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What is This?

Civil Society in Latin America and Eastern Europe: Reinvention or Imposition?

Vladimíra Dvořáková

Books Reviewed

Baker, Gideon (2002). *Civil Society and Democratic Theory: Alternative Voices.* London and New York: Routledge.

Glasius, M., Lewis, D. and Seckinelgin, H., eds (2004). *Exploring Civil Society: Political and Cultural Contexts.* New York: Routledge.

Howard, Marc Morjé (2003). *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kaldor, Mary (2003). *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Zimmer, Annette and Priller, Eckhard, eds (2004). *Future of Civil Society: Making Central European Nonprofit Organizations Work.* Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

The researcher of democratic transitions and consolidations often has to resolve a puzzle. The year of miracles (1989) in Central and Eastern Europe and the end of right-wing dictatorship in the 1980s in Latin America are mostly interpreted as a great victory for a civil society that had been reinvented as a concept in these regions before the nondemocratic regimes collapsed. At the same time, most of the authors reviewed argue that the problems with the consolidation of democracy and its fragility originate in the weakness or even almost nonexistence (especially in Central and Eastern Europe) of a vibrant civil society in these new democracies.

This review article considers the different approaches taken to resolve this "puzzle" using a rather broad framework. Its aim is to analyze these contradictory statements, trying to find whether a contradiction really exists or whether the

problem lies in using the same term and concept for different phenomena which occurred in different societal circumstances and which played different roles. We can even raise a provoking question: is the now weak civil society in these regions the direct or indirect outcome of the character and the type of activities of the then reinvented civil society? Also, last but not least, how has this reinvented term influenced the formation of "global" civil society? How has it been "elaborated" in western liberal democracies and how has this elaborated model been reimported and newly embedded in Latin American and Central and Eastern European societies?

There are so many publications dealing with the concept of civil society in both regions from various points of view that it was not easy to choose merely five of them. The theme of civil society in Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe runs through each chosen publication, although reference to these regions plays a different role in the general conception of each book. Nevertheless, the choice has had its logic. I begin with the "global" approach (Kaldor), then move to more comparative regional aspects (Baker; Glasius et al.), in which I will focus on the interpretation of Latin American and Central and Eastern European societies, and finally, I confront these approaches with the results of research carried out in Central and Eastern Europe (Howard; Zimmer and Priller).

For Mary Kaldor in *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War*, civil society was re-invented in the 1970s and 1980s almost simultaneously in both Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe and this reinvention was not isolated from the context of social, economic, and political changes in other parts of the world that became visible after 1989. Furthermore, the year 1989 brought the end of the Cold War and called into question the traditional, centralized war-making state. Since that time, according to her arguments, the words "civil society" and "global-ization" have become interconnected, reflecting a new reality – the concept of global civil society was born from the 1989 revolutions.

Because of the way the term was reinvented Kaldor argues against the broadly accepted opinion that the ideas of the 1989 revolutions were old, neither inno-vative nor oriented toward the future, as claimed by François Furet, Timothy Garton Ash, and Jürgen Habermas (all cited at Kaldor: 50). In her opinion, what was new about this concept "was both the demand for a radical extension of both political and personal rights – the demand for autonomy, self-organization or control over life – and the global content of the concept." As she characterizes them, these demands were "both about going beyond the state and transforming the state" and to achieve them it was both necessary and possible "to make alliances across borders and to address not just the state but international institutions as well" (Kaldor: 76).

These are important arguments in favor of the process of formation of global civil society and the rationality of international collaboration. But there is another important implication that Mary Kaldor does not mention because it is out-side the framework of her approach. What was the subsequent impact of such international development of civil society on Central and Eastern European and Latin American states?

The reinvention of civil society in the 1970s and 1980s in Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and other parts of the world was as important as the "inter-nationalization" or globalization of civil society. Even if there has been strong interconnectedness with Western European, North American, or international

nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), the internal conditions and the goals of transforming societies have been very different from those of stable democratic societies, although the vocabulary has appeared similar. Ironically, vocabulary seems to be one of the misleading factors that can often cause misinterpretation of the goals and the nature of particular organizations. The lesson of post-1989 development for many activists of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Central Europe was the importance of learning the "proper" vocabulary when preparing projects and seeking fundraising abroad. This was more important than defining the real problems of the society. That is, the development was more from "above" than from "below" and in some cases the problems solved by activists of civil society were "virtual," that is, society itself had not felt these problems as really important (although they might in fact have been so).

Kaldor does warn against the Eurocentric "imposition" of concepts and values and stresses the necessity of collaboration with internal streams in particular societies, but the reality is more complicated.[1] Whether we like it or not, historical determination or path dependency is present, and although global civil society is not only in the process of formation, but can also play an important role in changing the reality of the current world, we must also take into consideration the internal challenges and the necessity of step-by-step development from below that reflects the culture of each society.

The key problem of the reinvention of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe deals with the rule of law. As Kaldor stresses, the basic historical understanding of the concept of civil society is strongly connected with the rule of law: "civil society [is understood] as a rule of law and a political community, a peaceful order based on implicit or explicit consent of individuals, a zone of 'civility'" (Kaldor: 7). The rule of law is the base for any liberal democratic system, although it is not a sufficient condition for calling a regime a full-fledged democracy. Paradoxically, the typical feature of the reinventing of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s was the underestimation of the rule of law. Demands could be "both about going beyond the state and transforming the state," as was mentioned above. There are several explanations for this. First, there was almost no experience with the rule of law in both regions and if it existed, it was rather a short experience; thus, the procedures of the rule of law were not broadly accepted as "democratic values." Next, the "state" was supposed to be the enemy (and this attitude continues to be very strong in most of the associations and NGOs in these regions today). That was understandable, taking into consideration the character of the nondemocratic states, but Kaldor is right in stressing how the demand for a radical extension of both political and personal rights was part of the vision of how society was to be organized in the future, not only in Central and Eastern Europe, but also in the "postdemocratic" world. Václav Havel's (1985) famous essay "The Power of the Powerless," though strongly influential in the development of an understanding of the concept of civil society, makes no mention of the rule of law.

The concept of the "unneeded state" refers not to a refusal of the state, but to its lack of relevance for the organization of the life of civil society. It is present in the Central and Eastern European as well as Latin American concept of civil society, and in fact partly explains why Kaldor finds the roots of global civil society in these regions. The missing "world state" and the later-mentioned

problem of the missing "world public sphere" is not really a problem for her because other means are available: "the coming together of humanitarian and human rights law, the establishment of an international criminal court, the expansion of international peacekeeping, betoken an emerging framework of global governance, what Immanuel Kant described as a universal civil society, in the sense of a cosmopolitan rule of law, guaranteed by a combination of international treaties and institutions" (Kaldor: 7). This is a very weak framework for the rule of law to operate in, with limited space for the definition of basic procedures, centers of decision-making, and the responsibility and accountability of those who take the decisions. She is close to the activist interpretation of civil society: "The activist version is about political emancipation. It is about the empowerment of individuals and the extension of democracy" (Kaldor: 11). It is a radicalization of democracy and an extension of participation and autonomy. Active citizenship and self-organization outside formal political circles are necessary for such political emancipation; there must be space in which individual citizens can influence the conditions in which they live. This is really the heritage of the notion of civil society born in Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe: that civil society had to evade the state to form the space for freedom. However, this is also one of the reasons for the weakness of civil society in these regions, because in the process of transition there formed neither strong and effective channels of communication between the social and political spheres nor a full-fledged zone of "civility" (civil society as the rule of law and political community).

The concept of "global civil society" was indeed influenced by the reinvention of the concept in the regions of Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe. But what is current reality? It seems to me that the reality is nearer the neoliberal version as Kaldor describes it: "In the absence of a global state, an army of NGOs perform the functions necessary to smooth the path of economic globalization. Humanitarian NGOs provide the safety net to deal with the casualties of liberalization and privatization strategies in the economic field" (Kaldor: 9). Yes, there can be a positive impact on building the rule of law and respect for human rights in particular societies, but the problem consists not only in the state giving up responsibilities, as the foremost critics of the neoliberal approach argue, but also in the fact that INGOs tend to understand the public in particular countries as an "object" that is to be "liberated" or "educated," that is, not as the subject of the changes, not as a driving force reflecting the concrete problems of particular societies.

Kaldor's book is thought provoking and there are many other topics that would be interesting for discussion. However, my angle of interpretation is regionally limited, so these problems have been left aside.

Gideon Baker's approach and topics in his book *Civil Society and Democratic Theory: Alternative Voices* are in some sense similar to Kaldor's. The important difference is that whereas Kaldor places global civil society in the center of her analysis and both regions are important only because of the role they play in the reinvention of the term, Baker starts with analysis of Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe and gets to the problems of "global civil society" by considering the alternative voices. He considers "global civil society" as a possible alternative to the state–civil society relationship in both democratic theory and practice and his considerations are based on the historical (1970s and 1980s)

and current (transition and consolidation) experiences of both regions. The basic questions he asks are crucial for our interpretation. Are there alternatives to the liberal democratic vision of civil society?[2] Is locating democracy in civil society rather than the state either possible or desirable? Can global civil society further the struggle for democracy initiated by national civil societies?

His alternative readings of the relationship between civil society and democracy, the vision of a "democracy of civil society," raises the question of whether there really exists an alternative to the liberal democratic approach in which the role of civil society is largely instrumental. His analysis starts with the "historical" alternative discourses born in Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s that were more or less abandoned during the processes of transition in these regions where the liberal democratic model was accepted. His analysis continues with consideration of the new challenges to the liberal democratic model represented by "global civil society" (the transnational actions of new social movements and other non-state associations with global ambitions and reach), basing this on an investigation of the practice of the Zapatistas in Mexico. He argues against the generally accepted idea of the originality of the Zapatista movement, finding many similarities with the discourse of Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe in the 1980s. Zapatismo "involves the rejection both of traditional left vanguardism, and more generally, of the aim of achieving power in the state as such." Political space is "not only free from but also fundamentally indifferent to the party-state" (Baker: 132). However, he does acknowledge distinct features of the Zapatista understanding of civil society that reflect the societal, economic, and cultural context within which they operate and that differ from the 1970s and 1980s reinvention of the concept of civil society. To begin with, there is the role of armed struggle in their political theory and, second, "perhaps more significant still is the increasingly international account of the agency of civil society that the Zapatistas provide" (Baker: 141–2).

Zapatismo is a very good example for thinking about both synchronic and diachronic comparisons with Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s and nowadays. The similarities and differences described by Baker are substantial ones, but one difference is crucial, and that is the attitude toward neoliberalism. Although the negative position was present in most Latin American civil society activities against nondemocratic regimes, this was not part of Central and Eastern European dissent and has not developed even after the 1989 revolutions, when the neoliberal approach became the basis for economic transition. Zapatismo differs also from traditional civil society activities even in Latin America in its

> denationalised, or internationalised, conception of action in civil society ... State authoritarianism ... is to be understood within the wider context of neoliberalism as both global ideology and international political economy. It is to be variously resisted by those who are oppressed by it in a global network of opposition. Thus, with Zapatismo, the struggle of "civil society against the state" takes on a whole new, this time global, meaning. (Baker: 144)

Returning to our "puzzle" of the apparent move from a strong civil society that overthrew the communist regime to a weak civil society that now complicates the processes of democratic consolidation, Part III of Baker's publication is

important for us. The title of this part is significant: "The Taming of the Idea of Civil Society since 1989." He argues that the academic discourse on democratization is a liberal democratic one:

> There is thus a pervasive sense that civil society both cannot and should not reach beyond its role as a support structure for actually existing democracy at the state level. This largely uncritical attachment to the democracy that is over the democracy that might be reflects either an implicit acceptance of the thesis that liberal democracy represents the "end of history" or, to put it bluntly, an elitist fear of "too much" democracy. (Baker: 111)

The word "taming" used by Baker provokes because it takes for granted an "untamed" civil society in these regions in the 1970s and 1980s. But what was the reality? What was the impact of these concepts of civil society on the broader public? With the exception of Solidarity in Poland and the broader activities and discussions in Hungarian society, this "parallel polis" (Havel: 1985) was limited to rather small groups of dissidents in most of the communist countries. Charter 77, the most important proclamation of Czechoslovak dissent, was signed by 241 people in 1977. Even in Latin America, there was a lower level of organization as protests took place in particular countries, with Madres de Mayo in Argentina being the most famous example of the "reinvented" concept of civil society. This "untamed" civil society was not a broadly accepted vision even in the 1970s and 1980s in these regions. The methods of the "democracy of civil society" could be effective in the process of dismantling authoritarian regimes, but soon fell into the pitfall of pluralism in the moment of the construction of the new regime. The collapse of all the broad movements in Central and Eastern Europe which had organizational structures and methods based on these "civil society" principles (Solidarity, Civic Forum, Public Against Violence, Democratic Forum, and so on) was in some sense inevitable.[3] Furthermore, Baker does not take into consideration a factor that is extremely important for any democracy (whether liberal democracy or the "democracy of civil society"): the rule of law (as was discussed above). This indifference toward the state brought with it a generalized indifference to rules and procedures.

On the other hand, Baker is certainly correct when speaking about the taming of the idea of civil society. It was not only tamed, but somehow repudiated. The prevailing discourse[4] in Central and Eastern Europe today accentuates individual success, consumerism, and private life. Paradoxically, it is clear this tendency is in continuity with the final phase of the communist regime, a phase that was much more about the fragmentation, individualization, and privatization of society than about the formation of a "democracy of civil society." In fact, in some sense, the practices of the late communist regimes prepared the space for neoliberal policy.

Baker's conclusion is nonetheless optimistic:

> For democrats are often tempted to believe that their only option is to continue to [spend] their energies taking on the state, efforts which leave them for the most part exhausted, disillusioned and, given the sheer scale of their undertaking, open to temptation to vanguardist "solutions". Yet the idea of democracy worked out in civil society, sometimes falling into disrepair only to be revived in other times and places, resists just this narrowing move. At the

> moment when cynicism threatens to take over, the vision of "civil society first" is a salutary reminder that democracy does not have to be conceived as taking place somewhere above and beyond our everyday lives. (Baker: 171)

Baker's "alternative voices" represent an important contribution to the discussion of the role of civil society and the character of democracy in a globalized world and society.

When we turn to *Exploring Civil Society: Political and Cultural Contexts* by Marlies Glasius, David Lewis and Hakan Seckinelgin, we move to a more comparative approach that accentuates cultural contexts. It is worthwhile to compare the basic questions asked in this publication with those raised by Baker.[5] Is the civil society idea simply part of a neo-imperialist project of imposing western hegemony or is it about the radicalization of democracy and the redistribution of political power? Does the western bias toward thinking of civil society as secular, and formally organized, prevent the recognition of local forms of civil society? Is it beneficial to think of "global" civil society as a normative concept that embraces notions of nonviolence, solidarity, and active world citizenship? Although the topics are similar, the approach is different.

Here we again concentrate on the implications for Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe, leaving aside other regions. Nevertheless, it is necessary to stress that the significance of this book is mainly in its ability to analyze how the concept of civil society is being translated into different political and cultural contexts, and not only in Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe (in fact, the latter region is analyzed only in one chapter, that by Jerzy Celichowski). This broader scope permits deeper contextualization, as we see similar processes at work all over the world; the "global tour" is organized before getting to the problems of globalization and global civil society. It also enables us to "verify" the general questions and use the "comparative" approach.[6] The advantage (and, at the same time, disadvantage) is the very broad team of authors, mostly experts on particular regions. The different approaches, different understandings of the concept of society, and also different traditions of states in which "civil society" does operate limit the comparative value of the case studies. The more "general" chapters, such as those in Part Two ("Setting out the Argument"), set out very different interpretations of these processes by particular authors. Thus, Bikhu Parekh in his inspiring chapter "Putting Civil Society in its Place" argues that

> In the erstwhile communist countries, the state was an overpowering presence in society and stifled all areas of life. Not surprisingly, when communism collapsed, the demand for the long-suppressed associative freedom dominated popular consciousness and the concept of civil society became the central category of political discourse, especially among creative writers, trade unionists and political activists, who had suffered the most from its absence. (Glasius et al.: 20)

This is in contradiction with both the empirical research of Howard that we will discuss later, but also with the author of another chapter in this volume, Chris Hann ("In the Church of Civil Society"). Hann writes that "A decade after the collapse of socialism, I found that no academics in Moscow took the notion of civil society seriously. It was simply a magical phrase that it was always desirable to include in any foreign grant applications, just as a phrase about Russia's cultural

or spiritual renaissance was obligatory for grant applications within the country." Although I would not agree 100 percent with his interpretation, Hann confirms what I have mentioned above about the role of "vocabulary" and "language" in the process of fundraising by newly born NGOs.

This does not mean that Bikhu Parekh is not right when describing the feeling of part of society (in the Czech Republic, this stream can be seen as being represented by Václav Havel), but for the most part, after the first months of revolutionary enthusiasm, the willingness and readiness of the broader public to take an active part in the life of society, to be volunteers, was extremely low. It is not possible to say that the concept of civil society became the central category of political discourse; nevertheless, it was present. Hann gives at least a partial explanation for the low activity of citizens in post-communist countries:

> Many postsocialist citizens have experienced a decline in state provision – for example, in the value of pensions, or in education and health – without experiencing any compensatory material benefits from an NGO. Some of the consequences have been unintended, and even the opposite of what was intended, notably the brain drain abroad ... The main difference from socialism was that the new interventions had a foreign slogan, foreign managers and foreign criteria of success regarding what makes a decent society. (Glasius et al.: 46–7)

These are rather strong arguments, but they do not tell the full story. The neo-liberal approach toward economic transitions, entailing a very weak legal framework and weak legal constraints against conflicts of interest, led to the growth of corruption and broadly based mistrust in the state, thus reproducing the attitudes present in the previous regime regarding the role of the state and politics. One might have expected that this would strengthen the formation of civil society and provoke the formation of critical social movements following the tradition of the 1970s and 1980s. To explain why this did not happen would require more research than has yet been done; nevertheless, it is probably safe to say that this lapse is connected with the political culture, tradition, and to some extent with the self-censorship that limited criticism in the first years of transition, when any criticism was defined as support for the previous regime.

What is even more important, the memory of "civil society first" is lost, and the history of the dissidents, the discussions, and the visions are no longer in the center of public discourse, mainly because the process of "decommunization" was politically misused and in some sense reproduced the culture of the past. The numerous studies of "transitional justice" fail to take into account how most of the new political and economic elites view the link between the past and civil society in Central and Eastern Europe. Western literature on Central and Eastern Europe finds the historical roots of contemporary civil society in the reinvention of civil society in the 1970s and 1980s, but this is not the public discourse in Central and Eastern Europe. The past is interpreted in the mass media and by politicians in terms of what is found in the files of the secret police and the same is true even for the "Institutes of National Memory" that were formed under the control of the politicians[7] in some post-communist countries (Poland, the Slovak Republic, and the Czech Republic). In fact, the younger generation (and also the elder generation, because of the censorship during the communist

regime) knew nothing about the dissent and the reinvention of civil society in the 1970s and 1980s. The interpretation of the past is thus only negative; it is not the source of a positive future.

I think Bikhu Parekh is right in his analysis of state and civil society relations. "Civil society does not precede or exist outside or behind the back of the state. Instead, it is made possible by the state, which both permits and protects associative freedom, and exists as a moment, a space, within it" (Glasius et al.: 23). The rule of law is important and must be guaranteed by the state, with civil society playing the role of "watchdog." Parekh presents a strong argument against Baker's alternative voices. As Parekh puts it, civil society organizations "are not popularly elected and accountable, and sometimes they are authoritarian and remote from their members. Their decision-making procedures are not always transparent, [nor] their decisions open to public scrutiny" (Glasius et al.: 24).

The other questions that are raised in particular chapters of this volume deal with the important problem of the "exportation" of civil society and the state–civil society relationship. Chris Hann warns that the exportation of civil society can lead to the abortion of local processes of change (Glasius et al.: 44). His anthropologist approach is very critical of the "imposition of [a] specifically Anglo-Saxon notion of civil cohesion." I have mentioned above that an "exported" civil society is largely unable to react to the real problems of society. It is not based on the activities of volunteers, imposing instead topics and solutions that society is often not prepared for. On the other hand, this "imposition" in most of the Central and Eastern European countries filled the vacuum that existed when there was no professional staff and no experience with fundraising, accounting, and writing proposals and reports. Also, it disseminated the basic "standards" of liberal democratic regimes, getting topics such as accountability, conflicts of interest, human rights, and minority rights on to the agenda. It cannot be verified whether this imposition prevented the formation of grassroots organizations from below. But in any case, some positive stimuli were seen. Hann's conclusion is too pessimistic and in some senses, close to the neoconservative approach of those ruling elites who fight against "NGO-ism" and "human-rightism":

> This new church of civil society is roughly comparable to the secular religion it has replaced across much of Eurasia, the Marxist-Leninist variety of socialism. Both are varieties of non-spiritual religion. Their visions of the good life are somewhat different, as are the techniques they employ, but both suffer from a common deficiency. By proclaiming that salvation is to be found here on this earth, through improvements in human institutional arrangements, neither is able to connect with the transcendental, with that sense of the sacred, which so many human beings appear to need ... Many enthusiasts of the 1980s and early 1990s have already lost faith. Outside academia the church is struggling, at least in the postsocialist world. The combination of a continuing flood of rhetoric but dwindling material transfers and mounting moral revulsion may be enough to send civil society back to the conceptual graveyard from which it was so recently exhumed. (Glasius et al.: 49)

Reading Jenny Pearce's chapter "Collective Action or Public Participation? Civil Society and the Public Sphere in Post-transition Latin America" in Glasius et al., I found many similarities with Central and Eastern Europe, for example when she writes that "Latin America's state institutions evolved to serve narrow

political and economic interests. They preserved cultures of their own where the electorate was seen more as a clientele for the power struggles of politicians than as citizens with rights" (Glasius et al.: 62). This characteristic confirms the weakness of civil society in both regions, and at the same time, the result of this weakness. Furthermore, Pearce's interpretation of the role of the Inter-American Development Bank in supporting reforms in the public sector and alliance with "civil society" can be roughly compared to the role of the EU in the accession negotiations and the formation of NGOs that became increasingly donor oriented. However, Central and Eastern Europe lacks the rich panoply of social movements and grassroots activists working directly with the socially excluded, motivated by the quest for serious social change and inspired by the work of Antonio Gramsci, that Pearce finds in Latin America. But even in Latin America the situation is far from "ideal." For Pearce (Glasius et al.: 68–9), the main problem hindering the development of "public space" or "strong publics" (quoting Nancy Frazer) lies in the lack of common ground and mutual respect between social movement activists and nongovernmental and other groups who opt to work within the space opened up from above (by governments) and from outside (by external donors).

Leonardo Avritzer's chapter in Glasius et al., "Civil Society in Latin America: Uncivil, Liberal and Participatory Models," offers a more historical and sociological view of the problem. He explains the specific social structure of colonial and postcolonial Latin America that prevented the acceptance of the idea and concept of civil society in this region. The emergence of civil society in the late 20th century he interprets not only as a reaction to authoritarian regimes, but also as a response "to a further differentiation of market and society that was brought about by neoliberal policies" (Glasius et al.: 55). This is a very important thesis because it marks the basic difference in the two regions of Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe. Although the reinvention of the concept of civil society happened at the same time and was in reaction to nondemocratic regimes, the process of differentiation of market and society started in Central and Eastern Europe only after the collapse of communism. This can be an explanation for the lower level of organization in social movements and grassroots organizations in this region compared with Latin America. Avritzer also offers a very useful typology of models of civil society: uncivil model, liberal civil society model, and participatory model. The basic criteria are the level of state construction, the formation and character of the political society, and the capacity to exercise mediation. These ideal types provide a useful tool for further research, particularly in analyzing the shift to the left in Latin American regions.

The only chapter dealing with Central and Eastern Europe in Glasius et al. is Jerzy Celichowski's "Civil Society in Eastern Europe: Growth Without Engagement." Although he focuses mainly on Central Europe (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia), he also deals with other post-communist (non-USSR[8]) European countries. This coverage is too broad to get to deeper conclusions; nevertheless, most of the main problems are mentioned and Celichowski is able to confront the different approaches and arguments. Starting with the historical development of the concept, he emphasizes the strong "negative view of the state, which should be protested against (living the truth), escaped (antipolitics) or fought against (new evolutionism)." This was the position of the main intellectuals in Central Europe (Havel, Konrád, and to lesser extent, Michnik) that strongly

influenced the understanding of civil society in this region (Glasius et al.: 72). He discusses the problems of foreign aid for the support of the development of civil society. This aid reflects the donor country's domestic liberal agenda, yet foreign assistance "can be credited with the success of transplanting the hitherto unknown idea of NGOs. It was also crucial in promoting previously marginal issues such as women's rights or the environment." Celichowski also presents the critical opinion that "instead of fostering grass-roots activism the aid has created a class of NGO professionals much more attentive to donors' wishes than to the opinions of their fellow citizens" (Glasius et al.: 75). These are well-known arguments that reflect reality, but, of course, the problem was where to find "domestic" donors in the early phase of transition. This is similar to Claus Offe's puzzle concerning how to build capitalism without capital and capitalists when taking into consideration the social structure after the fall of communism and the significant decline in standards of living in the first years of such transitions.

Up to now our analysis has concentrated on the problems of the "reinvention" of the term "civil society" in both regions (that is, the concepts and activities of dissent) and the further development of the concept and activities in the processes of transition and consolidation. But this is not the full story. In communist states there was a very high density of official organizations and a very high level of "participation" of citizens in these organizations. Although these organizations were instruments of political control of society, at the local level they could present some interests. Research in this field is extremely scanty. We do know that some of these organizations maintained a spirit of independence. For example, some groups of the scout movement "survived" inside communist tourist organizations or in the Union for Collaboration with the Army (Svazarm) in the Czech Republic, and this spirit later enabled them to reconstruct their own movement quickly. Yes, these organizations had really been "tamed," to use Baker's expression, and did not challenge state policies in their fields of interest (environmentalists organizing mainly young volunteers to clean forests of rubbish and illegal refuse tips, women's organizations at the local level discussing cooking, sewing, and health education, and so on) and were manipulated to channel problems away from public discourse; on the other hand, at the local level, activists had some basic organizational skills and were able to reflect opinions from below and help define local problems. The new NGOs with their foreign ties took pains to distance themselves from these "official" organizations, criticizing them as too connected with the communist regime and "old fashioned."[9] Nonetheless, communist society was highly "organized" and almost everybody was a member of some organization. What was the impact of this high level of communist organization on future willingness and readiness for active participation in the new democratic conditions?

We can find some answers to this question in Marc Morjé Howard's book, *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe.* This study is important, mainly because it is based on comparative research of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe. Although the comparison is based on two relatively different post-communist societies (the former territory of East Germany and post-soviet Russia), Howard finds many similarities. He focuses on why there is a low level of public participation (compared with the "classical" western democracies and even with the post-authoritarian systems of Western Europe). His research differs from the traditional approach which concentrates on elites and compares

and evaluates the level of change mainly in terms of institutional transformation, that is, the ability to adapt to NATO, EU, IMF, and World Bank requirements and evaluations. His interest and research is concentrated on ordinary citizens and their social behavior. Comparing these two "extreme" cases (East Germany and Russia) he concludes that citizens in both countries have maintained "strong feelings of mistrust of voluntary organizations" since the communist period. Another important factor is the continued use of private friendship networks that originated during the communist regime and a third is frustration with the new political and economic system (Howard: 146–8).

In his conclusion, Howard opens several topics that arise from his research. He argues against the present tendency of emphasizing the differences between particular post-communist countries, whereas before the collapse of communism, the emphasis was on similarities: "Despite the wide institutional and 'civilizational' difference between the countries in the region, the data and analysis presented in this book suggest that in the context of ordinary citizens and their social behaviour, there are still very striking similarities among the citizens and societies of post-communist Europe" (Howard: 147). The differences he finds seem to be "differences in degree" as opposed to "differences in kind." Howard is right when calling attention to a deeper understanding of the communist experience, its legacy, and its impact on future development.

Howard also opens another topic that was underestimated or not part of the research in the publications previously discussed here. Although civil society is weak in Central and Eastern Europe, no one asks what the real impact is of that weakness on the future of democracy in this region. Somehow only the negative impact is presented. Howard tries to consider all angles of the problem. He presents the pessimistic version (that is, it can be a risk for democracy) and the partly optimistic version (that is, the decrease of the voluntary activity of citizens is a worldwide phenomenon, so maybe post-communist countries are just moving in the direction of the inevitable). Also thought provoking is his historical reminiscence of the Weimar Republic and the role of a civil society that enabled Hitler to come to power: "Indeed, the reluctance of so many post-communist citizens to participate in voluntary organizations today means that anti-democratic organizations and movements, just like their democratic counterparts, will also have problems organizing and mobilizing, and their efforts will be hindered by the same legacy of mistrust of organizations" (Howard: 150). Nevertheless, he is aware of the negative implications: lack of skills and habits, alienation, and removal of the public from the democratic process. He mentions also the lack of what Theda Skocpol calls a "source of considerable popular leverage" to influence the political process (Howard: 150–1).

The last question Howard raises deals with "civil privatism" (as Jürgen Habermas put it). He argues that there exist vibrant private networks that developed under communism and these private networks are to some extent an alternative to, or a substitute for, the social ties acquired through voluntary organizations. These networks provide arenas for socializing and the development of what Putnam calls "social capital." Such networks can be important, but only "alongside and in addition to public participation," because they remain resistant to public mobilization, since they were historically created in a situation of a strict division between the public and private spheres (Howard: 153–4). The question of "civil privatism" is really very important – indeed, it is not clear Howard himself is

aware *how* important. The key problem in Central and Eastern Europe was that these networks did not exist in addition to public participation. Furthermore, it is difficult to speak about them as substituting for the social ties acquired through voluntary organizations, because these ties became grounds for exclusion throughout the process of transition. What is important in most of the associations in stable democracies is that they are cross-cutting, weakening social and even political and ideological cleavages and thereby creating a source of trust that is so crucial for the stability and legitimacy of any democratic regime. But this is not what took place in Central and Eastern Europe, where the former ties were radically changed, and it is difficult to create and draw on such ties for solving problems. Again we come back to the problems of the rule of law, procedures, channels of communication, and the interconnection of economic and social interests with the political world.

To conclude this review of Howard's work, I will use the words of the author of a very sophisticated review of this publication. Kubik (2005: 120) says this book "combines logical rigor, empirical precision, and ethical passion," and I agree.

The volume by Annette Zimmer and Eckhard Priller, entitled *Future of Civil Society: Making Central European Nonprofit Organizations Work*, combines theoretical and historical approaches, empirical research, country profiles, and educational goals. The authors do not concentrate only on the post-communist space that is covered by the Visegrad countries (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland), but include Germany (which to a certain extent is also a post-communist country) and Austria as well. Both of the latter countries were characterized as "new democracies" before the collapse of communism started (a legacy of Nazism), but this was not the reason they have been included. The editors had in their minds the "common" or "shared" history in this region and from this point of view their approach is able to reflect some of the deeper roots of civil society "activities," traditions, and so on. The publication is divided into four parts. Starting with "Traditions and Perspective of Civil Society in Central Europe," it continues with "Regulatory Environment" in Part II, "Central Topics of Nonprofit Management" in Part III, and concludes with Part IV, "Country Profiles."

For our discussion, the chapter by Zdenka Mansfeldova, Slawomir Nalecz, Eckhard Priller and Annette Zimmer, entitled "Civil Society in Transition: Civic Engagement and Nonprofit Organizations in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989" (in Part I) and analyzing the problem from a political culture and democratic theory perspective, is very important. These authors ask what the impact of "civil society" under socialism was, stressing the extremely high density of the organizational networks, and the fact that even this "pseudo" civil society or "imperfect civil society"[10] lacking legal security, helped to create a network of mutual relationships among citizens. The authors analyze the first decade of post-communist development, comparing the dates 1990–2000. They find that after a "boom" in 1990 with strong public mobilization and activity, a slowdown of civic activity followed. Comparing the situation with Western Europe we find that nowadays there is a much lower membership affiliation in the Visegrad countries; nevertheless, the structure of membership is more or less the same (prevailingly, leisure activities and sports clubs).

> Unfortunately, with respect to membership affiliation and civic activity there
> are specific trends indicating that a civic culture has not yet fully developed

in the countries under study. Firstly, between 1995 and 2000 even those nonprofit/civil society organizations which are active in the leisure oriented fields of activity suffered from a decline in membership. And secondly, even more than a decade after the breakdown of the socialist regime citizens still lack an entrepreneurial spirit with respect to civic engagement on behalf of community affairs. (Zimmer and Priller: 117)

The explanation for this low level of participation can perhaps be found in other findings the authors mention. Compared to Western Europe, there is a striking difference with respect to the integration with the nonprofit sector in welfare-state arrangements. The lack of channels of communication between society and politics, the fact that public demands or problems formulated by nonprofit organizations have often been delegitimized by the politicians ("Whom do they represent?"), and the fact that "civil privatism" is more important than public activities all work together to discourage grassroots activism. Many activists lost their enthusiasm and the belief that they could influence any development.

The volume edited by Annette Zimmer and Eckhard Priller contributes to the discussion on civil society in important ways, bringing Central European "voices" into the discussion, with studies rooted deeply in the history of the communist regimes and taking into consideration political culture and deeper historical traditions as well as the results of empirical research realized in particular countries.

Conclusion

The five books analyzed here represent different approaches, different methods of research, and different goals. None of them sought to compare Central and Eastern Europe with Latin America or was directly asking the question we have used in our title – reinvention or imposition? Each of them touches these problems from its own perspective, but mostly these different approaches define the same challenges to further development. The "internationalization" of civil society brings new stimulus to the development of civil society in the new democracies at the same time as it shapes the activities of local NGOs, which often reflect the ideas and topics of the "donors" more than the everyday problems of the citizens of particular states. The professionalization of NGOs is important in order to be able to channel demands into politics, but it does not form the skills and habits of common citizens, instead it removes citizens (volunteers) from the public sphere. We need more research on the history and traditions of civil society in these regions and also a more comparative approach based on empirical research. It seems that the "reinvention" of the term in Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America has left deeper roots in the processes of internationalization and the formation of "global civil society" than in the particular countries where the concept of civil society was reinvented in the 1970s and 1980s. We also need more empathy in understanding particular countries, their political culture, social structure, and forms of societal communication. Finally, we must be more aware of the side effects of embedding "western" concepts in "non-western" societies.

Notes

1. I remember the presentation of one of the former leading 1989 student activists who mentioned one of the important problems. He asked one of the human rights organizations which trained activists from nondemocratic countries how many participants of their training were either imprisoned or killed after returning home. The organization had no information. Later they found that some of the trained women from Afghanistan were killed by their relatives – their activities went against the basic shared values of the traditional family.
2. Baker describes the main features of the liberal democratic vision of civil society in this way: civil society is the support structure for democracy at the level of the state, providing a voice for public opinion, an education in democratic values for citizens, and acting as a "watchdog."
3. Later attempts to renew this "civil society" approach via broad movements (such as Impuls 99 and Thank You, Time to Go) also totally collapsed in the Czech Republic. For my analysis of these movements, see Kopecký and Mudde (2003).
4. The current President and former Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Václav Klaus, refuses to accept the "concept of civil society," even in a liberal democratic sense: "there is an individual and the state, nothing in between." On the other hand, he is probably aware of the "danger" that can bring about a "global civil society," so he often warns against the "NGO-ism" and "human-rightism" that he supposes to be the same danger as communism.
5. The questions I ask can be found in the particular books reviewed. What I have used for comparison here are the prefaces that Routledge uses to establish the basic characteristics of these publications. Although the publications are very different in their approaches, the identification of the main problems in this "simplified" version provides evidence about the main issues of current research.
6. We really cannot speak about comparisons as a method used in this book. Rather, we can find some generalizations or, on the contrary, emphases on some specific features of regional development.
7. The board that controls the research and decides about the directors of the institutes is appointed by parliament (or one of the chambers of parliament), so it reflects the actual political majority. Again, this is reproduction of the past, in that it limits freedom of research in the social sciences. For more about this problem and repetition of the past, see Maldini and Vidović (2007) and Dvořáková and Milardović (2007).
8. Nevertheless, one paragraph is devoted to Belarus.
9. The other problem that complicated the "collaboration" was the question of the property of these former communist organizations and its redistribution.
10. The authors quote from Kubik (2000).

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