Preface

Back in the 1980s, when I was a student in the Soviet Union, sociology was not an officially recognized discipline. This is not to say that I could not study it. As it was often the case in 'real socialism', everything was prohibited, but anything was possible. Deep in taiga, sociologists of the Siberian branch of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, have been conducting sociological research since the 1960s. The Institute of Economics department of social problems had produced multiple classified papers on social problems in rural Siberia. One of them, stating a yawning gap between the claims of communism and the actual performance of stagnating socialism, the so-called Novosibirsk report was leaked and published in the Washington Post in the August of 1983. The Soviet realities of informal economy and informal governance have shaped the agenda and methodology of economic sociology emerging from the department of Tatiana Zaslavskaya.

That paper and many others developed by Siberian sociologist had been influenced by their Hungarian colleagues, already working on ideologically marginal subjects of inequality and social stratification under socialism, income distribution and privilege systems. I remember the *samizdat* translations being circulated and discussed, tested and applied. Iván Szelényi's research on social inequalities, elitism and hidden marketization within the socialist system and Janos Kornai's conclusion of the systemic nature of its flaws – soft-budget constraints, state ownership, and ideological decision-making – were particularly subversive (Kornai 1980). Yet these early analyses of state socialism also drew attention to the inner logic and complexity of socialist systems, as well as controversies in the communist governance.

They identified the grey zones, which became much more obvious with hindsight. Hungary had pioneered the economic reforms, but not in a direct manner. Kornai wrote:

> There was no question of communist political power imposing private ownership on the economy in the period between 1968 and 1989. Nonetheless, private ownership began to develop spontaneously once the political sphere had become more tolerant (Kornai 2000: 29).

Similar ambivalence can be observed on a vast scale in China, where the Communist party has reaffirmed its commitment to non-democratic values in 1989 by a brutal crush of the Tiananmen square protests, but at the same time not only allowed, but encouraged markets to develop and private sector to grow on an unprecedented scale.

It is such paradoxical attitudes applied by Communist parties, ability to sustain ideology while dealing with complexity, to believe yet remain pragmatic, to turn a blind eye in some circumstances yet exercise punishment in others, to coopt but also to control, that sustained sophistication of socialist governance. It is these practices of navigating the doublethink, double-deed, double standards and double motivation that have been lost on the preachers of democracy since the collapse of the Berlin's wall in 1989. It was presumed that once people are given freedom from communism they would embrace democracy. The outcome has turned out to be much more complex.

However temporary the existence of socialist regimes may seem from the 21st century, it is paramount to acknowledge their lasting legacies and learn their lessons in tackling ideological constraints, governance issues, and complexity of 'real' socialism. Thirty years on, we continue to witness the boomerang effect of the post-1991 euphoria, an intense happiness about the end of the enemy-number-one and passionate self-confidence predominant in democratic discourses since "by the grace of God, America has won the cold war" in the current affairs.

As a result of the spectacular 1989 withdrawal of communist ideology across Europe and Eurasia, the 1990s' intellectual scene became dominated by the protagonists of transition economies (World Bank 2002, 2004) and theorists of post-socialism (Müller 2019). In the decade of the 2000s, and especially since the accession of formerly socialist countries to the EU in 2005-2007, concerns over the language of transition have emerged from the comparative analyses of the three waves of democratisation globally. Transitioning economies have departed from authoritarian dictatorships yet have never arrived to consolidated democracies (Carothers 2002).

The thesis of the 'end of the transition paradigm' pointed to the prevalence of grey zones where majority of transiting regimes find themselves and the academic incapacity to describe them without references to non-existing poles of the authoritarianism-democracy binary. The puzzle can be formulated as follows: political scientists have a critical mass of cases that cannot be categorized clearly and fall into the grey area of 'neither-nor' or 'both,' which brings the binaries themselves into a question (Ledeneva et al. 2018). Balint Magyar and Balint Madlovic place this theoretical point, made in social theory much earlier, into the context of post-communist regimes (Merton 1976, Bourdieu 1990, Bauman 1990, Magyar 2019).

Magyar and Madlovich's *The Anatomy of Post-Communist Regimes* could not have been more timely (forthcoming 2020). Once a testing ground for normative and confidently prescribed 'one-size-fits-all' democratic reforms, neo-liberal macro-economic packages and the opening-breakthrough-consolidation logic of democracy, the so-called post-communist regimes start reflecting upon their pathways and seek legitimacy within rather than outside national borders. The emerging governance crises in democratic regimes press further for finding adequate ways to reflect what binaries, such as capitalism and socialism, good and bad governance, democracy and authoritarianism could not grasp. The complexity of the post-communist regimes, not fitting the transition paradigm or engaged in political U-turns has put pressure on the normative, top-down, US-centred theoretical approaches to their conceptualisation.

Not paying attention to the ambivalence of state socialism have led scholars to arrive at categorising regimes with reference to their past (post-), to their performance against teleological target (quasi-, semi-, illiberal, democracies with adjectives), or to their hybrid nature (hybrid regime). It might be worth pointing out the obvious: hybrid regimes are hybrid from the perspectives of observers, who prefer to compress the puzzle of ambivalence into a hybrid category that allows us to come up with a narrative or conceptualisation in a short term. In the language of participants, there is nothing hybrid about the regimes. There are front and backstage practices, complex overlaps of rules and norms, various terminologies depicting competing interests, yet the synthesis that would result in a clear categorisation of the regime remains beyond reach. Arguably, hybrid concepts are practical solution to delay the necessity of facing the ambivalence and the complexity it produces for the governance, an issue by no means restricted to the post-communist world.

This book makes an ambitious attempt to assemble concepts that proved robust and relevant for participants as well as for observers of post-communist regimes. In fact, the book starts with an observation that a 'renewal of the language used to describe [post-socialist] regimes' is long overdue. The authors' major contribution here is twofold. First, they establish the state-of-the-art vocabularies bottom up to balance off the predominant top-down conceptualisations of post-communist trajectories. The second, and more ambitious, contribution is systematic mapping of possible post-communist trajectories, departing from the ideological hegemony, bureaucratic structure and state-dominated economy but not really

arriving at proclaimed destinations. Consistent with Magyar's previous project, this new book investigates 'stubborn structures' and path-dependency, defined as deeply embedded norms shaping political outcomes behind the facades of formally reformed institutions. The authors associate such norms with "informal, often intentionally hidden, disguised and illicit understandings and arrangements that penetrate formal institutions."

The cross-disciplinary connotations of 'stubborn structures' are immediate: from Weber's "habitual action," de Certeau's "quotidien," de Sardan's "practical norms" to Hall's "high-context cultures," Geertz's "thick description" and "local knowledge," Polanyi's "tacit knowledge," Chomsky's "deep structures" etc. Through social interactions, individuals develop a shared meaning of the "rules of the game", "rule-following" or "rule-bending" (respectively North 1991, Wittgenstein, Ledeneva 2001). Individual strategies of problem-solving rely on collectively shared expectations, context-bound norms and result in social practices deemed appropriate. Such practices may derive from historical preference, cultural legacies, religious values, tacit understanding and habitual behaviour that work against the rational choice-based modelling. To a large extent, such practices account for the democratic back-pedalling associated with the underperformance of democratisation efforts in post-communist Europe and Eurasia and the persistence of 'stubborn structures.'

The authors search through the existing literature to establish relevant conceptions to relate to such practices and combine these with their own findings in order to offer a coherent multi-level analytical framework for post-communist regimes. Effectively, they produce a conceptual "toolkit" or "vocabulary" for important actors, processes, and (often informal) institutions. When faced with a choice of formats for the resultant assemblage of concepts, trajectories and terms, whether used by participants or coined by observers, the authors opt for a mixture of encyclopaedic and anatomical ones.

The encyclopaedic format has both advantages and disadvantages. While it may border on the descriptive or lack room for discussion it also allows for an inductive, bottom-up approach to data collection, accommodates conceptual multiplicity in the field and sets out grounds for experimental take on post-communism and modelling its complexity. Anatomical format splits material into functional clusters: politics, economy and society; structures and actors. The advantage if evident, as one can embrace clusters of concepts related to the same domain and be briefed about the range of existing approaches in an effective way. The disadvantage is that, strictly speaking, it is not possible to associate each particular entry with a specific cluster. Thus, church, for example, could appear in all clusters, as it performs different functions in society, while also playing a role in economy and politics, extracting economic benefits and political gains from colluding with the executive power.

In a similar effort to structure *The Global Encyclopaedia of Informality*, I faced a similar challenge, whereby the same practice could be representative of network-based re-distribution, communal solidarity, individual survival and systemic coercion. Solving this structural problem has pointed to the centrality of ambivalence to the functioning of practices we aim to conceptualise. In dealing with the Global Informality Project dataset I have opted for the encyclopaedic principle at the start, i.e. non-normative, non-hierarchical, non-geographical approach, and applied rigour by including entries generated bottom-up, by user communities and expressed in the vernacular, while also making it possible to create a multiplicity of observer-standpoint clusters in the online version of the dataset (in-formality.com).

In a similar way, the authors of *The Anatomy of Post-Communist Regimes* adopt a structuralist approach, driven by language. They tackle complexity and multidimensionality of post-communist regimes not simply by cataloguing existing concepts but by relating them

to each other and constructing a broader, overarching framework: a new language for post-communist regimes. The authors focus on categories of the higher order, as it were, that is those used by observers: patronal democracy, conservative autocracy, and market-exploiting dictatorship. The notion of the adopted political family, for example, includes kinship and quasi-kinship relationships, thus constituting networks that differ from other types of human associations such as class, feudal elite, or nomenklatura. Innovative methods like the proposed triangular model, use of certain terms, and instances of concept-stretching necessary for fitting them into the proposed framework sometimes stagger the reader, overwhelmed by the colossal effort undertaken by the authors. The scope and ambition of the book are balanced off by the integration of the valuable perspectives "from within," taking us beyond the existent top-down and bottom-up approaches.

Countries analysed from a variety of aspects, comparatively or as single case studies, include Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Ukraine. The resulting outcome significantly expands our understanding of the "real politics" of post-communist regimes and represent a shift from the Western-centred perspectives to the context-rich conceptualisations. With the on-going global U-turns to dictatorships and democratic back-pedalling occurring in democracies, we witness a certain linguistic turn in political science in response to the post-communist experience. With some notable exceptions, a switch of terms from democracy to kleptocracy does not yet mean a change in the top-down, US-centred, normative approaches, often grounded in the oblivion of their own histories.

The conceptual, methodological and semantical innovations contained in *The Anatomy of Post-Communist Regimes* will undoubtedly produce an abundance of reactions among scholars, students and readers yearning for orientation in the complex world of post-communist realities.

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