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# Eszter Bartha and Attila Bartha · New Perspectives on Post-socialist Labour, Discursive Governance and Roma Politics

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This issue of *Intersections: East European Journal of Society and Politics (IEEJSP)* covers three sections of articles, research notes, interviews and book reviews. In the first section our authors portray some major trends in the recent history of labour in Eastern Europe from a genuine semi-peripheral perspective. The articles of the second section discuss two salient issues of present-day East European politics: the mechanisms through which populism is shaping governance and the impacts of non-fulfilment of electoral pledges on representative democracies. The third section continues the debate about spatial exclusion and marginality that was the main topic of the previous issue of IEEJSP. The articles in this issue, however, focus on the political mechanisms beyond the Roma marginalisation in local communities: the invisibility of Roma political participation, the political economy impacts on ghettoization and the political strategy of moral panic in shaping Roma segregation.

## ***Towards a new labour history: Eastern European perspectives The ‘working class’ under state socialism***

Labour history writing in Eastern Europe has been suffering from an ideological bias both before and after the change of regimes. During the era of state socialism, labour histories had to be in line with the legitimating discourse of the ruling Communist regimes across the region. According to this discourse, the Party ruled in the name of an allegedly homogeneous working class with a revolutionary consciousness, whose century-long struggle against capital was won with the leadership of the Party (the ‘vanguard’). Scholars, whose work contradicted this legitimating discourse, risked their academic careers.

A famous example is the show trial against Miklós Haraszti, who wrote a sociology of factory work, in which he argued that workers are exploited to the same extent under socialism as under capitalism; moreover, they are conscious of their exploitation (Haraszti 1978). Since they do not consider the factory as theirs, they use all kinds of small tricks to cheat the proprietor, the State, and its local representatives (factory management, trade union leaders, foremen). They refuse to

follow labour protection regulations, they falsify work-sheets, they cheat with the calculation of norms (they are 'looting') they feel alienated and lonely in the brigades, they misappropriate materials and use machines for their own purposes (such workers are called 'homers', who are portrayed as thieves in the satirical journals) and they do not consider the misappropriation of state property as stealing. At the subsequent show trial sociologists, in fact, argued that they heard even sharper opinions of interviewed workers, so workers' discontent was by no means unknown to the regime. Workers' social and political opinions ('the conditions of the working class') were, in fact, carefully monitored, and strictly confidential reports were sent to the centre and the top functionaries about the political mood of working-class districts. Nevertheless, as the show trial shows, the open admission that 'real' workers behaved differently from the socialist ideal, tested even the relatively liberal Kádár regime's tolerance.

Thanks to this relative liberalism, however, in Hungarian sociology there were three major scholarly directions, which started the revision of the 'classical' legitimating discourse. The first grew out of ethnographic research on labour and the most famous representative is István Kemény. Kemény investigated various working-class groups in different industries and living places. During his ethnographic study he compared their origin, family circumstances, training, education, the nature of their work (how monotonous it is, what physical effort it requires and whether a special knowledge is needed to perform the given task), their financial and living conditions. Based on his fieldwork data he gave a more differentiated analysis of working-class consciousness than what was propagated by the official ideology. The fieldwork of Kemény showed that the industrial working class was not homogeneous either in its social composition nor in its culture, and stratification manifests itself even in the division of labour: immigrant workers, who are usually less qualified than their native urban counterparts, occupy lower ranks in the production hierarchy and specialists, who often come from old working-class dynasties, monopolize the posts of functionaries, foremen and other key positions in production (Kemény 1990).

The most famous member of the second school, which focused on social stratification, was Zsuzsa Ferge (Ferge 1976). Her research showed that school continues to reproduce social inequalities in socialist Hungary - in fact, with the dispossession of people cultural capital became the most important form of capital that parents could pass on to their children. Thus, the children of working-class parents received worse grades in school than those of employees and intellectuals. The stratification surveys of the 1960s refuted that social and material inequalities cease to exist under state socialism, and thus, it became clear that the theory of two-class-one stratum (working class, peasantry, intellectuals) was infeasible.

The third direction was that of industrial sociology and it mainly relied on surveys and participant observation. Lajos Héthy and Csaba Makó conducted research on the impact of technical development on working-class consciousness in the Rába factory (Héthy and Makó 1975). However, the survey also contained questions about the workers' trust in enterprise democracy, the trade union, and even in the Party itself. It is perhaps not surprising that workers were less satisfied with the trade union than with the Party, nor did they hold enterprise democracy to be a participatory one. They thought in fact that they did not have much say in enterprise

decisions. But the majority likewise argued that they could not even influence their immediate environment: only one third of the respondents thought that the management was interested in the proposals and innovations of the workers and less than one third agreed with the statement that the enterprise took an interest in the welfare of the employees. Makó and Héthy (1978) also demonstrated that workers, who occupied core positions, could successfully bargain with the management over the wages and the fulfilment of the plan.

Following the lead of these schools (mainly that of industrial sociology) Michael Burawoy conducted fieldwork in the Lenin Steel Works in Hungary. From his comparative studies in capitalist and postcolonialist countries he concluded that the despotism of early capitalism was replaced by hegemonic despotism, where workers gave concessions to capital to preserve their factories and workplace. His Hungarian fieldwork experience led him to the conclusion that the socialist factory regimes also developed into hegemonic despotism but at that time he was optimistic about the prospect of socialist workers' establishing self-governing, self-managing regimes after they got rid of the tutelage of the Party (Burawoy and Lukács 1992).

### *Rediscovery of the working class*

While both Eastern and Western leftists shared Burawoy's opinion at the time, the collapse of state socialism did not verify left-wing hopes for a 'tertium datur' in the Lukácsian sense (neither Stalinism nor capitalism). There was only sporadic working-class resistance to the restoration of capitalism and full-scale privatisation. In spite of this, socialist workers were seen by many economists as 'lazy' or 'unfit to work' in a competitive environment, and their association with the fallen regime nourished a further bias against the re-discovery of labour histories – after they had been liberated from the tutelage of the Party.

The collapse of state socialism widely discredited legitimizing narratives of the old Communist parties, which were based on a simplistic equation of class, class consciousness and political action and organisation (Welskopp 1993). Anthropologists studying workers in Central and Eastern Europe, indeed, argued that the workers became the new subaltern class (Kideckel 2002; 2008; Buchowski 2001; Kalb 2009; Kalb and Halmai 2011). While sub-alternity was used by Rudolph Bahro (1977) to explain workers' location at the bottom of a knowledge-based division of labour in socialism,<sup>1</sup> the transformation of socialist political economies to a market economy have deepened the subalternization of labour according to this stream of authors. Kideckel, for instance, argues: 'The dominant trends, however, have been to sanctify individualized ownership at the expense of social equity, to pursue inappropriate loan policies, and to facilitate a corrupt bargain between owning and political classes at the expense of labor. Industrial workers have fallen to near the bottom of the economic and social scale, there is still no effective middle class, and class boundaries are further solidified' (Kideckel, 2002, 115).

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<sup>1</sup> See also Konrád and Szelényi (1979).

This new political bias hindered the recognition that labour histories can be written from various angles and that in the Western literature there was a call for writing a new labour history, which has also been referred to as global labour history (Van der Linden 2007). The call for a new labour history seeks to re-orient traditional labour history-writing, which focused on large-scale social movements, strikes and party histories, and also in the West towards a widening use of social historical and anthropological methods to study different working-class milieus, cultural contexts, gender relations and everyday working-class life. There is also a re-orientation towards the global South and the inclusion of non-free workers (in contrast with the focus of the old labour histories on the white, male wage-earners, who are seen as members of the 'traditional' working classes).

In Eastern Europe, there have been recent attempts to re-discover the working classes in the postsocialist era (see Ost 2005; Kalb and Halmai 2011; Kideckel 2008; Trappmann 2013), and there is an increasing interest in the new labour history among young researchers. The investigation of the social milieus of working classes and the recognition that there have been various working-class groups has been an important part of new labour history, which has strong connections to social history (from the German literature see, for instance Vester et al. eds. 2001). In Hungary, Tibor Valuch is the most prominent representative of this new approach.

Another, 'Eastern European' specific field is the recollection of state socialism in working-class memory. While workers were often uncritically associated with the state socialist past, the memories of state socialism are far more controversial (see e.g. Bartha 2014; Bittner 1998; Rudd 2000). The memory of state socialism, however, remains to be a contested field of contemporary politics and ideology.<sup>2</sup> Dominic Boyer (2006) argues that in East Germany several journalists told him that speaking critically of unified German society was something they were loath to do because such criticism was immediately taken by their Western colleagues as a lack of commitment to democracy and as a yearning for a return of the GDR. To illustrate the point of the essentially different *rights* of talking of the future and the totality of a society, he cites a journalist, who complained that while it was natural for West Germans to ask their 'Ossi' counterparts, how they could have lived under such a totalitarian regime, they would not understand the reverse question: how could one live in a society, where so many people are unemployed or threatened with unemployment (Boyer 2006, 374) or where – as in the case of Hungary – sociologists showed the existence of a large underclass?<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g. the insightful introduction of Maria Todorova (2010).

<sup>3</sup> Ladányi (2012) argues that one-fifth of the population of the country lives in segregation and he concludes with the argument that since the collapse of state socialism, *deprivations have been multiplied*: 'Geographical segregation, the segregation of the poor, and primarily that of the Roma population sharply increased after the change of regimes. If one looks at the maps of where the unemployed, the uneducated and the Romas are concentrated, these maps are easily interchangeable. The relationship is so strong among the processes of segregation that they show the same tendencies. In the North-eastern, Eastern and Southern, South-western regions of the country there is a concentration of small poor, and multiply disadvantaged settlements (*törpefalu* or *aprófalu*), where there is a very high concentration of the excluded and multiply disadvantaged Roma population' (Ladányi 2012, 175).

Of course, workers *en bloc* cannot be seen as part of the precariat even though many of them undoubtedly belong to the losers of the change of regimes. Ferge (2010) argues that the working class constitutes a separate category within the social structure – but mention must be made of the fact that the ‘working class’ is highly segmented with a fragmented group consciousness (if it exists at all) so it is more appropriate to speak of working classes. Szalai (2004) argues that a dual model is needed to describe contemporary Hungarian society in which she distinguishes between the workers of the multinational companies and the workers of the domestic sector. The latter are described as poorly paid, badly exploited ‘*bricoleurs*’, who are often informally employed and they live from one day to the next while the former are better paid, have better working conditions and enjoy a higher degree of job security than the *bricoleurs*. At the same time, Szalai stresses the differentiated character of the Hungarian working class and the weakness of the local trade unions, which account for the weak (or non-existent) class consciousness. The specification of the model is rendered difficult by the lack of empirical research which Erzsébet Szalai strongly advocated. Other Hungarian sociologists also recognised that the specific working-class perspective was missing from the literature, for instance Ágnes Losonczi (2005) urged for new oral history projects, which would analyse the impact of the change of regimes on workers without the old and new political distortions, separating collective memory from ideology and counter-ideology.

We should also take into consideration that in Eastern Europe de-industrialisation (the decline of heavy industries, mining, textile industry) was paralleled with processes of re-industrialisation in certain regions, mainly driven by global capital. Therefore it is fully justified to speak of the highly fragmented structure of the ex-socialist working class, and we should also stress that workers in different industries and companies have access to labour interest representation to a very varying degree. That said, it is not to deny that a significant part of the ex-socialist ‘working class’ became self-employed or unemployed: Ferge (2010) estimates that one million jobs were lost in Hungary as a result of economic re-structuring while according to the calculation of Mark Pittaway, there were 23% fewer jobs in Hungary in 2008 than in 1989 (Pittaway 2011).

The present issue seeks to explore new research and theory on Eastern European labour, which attempt to answer the call for the re-orientation of old labour history and at the same time remain open to a critical engagement with the social and material inequalities developed by global capitalism. Burawoy observed that the new capitalist labour organisation increases the exploitation and dependence of labour already in the mid-1980s: what kind of wage dispute can be successful in the advanced Western countries when the management threatens to transfer production to cheaper countries (where there is no strong working-class movement and resistance)? In Eastern Europe the picture is mixed because of the parallel processes of the decline of the old socialist industries and re-industrialisation as observed above; nevertheless, labour interest representation remains weak and concentrated on multinational companies, which adopt the German model of enterprise councils and trade unions.

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*Critical perspectives on Eastern European labour: this issue of IEEJSP*

For this special issue, we interviewed Marcel van der Linden, who is one of the chief representatives of global labour history. In the interview he shows how this history developed out of traditional working-class history and how the category of worker (which mainly meant white, male wage-earner) was extended to include other major groups of labourers in the non-European parts of the world. He also gives interesting examples for how this Euro-centrism of old labour history was challenged and how important it is to include non-free workers and women workers in the analysis. It is worth stressing that reproductive work also counts as an integral part of the analysis since ‘caring’ (housework, raising of children, etc.) is central to the maintenance of the life of the wage-earner. The well-known labour historian also speaks of the global processes, which render (most) labour relations inflexible, incalculable and often informal – both in the global North and in the global South. This is paralleled with the weakening of trade unions in the global North and the difficulties of the establishment of labour representation in the global South. As a result, people turn for defence to religious fundamentalist and right-wing populist movements. He also shares with us his thoughts on the Western left-wing criticism of state socialism and contemporary Russia. Marcel van der Linden also discusses the (possible) relationship between political activism and labour history writing. The interview provides a nice framework to this special section, which attempts to bring together papers that address the Eastern European ‘specificity’ (between the global North and global South as Marcel van der Linden also formulated), while they aspire to contribute to the new labour history.

Sonja Dragović sets out to analyse new Eastern European labour initiatives through the example of the case study of a Croatian textile factory, Kamensko, which was closed down and left workers unpaid for seven months. The author carefully documents the process through which the workers of the factory trained themselves to be activists and set up *Kamensko Opened*, the first non-governmental organisation in Croatia founded and led by industrial workers. Other NGOs and civic organisations also supported the workers’ struggle. Sonja Dragović’s article shows how ‘global capital moves around in search of the cheap, skilled labour that is closer to home than the sweatshops of Asia, keeping the largely exploitative textile industry in Eastern Europe alive’. It also demonstrates the overall weakness of labour interest representation in the region as well as the essential deficiency or lack of labour legislation, which would effectively defend workers’ rights against capital. Sonja Dragović’ research explores the mechanisms through which workers gain empowerment under the difficult conditions of neoliberal capitalism (and she also focuses on the gender dimension since many interviewed workers are women!) and succeed to obtain – with the help of the NGOs – the support of a wider community. Given the sporadic working-class resistance to the neoliberal project in Eastern Europe, it is very important to document existing initiatives for a scholarly audience. The argument that the factory was set up for bankruptcy in order to be torn down and its land used for the new real-estate development brought the support of the local community for the workers. The case sadly depicts, how defenceless workers are in the new regime, who rather choose to

work even without pay than to be unemployed. Sonja Dragović cites Bohle and Greskovits, who relate 'Croatia's weak state capacity' to the 'combined effect of an unbalanced nationalism, war and its aftermath, and the semiauthoritarian nature of the Tudjman regime that undermined an originally capable state' (2012, 194). From a comparative perspective, however, it can be said that workers had no say in the outcome of privatisation in countries such as Poland (Ost 2005; Trappmann 2013) or Hungary (Nagy 2012). It is a very far-reaching topic how the original self-managing ideas were replaced by the neoliberal recipes across the region<sup>4</sup>; nevertheless, the outcome is the strengthening of the support of far-right-wing, populist parties with an overtly nationalistic, anti-globalist programme (Ost 2005; Kalb and Halmai 2011; Feischmidt and Hervik 2015). It is all the more important to analyse cases when working-class resistance manifests itself in new labour initiatives; further, it is capable of attracting wider social support.

Ádám Mayer's paper continues a tradition, which has been started in the second thematic issue of *Intersections. East European Society and Politics*: it is critically engaged with the Eastern European specificity of knowledge production and self-understanding. He starts from the assumption that Eastern European social sciences have been developing self-defeating and self-orientalising tendencies since at least the change of regimes (see also Tlostanova 2015; Petrovici 2015). Therefore, he suggests a theoretical parallel with African social thought, arguing that it can offer illuminating insights into the history of global marginalisation. Mayer shows with the example of Nigerian Marxism, how rich critical thinking can develop as a response to the experience of peripherization and he gives some theoretical examples how to fight against Euro-centrism and neo-colonialism, which 'stratify' modern social thought. In the global hierarchy of knowledge production Eastern Europe does indeed occupy a lower rank - it is enough to think of the list of leading universities or academically ranked journals. Further, the regional academies also suffer from self-orientalism; and here we can also cite - alongside Marcel van der Linden - Dipesh Chakrabarty, who argues that the reference point for many Indian historians continues to be the West. The outcome is often a list of what 'have not' yet happened events in India (in comparison with Western Europe and North America). Eastern European scholars often encounter the same problem. By recognising the creative *potential* of African social thought to revitalise Eastern European social sciences, we already made a step forward to fight Western cultural hegemony.

The research note by Attila Gulyás reviews the literature on how to measure subjective well-being (SWB), an important part of which is work satisfaction. Attila Gulyás reflects on the fact that the nature of work has changed dramatically as a result of technological development as more and more people are doing routine white-collar work. Their satisfaction with the job may be influenced by several factors - but it seems safe to argue that money alone cannot explain work satisfaction. It was observed that SWB did not increase in proportion with economic wealth - this later became known as the Easterlin Paradox. SWB was developed as a concept to indicate that happiness was not a mere 'sum' of economic indicators but it also includes the

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<sup>4</sup> In Hungary, the journal *Eszmélet* (Consciousness) seeks to preserve the most consistently the intellectual heritage of self-management and the concept of *tertium datur*.

everyday positive and negative effects people experience in various domains of their lives (this adds the ‘subjective’ element). Gulyás then goes on to introduce some current international surveys that may be used for SWB related research and describes the applied methodology. He critically notes, however, that the methodology was developed for Western European countries, and it may be important to investigate the impact of the between-country differences on the validity of the measures. There are numerous points where asking about satisfaction and happiness in different countries may lead to significantly different opinions when controlling for other factors. Two important factors are the wording of the survey questions and the approach to happiness in the given culture. As for Hungary, the data show a steady, very slowly descending SWB value, which didn’t change significantly until the 2008 crisis and the 2010 elections (after which it reached its negative peak). When taking into account data on happiness, the author concludes that in Hungary the collapse of state socialism had the strongest effect on SWB among the recent major events in the country’s history.

The last few decades brought a change in the work itself as the ‘traditional’ working classes are increasingly replaced by routine white-collar wage-earners – at least in the advanced capitalist countries. In these circumstances it is obvious that the attitude to work, the expectations of work and how work influences people’s well-being is also changing, which renders SWB a relevant and fruitful subject of research.

The coming of the neoliberal era brought about fundamental changes in the social composition and bargaining power of wage-earners. Eastern Europe experienced these changes somewhat belatedly as Communist regimes artificially maintained ‘traditional’ working classes and universal employment to avoid social protests. The collapse of state socialism removed former barriers to neoliberal transformation: old industries were severely reduced; however, de-industrialisation was paralleled with processes of re-industrialisation, mainly driven by global capital. Eastern Europe thus occupies an ‘in-between’ position in relation to the global North and the global South. The papers of our thematic bloc aspire to bring some examples of new labour initiatives and critical social thought in the region, which facilitate a productive dialogue with global labour history.

### ***Discursive governance, populism and pledge fulfilment***

In the field of Eastern European politics, a major issue often associated with the persistent disappointment with well-being prospects of the people is the rise of populism. Concerning Western Europe, Cas Mudde wrote about the emergence of a populist *Zeitgeist* in a seminal article already more than a decade ago (Mudde 2004). In this context, Peter Mair pointed to a division of labour between the mainstream West-European parties that typically govern ‘but are no longer seen to represent’ (Mair 2011, 14) and the parties of protest populism that seem to better fulfil the representation, but tend to adopt a populist political attitude and are typically in opposition. The thesis of inadequate fulfilment of the representation function of national party systems is, however, even more valid in the case of Eastern Europe



where the weaker institutionalisation of the party systems makes the new democracies of the region more susceptible to the rise of populist challenges (Kriesi 2014). This process has been paving the way for the rise of a new ‘centrist populism’ (Učeň 2007) and in several countries of Eastern Europe populist parties came into power thus they are governing, dominating the policy agenda as well as the style of political communication.

### *Populism in Hungary and making sense of pledge fulfilment: this issue of IEEJSP*

Hungary represents a typical case of populist democracies (Pappas 2014). The article by Zoltán Ádám and András Bozóki in this section of IEEJSP explores the *faces of Hungarian populism in government position*. The authors argue that the populist idea of governance intends to reconcile the anti-elitist and anti-institutional perspective of popular participation with limiting the public contest for power. According to Ádám and Bozóki a peculiar feature of this Hungarian populism is the politicized understanding of Christianity that also provides legitimacy for charismatic leadership.

The specific features of Eastern European new democracies have probably fertilized the research agenda presented by Miklós Sebők. The conceptual framework of Sebők’s article interprets *mandate fulfilment in the context of normative theory of representation*. The study has a particular focus on pledge fulfilment and the author argues that non-fulfilment of electoral pledges is not necessarily bad for democratic representation. An empirical novelty of this article is the operationalisation of good and bad forms of mandate slippage and Sebők provides ample evidence about the *conditional compatibility of non-fulfilment of pledges with representation*.

From a broader theoretical perspective the logic of discursive governance is shaping the instruments of populist politics and often the effectiveness of discursive governance decides the viability of mandate slippage. Interpreting the varieties of discursive governance is embedded into the social constructivist tradition in the chapters of the *Discursive Governance in Politics, Policy and the Public Sphere* volume edited by Umut Korkut, Kesi Mahendran, Gregg Buckan-Knapp, and Robert Henry Cox; this volume is reviewed by Gábor Illés. The articles explore the discursive mechanisms through which political parties and major policy actors are successful or fail to achieve particular policy goals and the readers are also informed about the patterns of perception of the targeted recipients of these discourses, the wider public. The empirical analyses cover a large variety of policy fields and European regions (including Eastern and Southern European Union member states as well).

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### *Political mechanisms beyond the Roma marginalisation in local communities*

Spatial exclusion and marginality was the main topic of the previous issue of *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*. Our authors discussed the different faces of spatial and social peripheral inclusion of the marginalised Roma through labour market, housing and urban policies as well as local development policies. The articles of this issue, however, explore the implicit political mechanisms beyond the Roma marginalisation in local communities.

Júlia Szalai investigates the apparent *Roma policy puzzle*. While in the past decade the issue has become largely thematised and national as well as European inter-governmental Roma policy strategies were developed, marginalisation of the Roma has nevertheless rather increased in education, work and the daily conditions of living, and the tendencies of exclusion of the Roma have become stronger in a wide range of local communities. Szalai argues that the *invisibility of Roma political participation* may be a major factor in the reproduction of deprivation and exclusion of the Roma.

Enikő Vincze and Florina Pop portray the process of ghettoization of the Roma in two settlements (Bufa and Poligon) in Aiud, a small town in Romania. The authors argue that recurring *discretionary use of power has deprived individuals of their human rights and often pushed them into instances of bare life*. Local housing policies include forced evictions, the reluctance to legally recognise informal housing and to provide local resources for the improvement of housing conditions. In addition, Vincze and Pop pinpoint that the development of welfare dependency discourse and subsequent exclusionary local policies against the Roma has been legitimised by the neoliberal shift in social policies.

Ioana Vrabiescu explores *citizenship rights limitation of the Roma under metropolitan governance in Barcelona and Bucharest*. The article interprets the process of denial of the right to the city in the context of a moral panic political strategy. Vrabiescu presents how urban governance enacts moral panic against the Roma and implies practices of evictions and voluntary returns as forms of spatial cleansing. Scapegoating of the Roma preserves the social conflict, and at the same time alleviates the political responsibility to secure social provisions for vulnerable groups. The author demonstrates that local authorities of Barcelona and Bucharest not only force the mobility of the Roma, but also blames this vulnerable ethnic group for their alleged failed integration.

### *Failing Europe?*

The three sections are followed by a review of a thought-provoking volume edited by Jody Jensen and Ferenc Miszlivetz about the interdisciplinary perspectives on the state of European integration and the challenges that face the common European project (*Reframing Europe's Future. Challenges and Failures of the European Construction*) by Gábor Kardos. The book offers a critical discussion about the impacts of the financial crisis, the economic strategies of the possible way-out, as well as of what

constitutes 'Europe'. The main thesis of the book is that Europe remains a widely contested terrain, both intellectually and practically. Indeed, the articles of this issue of *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics* seek to contribute to global thinking from the perspective of being European without being Euro-centric.

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