious, as its two heavy-hitting chapters offer a theory of the dynamics of understanding through validation: recognition, corroboration, and resonance are described as key mechanisms for the production and institutionalization of the Stasi worldview. These are maintained by networks of authority that give weight to particular interpretations of the world—that enable and disable potential worldviews (this is what political epistemics are about). Worldviews are produced or expressed not only through discourse, but also through emotions and kinetic experiences: feelings of similarity and difference, of agreement and dissent, are experienced at the level of the body and emotion, as well as in the ideological language available for capturing the world one lives in. This theory subtly illuminates the essential role of understanding in the organization of human action and crucially, connects comprehension, action and reaction, and institutionalization. The analytical power of the book comes from connecting semiotics to historical social processes—building on the pathbreaking work of William Sewell, Jr., and others.

Parts 3 and 4 deploy the analytical tools developed in part 2, focusing on Stasi officers and dissidents. These chapters show Glaeser to be a top-notch historical ethnographer. Part 3 draws on interviews with 25 hard-to-locate former Stasi to detail their work, how they were recruited and trained, how they gained faith in the system, and how their patterns of interaction limited access to alternative interpretations of reality—for instance, by living and vacationing with other Stasis. Part 4 analyzes the everyday lives of the dissidents, how they went about contesting the system, and how they worked in collaboration with churches to build a women's movement, a peace movement, and a civil rights movement.

Part 5 explores why the party state was unable to preempt the self-destruction of the GDR and the factors that led to its demise. This section also considers the recruitment of informers in the context of the crumbling regime. Finally, it revisits some of the key themes of the book and ties together theoretical and empirical contributions.

On two counts, *Political Epistemics* does not live up to its full potential: the structure of the argument, and its positioning in the field. Because Glaeser wrote two books in one, he is forced to come back often to earlier parts of the arguments to keep in play its multifarious strands and multilayered connections. This results in cumbersome repetitions. Also, the two theoretical chapters are so substantial, heavy going, and technical (esp. chap. 4) that one cannot help but wonder whether the overall integrity of the project would have been enhanced if they had been published separately.

Concerning positioning of the argument, one finds significant lacuna despite abundant and detailed footnotes. This is consequential, for it means that Glaeser does not fully develop the case for the originality of

his work. His prime interlocutors are classical phenomenological texts and contemporary linguistic anthropology (particularly the work of Michael Silverstein)—a defensible choice. But he should have contrasted his approach to that of influential cultural sociologists whose contributions concern the core topics of *Political Epistemics*: resonance and validation. I mostly have in mind the work of scholars such as Michael Schudson (“How Culture Works,” *Theory and Society* 18 [1989]:153–80) and Robert Wuthnow (*Communities of Discourse* [Harvard University Press, 1993]), among other theorists of “cultural fit” and “diffusion.” Additionally, the chapters on dissidents concern the creation of the public sphere, yet Glaeser does not engage relevant innovative work on the creation of publics and counterpublics by cultural sociologists Eiko Ikegami and Ann Mische. Moreover, it would have been preferable to compare more fully Glaeser’s theory of institutions to the important interdisciplinary literature on the various institutionalisms—the book contains only brief discussion on new developments on institutions. Finally, the introduction and conclusion include quick references to the alternative explanations to the fall of the GDR (e.g., p. 562) but no systematic argument weighing competing approaches. The reader is left to her own devices and asked to believe that indeed the path-dependent process created by the main tenets of Marxist Leninism is the best possible explanation for these events. This omission leaves a regrettable impression of unfinished business that does not measure up with the overall quality of this remarkable book. Nevertheless, I can only recommend strongly Glaeser’s important contribution, which I hope will be the object of future disciplinary conversation—despite the opportunities missed by the author for engaging dialogues, especially and paradoxically, between linguistic anthropology and cultural sociology.

Peasants under Siege: The Collectivization of Romanian Agriculture, 1949–1962. By Gail Kligman and Katherine Verdery. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011. Pp. xxiv+508. \$39.50.

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In this book, Gail Kligman and Katherine Verdery demonstrate just how under siege Romanian peasants were for the 13-year period under study. *Peasants under Siege* is an ambitious work, and the authors succeed in creating a model that may promote other works on more specialized topics in the collectivization of Romania.

Most scholarship about collectivized agriculture refers to the Soviet Union and, less commonly, the People’s Republic of China. The large quantity of data and studies about Soviet collectivization is commensurate with the scale on which this most revolutionary approach to agriculture in the modern world happened, as well as the horrendous methods re-