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INTRODUCTION: TO SOCIAL CHANGE ANTHROPOLOGY

Abstract: The social changes in Eastern Europe became a current research topic especially after the fall of the socialist system and during the transformation of the former socialist societies into Western Europe type democracies. At the same time, these societies are said to be changing societies, transitioning societies, post-socialist societies etc. In spite of the tendency to copy the western European democracies, the eastern European countries are still seen by others as something different.

Key words: social change, transition, post-socialism, post-communism, Eastern Europe.

Social changes are processes that are attractive to researchers, irrespective of whether they approach the problem from the point of view of ethnology and anthropology, history, sociology, political science, etc. Often, these changes are called social *transition*, but the French anthropologist Maurice Godelier (Godelier, 1989: 203) uses the term *period of change*, which marks a special stage in the evolution of a society, a stage wherein the society faces internal or external difficulties in the process of reproducing the economic and social relations on which it is based. However, at the same time, the society witnesses the emergence of new social and economic relations that quickly or slowly, more or less become general and become the new conditions for the smooth functioning of that society. This means that the stages of change create periods of special significance in the real life of society, i.e. they represent a moment when the ways of production, ways of thinking, the individual and collective work gave either the inner or outer limits and start to break, to lose significance, to break down and vegetate for a long time in less significant places, ready to extinguish either by themselves or by the systemic will of the societal groups that oppose their reproduction on behalf of the other ways of production, thinking and work. Vladimir Ribic (Ribic, 2007: 6-7) bases his thesis on transition on the thesis of the American sociologists and political scientist Charles Tilly, which in turn refers to the micro-historic and macro-historic level of manifestation of cultural idioms. Mr. Ribic emphasizes that, still the macro-historic processes have a big impact over the structural conditions, primarily the global conditions, but also strongly influence the national and local levels. Within such structural conditions, individual cultural idioms (political, economic and other) either are completely affirmed or do not adapt at all to the new conditions. Therefore, when researching social transitions, according to Ribic, the macro-historic processes have to be taken into account as well (Ribic, 2007: 6-7).

These last one hundred years feature significant social changes that have changed the course of history globally. Thus, at the beginning of the 20th century the process of degradation of the world economy was intensified, which culminated in the First World War. After the war, the League of Nations was formed, whose task was to renew the sys-

tem of power balance. However, in the early thirties of the 20th century, new changes arrived: Russia's five year plans were abandoned, the so called "New Deal" was introduced in the USA, the national socialist revolution happened in Germany, the League of Nations was abolished and conditions were created that would lead to the beginning of the Second World War. Namely, radical political changes happened in the different countries and thereby the two party systems were either replaced with one-party systems or, sometimes with national unity governments. In this way the USSR introduced *dictatorial socialism*, while the liberal capitalism was abandoned in the countries preparing for the upcoming war, such as Germany, Japan, Italy, and to a lesser extent the USA and Great Britain (Ribic, 2007: 11-12). The period after the Second World War, again features significant expansion and strengthening the socialist block in Eastern Europe, but also in other parts of the world, followed by the start of the cold war (Gelner, 1993: x-xv; Hann, 1993: 2-5).

Still, this paper focuses its interest especially on the period marking the end of the 20th century, i.e. the period that has been characterized as the end of socialism in Europe, according to some, or as the period when Europe, which has been divided for decades is finally unified, according to others. A particular characteristic of the countries where socialism fell,¹ is that most of the people, encouraged by the millenarianist myths created by the national political centers of power, expected the fall to be followed by the good years. Namely, they expected that everything they "dreamed" about would be realized after the collapse of the iron curtain between the East and the West. Ultimately, it turned out that the fall of socialism did not entail only a simple change of the societal system and structure, but usually it was accompanied by elements of nationalism, chauvinism and religious fundamentalism. Indeed, when interpreting the fall of socialism or identifying the events that mark the beginning of the transition of societies, it is said that it represents a societal, political and cultural process. Katherine Verdery (Verdery, 1996: 20) concludes that socialism began to fall as a result of the system of "centralized planning" that could no longer be controlled. Thus, the changes of societies from socialism towards liberal-capitalist democracies were paralleled by changes of political nature, i.e. the single party system shifts towards multi-party system, followed by cultural changes, when everything that was considered a positive cultural category is no longer considered as such, or usually becomes a negative category, and, under the influence of the centers of power, new cultural categories start forming, which should reflect modern times and the new societal structure. Particularly these changes did not unravel so straightforwardly and easily, and, in some of the countries of Eastern Europe they caused civil wars, interethnic and interreligious armed conflicts, almost all stemming from the ideas of governing, independence, and religiously pure countries. Indeed, the new and the transitional potentates needed power they could use to create societal life that would best suit their purposes. Thus, culture, including language is usually one of the key criteria related to the formation of the new, but also the breakdown of the existing countries. In addition, during the wars in Yugoslavia, the policy of ethnic cleansing also stemmed from the cultural manipulations intended to distort history as much as possible in order to create new differenc-

1 Researchers (primarily ethnologists and anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, economists) consider the year 1989, the year of the Berlin wall collapse, as the year when socialism fell and transition began .

es that will introduce new hostilities between the opposing national ideologies (Markowitz, 2004: 331).

Although socialism, as a form of society, no longer exists, still some authors disagree that the division of the world into political blocks ceased to exist. Some of them claim that the cold war can still be felt, but with a significantly reduced intensity during the last few years (Hann, Humphrey, Verdery, 2002: 20). Such opposing standpoints led researches to closely follow the dynamics of societal changes in the countries of Eastern Europe. The researches have characterized these new societies as post-socialist or post-communist. Thus, after 1989 *post-socialism/post-communism* started to become a scientific problem as well, and even to have a dominant role in anthropologic research in Eastern Europe (Podoba, 2007: 192).

One of the researchers of societal and political change in Eastern Europe is Hermine de Soto (Rihman – Auguštin, 2000: 40-41). She followed the turbulent arguments related to changing the street names in Berlin, at the beginning of the nineteen nineties and sided with the people who got very angered with specific changes to the street names. In her arguments, De Soto understands street names as communication signs used in daily life and as already accepted symbols. Thus, in time they become a habit, and partly people's biographies. Namely, people get accustomed to those names, closely relate to them, and in a way they represent signs of people's identity. However, after the fall of the Berlin wall, the eastern ideology, together with the eastern architecture, as well as the way of life were put into doubt. The arguments to abolish some street names that signified the communist, but also the left anti-fascist tradition, these author reads as resistance to the new hegemony heralded by the new oncoming ideological practice.

Most of the eastern European countries feature fast pace changes in order to catch up to the western European societies.² Regarding this issue The German political scientist and sociologist Ralf Dahredorf says that: "the countries in Eastern Europe changed their government in six days, their laws in six months, the institutions in six years, but they will need sixty years to change the way their people think and behave." Indeed, the changes to the societies which, prior to 1989 were identified as socialist, are still ongoing although most of these countries have joined the European Union and NATO, which, unofficially, are core indicators of the level of change in the societies. However, the Western European institutions still treat and refer to these countries as post-socialist. This inspired the Polish anthropologist Michal Buchowsky (Buchowsky, 2001: 9; Prica, 2007: 27), to ask the question: how far would the post-socialist countries have to go, not to be named post-socialist? Michael Burawoy adds his opinion, i.e. that the theorization of post-socialist continues to be based on socialism, which represents a negation or comparison – mainly as celebration of the capitalist supremacy,³ i.e. the victory of the capitalist West over the so-

2 An excellent example of the changes in the German Democratic Republic is the film *Goodbye Lenin* from 2003, directed by Wolfgang Becker, which shows the changes in the societal system after the fall of the Berlin wall, the unification of the divided city and both parts of Germany.

3 An example reflecting part of this situation, which emphasizes the victory and the supremacy of the West over the East, is the story about the fictitious country of the Republic of Molvania created by Australians Tom Gleisner, Santo Cilauro and Rob Sitch. Namely they locate Molvania somewhere in Eastern Europe and represent it as a synonym of the eastern European countries. Shortly, after the fall of socialism, the government in Molvania becomes a dictatorship with a corrupt Administration that has close ties with the Mafia. This post-socialist country is mainly inhabited by Molvanians who are general-

cialist East, but also as a source of criticisms of capitalism, but this can be found much more rarely. Also, usually, post-socialist countries are the object of researchers from western European countries, which is linked to the financial power they have over the East, and the transformation of socialist societies is primarily represented through the way they see things. However, their research and results is subject to reactions from eastern European anthropologists. A notable researcher among them, the Hungarian anthropologist Lazslo Kurti (Kurti, 2002: 181) doubts their conclusion and asks: why do the western anthropologists always note only the errors, deformations and lapses, while the successes, the positive results and accomplishments are always outside of their focus? According to him, the constant remarking only about the failures represents a one-sided view of things. Thus, with the withdrawal of socialism in history, there will be a danger that people will become more and more captives of the only existing model, i.e. the ideal projection of the liberal capitalism, which has already become a point of reference for all comparisons (Burawoy, 1999, 310).

However, as seen from the above, there exists in anthropology a movement that opposes the use of the terms *post-socialism* and *post-communism*, represented primarily by eastern European anthropologists. Still, probably due to reasons coinciding with the financial supremacy of the West over the East, the use of these terms persists. Indeed, these terms cause a plethora of discussions regarding the characteristics and particularities of the newly formed societies in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the discussions and the papers that come out of them, only facilitate the perpetuation of the massive use of these terms in social sciences, and in anthropology in particular. The result of this is the existence of an entire anthropological sub-discipline entitled *post-socialist anthropology*.

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ly dirty and untidy. They are very bad, and their religion is dominated by strange beliefs stemming from the Molvanian tradition... In spite of the multitude of criticisms, the book about the Republic of Molvania, which, in fact, represents a sort of a tourist guide for the country, has been translated in several languages and is sold throughout the world, and there is a website for it. More information about the Republic of Molvania available at: <http://www.molvania.com.au/molvania> (Last visited on 12.12.2008).

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