Irina Culic: State, Population, and Citizenship

Thesis for professorship and PhD supervision

Summary

Designed as narrative, extended academic curriculum vitae, this thesis is organized according to the main research and teaching interests that I had continued and developed since being granted the title of Doctor in Sociology. They are marked by three constitutive elements of my academic profile. First, my areas of investigation emerged from the social reality around me, with its issues of injustice, struggle, subjectivity, and achievement. As a publicly-minded scholar, it was important to know, understand and find ways to represent them. Second, they were shaped by the framework within which I had carried my research and teaching activities. For the last fifteen years, the higher education system in Romania, the social research funding environment, the relationship between knowledge, politics and the market have changed continuously and significantly. The dynamics among all these pointed to several areas of study and influenced my decisions with regard to career choices, institutional partnerships, and collaboration with fellow scholars and academics. Third, my situatedness in the world and the local-global events of my biography drew me to several particular topics of research, salient for the society at large.

The first section of the thesis introduces previous and present lines of investigation, discussing the junctures which formed me as a scholar, the work and results of my doctoral research, and the institutional framework that made them possible. Focused on the impact of social structure of elites on the process of democratic transition, this research was accompanied by a course I had taught during that period at the Central European University in Budapest on Political and Cultural Elites, and the supervision of several master's theses using the methodology I had devised for my study.

The following sections detail the five main directions of work I am pursuing presently. First, the sociology of the state, with a focus on epistemological and methodological issues, has integrated many separate threads of investigation, developed at different points in time and out of specific issues. Started from an inquiry into the process of institutional design of the states after the fall of communist regimes and the set up of new independent states in Central and Eastern Europe, it covered in particular the issue of regionalism and the form of democratic institutions. They all addressed the more encompassing problem of state-building and the relationship with the people and territories in whose name states claimed legitimacy. More recently, I discussed citizenship and the problematic it covers, tackling the two crucial conditions that make citizenship: the existence of a political community and equality for its members. It is what Seyla Benhabib (2004) calls the "paradox of democratic legitimacy". Normatively, there is a tension in the liberal democratic view of citizenship based on these two pillars of membership and equality. The first is based on the democratic principle of self-determination which creates boundaries of inclusion and exclusion - territorial, political, ethno-cultural, symbolic, and others, while the second is grounded in the principle of universal human rights.

The second main line of research is international migration, which brings along more clearly the issue of belonging and of borders. My research here covers international migration of Romanians and Moldovans in Western Europe, and an ongoing and future social historical

investigation of Romanian migration to North America. Third, interethnic relations and nationalism, as a continuing field of interest and study, occupy my agenda. Cluj has been a symbolic and discursive battleground of nationalist claims in the last two decades, especially during Mayor Funar's mandates. Moreover, struggles over Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj and the stake of a Hungarian state university in Romania, made this topic extremely salient for me and my colleagues. I cooperate on continuous bases with a number of Hungarian academics, scholars, and public intellectuals on research approaching interethnic relations, nationhood, and nationalism in Romania and the region. A fourth line of investigation looks at class formation and social inequality in Romania. This traverses of all other topics of research and allows me to have fruitful encounters with colleagues working on social policy issues, working-class formation during the communist regime, social stratification and social structure change after 1989. Finally, as yet another line of interest that cuts across all other topics of research is my constant engagement with grounds of knowledge, good scholarship, and innovative methodologies. The last section of the thesis discusses prospects of my research and academic career. All these are accompanied by the bibliography that contoured through the exposition of my past, present, and coming activity.