

Theoretical Interpretations of Elite Change in East Central Europe

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Introduction

Elite theory enjoyed a remarkable revival in East Central Europe. Many researchers coming from different schools of thought — Marxist class analysis, Weberian sociology, functionalist social stratification research, New Class theory, and the like — turned to the analysis of rapid political and social changes and ended up doing elite-centered research. One of the most important characteristics of contemporary elite research is the focus on elite *transformation* because nowadays elite research is primarily about *change*. After decades of the more static “Kremlinology” and “Sovietology” (cf. Taras 1992) suddenly everything, the social, political, and economic regime changed, including the elites. Therefore, with little exaggeration, one can claim that elite research regained attention as part of “transitology” and “consolidology.” There is a widespread agreement among scholars that transitions to democracy have been elite-driven processes. There was also a — less outspoken — agreement, particularly in the early 1990s, that reliable democracy should not be made by the masses but be crafted by elites. Why has elitism become so fashionable?

At the time of the early elitist school true democracy and elite rule were parallel, but somehow contradictory, phenomena. According to Michels (1915), with the tendencies of oligarchization, elites inevitably “corrupted” democracy, so representative democracy was increasingly understood as a dishonest form of elitism. For many decades afterwards, elitism was associated with fascism or, at least, with charismatic leadership so it earned a bad reputation. In the West, elitism was seen as a not-fully-democratic approach in explaining phenomena related to political leadership, ruling class, political class and the like. Debates between the advocates of “elitist democracy” (cf. Schumpeter 1942) and “participatory democracy” in the

late 1960s and early 1970s led to the temporary “victory” of the latter (cf. Bottomore 1964; Bachrach 1969, 1971). Elitist democracy was understood as one of the hardly consumable side-products of modernization, and — after some years of its advancement — modernization theory became subject to heavy criticism in anycase.

In East Central Europe, during the decades of dictatorship, official sociology, or, rather, historical materialism, advocated a simplified version of Marxist class theory. This suggested a two-class-one-stratum model (the proletariat as the dominant class, ruling in collaboration with the peasantry, and the subordinated stratum, the intellectuals [called “mental workers”]), who were supposed to assist them). This official model of Marxism-Leninism dominated social sciences in the universities in most of these countries. Official sociologists talked about “Old Class” theories, while dissident sociologists used “New Class” theories to criticize the then existing socialist regime.

The revival of elite theory in the late 1980s (Domhoff & Dye 1987; Burton & Higley 1987a; Higley & Burton 1989; Wasilewski 1989; Field et al. 1990) came as a surprise. Scholars stopped using the heavily ideologized Marxist discourse in the social sciences because it was regarded as the language of the ideocratic communist regime. Since transition and elite transformation seemed to be parallel processes, it was understandable that sociologists and political scientists of the region started to use elite theory — sometimes without re-reading Pareto and Mosca. Transitions to democracy became frequently analysed as “elite games.” The main focus of social sciences shifted from structures to actors, from path dependency to institutional choices. Transitions, roundtable negotiations, institution-building, constitution-making, compromise-seeking, pact-making, pact-breaking, extended consensualism, strategic choices — all of these underlined the importance of elites, and the significance of research on political elites. Thus both the historical and intellectual conditions were given to mainstreaming elite theory, again (cf. Higley & Gunther 1992; Etzioni-Halévy 1997; Finocchiaro 1999).

Social theory and research in East Central Europe has been reoriented from status quo to social change, from social stratification to revitalized cleavages, from class analysis to elite research. On the more theoretical level, formerly fashionable New Class approaches have been replaced by elite theories.

The New Class Theory

During the communist period, despite the dominance of official Marxism-Leninism, there were, some important differences among the countries in the Sovietized belt. The Baltic republics, for instance, were part of

the Soviet Union therefore they did not even have a chance to teach empirical social science in their own territory. In Poland, Yugoslavia, and Hungary, however, social sciences still had some relative autonomy. In Poland, sociology continuously existed throughout the dictatorship, and political science as an academic discipline was also initiated from the 1960s. Hungary reinstalled sociology in the early 1960s, after 15 years of silence, but political science was not allowed up until the early or mid-1980s. In those countries, non-official or semi-official Marxist philosophy also enjoyed considerable autonomy around some circles (Praxis group, Budapest School) or philosophers (Leszek Kolakowski, Georg Lukács). The few years before the Prague Spring offered some opening in the Czechoslovakian social sciences as well, but this was brutally interrupted during the years of “normalization,” a process that followed the Soviet invasion of 1968. The (post)totalitarian regimes of Bulgaria, Romania and East Germany did not allow similar activity.

East Central Europe’s (half-legal or illegal) independent social science had some genuine responses to the political oppression in describing the relationship between the power structure and the society. Besides theories of market socialism, civil society, second society, the parallel existence of formal and informal societies, one important theory emerged: the idea of a New Class (cf. Széleányi & Martin 1988). Former communist politicians on the way to exile or prison (Trotsky, Djilas) made genuine and successful early efforts to describe and criticize the seemingly “revolutionary” regime on the basis of analysis of their bureaucracy. For Trotsky the bureaucracy was still a social stratum with class features (Trotsky 1964). For Djilas (1966), however, more than two decades after, this bureaucratic rule was obviously seen as the domination of a New Class. Their arguments reminded students of communist rule to the ideas of earlier thinkers, forerunners of New Class theory: Bakunin (n.d.) and, especially, Machajski (1905).

From the mid-20th century, New Class theory promised some chances for convergence between East and West. In the early 1940s, Burnham claimed that in modern capitalist society it is managers, and not property owners, who make strategic decisions in large firms. The new stage of development can therefore be called managerialism, where not ownership but decision-making positions count more as power (Burnham 1941). This claim was reinforced decades later by Konrád and Széleányi (1979) who described the reformist period of communism as a struggle inside the dominant class between (old, less educated, ideological) bureaucracy and (new, more educated, intellectual) technocracy, which voices the ideology of expertise. According to their view, the Communist nomenklatura was to be taken over by technocrats who would fundamentally alter the sociological

nature of the regime. The intellectuals would finally complete a historical project in ascending to class power as experts.

Incidentally, their book, originally written in Hungary in the first part of the 1970s, was published in English in a period when New Class theory gained ground. Alvin Gouldner's influential analysis (1979), based on Marxist theory, discussed the New Class with optimism, as a progressive force able to cultivate the culture of critical discourse (CCD) and thus undermine capitalism. For the same reason, neo-conservatives looked upon the New Class with more worry. Daniel Bell (1975), Kevin Phillips (1975), Irving Kristol (1978, 1983) and others pointed out the contradictory cultural tendencies of capitalism: besides its mainstream culture, capitalist liberal democracy produces its own "adversary culture" which might undermine its fundamental values. Some authors just described this phenomenon rather neutrally, while others were more worried about a coming cultural decline. They regarded the holders of "adversary culture," the "knowledge class," or "knowledge industry," as a New Class. According to their understanding, this New Class was not a cherished social agency any more but a dangerously destructive force (cf. Bruce-Biggs 1981). Daniel Bell called this "New Class" as a "muddled concept," a mentality rather than a class, which was not to be taken, as a class theory, scientifically seriously (Bell 1980: 144-64). Later, Lipset (1991), along with others, strongly criticised Konrád and Szelényi (1991) who interpreted the 1989 revolutions and their aftermath as a victory of intellectuals, not as a New Class but as "politicocracy." It seems that New Class theory was fashionable only as long as state socialism existed and the gap between the increasingly technocratized "political class" and the rest of the society (proletariat etc.) could effectively be described and criticized.

Table 1 summarizes different New Class theories and theorists according to the scope and focus of their analysis.

In this paper, I distinguish between elite theories and approaches according to the scope, level, and focus of their analysis. According to this view one can differentiate between 1) Classic elite theories, 2) Contemporary general elite theories, 3) Theories and approaches applicable to post-communist East Central Europe, and finally, 4) Theories and approaches applicable to individual post-communist countries of East Central Europe.

Contemporary Theses in Elite Theory

Elite approach gained strength by the end of the 1980s, partly because elite theory seemed to be more appropriate to capture the phenomenon of post-communist transformation than the previously dominant New Class approach. In the following, I will present some influential theses and

Table 1
Theorizing New Class

| | Scholar | Major thesis |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Classic theories | Jan W. Machajski (1905) | Intellectuals as New Class |
| | Leon Trotsky (1964) | Bureaucracy (as stratum) |
| | James Burnham (1941) | Managerialism |
| | Milovan Djilas (1966) | Bureaucracy as New Class |
| Recent theories | Daniel Bell (1975) | Cultural contradictions of capitalism |
| | Kevin Phillips (1975) | Mediocracy |
| | Alvin Gouldner (1979) | Intellectuals as New Class: culture of critical discourse, and knowledge |
| | György Konrád & Iván Szelényi (1979) | Intellectuals as technocracy: bearers of trans-contextual knowledge |
| | Irving Kristol (1978, 1983) | Adversary culture, “knowledge industry” |
| | György Konrád & Iván Szelényi (1991) | Intellectuals as “politocracy” |

approaches which all have been (re)invented in the 1980s and '90s inside the framework of elite theory.

The classic elite theories of Michels (1915), Weber (1915-21), Pareto (1935, 1968), Mosca (1939) and C.W. Mills (1956) are widely known and accepted. In the following, I will focus on some theoretical innovations in elite studies which were elaborated in the last two decades.

1. Elite Settlements

Just a year after O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) gave a widely recognized “guideline” for democratic transitions, and, two years before the crucial year 1989, Burton and Higley emphasized the importance of elite groups in political change. They claimed that elite settlements represent one route to stable democracy. Their definition is the following:

“Elite settlements are relatively rare events in which warring national elite factions suddenly and deliberately reorganize their relations by negotiating compromises on their most basic disagreements. Elite settlements have two major consequences: they create patterns of open but peaceful competition, based on the “norm of restrained partisanship” among all major elite factions, and they transform unstable regimes (...) into stable regimes in which irregular seizures no longer occur and are not widely expected.” (Burton & Higley 1987b: 295)

Elite settlements were presented as alternatives to social revolutions (cf. Skocpol 1979). These are defined as the elite side of peaceful transitions to

democracy and acknowledged as the more important part of it. According to the authors, elite settlements have five major characteristics: 1) Speed (it must be done quickly or not at all), 2) Negotiations (face-to-face, partially secret), 3) Written agreements, 4) Conciliatory behavior, 5) Experienced leaders.

The idea of such elite-driven change was formulated in the intellectual atmosphere of the 1980s which emphasized the importance of the more formal, minimalist, “modest” meaning of democracy (Huntington 1984, 1989), where elite choices are not so much disturbed by the masses. Huntington’s own approach was also elite-centered when he said that “democratic institutions come into existence through negotiations and compromises among political elites calculating their own interests and desires” (Huntington 1984: 212). The elite settlement approach was then followed by some important contributions in “transitology” which described the process of regime change largely as “elite games” (Przeworski 1991, 1992; Bruszt & Stark 1992; Colomer & Pascual 1994; Colomer 2000; Higley & Burton 1998; Higley & Pakulski 2000a).

2. *Circulation vs Reproduction*

As a hypothesis for comparative research, Iván Szelényi reformulated Pareto’s distinction between elite circulation and elite transformation. In a co-authored study with Szonja Szelényi they argued that there were basically two ways for elite change: 1. *elite reproduction* or 2. *elite circulation*. According to the elite reproduction theory, “revolutionary changes in Eastern Europe did not affect the social composition of elites. This is because the old nomenklatura elite has managed to survive at the top of the class structure and is now becoming the new propertied bourgeoisie.” According to the elite circulation theory, “transition to post-communism resulted in a structural change at the top of the class hierarchy: new people are recruited for command positions on the basis of new principles” (Iván Szelényi & Szonja Szelényi 1995: 616).

Together with Don Treiman, Szelényi conducted the largest international comparative elite research ever in East Central Europe (in 1993-94) under the project title “Social Stratification in Eastern Europe After 1989.” They collaborated with top researchers of the field in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Russia and Slovakia. Their findings were published in a 1995 special issue in *Theory and Society* edited by Szelényi. Although Szelényi himself, in his earlier theory of “interrupted embourgeoisement” (1988), tended to argue for the relevance of elite circulation (opposing the views of Hankiss, Staniszkis, and Szalai who emphasized the prevalence of elite reproduction), he was right only in judging the transformation of political elites. As it turned out, contrary to his expectations, the thesis of elite reproduction was more relevant in explaining the change of

economic elites. So empirically both of them were partly right and wrong. The real relevance of Széleányi's idea was, however, not the answer but the question itself. The question of "reproduction vs circulation" proved to be very enlightening and shaped the whole discourse of the elite research of the 1990s in a fundamental way. It also turned out that his theoretical question had broader relevance than the East Central European region: it was relevant for all societies experiencing sudden social and political change.

3. Elite Differentiation and Unity — Forms of Elite Circulation

This theory was first formulated by Field and Higley (1980), later further elaborated by Higley and Pakulski (1992), and more recently by Higley and Lengyel (2000). The theory holds that there is a consensus among the otherwise widely differentiated elite groups that, despite their disagreements in ideologies and policy issues, they stick to the democratic rules of the game. "Elite unity in diversity is the sine qua non of a robust democratic polity and an effective market economy" (Higley & Lengyel 2000: 1). In a democratic society elite unity is not to be confused with elite homogeneity, elite unity exists in conditions of wide elite differentiation: in sum, the unity is about the basic procedures. There is, however, another form of elite unity, where elite differentiation is narrow: that is the case of an ideocratic elite which occurs in totalitarian or post-totalitarian political regimes. Elite disunity might produce a fragmented elite in the case of differentiated elite groups (which is a characteristic feature of unconsolidated democracies), or, alternatively, can lead to a divided elite in the case of narrow differentiation (which is typical in authoritarian regimes).

On the basis of elite unity and elite differentiation Higley and Lengyel developed a two-dimensional model applicable to different political regimes. This model, summarized in Figure 1, has served as a useful starting point in many analyses of elites and democratic consolidation in East Central Europe.

Further, Higley and Lengyel elaborated another figure for forms of elite circulation to make elite theory corresponding more to dynamics of political change. They did not follow the Széleányi and Széleányi model (1995) by talking in terms of circulation vs reproduction as alternative forms of elite change. For them circulation means something else: it is the way elites change. Circulation can only be modified by "classic," "reproduction," "replacement" and "quasi replacement" forms of change to create a typology of elite change. They use the notion of reproduction as adjective to circulation. The notion of "replacement" was borrowed from Huntington (1991).

Figure 1
Configurations of National Elites and Associated Regime Types

| | | <i>Elite unity</i> | |
|------------------------------|--------|--|--|
| | | Strong | Weak |
| <i>Elite differentiation</i> | Wide | <i>Consensual elite</i> (consolidated democracy) | <i>Fragmented elite</i> (unconsolidated democracy) |
| | Narrow | <i>Ideocratic elite</i> (totalitarian or post-totalitarian regime) | <i>Divided elite</i> (authoritarian regime) |

Source: Higley and Lengyel (2000: 3).

Figure 2
Patterns of Elite Circulation

| | | <i>Scope of elite circulation</i> | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | | Wide and deep | Narrow and shallow |
| <i>Mode of elite circulation</i> | Gradual and peaceful | Classic circulation | Reproduction circulation |
| | Sudden and enforced | Replacement circulation | Quasi-replacement circulation |

Source: Higley and Lengyel (2000: 5).

4. Elite Theory vs Marxism: A 20th Century “Verdict”

Throughout the 1990s, there was a hidden debate between elite theorists and class theorists about the relevance of their theories. This debate became sometimes explicit especially between Pakulski and Waters (1995, 1996) on the one hand, who criticized the overwhelming “classological” literature and advocated elite theory, and Erik O. Wright (1996) on the other, who maintained that class analysis was still relevant. Other scholars of the field applied different, sometimes mixed research strategies. As we can see, Higley et al. continuously used elite theory only, while others, most notably Szelényi, combined elite and class approaches without committing themselves to one of these theories. Higley and Pakulski (2000b) summarized the 20th century history of both paradigms. Being on the side of elite theory, they concluded that after decades of irrelevance, finally, elite theory had returned “victoriously” in the last two decades of the century. They attribute this revival to the increasing recognition of the autonomy

of politics, and the relative autonomy of elites (Etzioni-Halévy 1990), which created more room for manoeuvre for policy-makers. According to Higley and Pakulski, three historical phenomena forced this return: 1) The economic miracles in the “Asian Tiger” countries (which was largely due to elite decisions), 2) The existence of state socialist countries and special ways for researching their power relations (Kremlinology, Sovietology), and finally 3) The “elite-driven demise of the Soviet Union and the satellite countries” in 1989-91 (Higley & Pakulski 2000b: 236-7). They quote Diamond, Linz and Lipset that “Time and again across our cases we find the values, goals, skills, and styles of political leaders and elites making a difference in the fate of democracy” (Diamond et al. 1995: 19). However, despite all of the fruits of elite theory, the authors themselves modestly recognize, that “elite theory has not been renewed” (2000b: 238), so we can suppose that “the 20th century verdict” presented by Higley and Pakulski will not necessarily be the “final verdict.”

5. Inspirations from Social Theory: Foucault, Bourdieu, Mann, and Poggi

These theories, approaches and conceptual tools, elaborated by Higley, Burton, Field, and Széleányi, are the main ones operationalized in elite research in East Central Europe. However, it is important to note that besides approaches in general elite theory, the impact of social theories of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu proved to be decisive in shaping conceptualizations of elite change as well. Foucault (1983) made clear that power does not exclusively belong to a class or even to a group of people, rather it is a general phenomenon in all aspects of social life. Bourdieu’s theory (1983) on different “forms of capital” was also crucial, because it opened the way for thinking about the convertibility of different social assets. One should also mention Michael Mann’s theory of “society as organized power networks” (1986) which discussed similar points from a general historical and theoretical perspective, and stimulated most recent social thought, on “forms of power,” especially the writings of Gianfranco Poggi (2001).

Contemporary Theses on Elites in East Central Europe

1. Conversion of Power and the “Grand Coalition”

Elemér Hankiss (1990, 1991) formulated a powerful thesis for elite reproduction. According to him, ruling elites are never ready to give up their power voluntarily. If they do so, there must be some special conditions which motivate them to quit. For Hankiss this motivation was the opportunity for conversion of power. Those political leaders, and their followers, who were involved in the reform processes in East Central Europe in the second part of the 1980s did not primarily act to serve the

“public good” or to achieve freedom; rather, according to Hankiss, they were working for their own self-interests. Influenced by Pierre Bourdieu, Hankiss believed that there are different forms of power available in a society and when the communist elite had to face the decline of the *ancien régime* and the possibility of losing their political power they became increasingly interested in saving their power by converting it to another terrain. Hankiss proves that legislation on “spontaneous privatization” was the main tool for them to achieve this goal. He used Hungarian examples to demonstrate his case but he extended the scope of his analysis to East Central Europe as well. At the time of the publication of his book, his thesis was more heuristic, it was not preceded by systematic empirical analysis. However, he formulated one of the strongest hypotheses of elite transformation in East Central Europe.

Hankiss thought that communist-turned-to-be-pragmatic elites would find their way-out: to get rid of the discredited regime and to save their influence at the same time. He supposed that the winners of the change would finally create a “grand coalition,” in the social sense of the word, in which the former communist political class would merge with managers, directors of state owned firms, top entrepreneurs, and those who occupy top positions in the state administration. According to Hankiss, “reform” was just a catchword to hide deeper processes of elite convergence via power conversion. Members of a potential new elite paved the way for their comfortable survival. This elite, for Hankiss, was not to come from outside the already influential circles; it was to be recruited from all of those who had enough political influence to create access to property for themselves. Later, other scholars suggested that this was the price to pay for peaceful, bloodless transition to democracy.

The Szelenyi and Treiman research (1993-94) proved that Hankiss had partly been right only: elite reproduction (or reproduction circulation) was a major way for change in the post-communist economy. On the more visible terrain of politics, however, a quicker and deeper change, circulation (or “replacement circulation”), occurred in the political elite which was probably beyond Hankiss’ expectations.

2. Political Capitalism

Jadwiga Staniszkis (1991) developed a very similar idea to that of Hankiss’. According to her, the former nomenklatura uses its political power to gain private wealth. She believed that the process of privatization would benefit the Communist political class which could retain its top position in the society. She anticipated the making of a propertied bourgeoisie from the ranks of top cadres and the nomenklatura. Staniszkis called this phenomenon “political capitalism” because capitalism is designed according to the needs of the “outgoing” political elite by political

means, for themselves. She sees this as a “hybrid form of Westernization” Staniszkis examines six forms of the combination of power and capital, and enlists both the advantages and disadvantages of political capitalism. Since she states that “there is no rational privatization without capital” she views this process in a somewhat disillusioned manner. Among the disadvantages she mentions “compromising the idea of privatization of state sector in the eyes of society” which makes them unenthusiastic about the new regime and prevents their active participation in public matters. Among the advantages, she observes that it made the systemic transformation easier and quicker because members of the *nomenklatura* had not opposed the process at all. Both Hankiss and Staniszkis accepted Bourdieu’s thesis of different forms of capital (1983), and they believed that the convertibility of political capital into economic capital would be the dominant social process in elite change of the post-communist transition.

3. The Elite Network State

The Norwegian scholar, Anton Steen (1997a) did the most comprehensive work on the Baltic states and invented some important concepts for elite research. In his book, he considers the question: “Who are the new elites, how do they cooperate and what are their main priorities and decisions?” Differences in elite patterns and policy development between three Baltic states are analyzed from the perspective of historical conditions, structural problems, institutional affiliation and previous regime connection. Variations between the three Baltic states in elite attitudes, behavior and decision-making appears to be particularly related to ethnic structures. The study proposes a theory of elite control a response to ethnic problems, accounting for why the seemingly similar Baltic states are developing along different lines regarding elite configuration and the role of the state. In respect to the attitudes, Steen finds that the elites hold not as liberal views as the ones found in the US, nor as social democratic as found in Scandinavian countries. His analysis further allows him to conclude that the difference between the elites in the three Baltic countries are smaller than expected, which gave him a reason to suggest that institutions have only minor effects on variations, recruitment, attitudes and behaviour. The same applies to historical/communist legacy, which matters little, if at all. What matters, according to Steen, is the country’s structural characteristics, like geographical location, religious practice, minority situation and social cleavages. On the basis of these characteristics, Steen develops the concept of elite network state which describes a post-communist society where “elites interacting under few institutional constraints, adapting to the rhetoric of market liberalism, while using the state for pragmatic pursuit of specific interests, make this kind of state formation very different from Western countries” (Steen 1997a: 335).

4. *Technocratic Continuity*

Erzsébet Szalai (1990, 1995) was inspired by Hankiss' thesis on the emerging "Grand Coalition." In the 1980s, she did empirical research in state owned big socialist firms and she agreed with Hankiss that managers of state companies had been prepared for a special "spontaneous" privatization which had been designed to combine political and economic capital.

However, she claimed, that it is not the whole nomenklatura class which could implement this large scale conversion but only its younger and more educated elements. Szalai pictures this process of transformation as an increasing struggle between the "old elite" and the emerging "new technocracy" inside the top strata of the communist regime. She predicted that the younger, better educated, technocratic "new elite" would control the process of regime change, or at least, the process of economic transformation. Szalai was right in her diagnosis as far as the economic transformation is concerned. For the political elites, however, circulation (or replacement type of circulation) dominated the process over reproduction (or reproduction type of circulation). As Szelényi rightly observed, Szalai's hypothesis was a bit more complex than those of Hankiss and Staniszkis: "Those who relied exclusively or overwhelmingly on political capital for their power and privilege (i.e. the old elite) are likely to be downwardly mobile, while those who combined cultural and political capital (i.e. the new technocracy) are better positioned to achieve positive privileges in terms of economic capital today" (Szelényi & Szelényi 1995: 618). The theses of Hankiss, Staniszkis and Szalai were the most powerful statements about elite change in East Central Europe at the beginning of the 1990s.

5. *Post-Communist Managerialism: Elite Theory and New Class Theory Combined*

Just two years after the "reproduction vs circulation" debate, Gil Eyal, Iván Szelényi and Eleanor Townsley (1997) came up with a new proposition that they called the theory of post-communist managerialism. The interesting feature of this approach is that the authors combined approaches of elite theory and New Class theory. In fact, Szelényi, unlike Pakulski and Waters (1996), never gave up class analysis completely. For him elite and class theories can be not mutually exclusive but complementary instruments to understand social change. The authors of the study claim that

"the distinctiveness of the new capitalist societies of East Central Europe is due to the coalition of class fractions and elites which currently rule them. This coalition constitutes a 'power elite,' which controls the command positions of political, cultural, and economic institutions, and is busy making 'capitalism without capitalists.' For the time being, this post-communist power elite does not look like a capitalist class (...) nor does it resemble the communist nomenklatura. (...) Instead, the new power elite of post-communism resembles

most closely what Bourdieu has called 'the dominated fraction in the dominant class' in Western capitalism: it exercises power principally on the basis of knowledge, expertise and the capacity to manipulate symbols, in short 'cultural capital'." (Eyal et al. 1997: 61)

This new elite groups, the managerial elite, the new "politocracy" and cultural elite, constitute a New Class, according to the authors, which dominates a regime which can be called post-communist *managerialism*. The reference to Burnham (1941) is not accidental, although the authors recognize the differences between the social conditions of the post-depression capitalism of the 1930s, and the post-revolutionary "half-capitalism" of the 1990s. Post-communist managerialism is not the most advanced form of capitalism, as was originally by exponents of managerialism theory. Post-communist managerialism reflects upon diffuse property relations, dispersed ownership, "recombinant property" (Stark 1996), and the prevalence of social and political uncertainty. It is primarily designed by financial managers and experts working for foreign and international financial agencies who plan capitalism for a globalized economy. In a sort of true Gramscian spirit, the authors observe that the hegemonic ideology of managerialism is monetarism which serves as a political technology as well. The authors even risk stating that "managerialism may not be merely a phenomenon of transition," it might serve as a legitimizing idea of a technocratic rule for a longer period of time. The co-optation of humanistic intellectuals into this new power structure serves the goal of a more efficient legitimacy of the regime, but they will just represent the "dominated fraction" inside the power elite.

This analysis was very innovative and powerful: it offered a combination of elite and New Class theories including some parts of Szelényi's earlier theory on intellectuals. It reflected very well the chaotic period of the first part of the 1990s. In my view, however, the theory of managerialism overgeneralized the rather temporary interests of the power elite, and also the stability of the coalition of managers, technocrats, "politocrats" and the humanistic intellectuals. Approaching the millennium, it became clearer that managers and other elite circles were, in fact, very much interested in gaining property. For them, after the years of uncertainty and *anomie*, finally the restabilization of property relations meant consolidation. It turns out that managers of the post-communist era did not want to stay as managers for the rest of their life. They considered this as a tiring, nerve-breaking, unhealthy job. They wanted to get rich in the first place and retire afterwards to have enough time to enjoy their wealth and newly gained property.

Recognizing the potentially changing conditions, Eyal, Szelényi, and Townsley, while maintaining the major statements of post-communist

managerialism, somewhat relativized some of their sharp generalizations and the endurance of managerialism for East Central European societies. In their reformulation, post-communist managerialism was seen not as the beginning of a potentially unique regime in history, but as a phase of social struggles on the way of “the making the new propertied class.” As a result, their book, *Making Capitalism Without Capitalists: The New Ruling Elites in Eastern Europe* (1998) became a well balanced, theoretically and empirically very rich volume, which is considered by many scholars as the best book written on post-communist elites in the 1990s.

6. *Elites as Institution-builders*

In an article published in the mid-1990s, Antoni Z. Kaminski and Joanna Kurczewska (1995) examined elites and institution-building processes together. They distinguished between two polar cases of institution-building: 1) A political regime “conceived and implemented by a small elite in power” (top-down implementation), 2) A political regime “emerges during the process of negotiation and compromise among many local, national, and/or functional groups” (bottom-up implementation). These two forms of institution-building correspond to two different perspectives on elites: stratificational and functional. First, from the *stratificational perspective*, elite is a group of people who occupy certain positions on the top levels of social hierarchy which give them opportunity to control or influence strategic decisions. Second, in a *functional sense*, there can be groups which are alienated from the formal authority structures and can pose an alternative to it, especially in crisis situations (social reformers, revolutionaries). As they argue,

“In the first case, a unified, national elite constructs a regime which protects it against interferences from below and monopolistically operationalizes the meaning of the public interest. (...) In the second instance, the groups that participate in the constitutional contract create institutional devices which protect their political rights and social autonomy against arbitrary interference from the power centre.” (Kaminski & Kurczewska 1995: 139)

Kaminski and Kurczewska also developed an elite typology which was inspired by Weber’s writings. They distinguished between 1) Traditional elite, 2) Charismatic elite, 3) Bureaucratic-collectivist elite, and 4) Interactionist-individualist elite. While traditional elites are inherently conservative, charismatic elite groups “have a sense of mission personified in a prophet or a hero; a belief in his extraordinary virtues and qualities. (...) All relations are personalized. These elites have an active disposition towards moral values. (...) Only motives and intentions count, results are secondary” (Kaminski & Kurczewska 1995: 143-4). The third and the fourth types are both rational-legal type. While members of the bureaucratic-collectivist

elite are thinking in terms of division of labor, centralization, state assets, and *raison d'état*, members of the interactionist-individualist type of elite are thinking in terms of entrepreneurship, citizenship, civil society, the market and the public sphere. They conclude that "interactionist elites create, in comparison to the bureaucratic ones, a more open, richer and diversified form of social coexistence" (1995: 145). Exactly this type of elite is missing in countries of East Central Europe.

7. Three Elites

In a recent study, Jacek Wasilewski (2001) distinguished between three phases of social and political change in East Central Europe, 1) Transition, 2) Transformation, and 3) Consolidation. He claimed that these three epochs require three different types of elites. By transition, he means "a relatively brief period between two regimes, during which new rules of the political game are established." It is the period when strategic choices are made. Second, by transformation he means implementation processes of already made decisions, i.e. the practical processes of crafting democracy and market economy. He argues that, unlike transition, transformation processes are more embedded in the social reality of the given countries: "they emerge out of a recombination of available resources, through a process of, exactly, transformation of already existing components." And finally, consolidation refers to the new order, to "its stability and smooth operation. It is the process of habituation of new rules and patterns" (Wasilewski 2001: 134). Here Wasilewski basically accepts the definition of consolidation offered by Linz and Stepan (1996).

Corresponding to these phases, 1) The elite of transition can be portrayed as the elite of mission and vision; 2) The elite of transformation "was to put into motion a vision (...) therefore it was composed of engineers and technologists of a new polity and new economy"; and finally 3) The elite of consolidation "is to habituate the new order (...). They are to be moderators, integrators, growth-inducers" (Wasilewski 2001: 135).

By simplifying Wasilewski's model we can sum it up in Table 2.

In summarizing the "three elites" thesis, Wasilewski recognizes that different periods require different political skills, approaches, leaders and also elites. Different elite groups must either rotate or adapt themselves to different tasks, because, as Schmitter (1995) and others pointed out, consolidation requires completely different approaches than transition itself. As Robert Putnam (1976) already stated, in many aspects, post-revolutionary elites are very different from the revolutionary ones.

8. Further Typologies of Political Elites

Based on Max Weber's theory and his own empirical research on four Polish parliaments, Włodzimierz Wesolowski (2001) elaborated a typology

Table 2
Regime Change and the Three Elites

| Elite/period Relations | Elite Characteristics | Major tasks | Mass-Elite |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Elite of transition | mission and vision | institutional choices | symbolic politics |
| Elite of transformation | engineering the new order | crafting democracy and market economy | reform politics |
| Elite of consolidation | integration and habituation | consolidating democracy and inducing growth | distributive politics |

Source: Wasilewski (2001: 137) modified.

of politicians who are members of the parliament. He recognized that, in consolidated democracies, politicians are primarily living “off politics.” However, living off politics can have a positive and negative side. On the positive side, Wesolowski mentions politicians “with calling” who are ready to serve a specific, well-defined social, political, cultural or geopolitical “purpose.” (Note that these are not with politicians with mission, which is a rather obscure, meta-political concept in their own self-understanding.) On the negative side, one can find politicians “seeking enjoyments” who are not motivated by particular social goals. Concerning their everyday operation, Wesolowski distinguishes between professionalization and routinization. On the positive side of politicians “living off politics” one should mention professionalization which “involves a special kind of occupational training and a special way of methodical conduct at executing the job” (Wesolowski 2001: 33). By contrast, routinization represents the negative side, a “professionalization which has gone wrong. Instead of sound knowledge the deputy makes use of a few clichés which make thinking easier” (Wesolowski 2001: 34).

Another research has examined the relationship between cultural and political elite by focusing on those intellectuals who became politicians at the period of regime change (Bozóki 1994). In this typology four types of intellectuals could be distinguished according to the individuals’ attitudes to politics and to becoming politicians: 1) “Professionals,” 2) “Missionaries,” 3) “Hesitants,” and 4) “Retreatists.” In the first category, those former intellectuals were located who became professionals and found out that making politics was their real, “natural” job. They easily and rapidly identified with the politician’s role and sought quickly to raise it to a professional level. The second group consisted of intellectuals taking part in politics with a sense of mission. This type of intellectuals entered politics with idealistic, romantic feelings, so they could operate well in the symbolic

Table 3
Theorizing Elites for East Central Europe

| Scholar | Major thesis |
|---|---|
| Thomas A. Baylis (1994, 1998) | Elite transformation in post-communism |
| András Bozóki (1994) | Types of intellectual politicians |
| Gil Eyal & Eleanor Townsley (1995) | Communist nomenclature |
| Gil Eyal, Iván Szelényi & Eleanor Townsley (1997, 1998) | Post-communist managerialism: elite and New Class theory combined |
| Éva Fodor et al. (1995) | Political and cultural elites |
| Janina Frentzel-Zagórska & Jacek Wasilewski (2000) | Second generation of elites |
| Elemér Hankiss (1990, 1991) | Power conversion via grand coalition |
| Eric Hanley et al. (1996) | Post-communist elite characteristics |
| John Higley & György Lengyel (2000) | Forms of circulation |
| J. Higley, J. Pakulski & W. Wesolowski (1992) | Post-communist elites |
| John Higley & Jan Pakulski (2000) | Elite theory vs Marxism |
| Antoni Z. Kaminski & Joanna Kurczewska (1995) | Elites as institution-builders |
| Vladimir Shlapentokh et al. (1999) | New elites compared |
| Jadwiga Staniszkis (1991) | Political capitalism |
| Anton Steen (1994, 1997a, 1997b) | Elite control and elite network state |
| Erzsébet Szalai (1990, 1995) | Technocratic continuity |
| Iván Szelényi (1988) | Embourgeoisement: “socialist entrepreneurs” |
| Iván Szelényi & Szonja Szelényi (1995) | Elite circulation vs reproduction |
| I. Szelényi, D. Treiman & E. Wnuk-Lipinski (1995) | Emerging elites compared |
| Jacek Wasilewski (2001) | Three elites |
| Włodzimierz Wesolowski (1998a, 2001) | Elites compared, types of political elite |

politics of the regime change but lost influence during consolidation, the period of habituation and routinization of democratic practices. The third group was composed by people of “brooding,” who were pending, hesitating between the roles of an intellectual and of a politician, sometimes combining the two but losing ground soon in both terrains. Finally, in the fourth category one could find “people of rapid retreat” that is intellectuals interested in politics who regarded flirtation with practical politics as a passing adventure, a short detour deriving from the exceptional situation, and who, as soon as they felt that the situation had changed, returned to their old vocations.

There some other concepts, ideas, theories to be mentioned, but I have no space to discuss them. Instead, I attempt to summarize theories on political elites in Table 3.

Elite Research in Countries of East Central Europe

It is difficult to give a full overview on elite research in the individual countries of East Central Europe, although a pioneering book was already published (Best & Becker 1997). It seems to be true that systematic elite research in the last ten years has been done in Poland and Hungary only. By systematic elite research I mean research projects which are designed to analyse elites, elite change, elite behavior, etc., on the basis of elite theory.

From this viewpoint we can say that Pakulski, Panków, Post, Staniszkis, Wasilewski, Wesolowski, Wnuk-Lipinski and others did this type of research on Poland, while Böröcz, Hankiss, Lengyel, Róna-Tas, Szalai, Szelényi, Tökés and others did so on Hungary. Many Polish and Hungarian researchers participated in large scale elite-researches: first, in the Szelényi and Treiman project in 1993-94 (which discussed the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Russia as well), and second, collaborating with John Higley, in two books, published in 1998 and 2000, and with Dogan and Higley (1998). The cases of Lithuania and the Czech Republic should, perhaps, also be mentioned where important achievements have been made in elite research in the last few years.

Otherwise, in most countries, social science research was dominated by research on social and political change: democratic transition and consolidation, constitutionalism, party system, electoral system, voters' behavior, economic transformation, privatization, social stratification, ethnic conflicts, and public policy issues. Researchers were busy in describing and understanding the formalities of this historic change focusing on institution-building processes. There are also many non-systematic and semi-scientific approaches to elite change as well, which, however, can be important source of knowledge: memoirs, philosophical essays, sociographies, journalistic accounts and the like. In many cases even data collection is missing or unfinished, so documentary histories and pure statistical analyses are of great importance.

Nevertheless, many analyses touched upon the issue of political elites even though those studies were primarily focusing on other characteristics of transformation. Virtually everybody acknowledged the importance of elite studies, both in the East and the West, still most approaches in the 1990s dealt with the dynamics of change (revolution, transition, consolidation, changes in social stratification, etc.) first of all.

With a partial exception of Poland and Hungary, it was characteristic that, in the first part of the 1990s, foreign scholars, or native scholars living abroad, played a crucial role in starting researches on these countries. They had easier access to different funds and the academic skills to develop a larger or more comparative research design of a Western style. For researchers living in the countries of the region, the works of some foreign-

based scholars proved to be particularly helpful, even if not all of them cultivated elite-centered research. After the initial period of learning from them, local scholars started to co-operate with their Western colleagues in different projects. This became easier since there was a generation change in the Western academia also. Those scholars who left their own countries for the West in the 1950s and 1960s have been increasingly replaced by those East Central Europeans who left for studying in the United States, legally, in the 1980s and 1990s to do their PhD and find academic job overseas. In many cases, they were successfully collaborating with their academic partners in each country combining local, empirical knowledge with theoretical apparatus. Today, one can observe an emerging new generation in the social sciences in East Central Europe. These scholars are now able to both compete and collaborate with their Western counterparts.

The Table 4 gives a summary on elite research (and related researches) in different countries of East Central Europe.

Which Are the Main Lessons Offered by Contemporary Elite Research in East Central Europe?

First, it is noticeable that transition and elite research have been intertwined, therefore the focus of research shifted from structures to actors, from social determinism to political choice. Elites were seen as essential “players” of the democratization “game.” In those countries of East Central Europe where problems of statehood did not emerge as a new problem to be solved, elites could focus on democratization, and were able to achieve elite unity quickly. In countries where elites had to be involved in other “games” beside democratization — independence, ethnic conflicts, new borders, nationalism, sovereignty and the like — they proved to be less effective in managing the multiple problems of the double or even “triple transition” (Offe 1997). This “triplicity” of transition challenges — namely transition from dictatorship to democracy, from socialism to capitalism, and, in some cases, from non-state to sovereign nation-state, — posed a huge challenge for students of elite transformation.

Secondly, beside the transition studies, elite research in East Central Europe has also been connected to other projects, especially to those which analyzed political parties and party systems, social and political cleavages, and social stratification. Sometimes scholars working on these fields revealed important sociological lessons for elite studies as well.

Thirdly, regarding the fact that East Central European societies were in a constant state of flux during the transition years, it is not surprising that research on political elites has been closely interrelated to the examination of economic and cultural elites as well. The phenomenon of “conversion of power” made it imperative to study conversions of different forms of social capital (Bourdieu 1983) from political to economic, from cultural

Table 4

Research on Political Elite in Countries of East Central Europe

| Country | Scholar | Focus |
|------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| Bulgaria | Evgeni Dainov (1998) | political elite |
| | P. Kabakchieva & D. Minev (1996) | political and other elites |
| | Petya Kabakchieva (2001) | state vs civil society |
| | Georgi Karasimeonov (1995) | parties and party elites |
| | Dobrinka Kostova (2000) | economic elites |
| | N. Tikidjiev et al. (1998) | social stratification and elites |
| | Zdravka Toneva (1997) | elite research overview |
| Czech Rep. | L. Brokl, Z. Mansfeldova & Z. Kroupa (1993) | political elite |
| | Pavel Machonin & Milan Tucek (2000) | new elites |
| | Petr Matějů & Nelson Lim (1995) | elite change |
| | Petr Matějů (1997) | elite research |
| | Aviezer Tucker (1999) | intellectuals |
| Estonia | Jaana Kelder & Indrek Mustimets (1993) | parliamentary elite |
| | Marika Kirch et al. (1998) | elite groups |
| | Anton Steen (1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c) | political elite and the state |
| | Anneli Tarkmeel (2000) | elites and development |
| | Jaana Toomal (1999) | parliaments, old and new |
| Hungary | Attila Ágh (1992) | nomenclature and party elites |
| | András Bozóki (1996a, 1996b, 1999, 2002) | intellectuals, roundtable elite |
| | A. Bozóki, I. Javorniczky & I. Stumpf (1998) | political leadership |
| | József Böröcz & Á. Róna-Tas (1995) | formation of economic elites |
| | J. Böröcz & Caleb Southworth (1996) | intellectuals |
| | Tibor Huszár (1997) | elite research |
| | András Körösenyi (1996, 1999) | cleavage, nomenclature, intellectuals |
| | György Lengyel (1989, 1998) | economic elites, managers |
| | Gy. Lengyel & A. Bartha (2000) | managers |
| | András Nyíró (1989, 1992) | polibureau, nomenclature |
| | Ákos Róna-Tas (1991, 1994, 1995) | new parliament, economic elites |
| | Erzsébet Szalai (1994, 2000) | new technocracy, intellectuals |
| | I. Szelényi, Sz. Szelényi & I. Kovách (1995) | political and economic elites |
| Lithuania | Rudolf L. Tökés (1991, 1996, 2000) | communist and roundtable elites |
| | G. Babachinaite et al. (1998) | power elite |
| | Diana Janusauskiene (2002) | political elite, democratization |
| | Algis Krupavicius (1996) | elite formation |
| | Kestutis Masiulis (1997) | elite attitudes and orientations |
| | Irmina Matonyte (2001a, 2001b) | post-Soviet elites |

Table 4
(Continued)

| Country | Scholar | Focus |
|----------|--|------------------------------------|
| Poland | Janina Frentzel-Zagórska (1993) | elites, consolidation |
| | A. Kaminski & J. Kurczewska (1994) | nomadic elites |
| | Michael D. Kennedy (1991) | professionals |
| | Ireneusz Krzeminski (1995) | intellectuals |
| | B. Mach & W. Wesolowski (2000) | political elite |
| | Witold Morawski (1994) | managerial elite |
| | Krzysztof Palecki (1992) | political elite |
| | Irena Panków (1994, 1998) | parliamentary elite |
| | Aleks Szczerbiak (1998) | bureaucrats, professionals |
| | Jacek Wasilewski (1990, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1997, 1998b, 2000) | elites, parliaments, consolidation |
| | J. Wasilewski & I. Panków (1995) | political elite |
| | J. Wasilewski & E. Wnuk-Lipinski (1995) | elite change |
| | Włodzimierz Wesolowski (1992) | political elite and parliaments |
| | W. Wesolowski & B. Post (1998) | political elite and parliaments |
| | Jerzy Wiatr (1987) | leadership |
| | Edmund Wnuk-Lipinski (1993 etc.) | transition, elites, conversions |
| | Voytek Zubek (1991) | nomenclature |
| Romania | Nándor Bárdi & Zoltán Kántor (2001) | minority political elite |
| | Silviu Brucan (1996) | power elite |
| | Irina Culic (1999, 2001) | intellectuals, political elite |
| | Florin Mirghesiu (1998) | political elite and modernity |
| | Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (1999) | intellectuals, political culture |
| | Vladimir Pasti (1995) | transition and elite change |
| | Andrei Plesu (1996) | transition elites |
| | Laurentiu Stefan (2001) | political elite recruitment |
| | Stelian Tanase (1996) | elite and society |
| | Gheorghe Tibil (1995) | elite conflicts |
| | Vladimir Tismaneanu (1998) | transition, elite ideas |
| Slovakia | Martin Bútora et al. (1999) | consolidation and party elites |
| | Zuzaná Kusá (1993, 1997) | intellectuals, elite research |
| | L. Maliková & J. Chapman (1995) | local elites |
| | Janá Plichtová & E. Brozmanová (1994) | local elites |
| | Sona Szomolányi (1994a, 1994b) | formation of political elite |
| | John Gould & S. Szomolányi (2000) | consolidation of political elite |

to political, from economic to political and so on. Therefore one of the characteristics of elite research in East Central Europe is that it focuses on connections of different elites as well. To present the major finding, as an East Central European pattern, in a nutshell: There was an elite circulation in politics, but elite reproduction in the economy.

Concerning political elites, understood more strictly and narrowly, research has largely focused on the members of the consecutive parliaments and party elites (Best & Becker 1997; von Beyme 1993). This part of analysis has been closely tied to positional definition of elites, i.e. elites are understood as those groups which are making strategic decisions in top positions. Democracies can be differentiated from dictatorships on the basis that while in the former regimes formal power positions correspond more reliably to the real hierarchy of power, in the latter cases there is wider room for informal powers. That is why the predominance of positional analysis of elites in new democracies is justified. On the other hand, in defining elites, perhaps, there was too much emphasis on formal positions. There are important groups in these societies which exercise informal power or influence, and the second type of research, also characteristic in the contemporary East Central European scholarship, tried to capture this phenomenon. Such research focused on the role of intellectuals and the influence of cultural elites on politics, as well as on the cooperation between economic and political actors, as networks, lobbies, families in the period of early capitalism. One should not forget that early capitalism in East Central Europe was built “without capitalists” and therefore it was a capitalism “with comradely face.” Given these characteristics of East Central European elite transformation, comprehensive elite research should in the future deal with *formal*, positional analysis and an *informal*, elite network approach as well.

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