

Bounded generalizations revisited: is the post-communist area a world in reverse?

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Abstract

Since Valerie Bunce's (2000) seminal work on big and bounded generalizations in the post-communist world, plenty of new research has time and again confirmed its main premise: these countries do not simply follow universal political trends. They may, for sure, adapt themselves to general movements, but when they do, they usually offer new, unexpected bounded tendencies. This applies not only to the key features and stages of political transition, but also to other important elements of political system and behavior, such as the levels of social capital and the dynamics of new radical right parties. This presentation has three aims. First, it will summarize the current research since Bunce's work that falls within the category of big and bounded generalizations. Second, I will discuss my findings through the lenses of the paradigmatic debate between instrumentalist, positivist and constructivist epistemologies in political science. In other words, I will discuss whether the bounded generalizations approach makes the facts speak for themselves, or is freely imposed by rational researchers, or grows out of discursive communities. And finally, I will offer an interpretative understanding of big and bounded generalizations by presenting results of semi-directed interviews with researchers that work on post-communist countries and, therefore, must constantly position themselves on the big-bounded generalization map.

Introduction

Working on the final touches of my doctoral dissertation on post-communist democratization in the context of EU integration, I came across a few recent studies (e.g. Popova 2010, 2012; Valkov 2010). Despite their diversity in terms of theoretical approaches and subject matter, they had something in common. They showed post-communist world as a region where big generalizations, generalizations conceived to apply to any geographic area, did not work very well when tested in former communist nations in Central and Eastern Europe or in the former Soviet Union. In fact, these authors claimed that these nations presented different picture, where common features should be seen as regional, at the best, instead of universal. I immediately thought about Valerie Bunce's (2000) seminal work on big and bounded generalizations in the post-communist context. According to her, post-communist democratic transition confirms some expectations established within the framework of general transitology studies – big generalizations; these studies are built upon empirical data accumulated from political democratization in Southern Europe in the 1970s and in Latin America in the 1980s. On

the one hand, Bunce names big the following generalizations: high levels of economic development in guaranteeing democratic sustainability, the centrality of political elites in establishing and terminating democracy, and deficits in rule of law and state capacity as the primary challenge to the quality and survival of new democracies. On the other hand, she designates as bounded the following generalizations: the relationship between democratization and economic reform and the costs-benefits ratio for democratic consolidation of breaking quickly versus slowly with the authoritarian past.

Before continuing, I should make a qualification to the definitions of big and bounded generalizations. These are not absolute but relative concepts; sometimes big represents just a larger version of bounded generalization. For example, taking the Bunce (2000) article, what she names big generalizations are in fact generalizations that apply simultaneously to Latin America, Southern Europe and post-communist countries; she does not claim that they apply to other regions and to other historic context. Therefore, big and bounded generalizations in this article should always be understood in their relative, not absolute, aspect.

The studies I recently came across pointed only to bounded generalizations, to use the Bunce's vocabulary. I was puzzled whether such tilting could mean regarding the general argument of her argument. Could this lead to diminishing of the relative weight of the big generalizations in relation to bounded generalizations? Is there any specific circle of subject matter where such tilting is particularly concentrated? Can we still oppose big and bounded generalizations as far as the post-communist world is concerned or this world is already part of big normality? The last of these questions had particular importance. If my first impressions were wrong and bounded generalizations represented only marginal studies within literature, then post-communist world, at least large parts of it, could safely be taken outside areas studies and put within the amorphous body of general comparative studies of the developed world.

I answer these and other questions that came up in the process of study based on evidence from articles published in the peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal "Communist and Post-communist studies" after 2002.

The reason to choose this starting point in time was to make sure that the authors could be familiar with the Bunce's article published in 2000. The selection of articles followed few criteria. Based on information included in their abstracts, I used only these articles that treated former communist nations of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, eliminating the studies of current communist countries, such as China. In addition, I eliminated all these studies, which could not be included in political science broadly speaking. I also eliminated from the final selection all idiographic studies or studies without element of comparison as well as all studies that focused on narratives instead of analytical generalizations. Thus, finally, from more than 300 articles published after 2002 I had chosen 24 articles for further analysis.

This presentation begins with brief outline of each article of the sample based on the arguments presented by their authors. In this section I outline the main goal of each article as well as its relation to existing body of literature. Next, I position each of these articles on the scale when one extreme shows big generalizations, and another extreme shows bounded generalizations, following Bunce's (2000) taxonomy. After presenting the persisting dichotomy between big and bounded generalizations, I will try to make sense of it by applying different epistemological approaches: positivist, instrumentalist

and cultural. Next in line, I will launch a hypothesis that correlates the presence and persistence of big-bounded generalizations dichotomy with different cultural archetypes, religious background that influences researchers in one or another direction. I will test this hypothesis on the sample of 24 articles and find sufficient evidence to confirm my hypothesis. Finally, I will present interpretative suggestions as to the reasons researchers make big or bounded generalizations, suggestions extracted from semi-directive interviews during interdisciplinary conference focusing on the Balkan region history and on its recent development.

Evidence sample

In this section I briefly present all articles of the sample, by the chronological order of their publishing, providing references, main objectives and theoretical or model engagements that put them in relation, harmony or collision, to existing literature.

Agh (2002) investigates the contradictions facing social-democratic parties in Central and Eastern Europe. He claims that unlike the West European social-democratic parties that have experienced with various versions of the “Third Way” policies, their East European homologues had to overcome economic deficit through creating huge social deficit.

Pollack (2002) tries to explain the social and political upheaval in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) by using a theoretical model worked out by Pierre Bourdieu. The author claims that by applying this approach on the system’s change in the GDR it is not only possible to determine the structural and functional conditions of the upheaval, but also to describe the concrete historical processes of how the upheaval took place.

Nikolenyi (2003) provides a solution for theoretical puzzles created after the formation of minority government in the Czech Republic after the elections of 1998. He claims that neither theories of coalition formation nor those of minority government formation provide an accurate prediction for this outcome. Instead, he bases his analysis on game theory.

Aligica (2003) discusses the conceptual model behind the widespread belief that in post-communist societies, once the democratic and market institutions are introduced, the emerging values engendered by those very institutions will create the conditions for the consolidation and reproduction of democracy and market economy. The author claims that the direct relationship between institutional structures, institutional learning and the emerging values is difficult to establish and substantiate.

Wiatr (2003) illustrates the importance of reformist leadership in post-communist democratization, thus taking side with those authors in the literature that emphasize its conceptual importance. He makes his demonstration on the basis of empirical studies made in Poland since 1966.

Marks (2004) examines the social composition of the communist party in the Soviet Union and in four East European countries during the post-war period in the light of two alternative explanations for joining the communist party: the classical political participation model and the party policy model. He finds much stronger support for the political participation model.

Thorson (2004) analyzes why politicians create an independent judicial institution with the authority to overrule their own decisions. The author claims, based on empirical evidence from post-communist Russia, that political actors establish a constitutional court to enhance their democratic credibility.

Buttrick and Moran (2005) argue that there is a spurious correlation between social capital and economic development in the regions of post-communist Russia. This argument rejects Putnam's hypothesis that social capital is the ubiquitous cause of economic growth. Rather, the data presented indicates that individualistic behavior in the form of entrepreneurialism has been the prerequisite for growth in post-communist Russia.

Ganev (2005) answers one of the most intriguing questions about post-communist politics: why did the infrastructure of governance deteriorate considerably immediately after the collapse of the old regimes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union? He claims that the process of democratization represents, contrary to Charles Tilly's hypothesis of state formation, a process of weakening, not strengthening the state.

Hug (2005) suggests that the political effects of referendums should vary according to the institutional provisions that allow for direct involvement of citizens in decision-making. The paper demonstrates effects of different institutional provisions on policy outcomes, which, so far, have only been demonstrated at the sub-national level, for example, in the United States and Switzerland.

Kubicek (2005) examines the extent of EU involvement in Ukraine and its results. As authoritarianism in this country became more pronounced in the early 2000s, the EU began to disengage from the country. The article argues that part of the problem was that the EU never applied political conditionality to Ukraine as it had with other states.

Thames (2005) studies legislative behavior in post-communist Ukraine in relation to party affiliation and the role it plays in legislator voting decisions. The author claims that the evidence from Ukraine confirms the existence of party effects, previously established on the case of the United States; he, however, also claims that the ability of a party to affect deputies does not depend on the strength of the party label as it does in the US case.

Bunce and Wolchik (2006) analyze a number of elections in post-communist regimes, perched between democracy and dictatorship, between 1995 and 2005 that have led to the triumph of liberal oppositions over illiberal incumbents. The authors test this evidence with international diffusion as explanatory multivariable model. They claim that despite the evidence, the cross-national diffusion of the electoral model in this region may have run its course, largely because of less supportive local and international conditions.

Luhiste (2006) seeks to identify variables that explain trust in political institutions. He tests different theories of institutional trust with individual-level survey data from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Building on prior research, two competitive theories, the cultural and performance explanation are identified and tested. The results show that both cultural and performance variables influence citizens' trust in political institutions.

Shulman (2006) tests the assertion that ethnic and regional cultural heterogeneity is a source of conflict and alienation in a state with respect to ethnic and regional differences in Ukraine. The results of this analysis suggest that subjective cultural

differences in this country do not substantially undermine national identity, but they do weaken national unity.

Kuzio (2008) builds on Ishiyama's (1998) seminal study of Communist successor parties by providing comparative study of the fate of Communist successor parties in Eurasia and Central-Eastern Europe. Kuzio outlines four paths undertaken by Communist parties in former Communist states: those countries that rapidly transformed Communist parties into center-left parties; countries that were slower at achieving this; countries with imperial legacies; and Eurasian autocracies.

Petrovic (2008) analyses the reasons for the division of post-communist Eastern Europe on better performing countries from Central Europe and the Baltic region and laggards from the Balkans. Not denying the relevance and structural impacts of some historical and geo-political facts concerning the establishment of these differences, the author argues that there is a limited explanatory value to structural arguments of the role of initial conditions in assessing the reasons for the slower progress of the Balkan states in post-communist reform.

Tworzecki (2008) focuses on the case of Poland to examine the phenomenon of widespread popular disengagement from civic and political life by testing the relative explanatory power of cultural and institutional hypotheses. The former see disengagement as the consequence of values and patterns of behavior that are in some ways incompatible with pluralist politics, whereas the latter see disengagement as the result of a mismatch between the realm of politically relevant individual interests and identities on the one hand, and the realm of available institutions of state-society intermediation on the other.

Aidukaite (2009) reviews theoretical and empirical literature written on welfare state development in post-communist Eastern Europe in the light of the theories and approaches that have been developed to study affluent capitalist democracies. The author states that the exclusion of former communist countries for more than twenty years from welfare state theorizing has created an empirical and theoretical gap. Therefore, it is necessary not only to test already existing welfare state theories, definitions, typologies and approaches on these countries, but also to advance them.

Koinova (2009) state that contrary to the predominant understanding in the literature that diasporas act in exclusively nationalist ways, they do engage with the democratization of their home countries. Drawing evidence from the activities of the Ukrainian, Serbian, Albanian and Armenian diasporas after the end of communism, the author argues that diasporas filter international pressure to democratize post-communist societies by utilizing democratic procedures to advance unresolved nationalist goals.

Valkov (2009) challenges the hypothesis that there is cohabitation of civic engagement and democratic institutions and practices. For him, while valid at a general level, the relationship is not confirmed once it is scrutinized thoroughly and heterogeneous categories are disaggregated. For the European post-communist cases, the pattern of the relationship between the regime type and the propensity to associate closely resembles the one in Latin mature democracies and non-authoritarian countries, provided that voluntary associations are chosen as measurements of vitality of social capital and robustness of civil society.

Ganev (2011) builds upon insights derived from the literature on fiscal sociology and from Joseph Schumpeter's analysis of modern tax states, to outline a new approach

to the study of various phenomena related to revenue-collection in post-communism. Having identified important gaps in the understanding of the transformative processes that engulfed the region after 1989, the paper introduces a more comprehensive research program focused on the context-specific challenges inherent in the attempt to re-establish tax states in the formerly communist countries.

Rybar (2011) shows that the dominant theory of European integration, the liberal intergovernmentalism, contains several assumptions about the process and character of national preference formation that may not be fully met in the post-communist EU member states. The author argues that the primacy of economic and societal interests in influencing positions of national governments should not be taken for granted. Using Slovakia as an example, it demonstrates the autonomy of political and bureaucratic actors and importance of their preferences. He also argues that ideational and exogenous factors should not be left out in constructing a realistic framework of national preference formation.

Positioning on big-bounded generalization scale

The articles presented in the previous section make simple taxonomy big-bounded generalization a rather tricky enterprise. Unlike the works used by Bunce (2000) to illustrate her argument, the literature after 2002 is focusing not only on general issues, such as the causes for post-communist democratization; it is also interested in seemingly minor issues, such as party affiliation, welfare development or relation between institutional arrangements and referendum results. Even if the big question of factors leading toward different political regime outcomes is still present, if not at center stage, then near the background, the more recent studies, when they confront it, try to zoom deep inside the big picture, to the elements that were overlooked in the 1990s, when Bunce (2000) accumulated her empirical evidence. Despite this more nuance approach, it is still possible to put the more recent research on the scale between big and bounded generalizations.

To properly categorize different articles from the sample I take as key factor the authors' intentions. For example, an author that states his or her intentions to show how post-communist patterns support particular general theory or model will be classified within the group of big generalizations; accordingly, authors that state his or her intentions to show how post-communist patterns differ from universal general patterns will be classified within the group of bounded generalizations. Therefore, I am not focusing on the question whether the author's intentions really match their findings. I am not making a police investigation as to whether their findings warrant their initial general statements. At this point I accept their claims at their face value, without critical evaluation.

The first group of studies falls frankly within big generalizations argument. According to this argument, general laws of causality apply equally well to post-communist countries. These general laws are established by studying material evidence from regions and countries outside the post-communist context, but when tested on post-communist findings, these theories or models are largely confirmed, although sometimes with nuances. This group includes the studies of Pollack (2002), who considers the system's change in the GDR as following the logic of the theoretical model worked out

by Pierre Bourdieu; Wiatr (2003), who illustrates the importance of reformist leadership paradigm with the evidence from the post-communist democratization in Poland; Nikolenyi (2003), who despite discrediting some current explanations of causes of formation of minority government does provide alternative explanation based on game theory; Marks (2004), who explains the social composition of communist parties with political participation model; Thorson (2004), who analyzes the creation of independent judicial institution with the game theory models of enhancing democratic credibility; Hug (2005), who suggests that political effects of referendums follow general patterns established through studies in the United States and Switzerland; Kubicek (2005), who examines the extent of EU involvement in Ukraine and its results within the theoretical framework of EU conditionality; Thames (2005), who studies legislative behavior in post-communist context and confirms the existence of party effects, previously established on the case of the United States; Luhiste (2006), who seeks to confirm that two competitive theories, the cultural and performance explanation, both explain trust in political institutions; Shulman (2006), who separates different elements within tested models, some of which confirm theoretical predictions; Kuzio (2008), who builds on Ishiyama's (1998) seminal study of Communist successor parties in order to provide comparative study of the fate of Communist successor parties in Eurasia and Central-Eastern Europe; Tworzecki (2008), who focuses on the case of Poland to examine the phenomenon of widespread popular disengagement from civic and political life by confirming the explanatory power of both cultural and institutional hypotheses; and Aidukaite (2009), who explains welfare state development in post-communist Eastern Europe using theories and approaches that have been developed to study affluent capitalist democracies.

Second group of studies supports the bounded generalization paradigm. To put it simple, they all agree that some patterns in the post-communist context contradict the universality patterns established by studying different regions and different historic context. This group includes Agh (2002), who claims that unlike the West European social-democratic parties that have experienced with various versions of the "Third Way" policies, their East European homologues had to overcome economic deficit through creating huge social deficit; Aligica (2003), who claims that in the post-communist context the direct relationship between institutional structures, institutional learning and the emerging values is difficult to establish and substantiate; Buttrick and Moran (2005), who argue that there is a spurious correlation between social capital and economic development, an argument maintained by Putnam, in the regions of post-communist Russia; Ganey (2005), who claims that the process of democratization in the post-communist context represents, contrary to Charles Tilly's hypothesis of state formation, a process of weakening, not strengthening the state; Bunce and Wolchik (2006), who claim that the cross-national diffusion of the electoral model in the post-communist region may have run its course, largely because of less supportive local and international conditions; Petrovic (2008), who argues that there is a limited explanatory value to structural arguments of the role of initial conditions in assessing the reasons for the slower progress of the Balkan states in post-communist reform; Koinova (2009), who states that contrary to the predominant understanding in the literature, that diasporas act in exclusively nationalist ways, they in fact do engage with the democratization of their home countries; Valkov (2009), who challenges the hypothesis, inspired from Putnam's studies on social

capital, that there is cohabitation of civic engagement and democratic institutions and practices; Ganev (2011) who introduces a more comprehensive research program focused on the context-specific challenges inherent in the attempt to re-establish tax states in the formerly communist countries; Rybar (2011), who shows that the dominant theory of European integration, the liberal intergovernmentalism, contains several assumptions about the process and character of national preference formation that may not be fully met in the post-communist EU member states.

Explaining different outcomes

Next step in this study is trying to understand the persisting dichotomy between big and bounded generalizations by applying different epistemological approaches: positivist, instrumentalist and cultural.

Within positivist vision of social world, a vision in which knowledge streams both naturally and logically from the reality itself, the question “why the post-communist research is divided into two groups, big and bonded generalizations” may at first glance appear redundant. According to this vision, inherited from the works of August Comte and Emile Durkheim, the main objective of social science is to search for general objective laws akin the laws in natural sciences such as physics, chemistry or biology. The role of researchers within this search for knowledge is to observe and report objective data and, as far as possible, to detach themselves from the studied reality in order not to bring in their own prejudices. Therefore, any difference in findings would reflect above all differences in searched social reality; in other words a study that confirms bounded generalizations will faithfully report an existing bounded generalization regarding particular issue, e.g. the post-communist level of social trust (Valkov 2008). There is, however, an internal contradiction between positivist approach and the reported persistent dichotomy of big and bounded generalizations. This contradiction flows from the fact that positivism is concerned not with bounded, but with big generalizations only. Bounded generalization, the core of area studies argument, within this epistemological approach makes sense no more than claiming the presence of different set of physical laws for one part of the universe. Bonded generalizations, therefore, create tensions that need to be solved in findings new big generalizations that encompass the deviant cases. Persistence over time of bounded generalizations, therefore, is a problem that needs to be solved outside positivist paradigm.

An alternative, instrumentalist approach, may provide some clues to the presence and persistence of big-bounded generalization dichotomy. According to this approach, inspired by the works of Weber (1904) the central piece of any social research is not the objective reality but the subject of the researcher. It is him or her who conceive research questions, choose general methodology and apply particular techniques. Their intentions are strongly correlated to research findings, which, however, is different from producing false research based on individual prejudices. Objectivity, to follow the Weber’s argument, is not absolute, but only a relation between arbitrary chosen methodology and findings. Within this approach the intention, therefore, to prove relevance of bounded generalizations is indistinguishable from the will to prove the *raison d’être* of areas studies as far as the post-communist countries are concerned. A hypothesis within this approach may be presented, according to which it would be the interest to promote

research within post-communist world that triggers the thrust toward producing bounded generalizations studies. Researchers with vested interests from and toward this region, for example because of their upbringing and strong emotional links, would be tempted to focus more on particularities instead of general trends that make this region indistinguishable from the rest of Europe. To the contrary, researchers with western upbringing would tend to insist on big generalizations and discredit the basis of areas studies as far as the post-communist world is concerned. To make this hypothesis even simpler, bounded generalizations could be expected only within the circle of researchers that come from post-communist countries. Given the sample of articles, is this hypothesis confirmed or rejected? It is only partly confirmed. Researchers from outside the post-communist world are overwhelmingly trying to put it inside the big generalization paradigm, although some of them succeed it only at the cost of reformulation of big generalizations in order to embrace the post-communist experience. Within the group of researchers from post-communist countries there is no such statistical trend; the group is divided into two camps on the issue of choosing big versus bounded generalizations. The instrumentalist approach and its hypothesis, is not sufficient to account for the presence and persistence of the big-bounded generalization dichotomy.

Here comes to light another, cultural approach to the research question. It is different from both positivism and instrumentalism. It does not consider research as only mechanically following its object; neither it considers the object of enquiry as only arbitrary constructed by the researcher following his or her particular interests. To be sure, these considerations are never completely disregarded, but they are not at the center of cultural explanation. What is important here, building on the long tradition from Dilthey (1957) to Geertz (1973), is the subjective understanding of the meaning, in this case, the meaning concerns the presence and persistence of two different trajectories within social research on post-communist countries. Subjective here does not mean chaotic; it takes into account the subject and the object as interrelated system and subjects as social foundation of different discourses. Back to our research question, big and bounded generalizations within hermeneutics are different socially embedded cultural approaches that make sense of post-communist reality either by putting it within big or within bounded generalizations. Hermeneutics is a research approach particularly friendly in order to study differences and particularities.

Without further introduction I launch my hypothesis inspired by cultural approach regarding my research question. I posit that it is a particular religious social background that finally makes researchers to feel more comfortable by presenting their results either as part of big or bounded generalizations. It is the culture of Eastern Orthodoxy that maintains the spirit of bounded generalizations; it is the spirit of Western Christianity that fights for establishing big generalizations. Speaking of religious background does not presuppose presence of explicit and practical religiosity and even less looks to religious norms and dogmas as paramount, as framework of what is allowed or not allowed to study and report. By religious social background I do mean the presence of intersubjective values within particular society that affect its general worldviews. To illustrate this point I do not need to go further than quoting Weber's analysis on protestant ethic that sees the accumulation of capitals as God's blessing, a vision quite different from traditional catholic moral, putting sign of equation between wealth and sin. Back to our question, within this religiously colored explanation it would be quite normal

to see predominantly catholic and protestant approaches in producing scientific truth. I must here give credit to Bélanger (1997) for making me think in these categories. My hypothesis, however, is not about the differences between catholic and protestant science; my goal is to define the Eastern Christian unique approach and to put it in relation to the big-bounded generalizations issue. I also want to give credit to Kristen Ghodsee, who during her presentation (2011) made the conceptual link between the Eastern Orthodoxy and the bounded version of human rights, rights limited to a particular nation-state community without universal appeal. Once the conceptual relation between Eastern Orthodoxy and bounded generalizations was conceived, I was able to test it on another subject matter, by findings traces of it in the process of analysis of the findings of my doctoral dissertation (2012).

Why Eastern Orthodoxy created a unique way of seeing social reality in terms of bounded generalizations? The Eastern Church that split from the West after the great schism of 1054 had no original intentions to make such bounded claims of dogmatic validity. In fact, the schism originated when Pope Leo IX denied Patriarch in Constantinople the title ecumenical and asked in term to be acknowledged as head of all Christian churches that were part of the Pentarchy (Five Churches – Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem). It was only in relation to the Pope's claim of universal jurisdiction over all religious matters within Christianity that a special doctrine of limited jurisdiction within each Orthodox Church, autocephaly, was given its present weight. Autocephaly means that a person who does not need to report to any superior religious authority heads each Eastern Orthodox Church. At the same time, each Eastern Orthodox Church is part of a commonwealth of Churches with equal status, which share common vision on religious matters. This fact is important while investigating the phenomenon of bounded generalizations in current social and political research. The Eastern Orthodox cultural approach is at the same time one that denies big generalizations, generalizations that apply to all peoples, but accepts transnational bounded generalizations, generalizations that fall short of universal application.

Analyzing findings

If my hypothesis is true, if big-bounded generalization divide is due to cultural heritage of Christianity and if bounded generalization, in particular, is due to cultural influence of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, then the researcher who has been more deeply embedded within societies with dominant Eastern Orthodox Christianity should express more likely any tendency toward making bounded generalization claims. The evidence I use to test this hypothesis is the sample of articles after 2002 in the periodical "Communist and Post-communist studies".

Let me first start with the group of bounded generalizations. It includes the following authors: Agh (2002), Aligica (2003), Buttrick and Moran (2005), Ganev (2005), Bunce and Wolchik (2006), Petrovic (2008), Koinova (2009), Valkov (2009), Ganev (2011), and Rybar (2011). I have enough biographical data to analyze some of these authors: Attila Agh, who is Professor at the Department of Political Science at the Corvinus University of Budapest; Paul Dragos Aligica, who works at National School for Political Science and Public Administration, Bucharest and Hudson Institute; Venelin Ganev, who is Professor at the Department of Political Science at the Miami University

in Ohio with university degree from Sofia University; Milenko Petrovic, who is Researcher at the National Centre for Research on Europe in New Zealand with university studies in Belgrade; Maria Koinova, who is working at Dartmouth College, Dickey Center for International Understanding and reports Bulgaria as native language; Nikolay Valkov, who graduated from University of Montreal and reports Bulgaria as native language; and Marek Rybar, who works at the Department of Political Science at the Comenius University, Bratislava. From these seven researchers, five – Aligica, Ganev, Petrovic, Koinova and Valkov, were born and grew in three Balkan countries where Eastern Orthodoxy is traditionally the dominant religion – Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia. All of them currently do not work in this region, although it remains their primary research focus. The other two researchers from this group – Agh and Rybar, are researchers that were born, studies and worked in their native countries – Hungary and Slovakia.

All these researchers, seeing the post-communist world as a field of bounded generalization, could have reached different results if they have decided to use different theoretical and/or methodological lenses. For example, Valkov (2009) challenges the hypothesis that there is cohabitation of civic engagement and democratic institutions and practices. For him, while valid at a general level, the relationship is not confirmed once it is scrutinized thoroughly and heterogeneous categories are disaggregated. He claims, that for the European post-Communist cases, the pattern of the relationship between the regime type and the propensity to associate closely resembles the one in Latin mature democracies and non-authoritarian countries, provided that voluntary associations are chosen as measurements of vitality of social capital and robustness of civil society. Theoretically, Valkov remains strongly embedded within Putnam's (2000) unequivocally positive approach on causality between high social capital and political regime type. Methodologically, he uses Putnam's measurements, voluntary associations, to provide statistical values to social capital. If Valkov had decided to follow another more nuance approach on social capital and its consequences, for example, that of Portes (1998), or that of Bourdieu (1977), his main conclusions would be quite different. The negative elements of social capital in an elite group within a class society would have made Valkov reconsider his claims about post-communist exceptionality or would have give him reasons to link such exceptionality with positive political development, more positive even than in advanced western societies. Although there is no doubt that the Valkov's results, and for that matter, the results of all other authors within the sample, reflect his theoretical and methodological choices, the research question here is not about this link but about the reasons why he makes such choices that affect his findings.

On the level of statistics, it seems that there is strong link between the fact that a social researcher is influenced by Eastern Orthodox mentality and the results of his or her studies. Being embedded within such mentality, however, requires cultural links of some significance. In other words, people should give certain meaning to their acts. The paradox here is that most social researchers are not religious zealots and for this reason only the meaning of transmitting Eastern Orthodox mentality within the field of social research cannot be explained interpretatively with the intention to make such transmission. There must be another cultural meaning of seeing the post-communist world as separate from big generalizations; another meaning of making such bounded

generalizations. There must be an alternative, no religious, way for the Eastern Orthodox mentality to influence the social research findings.

In the following section I will present interpretative suggestions as to the reasons researchers make big or bounded generalizations, suggestions extracted from presentations, general discussion and semi-directive interviews during an interdisciplinary conference focusing on the Balkan region history and on its recent development (Ohio State, 2011). For respect to confidentiality of authors, I will not reveal their names. I may, however, not hide their preferences, if any, as far as the big-bounded generalization choice is concerned.

The answers concerning interpretation of big-bounded generalization dichotomy reflect the rainbow of epistemological possibilities, some of which were already discussed in the previous sections. There are several possible answers on the research question:

1. A researcher from the United States who was born and grew up in the Balkans looked at the question from purely instrumental point of view. According to him, it all depends on the governmental subsidies whether an emphasis should be given to confirmation of big theories or to areas studies. He says: “ During the Cold War the priority was given to study the communist countries as areas studies, as exceptions to the general rules... Since the early 1990s, the trend has been reversed... After the mid-1990s, once again the emphasis was put on big generalizations”. According to this view, a researcher who wants to be funded and published should pay attention to the shifting institutional environment in purely instrumental way.
2. Two researchers from the Balkan countries, working in the United States, who make big generalizations regarding the Balkan post-communist countries, declare to want to normalize this region by integrating it within big theoretical frameworks. One of them says: “We want to normalize Balkan history”. Another adds: “I belong to the camp that wants to normalize history”. By “normality” they understand putting the development of the post-communist countries within the continental general historic development. In other words, by making research that emphasis on big generalizations they want to show that the Balkan identities are in fact part of larger European identities.
3. Two other researchers from the Balkan countries, working in the United States, who make bounded generalizations regarding the Balkan post-communist countries, declare to want to show these societies as exceptions within general flow of European history. While I investigate the interpretative reasons for this position, they first point out at the objective features of this region that make it so different from the rest of Europe. (Let me remind here that this is not sustainable position from positivist point of view; exceptionality within positivist paradigm creates tension that can be overcome only by establishing different big generalizations.) When I dig deeper, one of them points out at the unique Ottoman heritage and the other at the Soviet domination during the Cold War. In other words, these researchers explain their bounded

generalization preference with the specific regional national identity, which they are part of. For them this makes the entire region distinct from the rest of Europe.

The researchers quoted above are bringing in possible interpretative explanations regarding the reason how Eastern Orthodox mentality can influence current social research, by stimulating creation of bounded generalization studies. The causal mechanism includes the sentiment of national belonging, a concept that is not religious, strictly speaking, but which is embedded within particular cultural environment, the same environment that became possible as a result of religious mentality. Researchers are facing big identity dilemma: to accept their national exceptionality as part of the religious cultural package or to try to overcome this exceptionality by putting it within much larger social normality, within big generalizations. Although it is not clear so far whether the result of this dilemma is rather automatic or voluntary, it is clear already that this result affect decisively the research agenda, pushing the researchers toward big or bounded generalizations.

Conclusion

The research question why the political literature on post-communist development shows presence and persistence of dichotomy between big and bounded generalizations seems to have found some tentative conclusions. As it turns out to be, they are far from the simple positivist and instrumentalist vision of social science as purely reflective or purely voluntary activity; on the one hand, the researchers are not simply following the subject matter; on the other hand, they are not simply imposing their categories on amorphous subject matter. These traditional explanations may play some role for some authors, but they are far from satisfactory to explain the general phenomenon. Far stronger explanation follows the cultural approach. The social researchers are part of cultural communities that share common understandings. These understandings are product of centuries of religious mentalities that affect the way they see the worlds and themselves. The only way to overcome their bounded set of identities is to embrace new vision for nationhood, one that is part of universal human development. Without this intermediate step, they may never cross the line that separates them from Western-inspired temptation to build big generalizations.

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