

BARBARA SZACKA
Warsaw School of Social Psychology

“Solidarity” and the Martial Law in the Collective Memory of Polish History

Abstract: Author analyze the processes of development of the collective memory of “Solidarity” and the martial law and try to determine their place in collective memory of Polish history. The analyze is based on data from five sociological surveys made in two periods divided by sixteenth years in which communist regime has collapsed and a new political regime emerged. The analyzes shows the ambivalent evaluation of this two events which diminish with time and “Solidarity” is more univocally seen as the positive event of Polish history and martial law as the negative one. In spite of this, the author suggest that there is no reason to think that ambivalence towards “Solidarity” and martial law will disappear completely.

Keywords: collective memory, “Solidarity,” martial law, Lech Wałęsa, Wojciech Jaruzelski

“I believe that the victory of “Solidarity” will become a permanent part of our national heritage and will be engraved in the collective memory—said Lech Wałęsa in the Parliament yesterday,” announced *Gazeta Wyborcza* on 30 August 2005. It is natural that anniversary celebrations highlight the event whose anniversary is being celebrated, create an aura of positive emotions around it and enhance the sense of significance of the event. Often only for a fleeting moment. Certainly, the events of August 1980–December 1981 will be permanently engraved in the collective memory. What is less certain, however, is how they will be engraved and how central a place they will occupy as a result of the earlier spontaneous processes of inclusion into the collective memory and the further impact of the mass media, so intensive in the days of the jubilee but perhaps waning even to the point of oblivion within the next few months or years.

In this paper I want to focus on the processes of development of the collective memory of “Solidarity” and the martial law as they have progressed so far. I intend to study the memory of these two events together because I am deeply convinced that they cannot possibly be viewed otherwise than as a closely linked sequence of events.

To begin with, I owe my Readers a few explanations. They have to do with the perspective from which I am going to analyse the memory of the events in question. I defined my way of understanding collective memory elsewhere (Szacka 2004) and will therefore not go into details here. Suffice it to say that I am fully aware how

Author is Professor of Sociology in Warsaw School of Social Psychology, Warsaw, Poland; email: bszacka@data.pl

ambiguous or even controversial the term “collective memory” is but for reasons I spelled out elsewhere (Szacka 2005) I have decided to use the term to mean ideas concerning group history which are to be found both in that group’s culture and in the consciousness of its members.

In my analysis of collective memory I focused, above all (but not only), on those its contents, which can be investigated by means of questionnaires, i.e., on so-called vernacular collective memory. This source of information is often criticised or at least treated with distrust, often expressed in the form of doubts as to the reliability of the information gathered on the grounds that we do not know whether “this is what people really think.” This lack of faith in questionnaires is rooted in at least two misunderstandings.

The first misunderstanding is caused by neglect of the simple fact that questionnaires are only one type of research instruments and that they are instruments of limited rather than universal applicability. Questionnaires are excellent sources of information on some aspects of reality but not others. As far as vernacular consciousness is concerned, they can be a source of insight into clichés and thought patterns but not into the degree and range of their internalisation. Of course we may conclude that the knowledge which can be acquired from questionnaires is not very interesting but we cannot accuse questionnaires of not providing answers to important questions which they were not designed to provide. Just as we cannot accuse a mincer for not being able to dry our hair.

Second, the data which we acquire from questionnaire surveys, just like the data we acquire from all other sources, demand a critique. In this case the object of criticism should be both the construction of the instrument itself and the manner the research was conducted as well as the legitimacy of the conclusions drawn from the gathered data. In other words, we should neither overestimate nor underestimate the knowledge provided by surveys—as it is so often the case.

There have been many surveys on the memory of “Solidarity” and the martial law and many research centres have conducted such surveys. The data need to be analysed but this is not the place to do it. The in-depth analysis of the data on the martial law and a more general analysis of the memory of “Solidarity” has been done by Piotr Tadeusz Kwiatkowski (2004, 2005).

Here I want to focus not on the picture of “Solidarity” and martial law *per se* but on the place of these two events in the general picture of Polish history among other events within the entire history of the nation and on the process whereby these events are placed in this general picture. I shall base my discussion on five studies of the representation of Polish history in vernacular collective memory which were conducted in various years and on various samples and in which (with one exception) I participated more or less actively. Since the surveys dealt with a very broad theme—the entire history of Poland—the frequencies of responses referring to these two events were small and cannot be submitted to in-depth statistical analysis. However, even the percentile distributions alone are a source of interesting and noteworthy information on the place of “Solidarity” and the martial law in the general, vernacular representation of entire Polish history.

The studies to which I wish to refer, in chronological order, are the following:¹

- (1) 1987, CBOS [Social Opinion Research Centre], “History and the present,” Polish national random representative sample N 1374. Report (T057).
- (2) 1988, Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw, men and women with higher education in Warsaw and Wrocław, non-representative sample N 1492. Barbara Szacka, Anna Sawisz, *The past and social memory*, Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw, 1990.
- (3) 2004, Pentor, “Contemporary Polish society vis-à-vis the past,” representative Polish sample N 800. Report.²
- (4) 2004, Pentor, “Contemporary Polish society vis-à-vis the past,” Polish sample of men and women with higher education N 271. Report.
- (5) 2005, TNS OBOP [Public Opinion Research Centre], “The Poles’ historical consciousness,” representative Polish sample N 1003. Report.

Because of the differences in sampling methods in the individual surveys, a lack of certain questions in some of the surveys, changes in wording of the same questions in different surveys, and sometimes also different methods of categorisation of responses to the same questions, the results are not completely comparable. Even so, we can still recognise the process of inclusion and placement of “Solidarity” and the martial law into the vernacular representation of Polish history—the process which is the focus of discussion in this article.

I shall take into consideration answers to five different types of questions. The numbers of the surveys in which they appear are given in parentheses.

- I) Participation in important historical events: of a respondent him/herself or a member of a respondent’s family (1) (2) (3) (4), of a friend or acquaintance (3) (4).
- II) Conversations concerning historical issues (1) (2) (3) (4).
- III) The past (historical figures and events) as a source of pride or shame (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) and Polish historical anniversaries which should be celebrated.
- IV) Twentieth-century events which the respondent think will become part of Polish history and world history (3) (4).
- V) Evaluation of the period of communist Poland (1) (3) (4) (5).

The studies which I am going to analyse were conducted in two different eras, with an interval of nearly 20 eventful years. The first two surveys were conducted during the decline of communist Poland, a fact of which few people were aware at the time, even if they anticipated it. Eighteen years later not only did the respondents live in a completely new reality but also a generation shift had taken place. Those who were born in the years of the first surveys and had no personal experience of “Solidarity” or the martial law have grown up. The following comment on the martial law by Piotr Kwiatkowski can also be applied to both of the events we are discussing here: “in 82–89 the opinions on martial law which were studied were opinions on a topical event, one which was directly connected with the existing political system and people’s daily lives ..The second period involves investigations conducted after 1990 when martial law was a fact from the realm of collective memory and a political

¹ When quoting these studies I will simply give their numbers in parentheses in the rest of this article.

² The research done as a part of research project sponsored by KBN 2H02E03824.

symbol” (Kwiatkowski, 2004, p. 1). For the very same reason I have split the studies I am going to present into two series, conducted in two different epochs. Studies (1) and (2) belong to the first series and studies (3), (4) and (5) belong to the second series.

The two studies from the first series differ one from another in several respects. First of all, they differ with respect to sample selection. The 1987 study was run on a Polish national, representative random sample and a separate over-representation of men and women with secondary and higher education. The findings of this study are presented with relation to: a) the general sample, b) the over-representation of men and women with at least secondary education, c) a group of respondents consisting of men and women with at least secondary education from both the basic sample and the over-representation. In the following discussion, as far as the first study is concerned, I shall concentrate on the data on samples a) and c).

The 1988 study was conducted in Warsaw and Wrocław on people with higher education, representing five professions: lawyers, economists, physicians, engineers and teachers. Those respondents were randomly selected from lists of the professional organisations. Second, the studies differ with respect to the method applied. The first study was conducted with the help of interviewers whereas the second one was conducted by means of a questionnaire which was distributed directly to respondents. Hence, in the latter study responses were given independently and may have been more spontaneous whereas in the first study they may have been involuntarily “coerced” by the interviewers or suggested by their probes.

When analysing the data collected in 1987 and 1988 we must remember that in those days respondents could have been reluctant to answer candidly the questions on the events which interest us here because of more or less justified fear of the possible consequences of admitting to involvement in the “Solidarity” movement or of expressing opinions other than the official opinions on the movement and the martial law. Another reason could also have been the recency of the two events, i.e., the events may not have been perceived as “historical” . Therefore we should not be surprised that the events were rarely mentioned whereas even the slightest hint that these were perceived as historical events should be of particular interest for our analysis.

In the second series of studies, they were all conducted by means of questionnaires which interviewers filled in on the basis of interviews with the respondents.

Participation in Important Historical Events

1987 and 1988

In all the studies in series one at least half of the respondents said that a member of their close or distant family had participated in important historical events. The proportion of respondents who said this among people with at least secondary education is higher than that in the basic sample in 1987 and amounts to 57% whereas in

the 1988 study, conducted only on respondents with higher education, it is as high as 78%. Awareness of family involvement in historical events reaches quite far back in time. In study (1) it reaches back to the 1863 January Uprising whereas in study (2) 14 respondents (1%) even named earlier events.

Participation of family members in the events of August 1980 and “Solidarity,” strikes, manifestations and trade union activities viewed as important historical events was only mentioned in one study, the 1988 study (2) of respondents with higher education and only by a very small percentage of respondents (0.1%). A similar pattern was found for the responses belonging to the “martial law” category which included being an object of repression and undertaking illegal activity (0.3%). If fear of negative consequences made respondents reluctant to share information on these issues, it probably inhibited willingness to tell others, including one’s family about one’s activity. The reason why I think this is what happened is that when respondents themselves were asked whether they had participated in important historical events there were more answers mentioning it. In the 1987 study (1) 1.4% of the basic sample and 3.1% of the sample with higher education mentioned August 1980 whereas in the 1988 study (2), where the questionnaires were filled in independently, without the help of the interviewers, as many as 10.1% mentioned August 1980. The same is the case with the martial law. When asked whether they themselves had participated in important historical events, 0.7% of the basic sample and 1.5 of the sample with higher education mentioned it in 1987 (1) and 3.1% of respondents with higher education in 1988 (2).

2004 and 2005

In the interval between the two series of studies, August 1980, “Solidarity” and the martial law acquired some patina and became really historical events, i.e., events which took place beyond the temporal limits of their own biographies, for at least one generation. For those generations, on the other hand, for whom the eighties were within these limits, admission to participation was now ennobling. Two factors which had previously kept people from indicating them no longer existed. Hence, in the 2004 study, in the representative sample, more respondents indicated that a family member, friend or acquaintance or they themselves had participated in these events which were now perceived as important historical events. Despite this shift, the tendency to mention a family member less frequently than a friend or acquaintance and particularly oneself persisted. Our attention has been also drawn to the fact that the martial law was mentioned more often than August 1980 or “Solidarity” in response to the questions on participation in important historical events. This suggests that the discomfort of the martial law became more deeply imprinted in memory than the experiences of the early years of “Solidarity.” This is illustrated in Table 1 which shows the proportions of responses confirming participation in this two events.

Of course it would be desirable to analyse the determinants of the responses but their frequencies are too small for well substantiated conclusions. All we can do is only to indicate certain tracks. One is that in study (3), in response to the ques-

Table 1

Participation in important historical events (percents)

Participation in important historical events	A family member	A friend or acquaintance	The respondent him/herself
August 1980 and, "Solidarity"	2%	5%	16%
Martial law	4%	15%	20%

tion of participation in important historical events—one's own and one's friends' and acquaintances'—the frequency with which the martial law and "Solidarity" are mentioned varies depending on the level of historical competency (the greater the competency, the greater the frequency). Another factor is age. Obviously, those respondents for whom the historical events in question were experiences of their youth, were the ones to mention participation (their own and friends') most frequently. At the time of the study those respondents were in the 40–49 age group.

Conversations on Historical Themes**1987 and 1988**

In the 1987 study, 21.8% of the respondents from the Polish national sample (1a) and 11.2% from the sample of people with at least secondary education (1c) said that they did not talk about historical issues with their friends and/or family. Among those who admitted to talking about such issues, 11.4% in the national sample and 15.3% in the sample of people with at least secondary education said that these issues had been a frequent topic of conversations. The most frequent theme was World War II whereas the theme of August 1980–December 1981, i.e., "Solidarity" days as the topic of conversations, were indicated by 2.0% and 3.1% of respondents and the martial law time by 0.9% and 1.9% respectively in both samples.

In 1988, in the study of people with higher education (2), only 1.6% of the respondents admitted that they had never discussed historical issues with their family and friends. As far as the subjects of these conversations are concerned, it was not possible to identify themes relating to "Solidarity" and martial law. One of the reasons for this may have been the fact that the respondents filled in the questionnaires themselves, without the help of "probing" interviewers. Another reason may have been the different approach to response categorisation. The latter reason seems to be less important, however, particularly with respect to the martial law, because the proportion of responses included in the general category for these responses, which also covered themes such as the Stalinist days, 1968, 1970, KOR (the Committee for the Defence of Workers) and martial law, amounted to 5.5%, suggesting that the proportion of indications of the martial law as but one component of this category must have been very small if any.

2004 and 2005

Nearly twenty years later the events which interest us here naturally acquired the status of historical events. At the same time there is a noticeable reduction in the frequency of conversations on historical topics. In 2004 in the Polish national sample (3), 26% of the respondents said that they did not conduct such conversations whereas 12% of those who said they did conduct them said they did it frequently. In the other study in the same year (4) on the sample of people with higher education, 15% said they never discussed historical issues whereas 14% said they often discussed them.

In both samples the most frequent topic of conversation was World War II and in both the events of December 1981–1988 were a more popular topic than the “Solidarity” days. In the Polish national sample 8% of the respondents mentioned the first period, what gave it the third position on the list of discussed topics, and 3% mentioned “Solidarity” (position six). In the sample of people with higher education, martial law and the nineteen-eighties were indicated by 15% of the respondents (position two) and “Solidarity” was indicated by 6% (position five).

As we can see, the tendency to root the martial law in collective memory more distinctly than “Solidarity,” already found in the previous studies, became stronger in the later studies. We may expect that if this pattern of historical discussions with friends and family, and therefore the content of informal transmission persist, this asymmetry will be further increasing.

The Past Events and Figures as a Reason to be Proud or Ashamed and Events whose Anniversaries should be Celebrated most Grandly

In all the studies the questionnaires included items enquiring about events and figures of which Poles can be proud and ones of which they should be ashamed and respondents were asked to indicate such events and figures. Although this paper focuses on events rather than figures, it is worth to take into account two figures, Lech Wałęsa and Wojciech Jaruzelski, as the objects of pride and shame because they both were closely connected, actually and symbolically, with the two events which interest us here.

1987 and 1988

Evaluation of the “Solidarity” period and martial law is clearly ambivalent. In all the studies both are listed among the praiseworthy events and the shameful events. The proportions of indications differ from study to study, however. These discrepancies can be found between the 1987 studies conducted by CBOS (1), perceived at the time as connected with the centres of power and whose results were usually more in line with these centres’ expectations (Sulek 2001), and the 1988 study conducted on people with higher education by the Institute of Sociology, Warsaw University (2), and also within the same CBOS studies of the Polish national sample (1a) and the sample of people with at least secondary education (1c).

All in all, 2.3% of the respondents in the CBOS Polish national study and 5.5% of the respondents in the sample of people with at least secondary education (1987) and 8.1% of the sample of people with higher education (1988) said that “Solidarity” was something to be proud of. If we look at the rank of these events on the list of coded reasons for pride, we see that in study (1a), where there were 75 items on the list, “Solidarity” holds the 24th position and the 15th position in the study of people with at least secondary education (1c). In the 1988 study of people with higher education, respondents indicated 22 events which may be a source of pride (the events with at least 2% of indications were taken into account) and here “Solidarity” came tenth on the list.

In the 1987 “Solidarity” was perceived as something of which we should be ashamed of by 3.6% of the respondents in the Polish national sample (1a), i.e., 1.4 percentage points more indications than for “Solidarity” as something to be proud of, and by 4.2% of the respondents in the sample of people with at least secondary education (1c), i.e., 1.3 percentage points more indications than for “Solidarity” as something to be proud of. In 1988 study (2) among people with higher education only 0.7% of the respondents saw it as something to be ashamed of, i.e., 7.4 percentage points fewer than those who said it was something to be proud of.

It is noteworthy that compared with the Polish national sample, respondents with higher education more often perceived “Solidarity” in positive terms than in negative terms—very slightly in 1987 study (1c) and considerably more often in 1988 study (2).

Lech Wałęsa, a symbol of August 1980 and “Solidarity,” was not indicated even once as a figure to be proud of in 1987 (1) whereas 1.0% of respondents in the Polish national sample (1a) and 1.3% in the sample of people with at least secondary education (1c) indicated him as someone we should be ashamed of. In 1988 (2) not a single respondent mentioned Lech Wałęsa. The anniversaries of August 1980 wanted to celebrate, 0.8% of respondents in the Polish national sample and 1.0% of respondents with at least secondary education in study (1) and 2.7% in study (2).

Whereas in the appraisals of August 1980 and the “Solidarity” movement respondents saw more cause for pride than for shame (although not always and the differences was sometime slight), the opposite was true for their appraisal of the martial law. In study (1), 0.6% of respondents in the Polish national sample and 1.2% of respondents in the sample of people with at least secondary education said the martial law was something to be proud of whereas in study (2), conducted on the sample of people with higher education, only 0.2% of the respondents said martial law was something to be proud of. The martial law as a source of shame was mentioned by 4.2%, 7.2% and 8.3% of respondents, respectively.

In both the 1987 CBOS studies (1a and 1c), Wojciech Jaruzelski was indicated as a figure to be proud of by 2.6% of respondents whereas not a single respondent said he was someone to be ashamed of. In the 1988 study (2), quite a different pattern of responses emerged: 1.0% of respondents said Wojciech Jaruzelski was a cause for pride and 6.2% said he was a cause for shame.

Not one respondent in any of the samples was willing to celebrate the anniversaries of the martial law.

2004 and 2005

The two series of studies were divided by an interval of many years which brought a new perspective on the events which interest us here. The political system changed and this itself was an event which ranked first on the list of events to be proud of. In 2004, 19% respondents in the study conducted on the Polish national sample (3) and 27% of the respondents in study (4) indicated the systemic transition as a cause for pride, as did 14% of respondents in study (5), conducted in 2005. The proportions differ from study to study but the overall pattern is the same: this was the event most frequently indicated as something to be proud of.

This affected the perception of “Solidarity” which, in the symbolic dimension, was incorporated by this event as its prelude. Yet, in comparison to the earlier years more respondents mention it as a source of pride. In 1987, 4.0% of respondents in study (3) and 6.27% in study (4) mentioned this event whereas a year later, in the study conducted on the Polish national sample (5), 7.6% of respondents indicated this event. Also, in all the studies this event ranks higher on the list of things to be proud of compared with earlier studies: (3) rank 9, (4) rank 11 and (5) rank 5.

Respondents are now no longer ambivalent in their appraisal of “Solidarity.” Only two respondents in study (3), one respondent in study (4) and one respondent in study (5) indicated “Solidarity” as an event to be ashamed of.

Ambivalence towards the martial law also subsided. Both in the two 2004 studies, (3) and (4) very few respondents, i.e., 1%, and in the 2005 study (5), fewer than 1%, saw it as something to be proud of whereas 8.3%, 8.5% and 2% respectively saw it as something to be ashamed of.

If “Solidarity” and martial law were now quite consistently viewed as events to be proud of or ashamed of respectively, the two related figures, Lech Wałęsa and Wojciech Jaruzelski, still evoked ambivalent evaluations, especially the former who is generally mentioned more frequently than the latter. In 2004 16% of the respondents in study (3), 23.6% in study (4) and 16.5% in study (5), conducted a year later, evaluated Lech Wałęsa positively and mentioned him as a figure to be proud of whereas 9%, 8.1% and 9.9% respectively said he was a source of shame.

Wojciech Jaruzelski, meanwhile, is mainly a source of shame. The proportions of respondents who endorsed this opinion in the successive studies were: 6.3% (3), 8.1% (4) and 7.6% (5). The proportions of respondents who evaluated Wojciech Jaruzelski positively were: 1.6% (3), 3.7% (4) and 2.0% (5).

August 1980 as an event whose anniversaries should be celebrated on a grand scale was not indicated at all in 2004 (3) whereas 4% of respondents in that same study said that we should celebrate the anniversaries of the fall of communism in 1989. In study (4), also conducted in 2004, but on people with higher education, 6% of respondents said that the fall of communism should be celebrated and 2% said that August 1980 should be celebrated. Two percent (2%) of respondents in studies (3) and (4) would like to celebrate the anniversaries of introducing the martial law.

In study (5) respondents were not asked to indicate events whose anniversaries should be celebrated.

Twentieth-century Events which will become part of Polish History and world History

Obviously, Polish history and world history are two different perspectives and two different scales for the perception of events taking place in Poland. Hence, as far as world history is concerned, we wanted to know whether "Solidarity" and martial law were at all mentioned as events which would become part of world history. In the case of Polish history we wanted to know whether these two events would become part of it in the opinions of the respondents.

In both the 2004 studies, (3) and (4), respondents were asked to say which events they thought would become part of world history. The event most frequently indicated (by more than half of the respondents) was World War II—57% and 60% respectively. Next on the list were: World War I (34% and 39%), the fall of the USSR and communism (18% and 26%) and election of Karol Wojtyła for the papacy (13% and 15%). In studies (3) and (4) "Solidarity" and the martial law were included in the same category and together received 3% of indications. In other words, from the perspective of world history they lost their distinctiveness and were viewed as one historical event. It is worth noting that Polish accents, e.g., the Round Table, were present among the symptoms of the fall of communism.

As far as Polish history is concerned, the event most frequently mentioned as the one which would become part of it was the fall of communism and the systemic transition. In 2004 38% of respondents from the Polish national sample (3) and 52% of the respondents from the sample of men and women with higher education (4) mentioned these events. For some, the Round Table talks were a symptom of transition whereas for others these were the first parliamentary elections or the first democratic government. "Solidarity" itself was the sixth on the list of events which respondents believed to become a part of Polish history in study (3)—11% and the fifth on the list in study (4)—15%. In 2004, in the Polish national sample (3), "Solidarity" as a historical event ranked one point higher than the martial law, mentioned by 11% of respondents, whereas in the sample of people with higher education (4) it ranked two points higher than the martial law which received 9.9% indications.

In order to obtain a more complete picture of the rank of August 1980, "Solidarity" and the martial law in the list of events which will become part of Polish history we must know which events were indicated less frequently and more frequently than them. Indicated less frequently were the EU accession and the victorious end of World War II. Apart from the overthrowing of communism which ranked first, events which were indicated more frequently were: the outbreak of World War II, election of the Polish pope and regaining by Poland independence in 1918. Generally speaking, the two events which interest us here—August 1980 and "Solidarity," martial law—are situated on a par with World War I as events which will become part of Polish history. It is worth noting that, looking from the perspective of Polish history, the most important historical event—according to the respondents—was the fall of communism whereas looking from the perspective of world history the most important events were the two world wars.

Evaluation of the Days of Communist Poland

The most important question I asked was: how did the perception of August 1980, “Solidarity” and martial law has evolved over the years which were marked by a fundamental systemic transformation. To answer this question I had to find out how people evaluated the days of communist Poland. As it turned out, this evaluation evolved with the change of political and economic system.

In 1987, all sub-periods of communist Poland except August 1980–December 1981 received more positive ratings than negative ratings. Within the next quarter of a century, however, the picture of communist Poland became darker. The ratio of negative ratings to positive ratings began to tilt in the negative direction for most of the sub-periods of communist Poland. There were only two sub-periods for which there were still more positive ratings than negative ratings: the Gierek years (1970–1980; 30 percentage points more positive than negative ratings) and the years following the October thaw (1956–1970; 7 percentage points more positive than negative ratings).

Two things draw our attention here. First, in the 1987 studies the Gierek period was not rated as positively as it is today. One may say that this period did not begin to make a “career” until after the systemic transformation. In 1987, two other periods were rated more highly, both in terms of the proportions of positive ratings and in terms of the differences in proportions of positive and negative ratings: 1956–1970 (a difference of 51 percentage points) and 1944–1948 (a difference of 45 percentage points). Interestingly enough, although this may be purely accidental, both in the 1987 studies and the 2005 studies the last but one period preceding the one in which the study was conducted was rated most highly. (Of course this is only true if we treat 1980–1989 jointly, a manoeuvre which is not illegitimate from a broader perspective). The reason I mention it is that this may be a sign of the activity of certain mechanisms of collective memory which social psychologists are now uncovering (Pennebaker 1997).

The second thing which strikes us is the enormous discrepancy between the evaluations of the years 1944–1948 in the two series of studies. In 1987, these years ranked second on the list of positive periods, both in terms of the percentage of positive ratings and in terms of the difference between positive and negative ratings, whereas in 2005 these years were rated most negatively of all from the Poland’s benefits perspective.³ This probably reflects the new ideas and points of view which have appeared in social circulation. For men and women who had survived the Nazi occupation, the first post-war years marked the end of the occupational horror, return to normalcy and reconstruction of the country and their own war-battered lives. And this is the image they passed on to their children and possibly their grandchildren. The persecutions which took place in those days were carefully concealed and were not on such a mass scale as to become widely known despite the efforts to keep them secret. This knowledge only became widely known after the systemic transformation when, above all,

³ In 2005 the questions relating to the sub-periods of communist Poland were coined in two different ways. For every sub-period, respondents were asked to say whether it had brought more benefits than losses a) for Poland, b) for the respondent’s family.

the post-war years were no longer viewed as the end of old evil but were exposed as the beginning of the new communist evil.

Another striking finding is the extremely low rating of “Solidarity” period: August 1980–December 1981. This finding is less surprising in the 1987 study (1) where critical appraisals of “Solidarity” itself prevailed over positive appraisals of it in the Polish national sample, which is not the case in 2005 (5). In study (5), despite the positive ratings of “Solidarity” itself, negative ratings of August 1980–December 1981 prevailed over positive ratings, even by more percentage points than in the case of the period initiated by introduction of the martial law. This applies both to the ratings of these periods in terms of benefits and losses for Poland and in terms of benefits and losses for the respondent’s family. Two possible interpretations of these findings come to mind and the two are related. First, the frequency of respondents indicating “Solidarity” and the events it symbolised among events which should be a source of pride were small. The vast majority of respondents remembered this period mainly as a time of hardship and daily hassles, enormous market shortages, stress and tension. Many people had also probably internalised the propaganda of the day which said that “Solidarity” and strikes were guilty of all the shortages and hardships. The next period, on the other hand, even though it began with the shock of the martial law, eventually brought relative calm and finally led to the fall of communism. All this probably determined the opinions.

Concluding Remarks

As I said in the introduction, the data do not allow us to formulate any conclusions supported by refined statistical analysis. This is because the frequencies of indications were low—hardly surprising if we remember that the studies were about the perception of the entire history of Poland. Despite this shortcoming, I am quite sure that the presented research has yielded information which merits serious consideration. If several studies conducted in various years by various centres and by means of various questionnaires have produced the same trends and relations, then they are probably reliable.

The data presented above gives way to the following conclusions regarding the place of “Solidarity” and the martial law in vernacular collective memory.

1. All the studies analysed in this article, no matter when they were conducted, consistently suggest the effect of level of education on connections with “Solidarity” and the approach towards communist Poland. More educated respondents declared closer connections with “Solidarity” and a more positive appraisal of its activity. They also expressed a more critical approach to communist Poland and a more frequent tendency to evaluate this period of Polish history negatively.

2. In the nineteen-eighties, appraisal of both the events which interest us here were clearly ambivalent. The events were mentioned as both positive and negative but, with the exception of the 1987 study of the Polish national sample (1a), positive opinions about “Solidarity” prevailed whereas opinions about martial law were more

often negative than positive. With time this ambivalence gradually diminished and each event began to be perceived more unequivocally, with “Solidarity” being counted among the positive events of Polish history and martial law among the negative events. However, despite these systematic trends revealed by the analysed studies, there is no reason to think that ambivalence towards “Solidarity” and martial law will disappear completely. This is suggested, among other things, by the evaluations of the different periods of communist Poland.

3. The data presented above suggest, albeit not always unequivocally, that martial law imprinted itself, or at least has a chance of being imprinted, in collective memory more profoundly and more distinctly than “Solidarity’s” August.

As far as the 1987–1988 studies are concerned, this may be explained as follows. The discomforts of martial law and its later repercussions were serious enough to imprint themselves more deeply in memory than the carnival of “Solidarity.” But the fact that signs of this asymmetry can also be detected in the studies conducted eighteen years later suggests that we should look for additional explanations. The following come to mind. The martial law was not difficult to interpret. It was quite easy to draw from the repertory of Polish national symbols and make it one more symbol of struggle and resistance against an oppressive and alien power and incorporate it as such into collective memory. In this memory, events and figures are always changed into symbols of values and anti-values of great significance for group identity. Meanwhile, as far as August 1980 and “Solidarity” are concerned, the process was and is much more difficult. There are two obstacles here. First, the “Solidarity” movement combined many different contents and trends which went their own separate ways in later years quarrelling about the interpretation of “Solidarity’s” legacy and the right to its continuation. This made difficult to attribute one socially accepted and equivocal meaning to “Solidarity.” Second, the movement was a new phenomenon in Polish history and there were no available clichés in our national memory store to help us to interpret it or even impose an interpretation upon us, as was the case with martial law. We automatically tend to view “Solidarity” as a symbol of the fall of communism but here too we come up against several obstacles which prevent expansion and consolidation of the memory of this event, as demonstrated by the analysed studies. The answers gathered in general category “fall of communism” suggested that for some respondents this meant the Round Table, for others it meant the first democratic elections and for still others it meant the outset of Tadeusz Mazowiecki’s government. In other words, as a symbol of the fall of communism “Solidarity” has its rivals. Hence the tendency for “Solidarity” to imprint itself in collective memory not as an event or phenomenon *sui generis* but rather as an element of the systemic transformation whose only distinguishing feature was that it set the whole process in motion.

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I wrote this text in August 2005, when preparations for the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the birth of “Solidarity” were being under way. In these days of omnipresent public opinion polls one would hardly expect the official cele-

brations of August 1980 to be free of surveys investigating how the Poles remember “Solidarity,” what they think about the years 1980–1981 and how they evaluate them. It is worth confronting the results of those opinion polls, broadcast by the press, with the foregoing conclusions. This confrontation is very interesting indeed because we are dealing with two different research settings. In the studies analysed above, “Solidarity” and the martial law were analysed as elements of the general picture of the history of Poland. This was a bird’s eye view of a homogeneously illuminated field of our history and an attempt to determine the place of analysed events in it. Meanwhile, the studies of “Solidarity” itself are more like a spotlight turned upon just one historical event. In this research approach, whatever its nature, more respondents will always declare that they remember the event in question and will express their evaluation of this event. All the more so that surveys such as these are usually conducted on the occasion of this or that anniversary, when there is considerable media coverage of the event. The transmitted messages reach the respondents and are assimilated by them to an unknown degree and then captured by the opinion polls, thus conveying a picture whose stability is unknown. Nobody knows how long this image will live in the respondents’ heads.

In this jubilee year, three independent research centres conducted research on representative Polish national samples. At the beginning of August CBOS asked: “How would you say today: was the founding and activity of “Solidarity” in 1980–81 an important event for you (53% choices); an event which should only interest historians (36% choices); hard to say (11% choices. OBOP asked: “For Poland, the strikes and founding of “Solidarity” in 1980 were: good (65% choices); good and bad in the same degree (13% choices); bad (12% choices); hard to say (10% choices).⁴ Pentor, in an opinion poll commissioned by Polish Radio,⁵ asked: “Looking at the events of August 1980 from the perspective of twenty-five years would you say that it was worth going on strike then or not?” Twenty percent of the respondents in a Polish national sample said it was not worth it.

Of course responses such as these are ambiguous. One may give such an answer because one is convinced that communism would have fallen anyway and therefore it was not worth the effort of strikes. But one may also answer this way because one is disappointed with the outcome of the transformation triggered by the strikes in August 1980. One way or another, the response distribution suggests continual ambivalence with respect to “Solidarity.” This ambivalence showed up clearly in the OBOP study where 43% of respondents said that “Solidarity” had improved their conditions of life, 22% said they would have been better off without it and 15% said that things were much the same as before.

These studies show also that August 1980 and the birth of “Solidarity” are not indisputably the most important symbol of the fall of communism for all Poles. In the studies analysed here this was evident with respect to the fall of communism in Poland. In the CBOS jubilee study the point of reference was Eastern Europe. They showed that the opinion that these events had a major impact on the future of this

⁴ *Gazeta Wyborcza*. 20 August and 2 September 2005.

⁵ Data received from Polish Radio.

part of Europe was least salient among the youngest respondents. They indicated two events with almost equal frequency: the birth of “Solidarity” (37%) and the collapse of the Berlin wall (34%).

Our attention is also drawn to the fact that the atmosphere of the jubilee rejoicing did not enhance the willingness to celebrate the anniversary of August in any significant way. Only 5% of respondents in the CBOS study said this was one of the most important anniversaries.

And one final confrontation of these anniversary studies with the earlier studies of the perception of Polish history which suggested that a level of education has a positive effect on the “Solidarity” ratings. The Pentor survey corroborated this finding. If 61.9% of respondents with primary education voiced the opinion that it had been worth going on strike in August 1980 (including 26.9% who said that it was definitely worth while), then the respective proportions for respondents with higher education were 82.7% and 26.9%.

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