

Radim Marada: The Culture of Protest and the Politicisation of Everyday Life

CDK Brno, 2003, 220 p.

Radim Marada's book *The Culture of Protest and the Politicisation of Everyday Life* is distinctly shaped by the author's long-lasting research in the area of history of sociology, sociology of civil society and last but not least in the area of sociology of knowledge. Due the remarkable use of his research Marada's book ranks among those with an influence that will transcend the subject area as well as time of publication.

The first part of the book *Political Experience in State Socialism* builds on experience of older readers in the former regime, when it had been difficult to express discontent. With this background, Marada abandons the usual understanding of the politicisation of everyday life as a personally experienced *dissatisfaction* with the way of governance and he approaches it as *a capability and ability* to articulate this dissatisfaction.

He tunes our attention towards the structural conditions and cultural prerequisites of this articulation. Marada tries to show the consequences lack of argumentative discussion about controversial issues had even after the fall of the former regime. He argues that the inability to discuss issues of conflict openly was caused not exclusively by the fear of persecution, but it was also a consequence of lacking patterns of argumentative discourse.

Focusing on the analysis of prerequisites and conditions, Marada turns away from the mainstream sociological concentration on states of mind. Throughout his work he uses a three-dimensional Bourdieu analysis, which integrates the examination of structural conditions, cultural prerequisites and acting itself. This multiplied perspective A makes it clear that we can speak about the modernising deficit of state socialism in Czechoslovakia before 1989 due the absence of a sphere of public representation of political conflicts.

In the second part *Modern State, Citizenship and Politicisation of Everyday Life : A Historical Perspective* Marada outlines the main features of historical process, which led to separation of economic sphere and to establishment of a relatively autonomous sphere of politics. He examines the consequences of this process for the expansion of experience of a private, formally independent identity and for the shaping of political attitudes or identities. Marada shows that a major consequence of an autonomous public sphere is the fact that we adopt political attitudes and identities to a certain extent independently of other social characteristics. Thus Marada offers a structural explanation for the weak correlations of social and political characteristics, long indicated by political orientation surveys, which are normally interpreted as a manifestation of an incompletely developed political culture. He develops a structural model of political identity and shows that the opportunity of shaping and articulating political identities is connected with institutionalisation of conflict in political and public spheres and the existence of a reservoir of generally comprehensible and available cultural assets or artefacts. At the same time author shows that the autonomy of political sphere is a fundamental prerequisite if individuals are to feel and act like relatively autonomous political actors and adopt political identity as an integral part of their self-perception and self-presentation. And if sociologists still sometimes consider mutual determination of status and lifestyle as a „normatively normal“ state, Marada shows that their firm binding is a restriction of freedom of choice and to a certain extent a cultural trap for social actors.

It is in this part of the book that Marada fully develops his complex approach which he himself calls „a structural analysis of Bourdieu's tradition“. He perceives identity as *sensitivity to stimuli* „Indication of political identity is ability and urge to interpret elements of own experience as politically relevant. It is a disposition to recognise impulses stemming from experience as part of the problem, which falls within or should fall within the agenda of political decision-making. This sensitivity works as a filter and identifies in our experience problems with which we cannot or do not want to cope merely individually as with our private matters, nor do we want to leave their solution to fate or God.“ (p. 74-75)

Marada's understanding of identity as sensitivity to impulses could in my opinion help contemporary research of identities. It certainly is a cure for analytical unilateralism – it enables to bind identity with an individual and simultaneously to analyse it in sociological or structural terms. It is responsive to social actors' experience and at the same time takes in regard the nature of available interpretative and discursive schemes which promote or restrict various types of political sensitivity.

Third part of the book *Identity of Protest: Political Sensitivity of Youth* offers the exposition of the process of establishment of protest culture as a relatively autonomous cultural form and a sphere of social interaction. Here, Marada describes the changing nature of protest culture in past decades. He shows that although modern radical protest movements continue to use symbols of youth, they are no longer expression of a conflict between generations. The culture of protest is ever more clearly detaching from youth in biological sense. This historical shift is closely linked with a certain weakening of the generation conflict, which in the past used to be the socially psychological basis and an integral part of revolts. According to Marada, these developments entitle us to understand and describe protest behaviour as one of (optional) ways of social integration and adaptation.

In this chapter attention is paid particularly to the protest culture. Marada convincingly demonstrates that it is possible to graft Simmel's concept of cultural forms as well as Luhmann's theory of social systems on a Bourdieu stem. He offers a brilliant analysis of organisational forms of protest communication and shows just how much

attention is in terms of protest movements being paid to the boundaries of authentic protest, and how it contributes to the articulation of social identities of the individual actors. He draws our attention to the substantive difference between protest as a cultural form or a communication carrier and the institutional-organisational base of protest movements and evaluates potential collisions between manifestations of protest mentality and a strategic instrumentalisation of organised activities.

Political sensitivity of middle class and its relation to protest movements, is one of the book's key topics. Marada virtuously sets this issue in perspective of intertwined social experience of middle classes and organisational and symbolical forms of their political self-representation. If we accept that cultural representations shape our experience and relationships and help us to find motivation for acting, then we can – together with Marada and drawing on Bourdieu – acknowledge that, in modern society, the process of social stratification takes place predominantly in the sphere of social-cultural interpretations: as a process of ~~mutual~~ classification the subjects of which are social actors themselves. In this perspective, the middle class is a self-definition and not a research product. Marada shows that this conscious – and self-reflecting world of middle classes becomes a privileged battlefield, where political conflicts are being formed and enforced as political contest or public debate agenda. Expansion of new social and protest movements form an integral part of this process. Main conflicting parties (supporters of the “establishment” as well as its critics) find their mobilising basis mostly in the middle class mentality. Movements do not enter the political arena merely as bearers of demands from political representation, their objective is also democratisation of everyday life. Their aim is to revise the classical liberal policy of equal rights by adding to it policy of differentiation (the right to be recognised in one's unique identity). This way, Marada reasons that the line of conflict in modern societies resembles more a separation of alternative and disharmonious worlds (to simplify – the different ethos of yuppies and hippies) than a direct subordination of social groups.

An additional merit of this chapter is the fact that it successfully casts doubts upon simplified media debate on protest movements.

Logical reasoning of the book is completed in its fourth part *Culture of Protest and Political Sensitivity of Middle Classes*. It is dedicated to the transformation of middle classes and to the paradoxical simultaneous establishment as well as disappearance of civil society. Here, Marada proves that in the world of work new middle classes are represented by symbolical analysts – professionals, who in one way or another earn their living with interpretation of social experience and that the significance of these professions is connected with the individualism of new middle classes. This individualism becomes apparent through the great significance the ability to have and to present one's own opinion has for members of the middle classes. Culture of protest is also confirmed, or documented, through choice of job: “certain sector of the job market gets under the influence of a gravity field defined by its relationship with the governing economic-political system and the ethos this system represents with respect to protest“. (p. 193) This means that middle classes can become polarised also in the world of work and for devoted representatives of protest their choice of job becomes an indicator of the authenticity of protest as a politically relevant attitude. In other words, choice of job “may become the realisation of the politics of identity par excellence“. (p. 194)

We can now analyse culture of protest as a stable form which has become a generally employable cultural asset. This means that it is no longer owned by some specific social group which could determine the authenticity of its practical employment. This in turn results in the impossibility to derive authenticity of protest from social characteristics of its actors – it becomes necessary to derive it from mastering the cultural form itself. At this stage Marada warns that the growing autonomy of culture of protest can take on the form of a cultural trap. The concept “cultural trap” denotes here those situations or constellations, in which the freedom of choice of one's activities in life is restricted due to their political markedness. Considering the range of autonomy of choice – that is the only direct value assessment used by Marada in his work.

Marada remarkably draws on the ideas of Simmel, Luhmann and Bourdieu as well as other sociological classical writers. He integrates structural analysis, the approach of cultural forms and the perspective of social practice. He avoids the language of social psychology except for cases in which actors themselves use it to organise their experience. Such is the case with the notion of identity which demonstrates more than we would expect thanks to being cast in a structural perspective.

Marada's book is a comprehensive study about the transformations of power, social conflict and self-understanding of citizens as political actors. He has provided us with a model of sociology able to describe the development and structural classification of perspectives of supporters and adversaries of social protests. However, he has managed this without expressively telling us how to use this knowledge and what stance to adopt on historical facts. Marada shows that risks stem from lack of elections, but also excessive autonomy and independence. He warns that questions of priorities can only have social answers. This acknowledgment and stress on socially unbiased sociology makes Marada a model example for many.

I assume that some sociologists will see Marada's book as some kind of homecoming. It proved the advantages of complex structural analysis, which can further be enriched by various refined analyses (for example those of

interpretational schemes, discourse representations), which by themselves represent somewhat weak contribution to our knowledge. He reminds us that the ability to work with broad historical material was always been a prerequisite of good sociology and that only this ability lets the virtues of sociology shine through. In short, if until now practical experience has proved Mills's words that sociological discoveries happen through transfers or loans from other disciplines, Marada's book by contrast demonstrates the richness of legacy and great opportunities provided by our own discipline.

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