Discerning the global in the European revolutions of 1989

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Abstract

With the benefit of hindsight it becomes easier to appraise the historical significance and impact of the European revolutions of 1989. By a privileging a global point of view, it becomes possible to leave behind the prevalent perspective of 1989 as a regional transition of Central Europe only. This essay does not substitute the stultifying regional perspective for a globalist doctrine, but rather acknowledges the contested character of revolution and its interpretation by taking as starting point six distinct interpretations of 1989. These are:

- ❑ The breakdown of the Soviet empire due to the disintegration of its association of party and nomenklatura, and the future of "Empire;"
- ❑ The transition from communist party rule to democracy;
- ❑ The exhaustion of socialist welfare regimes based on a planned economy and the return of the market;
- ❑ Nation building processes in the USSR and Eastern Europe and the consolidation of independent states;
- ❑ Resistance, dissidence and the revival of civil society in a carnival of revolutions;
- ❑ The end of the Cold War, the collapse of Soviet world power and the new world order.

Through each of these lenses an effort is made to appraise the global scope and scale of 1989. The following questions guide the enquiry:

- a. What is the global meaning of this aspect of the revolutions of 1989?
- b. Does this shed new light on the history before1989?
- c. What kind of structural and cultural change followed after 1989?
- d. In scholarship, which discursive shifts have occurred in response to 1989?

In conclusion, a first estimate on the global significance of 1989 is provided with respect to short-term impact and medium-term change. Viewed from after 1989, the 20th century has seemed dark, an age of extremes and violence defined in Europe and spreading from there. However, just before 1989, it seemed as if the social question had been resolved, at least in the North: the 20th was seen as the social democratic century. Yet, in the 21st century the social question returns. But, with Marxism discredited and socialism infeasible, no ideas or actors are discernible that could carry the world towards a new resolution of the social question. This outcome is disquieting, for it now seems as if communism, fascism and world war were necessary handmaiden in this resolution, but have no peaceful, civil or cosmopolitan equivalent – at least, not yet. This should worry everyone.

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Introduction: A global 1989?

The revolutions of 1989 are often understood to have been a Central European affair only (e.g. Garton Ash 1990). Some scholars have extended the notion of Central Europe as defining a space from Slovenia to Ukraine (e.g. Kenney 2002), or examined the wider revolutionary ideas and ideals (e.g. Kumar 2001). Of course, 1989 was widely understood as "return to Europe," but the wider European implications of 1989 have received little attention because notions such as "refolution," "rectifying revolution" or "unrevolution" (e.g. Garton Ash 1990, Habermas 1990, Gellner 1993) led scholars to focus only on the regional transition and the (prospective) Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe, not the wider transformation of Europe and the world.

Notions such as the "third wave of democratization" (Huntington 1991) deny any specificity to the revolutions of 1989. The observation that the paths of Central Europe, Russia and China began to diverge in 1989 introduces a comparative perspective. The observation that in the conjuncture of 1989 a new type of revolution was born, the "negotiated revolution" (Lawson 2005), begins to address the wider context. Yet, the global context and implications of the revolutions of 1989 have not been examined.

An effort to discern the global significance of 1989 does not necessarily imply the claim that globalisation and the information technology revolution brought down the Soviet system (Castells/Kiselyova 2003). Rather, it is an effort to investigate the historical impact, social consequences and cultural shifts associated with 1989. By choosing as point of view the globe, it becomes possible to appraise the scale, scope and reach of the revolutions of 1989. Twenty years after the events, as the short-term impact gives way to medium-term change, scholarly vision may clear, including the chance to discern unintended and unwanted social consequences or unacknowledged cultural shifts.

To be sure, just as revolutions are contested affairs, so are the explanations of causes and consequences a contested matter. Therefore, rather than providing a particular story, we utilise six rivalling research programmes on 1989, which are

shared across scientific disciplines as well as national boundaries, to elucidate the global significance and meaning of the revolutions of 1989.

Six rivalling research programmes on the causes and consequences of 1989

Scholars often respond to important historical events, like the European revolutions of 1989, by offering simplistic narratives or, else, claiming multiple and indeterminate causation. Typical examples of simplistic narratives are the top-down focus on Gorbachevian reforms as well as insular accounts of national revolutions. Typically over-complex explanations simultaneously invoke political failure, economic collapse, technological backwardness and military defeat. However, to enhance explanatory scope and power one needs to weigh and sequence causal factors. For an accurate and convincing narrative one must identify the necessary and sufficient historical conditions. Methodologically, the comparative appraisal of research programmes enables the scholar to assess theory and narrative, explanation and interpretation. In this spirit, six rivalling research programmes were identified. They are the following:

❑ The end of the Cold War by the collapse of Soviet world power: Researchers claim that as Moscow centre was retrenching from military over-stretch and aiming to undo the blockage of economic development, it was powerless to hold down its central European periphery any longer, which consequently seceded, triggering the collapse of the Soviet centre itself (e.g. Pravda 1992, Arnason 1993, Westad 2006).

❑ Resistance, dissidence and the mobilization of civil society: Researchers claim that resistance and dissidence made a certain accommodation inevitable. The 1980s saw the nascent self-organization of civil society, bottom-up, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. In 1989 the agents stepped into the void left by the atrophy of the communist regimes and led the peaceful revolutions that dismantled the Soviet bloc and subsequently played a very important role for shaping the period of transformation (e.g. Ekiert 1996, Kenney 2002, Falk 2003).

❑ The exhaustion of socialist welfare regimes: Researchers claim that as central European socialist states proved unable to maintain welfare provisions their welfare regime lost its legitimacy in the eyes of the population, especially the workers; while in the USSR, it is said, nomenklatura and workers resisted any reformulating of the social contract, thereby forestalling economic reform (e.g. Kornai 1992, Wolle 1998).

❑ Nation-building processes in the USSR and Eastern Europe: Researchers claim that as national consciousness grew with educational achievement and economic prosperity, nascent self-organisation found its form in national movements, which broke up the empire from within, achieving independent statehood (e.g. Carrère d'Encausse 1990, Suny 1993, Szporluk 2000)

❑ The transition from communist party rule to democracy: Researchers claim that in many relevant cases the transition was negotiated by pact or reform. The communist party organisation may have been beset by ideological stasis and caught between ascendant state and emerging public, but it was still the main agent of change in the Soviet Union and Europe. Even in the case of mass mobilisation from below the communist elite was able to secure a negotiated outcome (e.g. Meuschel 1992, Horvath/Szakolczai 1992, Gill 1994).

> ❑ The breakdown of the Soviet empire: Researchers claim that within the Soviet imperial association the communist parties and their nomenklatura, the relations of command and obedience lacked legitimacy after the cessation of terror. As efforts for a rationalisation and legalisation of domination were unsuccessful, the Soviet empire drifted towards a structural stasis. When the imperial apex did make an effort at rejuvenation in the late 1980s, the structural stasis had rendered the empire immobile and Moscow centre had to look on as the imperial association disintegrated and its networks dissolved (e.g. Volkogonov 1998, Armbruster 2005).

A research programme is embedded in an interpretive framework that is structured by key concepts such as identified above. It is proposed to utilise these frameworks and concepts as lens through which to discern the global scope and scale of 1989 and thereby its significance. The picture one obtains might usefully be analysed in the following dimensions:

      a. What is the global meaning of this aspect of the revolutions of 1989?
      b. Does this shed new light on the history before 1989?
      c. What kind of structural and cultural change followed after1989?
      d. In scholarship, which discursive shifts have occurred in response to 1989?

The breakdown of the Soviet empire and the future of "Empire"

After the fact, in the 1990s, a significant number of books and articles were published that spoke of a Soviet empire. However, actors and observers of the 20th century had a strong sense that the age of empire had passed. World War I spelled the end of empire in Europe. As a consequence of World War II, the colonial empires dissolved too. The dissolution of empire took decades and included wars, but there was never a sense that this trend would be reversed.[1]

The observation that an empire had collapsed in 1989 stands in contrast to the self-perception of communists as anti-imperialists as well as the self-proclaimed mission of the Soviet Union as an ally of new nations. Moreover, during the lifetime of the Soviet entity other appellations such as Soviet bloc, communist state and totalitarian system were much more common. There are indicators that by the late 1980s the Soviet entity was increasingly perceived as an imperial formation, consisting of an inner empire (USSR) and an outer empire (Eastern Europe, clients elsewhere). It was, however, neither the occupation of Afghanistan nor the invocation of 'the empire of evil' that prompted recognition, but rather the rise of secessionist national movements in the Soviet republics in the 1980s. Therefore much of the literature of the 1990s was imbued with a sense that the world had witnessed the collapse of the last empire.

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[1] Most of the literature on the Soviet empire dates from after the breakdown, e.g. Carrère d'Encausse 1990 (notable exception with first publications on the issue in the 1970s), Pravda 1992, Buttoni 1993, Volkogonov 1998, Zubok 2007. The notion of empire is used freely in much of the (former) West, including North America as well as in Russia and the Former Soviet Union. I pass over the memoirs and the autobiographical literature. In the former outer empire of Eastern Europe, usage is not so widespread because the focus is more on the national communist regime. For analysis pervaded by the notion that the Soviet empire was the last (European) empire see Simon/Simon 1993, Altrichter/Neuhaus 1996, Barkey/v. Hagen 1997, Dawisha/Parrot 1997, Demandt 1997.

The notion of a Soviet imperial breakdown highlights the interconnectedness, simultaneity and rapidity of events in 1989. Also emphasised is an inner logic of imperial breakdown that directs attention to the completeness of the collapse in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The Soviet empire was an empire of control. The events of 1989 were interconnected in the sense that they signalled a loss of control over borders and internal space. Well remembered are the large demonstrations in Hungary (June, Nagy's reburial), the GDR (Monday demonstrations in October and November) and the CSSR (November, December). However, public gatherings that similarly demonstrated a loss of control over internal space also occurred earlier in Georgia (April) and the Baltic republics (August). As regards the breached borders, images come to mind of the opening of the Hungarian border in late August and the fall of the Berlin Wall in November. Equally important was, however, that on 24 December 1989 the People's Congress in Moscow declared the secret protocol to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact null and void, making Baltic secession and the break-up of the USSR inevitable. Noteworthy is that in just nine months, from April to December 1989, the imperial apex completely lost control over borders and space. Moreover, and in an important sense, secession commenced in the Soviet republics, spread to Eastern Europe and then engulfed Moscow, hastening the empire's breakdown.

If 1989 signifies an imperial collapse, how did the Soviet project turn into an empire? Neither the imperial subjects nor any outside observers, whatever the hue, described the Soviet project as imperial first and foremost. This is not to say that the centralisation of decision making in Moscow, overrepresentation of Russians, Soviet military occupation and outbound Russian migration were not an issue. Yet, locals ruled the outer and increasingly also the inner empire, with a discernible nativization of elites (even as the second secretary in the Soviet republics was usually still Russian). Rulers in Soviet republics and Eastern Europe ultimately relied on Soviet troops, but because of the strength of local organisation in politics and other fields, political rule was not primarily experienced as imperial. In this sense, the Soviet project can only have been imperial inadvertently and, as an imperial project, not consciously coherent.

One might argue that the military re-conquest of most lands of the extinct Tsarist empire led to the re-establishment of centralised rule over a huge space and many people - which was extended by victory in World War II. By 1922, the Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR) and the Comintern were subject to policy formulations and directives from Moscow centre, transforming the transcendent communist vision into an immanent ideology of the Soviet empire. There was a difference between what the Bolsheviks intended to achieve and what the unintended effects of their actions were. This claim is historical: in the Soviet case the unintended effects amounted to being 'caught up' in imperial relations; not all empires are unintended effects, nor do revolutionary movements always build empires. Though 'empire' was unspeakable for a communist, they were members of a trans-national force that ruled over far-flung territories and governed many people.

Indeed, the complementarity of communist party rule with an empire of domination was very high. The hierarchical and star-shaped networks created by the party gave the Soviet empire the formal unity by which collective action was purposeful and task-oriented. The Soviet empire was ruled by its political network, with the

Moscow Politburo and Central Committee apparatus situated at its central apex. The military network secured the empire and the cultural network bolstered it. Control of the economic network enabled the primacy of resource acquisition and appropriation by the imperial association. Significantly, heads of an academy of science, generals of the army or directors of key enterprises were appointed by the Central Committee apparatus, sometimes pending approval by the Politburo. As the party and its nomenklatura provided the mechanism for interlocking the diverse networks, a veritable imperial cage could be constructed with tight control over borders and space, including the organisational borders of the various political, economic, military and cultural units.

If one follows this analysis of inadvertent imperialism, then two interesting observations follow:

- Firstly, the Soviet empire resembles archaic empires of domination, whose primary principle of social action - 'compulsory cooperation' - is observable already for the Akkadian empire in 2300 BC (cf. Mann 1986). The concentrated use of coercion enabled the Soviets to run a regime based on the extensive and intensive mobilization of people and resources.
- Secondly, the Soviet empire seems an early instantiation of the 'network society' (cf. Castells 1996) because at least its political network can be shown to have global reach, local nodes and an information and communication structure to support it that included all modern technology available before the Internet.

In sum, one observes an empire based on modern mechanisms but archaic principles of social action, the symbols of which were, on the one hand, the Communist International and Soviet military power, and, on the other hand, the Gulag and the Berlin Wall. The revolutions of 1989 signalled the breakdown of coercion and control and the collapse of the principle of 'compulsory cooperation'.

The immediate effect of Soviet breakdown was the emergence of a large number of new nation-states. As the USSR had been a federalist formation, this also discredited federalist states of a multitude of nations, thus contributing to the collapse of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Indeed, it could be argued that the Soviet collapse has considerably narrowed the scope of what is seen as a viable project of state building as well as contributed to the future prevalence of the small nation-state in Europe.

It is most interesting how, despite the appraisal of the Soviet project as last empire, the concept of empire has been revived by scholars, intellectuals and policy makers. Some identify the USA as the new and last empire (Hardt/Negri 2001; Todd 2003), while some dream that the USA will become the new Rome. The concept of empire also has been rescued in mainstream political science as 'not such a bad idea' (Muenkler 2005) and, sure enough, the European Union is also identified as an empire. The conceptual revival of empire is a direct consequence of 1989. However, does this describe and analyse a re-ordering of the world in which empires will again play a significant role?

Not unlike the Soviet empire, the EU is analysed as an inadvertent imperial formation (Zielonka 2006) and the USA as an incoherent empire (Mann 2003). But, more pointedly, it is possible to assert that the present popularity of the

concept empire is not much more than a projection. While it is neither logically nor historically possible to exclude the emergence of another empire, the analysis of such phenomena as globalisation and the rise of the network society suggest that the world is coming together in a multi-power actor civilisation. The consolidation of this new world order works against the emergence of any self-conscious imperial project while also limiting the impact of any inadvertent imperial formation. Social and political science may lack the tools to describe and analyse this new world order and thus be tempted to invoke older concepts like empire, but this does not signal the actual emergence of new empires.

The transition from communist party rule to democracy

Sovietology and area studies were once busy dissecting communist party rule, analysing party organisation and reporting politburo contortions. After 1989, little interest has been shown in taking these studies any further. To be sure, some accounts have been written of the demise of communist party rule, but attention largely shifted to the emergent democratic opposition and then towards tracking the transition to the post-communist order. As a consequence, we have plenty of chronicles of transition but relatively few sustained attempts at explaining how and why communist party rule exhausted itself and ended so unexpectedly and peacefully. Given the history of communist parties, and the Soviet party in particular, the odds were stacked against a peaceful exit.[2]

While a one party rule may end, and also end abruptly, it is of interest that the Marxist-Leninist ideology espoused by party members seemingly dissolved as party organisations disintegrated and leaderships scrambled to reconstitute their organisations as non-communist parties of the left. While it seems possible that Marxist-Leninist ideology had been an empty ritual for quite some time (maybe since the repression of the Prague spring in 1968), it is puzzling that Marxism, as a wider intellectual and political tradition, evaporated too. Up until the 1980s, Marxists in East and West were confident that the crises of late capitalism would usher in a new order. Instead, the communist order collapsed, with no effective intellectual or organisational defence being mounted.

The focus on the transition to democracy draws attention to the self-limiting and negotiated character of the revolutions of 1989. By and large, the political revolutions were non-violent. Throughout much of Eastern Europe the events are colloquially not referred to not as revolution but as "turnabout." The notion of the turnabout includes recognition of continuity in personnel. Indeed, the body count among communists was very low, while transitional justice and lustration was

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[2] Sovietology has been derided, after 1989, for partying at its own funeral. However, for a notable look back to Sovietology, see Cox 1998. On communist party rule some noteworthy analysis are: Meuschel 1992, Horvath/Szakolczai 1992, Gill 1994, Janos 1996, Maier 1997. The literature on the demise of communist party rule is necessarily ex post. In some Central European countries, communist party rule has become a ghost that haunts political debate about complicity with the regime, lustration and "trials of communism" (e.g. Rupnik 2002, Elster 2004). In this partisan debate, historians have stooped low in attempting to compromise even heroes of the revolution (e.g. "TW Bolek"). Incidentally, this makes it more difficult to assess the end of communist party rule, as a "neutral" review seemingly requires coverage of such literature. For the notion of the self-limited or negotiated revolution, see the classic treatment: Staniszkis 1984; for Hungary: Tokes 1996; for later comparative analysis extending the notion to Chile and South Africa: Lawson 2005.

limited. In some countries there were attempts to bring to justice those politically responsible for violence and corruption, but the new legal order offered only limited means of redress. The only significant move was the exposure of the members of the secret police and the informers among the population. This is remarkable in that it draws attention only to the organs of coercion, often apportioning blame and guilt to a single institution, the secret police. That institution may have been very powerful and communist party rule heavily reliant on it. Yet, it was not the police that was ruling, but the communist party.

Further still, the focus on the police and the secret service meant that the nomenklatura turncoats could slip out of the limelight and utilise their principally privileged access to information and finance to convert themselves into a part of the new economic elite. This conversion of (former) political capital into (new) economic capital enhances a sense of continuity (cf. Tucker 2008). However, the focus on communist party rule also highlights divergence in post-communist rule, including continuous rule in China. In Eastern Europe a variety of patterns are observable, including strong continuity in personnel (e.g. oligarchs, former nomenklaturists and secret police members as politicians) and belated disputes over lustration fuelled by a sense that the revolution had been betrayed by not going after the communists. In China, too, continuity is strong as the new economic elite springs from party officials turned businessmen.

There seems to be a clear difference between those countries that experienced a negotiated revolution that at some point led to an exposure of the workings and members of the organs of coercion and those countries experiencing an abrogated revolution or none at all, in which the secret police and its members transitioned into the new area and in some cases, notably Russia, became much more powerful. This is not surprising if one accounts for stultified political organisation, the miniscule middle class and the weak civil society of the pre-revolutionary societies. In the revolutionary vacuum, some police organs were able to seize control of politics, acquire resource-based industries and fragment any civil self-organisation. On the other hand, negotiated revolutions, the cooptation of communist cadres into the new order and the possibility for the communist party to reconstitute itself has led to a high level of stability, facilitating a comprehensive transformation encompassing the political, economic, military and cultural domain.

Where negotiated revolutions led to democracy, these regimes consolidated quickly. Noted may be a correlation between the negotiated character of the revolution and the subsequent procedural consolidation of democracy, i.e. rule of law, accountability, participation and elections (Armbruster 2008). This holds throughout Central Europe and the Baltic states (including Slovania, but excluding Romania and Croatia). This result and the reasonable assumption that democracy was made at the origin, i.e. with and through the negotiated revolution, stands in stark contrast to the widespread assumption that external assistance will do the trick (FSU), that conditionality is essential to stabilising democracy (EU, World Bank) or that armed intervention may secure democracy (Iraq).

Privatization to the nomenklatura makes for moral and political hazards, but in the countries of negotiated revolutions this has not led to 'unbearable' social inequality. Notably, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia have a GINI

coefficient in line with Scandinavia. Even where social inequality has become more marked, as in Poland and the Baltic states, the GINI coefficient is no more extreme than in the United Kingdom or Ireland and still indicates considerably more equality than in the USA (UNDP 2007).

In contradistinction to the real success of constitutional and democratic consolidation in Eastern Europe, much current scholarship is marred by unspoken assumptions about the continued backwardness of the region. Typical are recurrent moral panics over 'teenage' democracies that are thought to be backsliding lest the West (e.g. EU, NATO, World Bank) intervenes. National habits, backward populations and corrupt politicians are variously blamed. These moral panics ensue not over the autocracies but the democracies. As scholars worry, the social and political sciences stand accused of accepting ideological blinders. The wider impact of 1989 on Europe and, for example, on the party system of the (formerly) Western half of Europe is largely ignored, while the continent continues to be wilfully divided conceptually into West and East. While political systems are undergoing change everywhere and populist politics are on the rise, it is assumed only for the formerly eastern regions of Europe that anti-democratic politics might return.

The collapse of state socialism and the return of the market

That state socialism failed because of a chronic shortage economy and its limited but increasingly faltering welfare provision is widely accepted. This historical conjecture is bolstered by the logical assertion that a planned economy is not feasible. That socialism did not deliver the goods is mainly asserted in a comparative perspective: the West was the chosen point of reference for state socialism, by comparison to which it kept falling behind. The post-1989 economic recession, and outright collapse in much of the former Soviet Union, is taken as further evidence of the inherent weakness of state socialism.[3]

Logical assertions, scholarly perceptions and historical chronology stand in an uneasy relationship. While the socialist economies were stagnating and living standards did begin to decline in the late 1980s, it cannot be said that economic collapse triggered the demise of state socialism. Economic collapse set in as a consequence of 1989. This is not to deny that state socialism experienced severe economic difficulties, only to observe that absolute economic decline in the 1980s was gradual only. Economic decline was aggravated by the arms race and falling world market prices for oil and gas, but the chronology of events does not lend itself to any notion that economic collapse precipitated the revolutions of 1989.

We know that growth statistics and other economic data were manipulated and exaggerated. Moreover, scholars have demonstrated convincingly that state socialism leads to chronic shortage. That state planning does not make for feasible economics was first asserted by Ludwig von Mises in the 1920s. Efforts at

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[3] A definite treatment of the socialist economy was provided by: Kornai 1992. The infeasibility of a state-planned socialist economy is no longer disputed, cf. Nove 1991. On the intractable problems of the socialist welfare state: Feher/Heller 1979, Adam 1991, Cook 1992, Wolle 1998. For the later discussion on left politics see Giddens 1999, Fraser/Honneth 2003. On an appraisal of the earlier impact of the 1968 Prague spring on Western Marxism and the left: Bracke 2008.

the reform of state planning and economic restructuring, for example in the 1960s and the 1980s, bear out this early logical assertion about the impossibility of socialist economics (other than as the compulsory cooperation discussed above). These assertions about the logic of state socialism have a much wider impact than the chronology of the events: in intellectual and practical terms they make a return to a planned economy impossible in times of peace.

The focus on the collapse of state socialism highlights the role of the citizen as consumer and the nomenklaturist as economic planner and manager. It is widely suggested that socialist citizens did have consumerist aspirations, regardless of the bane of shortage. Demonstrations and public opinion polls revealed a desire to partake of the European Social Model. On the other hand, spontaneous nomenklatura privatization and interviews with the economic nomenklatura (conducted after the fall) reveal that at least in Central Europe the responsible people had lost faith in the possibility of reform even before perestroika was launched.

1989 seemingly cemented, in the scholarly imagination, a junctim between planning and public ownership versus the market and private ownership. While these are complementary relationships, they are not necessary ones. Indeed, because a junctim was established, post-socialist transition management was guided by the assumption that only the combination of rapid privatization and free markets would deliver economic growth and stability. 1989 thus reinforced an antecedent drive for the privatization of state assets in the West. Some privatizations were undertaken for ideological and political reasons (e.g. on the assumption that a privatized company would deliver better public service or, simply, to break the power of trade unions), but governments also discovered that it was easier to sell off state assets than reform the welfare system directly. It seems as if the conjuncture of an aggressive neo-liberal anti-public ownership ideology with the failure of state socialism and the more general troubles of the welfare state accounts for the successful establishment of the junctim. Any conception of the market other than as 'free', i.e. dominated by private capitalist interest, is on the defensive.

In an important way, the untold history of socialism is not the really existing misery of state socialism, but the ignorance and incompetence of the Western Left. Public intellectuals, union leaders and party hacks were fantasising about the so-called legitimacy crisis of late capitalism well into the 1980s, while neoliberal privatization policies were being prepared. Moreover, the Left was largely ignorant about the conditions of really existing socialism, if not colluding with the communist nomenklatura in ignoring reality in favour of détente. Not all of the peace movement colluded, but a significant section did, enabling the acceptance of communist front organisations in the trans-national peace movement. There was also a decided unwillingness and incapacity to confront the funding problems of the redistributive welfare state, to the point of silently preferring the privatization of state assets to temporarily replenish state coffers and buy time. In sum: even though the writings of leftist dissidents from Eastern Europe were available, the left was not prepared for the eventuality of the collapse of the socialist dictatorship over needs, nor for the neo-liberal drive to privatise state assets.

During the 1970s and 1980s the Left was challenged by new social movements in much of Europe. While some individuals in the West did have connections to the East, the wider movements, be they feminist, gay and lesbian or green, did not develop a strategy for dealing with the collapse of state socialism. Indeed, the Western social movements quickly felt threatened by the (new) Eastern sisters and brothers. That there would be a disconnect between the East and the West was not an unavoidable consequence of 1989, considering, for example, high female employment rates or large-scale environmental destruction. Yet, the new social movements, increasingly foregrounding not equality and redistribution but identity and difference, seemingly could not but imagine Eastern Europe as the "other." As they pictured the ex-socialist citizens as consumerist and conservative (if not outright racist, sexist and so on), the new social movements fostered division and exclusion in Europe. The identitarian left has perpetuated clichés about the civilizational backwardness of Eastern Europe, thus helping to create the ideational divergence that makes the search for joint solutions of East and West difficult – be it in the realm of gender politics or international security.

It must be observed that the defeat of the non-communist left was avoidable and therefore political. Current changes in Europe, even if large scale, are not of the same order as the transition between agricultural and industrial society. Politics, policies and elections do matter. While the redistributive left was hemmed in by globalisation, privatization and the funding problems of the welfare state, this is no excuse for the failure to critically examine options around the nexus of the market and ownership and imagine the consequences of privatisation. Privatisation, shareholder value and the free market mania have not stoked the legitimacy crisis of capitalism but entrenched ownership relations and state structures that severely limit any efforts at redistributive policies. Perhaps most significantly, over the medium-term, is that the European Left has no strategy for dealing with the very large regional inequalities inside the enlarged European Union and beyond. The average income in London is 12 times higher than in the rural regions of Bulgaria and Romania. More widely observable is a differential of 8:1 for the richer Western regions as compared to the poorer Eastern regions. Leaving the integration of Europe to a combination of free market policies and identity politics will result in a toxic combination of capitalism and nationalism that is fuelled by destructive competition, migratory pressures and the securitization of identities.

Nation building and independent statehood in the post-Soviet space

It is often said that the revolutions of 1989 were national revolutions: an 'autumn of nations'. To say that these were national revolutions is also to emphasise that they were neither a joint revolution against an imperial centre nor merely an instance of falling dominoes. While one may argue whether the collapse of the Soviet empire was the cause or consequence of the revolutions, there is no doubt that the revolutions played out nationally. Even in federal republics (e.g. Slovenia, the Baltic republics) the revolution was distinctly national, fuelled and confirmed by a centre that attempted some form of military intervention. In being directed against Soviet hegemony, the revolutions of 1989 were secessionist, establishing independent nation-states.[4]

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[4] The autumn of nations brought with it a veritable boom in nationalism studies. Some noteworthy studies are: Simon 1986, Carrere d''Encausse 1990, Dunlop 1993, Motyl 1993, Suny 1993, Szporluk 2000. On the

Before and after 1989, notions of primordial nationalism as well as instrumental nationalism were projected onto the (post-) Soviet space. The notion of primordial nationalism fuses anthropology and history to suggest that Eastern Europe is a site of old and tribal ethnic communities that strive for political independence while also rivalling for political hegemony. Sometimes it will be claimed that primordial nationalism is typical of Eastern Europe, while instrumental nationalism is typical of Western Europe. For instrumental nationalism to emerge, state building, industrialisation and the trappings of modernity, like literacy, compulsory education and a national public sphere, are deemed essential. If extended to Eastern Europe, then the more recent modernization is emphasised, including the modernising agency of the Soviet state in, first, introducing compulsory education and, then, expanding higher education in the USSR.

Yet, in focusing on the revolutions of 1989 it becomes evident that these were accompanied in the main by vigorous efforts at state building. First and foremost came efforts to secure independent statehood, notably in Russia too. In many instances these efforts were directed at establishing a democratic and constitutional state in the full sense of the meaning. Not everywhere was this the case and some leaders may have embraced independent statehood reluctantly. Yet, the revolutions of 1989 were arguably more about independent statehood than nationality. Moreover, even an only cursory glance at the preceding history makes clear that these states were new. Some states had never existed before and those that had, could draw little from this tradition. This is especially true in Central Europe. Even though all these states had existed in some form at some point in the 20th century, the states that became independent in 1989 were essentially new, especially in their aspiration to be democratic and constitutional. Furthermore, staying viable as a state, mostly as a fairly small state, required integration twice over. Internationally, these states had to integrate into larger structures designed to secure peace and cooperation. Nationally, they had to integrate any (remaining) minorities, not least to pre-empt future challenges from neighbouring states. Thus the logic of the situation created in 1989 effectively curtails nationalism. The slogan of a "return to Europe," widespread in Eastern Europe before and after 1989, captures the need for the new states to integrate internationally and internally.

Scholarly assessments of the legacy of 1989 were, however, coloured by what happened afterwards. The war in the Balkans and the return of ethnic cleansing and genocide prompted a wider reappraisal of the 20th century as an age of extremes and violence. To be sure, as a consequence of World War II, most people began living in homogenous nation-states. This observation, however, highlights that the Soviet period was instrumental for nation building. It was instrumental in all its violence of deportations, ethnic cleansing, boundary shifts and genocide, as well as those aspects of Soviet nationality policy that fostered a sense of national community – like the creation of political units with titular nations, compulsory and higher education, mass media and so on. Notably, the communist

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distinction between instrumental and primordial nationalism: Smith 1986, Gellner 1997. For historical overviews that thematize the connection between nation building and war, genocide and ethnic cleansing: Hobsbawm 1994, Mazower 1998, Judt 2005.

party was part of this process, at times adapting to nationalist pressures, at times furthering nation building.

Post-1989, a mistaken consolidation of a frame of reference may be observed, by which nation building is now overwhelmingly associated with nationalism. Interesting about this discursive shift is only the difference to 1848. While in the 'spring of nations" it was still a concept of hope; in the "autumn of nations," the nation is something to be afraid of lest its latently violent nature becomes overt in ethnic cleansing and genocide. While this may be grist to the mill of those advocating a post-national Europe, this frame of reference obscures the split legacy of 1989 in terms of state building.

A significant number of states have joined NATO and the EU. To all purposes and intent, these states are consolidated democracies that are on their way to becoming competitive innovators (like Spain or Ireland before them). Some states have developed a form of competitive authoritarianism that features elections but has not (yet) resulted in meaningful democratisation. Moreover, advances are often only temporary. The future of these states seems unclear. A significant number remain marred in conflict and violence, possibly for decades to come. Where Western military intervention is not feasible, stabilisation and peace seems altogether elusive (Caucasus, parts of Central Asia, Moldova). Yet, it is unclear whether Western intervention will indeed lead to a different outcome (Bosnia, Kosovo).

In all of this there seems to be a trend towards state building based on ethno-linguistic homogeneity. These are not projects of re-unification or aggrandisement, but rather of fragmentation. While the early European Community may have been a brilliant rescue of the larger nation state (cf. Milward 1992), the new European Union looks like a trendsetter on the way to small nation states.

Resistance, dissidence and the revival of civil society

The spontaneous rise of civil society in 1989, so it may be contended, constituted a utopian moment. In the span of a few months, the heroes of dissidence, public intellectuals and newly organised civic associations led whole societies to new shores. This exhilarating founding moment of post-totalitarian society brought with it high expectations not just about democracy, but also the democratisation of society. These expectations in the main were held for Central Europe, but did extend to Russia for some time.[5]

Civic triumph in 1989 led scholars to search for the origins of revolution in earlier civic resistance, dissidence and self-mobilisation. This has led to a shift in attention away from the totalitarian system and towards spaces of resistance. Poland often features prominently in these accounts. In 1980, Solidarity became a trade union and a national movement that carved out a civic space in and against a totalitarian regime. Even if this regime was the most troubled in the Soviet bloc, this form of self-mobilisation, led by workers and supported by dissident

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[5] The literature on the civil society emerged in the 1980s from Eastern Europe and the topic has received sustained attention, leading to notions of a global civil society. Some noteworthy pieces are Konrad 1984, Keane 1988, Cohen/Arato 1992, Goldfarb 1992, Havel 1994, Bozoki 1998.

intellectuals, was wholly unexpected. Solidarity pioneered the self-limiting revolution, which became the model for the peaceful revolutions of 1989.

Some historians have been seeking to trace linkage, exchange and mobility in Central Europe in an effort to show how the theory and practice of the self-limiting revolution spread (Kenney 2002). Despite martial law being imposed in Poland in December 1981, Solidarity continued to function, if underground, and new civic organisations emerged. Indeed, it may be shown that among a key group of individuals in Central Europe, numbering no more than a few hundred, travel to and from Poland and the exchange of information and experience in the region helped in important ways to shape civic self-mobilisation when it came.

The scholarly turn towards Poland also set the scene for the re-examination of the relationship between dissident intellectuals and the wider society. This is not just about the defence of workers, but about the more systematic interaction between Solidarity and dissident intellectuals, who acted as advisers and created international publicity. Moreover, church and religion return into focus, especially the fusion of religion, identity and language in movements for national independence, which burst onto the scene in the late 1980s.

While most scholars will acknowledge the temporal compression of civic self-organisation, i.e. from 1987 onwards in Central Europe and Russia; a re-evaluation nevertheless has begun of the antecedents of civil society in the 1960s and 1970s. However, this shift is highly ambiguous for it tends to consider as very important the combination of (individual) acts of dissidence, the wider Helsinki process and some form of media (e.g. samizdat, tamizdat, Radio Free Europe publicity). This amounts to a revision of history, possibly unintentionally, that makes the communist system look decidedly more "liberal". While the late totalitarian system of the 1970s and 1980s was not as murderous as that of the 1950s, there can be no doubt that any opposition was repressed, dissidence marginalised and individuals imprisoned time and again. What should give revisionists pause, is that the dissidents themselves often re-affirm earlier analyses that emphasise the totalitarian character of the system. On the other hand, the meaning of dissidence also depends on the actions and reactions of the repressor. If the threat of repression (violence) is withdrawn or no longer plausible, then dissidence becomes not only unstoppable but is also magnified in its significance precisely because of the earlier history of repression.

The notion of the revival of civil society highlights that the dissidents and organisers taking centre stage in 1989 went on to take over many of the key positions in the new political order, including heads of state and government. Thus the spirit of 1989 lived on in Europe and on the international stage for the following decade. The civil society of 1989 inserted itself into globalisation through an emphasis on human rights. Moreover, the utopian moment reinforced the notion that there exists a single, universal path towards democracy, private property and the market. Depending on the nation and locality, variety may be observable, but no viable alternative to liberal democracy exists. The other of this path towards the light of liberal democracy is the descent into authoritarianism, nationalisation and planning. Indeed, so the assumption, one begets the other and none of these is

acceptable any longer. Planning, nationalisation and autocracy constitute the new taboo of the emerging global order.

The utopian moment of 1989 has created high standards. In a significant number of countries, the revolutionaries achieved a peaceful transition that was democratic at the origin; in multiple senses:

❑ Elections were held, which were also free and fair for the incumbents of the old order;
❑ Constitutionalism was doubly democratic in that the process of writing and altering the constitution was itself undertaken 'as if' a democratic constitution had already been enacted;
❑ The new democracies instituted a large measure of vertical and horizontal accountability, which limited the power of politics by party and government through constitutional courts, media and electoral turnover;
❑ The new democracies quickly accepted the jurisdiction of a wider international order and courts (e.g. European Court of Human Rights).

The legacy of 1989 has shaped the interaction of the European Union with its "near abroad." EU strategy became less realist and more moralist by holding neighbouring regimes to high expectations (cf. Meloni 2007, Delcour/Tulmets 2008). The European Neighbourhood Policy extends a mutual commitment to common values to regions that have not in any meaningful sense established these values (democracy, human rights, rule of law etc.). This is paradoxical and problematic because the negotiated revolutions of 1989 were national events with local roots. That is to say, though the revolutions of 1989 were a trans-national event, the consolidation of democracy in the emerging new states was dependent on the local course of events. Only where a negotiated revolution was completed successfully, democracy stabilised. It seems unlikely that the values affirmed locally may now be transposed to a near abroad.

The end of the Cold War and the new World Order

"How Ronald Reagan won the war"… has become a familiar story line. It resonates with those who think the USA won the Cold War and with those in the former Soviet Union who think that Moscow lost the war. That the Cold War ended was unexpected. The Soviet bloc seemed invincible. This was all the more so because the Cold War created a symmetry of perspectives. In as much as NATO seemed unassailable by mutually assured destruction, so did the Warsaw Pact. After 1989, observers noted that the Soviet Union and its military machine was overstretched, but during the 1980s the main worry had been that the USA might suffer from decline. While Reagan's military spending was impressive, it only reinforced worry. Once Gorbachev made serious proposals of disarmament, Reagan and NATO responded. For much of the late 1980s, Gorbachev received rapturous applause on an extended goodwill tour.[6]

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[6] Much money been spent on the revision of the history of the Cold War as archives and new sources became available internationally. This issue has received more sustained attention that any other and the publication of new results is ongoing. Some noteworthy synthetic new histories of the Cold War are: Arnason 1993, Maier 1996, Gaddis 1997, Saull 2001, Westad 2006.

If anything, the new rapport between Moscow and Washington seemed to increase Gorbachev's room for manoeuvre at home. Indeed, easing international tensions seemed a necessary prerequisite for perestroika and a reorientation of the economy away from the military. That no one in the West was actively seeking the destruction of the USSR was also borne out in the way that the West continued to be supportive of Gorbachev even as the Congress of the Peoples' Deputies declared the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact void and the Baltic republics prepared to secede.

Nevertheless, from its endpoint, the history of the Cold War needed re-writing. Revisions have been extensive (and more so than for any other area covered here). While the Iron Curtain from the Barents Sea to the Adriatic symbolised the standoff between East and West in its asymmetric nature, the conflict in particular constituted and shaped the Third World. While Western Europe enjoyed a golden age under the umbrella of mutually assured destruction, Eastern Europe resembled a giant prison on rations and the Third World mainly experienced disaster in the form of external assistance, military intervention and civil war.

The Cold War globalised the world by a mix of superpower intervention and postcolonial politics (Westad 2006). While both superpowers were driven by an interventionist ideology, the agency of the postcolonial leaders should not be underestimated, particularly in aligning themselves to a superpower or in opposing both. Where in the Third Wold the war was frozen as in Europe, the pattern was repeated initially: South Korea, Japan and Taiwan enjoyed increasing prosperity, the Communist states descended into misery (North Korea, China). The more important legacy, however, may well be:
  ❑ The destabilisation of large parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America in a stand-off between the superpowers, for which armed conflict has been a way of life for decades;
  ❑ The realignment of China outside the Soviet bloc, supported by the USA, which has enabled them to mix autocracy with capitalism.
Ironic is that while the USA may think it has won the Cold War, it has become the chief victim of its fallout by being caught in a vicious circle of being asked or forced to intervene abroad only to incur more implacable hostility.

The dynamic that brought down Soviet world power did not play out in the Third World, but in relation between the inner and outer empire in Europe. For Moscow and the CPSU, integration into the Cold War was increasingly the raison d'etre. In their eyes this was legitimated by the experience of World War II and gave them the right to keep Central Europe occupied. Engagements in the Third World and the maintenance of a blue water navy may have been costly, but what destroyed Soviet world power was the loss of the European possessions. While these were legitimate possessions in the eyes of Moscow, the manner of their secession revealed that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, Yalta and Soviet occupation policies with their rape, murder, deportations and ethnic cleansing, had bequeathed a birth defect to the Soviet world system.

In the immediate aftermath of 1989, there was a strong expectation that a peace dividend would now accrue. Instead, the world very quickly entered a new phase of war, civil war and terrorism that has begun to transform the West too. This new

era of permanent warfare has been framed as a clash of civilisations and war on terror, but it seems much more to be the result of the 40 years war in the Third World in conjunction with the Soviet collapse.

However, ever since 1989, the foreign policy of US administration seems to have been misguided by Cold War triumphalism (Falk 2008). Notions of pre-emptive military action, regime change and external democracy assistance came to the fore and to grief most obviously in Iraq, but these notions have been cherished by scholars, politicians and policy-makers for many years and found expression in the National Security Strategy as early as 1992. On the assumption that the US won the Cold War, the foreign policy of that era seemed vindicated and the defeats of the Cold War (e.g. Cuba, Vietnam) were re-assessed as temporary setbacks. US intervention in the Balkans, aided by the incompetence and incapacity of the European Union, seemingly confirmed US interpretations about 1989. Historical events are always open to interpretation, but wilful interpretations may come to haunt the interpreter. If strategic action is to result in intended outcome, this does require as a prerequisite an adequate understanding of the historical situation. It seems doubtful that successive US administrations grasped the logic of the historical situation.

Conclusion: The global 1989

The revolutions of 1989 were not anticipated. Their scope and rapidity ushered in a new order overnight: in the revolutionary countries, for Europe and of the world. Because the revolutions of 1989 are associated with the end of the Cold War, the breakdown of the Soviet empire, the dissolution of communist party rule and the collapse of state socialism, the immediate impact as well as the ensuing socio-cultural change have been of truly global significance. The world after 1989 is very different from the one before 1989, both in a structural and an ideational sense. Indeed, the changes are so profound that two decades later actors and observers all over the world are still struggling to regain their bearings.

War and peace, conflict and cooperation in the international arena perhaps have been most obviously impacted by 1989, e.g. directly leading to the enlargement of NATO and the EU or the wars in the Post-Soviet space and the Balkans. Equally obvious is a shift in perceptions, for example, for the terrorists plotting 9/11, as well as the response of the US administration in invading Afghanistan and Iraq and the opposition to the Iraq invasion that was voiced in a concerted fashion by Paris, Berlin and Moscow. Also, the collapse of the Soviet empire and the USSR left behind not only a temporary vacuum, but also, for the future, tightly circumscribes the possibilities for federalist or imperial projects. In this sense, states and polities are also affected by 1989 at the structural level, e.g. by secession, devolution and the trend to small states; and at the ideational level, e.g. in that the nation-state is the state formation to which no alternative is imagined.

The post-communist and post-socialist world that we have inherited is different for states and societies and has brought about change in politics, the economy and culture. This change, however, is not always of the kind that was touted in the immediate aftermath of 1989. For example, while totalitarian rule has ended, this has not only implied a 'wave of democratization' but in the medium-term also a

new alliance of autocracies (e.g. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation). Another example: while communist party rule has ended, this has not resulted in a triumph of social democracy but its disorientation and in many countries led to a rise of a populist left, notably in Germany too. Indeed, it seems as if the return of social inequality is inexorable, a return based on class, but also marked by ethnic stratification and regional disparities. While the mobile society seems to exhibit a complementary fit with the new world order, the mobility of capital, goods, knowledge, people and services seems to circumscribe or even be antithetical to social mobility. It is therefore not accidental that the global knowledge society is described as a neo-feudalist order or the European Union as a neo-medieval empire. The counter vision of a cosmopolitan world society, while emphasising respect and recognition, would seem to fall short because it does not have a strategy to effectively address social inequality. Indeed, cosmopolitans are not able to challenge social exclusion, which undermines all talk of respect and recognition. Notions such as the "right to food" or the "right to water" address the issue in terms of human rights, but positive human or social rights are notoriously unenforceable.

Viewed from after 1989, the 20th century has seemed dark, an age of extremes and violence defined in Europe and spreading from there. However, just before 1989, it seemed as if the social question had been resolved, at least in the North: the 20th was seen as the social democratic century. Yet, in the 21st century the social question returns. But, with Marxism discredited and socialism infeasible, no ideas or actors are discernible that could carry the world towards a new resolution of the social question. This outcome is disquieting, for it now seems as if communism, fascism and world war were necessary handmaiden in this resolution, but have no peaceful, civil or cosmopolitan equivalent – at least, not yet. This should worry everyone.

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