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## Remaking History and Remaking Psychology: On the Contributions of Janusz Reykowski and Janusz Grzelak to the Polish Round Table Negotiations

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### Abstract

In this introductory piece to the special issue, I seek to establish the importance of the topic under discussion: that is, the psychology of the 1989 Polish Round Table Talks. I start by underlining the unique opportunity to gain insight into this topic given that two of the main protagonists, Janusz Reykowski on the Government side and Janusz Grzelak on the Solidarity side, are social psychologists. Next, I argue for both the world-historical significance of the Round Table Talks and for the necessity of a psychological dimension to the analysis of what happened. I then address what Psychology provides for an understanding of the Round Table process and what the Round Table process contributes to an understanding of Psychology. Specifically, this turns on the need for a more complex and historical conceptualisation of intergroup relations in which the very nature of the groups in relation may be transformed. I conclude by pointing to further research opportunities on this key question of the configuration and reconfiguration of social groups.

### Keywords

Polish Round Table talks, intergroup relations, social categorisation, social change



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## A Unique Opportunity

When – at a special session of the Annual Conference of the International Society for Political Psychology in Warsaw, July 2016 – I listened to Janusz Grezlak (JG) and Janusz Rekowski (JR) discussing the Polish Round Table (RT), I knew that this was something truly special that needed to be preserved. It is not a feeling I have very often! That is why, in February 2018, Miroslaw Kofta and I organised a small group meeting (supported by ISPP and the University of Warsaw) with the title “From conflict to dialogue: Learning the lessons of the Polish Round Table”. The aim of the meeting was to give more time for JG and JR to talk about their experiences and then, with the participation of leading authorities in a range of areas, such as intractable conflict, negotiation, collective action, leadership and group processes, to discuss both what psychology might contribute to an understanding of the RT and what the RT might contribute in terms of affirming, challenging and extending our psychological knowledge of the processes that alternatively divide and bring societies back together. This special issue is the fruit of that meeting.

I want to start by communicating something of the excitement I felt, back in that conference room in 2016. Through that I want to explain just why the conversation was so special and hence why it was important to preserve the insights it contained – which has now been achieved in the papers that you are about to read.

It is rare enough for psychologists to root their analyses in important real world events – Janis’s (1972) development of the notion of ‘groupthink’ from the Bay of Pigs fiasco being a shining exception. One consequence of this is a tendency for the discipline to descend into immaculate irrelevance. If we only compare our studies to previous studies we can never know if they actually make sense of the phenomena they purport to address. At least in part this is at the root of the contemporary loss of confidence in psychological science (often dubbed ‘the replication crisis’ but actually about far more than replication).

Another consequence of us abandoning the world is that the world abandons us. Whenever there are debates about the most pressing of social phenomena – nationalism, populism, xenophobia, migration, climate change and so on – a wide range of experts are generally included: historians, political scientists, sociologists, geographers and so on. But psychologists are chiefly notable for their absence, even though there is a core psychological dimension to all of these issues and indeed they speak to core dimensions of psychology (social psychology in particular) such as identity, intergroup relations, social influence.

In the present case, though, it isn’t just that we address an important, world-changing, real world event – the Polish Round Table. It is that two of the key protagonists – JR on the Government side and JG on the Solidarity side – were (and are) psychologists. I can think of no other event of comparable significance where this is the case. Their involvement gives them a depth of involvement, of experience and of knowledge that would be impossible to glean from the outside. They saw what was going on behind

the scenes as well as in front. They were party to the internal discussions, the private conversations, the informal interchanges which otherwise would be lost to us. And, what is more, with their analytic insight, they are able to see the significance of even apparently trivial moments which even other insiders would not appreciate.

This indeed is a treasure trove. It provides a robust test of existing theory and also helps us in seeing what is missing in existing theory on issues of conflict and harmony which, from the very start, have defined the territory of social psychology. However, before going on to discuss what we have to learn from the accounts of JG and JR, let us first briefly (for those who may not recall the details) recap what happened through the RT process (see [Osiatynski, 1996](#) for a fuller account) and then deal with two preliminary issues which have been, and continue to be, a source of considerable controversy.

## The Round Table Process

The process began in 1988 when, following a wave of wildcat (illegal) strikes, General Jaruzelski offered negotiations to Solidarity. This led to a number of discussions between Government figures and Solidarity (Lech Walesa in particular) and the terms and conditions of the talks. At the outset their remit was strictly limited. They were not intended to change the whole nature of the system or place in doubt the dominant position of the Communist Party. Rather the deal on offer was to offer Solidarity legalisation and a degree of political voice within the system in return for stabilising and legitimisation of the system.

More concretely, when talks began on 6<sup>th</sup> of February 1989, what was on offer to Solidarity were open elections for 35% of the seats in Parliament (the Sejm) with the other 65% reserved for the Party and its allies. But even this came with the introduction of a strong Presidency which could veto legislation, dissolve the Sejm and which retained control over national security and international relations.

When the Round Table formally ended less than two months later, on 5<sup>th</sup> April, a much broader set of changes had occurred. At the level of structures, the Communist dominated Sejm was balanced by a Senate in which all members would be freely elected and the Sejm and Senate would jointly elect the President. On top of this there were a raft of changes affecting nearly every aspect of society from agriculture to education, the environment, health care and housing. Critically, censorship was eased, the weekly Solidarity paper was reinstated and a new daily opposition paper was created.

When elections took place on June 4<sup>th</sup> Solidarity won crushing victories: they gained every single one of the 35% of seats on offer in the Sejm and all bar one of the seats in the freely elected Senate. Although General Jaruzelski was elected President (that was part of the deal), the old system was effectively at an end. Power had shifted irreversibly away from the Communists. Soon their allies in the Sejm shifted over to Solidarity giving them a de facto majority in both houses. A year later, Jaruzelski resigned and on 9<sup>th</sup> December

1990 Lech Walesa was elected to succeed him as President. What had started off as a process intended to preserve Communism ended up by burying it. It was the first in a series of transitions which ultimately saw the end of the Soviet system in Russia and almost all of Eastern Europe (Elster, 1996a).

It is for these reasons that it seems fair to call the RT a world changing event. Not only did it transform the social system in Poland, it did so without any violence even though there were those on both sides prepared to use force, and moreover it provided a model for peaceful transitions for those who came later in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic (Elster, 1996b). It is easy to forget that, before the RT, few could envisage ways of resolving the decline of the old eastern European regimes without catastrophic consequences. As Laszlo Bruszt puts it:

*“Even as late as 1987, it was the dominant view in Eastern and Central Europe that the probability of peaceful political change in the countries of the region was minimal, and the chances for finding a way out of the declining state socialist regimes were rather bleak”* (Bruszt, 2000, p. 111).

After the Round Table everything changed. In the words of Michael Kennedy (2000):

*“While only a few months in a single country, these talks nevertheless altered the course of human history by providing a model for the radical, but peaceful, negotiation of fundamental differences in the collapse of communism”* (p. 65).

Or rather, and more poetically, one of the key participants in the RT on the Solidarity side, Adam Michnik, has suggested:

*“The Round Table initiated a new phase of dismantling dictatorships through negotiations. This was perhaps the most important invention of the twentieth century, the century of totalitarian dictatorships, the century of Auschwitz and the Holocaust, the century of Stalinism, Katyń, and the gulag”* (as cited in Kennedy & Porter, 2000, p. 49).

## The Significance of the RT

And yet, as Janusz Grzelak argues in his contribution to the current issue, we need to be cautious in according the RT an unqualified seal of approval. It has its critics and, if anything, these grow louder over time. On the left, it is argued that many of the problems of contemporary Poland derive from features of the RT. Nowicka-Franczak (2018) documents a number of these: that by focusing on the economic it neglected social questions such as inequality and the elite-mass relationship; that it infantilised the masses and excluded them from political debate; that it was dominated by men and led to the political exclusion of women from power, Matynia (2001) documents that out of 452 people involved in the RT process only five, just over one percent, were women. All these

are seen as important factors in the recent rise of authoritarian and patriarchal populists in Polish politics.

On the right, there are those who argue that the RT actually impeded a more thorough-going transformation in Polish society and, if anything, served to preserve the economic and political power of the old Communist elite. Nowicka-Franczak (2018) suggests that this derives from what Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the first non-Communist Prime Minister of Poland, described as a ‘thick-line’ policy – denying the responsibility of the new regime for the actions of the old – which the right then sees as a warrant for the ex-communist elites to avoid any penalties for their previous actions and to remain politically active.

In simpler terms, many right wing figures saw the RT as a stitch-up between ‘pinks’ (in Solidarity) and ‘reds’ (in the Government). Brian Porter, who (with Michael Kennedy) co-organised a conference in Michigan to reflect back a decade later after the RT, expresses his surprise at the level of animosity that this evoked. The right wing paper *Głos* attacked the conference as “*a forum for communist criminals*” (Porter, 2000, pp. 53-54), Mirosław Krupinski sent a poem, complaining of ‘traitors’ who: “*ten years later, fat and arrogant / well fed from profits, and victorious / without any disputes, any disagreements / once again raise a toast—in Michigan*” (ibid., p. 54). And Tadeusz Witkowski wrote an article for the Polish-American journal *Periphery* in which he claimed that:

*“for many Poles it is only one more fraud and act of power division. Many would prefer to leave the “opening of a new era” to others and in Poland settle accounts with those responsible for the crimes of the communist era....At the Round Table, new elites emerged that absorbed the old ones”* (ibid., p. 54).

At the extreme, there are those on the right who argue that the Round Table was neither more nor less than a sordid accommodation between elites as to how to divide up the spoils to the detriment of the Polish nation. If the Communists retained their elite privileges, so the leftist majority gained important privileges. Wiesław Chrzanowski (a Conservative within Solidarity) provides an example: “*it’s enough to mention Gazeta Wyborcza, presently Mr. Michnik’s paper, the publication of which was a concession from the government to Solidarity arranged at the Round Table*” (as cited in Kennedy, 2000, p. 73). This leads Chrzanowski to argue that, ultimately, the RT was of little significance. As he puts it, all the negotiations achieved was to accelerate “by a few months the changing of the guard of power in Poland” (as cited in Porter, 2000, p. 60).

This seems an unduly harsh judgement. It may well be true that the RT had some negative effects and that its failure to address key economic, social and political issues have subsequently festered in Polish society. It is certainly important to be aware of these and to avoid becoming uncritical cheerleaders for the RT process as if everything about it was positive. But this is very different from denying that it had important effects.

Even if it were true that it was an accommodation between elites (and that is a highly controversial claim) we would still have to explain how two parties who initially saw each-other as the enemy could end up as partners in a joint enterprise. To cite *Osiatynski (1996)*: “(t)he mechanism involved in achieving consensus between the leaders of Solidarity and the very same forces that had brought tanks to crush them eight years earlier – between recent prisoners and their guards – is worth studying” (p. 22). We also have to judge that outcome against an alternative in which the two parties went to war against each other. And, perhaps most importantly, we have to evaluate the RT not only for what it achieved in Poland but what it inspired beyond.

In the end, the RT may have been a victim of its own success, providing a model for others who were then able to move faster and further and end up with a more satisfactory transition. *Kennedy (2000)* thus explains:

*“Poland was first to develop this Roundtable-negotiated end to communism. Although imitated, it was quickly surpassed. Each subsequent negotiation—in Hungary, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, and to some extent Bulgaria—took less time and communists retained fewer negotiated privileges in the new system. Instead of Poland becoming the isolated trailblazer of reform, Poland’s political accomplishment, measured in terms of communist weakening, became shameful for many in the Polish opposition”* (pp. 6-7).

To use a military analogy, those who go over the top first are most likely to suffer the consequences. But without them, no victory would ever be won. By the same token, whatever flaws and limitations there were to the Polish RT process, these do not detract from the claim that it was a world changing event. To the contrary, they derive precisely from that fact.

## Putting Psychology in its Place

Having argued that the RT is an event of considerable importance from which we have much to learn, the next question is whether psychology has much to contribute in explaining what happened in the RT process – or much to learn from that process. In this regard JG is quite right to start his contribution by counselling caution. Clearly, there were many other non-psychological factors which made the talks possible in the first place and which shaped what happened in them. To overstretch the part played by psychological factors would be quite wrong – an act of hubris. And, as the Greeks showed us, hubris always leads to tragedy.

To start with, it is necessary to address the economic context. Through the 1980s it became increasingly clear that the regime could not bring about economic development without profound economic reforms, which would involve immediate price rises and hardship and hence were impossible without popular support. At first they tried to

achieve this alone, organising a referendum on the necessary reforms in 1987. But this was defeated and rather than providing support led to a series of strikes, first in May involving the iconic Gdansk shipyard and the Nowa Huta Lenin steelworks near Krakow, later and more widespread, in September. The regime realised it needed Solidarity as a partner to contain unrest and gain support and indeed one of its key conditions at the start of the RT process was that Walesa call for the end of the strike wave (Osiatynski, 1996).

The economic factors, then, clearly link to political considerations. These were relevant on multiple levels, the inter-national, inter-party and intra party. At the inter-national level, nearly every commentator (including JG and JR) stresses that what happened in the RT critically depended on the Soviet Union (Elster, 1996a; Kennedy & Porter, 2000). Gorbachov's *glasnost* and *perestroika* meant that there was a possibility for meaningful change in Poland without Soviet tanks rolling in to restore the status quo – as long as the changes did not go too far and endanger the leading role of the Communist Party.

At the inter-party level, commentators (again, including JG and JR) agree that the agreement between the Government and Solidarity depended on the weakness of both sides. As we have already discussed, the Government was unable to bring about necessary reforms and to stabilise the country on its own. Equally, as it had discovered to its bitter cost with martial law in 1981, Solidarity was unable to overcome the sheer repressive might of the regime. This historical experience is eloquently expressed by the Solidarity activist Zbigniew Bujak:

*“No matter how many times we tried to overcome the other side by armed struggle, it would turn out, and I’m referring here to the post-war period, it turned out that the party apparatus could easily present the opposition as some sort of criminals, armed assailants. And we kept losing. Therefore we figured out that the idea of fighting without violence was the best”* (as cited in Kennedy & Porter, 2000, p. 22).

At the intra-party level, both the Government and Solidarity camps were deeply divided. If anything, the reformers who favoured compromise over confrontation were in a numerical minority. Thus, on the Government side, Osiatynski (1996) reports that the majority of the district Communist Party branches (39 out of 51) wrote into the centre expressing their opposition to compromise with Solidarity and, according to Kubik (2000), 85% of regional Party secretaries responded to a secret poll in November 1988 by rejecting anything that changed the basics of the existing system. In the famous words of Stanislaw Ciosek (General Secretary of the Polish Communist Party from 1986-1988): *“the Party howled”* (as cited in Kubik, 2000, p. 97). Equally, on the Solidarity side, a substantial group of activists considered a deal with the Party as an act of betrayal. As the RT talks began, protestors stood outside holding aloft banners that read *“To talk with the Commies is treason”* (Kennedy & Porter, 2000).

In the light of such divisions and such resistance, the role of leadership was critical. The importance of Lech Walesa as the face of Solidarity is generally well appreciated. This gave him the authority to stop September's wildcat strikes. Moreover after he comprehensively defeated Alfred Miodowicz (leader of the Government aligned official Trades Union Movement, OPZZ), who had challenged the Solidarity leader to a debate, support for Solidarity's legalisation rose from 42% to 62% (see Kubik, 2000) and Walesa's authority both within and beyond the opposition grew accordingly. His support for the RT was decisive.

What may be less widely appreciated is the importance of Jaruzelski's reformist leadership in the Party and Government. Osiatynski (1996) records how, at a meeting of the Central Committee in January 1989, general Jaruzelski threatened, along with others, to resign and actually walked out of the room: "*the Conservatives, who lacked a strong leader in the politburo, panicked and missed their opportunity to prevail. Jaruzelski and a group of reformers carried the day, paving the way to the RT*" (p. 30).

But, even as I have been documenting these various political considerations, it should be clear that these do not supplant, but rather articulate with psychological analyses. Sure, ideological and structural changes in the Soviet Union were important, but they had an indirect effect on the RT through the way that they were perceived by the protagonists in Poland. And moreover, it may have been a *misperception* of the likelihood of Soviet intervention (i.e., a belief that this might still happen if change went too far) that led both parties into talks – Solidarity because it still believed that compromise was necessary to avoid catastrophe, the Government because it still believed that the system remained ultimately secure whatever compromises were made.

It is worth adding that these perceptions and misperceptions of Soviet intentions were not simply private cognitions that guided action. Rather they were rhetorical resources used publicly to shape the behaviours of others in the RT process – sometimes those on the other side, but sometimes those on one's own. Thus, to cite Osiatynski (1996) once more:

*"at various points the threat of possible Soviet intervention was used in the negotiations. Most often it emerged in the form of a question: Would the Soviets accept far-reaching change? Interestingly enough, it was not only the Communists who asked this question. Sometimes it was used by the Solidarity negotiators as well. Whenever the demand for too radical change was to be countered, the Soviet interest in stability and in a gradual change was evoked"* (p. 25).

What is true of the inter-national level is equally true of the inter-party level. What counted was not weakness per se but rather perceptions of weakness. Though actually, as Aleksander Kwasniewski (ex-Youth Minister, then president of Poland in 1995-2005) argues, it may be too simplistic simply to talk of weakness. Osiatynski (1996) also makes this point. The Government entered the RT because, although it felt too weak to make



the changes it wanted, it still felt strong enough to keep the overall system intact. Had they realised just how weak they really were, and that compromise would lead to collapse, then they may well have eschewed the process altogether. In other words, it was not 'objective' power relations that led to the RT, but rather subjective misperceptions of power relations that made it possible.

And finally, moving on to the intra-Party level, here the importance of a psychological level of analysis is (perhaps) most obvious of all. If leadership was critical in taking both divided sides into the RT talks, that was not only because of how these leaders were perceived within these respective sides but also because of the way that those within these divided sides perceived that the leaders were perceived within the wider country. Thus, for instance, it was precisely because Solidarity members saw Walesa as giving the organisation credibility within the wider nation that they ceded to him. And equally, it was because Government members and supporters feared that, without Jaruzelski, they would lose whatever credibility they might have as leaders of the Polish nation, that both were able to prevail over their RT sceptics. Elsewhere, we have argued that leaders are effective to the extent that they are seen as representative of the group and hence gain power through the support of group members (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011). Here the argument is taken one step further. It is to the extent that a political leader makes their organisation representative of the wider polity that they gain the support of organisation members in their attempts to win the support of polity members.

All in all, then, the various human sciences are not seeking to divide up an explanatory pie of fixed size, such that the more one discipline takes, the less is left for the others. We are not playing a zero-sum game. The better analogy might be a layer cake, where each extra level adds to rather than takes away from the others. For certain, we need economists, political scientists and historians to help us understand the context in which the RT took place. But there is still plenty of room left for psychology if we want to understand the outcome!

## Rethinking the Paradigm of Intergroup Relations

So, having completed our somewhat lengthy detour to discuss the value of the RT and the value of psychology in an analysis of the RT, we can now return to our core question. What precisely is it that we learn about psychology from the accounts of JG and JR and from other accounts of the RT? My aim in this introduction is not so much to preempt the rich and varied contributions both in the target papers and in the various commentaries (I will come to those presently). What I do want to do, however, is comment briefly on the general way in which we tend to think about intergroup relations and how this needs to be modified based on a clash with the brute reality of real world phenomena.

I will concentrate on two points. The first is that social psychologists generally characterise intergroup relations so simply as to ignore what the phenomenon is really

like. Indeed, our conception literally could not be simpler. It evokes two homogenous collectivities and the ways in which they think, feel and act towards the other. The irony is that this does not even describe the world inside the studies we ourselves design (let alone the world outside our studies). Here, the experimenters themselves constitute a third group, constituting and policing the relations between the other two - although this is generally ignored in the analysis. Without addressing our own role within such studies, we will never understand what is going on. In the same way, how could one understand the relations between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda without addressing the role of the Belgians in setting up rigid categorical differences between the two? How could one understand divisions between Hindus and Muslims in India without considering the role of British colonialism. And how could one understand the relations between Government and Opposition in Poland without taking the position of the Soviet Union into account?

But that is just the start of it. There are multiple other layers of complexity that need to be woven into our story. As well as third parties who indirectly frame relations between groups (Harth & Shnabel, 2015; Saroyan, 2009), there are also mediators who intervene directly between groups, usually with the express aim of producing harmony and reconciliation (Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992). In Poland, the role of the Catholic Church as an honest broker (which, even if broadly aligned with Solidarity was seen by the Government as a trustworthy and competent broker) was crucial (Osiatynski, 1996).

Next, the individual groups themselves are rarely homogenous entities. They are generally divided into multiple factions and multiple aspirant authorities which contest each other to determine who defines and speaks for the group as a whole (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Subašić, Reynolds, & Turner, 2008). Indeed, the integrity of the groups is often fragile with the ever present danger that these factions will find their understandings of the group irreconcilable, thus opening the way to a schism (Sani & Reicher, 1999) – and again, the simplistic notion of ‘two camps’ – Government and Opposition – in the Round Table hides the fact that these sides themselves had sides that were not always self-evidently closer to other sides within their own camp than to certain sides in the rival camp.

So, already, a fairly cursory investigation of the RT shows us a picture of groups within groups whose relationship was moderated by third parties and mediated by a mutually respected ‘honest broker’. But there is one more critical dimension that we must add to this now subtly shaded picture. Different authors have pointed out that, for analytic and methodological reasons, contemporary social psychology increasingly analyzes group members in isolation from each other and from members of other groups. Any interaction would mean that participants can no longer be treated as independent data points and interaction is messy, spawning multiple uncontrollable outcomes, growing exponentially with each turn in the interactional sequence (the study of interaction

is, of course, necessarily historical). So studying interaction becomes increasingly rare in the discipline (Doliński, 2018; Haslam & McGarty, 2001).

But by losing the interactive and historical dimension to intergroup processes, we render the dynamic static, we essentialise our constructs in the forms they take at one particular moment in time, and above all, we lose the ability to understand change. Therborn (1980) points out that no revolutionary process ever starts with people intending a revolution. It is always a matter of how authorities respond to initial discontent, how this in turn impacts the discontented and so on. In the same way, no-one started the RT intending to dismantle the system. It can only be understood in terms of the evolving interactions between the complex and fragile configuration of parties that I have described.

This brings me to my second general point about how the study of the RT impacts our understanding of intergroup relations. It is a very simple point and one which – clearly with limited success! – I have insisted on throughout my career. That is, group psychology tends to limit itself to how relations between groups are determined rather than asking about the nature of the groups themselves. To put it slightly differently, we essentialise the groups involved in inter-group relations. We might ask whether ‘white’ and ‘black’ people are in harmony or conflict, but we rarely address why we categorise people in racialised terms (Reicher, 1986). But if there is one thing that comes through time and again, both implicitly and explicitly, in the literature on the RT, it is that the way that the protagonists group themselves and others shifts through the process.

It was this, more than anything that struck me back in Warsaw in 2016 when I first heard JG and JR speak together. JG told us about his feelings on the first day of the RT. That morning he did not know what would happen that day or where he would be that evening. Would the talks be genuine? Was it a trap? Would they put him in prison? Might they even kill him? And yet now, in the conference room, he and his old antagonist JR were warm and teasing and affectionate and reflecting on their common experience. What was powerful was not just the shift from fear to trust, from enmity to friendship, it was above all a shift from a sense of ‘they’ to a sense of ‘we’ and ‘us’. Categories of exclusion had given way to common categorisation.

This is echoed in two other telling incidents that occurred in the RT process, one at the very start, one at the very end. Adam Michnik tells a famous story of how, when he entered the Viceroy Palace for the opening of the RT, he spotted General Kiszczak at the top of the stairs, welcoming guests. Kiszczak was Minister of the Interior, the effective ‘Chief of Police’ as Michnik (as cited in Kennedy & Porter, 2000, p. 18) describes him, the man who had overseen the imposition of martial law. The idea of shaking hands with this sworn enemy was such anathema to Michnik that he hid in the toilet to avoid it. “*I was simply afraid my wife will kick me out of the house*” he explained (ibid, pp. 18-19). But when he finally emerged, Kiszczak was still there and so Michnik could not avoid the handshake. As he put it: “*I lost my virginity*” (as cited in Kennedy & Porter, 2000, p. 19).

The incident at the very end is equally famous. During the final ceremony, the two sides agreed that the leaders of the Government and Solidarity delegations (Kiszczak and Walesa) would speak first, followed by the other participants in alphabetical order. Miodowicz (the Official Trades Union leader who we have already encountered) refused, demanded to go third and threatened to walk out if refused. This led to an impasse. The television coverage was suspended. Music was played. There were fears that the RT might collapse at the last hurdle. Then Ireneusz Sekula, the deputy Prime Minister recounted an anecdote. Immanuel Kant was walking down a street in Kronenburg when a stranger came towards him. One of them had to give way. "I never give way to a moron" said the stranger. "I always do" said Kant, and let the stranger pass (this version is from [Osiatynski, 1996](#), p. 54 – in another version, by Reykowski, as cited in [Kennedy & Porter, 2000](#), p. 39 the story is the same except that it concerns Goethe meeting his fiercest enemy on a mountain path). Everyone laughed and the impasse was resolved. Geremek, who would have gone third, waived his rights and Miodowicz took his place.

What is telling here is that the Kant (or Goethe) story is told by a Government minister in order to 'other' a supposed member of the Government side. More generally, [Osiatynski \(1996\)](#) notes that "*by the end of the RT, top Party negotiators perceived the apparatchiks as 'them' and included themselves, along with their partners from the other side of the table in an 'us' category*" (p. 59). So, over the course of the RT, the faultlines between compromisers and hardliners within both the Government and Solidarity sides had split open leading to a reconfiguration of categories such that the compromisers joined together against hardliners irrespective of where they had come from.

JR rightly refers to this as a temporary identity and he rightly counsels us against thinking of it in absolute terms. Like the old, the new categories are fragile. To use [Billig's \(1988\)](#) terms, they are perhaps best seen as dilemmatic, a matter of swithering between different ways of categorising a complex reality and the shift from 'Government vs. Opposition' to 'Compromisers vs. Hardliners' is more relative than absolute.

It is important, however, to integrate this argument with another of JR's insights. He argues that, before the process began, both the Government and the Solidarity sides saw themselves as representatives of the Polish nation and their opponents as non- or even anti-national. The Government saw themselves as doing their utmost to preserve Polish independence in the face of potential Soviet intervention and they saw Solidarity as even reckless or deliberate in endangering that independence – at worst being foreign agents. Solidarity saw themselves as representing Polish society against a Government serving the interests of a foreign power. Or, as [Chesler \(2000\)](#) puts it: "*the regime was not nativist but foreign (even if they were Poles) and evidence of an occupying power rather than a domestic dictatorship*" (p. 165).

In the course of the RT that changed. Both those from the Government and from Solidarity began to accept that the other were not anti-Polish. Moreover, not only were they Poles but they were dedicated to the cause of Poland (even if there might be

disagreements as to what that entailed). Reykowski himself is quoted by Kubik (2000) as observing how, during one of the key debates, someone from the Government side observed: “*What’s wrong with Solidarity taking over power. They are also Poles?*” (p. 96). This is echoed by Michnik, from the Solidarity side:

*“Communists, and those who accepted the communist government for their own benefit, are a component of the Polish nation, which cannot be excluded from Poland, unless one wants to destroy the Polish national community. And this is what I learned at the Round Table”* (as cited in Kennedy & Porter, 2000, p. 35).

In other words, the temporary and fragile common identity which was forged through the RT was not purely situational. Rather, it may be better conceptualised as a (temporary and fragile) shift from exclusion to the inclusion of one’s interlocutors in the Polish nation – a category which held deep meaning and importance for all. As both Kennedy (2000) and Chesler (2000) note, that was the key psychological basis on which constructive negotiations could take place. That, I suggest, underpins the shift from competitive to cooperative conflict schemata (as discussed by JR). It underlies the creation of a common set of values, a common set of goals and a common motivation to reach agreement (as discussed by JG). For, in the end, how can one have a common self-interest without a common self? And, as Chesler (2000) illustrates, the success of the RT was ultimately grounded in the fact that, ultimately *all members considered themselves ‘Poles’ first and foremost*” (p. 159) – and, we might add, that they also considered all other members to be ‘Poles’ first and foremost. As so often, meta-perceptions are as important as self-perceptions in driving group processes.

## Conclusion

In introducing this very special collection, I have sought to demonstrate the importance of the Polish Round Table to the contemporary world and the importance of a psychological analysis to an understanding of the Round Table. I have also sought to demonstrate how an analysis of the Round Table is important in developing our understanding of group psychology. More specifically, I have argued that it points to the overly simplistic manner in which we conceptualise intergroup phenomena and the need to consider more complex configurations of groups along with the ways that these develop over time through interactions. I have also argued that, in the course of these interactions, it is not only relations between groups that may be transformed, but the very nature of the groups themselves.

To tie things together, then, I want to finish with a question. In what ways, and under what conditions do intergroup interactions reconfigure social categories? This, I believe, is a key question for anyone interested in societal change and it is something I have been interested in for many years – specifically looking at crowd-authority confrontations

(Drury & Reicher, in press; Reicher, 1996). But the RT also has much to teach us in this regard – as much by generating hypotheses as by resolving them. How, through two months of meetings, did negotiators come to see themselves as “*those who served the People’s Republic*” in contrast to “*those who fought against the People’s Republic*” (Michnik, as cited in Kennedy, 2000, p. 86)?

There are various dimensions to consider. First there is the structure of interactions, both spatial (Osiatynski, 1996 notes that Solidarity initially wanted a rectangular rather than a round table so as to emphasise their unique opposition to the Government – would that have made any difference?) and procedural (JR outlines the ways in which Government and Solidarity delegations were treated as equals, not only in the negotiations themselves but beyond them – one example that particularly struck me was the way that the police at crossroads gave cars from both delegations the same priority). There is the temporal structuring of negotiations, (again emphasised by JR), ensuring an initial sense of joint agreement and common progress before addressing more contentious matters. Then there are the different behaviours of different actors. As negotiations continued it became clear that the main opposition to agreement came from the Government officials and Party members (nomenklatura and apparatchiks) who feared losing their privileges in a reformed system, none more so than the official Trade Unions whose monopoly of representation was severely threatened by a legalised Solidarity (Osiatynski, 1996). In this sense, the actions of their leader, Miodowicz – and his role in showing that the Government and Solidarity had more in common than that which divided them from the hardliners – are emblematic. More technically, the seemingly self-interested obstructionism of the hardliners during the RT made new categories which brought the negotiators together in a single ‘Polish’ category a better fit to the situation (cf. Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994).

There is one further dimension that particularly interests me. Many witnesses (JR and JG) point to the importance of prolonged and intimate personal contact in humanising past enemies and dispelling past fears. “I was afraid of their radicalism and fundamentalism” says Reykowski of the Solidarity team (cited in Chesler, 2000, p. 165), “and to my great surprise...I found that it was a very reasonable group of people, who were well prepared and with whom we could think together how to find solutions to the Polish situation”.

I am reminded here of an experience I had back in 1994 during the transition from Apartheid to a democratic South Africa. I was visiting Cape Town Central Police Station, along with a well known academic and anti-apartheid activist, in order to discuss how to reform public order policing. The four officers who met us, all Colonels, knew my colleague well and clearly viewed him with great suspicion. He also knew them well, and indeed he recognised one of them as a past South African Rugby international. At one point, in the conversation, he referred to this, waxing lyrical about a famous try the officer in question had scored. Everything changed from that point. Our previously

tortured interaction opened up and became highly constructive. When we discussed this later my colleague explained that Anti-Apartheid activists were viewed as alien beings by Apartheid's enforcers. They weren't real South Africans, they were effete and degenerate and the men were not real men. So to find an ardent Anti-Apartheid rugby fan (and an accomplished sportsman himself) made it much more difficult to exclude him from the national category. And once seen as a fellow South African, they could all discuss South Africa's future together.

In a similar way I am intrigued by what happened in the discussion, and the joint meals to which JG refers. To what extent did people discover common tastes, common cultural sensibilities, common enthusiasms that – beyond ideology – make up a common national identity? And what does this teach us not only about how common identity is created but about the very nature of identity itself?

All in all, much as we have learnt already from the RT, there remains much to discuss and much more to learn. And the two men, Janusz Grezłak and Janusz Reykowski who made political and social history 30 years ago are now helping to make scientific history today. We have much to thank them for.

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