
AFTER POST-SOCIALISM? TRANSITION'S OBSCURED INEVITABILITY

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Introduction

In the fall of 2000, outside of Warsaw, an American judge stands at the front of a recently renovated Polish courtroom. Behind him, on the screen, a slide announces, "United States Judiciary: The Domestic Violence Example." A television news camera is positioned to one side to document the event, a conference on efficiency in the legal system.

The judge says 'hello' into the microphone carefully in Polish, and, shifting to English, explains that he will be giving his presentation in English. Although small cohorts of American and German guests bestow upon the event an international character, the audience is composed mostly of Polish lawyers, judges, and media, and a frustrated murmur emerges throughout the courtroom in response to the absence of a translator.

The judge moves over the noise with a story about protection in the United States, one that, as a student of domestic violence intervention in the United States and native English speaker, I can easily understand. It is a story about how although everyone is legally protected from violence in America, that hasn't always been evenly applied when it comes to families. Even animals are protected by anticruelty groups, he points out, and children.

It is difficult to concentrate as the judge discusses *ex parte* restraining orders against a wall of individually whispered translations that disperse in front of his every word, punctuated by the syncopated rings of cell phones (clearly a moment in which centralization would help everybody).

I have no idea how to quickly translate the idea of an *ex parte* restraining order to the person sitting next to me, who gives up on me, and in the quiet melee, I'm asked to help pass out examples of a protection order form.

A second slide reads, "The Evolution of Domestic Violence." Below the title is a cartoon depicting footprints from less to more 'evolved,' starting with a large Neanderthal-type caricatured foot, moving to the imprint of a man's dress shoe and culminating in the dots left by the imprint of

high heeled shoes. It is not explained. In my notebook I jot down the word "ambiguous."

Two other American judges are slated to follow him. The first begins his talk by saying in English, "I do not hit my wife," at which point problems of translation reach a peak, and by the time adequate translation is arranged an ad hoc question and answer session has begun. Someone in the audience asks how long it takes to get a protection order. Very quickly, as little as several hours, is the response. How many cases like this do you do in a day in Domestic Violence court? About forty. A man stands up and says, "In our country, you can't order someone to leave the home so fast." Another adds to this, "You can't put the man out of the house without at least being heard by one court, where would he go [before the initial hearing]?"

A judge, visiting that day from Germany, comes to the microphone and asks, "Aren't you worried that speed in the judicial system is a danger?" Whispering in the audience shifts to small audible conversations. A woman sitting in front of me stands to say that the "instant prosecution is too obstacle-free and doesn't hear both sides." "Can a child get a protection order to remove their parents from the house?" someone adds.

At some point, amidst the difficulties of translation and description (linguistic and legal), the "exchange" atmosphere has taken a polite, but decisively, critical turn. As questions continue, the United States Judiciary begins to feel like an anthropological artifact, its response to domestic violence probed as a mysterious and perhaps slightly dangerous object by the Polish and German legal onlookers. The American judges say repeatedly that they place great value on due process.

After the presentation, we assemble in a crowded room for tea. It is a polite and friendly atmosphere. The American judges don't seem fazed by the questions. I comment to one judge about the responses and ask how he sees difficulties of translating between different legal systems. He says that this was just like many experiences he's had talking about American law

abroad, "What we're doing now, they'll be doing in fifteen years. They just have to evolve".

But the question always returns, "evolve" towards what? I began researching domestic violence interventions in 1997, not in Poland, but in North Carolina, where I observed in family violence court rooms, spent time with police officers, victims' advocates, and learned to facilitate batterers' treatment programs for convicts. It was, indeed, in North Carolina, where I first met a group of Polish police officers, who were visiting to learn about the very domestic violence intervention that I, myself, was learning about. It was a meeting that compelled the project to take a distinctly transnational shift. For almost eighteen months, from 2000 to 2001, I was to follow the expertise I had come to know in the United States as it traveled into the unexpected-to-me context of Polish state restructuring.

Learning about domestic violence intervention programs was no easy task in North Carolina as elsewhere, partly because the policing of domestic violence in the United States itself undergoes rapid transformation and thus there is much to keep up with, prompted for example by infusions of US Federal funding from the 1994 Violence Against Women Act. Without sustained pretense to a fixed and legitimated set of "American" intervention practices to merely adopt, it is not easy to understand how such uncertain expertise can travel with such apparent coherence and self-assuredness (Shephard and Pence, 1999).

Drawing on lessons from this fieldwork between the United States and Poland, I raise a set of questions that are at once methodological, theoretical and topical, all relating to the work of inevitability in discursive constructions of "Transition" as it pertains to post-socialist states (and ethnographic projects about post-socialist state formation) through the 1990s and into the present. This is part of a larger project to re-theorize—recuperate, even—transition, as an object of study, not as a better or worse theory of change or complexity, but rather as historically and culturally situated sets of practices (whether directed toward constructions of security, development, wealth, human rights, etc.) to be engaged ethnographically in their material and spatial intricacies.

Inevitability's Aftermath

To understand the predictive powers emanating from bodies of expertise and how they relate to conceptualizing cultural and political

transformation, let us first observe a convergence between two very different modes of conceiving the inevitable in the policing of domestic violence. On the one hand, as illustrated in the field scenario above, "evolution" is understood by the legal trainers as guaranteeing an *end* in advance, while the difficulty of how to get there, of replication-in-action, is left open: "What we're doing now, they'll be doing in fifteen years."

Conferences and their attendant technologies, in this regard, generally count as forms of intervention that nudge a process along or keep it on one or another spatio-temporal track. As many critics observe, this image of change presumes not only a teleological end, but more critically implies the existence of experts which have themselves achieved a state of self-consciousness not (yet) granted to the recipients (Glaeser, 2000; Wedel, 1998).

However, the evolutionary social theory lending confidence to post-socialist expertise is not the only construction of inevitability one finds in domestic violence discourse. Among the infrastructural expertise pertaining to the policing of domestic violence that travels is also a conceptualization that domestic violence is characterized by repetition and escalation, resulting ultimately in homicide. This emphasis, by American experts, implies a narrow definition of domestic violence in terms of physical brutality and ends. Indeed, one piece of the American pedagogical framework, intended to insist police officers take domestic violence more seriously, encourages officers to treat evidence as if they were *collecting evidence on a future homicide*. And, though a small itinerant training catchphrase, it is one example of the inevitability of an end, written into the representational machinery of evidence collection, freezing and objectifying time, in this case collapsing violent relationships into violent events, and producing a new form of police force in the process.

In the United States, this brutal socio-psychological theory of inevitable homicide appears eerily accurate based on my experience with batterers' treatment programs in North Carolina, a theory that smartly, partially, and instrumentally, reflects fragments of the contexts in which it was produced. Escalation and repetition was not, however, the immediately recognizable discursive frame to the criminologists, lawyers, police officers, and activists I worked with in Poland. This is not to say there was, in its place, a carefully developed alternate theory of domestic violence. As with

ever-tenuous, contested and transgressed constructions of public/private divides, violence is not ultimately separable from the infrastructures of its intervention.

In place of an over-arching "Polish model" of domestic abuse, what I found, particularly in Warsaw, was a contested space of theorizing the future and its relationship to the sanctity or other limits of domestic spaces (both in terms of what domestic violence would be understood to consist of and, related, the thinkable routes of the future of interventions themselves). Here, an apparently general cultural or political academic question of 'transition to a democratic police force' is in fact intricately linked to the details of the expertise, and experts, in transit.

Although the specifics remained to be worked out in and around Warsaw, that domestic violence had a future in the Polish state apparatus circa 2001 appeared, in some form, inevitable. While the intervention infrastructure remained inchoate, if not just murky, women's rights activists had succeeded above all in constructing a palpable effect of domestic violence intervention's absence (Hobart, 1993). Transition, seen from this standpoint, would thus consist in the form of a corrective—indeed, a corrective that structurally echoes academic interventions against 'transitology,' insofar as both can be characterized by interventions upon interventions, to paraphrase Michel Foucault.

Withering of transition?

Throughout the 1990's, anthropologists, sociologists, cultural geographers and others argued that "transition" was an inadequate concept for addressing post-socialist transformations. In the face of teleological notions of change, ethnographers sought to account for complexity, recombination, process, failure, unintended consequences and change in myriad ways (Pickles and Smith, 1998). In an effort to undo the categorical fixities and moral, triumphalist subtexts, which often frame discussions of transitions to democracy and capitalism in Eastern Europe, critical literature on post-socialism underscored themes of "transformation" and "uncertainty" (Berdahl et al., 2000; Burwoy and Verdery, 1999).

Appeals to uncertainty in writing on Eastern and Central Eastern European transformations since 1989 often attempt to open spaces of critical reflection on, and representations of, authorizing narratives of change, and the diversity of their concomitant spatial and temporal

consequences. Yet, theorizing uncertainty, too, presents problems not unlike those associated with theorizing transition. For example, one might ask, does the designation of post-socialist life as *uncertain* necessarily, albeit inadvertently, presuppose the existence of a more stable or *certain* elsewhere with which it is contrasted?

If, on the other hand, in the study of conceptualizations of the future, we are left with uncertain transitions all the way down, then perhaps it is worth formulating intellectual projects to locate, articulate and distinguish between moments, forms, and uses of certainty. That is, throw into action the uses of certainty or its absence, lest we find ourselves trapped on an ethnographic hamster wheel of compulsive anti-transition which subtly demands "ethnographies of post-socialism" are staged in terms of before and after 1989 (even in their attempts to dissolve this marker), a demand which threatens to inadvertently reproduce the very sorts of static dichotomies—state/civil society, communism/capitalism, private/public, east/west, developed/undeveloped—that ethnographic work can so usefully disrupt.

Writing on uncertainty as a political gesture against neoliberal hegemonies in 'post-Cold War Eastern Europe' points toward a very specific genealogy of political and representational crisis brought on by the dissolution of utopian projects. The tension between the loss of an overarching narrative of political resistance and the ongoing ethnographic promise to think the world otherwise is one way of understanding the organization and emplotment of contemporary fieldwork projects in Eastern Europe. One might ask, for example, is the uncertainty invoked therein the same uncertainty confronted by anthropological work on anti-globalism, work that is often inspired by (or inspired against) the recent resurgent popularity of Marxist thought synthesized most popularly by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, or, conversely, J-K Gibson-Graham (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Gibson-Graham, 1996)?

There are additional reasons to ethnographically reincorporate the uses of uncertainty and transition at the present moment, which are pointed to by the theme of this year's Soyuz conference theme: Post Post-Socialism? Indeed, this theme, the end of endings, circulates widely, from the hopes of police officers and rights activists trying to stop domestic violence, to the fears registered by the scholar of Soviet

defense policy, former US National Security Advisor and current US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, who announced in a speech in 2002 that:

The international system has been in flux since the collapse of Soviet power... Now it is possible -- indeed, probable -- that that transition is come to an end. . . Before the clay is dry again, America and our friends and our allies must move decisively to take advantage of these new opportunities (Kessler, 2004)

Endings are also, for very different purposes, the theme of much academic writing through the late 1990's of varying styles, ranging from the Late Editions volumes edited by George Marcus, to the reflexive sociology of Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash (1995), or the reflections on modernity found in the work of Zygmunt Bauman (1999) and Niklas Luhman (1998). One thing these writings of the end have in common is a focus, or at least desired focus, on emergence, that is, keeping the clay wet, including attention duly paid to the question of who, after all, is being taken advantage of.

Instead of adding post upon post, each rebounding off the next in uncanny ways, perhaps it is more useful to think outside of the post of post-socialism through analyses of ongoing exchanges of conceptualizations of uncertainty; a trafficking in expertise of the known and the unknown, both within, between and beyond ethnographic writings; flows of tools, techniques, interventions, which themselves can be registered ethnographically. This circulation is not simply a demonstration of intensified interconnections of distant locales through universalizing tokens of exchange, to paraphrase Giddens, but also a rearticulation of concrete practices and techniques of intervening, representing, capturing and reformulating social cultural spaces, strategies of conceiving, diagnosing, and constructing potential futures, in which ethnography forms symmetries with the entangled discursive frames of activism, rights, development and security that it seeks to represent.

Acknowledgements

The dissertation research and writing on which this paper was based was made possible by the Fulbright Foundation, the American Council for Learned Societies, and the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation.

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