
Searching for Transitologists: Contemporary Theories of Post-Communist Transitions and the Myth of a Dominant Paradigm

Jordan Gans-Morse¹

Abstract: A political scientist investigates the claim that the field of post-communist studies is and has been dominated by a transitology paradigm whose teleological biases lead to faulty analysis. Based on a comprehensive analysis of post-communist regime change studies published in 10 leading area studies and comparative politics journals between 1991 and 2003 as well as a broader review of the post-communist transition literature, this article seeks to clarify the terminological confusion that is a prominent feature of critiques of transitology and to examine the claim that a single mode of analysis dominates the study of post-communism.

The collapse of the Soviet Union presented social scientists with a daunting set of challenges. For half a century, comparativists in the fields of political science, sociology, and development economics had sought to develop theories capable of explaining transitions from tradition to modernity, underdevelopment to development, and authoritarianism to democracy. The question naturally arose as to whether these theories of change could form the basis for a theory of post-communist transition or whether a transition away from state socialism required a fundamentally new and unique theoretical approach.

¹Doctoral Candidate, Department of Political Science, University of California, Berkeley. The author would like to thank the following people for insightful comments and advice on earlier drafts: Neil Abrams, Taylor Boas, George Breslauer, Kiren Chaudhry, M. Steven Fish, Regine Spector, Edward Walker, Jane Zavisca, and participants at University of Toronto's Centre for Russia and East European Studies conference, "The Russian Federation 12 Years On: Moving Beyond Transitology," held February 5–6, 2004 in Toronto.

Today, a decade and a half after the momentous year of 1989, there exists a widely repeated assumption that two purportedly related theoretical traditions—transitology and modernization theory—have dominated and distorted the study of post-communist transitions. For instance, Stephen Cohen, one of the most outspoken critics of what he identifies as “mainstream” theories of post-communist transition, writes that:

Since the early 1990s, American scholars of post-communist Russia have enthusiastically embraced a new guiding concept. Sometimes known as “transitology,” it should be called “transitionology” in order to underline all its assumptions and implications.... Transitionology has become a near-orthodoxy—as its proponents tell us, the “standard fare,” the prevailing “organizing theme,” the “way of posing questions” (Cohen, 2000, p. 21).

For Cohen, this transitology is little more than a rehashed formulation of modernization theory: “Concepts and theories of modernization have, of course, long been a major part of Russian studies. And for all its new language and social science pretense, transitionology is itself little more than a latter-day version of those old approaches in the field, now equating modernization solely with a ‘transition to democracy and free-market capitalism’” (Cohen, 1999, p. 48). Other critics concur. Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glinski, for example, argue that “the science of ‘transitology’ was another influential offspring of the modernization paradigm” (Reddaway and Glinski, 2001, p. 64).

Scholars such as Cohen or Reddaway and Glinski may be among the most forceful critics of what they perceive as dominant trends in the study of post-communist transitions, but they are hardly alone. Numerous other observers also contend that transitology has exerted an undue—and unconstructive—influence on students of post-communism (see, e.g., Bunce, 2000; Burawoy and Verdery, 1999; Carothers, 2002; Jowitt, 1998; Kubicek, 2000; Saxonberg and Linde, 2003; Terry, 1993; Verdery, 1996; Wiarda, 2001). These thinkers charge that transitologists’ faith in the applicability to the study of post-communism of theories developed in the context of other regions and other historical periods leads to an emphasis on inappropriate explanatory variables, the development of misguided research agendas, and the faulty interpretation of empirical evidence. Critics additionally claim that the transitological approach to the study of post-communism is infused with a teleological perspective based on the assumption of a single endpoint to historical progression, namely, liberal democracy (see, e.g., Burawoy and Verdery, 1999, p. 15; Carothers, 2002, p. 7; Cohen, 2000, p. 23; Gelman, 1999, p. 943; Pickel, 2002, p. 108; Stark, 1992, p. 300). This assumption of linear historical progress further distorts transitologists’ analyses, given that regression, stagnation, or multi-linear tracks of development may better characterize the trajectory of post-communist transitions.

Is there a basis for such charges? If there is, are modernization theory and transitology to blame? And should modernization theory and transitology so readily be equated? Critics' classifications of broad swaths of the voluminous and eclectic literature on post-communist transitions under the rubric of single schools of thought such as modernization theory or transitology often tend to caricature the target of their disapproval. As a result, they falsely create the impression that a loosely related body of diverse literature is a coherent—yet unsophisticated—approach to social science. Moreover, many of these critics present claims about “mainstream” thinking while providing references to only one or two citations. In some instances, citations referring to widespread trends in the field point the reader back to other critiques of post-communist studies rather than to actual examples of transitology or teleological approaches.

Consequently, while references to the influence of transitology are widespread in the literature on post-communism, the term's definition seems to have remained unexplored. Transitology has taken on multiple meanings, fostering confusion and muddying already complicated debates. Some critics are explicitly referring to transitology as a body of literature developed through the study of democratizing regimes in Southern Europe and Latin America. These thinkers argue that it is the mode of analysis developed by *these* transitologists that is both flawed and hegemonic in post-communist studies (see, e.g., Bunce, 1995; Jowitt, 1996a; Jowitt, 1996b; Terry, 1993; Wiarda, 2001). But other thinkers imply that the transitology they object to is not a specific body of literature, but rather an approach to the study of political, economic, and social change that conceptualizes these processes as a transition with a pre-determined endpoint (see, e.g., Burawoy and Verdery, 1999; Stark, 1992; Stark and Bruszt, 1998; Verdery, 1996). These scholars propose a theory of change based on the notion of overtly open-ended “transformation,” a formulation that highlights their belief that the word “transition” is inherently imbued with teleological qualities. Still other scholars define their critique of transitology even more broadly. Cohen (2000) presents a sweeping objection to the use of deductive social science models that fail to account for the uniqueness of the post-communist region. He additionally questions whether the word “transition,” which he believes implies progress, should be applied to countries that have experienced political and economic crises. Thomas Carothers (2002) raises the issue of whether political systems that are no longer authoritarian regimes yet have not come to resemble liberal democracies should continue to be classified as countries in transit, or whether it is time to recognize that the hybrid institutions of many so-called “transition countries” actually represent a stable equilibrium point rather than a stage on the way to further democratization.

The present article investigates this terminological confusion with the aim of evaluating the proposition that transitology—or any other approach—dominates the study of post-communism. It first examines definitions of modernization theory and transitology by situating the current debates over post-communism in the context of long-enduring

disputes over the study of transitions. It then searches for evidence of a transitological approach among scholars of post-communism through a comprehensive analysis of articles published on post-communist regime change in 10 leading area studies and comparative politics journals between 1991 and 2003.² A broader review of the post-communist regime change literature supplements the survey of journal articles. The findings of this analysis challenge the notion that transitology has been the dominant approach to the study of the post-communist transitions, at least if transitology is defined as the literature on democratization that developed out of the study of transitions in Southern Europe and Latin America. A review of the literature instead uncovers a welter of diverse and innovative approaches to the study of regime change in post-communism. Prominent scholars may have advocated a transitological approach at the outset of the first post-communist decade, but their proposals served more as a focal point for criticism than as a widely-adopted research agenda.

The article then addresses other critiques of post-communist studies that define transitology more broadly and object to its perceived teleological qualities. A close analysis of the post-communist regime-change literature demonstrates that much of the debate over teleology in the study of transitions is misplaced. Contrary to some critics' assertions, analysts of post-communism have rarely expressed the opinion that liberal democracy (or any other regime type) is the singular, natural, inevitable, or even probable outcome of transitions. Rather, contemporary scholars of post-communism are struggling with the same question that has plagued students of comparative transitions for decades: how to most effectively utilize generalizable ideal types of regimes and political-economic systems to understand specific processes of change in a given region. Moreover, it will be argued that open-ended conceptions of transformation that some critics offer in lieu of transitology's ostensibly teleological tendencies do not necessarily provide superior analytical insights as compared to carefully formulated theories of closed-ended frameworks that conceive of transition as movement from one ideal type to another.

²These area studies journals include *East European Politics and Societies*, *Europe-Asia Studies* (*Soviet Studies* until 1993), *Post-Soviet Affairs* (*Soviet Economy* until July–September 1992), *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* (*Studies in Comparative Communism* until 1993), and *Slavic Review*. Comparative politics journals included in the survey are *World Politics*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *Comparative Politics*, *Journal of Politics*, and the *British Journal of Political Science*. A few words are in order about the scope of this article. This analysis is limited to academic works, which leaves open the possibility that a transitological approach wields influence in the realm of policymaking. Without denying such a possibility, a survey of the academic literature is still in order. While some of the critiques discussed above are directed partially at journalists and policymakers, they are in many cases aimed explicitly at academic practitioners of post-communist studies. If these critiques can be shown to be inapplicable to the academic literature, this should at least force critics to more cautiously identify the targets of their attacks. Moreover, if indeed such a divergence between academic and policy approaches to the conceptualization of transition can be shown to exist, this in and of itself would lay the ground for a fertile research agenda on the influence (or lack thereof) of academics during the post-communist period.

Finally, this article concludes with a discussion of the future trajectory of the study of post-communist regime change. As will be shown, despite the wide range of approaches that scholars of post-communism employ, there is remarkable agreement on one point: the study of post-communism requires theory building, not just theory testing. Moreover, despite critics' claims to the contrary, many scholars of post-communism agree that existing theories, whether they be modernization theory, transitology, or some other approach, provide only a starting point at best. The processes of change under way in the post-communist region are fundamentally different from other forms of transition that social scientists have previously encountered; some analysts even raise the question of whether these processes are best described as "transitions" at all, or whether some other guiding metaphor, such as revolution, institutional breakdown, or decolonization, might be more apt.

This process of theory building begins with a reexamination of the analytical frameworks and terminology that lie at the heart of the study of post-communist regime change. Fruitful discussion of where a field should be headed must be preceded by frank assessments of where it is today. Thus, by surveying the basic building blocks of theory that are emerging in recent studies of regime change, this article aims to assist in the difficult process of developing a new and unique theory of post-communist transitions.

MODERNIZATION THEORY, TRANSITOLOGY, AND THEORIES OF POST-COMMUNIST TRANSITIONS: ONE OF A KIND?

Evaluation of the prominence of modernization theory or transitology in the study of post-communist transitions must begin by clearly defining the theoretical traditions that some claim are the progenitors of post-communist theories of transition. A brief examination of the emergence of the fields of comparative politics, comparative sociology, and development economics in the American academy in the post-World War II period thus provides context for contemporary disputes in post-communist studies. With the onset of the Cold War, one of the most pressing issues for the West became the development of democracy and capitalism in Europe's former colonies and the other countries in what was becoming known as the Third World. In stark contrast to the study of formal institutions that had dominated American social science prior to the war, the formulation of theories of democratic and capitalist transitions became a central objective of post-war academia (Janos, 1986, ch. 2).

Modernization theory became the dominant paradigm for these inquiries. On the basis of the imported premises of 19th century European political sociology and political economy, modernization theorists posited that changes in the economic base of a society, most importantly its mode of production, lead to changes in its social structures, which in turn

necessitate evolution in the political sphere. Thus, according to this formulation, industrialization spurs changes in the division of labor, leading to urbanization, increased levels of education, and new forms of communication technology, which then serve as preconditions for the development of democratic institutions (Lipset, 1960). In its boldest representations, modernization theory rested on the assumption that this sequence of economic, social, and then political evolution—a sequence developed from the study of the transition from feudalism to capitalism and democracy in the West—would be repeated throughout the developing world (Rostow, 1960).

By the 1960s, modernization theory came under broad attack for these teleological and universalistic claims from thinkers on the Left, such as the dependency and world systems theorists (Frank, 1972; Wallerstein, 1974), as well as from mainstream liberals such as Reinhard Bendix (1977 [1964]). But more curious from the perspective of students of post-communism—who often hear of the affinity between transitology and modernization theory—is that transitology itself was born as a response to modernization theory. In his 1970 article titled “Transitions to Democracy,” often cited as the grandfather text of transitology, Dankwart Rustow (1970) eschewed the idea that the development of democracy depends on a set of economic and social preconditions (the one key exception being the precondition of national unity, defined as a preexisting agreement about the territorial boundaries of the nation-state). He instead elevated the role of human actors in the process of democratization, arguing that democracy results from a political struggle among factions of elites that concludes upon the “deliberate decision on the part of political leaders to accept the existence of diversity in unity and, to that end, to institutionalize some crucial aspect of democratic procedure” (Rustow, 1970, p. 357).

Over a decade later, when a group of prominent scholars organized the “Transitions” project, a research agenda devoted to the collapse of authoritarian rule in Southern Europe and Latin America, they found clear inspiration in the process-oriented, actor-centric framework of Rustow. They rejected the macrostructural explanations that had dominated the literature on democratization during the era of modernization theory as too confining, pessimistic, and, ultimately, inapplicable to the burst of unexpected democratization in the 1970s and 1980s.

From the “Transitions” project emerged a series of propositions about democratization that would structure the debate about regime change in Southern Europe, in Latin America, and, some would argue, eventually in Asia, Africa, and the post-communist region. Summarized in the influential volume by Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies* (1986), these tenets form the core of what has become known as the “transitions literature” or, alternatively, as “transitology.”³ First, advocates of transitology argue that, with the exception of Rustow’s emphasis on national unity, no set of preconditions must exist for democracy to take root. Democratization is possible, although more or less likely, in a variety

of structural contexts. Second, the primary causal variable during transitions is elite bargaining and, in particular, the strategic interaction between leaders of the former regime and representatives of the opposition forces. Consequently, civil society and the importance of political parties only come into play at a relatively late stage in the transition process; international actors take a backseat to domestic factors with regard to transition outcomes (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986). Third, different patterns of elite interaction—or different modes of transition—impact the prospects for democratization and influence the institutional features and quality of the democracy that emerges. The mode of transition that early transitologists deemed most conducive to successful democratization involved formal or informal bargains. These bargains, often referred to as pacts, sought to neutralize the influence of hardliners within the collapsing authoritarian regime and radicals among the opposition by forging agreements about such thorny issues as the future of the military or the redistribution of property. This emphasis on negotiated transition led to the conclusion that revolutionary transitions and high levels of mass mobilization endanger, rather than abet, the process of democratization (Karl, 1990; Karl and Schmitter, 1991).⁴

Ironically, just as transitology was dominating the study of regime change in more southerly reaches of the globe, some scholars of communism were promoting a new version of modernization theory, shorn of its more teleological and ethnocentric premises, to explain the liberalization of the *perestroika* period in the late 1980s (Lewin, 1988). These scholars attributed the fall of authoritarian regimes across the globe to macrostructural factors such as increased levels of wealth, education, and communications technology. For example, Lucian Pye, in his 1990 presidential address to the American Political Science Association, referred to the global “crisis of authoritarianism” as “the vindication of modernization theory” and insisted that “the key factors [pertaining to democratizing trends] were all identified as critical variables by the early modernization and political development theorists” (Pye, 1990, p. 7).

Thus, on the cusp of the Eastern Bloc's collapse, as Sovietologists struggled to keep up with rapidly changing events, modernization theory and transitology stood as two distinct approaches to the study of regime change. Yet despite these evident distinctions between modernization

³ Although this literature is often referred to as the “democratization literature” as well, this interchangeable use of the terms “transition” and “democratization” is misleading, as will be discussed later in this article.

⁴ This depiction of transitology must be qualified. Transitology is, in the recent words of one of the key scholars of the original “Transitions” project, “a large and uneven body of work” (O'Donnell, 2002, p. 6). Many of the above propositions have been challenged or modified by prominent analysts of recent transitions, including many of the initial transitologists themselves. Still, the representation of transitology provided here follows the interpretation of influential scholars of transition (McFaul, 2002; Bunce, 2003; Collier, 1999) that depicts transitology as a *method* of studying transition characterized by an actor-centric, elite bargaining approach.

theory and transitology, many critics argue that these two schools of thought are bound together by shared assumptions of a teleological faith in the inevitability of liberal democracy and a belief in the possibility of developing transition theories that remain robust across space and time. Moreover, critics insist that elements of these two theories—and especially transitology—dominate the study of post-communism, obscuring the uniqueness of the post-communist region. Having defined the terms in question, it is now possible to assess these claims.

SEARCHING FOR TRANSITOLOGISTS

Throughout the literature on post-communism, scholars refer to the transitological approach as the “near orthodoxy” (Cohen, 2000, p. 21), the “correct line” (as the title of Jowitt [1998] indicates), and “hegemonic” (Bunce, 2000, p. 721); its critics feel compelled to develop new theories to counterbalance “so much fashionable transitology” (Verdery, 1996, p. 16). Nor is the impression that the field must escape the grasp of transitology subsiding, as indicated by recent article titles such as “Beyond the Transitology-Area Studies Debate” (Saxonberg and Linde, 2003) and “Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, and Comparative Politics: Transitology and the Need for New Theory” (Wiarda, 2001). Is transitology or modernization theory as prevalent as some critics insist?

This section tests these propositions through a comprehensive analysis of articles published on post-communist regime change between 1991 and 2003 in 10 leading area studies and comparative politics journals. Following other surveys of the literature on post-communism (Kubicek, 2000), I begin this survey in 1991 to provide a “lag” time for scholarship to catch up to the rapidly changing events of the late 1980s. During this period there were 100 articles on post-communist regime change published in area studies journals and an additional 31 published in the comparative journals.⁵ Recognizing that the influence of individual works varies, I supplement this quantitative analysis with a broader review of the literature that explores more fully the influence of prominent scholars.

A Quantitative Review of the Literature

Table 1 summarizes several noteworthy findings. First, the majority of articles published on post-communist regime change in this sample bear no mark of a transitological approach, if transitology is understood as the literature that first emerged out of the study of democratization in Southern Europe and Latin America. They make no reference to major works on

⁵Articles that pertain tangentially to regime change but are devoted primarily to other issues—political culture, mass attitudes, elite turnover, specific political events, the development of particular institutions, or the relationships between political and economic reforms—have not been included unless they make an explicit attempt to contribute to the study of regime change more broadly.

transitology and do not adopt the terminology, key methodological and theoretical assumptions, or research agenda that would be expected if the authors had used the transitions literature as the basis for theorizing post-communist transitions. There is also little evidence that modernization theory plays a prominent role in the current discourse on post-communist regime change. Of the 131 articles analyzed here, only 11 explicitly discuss modernization theory; of these, all but two (Tedin, 1994; Vassilev, 1999) question whether the tenets of modernization theory provide a sufficient starting point for analyzing the collapse of Eastern Bloc nations and the formation of new regimes. Instead of relying on transitology or modernization theory, scholars of post-communist transitions have utilized an eclectic array of analytical approaches. These draw inspiration from thinkers ranging from Pierre Bourdieu (Pollack, 2002) to Herbert Spencer (Janos, 1991), adopt comparative perspectives based on cases outside of the "Third Wave" studied by transitologists, such as 19th century Europe or America (Jasiewicz, 2000; Young, 1992), and propose new analytical frameworks in which the explanations for regime-change outcomes vary from geography (Kopstein and Reilly, 2000) to the development of civil society (Fish, 1999).

A second notable finding is that a significant number of the scholars who explicitly discuss transitology do so *not* to promote its application but rather to make clear that they find the transitological approach inapplicable or insufficient for analyzing the key questions of post-communism. They question its emphasis on domestic variables, noting that external factors—the collapse of Soviet hegemony in the region and the West's subsequent promotion of democracy and capitalism—played a much more significant role in post-communist transitions than in the cases of Southern European and Latin American regime change (Brown, 2000; Janos, 1994; Janos, 2001; Steves, 2001). Other skeptics argue that the original transitology literature, developed in ethnically homogeneous regions, fails to provide a basis for analyzing the ethnic diversity and unresolved issues of national identity prevalent in post-communist cases of regime change (Roeder, 1999). Many scholars of post-communism further agree that the focus on national elites found in the transitology literature is ill-suited for study of the post-communist region, where the role of mass movements and protests (Ekiert and Kubik, 1998; Waylen, 1994), collective actors such as trade unions (Kubicek, 2002), and sub-national politics (Hughes, 1997; Kubik, 1994; Ross, 2000) figured prominently in the collapse of the Eastern Bloc.

Finally, some skeptics of transitology argue that it provides no framework for analyzing the new breeds of authoritarianism emerging in the post-communist region. Whereas the cases of regime change studied by the original transitologists were grouped together as instances of democratization, the cases of regime change in the post-communist region became a unified set due to the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. Many of the post-communist states soon diverged on a trajectory that resembled more a transition from state socialism to a new form of authoritarianism than a transition to democracy (Roeder, 1994; Way, 2003). Thus, to talk of "democratization" across the region is a misnomer, and studies of post-

Table 1. Trends in the Study of Post-Communist Regime Change^a

| | Area- studies journals | Comparative journals | Total |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Total number of articles on regime change | 100 | 31 | 131 |
| Number of articles with explicit reference to "transitions literature" | 48 (48 percent) | 18 (58 percent) | 66 (50 percent) |
| Of these articles— | | | |
| Number of articles critical of the applicability of the "transitions literature" to the study of post-communist regime change | 30 (30 percent) | 9 (29 percent) | 39 (27 percent) |
| Number of articles that use the "transitions literature" as starting point for analyzing post-communist regime change | 13 (13 percent) | 9 (29 percent) | 22 (16 percent) |
| Number of articles focused on specific topics related to transitology, such as the "torturers dilemma" or civil society issues (see p. 330) | 5 (5 percent) | 0 (0 percent) | 5 (4 percent) |
| Number of articles with explicit reference to modernization theory | 6 (6 percent) | 6 (19 percent) | 12 (9 percent) |
| Of these articles— | | | |
| Number of articles critical of the applicability of modernization theory to the study of post-communist regime change | 5 (5 percent) | 5 (16 percent) | 10 (8 percent) |
| Number of articles that use modernization theory as starting point for analyzing post-communist regime change | 1 (1 percent) | 1 (3 percent) | 2 (2 percent) |
| Number of articles that emphasize "legacy approach" in the study of post-communist regime change | 4 (4 percent) | 1 (13 percent) | 8 (6 percent) |
| Number of articles that analyze post-communist regime change as revolution | 12 (12 percent) | 1 (3 percent) | 13 (10 percent) |

^aThere are overlaps among some of these categories. For instance, some articles that explicitly reject transitology are the same articles that advocate a legacy approach; some articles that reject transitology similarly find modernization theory to be an inadequate starting point for theorizing post-communism; and so on.

communist regime change must develop theories of multi-track transitions to both authoritarianism and democracy (Brown, 2000).

The survey shows that of the 66 articles that explicitly refer to transitology, only 22 use transitology as a starting point for their study of post-communist regime change. However, even this statistic overstates the support for transitology among scholars of post-communism. Fifteen of these 22 works modify the assumptions underlying the original works of

transitology so extensively that in many cases it becomes difficult to draw a clear line between the work of these authors and the scholarship of transitology's critics. While borrowing various aspects of the transitological approach, these 15 authors integrate the role of the international system (Agh, 1999; Pridham, 2002; Pridham, 1999), ethnicity and nationalism (Bibic, 1993; Cichok, 2002; Leff, 1999), mass movements and civil society (Friedheim, 1993; McFaul, 2002), sub-national politics (Gelman, 1999), and new forms of authoritarianism (McFaul, 2002) into their analyses.

In addition to turning their attention to variables understudied in the original works of transitology, scholars who have built on the edifice of transitology have often synthesized the transitological approach with other theoretical frameworks. Several scholars have combined the "legacy approach" most often associated with the work of Ken Jowitt (1992) with analysis of modes of transition from state socialism, focusing on how specific cultural or institutional legacies of communist systems structure possibilities for elite interactions during transitions (Bernhard, 1996; Crawford and Lijphart, 1995; O'Neil, 1996; Zhang, 1994). Others have utilized models developed by the field of Sovietology in conjunction with concepts borrowed from the transitology literature (Karklins, 1994). Such analyses seek to strike a balance between the voluntarism sometimes associated with transitology and the determinism of structuralist outlooks.

Finally, as can be seen in Table 1, there are a handful of scholars who use the transitology literature not to develop a full-blown theory of transition but to address specific problems related to regime change discussed by major transitologists, most notably the questions of how best to deal with former leaders of the old regime (Huntington's "torturer problem") (Huntington, 1991, ch. 5) or what the role of civil society during transition should be (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986, ch. 5). However, these scholars, too, often reject or extensively modify the findings of transitology with regard to these issues, emphasizing the differences between the post-communist cases and other instances of regime change rather than the similarities.

Overall, out of the 131 articles in the sample, a mere seven (Bova, 1991; Korbonski, 1999; Munck and Leff, 1997; Schmitter and Karl, 1994; Schmitter and Karl, 1995; Tedin, 1994; Welsh, 1994)⁶ directly utilize or advocate a transitological approach to the study of the post-communist region or compare post-communist cases to transitions in Southern Europe, Latin America, or other "Third Wave" democracies without the significant modifications discussed above. It is therefore difficult to understand why some scholars of post-communism continue to warn the field in recent publications that "We need to sort out which insights from studying Southern Europe and Latin America are useful and which are less so; certainly no wholesale, mindless application of the transitology/consolidology litera-

⁶Munck and Leff (1997), it should be noted, was part of a special issue dedicated to Dankwart Rustow; its transitological perspective, therefore, should not be surprising.

ture to East/Central Europe is appropriate" (Wiarda, 2001, p. 486). If the evidence shows that the vast majority of scholars of post-communism agree that transitology should not serve as the basis for theorizing post-communist transitions, then why does such a widespread perception of transitology's dominance continue to persist? To explore this question, a broader review of the debates surrounding the application of transitology to the post-communist cases is necessary.

A Qualitative Review of the Literature

At the start of the 1990s, the question of whether the transitions occurring in the former Eastern Bloc could be considered continuations of political trends seen in other recent processes of democratization loomed large. As the *Chronicle of Higher Education* noted in its June 19, 1991 issue, "The analogy between Eastern Europe and Latin America is one of the most chic themes in academia today" (cited in Croan et al., 1992, p. 44). High-profile scholars such as Samuel Huntington (1991), Adam Przeworski (1991), and Giuseppe di Palma (1990)⁷ published books at the beginning of the 1990s that treated the Eastern European revolutions of 1989 as part of a global tendency toward democratization. Meanwhile, Russell Bova attracted significant attention with his claim that the *perestrojka* era could be studied as a sub-category of the broader process of transition from authoritarian rule and his call for a "more comparative approach to the issue of post-communist transitions in general" (Bova, 1991, p. 114). However, it should be noted that Bova could hardly be considered an advocate of "mindless" application of transitology literature to the post-communist cases. First, in his controversial article he reviewed both the transitological approach as well as the structural, preconditions-to-democracy literature and called for a synthesis of the two in the study of post-communism (Bova, 1991, p. 127). Second, he divided the process of transition into two parts—the breaking down of authoritarian rule and the creation of a new regime—and noted that it was perhaps only the former to which the processes of liberalization studied by the transitologists in other regions could be seen as parallel (Bova, 1991, p. 126), a claim with which even some critics of transitology have agreed (Terry, 1993).

Writing in 1991, Bova noted that approaches to the study of transition borrowed from Latin America had barely been applied by students of what was becoming post-communism. However, the situation had apparently changed to such a degree by 1993 that Sarah Meiklejohn Terry perceived herself to be playing "devil's advocate" and proposing some "heresies" when she argued that post-communist transitions are different from Latin American democratization and require new analytical approaches (Terry,

⁷It should be noted, however, that in other works Di Palma (1991) explicitly recognized that the transitions in Eastern Europe were different processes of change than had been observed in Latin America and Southern Europe and that contemporary social science models may prove inadequate for the study of post-communist transitions.

1993, p. 333). A year later, Philippe Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl added to the impression that transitologists were invading the field of post-communist studies when they claimed that "The neophyte practitioners of transitology and consolidology have tended to regard the implosion of the Soviet Union and the regime changes in eastern Europe with 'imperial intent'" (Schmitter and Karl, 1994, p. 177). In their influential essay, "The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolidologists: How Far to the East Should They Attempt to Go?" Schmitter and Karl questioned whether the post-communist cases were similar enough to democratizing regimes in other parts of the globe as to make the application of the transitology literature fruitful. They concluded that to explore this question, scholars must first incorporate the post-communist transitions into the "Third Wave" cases and only then pass judgment on the differences and similarities between the post-communist bloc and other regions.

In some ways, Schmitter and Karl's ambitious research agenda seemed to set the stage for an onslaught of transitology-based research, but no sooner had the proposal been made than prominent scholars of post-communism vigorously rejected the utility of seeking similarities between cases where it can be seen *ex ante* that few exist. Valerie Bunce (1995), following Terry's lead, elucidated numerous ways in which the transitions in the post-communist states differ from earlier transitions studied by the transitologists. First, she noted that transition in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union entails laying the foundations for a major economic transformation, a component of transition unseen in the cases studied by the early transitologists. Second, she pointed to the difference between the nature of authoritarian regimes in Southern Europe and Latin America and the totalitarian states of the Eastern Bloc, which promised to leave much longer-lasting undemocratic legacies. Third, she called for attention to the unique mode of transition in the post-communist context, where, unlike the pacted transitions orchestrated by elites in many significant cases of previous democratization, mass mobilization of the populaces and the agenda of national liberation from the Soviet Union's hegemony have played significant roles. Finally, she emphasized the major changes that had taken place in the international economic and political system between the 1980s and 1990s. Unlike the stable bi-polar system in which the West encouraged democratization in Southern Europe and Latin America as part of its larger Cold War goals, the post-communist transitions began during a period in which the international system itself was very much in flux.⁸ In proposing a research agenda based on comparison between the post-communist cases rather than interregional comparison, Bunce posed the question, "Are we comparing apples with apples, apples with oranges (which are at least varieties of fruits) or apples with, say, kangaroos?" (Bunce, 1995, p. 112), a remark that has been cited many times over in post-communist studies.

⁸To be fair, Schmitter and Karl (1994) also noted many of these differences.

As the findings from the analysis of journal articles presented above suggest, Bunce appears to have gotten the better of the debate. Scholars of post-communism exhibit widespread agreement on the uniqueness of the post-communist cases and express skepticism about the applicability of transitology to the study of post-communism. Other than the handful of articles previously mentioned, there have been few attempts to carry out the research agenda proposed by Schmitter and Karl of incorporating the post-communist cases into the literature on transitology, the one major exception being Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan's high-profile study *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (1996). It is noteworthy that in this study Linz and Stepan draw attention to similar points of post-communist uniqueness that Bunce herself noted, such as the role of international influences and the legacies of totalitarianism, in their case studies of Eastern Europe. Indeed, they note upfront that "In the process [of incorporating the post-communist cases into the study] we were forced to recast and rethink much of the transition and consolidation literature that we have been so involved with since the mid-1970s" (Linz and Stepan, 1996, p. xvii).⁹

It is thus clear that a significant revision of the widespread assumption that transitology dominates the study of post-communism is necessary. To be sure, at the outset of post-communism, influential scholars of comparative politics seemed poised to present post-communist regime change as a process analogous to the democratization that had been occurring in many parts of the globe since the mid-1970s. However, prominent thinkers with expertise in the post-communist region who wielded considerable influence of their own questioned this approach at every opportunity (most notably, Bunce, 1995; Bunce, 1998; Bunce, 2000; Bunce, 2003; Jowitt, 1996a; Jowitt, 1996b; Jowitt, 1998). By the mid- to late 1990s, the clear majority of students of post-communism were proclaiming that theoretical approaches beyond transitology were required for studies of regime change in the former Eastern Bloc, even though advocates of transitology—especially in an unmodified form—were few and far between. Theorists of post-communist transitions, as discussed above, have utilized a wide range of approaches and have shown flexibility and imagination in their attempts to synthesize multiple theoretical frameworks; this plethora of approaches belies the notion that a hegemonic discourse based on transitology exists in post-communist studies.

This again raises the question of why the impression that transitologists abound continues to persist among scholars of post-communism. Several explanations are plausible. First, it appears that the vocal criticism directed at transitology and the oft-repeated assertions that transitology

⁹ Post-communist area studies specialists have also noted that Linz and Stepan (1996) should not be considered a "traditional" work of transitology. Charles King (2000, p. 157) remarks that Linz and Stepan revised many of transitology's original assumptions in their recent work. Saxonberg and Linde (2003, p. 10) similarly praise Linz and Stepan for dropping universalistic assumptions and modifying earlier approaches to the study of transitions.

dominates the study of post-communism have created the illusion that numerous—but usually unnamed—advocates of transitology exist, even though in reality scholars of post-communism share a near consensus that transitology is an insufficient basis for new theories of post-communist transition. It is the critics of transitology themselves, rather than a phalanx of transitologists, who have kept the discourse about transitology alive in the field. Second, as mentioned above, the conflation of transitology with other theories of change, such as modernization theory (Cohen, 1999, p. 48; Reddaway and Glinski, 2001, p. 64) or neoliberalism (Burawoy and Verdery, 1999, p. 4; Cellarius and Staddon, 2002), multiplies the contexts in which critics of “transitology” find cause to use the term. Third, transitology has become a buzzword in the debates over area studies versus comparative approaches. When area specialists describe the infringement of comparative techniques on their domain, transitology, given its pseudo-scientific sounding name, is often one of the first examples named, even though these critiques are directed more broadly at social science approaches with aspirations to develop generalizable theories (see, e.g., Bernhard, 2000; Saxonberg and Linde, 2003, p. 5). This, too, has raised the profile of transitology, adding to the impression that it is prevalent in the field of post-communist studies.

Finally, as discussed in the introduction to this article, critics of “mainstream” theories of post-communist transition appear to be using the term “transitology” in a multitude of ways. As a consequence, the term finds a niche in discourses other than the discussions of the transitions literature analyzed so far. In order to fully evaluate the claim that transitology dominates post-communist studies, it is necessary to explore the other contexts in which the term is being used.

OPEN-ENDED TRANSFORMATION VS. TELEOLOGICAL TRANSITION

The debates over transitology as it emerged out of the study of democratizing regimes in Southern Europe and Latin America have been conducted, in large part, among political scientists. More recently, sociologists and anthropologists, led by thinkers such as David Stark (1992), Michael Burawoy (2001), Katherine Verdery (1996), and Burawoy and Verdery (1999), have injected a reformulated notion of transitology into the debates over post-communism. These critics broadly refer to “conventional transitology” as those theories of transition “committed to some pre-given future [such as capitalism and democracy] or rooted in an unyielding past [such as totalitarianism]” (Burawoy and Verdery, 1999, p. 4). Such teleological approaches, they argue, emphasize the characteristics of democracy and capitalism that post-communist countries continue to lack—what Burawoy has termed “deficit models” of analysis (Burawoy, 2001, p. 270)—instead of focusing analysis on the actual features that post-communist countries exhibit. An assumption of progress and forward movement

comes to underlie assessments of post-communist events, whereas in actuality the economic and political crises that have shaken many post-communist countries could more aptly be conceived as regression, or at least stagnation. Moreover, unlike the transitology previously discussed, this form of transitology pertains not only to frameworks for the study of regime change but pervades scholars' thinking about post-communist politics and economics more generally. When studying political parties, electoral institutions, civil society organizations, or privatized enterprises, analysts compare their findings with expectations of what these institutions and organizations *would* look like in a consolidated democracy and market economy. They then may use this analysis to evaluate the prospects of a country's transition to democracy and capitalism, as opposed to seeking to understand the particular and potentially unique functions that these institutions and organizations perform in the post-communist region.

To counter *this* form of transitology, these critics propose a conception of post-communist change as open-ended "transformation" that, by rejecting any conception of a presumed endpoint to transition, forces analysts to focus on present events and to evaluate empirical evidence without the bias that potentially results from the belief that a country is on a transition track to a given outcome. As Verdery explains, "In my opinion, to assume that we are witnessing a transition from socialism to capitalism, democracy, or market economies is mistaken. I hold with ... others who see the decade of the 1990s as a time of *transformation* in the countries that have emerged from socialism; these transformations will produce a variety of forms, some of them perhaps approximating Western capitalist market economies and many of them not.... When I use the word 'transition,' then, I put it in quotes so as to mock the naivete of so much fashionable transitology" [*italics in original*] (Verdery, 1996, pp. 15–16).

This broad definition of transitology as an approach to the study of transitions that exhibits teleological qualities dovetails with other critics' assertions that the transitology discussed in the earlier sections of this article is itself teleological, naively assuming that transitions from authoritarianism entail progress toward a single endpoint—liberal democracy (Carothers, 2002, p. 7; Cohen, 2000, p. 23; Gelman, 1999, p. 943; Pickel, 2002, p. 108). As with the common assumption about the dominance of transitology, this claim that a teleological outlook pervades scholarly thinking about post-communism has gone largely unchallenged and unexamined. Rarely do critics provide specific examples of scholarship that exhibits these teleological tendencies, nor—with the important exception of the proponents of a "transformation" approach noted above—do they usually define what they mean by teleological thinking or explain why it inherently leads to faulty analysis. Consequently, an assessment of these assertions must begin by exploring the meaning of "teleology."

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, teleology is defined as a "belief in or the perception of purposeful development toward an end, as in nature or history."¹⁰ Thus, teleological thinking according to this definition would presumably refer to analysis based on a conception of

history as evolution toward a final end state. Such a view would frame democracy and/or capitalism as natural—perhaps even inexorable—outcomes of historical progression. Telltale marks of this type of analysis might manifest as unfounded optimism about democracy's prospects, based on a belief that liberal democracy was an inevitable victor over socialism owing to its moral or economic superiority.

If this is what critics mean by teleology, then these charges should be dismissed outright. The survey of the literature on post-communist regime change presented above did not uncover a *single* work that would fall into this category.¹¹ Scholars of post-communist regime change on average have been remarkably cautious, if not downright pessimistic, with regard to their predictions concerning the prospects of democracy and capitalism in the post-communist region. They have recognized the possibility of multiple outcomes of transition, including the revival of authoritarianism, new forms of hybrid regimes, or some entirely unpredictable turn of events. Philip Roeder's guarded analysis is representative of many scholars' thinking on the outcomes of post-communist transitions: "By 1999, successful national, democratic, and capitalist transformation had taken place in nine countries [out of 28 in the post-communist region]. This is not to claim that there cannot be setbacks in future decades or that all states are marching toward some common future. Instead, this simply indicates that a rather extraordinary change has taken place in some of these states—at least for the moment" (Roeder, 1999, p. 748).¹²

While there is no evidence supporting the contention that scholars of post-communism tend to view liberal democracy as an inevitable or single outcome of transition, critics such as Stark, Burawoy, and Verdery are correct that much of the *discourse* on post-communism is framed as a transition *to* democracy and capitalism as opposed to the more open-ended formulation of a transition *from* socialism.¹³ It strains credulity to imagine that scholars who refer to a transition *to* democracy truly believe in the inevitability or ease of democratization, but the transformation theorists'

¹⁰Source available at Dictionary.com (<http://dictionary.reference.com/>).

¹¹Outside of the journal survey, the broader literature review identified only one work that exhibited notable optimism about the ease of democratization and the naturalness of democracy as a mode of government (see Mueller, 1996).

¹²Even if the original transitologists had exerted a significant influence on the study of post-communism, it is not clear why this would have been a source of teleological thinking. O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986, p. 3) open with an unambiguously open-ended definition of transition that bears a remarkable resemblance to the "transformation" approach: "The present volume deals with transitions from certain authoritarian regimes toward an uncertain 'something else.' That 'something' can be the instauration of a political democracy or the restoration of a new, and possibly more severe, form of authoritarian rule. The outcome can also be simply confusion." Other prominent transitologists have been similarly careful to warn that democracy is by no means the only outcome—nor even the likely outcome—of transitions (see Huntington, 1991, pp. 14–26; Linz and Stepan, 1996, p. xiii). Once again, it appears that thinkers such as Verdery are using a different definition of transitology when they refer to its widespread teleological tendencies.

critique nonetheless merits serious attention. Choices of terminology and analytical frameworks undeniably affect the way scholars design their inquiries. Framing processes of change in the post-communist region as transitions *to* liberal democracy means that liberal democracy becomes the predominant point of reference to which processes, institutions, and events in the post-communist region are compared, even if scholars routinely supply the caveat that there is nothing inevitable about the emergence of democracy in transition countries. The questions raised by the transformation theorists therefore force analysts to reexamine whether liberal democracy is in fact the most apt benchmark for their studies of post-communist countries, or whether the focus on comparisons to liberal democracies leads scholars to misinterpret the unique features of post-communism.

Thus, it becomes clear that debates over teleology in post-communist studies have been misleading. Rather than continuing disputes over the inevitability or naturalness of democratization and the singularity of transitions' outcomes, a more nuanced inquiry is needed concerning the question of whether post-communist change should be theorized as open-ended *transformation* or as a process of *transition* from one ideal type regime or socio-economic system to another, a closed-ended conception. In this respect, it is worth noting that this question arises whenever social scientists examine transitions. For instance, in his classic 1964 critique of modernization theory, Reinhard Bendix addressed the issue of whether scholars of Third World development could fruitfully utilize frameworks based on the study of Western European transitions from tradition to modernity, or whether entirely new and potentially open-ended frameworks would foster better analysis. He addressed the question of teleology head on, questioning whether "terms like 'development' or 'transition' are misnomers when applied to societies whose future condition may not be markedly different from the present" (Bendix, 1977 [1964], p. 395). A similar divide between transformation and transition approaches can be seen in the debates over globalization, where some analysts conceive of globalization as a closed-ended process of transition resulting in a global market and borderless world, while other analysts agree that massive change is occurring but insist that it should be studied as an open-ended phenomenon (Held et al., 1999).

For all of these debates, the vital question remains whether the transformation approach avoids the pitfalls of the transition framework described above. According to dictionary definitions, it is true that a transition entails a "passage from one form, state, style, or place to

¹³It should be noted, however, that in works devoted specifically to the study of regime change, scholars of post-communist transitions often *do* make this distinction, following the example of O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986, ch. 1), who distinguish between liberalization and democratization. It is when scholars write more generally about other topics—such as political parties, electoral institutions, civil society, and so on—in the context of transition that they tend to be less sensitive to the distinction between transitions *to* democracy and transitions *from* authoritarianism.

another." A transformation, in contrast, connotes only a "marked change, as in appearance or character, usually for the better."¹⁴ Thus, while the term "transformation" does not necessarily discard an intimation of progress, it does appear to be more open-ended. By emphasizing the open-endedness of political and economic change, transformation theorists shift the focus of analysis, as any assumption of forward movement is abandoned. Regression or stagnation are transformed from pit stops on the track to a preconceived destination and instead become the central framework for investigation. In this vein, many of the proponents of the transformation approach have not drawn parallels between post-communist regimes and modern political systems but have instead pointed to the reemergence of feudal-like structures (Burawoy, 2001; Verdery, 1996).¹⁵ Verdery, for instance, claims that this decomposition of the national state and the development of semi-feudal suzerainties becomes especially apparent upon examination of the murky property rights battles underlying post-communist privatization, the turf wars of organized crime syndicates, and the loss of centralized control over the judicial system and law enforcement agencies (Verdery, 1996, ch. 8). Like all analogies, comparisons of post-communism to feudal systems become useless if pushed too far. They do, however, provide a powerful and startling counter-image to the notion that post-communist countries are on a progressive path to capitalism and liberal democracy, and this is, presumably, what their proponents find valuable first and foremost.

As such, the transformation approach should be lauded as a useful cautionary reminder that it is vital for social scientists to continually reevaluate their underlying assumptions about the trajectory of a system undergoing transition and to view with skepticism frameworks of analysis that utilize a single ideal type as the reference point for analysis of post-communist events. However, beyond this, it is not clear that a transformation approach is a superior theoretical framework to a carefully formulated, closed-ended conception of transition. It is of course true that an assumption that a transition is headed to a predetermined endpoint can lead to faulty analysis if this assumption is unfounded. But this does not rule out the possibility of using a transition framework as an *analytical construct* (as distinguished from a statement about empirical trends). In this sense, the endpoint of transition exists only as a hypothetical idea that allows a theorist to conduct analysis through the comparison of current institutions and structures with a theorized ideal type of a future regime or political-economic system; it by no means implies or assumes that a given country will actually come to approximate this ideal type, just as liberal democracy in the West does not perfectly represent its ideal type.

¹⁴See the *American Heritage Dictionary* at Dictionary.com (<http://dictionary.reference.com/>).

¹⁵While sociologists and anthropologists have been more prone to accept this view, notable economists and political scientists have also noted the similarities between post-communism and feudalism. See Ericson (2001) and Bunce (1999b, p. 792).

Indeed, while thinkers like Burawoy and Verdery reject the “deficit models” that analyze post-communist systems in terms of which characteristics of democracy and capitalism they lack rather than which characteristics they actually exhibit, they nonetheless propose an alternative framework—a transition to “feudalism”—in order to highlight these actually-existing traits. This seems to imply the difficulty—if not the impossibility—of theorizing transition without a framework that includes some conception of a theoretical (but not actual) endpoint. In fact, it was Bendix who pointed out several decades ago that it is the very use of ideal-type sequences of transition to a theoretical endpoint that makes the recognition of particularity and uniqueness possible. Writing of the applicability to the study of non-Western countries of the ideal-type sequence derived from the Western experience of the shift from feudalism to capitalism, he promoted the use of such a sequence “as an analytical tool to show how and why actual historical developments deviate from it.” But he forcefully warned that such sequences should not be used to “make contingent predictions about the future of ‘developing’ societies” (Bendix, 1977 [1964], p. 394).

In short, perhaps critics of teleological theories of transition should not posit an entirely open-ended transformation. Instead, following Bendix, a more moderate approach could emphasize the need to continuously reevaluate the question of *which* ideal type a theorist should adopt when analyzing a given transition as well as the importance of not confounding theoretical models of ideal type endpoints with the notion that real, existing systems actually move along teleological, unilinear paths. A thoughtful theorist would undoubtedly refer to ideal types other than liberal democracy—such as feudalism and new forms of authoritarianism—so as to avoid the assumption that democracy is the most likely outcome of transition.¹⁶ This approach seems to capture the indeterminacy inherent in the process of transition that transformation theorists rightly emphasize, while retaining the theoretical constructs that make possible both recognition of uniqueness and particularity as well as comparisons of transitions across space and time.

These difficult theoretical challenges indicate that the debate over teleology in post-communist studies is misplaced. Contrary to the claims of critics, there are very few scholars who construct unsophisticated models of transition based on the belief that countries across the post-communist region are inevitably progressing toward a single destination of liberal democracy; if this is what critics mean by transitology, then once again it

¹⁶However, even such cautious utilization of ideal types by no means resolves all issues related to the question of how ideal types should be employed. Does an ideal type refer to the average set of institutional characteristics observed in already-existing democracies and authoritarian regimes? Or should it be considered a normative statement concerning desired institutional features of democracy, and the lack thereof in authoritarian regimes? These questions are raised by Guillermo O'Donnell (1996, p. 37) in his insightful discussion of teleology and ideal types.

is not apparent that a transitology framework dominates the post-communist studies field. Rather, all scholars of post-communism are struggling with the common problem of what comparative reference point to employ in order to better understand the political processes under way in the post-communist world and how to cautiously and critically utilize such reference points without falling prey to misguided teleological assumptions. These are not easily resolvable challenges, as evidenced by the fact that theorists of transition have been struggling with similar questions at least since Bendix's time. Just as theorists of communist legacies are correct to emphasize that the present cannot be understood without analysis of the past, transformation theorists are correct to warn that those who are too focused on an idealized future fail to grasp the particularities and uniqueness of contemporary post-communism. However, analysis that relies exclusively on the past and present remains incomplete. Understanding of particularity and difference requires comparison, and for this scholars must continue to examine ideal types of possible—though certainly not inevitable—future outcomes of transition.

CONCLUSION: TRANSITIONING FROM THE TRANSITOLOGY DEBATES

Competing definitions of "transitology" have multiplied the contexts in which the term is used, thereby contributing to the widespread impression that a transitological approach to the study of regime change dominates post-communist studies. Lack of clarity about the term's meaning has additionally obscured the target of critics' reproaches. The evidence presented in this article shows that there is no basis for claims that scholars of post-communist regime change have embraced transitology, at least if transitology is defined as the method of studying regime change developed by prominent students of Southern European and Latin American transitions. Meanwhile, critics who define transitology more broadly as a teleological approach to the study of transitions have raised important questions about the assumptions underlying the terminological and analytical frameworks widely employed in the post-communist studies field. It is not clear, however, that their transformation approach is a superior analytical framework to a carefully constructed conceptualization of closed-ended transition. Overall, continued discussion of transitology's deleterious effects on the study of post-communism merely serves to detract attention from the common goal shared by the majority of scholars in the field of post-communist studies: to move beyond modernization theory and transitology in order to build new theory.

This shared quest to develop new analytical frameworks raises a final question about the definition of transitology. Some scholars refer to transitology even more broadly than the transformation theorists. Cohen, for instance, objects to the very notion that countries like Russia are experiencing "transitions." He argues that "The history of post-communist Russia

hardly fits the imagery of a country 'in transit' to a progressive political and economic destination. Indeed, it does not look like any kind of forward 'transition' in Russia's development... If it looks like regression, again, why call it 'reform' or 'progress'?" (Cohen, 2000, p. 39). Likewise, Carothers (2002), while not challenging the utility of a transitions framework during the 1990s, has questioned whether "transition states" are still actually in a period of transition, or whether a post-transition framework of analysis is needed. He notes that hybrid regimes that do not fit neatly into typologies of either authoritarianism or democracy may be stable and enduring political systems, so to categorize them as unconsolidated democracies or instances of unfinished transitions truly is teleological.

Regardless of whether one agrees with Cohen's or Carothers's claims, their critiques draw attention to a question that is vital to scholars seeking to move beyond modernization theory and transitology, namely, whether there are alternative metaphors and analytical frameworks that better describe the processes of post-communist change than the concept of "transition." While the review of the literature presented here shows that the notion that post-communist countries are experiencing transitions is widely accepted, it remains an open question—and a question that some scholars have raised—whether other frameworks might not provide students of post-communism with superior analytical insights. For instance, could not the processes of change in some post-communist countries be considered revolutions, institutional collapse followed by state (re)building, or decolonization?¹⁷

Returning to Table 1, it is evident that the notion of post-communist change as revolution has received a reasonable amount of attention, even if the transitions framework remains dominant. Of the 13 articles in the sample surveyed that discuss the concept of post-communist revolutions, many refer to the violent and explosive events that toppled the Romanian communist regime. But several scholars, most notably Michael McFaul, have argued more broadly that many of the post-communist transitions should actually be considered revolutions (see, e.g., Aron, 1995; Bunce, 1999a; Bunce, 1999b; Kis, 1998; Kuran, 1991; McFaul, 1993; McFaul, 1995; McFaul, 1996; McFaul, 2002). Bunce (1999b), commenting on this proposition, notes that it holistically captures the economic, political, and social dimensions of the transformations under way in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, unlike the separate sets of literature on regime change and economic reform. Moreover, it emphasizes the role of widespread

¹⁷A fascinating counterfactual question would be whether the transition framework would have become the predominant concept of analysis had the Soviet Union collapsed at a different time, rather than on the heels of the Third Wave of democratization. In this respect, perhaps, the influence of the original transitology literature on post-communist studies can be seen; while, as discussed above, scholars of post-communism have certainly not based their work directly on the Latin America regime change literature, they have inherited the concept of transition as the guiding metaphor for understanding of the processes they are studying.

conflict and instability during times of economic and political change rather than downplaying these factors in favor of analysis of elite interactions (but for some of the drawbacks of a revolutions approach, see Bunce, 1999a).

A second alternative to the transitions framework—institutional breakdown and state collapse—has received much less attention than the concept of revolutions. The notion was first articulated by Jowitt: “The institutional breakdown—a concept as telling as, or more telling than, ‘transition’—of the Soviet party left its constituent social, political, and economic parts of the regime weak and fragmented” (*italics added*) (Jowitt, 1996b, p. 410). This conceptualization shares with the revolutions framework an emphasis on the disintegration and chaos engendered by the destruction of the old regime; it finds affinity with the transformation approach in its rejection of the image that transition in the post-communist region entails an intentional and neatly crafted progression from one regime type to another. While Jowitt’s analysis concludes with a depiction of a post-communist world of disorder and dissolution, other scholars have recently taken an additional step and theorized the processes of change under way in the post-communist region as state collapse followed by subsequent state and market (re)building (see, e.g., Grzymala-Busse and Jones Luong, 2002; Woodruff, 1999; Volkov, 2003). This literature criticizes scholars of post-communist regime change and economic reform for assuming that a functioning state continues to exist in places such as Russia and Ukraine. Instead, the inability of national governments in the former Soviet Union to establish political and economic sovereignty over their domains leads to fundamentally different processes of transformation than those witnessed in the transitions and democratizations of Southern Europe and Latin America (Woodruff, 1999; Volkov, 2003).¹⁸

This formulation of post-communist change as state collapse and state (re)building dovetails nicely with a third potential conceptualization—decolonization. Mark Beissinger and Crawford Young (2002), for example, have recently argued that Central Asia and the Caucasus display significant similarities to post-colonial Africa. Both are characterized by weak states exploited by self-serving leaders, boundaries laid out by former colonial overlords, and a tendency to resort to violence to resolve political and economic disputes.

Ultimately, there is no reason why these multiple conceptualizations of post-communist change should be perceived as competitors. Most scholars may continue to contend that the transitions framework best describes the processes of change that have been occurring in East-Central Europe. Meanwhile, analysis of state collapse followed by state building

¹⁸In general, the issue of state weakness remained understudied by scholars of post-communism until recently. As Charles Fairbanks notes, “The weakness of the postcommunist state is important to political scientists because it is the key transition development that we did not foresee” (Fairbanks, 2002). The persistent exception has been Stephen Holmes (Holmes, 1997), who has consistently pointed to the weakness of post-communist states.

may yield more fruitful results for scholars focused on Russia and Ukraine, while the decolonization framework perhaps deserves further attention among scholars of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Likewise, the applicability of the revolutions rubric to countries such as Romania and the distinction between revolutions and transitions more broadly certainly merit further investigation. Sophisticated analysis of post-communism will undoubtedly come to recognize that a region as diverse as the former Eastern Bloc requires a patchwork of guiding metaphors and theoretical frameworks if scholars are to adequately analyze and comprehend post-communist events.¹⁹

For scholars continuing to work within the transitions framework, the question will remain of how to develop a theory of post-communist transitions that moves beyond transitology. The review of post-communist theories of regime change presented in this article demonstrates that there is widespread agreement among scholars of post-communism with regard to the fundamental building blocks that this new theory might incorporate. First, it must be recognized that a theory of post-communist transitions will not be a theory of democratization. It will be a theory of transition *from* state socialism to many regime types, including novel forms of authoritarianism, enduring hybrid regimes, unstable forms of poor capitalism and low-quality democracy, and a handful of regimes that successfully develop sustainable liberal democracies (Brown, 2000; Bunce, 2000; McFaul, 2002; Roeder, 1994). Second, a theory of post-communism must capture the complexity inherent in the double or triple nature of transitions in the region. From the beginning of the 1990s, scholars have recognized that the processes of change under way in the former Eastern Bloc entail far more dramatic transformation than the purely political regime change that occurred in Southern Europe and Latin America. Entire economies are being restructured, national consciousnesses and, in some cases, national boundaries are being reshaped. Scholars will continue to face the challenging task of untangling how these multiple transitions affect each other. For some, this may result in analyses that treat each sphere of transition independently yet examine the mutual effects of each sphere on the others (see, *e.g.*, Fish, 1998). Others may seek a more holistic approach and develop theories of transition that bring together multiple aspects of transitions, such as attempts to link both economic and political developments to modes of privatization (see, *e.g.*, Stark and Bruzst, 1998; Schwartz, 1999). Third, scholars are increasingly coming to realize that fruitful analysis of post-communism requires recognition of the weakness and disintegration of many post-communist states. Much of the political science and economics literature on transitions, democratization, and economic reform assumes that a functioning state exists, that discernible lines between legitimate and illegitimate force are in place, and that the state wields the monopoly on violence necessary to utilize this force and carry out its

¹⁹For a similar perspective see Bunce (1998).

policies. As discussed above, theorists of institutional breakdown as well as other analysts have made clear that these assumptions do not hold in the post-communist region (Bunce, 2000, pp. 714–715; Carothers, 2002, pp. 8–9; Jowitt, 1996a; Jowitt, 1996b). What this means for the study of transitions must be investigated further. Fourth, theorists of post-communist transitions seem especially well poised to make a unique contribution to synthesizing the competing structural and actor-centric approaches to the study of economic, political, and social change that have been at loggerheads for decades. Many theorists of post-communist regime change recognize that the complexity of post-communist events cannot be understood without attention to both historical legacies and short-term strategic human interactions, and without emphasis on both domestic and external factors. How individual theorists will weight these different factors will understandably vary according to the cases in question and analysts' personal inclinations, but few scholars seem devoted to a radically one-sided approach. Finally, a theory of post-communist transitions will have to confront the difficult questions pertaining to teleology discussed in the preceding section. Here too, scholars of post-communism can make a significant contribution to larger debates. The variety and uniqueness of post-communist regimes is fertile ground for exploring novel political and economic systems, and this diversity presents the opportunity for analysts to develop new ways of utilizing ideal types so as to theorize transition in a non-teleological yet theoretically rigorous manner.

Theories of post-communist transitions based on these components will undoubtedly display many features unique to the post-communism region. But they will surely be of wider interest to students of transitions in general. As such, perhaps they will be a step forward with regard to creating a field of post-communist studies that is integrated into the larger discipline of comparative politics yet which does not induce criticism of being held hostage by proponents of methods and theories derived from the study of other regions. When this occurs, it will be possible to say that the field has truly moved beyond modernization theory and transitology.

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