

## Introduction

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The world has been shaped profoundly by changes in Eastern Europe. The Cold War began, in part, around the Soviet Union's takeover of Eastern Europe after World War II. Announcements about a "new world order" were inspired by communism's end in Eastern Europe. American scholarship has also been importantly shaped by East European changes. This collection aims to shape that scholarship by reframing the discussion around communism's end in 1989, moving it away from the imagery of collapse toward one of negotiation in producing radical change.

Of course, Eastern Europe already occupies an important place in American scholarship. Comparative sociology, my own field, developed an important dynamic around the contrast between capitalist and socialist systems with Eastern Europe, especially Poland, prominently portrayed in the latter. The collapse of communism also inspired a new wave of scholarship about how markets and democracy are made. In this latter case, this scholarship is clearly implicated in a larger project of intervention. Sometimes the scholarship is designed to help designers of economy and polity develop more effective strategies for implementing change; sometimes it is designed to critique those plans already undertaken. In the former case, the political impulse was a bit removed, but it was also there. Typically, these comparisons of systems were designed to point up the superiority or inferiority of one or the other system. Those politics, however, were more distant than in much sociology today. For my East European colleagues, good scholarship often required distancing communist politics, or risking dissident or opposition status. For my Western colleagues in that period, extended collaboration with East European colleagues seemed to require a disposition of comparatively apolitical objectivity.

Like many of my Western colleagues who studied Eastern Europe before the collapse of communism, I was drawn to the region by a wish to move beyond "either/or" comparisons. I wanted to develop a more critical sociology that took, as its point of departure, Eastern Europe. The formation of the Solidarity movement in 1980-81 in Poland was therefore, one might say, a godsend. Here one had a proletarian movement struggling for social justice, democracy and freedom, but against communist

rule. The Solidarity movement, and its intellectuals, not only helped to lay the groundwork for viewing communism as a mutable system, but they also transformed scholarship in the West. Solidarity, and the other smaller East European movements that developed in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and elsewhere, helped to bring civil society back to our analytical and political vision.

This framework of civil society fit very nicely with many existing analytical frameworks. On the one hand, theories of social movements could use it and could help it. After all, movements were one important expression of civil society, but civil society also was an important precondition for the development of social movements. The second economy was also understood as an element of civil society, demonstrating the entrepreneurialism and resolve of many East Europeans in developing life apart from state dependencies, so it was said. Anthropologists, economists and others were vitally important, too, in explaining how social relations and the state enabled this second economy to develop. Literary scholarship and media studies also attended to the development of an underground or independent public sphere, itself helping to articulate that vision of civil society. Western scholars helped to translate, and interpret, that underground sphere's most eloquent spokespersons.

This civil society work was very comfortable analytically and politically. It allowed Western scholars and public intellectuals to identify with certain elements of East European societies without risk, and to identify the problems or constraints in other levels. Communist rule was rarely, if ever, posed neutrally, much less positively, in these depictions of civil society. While the protest movements, underground entrepreneurs and dissident intellectuals may not have always been presented unambiguously as heroes, they were rarely critiqued and held accountable for their actions. While this civil society framework existed beyond its East European expressions, in its general embrace of pluralism, legality and publicity, its politics was clear. It was civil society against the communist state. The Round Table Negotiations of 1989 were, however, something very different. And perhaps, for that reason, they have received scant attention.

Scholarship has many motivations, but one of its most powerful drivers is the burning political question. Once communism was gone, or as it was being buried, the most important analytical issues were to get proper rules for the development of private property and electoral competition in place. Focusing on the means by which communists were removed from power hardly seemed important. But this relative lack of attention, especially in the West, reflects more than urgency. It reflects a messy politics.

Poland was first to develop this roundtable-negotiated end to communism. Although imitated, it was quickly surpassed. Each subsequent negotiation – in Hungary, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, and to some extent Bulgaria – took less time and communists retained fewer negotiated privileges in the new system.

Instead of Poland becoming the isolated trailblazer of reform, Poland's political accomplishment, measured in terms of communist weakening, became shameful for many in the Polish opposition. The Round Table, rather than a brilliant political move, was a deal with the devil. Unlike civil society, whose heroes and villains were apparent, the Round Table complicated judgments and split anti-communist forces in Poland, and their friends abroad.

Perhaps that was why I was taken slightly aback when my colleagues Brian Porter and Marysia Ostafin first posed the idea that we develop an entire conference around the Polish Round Table. Normally our annual Copernicus lectures featured relatively uncomplicated heroes of scholarship or politics, much like civil society could focus on the good of society against the evil of the communist state. This would be complicated because we couldn't simply present the Round Table from a single point of view given that it was, after all, a compromise. And that would mean bringing former communists to Michigan.

Of course there was precedent. Janusz Reykowski, one of the most important negotiators for the communists, was a prominent social psychologist and a longtime associate of the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. Indeed, he had visited Michigan in 1989 to discuss these negotiations. I remember being struck at that time how important his microsocial expertise was in helping to produce the most macroscopic of social changes. In the nearly ten years that had taken place, however, there was relatively little scholarship undertaken to explain how these negotiations took place. There was especially little that tried to link the narratives of the participants in making radical change with the contingencies of the transformation itself.

While we specialists in Polish culture, history and society could thus justify our interest in the subject, we had to think much more ambitiously about this conference. We already anticipated that commemorations of the tenth anniversary of communism's collapse would become commonplace. Also, why should the Polish Round Table deserve more interest than the fall of the Berlin Wall? The latter image, after all, fits much better with the narrative of collapse than a picture of people talking around a large table.

In the rush to build a new society on the ruins of communism, the imagery of collapse fit very well those who would design, or impose, institutions anew. With communists vanquished, questions of how their exit was made seemed best relegated to the historians, once sufficient time could intervene to allow neutral portraits to be painted. However, as more time intervened, it became clear that communist rule produced a pattern of social relations that made the communist-ruled past an integral part of understanding a capitalist and democratic future. Although that made analytical sense, it still left a powerful political distaste for many, especially when communists could be perceived to have profited from their own exit. The Round Table, it has been said, was a deal that privileged its attendees. There was, however, another way to see

this Round Table, but it required stepping outside the stream of popular Polish history into a world of contingency and comparison. It required thinking about the Round Table as an instance of peaceful, but radical, change.

When we think about radical change, we normally think about violence. Sometimes the very definition of revolution includes violence as a necessary element. This is one reason many commentators at the time sought out new words to describe the radical changes of 1989. Peaceful change across the region, with Romania the exception that proved the rule, soon became one of the distinctive features of “revolution.” Although an element of description, it was rarely elaborated, or explained, especially around the Round Table.

For some of the negotiators at the Round Table, violence was a possibility they sought to avoid. Indeed, the struggle to avoid violence could be read as a leitmotif of recollection, but rarely a major theme of analysis. Once violence becomes a possibility in the narrative of communism’s collapse, however, its relationship to other features of social transformation becomes critical. And manifold.

We have approached this question of peace and violence in 1989 with a clear recognition that the implications of negotiated but radical change require a variety of scholarly approaches, with grounding in different world regions, to realize its larger analytical potential. Of course, we draw on those who are already associated with Polish studies – a historian, a political scientist, and a sociologist – posing questions about this “peaceful but negotiated change” in light of disciplinary discussions with clear resonance in Poland. We also bring those with principal scholarly grounding in other sites – in the USA, Armenia, Hungary and South Africa – to develop scholarly accounts around conflict resolution, memory, and political and global change with animating questions derived from broader comparative visions.

This collection, therefore, draws on those past comparative ambitions of American scholarship I mentioned earlier, figuring how changes in other parts of the world are similar to, and different from, changes in Poland. But these comparisons are also different from that earlier tradition that contrasted socialist and capitalist systems. These comparisons are not so easily predicated on notions of alternative systems, or even categorically distinct societies. Instead, we find change in Poland, Hungary, Armenia and South Africa implicated in a larger transformation of the world. They also are influenced by each other. In addition, we find important resonance with microprocesses of conflict resolution across various sites of social change. Although we need to attend to comparisons across instances of world historic change, important lessons can be extended from, and to, these dramatic moments by those who think about how conflict resolution works in comparatively mundane settings.

We also find, in this collection, a much more complicated relationship between scholarship and politics. Although Max Weber was himself one of the principal exponents of value-neutral scholarship, he was also quite well aware that the *questions*

animating social and historical scholarship can never be divorced from civilizational concerns in the context shaping inquiry. This is especially clear in this collection, where each of the authors struggles not only to explain how the Round Table articulates with various bodies of scholarship, but also how the questions posed might reframe the normative grounding of academic work in relation to politics, history and social change. A great deal of scholarship, whether on nations or the dispossessed, or on the proletariat or civil society, has identified with the agents of change against the figures of oppression or of the old regime. At the Polish Round Table, this comfortable seating is lost. How enemies become negotiators, how fundamental conflict yields to pragmatic conflict resolution, implies a different scholarly location, an unusual normative grounding, and a changed relationship to the making of history. It suggests a different agenda for thinking about the relationship between politics and scholarship, at least for those who have long been implicated in an academics that has counterposed capitalism and socialism. The lessons of the Polish Round Table go beyond Poland, and rather invite us to think seriously about how visions of systemic alternatives, microprocesses of conflict resolution and the making of history and political alternatives might be remade in light of this peaceful, but fundamental change in Poland, and beyond.