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Political Culture, Post-Communism and Disciplinary Normalisation: Towards Theoretical Reconstruction

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This chapter mounts a critique of much of the study of post-Communist political culture, suggesting its theoretical development is inadequate and that method has substituted for theory.[1] The inadequacy of theory is traced to the failure to exploit the original interdisciplinarity of the concept. That characteristic was displayed most vividly in a set of divergent conceptualisations and uses that developed in political culture research within Communist studies, but these were not themselves adequately substantiated theoretically. Moreover a 'normalisation' of study has occurred in the currently prevalent mode of political culture research. The potential of interdisciplinary investigations to address the theoretical elaboration of political culture is illustrated by a discussion of some work in social psychology.

The concept of political culture emerged at a time of high confidence in the ability of political science to combine broad analytical scope with rigorous method (Welch, 1993, pp.72–4). The concept, accordingly, has a distinctive multidisciplinarity at its origins. But the fragility of the concept's theoretical establishment quickly showed itself in scholarship through a tendency for conceptualisations and uses to proliferate and diverge. In particular, maintaining the

link between broad scope and rigorous method has proved a challenge, resulting in a series of alternating pronouncements of the death and rebirth of the concept.[2]

The concept's career in Communist and post-Communist studies is distinctive within this broad pattern. The Communist setting brought about a particular set of conceptual divergences, which were countered by an argument for 'disciplinary normalisation' centred on a characteristic method. A new and distinct phase of political culture research was entered with the advent of post-Communism, the conditions of which have facilitated a more widespread normalisation of approach, in several respects. The new research setting involves the extension of already developed techniques to the newly open territories, and the use of these techniques to answer generic questions.[3] Whether or not democracy, or the market, has been consolidated in the post-Communist area, political science certainly has been. This extension of disciplinary grasp, whereby the mysteries of Kremlinology and the interpretivist epistemology of area studies have been replaced by the certainties of reliable socio-economic data and representative surveys of popular attitudes, has for the most part been welcomed. This chapter, however, enters a doubt, suggesting that the rush to exploit the vast new possibilities for empirical investigation using the already highly polished analytical techniques of political science may have exacerbated an existing tendency for method to substitute for theory (on that tendency in political science see Sartori, 1970).

The work of Archie Brown triggers the argument of this chapter, in a number of ways. Brown (1977) was a pioneer in the use of this relatively newly coined concept in the political analysis of Communist states, a use that subsequently fed back into and reinforced the discussion of the concept in the political science 'mainstream' (as it then was) (Almond, 1983). At the same time, Brown has also written an

important essay (1984a) that has been distinctive in reopening political culture research to influences from outside political science, specifically from anthropology and social psychology. Such disciplinary openness is a model for the present chapter.

But while Brown used this extra-disciplinary foray to defend both a specific conceptualisation of political culture and the approach as a whole, in this chapter the ultimate aim of theoretical consolidation will be served less directly, by an investigation that initially criticises and thus potentially destabilises prevailing usage of political culture and opens up other, neglected, possibilities. The assumption that all that remains for political culture research is empirical accumulation is premature; further theoretical work is necessary; and some arguments in social psychology not so far looked at by students of politics provide material for it: such is the argument of this chapter.

The Origins of Political Culture Research and Its Development in Communist Studies

A genealogy of political culture research has already been provided by its mid-twentieth century progenitor, Gabriel Almond (1989). One noteworthy feature is the size of the Pantheon of intellectual precursors that Almond claims, which includes Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Montesquieu and Tocqueville. This reflects the inescapability of the phenomena to which culture-like concepts have responded in political science and its predecessors. It does not, however, help much in specifying the concept.

Only a little more specifically, Almond (1989, pp.10–16) goes on to highlight the diverse origins of the political culture concept by describing several *disciplinary* influences: European sociology (mainly Weber, as transmitted via Parsons); social psychology (understood as a science of attitudes); and psychoanthropology

(especially theories of ‘modal personality’). But the ‘catalytic agent in the political culture conceptualization and research that took place in the 1960s’ (Almond, 1989, p.15) was, he says, a development in method: that of the attitude survey.

This combination of sources, not on the face of it an easy one, expresses the intellectual excitement and confidence characteristic of mid-century American political science, a mood whose fading Lucian Pye (2003, p.6) has recently lamented. In the event, as soon as the early 1960s, with the publication of the first two classic studies of political culture, *The Civic Culture* (Almond and Verba, 1989) and *Political Culture and Political Development* (Pye and Verba, 1965), a tension was evident between two applications of the concept (Lane, 1992).

In the application that would become typical of *comparative politics* the method of statistical correlation and modelling prevailed, making use not only of survey-based measurement of political culture but also of quantitative political and socio-economic data in order to model causal relationships (if in a rather primitive manner at this stage, and not always in a way that facilitated inter-country comparison: Welch, 1993, pp.14–22). In contrast, in the *area studies* application, evidence drawn from political history, religious studies, ethnology and literature was deployed in a methodologically eclectic though largely interpretive manner in the production of a synoptic view of political culture, presenting considerable impediments to systematisation and generalisation. Thus, in the first major works of political culture research, streams in the original disciplinary confluence were beginning to separate.

The insertion of political culture into Communist studies both displayed and developed this comparative politics/area studies tension, contributing to the theory of political culture through a debate over definition (for fuller discussion see Welch,

1987). Brown (1984b, p.2) defined political culture in 'subjective' terms as 'the subjective perception of history and politics, the fundamental beliefs and values, the foci of identification and loyalty, and the political knowledge and expectations which are the product of the specific historical experience of nations and groups'. He took the utility of this definition to lie in its potential to reveal dissonance between political culture and prevailing political institutions and behaviour, a state of affairs which definitions that incorporated patterns of behaviour into political culture itself would obscure.

The positions opposed by this *attitude-continuity* conceptualisation are of three types.[4] One opposing view sought (consistently indeed with Brown's incorporation of 'historical experience' into his definition)[5] to derive a specification of political culture from a synoptic interpretation of a country's history. Work by Tucker (1977), White (1979), Keenan (1986) and Szamuely (1974) is illustrative, though not all refer to political culture. Its key focus is *historical continuity*. Brown's view is not however incompatible with the substantive findings of this approach. Indeed, for at least one of these writers, White, the more comprehensive definition seems largely to be a matter of evidentiary convenience: his theory (White 1984) of the means by which political culture is transmitted – via socialisation in family and educational institutions – marks an underlying commitment to the attitude-continuity position.

A second opposing position also involves a contribution from Tucker (1973),[6] as well as writers such as Fagen (1969) and Meyer (1972), and draws on arguments in cultural anthropology. This approach stresses the distinctiveness of Communist regimes as promoters of *cultural revolution*. Analysts argued that such a focus demanded a broader definition, not just a broader range of evidence, in order that

resocialisation efforts not be seen as, in Fagen's terms, mere 'political advertising' (1969, p.6).

Such arguments pioneer a 'cultural turn' that has been widely manifest in historical research in the last two decades, notably in the study of the Nazi, the fascist, and the Stalinist regimes (however we label them). Sometimes the term 'political culture' is employed, sometimes not, as in Falasca-Zamponi's (1997, p.7) 'cultural-political analysis' of Italian fascism. In either case, these writers are drawing on the creative and aesthetic implications of the concept of culture (Williams, 1981, p.11) in their work, just as did earlier students of cultural revolution. To quote Falasca-Zamponi (1997, p.4) again: 'More than mere means of political legitimation, rituals, myths, cults, and speeches were fundamental to the construction of fascist power, its specific physiognomy, its political vision'. It always remains relevant to ask about the effect and efficacy of such efforts (Confino, 1997), but the supposition of these authors is that the question is posed too starkly as a matter of popular acceptance or rejection. Their claim is of a role for official discourse, ritual and mobilisation that is in some sense 'constitutive' of political culture, rather than (as in the attitude-continuity position) subject to acceptance or rejection by it.

A third alternative is perhaps maximally incompatible with Brown's definition. It arises when we look not at the cultural impact of mass mobilisations, mythic discourse and other public interventions but at the structuring of everyday life by the regimes, as is invited by Jowitt's definition of political culture as 'the set of informal, adaptive postures – behavioral and attitudinal – that emerge in response to and interact with the set of formal definitions …that characterize a given level of society' (Jowitt, 1992, p.55). Studies that have operated in this terrain of *cultural adaptation* range from sweeping theories of Communist society such as that of

Zinoviev (1985) to more narrowly focused ethnographic work on the use of ‘connections’ (DiFranceisco and Gitelman, 1984; Ledeneva, 1998) and on hoarding as a defensive mechanism in the production apparatus (Swain, 1992, ch. 6; Kenedi, 1981). While cultural-revolution approaches focus on the public discursive and mobilisational displays that (at least some of the time) characterised the regimes, the focus of these cultural-adaptation studies is at a more intimate social level, on the ‘lifeworld’ of communism.

Four conceptualisations of political culture can therefore be identified within the ‘subjective/comprehensive’ definitional dichotomy. Firstly, Brown’s attitude-continuity usage is designed to expose and make researchable one aspect of the inauthenticity of the regimes – the failure of their resocialisation (attitude changing) efforts. Secondly, Tucker, White and many others (mainly in the Russian case) construe political culture in terms of historical continuity, emphasising one or another historical pattern, usually an authoritarian one. Thirdly, the work of Fagen, Mayer and Tucker emphasises the distinctively political-cultural revolutionary agenda of the regimes, and the magnitude of the efforts it sometimes involved. The method here is also interpretive, but with discourse, rituals and displays as the interpreted materials. Work on cultural adaptation instead focuses on the behaviour and the skills induced and inculcated by communism, distant both from the official aims of the regimes and from the behaviour that would have occurred in their absence, and thus neither strictly authentic nor inauthentic.

Such rival conceptualisations of political culture take their cue from selected empirical observations, but also reflect different uses of the term. They are not subject to straightforward empirical evaluation, as they are intended to direct attention to different sets of facts, and implicitly invoke different causal connections. It is

perhaps arguable, in a deconstructive mode, that they should be evaluated politically, in view of the extreme political importance, during the Cold War especially, of judgements about matters such as the authenticity and inauthenticity of Communist regimes.[7] But in this chapter a reconstructive rather than a deconstructive course is followed.

Its cue is Brown's reach into social psychology for support for his conceptualisation of political culture. For example, he derived from the substantial literature on 'cognitive dissonance' the finding that attitude change is more likely to be brought about among active Communist proselytisers (Brown, 1984a, p.158), but also from the literature on 'reactance' that highly visible coercion tends to produce the reinforcement of the repressed attitude (Brown, 1984a, p.166). Resources such as this, even though Brown admits that the findings he cites are not always so counterintuitive as to need the confirmation of social psychology (Brown, 1984a, p.158), offer theoretical reinforcement by substantiating the psychological processes on which a subjective definition of political culture implicitly relies. But though the term 'psychological' has sometimes been reserved, by critics as well as supporters, for Brown's and similar definitions, it is clear that the alternative conceptualisations we have considered also contain an implicit psychology. One of their great weaknesses is that it has remained implicit. It is hard, for example, to know exactly what is meant by the 'constitutive' role of public political discourse, or how 'adaptation' works as a psychological process. With Brown's chapter as our model, we might hope for at least equal illumination from a cross-disciplinary foray that keeps these questions in mind.

Political Culture Research and Post-Communism

The collapse of Communism in Europe brought greater potential for the disciplinary normalisation that Brown's definitional argument had promoted. This was so for two reasons. The first was the possibility of using the method Almond had cited as the key catalyst for political culture research in the mainstream, the attitude survey. Its use under Communism, while not unknown, had certainly faced serious impediments. The other was the framing of post-Communist studies around the problem of democratisation, a generic problem whose posing suggested the possibility of subsuming post-Communist studies under the subdiscipline of 'transitology'. Together, these considerations amount to the abandonment of an area-studies approach to post-Communist political culture and the adoption of a comparative politics one. One cost of this has been the marginalisation of the alternative conceptualisations of political culture discussed in the preceding section.

The literature of empirical political culture research in post-Communist studies is now substantial. Critical reviews of this literature have already appeared (Fleron, 1996, Alexander, 2000, pp.45–67), and only some general points will be noted here. The survey method has produced somewhat ambiguous results concerning the question of political-cultural foundations of democratisation. Early writings expressed an optimistic view that political culture in former Communist states did not present a significant impediment to democratisation. Some later work has challenged this view, and in the course of attempts to resolve these disagreements there has been much discussion, some of it of a quite technical nature (for example Barrington and Herron, 2001, which criticises the use of multiple regression analysis), about the interpretation of survey findings. Survey research practitioners have occasionally voiced concerns about the problematic nature of the post-Communist

contexts for the actual conduct of survey research, referring not just to problems of training and communication but also of an exacerbation of distorting 'response effects' (Swafford, 1992).

James Alexander (2000) makes a broader argument that 'cultural formlessness' is the main characteristic of post-Communist political culture, a condition that he takes to invalidate the attempt to measure political culture using surveys. Instead, he undertakes 'ethnographic' investigation (though not perhaps of a type that many anthropologists would recognise) based on in-depth interviews. The results he produces are, however, not strikingly different in form from what might be obtained by survey methods: he finds that his respondents fall into four types based on differences in their largely verbal reactions to the post-Communist environment. It is by no means clear why surveys should be thought less adequate in circumstances of cultural formlessness so long as stable groups of respondents can nevertheless be identified. Perhaps, indeed, the 'snapshot' characteristic often noticed and criticised in surveys (other than panel surveys) would be especially appropriate to this situation. A different indicator of political cultural formlessness comes from surveys themselves – in particular the high incidence of 'don't know' responses in them. Ellen Carnaghan (1996), using quantitative methods, has suggested that these responses reflect apathy, though without providing much guidance as to *its* roots.

A less sweeping scepticism about survey methods has been expressed by Frederick Fleron (1996). His review of the specific findings of survey-based studies of post-Communist political culture suggests that 'there has been little effort to examine the effects of timing and the wording of questions on survey results or the motives of citizens who express positive affect toward democratic values' (1996, p.234). Moreover, differences *among* and relationships *between* 'orientations,

attitudes, values, beliefs and norms' receive only 'scant attention' in the research Fleron (1996, p.236) reviews.

It is not only in the field of post-Communist studies that objections have been made to the use of surveys to measure subjective phenomena. The theory of survey research itself has developed a large literature diagnosing problems such as question-wording and priming effects. Some critics and practitioners see these as setting limits to the 'science' of attitude surveying (Roper, 1983), others as providing scope for further scientific study and attempts to bypass the problems (Schuman and Presser, 1996; Zaller and Feldman, 1992). The survey situation itself has been examined for the presence of complex kinds of communication, familiar to researchers but not capable of being represented in survey results, such as 'rebelliousness, cynicism, outrage, intimidation, lies, shyness, hints, metaphors, bragging, hostility, sexual advances …' – examined, in other words, as a *conversation* that masquerades as a scientific measurement (Eliasoph, 1990, p.470).

Perhaps most fundamental for our present discussion is the question of whether political culture should be measured using the same instruments with which we measure public opinion. A caution has been entered by David Laitin, who suggests in support of ethnographic methods in political culture research that people 'are not fully conscious of the sources of their visions and, even if honest, would not necessarily provide the relevant data to survey researchers' (Laitin and Wildavsky, 1988, p.592). Nevertheless, the practice is a feature of the disciplinary normalisation of post-Communist studies. It has been explicitly endorsed for instance by Matthew Wyman (1997, p.123): 'to reject such evidence is to reject the only method we have that can get remotely close to representative data on political cultural attitudes'.[8] This sounds suspiciously like letting our methods dictate our concepts – something

complained of by Sartori (1970, p.1038), who emphasised that ‘concept formation stands prior to quantification’.

In post-Communist studies, factors of normalisation such as the new capability to conduct attitude surveys and the insistent problem of democratisation, together rendering post-Communist studies a scarcely distinctive branch of comparative politics, have combined to produce a political culture research programme that is methodologically sophisticated but conceptually weak. In the political culture research of Communism, a diversity subsisted not only of definitions but also of uses of political culture (with Brown representing the comparative politics mainstream but somewhat isolated in his own subfield: 1984b, p.3). But in post-Communist political culture research a conceptual contraction has occurred. We can certainly obtain more information of the type yielded by surveys; but this need not mean better knowledge.

Considering that political culture research makes a number of psychological assumptions (possibly disparate and seldom explicit), it is surprising that its interest in social psychology has been so limited. The perils of extradisciplinary forays notwithstanding, the next section investigates the possibility that social psychology offers resources for the reconstruction of political culture *theory*.

Social Psychology: Attitudes, Skills and Discourse

Although a definition of political culture that operationalises it via the attitude survey method has sometimes been called ‘psychological’, it is clear that all conceptualisations of political culture must in some way invoke psychology. Invoking ‘attitudes’ is indeed reason enough for paying attention to social psychology, given that that discipline has often been understood as the science of attitudes (see for instance Allport, 1973, p.19), as it was by Almond. But what does it

mean to say that political culture is at least in part a psychological phenomenon? What, indeed, is psychology's conception of an attitude? Even a brief investigation of social-psychological literature reveals that these are by no means settled questions.

A comprehensive study in the history of ideas by Donald Fleming (1967) traces the evolution of the concept of attitude to its current prominence in the human self-image. From an original meaning having to do with physical posture (even *im*posture), the concept was developed in the nineteenth century, under the influence of a radical materialism, in a physiological direction, as a state of physical readiness for action. But, as the need for materialism to proclaim itself so virulently against religious doctrine diminished, it became possible to consider mental as well as motor aspects of the term; aspects which eventually prevailed. With Thomas and Znaniecki's (1958; orig. publ. 1918–20) study of the adaptation of Polish immigrants to American life as a major influence, attitudes came to be seen as relatively enduring mental predispositions to act. A final major development occurred when 'opinion' became separated from attitude under the influence of Gallup's opinion polling. As opinion 'became the natural term for any preference that was consciously avowed and correspondingly easy to tabulate' (Fleming, 1967, p.349), attitude moved into a complementary niche by acquiring a connotation of *depth* – presumably not consciously avowed and less easy to tabulate.

It is at this point that the concept of attitude entered into political culture theory, with a connotation of depth that made it complementary to public opinion, but with no further conceptual specification and in association with a method – the attitude survey – that seemed to make the empirical determination of attitudes straightforward and was bound to lead to the *assimilation* of political culture to public opinion.[9] In this setting, its conceptual development pretty much stopped, to be

replaced by progressive methodological refinement. The same was not, however, true in its original home of social psychology, where conceptual debate, influenced by experiment, has remained very much alive. In several lines of research, a strongly sceptical analysis of attitudes has developed

The behaviourist tendency in psychology, with its programme of the elimination from science of mental phenomena, did not succeed in removing attitudes from social psychological study (DeFleur and Westie, 1963, p.19), or indeed in retaining dominance in psychology. Nevertheless, the problem of the inaccessibility of attitudes continues to provoke theoretical responses. An important one was set out by Daryl Bem (1972) as the self-perception paradigm, which offered a new interpretation of the results observed in the literature on cognitive dissonance.

A key example of cognitive-dissonance research is the widely cited finding (Festinger and Carlsmith, 1959) that subjects' attitudes are modified in order to bring them in line with attitude-inconsistent behaviour induced by the experimenter. Specifically, when the experimental inducement to perform a previously derogated task is large, say $20, no change in the evaluation of the task is produced; when the inducement is smaller, say $1, presumably not a convincing reason for the induced behaviour, evaluations change to compensate. Bem (1972, p.50) noticed that subsequent behaviour changed more reliably than reported attitudes, suggesting that attitude reports are themselves an inference from behaviour, and not a wholly reliable one. Bem's self-perception theory thus proposes that 'the individual is functionally in the same position as an outside observer' when seeking to describe 'attitudes, emotions, and other internal states' (1972, p.2).

A different view of cognitive dissonance findings, but with similar negative implications for an introspectivist account of attitudes, is that attitude reports – such

as those eventuating from cognitive dissonance experiments – derive from concerns for self-presentation (Baumeister, 1982, pp.11–12) or impression management (Tedeschi *et al.*, 1971; see also Gecas, 1982, pp.20–1). In this theory, which also has its own experimental support, the subject responds in order to convey an impression of rationality and consistency and avoid conveying one of hypocrisy or gullibility.

While the thrust of these critiques may appear to be a pronounced scepticism about attitudes – compatible, at least in Bem's case as a 'sometime radical behaviorist' (Bem, 1972, p.49), with doubt that attitudes even exist or have casual efficacy – they actually substantiate a less drastic but still significant conclusion: that what we can learn about attitudes from people's reports about them is limited. This has been the theme of another line of research that was stimulated by some of Bem's findings, Timothy Wilson's theory of *dual attitudes*.

The original essay, by Nisbett and Wilson (1977), reviewed experimental literature in both cognitive dissonance and self-presentation theories. The results, they concluded, 'confound any assumption that conscious, verbal, cognitive processes result in conscious, verbalisable changes in evaluations or motive states which then mediate changed behavior' (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977, p.235). Wilson has developed this line of argument into the view that motivations for behaviour and the 'explanatory system' are psychologically distinct (Wilson *et al.*, 1981). The existence of two distinct mental systems, one that is 'conscious and attempts to verbalize, communicate, and explain mental states' and another that mediates behaviour but is inaccessible (Wilson, 1985, p.16), has troublesome implications for conventional social psychological methods: 'It is even more difficult to investigate cognitive processes than generally believed' (Wilson, 1985, p.30). Wilson has discussed the implications for survey research (Wilson *et al.*, 1990, 1996). Asking respondents to

provide reasons for their attitudes can have the effect of changing the attitudes reported, with the original attitude sometimes resurfacing later. For instance, highly analysed purchasing decisions prove to be more often regretted later than spur-of-the-moment ones (Wilson *et al.*, 1990, p.213). 'By including only explicit measures of attitudes', Wilson *et al.* (2000, p.120) conclude, 'the vast literature on attitude change may have overestimated the extent to which change takes place. People may maintain implicit attitudes that continue to influence their behavior.' Proffered reasons, Wilson *et al.* suggest, are 'often a function of shared cultural theories about why people feel the way they do' (Wilson *et al.*, 1996, p.95). The theory of 'dual attitudes' has become bolder in Wilson's recent work (Wilson, 2002; Wilson and Dunn, 2004), where he has made an effort to rehabilitate for social psychology the idea of the unconscious. The unconscious now refers, for Wilson, not to the psychodynamic mechanisms described by Freud (nor to the 'subliminal effects' also discredited by psychologists: Wilson *et al.*, 1998), but simply to the inaccessible psychological sources of behaviour.[10]

The thesis that the psychological sources of behaviour are inaccessible 'implicit attitudes' supports the supposition of the psychological depth of political culture while at the same time making problematic the empirical grasp of political culture via surveys. A clue as to how, alternatively, empirical grasp may be had comes from illustrative reference by Wilson and Dunn (2004, p.500) to recent work on motor learning and perceptual skills. This work has given experimental support to speculative philosophical arguments made by Michael Polanyi (1962, pp. 49–57) on the phenomenon of *skill*, namely the irreducibility of skills to explicit rules, and the disruption of the exercise of them by conscious reflection or monitoring. Implicit

attitudes may work in the same way, and thus be accessible to study not via verbal reports but ethnographically, in the observation of skilful practice.

Cultural psychology has explored this kind of phenomenon cross-culturally, with interesting results. This sub-discipline emerged as a set of findings of difference and difficulty in the application of standard psychometric tests to non-Western populations. As this line of research progressed beyond critique to the development of its own positive agenda, it has moved, according to a review by Rogoff and Chavajay (1995), in new directions 'that involved testing cognitive skills that were seen as representing important skills tied to cultural practices rather than skills that were usually assumed to be general' (Rogoff and Chavajay, 1995, p.863; see also Lehman *et al.*, 2004, pp.695–7). One striking example is that 'Japanese abacus experts show specific but powerful consequences of their skill in the use of the abacus as a tool for mathematical operations' (Rogoff and Chavajay, 1995, p.865), such as increased capacity to remember number sequences.

Different implications for political culture research arise from the view, present from the origins of the dual attitude theory, that the source of subjects' reports of their attitudes is prevailing explicit cultural rules or implicit cultural theories. It is intriguing that social psychology, itself an obvious if seldom exploited source for developing the psychological basis of political culture, also finds it necessary to invoke an unanalysed 'cultural background' in its investigation of attitudes. However, other branches of social psychology have been less reticent in the analysis of this context, in some cases guided by a programmatic intention to make social psychology more 'social'.

One such body of work is that on *social representations*. Taking a cue from Durkheim's concept of 'collective representations', Serge Moscovici and associates

(Moscovici, 2000; Farr and Moscovici, 1984) have developed an approach that eschews laboratory studies and mainly takes the form of case studies of the emergence and spread through society of classifications and theories such as those of Freudian psychoanalysis. They constitute socially accepted common-sense ways of explaining phenomena, typically arising in scientific work but becoming generalised (in Moscovici's view) through conversational transmission, initially by being grasped in relation to an existing social representation. Moscovici gives the example of psychoanalysis being initially understood in terms of religious confession, whereas later in its career the social representation of the analyst's role could be used to elucidate that of the confessor (Moscovici, 1984, p.26).

Somewhat related too has been the theory of 'cultural epidemiology' advanced recently by Dan Sperber (1985, 1996). Sperber is keen to revive disciplinary exchange between anthropology and psychology, dismissing fears, which have inhibited such exchange, that one discipline might be reduced to the other. Such reduction, he points out rather usefully for our present discussion, can happen to individual theories, but not to whole disciplines. Also construing culture as 'representations' (though without reference to the social representations literature), Sperber draws on the example of epidemiology to suggest that a theory of culture needs to concern itself both with what is spread (psychological phenomena) and the dynamics of that spreading, which will differ among representations as it does for different diseases and will involve objective conditions such as the physical mode of representation (that is, the communications media). This view, in some ways a generalisation of Moscovici and his followers' case studies, can form the basis of an attempt to account for what frames and cultural recipes are available for the processes described by psychologists such as Wilson.

In terms of political culture research, what these arguments invite is a focus on discourse, and particularly on the way that local discourse and behavioural accounting draws upon a culturally available set of meanings whose origins may be obscurely intellectual. 'Toolkit' or 'repertoire' theories have been proposed by sociologists in the analysis of culture (Swidler, 1986; Archer, 1988), but with little psychological substantiation. Sources for such theoretical elaboration can be found in the work of Moscovici and Sperber, which goes beyond the mere listing of culturally available representations to the analysis of their passage through society.

This section has provided a highly selective review of some lines of research in social psychology which have implications for political culture research. The discovery of 'psychologically deep' causes of behaviour via surveys, a somewhat contradictory enterprise to begin with, is shown to be problematic by findings produced in the 'dual attitudes' theory of Wilson and colleagues. The findings show that there may indeed be psychologically deep sources of behaviour, but that their verbalisability is limited. The behaviour they give rise to may better be understood using the model of skilful practice, which is itself far from unobservable. Skills, moreover, show features relevant to the specification of political culture: variability across space and persistence in time. Ethnographic observation of cultural adaptation is supported by these social psychological insights.

A different source exists for explicit attitudes – attitudes that are reported by subjects as reasons for their behaviour and apparent to them on introspection. Such attitudes invoke prevailing cultural repertoires, the study of which (their origin, transmission and distribution) has been the subject of social representations research in social psychology. Research of this kind offers the possibility of psychological substantiation of the otherwise rather mysterious idea of the constitution of political

culture by public discourse and display. Political culture research, especially in its cultural-revolution variant, has paid much attention to public discourse but has tended to address the question of constitution by definitional fiat.

There are, then, suggestive connections between work in social psychology and the alternative conceptualisations of political culture that emerged in the area studies mode of Communist studies. In the next section these connections are developed in the context of post-Communist political culture research.

Political Culture Theory and Post-Communism

The study of political culture in the post-Communist setting has undergone a process of disciplinary normalisation. Three aspects of this have been alluded to. In the first place and most obviously, the capacity to administer attitude surveys has been widely exploited, generating a large body of literature that, unlike much of the political culture research undertaken in the Communist period, closely resembles the mainstream of empirical political science literature on political culture. A new empirical bounty has become available, rather like the newly accessible archives whose use has had such an impact on the historiography of Communist states. As in the case of archival research, however, any notion that these new resources would now make the facts clear and indisputable has turned out to be too simple.

Secondly, the political culture research of post-Communism has been largely subsumed under the rubric of the problem of democratisation. This has led to debates about the relevance of a mainstream transitology literature to the post-Communist cases (Bunce, 1995), but in political culture research its effect has been a largely undisputed importation of assumptions about the cultural prerequisites of democracy. There are some widely accepted standard accounts of these prerequisites (Linz and

Stepan, 1996). Indeed, such is the degree of standardisation that political scientists have become accustomed to 'outsourcing' the production of relevant data to organisations such as Freedom House and Transparency International. Arguments about the meaning of democracy are thereby sidelined, as they have been in much of the 'empirical theory of democracy' (Bay, 1965; Skinner, 1973; Ricci, 1984), and the same has become true of political culture in the face of this pressure to provide answers. The chief merit of political culture research may, however, not be in answering the important but possibly too difficult question of how democracy may be consolidated, but rather illuminating what forms democracy may take (Sullivan and Transue, 1999). For this purpose a greater openness to conceptual revision would be an advantage rather than a threat.

Thirdly, in consequence, post-Communist studies has had less of the character of area studies – eclecticism, multidisciplinarity and interpretivism. Indeed area studies in general has come under simultaneous pressure from 'rationalist-scientific' and 'cultural-humanistic' standpoints, targeting respectively its contextual interpretivism and its supposed cultural essentialism (Katzenstein, 2001, p.790). The merits and demerits of this transformation have been debated in general terms in the post-Communist field (King, 1994), but in post-Communist political culture research its effect has been one of theoretical simplification, excluding the alternative conceptualisations which were briefly explored above in connection with Communist studies. These are nowadays largely seen as unfortunate symptoms of the former scarcity of data.

In response to such developments may be set the implications of the extra-disciplinary investigations of the preceding section. The negative implications are easiest to see. Social psychology's study of attitudes suggests care in the

interpretation of survey data as a record of mental contents. The possibility of limited access to attitudes, of a dual system of attitudes, and of the attitude-changing effects of asking about reasons are all products of Wilson's line of research, but are suggested by some quite different lines also. Wilson expressly draws conclusions for the conduct of surveys, as we have seen. In general, the idea of surveys as an unimpeachable empirical record of what people think cannot be sustained. This is far from rendering them useless, but it does suggest the desirability of paying more attention to the evidently complex psychological processes of which survey responses are the result. While, as already noted, we always want to ask what the people 'really think' about the mobilisations they are swept into, or the ideological, aesthetic and myth-making discourse to which they are exposed, the difficulty of doing this may be more than a matter of the permissibility (and costs) of survey research. Political culture research cannot afford to continue to ignore social psychological thinking about attitudes in developing a research programme that rests methodologically on some evidently simplistic assumptions about that concept.

Studies that eschew the use of surveys do not by virtue of that necessarily rest on firmer psychological foundations. Alexander's arguments in *Political Culture in Post-Communist Russia* (2000), for instance, are based on longer and in-depth interviews, but his results do not give a great deal of insight into psychological processes (they can be both compared and contrasted with the pioneering work of Robert Lane (1962) in this respect). Alexander's thesis of 'cultural formlessness', derived from the arguments of Harry Eckstein (1988), is provocative but certainly under-specified in psychological terms. Given Eckstein's somewhat functionalist arguments about the economising advantages of cultural predispositions (1988, pp.791–2), it is also questionable how long a condition of cultural formlessness could

be expected to endure. Failing to get a clear view of political culture from surveys might be a result not of formlessness, but of the deeper-lying problems of conceptualisation that the 'dual attitude' theory highlights. Formlessness is perhaps a premature substantive inference from a methodological deficiency.

Nicolai Petro's *The Rebirth of Russian Democracy* (1995), despite its rather sweeping dismissal of previous work on Russian political culture, is readily assimilated to the interpretive historical-continuity approach of authors such as White and Tucker. Petro presents a historical survey of an 'alternative' political culture – alternative, that is, to a stress on the underdevelopment of democratic traditions in Russia. It is in fact discourses that he surveys: manifestoes, proposed constitutions and Slavophile philosophy are his materials (making Szamuely, 1974, also largely a study in political thought, the closest analogue in the Communist studies literature). Petro's study usefully expands our view of the prevailing cultural repertoire, as expressed in elite and dissident discourse. But it suffers, as other studies of this type have, from a failure to trace the connections that would justify counting these discursive elements as part of political culture. Especially in view of the historical distance or (in Soviet times) the repression and isolation of this discourse, questions arise as to what extent it can form part of the culturally available basis of explicit political attitudes on the part of the population as a whole – and if it does, how that connection has been effected.

In *The Political Culture of the Russian 'Democrats'* (2000), Alexander Lukin deploys a method that, in contrast, clearly reveals the connections between culturally available elite discourse and explicit attitudinal responses. Such connections are indeed the book's topic. The achievement is, to be sure, easier in a study whose historical coverage is a mere six years (1985–91). Lukin's findings are derived

largely from interviews, and his focus in these interviews has included not just explicit attitudes but life histories that have enabled the connections between pubic discourse and private attitude to be exposed. Lukin's study is narrow in social scope too. His 'democrats' are a tiny fraction of the population, and his study does nothing to back up its concluding observation that 'the "democratic" belief system of Soviet Russia profoundly influenced the broader political culture of the new Russia' (Lukin, 2000, p.299).

The focus of Kathleen Smith's *Mythmaking in the New Russia* (2002) is very much on the public aspect of political culture (not a term she uses), in the fashion of the cultural-revolution approach in Communist studies and in recent studies of political aesthetics such as Falsca-Zamponi's. Her topic is the attempt by post-Soviet leaders in Russia to construct powerful and evocative public symbols of their regime. In contrast with Petro's account of a resurgent but democratic Slavophilism and Orthodoxy, Smith gives a more differentiated picture of the capacity to evoke a strong response of the symbols 'proffered' (2002, p.8) to the population. Combining democratic and reformist themes with nationalist symbolism has proved difficult: the problem is both the resistance of the recent historical materials to a heroic treatment and the lack of commitment to mythmaking on the part of post-Soviet leaders.

Contrasting with these studies of the public and discursive aspects of political culture is the work of Alena Ledeneva in *Russia's Economy of Favours* (1998). Like Lukin's study, Ledeneva's relies on interviews, but focusing in this case not on reported political attitudes but on skills and practices. It illustrates the phenomenon of cultural adaptation. It also displays psychological insight in noting how the use of '*blat*' in the Soviet Union evoked feelings of guilt and denial that contribute to difficulties in speaking about it as well as lubricating its actual operation. *Blat* was

systematically misrecognised by participants (Ledeneva, 1998, pp.59–72), who had a variety of explicit attitudes towards it (rationalizations, denials, mitigations); nevertheless it occurred pervasively. The skills that it involved may be expected to persist as adaptations into the post-Soviet period.

A study with a focus more readily aligned with the interests of normal political science (particularly its recent preoccupation with social capital as a prerequisite of democracy) is Marc Morjé Howard's (2003) study of post-Communist civil society, *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe*. The principal method of this study is the quantitative assessment of levels of participation, derived from surveys enumerating individual membership of communal organizations. As a supplementary method, in-depth interviews seek to show how these patterns relate to individual experiences in the Communist lifeworld. The finding is a distinctively low level of communal participation in both Russia and eastern Germany, a legacy, Howard argues, of the radical separation between public and private that was an adaptation to the Communist setting. This adaptation has persisted, despite what theorists consider to be its inappropriateness in the democratic setting, because nothing has happened to require its significant alteration. In effect, it still works. Howard (2003, p.150) concludes: 'the weakness of civil society [is] a distinctive element of post-communist democracy, a pattern that may well persist throughout the region for at least several decades'. We have here a proposal regarding political-cultural continuity that eschews reference to attitudes and thus need not take a position on the authenticity or otherwise of communist regimes. Practice itself does much of the explanatory work.

As this brief review of some recent literature has shown, social psychological doubts about the attitude survey method of political culture research do not justify

blanket endorsement of approaches that use other methods. The purpose of this chapter's exploration of social psychology was indeed in part to question the prestige attaching to the attitude survey method in the context of disciplinary normalisation, but it was also to explore what social psychology might offer for the theoretical consolidation of alternatives. Taking this purpose seriously also involves noting critical implications for the alternatives.

We have found a basis in social psychology, which to be sure is in need of much further exploration, for looking beyond survey responses to a dual manifestation of political culture, in the public realm as a constitutive background and in the realm of local and social practice as a set of implicit skills and adaptations. Much needed theoretical support is thereby provided for approaches to political culture that might have seemed consigned to the disciplinary dustbin; ironically derived precisely from looking closely at attitudes, the mainstay of the attitude survey method in the comparative politics mode of political culture research On the other hand, the synoptic interpretive sweep of the historical-continuity approach to political culture is less well supported. The fundamental problem here is the ambiguous category of 'historical experience'. It is in need of considerable psychological unpacking. Narrowing the historical materials to patterns or traditions of discourse in the fashion of Petro (and of Szamuely) does not go very far towards making visible the psychological processes that may be involved. In particular, whether historically distant discursive or symbolic elements persist, psychologically (via family socialisation perhaps) or are instead rediscovered in politically propitious circumstances remains unaddressed in most examples of the historical-continuity approach. For the other alternative approaches, too, theoretical reconstruction remains an ongoing task. Only its barest outlines, involving a dualistic

conceptualisation of political culture relating it to public discourse and to local social practice, have been provided here. How far these can be developed remains to be seen.

Interdisciplinary work is harder and harder to achieve, not only because of the disciplinary normalisation that has been a particular feature of post-Communist studies, but because in general specialisation within political science is becoming ever more intense, producing in some cases theoretical consolidation by default. Political culture research originated in an ambitious reach beyond the existing limits of political science. But aside from Brown's efforts in the 1984 essay, the attempt has seldom been repeated. This chapter has sought to renew it.

Endnotes

[1] I would like to thank this book's editor, Stephen Whitefield, for his great indulgence towards my response to deadlines, and him and Archie Brown for helpful, insightful and encouraging comments on earlier drafts. Remaining defects are entirely my responsibility.

[2] Recent examples of announcements of death and of rebirth are, respectively, Jackman and Miller, 1996a, 1996b, and Harrison and Huntington, 2000.

[3] One can indeed speak of 'normalisation' with some (though incomplete) reference to Kuhn's notion of 'normal science', whose 'puzzle-solving' character he takes to demarcate scientific from other investigations (Kuhn, 1970, p.6). To do this however begs the question of the 'scientific' status of political science (as much of the discipline in fact does). Kuhn withholds this designation from most of the social sciences. One might therefore speak of a 'premature normalisation', occurring before the full theoretical elaboration of a paradigm. This implies premature science.

[4] The differences are variously substantive and methodological, a source of complexity that has not always been appreciated, as in the drastically oversimplified critical survey provided by Petro, 1995, pp.1–27.

[5] 'Historical experience' is a significantly ambiguous term. It could refer to historical events and processes themselves; to popular knowledge and understanding of them as they unfold; or to the retrospective knowledge and understanding possessed perhaps generations later, in other words 'historical memory'.

[6] Tucker's complex position also contains a strand of psychoanalytical interpretation of Stalin and Stalinism. The combination is analysed in Welch, 1996.

[7] An example would be Gleason's (1995) attempt to explain the use of the totalitarian model in terms of Cold War political imperatives.

[8] Wyman goes on to make a contrast with 'oversimplified generalisations' such as Almond and Verba's 'subject' and 'participant' categories of political culture – yet these too were derived from surveys. Surveys always have to be *designed*, and the results *interpreted*: the method itself is no protection against 'oversimplification'.

[9] Terminological usage in political culture research has to be sure been somewhat unstable. For example, Brown (2003, p.18) speaks of attitudes as 'more malleable and ephemeral' than 'values, deep-lying beliefs and sense of identity', while nevertheless devoting most of his survey of social psychological literature to attitudes and the attitude–behaviour relationship. Whatever the terminology, the question is whether political culture research has substantiated or even sufficiently examined its supposition of the 'psychological depth' of political culture. A purely *methodological* response is to propose that political culture is that portion of measurable opinion/attitudes which changes slowly, as discovered by surveys. This seems unsatisfactory in the absence of theoretical specification of the difference.

[10] A more radical extrapolation of Wilson's findings has been made by philosopher of mind Stephen Stich (1983), who concludes from Wilson's theory of dual attitudes: 'In those cases where our verbal sub-system leads us to behave as though we believed some incompatible proposition, there will simply be no saying which we believe… And under those circumstances I am strongly inclined to think that the right thing to say is that *there are no such things as beliefs*' (Stich, 1983, p.231, original emphasis). Wilson might well demur from that extrapolation, but he does agree that in such cases it is impossible to say what is the *true* attitude (Wilson *et al.*, 2000). Merely asking the subject, even under unconstrained conditions, is inconclusive.

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