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Robert Brier. *Poland's Solidarity Movement and the Global Politics of Human Rights*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021 https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108565233

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Introduction by Sarah B. Snyder, American University

Robert Brier's new book, *Poland's Solidarity Movement and the Global Politics of Human Rights,* intervenes in debates about the rise of human rights politics, the history of ideas, and the reasons for the end of the Cold War in Europe. Three of the four reviewers offer enthusiastic and varied praise for his research, interpretation, and nuance.

For Gregory Domber, Brier's "greatest insights come from being grounded in the specificity of Solidarity's origins and values" and how Solidarity "became symbols and 'icons' of the human rights cause in Poland." Domber writes, "Both the complexity and clarity of his arguments are compelling."

Theresa Keeley praises the "impressive array of sources" Brier deploys. Indeed, he conducted research—in six countries—France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom, and the United States and five languages—English, French, German, Polish, and Russian.

Paweł Sowiński praises Brier's contributions to our understanding of the origins and reception of Solidarity. For Sowiński, Brier's work "brings a wide, open, and imaginative vision of human rights which may stimulate different reflections on which policy better defends human rights under a repressive regime." Sowiński frames his discussion of topics Brier might have considered not as a criticism but a possible agenda for future research.

When his perspective expands beyond Central and Eastern Europe, Brier addresses what Domber terms as a key "mystery"—how the trade union movement gained such widespread appeal. Brier shows how criticizing Poland's record served many different agendas, as indeed championing human rights during the Cold War did more broadly. It even brought together those who were opposed on many other issues. Furthermore, in one of the more unique elements of the book, Brier reflects on ties between Solidarity and the movements in South Africa against apartheid and in Chile against dictator Augusto Pinochet's repression. For Sowiński, illuminating those ties may have been Brier's most original contribution.

One of the central questions Brier grapples with is the relationship between politics and human rights. In Brier's account, Polish Solidarity activists had a different conception of this relationship than other actors, such as those involved in Amnesty International. Despite these differences, Brier shows, as other human rights activists did, that Solidarity nonetheless utilized Amnesty's tactics.[1] In addition, Brier emphasizes the distinctions between human rights and dissidence for actors at the time.

Brier's account demonstrates the "malleability of human rights," as Domber puts it as well as the ways in which Solidary and its leaders became symbols. In Brier's telling, they were not just picked up and repurposed by external actors, but Solidary members themselves participated in the process by which they became international "icons" (148-9). He shows that the "icon" of Solidarity leader Lech Wałęsa then underwent further sanctification through the Nobel Prize (174). By universalizing their plight, members of Solidarity ensured broader attention to their cause. But Brier shows that there were also risks posed by the construction of Polish political prisoners as universal symbols and the risks that iconization presented to the leaders of the Solidarity movement.

[1] Patrick William Kelly, *Sovereign Emergences: Latin America and the Making of Global Human Rights Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 96; and Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 121.

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Brier intervenes in debates about the origins and significance of human rights, arguing against a narrative that we can point to a "single breakthrough" that was static in nature (3). He argues instead that the meaning and significance of human rights evolved over the years. Occasionally Brier simplifies the existing scholarship to overemphasize accounts that suggest the rise of human rights ideas and politics was inevitable and uninterrupted. This characterization may obscure the originality and the significance of his contribution to the literature.

For Michal Kopeček, *Poland's Solidarity Movement and the Global Politics of Human Rights* is an "ambitious book" that ultimately falls short of its aims. In this critical review, Kopeček expresses frustration with Brier's efforts to balance the national, transnational, and international dimensions as well as with his initial chapters that explore Polish understandings of human rights. For Kopeček, Brier's efforts to interrogate activists' conceptions of human rights lead him into a "methodological battle with a strawman." Instead, Kopeček writes that he had hoped for greater clarity of terms and a more in-depth examination of language. He also criticizes what he terms Brier's "lack of understanding of state socialism."

Brier, in his response, conveys appreciation for the varied ways in which his book stimulated and provoked his reviewers. Although the group collected here comes from varied backgrounds and research interests, Brier is clear that he had a specific audience in mind—"historians of human rights." Some of the tension between his interpretation of his book and Kopeček's review may partly lie in the frequent divisions between international historians and area-studies specialists, particularly over the historiographical debates of interest to them. But Brier also characterizes himself as "baffled" and "profoundly disappointed" in what he characterizes as Kopeček's misreading of his book.

Participants:

Until 2018, **Robert Brier** worked as a historian focusing on the intersection of intellectual history and international relations in the late twentieth century. He held positions at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw and at the London School of Economics. In addition to the book reviewed here, he published articles in journals such as *East European Politics and Societies* and the *Journal of Cold War Studies.* He has since left academia and now teaches history and English at a secondary school in Frankfurt

Sarah B. Snyder teaches at American University's School of International Service and is the author of two award-winning books, *From Selma to Moscow: How Human Rights Activists Transformed U.S. Foreign Policy* (Columbia University Press, 2018) and *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge University Press, 2011). She is the founding editor, along with Jay Sexton, of Columbia University Press' Global America book series.

Gregory F. Domber is the author of *Empowering Revolution: America, Poland, and the End of the Cold War* (UNC Press, 2014). He is a lecturer in the Department of History at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.

Theresa Keeley is an associate professor of US and the World Studies at the University of Louisville. Her first book, *Reagan's Gun-Toting Nuns: The Catholic Conflict over Cold War Human Rights Policy in Central America* was published with Cornell University press in 2020. Keeley's work has appeared in publications including

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Diplomatic History, *Gender & History*, and the *Washington Post*. Her teaching and research interests draw on her experience as a human rights activist and attorney. She earned her JD from the University of Pennsylvania and her Ph.D. from Northwestern University.

Michal Kopeček is a senior scholar at the Institute of Contemporary History, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, and co-director of Imre Kertész Kolleg, Friedrich Schiller University in Jena. His research interests include comparative modern intellectual history of East Central Europe, nationalism studies, history of Communism and post-Communism in Central and Eastern Europe. He is currently working on a monograph about the legacy of dissidence in East Central Europe focusing on dissident political and legal thought and practices in 1970s-2000s.

Paweł Sowiński is a fellow at the Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Science, Warsaw, Poland. He has recently published on transnational networks of the Polish anticommunist resistance during the Cold War.

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Review by Gregory F. Domber, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In August 1980, striking workers and the Polish communist government signed an agreement in Gdańsk which allowed for the creation of the Independent, Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarity, an organization advised by long-time dissidents that quickly became a mass movement focused on promoting human dignity and freedom of association in Communist Poland. Sixteen months later the Polish government declared martial law and imprisoned thousands of Solidarity leaders and advisors. In his meticulously researched book, *Poland's Solidarity Movement and the Global Politics of Human Rights*, Robert Brier synthesizes the best aspects of international, intellectual, and human rights history to explore how the idea of Solidarity (or the "imaginaries" that Solidarity provoked) were contested in the West by varied and competing groups—defenders of détente and peace activists in West Germany; trade unionists, "new philosophers" (115), and the anti-totalitarian left in France; trade unionists, Jackson Democrats, and the Reagan Administration in the U.S.; and even political activists agitating against the Pinochet regime in Chile. Brier makes a number of valuable arguments about the development of human rights over the course of the 1980s, but the book's greatest insights come from being grounded in the specificity of Solidarity's origins and values, combined with his dissection of the ways that Solidarity—most notably union Chairman Lech Wałęsa and long-time dissident and Solidarity advisor Adam Michnik—became symbols and "icons" of the human rights cause in Poland. In Brier's words, Solidarity's experience shows that human rights should be "characterized not by a single breakthrough…but by their repeated reinvention, their continuous adaptation to new circumstances" (3).

To understand Solidarity's effects on international human rights debates, Brier rightly begins by interrogating the movement's origins and ideals. The first two chapters ground later discussions in the book in a deep understanding of Poland's specific circumstances and intellectual and social traditions.[2] As Brier deftly explains, human rights advocates in Poland came together from two primary streams: the Warsaw left and Commandos (children of the Warsaw left who "did not attack Communism itself so much as the ideological ossification of its Soviet-style variety," 23) and the independence group (anti-Communist, Catholic nationalists). Together over the 1960s and 1970s these groups coalesced around shared experiences of repression and a rejection of totalitarianism which "both violated the universal dignity of humans and, by deforming public speech, deprived them of their social community" (40). As Brier rightly notes, this movement that combined devout Catholics with Marxists "was one of the strangest beasts to have ever stomped through Europe's political history" (36). From its creation, the Solidarity trade union focused on freedom of association (the creation of an independent workers' union) as an overtly political means to bridge human dignity and the need to create a more truthful social community. These first two opening chapters provide a succinct, yet complex overview of the development of Polish dissidence worthy of any graduate syllabus.

The third chapter dives into the effects of Polish events on the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) process and the follow-on meeting in Madrid, specifically illustrating how the initial response to the declaration of martial law was not to embrace the human rights provisions of the CSCE but instead to emphasize the preeminence of national sovereignty in the name of dulling the response to what some—

[2] The best general survey of Poland's experience of political transformation from 1945 to 1989 in English remains Andrzej Paczkowski, *The Spring Will be Ours,* translated by Jane Cave (University Park: The Penn State University Press, 2003). For a more detailed study of the Polish Crisis of 1980-1981 through the revolutionary events of 1989 in Poland, see Paczkowski, *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Poland 1980-1989,* translated by Christina Manetti (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2015).

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particularly in West Germany—argued was primarily an internal concern. Importantly, this highlights how "Western sanctions against Poland were neither a 'Helsinki effect' nor the necessary result of a 1970s human rights revolution—they were the smallest common denominator of a Western alliance quarrelling over how and where, if at all, to conduct joint human rights policy" (89).[3]

Chapters four, five, and six take deep dives into Solidarity's sources of support in West Germany, France, and the United States to show how the meaning of human rights remained contested and that support for Solidarity reflected specific national debates about human rights and policies. In West Germany, support for Solidarity became a pivot point about how to foster change—either through long-term projects like *Ostpolitik* that were focused on structural change, or through more overtly political means via the struggle for individual rights—a pivot that opened the door for human rights as democracy promotion. In France, the cause of Solidarity, which received full throated support from French unions and the intellectual left, became part of the anti-totalitarian push to define the "future of left-wing politics and democratic socialism" in which human rights would be an antidote to totalitarianism and the growing power of the French state, thereby "laying the foundation of a new form of politics. . . human rights activism was interpreted as a path to building communities and enabling forms of social self-organization." (109).[4] In the United States, the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) and the Reagan administration agreed that Solidarity deserved American support out of their shared anti-Communism. Nonetheless Solidarity became embroiled in conflicts between its two main benefactors in the U.S. While the Reagan administration called Solidarity freedom fighters and linked the movement "with a vision of dis-embedded individuals whose potential for initiative and creativity the state artificially stifled" (139), AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland used Solidarity as a cudgel to buttress his belief that unions and freedom of association were essential parts of a strong democracy that could fight Communism.[5] In each of these cases, Brier shows that "Solidarity became a vessel for the desires and ideas of its supporters" (145), again highlighting the malleability of human rights during this period.

The book's most innovative section comes in chapters seven, eight, and nine, in which Brier writes convincingly about Solidarity's usage as a symbol in an international context, a symbology shaped by both Adam Michnik and Lech Wałęsa.[6] As international interest in Poland's plight waned in the mid-1980s, Michnik remained imprisoned and wrote about his experiences while incarcerated, presenting himself and his colleagues as prisoners of conscience. In this way, Brier argues, Polish activists purposefully became "icons." They "turned themselves into quasi-religious symbols reflecting, incarnating even, the most hallowed principles of the international community . . . dissolve[ing] the story of its struggle for social self-organization and economic justice into a universalizing narrative" (149). By universalizing their plight as nearly generic political prisoners, dissidents like Michnik could keep attention on Poland, ultimately successfully mobilizing international pressure to have Michnik and 10 other Solidarity activists released from prison at the start of a high stakes trial. Even more iconic was Wałęsa's turn as a Nobel laureate in 1983. As Brier explains, the Nobel process separated Solidarity's leader

[3] The reference to a "Helsinki Effect" is related to arguments in Daniel Thomas, *Helsinki Effect* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001. On the Madrid meeting specifically, see Sarah B. Snyder, "The CSCE and the Atlantic Alliance: Forging a New Consensus in Madrid," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2010): 56-68; as well as her book, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[4] On Solidarity's relationships with European trade unions, see: Idesbald Goddeeris, ed., *Solidarity with Solidarity* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010).

[5] On coordination between the AFL-CIO, the Reagan Administration, and Solidarity, see: Gregory F. Domber, *Empowering Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

[6] For a very different but fascinating study of Solidarity's use of symbols within a domestic Polish space, see: Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power* (University Park: The Penn State University Press, 1994).

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"from his personality and his social background" while descriptions of him and Solidarity "disassociated the venerated activist from their political aims and social visions" (181). Solidarity, once again, became a vessel for others' ideas and lost the specificity of its goals to feed international human rights community's desire to create a universalizing human rights discourse. Nonetheless, for Wałęsa the ceremony (which he did not attend) was a useful forum to highlight his importance and counterbalance narratives pushed by the Polish government of his waning influence and national importance. This section concludes with a fascinating examination of Solidarity's connections to the struggle against Pinochet in Chile. Trade unionists and activists in Poland and Chile formed a kind of symbolic alliance, because "the only political resources of Polish and Chilean human rights activists were symbolic—all they could do was to draw on their status as international icons in order to compel other state and non-state actors to act on their behalf" (192). Becoming a "prisoner of conscience" or human rights "icon" turned Solidarity into a more generic human rights cause, but simultaneously provided Polish activists with symbolic tools to continue to bring attention, relevance, and international pressure to further their very specific, local, political goals. In meaningful ways, Solidarity utilized its agency to shape and weaponize its symbolic meaning.

The book's concluding chapter directly links the human rights debates of the early and mid-1980s to the 1986 amnesty for political prisoners, which was provoked by a European demarche requiring the Polish Communist Party to free all remaining political prisoners if the Party wanted to enjoy positive economic relations with the West. It was this final amnesty that laid the ground work for the revolutionary changes negotiated at the Round Table meetings, after which Solidarity was allowed to run in semi-free elections and the Communist system quickly collapsed. The book ends with an epilogue connecting the contests over human rights in the 1980s to the prevalence of humanitarian interventions in the 1990s and early 2000s.

The strengths of this book are myriad. Brier's ability to interrogate and synthesize scholarship written in five languages—Polish, English, German, French, and Russian—is laudable. There is a wealth of knowledge and expertise spread throughout the footnotes to help those of us with weaker linguistic talents stay up on the best and most relevant recent scholarship. This linguistic breadth is matched by the book's archival depth, again drawing from archives spread across six countries, in both national collections and smaller institutional archives, particularly collections maintained by various unions. This work deserves its spot in Cambridge University's exceptional Human Rights in History series for Brier's contributions to that historiography. More generally, the book will be of interest for advanced students and scholars working in intellectual history, labor history, Cold War international history (specifically those of us who focus on the end of the Cold War), and Polish studies. Throughout the narrative Brier adeptly switches from retelling political events, to summarizing shifts in intellectual debates, to providing an almost ethnographic analysis of the symbology of Solidarity and human rights more generally, before returning again to the importance of these developments in the political events that shape people's lives. Both the complexity and clarity of his arguments are compelling.

There was one section, however, that left me wanting more. In chapters seven through nine, Brier makes a nuanced argument about how Michnik and Wałęsa were both universalized by international human rights discourse and still purposefully shaped their own images, utilizing agency for their own goals. In the chapter on Solidarity's connections to Chile, there is a fascinating, but brief, exploration of the advice Jerzy Milewski (the Solidarity Trade Union's official representative in the West) gave to Solidarity leaders back in Poland on how to shape their relations with other movements in order to maximize their political leverage (192-194). Seweryn Blumsztajn (a Commando and Solidarity representative in Paris) is mentioned in the chapter about French intellectuals and trade unions, and Brier thanks a number of Solidarity activists in the West for granting him interviews—including Irena Grudzińska, Irena Lasota, and Aleksandr Smolar. Little direct information from

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these interviews shows up in his analysis, however. What advice did these individuals give to Solidarity activists in Poland about how to shape their message and leverage their symbolic power? What steps did the activists in the diaspora take independent of Warsaw when navigating the different national debates about human rights that Brier so deftly illuminates in the book? Did these activists in the West market the icons of Solidarity to different audiences in different ways? How did the network of Polish émigré activists outside of Poland understand, shape, and/or leverage the idea of Solidarity?

As an Americanist who studies Poland's transformation in the 1980s, I have always been struck by the wide support that Solidarity received from often contradictory or conflicting groups in the West. On a superficial level the moral righteousness—and danger to the Communist system—of a non-violent workers' movement agitating for freedom of association is obvious. But advocacy for Solidarity made for strange bedfellows, as when Reagan met with Kirkland shortly after the declaration of martial law and reportedly joked, "Well at least we have something we can agree on."[7] *Poland's Solidarity Movement and the Global Politics of Human Rights* provides a cogent answer to that mystery of Solidarity's wide appeal, by showing us the malleability of both human rights generally and Solidarity's identity specifically, as living "icons" that reflected different imaginaries at different times. The Solidarity trade union first grew into a movement and then became an iconic idea that could be manipulated and applied across multiple national debates wrestling with the meaning and uses of human rights. And, in turn, Solidarity activists successfully mobilized their iconic and symbolic power to pressure the West to act on their behalf. Ultimately it was Solidarity's (and the idea of Solidarity's) malleability that fostered the Western consensus that economic sanctions against the Communist regime should only be lifted once political prisoners were freed, an essential step in late 1986 that set the stage for Poland's negotiated revolution and the collapse of Communism in 1989.

[7] As quoted in Domber, *Empowering Revolution,* 70.

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Review by Theresa Keeley, University of Louisville

Following a wave of strikes in Poland, workers in August 1980 formed Solidarity, the first independent labor union in the Soviet bloc. In December 1981, the Polish government, led by General Wojciech Jaruzelski, imposed martial law and jailed those associated with Solidarity. In *Poland's Solidarity Movement and the Global Politics of Human Rights*, Robert Brier examines how domestic and international actors responded to events in Poland in the 1980s, paying particular attention to how they used human rights language to do so. To illustrate his claims, Brier uses an impressive array of sources in Polish, English, German, French, and Russian.

Brier's book contributes to human rights historiography in several ways. In contrast to scholarship that contends that human rights rose to prominence in the 1970s and were then a permanent feature of international relations,[8] Brier argues there was not a single moment. For Eastern Europe, the signing of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) Final Act of 1975, or "Helsinki Accords,"[9] was not *the* pivotal event, he charges, but one of many in fostering human rights activism. Neither the rise nor continued influence of human rights was inevitable. Brier contends that it was not events in Moscow, but Poles and their transnational supporters that "almost exclusively" triggered events leading to the 1989 revolution in Poland (201).

Brier groups his chapters by theme. The first two provide background. Brier stresses that domestic factors played a bigger role than international developments in shaping Polish dissent from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. While in the 1970s Polish intellectuals and labor activists spoke of rights in different ways, in 1980, intellectuals encouraged workers to frame their demands in human rights language, not just in economic terms.

A unique Polish human rights language evolved as intellectuals merged their belief that they lived in a totalitarian society with their understanding of personalism. Polish intellectuals argued that a totalitarian society twisted the meaning of language. One avenue for infusing meaning into society was through religion, namely Catholicism. Although there was a history of anti-Semitism in Poland, some Jewish dissidents grew to see Christianity as providing "an objective moral order" (49). Consequently, human rights in Poland "had a clear religious dimension" (50), distinguishing it from the language of past Polish dissent, Soviet dissidents, and Amnesty International.

The next four chapters explore how human rights concerns influenced international actors' responses to the Polish crisis. Although the West imposed sanctions against Poland, human rights were not the first or primary motivating factor. Both NATO and the European community initially called for non-interference by the West and the USSR; they did not condemn the human rights situation. Likewise, President Ronald Reagan defended

[8] See, for example, Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Barbara Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s (*Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

[9] For a discussion of CSCE and human rights, see Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

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Solidarity because he and his advisors saw an opportunity to withdraw the United States from the Helsinki process; it was not about human rights.[10]

Non-governmental leaders' responses similarly reflected different motivations. Willy Brandt, former West German chancellor and promoter of *Neue Ostopolitik*, opposed reprimanding Poland, preferring quiet diplomacy and for human rights to follow other societal changes. By contrast, the French Confederation of Labor (CFDT) and the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) were among Solidarity's most active Western supporters. The backing of both groups also reflected domestic concerns. The French left worried about "the future of left-wing politics and democratic socialism" (109), while the state of trade unionism worldwide troubled US labor, especially after Reagan fired 11,000 striking air traffic control workers (PATCO) in 1981.

In chapters seven through nine, Brier explores the making of human rights icons. He analyzes how Polish activists used the prisoner of conscience figure popularized by Amnesty International. Amnesty advocated for those who were jailed for holding views in opposition to the state and who did not advocate violence. In contrast, political prisoners saw prison as part of the struggle. Polish dissidents evoked the Amnesty framework to garner more international attention and sympathy for their cause. In 1984, the Polish underground characterized prisoners who refused to pledge loyalty to earn release as those "whose conscience had compelled them to be [politically] active even during martial law" (159).

This symbolic work involved more than prisoners. Brier shows not only how the international community viewed Lech Wałęsa, leader of Solidarity and winner of the 1983 Nobel Peace Prize, as a symbol, but also how Wałęsa fostered that image himself. Polish and Chilean trade unionists also sought to merge their causes to avoid competing for international attention. Brier highlights how visual similarities—Chilean trade unionist Rodolfo Seguel's Wałęsa-like moustache and Augusto Pinochet's and Jarzuelski's shared loved of military dress and sunglasses—fostered and aided these links.

I had many questions as I read *Poland's Solidarity Movement*, but I will confine myself to three. First, in contrast to associating themselves with Amnesty, I wondered if the Polish prisoners intentionally disassociated themselves with Irish republicans. The Poles, like Irish prisoners, engaged in hunger strikes, although not to the death. The tenth and final Irishman died on hunger strike in August 1981, several years before the Polish efforts regarding prisoners of conscience. Brier notes that although the Irish "protests drew vastly more attention than the protests in Poland, the IRA prisoners were denied iconic status by such authorities like Amnesty International and the *New York Times*" (167). Did the Poles learn from—or at least consider—the international response to Irish republican prisoners when formulating their campaign?

Second, I wondered how, if at all, the murder of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko by Polish secret police in 1984 affected the Polish prisoners' campaign and the international response to Solidarity more generally. Brier briefly mentions Popiełuszko and how in 1987, Senator Edward Kennedy honored the priest with the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award. Not long after, Vice President George Bush visited Popiełuszko's grave. Despite Brier's passing references, the murdered priest featured prominently in protests and coverage of Poland. London's Catholic

[10] For a more detailed discussion of US responses to the Polish crisis and Solidarity, see Gregory F. Domber, *Empowering Revolution: America, Poland, and the End of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

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Tablet described Popiełuszko as "Poland's New Martyr" shortly after his death.[11] In 1985, Polish Americans in California showed support for Solidarity by attending a Mass, which included a tape recording of Popiełuszko.[12] Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky charged that the US media—both qualitatively and quantitatively—gave so much attention to the priest that he was equal to one "hundred religious victims in Latin America."[13] Did international observers see Popiełuszko as the same kind of icon as the Polish prisoners? Did Popiełuszko's murder impact how the Polish underground framed its discussion of prisoners of conscience?

Finally, I wondered about another union: the United Farm Workers (UFW). Like Solidarity, the farmworkers fought for rights by incorporating Catholicism, including marching with crosses and banners of *la Virgen de Guadalupe*. But, unlike Solidarity, US conservative Catholics and some church hierarchy members opposed César Chávez and his efforts.[14] Some conservatives even recognized this anomaly.[15] Did the AFL-CIO discuss—even internally—the similarities between the UFW and Solidarity, given that the UFW was part of the AFL-CIO at this time? Or, like the PATCO situation, did the AFL-CIO avoid making comparisons?

Brier packs so much into this book that I did not fully appreciate it until I stepped back for the review. In demonstrating how the language of human rights evolved in Poland, Brier persuasively shows the importance of considering how human rights' meaning can change, even in one place. He deftly balances his focus on Polish actors with those outside of the country. What I most appreciated, however, was Brier's discussion of how both state and non-state actors' responses to Solidarity simultaneously reflected their views of human rights and their own concerns. While scholars often examine states' competing concerns when deciding how, or even if, to respond to a human rights situation, the same kind of analysis is not always applied to non-state actors. Overall, Brier makes an important contribution to existing scholarship regarding human rights.

[11] Mary Craig, "Poland's New Martyr," *The Tablet*, November 10, 1984.

[12] Andy Rose, "Yorba Linda: Polish-Americans Rally in Support of Solidarity," *Los Angeles Times*, August 10, 1985.

[13] Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 37-86.

[14] Marco G. Prouty, *César Chávez, the Catholic Bishops, and the Farmworkers' Struggle for Social Justice* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 2006); Stephen Pitti, "Chicano Cold Warriors: César Chávez, Mexican American Politics, and California Farmworkers," in *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War*, edited by Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 273-307; Robert Chao Romero, "The Spiritual Praxis of César Chávez," *Perspectivas* 14 (Spring 2017): 24-39.

[15] Dale Vree, "Hypocrises," *National Catholic Register*, April 12, 1981.

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Review by Michal Kopeček, Institute of Contemporary History, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague

Robert Brier's *Poland's Solidarity Movement and the Global Politics of Human Rights* is an ambitious book covering a significant topic in late Communist East Central Europe and the global history of human rights. The author undertook years of painstaking research in various archives in many countries, compiling source material in several languages behind the book. Being familiar with the author's previous works,[16] I was very much looking forward to reading this long-awaited monograph. I was disappointed.

Brier intended to intervene in the lively scholarly discussion about the rise of the global human rights culture by scrutinizing one of the prominent cases, the Solidarity movement, and seeing how it fits into the general stories of human rights in the last third of the twentieth century. The book is meant to show what human rights meant for the Polish democratic opposition and Solidarity and how these understandings were relevant internationally. In what is the core of his book (starting with chapter 3) Brier follows some of the big international players in various Western societies in their interaction with and perception of Solidarity in the early 1980s. He shows here, for instance, the reluctance in embracing the cause of East European dissidents and Solidarity by the traditional West European left using the example of the leader of Social Democratic Party and West German chancellor in 1969-1974, Willy Brandt. He describes how French and American supporters turned the Solidarity case into a prominent human rights issue and how this bestowed on the Polish trade union an 'iconic status' in the emerging global culture of human rights. Often these are exciting and original themes, such as the reconstruction in chapter 7 of the use by Solidarity activists of the Amnesty International 'prisoner of conscience' metaphor, even if they require a deeper conceptual grasp.

Interpretively Brier tries to balance the Polish domestic context and the transnational level of Solidarity's influence and international entanglement. However, the book falls short in the domestic policy sphere compared to the transnational contexts of the Solidarity story. This lack of balance between the domestic and the international, between the dissident human rights and the international politics is, in my view, one of the fundamental flaws of the monograph that undermines what is a laudable undertaking.

The most troubled part of the book is the first two chapters, where Brier describes the birth of the Polish dissidence and its politics of human rights. What should have been the starting point from which the story embarks on Solidarity's long journey of struggle for human rights, democracy, and international recognition is a weak point in the book. I will concentrate on two major problems: the 'meaning' of human rights for Polish dissidents and the interpretation of state socialist dictatorship. In the end, I outline what this means for the transnational part of the story.

The book's central motif, namely the dissident 'politics of human rights,' is not examined in a convincing manner. To be sure this is not an easy topic, since it is a more heuristically and interpretively demanding task than it first appears. In contrast to potential general expectations about the human rights protest movement, the dissidents did not provide elaborate theories of human rights. Except for a few, albeit important exceptions, such as János Kis in Hungary or Jiří Hájek in Czechoslovakia, there were scarcely any direct reflections in samizdat or

[16] For example, Robert Brier, "The Roots of the 'Fourth Republic' Solidarity's Cultural Legacy to Polish Politics," *East European Politics and Societies* vol. 23 (2009): 63-85; Brier, "Adam Michnik's Understanding of Totalitarianism and the West European Left. A Historical and Transnational Approach to Dissident Political Thought," *East European Politics and Societies* vol. 25 (2011): 197-218; Brier, "Gendering Dissent: Human Rights, Gender History and the Road to 1989," *L'Homme—Europäische Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* vol. 28 (2017): 15-31.

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tamizdat on the meaning and interpretation of human rights as a worldview or philosophical issue. To be sure, human rights, the international covenants, and their domestic legal codifications were invoked and quoted but seldom discussed as a matter of principle. *Samizdat* was full of various topics from police brutality and illegal actions through sore points in national history and in the contemporary history of the region up to literary and theatre life. And, of course, it included all possible individual cases of the authorities' infringements on human rights. However, human rights were rarely engaged with as an interpretative question. Thus, based on available sources, it is not easy to state what human rights 'meant' for the dissidents. If we want to establish what human rights meant for the dissident movements in Poland and East Central Europe, it is of little avail to look for direct treatises by dissident intellectuals on the subject. Instead, we have to look at the social practices of dissent, its legalist strategies and read the meaning out of these practices. Furthermore, we must notice where human rights as a concept do not appear, even when we would expect them, and what came in instead. Brier discusses the problem, but does not provide a satisfying solution.

Obviously, in a book of this kind, the rather complicated and multi-layered story of the Polish democratic opposition needs to be somewhat schematic. This indeed happens when the author talks about two major cultural milieus, the leftist post-Marxist and the Catholic-national, out of which the Polish dissent originated. Such a schema, which could potentially be misleading, would work well if the author had shown us how human rights provided the "language of cooperation and protest" (24), but we learn only very little about it. The book would have to show how human rights were understood and interpreted very differently by the different groups of these milieus and how the deliberately vague human rights discourse served as a fragile and ambiguous, but ultimately effective, platform for an uneasy dialogue and cooperation in the opposition. Instead, the book seeks to capture what human rights meant for the Polish democratic opposition as a whole. In doing so, it reaches a level of abstraction that distorts rather than clarifies real historical processes.

The author sets the book against an interpretation that should allegedly understand the dissidence as a "deliberately anti-political movement that sought to permanently replace politics for the sake of universal morality" (38). But it is not clear who interpreted the dissidence in Eastern Europe in such a way. Brier does not cite any concrete works by name in these quite numerous passages outlining the interpretation to which he objects. Some contemporaries and later some historians have certainly criticized the dissidents for excessive moralizing at the expense of political action. But it was never a matter of either morality or politics, but of the ratio between them. It seems that Brier is fighting a methodological battle with a strawman here.

One of the general problems of the book is that it uses specific concepts, sometimes very idiosyncratic ones, such as 'consensus liberalism,' but never defines them. This is particularly problematic in terms of the book's central concepts, such as 'vernacularization of human rights' or 'antipolitics.' Especially in the case of the latter—maybe because it is such a commonplace term in dissidence studies—the lack of definition is costly. Brier seems to claim that antipolitics, standing for the moral anchoring of dissident self-understanding in the universal human rights, should have supposedly led to morality instead of politics. Of course, the tensions between the humanitarian and political aspects of dissident activism were a permanent bone of contention among the dissidents. Nevertheless, this questionable understanding of antipolitics as pure morality does not work even for the Czechoslovak dissent, the most 'antipolitical' and moralist in the region due to the Patočkian-Havelian intellectual underpinnings of Charter 77 and the tight repressive-police character of Husák's regime, which did not allow even a hint of political action outside the Communist Party.

For the Polish dissent, such moralistic 'antipolitics' was never really a question. Thus, Brier's point that "Polish dissidents never wanted to replace politics with a purely moral focus on human rights" (39) or that "human

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rights activism did not necessarily lead to a moralist retreat from politics" (60), breaks into an open door. The existing scholarship does not contain such claim. A more useful focus for the book would have been the question of how human rights really operated within the Polish opposition, which was quite specific compared to dissident movements in other Eastern bloc countries. The Polish opposition always understood itself prevalently as political opposition to the regime rather than 'only' as a dissident movement. It is true that the Helsinki process gave an impetus to incorporate human rights language more consequently into the oppositional claims. It eventually also changed the character of the Polish opposition to some extent. Yet, in Poland, unlike the other countries, the arrival of the 'Helsinki effect' occurred in a situation when the opposition had already been formed around various other topics and programmatic visions, such as the powerful intelligentsia's protest against the constitutional amendments in the mid-1970s.[17]

The human rights and legalist formula accompanying the rise of major Polish dissident organizations such as the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR) and the Movement for the Defence of Human and Civil Rights (ROPCiO) did not mean the depolitization of the opposition, but rather a broadening of the spectrum of its activities, incentives for cooperation, and more vital employment of the language of rights. While human rights discourse became a firm part of the opposition's rhetoric, in the Polish case—in contrast, for instance, to Charter 77—human rights were not the backbone of the oppositional strategy or identity. Such a backbone represented the vision of societal self-organization and the formation of a strong 'anti-totalitarian' democratic movement composed of various streams of opposition and workers protest. The human rights formula of KOR or ROPCiO at times clashed with these broader political ambitions. Even within KOR, there was a constant tension between the 'political opposition program' and the pure human rights formula. Social movements are not thinkers; they do not provide coherent doctrines, but rather stories and ideologies full of contradictions. Yet nothing of it is reflected in Brier's narrative, which instead constructs an abstract and supposedly prevalent Polish dissident understanding of human rights as "the expression of an objective, transcendent truth about the inviolable dignity of human being" (60).

Moreover, the same dilemma was transposed by dissidents to Solidarity in 1980, but then it played out on a much larger scale. Inexplicably, Brier ignores David Ost's classic account of Solidarity's antipolitics.[18] Instead of enumerating here the many questions that I yearned to know about Solidarity and its human rights discourse (admittedly a research project on its own) and that I did not learn from the book, I would put just one question: what about Solidarity's prevailing anti-Communist socialist self-understanding? We do not learn anything about it in the book, but I believe that this is the crucial question when it comes to the 'meaning' of human rights for Solidarity activists.

The trade-union movement Solidarity came into being as a consequence of a protest in defence of the social-economic grievances and interests of the workers. Social, economic, and cultural rights were always abundantly present in Solidarity's identity and politics. Solidarity was an enormous social movement composed of many different streams and milieus. Thus, it was characterized by national, democratic, liberal, religious and populist features often contradicting each other. However, the core of the 1981 Solidarity Program was the concept of the 'self-governing republic.' On the one hand, it concentrated on self-governing principles at the level of enterprises and local government, and on the other hand on the possible legal and constitutional control of the state

[17] Andrzej Friszke, *Opozycja polityczna w PLR 1945-1980* (London: Aneks 1994); Jan Skórzyński: *Siła bezsilnych: Historia Komitetu Obrony Robotników* (Warsaw: Świat Książki 2012).

[18] David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Antipolitics: Opposition and Reform in Poland since 1968* (Philadelphia PA: Temple University Press 1990).

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authorities emphasizing the elaboration of rule-of-law principles and legality. The stress on the exercise of political and civic rights in Solidarity and East European dissent later gave a powerful impetus to the liberal re-reading and reinterpretation of the dissident movement. We now know that this is quite misleading.

Brier sees the cultural and political plurality in dissent and Solidarity, but he does not elaborate on it, ignoring various recent historiographical attempts in Poland and the whole region to reconstruct the variety and abundance of political projects in dissent, including perhaps the vaguest but well-spread one, namely socialist democracy.[19] Brier's aim is to provide a new, iconoclastic reading of the Polish movement's contribution to global human rights. And yet we get in the end the old binary story of the so-called democratic opposition against the totalitarian regime, where the socialist identities present on both sides of the conflict, among the oppositionists and the representatives of the regime, do not play any role.

This brings us to another significant deficiency of the book: its lack of understanding of state socialism. Brier does not consider the vast recent historical literature on the social and cultural history of late state socialism that puts in doubt the convenient cold-war stereotype of totalitarian state vs. captive society.[20] However, the model on which the book is based is precisely such a stereotype. Instead of problematizing the cold-war binary of dissent vs police state, the narrative offers the most black-and-white picture imaginable. We do not learn anything about the many deeply embedded structural ambiguities of dissent in an authoritarian socialist state where most actors of the political conflict were in fact invoking human rights and speaking socialist political languages.

The author in several places confuses the source and the analytical frame, when he takes dissident imaginaries of 'life in truth' and 'life in lies' at face value as the basis for the book's picture of the late socialist dictatorship. Brier's interpretation relies on the authority of Leszek Kołakowski, who was undoubtedly an extremely influential thinker in Poland and beyond. However, Kołakowski was also a very skilled polemicist and political propagandist for most of his life. His political journalism of the 1970s-80s was motivated by a desire to mobilize intellectual and cultural potential in resistance to dictatorship,[21] which was to be served, among other things, by portraying Poland under the rule of the party leader, Edward Gierek, as a sclerotic totalitarian dictatorship. It offered a powerful and emotional approach that fulfilled its political role. However, such images are to be read today primarily as a symptom of the dissident and democratic exile's semantic and ideological struggle against dictatorship. They can hardly be taken as a serious historical reconstruction of the late Communist regime and its social context. This lapse is all the more surprising here, since in his previous work Brier reflected very successfully on the performative and propagandistic function of the central dissident concepts such as totalitarianism.[22]

Why is that so important? Because it heavily distorts the historical reality available to us in the existing research and misinterprets the role of human rights in late communist Poland and the Solidarity movement. We read, for

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[19] See for example, Michał Siermiński, *Pęknięta Solidarność: Inteligencja opozycyjna a robotnicy 1964-1981* (Warsaw: Książka i Prasa 2020)

[20] For example, Thomas Lindenberger, ed., *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur. Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Köln-Weimar-Wien: Böhlau Verlag 1999), Mary Fulbrook, ed., *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961-1979: The 'Normalisation of Rule'?* (New York: Berghahn Books 2008); Pavel Kolář, *Der Poststalinismus: Ideologie und Utopie einer Epoch*e (Köln-Weimar-Wien: Böhlau Verlag 2016).

[21] See for example, Leszek Kołakowski, „Totalitarianism & the Lie," *Commentary Magazine* vol. 75 (1983): 33-38, Kołakowski, „Marxism and Human Rights," *Daedalus*, Vol. 112 (1983): 81-92.

[22] Brier, "Adam Michnik's Understanding of Totalitarianism."

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instance, the erroneous cold-war liberal commonplace assumption about 1968 as the last ever Communist reform endeavour in Eastern Europe. Necessarily then, the book does not take into account the fact that much of what happened in Poland before and even after Solidarity in 1980-81 was, in fact, partly a result of the strong stream, within the People's Republic, of Communist reformism that stood, for instance, behind the apparent constitutionalization of the authoritarian regime. Finally, it is important because such a black-and-white picture tells at best only one half of the story, since it ignores the existing research on official state socialist human rights doctrine and its role. For example, as Ned Richardson-Little has convincingly shown in the case of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), socialist dictatorships in Europe hardly ignored human rights.[23] At least since the 1960s up until 1989, they were very active in promoting their own human rights agenda. Yes, they lost here, eventually, to dissident and international human rights activism. But the complete picture is very different from the cold-war platitude, which is unfortunately reproduced in this book, about the ageing regimes that, despite their innate opposition and defiance to human rights, were forced by democratic activism to the round tables.

These unintentional reproductions of Cold War stereotypes have obvious consequences for the story of Solidarity and of global human rights, too. I can only point out two aspects here. Brier does not discuss the socialist human rights agenda of either the Communist regime or Solidarity. He of course registers the different political projects of different players in his story. His portrayal of the way in which such different actors as the Reagan administration, the American Federation of Labor, the French post-Marxist Left, or the creator of German Ostpolitik, Willy Brandt, perceived and interpreted Solidarity, belong to the most original part of his research. Brier shows how the different actors used and understood the 'human rights icon' Solidarity, and how these usages differed from what the Solidarity activists meant. Furthermore, he shows how Solidarity used its iconic status on the international stage to its advantage. So far, so good. But eventually, we learn a little beyond the somewhat banal claim that various actors adapted Solidarity and its image differently to fit their own needs.

Brier observes that many of his actors, East or West, supported human rights "as a means to empower citizens to organize themselves and to confront the issues that concerned them most, economic injustice chief among them. Instead, they got a neoliberal economy and the transfer of Western political institutions" (10). How it is then that even though a significant number of human rights actors sought to redress economic injustice—and Solidarity was the symbol par excellence in this respect—economic and social rights came up short in the end? Brier does not provide a conceptual apparatus to reflect on the neoliberal ascendancy that was concomitant with the rise of the global human rights. The book addresses neither the debate in recent human rights historiography about the mutual conditioning of human rights and neoliberalism[24] nor Solidarity's socialist agenda. Yet an analysis of Solidarity as a movement with a distinctly socialist political program framed in a human rights language at a time of the rise of neoliberalism in the West and the incipient neoliberal convergence of the rest of the world, including Eastern European communism, could have been an essential addition into this discussion.

In the end, despite the author's extensive research and his vast knowledge of the issue, the book's conclusions are unconvincing. The banal thesis of the so-called vernacularization of human rights is the starting point and simultaneously the conclusion of the analysis. We learn that each group and political current has interpreted human rights and Solidarity in its own way. But isn't this the case with every major political and social thought

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[23] Ned Richardson-Little, *The Human Rights Dictatorship: Socialism, Global Solidarity and Revolution in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2020).

[24] Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Jessica Whyte: *The Morals of the Market. Human Rights and the Rise of Neoliberalism* (London-New York: Verso 2019).

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concept such as democracy, social justice or equality? Human rights carry essential polyvalence, as does any big political concept, and its meaning changes depending on the speaker and context and is always contested. This is not a conclusion worthy of such an important topic. The vital chapter on Solidarity and its human rights agenda as part of the emerging global culture of human rights and the post-Cold War world will have to be opened again and differently.

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Review by Paweł Sowiński, Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Science

As we know too well from history, the connections between human rights and states turned out to be paradoxical. In the last two or three centuries, state powers did a lot to deliver human rights ideas to the public and, at the same time, implemented them very imperfectly, by granting rights to some groups of people and excluding others. The Soviet Union may serve as a primary example of this inequality. Officially, the Soviet regime propagated human rights, but unofficially it created one of the most brutal surveillance states, as Eric D. Weitz, a distinguished researcher in the field, argues.[25] Following Weitz's approach, Robert Brier's book explores more deeply how the idea of human rights was practiced in post-war Poland, which was at that time Soviet satellite state. Brier's contribution focuses on the intellectual history of the Polish most famous social movement—the Solidarity trade union which resisted the Communist state on an enormous scale. The story is told from a truly international perspective. This is a highly conceptualized work that does not analyze the historical events at first but rather tends to trace the evolution of various political imaginaries and discourses on human rights in Poland, and more broadly, worldwide.

Brier draws a lot from recent Polish historiography on the anti-Communist opposition[26]. At the same time, the book convincingly highlights some of the controversy about the Polish literature: its shortage of wider international context and the tendency to overestimate Polish developments over Soviet dissidence achievements which—as he correctly reports —invented and implemented most of tactics and ideas of the Eastern European anti-Communist resistance. Also, his fragments on the significance of the Catholic Church in Poland offer a balanced and nuanced view. Brier praises the Church for what it did to promote human rights in Poland but simultaneously distances his narrative from a too Church-oriented approach. Bier is also cautious enough when interpreting revelations from the archives of the Polish secret service which were disclosed some time ago and have been hotly debated by historians[27]. For instance, the author does not endorse the overcritical and politically motivated opinions on Lecha Wałęsa, the legendary leader of the Solidarity.

What Brier's book offers is an insightful look at the origins of Poland's Solidarity. The author dives deeper into the quest for the moral and ethical basis of human rights activism in Poland. He does not neglect the political or tactical aspects of the dissidence movement but he generally tends to see Polish and Eastern European opposition before 1980 as a group of idealists driven by moral commitments to help people who had been abused by the oppressive state-power. This argument could be even better supported when one takes into consideration that the Eastern European dissidence consisted of a relatively small number of people who struggled not to gain power but to survive under dictatorships. Haunted by the secret police, they faced rather real isolation than big

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[25] Eric D. Weitz, *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation-States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 295; H-Diplo/ISSF Forum 30 on the Importance of the Scholarship of Eric D. Weitz, ed., Diane Labrosse,| 17 November, 2021; https://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Forum-30.pdf.

[26] For instance, Andrzej Friszke, *Anatomia buntu: Kuroń, Modzelewski i komandosi* [Anatomy of the Protest. Kuroń, Modzelewski and "Commandos"] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2010); Jan Skórzyński, *Siła bezsilnych. Historia Komitetu Obrony Robotników* [Power of Powerless. History of Workers' Defense Committee] (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2012); Andrzej Friszke, ed., *Solidarność podziemna 1981-1989* [Underground Solidarity, 1981-1989] (Warszawa: ISP PAN, Stowarzyszenie „Archiwum Solidarności", 2006).

[27] See, for instance: Jan Skórzyński, *Zadra. Biografia Lecha Wałęsy.* [A Grudge. Biography of Lech Wałęsa] (Gdańsk: Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, 2009); Sławomir Cenckiewicz, Piotr Gontarczyk, *SB a Lech Wałęsa. Przyczynek do biografii* [Polish Secret Service and Lech Wałęsa] (Wydawnictwo IPN: Gdańsk, Warszawa, Kraków, 2008).

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popularity. The dissent resistance under autocratic regimes could be only named the "politics of small things"[28] as it did not have the access to the instruments and arenas of policy-making in the form of political institutions, elections, huge social movements, NGOs, or mass media.

Instead, the Eastern European opposition took a very intellectual direction—far from the canvassing for votes that is typical for the real politics. The resistance milieu dived into the world of ideas, searching for new concepts of totalitarianism, religion, or truthfulness. Regarding religion, as Brier discovers, some Polish leftist anti-totalitarians opened themselves not only to the modern and liberal current of the Polish Catholic Church, which is rather widely known, but also they went as far as to recognize the anti-totalitarian voice of the Protestant Church thinker and German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who had been killed by Nazi for being involved in the resistance. In the Polish-German context, it meant a lot at that time and can be seen in terms of bridging Polish and German Democratic Republic (East Germany) anti-government campaigners. This convinces me that Polish left dissent owed more inspiration to German religious discourse than I had previously thought.

The more personalist idea of human rights developed by the urban intellectuals in the 1970s gave way to a more collective and nationalistic idea of human rights of the 1980s —the process marked by the birth of Solidarity, a huge and political social protest. Brier's contribution in this section is the fresh notion that Solidarity understood the idea of human rights a bit differently than Western thinkers did at that time. The idea of freedom expressed by the Solidarity was mostly about the right to participate actively in community life, while the Western democracies developed a more progressive idea of unconditional freedom—not the rights of the humans within society or larger social structures but unconditioned rights for all, also for "disembedded individuals"[29] and "suffering strangers"[30] (13 and 6) who were excluded or exiled from the community. This difference, however, diminished again after martial law was imposed in Poland. Solidarity shrank again to pave the way for more personalist figures entering the human rights stage, namely "prisoners of conscious" who suffered and sacrificed alone behind the bars of the Polish correctional institutions.

In Brier's book, one finds a lot of evidence that Poland's Solidarity greatly benefited from the transformation of international politics towards a human rights approach. Brier, however, neither romanticizes nor simplifies this process of humanizing international politics. He argues that human rights activism in Central-East Europe came into existence as a local and largely autonomous phenomenon, and not only as a result of the global developments. Also, there were a lot of drawbacks and obstacles in implementing the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, not only because of the violent domestic politics of Soviet-dependent countries but also because of the policy of Western European countries on non-interference in other sovereign states. What gave the Europeans significant push towards a more offensive approach in defense of human rights abuse in post-1981 Poland was the United States determination and global grass-roots activism in support of Solidarity in Poland.

The Western governments' reactions remain underexplored, especially with respect to the role of covert actions. Special programs to help Polish opposition emerged after the imposition of martial law. A large number of

[28] Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, *The Politics of Small Things: The Power of the Powerless in Dark Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[29] Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[30] Akira Iriye, Petra Goedde, and William I. Hitchcock, eds., *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

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printing machines and other supplies were smuggled to Poland through covert channels[31]. Studying the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) documents could bring a valuable addition to what has been already offered by Brier's book on "the global culture of compassion and erosion of sovereignty" (230). Many efforts by private individuals were supported by the United States and its allies in Western Europe.[32] In 1984 alone, the US government budgeted 8.3 million dollars (21 million today) for Soviet and East European covert action programs[33]. Presumably influenced by the idea of international human rights, the CIA projected 18 million dollars for ongoing and new actions in 1985 but the real numbers remained probably lower.[34]

This is a larger theme that goes beyond the scope of the book. The main objective of Bier's explorations is to provide a history of thoughts, debates, and spiritual resilience. In future research planning on human rights in Central-East Europe, however, it might be worth not pushing those covert options into the far background because projects of this kind were designed to promote human rights behind the Iron Curtain. The human rights discourse was also widely used in the inner communications between various agencies of the Reagan administration while they discussed future covert scenarios. Covert programs delivered workable solutions in the time when—as the author rightly notes—"the source of financial aid dried up," the Polish underground was "under sustained pressure from the Security Service," (152-153) and the Western front against Jaruzelski's martial law "began to fracture" (198), even if most of the Western countries still insisted that Polish leadership recognize the opposition.

The strong point of the Brier discourse regarding Western responses is the part concerning the power of social movements—the spontaneous and enthusiastic support for Solidarity generated by the Western societies. In December 1981, 200,000 French citizens protested against martial law in Poland. Shortly after that, thousands of tons of humanitarian aid was sent to Poland from Germany. US labor movement as well as Polish and Jewish organizations were heavily lobbing the White House and Congress to help Solidarity. And this massive-scale engagement boosted the opposition in Poland to survive the darkest moments of the tough policy measures imposed by the Communist regime. As Brier argues brilliantly, it boosted the Western governments as well. Without this purely grass-roots factor, the responses on the governmental level towards the Polish crisis would have been less energetic, and more cautious. This book is as much about Poland's Solidarity as about international solidarity with Solidarity which turned into "distant suffering" (230) quickly after its emergence.

Brier strongly stresses the role of the Polish domestic scene that produced the most emblematic human rights fighters of that time, Adam Michnik, who was incarcerated for more than two years and unsuccessfully pressured to leave Poland—both physically and psychologically—by the Polish secret service personnel. Another significant event widely discussed in the book is the decision by the Norwegian Committee to award Lech Wałęsa with the

[31] Gregory F. Domber, *Empowering Revolution. America, Poland, and the End of the Cold* War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 110.

[32] Memorandum from the Chief of the International Activities Division CIA to the Director of CIA [William J.] Casey, Washington, dated on July 14, 1983, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981–1988, Volume IV, Soviet Union, January 1983–March 1985 - Office of the Historian

[33] Memorandum from Walter Raymond of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs [Robert C.] McFarlane, Washington, dated on July 17, 1984; Letter from Secretary of State [George P.] Shultz to Director of Central Intelligence [William J.] Casey, Washington, undated, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981–1988, Volume IV, Soviet Union, January 1983–March 1985 - Office of the Historian

Inflation in 2021 using U.S. dollar inflation calculator: Inflation Calculator | Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis (minneapolisfed.org)

[34] Memorandum from the Chief of the International Activities Division cited above.

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Nobel Peace Prize for 1983. Wałęsa's and Michnik's moral strength greatly reinvigorated the West's engagement with aiding the Polish opponents of totalitarian government. What is intriguing in Brier's narrative about both of them is the symbolic power of their presence in public life. Brier uses many sources, including visual materials, to depict the aura that surrounded them—a sort of magical atmosphere, perhaps characteristic for the sacred persons, but rather secular than religious in its meaning.

The author demonstrates a very high ability to find different meanings and aspects of human rights in his story. Brier's book vastly broadened my horizons on German Chancellor Willy Brandt's *OstPolitk* and its conciliatory stance towards the Polish Communist government after martial law. Brier rather tends to explain this policy than condemn it. Generally, this book brings a wide, open, and imaginative vision of human rights which may stimulate different reflections on which policy better defends human rights under a repressive regime. A revolutionary movement against the authoritarian regimes is a heroic fight for freedom but can trigger the more repressive policy from the undemocratic state-power which, as result, may make the humanitarian crisis even worse. Brier, however, can offer much more intellectual and sublime explanations of Brandt's "old-fashioned" view. Brandt focused more on reforming social structures and, generally, represented the long-term horizon of progress both in domestic and international politics.

Solidarity created a big "anti-totalitarian moment"[35] for the French revolutionary left intellectuals who had been earlier disillusioned with the Soviet Union but who were pushed even more towards the support of dissidents by the imposition of martial law in Poland. Brier not only traces the defining moments in these changing ideas but also slightly emphasizes the personal involvement of leading figures behind that progress—in this case, famous French historian Michel Foucault, who contributed vastly not only as a man of letters but also as one of "*les fourmis de l' histoire*,"[36] that is, one of many ordinary people engaged in laying the organizational foundation for the French branch of Solidarity. What French intellectuals particularly admired about the Poland workers' movement was its being close to the people and far away from the state. Brier interestingly combines the past and the future of French socialism and claims that the Solidarity experience had an impact on French "second left" (125-126) transformation towards non-étatist, personalist, and more democratic socialism (in French *socialisme autogestionnaire*).

Also elaborative in Brier's insight into the history of Solidarity is the interplay between the Polish drama and the idea of global human rights. Brier, like perhaps no one else before, can penetrate how the Polish human rights issue was interwoven with those of Chileans and South Africans and how the three competed and collaborated to maintain their iconic status in international "symbolic politics." Brier's book embraces distant—and seemingly not connected sites and events—in one historical investigation which is fascinating but also a challenging research task. To link two distant arenas of human rights protests—Poland and Chile—Brier uses "the "symbolic power" explanatory model developed by Pierre Bourdieu,[37] which deepens our understanding of how Western politicians compare and counterbalance the Polish and Chilean cases by putting them in the hierarchy of different values and aims.

[35] Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004).

[36] "Ants of the history" —a term coined by Michel Foucault in 1982 to commemorate people who helped Poland, here cited from Ania Szczepańska, *Une histoire visuelle de Solidarność* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2020), 231.

[37] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

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Finally, the most central element in Brier's thinking is the concept of Solidarity as a "contested icon" (8-10). The fate of every iconic social movement that goes global is its lack of ideological coherence. Supported by people from all sides of the political spectrum in the West, Solidarity represented the universal and desirable value of freedom and hope for a better future. But, on the other hand, this surprisingly wide range of advocacy meant that everyone understood Solidarity's mission differently and tailored the Polish movement to their political environment. Solidarity thus was quickly drawn away from its original Polish context to be blended with the larger framework of global human rights. Such a reimagining of Poland's Solidarity is the most innovative contribution of this brilliant book.

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Response by Robert Brier, Independent Scholar

I want to begin by thanking Sarah Snyder for putting this roundtable together and Gregory Domber, Theresa Keeley, Michal Kopeček, and Paweł Sowiński and for taking the time to read and comment on my book. Reading their contributions reminded me of how fortunate I am to have been part of at least four fascinating discourses: on international history, on the Cold War, on the history of Central and Eastern Europe, and on human rights. More importantly, I am able to interact with scholars working in these fields, having been able to learn from them and to discuss my ideas with them. Two of them are Domber and Kopeček and so it is a particular delight to read their views on my book and be able to respond to them.

Before I do so I would like to reiterate briefly what my book is and is not about. It is not a book primarily on Polish dissent. Nor is the book primarily about exchanges between Polish dissidents and western actors. One of the more depressing findings of my book, in fact, is that there was comparatively little exchange between Polish and western actors. The notion of a human rights icon that I develop in the book was meant to capture how human rights activists drained local movements of their specific cultural context in order to turn them into sacred symbols of human rights culture. The main aim of the book, rather, was to make a contribution to the historiography of human rights. Poland's Solidarity movement and the response it elicited in the West and globally, I hope to have shown, provides access to a wide variety of human rights discourses, and studying these discourses can make three contributions to our understanding of human rights history.

First, it shows that the seeming breakthrough of human rights in the 1970s was much less final than is often assumed and that the historiography needs to take the years between that decade and our own time into account to explain the dominance of rights discourses in the twenty-first century. Second, this breakthrough was not universally nor even only primarily driven by a desire to move beyond politics. To the contrary, the work of actors who were central to the human rights revolution, such as dissidents and their western supporters, was always deeply political. Third, analyzing the mentioned discourses shows how what Daniel Rodgers called the "age of fracture"[38] created the conditions of possibility for human rights language to emerge.

Reading the responses by Sowiński, Keeley, and Domber, I was delighted to learn that my efforts may have had some success, given how all three authors summarize my arguments in a sympathetic fashion. I was particularly happy that may account of Polish dissent and opposition found Sowiński's support and that he agrees with my account of the importance of Soviet dissent for the emergence of intellectual resistance in Poland. I was similarly happy that I was able to convey just how important the work of scholars like him at the Institute for Political Studies, Andrzej Friszke chief among then, and at other institutions in Poland was for my own research.[39]

Similarly, it was gratifying to read that my account of Willy Brandt's thought and of *Ostpolitik* may have helped to clarify the reasons for the former chancellor's restraint toward Solidarity. Sowiński raises the important question of what covert US operations contributed to developments in Poland. In this context, I once came across a note in a Polish secret service file stating that the opposition in Poland was using "microcomputers" to

[38] Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MT, London: Belknap Press, 2011).

[39] Andrzej Friszke, *Anatomia Buntu: Kuroń, Modzelewski i komandosi* (Kraków: Znak, 2010); Andrzej Friszke, *Czas KOR-u: Jacek Kuroń a geneza Solidarności* (Kraków: Znak, 2011); Andrzej Friszke, *Rewolucja Solidarności* (Kraków: Znak, 2014); Dariusz Gawin, *Wielki zwrot: Ewolucja lewicy I odrodzenie idei społeczeństwa obywatelskiego 1956-1970* (Kraków: Znak, 2013), Jan Skórzyński, *Siła bezsilnych: Historia Komitetu Obrony Robotników* (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2012).

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communicate with émigré centers in West. Initially, I thought I had found evidence for a highly sophisticated spy device. As it turned out, "microcomputer" merely referred to the very home computers I had played video games on as a kid in the 1980s. Such anecdotes aside, covert operations may very well have made a crucial contribution to the Polish opposition's eventual success. As Sowiński himself notes, however, this is a topic for another book.

Theresa Keeley, in turn, raises three fascinating questions related to labor activism. I have to admit that I have no knowledge whatsoever of whether the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) discussed the similarities between United Farm Workers (UFW) and Solidarity. My experience in working in AFL-CIO archives is that Solidarity's Catholicism did not feature very prominently in the work of US labor organization for Solidarity, focusing as it did primarily on Freedom of Assembly. I would be excited to learn, however, whether the activists at UFW drew any parallels between their work and that of Poland's Solidarity. Mentioning the assassination of Jerzy Popiełuszko, Keeley brings up a glaring omission of my book. After Popiełuszko's funeral in October 1984, this charismatic opposition priest's grave in Northern Warsaw became a crucial symbolic site that western politicians would visit to express their support for the Polish opposition. So, yes, he did become an icon not unlike the dissident intellectual Adam Michnik or Solidarity leader Lech Wałesa and Polish oppositionists drew on the symbolic capital his popularity provided. I was interested to see that his case was even mentioned in Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent.*[40] However, I had written about this topic elsewhere (in German).[41] Moreover, I could not think of a good way of discussing this issue more prominently in the book, so it is mentioned only in passing. When it comes to the Irish Republican prisoners, I do not think the Polish prisoners were aware of them. The latter's activism for political prisoners does suggest, however, that they were well acquainted with Amnesty International's activism. The reason I brought the Irish Republican prisoners up was that comparing them to the figure of the dissident helped bring out the latter's characteristics.

Reading Greg Domber's views on my book, finally, was a particular delight, given that we met several times while I was working on this book and that, more importantly, my work benefitted greatly from these exchanges. Therefore, my favorite part of his review is the statement that my book may help scholars like him to identify sources. If this is true, I am merely repaying a debt to him: Without Domber's pioneering work at GWU's Cold War archives and at the Reagan library, large parts of my book could not have been written.[42] In his review, Greg raises the question of the extent to which Polish actors strategically adapted their statements to the demands of international audiences and what role émigrés played in this.

On the latter question, Jerzy Milewski's instruction is the only direct evidence I found of advice from Polish activists in exile. However, I do believe that many Polish activists were aware of the expectations of western audiences and took them into account when writing their texts. When it comes to intellectuals like Michnik or Wałęsa's advisors Bronisław Geremek and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the most probable authors of his Nobel speech, I believe they did not need advice from western exiles. All three were well versed in western political debates. When it comes to the underground activists who designed the campaign for Polish political prisoners, I believe that Polish activists may have benefitted from the advice of western émigré groups. Even more important,

[40] Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Hermann, *Manufactoring Consent* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

[41] Robert Brier, Tod eines Priesters: Globalhistorische Perspektiven auf den Erinnerungskult an Jerzy Popiełuszko, in: *Osteuropäische Geschichte und Globalgeschichte*, ed. Julia Obertreis and Martin Aust (Wien: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2014), pp. 259-282.

[42] See, for example, Greg Domber, *Empowering Revolution: America, Poland, and the End of the Cold War* (UNC Press, 2014).

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however, were Polish activists who had been cooperating with Amnesty International since the mid-1970s. I am sorry that this is all I can add to this topic and would like to thank Domber again for his comments and for his work on Solidarity.

Responding to Michal Kopeček's review is significantly more difficult. Kopeček, whose profound knowledge of dissidence I greatly admire, writes that my book left him "disappointed." In large part, this seems to be due to the fact that he hoped I would write an in-depth study of Polish human rights discourses which, as outlined above, I did not. As a result, he directs his criticism at two aspects of my book: First, he challenges my view of Polish dissent and Polish human rights discourses. When I write that "Polish dissidents never wanted to replace politics with a purely moral focus on human rights" (39), he argues, I merely knock down a straw man because "it is not clear who interpreted the dissidence in Eastern Europe in such a way." This line of argument is somewhat contradicted by Kopeček's statement elsewhere in his review that "antipolitics" is "such a commonplace term in dissidence studies."

Nevertheless, he goes on to say that I do not cite anyone who holds a view of dissidence as anti-politics. I do agree that few, if any, experts on Central European history would support the notion of dissidence-as-anti-politics. These experts, however, are not my main audience; historians of human rights are. As I show in the introduction, the view that the sudden global popularity of human rights in the 1970s was the result of an anti-political moment is quite prominent in the historiography of human rights (6-8). In the context of the latter literature, therefore, it *is* important to show that almost all dissidents understood their activism in a political way even though they did, as Kopeček concedes, apply and create the social practices of the emergent human rights movement. And since this political understanding of dissident activism was, as again Kopeček himself writes, shared across different cultural milieus my necessarily schematic depiction of Polish dissident activism is what is needed for the broader argument I am making. As a result, I absolutely agree with Kopeček that it would be thrilling to read a more detailed analysis of Polish human rights discourses. My book, alas, has a different aim.

Other parts of Kopeček's review misrepresent the content of the book. For instance, he writes that I reduce Polish dissident discourse to the idea of human rights as "the expression of an objective, transcendent truth about the inviolable dignity of human beings" and that I thus ignore the diversity of the Polish opposition movement. I do believe that human dignity was a central notion of Polish human rights discourses. Yet on the very page of this quotation I also describe how these discourses left room both for liberal views and for ethnic nationalism (60). The quotation, moreover, comes at the end of a lengthy discussion in which I do describe the various discussions within and between the Committee to Defend the Workers (KOR) and the Movement to Defend Civic and Human Rights (ROPCiO) or the fact that labor activism or self-government were crucial notions for the Solidarity trade union (54-61). To say, then, that the only thing one learns from my book about Polish human rights is the aforementioned notion of dignity is false. In fact, a central point of the chapter is to show how such a broad notion of human dignity was adaptable to a wide variety of causes few of which are traditionally considered part of human rights activism, narrowly understood. To be sure, my analysis is not at a level of detail at which someone as deeply familiar with dissident discourses as Kopeček would learn something new. But, again, this was not my intention in writing the book. If I had written a book at that level of detail, it would most likely have had an audience of one.

The second part of Kopeček's criticism is aimed at my alleged view of life under state-socialism. In this context, he charges that I take the dissidents' and especially Leszek Kołakowski's "imaginaries of 'life in truth' and 'life in lies' at face value." I concede that there may be some sections in Chapter 2 which could be interpreted that way. But any fair and attentive reading of the chapter as a whole, especially in the context of my other work with

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which Kopeček expresses familiarity, shows that it entails a conceptual analysis of dissident discourse, not an analysis of life under state-socialism itself. I do not claim in the book that 1970s state socialism was a totalitarian society, merely that the concept of totalitarianism helped Polish intellectuals endow their situation with meaning. After all, the very question I pose at the chapter's beginning is why totalitarianism was such a popular concept among Polish dissidents given how little it fit the realities of 1970s state-socialism (41).

Other aspects in this review left me simply baffled. It is, for instance, beyond me why Kopeček believes it necessary to explain that the notion of anti-politics as morality does not even work for Charter 77, since I make exactly that point in the book (61-63). I am similarly at a loss as to why he stresses that the "'Helsinki effect' occurred in a situation when the [Polish] opposition had already formed" since, again, I make this exact point in the very book Kopeček claims to have read (69-73) and devote an entire chapter to criticizing the notion of a "Helsinki effect" (Chapter 3).

As regards the description of the remainder of the book as "banal", I will just say this much: The fact that actors adopt ideas to their specific needs and struggles is indeed not groundbreaking. To show, however, that social activists support causes abroad because these causes fit their social struggles at home is an insight which is not banal. Among others, it shows that the very thing Kopeček is asking me to have written about never existed: Solidarity's idiosyncratic ideas and type of activism had little to no impact on international and global human rights discourses. Solidarity's emergence and suppression, then, was certainly an important catalyst for a wide range of human rights discourses. The people involved in these discourses, however, almost never took the time to fully understand this weird movement and its idiosyncrasies. US President Ronald Reagan could easily ignore its character as a socialist labor movement, just as French philosopher Michel Foucault could ignore the prominence of Catholic symbols and beliefs in it.

Solidarity's various supporters abroad, in other words, saw the Polish movement as more or less what they wanted to see. By studying western support for Solidarity, then, we learn more about the concerns and ideas of the western supporters than about Solidarity itself. What we do learn, however, is not merely that human rights are malleable to various concerns but that, in countries as different from one another as France and the US, human rights were adaptable to struggles about citizenship and social agency. Human rights, therefore, did not narrow political activism down to questions of individual suffering as is often claimed in human rights historiography. The history of western support for Solidarity, then, provides ample evidence for the need to adjust the history of human rights. I do not think that this conclusion it is banal.

This last aspect brings me to two important questions that Kopeček raises. First, I completely agree that a study describing various human rights discourses in a Cold War context would have benefitted greatly from a discussion of state-socialist human rights ideas. An important question could have concerned the extent to which dissident discourses were shaped by these state socialist ideas. Alas, there is only so much one can do in one book and so I have to leave this question to other scholars. Second, Kopeček raises the important question as to how neoliberalism and human rights were connected in a Polish movement in which workers rights had once been front and center. I had originally planned and drafted a chapter on this aspect. My thesis was that the ascendancy of neoliberalism in Poland had little to do with human rights discourses and more with the politics of the Citizens' Committees in the Polish parliament that was elected in 1989. However, substantiating this thesis would have involved a great deal more research and so I decided to publish the monograph without it. But I do absolutely agree that this is a crucial question for further research. Had I stayed in academia, I probably would have started to work on this subject.

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If a review roundtable such as this one is to make sense, it needs critical voices, even sharply critical ones. I have always welcomed an occasion to defend, hone, or alter my views. However, such criticism does need to be based on a thorough reading of the book in question and an appreciation for what its author set out to do. Unfortunately, I find neither in Kopeček's review. As a result, it left me as profoundly disappointed as Kopeček professes himself to be.

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