



Guest Editor's Foreword

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Jaap Dronkers, who has significantly reviewed new sociological inquiry on the continuing social relevance of the European nobility, associated the vitality of this community with its unique capabilities of accumulating social and cultural capital. To be sure, in some studies, Dronkers with his collaborators also mentioned the importance of material capital which has contributed to the prevalence of the comprehensive network of noble origin families in Western Europe (Korom–Dronkers 2009). Dronkers' attention was focused mainly on the Dutch civil nobility, which, unlike military or landed nobility, was better adapted to the dominant bourgeoisie-oriented modernity, what additionally explains the continuing social relevance of this group. Importantly, Dronkers (2003: 83) admitted that the prevalence of nobility in contemporary Europe has its limits, namely: “the importance of noble origins declines only if social relationships change so rapidly (e.g. due to a revolution, defeat in a war, or a serious economic recession) that the old social and cultural family capital is no longer usable or ceases to apply under the new circumstances”.

Albeit Dronkers did not make mention of Eastern Europe, it could be inferred from his statement that nobility in countries re-arranged by communist revolutions during the crucial period of 1944–1956 ceased to exist, by the very definition, as a comprehensive social class. The slowly emerging studies on contemporary Eastern European nobility, particularly on the Hungarian and Polish noble milieu (e.g. Jakubowska 2005, Sztáray-Kézdy 2009, Smoczynski–Zarycki 2012), partially confirmed Dronkers' musings. We cannot identify a noble social stratum in Eastern Europe which would comply with the Weberian or Marxian class criteria. Probably, the confiscation of land properties, a structural constraint imposed on the capital accumulation within the relics of noble networks, and eventually the gradual process of the relocation of noble origin individuals into other class positions, most notably into the intelligentsia stratum, were the most important reasons of this class extinction. Having noted this obvious fact, we should also note that the above-mentioned novel studies have shaken the assumption about the historical necessity of the disappearance of noble networks in Eastern Europe

which draw on feudal legacy in various forms. Even though we cannot delimit a proper post-feudal social class ranging from East Germany to Caucasian Georgia (Seelig 2015, Sulaberidze et al. 2015) which would have survived communism, there is a considerable empirical evidence suggesting that communism has not succeeded in eliminating networks based on traditional noble cultural and social capital, although the degree of the social integrity of these groups as measured e.g. by noble homogamy decisively varies in this region. Overall, the crucial argument of the above-mentioned revisionist scholarship charges that the identity-building strategies of the Eastern European nobility should be analyzed e.g. within the Weberian status perspective, which allows grasping the strategic relationship of members of nobility with the intelligentsia stratum, that is to say, the élite of cultural capital. The latter stratum, which actually originates from the 19th-century waning petty nobility – as this argument evolves –, created specific symbiotic ties over the last century, particularly after the Second War World, with the remaining noble milieu what, on the one hand, has re-defined its class identity in modern merit-based terms but has preserved its crucial pre-modern features on the other (e.g. elitist ethos, a kinship network proximity, a limited noble homogamy).

The current contribution aims at expanding the crucial lines of this revisionist inquiry focusing on two Eastern European countries where the noble population had been historically the most numerous and only recently had ceased to impact the public sphere, namely, Hungary and Poland. Bringing several papers together, this volume aims specifically at mapping noble homogamy in Poland, drawing on a unique empirical data called *The Genealogy of Descendants of the Great Sejm*. Minakowski and Smoczyński analyze quantitatively longer trends of several (e.g. five, eight, or even more) generations of nobles (or nobles' descendants) in Poland over the last two centuries. Urszula Idziak and Bartosz Bednarczyk seek to find a universalizing potential of nobility in contemporary Poland while applying Alain Badiou's truth procedure analysis to empirical data. Éva Sztáray-Kézdy, in turn, using both ethnographic and survey approaches, depicts the lifestyle of young descendants of aristocratic families living in Hungary at the turn of the 21st century. Gábor Kovács carefully studies the peculiarity of the late-19th- and early-20th-century Hungarian hybrid dual society with lingering pre-modern and emerging modern segments: aristocracy, nobility, and peasantry on the one hand and bourgeoisie and the working class on the other hand. Kovács in his essay demonstrates how Hungarian collective mentality has been determined by the archaic, military-aggressive attitudes of the feudal élite while nation building has been hindered by imperial political structures and war defeats. In the concluding paper, Béla Mester analyzes the transition of the intellectual models of the activity in the Hungarian public sphere from the behavioral patterns of the representatives of the nobility to the modernized norms of a new intelligentsia of mixed, noble, and common origin.

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