

Introduction to the Special Issue: "Down with Communism – Power to the People": The legacies of 1989 and beyond

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Larry Ray

SSPSSR, University of Kent,
Canterbury, UK

Veronika Stoyanova

SSPSSR, University of Kent,
Canterbury, UK

ABSTRACT

This special issue brings together reflections that mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Revolutions of 1989 and their consequences for understanding European and global society. What seemed for some at least the surprising and rapid collapse of Eastern European state socialism prompted rethinking in social theory about the potential for emancipatory politics and new modes of social and political organization. At the same time there was increased reflection on the nature of varieties of capitalism and the meaning of socialism beyond the failure of at least its etatist and autarkic mode. The five articles here and the editors' introduction address themes such as utopian hopes, civil society, the transformation of Europe, the world beyond 1989, and new configurations of power and conflict.

Résumé

Ce numéro spécial rassemble des réflexions portant sur le trentième anniversaire des révolutions de 1989 et examinant leurs conséquences afin de mieux comprendre la société européenne et mondiale. Ce qui est apparu pour certains au moins comme l'effondrement surprenant et rapide du socialisme étatique d'Europe de l'Est a incité à repenser, à partir des sciences sociales, le potentiel de politiques émancipatrices et de nouveaux modes d'organisation sociale et politique. Simultanément, la nature des différentes formes de capitalisme et le sens que prend le socialisme, au-delà de l'échec, au moins, de son mode

étatiste et autarcique, font l'objet de nombreuses réflexions. Les cinq articles regroupés ici et l'introduction des éditeurs abordent des thèmes tels que les espoirs utopiques, la société civile, la transformation de l'Europe, le monde au-delà de 1989, et les nouvelles configurations de pouvoir et de conflit.

The title of this collection of articles reflecting on thirty years after the fall of communism in Europe plays on the irony that the anti-communist revolutions were invoking the very slogans of popular power such as 'Power to the People' with which communism had once been associated.¹ The themes addressed here, are those of the utopian hopes raised in 1989, the idea of civil society, the wider transformation of Europe, the world beyond 1989, and new configurations of international relations, power and conflict. These lead on to questions about the future of Europe across the former 'east' and 'west' in a context of populist politics, new nationalisms and divisions. Regarding the occasion of this volume, we acknowledge that anniversaries are calendrical events and a single year should not be fetishized but rather at most stands symbolically for changes of longer durée. These articles do anyway address the legacies of the period 1989-91 that culminated with the end of the Soviet Union. At the same time, for those of us in cultures organized around the passing of time, significant anniversaries can be points of reflection, evaluation and thinking about the future. Clearly there have been many changes of fortune and direction in the former communist societies since 1989 and there are serious questions to be raised as to whether we can still refer to the idea of 'post-communist transition', or perhaps when it was we stopped doing so, and whether the region shares any fate in common simply by virtue of their formerly having been a part of the 'eastern' side of the Cold War.

Particular years might carry such weight of significance as to be 'turning points', but we should be skeptical of these attributions. The English historian G.M. Trevelyan notably described the revolutions of 1848 as 'the turning point at which history failed to turn' (1979: 287) and writing on the twentieth anniversary of 1989, Agnes Heller refers to this as 'the last great turning point of the twentieth century' (Heller 2012: 56). Aside from the question of the actual legacies of 1848 that are beyond our remit here, these comments raise the question of the nature of history. Is it a path with signposts on which it is possible to take proper turns (or fail to do so)? This is meant metaphorically of course and Trevelyan's main interest was in how the revolutionary year of 1848 was followed by the reestablishment of autocracy across Europe in the 1850s. Yet in attempting to understand the legacies of 1989 social scientists face a not dissimilar puzzle in that the revolutionary optimism carried along by the uprisings, at least in Central and Eastern Europe, becomes difficult to sustain from the vantage of hindsight, and this is a view that predominates in the articles in this collection. Heller concluded that for the people of her generation 'who treasure freedom, 1989 lived up to its promise' but she still saw 'no cause for triumph' because the world faces unforeseen dangers and moreover, despite

the constitution of liberal institutions there was not yet a 'spirit of democracy' in central Europe (2012:56-7).

These questions are particularly poignant in view of what was widely regarded as the unexpected nature of the anti-communist revolutions, which still gives rise to soul-searching as to why social scientists were so ill-equipped to predict such extraordinary events (for example Howard and Walters 2014). Assuming we do not expect social scientists to be clairvoyants, and to have said exactly when the Berlin Wall would be breached, then there were analyses suggesting the systems would not survive indefinitely (on this see Outhwaite and Ray 2011). Marx himself of course had insisted that the condition of a successful Russian Revolution would be a supportive proletarian one in the west, implying that left to itself the Russian revolution would not survive.² He would probably have been surprised though by how long the Soviet system, not to mention western capitalism too, managed to last. In 1970 Andre Amalrick asked whether the Soviet Union would survive until the fateful year 1984 predicting the country's breakup under the weight of social and ethnic antagonisms and a disastrous war with China (Amalrick 1970). Such expectations were not unreasonable, if also not widely held, in view of the presence of systemic dysfunctions and the repeated crises in the post-War decades, 1953, 1956, 1968 and the extended Polish turmoil through the 1970s and 80s. Coinciding with the period of detente and Khrushchev's reforms, Talcott Parsons, in his essay on evolutionary universals, famously predicted (in a sense rightly), that the Soviet Union would 'either make adjustments in the direction of electoral democracy and a plural party system or "regress" into generally less advanced and politically less effective forms of organization' (Parsons 1964:356). Likewise, Fehér et al (1984) argued the systems were both unreformable and ultimately unsustainable. These analyses raise crucial questions about the degree of organizational variation, and particularly political centralization, that is permissible as societies increase in social differentiation and complexity.

The unexpected nature of the events of 1989-91 and their apparently transformative consequences for the world order prompted wide speculation about the future that could very roughly be understood in terms of optimists and pessimists (or 'realists'). Leading among the optimists was Fukuyama's (1992) 'End of History' thesis along with globalization-optimism epitomized by Thomas Friedman's vision of a coming world of peace and prosperity (Friedman 2012). As Richard Sawka here points out, Habermas designated 1989 as 'rectifying revolutions' (*die Nachholende Revolution*) thereby suggesting a return to the past and a lack of innovation. But Habermas also, perhaps briefly, hoped that there would also be a 'second chance' to realize the idea of a communicative civil society in both East and West, but this time free from 'Eurocentric narcissistic self-absorption' (Habermas 1994:72). As Stephen Holmes noted, these

kinds of optimistic hopes were expressed particularly in the 'long postcommunist decade' 1989-2001 defined by the Fall of the Wall at the beginning and the fall of the Twin Towers at the end (Holmes 2001). Even so, prior to 2001 there were naysayers predicting that in the post-Cold War world things would not work out well. Writing in the *Atlantic Review* Robert Kaplan conjured a vision in which the 'classificatory grid of nation-states is going to be replaced by a jagged-glass pattern of city-states, shanty-states, nebulous and anarchic regionalisms—it is necessary to consider, finally, the whole question of war' (Kaplan 1994). And with the civil war in Yugoslavia in the forefront of his thinking, Stjepan Meštrović predicted that this crisis 'is a microcosm of the fate of Europe ... everywhere post-Enlightenment narratives are clashing with ...tradition, nationalism, fundamentalism, racism... The Disneyworld dream of a united Europe is unravelling' (Mestrovic 1994: 192). Some of these pessimistic narratives, including Kaplan's, were underpinned by Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington 1996) written in response to his former student Fukuyama. According to Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes, Huntington unlike Fukuyama, was a best-seller in Russia having caught the illiberal mood of Russia's 'nationalist-minded intellectuals' (Krastev and Holmes 2019: 119).

If the initial debates over 1989-19 in the West were ranged across optimism and pessimism, it would be fair to say it is the latter that frame many contemporary analyses, including those in this volume. This is not an uncommon view that has emerged in many studies of the consequences of the transformation over the past three decades, confronting the messy reality of life in post-communist societies against the background of initial expectations. One example of this is Henri Vogt's (2004) study based on interviews with participants in the events of 1989, from (former) Czechoslovakia, the DDR and Estonia, which develops a wider thesis on the nature and outcome of the revolutions. In particular, Vogt challenges the view of the 1989 revolutions as anti-utopian revolutions of recuperation, as in Habermas' concept, and suggests on the contrary that, 'it is indeed a useful endeavour to think about the transformation from communism to democracy and a market economy through the lens of utopia' (2004: 260). These were partially utopias of everyday life, such as desires for freedom of movement, an open and undefined future, free expression of collective identity, and choices about lifestyle, rather than imagined political blueprints for the future (2004: 213). These were to an extent fulfilled for many people, Vogt argues, in that many reported that their lives were much better than before the revolution, although not for others who report worsened living standards and strong dissatisfaction with how life after the system changes has panned out. At the same time, these utopias were not purely personal. There were also collective utopias of national community and solidarity and here Vogt found that there was less sense of fulfilment. There were tensions between ethnically-based nationalism and European cosmopolitanism, which are also

discussed extensively by Habermas of course (e.g. Habermas 1998). Perhaps utopian expectations will always be frustrated, a point Heller (2012) also makes, and in Vogt's study disillusionment following 1989 is attributed to the 'permanent consequences of uncertainty and contingency of the world' (Vogt 2004: 132). By 1989, the societies of Eastern Europe had become profoundly atomized, interpersonal trust was low and social dynamism had been lost. In the following years, this was exacerbated by material factors as income inequalities increased, unemployment rose and poverty grew and became more visible than in the past, leaving lingering feelings of injustice. Similarly, Long's (2005) interviews with former Czech dissidents reveal a mix of relief that the old order has passed but also disappointment with aspects of post-Communism, especially where they perceive a generational shift in values. The world of new freedoms brought a new future where people live in ambivalence between systems and in uncertainty in a society which is founded on individualism, self-direction and self-expression, as well as of competitiveness and consumerism.

Unfulfilled Potential?

A theme of many evaluations of the fate of 1989 has been that of unfulfilled potential. We do need to ask though, whose expectations and for what? Were these the hopes of western leftist intellectuals, former dissidents, or of workers? William Outhwaite voices the thematic sense of disappointment that the 'victory of democracy' turns out for the moment to be one of post-democracy and xenophobic populism across Europe and more widely. Quoting Heller (as above) on turning points, he argues that 1989 had a kind of beginning, in the founding of KOR³ in Poland in 1976 and subsequent events of the 1980s, although its ending could be seen in various ways. The role of Poland here is important since this could be seen, in Leninist terms, as the weakest link in the socialist chain – not only persistently unstable but the only state socialist society that produced a worker-based anti-communist opposition. Outhwaite emphasizes the varieties of 1989 that manifested quite differently across the region as did the post-1989 transformations in their *unevenness*. Despite these varied forms of state and society following different path dependencies, Outhwaite suggests that there are significant aspects which distinguish the East's '1989 years' from the West's. Apart from the two big thorns – the difficulty in building liberal democratic institutions and the issue of corruption, other differences include such issues as lustration and the weaponisation of politicians' pasts as part of political battles, problematic privatization processes and unrestrained neoliberal reforms in the 1990s generating significant inequalities, and, partly as a consequence, Outhwaite argues in agreement with Chris Hann (in this volume), that there is a contemporary cultural clash between liberal urban intellectuals and the victims of neoliberal policies.

In these terms, and in relation to the more progressive hopes expressed by many around 1989 the process has taken another 'wrong turn'. Outhwaite suggests that the foundations for this might have been set in the idea of western democracy as 'normality', as an imitation of western models of governance, rather than releasing creativity and a search for something more original. This opened the way for conservative nationalists to insist on nativist authenticity. At the same time, and like others (e.g. Krastev and Holmes 2019), Outhwaite stresses that now, 'populism and cultural conservatism or cultural counter-revolution have sprung up everywhere' which he sees as 'a warning against facile orientalizing' of the region. The rise of populism across both East and West Outhwaite also sees as a reason we might consider 1989 over, but expresses hopes that its liberal ideals will survive.

Richard Sawka on the other hand, advances an almost apocalyptic pessimism while importantly reminding us that the trajectories of eastern and central Europe have been different from Russia and the post-Soviet world. Sakwa regards the original agenda of 1989 as negative both in Habermas's sense but also in repudiating not only what had come before, but also denying the political logic of communist power and the emancipatory potential of revolutionary socialism in its entirety. In the event, he suggests, while the negative agenda of 1989 has been fulfilled, it failed in the end to transcend the political logic of the systems that collapsed at that time. He makes the interesting suggestion that in Russia the potential of 1991, for a more pluralist international system allowing diverse paths to modernity in the post-Cold War world, was defeated by the agenda of 1989. In the end, he argues, 1989 became more of a counter-rather than an anti-revolution and replicated, in an inverted form, the practices of the mature state socialist regimes. Therefore, the paucity of institutional and intellectual innovation arising from 1989 is striking. Its dominant motif was what he calls 'returnism', that is, the attempt to join an established enterprise rather than transforming it. Sakwa develops this idea with reference to Girard's concept of mimesis, so that 1989 can be seen as mimetic revolution, in the sense that it emulated systems that were not organically developed in the societies in which they were implanted. For Eastern Europe, 'returning' to Europe (something that was voiced very widely at the time) appeared natural, but for Russia the civilizational challenge of post-communism was of an entirely different order. Here there could be no return and instead of a linear transition outlined by the classic transitological literature, Russia's post-communism demonstrated that the history of others could not be mechanically transplanted from one society to another. Moreover, the return to Europe after 1989 more materially involved EU enlargement and NATO expansion into what it perceived to be a vacuum. However, this failed to take into account the power consequences of its actions when it encountered an alternative civilization in Eurasia, with its own complex and manifestations of modernity. Mimetic copying of the structures and systems of western

Europe was axiological in the sense that only one future model was possible, as opposed to dialogical in which all of the partners might change through their interactions.

Mimesis has been a dominant theme of the post-89 years. Sakwa's analysis is in some ways similar to the way mimesis is developed by Krastev and Holmes (2019) for whom CEE post-communist elites set out the project of returning to 'normality' but imported wholesale Western political and economic models and thereby embarked on a massive social experiment, despite themselves.⁴ The partial failure of these strategies and (not unlike the process Sakwa identifies in Russia) prompted the insistence by conservative populists of the possibility of a different 'authentic' Europe versus western secularism, multiculturalism and liberalism. This agenda was given additional impetus by the migration crisis leading to reactionary counter-elites capturing national identity. Meanwhile in Russia (as for Sawka) 1989-91 was not a liberation but a humiliating defeat. Thus for Krastev and Holmes Russia pretended to imitate the West but this was always a facade of 'Potemkin' constitutional structures that everyone knew were without meaning. The 'colour revolutions' in the 2000s coinciding with open opposition to Putin, showed the system was failing and opening to western influence. Putin then deflected opposition through an aggressive foreign policy (annexation of Crimea, occupation of the Donbas) not because he was worried by NATO ships in the Black Sea but as part of a 'retaliatory imitation.' By occupying, interfering in elections, supporting Assad and so on Putin was holding up a mirror to the west, thereby saying we can be like you, and 'we have demonstrated that nobody can impose anything on us.... Nobody listened to us. Listen now' (Krastev and Holmes 2019: 113). The upshot of these developments along with the collapse of the US's ambitions to world leadership under Trump is that we have reached the end of the Age of Liberal Imitation and the Enlightenment project. One might say then that in answer to Outhwaite's question, 1989 ended with the paradoxical collapse of global liberalism when the absence of super-power competition removed the need for the US to promote its values versus communist opponents.⁵

Central to the post-1989 liberal imagination was the idea of civil society, which was also a concept for all seasons, with many potential meanings. Recent usage often sees civil society as a quasi-autonomous sphere separate from and possibly opposed to the state. This idea was based on an emerging public-private dichotomy which owes a lot to Habermas's early work on the public sphere, where the core of civil society is a 'network of associations that institutionalizes problem-solving discourses on questions of general interest inside the framework of organized public spheres' (Habermas, 1996: 367). Civil society theories were concerned to defend the idea of a space for public debate and private association at a time when such liberal principles were not widely shared. The idea thus appeared to resonate with both the new social movement activism on anti-communist activism and suggest potential alternative forms of social

and political organization in the future. Adam Michnik (1999) for example saw these new networks as a 'rebirth of civil society', that also included ideas of 'anti-political politics' and 'détente from below'. Here Chris Hann contrasts the 'fuzzy concept' with concrete realities that took shape in post-communist Hungary, specifically in the town of Kiskunhalas, in the Danube-Tisza interfluve.

Seeking to put a finger on what went wrong, but in the sphere of 'civil society' Hann takes a critical distance from the concept itself and explores questions of the concrete (material) realities behind the discourses of civil society. He begins with a discussion of civil society as a prominent theme in dissident writings in East-Central Europe in late socialism which, initially advanced as a cure for the specific problems of totalitarian socialism, after 1989 was promoted more generally as a philosophy of governance. A key thesis is that political economy underpins a functioning civil society and that under post-socialism growing inequalities and social fractures undermined social associations. Hann studies the gradual decline of associational life in Kiskunhalas after 1989 against the backdrop of a wider elitist discourse of civil society grounded in both a political binary that opposes state to society and in a civilizational divide between East and West. Hann draws on the contrasting intellectual traditions of on the one hand Ferenc Erdei and Ivan Szelenyi who advanced a materialist model for emancipation built on the embourgeoisement of the peasantry, and on the other hand that of Istvan Bibó and Elemer Hankiss who based their thinking on abstract liberal notions and paid little attention to political economy, advancing instead culturalist explanations for the decline of civic and associational life. Hann asks if the rhetorical promotion of civil society whilst ignoring the importance of material preconditions for a cohesive society ultimately produces cynicism towards political action and nostalgia for the secure forms of sociality in the old regime. In applying the framework of totalitarian theory to postcommunist antinomies – presenting these as a lingering dualism between atomized totalitarian society versus an authentic alternative of free associations, and with this, reproducing the language of a civilizational divide (East vs West), the new NGO-based discourse and practices of the 'church of civil society', Hann argues, have done little to bolster associational life across Hungary. The increasingly severe struggle for small-town Hungary to meet existential needs, the growing atomization of families through Westward migration, together with the privatization of formerly public space and the dismantling of the former material infrastructure for socialist associational life (such as cultural houses and trade union based associations and clubs), Hann demonstrates, have proven deleterious for civic life. From 2010 onwards it was Viktor Orbán's 'civil circles' that attempted to capture society's impulse for social cohesion at the grass roots – an illiberal programme built on, to use Sakwa's Girardian lens, mimetic scapegoating (of migrants, Roma, Jews, western infiltrators and George Soros) and ultimately grounded in 'incivility'. Hann concludes that a civil atmosphere of political debate does

not now exist at any level in contemporary Hungary. If civil society, Hann suggests, was the 'gauntlet laid down by this region to social theorists a generation ago', then the challenge today is to theorize the 'incivility' of the new populism. Echoing others here who refer to the global context for post-socialist transformations, he further suggests that these political processes are driven by the demise of socialist embourgeoisement (Ivan Szelenyi's rural 'socialist entrepreneurs') in the face of a new national bourgeoisie under peripheral capitalism. He concludes that some of the moral responsibility for these developments lies with the unwavering intellectual enthusiasts of abstract liberalism.

These arguments reflect a widely-held view that post-communist civil societies are 'structurally deficient' in the sense of not providing an institutional mediation between state and citizens and a space for collective action. There is a wider discussion we could have here. For example, we might also make distinction between different concepts of civil society between liberal and pluralist underpinning of democracy, a tradition drawing on De Tocqueville in particular, and institutionalist ideas that focus on concepts of governance and polity that see state and civil society as mutually connected and reinforcing. Drawing more on the latter concept Cox and Gallai (2014) argue in relation to Hungarian health policy, that research needs to focus on how the interconnectedness of political and civil society provides a context and shapes the opportunity structures within which civil society organizations can operate and develop. Further, some commentators do find that many post-communist countries possess 'vigorous public spheres and active civil society organizations' connected to transnational civic networks especially in east central Europe (Foa and Ekiert, 2017). Again, Johnson and Saarien (2011) argue that, through the lens of social movements working against gender violence in Putin's Russia, there are significant signs of both retrenchment of NGOs but also survival of innovative local initiatives that have made inroads into state policy. Paradoxically, it is in the context of renewed authoritarianism and the prevalence of corruption that citizens might place more trust in civil organizations than state institutions, as Dani Marinova (2011) suggests. Indeed, she says, the void of lack of trust in the state can be filled by trust in the effectiveness and transactional capacity of civil associations (for example, NGOs, voluntary organizations, charity organizations, and church and religious organizations) even though there is limited focus on political mobilization and activism. This could be a kind of return of the circle to the idea of civil association as an alternative network to state agencies. Green (2012) develops this explicitly arguing that in a 'teleological way' the emergence of post-Soviet Russia imagined the future a democratic one, in which civil society was an important part of the equation. However, the predatory illiberal state is rent-seeking but offers a new socio-economic equilibrium in which economic security is traded for political apathy and people organize their lives around personalized exchange in

informal networks. Loyalty to the state is very thin but activism can be found in local movements, such as ecological protests.

On the other hand, Chris Hann's observation of the failures of the rhetorical promotion of civil society complement Richard Sakwa's disappointment with the failure of the anti-revolutionary rhetoric of 1989 to transpire as such in practice. Both the ideas of civil society and of anti-revolution (or the related 'anti-politics' in the articulation of Poland's *Solidarność*) appeared to unravel as abstract liberal notions deprived of a wider mobilisational capacity. Whilst claiming to repudiate the logic of revolution, the transitional project of the 1990s, Sakwa and others have argued, proved Bolshevism in reverse (see also Reddaway and Glinksi 2001; Burawoy and Verdery 1999:4). Similarly, others have examined the ways in which the discourse of civil society has similarly been utilized in the project of dismantling the socialist state by pitting civil society against the state and promoting neoliberalism's emphasis on small states and self-responsible and entrepreneurial citizens active in civil society (Stoyanova 2019). These processes had mostly devastating effects for welfare states across the region. As Chris Hann argues, when populations struggle to meet basic needs, the civil societies of the liberal imaginaries of 1989 become impossible.

One of the reasons for the ennui of frustrated expectations lay in the contradiction identified by Claus Offe (1991), at the beginning of this process, between simultaneously building capitalism and democracy. Collective participation through newly vibrant forms democratic association were always going to be limited by the path towards relative decoupling the state from the economy, privatization, market resource allocation, reducing costs and raising social and economic inequalities. Thus hope for transcending revolutions and new, vibrant politics largely went frustrated, and some have argued, the problem lay with these ideas' propensity to drive precisely the opposite – 'post-political' technocratic governance – in the event foreclosing the properly political moment and making civil societies largely exclusive and elitist (Mouffe 2005; Ost 2018; Stoyanova 2018). New, illiberal forms of politics seem to have emerged instead. Yet, considering how the new populist phenomenon has 'sprung up everywhere', as Outhwaite notes, rather than only to the east of the Berlin Wall, one is bound to consider it as a manifestation of the wider problem of renewed marginalization under global capitalism, as Chris Hann observes. Continuing this theme, Balihar Sanghera and Elmira Satybaldieva demonstrate in this volume some of the ways in which globalized rentier form of capitalism imposed in the post-Soviet space helps to reproduce deep inequalities in the region. Tomasz Zarycki similarly looks at the new forms of politico-economic dependencies in the post 1989 world order from a world systems theory perspective.

Global systems and political economy of transitions

The communist systems and their successors both operated within a structuring global context. Tomasz Zarycki links the fate of the post-89 transition to structural dependencies embedded in Polish history. Taking Poland as an example of Central-European countries, he develops a structural comparison between the thirty post-communist years and the earlier historical cycle, of the first three decades of the communist rule. Drawing (as does Sawka) on Viacheslav Morozov's idea of the 'subaltern empire' to describe the seeming paradox of the dependent nature of Soviet and Russian imperialism that Poland could be seen a victim of, he links these key phases of political change with the global context of persistent economic and cultural dependence, both in the communist period and beyond it. Zarycki's analysis is based primarily on a world-system theory perspective in conjunction with a critical sociology of elites in which the political fractures of the latter were tied to the shifting formations of Polish modes of integration into the global system. He challenges the idea of the inevitable collapse of the system under the weight of its internal dysfunctions in favour of understanding a modernizing growth model under conditions of dependency. In the 1970s a Moscow-dependent system gave way to 'debt-ridden development' of the entire region from double dependence on western capital and Soviet energy. During 1956-68 there was a liberalization and relative autonomy in Polish fields of culture headed by an elite with internationalized cultural capital but facing increasing dissatisfaction with growing inequalities and slow growth. The elite came increasingly into conflict with a newly educated technocratic, nationalist and antisemitic aspiring elite that gained ascendancy after the 1968 purges. Moving forwards to the post-communist period, Zarycki suggests that there was an equivalent turning point, following the two electoral victories of the conservative Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) party and its presidential candidates: Lech Kaczyński elected in 2005 and Andrzej Duda elected in 2015 and again in 2020. There was then a parallel between the '1968 moment' and what he calls the '2005/15 moment.' Both of these turning points can also be read as points of crises of the political effectiveness of earlier modernization ideologies. These were, respectively communism and then euro-enthusiastic democratization and neo-liberal marketization. Zarycki's key observation is that even if both 1970s and late 2010s can be considered as periods of relative political stabilization and economic growth for the region as such, and Poland in particular, they are related to considerable and even increasing economic dependence of Poland on the Western core. He concludes then that this approach, taking account of an understanding of the structural dependency of the region, may allow new light both on the nature of current dynamics in Polish politics as well as on the possible future trajectories of the country.

Placing the post-communist 'turns' within a wider global context of political economy might assist the understanding of other political manifestations, including contested

issues around memory and national identity. In the Polish 1968 purge of 'cosmopolitans', the 'fifth column' and a 'well-organized Zionist conspiracy' (all code-words for 'Jewish') conflicts over modes of modernization and global integration generated illiberalism and antisemitic scapegoating. Now under the PiS government we have again seen this manifested in 'memory wars' over accounts of Poland under German occupation. These reflect in some ways illiberal 'culture wars' seen elsewhere and a kind of Girardian mimetic conflict over identity and the sacred object. One issue here is that the collapse of Communism enabled the liberation of the repressed alternative counter-memories of oppression and suffering under the communist rule. There was an international dimension to this too since the re-emergence of memory coincided with EU accession and Holocaust memory being instituted as the cornerstone of the European 'transnational memory', providing the EU with a 'foundation myth' and a moral yardstick for new member states', as Levy and Sznajder (2007) put it. This generalization of Holocaust memory and commemoration, which was promoted by secular and liberal intellectuals and politicians, conflicted with what Nikolay Koposov calls 'national romances' that bring memory politics in the service of cultural patriotism and national heritage (Koposov 2018: 54). The disputes over Holocaust memory in Poland and the 2018 'defamation law' (subsequently revised) prohibiting claims that 'the Polish Nation' was responsible or co-responsible for Nazi crimes, represent not only the illiberal turn but also the way post-communist elites have continued to be divided over the symbolic memory of the nation versus cosmopolitan identities and modes of integration into global structures.⁶

In a further consideration of the global context, Sanghera and Satybaldieva focus on what went wrong in the post-Soviet space in economic terms. Rather than following in the footsteps of many who take the usual interest in corruption and attribute the economic woes of the region to legacies of the old regime and more or less deep seated incompatibilities between old habits and the new requirements of a market economy, Sanghera and Satybaldieva move our focus onto the very nature of the neoliberal model employed in the former Soviet space as the root cause of its failure to bring about the wellbeing and prosperity the revolutions promised thirty years ago. The authors draw on the distinction between the classical economists' conception of the free market as "free of economic rent" and of capital as productive on the one hand, and the neoliberal forms of rentiership which characterize post-Soviet markets. Neoliberal reforms in the region, they argue, have allowed unproductive investors to extract income free of state regulation whilst accumulating enormous wealth and power. Focusing on Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan they argue that 'post-Soviet oligarchs' became an unproductive rentier class grounded in income from finance, land, natural resource rents, monopoly rent, spectrum rents (broadband frequencies), intellectual property and digital platforms. Their interviews with business practitioners reveal a moral economy of

cultures of corruption and debt obligations, patronage and highly unequal social relationships. A consequence of this they argue is that rentier oligarchs have 'largely captured the post-Soviet landscape' and generated plutocracy rather than democracy in the political system.

Sanghera and Satybaldieva take an interest in the *moral economy* of the post-Soviet space – tapping into the moral sentiments, norms, and discourses people employ in order to justify, rationalize, and normalize the new economic relations in which they exist. Interviews with practitioners in banking, real estate, and the judiciary reveal that neoliberal values and rhetoric are being drawn upon to legitimize unjust and unequal relationships and practices. The language of consumer choice and market freedom serves to justify exorbitant interest rates and unfair contractual relations between lenders and borrowers, neoliberal thinking that puts exchange-value over use-value, as well as liberalized property laws that normalize the practices of speculation and extracting unearned income by the property-owning class. At the same time, they argue, judges draw on their duty to defend the law when they pronounce as unjust enrichment the behaviour of impoverished illegal settlers against landowners, in this way ratifying the power of the propertied class over the propertyless. It is commonly through corruption, fraudulent privatization, patronage and nepotism that access to valuable rent-extracting assets is gained and controlled, but it is the neoliberal reforms and concomitant thinking promoted and endorsed by Western governments and international financial institutions which legitimize and normalize the reproduction of inequalities generated by the rent-extracting sectors. Through criminal practices of primitive accumulation followed by legally and morally sanctioned defense of practices on the basis of neoliberal values, property rights, and the rule of law, rentiers have 'largely captured the post-Soviet landscape', reproducing social inequalities, and generating plutocracy rather than democracy in the political system. In her study of worker's experiences of neoliberalism in Kyrgyzstan, Satybaldieva (2018) also finds both shame and resentment at the experience of inequality, the lack of social care and denigration by the authorities. This she argues gives rise to nostalgia for the Soviet system as a restorative moral discourse about dignity and an alternative vision of human flourishing.

Sanghera and Satybaldieva's work raise some further important questions about the role of the idea and practice of corruption. Since the late 1990s through the 2010s, public analyses of what is wrong with the transformation in Bulgaria for example (but also more widely in the region) were permeated by a scathing critique of corruption – both historicized as a legacy of the old regime and included in Orientalizing (and self-Orientalizing) narratives as a cultural defect. Yet, Medarov and Tsoneva (2014) find that some liberal mainstream interpretations of corruption in late 1990s Bulgaria considered

the phenomenon acceptable as part of the initial processes of privatization and liberalization. As part of these, corruption was '[n]ot fatal, as it happens only once' (ibid., p. 38) and seen as a necessary evil that would put assets into private hands – and out of the clutch of the state – following which the behaviour of the new entrepreneurs, these hopes went, would be regulated by the invisible hand of the market. When these expectations appeared increasingly frustrated, the liberal critique of corruption was oriented inwards, as part of a culturalist explanatory framework which sought to attribute corruption to institutional legacies of the former regime and to the corrupt cultures of bad (East European) business. Overall, the question of corruption then underpins an important tension between the needs of processes of primitive accumulation – necessary when building a capitalist order – and questions of moral ends (and means), and in the event, questions of democracy, since political power (and voice) appear to be highly contingent on economic power across the region.

What is more, the rentierization of the Soviet space which Sanghera and Satybaldieva discuss, is not entirely a phenomenon characterizing the transformation of command economies into free market economies. The proliferation of rent-extracting sectors and of speculation characterize contemporary global financial capitalism. In this sense, these aspects of the post-Soviet transformation may not need to be considered as an aberration, but as following a wider trend of increasingly militant capitalism, which as Sanghera and Satybaldieva emphasize, is unproductive and hostile to human flourishing. Indeed, as Richard Sakwa in this volume observes, it is not only that the East tried to catch up with the West, the West also changed since 1989 – the collapse of the communist Other radicalized Western capitalism, letting neoliberalism rein free.

In his 1990 book on the politics of *anti-politics*, David Ost remarks, 'All those who talk about the "death of communism" miss the essential point: as reform proceeds apace, the slogans of Marxism will come into vogue once again' (1990: 213). Although signs of this are emerging across the world, what we have largely seen to the East of the Berlin Wall over the past decade is the emergence of the illiberal and anti-socialist hybrid of right wing populism. If one is to take a clue from Richard Sakwa's distinction between anti-revolution and counter-revolution, then the answer to William Outhwaite's question of when 1989 ended might need to wait until we see how the conflict between the revolutionary anti-communism of the liberal transformation and the counter-revolutionary nationalism of its illiberal populist reaction gets resolved.

Concluding reflections

These uncertainties about the significance of 1989 raise important questions about actual paths of transformation and their relationship with the organizational forms of western modernity. The unidimensional sociology of classical modernization theory mistakenly assumed an immanent tendency towards single organizational forms in modern societies but their global diversity suggests that there are more variegated routes into capitalist modernity. This will be briefly elaborated. Capitalism, along with different modes of articulation of local and global capital, appears to be compatible with multiple political and organizational structures. We might hope (as many of the 1989 optimists did) that there is some sort of 'elective affinity' between capitalism and socially liberal politics, but the coexistence of capitalism with repressive systems in for example, Iran, China, and some post-Soviet states indicate otherwise. One lesson from 1989, should we have needed reminding, was that societal change always occurs in unique circumstances, and the availability of extant organizational models for emulation will give it an inescapably reflexive character, so (despite various efforts towards mimicry) one cannot self-consciously repeat phases of modernization that were once experienced unselfconsciously. Further, marketization was a key feature of post-communist transitions, yet markets are never free-floating separate and distinct spheres, but are rather embedded in non-economic institutions, as Karl Polanyi (1957) and many since have argued. Thus post-communist societies were confronted by a diversity of capitalist paths (the American, British, German, Scandinavian, South Korean etc.) none of which could be exactly replicated, while attempting to do so resulted as József Böröcz argued at the time, in another simulated modernity, this time of western capitalism rather than socialism (Böröcz 1993). A further reason why we cannot assume any kind of neo-convergence among post-socialist societies and 'the west' arises from path dependencies (see for example Blokker 2005) and in particular the specific ways these societies emerged out of the 1989 that shaped subsequent political institutions and economic formations.

At the same time, western political and economic systems underwent transformation in the decades since 1989, especially following the financial crisis of 2008, as they will again under the impact of COVID-19. It has been noted here that features of post-socialism such as populism and rent-seeking capitalism can be found in the former 'west' as well as the 'east'. Across Europe traditional parties of the left seem to be in decline and were largely unable to capitalize on discontent from the 2008 crisis and neoliberal reforms that followed it. There has rather been mobilization around cultural, social, identarian and racist agendas framed in a Schmittian friend/foe rhetoric that threaten democratic institutions in western and eastern Europe. Brexit in many ways is the epitome of these in foregrounding a pastiche of invented Britishness, exclusivity, fear of immigration and nostalgia for a more 'glorious' past. These populist tendencies *could* be viewed as evidence of new convergence, and do in a way illustrate how

European societies across 'west' and 'east' shared post-2008 problems and responses. Nonetheless, we should be cautious in drawing this conclusion. 'Populism' is an over-used concept, often rolling together nationalist, nativist, racist, left and right movements that should be more clearly separated (László, 2020). The agendas and political economy of these movements might be quite different. In the absence of local entrepreneurs, post-communist capitalism was often 'capitalism from above' managed through a combination of state patronage, illicit privatization and rentierism. If Szelenyi (2016) is right that 'post-communism from China to Russia and to Eastern Europe may be converging on an illiberal prebendal system' epitomized by Putinism, then we could be seeing a particularly post-communist political economy, even if this has echoes elsewhere.

In these terms, Orbánism, which is often regarded as the epitome of modern populism and illiberalism could be seen as a characteristically post-communist project. Rhetorical hostility to global and EU forces, including the expulsion of the CEU, is combined with leaving the transnational economic sector untouched, while developing extensive lines of local patronage and rent-seeking through the economy, media and justice system (Meyer-Sahling and Jager 2012). Brexit, on the other hand, another populist manifestation, originated in the UK's historical structural marginality from core EU institutions, its position as non-euro member while possessing the offshore financial centre of the euro-zone and multiple post-2008 divergence in macro-political economy (Thompson 2017). We suggest then that while there might be convergences between politics and economy across Europe it would be over-stretching this to suggest that there is a project of post-89 neo-modernization. The particular forms of political economy emerge from the singularity of these societies and their pre- and post-89 trajectories.

How then should we view the place of 1989-91 in the course of history? One answer to this question might be that it signalled the end of the post-WW2 order, which was also in many ways a disorder, that was starting to fragment from the collapse of Bretton Woods in 1971. Since 1989 we have been witnessing the formation of a new geopolitical order and regimes of local and global accumulation. In some ways, this has seen a tri-partite conflict between the 'West', Russia and China but this is an asymmetric conflict in which struggles for hegemony over physical space and cyberspace, political and economic influence assemble in complex ways. In addition, one could read Trump as an acknowledgement that although 1989-91 appeared to be a triumph for US hegemony, in fact it signalled its decline in that the US and USSR were symbiotic partners in global hegemony. How significant 1989 will appear in longer-term historical perspective is impossible to say (one is reminded of Elias's comment that historians in the future could

regard the present age as 'late barbarism' [Elias 1994: 230]) especially as the effects of the climate emergency coalesce with the pandemic.

Turning points such as 1989, along with 1968 and the current moment of turbulence, are clearly crisis moments – when current forms of politics get challenged and new visions articulated. Points like these bring about elevated hopes and expectations for more or less radical change and whatever set of new political ideologies gets to embody these new hopes and expectations is bound to be held accountable for its failure to fulfil them. The popular will of 1968 sought to hold state socialist elites to account for their failure to fulfil the potential of 1944-45. 1989, as Richard Sakwa argues in his contribution, emerged from the failure of 1968 and in this sense can be seen as the institutionalized radicalization of the popular charge levelled 20 years before. The current crisis of liberalism can similarly be seen as a reaction to the failure of 1989 – the frustration of the hopes and expectations projected onto the politics of euro-enthusiastic market liberalism is once again being manifested in street protest mobilizations and at the ballot box. It is as yet unclear just what the consequences of the unfulfilled promise of 1989 are going to be – could there be a sudden, self-driven (and bloodless) unravelling of liberalism similar to the ‘velvet’ unravelling of state socialism in 1989?

Although drawing parallels of this sort is always a risky endeavor, some of the articulations of the crisis moments of 1989 and the one we are living through now are striking. Both in 1989 and today in Bulgaria, for example, a key rhetorical weapon against both state socialism and liberal capitalism is the notion of ‘truth’. It permeated much of the revolutionary discourses of the 1989-90 period. One of the key protests against the regime in 1989-90 was a tent occupation of Sofia’s central square, dubbed the ‘City of Truth’ [*Gradut na Istinata*] and led by a movement that called itself ‘Civic Movement in the Name of Truth’ [*Grazhdansko Dvizhenie v Imeto na Istinata*]. Key to their demands was to gain access to ‘the truth’ about the repressions during the regime, the authorities’ concealment of information about the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, the biographies of officials who held important positions in the cabinet, and other suspected ‘secrets’ or ‘crimes’ of the regime. A similar rhetorical elevation of the concept of ‘truth’ can be observed today in Bulgaria (at least since the protest mobilizations of 2013 [Stoyanova 2018]) which are often articulated as protest campaigns seeking the ‘truth’ about the post-1989 ‘transition’ – particularly concerning the process of privatization of state assets, and the wider (re)distribution of economic and political power after 1989. Similar tendencies can also be observed elsewhere, particularly if one is to take the wider debate of ‘fake news’ which permeate both liberal and illiberal narratives. Notions of ‘truth’ and ‘falsehood’ appear to be key to political conflict across both East and West today. We argue that rather than being part of more general moralizing protest discourse, this search for ‘truth’ is linked to the cycles of political promise-making at the

major 'turning points' discussed here – 1968, 1989, and today. The unfulfilled potential of each seems to drive each 'turning point'.

The past 30 years then have seen some dramatic changes, but not always in line with the elevated hopes and aspirations of many in 1989. The reassessment of the scores of optimist and pessimist predictions at the time invite questions of whose hopes and expectations, and for what. Was Fukuyama's declaration of the coming of a peaceful world that has rid itself of ideological conflict an optimistic narrative against the background of thirty years of reforms which Richard Sakwa describes as linear and returnist, William Outhwaite regrets as uninnovative, Chris Hann identifies as exclusionary, and others denounce as post-political and post-democratic (Crouch 2000; Mouffe 2005)? With hindsight, whose predictions at the time were more optimistic – those of the post-ideological world of Francis Fukuyama or those of the return of Marxist slogans of David Ost? The answers to why the aspirations for postmodern anti-revolutions and for free and dynamic civil societies turned into realities of counter-revolutions and 'incivility' are of course many. Some of the answers contributed in this collection point to the geopolitical realities of power grabbing (Sakwa), the hubris of intellectual elites (Hann), the problem of corruption for the consolidation of liberal democracies (Outhwaite), the reproduction of rabid inequalities in rentier capitalism (Sanghera and Satybaldieva), and the problem of structural dependencies (Zarycki) which the global liberal capitalist order depends on. Could things have gone another way? If the celebrated aim in 1989 was to end ideological conflict and 'return to normality', could we have ever built anything other than a shanty version of what was already there? Could alternative political models be conjured up without a clash of ideas, could privatization of state assets go into private hands without corruption, could people learn to trust institutions which were increasingly missing (being 'rolled back')? Indeed, could the call to suffer through traumatic socio-economic reforms withstand beyond the realization that the promised land contained as Sakwa says here, 'only more of the same'?

NOTES

¹ The inspiration for these articles was a symposium at the University of Kent in June 2019, organized by the editors, addressing the theme of the thirtieth anniversary of the collapse of communism in Europe in 1989.

² In the 1882 preface to the Russian edition of the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels said: 'If the Russian revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that each complements the other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist revolution' (Marx and Engels, 2009: 12).

³ Komitet Obrony Robotnikó, Workers' Defense Committee, founded by Antoni Macierewicz was a precursor of Solidarity

⁴ It is important to note though that while post-communist elites might have striven for imitation, what they got, at least in the first decade or so, was a brutal form of capitalism and infrastructural collapse that did not mirror anything in western Europe at the time.

⁵ It could be said though their thesis is limited to the duration of the careers of some key politicians. Trump, Orbán, Kaczyński, Putin and Trump will pass. Have the societies or political elites from which they came also changed to the extent that there could be no return to previous more liberal trajectories? They did not envisage the kind of global mass mobilization we are currently witnessing in Black Lives Matter. Nor, of course, being written in 2019, could they consider the possible political consequences of COVID-19 especially for those illiberal regimes that are failing to contain it.

⁶ For extensive discussion of this see Ray and Kapralski (2019)

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