BOOK REVIEWS

"***Towards a New Paradigm in Transitology***" **Frank Bönker, Klaus Müller, and Andreas Pickel. eds.** ***Postcommunist Transformation and the Social Sciences: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches.*** (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002, 294 pages). - reviewed by Boyka Stefanova**.**

The democratic transformation of the former communist states in Central and Eastern Europe constitutes a widely researched area in the social sciences. Academic and public policy interest in the field is motivated by the specifics of the political development of the region since 1989, otherwise broadly defined as a transition to democracy. Eastern Europe comprises a distinct subset of democratic transitions, a newcomer and a major consecutive instance of the third wave of democratization commenced in 1974.[1] The region represents also a significant challenge to democratic theory, comparative politics research, and international politics. Political discontinuity, system transformation and political change, as well as social justice and conflict management in the unique geopolitical setting of Central and Eastern Europe became a critical test of the capacity of theoretical and analytical constructs to explain, guide, and predict the progressive accomplishment of democratic transition. Against the background of structural change in the international system, the accelerated pace of transformation in Eastern Europe produced a unique momentous feedback and critical reevaluation of the approaches followed. In conceptual and methodological terms, it questioned the entire transition paradigm. The problems posed by the practical implementation of political and economic approaches to democratic transformation and the lessons learned from this experience in turn reshaped the existing conceptual frameworks applied by both theoreticians and practitioners of reform.

Among conceptual approaches to democratization in Eastern Europe neoliberalism established itself as the paradigm of transition, and, arguably, subsequently failed to maintain a fundamental explanatory matrix of political development and social change. *Postcommunist Transformation and the Social Sciences: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches*, a collection of papers presented at a conference in Berlin, constitutes a major reevaluation of the dominant paradigm and of the puzzles and anomalies with which it is confronted. The volume consists of thirteen individual chapters presenting distinct theoretical and methodological perspectives from public economics, social theory, comparative politics, international relations, institutionalism, and synthetic frameworks.

The overarching question which all essays ultimately address, is: how does theory and its conceptual boxes deal with novelty and with social dynamics which remain unpredicted or unexplained by existing theories? Most of the authors concur with contributor Béla Greskovits that normal-science transitology of the postcommunist period has made a very limited contribution to understanding social change. It has engaged in puzzle-solving but failed to resolve the anomalies of political development presented by the crises of transition: recession, state failure, and undermined social structures. "At the end of the twentieth century history luckily surprised social scientists with a complex laboratory that allows the undertaking of new intellectual experiments," contends Greskovits. "So far, however, social scientists have been capable of little more than repeating their predecessors' visions, and teaching contradictory results." (p. 242). This verdict closely resonates with Thomas Carothers' argument, advanced elsewhere, that the transition paradigm should be discarded due to the reality "crash" of its core assumptions.[2] In line with such reasoning, this book aspires not only to conduct the search towards

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[1]The period between 1974 and the early 1990s is generally referred to as "the third wave of democratization" in line with Samuel Huntington's argument about the distinctiveness of the political transition towards democracy in a global context since the mid-seventies. See Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

[2] Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm." *Journal of Democracy* 13.1 (2002) 5-21.

novel approaches to transformation studies but also to contribute towards a new paradigmatic consensus within the social science research community.

Several essays reassess key conceptual tools and approaches to the study of transitions in order to correct for the inadequacies of the neoliberal paradigm. Kazimierz Z. Poznanski contends that the state with its crises, dysfunction, and failures in the transition process remains in the center of postcommunist transformation. The market-based orthodoxy of neoliberalism, which takes the functioning state for granted, has failed to explain variation due to differences in state institutional capacity and performance. Further in that direction, Bruno Grancelli and Martin Raiser contribute to the reversal of neoliberal assumptions by advocating an actor-based approach to transition, rather than path-dependency on existing structures. Grancelli reopens the black box of politics by studying social and economic networks in which hybrid forms of coordination evolve beyond the state-market dichotomy. The key actors in transition operate through novel networks creating human capital and investing it in local institutions. Similarly, Raiser defines the new type of leadership in terms of social trust and its determinants. A neoliberal-style entrepreneurship is thus replaced by agency in a socially rich context. Through the lens of case study inquiry, Peter Rutland underlines the need to seek solutions to individual transitions beyond the universalistic rules of the market. Comparative economics, the author contends, may be positionally useful in suggesting transition paths; however, nonmarket methods as well as regional approaches anchored in geopolitics and local conditions constitute a more viable alternative.

These essays illustrate the value of multidisciplinary perspectives on democratic transition and are representative of the significant contribution which the book makes in that direction. The plurality of approaches adopted by the authors is far from amorphous, however, thanks to an overall consensus on the importance of social institutions. In light of the increased complexity of social interaction under the constraints of policy reform, several authors elaborate on the need to redefine institutions in a social context, beyond market-based models. Institutional innovation is the core of transformation as it blends together the state, society, property rights, markets, networks, actors, and moral resources.

Willfried Spohn contends that the likelihood of a revival of nationalism, ethnic conflict, and non-democratic forms of government remains unaccounted for by the transition paradigm and "thin" versions of social theory. By introducing individual cultural context, identity factors in actors' preference formation, and agency in nation-building, Spohn considerably expands the explanatory matrix and once again points to the obsoleteness of modernization theory and its neoliberal version as transition paradigm. Spohn contends that democratic transitions are the product of "particular developmental trajectories with interrelated social structures and social actors as well as with changing internal components and external conditions." (p. 216). Obviously, the market-based philosophy of neoliberalism failed due to its reductionism and monocausality.

By introducing pluralist approaches with a specific focus on social factors and consequences, the authors successfully resolve the complex triangular relationship state—market—democracy. They converge in their conclusions on the role of social and political institutions in postcommunist transition in Eastern Europe. Such research outcome may be interpreted as an instance of the recurrent (or standing) consensus within the scientific community on Samuel Huntington's classic thesis of the role of complex institutionalization as the essence of political development.[3]

Although empirical analysis suggests that neoliberalism has failed, the distinct subset of postcommunist transitology has not. As the authors' commentaries to Greskovits suggest, claims to the effect that democratic transformation in Eastern Europe has stalled, lacks efficacy, or follows along uncertain and unchartered paths may be premature. The IMF and the World Bank readjusted their programs along the lines of conceptual and operational flexibility which most contributors to the book under review recommend as a remedy to the abstract institutional isomorphism of the early transition. In critical segments of Eastern Europe, postcommunist transition is on the road to success. International factors and conditions have acted as a powerful anchor and corrective to democratic transformation. They practically redefined the transition paradigm. The democratization of Eastern Europe emerged as a true process of "authoritative allocation of values" to produce a Kuhnian-type scientific consensus on

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[3]See Samuel Huntington's seminal work *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965 (definition of "institutionalization" on p. 12).

a new paradigm, that of integration. The book will serve as a valuable resource for scholars and practitioners of democratic reform by providing conceptual richness, empirically based theoretical innovation, and methodological refinement to the paradigmatic study of postcommunist transition.

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Sandu Frunzã, editor, *Filosofie şi Religie: O Abordare Multidisciplinarã* (Philosophy and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Approach). (Cluj-Napoca, Romania: Editura Limes, 2001. 244 pages, paper.) Reviewed by Michael S. Jones.

It seems that in Western Europe and America the interdisciplinary approach to knowledge has of late been gaining in popularity. This is particularly true in two domains of knowledge that are of interest to the readers of *REE*, religion and philosophy. Philosophy has virtually ceased to have an independent identity, and has largely become the discipline of analyzing other disciplines. This is seen in the very names of many of the philosophy courses taught at most universities: philosophy of science, philosophy of religion, medical ethics, philosophy of law, etc. The interdisciplinary study of religion has likewise become commonplace. Religious thought has been stimulated by interdisciplinary interaction with philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, historiography, the natural sciences, aesthetics, text-critical studies, and other intellectual disciplines. This growth in interdisciplinary thought may reflect a growing liberalization of the Western mind (the term "liberal" is used here in its classical sense, without reference to political or theological positions). When a mind is given increased freedom, and when it becomes more used to this freedom, it becomes more open to hearing what other disciplines have to say about its own area of interest and specialization. When it discovers that other disciplines can make valuable contributions to its own projects, it embraces interdisciplinary study.

An interesting question is whether or not the growth of interdisciplinary study seen in Western Europe and America has any counterpart in Eastern Europe and the republics formed from the Soviet Union. Several factors might incline one to expect a lack of interdisciplinary thought in this region, including the lack of intellectual freedom under the former socialist governments of the region, the present political uncertainties and economic hardships, and the more conservative nature of the popular culture and religious institutions. However, there are also factors that contribute to a positive climate for interdisciplinary thought. These include the intellectual freedom now enjoyed in many of the countries of this region, the increased ability to travel outside of the region, and perhaps most of all, the ability to communicate quickly and affordably with people from around the world via email and the World Wide Web.

My own impression, formed while living in Eastern Europe for 21 months, is that interdisciplinary study of philosophy and of religion does exist, and that it is growing. One piece of evidence for this is the book under review. It is an orchestrated collection of articles united by two main elements: the shared topic of religion, and the relationship of all of the contributors to the city Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Each of the contributors to the volume has some close connection to Cluj-Napoca, a principle Romanian educational center, most of them living in Cluj at the time of publication. Each contributor also has a unique area of academic specialization, thus making the book a pluriperspectival examination of religion by authors within the same geographical and cultural region.

The articles reflect the specializations of the various contributors. Each author has contributed an article that in some way brings his or her own specialization to bear on the study of religion. Many of the contributors are from the philosophy department of Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj, while others are from other departments of the same university or other schools within the city. The contributors from the philosophy department of BBU are, first, Marcel Bodea, who is a doctoral candidate at the University of Bucharest and instructor of epistemology in the Chair of Systematic Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy of Babeş-Bolyai University. Bodea writes about the differences and similarities between scientific knowledge and religious knowledge. Second, Aurel Codoban, who is a professor of philosophy of religion in the Chair of Systematic Philosophy at BBU, writes about the Gnostic elements in popular Romanian Christianity. Third, Vasile Frãteanu, who is a professor of philosophy of culture and chairs the Systematic Philosophy section of the philosophy department of BBU, contributes an article arguing that philosophy is in a unique position to make possible a

knowledge of God. Fourth, Mihaela Frunzã, who is a professor of feminist thought in the Chair of Systematic Philosophy, contributes an article on the integration of religion and philosophy in the thought of Maimonides. Fifth, Sandu Frunzã, who is a professor of philosophy of religion in the Chair of Systematic Philosophy and is the editor of this volume, discusses the relationship of philosophy and Jewish tradition in the thought of two leading 20th century Jewish thinkers, Buber and Levinas. Finally, the author of this review, Michael S. Jones, who at the time the book was published was a doctoral candidate at Temple University and an adjunct professor of philosophy in the Chair of History, Philosophy, and Logic in the Department of Philosophy at BBU, contributes an article explaining William James' proposal for a pragmatic justification of religious belief.

Of the contributors who are not from the philosophy department of BBU, four are professors of religion. Father Ioan Chirilã, professor of Old Testament in the Faculty of Orthodox Theology at BBU, contributes another article attempting to reconcile philosophy and theology, this time through a discussion of the Romanian philosopher D. D. Roşca and the Romanian theologian Isidor Todoran. Father Ioan-Vasile Leb, professor of church history and chair of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology at BBU, presents an essay on the early 4th-century Christian apologist Lactantius, using Lactantius' writings as the basis for a warning against pagan philosophy and an argument for a Christian approach to philosophy. Father Ştefan Iloaie, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Orthodox Theology of the University of Sibiu and lecturer on ethics in the Faculty of Orthodox Theology at BBU, contributes an article that attempts to define the basic characteristics and strengths of a Christian philosophy. Cãlin Sãplãcan, doctoral candidate and instructor of ethics in the Faculty of Greek Catholic Theology at BBU, discusses the differences and similarities between religious ethics and philosophical ethics and argues for a dialogue between the two.

The remaining contributors are professors or researchers in various other domains at institutions located in Cluj-Napoca. Ştefan Angi is a professor of aesthetics at the Gheorghe Dima Academy of Music. Angi's article discusses the role of aesthetic contextual elements in religious (as well as non-religious) interpretation. Vasile Boari, professor of political science at Babeş-Bolyai University and chair of the Faculty of Political Science and Administration, investigates the philosophy of the author of the Biblical book *Ecclesiastes*, finding pieces of wisdom that he deems equal to the insights of the great philosophers. Camil Mureşanu, who is director of the Institute of History at the Cluj branch of the Romanian Academy (and also professor in the philosophy department of BBU), provides an analysis of the concepts of certainty and doubt that attempts to uncover a zone of reciprocity and tolerance between the two. Marius Jucan, professor of American Studies in the department of European Studies at BBU, contributes a study on the relationship between the religious and the political in literature. Lastly, Andrei Marga, the president of BBU and a former professor of philosophy, writes on the return of contemporary philosophy to the contemplation of religion, using the Jewish philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig as his example.

Many of the articles that comprise this volume are truly pluriperspectival: they involve not only the study of religion from some perspective outside of religion, but also the embracing of the insights of one religious tradition by an author from another tradition. An example of this is the contribution by Dr. Sandu Frunzã. Frunzã's article combines a historical and philosophical analysis of certain religious elements in the philosophies of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas. Dr. Frunzã is well qualified to write about Jewish philosophy, having studied in Israel and having taught courses on Judaism at BBU.

Frunzã opens his article with a discussion of the essence of Jewish philosophy. He then turns to an analysis of the relation of philosophy and religion in the thought of Buber and Levinas. Then follows an exegesis of the philosophy of relationality as found in each thinker, including discussion of the similarities and differences between human-human relationships and the human-divine relationship. Along the way Frunzã points out how the Jewishness of their thought is reflected in their philosophical proposals. He reflects positively on the conceptualization of relationality found in these thinkers and suggests that in addition to illuminating the natures of the subject-subject relationship, the subject-object relationship, and the subject-God relationship, this conceptualization may also provide a clarification of the philosophy-theology relationship.

Frunzã's appropriating of elements of the philosophies of Buber and Levinas, which according to Frunzã's analyis are at least in part a product of their Jewishness, is particularly interesting because

while Frunzã views the Jewish elements in the thought of Buber and Levinas as a positive contribution, Frunzã is not himself Jewish. To the contrary, Frunzã is Romanian Orthodox, and has written extensively on the philosophical elements in the thought of that greatest of Romanian Orthodox theologians, Dumitru Staniloae. This is an outstanding example of the intellectual openness and the inter-ideological profundity that can now be found in Eastern Europe.

The articles of which this book is composed are fitted together loosely, held together by the common interest in the interdisciplinary study of religion and by common cultural elements, but distinct in their specific topics and in many cases in their methodologies. In reading them one gets an impression of unfettered intellectual freedom, each author arguing for his or her own perspective or conclusion with care for neither overt nor covert political consequences. While the articles and the subjects that they address are interesting, the intellectual freedom evidenced in these articles may be as interesting as what the articles actually say about religion. To those who have an interest in the development of Eastern Europe, this book may be one welcome sign of the progress of intellectual freedom in the region.

This broad array of experts bringing their diverse expertise to bear on topics of religion and philosophy is compelling evidence that the interdisciplinary study of philosophy and of religion exists and is thriving in at least one part of Eastern Europe. Since the political and intellectual freedoms that helped to bring about this community of liberal-minded scholars and their work are now found throughout most of Eastern Europe, it seems likely that such interdisciplinary efforts can be found in other Eastern European educational centers as well.

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Mary M. Leder. *My Life in Stalinist Russia: An American Woman Looks Back.* Edited by Laurie Bernstein, introduction by Laurie Bernstein and Robert Weinberg. (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2001.) - reviewed by Robin Bisha.

Mary Leder's engaging memoir chronicles the day-to-day life of an American-born Jewish woman in the Soviet Union from the 1930s through the 1960s. Through Leder's eyes readers see the progression of the Soviet Union from an internationalist, workers' paradise that welcomed Jews from abroad to a land in which "anti-Semitism had become a way of life (335)."

Leder's experience raises in stark relief the religious fervor of Soviet communism. In this respect the book is, perhaps, even more interesting than in its attention to the details of Russian and Soviet anti-Semitism. Leder's descriptions of her own evolution from a "true believer" to a critic of Soviet communism employ particularly religious language. Her analysis of the evolving political situation over the three decades she lived in the Soviet Union reveals a rhetoric that, if not religious, borrows heavily from the vocabulary of religion. The language of faith is clear in her presentation of a discussion with her father about his willingness to send his 16-year-old daughter to Moscow alone

> [H]e replied, "We thought nothing bad could happen to you in a socialist country."
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> Clearly, it was faith. (25)

At other times, Leder hears calls to communist vigilance that recall Christian exhortations to resist the efforts of Satan to derail God's plans (75-76). Committed Soviet communists, Leder included, accepted these exhortations without demanding proof, as a matter of faith (48, 57, 133, 155, and others) . Many held to their faith throughout the periods of mass arrests, exile, and executions.

As a foreigner in Soviet Russia, Leder spent much of her life living and working among committed Communists from European countries and the United States. These people could easily be seen as "true believers" who went to the U.S.S.R. to build utopia – or in religious terms, the kingdom of God on earth. Unfortunately for such idealists, the Soviet government did not live up to the faith they placed in it. Her reflections are politically aware and astute at the time the memoirs were composed; she is painfully aware of her naïveté at the time this history was unfolding. In fact, she cites official Soviet anti-Semitism as the primary reason for her disappointment with communism. She writes of her disillusionment as a loss of faith (253, 254).

Leder's memoirs chronicle the ebb and flow of anti-Semitism from Stalin's consolidation of power through his death and the reforms that followed it. Upon arrival in Birobidzhan, the failed Soviet

attempt to create a Jewish homeland in Siberia, in 1931, Leder's parents (themselves emigrants from the western territory of the Russian Empire) noted a marked improvement in relations between Russians and Jews (15-17). However, Leder's experience and that of her Jewish friends, reveals that the rapprochement was only skin deep. First, the careful reader will note that Leder dates only Jews. Few so-called mixed marriages are in evidence among her acquaintances. The Soviet government, even when not following overtly anti-Semitic policies, grouped Jews together. For example, during the war, Leder's husband was billeted with a Jewish family (182). They insisted that she should indicate Jewish as her nationality on her internal passport. When she used arguments to the contrary developed by Stalin and Lenin to resist, the ethnic Russian officials still considered her insistence that her ethnicity was American eccentric (61, 96).

During the stressful period of World War II, Leder notes that "creeping anti-Semitism from below" quickly bubbled up to the surface (252). Russians made openly anti-Semitic remarks to her; her neighbors stole her things from the apartment she evacuated in Moscow, and the Jews of southern Russian and Ukrainian towns feared *pogroms* if the Germans should take the area. On the official level, news of Nazi policies and actions toward Jews were purposely kept from the Soviet population. Unsuspecting Soviet Jews, therefore, did not know what was in store for them if they complied with German orders, and many lost their lives because they did not flee the advancing German armies (193-194, 241).

One aspect of Leder's narrative deserves additional consideration by scholars. While the literature on the Holocaust and mainstream histories of World War II provide numerous accounts of Western liberators of the Jews from death camps, one rarely sees similar accounts on the part of Soviet liberators. Leder's husband, a Jew himself, wrote letters describing what he saw along the eastern front (248-249). While this is but a small part of her narrative, it is intriguing.

Leder and the editors of the book provide the necessary historical context to understand the events of her life and the swirl of events around her. This includes extensive notes on the American political left and mainstream Soviet history. The editors recommend a few books for additional reading, but the list is not extensive.

Religion is more important to Leder's observations near the end of her two and one half decades of Soviet life. Prior to her recognition that anti-Semitism had not been overshadowed by internationalism and her subsequent disillusionment with communism, Leder's life story is more interesting for those who are curious about the particulars of life in communal apartments, the foreign community in Moscow, and the local mechanisms and effects of the purges on day-to-day life in the Soviet capital. It is particularly useful for those interested in the life of Americans in the Soviet Union where, as Leder writes, "To be Jewish in Soviet Russia was bad enough. But to be American was worse (298)."

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