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Christopher S. Swader. *The Capitalist Personality: Face-to-Face Sociality and Economic Change in the Post-Communist World*. New York: Routledge, 2013. 238 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-89221-6.

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The book under review, published in 2013, is a sociological study exploring what happens to human intimacy within capitalism. Posing the question of “how values change in connection with the shift to capitalist culture” (1), the book provides an illuminative analysis of how economically successful people in post-Communist societies value their intimate face-to-face interactions and relationships differently from earlier generations. The societies within the loop of Swader’s study are China, Russia, and Eastern Germany. These countries, having a common history of Communist rule, differ, according to Swader, across several key dimensions relevant to the measurement of value change, including their recent socialist history, religion, level of industrialization and techno-bureaucratic development, external economic support for transformation, and so forth. The underlying assumption in this study is that the formation of a “capitalist personality” among successful men in these societies is achieved at a high social cost, namely the weakening of face-to-face sociality and intimacy.

The book considers a relevant sociological question: what are the mechanisms behind the weakening of sociality found in capitalist countries? Symptomatic of societies experiencing transformation to capitalism in 1990s were: rising crime rates, family breakdown, and diminishing informal social control. Swader insightfully argues that the key to understanding why these processes occur in this historical conjunction lies in the effects that emerging market economic structures have on social values such as intimacy, face-to-face interaction, and close bonds between family and friends.

The author’s empirical evidence draws from both qualitative and quantitative data, collected in China, Russia, and Eastern Germany. To detect the degree to which capitalist changes occur over generations, comparative interviews with 32 informants (all but one being male), 18 interviews with successful businessmen (aged 32 to 49) and 14 with their surviving fathers (aged 60 to 80) were conducted in Shanghai, Moscow, and Leipzig. The study’s quantitative data is drawn from four consecutive waves of the cross-sectional World Value Survey (WVS) within the three countries, collected in 1990, 1995–1997, 1999–2001, and 2006–2007. The empirical data is presented extensively in three appendixes to the book.

The first of the book’s ten chapters introduces the key arguments of the book, its research questions, and its methods, as discussed above. Right from the start we enter a fascinating, yet seldom researched, question of sociology, namely what are

the essential features of capitalism as an economic culture and how does it produce certain patterns of personality by rewarding particular values, such as individualism, that lead to a decline in intimate relationships.

Chapters two and three delineate the theoretical rationale of the study in further detail. Central to these chapters is a longish critical discussion of various strands in the individualization paradigm, in which the idea of deintimization is crucial due to its usefulness in understanding the intersection of capitalism and social values. The leading hypothesis formulated here is that "capitalist culture and the valuation of face-to-face social ties are in tension with one another" (12), a hypothesis, the author asserts, that has not been examined before, neither by economic sociologists nor by transitology specialists. Further on, the book analyses the four main mechanisms of desocialization in postsocialist societies: namely conscious adaptation, ideological conflict, cognitive dissonance, and intergenerational change. Based on the interview data, the author observes that the majority of younger businessmen sought success in their new capitalist societies by inflating the value of work, commodifying their time and friendships, whilst still being conscious that they did so at the expense of their family life. Another conflict that all respondents experienced, albeit unconsciously, was an ideological one: they had to adopt capitalism "in its 'ideal' communist presentation: as a wholly individualized, immoral and anti-social entity" (49). The fundamental discrepancy between actual capitalist conditions and the respondents' assessment of capitalist values led very often to a cognitive dissonance, which younger businessmen tended to resolve by devaluing family and sociality, using as role models their peers or famous businessmen instead of their own fathers.

Chapter four provides a rather cursory overview of family and intimate relations, posteconomic transformation, and social value changes after the fall of Communism in all three countries. The main argument of this chapter is that, despite the significant differences among the case countries when it comes to history, religion, family, and the state, as well as the path of post-Communist reforms, they all experienced value change. As Swader argues, this can only be attributed to the fact of the shift from a planned to a capitalist economy.

Chapters five and six are empirical comparisons of data from the quantitative cohort analysis and interviews from all three countries. They point to the fact that the values of individualism, ambition, and work have commonly become key to success for those in new occupations. A surprising finding in the interviews, however, is that the dividing line in high valuation of work is found not between younger businessmen and their fathers but rather between those who were employed or unemployed at the time of the interview. The data reflect a value shift in relation to money, which in the early years of the postsocialist transition tended to be something one wished for or worried about, while for those in new occupations after the transformation, money became revalued as a tool of profit calculation and the cultivation of image.

Chapter seven moves the focus of the empirical analysis to the core question of the book, namely how the enhanced values of work, materialism, ambition, individualism, and consumption affect interpersonal relations in the post-Communist world. The summary of the findings, both country- and generation-wise, is sobering, for in

all three countries, “[t]ypically, when informants are ambitious ... they are devaluing the family in tandem” (138). Moreover, young and successful businessmen are reluctant to make personal sacrifices for the benefit of their children, and they are less respectful of older generations. At the same time, they value friendship, even if in an instrumental way, which sometimes comes at the expense of family.

The family-work conflict is clearly reflected in the money-morality tension analyzed in chapter eight. A disturbing trend observed by Swader is that the shift to capitalism in all three post-Communist countries seems to cause moral apathy and disillusionment with politics, which is especially pronounced when younger cohorts are compared with their fathers.

In the ninth chapter, the individualization processes observed in Russia, China, and East Germany are compared with those in OECD countries and the developing world, using data from the WVS. An interesting conclusion is that in almost all value dimensions post-Communist and OECD countries demonstrate essentially the same attitudes, confirming the author’s hypothesis about the formative role of capitalist culture in producing capitalist individuals.

In the tenth and final chapter, the key themes emerging from the book are brought together in a discussion of the ambivalence surrounding individualization processes taking place in the post-Communist world. Personal ambition, tolerance, self-reflexivity, and independence are rewarded by capitalist culture as positive traits, but they come with a higher social cost—namely, a diminishing role for close personal relations and intimacy. The chapter also contains the author’s critical reflections with regard to the theoretical model of the study and its methodology, especially when it comes to how successful they have been in illuminating the capitalism-sociality link.

The greatest merit of this book can be found in Swader’s careful mapping out of the essences of capitalist culture, its mechanisms and inner tensions, by using the examples of the most recently built capitalist societies of China, Russia, and East Germany. Another strength consists in Swader’s lucid analysis of the emerging value gaps and the conflicts they create between older and younger generations. While Swader certainly manages to substantiate the individualization hypothesis in the post-Communist countries by using both qualitative and quantitative sources, the same cannot always be said of methodological rigor, particularly that of the interview data. The most vivid example is the choice of almost exclusively male respondents as “the most affected gender” to study the devaluation of the family in the post-Communist world. This choice elides the fact that even under Communism men devoted to their careers would leave the management of intimate and face-to-face ties to their spouses. The book would have benefited by giving a more precise definition of intimate sociality itself, as currently it uses the concepts of friendship and family in an indiscriminate manner. Swader’s treatment of the earlier cultural, political, and economic histories of the case countries in chapter four is rather superficial, based on an exceedingly simplified comparison of complex phenomena. In sum, with the hope that the oversights listed above could be remedied in the future, the book is, without doubt, an important contribution to the scholarly examination of what capitalism does to human intimacy.