PART I

Introduction

1

The discourses of democratic transition

In 1989, the "Autumn of the People" ushered in high hopes concerning the possibilities for democratic transformation in the countries of the soon-to-be-post-communist world. Suddenly the Soviet bloc was no more – and within two years the Soviet Union itself would be gone too. While the revolution took different forms in different countries, in many ways 1989 was the hour of those who had labored in oppositional civil society, often underground, sometimes in prison. Suddenly they were joined on the streets by many others. This fine democratic hour seemed to hold lessons even for the more established liberal democracies in the West, which featured at that time a much less heroic kind of democratic politics, beholden to routine, ambition, material interest, and money. For a moment, democracy in its most inspirational form seemed to be found in the East rather than in the West.

Many of these high hopes have now withered. It is one thing to overthrow an exhausted system (or even just to walk into the vacuum left by its collapse), quite another to deal on a day-to-day basis with ethnic tensions, the legacy of economic stagnation, a global capitalist political economy that soon turns out to be ungenerous and unforgiving, severe environmental pollution, and inherited creaking state bureaucracies. Simultaneous negotiation of institutional, economic, and attitudinal transition has often proven extraordinarily difficult, especially in the presence of ethnic conflicts and controversies over borders and boundaries.[1] Moreover, each of these three

[1] For an argument that simultaneity can actually facilitate transition by focusing reformers' attention on everything that needs to be done and how different aspects can and should be interrelated, see Di Palma, 1993. For a counterargument, see Binder, *et al.*, 1971 (we were led to these sources by Ramet, 1997).

dimensions of transition has several aspects. Institutional transition refers to legal, social, and educational institutions, as well as governmental ones. Attitudinal transition covers attitudes not only toward new institutions and laws, but also toward changing class structures, identities, and international allegiances. Since 1989 the post-communist world has witnessed plenty in the way of economic catastrophe, ethnic warfare, civil conflict, political instability, and lingering and sometimes resurgent authoritarianism. Of course, some countries have fared much better than others on the various dimensions of transition; but whether or not there is light at the end of them, many tunnels have had to be negotiated, and remain to be negotiated.

By now there exists a number of studies of the experience of political and economic transition in post-communist societies. So why add another at this juncture, more than a decade after those heady days of 1989? We believe we do have something different, novel, and important to offer. We present here a study that is based on the way democracy and democratization are conceptualized and lived by ordinary people and political activists in the post-communist world – including those for whom democracy is a negative symbol – for democracy is not just, or perhaps even mainly, a matter of introducing institutions such as a constitution, parliament, elections, a party system, and a legal system. Such institutional hardware is vital, but so too is the institutional software. That is, to understand if or how democracy works, we must attend to what people *make* of it, and what they think they are doing as they engage politics, or politics engages them. Here, a glance at a different time and place is instructive. Attempts to parachute Westminster-style institutions into ex-British colonies in Africa in the 1950s and 1960s produced only parodies of the original, mainly because those involved with these institutions had little or no exposure to the habits, traditions, and dispositions necessary to make these particular institutions function.

What people make of democratic institutions matters precisely because what is at issue is democracy, unique among the political forms in human history. Such a question is much less pressing for political systems in which what the people think as they engage or are engaged by politics is mostly irrelevant.

It is common to begin books about democracy with the observation that democracy as a concept today meets something approaching universal approval – provided that one does not inquire too closely into what democracy actually means to all those who applaud it, for democracy is a contested concept, especially in societies in the process of transition from an authoritarian or totalitarian political economy. Political actors in these societies often justify their projects and preferred political orders in the language of democracy – even when these projects are directly opposed to one another, as in the case of the violent confrontation between president and parliament in

Russia in 1993. But widespread appeal to the symbols of democracy should not necessarily lead to cynicism about the language of democracy. Rather, it suggests that we should pay close attention to the variety of meanings that can be embedded in this language by political actors and ordinary people. It is these meanings we propose to study, for they reveal what people can and do make of democracy, and of the institutions with which they are confronted.

We show that in post-communist societies there prove to be many varied interpretations of what constitutes the essence of democracy – though probably no more varied than within the more established liberal democracies.[2] In addition, as we shall see in this study, the generalization about universal approval of the concept of – the very word – democracy no longer holds. Within some (but not all) of these societies, there are indeed those who ascribe negative connotations to the term itself. We intend to explain the variety of positive and negative interpretations and accounts of democracy through reference to the histories – both recent and more distant – and contexts of each society, and examine their consequences for what is found and what is possible in the way of political models and reform trajectories.

We shall develop an account of the discourses of democracy prevailing in the mid- to late 1990s in Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, China, Czechia, Georgia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).[3] For each country, this account resembles what Bourdieu (1990, 1993) calls a "discursive field," constituted by the positions that actors, often opposing one another, can occupy. The structure of the field constrains what positions can be taken, but is itself determined by the actions, interactions, and contestations of those taking positions (for a good application of this idea to Soviet and Russian politics, see Urban, 1997). In developing this account for each country, we deploy methods that give full rein to individuals to express their own subjective conceptualizations of what democracy and democratization mean. These results are, then, firmly grounded in the way people think and so act politically; it is these subjective dispositions and capabilities that we seek to reconstruct. Of course, we cannot remove our own vantage point entirely: we do not offer unmediated views from inside post-communist countries.[4]

[2] The relative *proportions* of the various interpretations might well differ between these two kinds of society. However, even this should not be assumed, and requires empirical testing. Individual countries in both groups might be closer to individual countries in the other group than to their group's norm.

[3] We tried to include Hungary in our analysis, but a severe glitch late in the project meant that this aspiration was frustrated. Hungary's absence does not affect our basic argument.

[4] Cumings (1999, p. 4) speaks of a "parallax view" that looks at both sides (in his case, the United States and East Asia) from a point that is in neither, but rather "off center," such that *both* sides are problematized.

But we do not intend simply to report on the discursive field of democracy for each society. As just mentioned, we shall seek to explain the content and pattern of the discourses that we find through reference to both the deeper history and the contemporary circumstances of each country. This does not mean that we should expect to find simple congruence between these circumstances and prevailing discourses. Dissonance is also possible. For example, if there is little or no congruence between public policy on fundamental matters and popular discourses, then there is a risk of instability, protest, perhaps even violence. At any rate, whether it is stability, instability, breakdown, or reform that is at issue in a particular case, the extant discourses can shed explanatory light on political-economic situations and how they change.

We conceptualize the relationship between political development and discourses in interactive terms: discourses help condition what is possible and likely in terms of political development, while political development can change the terms of discourses. However, we believe discourses can be relatively stable over time, though dramatic events such as the revolutions of 1989 might occasionally change their configuration quite radically. We cannot *prove* this stability, because our empirical work was carried out at one time in the late 1990s. However, in drawing out connections between discourses and historical legacies, we try to render plausible the idea that discourses can endure over years, decades, possibly even (in Poland and China) centuries. Though their historical reach is quite variable, the discourses we identify represent more than passing reactions to events.

In addition, we will explore connections and conflicts between these discourses and particular models of democracy and democratization, for all democratic theories, be they liberal, participatory, republican, feminist, pluralist, or elitist, make claims about the capabilities and dispositions of individuals who compose any actual or potential political order. Our methodology can test such claims for particular times and places, and so illuminate the possibilities for congruence and dissonance between the various models of democracy and the particular cases to which they might apply.

Discourses and models of democracy

Among those who make it their business to study post-communist political transformations, there have, we think, been rather too many for whom an adequate model of democracy remains a minimalist or electoralist one. This model takes its bearings from Joseph Schumpeter's (1942) depiction of realistic democracy as the electoral struggle between competing elites. Ordinary citizens have an occasional voter's role in this model, but they are treated in general as uninformed and apathetic, and so incapable of exercising effective

control over the content of public policy. This model fell from favor long ago among democratic theorists, but remains popular among transitologists (see, for example, Di Palma, 1990; Huntington, 1991; Mueller, 1996), most of whom have no interest in the efforts of democratic theorists.[5] Contrasting the fortunes of democratic theorists' ambitious models with what happens in the real world, Sartori (1991, p. 437) declares that "the winner is an entirely liberal democracy, not only popularly elected government, but also, and indivisibly, constitutional government; that is, the hitherto much belittled 'formal model of democracy' that controls the exercise of power."

On the minimalist account, we should stop worrying about political transition or transformation once competitive elections have occurred. As John Mueller puts it,

> most of the postcommunist countries of central and eastern Europe have essentially completed their transition to democracy . . . what they now have is, pretty much, it. They are already full-fledged democracies if we use as models real Western countries (as opposed to some sort of vaporous ideal) . . . In consequence, it may be sensible now to decrease the talk of "transition" and to put a quiet, dignified end to the new field of transitology. (Mueller, 1996, pp. 102–3)

Following this advice, once we stop worrying about transition, we can start to worry about consolidation, conceptualized simply as stabilization of regular competitive elections (Schedler, 1998). Here it may be especially important for both old (ex-communist) and new (nationalist) "counter-elites" to accept the electoral order (Kopecky and Mudde, 2000, p. 524). Huntington's (1991, p. 267) two-election test (requiring a freely elected government to cede power after a subsequent electoral defeat) can be applied as an empirical indicator of (minimalist) consolidation.[6]

[5] One of the anonymous reviewers of our typescript suggested that we were setting up a straw man by stressing the influence of Huntington in this field. But corroborating our assessment, M. Steven Fish recently concluded that "Huntington-type views" predominate in the literature on post-communist transition and have been of "immense global influence" (Fish, 1999, pp. 796 and 821).

[6] Beyond these brief comments, we do not consider it necessary for our purposes to enter the heated and sometimes precious debate concerning the appropriateness of the terms "transition," "transformation," and "consolidation." For what it is worth, we see the whole stage between the collapse of one system and the crystallization and stabilization of another as transition. Typically, in the early stages, the transitional society is coming to terms with its past (the legacy); this stage can be called the transformation phase (Bryant and Mokrzycki, 1994; for a reversal of this understanding of transition and transformation, see Schneider, 1997, p. 17). Later, the focus is more on perfecting the new institutions and practices through trial and error. This is the consolidation phase. Defining the point at which the consolidation stage has been completed (i.e., the new system is consolidated) is notoriously difficult (for a useful analysis, see the review article by Encarnación, 2000). Roughly, we

On the face of it, the minimalist model seems to imply that it hardly matters what people *think* about what they are doing as they participate (or indeed, choose not to participate) in democratic institutions. Yet closer examination reveals that even the minimalist model of democracy demands certain qualities in the political dispositions and capabilities of the masses, and somewhat different ones for elites. For the masses, the model requires a widespread attitude toward electoral politics that is apathetic yet supportive, accepting voting as the limit of participation. This attitude means leaving all important decision-making to be unquestioned, the preserve of elected elites (Zakaria, 1997 criticizes this minimalist approach as "illiberal democracy"). On this account, what O'Donnell describes and criticizes as "delegative democracy," emerging in some countries in Latin America and the post-communist world, passes the minimalist test. Under delegative democracy, "whoever wins election to the presidency is thereby entitled to govern as he or she sees fit, constrained only by the hard facts of existing power relations and by a constitutionally limited term of office" (O'Donnell, 1994, p. 57). To O'Donnell, this situation is not representative democracy because there is no accountability, no need for election promises to be remembered (for questioning of whether such an arrangement should even be called democracy, see A. Brown, 1999, especially p. 6).

The minimalist model does not require much in the way of political literacy or toleration of those with different points of view. Political literacy and

would argue that it has been reached when most members of the polity have accepted that the broad parameters of the system are settled – when, to paraphrase Offe, there are no longer major debates *about* the basic rules, but only *under* them (or, in Przeworski's [1991] terms, the new system has become "the only game in town"). One way to test this empirically would be to survey people on whether or not they believe that the basic *system* – as distinct from a particular *regime* (a leadership team) – will still be in place a decade hence. Of course, as Russia in the late 1990s warned us, the wording of the questionnaire would have to distinguish between normative acceptance of a system and a feeling that everything is likely to be basically the same – chaotic! – ten years hence. Clear explanation of what is understood as a system should largely overcome this problem. For us, however, the problem would remain that we see democracy as an ongoing interactive process, rather than some clearly defined end goal. In this sense, it is impossible to be entirely satisfied with the very concept of "consolidated," which implies completion as a form of closure. Yet we want to be able to continue with our argument without being accused of being unaware of a very important theoretical debate that others might believe we should engage. To return to the opening point of this footnote, we are not interested in becoming embroiled in an argument we believe can only go around in circles. For one of the most heated debates on "transition" and "consolidation," which considers the appropriateness of comparing different macro-regions of the world as well as these concepts, see (in this order) Schmitter and Karl, 1994; Bunce, 1995b; Karl and Schmitter, 1995; and Bunce, 1995a. For an early, rather cantankerous rejection of the notion of transition, see Jowitt, 1992, who believes that transition necessarily implies transition to democracy. His belief that the prospects for this in many countries of the region were slim explains his rejection of the term.

tolerance can be treated as the preserve of, and protected by, elites. However, proponents of the minimalist model must require acceptance on the part of ordinary people of the rules of the electoral game, and of the legitimacy of the political system to which elections are central (Plasser, Ulram, and Waldrauch, 1998). Without a supportive discourse, such acceptance can rest only on pragmatic compliance contingent on economic performance, or on habituation (Powers, 1998), or even on coercion. All three of these latter alternatives provide weak defenses for democracy, especially if economic crisis arrives. There needs to be something more robust, a normative commitment. In short, democracy needs popular *legitimacy*. Thus intelligent minimalists should attend to democracy's discourses.

Among liberal constitutionalists, there is in fact some recognition of the need for institutional transformation to be accompanied by a supportive civil society and political culture, and so (in our terms) discourses of democracy. However, such recognition is apt to treat civil society's discourse in one-dimensional terms, according to how well this discourse measures up to the requirements of liberal institutions.

There is no denying the analytical purchase that the minimalist model supplies when it comes to comparisons across time and space. With a little stretching, it can underwrite a temporal scale (in years) for rating the degree to which a democracy is consolidated (e.g., Lijphart's [1984, p. 38] "30–35" years of continuous existence before a new democracy can be considered consolidated). But this undoubted convenience for the analyst is, we believe, bought at the unacceptable price of insensitivity to the variety of forms that democratic political development can take, and to variations in the quality of democracy in systems that both pass and fail minimalist tests.

Other models of democracy can be both more demanding and more nuanced in terms of what they seek in the capabilities and dispositions of masses and elites alike. The methods we deploy do in fact enable us to investigate discourses in fine detail, rather than just array them crudely on a supportive/not supportive dimension. We will reveal a rich variety of parallels and conflicts between particular models of democracy and post-communist political discourses. This juxtaposition yields insights into just what kinds of democracy may be possible or impossible in different places, and how the ideals of democratic theorists and reformers (or, for that matter, reactionaries) might connect to political practice. We should emphasize that our interest is quite different from those consolidation scholars who eschew a minimalist model in favor of a more demanding set of tests that more countries fail (for example, Green and Skalnik Leff, 1997). We are interested in understanding, not condemnation.

Once we acknowledge that there is more to democratic life than a universally applicable, one-size-fits-all, minimalist model of democracy, a range

of possibilities opens up. This opening enables some fruitful connections to theories of democracy, as well as more nuanced interpretation of the paths that democratization can take. Such possibilities can be arrayed along the following dimensions, among others.[7]

Social democracy to libertarianism. Social democrats, in whose ranks may now be found a fair number of reformed communists, believe in substantial state intervention in the market economy along with governmental provision of welfare programs. Thus a democratic system should do more than allow citizens to make demands and representations (inputs); it should also ensure that citizens' needs are met (outputs). In contrast, libertarians believe that civil society and the economy can and should assume many of the tasks social democrats assign to the state. Libertarians believe in a small state and maximal scope for the market. True libertarians believe this arrangement is appropriate anywhere and at any time. Advocates of "shock therapy," applied most famously in Poland after 1989,[8] borrow some libertarian prescriptions for a limited transition period, but also require a very interventionist state to design the new market order.

Authoritarianism to open society. Authoritarianism can be exercised in the service of either a planned or market economy. One school of thought argues that effective marketization cannot proceed under democratic auspices. For example, Przeworski (1991, p. 183) argues that market-oriented reforms "are based on a model of economic efficiency that is highly technical. They involve choices that are not easy to explain to the general public and decisions that do not always make sense to popular opinion." Thus "A reform policy is not one that emerges from broad participation, from a consensus among all the affected interests, from compromises" (Brucan, 1992, p. 24; for a more comparative argument that too much democracy in developing and underdeveloped economies causes poor economic performance, see Gasiorowski, 2000). In contrast, advocates of the open society believe that political and economic liberalization can and should proceed hand in hand, for only an experimental, trial-and-error approach enables mistakes to be recognized and corrected, a process impossible under authoritarianism (Pickel, 1993).

Civil society to a strong state. Civil society conceived of in terms of political association not encompassed by the state or the economy played a large

[7] For a simpler but useful typology of kinds of democracy in the post-communist world, see Commisso, 1997, esp. pp. 1–15.

[8] Though Murrell (1993) has persuasively challenged the notion that it was implemented very extensively in Poland.

part in the revolutions of 1989. Many commentators were quick to write off civil society in this heroic guise, and some lament the persistence of the attitudes associated with it (Linz and Stepan, 1996), but it has its advocates as a continuing inspiration for post-communist societies (for example, Arato, 1993). A different, more prosaic version of the civil society model emphasizes the organization of interests, especially those with economic roots such as businesses and unions. Along these lines, Ost (1993) laments the weakness of civil society organizations in post-communist Eastern Europe, which leaves the field clear for a politics of identity that emphasizes religion and nationalism, together with a strong state (for further discussion of the weakness of post-communist civil society, see Bernhard, 1996; Pickvance, 1999). But a strong state may be a necessity where civil society is weak, and it does not have to be tied to the politics of identity. While it might at first sight seem paradoxical to argue that the consolidation of democracy requires firm central leadership, post-communist societies often lack not only the civil society (in the prosaic sense) but also the institutions, civic traditions, and culture of compromise that can make liberal democracy work, and can avoid a slide into political chaos and/or dictatorship. In this light, the key to democratic consolidation is effective state leadership committed to democratic and constitutionalist principles. Here, a strong state is one with the capacity to establish frameworks and laws, implement policies, and keep political development on a democratic course until civil society can assume more political responsibilities (L. Holmes, 1998). Of course, strong states can be put to very different uses by those not committed to such principles. Authoritarian states can be strong states, especially in the sense of being intrusive into citizens' lives and possessing large coercive apparatuses. Here we consider only the case for the strong state *within a democratic context.* This state is a capable state, which can establish effective democratic institutions and legal frameworks in the early post-authoritarian era and promote democratic political culture. It is strong enough to collect the taxes to fund democratization,[9] and capable of resisting both authoritarianism and anarchy. It does not have to be large; the Russian state machinery under Yeltsin was large but not very capable, hence not strong in this sense.

Pluralism to republicanism. Pluralists, indeed most liberals, believe that politics is properly about the reconciliation and aggregation of partial

[9] This problem of adequate funding of democracy is not confined to transition countries. Much of the recent political corruption in Western Europe – notably Germany – relates to inadequate legitimate funding of political parties. In today's world, there is no such thing as a free lunch, and no cost-free democracy.