



## BOOK REVIEW

***Dependență și dezvoltare. Economia politică a capitalismului românesc (Dependency and Development. The Political Economy of Romanian Capitalism) by Cornel Ban. Cluj-Napoca: Tact Publishing House, 2014, 293 pages.***

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Cornel Ban's "Dependency and development. The political economy of Romanian capitalism" is a contribution both to the sociology of development and heterodox economics. Romanian modern economic history unfolds in eight chapters covering the period from the dawn of the local capitalist state, in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, to the contemporary state policies, in the aftermath of the 2008 Great Depression. The reader is invited to follow the institutional complementarities and contradictions that emerged in the region and in Romania in relation to policies regarding financing, investment, industrial development, international trade and the labour market. The decisions taken in these various economic spheres are shown to be connected, producing consistent policy regimes. The attention to history makes visible successive economic decisions, in a twofold way: as species of the various Central and Eastern European attempts to escape the peripheral status in the capitalist world system and as strategies that have continuities, effects and are subject to reinterpretation across historical epochs.

### Theoretical Stakes

Conceptually, the book rests and builds on the theoretical advancements regarding the developmentalist states (Amsden, 1992; Chibber, 2003; Evans, 1995; Kohli, 2004) in the varieties of capitalism framework (Bohle and Greskovits, 2012; Hall and Soskics, 2001; Hancké, Rhodes, and Thatcher, 2009; Nölke and Vliegenthart, 2009). The methodological strategy is consistently comparative, allowing meaningful parallels across time and space. The most important dislocation to emerge from this engagement is rendering comparable actually existing socialist policies with those of other developmental states. The stakes the approach are

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rooted in the effort to dismantle the current anti-communist orthodoxy of the Eastern European and Romanian intellectual milieu. Much of the cultural orthodoxy describes socialism as a criminal system pertaining to a pre-modern era that erupted as a strange Eastern European re-feudalization of society. Cornel Ban not only argues for understanding state socialist policies as a particular case of state developmentalism, comparable with similar projects in Latin America and South Asia, but he also shows how these hegemonic post-communist interpretations came about in the broader epistemic power fields. Aided by the sociology of translation of actor-network theory (Bockman, 2011; Bockman and Eyal, 2002; Callon and Muniesa, 2005; Latour, 1993, 2005; MacKenzie, Muniesa, and Siu, 2007; Muniesa, Millo, and Callon, 2007), Ban follows the minute details in which market fundamentalism fused with the local anti-communist ideology to legitimize a radical brand of neoliberalism in Romania. Cornel Ban names this particular fusion "cultural neoliberalism". The book is thus a critical engagement of the economic policies prescriptions of cultural neoliberalism as well as an analysis of its genealogy.

The major contention of the book is that institutions that shape the local possibility of capital accumulation in the transnational commodity chains are interconnected with the structure of the epistemic fields where policies options are formulated. The thesis is far from new. It spins off from the 1990s theories of the role of the elites in reshaping the Central and Eastern European states (Burawoy, 2001; Eyal, Szelényi, and Townsley, 1998, 2001; Stark and Bruszt, 1998). In their turn, these theories are an analytical reworking of the role of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, the cultural bourgeoisie with modernizing ethos in Central and Eastern Europe (Kocka, 1995). Nonetheless, Cornel Ban's argument broadens the scope of the *Bildungsbürgertum* thesis with an actor-network twist, along the lines opened by Bockman and Eyal (2002) and Bockman (2011). Far from being a characteristic of the East, the cultural bourgeoisie is placed on a greater scene: the academics and the experts are forming global criss-crossing networks of epistemic cooperation and competition. Moreover, the argument is focused on the crucial role played by a particular type of cultural bourgeoisie, the intellectuals capable of formulating economic epistemes, following the suggestion that the economy is a performatively instituted process (Callon and Muniesa, 2005; MacKenzie et al., 2007; Muniesa et al., 2007). Although the role of the economists is much emphasized, the argument is far from idealist. On the contrary, in the notorious ANT sway, scientists are showed to succeed in imposing an orthodoxy by political means, that is by mobilizing power resources from outside the epistemic field in order to create a bigger and a stronger network of enrolment and translation from point-to-point for their ideas. Therefore the role of the major western colonial institutions was fundamental in sustaining through resources the successive

epistemic alliances that favoured policies options in the periphery in the benefit of the capitalist centre. However, critical and alternative strategies did also emerge, either as counter-hegemonic alliances or part of the mistranslation and editing. The book reconstructs the global networks of policies translation and the local editing that sometimes produced new or even critical ideas.

### **Policy regimes**

The first chapter analyzes the economic policies from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century – the period of the formation of the first Romanian modern capitalist state – up until the end of the Second World War. Three successive policy formations are identified. First, there were the policies of the radical democratic network of intellectuals (*pașoptiștii*) in favour of an economy coordinated by a bureaucratic and rational state against the big landowners involved in the grain exports. However, their endeavor succumbed gradually in a self-orientalizing way that led towards an orthodox liberalism of free markets, the search for a competitive advantage interpreted as agrarian specialization, a publicly educated labour force, public investments in transport infrastructure, independent courts and a mercantilist state. The transnational alumni networks of intellectuals educated in Western universities constructed a hegemonic pro-occidental episteme where the European unrestricted markets were seen as a source of modernization. Second, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was an emerging set of liberal criticism against these policy options pleading for the need of a local bourgeoisie capable of fixing in the national space the benefits of capital accumulation (i.e. Ion C. Brătianu, Ștefan Zeletin). A new epistemic hegemony formed having as its core the Bismarckian protectionism and ethnicist policies. The new epistemic alliance was editing the transnational prescriptions by grafting itself on the pre-existing mercantilist understanding of the state. A neo-mercantilist state was put in place, one where the national bourgeoisie was the object of protection in an increasingly eugenic interpretation of the nation's body. Third, during the 1930s, the role of the national bourgeoisie was collapsed on the role of the state in a hyper-modernist move of entrusting the rational state, dominated by a single party-bureaucracy, to plan the accumulation of capital. For example, the economist Mihail Manoilescu pleaded for a neo-corporatist strategy of development, along, yet in opposition with the advanced economies. The advanced economies were no competitive match for the under-developed ones on an unrestricted and uncoordinated market. Therefore, he points to the importance of an autonomous industrial development and of the state capital, points which had a global career (Love, 1996). These ideas were in dialog with the pan-european discussions on comparative competitive advantage

and the very successful German national-socialism in securing a hegemonic role. Yet, much of the polemical steam of these theories was coming from the local debates with the socialists, narodnicists and conservative political forces.

In the second chapter Cornel Ban is keen in insisting, with convincing arguments, on the continuities between the presocialist policy options and the socialist developmentalist strife. In a very interesting hypothesis, he shows that many of Manoilescu's economic strategies were actually taken up as state strategies by the communists. His point is that even if some of the policy prescriptions are transnational in origin, the local actors are always contextualizing them in a process of editing the translated ideas. The Moscovit economic ideology makes no exception. Cornel Ban actually reinterprets the purportedly neo-Stalinist turn of the mid 1970s operated by Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime, as a re-contextualization of neo-corporatist ideas: strong orientation towards industrial development, financing of this development through intersectorial transfers from agriculture toward industry, avoiding dependent development induced by the capitalist markets, an ethnicists understanding of the labour force, international relations based on national interest. The hard version of austerity conducted by the Ceaușescu regime in the 1980s to avoid the IMF and World Bank dictums and policies linked to the 1970s loans were exceptions in the region. Only by taking seriously the epistemic hybridization processes one can explain the radical versions of developmentalism played by the Romanian socialists. The chapter excels in making visible the socialist industrial and financial strategies by use of comparative data. Other developmentalist states performances are brought into discussion and played against the core western capitalist state aggregate economic indexes. The analytic strategy is very successful in making visible the specificities, accents and exaggerations that brought the demise of the Romanian communist state. Romanian heavy industry, reluctant towards costly technological imports, was in fact in need for external politically-friendly markets to acquire the needed petrodollar. The neo-corporatist elements deepened the regional crisis of the 1980s, making Romania very vulnerable, paradoxically, to external economic crisis.

The next four chapters follow the policy regimes that formed and competed against each other along the 1990s and 2000s, with the triumphant imposition of the last one of them, neoliberalism. First, between 1990 and 1992, a new form of developmentalism was formulated by a series of local economists with important positions in the economic research institutes of the 1980s. Working in the *Foreign Trade Research Institute and Industrial Relation Institute* of the *Romanian Academy* they were part of a technocratic generation of researchers, some involved in the planning process, part of the developmental communist economic machine. Their academic allegiances were still with the French dirigiste school and the Moscovit planning school, yet they had a strong critical stance

against the bureaucratic coordination of the economy. In a thorough set of policy recommendations solicited by the head of the state, Ion Iliescu, The *Postolache Report*, suggested markets liberalization, some privatizations and new forms of directing investments via a stock exchange. Nonetheless, the major investments were still a state prerogative, as well as the ideal of industrial autonomy and preservation. Major neo-corporatist ideas made their way in the report and in many state decisions, especially the hope of creating a local class of Romanian capitalists. Yet, the international institutions like IMF and the World Bank criticized the dirigist approach, pressuring against state crediting the public industrial sector and proposed creating an internal inflationary adjustment of the consumption in order to institute markets. This gave greater weight to the critics of the developmentalist state and pushed forward a set of economists that were better connected with the global neoliberal discourse. The effects were the retreat of the state from industrial crediting and state subventions of the staple food and basic products. A new, rather strange, liberal neo-developmental state emerged under the lead of the prime-minister Theodor Stolojan (an economist working in the 1970s in *Central Planning Department*, and in the 1980s in the *Department for Foreign Exchange and International Financial Relations*) with catastrophic consequences for the population and the economy.

Second, between 1992 and 1996, as a reaction to the massive unemployment produced by IMF policy suggestions, the neo-developmental with a corporatist orientation gained momentum, and won the power inside the governing alliance. Another economist, Nicolae Văcăroiu (working from the 1970s in the *Central Planning Department*) put in place a consistent developmentalist program, with a much more clear concern for social justice than his predecessors. Cornel Ban names this set of policies, accordingly: “popular neo-developmentalism”.

Third, between 1997 and 2008, a radical neoliberal alliance was able to foster energies from different parties and to install a hegemonic consensus over state policies. Cornel Ban formulates a very powerful puzzle. He traces the transnational policy networks (local university programs, IMF and World Bank educational programs, transnational research programs, post-docs in western universities) which successfully installed the neoliberal set policies as normalcy. However, he observes, that even if this economic ideas were translations from the core capitalist international institutions, IMF and the World Bank, the local idiom was more radical than its core counterpart. That is a minimalist state, minimum redistribution, autocratic firm management, flat taxation, high taxation of work and low taxation of capital, favouring of transnational capital. Concepts and hypothesis that were marginal in the western neoliberalism were presented by the local intelligentsia as great achievements of the economic sciences. Much of this radicalism, Cornel Ban argues, was legitimized using the anti-communist

ideology. Social justice, redistribution, protectionist policies or state credit to local firms were all indexed as communist policies halting the true development of interconnected self-regulated markets.

Forth, between 2009 and 2014, a new neoliberal alliance profited from the economic crisis and opened the internal labour markets to transnational capital, especially the Western European capital. Cornel Ban shows that Romania, as many other Central European economies, produced a series of policies which transformed the country in an assembly lines for the transnational chains of production. The radical neoliberal policies of the previous policy regime came to full fruition by a new set of regulation: for labour (market flexibilization), the consumers (an increase of VAT), for small business (new taxes), and the furious clients over banks abuses. And especially, to avoid any technological spill-over giving all control over innovations to the multinational. Moderate prosperity became possible for the employees of multinationals or for the employees of the local firms serving the multinationals. Cornel Ban names this configuration: "dependent neoliberalism". Cornel Ban shows that Romania once again excels in terms of radicalism of the "dependent market economy" (Nölke and Vliegenthart, 2009).

### **A challenging contribution**

Besides its undeniable salience for social sciences in Romania, Cornel Ban's book is a challenging contribution to the greater global academic endeavour to understand the varieties of policy regimes and the way policy travels across spaces and time. The disclosure of continuities and discontinuities in the political economy and policy-regimes of the Romanian states starting with the 19<sup>th</sup> century is agenda setting. The global scale and breath in which local options were forged come at the surface with great clarity and allow us to better grasp yet another case of how capitalist peripheralization works and how it is resisted.

Cornel Ban's contribution is part of the generational academic endeavour that pressure for a game change in the analysis of the way policy options are formed. More exactly, this is a contribution to understanding the global conversation between the capitalist centre and the semi and peripheral areas, the formation of epistemic hegemonies and local hybridizations. The book also has some daring theoretical promises and some bold theoretical purposes. In the rest of this extended review I engage some of the major points in the architecture of the book which, I argue, are not thoroughly addressed. Also, I argue that some of the theoretical promises are not fully realized.

The conceptual language of the book is, at times, heavily infused with unexplained macroeconomic parlance and neoinstitutionalist Polanyian jargon. Nonetheless, the book still remains reader friendly for diverse audiences because

it mobilizes professional vocabularies which tend to sustain each other. This shortcoming could have been avoided through the addition of a more consistent theoretical introduction where the basic theoretical resources could have been explained: the actor network theory (Bockman and Eyal, 2002; Callon and Muniesa, 2005; Latour, 1993, 2005; MacKenzie et al., 2007), varieties of capitalism (Bohle and Greskovits, 2012; Hall and Soskics, 2001; Hancké et al., 2009; Nölke and Vliegthart, 2009) and the developmentalist states agenda (Chibber, 2003; Evans, 1995; Williams, 2014; Woo-Cumings, 1999). And, more importantly, the links between them. There are some important analytical holes created by the lack of paradigmatic integration of the theoretical strands used in the book. More precisely I address three aspects: the link between popular and expert epistemes, the issue of homology between political fractions and economist fractions and, finally, interest and agency.

### **Popular and expert epistemes**

This lack of theoretical integration can be attributed, at least partially, to the greater framework in which he is working in: the elite approach. The elite framework blocks a real conversation between the developmentalist theories and the actor-network theories. Cornel Ban makes the very interesting observation that there was a short opening in the early 1990 when workers self-organized and took over the factories in a daring democratic experiment at the shop floor level. However, the developmentalist alliance did not takeover this experiment, on the contrary they were loyal to their epistemic certainties regarding the virtues of top-down planning. The effect was a re-imposition of autocratic managerial control. The same contradictory effect obtained through the MOEBO privatization process, of entrusting the factories to their workers, yet the management hierarchies were constantly reinforced by the same technocratic ruling elite. Given the elite framework, all these remain but observations about missed opportunities of the ruling developmental elites. A wider and more integrated framework would have recognized these opportunities as clear instances of class conflict with a direct effect in terms of the retreat of the working class support for the ruling elite. In addition, the frustration of the working class was captured by the contending neoliberal epistemic formation: the long-awaited democracy supposedly can be obtained only in a new meritocratic context, where both the hard working person is going to be awarded by the market and the striving company will be bought by the international investors to be put on its rightful track – among the best on the world market. Besides the support of transnational academic networks, the contending neoliberal technocratic elite (Christian Democratic Alliance – CDR) was able to forge a "popular neoliberalism" with

the direct help of the working class. The biggest support for CDR was rallied from Transylvania, from the most industrialized areas of the region and from Romania. In such an alternative reading of the same empirical material the forgers of the neoliberal episteme are not just the elites, but also the masses, and the masses react to various policies as part of a network of interest formed in the capitalist division of labour.

Focusing solely on epistemic and political elites the rest of the society fades away, making unclear the greater silencing dynamics involved in class struggles and the production of ideology. A class analysis posits that agency is present in both the dominant and the dominated poles. The possibility of a relationship cannot be grasped if the dominated are analytically transformed into an ineffective category, nothing more than silent victims of active elites. The elite explanation suggests that the only important transformations that are relevant in terms of explanatory power are the differentiations at the top of the social hierarchy. Cornel Ban is always keen to show the effects on the population in terms of inequalities and redistribution. However, this is not yet a dynamic model. Those who are left out of the redistributive game are in dire situation, yet this deprivation does not make them inconsequential. However, in Eastern Europe, the scholars that Ban is using as resources have argued that the working class has evaporated after the end of state socialism. Gil Eyal, Ivan Szelenyi and Elenor Townsley, for example, claim that “the greatest question of the postcommunist transition is where the working-class-cum-collective-actor we are supposed to study is? At present, there is nothing but a demobilized, disorganized mass of workers!” (Eyal et al., 2001:1221).

In a recent paper, Cornel Ban analyzes the virtues of class analysis in the Romanian academic field (Ban, 2015). In the book itself there are numerous references to the effects of class struggles and fine observations on the social dynamics produced by the very policies the author engages. However, he places too much theoretical emphasis on the editing process done by the locally enrolled actors. Editing becomes the major mechanism of discursive hybridization and much of the radicalism of the ethnicist reading of the development at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, independent developmentalism of the socialists, or dependent neoliberalism are explained as a positioning game of some intellectuals in the greater global networks. In this strategy the brunt of explanation falls on the relative autonomy of the intellectual elite in the global academic fields in making translations. Capitalism happens especially at a global scale. Nonetheless, capitalism also produced categories of people in the division of labour, with their epistemic outlook on the world that are captured by or subvert hegemonic formations. In order to make editing a relevant concept, epistemic formations have to be seen in their complex ontologies. Editing becomes the backdoor through which greater

contextual forces are attributed to economists. While the intellectual elites are purportedly the only active groups, all others are deprived of any agency. In this respect, reacting to the elite paradigm, Burawoy argues that it is possible “that the compromises struck between dominant and subordinate classes set the prior conditions for alliances among the dominant classes” (2001:1112). Thus, before any split at the top occurs, a compromise between the various social strata might be needed. If we were to continue Burawoy’s criticism, we could argue that whether the subordinate are relevant or not for the power games played at the top is primarily an empirical question. This matter cannot be settled *a priori* epistemologically, through an act of agency dispossession, leaving entire parts of the social field completely inert. Somehow the popular criticisms, hopes and visions have to make it analytically in explaining hegemonic formations.

### **Elite fractions**

The developmentalist state agenda focuses on the growth alliances between various classes or fractions that appear in a given national context against the core capitalist states (Amsden, 1992; Chibber, 2003; Evans, 1995; Kohli, 2004) or with the help of some fractions of the core capital (Anderson, 2013a, 2013b; Brenner, 2006). The effects are particular types of bureaucratic configurations of the state agencies that produce a dynamic tension between the autonomy of the technocratic strata, the capital fractions and workers claims. While Cornel Ban is heavily referencing Peter Evans’ (1995) embedded autonomy of the bureaucratic state elite, it is somehow unclear how these technocratic fractions are linked with the epistemic communities of the economic science. How is developmentalist critique actually linked with the ANT paradigm?

Given the existing literature on the subject (Cucu, 2014; Cucu and Culic, 2012; Culic, 2002, 2006; Pasti, 1997; Petrovici, 2006; Poenaru, 2011; Zamfir, 2004), it seems that the field of the economists somehow is very similar with the contending bureaucratic fractions of the end of the 1980s. State socialism, as an accumulation machine, produced different strands of bureaucratic fractions with very different interests. The firm level managerial fraction was in a direct struggle with the county and national planning technocracy. In the planning machine there was a very important struggle and competition between those who were coordinating and research the exports and those who were coordinating internal production (Pasti, 1997). We are left to as if there are some linkages between the three major fractions in the economic field (liberal developmentalists, populist developmentalist and neoliberals) and the fractions reported by the literature as being influential in the political games of the 1990s.

These kinds of insights are completely invisible in the book and makes unclear why in 1992 the planning branch of Nicolae Văcăroiu prevailed in defining the economic policies and Theodor Stolojan's group of neoliberals was defeated.

Take the example of *The Postolache Report*, which is mentioned as a very important resource for the populist neodevelopmentalism of the 1992-1996. Yet it is both unclear why these former economists enrolled in the socialist planning in the 1980s prevailed over the neoliberal fraction at the beginning of the 1990s and how they were unable to sustain their temporary epistemic consensus after their first electoral defeat in 1996. Cornel Ban suggests that there was a major split in the economic field of the 1990s. In that period, many of the economists were coming from the same *Foreign Affairs Institute* of the *Romanian Academy*. Some of them migrated to the *National Romanian Bank* becoming the most radical neoliberals. Some of them migrated in the economic academic field and retained a developmentalist outlook on the economy with some liberal elements. It is not clear why these economists from the *Foreign Affairs Institute* did not have an outright monetarist vision as their Hungarian and Polish counterparts did (Eyal et al., 1998). It is also completely unclear why their French and Moscovite education and professional networks did not influence the entire cohort giving them the same ideological outlook. Why did they split into a liberal developmentalist branch and a neoliberal one?

It is also left unexplained how come that the hegemonic economic neodevelopmentalist episteme of 1992 and 1996 died so suddenly. Cornel Ban notes only that despite their economic successes they lost the election to the radical neoliberals in 1996 and their epistemic agenda had no heiress. It is suggested that the transnational neoliberal alliance had resources provided by the IMF and World Bank, and their success is not an epistemic one, but a crowding out effect done through their political capacities. Nonetheless, this does not explain the 1996 neoliberals' electoral success, despite their economic failures in 1992. Also it does not explain the nature of power resources, coming outside of the epistemic fields, yielded by the neoliberals, because they were extremely successful in silencing alternative voices in just a single year, the election year of 1996. Cornel Ban shows that there were homologies between the epistemic fields, political fields, and the class decomposition and recomposition dynamics. Yet, the links are left unexplained, hanging to each other only through their theoretical juxtaposition and not a real dialogue. As reader we are left to infer that this outcome may be a result of the angry disenfranchised workers fared in mass in 1992 and the unheard worker's voices that would have liked to short-circuit the factory hierarchies in the period of 1992 and 1996 and could not do that against the neo-developmentalists loyal to managerial line of command.

However, this would mean that class formation, diffuse popular emotions and fuzzy political stands are consequential in terms of policy outcomes, a point I made above.

### **Interest and agency**

In an insightful empirical tour de force, in the last chapter of the book, Cornel Ban discusses the issue of financing of the economy between 2002 and 2014, arguing that the current conjunction can be attributed to decisions taken at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of 2000s. The privatization of the financial sector produced an economy highly dependent on a domestic credit market dominated by western capital (80% of the banking sector is owned by foreign banks), and where most of the financial resources came from the intra-firm lending between the multinational headquarters and their local divisions.

To account for this transformation, Cornel Ban proposes an unexpected entitization, construing "the Eastern Europeans" as a global actor (p.228). More precisely, the eastern Europeans decided to privatize their financial sectors to the western capital, because that move allowed for a rupture between state banks, state companies and toxic loans. Purportedly, this strategy had the potential to avoid the formation of oligarchies, as opposed to the Ukrainian and Russian cases, and restart the domestic credit markets. Obviously, Cornel Ban is using the "Eastern Europeans" in a metaphorical sense. We are far from being invited to imagine that there was a collective actor who had a meta-historical vision which permitted a detached reflexive decision. Nonetheless, he does deploy this burgeoning metaphor. I argue that this is not just a short hand, but an effect of an incomplete fusion between the actor-network agenda and the developmentalist agenda.

On the one hand, the ANT framework is used to trace the logic of translation and epistemic formation across space and local contextualization across time. The economists and the actors engaged in economic policy debates derive much of their identity from their epistemic engagements, while other allegiances fade into the background. On the other hand, the developmentalist state framework is used to follow the logic of interest in which various elite class fractions are shaping state policies against other states and transnational capital. There is an expectation of agents as stable and coherent entities, which exists prior to the field of power in which they are placed. The state is not really engaged as a state system with multiple actors with contenting interests both at the elite level and at the popular level.

These two approaches come very handy, because they explain a very puzzling empirical reality. Cornel Ban shows convincingly, that economists turned into politicians in a blink of an eye, during the whole analyzed period. In the

last twenty five years, we witnessed overnight the transformation of neoliberal economists or of their neo-developmental counter-parts into high ranking political figures. When the neo-developmental agenda is failing, magically, the neoliberal academics are summoned to fix the economy, and vice-versa. Therefore, the ANT framework comes very handy in explaining why key economists from the Central Bank or think tanks are becoming key politicians. The developmentalist state framework is very useful in explaining why economists dedicated to a more embedded economy are transformed, almost as if in a Polanyian counter-movement, into alternative politicians. Nonetheless, both of these frameworks are not very useful in explaining how these economists are switched off and send back to their academic position or to heading their non-governmental organizations<sup>2</sup>. The implicit invitation that the empirical reality makes is to superpose the state with the economist agency. However, this is untenable theoretically. A possible solution, respectful both to the empirical material described by Cornel Ban and his theoretical insights, is to revisit the way interest and intentionality emerges for different actors and groups.

In the elite framework laid down by Eyal et al. (1998) the socialist managers seized power over the state enterprises in the 1990s and negotiated their control positions in the factories by mediating an ownership transfer from state to multinational companies. The fact that foreign direct investments were between 40-70% from GDP, along the 2000s, in the whole Central and Eastern Europe, is a reality that was predicted by the elite theory. In this theory, the managers, a fraction of the cultural bourgeoisie, did not have this meta-historical vantage point from where to calculate such a strategy. On the contrary, they followed their own interests. Unfortunately, a shortcoming of this analytical strategy, as mention above, is that it misplaces agency within the “doer” and it conflates class with subjectivity. The cultural bourgeoisie is the only bearer of interests. They have their interest spelled down in a strategy with a clear outcome. In addition, in an alliance of the managers with the socialist technocratic elites they were able to forge a hegemonic ideology with strong monetarist elements. From this theoretical vantage point, for an agent or a class to be consequential it has to have clear interests, to be fully formed as a group in order to act, or to have a common ideological stand. In this paradigm only the elite can become an agentic social strata or a class, leaving no room for other classes, for example the working class, to be constituted through their very unknowing acts or through their relations to other classes.

In Cornel Ban analysis the foreign direct investments seem to derive from a generic epistemic calculation done by the economists, apparently completely unrelated to ownership positions or organizational control issues. In this way

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<sup>2</sup> I owe these observations to Florin Faje.

agency is relegated to a generic bourgeois subjectivity formed in the transnational networks of academic debates over right policies. Such an analytical move resonates very much with ANT's claims. Certainly, ANT insists on the role of the objects as agents and tries to dissolve agency in the networks of interests, translations and mediations (Latour, 1993, 2005). Nonetheless, subjectivity is in many ways a privilege of someone who inscribes some meaning on an object/subject that circulates in a flat ontology across space and time. No room is left to mute emotions, unuttered sadness, uncoordinated irritation, fuzzy opposition, or just blunt rejection. Latency, splits, fractionalism, contractions, criticism, phantasms find with their ontology with great unease in an ANT scheme.

However, most probably the actors interested in formulating economic policies are themselves part of a greater network of interest that steam from the division of labour and the fights between capitalist fractions for reproducing capital accumulation. Their epistemic engagements come also from their own biographies inscribed in the local fields of power. Probably, they may be bearers of some class interests. In this way, probably, a better understanding comes from grasping how they are activated and deactivated in the political field as experts. Contextual political alliances, formed at the level of state institution, have the potential to be seen as instances of class struggles.

### **Conclusions**

Cornel Ban's book is an agenda setting contribution. Empirically dense, theoretical provoking. The above mention analytical tension lines – the link between classes and elites, the relations between elite fractions and the issue of interest/agency – are great openings to further the inquiry. They all constitute points for an exciting new research agenda with new theoretical tools. Cornel Ban's book is a very illuminating analysis of the way the economy was performed by various agents and the manner in which they composed the state in coherent and contradictory ways in the European periphery. All the chapters of this book are translated from English, being previously published independently. Many of the chapters are already well cited and have influenced contemporary research. Being brought together in Romanian language made only more visible the fruitfulness of the proposed approached to investigate the way the capitalist centre/periphery has been constituted in the last two centuries. This is a mandatory lecture for all Romanian speaking sociologists and heterodox economists.

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