An agenda for research on work and class in the postsocialist world

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Abstract

This article reviews the scholarly treatment of work and class in postsocialist states. It traces how class discourses under socialism led to a lack of meaningful working class studies in the postsocialist academy. It offers as an agenda for future research three points of departure: (a) greater confrontation of the one-sided discourse on class in these societies and the academy itself (class blindness of research). (b) The value in studying postsocialist societies both comparatively to global North and South, and as an intermediate positioning for worker exploitation and responses in global capitalism. (c) To achieve the first 2 agenda items, a more grounded methodological approach proceeding from the lived experience of class and work is proposed.

Current research on social networks, memory studies and personhood, the informal economy, deindustrialization, and the "domestication" of neoliberalism show that empirically grounded work on postsocialist working classes can make important contributions to wider social science debates. Studying the "losers" of postcommunist transition can tell us much about populist politics, the rise of the global working class outside the global North and the nature of global capitalist exploitation more generally. In addition, this agenda serves as an important point of departure from the dominant middle class focus of research in postsocialism.

1 | INTRODUCTION

"Arise, those who have been branded by a curse"

First line of the Russian version of the Internationale

Class is everywhere you look in the postsocialist world. The media are awash with stories about aspirational yet "normal" "European" lifestyles and the desirability of gated communities (Blinnikov, Shanin, Sobolev, & Volkova, 2006; Polanska, 2010), along with discussion of "Communist-era" mentalities and outmoded concepts such as social justice and cohesion. Popular culture features "low lifes" and track-suit-clad petty criminals who serve as thinly veiled fantasies about dangerous lumpenization (Stenning, 2005; Walker, 2014). Against a backdrop of rising authoritarianism and
populism in Eastern Europe, social protests are analysed for what they reveal about the growth of the middle class rather than a barometer of social distress. In scholarship, there is often selective attention and selective invisibility (Ost, 2009). In Russia, for example, liberal elites bemoan what they see as the political compliance of “ordinary people” to the government’s revanchist, chauvinistic authoritarianism. Pensioners, rural dwellers, and blue-collar workers in industrial “hinterlands” are seen as dangerous classes of political conservatives (Zubarevich, 2009, 2011), or worse, they are seen as easy prey to populist neo-nationalist movements (see Kalb, 2011: 7).

Just as once workers were the “vanguard” of revolution and progress, now the “creative class” (Kustarev, 2013) is a talismanic “locomotive of modernisation” and social transformation of these countries into “normal” polities. “Middle class” now stands for class studies more generally, with little acknowledgment that in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) this group still remains a “spirit seeking a social body” (Smolar, 1996). Similarly, when it comes to work and organizations, scholarship often focuses on the rise of service industries, but the bread and butter of the socialist era—blue-collar work—is rarely the object of research, except as a form of “ruin gazing” (High, 2013), or as part of the study of urban renewal and deindustrialization (Mah, 2012; Trubina, 2013). All this suggests the first item on the agenda for class and work studies: the need for a more critical and reflective turn on “class blindness” in the academy, which parallels the one-sided popular discourse on class in these societies. Both of these omissions are key to understanding the rise in populist politics and attitudes to inequality more generally.

With workers and others easily written off in this way, the road to modernization and democratization, and agency itself, is reserved for an ascendant middle class, despite the continuing widespread reality of low-tech manufacturing and resource extraction underpinning many of the regions’ economies. Indeed, many of these states have become sought-after sites of manufacturing because of the new consumer markets they offer to transnational corporations and their low wages. This indicates the second item for a renewed research agenda: work and class study reveal a crunch point at the meeting of unbridled neoliberal capital and disembedded labour between global North and South, understood both diachronically and spatially.

Postsocialist countries as diverse as Kazakhstan and Slovakia remain highly industrialised societies and are now productive sites of neocapitalism. Yet they sit between the global North and South—lacking significant legacies of the social rights and privileges of Fordist labour—and yet offering a much longer working class history, including of social mobility and negotiation with the state (memory of a social wage), than the South. Yet they share with the South the significant structural working-class power that the North now arguably has lost (Ness, 2016); many post-socialist blue-collar contexts occur, like in the South, at crucial junctures of global supply chains.

Postsocialism, through the study of working classes, can also show the global North a version of its own past: offering a “living” laboratory for oral historians and sociologists to study deindustrialisation as it happens now, as well as the renewed struggle for workers’ rights in contexts where structural working class power is still significant. It also indicates possible global North trajectories: the “endgame” of extreme neoliberal reform in states where a social contract of sorts was formerly operative. Postsocialist workers are now at the heart of global working-class concerns and the movements of global capital.

Finally, a last, but no less important, agenda item is the need for more grounded and microfocused portraits of class and work. This is the main approach suggested in this article—one that can help achieve all the other agenda aims. Grounding scholarship in the lived experience of “ordinary” people—providing emic perspective—would shed light on many issues we still do not know enough about. For example: how do people resist and engage in household reproduction when wages are so low and the social state withdrawing or absent (Stenning, Smith, Rochovská, & Swiatek, 2010)? How do memory and the mnemonic resources of the socialist past inflect current class identities and politics (Rivkin-Fish, 2009; Straughn, 2009)? How do transnational companies confront workers in the specific circumstances of postsocialism, and how are they in turn confronted by workers in an increasingly multipolar and transnational capitalist environment (Hinz & Morris, 2016)? What does work mean for ordinary people and what are the conflicting discourses of class and work (Salmenniemi & Adamson, 2014; Walker, 2014). We need a theoretically informed yet grounded portrait of working and newly impoverished classes in the postsocialist world. These people, to paraphrase E. P. Thompson, are “present at their own making” as a class. The fusion of postsocialist polities
predicated on populism and semiauthoritarianism, extreme and rapid neoliberal transformation, and the withdrawal of the social state means a new kind of class identity and reality are in formation. However, that also means we should take note of how people are active in shaping their own roles, whether in exit, voice, or loyalty, to those realities, and never as passive recipients of neoliberalism.

2 | THE HANGOVER OF COMMUNIST-ERA SOCIOLOGY

Communist regimes continually invoked class imagery as one tactic of legitimation. A superficial class lexicon was embedded in society—“in legal texts, the media, at the workplace, and of course in academia, too” (Fabio, 2015: 589). Despite this, sociology was allergic to scientific inquiry into class issues. Regimes were afraid the results would show high inequality and that working life was just as miserable under socialism as capitalism. Indeed, some take the view that the sociology of class and inequality was largely impossible to practice—as a “bourgeois pseudoscience”—replaced by Marxism–Leninism (ibid). On the other hand, sociology was a policing science par excellence—obsessively focussed on the “concrete” empirical underpinning of the state’s legitimacy by means of the accumulation of mass survey data (Filippov, 2013).

This history has important implications for the present. Now conceptualising itself as needing to resist ideological control in the name of science, sociology is highly positivistic, survey based, and “conservative and functionalist” (Fabio, 2015: 591). The sociology of work remains “theoretically timid” and hindered by “historical limitations in qualitative research design” (Morrison & Bizyukov, 2016: 2). Stratification and employment-based approaches adopted from Goldthorpe, and British sociology more generally have dominated, inflected by anticommunist politics (Boyadjieva & Kabakchieva, 2015; Drahokoupil, 2015). In some cases, there is good reason for this—for example, in linking rapid social and political change to the destruction of a relatively homogenous industrial working class (Lazić & Cvejić, 2010). However, this means that the use of qualitative methods to reach marginalised groups is the exception not the rule.

At the same time, there has been an “anti-class” turn, where critical analyses of new property relations, systemic transformation, and power structures in the postsocialist world is lacking (Ost, 2015; Ost & Gagyi, 2015). Now, freed from ideological constraints, native scholarship often resembles the revenge of the repressed, producing much work on the “creative” middle classes and “achievement ideology” often based on uncritical acceptance of the idea of successful imposition from above of a neoliberal order and even embarrassment about adopting a class perspective (Helemäe & Saar, 2015), or the idea that class analysis is no longer relevant to “reflexive modernity” of postsocialism (Hass, 2013). This gives the myth of postsocialist classlessness a relentlessly aggressive inflection in such contexts as the priority of civil society building over maintaining “old-fashioned” social protection (Fabio, 2015: 590). In turn, the exacerbation of conflict and the polarization between capital and labour in postsocialist states is masked by sociological preoccupation with elite agency, “exclud[ing] subordinate classes, which in effect become the bewildered-silent and silenced- spectators of transformations that engulf them” (Burawoy, 2001: 1107).

Finally, in authoritarian states like Russia and in Central Asia, urban and social movement studies focus more on the middle classedness of metropolitan protests and pay less attention to industrial disputes outside the metropolises but which are equally bellwethers of change (Bibkov, 2012; Grigoryeva, 2015; Zubarevich, 2009). More work is needed on alternative class experiences of the urban along the lines of recent scholarship in geography and history (e.g., Marzec & Zysiak, 2016; Pozniak, 2014; Stenning et al., 2010).

3 | THE SCHOLARLY HERITAGE OF CLASS-STUDIES—COMMUNISM AS A LABORATORY IN EXPLOITATION

Despite the “middle classification” of class discourse in Eastern Europe as following similar, if more extreme lines as in W. Europe (Edwards, Evans, & Smith, 2012), there have always been good reasons for sociologists and anthropologists
to study the lived experience of work and workers. In the communist period, scholarship about workers related mainly to studies of political engagement, resistance, and (false) consciousness (e.g., Holubenko, 1975). Anglophone scholars were keen to measure the political responses to increased exploitation and saw the working class as a barometer of possible social discontent. The best work emerged from cross-fertilisation of history and sociology—indicating the potential for a holistic treatment of class in the present. In the later socialist period as Western scholars gained at least limited access, political historiography, anthropology, sociology, and area studies all provided important insights into the extremely harsh life and economic burden the working classes suffered, but due to the closed nature of the countries there was little empirically based social science carried out. Harasztï’s (1977) work on Hungary was a classic “native” sociology of atomizing and alienated factory life but written from the point of view of the anticommunist intelligentsia. Michael Burawoy (1992) drew attention to the camaraderie of working classes, identifying a grim solidarity despite, or because of their exploitation. The less mediated exploitation of communism meant that workers saw through ideology and developed a kind of negative (critical) class consciousness, despite supporting the broad aims of socialism. More recently, Hann (2006: 106) explores the theoretical and methodological potential of an anthropology–sociology conversation that would rethink the relationships between alienation, identification and work more generally—for example, in (post)socialist contexts of constrained consumption. This has implications for studying the lived experience of class in the present, where precarious work and lack of class mobility are pressing concerns.

Towards the end of the socialist period a conflicting picture emerged: On the one hand, studies of the “growing assertiveness” of workers (Triska & Gati, 1981) and the Solidarity movement in Poland. Elsewhere portraits of political atomized Soviet workers unequipped to take on a significant role in social or political transformation. Although labour historiography generally supported an atomization thesis, it added much in terms of trying to understand social change and the nature of control under socialism (Filtzer, 1992, 1996; Kotkin, 1995; Siegelbaum, 1988; Siegelbaum & Suny, 1994; Straus, 1997) but was less confident in exploring social stratification beyond state-centric understandings (Edele, 2007: 350).

More recently, scholars have pointed to the structural power of workers under socialism and after. Labour studies and sociology have explored the paradox of “passivity” versus incipient class power (notably Crowley & Ost, 2001, Clarke, 1995). Outhwaite (2007) reiterates points made by Burawoy (2001) on the importance of moving beyond an elite agency approach where working classes are merely “demobilized” (Eyal, Szelényi, & Townsley, 1998), to do better justice to the reality of antagonistic class relations after communism. In the historical context, sociology has recently also painted a more nuanced picture of the contested nature of the inner life of industrial socialism and its workers as more than the passive victims of state power (Hornsby, 2013; Kenney, 1997; Pittaway, 2012).

An instructive example of early postsocialist grounded empirical scholarship exploring the complex meanings of workers’ lifeworlds and structural positioning is the slender yet wide-ranging account of Russian factory workers by Sergei Alasheev (Alasheev, 1995a, b; Alasheev & Kiblitskaia, 1996), a member of Simon Clarke’s team. Alasheev’s body of work on workers, stretching to a mere 90 pages, manages to accomplish a sensitive and deeply resonant portrait of change, yet the enduring social embeddedness of workers in the (post)socialist factory. What emerges is an analysis paying enough attention to agency, the state, exploitation and processes of self-exploitation, and class as an occupational ethnographic culture or status group, to satisfy even the toughest critics of insufficiently broad (and allowing for potential comparative) class analysis (Therborn, 2002). In terms of anticipating a rebirth of empirically grounded, yet theoretically informed sociology, the themes of Alasheev’s work serves as signposts for more recent scholarship. For example, how does work continue to serve as a powerfully anchoring source of identity, well-being, attachment, and sense of possible autonomy? How does class intersect with gender? How do workers endure the loss of breadwinner status and security associated with the socialist period? Not to mention the loss of the enterprise as the source of the social wage, massive loss of purchasing power in their cash wages, enormous loss of status, demonization, even. Do workers in these states now have more in common with production-scapes in the global South? Do practical skills and a long history of “making do” mean that precarity is “compensated” for by the informal economy and in Do-it-yourself (DIY) practices (Caldwell, 2004: 29, Morris, 2016)?
Similarly, although factories are dismembered and societies undergo demographic shocks, the spaces of factory towns and urban settlements do not disappear. Memory and place link to working class identity as “a sort of antimuseum” filled with absent presences (de Certeau, 1984: 108). The spirit of class-based loyalties haunts many spaces and reveals itself in the meagre yet vital life practices of the marginalised and humiliated, revealing class-based resourcefulness. Although use of the term "resilience" too often becomes a way of naturalizing and therefore excusing neoliberal governmentality (Zebrowski, 2013), and shifts risks formerly dealt with at the level of the social onto the “adaptable” individual (Joseph, 2013), another key to the relevance of class in postsocialism is the question of communities’ and individuals’ responses to the incessant hailing by the model of the neoliberal self (Tóth, n.d.).

4 | RECENT SCHOLARSHIP—THREE VECTORS

Despite its difficult history, there is renewed interest in work and class in the former socialist world. The previous section shows that there was always a small community of scholars working on the lived experience of class and its wider structuring. This took place in a relatively broad and open subdiscipline where sociology, labour studies, and anthropology intersect with area studies. In some cases, like that of Simon Clarke on Russia, talented native researchers made coinvestigations more fruitful. Other examples in this line are (mainly limiting our scope to Anglophone scholarship for convenience) Claudio Morrison (2008) and Sarah Ashwin (1998, 1999) who focussed on the postcommunist transition of relations in Russian industry—the decay of paternalism and the endless patience of workers in the 1990s. They also produced important insights into the kind of neoliberal reform imposed on these societies and how ordinary people responded and “coped.”

More recently, in the 2000s, Elizabeth Dunn (2004), Chris Hann (2006), David Kideckel (2002, 2004, 2008) and Alison Stenning et al. (2010), among others, provided empirically rich yet theoretically insightful and satisfying contributions on particular forms of neo-capitalism and “domestications” of neoliberalism in Poland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia/Poland, respectively. Stenning et al. (2010) describe “domestications” of neoliberalism in postsocialist communities but more often their portrait is of enforced “accommodation”—as those who could formerly reproduce the working class household are forced into portfolio employment. Similarly, Kideckel (2002) stresses the “unmaking” of a working class in Romania; the pace of “neocapitalist” forces there leads to extreme declines in workers’ fortunes.

A third vector studies work and class in postsocialist societies in an intersectional manner. This is not so much a cultural, as an ethnographic turn in the scholarship on postsocialist work and often involves native scholarship. Walker (2009, 2014) and Salmenniemi (2012) examine the intersection of class, work, youth, social mobility, gender, consumption and rural–urban migration in Russia, bringing a performative and interactionist lens to analysis. Kesküla (2014) and Rotkirch, Tkach, and Zdravomyslova (2012), provide details of the actual organizational and relational processes of labour disembedding and alienation in the postsocialist period as well as documenting the encounter of transnational capital, postsocialist workers and re-embedding processes of governmentalization more closely (Tóth, n.d.). Some studies link governmentalization and its rejection to alternative cultural resources and discourses of class identity (Morris, 2016; Satybaldeva, 2017). In addition, a new historicism of labour and working classes under late socialism is underway (Barta, 2013), and others focus on the continuing salience in the present of nostalgia and memory—or mnemonic resources of class—intersecting with classed identities and the meaning of work (Levinson, 2007; Schwartz & Morrison, 2013).

Lem (2002: 287), writing on contemporary France, argues that class maintains its potency both as a subjective category and an analytical category despite processes of deindustrialization and “remains indispensable to understanding the nature of change in late capitalism.” But what of postsocialist societies where social and economic transformation has occurred in little more than a generation? Some key questions around class arise from new forms of precarity that workers face after social state withdrawal in postcommunism (Artiukh, 2015, Nedbálková, 2015, Mrozowicki, 2011). This is experientially refracted through the living memory of the socialist period—particularly in urban spaces where generations of workers have lived—even if these places have suffered rapid deindustrialisation.
At the same time some CEE states have recently experienced new forms of neoliberal patch-work reindustrialisation, as transnational corporations relocate production to what are now low-wage countries attached to the core. Workers are therefore a key “pinch point” in the current stage of the globalisation of capital, the spread of governmental neoliberalism, and therefore a mine of sociological data on a possible future for the West: societies stripped of most pretences of social democracy, a residualised welfare state, workplaces less mediated by pretences of industrial relations, low social mobility, high inequality, and a growing informal economy and other symptoms of precarity. These factors offer promising themes to work on, which can be roughly divided into the following areas.

5 | SPACES OF WORK AND WORKERS

Recently, scholars have focussed on the legacy of the “company town” or monotown in the present, as workers struggle with economic transformation. Many take their cue from Stephen Kotkin’s (1995) labour history, Magnetic Mountain, a rich portrait of the total social institution factory town under Stalinism—but which also shows how workers’ articulation of a social contract with the state emerges in this space and time—along with social mobility, despite the coercive nature of the Soviet factory.

Alison Stenning et al. (2010) put the emphasis on “coping” and managing by workers who are at the sharp end of market-led reform: “domesticating neoliberalism” explains how Polish and Slovak worker families deal with the loss of jobs and their new status as “working poor.” The major contribution of this study is the satisfyingly complete account of placeness—the massive high-rise housing estates of Krakow and Bratislava that retain a working class identity and serve as some kind of basis of survival in social networking and mutual aid in the present. Deindustrialisation of space is connected to the lived dimensions of classed communities that continue after the factory. There are other recent treatments of the company town highlighting placeness and the continuity of industrial and class identities in the present across Eurasian postsocialist states (Kesküla, 2014; Morris, 2016; Pelkmans, 2013; Rajkovic, 2015; Tkach, 2008).

6 | MEMORY—THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

As can be seen from some of the research cited earlier, there is a tendency, even in work sensitive to the personhood of workers, to focus on victimhood—for good reason. Vaccaro (2006) writing on the deindustrialised Spanish Pyrenees, notes that while social memory among groups subject to loss of status and livelihood can fall into nostalgia—a category widely explored in postsocialism—it is equally important to avoid pervasive essentializations based on the “lack of options for the local populations in the face of these changes. Local agency, however, manifests itself in many ways: resistance, transformation, negotiation, connivance or denial” (372). Memory studies are important in highlighting the ongoing articulation of class in the present in terms of the past whether in terms of dignity in work or the social wage (Schwartz, 2015; Straughn, 2009). For example, Smolyak (2014) examines the changing meaning of factory gleaning and “resource theft” for DIY practices in the past and present in Russia. Always key to the maintenance of social networks, DIY linked professional identity and pride in work and particularly socialist forms of ownership. Now, with limited access to factory resources, DIY bespeaks inequality. An attention to the longue durée of class identity also questions whether late capitalism represents radical breaks and disjunctures. The temporal and more agency-focussed approaches reflect a wider shift towards biographical and oral histories (Raleigh, 2012). These use autobiographical narratives, written memories and the like to better understand the dynamic of social transformation in Eastern Europe and the biographical “consequences” of class disembedding (e.g., Golczynska-Grondas & Potoczna, 2015).
Insightful research on working class agency pays attention not only to place and memory but also to temporal continuities and changes: what workers “do” and “make”—whether they remain in formal normative employment or are pushed into the margins in the informal economy, subsistence farming, or white-collar service work—experienced as both downward and upward mobility (Morris, 2016; Walker, 2014). Other examples in the line of apprehending class in the present are studies on “invisible citizens” (informal day labourers and the unemployed) in Lithuania (Harboe Knudsen, 2014), the “normalisation of precarity” among youth in Poland (Mrozowicki, 2011), class, gender, and biopolitics in Russia (Salmenniemi & Adamson, 2014), and class-based domestic and care work (Kovács, 2014; Rotkirch et al., 2012).

Much current work on marginalised people is concerned with a postsocialist understanding of precarity that cuts across class structures. However, workers in postsocialist states are the groups most enmeshed in new forms of capitalist relations. Debates continue about the relative degrees of entrepreneurial self-remaking associated with neoliberal governmentality, or even whether, given the rapid industrialisation of part of Eurasia in the socialist period, older, peasant identities remain informative of class identities (Peacock, 2012). At the same time, we should take note of those who use the example of the global South to challenge not only the position that class is no longer relevant, but also question the “marginality paradigm” along with examining precaritization more generally (Munck, 2013). As postsocialist societies are sites of ever-more intensive exploitation by transnational corporations, a reproletarianization approach may be just as apt as the deindustrialisation one. This logic is compounded by relative ethnic homogeneity that remains in working-class communities (Ost, 2015). As the transnational factory and postsocialist workers encounter each other, what will be the results in terms of resistance and reaction, given the socialist inheritance? Will it be continued atomisation or articulation?

Postsocialist workers are “present” at their own making—that is, subjectively responsive to continuity and change in their reinscription as workers (Krinsky, 2007). Scholars have the opportunity to observe work and class discursively, as much as grasp it ontologically, showing when and how “class happens,” and how class patterns social action (Therborn, 2002: 223). Just as postsocialist transformation cannot be said to have an end point, class relations in Eastern Europe and Eurasia are ongoing processes. They are neither statically objective, neither are they completely open ended “but are constrained, shaped—and recursively shape—the political and social worlds in which they occur.” (Krinsky, 2007: 344). Helemäe and Saar (2013: 54) argue that this makes postsocialist societies extraordinary laboratories for testing both existing theories and elaborating new ones on class (see also Eyal, Szelényi, & Townsley, 2003). They present the opportunity to challenge and develop knowledge (Stenning & Hörschelmann, 2008).

Lem’s (2002: 301) critique of the neglect of class by postindustrial theorists in the West is instructive to the postsocialist context and relevance of class:

> the presence of new kinds of workers in new kinds of enterprises, in contexts that involve increasingly political and cultural complexity, with the emergence of nationalism and regionalism, does not necessarily imply the elimination of subjectivities that express such class divisions.

Although the mainstream marginalization of class discourse continues in these societies and influences perhaps most of all workers themselves, whose class consciousness and identity remain “underdeveloped” (Helemäe & Saar, 2013: 54), this “repression” leads to unpredictable political effects such as neo-nationalist populism (Kalb, 2011: 14). Populism in Eastern Europe as a “return of the repressed” anticipates unresolved issues in class analysis in the West too, particularly since the 2008 global financial crisis. The ongoing trauma of working-class experience in postsocialist societies, in this sense, needs to be comparatively appreciated as a more extreme, brutal, and rapid version of processes of labour disembedding in the West (just as urbanisation and industrialisation were in the socialist period). Kalb links rapid and extreme forms of “primitive accumulation” and new class formations associated with this in CEE with the rise
of right-wing populism and a "displaced version of working class politics" (Žižek, 2008: 267, in Kalb 2011: 14–15). The newly exploited are left to their "depleted informal ... economies" (Kalb, 2011: 18). They are too easily reimagined as the dangerous opponents of civil society and democratization thus justifying their absence in serious sociological inquiry, despite the fact that it is workers who are best qualified for an immanent critique of new forms of marketized social relations. Kalb concludes,

> Ironically, therefore, the post-socialist East allows us to tell the West about class again [...] This alerts us to the possibility that other driving forces, more straightforwardly associated with the making, unmaking, and restricting of class, may be the more fundamental ground from which xenophobia as a politically driven process gets its support base in the West (Kalb, 2011: 18–19).

Thus, sociological sensitivity to the experience of class and class analysis in the East is instructive of the continued need and importance of "working class studies" in general. This entails an analysis of "working class lives as complex and embodied practices played out in a wide variety of spaces, neither reified nor vilified, but explored and analysed" (Stenning, 2005: 993, in Dowling, 2009: 837).

ENDNOTES

1 As members of a new global working class, postsocialist workers must be included in a broadened perspective of the 21st century "proletarian position" to include indentured labour of all kinds, lumpen formations, subsistence-wage service and care workers, and the informally working inhabitants of slums (cf. McMillan, 2013: 128). All of these groupings exist in some form within postsocialist countries, in the global South and increasingly the global North.

2 I use "ordinary" people here to stress the radical potential of a class-infected scholarship of postsocialism to uncover the connections in exploitation and concerns of many social groupings and to underline the potential universality of the disenfranchised and disembedded conditions in postsocialism. It is a measure of the group-think within and beyond the academy that in a recent high-profile policy report I wrote on the former Soviet Union, the highly respected and influential global nongovernmental organisation requested I remove all "class" references. When I replaced "working class" with "ordinary people", this was also rejected and replaced by "many people."

3 Important exceptions include the work of Konrád and Szelényi (1979) who wrote on urban inequality and intellectuals in communist Hungary as a dominant stratum. In doing so, they acknowledged the class exploitation of workers under socialism and the loss of any proletarian political role, as well as anticipating Bourdieusian notions of classed capital (Verdery, Bernhard, Kopstein, Stokes, & Kennedy, 2005). Current narratives of technocratic intelligentsia entitlement could be seen as an echo of such a position.

REFERENCES


AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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