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# Bounded generalizations revisited: is the post-communist area a world apart?

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**Abstract:** Since 2000, research has confirmed the main premise of Valerie Bunce (Bunce, 2000) that post-communist countries do not simply follow universal trends. They may also offer bounded tendencies. These latter trends equally apply to the key features and stages of political transitions and to elements of political systems, such as the levels of social capital and the dynamics of new radical right parties. In this paper, I will first summarize the current research since Bunce's work from the point of view of the division between big and bounded generalizations. Second, I will discuss the findings through the lenses of the paradigmatic debate within political science. Finally, I will offer an interpretative understanding of the big and bounded generalizations as a result of the authors' cultural background.

**Key words:** Post-Communism, political transition, Valerie Bunce

## Introduction

Working on the final touches of a project that links post-communist democratization with EU integration, I came across a few studies (Popova, 2010; Popova, 2012; Valkov, 2009) which had something in common, despite their diversity in terms of theoretical approach and subject matter. They showed the post-communist world as a region where big generalizations, generalizations conceived to apply to any geographic area, did not work well

when tested on former communist nations in Central and Eastern Europe or in the former Soviet Union. In fact, these authors claimed that these nations presented a different picture, where common features should be seen as regional, at the best, instead of global. I immediately connected these studies to Bunce seminal work on big and bounded generalizations in the post-communist context. According to the author, the post-communist democratic transition confirms some expectations established within the framework of transitology studies – or the big generalizations. Transitology studies are built upon empirical data gathered and analyzed from political democratization in Southern Europe in the 1970s and in Latin America in the 1980s. On the one hand, for Bunce, the big generalizations are the high levels of economic development in guaranteeing democratic sustainability, the centrality of political elites in establishing and terminating democracy, and deficits in the rule of law and state capacity as the primary challenge to the quality and survival of new democracies. On the other hand, the bounded generalizations are the relationship between democratization and economic reform and the costs-benefits ratio of democratic consolidation breaking quickly versus slowly with the authoritarian past.

The big and bounded generalizations, however, are not absolute but relative terms; sometimes big represents just a larger version of bounded generalization, without global claims. For example, Bunce names big generalizations those that simultaneously apply to democratization in Latin America, Southern Europe and the post-communist countries; she does not claim that these big generalizations must apply to other regions and to other historic contexts, e.g. the post World War I period in Central Europe. Therefore, I always use the big and bounded generalizations in their relative meaning.

The studies I recently came across confirmed only the bounded generalizations thesis. I was puzzled as to what such trend could mean regarding the Bunce's general argument. Could this diminish the relative weight of the big generalizations, as the post-communist countries were moving away from the initial breaking point with communism? Is there any specific circle of subject matter where such trend is particularly concentrated? Can we still oppose big and bounded generalizations as far as the post-communist world is concerned or is this world already part of a larger normality? The last of these questions had particular importance. If my first impressions were wrong and bounded generalizations represented only marginal studies within the literature, then the post-communist world, at least large parts of it, could

safely be taken outside area studies and put within the amorphous body of general comparative studies.

I will answer these and other questions that come up in the process of a study based on evidence from articles published in the peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal 'Communist and Post-communist studies' after 2002.

The reason to choose this starting point in time is to make sure that the authors are, at least theoretically, familiar with Bunce's arguments published in 2000. The selection of articles follows few criteria. Based on information included in their abstracts, I use only those articles that treat the former communist nations of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, eliminating studies of current communist countries, such as China. In addition, I eliminate all those studies, which could not be included in political science broadly speaking. I also eliminate from the final selection all idiographic studies or studies without elements of comparison as well as all studies that focus on case narratives instead of analytical generalizations. Thus, finally, from more than 300 articles published after 2002, I narrowed my sample down to 23 articles.

Regarding organization, this article begins with a brief outline of each text from the sample based on the arguments presented by their authors. In this section, I outline the main goal of each article as well as its relationship to the existing body of literature. Next, I position each of these articles on the scale when one extreme shows big generalizations, and another extreme shows bounded generalizations, following Bunce taxonomy. After presenting the persisting dichotomy between big and bounded generalizations, I try to make sense of it by applying alternative explanatory epistemological approaches: positivist, instrumentalist and cultural. Next, I launch a hypothesis that correlates the presence and persistence of the big-bounded generalizations dichotomy to different cultural archetypes, more precisely to religious backgrounds that influences researchers in one or another direction. I test and confirm this hypothesis on the sample of 23 articles. Finally, I present interpretative suggestions as to the reasons researchers make arguments consistent with big or bounded generalizations, suggestions extracted mainly from semi-directive interviews taken during disciplinary and interdisciplinary conferences.

## Evidence sample

In this section, I briefly present all articles from the sample in chronological order of their publishing, providing main objectives and theoretical or model engagements that put them in relation, in harmony or in collision, to existing literature. The main elements of this narrative are included in the first two columns of table 1.

Agh (2002) investigates the contradictions facing social-democratic parties in Central and Eastern Europe. He claims that unlike the West European social-democratic parties that have experienced with various versions of “Third Way” policies, their East European homologues have had to overcome economic deficit through creating huge social deficit. Pollack (2002) tries to explain the social and political upheaval in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) by using a theoretical model worked out by Pierre Bourdieu. The author claims that by applying this approach on the systems change in the GDR it is not only possible to determine the structural and functional conditions of the upheaval, but also to describe the concrete historical processes of how the upheaval took place. Nikolenyi (2003) provides a solution for theoretical puzzles created after the formation of minority government in the Czech Republic after the elections of 1998. He claims that neither theories of coalition formation nor those of minority government formation provide an accurate prediction for this outcome. Instead, he bases his analysis on game theory. Aligica (2003) discusses the conceptual model behind the widespread belief that in post-communist societies, once the democratic and market institutions are introduced, the emerging values engendered by those very institutions will create the conditions for the consolidation and reproduction of democracy and a market economy. The author claims that the direct relationship between institutional structures, institutional learning and emerging values in this historic context is difficult to establish and substantiate. Wiatr (2003) illustrates the importance of reformist leadership in post-communist democratization, thus siding together with those authors who emphasize its conceptual importance. He makes his demonstration on the basis of empirical studies made in Poland since 1966. Marks (2004) examines the social composition of the communist party in the Soviet Union and in four East European countries during the post-war period

in light of two alternative explanations for joining the communist party: the classical political participation model and the party policy model. He finds much stronger support for the political participation model. Thorson (2004) analyzes why politicians create an independent judicial institution with the authority to overrule their own decisions. The author claims, based on empirical evidence from post-communist Russia, that political actors establish a constitutional court to enhance their democratic credibility. Buttrick and Moran (2005) argue that there is a spurious correlation between social capital and economic development in the regions of post-communist Russia. This argument rejects Putnam's hypothesis that social capital is the ubiquitous cause of economic growth. Rather, the data presented indicates that individualistic behavior in the form of entrepreneurship has been the prerequisite for growth in post-communist Russia. Ganev (2005) answers the question why did the infrastructure of governance deteriorate considerably immediately after the collapse of the old regimes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union? He claim that the process of democratization represents, contrary to Charles Tilly's hypothesis of state formation, a process of weakening, not strengthening the state. Hug (2005) suggests that the political effects of referendums should vary according to the institutional provisions that allow for direct involvement of citizens in decision-making. The paper demonstrates effects of different institutional provisions on policy outcomes, which, so far, have only been demonstrated at the sub-national level, for example, in the United States and Switzerland. Kubicek (2005) examines the extent of European Union involvement in Ukraine and its results. As authoritarianism in this country became more pronounced in the early 2000s, the EU began to disengage from the country. The article argues that part of the problem was that the EU never applied political conditionality to Ukraine as it had with other states. Thames (2005) studies legislative behavior in post-communist Ukraine in relation to party affiliation and the role it plays in legislator voting decisions. The author claims that the evidence from Ukraine confirms the existence of party effects, previously established on the case of the United States; the author, however, also claims that the ability of a party to affect deputies does not depend on the strength of the party label as it does in the US case. Bunce and Wolchik (2006) analyze a number of elections in post-communist regimes, perched between democracy and dictatorship, between 1995 and 2005 that have led to the triumph of liberal oppositions over illiberal incumbents. The authors test this evidence with international diffusion as an explanatory multivariable model. They claim that despite the evidence, the cross-national diffusion of the electoral model in this region may

have run its course, largely because of less supportive local and international conditions. Luhiste (2006) seeks to identify variables that explain trust in political institutions. The author tests different theories of institutional trust with individual-level survey data from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Building on prior research, two competitive theories, both the cultural and performance explanations are identified and tested. The results show that both cultural and performance variables influence citizens' trust in political institutions. Shulman (2006) tests the assertion that ethnic and regional cultural heterogeneity is a source of conflict and alienation in a state with respect to ethnic and regional differences in Ukraine. The results of this analysis suggest that subjective cultural differences in this country do not substantially undermine national identity, but they do weaken national unity. Kuzio (2008) builds on Ishiyama's (1998) seminal study of Communist successor parties by providing a comparative study of the fate of Communist successor parties in Eurasia and Central-Eastern Europe. Kuzio outlines four paths undertaken by Communist parties in former Communist states: those countries that rapidly transformed Communist parties into center-left parties; countries that were slower at achieving this; countries with imperial legacies; and Eurasian autocracies. Petrovic (2008) analyzes the reasons for the division of post-communist Eastern Europe on better performing countries from Central Europe and the Baltic region and laggards from the Balkans. While not denying the relevance and structural impacts of some historical and geopolitical facts concerning the establishment of these differences, the author argues that there is a limited explanatory value to structural arguments of the role of initial conditions in assessing the reasons for the slower progress of the Balkan states in post-communist reform. Tworzecki (2008) focuses on the case of Poland to examine the phenomenon of widespread popular disengagement from civic and political life by testing the relative explanatory power of cultural and institutional hypotheses. The former sees disengagement as the consequence of values and patterns of behavior that are in some ways incompatible with pluralist politics, whereas the latter sees disengagement as the result of a mismatch between the realm of politically relevant individual interests and identities on the one hand, and the realm of available institutions of state-society intermediation on the other. Aidukaite (2009) reviews theoretical and empirical literature written on welfare state development in post-communist Eastern Europe in the light of the theories and approaches that have been developed to study affluent capitalist democracies. The author states that the exclusion of former communist countries for more than twenty years from welfare state theorizing has created an empirical and theoretical

gap. Therefore, it is necessary not only to test already existing welfare state theories, definitions, typologies and approaches on these countries, but also to advance them. Koinova (2009) states that contrary to the predominant understanding in the literature that diasporas act in exclusively nationalist ways, they do engage with the democratization of their home countries. Drawing evidence from the activities of the Ukrainian, Serbian, Albanian and Armenian diasporas after the end of communism, the author argues that diasporas filter international pressure to democratize post-communist societies by utilizing democratic procedures to advance unresolved nationalist goals. Valkov (2009) challenges the hypothesis that there is cohabitation of civic engagement and democratic institutions and practices. For him, while valid at a general level, the relationship is not confirmed once it is scrutinized thoroughly and heterogeneous categories are disaggregated. For the European post-communist cases, the pattern of the relationship between the regime type and the propensity to associate closely resembles the one in Latin mature democracies and non-authoritarian countries, provided that voluntary associations are chosen as measurements of vitality of social capital and robustness of civil society. Ganev (2011) builds upon insights derived from the literature on fiscal sociology and from Joseph Schumpeter's analysis of modern tax states, to outline a new approach to the study of various phenomena related to revenue-collection in post-communism. Having identified important gaps in the understanding of the transformative processes that engulfed the region after 1989, the paper introduces a more comprehensive research program focused on the context-specific challenges inherent in the attempt to re-establish tax states in the formerly communist countries. Rybar (2011) shows that the dominant theory of European integration, liberal intergovernmentalism, contains several assumptions about the process and character of national preference formation that may not be fully met in the post-communist EU member states. The author argues that the primacy of economic and societal interests in influencing positions of national governments should not be taken for granted. Using Slovakia as an example, he demonstrates the autonomy of political and bureaucratic actors and importance of their preferences. He also argues that ideational and exogenous factors should not be left out in constructing a realistic framework of national preference formation.

## **Taking sides on the big-bounded generalization scale**

The articles presented in the previous section make simple taxonomy big-bounded generalization a rather tricky enterprise. Unlike the works that Bunce (2005) quotes to illustrate her argument, the literature after 2002 is focused not only on general issues, such as causes for post-communist democratization; it is also interested in more specific issues, such as party affiliation, welfare development or relations between institutional arrangements and referendum results. Even if the big question of factors leading toward different political regimes is still present the more recent studies, when they confront it, they try to zoom deeper inside the big picture, to the elements that were overlooked in the 1990s when Bunce (2005) accumulated her empirical evidence. Despite this more nuance approach, it is still possible to put the more recent research on the scale between big and bounded generalizations.

To properly categorize different articles from the sample, I take as a key criterion the authors' intentions. For example, an author that states his or her intentions to show how post-communist patterns support a particular general theory or model will be classified within the group of big generalizations; correspondingly, authors that state intentions to show how post-communist patterns, applying to many countries, differ from some universal general patterns will be classified within the group of bounded generalizations. Therefore, I am not focusing on the question of whether the author's findings really match their intentions. I am not making a police investigation as to whether their findings warrant their initial general statements. At this point I accept their claims at their face value, without critical evaluation. This categorization can also be found in the third column of Table 1.

The findings suggest that one group of studies falls openly within the big generalizations argument. According to this argument, general laws of causality apply equally well to post-communist countries in particular. These general laws are established by studying material evidence from regions and countries outside the post-communist context, but when tested on post-communist cases, these theories or models are largely confirmed, although sometimes with qualifications. This group includes the studies of Pollack (2002), who considers the system's change in the GDR as following the logic of the theoretical model worked out by Pierre Bourdieu; Wiatr, who illustrates the

importance of reformist leadership paradigm with the evidence from the post-communist democratization in Poland; Nikolenyi, who explains the formation of minority government with arguments borrowed from the game theory model; Marks, who explains the social composition of communist parties with the political participation model; Thorson, who analyzes the creation of independent judicial institutions with the game theory model of enhancing democratic credibility; Hug, who claims that political effects of referendums follow general patterns established through studies in the United States and Switzerland; Kubicek, who examines the extent of EU involvement in Ukraine and its results within the theoretical framework of EU conditionality; Thames, who studies legislative behavior in post-communist context and confirms the existence of party effects previously established on the case of the United States; Luhiste, who seeks to confirm that two competitive theories, the cultural and performance explanation, both explain trust in political institutions; Shulman, who separates different elements within tested models, some of which confirm theoretical predictions; Kuzio, who builds on Ishiyama's seminal study of Communist successor parties in order to provide a comparative study of the fate of Communist successor parties in Eurasia and Central-Eastern Europe; Tworzecki, who focuses on the case of Poland to examine the phenomenon of widespread popular disengagement from civic and political life by confirming the explanatory power of both cultural and institutional hypotheses; and Aidukaite, who explains welfare state development in post-communist Eastern Europe by using theories and approaches that have been developed to study affluent capitalist democracies.

Another group of studies supports the bounded generalization paradigm. They all agree that some patterns in the post-communist context contradict the universality patterns established by studying different regions and different historic contexts. This group includes Agh, who claims that unlike the West European social-democratic parties that have experienced various versions of the "Third Way" policies, their East European homologues had to overcome economic deficit through creating huge social deficit; Aligica, who claims that in the post-communist context the direct relationship between institutional structures, institutional learning and emerging values is difficult to establish and substantiate; Buttrick and Moran, who argue that there is a spurious correlation between social capital and economic development, an argument maintained by Putnam, in the regions of post-communist Russia; Ganey, who claims that the process of democratization in the post-communist context represents, contrary to Charles Tilly's hypothesis of state

formation, a process of weakening, not strengthening the state; Bunce and Wolchik, who claim that the cross-national diffusion of the electoral model in the post-communist region may have run its course, largely because of less supportive local and international conditions; Petrovic, who argues that there is a limited explanatory value to structural arguments of the role of initial conditions in assessing the reasons for the slower progress of the Balkan states in post-communist reform; Koinova, who states, contrary to the predominant understanding in the literature, that diasporas act in exclusively nationalist ways in fact do engage with the democratization of their home countries; Valkov, who challenges the hypothesis, inspired by Putnam's studies on social capital, that there is cohabitation of civic engagement and democratic institutions and practices; Ganev who introduces a more comprehensive research program focused on the context-specific challenges inherent in the attempt to re-establish tax states in the formerly communist countries; and Rybar, who claims that the dominant theory of European integration, liberal intergovernmentalism, contains several assumptions about the process and character of national preference formation that may not be met in the post-communist EU member states.

## **Explaining divergence**

The next step in this study is to answer the persisting dichotomy between big and bounded generalizations in post-communist political studies by applying different epistemological approaches: positivist, instrumentalist and cultural.

Within the positivist vision of the social world, a vision inspired from natural sciences, in which the knowledge streams both naturally and logically from the reality itself, the question "why the post-communist research falls into two groups, big and bounded generalizations" may at first sight appear unnecessary. According to this vision, inherited from the works of August Comte (1970) and Emile Durkheim (1895/1938), the main objective of social science is to search for general objective laws akin to the laws in natural sciences such as physics, chemistry or biology. The role of researchers within this quest for knowledge is to observe and report objective data and, as far as possible, to detach themselves from the studied reality in order not to bring in their own subjective prejudices. Therefore, any difference in findings

would reflect above all the differences in observed social reality. In other words, a study that confirms bounded generalizations would have faithfully reported an existing bounded generalization, e.g. the relatively low level of social trust (Valkov, 2009). There is, however, an internal contradiction between the positivist approach and the reported persistent dichotomy of big and bounded generalizations. This contradiction flows from the fact that positivism is concerned not with bounded, but with big generalizations only. Bounded generalization, the core of the area studies argument, within this epistemological approach, makes sense no more than claiming the presence of a completely different set of physical laws for one part of the universe. Bounded generalizations, therefore, create tensions that need to be solved in findings with new, even bigger, generalizations that encompass the deviant cases. Persistence over time of bounded generalizations, therefore, is a problem that cannot be explained within the positivist paradigm.

An alternative, the instrumentalist approach, may provide some clues to the presence and persistence of the big-bounded generalization dichotomy and to the persistence of bounded generalization. According to this approach, inspired by the works of Max Weber (1904), the central piece of any social research is not the objective reality but the subject of the researcher. It is him or her who conceives research questions, chooses general methodology and applies particular research techniques. His or her intentions are strongly correlated to research findings, which is a different matter from that of producing false research based on individual prejudices. Objectivity in science, to follow Weber's argument, is not absolute, but only a particular relation between arbitrary chosen methodology and logically following findings. Within this approach, the intention behind making bounded generalizations claims is indistinguishable from the will to prove the *raison d'être* of areas studies as far as the post-communist countries are concerned. A hypothesis within this approach may be presented, according to which it would be interesting to promote research within the post-communist world that triggers the thrust toward producing bounded generalizations studies. Researchers with vested interests from and toward this region, for example Ganev, Petrovic, Koinova and Valkov, due to their upbringing and strong emotional ties, would be tempted to focus more on particularities instead of general trends that would make this region indistinguishable from the rest of Europe. To the contrary, researchers with western upbringing, for example Hug, Kubicek and Thames, would tend to insist on big generalizations and discredit the basis of areas studies as far as the post-communist world is concerned. To make this hypothesis even

simpler, bounded generalizations could be expected only within the circle of researchers that come from post-communist countries. Given the sample of articles, is this hypothesis confirmed or rejected? It is only partly confirmed (see table 1, 5th column). Researchers from outside the post-communist world, mainly from Western Europe or North America, are overwhelmingly, although not unanimously, trying to place their research within the big generalization paradigm, although some of them, e.g. Thames, succeed in this enterprise only at the cost of reformulation of big generalizations in order to embrace the post-communist experience, exactly as the positivist epistemological paradigm requires. Within the group of researchers from post-communist countries there is no such statistical trend; the group is divided into two camps on the issue of choosing big generalizations, e.g. Pollack, versus bounded generalizations, e.g. Ganey. The instrumentalist approach and its hypothesis that tries to account for the choice of big versus bounded generalization on the author's upbringing, is not sufficient to explain the presence and persistence of this dichotomy.

Here comes to light another, cultural approach to the research question. It is different from both positivism and instrumentalism. It does not consider research as an activity that only mechanically follows its object; neither does it consider the object of enquiry as something only arbitrarily constructed by the researcher following his or her particular interests. To be sure, these considerations are never completely disregarded, but they are not at the center of cultural explanation. What is important here, building on the long tradition from Dilthey (1957) to Geertz (1973), is the subjective understanding of the meaning, in this case, the meaning that concerns the presence and persistence of two different trajectories within social research on post-communist countries. Subjective here does not mean arbitrary; it takes into account the subject and the object of research as an interrelated system, and researchers as individual platforms of different social discourses. Back to our research question, big and bounded generalizations within hermeneutics are different socially embedded cultural approaches that make sense of post-communist reality either by putting it within big or within bounded generalizations. Hermeneutics is a research approach particularly friendly in order to study differences and particularities.

Inspired by the cultural approach regarding my research question. I posit that it is a particular cultural background that finally makes researchers framing their results either as part of big or bounded generalizations. More

specifically, it is the culture of Eastern Orthodox Christianity that maintains the spirit of bounded generalizations while it is the spirit of Western Christianity, both Catholicism and Protestantism, that fights for establishing big generalizations. Speaking of religious background does not presuppose some presence of explicit and practical religiosity and even less looks to religious norms and dogmas as paramount to a framework of what is allowed or not allowed to be studied and to be reported. By religious background here I mean the presence of intersubjective archetypical values within a particular society that affect its subcultures, including the scientific community. To provide examples of past research on the correlation between strictly religious views and strictly secular matters, I do not need to go further than to mention Max Weber's analysis on the protestant ethic that sees the accumulation of capitals as God's blessing, a vision quite different from traditional catholic moral, putting the sign of equation between wealth and sin.

Of course, Max Weber is not alone in seeing religion as an ethic and a practical guide for meaningful secular social activity. Major figures of twentieth century social sciences, such as Horkheimer, Marcuse, Habermas (Mendieta, 2005) and Foucault (1999) have frequently discussed the key role of religious ideas as constitutive rather than purely reflective in important aspects of social behavior.

Back to my question, within this explanation where the emphasis is put on religious background, it would be quite normal for example to present different catholic and protestant approaches in producing scientific truth. I must here give credit to Bélanger (1997) for making me think in these categories. My hypothesis, however, is not about the differences between catholic and protestant science; my goal is to frame the Eastern Christian Orthodox approach and to put it in relation to the big-bounded generalizations issue. I must also give credit to Kristen Ghodsee (2011), who during her presentation made the conceptual link between the Eastern Orthodoxy and the bounded version of human rights, rights limited to a particular nation-state community without universal appeal.

How has Eastern Orthodoxy created a unique way of seeing social reality in terms of bounded generalizations? The Eastern Church that split from the West after the great schism of 1054 had no original intentions to make such bounded claims of dogmatic validity. In fact, the schism originated when Pope Leo IX denied the Patriarch in Constantinople the ecumenical title and asked in turn to be acknowledged as head of all Christian churches that were part of the

Pentarchy (Five Churches – Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem). It was only in relation to the Pope's claim of universal jurisdiction over all religious matters within Christianity that a special doctrine of limited jurisdiction within each Orthodox Church, autocephaly, was given its present weight. Autocephaly means that a person does not need to report to any superior religious authority in each Eastern Orthodox Church; each church therefore is sovereign but limited, to use Anderson's definition of modern national community as both limited and sovereign (Anderson, 1991). At the same time, each Eastern Orthodox Church is part of a commonwealth of Churches with equal status, which share a common vision on religious matters. This fact is important while investigating the phenomenon of bounded generalizations in current social and political research. The Eastern Orthodox cultural approach is at the same time one that denies big generalizations, generalizations that apply to all peoples, but accepts transnational bounded generalizations, generalizations that fall short of universal application.

### **Analyzing findings**

If my hypothesis is true, if the big-bounded generalization divide is due to a cultural heritage of divided Christianity and if bounded generalization as a way of thinking, in particular, is due to the cultural influence of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, then the researcher who has been more deeply embedded within societies with dominant Eastern Orthodox Christianity should more likely express the trend toward making bounded generalization claims. The evidence I use to test this hypothesis is again the sample of articles after 2002 in the periodical 'Communist and Post-communist Studies'.

Let me present the group of authors making claims consistent with bounded generalizations. It includes the following authors in alphabetical order: Agh, Aligica, Buttrick and Moran, Ganev, Bunce and Wolchik, Petrovic, Koinova, Valkov, Ganev, and Rybar. I have enough biographical data to analyze some of these authors: Attila Agh, who is Professor at the Department of Political Science at the Corvinus University of Budapest; Paul Dragos Aligica, who works at the National School for Political Science and Public Administration, Bucharest and the Hudson Institute; Venelin Ganev, who is Professor at the Department of Political Science at the Miami University in Ohio with a university degree from Sofia University; Milenko Petrovic, who is

Researcher at the National Centre for Research on Europe in New Zealand with university studies in Belgrade; Maria Koinova, who is working at Dartmouth College, Dickey Center for International Understanding and reports Bulgaria as her native language; Nikolay Valkov, who graduated from the University of Montreal and reports Bulgaria as his native language; and Marek Rybar, who works at the Department of Political Science at the Comenius University, Bratislava. From these seven researchers, five – Aligica, Ganev, Petrovic, Koinova and Valkov, were born and raised in three Balkan countries where Eastern Orthodoxy is traditionally the dominant religion – Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia. None of them currently work in this region although it remains their primary research focus. The other two researchers from this group – Agh and Rybar, are researchers that were born, studied and now work in their native countries – Hungary and Slovakia.

All of these researchers, seeing the post-communist world as a field of bounded generalization, could have reached very different results if they had decided to use different theoretical and/or methodological lenses. For example, Valkov challenges the hypothesis that there is cohabitation of civic engagement and democratic institutions and practices. For him, while valid at a general level, the relationship is not confirmed once it is scrutinized thoroughly and heterogeneous categories are disaggregated. He claims, for example, that for the European post-communist cases, the pattern of the relationship between the regime type and the propensity to associate, closely resembles the one in Latin mature democracies and non-authoritarian countries, provided that voluntary associations are chosen as measurements of the vitality of social capital and robustness of civil society. Theoretically, Valkov remains strongly embedded within Putnam's (2000) unequivocally positive approach on causality between high social capital and political regime type. Methodologically, he uses Putnam's measurements, membership in voluntary associations, to provide statistical values to social capital. If Valkov had decided to follow another more nuance approach on social capital and its consequences, for example, that of Portes (1998), or that of Bourdieu (1977), his main conclusions would be quite different. The negative elements of social capital in an elite group within a class society would have made Valkov reconsider his claims about post-communist exceptionalism or would have given him reasons to link such exceptionalism with positive political development, even more positive even than in advanced western societies. Although there is no doubt that the Valkov's results, and for that matter, the results of all other authors within the sample, reflect his theoretical and methodological choices,

the research question here is not about this link but about the reasons why he makes choices that ultimately affect his findings.

On a statistical level, it seems that there is a strong correlation between the fact that some social researchers are influenced by an Eastern Orthodox mentality and the results of their studies (see table 1, 6th column). Being embedded within such mentality, however, if we use the cultural epistemological approach, requires cultural links of some significance. In other words, people should give certain practical meaning to their acts. The paradox here is that most social researchers are not religious zealots, they are quite the opposite, and even for this reason only, the meaning of transmitting an Eastern Orthodox mentality within the field of social research cannot be interpretatively explained with the intention to make such transmission. There must be another cultural meaning of seeing the post-communist world as separate from big universal generalizations; another meaning of making such bounded generalizations. There must be an alternative, not religious but rather, purely secular way for the Eastern Orthodox mentality to influence the social research findings.

### **The reasons behind different types of generalizations**

In the following section I present interpretative suggestions as to the reasons researchers make big or bounded generalizations, suggestions extracted from semi-directive interviews and presentations during a few disciplinary conferences of the Canadian Political Science Association between 2011 and 2015 and during an interdisciplinary conference focusing on the Balkan regions history and on its recent development (Ohio State University, *Beyond Mosque, Church, and State: Negotiating Religious and Ethno-National Identities in the Balkans*. October 6-8, 2011). Out of respect for the confidentiality of the informants, I do not reveal their names. I may, however, not hide their preferences, if any, as far as the big-bounded generalization choice is concerned.

The answers concerning the interpretation of the big-bounded generalization dichotomy reflect the rainbow of epistemological possibilities, some of which were already discussed in the previous sections. There are a few possible answers to the research question:

1. A researcher from the United States who was born and grew up in the Balkans looked at the question from a purely instrumental point of view. According to him, whether an emphasis should be given to confirmation of big theories or to areas studies depends on governmental subsidies. He says: "During the late Cold War the priority was given to study the communist countries as areas studies, as exceptions to the general rules... Since the early 1990s, the trend has been reversed... After the mid-1990s, once again the emphasis was put on bounded generalizations". According to this view, a researcher who wants to be funded and have better chances to be published should pay attention to the shifting institutional environment in a purely instrumental way.

2. Two researchers from the Balkan countries working in the United States, who make big generalizations regarding the Balkan post-communist countries, declare wanting to normalize this region by integrating it within big theoretical frameworks. One of them says: "We want to normalize Balkan history". Another adds: "I belong to the camp that wants to normalize history". Here, by normality, they understand putting the development of the post-communist countries within the continental general historic framework. In other words, by making research that emphasizes on big generalizations they want to show that the Balkan national identities are in fact part of larger European identities.

3. Two different researchers from the Balkan countries, working in the United States, who make bounded generalizations regarding the Balkan post-communist countries, declare wanting to show these societies as exceptions within the general flow of European history. While I investigate the interpretative reasons for this position, they first point out the objective features of this region that make it so different from the rest of Europe. (Let me remind the reader here that this is not a sustainable position from a positivist point of view; exceptionality within the positivist paradigm creates tension that can be overcome only by establishing higher levels of big generalizations, not by escaping toward bounded generalizations.) When I dig deeper, one of them points out the region's unique Ottoman heritage and the other Soviet domination during the Cold War; both informants speak about link of causality between these historic facts and the specific regional development of modern nationalism. In other words, these researchers explain their bounded generalization preference with the specific regional national identity of which they are a part. For them, this makes the entire region distinct from the rest of Europe.

The researchers quoted above are bringing in possible cultural interpretative explanations for the reason why an Eastern Orthodox mentality can influence current social research by stimulating the creation and persistence of bounded generalization studies. The causal mechanism includes the sentiment of national belonging, a concept that is not religious, strictly speaking, but which is embedded within a particular cultural environment, the same environment that becomes possible as a result of a religious mentality. Researchers from Orthodox post-communist countries are facing a big identity dilemma: to accept their national exceptionality as part of the religious cultural package or to try to overcome this exceptionality by putting it within much larger social normality, within big generalizations. Although it is not clear so far whether the result of this dilemma is rather purely automatic or voluntary, it is already clear that this result decisively affects the research agenda, pushing the researchers toward big or bounded generalizations.

There is already a vast literature on the link between Eastern Orthodox Christianity and the development of national mentality in the countries where this form of religion is dominant. Some authors (Arnakis, 1963) go as far as to suggest that Eastern Orthodox Christianity is the key element in the development of Balkan nationalism as a result of the synthesis between ethnicity and religiosity during the Ottoman period. They point out this factor in not only explaining regional differences from the rest of Europe, but also in explaining the lack of progress in understanding these differences from universal western point of view. Other authors (Bozeva-Abazi, 2007) suggest that the causal factor between Eastern Orthodoxy and modern nationalism should be put within the context of new modern state building. According to this argument, it is the purposeful effort of these new states, by using the Orthodox Church as a known and popular cultural matrix, to shape nationalism in its present form. No matter which of these two alternative explanations we take, they both point to the same conclusion; the specific form of nationalism in the countries with predominant Orthodox Christianity is directly related to the cultural matrix of bounded generalizations that go hand-in-hand with this form of Christianity. Therefore, the current cultural attraction toward bounded generalizations within the social science community in these countries, despite its purely nationalistic interpretation, is in fact a direct descendant of the specific Orthodox religious mentality.

## **Conclusion**

The research question asking why the political science literature on post-communist development shows the presence and persistence of a dichotomy between big and bounded generalizations seems to have found some tentative answers. As it turns out, they are far from the simple positivist and instrumentalist vision of social science as a purely reflective or as a purely voluntary activity. On the one hand, the researchers are not simply following the subject matter; on the other hand, they are not simply imposing their categories on amorphous subject matter. These traditional explanations may play some role in explaining the arguments of some authors, but they are far from satisfactory in explaining the general phenomenon and the persisting presence of bounded generalizations. The cultural approach provides a far more powerful explanation. The social researchers are part of cultural communities that share common understandings. These understandings are products of centuries of religious mentalities that affect the way they see the world and themselves. The only possible way to overcome their bounded set of national identities is to embrace a new vision of nationhood, one that is part of universal human development. Without this intermediate step, they may never cross the line that separates them from Western-inspired temptation, based on alternative religious models, to build universal scientific generalizations.

<b>Author and date of publishing</b>	<b>Main focus of publications</b>	<b>Big - bounded dichotomy</b>	<b>Authors' upbringing (western or post-communist)</b>	<b>Correlation between authors' claims and their upbringing</b>	<b>Correlation between authors' claims and religious background</b>
1.Agh (2002)	Showing contradictions facing social-democratic parties in Central and Eastern Europe.	Bounded	PC	Positive	Positive
2.Pollack (2002)	Explaining the social and political upheaval in the former German Democratic Republic.	Big	PC	Negative	Positive
3.Nikolenyi (2003)	Solving theoretical puzzles created after the formation of minority government in the Czech Republic.	Big	No data available	No data available	No data available
4.Aligica (2003)	Discussing conditions for the consolidation and reproduction of democracy and market economy.	Bounded	PC	Positive	Positive
5.Wiatr (2003)	Illustrating the importance of reformist leadership in post-communist democratization.	Big	PC	Negative	Positive
6.Marks (2004)	Evaluating alternative models explaining membership in communist parties.	Big	West	Positive	Positive
7.Thorson (2004)	Explaining why politicians create an independent judicial institution.	Big	West	Positive	Positive
8.Buttrick and Moran (2005)	Discussing correlation between social capital and economic development in Russia.	Bounded	West, West	Negative	Negative

Author and date of publishing	Main focus of publications	Big - bounded dichotomy	Authors' upbringing (western or post-communist)	Correlation between authors' claims and their upbringing	Correlation between authors' claims and religious background
9.Ganev (2005)	Explaining deterioration of state infrastructure after the collapse of communism.	Bounded	PC	Positive	Positive
10.Hug (2005)	Explaining political effects of referendums with the institutional provisions for direct involvement of citizens.	Big	West	Positive	Positive
11.Kubicek (2005)	Explaining political democratization with the extent of EU involvement.	Big	West	Positive	Positive
12.Thames (2005)	Showing legislative behavior in Ukraine in relation to party affiliation.	Big	West	Positive	Positive
13.Bunce and Wolchik (2006)	Testing the hypothesis of international diffusion of democracy.	Bounded	West, West	Negative	Negative
14.Luhiste (2006)	Evaluating alternative explanations for the trust in political institutions.	Big	PC	Negative	Positive
15.Shulman (2006)	Testing the assertion that ethnic and regional heterogeneity is a source of conflict in a state.	Big	West	Positive	Positive
16.Kuzio (2008)	Explaining different paths undertaken by Communist parties in post-communist states.	Big	No data available	No data available	No data available

<b>Author and date of publishing</b>	<b>Main focus of publications</b>	<b>Big - bounded dichotomy</b>	<b>Authors' upbringing (western or post-communist)</b>	<b>Correlation between authors' claims and their upbringing</b>	<b>Correlation between authors' claims and religious background</b>
17.Petrovic (2008)	Explaining the reasons for political diversity in post-communist Eastern Europe.	Bounded	PC	Positive	Positive
18.Tworzecki (2008)	Explaining the phenomenon of popular disengagement from civic and political life.	Big	West	Positive	Positive
19.Aidukaite (2009)	Reviewing literature on welfare state development in post-communist Eastern Europe.	Big	No data available	No data available	No data available
20.Koinova (2009)	Discussing the role of diasporas in post-communist democratization.	Bounded	PC	Positive	Positive
21.Valkov (2009)	Challenging the hypothesis of cohabitation of civic engagement and democratic institutions.	Bounded	PC	Positive	Positive
22.Ganev (2011)	Presenting new approach to the study of revenue-collection in post-communist states.	Bounded	PC	Positive	Positive
23.Rybar (2011)	Challenging the theory of liberal intergovernmentalism in the post-communist context.	Bounded	PC	Positive	Negative

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