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Polish Political Science Review. Polski Przegląd Politologiczny 11 (1)/2023

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BOOK REVIEW: ANDRÁS BOZÓKI, "ROLLING TRANSITION AND THE ROLE OF INTELLECTUALS: THE CASE OF HUNGARY, 1977–1994", CEU PRESS, 2022, 602 PAGES

https://doi.org/10.2478/ppsr-2023-0010

► Received: 30 March 2023 ► Accepted: 9 April 2023

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„Rolling Transition and the Role of Intellectuals: The Case of Hungary, 1977–1994" is a single-author monograph. The academic and scientific expertise of the author András Bozóki (Central European University and the former Minister of National Cultural Heritage) covers several research disciplines: democratisation, de-democratisation, political regimes, ideologies, Central European politics, and the role of intellectuals. Bozóki's excellent combination of academic expertise and the knowledge he imparts to the reader makes the book a high-quality work that should be required reading for anyone working on the role of elites and intellectuals in Hungary's democratic transformation. The book provides the reader with a broad and detailed political, historical, and sociological perspective on the emergence, development, rise to power, decline, and role of opposition intellectuals between 1977 and 1994, who were among the most important actors in the process of political and social change in Hungary. Indeed, the book is an excellent work in which the opposition Hungarian intellectuals – who consisted of only 2,000 people but were able to mobilise 200,000 people during the democratic transformation of Hungary the individuals, political parties, movements, ideologies, civil society, press, and actors involved in the transformation itself – are thoroughly researched and analysed. The comparison of the "bumpy", non-violent, gradual, elite-driven, and negotiated transformation in Hungary, where the communist regime gave way to democracy, with other post-communist Visegrád countries (especially Poland) also contributes significantly to the structure and content of the work. Since Central and Eastern European transformation and post-communism is a region and a subject that is sparsely covered even in the English-language scholarly literature, the book's exploration of Hungary's transformation, democratisation, and the unusual role of intellectuals is another factor that makes it extremely valuable. The author has thus succeeded in placing his work in an important gap in the literature. Another feature of the book is undoubtedly the detailed analysis of the role of opposition intellectuals before the transformation, during the transformation, at the beginning of

democracy and the multi-party era, within political parties, within civil society, within the media, and within the opposition.

The structure of the book consists of an introduction, nine main chapters, and a conclusion. In addition, the book is well grounded with figures, tables, a list of abbreviations, and a detailed bibliography. From an editorial perspective, the book has a very strong structure and presentation.

The following analysis will enlarge upon the contents and themes of the book. Social phenomena do not speak about their own cause and effect, and the regime change in Hungary is no exception. If we are talking about transformations in the political system, constitutional developments, and the provision of rights and freedoms, such a democratic change has taken place in Hungary. However, the fact that these developments took place does not directly lead to any narrative about what might have made these events possible. This is because causality is too complex to be thought of in terms of one event causing another event on its own. Therefore, in order to understand the democratic transformation in Hungary, it is necessary to focus on the process that preceded the events to which we owe the regime change and to understand the relationships within this process – but this is not the only condition. Relationships cannot be perceived directly. Therefore, they can only be uncovered by taking into account the agents who occupy a position in the relevant space. The relations are revealed by considering the acts and activities of these agents due to their presence in the space in question, either together or in opposition to each other. Only in this way can the emergence of the relevant social phenomenon be better explained by redescribing and reorganising the plot of the inferences drawn from the agents and the interactions between them.

The phenomenon for which the book promises a better explanation is the regime change in Hungary. In this respect, we think the book fulfils what it promises. The fact that it describes this historical development in more detail, as discussed above, is in itself an important contribution. However, the book's contribution is not limited to the Hungarian or Central European literatures. It also contributes to the literature on the concept it employs to reinterpret the process that led to the regime change: intellectuals.

Intellectuals constitute a particularly interesting group for social scientists working on political sociology. Due to their intermediate position in the social space, they provide an opportunity to construct a narrative that can fill in some of the gaps (in a causally more explanatory way) left by reductionist approaches that attribute excessive power to one party while explaining state-individual or party-citizen relations. The acceptance of the idea that all types of political mobilisations from above or below are mediated by intellectuals has led to the attribution of new meanings to the word "intellectuals", which has no meaning other than to denote a group of people with certain common characteristics. The word has thus become a concept that has been the subject of numerous theoretical debates. The author's participation in this debate, in which questions such as who intellectuals consist of and what their influence is, has enriched the conceptual thinking on intellectuals and their role by presenting these propositions in dialogue with a comprehensive set of qualitative and quantitative data.

Since the author intends to interrogate the process leading to regime change in Hungary through the role of intellectuals, it is fitting and appropriate that the first chapter of the book is devoted to a conceptual discussion of intellectuals. More vital, however, is the categorisation of the various approaches to who or what intellectuals are according

to their historical periods. This historicisation of interpretations is important because it reveals the socio-political context in which the arguments about certain characteristics of so-called intellectuals take place. Starting his conceptual analysis with classical theories, the author discusses the similarities and differences between the systematic propositions about intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century through Benda, Gramsci, and Mannheim. Although there are disagreements on many issues ranging from who intellectuals are to what their role is, the common feature of these approaches is that they approach intellectuals from a normative perspective. With the spread of state-socialisms after the Second World War, not only this normative tone but also the content of the debate on intellectuals changed. In this context, the term "new-class" conceptualises the answer to the question of what is the position of intellectuals under state-socialism. It refers to a set of propositions about the new position and role of intellectuals in the current situation, focusing on a political and institutional power that intellectuals have in contrast to the previous period (the first half of the twentieth century). Here, once again, we see that the concept owes its diversity of meaning to the change in the situations in which it is interpreted. From here, the author moves on to modern theory. Modern theory, unlike new class, centres on the intellectuals in welfare states, not socialist ones, and on the areas and ways in which their influence is concentrated. In these countries, where the liberal interpretation of democracy is established, intellectuals do not have as much political and institutional power as the intellectuals in the socialist-states considered as new class, but they have significant autonomy and freedom of discussion. According to Bozóki, this situation is extremely important because he thinks that the fact that intellectuals discuss their views despite the disagreements between them enables some new ideas to sprout on the social ground over time. The critical point here is that intellectuals should not be approached as a single homogenous group but as a heterogeneous aggregate among which there are battles of ideas. By attributing the political influence of intellectuals to this situation, the author shares the reason why he will focus on intellectuals when dealing with the regime change in Hungary.

After the conceptual discussion on intellectuals, the second chapter focuses on the political climate in Hungary. The author discusses the authoritarian aspect of the social atmosphere during the Kádár era through censorship and provides a good description of this period by including the actors responsible for the repression of freedom of expression in his narrative. At this point, it may be useful to ask the following question: If the political-social climate in Hungary was authoritarian – in other words, if the public sphere was institutionally controlled – how were intellectuals able to circulate new ideas? This question is important because if one of the critical elements of the regime change in Hungary was the dissemination of new ideas into society by intellectuals, it is necessary to show how all this could have happened anyway (despite the authoritarian social atmosphere). The author tries to show how the situation mentioned in the previous question was possible through the activities of some periodicals in Hungary. The existence of these publications, according to the author, does not mean that state-socialism in Hungary did not have an authoritarian social atmosphere. Rather, the author explains the existence of these publications by the relative loss of the political power concentrated in the centre of the party and the state towards the periphery, which constituted the various strata of the public sphere. In any case, the author considers these publications important because they

show that despite the authoritarian climate in Hungary, intellectuals had some means to discuss their ideas.

In the third part, the author analyses the situation of the pro-democratic opposition in the period preceding the dissolution of the socialist regime. The detailed description of the actors in the anti-system space facilitates the follow-up and comprehension of the political debates and strategies put forward by the opposition. It should be noted that the conclusions drawn from the cases analysed reveal the position of the opposition in the broader social context, capturing and reflecting the dynamics at work in the process leading to regime change. Nevertheless, the most impressive part of the chapter is the last part, which is directly related to the main argument of the book, analysing periodicals (namely, *Beszélő*, *Hírmondó*, *Demokrata*, and *Égtájak között*). In this part, where the specific characteristics of each periodical are discussed through specific topics, the author also actualises (through these publications) the capacity of intellectuals to circulate new ideas of dissent.

In the fourth chapter, "From moral principles to political action", the author examines the ideas advocated by dissidents on certain socio-political themes that he considers important and the political organisations that emerged out of these debates. The chapter is also important as it precedes the discussion in the fifth chapter on the democratic transformation in Hungary, allowing us to directly envisage the role of intellectuals in regime change. The social movements and political organisations discussed in this chapter, although they constitute the triangulation points of the process leading to the regime, are not given but are themselves the result of certain developments. In other words, these movements are not things that have to happen but rather the product of complex processes that are characterised by their own crisis and opportunity situations, the direction of which depends on many factors. Here, the author describes very well how the ideas discussed by intellectuals seep into the public sphere over time, how this discussion reveals the crisis and leads to protests, and how the mass enthusiasm and sense of legitimacy that emerges in the name of democratisation is again massaged by intellectuals and leads to political partnerships and unification (with inferences based on events). The fact that he takes into account the developments that enabled the formation of these political organisations and the actors responsible for these developments helps to understand how the democratic transformation in Hungary was possible (as a result of the interrelationship of the events that preceded it) by revealing the crises and opportunities that the period preceding the regime change contained.

In the fifth chapter, the author explores the transition process in Hungary within the framework of "elite theory" and focuses on the "age of circles" in the second period of the 1980s. The chapter compares Hungary's struggle for freedom, the transition process, the dynamics of the transition, and the domino effect in the region with another Central European country, Poland, which made the transition to democracy, and compares the opposition movements in these two countries. According to the author, unlike the Polish opposition, which had a large and inclusive organisational power, was based on the principle of democracy-pluralism within the framework of the religious-freedom struggle and developed with the support of the church, the Hungarian opposition was a secular and limited group of Budapest-based intellectuals, devoid of religious traditions and developed through pluralism-democracy. This is undoubtedly very important for understanding and making sense of organisation and dissent. In the chapter, the author successful-

ly provides a detailed analysis of the transitional elites, intellectuals and reformists in Hungary, focusing on modernisation ideology, technocracy and elite theories before and during the transition (round table discussions), elite changes, and elitist approach. The author concludes the chapter by laying the foundations of the political elitist changes that led Hungary to the Round Table talks and the approaches of the opposition parties. The chapter has valuable analyses that provide the reader with a comparative perspective on the evolution of Hungarian elites.

Chapter six analyses the dynamics of the Round Table talks, detailing the Hungarian democratic revolution, the interactions between the parties forming the opposition EKA group and the communist party MSZMP. The chapter is one of the most important chapters of the book as it focuses on the detailed analysis of the Round Table talks as part of the negotiation process of the transition, its actors and revolutionary features, the differences between the Polish and the Hungarian model, the negotiations of the revolution and the making of the new constitution, and the process leading up to the free elections of March 1990. The description of the importance of the Round Table talks for the Hungarian opposition and the historical events that followed make the structure of the chapter very understandable. The author, who presents the steps of the transition to democracy as political and economic negotiations, describes both the characteristics of these negotiations on the basis of parties and the negotiations (open bargaining), goals and policies between the communist government (MSZMP) and the opposition (EKA) during the making of the new constitution, which was one of the most important points of the transition. Analysing the relationship between the people-elites-intellectuals during the transition in Hungary in-depth, the author writes critically about the communication gaps between the communist government and the people. In such a political environment, the decisions of non-violence, making a new constitution, organising free elections, change, and referendum taken to determine the outlines of the transition brought to light the relations between power-opposition-people.

Chapter seven focuses on the emergence and empowerment of intellectuals as "new legislators and strategic bridges at certain points and how Hungarian intellectuals became the most important actors of the transition. After outlining the divisions within the intellectuals and opposition parties, the chapter analyses the old and new parties in detail. The author provides in-depth analyses of the old and new opposition parties, samizdat journals, intellectuals, and intellectual movements that played a role in the transition. He also enriches the chapter with 200 interviews with politicians and witnesses of the period, their criticisms, analyses, and messages. On the other hand, it is a pity that András Bozóki, one of the intellectuals who lived through the transition period, does not include his own experiences in the book. The author's effort to enrich the chapter enables the reader to learn about the critical transition process through different and pluralistic methods, even if they are unfamiliar with Hungarian politics. It can be safely said that this chapter is extremely useful not only for those researching Hungary's transition to democracy but also for those researching Hungarian parties.

The main focus of the eighth chapter is the sudden change in Hungarian history and Hungarian intellectuals. The chapter focuses on the transformation of intellectuals in Hungarian politics as new political actors, their representation in the new parliament, their professionalisation efforts, and how and why some of them left politics after one year of the first government after Hungary's transition to democracy. The main focus of

the chapter is enriched by the fact that intellectuals, who thought democracy would be damaged by the political shift to the right-wing of the first government, founded the Democratic Charter to stop this transformation, became involved in politics, and, in a sense, put themselves forward as the guardians of Hungarian democracy. The chapter also deals with the radical right and populists (MIEP) who broke away from the ruling MDF party, enabling the reader to analyse how the Hungarian radical right and populism developed after the transition to democracy. In fact, the populist and radical development after the transition emerged as a response to the "unfinished" transformation in Hungary. On the other hand, the fact that the historical context of populism, which has a long history in Hungary (especially post-Trianon populism), is not covered in the chapter makes it difficult for the reader to make comparisons with the past. At this point, mentioning the characteristics of Hungarian populism in the past would have enabled a clearer understanding of the characteristics and differences of the populism that developed in Hungary after the democratic transition.

Chapter nine, written together with Ágnes Simon, whose expertise revolves around the field of comparative politics with a particular emphasis on the study of decision-making processes, focuses on the Hungarian democratic transition and comparatively analyses and quantifies the role of politically active intellectuals before, during and after the transition. The author analyses the activities of Hungarian intellectuals between 1977 and 1994 under five periods (1 – Opposition (1977–1987), 2 – Open Networking (1988), 3 – Round Table Negotiations (1989), 4 – Parliamentary Politics (1990–1991) and 5 – New Pro-Democracy Initiatives (1991–1994)) and provides the reader with important information for comparing periods, actors, activities, and participants. Although the information provided is supported by charts and statistics and all the characteristics of the intellectuals are listed and compared, it is a pity that the Jewish Hungarians who laid the foundations of Hungarian intellectuality are not mentioned and this factor is not included in the comparisons. Nevertheless, the author has successfully analysed the chapter from a periodical point of view and has managed to summarise all the periods mentioned in the previous chapters in a single chapter.

As intended, the book successfully answers the questions of who were the intellectuals who played the most influential and comprehensive role in Hungary's transition from state socialism to democracy, what they wanted, and what they were against. Beyond the questions, the book analysed the ideas, strategies, rotations, and activities of Hungarian intellectuals before, during, and after the transition with great success. In contrast to the Polish society, in the fragmented, atomised and passive Hungarian society, the intellectuals had to constantly renew themselves, show continuity, act together, and adapt to all kinds of changes. In fact, these were the factors that developed them, made them the pioneers of democracy, and made them effective. The book is invaluable for its detailed account of the Hungarian intellectuals' uphill struggle and their significance, its theoretical and empirical conceptualisation of regime change, and its meticulous filling of this gap in the English-language literature (especially on the Round Table discussions).